ABSTRACT

FRAMING DISASTER: HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE NATIONAL MEDIA

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This thesis examines the 2005 media coverage of Hurricane Katrina. It analyzes the content and the reasons for the sensationalist reporting which permeated media coverage, and looks at the extent to which racial identity and class level of those affected by the hurricane influenced that media coverage.

The analysis shows that although there was an attempt at some level to provide institutional/structural reasons for why people couldn't leave, especially in The New York Times editorial articles, there was far more emphasis on tales of lawlessness and individual stories. When the media did point to institutional factors, two main challenges arose. First, these issues were often not adequately discussed, especially in television news reports. Second, focus on governmental failures often led to finger pointing at officials, instead of examining how the system as a whole had failed.
FRAMING DISASTER: HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE
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Chapter One
Introduction

On August 28, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, a category five storm that had already hit parts of Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, swept into New Orleans, creating breaches in the levees that had been built to protect the city from flooding. The breached drainage and navigation canals allowed water to flow from the lake into low areas of New Orleans and Saint Bernard Parish, flooding roughly 80% of the city and killing 1,577 people (Reports of Missing and Deceased, 2006) not to mention the approximate 700 others who are still reported as missing (Krupa 2006). In the days after the storm, the city government also established several “refuges of last resort” for citizens who could not leave the city, including the Louisiana Superdome, which sheltered about 26,000 people. The government was supposed to provide people with food and water, but federal and state government response was slow, resulting in widespread criticism from politicians, activists and journalists. The total damage from Hurricane Katrina was estimated at $81.2 billion, making it the costliest hurricane in U.S. history (Knabb et al., Tropical Cyclone Report, 2006). A Congressional investigation found that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Red Cross “did not have a logistics capacity sophisticated enough to fully support the massive number of Gulf coast victims,” and additionally, placed responsibility for the disaster on all three levels of the government (United States Congress 2006).

In the days following the hurricane, however, the horrific living conditions of those left behind was often overshadowed by negative media depictions of New Orleans residents as “looters,” “rapists” and “snipers” (Kaufman 2006). Across the nation, headlines announced “The Looting Instinct,” “Thugs Rein of Terror,” and “Dodge City--Rape and Anarchy in New Orleans; Horror and Heartbreak of Katrina,” to name a few (Kaufman 2006). In a USA Today article titled “The Looters, They’re like Cockroaches,” the only picture was one of two members of the Louisiana National Guard “manning a position,” while underneath a caption quoting a New Orleans resident claiming, “Last
night, I heard some of the gunshots. And I've heard stories that (the looters) are better armed than the police” (Yassin 2005). Stories of “heavily armed police and soldiers patrolling the flooded streets of New Orleans” reinforced the image of a warlike, even anarchical state, and “harked back to an earlier time when civilian disasters were tackled in a paramilitary way under the assumption that the principal problem was how to restore law and order, rather than how to restore health, safety and dignity to the affected population” (Alexander 2006).

At the end of the first week, when questions about the news coverage began to emerge, some media responded to criticisms of racism and classism, albeit cautiously, and debunked most of the wilder reports, including those of pedophilic rape, murder at the Superdome and roving bands of armed gang members attacking the helpless, as simply untrue. *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* reported in a story printed on September 26 and titled “Rumors of Deaths Greatly Exaggerated” that just six dead bodies were in fact found in the Superdome, four attributed to natural causes, one from an apparent suicide, and one from a homicide, a small body count compared to the 200 that were supposedly stacked in a freezer outside of the dome (Yassin 2005). Similarly, Knight Ridder’s wire service discredited the prevalent reports of sniping at rescue vehicles, reporting “more than a month later, representatives from the Air Force, Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security and Louisiana Air National Guard said they have yet to confirm a single incident of gunfire at helicopters” (Yassin 2005). The news media received further criticism when a young, dark-skinned African-American man wading through chest-deep water with a case of soda and a bag of chips was described as “looting,” while a second picture of a white couple also carrying food through the waters stated that they were “finding bread and soda from a local grocery store” (Kinney 2005). Furthermore, the media failed to emphasize that some “looters were people who strove to find basic supplies for themselves and others who were left behind in the city (Kinney 2005). The realization that “while there had been some violence, and looting that could have been motivated by profit, there was apparently no raping/murdering/looting gangs, nor was there any substantial devastation wrought by violence and looting" (Yassin
2005). The initial media focus on looting and violence led to some absurd media exchanges, such as this one between Wolf Blitzer and correspondent Ian Robertson

Blitzer: “What about all those shops, those stores, the restaurant behind you, along those streets? Are most of them looted?”

Robertson: “They haven’t [been], that’s the very surprising thing” (Yassin 2005).

Statement of Research

This paper will focus on how the media framed New Orleans residents impacted by Hurricane Katrina by examining different regional newspapers, magazines, and television news transcripts in the US for Hurricane Katrina coverage. Specifically, this analysis will look at five different news publications and media outlets (newspaper and television news) that represent divergent points of view and different styles of presentation: The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Post, and CNN and FOX News. Using the methodological approach of framing analysis, news coverage will be examined from August 28, the day the Hurricane hit, to September 4, when people left the superdome.¹

This research will hopefully shed light on why there was such sensationalist, exaggerated, even false reporting in the days after the Hurricane struck New Orleans, and to what extent the racial identity and class of those affected by the hurricane influenced this media coverage. Specifically, this analysis will be attempting to answer the following primary question: How did media stories frame those affected by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans?

In addition, the thesis will also shed light on other areas. Did the coverage of Hurricane Katrina succumb to the same problems found in the Kerner Commission’s

¹ As Covert and Wasburn note in their article “Measuring Media Bias: A Content Analysis of Time and Newsweek Coverage of Domestic Social Issues, 1975-2000,” our understandings of what defines “liberal” and “conservative” changes over time. Still, the authors argue that there is a generalizable distinction, like on the issue of poverty (695), where liberals tend to call for greater government assistance to the poor, while conservatives argue for less government intervention. In this paper, it is not whether CNN or Fox is actually liberal/conservative that is the issue as much as whether they are perceived to be that way.
analysis of the 1960’s civil rights riots? Did the media coverage of the mostly black Hurricane victims conform to an individual or institutional mode of framing? When New Orleans residents were interviewed, were they presented as having agency, or were they framed as helpless victims? Why were the terms "Third World" and "refugee," evoking images of non-citizen outsiders, used by the press? Were these terms used universally or disproportionately towards the African American community?

**Literature Review**

Some of these questions have been broached by a number of researchers. Certain elements of the thesis can be found in various analysis and studies, which will be addressed in the literature review.

**Framing Analysis Theory.** Framing theory describe how people make sense of their outside world by utilizing expectations from their own experiences. Within this context, framing “helps people locate, perceive, identify and label events” (Goffman 1974, 21). Robert Entman, in the book *The Black Image in the White Mind*, defines a frame as a device that simplifies a story into four elements. They “define problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes – identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects” (Entman 2000, 49-50). This idea that narratives have morals, and that without morals there would be no story, is an important concept of Entman’s conceptualization of framing, and will be useful when sorting through my coverage of Hurricane Katrina.

It has to be understood that framing does not occur outside the existing power relationships in society. In this context, Stuart Hall discusses the consolidation of power through media control and manipulation of information. In Stuart Hall’s *Policing the Crisis*, Hall explores the relationship between government elites, the media and the audience. Hall argues that the time pressures which the news media is under and the demands to be both professional and objective in their news reporting, results in a dependence on “official” sources that are in powerful and privileged institutional
positions (Hall 1978, 57). This reliance on these sources stems from a belief that those in high-status positions are more likely to have access to factual, detailed information that most of the population wouldn’t have. Hall argues that these sources essentially become the “primary definers” of topics, and any backlash/disagreement or response would be just that – a response to the main framework that the primary definers of a topic have founded. The media become the “secondary definer” that basically reinforces the ideologies of the ruling classes. So basically, once the “primary sources” define the situation, i.e., the problem of looting, raping, etc., it is difficult to reverse these viewpoints in peoples’ minds once they have already been established as true by officials.

Diana Kendall, in her book Framing Class-Media Representations of Wealth and Poverty in the U.S., reveals how slanted media coverage of class and poverty influence the way people think about the working class and the poor. While there are several books that discuss framing of race and gender, few books primarily address the framing of social class. Using the 1965 Watts riots and the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago as case studies, Jill A. Edy’s book, Troubled Pasts: News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest, creates a framework for understanding how conflicting narratives of these events emerge in the media, how they are eventually resolved, and how these resolutions influence the representation of current news stories.

The media is often influenced by governmental policy, and thus this thesis will also include works like Do the Media Govern? Politicians, Voters, and Reporters in America. Since I believe that power dynamics has much to do with class structures, I will include Cultural Politics in Contemporary America, which deals with this issue at length. Included in this anthology is Leslie T. Good’s “Power, Hegemony, and Communication Theory” which argues that those who assume communication plays a “socially integrating role” see power as “an ultimately integrative force, and communication is functional in not only exercising power, but also, in turn, in producing and maintaining social stability” (Good 1989, 52). These explanations of the connections between power, class, and communication are essential in my research on Hurricane Katrina, a disaster in which the thousands who were affected, and who tended to be misrepresented by the media, were disproportionately poor, with little or no access to the levers of power.
The Watts Riots and the Kerner Commission. After the Watts riots in 1965, the Johnson Administration issued reports on both the causes of the riots and the media coverage of the event. The National Advisory Commission of the Causes and Prevention of Violence (or the Kerner Commission) found not only that white racism was at the root of this violence, but also that the media had been “shockingly backwards” in their “coverage and employment of people of color” (Alterman 2003, 110). Jill Edy, in her book Troubled Pasts, describes how four frames were used to make sense of the Watts riots: the lawlessness frame, the insurrection frame, police brutality frame, and economic deprivation frame. Of these four, which will be described in more depth in my methodology section, the lawlessness frame was the most prominent way to depict the riots and those who were involved in it. Furthermore, Edy notes that the media reports often failed to contextualize the event, so that “stories describing looting and arson during the Watts riots often do not describe the poverty of the neighborhoods involved” (Edy 2006, 19). The Kerner Commission concluded that the media did indeed avoid contextualization in favor of using “scare headlines” and relying on rumors that had “no basis in fact” (Kerner 1968, 364). These findings into the causes and coverage of the Watts riots are important to my research for two reasons. First, it provides an important parallel to my analysis of Hurricane Katrina, in which many of the same issues in reporting arose. Secondly, the Kerner Commission recommended legislation that was intended to create more jobs and economic opportunity for minorities, and also spurred a number of minority training programs for journalism. These measures were taken to ensure improvements in both how African Americans lived and how they were covered in the media. Books like Eric Alterman’s What Liberal Media delves into whether the media has truly succeeded in embracing the concept of “diversity,” while Dennis E. Gale’s Understanding Urban Unrest examines the effectiveness of urban-planning programs such as the Model Cities Program.

The Media and National Attitudes toward Poverty. Researchers in the last few decades have pointed to the media, specifically the news media, as being influential in molding Americans attitudes toward poverty, which questions the widely held belief that many Americans’ tendency to hold poor people responsible for their own poverty may be
due to dominant cultural values, such as individualism and self-reliance. Scholars like Shanto Iyengar, author of *Is Anyone Responsible? How television frames political issues*, have found that news coverage of poverty in which images of the poor predominate can be shown to affect Americans’ views on poverty. In his landmark study published in 1990, Iyengar found that over a 6 year period, “episodic” news stories, those that show viewers certain instances of those living in poverty, far outnumbered the “thematic” news stories about poverty, in which “the coverage is abstract and impersonal, conveying information about general trends” (Iyengar 1990, 14). He also conducted an experiment to determine how framing conditions of television news presentations affect what people identify as the causes and cures of poverty. His research concluded that when poverty in news stories is framed primarily as an individual problem, responsibility is assigned to those who are poor. When journalists frame stories more thematically, in a manner that “portrays poverty as a general outcome -- meaning a systemic perspective that places responsibility on communities and the nation,” -- his research subjects would “characterize poverty, hunger, and homelessness from a structural approach focusing on such factors as how local and national economic and housing conditions produce homelessness” (Kendall 2005, 99-100).

Furthermore, patterns of responsibility vary depending on the type of victim that is depicted. While children, elderly widows, and unemployed males were generally seen as “needy” and deserving of government aid, both adult and teenage single mothers elicited high levels of individualistic responses and were viewed as less “deserving” (Iyengar 1991, 61). In another experiment, Iyengar revealed that news coverage of homeless people was far more likely to elicit attributions of individualistic causal responsibility than stories about unemployed workers or families unable to meet their heating bills. Iyengar attributes several reasons for this difference. Firstly, he argues that “news coverage of homeless people may encourage viewers to hold poor people responsible more frequently because the homeless fit our mental representations of ‘poor people’ more closely than unemployed workers or families living in unheated homes” (Iyengar 1991, 56). Furthermore, the homeless may personify an “extreme” form of economic hardship, and research on causal attribution has revealed that such extreme outcomes tend
to elicit a stronger sense of individual responsibility. In the case of homelessness, Iyengar argues that “because the homeless have apparently lost everything, people reason that there must be something deficient in their character; if not, homelessness could happen to ‘ordinary people,’ a rather threatening proposition” (Iyengar 1991, 57). This could also be an important parallel to the attitudes towards those affected by Hurricane Katrina, since research such as Deborah Belle’s and the Pew Research Center has revealed that social causes figured little in attitudes toward the Hurricane victims, and enthusiasm for government efforts to reduce economic inequality immediately following the hurricane actually declined. One could thus argue that the extreme images of hardship suffered by Hurricane Katrina victims, including homelessness, illness, dispersal, etc., might have provoked a similar reaction, with a tendency to place individual responsibility on the victims.

Diana Kendall, in her book Framing Class, argues that most articles about the poor and homeless “either treat them as mere statistics or have a critical edge, portraying the poor as losers, welfare dependents, mentally ill persons, or criminals” (Kendall 2005, 94). In her examination of media framing of poverty, she also divides her analysis into thematic and episodic framing, but uses four forms of episodic framing--sympathetic, negative-image, exceptionalism, and charitable. She contends that while sympathetic framing mostly consists of stories about children, the elderly, and the ill, negative-image framing focuses on topics such as welfare programs and homelessness. Exceptionalism framing, on the other hand, focuses on people who have risen from poverty or left lives of homelessness, while charitable framing focuses on helping the poor during the holidays and disasters. It is important to note that past researchers have found that “charity fund-raising activities publicized in the media usually show more minority group members, particularly African Americans and Latinos/Latinas, than white (Euro) Americans” (Kendall 2005, 125).

This “racialization of poverty” in the news media has been researched by several scholars, most notably Martin Gilens in his book Why Americans Hate Welfare--Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy. In his landmark 1990s study, Gilens found that media stories on poverty significantly over-represented African Americans in
particular. After conducting a methodical examination of newsmagazines and TV news between the years 1950-1992, Gilens found that news magazines, specifically *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* exaggerated the number of African Americans who are poor, with African Americans shown 57 percent of the time in stories about poverty,” while in weeknight news shows “broadcast by ABC, CBS, and NBC, a similar pattern was identified: African Americans represented the poor 65 percent of the time” (Gilens 1999, 114). This overrepresentation of black poverty has been especially high during the last three decades, reaching its peak between 1967 and 1968, when newsmagazines and television news depicted the poor as 72 percent and 94 percent African American, respectively. While it is true that African Americans do have high poverty rates, with 24.9 percent of blacks living under the poverty line as opposed to 8.3 percent of whites, they are nevertheless a small segment of the population and include only a minority (about 27 percent) of all poor people. Furthermore, the average incomes for both Hispanics and Native Americans also greatly trail those of non-Hispanic whites, with 21.8 percent of Hispanics living under the poverty level (Olemacher 2006) and 23.2 percent of Native Americans (U.S. Census 2005). Even Asians, who have higher incomes and education levels than whites, still have higher poverty and lower homeownership rates, with 11.1 percent living below the poverty line and only 60 percent owning homes, versus 69 percent of non-Hispanic whites (Olemacher 2006).

Yet, despite these figures, studies have revealed that a majority of Americans tend to view the poor as consisting of mostly of African Americans (Gilens 1999, 68). Additionally, a CBS news survey on welfare conducted in 1996 found that only 35 percent of respondents believed that more people on welfare were white, whereas in actuality, only 36 percent of those on welfare in 1995 were African American (Gilens 1999, 106). Gilens writes that this tendency to associate welfare with black people may be why most Americans view welfare so negatively. Specifically, Gilens offers four reasons for the extreme unpopularity of welfare programs. First, “that welfare violates Americans’ individualist orientations in a way that other social programs do not; second, that self-interest leads middle-class Americans to support universal social programs but oppose means-tested programs that benefit only the poor; third, that opposition to welfare
stems from skepticism about the true need of welfare recipients; and finally, that negative attitudes toward blacks underlie white Americans’ opposition to welfare” (Gilens 1999, 30). For example, although over 70 percent of Americans say we are not spending enough on “fighting poverty,” and a large majority support child care, health care, and social security, only 9 percent think spending for food stamps should be increased, while 60 percent to 70 percent of those polled believe we are spending too much for welfare (Gilens 1999, 29). Gilens contends that while nonracial considerations, such as respondents’ liberal/conservative ideologies, their party identification, their attitudes toward individualism, and their views whether welfare recipients are deserving all played a significant factor in influencing white Americans’ welfare policy preferences, it was the perception that Blacks are lazy which emerged as the “strongest determinant of whites’ beliefs about welfare recipients, and it was a powerful influence on their preferences with regard to welfare spending” (Gilens 1999, 167).

It is important to note that the distinction between the “deserving poor” and the “undeserving poor,” i.e. between “those who are trying to help themselves and those who are not, between those who share a commitment to individual responsibility and those who prefer to rely on the government for support” (Gilens 1999, 66), has been reflected in the media. As mentioned before, the media undoubtedly play a significant role in shaping Americans’ views on welfare. Gilens’ experiments revealed not only that the media painted the poor as disproportionately black, but also depicted them in more negative ways than the white poor. When white Americans were featured in poverty-related stories, they were more often in articles about the elderly poor or about poverty-level workers in job training programs, while stories such as drug abuse and welfare dependence largely presented African Americans (Gilens 1999, 129). In fact, in an analysis of newsmagazine pictures of the poor between 1950 and 1992, Gilens found that stories about the elderly poor, “one of the most sympathetic subgroups of poor people” are “illustrated exclusively with pictures of poor whites,” while stories on the underclass and urban problems, topics that elicit far less sympathetic responses, were almost entirely accompanied with pictures of African Americans (Gilens 1999, 129).
Steve Macek, author of *Urban Nightmares-The Media, the Right, and the Moral Panic over the City*, also argues that the ideologically charged concept of the “urban underclass” is what formed urban and social policy debates and helped to gain middle class support for the right’s castigatory “law-and-order” agenda in the last two decades. In his analysis of two CBS Evening News feature stories that aired on February 8 and 9, Macek contends that the reports, which focus on “unwed fathers” and welfare mothers, respectively, frame poverty and the “breakdown of the family” almost wholly as urban, minority issues. With its images of “shadowy figures” who “haunt the playgrounds of the postindustrial ghetto and allegedly father children irresponsibly,” (Macek 2006, 182) and conservative scholars like Charles Murray (author of *Losing Ground*, 1984) claiming that “If the epidemic of unwed births continues to spread unchecked, we will have white urban neighborhoods that look and feel like black urban neighborhoods,” (Macek 2006, 181) the image of an untamed urban core that is threatening middle class white life is strengthened. Herman Gray, in his article, “Television, Black Americans, and the American Dream” (1989) also examined the representations of urban black life in the 1985 CBS special report, “The Crisis in Black America: The Vanishing Family”, and found similar fear-inducing depictions of the underclass. Gray notes that even the title-including the words “vanishing family” and “crisis”- suggests a certain degree of abnormality that needs to be addressed. The visual rhetoric of the story supports this contention, as images of “welfare lines,” “couples arguing,” “the police,” and “housing projects” saturate the report and “tie the specific theme of the ‘vanishing black family’ to a broader (and deeply racist) discourse about American race relations”(Macek 2006, 175). These images are in a sense reinforced by interviews with several black adults in the community who claim that the “lack of motivation” and “unsound values” are at the root of these problems, and work to displace social explanations for the plight of urban black communities.²

² A recent article in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* revealed the Census' findings that racial inequalities still persist in pay, home ownership, and education. The article reveals that three-fourths of white households owned their homes in 2005, compared with 46 percent of black households and 48% of Hispanic households. The article notes that while
In actuality, while the trends of single parent-\textit{hood} are more pronounced among the so-called underclass, single parent families are increasing steadily in suburbia as well as white, wealthy communities, not just in the urban core or black and Latino ghettos. These reports thus “treat as a proof of the ghetto’s ‘abnormality’ what is, in fact, a fairly prevalent, society wide trend (Macek 2006, 182).

Negative media portrayals of black poverty might account for why studies have revealed that black poor people tend to elicit more individualistic attributions and fewer societal attributions (Iyengar 1990, 59). The experiments conducted by Shanto Iyengar revealed not only that respondents tended to sympathize more with the poor when they were framed thematically rather then episodically, but that race played a significant factor as well. In his study, when the predominately white respondents followed a news story about a poor person depicted as white, “societal intervention was viewed more often as an appropriate response to poverty,” but when “poor black individuals were portrayed, they were seen as more responsible for their own economic situations” (Iyengar 1990, 60). The racial differences were especially prominent for adult single mothers, as the black mother in the story elicited “twice the proportion of individualistic treatment

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Homeownership rates are near an all-time high in the United States, these racial gaps have actually increased in the past 25 years. The article blames this on cyclical poverty (the fact that people tend to acquire the same jobs and schooling that their parents had), and the decline of manufacturing jobs -- the same jobs that "helped propel many white families into the middle class after World War II" (Olemacher, \textit{Cincinnati Enquirer}). Urban scholars like Steve Macek agree with this analysis, noting that the outsourcing of industry has left a service economy in cities like New Orleans, which caters to tourists and thrives on low-paying, transient, and unstable jobs. Furthermore, the consequences of "white flight" from the cities to the suburbs resulted in concentrated poverty in urban ghettos. Macek argues that since the federal government concentrates public housing in segregated inner-city neighborhoods, the poor is cut off from decent housing and educational and economic opportunities by keeping affordable housing for poor minorities out of surrounding suburbs. Michael Eric Dyson in \textit{Come Hell or High Water} claims that "the effects of concentrated poverty have been amply documented: are reduced private sector investment and local job opportunities, higher prices for the poor in inner-city businesses, increased levels of crime, negative consequences on the mental and physical health of the poor, and spatial dislocation of the poor spurred by the "black track" of black middle-class households to the suburbs" (Dyson 2006, 7).
attributions” compared to that of the white mother (Iyengar 1990, 59). Individual attributions were especially high when framed episodically (Iyengar 1990, 61). This makes sense, as scholars like Paul M. Kellstedt have argued that when the media frames race and poverty episodically instead of thematically (or a narrative versus analytical frame, as he codes it), it “presents as opportunity, depending on the characteristics of the person who is the subject of the story (such as, whether the person is black or white), either to confirm or refute preexisting stereotypes” (Kellstedt 2003, 19). For example, if the media tells a story about teenage pregnancy by choosing an inner-city black girl as the subject, they are essentially “confirming the stereotype that teen pregnancy is a black problem as well as an urban problem,” instead of challenging stereotypes by choosing a wealthy white suburbanite. While these “stereotype-disconfirming stories” do occasionally appear in the media, the general literature on the issue is overwhelmingly unanimous in its conclusions that such stories are the exception, not the rule (Kellstedt 2003, 19). Kellstedt thus argues that the press might cultivate stereotypical beliefs among the public when they tell stories that confirm, rather than challenge, the preexisting attitudes of their viewers and readers.

Taking that point further, it is important to emphasize that the mass media is not entirely at fault here. As Sanford F. Schram states, in the article “Putting a Black Face on Welfare” we also need “to explain how our culture primes people to read news reports and images in a certain way” and that in the case of welfare, it is our prejudices which operate to read racialized images of welfare recipients in negative ways (Schram 2003, 215). For example, on the original cover of Gilens’ Why Americans Hate Welfare, an ambiguously multi-shaded hand is pictured, compelling viewers to come to their own conclusions about who is taking welfare and why. Schram argues that this photographs is what W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) calls a “‘metapicture’-- a representation that refers not so much to a visualized object but more importantly to the process of visualization” (Schram 2003, 213). To make this representation coherent, viewing subjects must make judgments that are to varying degrees rooted in the prevailing culture. Schram then notes that white viewers are often thinking negatively about persons of color on welfare even prior to reading biased news stories. It was for this reason that the racially ambiguous
hand on the cover of the book was seen as too problematic, and was removed upon the publication of the paperback (Schram 2003, 213).

It is thus clear that poverty is a “race-coded” topic that often induces racial imagery and viewpoints even when race is not overtly mentioned. During the welfare debates of the early 1990’s, the Minneapolis Star Tribune commented on this, quoting University of Minnesota Law School’s John Powell as saying “A lot of this discussion is racism in drag….When you talk about welfare, vouchers, urban strategies, crime, poverty, you’re really talking about race” (Gilens 1999, 67). Since the 1960’s, poverty and race have been closely linked. Before then, it was largely images of Irish immigrants, southern Europeans or white dust-bowl farmers that conjured up definitions of “the poor.” These images have since been replaced by urban blacks, and “the most salient contemporary images of the poor-the homeless beggar, the welfare queen, the teenage ghetto gang member, the heroin addict shooting up in an abandoned building—are strongly associated with minorities in both the mass media and the public imagination” (Gilens 1999, 67). Yet, despite the fact that the ghetto is the favored backdrop for just about every news story having anything to do with poverty or welfare, just six percent of all poor Americans are blacks living in urban ghettos (Gilens 1999, 132).

**Hurricane Katrina.** The Kerner Report identified a number of problems with media coverage of the riots in the 1960’s. Hurricane Katrina is an interesting case that can reveal whether the same problems identified in the Kerner Report continue to exist 40 years later. The fundamental question is, to what extent does the coverage of Hurricane Katrina demonstrate that the problems identified in the media coverage of the Kerner Report have changed or remained the same?

These questions are also important when analyzing media and citizen responses to Hurricane Katrina. In Deborah Belle’s article, “Contested Interpretations of Economic Inequality Following Hurricane Katrina,” she notes that “70% of respondents in one poll said they paid very close attention to the story” (Belle 2005, 144), while more than 50% of those polled stated that they felt angry and depressed by the hurricane, and 56% said that they or someone in their household had already made a donation to Katrina victims. This response spurred hope that in the wake of Katrina, a national commitment to
economic and social justice would be “triggered by the searing images of impoverished African American communities, so vulnerable even before the hurricane struck” (Belle 2005, 144). Belle argues that this was unfortunately not the case, as polls carried out before and immediately after Hurricane Katrina revealed only a slight increase in Americans’ beliefs that “we are becoming a society of the haves and the have-nots,” and that support for government efforts to “reduce economic inequality actually declined over the same time period.” (Belle 2005, 144). A New York Times article, “Liberal Hopes Ebb in Post-Storm Poverty Debate,” expressed the disappointment many liberals and progressives felt as Republicans pushed for spending cuts after the storm, especially those that affected the poor the most, such as Medicaid and food stamps (DeParle 2005). These regressive measures, and American citizens’ willingness to remain complacent about them, might be due to what Belle believes was a more “episodic” media coverage of the mostly black hurricane victims, in that “its emotional focus on specific distressed individuals and communities may have encouraged victim blaming in many viewers rather than a sense of shared societal responsibility” (Belle 2005, 144).

Analysis of media coverage of the events of the Hurricane Katrina disaster must be contextualized in terms of dominant trends in the depiction of race, class, and poverty in the United States. Reflections and reports on Hurricane Katrina are a burgeoning area. News sources and government reports often repeat the basic facts of the disaster, along with offering a focus on individual tragedies (Editors of Time 2005; Moyer 2005; U.S. Government Report 2005). There are several books that delve deeper into the issue and deal with how Hurricane Katrina revealed racial and class inequalities. Hartman and Squires, in their book There is no Such Thing as a Natural Disaster, address gender, race and class disparities as they existed before and after Hurricane Katrina, and argue for sound and functioning infrastructure and efficient public services to overcome the challenges of post-Katrina disasters. A number of Harman and Squires’ themes are addressed by Michael Eric Dyson, with greater emphasis on race and class, and the way the media propagated false rumors of looting, rape and anarchy. He does however accept that the media “regained a bit of its necessary skepticism about the government while covering Katrina” (Dyson 2006, 209). Cultural theorist Henry Giroux contends that the
media images of the poor, sick and elderly among the predominantly African-American populations who were left behind in New Orleans exposed the persistence of racism. He suggests that the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Katrina was a result of neo-liberal policies that sacrifice the public interest in favor of privatization schemes and tax cuts for the wealthy. The disaster, Giroux argues, revealed not just the government’s incompetence but also its passive indifference towards the marginalized, including those who were simply unable to leave New Orleans without access to private transportation.

These issues are also explored in depth on the SSRC (Social Science Research Council) website titled “Understanding Katrina” in which various authors discuss Hurricane Katrina from different perspectives. Several focused on the failures of federal, state, and local governments (Lucas 2006; Perrow 2006; and Sturken 2006), and while they helped in providing context on the disaster, I tended to incorporate the articles that focused more on how Hurricane Katrina revealed class and race inequalities. Havidan Rodriguez and Russell Dynes’ article, “Finding and Framing Katrina: The Social Construction of Disaster,” focused on how television news framed Hurricane Katrina in often inaccurate and unhelpful ways in order to seduce an audience. They note, “Given the disparity of time and few facts, TV tends to draw on common cultural assumptions (including myths) about what will happen” (Rodriguez et. al 2006). Television reports frame stories that are tangible to the audience and can be easily incorporated into a short news report, so that “finding damage, death, help, authority and the bad guys” become the main storylines, as opposed to a story about the “transition from being a victim to being a survivor” or the “rediscovery of racism and poverty” (Rodriguez et. al 2006). Virginia R. Domínguez’s article “Complicity in Disguise,” focuses on the meaning of New Orleans and its residents being compared to the “Third World” during Hurricane Katrina. Noting that 37 million people across the United States live below the poverty line, she questions why Americans are always so shocked when they are confronted with poverty staring at them in the face. She argues that the use of the phrase “Third-World,” while possibly used to evoke sympathy for the victims, might also reflect our difficulty in imagining Americans as poor, thus registering them as “defective, foreign, or unwilling to assimilate, or as guests but never as members” (Dominiguez 2006). She ends by
urging for middle and upper class Americans to really start “seeing” those Americans
who do not live the much touted, prosperous middle-class life for which the United States
is known. Nils Gilman continues this discussion with his enlightening article “What
Katrina Teaches about the Meaning of Racism,” in which he argues that the debate over
whether Hurricane Katrina revealed prejudice in our society requires an actual definition
of racism. Whether racism is a question of individual psychology or a “social, structural
phenomenon change in our seriously flawed institutions” (Gilman 2006) is a heavily
debated issue. Gilman’s article sheds light on what he calls “subtle racism” or “racial
exclusion” in which racism occurs less through active malice and more through the daily
exclusions of marginalized groups “created by these sorts of unstated, unconsidered
social habits” (Dominiguez 2006). He gives the example of a white country club that
used to bar blacks, but no longer does so and thus, should be racially integrated.
However if the members of the country club do not know any African Americans, and
more importantly, do not make an effort to do so, then the institution will remain
segregated, and the same social structures will remain in place. Gilman argues that this
isn’t really a result of bigotry, but of passive indifference, and it is this passive
indifference towards poor African Americans that resulted in both the levees collapsing
after years of neglect and the lack of dialogue about racism after Hurricane Katrina
struck.

Less has been written about the media depiction of Hurricane Katrina, perhaps in part
because not much time has elapsed since the disaster. There are still some important
contributions to this literature, however. In her article, “The Criminalization of New
Armenians in Katrina’s Wake,” Sarah Kaufman focuses on the depiction of the victims in
New Orleans as “rapists” and “looters.” Similarly, Jaime Omar Yassin from the media
watch group FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) wrote an article titled
“Demonizing the Victims of Katrina—Coverage painted hurricane survivors as looters,
snipers and rapists,” which provided an impressive overview of various outlets—from
print to television, which had succumbed to this faulty reporting. Caroline Heldman
recently presented a paper titled “Andrew Meets Katrina: Racial Framing in Post-Disaster
Print Media Coverage” which compares the primary media narratives used during
Hurricane Katrina and those incorporated during Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Her study reveals that both the “looter” frame and “refugee” frame were far more popular during Hurricane Katrina than Hurricane Andrew, the latter of which affected a mostly white population. Even less has been written about Hurricane Katrina’s effect on the discourse of poverty in the media. Deborah Belle’s article, “Contested Interpretations of Economic Inequality Following Hurricane Katrina,” which I have cited at length, is one of my main guides in analyzing the specific media coverage of Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath. There is an extensive, almost overwhelming amount of information on Hurricane Katrina, but much less has been written about the role of the media, and whether the Hurricane changed how the media framed poverty.

Methodology

As has already been stated, I will be analyzing reports on Hurricane Katrina that appeared in five different newspapers and television news programs. I will narrow my findings by specifically searching for articles that appear when I type in "Katrina and looting" and "Katrina and race" to my search engine, since looting was identified by New Orleans officials as the most prevalent crime associated with the Hurricane Katrina victims. I would also like to analyze the discourse on race during that time period. I searched for newspaper articles under "headline/lead paragraph" for my CNN and Fox news transcripts since the results using this search were so robust. I examined and coded 94 articles, the detailed results of which are presented in the Appendix.

To make sense of this data requires that I develop “master frames” as a tool to identify how various story elements function within the texts. Jill Edy argues that similar facts can function quite differently depending on how the narrative is shaped (Edy 2006, 26). Thus, for example, I will look at whether Hurricane Katrina victims and their conditions were defined primarily as individual problems or institutional ones. An individualistic perspective assigns responsibility to those who were stranded after the Hurricane, and as a result, "blames them for their plight and holds them responsible for numerous other community problems" (Kendall 2005, 99). An institutional frame, on the other hand, would depict the situation as a "general outcome -- meaning a systemic
perspective that places responsibility on communities and the nation" (Kendall 2005, 100). Such a frame would be more likely to contextualize the seeming inability of people to leave, highlighting the fact that most of those stranded were poor and had little access to transportation. Journalists framing their stories in this manner might also point to years of neglect by federal and state government that resulted both in poorly built levees and high rates of poverty in the city.

Additionally, because I am examining how Hurricane Katrina victims might have been criminalized, I also will consider how depicting "lawlessness" in the form of looting, raping, and murder might add to that individualistic frame. Edy uses four frames in her examination of the media coverage of the Watts Riots. The first, the "lawlessness frame," was the most prominent of the early narratives attempting to make sense of the violence in Watts. It defines the problems as "wanton criminal behavior and the rioters as responsible," making it a highly individualistic frame (Edy 2006, 41). In this regard, Stuart Hall and associates argue in their book Policing the Crisis that the crime story is the most basic and prevalent narrative genre in news, with "law and order" in the form of larger police forces with more power as the most obvious solution. The second frame Edy uses is the insurrection/conspiracy story, which describes the problem as a "civil war, a 'race war,' by inner city black people against the 'Establishment'" (Edy 2006, 41-42). The third frame, the police brutality narrative, was the most dangerous to the Establishment, because it "implied the problem was racism, and blamed the structures of authority as the problem" (Edy 2006, 42). And the final frame, the economic deprivation narrative, defined the problem as a "lack of economic opportunity and social services for inner-city residents"(Edy 2006, 42). The latter two frames are the most institutional, and yet, it is important to note that even when an individual is framed sympathetically, it does not mean that the media are framing the problems that a person faces within an institutional framework. As the analysis will show, there are several articles in which individuals being interviewed explained why they were looting: i.e. they needed food, baby formula for their child. The intention of these reporters might be to evoke sympathy for the victims; yet often, articles do not provide the context that viewers needed to understand why that person is still in New Orleans in the first place. So when the media
frame these stories episodically by focusing on specific people and events, they present an “opportunity, depending on the characteristics of the person who is the subject of the story (such as, whether the person is black or white), either to confirm or refute preexisting stereotypes" (Kellstedt 2003, 19). Although the analysis will be focusing on the individual vs. institutional framework, I will also consider Edy's four frames as endemic to this framework, since criminalization was such a central story during the Hurricane.

Scope

I will examine this coverage from the day the Hurricane hit, August 28, 2005 to when people left the superdome, around September 4, 2005. This timetable makes sense because the media coverage at this period was at its most intense. By September 4 almost all who had taken refuge at the Superdome had been relocated. Therefore, after September 4, there was a discernable decline of media coverage of the kind of themes (e.g. reports of arson, rape, looting, etc.) this thesis addresses.

Plan of the Thesis

Chapter Two provides a social-historical background of the racialization of poverty in the United States that would culminate in the Watts Riots, and the ensuing Kerner Report. It then examines the media’s response to race and poverty as it emerged during the 1960s race riots. It also looks at whether the Kerner Commission's efforts to strive for racial equality both politically and in the newsroom has proven effective, and delves into the obstacles the media still faces in that respect. Chapter Three is my analysis of The New York Times, The New York Post, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, and FOX News in their coverage of Hurricane Katrina. I will examine the articles that I find when I search for "Katrina and looting" and "Katrina and race" and identify and analyze pertinent frames. Finally, chapter Four (the conclusion) consolidates the findings of the case studies and returns to the original questions posed: Was Deborah Belle right? Did the media really use more "episodic" or individualistic coverage of the mostly black hurricane victims? To what extent has media coverage of race and class changed since
the Kerner Commission, which found that the coverage of the Watts riots and other riots
during the 1960s which involved African Americans overwhelmingly relied on scare
headlines, reporting of rumors that had no basis in fact, and reliance on (mostly white)
official sources?

Two weeks after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, Secretary of State
Condoleezza Rice finally spoke publicly about the racial implications of the Hurricane.
She said the people who were stranded in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina are
evidence that race and poverty can still come together "in a very ugly way" in parts of the
"Old South" (CNN.com 2005), and even stated that the Hurricane Katrina disaster could
provide an “opportunity for Americans to launch a comprehensive attack on poverty”
(CNN.com 2005). The Secretary of State of a conservative administration called for a
change "not just in the federal government, but state and local officials ... as well as the
private sector -- and I mean non-governmental organizations and I mean the private
business sector -- to address how we might deal with the problem of persistent poverty”
(CNN.com 2005).

Forty years since the Kerner report, it is unfortunate that the secretary of state
should echo the very concerns that the commission voiced. In analyzing the coverage of
Katrina by the contemporary media, my thesis should demonstrate whether (and to what
extent) the media coverage of, as well as societal attitudes to, race and class have
changed or interrupted the conversation in ways that can be measured?
In this chapter, I will describe the historical and social trajectory of the “racialization” of poverty in the United States in order to understand the extent to which Hurricane Katrina was either a departure from past treatment or a continuation. In the early twentieth century, works such as Robert Hunter’s book *Poverty* (1904) brought attention to the American poor, but focused largely on European immigrants, such as Italians, Irish, Poles, Hungarians, Germans, and Jews. African Americans were completely excluded from his analysis (Gilens 1999, 103). During the “Great Migration” of the 1920s from the rural South to the urban industrial centers of the North (Macek 2006, 13), some attention was brought to African American poverty, especially as Harlem emerged as an extremely visible urban black neighborhood. Yet mass-circulation magazines printed during this period presented blacks as symbols of the Jazz Age and Harlem as a place of “laughing, swaying, and dancing” (Gilens 1999, 103). Even during the Great Depression, when the topic of poverty was at the forefront of public consciousness, far more attention was centered on white rural poverty and dust-bowl farmers than the black poor.

During World War II and postwar era, poverty took a backseat as the country turned its focus to fighting communism and rebuilding the domestic economy. It wasn’t until the 1960s that poverty was essentially “rediscovered.” Two books stimulated this discourse: John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* (1958) and Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962). Harrington’s book was one of the first to focus on the plight of the black poor, and to push for racial equality that he firmly believed would bring better economic conditions for them. He contends that “the Negroes cannot achieve their emancipation on their own. They are, quite literally, a minority in the society, and they do not possess the political power to win the vast and comprehensive changes in public policy that are necessary if there is to be real equality” (Harrington 1969, 81). Although Harrington acknowledged that the majority of the American poor were white, he argued that “the nonwhite minorities suffer from the most intense and
concentrated impoverishment of any single group” and that while “rural poverty is one of the most important components of the culture of poverty; it does not form its mass base” (Harrington 1969, 185). Harrington also engaged in a complex discussion on urban poverty, noting that “there is a new poverty that is becoming more and more important,” for in “Detroit, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Oakland, and other cities of the United States, one finds the rural poor in the urban slums, the hill folks, the Oakies who failed, the war workers from the forties who never went back home” (Harrington 1969, 83). He thus challenged the most prevalent image of poverty at this time, the white rural poor of the Appalachian coal fields (Gilens 1999, 104). This was still the dominant image during the early 60s, as attention to black poverty was still limited in the mass media until the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement and President Johnson’s War on Poverty.

It was during the mid-1960s that poor blacks came to dominate public opinion about poverty. This racialization of poverty was influenced by two social changes. The first was the migration of rural southern blacks to northern cities, which grew tremendously between 1940 and 1960, with more than 3 million southern blacks moving north. In 1940, fewer than 50% of African Americans lived in cities compared to 57% of whites. By 1970 however, 81% of African Americans were urban dwellers, while only 72% of whites were (Macek 2006, 13). In the 1990s, at least half of the population in cities like Newark, Washington D.C., Detroit, and Baltimore were African Americans, in part due to decades of “white flight” (Macek 2006, 13). Yet, even though blacks made up 12 percent of the population in urban areas by 1960, Gilens argues that this cannot be the only reason for the racialization of public images of the poor, because that occurred quite suddenly and radically between 1965 and 1967. It was still an important factor nevertheless, and a “link in the chain of events that led to the dramatic changes in how Americans thought about poverty” (Gilens 1999, 105).

The other significant change that set the stage for the racialization of poverty images was the changing racial composition of the country’s most prominent program to aid the poor, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Established in the Social Security Act of 1935, it was structured in a way that allowed states to restrict the number of black recipients. Black children in the south thus received far less in
government assistance than the national average of $13.00 per month. Furthermore, even though AFDC was initially created to assist single mothers so that they could spend their time raising their children, some southern states “provided only seasonal benefits to blacks, eliminating assistance when additional labor was needed in the fields during harvest time” (Gilens 1999, 105-106). The CBS documentary *Harvest of Shame* addressed these issues and captured the plight of the poor black migrant worker who had to leave her children at home unsupervised because she could not afford daycare.

Although in 1936 African Americans were only 13.5 percent of AFDC recipients, the proportion of blacks receiving AFDC increased steadily over the next three decades. This was due to both economic and legislative influences. First, far more white widows than black widows were removed from the AFDC rolls when Social Security Survivor benefits was established in 1939, thus increasing the proportion of African Americans among those who remained (Gilens 1999, 106). Secondly, the federal government expanded the AFDC program from one-third to one-half of total state AFDC expenditures, encouraging some states to begin participating in the AFDC program for the first time, or to broaden their coverage (Gilens 1999, 106). Thus, the percentage of African Americans among AFDC recipients rose steadily from around 14 percent in 1936 to a high of 46 percent in 1973. It has slowly declined thereafter, to about 36% in 1995.4

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3 The social security system introduced during the New Deal period, while progressive, was still racially discriminatory. With pressure from Southern members of Congress, it excluded two occupations: farmworkers and domestics, two occupations dominated by racial minorities, especially African Americans. Minority households received little home ownership assistance from federal housing programs, further reinforcing patterns of residential segregation. In fact, the GI Bill following World War II massively benefited whites but provided minimal education and housing assistance to minorities (Hartman and Squires, 4).

4 This percentage has been challenged by scholars like Sanford F. Schram, who argues in his article “Putting a Black Face on Welfare: The Good and the Bad” that most data on welfare only takes into account first-time users, and ignores the fact that African Americans are more likely to return to public assistance as second or third--time users, which he largely attributes to lower marriage rates. He believes that looking only at first-time recipients or only who is on welfare at any one point at time (which could include a suburban, middle-class woman who is given a partial welfare benefit for one month while, for example, making the transition from marriage to divorce), allows the discourse
Between the mid-1960s and early 1970s however, African Americans made up a sizeable minority of AFDC recipients, and this may be a factor in why the public’s attention was drawn disproportionately to poor blacks. Yet, Gilens also notes that this figure had been rising for decades, and that the percentage of blacks among welfare recipients in 1960 was similar to the proportion receiving it in 1967.

The steady demographic changes in both residential patterns and welfare recipients by African Americans certainly laid the foundation for the changes in how Americans viewed the poor. However, the sudden and extreme rise in racialized images from 1965 to 1967 in large part can be attributed to more immediate precipitating events, specifically the urban riots that shook the country between 1964 and 1968 and helped spur the civil rights movement’s changing focus from the fight for legal equality to the struggle for economic equality (Gilens 1999, 108).

**The Watts Riots and other civil disorders**

Although the country had experienced rioting before the 1960s, most notably in Detroit (1943), Harlem (1943) and Los Angeles (the “zoot suit riots” of 1943, in which Chicano youth, some of whom wore flashy “zoot suits” were assaulted by American servicemen), nothing compared to the 1965 Watts riots in Los Angeles. On August 11, 1965, the neighborhood of Watts, a segregated, poor, African American community in downtown Los Angeles, made national headlines when a young black motorist was pulled over by a California Highway Patrol car. A violent altercation developed and led to rioting that lasted for five days, “killing thirty-four people and injuring another 1,000,” (Macek 2006, 53) It took “16,000 police and National Guard troops to subdue the roughly 35,000 adults who had rioted,” and by the time the fighting had died down, an estimated

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to be taken off the more uncomfortable, controversial topic of long-term welfare population, which he contends is disproportionately nonwhite. Schram believes this is a mistake, that by not talking about race we are not making visible the differences in welfare recipients and their often “inequitable situations.” He states that “the dilemma is that if we take race into account, we risk reinscribing racial prejudice; however, if we do not, we risk not calling such prejudice into account for the crimes of poverty that it has inflicted on some groups more than others” (Schram 2003, 219).
$200 million in property damage had been done, and 4,000 rioters arrested. It is important to note, however, that the black population in Los Angeles during that time was 650,000, and observers thus estimate that only two percent were actually involved in this disorder (Waldrep 2006, 303). Nevertheless, the media still managed to cast the rioters, even though they constituted an extreme minority, in a sinister light.

There were varying interpretations of conditions in the ghetto and of the causes of the riots. Conservatives ultimately pinned “responsibility for the ‘long hot summers’ of the ‘60s on the pathology of ghetto dwellers and the permissiveness of liberal anti-poverty programs” (Macek 2006, 54), particularly after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. These interpretations avoided mention of structural changes to the U.S. economy or white racism. They appealed instead to “white middle class suburban shock and horror at the scale of destruction in this and the other riots of the 60’s,” and helped Ronald Reagan win the California governor’s mansion in 1966, as well as propelling Richard Nixon into the presidency in 1968 (Macek 2006, 53).

That said, there were sympathetic reactions from the intellectual and national political establishment. The Johnson Administration issued reports on the causes of the riots by two commissions, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (or the Kerner Commission) and the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (Macek 2006, 53). The Kerner Report concluded that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal” (Gale 1996, 74). It targeted racism as the primary cause of the riots, and warned that “unless conditions were remedied,” the country “faced a ‘system of apartheid’ in its major cities” (Gale 1996, 74). The Kerner report largely blamed “white racism” for the poor economic opportunities and decrepit slum conditions, and recommended legislation to “create jobs, job training programs, and decent housing” (Kerner 1968, 410-482) as a way to further racial integration and improve living conditions. Specifically, the Model Cities Program was created in response to the riots, with two objectives, as a “long-range program of metropolitan and urban planning with coordinated social and physical redevelopment of our communities” and as “rapid action to avoid repetitions of the Watts riots in cities such as Washington, New York (Harlem), Chicago (where violence has already erupted),
and Atlanta” (Gale 1996, 32). The commission approved of the president’s request that funding for Model Cities be raised to $1 billion for the next fiscal year and encouraged additional funding to other target programs like Urban Renewal (Gale 1996, 76).

The Kerner Commission also found that the national media had been “shockingly backward” in their “coverage and employment of people of color,” (Alterman 2003, 110), and spurred a number of minority training programs that media organizations established, such as the Summer Program for Minority Journalists, and the Michelle Clark Program for Minority Journalists. The latter project “trained and placed 70 people of color newpersons for print and broadcasting jobs from 1968 to 1974” (Gutierrez and Wilson 1995, 211).

To gauge an understanding of the causes of the riots of the 1960s, the “Commission visited many of the cities and interviewed participants and observers” (Kerner 1968, 36). What they found was that while the disorders were indeed serious, they were “less destructive, less widespread, and less a black-white confrontation than most people believed” (Kerner 1968, 365). The Kerner Commission identified specific factors that seemed responsible for creating exaggerated and misleading perceptions about the intensity and scope of the riots. The first was the presence of “gross flaws,” such as “scare headlines” that were “unsupported by the mild stories that followed,” and the reporting of rumors that had “no basis in fact” (Kerner 1968, 364). Second, much of the factual information that the press obtained about the scale of the disorders, such as deaths, personal injury, and property damage, were often from local officials, many of whom were “inexperienced in dealing with civil disorders and not always able to sort out fact from rumor in the confusion” (Kerner 1968, 364). For example, while news reports of property damage at the height of the Detroit riot put the figure in excess of $500 million, subsequent investigation actually showed it to be $40 to $45 million (Kerner 1968, 364). Third, the televised coverage of the disorders tended to portray the events as black-white conflicts, when in fact, nearly all of the causalities and deaths took place in all-black neighborhoods, and therefore the “disorders were not ‘race riots’ as that term is generally understood” (Kerner 1968, 364). Furthermore, the report revealed a deep distrust of the “white press” by African Americans, many of whom cited specific
instances of media unfairness during the riots, such as failing to report the “many examples of Negroes helping law enforcement officers and assisting in the treatment of the wounded during disorders,” and “the instances of excessive force by the National Guard,” and “white vigilante groups which allegedly came into some disorder areas and molested innocent Negro residents” (Kerner 1968, 375).

There is some evidence that the Watts riots incited an immediate change in media coverage of poverty. Paul M. Kellstadt notes that there was little connection between race and poverty in the news media of the early 1960s. By 1964 however (the year of the Harlem, New York neighborhood riots), references to “ghettos” appeared 32 times in Newsweek alone, and by 1965, the year of the Watts Riots, Newsweek included 74 references to ghetto conditions. After the greater number of riots in the summers of 1966 and 1967, the references to ghettos proliferated, reaching its peak in 1967, with “310 mentions of the word for an amazing average of almost 6 mentions per issue of Newsweek for that year” (Kellstedt 2003, 47). Gilens’ research on media coverage of poverty during that time revealed similar conclusions. He notes that the proportion of blacks among images of the poor increased from 27 percent in 1964 to 49 percent in 1965, which Gilens contends does not correlate with the marginal change in percentage of blacks among the poor during this time period. He also found that 1967 saw the greatest percentage of poverty stories that mentioned blacks, 72 percent versus only 27 percent in 1964 (Gilens 1999, 120). He attributes this largely to a “series of events (e.g., riots, new government programs)” which “led news organization to focus on new aspects of poverty or new subgroups of the poor and that these subgroups happened to be disproportionately black” (Gilens 1999, 120). It is important to note, however, that the single most common poverty subject in these magazines from 1964 to 1967 was the War on Poverty, accounting for 45% of all poverty stories from 1964 to 1967 (Gilens 1999, 119). That said, media reports on urban poverty in the media did increase in 1966 and 1967 to the point where urban poverty coverage almost equaled that of the War on Poverty, thus revealing the growing concern and focus on America’s cities (Gilens 1999, 119). Most importantly, Gilens reveals that newsmagazine coverage in the early 1960s were more likely to use pictures of poor blacks to “illustrate stories about waste,
inefficiency, or abuse of welfare,” while “stories on new policy initiatives tended to be both neutral in tone and dominated by images of whites” (Gilens 1999, 115). This association and linkage of negative coverage of poverty with less sympathetic groups (namely poor blacks) and less sympathetic times was fairly consistent for the next three decades.5

Has the media changed since the Kerner Report?

While these extensive investigations and sobering conclusions of the Kerner Report did result in some immediate changes, both politically and within the media, it is debatable whether much of the legislation enforced after the Commission reports were issued had any long-term effects. In 1998, for example, 30 years after the Report was written, a study co-authored by former Senator and Commission member Fred R. Harris found the “racial divide had grown in the ensuing years with inner-city unemployment at crisis levels” (Kerner 1968). Eric Alterman, in his book What Liberal Media?, also questions whether the media’s attempts at embracing the concept of “diversity” have truly succeeded. He argues that the media have always struggled over “how to go about fulfilling that mandate” (Alterman 2003, 110). Alterman cites a 2001 study that demonstrates how whites still are dominant in the media, noting that “whites made up 92% of the total, blacks 7%, Latinos and Arab-Americans 0.6% each, and Asian-

5 In Gilens’ examination of the media coverage of black poverty from 1950-1992, it should be noted that the lowest percentage of blacks in magazine depictions of the poor of any time since the early 1960s was during the economic recession of the early 1980s. Overall, African Americans made up only 30 percent of the poor people depicted in general stories on poverty and antipoverty programs between 1982 and 1983. Most notably, news coverage in 1982 to 1983 often drew a connection between the problems of the poor and national economic conditions, and poor whites were far more likely to be featured in these usually sympathetic stories. Most of the coverage was extremely critical of the Reagan administration’s efforts to “trim the safety net” for the poor, such as Newsweek’s important article titled “The Hard-Luck Christmas of ‘82” which claimed that “with 12 million unemployed and 2 million homeless, private charity cannot make up for federal cutbacks” (Gilens, 126). This story is fairly representative of the general lack of black faces in these sympathetic poverty stories, with only 17 African Americans included among the 90 poor people pictured (Gilens, 126).
Americans 0.2%, even though the 2000 census revealed the U.S. population is actually 69% percent non-Hispanic white, 13% Hispanic, 12% black, and 4% Asian (Alterman 2003, 114). Entman and Rojecki, authors of The Black Image in the White Mind, analyzed racial representation of the covers of two news magazines, Newsweek and Time. The authors examined Time covers from 8 January 1996 to 6 September 1999, specifically the cover topics that “call for a visual representation of a person symbolizing the prototypical American,” like “Growing up Online” and “How to Make Your Kid a Better Student.” Of the 30 such covers Time ran, every single image was of a white person. Of course, there were individual African Americans featured on the cover, like Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey, but they never stood in for the “prototypical American” (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 54). Newsweek had similar results. Of the ten covers featuring this type of anonymous representation, all showed just one person: white. The only “near-exception” was one cover titled “Your Next Job,” that portrayed ethnic diversity: a Black woman and two white men, one of whom may have been Latino (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 54). The authors argue that this tells us when “editors think ‘an American person,’ they automatically think ‘white.’” When they need to represent a group of Americans however, they “consciously recognize the need to show diversity and throw it in” (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 54).

It is also important to discuss the association between crime, poverty, and race, and the definite racial skew that exists in media coverage of violence. Alterman also discusses the discrepancy of coverage in crime victims, especially when a single individual becomes the center of intense media scrutiny. He argues that “the crime statistics do not begin to match media portrayals, with their vast over-representation of black criminals and white victims and a corresponding under-representation of white criminals and black victims” (Alterman 2003, 115). He compares the mass hysteria that was induced by the rape of a white, wealthy jogger in Central part by young black and Latino men, to the nearly absent coverage of a black woman who “met the same fate in the same park, at approximately the same time” (Alterman 2003, 115). He also refers to a study conducted by Entman and Rojecki which gives an in-depth analysis of ABC News. The authors found that the network “mainly discusses blacks as such when they
suffer or commit crime, or otherwise fall victim and require attention from government,” (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 67). They were also three or four times more often than whites to appear in sports stories, and about one-third as much in political stories (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 66). There is generally an absence of stories that “have as their central theme either Blacks as positive contributors to American society or as human beings whose racial identity is incidental” (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 67). This creates an image of African-Americans as a “distinct source of disruption,” and the authors argue that because Caucasians are hardly ever depicted in this manner, relative to the number of times they are shown, “the news can easily imply a baseline or ideal social condition in which far fewer serious problems would plague the society if only everyone in the United States were native-born whites’” (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 67).

Why does the news take this path, despite its supposed liberal reputation and commitment to objectivity? One possible explanation is that feeding public anxiety and fears about urban blacks serves to legitimate the policies of political elites, specifically those of conservatives. Because news organizations are under extreme time pressures to come up with fresh stories every day, reporters must depend on “official sources” from government bureaucracies and socially powerful institutions as sources of commentary and information. This reliance on these sources stems not just from time pressures but also from the belief that those in high-status positions are more likely to have access on more factual, detailed information that most of the population wouldn’t have. As Stuart Hall and his cohorts note in Policing the Crisis, “the media do not themselves autonomously create news items; rather they are ‘cued in’ to specific new topics by regular and reliable institutional sources” (Hall 1978, 57), and it is their “structured preference” for those in power that allows institutional definers to provide the first and primary interpretation of the topic in question (Hall 1978, 57). Thus the CBS reports of the early 1990s welfare debates (examined by Steve Macek) that framed black urban mothers in particularly negative ways, contributed to legitimating the New and Religious Right’s punitive “law and order” policies.

This was also true of reporting on the “war on drugs.” Jimmie Reeves and Richard Campbell, in their seminal work Cracked Coverage (1994) analyzed television
news coverage of the cocaine and crack crisis during the Reagan administration (1980-1988). The networks' evening news shows aired around 528 separate items on the topic of cocaine, with the stories increasing every year up to 1986, after which coverage declined somewhat. What their analysis of those reports revealed was that the discourse of television news converted “the war on drugs into a political spectacle that depicted social problems grounded on economic transformations as individual moral or behavioral problems that could be remedied by simply embracing family values, modifying bad habits, policing mean streets, and incarcerating the fiendish ‘enemies within’” (Reeves and Campbell 1994, 3). So much like the welfare debates of the early 1990’s, the media helped to legitimate the New Right’s “backlash politics” (Macek 2006, 162). Furthermore, Reeves and Campbell argue that there was definitely a racist and classist slant to these stories, best revealed in the media’s dissimilar framing of “cocaine narratives” and “crack narratives.” The authors contend that because cocaine was viewed as a status symbol and associated with affluent white users, coke abusers featured in these stories were usually portrayed as self-destructive and morally flawed, but were still “redeemable offenders” whose “normalcy” and return to the white, middle class mainstream society could be restored with the proper amount of treatment (Reeves and Campbell 1994, 123-125). Furthermore, stories about cocaine were more likely to cite as official sources drug counselors, treatment program administrators, and therapists, rather than the police and courts (124).

This changed significantly with the growing popularity of “crack,” a highly addictive, cheap, smokable form of coke that spread quickly in the inner-city neighborhoods around the country. Thus in 1985, the “symbolic source of cocaine’s menace to society shifted from the hot tubs of Hollywood to the mean streets of the ghetto,” threatening Middle America and further demonizing the inner city (Macek 2006, 162-163). These stories of crack addicts really took off in the late 80s, and unlike the narratives of coke addicts, were far more likely to cite the police and court officials. In fact, as critic Robert Stutman noted, enlisting journalists in “the hottest combat-reporting story to come along since the end of the Vietnam War” (Reeves and Campbell 1994, 134) was easy, and the reporting itself increasingly took the side of the police. Stories about
crack addicts framed them in gorier, more demonizing ways, likening “packets of crack to bombs in World War II that wiped out whole neighborhoods” (160), and accompanying their stories with graphic images of hopeless “crack mothers” and “crack babies” that were framed as yet “another example of the ‘poverty of values’ crippling America’s largely black inner cities” (209). Stories about raids of crack dens were frequent, with Nancy Reagan famously declaring during one drug bust in Los Angeles that “these people here are beyond the point of teaching and rehabilitating” (136). So unlike the narratives of the coke addicts during the early 1980s, the “crack narratives” framed crack users as entirely devoid of hope and redemption. The reporting during that period only reinforced the conservative belief that the people who are most in need and in trouble are the ones who actually cause this trouble, and scapegoated the urban poor and inner-city communities of color in particular, for “social problems caused by decades of economic and demographic decline and federal divestment” (Macek 2006, 164).

Yet, Entman and Rojecki argue that it is not just governmental ideology or the power of elite officials that shape the biases of reporting, but also the journalists’ own stereotyped thinking. The coverage of the Los Angeles civil disturbances of 1992 reveals this perfectly. Despite the fact that the uprising was interracial, in that a majority of those arrested were Latino and many were Anglo, media depictions largely associated Blacks with lawlessness and often heavily equated them as “rioters” (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 92)). The authors argue that it is not surprising that journalists themselves contain stereotyped racial patterns in their thinking, which ultimately projects in the stories and images they produce. They do note, however, that the association with urban unrest or “riots” has “at its core the concept ‘Black people’ because the largest civil disturbances in American history have generally involved Blacks” (93). Since most of the heads of news organizations are old enough to remember the televised images of rioting in the 60s, it is ultimately these events that “established their race-linked notions of what a riot is” (93). As we will see in the following chapter, this failure to live out the promises of the Kerner Commission were never more evident than during Hurricane Katrina, when the media resorted to using many of the same stereotypes to which the Kerner Commission so painstakingly drew attention.
Chapter Three
Analysis of Media Coverage

Before delving into this analysis, it is important to provide some contextual background on New Orleans, a city that had been drowning in extreme poverty for decades. While 37 million people nationally lived in poverty in 2004, the two regions hit hardest by the Hurricane had unusually high poverty rates: Mississippi and Louisiana are the poorest states in the nation. New Orleans had a poverty rate of 23%, compared to a national rate of 13.1% (Dyson 2006, 4-5). The black poverty rate in the city in 2000 at “35% was more than 3 times the white rate of 11%, and 43% of poor blacks lived in poor neighborhoods” (Hartman and Squires 2006, 3), while 27% of black New Orleans residents had no access to cars, with 80% of the "poor and near-poor [making] up the vast majority of those without car access" (Dyson 2006, 6). This demographic and residential pattern meant that when Hurricane Katrina hit, it was the low-lying, poor and predominantly black neighborhoods that fared the worst.

New Orleans has a history of intense segregation. It was one of 15 most racially segregated among the nation’s 50 largest metropolitan areas” (Hartman and Squires 2006, 3), although this was not always the case. In the Reconstruction era, the city was a mix of free blacks, whites, Cajuns, and Creoles, boasting a rich culture that was due in large part to the French and Spanish influence. That culture is still there, but the mixed neighborhoods are not. In 1960, New Orleans was around 34 percent black, and by 2004, it was 67.9 percent black. The increasing suburbanization around the city created “white flight” to Tammany, St. Bernard, and St. Jefferson Parish, while the black middle class retreated to Gentilly and New Orleans East. The Lower Ninth Ward had emerged as the best example of the devastating effects of concentrated poverty. One of the last neighborhoods in the city to be developed, it was isolated from the rest of the city and suffered from poor drainage lines. Its growth was so delayed that half of it was still underdeveloped by 1950. In September of 1965, Hurricane Betsy struck New Orleans, killing 81 people and covering 80% of the Lower 9th in water. Critics have argued that it was Hurricane Betsy's devastating impact that really fueled the decline of the Lower 9th,
since the government did not give adequate loans to residents or financial aid to help repair and rebuild the neighborhood (Dyson 2006, 11).

The federally enforced concentration of public housing in neighborhoods like the Ninth Ward created further segregation, and ultimately cut off the poor from good schools and health care. In terms of education, New Orleans has a 40% illiteracy rate, and 50% of its ninth graders do not finish high school. A consequence of this concentration of poverty is low private investment in the city and minimal job opportunities, an increase in prices in scarce inner city businesses, and poor access to good schools and health care, to name a few. As sociologist Douglas Massey contends: "Any process that concentrates poverty within racially isolated neighborhoods will simultaneously increase the odds of socioeconomic failure" (Massey 1993, 424).

The fact that industry has suffered in New Orleans has left many in the city to serve in the tourist industry, in low wage, transient jobs (Dyson 2006, 7-12). As noted in the book There Is No Such Thing As A Natural Disaster, "more than two in five of those who were poor experienced poverty despite being employed" (Hartman and Squires 2006, 88). The extent to which New Orleans residents were devastated by the Hurricane was inarguably a result of the poverty they had been entrenched in for years. As a Brookings Institution report noted: "By 2000, the city of New Orleans had become highly segregated by race and had developed high concentrations of poverty...blacks and whites were living in quite literally different worlds before the storm hit" (Hartman and Squires 2006, 3). This could have contributed to why only 32% of whites vs. 71% of blacks agreed that “racial inequality remains a major problem in this country” (Belle 2006, 151) and why “blacks were more likely than whites to make situational attributions for the behavior of storm victims, while whites were more likely than blacks to make dispositional attributions for the same behaviors” (Belle 2006, 150).

The Analysis

I conducted an analysis of media framing of the Hurricane's impact in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Details of the stories analyzed are in the Appendix, and are discussed below.
The use of official and expert sources. Stuart Hall, Steve Macek and others have written extensively about the media's reliance on official or "expert" news sources. This has been shown to be problematic because these official sources essentially become the "primary definers" of a topic, and the media becomes the "secondary definers" that basically reinforce the ideologies of the elite. Any response/defense to that main framework would be just that, a response to the viewpoints that have already been established as true by officials. When the Kerner Commission examined the media coverage of the Watts riots, they found that the media often relied on local officials to provide much of the factual information about the scale of the disorders, such as deaths, personal injury, and property damage. The problem arose because many of the sources analyzed by Kerner were inexperienced in dealing with civil disorders and not always able to sort out fact from rumor in the confusion.

For the CNN news transcript analysis, the search for "Katrina and looting" produced twenty-one articles. Of those twenty-one, four exclusively used official sources. The rest utilized a mix of both official sources and those affected by the hurricane. It is important to note however, that even then the articles contained quotes that were mostly from officials, and when they were not, the quotes from victims tended to focus on individuals and individual behavior. In the search of the CNN coverage for "Katrina and Race" six articles found quoted both officials and Hurricane Katrina victims.

The FOX news search for "Katrina and looting" resulted in ten transcripts, seven of which quoted only officials, while the remaining three quoted a mix of both. The search for "Katrina and Race" produced only one newscast, in which Bill O'Reilly conducted an interview with two correspondents and a civil rights activist. The latter provided dissenting opinions from O'Reilly's but was still an "expert" opinion nonetheless.

In the analysis of The New York Times, the search for "Katrina and Looting" resulted in twenty-nine articles, twelve of which quoted only officials, eleven a combination of official sources and victims, and one article that only quoted New Orleans' citizens affected by the Hurricane. In the search for "Katrina and race," there
were ten articles: five of which only quoted official, three that cited both officials and citizens, and two that were not applicable because they were editorials and did not quote anyone.

In *The New York Post*, nine articles were produced by the search, five of which only quoted officials, three that quoted both officials and Hurricane victims, and one article that only quoted those hit by the hurricane.

Finally, *The Wall Street Journal* produced eight articles when I searched for "Katrina and Looting." Of those eight, only four quoted just officials, two quoted both officials and victims, and two did not quote anyone. Neither the *New York Post* nor the *Wall Street Journal* had any articles that pertained to "Katrina" and "race."

With reporters attempting to find an overall frame, expert and official sources were used to add a great degree of legitimacy to their stories. In the articles examined in *The New York Times*, 17 of the 39 depended exclusively on official sources, and an additional 14 quoted both official sources and citizens. One article titled "Storm will Have a Long-Term Emotional Effect on Some, Experts Say," quoted Suzanne Yates, a psychologist at Lehman College in the Bronx: "If people start looting, and nothing happens to them, you get a kind of cascade, and a new norm of behavior is established, which makes it more crucial for those in authority to take some control" (Carey 2005). Citing an expert who affirms the need for law and order might make it acceptable to actually utilize punitive measures. The *New York Times* also quoted police commissioner Edwin P. Compass III, who claimed that "we have individuals who are getting raped, we have individuals who are getting beaten" (Dao et al. 2005), and that "these are not individuals looting, these are large groups of armed individuals" (Treaster et. al 2005), thus helping to perpetuate these rumors of lawlessness by citing authoritative officials who were trusted to know more than the general population due to their positions. Even when officials like Joseph H. Matthews, a deputy fire chief and director of the city's Office of Emergency Preparedness admitted that "nothing's been confirmed," he still contended that the rumors were "probably true" (Dao et al. 2005). And when FOX reporter John Gibson responded to news correspondent David Miller's contention that "there are so many murders taking place. There are rapes, other violent crimes taking
place in New Orleans," by correctly stating "we have yet to confirm a lot of that," his
tentative rejection of these rumors were dwarfed by the story's headline, "Anarchy in
New Orleans" (FOX 09/01/05).

As noted before, it is important to emphasize that even the articles that quoted
both officials and New Orleans' citizens tended to consist mostly of expert sources. For
example, the first couple of CNN transcripts entitled "New Orleans shelters to be
evacuated" and "Hurricane Katrina's Aftermath" only quoted one victim, Hardy Jackson,
a Biloxi, Mississippi man who was mistakenly referred to as "Harvey Jackson" of
Mobile, Alabama. His story of how he tried to save his wife while they clung to their roof
was heart wrenching and tragic, and was recycled repeatedly in almost every news outlet.
In the first few days of the Hurricane, his story was used to "symbolize the plight of the
entire Gulf Coast" (CNN 08/29/06), but it also revealed how, amidst the chaos of the
storm, reporters were relying on recycled information. When victims were quoted, they
were often referred to as "unidentified," stripping them of a name or identity. This use of
"unidentified news sources" was especially typical of the television news coverage,
which may be in large part due to the pressures that TV reporters were under to report the
news several times a day, thus giving them more liberties to be vague. In another CNN
story titled "Law and Order Breakdown in New Orleans" an unidentified female cries to
the camera "Please give us a call. Please, anybody who knows anything about any of my
family members, please help them. Help them get to a phone. Help them get to a
computer. It doesn't matter. Please help them. We love y'all, if y'all can hear us!" (CNN
09/01/05). The fact that this woman was not named made her cries for help somewhat
fruitless. Her pleas for people to help get her family access to a computer or phone,
highlighted one of the main obstacles that Hurricane Katrina victims faced: gaining
access to communication so that they could not only get help but also have some control
over how they were represented.

Reporters supplant official sources. During the coverage of Hurricane Katrina,
reporters also resorted to summarizing the experiences of Hurricane victims for them.
One way in which they did this was in referring to those affected by the hurricane as
"these people." For example, in a CNN transcript entitled "Hurricane Katrina's Aftermath," the news anchor Rick Sanchez asked,

"Why did these people end up in their attics? Did they not figure out that if the water kept rising they would be creating a trap for themselves?" to which photojournalist Mark Biello replied, "We talked to one local law official and she was a police officer who was here in the past. And she sort of made a reference, and this was before the hurricane, saying that what people learned in the area is that they've put a statue of Saint Joseph in the lawn and they always keep an ax to hack their way out of the attic in case the floodwaters rose" (CNN 08/30/05).

Biello then admitted that this was "sort of not a joke, but it was just talk," and contended that "a lot of these people, why the people were still there, why they were trapped, again, you know this is a low-income area. They didn't have the means, they didn't have the communications…"(CNN 08/30/05). This exchange is absurd not just because Biello quotes from a local law official who "sort of made a reference," but also because it implies that "these people" lacked the good sense to leave, and therefore, were too trusting and ignorant. Although his acknowledgment that a lack of means and communications played a large part in people's inability to leave, Biello's coverage is still problematic because it associates ignorance and lack of initiative with the poor, specifically the black poor.

This association was reinforced again and again in the media, as when CNN producer Kim Segal concluded on camera that people were looting and "there's nothing you can do about it" because "you can't talk sense into, you know, these people here. This is what they want to do" (CNN 08/31/05, “Evacuation from…”). CNN correspondent Chris Lawrence explained the need for the National Guard by noting: "These people are hungry. They're tired. They've got nowhere to go. And the officers said, when night comes -- I'm watching the sun dip behind the buildings right now, he was very afraid -- he said, I don't know which night it's going to break, but these people have a breaking point. And I'm scared to see what happens when they reach that point"
(CNN 08/31/05, “Katrina Aftermath: Live…”). Although he finished by contending "like any of us, you do what you can to try to eat," a clear distinction had been made between "us" and "these people," who are not only "senseless" but violent as well.

Even when the media did not use amorphous, even dehumanizing, terms like "these people" to refer to Hurricane Katrina victims, they found other ways to convey their opinions to viewers. Bill O'Reilly in the FOX News report "Did Hurricane Lead to Crime?" responded to Shepard Smith's report that there had been "people who stay[ed] behind and help[ed] feed people who didn't have anywhere to go," by rebutting "I understand, but you've got to keep an eye on the thugs, because unfortunately it's just a fact of life" (FOX 08/29/05). Other reporters, like Fox's Greta Van Susteren, confirmed rumors that were later revealed to be false by stating, "Here's the cold truth. Last night there were shootings. Groups of dangerous criminals are roaming the dark streets. Looters are stealing guns and the situation is getting more dangerous by the hour" (FOX 08/31/05). Smith also confirmed that "people have waited in line for four days in squalor with shootings happening in there and people being raped. That's not -- that's not conjecture. That's not speculation. That happened" (FOX 09/02/05, “Is there a Racial…”).

There were times when reporters tried to use their position to frame the victims sympathetically, such as when Anderson Cooper rejected the rumors of widespread looting by contending: "I wouldn't call it looting. What I have seen is desperate people kind of wandering around here in downtown Gulfport. I saw a man with two bottles of olive oil. He was hoping to try to cook something up. He says he has no water. So there are a lot of people just desperately in need" (CNN 08/30/05, “Louisiana Governor…”). Still, despite Cooper's sympathetic framing, the fact is that he was still positioning himself as an authority on this man's experiences. Why was the man not interviewed? Furthermore, Cooper's empathy with the victims seemed to be short lived. When Nancy Grace pointed out in the same program that "many people are refusing to evacuate, Anderson, because they fear looting," Cooper replied, "Yes, absolutely. And it's a concern. I mean, it's a scary situation. You know, when darkness falls, I mean, you're stuck in your home all alone, and there are people wandering around in your
neighborhood…..And looting, you know, it's a breakdown in civil society, and that is something that authorities simply cannot tolerate or will not tolerate because it just spreads and it feeds on itself, as you know, Nancy" (CNN 08/30/05, “Louisiana Governor…”). Thus reporters' tendency to slip into framing the situation as "dark," with violence looming just around the corner, undermined their ability to simply report this chaotic and confusing situation as such.

When victims were quoted, it was usually to confirm the dominant image of violence. One CNN interview with a Hurricane evacuee basically reaffirmed the reporter's narrative on looting. When the reporter asked, "Are you scared? Do you not want to be around the people you're seeing in the streets?" the evacuee, Suzanne Bennett replied, "I mean, because I'm kind of shocked the way they reacted. I mean, going into the hospital, shooting people and all that in a time like this, a life-death situation and they're reacting like this, so I don't want to be around them" (CNN 09/02/05). The reporter did not feel the need to ask whether Ms. Bennett was an eyewitness to the horrors she narrated.

Other victims were represented as helpless and totally dependent. A Wall Street Journal article quoted Deon Ricard, 37, with "tears streaming down her face" explaining that "we don't have water, we don't have gas. I've got nine children. We're all sitting out on the corner waiting for someone to help us" (McKinnon et al. 2005). These images of poor blacks waiting around for someone to "help them" can be problematic, for several reasons. Authors Entman and Rojecki, of The Black Image in the White Mind, examined race representation in television news and found that "the networks mainly discuss Blacks as such when they suffer or commit crime, or otherwise fall victim and require attention from the government (and perhaps, taxpayers)" (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 67). This association of Blacks to narratives of crime and victimization "constructs African Americans as a distinct source of disruption" (Entman and Rojecki 2000, 67).

Furthermore, the focus on individuals may encourage victim blaming in some viewers. The image of Ricard, for example, sitting around with nine children "waiting for someone to help us" brings to mind negative stereotypes of poor blacks, including loose sexuality, laziness, and helplessness/dependence.
In addition, the media “victimized” New Orleans' evacuees to the point of othering, by labeling them as “refugees,” and "of or from the Third World." There were references to "Bangladesh" (CNN 08/31/05, “National Guard…”), "Sudan" and "Somalia" (CNN 08/31/05, “Aftermath of…”), and Baghdad (Purdam 2005), to name a few, and the labels "refugee" and "Third World" were especially prevalent throughout all of the news coverage I examined. The media's tendency to either "criminalize" New Orleans citizens or "other them" is no better displayed than in *The New York Post* headline "Thousands' Are Drowned -- Refugees Ordered Out of New Orleans as Gangs of Looters Swarm Ghost City” (Gellar 2005).

What is problematic with associating those New Orleans residents on TV as “Third World” is that “equating poor people with non-white people and both with the “Third World” quietly allows viewers to think that poverty and non-whiteness are non-American things, when they are actually present in the U.S. in significant numbers” (Domínguez 2005, 3). Media critics and civil rights leaders like past Congressional Black Caucus chairman Elijah Cummings demanded in a CNN interview that "we need to stop calling them refugees because I think when we begin to call them refugees, we begin to treat them as refugees as they're not part of this country. This is America (CNN 08/31/05, “Aftermath of…”). In a FOX News interview with Bill O'Reilly, Civil Rights activist Lawrence Guyot argued that only black people were called "refugees," (FOX 09/02/05, “Is there…”) which I found to be true in this analysis as well. Although there were reports of looting in Biloxi, there were no references to the destruction as being reminiscent of the "Third World" and the people as "refugees." This may point to what theorists like Gilens and Entman have been arguing for years, that while Americans hold low opinions of the poor, it is images of the black poor that tend to bring forth the most debasing stereotyping and evoke the most negative feelings.

When they were not "othering" New Orleans residents, reporters still could not shake off the image of "helpless victim." This can be just as problematic as criminalizing them, for several reasons. First, it can evoke images of the “white rescuer” who must come to the aid of the “helpless” blacks, especially women and children, which feminist theorists like Mohanty believe is problematic because it “implies a relation of structural
domination, and a suppression – often violent – of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (Mohanty 2001, 463). Mohanty’s work, along with Gayatri Spivak’s groundbreaking 1985 essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is important when analyzing why the images of white people “saving” masses of black victims is problematic. Spivak coined the phrase “white men saving brown women from brown men” to describe the British abolition of suttee (the sacrificing of widows) in the nineteenth century, and analyzed how saving brown women became the justification for declaring war that drove the civilizing mission in South Asia (Spivak 1985, 120-130).

In New Orleans, the media criminalization of black men supposedly preying on helpless women and children in the Superdome was readily bought by both the government and the public, and provoked such a strong response that Governor Kathleen Blanco, at a press conference, warned the “hoodlums” that she had brought in soldiers from Iraq to “shoot and kill” (Dyson 2006, 115). The focus had thus shifted from “saving” New Orleans residents from the Hurricane and the ineptitude of the federal governmental response, to saving women, children, and elders from these “dangerous” black men. And while the coining of those affected by the Hurricane as of the “Third-World” might have been intended to evoke sympathy for the New Orleanians who had been left behind, it nonetheless created a colonial framework in which “poor, black victims,” especially women, children, and elders, were placed in an analytical position of dependency and helplessness. Certainly, women, children, the elderly and minorities are more likely to be victims of violence and are more vulnerable to social conditions such as poverty, but only framing them in these helpless positions strips them of their agency, and ultimately, their power. Ironically, the widespread images of suffering actually resulted in a criticism of the federal government, and an argument by conservatives that the Hurricane proved that more money should be given to state governments.

Furthermore, when one considers the studies by Iyengar and Gilens, which have concluded that white Americans feel more sympathetic with the poor when they are depicted as white, and tend to characterize minorities as mostly poor and welfare-dependent, this image of New Orleans residents as “helpless” victims unable to leave the
city might have actually done more to reinforce the negative stereotypes than challenge them.

Additionally, although many Americans revealed that they followed Hurricane Katrina closely and were often angered and depressed by it, there was little subsequent discourse on the Hurricane, i.e., reconstruction of New Orleans, the state of the victims. This reveals another negative consequence of overexposing the public with images of helplessness, despair, and death. As Susan D. Moeller writes, in her book Compassion Fatigue, “the constant bombardment of disasters, with all their attendant formulaic, sensationalist, Americanized coverage, has made the public deaf to the importuning of news stories and relief agencies. We turn the page, as the Save the Children advertisement cautions us against, and leave the troubles of others behind” (Moeller 1999, 40). Moeller describes this as “compassion fatigue,” a consequence of “rote journalism and looking-over-your-shoulder reporting,” of “sensationalism, formulaic coverage and perfunctory reference to American cultural icons” (Moeller 1999, 32) that can result in certain events becoming overexposed, and ultimately yesterday’s news. Furthermore, this "hypervisibility can be used to stigmatize people or to easily identify them as an object of fear or a target for violence"(Bierra, Liebenthal, and incite! 2007, 32). The authors of the article state that "to render ourselves visible: women of color organizing and hurricane Katrina," argue that while sexual violence is rarely discussed in the media and public dialogue, this was different in the case of Hurricane Katrina, as rumors of rape and sexual assault were widely believed as true by both the media and the public. The authors question why sexual assault was so intensely focused on, and queries whether it was to "lure outside viewers into buying more newspapers and watching more 24-hour news channels by offering them scandalizing tales that would satisfy their racist and sexist curiosities?" (Bierra, Liebenthal, and incite! 2007, 33). The frequency of these stories and images can stimulate a “controlled emotive response-emotive because it acts on us sub rosa, under the level of our conscience intellectualizing; controlled because we retain the power of turning the page” (Moeller 1999, 39). Or in Hurricane Katrina’s case, after being exposed to two weeks of reporting that focused both on black helplessness
and black crime, including rape, as well as the embarrassment of watching an inept
government unfold on our television screens, we could simply turn the TV off.

*Institutional/Individual framing.* Another factor examined was whether Hurricane
Katrina victims and the conditions they were in were defined primarily as an individual
problem or an institutional one. An individualistic perspective assigns responsibility to
those who were stranded after the Hurricane, and as a result, "blames them for their plight
and holds them responsible for numerous other community problems" (Kendall 2005, 99). An institutional frame, on the other hand, would depict the situation as a "general
outcome -- meaning a systemic perspective that places responsibility on communities and
the nation" (Kendall 2005, 100). Such a frame would be more likely to contextualize
why so many people were unable to leave, highlighting the fact that most of those
stranded were poor and had little access to transportation. Journalists framing their stories
in this manner might also point to years of neglect by federal and state government that
resulted both in poorly built levees and high rates of poverty in the city. In her analysis
of the Watts riots, Jill Edy found that "many stories that attempted to make sense of these
social conflicts are so incompatible that they shun all efforts to integrate aspects of the
events," so that "stories describing looting and arson during the Watts riots often do not
describe the poverty of the neighborhoods involved" (Edy 2006, 19).

Although the analysis will be focusing on the individual vs. institutional
framework, Edy’s work on narrative conflicts will also be used in this section of the
analysis. I will incorporate her four frames of lawlessness, insurrection, policy brutality
and economic deprivation. The latter two frames are the most institutional, and yet, it is
important to note that even when an individual is framed sympathetically, it does not
mean that the media is framing the problems that person faces within an institutional
framework.

Furthermore, the use of "war/military metaphors," in the media coverage will also
be incorporated into this analysis, as this motif supports the lawlessness narrative. When
Edy examined the articles on Watts, she found that both Time and Newsweek "describe
events in Los Angeles in military terms and draw direct analogies to the war in Vietnam,
especially after the arrival of National Guardsmen in South Central Los Angeles” (Edy 2006, 33).

The search for CNN transcripts under the terms "Katrina and looting" produced four articles that used individualistic framing, and seventeen reports in which there was a mix of individual and institutional framing. There were six articles that focused on lawlessness, and fifteen on lawlessness and economic deprivation. When I searched for "Katrina and Race" under CNN transcripts, I came up with four reports which utilized an individualistic framework, and two articles that focused solely on institutional variables. There were three articles in which both lawlessness and economic deprivation were narrative conflicts, and three that placed a greater emphasis on economic deprivation. For the Fox news search, there were seven articles that focused on individualistic narratives, while three used both individual and institutional framing. The majority of the articles, seven, focused on lawlessness, with one article framing its story in terms of economic deprivation, and one article consisting of both. The New York Times contained six stories that tended to frame the victims in individualistic ways, six that focused on institutional factors, and twelve that were a mix of both. Nine of these stories centered on lawlessness, fifteen on lawlessness and economic deprivation, one on lawlessness and insurrection, and one solely on economic deprivation. When searching for "Katrina and race" in The New York Times, one article was found which focused on individuals and individualistic behavior, two that were a combination of both institutional and individual framing, and six that were mostly institutional. All of these articles focused primarily on economic deprivation as its narrative. The New York Post presented a less complex picture. Eight articles focused on the individualistic framework, one on both individual and institutional variables, and none highlighted solely institutional factors. Seven of these articles centered on the lawlessness narrative, while one framed its story in terms of both lawlessness and economic deprivation. Finally, of The Wall Street Journal’s eight articles, five framed the situation in individualistic terms, two took both individual and institutional factors into account, and one was non-applicable because it only gave a brief summary of the events. Five of the articles focused on lawlessness, and three on lawlessness and economic deprivation.
The twenty-one CNN transcripts found when searching for "Katrina and Looting" provided conflicting views of the events, as revealed in previous discussions of this analysis. A perfect example of this is when reporter Nancy Grace informs Anderson Cooper about the "laws against looting" and claims "And Anderson, CNN has so much of this on video! The hurricane strikes, and suddenly, that's your free ticket to a microwave!" (CNN 08/30/05, “Louisiana Declares…”), thus supporting an individualistic framework and narrative of lawlessness. In a CNN report three days later however, when congressman Bobby Jindal stated that "there's no excuse for the lawbreakers and these looters," Nancy Grace interrupted him by saying "But Congressman! Congressman, if I were trying to get my family on the bus, you're darn right I would attack that bus to save a member of my family! Are you kidding me?" She not only supports an economic deprivation narrative, but she expands blame to the government by questioning, "I don't understand why there aren't more buses, why there's not more relief pouring in" (CNN 09/01/05, “Law and Order…”).

This mix of institutional and individual factors, as well as the dual theme of lawlessness and economic deprivation, was typical for the CNN coverage. It presented a complicated, often confusing situation. That said, there was more of an emphasis on lawlessness as the days progressed. Early headlines such as "New Orleans shelters to be evacuated" and "Hurricane Katrina's Aftermath," were replaced by titles that resembled "scare headlines," such as "Looting and general lawlessness reported breaking out in New Orleans. Can the military restore order?" and "Law & Order Breakdown in New Orleans." With rumors of "armed gangs roaming the streets" (CNN 08/31/05, Evacuation from New Orleans Ordered) "law and order" quickly became a priority. In fact, it became such a priority that the media resorted to ignoring the vast institutional failure of the response by federal and local governments, and instead turned to focusing on criminalization and "law and order" to justify a nonexistent rescue operation. In the article, "White House Briefing on Disaster Efforts," for example, CNN correspondent Deborah Feyerick says, "we spoke to one state senator and he said right now the plan is simply to restore order within New Orleans, and another senator said: "You can't rescue people when you are being shot at" (CNN 09/01/05, “White House…”). Another CNN
report, when investigating rumors of sniping at helicopters that was "preventing" rescue crews from doing their job, quoted Gloria Roemer, Harris Country Spokeswoman as stating "It's a very bad delay caused by very, very bad people and it's really, really quite unbelievable that somebody would be shooting at a rescue helicopter" (CNN 09/01/05, “Massive Evacuation…”).

These tales of lawlessness, reported without much, if any, supporting evidence, were cemented by military imagery, such as when Ray Bias, a registered nurse, noted that "there's just so many people. It reminds me of -- I'm also military so it reminds me of a refugee situation" (CNN 08/30/05, After the Hurricane: Wreckages and Rescues). Correspondent Nancy Grace observed, "When you pull in the National Guard, they're walking up and down the streets with guns to protect themselves. It looks awfully militaristic to me" (CNN 09/01/05, “Law and Order…”). Jaime Omar Yassin, who also wrote on the coverage during the Hurricane Katrina disaster, noted that "CNN seemed especially intent on riding the wave of military fetishism, its bread and butter for over a decade of U.S.-sponsored conflicts" (Yassin 2005).

Yet sometimes that imagery which seemingly endorsed a "law and order" framework actually revealed the complexity of the situation. In the report "White House Press Briefing on Disaster Efforts," a reporter revealed that "there are SWAT teams that go by in armored vehicles with 12 or 13 officers, guns drawn, and they blaze by to, you know, show people that there is a show of force here. That they are not going to let things get out of hand, but there is no official talking to these people. There are no buses, there is no hope of when they are going to be able to leave" (CNN 09/01/05). This quote divulged just how complicated the circumstances were, and how the possible search for heroes in the military was fruitless because of lack of communication with, or services for, the victims.

Edy has argued that a way for stories to refute that events qualify as social problems is by "denying that they could have been prevented" (Edy 2006, 102). This is often the case during natural disasters, as there is usually a distinction made in the media between "social disasters" like the Watts riots and "natural disasters," in that agency is not an issue for the latter. The media often used the excuse that this was a natural
disaster and thus was not the government's fault. An example of this was the story "Recovering from Hurricane Katrina" (found when I searched for "Katrina and Race") in which news correspondent Tony Harris asked, "Can this simply be a situation where this was an overwhelming natural disaster and it just simply took the federal government, the state, the local officials, time to assess the gravity, to catch up, to get up to speed?" (CNN 09/03/05). Hurricane Katrina victims, on the other hand, were far less likely to have their situations framed as "unpreventable." In fact, in one CNN report, titled “Katrina Aftermath; Hurricane Death Toll Rising,” anchor Aaron Brown noted: "And it is not simply a disaster tonight. It is becoming the sort of disaster humans cause," and then later stated, "What nature hasn't ravaged, looters seem to be,"(CNN 08/30/05), thus not so subtly blaming those still trapped in New Orleans for the horrific conditions they faced. Caroline Heldman, in her paper “Andrew Meets Katrina: Racial Framing in Post-Disaster Print Media Coverage” also came to similar findings in her analysis of print media coverage during Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, her paper examines the differences in coverage of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Andrew in Florida in 1992, and found that while similar degrees of looting took place after both disasters, news articles were more likely to frame those affected by Hurricane Andrew as victims, while coverage during Hurricane Katrina more often resorted to the “looter” frame. Furthermore, New Orleans residents were far more likely to be described as stubborn and/or irrational, which Heldman argues only heightened racial stereotypes that might have delayed government response (Heldman 2007, 18).

Certainly, there was some focus on institutional factors, especially when searching for "Katrina AND race," since that brought into focus more societal factors like racism and poverty. One report, "Recovering from Hurricane Katrina," places the most importance on institutional variables, such as the necessity of funding the levees so that they don't collapse, and "not sticking our heads in the sand" when it comes to addressing the issue of poverty (CNN 09/03/05). Yet there was still a great amount of finger pointing at certain individuals, such as Governor Kathleen Blanco, Mayor Ray Nagin, president George Bush, and FEMA head Michael Brown, when there should have been more focus on how the system as a whole had failed. The CNN news stories were, for
the most part, much longer than those of Fox News, and there were more newscasts. Longer articles allowed the reporters to delve a little deeper into the story, to ask more questions about governmental responsibility. But as shown above, these questions could never be answered in depth, and most of the responses were shallow and insufficient. Of course, this could also reflect the massive confusion surrounding the events, the dependence on official sources who were often relying on rumors to substantiate their opinions, and the immense pressure reporters were under to release a story.

**Reasons for looters.** Finally, it is important to discuss what was typical of all the media coverage analyzed, the distinction made between those who were looting for survival, and those who were looting for opportunistic reasons. Thus, even those who were sympathetic to the dire conditions many poor blacks were facing, tended to discuss these views within a larger framework of black criminality. For example, in the CNN report “Fire Breaks Out in New Orleans,” correspondent Kim Segal acknowledged that "people are in -- a serious situation down here and they need to get out. And unfortunately, they're doing the best that they can to get as many out as best they can," but then noted that "the other guys, you know, they want to stay. They want a, you know, a free TV or a T-shirt. So…” (CNN 08/31/05). Reports that "swarms of people are stealing everything from diapers to sneakers to television screens" (CNN 08/31/05, “Eastern Gulf…”) led many in the media to distinguish between these "good blacks," those who were "starving," who "should be allowed to go and get the bread, the water, the food they need" (CNN 09/01/05, “Law & Order”) and "bad blacks," those "who we have to get" because "they are not only victimizing the poor people who are stuck there, they're victimizing America. They're victimizing all of us" (CNN 08/30/05, "Hurricane Katrina's…"). Scholars like Michael Eric Dyson have argued that while "separating 'worthy' from 'unworthy' blacks is supposed to strengthen the cause of the 'good Negro,' such distinctions ultimately make all blacks more vulnerable because they grant legitimacy to a distorted racial framework"(Dyson 2006, 167). One wonders whether that distinction would have to be made if the victims were white, as in the case of the AP photos that were released showing the black person "looting" versus the white couple "finding" food. Furthermore, the hysteria over looting points to a more troubling reality,
that protecting material objects is often valued more than helping poor and black people. While many defended the need for people to loot things like food and baby formula, taking clothes and shoes was often treated with contempt. No context was given as to why people might be taking these clothes, such as needing to change from their drenched or "soiled clothing where they had to urinate or defecate on themselves" (Dyson 2006, 168).

The Fox News reports were even more centered on lawlessness and "law and order." There was initially some recognition that looting was done for survival, like when reporter Jeff Goldblatt contended: "I wouldn't characterize it as looting. I'd characterize it as survival. I've seen people going into stores. They're taking things, but they're going in there and then passing that food out. They say I have to eat, and this is the only way I can do so" (FOX 08/30/05). In that same newscast, guest host John Kasich informed the audience, "We'll take you to the areas hit hardest. And dramatic footage of rooftop rescue missions. We'll talk to some of the heroes." In that particular period, CNN too drew a distinction between "righteous" looters and "criminal" looters, as when correspondent John Kasich said that the disaster can "bring out the best and the worst of people" (CNN 08/30/05, "Impact: Will Katrina...").

As it became clearer, however, that the situation was complicated and the heroes were more ambiguous, greater focus turned to looting and restoring "law and order." Reports that "thieves and looters are running wild" (CNN 08/31/05, “Miami Police”), legitimized the need for military authority, as revealed when Orlando Salinas recounted how "one officer showed up with his AR-15, which is a heavy-duty weapon" and "took it out there. People got to see it, and sure enough, the crowds regained their composure" (CNN 08/31/05, “Live Report…”). He ended by saying, "One cop told us that he would just as soon get his gun, shoot those people right there on the spot, take a big piece of paper with the big fat letters and say 'Looter' and leave it right there. Let justice be done" (CNN 08/31/05, "Live report…"). Similarly, Fox justified official violence by the need to restore order, to "make sure those armed thugs are under control" (FOX 09/01/05, “Anarchy in…”).
The networks’ reliance on unsubstantiated rumors was never more apparent than in a September 2 report, when correspondents David Asman and Gretchen Carlson breathlessly reported that there was a "hostage situation" in St. Bernard's Parish, where apparently 50 to 100 firefighters and their family members are being held hostage by snipers outside of this building" (Fox, 09/02/05, “Hurricane Katrina: Special…”). These reports were admitted to be "sketchy," so sketchy in fact, that the report was not confirmed by any other source, nor was it revisited after that broadcast. Nevertheless, the fabricated incident provided the launch pad for claiming: "so the violence and the looting continues" (Fox 09/02/05, "Hurricane Katrina: Special...") and labeling New Orleans "a city where looting, murder, and rape reign" (Yassin 2005).

Of the two networks, Fox seemed to be the more reluctant in its coverage on Hurricane Katrina to level criticism at the federal government response. In its "Live report from New Orleans," there was some discussion on what to do about the levees, but little admission that the government had ignored this problem for years. When Greta Van Susteren interviewed Michael Sumstein of the Army Corps of Engineers and asked him

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6 This reluctance to openly criticize the government, specifically the Bush administration, is consistent with Fox’s generally pro-Bush agenda. Jonathan S. Morris, in an article titled “The Fox News Factor,” examined data from the Pew Research Center’s 1998 to 2004 Biennial Media Consumption Surveys to understand how the cable news industry, particularly the Fox News Network, have become so successful in recent years. Furthermore, Morris also wanted to determine what demographic and attitudinal factors will influence whether a person will watch either a network news channel or one of the cable channels for news. Morris argues that during “times of crisis,” such as the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, the 2000 presidential election and recount, and the second Gulf War, the ratings for Fox spiked. He attributes this to several factors, mostly the network’s engaging use of audio and visual tools in their news presentations (such as the scrolling “ticker” at the bottom of the television screen for headline updates, as well as dramatic sound effects and multimedia visuals to introduce news segments), their challenges to conventional journalism by eschewing objectivity and instead embracing a right of center bias, and adopting a pro-Bush/Pro-war slant on issues like the Second Gulf War. This appeals to Fox News viewers, who Morris found are more likely to follow both entertainment-based news, are less likely to follow news that is critical of the Bush administration, and prefer watching news that reflects their own personal views. Morris argues that this differs from CNN watchers, who tend to prefer news that has more in-depth analysis (Morris 2005).
whether "we got to put the money into it?" Sumstein responded, "Well I think that -- I think that the country is going to see the importance of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana plays in the national scheme of things after this” (Fox 08/31/05). This was somewhat of a roundabout admission of the importance of larger institutional factors. Even so, this perspective was very rare in the Fox coverage; Fox’s almost exclusive focus was on "law and order," which naturally took attention away from the governmental response. Of the eleven stories coded for this thesis, seven focused exclusively on lawlessness. Yet, even if it did not delve into the issue at length, it was still difficult for Fox to conceal the failures of the administration. For example, in the news report "National Guard Troops Arrive in New Orleans," Geraldo Rivera says, "I'm telling you, Sean and Alan, this is -- you cannot deny that it's six days since this natural disaster befell New Orleans. It's just -- I mean, I can't understand it." He then notes, "They're all still here. Why is that? God, I wish I knew. I wish someone could tell me” (Fox 09/02/05).

Thus, although there is no explicit blame placed on anyone in particular, the lack of governmental response is revealed nonetheless.

_The New York Times _was far more likely to highlight social/institutional factors for the lack of a response, yet it mostly did so in its editorial section. Articles like "A Can't-Do Government" cited _Times-Picayune _articles which revealed that the Army Corps of Engineers "never tried to hide the fact that the spending pressures of the war in Iraq, as well as homeland security -- coming at the same time as federal tax cuts -- was the reason for the strain on flood-control work” (Krugman 2005). Yet at the same time, it was not exempt from reporting the rumors of lawlessness, both in its editorial and news sections. For example, in the opinion article "United States of Shame," columnist Maureen Dowd equated "limited government with incompetent government," but also contended, "America is once more plunged into a snake pit of anarchy, death, looting, raping, marauding thugs, suffering innocents, a shattered infrastructure, a gutted police force, insufficient troop levels and criminally negligent government planning” (Dowd 2005). One article cites Governor Kathleen Blanco affirming, "It's not like people are just there because they want to be there right now. They're there because they're trapped" (McFadden et. al 2005), while another article (released the same day) with the militaristic
headline, "Owners Take Up Arms as Looters Press Their Advantage," also cites Blanco, this time angrily stating during a news conference, "What angers me the most is disasters tend to bring out the best in everybody, and that's what we expected to see. Instead, it brought out the worst" (Berringer et. al 2005). This acknowledgement of both institutional and individual factors was typical of *The New York Times* coverage. Yet law and order was always a central theme. The article, "Administration Steps Up Actions, Adding Troops and Dispatching Medical Supplies," cites General Blum, who listed his main concerns as "law and order, food and water, and medical supplies," thus placing restoring order as more important than helping people gain access to the bare necessities. That same article even framed Bush positively by contending, "In cutting short his vacation and showing a quick federal response, Mr. Bush made it clear again that he had studied the mistakes of his father, who was widely criticized in 1992 as responding too slowly to Hurricane Andrew in Florida” (Stevenson 2005).

The obsession with the breakdown in law and order was such that several articles released at the onset of the coverage actually framed law officials as victims at the hands of the "looters," who "brazenly ripped open gates and ransacked stores for food, clothing, television sets, computers, jewelry and guns, often in full view of helpless law-enforcement officials" (McFadden et. al 2005). The distinction between "good" looters and "bad" ones was also made frequently throughout the coverage. For example, in *The New York Times* article "Owners Take Up Arms," the writers observe that "across New Orleans, the rule of law, like the city's levees, could not hold out after Hurricane Katrina. The desperate and the opportunistic took advantage of an overwhelmed police force and helped themselves to anything that could be carried, wheeled or floated away, including food, water, shoes, television sets, sporting good and firearms” (Berringer et. al 2005)

An interesting aspect of the Times coverage, that somewhat set it apart from the others, was that while lawlessness and "law and order" were central themes, it often justified people's behavior on the basis of their "desperate conditions, presenting coverage that was at times both complicated and confusing. For instance, it attributed "dozens of carjackings" to "survivors desperate to escape" (McFadden et. al 2005), and cited local officials who "blasted the federal and state emergency response" as weak and
inadequate, "leaving far too many city residents behind to suffer severe hardships and, in some cases, join marauding gangs" (Shane et. al 2005). Here again, while blaming the government and attempting to use the narrative of economic deprivation to explain why people turned to lawlessness, the article still perpetuated the rumors of "marauding gangs." One article, "Storm Will Have a Long-Term Emotional Effect On Some," even supports an insurrection narrative, when it cites sociologist Steve Kroll-Smith, who noted, "There are huge divisions by race and class in New Orleans, and everyone who lives there knows it. The truth is that people living in the Garden District got out and those in the Ninth Ward and other poor neighborhoods didn't, and now this combination of rage and poverty is bubbling to the surface" (Carey 2005). Jill Edy defines the insurrection narrative as a conflict -- a "civil war, a 'race war,' by inner-city black people against the 'establishment'" (Edy 2006, 41). The prospect of a race riot is threatened by describing this mix of "rage and poverty" as "bubbling to the surface."

As the coverage progressed, there was more criticism of the slow response. One article, "A Delicate Balance is Undone," actually gives historical background on New Orleans and the poverty. It attributed people's inability to leave to the high rate of adults that were disabled, and the fact that about 50,000 households in New Orleans lacked cars. Still, it pointed to individual factors as well, like "they had elderly parents who were going to stay, because they thought they knew which parts of the city flooded and which did not. Or because they always had" (Applebome et. al 2005). The author then cites Mrs. Weiss, a New Orleans resident who had lived there for 41 years, as attributing her reasons for staying to being "hard-headed, honey. From now on, I'm leaving for a tropical storm" (Applebome et. al 2005). A broader context of the problem was cited in the article "Government Saw Flood Risk," which quoted Brian Wilson, an engineering professor at Louisiana State University who served as a consultant on the state's evacuation plan, revealing that "little attention was paid to moving out New Orleans's 'low-mobility' population -- the elderly, the infirm and the poor without cars or other means of fleeing the city, about 100,000 people. At disaster planning meetings, the answer was often silence" (Shane et. al 2005).
On this topic, although the Times coverage certainly quoted more New Orleans' citizens than either The New York Post or The Wall Street Journal, both of which tended to heavily rely on official sources, it tended to quote many people briefly, thus providing little context to these people's situations and why they were unable to leave. One article, "French Quarter Becomes an Oasis of Wary Calm for Some Amid the Chaos Nearby," was the only article found in the coverage that solely quotes New Orleans' citizens, yet its description of a family trying to block "looters" from their neighborhood only reinforced the narratives of lawlessness. The author uses military imagery to describe the family, painting "Mr. Montgomery" as the "group's general," whose "reputation as an enforcer has gained him renown within the neighborhood" (Dao 2005). In fact, war-like imagery was prevalent throughout the Times coverage, and certainly fit with the "law and order" narrative that much of the coverage was pushing for, no better exemplified than when Governor Kathleen Blanco was quoted, warning, "I have one message for these hoodlums. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so if necessary" (Dao et. al 09/02/05).

The New York Post emphasized lawlessness and restoring order to a far greater degree than The New York Times. With eight of its nine articles pointing to individual factors and lawlessness, and five quoting only officials, it presented a far less complicated version of the events. It contained the least amount of journalistic integrity compared to the other news outlets that were examined, resorting much more frequently than the other newspapers to scare headlines such as "Thousands' are Drowned -- Refugees ordered Out of New Orleans as Gangs of Looters Swarm Ghost City." The content of the articles was just unprofessional, referring to the federal government as "the feds," the president as "the prez" (Orin 2005, “Prez off…”), and writing that the cops couldn't "bust" anyone "because there was no place to put the looters" (Olshan 2005). The language used in these articles was reminiscent of "The O'Reilly Factor," as O'Reilly often used emotive words like "thugs" to convey his opinion. There was a major focus on individual responsibility as well, as the coverage emphasized that those who were able to leave New Orleans did so because they "obeyed warnings," ignoring societal factors like little access to cars, to communication. Interestingly enough, the one Post article that
only quoted storm victims, titled "Hell For Tulane Coed Kin," sympathetically framed the white couple taking their daughter to school for the start of her freshman year at Tulane University, describing their "five-day odyssey of floods, looting, violence, vandalism and death" as a horrific consequence of having "nowhere to go when the evacuation order was issued" (Hinch 2005).

The *New York Post* was also the most political, best revealed in the article "GOP Might Storm Back," which argued that because Democratic Governor Blanco was "wringing her hands and saying that she had no way to cope" with the looting, the Democratic party's image might be tarnished, negatively impacting "Americans' willingness to pick a female president in 2008" (Orin 2005, “GOP Might…”). Another of the Post’s articles that infused national politics into its coverage of the hurricane, observed "where there was national unity after 9/11 in the face of terrorist attacks, Katrina has already prompted political sniping from some Democrats" (Orin 2005, "Prez Off To Gulf With Stern Warning").

The *Wall Street Journal* 's coverage was similar to the Post's in that individual responsibility was centered on, and great importance was placed on restoring law and order even early in the coverage. In one article, a call is made for intervention, as the writers argues that "the Gulf Coast disaster, with its associated looting and creeping lawlessness, appears tailor-made for quick military intervention" (Cooper 2005). An article released the next day notes that while a Civil War Act -- the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 -- places restrictions on active-duty troops guarding building like hospitals or confronting looters, an exception to the law -- the Insurrection Act -- can be used during periods of "severe public disorder" (Dreazen 2005). The authors then note that this was how "active-duty personnel were allowed to help quell the Los Angeles riots in the early 1990s and the Chicago riots of 1968," thus placing this natural disaster in the same category as these "social disasters." One article, "Taste -- de gustibus: In New Orleans, Moral Levees are Inundated Too," focused on the "moral depravity" of the looters, stating, "Looters have emerged, as if from some dark corner of the civic soul. They have emerged -- with seemingly brazen inevitability -- to take, to tarnish, to turn our sympathy into rage, our compassion into gloom." Looting is described as the "most disturbing" of
"all the bad news from New Orleans" (Editorial 2005), thus again placing a greater importance on individual behavior and lawlessness than rescue.

Still, unlike the New York Post, the Journal did occasionally incorporate an institutional framework. In the article "The Battle of New Orleans," for example, the authors note that while Americans sometimes expect their government to do far too much -- such as ensure low gasoline prices, they "do have the right to expect that it will at least provide for the safety of its citizens, even or perhaps especially in a crisis." The article then questions whether the numerous comparisons to the "Third World" reveal a "sign of complacency born of prosperity and the resilience of our legal and civic institutions" (Editorial 2005). And while the Post was hesitant to criticize the President and the federal government, instead focusing on "local officials," who "clearly hadn't planned for the twin disasters of both a hurricane and a levee break in New Orleans, despite warnings over the years," (McKinnon et. al 2005) the Post did acknowledge that "local officials had trouble communicating their needs" because of poor phone and radio service.

To sum up, it is clear that the bulk of the reporting was sensationalist, focusing on rumors that had little basis in fact, such as looting and rape. There was a blatant neglect of reporting on the plight of the victims, or any real probing of the indifferent government response. In that sense, the reporting tended to fall generally into the episodic instead of the thematic model, where news and images of selected instances of those living in poverty and their problems far outnumbered thematic news stories about poverty, in which the coverage conveys information about general trends and responsibilities (Iyengar 1990, 14). Hence, Deborah Belle was correct when she speculated that following the Hurricane, the complacency Americans felt towards helping the poor might have been due to the more episodic coverage of the Hurricane victims, in which the “focus on specific distressed individuals and communities may have encouraged victim blaming in many viewers rather than a sense of shared societal responsibility” (Belle 2005, 144).

Although there was an attempt at some level to provide institutional/structural reasons for why people couldn't leave, especially in The New York Times editorial articles, there was far more emphasis on tales of lawlessness and individual stories. Even
when individuals were framed sympathetically, the coverage was still episodic because it failed both to delve deeper into people's situations and to provide the viewers with needed context. And as mentioned earlier, defending certain peoples' right to "loot" items such as food and baby formula still places them within the larger framework of black criminality by having to distinguish them from "criminal looters" in the first place.

To conclude, when the media did point to institutional factors, two main challenges arose. First, these issues were often not adequately discussed, especially in television news reports. This may be largely due to time pressures (although the round-the-clock coverage of the disaster diminishes the force of lack of time as a reason), the desire to cover ‘breaking news’ rather than provide in-depth analysis, and the fact that many reporters were depending on rumors to substantiate their stories. Second, focus on governmental failures often led to finger pointing at officials, instead of examining how the system as a whole had failed. This persistent questioning of "who's in charge" revealed what could be labeled the "Oz Theory of Authority," that "behind some curtain, there is a wizard" (Rodriguez et. al 2006, 4). Viewing the Hurricane Katrina response as the fault of particular individuals, when it was in fact a coordinated effort "of individuals and organizations with skills, resources, energy, the capacity to improvise, and the knowledge of the impacted community," (Rodriguez et. al 2006, 4) that is involved, is misguided. It also detracted attention from the larger social issues, such as systemic poverty that so many people in New Orleans suffered from, and the fact that funding had been cut from disaster-relief organizations like FEMA as spending for Iraq increased. All of these factors combined to make the media a part of the problem, instead of a mirror designed to reflect the problems that made Hurricane Katrina into such a catastrophe.
Chapter Four

Conclusion

Hurricane Katrina was the first hurricane to be covered by continuous (24/7) TV news coverage. This was a perfect story for television news to grab hold of, for several reasons. The collapse of conventional communication meant a reliance on visual images, and reporters as a result taking on the role of “policy makers” (Heldman 2007, 18). Furthermore, since the breaks in the levees, subsequent flooding, and rumored anarchy in New Orleans provided television news with more than enough “live” drama to attract its viewers, reporting on the rest of Louisiana and Mississippi took a backseat to the coverage of the Hurricane in the “Big Easy.” As Rodriguez notes in “Finding and Framing Katrina: The Social Construction of Disaster,” New Orleans, with its reputation as a city for “hedonistic behavior,” might have been an ideal backdrop for these rumors of looting and anarchy to proliferate and be taken as true by the public. (Rodriguez 2006, 5). Also, it must be noted that while both Hurricane Andrew (1992) and Hurricane Katrina received a significant degree of news coverage, Hurricane Andrew happened before “competitive twenty-four hour cable coverage” (Rodriguez et. al 2006, 1). Thus, while Caroline Heldman makes a strong case for arguing that the more prevalent use of the “Looter Frame” during Hurricane Katrina as opposed to Hurricane Andrew was most likely due to the race of the victims, it may also be due to the pressure networks were under to deliver sensationalist, dramatic stories that would attract viewers to their particular station.

Certainly, there were a couple of articles and transcripts that discussed how the “conservative” focus on issues like Iraq and the cutting of programs that helped the poor might have contributed to the weak coordinated response, yet this discourse was not at the forefront of the coverage. What I did find was that CNN and the Times were more likely to point out these factors than FOX news, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Post were. The latter three news outlets were more likely to defend and praise President Bush’s response, like in the FOX News report "Hurricane Katrina: Special Coverage" which asserted that "Mr. Bush, obviously, is not as interested about places like
Baghdad and Najaf now as he is about Biloxi and New Orleans. And it looks likely to stay that way for quite some time” (FOX 09/02/05). Yet, as shown in my analysis, CNN and The New York Times also praised the government response in the early stages of the coverage, with criticism of the administration only coming later on. The use of sources varied slightly, with CNN and the Times more likely to interview politicians that were Democrats, while the other three outlets were more likely to conduct interviews with conservative politicians like Trent Lott. These differences, however, are on the margins and are not central to the story.

What was central to all of these media narratives was the theme of lawlessness and restoring order. In all of these outlets, the media chose to focus on what subsequently proved to be unsubstantiated stories of black criminality instead of "the thousands of people who were injured, suffering, or just plain living in misery with little or no help, lacking both relief or the possibility of escape" (Giroux 2006, 51), thus revealing a conservative tendency to treat those most in trouble as the ones who cause trouble (Macek 2006, 164). The consequences of such rumors swirling through the media and even being presented as facts by local officials on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" was the "diversion of security forces to follow-up on such reports when they were needed for other duties," and the many refusals on the part of some EMS personnel to complete assignments, "citing their own apprehension" (Rodriguez et. al 2006, ).

Stuart Hall et al. in their book, Policing the Crisis, argue that the so-called "mugging crisis" that took place during the 1980s in London was really a way to deflect attention from other societal problems, while reinforcing the need for a strict authoritarian state. Other researchers, like Steve Macek, Jimmie Reeves and Richard Campbell, have supported this view, noting that governmental policies during the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton years often resorted to punitive law and order policies that only served to legitimize their authority. During Hurricane Katrina, the ineptitude of the federal and state government in helping the victims of the Hurricane was quickly revealed. So, I would argue, the focus on the criminalization of the poor was an easy way to divert attention from the weakness of FEMA and other federal and state institutions that were supposed to be helping the Hurricane victims. The fact that these stories of
lawlessness increased in volume and became more central to the narrative as the coverage progressed may have been a way to establish order in an increasingly chaotic situation.

Yet, Entman and Rojecki argue that it is not just governmental ideology or the power of elite officials that shape the biases of reporting, but also the journalists’ own stereotyped thinking. The coverage of the Los Angeles civil disturbances of 1992 reveals this perfectly. Despite the fact that the uprising was interracial, in that a majority of those arrested were Latino and many were Caucasian, media depictions largely associated Blacks with lawlessness and often heavily equated them as “rioters” (Entman et. al 2000, 92). The authors argue that it is not surprising that journalists themselves contain stereotyped racial patterns in their thinking, which ultimately projects in the stories and images they produce. They do note, however, that the association with urban unrest or “riots” has “at its core the concept ‘Black people’ because the largest civil disturbances in American history have generally involved Blacks” (Entman et. al 2000, 93). Since most of the heads of news organizations are old enough to remember the televised images of rioting in the 60s, it is ultimately these events that “established their race-linked notions of what a riot is” (Entman et. al 2000, 93).

All of the media outlets I examined succumbed to the same problems found in the Kerner Commission's analysis of the 1960's civil rights riots: reliance on official and "expert sources" who were often citing unsubstantiated rumors, the use of "scare" headlines, the emphasis on lawlessness and restoring order, use of militaristic imagery, and a lack of discourse on institutional and social factors. As Lawrence Aaron of New Jersey's The Record put it, it's "much easier to depict images of 'looting, shooting, rioting and dead bodies' than being 'scared of the unknown' or 'confused about the future' or 'angry at the failure of the government' images" (Aaron 2005). Although many news sources eventually retracted the rumors that they had so eagerly promulgated, it is difficult to challenge that primary framework once it has already been established. Aaron contended, "When the history of the incident is written, it will be the rioting black people of New Orleans that is recorded and remembered as the dominant reality, not the failure of the government, which is indeed what we're seeing"(Aaron 2005). While certainly
there was criticism leveled at the government’s response after the Hurricane, the same level of scrutiny has not been directed at the media.

I hope that this paper has revealed the many ways in which racist and classist views have been manifested in the media and society in general. Although expressing active racial hatred has become taboo, leading many to believe that racism is no longer a significant crisis in American society, modern or "symbolic" racism, in which "speakers are aware that expressing overtly racist views is unacceptable in a public setting, so their racism is manifested in more subtle linguistic forms" (Kaufman 2006, 3) has persisted. These forms include "the combination of fear, resentment, and animosity toward blacks, denial that racism is still a problem in the country" (Macek 2006, 136), and unwillingness to support policies that would achieve racial equality, such as busing and affirmative action, despite favoring the idea of racial equality itself (Edy 2006, 116).

If there is one lesson that one can learn from Hurricane Katrina, it is that racial discrimination does not just take place through intentional contact between individuals, but also as a consequence of "deep social and institutional practices and habits," in that even after white people stopped actively hating racial minorities, the same social patterns --"where people live, which social organizations they belong to, what schools they attend," continued to persist (Gilman 2006). So when Senator Barack Obama made the point on the Senate floor that the weak response to Hurricane Katrina was "not evidence of active malice," but a "continuation of passive indifference," he was exposing how for years, the government and public have perpetuated these racist institutions simply by denying that they exist.

In conclusion, we need to talk about race and poverty. We need to accept that the same race-based system that we thought had been extinguished in the 60s is still very much alive today. My media analysis of the Hurricane Katrina coverage revealed comparable findings to that of the Kerner Commission's analysis of the Watts Riots in 1965. More than forty years later, we are still seeing poor black people in very similar ways. As Virginia R. Dominguez notes, if seeing poor people of color in despair makes Americans think of the “Third World” because these images conflict with the one that we are accustomed to -- that America is a prosperous, middle-class country -- than both this
inequality and the “habits of thought of so many about ‘America’ needs serious thinking” (Dominguez 2006, 5). We need to take measures to incorporate more discussions on race and class in our educational institutions, and we need to make more of a concerted effort to hire more minorities in the newsrooms.

The coverage of Hurricane Katrina shows, however, that reform in the newsroom will continue to be a difficult task as long as large corporations that must compete for profit dominate the present economic structure of the media. Until this changes, sensationalist and immediate coverage of news that avoids contextualization in favor of “hot” news stories that are meant to capture the interest of the audience will continue. The fickleness of the media does not allow for much discourse on the structural problems that were revealed during Hurricane Katrina, nor does it facilitate long-term coverage on the hundreds of thousands of people who were displaced, uprooted from their communities, and left with little. With the departure of the New Orleans residents from the Superdome, the sensationalist element of the story disappeared. And the American viewer, for the most part, turned the channel to another “reality” show, while the residents of New Orleans continued to be mired in their poverty-stricken environment.

In the final analysis, Hurricane Katrina highlighted the link between power, communication, and social stability. Those who lacked access to phones and computers were less likely to be informed of disaster relief efforts, more likely to be separated from their family, and more vulnerable to being misrepresented in the media. Their efforts to survive, their desire for rescue, not only from the storm, but then also from their wider situation, should have been the central frame, but that frame too was looted, this time by the media.
## Appendix: Coding of Media Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Katrina and Looting</th>
<th>Katrina and Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CNN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Articles</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoted Source</td>
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<td>6 mix of official and citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Institutional</td>
<td>6 ind, 15 mix of ind/inst</td>
<td>4 ind, 2 inst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing: Lawlessness/Insurrection/Police Brutality/Econ Deprivation</td>
<td>6 lawlessness, 15 mix of lawlessness/econ deprivation</td>
<td>3 mix of lawlessness/econ deprivation, 3 econ deprivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOX</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1 mix of official and citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Institutional</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Framing: Lawlessness/Insurrection/Police Brutality/Econ Deprivation</td>
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<td>1 mix of lawlessness and economic deprivation</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Institutional</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10 economic deprivation</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>The New York Post</strong></td>
<td>Katrina and Looting</td>
<td>Katrina and Race</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>5 lawlessness, 3 lawlessness/econ deprivation</td>
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