

SEVEN DAYS in the CRESCENT CITY  
KATRINA'S HANDLERS, CRISIS DISCOURSE, and  
STORY LINES

by

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Seven Days In The Crescent City  
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Beloved Parents, June and Chet Mazur, and Ken Kuntz, my best friend and the joy of my life.

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## ABSTRACT

### SEVEN DAYS IN THE CRESCENT CITY KATRINA'S HANDLERS, CRISIS DISCOURSE, AND STORY LINES

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Hurricane Katrina is one of the most important events of our lifetime. The issues raised by the response to Hurricane Katrina, stated one congressional committee, could not be more critical to America's sense of itself in this moment in history. Some even assert that Hurricane Katrina is a harbinger of America's demise. In response to the statements above, this dissertation asserts that a Conflict Management Professional should be included with the top officials during the crisis phase of a disaster for better coordinated emergency management operations.

This study explores and describes the critical seven days surrounding Hurricane Katrina's landfall on August 29, 2005, in New Orleans. Using discourse and narrative analyses, positioning theory, and grounded theory, the author examines the communications among Mayor Nagin, Governor Blanco, FEMA's Under Secretary

Brown, the Department of Homeland Security's Secretary Chertoff, and President G. W. Bush ("the Key Parties"). The research goals are to: 1) discover how the speech acts among Blanco, Nagin, and the federal government undercut the initial Hurricane Katrina response; 2) review the scholars who offer relevant conflict analysis and resolution formats; and 3) develop a conceptual model for intervention that uses discourse to shift social positioning systems and narratives to promote a more effective response to crisis. Conflict analysis and resolution are integral to successful emergency management.

Data includes all relevant communications in writing or captured by electronic media (press conferences, radio, TV, interviews, etc.) by Nagin, Blanco, Brown, Chertoff, and Bush; congressional testimony; government reports; blogs; emails; personal notes of disaster officials; documentaries; books chronicling the events; newspaper, magazine, and journal articles; and other dissertations.

This research sets forth the phenomenology of a disaster's first days. After thorough review of the Key Parties' speech acts, the author found 1) disruptions, and 2) dysfunctional communications. Disruptions, which are defined as sources of conflict, included backstories of: 1) control and politics, information gaps, and history and context; 2) the power words that were misunderstood or used to exaggerate or deny the events; 3) positioning the problem elsewhere so that it was blamed on the other, embedded in regrets and excuses, or externalized; 4) malignant positioning by Brown of Blanco and by Nagin of his state and federal counterparts; and 5) the inartful reflexive positioning of Bush and Brown.

Secondly, the research determined that communication was ineffective because questions were not asked or genuinely answered. These findings revealed underlying assumptions, motivations, and powerful but conflicting narratives that drove decision-making and shaped disaster response activities and police and civilian behavior.

An Ombuds is proposed as a conceptual model to assist the key officials on-site during the crisis phase of a disaster. Conflict management and emergency management theory are woven together to illustrate this concept. It is systematically explained how the Ombuds could be aware of and address the disruptions and the dysfunctional communications mentioned in the previous two paragraphs. Using discourse, narratives, and positioning theory, the Ombuds would promote professional interpersonal dynamics, collaboration, and high-quality decision-making.

The Ombuds would be expected to facilitate successful communication and process, build a culture of respect, establish him/herself as neutral, and assiduously identify problems and resolutions. The author has suggested tools, outlined psychological tendencies and counter-measures, and crafted the acronym ALLURE which stands for: 1) ask and be curious, 2) listen for positions, 3) link the parties together, 4) unsettle assumptions, 5) reposition the parties, and 6) encourage new narratives.

Through discourse the Ombuds can legitimize, augment, and leverage the narratives and reposition the parties. Finally, it is proposed that the Ombuds would have authority to end stalemates; deadlocks during Hurricane Katrina are used as examples. Potential contenders for the Ombuds' role have been put forth, such as the White House

chief of staff and the Principal Federal Official, as well as, experience and educational requirements. A standard operating procedure that requires inclusion of an Ombuds during the crisis phase of a disaster to work with the highest levels of government will improve emergency response activities. This research is significant for all future disaster victims, any disaster handler, and all Conflict Management Professionals.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*[I have] deep respect... for those who remain committed to New Orleans, either through direct service or the equally important task of simply staying informed (Horne xvii).*

### A. Prologue

It was the year of the Terri Schiavo debate, the death of Chief Justice William Rehnquist, and a White House indictment regarding the Valerie Plame disclosure. All of these events, however, pale in comparison to the hurricane that hit the Gulf Coast at the end of August. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina<sup>1</sup> became one of the worst disasters,<sup>2</sup> the most expensive and the largest storm, in the country's history (Horne 83)(Moyer 45)(Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to Hurricane Katrina 319).

The eye of Hurricane Katrina made landfall around 6:10 a.m. Central Standard Time (CST) on Monday August 29, and within 24 hours in New Orleans more than 1,000 were dead,<sup>3</sup> 180,000 were homeless, and 80 percent of the city was underwater. It was a

---

<sup>1</sup> Slightly evocative of a foreign name or that of a child (K. Ford).

<sup>2</sup> Katrina was the fourth category five hurricane to make landfall in the U.S. and the 17th to maintain category five status longer than 30 hours (Hawken 71).

<sup>3</sup> The official death count for New Orleans is over 1400 (Schleifstein 1), which does not include the deaths that occurred in the ensuing months (Deichmann 164).

narrative of diluvian landscapes and ontological heroes and villains. It was a narrative of one of the most redoubtable failings of our government in our lifetime.

Complicating things beyond measure was the way local, state, and federal governments spoke to each other and about each other in the immediate days before and after that fateful day. I suggest that the discourse between the three governmental entities charged with handling Hurricane Katrina's emergency management provides a basis for understanding how the officials failed to implement an effective disaster response.

This dissertation analyzes the narratives that unfolded in the seven days surrounding Hurricane Katrina's landfall.<sup>4</sup> Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, and the federal government represented the three levels of government directly responsible for coordinating Katrina's emergency preparation and response.<sup>5</sup>

I review the private conversations and public statements made by Blanco, Nagin, and the federal government, defining the federal government as: 1) Mike Brown, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Under Secretary; 2) Michael Chertoff, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS); and 3) the White

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<sup>4</sup> Landfall is the point where the eye of the hurricane makes contact with land (Ouellette 35). The word "hurricane" is derived from the name of a Mayan creator god—"Hurican" (Ouellette 8).

<sup>5</sup> Many other federal agencies may be involved, but only FEMA is responsible for coordinating the disaster response. For instance, the FBI will be present if the incident is deemed a crime scene such as 9/11 and the Murrah Federal Building bombing. If the weather is involved, NOAA will communicate meteorological predictions, public information, and warnings.

House, primarily President George W. Bush. These five people are referred to as the “Key Parties.”<sup>6</sup>

The discourse at the highest level of command and control reveals an implicit set of assumptions about the characteristics, obligations, rights, virtues, and flaws of these figures. Such assumptions, which can be represented as a system of social positioning, were critical to the actions, and in some instances, inaction of those who needed to work together to solve a time-sensitive crisis impacting life and critical infrastructure.

I review their speech acts<sup>7</sup> and the archival data beginning on Saturday, August 27, up to and including Friday, September 2, five days after the hurricane struck on August 29, 2005. My research analyzes the discourse, narratives, and social positioning systems to effect more successful emergency management operations in the future.

Hundreds of hours of hearings and thousands of pages of testimony have resulted in numerous government publications, cataloging the failures in the critical days of the crisis. Many of these reports focus on the lack of an effective unified command and control system, the need for a commitment to the U.S. National Grid, a shortage of satellite phones, insufficient prepositioning of supplies and equipment, an absence of

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<sup>6</sup> When I use the phrase “key parties,” as opposed to “Key Parties,” I am referring to a generic group of politicians involved in managing the early days of a crisis.

<sup>7</sup> Used here “speech acts” or “utterances” are basic units of linguistic communication, i.e., speaking a language is performing speech acts (Austin)(Searle 16-21). Generally the speech act is a function of the meaning of a sentence (Searle 18).

standing contracts for water and ice, an inartfully drafted National Response Plan, and many other logistical failures. These lessons, while not guaranteed to have been learned, are easy to address.

The more complicated lessons demand further scrutiny. If we fail to examine and learn from the discourse among these Key Parties, we are destined to replay the cross-purposes, malignant agendas, and misunderstandings and reap the same calamitous results. I expect that devastating events of this magnitude will happen again. After this analysis, I suggest roles and interventions that can be taken by Conflict Management Professionals such that discourse, narratives, and social positioning systems can be used strategically to solve problems instead of amplifying them.

A closer look at Katrina discloses staggering numbers. Katrina is not only the most expensive domestic disaster ever, but future disasters will likely be even more costly.<sup>8</sup> The estimated economic loss to New Orleans alone was priced at \$200 billion (Clower 239)(Forman 243). Hurricane Katrina affected one quarter of the world's oil supply, with 95 percent of oil production in the Gulf of Mexico shutting down (Forman 243).

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<sup>8</sup> Disaster costs are rising significantly over time.

Loma Prieta Earthquake,	1981,	\$10 Billion;
Hurricane Hugo,	1989,	\$ 6 Billion;
Hurricane Andrew,	1992,	\$20 Billion; and
Northridge Earthquake,	1994,	\$25 Billion (Clower 239).



The hurricane resulted in a housing loss of 700,000<sup>9</sup> across three states<sup>10</sup> (Crowley 125), the “largest displacement of people since the Civil War, and maybe the largest displacement of children ever”<sup>11</sup> (Stein and Preuss 41). The New Orleans Louis Armstrong Airport hosted the most massive medical evacuation ever staged (Flener 37). Baton Rouge was the site of the largest temporary medical staging and services area in U.S. history.

The country waited as scientists tried to discern the environmental impact in New Orleans. Katrina flooded 466 chemical factories, 31 Superfund sites, and 500 sewage treatment plants (Hertsgaard 18). The Murphy oil refinery was the source of a spill of over a million gallons of crude oil (Cooper and Block 129). Scientists detected that ambient airborne mold posed a serious health risk, indoor air quality was even worse than outdoor air samples, dangerously high toxins were in the soil samples, and high levels of bacteria were in the water (Zdenek et al. 170-71). The “Katrina cough syndrome” was identified by health officials in September, when reports also indicated that people had died from drinking contaminated water (Franklin 191)(Hartman and Squires 191).

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<sup>9</sup> Compare this to 30,000 homes lost from Hurricane Andrew (Powers 23)(Crowley 125).

<sup>10</sup> The three states impacted were Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

<sup>11</sup> Katrina displaced two million people, including 372,000 children (Cassery 206)(Hartman and Squires 1).

Is there any measure to gauge the emotional impact of such an event?<sup>12</sup> We know that divorce, alcoholism, and domestic violence became part of the ongoing destructive consequences<sup>13</sup> (Cohan and Cole)(Vlahov et al.)(Jenkins and B. Phillips)(Richardson and Byers 279)(Clemens et al.). Suicide and depression were a shocking after effect, with one person jumping off an upper tier during the five dark days of Superdome confinement (Horne 275-76)(Brinkley 192)(M. Gibbs and Montagnino 98). And, with each passing year, the New Orleans suicide rate has increased significantly, currently approaching twice the national average (Barrow 1).

Katrina is called one of America's most anticipated disasters.<sup>14</sup> On so many levels and at so many junctures, human suffering could have been foreseen, prevented, and ameliorated. Max Mayfield, the Director of the National Hurricane Center,<sup>15</sup> did something he had never done before in his 33 years of watching hurricane weather patterns (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 10). He personally called the governor and mayor on Saturday before the Monday hurricane to warn them of its likely severity (Brinkley 57-58, 79-80, 97-98). By Sunday morning Katrina was a

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<sup>12</sup> Most economic disaster impact studies do not account for intangibles such as loss of historic monuments, memorabilia, and cultural assets and the hidden cost of trauma (Clower 244). Some economists value the loss of human life at 2 million dollars per person (Clower 237).

<sup>13</sup> New Orleanians coined the phrase, "Katrina Syndrome," as a fear of spending money, an inability to make decisions, confusion, and a debilitating grieving for loss of place (Allain 38, 44).

<sup>14</sup> It should be stated that while an exercise called "Hurricane Pam" by local, state, and federal disaster employees had taken place in New Orleans the year before to prepare for a category three storm, the exercise showed the levees as being overtopped, not breached (FEMA Managers in the Field for the First 20 Days vii).

<sup>15</sup> The National Hurricane Center, near Miami, is a unit of the National Weather Service. Both of which are part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

category five storm, and the Center issued a warning that contained such expressions as "certain death" and "human suffering incredible by modern standards" (79-80). The hurricane was 460 miles in diameter (132), and traveled at walking speed.<sup>16</sup>

When a crisis is anticipated and then unfolds,<sup>17</sup> open communication, clear conversations, and mutual understanding are the integral links to saving lives. The discourse between the Key Parties was, at first, calm, routine, civil, and regular. We will see, however, that communications quickly broke down and the parties became angry, bombastic, isolated, and withdrawn.

#### B. Research Questions and Brief Overview

*[New Orleans] will never be the same, but neither will we* (Moseley Braun 48).

I will pursue three research questions. How did the speech acts among Governor Blanco, Mayor Nagin, and the federal government evince a social positioning system that undercut the initial Hurricane Katrina response? Does the Conflict Management literature offer relevant models for decreasing conflict and increasing understanding? How could a Conflict Management Professional intervene to shift positioning systems and promote a more efficient and effective emergency management response?

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<sup>16</sup> Inadequate preparation and lack of urgency are the initial mysteries. The inability to anticipate, plan for, and monitor potential levee breaching, and then failure to connect the flooding with breaching becomes another mystery. One-hundred and twenty-seven thousand people did not evacuate, and some allege that by 11:00 am Monday, authorities knew the levees had breached (Brinkley 243)(Forman 59)(Palast). Some people went to bed Monday night not knowing that floodwaters would enter their home and reach up to the roof during the night.

<sup>17</sup> Hurricane Katrina was named a tropical storm on the morning of Wednesday, August 24 (Cooper and Block). Hurricanes begin as waves off the African Coast. With equatorial winds and the loop current (deep warm water from the Caribbean and the Straits of the Yucatan), the waves evolve from a disturbance, to a tropical depression, to a tropical storm, to a hurricane watch, and then to a hurricane warning.

My research data are drawn from Senate, House, Office of Inspector General, FEMA, and White House investigative reports. I have watched press conferences and read the transcripts from interviews, TV shows, radio broadcasts, congressional hearings, and teleconferences. I have studied documentary footage; memoirs; memos; firsthand accounts; newspaper, magazine, and journal articles; New Orleans blogs; emails; and conducted personal interviews; *inter alia*.

I used positioning theory to examine the local moral order, which is a system of rights, duties, and obligations founded on the “symbolically mediated interactions between people”

1). Deep interconnections between agency, power, knowledge, and worldview emerged. My research explored how the positioning dynamics shaped this event and contributed to and exacerbated the miscommunications and delays.

The positioning systems disclosed implied, unspoken assumptions that became critical to the decision-making of the Key Parties. Character traits were insinuated in the discourse and were revealed through speech acts and narratives. These defining traits of the Key Parties are discussed in the sections below. Positioning theory language describes this as “characterological” analysis.

Analyzing the discourse of the Key Parties, we see an unfolding narrative that can be engaged in order to confront, challenge, or bolster the story line. I have taken Linda Johnston’s recommendation and searched the discourse for values and turning points (286-87). Stories become subject to transformation or reification as the events and Key

Parties are positioned. A worldview, sense of self, and a constellation of negotiated relationships emerge through a person's positioning system. In the Katrina narrative, the Key Parties misunderstood, competed with, antagonized, and disrespected each other.

After discussing the Key Parties from this perspective, I review several conflict resolution scholars to find theoretical and practical schemes. Based on these, I recommend a Model for Conflict Management Professionals and forms of intervention that would be helpful before and during a disaster's crisis phase. The Conflict Management Professional would use discourse and narrative analyses and positioning theory and other conflict management tools to enhance the Key Parties' disaster response.

### C. Research Methodology

*Where silk and steel fail, story must succeed* (Verghese).

My frame is positioning theory and my technique is the application of grounded theory. I studied the important communications of the Key Parties to uncover the functions served by the positioning systems, social forces, and story lines. My research located misperceptions, disruptions, values, and themes. I have not sought to present all of the relevant discourse I have found, but rather to present portions that are the most helpful in determining a way forward. I seek to generate a descriptive not exhaustive model.

#### D. The Crisis Period and Key Parties

*If you respect the dead  
And recall where they died  
By this time tomorrow  
There will be no place to walk* (K. Ford 13).

The seven-day period spanning two days before and five days after landfall is the most critical for this work. On the Saturday before landfall, it was clear that a serious hurricane was inevitable. By the Friday afterward, the Superdome and Convention Center had been evacuated, and the military was in charge of the city. A second mandatory evacuation ensued, leaving New Orleans virtually empty. The pressing issue of saving human lives was over.

The three levels of government responsible for preparing for and responding to Hurricane Katrina--the local, state, and federal government--make up my levels of analysis. Indeed, the iconic civil defense triangle (Figure 1) symbolizes the three parts of government working together equally to prepare for and protect people from disaster (Kuntz).



**Figure 1 Civil Defense Symbol**

#### E. Future Disasters

*To the lady in the darkness who I could hear but could not see, Please forgive me for not coming* (Montana-Leblanc 208).

The initial governmental response to Hurricane Katrina requires analysis and suggested solutions that exceed logistical matters. Serious disasters over the course of this decade are foreseeable. In early 2001, FEMA predicted that the three most likely and most devastating disasters facing the U.S. were an earthquake in San Francisco, a terrorist attack in New York City, and a hurricane in New Orleans (Daniels, Kettl, and Kunreuther 5).

Some people believe that no amount of money can protect New Orleans from a category five or a slow-moving category three hurricane (Foster and Giegengack 41-58)(Crowley 151). Mayfield states that, all controversy about global warming aside, the next 10 to 20 years will be a phase of extreme weather conditions, including more intense

hurricanes in the Gulf<sup>18</sup> (Editors of Popular Mechanics)(Penry-Davey and Chinn)(Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 91).

Hurricanes tend to strike in the southeastern U.S., with the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas being most at risk. Nonetheless, scholars predict that massive damage would occur if a significant hurricane moved up the East Coast and hit Long Island and New York City and that this is a very likely scenario (Tierney 126).

A group of earthquake experts recently predicted that the U.S. faces a 90 percent chance of the dreaded New Madrid Earthquake. Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee are at risk for a six- to seven-magnitude earthquake over the next 50 years (Elnashai et al. 3). Improvements in building design and materials, hazard reduction programs, and planning are not keeping pace with the vulnerabilities wrought each year by increasing populations and property values in high-risk areas (Birkland 105).

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<sup>18</sup> Kerry Emanuel of MIT has stated that the increase in hurricane strength and duration can be linked to global warming (Emanuel). The 2005 hurricane season was the first when the entire alphabet was utilized in naming hurricanes, requiring the use of the Greek alphabet (“Digital Typhoon: Typhoon Names (Asian Names)”). Overall, the 2005 season is tied as the fourth most active in terms of named storms (16) and major hurricanes (five) and is tied as the fifth most active in terms of all hurricanes (eight) since 1944. For the first time on record, six consecutive tropical cyclones made landfall on the U.S. mainland, and it was the first Atlantic season to have a major hurricane (category three) form in five consecutive months (“NOAA - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - Atlantic Hurricane Season Sets Records”). Furthermore, the 2010 Atlantic hurricane season was one of the busiest on record. It was the most active season since 2005, and with 19 named storms, it ties 1887 and 1995 as the third busiest season (“KCC\_NearTerm\_HurrModels\_Jan2011.pdf”). The National Hurricane Center uses a method called the Accumulated Cyclone Energy Index, which combines maximum wind speeds and durations to calculate a season’s total hurricane energy to define “activity” (Drye). While wind speed is a way to measure hurricane strength, most deaths are caused by hurricane waters (Freudenburg et al. 14).



Of course, the most frightening scenario would be a major chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or explosive event (CBRNE, pronounced “see-burn-ee”), in an urban area, where millions simply could never return. Clearly, this research is significant for all future disaster victims, any disaster handler, and all Conflict Management Professionals.

#### F. Conflict Management Linkage to Emergency Management

*Thank you God. Now save us from ourselves. Katrina 2005* (Clark 105)[New Orleans Graffiti].

The discipline of conflict analysis can help us better understand and effectively implement emergency management. Both fields of discipline can benefit from working together more closely. McEntire finds growing consensus among scholars and practitioners for multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to disasters and emergency management (McEntire, *Disciplines, Disasters and Emergency Management* 3-10). He emphasizes international relations as a good example of a discipline that could inform emergency management (McEntire, “International Relations and Disasters: Illustrating the Relevance of the Discipline to the Study and Profession of Emergency Management” 170-77). Pine agrees, stating that successful emergency management “depends more on how its parts relate than on how well each part operates” (Pine 199).

Conflict resolution as a discipline must define its relevance to the emergency management discipline. Daniels sets forth the foundational and conceptual framework for disaster studies.

Engineering, medicine, and the natural sciences provide data on the nature of risks associated with disasters (Risk Assessment). Geography, organizational theory, psychology, sociology, and other social sciences provide insights on how individuals, groups, and organizations perceive the risk and make decisions (Risk Perception and Choice). Economics, insurance, health care, public policy, and other disciplines form the basis for alternative disaster management strategies (Risk and Crisis Management). Political science and law underpin important issues related to public and private responsibilities about ... resources (Implementing Public-Private Partnerships)(4).

Conflict analysis, management, and resolution is an important field of discipline that can inform emergency management concepts and research. People in leadership positions, responsible for life and death and effectual provision for emergency needs, require greater conflict management assistance. Scholarship, data, and insights from the conflict resolution discipline will bring a much-needed dimension to emergency management studies and operations. The Key Parties have been accused of “[u]njustifiable miscommunication, failed leadership, and small-minded politics” (Lalka 95). Their discourse in the seven critical Katrina days requires conscientious conflict analysis, my goal for this dissertation.

In my research on emergency management, Katrina’s lessons learned, and crisis communications, I have seen nothing that addresses conflict management assistance for disaster handlers/managers as a viable resolution of Katrina-like issues. Some emergency management scholars recommend increased contact between key parties beforehand: more exercises and trainings. (Drabek, *Strategies for Coordinating Disaster Responses* xviii)(Auf der Heide 87). With the ever-changing and unpredictable nature of disasters and political leaders, prior attendance at trainings and exercises is not a realistic answer.

Having a Conflict Management Professional on-site at a disaster is a realistic answer as well as a practical and simple solution. The presence of a Conflict Management Professional working with key parties in real time in a crisis can be a cost-effective and potent tool.

The research librarian at George Mason University library, Ms. Gretchen Reynolds,<sup>19</sup> and I could find no dissertation, article, or book on the topic of communications, narratives, or discourse analysis between Blanco, Nagin, Brown, or the federal government during Hurricane Katrina. There is no research on conflict management skills, Hurricane Katrina, and the government response or on Hurricane Katrina and the positioning systems of these Parties. The disciplines of conflict resolution and of emergency management have not yet been linked and applied to improving the effectiveness of disaster handlers.<sup>20</sup>

#### G. Positioning Theory as an Epistemological Tool

*My wife says our ground floor was half full of water .... But I am an optimist. I say it was half empty* (McNulty 34).

Citing Sherif and Zimbardo, Moghaddam et al., asserts that current research on conflict in groups, people who are together over a period of time, has failed to provide micro analyses of social forces or speech acts 138, 154)

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<sup>19</sup> Ms. Gretchen Reynolds was extremely helpful and persistent.

<sup>20</sup> The closest linkage is probably Dr. Greg Saathoff, M.D., and psychiatrist, who teaches psychology at the University of Virginia and calls himself a “Conflict Resolution Specialist” when he assists the FBI’s Critical Incident Response Group. I discuss this more fully below.

(Sherif)(Zimbardo). Positioning theory scholars seek to remediate that failing.

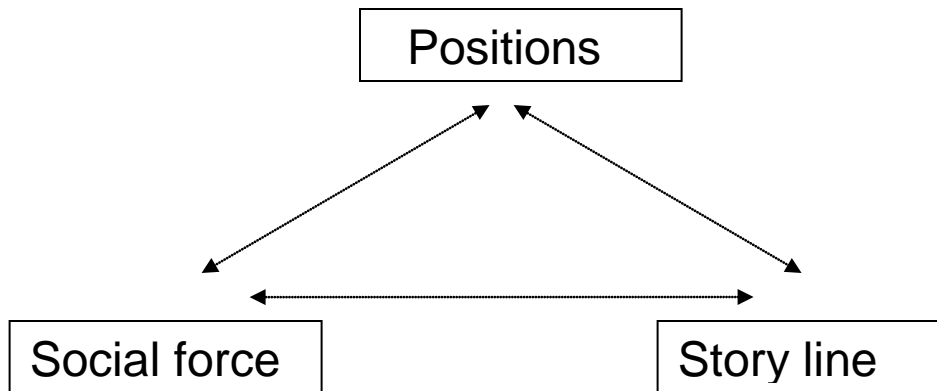
Positioning theory is a discursively oriented framework to “analytically organize complex and dynamic social interactions”<sup>21</sup> (Moghaddam, Harré, and N. Lee, *Global Conflict Resolution through Positioning Analysis* 9).

People negotiate meanings about themselves and their social world by strategically positioning themselves throughout a dialogue (Taylor, Bougie, and Caouette 204). “A positioning theory perspective highlights the social functions served, and the social tasks accomplished, in social interaction and how people accomplish these social tasks through the use of symbols in their communications” (Slocum and Van Langenhove 219).

Humans make meaning by framing, shaping, and manipulating notions of social reality (Slocum-Bradley 211). Positioning theory analyzes this “meaning-creation” by “illuminating the mutually influential relationship of positions attributed to actors, story lines, and the ‘social force’ of utterances and acts” (211). The figure below illustrates the trifold concept called the Positioning Triad.

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<sup>21</sup> Positioning theory lends itself particularly well to interpersonal episodes where people are maneuvering for advantage over time with shifting political and social landscapes, in contrast to laboratory experiments that might last an hour or two (Moghaddam and Kavulich 247).



**Figure 2 Positioning Triad (Van Langenhove and 18).**

### 1. Positions

A position is a “loose set of rights and duties that limit the possibilities of action” (Harre and Moghaddam 5), while positioning is the “dynamic construction of personal identities relative to those of others” (Parrott 29). We use language, differing by context, to position or construct our vantage point (Druckman 256).

“[P]ositioning is an ever-negotiable definition of self” (Boxer 255). It is through positions that a person’s moral and personal attributes are defined, strengthened, or diluted (Sabat, “Malignant Positioning and the Predicament of People with Alzheimer’s Disease” 85). Positions are relational, flexible, and dynamic and vary to the extent to which they are consensual and to which they are intentionally chosen (R. Stockard, S. Stockard, and Tucker 74)(Louis 28). People bring to a situation their “history as a subjective being, that is the history of one who has been in multiple positions and

engaged in different forms of discourse” , “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves” 48)

People establish a moral order and locate themselves within this order through the political interactive process which defines positioning. Cobb writes:

“[T]hat is, good guys versus bad guys, innocent versus guilty, cooperative versus uncooperative, fair versus unfair, and so forth. These positions create accounts of relationships within the story that organize the interactional patterns in which the story unfolds, which, in turn, constrains and enables the organization within the story world” (Cobb, “Theories of Responsibilities: The Social Construction of Intentions in Mediation” 178), citing , “Positioning: Conversation and the Production of Selves”).

Examining a person’s positioning system can disclose facets of judgment, agency, character, and motivation. Deeper parts of a person’s worldview may be revealed, such as, beliefs, values, and identity issues (Louis 29).

## 2. Social Force

Social force links semantics and human action. Changes in positions and story lines are negotiated through conversation and symbolic exchange. “Social force” can be defined as what is accomplished socially through conversation and symbolic exchange (Slocum-Bradley 211) and can shape the social world (Ha 6).

When examining social force, what is important is not what is said but what is meant. Equally important is how the words are understood. Speech acts will have different social meanings depending on an episode’s positions and story lines.

### 3. Story Lines

Pearce and Littlejohn describe stories as “the driving force of human understanding and action” (109). A story is a locution with a purpose, audience, and setting. Social episodes reveal a cluster of narrative conventions or a “story line”

6). Story lines are embedded in and flow from acts and utterances. Similar to a script, story lines can be actively constructed and contested (Louis 26). They make sense out of sequential actions (Slocum and Van Langenhove 226). In the story line people can accept, reject, be forced into, be displaced from, and be refused access to positions.

People locate themselves in stories to feel cohesion and connection

, “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves” 59). “Our ways of orienting to one another constitute forms of communication that shape the ways we treat the people around us and how we act on our stories” (Pearce and Littlejohn 109). Shared story lines may involve “shifts in power, access, or blocking of access, to certain features of claimed or desired identity” (Davies and Har , “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves” 49). An individual is the agent, author, player, coauthor, and co-producer of his/her story (52).

Positioning theory is an epistemological tool to examine identity and face.<sup>22</sup> It can expose the meaning-making, understandings, and intentions of the Key Parties. An

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<sup>22</sup> A term developed by Erving Goffman to mean respect and positive self-identity.

expert in positioning theory can calibrate his/her response to address the person through a fluid and changeable narrative (Sabat, “Malignant Positioning and the Predicament of People with Alzheimer's Disease”). Through positioning analysis we can find points of entry, opportunities to change the story, and a means to shift or strengthen themes.

#### 4. Frames

A frame is a lens that forms a person's story lines and positioning system. They are mental structures that render a scene meaningful and shape one's goals, plans, and behavior (Goffman, *Frame Analysis* 10-11, 21)(Lakoff xv). A frame is a perspective, a backdrop, and a *mis en scene*. Consider how Bush framed Brown with his statement, “Brownie, you're doing a heckava job.” Bush characterized Brown as a leader who was getting results and framed him with personal recognition and praise meant to position him as a hero before the American public.

George Lakoff states that our conceptual system, revealed through frames, dictates how we think and act (Lakoff and Johnson 3). Metaphors make up our conceptual system and structure our reality. Blanco used a “lock and load” metaphor, discussed below, that produced a much more sinister reality than she intended (McCarthy and Maggi, “Shoot All Looters” A1+).

“Brownie” is also a metaphor. In Scottish Gaelic folklore, a brownie was a household elf who would clean and straighten the home while the family slept, “working miracles.” Bush was trying to push his frame to structure the audience's reality, giving Brown a mythic and merry dimension (Lakoff). Metaphors are powerful vehicles that



promote images and concepts. In this example, Bush's public statement with a powerful metaphor and almost intimate phrasing was soon trumped by a more dominant narrative, Brown's lackluster performance.

#### H. Positioning Is Revealed through Discourse

*Everything can be moved from one place to another without being changed, except speech* (Tannen 104).

"Discourse is both the process of talk and interaction between people, and the products of that interaction" (Winslade and Monk 42). Often just below the surface of any conversation is a set of structuring statements about how things are. These statements give meaning to social practices, personal experience, structural arrangements, and institutions (Winslade and Monk 42). Deborah Tannen calls discourse analysis the study of language beyond the sentence<sup>23</sup> (5).

Discourse analysis is a heuristic device to interpret the meaning of human experience (Tannen 11). Its epistemological claim is that our lives are ordered by stories and can best be studied and understood through stories (12). It puts people, speech acts, and story lines at the center of understanding our existence. Shkedi states that stories "create the reality which people inhabit" (9).

Michel Foucault, and Edward Said who relied heavily on him, defines discourse as a discipline used to manage and produce the world (Foucault, *The Archaeology of*

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<sup>23</sup> Some criticize discourse analysis for lacking a unified theory, agreed-upon method, and comparable types of data; Tannen asserts that this increases the value of discourse analysis (6).

*Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*)(Said 2-14). How we construct the world is reified in our literature, history writing, culture, philosophy, and religion (Said 14). One's world isn't necessarily reflected in discourse, instead the world is created through it. How we think and act, talk and reason are defined by discourse; it constitutes our being. Discourse can assure permanence and functioning of institutions but also can develop and reform the world (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 38-52). Knowledge, power, and discourse are intertwined.

Humans have a social and cultural history of investing certain things with meaning, and this structures their attitudes and their discourse 94). Nelson Phillips defines discourse as, "an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that brings an object into being" (N. Phillips 3). Indeed, he says, "[T]he world cannot be known separately from discourse" (6). At its best, "[d]iscourse analysis subverts and challenges taken-for-granted understandings and undermines the tendency to reify and solidify knowledge" (84).

The discourse of the Key Parties evinced confusion in their interactions and set the tone of poor communication that marked these seven days. Their differences in perspective regarding gender, race, geography, age, politics, and their purpose marred their ability to conduct effective disaster response. Through the lens of positioning theory, I analyze their discourse to understand better what they were saying and doing and what meaning they were making of the events and their relationships. With this deeper understanding, I analyze relevant conflict analysis and resolution literature and

recommend an interventionist role, by definition a discursive practice, for Conflict Resolution Professionals.

#### I. Using Positioning Theory to Advance Conflict Analysis and Resolution

*Narrative is the beginning of recovery.* Ripley

Many scholars believe that positioning theory is a “powerful tool” for understanding and resolving conflict, which involves a temporal relationship with a constructed, contested social reality (Louis 21). The theory is used to analyze conflict sources and promote “harmony-sustaining strategies” 131, 135) 138)(Parrott 29)(Henriksen 60). “Positioning Theory illuminates how meaning-making practices ... lie at the heart of conflict” (Moghaddam, Harré, and N. Lee, “Afterword” 284). Contrary themes and demands are negotiated through talk (Stanley and Billig 161). Through this powerful tool we are better able to understand differences and mismatched perceptions.

Positioning theory can clarify how parties might reinterpret their roles such that destructive acts can be set aside and acts “appropriate to [new] rights and duties are recalibrated” (Rothbart and Bartlett 235). A shift in conversation can produce a dramatic shift in negotiating shared meanings. Jessie Sutherland states that learning how to dynamically engage across differences to “create shared pictures is a critical skill in today’s world” (Sutherland 40). Conflict is relational and social, so, positioning theory is an appropriate tool to research both the sources of conflict and those of possible resolution.

## J. Background

### 1. Accident and Disaster Theory

Charles Perrow's fascinating book, Normal Accidents, posits that large-scale accidents are highly probable, almost normal in our complicated world. Usually, these normal accidents involve indirect information and incomprehensibility, along with an interaction of multiple failures that are not in operational sequence (23). These accidents are made up of complex as opposed to linear systems and tight coupling, which means a tight connection with interlocking fragilities<sup>24</sup> (72-93).

In another fascinating book, Shouldering Risks, Constance Perin identifies habitual, conceptual thinking that contributes to the under-appreciation of risk, which contributes to accidents.<sup>25</sup> Categorically, this thinking includes: frequency bias (habitual action), similarity bias (matching to what is already known), confirmation bias (not seeking contrary evidence), salience bias (noticing prominent indicators and ignoring others), and recency or availability bias (equating a new occurrence with a previous one) (223).

Habitual thinking, denial, and an inclination toward banality all contribute to misapprehension of crisis. Quoting Diane Vaughan, Perrow discusses "a zodiacal

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<sup>24</sup> Perrow argues that systems need redundancies and opportunities for correction to circumvent complete failure when things go wrong (92-96). It is generally understood that the New Orleans levees and floodwalls presented a system too complex to adequately anticipate specific points of failure. Levees and floodwalls comprise a series of systems that lack the redundancies of many other engineered systems (Foster and Giegengack 49).

<sup>25</sup> Discussing predictability, risk, and normative expectations, Taleb asserts in essence that our rigid epistemological convictions can cause or exacerbate rare and, for our purposes, disastrous events (xxi).

construction of reality” that allows a banality of bureaucracy to normalize unacceptable practices (379). Actors reproduce cultural scripts to normalize risks and failures (Perrow 380). This is compounded by communication barriers between key parties that can lead to dangerous deference and denial<sup>26</sup> (381).

When things start to fail, there is an increased need for “situational intelligence, foresight, and, above all, ... the interpretation of signals of many kinds” (Perin xiii). Both Perin and Perrow emphasize the need to create an atmosphere and culture that allow underlings to point out vulnerabilities and push operators “to see the whole system rather than just their part of it” (Perrow 379)(Perin 59). Perin quotes nuclear power plant employees who admitted that while their expertise was in operations and technical knowledge, their conflicts and problems flowed from different cultural perspectives (Perin xiii). They positioned other workers in risk/safety assessment meetings in ways that reduced the participation of the other workers and actually increased the likelihood of accidents.

Problems of the past decade warrant review for analogous patterns. The decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003 and the near failure of the banking industry in 2008 show similarities, e.g., that information was cabined.<sup>27</sup> Banking colleagues were not sharing

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<sup>26</sup> Finding that junior pilots are failing to raise concerns, a communication barrier resulting from the difference in status, airlines are attempting to create a culture where junior pilots feel that they can question the senior pilot’s decisions (Gusterson, 15 June 2009).

<sup>27</sup> (Tett)(Ricks)(Woodward).

information despite the fact that they were at the same bank or shared an area of expertise.

Regarding the decision to invade Iraq and the extended execution of the war, information was deliberately withheld by the key parties from each other (Ricks)(Woodward). No one was proactively looking at the big picture and taking responsibility for making the components work together. Assessing the difficulties of the war and the banking industry, it is clear that leadership will be most successful when they: 1) are surrounded by people who tell them the truth, 2) create a culture of dissent, and 3) require key figures to be accountable to share information vertically and horizontally.

Accident and disaster theory indicate that disasters may flow from very ordinary, often predictable events. Or they may flow from a sense of an exclusive identity, structure, or turf. Institutions may have a structure and culture that undercut strategic communications necessary to assess and reveal risk. Organizations can re-structure processes, meetings, physical configurations, and meeting places and add a new job category to facilitate collaboration. Potential disasters have error-inducing precursors that require attention to nuance and a culture of vigilance.

## 2. Disaster History

In America, the disasters<sup>28</sup> of catastrophic significance are relatively few.<sup>29</sup> The Chicago Fire in 1871 resulted in 100,000 homeless and 300 dead (Powers 14). The Johnstown Flood of 1889 killed more than 2,000 people when a dam failed and caught a downstream community by surprise. Texas suffered 8,000 deaths from the 1900 Galveston Storm<sup>30</sup> (Larson). In 1906, the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire resulted in 250,000 homeless (Lott) and an estimated 3,000 dead<sup>31</sup> (Powers 16)(Lean). The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 is the most destructive flood in U.S. history. It caused 400 million dollars of damages and killed 246 people across seven states (Wikipedia, “The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”).

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<sup>28</sup> Psychologists define a disaster as “an unexpected or uncontrollable event” that involves a significant number of people, as opposed to something chronic (M. Gibbs and Montagnino 95-96). Some scholars argue, however, that chronic events can qualify as disasters, perhaps even droughts, a pandemic disease, a heat wave, or climate change.

<sup>29</sup> On an annual basis, flash-floods are the leading cause of weather-related deaths with about 200 per year with 50 percent of those being vehicle related. Six inches of moving water can knock a person off his/her feet, and two feet can float an SUV (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 19). Car accidents cause about 35,000 deaths a year. And fires are responsible for between 3,000-4,000 deaths in the U.S. per year.

<sup>30</sup> Sadly, Galveston never regained its status as the “New York of the South.”

<sup>31</sup> In recent memory, the U.S. experienced the Midwest Floods of 1993, which inundated 20 million acres in nine states (Kousky and Zeckhauser 61) and resulted in 48 deaths (Lott), and the Northridge Earthquake in 1994, which killed 57 people (Cooper and Block 63). Regarding the history of deadly infectious disease in America, the population suffered widespread epidemics of small pox in the 18th Century, tuberculosis in the 19th Century, and influenza and AIDS in the 20th Century (Grob 91-95, 106-15, 147, 267-70).

The U.S. experienced three category five hurricanes in the 20th Century<sup>32</sup> (Wikipedia, “Hurricane Camille - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”). The 1935 category five Labor Day Hurricane resulted in 400 deaths. Hurricane Camille in 1969, said to have the highest wind speeds ever, produced 256 deaths.<sup>33</sup> Hurricane Andrew, the first named storm of 1992, caused 65 deaths and massive damage.<sup>34</sup>

Excluding 9/11<sup>35</sup> and the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building as intentional acts, we count our significant man-made disasters<sup>36</sup> as 1) the Titanic death toll of 1500 in 1912 (Clower 233); 2) Pennsylvania’s Three Mile Island in 1979 with no direct deaths; 3) the Alaskan Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 releasing 11,000,000 gallons of crude oil, with no human deaths, but with wide-scale environmental damage (Chiles 309); and 4) the 2010 Gulf of Mexico Deepwater Horizon accident, considered the largest

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<sup>32</sup> Hurricanes are measured in three separate dimensions: fatalities, costs of damages, and data related to intensity (Senauth xii). The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale was invented in 1969:

Tropical Storm	— winds 39-----73 mph	
Category 1 Hurricane	— winds 74-----95 mph	Storm Surge 4----5 ft
Category 2 Hurricane	— winds 96-----110 mph	Storm Surge 6----8 ft
Category 3 Hurricane	— winds 111----130 mph	Storm Surge 9----12 ft
Category 4 Hurricane	— winds 131----155 mph	Storm Surge 13---18 ft
Category 5 Hurricane	— winds 156 mph with no upper limit	Storm Surge 18+ ft

<sup>33</sup> Camille missed New Orleans but killed 143 in Mississippi (Cooper and Block 47). It is considered the only Atlantic hurricane in recorded history to make landfall at or above wind speeds of 190 mph (Wikipedia, “Hurricane Camille - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”). Public Law 91-79 the Disaster Relief Act of 1969 was called the Hurricane Camille legislation. It expanded the scope of federal aid in both public and individual assistance categories (Bourgin Ch. IV, pps. 5-6, 11).

<sup>34</sup> U.S. scientists began naming tropical cyclones during World War II. Hurricane Bess was named in 1949 after First Lady Bess Truman. The National Weather Service began to officially name storms in 1953. After 1979, men’s names were incorporated into the list of female designations (Ouellette 27).

<sup>35</sup> 9/11 is considered the worst fire-service disaster, killing one-third of the fire fighters (Chiles xiv).

<sup>36</sup> The Challenger accident in 1986 and the Columbia accident in 2003 deserve mention because of their serious impact on public confidence and morale. Furthermore, no discussion would be complete without mention of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York City, which killed 146 young women in 1911 and resulted in sweeping changes in fire codes and workplace standards (Dyson 39).



marine oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry, with 11 deaths attributed to the initial platform explosion and fire.

The Grand Teton Dam breach is an interesting addition to this list. It is America's biggest structural collapse in sheer tonnage, more than 9/11 (Chiles). This is one of the few times the U.S. government admitted legal responsibility for a major disaster. It occurred in 1976 in Idaho with 11 dead and thousands homeless. The Bureau of Reclamation had three years of geological warnings about the risk of failure (Perrow 236).

Regarding international accidents, the 1984 Union Carbide toxic chemical release in Bhopal, India, resulted in 7,000 deaths, and the 1986 Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station explosion in Ukraine resulted in an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 deaths, mostly of cleanup workers<sup>37</sup> (Chiles 306-07). On the natural disaster list,<sup>38</sup> the deadliest in modern times were the 1970 Bhola Cyclone, which killed 500,000 in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh<sup>39</sup> (Senauth xiii), and the China Tangshan earthquake with a death toll of 240,000 in 1976.<sup>40</sup> And for this decade, the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and tsunami killed more than 225,000, and the 2010 Haiti Earthquake had an official death toll of over 220,000. While

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<sup>37</sup> These figures are understandably contentious. Some estimates are quite a bit higher. Accordingly, it is impossible to account for people who succumbed to cancer from world fallout (Gusterson, 15 June 2009).

<sup>38</sup> This list excludes drought, famine, and disease-related deaths. Civil strife kills more people than natural disasters and human accidents combined (Piers et al. 4).

<sup>39</sup> The deadliest Atlantic Storm was Hurricane Mitch, which killed 18,000 in Central America in 1998 (Senauth xiii).

<sup>40</sup> One very important historic calamity is the 1918-19 influenza flu pandemic that killed 30 million globally (Clower 233).

natural disasters may be increasing, the American death rates remain comparatively low.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Federal Emergency Management Agency History

Even before this country became a nation, disasters forged its heritage. A hurricane is credited with forcing the British troops to surrender in Yorktown at the end of the Revolutionary War (Dyson 36). The first “federal disaster” was recognized in 1803 after a catastrophic fire in Portsmouth, New Hampshire<sup>42</sup> (Nicholson, *Emergency Response and Emergency Management Law* 235). Throughout this time, Congress would pass many emergency appropriations to provide federal support for individual calamities and fires. It was not until the Flood Control Act of 1936 and the Disaster Relief Act of 1950 that the federal government played a consistent role in emergency management (Mycoff 179).

Congressman Harold Hagen of Minnesota and Congressman William Lemke of North Dakota can be credited with establishing the original comprehensive disaster relief program, the Disaster Relief Act of 1950, Pub. L. 81-875 (Bourgin Ch. 1, p. 4). For the first time, permanent and general legislation authorized American presidents to declare

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<sup>41</sup> Compare the 1994 Northridge Earthquake deaths of 57 (Cooper and Block 63) to the 1995 Kobe Earthquake deaths of 6,500 (Wikipedia, “Great Hanshin earthquake - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”).

<sup>42</sup> The American Red Cross, founded by Clara Barton, became the nation’s first organization devoted to disaster relief when it coordinated food and supplies after a forest fire in Michigan in 1881 (Dyson 37). Barton is credited with forcing the federal government to serve black as well as white victims for the first time in the 1889 Galveston Storm and was terminated by the Red Cross after this (Brasch 86-87) .

disasters<sup>43</sup> (Sylves 144)(Cooper and Block 47). The law's immediate concern was the Minnesota and North Dakota flooding (Bourgin Ch. 1, p. 4). Early federal relief laws often involved debris removal and repair of farm-to-market roads and bridges that had been damaged by floods (Bourgin Ch. 1, p. 1; Ch. 2, p. 23).

In these years the disaster relief fund was administered by many different entities, including the General Services Administration, the Housing and Home Finance Agency, the Federal Civil Defense Administration in conjunction with the Bureau of Budget, the Office of Civil Defense Mobilization, and the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Bourgin Ch. 1, p. 13; Ch. 2, pps. 7, 13, 15).

In the '70s, the number of programs providing disaster services grew to more than 100. Some of these included:

- Defense Civil Preparedness Agency: Preparedness, planning, and relocation;
- Department of Commerce: Weather warning and fire protection;
- General Services Administration: Continuity of government, stockpiling, and federal preparedness;
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission: Power plants;
- Housing and Urban Development: Flood insurance, housing, and disaster relief; and
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Flood control (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 5)(Nicholson, "Emergency Management and Law" 251).

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<sup>43</sup> In 1953 the federal government provided one percent of disaster relief funding. For the most part at that time, people were not expecting government disaster relief. By the mid-1970s the federal government was paying more than 70 percent (Clower 235). In 1964 congressional allocations to disaster relief reached over 100,000,000 dollars (Bourgin Ch. 2, p. 24). For a sense of scale, in 1953, 13 disasters were declared, in 2010, 81 were (Bourgin Ch. 2, p. 31)("FEMA: Annual Major Disaster Declarations Totals").

The Disaster Relief Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-288) was passed in response to the 1974 tornadoes in Xenia, Ohio, the 1973 flooding of the Mississippi River, the 1971 San Fernando Earthquake (which damaged two large private hospitals), and several prior hurricanes, including Hurricane Agnes in 1972 (Bourgin Ch. 6, p. 1)(G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 4-5). The National Governor's Association and the newly organized National Association of State Directors of Emergency Preparedness started to lobby for one consolidated agency to handle disasters. That with other factors resulted in President Jimmy Carter's Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1978.<sup>44</sup> Four days after the Three Mile Island incident, on March 28, 1979, Carter signed the first of two Executive Orders implementing the creation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).<sup>45</sup>

FEMA became functionally responsible for civil defense,<sup>46</sup> dam safety, federal flood insurance, the National Fire Administration, earthquake damage reduction, disaster-warning systems,<sup>47</sup> and also for administering disaster relief.<sup>48</sup> Statutes and presidential delegations defined FEMA's primary mission: to save lives and protect property.

The newly established FEMA was tested by the first events it had to coordinate in 1980: Love Canal (pre-Superfund), Mount St. Helens, and the Cuban refugee crisis

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<sup>44</sup> May 20, 1978 (5 U.S.C. Section 901 notes).

<sup>45</sup> Carter implemented the reorganization plan by Executive Order 12127 effective April 1, 1979, and E.O. 12148, July 15, 1979 (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 6).

<sup>46</sup> Public Law 81-920 as amended.

<sup>47</sup> FEMA had several authorizing laws, including the National Dam Safety Act, 33 U.S.C. §467; the Earthquake Hazards Reduction Act, 42 U.S.C. § 7701; and the National Flood Insurance Act, 42 U.S.C. § 4001.

<sup>48</sup> Administering disaster relief was authorized by the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, Public Law 93-288, which was supplemented and amended by the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act), Public Law 100-707, now codified at 42 U.S.C. § 5121 (1979).

(Nicholson, *Emergency Response and Emergency Management Law* 237). During these early years, FEMA's activities were heavily influenced by the cold war and a civil defense orientation. The press started to criticize FEMA for being inefficient, uncoordinated, and a "political dumping ground" after the Loma Prieta Earthquake and Hurricane Hugo, both in 1989. Some of these complaints were confirmed in a 1991 GAO study (Hogue and Bea 15).

Bill Clinton appointed James Lee Witt as the FEMA Director in April 1993, directing Witt to shift the agency's focus to an "all hazards approach." After FEMA's poor performance with Hurricane Andrew in 1992, several reports had made this recommendation (Hogue and Bea 15-17).

Witt brought a fresh approach to disaster management theory and operations. FEMA's disaster concepts, planning, and services were no longer driven by the fear of a nuclear war. Under this more inclusive risk management approach, essential functions performed in response to all types of disasters would be identified and prioritized. Civil defense was no longer the priority; Congress assisted by repealing the 1950 Federal Civil Defense Act.<sup>49</sup>

In 1996 Clinton elevated Witt to an ex officio member of the Cabinet for his second term (Cooper and Block 63). Witt had excelled with the 1993 Mid-West flooding

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<sup>49</sup> Small portions of that statute were retained as a new Title VI of the Stafford Act, Pub. L. 103-337.

and the 1994 Northridge Earthquake. With this new prominence and status, the Clinton administration championed and amplified the important role of emergency management.

Just over a year after 9/11, Congress passed the Homeland Security Act, 6 U.S.C. § 101. In 2003, FEMA was one of 22 agencies brought together to create the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS), making up part of its 180,000 employees (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 14). DHS became the 15th cabinet-level department, and FEMA lost its independence.

DHS' primary mission is preventing, reducing vulnerability to, and minimizing the damage from terrorism. Most DHS components have missions involving law enforcement, prevention of terrorist acts, and domestic intelligence gathering (Cooper and Block 81). In January 2005 the Association of State Floodplain Managers sent a letter to the Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, stating:

Since FEMA has become part of the Department of Homeland Security.... Funds have been raided, staff have been transferred into other DHS functions without being replaced, slowdowns because of added layers of bureaucracy for nearly all functions have dramatically increased, and there is the constant threat of reprogramming appropriated funds ("Hurricane Katrina: FEMA: Hastert Was Warned About FEMA's Problems").

FEMA's all-hazards approach, treating all types of disasters equally, now shifted to focus on terrorism. It was stripped of resources, funding, autonomy, accountability, and clear lines of authority (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 20). Many qualified people left FEMA, funding for disaster training and equipment became a low priority, and the ensuing budget cuts and organizational changes undermined FEMA's mission

(Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to Hurricane Katrina 152, 155). Michael Chertoff became DHS Secretary in February of 2005, replacing Tom Ridge (who had been a former governor of Pennsylvania).

Craig Fugate, an experienced emergency management professional from Florida, is the current FEMA Administrator. He was appointed by President Barack Obama, confirmed by Congress, and reports to DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano. FEMA has 4,000 permanent employees and a 10,000 surge-employee capacity (Farmer 1).

The history of FEMA and disaster management in America have evolved slowly. Over the centuries the public has increasingly come to expect the federal government to assist all citizens before, during, and after a disaster. Previously, people accepted disasters as an act of God or fate; calamity was considered an individual or community event. As a self-sufficient culture, people were expected to bear up and “carry on,” despite misfortune.

While the expectations of federal responsibility to provide disaster services and relief have increased, so have the intricacies of the system. “The growing number of governments, agencies, and sectors infused into the system has meant a concomitant growth in the levels of coordination and the complexity of interactions” (Ward and Wamsley 207-39). Emergency management logistics, theory, and practices have become more sophisticated. Strategies to assist the key parties to work effectively together, however, have not emerged.

#### 4. How FEMA's Disaster Assistance Program Works

The Stafford Act authorizes federal assistance when an emergency or a major disaster occurs. A “major disaster” is any natural catastrophe, including hurricane, tornado, storm, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, or drought, which in the president's determination causes damage of severity and magnitude to warrant federal assistance. In addition, not limited by the adjectival word “natural,” a major disaster may include: fire, flood, or explosion (42 U.S.C. § 5122 (2)). The language has been interpreted broadly to include among other things airline crashes, riots, and a heat wave.

The Stafford Act defines an “emergency” as “any occasion or instance for which, in the determination of the President, Federal assistance is needed to supplement State and local efforts and capabilities to save lives and to protect property and public health and safety, or to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in any part of the United States.”<sup>50</sup> This language has been interpreted broadly to include preparation for Y2K, national political conventions, and the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Underscoring state autonomy, the governor whose state is affected must request a presidential declaration, and the president has discretion to grant or deny it. The president will declare a federal disaster if he/she finds: 1) damage is of sufficient severity and magnitude, and 2) adequate response is beyond the state's capability (42 U.S.C. §

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<sup>50</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 5122 (1)(2010).



5170). The governor must execute the state's emergency plan, which normally means declaring a state of emergency, agreeing to hold the federal government harmless for its subsequent efforts, and agreeing to pay a 25 percent cost-share with the federal government paying the remainder. Once the president has declared a major disaster, areas within the state that are eligible for assistance are identified by county or parish.<sup>51</sup> All local applications for assistance come to FEMA through a state coordinating officer appointed by the governor.

The Stafford Act authorizes the President to fund through his/her delegates, i.e., DHS/FEMA, three categories of disaster assistance grants. Mitigation grants are provided to state and local governments to implement long-term, hazard-mitigation measures. Public assistance grants are provided to governments, and non-profit organizations fulfilling a governmental function, to repair state and local public infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, utilities, etc.

Individual assistance grants provide private citizens with basic emergency services and expenses, temporary rental assistance, home repair, and direct temporary housing. This assistance may also include crisis counseling, unemployment assistance, legal services, and funeral expenses, *inter alia*. Homeowners are eligible for repair grants; that amount, adjusted annually by the consumer price index, had a ceiling of

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<sup>51</sup> Owing to the displacement of thousands of Katrina victims, Bush took the unprecedented step of declaring emergencies under the Stafford Act for victim-receiving states despite the absence of a direct physical disaster impact.

\$30,200 in 2010. Each home is inspected for eligible damage, ownership, and whether it can be made habitable within the allotted dollar amount.

FEMA has defined four phases of disaster work:

Preparedness: building federal, state, and local capabilities through emergency management policy making, contingency planning, exercise coordination and evaluation, and training;

Response: immediate activity after a disaster;

Recovery: activities once all the emergency needs have been satisfied; and

Mitigation: activities designed to prevent and reduce losses from future disasters, such as building codes, land use planning, requiring safe rooms, etc. (Waugh 49).

Preparedness and mitigation are similar. Preparedness focuses on the requisite response activities taken after a disaster event, such as trainings and exercises so that a community will be ready to respond once a disaster has occurred. Mitigation focuses on reducing the likelihood and consequences of a future disaster, such as strengthening dams, moving houses out of the floodplain, etc. (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 102). Agreement as to when disaster activity moves from response to recovery or when recovery moves into mitigation is rare. FEMA generally states, chronologically, that six months marks the transition to recovery work, i.e., the focus changes from addressing immediate needs to long-term activities and planning. This varies depending on the magnitude and type of the disaster. FEMA usually does not leave a disaster site for many years.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> FEMA still has an office at Northridge Earthquake (1994), and has just finished its work from Hurricane Andrew (1992).

After severe criticism from the General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office) regarding its response to the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake, FEMA developed the Federal Response Plan to operationalize and coordinate federal resources for earthquakes (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 118). After Hurricane Andrew in 1992, this plan was expanded to cover all types of disasters. The plan stipulates that once a disaster is declared, FEMA can activate 15 federal emergency response functions calling upon other agencies and non-governmental organizations.

These 15 functions, listed below, are the building blocks of disaster response and recovery. They require interoperability and coordination among at least 26 federal agencies:

- #1 Transportation;
- #2 Communications;
- #3 Public Works and Engineering;
- #4 Firefighting;
- #5 Emergency Management;
- #6 Mass Care, Housing, and Human Services;
- #7 Resource Support;
- #8 Public Health and Medical Services;
- #9 Urban Search and Rescue;
- #10 Oil and Hazardous Materials Response;
- #11 Agricultural and Natural Resources;
- #12 Energy;
- #13 Public Safety and Security;
- #14 Long Term Community Recovery and Mitigation; and
- #15 External Affairs (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 125-26).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> All 15 functions were activated for Hurricane Katrina, an unprecedented number (FEMA Managers in the Field for the First 20 Days i).

In 2003, Bush issued *Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD)-5, Management of Domestic Incidents*, directing the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and administer a comprehensive national incident management system integrating all levels of government and consolidating existing federal government emergency response plans (United States Government Accountability Office 1). The National Incident Management System was established to create a core set of concepts, principles, and terminology to organize emergency management at all levels. After the proposed system underwent vetting and coordination among federal agencies, it was released by then Homeland Security Secretary Ridge in 2004.

As a second response to *Presidential Directive-5*, the National Response Plan, which superseded the Federal Response Plan, was issued in April of 2005. It amplified the National Incident Management System and established normative standards for emergency management organizational structures, procedures, planning, trainings, exercises, and personnel qualifications (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 119). As a result of ambiguities and flaws in this plan and the poor federal response to Hurricane Katrina, Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act in 2006, attempting to give FEMA more autonomy.<sup>54</sup> This Act required a review and revision of the National Response Plan (Cooper and Block 82).

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<sup>54</sup> It was enacted as part of the FY 2007 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, P.L. 109-295.

The National Response Framework was subsequently published in 2008 to replace the National Response Plan. It is “built upon scalable, flexible, adaptable coordinating structures” (Federal Emergency Management Agency 1). It integrates principles of engaged partnerships and unity of effort through multi-jurisdictional unified command.

The National Response Framework added and renamed several of the 15 emergency response functions to include: Information and Planning, Law Enforcement and Security, Food and Water, Public Information, Animals and Agricultural Issues, and Volunteers and Donations<sup>55</sup> (Sylves 150)(Federal Emergency Management Agency).

The companion National Incident Management System guidance was also revised in 2008 based on Katrina’s lessons learned and stakeholder input. It provides a systematic, proactive, operational approach for all involved organizations. It serves as the overarching, organizational system for any incident, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity.

The Post-Katrina Act authorized more generous disaster assistance for Hurricane Katrina, Rita, and Wilma victims as a one-time exception to the normal Stafford Act grants (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 24). The Government Accountability Office identified over 300 discrete provisions in this Act that required action by FEMA or DHS (Jenkins, Jr. 1). Reporting its internal changes in response to the Act, FEMA stated

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<sup>55</sup> The Framework is roughly 80 pages, plus eight annexes.

it had improved evacuation capabilities, could track supplies better, had many pre-existing contracts in place, and had developed policies to accommodate pets and guns. FEMA has since hired a permanent, high-level, disability coordinator, revised the disaster assistance application to signal special needs, formulated a better coordinated housing response, and developed a family and child locator system (United States Government Accountability Office 116-22). DHS and the Superdome indelibly changed how FEMA works. These changes do not address, however, the troubling interactions of Katrina's Key Parties.

## 5. History of New Orleans

*[New Orleans] has always been a city of masks and painted faces, with past mysteries and glories lurking faintly visible underneath* (Isaacson 71).

New Orleans is known as the “Big Easy,”<sup>56</sup> the “City That Care Forgot,” and the “Crescent City,” for its shape as it sits in the half moon bend of the Mississippi River. It was founded by a Frenchman named Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville in 1718, who named it after the Duke of Orleans. The navigable waterways at its borders, Lake Pontchartrain, the Mississippi River, and the Gulf of Mexico, brought commerce, interest, and activity. Additionally, it was near a Native American trading portage.

The storied city of New Orleans is said to have been originally populated by convicted criminals and the accused. Prostitutes and female prisoners were deported

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<sup>56</sup> Black musicians gave the city this name because it was easy for them to find work there (Dyson 14).

from France (Sublette 52). The fleur-de-lis was tattooed on their shoulder to indicate that they were under sentence for life (Sublette 52-53).

In essence New Orleans experienced what amounted to three colonial eras in rapid succession: 1) French, beginning in 1718 with Bienville; 2) Spanish (1762-1803), France gave it to Spain in 1762 but regained ownership in 1803; and then 3) Anglo-American (Sublette 4) when in 1803, President Thomas Jefferson bought Louisiana<sup>57</sup> from Napoleon<sup>58</sup> for its valuable waterways. This was one of the largest land purchases ever, and certainly controversial.

New Orleans is not unfamiliar with catastrophe. It suffered two great fires in the late 1700s. The British tried to conquer the city and the state in 1812 and failed. It played a pivotal role in six wars (Sublette 11), was decimated by yellow fever 36 times between 1796 and 1869, and endured 11 cholera epidemics between 1832 and 1869 (Lane 16).

New Orleans has a racial history of bigotry and tolerance. It was active in slave trading, yet it was North America's largest community of free persons of color (Robinson 120). Louisiana drafted a new constitution in 1865 at the close of the Civil War that did not extend the right of suffrage to blacks; nonetheless, this document

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<sup>57</sup> The territory has been known as Louisiana since 1682 (Polidori 10), and Louisiana became the 18th state in 1812.

<sup>58</sup> One author claims that freed slaves in New Orleans lost significant rights when Louisiana was purchased by President Jefferson (Guare and Wolfe), i.e., they had been treated more equitably under French and Spanish rule.

emancipated all slaves and provided public schools equally to blacks and whites (Goodwin 728).

In 1892 Homer Plessy, a black man from New Orleans in his late 20s, boarded a New Orleans train with a ticket for first class where black people were barred by state law (Fireside). He was arrested and his lawyer argued that the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled against him, reaffirming the 1857 Dred Scott decision, which had denied citizenship to blacks even if freed under state law. This infamous decision, Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), would not be overturned until 1954 by Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

New Orleans is the birthplace of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King in 1957 (Brinkley 67). In 1960 New Orleans was the first large city in the South to desegregate its schools (Holley-Walker 176). In 2005, in contrast, a Human Rights Commission found that Bourbon Street bars were charging African American patrons 40 percent more for their drinks (Forman 26-27).

New Orleans' history includes other deadly hurricanes. Hurricane Betsy,<sup>59</sup> hit New Orleans in 1965. It was the first hurricane to cause damage in excess of \$1 billion, earning it the nickname "Billion-Dollar Betsy" ("Hurricane Betsy - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia"). Betsy destroyed levees protecting the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet and

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<sup>59</sup> Public Law 89-339 was a special relief act passed for the states Betsy struck (Bourgin Ch. II, p. 2).



both sides of the Industrial Canal failed. See Figures 13 and 14. The floodwaters reached the eaves of some homes and covered some one-story roofs in the Lower Ninth Ward. Residents drowned in their attics, trying to escape the rising waters (“Hurricane Betsy - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”). Seventy-five people died (Horne 20). In response, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began a series of multiple-year projects, building levees to protect New Orleans from fast-moving, category three hurricanes.

New Orleans is a place of tragedy, inspiration, beauty, and irony. It should hold vast economic promise. The Mississippi River and its tributaries form the largest river system on the North American Continent (Foster and Giegengack 42). The Port of New Orleans, the hub of “America’s Energy Coast,” is the fourth largest in the world (Tidwell 18). New Orleans produces 30 percent of the nation’s oil,<sup>60</sup> 20 percent of its natural gas, and one-third of its fish and shellfish (Kluger and Booth Thomas 75). One-quarter of the country’s coffee passes through its port, along with three-quarters of the world’s grain (Tidwell 18). Before the Civil War, it was America’s richest city<sup>61</sup> (Barry, *Rising Tide* 219).

In 1913 engineer Albert Baldwin Wood designed and built pumps capable of moving 47,000 cubic feet of water per second through subterranean canals in New Orleans. They are buried under the “neutral ground,” the unique tree-lined grassy portion of land used by the streetcars, dividing the flow of traffic. This is the world’s largest

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<sup>60</sup> It houses 10 percent of the nation’s oil refining capacity (Klare 90).

<sup>61</sup> Some historians assert that New Orleans could never recover from the 1962 Cuba embargo (Sublette 4-5).

pumping system; it was replicated around the world, with many systems still in use today (Barry 228). New Orleans counts on a flood control system that includes more than 350 miles of levees,<sup>62</sup> referred to as the “thin mud line,” numerous floodgates and pumping stations, and 69 miles of drainage canals (Global Security)(Foster and Giegengack 46)(Horne 367).

The Lake Pontchartrain Causeway, which connects New Orleans and St. Tammany Parish, is the longest above-water highway in the world (Robinson 3). Lake Pontchartrain is the second largest saltwater lake in the country (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 31). The New Orleans Superdome is one of the world’s largest enclosed stadiums (55).

New Orleans has been the place of intellectual and cultural firsts. It began the historic preservation movement in the U.S. in 1936 and was the first in the world to designate an historic preservation district. New Orleans has one of the oldest observatories and the oldest opera house in the U.S. (Fisher and Jr 59)(“Why New Orleans Is Important to America.pdf”). And yet New Orleans wins some of the lowest rankings as well.

In the modern age, before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans’ public schools were among the poorest performing of the nation’s urban schools, were twice as poor and five times as black as the national average, and had school conditions that were among the

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<sup>62</sup> The word “levee” comes from the French word, “lever” meaning “to raise” (Ouellette 16). The Corps of Engineers is considered the best levee builder in the world, but Hurricane Katrina undermined the Corps’ reputation by producing the greatest failure in the history of American engineering (Horne 23, 149, 251).

nation's worst<sup>63</sup> (Casserly 198, 200-01). Renowned scholar Michael Dyson calls this "concentrated poverty," where negative effects compound and multiply each other (Dyson 7). Problems were not limited to the youth. The national average for elders with disabilities was 39 percent in 2005 and 57 percent in New Orleans (Dyson 5).

Systemic, state-wide problems have a strangle-hold on New Orleans. Louisiana ranks as the fourth poorest state in the Union (Marcuse 283). In 2004, it was ranked the lowest in the country for health status<sup>64</sup> and it "numbered among one of the five worst states for infant mortality, cancer deaths, prevalence of smoking, and premature deaths" (Franklin 185). Louisiana has one of "the nation's highest rates of cardiovascular deaths, motor vehicle deaths, occupational fatalities, infectious diseases, and violent crime"<sup>65</sup> (185) and a school dropout rate of 70 percent (Reyes 287).

Louisiana is legendary for government graft. During the years of 1997-2006, it ranked first in the nation for corrupted officials, edging out Illinois, with an accumulation of 326 federal corruption convictions<sup>66</sup> (Weisberg). Billy Tauzin, a former lawmaker, stated, "Half of Louisiana is under water and the other half is under indictment"<sup>67</sup> (Editors of Time 15). Three top state emergency officials were indicted for mishandling disaster

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<sup>63</sup> Before Katrina only 35 percent of New Orleans' high schools had a majority of seniors meeting basic proficiencies in English and math (Holley-Walker 169).

<sup>64</sup> New Orleans has an asthma rate three times that of the national average (Reid).

<sup>65</sup> It also led the nation in illiteracy, teen pregnancy, and per capita rates of incarceration and unemployment (Katner 121).

<sup>66</sup> In 2004 the federal government brought criminal indictments against 11 people for financial mismanagement of the New Orleans public schools (Holley-Walker 178).

<sup>67</sup> Nagin ran on an anti-corruption platform, and in 2010, asserted that his eight years of leadership were scandal-free (Krupa and Carr).

funds in 2005 (N. Gibbs 45-46). Not just officials were accused of fraud: more than a few of FEMA's individual assistance checks were used for non-emergency purposes, gaining national attention. See Figure 3.



Figure 3 New York Daily News Feb. 15, 2006

Today, New Orleans is famous for its color and soul, its architecture, communal ceremonies, food,<sup>68</sup> artists, authors, music,<sup>69</sup> and truthfully, in the French Quarter (Vieux

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<sup>68</sup> New Orleans chefs are more famous than local sports heroes. The city is considered one of the top three culinary destinations in the world ("Why New Orleans Is Important to America.pdf").

<sup>69</sup> New Orleans is famous for the birth of jazz, America's only indigenous art form (Time Magazine Editors 31). Notwithstanding controversy, some claim it hosted the first recording of rock and roll (Wagner). And modern poker was invented here (Barry 213).

Carré),<sup>70</sup> over-indulgence.<sup>71</sup> The natives brag that, unlike any other place in America, it has a “lived tradition” (Vollen and Ying 247). Its internationally attended Mardis Gras celebration showcases carnival balls and krewes that trace their history back to the 1700s (Barry 215-16). One historian commented, “There is perhaps no other city in America where men are social arbiters,” planning every aspect of their carnival balls (Barry 216). No other place can lay claim to such a unique blend of Native American, French, Spanish, Cajun, Creole, and African roots.<sup>72</sup>

In the 2000 census, the metropolitan area had a population of 1.3 million and the city’s population was 485,000<sup>73</sup> (Whelan 216). Most noteworthy, New Orleans had an unusually high nativity rate of 77 percent (Horne 183). In a poll taken a few weeks before Hurricane Katrina, New Orleanians “regardless of age, race or wealth – were ‘extremely satisfied’ with their lives, [more so] than residents of any other American city” (Baum xii). New Orleans, nuanced, complicated, and enigmatic, is a study in remarkable contrasts.

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<sup>70</sup> Pronounced “view kay-ray,” Vieux Carré literally translates as “Old Square.” This has been the residential neighborhood of Sicilian families for the last century (Wilkie 38).

<sup>71</sup> Considered the city of constant carnival, many people find it irresistible. In 2004, New Orleans had the highest rate in the country for syphilis and the second highest rate for gonorrhea (Spielman 80).

<sup>72</sup> These roots include peoples from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.

<sup>73</sup> New Orleans has a history of the fewest cars per capita of any other U.S. city (Thomas), nonetheless, 50,000 cars were flooded, useless, and had to be removed after Katrina (Horne 45).

## 6. Political Positions and Story lines

*Power infuses all talk and therefore all talk is political.* Foucauldian assumption

President George W. Bush, 59 in 2005, is a white Republican who was born in Connecticut and received his undergraduate degree from Yale and his MBA from Harvard. Before he was elected America's 43rd President in 2000, he had been a two-term governor of Texas. His father, George Herbert Walker Bush, served as the 41st President from 1989-1993. George W. Bush's paternal grandfather was a U.S. Connecticut Senator for 10 years.

Mike Brown, 51 in 2005, is a white Republican who was born in Oklahoma and received his law degree from Oklahoma City College. He was appointed as FEMA's General Counsel in 2000 by his long-time friend, FEMA Director, Joe Allbaugh. Allbaugh made Brown the Acting Deputy Director in 2001, and he was confirmed as Deputy Director in 2002. Allbaugh left FEMA shortly after the creation of DHS. Brown acted in Allbaugh's stead, and was confirmed as DHS/FEMA's Under Secretary in 2003.<sup>74</sup>

Clarence Ray Nagin, 49 in 2005, is a black man who was born in New Orleans and educated in its inner city schools. He earned his MBA at Tulane University (Brinkley 21) and became a corporate telecommunications executive. He was elected mayor in 2002. He is a Democrat who stunned many in 2003 when he endorsed

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<sup>74</sup> Bush's Senior Advisor and Deputy Chief of Staff, Karl Rove, stated in his memoir that he opposed Brown's confirmation due to his lack of experience (Rove 449).

Republican Bobby Jindal as candidate for governor, over Blanco who was then lieutenant governor (Cooper and Block 108).

Nagin was asked in March of 2006 whether he regretted his Jindal endorsement and he glibly responded “The only thing I regret is he didn’t win” (Brinkley 89). Explaining that decision to one of his aides, Nagin said that Jindal had presented him with a "big, well-thought-out plan" for New Orleans, whereas Blanco and U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu "gave me all this (Democratic) party crap" (G. Russell, “Ex-Nagin Aide Pens Tell-all Book”). No one has really offered an explanation for how relations between Blanco and Nagin deteriorated. Long before Katrina, a split was growing among the Democrats of Louisiana.

Kathleen Blanco, 62 in 2005, is a white female Democrat who was born and educated in rural Louisiana. She received her B.S. in business education from the University of Southwestern Louisiana. In 1983 she ran for the state legislature and served two terms as lieutenant governor. She was elected the first female governor of Louisiana in 2003 and was one of the few Democrats to hold a governorship in the South.

#### 7. Hurricane Katrina’s Impact<sup>75</sup>

*Everyone here is mentally ill now* (Rose, *I Dead in Attic* 51).

Hurricane Katrina is considered by some to be the most catastrophic natural disaster in our history (Hartman and Squires 1). The size of the land damaged was

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Friedman would later write that Hurricane Katrina changed the way Americans viewed the weather; they would now have a guilty feeling that the weather was their fault (Friedman 138).

90,000 square miles, the size of England (Forman 243). Even though Katrina, once it made landfall, was quickly downgraded to category three<sup>76</sup> (Miskel 93), and even though Katrina's eye passed 30 miles to the east of New Orleans,<sup>77</sup> its storm surge proved to be at a category five level with estimates up to 25 feet<sup>78</sup> (Foster and Giegengack 46). New Orleans had no flood walls higher than 17 feet. The storm surge was "greater than anything previously recorded along the Gulf Coast"<sup>79</sup> (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 36).

Fifteen percent of the police force fled (Brinkley 203). The Superdome<sup>80</sup> was quickly dubbed the "epicenter of human misery"<sup>81</sup> (192). Then the nation learned of arson, looting, abandoned prisoners and nursing home patients<sup>82</sup> (Inglese), and forgotten hospitals (Thompson). Two hundred and fifteen hospital and nursing home patients died (Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to

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<sup>76</sup> This was probably a category 4 landfall, but Katrina also made landfall in St Bernard Parish and St Tammany Parish as a category 3 hurricane, making three landfalls in Louisiana (Wikipedia, "Timeline of Hurricane Katrina").

<sup>77</sup> Hurricanes spin counterclockwise and the most dangerous place to be during a hurricane is east (right) of the eye. When the hurricane winds pushed water from Lake Ponchartraine down the 17th and London Avenue canals, the wind speeds were much diminished. Some speculate that the levees failed under category one conditions (Cumming, "Canal Failures under Category One Winds").

<sup>78</sup> The season included three other notable hurricanes: Dennis in July and Rita and Wilma in September (Editors of Time 23).

<sup>79</sup> Hurricane Katrina had one of the lowest barometric pressures, 920 millibars, on record (Horne 18). Meteorologists use millibars, a metric unit, to calculate the weight of the air above this unit area at sea level ("Units of Pressure: Meteorologists Use Millibars").

<sup>80</sup> "New Orleanians coined a new word for what happens to people unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the authorities purporting to save them: domed. As in 'I just got domed'" (M. Lewis).

<sup>81</sup> The press was not allowed in (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 19).

<sup>82</sup> Forty-five patients died at Memorial Hospital during Katrina and the staff was investigated for euthanizing at least nine (Fink). Thirty-five patients drowned in St. Rita's nursing home (Schaefer 220). Lafon Nursing Home had 12 residents die (Brinkley 424).



Hurricane Katrina 286, 294, 302). Six hundred and twelve caskets were disinterred<sup>83</sup> (Downs 361).

This somber narrative was coupled with counter-narratives of mindboggling, humanity-affirming rescue efforts. More than 30,000 people were rescued in a three-day period (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 397). The local population came together offering kindness, aid, rescues, and acts of heroism on each other's behalf (Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell* 233-34, 243-44)(Lokey Pt. 3, p. 2).

It is estimated that eighty percent of Americans donated money or services to Hurricane Katrina victims (Forman 233). In the five years after Katrina, over a million volunteers would come through the city (Solnit, "Reconstructing the Story of the Storm Hurricane Katrina at Five" 15). One resident said, "For the first time in my life, outsiders are pouring into the city to do something other than drink" (M. Lewis).

The floodwaters of Lake Pontchartrain reached up to 20 feet once inside New Orleans and took 43 days to be pumped out (FEMA Managers in the Field for the First 20 Days vii). One hundred and fifty thousand animals died (Pezanoski). Twenty-five thousand businesses were destroyed (Forman 243). One hundred and twenty million cubic yards of debris would be collected (243), more than Hurricane Andrew and 9/11 combined. Debris remains an ongoing recovery challenge.

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<sup>83</sup> There are six lists of hurricane names; each one is repeated every six years. These names are occasionally retired out of respect for those who suffered. Katrina has been retired, to be replaced by Katia in 2011 (Roylance).

Hurricane Katrina's impact resulted in the loss of 200,000 thousand jobs (Whelan 218). A month after the hurricane, 400,000 New Orleanians were displaced (Brinkley 620). The phrase "double displacement" was coined by returning residents who could no longer find their homes, their previous existence, or their sense of place (Vollen and Ying 249).

In 2010 New Orleans still had 61,000 blighted and abandoned properties, the highest rate in the country by far (Hammer 1). The Ninth Ward is still an abandoned community with most home-fronts bearing the spray-painted communications of search and rescue teams from six years ago.

Hurricane Katrina may have hurt President G. W. Bush politically more than anything else during his presidency.<sup>84</sup> Generally speaking, after Hurricane Katrina, his approval ratings steadily decreased<sup>85</sup> (Agiesta). Scott McClellan, Bush's Press Secretary from 2003-2006, specifically describes the famous Bush flyover photos as the most damaging image of the Bush presidency<sup>86</sup> (McClellan) and "most political pundits [say

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<sup>84</sup> One blogger mused that Bush's presidency started with 9/11 and ended with Katrina (Cumming, "Hurricane Katrina--Post Script" 2).

<sup>85</sup> Indeed, at one point in his presidency, Bush had the lowest ratings (23 percent) in presidential history since 1938, when ratings were first collected (Agiesta) and as low as 2 percent among African Americans after Katrina (Moore 225).

<sup>86</sup> In his recent memoir, McClellan places the blame for this squarely on Rove's shoulders (McClellan 274-80).

Katrina was] one of the most badly handled press relations incidents in recent history”<sup>87</sup>  
(W. Klein 193). See Figure 4.



**Figure 4 Photo of G. W. Bush Fly-over on Wednesday August 31 (Shaw 1).**

#### 8. Hurricane Katrina: What Happened?

*The horrific events in New Orleans and surrounding territories are being picked apart, like entrails in Aboriginal Africa, as though there might be a clue, even a message, that will explain how America has begun to fall apart (Ellis 15).*

On Friday August 26, Blanco declared a state of emergency for Louisiana  
(Cooper and Block 236). She asked for and Bush granted a federal emergency

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<sup>87</sup>Some believe Katrina undermined the administration’s agenda, sidelining an effort to repeal the estate tax, delaying a bill to cut health care and education spending, and dooming Social Security reform (Mycoff 191-92).

declaration (Vollen and Ying 47). Blanco then wrote a letter to the President requesting federal assistance (Brinkley 39).

On Saturday, Blanco and Nagin called for a voluntary evacuation. Nagin said he did not call for a mandatory evacuation because he feared liability for disrupted business revenue, especially if the storm diverted (Brinkley 22-23). Nagin was first and foremost a corporate CEO; his concerns were for business profits and avoiding government liabilities (Vollen and Ying 57)(Dyson 57).

On Sunday August 28, Nagin announced, with Blanco at his side, the first-ever mandatory evacuation of New Orleans and the first evacuation of a U.S. city of its size since the Civil War. His order exempted nursing homes, prisons, hotels, and hospitals.<sup>88</sup>

On Monday at 6:10 a.m. CST, the eye of Hurricane Katrina hit Buras, Louisiana. It is suggested that the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal had been breached at 3:00 a.m., and this was officially logged in from a 5:00 a.m. phone call to the Army Corps (Dyson 60)(Brinkley 196). The Bush administration learned of a levee break at 7:30 a.m. (Brinkley 333)(Cooper and Block 134). Both Nagin and the U.S. Army learned of the breach some time that morning (Brinkley 243, 630)(Honoré 92). At 8:14 a.m. the National Weather Service warned of a breach of the Industrial Canal (Brinkley 219). And at 9:30 a.m. the London Avenue Canal breached (Brinkley 142). See Figure 14.

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<sup>88</sup> Urban evacuation was Nagin's responsibility (Brinkley 56). Eighty percent of the 500,000 population evacuated, leaving 100,000 behind. Many were unable to leave due to poverty, illness, or a disability.

The Superdome lost power and the roof ripped off in two places. An eight-mile twin-span interstate bridge connecting New Orleans and Slidell toppled into the water. Communication systems began to fail. New Orleanians didn't yet know that they faced a week without sanitation and power and with scarce amounts of food, water, medicine, and security.

People were walking to or being dropped off at the Convention Center and the Superdome. The Coast Guard and Louisiana Fish and Wildlife Service began rescue operations. Three hundred Louisiana National Guard were completely flooded in their headquarters, Jackson Barracks, in the Ninth Ward and needed to be rescued.

Brown's messaging was ambiguous; on Monday afternoon, he sent a memo to Chertoff requesting 1,000 federal workers within two days for "this near catastrophic event." It politely ended "thank you for your consideration in helping us to meet our responsibilities" ("Think Progress » Katrina Timeline" 3). Brown stated in this memo that he wanted to "convey a positive image of FEMA" (Cooper and Block 229).

Bush was with Senator John McCain for the latter's birthday and made an Arizona speech to promote Medicare drug benefits (Brinkley 244). Many of Bush's top advisors were on vacation.<sup>89</sup> Blanco began lining up shelters for 25,000. Everyone was waiting for buses.

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<sup>89</sup> Vice President Dick Cheney was in Wyoming, fly-fishing. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was in New York City. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was at a Padres baseball game in San Diego. Chief of Staff Andrew Card was in Maine (Brinkley 339, 392, 440).

On Tuesday August 30 at 5:00 a.m., the White House team had a conference call confirming the worst-case scenario for New Orleans, the levees had been breached, and the city was underwater (McClellan 271-73). Bush later gave a speech in San Diego on Iraq (Brinkley 244). More people gathered at the Convention Center and 20,000 would be there before nightfall. DHS Secretary Chertoff was briefed in Atlanta by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention about pandemic flu. Late in the day, Chertoff declared Katrina an “incident of national significance,” the first use of the National Response Plan, and designated Brown as the “Principal Federal Official.” Everyone in New Orleans was waiting for buses.

On Wednesday August 31, Bush cut his vacation short to fly back to Washington. Air Force One flew over the affected area so the President could view the damage. See Figure 4. Neither Bush nor Card would take Blanco’s calls. It took her six hours to reach Bush (Time Magazine Editors 94). Meanwhile, Lake Pontchartrain’s floodwaters reached parity with floodwaters inside New Orleans. See Figure 13. The Secretary of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency in the Katrina-affected states.

When Blanco reached Bush Wednesday afternoon, she told him she needed 40,000 troops to assist with relief efforts. Troops would help with the massive cleanup, and could transport people in need, hand out provisions, pass along information, and lend a sense of security. Bush gave a Rose Garden address where he detailed comprehensive planning for long-term recovery and the lists of supplies being delivered to those most in

need (McClellan 284-85). General Russell Honoré, the Commander of the Joint Task Force Katrina and in charge of all active duty military forces sent to Louisiana and Mississippi, arrived in New Orleans. Everyone was waiting for buses.

On Thursday September 1, Nagin lost his temper and lambasted his state and federal counterparts in a live radio interview, broadcast worldwide (Brinkley 421). Buses started to trickle in.

On Friday September 2 at 4:35 a.m., a chemical storage facility exploded; other explosions and fires followed (Dyson 93-94). Blanco gave a press conference warning that the incoming troops had M-16s that were “locked and loaded” (Brinkley 508). On the tarmac in Mobile, Bush told Brown he was “doing a heckava job.” Next Bush arrived in New Orleans. He met privately with Blanco on Air Force One and said, “I’m going to need you to sign a waiver [indicating] that the Louisiana National Guard needs to be turned over to the federal government. I can’t take that from you but I’m going to need you to federalize them”<sup>90</sup> (Alexander 192).

Bush wanted Blanco to turn over the operation to him. He would become the one with all of the power, and she would be sidelined. Blanco replied that she needed 24 hours to think about it. By taking complete control of the situation, Bush could blame the prior week on her and take credit for turning the corner that he suspected was imminent.

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<sup>90</sup> As Blanco met with Bush, she was commander in chief of the largest deployment of National Guard troops in history (Alexander 192).

With her declination, he could make the delays appear to be her fault. He had positioned himself to be in a winning situation, no matter her response.

A large contingency of buses started to arrive. Two police officers committed suicide. Friday evening the White House again asked Blanco to sign over control of the response. She refused.

By Sunday, everyone in the Superdome and Convention Center had been evacuated. More than 50,000 people had been taken in by communities around the country and given hot food, cold water, clean sheets, blankets, beds, hot showers, soap, towels, clothes, diapers, computers, phones, nursery services, prescriptions, doctors, and the creation of medical records databases and people locator files.

The following Friday, September 9, Chertoff relieved Brown of Katrina duty in the Gulf, returning him to Washington. On Monday September 12, Brown resigned. In all the follow-up investigations, it has never been explained why the requested buses took five days to arrive.<sup>91</sup>

On Saturday September 24, category three Hurricane Rita hit the Gulf Coast, and the Lower Ninth Ward flooded again. In May of 2006 Nagin was re-elected. He had faced 23 candidates and won in a tight run-off against Lieutenant Governor Mitch

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<sup>91</sup> A personal document created by an on-site emergency management official in Baton Rouge stated that the first order for buses was placed on Wednesday (Baton Rouge On Site Official 3).



Landrieu.<sup>92</sup> In March of 2007 Blanco announced she would not run for re-election, and in January 2008 Bobby Jindal was elected governor.

Between 2006 and 2010, New Orleans had the highest crime rate in the nation. In 2008, there were no trials and no convictions for the 179 murders committed that year (Brown 263). In 2009 the U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder conducted nine investigations into various killings by New Orleans police officers in the week following Katrina (McCarthy and Maggi, "Sources: Police Indictments Coming")(McCarthy, "5th Ex-Cop Is Charged in Danziger Coverup")(McCarthy, "Alleged Beatings by Cops Probed").<sup>93</sup>

Holder's police investigations led to an investigation of white vigilantes who attempted to murder innocent black men during that first week (Solnit, "Reconstructing the Story of the Storm Hurricane Katrina at Five"). Nagin ended his second term in May 2010, alleging that a shadow government was working to discredit him (Rose, "City Leaders Lurk in 'Shadows'... So They Say - New Orleans News, Breaking News, Sports & Weather - Fox 8 Live WVUE-TV Channel 8"). The critical seven days continue to have repercussions and will do so far into the future.

In this section I have reviewed disaster theory, briefly describing significant disasters in America and elsewhere. America's history of disaster relief activities was

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<sup>92</sup> In 2002 Nagin received 85 percent of the white vote and 40 percent of the black vote. In 2006, he received 80 percent of the black vote and 20 percent of the white vote ("Ray Nagin - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia" 3, 7).

<sup>93</sup> One police officer convicted for covering up police killings of unarmed citizens has undermined current cases because his lack of credibility as a trial witness is leading to acquittals (Filosa).

examined. I discussed FEMA's legal underpinnings and functionality and then sought a deeper understanding of New Orleans. I have set forth the backgrounds of the Key Parties and Katrina's impact and chronology. With an appreciation of Katrina's backdrop and context, we have a better basis for analyzing the Key Parties' positioning systems, social forces, and story lines.

#### K. The Way Forward

*Don't believe it can't happen to you; don't be poor, old, or in ill health; and most importantly, don't count on government to save your life* (Menzel 812).

The largest part of the U.S. population is made up of the baby boomers and the World War II generation. Amanda Ripley in her book Unthinkable asserts that disasters and specifically Hurricane Katrina did not disproportionately affect the poor; instead, “[Katrina victims] were disproportionately old”<sup>94</sup> (Ripley 28). One of Ripley's theories is that elderly people assess risks differently than younger people<sup>95</sup> (28). Indeed, one Gulf Coast city spokesman stated, “[Hurricane] Camille killed more people in 2005 than it did in 1969” (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 25). My research has important implications for protecting our most vulnerable populations from disasters.

Research abounds on many facets of Hurricane Katrina, including race, poverty, environmental contamination, education, the Corps, mental health for children, the

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<sup>94</sup> Other research indicates as well that Katrina victims were first old, second women, and third poor (Morganroth Gullette 103-19).

<sup>95</sup> Taleb states that humans underestimate the most likely risks and overestimate the least likely. In short, all humans are quite poor at risk prediction (129-36).

media, and housing. No one, however, has studied the discourse, narratives, and social positioning systems between the Key Parties to find out what happened between and among them. No one has proposed a conflict management prototype to circumvent similar future failures.

Contrary to my prior beliefs, Conflict Management Professionals may be able to offer skills that can be of great assistance. I work for FEMA as the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Director. After 9/11, mediators called me from around the country, asking how they could help. After the Oklahoma City bombing, I had similar offerings from volunteer massage therapists, who wanted to assist the fatigued and beleaguered urban search and rescue workers.

I have always taken the unpopular position that, unlike massage therapists, freelance mediators have no material role at disaster sites. After 9/11 Maria Volpe, Director of the Dispute Resolution Program at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, conducted numerous meetings and conference calls trying to coordinate a mediation component to the response. After much thought, analysis, and dialogue, she decided that mediators were not needed.

Volpe spoke at the September 2005 Association for Conflict Resolution Annual Conference in Minneapolis. She said professions that were most needed in the disaster aftermath were social workers, therapists, counselors, psychologists, and advocates. Indeed, a Department of Justice Community Relations Service representative commented from the audience that mediators were failing to remain neutral during the Katrina

response.<sup>96</sup> Instead, they quickly assumed the role of advocate, hurting the profession's reputation for impartiality.<sup>97</sup> She urged mediators to stay away.

ADR conference organizers have contacted me frequently, asking me to speak about the role of outside mediators at disasters. I have always declined because I didn't think there was one. I believe, however, as a result of this research, I could advocate for a unique role for the Conflict Management Professional. What makes this even more intriguing is the idea that this person should assist, not at the lowest level, but rather at the highest level, and not at the end, but at the beginning.

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<sup>96</sup> Some scholars disagree and find it is quite acceptable for mediators to be advocates (Warfield). Others assert that once in an advocacy role, the person should no longer hold oneself out as a mediator.

<sup>97</sup> Alive in Truth volunteers, who were taking oral histories of Katrina victims, faced similar problems, becoming directly involved as advocates, which worried project managers (Stein and Preuss 42). Public dialogue professionals have a separate role altogether. *AmericaSpeaks* helps distraught communities talk about issues and concerns in a process aimed at facilitating healing. *AmericaSpeaks* went to New York City after 9/11, to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and, more recently, around the country facilitating citizen feedback or solutions to the budget deficit.

## II. METHODOLOGY

*An American has not seen the United States until he has seen Mardis Gras in New Orleans.* Mark Twain

### A. Grounded Theory

This dissertation involves qualitative analysis of a case. Unlike the natural sciences, the purpose of qualitative research is to understand rather than offer causal explanations (Schwandt 191). My method is grounded theory, comprising data collection, analysis, and theory development. The theory is built through the research and “grounded” in the data (Robson 190). The research, which is systematic but flexible, offers a set of heuristic devices (Robson 90)(Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* 4).

Two American sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, who researched the phenomenon of patients dying in hospitals, are credited with conceiving of and developing this theory (Robson 191). They wrote their groundbreaking text in 1967, asserting that grounded theory research generates theory rather than verifying it (Glaser and Strauss 118).

Robson suggests that through the data, one finds the categories, finds the relationships between the categories, and establishes the core categories (493). By using

a non-linear approach (Robson 193), the categories are linked to a unique datum and are constructed to capture the essence of a case (Druckman 259).

One goal is to step outside conventional thinking, to stop, ponder, and re-think (Corbin and Strauss 197)(Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* 135). The more the researcher works with the datum, the more understanding can evolve (197). Each step of the analytical process moves through “development, refinement, and interrelation of concepts” (Charmaz, “Grounded Theory Objectivist and Constructivist Methods” 510). Grounded theory provides “a useful conceptual rendering and ordering of the data that explains the studied phenomenon” (511).

Kathy Charmaz states that comparing is a major technique in grounded theory. Parties are compared to each other and to themselves at different points in time, incidents are compared with other incidents, a datum is compared with a category, and a category is compared with other categories (Charmaz, “Grounded Theory Objectivist and Constructivist Methods” 515). Through the datum, one looks at assumptions, processes, and actions (517). The research focuses on the parties’ views and realities.

This research explores how the Key Parties interpreted the events and how they structured their responses. Values, sources of friction, and face issues emerged that reveal conflicting narratives and turning points. Grounded theory can expose epistemological assumptions that impacted overall disaster response activities. The research uncovers how ideologies and biases eclipsed other ways of knowing. Through this research we see that dysfunctional information-sharing limited situational awareness

and drove poor decision-making and how issues of agency and lack of respect undermined effective response.

Juliet Corbin believes that research should be the foundation for instigating change (40). Grounded theory is particularly well suited to conflict analysis and resolution because the researcher tries to discover the central problem in an event from the perspectives of the parties and how they process the problem (Noerager Stern and Kerry 68)(Glaser). Charmaz surmises that problems can be ameliorated with grounded theory as it is useful in trying to understand the parties' actions, failure to act, and the reasons for their behaviors (Charmaz, "Shifting the Grounds Constructivist Grounded Theory Methods" 131).

Grounded theory provides analytical tools for understanding how "[e]ach person experiences, gives meaning to, and responds to events in light of his or her own biography or experiences, according to gender, time, and place, and cultural, political, religious, and professional backgrounds" (Corbin 39). As I analyzed the discourse during the seven critical days, I used grounded theory to discover patterns and construct categories to increase understanding of the Key Parties.

#### B. Discourse Is Nested in Narrative Analysis

*We encounter each other in words.* Elizabeth Alexander, Inaugural Poem, Obama's Inauguration, January 2009

This research analyzed the conversations that Blanco, Nagin, and representatives of the federal government had between and among themselves and about each other.

Narrative analysis is a review of the discursive practice, that is, the way people experience their social identity, the social world, and their place in it , “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves” 45-46). The narrative produces structured speech acts, i.e., “institutionalized use of language and language-like sign systems” (45). Foucault discusses it this way:

“[O]ne tries to rediscover beyond the statements themselves the intention of the speaking subject, his conscious activity, what he meant, or, again, the unconscious activity that took place, despite himself, in what he said or in the almost imperceptible fracture of his actual words; in any case, we must reconstitute another discourse, rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animates from within the voice that one hears, re-establish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them” (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language* 27).

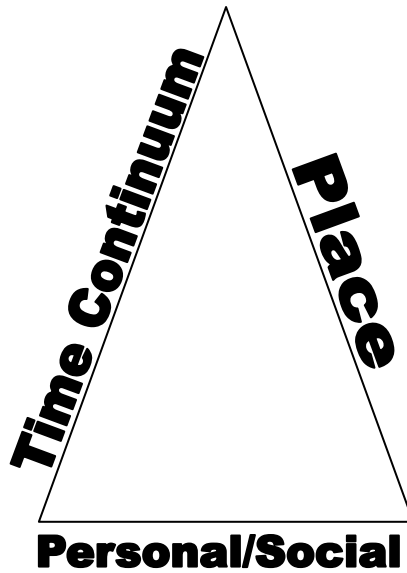
People come to understand themselves through their narratives (Clandinin xxvi); indeed, these narratives are the organizing principle for human action (Riessman 1). Narrative analysis is a technique to conceptualize the storied nature of cultural, institutional, and individual perspectives (Daiute and Lightfoot viii-x). “Our very lives are bathed in stories, in comedies and tragedies, with happy endings and shocking, or unanticipated, or disappointing ones” (65-66). Some would suggest that storytelling is a form of problem-solving. Isak Dinesen stated, “All sorrows can be borne if we can put them into a story” (Riessman 4).

Words call us into existence (Bamberg 153). “[D]iscourse—and narrative—are what constitute, define, and construct the material world” (Carney 215). My research



views the world as text-centered, i.e., everything can be viewed as text and text is a narrative (White and Tacket 701).

Jean Clandinin sets forth a three dimensional narrative inquiry space (50). See Figure 5.



**Figure 5 Narrative Inquiry Space**

My research examines the event from the vantage point of time, place, and personal and social factors. The Three Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space enriches my datum analysis.

Barbara Czarniawska-Joerges states that narrative is a form of social life, knowledge, and communication (13). She calls “narrative” an alternative mode of

knowing (8). She explains we are never the sole author of our narratives; positioning, which is accepted, rejected, or improved upon, takes place in every conversation (5).

Seymour Chatman quotes Ludwig Klages:

“[W]e contend that whoever, having the right talent, should do nothing but examine the words and phrases which deal with the human soul, would know more about it than all the sages who omitted to do so, and would know perhaps a thousand times more than has ever been discovered by observation, apparatus, and experiment upon man” (Chatman 124)(Allport and Odbert 1)(Klages 74).

Using grounded theory to analyze the Key Parties’ discourse and after carefully examining the narratives and positioning systems, I describe disruptions, miscommunications, categories, and themes. Next, my research reviews conflict resolution models from such scholars as Drs. Marc Gopin and John Paul Lederach. Finally, I propose interventions around positioning and storytelling that could lead to substantially enhanced interpersonal cooperation and emergency response.

### C. Research Data

My research data come from intergovernmental phone calls and video conferences; newspaper and op ed articles; congressional testimony; government reports; press releases; press conferences; emails; memoirs, interviews; magazine and journal articles; books documenting the events; first-person victim accounts; personal notes from disaster officials; websites from government-watch organizations; TV and radio clips; and documentaries. I also reviewed a public Department of Homeland Security database, Lessons Learned Information Sharing.gov, which contains over 1,300 reports on Hurricane Katrina. The result is an abundance of material.

My primary datum is the exact words of the Key Parties at the time. This can be subdivided into public and private discourse. My secondary datum is people writing about these Parties' attitudes, actions, and values. My tertiary datum is the transcripts, testimony, writings, and interviews given by these Parties once they were significantly removed from and reflecting back on the first seven days.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTION ONE: HOW DID THE SPEECH ACTS AMONG GOVERNOR BLANCO, MAYOR NAGIN, AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EVINCE A SOCIAL POSITIONING SYSTEM THAT UNDERCUT THE INITIAL HURRICANE KATRINA RESPONSE?

*[New Orleans, a] place where the firm ground ceases and the unsound footing begins* (R. Ford).

Joseph Riley, the mayor of Charleston during Hurricane Hugo in 1989, laid out the various positions a leader must take to be effective. “In a time of disaster, you’re the citizens’ leader, more so than [at] any other time. You’re their counselor, their coach, their cheerleader, their security giver—you’re all those things. There’s a grieving process after a disaster, and you have to get the spirit up and keep it going” (Riley 85).

To be a good leader, one must position him/herself in multiple ways to meet the citizens’ needs. Bush, Brown, Blanco, and Nagin positioned themselves at first in ways that followed Riley’s advice. Their narrative started with warnings, assurances, and affirmative positioning. A positioning system soon emerged, however, that severely diverged from Riley’s advice and undercut cooperative conversation.

#### A. Warnings

Nagin issued his mandatory evacuation order on Sunday August 28, 2005, with Blanco at his side, stating, “The storm surge most likely will topple our levy system” (Nagin and Blanco, “New Orleans Evacuation Order”). He directed, “If you have a

medical condition, if you are on dialysis, or [have] some other condition, we want you to expeditiously move to the Superdome.” He continued, “[A] hurricane, a Category five with high winds most likely will knock out all electricity in the city; and therefore, the Superdome is not going to be a very comfortable place ... [a]nd this evacuation could be in effect for up to five days, so if you do find yourself in a shelter, they're asking you to please bring enough food and supplies to last for that long” (Nagin and Blanco).

During the same press conference, Blanco warned the public to take the oncoming hurricane seriously. “[T]his incident will be of such severity and magnitude that effective response will be beyond the capabilities of the state and the affected local governments” (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 16). “Waters could be as high as fifteen to twenty feet” (Nagin and Blanco, “New Orleans Evacuation Order”).

Nagin and Blanco stood shoulder to shoulder, delivering messages designed to save peoples’ lives. They physically positioned themselves to appear as a team, sharing responsibility as joint guardians of people’s safety. Unfortunately, their warning was Cassandraesque, as one-fifth of the population, about 100,000 people, did not leave New Orleans.

Many simply could not leave because they were housebound, including the elderly, the poor, the physically and mentally disabled, and those with debilitating illnesses or serious medical conditions. Others had no means of personal transportation and no money for a bus, train, or hotel. It was the end of the month, when household funds were typically low. Some did not evacuate, reasoning that they had successfully

lived through Hurricane Betsy. Some wanted to guard their homes from looters, and others refused to leave their pets behind.

Brown, speaking to response workers, stated, “I know I’m preaching to the choir on this one, but I’ve learned over the past four and a half, five years, to go with my gut on a lot of things, and I’ve got to tell you my gut hurts on this one. It hurts. I’ve got cramps. So, we need to take this one very, very seriously” (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 234).

#### B. Assurances and Affirmative Positioning

While the Key Parties wanted to warn the public and other emergency responders, they also wanted to assure and calm them. The Army Corps described the “exceptional condition” of the New Orleans’ flood control system days before the storm (Cooper and Block 240).

At noon on Sunday, Brown said on a conference call with many state and federal officials, “[L]ean as far, far as you possibly can, you know, without falling, and your people here are doing that. And that's the type of attitude that we need in an event like this.... Now, the good thing about this is we've got a great team around here that knows what they're doing, and they [missing] to do it.... We're going to do whatever it takes to help these folks down there because this is, to put it mildly, the big one I think, All right?" (Gaynor).

Brown stated to the media later that Sunday, “We actually started preparing for this about two years ago.... And actually there is a tabletop exercise with the Louisiana

officials about a year ago. So the planning's been in place now. We're ready for the storm" (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 12).

Brown pledges "FEMA is not going to hesitate at all in this storm. We are not going to sit back and make this a bureaucratic process. We are going to move fast, we're going to move quick, and we're going to do whatever it takes to help disaster victims" (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 16).

Brown's assurances amplified his power, commitment, and rescue acumen. His words promised agency and performance. In a state/federal conference call with a wide audience, he commanded, "I want to see that supply chain jammed up just as much as possible. I mean, I want stuff [more] than we need. Just keep jamming those lines full as much as you can with commodities" (Cooper and Block 114).

On a video conference call on Sunday, Bush said "I want to assure the folks at the state level that we are fully prepared" (Cooper and Block 113). "For those of you who are concerned about whether or not we are prepared to help, don't be. We are. We are in place" (Cooper and Block 143). Bush actually called attention to fear and doubt among state responders, i.e., not a nervous public but knowledgeable colleagues. There was some prescient worry that the federal government had not adequately prepared. Bush swept this concern aside with clipped, two-word sentences: "Don't be. We are."

In a similar speech to responders, Bush contextualized the verb "help" three times, the noun "folks" four times, and the verb "pray" twice (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 235). This word usage was designed to sooth and

reassure. In sum, the Katrina response narrative started with words of comfort, bravado, compliments, and booster talk.

Also, the Key Parties showed a high degree of cohesiveness. After Katrina moved northeast on Saturday August 29, Blanco stated to Brown, “I hope you will tell President Bush how much we appreciate—these are the times that really count—to know that our federal government will step in and give us the kind of assistance that we need.” Through her premature thanks, Blanco positioned Bush as the hero of the narrative. He was the one person coming to their rescue with assistance, services, and results when they needed it most. She positioned him as gallant, effective, and responsive.

Brown positioned Blanco too as an effective partner, one who deserved confidence. He stated of her, “What I’ve seen here today is a team that is very tight-knit, working closely together, being very professional doing it, and in my humble opinion, making the right calls” (“Kathleen Babineaux Blanco”). Problems quickly materialized, however. These remarks were repudiated with “narrative disruptions” that positioned the storm, each other, fate, and even the victims as antagonists.

### C. Disruptions

There are five areas of disruption in the narratives of the Key Parties. By “narrative disruptions” I mean recurring points or sources of conflict. Sara Cobb believes that there are “critical coherence points,” places “at which positions can be altered, either negatively or positively” (“Theories of Responsibilities: The Social Construction of Intentions in Mediation” 183). The narrative disruptions I found in my research are: 1)



Backstories, 2) The Power of Words, 3) Positioning the Problem Elsewhere, 4) Malignant Positioning, and 5) Inartful Reflexive Positioning. Later, I will discuss these disruptions as points for positive intervention.

1. Backstories

The backstories are sub-divided into issues of control and politics, information gaps, and history and context. They informed the Key Parties' values, perceptions, and points of view and heavily influenced response operations, communications, and decision-making.

- a. Control and Politics

One point of disruption involved the miasmic backstory of control and politics. There simply is no doubt that partisan party politics was in part responsible for the Katrina failures (Carafano and Weitz 231). Politics, control, respect, and authority played out like a Shakespearean tragedy. Goods, services, and information were interrupted, delayed, commandeered, and denied. They became objects of political control.

At the beginning of a large disaster, the immediate question is, "Who is in control?" Lines of authority can become muddled as three levels of government struggle to work together. Scholars and practitioners like to say that all disasters are local, but if the lowest level of government were in control, it probably would not need federal assistance. Indeed, federal disasters are defined as situations that are beyond state and local control. Questions like, "Who is authorized to set the priorities?" and "Who is

ultimately responsible for the decision-making and the results?” are never satisfactorily answered.

I begin with Nagin. Evacuation orders, security, and public health and safety, all raised questions of state versus city control. Nagin was a leader who wanted to maintain control and have his authority dominate (Forman 201). On Tuesday, he heard a rumor that Blanco had re-directed helicopters that he had designated for levy repair. She allegedly had diverted them to rescue a thousand people trapped on a church rooftop in New Orleans East<sup>98</sup> (Forman 90). Blanco’s alleged act trumped Nagin’s power and agency by prioritizing rescue over repair. Not telling him exacerbated her triumph in his view. His closest aides said he had always been quick to mistrust others (Forman 201).

Nagin became “furious.” He cut off critical communication with Blanco, and would later publically accuse her of killing people (G. Russell, “Nagin: Mistakes Were Made at all Levels--His Biggest Frustration Was Slow Pace of Relief”)(Forman 90). This was Nagin’s turning point. From this point forward, his remarks were angry, sour, and accusatory, progressively worsening as the week wore on.

Issues of contested control and authority between Nagin and Blanco retarded response activities. Lashing out against Blanco, Nagin cancelled his office’s attempts to set up environmental cleanup/debris removal contracts.<sup>99</sup> He was suspicious that Blanco’s attempts to put clean-up contracts in place was again usurping his authority. He

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<sup>98</sup> Blanco denied ever doing this (G. Russell, “Ex-Nagin Aide Pens Tell-all Book”).

<sup>99</sup> Debris removal is an early top priority in emergency response.

started to use his power to wrestle control from her. If the debris removal company had a hint of ties to Blanco, it would be cancelled (Forman 124-25). Politics and control framed the discourse.

Disasters can bring hidden dividends to government leaders. The authority to contract is a significant source of influence.<sup>100</sup> In times of emergency, to promote the public welfare, huge government contracts are sometimes let without competitive bidding. Massive outlays of funds can be directed to specific groups, individuals, and projects. Naomi Klein coined the phrases “Disaster capitalism” and “disaster profiteering” to bring attention to the dark side of emergency management (N. Klein).<sup>101</sup>

One researcher alleged that the busses were delayed in part because FEMA was looking for a Republican contracting source. The contractor who was hired had strong ties to the party and little familiarity with bus logistics (Brinkley 396). Other disaster goods and services were delayed as contracts were shopped around according to political relationships, including no-bid contracts for food, water, and transportation (Baum 248), disaster mortuary teams (Baum 256-68), security (Honoré 145) and debris removal (Forman 124-25).

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<sup>100</sup> Areas impacted by disasters show improvement and strengthening of infrastructure and an increase in economic vitality over time (Bennett).

<sup>101</sup> Blackwater Worldwide beat most federal agencies to New Orleans and picked up lucrative contracts, providing heavily armed mercenaries to protect people, property, and government officials (Scahill xxiv-v). Thousands of National Guard and active duty soldiers were available to fill these jobs, but were rejected in favor of private contracting (Honoré 145).

Klein asserts that Katrina was an opportunity for new thinking: “using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering (N. Klein 9). These types of policies, driven by politics and the desire to assert control, can be seen in the affected areas. After Katrina the New Orleans City Council approved demolition of 45,000 apartments at four massive public housing projects even though they had withstood the storm (Brown 199). Bush suspended environmental protection regulations, along with the Davis-Bacon Act which guarantees a minimum wage (Brasch 74, 83). These decisions shaped the race, class, and ethnicity of the people who re-populated the city.

Assets appeared to be assigned according to political affiliation. A landing craft from the U.S.S. Bataan that weathered Katrina in the Gulf of Mexico set out for Louisiana, full of food, supplies, medical care, and beds. On Tuesday, within several hours’ distance of New Orleans, the craft was inexplicably ordered, apparently by Mississippi Senator Trent Lott, a Republican, to the Mississippi Coast (Kirkpatrick and Shane)(Dyson 118)(Brinkley 356, 556).

By the end of 2005, despite having incurred a fraction of the damage, on a per capita basis, compared to Louisiana, Mississippi had secured three times the aid in community development block grants (Horne 99). The Pentagon apparently deliberately delayed active military and National Guard assistance to New Orleans (Brinkley 416-22), which is discussed more fully below.

Next, I turn to the White House's political maneuvers for control and for vilification. On Tuesday, Rove, asked Senator David Vitter (R-La) to ask Blanco to relinquish her control of the situation so federal/martial law could be imposed and the federal government could take over (Lalka 84). The White House used the New York Times to begin a public relations strategy to blame the governor and mayor in a "barrage of [false] accusations" (Max). For instance, on Sunday September 3, the Washington Post, citing the White House, reported that Blanco failed to declare a state of emergency in Louisiana, miserably hog-tying disaster assistance (Roig-Franzia and Hsu).

The Post quickly published a retraction, noting that Blanco had declared a state of emergency three days before Katrina's landfall (Roig-Franzia and Hsu). The White House effectively campaigned to discredit Blanco (Dyson 105-06)(Horne 93-94). Recently I asked a knowledgeable New Orleanian about Blanco, and I was told that Blanco had waited too long to declare a state of emergency.

Brown revealed that within weeks of his resignation, he was recruited by the White House to write an article for the New York Times specifically to shift the blame to Blanco and the state of Louisiana (Cooper and Block 235). Brown commented many months later, "Certain people in the White House were thinking, 'We had to federalize Louisiana because she's a white, female Democratic governor, and we have a chance to

rub her nose in it.<sup>102</sup> We can't do it to Haley [Barbour] because Haley's a white male Republican governor. And we can't do a thing to him. So we're just gonna federalize Louisiana'" (Sturgis).

An interesting aspect of the White House's struggle for control took place late at night, September 2. According to two New York Times reporters, that Friday, four days after Katrina hit, at 11:20 p.m. a fax arrived at the Baton Rouge emergency operations center. It had no information identifying the sender, not even a phone number (Cooper and Block 213). The cover memo suggested that Blanco sign the attached federalization agreement, allowing Bush to take command of all soldiers in Louisiana. Blanco's lawyer called the White House and reached Andrew Card, the Chief of Staff, who stated it needed to be signed quickly as a press release was ready for the President for the next morning. While Card read the release over the phone, he refused to provide a copy for review (Cooper and Block 214).

Army Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum of the National Guard Command called Blanco's lawyer three hours later from the White House and insisted that Blanco sign the document. He stated that the Louisiana state government would be personally responsible for the deaths in New Orleans by not doing so (Cooper and Block 215). Oddly enough, Blum had earlier advised Blanco that signing this document would add neither additional federal assets nor any speed to the operations. He had advised her not

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<sup>102</sup> More than two years after Katrina, while touring California wildfires, Bush stated to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, "It makes a significant difference when you have somebody in the statehouse willing to take the lead" (Moller).

to federalize the disaster (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 519).

The White House positioned Blanco in a “no win” bind. She either stayed in control and took responsibility for five days of chaos, or she gave up control, admitting she was unable to succeed and needed Bush to take over. She would look weak no matter which decision she made. Meanwhile, the White House hoped to position itself as *deus ex machina*.

After discussing this matter with her staff, Blanco refused to sign over control, and took a lot of criticism for her stance. She refused to give up her agentivity, choosing instead to stay responsible. Exasperated over these games and to reassert her power, on Saturday, September 3, she contracted with James Lee Witt, who had been FEMA's director in the Clinton Administration and would know well how to handle the White House (Brinkley 247).

The decision to hire Witt was Blanco's turning point. She had until then tried to work with the administration. She had had suspicions on Tuesday, when Vitter was reporting that he was in communication with Rove, that the disaster was being turned into a political event. The Friday night fax and the Saturday morning call about the press release confirmed her suspicions. Hiring Witt repositioned her as perspicacious, strong, and defiant.

Bush had asked Mississippi's Governor Barbour to sign over control of the disaster earlier in the day on Friday, and he had promptly refused (Cooper and Block

212). The option to federalize the Katrina response would later receive a lot of attention. The National Emergency Management Association and almost all of the then current governors stated they strongly opposed federalizing domestic disasters (Lalka 89). The House Report found that federalizing the state militia would have provided no advantages at all to Blanco (Horne 96). Furthermore, Florida Governor Jeb Bush wrote a September 30, 2005, op-ed article aggressively criticizing any attempt to federalize an emergency response to catastrophic events (Cooper and Block 275).

Finally, within weeks President Bush tried to superimpose his political frame on the Katrina event by turning to a terrorism metaphor. “We look at the destruction caused by Katrina and our hearts break. [The terrorists are] the kind of people who look at Katrina and wish they had caused it. We’re at war against these people” (Alexander 199).

Bush positioned Katrina victims as analogous to victims in his terrorism narrative, linking the disaster story to that of the evil-doers. In his Jackson Square speech, September 15, 2005, Bush stated, “This government will learn the lessons of Hurricane Katrina. We are going to review every action and make necessary changes so that we are better prepared for any challenge of nature, or act of evil men that could threaten our people” (G. W. Bush, “Bush: 'We Will Do What it Takes' - CNN” 7).

Politics and control are some of the backstories to this disaster response. Politicians high-jacked decision-making and took valuable time away from the response.



People positioned their allies/friends for lucrative contracts, worked to discredit others and undermine their authority, and turned Katrina into a distracting political metaphor.

b. Information Gaps

“[O]ur biggest flaw [in Katrina] is that we failed to communicate” (Bayard 306). The most debilitating Katrina discourses were those where people failed to test their assumptions, shunned participation, or were intentionally excluded. For instance, Chertoff stated he did not know about the levee breaches until Tuesday. Brown deliberately kept information from Chertoff, and refused to answer his cell phone when he saw that Chertoff was calling (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 6)(Horne 59). Chertoff complained that he was not adequately apprised of the situation, despite the fact that as DHS Secretary he “had the most effective communications network of any cabinet office” (Brinkley 271).

The Senate found Brown’s unwillingness to share information with Chertoff abominable (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 166). In his memoirs Honoré complained that he had difficulty reaching Brown throughout the time that Brown was on site (Honoré 109-10, 158). The Homeland Security Operations Center, the information clearing house for disasters that was responsible for keeping the White House informed, accused FEMA of deliberately withholding information from it (Cooper and Block 183).

Wednesday, Blanco tried repeatedly to call the President. She was transferred around the White House until finally speaking with Homeland Security Advisor Fran

Townsend. For the greater part of that day, Bush would not take Blanco's calls (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 39-40).

Nagin refused to take Blanco's calls at certain points (Forman 210-11). Key Parties literally were not answering the phone. People positioned themselves to limit other peoples' access to information. This was driven by politics, egos, and misunderstandings. Failure to share information, which created information gaps, was one of the backstories that sabotaged emergency response.<sup>103</sup>

### c. History and Context

While Bush attempted to have Blanco sign over control of the disaster, others seriously disagreed as to whether her approval was necessary. Lawyers were examining the power of the federal government to send troops into Louisiana. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 prohibits the use of federal troops for law enforcement purposes. It was passed during Reconstruction to protect the South from U.S. troops taking on the role of law enforcement (Brinkley 486).

The Stafford Act does not authorize the use of federal troops in times of disaster without the governor's request. The National Guard units under Blanco's authority could

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<sup>103</sup> Analysis of the handling of the Iraq War indicates that the failure to share information was a debilitating problem in that operation as well (Ricks)(Woodward). One can see a pattern in the backstories of the war and Katrina. There was a lack of situational awareness that transitioned into disconnected statements of success. The leaders did not foresee arguably obvious potential problems. They flatly refused to admit mistakes while blaming others. There was a strange complacency and inattention. The administration demonstrated an inability to hear, obtain, and believe bad news. Because Bush saw his role as a cheerleader showing confidence and enthusiasm, he did not pursue deep discussions.

be used for law enforcement, while the active military forces under Honoré's command could not. In short, "active-duty military troops" support civil authorities in times of disaster to save lives (Honoré 16) and must be invited in by the governor.

Understandably, there were serious reservations about ordering troops into Louisiana over the objections of local officials.

The Insurrection Act, which can supersede the Posse Comitatus Act, allows the federal government to enter a state to enforce the law with or without the governor's approval (Elsea and Mason). This act puts a city under martial law and federalizes all military and police. Federal troops have been ordered to the South twice since WWII under the Insurrection Act. In 1957 in Little Rock and 1963 in Oxford, Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, respectively, sent troops to the South to enforce civil rights without gubernatorial invitations (Lemann). President George H. W. Bush invoked the Insurrection Act for the 1992 L.A. riots pursuant to the governor's wishes.

From the point of view of the South, federal government activity regarding state and local rights is very suspect. In the past, the federal government was either militaristically intrusive or its passivity led to unbridled violence. There is a history of federal failure to honor promises and to protect innocent citizens.

Governor Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio garnered significant black votes when he ran for president in 1876 on a pro-Republican record, promising to protect the civil rights of blacks (Beatty)(Foner, *America's Reconstruction* 134)(Gillette 311-38). Through a series of backroom deals to secure his election, Hayes agreed to recognize Democratic

control of the southern states, to withdraw the federal troops guarding the Republican governments in Louisiana and South Carolina, and to withdraw all remaining troops from the other nine former Confederate states (Beatty) (Foner, *America's Reconstruction*)(Gillette)(Fireside 13). The last Reconstruction governments in the southern states collapsed (Fireside 14).

Betrayal of the Reconstruction ideals had started in the mid-1860s when federal troops failed to protect the southern Republican governments. Louisiana experienced many brutal massacres. More than 100 black men and some white men tried to maintain the Republican election results when Republicans, some of them black, won power in Colfax, Louisiana.

On Easter Sunday in April of 1873, a stalwart group of these men barricaded the county courthouse. The white Democrats surrounded the courthouse. They set it on fire and killed over 100 men, many of whom were running from the burning building. It is believed to be the bloodiest of the massacres that followed the Civil War, which had promised Reconstruction, free elections, and an end to Confederate rule. The event is remembered in the South as a great betrayal by the federal government as it failed in its promise to protect newly elected governments (Tademy)(Lane)(Foner, *Reconstruction*).

In 1874, powerful and moneyed New Orleanians took up arms and slaughtered a largely black police force to topple the Reconstruction government (Barry 217). Newly elected Republican governments coming under fire were expecting federal troops to

protect them as promised. Violence was not deterred. In the 90 years following Reconstruction, the South has averaged about one lynching a week (Hawken 81).

As John Barry describes in Rising Tide, the U.S. experienced disastrous flooding in 1927. In April, in Mississippi, black plantation workers were forced at gunpoint to assist in the sandbagging of a levee breach. Several hundred died as they continued to work until the levee caved, and they were swept away (Barry 200-02).

On April 29, 1927, business and bank representatives of New Orleans decided, illegally, but with local, state, and federal government approval, to dynamite a levee downriver from New Orleans (Breunlin, Lewis, and Regis 23). Black parts of town were needlessly sacrificed to save the wealthier parts from floodwaters that never reached New Orleans. Ten-thousand residents were displaced (Barry 190-258). Louisiana balladeer Randy Newman bemoans this event in his rendition of the song Louisiana 1927.

Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91Eb3FiebTs> (Newman).

Shortly thereafter, Herbert Hoover, seeking the presidency, made a secret deal with black leadership to create a “Colored Advisory Commission” to investigate and downplay the scandal of severe abuse of blacks in the refugee camps created by the Mississippi Flood. He promised to break large plantations into small farms, giving sharecroppers land ownership. The blacks kept their word and supported his candidacy; Hoover won and broke his promise to empower sharecroppers (Barry, “After the Deluge | History & Archaeology | Smithsonian Magazine”).

The past is the back story of the present. There is evidence that senior White House officials were involved in a smear campaign against Blanco (Alexander 186-99). Blanco's special assistant, Leonard Kleinpeter, would later call the people heaping blame on Louisiana, "Verbal carpetbaggers"<sup>104</sup> (Brinkley 291). This metaphor positioned Blanco's critics as outsiders who would exploit unsettled social and political conditions. This is a metaphor of epic proportion, linking anger, hatred, and unscrupulousness while positioning the Louisiana government as viciously victimized, abused, and betrayed.

Katrina is fraught with themes of great moral freight. Nagin angrily points out the broken promises and the responsibility of the federal government to protect its people, especially the vulnerable (G. Russell, "Nagin: Mistakes Were Made at all Levels--His Biggest Frustration was Slow Pace of Relief"). Katrina became the master narrative where the federal government is perfidiously evil. Nagin and Blanco saw a world of immoral betrayal, so much so, as we will see below, Nagin pronounced God's punishment on the betrayers. Both leaders made meaning of the Katrina event in relation to the discursive formation of Louisiana.

Katrina's federal response unleashed backstories in socio-cultural ways. Bush tried to usurp the governor's power, awakening memories of the Insurrection Act's being invoked over a southern governor's objection. Day after day Brown made empty promises of buses and troops. Hurricane Katrina was reminiscent of broken promises

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<sup>104</sup> General Honoré speculates that there is a friction between state and federal officials dating back to the Civil War (Honoré 32, 89, 125).

from the federal government to protect the innocent and vulnerable. These underlying historical themes reified the position of the federal government as a treacherous and even murderous malfeasant. One cannot fully understand Katrina discourse without an appreciation for the backstories of control and politics, information gaps, and history and context.

## 2. The Power of Words

*God confused the language of all the earth.* Genesis 11.9

### a. “A Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words”<sup>105</sup>

Another disruption was the power of words to cause confusion and deny and exaggerate problems. The disaster unfolded as the Key Parties failed to take stock of the words, “breached” and “overtopped,” as they applied to floodwaters and levies. Brown alternatively described the levies as breached and overtopped during a round of TV interviews on Monday from Baton Rouge (Cooper and Block 147). The Times Picayune used the word “collapsed” Monday evening (150). These words would raise little concern if one were to say his/her swimming pool was being “overtopped” by winds, rather than “breached” or “collapsed” by winds. The words were misused, ignored, and imprecise. This seems odd, given the prior levy-related warnings of Nagin, Blanco, Brown, and Mayfield.

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<sup>105</sup> (Kundera 89).

The most damaging metaphor in the narrative was that New Orleans had “dodged the bullet.” All early headlines started there. “New Orleans dodged the big bullet” (NBC’s “Today” show, August 29). “They dodged the bullet, but they still got a sound bruising” (National Public Radio’s “Talk of the Nation,” August 29). “Superdome Structurally Sound Despite Losing Part of the Roof” (Brian Williams, Today Show, NBC, Aug. 29, 2005, 7 a.m. ET). The worst had passed, and everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

Then, a noun, “sniper,” and an adjective, “contaminated,” started to spook and then paralyze the Key Parties. Honoré stated that these words had a devastating impact on the disaster response (Honoré 169). They had the power to stop rescue efforts. By raising the specter of even more horrible deaths, these two words exponentially multiplied the chaos. They “interrupted virtually every aspect of the response” (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 587).

Rumors of snipers halted rescue efforts to individuals, hospitals, prisons, and nursing homes. (Deichmann)(Brinkley 365)(Inglese). State and local bus drivers refused to drive buses into and out of New Orleans for evacuation (Brinkley 288-90). FEMA withdrew its New Orleans staff on Wednesday and refused Red Cross access to the city (Brinkley 336). The National Guard decided not to bring needed supplies to the Convention Center (Cooper and Block 206). Nagin declared a law enforcement emergency on Wednesday and ordered 1500 New Orleans police officers to abandon search and rescue operations to focus on maintaining law and order (Cooper and Block



168). “Sniper” repositioned rescuers/heroes as victims, and maybe even as cowards. The narrative posed a choice: “Save the victims or save yourself.” The fear-inducing words, “contaminated” and “sniper,” created grotesque images and curtailed opportunities for rescue.

Next, I believe that the federal government confused the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center with the Superdome. Brown told CNN’s Soledad O’Brien that he had learned about the Convention Center only the day before (Thursday) from TV (Lalka 86). Brown told newsmen Wolf Blitzer and Ted Koppel on Thursday, “[W]e just learned today from the state about the Convention Center and the folks there” (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 71). They did not realize until late in the week that there were two different superstructures housing evacuees.

Chertoff on National Public Radio on Thursday, scoffed at the idea of hungry, displaced crowds, gathering at the Convention Center (Chertoff and Siegel). Brown told NPR’s Jim Lehrer that day, “We have had an ongoing supply of food and water to [the Convention Center]. They’ve had meals every day that they have been there” (Lehrer). But that was in fact not true, and Brown was probably confusing the Convention Center with the Superdome.

One researcher repeatedly remarked on the difficulties the federal government had understanding Louisianan geography, language, culture, logistics, the different localities

with similar names,<sup>106</sup> the peculiarities of the Mississippi River in that area,<sup>107</sup> and the different ports with similar names (Brinkley 259, 576). The federal government needed constant translations. Unfortunately, as the saying goes, they did not know what they did not know. Misunderstood, inflammatory, and mischaracterized words had a tremendous debilitating power.

b. Denial

Denial is my term for the repeated speech acts that dismissed problems and painted fanciful pictures of success. Noting the time line outlined above in the section “Hurricane Katrina: What Happened,” almost every leader knew about levee breaches at some point on Monday. Yet at a news conference at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Senator Vitter stated, “[the floodwater] is not rising at all.... I don’t want to alarm anybody that, you know, New Orleans is filling up like a bowl. That’s just not happening” (Brinkley 343).

Blanco likewise brushed off the difficult questions:

Interviewer: Does the water that's downtown -- does this represent what everyone feared before the hurricane would come, that you would have this toxic soup that has overrun the city?

Blanco: It didn't -- I wouldn't think it would be toxic soup right now. I think it's just water from the lake, water from the canals. It's, you know, water.

Interviewer: Well, something could be underneath that water.

Blanco: Pardon? (“FactCheck.org: Katrina: What Happened When”).

She was resisting the interviewer’s attempts to frame reality for the audience.

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<sup>106</sup> The East Bank can be the north bank.

<sup>107</sup> The river does not run north-south in some areas.

The Key Parties tried to recast the narrative as “Your government is doing a great job.” A Chertoff spokesman denied any delay in federal response (Kirkpatrick and Shane). And, on Tuesday Bush stated, “Our teams are in place and we’re beginning to move in the help that people need” (Cooper and Block 172).

At 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Brown stated to newsman Anderson Cooper, “You can tell them, you’ve talked with the FEMA director and [excellent results are] going to happen” (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 50). Later that evening, Brown stated to CNN’s Aaron Brown, “I’ve got the resources that I need now. And we’re moving full steam ahead” (52). In that same interview, Brown stated, “And I’ve now got the teams. I’ve got the equipment. I’ve got the oomph behind me right now to get this done” (53).

Chertoff dismissed the terrible conditions at the Convention Center as “baseless rumors” (McClellan 285). That same day he said, “We are extremely pleased with the response that every element of the federal government, all of our federal partners, have made” (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 46).

Chertoff praised “the genius of the people at FEMA” on Thursday. “I think it is a source of tremendous pride to me to work with people who’ve pulled off this really exceptional response” (Cooper and Block 204). Chertoff also said Thursday that he thought FEMA and other federal agencies had done a “magnificent job” under difficult circumstances, citing their “courage” and “ingenuity” (“CNN.com - New Orleans Mayor Lashes Out at Feds - September 2, 2005”).

Thursday, FEMA Deputy Director Patrick Rhode characterized the debacle with a “little bumps” metaphor. “There is no question that, in any sort of a comprehensive response phase, that there are always some little bumps along the road” (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 68). Denial of the severity of the problems led to wholesale overstatement of federal resources and strength. Federal officials over-praised themselves and overpromised their services in their effort to deny problems.

c. Exaggeration

The counternarrative to denial of problems was exaggerated death, mayhem, and indiscriminate violence. For some Key Parties this was the dominate story line. Nagin predicted the New Orleans death toll would be 10,000 (Joyner)(McClellan 285). “[We] probably have thousands of people that have died and thousands more that are dying every day” (Brinkley 533). On Friday night, Nagin announced that more than 50,000 still remained on rooftops, in shelters, and elsewhere in New Orleans. “The people of our city are holding on by a thread. Time has run out. Can we survive another night, and who can we depend on? God only knows” (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 82).

Eddie Compass, the police superintendent told Brown on Tuesday, “All my men have left town,” and “Rapes are happening in the hospital” (Brinkley 282). He told Oprah Winfrey that inside the Superdome, “We had little babies in there. Some of the little babies getting raped” (Brinkley 573). He stated to the press reporters, “My guys are getting killed out there ... [a] girl, a child died in my arms” (Cooper and Block 193). He

stated that the Convention Center contained vicious, armed gangs who had a weapons armory on the third floor, and they were picking off tourists.

Then, Thursday, Nagin stated on public radio, “[D]rugs flowed in and out of New Orleans and the surrounding metropolitan area so freely it was scary to me. That’s why we were having the escalation in murders.... [T]hey are looking for a fix.... And they have probably found guns. So what you are seeing is drug-starving crazy addicts, that are wrecking havoc”<sup>108</sup> (Brinkley 532-33). The media was quick to jointly produce these story lines.

Nagin told Winfrey that “hundreds of gang members” were raping women and committing murder at the Superdome and that the crowd had fallen into an “almost animalistic state” (Horne 92)(Ouellette 52). He reiterated, “[H]undreds of people have been “in that fricken’ Superdome for five days watching dead bodies, watching hooligans killing people, raping people” (Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell* 236). Nagin is conjuring a story line that takes one’s breath away.

This became a potent narrative that drove policy. As mentioned above, FEMA officials left New Orleans, the Red Cross was prevented from entering the city, hospital evacuations were slowed until armed guards could be arranged, the National Guard took several days before it amassed enough troops to confront the “criminals” in the Convention Center, and truck and bus drivers refused to enter the city (Select Bipartisan

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<sup>108</sup> Inexplicably, Nagin said on TV on Tuesday evening that the city was “relatively safe” and that he had “enough law enforcement” (G. Russell, “Ex-Nagin Aide Pens Tell-all Book”).

Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to Hurricane Katrina 260, 285).

The power of words includes misunderstood words, denial, and exaggeration.<sup>109</sup>

Some Key Parties were inattentive to the meaning of words, while others positioned themselves in willful ignorance and denial by touting the government's exemplary response. Some described an astonishing breakdown of law and order. These became major disruptions in the delivery of emergency assistance.

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<sup>109</sup> Honoré states in his memoirs that over-exaggeration is a part of Louisianan culture (Honoré 120).

### 3. Positioning the Problem Elsewhere

*Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.* John F. Kennedy



Figure 6 Float from 2006 Mardi Gras (“Krewe of Muses”).

#### a. Position Responsibility with the Other

The “blame game” was a large part of the narrative. It was captured by one of the 2006 Mardi Gras Floats. See Figure 6. The object is to squarely position responsibility for the problem with the other “guy.” “They should have done these sandbag operations first thing this morning and it didn’t get done. I’m very upset about it” said Nagin on Wednesday (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 38). Nagin stated to the local radio host, “You know what really upsets me, Garland? We told everybody [the governor, Homeland Security, FEMA] the importance of the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal issue. We

said, ‘Please, please take care of this. We don’t care what you do. Figure it out’” (Brinkley 532).

Nagin stated that his responsibility as mayor was in “getting people to higher ground, getting them to safety.” He expected “our state and federal officials to move them out of harm’s way after [that]” (G. Russell, “Ex-Nagin Aide Pens Tell-all Book”). Nagin stated in his congressional testimony that his big regret was that the National Hurricane Center’s Max Mayfield had not warned him earlier.

Brown stated, “Unfortunately, [the high number of deaths is] going to be attributable a lot to people who did not heed the advance warnings” (“CNN.com - FEMA Chief: Victims Bear Some Responsibility”).

Brown, in a convoluted interview, tried to take the high road and the low road at the same time. He stated on TV, “I’m not going to go on television and publicly say that I think that the mayor and the governor are not doing their job and that they’re not--they don’t have the sense of urgency. I’m not going to say that publically. I don’t think that is the proper thing to do” (“The Storm”).

Brown complained that the White House never followed up when, on Tuesday, he told them, “Guys, this is bigger than what we can handle. This is bigger than what FEMA can do. I am asking for help” (Brinkley 370). But defending the White House, a spokesman replied, “I never got the feeling from Brown that there was any problem that wasn’t surmountable” (Kirkpatrick and Shane). Card provided an email from Brown that indicated a lackadaisical attitude on Monday night, “Housing, transportation and



environment could be long term issues” (Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to Hurricane Katrina, Supp. Rep. p. 7).

“The responsibility and the power ... the authority to order an evacuation rests with state and local officials. The federal government comes in [afterward] and supports those officials,” said Chertoff (Moore 222). Nagin blamed the federal and state officials. Brown blamed the victims and the state and local officials. Brown blamed the White House, and the White House blamed Brown. Chertoff blamed the state and local officials. The Key Parties diligently positioned the failure with “the other.”

#### b. Regrets and Excuses

There is no more artful way to re-position responsibility than with regrets. Brown said, “My biggest regret is not getting the governor and the mayor of New Orleans to sit down and iron out their differences” (Brinkley 267). He stated “My biggest mistake was not recognizing by Saturday that Louisiana was dysfunctional” (Cooper and Block 237). “My mistake was in [not] recognizing that, for whatever reasons.... Mayor Nagin and Governor Blanco were reticent to order a mandatory evacuation” (“CNN.com - Brown Puts Blame on Louisiana Officials”).

Brown also stated, “[T]he most serious mistake that I made was not just saying, ‘Look, we just can't get this done by ourselves, let's get 10,000 troops in here and do something’” (M. Smith). Brown stated that his biggest mistake was in waiting until late Tuesday to ask the White House explicitly to take over the response (Kirkpatrick and

Shane). “Maybe I should have screamed twelve hours earlier,” he said (Kirkpatrick and Shane).

Nagin: “Scream louder ... I should have screamed louder” (Leavey).

Blanco admitted that she should have “screamed louder” (Brinkley 266). “I believe my biggest mistake was believing FEMA officials who told me that the necessary federal resources would be available in a timely fashion,” Blanco wrote in one memo (“Blanco releases 100,000 pages of documents related to Hurricane Katrina response [Archive] - SpeedGuide.net Broadband Community”).

Each positioned him/herself to be at fault only for failing to recognize fully that the problem was originating from “the other.” They were negating their responsibility through regrets and excuses.

#### c. Externalize the Problem

Responsibility for the problem can be diluted if the problem can be objectified. “The failure to evacuate was the tipping point for all the other things that ... went wrong,” said Mike Brown (Editors of Popular Mechanics).

Responsibility can be minimized if the Key Parties never conceived of the problem. Bush stated, “I don’t think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees” (Brinkley 452). The levy breaches were “a second catastrophe” that “really caught everyone by surprise,” said Chertoff (Cooper and Block 133). Brown stated on Wednesday, “I must say, this storm is much bigger than anyone expected” (“Think Progress » Katrina Timeline” 6).

The storm usurped personal agency, positioning Brown and Nagin as the victims. Nagin would later say publicly, “I never signed up for this” (Spielman 54). Brown emailed privately on August 29, “Can I quit now? Can I go home?” (Brinkley 267) and on September 2, “I’m trapped now, please rescue me” (Brinkley 272).

Finally, Brown positioned an interviewer to create self-exoneration. Martin Smith: “I just don't understand how you would misspeak three times about [the Convention Center].” Brown: “Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. Next time there's a really big disaster, we'll put you in charge of it, we'll not give you any sleep, and we'll put you on this side of the chair, this side of the camera, and we'll pepper you with questions for a couple hours at a time and then see how tired you are” (M. Smith).

Blame takes many variations. The Key Parties placed the Katrina failures on the shoulders of each other, and, in one case, even on the victims. They used regrets and excuses to heap blame on each other, holding themselves responsible only to the extent that they failed to recognize how fully the other party was at fault. They repositioned the problem as abstract and unimaginable. Next I examine Brown and Nagin’s use of malignant positioning as they raise the bar on discrediting others.

#### 4. Malignant Positioning

##### a. Brown Positioned Blanco As Old

“Malignant positioning” means “a person’s behavior is prematurely explained as being dysfunctional.” The person is being positioned in a negative way. “If the negative positioning leads to treatment that is depersonalizing, then we can say that the

positioning is ‘malignant’” (Sabat, “Positioning and Conflict Involving a Person with Dementia: A Case Study” 81). Malignant positioning is a gratuitous, *ad hominine* attack.

Brown lovingly pillories Blanco; he starts with a compliment and quickly moves to disdain and condescension. “Blanco reminded me of an aunt I have whom I love to pieces. But I would never trust this aunt to run a state or be a mayor. She was just a wonderful human being. I just see Blanco as this really nice woman who is just way beyond her level of ability” (Brinkley 411).

Blanco was a veteran of state politics; it is likely that her knowledge base and experience in government far exceeded Brown’s. She worked her way up the state’s political ladder, serving as a legislator, public service commissioner, and lieutenant governor before seeking Louisiana’s top job in 2003. Yet Brown positioned her as doddering and feeble and by implication positioned himself as the more knowledgeable person who could adroitly take her measure.

Brown positioned Blanco as an ineffectual, marginalized elderly woman. Brown conjured an image of a helpless, decrepit old-lady. Three ubiquitous pictures from Katrina created confluence with his story line. First, the older black woman who wrapped herself in the American Flag for protective covering outside of the Superdome.



**Figure 7 Pictures of Katrina Coverage (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 67)(Times-Picayune 55)(J. R. Lee).**

Second, the deceased woman in the wheelchair, Ethel Freeman, covered in a blanket outside of the Morial Convention Center. And third, the story of the five-day failure to tend to the body of Vera Smith. Her body had been left out on the pavement of Jackson Avenue, and her burial became a major standoff with the police (J. R. Lee). See Figure 7.

Blanco might be a “really nice woman” but she could not be trusted to be a leader of any substance (Brinkley 411). It was a humiliating and patronizing position.<sup>110</sup> True to this positioning, in a New York Times interview Brown emphasized Blanco’s “confused” response to Katrina, suggesting the image of dementia (Kirkpatrick and Shane). Brown’s malignant positioning depersonalized Blanco.

It is interesting that Brown used the word “trust,” positioning Blanco as one who was not reliable or dependable. The word “trust” has moral connotations. Someone who cannot be trusted lacks integrity and honesty. Brown positioned Blanco as someone of

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<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Brown went so far as to state that the only person Brown found to be responsive was Blanco’s husband (Kirkpatrick and Shane).

low moral character. He used this malignant positioning to reinforce her image as inept and incompetent.

b. Nagin Positioned his State and Federal Counterparts as Slackers and Press Hounds

Nagin demonized both the state and federal officials, turning his malignant positioning into a dramaturgical event. On Thursday, using hyperbolic and overblown images, he cursed, yelled, condemned, and cried in a live radio interview (by phone) with the well-liked, local radio-personality, Garland Robinette. Radio Station WWL had managed to stay on the air through the storm and afterward. Nagin's declamations and tendentious positioning publicized, enflamed, and escalated the interpersonal conflict.

He suggested that God would punish Brown, Bush, and Blanco for their sins. "God is looking down on all of this ... and if they are not doing everything in their power to save people, they are going to pay the price"<sup>111</sup> ("The Situation Room: Troops Arrive in New Orleans; President Bush Tours Devastation"). His words were contemptuous, vitriolic, and crude. "[T]hey were talking about getting public school bus drivers to come down here and bus people out of here. I'm like 'You've got to be kidding me. This is a national disaster. Get every doggone Greyhound bus line in the country and get their asses moving to New Orleans'" (Brinkley 531). He keeps exhorting them to think big.

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<sup>111</sup> This is not the only time Nagin knew God's mind. Katrina, Nagin stated was evidence that "God is mad at America" (Brinkley 653). "[Katrina] was God's plan for me.... To rebuild New Orleans" (Forman 162).

“Excuse my French, everybody in America, but I am pissed.” “I don’t want to see anybody do anymore goddamn press conferences. Don’t do another press conference until the resources are in the city. And then come down to this city and stand with us<sup>112</sup> when there are military trucks and troops that we can’t even count. Don’t tell me 40,000 people are coming here. They’re not here. It’s too doggone late. Now get off your asses and do something and let’s fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country” (Horne 92). Nagin then broke into tears (G. W. Bush, *Decision Points* 309).

Some people were shocked by Nagin’s outburst, some credited it with quickening the federal response, and others were simply highly entertained (Forman 133-35) (Brinkley 535)(Clark 77). Nagin positioned himself as a man, overcome by emotion, who was unafraid to criticize the highest levels of government. His wild and colorful discourse, however, caused consternation and supported a second story line that he was “unhinged.” Brown and Nagin attempted to use malignant positioning to deflect blame from themselves. Below I discuss how Bush and Brown lost face through inartful self-positioning.

## 5. Inartful Reflexive Positioning

### a. G. W. Bush

Some of President Bush’s speech acts were out of sync with the story line. He tried to reflexively position himself (Sabat, “Malignant Positioning and the Predicament

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<sup>112</sup> Nagin seemed to be referring to Bush’s flyover photo from the day before. The photo gave the impression that Bush was distant, removed from, and emotionally untouched by the catastrophe. See Figure 4.

of People with Alzheimer's Disease" 85) as the man with the ability to look past great calamity and see a time, a new day, of peace and harmony. "Out of the rubbles of Trent Lott's house—he's lost his entire [second home]—there's going to be a fantastic house. And I'm looking forward to sitting on the porch" (Cooper and Block 211)(Brinkley 548).

He laid claim to the position of buddy, a "good ole boy." This was his consistent theme as he positioned himself throughout his speech acts. He crafted a story line of sitting on the new porch of his friend, evoking an iconic American image that incorporates relaxation, ownership, calm, pleasure, good weather, and satiation.

The phrase "out of the rubbles" created images of rebirth and power. But Bush's reflexive positioning was out of sync. He sounded oddly self-absorbed and unaware of the tragic suffering that had just unfolded. He was out of sync with the poor and the people who lost everything, and maybe would never be able to return or to rebuild.

"I believe the town where I used to come ... to enjoy myself—occasionally too much—will be that very same town, that it will be a better place" (Brinkley 636). Bush evoked a story line of a person with youthful indiscretions, laughing to himself about his good times in New Orleans when he was young and foolish.

He had come to New Orleans to position himself as commander in chief, witnessing, empathizing with, and resolving human suffering on a massive scale. Instead, he joked about debauched vacations from his youth. He was out of sync with the indigenous people who struggled to get an education, make a living, and raise their children in New Orleans. They wouldn't identify with the typical college tourist.



Bush used pet names and folksy slang. He was ever the affable leader, grandstanding to compliment his employee in front of the cameras. “Brownie, you’re doing a heckava job” (Vollen and Ying 145). Bush explained that he wanted “to pump up everybody’s morale” with this statement (McClellan 289). In this indelible moment we see how he positioned himself as the one who lifted spirits, gave praise, and bolstered morale. He meant to position Brown as a hero and close buddy. But Bush was out of sync with the facts. Even Brown said he cringed at this remark (Diemer). In the presence of the President, Brown could neither resist nor redefine his position.

Bush wanted to bolster other emergency management workers as well. Again, we see this poorly executed. On Friday September 2, he stated, “I’m down here to thank people. I’m down here to comfort people ... I’ve come down to assure people.... And now we’re going to try to comfort people” (Brinkley 548). This was a misexecution of his goal. Instead of using the speech act to obtain his results, Bush merely stated his intent. Bush fell short of attaining for himself the position of thanker, comforter, and assurer. His reflexive positioning was woefully inartful and inadequate.

#### b. Brown

On the day Katrina hit, Brown emailed a female, FEMA colleague, “If you’ll look at my lovely FEMA attire you’ll really vomit. I am a fashion god” (Brinkley 272). He also wrote: “I got [my shirt] at Nordstrom’s. E-mail xxxx and make sure she knows! Are you proud of me?” (Brinkley 267). These remarks were captured by a Mardis Gras float in February 2006. See Figure 8.



**Figure 8** Float from 2006 Mardi Gras (“Krewe of Muses”).

On Wednesday Marty Bahamonde, FEMA’s only staff person in New Orleans, sent Brown a frantic update on the deteriorating Superdome conditions. “Sir, I know that you know the situation is past critical (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 165) ... thousands [without] food or water ... many will die within hours” (Brinkley 395). Brown replied, “Thanks for the update. Anything specific I need to do or tweak?” (Brinkley 272).

Shortly thereafter, Brown’s press secretary sent an email, chiding staff for bothering Brown, who needed more time to eat his dinner at Ruth’s Chris. Restaurant

lines and congested traffic in Baton Rouge were a big concern (Brinkley 395). This was memorialized by a 2006 Mardis Gras float. See Figure 9.



**Figure 9 Float from 2006 Mardis Gras--Brown's Out to Dinner ("Carnival Courier").**

On the second Tuesday after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, when the full weight of the tragedy was well known, Brown emailed a FEMA employee about how to order dinner, "Order a #2, tater tots, large diet cherry limeade" (Brinkley 272). Brown was surrounded by staff who positioned him as an object that needed to be dressed and fed. He seemed to relish that position.

In private emails that became public through the Freedom of Information Act, Brown positioned himself in sharp contrast to a compassionate professional. His backstory exposed the banality of bureaucracy.<sup>113</sup> The piffle and blather behind the scenes was out of sync. On Thursday, FEMA's press secretary advised Brown: "Please roll up your [sic] sleeves of your shirt ... all shirts. Even the President rolled his sleeves to just below the elbow. In this crisis and on TV you need to look more hard-working. ROLL UP THE SLEEVES" (Brinkley 537). These incongruous emails revealed backstories that seemed mindlessly disconnected to the mortal events still unfolding.

Brown was no longer positioned as an honest broker. When these emails became public, he was reflexively positioned as shallow, vain, soulless, and self-absorbed. He was delegitimized as vacuous (Slocum-Bradley 210).

The speech acts of Blanco, Nagin, and the federal government evinced a positioning system that undercut the initial Hurricane Katrina response. The story line started with warnings, assurances, and affirmative positioning. As the disaster descended into chaos, so too did their positioning systems.

Their discourse revealed five areas of disruption: 1) backstories; 2) the power of words; 3) positioning the problem elsewhere; 4) malignant positioning; and 5) inartful reflexive positioning. Backstories of stratagems for control, decisions driven by politics, withheld information, and history and context became impediments to response. Words

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<sup>113</sup> Brown was accused of ordering FEMA officials later in the week to withhold food from stranded people because food would only encourage them to stay in the city when full evacuation was needed.

were misused and misunderstood. People positioned themselves in story lines of denial and exaggeration. Their discourse became a frantic race to unburden themselves of blame and reposition others as the true culprits. They malignantly positioned each other, and sometimes mis-positioned themselves. Blanco, Nagin, and the federal government's discourse was fraught with disruptions. My research revealed two categories: 1) disruptions, and 2) the fog of conversation. We turn now to the second category, which subdivides into: 1) the failure to ask, and 2) the failure to answer.

#### D. The Fog of Conversation

##### 1. The Failure to Ask

For effective emergency response, people must ask the right questions and listen to the responses. Brown, Chertoff, and Bush evinced lack of engagement. We see a failure of interest and, therefore, a failure to ascertain the truth. Many of Brown's emails indicated that he did not want to be at the disaster. The Key Parties paid little attention to the discourse, as if they would prefer to have no position whatsoever. They chose positions of silence, insouciance, and enervation.

Chertoff was "unengaged" (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 6). Indeed, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs chastised him for accepting uncritically all the assurances he heard from his staff (6). He had asked no questions in the Monday noon conference call (Cooper and Block 137).

Bush was widely criticized for failing to ask questions during the teleconferences (Brinkley 98)(Cooper and Block 114). His conversational involvement was nil. He made no attempt to gather information or actively engage in understanding the situation.

## 2. The Failure to Answer

When asked a question, many people will give the answer they think is expected. The Hawthorne effect results when the person being questioned gives the answer he/she thinks the questioner wants to hear in an attempt to please the questioner. People position themselves as cooperative. For example, the following answers were captured during the Sunday videoconference call.

Brown asked a Louisiana state official: "Any questions? Colonel, do you have any unmet needs, anything that we're not getting to you that you need or...."

Colonel Smith: "Mike, No. (Inaudible) resources that are en route, and it looks like those resources that are en route are going to — to be a good first shot" (Gaynor).

"Hi. This is Secretary Chertoff. And, again, as it relates to the entire department, if there's anything that you need from Coast Guard or any other components that you're not getting, please let us know. We'll do that for you. OK."

Chertoff asked Brown: "Secondly, are there any DOD [Department of Defense] assets that might be available? Have we reached out to them, and have we I guess made any kind of arrangement in case we need some additional help from them?"

Brown replied, "We have DOD assets over here at the EOC [Emergency Operations Center]. They are fully engaged, and we are having those discussions with them now."

Secretary Chertoff added two words: "Good job" (Gaynor).

The questions and answers were rote. We know now that DOD was not engaged. Some would later state that DOD deliberately delayed Katrina assistance. It is not clear why, but Rumsfeld was resistant to authorizing any DOD support in the first three to four days after landfall (Graham 549-53)(Draper)(Dyson 60)(Cooper and Block 155)(Woodward 427-28).

In answer to Blanco's repeated requests, Brown assured her that hundreds of buses were on the way (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 69). This is bewildering. One is led to conclude that Brown was dissembling, his staff was intentionally or negligently giving him false information, or he was making wildly unconfirmed assumptions. No one appeared to be following up.

"If there's one thing FEMA's got it's buses," Brown smiled broadly, "Catch up with the paperwork later" (Cooper and Block 162). On Monday he told Blanco that "he had 500 buses. They were ready to roll" (Alexander 184). Honoré described Brown as a man "whose confidence far exceeded the capabilities of FEMA" (Honoré 158). The answers seemed designed to please the questioner rather than to respond authentically.

Some of the speech acts of Bush, Chertoff, and Brown showed a serious lapse in participation and involvement. Questions were not asked or sufficiently answered. Some questions were rhetorical, and some answers were perfunctory. The Key Parties did not demand detailed, veracious, and comprehensive responses. The fog of conversation was a severe source of confusion and misapprehension. Disruptions and the fog of

conversation clouded the emergency management response. I turn now to the conflict management literature for greater perspective.



#### IV. RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: DOES THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT LITERATURE OFFER RELEVANT MODELS FOR DECREASING CONFLICT AND INCREASING UNDERSTANDING?

*The issues raised by the response to Hurricane Katrina could not be more critical to America's sense of itself in this moment in history, its security, prosperity, and honor (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 35).*

The conflict management literature offers relevant models for decreasing conflict and increasing understanding. In this section I will discuss the scholarship of Marc Gopin, John Paul Lederach, Michelle LeBaron, and Donna Hicks.

##### A. Gopin

In 2004, Gopin wrote Healing the Heart of Conflict: 8 Crucial Steps to Making Peace with Yourself and Others. He discusses in depth eight pathways to conflict resolution that involve greater understanding and acceptance of the other. He details methods of 1) being, 2) feeling, 3) understanding, 4) hearing, 5) seeing, 6) imagining, 7) doing, and 8) communicating. These methods can deepen one's ability to live and work with one who is perhaps viewed as an enemy (Gopin, *Healing the Heart of Conflict*).

He emphasizes that we need to examine our own conflict, define ourselves in new ways, and find meaning in conflict. Then, we must confront our emotions at the heart of our conflicts and use them for growth and healing. From conflict, we can learn the universal lessons of what wounds and what heals. If we listen to those with whom we are

in conflict and skillfully observe cues that might help us enter their world, we may be able to imagine ways to utterly transform our lives and our relationships.

Gopin urges us to act in accordance with our deepest wisdom. He describes ideas such as competition in goodness and gestures of healing. Finally, it would behoove us to have always before us a strong goal to communicate, reconcile, and heal conflicts.

Gopin's steps involve the ability to live with contradictions, the need for imagination, and the talent to free ourselves of preconceived ideas (132).

These precepts are foundational for working through the problems I have discussed in this dissertation. Also, Gopin's precepts can infuse positions, social force, and story lines to bring about greater respect and understanding. He explicates this further in his most recent book, To Make the Earth Whole (Gopin, *To Make the Earth Whole*). He recommends investment in networks of deep relationships and commitment to the social contract in all our work. The social contract demands the "necessary conditions of coexistence that include sharing, respect, honor, and compassion" (Gopin, *To Make the Earth Whole* 11). The Conflict Management Professional is called to make the earth whole through every interaction as he/she facilitates this emergency management work.

#### B. Lederach

Lederach, another prominent conflict resolution scholar, discusses how to move successfully through conflict and crisis in his book The Moral Imagination. He describes the four qualities of moral imagination: 1) relationship, 2) paradoxical curiosity,

3) creativity, and 4) risk (34). These categories can be stated as imperatives. First, reach out to those you fear. This denotes acknowledging interdependency and relational mutuality, which demands humility and self-recognition.

The second imperative is to embrace complexity, avoid categories of dualism, and develop a capacity to live with a high degree of ambiguity. Lederach would ask that the Conflict Management Professional approach polarity with curiosity, wondering what holds all these opposites together. The third imperative is to believe that the creative act and response are permanently within reach and always accessible. This is a wellspring that feeds conflict resolution and allows for the unexpected (38-39).

The final discipline is the willingness to risk. This is the courage to step into the unknown without any guarantee of success or safety. The person would be able to move into unfamiliar ground with acceptance and grace. Lederach's model encourages high quality communication and interaction. Like Gopin's model, it is an orientation that permeates ones' work, attitude, and ways of being in the world.

#### C. LeBaron

LeBaron's book Bridging Cultural Conflicts makes it clear that Conflict Management Professionals will only be "as effective as the relationships that link them to people in the conflict" (272). She wants the Conflict Management Professional to create fluency. She advises him/her to be mindful that "[c]ultural influences and personal habits of attention interact within worldviews, shaping what is seen and not seen, what is valued and disregarded, what is expected and out of bounds, and influencing the whole realm of

conflict behaviors and attitudes” (273). Indeed, one disaster scholar references “chaos theory” for the proposition that “just a small change in the initial conditions may have significant change in the long-term behavior of the system” (Pine 200).

Conflicts will arise that will test our resolve to be open and curious, LeBaron advises. Nevertheless, she proposes a very positive view of the potential influence of the Conflict Management Professional. “We contribute more than we know to the climate of the relational worlds we inhabit” (300). Cultures change and identities are constantly becoming (301). I will use more of her work in the practical model, “ALLURE,” that I outline in the next chapter.

#### D. Hicks

Hicks has developed a “Dignity Model” (“Summary\_of\_Dignity\_Model.pdf”), which has ten elements. The parties to any dispute or conflict want:

1. Their identity to be respected,
2. Recognition for who they are and what they’ve experienced,
3. To be included and have a sense of belonging in the process,
4. To feel secure physically and psychologically,
5. To be treated fairly,
6. To be free from domination,
7. To be understood and to have an opportunity to explain themselves,
8. To be given the benefit of the doubt because they often feel unjustly accused, and distrusted by the other party,
9. To feel responded to, and
10. To have a sense of accountability and integrity.

The Conflict Management Professional will have many opportunities to put all ten of these elements into practice. He/she can ensure that these are woven into all of the interactions and are conscientiously reinforced. The ten elements of preserving dignity

are integral and basic to every communication. Respect is currency. The story line must defend the honor and protect the dignity of the parties. They need opportunities to prove or redeem themselves.

Conflict management literature offers relevant models for decreasing conflict and increasing understanding. Gopin, Lederach, LeBaron, and Hicks offer the Conflict Management Professional valuable theory and models that can assist him/her in reflexive positioning such that all of his/her speech acts, positioning, and story lines are based on these precepts.

V. RESEARCH QUESTION THREE: HOW COULD A CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL INTERVENE TO SHIFT POSITIONING SYSTEMS AND PROMOTE A MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT RESPONSE?



**Figure 10 New Orleans' Flooded Buses (Kevin).**

*Disaster is a stage for heroism (de Waal).*

*What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? Henry James*

I propose that a Conflict Management Professional be appointed and included as one of the Key Parties in the crisis period. So far, I have used the generic term, “Conflict Management Professional.” At this juncture, it is important to craft a more specific label.

I will use the term “Ombuds” for the role I envision.<sup>114</sup> An “ombudsman” is an indigenous Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish term, meaning an official charged with representing the public interest by investigating and addressing complaints (“Ombudsman - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”). She/he mediates fair resolutions and acts as a trusted advisor. The ombudsman role connotes an ability to make decisions with authority and independence. I prefer “Ombuds” to “Ombudsman” although many professionals assert that the original word should not be abbreviated. I prefer the abbreviation because it dispenses with any gender associations, right or wrong.

An Ombuds has numerous opportunities to intervene and shift the positioning systems of the Key Parties. This intervention has the potential to promote a more efficient and effective emergency management response. Requiring an Ombuds on site, thereby changing the organizational structure, could limit conflict because it has the ability to change the power and communication patterns.

The public needs and deserves to have assurance that someone is responsible for watching over the integrity of the whole process. In this section I will propose points and methods of intervention that the Ombuds could use regarding discourse, narratives, and social positioning systems to serve the Key Parties in handling the disaster response.

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<sup>114</sup> I chose not to use the term “Ombuds” until now because it has many different meanings in our culture and its role and scope of authority are usually defined by an idiosyncratic statute or policy, and, therefore, as an abstract term, it is not helpful. At this point in my dissertation, the context is much clearer so the concept will be more easily understood.

Through this discussion, the meaning, role, and responsibilities of the Ombuds are developed. And I will discuss why this idea could have traction.

#### A. How Should the Ombuds Position Her/Himself?

##### 1. Facilitating Communication and Process

One important recommendation from disaster scholars is: “Under conditions of organizational stress, the communication capacity may [need to] be increased by assigning extra manpower to act in auxiliary and supportive roles” (Dynes and Quarantelli 45). “[P]reventing, preparing for, and responding to crises requires process management. This includes a constant surveillance of the quality of the decision-making process, the acknowledgement of trade-offs, the management of information and communication streams, the asking of unpopular questions, and the realization that conflict is a reality of crisis situations” (Rosenthal, Charles, and Hart 471). These two statements create the perfect job description for the Ombuds. Hiring an Ombuds may call for organizational redundancy, but redundancy is one of the factors in preventing cascading accidents. And this would be consistent with thinking “Big.”

First, I propose that the Ombuds facilitate each briefing that takes place with the Key Parties. In Katrina these began on the Saturday before the Monday landfall. The Key Parties had meetings (video conference calls) up to four times daily that were videotaped and transcribed. The Ombuds would have responsibility for conducting the meetings and would have the requisite meeting and facilitation expertise.



Meetings would begin by establishing the goals and end with clear points of follow-up. The Ombuds would have a private checklist and a public written agenda. Items of responsibility would be attached to specific people to be completed within certain operational periods. Report-backs would be calendared. Meetings would be focused and stay on track.

A crisis has political and psychological dynamics that are not addressed by good contingency planning or adequate information-processing systems (Rosenthal, Charles, and Hart 462). The Ombuds can take up the role of managing political and psychological dynamics in addition to managing a professional process for information exchange. He/she could be the needed addition to the “good contingency planning” recommended above.

The National Emergency Management Association set forth recommendations concerning rebuilding the emergency management system after Katrina. Its fourth priority recommendation stated “All levels of government must focus on enhanced [communication]” (G. D. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola 441). The Ombuds can play a vital role in improving communication and coordinating information.

Preliminary disaster assessments are often limited to particular organizations, and information is not pooled or shared. Therefore, the overall understanding of the scope and severity and the types of problems and needs does not materialize early enough (Auf der Heide 63, 79-81). Secondary threats are not immediately apparent and the necessary prophylactic measures are not taken. The Ombuds would take responsibility to check and

double check that the necessary information is obtained and shared and that nothing is overlooked.

The Ombuds needs to understand the common communication failures that are identified in disaster research:

1. Problems can be overblown and underestimated;
2. Requests for resources can be ambiguous;
3. High-level officials may not get important information;
4. Lack of a pre-established social relationship can have a negative effect;
5. Thoroughness of decision-making is decreased; understanding consequences of decisions is decreased; and decision errors are increased;
6. Problem-solving becomes rigid, the ability to improvise declines, and pressure increases to make decisions quickly;
7. As the volume of information rises, selectivity of information rises;
8. Increase in stress reduces the number of information channels;
9. Messages are uncoordinated and contradictory; and
10. Under stress the on-site personnel seldom provide needed information about what is transpiring (Dynes and Quarantelli 11-12, 29-31, 39, 41, 44).

The Ombuds must create a culture where information-sharing is highly valued (G. D. Haddow and K. Haddow 10). The Ombuds would be the go-between when, as in this case, there was a profound dysfunction between the Parties in that they utterly failed to share basic information (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 166). An Ombuds could trump expensive, state-of-the-art communications systems by facilitating vital information transfer and making sure information is received and understood. Information can be protected from being drowned out, hoarded, or stovepiped. It could be the Ombuds' job to ensure that all phone calls at a certain level get answered and the potential for information gaps are minimized.

One Mississippi FEMA official complained that the numerous video conferences and phone calls were inordinately time-consuming (Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to Hurricane Katrina 326). The Ombuds can bring focus, goals, and discipline to these activities. Moreover, the Select Bipartisan Committee found that some conference calls actually added to the confusion because FEMA expected verbal requests for buses, services, and supplies to be put in play by the state's follow-on written requests. The state thought its verbal requests in these calls were sufficient to set things in motion (139). An Ombuds can promptly sort out this type of misunderstanding by clarifying the communications and strengthening the process for interaction.

## 2. Building a Culture of Respect

The Ombuds will establish basic ground rules and values. Key parties need to recognize that they are yoked and that a positive organizational climate is necessary for effective operations and problem-solving (Pine 203). Each party needs to work with the precepts of Hick's dignity model. Chris Mitchell emphasizes the necessity for "the parties in the relationship [to] understand the importance of maintaining one another's self esteem, dignity, and reputation" (Mitchell, *Gestures of Conciliation* 182).

The first Katrina narratives to emerge were warnings, assurances, and affirmative positioning. The Ombuds should carefully reiterate the affirmative positioning. He/she would keep reminding the Key Parties of their exact words. These statements can be gently woven into meetings and conversations.

Using the transformative model, the Ombuds can move people from defensive, fearful, and self-absorbed positions. People who are blinded by conflict and unable to recognize the full dimensions of the situation can be moved to positions of empowerment and recognition of interdependence (R. A. B. Bush and Folger 20-21).

“[T]here is no occasion of talk so trivial as not to require each participant to show serious concern with the way in which he handles himself and the others present” (Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* 33). Erving Goffman states that elements of universal human nature include pride, honor, and dignity (Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* 44-45). People want to claim good character and social worth, which he calls “face.”

The Ombuds can reframe social and professional positions to ensure that the parties save face and have dignity. A story line can be articulated such that all parties want a quick and successful outcome where they are perceived as heroic rescuers with sharp, expedient, problem-solving abilities. The success of the operation inures to the benefit of all.<sup>115</sup> With Katrina, not one of the Key Parties saved face or walked away untainted. Brown was fired. Blanco withdrew from politics at the end of her term. Nagin won a second term but the international attention that he drew to himself left many thinking he had never been mayoral material. They all suffered a crisis of legitimacy, and not one was satisfied with the emergency response.

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<sup>115</sup> “We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately.” Benjamin Franklin.

Blanco came the closest to embodying Hick's ten precepts. Publically, she articulated faith and trust in her political partners. She began the week by thanking Brown and asking Brown to thank the President for what she believed would be a successful federal response. Even after the week of political undermining, i.e., one week after Katrina struck, Blanco stated, "We are partners in this effort. We are a team. I want to say it again we are a team" (Millhollon and Ballard).

In an interview with author Douglas Brinkley in December of 2005, when asked about her estimation of and relationship with Nagin, she stated, "I don't want to talk about him. It doesn't serve me well to talk about him" (Brinkley 571). Some believe Blanco was the only one who wanted and worked for a bi-partisan effort (Horne 343). She deliberately refrained from casting aspersions on the President (Horne 348). I would never "criticize my president in the middle of a crisis" (Brinkley 289). She positioned the answer to reflect positively on her character and limit attention to the President. Even though the White House was turning the hurricane into a political event, she privileged cordiality and civility.

Nagin's worldview did not prize respect and dignity for others. He was more likely to be suspicious, judgmental, critical, and paranoid (Brinkley 527). He was prone to believe the worst in people (G. Russell, "Ex-Nagin Aide Pens Tell-all Book"). Nagin's demoniacal tirade required him to apologize to the American public, "Pardon my French." He took no moment to pause, however, for he began to swear in his very next

breath. He was neither circumspect about the people he castigated, nor about the words he chose. The rules of cordiality and civility held no sway with him.

An Ombuds would have several tools for dealing with this mind frame. He/she could be very transparent, admit the difficulties and problems, and address them head on; or be an insider who has social capital with the parties. The Ombuds could change the power structure by: 1) changing the discourse and narratives; 2) helping people build coalitions; 3) creating opportunities for mutual aid; 4) objectifying the problems; and 5) as much as possible, positioning a party on the same side as the others. Working with the precepts detailed in the prior chapter, he/she would push the parties to cooperate at their highest level.

Nagin was infuriated, I would assert, because he believed Blanco disrespected him when she reached out to a debris removal contractor without coordinating with him and when she allegedly redirected his levy-repair helicopters. He refused Blanco's calls, viciously criticized Bush and Blanco on the radio, and repeatedly remarked publically that Blanco's failure to act decisively directly resulted in greater loss of life. The fact that he felt disrespected played a large part in Nagin's positioning of himself and others.

The Ombuds can help when disrespectful discourse gets tangled up with "truth." When Nagin was asked by his aide to stop publically denigrating Blanco, Nagin stated that he was going to tell the truth as he saw it (G. Russell, "Ex-Nagin Aide Pens Tell-all Book"). Nagin's worldview required him to gratuitously report that Blanco was responsible for increasing the death toll. He was driven by a sense of self-righteousness.

He tried to position himself as the heroic whistle blower. He assumed he knew the truth, there was only one truth, and he had a duty to reveal it writ large. No doubt or further investigation was warranted.

Blanco had a more nuanced view of the truth. She did not go out of her way to speak negatively about anyone, especially Nagin. She tried at all times to keep her public statements about the other parties positive. If she thought she had the only truth, she did not feel obliged to disseminate it pell-mell. Truth was not her obligation, civility was. Her worldview required her to take the high road. We find one worldview that eschewed criticism and another that required it.

Nagin's top aide admitted that no one from Nagin's staff reached out to Blanco to find out if she had in fact undermined his control of the helicopters and re-routed them (Forman 90). Obtaining the facts and listening to Blanco's explanation would likely have solved many of the ensuing problems between them. There needs to be someone who is responsible for conflict management and is working toward resolution and good will.

Nagin was not the only person who felt disrespected. Brown also believed he had been dealt an ignominious blow. Chertoff became angry when he could not reach Brown despite numerous attempts. On Tuesday Chertoff told Brown to stop "running around, flying all over the place, I want you to go to Baton Rouge and not leave Baton Rouge" (Cooper and Block 170). When Brown protested that he would be meeting with the Mississippi Governor, Chertoff cut him off.

Brown was appointed as the Principal Federal Official by Chertoff that same day. This designation was little understood and was taken by Brown and his staff as an affront. FEMA's press secretary wrote Brown, "Demote the Under Sec to PFO?... What about the precedent being set?" (Cooper and Block 174). Chertoff later testified that this designation was not meant to be a demotion of any kind and in fact conferred on Brown all of Chertoff's authority. The appointment, he said, made Brown Chertoff's personal operative (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 169-70).

Brown believed Chertoff had disrespected him by ordering him back to Baton Rouge, forbidding him from further travel, and naming him Principal Federal Official. In Senate testimony Brown admitted he ignored Chertoff's calls and failed to keep him properly informed as his (Brown's) job demanded. He called Chertoff "clueless" and Brown stated he "couldn't be bothered to brief him" (Horne 93).

By cutting off communication with Chertoff, Brown positioned himself as the more knowledgeable and his boss as outside the story line. Chertoff was positioned at the margins with limited power and agency. The result was that many of Chertoff's statements seemed oddly sanguine. Brown positioned Chertoff to be flat-footed.

Brown refused to follow the chain of command and by-passed Chertoff to call the White House directly. This clashed with Chertoff's expectations of how such things would be handled. Perplexed and abashed, he stated, "It never occurred to [me] that Brown would deliberately ignore [me] and established procedures for coordinating the response" (Neuman and Timiraos).



The need for respect is paramount, and it is the Ombuds' role to unsettle story lines that create negative attribution. It is possible that Nagin and Brown were both wrong in their belief that they were being disrespected. Blanco may not have re-routed helicopters. Chertoff may have been urged by his staff to appoint a Principal Federal Official. Brown was there and the most likely to understand and be effective in that role. The Ombuds would work to free people from their preconceived ideas.

The narrative could be changed by the Ombuds if he/she unraveled the stories of disrespect and malignant positioning and amplified superordinate goals of high appeal and value for all. The Ombuds' job is to create understanding, shared story lines, and positions of respect. The Ombuds would enhance individual and structural-level interaction and foster high regard and esteem.

### 3. Identifying Problems and Resolutions

Part of disaster mitigation is to design a system to limit problems from occurring and, if they do, to reduce the probability of cascading accidents (Perrow 180). The Ombuds is an important part of that design system. He/she would assist the "process for finding, evaluating, and correcting problems" (Perin 197). Requiring an Ombuds on site would be one way to reduce error inducing contexts.

The Ombuds must be skilled at laying out and considering the problems, barriers, and options. This job description requires the Ombuds to look at the overall picture, monitoring and collecting information, and helping to "connect the dots." The Ombuds'

training would require diagnostic capabilities to discern the lines and issues of conflict that are likely to emerge (Rosenthal, Charles, and Hart 462).

#### 4. Identifying Conflicting Narratives

An Ombuds is alert to conflicting narratives. Two Katrina philosophies were in opposition. One was to advance the goal of saving lives, however daunting. The other was to advance the goal of fighting crime and terrorism. Rumors of snipers and looters led to a significant reduction in search, rescue, and evacuation efforts, giving primacy to deterring crime. The latter philosophical goal became the dominant narrative that cut off rescue efforts.

Medical staff, taking herculean measures to keep patients alive, asked, “[Should] one or two guys with a Saturday night special really stop an entire military operation” ... this is “fussy cowardice in the face of an evil piffle” (Brinkley 487-88). The two philosophies evinced stark contrast in role expectations and the weighing of risks, vulnerabilities, and the duty to protect. Some wanted help for innocent victims to prevail over fighting terrorists and criminals. The responders were giving aid and care, or they were armed, suspicious, and implicitly authorized to use deadly force.

Blanco stated, “These troops are fresh back from Iraq, well trained, experienced, battle-tested and under my orders to restore order in the streets. They have M-16s and they are locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill and they are more than willing to do so if necessary and I expect they will” (Dyson 114). She meant to create a world where good citizens could feel safe and protected by their government.

Instead of bringing a sense of law and order, she unintentionally created a world of fear, distrust, and harsh treatment. There was a subtext of permission if not advocacy for any tactics necessary to root out the criminals. The public was now the enemy. The structure and logic of this narrative tell us that bad people must die to preserve the social order.

I have watched this press conference. Blanco is clearly reading from notes. She begins with animation, but her final words, “and I expect they will” is said slowly, without expression, and almost in a whisper. It is as if, as she is reading the words, she realizes that she is positioning herself as a proponent of violence.

The person who wrote these words for her was trying to position her as strong, decisive, and fierce. Her staff wanted her image to be more like the commanding Mississippi Governor, Barbour, or John Wayne (Brinkley 289). As she spoke the final words, however, she spoke them with as little impact as possible. It is a grotesque statement. In that moment I would venture that she rejected that position for herself. No matter how little they lost or how much they looted, the people of New Orleans had just come through a horrific experience. Though she meant to deter criminals and buck up others who were afraid, in America we don’t shoot our criminals, we arrest them.

Did ill-advised language lead to innocent deaths? Nagin announced on public radio that he had declared martial law to bring order to the city, which led to confusion about the rules of engagement for the police. And Blanco’s “lock and load” threat further led police to believe their rules had changed (McCarthy and Maggi, “Shoot All Looters”).

Because of this language usage, some blame Nagin and Blanco for the police killings of 11 unarmed civilians in the first week of the Katrina aftermath (McCarthy and Maggi).

How else could one explain the killing of innocent civilians? One incident entailed a police officer who coolly took aim from a rooftop and shot and killed a looter down below. He was not threatened. He had other means to intervene such as yelling or firing a warning shot. There was no panic or confusion as in some of the other cases (McCarthy and Maggi, “New Orleans Police Officer Under Investigation in Shooting in Days after Katrina” | NOLA.com” A1+)(McCarthy, “5 From NOPD Indicted in Storm Death”).

Blanco could have positioned the National Guard by using a blanket metaphor of safety and protection, giving comfort and preventing harm. General Honoré quickly countered Blanco’s story line on Friday when he was repeatedly seen on TV barking at his troops, “Guns down, put your God damn guns down!” and the narrative shifted. It is as if he directly responded to Blanco’s speech. The victims would have respect and dignity. Honoré positioned his troops as the protectors and the civilians as people to whom they must give care and assistance. This now was the dominant narrative.

The conflicting narratives between law enforcement and life-saving efforts continued in other venues. Chertoff was first and foremost the czar of Homeland Security. He had spent Tuesday in a conference on bioterrorism. Natural disasters were not a salient part of his identity, duties, or responsibilities. A natural disaster might never have currency with a person who made sense of the world in terms of fighting terrorism.

Indeed, fighting terrorism became the main focus if not an obsession for some federal, state, and local law enforcement officers after Katrina (Eggers). Even Bush fueled this narrative.

There was a clash between valuing the truth even if it were slanderous and valuing discretion. Some Parties used causticity and antagonism to get results when others sought cooperation and affiliation. There was a tension between privileging law enforcement over against first responders whose only concern was the most needy. An Ombuds would need to assure that one worldview did not eclipse the others.

It is a fact that in a crisis, the decision makers can “have extreme *difficulty in redefining the situation*” (italics in original)(Rosenthal, Charles, and Hart 21). The Ombuds brings a fresh perspective. A third party can be invaluable in solving desperate problems. After others had spent hours trying to figure out what was going wrong in the Three Mile Island incident, an employee beginning a new shift was able to help diagnose the problem (Perrow 15-31). This raises epistemological issues of what the group knows and how they know it. The Ombuds can establish epistemological cautiousness or capacity to see the information anew.

Some of the problems denoted so far involve suspicion, trust, conflicting narratives, identity, and the need for dignity. The depth of these currents was not visible to the public. The Ombuds must search out these themes and use them in his/her problem identification and resolution efforts.

#### 4. Being Neutral<sup>116</sup>

The Ombuds is an ideal addition because he/she has no interest in turf, is apolitical, and has the skills to build trust. Training in neutrality is a required piece of the Ombuds' position description. It is an independent and impartial role. The Ombuds' only stake is in good process. He/she has no personal agenda but to succeed and no constituency. Modeling collaboration, interoperability, and professionalism, the Ombuds will downplay the egos and emphasize the synergistic use of talents.

#### 5. Working With the Disruptions

##### a. Backstories

##### (1) Control and Politics

Politics, egos, professional jealousies, and bureaucratic competition increase in a crisis (Rosenthal, Charles, and Hart 18, 462). Disaster scholars find that hostility grows between the disaster handlers regarding power, responsibilities, and authority. These conflicts are disruptive and hinder effective administration of relief programs (Fritz and Williams 47, 50).

Mary Woodell states that turf battles and finger pointing are the most common failures of effective crisis management and need to be addressed as part of crisis planning (Woodell 60-61). The Ombuds would be one potential tool to combat this. Woodell recommends recognizing and addressing the problem by acknowledging it and even

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<sup>116</sup> Cobb would use the word "multi-partial." Being neutral does not mean being devoid of values, instead parties are treated fairly and tended to equitably (Rifkin, Millen, and Cobb).

making fun of it. The Ombuds must not just stop the in-fighting, but enable the key parties to work well together.

Two scholars from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy's School of Government testified to the Senate that "the greatest weakness" of the present system of emergency management is that "it does not provide any mechanism or guidance for trying to facilitate political coordination" (Leonard and Howitt). This critical coordination can be part of the Ombuds' responsibilities. The Ombuds must address difficult issues, especially when there is a power struggle or a perception of disrespect. Based on her research, Jayne Docherty states that parties can negotiate and articulate mutually acceptable power relationships (353). The Ombuds is alert to issues of control and politics.

## (2) History and Context

The Ombuds must be familiar with the history and themes of the community. Nagin voiced his frustration that federal officials made repeated promises that were not kept (G. Russell, "Nagin: Mistakes Were Made at all Levels--His Biggest Frustration was Slow Pace of Relief"). His complaints echoed down through the ages of black people at deadly risk, helpless, and not being protected. The Ombuds can look for parts of the historical story line that challenge the dominant narrative and seek countervailing themes.

History and context can help the Ombuds to understand a party's perceptions vis-a-vis rights and responsibilities. The Ombuds must be familiar with positioning theory, which can reveal parties' expectations regarding claims and obligations. Blanco assumed

that after Brown's promises, she had a right to rely on him. He had a duty to keep his word. In this case, the Ombuds could emphasize promise-keeping as a crucial theme.

Bush stated in his memoir that his big mistake in Katrina was in not releasing the military more quickly to Blanco (G. W. Bush, *Decision Points* 331). An Ombuds might have been able to persuade Bush to come to this realization sooner and quickly assign the troops without drama. Later, if the law enforcement duties were needed, they could be negotiated when/if that became evident.

Understanding, knowing, and utilizing the community context is invaluable. The community will be chock-a-block with respected people that demand an integrated and successful commitment to emergency response. The Ombuds will read the newspapers and blogs to find these voices. For instance, David Spielman was an admired and well-known photographer in New Orleans. He was quoted as saying, about Bush, Brown, Blanco, and Nagin, "[I]f they don't put aside their personal agendas and go for the greater good, we are toast" (Spielman 64).

The Ombuds needs to become familiar with the community's agenda, collective perceptions, and respected voices. He/she can use community figures as a profound feedback mechanism. Knowing the history and understanding context increase the Ombuds' tools. I will further discuss the power of community voices below when I discuss affirmative re-positioning.



## b. The Power of Words

What if language lacks interoperability? Misunderstandings and incorrect assumptions defined the Katrina response. One researcher found that the House Republican report entitled “Failure of Initiative” boiled the Katrina problem down to “a lack of semantic clarity” (Horne 87). Positioning theory is a useful heuristic in obtaining semantic clarity and illuminating the nature and resolution of interpersonal conflicts (Sabat, “Positioning and Conflict Involving a Person with Dementia: A Case Study” 92). Words have the power to transform conflict.

Malcolm Gladwell in his book Blink discusses the power of words. He describes a phenomenon that he calls, “To prime.” People can be primed by select words. He directs the reader to several studies indicating that words influence people’s performance and abilities (Gladwell). In one study, words like “old,” “tired,” “golf,” and “Florida” sprinkled through a story that did not tie these words together, resulted in reduced productivity and energy levels for the listeners. The listener was primed for being old and retired (Gladwell 52-53).

Gladwell describes other studies related to priming where students demonstrate a significant increase in test performance scores when the researcher asked them before the test to consider taking on the role of an academic (Gladwell 56). These studies suggest that the Ombuds could carefully select word usage like “integrity,” “heroic,” “honorable,” “collaboration,” “international acclaim,” and “constituent praise” to produce more congenial interactions.

Working with international face, macro-positioning, and a socio-historical context, the Ombuds could reference archetypal implications, e.g., the Nobel Peace Prize. The Ombuds might emphasize the indelible legacy that comes from cooperation and generosity. Sacramento became legendary when it sent the following message to San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake: “San Francisco can count on Sacramento for the last bit of bread and meat in the house, can draw on us for every dollar we have, and you can have our blood if you need it” (Auf der Heide 109).

We remember crises by our own communicative acts (Clarke 215). The power of words cannot be underestimated. The parties could be primed for communicative acts that secure affirmative positioning for themselves, others, and the collective memory.

#### (1) A Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words

Perin states, “An axis of meanings acknowledges the centrality of ambiguities in the [risk analysis] process” (Perin 275). We have to understand each other’s dictionaries to work together effectively. The Ombuds can help disambiguate, dispatch the bureaucratese, and seek opportunities to clarify common language.

Designing a structural solution, the Ombuds may request basic informational briefings to create interoperable understandings. For instance, had one conference call before the storm included a 20 minute briefing by the Corps, the Sewerage and Water Board, or the Levy Board, it is possible the Parties would have heard and recognized: 1) the difference between overtopping and breaching of the levees, 2) how quickly overtopping can lead to scouring and breaching, 3) the relative unreliability of the

pumping stations if flooded, and 4) the power of the canals to drive water back into the city.

A 10-minute briefing by Nagin or the New Orleans emergency management official may well have established the difference between the Convention Center and Superdome and clarified their relative viability for food, water, plumbing, and power resources. The Ombuds must carefully attend to word usage to create an accurate narrative understood by all Parties.

## (2) Denial and Exaggeration

“Years of social science research has documented consistently that the initial human response to threat is denial” (Drabek, *Disaster Evacuation and the Tourist Industry* 244). [S]ociologists find that: organizations are always screwing up; rosy predictions are self-serving and delusional, and not to be credited; lack of situational awareness drives system accidents” (Perrow 388). When the Homeland Security Operations Center saw pictures on TV that the French Quarter had not flooded, they extrapolated that no part of New Orleans had flooded. Brown would testify later that he thought Marty Bahamonde, the person giving him first-hand accounts of levee breaches on Monday, was prone to hyperbole (Cooper and Block 145).

It has been said that the “American psyche fluctuates between only two states: complacency and panic” (Striedl, Crosson, and Farr 14). Brown was concerned with his wardrobe and asked his only employee reporting from the Superdome if there was

anything he could “tweak.” This off-kilter remark was glorified by a Mardis Gras float five months later. See Figure 11.



**Figure 11** Float from 2006 Mardi Gras (Cooper and Block 270h).

He told the public on Thursday, “Considering ... things are going relatively well” (“CNN.com - FEMA Chief: Victims Bear Some Responsibility”). Later, Brown would say the he intentionally misled the public to quell panic<sup>117</sup> (M. Smith). He sought to use the media as a tempered means to calm the public.

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<sup>117</sup> David Letterman had a top ten questions list he would ask the FEMA director including, “Are you able to convey a false sense of security?” (Brinkley 245).

The exaggerated stories were also misleading. Rumors of murder, rape, looting, snipers, and wanton marauding during Katrina turned out to be false (Vergano).

In all of the local, state, and federal reports, there was no proof that guns were fired at helicopters. Some surmise that trapped people tried to signal their location. Of the six deaths at the Superdome, one was a suicide, one was a drug overdose, and four were from natural causes. Four bodies were found at the Convention Center. Three were attributed to natural causes and one was an apparent gunshot wound (Honoré 120). Not a single police officer was killed in the line of duty, and there is a record of only three malicious police injuries (Clark 307).

Rumors must be deflated early in a disaster. They form because “the demand for information can become so intense that people grasp at straws, imaginings become realities, and the need for action is so compelling that some people spread information and misinformation indiscriminately out of a sense of responsibility” (Turner 250).

“Dr. Kathleen Tierney, head of the University of Colorado-Boulder Natural Hazards Center [stated that] misleading or completely false media reports should have been among the most foreseeable elements of Katrina” (Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to Hurricane Katrina 361). One should be especially skeptical of reports that hint at bigotry (Allport and Postman 170-99). Positions and story lines that are racialized need conscientious scrutiny.

Rumors blot out important information. They have a huge impact on morale, unity, and emergency response. They can create embittered suspicions, recriminations, and wedge-drivers when these can least be tolerated.

Eddie Compass and Nagin reported rapes, drugs, gangs, and snipers. Compass told Spike Lee in the documentary “When the Levees Broke” that he had intentionally exaggerated in an effort to get the nation’s attention. He sought to use the media as an excitable method to generate public outrage. Brown and Compass fabricated communications in an attempt to enhance emergency response.

Nagin exhorted on the radio that his colleagues should not do any more press conferences. He positioned them as imprudently grandstanding and failing to tend to response activities. There were conflicting agendas among the Parties. Some wanted to: 1) use the media to convey a sense of calm and government action,<sup>118</sup> 2) use the media to convey an apocalyptic cry for help, or 3) avoid the media altogether to focus on the job at hand. These conflicts can be influenced by a neutral third party. The Ombuds can find the piece that holds these differences together, i.e., the common area between the contrasting points of view.

While the New Orleans looting narrative was gaining prominence, the counternarrative of white vigilantes was eclipsed (Solnit, “Reconstructing the Story of the Storm Hurricane Katrina at Five”). The dominant narrative cut off conversations about

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<sup>118</sup> Bush in the following days would repeatedly use the media as an opportunity to list both all of the agencies’ activities and the massive amounts of goods and services moving into the area.

the crimes being committed by whites against blacks and police officers against unarmed civilians. It took five years for this narrative to gain national attention.

And there was yet another important narrative that was ignored. Malik Rahim, a black community organizer who was working to get people critical provisions, had his finger on the pulse of part of the black community. He stated that he worked with white volunteers who came from out of town to give away aspirin and other small palliatives. These young people through their presence and desire to be of service stopped what Rahim believed was an ineluctable riot by blacks. The black community was ready to explode as word spread that white vigilantes were killing blacks with impunity (Horne 225).

The narrative of concerned white volunteers counteracted and diluted the narrative of the white vigilantes, although both were true. The band of volunteers brought a sense of normalcy and humanity, which brought a renewed willingness to trust the white community. The narrative shifted, and blacks did not necessarily have to protect themselves by going on the offensive. A small group set in motion some priceless, unintended consequences. They de-escalated the fear that was enveloping the area simply by being present and forming cross-cutting relationships.

The narratives kept twisting and turning, and it is important for the Ombuds not to be complacent with just two stories. The Ombuds' role would be to seek out new facts, reframe the perspective, unsettle assumptions, and keep the story open-ended.

In disasters, there are two very important rules of human behavior to consider: minimizing and over-reaction (Drabek, *Disaster Evacuation and the Tourist Industry* 244-45). The Ombuds must take into account that most research shows that pro-social behavior and worst-case rumors are the norm in natural disasters and wartime experiences (Fischhoff 80-81). The Ombuds can push back when parties demonize the situation or fail to see the critical problem. The way to counter both denial and exaggeration is to create margins for error and seek redundancy of information.

c. Positioning the Problem Elsewhere

With the requisite diplomacy the Ombuds could suggest that blame will often come back to haunt the blamer. Brown was publically skewered for blaming others for Katrina problems. Representative Jefferson Davis (D-La), stated, "I find it absolutely stunning that this hearing would start out with you, Mr. Brown, laying the blame for FEMA's failings at the feet of the Governor of Louisiana and the Mayor of New Orleans" (FBIHOP).

Representative Christopher R. Shays (R-Conn), stated, "That's why I'm happy you left, because that kind of, you know, look in the lights like a deer tells me that you weren't capable to do the job." Shays said, "The whole reason why I think you're there is to take command of coordinating, working with [state and local governments], not just complaining about what other people are doing." ("CNN.com - Brown Puts Blame on Louisiana Officials").



It is almost impossible to position responsibility for a problem wholly with another person. Blame ultimately positions the blaming party as tainted alongside “the blamed.” It is worthwhile for the Ombuds to use techniques to reposition the blamed party and change the rebuking discourse. Cobb recommends, when it is appropriate, that the Ombuds use passive voice to avoid attribution of blame (Cobb, “Theories of Responsibilities: The Social Construction of Intentions in Mediation” 183).

#### d. Malignant Positioning

Brown malignantly positioned Blanco by implying that she was old, inexperienced, overwhelmed, and ineffective. He depersonalized her. Nagin malignantly positioned his state and federal counterparts by implying on live radio that they were indifferent, vain, and vacuous. He blamed them for lost lives and for making decisions based on politics. He denounced them and invoked divine retribution. The Ombuds must seek ways to recalibrate the positions and assist with affirmative re-positioning (Rothbart and Bartlett 235).

One good example of re-positioning and changing story lines through social forces involved two black musicians. Kanye West made headlines by proclaiming on National TV that “George Bush doesn’t care about Black people”<sup>119</sup> (Dyson 27). The Louisiana Rapper, Master P, responded to West’s comment in an interview later that

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<sup>119</sup> G. W. Bush stated in his memoirs, “[This] was the worst moment of my presidency” (G. W. Bush, *Decision Points* 326).

night, “We gotta save people. We need George Bush, we need the mayor, we need the governor. I’ve lost people. I know how real it is” (Dyson 154).

Master P reframed the narrative. Bush was not the pinnacle of indifference and gross negligence, not a person to be disparaged. He was on a par with the other Key Parties. Bush’s position was recalibrated with amplification of his integral responsibilities and duties. Bush was valued as part of a leadership force that was needed to solve the catastrophic problems.

Master P positioned all the Key Parties as critical to the success of the disaster response. He blotted out Bush’s position as a bigot, instead Bush was interlocked with the other Key Parties as a prized and invaluable rescuer. Drawing from community voices, the Ombuds could repeat and capitalize on these types of story lines.

The image of parity and interdependency may help to dissolve egos and malignant positioning. The Ombuds will need to have the skills of influence and persuasion. It would be wise to be conversant with Marwell and Schmitt’s 16 compliance-gaining techniques for effective interaction (Marwell and Schmitt), and to have an understanding of how organizational interpersonal influence is mediated through communication (Seibold, Cantrill, and Meyers 542-88).

These compliance-gaining techniques involve: promising reward, threatening punishment, using expertise in a positive way (the world works in a way that automatically rewards your compliance), using expertise in a negative way (the world works in a way that automatically punishes your noncompliance), using a conciliating

manner, rewarding before hand, punishing until one gets compliance, invoking past favors, using moral appeal, promoting positive feelings for compliance, promoting negative feelings for noncompliance, categorizing compliance as model behavior, categorizing noncompliance as characteristic of one who is “bad,” asking for help, promising that one will gain esteem, and threatening that one will lose esteem (Marwell and Schmitt 356-58).

Trust is obviously a salient factor in de-stabilizing malignant positioning. High levels of trust increase the effectiveness of groups in problem-solving (Mitchell, *Gestures of Conciliation* 165). The Ombuds would want to be familiar with Charles Osgood’s Graduated and Reciprocal Initiatives in Tension Reduction and gestures of conciliation and diminution of mistrust (Mitchell, *Gestures of Conciliation*).

These can involve concessions, symbolic acts, tension-reducing measures, and confidence-building behaviors (Mitchell, *Gestures of Conciliation* 92-113). Osgood’s scheme starts with a pre-announced series of small, de-escalatory moves involving a wide range of issues and arenas (142-43). These are openly implemented in a series of actions that are difficult to miss or ignore (142-43).

Techniques to build trust between the key parties include mentioning peoples’ names, exchanging information, giving the key parties credit, and respecting contributions. The Ombuds can extend small gestures of respect and amplify interpersonal valuation of roles. Cobb states that an “Ombuds” can construct positive intentions by asking questions, and these positive intentions will manifest in the

interactional patterns (Cobb, “Theories of Responsibilities: The Social Construction of Intentions in Mediation” 183-84). These questions can bring alliances and affiliation into a conversation, debunk unfounded mistrust, and dispel murky motivations. The Ombuds can work with the disruptions of: 1) backstories, 2) the power of words, 3) positioning the problem elsewhere, and 4) malignant positioning. Next, the Ombuds can work with the fog of conversation.

## 6. Clearing The Fog of Conversation

### a. The Failure to Ask

One invaluable Ombuds skill is to ask powerful questions. The Ombuds could bring a major epistemological shift to the group. Missing information needs to be acknowledged and sought out. Parties would be coached to review the “landscape” and ask, “What are we missing?” (Perrow 333). Setting a tone of being curious and open to new knowledge, the Ombuds would continue to ask questions, such as, “What don’t we know that we don’t know?” “What and where are the landmines and vulnerabilities?” “What things are going wrong that we can’t see?” “What might happen next?”

Perin recommends that the group avoid “stunted curiosity” (Perin 193), by asking, “Is there a fundamental flaw in our way of thinking?” (196). Asking pointed questions should avoid the traps of denial and exaggeration. A safety culture means instilling in people a questioning attitude and adopting personal accountability (Perin 16, 58)(Drabek, *Strategies for Coordinating Disaster Responses* 174).

Another three-part question for the Ombuds to ask is, “What is the worst that can happen, are we ready to find out, and are we ready if it does?” The Ombuds performs a valuable function by making certain that the silent people contribute. “Can anyone else tell us what we are not doing right or anything else we should be doing? Where are we the weakest?” The Ombuds reminds the parties of the tendency “to avoid the more labor intensive and more difficult ‘what if’ analysis” (Perin 189). No one likes bad news or difficult issues. The Ombuds helps the parties recognize and avoid the path of least resistance and fosters an ability to break the mechanisms of “not seeing” (223). Acknowledging uncertainties increases the ability to imagine the unimaginable (275).

Citing a study from the University of California at Santa Barbara, Perin writes that many risk analyses leave out important risk potentials<sup>120</sup> (264). For instance, complacency and boredom elude risk assessment metrics (264). Once the Key Parties thought they had dodged the bullet, they had difficulty taking in contrary information.

The federal government has started to use a similar “proactive questioning” approach. In 2002 Frank Carr was the Chief Trial Attorney and Agency Dispute Resolution Specialist for the Corps of Engineers (“Carr Swanson&Randolph, LLC - Partners: Frank Carr”). He devised a program that he called, “Partnering.” Contractor

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<sup>120</sup> For example, most casino’s view their primary risk as that of potential cheaters. They spend a great deal of thought and money protecting themselves from this liability. In contrast, Taleb described four serious true scenarios that presented near-catastrophic liabilities for a casino that it had not imagined: a tiger act gone disastrously wrong, a disgruntled contractor trying to blow up the casino, an employee who for years inexplicably hid instead of filing critical tax forms, and a kidnapping and ransoming of the casino owner’s daughter (Taleb 129-30).

lawsuits brought against the Corps, he discovered, undermined project completion dates, budget constraints, and the public fisc. His partnering idea involved beginning construction projects with all of the relevant parties sitting together around a table. Each would identify problems that could arise. This he found fascinating.

Each person from his/her particular vantage point could identify potential liabilities that might arise in the future. These were things that as the Corps' chief litigator he would not generally know about until it came to litigation, i.e., after it was a much more complicated problem. When these were identified and addressed upfront before the project began or at the beginning, all manner of problems became manageable or obviated.

Carr found that his "Partnering" construction projects were able to come in under budget and before deadline. Partnering has been used on other projects in the government to great success. A form of Partnering could be used by the Ombuds, to catch, report, and confine problems early. Some industries even have a program called the "crackstopper" where employees are motivated and rewarded for catching problems ("cracks") that could spread out in numerous directions. Items can be identified and corrected before they expand into major crises. Parties can be alerted to things about which they would have no way of knowing until it is too late.

It is clear that during the Katrina response, knowledgeable voices got lost (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 172). The Ombuds can make room for small voices and structure meetings such that at least one of the lowest

workers is present. That may be an operative who has no political standing. Failing to ask questions is a problem the Ombuds can address personally and structurally.

b. The Failure to Answer

“Speaking up” takes courage. Socio-political pressures to conform and be loyal are constraining. Group think and the Abilene Paradox are not easily counteracted. Several dynamics must be considered. There is a tendency to: 1) overestimate one’s ability to surmount problems, 2) underestimate the complexity of the situation, and 3) tell people what they want to hear (McConnell). The likelihood of a full discussion without the benefit of an Ombuds role seems remote.

The Ombuds could counteract a culture where uncomfortable or inconvenient facts are discouraged. In the Katrina meetings there appeared to be pressure to keep problems from surfacing. People were to report positive things (Dyson 78). The Ombuds can affirm challenges and contradictions and leverage disagreement (Perin 82). One is not disloyal for dissenting.

On Saturday August 27, when Brown asked the Louisiana emergency preparedness official if he had any unmet needs, the official answered, “No” (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 150), similarly on Sunday, the state reported that they were way ahead of the game (175).

Bahamonde, the FEMA official who had been at the Superdome before and during the storm testified before Congress: “There was a systematic failure at all levels of government to understand the magnitude of the situation.... The leadership from top

down in our agency [was] unprepared and out of touch.” “[C]ritical information... was either discounted, misunderstood, or simply not acted upon.... [There was a] complete disconnect between senior officials and the reality of the situation” (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 165).

The Ombuds can be incredibly useful in addressing these types of problems. People need help listening to each other and speaking up. Every single Party except Bush stated that they should have screamed louder. Each of the Key Parties felt that they had not been listened to. An Ombuds could turn this around so that facts are repeated, warnings are nailed down, and urgency is conveyed.

c. Keep Focused on the Big Picture

The Ombuds could be responsible for maintaining focus on the big picture. Ripley introduces a good analogy for the Ombuds concept (Ripley 72-74). She describes an Eastern Airlines jet from New York City making its final approach to Miami International Airport on December 29, 1972. The captain had more than three decades of experience. A warning light signaled that the landing gear was malfunctioning, and the entire cockpit crew focused on this problem. An alarm went off and the taped conversation revealed that no one took notice of it (72-74).

The second time the alarm sounded, it was too late, and the plane crashed into the Everglades. One hundred people were killed. It was later determined that the warning light was broken and the landing gear was in working order. After this incident FAA trainings required that one person be designated to stay focused on flying the plane at all



times. There is a strong tendency to fixate on one problem and not see the whole picture. The Ombuds would be the one person designated to stay focused on the big picture at all times.

By taking on this role, the Ombuds reduces the communication duties and responsibilities of the parties. This can be a relief to government officials who have little capacity for facilitating meetings wherein all voices are heard and next steps are confirmed. High-level politicians do not normally have the background in conflict dynamics and interpersonal communication patterns. Instead, they have healthy egos and personal and public agendas that can skew discourse and decision-making.

The Ombuds' goal is to create smooth interoperability and position the key parties as well coordinated. The Ombuds can enhance, maintain, and solidify the social bonds. The parties would be legitimized through the Ombuds' use of positioning theory to help them with efficient and effective communication.

The discourse, narratives, and social positioning systems of the parties become instantiated in the structure. Without changing the structure (adding an Ombuds to the process at the beginning to act with the key parties on site), enhanced emergency management communications would be a matter of fiat. The discussion above can be summarized and formulated into a practical acronym for action to be utilized by the Ombuds.

## 7. Using ALLURE

Perin explains the “STAR” acronym, a required system of steps to reduce risk and reinforce focus in nuclear power plants. “S” stands for “Stop,” “T” for “Think,” “A” for “Act,” and “R” for “Review” (Perin 100). The Ombuds can use the acronym, “ALLURE.”

### ALLURE:

Ask and be Curious,  
Listen for Positions,  
Link the Parties Together,  
Unsettle Assumptions,  
Re-Position, and  
Encourage New Narratives.

Ask: LeBaron discusses maintaining a spirit of inquiry. She reminds the reader that all conflict is in some way relational and can touch areas where meaning is made and identities are formed and re-formed (114). She proposes eight components of dynamic conflict engagement: 1) attend and assess, 2) suspend judgments and expand perspectives, 3) receive the other side, 4) create a shared experience and be open to shifts, 5) design a way through that reflects common sense, 6) reflect, 7) integrate, and 8) quest (137-54). She seeks shifts such that people pay attention differently to each other.

Admitting that our vision is always limited, we partner with others to gain more insight (220). The foundation of good communication and good conflict management is the spirit of inquiry.

Listen: LeBaron advises the culturally fluent “Ombuds” to be aware of “whether participants come to conversations with ideas of absolute truth or multiple realities,

rushed or relaxed attitudes to time and turn taking, primary identification as individuals or group members, and a focus on pragmatic specifics or broad-brush generalizations.... [The Ombuds] can influence pacing, setting, sequencing, and other aspects of conversation to accommodate a broad range of communication styles and preferences” (247). Samantha Hardy cites Mary and Kenneth Gergen for the proposition that the act of listening can help people cross boundaries of meaning and help to establish mutuality (Hardy 248)(M. M. Gergen and K. J. Gergen 117).

Link the Parties: LeBaron recommends offering images of connection and responsible, mutual relationships. The participants belong to each other (292, 295). Embedded in the advice given by Charleston’s Mayor Riley is the irrefutable assumption that to be a good counselor, coach, and security giver, the government officials, the crisis handlers, have to be seen as acting in concert. To give the public a sense of security and confidence, the parties must act in tandem, with coordinated communication focused on the emergency, not each other.

The parties have common interests. They are concerned with the press, answer to the public and the president, want to be seen as doing their jobs well, and enjoy getting good results. They have shared responsibility for public safety. The Ombuds can stress that each needs to do his/her part and to recognize that no one can be effective alone.

The famous local photographer, Spielman stated, “[New Orleans] will probably survive because of our differences” (Spielman 118). The Ombuds wants to link the parties but also wants to build on diversity. Often the emergency management parties are

from different worlds and speak different languages (Drabek, *Strategies for Coordinating Disaster Responses* 107). Worlds can be re-narrated through cooperative dialogue and engagement.

Emergency management coordination strategies involve enhancing awareness of cultural differences and promoting interagency cross-talking (Drabek, *Strategies for Coordinating Disaster Responses* xvi). Indeed, the Ombuds would want to facilitate communication that “aims to express moral difference eloquently in ways that build understanding and respect” (Pearce and Littlejohn 122). “[T]hird parties can skillfully participate in making new, more productive patterns [of communication]” (79).

To create cohesion Jacob Bercovitch states the “Ombuds” can encourage meaningful communication, listen for dissonance, reduce tensions, help the parties to save face, and alter the disputants’ payoffs and motivations (Bercovitch 137-42). Mitchell discusses the value of the intermediary as being able to assess realities and identify communication gaps (Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* 273, 299-300). The Ombuds emphasizes the individual and collective interest in getting everyone to participate and understand each other despite differences (Drabek, *Strategies for Coordinating Disaster Responses* 161).

The parties may need to be linked across lines of race, gender, age, religion, and politics. Wallace Warfield speaks to the issue of race narratives and explicates several tools that could build trust in conflicted relationships. There is no doubt that Nagin and Blanco had a tense and even tortured relationship. Warfield states that the Ombuds can

work to get the parties to acknowledge their interdependency (Warfield, “Race Narratives in Dispute Resolution”).

It may seem naïve to suggest that words from an Ombuds could re-position a troubled relationship, but sometimes stating the obvious or making a small gesture can help people re-frame a situation. A neutral voice of reason doing a reality check can help to shift people. Blanco, Nagin, and Brown by definition were motivated and smart people. Influence from a third-party neutral might go a long way.

The Ombuds would try to move the focus from differences to commonalities. Creative use of appreciative inquiry can be used to build trust, connection, affiliation, and concern. The parties would be asked to discuss what has worked well in the past between them and what qualities they admire in the other (Warfield, “Race Narratives in Dispute Resolution” 12-13).

Unsettle Assumptions: LeBaron references five cultural traps or lenses: 1) our way of viewing the world is normative, 2) all cultural knowledge can be categorized, 3) true cultural knowledge is beyond our ken, 4) our commonalities are emphasized over against our differences, and 5) our differences are emphasized over against our commonalities (33-34). These are limiting assumptions the Ombuds can help the parties become conscious of and avoid. The Ombuds will want to question assumptions about the way the world is understood (92-94).

Mitchell points out that there is a constant tendency to misperceive and misunderstand an adversary’s position even though one would believe him/herself to

have a very clear understanding of “the other.” This misunderstanding of the other party can lead to increased suspicion and hostility (Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* 75, 214).

Nagin demonstrated negative attribution, which means assigning fault and malicious motives to another person; these assumptions are likely to be incorrect and can be unmasked. The Ombuds may teach and apply the principles of the “Ladder of Inference,” which is a practical method for dispelling assumptions<sup>121</sup> (Schwarz 99-108). Cobb suggests that the Ombuds should use positioning and turning points to destabilize the parties’ conflict narrative (Cobb, “Creating Sacred Space: Toward a Second-Generation Dispute Resolution Practice”).

Hardy analyzes Cobb's three-step process for destabilizing and unsettling assumptions: 1) recalibrating the legitimacy of the speaker’s construction of him/herself, 2) recalibrating the legitimacy of the speaker’s construction of the other party, and 3) creating circular logic displaying the interdependence of the parties’ actions (262).

Re-Position: LeBaron promotes the use symbolic relational tools to undercut negative projections, dissimilar meaning making, and different identities and to deconstruct enemy positioning. Symbolic relational tools include stories, myths, rituals, and metaphors, and they must be used with intention and awareness (276). These “significantly expand [the Ombuds’] resources for creating understanding” (283).

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<sup>121</sup> This model involves describing to the other party an incident, stating the assumption one is drawing from the story, and asking the other party to share his/her thinking (Schwarz 99-108).

The Ombuds can guide the way people construct meanings and make decisions. In his treatise, “Conflict as a Resolvable Problem,” Mitchell discusses the idea that an intermediary can assist to remove miscommunications, including “removal of some of the grosser perceptual distortions and over-simplifications” (16-17). The Ombuds would try to redefine the positions to complexify them and dissolve distortions.

The Ombuds can re-position key parties as aligned superstars who exemplify formidable determination, expertise, and power, like the civil defense triangle, a mutually dependent triad. The three levels of government are an interlocking team, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. See Figure 1.

Encourage New Narratives: The Ombuds can uncover working assumptions, meaning-making, and the individual interpretation of another’s logic, stories, and values. Quoting David Bohm, LeBaron states that people can access a greater intelligence in group work (LeBaron 257). They can listen for places where meanings become visible (277) and build more expansive stories.

The Ombuds must look for the characteristics of a mutually acceptable story line that privileges fairness and reciprocity. The new story line can be populated with positions that expand the parties’ concepts to include trust, collaboration, and victory. The social rewards for cooperation should be created and/or emphasized by the Ombuds. And then, he/she will look for a salient archetype or metaphor that binds them as heroic partners mutually strengthening each other’s ability to end human suffering in a grand narrative.

Citing Cobb, Hardy states that an “Ombuds” can interact with disputants “to evolve the conflict stories, reformulate relationships, reframe the past, and rebuild the future” (Hardy 248, 263)(Cobb, “Creating Sacred Space: Toward a Second-Generation Dispute Resolution Practice” 1029). This new story line positions each party as responsible for increasing cooperation and mutual respect (Hardy 263)(Picard and Melchin).

LeBaron states that an intermediary must embody “collaboration, genuineness, creativity, reflectiveness, sensitivity, humility, and congruence,” which she calls “relational adeptness” (284-85). She urges the “Ombuds” to create positive momentum by highlighting compassionate and generous choices (292). She advises that the “[Ombuds] live transformation into being,” because his/her influence through modeling is a powerful agent (300).

The ALLURE system I have devised incorporates the sagacious principles of Gopin, Lederach, LeBaron, and Hicks. It is a simple, practical, comprehensive tool to address group conflict in a crisis and move parties to a place of cooperation. The Ombuds can use ALLURE to work through disruptions in the discourse and address the fog of conversation.

#### 8. Understanding Risk

Humans tend to skew situational awareness by under-appreciating risk and desiring to normalize events. As mentioned above, Perin describes five perspectives that mar clear recognition of the situation. These are:



1. Frequency bias (habitual action),
2. Similarity bias (matching to what is already known),
3. Confirmation bias (not seeking contrary evidence),
4. Salience bias (noticing prominent indicators and ignoring others), and
5. Recency or availability bias (equating a new occurrence with a previous one) (Perin 223).

Brown stated, "I have overseen over 150 presidentially declared disasters. I know what I am doing. And I think I do a pretty darn good job of it" ("CNN.com - Brown Puts Blame on Louisiana Officials"). He positioned himself as an expert, but he did so by relying on all five of the above biases. Brown was certain of his capabilities. In essence, he was saying, "We do this type of thing all the time, we know how to do it from past experience, there is nothing different or new about Katrina, and it is just like the four hurricanes I handled very well last year in Florida." He used these biases to distort the catastrophic differences between Katrina and the other disasters he had coordinated.

Mitchell calls this "stress optimizing." In the midst of a disaster, parties are looking for easy answers to limit uncertainty. The parties will exhibit "efforts to reduce the complexity, contrariness and stress of a [conflicted] environment" (Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* 76-77).

Mitchell discusses two psychological processes for cognitive consistency:

1) selective inattention, where information is ignored and rejected if it doesn't conform to exiting beliefs and images; and 2) selective perception, where expectations derived from past experiences determine current perceptions (Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* 79). Ambiguity or uncertainty is avoided by "the tendency to over-simplify a

complex and contradictory reality” (80). People routinize new problems to make them similar to ones that are more familiar.

Tunnel vision also becomes a factor in times of stress and conflict. Tunnel vision “denotes a tendency by decision makers to concentrate upon a few specific aspects of their environment ... to the exclusion of all else” (Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* 83). The story line shrinks and cuts off options.

A problem or crisis is easily misapprehended. The Ombuds can monitor the discourse for these tendencies. An Ombuds is normally trained in excellent listening skills and the ability to ask probing questions without creating defensiveness. Parties are able to hear that their reasoning and speech acts might be based on latent misperceptions.

#### 9. Educational Requirements

The Ombuds should have a background in disaster literature and conflict management theory and practice and possess leadership skills. William Lokey, the Louisiana Federal Coordinating Officer for Katrina for the first month, produced his own “Lessons Learned Presentation.” He based this on Katrina and other disasters with which he had been involved in his 35 years of emergency management (including 22 years at the local and state level).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> He served as the Federal Coordinating Officer for 24 presidentially declared disasters and has been involved in the response and recovery for numerous other presidentially declared disasters, including the eruption of Mt. St. Helens and the Oklahoma City bombing. Lokey currently works for Witt Associates, James Lee Witt’s firm, as a program director.

Lokey writes that, “Most disaster problems are management problems, not skills problems; yet, most disaster training is skills training” (Lokey Pt. 3, p. 16). The Ombuds can address this flaw by being knowledgeable in management principles. He/she should be skilled in organizational, group, and interpersonal dynamics.

If most disaster problems are management problems, there certainly is a dearth of suggestions on how this should be resolved. Most disaster scholars taut the importance of prior relationships, and try to satisfy this by suggesting joint trainings and exercises prior to the disaster. The high turnover of emergency managers and political officials with widely differing levels of status make this is a fallacious solution. Therefore, another more feasible solution is in order, the Ombuds.

The focal point of the Ombuds’ education must be problem-solving strategies, decision-making theory, and conflict management. The conflict analysis and resolution field involves familiarity with of all of the alternative dispute resolution processes and stresses the importance of being viewed as independent by all sides. Neutrality becomes the Ombuds’ currency. Positioning theory is one tool among many taught in conflict analysis and resolution studies. This academic degree involves learning facilitation, listening, and negotiation skills, and conducting dialogues.

The conflict management student is normally trained in techniques of conflict de-escalation and containment, how to build consensus, and the use of “nonviolent language.” He/she gains practical experience in structuring powerful questions, reframing, and re-positioning. Conflict coaching, a new discipline, is being blended into

the conflict management discipline. This extensive knowledge base is a formidable vantage point from which to navigate the key parties successfully through a crisis.

#### B. Assume the Role of the Principal Federal Official

Pursuant to law, FEMA appoints a Federal Coordinating Officer in every presidentially declared disaster to be the top federal/FEMA person who is responsible for overseeing the disaster. The DHS Secretary does not have quite as clear guidelines regarding the appointment of a Principal Federal Official,<sup>123</sup> which is totally a matter of his/her discretion. The position is poorly understood and rarely filled. Therefore, it has not been viewed as something of value.<sup>124</sup>

The actual language of the Principal Federal Official duties, however, could easily translate into an Ombuds' position description. The National Response Framework of 2008 states that the Principal Federal Official: "promotes collaboration and, as possible, resolves any Federal interagency conflict that may arise. The Principal Federal Official identifies and presents to the Secretary of Homeland Security any policy issues that require resolution" (Federal Emergency Management Agency 67).

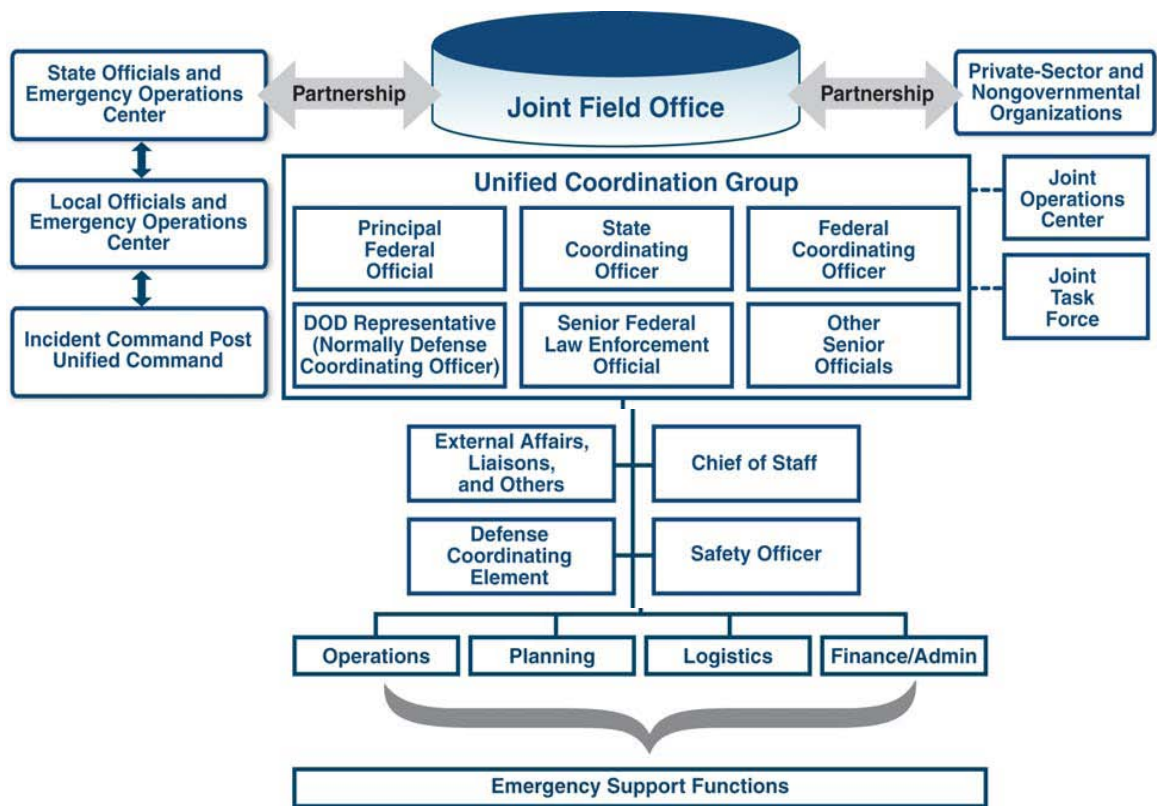
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<sup>123</sup> Pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5, the Secretary of DHS is the Principal Federal Official responsible for coordination of all domestic incidents requiring multi-agency response. The Secretary normally delegates this responsibility once he/she activates it.

<sup>124</sup> The Principal Federal Official position is often viewed as a useless addition of bureaucracy, as a signal of lack of confidence, and a needless injection of confusion over respective authority. And indeed, Congress has refused to fund the position without a specific waiver from the Secretary of DHS and agreement that the Principal Federal Official will work under the Federal Coordinating Officer (U.S. Government 573).

The Principal Federal Official “[m]ay be appointed to serve as the Secretary of Homeland Security’s primary representative to ensure consistency of Federal support as well as the overall effectiveness of the Federal incident management for catastrophic or unusually complex incidents that require extraordinary coordination” (“National Response Framework, Resource Center”). He/she interfaces with federal, state, tribal, and local jurisdictions and is a “senior Federal official with proven management experience and strong leadership capabilities” (Federal Emergency Management Agency 66). A high-level figure, who is skilled in conflict resolution and collaboration and who insures effectiveness, coordination, and consistency embodies the Ombuds qualities.

Certain medical personnel and all urban search and rescue teams become federalized employees when they deploy to a federal disaster. Thus, an Ombuds would not necessarily have to be a federal official prior to being appointed. He/she would, however, need to have credibility. I propose specific people and job titles in a subsequent section.



**Figure 12 Joint Field Office (Federal Emergency Management Agency 63).**

The figure above, set forth in the 2008 National Response Framework, describes the title, functions, and subgroups that comprise a Joint Field Office, which is the place that houses the various personnel responding to a federal disaster. For the Louisiana Katrina response, this Joint Field Office was the state Emergency Operations Center in Baton Rouge.

The figure shows that the Principal Federal Official is on the same line with FEMA's leading official, the Federal Coordinating Officer. Reflecting on this box of six

parties, i.e., the “Unified Coordination Group,” during the first week of Katrina, Blanco was standing in for the State Coordinating Officer, Brown was standing in for the Federal Coordinating Officer, and several days later he was given the title of Principal Federal Official. There is no place on the chart for Nagin, indicating that Blanco had a large responsibility to keep him informed and learn his concerns. Honoré and Thaddeus Allen from the military might fill the DOD spot. In the first five days, politicians and the Under Secretary of FEMA were managing the disaster. None of the organizational charts contemplate this.

Alternatively, if the Ombuds were not appointed as the Principal Federal Official, there is a box for “Other Senior Officials.” The Ombuds could be placed there and be part of the Unified Coordination Group and part of the chain of command. The Federal Response Framework states that “[t]he composition of the Unified Coordination Group will vary, depending upon the scope and nature of the incident and the assets deployed in support of the affected jurisdiction” (Federal Emergency Management Agency 64). This allows the necessary flexibility.

In defining “Other Senior Officials,” the National Response Framework states: “Based on the scope and nature of an incident, senior officials from other Federal departments and agencies, State, tribal, or local governments, and the private sector or Non-Governmental Organizations may participate in the Unified Coordination Group. Usually, the larger and more complex the incident, the greater the number of entities represented” (Federal Emergency Management Agency 69). An Ombuds could serve in

a defined role in at least two places in the Unified Coordination Group, the “Principal Federal Official” or “Another Senior Official.” As such the Ombuds should be neither an uncontrollable outlier nor a marginalized appendage.

One scholar suggests that Hurricane Katrina demands “a reconception of the duty of government to its citizens” (Greene 2007). The Ombuds could be part of that reconception, i.e., an addition that signals a commitment to do things in a more accountable manner. In the next section I propose that the scope of the Ombuds’ authority be extended to encompass any conflict that brings the emergency efforts to a halt and not just between federal parties. The Ombuds would be an expedient decision-maker.

#### 1. Levy Clashes

Louisiana law requires levee districts to have emergency plans. The Orleans Levee District had such a plan, but did not contemplate repairing major breaches like those experienced during Katrina along the 17th Street and London Avenue Canals. Instead, the Levee District relied on the informal distinction it used in classifying operation and maintenance problems--minor problems were its responsibility and major problems were the Corps' responsibility. Fixing any breach in the system would be the Corps' responsibility, because it would be "major."

The Corps, meanwhile, was under the impression that the Lake Pontchartrain Project had been turned over to the Orleans Levee District for all future handling. So, in the Corps’ view, it was the Levee District's responsibility to be the first responders for



any emergency, regardless of size. These conflicting expectations resulted in a breakdown in the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina among all involved--the Corps, the LA Department of Transportation and Development (LA DOTD), and the Orleans Levee District.

A specific responsibility for the Ombuds could be resolving critical points of disagreement that freeze emergency response like the one below. At a hearing held by the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs (December 15, 2005, Hearing, "Hurricane Katrina: Who's in Charge of the New Orleans Levees?"), it became apparent that these parties had no agreement on emergency responsibilities. Chair Susan Collins asked the witnesses--Colonel Wagenaar, head of the Corps' New Orleans District; Edmund Preau, LA DOTD's Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public Works; and James Huey, President of the Orleans Levee Board on August 29, 2005--who was responsible for levee repairs. Chairperson Collins received three different answers:

Colonel Wagenaar (Corps): Senator, my original thought was that it was the Orleans Levee District.

Mr. Preau (LA DOTD): Originally, levee districts are supposed to be first responders on situations like this. If it is beyond their control, beyond their resources, then it would move up to the state level to take over. I think it was beyond the state's resources at that point. We looked towards the federal government, who had a lot more resources than we did, and who we've relied upon in the past to do major repairs. If you read the project agreements, most major repairs are to be undertaken by the Corps of Engineers on federal projects.

Mr. Huey (former President, Orleans Levee Board): First of all, it is unequivocally, I would say, the Corps of Engineers (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 138).

Water was pouring into the city and could not be pumped out until the levees were repaired. Wagenaar testified that LA DOTD had blocked local roads and refused the Corps access to begin levee repair because they disagreed over the appropriate method for doing so (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 140).

This type of situation needs to be resolved expeditiously. The Ombuds could quickly do a med-arb process, which means a conflict would first be mediated by the Ombuds between the two parties; then, if the parties could not agree within two hours, the Ombuds would act as an arbitrator and make the decision. The Ombuds would function first as a mediator, and the parties would be incentivized to agree because in the second phase, the Ombuds makes a binding decision. This authority would need to be programmatically endorsed and enforced.

If the Ombuds' decision were rejected, he/she could seek quick access to the President or his/her authorized designee, giving him/her a recommendation for a final decision. If the Ombuds contacted the president, it would be clear that disaster services were stymied and a decision had to be made immediately for disaster services to proceed. No President wants to be clocked for the amount of time disaster services were interrupted because of his/her unresponsiveness. With lives and substantial property damage at stake, this critical levee repair dispute took three days to be resolved (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 141).

## 2. More Katrina Clashes

FEMA and the Department of Health and Human Services took a week to settle issues of respective authority and control of public health and medical services (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 422). Moreover, DHS and the Department of Justice took a week to resolve the question of who should take the lead on issues regarding public safety and security (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 448). Critical services were unavailable until these types of disputes were decided. The “political upheaval and instability” must be uncovered and immediately brought to closure (Boin et al. 139).

### C. Possible Contenders

This position could be filled by a nationally recognized mediator/arbitrator such as Kenneth Feinberg. He acted as Special Master for the BP oil spill fund, Special Master for TARP Executive Compensation, Special Master of the Federal September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, Administrator for the Virginia Tech Memorial Fund, one of three arbitrators selected to determine the fair market value of the original Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination, and one of two arbitrators selected to determine the allocation of legal fees in the Holocaust slave labor litigation; and he administrated the distribution of funds in the Agent Orange and Dalkon shield class action cases. Feinberg is considered fair, experienced, and authoritative regarding catastrophes and how difficult decisions are decided and implemented.

Gregory B. Saathoff, M.D., an Associate Professor of Research in Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, and Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at the University of Virginia's School of Medicine, is another prospect. He serves as Executive Director of the University of Virginia's Critical Incident Analysis Group (CIAG). His title also includes Conflict Resolution Specialist for the FBI's Critical Incident Response Group.

Saathoff has been hired by FEMA to develop an "Advice in Crisis" role for attorneys at federally declared disasters. The attorney in this model would partner with the command staff to lead, advise, shape decision-making, and direct good policy-making during a crisis.

Saathoff is a risk management official tasked with doing process work. He is skilled in communication, conflict management, and emergency management. He was tagged by the Justice Department to help with the Waco incident and later became head of a task force on "group think" for Attorney General Janet Reno. Saathoff has experience in crisis negotiation and working with governmental key parties, making life and death decisions.

The Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina found that the most serious problems were leadership passivity, leadership inaction, and leadership detachment (359-60). For the Ombuds to correct these types of issues, it could be argued that he/she be a politically influential person.

Hugh Gusterson suggests the White House chief of staff as a possible contender (Gusterson, 1 December 2010).

The chief of staff is a powerful person and would be expected to use his/her influence to ensure clear, regular, and respectful communications among the parties. If Brown refused to talk to Chertoff, the chief of staff could usurp Brown's role. If Nagin felt disrespected or ignored, the chief of staff could change the dynamics and the balance of power. There is evidence that despite Nagin's tirade, he was quite anxious to please the President.<sup>125</sup> It is possible that Nagin would have been quite deferential to the chief of staff. Similarly, Brown wanted to work more directly with the White House. It is quite possible that he would have been obsequious to the chief of staff. Assuming the chief of staff witnessed dysfunctional communications, he/she could figuratively knock heads together.

The White House chief of staff could perform the function of the Ombuds or Principal Federal Official, but he/she would need to be present on site. This might require some sacrifices from the White House, but would certainly send a message of attention, access, and accountability. The chief of staff would have first-person knowledge about the unfolding disaster, and his/her eye-witness testimony would not be ignored or dismissed. He could secure White House attention like few others.

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<sup>125</sup> Nagin whispered an apology to Bush as soon as they met on Friday (G. W. Bush, *Decision Points* 331).

President Obama's prior chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, could fit this role with his aggressive, bullying, results-driven persona. He would not have tolerated leadership passivity, inaction, and detachment. The downside, however, is that this type of chief of staff would be intimidating and people would be reluctant to speak up and admit problems.

Bush's chief of staff, Card, is a very different person. In his tenure he assumed the role of a mediator/facilitator personality type. That is also an effective model. He could have made the President more aware of the dynamics and could have underscored cooperation on behalf of the President.

As mentioned above, FEMA is developing an "Advice in Crisis" role for its attorneys at federally declared disasters. A FEMA lawyer should not be placed in this Ombuds role because there would be great pressure to bow to politics and internal loyalties. In-house lawyers are generally expected to maintain continuity and the status quo within the agency. The lawyer could not be expected to be independent or neutral. And just like the Federal Coordinating Officer, the lawyer has to stay focused on doing his/her job.

Another possible source for this Ombuds position could be the International Association for Conflict Resolution. This Association has a Crisis Intervention Section. Conflict Resolution Professionals who are members of this section have worked with the FBI to gain skills in hostage negotiation and crisis management.

A slightly different twist on the Ombuds position would be a role from the corporate world called, “Risk Manager.” This person reviews budgets, policies, procedures, and practices to reduce liability and exposure. Similarly, the military has a civilian “Organizational Effectiveness Officer” whose sole job is to be a troubleshooter, prevent problems, and advocate for organizational effectiveness. He/she walks the halls and speaks with people, sits in on meetings, asks questions, and makes sure all perspectives are considered. He/she is a “free agent” and can involve him/herself in projects and policy development at his/her election.

The Organizational Effectiveness Officer is charged with analyzing processes and forecasting unintended consequences. He/she tackles friction points and suggests problem-solving options. Symbolically and practicably, this Officer promotes a culture of high standards and individual and organizational accountability. Leadership takes this role very seriously and gives it force.

#### D. Fill the Void

The National Response Framework builds on the principles of engaged partnerships and unity of effort through unified command. When political appointees, elected officials, and military generals or admirals assume responsibility for emergency management, unity of command becomes muddled. The Ombuds can make sure that:

- 1) everyone understands the unity of command model,
- 2) it is clear who is taking responsibility for originating disaster assistance requests,
- 3) it is clear who is in charge of

receiving the requests, 4) requests are being funneled to the right place, and 5) requests are being acted upon.

This wildly diverse group of players needs a coordinator with expertise. The federal and state emergency coordinators presumably have emergency management knowledge and experience, but not necessarily. They may be political figures. The National Response Framework states that one of the challenges for effective emergency management is the high turnover and short tenure among elected and appointed officials responsible for emergency management (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2). If other politicians such as Blanco and Chertoff are at the helm, there is a further dilution of emergency management knowledge. The structure calls for someone focused on group cohesion and mission.

Lokey, mentioned above, FEMA's Katrina Federal Coordinating Officer in Louisiana, stated, regarding a catastrophic event, "Standard management practices will not apply. Special resources will be needed" (Lokey Pt. 2, p. 23-24). It is naive to think that a disaster can throw together three or more politicians and agency heads, who don't know each other, have varying levels of power and expertise, have overlapping roles, and are working under horrific circumstances, and expect them to be able among themselves to create a management team. Moreover, they will be exhausted, overwhelmed, and no doubt ill-tempered.

The Ombuds can be someone outside the political circle with a different set of responsibilities. He/she can bring a fresh perspective, elicit the consequences of



decision-making, avoid stovepiping of information, and identify the decisions that are being avoided and commands that are being ignored. This person works with group dynamics, provides balance, and draws the best from all leadership.

An Ombuds can legitimize, augment, and leverage the narratives. He/she would see Nagin looking for forceful promise-keeping, a response that was symbolically “big,” and personal respect and authority. Blanco was looking for a stronger more decisive image and conciliation. Brown wanted to regain face with the White House (which had asked him to stop calling), Chertoff (who had banished him to Baton Rouge), and the public (that did not think he was doing such “a heckava job”). The Ombuds could facilitate resolution of some of these issues.

Key parties will want two things from the Ombuds. They want to look good (Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*) and they want their jobs made easier. The parties want to avoid disgrace, which in a crisis is an ever-present threat. Goffman states that face-work once a person has been threatened can be carried out effectively by a third party intermediary (Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* 27). The Ombuds would bolster the positive social value a person claims for him/herself.

The Ombuds can make the parties’ lives easier by helping with coordination and communication. He/she reduces social friction and brings integrity to the response. He/she can help to manage the differentials in politics, power, and worldviews. Some parts of the Key Parties’ identities excluded common ground, but some parts

encompassed it. Intolerance of each other's stories can be reduced when the Ombuds narrates and amplifies the common ground (Roe 149).

Docherty states that reconciling, coordinating, and managing worldviews exacts an ability to "name the world cooperatively or negotiate reality" (Docherty 191). In her research on the Waco negotiations, she found that parties first needed to comprehend the worldview of the other, and then conceptual linkages needed to be created "to craft a mutually satisfactory resolution" (Docherty 348). Parties cannot do that without assistance.

Hardy cites John Winslade to suggest three goals for an "Ombuds": 1) create the relational conditions for the growth of an alternative story, 2) build a relationship narrative that diminishes and is incompatible with the conflict, and 3) open a space to allow for new positions (Hardy 263)(Winslade).

The Ombuds ideally would be viewed as a prized asset to have on the team. To insure effective leadership, the federal government must acknowledge that the egos, turf wars, and negative attribution have unavoidably dire consequences. The federal government needs to provide appropriate support for successful communications and outcomes in emergency response activities. The Ombuds assists with leadership capacity-building. He/she reduces the collective flaws and weaknesses and fuses the efforts, talents, and power of the parties.

In summary, the job description for the Ombuds includes facilitation of all of the parties' meetings, being in charge of communication and process, building a culture of

respect, problem identification and resolution, and being neutral. He/she must work with disruptions in the narratives, such as backstories--control and politics, information gaps, and history and context. These can be discussed frankly. Informational briefings will be made part of the standard operation procedures. Words can be selected carefully to influence people and create a grand narrative.

The Ombuds is needed to deflate rumors, find the counter-narratives, and puncture exaggeration and denial with proper push-back. He/she works to position blame and malignant positioning as incompatible with the key parties' story lines. He/she seeks voices of famous people and people from the community to re-position the parties and give them significant feedback.

The Ombuds will recognize the fog of conversation. He/she can ask the difficult questions, assure that all voices and unpopular stances are heard, and locate the lost answers. He/she has the option of using the ALLURE model. He/she could be appointed to the role of the Principal Federal Official, and be given clear authority to rule on any conflict that is delaying rescue and response. The Ombuds will be excellent at problem solving, conflict management, and creating good will.

Brown or the head of FEMA cannot be both an expert in communication and process, and work with the substantive operations and logistics of disaster response. The Ombuds role can have traction because it doesn't make sense for a key party to be responsible for performing all these duties. Politicians are not necessarily the best people to run meetings and navigate communication, conflict, positioning, and information-

sharing. People don't succeed at multi-tasking (J. Russell). If it is agreed that this Ombuds role would add value, and if it is agreed that one person cannot coordinate the disaster and perform this role, then the need for an Ombuds is indisputable and certainly worth testing.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

*It is not the blow we suffer from, but the tedious repercussive anti-climax of it, the rubbishy aftermath to clear away from off the very threshold of despair (Faulkner).*

One limitation of my study involves human error. No amount of research will stop similar or different mistakes from happening. Problems are endemic to disasters. There is no project not subject to human fallibility, “no mode of organizing social life not subject to contradiction or unanticipated consequences” (Pressman and Wildavsky xviii). The apparently simple and straightforward is really much more complicated (93). No Ombuds can change that.

Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky’s exceptional book, Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland: Or, Why It's Amazing That Federal Programs Work at All, This Being a Saga of the Economic Development Administration as Told by Two Sympathetic Observers Who Seek to Build Morals on a Foundation of Ruined Hopes, shows how deceptively simple governmental undertakings quickly become more convoluted than one can imagine. For instance, extrapolating from

their book, I would assert that,

with a disaster of unprecedented scope, which has to be administered through state and local instrumentalities, on an impossible time schedule, by an understaffed agency, beset by public complaints and demands, amidst totally inaccurate information or none at all, with many state and local staff being victims themselves, it is a wonder that disaster relief doesn't founder more tragically (90).

Pressman and Wildavsky title this, "The syndrome of glorious aims and ignoble results" (124). Human failure, bureaucratic limitations, and normal accidents are to be expected. While disasters will always be handled less than perfectly, the Ombuds can assist in avoiding numerous problems that are part and parcel of the undertaking.

More specifically, the Model's limitations are as follows. First, it lacks a champion. Someone has to put this idea in place. The Model will work only if it has support and explicit approval of the on-site FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer.

It is unclear whether the government would even allow an independent professional into these most stressful and in some ways intimate interactions. It is human nature to be suspicious of outsiders who want to help, especially when key parties are vulnerable and under tremendous pressure.

The key parties would no doubt reject the idea as a meddling intrusion. Similar to the general feeling about the Principal Federal Official position, the Ombuds would create competing lines of authority. People resent impingement on their turf and are jealous of their authority. Key parties at a disaster are very powerful people; money is often at the heart of many decisions. Fear of losing one's power, the blurring of roles, and unwanted interference undermine the Model's viability.

The Ombuds Model is not meant to be seen as a threat or creating a power struggle, but issues of authority and control are bound to be misapprehended. The scope of the role would need to be repeatedly introduced, explained, and clarified. The Ombuds' presence would complexify things, adding more channels of communication, adding another bureaucrat.

Second, key parties may accuse the Ombuds of taking up valuable time and being an expensive distraction. In a disaster, one extra body is a drain on limited housing, scarce food, precious rental cars, and coveted space "at the table." There is always pressure to keep the inner circle small. Some assume the fewer people at the table, the more efficient the operation.

The key parties may view the Ombuds as superfluous, meeting him/her with scorn and derision. The Ombuds could be one more person who is ignored and kept out of the loop. It would not be helpful if the Ombuds became enmeshed in the context as one more dysfunctional party in the group.

The Ombuds job has to be performed in an exemplary manner. As in any ADR model, the Ombuds must be above reproach, professionally and personally.<sup>126</sup> If this job is performed poorly, this person can be a serious detraction. The worst case scenario would be an Ombuds that did not stay neutral, played favorites, or took sides.

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<sup>126</sup> Integrity would be a part of the job description. Just as the pastor cannot gossip about parishioners to other parishioners and managers cannot date subordinates, very strong boundaries would be in order.

Third, the Ombuds' "added value" needs to be fully articulated and appreciated. His/her profound worth probably wouldn't be grasped. Third party neutrals, ombuds, and mediators prevent problems from "blowing up." It is hard to account for things that might have gone wrong. Nassim Taleb points out that had a safety regulation requiring locked cockpits been promulgated prior to 9/11, it likely would have prevented this event; but, no one would know that and the regulation's supreme value would go unnoticed (Taleb). His point is that these types of proactive measures don't garner much support.

Finally, my Model, has another substantial problem: No one is paying attention. Let's look at the narratives and the subsequent Katrina-driven policies. "Policy narratives are stories (scenarios and arguments) which underwrite and stabilize the assumptions for policymaking" where there are unknowns, interdependence, and conflict (Roe 34-37).

The Katrina policy narrative is that the federal government should have been better prepared and done a better job. The assumption is that the federal government should be able to meet the challenges of a catastrophic disaster. The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 reorganized FEMA and gave it more responsibilities. The National Response Framework and an improved National Incident of Management System were issued in 2008 to clarify roles and overcome common management problems. Neither the catastrophic nature of the incident nor the maladaptive behavior of the Key Parties was confronted.



Is there an assumption that non-functional communication patterns at the highest levels of government can be fixed by numerous lengthy congressional hearings and voluminous reports?<sup>127</sup> The Key Parties were chastised but no sanctions were imposed. Or is there a tacit, passive acceptance that leaders have a difficult time working together, i.e., human conflict is a fact of life that we must suffer and endure? Either way, catastrophic disasters and impossible politicians were not addressed in any subsequent policy. Therefore, the most important Hurricane Katrina issues remain unabated. My Ombuds Model could fall on deaf ears.

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<sup>127</sup> Is there an assumption that the critical problems have been addressed by the passage of the Post-Katrina Act whereby FEMA created a disability coordinator position and a new pet policy?

## VII. BROADER IMPLICATIONS

*Katrina is a catastrophe that has affected us all, and that we each may be accountable for in some incremental measure (Jordan).*

### A. Next Steps

The Ombuds Model could have broad reach. It can apply to all crisis situations that involve high stakes, high visibility, and tremendous pressure. Most of these disaster scenarios have huge consequences for public trust and social and political capital. Unfortunately, manifest conflict, unchecked egos, turf wars, and poor communication are rampant and standard in many of these events.

Professional, mission-oriented relationships and clear communication are critical elements in all instances of joint problem-solving and quality decision-making. The potential for the Ombuds to filter out noise, confusion, and misinterpretation at disasters is the focus of this research. This role, however, can be extended to acrimonious management teams, dysfunctional meetings, important interfaces between organizations, and the coordination and sharing of information in war time or throughout the banking industry.

Future research could involve implementing my Model and evaluating the value of the Ombuds' presence and intervention. Obviously, no quantitative study could

produce a control disaster. The Ombuds must do a thorough self-reflection. Evaluation by others might be conducted with surveys or interviews after the crisis. As discussed above, however, there are clear reasons why an Ombuds would not be fully credited with success.

#### B. What's Next for New Orleans?

*It is better to live [in New Orleans] in sackcloth and ashes than to own the whole state of Ohio* (Spielman 82), quoting Lafcadio Hearn.

In January 2006 Blanco won a huge victory by proposing legislation, which later passed, consolidating the balkanized, patronage-ridden, and ineffective system of district levee boards (Horne 350-60). In 2009 the controversial, expensive, and little-used Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Corps project started in the 1960s was closed. Many believed it destroyed critical wetlands, exacerbated erosion, and contributed significantly to the Hurricane Katrina damage.

In 2009 New Orleans voters approved two important amendments to the city charter. First, all zoning and land use requirements must conform to each other. This is designed to create predictability, market confidence, and a more transparent and organized process for public participation. Second, a revenue source was dedicated to the newly created Inspector General's Office to work toward accountability and to counter mistrust, fraud, and waste. In addition, the City Council approved funds for an Economic Development Corporation to lead the city's economic growth across mayoral administrations (Brookings 7).

In February of 2010 Mitch Landrieu was elected Mayor of New Orleans, and the next day the New Orleans Saints won the Super Bowl. Today, there are more restaurants in New Orleans than before Katrina (G. W. Bush, *Decision Points* 332).

In April of 2010 a British Petroleum oil rig exploded, bringing renewed despair and economic hardship to the region. Many important social problems seem to be getting worse. For example, as of August 2010, 11.3 percent of New Orleans's squatters were over 62 years of age as opposed to 2.8 percent nationwide, and 87 percent of the squatters were disabled as opposed to 40 percent nationwide (Reckdahl). Notwithstanding the grim figures above, New Orleans is a place of spirit, renewal, and eternal hope.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

*Still, maybe this is not the end at all,  
Nor even the beginning of the end.  
Rather, one more in a long list of sorrows,  
To be added to the ones thus far endured*

Thomas Lynch, contemporary poet (Cable News Network and Andrews McMeel Publishing 6).

Hurricane Katrina, whether deemed a natural or unnatural disaster, is considered one of the most important events of our time (Erikson xviii). Within days it was designated an incident of national significance. Directly affecting Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, it caused billions of dollars of damage and altered many lives forever. The nation is itself forever changed because of the images, discourse, and stories flowing from this event, which seem to have no surcease.

There remains the real probability that a catastrophic hurricane of this magnitude will happen again. Weather patterns are making hurricanes in the Gulf more intense and more frequent. New Orleans is particularly vulnerable;<sup>128</sup> it sits an average of eight feet below sea level and is sinking. The Mississippi River sits on average about 14 feet above sea level and Lake Pontchartrain sits on average about one foot above sea level (Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and the Response to Hurricane

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<sup>128</sup> The Brookings Institute warns of the looming potential of future, devastating storms for New Orleans (Brookings). Foster and Giegengack state, "So we predict with confidence: the city can look forward to additional Katrina-like tragedies" (Foster and Giegengack 51).

Katrina 51). The city faces flood threats from the Mississippi River, Lake Ponchatraine, and internal drainage and runoff (Cumming, “Hurricane Katrina--Post Script” 2). It experiences continual loss of crucial barrier islands and wetlands (Tidwell 65).

Even if we rule out Louisiana and hurricanes altogether, however, catastrophic disasters affecting vulnerable populations and in urban areas are predicted to increase. More than half of the U.S. population lives in areas prone to natural disasters (Daniels, Kettl, and Kunreuther 3). Floods, droughts, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, and pandemic flu pose more and more dangers. The growing global interdependence dictates that a calamitous event in the United States would be felt around the world and vice versa.

Thus, the lessons learned from this event must not only include an examination of stymied resources and failed floodwalls. It must also involve analysis of the narratives and semiotics between the Key Parties involved in Katrina’s emergency management response. Analyzing their discourse as they responded to this crisis is fundamental to understanding what happened.

Through discourse and narrative analyses, positioning theory, and grounded theory, I found that Governor Blanco, Mayor Nagin, and the federal government representatives brought differing perspectives to this event that significantly interfered with their ability to communicate effectively. Two categories emerged: 1) disruptions, and 2) the fog of conversation. Disruptions, which means sources of conflict, were comprised of: 1) backstories of control and politics, information gaps, and history and

context; 2) the power words that were misunderstood or were used to exaggerate or deny the events; 3) positioning the problem elsewhere so that it was blamed on the other, embedded in regrets and excuses, or externalized; 4) malignant positioning by Brown of Blanco and by Nagin of his state and federal counterparts; and 5) the inartful reflexive positioning of Bush and Brown.

The second category was the fog of conversation, which included the failure to ask relevant questions and the failure to seek genuine answers. This dissertation analyzed values, agency, suspicion, apathy, lack of respect, and turning points in the relevant speech acts. Motivations, frames of responsibility, beliefs, and conflicting narratives were discussed. These themes impacted how the Parties made sense of this event. Their situational awareness, behavior, and decision-making were informed by their positioning systems, narratives, and discourse.

The unimaginable bungling of this emergency response demands a new policy: a standard operating procedure wherein an Ombuds is included in large scale disasters. I have enumerated many ways an Ombuds can use positioning theory and narrative and discourse analyses to shift disruptions, clear up the fog of conversation, and challenge the group's epistemological assumptions and story lines.

Four underlying themes are all too often present in most crises: 1) failure to recognize the extent of the problem and then to admit it; 2) a startling lapse in attention; 3) politics that shape policy decisions and communications at all levels and thereby undermine the mission; and 4) ongoing confusion as to who is in control, i.e., who has

authority to make certain critical decisions and bear responsibility. An Ombuds cannot solve these problems, but he/she can help.

The Senate Homeland Security Committee found that government leaders failed to think big and challenge existing response assumptions (Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs 35, 172). Nagin chided the politicians for thinking small, “They’re thinking small, man. And this is a major, major, major deal” (Brinkley 531)(Forman 134). Hiring an Ombuds would be one way of thinking “Big.”

Emergency management scholars state the “greatest challenge ... is to stretch our minds beyond familiar research questions and specializations so as to be innovative, even ingenious, in producing new understandings” (Cutter, Richardson, and Wilbanks 4). McEntire urges that this will require approaches that are far more vital for our comprehension of disasters and emergency management than multidisciplinary approaches of the past (McEntire and S. Smith 334).

The best solutions come when problems are looked at from highly interdisciplinary points of view (Burgess 2). Blending emergency management and conflict management can create a highly creative and imaginative multi-disciplinary perspective. The Ombuds can provide a vital, innovative, even ingenious role in improving emergency management response.



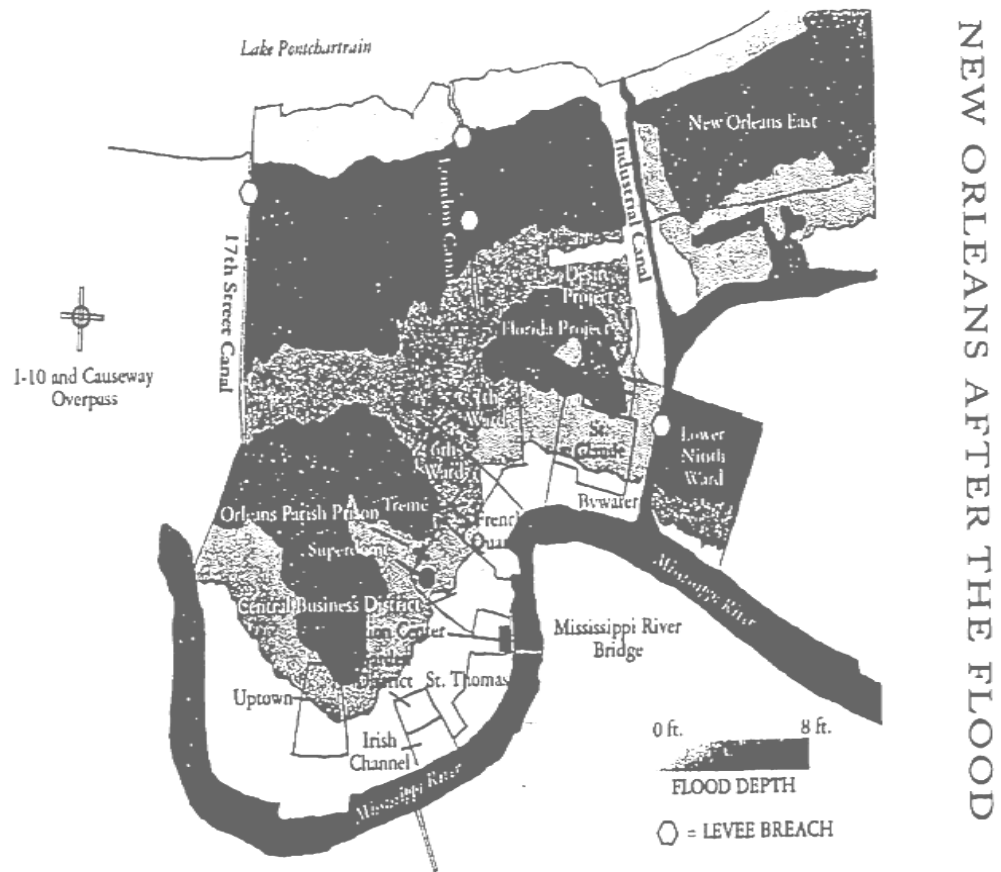


Figure 13 New Orleans Flood Depth Map (Vollen and Ying 309).

# NEW ORLEANS NEIGHBORHOODS

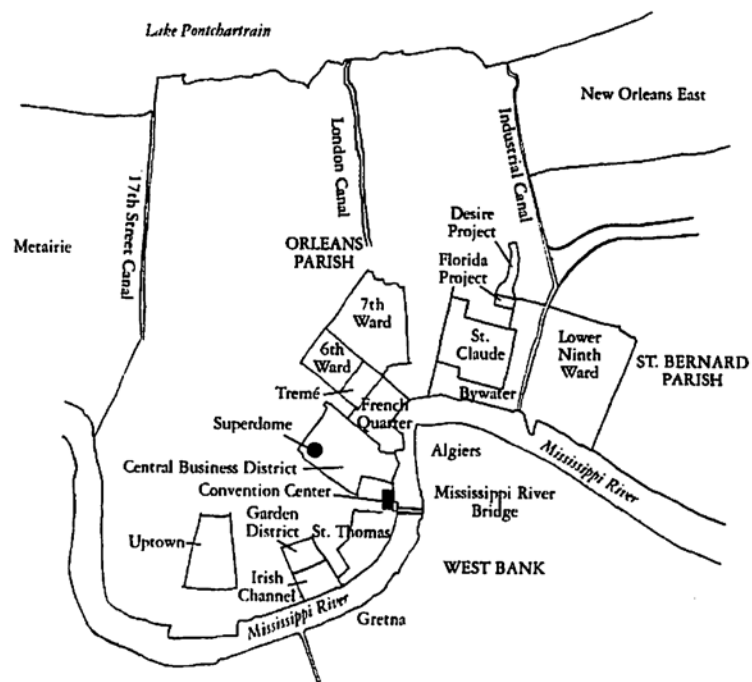


Figure 14 New Orleans Neighborhoods (Vollen and Ying 308).

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Cindy Mazur graduated with her B.A. in English Literature from Hartwick College in Oneonta, N.Y. Then, she earned an M. Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and served a bi-racial church on Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota as an ordained minister. This created an interest in Indian law. She went to Syracuse University College of Law and clerked for the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond. After working at a large D.C. law firm, Cindy received her LL.M. as a Teaching Fellow at Georgetown University. She received a scholarship to attend the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France. Currently, Cindy is the Director for Alternative Dispute Resolution at a federal agency delivering emergency management services. She lives in Northern Virginia.