GOD TALK: SHIFTING RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN POST-KATRINA
NEW ORLEANS

By

KATHRYN MICHELLE ELVEY

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Approved By:

Kenneth Hoglund, Ph.D., Advisor

Examining Committee:

Lynn Neal, Ph.D.

Steven Folmar, Ph.D.
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In 1960, Kenneth Burke wrote *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. In his book Burke comments on the rhetoric of religion and its uses. Using Burke’s analysis of religious rhetoric, this study attempts to show that Burke’s concepts of religion as a rhetorical device are applicable in a modern case study of post-Katrina New Orleans concerning the way words in the New Orleans community have taken on new meanings among both secular and religious institutions. Likewise, this case study will raise serious questions about why the language changed and what the implications are for society. This project shows how religious rhetoric in New Orleans has shifted in African American communities from being confined simply to the religious sphere, and how it has taken on more philanthropic overtones in the Protestant African American community and more racist overtones in the Catholic African American community. Since the tragedy of Katrina churches, religious organizations, and institutions have used their grassroots efforts to bring the city back to life. The African American community is the majority population in New Orleans, and they were also the population most affected by Katrina. In sum, this study shows how religious rhetoric shifted in Catholic African American communities and Protestant African American communities through a Burkian lens and presents the implications of what a shifting rhetoric means.
INTRODUCTION

In today’s society religious rhetoric is a topic that is not confined to the religious sphere or places of worship. In 1960, Kenneth Burke wrote *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. Using Burke’s analysis of religious rhetoric, this project shows that Burke’s concepts of religion as a rhetorically persuasive device is applicable in a modern case study of post-Katrina New Orleans concerning the way words in the New Orleans community have taken on new meaning among both secular and religious institutions. Likewise, this case study raises serious questions about why the language changed and what the implications are for society, and, more specifically, what the implications are for New Orleans both socially and religiously.

In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke only references the examples and case studies of Augustine and Genesis, and he then ends with an imaginary dialogue between Satan and God. By adding the twenty-first century example of post-Katrina religious rhetoric this paper will show that Burke is still applicable in a modern context. Before jumping into the applicability of Burke this project addresses specifically what Burke’s intentions were and how he defined rhetoric before applying his theories to the case of post-Katrina rhetoric.

More specifically the focus of this project will be on both Protestant and Catholic congregations in New Orleans that are predominantly African American. By working with the African American community in New Orleans this project examines the largest segment of the population affected by Katrina.
New Orleans History and Background

To begin to understand the way religious rhetoric has changed in New Orleans through the theoretical framework of Kenneth Burke one must first look at the unique qualities of New Orleans as well as the destruction that Katrina caused. To describe to someone who has never been to New Orleans the electricity, personality, and rhythm that the city has is hard if not impossible to do. It seems silly if not down right un-academic to describe a place as fierce, electric, moving, emotional, and jubilant all at once, yet setting foot in New Orleans you know immediately that this place is alive. In *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*, Michael Eric Dyson tried to capture the city’s persona by quoting Lawrence Powell a Louisiana historian. Powell described New Orleans as “quirky and endlessly fascinating.”¹ During my own brief time in New Orleans, not a day would go by without hearing someone say, “I couldn’t live anywhere else.” The people who live in New Orleans are fiercely loyal and would do anything for the city they love.

New Orleans was originally founded in the eighteenth century on swampy marshland. The city is surrounded by water; it has the Mississippi River to the south and Lake Pontchartrain to the north. The French Quarter was built mid-century on high ground right outside the Mississippi delta.² As New Orleans became a popular attraction the city began to expand. Canals, levees, and water pumping stations were made in order to keep the land dry as well as inhabitable. Over time the organic material that comprised the swamps began to compact and shrink causing the new city to fall seven to ten feet

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¹ Lawrence Powell as quoted in: Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), xi.

below sea level.³ New Orleans became a dry bowl surrounded by water from the north and south. Residents, meteorologists, and scientists feared any type of storm that could bring enough water to fill the bowl of New Orleans and leave it devastated and possibly uninhabitable. Katrina made those fears a reality.

August 29, 2005 was a day that those most loyal to New Orleans will never forget. A category five hurricane called Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the United States around 6:00 AM EST.⁴ Katrina’s winds were in excess of 150 miles an hour and created a storm surge⁵ of approximately fifteen feet. The storm surge and winds toppled three major levees, flooding the city and leaving over seventy-five percent of the greater New Orleans area under water.⁶ The breech in the levees⁷ caused water from the Mississippi and Lake Pontchartrain to continually flood into New Orleans. The residents of New Orleans were dismayed when the water continued to rise even after the hurricane was gone on August 30th.

Once the damage was done the people of New Orleans looked to the local, state, and the Federal government for the help they desperately needed. Unfortunately, no help was in sight. To exacerbate the already bleak circumstances it became obvious that those most devastated by the hurricane were the poorest inhabitants of the city, who were predominantly black. In an interview for National Public Radio conducted by Ed Gordon, he articulated in just a few words what so many people felt and thought during this time

³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
⁵A storm surge is a wave the accompanies a hurricanes landfall.
⁷There were two breeches on the Industrial Street Canal (which is in the Lower Ninth Ward) and three on the 17th St, London Ave, and Central Ave Levees. From: NOVA: Storm That Drowned a City, PBS.
when he said, “Hurricane Katrina blew the roof off poverty.”

8 Not only was poverty exposed, so was the “color of disaster.”

9 In 2004 the census Bureau reported that African Americans comprised 67.9 percent of the population affected by Katrina (Appendix A). That same year the Census Bureau reported that New Orleans had 103,127 people living in poverty (23 percent of its population), which is 76 percent higher than the national average of 13.1 percent (Appendix B). Unfortunately the numbers do not stop there. Even if people had wanted to evacuate during the mandatory evacuation issued on August 28, just 24 hours before the hurricane hit, they could not. With their pressing poverty levels, many of those affected most by the storm did not own cars. In the city of New Orleans 32.7 percent of the black population did not have access to a household automobile (Appendix C). This left the city’s poorest inhabitants stranded.

The day Katrina hit land CNN wrote that Mayor of New Orleans Ray Nagin estimated that “nearly one million people had fled the city and its surrounding parishes by Sunday night.” The article goes on to say that, “Between 20,000 and 25,000 others who

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9 This is a reference to the title of Michael Eric Dyson’s book, Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster.


11 Ibid. Poverty is defined by poverty thresholds. If the income of the family does not meet its poverty threshold (i.e. cannot properly support the family), then the members comprising the family are living below the poverty level. Please see the Census Bureau’s “Poverty” page for more information at: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/povdef.html.


remained in the city lined up to take shelter in the Louisiana Superdome, lining up for what authorities warned would be an unpleasant day and a half at minimum.” Unfortunately both the article and Mayor Nagin could not and did not foresee the amount of devastation that was about sweep over New Orleans. In the end about 30,000 people were in the Superdome when the storm hit and the overflow of 10,000-20,000 that arrived afterwards were put in the New Orleans convention center about one block away.  

Those who decided to take refuge in the Superdome became stranded in what they thought was going to be a safe place. However, the hurricane had ripped holes in the stadium leaving it exposed to rain water; it also lost power and water pressure. To add insult to injury water and food were in short supply and people were beginning to starve. New Orleans citizens were stranded for five days before help finally began to arrive. Dyson described the scene in his book saying, “Filth and feces, stench and urine, hunger and hopelessness, anarchy and anxiety, and darkness and death polluted the air as the stranded, largely black poor exiles were crammed into unforgiving spaces that reeked of unrelied horror for up to five days.” The situation in the convention center was not much better; the overcrowding, stench, and heat were unbearable.

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15 Ibid.


17 Ibid.

18 Michael Eric Dyson, Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster (New York: Basic Civitas), 71.
So where was the government? What was taking so long? How did they not realize this was going on? For the sake of space only a few of the many failures by local, state, and Federal officials can be addressed. As stated earlier the Federal government was nowhere to be seen when the hurricane hit. Local, state, and Federal officials were widely criticized for not acting quickly enough and failing to recognize where help was needed most. Federal investigations that occurred in light of the poor reaction time on the government’s part focused on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as Homeland Security.

Michael Brown was the director of FEMA when Katrina hit. Brown confessed on national television that it wasn’t until Thursday morning (24 hours after the hurricane hit) that he learned about the amount of suffering going on in the Superdome, in spite of the fact that the devastation of Katrina had been visible on every television and newsstand across the country. Likewise, the Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff was asked four days after the storm what he was doing to get food and water down to the Superdome and he responded that this was the first he had heard that people "don't have food and water in there." Clearly the Bush administration was not aware of how quickly the local conditions were sinking. At the Mobile Regional Airport at a press conference on September 2, 2005 (five days after the storm) Bush infamously praised

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20 Brown resigned from his position less than two weeks after Katrina. Ibid.


Michael Brown and FEMA for doing a great job, grinning and patting Brown on the back he said, “Brownie, you’re doing a heck of a job.” Bush’s statement could mean one of two things: he was blissfully unaware of the dire situation in New Orleans, or he actually believed that FEMA was doing a good job; in either case, the President was sorely misguided.

When help from FEMA finally arrived, its emergency management plans were poorly executed. In an article published by Fox News online, Terry Ebert the head of Homeland Security for New Orleans shared his feelings about FEMA he said, “This is a national emergency. This is a national disgrace. FEMA has been here three days yet there is no command and no control. We can send massive amounts of aid to tsunami victims, but we can’t bail out the city of New Orleans.” The command and control implemented by FEMA was bogged down by jurisdiction, authorization, and clearance. Hundreds of various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and even some governmental organizations were turned away or not called upon because they had not and would not be cleared by FEMA.

One of the most astounding instances of oversight on FEMA’s part was their failure to call in the U.S.S. Bataan which was waiting off the coast of Louisiana to receive authorization and permission to go in and execute search and rescue missions. The Bataan was equipped with hospital beds, physicians, helicopters, food and water.

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25 Michael Eric Dyson, Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster (New York: Basic Civitas,) 115-135.
However, it never got the call. Not only did FEMA not ask for help but they also turned it away, FEMA would not authorize entry of the Red Cross into New Orleans claiming that it was “too dangerous.” Renita Hosler the Red Cross’s spokeswoman said, "Right now access is controlled by the National Guard and local authorities. We have been at the table every single day [asking for access]. We cannot get into New Orleans against their [FEMA and Homeland Security] orders.”

However, FEMA was not the only government organization under fire. President Bush’s administration was scrutinized for dragging their feet on deploying the National Guard. It was not until four days after the hurricane hit that the National Guard arrived in New Orleans. However when the “help” arrived, it was criticized for not helping and contributing to the chaos and confusion. People, refugees, left in New Orleans began looting for survival. Kathleen Blanco, the governor of Louisiana, said she authorized the National Guard to shoot “hoodlums.” She went on to say:

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.

26Ibid., 121.
28Ibid.
29Michael Eric Dyson, Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster (New York: Basic Civitas,) 101, 164-171.
Blanco’s statements resounded with citizens and outraged many who believed that the looting was taking place in order to survive.\textsuperscript{32}

Many reports and citizens of New Orleans argued that the government should have known that the levees could not and would not sustain the hurricane’s winds and waters therefore government emergency aid and evacuation procedures should have been available as soon as the force and path of the hurricane was forecasted.\textsuperscript{33} In an interview done with Ariska Fortenberry, a survivor of hurricane Katrina by Charles Henry Rowell for \textit{Callaloo}\textsuperscript{34} magazine, Fortenberry says:

Hurricane Katrina, the failure of the levee system in New Orleans, and the resulting flooding gave us lots and lots of opportunities for people's feelings about the low value, the unimportance, the non-productivity of, the failed value of African American people to play out in everyday bureaucratic decision-making. This was evidently a place where the American values of one nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all, of, by, and for the people were not as deeply seeded as old fashioned religious values. And so moral people suffered because of a government caught in grid lock.\textsuperscript{35}

The ineptitude of the government clearly did not go unnoticed; Fortenberry’s serious comments about the failure of the government were played out all over the national media. \textit{The Daily Show with John Stewart} has a viewing audience that reaches into the millions. Stewart used the government’s slow reaction time as the focus of some of his segments. Though \textit{The Daily Show} is not considered a reliable news source, it did

\textsuperscript{32}Michael Eric Dyson, \textit{Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster} (New York: Basic Civitas), 99.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Callaloo} is a journal of African and African-American writing containing original work by and critical studies of black writers worldwide.

effectively satirize the fact that seemingly all of America knew what was going to happen when Katrina hit, and still the government was unresponsive.\textsuperscript{36}

Post-Katrina one of the most infamous speech acts concerning the (in)actions of the Bush administration was aired on live television on September 2, 2005 by recording artist, Kanye West. He accused George Bush, on a live telethon event that benefited the victims of Katrina, of not caring about the minorities that were most affected by the tragedy. He said, “They [the government] have given them [the National Guard] permission to go down and shoot us…George Bush doesn’t care about black people.”\textsuperscript{37} West’s remarks brought to light what a large number of people in New Orleans felt at the time: that the government had short changed the people of New Orleans because they were a predominantly African American population and poorest of the poor. According to a \textit{CNN/USA Today/Gallup} poll six in ten black people in New Orleans believe that race was a contributing factor to the slow reaction time of the government. The numbers were similar on whether it was thought that rescuers were slower because the victims were poor, with 63 percent of blacks blaming poverty compared to only 21 percent of whites that believed poverty was a contributing factor.\textsuperscript{38}

In the end, Louisiana’s Department of Health and Hospitals reported that 682 people in New Orleans died with an additional 199 deaths in the greater New Orleans area. The same report stated that, “…the mortality rate among blacks was 1.7 to 4 times


higher than among whites for people 18 years old and older.”\textsuperscript{39} The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that approximately seven weeks after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, “20.2% of housing units lacked water, 24.5% had no electricity, 43.2% had no telephone service, and 55.7% of households contained one or more members with a chronic health condition (Appendix D).”\textsuperscript{40} This increased potential hazards and sickness in the New Orleans area considerably.\textsuperscript{41}

Despite the ineptitude of the government, the loss of life, and the destruction of the city, there was still a silver lining, a small glimmer of hope. Above I stated that people who live in New Orleans are fiercely loyal to their city; they are also fiercely loyal to one another. Grass roots organizations, faith-based organizations (FBOs), and individual citizens rose to the occasion and helped rescue, evacuate, and provide for others in need. Since Katrina many task forces, committees, papers, and books have examined what went wrong and how things could have been different and almost all of them point out the amazing efforts of NGOs, FBOs, and the heroism of individuals that help contribute to saving lives and re-building New Orleans since Katrina.\textsuperscript{42}

On December 18, 2006 the Homeland Security Institute released its findings documenting the role of FBOs and NGOs titled, “Heralding Unheard Voices: The Role of FBOs and NGOs During Disasters.” The study was intended to show the proportional


\textsuperscript{40} Center for Disease Control, “Assessment of Health-Related Needs After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita --- Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, New Orleans Area, Louisiana, October 17--22, 2005,” Center for Disease Control Online, http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5502a5.htm.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

response of governmental organizations to other nongovernmental organizations and faith based organizations. Their findings showed that FBOs and NGOs “stepped in to fill the gaps when the geographic scales, intensities, and durations of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita overwhelmed the existing disaster response resources. FBOs and NGOs undertook a surprisingly large, varied, and demanding set of activities with extraordinary effectiveness.” Ultimately, the study showed that NGOs’ and FBOs’ ability to quickly and effectively respond to disaster made them a greater asset to recovery and rebuilding efforts than the Federal government. The report stated that the NGOs and FBOs “successes in providing services are a stark contrast to the many chronicled deficiencies and failures of government during the catastrophic 2005 hurricane season.”

Another report done by Lenor Ealy, of the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, echoes the research done by the Homeland Security Institute. In the report Ealy states:

> In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, bureaucratic systems inadequately facilitated resilience and recovery… by contrast, response and recovery efforts by numerous individuals and grassroots, community, and faith-based organizations—the existing and emergent organic structures of communities—nimbly helped to coordinate delivery of the material and non-material resources needed to foster resilience. Community-based organizations—including nonprofit and faith-based organizations, associations and clubs, and philanthropic foundations—possess critical local knowledge and the strongest motives for success in restoring communities after disaster.

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44 Ibid.

Clearly, mass efforts by FBOs and NGOs did not go unnoticed and these groups were able to assist in most cases more readily than the government.

About This Project

Only a few studies have been conducted on the way religious rhetoric in New Orleans has changed since Hurricane Katrina, and of those, the emphasis of the research has been placed falsely on divine retribution. Chapter II focuses on theodicy and divine retribution as a rhetorical pattern post Katrina but shows that it was not a phenomenon that took place in New Orleans but rather outside the city and on national level.

Likewise, in researching for this project I also found that very few studies have been conducted on the way religion, religious institutions, and organizations have had to change since 2005 in this area. Most of the research and literature to date has focused on the failure of the local, state, and the Federal government to properly and appropriately address Katrina both prior to and after the hurricane hit. As the end of the last section shows clearly, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and grass roots organizations played a major role in rescue efforts. Thus, questions about their experiences should be raised.

By approaching Katrina from a Burkian perspective, two different voices: those of Catholic and Protestant African Americans can be heard and, in turn, appropriately analyzed. Both of these groups’ experiences provide insight into the recovery process in New Orleans. This study attempts to discern the way these two different religious groups have had to change their notions on varying topics such as politics, emergency management, cooperation, and philanthropy. Kenneth Burke believed (as we will see

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46 See: Anne M. Arlinghaus, “Religion, Rhetoric, and Social Change After Hurricane Katrina,” Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Journal, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 2006; Michael Eric Dyson, Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster (New York: Basic Civitas,) 179-211;
more in depth in chapter I) that language is not a random act but that it is, “a strategic human response to a given situation.”\textsuperscript{47} Katrina was the situation, the group most affected was the African American community, and the responses of both the Catholic community and the Protestant community since Katrina has varied for a number of different reasons (see chapters III and IV).

The goal of this project is threefold. The first goal is to show that Burke and his theory of \textit{dramatis} (see chapter I) is still applicable in a modern context. Second, to show that religious rhetoric in New Orleans has changed and why. Both predominantly African American Catholic and Protestant congregations have altered the way they discuss and, ultimately as Burke says, view their specific religious organizations. And last, to provide possible answers for what the implications of a shifting rhetoric would mean both in New Orleans and for other places that have experienced tragedy on the same scale as New Orleans.

\textbf{Methods}

In this project various methods have been used in order to construct a well-rounded picture of the rhetoric being used by these two different FBOs. Sources such as websites, blogs, books, published speech acts, published interviews, and periodicals were used to provide information about New Orleans and give insight into the past and current situation there. Also, personal observations from my own experience in New Orleans, informal interviews, and formal interviews were all used to glean supporting information on the current rhetorical situation in New Orleans. Though this project is heavily based on research, interviews were used in order to provide information that might not be

readily available or noticeable. Different churches, congregants, and community leaders were picked at random.

In regards to my interview process, three specific groups of people were picked to answer a different set of questions on what they believe has changed in New Orleans since Katrina. The three groups are the following: Pastors/Priests of predominantly African Americans churches located in New Orleans, congregants of churches in New Orleans, and community leaders of grassroots organizations that helped to facilitate the rebuilding of New Orleans alongside FBOs.

Each group was picked for the type and breadth of information they could supply to this study. Congregational leaders have a firsthand view, and they led the charge on rebuilding efforts. Congregants can attest to the many changes that have occurred post-Katrina, for example if their church closed, what has moving meant to them? Last, grassroots organizations can give an outsider perspective of what they have seen FBOs doing. Some of the organizations used for this study are actually groups of churches that have come together to support one another as well as the congregations of all the faith-based organizations involved. For example, Churches Supporting Churches (CSC) is an organization of different predominantly Protestant African American churches that provide monetary and emotional support as well as news and information for one another. Organizations such as CSC are helpful indicators of the rhetoric used in New Orleans because of their involvement with such a large and connected religious community.

A total of 20 interviews were conducted, with a total of 18 people. Six interviews were conducted with pastors and two with priests. Four interviews were conducted with congregants of Catholic churches and four with congregants of Protestant churches. Last,
six interviews were conducted with grassroots leaders from various organizations such as Churches Supporting Churches and Beacon of Hope Resource Center (note, some of the pastors are also grassroots leaders).

Last, and most importantly, everyone chosen for this project identified themselves, their congregations, or their groups as working with, for, or in support of the African American community in New Orleans. New Orleans has a rich, multicultural, history, and is well known for its Creole ancestry. In an essay written by James Bennett titled, “Catholics, Creoles, and the Redefinition of Race in New Orleans,” he says:

Historically, individuals and institutions alike have relied heavily on physical appearance and genealogy for racial categorization, with dark skin the rumor of an African or even mixed-blood ancestor enough to make one be categorized as black, according to the one-drop rule. Yet skin color does not necessarily indicate place of origin, and the identity of ancestors is not easily determined or agreed on.

Thus, it is important to point out that while there are many different ethnic backgrounds in New Orleans, black is not synonymous with African American.

Ethical Considerations

This project, its questions, participants, benefits, and risks have been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wake Forest University. Each interview participant was informed of his or her rights and the risks involved before interviewing occurred. Each participant also signed an informed consent form stating that they were aware of their rights as a participant in this study. Upon request, names in this project have been changed in order to ensure anonymity.


49 Ibid., 202.
Kenneth Burke has written hundreds of articles, books, and lectures on rhetoric, identity, and symbolism. As stated earlier, this project will focus on his work, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. In this book Burke discusses, defines, and expounds upon his theory of dramatism. Burke also theorizes about where religious rhetoric comes from, how and why it changes over time. While this project focuses on *The Rhetoric of Religion*, other works of Burke’s will be used in order to set up some key terms and ideas that Burke has used to lay the foundation of his theory of dramatism and the way words change meaning over time. This chapter addresses the definition of rhetoric and how it’s used according to Burke, as well as key terms that support his theory: identification, consubstantiation, god-term, devil-term, and the dramatistic pentad. This chapter will also address some of the criticisms of Burke’s writing as well as why his theory was chosen for this project.

In his introduction to *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke outlines his specific goals. He hopes to bring about a greater understanding of the concept of “order.” Order is the innate need of man (human beings) to continually create hierarchies. Burke intends to not only explicate his concept of order but also to draw on six different analogies to prove his point. Burke shows in these analogies that the “religious” man borrows words from

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50 Below, you will notice, that this is one of the critiques of Burke, that he is constantly building off of old theories, thus when reading Burke one must have a substantial knowledge of his older works in order to grasp the current ones.


52 Ibid.
society and gives them religious connotations. These connotations then stay with the words even if they are borrowed back from the borrower. In other words (pun intended) because man’s vocabulary is confined to the secular, man must use words that are not inherently religious to define religious terms. In doing so, man makes a secular word “supernatural.” The secular world can still use these words, but because the religious community has picked it up it now has new, supernatural connotations; however, there is still the mark of the secular on the word. Thus, a word now retains both its secular and its religious connotations.

Marking words as religious or using religious words in secular terms is considered by Burke to be an “act.” Burke says language should be approached as a type of action rather than a way of knowledge. He called the way in which language functions as a symbolic method, dramatism. Dramatism, for many, is considered to be Burke’s greatest theoretical accomplishment. He states that life is a series of responses through the symbolic act of language, and all the responses are motivated by a specific situation. These responses through language do not and are not normally conscious decisions. Burke goes on to define dramatism as an act that “assumes a qualitative empirical difference between mental actions and mechanical motion.” He wants to separate the action of language from science. In other words, the words of Burke, he wants to ask

53 Ibid.
54 Burke uses the word Dramatism: from Drama. Burke believed that life was not like a play but that it was a play. Think of the Shakespearian concept, “All the worlds a stage.” See, Em Griffin.
56 Ibid.
questions about language not by using the scientific method but through a new method, dramatism. According to Burke, dramatism begins with the act and form, whereas “scientism” begins with the perception.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, in order to truly study what people are saying from a dramatist perspective the analyst cannot look at just cold hard facts, but also the feeling, the non-scientific. He goes on to state that people are capable of symbolic actions, and that language is a way of expressing these symbolic actions.

In applying his theory of dramatism, Burke looked at and analyzed St. Augustine’s \textit{Confessions} in his \textit{Rhetoric of Religion}. It is one thing to say that the words of Augustine have been transformed and given new meanings being that Augustine is now widely read and studied in the Christian context. This leaves much to be desired regarding the use of words in a 21\textsuperscript{st} century context. Can words still take on a new “supernatural” context even though there has not been a long, well documented history, from the author or speech giver, until now? This brings into play the case study of New Orleans and the motivation for a change of the modern rhetoric.

**Key Terms: Defining Rhetoric**

In \textit{A Rhetoric of Motives}, Burke discusses the traditional principles of rhetoric. He acknowledges that the basic definition of rhetoric from Cicero, to Aristotle, to Augustine is the art of persuasion. Burke points out that persuasion to action might not always be “out-and-out action”\textsuperscript{59} but, “Insofar as a choice of action is restricted, rhetoric seeks rather to have a formative effect upon attitude.”\textsuperscript{60} Thus, poetry and novels can be considered rhetorical devices as well, so long as they affect the listener in some way.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

What makes Burke unique is that he does not accept the given definition of rhetoric. As *A Rhetoric of Motives* continues he tries to get to the heart of rhetoric, what makes it tick and what makes it persuasive. He suggests, and convincingly so, that rhetoric is identification with the audience. Burke is aware that identification is not a wholly new concept but the emphasis he places on identification makes it a new way of defining rhetoric. In an essay written by Marie Nichols, titled “Kenneth Burke and the New Rhetoric,” she succinctly describes what Burke is doing. She says, “The key term for the “old rhetoric” was *persuasion* and its stress upon deliberative design. The key term for the “new rhetoric” is *identification* and this may include partially unconscious factors in its appeal.” Thus, rhetoric is identification. Burke comments on why it is important in having identification and understanding, he argues, “Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man’s very essence.”

Burke realizes that sometimes identification might be too broad a term, he quotes Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* when he says, “It is not hard to praise Athenians among Athenians.” But, he continues by pointing out that the more the speaker has in common

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60 Ibid.

61 In, *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* the editors state, “that Burke is quoted as stating that this monograph is the best analysis of his rhetoric ideas appearing to date.” James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1976), 183.


with the audience the more persuasive he or she will be. This identification can be expressed verbally using style, for example, speaking in the vernacular. Returning to the Nichols quote above she references the “unconscious.” This is a way that the speaker uses their rhetoric stylistically, the way someone speaks in their everyday life may be different from the way they address someone else or an audience. This can be a conscious or unconscious way to get the audience to identify more closely and thus agree with the speaker.

This idea of identity comes into play more specifically when looking at the way both religious leaders and political leaders have addressed audiences in New Orleans since Katrina. After the hurricane, political leaders such as Nagin often invoked the name of God and he lavished praise on the faith-based organizations that were providing much needed relief.\(^65\) Nagin’s use of God and religion in his rhetoric plays into the concept of civil religion. The idea of civil religion was a term originally coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and is used to describe political, civil institutions that invoke religion.\(^66\) Civil religion is often used in today’s society by politicians to garner support from a heavily Judeo-Christian society.\(^67\) By using the name of God it easier for politicians, such as Nagin, to identify with their audience. The more one can identify with the speaker the more one is persuaded to listen, consider, and think about what the speaker has to say, which, in turn leads to agreement and alignment with the speaker’s frame of reference.

\(^65\) James Varney, “Religion, Politics Mix After Storm,” *Times-Picayune*, November 21, 2005


\(^67\) Ibid.
Identification is hard to pinpoint. How exactly does a person define who they are? Is it by race, gender, and class? Or is by different means, such as appearance? For Burke the range of identification markers is endless and overlapping. He uses the term “substance” to describe what makes up an individual; it is all their substances combined that make them an individual. Even Burke acknowledges this is not the most scientific approach to defining one’s self through substance. He explains, “However, “substance” is an abstruse philosophical term, beset by a long history of quandaries and puzzlements.”

Because of the ineffective nature of substance he sets aside trying to define a person and instead focuses on the things that make individuals alike, as well as able to identify with one another, he calls these overlaps of identification, consubstantiatiality. He says, “… in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes that make them consubstantial.” Here, Burke is affirming that people who live and work together develop similar thought patterns. In an essay by Em Griffin he points out that rhetorical style has just as much to do with identification than the content of the speech act, he argues, “Audiences sense a joining of interests through style as much as through content. Burke said that the effective communicator can show consubstantiality by giving signs in language and delivery that his or her properties are the same as theirs.” These are the same, sometimes unconscious, factors of which Nichols spoke.

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
Burke also addresses the differences that abound among individuals. He says, “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division.”\(^{72}\) This harkens back to Burke’s quote that a rhetorician is needed to proclaim unity.\(^{73}\) To sum up all the above points, Em Griffin does so concisely, stating, “But without some kind of division in the first place, there would be no need for identification. And without identification, there is no persuasion.”\(^{74}\) Thus the Burkeian cycle for rhetoric is complete using division, identification, and consubsantiality, which result in persuasion.

**Other Key Terms: Dramatistic Pentad, God-Term, Devil-Term**

As stated earlier, dramatism, as defined by Burke is the motive(s) behind any speech act. In his book, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, he compares dramatism to a methodological, scientific approach, he says motivation can be compared to, “…flat cause-and-effect or stimulus-and-response.”\(^{75}\) In accessing dramatism Burke created a systematic way to address motivation, titled the dramatistic pentad. He says,

In a founded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the *act* (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicated what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*.\(^{76}\)

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\(^{73}\) Ibid.

\(^{74}\) Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 290.

\(^{75}\) Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1941), 103 and 106.

Here, Burke identifies that act, agency, purpose, scene, and agent, make up the pentad and are the tools that will help identify motivation for a speech act. In Marie Nichols essay she explains the cause-and-affect relationship that the pentad addresses. She says:

One might illustrate by saying that, for instance between scene and act a logic prevails which indicates that a certain quality of scene calls for an analogous quality of act. Hence, if a situation is said to be of a certain nature, a corresponding attitude toward it is implied.\(^77\)

With Katrina we will see that certain acts were taken in response to Katrina and access the agents, agency, and responses that occurred (the cause- and –affect). According to Burke, every act is motivated by a given scene, here, Katrina.

In analyzing the pentad Em Griffin gives the reader another clue as to what Burke was trying to accomplish with the pentad. He writes, “By evaluating the ratio of importance between individual pairs (scene-agency, agency-act), the critic [reader or listener] can determine which element provides the best clue to the speaker’s motivation.”\(^78\) He goes on to say, “When a message stresses one element over the other four, it reveals a speakers philosophy or worldview.”\(^79\) This will be paramount in understanding the current rhetoric in New Orleans because it lays the groundwork for analyzing the speech acts that this project will be examining.

Another Burkian term that needs to be analyzed is “god-term.”\(^80\) Words are constantly evolving to fit the speech and thought of those who are using them. God-term


\(^78\) Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*, 291.

\(^79\) Ibid.

is a way of giving new meaning to a word that is used often and in a certain context. In *A First Look at Communication Theory* Em Griffin defines what god-term means from a Burkian perspective, he says, “The speaker’s god-term is the word to which all other positive words are subservient. When critic’s discover the god-term, they should avoid dictionary definitions as a way of determining exact meaning.”  

This is one way to examine the way in which speech has changed over time, something that is of prime interest to Burke in *The Rhetoric of Religion*. Griffin also identifies devil-term as being the opposite of the god-term. The devil-term is a word that stands for everything that is evil. In a social setting, once a listener identifies the devil-term they must understand everything associated with it is tarnished in some way and throw out all preconceived notions of the original term.  

**Critiques of Burke**

Burke has been widely recognized as one of the foremost rhetoricians of the twentieth century. His work has been used in fields from sociology to religion and through reading his works one can see that he has considerable amounts of knowledge on the history of rhetoric and a wide-ranging panoply of sources to support his theories. With this in mind it is apparent that one can get lost in his thought process. He is constantly jumping back and forth from famous theory and theoreticians, to philosophical thought, to literary works. To pick up on his anecdotes and examples the reader must

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82 Ibid. I could not find any use of the devil term in Burke’s work, however it does not mean that its not there. It is also intuitive to assume that there would be a companion to the god-term and will serve as a great source when looking at the way people in a post-Katrina society view organizations such as FEMA.

have a keen eye. In *The Rhetoric of Western Thought*, the editors start off their assessment of Burke by stating, “Notwithstanding Burke’s provocative insights and memorable phrases, his works are often marred by intricate details, obscure allusions, and troubling digressions…” So, even these men, who have edited an edition encompassing rhetoricians from Cicero to Richard Weaver, have a problem understanding the complexity of Burke.\(^8^5\)

Likewise, as stated at the beginning, Burke is constantly referencing his own work and assuming the reader has a vast knowledge of his theories. For example, Burke references the “god-term” as one of the keys to his analogies at the beginning of *The Rhetoric of Religion*, however he never defines the term nor goes into it later; he simply assumes the reader knows what a “god-term” is.\(^8^6\) That is why much of this section references earlier works of Burke’s because without understanding his earlier works it makes grasping parts of *The Rhetoric of Religion*, hard if not impossible. Marie Nichols speaks to this problem when she says, “To read one of his volumes independently, without regard to the chorology of publication, makes the problem of comprehension even more difficult because of the specialized meaning attached to various words and phrases.” It is surprising to hear that someone who was praised by Burke for her analysis of his work even had a problem understanding him fully.\(^8^7\)

Yet, these criticisms of Burke are minor and cannot compare to the amount of praise he has received as well as how applicable his concepts are to many situations. Of

\(^8^4\) Ibid.

\(^8^5\) Ibid.


\(^8^7\) See: footnote 10.
the authors that I have referenced who have written about Burke, almost all of them lavish him with praise for his additions to rhetorical theory and linguistics. In *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* the editors say, “The legacy Burke has left to communication theory and literary criticism is remarkable in its conception and execution.” He is even said to be, “One of the few truly speculative thinkers of our time” and “unquestionably the most brilliant and suggestive critic” to write in America. Clearly, just because Burke is lofty in his thought process does not mean that his ideas and theories have been lost on the public, rather, one just has to try that much harder to understand his work.

**Applying Burke**

Burke’s theory of dramatism, speech being a symbolic act that is designed in response to a given situation as well as the way words change, will provide insight into the current rhetoric in New Orleans. The post-Katrina rhetoric has had a very distinct tone. Religious as well as institutional terms have taken on whole new meanings within the greater community of New Orleans. These terms cannot now be separate from their new definitions. Politics has become synonymous with corruption (not that it was not always, however now it is more blatant if not downright literal), and religious institutions have become the leaders of rebuilding—not only for participants in religion, but for the

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community at large. Thus corruption and organized religious institutions are a manufactured dialectic in the greater New Orleans area. As the following chapters will show these changes were motivated by Katrina. Both the Protestant and Catholic communities have changed their views on government, emergency management, race, and religion all at once. Speech acts, blogs, and interviews all show that Katrina has motivated individuals to take action (remember that this does not imply “out-and-out action”). By using the dramtistic pentad, god-terms, and devil-terms to examine post-Katrina rhetoric Burke’s theories help to show that words have taken on new meanings which now shape the way New Orleanians view their society and religious institutions. However, for the purpose of this project it is important to point out that this is a generalized look at the way terms have changed and does not focus on one or two words but on how the whole institutional structure is viewed.

Burke claims that changing words over time is not merely referential, but in fact “does add a ‘new dimension’ to the things of nature.”⁹² Likewise, his theory of dramatism states that the symbolic act of language and the changing of language are motivated by specific events. When applying the case study of Katrina many of Burke’s main arguments and approaches to language are proven true. For example, Katrina as applied to dramatism shows that language reacted symbolically to this particular event. Burke says, “words transcend non-verbal nature.”⁹³ By saying this, Burke is implying that people’s unconscious thoughts, actions, and behaviors are all symbolized through words. Because of the rhetorical shift in New Orleans, Burke is implying—and this paper is showing—that there is a literal shift taking place. The impetus of, the motivation behind


⁹³ Ibid.
the change in religious rhetoric relates directly to the corruption of the government and the trust in religious institutions for basic human needs.

Often, the way language reacts to a situation is not examined as stated in the introduction I have not found any work that has been done accessing the way rhetoric in New Orleans has changed and what this could mean for New Orleans society. Using New Orleans as a case study will help provide insight into other current situations and the way rhetoric may have functioned in response to those situations. For example, if one were to look at the 9/11 or the Obama campaign, it is probable that language reacted symbolically in these situations as well. The importance of the reaction may be miniscule and unimportant; however, the reaction indicates some type of change in thinking within a community or an entire culture at large. The case of Katrina, however, is significant because it may symbolize a shift in the whole way of thinking about religious institutions, not only in New Orleans, but across the nation as well.94

Burke’s theories have given theoreticians, linguists, sociologists, and ethnographers, a way to look at rhetoric critically and analyze it in an efficient and organized manner. He lays the ground for this research and as the next two chapters will show his theories help provide profound insight into the current rhetoric in New Orleans.

94 Please see Chapter III for the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference’s response to Katrina and the role of religious institutions.
CHAPTER II
THEODICY: A NON-ISSUE

When I first began my research for this project, I assumed that everyone affected by Katrina would be waving his or her fists in anger at God asking, “Why?” However, I found that it was not people from New Orleans that blamed God or thought it was God’s doing, but people on the outside, people who were looking at New Orleans in disgust for its reputation of loose morals. Before going into the specifics of how predominantly African American Protestant (Chapter III) and Catholic (Chapter IV) churches have used rhetoric post-Katrina, I want to take a moment to dispel any preconceived notions that post Katrina people from New Orleans directed their anger towards a higher power. Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines theodicy as “defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil.”\(^95\) In other words, reasons why bad things happen if God is good. It is important to address this issue in my work because anyone doing research about post-Katrina rhetoric will face this question repeatedly and often times come to the conclusion that there was an overwhelming sense of theodicy present in New Orleans post-Katrina. Instead, as later chapters will show, anger was directed at secular authorities. This chapter serves as an important reminder that theodicy, while it was present on a national level, was not present in New Orleans, at least to the extent that one might be led to believe.

Just the Facts

Citizens of New Orleans did not see Katrina as a retributive act of God. In a poll done by ABC News and The Washington Post, it found that of the people who did believe

that Katrina was an act of god, “just 8 percent see it as a punishment. About half see it as a warning sign, just over a quarter say it's for a reason we cannot understand, and 14 percent say it's a test of faith.” These numbers show that a large percentage of people who were religious did not see the hurricane as an act of divine retribution. Everyone that I personally spoke with in New Orleans for this project seemed to agree with the idea that Hurricane Katrina was not a retributive act of God. Not one person blamed God for the hurricane hitting New Orleans and understood it for what it was: a force of nature. So, if people were not talking about the hurricane as a form of retribution or a symbol of God’s anger, then why was I led to assume this would be the case? Answer: the media.

Post-Katrina, everyone seemed to have an opinion about what went wrong in the rescue efforts, why New Orleans was ignored, and what God’s role in all this was. The media provided stories and insights from leaders from all types of religious organizations. As stated in the introduction, the media picked up on the government’s ineptitude. However, that is not the only thing that the media focused on. Dyson discusses the effect of the media and its response to Katrina in his book when he states:

If race grabbed the biggest headlines in the aftermath of Katrina because of poverty and politics, its force was also felt in other dimensions of the cultural and personal response to the hurricane. The media became a big part of the story. Reporters’ anger at the government’s tragic delay leaped off allegedly neutral pages and TV screens.…

Here, Dyson touches on a profound point, the media is not neutral; they report on issues that will get ratings, and in order to get ratings there must be controversy.

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97 Michael Eric Dyson, Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster (New York: Basic Civitas,) 141.
In a book titled, *Buzzmarketing: Get People to Talk About Your Stuff*, author Mark Hughes, the vice president of Half.com, discusses the best ways to get noticed by the media. Each chapter provides specific “maxims” to get attention. Here are just a few that are relevant, “Stir up controversy and you’ve got an instant media story.”\(^{98}\) Or, “create a story that’s already hot in the media.”\(^{99}\) Last, “create an unusual or outrageous story to capture the media.”\(^{100}\) Below, looking at the stories and ideas that are put forth in the media by religious leaders it seems that all of them have tapped into the “buzzmarketing” concept. Whether they truly believe these ideas, are trying to get attention for their cause or themselves, or all of the above is not important. What is important is that they captured the medias attention and in doing so, led the public to believe that theodicy did in fact play a role in post-Katrina thought.

**Theodicy in the Media**

So what were people saying that grabbed the media’s attention? How controversial could they really have been? Below are just a few examples of the numerous perspectives that gained media attention after Katrina. Every controversial subject from homosexuality, foreign politics, abortion, and race are mentioned. It is important to note that none of the people in this report or others that I have read regarding these issues are from New Orleans, except for one (see Nagin’s speech below). Some religious leaders even had multiple explanations for Katrina, such as Reverend John Hagee.

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\(^{98}\) Mark Hughes, *Buzzmarketing: Get People to Talk About Your Stuff* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 86.

\(^{99}\) Ibid., 94.

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 85.
Reverend Hagee, from San Antonio, Texas, is the CEO of Global Evangelism Television, a well-known evangelical leader, and a lobbyist in Washington, DC for the Christians United for Israel movement. He stated that, “consequences await those who do not obey God’s will.” He had a number of theological explanations for why Katrina occurred. Hagee believed God sent Hurricane Katrina because of America’s role in helping Israel forcibly remove Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip. He equated the thousands of displaced Jews in Israel to the thousands of Americans who were displaced by Katrina. He was not the only one who felt this way; Ovadia Yosef, a prominent ultra-Orthodox Israeli rabbi, who lives in Jerusalem, agreed with Hagee, citing Bush’s support of the August 2005 withdrawal of Jewish settlers. In talking about Bush and Katrina, Yosef said, “It was God’s retribution. God attacked America and the prayers of the oppressed were answered.”

Returning to Hagee, we see that his explanations did not stop at foreign politics and divine retribution. He went on to say that God sent Katrina because of the homosexual population in New Orleans. The same day Katrina hit New Orleans there was going to be a gay pride parade through the French Quarter. Hagee said:

I believe that New Orleans had a level of sin that was offensive to God… There was to be a homosexual parade there on the Monday that Katina came- there a

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102 John Hagee, “John Hagee Says God Sent Katrina,” Youtube, http://www.youtube.com/index?ysession=MOvKTID7wtjDsRjM966dvdYjkVDucj8tZvI_poHpP_tA1o3Xq1I7Kh2. This video has been taken down since I first accessed it due to “terms of use violation.” For more information on these comments you can see Think Progress’s website: http://thinkprogress.org/2008/04/23/hagee-katrina-mccain/

103 Ibid.

promise of demonstration of homosexuality that these parades has never been seen before- and I believe that God was punishing New Orleans.¹⁰⁵

Rev. Dwight McKissic, senior pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas had his own reasons to explain why Katrina occurred, including (but not limited to) the gay pride parade. He said:

New Orleans flaunts sin in a way that no other places do. They call it the Big Easy. There are 10 abortion clinics in Louisiana, five of those are in New Orleans. They have a Southern Decadence parade every year and they call it gay pride. When you study Scripture, it’s not out of the boundaries of God to punish a nation for sin and because of sin...They openly practice voodoo and devil worship in New Orleans. You can’t shake your fist in God’s face 364 days a year and then ask, ‘Where was God when Katrina struck?’¹⁰⁶

Each of these individuals grabbed the media’s attention with their remarks, and each tapped into an issue that was important to them because of their ideals, and that tied into the situation of contemporary society.

Of the speeches that were given regarding theodicy only one came from inside New Orleans. Mayor Nagin said, “And as we think about rebuilding New Orleans, surely God is mad at America. He’s sending hurricane after hurricane after hurricane. And it’s destroying and putting stress on this country. Surely he’s not approving of us being in Iraq under false pretenses.”¹⁰⁷ Mayor Nagin’s comments are not indicative of the feelings of other people in New Orleans (see below) and he was widely panned after giving this speech. Jed Horne in his book Breach of Faith criticized Nagin saying, “The invocation of the deity as an explanation of the disaster was a bizarre rhetorical strategy


more familiar with the rantings of the far right.”108 He goes on to state, “Nagin’s mimicry of the Bible-thumpers style had been an oafish- a goofball of a speech…”109 While Nagin is from New Orleans, most would not claim his views as their own. Likewise, in all the interviews I conducted, everyone seems to look down on Nagin for the corruption that was rampant in his cabinet, his poor job while in office, and his multiple public embarrassments (i.e. “The Chocolate City” speech).110 His comments regarding God’s involvement are not reflective of the mentality in New Orleans and his often out of touch behavior, and the reaction of the citizens to him, prove that he should not be considered a representative mouthpiece for the people of his city.

There are just a few of the many outrageous and hurtful things that people said trying to grab the attention of the media post-Katrina. All of the speakers mentioned above have a history of making it into the news for making comments that are politically and ideologically driven. Every single one of them tapped into the buzzmarketing concepts to get noticed, and put their personal agendas at the forefront of the media.

Eric Dyson addressed the question of theodicy in his work as well as some of the above statements. He aptly summed up his thoughts and feelings on theodicy and the nature of divine retribution when he said:

Of course, one supposes by this logic that where wind fails, quaking earth quenches queer desire all the same. But thousands of straight people die in earthquakes, just as they do in hurricanes. Did no conservative Christians die in the flood? Either God’s aim is off, or the advocates of divine wrath believe that these innocents are the lateral damage. But does God punish the innocent to get a message to the guilty? What about the babies who died, who practiced neither

108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Jed Horne, Breach of Faith, 313.
abortion nor voodoo, and who hadn’t claimed their sexual orientation or engaged in racial politics? Such a gesture is dirty pool, even for divinity.\footnote{Michael Eric Dyson, \textit{Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster} (New York: Basic Civitas,) 183.}

In sum, Dyson’s words echo the sentiments of so many of the people of New Orleans. To them it seems ridiculous that God would punish the innocent alongside the guilty. What came to light, throughout my work, is consistent with Dyson’s comments. People said they believe God was not trying to punish the people of New Orleans as a whole or even as a few, but that Katrina was natural disaster that could not have been avoided.

\textit{If You Save Me I Will Come to Your Church: The Truth on the Ground}

As stated earlier, not one person I interviewed for this project, in the religious sphere, believed that God was trying to punish them or anyone else, thus of 17 interviews all of the interviewees agreed that Katrina was not an act of divine retribution. Below are just a few of the varied responses I received when I questioned people in New Orleans about God’s role in the Hurricane. Although I interviewed 20 people, and have over 20 hours of interview tapes, for the sake of brevity I have only included some of the most poignant and memorable quotes, ones that summarize what so many others said during our discussions.\footnote{All transcripts, recorded interviews, and informed consent forms have been kept and cataloged in accordance with the IRB.}

Pastor Walker is one of the many people I spoke to about his experience with Katrina. He has been a pastor at Noah’s Ark Missionary Baptist Church for 11 years; it is a predominantly African American church, located in a “rough neighborhood.”\footnote{Willie Walker, Interview, April 2, 2010.} During my research he has became a friend and a confidant. I interviewed him multiple times for
this project and his candid answers as well as down to earth attitude made him a wonderful informant. He has not only helped me to answer some of the more difficult questions I have faced but also has set me up with many more contacts and interview participants for this project. He has been my longest\textsuperscript{114} and closest contact in New Orleans concerning this project; however, our official interviews for this project did not take place until recently.

What is so interesting about Pastor Walker is his involvement in the community after the storm. Walker stayed in New Orleans during the hurricane. He is the only pastor that I spoke with who stayed during the storm, thus, his firsthand accounts are moving, as well as telling of the attitude that was present (and still is present) in New Orleans during that time. During his rescue efforts he ended up meeting up with the actor Sean Penn, and together they went out in the toxic waters of New Orleans and rescued people stuck neck-deep in sewage and swamp water.\textsuperscript{115}

When I posed the theodicy question to Pastor Walker he seemed baffled. To him the answer was simple: people were not looking to blame God, they were thanking God for their lives. He said, “Well, during Katrina when I was rescuing people, a lot of people started talking about God, and a lot of people were, ‘if you get me out of this I will serve you, God,’ and a lot of them said, ‘I will come to your church,’ and I said well, ‘you don’t have to do that, just go to somebody’s church’...I saw a lot of people re-dedicate their lives.”\textsuperscript{116} To Walker, no one seemed to blame God. Even since Katrina, 

\textsuperscript{114} I first spoke to Pastor Walker on April 21, 2009. We have spoken often since.

\textsuperscript{115} Willie Walker, Interview, April 2, 2010.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
people haven’t turned their backs on Him because of the storm. I spoke with some of his congregation during my time there and was able to formally interview some of them. Once again, no one I interviewed from his congregation or other congregations believed that the hurricane was some form of punishment but was simply, “a natural disaster.”

Walker is not the only person who took notice of the continuation of faith during and after Katrina. Many of the accounts I came across during my research documented people praying or singing hymns during the storm. For example, in his book, Jed Horne tells the story of mother and daughter, Patrina and Keia Peters, as they struggle to stay alive during the storm. The two women stayed at home during Katrina, and as the water began to rise they had no choice but to go out on to their roof. The storm was raging all around them while trees and houses that had been lifted off their foundations knocked against their house. As this was going on, Patrina “began to sing at the top of her voice: ‘Come by here, Lord. Come by here, Lord. I need you, my Lord. Come by here.’”

Interestingly, another pastor I spoke with, Aldon Cotton, stated the same point: that nationally people were pointing the finger at God, but in New Orleans, people were preoccupied with other things, such as losing their house, which only led to any type of philosophical questioning later on. Rev. Cotton said that he heard stories about “some pastor in San Francisco” who was saying New Orleans was struck by Katrina as a punishment for the sin that takes place there. Rev. Cotton went on to jokingly say, “well if that’s the case, then San Francisco is in BIG trouble.”

117 Erica Smith, Interview, April 2, 2010.
When looking at the issue from a Catholic perspective, I turned to Erica Smith.\textsuperscript{120} Erica Smith was a member of, a predominantly African American Catholic church, in New Orleans, which she said had a “vibrant congregation.”\textsuperscript{121} She was a lecturer in her church as well as a member of the “the dream team” which thought up and implemented social service programming for the youth and elderly of her parish. After Katrina, her church had to combine with another church located close by. Smith explained that many people in her church had a very serious problem going to a new parish because historically, this new parish had not allowed blacks to attend.\textsuperscript{122} Smith explained that her church community was lost. The church where her grandmother, who was born in 1911, went would no longer be a staple in her life. It was the diocese that made the ultimate decision to close down her church and “force” their members to attend a new parish.\textsuperscript{123} When I asked Smith if people lost their faith, or questioned God after Katrina she replied with:

I think people were so challenged, I guess it’s like anything, any loss, of a parents or a sibling, not as severe, but it’s a loss. I think you go through some of the same adjustments. Faith was not lost, but faith in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church was tested. But I don’t think faith has nothing to do with this. Actions are of men. Faith is connected to a belief in a power that transcends human nature and actions. Faith was not lost.\textsuperscript{124}

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\textsuperscript{119} Aldon Cotton, Interview, April 3, 2010.
\textsuperscript{120} It was Erica Smith’s experience post-Katrina that led me to look at Catholic Churches in New Orleans. Her story about the church closings of predominantly African American Catholic Churches astounded me. See Chapter IV.
\textsuperscript{121} Erica Smith, Interview, April 1, 2010.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
For Smith, the loss of her church and her church community was a test of her faith in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church; however, it was not a test of her faith in God (something that will be examined in Chapter IV).

Above are just a few of the many reactions from the people who live and work in New Orleans and have had to deal with the ramifications of a post-Katrina life. In many cases, faith was not shaken, and in some cases it was strengthened.\footnote{Opal Harrison, interview, April 12, 2010.} Only those from the outside thought or stated that God played a role in destroying New Orleans. Though I have only provided a few snapshots of people’s reactions I think they are some of the more poignant examples.

**WWKBD: What Would Kenneth Burke Do?**

Given the above information there is not a lot that Kenneth Burke would say on the matter. Simply, if people are not talking about theodicy, then it is an issue that does not need to be addressed. As I stated before, nobody that I spoke with saw God as doling out punishment for some type of wrongdoing. Instead, everyone seemed to acknowledge the fact that this was a natural disaster, and that if anything; the government (man) should have done a better job in protecting the people of New Orleans, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

However, Burke would point out that Katrina was the cause (scene) that led to an effect. The effect on the rhetoric outside of New Orleans was varied and sometimes used as a way to shame and blame people for ideologies that do not fit in line with one’s personal beliefs, whether they are regarding abortion or homosexuality. As the next
chapter will show, Katrina was still the cause (scene), which led to a much different rhetorical effect within New Orleans.¹²⁶

Conclusion

When looking at post-Katrina rhetoric in New Orleans, it is important to separate the rhetoric of those on the outside from those on the inside who were directly affected by the hurricane. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, anyone assessing the rhetoric of post-Katrina New Orleans would be hard pressed to ignore the mass amounts of publicity that individuals such as Dwight McKissic received post-Katrina. He is brilliant at tapping into buzzmarketing concepts, getting his name in the media, and pushing his agenda, however his opinion is not representative. Also, people such as Mayor Nagin are not representatives for the opinions of the common citizen in New Orleans. Rather, there was an overwhelming sense of faith in God after Katrina. Those who had faith prior to the storm, placed their trust in God to help them get through the storm.

¹²⁶ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1941), 103 and 106.
CHAPTER III
AFRICAN AMERICAN PROTESTANT REHTORIC: A COMMUNITY UNITED

Now that the myth of theodicy as a common rhetorical pattern post-Katrina has been dispelled, examination of the individual religious groups within the African American community and their particular rhetorical changes can begin. First, it is important to point out that two religious, as well institutional, terms took on whole new meanings within the greater community of New Orleans. These terms cannot now be separated from their new definitions. Politics has become synonymous with corruption, and organized religious institutions, particularly Protestant groups, have become the leaders of rebuilding—not only for participants in religion, but for the community at large. Thus, corruption and organized religious institutions are a manufactured dialectic in the greater New Orleans area. They are opposing terms that help define more clearly what the other means, particularly in the context of New Orleans. Remember, this project is assessing the overall change in the way these institutions are viewed. Before explicating on this, we will examine how these two institutions/terms were chosen, and some Burkian analysis will be performed to set the stage for the rest of the chapter.

Background

An interview with Rev. Graylan Scott Hagler, president of Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice; Rev. O'Neal Dozier, founder and pastor of the Worldwide Christian Center of Pompano Beach; and Iva Carruthers, general secretary for the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference (an international clergy and lay leadership organization) was conducted on NPR by Ed Gordon. They discussed the role of religion and that of the African American clergy in the wake of Katrina. All of these guests are a part of the
African American religious community and cater mostly to the racial minorities (who constitute the majority) in New Orleans.\textsuperscript{127}

Surprisingly, the interview did not have a theological tone, but a political tone. Gordon asked about the responsibility of the religious community now that the hurricane has hit. The responses from his guests varied, but they all agreed that politically, churches had to stand together and hold the government responsible for its inaction. They also agreed that church leaders had to step up and become politically active to make sure that their congregations, and the people of New Orleans, were getting the help they needed. The interview left listeners with the feeling that the churches have a social responsibility.\textsuperscript{128}

Many interviews, much like the one above, about post Katrina religious rhetoric focused on the dialectical pairing of (political) \textit{corruption} and the need for the city’s \textit{redemption} through \textit{organized religious institutions} and \textit{faith-based organizations}. Newspapers were filled with what the religious organizations were doing, what individual pastors had to say about the government, and how the religious organizations were rebuilding the city, not the political entities which failed to protect the city to begin with.

New Orleans has always been known for its corrupt politics. In Chapter I, I briefly referenced the fact that since Katrina has become the center of most political campaigning, commentary on the corruption of politics has lost its satirical edge and become a matter which is no longer being taken lightly.\textsuperscript{129} In an article published by the


\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.

In 2009, the author Howard Wit states that Katrina was the turning point for tolerating the rampant corruption in New Orleans. “Residents and business people returned to New Orleans determined to cleanse their hobbled city of the mildew of decades of public corruption.” Unfortunately, when this article was published last year, New Orleans was still ranked one of the most corrupt cities in America; the state of Louisiana comes in third overall.

By comparing these corrupt entities to the religious institutions, which are leading the way in rebuilding, it is no wonder that so many people have felt let down by their government but uplifted by their local community churches. In the introduction, studies such as the Homeland Security Institute’s “Heralding Unheard Voices: The Role of FBOs and NGOs During Disasters” and “Coordinates of Resilience” by George Mason showed that the FBOs and NGOs were major players in the post-Katrina rebuilding process.

By looking at interviews (both personal and published), periodicals, and legislation since Katrina, a well-rounded understanding of how religious institutions and the government have taken on new meanings in New Orleans can be better understood. Through a rhetorical analysis from a Burkian standpoint the way African American protestant institutions are viewed in New Orleans compared to the view of the

130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
government will show how these entities have taken on new contexts and “borrowed” from their original context to mean something wholly different.\textsuperscript{133}

The Transformation of the Religious into the Secular

In Chapter I, I briefly referenced a speech given by Mayor Nagin after Katrina. Let’s return for a moment to that speech. At a November 2005 town hall meeting in New Orleans, James Varney of the \textit{Times-Picayune} reported that Mayor Ray Nagin was not well received, “but when he invoked God the crowd of hundreds was solidly behind him.”\textsuperscript{134} Varney then goes on to say that in an email Nagin wrote, “The churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious institutions are the foundation for many people’s lives here. I do not make decisions for my city based on my faith. Rather, my faith gives me the capacity to continue hoping, striving, and working to rebuild New Orleans.”\textsuperscript{135}

This clear invocation of the supernatural by the political/secular realm shows that the two are closely intertwined in a post-Katrina context. The sheer fact that Nagin even references God and that his invocation is well received means that people see religious institutions in a favorable context. The juxtaposition of religious institutions against the politically corrupt order that Nagin represents reinforces the dialectic of the corrupt political institutions versus the redemptive religious organizations (though it was

\textsuperscript{133} The borrowing I am talking about is a reference to dramatis. For a reminder please see chapter I.

\textsuperscript{134} James Varney, “Religion, Politics Mix After Storm.”

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
probably not Nagin’s intent to reinforce the dialectic but rather to make himself viewed more favorably in the context of the role of civil religion).\textsuperscript{136}

Despite the attempts of the government, both Federal and local, to repair relations either by handing out money (see below) and apologies, or by invoking God, their attempts have fallen on deaf ears. Even time cannot heal these wounds. In an interview conducted with Brent Klutchin, a New Orleans native, four years after the storm, regarding the local government he said, “You think I believe someone is going to step up and have a heart and fix somethin’? No… why would it happen now?”\textsuperscript{137}

Another poignant example of the corruption of the government is the amount of money that has been mishandled by officials since Katrina. After Hurricane Katrina, three emergency preparedness officials were indicted with obstruction and lying in connection with the mishandling of 30.4 million dollars in disaster relief.\textsuperscript{138} Just this last year, a case went to court where Mose Jefferson, the eldest brother and chief political strategist of embattled U.S. Rep. William Jefferson, has been accused of bribing the former New Orleans School Board president, Ellenese Brooks-Simms, for her help in getting the board to approve two contracts totaling almost 14 million dollars.\textsuperscript{139} With cases like this constantly coming to light, it is not hard to see why people do not trust the political powers in charge. One of the biggest problems when it comes to money (and getting it back) is the slow reaction time from groups like Road Home and FEMA in

\textsuperscript{136} See Chapter I for more information on civil religion.

\textsuperscript{137} Brent Klutchin, formal interview, April 2, 2010.

\textsuperscript{138} Federal Bureau of Prisons: An agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, online at: www.bop.gov.

handed out the money that the government has promised to the citizens of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{140}

Once again, the religious organizations in New Orleans have had to step up and take on the government in an attempt to get citizens their money back. In 2007, an organization called All Congregations Together (ACT)\textsuperscript{141} joined in asking Road Home, a government program, to give money to the most devastated people of New Orleans. Yet, by 2007, Road Home had “delivered checks to less than 1 percent of the more than 100,000 applicants.”\textsuperscript{142} Rev. Joseph Campion, pastor of the Catholic churches St. David and St. Maurice (where the group held the news conference), said, "We're calling for an immediate investigation.” This was something the government had yet to do, despite all of the money mishandling. It is evident that the religious organizations were not only concerned with getting their money, but also with protecting all of the citizens of New Orleans. Religious institutions have had to become a beacon of stability, and now call on political organizations to get their acts together and keep their promises.

Another huge problem with Road Home and FEMA is the amount of paperwork required to get money from them. FEMA requires a “project worksheet” to be submitted to document how much damage has been done to the property. Likewise, if you received money from insurance and/or Road Home, you must explicitly state how much, as well as


\textsuperscript{141} Not to be confused with: Action by Churches Together (ACT)

provide proper documentation. According to a September 2007 CBS article, about 20,000 project worksheet reports, each normally over 1,000 pages, had been submitted since the storm. Pastor Walker discussed the hardships that many of his congregants and the community faced when it came to dealing with the large amounts of paperwork post-Katrina. He said:

Excuse me, because these people never had to build from the ground up. We are seeing just the devastation of not only our government taking advantage but the predators [contractors], too. So, a lot of the issues stem in this area too. Many people in this area only had an eighth grade education, not even that high, so they attack them with this much (holds his hands apart) paper work, some of them dropped out of school because they didn’t want to read, or couldn’t read, now you’re going to hit them with terms and terminology that are basically going to frustrate them, and they are going to walk away. And it’s just sad.

Walker went on to state that many people who came to him, told him they would have given up if he hadn’t been able to help them read, understand, and submit the paperwork.

Time-consuming and difficult government policies do not mean that religious organizations have not tried to engage the government and demand action. The Samuel De Witt proctor conference submitted *The Breach: Bearing Witness* to the United States Congress in 2007. The aim of the proposal is to get Congress to incorporate religious institutions (specifically, African American churches) into the infrastructure of the government’s emergency management process. The proposal points out in very specific

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146 Ibid.
terms the ways in which the political system in New Orleans failed and how it could not be trusted because of its corruption. The proposal says:

4.6 Every effort [should] be made to sustain and support an emergency preparedness and management council comprised of representatives from African American professional and civic organizations and faith leaders. Such a council would facilitate identification and dissemination of essential expertise and information in the case of another national emergency or disaster.¹⁴⁷

The proposal then goes on to show how the organized religious institutions helped to bring New Orleans back to life, and how they are still helping New Orleans now. Here we see that the religious institutions have begun to take on the roles that traditionally have been considered the responsibility of political powers. As a result of religious institutions having taken on the roles within the community, they are now viewed as more political and more philanthropic, though as Burke would point out, they still retain much of their original “supernatural” overtones.

Is it not the matter of all churches to be philanthropic? Yes, but many religious organizations’ philanthropy holds overtones of religious practice. Likewise, communities do not often rely on religious institutions to be solely responsible for their well being; they rely on other organizations such as non-profits or the government. But, because the impact of Katrina was so sudden and so dramatic, the effects have left an imprint on the identity of citizens of New Orleans and on their “language identity”¹⁴⁸ as well. With that in mind every single pastor I spoke with (four of them for a total of seven interviews) consistently and constantly used the word “community.”


¹⁴⁸ Because of the way religious institutions are viewed from the context of New Orleans, it is confined mainly to groups, community, cultures, and identity, thus creating a communal language identity.
Pastor Marvin Turner runs Mt. Arat Missionary Baptist Church in New Orleans. His church is run out of a shotgun style church located in a neighborhood that he described as “below the poverty line.” He is on the board of Churches Supporting Churches (see below) and he has become extremely active in the community surrounding the church post-Katrina. I asked him about his involvement in the community before Katrina, he replied, “Before Katrina, you know, we would throw a couple of hand grenades over the walls of the church and hope people would come. Now we are out there, in the community, helping people.” The word community and the churches involvement in their surrounding environments is integral in a post-Katrina New Orleans.

Willie Walker pointed out that because of the economic depression, non-religious people and institutions are reaching out to the religious institutions for help. His food bank at Noah’s Ark Missionary Baptist Church now serves approximately 130 families instead of the former 26. He believes that since Katrina, people are not afraid to go to churches and ask for help because they could not then (and even now) get help from the government. Walker explains:

We [black people in New Orleans]... have a custom, where we have our own space, our own self-dependence, and we are not comfortable, many of us, taking help from the government. We never got hand-outs, never got food stamps, never got any kind of checks to help us supplement our incomes.

For Walker, people do not want to rely on the government that has let them down repeatedly. However, they will rely on his church and surrounding churches for support,

149 Marvin Turner, Interview, April 17, 2010.

150 Ibid.

151 Willie Walk, Interview, April 2, 2010.

152 Ibid.
as shown by their willingness to come to his food bank or take clothes and checks from his church since Katrina.\textsuperscript{153}

Aldon Cotton, from the previous chapter, is the Pastor at Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church, which is now located close to Pastor Walker’s church (prior to Katrina it was on 33\textsuperscript{rd} and 13\textsuperscript{th}, downtown). He has been the pastor there since 1991 and it is the same church where he was born and raised. He is the second pastor in the history of this church, and it is apparent from the way he talks about it that he is very proud to work there and adores the close-knit community that it provides. Before Katrina, Rev. Cotton’s church had 150 members and is now down to about 60. In the days just before Katrina, Rev. Cotton evacuated with about 30 of his members to northern Mississippi where they waited out the storm. He stated that previous experiences with hurricanes had prepared him for Katrina. He had food, water, a list of where everyone in his church was, walky-talkies that had a five mile range, batteries, blankets, and more. He said that he has always had an evacuation plan for his members. I was surprised at how prepared Rev. Cotton was prior to Katrina, a fact which allowed him to mobilize his community in a very short amount of time as well as keep track of everyone extremely easily. This is reminiscent of the findings of the George Mason report, “Coordinates of Resilience.” The sub-heading for the report says it all, “On the Nimbleness of Community and Faith-Based Organizations in Disaster Response and Recovery.”\textsuperscript{154} It is clear that small groups like Rev. Cotton’s church were able to stick together through the storm, respond, and recover faster than the help the government provided.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.

Rev. Cotton not only has his own church, but he is also on the board for Churches Supporting Churches (CSC). The Churches Supporting Churches website provides an excellent description of the services provided by the organization:

Churches Supporting Churches is a comprehensive strategy to assist at least 36 African American congregations in twelve areas of New Orleans where Katrina destroyed or seriously damaged their facilities to "Restart, Reopen, Repair or Rebuild the Churches” in order for them to become “Agents for Community Development” in a comprehensive way. The strategy is designed to go beyond food and shelter issues and focus on expanding the capacity of these congregations to rebuild their communities.\(^{155}\)

When I spoke to Rev. Cotton personally, he explained that the group has helped him to rebuild his own church in New Orleans and has a vested interest in not only getting the churches back on their feet, but also in the community surrounding the churches. Rev. Cotton explained in our interview that it is important to get community centers such as churches back in good shape because it encourages other groups and individuals to do the same and return to New Orleans. What is interesting about this is that it is not the first time I heard about the hope that rebuilding one place could bring to an entire community. For example, Pastor Walker’s church was completely destroyed by Katrina, and then \textit{Extreme Makeover: Home Edition}, came in and within a week had built Noah’s Ark Missionary Baptist Church a whole new facility.\(^{156}\) The website for Deltec Homes, the contractor who built the church, stated that it “will rebuild this church and provide not just a place of worship for this congregation, but a refuge for the entire community.”\(^{157}\)


\(^{157}\) Ibid.
And it has done just that. There are other organizations that have the same ideas as CSC and Pastor Walker, for example: Beacon of Hope.

I originally contacted Beacon of Hope (BoH) because its name made it sound like it had some type of religious affiliation. It does not, but I think that it is important to include them because they share the same ideas and implementation methods as CSC. The founder and CEO of BoH, Denise Thorton, sat down and talked with me for about an hour about how BoH started, and her personal experiences with Katrina. Thorton explained that after Katrina hit, many of the homes in her neighborhood, Lakewood, were devastated. However, she realized that it was not the material things she missed after the storm, but the relationships that she had formed with her neighbors from the mailman to the entire community; she yearned for the relationships she had made before the storm.\footnote{Denise Thorton, Interview, April 2, 2010.}

So in an attempt to get people to come back to the neighborhood (many had decided not to return soon, or at all, because they did not want to have to clean up), she decided to turn her home around, get it fixed up, and use it as an example to her neighbors that it could be done.\footnote{Ibid.}

After the storm, her home became the center of operations for the organization that would later be named Beacon of Hope. Here, she set up internet and phone stations so that people could contact loved ones. She also had coffee and snacks around the clock so that people had a place to go. Her community is comprised of a few hundred homes, and eventually Beacon of Hope undertook the task of rebuilding the neighborhood one
block at a time.\textsuperscript{160} Since Katrina, Beacon of Hope now has 11 offices, which operate to provide information about contractors, rebuilding, insurance, and contact information for the entire area. Thorton believes that it is non-profit groups, community organizations, and churches that are predominantly handling the rebuilding and recovery efforts.\textsuperscript{161} Like Rev. Cotton, BoH has set up an evacuation procedure should any future incidents occur. Despite the work of groups such as the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference to get more involvement of community organizations in the emergency management process, both CSC and Beacon of Hope have not been contacted by the city of New Orleans to become involved in future emergency management procedures.

There are also groups in New Orleans that existed prior to Katrina that united the community through the churches and church efforts. However, many of these groups were “reinvigorated” by Katrina.\textsuperscript{162} As I said above, it is a matter of all churches to be philanthropic, but Katrina added new incentive to get old projects and organizations back off the ground. Holy Cross Neighborhood Association (HCNA) is run out of the Greater Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church (GLZMBC) located in the Lower Ninth Ward, it is one of the many projects in New Orleans that shook the water off its back, and the rust off its boots, and got back to work at a larger scale after the storm.\textsuperscript{163} The HCNA was originally formed in 1981, and they produce monthly newsletters online at

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
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helpholycross.org and in print to inform the community of events, update them on project information, and keep them informed of current events in the Ninth Ward. In a paper written by Richard Newman, professor of history at Rochester Institute of Technology, he states that “One of the groups single initiatives, called ‘Rebuilding Together,’ funds home maintenance and repair projects for low income and elderly residents who might otherwise have to leave the area.” Newman eloquently and succinctly sums up the group’s efforts; he says:

Whatever the specific affiliations of its members—whether secular or sacred—the HCNA’s “Rebuilding Together” program offers a glimpse of a much broader phenomenon among post-Katrina activists: the theologically inspired struggle to keep the black community intact.

It is clear that post-Katrina many African American run programs are trying to keep the community united, not just the sacred churches, communities, and buildings, but the entire community as a whole to help everyone rebuild from the ground up.

Has it not always been a part of the history of African American congregations to provide and build community? Yes, however, once again, like philanthropy, the storm heightened responses and encouraged community building beyond anything that New Orleans had ever seen before. James Cone in his book *My Soul Looks Back*, comments on the role of the African American church in the community, he says:

Theology cannot be separated from the community, which it represents. It assumes that truth has been given to the community at the moment of its birth. Its

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165 Ibid.

166 Ibid.
task is to analyze the implications of that truth in order to make sure that the community remains committed to that which defines its existence.\textsuperscript{167}

Unfortunately, the truth after Katrina was that the community had to face devastation, loss, and a need for renewal. Thankfully for the African American community all of the individuals and groups above rose to the challenge to bring back their communities and provide support for them in the process.

**WWKBD: Burkian Analysis**

Now that a number of responses\textsuperscript{168} have been provided, a Burkian assessment will provide the basis for untangling what all these reactions mean. There are many things that need to be examined from a Burkian perspective regarding the way predominantly African American Protestant religious institutions are now viewed. Since there is an inherent dichotomy set up between religion and politics in New Orleans, both will need to be addressed. First, determining the god-terms and devil-terms will provide the basis of analysis when looking at dramatism and the dramatis pentad. Next, what do these different terms tell us about the rhetoric being used in New Orleans, and how have those terms changed from their original meanings. Last, I will answer the question of what is the significance of the change in rhetoric, and why does it matter that these institutional structures now have new definitions.


\textsuperscript{168} Please note, that while a number of different individuals and stories have been introduced this is only the tip of the iceberg. Many people were kind enough to let me interview them along the way, but it is ultimately impossible to include everyone in my writing for this project.
It is easiest to start with the god-terms and devil-terms because they are easily recognizable. Remember that when looking at the god-term and the devil-term, dictionary definitions within the community or from the speaker’s standpoint no longer exist. Thus, one has to delineate and analyze how the speaker feels about the given terms in order to come up with the new definition. This is done through examining the rhetoric and discovering the speaker’s feelings on the topic as well as looking at their actions.\footnote{See: Em Griffin, \textit{A First Look at Communication Theory}, 291. Analysis provided more in depth in chapter I.} It is clear from looking at news articles, speeches (or reactions to speeches), and interviews that the god-terms are Protestantism, organized religious institutions, and the devil-terms are government, FEMA, and other government related words, ideologies, and institutions. Thus, for Burke these words cannot be taken at face value any longer, and new definitions have to be given to them.\footnote{Ibid.}

The god-term of Protestant, organized religious institutions are now characterized and associated more with philanthropy and rebuilding in New Orleans. It is not my intention to say that they do not still have religious overtones and that they have not always been philanthropic but the way both congregants and pastors speak about the church as well as the actions aimed at community outreach show that there is an overwhelming sense of change in the way African American Protestant churches function in New Orleans. The Protestant church has risen to the task of helping the community as well as coming together to provide for the surrounding community either through direct support in the form of food banks and money, or through helping them file their
government documents. It is clear that the churches are united in their efforts to bring New Orleans back to life.

Returning again to Robert Newman, he points out that there has historically been a struggle for African Americans to maintain a sense of identity among oppression and disaster. He explains, “Linking Katrina experiences to black struggles for justice throughout American history, they speak of communalism, surviving in the face of long-standing governmental neglect and protesting against racial injustice at both the local and national levels.” Thus, it should not come as a surprise that when disaster strikes in African American communities they rely on the help of organizations who have historically helped them in times of crises.

Clearly the devil-terms of government, FEMA, and other government related words and ideologies are now defined as untrustworthy, unhelpful, and unreliable. Anything associated with them is looked down upon, thus, many people have started their own organizations such as CSC, BoH, or HCNC in order to provide the much-needed help that the government has not provided. While I have said that the government has been historically known for not giving help, or as Pastor Walker stated people have never asked for help, the outright neglect post-Katrina sealed the fate for the way many African Americans in New Orleans view these institutions. Newman says, “[Add together the] collective amnesia, the apathy, and outright neglect of government and the point becomes clear: Katrina protesters and activist community had to organize to both protect their interests and publicize their ongoing struggle for justice.”

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mouths that the African American churches in New Orleans refer to the governmental organizations that let them down so badly.

Now that new definitions have been given to these institutions, we need to look at the role of dramatism. In Chapter I, I wrote that Burke defines dramatism as “…flat cause-and-effect or stimulus-and-response." 173 It is the way words change over time and take on new meanings while still holding overtones of their old meanings. I want to return for a moment to what Em Griffin said about the pentad, “By evaluating the ratio of importance between individual pairs (scene-agency, agency-act), the critic [reader or listener] can determine which element provides the best clue to the speaker’s motivation.” 174 He goes on to say, “When a message stresses one element over the other four, it reveals a speakers philosophy or worldview.” 175 Above, we see that Katrina laid the scene for all the acts that took place, thus the most important element of the pentad is the scene and its counter-part is the speech acts or physical acts, or lack of acts, that took place afterwards.

Now this may seem obvious, however, it’s important to note this factor because it is a driving force. Without the hurricane there would not have been a need for groups such as CSC or for people to reach out for help from churches who had not done so before. Before Katrina, people would have passed nice churches in their community and

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173 Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Berkley: University of California Press, 1941), 103 and 106.

174 Em Griffin, A First Look at Communication Theory, 291.

175 Ibid.
not thought anything of it, but now passing a nice church gives people hope as well as encouragement to reach out to the religious institutions in their areas for help. Burke would point out that this is profoundly important because without the stimulus of Katrina, then the responsive acts of churches and the non-responsiveness of the government would not have combined to shift the rhetoric in a post-Katrina New Orleans.

With the shifting views in government and churches, changes have taken place that might not have happened prior to Katrina. Rev. Cotton said that while there has always been corruption in New Orleans, Katrina exposed it.\textsuperscript{176} Actions to stop the government and its corrupt ways may not have taken place had Katrina not happened. People’s discontent and voting records may have been constant; however, without the scene that Katrina created there very well may never have been a crackdown on corruption in the area.\textsuperscript{177}

Burke would also say that Katrina gave people the opportunity to voice their discontent with the government and to find new ways to thrive and survive in an area that had been devastated. It was the churches that responded to the government’s inaction and stepped up to take the place of the unresponsive government. The services that churches have provided for their community, members, and other churches show that support, philanthropy, and community (re)building, since Katrina has been the main objective of religious organizations. The role of African American Protestant organizations now, is not just religious, but also strongly philanthropic, and, as stated earlier, though it is the job of all churches to provide some type of charity, churches in

\textsuperscript{176} Aldon Cotton, Interview, April 3, 2010.

the New Orleans area have an increased association with philanthropy and non-religious terms since the storm. Thus, there is a shift in rhetoric, and the Burkian cycle of going from religious to secular and back again is complete.

In New Orleans, political corruption and mistrust is an ongoing struggle and the churches have had to pick up the slack of the government at both local and Federal levels. By using the god-terms and devil-terms in New Orleans, people associate themselves with certain groups. Burke defined rhetoric as the ability to identify with one another. When using the god-terms and devil-terms in New Orleans and understanding the new context that they have taken on, people become more responsive. When the words “FEMA” or “Noah’s Ark” are uttered, there is a certain understanding that takes place between people in that community. The function and ideas behind these institutions have totally changed. Unless you try to understand or have actually felt the amount of suffering many of these people have seen, then you might not be able to comprehend just how deep words like “FEMA” can cut within this community.

**Implications**

The post-Katrina clean up, recovery efforts, and lasting effects show that the government has failed the African American community of New Orleans. If another disaster of Katrina’s proportion were to hit New Orleans again, there is no doubt that the area would have trouble recovering. The lessons that smaller organizations such as CSC and individual churches have learned and are implementing will help make the recovery efforts for their members much easier the second time around. Likewise, the communities surrounding churches have seen the philanthropic work these churches have
done to help neighborhoods recover, and no doubt would look to these anchors in their community for the help they would need.

It would behoove the government, both local and Federal, to heed the request of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and find a way to incorporate the African American church system into its emergency management process in New Orleans. Being that New Orleans African American Protestant congregations now have so much experience with rebuilding, it is in the best of interest of the government, church members, and New Orleans citizens to have some type of system that connects faith-based organizations to the government’s own response system. This would help make future emergency situations run smoother as well as continue to benefit outreach to whole communities and their trusted networks. Unfortunately, this may prove to be difficult since the government is already mistrusted by a great number of people, and it might mean that churches do not want to associate with the corrupt political power in charge. Willie Walker stated in his interview with me that he chooses not to get involved with the government because it would mean “guilt by association.” 178 So, some churches and groups may not even want to be involved with the government at all since they now identify and understand rhetorically that government is synonymous with unreliability and devastation.

Though a system connecting the church infrastructure, which is trusted and developed, to the government infrastructure might work well in New Orleans because they have experienced tragedy and re-building first hand, it might also prove to be useful in other areas during disaster relief efforts as well. The “nimbleness” 179 of the protestant

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African American churches, the widespread network, and their interconnectedness might be the key to recovery efforts for New Orleans in the future and can provide unique insight to other cities that experience disaster in the future.

Conclusion

Burke’s theoretical framework brings to light many conclusions about the way religious rhetoric in New Orleans changed after hurricane Katrina. First, it illuminates how the community introduced new words into their vocabulary like “FEMA,” which before Katrina were probably unknown by many. However, I would not have assumed that these words had new meanings outside of their dictionary definitions or that church groups could be viewed outside of religious contexts. There is a sense of change that has come over these groups that I do not think is understandable outside a Burkian framework; rhetoric can shift, there is a cause-and-effect for it, and there are implications for this change.

Second, I would not have thought that the changes that had taken place were irreconcilable. I would have said that the government just needs to court the African American Protestant churches and gain their trust. However, this may be impossible since the way people view these concepts is now so embedded in the way they talk, how they identify themselves, and how they identify with one another. A citizen in New Orleans who experienced Katrina firsthand, now defines themselves and their lives by this horrendous and traumatic experience; it has become a part of them and their identity. Without understanding completely how the African American community came to rely on these Protestant institutions for help and encouragement, people outside of New

Orleans will not be able to understand why the government will have problems in the future bridging the canyons that have been created out of this experience.

Once again, while words such as corruption and politics, and African American church, community, and philanthropy, have always been associated with one another, it was not until Katrina hit that these word relationships took on new and heightened meanings, and shifted more closely toward one another and away from their flat, dictionary, definitions. In conclusion, Donald DeVore sums up the role and experience of the African American church in New Orleans in his article, “Water in Sacred Places: Rebuilding New Orleans Black Churches as Sites of Community Empowerment.” DeVore says the African American community in New Orleans now fulfills a “role that fits within a longstanding tradition of African American churches as centers of the social, political, economic, and religious life of their members and communities.”

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CHAPTER IV

POST-KATRINA CATHOLICS: A COMMUNITY DIVIDED

When I started this project I was not going to look at Catholic churches in my research. I thought that adding predominantly African American Catholic churches would broaden my research too much and in turn take away from the strength of this project. Likewise, it was hard to get people in the Catholic community to openly discuss their frustrations with the church, but that does not mean they did not. However, while I was living in New Orleans a few facts about the Catholic church and community were brought to my attention that led me to believe that it was not only important to include them in my research, but also imperative. New Orleans is now and historically was a predominantly Catholic city; it is even home to one of the oldest black parishes in America.\(^\text{181}\) During my research on the Catholic churches in New Orleans, what I learned of was the great number of church closings as well as shifts in the division of parishes, due to the major population shifts.

Unfortunately, no studies on religious identification have been done in New Orleans. Thus, the number of black Catholics in the area is hard to determine. One study conducted by the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) gives some clue about the major shift in the religious population in New Orleans after Katrina. However, the problem is that this survey, as well as many of the other surveys like it, operates on regional or state levels, not city levels. I contacted ARIS’s representative at Hartford College, Barry Kosmin. He explained that one of the most telling signs was the shift in

the amount of people claiming Catholic identification on the ARIS application between the 1990 survey and the 2008 survey.\textsuperscript{182} He pointed out that Louisiana, as a state, went from 47 percent Catholic in 1990 to 31 percent in 2008, while Texas went from 23 percent to 32 percent in the same years.\textsuperscript{183} Even with these dramatic and dynamic shifts in religious identity in these states, it is not verifiable whether these shifts took place as a direct result of Katrina.

With New Orleans’ history being firmly grounded in Catholic beginnings, and the population being overwhelmingly Catholic it is important to address how the rhetoric in predominantly African American Catholic congregations has shifted. In the last chapter, I showed how Protestant congregations were united, both with one another and with their community. The rhetoric took on philanthropic overtones and focused around making the community in the church and outside of the church stronger than before Katrina. However, the story for the African American Catholics in New Orleans is much different. Black Catholics have been kicked out of their churches, forced to find new ones, and faced with what seems to be inherent racism in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

Katrina once again sets the scene to expose many underlying problems in New Orleans. This chapter first examines the history of the Catholic Church in New Orleans, before moving on to where it stood after Katrina, and where it is almost five years later. A Burkian analysis at the end will show how rhetoric regarding the Catholic institution has changed. Last, I examine what the implications are for the predominantly African American Catholic Church in a post-Katrina New Orleans. Before beginning, it is

\textsuperscript{182} Barry Kosmin, e-mail message, March 29, 2010.

important to point out that the shift in rhetoric regarding the Catholic Church is not as easily decipherable. Questions about race and hierarchy are touchy subjects that Catholic people in New Orleans are often uncomfortable discussing.

Before beginning it is imperative to keep in mind that Catholic churches and Protestant churches function very differently. Protestant churches do not have to answer to a larger structure, whereas Catholic parishes are owned and operated by the archdiocese that receives orders from the Vatican. With this in mind, the Catholic parishes have had a harder time returning because the individual churches are owned by the archdiocese. Thus, the ultimate decision about whether a church will return and rebuild or not is left in the hands of the archdiocese and not the individual parish, as is the case with Protestant churches.

Background

Before the Jim Crow era and strict segregation in America, New Orleans was known for its more lenient attitudes regarding race, and racial mixing. In an essay written by James Bennett titled, “Catholics, Creoles, and the Redefinition of Race in New Orleans,” he addresses the mixing of blacks, whites and Creoles in New Orleans, paying close attention to Catholic churches. Bennett says that in the early 1800s a visitor could go down to New Orleans and see jubilant, mixed Catholic Church services where men and women, black and white, all united on one day. He goes on to point out that it was not much later that New Orleans was straddling two eras and identities regarding

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185 Ibid.
segregation. The first was the British North American biracialism, and the second the South American and Caribbean multiracialism, where identities and race were not fixed.\textsuperscript{186}

Eventually, the North American attitude of biracialism won, and segregation gave way to racism. It was in New Orleans during the 1920s that the city’s archbishop, John Shaw, stated that the “good Lord had never intended that the races should fraternize.”\textsuperscript{187} Bennett explicates on the change in the city’s racial identity as well as the changes in the religious institutions, he says:

Changes in religious institutions functioned as a crucial measure of the city’s shifting racial landscape. Establishing separate parishes for black and white Catholics formed a pivotal event in the city’s racial reorientation, as the city’s white residents moved from a shaky racial fault line onto the seemingly firm ground of biracialism and segregation. Bolstered by these changes in the religious sphere, New Orleans emerged as one of the nation’s most segregated cities in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{188}

The segregation in New Orleans permeated every facet of life, including Catholic churches. Bennett points out that the places where people used to praise together were now divided. Blacks either had to sit in the back of the church or they had to start their own churches.

New Orleans is home to St. Augustine Church. The church’s website states that it was dedicated in 1842 and that it is the oldest African American parish in the nation.\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 184.


\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{189} St. Augustine, “History,” http://www.staugustinecatholicchurch-neworleans.org/hist-sum.htm. However, my interview with Father Bozeman shows that there is some argument if St. Augustine of Joan Of Arc, also located in New Orleans, is the oldest.
St. Augustine Church has been home to some famous historical figures, such as Homer Plessy, of Plessy vs. Ferguson, as well as Alexander P. Tureaud, Sr., a well-known civil rights attorney. Before the official dedication of the church there was a campaign by local whites to out-buy the pews, to keep the African Americans from taking majority control of the church. The website tells the story of the “War of the Pews.”

…The people of color began to purchase pews for their families to sit. Upon hearing of this, white people in the area started a campaign to buy more pews than the colored folks. Thus, The War of the Pews began and was ultimately won by the free people of color who bought three pews to every one purchased by the whites. In an unprecedented social, political and religious move, the colored members also bought all the pews of both side aisles. They gave those pews to the slaves as their exclusive place of worship, a first in the history of slavery in the United States.

This was neither the first nor the last time whites tried to prevent black Catholics from participating in their shared religion. The Catholic Church has collectively had a long history of racism that has been fought against by various organizations. The first National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC) was held in 1968. At the meeting it was declared that, “The Catholic Church in the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely part of that society.” So has this been erased since the late 1960s? No. Problems in New Orleans post-Katrina show that there is a growing distrust in the Catholic hierarchy and anger at the way they handled the parish closings. In most cases, it is because the parishioners feel their parishes were closed because of their race.

190 Ibid.
191 Ibid.
Where Did All the Churches Go?

After Hurricane Katrina many churches in New Orleans had problems getting on their feet again. As stated in the last chapter, Protestant organizations were able to rely on one another by using groups such as CSC. In contrast, Catholic parishes had to wait for help and word from the archdioceses of New Orleans before they could begin restoring their churches. Post-Katrina decisions from the archdiocese and the archbishop created controversy due to mixed feelings about certain church closures.\(^\text{194}\)

At a press conference in February of 2006 the archdiocese announced a plan that included, “closing 7 of its 142 parishes, temporarily merging about two dozen, and consolidating or changing many of its 107 schools.”\(^\text{195}\) The plan would be reevaluated in two years time.\(^\text{196}\) This left many churches vulnerable to closing, especially those that were ravaged by the hurricane and in the most vulnerable areas of New Orleans, which as we saw in the introduction were predominantly African American areas. Donald DeVore in his article, “Water in Sacred Places: Rebuilding New Orleans Black Churches as Sites of Community Empowerment,” states that parishioners “understood the importance of religiously informed group solidarity in preventing the kind of psychological fragmentation that leads to defeat and despair.”\(^\text{197}\) With this kind of understanding,


\(^{194}\) Ibid.


\(^{196}\) Ibid.

parishioners fought for their parishes and voiced their anger and discontent with the archdiocese for shutting down parishes after Katrina.\textsuperscript{198}

One of the most controversial church closings in New Orleans was St. Augustine Church. In February 2009 the archbishop of New Orleans, Alfred Hughes, closed down St. Augustine and removed Father Jerome LeDoux, without consulting the parishioners.\textsuperscript{199} The result was a 19-day sit in, which ended with the re-opening of the church, albeit under the direction of a new priest.\textsuperscript{200} When the priest came to church on his first day he was surrounded by ten armed guards. In an interview with \textit{Democracy Now!}, the president of the parish council, Sandra Gordon, stated her reaction to the incidents:

I was insulted as a person. I was insulted for not only for the black culture, but I was insulted for all cultures. We have never had any violence at St. Augustine’s through our church hall, nor through our church and to think that we were such people that you needed to bring armed guards to us as part of your welcoming committee, I was appalled.\textsuperscript{201}

The archbishop at the time came to a service soon after the sit-in, and apologized for the miscommunication between the diocese and the church. He said, “We have been able with humility and honesty to acknowledge deficiencies in St. Augustine’s Parish and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[198] Ibid.
\item[200] Ibid.
\item[201] Sandra Gordon quoted in: Democracy Now, “Historic African-American New Orleans Church Reopened After Weeks Of Protests & Rectory Sit-In.”
\end{footnotes}
unfortunate missteps on the part of the archdiocese." This is not the first time that the archbishop of New Orleans has had to apologize to the local Catholic community.

Archbishop of New Orleans, Alfred Hughes, submitted his resignation in 2007 but was asked by the Vatican to stay on for two more years until they could find his replacement. Eventually that replacement was found in Archbishop Gregory Aymond. During a news conference in June 2009 that was supposed to be the introduction of the new archbishop, Hughes took a moment to apologize to members of the Catholic Church in New Orleans. He said, "I want publicly to express my sorrow and beg forgiveness for those who experienced continued hurt or also experienced anger, I have never wanted in any way to hurt anyone. Obviously, difficult decisions do hurt people in ways that we don't want." It is clear from this quote that Hughes was reflecting on his own eight years in office when he had to endure the Catholic sex abuse scandals, 9/11, the economic downturn, and of course Hurricane Katrina. Though it is not clear exactly what he is apologizing for, it is apparent that Hughes felt things in the Catholic Church of New Orleans had gone seriously awry during his tenure as archbishop.


204 Ibid.

205 Ibid.

206 Ibid.
Aymond’s comments from the same press conference may give some insight into what Hughes was talking about. Aymond stated that he wanted to meet with people, talk with them, and let them voice their frustrations. A *Times-Picayune* article put it most aptly when writer Brian Nolan said that Aymond was “…acknowledging the bruised feelings and bitter legacy of Hurricane Katrina that still marks the Catholic recovery in New Orleans.”

Aymond also stated at the conference that he did not want to “second-guess” Hughes’ decisions, but instead move forward.

Though there were many predominantly African American Catholic churches that did close during this time it would be unfair to focus solely on those that closed, when there have been some that have been able to keep their doors open and positive things have been said about those parishes. Of the predominantly African American Catholic churches that stayed open, there was some agreement that, like the Protestant churches, the Catholic churches provided a safe haven and a respite from the hardships of a post-Katrina New Orleans. For example, Corpus Christi Epiphany Catholic Church (CCECC) in New Orleans was able to stay open after Katrina. Opal Harrison, a New Orleans native and member of CCECC, said that many people went to church just to get away from their homes, which had been destroyed and took the opportunity to meet up with friends whom they hadn’t seen since the storm. Or, indeed, after the re-consecration of St. Augustine, Newman said they “proudly reported that they are currently playing a pivotal

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207 Ibid.

208 Ibid.

209 I do not have a comprehensive list of African American Catholic church closures, however, it is apparent from my interview with Father Bozman, below, that the closures affected mostly African American congregations.

210 Opal Harrison, Interview, April 11, 2010.
role in Hurricane Katrina relief,…matching those in need with available legal, medical, and FEMA assistance and with volunteer workmen and cleanup crews."²¹¹ Despite fighting battles with the archdiocese, St. Augustine church wasted no time in ensuring that their surrounding community was getting the help it needed. But like St. Augustine, Corpus Christi suffered other negative consequences because of the storm.

Corpus Christi Epiphany was not always Corpus Christi Epiphany, it was once Corpus Christi Catholic Church (CCCC), and down the street was Epiphany Catholic Church. Both were predominately African American Catholic Churches. Once the storm hit, the archdiocese made the decision to close Epiphany and merge it with CCCC. In my interview with Harrison she stated that there were tensions between the two parishes.²¹² When Epiphany joined CCCC there were many disagreements about who would run the church and there were power struggles regarding services. Harrison pointed out that CCCC had to relinquish some of its authority to Epiphany before anyone could be happy.²¹³

One of the biggest problems Epiphany had with the merger is that they did not think it was going to be permanent, because they were expressly told that it was only temporary, until more of their parishioners returned. When they realized that it was a permanent change, many members of Epiphany became very unhappy.²¹⁴ Harrison pointed out that everyone needed to realize that there was nothing they could do about it.

²¹² Opal Harrison, Interview, April 11, 2010.
²¹³ Ibid.
²¹⁴ Ibid. This is also the case for the merger of St. Raymond’s and St. Leo The Great church in New Orleans, see interview with Father Bozeman.
It was the diocese that was making all the decisions, and making so many people upset.\textsuperscript{215} Harrison said that even Corpus Christi had some run-ins with the archdiocese post-Katrina. She said they had to prove to the archdiocese that they were self-sustaining, had enough parishioners back, and were able to make all the necessary renovations to the building. She said that despite doing that, the archdiocese was still considering shutting them down, which created some resentment towards their authority. Corpus-Christi is one of the oldest African American parishes in the United States.\textsuperscript{216}

Erica Smith told me in her interview that her parish had to go through the same process. She said that they were able to prove that they were self-sustaining, that they had raised enough money, and that almost all of their parishioners had returned, however the archdiocese still did not restore her parish.\textsuperscript{217} To add insult to injury, her church building had not sustained that much damage and enough money had been raised before submitting the paperwork to have the building restored.\textsuperscript{218} St. Francis de Sales, another predominantly African American church in New Orleans, suffered the same fate. Sandra Thomas, a parishioner at St. Francis told reporter Katy Reckdahl of \textit{The Times-Picayune} that, "she and other parishioners also requested, unsuccessfully, the specific financial data and benchmarks used by the archdiocese to judge the viability of their 141-year-old congregation. They then asked the archbishop to meet with them. He declined."\textsuperscript{219}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{217} Erica Smith, Interview, April 2, 2010.  \\
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.  \\
\end{flushright}
Thomas goes on to say, “I never envisioned in my life that at age 66 I would have to fight the Archdiocese of New Orleans for the love of my church.”

One of the online readers commented on this article and, in response to Thomas, said, “The Archdiocese of New Orleans is one of the most racist organizations on the planet and it's taken you this long to realize they care not about you.” Despite anger, resentment, and hurt feelings, it does not mean that churches like St. Francis, Epiphany, and others facing the same fate have not gone down without a fight. For example, St. Raymond’s a predominantly African American Catholic church petitioned to keep their pastor after he was slated to be moved by the archdiocese in 2008 (despite the petition, their beloved pastor was moved). St. Augustine is another shining example of what can be done with a little protest. Though the church endured a 19-day sit-in, they reached a victory not just for themselves, but also for their community and other African American congregations struggling to be heard.

St. Henry and Our Lady of Good Counsel are both white Catholic churches in the area. Both were slated for closure and both did end up closing, but not until they went to court at the end of 2008. Unfortunately they lost the case. Bruce Nolan reported, “Civil District Court Judge Kern Reese said four parishioners who brought the suit were not members of the legal corporation that constitutes the church parish, and thus had no standing to sue.” In other words, they are a part of the parish but they do not own the

220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
222 Antohony Bozeman, Interview, April, 21, 2010.
parish, the ownership of the parish is under the archdiocese, thus only they can decide if the church should remain open.

This past Easter both churches were opened for public visitation on Good Friday, which was a small victory for both. A note from archbishop Aymond created some hope for both of these parishes, he said:

At a recent meeting between parishioners of St. Henry and Our Lady of Good Counsel and I, it was agreed upon that both church buildings would be opened for public visitation on Good Friday, Friday, April 2 from 9 am to 12 noon. This will allow for those participating in the traditional 9 church walk to include these closed church buildings in their Good Friday pilgrimage. No services will be held at the church buildings.

This decision does not change the status of the parishes. They will not be re-opened as parishes. As I have stated before, those closed churches that remain intact at this time may be considered for use for funerals and other special events until a new use for the buildings is decided.

It is my hope that opening Our Lady of Good Counsel and St. Henry’s on Good Friday will bring healing to those still hurt and angry with the archdiocese for closing the parishes. I ask the people of New Orleans and the surrounding areas to join me in praying for peace here and around the world as we draw closer to the joyful season of Easter.\footnote{Gregory Aymond, “Our Lady of Good Counsel and St. Henry church buildings to be open on Good Friday,” http://www.arch-no.org/News.php?mode=read&id=644.}

Though it was only one day, it appears as though the Catholic hierarchy is listening to the people of New Orleans, albeit incompletely, and possibly too late. Father Bozeman, of St. Leo the Great and St. Raymond’s (combined after the storm) pointed to this as another way that white Catholic churches, though they were closed, are being showed favoritism.\footnote{Anthony Bozeman, Interview, April 21, 2010.}

Returning to Richard Newman and the African American Catholic church, he says, “The re-consecration of St. Augustine Church as a holy space was nothing less than
a metaphor for resurrection.” 226 Newman continues on with a quote from Sandra Gordon, “Well, I always have said that this has been a very heavy cross for the members of St. Augustine to carry…Our parish has been resurrected.” 227 No doubt St. Augustine, Epiphany, St. Francis, St. Leo the Great, St. Raymond’s, and Corpus Christi, as well as many other countless African American churches, have all endured a long hard struggle for not only their parishes and parishioners, but also their communities.

**WWKBD: Burkian Analysis**

As shown above, there is a strong sense of disunity in New Orleans when it comes to the Catholic Church. While churches have tried to pull together to protest through sit-ins and judicial action, the archdiocese has kept many African American parishes from returning to the lives they once knew and the churches they love.

Once again Burke would say, in addressing the dramatis pentad, that the scene was Katrina, and its counterpart was the act of repression by the diocese and protest by the parishes. As in the last chapter, Katrina gave people the opportunity to talk about certain things that had not been addressed, or may not have even considered problems prior to Katrina. While some people acknowledged that racism was apparent in the archdiocese of New Orleans prior to Katrina, it was not until the storm that people saw the power and influence that the archdiocese had over their parishes.

The devil-terms in this instance would of course be the Catholic Church, hierarchy, and archdiocese, whereas the god-terms would be the individual churches that

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227 Sandra Gordon quoted in: Ibid.
people remember fondly, that stood up for their rights, and in many instances were closed down. I am not implying that the Catholic Church itself is evil, however when it comes to the infrastructure that the Catholic Church has in place, much trust has been lost. Katrina tested the systems in place by the Catholic Church and showed weaknesses that led to dissatisfaction with its decisions. People in the African American community saw their churches as part of themselves; it is only when reflecting on their loss that you see how sad, confused, and hurt many of them are without their parish.

Just because the parishes are closed does not mean that the African American parishioners have lost their identity. As stated earlier they did not go down without a fight and many of them are still fighting. St. Augustine’s victory left many African Americans hopeful that through persistent action, things can get done. Richard Newman, once again, offers an insightful perspective on the subject; he states:

Like so much else in post-Katrina New Orleans, the picture remains cloudy even for St. Augustine. The archdiocese has only agreed to keep it open temporarily. And yet, it is also clear that congregants will continue to draw on traditions of sacred history, scripture, and community struggle to keep a beloved institution open.

Thus the rhetoric in African American Catholic communities is now about rebuilding, growing, and surviving despite all odds.

When approaching dramatism and the shift, it is clear that pushing forward, surviving, and fighting are all key words when it comes to getting Catholic churches back on their feet. This is a huge change from prior to Katrina where churches were carrying along on their daily routines and not afraid of hurricanes, or asking questions about

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228 Ibid.

229 Ibid.
whether they will be able to open.\textsuperscript{230} It is clear that there has been a comprehensive and absolute overhaul of the way African Americans discuss the Catholic Church in New Orleans since Katrina.

As for the churches that have stayed open, their rhetoric is like that of the Protestant churches. The services that the Catholic parishes like CCECC and St. Augustine (since reopening its doors) have provided for their community, members, and other churches (such as Epiphany) show that support, philanthropy, and community rebuilding, since Katrina has been the main objective of these religious organizations. However, they too have struggled to keep their doors open.

\textbf{Implications}

If the Catholic Church wants to rebuild a stable community, as well as one that supports racial diversity and history, some efforts should be made to reach a compromise. While the church sit-ins at St. Augustine proved to be useful in getting the church back, the parishioners were not able to retain Father Jerome LeDoux’s services. It is clear from many comments that there was no ongoing dialogue between the church and the parishioners about where it stood in regards to the post-Katrina church closing procedures.\textsuperscript{231} If anything, the archdiocese of New Orleans should have learned that transparency and communication are the two best tools for avoiding run-ins, like the one at St. Augustine.

\textsuperscript{230} Hurricane season in New Orleans was never looked at as something scary, but something expected and anticipated. Now there is tension when the words “hurricane season” are said over the radio or read in the newspaper. Everyone fears another Katrina. See: Erica Smith, Interview, April 2, 2010.

The archdiocese of New Orleans has a “racial harmony” branch whose job is to address “the sin of racism and to work to change hearts and minds so that the rich blessings of multiculturalism, diversity and ethnic inclusion will be appreciated.”

It would behoove the office of racial harmony to step up their efforts in the New Orleans area. For the sake of clarity, the archdiocese of New Orleans should address the issue of closed and closing African American churches frankly, instead of issuing veiled apologies after the fact and back-pedaling to make up for mistakes.

If natural disaster were to strike again in the United States, either in New Orleans or another heavily Catholic area, it would be in the best interest of that geographic region’s archdiocese to reflect on the lessons learned from Katrina. No matter what, people’s feelings are going to be hurt, but making sure that fair, consistent, and transparent polices are issued is the only way to help alleviate the tensions that are bound to arise in the aftermath.

**Conclusion**

Burke provides an insightful platform for analysis. By utilizing Burke’s analysis the following conclusions can be drawn: first, there will be a continuing battle for African American churches to get back on their feet and regain hope for redemption, as seen through the example at St. Augustine. The rhetoric shows that these parishes will fight to reopen for many years to come. In contrast, the archdiocese’s response shows that they are aware of the hurt feelings, and are also aware that parishioners will continue the fight, thus some compromise is possible and probable in the future.

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Second, there are many hurt feelings and lots of trust lost in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. I have spoken to African American Catholics as young as 29 and as old as 70. All of them are jaded by the experience and have feelings of hurt and anger when it comes to discussing topics like the archdiocese. Just as the last chapter stated, like the government, the archdiocese, if they want to reach out, will have to make a concentrated and deliberate effort before any type of amends can be made. It is evident by the language that the parishioners use that the wounds inflicted by the Catholic Church will not soon disappear.\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{233} I use the word “wounds” as a reference to the Erica Smith quote in Chapter II, where the equates the loss of her church to the loss of a loved one.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Even though it is approaching the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done in New Orleans. As this paper shows through a Burkian analysis, rhetoric has shifted, which in turn affects identity, and how people relate to one another, and their surrounding environment. One day, a very long time from now, when the clean-up of debris is finished and most of the houses are brought back to life, when all the visible signs are gone, there will still be lasting impressions found in the rhetoric and the way people identify (with) certain institutions. The African American population has struggled, through racism, poverty, devastation, rebuilding, and, in some cases, the loss of their communities. However, it is clear that the fight for equality, the fight for justice, and the fight for their lives will continue. It is not without struggle that New Orleans will be where it was prior to Katrina and hopefully better for it.

There have been innumerable lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina, from the response to the rebuilding. While no one can say where New Orleans will be in five, ten, or fifteen years, the projects and programs already in place will strengthen communities and relationships for years to come. The new identities that emerged from the storm will help shape the new New Orleans, the better New Orleans, and the growing New Orleans.

Both Protestant African American congregations and African American Catholics have faced their own separate struggles and both are still continuing their fight for equality and rebuilding. For the Protestants “Rebuilding the city meant that the
congregations stepped out into more secular relationships and partnerships. And for the Catholics it meant continuing to fight against racism and fighting to keep their parishes open.

I would like to end with the words of Richard Newman, as he eloquently sums up the roles of faith, community, and history in overcoming struggles and the seemingly unending problems that have faced the African American in New Orleans community since Katrina, he says:

If Katrina tells us anything, it is that religion remains a capacious vehicle for those dealing with modern environmental disaster. The chaos of disaster—not just physical death but the loss of home and savings, the separation of family and loved ones, the likelihood of long and uncertain struggles for restitution—compelled congregants, churches and entire religious networks to rededicate themselves to the basic principles of faith: a belief in a just God who enters into history at critical moments to inspire social justice...Katrina survivors have sought both to strengthen networks of religious reformers and to retain sacred church space precisely because it puts them in touch with the spiritual traditions that have strengthened oppressed communities.  

---


Table 3: Racial Composition of AffectedRegions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans (2001)</td>
<td>07.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana (2001)</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected regions (2001)</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>70.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana (2001)</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected regions (2001)</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data: U.S. Census Bureau

Found online at: “Who are Katrina’s Victims?” Center for American Progress, September 6, 2005, p. 4. www.americanprogress.org.
Appendix B:

Table 2. Economic Characteristics of Affected Regions: Individual Poverty Rates, Child Poverty Rates, Rank by State by Poverty Level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poverty Rank</th>
<th>Child Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>37.12% (18.1%)</td>
<td>18.02% (17.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans (2004)</td>
<td>108.12% (24.2%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statewide, 2004</td>
<td></td>
<td>228.000 (20.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State, 2004</td>
<td>001.880 (21.0%)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected regions, 2000</td>
<td>125.937 (17.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State, 2004</td>
<td>710.343 (16.1%)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected regions, 2000</td>
<td>915.226 (10.3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data: U.S. Census Bureau. CPS and ACS data. Child poverty is percentage of persons under age of 18 living in poverty. State rank is by poverty index.

Found online at: “Who are Katrina’s Victims?” Center for American Progress, September 6, 2005, p. 5. www.americanprogress.org.
Appendix C:

Table 3

Percentage of Residents without Household Access to Automobile by Race and Ethnicity:
The Nation as a Whole, the New Orleans Metropolitan Area, and the City of New Orleans

Panel A: All U.S. Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Residents</th>
<th>White, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Other, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Poor</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Poor</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel B: The New Orleans Metropolitan Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Residents</th>
<th>White, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Other, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Poor</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Poor</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Panel C: The City of New Orleans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Residents</th>
<th>White, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Other, non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Poor</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Poor</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data are from the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample of the U.S. Census of Population and Housing.

a. Individuals in households with incomes under 100 percent of the federal poverty line.
b. Individuals in households with incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty line.
c. Individuals in households with incomes greater than 200 percent of the federal poverty line.

Appendix D

Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Overall (% (95% CI))</th>
<th>Orleans Parish (% (95% CI))</th>
<th>Jefferson Parish (% (95% CI))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No electricity</td>
<td>24.5 (0.0–51.6)</td>
<td>65.5 (28.5–100.0)</td>
<td>0.6 (0.0–2.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No gas</td>
<td>31.2 (7.1–55.3)</td>
<td>70.4 (37.2–100.0)</td>
<td>8.4 (0.0–20.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No running water</td>
<td>20.2 (0.0–47.4)</td>
<td>53.8 (9.2–98.4)</td>
<td>0.6 (0.0–2.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No working toilet</td>
<td>31.4 (6.3–56.5)</td>
<td>57.9 (15.5–100.0)</td>
<td>16.1 (0.0–39.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No telephone service</td>
<td>43.2 (22.5–63.8)</td>
<td>76.8 (51.4–100.0)</td>
<td>23.6 (12.2–35.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No garbage removal</td>
<td>29.4 (2.5–56.4)</td>
<td>69.8 (36.1–100.0)</td>
<td>6.0 (0.0–12.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Property/Belongings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No damage</td>
<td>3.3 (0.0–6.8)</td>
<td>4.1 (0.0–10.0)</td>
<td>2.0 (0.0–7.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little damage</td>
<td>12.7 (4.6–20.8)</td>
<td>6.7 (0.0–14.0)</td>
<td>16.2 (3.6–29.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate damage</td>
<td>30.4 (18.0–42.8)</td>
<td>42.5 (24.5–60.5)</td>
<td>23.4 (11.8–35.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much damage</td>
<td>15.6 (0.1–31.1)</td>
<td>4.0 (0.0–9.2)</td>
<td>22.3 (1.3–43.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much damage</td>
<td>38.0 (24.8–51.2)</td>
<td>42.7 (26.2–59.1)</td>
<td>35.3 (16.2–54.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home not safe</td>
<td>41.9 (25.7–58.1)</td>
<td>51.9 (40.1–63.8)</td>
<td>36.1 (8.2–63.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illness or injury†</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preexisting chronic illness</td>
<td>55.7 (40.1–71.2)</td>
<td>60.4 (44.5–76.4)</td>
<td>52.9 (30.6–75.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injury caused by hurricane</td>
<td>3.7 (0.3–7.0)</td>
<td>3.6 (0.0–8.5)</td>
<td>3.7 (0.0–8.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness since hurricane</td>
<td>52.5 (42.1–62.8)</td>
<td>41.3 (28.3–54.4)</td>
<td>58.9 (46.8–71.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical care/Food</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems obtaining medical care</td>
<td>23.3 (12.2–34.4)</td>
<td>32.9 (13.9–51.9)</td>
<td>17.8 (7.7–27.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems obtaining medications</td>
<td>9.4 (1.5–17.3)</td>
<td>7.2 (0.0–15.2)</td>
<td>10.7 (0.0–21.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortage of food</td>
<td>4.2 (0.8–7.5)</td>
<td>2.5 (0.0–5.6)</td>
<td>5.1 (0.0–10.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Confidence interval.
†In a household member.

Found online at:


For clarity, a parish is equivalent to a county. Below is a map of Orleans parish, on the West and South of Orleans parish is the beginning of Jefferson parish. Thus, Jefferson parish surrounds Orleans parish in a crescent shape.
Found online at:

Greater New Orleans Community Data Center,
http://www.gnocdc.org/orleans/index.html


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Maggi, Laura. “Closing arguments completed in Mose Jefferson trial.” The Times-Picayune Online. 


SCHOLASTIC VITA

KATHRYN MICHELLE ELVEY

BORN: November 23, 1986, Bethesda, MD, USA

UNDERGRADUATE STUDY: University of Mary Washington
Fredericksburg, VA, USA
B.A. Cum Laude, 2008
With Honors in Religion
Religion and Political Science

GRADUATE STUDY: Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem NC, USA
M.A. Religion, 2010
Thesis Title: God Talk: Shifting Religious Rhetoric in Post-Katrina New Orleans