

The Media's Effect on Race Relations in post-Katrina New Orleans

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Word Count: 10,592

The Media's Effect on Race Relations in post-Katrina New Orleans by Yancy D. Edwards Jr, Kenyon College and Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware. Special thanks to my advisors both at Kenyon College and the University of Delaware, John Barnshaw, Dr. Kelly Besecke, Dr. Allison Hurst, Dr. Marla Kohlman, Dr. Sue McNeil, Dr. Jan Thomas and Dr. Havidan Rodriguez, my fellow students in the 2008 REU program at the Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware and fellow Sociology majors at Kenyon College for their feedback and support, my mother, father, and sister for their love and guidance, and to Laura for her love always. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation and the Department of Defense under Grant No. 0649031, and the University of Delaware Research Foundation. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the supporting agencies.

## The Media's Effect on Race Relations in post-Katrina New Orleans

This study aims to analyze how the media exposed and framed issues of systemic and color blind racism in a post-Katrina New Orleans. Through content analysis and an adaptive random sample of the *New York Times* and *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, this research codes for issues of systemic and color blind racism that may emerge.

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### INTRODUCTION

The study of race in sociology has been taken up in earnest by those wishing to understand the social and economic disparities, largely between blacks and whites. Despite the best intentions of these researchers, a tremendous amount of this scholarship has failed to explain race problems or predict social change brought about by racial groupings (McKee 1993). However, this is not to say that all of this research has been useless as several excellent theoretical frameworks have been developed (Bonill-Silva 2001; Feagin 2000; Omi and Winant 1994). This project aims to use some of the overlooked theoretical approaches in analyzing post-Katrina race relations, more specifically systemic and color-blind racism. The question at hand throughout this study has been: "How do sociological theories of race help us to understand and explain the ways in which the media constructed issues of race in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina?"

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to better understand the project at hand, a brief study of the history of racial scholarship in the United States is important, as it is of significant importance not only to the Black community, but our nation at-large. Although activists wrote about racial issues brought about by the forced enslavement of African Americans since the colonial period, racial scholarship as an academic endeavor did not emerge until the late nineteenth century (McKee 1993). Among the first major contributors to the racial

scholarship was Robert Park (1914) who developed a model of assimilation, the process by which blacks and other minorities become a part of and incorporate themselves into white, mainstream society. According to Park (1914) African Americans failed to assimilate to the culture and lifestyle of whites, not because of enslavement, but because whites refused to allow them to assimilate them into their culture. Thus, freed slaves and African Americans were neither part of Africa or African culture or part of the dominant white culture of the United States. Along with the transfer of power from the slave masters to the government, the ending of slavery brought with it the ability for blacks to “sever the personal relations” they had with white people (Park, 616). Without a culture or society to bind and define themselves with, it became imperative for blacks to form an identity of their own.

The idea of racial formation according to Michael Omi and Howard Winant is, “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhibited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 1994:55). Racial formation is so important because race is one of the first things that people notice upon seeing you. In the quest to define race, biological concepts have been discussed, and subsequently thrown out for beliefs that race is a social concept and socially, not scientifically constructed. Race has been framed in the political sense Omi and Winant argue, as a result of the racial dictatorship, or “legally sanctioned segregation” by the government after slavery and ending with the Civil Rights act of 1964. This racial dictatorship has defined the American identity as white, organized the “color line” that has divided our society, and “consolidated the oppositional racial consciousness and organization originally framed by marronage”

(Omi and Winant, 66). Over time however, this dictatorship has begun to shift into more of a democracy, limiting the hegemony whites have over blacks. It is in this idea of hegemony that contemporary racial scholarship has emerged.

Contemporary racial scholarship has evolved to incorporate class and gender in its analysis, forming the basis of intersection theory. They can operate independent of each other as well; looking exclusively at race has yielded ideas of systemic and color blind racism as explanations for the discrepancies in social and economic power between blacks and whites. In the context of disasters, race was first studied in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the displacement of Chinese immigrants (Banks and Read 1906). Other notable studies of race in disasters can be found following the Mississippi floods of 1927, in which New Orleans residents intentionally destroyed levees in order to relieve pressure and prevent damage in rich, predominantly white neighborhoods, and sacrificing predominantly Black neighborhoods. When Black residents were displaced, they were denied help from the Red Cross, forced to live in internment camps and threatened at gunpoint to fix the levees for meager wages (Adams et al.). White (1927) argued in his study that this Black northern migration was halted by these internment camps and wage exploitation (Barnshaw, PowerPoint presentation). Disaster research with a special emphasis on race and ethnicity has seen a rebirth after Hurricane Katrina and the number of blacks and other minorities that were affected, but as evident by the nearly 80 years between notable studies of race in disasters and Hurricane Katrina work, more needs to be done.

Literature on media framing in disaster research, in particular from Tierney, Bevc and Kuligowski (2006) points to the ways in which the media, in all of its forms, “exaggerates the incidents and severity of looting and lawlessness”. This is one of the more prevalent disaster myths perpetuated by mass media, the belief that looting and lawlessness will occur without “strong external social control” for example the military or FEMA (Tierney et al., 2006). This sort of framing can be used to play off of and strengthen public stereotypes regarding groups of people, the prime example coming from Hurricane Katrina and the looting vs. finding phenomenon between blacks and whites. The media can also determine for the consuming public what is newsworthy and which groups of victims are more important than others, again playing off of stereotypes and creating the “social value of disaster victims.”

## THEORETICAL APPROACHES

### *Systemic Racism*

Despite the proliferation of racial scholarship following Katrina, few studies have empirically utilized race theory (Tierney 2007, Erikson and Peek 2008). In preparing for this study, systemic and color blind racism were selected as the two race theories primarily because they look at race on a macro and micro level. Systemic racism is a more macro approach in that it looks at large scale practices of racism from institutions like governments, universities and corporations, while color blind racism occurs at a more micro level between people or small groups of people. In conjunction with each other, they provide the most comprehensive analysis of race relations in this country.

Critical race theory was originally proposed as a framework, but later rejected because of its better application in the study of law. The literature present on systemic racism, that is to say racist ideologies and practices by an institution, is discussed in-depth by social theorist Joe Feagin, who focuses on six key aspects of systemic racism: 1) the patterns of unjust impoverishment and unjust enrichment and their translation over time; 2) the resulting vested group interests and the alienating racist relation; 3) the costs and burdens of racism; 4) the important role of white elites; 5) the rationalization of racial oppression in racist ideology; and 6) the resistance to racism (Feagin 2000:18).

Unjust impoverishment, according to Feagin, is derived from the law, and is defined as “circumstances which give rise to the obligation of restitution, that is, the receiving and retention of property, money, or benefits which in justice and equity belong to another”, while unjust enrichment is, “discuss(es) the reality and consequences of racist oppression” (Feagin, 18). Put very simply, unjust impoverishment is the way in which blacks are wrongly exploited for their labor and unjust enrichment is the way in which whites profit from this exploitation. He equates this definition to his analysis on race by suggesting that Anglo-Americans have unjustly oppressed African Americans, beginning with slavery, and have continued to exploit their wealth and labor as means to advance themselves. This point, more so than others, illustrates the social significance slavery has had, especially for blacks.

Feagin’s second discussion point on systemic racism, the resulting vested group interests and the alienating racist relations, is related to the first in that it connects racism to the disproportionate amounts wealth and labor between blacks and whites. These

“vested group interests” for white people include maintaining both social and social dominance over blacks, while at the same time distancing themselves from any aspects of black communities. He takes this a step further however, and links this oppression to the fact that blacks are made into a lower, “proletarianized” class by whites, and as such are labeled as the inferior race in comparison. This process, along with others, is what makes systemic racism so powerful Feagin believes. It perpetuates the “racist relation” between whites and blacks and can transcend generations, making the problems for blacks as a result of slavery all the more real.

Feagin’s third point on systemic racism recognizes the cost and burden of racism on blacks. These costs include loss of wages, shorter life expectancy as a result of poor health care, as well as the inability to access the same social and economic resources that whites use to succeed. And while he does not make light of these concrete costs, he emphasizes “the consciousness that grows out of and reflects on oppressive conditions” as a more significant cost of systemic racism (Feagin, 28). This point echoes the first in recognizing the effects of slavery on the current social and economic situations of blacks. In the context of this project, the costs and burdens of racism can be seen in how predominantly white neighborhoods were prioritized when it came to evacuation over black neighborhoods.

His fourth point on systemic racism concerning the role of white elites relates directly to the previous three, in that these white elites have been constructed and integrated in our nation’s history through the institution of slavery. White elites are primarily male, and have similar characteristics to those who founded our country. But

not all whites are a part of the elite Feagin argues, and cites W.E.B. DuBois and his theory on the “public and psychological wage of whiteness” (Feagin, 30). What this means is that although they are not a part of the elite, the very fact that they are white makes them “better” in terms of their social position than the black working class. Those in the elite however have maintained their status by uniting themselves and those whites not in the elite to exploit working, lower class blacks and perpetuate the consciousness of inferiority held by blacks established by the costs and burdens of racism.

Feagin’s fifth point, the rationalization of racism, builds on the fourth point by explaining how white elites misinterpret ideas of meritocracy and create notions of a biologically superior and inferior race to fit a slavery-based paternalistic theory, to justify their role and actions. Rationalization of racism is only possible because whites have established their dominance over blacks by unjustly impoverishing and enriching themselves off of the goods and services of blacks, thereby creating a system of white elites. This rationalization acts similarly to color blind racism in that it tricks whites into believing that racism is a non-issue in this country and that any instances of it are unimportant and should be treated as such.

Much in the same way whites unite against blacks, blacks must do the same and resist racism; Feagin’s sixth point with systemic racism. By making a unified effort to “create...a collective consciousness that can lead to change”, blacks can begin to transform the institutions responsible for the injustices suffered, and take back some of the power lost through centuries of oppression (Feagin, 34). Feagin acknowledges some of the advances blacks have made, as well as the fear white America feels of this black

protest and revolution, but also understands the battle is far from over. Each major movement for black equality in our nation's history has been highlighted by an individual or small group of individuals who mobilized the entire race to their cause, from "David Walker and Frederick Douglass to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X" as well as the NAACP and Black Panther Party (Feagin, 35). It will indeed take a united black movement to combat institutional, systemic racism.

It is in this theory of systemic racism that the first coding category, embedded racism, emerged. Feagin defines embedded racism as the use of words or phrases by whites, "to target or denigrate black Americans but still appear unprejudiced at least to other whites" (Feagin, 120). Terms not limited to, but including "gangs", "the poor", and "drug pushers" are some of the most commonly used words or phrases used to describe blacks in the media and in everyday conversation. In the context of this study, institutions like the government and government officials on a national and local level, the white power elite, as well as the media and newspaper journalists can use embedded racism to further racist ideology and thought to derail black advancement and further, "the commonplace *denial of black agency*" (Feagin, 120).

### *Color-Blind Racism*

Color blind racism, on the other hand, is the belief that race is a non-issue and not responsible for many of the inequalities between blacks and whites. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva frames this theory around abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism as he defines it is, "involves using ideas associated with political liberalism in an abstract manner to explain racial

matters” (Bonilla-Silva, 28). Bonilla-Silva uses liberalism to describe how whites are against affirmative-action programs because they believe they don’t achieve their goal of equal opportunity. These same whites fail to realize however the deficiency of minorities in jobs and schools, and the necessity in implementing such programs; it “safeguards white privilege” (Bonilla-Silva, 31). Abstract liberalism uses the idea of meritocracy, namely that the best, most qualified person will receive the job or scholarship, no matter their race, to respond to those who cry racism. Furthermore, this theory subscribes to the notion that the uneven distribution of power between blacks and whites will eventually “work itself out”, and that the government should not force change upon its people.

Naturalization he argues provides an explanation of segregation for whites. This theory states that blacks naturally “hang out” with other blacks, and that they have no desire whatsoever to interact with whites, making any attempt by whites to include them pointless. Naturalization also works in color blind racism by allowing whites to believe that they too can “naturally” associate with whites, and hoard economic and social resources, because blacks do the same thing within their communities. The phrase, “that’s the way it is” is used ad nauseum with this theory as a cop-out for whites who want to believe that blacks exclusively self-segregate.

Cultural racism according to Bonilla-Silva is the new version of biological racism. It attributes minority status to cultural stereotypes such as “black men do not provide for their families” or “Mexicans are lazy.” Much in the same way biological racism justified racism by stating blacks were inferior because of a lack of intelligence, cultural racism believes that different lifestyle and morals are what make blacks inferior and whites

superior. It also helps support abstract liberalism and meritocracy in that it cites these cultural stereotypes as reasons minorities do not achieve and earn in the same way whites do.

The minimization of race, the fourth and final factor influencing color blind racism, is perhaps the most prevalent. It sums up the previous three points extremely well simply in terms of its namesake. Minimization of race and racial issues occurred in all three, through beliefs that unequal opportunities, segregation and cultural stereotypes were a thing of the past. This minimization however, punishes minorities for questioning these aforementioned inequalities in our society, and presents a no-win situation for minorities; if they do or say nothing, the discrimination persists, yet if they speak up they are labeled an agitator or someone who is “playing the infamous race card” (Bonilla-Silva, 29).

Sadly enough, there are those who truly believe that race is a non-issue in our country. As stated earlier, systemic and color-blind racism were selected as the two primary race theories because of their ability to study race on both a large and small scale simultaneously. Systemic racism understands racism as being steeped in history and performed and perpetuated by institutions through the implementation of embedded racism, while color-blind racism denies racial conflict exists and stigmatizes anybody believes otherwise. The literature available on both systemic and color blind racism is extremely interesting and poignant, yet as Feagin and Bonilla-Silva are the only mainstream theorists researching systemic and color-blind racism respectively, literature on the subject is lacking in breadth.

## METHODOLOGY

This research explores the media's construction of systemic and color blind racism in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina by doing a content analysis of newspaper articles. Using Lexus Nexus Academic search engine and inputting "race and Katrina" into the search parameters, articles have been collected from both the New York Times and the New Orleans Times-Picayune from August 30th 2005 to August 29th, 2006; in total, there are 379 articles from the New York Times and 938 articles from the New Orleans Times-Picayune. These newspapers were selected because the New York Times is the largest metropolitan newspaper in the United States and provides a national perspective on race and Hurricane Katrina, while the New Orleans Times-Picayune is the leading paper in New Orleans and will provide the local perspective on race and Hurricane Katrina. This research will use adaptive random sampling, more commonly known as systematic sampling, in selecting 15 percent of the 1,317 articles total. To get this 15 percent, a percentage which will best capture the essence of the coding categories, every 6<sup>th</sup> article from the 379 available from the New York Times and 938 available from the New Orleans Times-Picayune will be selected, for approximately 56 and 140 articles respectively.

Articles that do not use the terms "race" and "Katrina" in the way this research requires will be discarded. So if for example, an article uses the word race in the context of a bicycle race, or Katrina in the context of a twelve year old beauty pageant winner, it will not be used and passed over for an article that uses "race and Katrina" in the context

of this study, while selecting every 6<sup>th</sup> article. Maintaining this interval will allow for a thorough examination of the media's attitudes and thoughts on race and Hurricane Katrina on a week to week basis. There are three coding categories: embedded racism, minimization of race, and emergent or salient issues of race. Embedded racism borrows from Feagin's ideas of systemic racism, but is based primarily in its own theory. Put into action, this will include words such as "they", "those people", "poor" and "looters" in reference to blacks. Minimization of race comes from Bonilla-Silva's theory on color-blind racism, and includes phrases and beliefs such as, "things (race relations) are better now than they were in the past" or that blacks are playing the infamous "race card." The third coding category, emergent or salient issues of race, is complex. This category is designed to catch issues of race not covered in the other two categories, and may include ideas of long-standing patterns of racial injustice and broader racial themes. It can be hypothesized then, that the articles from the New York Times will offer more examples of embedded racism than those of the New Orleans Times-Picayune because of the racial diversity in New Orleans and the Times-Picayune readers versus the New York Times staff and readers and expected differing levels of sensitivity to issues of race. It can also be hypothesized that the New Orleans Times-Picayune will provide more and different subcategories of emergent or salient issues of race than the New York Times, this being because of the ever-present nature of problems regarding race and Hurricane Katrina; it is expected that there will be little to no difference in the amount of or types of minimization of race between the two newspapers.

This research offers perspectives from geographically impacted area and one non-impacted region. Both newspapers, the New York Times and the New Orleans Times-Picayune are well respected in their home cities, as well as on the national level. The New York Times has won 98 Pulitzer Prizes in its 157 year history, while the New Orleans Times-Picayune has garnered national attention and recognition for their commitment to New Orleans resident's post-Katrina with open letters to FEMA officials and President Bush. Their columnists engage in thought provoking discourse on a regular basis, and have certainly addressed the issues of race in post-Katrina New Orleans. In addition, doing a content analysis on both local and national newspapers allows for a cross comparison of the coding categories which in turn will present a more complete picture of race in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Conversely, there are limitations to this kind of research, first and foremost being the type of media analyzed. To totally and fully investigate the way in which the media exposed systemic and color blind racism in New Orleans would require looking at more than print media, and include pictures, radio and television. In addition, looking at newspaper articles from one year after Hurricane Katrina severely limits the sample and does not provide a complete picture of the media's construction of race. And perhaps the biggest drawback to this type of approach, not unique to this project however, but rather a problem with content analysis in general is the difficulty in quantifying and defining each coding categories. The best way to combat this and ensure that each coding category is complete and well defined would be to have several researchers working on the same categories, and then cross compare. These limitations aside, doing a content analysis and

adaptive random sample is, I believe, the best way study how the media exposed systemic and color blind racism in post-Katrina New Orleans.

## FINDINGS

### *New York Times*

41 articles from the New York Times were coded and analyzed. This number is significantly lower than the expected 56 articles available to code primarily because the articles towards the end of the batch farther away from Hurricane Katrina did not discuss race and Hurricane Katrina together; put very simply, the New York Times lost interest in covering Hurricane Katrina and felt more obliged to cover the mayoral race in New Orleans instead. It is expected however, that the New Orleans Times-Picayune will include more relevant articles on race and Hurricane Katrina in the necessary context. The three coding categories, embedded racism, the minimization of race, and emergent or salient issues of race, were each operationalized as discussed earlier, to make them easier to find in these articles. With this in mind, after reviewing all 41 articles from the New York Times population of 379, there were 65 instances of embedded racism found, 49 instances of minimization of race, and 61 instances of emergent or salient issues of race.

*Embedded racism.* Not surprisingly, embedded racism was the most robust coding category in these articles. Embedded racism is arguably the easy form of racism, because it is disguised and hidden within words and phrases that appear to be harmless and said or written without malice or ill-will. Within this category were three distinct sub-categories that have been categorized as the way in which blacks are portrayed in terms of being

poor, criminals and helpless victims. Through the frame of embedded racism, blacks are made to be poor through words such as “poverty, economic problems, low-income, less fortunate, homeless and disenfranchised.” Some of the more poignant examples of this include, “Some African Americans say that, remarkably, the hurricane has had the effect of pushing Mr. Bush to propose such sweeping Great Society-type programs -- the president called on Thursday for an Urban Homesteading Act to provide free land for low-income storm victims” (Bumiller and Kornblut 2005), “Politicians of all stripes have already condemned this plan, fearing that the trailer camps will become ‘FEMA ghettos,’ economically and socially isolated from communities and jobs” (Kaufman 2005), and “America's underclass were seen looting stores and defying the police in the wake of Hurricane Katrina” (Smith 2005). Several articles went so far as to link the experiences of blacks in post-Katrina New Orleans to refugees or even slaves on a slave ship, ““This looks like the hull of a slave ship," Mr. Jackson said as he reviewed the packed sidewalk where families had gathered, their belongings in torn trash bags. Ms. Waters said she had traveled throughout Africa and never seen anything quite like that scene. "This looks like an undeveloped country," she said. "No time did I think in America we would see this kind of homelessness, this kind of displacement. This is the worst thing I have ever seen.”” (Broder 2005). Several articles also used this subcategory of poor blacks and the subsequent poor housing and housing location associated with lower incomes as a reason for blacks being more at-risk during Hurricane Katrina, a sort of hybrid between minimization of race and embedded racism; this subcategory of blacks as poor was far

and away the strongest in that out of the 65 instances of embedded racism found in the 41 articles, blacks made to be poor occurred the most.

The second subcategory of how blacks are made to be criminals within embedded racism, namely the looting vs. finding food phenomenon, was not as prevalent as expected, in part due to the public outcry and the backlash the media took over pictures of a white man with a “finding food” caption versus a black man with a “looting food” caption that were published days after the storm. This subcategory used words such as, “looters, looting underclass and criminality” to link blacks to crime in post-Katrina New Orleans. Specific example of this would include, “Mr. Lee also sets the record straight on the false reports that spun out of the chaos, stories about men raping babies and shooting at helicopters, which portrayed the victims as savages. Those stories, magnified or invented whole cloth, drowned out the risks and sacrifices of Louisianans, which far outweighed the instances of criminality and opportunism” (Kulish 2006) and, America's underclass were seen looting stores and defying the police in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (Smith 2005). Again, this subcategory was not as strong as expected, primarily because of the public’s response to previous incidents of making blacks to be criminals. This third subcategory of blacks as helpless victims was one of great interest, as it used paternalism and paternalistic beliefs, that is to say whites must take care of blacks because they cannot do it for themselves, to categorize blacks in post-Katrina New Orleans. Words and phrases such as, “our citizens, they need our help, refugees, protect our citizens” were used in relation to blacks and in conjunction with the first subcategory of poor blacks to show how blacks needed help in helping themselves. Specific examples

of this include, "Can better neighborhoods rescue the poor? Or will bad luck and habits follow wherever they land?" (DeParle 2006) and, "Leaders like Mr. Rivers, a Democrat and a supporter of Mr. Bush, said the White House still had serious repair work to do among blacks after the images of the desperate and dying victims of the hurricane so shocked the nation and the world." (Bumiller and Kornblut 2005)

*The minimization of race.* The second coding category, the minimization of race, was present 49 times in the 41 articles coded. The majority of the minimization of race occurred on behalf of government agencies like FEMA and the Red Cross, President Bush and his administration, and the Republican Party by these same people. The action of minimizing race fought hard to defend against public outcry that the slow response time by the government to Hurricane Katrina was because of the predominantly black population of New Orleans or that the government is doing more abroad with disaster relief than in its own backyard. Examples of this include, "Many blacks voiced suspicions that thousands of people were left to suffer and die in the floodwaters because they were, for the most part, poor and black. 'Are you telling me we can coordinate a relief effort on the other side of the world and we can't do it here?' I.V. Hilliard, pastor of the New Light Christian Center Church in northern Houston, thundered from the pulpit of his mega church on Sunday morning. 'I'm not saying they didn't care. I'm saying they didn't care enough!' 'I can't help but think that race has something to do with it,' he added to a chorus of amen's. (Broder 2005), and "Scott McClellan, the White House press secretary, distanced Mr. Bush from his mother's comment by calling it a "personal observation," while Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the administration's most

prominent African-American, vehemently rejected any suggestion that Mr. Bush would discriminate on the basis of race. 'I find it very strange to think that people would think that the president of the United States would sit deciding who ought to be helped on the basis of color, most especially this president,' Ms. Rice said in an interview at The New York Times on Monday. 'What evidence is there that this is the case? Why would you say such a thing?'"(Bumiller and Kornblut 2005).

This minimization is surprising because the New York Times is generally a liberal paper, and has been extremely critical of President Bush and the way his administration has made policy decisions and handled the war in Iraq. Minimization also occurred in the thought that race relations are better than they have been in the past, but this is because racial inequality has become ambiguous and hard to discern through the way in which it is embedded in our society through the media. Examples include, "'Katrina tells us that things for the poor are still as terrible as they were in many instances in the 40's,' he continued. 'Katrina is a wake-up call, and the play allows us to understand what in a sense that's all about'" (Hoban 2005) and, "'But like most every other facet of the Hurricane Katrina story in this predominantly black city, race persists as a nettlesome issue'"(Rivlin 2005). What was expected to be perhaps the coding category that was found the most in these New York Times articles was unfortunately found the least, simply because addressing race in this country is still a messy and uncomfortable subject, in spite of its subtle nature.

*Emergent or salient issues of race.* The third coding category, emergent or salient issues of race, occurred 61 times in the 41 articles from the New York Times, four

subcategories actually emerged: racial inequalities prior to Hurricane Katrina, vulnerability of blacks prior to Hurricane Katrina, a need for open racial discourse, and a lack of or flight of the black middle class post Hurricane Katrina. These racial inequalities that are present in New Orleans are not exclusively a result of the storm, racial inequality existed prior to Hurricane Katrina. Examples of this would include, “But for many African-American leaders, there is a growing outrage that many of those still stuck at the center of this tragedy were people who for generations had been pushed to the margins of society.” (Gonzalez 2005) and, ““There is a deep history of injustice that has led to poverty and inequality, and it will not be overcome instantly,’ he said, adding that President Bush ‘from Day 1 has been acting boldly to achieve real results for all Americans.’” (Shenon 2005). Racial inequality in these articles was synonymous with class in that whenever race was mentioned in the New York Times articles, class was mentioned as well, usually in the same sentence. This subcategory relates well to another subcategory of black vulnerability to disaster in that they are both rooted in history and legalized segregation that existed in New Orleans and the South until the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Housing and school district lines were made by the government that isolated black neighborhoods and placed them in disaster prone, low lying areas. And while blacks have not been exclusively limited to these neighborhoods, family connections, government programs and a sense of community have kept them there and subsequently in danger, “The Bush administration believes that social-welfare programs often hold the poor hostage to their communities” (Kaufman 2005).

This category of emergent issues has also brought to the forefront the recognition for a need for open racial discourse, as it was lacking prior to Katrina and is important for fixing the current racial inequalities in New Orleans. The need for open discourse corresponds to individuals as well as to the government, more so to the government however. The coding revealed a sense in the media that people are waiting for the government to act, and that their actions would shape how this country views the current administration, “It means talking meaningfully about race in this country” (The New York Times 15 Sep. 2005) and, “Hurricane Katrina has forced President Bush to confront the issues of race and poverty in a way that has shaken his presidency and altered his priorities” (Bumiller and Kornblut 2005). And finally, the fourth subcategory of the flight of the black middle class is perhaps the most interesting. The black lower class by and large did not have the financial or cultural means to leave New Orleans, and were forced to stay and weather the storm and recovery efforts in FEMA trailers, while the middle class had the social and economic tools to relocate. This black middle, and even upper class, has left New Orleans, taking with them what little wealth blacks had, “Now their (middle class blacks) notable absences highlight the changed demographics of this shrunken city: it is largely devoid of its black middle and upper classes, while poorer blacks have begun to return to largely undamaged neighborhoods in the inner city in significant numbers. Whether the black educators, lawyers, business executives and health care workers who mostly lived in the ravaged areas of Gentilly and New Orleans East will return remains unclear” (Saulny 2006) and, “New Orleans East marched on, however -- a prized sanctuary for the nascent black middle class that was fleeing the

decaying inner city and was unwelcome either in the white-flight suburb of Metairie or in much of Uptown New Orleans. A generation later, the area was under water, and the black doctors, dentists and lawyers who populated it are gone, and angry” (Nossiter 2006). Without their return to the city and subsequent support of black businesses and community efforts, the black lower class, those most affected by Hurricane Katrina, have no chance of gaining social or economic mobility or equality.

*New Orleans Times-Picayune*

71 articles from the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* were coded and analyzed for this study. Much like the sample from the *New York Times*, 71 articles is significantly less than the expected sample size of 140 for many of the same reasons. As will be discussed in the conclusion, the search terms of “race” and “Katrina” yielded results about boat, horse and track races, and in particular the mayoral race, all following Hurricane Katrina that while interesting, are not relevant to this study. That being said however, the articles collected still provide insight to the media’s influence on race and race relations in New Orleans. Using the same coding categories as before, embedded racism, minimization of race, and emergent or salient issues of race, 71 articles from the 938 article sample size were selected, with 63 instances of embedded racism, 32 of minimization of race, and 119 instances of emergent or salient issues of race.

*Embedded racism.* As expected, there were less occurrences of embedded racism in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* than in the *New York Times*, relative to the sample size of each. Still though, there were the same three distinct coding categories to the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* articles as with the *New York Times*, blacks made to be poor,

criminals and helpless victims, in addition to a fourth subcategory of blacks made to be subhuman. And while not directly stated, it was expected that there would be differences in the expression of these coding categories between each newspaper due to the cultural uniqueness of New Orleans, however that did not happen. Regardless, each subcategory contained specific examples that only furthered the argument that the media effects race relations. Blacks in New Orleans are made to be poor through words such as, “underclass, welfare queens, and impoverished.” Specific examples of this include, “I just think the nation would have responded, the federal government would have responded differently, the state would have responded. I mean let's be honest. Tim, the images that were on the TV for those 12 days or so were primarily poor people,’ (Mayor Ray) Nagin said” (Alpert 2006) and, “New Orleans faces a potential disaster in race relations if black low-income evacuees return only to find that affordable housing has disappeared” (Editorial, 2005).

The second subcategory of how blacks are made to be criminals occurred more than expected, and certainly more than in the *New York Times* primarily because of the local news coverage’s propensity to report on more incidents of crime than a national newspaper. As a result of this over reporting, the chances for groups of people, blacks in particular, to be misrepresented drastically increases. The best example of this occurred in the reporting of the blockade of the Crescent City Connection just days after Katrina struck, and the accusations of police brutality in firing shotguns in the direction of black residents trying to cross into the West Bank, “New Orleans officials have criticized the blockade as a callous move to cut off desperate people perceived as potential thieves and

thugs looking to terrorize West Bank communities” (Hamilton 2006). Other examples of blacks made to be criminals include, “She (Mayoral candidate Peggy Wilson-Rep.) further continued the use of racially charged buzzwords that have brought her some criticism. She insisted that "gangbangers, pimps and welfare cheats" not be allowed back into public housing, without specifying exactly how such ne'er-do-wells would be identified” (Russell and Thevenot 2006) and, ““Some of the people shouldn't return,’ (U.S. Housing Secretary Alphonso) Jackson said. ‘The (public housing) developments were gang-ridden by some of the most notorious gangs in this country.’” (Walsh 2006). The third subcategory of blacks made to be helpless occurred in the same way as in the *New York Times* articles, with words like “vulnerable, desperate people, and neediest” being used to describe blacks following Katrina. Specific examples include, “It was incredible: the looks on their faces, quite desperate, needy, distressed,’ said Taffaro, who was in charge of West Bank operations for the Sheriff's Office in the days after the storm and saw people walking on the bridge as he drove across. ‘Their looks of despair and desperation were something I wanted to reach out and help.’” (Hamilton 2006) and, “...illustrated the depths to which New Orleans has plunged when it comes to taking care of its neediest people, most of them black” (Lee, 2006).

This fourth subcategory of blacks made to be subhuman is particularly fascinating, and completely contradictory to my hypothesis that because of New Orleans’ racial diversity, embedded racism would be less blatant and extreme. This was done by using words such as “immoral and lazy, trifling, and pimps” and done by blacks and whites, “(Rev. Jesse Lee) Peterson says the agony that prevailed in New Orleans after Hurricane

Katrina was not caused by failures inside the Bush administration and was not caused by failures inside the state and local governments. Instead, it was caused by black culture, which in Peterson's opinion is immoral and encourages laziness" (DeBerry 2006). This fourth subcategory borrows some from the previous three, yet acts on its own in describing blacks and black culture. As with all of these subcategories, the use of words and phrases as negative descriptors of race occur almost exclusively from the institution of government and government officials; indeed it is a powerful tool.

*The minimization of race.* The second coding category, the minimization of race occurred 32 times in the 71 articles coded and analyzed. This low number is not surprising because the majority New Orleans residents were in need of immediate relief, and rather than play the "blame game" with race and the government, instead focused their attentions on rebuilding their lives and communities. When it did occur however, it focused on the relief efforts and the reasons other than race for the delayed or inadequate response efforts by the local and federal government. Among the more popular reasons for poor relief efforts were, "Police and other West Bank officials say race was not a factor. They said conditions on the West Bank were unsafe and that emergency supplies on the West Bank were running out" (Persica 2006) and "But Terrol Williams, who had started his own small construction firm when the hurricane wiped out his business, said racism wasn't as much a factor as much as the federal government being unprepared and inadequately staffed for the disaster" (Alpert 2006). Unlike the sample from the *New York Times*, this group of articles did not make the argument that race relations were better now than in the past, one of the key aspects of the minimization of race. Instead,

the sample recognized race as an issue, yet argued that it had become oversensationalized and had lost its importance, “Long-shot mayoral hopeful Johnny Adriani garnered the strongest applause with the answer he gave after disengaging Curry: ‘The answer to the question is yes. But why are we sitting here and even debating this issue? It’s been oversensationalized. Let’s get over it,’ he said (Krupa 2006) and, “New Orleans City Council President Oliver Thomas, who is black, said he doesn’t think racism was behind the blockade. ‘To me, it was more of a human issue. We’ve got the race thing being thrown around so much now that when it’s really an issue, people don’t pay attention,’ he said.” (Hamilton 2006).

*Emergent or salient issues of race.* As expected, the third coding category, emergent or salient issues of race, occurred the most with 119 instances. And while the same four subcategories, racial inequalities prior to Hurricane Katrina, vulnerability of blacks prior to Hurricane Katrina, need for open racial discourse, and a lack of or flight of the black middle class post Hurricane Katrina, were present in this sample as with the *New York Times*, there were more subcategories, also as expected. Additionally, recovery and low-income housing, bringing back and keeping intact New Orleans culture and heritage and voting in the mayoral election emerged as subcategories, bringing the total to seven subcategories within emergent or salient issues of race. Racial inequalities and the vulnerability of blacks prior to Hurricane Katrina include, “The report bluntly depicts racist, bleak times for those on the working end of construction equipment or in the service industry. It details the experiences of migrant workers from out of town, many Hispanic and Asian, and also of African-Americans born and raised in New Orleans.

'New Orleans is being rebuilt on the backs of underpaid and unpaid workers perpetuating cycles of poverty that existed pre-Katrina,' wrote the authors" (Filosa 2006) and, "So, what explains the continuing images of the segregated South and of New Orleans as a city divided by race? For one thing, segregation for years was codified into law in the South, while restrictions working against black people elsewhere weren't as explicit (VanLandingham 2006). And much like the *New York Times*, this sample of articles expresses a need for open racial discourse, corresponding to both local and national government, in particular to the mayoral race and the need to elect a mayor who will encourage these conversations, "Watson, 50, the son and grandson of Pentecostal preachers, accuses City Hall of being in a state of denial, a criticism he extends to his rivals for the mayor's office. 'None of them want to engage in honest dialogue about race because they don't want to offend anyone,' he said. 'They're scared.' The unaddressed fractures along fault lines of race and class continue to divide the city at its core and impede its recovery, Watson said (Lee 2006). The fourth subcategory of the plight of the black middle class is understood differently in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* than in the *New York Times* in that the black middle class felt they were being forgotten about and all of the attention and financial aid was unfairly directed solely toward poor blacks. Specific examples of this include, "Despite the vital role that black professionals have played in the history of New Orleans, Hymes said she thinks they've been given short shrift during this crisis. She thinks the East took a backseat to Lakeview" (DeBerry 2005) and, "there's barely a mention of the devastation of eastern New Orleans, Lakeview or St. Bernard Parish. Poor and middle-class white people and middle and upper-class black

people suffered as well, but their struggles were not as visible” (Larson 2006). It is clear from the same subcategories with the two newspapers, that racial discourse for all blacks is crucial in order to fix existing inequalities.

The three new subcategories in emergent or salient issues of race, recovery and low-income housing, bringing back and keeping intact New Orleans culture and heritage and voting in the mayoral election, are truly specific to New Orleans and provide a unique insight to race and race relations. Many of New Orleans low income housing options were destroyed during Katrina, forcing residents who rode out the storm in FEMA’s temporary trailers to seek affordable housing, ” New Orleans faces a potential disaster in race relations if black low-income evacuees return only to find that affordable housing has disappeared. Of the 119,000 housing units that Katrina damaged or destroyed in New Orleans, 79 percent were low-income units within the budgets of the working poor” (Grace 2005). The argument made by government officials however, was that by rebuilding low-income housing neighborhoods, they would be agents in creating breeding grounds for crime and perpetuating cycles of violence. Examples of issues pertaining to housing include, “We need assistance in rebuilding neighborhoods -- black, white and integrated -- that were wrecked as a result of this failure on the part of a federal agency. And we need assistance in providing innovative and integrated housing developments that will continue to put black and white New Orleanians into daily contact with each other (VanLandingham 2006) and, ““Lots of working people, their wages are stuck pretty flat, while high income wages are going up,’ Turner said. ‘Poor and working people's incomes aren't keeping up and the housing squeeze is getting worse, including lots of

people working full time' (Filosa 2005). This category has strong ties to the subcategories of racial inequalities and vulnerabilities of blacks prior to Katrina, its only difference is the way in which it demands more immediate action; put very simply, people need places to live.

Bringing back institutions and events unique to New Orleans and its culture is not only extremely important to the city's return to stability, but also to blacks, as this culture, for example food and music, is rooted in black history and identity. In a sense, it gives blacks in New Orleans a sense of pride and ownership in their city; losing this cultural heritage would destroy what little power blacks have in New Orleans. "Opined a reader: 'It is without question true that the uniqueness and spirit of New Orleans is deeply rooted in the contributions of black culture that is found in our beloved music (from Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton to Allan Toussaint) and our delicious cuisine. These are the principal elements of the city that make it a must-visit destination for people worldwide. And it was our black citizens who bequeathed to us most of these treasures. (OK, let's give the French some credit too.) I know not one white person that would want those things to be destroyed. And I think you know that to be true'" (Rose 2006) is a prime example of this and the importance blacks have been to New Orleans and will be its continuation. In the quest to bring relocated blacks back to New Orleans, accusations have been made by whites that the government, under the helm of Mayor Ray Nagin, is discouraging whites to return and desire New Orleans to be primarily black. These accusations stem largely from Mayor Nagin's speech on Martin Luther King Jr Day 2006 about his dream for a "Chocolate City", a city comprised of

predominantly blacks, and perceptions that the government is doing too much for the poor, and for blacks. As a result of these misunderstandings, the quest to bring blacks and other minorities back to New Orleans has been hampered, and as such New Orleans has yet to fully recover.

The final subcategory, voting in the mayoral election, was found to be by far the most important issue regarding race and the relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina. With the need for leaders and policies to help blacks socially and economically recover and grow stronger than ever, it was crucial that leaders be elected that would assist in this. The problem however was that since there were limited housing and employment opportunities for blacks in New Orleans following Katrina, blacks could not return and as such could not vote in the upcoming election for mayor, “As expected, Katrina's population displacement also depressed overall voter turnout and shifted the racial demographics of the electorate” (Thevenot 2006). Quite simply, each candidate had different views on social and economic issues amidst the framework of race, “...Why aren't we looking at more imaginative solutions? The political debate hasn't confronted the issues straight on. No one's talking straight about issues of race, class and crime.” (Filsoa 2006). Because of this, activist organizations took action, “Tuesday's salvos were the latest from a coalition of liberal activist groups who argue that an election cannot be held because Hurricanes Katrina and Rita scattered much of New Orleans' African-American community throughout the South. Efforts by state officials to inform the exiles about the election, including an advertising and mailing campaign Ater pegs at more than \$1.5 million, are insufficient to overcome existing hurdles and the ignominious history of

race and voting in Louisiana, they say (Egler 2006), “The department's action drew immediate fire from several civil rights groups, which have contended for weeks that too little is being done to ensure that tens of thousands of black voters displaced by Hurricane Katrina will be able to participate in one of the most crucial elections in the city's history” (Bazile 2006). Race aside, the officers elected in the 2006 election would have the task of rebuilding New Orleans, and in order to ensure that their needs were met, blacks needed to vote. With government officials in place sensitive to blacks and issues of race, policies can be enacted to promote equality and begin the shift to a racially harmonious New Orleans.

## CONCLUSIONS/LIMITATIONS

In spite of its findings, this study is not without its flaws. One primary flaw upon review of the methodologies lies in the way in which the samples from the *New York Times* and *New Orleans Times-Picayune* were collected. The search terms of “race” and “Katrina” were too broad and should have been revised to make them more specific. “Race” can be interpreted as a boat, horse or a track race, and while to a computer search engine, “race” in the sense of black and white and race in the sense of a boat race are the same, for the purpose of this study they are not. In order to better generalize to the population size collected, a larger sample size would have been extremely helpful, and a larger sample size comes from having more articles relevant to the topic. For future research, the terms “racism” and “Katrina” would be more appropriate. Minor adjustments to this study also include studying print media from other newspaper companies from around the country to get a better geographical perspective of race in

New Orleans, coding articles from the *New York Times* and *New Orleans Times-Picayune* past the one year anniversary, as well as doing content analysis on other forms of media, for example television, radio and pictures. The inspiration for this project came from two nearly identical pictures with two different messages behind them, namely the looting vs. finding phenomenon; the power of pictures is amazing. In addition, two of the coding categories used, embedded racism and the minimization of race were severely truncated and not explored to their full capacity. As stated in the theoretical approaches section, systemic and color-blind racism contained in each of them several subcategories, six in systemic racism and four in color-blind racism. As this was an independent project done by one researcher instead of a team of researchers and done with a deadline, it was impractical and near impossible to code for all ten subcategories. The third coding category, emergent or salient issues of race, was designed in part to catch anything that may have been missed by not using every subcategory of the two theoretical approaches that were selected. With the proper research team and amount of time, I would like to code more vigorously for all of the subcategories of the theoretical approaches.

Perhaps the biggest issue and point of contention with this study comes in the very title itself. The phrase “media’s effect on race and race relations” can be interpreted as the ways in which the media reports racism in all of its forms through the use of quotes and paraphrasing, or the ways in which the media itself acts or writes about race and racism, primarily through embedded racism. It is also true that the racism that is being reported by the media may in fact not be racism, and instead just be the reporting of fact, an example that Blacks in New Orleans are poorer than whites. The key to understanding

this as racism I have found, is to determine whether or not the mention of these facts is necessary in making the point of the article; to talk about those “poor Blacks” in New Orleans when talking about a Black man from New Orleans who lost his home does not further the argument of losing a home. Such a bold statement, “the ways in which the media constructed issues of race” can unfairly label the media, or at least the *New York Times* and *New Orleans Times-Picayune* as a racist organization. After serious thought regarding this dilemma, I believe that after completing this study, the media has done both. Rather than make the distinction between the two different methods the media uses to perpetuate racism and poor race relations, I believe that studying both in conjunction with each other is the best way to approach it because, ultimately, it does not matter how racism survives and grows, the fact that it does is a problem. To identify racism is to acknowledge its existence.

This study has been one of personal growth and development, and has provided empirical evidence to support what many believe, including myself, is common knowledge-that race relations in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina were dreadful, and the storm only furthered the divide between blacks and whites. This research I believe is unique, and hopefully the first of its kind, as there is more needed on race and race relations in a post-Katrina New Orleans. More detailed and specific research can inform policy makers on the racial inequality in New Orleans and assist them in their decisions on issues that can positively affect Blacks and other minorities. This research has opened the door to different questions or ideas for future research include studying the effects of photographs or other types of media on race relations, as well as a

longitudinal study, where the same methods were used on newspaper samples from two or three years after Katrina, and analyze whether the same issues of race emerge.

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