

“Reporters Gone Wild”

Reporters and Their Critics on Hurricane Katrina, Gender, Race & Place

Steve Classen

The great fiction of the southern United States is frequently characterized by its passionate embrace of place. In her classic essay, “Place in Fiction,” the widely beloved Mississippi author Eudora Welty writes, “Place in history partakes of feeling, as feeling about history partakes of place. Feelings are bound up in place. Location is the ground conductor of all the currents of emotion and belief and moral conviction that charge out from the story in its course.”¹

Welty's rich stories evoke larger traditions of southern art and everyday culture imbued with multifaceted understandings of place. Starting with Welty's insight, in this essay I discuss the relationship of place and emotion and the expression of that relationship in journalistic storytelling—specifically, the rituals and techniques evident in the televised cable network news coverage of Hurricane Katrina as the storm and its aftermath devastated parts of the U.S. South. My aim is not primarily to provide yet another critique of network reporting (although much of it is ripe for such analysis), nor is it to present a systematic content analysis of television news texts. Rather, this essay offers a meta-critique, examining prominent published evaluations of the reporting in the earliest hours of the disaster, with a particular focus on moments in which normative national network news practices quite literally “broke down.”

I argue, in part, that “senses of place” are essential to better understandings of the “break down” of mainstream network reporting practices. Places are discourses, physical settings and ideological groundings; they are both where one is, and where one should be (as in one should know “their place”). But, importantly, they are about more than physical territory and are, in a broad sense, political. “Places are contested, intersecting, and uncertain, clearly shaped by power relations and human interests.”² While there are no essential meanings of a place or places outside of culture and particular social and historical contexts, as such meanings are understood, reproduced, discussed and enacted in daily encounters, they are powerful in their employment. Much more than a simple geography or a physical space, place matters.

The control, credibility and construction of place(s) are essential concerns within mainstream television journalism. One need look no further than their familiar late local newscast “live” reporter standing outside of a long-closed and darkened city hall, county building or state capitol to view the routinized investment of “live” television news in place. Why is the reporter standing where there is nothing happening and nothing new has occurred? In large part it is because the ritualistic performances of television news are so heavily grounded in myths of liveness and their vital connections to place.

Among the best illustrations of these investments are the conventions of live, on the spot reporting during large-scale crises or disasters. The practice of rushing to specific geographic points—chosen locations “central” to the crisis—and broadcasting live from such locations regardless of what may or may not be happening at the moment of live broadcast is commonplace. As Riegert and Olsson (2007) explain, such “live, at the place where news is happening” reporting “is as much about ritual and meaning-making as it is about providing information.”³ Newscasts continuing with a “breaking” news story pertaining to a local or national crisis for hour after hour, with little, if any, substantive new information to offer its audience and larger public, serve to proffer reporters less as informers than as comforters, advocates and co-mourners.⁴

Such common rituals work to legitimate and reinforce the mythology of a societal “center” at which media institutions reside.⁵ Through ritual practices such as the live, on the spot reporter in the midst of crisis or disaster, audiences and publics are persuaded to think of media as standing in for something

wider, something linked to the fundamental organizational level on which we “imagine ourselves to be connected as members of society.”⁶ Precisely at the moment of crisis or threatened social chaos, journalistic rituals reinforce news institutions' authority as central institutions in society that “speak for us all,” and work to control how places, people and events are understood.

Journalism Done a Different Way

What draws my interest in the case of media coverage of Hurricane Katrina's early hours, particularly as it was centered in New Orleans, is the breakdown or upsetting of such rituals. Discussing media ritual in catastrophic times, scholar Frank Durham (2008) has explained that a lack of access to traditional government sources during the early days of Katrina led to network television reporting that was more sensitive to and representative of local and populist perspectives, as well as sources of social power.⁷ He argues that “because the traditional press-government media ritual was undermined, broadcast journalists from both cable and networks were forced to vary from their routines of objectivity, producing, instead, a more populist form of coverage that resonated... with their audience's cultural experience of the storm.”⁸

In these mediated moments of journalism performed differently, we also have dramatic examples of tensions between conflicting journalistic epistemologies, most clearly manifest in the lively disagreements between reporters “on location” and network anchors in distant studios. In these professional and public disagreements, discourses of journalistic authority are tangibly challenged and the efficiencies of professionalized knowledge resisted, by “senses of place.” Examination of Hurricane Katrina television coverage reveals how the experiences and performances of place rupture technique (*techné*)—journalistic technique and craft—subsequently resulting in disparate critiques of journalistic professionalism.⁹

News reporters moved very quickly to take their traditional places and roles as Hurricane Katrina hit the South, in many cases traveling with impressive speed to where the news was at its most dramatic and tragic. As was painfully evident, television journalists moved to the storm zone with agilities and resourcefulness that often put federal and state emergency agencies to shame. Many were on the “front lines” of the disaster long before emergency services arrived. Pressed by the exigencies of commercial reporting in an environment of incessant multi-channel and multi-media flow and competition, reporters found ways to get to southern Mississippi and Louisiana, and to begin appearing before live cameras and microphones. The technologies that were a normal and essential part of contemporary journalistic practice, including electricity, however, were missing for the most part.

Houston Chronicle reporter Roma Khanna arrived in New Orleans early in the disaster and subsequently said, “For me, and for a lot of people, logistics were really just difficult: charging your laptop and charging your phones, sending your stories—basic, traditional things you take for granted.”¹⁰ Many reporters worked in almost total isolation for the first few days, operating with little or no contact with the outside journalistic world. Khanna reports being unable to watch a television or see any news for more than two weeks. Cell phones, Blackberries and Internet connections didn't work,¹¹ and even satellite technologies were problematic.¹² Radio frequencies were jammed with traffic, as were the essential transportation corridors. The few conventional sources of officialdom available to reporters, for example New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, or local police officers, were also hindered by a communication technology infrastructure in shambles. In fact, most governmental and state institutions, as well as elected leaders such as Nagin—all traditional and key sources for news—were most often in the same situation as isolated reporters, lacking timely, if any, new information.

CNN's Michael Perlstein summarized the journalistic state of affairs those first few days, saying that reporters and New Orleans officials were caught up in a “communications blackout.”¹³ NBC News Correspondent Carl Quintanilla, appearing on the PBS *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, observed that the failure of common communication technologies dramatically impacted the reporting from New Orleans, forcing the proportion of first person reporting to be larger than any other major U.S. news story in recent years. As Quintanilla observed, journalists cut off from their information-gathering routines, techniques and technologies were forced to report relying on their own immediate observations and conversations with those easily accessible to them.

Journalism had to be done a different way. The normative journalistic sphere had been reduced in scope—localized, personalized and relatively low-tech. Thus, reporting was first person storytelling—journalism spoken in the present, in dialogue, emotionally engaged and unmistakably connected to specific

physical spaces. The empathy, fear and anger of reporters were on uncharacteristic display as they worked within their limited, “grounded” news universe alongside anxious and often angry, suffering human beings.

The Critics Respond—“How Hard-Bitten Hacks Went Soft Over Katrina”

Critics subsequently responded to these television journalists and their storytelling in a variety of ways. In the weeks following the initial reporting on Katrina there were at least three different, yet prominent, themes repeatedly articulated by media critics, newspaper columnists and journalists themselves in evaluation of the television journalists and coverage involved. These themes often coexisted within a single review, but for the sake of analysis, I somewhat crudely summarize these often overlapping themes as: (1) Journalists as professionally emboldened heroes; (2) Journalists as perpetrators of racist and classist myths; and (3) Journalists as reckless rumormongers and transgressors of professional norms.

The first evaluative theme came in large part from the journalistic profession itself, a group who frequently apologized for the errors made in the haste and tragedy of the moment, but also very frequently placed such apologies within larger narrative frames praising the journalist as intrepid. Typical of the “journalist as hero” theme is an article by Don Wall in a September 2005 edition of *Television Week*. Wall wrote, “When disaster strikes, most people want to get out, fast. Not journalists—who sprint from all points directly into the danger zone.”¹⁴ Much could be said about such self-aggrandizing description—but I would just emphasize that such evaluations, when linked to the fact that the vast majority of the U.S. television reporting corps on most natural disaster stories are men, and the well-documented “macho culture of news work,” effectively reinforce mythologies of journalists as gendered heroes—as the tough, masculinized reporters—the “tough newsmen” capable of handling “the toughest of news stories.”¹⁵

These same tenacious professionals were also applauded by commentators for their “backbone” and “toughness” in their persistent questioning and criticism of government officials. Typical of this praise was a commentary by media critic William Powers:

Reporters are doing once again what, in a free society, they are supposed to do—asking tough questions and holding public officials to account for their sometimes appalling, and in this case, fatal, mistakes. White House press conferences, which in the age of President Bush have been reduced to spineless questions followed by bromidic non-answers—are full of dramatic confrontations.... The turnabout is so astonishing it is making headlines itself, and not just in those publications read by media-savvy Washington and New York insiders.¹⁶

However, in handling “the toughest of news stories,” as other commentators noted (and articulated a second evaluative theme), the less controlled and scripted journalism of the first days of Katrina flooding revealed not only journalistic persistence and passions, but also the operations of powerful racial mythologies connecting notions of crime and indolence with blackness.¹⁷ In the hours and days after Katrina hit, Jed Horne (2006), a metro editor for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, observed that the dominant media “aggregate portrait was of a city gone mad, a black city, a city of depraved men and women.”¹⁸ Terms such as “thugs” and “criminals” were repeatedly linked to televised images of blackness, as well as implicit and explicit criticisms leveled at the impoverished, primarily black, residents of New Orleans for not evacuating their homes and city. “Refugees” was the nomination initially given by some reporters to local citizens forced to flee, connoting their identities as fundamentally foreign. Some critics condemned such nominations and reporting, noting that these representations were immediately and materially consequential, as a mediated focus on “the great black [or foreign] terror roaming the streets” might have inhibited more effective and immediate relief efforts, particularly in historically poor and black neighborhoods, and may have hindered having more lives saved.¹⁹

Some, most notably *Slate*'s media critic Jack Shafer, highlighted what was missing in the reporting. Shafer wrote a column criticizing television reporters' collective hesitation to explicitly deal with the connected issues of race and poverty that underlay and precipitated the unfolding Katrina disaster. Shafer mourned a reporting opportunity and responsibility squandered, namely, missing the chance to “bring attention to the disenfranchisement of a whole definable segment of the population.”²⁰ Though understandings of class, race and place are inevitably and inextricably intertwined, television reporters lacking the supports of their conventional technical infrastructure frequently ignored local racial, cultural and political history. Sadly, while this type of decontextualized and ahistorical approach to

commercial television news reporting is the norm, its ignorance was even more transparent as reporters improvised and worked without the usual technical assistance—research aides, prompters and scripts.

In short, a journalistic ritual that presupposed careful scripting, pre-production, coordination with political and social institutions and reiteration of reassuring “official” knowledges, was upended. Reporters were uncoupled from that which usually guides and protects their professional public presentations. In the absence of these technologies and their attendant newsgathering techniques, some journalists were indeed intrepid. But, for good or for ill, it was difficult to ignore how nakedly emotional, subjective and powerfully relational and place-based most news reporting became, and, in turn, how this “different kind of reporting” drew, and continues to draw, considerable public comment and attention.

Standing for long hours in the places of terrible pain, field reporters, as many critics noted, “spoke truth to power” in terms of challenges to federal officials and politicians. But even more unusually, and jarringly, locally-based reporters again broke away from media ritual by challenging authoritative voices and framing perspectives offered by network anchors and show hosts suggesting a unified and falsely comforting “we’re all in this together” mythology. Instead, the reporters embedded in spaces of local tragedy aggressively challenged attempts by network anchors and colleagues to paint comforting, normalizing myths over the anguish of the places in which they stood. They bluntly refuted the ritual implication that hosts and anchors were, in fact, “with them” in the experiences of pain and loss.²¹

The friction between network anchors and reporters “on the ground,” who identified themselves as personally knowledgeable of, and connected to, specific places and their residents, set off sparks on several occasions. To the distant, comfortably situated anchors and authorities calling for calm and “perspective,” the on-the-scene reporters talked about “seeing and smelling” deteriorating local conditions, pointed to their surroundings and yelled back, “That is all the perspective you need!” One example of these moments, chosen here in part because of its continued popularity on a variety of blogs and websites, came from the Fox News network’s Geraldo Rivera and Shepard Smith.



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The previous day, September 1st, reporter Smith, who proudly identified himself as a native Mississippian, had a similar clash with colleague and celebrity pundit Bill O'Reilly that was clearly informed by Smith's personal embrace of Mississippi and Louisiana and his historical "sense of place." After multiple days on location, and after talking about seeing corpses floating in the open water around the Convention Center, a clearly fatigued and frustrated Smith said to anchor O'Reilly, "I want to say this. In my wildest dreams, I cannot conjure up a vision of this city rebuilt." O'Reilly replied, "No, they'll do it... Shepard, they'll do it, you'll see." Smith responded by pointing to area where he was standing, saying, "You haven't seen this, Bill."

This invocation of presence, local knowledge and felt place usurped and confronted a journalistic convention of addressing tragedy, threat and unsettling news through the calming and "objective" voices of knowledgeable elites who convince audiences that radical changes are unnecessary and that everything will be fine—as O'Reilly's comments above represent so well. Within this convention, representatives of "official" knowledge, often lead anchors and hosts, work to represent manifestations of society's larger social and structural problems as aberrations or temporary setbacks in the march of the status quo. They speak quickly of resolutions rather than framing social problems as outcomes of the chronic and unjust practices endemic to larger socio-political structures. But even as reassuring voices speak and wittingly or unwittingly attempt to re-frame and normalize problems, oppositional voices, in this case coming from within the ranks of journalistic professionals, respond to normalizing discourses such as Shepard Smith did, by saying, "Hell no, things are not fine, and will not be fine, and I know it, because I'm here, I'm in this place—you're not."

The print press quickly took note of this and other instances of what the on-line *Salon* magazine called "reporters gone wild"—television journalists openly clashing with politicians, pundits and network anchors [see a copy of the *Salon* "reporters gone wild" video compilation at: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3836075687474060909>].

As *Slate* noted a few days after the reporting, these "poignant outbursts have been noted, and in some cases toasted, by the *New York Times*, the *New York Observer*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, the BBC, *Slate* and *Salon*, among others, as signs of a renewed media vigor. 'Amidst the horror, American broadcast journalism just might have grown its spine back, thanks to Katrina,' the BBC declared."²² Maureen Ryan (2005) of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote about these scenes as well, saying that viewers of cable news had "seen a week of jaw-dropping moments, most of which are readily available for replay all over the Internet."²³

From some prominent conservative critics came the (third) evaluation: that reporters were primarily shirking their professional norms, responsibilities and ethics in their reckless abandonment of "objectivity." Conservative detractor Hugh Hewitt, appearing on the PBS *News Hour* program, quickly jumped on instances such as those mentioned above as examples of "careless" and "failed" reporting, criticizing journalists for leading with their emotions and passions, and thus, in the end, "getting it wrong."²⁴ Conservatives characterized the Katrina reporting as "absolutely unethical," and as a "self-righteous abdication of journalistic professionalism." A conservative "ethics watchdog" in Alexandria, Virginia opined: "It must have been extremely difficult for the reporters to witness first hand the astonishing plight of so many. Nonetheless, their professional responsibility was to maintain their composure and objectivity, and they failed. Not only failed, but unapologetically failed."²⁵ The same critic also wrote that journalists had failed to recognize their proper place or role in their efforts: "The journalists need to tend to the breakdown of their own professional standards and stop presuming that they know how to solve problems far outside their training, abilities, experience... and job description."²⁶

Some of the most emotional, confrontational and "out of control" journalists effectively advanced their careers via their "wild" and provocative performances in the early hours of Katrina coverage. Anderson Cooper of CNN, for one, saw his ratings numbers go up sharply following his on location Katrina reports. Following news of Cooper's ratings boon, Cooper's boss, CNN President Jon Klein, predictably praised the journalist, telling the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that he liked the "emotional Cooper." He also commented that Cooper was "about visceral experience" while the other CNN anchors were more about "cerebral analysis."²⁷

While the "visceral," "emotional" and "less cerebral" reporting of Anderson, Shepard Smith and other reporters on location during the early hours of the storm raised ratings and audience interests, and

thus favor with network bosses, it simultaneously raised commentator concerns over the qualitative erosion of “hard news” reporting. What was happening to the professional norm of a stolid objectivity? Was “hard news” reporting going more and more “soft,” with a tabloid-like focus on personal lives, emotionalism and rumors?

For instance, an October 2, 2005 headline of London publication *The Independent Sunday* highlighted “How hard-bitten hacks went soft over Katrina.”²⁸ In the article below the headline, which, like many others, applauded journalistic confrontations of inept political and public safety officials, the newspaper pointedly observed that veteran reporters “had lost all pretense of detached objectivity and instead gave full vent to their frustration and anger. Some even cried on camera.”²⁹ Joining in the criticism of such emotionalism in reporting, journalism professor and conservative pundit Robert Lichter argued in another press interview, “The job of the journalists is to step in and sort our rumor from fact, not to be part of the rumor-mongering process.” Lichter continued reiterating the importance of journalism divorced from emotion and subjectivity. “It is good journalism to dig beneath the official story,” he says, “but that doesn't require showing emotion. It requires channeling your emotion into getting the real story.”³⁰

In the eyes of these and other commentators, the exigencies of reporting on Hurricane Katrina had invited the excessive emotionalism, professional irresponsibility and rumor mongering that is part and parcel of the troubling and increasingly common practices eroding professional journalism. In their criticisms, these reviewers evoked mythologies that equated emotion, empathy and personal human interest perspectives with “rumor mongering,” “softness” and the feminine, in stark contrast with “hard news” that is “stolid,” distanced and “objective.” For these critics, the long-established professionalized (and gendered) lines between “soft” and “hard” news had been crossed, compromising the accuracy and truthfulness of news reporting done well.

In making these arguments, commentators were, at least in part, reiterating implicit concerns regarding a growing “feminization” of the news. Allan (1999) describes this anxiety: “While the subject of much debate among journalists, it would appear that the rising importance of women as a distinct audience group... is helping to dissolve [the] “hard” news vs. “soft” news dichotomy.”³¹ Stories formerly deemed trivial or “human interest” pieces within male-dominated newsrooms are more commonly finding their way into “hard” news presentations.³² The gendered ways of knowing and classifying knowledge within professionalized journalism cultures are increasingly points of debate and contestation.

Critics' worries about “rumor mongering” replacing journalistic objectivity represent more than idiosyncratic and isolated reactionary responses to contemporary journalistic trends. They can also be seen as calling attention to wider public concerns regarding emerging journalism practices and clashing professional epistemologies. Integrally joined to the hard and soft news binary is the problematic norm of journalistic “objectivity,” which is based on a dichotomization of the knower (subject) from the known (object). As Allan explains the feminist critique, “This separation naturalizes, to various degrees, a series of dualisms whereby ‘masculine’ discourses about reality (held to be objective, rational, abstract, coherent, unitary and active) are discursively privileged over ‘feminine’ ones (posited as subjective, irrational, emotional, partial, fragmented and passive).”³³

In the devastating wake of Katrina, reporters, mostly male, were experiencing technical failures on multiple levels—failures of essential everyday technologies and professional techniques. In turn, rituals, which reiterated the centrality of news organizations to society via reassuring and falsely unified portrayals of a large-scale crisis, broke apart quite visibly and with a good deal of emotion in full view. As Mary Ann Doane (1990) has observed, catastrophe does “always seem to have something to do with technology and its potential collapse,” and thus “our understanding of natural catastrophe is now a fully technological apprehension.”³⁴ As journalists suffered the collapse of common communication technologies in the early moments of crisis, and thus relied upon reportorial techniques that were “softer” on the “facts,” and less professionally efficient or “objective,” the anxieties and passions surrounding “natural” and “technological” catastrophes blurred together and were made powerfully manifest.

Viewing the devastated place they called home, some prominent New Orleans-based journalists and commentators, such as Dean Keith Woods of the Poynter Institute, referenced their relatives, friends and historical ties to the affected areas, saying they were unapologetic for their journalistic passions while talking about New Orleans and Mississippi as places of deep affinities and identity. In *Breach of Faith* (2006), New Orleans journalist Jed Horne wrote of the wrenching decisions of his colleagues to give time and effort to saving lives rather than working more “objectively” and “professionally” on perhaps the biggest story they would ever cover—and journalists weeping in memory of these horrible moments. CNN correspondent Kathleen Koch (2006), whose hometown of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi was destroyed, wrote

a year after her on location reporting of the Gulf Coast devastation, “I am a reporter. Tough, unemotional, detached. Until Katrina.”

Remembering the Outtakes

As the events of August and September 2005 become chronologically distant, the dramatic moments of journalistic “outbursts” and “naked emotionalism” will be deemed by some journalists and cultural analysts as extraneous, unnecessary and marginal to the “real stories” of Mississippi and New Orleans. They will likely be classified as journalistic “outtakes” and judged as peripheral by the discourses of officialdom. But it seems to me that scholars, particularly those in the humanities and cultural studies, should be examining and highlighting such “outtakes.” We should continue to show how our studies take particular interest in finding the ruptures, the dissonance and the historical outtakes because it is in these moments of opposition and possible contradiction that we find and build richer understandings of context and political potential.

These disruptions of the normalizing frames that news anchors and hosts continually employ were perhaps fleeting, and, some would argue, had little immediate impact beyond elevating the celebrity of some of the field reporters. But they are and continue to be circulated and celebrated in disparate communities and sites, from local comedy clubs to websites and blogs. As others have noted, these “jaw-dropping moments” have been consistently and readily available for replay, commentary and advocacy “all over the Internet.”³⁵ Their future power and political potential are dynamic and intertwined with more recent texts circulating and pointing to the continuing disregard and delay marking the rebuilding of New Orleans.³⁶ Some established media pundits might believe, and will encourage others to believe, that the nation has “healed” and “moved on” from Katrina. But the representational and cultural politics of the Katrina disaster cannot be neatly relegated to the past. They live on in myriad forms, including digital media reproductions of angry “reporters gone wild,” engaging and challenging distanced official perspectives by deploying local lived experience.

About the Author

Steven Classen is Associate Professor and Graduate Advisor in the Department of Communication Studies at California State University, Los Angeles. His book *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles Over Mississippi Television, 1955-1969* (Duke University Press), won the 2004 Donald McGannon Award for Social and Ethical Relevance in Communication Policy Research.

Endnotes

1 Eudora Welty, *Eudora Welty: Stories, Essays and Memoir*, ed. Richard Ford and Michael Kreyling (Washington, D.C.: Library of America, 1998), 781.

2 Jody Berland, “Place” in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris (Malden, MA: Blackwell), 257.

3 Kristina Riegert and Eva-Karin Olsson, “The importance of ritual in crisis journalism,” *Journalism Practice*, 1(2007): 143.

4 Ibid.

5 Nick Couldry, *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

6 Riegert and Olsson, 146.

7 Frank Durham, “Media ritual in catastrophic time: The populist turn in television coverage of Hurricane Katrina,” *Journalism*, 9(2008): 99.

8 Ibid., 111.

9 “Act Globally, think locally” is a phrase often attributed to the iconoclastic technological determinist and theorist Jacques Ellul (1964), who spent most of his intellectual life warning that the discourses of “technique” would lead Western cultures to dysfunction, inhumanity and despiritualization. While not in agreement with Ellul on many points, I’ve been impressed and influenced by his call to resist technique and its core concern—the efficiency of knowledge.

10 Katie O’Keefe, “Ethical firestorm: A month after one of the greatest natural disasters in American history, experts grade the media on their coverage of Hurricane Katrina,” *The Quill*, December 1, 2005: 3.

11 Ibid.

12 Although we have heard much about the productive use of the internet, blogs, and digital information technologies in the weeks and months following Katrina, many have reported, and Congress has acknowledged, that the uses of “old” communications technologies (such as hard-wired long distance phone lines, and amateur “ham” radios) were among the most essential communication technologies to first responders—including local rescue crews and reporters.

13 Brian Thevenot “Myth-Making in New Orleans,” *American Journalism Review*, January 2006:33.

14 Don Wall, “Disaster Teaches Valuable Lessons,” *Television Week*, September 26, 2005: 1.

15 This bit of journalistic “commonsense” continues to be reproduced in many ways. For example, on the educational front, in November 2005 I attended a special seminar at the Los Angeles branch of the Museum of Television & Radio, titled “Covering Disasters: The Lessons of Katrina and Rita.” The program began with a “highlight reel” of U.S. television news reporting during the natural disasters of the past 50 years, including coverage of event such as Hurricane Edna in 1954, and the Northridge, California earthquake of 1994. In the entire compilation, assembled by the educational staff of the Museum for college journalists in training, a total of one female reporter briefly appeared. Historical disaster reporting was presented, void of any criticism or further reflection, as the exclusive province of middle-aged men. On the assembled panel of four local television and radio journalists, speaking of “lessons learned,” there were no women, and the panel moderator, even when given opportunities to shift the direction of discussion to considerations of race and class dynamics, repeatedly brought the assembled back to considerations of the hardships and physical challenges endured by journalists in Post-Katrina New Orleans.

16 William Powers, Shock snaps US Media out of its long trance. *The Observer (Business)* September 11, 2005, 2.

17 See Carol Stabile (2007), “No Shelter from the Storm,” for a more extensive discussion of the racial mythologies and dynamics evident in the television network coverage of Hurricane Katrina.

18 Jed Horne, *Breach of Faith: Hurricane Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City* (New York: Random House, 2006): 108.

19 University of Dayton, “Is Media Turning Hurricane Katrina Into Crime Story?” AScribe Health News Service, Dayton, Ohio, September 2, 2005: 1.

20 Jack Shafer, “Press Box: Lost in the Flood,” *Slate*, August 31, 2005. <http://www.slate.com/id/2124688> (accessed December 3, 2005).

21 This observation—that the perspectives of on location reporters and network anchors repeatedly clashed due to senses of place—was presented in my paper (and illustrated via video new clips) in a plenary session of the May 2006 Console-ing Passions Conference, coordinated by Professors Carol Stabile and Elana Levine of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Subsequently, while my observation went unacknowledged, it served as a centerpiece for Stabile’s 2007 essay, “No Shelter from the Storm.”

- 22 Eric Boehlert, "Katrina Jolts the Press," *Salon*, September, 7, 2005.
http://dir.salon.com/story/opinion/feature/2005/09/07/press_katrina/index.html (accessed November 15, 2006).
- 23 Maureen Ryan, "Moments of Truth in the Coverage of the Post Katrina Disaster," *Chicago Tribune*, September 7, 2005: 1.
- 24 *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*. September 29, 2005. Public Broadcasting Service.
- 25 Jack Marshall, "Katrina Ethics, Part 2: A New Low for TV Journalism," *Ethics Scoreboard—Media*. ProEthics, Ltd., Arlington, Virginia, September 7, 2005.
<http://www.ethicsscoreboard.com/list/katrina2.html> (accessed December 23, 2006).
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Lisa de Moraes, "Anderson Cooper, CNN's Man of the Hour," *Washington Post*, November 3, 2005: C1.
- 28 Andrew Gumbel, "Media: How the Hard-Bitten Hacks of America Went Soft Over Katrina," *The Independent Sunday* (Business), London, October 2, 2005.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 O'Keefe, 3.
- 31 Stuart Allan, *Issues in Cultural and Media Studies: News Culture* (Buckingham: Open UP, 1999): 149.
- 32 Ibid
- 33 Ibid 134
- 34 Mary Ann Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe," *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990): 229-231.
- 35 Ryan, 1.
- 36 However, it is noteworthy that during the run-up to the most recent Congressional and Presidential elections that commentators on the same cable news networks that had initially covered Katrina repeatedly noted "the Katrina factor" might have played a role in voter attitudes and actions.

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