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A Content Analysis of Anderson Cooper 360°'s Coverage of Hurricane Katrina: Politically Slanted or Objective Reporting on a National Crisis

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**A Content Analysis of *Anderson Cooper 360*'s Coverage of Hurricane Katrina:
Politically Slanted or Objective Reporting on a National Crisis**

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Abstract

Over the last five years cable news programs have seen an increase in the amount of people tuning in to watch their programming. Along with these viewer increases, cable networks are facing even tougher competition in gaining and maintaining viewers. As a result, media pundits have accused the major cable news outlets, CNN and Fox, of politically slanting their reporting to cater to the ideologies held by their viewers; CNN is often labeled as a liberal media outlet, while Fox is considered to be conservative. The purpose of this thesis study is to examine whether or not CNN politically slanted its news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, the most costly hurricane in recorded U.S. history, to cater to its audience's politically liberal views.

Chapter One

Introduction

On average, Americans spend 32 minutes watching television news each day (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8). Over the last five years, cable news channels have gained a modest increase in viewership and this is attributed to the new trend of political slant in the media. Studies have concluded that conservative Republicans prefer to watch the Fox News Channel, while liberal Democrats prefer to watch CNN (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8)

Fueling the rise in partisan news coverage is the media's effort to reconnect with the American public by presenting the news in a way that makes it relevant to them (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2005). More viewers are likely to watch a program that they can connect with, and one that is consistent with their viewpoints. In fact, 43% of Americans who follow national and local news say they prefer watching newscasts that reflect their political viewpoints (The Pew Research Center, 2004 June 8).

Cable news' coverage of Hurricane Katrina was not without criticisms of being politically slanted to cater to those 43% of Americans. In fact, during Hurricane Katrina the cable news outlets had the opportunity to reach record numbers of viewers because during times of crisis cable news channels, in general, tend to experience an increase in viewership (Carter, 2005, September).

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, CNN saw its audience rise to 3.7 million viewers from just below one million—an increase of 336%—demonstrating the channel's ability to attract viewers interested in specific, significant news events (Carter, 2005 September; Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox vs. CNN*). Within four days of

CNN's coverage of Hurricane Katrina, the channel saw its ratings rise from 0.5 to a rating of 2.0, just slightly lower than Fox's 2.3 rating, which at the time was the highest rating among all cable news and network news programs (Carr, 2005, September 5). Anderson Cooper, anchor of CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360°*, was largely credited with boosting CNN's viewership and ratings numbers because of his ability to report on the storm and its victims with what was perceived as raw, human emotion (Carter, 2005, November 3).

Since CNN had the largest increase in viewership during the media's coverage of Hurricane Katrina in comparison to other cable news channels, and because of Cooper's role in attaining these new viewers, this paper will focus on his reporting on Hurricane Katrina as a means of determining whether or not CNN's coverage was politically slanted to reflect the political beliefs of the majority of its viewers. Although Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi, this paper will specifically examine CNN's coverage of the storm's effects on New Orleans since the city garnered the most media attention out of all the areas hit by the hurricane (Journalism.org, 2005, September 11). CNN will be the focus of this paper because the network was the first cable channel to provide 24 hours of all-news, making it a pioneer in the cable news industry (Carr, 2005).

Background

An Overview of CNN

Launched in 1980 by Turner Broadcasting, a Time Warner Company, CNN's cable television and Internet news services reach nearly one billion people globally (Corporate History, 2006). The channel prides itself on its "signature journalism," and

according to the Time Warner Corporate Web site: “CNN’s reporting across multiple platforms [cable news and on the Web] on Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath particularly resonated with viewers, who ranked CNN’s coverage #1 in believability, ahead of all other U.S. television journalism, in a Pew Research Center survey” (*Turner Broadcasting System overview*, 2006). Adding to CNN’s brand believability was Anderson Cooper, anchor of *Anderson Cooper 360°*.

CNN’s Anderson Cooper 360°

Described as a “fast-moving, surprising, and provocative alternative to the typical network evening newscast,” *Anderson Cooper 360°* covers the top stories of the day, as well as the “fascinating, the unexpected, and the underreported,” according to the show’s Web site (Cnn.com, *About the show*). Anchored by Anderson Cooper, the show currently airs weekdays from 10 p.m. until midnight (Cnn.com, *About the show*).

Cooper and *Anderson Cooper 360°* were awarded three Emmy awards in 2006 for reports about famine in Niger, Charity Hospital in New Orleans, and black market infertility drugs. Cooper has also received a National Headliners Award for his reporting on the 2004 tsunami that devastated parts of Asia, an Emmy for covering Princess Diana’s funeral for ABC, and a Bronze Telly for his coverage of famine in Somalia, among other awards. (Cnn.com, *Anchors & reporters*)

Prior to anchoring *Anderson Cooper 360°*, Cooper was CNN’s weekend anchor. He has covered many major breaking news events, including reporting from New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, Sri Lanka following the tsunami, and Baghdad during Iraq’s first democratic elections. Cooper moderated a Democratic presidential candidates’ forum in 2004 that was sponsored by CNN and Rock the Vote. Currently, Cooper, in

addition to his CNN television responsibilities, also hosts a news podcast on CNN.com and contributes reports to CBS's *60 Minutes*. In 2006, he published his memoir, *Dispatches From the Edge: A Memoir of War, Disasters, and Survival*, which was a *New York Times* bestseller. (Cnn.com, *Anchors & reporters*).

Before starting his career at CNN, Cooper most recently served as a news correspondent for ABC News and as host of the reality show *The Mole*. He anchored *World News Now* and provided reports for *World News Tonight*, *20/20*, and *20/20 Downtown*. Cooper is a graduate of Yale University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science, and he also studied Vietnamese at the University of Hanoi (Cnn.com, *Anchors & reporters*). Despite all of Cooper's education and professional experience as a reporter, his coverage of Hurricane Katrina would prove to have an enormous impact on his career as a CNN news anchor.

Overview of Hurricane Katrina

CNN, like most cable news networks, focused a majority of its news coverage on Hurricane Katrina during the days leading up to and after the storm made landfall. Proving to be one of the most devastating natural disasters to strike the United States, Hurricane Katrina's landfall in New Orleans and along the Mississippi coast resulted in an estimated \$75 billion in damage, also making it the costliest hurricane in recorded U.S. history (*Hurricane history, 2007*). Even more devastating was that approximately 1,800 people, mostly in Louisiana, died as a result of the storm and its aftermath, an aftermath that would reverberate throughout the Gulf Coast long after the storm's initial touchdown in Florida (Brunner, 2006).

On the evening of August 25, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall from the Atlantic Ocean near the Miami-Dade/Broward county line in Florida causing 11 fatalities (FactCheck.org, 2005). Katrina then moved southwest across Florida into the eastern Gulf of Mexico (*Hurricane history*, 2007). By August 28, Hurricane Katrina's intensity reached a Category 5 with 175 mph winds, and on August 29 it slammed into the Gulf Coast destroying almost everything in its path (*Hurricane history*; Brunner, 2006). One million people from Mississippi and Louisiana were displaced as a result of the storm, and after the New Orleans' levees were breached 80% of the city was submerged in water and debris from the flooding (Brunner, 2006). Twenty percent or 100,000 of New Orleans' 500,000 residents were without electricity, food, or drinking water and many were trapped on rooftops and in attics waiting to be rescued (Brunner). For days New Orleans remained flooded with a toxic mix of sewage, chemicals, and human and animal corpses (Brunner).

Conditions were not much better at the Superdome, the city's largest emergency shelter, where approximately 20,000 people faced sweltering heat, a lack of food, water, and medical care, as well as crime and lawlessness (Brunner, 2006). Across from the Superdome, thousands of the city's residents had taken refuge in the New Orleans Convention Center, and it would be three days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall before Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officials would realize survivors were there and needed help (FactCheck.org, 2005).

Overview of Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts

Within days of Hurricane Katrina making landfall, the media began reporting on the federal, state, and local governments' responses and aid efforts. Experts would claim

that a major flaw in New Orleans' evacuation plan was the lack of attention paid to evacuating the approximately 100,000 people who were elderly, infirm, poor, or without transportation (Shane & Lipton, 2005). Seventy percent of the city's 53 nursing homes were not evacuated prior to the storm's landfall and as a result a disproportionate amount of elderly were affected by the storm (Brunner, 2006).

New Orleans' large population of residents living in poverty were also faced with the difficult task of evacuating the city during the time when their monthly federal assistance checks were set to be mailed, and as a result many did not have money to pay for transportation out of the city or to pay for a place to stay until it was safe to return (Shane & Lipton, 2005). However, New Orleans officials claimed to have provided free transportation from specific pick-up points that were advertised on television, radio, and by people with bullhorns shouting on the streets (Shane & Lipton). New Orleans officials also opened schools and the Convention Center as shelters in addition to the Superdome (Shane & Lipton).

Unlike the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or the San Francisco earthquake of 1905, both of which caused death and destruction, New Orleans had advanced warning of the arrival of Hurricane Katrina (Shane & Lipton, 2005). Martha Madden, Louisiana's secretary of environmental quality from 1987-1988 told *The New York Times* that FEMA had been aware of the potential disaster a strong hurricane could cause in New Orleans for more than 20 years (Shane & Lipton). The agency, according to Madden, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars studying, training, and planning how to respond to a Category 5 hurricane (Shane & Lipton).

While the exact path of Hurricane Katrina was uncertain, the Army Corp of Engineers before Katrina made landfall secured the levees' locks, floodgates, and other mechanisms to maintain the levees during the storm (Shane & Lipton, 2005). An estimated 7,000 National Guard troops were called to active duty in Louisiana and Mississippi, however the Defense Department, by law, could not station them directly in the path of the hurricane's predicted landfall (Shane & Lipton).

Approximately 20 hours prior to Hurricane Katrina hitting the Gulf Coast, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin ordered a mandatory evacuation of the city—this was less than half of the time researchers predicted would be needed to successfully evacuate the entire city (FactCheck.org, 2005). It was also during this time, one day prior to landfall, that the Associated Press suggested that Hurricane Katrina had the potential to leave over one million people homeless, and cause “an environmental disaster of biblical proportions,” with the city becoming a “vast cesspool tainted with toxic chemicals, human waste” and coffins from the city's historic cemeteries (FactCheck.org).

Once Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, numerous politicians were quoted as saying they didn't think anyone could have anticipated the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, including President Bush (FactCheck.org, 2005). However, on July 13, 2004, a little more than a year before Hurricane Katrina occurred, FEMA conducted a hurricane drill to assess what would happen if New Orleans was struck by a Category 3 hurricane (FactCheck.org). New Orleans' *Times-Picayune* reported on the Hurricane Pam drill and concluded that the storm would force the levees to overflow causing damage to approximately 87% of the city's homes, and that almost 50% of New Orleans' residents would refuse to evacuate the city resulting in them being trapped on rooftops and in attics

(FactCheck.org). Neither the Hurricane Pam drill nor the 2000 Hurricane Zebra drill predicted that the levees holding Lake Pontchartrain out of New Orleans would be breached (Shane & Lipton, 2005). However, the media would criticize many government officials and politicians for their actions, or lack of action, during the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts.

In order to fully understand the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, it is important to review significant government actions and reactions preceding the hurricane's landfall, during it, as well as the relief efforts afterwards. Chart one outlines some significant occurrences from August 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast, until September 13, 2005, over two weeks after the storm struck New Orleans.

Chart One: Brief Timeline of Significant Occurrences in Response to Hurricane Katrina

Monday, August 29, 2005	Hurricane Katrina makes landfall on the Gulf Coast. The New Orleans levees are breached.
Tuesday, August 30, 2005	The water continues to rise.
Thursday, September 1, 2005	Louisiana officials deny the Red Cross entry into the city.
	Thirty thousand National Guard troops are ordered to the Gulf Coast; many do not arrive for several days.
	Buses arrive at the Superdome to drive people 355 miles away to Houston.

Friday, September 2, 2005	The first supplies reach evacuees at the Convention Center, four days after the storm.
Tuesday, September 6, 2005	Mayor Nagin orders police to remove all people from the city who are not involved in relief efforts. Residents still refuse to evacuate.
Wednesday, September 7, 2005	FEMA brings in Kenyon International Services to recover bodies. Government agencies will argue over who is responsible for paying Kenyon and bodies will remain in the city for weeks.
	Congress forms a bipartisan committee to review government responses to Hurricane Katrina.
Friday, September 9, 2005	Coast Guard Admiral Thad W. Allen takes over as head of recovery efforts.
Monday, September 12, 2005	Brown resigns as FEMA's director.
Tuesday, September 13, 2005	President Bush takes responsibility for the federal government's failures.

Note: All information contained in the above chart is referenced from

www.FactCheck.org, 2005, *Katrina: What Happened When*.

Statement of the Research Question/Problem

In Anderson Cooper's coverage of Hurricane Katrina as a CNN anchor, was there measurable political bias? If so, was it liberal or conservative bias?

Need for the Study

This paper aims to take an objective look at Anderson Cooper's reporting on Hurricane Katrina to determine if CNN presented politically slanted news. Hurricane Katrina was a crisis that was paid close attention to by the media, and enabled journalists to act as government watchdogs. However, it also provided cable news channels with an opportunity to present politically slanted news to a larger audience, as more people watch cable news during times of crisis. By reviewing the content of CNN's lead anchor's transcripts during the crisis, this paper will help to further explore whether or not CNN presented politically slanted news to its audience.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to determine whether or not Anderson Cooper's coverage of Hurricane Katrina was politically slanted and if it was, to determine if it was slanted to reinforce the political ideologies of the majority of the cable channel's viewers—Democrats.

Research Hypothesis

Since the majority of CNN's viewers describe themselves as following the ideologies of Democrats, Anderson Cooper's coverage of Hurricane Katrina will be more critical of the actions taken by Republican politicians involved in the recovery efforts than of the actions taken by Democrats. In general, the commentary provided by Cooper

and his correspondents will showcase the actions of the Republican run federal government in a negative way.

Definition of Terms

Blame Game

This phrase categorizes the need to place blame on someone in power for tragic occurrences or failures. In essence, it's the need to point a finger at someone else and accuse him or her of being responsible for the failure or occurrence. The blame game also is used as a way to humiliate someone for one's own personal gain. ("It's not a blame game, 2005)

Cable News

For the sake of this paper, cable news refers to channels that require a subscription to a cable provider, meaning they are not available free of charge to the public. The three largest cable news channels are CNN, Fox, and MSNBC (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8).

Commentary

An expression of opinion or interpretation (Commentary, 2007).

Conservatism

This is a term usually associated with the Republican party and its political views about government. It is defined as "a political philosophy or attitude emphasizing respect for traditional institutions, distrust of government activism, and opposition to sudden change in the established order." (Conservatism, 2007).

Content Analysis

As defined by *Erudium*, content analysis is a “group of research techniques aimed at isolating and assessing the importance of qualitative and quantitative aspects of oral, written, visual or audio communication; research technique for the objective and systematic description of content in communication.” (2001).

Cumulative Audience (Cume)

This is a type of viewership measurement, however it differs from television ratings. Cume refers to the total number of different people who watched a channel over a certain time period; cume measures unique viewers of a particular channel. A person is only considered part of a channel’s cume if they watch the channel for six minutes or more, and the total number of viewers is averaged over the course of a month. (Journalism.org, 2006, March 16, *Fox news vs. CNN*)

Democratic Party

One of America’s two major political parties; Democrats have supported policies promoting government involvement in the economy, civil rights, and the limitation of government intervention in people’s private affairs (Democratic party, 2007).

Hurricane

This is an intense tropical weather occurrence with strong thunderstorms, “well-defined surface circulation” and winds of at least 74 mph or greater. Hurricanes are classified by the strength of their wind speeds; Category 1 has the lowest speeds, while a Category 5 has the highest. (*What is a hurricane?*, 2006).

Hard News

Newspaper or television stories that report on serious topics or events that are timely (Hard News, 2007). An example of a hard news story would be a television report on a raging building fire.

Independent

An independent is a person who is not affiliated with a specific political party, such as a Republican or Democrat, and is not influenced by a political party affiliation (Independent, 2007).

Journalism

The writing and editing of facts or descriptions about events as is, without interpretation (*Journalism*, 2006). Its accuracy and balance in reporting that provides information as a public service, and as a watchdog against corruption and abuse (The Pew Research Center, 1999). Journalism is dedicated to conveying the facts, reporting on both sides of an issue, and not reporting rumors (The Pew Research center, 1999).

Levee

A levee is an embankment that is built along a river to prevent it from flooding when the water level rises. This is the oldest and most used method of flood control, and is usually built on a level surface around the river. Occasionally, sandbags are used as a temporary method of containing unusually high waters. One of the most extensive levee systems in the U.S. is along the Mississippi River. (Levee, 2007)

Liberalism

This term is usually associated with the Democratic Party and its political views. Liberalism is based on “the natural goodness of humans and the autonomy of the

individual favoring civil and political liberties...and protection from arbitrary authority.”
(*Liberalism*, 2007).

Network News

For the sake of this paper, network news refers to channels that are public providers of news, meaning a cable subscription is not required to view them. Examples of network news channels are: ABC, CBS, and NBC.

Objective

Free from the distortion and bias of “personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations”
(*Objective*, 2006).

Parish

The state of Louisiana is subdivided into 64 parishes. A parish is analogous to what other states refer to as a county. (Louisiana.gov, n.d.)

Politics

The term politics can be applied to both the “art and science of government,” as well as the art and science of influencing governmental policies (*Politics*, 2006).

Prime Time News

Television newscasts that occur during the time period of 8p.m. to 11 p.m. are considered prime time news because they have the potential to attract the largest available audience (Prime Time News, 2007).

Pork Projects or Pork Barrel

A pork project is a political term used to describe government funds, jobs, or favors distributed by politicians for personal political gain. Often times these “projects or appropriations result in rich patronage benefits.” (Pork barrel, 2007)

Ratings

Television ratings measure how many people in total are watching a specific channel at any given time (Journalis.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news vs. CNN*).

Republican Party

One of the two major American political parties; Republicans traditionally support having a strong national military, “laissez-faire capitalism, low taxes, and conservative social policies” (Republican party, 2007).

Segment

A segment is a separate piece of something (Segment, 2007). In terms of broadcast news, a news segment is a portion of the show dedicated to a specific topic.

Slant

Slant is when information is presented with the purpose of promoting a special interest (*Slant*, 2006).

Sound Bite

Used in television and radio news, a sound bite is a brief, previously recorded statement broadcast during a show (Sound bite, 2007).

Spin

Similar to slant, spin is “a special point of view, emphasis, or interpretation presented for the purpose of influencing opinion,” according to the Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (2006).

Viewership

This term refers to a television audience and its size or demographics (*Viewership*, 2006).

Limitations

CNN is the only cable news network that has an archive of its transcripts available to the public for free, and therefore this study is limited to transcripts of CNN broadcasts. Due to time constraints, this study will only look at the first two months of CNN's coverage of Hurricane Katrina. This study is also limited by the accuracy of CNN's transcripts and by inter-coder reliability.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Perception of the News Media

The Society of Professional Journalists believes that journalism should serve to enlighten the public as a means of providing the foundation for democracy and justice (2007). However, journalism is a three-pronged entity; it serves simultaneously as a business, a public service, and as a watchdog over political leaders and governments (The Pew Research Center, 1999). At times, these different roles cause cable news channels to face contradicting tasks, as acting in the interest of the public does not always satisfy the business and moneymaking aspect of journalism. Unfortunately, in some instances the business portion of journalism overrides the public service aspect, and as a result, an overwhelming majority of news media professionals agree that the lines have blurred between commentary and reporting, and between entertainment and news (The Pew Research Center, 1999).

Increasingly more and more reporters, editors, and executives also agree that news reports are "filled with factual errors and sloppy reporting" (The Pew Research Center, 1999). American viewers tend to agree, with 58% believing that news reports are

often inaccurate, while two-thirds believe that the media doesn't care about the people it covers (The Pew Research Center, 1999). Media coverage of Hurricane Katrina was not exempt from these feelings, and is an example of journalism serving as a business, a public service, and as a watchdog.

Although a national poll conducted by CNN and Gallup a week after Hurricane Katrina made landfall indicated that a majority of Americans felt there was no one to blame for the devastation caused by the storm but the hurricane itself, the news media continued to focus on the blame-game of who was at fault for the death and destruction, specifically in the parishes throughout New Orleans (Baumann, 2005). Some media critics felt that the hurricane coverage was "agenda-driven propaganda" with the Democrats using it as a chance to criticize President George W. Bush, a Republican, for the flaws in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) response, while Republicans seized the opportunity to find fault in the actions of Louisiana's Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, both Democrats (Baumann). Other media critics claimed that the scrutiny of President Bush's "perceived lackadaisical" response overshadowed the coverage of Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin's actions, even though they were the two responsible for the evacuation of New Orleans (Malzberg, 2006). Missing from the media's coverage of Hurricane Katrina was a comparison of what arguably were FEMA's failures in responding to Hurricane Katrina to FEMA's failures during the devastation caused by Hurricane Floyd on September 16, 1999, which occurred during President Bill Clinton's Democratic administration (Malzberg).

Throughout coverage of Hurricane Katrina, FEMA Director Michael Brown came under criticism for his agency's response to the storm's aftermath (Bulletin News Network, 2005, Brown's). While the President was seen and heard on television praising Brown, reports also surfaced claiming that Brown was not qualified for his position with FEMA (Bulletin News Network, 2005, Brown's). The media began to report that Brown had exaggerated on his resume, causing his qualifications to become scrutinized even more closely (Stevenson & Kornblut, 2005).

CNN was among the media that questioned Brown's emergency management experience, crediting what it called FEMA's "bungling of the recovery efforts" with putting Brown under media scrutiny (Bulletin News Network, 2005, Brown's). CNN reported that prior to being selected by President Bush to run FEMA, he managed the International Arabian Horse Association and had no direct experience with emergency management (Bulletin News Network, 2005, Brown's).

Within days of Katrina's aftermath politicians as well as media pundits were on cable news requesting Brown's resignation (Bulletin News Network, 2005, Brown's). On September 9, 2005, 12 days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast, President Bush pulled Brown off of the relief efforts (Stevenson & Kornblut, 2005). By September 12, 2005, Brown was forced to resign as the director of FEMA. The constant coverage of Brown and FEMA's relief efforts demonstrated how people in the news can become casualties of the news; was Brown the victim of the news media, or was the media acting as a responsible watchdog and Brown deserving of the negative publicity?

More than 85% of the media believe criticism, similar to the coverage of Brown and FEMA during Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, is needed to keep politicians acting

honestly, while one-third of the American public believes that the media's criticism actually hinders politicians from doing their jobs (The Pew Research Center, 1999). More than 80% of broadcast journalists and executives believe remaining neutral when reporting on a story is a core principle, yet roughly half of them also believe that the media's reporting on the personal and ethical behavior of public figures often drives controversies as opposed to simply relaying the facts (The Pew Research Center, 1999). Roughly 72% of Americans believe that reporting on political scandals actually fuels the scandal as opposed to only informing the public; six-in-ten of national news media personnel agree (The Pew Research Center, 1999).

In addition to focusing on what the media, including CNN, portrayed as Brown's lack of qualification to be the director of FEMA, the media also publicized portions of Brown's e-mail correspondence with his staff and acquaintances during the relief efforts. CNN reported that on the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Brown sent an e-mail to FEMA's Deputy Director of Public Affairs Cindy Taylor, asking: "Can I quit now? Can I come home" (CNN, 2005)? CNN also reported that Brown sent numerous e-mails during the relief efforts trying to find a dog-sitter, asking for advice on what color shirts to wear on TV, as well as if he should wear a tie and roll-up his sleeves to appear hardworking (CNN, 2005). E-mails sent to Brown from his subordinates asking for guidance and direction were reportedly ignored or forwarded to others for answering, according to CNN's coverage. As a result of these e-mails, CNN and most media outlets continued to portray Brown as an ineffective leader who wasn't able to make decisions and was more concerned with superfluous issues such as his wardrobe as opposed to concentrating on the relief efforts (CNN, 2005).

Although these e-mails were made public following Brown's resignation as FEMA's director, CNN and the rest of the media continued to use the e-mails as evidence of what they portrayed as Brown's lack of leadership during the crisis (CNN, 2005). It was as if Brown had become a top focus of the media's criticisms during its hurricane coverage, while other officials involved weren't as harshly criticized. For example, the media did not dwell on the fact that New Orleans Mayor Nagin only ordered residents to evacuate the city 20 hours prior to Katrina's landfall, and this was less than half of the time experts predicted would be needed for a large scale evacuation (FactCheck.org, 2005).

Other significant occurrences that were not dwelled on by the cable news outlets with the same scrutiny as Brown's actions were the facts that Nagin didn't use an available fleet of school buses to evacuate residents, or his refusal of an offer from Amtrak to evacuate thousands of residents by train (FactCheck.org, 2005). The media also did not emphasize how out of touch with reality Louisiana State Senator David Vitter was only one day after the storm when he stated at a press conference: "I don't want to alarm everybody that, you know, New Orleans is filling up like a bowl. That's just not happening"; yet at this point the city was already 80% under water (FactCheck.org).

Principles of Journalism Put to the Test

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was like nothing Americans had ever seen before (Stanley, 2005). Televisions were filled with images of dead bodies floating in the flooded streets of New Orleans, groups of children wading through contaminated water clutching garbage bags filled with what was left of their possessions, and reports of people shooting at rescue helicopters (Stanley). The uniqueness of Hurricane Katrina's

impact on the U.S. put core principles of journalism to the test. Reporting on Hurricane Katrina challenged the notions that journalists, in order to maintain credibility, must suppress their emotions and remain independent from the situation (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2005; The Society of Professional Journalists). Instead, Hurricane Katrina reporting was filled with emotion, which left many media pundits pondering if reporters had been too emotional (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2005).

The journalism code of ethics states that journalists must maintain independence from those they are reporting on; a journalist must always maintain credibility and accuracy in his or her reporting (Principles of journalism, 2006). This means that a journalist should be free from obligation to any other interest than the public's right to be informed; a journalist should always avoid conflicts of interest whether they are actual or perceived (The Society of Journalists, 2007). Reporting on Hurricane Katrina was both a perceived and real conflict of interest for all American reporters; this was an American tragedy being reported on by American journalists in America. Reporters were "embedded in the mayhem" and given the task of informing fellow Americans that New Orleans had become a "third world country" (Carr, 2005, September 5). Imagine being responsible for reporting on death and destruction of a town your family grew up in; CNN's Anderson Cooper did just that.

Cooper's emotions spilled over during interviews throughout his coverage of the devastation caused by Katrina. During one broadcast, Cooper's statements caused Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour to ask Cooper if he was trying to facilitate an interview or an argument (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2005). Cooper wasn't the only broadcast reporter who voiced his opinions and showed his emotions. Wolf Blitzer of CNN,

“normally unflappable,” reported to his audience that so much more needed to be done to help the survivors, clearly showing his disdain for how the relief efforts were proceeding (Stanley, 2005). CNN’s Chris Lawrence told viewers that there was nobody in charge of New Orleans and that the city was “a complete free-for-all” (Stanley). While parts of the city may have appeared to be in despair, Lawrence’s generalization and assumption that no one was in control was not a fair assessment; being fair is a cornerstone of the journalism code of ethics (The Society of Professional Journalists, 2007).

The fairness of coverage of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff was questionable during one particular interview broadcast on both CNN and Fox. While Chertoff was trying to reassure the audience that the federal government had relief efforts under control and that the looting in New Orleans was contained, CNN and Fox ran a split screen of Chertoff with images of a bare-chested man standing knee-deep in water smashing a store window with a baseball bat (Stanely, 2005). The contradiction of Chertoff’s message and the images shown by CNN and Fox could be perceived as though Chertoff was out of touch with the actual reality in New Orleans. What makes the fairness of CNN and Fox’s split screen questionable is the fact that viewers were more likely to believe the images being shown as opposed to what Chertoff said—55% of Americans prefer to see video footage of news events because they believe images provide them with a better understanding of the issues (The Pew Research Center, 2004).

While emotions were clearly evident during the media’s coverage of Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath, it is arguable that the media coverage might have been distressing if journalists had stifled their emotional responses to the death and destruction in the Gulf Coast (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2005). Additionally, “genuine human emotion drives

journalism to higher levels of inquiry” and gives journalists the confidence to ask the hard questions (Kovach & Rosentiel). However, emotion can also be used as a manipulative gimmick, positioning journalists as covering events only as a means to express their outrage (Kovach & Rosentiel). It is emotion that can distort coverage of the news and can cause a reporter’s political bias to influence how an event is covered. However, it was Cooper’s emotions that CNN’s viewers positively responded to, and his emotional style of reporting resonated with new viewers helping to increase CNN’s total audience reach.

In contrast, however, the public relies on journalists in times of crisis to “have their wits about them, to apply serious critical, independent thought to questions that will cut through the spin and provide people the information they need to make up their own minds” (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2005). After the devastation, death, and destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina, the public needed journalists to act as a government watchdog, but in a fair and accurate way. Adhering to the journalism code of ethics, and specifically the principles of seeking truth and reporting fairly, was crucial to providing viewers with a complete picture of actual events.

General Critiques of the Media’s Coverage of Hurricane Katrina

Unfortunately though, media pundits and critics were divided over whether the coverage of Hurricane Katrina was an example of journalism excellence or slanted reporting. One media critic called the coverage “the single worst job of reporting facts, finding real stories, and discussing real issues—maybe ever” (Baumann, 2005). While another “lauded the news media’s newfound passion” calling it a “welcome sign of new aggressiveness” (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2005). Other critics focused on what they

perceived as flaws in the coverage, or the media's attempts to get politicians to participate in the blame-game of who was at fault for the slow relief response. As one pundit explained: "perhaps the least edifying aspect of the media's performance were the commentators who traded charges about who was to blame, even as the floodwaters and death toll were still rising" (Kurtz, 2005).

During the first three days of hurricane coverage, the media seemed to avoid mentioning the fact that most of the hurricane's victims were poor, black Americans (Kurtz, 2005). And it wasn't until the looting, illness, hunger, and conditions in the Superdome deteriorated that reporters began to question politicians more aggressively about the response and relief efforts (Kurtz). As a columnist for the *Washington Post* explained:

The kind of activist stance, which would have drawn flak had it come from American reporters in Iraq, seemed utterly appropriate when applied to the yawning gap between mounting casualties and reassuring rhetoric. For once, reporters were acting like concerned citizens, not passive observers. And they were letting their emotions show...[for example] CNN's Jeanne Meserve crying as she described the dead and injured she had seen. (Kurtz, 2005)

Media pundits observed that while it was okay for journalists to show emotion and act as advocates on behalf of Katrina's victims, it would not have been okay for journalists to be emotional or to advocate for or against the war, when covering the war in Iraq. Hurricane Katrina was an American crisis on American soil, and therefore it seemed less threatening for a journalist to blur the lines of reporting the news and becoming emotionally involved in the events as they were occurring.

Additionally, some felt the focus of the coverage was not in the best interest of New Orleans, and did not give the American public a balanced view of events, instead focusing on the actions of the violent minority. For example, Brett Anderson, a reporter for *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* compared the coverage of Hurricane Katrina to that of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks:

It seems like the inverse of the 9/11 phenomena, where there was an unprecedented outpouring of support for New York, a city that people loved to hate. Before [Hurricane Katrina] happened, New Orleans was a place that people truly loved. People reporting...the news ought to be careful thinking that they can define New Orleans based on the actions of a few [criminals]. Right now Dennis Hastert, the speaker of the House, is debating whether New Orleans should be rebuilt. Of course it should be rebuilt. It should be rebuilt...because it is part of the United States. (Carr, 2005)

Other critics felt that coverage of Hurricane Katrina had evolved into a blame-game where officials at every level were “seeking to show a unified front, while the media attempt[ed] to goad them into condemning the response of others” (Bulletin News Network, 2005, Sept. 6). CNN anchor Soledad O’Brien was the target of such criticism on more than one occasion because of the questions she asked Governor Blanco, as well as the governor’s advisor James Lee Witt, a former FEMA director (Bulletin News Network, 2005, September 6). In an interview with Witt, O’Brien asked if there was “just absolute lack of confidence” in FEMA Director Michael Brown (Bulletin News Network, 2005, Sept. 6). O’Brien, in a separate interview, asked Governor Blanco why she did not give the federal government control of relief efforts, stating that “the first several days of the recovery were clearly disastrous” (Bulletin News Network, 2005, September 6). The

Governor corrected O'Brien and said that the "first five days of the recovery were heroic" demonstrating her obvious resentment of O'Brien's slanted line of questioning.

The media also faced, although to a lesser extent, criticism over its reporting of the impending landfall of Hurricane Katrina. Some pundits argued that people did not evacuate from New Orleans and other areas in the path of the storm because of the sensationalism with which the media covers hurricanes in general (Kurtz, 2005). One columnist for the *Washington Post* pondered if "the undeniable tendency of every network and local TV station to go haywire over each tropical storm and minor-league hurricane contributed to a sense of complacency" in New Orleans, where a large portion of the population was living in poverty (Kurtz). Not having the money or means to evacuate, combined with being desensitized to media coverage of hurricanes could potentially have lead many of New Orleans' residents to stay in the city.

Ironically, the same media coverage that was criticized by pundits, also brought with it a shift in viewership and ratings statistics for the top cable news sources—CNN and Fox.

CNN's Viewership

From 1980, when CNN debuted, until 2002, CNN dominated with both the highest cable news ratings and cumulative audience totals. However, in 2002 the Fox News Channel began to take over the lead in ratings as its viewership numbers steadily increased. In 2004, 25% of the American public was watching the Fox News Channel, while only 22% were tuned into CNN. Although there was only a three percent difference in viewership, both CNN's and Fox's audiences clearly have differing political viewpoints. Research has shown that people who consider themselves conservative

Republicans watch more cable news than those that consider themselves liberal Democrats; this accounts for the increase in Fox's viewership, as more Republicans watch Fox than any other cable news channel (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8).

Further demonstrating the political differences between viewers of CNN and Fox, are the results of a 2007 study conducted by The Research Center for the People and the Press. The study found that while CNN was the most recognizable news network among the six referenced in the poll, the word "liberal" was one of six most frequently used words to describe the channel (Parker). In contrast, Fox was the only news outlet in the study to be described as conservative and Republican (Parker). The results of the survey are not surprising as the Fox News Channel was branded by founders Rupert Murdoch and Roger Ailes as "a refuge for viewers fed up with real or perceived liberal bias elsewhere in the media" (Anderson, 2006).

Alies explained that Fox is successful because "what people deeply resent out there are those in the 'blue states' [Democrats] thinking they're smarter" (Anderson). He built Fox on the argument that "other news organizations had bias, and that [Fox] would be 'fair and balanced'" (Huff, 2006). Further illustrating Fox's perceived Republican ties are the facts that Fox was the first news channel to declare Bush the presidential winner during the 2000 election, and former Fox commentator Tony Snow was tapped to be the Bush administration's press secretary (Anderson).

Although Fox has a slightly larger viewership than CNN, CNN is clearly Fox's top competitor and is attracting more Democratic viewers than it had in the past—44% of CNN's regular viewers classify themselves as Democrats. In general, CNN's audience base consists of a higher percentage of Democrats in comparison to the general public.

Interestingly, Republicans rate CNN as the least trustworthy cable news channel, while Democrats feel CNN is the most trustworthy channel; conversely Republicans rate Fox as the most believable cable channel and Democrats perceive Fox to be the least believable. This demonstrates that the public is clearly divided by political ideology when it comes to choosing what is perceived as a credible cable news source, and therefore demonstrates that CNN's reporting attracts viewers whose political ideology is more aligned with the Democratic Party. This was not always the case; from 1996 until 2002, CNN dominated as the most believable cable news outlet in general.

Gradually over time, CNN's believability rating has slowly decreased from 42% of the American public rating the channel as trustworthy in 1998 down to 32% in 2004 (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8). CNN's believability rating amongst Republicans and Democrats has also fluctuated over the years; in 1998 44% of Democrats and 39% of Republicans rated CNN as highly believable (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8). However, by 2004, the gap between Democrats and Republicans widened with 45% of Democrats rating CNN as believable, while only 26% of Republicans did (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8).

In 2005, prior to Hurricane Katrina making landfall, the Fox News Channel was the ratings leader with its prime time newscasts attracting an average of 1.59 million viewers—more than double the 725,000 people watching CNN (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*). However, these viewership numbers only tell half of the ratings story. In fact, CNN could actually have been more popular overall than Fox because of CNN's ability to attract unique viewers, giving the channel a higher cumulative (cume) audience rating (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*). Some television analysts

argue that *cume* gives a better picture of a channel's ability to attract viewers because it measures the popularity of a specific channel's brand, as opposed to only focusing on a specific program, as is done to calculate ratings (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*).

Prior to Hurricane Katrina making landfall in 2005, CNN averaged seven million more unique viewers a month than Fox (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*). This means that while Fox has a more loyal audience that tunes in to the channel consistently, CNN has a large number of viewers who tune in during specific events. Hurricane Katrina was an example of this, as more people selected CNN as their cable news source for coverage of the storm than any other cable news outlet (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*). CNN's coverage of Hurricane Katrina brought the channel 100 million unique viewers and the highest viewership among all of the cable news channels (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*).

Three months prior to the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, a June 2005 study by The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press concluded that 24% of Americans turned to CNN for news on national and international issues and only 22% preferred to get their news from Fox (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*). As a result of Hurricane Katrina making landfall, CNN's prime time audience surged in size to an increase of 168% and the channel's daytime viewership rose an astounding 210% from what it was only three weeks prior to the storm (Journalism.org, 2006, March 13, *Fox news*). With the news coverage of Hurricane Katrina, it became evident that CNN was a credible news source that attracted the type of viewer who was interested in significant events. This demonstrates that while CNN's regular audience describes itself

as mostly Democratic, the channel also resonates with viewers who are looking to get information on specific occurrences; it demonstrates that the CNN brand has reach.

In general, 42% of CNN's regular viewership said that they follow hard news stories closely (The Pew Research Center, 2004). Of all cable news viewers, 43% prefer to watch a channel that conveys international, national, local government, and business news consistent with their political points of view (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8). This means that almost half of all cable news viewers would rather watch reporting on an issue that was aligned with their political beliefs, and this could imply that more Democrats watch CNN because its reporting is slanted towards a liberal ideology. Research also has shown that of those that prefer to see reporting that reflects their own views, most consider themselves Democrats or Republicans as opposed to Independents (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8).

Specifically in reference to CNN's viewers, 24% of the conservatives and 30% of the liberals who tune in like watching reporting that portrays their political views (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8). In contrast, 40% of Fox's conservative viewers agree that they prefer to watch news that conveys their political points of view, were as only 29% of its liberal viewers agree (The Pew Research Center, 2004). These statistics demonstrate that more viewers affiliated with the Democratic Party view CNN favorably because they perceive it to report the news in a way that represents liberal viewpoints, whereas Fox seems to attract more Republican viewers that enjoy receiving the news from a source that they perceive as conveying conservative viewpoints.

Interestingly however, approximately 58% of all Republicans who watch cable television believe news organizations are not trustworthy, while 47% of Democrats agree

(The Pew Research Center, 2004). So while a large portion of both Democrats and Republicans prefer to watch news programs that contain the same political viewpoints as they do, both parties are distrusting of news outlets.

In line with viewers' distrust of cable news outlets, some Democratic presidential candidates are weary to appear on certain cable programs. As of June 1, 2007, five presidential candidates from the Democratic Party declined to participate in a debate broadcast by the Fox News Channel (Hernandez & Steinberg, 2007, June 1). However, of the five candidates that backed out of the debate, only Senator John Edwards attributed his decision to withdraw to the fact that he did not consider "the Fox channel's programming to be neither fair nor balanced as the network's slogan suggests, and instead tilted in favor of Republicans" (Hernandez & Steinberg, 2007, June 1). Many Democrats and liberal based groups, such as MoveOn.org, were vocal in describing the debate as Fox's attempt to refute claims that it is a right-winged media organization (Hernandez & Steinberg, 2007, May 27). The debate was eventually cancelled after Fox's chairman Roger Ailes made comments about Senator Barack Obama that some Democrats felt were not appropriate (Cohen, 2007).

Also supporting the perception of political bias in Fox's and CNN's reporting are statistics on how each channel's audience viewed the government's relief efforts during Hurricane Katrina's aftermath. In general, research has shown that Fox's viewership was highly supportive of President Bush, and a 2005 survey by The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that Fox's audience reacted "more favorably to the president's handling" of Hurricane Katrina response efforts, than those whose relied on CNN and other news outlets for information (The Pew Research Center, 2005).

Additionally, those who turned to CNN for coverage of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath felt that people who stole were "mostly ordinary people trying to survive in an emergency," while Fox's viewers felt these people were "criminals taking advantage of the situation" in New Orleans (The Pew Research Center, 2005).

The favorable views of President Bush that Fox's audience held could be attributed to Fox reporting on President Bush's actions in a less critical way than perhaps CNN did. This could also explain in part why CNN viewers felt people who were stealing were not criminals; if these viewers didn't believe that the government was helping the victims as much as it should, one can speculate that they felt the victims should do what they must to survive in a time of crisis. Since Fox viewers felt the president acted appropriately in handling relief efforts, it makes sense that these same viewers would view people who stole in a more critical way.

While it is clearly evident that CNN attracts more viewers that value liberal ideologies, it is also evident that Fox attracts a more Republican audience. Statistics also show a correlation between audience ideologies and perceived similarities in political viewpoints between viewers and their cable news channel of choice. However, a 2004 study also found that more than half of all Americans (53%) prefer to watch a news broadcast that is presented by a person they perceive as having a pleasant personality (The Pew Research Center, 2004). Shortly after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, CNN selected Anderson Cooper as the new face of its prime time news shows and with the change the channel saw a sizeable increase in its viewership.

Anderson Cooper: The Face of CNN's Hurricane Katrina Coverage

On November 2, 2005, a little more than two months after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, CNN announced the replacement of its longtime anchor, Aaron Brown, with 38-year-old Anderson Cooper (Carter, 2005, November 3). As a result, Cooper's show, *Anderson Cooper 360°*, was expanded by an hour, making it a two hour program, and it was moved from its 7 p.m. week night time slot to 10 p.m., replacing Aaron Brown's *Newsnight* (Carter, 2005, November 3). Prior to replacing Aaron Brown's show, audience levels for *Newsnight* increased significantly during the month of September, and this was attributed to the introduction of Cooper as his co-anchor (Carter, 2005, November 3). Cooper's show also gained a 36% increase in viewership shortly after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, and this suggests that Cooper was seen as trustworthy in the eyes of the American news consumer (Carter, 2005, November 3).

Cooper gained prominence and "extensive media attention" as a result of his coverage of Hurricane Katrina, and CNN, according to its President Jonathan Klein, wanted to "expose Anderson...to more people" (Carter, 2005, November 3). Cooper was described by Klein as standing out because of his "passion and enthusiasm" during his coverage of the storm and its aftermath (Carter, 2005, November 3). The ratings and the number of people within the audience as well as the news industry who were abuzz about Cooper, according to Klein, was proof that Cooper had made an impact—Cooper also started to appear as a satirized character on NBC's *Saturday Night Live*, a "sure sign" people were paying attention to CNN (Carter, 2005, November 3).

CNN's decision to make Cooper the new face of its network is arguably an insight into what the network values as well as its political slant, if any. It is also interesting that

the network decided to promote Cooper based on, among other things, the media attention he garnered from his coverage—journalism is supposed to be objective and independent from the people it's covering, yet Cooper was being covered by other media outlets because of his displays of what was perceived as raw human emotion.

One interview that gained media attention, with mentions in the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* among other outlets, was Cooper's September 1, 2005 interview with Louisiana Senator Mary L. Landrieu, a Democrat. During the interview, Cooper interrupted the senator as she was thanking various politicians for their help during the relief efforts; Cooper said:

"I've been seeing dead bodies in the streets here in Mississippi, and to listen to the politicians thanking each other and complimenting each other, you know, I got to tell you, there are a lot of people here who are very upset, and very angry, and very frustrated. When they hear politicians slap -- thanking one another, it just . . . kind of cuts them the wrong way right now because literally there was a body on the streets of this town yesterday being eaten by rats because this woman had been laying in the street for 48 hours. . . . Do you get the anger that is out here"
(de Moraes, 2005).

Cooper's reaction to Senator Landrieu's comments demonstrated his personal opinions on the response to Hurricane Katrina during the first couple of days following the destruction. His statements gained him media attention because they "elicited the kind of anger that [had] been mostly missing from a toothless press" (Carr, 2005, September).

Cooper, it seemed, was acting as an advocate for the people of New Orleans. As he explained:

I always pride myself on not wearing my opinion on the sleeve, and on being able to adapt to a given situation and discuss ideas with anyone. This is different though. No one has any information and people are desperate. The least our politicians can do is answer questions. It seems to me totally inappropriate to stick to sound-bite statements and praise of the president (Cooper, 2006, p.145).

Cooper's style of questioning throughout his coverage of Hurricane Katrina "pushed right up to the line between tough questioning and confrontational advocacy journalism" (Jensen, 2005). He continued to conduct his interviews with politicians and officials using a "polite righteous indignation on behalf of hurricane victims" (Jensen). Cooper's emotions physically emerged as he was seen on-air choking back tears, and at one point during a newscast he abruptly stopped his commentary describing the many homes that were lost and waved away the camera, as he appeared to burst into tears (Jensen). The cameras also caught Cooper's humanitarian side, as he was seen playing with stray dogs, also victims of the hurricane, wandering in New Orleans (Jensen).

In his own opinion, Cooper felt he did not take sides in the political blame-game that followed Hurricane Katrina: "this is life and death. This is not some blow-dried pundit [Cooper] standing outraged for some ratings, which is what cable news often boils down to" (Jensen, 2005). However, in Cooper's autobiography, *Dispatches From the Edge: A Memoir of War, Disasters, and Survival*, he admits that while reporting on the scene of a hurricane it's "easy to get caught up in all of the excitement, easy to forget that

while you are talking on TV, someone is cowering in a closet with their kids, or drowning in their own living room” (2006, p.127). He admits that it is hard to separate oneself from the situation and therefore it is plausible that Cooper’s passion and outrage while reporting were his true feelings. In fact, Cooper explains that although he had covered numerous disaster stories before—the tsunami of 2004, wars in Rwanda and Iraq—the death and destruction he saw in New Orleans had more of an impact on him because it was an American tragedy, an event that happened on the soil of his country, in a city where his family had history (Cooper).

Cooper became angry at the government’s response to the hurricane, and the lack of help he felt the survivors were given (Cooper, 2006). To him, every politician was to blame because in his eyes a natural disaster had turned into a man-made catastrophe, with the New Orleans Convention Center as a glaring example of the failures in the relief efforts (Cooper). Hurricane Katrina wasn’t “about Republicans and Democrats, theories and politics,” according to Cooper (p. 141). He felt the government’s failures were obvious because relief was either in New Orleans or not, and the corpses lying in the streets were public evidence of the relief effort’s shortcomings (Cooper).

As Cooper continued to cover the hurricane’s aftermath, he became more and more focused on advocating for the victims and demanding accountability from politicians (Cooper). Acting in the role of government watchdog, Cooper felt there was nothing wrong with looking for answers to what went wrong with the relief efforts—Cooper is among the 90% of journalists who believe criticizing the government is necessary, to keep it acting appropriately (Cooper, 2006; The Pew Research Center, 1999). He strongly believed that if no one was held accountable for the decisions that

were made, then nothing could be learnt from the mistakes, and it could all happen the next time a similar crisis arises (Cooper). Cooper persisted throughout his coverage of the storm's aftermath to ask every official he interviewed what went wrong and "the only mistakes [politicians admitted] to [were] actually veiled criticisms of others," according to Cooper (p. 191).

Cooper's coverage and passion for the victims of Hurricane Katrina paid off for CNN, as his popularity rewarded the news outlet with an additional 160,000 viewers over the course of one year, increasing the cable channel's viewership to 710,000 (Carr, 2006, June). From the increase in viewership and ratings experienced by CNN as a result of Cooper's presence, it is clear that a good portion of the American public perceived Cooper favorably and felt he was a trustworthy figure. "He is the anchorperson of the future," explained CNN's President Jonathan Klein, attributing Cooper's likeability to his genuineness (Jensen, 2005).

While Cooper did express his frustrations with the government's response to Hurricane Katrina, Klein also insisted that CNN was not in the business of "fomenting an agenda" (Carr, 2006, June). However, if CNN promoted Cooper based on his emotional coverage of the hurricane, his advocating for the victims of the storm, and his outrage at the government's response to the storm, then CNN gave him a public forum to report on events in a politically slanted way.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In order to explore if CNN's coverage of Hurricane Katrina was politically slanted, the researcher compiled a data set of 45 transcripts from CNN's *Anderson*

Cooper 360°, which is anchored by Anderson Cooper. The first transcript analyzed was from August 29, 2005, the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans and one day after it made landfall in Florida. The last transcript reviewed was from October 29, 2005, two months later.

First, each transcript was analyzed for manifest content issues, such as:

- Time period during which the show aired (day of landfall, how many days after landfall)
- Length of coverage (determined by how much of the show focused on the hurricane; the entire show vs. part of the show)
- Placement of storm coverage segment during the newscast (beginning, middle, or end of the show)
- Who was the anchor for the show (Cooper vs. other CNN anchors)
- Focus of coverage (impending storm, destruction/death, crime, recovery, government efforts, etc.)
- Appearance of politicians on the show (number of Democrats vs. the number of Republicans)
- Number of times specific politicians are mentioned throughout the report (Nagin, Blanco, Brown, Bush, etc.)
 - What was their political affiliation
 - How many times were they mentioned in a neutral, critical, or praiseworthy way
- What government officials were shown in sound bites
 - What was their political affiliation

- How many times were they shown in sound bites
- Were any sound bites repeated
- What politicians were interviewed on the show, and what is their political affiliation
 - Who was the interviewer
 - How many hostile (hostile is defined as....), questions were asked
 - How many hostile (as defined above) interruptions did the politician face
 - Did the interviewer praise the interviewee
 - What other officials did the interviewee mention
 - What was their political affiliation
 - Were the mentions critical, praiseworthy, or neutral
- What was the overall type of commentary (not statements of facts) provided about the government's actions throughout the broadcast (neutral, critical, or praiseworthy)

After the initial review of the transcripts, each one was subsequently coded according to its adjective and phrase usage to determine if one political party was examined more critically than the other. Adjectives were categorized into those criticizing the politician/government, those praising the politician/government, or as being neutral. These categories were then categorized as adjectives congruent with negative criticism, positive attitudes, or neutrality towards the politicians.

Examples of adjectives coded as congruent with negative criticism are: ridiculous, inexcusable, inexplicable, inexperienced, unqualified, uninformed, misinformed, and

unprepared. Adjectives that were coded as congruent with positive attitudes and accomplishing tasks included: heroic, experienced, dedicated, resolve, and tirelessly.

In order to gain a more accurate assessment of the transcripts' portrayal of the government and/or a specific politician, certain phrases also were coded as negatively critical or as endorsing the politician's/governments' actions. Examples of phrases that were coded as congruent with negative criticism are: "...out of touch with truth or reality," "shouldn't you have...," "couldn't you have...," "why didn't you...," "finally are...," "aren't you mad at..." and "excuse me but..." Phrases that were coded as congruent with endorsing the politician/governments' actions included: "doing everything in their power," "acting quickly to help," "using all of the resources available...," "have asked for help...," "thank you for all that you're doing," "...really doing God's work," and "personally talking with residents..."

To effectively utilize the time period the researcher had to complete the study, a two-month time span was selected as a means to provide the most accurate view of how *Anderson Cooper 360°* portrayed the government and politicians involved in planning for and responding to Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, the researcher found that throughout the two-month time period there were occasional breaks in the coverage of Hurricane Katrina related issues, with the majority of coverage occurring within the first month of landfall. Shortly after the one-month anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landfall on the Gulf Coast, coverage of storm related issues became sporadic. Since this time span seemed to cover the course of a majority of the show's hurricane coverage, it was also a means of determining if *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s views of the politicians involved in the situation had changed over the course of the coverage.

The decision to only review transcripts from *Anderson Cooper 360°* was made because of the notoriety Cooper gained from covering the storm, the number of additional viewers he attracted to CNN, CNN's decision to promote him to the channel's prime time spot, and because of the availability of his memoirs detailing his personal thoughts during his coverage of the storm, as discussed in the review of the literature.

The researcher believes that one can determine if CNN presented politically slanted news based upon the views projected by its most popular and visible anchor; this happens to be Anderson Cooper. New Orleans was selected by the researcher as the locale of focus since a majority of the reporting was focused on and broadcast from the city, and because it was where the most destruction and death was reported to have occurred.

Adjectives were selected as one of the research tools because they are descriptors that tell a viewer how to interpret or perceive the subject being reported on. An adjective can reveal how the reporter feels about a subject, and is directly tied to his point of view. Adjectives also impact how a person understands and internalizes a subject.

Certain phrases were selected as a research tool because of their abilities to convey how the reporter views a particular interviewee or subject. Appendix A contains a sample coding form that was used by the researcher to perform the content analysis of the transcripts.

Chapter Four

Content Analysis Results

One of the criteria used to code the *Anderson Cooper 360°* transcripts was a measurement of how many of the 45 shows reported on Hurricane Katrina (see Appendix

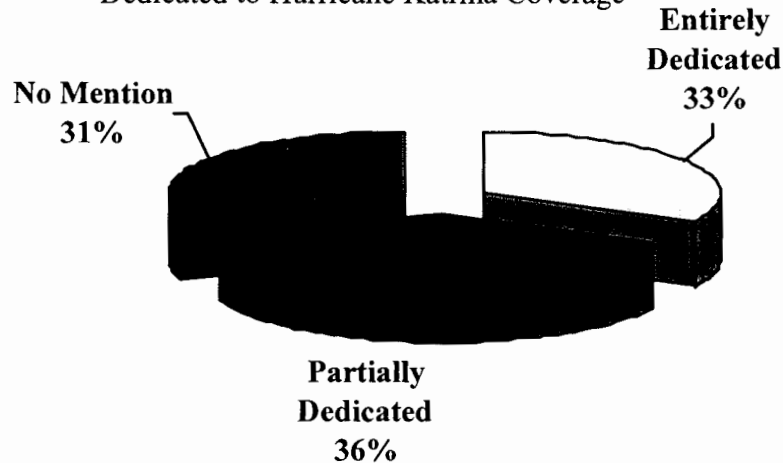
A for a sample coding form). The reason for examining the focus of the transcripts was to provide an overview of the time span that *Anderson Cooper 360°* remained dedicated to covering Hurricane Katrina issues and as a means of verifying the extensiveness of the show's coverage of the storm.

Over the two-month time period the researcher selected to review, 15 of the 45 transcripts coded reported exclusively on Hurricane Katrina and the devastation caused in Mississippi or Louisiana. Of the 30 remaining transcripts, 16 contained segments covering issues related to the storm's effects but did not dedicate the entire hour of the show to these issues, and 14 transcripts did not contain any segments that were specifically Hurricane Katrina issues.

Most of the 15 transcripts dedicated entirely to Hurricane Katrina issues were broadcast within the first few days after the storm made landfall on the Gulf Coast, (August 29, 2005). However, it is important to point out that on September 21, 2005, Hurricane Rita was reported as a threat to Texas and already-devastated areas in New Orleans and Mississippi, while Hurricane Wilma became a topic of coverage on October 17, 2005. Hurricane Rita was the sole focus of a majority of the September transcripts that did not cover Hurricane Katrina issues, while Wilma was the focus of the October ones. Chart two shows the percent of transcripts from the two-month period that were completely dedicated to Hurricane Katrina coverage, partially dedicated, or contained no

mention of the storm.

Chart Two: Percent of Transcripts Over a Two-Month Period Dedicated to Hurricane Katrina Coverage



After reviewing the focus of the transcripts, the two-month period examined appeared to be the maximum time allotted to consecutive coverage of the storm because as the weeks progressed coverage of the storm began to wane. In fact, throughout October *Anderson Cooper 360*'s coverage of issues related to Hurricane Katrina was sporadic; the transcripts from October 6- 10, and October 25, until November 10, 2005 (16 transcripts in total) did not specifically mention Hurricane Katrina. It was not until November 11, 2005, that a story related to the storm aired, and according to the transcript, it was one segment reporting on the building of the New Orleans levee system.

Next the researcher began examining the transcripts for political slant. This was done by counting the number of times a person or agency was mentioned throughout a transcript, what branch of government the person/agency was from, their political party affiliation, if the person/agency mentioned was praised, criticized, or referred to neutrally. Then the research went back and coded the interviews conducted on the show, who the interviewer was, who the interviewee was, what branch of government he or she

was affiliated with as well as his or her political party affiliation, how many times the person was interrupted in a hostile (as defined in Chapter 3) manner by the interviewer, and how many times the person was asked hostile questions.

Finally, the researcher then coded the transcript for the type of commentary provided by Cooper and the show's reporters to determine if it was neutral towards the government, critical of the government, or praiseful of the government (see Appendix A for a sample of a the coding form used by the researcher). By reviewing the number of appearances and mentions of politically affiliated people, and by examining the commentary provided by Cooper and CNN's reporters, the researcher aimed to further explore the notion of CNN as being a politically liberal media outlet.

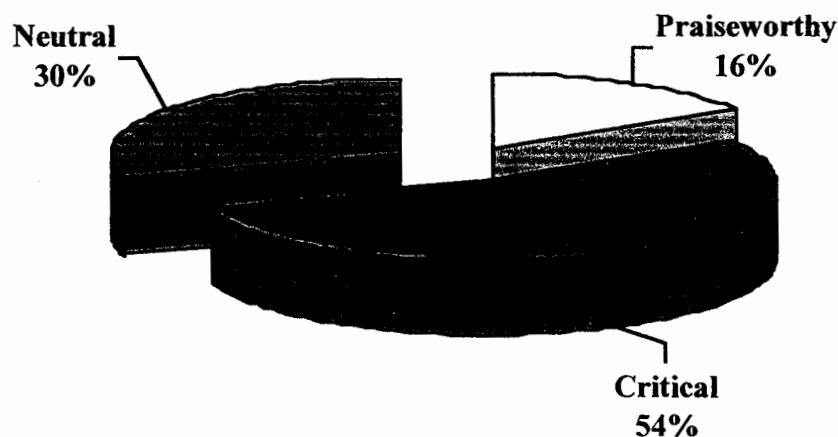
Although the first transcript coded for commentary was neutral in reference to the government, meaning Cooper and the reporters were providing facts, not their personal opinions, the second transcript did praise rescue workers from various government sectors, including the military and FEMA. However, by the third transcript, August 31, 2005, the commentary began to criticize the government's response to the situation and aiding the victims. The overall theme of the August 31, 2005, transcript was "where is the help" with references to people being "hungry and homeless" while the government slowly takes action. This transcript was from three days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast, and by this time Cooper had spent three days reporting from devastated areas in Mississippi.

Throughout the first seven days of *Anderson Cooper 360*'s coverage of Hurricane Katrina, a total of two transcripts contained commentary that was neutral towards the government, three transcripts that were critical, one transcript that was

praiseworthy, and two that were both critical and praiseworthy (both were critical of the federal government's response to the devastation, while also praising the rescue efforts of the military and first responders).

In addition to the first seven transcripts that were coded, there were 25 more that were either completely or partially dedicated to storm coverage. Of those remaining 25 shows, 14 were critical of the government's response efforts, one was coded as praiseworthy, and two were coded as being both critical and praiseworthy (both transcripts were critical of the federal, state, and local politicians' responses to the disaster, while also being praiseworthy of the military and first responders rescue efforts). A total of eight of the 25 transcripts after September 6, 2005 were coded as neutral meaning that they did not specifically praise or criticize the government. Chart three depicts the percentage of types of commentary contained in the transcripts dedicated to Hurricane Katrina issues.

Chart Three: Type of Commentary Provided Throughout Transcripts Dedicated to Hurricane Katrina



Since a majority of the commentary provided during *Anderson Cooper 360°* was critical of the government, it is important to examine what the transcripts were critical of to understand if the criticism was politically motivated. Of particular interest is the critical commentary that appears in the September 9, 2005 transcript, 15 days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast. This transcript detailed the federal government's attempt at banning the media from photographing and videoing the dead and the efforts to recover bodies and the subsequent lawsuit CNN filed against the government in response. At various points throughout the transcript, Cooper mentioned the lawsuit and explained that by barring the airing of footage of the deceased, the government was preventing the show from accurately and fairly covering the news. "The government cannot be allowed to hinder the free flow of information," Cooper said during the broadcast.

By September 14, 2005, *Anderson Cooper 360°* turned its attention on criticizing how the government handled the New Orleans evacuations and the problems encountered at the Superdome, where 30,000 people were stranded for days without water, food, security, electricity, and medicine. It is during this show, and only this show that racism is discussed as a reason for what Cooper calls the Superdome debacle.

Close to the predicted landfall of Hurricane Rita, the *Anderson Cooper 360°* transcripts that contained Hurricane Katrina reports began to emphasize what Cooper called government failures as a means of making sure the same mistakes did not occur after Hurricane Rita made landfall. The commentary during the September 22, 2005 specifically focused on what Cooper claimed were the government's failures and how to make sure that Hurricane Rita was not handled in the same way.

On September 29, 2005, the show begins criticizing the way FEMA spent money for the relief efforts, with a specific focus on the quarter of a billion dollars the agency spent on cruise ships that were to house evacuees, but that were less than half full.

As October approached and the days from Hurricane Katrina's landfall passed, reports on the storm are not as frequent until video surfaces showing what is allegedly New Orleans police and FBI agents beating a 64-year-old black man. The October 11, 2005, transcript is the first to mention the beating and to criticize the New Orleans police department for it as well as the way officers handled the news cameraman who was videoing the incident.

However, by October 13, 2005, the show's commentary begins to focus its criticism on Louisiana's state and federal politicians' requests for government money to fund rebuilding efforts. According to the transcript, \$250 billion in aid was requested for rebuilding devastated areas throughout the Gulf Coast. Of that \$250 billion, \$25 million was requested for a sugarcane research laboratory, something Cooper called a pork project, and he voiced his skepticism about it throughout the transcript. However, while he is critical of how some of the money was to be spent, he did acknowledge that much of was needed.

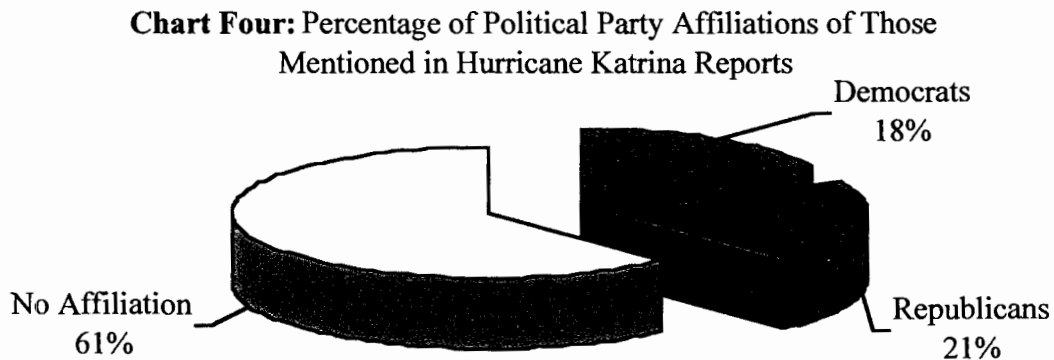
Cooper continues his criticism of how portions of the requested aid money will be spent throughout the October 19, 2005, transcript. He specifically criticized Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, a Democrat, for requesting \$35 million to aid the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing board, as well as her \$25 million request for the sugarcane research lab that, according to Cooper, wasn't finished prior to Hurricane Katrina making landfall. This transcript is also the last transcript that the researcher coded

as being critical of the government. Both the October 20 and 25, 2005 transcripts were coded as neutral in reference to the government and its response to Hurricane Katrina. The October 25, 2005 transcript was the last transcript coded from the two-month period to contain a Hurricane Katrina related segment.

Overall, Cooper's most common criticisms of the government throughout the transcripts were related to what he felt was a lack of coordination between the federal, state, and local branches, the federal government's slowness in responding to the needs of the victims, and politicians' attempts to spin the response positively when people were hungry, homeless, and dying. Although analyzing the type of commentary that was provided by Cooper and his show's reporters does provide insight on how Cooper, and therefore CNN, felt towards the government it alone does not imply the network to have a liberal or conservative political slant. In order to fully assess if *Anderson Cooper 360°* reported on Hurricane Katrina issues in a politically slanted way, it is imperative to review what politicians were interviewed and if the interview progressed in a hostile way. It is also of interest to examine what government agencies and politicians were simply mentioned throughout the transcripts, as well as whether they were criticized, praised, or mentioned in a neutral way.

In general, throughout the 45 transcripts containing reports on Hurricane Katrina, a total of 21 different Republican and 18 different Democratic politicians were mentioned. Overall, there were a total of 102 different people and government agencies mentioned over the course of the two-month period (see Appendix B for an alphabetical listing of the 102 mentioned). Examples of agencies that were not coded as Democrat or Republican include FEMA, the military, police, fire departments, paramedics, the

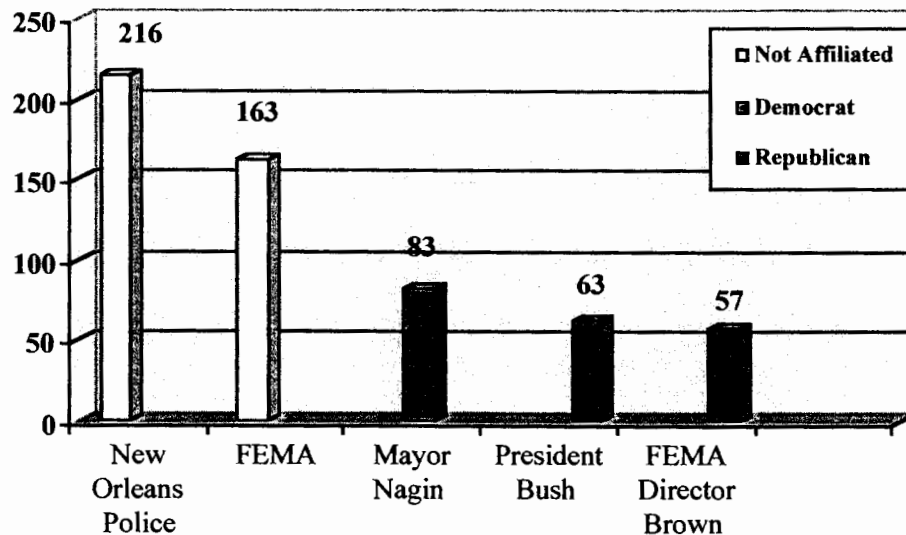
Environmental Protection Agency, etc. Examples of people who were not coded by political affiliation include FEMA spokespeople (FEMA Director Michael Brown was coded as a Republican since he was appointed by a Republican president), members of the military, police force, fire departments, paramedics, etc. Chart four shows the percentage of both political parties mentioned throughout the coverage.



As chart four demonstrates, there was a small margin of difference between the number of Democrats mentioned in the reporting compared to the number of Republicans. Although Republicans had three percentage points more than Democrats, this supports the idea that *Anderson Cooper 360°* presented liberally slanted reports on Hurricane Katrina when taken into account the finding that 54% of the show's coverage was critical of the government; it implies that while the Republicans were mentioned the most, it was in a critical way. It is also important to note that the majority of the New Orleans and Louisiana politicians involved in and closest to the relief efforts were Democrats. While New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, a Democrat, was one of the most mentioned overall, Louisiana Governor Kathleen B. Blanco, also a Democrat was not mentioned nearly as much as Nagin or President George W. Bush, a Republican. Chart

five lists the overall most mentioned throughout *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s coverage of Hurricane Katrina.

Chart Five: Most Mentioned Throughout Hurricane Katrina Transcripts



To further put this information into context, the researcher looked at whether or not those mentioned in the reporting were praised, criticized or mentioned in a neutral way. For example, although Nagin was mentioned 83 times throughout the two months of transcripts related to Hurricane Katrina examined, he was only criticized 16 times. Whereas Brown, who was only mentioned 57 times (26 times less than Nagin), was criticized 20 times (four more times than Nagin was). Both the terms federal government and Bush administration had the highest ratio of mentions to criticisms at 3:2. In addition to the two criticisms of the Bush administration, Bush himself was criticized eight out of the 68 times he was mentioned. Charts six and seven display comparisons of politicians who played key roles in the response to Hurricane Katrina and *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s commentary about them.

Chart Six: Louisiana Democrats Mentioned Directly Involved in Response to Hurricane Katrina

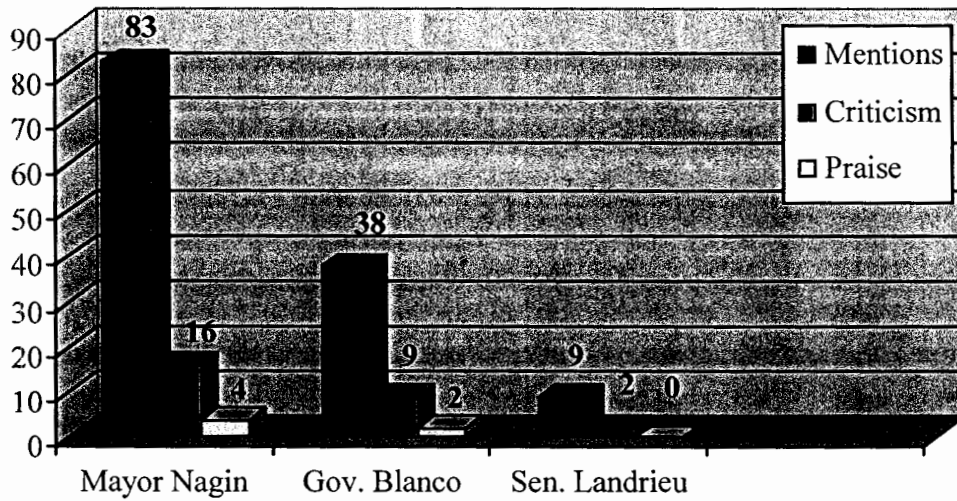
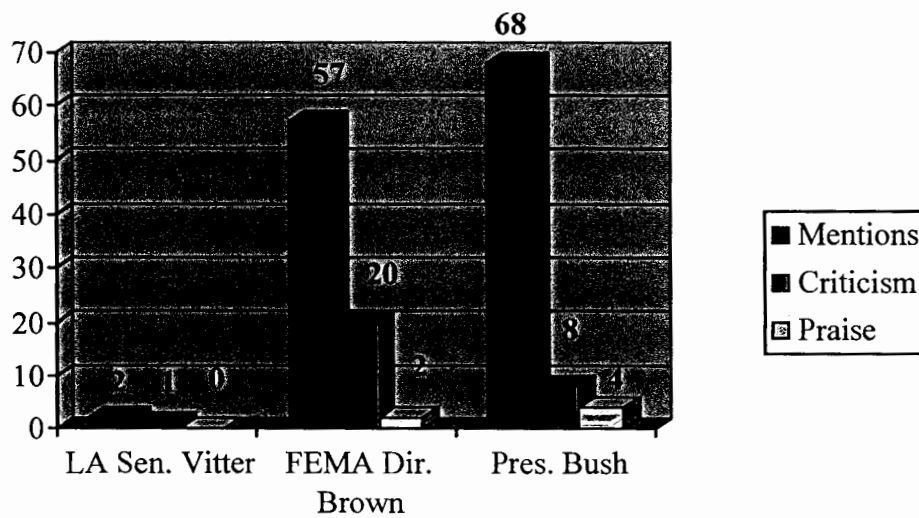


Chart Seven: Republicans Mentioned Directly Involved in Hurricane Katrina Response



associated with first responders (police, paramedics, fire departments), the Army, Coast Guard, or National Guard. The remaining eight people who were praised included three FEMA employees, President Bush, FEMA Director Brown, Governor Blanco, and Mayor Nagin. Yet, as charts seven and eight show, some of these politicians were not praised nearly as much as they were criticized. In fact, President Bush was criticized twice as much as he was praised for his role in responding to Hurricane Katrina and FEMA Director Brown was criticized 10 times as much as he was praised. Appendix C has an alphabetical listing of all politicians and agencies mentioned throughout the transcripts as well as if they were praised or criticized.

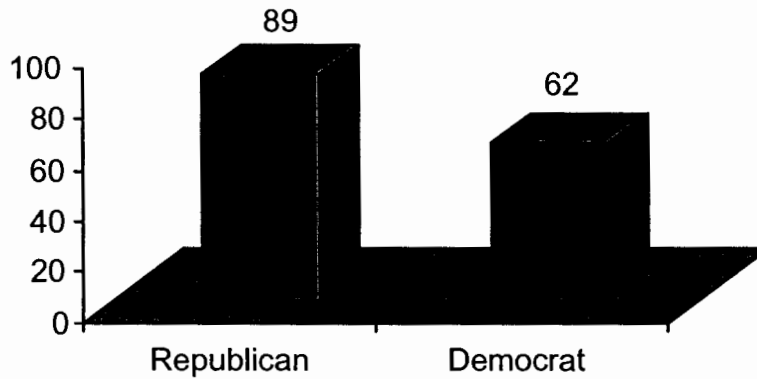
Interestingly, the New York City Fire Department had the highest ratio of praiseworthy comments to number of mentions with 3:3. In contrast, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff (coded as a Republican because he was selected by President Bush) had the lowest ratio with 18 mentions to zero praiseworthy comments and eight criticisms. FEMA also had one of the lowest ratios of mentions to praise at 163:3. The New Orleans police department, which was the most mentioned throughout, was praised only 14 times out of 216 mentions.

Over the course of the two-month period examined by the researcher, 56 different people contributed sound bites to *Anderson Cooper 360°*. A total of 34 of those people were associated with a specific political party. Chart eight depicts the percentage of Republicans compared to Democrats that provided sound bites for the show, while chart nine shows the number of sound bites in total from each political party.

Chart Eight: Percent of Sound Bites Contributed by Democrats vs. Republicans



Chart Nine: Number of Sound Bites Contributed By Political Party



Although the initial impression is that since Republicans contributed more sound bites, and had more representatives appear on *Anderson Cooper 360°*, the show did not show favoritism towards liberal politicians, this is not entirely accurate. A majority of the sound bites were critical of the federal government's response to the disaster, and in some

instances the same negative sound bite was repeated in various other transcripts. For example, a sound bite of President Bush expressing his shame at the government's response to aiding victims was broadcast five different times. Other sound bites were from Senators, both Republican and Democrats, who were not directly involved in the response efforts criticizing FEMA and Brown for what they called failures in relief efforts. For example, Democratic Congressman John Dingell of Michigan provided one sound bite that belittled Brown for his handling of FEMA, while Republican Congressman Christopher Shays of Connecticut contributed five sound bites of the same nature.

New Orleans Mayor Nagin provided the most sound bites throughout the two-month period of transcripts from *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s coverage of Hurricane Katrina. Nagin contributed a total of 32 sound bites, however nine of those were the same infamous quote repeated throughout the coverage. "Now get off your asses and do something, let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country," was said by Nagin during an interview with a local New Orleans radio station to convey his frustrations with the Bush administration and the relief efforts.

President Bush contributed a total of 27 sound bites to Cooper's show, making him the second most quoted person throughout the two-month period. Of those 27 sound bites, "Brownie, you're doing a heck-of-a-job" was repeated twice; once after Brown was relieved of command over the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, and once after he resigned as FEMA's director. The context of the use of this quote is important because it only aired on Cooper's show after Brown was demoted and sent back to Washington. The quote was used to question whether the president was actually aware of the situation in

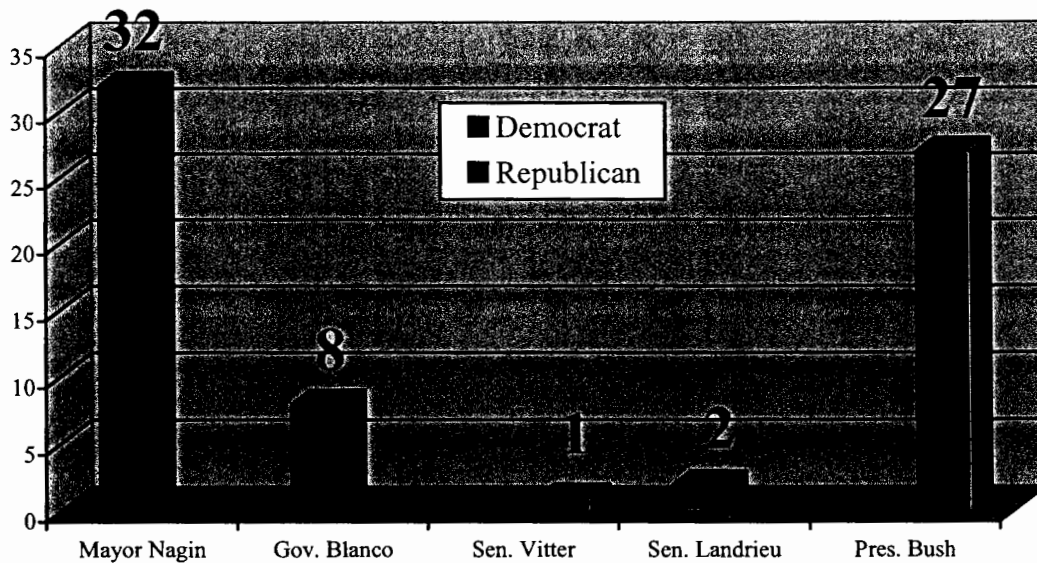
New Orleans and to question if the government was truly doing everything possible to help the victims of the storm. When the sound bite first aired, September 9, 2005, 12 days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s reporter Jeanne Meserve commented that "Brown seemed slow to recognize the magnitude of the Katrina catastrophe, slow to marshal federal resources, and unaware of widely reported aspects of the tragedy around him." So while the quote by itself seems praiseworthy of Brown, it is actually being used to highlight what Cooper had been calling the uncoordinated federal response.

Although Brown was the subject of numerous sound bites and criticism, he also contributed a fair amount of quotes to the show as well. Twenty sound bites were of Brown making him the third highest contributor. Interestingly, most of Brown's sound bites are contributed after he is reassigned back to Washington and are during Congressional testimony on the relief efforts. Of Brown's 20 sound bites, his statement of "my biggest mistake was not recognizing by Saturday that Louisiana was dysfunctional," was repeated three times. According to the September 27, 2005 transcript, Brown was referring to what CNN correspondent Ed Henry said was "Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin[']s slow call] for a mandatory evacuation."

In addition to focusing on the federal government's response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, Cooper's show occasionally focused on local governments' responses, although not on as consistent of a basis. One occurrence that his show aired on September 16 and September 19, 2005 was an argument between Kenner, Louisiana's Police Chief Nick Congemi and Kenner City Councilman Cedric Floyd. Almost 40 sound bites were of the two bickering over the evacuation of Kenner's poor, Hispanic residents,

with Congemi accusing Floyd of being a racist and footage of the two almost coming to blows. Both Congemi and Floyd each contributed more than twice the amount of sound bites as did Louisiana's Governor Blanco. Chart 10 puts into perspective the number of sound bites key politicians contributed to *Anderson Cooper 360°*.

Chart 10: Number of Sound Bites From Key Politicians



In addition to sound bites, Cooper and his team of reporters interviewed numerous politicians and government officials throughout the show's coverage of Hurricane Katrina. Within the first seven days of the coverage, Cooper interviewed nine different people involved in the current efforts or experienced in handling natural disasters. Rick Sanchez, one of Cooper's correspondents, interviewed one person as well, combining for a total of 10 people interviewed within the first seven days of the hurricane making landfall on the Gulf Coast.

Out of the 10 interviewees, five were members of the military or police involved in the rescue efforts, two were senators, one was FEMA's Director Michael Brown, one was former FEMA Director James Lee Witt, and one was former New Orleans Mayor Sidney Barthelemy. Three of the interviewees were associated with the Democratic party (Witt was categorized as a Democrat since he was appointed by and served President Bill Clinton) and two were members of the Republican party (Brown was categorized as a Republican because he was appointed by and served President George W. Bush).

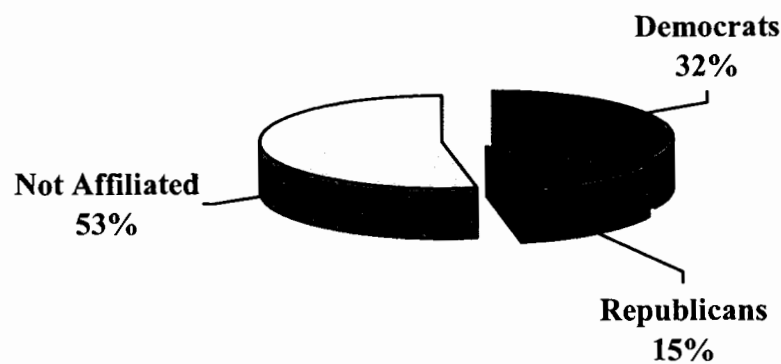
The senators interviewed by Cooper were Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, a Democrat, and Mississippi Senator Trent Lott, a Republican. Landrieu was interviewed on September 1, 2005 and was asked three questions that were coded as hostile and Cooper interrupted her twice in a ways that were coded as hostile. Cooper's hostile interruptions occur while Senator Landrieu is thanking numerous politicians, including President Bush, for their help and support during the crisis.

In contrast, during Cooper's September 2, 2005, interview with Senator Lott, a day after his interview with Landrieu, seven questions were coded as hostile and Cooper interrupted Lott six times in ways that were also coded as hostile. Cooper's questions become hostile with Senator Lott after Lott refused to name specific politicians who were at fault for what Cooper perceived as the government's slow response.

Of Cooper's seven other interviews within the first seven days of landfall, the only other interviewee to face a hostile question was FEMA Director Michael Brown. Ironically however, at the end of this interview, which aired August 31, 2005, Cooper thanked Brown for his work and efforts in the disaster recovery.

Overall, throughout the two-month period and 45 transcripts, Cooper's show aired 35 different interviews. Twice as many Democrats than Republicans were interviewed, and most of the interviewees were associated with police departments in Louisiana and Mississippi, as well as the Army, Coast Guard, National Guard and FEMA. Chart 11 depicts a breakdown of interviews by party affiliation.

Chart 11: Percentage of Democrats vs. Republicans Interviewed



Former President Bill Clinton, Illinois Senator Barack Obama, and Alaska Senator Don Young were among the Democrats interviewed on *Anderson Cooper 360°* about the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. While Obama and Young are not directly involved in the relief efforts they both criticize FEMA and the government's response in general. Clinton, however, was interviewed about a hurricane victims' charity he and former President George Bush Sr. jointly started, yet the former president Bush, a Republican, is not interviewed at all.

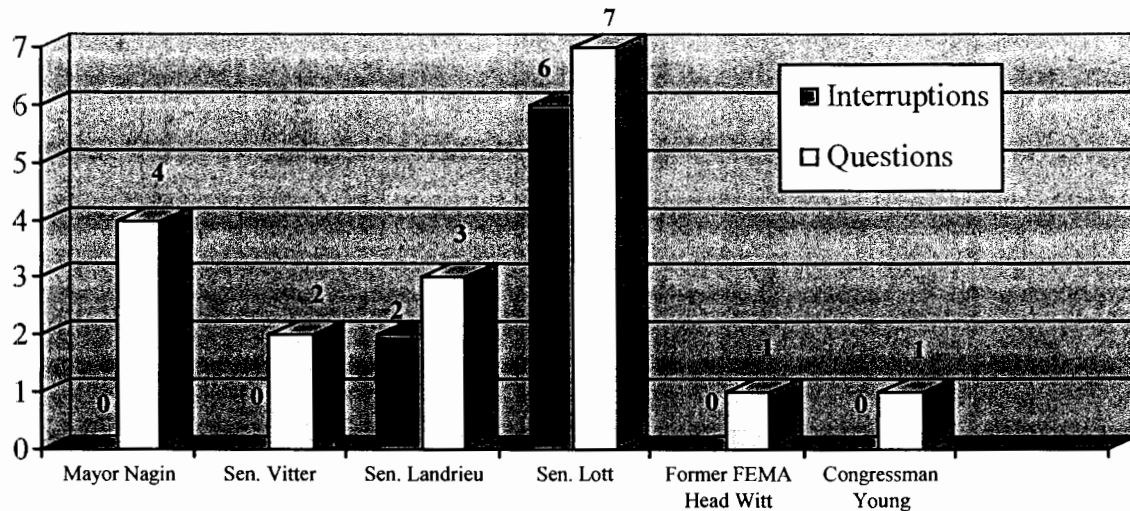
Only four people were interviewed on more than one show and they were: former New Orleans Mayor Sidney Barthelemy, a Democrat; former FEMA director for the

Clinton Administration James Lee Witt, a Democrat; Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu, a Democrat; and Louisiana Senator David Vitter, a Republican. Each of the three Democrats and the single Republican appeared on Cooper's show on two separate occasions.

During Landrieu's appearance on the show that aired September 7, 2005, she tells Cooper she would "punch President Bush" if he were to blame the Louisiana government for the relief efforts failures. Most of the people interviewed by Cooper or his correspondents either criticized the government or remained neutral when commenting on the government. Cooper in particular, was not satisfied by neutral statements and often tried to push his interview subjects to name names.

Throughout all of the interviews with politicians, Cooper would only ask six politicians questions that were coded by the researcher as hostile, and he would praise only one politician. Waveland, Mississippi's Mayor Tommy Longo, a Democrat, would be the only politician Cooper would praise for his efforts to help his constituents. Of the six politicians to face hostile questioning from Cooper, Senator Trent Lott, a Republican from Mississippi, would face the most interruptions and questions that were coded as hostile. However, Cooper would re-broadcast his infamous interview with Senator Mary Landrieu, a Democrat, on the one-month anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landfall (September 30, 2005). Chart 12 illustrates the amount of hostile questions and interruptions faced by the only six to receive them.

Chart 12: Number of Hostile Questions/Interruptions Faced

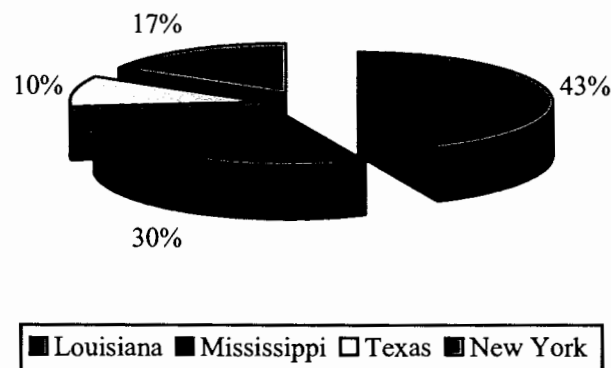


Interestingly, as chart 12 depicts, New Orleans Mayor Nagin, who was responsible for the evacuation of New Orleans, as well as the initial relief and rescue efforts was only asked four hostile questions by Cooper in comparison to Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi who was not only asked seven hostile questions, but was also interrupted by Cooper six different times in a hostile manner.

In addition to reviewing the content of the interviews that aired on *Anderson Cooper 360°*, the researcher also coded the location of each broadcast as a way of gauging the locations Cooper found to be most deserving of coverage. The location of *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s broadcasts was also significant because it clearly defined when coverage of Hurricane Katrina had completely played out; when the show began broadcasting from its home studio in New York City, there ceased to be constant coverage of the storm and its effects.

Interestingly, while New Orleans was the area most reported on in hurricane coverage, the first five *Anderson Cooper 360°* transcripts coded by the researcher were broadcast live from locations throughout Mississippi, including Gulfport, Bay St. Louis, and Waveland. It was not until September 5, 2005, seven days after Hurricane Katrina touched down in the Gulf Coast, that Cooper began reporting from New Orleans. Overall, a total of 15 broadcasts out of 45 would be from New Orleans. Both Baton Rouge and Kenner, Louisiana would be the location of one broadcast each. Chart 13 outlines the percent of Hurricane Katrina related transcripts that aired from specific locations.

Chart 13: Percent of Hurricane Katrina Related Broadcasts Aired From Specific Locations



Around September 21, 2005, until September 24, 2005 *Anderson Cooper 360°* began to report on the emerging threat and aftermath of Hurricane Rita. As a result, two shows were broadcasted from Galveston, Texas and one from Beaumont, Texas. The constant coverage of Hurricane Katrina was followed by and mixed with coverage of Hurricane Rita. In fact, the first *Anderson Cooper 360°* shows that did not contain coverage specific to Hurricane Katrina aired on Saturday, September 24, and Monday,

September 26, 2005, 27 and 29 days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast. Both shows focused on Hurricane Rita's aftermath, and the September 24 show aired on a Saturday, which is unusual as *Anderson Cooper 360°* normally airs on weekdays. Interestingly though, Cooper's emphasis on weather occurrences correlates with the fact that weather occurrences are the most watched news events, so it makes sense from a business perspective to air shows that research has proven people are compelled to watch (The Pew Research Center, 2004, June 8).

Chapter Five

Summary

In summary, a total of 45 *Anderson Cooper 360°* transcripts were coded starting from August 29, 2005, the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Gulf Coast, until October 29, 2005. Thirty three percent of these transcripts were completely dedicated to reporting on issues related to Hurricane Katrina, meaning that the entire hour of *Anderson Cooper 360°* was storm coverage.

In general, a majority of the transcripts (54%) contained commentary from Cooper or his correspondents that was critical of the federal government's response to the storm. Cooper's recurring complaints against the government throughout the transcripts were related to what he perceived as a lack of coordination between all government branches, the federal government's slowness in responding to the needs of the victims, and politicians' attempts to positively spin the response when people were left stranded for days without food, water, and shelter.

Overall, more Republicans were mentioned throughout *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s coverage than Democrats. Since the majority of the show's commentary was critical of

the Republican run federal government, this finding supports the notion that CNN caters to a politically liberal audience. Also in line with this notion, is the content analysis' finding that more Republicans than Democrats provided sound bites for the show, a majority of which were critical of the government's handling of the relief efforts.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, a Democrat, provided the most sound bites throughout the coverage, one of which was repeated nine times throughout various transcripts and specifically criticized the federal government. "Now get off your asses and do something, let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country," was the most replayed sound bite throughout the two-month period analyzed.

In stark contrast to the amount of times Republicans were mentioned throughout the coverage, significantly more Democrats were interviewed on *Anderson Cooper 360°*. However, throughout all of the interviews with politicians, Cooper would ask six politicians questions that were coded by the researcher as hostile, and he would praise only one politician. Waveland, Mississippi's Mayor Tommy Longo, a Democrat, would be the only politician Cooper would praise for his efforts to help his constituents. Senator Trent Lott, a Republican from Mississippi, would face both the most interruptions by Cooper and the most questions that were coded as hostile. New Orleans Mayor Nagin, who was responsible for the evacuation of the city, as well as the initial relief and rescue efforts was only asked four hostile questions by Cooper in comparison to Senator Lott.

Conclusion

As the content analysis of *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s coverage of Hurricane Katrina concluded, Cooper and his correspondents were critical of the federal government's response to those in need. While there clearly was a disconnect in

communication between the federal government and Louisiana and New Orleans politicians, Cooper seemed to only focus on what he believed were the federal government's shortcomings in responding to the disaster.

Although the content analysis showed that Cooper was highly critical of the federal, Republican run government, it is the researcher's judgment that *Anderson Cooper 360°* did not intentionally slant its coverage in a politically liberal way. However, it is the researcher's judgment that CNN, as a business, saw Cooper's connection with his audience as a marketing strategy and capitalized on his ability to gain new viewers.

While these findings do not support or negate the hypothesis that CNN deliberately slants the news with a politically liberal view, it does demonstrate that the channel knows its target demographic and markets its product specifically to them; CNN clearly has more liberal than conservative viewers and Cooper's anger at the conservative government's response to Hurricane Katrina was something CNN's liberal viewers could connect with. By making Cooper the face of CNN, the media outlet was able to satisfy its main demographics' need for news aligned with its politically liberal views.

Based on the findings from the content analysis of *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s transcripts, it is the researcher's judgment that there are two explanations for Cooper's focus on criticizing the federal, conservative government, as opposed to the Louisiana and New Orleans, liberal governments. First, Cooper focused on the federal government's actions because it was an easy target; the federal politicians were not in the midst of the destruction, they were living comfortably in Washington, D.C., while the local and state officials were themselves victims of Katrina. Secondly, and perhaps having the most impact, was the emotional response Cooper had to the situation. Since

Cooper's family had ties to both New Orleans and Mississippi, and because he was reporting in the midst of the death and destruction, he became emotionally involved in the events surrounding him, causing him to demand that the federal government take accountability for what he perceived as shortcomings in relief.

It appeared as though Cooper became emotionally involved in helping the victims of Katrina, instead of objectively reporting on the situation. Cooper explains his reaction to being in the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina as unique to this particular tragedy:

“Yeah, I would prefer not to be emotional and I would prefer not to get upset, but it's hard not to when you're surrounded by brave people who are suffering and in need. I feel like the people here deserve to have some answers” (Van Meter, 2005).

The death and destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina had a profound impact on Cooper, and in ways that he had never experienced before. As he told New York Magazine:

“I was really affected by the bodies. I've seen a lot of dead bodies before, and I'm not sure why these dead bodies affected me so much, but I sort of haven't been able to stop thinking about them,” (Van Meter, 2005).

This demonstrates that Cooper was unable to objectively report on the situation because he had become emotionally involved in it. Cooper was not an outsider looking in, but instead became an advocate for the victims.

Cooper took it upon himself to become a bridge between his viewers and the victims, and as a result Cooper “reacted the way any of us might have—raging against

government officials when help didn't come fast enough, and weeping when it all got to be too much" (Van Meter, 2005). Yet Cooper also admits that he is especially sensitive to tragedy and believes it's something he often "dwells" on. Even Cooper's mother, Gloria Vanderbilt, believes he is "especially sensitive and emotional," something she attributes to the death of Cooper's father at an early age, and the suicide of his older brother (Van Meter).

Adding to the emotions of the situation Cooper was reporting on is the fact that his father was from Mississippi and some of his family was still there when Katrina struck. Further supporting his connection to the people of the Gulf Coast is Cooper's belief that his Mississippi roots shaped him into the person he is (Van Meter, 2005). Being in Mississippi during Hurricane Katrina made Cooper feel connected to his father, and he agrees that's "why this story for [him]...has had such an impact on [him]," (Van Meter). Cooper's ability to connect with the victims of Hurricane Katrina is what helped him connect with and draw in viewers for CNN.

Clearly, CNN was capitalizing on the audience's connection with Cooper as he was promoted for his coverage of the storm. Cooper was able to connect with viewers because of his emotional involvement with the situation occurring; CNN's audience, its consumers, greatly appreciated Cooper's candor and humanism as evident by CNN's ratings gain. CNN, as a business, saw Cooper's coverage of Hurricane Katrina as an opportunity to enhance its brand image and capitalized on Cooper's ability to connect with viewers. Simply put, CNN enhanced its marketability by giving its viewers someone they could connect with, someone who conveyed the news in a way that was in line with

their political views. And as the ratings showed, knowing and capitalizing on your demographics' needs and wants is smart business.

Recommendations

Based on the information cultivated by the researcher, the following recommendations for further study are suggested:

- Perform a content analysis of a full year of *Anderson Cooper 360°*'s Hurricane Katrina coverage to determine if the show's viewpoints changed over time.
- Using a content analysis, compare Cooper's commentary on Hurricane Katrina to that of CNN's Lou Dobbs, Jack Cafferty, or Wolf Blitzer, who tend to be more opinionated in their commentary than Cooper.
- Compare CNN's coverage of Hurricane Katrina to Fox News Channel's coverage via content analysis of transcripts to determine if there was a significant difference in the way each station reported on the situation. This would provide a unique perspective, as media pundits label CNN as a liberal channel, while Fox is often labeled as a conservative outlet. (Note: this was the researcher's original intent, however accessing Fox transcripts was close to impossible).
- Analyze CNN's coverage of Hurricane Katrina in comparison to the channel's coverage of Hurricane Floyd. Katrina occurred while a Republican was in office, President George W. Bush, and Hurricane Floyd occurred when President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, was in office. This would provide a unique perspective into whether or not CNN criticized the Democratic run government in the same way it did the Bush administration, while FEMA was responsible and arguably failed in both situations.

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Appendix A

Appendix A: Criteria For Coding Transcripts

1. Title of Show:
2. Date Aired:
3. Time Aired:
4. Timeline from Hurricane Katrina Landfall (in days):
5. Anchor (s):
6. Location of Reporting:
7. Was the entire show dedicated to Hurricane Katrina Coverage? YES NO
8. If NO, how many segments were dedicated to Hurricane Coverage?
9. When did these segments air? Beginning Middle End
10. What is the focus of the hurricane reporting?
11. What government officials are mentioned in throughout the show (please also note their political affiliation, if there is one)?
 - a. How many times are each official mentioned criticized?
 - b. How many times are each official mentioned praised?
12. In general, is the reporters/anchor's commentary (not statements of facts) critical of the government?
 - a. If YES, what branch(es) of government is the commentary critical of?
 - b. If YES, what official(s) is it critical of?
 - c. If YES, what exactly is it critical of? (i.e.: slow to respond, etc.)
13. In general, is the reporters/anchor's commentary (not statements of facts) praising the government?
 - a. If YES, what branch(es) of government is the commentary praising?

- b. If YES, what official(s) is it praising?
- c. If YES, what exactly is it praising? (i.e.: rescue attempts.)

14. Please note the sound bites planned throughout the hurricane coverage and record:

- a. Name of person contributing a sound bite:
- b. Political affiliation of the person, if any:
- c. How many sound bites contributed overall by this person
- d. How many times a particular sound bite is repeated throughout the show:
- e. Transcribe the repeated sound bite:

15. Please note the interviews conducted during the show and record:

- a. Name of interviewer:
- b. Name of interviewee:
- c. Political affiliation of interviewee if any:
- d. What branch of government is the interviewee from, if any:
- e. Please record the number of hostile (defined as) questioned asked by the interviewer:
- f. Please record the number of times the interviewer interrupts the interviewee in a hostile (as defined above) manner:
- g. Is this a joint interview?
 - i. If YES, who else is being interviewed?
 - ii. If YES, what is his/her political affiliation if any?
 - iii. If YES, what branch of government is he/she from?
 - iv. If YES, please record the number of hostile (defined as) questioned asked by the interviewer:

- v. If YES, please record the number of times the interviewer interrupts the interviewee in a hostile (as defined above) manner:
- h. Does the interviewee(s) mention other officials?
 - i. If YES, whom do they mention (please note political affiliation and branch of government):
 - ii. If YES, are the mentions negative, positive, or neutral?

If more than one interview is conducted, use below:

16. Please note the interviews conducted during the show and record:

- a. Name of interviewer:
- b. Name of interviewee:
- c. Political affiliation of interviewee if any:
- d. What branch of government is the interviewee from, if any:
- e. Please record the number of hostile (defined as) questioned asked by the interviewer:
- f. Please record the number of times the interviewer interrupts the interviewee in a hostile (as defined above) manner:
- g. Is this a joint interview?
 - i. If YES, who else is being interviewed?
 - ii. If YES, what is his/her political affiliation if any?
 - iii. If YES, what branch of government is he/she from?
 - iv. If YES, please record the number of hostile (defined as) questioned asked by the interviewer:

- v. If YES, please record the number of times the interviewer interrupts the interviewee in a hostile (as defined above) manner:
- h. Does the interviewee(s) mention other officials?
 - i. If YES, whom do they mention (please note political affiliation and branch of government):
 - ii. If YES, are the mentions negative, positive, or neutral?

Appendix B

Appendix B: Alphabetical Listing of All Government Employees/Agencies

Mentioned Throughout the Transcripts

Allen, Thad, Colonel Coast Guard	Department of Homeland Security
Army	Dingell, John, Representative Michigan
Army Corp. Of Engineers	Ebbert, Terry, NO Office of Emergency Management
Army, Belgium	EPA
Bahamonde, Marty, NO FEMA Head	FBI
Barbour, Halely Miss. Gov.	Federal Government
Batt, Jay, NO Councilman	FEMA
Berwick, Bruce, US ACE	Fire Department, New Orleans
Blanco, Kathleen B., Louisiana Gov.	Fire Department, New York City
Boehlert, Sherwood, Congressmen NY	First Responders
Border Patrol, U.S.	Floyd, Cedric, Kenner City manager
Breaux, John, Former LA Senator	Forti, Charles Jr., LA Attorney General
Brown, Michael FEMA Director	Frist, Bill, Senate Majority Leader Tenn.
Brown, Steve, US ACE	Homeland Security
Bush Administration	Honore, Russell, Lt. General of National Guard
Bush, George W. President	Hughlett, Frank, Commander U.S. Navy
Bush, George, Former President	Immigration & Customs Enforcement
Bush, Laura, First Lady	Inslee, Jay, Congressmen Washington
Chambliss, Saxby, Senator Georgia	Jefferson, William, Congressmen
Chertoff, Michael, Homeland Security Sec.	Jones, Bruce, Captain, Coast Guard
Clinton, Bill, Former President	Kenner Mayor (Phil Capitano)
Coast Guard	Kilpatrick, Carolyn, Michigan Representative
Collins, Susan, Senator Maine	LA Attorney General Office
Compass, Eddie, NO Police Chief	Landrieu, Mary LA Senator
Congemi, Nick Police Chief of Kenner	Landry, Sherry LA State Attorney
Congressional Black Caucus	Lieberman, Joe, Conn. Senator
Congress	Lott, Trent, Miss. Senator
Delay, Tom, Senator Texas	Louisiana Government

Louisiana State Wildlife Enforcement
Agency

Marionneaux, Robert, LA Senator

McCain, John, Senator Arizona
McClellan, Scott, White House Press
Secretary

McDaniels, Sec. Of LA Department of
Environmental Quality

McMyne, Michael, Kenner City Council

Military

Mineta, Norman, Transportation Secretary

Morris, Ben, Mayor of Slidell LA

Mueller, Robert, Head of FBI

Nagin, Ray, New Orleans Mayor

National Guard

National Guard, Georgia

National Guard, Louisiana

Reid, Harry Senator Nevada

Riley, Warren, New NO Police Chief

Senate

Shays, Christopher, Congressman, Conn.

St. Bernard's Parish Sheriff

Strock, Cark, Lt. General ACE

Tancredo, Tom, Congressmen Colorado

Thomas, Oliver, NO City Council President

Thompson, Bernie, Congressmen, Miss.

Vitter, David, LA Senator

Whitehorn, Henry, Colonel LA State Police

Willard-Lews, Cynthia, NO City Council

Wilson, Kevin, NO Police Sgt.

Woods, Nicholas, New Orleans Police

Young, Don, Congressmen Alaska

Zumstein, Michael Army Corp of Engineers

Appendix C

Appendix C: Criticism and Praise of Those Mentioned Throughout the Transcripts

<u>Officials Mentioned</u>	<u>Political Party</u>	<u># of Mentions</u>	<u># of Criticism</u>	<u># of Praise</u>
Allen, Thad, Colonel Coast Guard		3		1
Army		14		1
Army Corp. of Engineers		23		1
Army, Belgium		1		
Bahamonde, Marty, New Orleans FEMA Head		10		1
Barbour, Haley Miss. Gov.	R	7		
Batt, Jay, New Orleans Councilman	Couldn't Find	1		1
Berwick, Bruce, US Army Corp. Engineers		1		
Blanco, Kathleen B., Louisiana Gov.	D	38	9	2
Boehlert, Sherwood, Congressmen NY	R	1		
Border Patrol, U.S.		2		
Breaux, John, Former LA Senator	D	1		
Brown, Michael FEMA Director	R	57	20	2
Brown, Steve, US Army Corp. of Engineers		1		
Bush Administration	R	3	1	
Bush, George W. President	R	68	8	4
Bush, George, Former President	R	4		
Bush, Laura, First Lady	R	3		
Chambliss, Saxby, Senator Georgia	R	1		
Chertoff, Michael, Homeland Security Sec.	R	18	5	
Clinton, Bill, Former President	D	6		
Coast Guard		28		12
Collins, Susan, Senator Maine	R	1		
Compass, Eddie, New Orleans Police Chief		19	4	2
Congemi, Nick Police Chief of Kenner		9		
Congressional Black Caucus		1		
Congress		2		

Officials Mentioned	Political Party	# of Mentions	# of Criticism	# of Praise
Delay, Tom, Senator Texas	R	1		
Department of Homeland Security	R	1		
Dingell, John, Representative Michigan	D	1		
Ebbert, Terry, New Orleans Office of Emergency Management		1		
EPA		3		
FBI		9	2	
Federal Government	Both	3	2	
FEMA		163	35	
Fire Department, New Orleans		2		3
Fire Department, New York City		3		
First Responders		5		3
Floyd, Cedric, Kenner City manager		6		
Forti, Charles Jr., LA Attorney General	D	1		
Frist, Bill, Senate Majority Leader Tenn.	R	1		
Homeland Security	R	1		
Honore, Russell, Lt. General of National Guard		17		
Hughlett, Frank, Commander U.S. Navy		1		7
Immigration & Customs Enforcement		1		
Inslee, Jay, Congressmen Washington	D	1		
Jefferson, William, Congressmen	D	2	2	
Jones, Bruce, Captain, Coast Guard		4		
Kenner Mayor (Phil Capitano)	R	4	1	3
Kilpatrick, Carolyn, Michigan Representative	D	1		
LA Attorney General Office		1		
Landrieu, Mary LA Senator	D	9	2	
Landry, Sherry LA State Attorney		1		
Lieberman, Joe, Conn. Senator	D	1		
Lott, Trent, Miss. Senator	R	2		

Officials Mentioned	Political Party	# of Mentions	# of Criticism	# of Praise
Louisiana Government		3	2	
Louisiana State Wildlife Enforcement Agency		1		
Marionneaux, Robert, LA Senator	D	1		
McCain, John, Senator Arizona	R	1		
McClellan, Scott, White House Press Secretary	R	1		
McDaniels, Sec. Of LA Department of Environmental Quality		1		
McMyne, Michael, Kenner City Council		2		
Military		3		
Mineta, Norman, Transportation Secretary		1		
Morris, Ben, Mayor of Slidell LA	R	1		
Mueller, Robert, Head of FBI		1		
Nagin, Ray, New Orleans Mayor	D	83	16	
National Guard		21		4
National Guard, Georgia		1		
National Guard, Louisiana		1		
National Guard, Oklahoma		9		5
Navy		2		
Navy, Mexican		1		
New Orleans City Officials	Both	1	1	
Obey, David, Congressmen	D	1		
Paramedics		1		1
Paulison, David, Acting Head of FEMA	R	13		2
Pelosi, Nancy, House Minority Leader CA	D	2		
Pence, Michael, Congressman Indiana	R	1		
Police Chief, Gretna, LA		1		
Police, Biloxi, Miss.		3		
Police, Gulfport, Miss.		1		1
Police, Miss.		7		

<u>Officials Mentioned</u>	<u>Political Party</u>	<u># of Mentions</u>	<u># of Criticism</u>	<u># of Praise</u>
Police, New Orleans		216	59	14
Politicians	Both	1	1	
Quave, Rusty, Mayor of D'Iberville, Miss	D	1		
Reid, Harry Senator Nevada	D	2		
Riley, Warren, New Orleans Police Chief		14		5
Senate	Both	2		
Shays, Christopher, Congressman, Conn.	R	1		
St. Bernard's Parish Sheriff		1		
Strock, Cark, Lt. General Army Corp. of Engineers		1		
Tancredo, Tom, Congressmen Colorado	R	2		
Thomas, Oliver, New Orleans City Council President	D	3		
Thompson, Bernie, Congressmen, Miss.	D	1		
Vitter, David, LA Senator	R	2	1	
Whitehorn, Henry, Colonel LA Police		1		
Willard-Lews, Cynthia, New Orleans City Council		1		
Wilson, Kevin, New Orleans Police Sgt.		1		
Woods, Nicholas, New Orleans Police		1		
Young, Don, Congressmen Alaska	D	2	1	
Zumstein, Michael Army Corp of Engineers		1		