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# Hurricane Katrina And Stereotyping

## -Media Portrayals of African Americans During Katrina

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Anne Hansen

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Copenhagen Business School

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Supervisor: Jan Gustafsson

Institute: Internationale Kultur- og Kommunikationsstudier

## Dansk Resume

### **Hurricane Katrina Og Stereotypering:**

#### **Skildringer Af Afroamerikanere Under Hurricane Katrina**

Dette speciale har til formål at undersøge hvordan sorte amerikanere blev fremstillet i medierne under dækningen af Hurricane Katrina. Dette speciale formoder at sorte blev dækket ved brug af race-stereotyper og at Othering (skelnen og separation mellem ind-gruppe og ud-gruppe) fremkom i dækningen. Derudover formodes det at de roller, ofrene for Katrina blev dækket i, varierede racerne imellem, dvs. at sorte og hvide blev portrætteret i forskellige roller og at disse passer med eksisterende race-stereotyper.

Sorte blev primært fremstillet som kriminelle og dette blev gjort gennem fokus på sort kriminalitet, der blev portrætteret som værende ude af kontrol. De fleste af historierne om kriminalitet blev afvist efter Katrina og viste sig at have været baseret på rygter. Det der gjorde dem troværdige var stereotypen om sorte kriminelle og historierne blev derfor dækket som værende faktuelle. Sorte blev ligeledes bebrejdet for ikke at have evakueret New Orleans inden orkanen, men i stedet være blevet tilbage og derfor havde bragt sig selv i en situation, hvor de skulle reddes. At sorte fattige ikke havde kunnet evakuere, fordi de ikke havde råd og ikke ejede biler, blev sjældent nævnt og resultatet var en "bebrejd offeret"-tone i dækningen af sorte og at sorte blev portrætteret som de stereotype sorte fattige, som er uansvarlige og ikke fortjener hjælp. Det samme mønster tegner sig i dækning af fattige sorte generelt før Katrina. Derudover blev folk i New Orleans betegnede som "flygtninge" i begyndelse af dækningen, hvilket medførte meget kritik, da det antydede mangel på statsborgerskab. Det skete samtidig med sammenligninger mellem New Orleans og U-lande. Det havde en stærk konnotation af fremmedliggørelse af de sorte amerikanere i New Orleans og Othering blev skabt gennem denne beskrivelse og gennem resten af

den stereotyp-baserede dækning. Det medførte et indtryk af katastrofen som fjern og distanceret fra resten af det amerikanske samfund. Dette blev understreget med beskrivelsen af amerikanske soldater, der blev sendt ind i New Orleans for at tilbageerobre byen fra de kriminelle, hvilket mindede om retorik normalt brugt om fjerne, krigsramte lande.

Sorte blev igennem dækningen fremstillet som stereotype sorte kriminelle og passive ofre. De blev sjældent portrætteret i andre roller såsom hjælpere, officielle medarbejdere, embedsmænd eller eksperter. Disse roller blev domineret af hvide, som samtidig blev dækket som kraftfulde, målbevidste ofre, hvilket passer med stereotyper om hvide i kritiske situationer. Medierne portrætterede sorte og hvide i stereotype roller af flere årsager. En var for at opnå enkle, lette at forstå portrætter. Det opnås ved at man portrætterer folk i forventelige, stereotype roller, og derfor blev sorte fremstillet som kriminelle og passive og ikke som hjælpere og eksperter. Derudover brugte medierne stereotyper fordi de sjældent dækker sorte fattige og derfor ikke har ret meget egentlig viden om denne gruppe, og de tyede i stedet til stereotyper om de sorte fattige. Medierne led også under et sammenbrud af kommunikation og af at embedsmænd og politiet gentog rygter, hvilket medierne tog som bekræftelse af rygterne og det bidrog til en rygtebaseret dækning af Katrina.

Dækningen af Katrina efterlod et indtryk af at sorte levede op til stereotyperne om sorte som kriminelle og som passive ofre. Samtidig blev de fremstillet som uansvarlige fattige, hvilket er en stereotypisk fremstilling af fattige, når sorte bliver vist i denne socioøkonomiske rolle. Disse fremstillinger af sorte blev kontrasteret af portrætter af hvide som aktive ofre eller i positive roller som hjælpere, eksperter og embedsmænd, samtidig med at hvid kriminalitet blev ignoreret i dækningen.



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## **Introduction**

On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina made landfall very close to New Orleans. The hurricane damaged an area the size of Great Britain and flooded most of New Orleans, as the levees surrounding the city could no longer keep the rising water out and breached. What followed next was more than a week of intense media coverage from a city in chaos, as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) seemed overwhelmed by the conditions of the city, and help consequently failed to arrive. Hurricane Katrina was the first disaster to be covered by the 24/7-news cycle and Katrina became one of the most covered events in over twenty years (Rodriguez and Dynes 2006:2), and coverage of Katrina was consequently ample. During the first two weeks of coverage, the New York Times and the Washington Post combined ran more than 200 articles about Katrina and NBC Nightly News dedicated more than half of its broadcasting to Katrina (Gross 2007:5).

The coverage of Katrina is interesting to examine, because blacks and the poor are two groups normally marginalized and underrepresented by the media. At the time of Katrina, 67.3 percent of New Orleans' population was African American (Lee and Gandy 2006:5) and New Orleans was one of the US's most impoverished cities. The black population was especially impoverished, as almost one-third of blacks living in New Orleans at the time lived below the poverty line, compared to a 19 percent average for New Orleans when including all residents (Marable and Clarke 2008:193). Research has shown that when African Americans receive media attention, it will most often represent existing racial stereotypes (Kahle et.al. 2007:76). Katrina was no exception. Research has also shown that even a few stereotypical portrayals of others can contribute to the public's development of stereotypes, making stereotypical coverage of blacks potentially very influential on the audience (Mutz and Goldman 2010:247). Katrina was a non-stop coverage of the black poor for an unprecedented long period and it is interesting to examine patterns occurring in the coverage, when

the focus was on racial and socio economic groups rarely portrayed by the media.

This thesis will explore the media's use of stereotyping of African Americans during Katrina, as I argue that the coverage was to some extent based on stereotypes. Reports of rampant looting, hundreds of rapes and the black citizens of New Orleans as nearly all having turned criminal filled the news and told the story of stereotypical black criminality. However most of the stories turned out to be incorrect and based on unsubstantiated rumors, but crime stories had dominated the reports from the city. While some of the inaccuracies in the coverage were due to officials repeating the rumors, and to the pace, which media reporting of catastrophes must have in order to keep up with events, the media also turned to racial stereotyping and usual patterns of media coverage of blacks, as stereotyping and expectations of the behavior of the black and poor victims were used to fill some of the blanks in the information.

As with all social and racial groups, a number of stereotypes exist about African Americans and the poor, and some of the most common stereotypes of poor blacks were dominant throughout the coverage. Due to the majority of the people in New Orleans being poor, black and needing rescue, as well as a dominant focus of the coverage being on private citizens rumored to commit crime and looting, stereotypes concerning race, poverty, criminality and victim behavior are analyzed for usage in this thesis. The specific, common stereotypes relevant for this analysis are of blacks as criminals and as lazy, and of blacks as helpless victims, who were dependent on help from the government, and of the black poor as the irresponsible and undeserving poor (Clawson and Trice 2000:54; Brezina and Winder 2003:402; Bing III 2010; Melican 2009:39; Dixon 2008:3; Brown et.al. 2003:99). These stereotypes were contrasted throughout Katrina with the common stereotypical portrayals of whites as pro-social, active victims who demonstrated stereotypical white determination (Melican 2009:39; Clawson and Trice 2000:54). This thesis will explore the use of these stereotypes in the coverage.

To explore the patterns of stereotyping, this thesis will analyze examples from Katrina where the focus of the coverage was on the private citizens for use of racial and socio-economic stereotypes. Black and white victims were often

portrayed differently while in similar situations and assigned different roles. The main examples used in the analysis are the coverage looking at why some people did not evacuate prior to the hurricane and the coverage focusing on crime and looting. The analysis will also explore the roles in which the people in New Orleans were portrayed. These roles were victims, criminals/looters, rescuers and experts, and this thesis will explore racial differences within the portrayals of these roles. One of the most explicit examples of racial differences in the coverage of Katrina's victims was when two similar photographs were published, one of a black man and one of a non-black couple, both carrying items while wading through the flood waters. The black man was described as "looting" food in the photograph's caption, while the non-black couple was described as "finding" food. This thesis hypothesizes that these roles differed along racial lines throughout the coverage, consisting with existing racial and socio economic stereotypes

Othering, a process of defining out-group members as removed and different from ones in-group, of New Orleans' black population will also be examined, as the Other is often created and maintained through stereotyping (Pickering 2001:48). It is interesting to see how normally a marginalized and rarely covered group of society was described compared with the dominant group in the US, whites, and if there were patterns of Othering. References to the victims of Katrina as "refugees", comparisons between New Orleans and the Third World and other examples from the coverage will be analyzed to explore a possible Othering of Katrina's black and poor victims.

This thesis will look at prior patterns in coverage of blacks and the poor, as it explains some patterns in the Katrina coverage. During Katrina, whites and blacks were often described in roles fitting racial stereotypes, which the media often uses to portray them, rather than look into the specific crisis at hand and only base victim portrayals on that context. It is pivotal as it helps explain some of the patterns emerging in the coverage, as the media often portrayed the black poor during Katrina like they usually do. This thesis will therefore analyze and discuss stereotyping in the media in general and stereotyping of the poor in general.

To explore these issues in the coverage the following research question has been designed:

**Research Question:**

*How were African Americans portrayed in the Katrina coverage?*

I primarily want to explore the use of stereotyping in the coverage and to do this, I have outlined three hypotheses, which will be examined throughout the thesis:

1. Whites and blacks were portrayed differently, and in different roles, in the coverage
2. These roles fit existing racial and socio economic stereotypes and coverage fit with usual patterns in media coverage of the black poor
3. Othering of the African American and poor victims of Katrina was created throughout the coverage

## **Katrina Timeline**

Both television and print coverage followed the same patterns in their coverage and had the same focus points overall throughout Katrina. Here is a brief overview of the media coverage during the first week following Katrina's landfall.

### ***Monday, August 29, 2005:***

The media focused mostly on Katrina's landfall, which occurred during the morning of August 29, and the media made few references to looting and crime. Race and class of the victims is not mentioned (McGann and Granfield 2006:6). Reports are aired by NBC from the New Orleans football stadium, the Superdome, which showed thousands of people taking refuge there and parts of the roof being blown off the building (Flener 2008). The vast system of levees and pumps protecting the low-lying areas of New Orleans is reported to have kept the water out and New Orleans is described as having avoided major damage from the hurricane.

### ***Tuesday, August 30:***

The news breaks that some levees *had* breached and major parts of the city was now flooded or in the process of being flooded (McGann and Granfield 2006:6). An estimated 80 percent of the city is under water by the end of this day (BBC News 2005). Coverage focused on rescue missions in the flooded areas following the breach of the levees and makes numerous references to looting and crime. There is still no mention of the victim's race and class (McGann and Granfield 2006:6). A report aired on CNN mentions looting as a mark of anarchy

and a lack of safety (Berger 2009) and ABC describes the general situation in New Orleans as pure anarchy (Flener 2008).

***Wednesday, August 31:***

Looting and crime, such as violence and murders, are the most dominant focus points of coverage, along with rescue efforts and the failures of FEMA. Rumors of crime and looting are dominating the information and are reported as facts (McGann and Granfield 2006:7). The looting is perceived as getting much worse and much more violent (McsGann and Granfield 2006). Mayor Ray Nagin ordered the police force to cease rescue operations and instead focus on stopping looting, following media reports of the widespread looting (Berger 2009:497). Reports from the Superdome and the deplorable conditions there were aired on most television channels, showing the 20,000 people taking refuge there with no functioning toilets and a lack of food and water. CBS showed images of people staying for days “in a shanty town” on a bridge with no food or water (Flener 2008).

***Thursday, September 1:***

Reports continue to focus on rumored looting and crime, and the first mentions of rapes at the Superdome were made in the coverage (McGann and Granfield 2006:8). Violence is described as escalating with stories of a guardsman being shot in the head and shots being fired at helicopters and aid workers. These reports were all found to be false later on (McGann and Granfield 2006:10). Television began focusing on the Convention Center on September 1, and the people taking refuge there. During a live television broadcast on ABC, FEMA was asked about the situation at the Center and FEMA admitted on live TV that they had absolutely no knowledge of thousands of people staying there. Thousands of citizens had taken refuge there since Monday with no food or water (Bennett et.al. 2007:167).

***Friday, September 2:***

Coverage continues to focus on rumored looting, rape, violence and murders, as well as the lack of government relief and on the specific plans for evacuations of the people in the refuges (McGann and Granfield 2006:13). People continue being rescued off of rooftops four days after the hurricane. Food and water is delivered for the first time to the Convention Center. Evacuation of the Superdome is now in effect (Manjoo et.al. 2005).

***Saturday, September 3:***

Main focuses of the coverage continue to be rumored looting, violence, rapes and murder, and the lack of relief from the federal government and FEMA (McGann and Granfield 2006:14). 10,000 people are evacuated from New Orleans in the largest airlift operation in US history. The Superdome is now almost evacuated, with 2000-5000 people still left there, waiting for evacuation. The refuges are still being covered as they are getting evacuated (Flener 2008). Buses are sent to the Convention Center to start the evacuation of people staying there (Manjoo et.al. 2005).

***Sunday, September 4:***

The Superdome and the Convention Center are fully evacuated (Manjoo et.al. 2005). Focus continues to be on rumored looting and crime, and the lack of help from FEMA and the federal government (McGann and Granfield 2006:15). Some official sources, especially from the National Guard and other parts of the military working in New Orleans, began making statements rebutting the reports of extreme looting and violence as well as the notion that social order had disappeared from the city, but the media deems these statements as being



unsubstantiated and continue to base much of the coverage on unverified rumors.

### ***Monday, September 5:***

News reporting from New Orleans is now diminishing. Focus continues on rumored looting and crime, but a new focus is emerging on the rebuilding of the city. One week after the storm, people are still being rescued off of rooftops (Teaching The Levees) and 10,000 people are estimated to be in the flooded city (BBC News 2005). The focal point of the rescue teams and the police was shifted away from controlling looting and crime, and instead to recovering the dead and bringing them to a morgue outside Baton Rouge (Teaching The Levees).

### ***September 6:***

Water is beginning to be pumped out of New Orleans, but half of New Orleans is still flooded by September 8. (Teaching The Levees).

## **Damages**

Hurricane Katrina became the costliest natural disaster in US history with more than 200 billion dollars in costs (Durham 2008:97) and it damaged an area of over 90,000 square miles, roughly the size of Great Britain (Guidici 2008:2). More than 2 million people from the affected areas had to be displaced in the biggest relocation of people in the US since the Dust Bowl in the 1930's (Melican 2009:90). It was also the deadliest hurricane in the US in over seven decades (Guidici 2008:1) with at least 1300 people killed (Melican 2009). Large parts of New Orleans were completely destroyed during Katrina, a consequence of some of the city's many levees breaching. New Orleans is often referred to as the "soup

Bowl”, due to it sitting 2 meters below sea level, leaving it incredibly vulnerable to flooding. An intricate system of levees and pumps surrounds the city, but the levees were constructed for weaker hurricanes and could not hold up against Katrina, which was one of the strongest hurricanes to ever hit the area. The flooding affected racial groups and classes very differently, as the lowest lying areas of the city had the cheapest real-estate values and were primarily inhabited by poor black people. FEMA, the federal government and president Bush were accused throughout Katrina of being indifferent towards the blacks and the poor in New Orleans. The struggles of the poor and the black population during Katrina did not go unnoticed; in 2006 the UN publicly criticized the US for failing to protect the poor, and especially African Americans, during Katrina (University of Washington 2008:10; ThinkProgress(b) 2005).

## Method

This thesis uses primary and secondary sources to explore the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina to explore the use of stereotyping in the coverage of Katrina. The primary sources consist of articles from The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and The Times-Picayune, and the secondary sources consist of a number of different books, academic articles and content analyses exploring the coverage of Katrina on television and the print media coverage. Some of my secondary sources explore both. I use content analyses as my main qualitative sources, because they provide comprehensive overviews of the coverage in condensed versions, which allows me to explore larger patterns in the coverage. My qualitative sources consist of books and academic articles, which analyze my main theories regarding stereotyping, in general and in combination with Katrina. To demonstrate the findings of my quantitative sources, I use qualitative, specific examples from the coverage in parts of the analysis. Those are taken from my secondary sources, which have used these examples in their own analyses as representational of their findings.

Television is the most dominant media outlet today, but a third of the media's audience still uses the newspapers to get information during a crisis (Kahle et. Al. 2007:76). The PEW Research Center found that by 1997, 72 percent of Americans watched local news regularly, 56 percent regularly read a daily paper and watched network television news (Entman and Rojecki 2001:79). By 2007, the average news consumer would watch 260 minutes of television, listen to 125 minutes of radio, spend 85 minutes on the internet and spend 20 minutes reading a newspaper and 16 minutes reading a magazine during a week (Bing III 201:142). According to McGann and Granfield (2006) print news tend to act as the basis for other media types, such as television and radio, and print media coverage is often perceived by the audience as more objective and trustworthy than other outlets (p. 5). Television is especially efficient in producing and reproducing stereotypical images, because its visual images are more memorable than printed or spoken words. Audiences also tend to view television as a channel for accurate representation of groups. This visual effect is also seen

in printed coverage of catastrophic events such as Hurricane Katrina, because disasters and crises are most often described not only via graphic language, but also through very graphic photographs and Hurricane Katrina was the most visual news event in America since 9/11 (Kahle et.al. 2007:77) This thesis will therefore combine analyses of the television coverage and of the print media coverage to create a wide-ranging pool of coverage to examine, because the two medias are seen as correctly representing groups due to the visual nature of catastrophic coverage. I have also chosen to include two photographs describing a black man “looting and a non-black couple as “finding”, which were not published in any newspaper, but were published on Yahoo.com. I have chosen to add these two photographs to the analysis, because they were two of the most iconic images from the Katrina coverage and stirred up some of the biggest controversies about race in the coverage. I therefore find that an analysis of Katrina’s coverage would be lagging if I chose not to look into these photographs as well. Radio reports, blogs, monthly magazines and e-mail chains, which were set up by anonymous sources to spread rumours about Katrina victims, will not be examined.

Content analyses, defined as being comprehensive analyses of the Katrina coverage in which aspects of the coverage has been coded for and quantified, are used throughout this thesis. The race, class, actions, placement etc. of the victims and the main focus of news segments and newspaper articles are the most common aspects of the coverage coded for in the analyses. They are important parts of the analysis, because the Katrina coverage was so ample and the content analyses allow me to get a broad overview of the coverage and of the patterns emerging in the coverage in general. Katrina was the first disaster to be covered by the 24-hour news cycle and it received one of the highest levels of media coverage for a single event in more than twenty years. Content analyses therefore provide a statistical and quantitative overview of the coverage, which is crucial in order to detect patterns in how the media covered this disaster, as well as a qualitative overview as they all discuss and analyze their findings. All the print media and television content analyses and the photographic content analyses were chosen based on which media outlets they analyzed. They primarily examine the largest news outlets with the largest audiences. The print

coverage analyses are mainly focused on The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and Times-Picayune, which is the local paper in New Orleans. Apart from Times-Picayune, these newspapers have some of the highest numbers of circulations among print news sources in the US (Davis and French 2008:247). Other local newspapers and black newspapers will not be examined. The television analyses examine the broadcast stations CBS, NBC, ABC and the cable stations CNN and FOX, which are the top viewed prime time television networks (Monk-Turner 2010). I have mainly chosen content analyses in which their coding choices have been outlined. According to Blaikie (2010) content analyses are both quantitative and qualitative sources, as they supply a quantitative overview of what is examined, but this is done through a process of evaluation and interpretation of the texts, images etc., through a subjective coding analysis (p. 205). Melican (2009) explain that coding results can be manipulated, because they are to a degree subjective, as individual evaluations of a situation, a person's actions or choices of words in news segments, articles or photographs are the basis for the process of coding. For instance, the race, age or action of a person coded for in a news segment might be evaluated to be different, depending on the person doing the coding due to that individuals age, race, educational background etc. I have therefore combined several content analyses in my thesis to ensure a credibility of the results of these analyses.

I have chosen to use television news coverage content analyses from Voorhees et.al. (2007), Flener (2008), Dixon (2008) and Melican (2009). Voorhees et.al. examined coverage on CNN from August 29. to September 29. mainly for the race, gender age and social status of the civilians portrayed in the news segments. Flener examined coverage on ABC, CBS and NBC from August 28. to September 4. from the Superdome, the Convention Center and the airport of New Orleans, which had been turned into a refuge and makeshift hospital. Flener analyzed the use and change in focus throughout the coverage. Dixon examined ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX and CNN from August 29. to August 31. and did a second analysis from September 1 to December 31. Among other themes, Dixon coded for the race of the people portrayed as looters and examined the "discursive and material consequences of Katrina's coverage" (p. 2). Melican did two separate content analyses of ABC, NBC, FOX and CNN. The first analysis (Melican: chapter

2) was from August 27 to September 8. for use of language, choice of visuals and the juxtaposition of visuals and words. The segments were coded for race of the people and the context of the stories in which these people appeared, and the segments were checked for dominant themes and dominant focus areas. The second analysis (Melican: chapter 3) was from August 29 to September 9, where the coverage was coded for portrayals of experts, heroes and criminals and their race. This content analysis also examined the extent of the media's focus on crime and looting. All the content analyses discuss their findings, and these results along with the discussions are used throughout this thesis.

The chosen print news coverage content analyses are from Davis and French (2008), Gross (2007) and McGann and Granfield (2006). Davis and French examined The New York Times, The Washington Post and USA Today from August 29 to September 5. They did a discursive analysis of language choices and implied meaning. Gross examined The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and Times-Picayune from August 30 to October 10. Gross analyzed the print media's use of racial and poverty characteristics and the victim blaming of the people who did not leave New Orleans before Katrina. McGann and Granfield examined 193 articles from unspecified "major newspapers" from August 29 to September 4. They examined the media's focus on crime and looting and the development in the extent of this focus during the time after Katrina's landfall. Like the television content analyses, the print coverage content analyses also discuss the findings and their results in these discussions as well as in the content analyses are used throughout this thesis.

Two photographic content analyses are also used in this thesis. Kahle et.al. (2007) analyzed 1160 photographs published in The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and the Wall Street Journal between August 25 and September 23. The race, roles and activities of the people in the photographs were coded, analyzed and discussed. A similar study was done by Lee and Gandy (2006). They analyzed all the 276 photographs published in The New York Times and The Washington Post between August 30. and September 7. and coded for the race and the role of the person or persons portrayed. This study also examined the captions published along with the photographs. Both photographic

content analyses discuss and analyze their results. Findings in their content analyses and in their discussions are used in this thesis.

The main theory or concept used in this thesis is stereotyping. To explore this I have primarily used two books; the first is Michael Pickering's "Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation" (2001), which is a comprehensive study of the concept of stereotyping and the Other in most aspects of the usages of these concepts, as in national identity, cultural identity and in racial contexts. Pickering explores the history and development of stereotyping and the various interpretations of the concept, as the concept of stereotyping, though frequently used, has several definitions. The second book on the background, interpretations and usage of stereotyping is Todd D. Nelson's (Ed.) "Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination" (2007). This ample study on stereotyping provides a comprehensive overview of the concept and usage of stereotyping in combination with Pickering.

More specific usage of stereotyping is done with a combination of different books. To examine the media's use of stereotyping and its representation of blacks in general coverage, several sources are used, but mainly Entman and Rojecki's "The Black Image in the White Mind. Media and Race in America" (2001) and Bing III's "Race, Crime, and the Media" (2010). Entman and Rojecki makes several empirical studies in their book and provides extensive research and analyses of black coverage. Bing III provides an analysis of the stereotypical portrayals of blacks and other minorities in criminal contexts in the media. Bing III combines prior research and uses it to provide a comprehensive overview of the field of stereotypical media representation of minority crime and criminality.

The use of stereotyping by the media when rumors function as sources of information in coverage, as was the case during Katrina, is explored by using the book "Rumor Psychology. Social and Organizational Approaches" by DiFonzo and Bordia (2007), which is a comprehensive study of the psychology of rumors, the creation and usage of rumors and their connection with stereotyping. Exploring stereotyping of the poor is mainly done with the help of "Poverty as we know it: Media Portrayals of the poor" by Clawson and Trice (2000), which is an empirical analysis of the media coverage of the poor. Their research and findings make up the main part of this thesis' background information on coverage and

representation of the black poor and the poor in general, prior to Katrina.

I have chosen to keep my sources recent. Media portrayals of blacks have changed a lot since the late 1960's, when President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967 established the Kerner Commission to investigate the causes of the urban racial rioting going on in American cities. The Commission pointed some of the blame for the riots on journalism's lack of minority representation in the newsroom, and on the consequential reporting on minorities often being slanted and inflammatory (Messer-Kruse 2008:146). The Kerner Commission cited perspective as a major problem and stated that "the media reports and writes from the standpoint of a white man's world" and criticized the portrayals of African Americans in the media for being lacking and prejudiced (Bing III 2010:166). It led to a mandatory hiring of African Americans by the media industry and through blacks are still underrepresented as employees in the media industry, it has had an effect on black representation in the media and it has been changing ever since. For this reason, studies of general media portrayals of African Americans do not date more than fifteen years back before Katrina.

These are just some of the sources and concepts I will use in this thesis to analyze the coverage of Katrina and answer my research question.

## **Delimitations**

The racial composition of New Orleans at the time of Katrina was not comprised of only whites and blacks. New Orleans also had large communities of Latinos, Native Americans, Vietnamese and Filipinos (Masquelier 2006:742). These groups were almost entirely uncovered by the media during Katrina and this thesis therefore only explores coverage and stereotyping of the black population of New Orleans, since there is very little material to analyze on coverage of the city's other minorities.

This thesis will not look into all parts of the media coverage of Katrina. It would first of all be near impossible, as the total number of articles about Katrina



was over 250,000 within the two first weeks of coverage alone (Journalism.org 2005). This thesis will therefore not look at “neutral” coverage, meaning articles and television reports reporting just details about the damages, the flooding etc. Also this thesis will not examine the vast number of articles looking into the rescue efforts or the errors of FEMA or President Bush during Katrina, unless such coverage has a relevant connection with the private citizens of New Orleans. Both Congress and the White House have examined FEMA extensively after Katrina in reports, and FEMA’s efforts were investigated and criticized during a series of Congressional hearings in 2005. The lack of successful efforts by FEMA during the crisis was speculated as having been due to racism and indifference towards the poor blacks in New Orleans. While this is an interesting aspect of Katrina, whether FEMA’s failures were due to racism is not examined or important to this thesis as I explore media coverage of the private residents of New Orleans. I have chosen to concentrate on the parts of the coverage, which focused on the private citizens stranded in New Orleans and explore the use of stereotyping in this coverage, because the majority of the city’s population was African American and poor, which are two groups normally marginalized by the media and rarely covered. The Katrina coverage was highly based on rumors due to chaos and a lack of credible and official sources (Berger 2009:491), and combined with coverage focusing on groups which the media had little experience in covering, stereotypes and expected group behavior were used to fill out the gaps in the information. I hypothesize that despite a good deal of neutral coverage of the private citizens, use of stereotyping and consequent Othering were dominant patterns in the coverage. To show this I have chosen to analyze parts of the coverage that according to the quantitative analyses used in this thesis and my pool of qualitative sources emerged as dominant focal points in the coverage of the private citizens where race and socio economic status was implicitly or explicitly visible. This was especially the case in coverage of rumored crime and looting, in the use of “refugee” to describe the stranded citizens, in differing roles in the disaster along racial lines as well as a dominant “blame the victim”-attitude of blacks, who had not evacuated. I therefore analyze these parts of the coverage to explore patterns of stereotyping and Othering.

Since two-thirds of New Orleans' population consisted of African Americans, it is interesting to examine media coverage of this group, because the media normally marginalizes it (Entman and Rojecki 2001). I focus on stereotyping, because research has shown that when African Americans receive media attention, it will most often represent existing racial stereotypes (Kahle et. Al. 2007:76). Stereotyping is often done unintentionally and can come from a non-discriminatory place, as stereotyping is used to fill in the blanks in information about a group, which one does not know much about. The point of this thesis is therefore not to examine if racism or hostility was part of the coverage, but only to explore how a racial out-group to the media, which is dominantly made up of white employees, was covered. I also examine how the roles occurring during Katrina, such as victims, helpers, experts etc. are racially divided and portrayed during coverage of Katrina, because limited roles can contribute to a negative stereotypical portrayal, while positive portrayals of blacks during this crisis could be a potential positive counter-stereotypical portrayal.

## **Definitions**

Even though Hurricane Katrina damaged an area the size of Great Britain spread across several Southern states, and killed hundreds of people outside of New Orleans, the term "Katrina" mainly references to events in New Orleans. The city emerged as the single focal point of the media coverage even before Hurricane Katrina made landfall and consequently all use of "Katrina" in the coverage and in this thesis refers to events in New Orleans, unless anything else is explicitly stated.

This thesis will use the concept of racialization in parts of the analysis. Racialization is a widely used term, but it has never been defined as having one specific use or meaning, but is rather left open for interpretation. The interpretation is highly dependent on which academic discipline it is used within or what the context is. Racialization will be used in this thesis as a term

demonstrating that a topic has been turned into a racial topic with a racial focus (Goldberg 2005 in Murji and Solomos 2005:3).

## **Theory**

Stereotyping is the main theory or concept, because the population of New Orleans at the time of Katrina consisted of 67.3 percent African Americans (Lee and Gandy 2006:5) and media coverage of blacks has been shown to most often represent existing racial stereotypes (Kahle et. Al. 2007:76). Use of stereotyping in the media coverage of the black poor of New Orleans is therefore highly plausible (Tierney et.al 2006:62). Stereotyping is interlinked with the process of Othering, which will also be a main concept throughout the thesis, and the coverage of the black citizens of New Orleans will be examined for occurrences of Othering. Stereotyping and the media interlinks as the media uses, creates, confirms and challenges stereotypes, and the process of stereotyping in the media is explained in this section. Stereotyping of the poor was part of the stereotyping of blacks during Katrina, because poverty disproportionately affects minorities, and stereotypes of blacks and the poor are intertwined, and stereotyping of the poor is therefore also examined. This section will therefore explore stereotyping and Othering as concepts as well as the different usages of stereotyping which are relevant to this thesis. This section will also attempt to outline the process of stereotyping of the black poor in normal media coverage, and connect the patterns to the coverage of Katrina, as this thesis argues that these usual patterns of stereotyping in coverage emerged in the Katrina coverage of New Orleans' black poor.

### **Stereotyping**

*"A stereotype can be defined as a person's "knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some social group." They are belief systems about groups, belief systems that represent the attributes, characteristics, behavior patterns, and so on, associated with a particular group. Once*

*formed, that set of beliefs is applied to all members of the group, generalizing across individuals, despite the fact that those persons may show considerable variation in numerous respects. This generalization process leads to the perception of homogeneity among group members. This perception of homogeneity is inherent in stereotyping, and consequently (...), stereotyping involves the overgeneralization of attributes to group members"*

(Hamilton et.al. 2009:179)

*"Stereotypes are usually considered inaccurate because of the way they portray a social group or category as homogenous. Certain forms of behavior, disposition or propensity are isolated, taken out of context and attributed to everyone associated with a particular group or category"*

(Pickering 2001:4)

Hamilton et.al.'s definition of stereotypes is one of several definitions, but in essence a stereotype is a preconceived idea or generalization about a group or a person based on perceived group belonging, done through categorization. Dovidio et.al. (2010(a)) define stereotypes as "associations and beliefs about the characteristics and attributes of a group and its members that shape how people think about and respond to the group" (p. 8). A definition of stereotypes is also found within cognitive psychology, which states that "stereotypes are defined as cognitive structures that contain the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about some human group" (Kahle et.al. 2007:77). According to social cognition research, people will look to have their expectations and their stereotypes confirmed rather than take in unexpected information or impressions as evidence *against* what they expected (Entman and Rojecki 2001:48; Dovidio et.al.(a) 2010:7). People stereotyping consider their

stereotypes as accurate, because out-group members are remembered for their stereotype-confirming activities, and counter-stereotypical behavior is ignored and forgotten, often unconsciously, making stereotypes seem accurate to the person doing the stereotyping. (Pickering 2001: 4). Cognitive psychology has established that most people can be labeled as “cognitive misers”, meaning that most people put very little energy into analyzing information for complexity and contradictions (Entman and Rojecki 2001:58). Information fitting with the expected and the stereotype confirming will be remembered, while unexpected, counter-stereotypical behavior is ignored. This is one of the reasons why stereotypes are so pervasive and long-lived (Dovidio et.al.(b) 2010:315; Vescio 2009:251). If a person experiences counter-stereotypical behavior from a member of an out-group, the person will look at the individual more favorably, but also view such an individual as an exception to the out-group (Harris 2006:933). Counter-stereotypical behavior is therefore seen as individual behavior, unlike stereotype-confirming behavior, which is seen as representing all out-group members (Entman and Rojecki 2001:55; Pickering 2001:73).

Stereotypes are “cognitive filters”, used to sort through information about unfamiliar people and groups (Monk-Turner et.al. 2010). We need and use these assumptions to help us efficiently process impressions and information, because “were we to approach every induction task without preconceptions, the manifold hypotheses that we could come up with to be tested in any given set of data would make the inference process unmanageable” (Entman and Rojecki 2001:60). Stereotypes can therefore be seen as a cognitive function we all possess and use to simplify impressions from encounters with out-group members.

The basis for stereotypes is the notion of out-group homogeneity, meaning a person can be ascribed characteristics and expected behavior based on categorization of their group. Categories are most often activated by very physically apparent characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age etc. (Stangor 2009:10), but can also be activated by less apparent characteristics like occupation or place of residence (Hamilton et.al. 2009:192). Research on activation of stereotypes has shown that stereotypes are activated very quickly after group categorization has occurred following encountering a person of an out-group, and it is most often done unintentionally. Categorization of group

belonging is especially important when the only information one has about a person is their group belonging. In such case stereotypes can become the almost exclusive source of knowledge about the out-group member (Stangor 2009:9). This means, that if a person is categorized as belonging to a group about which one has no knowledge, stereotyping becomes one's sole source of information on that person. In new situations, such as Katrina, where uncertainty and unfamiliar conditions created chaos and insecurity among the people and the reporters in New Orleans, stereotypes will generate expectations of group behavior. Very little official information and rumors combined with racial and socio economic stereotypes often being the only information about groups meant, that stereotyping became highly dominant in the coverage of the private citizens of New Orleans.

Ethnocentrism, in-group identification, self-interest, stereotypical images of other groups in the media and other social processes are important factors in the development and preservation of stereotypes and prejudices (Brezina and Winder 2003:403). Stereotypes often function as rationalizations for prejudices, because the stereotypes and preconceived expectations an individual has about other groups, can function as the basis of prejudice, which is the negative affect and attitude an individual may have toward, and may act out on, other groups (Dovidio et.al.(a) 2010:5). In racial prejudice, the prejudice functions as a way for the dominant group to maintain its position of dominance through group biases and discrimination. Minority groups can also have prejudices of the dominant group, but research mostly defines these affects towards the dominant group as *reactions* on discrimination and lack of equality, and is therefore a reaction more so than a pre-judgment, as prejudices are from the dominant group (Dovidio et.al.(a)2010:6).

Stereotypes are not by definition negative, they can also be positive preconceived notions about groups, such as stereotypes of women as sensitive, police-officers as loving donuts or Asian Americans as high-achievers. This was demonstrated during Katrina with a stereotypical portrayal of white determination; however racial stereotypes are most often negative (Harris 2006:934), and during Katrina, blacks did not encounter positive stereotyping as whites did. Positive stereotyping of one racial group during Katrina and not of

another racial group meant that the stereotypes of blacks became even more profound and negative as it had no in-group counter-stereotypical portrayals, but only contrasting out-group positive stereotypical portrayals, giving an impression of stereotypical negative behavior by blacks contrasted with stereotypical positive behavior by whites.

## **Othering**

Othering is a tool or a concept used to maintain boundaries between ones own in-group and an out-group and is used to distinguish between “us” and “them”. This is obtained through a focus on what differs from the in-group to members of out-groups, who are perceived as the Other. It is a way to exclude others and a way to enhance perceived similarities among ones own in-group by comparing in-group behavior with behavior of the Other.

Stereotyping is boundary maintaining, a way to keep an out-group distanced from the in-group. This often occurs through a focus on the stereotypes, which confirm preconceived differences between the in-group and the out-group. Stereotyping is used to externalize, distance and exclude those described through the stereotypes, and through this process, Othering occurs (Pickering 2001:48). When the black victims of Katrina was labeled e.g. as refugees and comparisons were made between New Orleans and the Third World, it shows an exclusion of this group of blacks from the rest of the, primarily white, society. Othering was created, as this label of refugees suggested that they were not fully part of society, but rather was a group of foreigners living in a distant Third World country, creating a feeling of the black victims as being part of a foreign and removed out-group going through a crisis which was not fully American (Berger 2007:15), and it demonstrates how choice of words is crucial to the process of Othering.

According to Pickering, Othering as a concept seems to have replaced stereotyping in some research, where stereotyping is perceived as an old-fashioned and out-worn concept. However, the two do not completely cover the



same processes, but should be viewed more as parallel terms with overlapping points and functions, with stereotypes being used in the *process* of Othering, as differences between ones own in-group and the out-group are overstated through stereotyping. Stereotyping helps develop and maintain the Other and like stereotyping, the Other can be used as a way to create boundaries between ones own group and others. Both use simplified and reductive terms of other groups to create these boundaries and to create judgements (Pickering 2001:48), and stereotyping and Othering are both ways to obtain symbolic containment of in-groups and out-groups (Pickering 2001:xi).

Entman and Rojecki (2001) describe the use of a racialized Other, where one distinguishes between racial groups as an “us” and a “them”, as a prerequisite for racial animosity. A continuous grouping of people based on their race makes it more likely that one will engage in stereotype-based generalizations and judgments and possess negative attitudes towards other races (p. 48). It interlinks stereotypes and the Other in a circular process where stereotypes are part of the process of Othering of an out-group; and continuing Othering of an out-group makes it more likely that one will engage in generalizations of such out-group through stereotyping, as perceptions of out-group homogeneity becomes more dominant as the out-groups feels increasingly removed and different from ones in-group.

## **Stereotyping And The Media**

One reason why racial stereotypes exist, despite progress in racial equality and public rejection of demonstrations of overt racism and prejudice, are media depictions of minorities, which are often based on stereotypes. Several studies have demonstrated that media representations of minorities help create and maintain racial stereotypes, both positive and negative stereotypes (Mastro 2000; Monk-Turner et.al. 2010; Harris 2006:942), and according to Dixon (2008) the media has helped reinforce stereotypes to a point where overt racial cues are not necessary for the audience to activate their preconceived notions of other

racial groups (p. 17). Research has also shown that just a single media exposure to an out-group member can be enough to produce or reproduce stereotypes and prejudice towards different social or racial groups (Mutz and Goldman 2010:247). Media portrayals can both *reflect* societal attitudes as well as *influence* the *shaping* of these attitudes. The use of stereotypes in the media can therefore create new stereotypes, represent existing stereotypes and challenge existing stereotypes (Sommers et.al 2006:40; Darder 1995:142).

US neighborhoods are segregated physically between different classes and races. People of one class or race do not interact often with people of another class or race, because they do not live in the same area, work in the same offices or have their kids go to the same schools (Bishop 2008; Alter 2005). This residential segregation also divides racially among classes, meaning that poor whites do not live in the same area as poor blacks or other poor minorities (Wise 2006:part 6). Media reporting is therefore often the only source groups have of information about other groups and the media's portrayals of other groups are consequently very influential (Gross 2007:4; Entman and Rojecki 2001:49; Martindale 1996:21).

Most often, when the media cover blacks, it is to cover stories of problems among or with blacks, such as crime. The lack of portrayal of everyday, ordinary black lives and the focus on problems, reinforce negative stereotypes of blacks (Kahle et.al. 2007:78). The boundaries between blacks and whites are made bigger by the lack of media depictions of ordinary, black lives, as whites fail to feel a similarity with blacks when all they see is black crime and black problems. It adds to the notion of in-groups and out-groups, of an "us" and a "them", and the media therefore contributes to Othering of blacks, as the media portrayals of blacks are limited to mostly covering problems (Entman and Rojecki 2001:68; Bing III 2010; Mastro 2000). This limited representation of blacks was evident in the Katrina coverage as blacks were generally portrayed as victims or criminals, while whites were shown in various roles such as victims, helpers, rescue workers, experts and officials.

Due to spending cuts and competition from vast numbers of competitive news outlets, reporters are pressured to produce the news quickly and on the spot, especially in a disaster situation like Katrina, often without verified sources

and using information from other news outlets, and a reporter will only have a short time to clarify the issue of a story to the audience and connect the audience to the topic (Masquelier 2006:741; Linn 1996:17). In order to make things clear right from the start of a story, the media will use stereotypical imagery to invoke pre-existing knowledge and expectations in the audience's minds, thereby obtaining simplification and ensuring that the audience understands the reporting right from the beginning of the story (Clawson and Trice 2000:55; Dennis 1996:ix-x; Linn 1996:17). For example, a typical story about crime would not have an image of a middle-aged white woman as an example of a criminal, because she would not symbolize a stereotypical criminal. More likely a black person, and typically a man, would be used as the story's example, to ensure that the audience understands from the start of the story that it is covering a crime.

The media can reduce a complex issue by using more simplistic terms and explanations of an issue, in order to ensure that the audience can easily understand the story. This can reinforce stereotypes, because the simplicity is obtained by using stereotypical, familiar portrayals of groups and individuals, accomplished through stereotypical labels, imagery and photographs (Bing III 2010:5). Television news is especially efficient in producing and reproducing stereotypical images, because audiences tend to perceive television news as a channel for accurate representation of groups. The visual images are perceived as accurate, and this effect is also seen in printed news coverage, especially in catastrophic events such as Hurricane Katrina, because disasters and crises are most often described not only via graphic language, but also through very graphic photographs (Kahle et.al. 2007:77; Martindale 1996:22). Images of people doing something are perceived as accurate, because the images are showing these actions so to speak. As Lacey (1998) in his analysis of media representation explains it "seeing is believing" (p. 5), meaning images are created and chosen to depict something specific, which a viewer beliefs, because we trust in what we can see and often neglect analyzing images for deeper meaning or background. What the audience often does not know or consider, is the process of selecting photographs or video-footage that goes on before a story goes out of which imagery depicts the situation the best, often being images depicting stereotypical situations. One photograph of a black man doing

something might have been selected from a pool of other photographs depicting whites as doing the same thing. The process of simplification was evident during Katrina in several aspects of the coverage. Stories covering the lack of evacuation simplified complex issues concerning the lack of evacuation and blacks were thereby described as the stereotypical irresponsible black poor, who chose not to evacuate, and the fact that they stayed behind in New Orleans out of a lack of way to evacuate was rarely covered. It was also present in the photographic portrayals in print news coverage, as blacks were shown as victims and rarely as helpers or rescuers, who were primarily showed as whites, which is a highly unlikely racial composition, as rescue teams will always be made up of 75 to 95 percent locals. But by using the stereotypical, expected composition of a black victim/white helper, the media outlet ensured that the reader would understand the story through a simplification of the roles of portrayed rescuers and victims (Lee and Gandy 2006:6). Research has demonstrated an improvement in the media portrayals of some minorities, mostly of Latinos and Asian Americans, over the past ten years, but despite this progress, blacks continue to be portrayed negatively in stereotypical ways, often as criminals, lazy and less intelligent than whites (Bing III 2010; Mastro 2000; Monk-Turner et.al. 2010).

The media industry is proportionally over-employed by whites, and issues concerning minorities and minority opinions are not covered equally to white issues and opinions as a consequence of this (Entman and Rojecki 2001:72). The portrayal of blacks in stereotypical ways is often a combination of the media's whiteness, of the commercial pressure to satisfy the main audience, which is also mainly white (Lee and Gandy 2006:12), and an "unintentional but inherent class bias" (Kahle et.al. 2007:78). The whiteness of the media can limit it in its portrayals of blacks and minorities in general. The audience's expectations of stereotypical and easily consumed portrayals of other groups and races, and of the roles of minorities, are often not challenged by the media, because it could make the audience turn to other news sources instead, where news would be less challenging to understand. Stories from Katrina of blacks in non-stereotypical ways would not have captured the audience, and the coverage of Katrina therefore focused on stereotypical black crime and black victim passivity and on stereotypical white determination, because it fit with stereotype-based

expectations of blacks and whites. There was a simultaneous pattern in the coverage of ignoring examples of black pro-social positive behavior and a lack of coverage of white crime (Thevenot and Russell 2005, *Times-Picayune*; Berger 2009:495).

It is important to note that racial stereotyping done by the media during Katrina is not analyzed as a demonstration of racism in this thesis. Harris (2006:934) explains that the racial character of the disaster and lack of progress in the rescue effort made people outside of the region furious, because the lack of rescue efforts were perceived as being due to the racial composition of the victims and that FEMA were indifferent of helping the victims because they were primarily black. Harris argues that this ruptured, at least for a short while, the notion among whites of US society as one of racial equality. People suddenly saw a group of victims, almost all blacks, struggling to get food and water, and waiting for rescue for several days. On several occasions, reporters visibly demonstrated the same anger as the public (Durham 2008:108), and this does show that it was not racial animosity that made them stereotype or retell fictional rumors; it was not done from evil, but rather it was what came natural to the reporters because it is how the black poor is always portrayed and stereotypical expectations of blacks as well as whites came to fill the holes in the often rumors-based, lacking information from the disaster (Melican 2009:104). This is not to say that racism was or was not part of the reason why the media stereotyped blacks during Katrina; however that is a vast research area in itself, as racism today has developed from Jim Crow-style overt racism to the more understated “modern racism” of color-blindness where racism is used much more implicit and subtly (Brown et.al. 2003), and this thesis will not attempt to explore the role of racism in the coverage.

## **Stereotyping Of Poverty**

Poverty and African Americans are interlinked and so are their stereotypes. Blacks and other minorities are disproportionately poor and most stereotypes of

the poor *are* therefore stereotypes of blacks and vice versa. New Orleans was one of the US's most impoverished cities at the time of Katrina. The black population was particularly impoverished, and almost one-third of blacks living in New Orleans lived below the poverty line, compared to a 19 percent average for all of New Orleans' population (Marable and Clarke 2008:193).<sup>1</sup> Black median household income in New Orleans was 25,000 dollars prior to Katrina, compared to a white New Orleans median income of 61,000 dollars (Logan:15). Because the areas of New Orleans affected the worst by flooding were overwhelmingly low-laying, poor, urban areas of New Orleans and the victims of Katrina therefore were primarily poor blacks, common stereotypes of the black poor came to be dominant in the Katrina coverage. Blacks are stereotypically portrayed as lazy and as the irresponsible and undeserving poor, who are unwilling to work to better their situation, which often results in a "blame the victim"-tone of coverage when the black poor is portrayed in the media (Clawson and Trice 2000:54; Brezina and Winder 2003:402; Bing III 2010; Melican 2009:39; Dixon 2008:3; Brown et.al. 2003:99; Dovidio et.al.(a) 2010:7). These stereotypes were all evident in the coverage of Katrina, as was a "blame the victim"-attitude.

The poor, of any race, are generally under-represented in media coverage. Ratings show that viewers change channels when poor people appear on television (Alter 2005). Studies suggest that this happens because poor people are not a positive, nice part of society to look at and television therefore tends to ignore poor people, who are consequently very under-represented in the media (Alter 2005). During Katrina, it was clear that the media lacked experience in covering the plight of the poor and black population. One example was the lack of understanding of how poor people could have no way of evacuating because they had no money and no cars.

The extent of black poverty is generally overstated in media portrayals of the lower economic classes, and white poverty is often underrepresented. Americans overestimate the black proportion of the poor, and the media's over-

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<sup>1</sup> *The poverty level in the US was in 2004 set at 15,219 dollars for a family of three, with two children and one adult, and 19,157 dollars for a family of four, with two children and two adults (Spriggs 2006).*

representation of the black poor is one of the reasons for this misconception. African Americans made up 27 percent and whites 45 percent of the poor in 1996 (Clawson and Trice 2000:57). A study on media portrayals of the poor from that year found that the media showed the poor to be black 49 percent of the time and white only 33 percent of the time (Clawson and Trice 2000:56). When the focus of these portrayals was on the poor and welfare, 52 percent of the stories were focusing specifically on African Americans, instead of on white poverty or on poverty in general. The same tendencies were clear in coverage of poverty and pregnancy, public housing and long-time welfare dependency with 63 percent of portrayals being of blacks (Clawson and Trice 2000:58). This adds to the stereotype of blacks as the irresponsible poor.

Several studies have shown that when the media discusses poverty, it over-represents the black urban and unemployed poor and thereby adds to the stereotype of the inner city poor black person, who is unwilling to work but just wants to collect benefits (Kahle et.al. 2007:78). Research done on media coverage of the poor have found that only 30 percent of coverage of poor people show them as having jobs, but the reality is that 50 percent of the poor are employed full time or part time (Clawson and Trice 2000:60). This ties in with a common stereotype toward poor people of them as being lazy and poor because of a lack of effort and it often develops into a “blame the victim”-attitude of the poor, because they are seen as irresponsible and undeserving due to this lack of effort (Brezina and Winder 2003:402). These stereotypes are found about all poor groups, regardless of their race, but they affect blacks more than whites, because they are more often portrayed as poor than whites (Clawson and Trice 2000:54).

The media often links poverty in urban areas to pathological behavior and cover stories of the poor, which confirm stereotypes of poor people as lazy, criminal and sexually irresponsible, resulting in stereotypes of black and other minority communities as plagued by crime, lazy people on welfare, out of wedlock births and sexually transmitted diseases (Clawson and Trice 2000:54). Because poor people in media coverage are mostly blacks and other minorities, these stereotypes cling to blacks. During Katrina, The Washington Post aired the common stereotype of black women being single mothers and blacks being

criminals when an article stated: “it is a safe surmise that more than 80 percent of African-American births in inner-city New Orleans (...) were to women without husbands”<sup>2</sup> and that the children of these unwed women were “lightly parented” and would “bring chaos” (Bacon 2005). Urban poverty is overly linked to drugs, alcohol abuse and criminal behavior by the media, even though anthropologists have shown that poverty actual can create a stronger community feeling (Kahle et.al. 2007:79). This does not mean that there is no urban poor crime, but that the media’s intense focus on the criminal aspect of life in the impoverished inner cities is not fully representative of the whole community, and this contributes to confirm the stereotype of the urban, black poor criminal and blacks as the irresponsible poor.

Studies of media coverage have found that the black poor are overrepresented as the irresponsible poor, like welfare recipients and welfare abusers, and underrepresented as the deserving poor, such as the elderly, and blacks have come to represent the undeserving poor in the minds of whites (Dixon 2008:3; Brown et.al. 2003:99; Clawson and Trice 2000:54,58). A study found that when public attention on occasions would focus on the hardships of the poor and the help they needed, media focus would shift towards the white poor, who are stereotypically portrayed as the deserving poor (Clawson and Trice 2000:54). It has severe consequences, as problems in urban areas tend to be covered as being self-inflicted and poor blacks are often blamed for their problems more than white poor people, who are often covered as having problems, which they themselves are not to be blamed for, but rather has occurred due to unfortunate circumstances like illness and bad luck. This was a clear pattern during Katrina as well, where a “blame the victim”-narrative was used throughout the coverage of the black poor.

Othering of poor blacks is created when white poverty is ignored and black and minority poverty is portrayed as the only existing poverty, simultaneously with a portrayal of the stereotypical black person as irresponsible, a possible criminal and a burden on the economy as a welfare recipients and a single mother (Entman and Rojecki 2001:105). This economic burden is perceived as

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<sup>2</sup> 38 percent of children living in the damaged areas lived with single mothers (Voorhees et.al. 2007:419).



being paid with taxes from white people, who are most often implicitly understood to be the typical taxpayers (Entman and Rojecki 2001:95).

The poor and the non-poor rarely interact, and boundaries and Othering are maintained through this everyday segregation between the poor and non-poor of any race (Bishop 2008; Masquelier 2006:741). This boundary between the two groups were broken for a short period during Katrina, as the whole nation got a brief look into the lives of a group normally marginalized by the media. Reactions during Katrina demonstrated the normal Othering of the poor, as the media audience looking at the events in New Orleans started asking where all these poor black people came from all of a sudden. Due to under-representation of this group in the media, people were shocked to suddenly see vast numbers of clearly poor people struggling in the flooded city. As a result, the black poor in New Orleans were described as an almost foreign group in society (Masquelier 2006:740; Dominguez 2006).

## **Race and Crime In The Media**

*“Strong associations between race and criminal behavior long predate Katrina and are the basis for an extremely resilient stereotype that strongly associates blackness with criminality”*

(Harris 2006:932)

News is a business and attracting viewers or readers is a crucial part of this business. News are therefore not fully objective accounts of events, rather stories are chosen and framed to attract most possible readers or viewers. This is often accomplished through sensationalizing events and focusing on the more extreme, which was demonstrated by the focus on crime during Katrina. Crime stories have high ratings and stories of looting and violence in New Orleans were

therefore expected to capture the audience and were consequently highly covered (Gotham 2006).

FBI estimated that 41 percent of those arrested for violent crimes and 32 percent of those arrested for property crimes in 1997 were blacks. A survey found that when people were asked what percentage they thought blacks made up of arrests for violent crimes, the average guess was 60 percent. One reason for this misconception is media coverage of crime, which over-represents the scope of black crime, and under-represents blacks as victims of crime and whites as perpetrators (Entman and Rojecki 2008:79). While it is not factually wrong for the media to portray blacks as being responsible for a larger proportion of crime than the 12 percent they make up of the population, the media over-represents this overrepresentation so to speak, making the audience believe that the disproportion is bigger than it actually is, adding to the stereotype of blacks as criminals (Bing III 2010:78; Entman and Rojecki 2001:81). One reason for over-representation of black criminals and under-representation of black victims is that the majority of the media's subscribers or viewers are whites, who prefer not to see stories about white perpetrators, and those stories consequently do not sell as well as stories with a more stereotypical and expected white victim/black perpetrator-angle (Glassner 1999).

Blacks are six times as likely to die by homicide than whites, but the media mostly ignores the higher level of black victimization in its coverage. A study done by the Department of Justice showed that the higher victimization rate for blacks is not evident in media coverage of crime, as black victims are rarely portrayed (Bing III 2010:48). One reason why minority victims are underrepresented is because they are not perceived as the "ideal" victim. Prejudice and racism leads some people to feel that minority victims deserve their fate and the media will cover minority victims less because of this (Bing III 2010:155). Underreporting of black victims and over reporting of black perpetrators fuel white people's fears of black criminals and contributes to the stereotype of blacks as inherently criminal and more criminal than whites.

The media also tends to portray black criminals as more dangerous than white criminals, and to highlight stories with white victimization by blacks (Kahle et.al. 2007:78). Stories of economic crime, which is predominantly a

“white” crime, is perceived as too complex to explain to the audience and is often not covered (Bing III 2010:153). Black crime is therefore much more likely to be covered than white crime, and it contributes to the negative stereotype of blacks as more criminal and more violent than whites (Hurwitz and Peffley 1997:376).

White criminals are often covered as human-interest pieces, where stories of childhood abuse, neglect etc. are used to give viewers a deeper insight into the white criminal’s reasons for becoming a criminal. The dominant group, whites, are shown to might have valid reasons for becoming criminals, whereas blacks and other minorities are portrayed through facts about their crime, with no background information, which might help explain their way into crime (Entman and Rojecki 2001:72). Blacks and whites are also portrayed differently by the media when shown as suspects of a crime. Blacks are generally portrayed less as individuals than whites by being shown getting arrested or wearing handcuffs while being taken in to a police station, and they are rarely identified by name, consequently portraying them as anonymous, violent criminals right from their arrest. Whites are typically shown wearing nice clothes standing next to their lawyer and are for the most part identified by name. Whites generally have more money than blacks and have the funds to get legal representation faster than blacks (Entman and Rojecki 2001:82; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997:376). A similar pattern was evident in the Katrina coverage, where blacks were often not identified by name, but shown unnamed while doing activities described as criminal, like looting. When an unidentified black man is seen looting, he is perceived as “a black man” doing something wrong, representing his group, as opposed to a named person doing the same. People identified by name, which mostly happens to whites, are seen more as individuals, and their criminal actions are perceived as not representing the group, but is rather an exception to the overall group behavior and identity (Entman and Rojecki 2001). Stereotypes are based on a notion of group belonging and differences between in-groups and out-groups, and stereotyping is therefore more prevalent, when a person accused of crime is seen as representing the out-group, while a person from ones own in-group accused of committing crime is not seen as representing the whole in-group.

## Rumors and Stereotyping

*"If the Dome and Convention Center had harbored large numbers of middle class white people, it would not have been a fertile ground for this kind of rumor-mongering"*

Times-Picayune-editor Jim Amoss cited in Los Angeles Times  
(Rosenblatt and Rainey 2005)

Rumors of rampant looting, murders, violence, rapes and other crimes dominated the coverage of Katrina; this will be elaborated on in the analysis. Most of these stories were rebutted afterwards and had been based on unsubstantiated rumors. Rumors and stereotyping are closely related. The media's process of finding information, especially in a disaster-environment like New Orleans during Katrina, will be affected by a need and desire to find information quickly and efficiently, and stereotypes will then be used, often unconsciously, to fill the gaps in the gathered information (Durham 2008). Rumors heard will be compared with the reporter's already existing knowledge and stereotypical expectations regarding the person, the group, the situation etc. being reported on, and stereotypes will be used in the reporter's process of choosing to discount or distribute the rumor-based information. Unverified rumor-based information, which is counter-stereotypical, will often be discarded, while stereotype-confirming unverified rumor-based information will be broadcasted, as it seem believable due to it fitting stereotypical expectations (DiFonzo and Bordia 2007:71; Berger 2009:495). Rumors of poor blacks committing crime during Katrina seemed believable because it fit stereotypes of this group, while the same rumors about a group of middle-classed white people would have seemed un-trustworthy, as Times-Picayune-editor Jim Amoss speculated.

Disaster news coverage is different from normal, every-day coverage of ordinary events. The reports are broadcasted or printed much faster, and often without normal procedures of source verification, of finding additional sources or of having thorough reviews of the stories before they go out (Kahle et. Al. 2007:76). During Katrina, this was combined with a lack of official sources, because the federal government was on holiday when Katrina hit, and a breakdown of communication technology in New Orleans, which led to chaos, as 911-centrals and phone-services stopped functioning due to flooding, creating an environment where rumors could flourish (Select Bipartisan Committee 2006:246). The fast tempo, lack of sources and lack of technology paved the way for incorrect, rumour- and stereotype-based reporting during Katrina, because stories were not properly investigated or verified. Rumors are often thought of as coming out of nothing; that however is not true. Rumors tend to be based on some sort of stereotype, believe or even on some portion of truth, but the lack of secure evidence makes it a rumor (DiFonzo and Bordia 2007:17). According to Gotham (2006) Katrina was an example of the boundaries between news and entertainment being blurred; while reporters were providing information on what was happening, they were also spreading unverified rumors and they focused on the more spectacular aspects of the crisis with their focus on looting and violence, the quantity of which afterwards proved to have been vastly overstated, and human suffering was boiled down to dramatic sound bites.

Officials and FEMA were accused of being slow and indifferent with the rescue efforts, because most victims were black. FEMA and the officials denied this to be the case. What is interesting is that the many rumors of looting and violence actually slowed down rescue efforts, as law enforcement was pulled away from life saving missions and was instead relocated to stopping looters (Tierney et.al. 2006:75). The rumors were so dominant mostly because the perpetrators were black and the stories of violence and looting fit into stereotypical expectations toward blacks of them as violent and criminal. Stereotypes therefore had an indirect effect on rescue missions and race *did* in fact play a part in the rescue efforts because of this. Stereotypes made the rumors believable and the rumors slowed down rescue missions (Berger 2009:493). Stereotypes make rumors believable, because stereotypes tell the

story of the expected about a group and as was seen during Katrina, stories of crime, violence and looting were not rejected, as it fit with the stereotypical notions and expectations of blacks.

## **Analysis**

*“Media texts cannot show reality as it is; by their nature they mediate”*

(Lacey 1998:189)

The point of this thesis is to explore how blacks, a racial out-group to the dominantly white media, were covered. As demonstrated in my theory section above, media coverage of blacks and of the poor tend to be based on negative stereotypes. I will in my analysis section below try and demonstrate the same patterns of stereotyping in coverage of the black and poor victims of Katrina. I argue that the media coverage of the victims of Katrina represented the black poor out-group as criminal, passive, irresponsible and almost foreign and not fully part of the US society, which was contrasted by portrayals of stereotypical white determination, which is consistent with usual patterns of coverage of the black poor and of whites. I will try and demonstrate this by exploring a pattern of negative portrayals Othering of blacks that are consistent with existing negative stereotypes and consequent in the coverage, which according to the quantitative and qualitative sources used in this thesis, emerged as dominant focal points in the coverage of the private citizens, where race and socio economic status was implicitly or explicitly visible. The analysis therefore explore stories of crime and looting, coverage of the lack of evacuation, as well as explore the comparisons made to the Third World and the labeling of Katrina’s victims as “refugees”. I also examine how the roles occurring during Katrina, such as victims, helpers, experts etc. were divided along racial lines and I argue these were portrayed fitting with existing racial and socio economic stereotypes. The race and class of Katrina’s victims was rarely discussed explicitly in the coverage, but was communicated through usage of implicit racialization. Through implicit demonstrations of the race and class of Katrina’s victims via photos and television images, an identity of the typical Katrina victim was created as a person who was black and poor (Davis and French 2008:249).

Use of stereotypes can be difficult to confirm because one can argue that it was just the reality of the situation, but I will argue that a common pattern of portrayals fitting stereotypical expectations of blacks as well as whites in New Orleans demonstrate the existence of stereotyping in the coverage. By trying to demonstrate that portrayals fitting stereotypes was a *common* pattern, and not only a *single* occurrence, I argue that one can conclude that stereotypes were used. Sommers et.al. (2006) observed in their analysis of the coverage that all the inaccuracies about the black victims erred in *one* direction only; as more violent, more stereotypical and more negative than reality in New Orleans warranted. Inaccuracies did not also err in the coverage of blacks as more generous, positive or helpful than what the situation warranted. It is an important observation, because it demonstrated an overall negative portrayal of blacks during Katrina, and it fits with a tendency in coverage of blacks in general to portray them through *negative* stereotypes. I also analyze occurrences of Othering of the poor blacks, because the black poor as an out-group in the white society and to the white media, is rarely portrayed by the media, and I therefore argue that Othering of the black victims was a likely outcome of the coverage, as the media covered a group they have very little experience in portraying.

## **Not Talking About Race Or Class**

Initial coverage of Katrina had very little explicit mention of race or class. Columnist Jack Shafer (2005) wrote an article on August 31 in which he criticized the media's reluctance to mention race and class in the coverage. Even though the images broadcasted from New Orleans overwhelmingly showed black people as the primary victims of Katrina, race was rarely mentioned explicitly. The media has a tendency to avoid mentioning race, in order to avoid any possible appearances of racism. It ties in with a general reluctance among most white people to mention race when describing others, even in instances where it would be purely descriptive, due to fears of appearing racist (Sommers et.al



2006:41). Shafer's article kicked off some explicit discussion of race and class during Katrina and by September 2. The New York Times and The Washington Post both had front-page stories discussing poverty and race (Kurtz 2005, *The Washington Post*). However, the explicit race and class of the victims continued to be among the lesser-covered topics of Katrina. A study done on the coverage of Katrina on CNN, MSNBC and Fox News Channel during the first week from August 28 to September 3, demonstrated a very low level of focus on race and class. Out of 1300 segments covering Katrina, 22 segments focused on race and class (ThinkProgress (c) 2005). By September 6., 0.56 percent of all articles containing the word "Katrina" also contained "African-American", 0.94 percent contained "poverty" and 1.9 percent of articles containing "Katrina" contained the word "race", demonstrating little explicit focus on these subjects in the coverage (Journalism.org 2005).

The lack of explicit mention by the media of race and class does not mean that it was of no importance during Katrina. Rather the media used implicit racialization through stereotyping, photographs and television images of black people *without* an explicit mention of race, which instead left the audience to read race into the coverage:

*"(...) by repeatedly situating race and class as markers of victimization, the reports encouraged readers to read race and class "into" concurrent reports, even when subsequent reports about victims and survivors did not directly discuss race and class".*

(Davis and French 2008:249).

Implicit racial cues, such as images of blacks, racially loaded words like "welfare" or "inner city" or stories about crime (White 2007:340), can activate whites' stereotypes of poor blacks, and provide implicit racial denotation to apparently non-racial issues due to stereotypical media portrayals previously connecting blacks to these words or subjects (White 2007:339). Research has

shown that implicit racialization can be more effective in activating racial stereotypes than explicit racialization, because they often function without a person registering the implicit racial cues and consequent stereotyping is done unconsciously, while explicit racialization is evident and activation of stereotypes are done more consciously and ultimately are more likely to be discarded by the person stereotyping (White 2007:340). When the media during Katrina showed images of black people or discussed crime, implicit racialization might have activated stereotypes in the audience and in the reporters, even though there was no direct mention or discussion explicitly connecting blacks with criminality in the stories, and stereotyping was therefore present and influential even when race and class was not explicitly mentioned.

The audience was shown the typical Katrina victim, through television imagery and photographs in print coverage, to be black and poor, but received were few explanations as to *why* that was. Even though the lack of explicit mention of race and class in the coverage seemed peculiar, because the victims of Katrina were clearly predominantly black and poor, the categorization through race and socioeconomic status could have seemed out of context, if it was then not discussed in depth as to *why* and *how* so many poor blacks were still in New Orleans. Davis and French (2008) found in a content analysis of print media that coverage mentioning race and class seemed to draw on the already existing discourse and stereotyping of race, class and criminality in New Orleans before Katrina, rather than looking into why it was that the people stranded in the city were so predominantly poor and black and why so few white people were among these victims (p. 249). New Orleans had one of the highest murder rates in the US prior to Katrina and 2005 had not looked to be an exception in the months before Katrina (Berger 2009:495). And an estimated twenty thousand “participants in the drug culture” lived in the city before Katrina, meaning occasional and permanent drug users, and consequent drug-related crimes like robberies and violence were daily occurrences (Rodriquez et.al 2006:98). The media consequently based much of its reporting on the *expected* criminality in New Orleans (Davis and French 2008:249), and thereby based much coverage on stereotypes of the poor blacks as criminals and irresponsible, which resulted in a dominating focus on crime. Most of the accounts of crime, looting, violence and

rapes were rebutted after Katrina and the aftermath of Katrina was actually one of the safest periods in New Orleans, when looking at murder rates (Yassin 2005).

## **Lack Of Evacuation And Victim Blaming**

On August 27, New Orleans' Mayor Ray Nagin urged people to evacuate and designated the Superdome as a "shelter of last resort" for the people who would choose to stay behind. On August 28, the evacuation was made mandatory as Hurricane Katrina went from a category 3 to a category 4 hurricane and later that day, to a category 5. It was the first mandatory evacuation in the US since the Civil War, but an estimated 100,000 people did not evacuate and stayed in New Orleans (University of Washington 2008).

Most of the damages in New Orleans were caused by the levees surrounding the city breaching, and not by the actual winds of Katrina. The media in general described the breach of the levees as something everybody in New Orleans should have anticipated and residents in New Orleans should consequently have known to evacuate, because several studies and news articles had stated for years that the levees were constructed for much weaker hurricanes than Katrina. Scientists and engineers had warned officials for years that due to global warming, hurricanes would go up in strength and a very strong hurricane could breach the levees, as Katrina correctly ended up doing (Berger 2009:494). It was described in a five-part article series in Times-Picayune in 2002 which stated: "It's only a matter of time before south Louisiana takes a direct hit from a major hurricane". The New York Times wrote in 2002 that New Orleans "is a disaster waiting to happen" and The Washington Post wrote in 2004 that would a category 4 hurricane ever hit New Orleans directly, the city would be completely destroyed and 50,000 people could drown (Kurtz 2005, *The Washington Post*). These articles were heavily cited in the aftermath of Katrina, for instance when President Bush tried to explain the lack of rescue efforts in the

area by saying on September 1, that: “I don’t believe anybody anticipated the breach of the levees” (University of Washington 2008:8).

The Times-Picayune articles from 2002 had also pointed out that *when* such a hurricane eventually would occur, approximately 38,000 households, consisting of 100,000-120,000, mostly poor, citizens did not own car and consequently had no way of evacuating (Strolovitch et.al. 2006; Dominguez 2006). This number was very close to the 135,000 people living below the poverty line in New Orleans prior to Katrina (Dominguez 2006). The articles therefore estimated that only 15,000-35,000 of the poor living in New Orleans would be able to evacuate on their own.

The people stranded in New Orleans were blamed for not evacuating, as general coverage stated that people had had ample warnings through these articles as well as the mandatory evacuation order, and therefore should have known to evacuate instead of putting themselves in harms way by staying in the city. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff was quoted on September 1., talking about the people still staying in New Orleans despite the order of mandatory evacuation, that: “Some people chose to not obey that order. That was a mistake on their part” (Gotham 2006).<sup>3</sup> The New York Times wrote on September 3. that “(...) as rescue teams in New Orleans searched for thousands of residents who remained in the city, many having ignored pleas to evacuate” (Bumiller and Haberman 2005, *The New York Times*). Due to the media’s focus on prior knowledge and the mandatory evacuation order, they missed crucial reasons for why people stayed behind *despite* this prior knowledge. One major reason for why people did not evacuate was that they had no way of actually evacuating because they had no cars. The last train out of New Orleans left the city late on August 27. Amtrak ran no more trains after that point and people without cars or money for plane tickets were stranded in the city. Katrina hit at the end of the month, making it even more difficult for poor people, living from paycheck to paycheck, to evacuate. And so, just like prior articles and studies had predicted, people without cars, meaning the poor and mostly black citizens, stayed behind because they had no actual way of evacuating. Another reason for why people did not evacuate was that the poor were afraid of looters like

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<sup>3</sup> FEMA as an agency is part of the United States Department of Homeland Security

everyone else in the city. They were often uninsured and would not take the risk of losing everything they owned to looters (Alter 2005).

The media failed to look at these factors; they mostly focused on blaming the victims for staying behind and causing their own desperation, which was based on the stereotype of the irresponsible black poor. Gross (2007) found in a content analysis of print media coverage of Katrina that around 20 percent of all articles examined in the analysis, stated that some people had chosen not to evacuate. 64 percent of these 20 percent stated that people had stayed behind because they refused to evacuate, despite the mandatory evacuation order. Of these 64 percent, 62 percent elaborates and explains that the refusal to leave could be a consequence of lack of transportation, money and a place to go (p. 17). One example was in an article in *The New York Times*, which quoted a New Orleans resident, who had managed to evacuate, as saying "(...) on the radio they kept hearing the same message: Evacuate, evacuate, evacuate. It seemed like a command that few could possibly obey" (Santora and Cave 2005, *The New York Times*). The resident further referenced this to the low level of car ownership in New Orleans among the underprivileged, which was one of the main reasons for the lack of evacuation. However, the article was published on September 4, and was a late coming explanation, as the media by that point had blamed the victims for not evacuation since Katrina's landfall on August 29.

Berger (2009) explains some of the media's lack of explanation for why some people did not evacuate to be, that the white, often upper middle-class or richer, reporters had no understanding of how the poor live. They lacked any understanding of how one could be unable to evacuate due to a lack of money and not owning a car (p. 495). The "blame the victim"-attitude was therefore not just a result of racial socio economic stereotyping, but also a lack of understanding of a group rarely covered by the media. Other groups besides black poor people did not evacuate. Nursing homes, hospitals and prisons suffered under a lack of evacuation plans and were in several cases not evacuated. Tourists in the city did not evacuate either. They, like the poor, had nowhere to go and were trapped in the city; however, unlike the poor and the black, they were given high rescue priority and were not condemned by the

media for their lack of evacuation. Rather they were met with sympathy (Berger 2007:19).

Media references to the earlier articles on the dangers of stronger hurricanes and the mandatory evacuation order developed into a “blame the victim”-attitude, where victims were criticized for putting themselves in a situation where they needed to be rescued. USA Today wrote on September 2: “Every U.S. news agency repeatedly told residents within reach of the storm that Katrina would likely cause catastrophic damage. Yet it appears that through sheer ignorance or foolish bravado, many residents of affected areas *decided* that mandatory evacuation notices didn’t apply to them. Now *they’re* sitting on rooftops, surrounded by flood waters, *expecting* emergency personnel to risk their lives to save *them*” (*emphasis added*) (Davis and French 2008:250). The article declared that New Orleans’ residents were irresponsible for not evacuating, the mention of prior knowledge of the levees and people ignoring orders to evacuate tell readers, that people got themselves into a situation where they had to be helped, and it is implied that this help was given at great expense and danger to *us*, in order to help *them*, and an implied insinuation was present that they perhaps did not deserve such rescue because they had put themselves in that situation (Davis and French 2008:251). This is consistent with prior patterns of coverage of the black poor where they are described as the irresponsible and undeserving poor. Othering is created as the black victims are described as a group removed, an out-group, from the rescue teams saving them. The rescue teams were predominantly shown as consisting of whites throughout the coverage, and the implication is that blacks, as an undeserving out-group, might not deserve rescue by the in-group (Lee and Gandy 2006:6). Where some media outlets were implicit in their “blame the victim”-attitude and possible lack of deserving rescue, Bill O’Reilly from Fox was not: “Connect the dots and wise up. Educate yourself, work hard and be honest... If you don’t... the odds are that you will be desperately standing on a symbolic rooftop someday yourself. And trust me, help will not be quick in coming”. He then continues: “The white American taxpayers are saying, ‘How much more do we have to give here?’” (Bacon 2005). O’Reilly’s comments were aimed at the poor black citizens of New Orleans, whom whites, in O’Reilly’s opinion, do not wish to come rescue at

another point in the future. The stranded people in the city are the Other, as O'Reilly distinguishes between "us" and a "them", and by suggesting that the white tax-payers, who are the dominant in-group in a position of giving help, might not want to help in the future, a clear boundary is made between whites and the black people, who need help. Blacks are seen as an out-group in a society where rescue by the in-group is seemingly a luxury, which the Other might not deserve. Pickering (2001) explain that stereotypes can give the dominant group a feeling of superiority of the Other; O'Reilly's comments builds on the stereotypes of blacks and poor as under-educated and lazy, and there is a clear demonstration of superiority in the suggestion that blacks in the future might not be deserving of help from whites in a disaster (p. 42).

A study done on photographs in The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and The Wall street Journal in articles about citizens in New Orleans preparing for the hurricane *prior* to Katrina's landfall showed, that people portrayed as actively preparing for the hurricane were 87.50 percent whites and 12.50 percent blacks (Kahle et. Al. 2007:83). This disproportional coverage may have laid the foundation for the "blame the victim"-attitude of the media after Katrina and their focus in the coverage on blacks as irresponsible for not evacuating. Kathleen Tierney, a sociologist who has done much research on media coverage of Katrina, described Katrina as the "most egregious example of victim blaming" that she had ever seen (Berger 2007:20).

These differences in portrayals of black and whites follow common patterns in portrayals of these two groups. Determination is a stereotypical dominant trait of whites; here they evacuate as ordered after making sure to prepare for the hurricane, while blacks are not seen preparing and seemingly stay behind out of ignorance. The process of simplification was evident as the lack of evacuation was reduced to a coverage of people having stayed behind for selfish and irresponsible reasons, resulting in a "blame the victim"-attitude, and rarely were the reasons why people had not evacuated elaborated on in the coverage. General dominant patterns in coverage of the black poor as irresponsible and undeserving were visible through this portrayal, and blacks staying behind and consequently needing rescue, were condemned and blamed, and a need of rescue was consequently seen as a result of a selfish and irresponsible decision not to

evacuate (Davis and French 2008:251). It fit stereotypical portrayals of the black poor as irresponsible and as undeserving of rescue or sympathy, because they put themselves in harms way.

## **Crime Rumors And War Rhetoric**

*“There was a racialized undertone to the coverage as media jumped on these unfounded stories of violence among the largely black survivors in New Orleans”.*

*(Hollar 2010)*

According to Welch (2005) the root causes of the false reports of crime during Katrina were mainly the breakdown of communication, which created an “information vacuum” where verbal accounts of actions became a dominant source of stories in New Orleans and “reporters failed to exercise enough skepticism in passing along secondhand testimony from victims (who often just parroted what they picked up from the rumor mill), and they were far too eager to broadcast as fact apocalyptic statements from government officials” (Welch 2005). The media suffered from rumors being repeated by officials and by the police and rescuers, leaving the media with an impression that the rumors had been verified. What made the rumors believable were stereotypes of the criminal black and the irresponsible black poor (Melican 2009:104). The pace of the coverage also contributed to the incorrect coverage. Disaster news coverage is much faster than normal coverage and is often done without normal procedures of source verification, of finding additional sources or of having thorough reviews of the stories before they go out (Kahle et. Al. 2007:76), and this, combined with a lack of official sources and the breakdown of communication, paved the way for incorrect, rumour- and stereotype-based reporting during



Katrina (Berger 2009:491). Because the media had very little actual knowledge about black and poor people, the media turned to stereotypes and expected behavior from a group mostly marginalized by the media (Stangor 2009:9). The reporters perceived the rumors as being confirmed through the stereotypes, and the rumors were then presented as facts (Berger 2007:14). There was very little information from official sources, and the media therefore used each other as sources (Welch 2005). That meant that the rumors were repeated in most news outlets very fast, and the ample amount of rumors made it seem even more believable. The repeat by other media outlets made the rumors seem sort of verified (Berger 2009:495).

During Katrina, rumors of rampant violence and looting dominated the stories from New Orleans and only a few of these stories have ever been verified. Looting will be elaborated on in the next section. Journalists reported stories of babies being raped, of a 7-year old girl getting killed by having her throat slit at the Convention Center and of people killing each other over food (Thevenot and Russel 2005, *Times-Picayune*). None of these stories have ever been verified. On September 4, the New York Times wrote that tourists were being beaten and raped in the streets (Dwyer and Drew 2005, *The New York Times*) and The Washington Post printed a story falsely claiming that three out of four of all confirmed deaths appeared to be people having been beaten to death, among them an older woman in a wheelchair (Thevenot and Russel 2005, *Times-Picayune*). These stories were rebutted after Katrina. Several reports of shootings were also broadcasted. CNN reported on September 1. that a rescue helicopter had been fired at and that the shooting had halted rescue operations (Pierre and Gerhart 2005, *The Washington Post*). This never happened and was rebutted by the military flying the helicopter. However before they could do so, most news outlets had already published the story. This was the case of most rumors during Katrina, where other media outlets quickly repeated the rumors and reported them as facts, before they could be confirmed or rebutted (Pierre and Gerhart 2005, *The Washington Post*; Berger 2007:14). There were also stories of shots being fired at rescue workers, at ambulances and at police officers. Stories of snipers firing at civilians, the police and officials were also circulated. None of these stories were ever verified. The refuges were reported

as being plagued by shootings, but these accounts were rebutted during Katrina (Thevenot and Russell 2005, *Times-Picayune*). At both the Convention Center and the Superdome, stories of rampant violence, armed robbery and murders quickly emerged, but these accounts were rebutted, as the National Guard did several searches for weapons at the refuges and investigated every report they got from people about shootings, and found no dead bodies and only a few weapons (Thevenot and Russell 2005, *Times-Picayune*). Rapes were some of the most dominant crime stories, but only two rape cases were officially reported to the police. Sexual assaults are notoriously underreported crimes, but the media told stories of a sexual assault wave with possibly hundreds of rapes, which is far from the two reported assaults, even if the two cases represent a lot of unreported cases (Dwyer and Drew 2005, *The New York Times*). The crime stories often referred to general acts of crime and violence and not specific cases. On September 1, The Washington Post stated on its front page that rapes and murders were happening at the Superdome. By not reporting on specific cases but describing the crimes in general, readers were left with an impression of violence being so bad that it was going on everywhere to a degree that made it impossible to specify the details (Masquelier 2006:740). And because images from the refuges and from the rest of New Orleans showed primarily black people, blacks were connected to the crime stories more than whites and there was a consequent implicit racialization of the crime stories (Pierre and Gerhart 2005, *The Washington Post*). These stories were just some of the rumors of crime and violence, which dominated the coverage from New Orleans. The media reported on these stories of violence, rape and murder almost entirely based on rumors and hearsay, and reporters rarely actually witnessed any violence or lawlessness with their own eyes (Tierney et.al. 2006:74). While it is not unusual in crime reporting for the journalist not to witness the violence as it happens, the crime wave suggested to be going on in New Orleans would have meant that reporters at some point probably would have witnessed violence and looting.

A content analysis of coverage on all evening news shows on CNN, ABC, NBC, and Fox found that 20,2 percent of the stories focused on crime. (Melican 2009:101). Gross (2007) did a content analysis of the New York Times, the Washington Post, USA Today and the Times-Picayune. This mainstream print

media analysis examined a sample of 25 percent of articles covering Katrina published between August 30 and October 9, 2005 and found that 27 percent of the articles made references criminal behavior. Thevenot and Russell (2005) from Times-Picayune were some of the first to question the credibility of the crime stories from New Orleans and in their investigatory reporting after Katrina they estimated that the media had reported on 30-40 murders.<sup>4</sup> New Orleans actually experienced a long time low in the murder rate with just four accounts of violent deaths for the entire flood period, making it one of the safest periods to be in New Orleans, murder wise (Yassin 2005; Bacon 2005).

It was not all stories of crime, which were reported on, rather several crime stories with whites committing crime against blacks were often uncovered (Bacon 2005). The media ignored stories of how a racially mixed group of police officers shot and killed 2 unarmed black men on a bridge on September 4. (Robertson 2011, *The New York Times*), and how a neighbourhood of whites set up their own “neighbourhood watch” and shot black people entering the area, even black people who lived there (Thompson 2008). This might be due to crime stories with a stereotypical white victim/black perpetrator-angle often selling the most and the underreporting of crime against blacks follow usual patterns of coverage (Glassner 1999), and it contributes to the negative stereotype of blacks as more criminal and more violent than whites (Hurwitz and Peffley 1997:376). The underreporting of white crime contributed to the image of blacks as the criminals during Katrina, as unsubstantiated stories of black crime was covered heavily, while white crime was ignored.

The situation and the people in New Orleans were often described through rhetoric, which is usually only used in coverage of war-stricken areas, and the war-rhetoric was mostly used to emphasize crime and violence As the National Guard entered New Orleans, the Times-Picayune wrote this: “New Orleans on Thursday pulled back from an almost complete collapse of public order, a near anarchy that had supplanted receding floodwaters as the gravest threat to the

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<sup>4</sup> Thevenot and Russel (2005, *Times-Picayune*) explain the 30-40 murders to be the total number of different murders reported. They compared all the different reports of murders to find out how many different murders were reported and not how many stories of murders were written, as the number of articles describing murders is in the thousands.

city's still tenuous recovery" (McGann and Granfield 2006). The Washington Post wrote on September 6. that it "was like Baghdad on a bad day". CNN described the arrival of the National Guard as a "display of force" and Anderson Cooper said during a CNN show that: " (...) no matter where it is in the world, some people step up and become heroes, and some people (...) become desperate and become monsters". CNN's Wolf Blitzer announced on September 2. that "eight convoys and troops are on the ground at last in a place being described as a lawless, deadly war zone" and another CNN reporter compared the evacuation of New Orleans to the evacuation of Vietnam (Yassin 2005). This rhetoric contributed to a feeling of New Orleans as completely out of control and as a foreign, distant warzone.

Because the victims of Katrina throughout the coverage were portrayed as mainly being black and poor, the war rhetoric told a story of a war zone full of black poor people and it emphasized the feel of the coverage of New Orleans as a city full of criminal, violent out-of-control black and poor people. It builds on the stereotype of the criminal black person, and it contributed to the Othering of the situation, as the feel of the coverage was of a distanced, war-torn country where the military was entering to take over control from a foreign group of people, which had been Othered in the coverage by the use of refugee and comparisons to the Third World. The use of refugee and Third World comparisons will be elaborated on in a later section. The audience got a sense of separation and Othering as coverage told the story of a war-stricken, foreign country, out of control and near anarchy, separated from the US.

Due to extreme stories of violence and shootings from the Convention Center, the National Guard entered the Center on September 2. in full battle gear to disarm the killers, who were reportedly going crazy inside. The National Guard however went in only to find the Center full of desperate hungry people and, unlike the reports saying that there were piles of dead bodies inside, they only found four bodies at the Convention Center. Three had died from natural causes and one appeared to be a possible homicide (Thevenot and Russell 2005, *Times-Picayune*). Despite the National Guard only finding four bodies on September 2, and consequently rebutting the reports of multiple homicides and rampant violence there, the media continued to focus on violence in its reports

from the Convention Center. On September 3., stories were broadcasted from the Convention Center of multiple child rapes and of a baby being trampled to death. These stories were also based on unconfirmed rumors and later turned out to be false (Thevenot and Russell 2005, *Times-Picayune*). It demonstrates that the media pursued crime stories, even when facts had showed that the stories were based on unsubstantiated rumors, and this was most likely because crime stories have high ratings and are essentially good business (Gotham 2006). Stereotyping of blacks as criminals was not the only reason why the rumors of crime were so common in the coverage, rather it was a combination of crime stories having high ratings and the media therefore sensationalizing events, as well as the rumors of crime and violence seeming believable because it fit stereotypical expectations of blacks.

Berger (2009) did an analysis of articles from the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Times-Picayune as well as news stories from CNN in the aftermath of Katrina. He concluded that the media had an overwhelming focus on individual crime and criminality and that the coverage was persistent in seeking out these elements as key features of the aftermath of Katrina. The media reporting on violent crimes at the Convention Center the day after the National Guard rebutted rumors of violence there is an example of how the media pursued the crime stories, not only despite lack of solid facts confirming the stories but also despite evidence actually *rebutting* the stories. It was a clear example of sensationalizing and Berger (2007) concluded in an analysis “No story was too scandalous to report” (p. 14). Gotham (2006) made the same observation in his analysis of Katrina, where he found that the media focused on the more spectacular aspects of the crisis with this focus on crime and human suffering was boiled down to dramatic sound bites.

Because the population of New Orleans was comprised of two-thirds African Americans and because the people shown throughout the coverage were primarily blacks, these stories had an implicit narrative of blacks as the perpetrators of the crimes, and all the stories fit the stereotype of the criminal, violent black person. Crime have been shown to be covered in a racialized context in the news (Bing III 2010:133), and the crime stories from Katrina demonstrated the same tendency because most people shown as victims of

Katrina were blacks, creating implicit racialization. The rumors were made more believable because the media printed them, resulting in the media and the rumors creating a cycle of confirmation between the two, which eventually created the image of a city completely out of control, and the sympathy for the victims diminished, as African Americans were portrayed as anti-social, out-of-control criminals who were consequently undeserving of help (Harris 2006:937). The anti-social behavior of blacks during Katrina with looting and violence fit with stereotypical expectations of the in-group towards this out-group and created Othering as blacks were seen as violent and dangerous and constituting a threat to the in-group (Shah 2009:2). Othering was further created through war-rhetoric describing New Orleans as an almost foreign, war-stricken country that had to be fought down by the American National Guard. According to Gotham (2006) the spectacle of crime and looting scapegoated blacks, reinforced racial stereotypes, and contributed to building an international image of New Orleans as a place of rampant violence. The rumors were believable due to stereotypes of blacks as criminals and due to patterns of coverage of the poor, in which the black poor are portrayed as the irresponsible and undeserving poor. As Jim Amoss from Times-Picayune speculated, it seems unlikely that the same rumors of crime and looting would have been so believable if they had not been regarding black and poor people, but had instead been telling the same tales about white people.

## **Looting**

Looting was an essential theme in the Katrina coverage, as it was highly covered, but rarely through images of actual looting, and it had severe implicit racial aspects, as black looting was highly covered, while white looting was not. Looting is a major example from the Katrina coverage of how events were covered through rumors, but with few actual acts of looting to show, reports

were narrated to tell the story the media wanted to tell. It will be demonstrated in this section how that was accomplished.

Headlines like “The Looting Instinct”, “The Looters, They’re like cockroaches”, “Thugs Rein of Terror” and “Owners Take Up Arms as Looters Press Their Advantage” filled the newspapers during the first weeks of coverage (Gotham 2006; Barringer and Longman 2005, *The New York Times*; Shin 2005; O’Driscoll 2005, *USA Today*). On August 30, CNN described the acts of looting in New Orleans as signs of anarchy and a general lack of safety, while they showed images of people coming out of a store (Berger 2009). Looting combined with other acts of crime came to symbolize a city out of control. Looting and disorder is generally anticipated to occur in disasters, but empirical evidence has contradicted this to be the case and found that looting is actually highly unusual in US disasters (Tierney et.al. 2006:65).

A search performed on September 2. 2005 for articles containing the word “Katrina” found that there were 10,100 articles, which also contained the word “looting”. In comparison, 11,600 articles contained the word “evacuate” and 7,190 contained the word “FEMA”, which were two other major focus points of the coverage. A new search performed on September 6. found 13,000 articles containing the word “looting”, demonstrating a drop in the focus on looting. As people were evacuated out of New Orleans, debates about the geographic relocation of residents and the re-building of the city became the more dominant focus of the coverage (Journalism.org 2005).

Looting was covered as being performed almost exclusively by blacks and the poor, as white looting was rarely covered, and the looter of Katrina was throughout Katrina established as being a poor African American (Berger 2007:16), building on the stereotypes of the criminal black as well as the irresponsible black poor. According to Berger (2007) looters were shown to be “depraved, impoverished, black and pathological” (p. 16). Voorhees et.al. (2007) found in an examination of CNN coverage from the first 30 days, that out of the 30 sampled clips analyzed, all clips of people looting showed African Americans only, and most were male (p. 424). An analysis of photographs used in The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and The Wall street Journal found that when a person was described as looting, an African American would be

pictured in 83.33 percent of the photographs, but when people were shown as guarding their personal belongings, 66.67 percent of the photographs were of whites (Kahle et. Al. 2007:83). Dixon (2008) found in his analysis of CNN, Fox, NBC, ABS and CBS that in 80 percent of stories focusing on looting, the items looted were never showed, but the acts of looting were discussed, while images were shown not directly showing looting and looting was discussed without actual images of looting. Dixon also found that when footage showed actual looting or other criminal acts, which was very rare, 86 percent of the people shown were blacks (Dixon 2008:14). Blacks staying behind in New Orleans after Katrina's landfall were as a consequence automatically stereotyped as potential looters because most looters were black (Alter 2005).

Looters were portrayed in the coverage as one large group of people doing anti-social acts. The desperation of the situation and the fact that most looters *had* to loot due to the lack of governmental help and that police officers in some cases helped loot stores and pharmacies for necessities like food, water and medicine (Select Bipartisan Committee 2006:243; Tierney et.al. 2006:60) is rarely mentioned in connection with black looting. Bing III (2010:67) and Berger (2007:20) found that when white looting was covered, there were differences in the descriptions of black and white looting. Where black looters were condemned by the media for their actions, white looters were portrayed as doing what was necessary in order to survive the disaster. White looting was therefore excusable, while black looting was seen an examples of stereotypical black crime and was consequently condemned. Investigatory reporting afterwards found that the number of reports of looting had been grossly exaggerated, and while there is no question that acts of looting occurred, the media's coverage had painted a picture of looting as rampant and completely out of control, which was not the case (Thevenot and Russell 2005, *Times-Picayune*; Voorhees et.al. 2007). But as with the other crime stories during Katrina, the rampant reports of rumored looting seemed believable in part because they fit existing stereotypes of blacks as criminals.

One of the most controversial and iconic images from the media coverage, as well as one of the most explicit portrayals of racialization during Katrina, were two photographs published side-by-side online (Appendix 1). The images stirred



up much criticism of the media as one picture showed a black man carrying food and labeled him as “looting” food, while the other photo showed two non-black people, in a very similar composition of carrying food, but they however were described as “finding” food. There were severe racial implications in these captions, as the photos seemed to imply that black people loot, while white people find. The use of the word “looting” implies a criminal act, where the word “finding” implies non-criminal actions taken to survive, and portrayal of the non-black couple is therefore one of deserving victims, while the black man was the stereotypical black criminal and undeserving black poor (Harris 2006:930). The white couple were also labeled as “residents” where the African American was just “man”. “Resident” shows that they belong in New Orleans, which the black “man” may not. By calling the black person “man”, he appears more anonymous than the non-black couple, who through the label “resident” are given more of an identity through a geographical belonging (Berger 2007:17).

The photographer of the photograph of the non-black couple made a statement following the controversy saying he believed that the couple had found the food in the flood water and therefore had labeled it as “finding”. While it is not impossible that they did so, it is highly unlikely, since taking food floating around in the water would have been a serious health hazard. The floodwaters consisted in part of sewage water and several people died of diseases contracted from the polluted water and an official warning was sent out telling people to avoid contact with the water (BBC News 2005). This makes it very unlikely, but not impossible, that the couple would have found the food in the water and decided to keep it. However it is very likely that the photographer instead saw the couple with food, and due to them being white he did not jump to the assumption that they had looted, because whites were not stereotyped and expected to loot, as opposed to blacks (Sommers et.al. 2006:43). The audience came to expect looting to be performed by blacks, not by whites. To ensure simplification, the photographer may have made a conscious decision not to go against those expectations and the stereotypes associated with the race of Katrina’s looters (Sommers et.al. 2006:43). When the two non-blacks are assumed to be finding the food and not looting, it can be due to an operation of the stereotype of whites as less criminal than blacks and because looting had

such a strong association with blacks during Katrina, it is possible that the photographer unconsciously did not associate the word with this situation.

An editorial in USA Today from September 1. stated: "Although TV correspondents covering Hurricane Katrina avoid commenting on the obvious, their cameras hold back nothing. The people who couldn't or wouldn't leave New Orleans are overwhelmingly poor and black. As are the looters" (USA Today 2005). This groups ordinary victims of Katrina and the looters together as one group, based on them being categorized as black (Davis and French 2008:249). The lack of separation of the ordinary victims and the criminals in this situation demonstrate how blacks were categorized as one homogenous out-group based on race, instead of for instance on individual actions, and this is a prerequisite for stereotyping. The public may have found their stereotypes of blacks as criminals confirmed, as the media portrayed blacks as a homogenous out-group by not differing between ordinary victims and looters, which gave an impression of all blacks as stereotypical black criminals.

The stories covering looting got increasingly more violent as the days went on. Acts of looting began being described as a catalyst for violent behavior (Yassin 2005). The media made a connection between ordinary people taking water, food and medicine with rumors of people burning down buildings for pure entertainment and described this as a natural development, where people would get caught up in the criminal behavior of looting and quickly become more and more criminal and violent (Yassin 2005). The story of arson was refuted after Katrina and had been based on rumors. This description of ordinary people as potential violent criminals following acts of looting for food and water builds on the stereotype of blacks as inherently criminals. Blacks are stereotyped generally as not only more criminal than whites, but also more *inherently* criminal, where blacks are seen as having a predisposition to become criminal more so than whites (Brown et.al. 2003:146; Melican 2009:39; Bing III 2010; Mastro 2000; Monk-Turner et.al. 2010). The stereotype of the inherently black criminal suggests that blacks can turn criminal at any time and that they have much more of a predisposition to become criminals than whites, and the potential change towards a more criminal path for all blacks during Katrina seemed fitting with the stereotype of the inherently criminal African Americans.

The media pursued the theme of looting and crime even when they had no explicit examples of looting to base it on. As mentioned in the previous sections, Berger (2009) concluded in an analysis of the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Times-Picayune and news stories from CNN that the media had a focus on crime and sought out these elements as key features of the aftermath of Katrina, in part because crime stories have high ratings. The media did this in stories about looting by narrating the stories in a way so that looting was read into stories and often did so while showing images of African Americans. The media's intense focus on crime and looting meant that they came to expect these actions and sought a criminal context when there was none. On September 5, during an episode of Situation Room on CNN, anchor Wolf Blitzer asked a reporter standing in New Orleans this question: "What about all those shops, those stores, the restaurant behind you, along those streets? Are most of them - have most of them been looted?" To this the reporter answers: "They haven't, that's the very surprising thing" (Yassin 2005). The reporter was standing in a street only damaged by the hurricane, not by looters, there were no looters around and the reporter had not witnessed any looting on the street before the interview. Despite this, the focus of the news show was looting and how it was surprising that looting did not seem to be going on.

An example of the media narrating crime and looting into a story where there was no definite crime was a news segment on CNN on August 30. In her content analysis of the media coverage of Katrina, Melican (2009) gave this as a representational example of the way the media narrated a criminal context into stories where there was none (p. 47). CNN anchor Aaron Brown talked about lawlessness and widespread looting occurring in New Orleans and while he did this, a loop of clips was shown. The loop consisted of 4 different clips: the first was three black people carrying large plastic bags while climbing over debris, the second one was three black boys coming out of a store, two of them carrying bags, the third clip was of three young black guys running, two were carrying clothes and the third was hiking up his pants, and the fourth clip was three people of unclear race, walking by a dumpster carrying clothes and plastic bags. The loop was put together to show the audience acts of looting; however none of

the people in the four clips are actually *seen* looting, but coming out of a store and/or carrying things.

Aaron Brown then describes how the police was unable to control the lawlessness, how looting was going on and how these were signs that anarchy was approaching. While he talks, a second loop is shown, which consists of three clips: the first is of a black woman walking and trying to shield her face from the camera with what appears to be three packs of diapers, the second clip shows black people coming out of what might be a store, carrying things, but no store signs are visible<sup>5</sup>, and the third clip is the back of a mans head, who is watching the front of the door to this possible store. The wording of Brown during this loop seems displaced, as the word “anarchy” is spoken while the clip of the diaper-carrying woman is on screen. No sympathy is demonstrated here for a woman carrying things that might be a necessity, and no clip actually shows her looting these items; she is only seen carrying them. Again clips are shown of black people carrying things while the anchor speaks of looting and lawlessness. All the people in the clips, who are supposedly seen looting, are blacks and the stereotypical portrayal of black people as criminals continue on in the story.

Aaron Brown also talked to a reporter Adaora Udoji, who was reporting live from New Orleans. Brown asked Udoji “I guess the question, Adaora, is how lawless is New Orleans tonight?” (Melican 2009:57). Udoji describes people as confused and talks about how they have nowhere to go and how some people are stranded on bridges and highways. She never mentions looting, but only describes the horrible conditions for people stranded in New Orleans. Throughout the interview she makes it clear that crime has not occurred where she has been present and that conditions are not as dangerous as the media thinks they are. While she is talking, a third loop of clips is shown; first a clip of two people pushing a shopping cart, then a clip of people going into a building and lastly a clip showing people picking things up from the street. These clips do not match what Udoji is talking about and the clips seem out of context at this time. Brown re-introduces the theme of crime as he asks Udoji if it is safe to walk the dry streets of New Orleans, after he has just made a reference to a report

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<sup>5</sup> Melican (2009) points out that the store shown in the looting clips might have been a store opening its doors to help people in need (p. 173).

where a motel owner said he witnessed looting. While Udoji is answering, the first loop of clips is put on screen again. Udoji is now discussing crime in the city and how they have seen broken windows in stores, but that they could not tell if that had been due to the flooding or to looters. The first loop of clips comes on air again. At this time in the story the sequence of loops goes on for 45 seconds. Of the 6 minutes and 49 seconds this segment lasts, more than 2 minutes are scenes of apparent looting or disorderly conduct. The loops have no relevance to what Udoji is saying during the report, but distort her account of the situation in the city. She is saying that things are not as bad as people think; however the viewer is repeatedly shown clips of black people supposedly looting (Melican 2009:59). It suggest that Udoji's portrayal of the city was not what CNN was looking for; they wanted action and tales of out of control conditions and when she did not deliver that, loops of clips were used to narrate something else than what she was reporting (Melican 2009:59). According to Berger (2009) it was a common pattern in the coverage to pursue the theme of crime and lawlessness by basing stories on narratives, which did not match, and often even contradicted, the images broadcasted (p. 499). As Berger describes it "dramatic narrative can thus drive out relevant facts", and that often happened in stories of crime and looting where facts were ignored, and a crime-context was narrated into the imagery, as was seen when a woman carrying diapers was labeled as looting (p. 503). So even when reporters dismiss the stories of out of control looting and lawlessness, stereotypical portrayals are still used, in the form of visual images narrated in a way to put them in an implied criminal context. Crime stories have high ratings, which might have contributed to the narration towards a criminal context, even when there was none.

But facts are important at *one* point of the interview. During the conversation with Udoji, Brown asks her if she knows anything about the National Guard arriving in New Orleans. She answers that she has heard that they were there, but she had not seen them. Brown replies: "Okay. We only want you to report what you know, not what you think you know, as we say around here" (Melican 2009:60). A photographic content analysis of The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and the Wall Street Journal found that 93.75 percent of the soldiers in New Orleans were portrayed as whites (Kahle et.

Al. 2007:84), and it suggest that talking about the mostly white National Guard in the CNN segment required more facts than talking about black New Orleans residents did (Melican 2009:61). Talking about blacks and their actions were done in a way where assumptions about their actions were based on stereotypes of blacks as criminals, like a woman carrying diapers was labeled as looting, which is very different from the assumptions made about non-blacks, as was demonstrated with the photograph of the non-black couple, who were labeled as “finding” food in an ambivalent situation, rather than as looting. It suggests an Othering of the New Orleans blacks, as segments about them seemed to not require the same level of confirmed information as talking about the in-group, such as the white National Guard, did. Here, blacks seem like an out-group, where the anchor, perhaps due to lack of knowledge about the group, bases his assumptions on expected group behavior and the stereotype of the black criminal, rather than look at the person in that specific situation, which was a woman carrying diapers with no footage of her looting them.

Another example of crime narrating not fitting the images broadcasted, was a news segment aired on September 1, on CNN. CNN did a report about New Orleans, which they described as a city full of “crazed” armed gangs of people, who raped women, attacked tourists and fought the police, and an anonymous police officer was quoted for stating that no “normal” people were left in the city, only armed people remained in New Orleans (Berger 2009:501). While these statements were made, images were shown of large groups of black people walking around in the Superdome and the Convention Center and none of the people in these images carried any types of visible weapons (Berger 2009:501). The statements were broadcasted to the viewers despite the television images clearly showing that there were plenty of unarmed people in New Orleans; in addition to the images from the Superdome, the broadcast was full of images of black people on rooftops, at other refuges and wading through the floodwaters. None of these people were pictured carrying weapons. Viewers were left with a narrative of crazy people being the only ones left in the city, while images were shown of black people walking around unarmed and not performing criminal acts. But the narrative of the report left viewers to read crime into the images of

the black people in the broadcast and it build on the stereotype of the black criminal.

Looting was very dominant in the Katrina coverage, and one reason was that when blacks were seen walking around with things, they were assumed to be looters, as it fit with stereotypical expectations of black criminality. It would have been natural for people in New Orleans to carry things around if their homes had been flooded and they had escaped, carrying a few personal items. No one questioned the ample amount of rumors about looting, even though few reporters actually witnessed looting, which they probably would have if looting was as widespread as media reports stated and despite images in most cases showing people in ambivalent situations where a looting context had to be narrated into the images, like the image of a woman carrying diapers or people walking beside a dumpster carrying things.

Rumors of wild looting, violence and anti-social behavior fit stereotypes of the irresponsible black poor and the criminal blacks, and similar to other stories of crime from New Orleans, the stories were believable due to these racial stereotypes. Combined with very rare portrayals of white looting, the role of the Katrina looter was almost filled by blacks only. It creates Othering as black looting was described as ample and was condemned, while white looting was excusable, demonstrating a boundary between the in-group and the out-group where similar actions are condemned differently for in-group members compared to out-group members. People watched as the black out-group acted in criminal and condemned ways while the white in-group members did what was necessary to survive and were not condemned. The visual images of black people carrying things around were narrated by commentary to demonstrate stereotypical behavior of black crime and violence, which was not actually being shown by the images, while whites in similar ambivalent situations were differently portrayed, most explicitly demonstrated when a non-black couple carrying food were labeled as “finding” food and a black man in a similar situation was labeled as “looting”.

## Roles In Photographs

One expression of racial stereotyping during Katrina was in portrayals of blacks and whites in differing roles, which divided along racial lines. This is particularly evident when examining the photographs used in the print media coverage, in which blacks were portrayed in limited, and mostly negative, roles, while whites were portrayed in most, and typically positive, roles occurring during the disaster. Blacks were overwhelmingly portrayed as the stereotypical black helpless and passive victim and rarely as helpers or rescuers, while whites were seen as dominating the role of rescuer and when portrayed as victims, whites were portrayed as a stereotypical white determined and active victim.

*“Photographs have the power to immediately impact readers’ perception and many readers gain their first impressions about a story by first looking at the photo that accompanies it”*

(Martindale 1996:24).

Research has shown that photographs are the first thing a reader will look at when going over a newspaper page, making the photograph the reader’s first impression of a story (Kahle et. Al. 2007:80), and editors consider the photographs accompanying stories as being equally important with the text in an article (Clawson and Trice 2000:55). Photographs accompanying print news coverage are important, because they tell the story of the implicit and ad drama (Kahle et.al. 2007:78). As Elliott (1996) puts it “Pictures sell” (p. 3) and photographs and visual images are believed as accurate (Lacey 1998:5) because we trust what we see, often with little consideration of the media outlets choosing images that fit with what to portray and discarding the ones that do not. Dramatic photographs draw the reader in and are therefore good business. And in an event as covered as Katrina, where every news outlet covered the



disaster heavily, having the most dramatic photographs could ensure the newspaper readers over another news outlet and using stereotypical imagery of blacks and whites ensured simplification so that readers could understand the story from the start.

One of the most observable ways that the media preserve stereotypes is through its selection of examples to illustrate stories (Linn 1996:16). The choices made about which photographs to print with an article can lead to false or stereotypical conclusions about the social group being shown in the photographs, because photographs are chosen for their ability to provide implicit meaning to a story, which is often based on simplified stereotypical expectations of group behavior (Kahle et.al. 2007:77). Stories about e.g. crime will therefore often have a photograph of an African American man, as he will have an implied connection to crime due to stereotypes of blacks as criminals. A crime report with an accompanying photograph of a middle-aged white woman could confuse readers, because there is no criminal stereotype or expected behavior of such woman implying crime. During Katrina, images from the Superdome for example did not portray the “guys who looked like thugs, with pants hanging around their asses” who the National Guard after Katrina said had helped them out at the Dome by bringing collapsed people from the Superdome to a make-shift medical center near by (Thevenot and Russell 2005). Images like this were not shown, as it probably would have not fit with the stereotypical expectations of the audience; as Harris (2006) puts it, “these images did not make racial sense” (p. 940)

When the black poor are portrayed by the media as victims in times of crises, they are stereotypically portrayed as powerless, passive and helpless victims, who are dependent on help from others, especially from the government, or as breaking social norms through crime (Melican 2009:39; Voorhees et.al. 2007:426). They are consequently portrayed as being a burden or a threat to the dominant group, whites, who are, when they are portrayed as victims, stereotypically portrayed more as determined and active victims, trying to better the situation on their own (Voorhees et.al. 2007:418). The stereotype of white determination and black passivity and criminality were dominant themes

throughout the coverage of Katrina and were evident in the print media's photographs.

The New York Times and the Washington Post combined ran more than 200 articles during the first two weeks following Katrina's landfall (Gross 2007:5). A photographic content analysis examined all photographs run by The New York Times and the Washington Post covering Hurricane Katrina. The study found that The New York Times', in photographs depicting a victim, showed 78.4 percent depicting a black victim and 22.2 percent had a white victims. The Washington Post had a similar number, with 72.3 percent black victims and 28.3 percent white victims (Lee and Gandy 2006:6). Both newspapers overrepresented the black population as victims compared with their proportional size of New Orleans' population, but it is most likely explained by poor blacks not having evacuated and they could therefore have made up this larger share of the stranded (Voorhees et.al. 427:2007).

The analysis also examined whether the victim portrayed in the photographs was active or passive. The actives were actively trying to better the situation by building, escaping, helping others etc. as opposed to the passives, who were characterized as people waiting for help from others and not actively doing something to better the situation (Lee and Gandy 2006:3). The New York Times portrayed whites as active in 88 percent and as passive in 12 percent of photographs with white victims. The Washington Post had a similar representation of whites with 82.2 percent as active and 17.7 percent as passive victims. African Americans were portrayed differently. In The New York Times, blacks were shown as active in 28.5 percent of the photographs containing blacks and as passive in 71.4 percent. The Washington Post had a similar portrayal of blacks, where 30.9 percent of photographs showed blacks to be active and 72.7 percent to be passive (Lee and Gandy 2006:7).<sup>6</sup> Overall, whites were portrayed as actives, while blacks were portrayed as passives, and this fit the stereotype of white determination and the stereotypes of blacks as helpless and passive victims (Lee and Gandy 2006:7).

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<sup>6</sup> Added up, the result is more than 100 percent, because 4 photographs had both active and passive black victims in one photograph (Lee and Gandy 2006:7).

The photographs were also examined for the racial composition of rescuers, meaning police, firefighters, rescue workers etc. The Washington Post had 19.9 percent African American rescuers in their photographs and The New York Times had 5.7 percent. Because relief work teams usually are made up of 75 to 95 percent locals, even in the most critical disasters, it demonstrates a large disproportional portrayal of whites as rescuers as opposed to African Americans (Lee and Gandy 2006:6). While no data is available on the actual racial composition of the relief- and rescue workers helping during Katrina, one study calculates that in order for whites to be so proportionally outnumbering blacks as rescue workers, as they are in the photographs, the number of white rescue workers would have had to number in the hundreds of thousands, which they did not (Kahle et. Al. 2007:86), and black rescue workers were therefore underrepresented. In photographs containing both a victim and a rescuer, the overwhelming majority of the photographs showed a white rescuer and a black victim, with photographs in The New York Times having such a composition in 87.5 percent of the photographs and the Washington Post in 70.4 percent. Not a single photograph in The New York Times showed a white victim with a black rescuer, while The Washington Post had 1 photograph with such a composition (Lee and Gandy 2006:7). The lack of black rescuers adds to a general negative stereotyping of blacks during Katrina (Lee and Gandy 2006:9), because very stereotypical portrayals of blacks as criminals, lazy and passive victims had no or very few counter-stereotypical portrayals of blacks in positive roles, such as rescuers and active victims. It makes negative stereotypical portrayals the dominant representation of blacks during Katrina, which can confirm racial stereotypes to readers.

A similar photographic content analysis examining photographs from The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and The Wall street Journal between August 23, 2005 and September 23 supports the findings of the previous study. This study also found blacks to be over-represented as passive victims and whites over-represented as rescuers. In 72.28 percent of photographs depicting African Americans, they were shown to be passive compared to whites, who were portrayed as passive in 27.72 percent of photographs containing whites. The people in the active photographs were 30.47

percent blacks and 69.53 percent whites (Kahle et.al. 2007:82). Another difference along racial lines was seen in photos from rescue missions. African Americans were mostly shown as being evacuated, while whites were shown to be coming home and beginning the rebuilding of their homes (Kahle et. Al. 2007:84). Lee and Gandy (2006:10) argues that the photographs may overwhelmingly have had this black victim/white rescuer composition because photographs become more powerful if they demonstrate contrasts. This was obtained by not just having the racialized victim/rescuer portrayals, but also the racialized passive/active compositions. Lee and Gandy argue that it helped underline the concept of “us”, meaning whites, who were helpers and active victims, and “them”, who were black passive victims. It could have been done consciously or unconsciously by the media to ensure the white audiences attention and ensuring that they could sympathize with the images, and according to Lee and Gandy this was done by portraying whites more positively contrasted with the Other, who were blacks.

Another reason for the racial compositions in the photographs may have been a desire to meet the audience’s expectations and stereotypes of races, in order to make the story easy to understand quickly. Because the portrayal of whites as helpers of blacks is the usual and therefore expected portrayal it could confuse the audience if that perception was challenged (Lee and Gandy 2006:13). Newspapers may have chosen photographs that depicted blacks and whites stereotypically to obtain simplification, in order for their audience not to be confused by unexpected and counter-stereotypical photographs (Rodriguez and Dynes 2006:2).

Blacks are often portrayed by the media as taking on a passive role, and such representation is often accompanied by an emphasis by the media on how the minority members will ask for “our” help for “their” problems, as was demonstrated by the statement of Fox’s Bill O’Reilly and by USA Today. This creates Othering of blacks through a representation of them as a passive out-group removed and needing help from the dominant in-group of society, which is implied to be whites (Lee and Gandy 2006:9; Van Dijk 2000:40). Lee and Gandy (2006) further suggest that the images of blacks as receiving help from white helpers was consistent with normal imagery from Third World disasters, and

combined with linguistic references to the Third World by the media in stories from New Orleans, it helped Othering develop (p. 9), as the disaster felt removed and foreign; the images and linguistics were more similar to coverage of disasters in far away countries than events in the US, and the disaster was portrayed as almost not happening in the US. Readers were left with an overall impression from the photographs of blacks as victims, doing nothing active to better their situation, but waiting for help, while whites were shown both as helpers and as victims, but victims who were determined to help themselves. Kahle et.al. (2007) argues that because photographs from a disaster are so expressive and the photos from New Orleans were so misrepresentative of blacks, it is very likely that the readers will “retain these images in their memories as part of their mental representations of African Americans” and see their stereotypes of blacks as confirmed through the coverage (Page 78).

Combined with a representation in the rest of the Katrina coverage of blacks as criminals and looters, the limited roles of blacks as helpless and passive victims, and rare portrayals of blacks in the positive roles of helpers and rescuers, emphasized the patterns of negative racial stereotyping of blacks in the coverage, as there was a lack of positive counter-stereotypical portrayal to help give a more balanced representations of blacks. It followed usual patterns of coverage of blacks where portrayals are usually very limited and often only cover problems among blacks (Entman and Rojecki 2001:68; Bing III 2010; Mastro 2000). It also emphasized Othering, as boundaries between the white in-group and the black out-group were made stronger by portrayals of the two groups as fundamentally different in the coverage, as whites were seen helping out and being active victims, while blacks were seen as living up to the stereotypical role of blacks as helpless victims and criminals.

## **Roles On Television**

A similar tendency of roles differing along racial lines, as was seen in newspaper photographs, was demonstrated in content analyses of television

coverage of Katrina. Voorhees et.al. (2007) did a content analysis of CNN's coverage during the first 30 days after Katrina. During that period, 360 news segments were aired on CNN with Katrina as the main focus and 30 sampled clips from these news segments were analyzed. The study found that two-thirds of news reports showing help being given and received, portrayed whites helping blacks. Two other rescue missions had shown people helping someone of their own race and two showed racially mixed cooperative rescue efforts. There were no broadcasts showing only blacks helping only whites (p. 424). The analysis found that African Americans portrayed as mostly doing nothing active, but instead waiting to be rescued, while whites were actively doing something, which ties in with the stereotypes of the helpless black victim contrasted with stereotypical white determination (Kahle et. Al. 2007:79). The content analysis also analyzed the race of the people shown in roles of authorities. The analysis found that people shown in roles of authority, meaning experts, officials, rescuers, military, doctors, police, security workers and politicians, were 89.5 percent whites, with minorities only being shown in positions of authority in 10.5 percent of the coverage. Another content analysis of television coverage supports the racial composition of representation found in Voorhees et.al.'s analysis. The study examined samples of ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and CNN coverage and found that helpers were present in 15 percent of the sampled stories; 80 percent of these were whites, 5 percent were blacks and 4 percent were Latino. Victims shown in the coverage were 54 percent blacks, 33 percent whites and 13 percent were stories with a mix of races (Dixon 2008:14). Television coverage had a lower level of portrayals of blacks as victims than photographic coverage, but underrepresented blacks as rescuers and helpers similar to print coverage, demonstrating the stereotypical portrayal of black passive victims being rescued by whites.

Melican (2009) did a comprehensive analysis of the media coverage of Katrina and found an almost equal percentage of black and white citizens making a sound bite in television news segments as "ordinary people" affected by Katrina, meaning people living in New Orleans, who were not experts, officials or rescue workers. Blacks made up 24 percent of ordinary people making a sound bite and whites made up 26 percent. Percentage wise it is one of the most

racially equal representations of the Katrina coverage (p. 100). However the portrayals of whites and blacks as ordinary people were found in the content analysis as differing, as whites often were shown wearing clean clothes, thanking God they were alive and demonstrating stereotypical white determination. Blacks tended to be shown on the streets, in dirty clothes and talking about hopelessness and despair, showing them as the stereotypical helpless black victim (Melican 2009:52). Even though an equal number of white and black every-day people were portrayed, it did not add up to equal portrayals of the two groups due to these differences. In her findings, Melican gives this as a representative example of white determination and blacks helplessness: A series of interviews aired August 30. on CNN during a news segment demonstrate the stereotypical portrayal of white determination against black helplessness. Two white people and two black people are interviewed and the four interviewed are described as being in the same situation, due to them all being citizens of New Orleans and all having remained in the city during the hurricane. The two white people in the story were interviewed at two different locations; they both seemed to be okay and were wearing clean clothes. One of the interviewed white people was standing in front of his house, which had survived the hurricane. Both interviewed white people thanked God for being alive and they were shown to be in good spirits despite the desperate situation. Two black people are also interviewed, likewise at different locations. Unlike the whites in the story, they were portrayed as emotional and in need of help, with no positive outlook on the situation and they were wearing dirty clothes. One of the two was sitting in the street talking about having lost everything (Melican 2009:52). Some black people lived in areas where the destruction was not total, but the journalist did not interview black people from such areas. Instead a black woman, who had lost everything and was sitting in the street with nothing left and nowhere to go, was juxtaposed with a white man who still had his home. It seems natural that these two people would have different outlooks on the future, but they are presented in the story as equals, as people experiencing the same thing. It portrays blacks stereotypically as helpless and passive victims, dependent on assistance, as opposed to the stereotypical demonstration of white determination, where whites, even in a desperate situation, seem to be doing okay on their own

without help from the government or others. And the result is a black woman living up to the stereotype of a person who has to be helped and who is dependent on government assistance, as opposed to a white man who can take care of himself due to stereotypical white determination (Melican 2009:56).

Melican (2009) also found in her analysis that whites were portrayed as heroes in 8 percent of the stories and blacks as heroes in 4 percent of the stories. The study examined all coverage on evening news shows on CNN, ABC, NBC and Fox and not just stories of rescue missions, and the percentages are therefore relatively low; however it does demonstrate how blacks were shown as heroes half as often as whites (p. 102). Overall, blacks were found to be portrayed as victims and passive and whites as helpers and actives, which is consistent with the findings of Voorhees et.al. and the findings of content analyses of newspaper photographs.

Voorhees et.al.'s (2007) television content analysis also found differences along racial lines in the locations of the victims. Most of the white Katrina victims in the sampled 30 clips were shown in safe locations, like shelters, private homes or rescue boats. Some black victims were shown in similar locations, but blacks were much more likely to be shown on rooftops, being rescued by helicopters, wading through the flood waters, looting or being crammed together in the Superdome or the Convention Center (p. 424). Voorhees et.al. found that one-third of victims in the television coverage were whites. If one-third of the victims shown are non-blacks, it seems unlikely that only a few of these white victims would have been observed outside of safe locations. Rather some of the difference in victim locations is most likely due to stereotypical expectations of viewers not to see whites in such a situation. Clips of victims would almost certainly have been selected to obtain simplification, like the newspaper photographs, so to fit viewers' stereotype-based expectations of how different races are to be portrayed in different situations during a crisis, so that it becomes easy to understand for the audience.

Another example of roles being limited for blacks on television was seen in the use of experts and authorities in general. The Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin, was African American, as was the Police Superintendent Eddie Compass. They appeared frequently on television and in the newspapers, and spoke as



officials and experts. They however were some of the only appearances in the Katrina coverage by blacks as experts. Underrepresentation of black experts during Katrina was consistent with patterns in general news coverage. A study done on ABC, CBS and NBC prior to Katrina showed a white expert to black expert ratio at about 36:1 (Entman and Rojecki 2001:69). A content analysis coding for experts in television coverage during Katrina on ABC, NBC, FOX and CNN found that out of a total of 22 stories on all four channels featuring just a single expert, 1 story used a black expert. The other 21 stories, or 95.4 percent, used a white expert. 14 additional stories featured groups of experts; none of these stories used just black experts, nine stories used only white experts and five stories used a racially mixed group of experts. It adds up to a 17 percent use of black experts, which is proportionally higher than the 12 percent, blacks make up of the US population. So blacks were underrepresented as single experts, but when adding in groups of experts, they were actually overrepresented. However compared to the racial composition of New Orleans, black experts were underrepresented, as blacks made up 67.3 of the population of New Orleans at the time of Katrina (Melican 2009:99). The lack of black experts had the same effect as the lack of portrayals of black rescuers. It added to the stereotypical image of blacks during Katrina as either helpless victims or criminals, because it contributed to a limited and negative set of roles of blacks during Katrina, and black experts would have been a positive counter-stereotypical portrayal of blacks to contrast the image of the black criminal of Katrina.

Television portrayed blacks in similar roles as the print media photographs did, which were as helpless and passive victims, which is the usual way black victims are portrayed by the media. This was contrasted with portrayals of white victims as stereotypically determined and active. Blacks were almost only shown in these limited and negative roles, while whites were shown dominantly in the roles of rescuers, helpers, heroes and experts. By not showing blacks in positive roles, the portrayals of blacks as stereotypical criminals and passive victims were emphasized as they lacked positive counter-portrayals. As in the photographic portrayals, it emphasized Othering by portraying the in-group and the out-group as fundamentally different. Television portrayals and photographic portrayals of blacks as passive victims may have created

resentment in the audience as the “blame the victim”-attitude caused by the representation of the irresponsible poor victim for not evacuating was combined with this overall portrayal of black victims as not actively doing anything to help out in the situation, which they were portrayed as having put themselves in, when they failed to follow orders to evacuate. It builds on the stereotype and usual portrayals by the media of the black poor as the undeserving poor, who does nothing to better their own situation in life.

## **Refugees And The Third World**

During the first days of coverage, the media labeled the people trapped in New Orleans as “refugees”. This resulted in heavy criticism from the public, officials, black leaders and President Bush, who all argued that the term refugee was derogatory and misleading, as it implied a lack of citizenship of the victims of Katrina, who were predominantly black, and President Bush publicly asked the media to stop using the label “refugee”. Civil rights activists Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton argued that “refugee” was a racial term because it usually describes an outside group and the word implied that the mostly black New Orleans survivors were not fully citizens in the US. Al Sharpton told the New York Times that “these are not refugees (...). They are citizens of Louisiana and Mississippi, tax-paying citizens. They are not refugees wandering somewhere looking for charity. They are victims of neglect and a situation they should have never been put in in the first place” (Broder 2005, *The New York Times*) and Jesse Jackson argued that the use of the word refugee had a “racist connotation of second-class citizenship” (Adams et.al 2006:217). Combined with repeated comparisons made between New Orleans and the Third World, Othering was created, as residents in New Orleans were described in terms more fitting a disaster happening in a foreign country.

In coverage of the first week following Katrina’s landfall 56 percent of articles discussing Katrina’s victims used evacuee and 44 percent used refugee (Sommers et.al. 2006:41). Due to the severity of the situation in New Orleans,

journalists argued that “victim” or “survivor” were too subtle words to capture what was happening and that “evacuee” indicated people had been safely evacuated from the area, which was not the case. Refugee fit in the sense that a very large group of people were in desperate need of help and would probably not be able to return to their homes for a very long time, if ever (Sommers et.al 2006:41). However, when the articles containing either refugee or evacuee were checked for a simultaneous use of either “poor” or “black” within 10 words of each other, there was a 68 percent use of refugee and a 32 percent use of evacuee, showing that the use of refugee was more connected to race and poverty than the use of evacuee was, which shows that refugee had a racial and socio economic connotation and was not only used because the other words were found to be too subtle (Sommers et.al 2006:41).

Language is a crucial part of the creation and definition of the Other. Language help define who is “we” and who is “them”, and word choices and definitions of the Other is thereby used to create a boundary between ones in-group and the out-group described (Pickering 2001:72). Refugee has an implied denotation of lack of citizenship and geographical belonging and Othering of blacks occurs through this implied lack of belonging. It also implies that the group labeled as refugees becomes an economic burden on the group taking them in. It fit the situation of New Orleans, as the whole nation would have to pay for the rebuilding of the city as well as the relocation of more than 200,000 black people, thereby making them a burden on whites and the society. Otherness was created through the use of refugee, due to the implicit subtext of a distanced, foreign group suddenly becoming a burden on a society to which the group does not belong, just like refugees, who go to a refugee camp and need help, often from a different country than their own (Masquelier 2006:738). As Congresswoman Diane Watson said at a Black Caucus press conference “refugee calls up to mind people that come from different lands and have to be taken care of” (Masquelier 2006: 738).

Comparisons to the Third World were also widely used in the coverage. The New York Times wrote: “(...) a Third World country had suddenly appeared on the Gulf Coast”, USA Today compared New Orleans to “a Third World refugee camp”. And CNN, Fox News and most other television stations made Third World

country comparisons as well (Dominguez 2006). As Dominguez (2006) states: "This phrase carries meaning. "Third World" is never used in this country as praise. It is typically used to refer to other countries, especially in Africa, Latin America, and Asia—places Americans see as non-European and, therefore, as inhabited exclusively or overwhelmingly by non-whites". Several African nations took offence to the Third World comparisons. A newspaper in Kenya was enraged by the comparisons and called them racist. Other African newspapers said that had such a disaster and subsequent lack of rescue effort occurred in an African nation, the US would certainly be among nations criticizing that African nation for abandoning its citizens (Kalyango Jr. and Eckler 2010:279). The Third World comparisons seem logic to the extend that most of New Orleans was in ruins at one point. However, the Third World associations may have been made because the images from New Orleans were primarily of black people surrounded by chaos and ruins, creating associations to Africa and the hunger- and war stricken countries there (Sommers et.al 2006:43). Some media critiques speculated that had the victims been mostly white, comparisons with The Great Depression or the earthquake of San Francisco would more likely have been used during Katrina; disasters, which occurred in the US and do not have the Othering effects that the Third World comparisons have (Dominguez 2006). The feeling of distance between the rest of the US and a city compared with a Third World country was made bigger as the self-image in the US of the nation as one of the leading countries in the First World was threatened (Dominguez 2006). Othering is a way to obtain symbolic containment of in-groups and out-groups (Pickering 2001:xi) and by comparing New Orleans to the removed Third World, New Orleans was removed from the rest of the nation, and combined with references to the citizens of the city as refugees, a feeling of the black public in New Orleans as separated from the US emerged.

Dixon (2008) argues that the use of "refugee" and references to the Third World, combined with depictions and descriptions of looting and violence, "raises subtle racial connotations that rely on stereotypes" (p. 17). Blacks were portrayed as stereotypical criminals, who were foreign and not fully part of the US society, which is consisting with blacks as an out-group in the overwhelmingly white society and the white media. These connotations are

further enhanced through the stereotypical portrayals of blacks as helpless victims. The use of refugee coincided with virtually no mention of race in the initial coverage, leaving the audience to view images of black survivors combined with the media's use of a word, which suggested that this group was not fully part of US society, and perhaps consequently looking at the survivors as outsiders and the Other, more so than they otherwise might have done.

The media is mostly perceived as being neutral, objective and value free in its coverage of events (Davis and French 2008:245). This image of neutrality in media discourse is achieved among other things through use of nuanced language and labels. However, some labels can be perceived by the audience as having overt implied meaning. Mutz and Goldman (2010) explain that when a portrayal of an out-group becomes *transparently* stereotypical, it can produce a negative public reaction towards the media (p. 248). The use of the label "refugee" about the Katrina victims received a negative reaction from the public and from officials, who interpreted the word as not fitting the situation, because the term usually describes people fleeing a foreign, war torn country and having no-where to go. The backlash from the public and officials made the media change the label from "refugee" to "victim" and the more positive "survivor". During the first week following Katrina's landfall, the ratio of articles using evacuee and articles using refugee was 1.3 to 1. Articles published in the *two* first weeks had a ratio of 2.7 to 1 in usage of evacuee and refugee. This difference is most likely due to the controversy following the first days' use of refugee in the coverage, where the media was asked to stop using the word (Sommers et.al 2006:41). In a content analysis of CNN, Fox, NBC, ABS and CBS coverage, Dixon (2008) found that similar to the print media, television segments were much more likely to describe New Orleans residents as refugees in the early days of the crisis. This demonstrated how the media failed to get the label "refugee" perceived by the audience as a neutral label and a neutral representation of the people involved. When the media labeled people as refugees, the foreign associations and consequent Othering became *too* blatant and the public rejected the label. Masquelier (2006) and Dominguez (2006) suggest that an additional reason why people reacted so strongly to the use of refugee was that it hurt the image that Americans believe they have nationally and internationally, as strong

and self-sufficient and as one of the most powerful nations in the world. This self-image took a blow with the suggestion that a large group of Americans were now refugees, a group often needing help from other countries.

The label of the overwhelmingly black victims of Katrina as refugees, combined with comparisons between New Orleans and the Third World had severe racial implications and described the situation and the people in New Orleans as almost foreign. It suggested that the black people of New Orleans were not fully American, which is underlined by the label being used more in connection with descriptions of blacks, and was a clear demonstration of Othering, which was so strong, that the public and officials rejected the label. As mentioned, implicit racialization activates stereotypes of others more than explicit racialization does because it is done unconsciously (White 2007:340). When the media labeled blacks as refugees, they may have racialized the label explicitly enough to make part of the audience aware of the racial cues in the word and they rejected the term as too racialized and stereotypical. But Berger (2007) found that the use of refugee and Third World comparisons contributed to Other the disaster to a point where people questioned how much resources should be spent on the relief efforts, which demonstrates that although some rejected the label, it did have an impact on the audience (p. 15).

## **Stereotyping In The Coverage**

Was it stereotyping? I argue yes. As mentioned before, the use of stereotypes can be difficult to prove, because one can argue that it was just the reality of the situation. However it was a common pattern in the coverage of the public in New Orleans that portrayals fit common racial and socio economic stereotypes of blacks as criminal, passive victims and as the irresponsible poor. That might be a coincidence, but it seems unlikely, and as Sommers et.al. (2006) found in their analysis of the coverage; all the inaccuracies about the black victims erred in *one* direction only; as more violent, more stereotypical and more negative than reality in New Orleans warranted. Inaccuracies did not also err in

the coverage of blacks as more generous, positive or helpful than what the situation warranted. On the contrary, pro-social black behavior was ignored and uncovered during Katrina (Thevenot and Russell 2005, *Times-Picayune*). And whites were stereotyped as well; they were portrayed as stereotypical determined white victims. Stereotyping was therefore not just done about the poor black, but was done of other races as well. It was done, as journalists lacked credible sources and rumors became a dominant information source. After a while, it became clear that most stories from New Orleans had been grossly overstated, and the fact the victims of Katrina were primarily black was no coincident: blacks are stereotypically expected to behave in deplorable and criminal ways and the stories from Katrina, though based on unverified rumors, were believable due to racial stereotypes of blacks (Butler 2007). The media also turned to usual patterns of stereotypical coverage of the black poor, which also led to the overall portrayals of blacks as criminal and passive victims, and as the irresponsible and undeserving poor. Further, the media covered blacks and whites in ways to achieve simplification, and that was obtained through stereotyping (Lee and Gandy 2006:11). Othering can be a consequence of stereotyping, and as was shown in this thesis' analysis, Othering was created through most parts of the coverage. It further adds to the accuracy of the hypothesis that stereotyping was used.

Stereotypical depictions of blacks and other minorities in the media is a serious problem, because "the news may construct images that partake of the first component of racial animosity, the exaggerated sense of group differences recorded in the negative stereotypes" (Entman and Rojecki 2001:67). New Orleans was portrayed as a place with nightmarish conditions of rampant crime, rape, violence and looting. As Tierney et.al (2006) describes it "reports constructed disaster victims as lawless, violent, exploitative, and almost less than human in the days following Katrina" (p. 63). Voorhees et.al. (2007) argue that even if the media only portrayed events in New Orleans accurately, the imagery that came out of the coverage can "reinforce existing social inequities" (p. 426). The coverage of Katrina is interesting to examine, because studies have shown that even a few stereotypical portrayals of others can contribute to the public's development of stereotypes (Mutz and Goldman 2010:247). So while parts of the

coverage were neutral and objective, the news coverage that was not is what leaves more or less permanent marks in the minds of the public.

## **CONCLUSION/FUTURE RESEARCH**

In their pursuit of the best story, the media focused heavily on crime in the coverage, and combined it with simplification, where stereotypical images and roles of blacks were selected to ensure that the viewer could understand the stories quickly. Hurricane Katrina was a very unique situation for the media, as it cut reporters off from most of the communication technologies used every day in normal reporting. As the reporters got cut off from their normal procedures, they turned to rumors and unsubstantiated stories and presented them as facts. The stories of sniper shootings, rapes of women and children and hundreds of stories about murders filled the news coverage after Katrina's landfall. While some of the inaccuracies of the coverage was due to officials repeating them, and to the pace which covering catastrophes must have in order to keep up with events, the media also turned to racial stereotyping and to its usual patterns of covering blacks. They filled the blanks in their information by generalizing and stereotyping the victims of the city. The wild rumors of an out of control city, hit by a crime wave of extreme dimensions, had a clear racial and stereotypical aspect as white crime often was ignored and as the credibility of these rumors came from stereotyping of blacks as criminals (Bacon 2005).

The race and class of Katrina's victims were rarely discussed explicitly in the coverage, but was communicated through usage of implicit racialization. Through implicit demonstrations of the race and class of Katrina's victims via photos and television images, an identity of the typical Katrina victim was created as a person who was black and poor. Because the media was reluctant to try and explain *why* that was, the consequence was stereotyping of black and poor victims as the stereotypical "irresponsible" poor black. The media did not explain that victims were predominantly blacks mostly because they were stuck in the city as they had no means of leaving. They were instead described as



irresponsible for not evacuating, as selfish due to the consequential expensive rescue efforts, and as criminals, who were looting, raping and killing. This was fitting with existing stereotype of blacks as criminals, and as the irresponsibly and undeserving poor (Davis and French 2008:249). Blacks were shown in limited, negative roles as passive victims and criminals, which were contrasted by representations of whites as helpers, rescuers, experts and stereotypical white determined victims and rarely as criminals. Media coverage of blacks during Katrina was consistent with racial stereotyping and usual patterns of coverage of the black and the poor. The media represented blacks as criminal and passive victims, as well as irresponsible and undeserving victims, which is consistent with portrayals of the black poor in media coverage before Katrina (Kahle et. Al. 2007:76).

Othering of New Orleans' black population was created through the stereotypical portrayals and through different descriptions of the survivors of Katrina. Othering was created as the victims of Katrina were referred to as refugees, which implies people fleeing their homes in times of war and conflicts and seeking refuge in a foreign country. Refugee was used mostly in stories describing the black victims of Katrina, which demonstrates a racial implication of the use of the word. New Orleans was also compared to the Third World, which contributed to this Othering as the disaster was almost described as going on in what could be a foreign country. Katrina came to be described as a foreign disaster, which was further underlined by war-rhetoric describing the National Guard as entering New Orleans to take back the city by force, similar to descriptions of a foreign country being invaded

In sum, blacks were described as the stereotypical black criminal and as the stereotypical black irresponsible poor. They were shown in limited, negative roles as passive victims and criminals and rarely in positive roles as helpers, experts, officials and rescuers. This was contrasted by whites being portrayed in positive roles as rescuers, experts, helpers and stereotypical white determined victims. Whites were rarely portrayed as criminals in the coverage, leaving an overall impression of the black poor of New Orleans as confirming the stereotypes of blacks as anti-social criminals and passive victims. The lack of

positive portrayals contributed to underlining the negative stereotypes of blacks, as there were very few positive portrayals to counter out the negative portrayals.

Future research: After Katrina, every state in the US received victims from New Orleans, and many residents have never returned. It would be interesting to explore if the media coverage of the black victims had an impact on how they were received in their new states and cities. Did the stereotype-based coverage develop into prejudice in the media's audience, who now had to share communities with hundreds or thousands of people whom they had just witnessed being portrayed as dangerous criminals? Because Katrina's victims had an immediate direct contact with the audience looking at the coverage, it is a unique opportunity to look at how media coverage might have shaped attitudes towards the black victims of Katrina arriving in large numbers to different neighborhoods, and it would be interesting to examine how they were received and treated and if the media's portrayals of blacks during Katrina might have had an impact on this.

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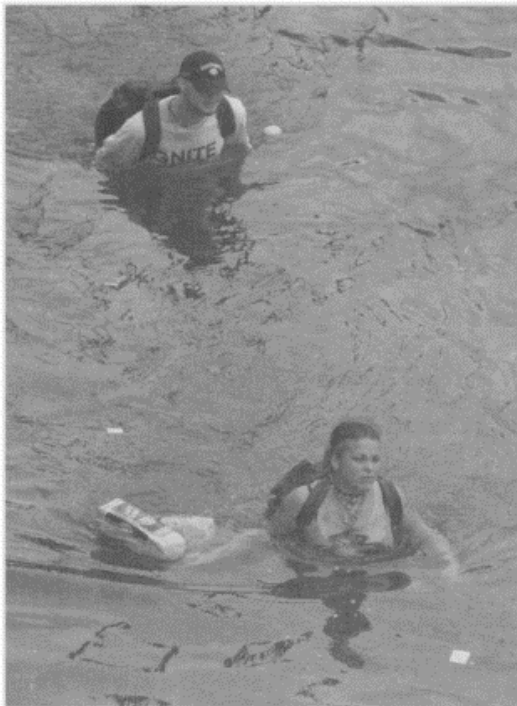
## Appendices

## Appendix 1:



**Image A** Copyright Associated Press, 2005

A young man walks through chest deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans on Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2005. Flood waters continue to rise in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage when it made landfall on Monday. (AP Photo/Dave Martin)



Chris Graythen / Getty Images

**Image B**

Copyright Getty Images, 2005

NEW ORLEANS - AUGUST 29: Two residents wade through chest deep water after finding bread and soda from a local grocery store after Hurricane Katrina came through the area on August 29, 2005 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Katrina was down graded to a category 4 storm as it approached New Orleans. (Photo by Chris Graythen/Getty Images)

*The man is white, while the woman's race appears more ambivalent. No official race has been determined from either the photographer or from anyone who could recognize her. She is most likely white, but possibly Hispanic (Harris 2006:929).*