The University of Southern Mississippi

RADIO'S ROLE DURING HURRICANE KATRINA: A CASE STUDY OF WWL RADIO AND UNITED RADIO BROADCASTERS OF NEW ORLEANS

by

Reginald Ford Moody

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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In the days following Hurricane Katrina's devastating landfall, a committed, devoted and enthusiastic merger of men and women broadcasters helped New Orleans and surrounding areas recover from the assault of Hurricane Katrina. Collectively known as the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans, this group of broadcasters from Clear Channel Radio, the nation's largest broadcaster, and Entercom, the nation's fourth, worked against great odds to broadcast news and information to an audience that had lost just about everything, except hope. This study asked three main categories of questions dealing with the operation of the network, the cooperation between its members, and the evaluation of the effort.

After operating piecemeal for about a day or two, WWL and its five sister stations combined forces with cross town rival Clear Channel Radio, owner of six FMs in the New Orleans market, in a studio 80 miles away from New Orleans. What started out as a general feeling of camaraderie eventually led to member interpersonal conflict. As tensions mounted and conflict began to emerge, the development of two cultural fronts led to strained relationships between Clear Channel and Entercom. On the first front, two completely different radio cultures had come together—Clear Channel's entertainment culture and WWL's news culture. The strains of mass producing news during a time of

disaster and catastrophe created an emotional fragility among all staffers, often leading to personality differences and threats to self-esteem. The United Broadcasters of New Orleans may have, in reality, reflected the racial divide within its member ranks similar to that Hurricane Katrina brought out in New Orleans.

United proved that radio is still vital, especially in times of disaster and catastrophe; that radio, on the local level, and as a collaborative effort among other broadcast outlets, may be the one distinct factor that keeps the public tuned in to the medium, thus keeping it meaningful in the arsenal of other media, particularly the new media.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"During Hurricane Katrina, it was old-fashioned radio, not newfangled insta-media that served as a lifeline for people battered by the storm. In the dark chaos of the Louisiana Superdome, or the lonely quiet of their homes, people along the Gulf Coast huddled around battery-operated devices, seeking comfort and news from the on-air voices."
-Newsweek, September 21, 2005

Hurricane Katrina was the first Category 5 hurricane of the 2005 Atlantic Hurricane season, with winds exceeding 150 miles per hour. The storm formed over the Bahamas on August 23, 2005, and crossed southern Florida at Category 1 intensity before strengthening rapidly in the Gulf of Mexico, becoming the strongest hurricane ever recorded in the Gulf. Luckily, for people along the Gulf Coast, Katrina grew weaker before making its second landfall as a large Category 3 storm on the morning of August 29 along the Central Gulf Coast near Buras-Triumph, Louisiana. To the east and west, hurricane winds lashed away at Gulf Coast communities, some as far as 200 miles away from the storm's center. Some cities were wiped clean. New Orleans, although not a direct hit, found itself under water for days.

Before Katrina made its landfall, up to 1.2 million Louisiana residents evacuated their homes and took to the already crowded highways and interstates. Others in New Orleans, especially those without vehicles or financial resources to evacuate, did not. Many refused to seek shelter, choosing instead to stay in their homes. They were worried about their homes and possessions. Some worried about their pets. Some simply decided to challenge the storm's assault like they had done so many times before.

The effect of Katrina was cataclysmic. It is estimated that the storm caused over $75 billion in damages, making it the costliest hurricane in United States history. As of July 2006, more than 1,500 people had been killed as a result of the hurricane; some lost to the sea and some to the swamps of Louisiana (Times-Picayune, 2/16/06).

In New Orleans alone, almost 80 percent of the city was flooded, with some sections under 20 feet of water. Hundreds of people in the city's low-lying neighborhoods were forced to seek shelter inside attics and, as some of the city's 9th Ward residents were made to do, scramble to their rooftops in hopes of rescue. Most residents in the 9th ward were impoverished and had no money for transportation out of the city. Just the same, many would have refused to leave anyway because they had weathered hurricanes before and didn't think Katrina would be the bad storm everyone said she would be. Yet, within hours of the storm's landfall, emergency 911 operators were frantically answering thousands upon thousands of desperate calls for rescue in that community (Nagin, 2006). When rescuers finally reached the 9th ward, they found bodies floating in the streets and people on rooftops, begging for help.

When Hurricane Katrina passed that Monday morning, some residents of New Orleans, including police officers, began looting stores in their neighborhoods. Many were in search of food and water, though a great number stole non-essential items, like TV's and toys. Hardest hit were stores that sold drugs, clothing and jewelry in the French Quarter and in other areas of downtown New Orleans (Drew & Dwyer, 2005).

Reports of carjackings, murders, thefts, and rapes mostly proved false. They were mostly rumors made up by frustrated victims, public officials included (Thevenot & Gordon, 2005). For example, Eddie Compass, the superintendent of New Orleans police,

told television talk-show hostess Oprah Winfrey on September 6, 2005, that "babies were raped at the Superdome." New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin made matters worse, telling Winfrey that "crowds at the Superdome had watched murder and mayhem." Nagin offered what he considered as fact: "They have people standing out there...have been in that frickin' Superdome for five days watching dead bodies...watching hooligans killing people, raping people" (Harper, 2005). The media, too, reported its share of misinformation, stating that bodies were being piled up in a cooler in the city's convention center. These stories and others proved to be incorrect (Dwyer & Drew, 2005). In retrospect, media analysts would say that conditions in New Orleans were chaotic and that reporters relied on patchy accounts, collected from often unverifiable sources. "The fog of war and the gusts of a hurricane both cloud and obscure vital truths," said Matthew Felling of the Center for Media and Public Affairs (Harper, 2005). But, the Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, U.S. House of Representatives, issued by the House in February 2006, determined that "poor situational awareness and its resulting effect on command and control contributed to the negative effects of inaccurate media reports because public officials lacked access to the facts to address media reports" (Final Report, 2006). First responders said mistaken or overstated reporting of conditions in New Orleans created anxiety and fear, delayed some critical elements of the response effort, and discouraged some residents in dry neighborhoods from evacuating the city (Thevenot & Russell, 2005).

Without a doubt, circumstances in New Orleans were hectic and confusing. Thousands of residents had little food and water, and had lost so much. National media

focused on children who had lost their parents. There were stories about older victims who were without their medicine and someone to care for them. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Taffany Smith, 25, of the conditions in a shelter of last resort, the Superdome: "We pee on the floor. We are like animals" (Gold, 2005). The Superdome, where Taffany stayed that night, lost part of its roof, but, by chance, none of the 10,000-plus people in the dome were injured. When emergency generators kicked in to provide light to the arena, the backup was not enough to run the building's air conditioning system.

Katrina's high winds and subsequent flooding caused what the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) called "extraordinary destruction of communications facilities" (FCC, 2005). Almost 3 million telephone lines were knocked down, thirty-eight 911-call centers were put out of action, more than 1,000 cell towers were left useless and most TV stations, radio stations and cable systems were wiped out. Without these communications systems it became enormously difficult for victims to get emergency information or to communicate with family and friends. Not having communication wherewithal also crippled the ability of government officials and first responders to do their jobs (Lieberman, 2006). For example, emergency workers in New Orleans and three bordering parishes could not communicate with one another because they were using different kinds of radios, with different sets of frequencies (CBS Special Report, 2005).

Hurricane Katrina will be known as the storm that brought a famous American city to its knees. Next to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, it was the "spectacle of a complex, technologically dependent, civilized society totally breaking down before your eyes," said Robert Thompson, a media and popular-culture professor at

Syracuse University (Carpenter, 2005). Matthew Felling, media director at the Washington, D.C. - based Center for Media and Public Affairs, contended that misery loves company, and makes for compelling television. "Disaster coverage feeds a demographic of grief junkies," said Felling, "who are tapping away at the remote control like a rat tapping for crack pellets" (Carpenter, 2005).

Katrina was also a storm in which the government's attempt to better its response to catastrophic disasters failed; a story where, at all levels, government's response to calamity was fraught with confusion and uncertainty, widespread lack of coordination and communication failures (Berger, Campbell & Duncan, 2005). Criticism of government response to Hurricane Katrina primarily consisted of attacks on mismanagement and the lack of leadership in response to the storm, specifically in the belated response to the flooding of New Orleans. New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin was criticized for instructing residents to go to a shelter of last resort, one that did not have any provisions for food, water, security or sanitary conditions. Perhaps the biggest condemnation of Nagin was that he waited to give a mandatory evacuation order until 15 hours before landfall, possibly causing the deaths of many people who could not find any way out of the city.

After Hurricane Katrina made landfall, modern modes of communication stopped functioning in New Orleans, yet one technology stayed afloat, and that was radio. From a small studio in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a crew of personalities from 15 New Orleans radio stations---sportscasters, rock jocks, Christian broadcasters, soft rock and smooth-talk R&B talent---all assembled to broadcast the latest news and information on Hurricane Katrina. Collectively, they called themselves the United Broadcasters of New

Orleans, and "for the millions of people without electricity, the network proved to be their only source of information," wrote *Wall Street Journal* reporter, Sarah McBride (McBride, 2005). Led by WWL AM Radio, a 50,000 watt all news radio station in New Orleans, the United Broadcasters of New Orleans devoted manpower, resources and unlimited fiscal resources to give the news New Orleans and the surrounding community needed, for as long as possible and for as many people as possible. Gathering the news and coordinating on-air coverage was provided by WWL's news staff, with the assistance of other reporters in the network. WWL news director Dave Cohen positioned his cluster of reporters in New Orleans and his on-air talent, primarily talk show hosts, in Baton Rouge. During it all, WWL Radio and the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans became the lifeline to thousands of listeners in those first two weeks after Katrina roared onshore, and the many days afterwards. It was by turning to WWL radio and the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans that victims could listen and discuss how the storm impacted them, their families and their neighborhoods. Continuous coverage included call-in reports or messages from listeners, street reports from the news staff, and statements from public officials who were eager to utilize a communication system that worked when their systems did not. New Orleans stations on the network included KFXN-FM, WRNO-FM, WODT-FM and AM, WQUE-FM, WNOE-FM, WYLD-AM, WSKL, WWL-AM, WSMB-AM, WTKL-FM, WKBU-FM, WLMG-FM, WEZB-FM, and 1470 KLCL in Lake Charles and 1290 KJEF in Jennings, Louisiana.

Study Focus

WWL Radio and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans were the keystone of hurricane coverage in New Orleans and the surrounding area. As partners, the stations

provided a way to make sense of a very demanding and complex time in people's lives, and in doing so, created a radio neighborhood of hope.

This dissertation examines the role WWL Radio and the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans played during the real life drama of Hurricane Katrina. It is a description and analysis of the network's broadcast role in the context of this environment. How did this coalition of radio stations come about? How were they able to create a makeshift radio network overnight? How did each weather the strains of working with its competitor? How did their hurricane coverage fare against other media, particularly the "new media?" What does all of this say about the viability of radio and its place in today's media picture? Finally, what policy recommendations are in order?

Study Rationale

Scholars have produced numerous studies about mass media during times of catastrophe and emergency. Likewise, a number of scholarly works have dealt with radio's role, specifically the effect radio has during times of catastrophe. Yet, few have dealt explicitly with emergency collaborations between competing in-market radio stations, as was witnessed in the cooperation between radio conglomerates Clear Channel and Entercom. Hence, this dissertation attempts to fill this gap in research knowledge by conducting an exploratory analysis of this alliance and the role it played in the midst of a major American hurricane.

Even still, as we consider a future in which many new communication technologies are becoming available to people, one must recognize that traditional radio's viability as a useful medium is being doubted. New media---the Internet, satellite broadcasting and technologies yet to come---will indisputably shape radio's place in the

media order. However, radio's potential to instantaneously cover disasters and catastrophes, such as hurricanes, and do it on the local level, and as a collaborative effort among other broadcast outlets, may be the one distinct factor that keeps the public tuned in to the medium, thus keeping it meaningful in the arsenal of other media.

It is hoped that this study will help the radio industry consider new ways to pool resources, hence providing enhanced services to audiences in time of need. It is further hoped that first responders in disaster---police, firemen, medical and government officials---will embrace this model and make a greater effort to integrate their hard work with the collective effort of media.

Research Questions

This study asked three main categories of questions dealing with the operation of the network, the cooperation between its members, and the evaluation of the effort.

Questions involving the operation of the network included: How did WWL and the United Radio Broadcasters in New Orleans come about? How did they go about doing their jobs before, during and after Hurricane Katrina? How were they able to create a makeshift radio network in a matter of hours?

Questions relating to cooperation included: How was each station of the network able to overcome logistical and competitive hurdles? How did each station weather the strains of working with its competitor?

Questions involving evaluation included: How did the network's coverage compare with other media, particularly the "new media?" What differentiated coverage by WWL Radio and the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans from other traditional media, such as TV and newspapers? How was the network perceived by other

media, more specifically, national media covering the disaster and recovery from afar? What do the efforts of WWL Radio and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans say about radio and its place in today's media society? Finally, what policy recommendations does this analysis suggest?

Literature Review

Perhaps the most telling of accounts of Hurricane Katrina can be found in four books released shortly after the storm. One was entitled *The Great Deluge*, by Tulane professor, Douglas Brinkley, released in May, 2006. The second, released a few months later, was *Breach of Faith*, written by New Orleans Times-Picayune writer Jed Horne. The third was *The Storm: What Went Wrong and Why During Hurricane Katrina--the Inside Story from One Louisiana Scientist*, by Ivor van Heerden and Mike Bryan. The fourth was *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* by Michael Eric Dyson.

Hurricane Katrina was an "avoidable catastrophe, more the fault of man than of nature," wrote Doug Brinkley in *The Great Deluge,* adding "those responsible must be held to account." According to Brinkley, city administrators did not do any significant hurricane planning, even though they had been warned by officials who were knowledgeable about hurricanes. The White House seemed detached from the problem, therefore slow in its response. President Bush's post-Katrina speeches, said Brinkley, had "all the pathos of reading from a phone book." According to Brinkley, Bush may have lost credibility when he proclaimed that Michael Brown, the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), was doing a "heck of a job," when everyone could see that Brown was not. "By all accounts," said Brinkley, "Michael Brown was an

unlikely head of an emergency organization like FEMA. It's been said that under his leadership, FEMA lost the 'M' for Management." Even Michael Chertoff, secretary for homeland security, seemed uninformed of what was really happening in New Orleans, said Brinkley. "Clearly Chertoff didn't just make a mistake during the first days of Katrina---he did virtually nothing at all, which was by far the greater sin," he said. "When CNN, Fox News, ABC News, and the rest started reporting the horrific flooding in New Orleans due to the levee breaks, Chertoff scoffed, dismissing media reports of human suffering as melodrama." According to Brinkley, Chertoff's failure to get involved cost lives.

Brinkley painted New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin as a coward, someone who liked to "flaunt and parade before the media." Nagin squandered away what Brinkley called a "bullhorn moment" to rejuvenate his political career by not meeting directly with people who were affected by the storm, and offering them support and understanding. According to Brinkley, Nagin "feared that if he mounted a soapbox at the Superdome, he'd get shot, lynched, or bloodied up. He made the costly mistake of viewing the displaced persons as malcontents. He had squandered the golden moment, putting his own personal safety ahead of those poor and elderly in trouble."

Brinkley credited Louisiana governor Kathleen Blanco for her take-charge approach. However, he criticized her for being unclear about what she needed from the federal government in terms of relief and rescue immediately before and after the storm. Also, her lack of "media savvy tended to be a serious Achilles heel," said Brinkley. A perception grew nationally that the Louisiana governor was a hack. She had never

explained to the press properly that her 200 Wildlife and Fisheries boats were in the high-rescue mode, and another 200 were on the way to the flood zone."

Before the Gulf South can heal, said Brinkley, it needs time to nurse itself back to health. "While entrepreneurial zeal is the rightful engine of the rebuilding, the Gulf South needs to take a breath, to pause, and to remember what transpired on August 29, 2005---the day it was so gravely wounded. Only by remembering, and holding city, state, and federal government officials responsible for their actions, can a true Gulf South rebuild and commence in the appropriate fashion," he added.

The basic argument in Jed Horne's *Breach of Faith* was that Katrina was a disaster made by man. Horne's book is a well-argued, convincing accusation of local, state and federal government's irresponsible response before and after Hurricane Katrina. This was seen clearly in the stories he gleamed from victims of the storm who fled the city, and from those who did not. "FEMA's failings, most of them reflecting simple ineptitude in the art of mustering available resources, were extravagant, outrageous - one wanted to say fabulous, except that they were also deadly," Horne wrote. The author saw dysfunctional bureaucracy and racism as the key to the Katrina disaster. From the start, government officials were quick to point fingers at one another, refusing to take the blame for a botched response to the storm. It was this brazen politicization that over shadowed the relief and rescue efforts, said Horne. "Katrina was a test of [President] Bush's faith in smaller government and his fixation on foreign terror, and rarely does history grade a presidency so quickly or so harshly," Horne wrote. "Because if Homeland Security, and its stepchild, FEMA, was what stood between America and the next 9/11, then as New Orleans learned the hard way, America was in trouble."

Horne contended that the levees surrounding New Orleans were badly designed and poorly maintained by a multitude of levee districts that failed to work together, and that President Bush seemed unaware of how bad things were along the Gulf Coast. New Orleans Mayor Ray C. Nagin, said Horne, showed how inept he was in handling the crisis in his own city.

Horne's book provided a much more elaborate account of what really went on in two public shelters that became an embarrassment for the city's mayor---the Louisiana Superdome and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. Both facilities were not prepared adequately as shelters, and people housed there were, for all practical purposes, forgotten and abandoned once the flooding began. Horne, like Brinkley, was disapproving of George Bush, Michael Brown and Michael Chertoff. He contended that hurricane planning was no one's main concern in New Orleans. The city had escaped numerous scrapes with storms since the 1960s. Why worry now? Horne's book documented the "finger pointing" that goes on between public officials. It's this kind of blame game that hampered the rebuilding.

The Storm, by Ivor Van Heerden, was a important, scientific explanation of what happened in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina struck, and what happened (or what should have happened) years before the disaster occurred. Van Heerden, the South African deputy director of the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center, held the Army Corps of Engineers responsible for the flooding of New Orleans. The corps, he said, failed short of maintaining the levees in New Orleans. When warned that the structures would not fare well in a storm like Katrina, the corps simply shrugged off the dangers and did nothing. So did other politicians and area residents who had seen storms

come and go, and tended to have an attitude of "live for today." Van Heerden was outraged when his ideas about recovering from a hurricane were turned down by the federal government at least one year before Katrina. According to Van Heerden, Katrina was both a natural disaster and a total failure by the nation to respond. As the "natural disaster story evolved into the national disgrace story, the reporters lost patience with the politicians and bureaucrats who spent the first five minutes of each press conference thanking all the other politicians and bureaucrats arrayed left and right for their great work." The reporters, said Van Heerden, welcomed him as an official who was willing to "state bluntly that some of those officials had failed in their responsibilities, that assorted government agencies had ignored years of excellent science, failed to heed warning after warning, failed to plan for the disaster, failed to act when it did happen, and, if the past is indeed prologue, would probably now fail to rebuild New Orleans properly and assure it safety from another catastrophe." FEMA, in particularly, said Van Heerden, "is not capable of handling a complex catastrophe.....without a radically revised attitude on the part of this and all subsequent administrations in Washington, we are doomed to repeat this debacle in southeast Louisiana, or somewhere else, or both."

Michael Eric Dyson's *Come Hell or High Water,* the first major book to be released about Hurricane Katrina, seemed to be more opinion and analysis than factual reporting. Like others, Dyson described the storm from a few days before landfall to the days following the storm, when the relief and rescue efforts were lacking. Dyson's argument contended that the nation's inability to offer aid and do it quickly hinted at deeper problems—those of race and class bias. Quite clearly, Dyson's argument that Katrina uncovered a major culture with hatred toward poor blacks and, lack of sympathy

to their problems, will be fodder for editorialists and talk show hosts for years. Dyson blamed the federal and local governments for cutting off blacks and the poor from respectable housing, economic and educational chances. Dyson also attacked the news media, blaming them for the "stereotypical images they perpetuated of blacks as being looters and rapists." Dyson's message was that America had broken its word to take care of deprived blacks.

Disasters as Media Events

The mass media and the electronic media, TV and radio in particular, are the most important sources from which the community obtains information on disasters (Wenger, Dyke, Sebok, Thomas, & Neff, 1980).

During a crisis, members of the electronic media are hungry for information, often devoting hours of nonstop programming to disaster coverage (Scanlon, Alldred, Farrell, & Prawzick, 1985). Because news attracts rather large audiences, creative and attention-getting techniques are introduced to help expand and maintain these audiences (Larson, 1980). News editors expect reporters to find stories that contain drama, conflict and suspense. Television, for example, "frames" stories for their visual impact, using attention-getting editing methods to heighten interest. They may accentuate elements of a story primarily for their visual integrity (Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 2003). A disaster's level of newsworthiness is based on the disaster's impact, such as the number of deaths and injuries, and the amount of property damage resulting from the disaster (Larson, 1980).

Because the media are one of the most important sources of disaster information, they can significantly influence or shape how the population and the government view,

perceive, and respond to hazards and disasters (Fisher, 1994). For instance, the opinions or views of individuals or groups who are perceived by the general population to be "experts," such as the media, play a central or defining role in the construction of risk. As Widalsky (1979) stated, "The perception of risk is reflected by the media's coverage of these events."

All is not "rosy" between news media and emergency personnel---first responders---during times of disaster. The first-responder community is a diverse group that includes police, firefighters, search and rescue teams, emergency medical personnel, public safety and construction workers, sanitation and communication experts and engineers. At times emergency managers express irritation with the media when a disaster strikes. They believe the media make matters worse by constantly pressuring officials for information, creating a distraction that lessens the amount of time first responder's can spend on other pressing matters, like search and rescue (Wenger, 1985).

The entertainment demands of news broadcasts spotlight the drama and conflict of disasters, but, more often than not, focus more attention on elements not typical of the situation at hand (Larson, 1980). In other words, media obsession with the dramatic aspects of the story overstates the true scale of disasters (Wenger, 1985). Fisher (1994) points out that "if most Americans rely on the various forms of mass media to obtain their information about what occurs before, during, and after a disaster, then it stands to reason that the accuracy of their perception is dependent upon the media." However, Fischer argues that a "less than accurate image is still frequently depicted in both print and broadcast media." This fact is echoed by Joseph Scanlon (1977) who agrees that, although the media play a key role in many aspects of crisis and disasters, they are also

responsible for many of the misconceptions that exist about disaster, misconceptions that may lead to errors of judgment when disaster strikes. Other studies agree with the media's tendency to report inaccurate, biased, and exaggerated information. An example is the media's tendency to concentrate more on death and devastation (Wenger, 1980). Entman (1993) pointed out that "journalists may follow the rules for objective reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the news that prevents most audience members from making a balanced assessment of a situation." In other words, disasters can be framed by news organizations in ways that can be deceptive and particularly oversimplified. The media can communicate untrue information about the extent and even the location of disaster damage, he said. For example, New Orleans received national news coverage which conveyed or implied it to be the hardest hit of all coastal areas. Yet, communities in nearby Mississippi received equal or greater damage. Obviously, New Orleans represented a bigger story because of the city's population and the effects of flooding that affected a huge number of poverty-stricken residents.

In defense of media, however, it should be said that the inaccuracy of news reports cannot be attributed to the media alone. There are questions about the extent to which the media bring in distortion and to what extent they are simply reactive disseminators of inaccurate information made available by official informants (Kreps, 1980).

On the other side of the coin, the media can also be vital in putting down rumors. When a severe windstorm hit Nova Scotia, there was a rumor that the ferry between North Sydney and Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, had sunk. The rumor stopped when the mayor sent a reporter from the one radio station still on the air to interview the ferry

captain at the docks. The captain said that the voyage had been a rough one but his ship was okay (Scanlon, 1977).

During natural disasters, radio stations often become players or participants in the tragedy in an effort to bring order back to the community (Singer & Green, 1972). Participants in a study by Hindman and Coyle (1999) In that study participants saw local radio's role in covering the April 1997 Red River Valley floods as being central in helping the community to come together, and in helping respondents to be informed about communities and neighborhoods affected. Respondents in the study recognized radio's information role, but also acknowledged radio's ability to foster community cohesion and solidarity. In other words, local radio helped respondents feel more linked with their communities, with local representatives, local mass media and other people in the community (Hindman & Coyle, 1999).

Radio's advantages over other media include its capacity to make news available to an audience as it is happening, or shortly after it has happened, giving radio an early advantage over other media (Singer & Green, 1972). At times, especially in the early moments of a disaster, when electrical power is out, radio may be the only available medium to retrieve information for people who have battery-operated radio sets. Because of these advantages, radio acts as a "command post" for public officials enabling them to transmit timely and critical information.

Emerging technology has played and continues to plays a major role in disaster communication. These new innovations, including satellites, the Internet, e-mail, cell phones, text messaging, PDA's and other handheld electronic devices, have changed the ways people connect to news and information. For example, the Internet has become a

major source for weather information. At any given time, citizens can surf *The Weather Channel* in the United States to find out the latest in specific weather.

Before radio, there was no other media that could provide instant and usable information, and expose that information to millions at the same time. Radio pioneer David Sarnoff was the first to propose the "radio music box," or a commercially marketed radio receiver. Sarnoff envisioned that radio would become a popular mass medium, and manufacturers would sell millions of the sets to individuals who wanted to be entertained and informed. Within three years of Sarnoff's prediction, RCA sold more than $80 million worth of receiving sets. The "radio music box" personalized events, made events more intimate and relevant. Radio involved listeners emotionally and brought them together like never before. During the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, radio revolutionized communications the world over.

Radio was a medium for reaching millions of people, all at the same time, anywhere. Radio knew no geographic borders. The medium symbolized "as powerful an assault upon sectional and parochial mentalities as any single force in American history," stated J. Fred MacDonald in *Don't Touch that Dial: Radio Programming in American life, 1920-1960* (1979). Edward D. Miller (2003), in *Emergency Broadcasting and 1930s American Radio* wrote: "The promise of radio was that national solidarity could be achieved, connecting the Iowa farmer with the New York immigrant, educating all in the proper ways to be American. Radio could provide contact with the outside world while bringing the listener to a safe home."

In the early days, radio programs were broadcast live, and consisted of a mixture of religious sermons, musical performances, news, election returns, or play-by-play

sporting events. Radio networks connected stations all across the nation with noteworthy and entertaining radio programming. One notable network show was the *CBS World News Roundup*, heard at the end of each workday. *The CBS World News Roundup* began on March 13, 1938, when war in Europe was raging. The initial broadcast was hosted by veteran newscaster Robert Trout, who broadcast over shortwave with reports from Paris, Berlin, Rome, London and Vienna. Edward R. Murrow's reports from London and William L. Shirer's reports from Berlin became required listening for Americans who were disturbed about what was taking place overseas (Radio Hall of Fame, 2006). It was during this time that United States President Franklin Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats" made for memorable radio moments between the president and millions of Americans scattered in the cities and rural areas. J. Fred MacDonald in *Don't Touch that Dial: Radio Programming in American life, 1920-1960* (1979) wrote: "It was often called a 'theater of the mind' because broadcasting, as an audio-only medium, was fully realized only in the mind of the listener. Each person in the audience created a mental picture of Roosevelt as being friendly and sincere. It was like they were chatting with him in front of the fireplace. Roosevelt's voice was pleasant, assuring, and trusting during a time of uncertainty and war."

One of the first examples of disaster reporting on radio was WLS radio announcer Herb Morrison's eyewitness account of the explosion of the Hindenburg airship, a German zeppelin destroyed by fire while landing at Lakehurst Naval Air Station in New Jersey on May 6, 1937. A total of 36 people died in the accident. What was expected to be a historic landing of the Hindenburg that day instead became a fiery catastrophe.

Coverage of the Hindenburg disaster became a historical note in radio broadcasting (Miller, 2003).

What became known as the "golden age of radio" lasted from the 1930s until just after World War II, when television began to challenge radio's place in mass communication. During this period, radio presented the nation's best in entertainment. One show that established the magic of broadcast radio was the 1938 Halloween night broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*. On that night, six million people listened to the adaptation of H.G. Well's novel, and many were convinced that Martians were invading the Earth (Rubin, 1998).

Radio today continues to be a prime source of entertainment and information, especially during times of disaster and catastrophe. Radio is still a personal medium; people often listen alone, in their cars or in a private room. Radio reaches more than 94 percent of the United States' population each week, ages 12 and up (ARB, 2005). On average, Americans spend almost 20 hours per week listening to their favorite station (Arbitron: *Radio Today*, 2005 edition).

In 2004, there were a total of 13,838 radio stations across the USA (Arbitron: *Radio Today*, 2005 edition). In the United States, there are 675 million radio receivers in use, between two and three for every man, woman and child. Radios are also the most portable electronic medium, which may explain the very reason more people than ever turn to radio during times of disaster and catastrophe.

Method of Study

This case study used qualitative methods in its analysis of WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans. Qualitative techniques focus more on the interpretation of observations, discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships.

One qualitative tool used in this study was field research. Field research provides a useful balance against the strengths and weaknesses of experiments and surveys, because it is the most "natural" social research technique (Babbie, 2002). However, field research involves many implicit assumptions, and subjective observations and analyses, which are wide open to error, according to Babbie.

This case study focused on the characteristics, circumstances, and complexity of a single case. Case studies involve a particular method of research. Rather than using large samples and following a rigid protocol to examine a limited number of variables, case study methods involve an in-depth examination of a single instance or event: a case. They provide a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results. A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion. Yin (1993) considered case methodology "microscopic" because it lacked a sufficient number of cases. However, Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) argued that the relative size of the sample, whether 2, 10, or 100 cases are used, does not change a multiple case into a microscopic study. Consequently, this study is viewed by the research as being valued in its own right, and while its findings can raise consciousness of general issues, the aim is not to generalize the findings to other cases. Additionally, reliability and validity do not apply very well to qualitative research simply because the way people use

radio and other media may change tomorrow relative to their use during catastrophes and disasters.

Data Procurement

Data for this study was acquired in the following manner: (1) Information relating to the specifics of Hurricane Katrina, such as preparation and impact, first responder command and control, search and rescue efforts, and communications breakdown, was obtained from local and national mainstream media accounts and personal testimony given by first responders during congressional hearings conducted after the storm. (2) Information pertaining to the start-up and maintenance of WWL Radio and the United Broadcasters Radio Network was obtained from local and national mainstream media accounts, in addition to oral interviews conducted with Entercom and Clear Channel executives, radio program managers, news directors, news anchors, field reporters, and network personalities within the Entercom and Clear Channel radio partnership.

CHAPTER II

NEW ORLEANS BROUGHT TO ITS KNEES

"Generations of New Orleanians worked for 300 years to raise a great city in the often inhospitable terrain along the banks of the Mississippi River. It took Hurricane Katrina less than six hours to put that labor of love under water, damaging 200,000 homes and killing more than 1,200 people."

Bob Marshall
New Orleans *Times-Picayune*
Sunday, May 14, 2006

New Orleans is a "melting pot" of French, Spanish and African American influences. Some historians have called this southern town the birthplace of the blues (Cosper, 2005). The city is renowned for its cuisine and for its many tourist attractions, like the French Quarter and the Mississippi Paddlewheel boats. The city is celebrated world-wide for its many festivals and celebrations, including Mardi Gras, the Jazz Fest, the Voodoo Fest, and college football's Sugar Bowl.

Who would have imagined that New Orleans, a southern jewel that took 300 years to create, would one day be destroyed in six hours on the morning of August 29, 2005? On that morning, New Orleans was brought to its knees by one of the meanest and most unforgiving storms of the century—Hurricane Katrina.

On Saturday, August 27, 2005, at about 7:30 a.m., Warren J. Riley, Superintendent of the New Orleans Police Department, received a call from the Director of Homeland Security and Public Safety for the City of New Orleans, Colonel Terry Ebbert. Ebbert told Riley to meet him at City Hall as quickly as possible. When Riley arrived, he was met by Ebbert, Deputy Superintendent Steven Nicholas, the Assistant Chief for the Technical and Support Bureau, and Police Superintendent Edwin (Eddie)

Compass. Riley was told that Hurricane Katrina would impact New Orleans in a drastic way (Riley, 2006). After a brief conversation with Colonel Ebbert, Police Superintendent Compass gathered his commanders and assistant commanders of each division and major units within the New Orleans Police Department and advised them that Hurricane Katrina would trigger considerable wind damage and probable street flooding (Riley, 2006).

A day before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin announced a mandatory evacuation order that some say was too late. Police officers rode through all communities, with lights and sirens, and announced over loud speakers "you must evacuate...you must leave New Orleans" (Houser & Lueck, 2005).

The Storm Makes Landfall

When winds reached 50 mph, officers were told to "relocate to their pre-staged locations to weather the storm" (Riley, 2006). Strong storm winds began to roll in about 5:30 Monday morning, the morning of landfall. At approximately 7 a.m., Katrina made landfall in Plaquemines Parish, further to the south, slicing and tearing its way through the quagmire of marshes, swamps, and wetlands; demolishing homes, hurling boats onto streets, ripping apart levee systems built to protect the area from floods. Two hours later, the effects of Katrina reached Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard and St. Tammany parishes. Trees fell and snapped. Buildings, large and tall, fell in pieces. Gas, phone, and electric utilities, including 911 emergency phone services, were knocked out of operation. Entire parishes were left with no landline or cellular phone service, or computer or radio communications, making it hopeless to communicate. Katrina's counter-clockwise winds brought a gigantic storm surge from the Gulf of Mexico directly into Lake Pontchartrain, creating tremendous pressure under the Interstate 10 twin span bridges between New

Orleans and Slidell, knocking hundreds of 300-ton concrete bridge supports out of position, or off their supports; some were partially submerged in the lake; some fell to the bottom.

Dr. Max Mayfeld, Director of the National Hurricane Center, testified a few days later before the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, U.S. House of Representatives, about how the devastation along the Gulf Coast from Hurricane Katrina was like nothing he had ever witnessed before. "It was catastrophic...words cannot convey the physical destruction and personal suffering in that part of the nation" (Mayfeld, 2005).

Just as New Orleans thought it had escaped the worst of Katrina, word got back to Riley that a number of levees had breached, or were broken down at the weight of the water surge. Riley heard the panicking cries of mothers, fathers, husbands, wives and children who were desperately pleading and begging for help (Riley, 2006). When the water hit the Lower 9th Ward, it took less than a half hour to rise 15 feet. Water flowed from Jordan Road, Tennessee Street, and Flood Street into St. Bernard Parish. Radio operators and 911 operators could not dispatch officers to help because the flooding was too dangerous (Riley, 2006). To make matters worse, three hundred New Orleans police officers were stranded by flood water; their vehicles were under up to 13 feet of water. Over 80 off-duty officers were stranded on rooftops and in attics. It took almost two days to rescue all three districts of police officers (Riley, 2006).

By mid afternoon the day of the hurricane, the wind and rain eased up enough so that National Guardsmen, the Coast Guard, and Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries rescuers could motor their boats into the flooded regions in search for hurricane victims marooned

on rooftops. In some places the water was so deep that rescuers were able to tie up their boats to the sides of the rooftops, like anchoring to a dock. All around, the scene was overwhelming. Homes were on fire because of broken gas mains and service lines, roofs were populated by victims who could not or would not leave in advance of the storm.

Brod Veillon, Brigadier General, and Assistant Adjutant General, Louisiana National Guard, remembered the moment. In his testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, January 30, 2006, Veillon recalled how people told rescuers their neighbor was trapped in her attic. When guardsmen docked on her roof, removed a roof vent, they saw a woman crying for help. "The rapidly rising water had forced her up into her attic where she became trapped. She could go higher but could not go down," said Veillon. "They used an ax to cut a hole in her roof and reached down to lift her to safety" (Veillon, 2006). Such a sequence was repeated continually---rescuers would cut holes in rooftops and lift people out, some young, some old, some sick, and some dead. Bridges and raised highways, including interstate ramps, became drop off points for the boats so helicopters could pick them up and move them to the Superdome or other "safe havens."

By Tuesday morning, New Orleans was completely underwater, flooded from the wave action of broken levees. Engineers were hard-pressed with how to manage the flowing water. At one point, engineers dropped 3,000-pound sandbags by helicopter in an attempt to "plug" the breach. The idea didn't work. The plugs were simply washed away (Bradberry, 2006).

The Storm's Aftermath

When it was all over, Katrina became quite clearly one of the most destructive natural disasters ever to strike American soil. The scope of the damage was beyond compare. Some 90,000 square miles of land was affected by Katrina (Chertoff, 2006). Katrina forced an estimated 770,000 people to seek refuge in other parts of the country, representing the largest displacement of Americans since the great Dust Bowl migrations of the 1930s (Chertoff, 2006).

In terms of the damage to housing, Katrina destroyed or made uninhabitable an estimated 300,000 homes, six times as many homes destroyed by the Midwest Flood of 1993, and almost 11 times as many homes destroyed by Hurricane Andrew (Chertoff, 2006). Hurricane Katrina's trek through the Gulf Coast caused many deaths and damage to property never before experienced in the United States. Entire towns, like those in southern Mississippi, were obliterated, forcing hundreds of thousands of Americans into a homeless status. Thousands of people lost jobs, and had to look for a new place to stay. Families were separated, and would not be reunited for days, sometime weeks (Lehrer, 2005).

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, in his testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, February 1, 2006, painted a picture of New Orleans *before* Katrina. According to the mayor, New Orleans' city government was "transparent and fiscally sound." It had more than $3 billion in construction activity in progress, real estate was "on fire." Donald Trump had just announced the latest Trump Tower. The city would be the backdrop for a new movie called *Hollywood South*. A record 10.1 million visitors visited New Orleans that year, and thousands more were

embarking on a cruise out of the Port of New Orleans. Equally important, about 38,000 people moved from the poverty rolls, many into new jobs created in 2004 and 2005 (Nagin, 2006).

But, on August 29th, Katrina would be recorded as one of the deadliest and costliest of all hurricanes to hit the mainland. In his testimony, Nagin said:

> "I don't know if I can convey the desperation, but I was looking at my city with thousands of people who were on the street, on our bridges, in the water, in the Superdome and at the Convention Center....people from the lower-lying parts of the region being dropped into our city. We were in most desperate need for assistance" (Nagin, 2006).

Patricia Thompson, a New Orleans citizen and evacuee, discussed her feelings of rejection before the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, U.S. House of Representatives, and December, 6, 2005:

> "We were abandoned. City officials did nothing to protect us... we slept next to dead bodies... we slept on streets at least four times next to human feces and urine. There was garbage everywhere in the city. Panic and fear had taken over" (Thompson, 2005).

Hurricane Katrina overwhelmed the ability of local, state and the federal government to help. Gone were homes, families, businesses, lives, and the unique lifestyle of Southeast Louisiana. "Left behind to build the foundation for a future New Orleans is a city with little money or revenue, a crippled criminal justice system, an impaired levee protection system, lack of housing for fifty percent of its citizens, and healthcare system clinging to life," Colonel Terry Ebbert, Director of the New Orleans Office of Homeland Security, testified before a senate select committee, January 31, 2006 (Ebbert, 2006).

In the days leading up to Katrina's landfall, 85 percent of the city paid attention to evacuation orders and fled the city. However, many of the city's poor, the sick, and the

aged, could not or would not leave. Many did not have money for personal transportation, while others did, but refused to leave. Just the same, U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman, in opening remarks before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, January 31, 2006, expressed his disdain:

> "The searing pictures of those who were left behind in New Orleans – at the Superdome, the Convention Center, on the I-10 overpass, and in flooded medical facilities -- are images that remain with us. Emergency planning that does not make provisions for society's most vulnerable – the aged, the sick, the poor – is not just operationally unacceptable. It is morally unacceptable" (Lieberman, 2006).

Two days after the storm washed ashore, *WWL-TV* reporter Karen Swensen related a particularly heartbreaking account:

> "A New Orleans woman waded through the streets of the city, trying to get her husband to Charity Hospital. Although he was already dead, she floated his body through the flooded streets on a door that came off their home" (Swensen, 2005).

Associated Press writer Mary Foster, in her assessment one day after Katrina, quoted one hairdresser's impression of the storm:

> "Oh my God, it was hell," said Kioka Williams, who had to hack through the ceiling of the beauty shop where she worked as floodwaters rose in New Orleans' low-lying Ninth Ward. "We were screaming, hollering, and flashing lights. It was complete chaos" (Foster, 2005).

New Orleans *Times Picayune* writers Brian Thevenot, Gordon Russell, Keith Spera and Doug MacCash related 52-year-old Daniel Weber's account:

> "Sitting on a black barrel amid the muck and stench near the St. Claude Avenue bridge, 52-year-old Daniel Weber broke into a sob, his voice cracking as he recounted how he had watched his wife drown and spent the next 14 hours floating in the polluted flood waters, his only life line a piece of driftwood. "My hands were all cut up from breaking through the window, and I was standing on the fence. I said, 'I'll get on the roof and pull you up," he said. "And then we just went under" (Thevenot, Russell, Spera and MacCash, 2005).

New Orleans *Times-Picayune* capital bureau writer Jan Moller in "Notes from a plane flight," depicted the distressing scene in lower Plaquemines Parish, the site of landfall:

> "Metal buildings twisted beyond recognition. Neighborhoods almost completely destroyed and submerged, the only clue that humans once lived there being the telephone lines that rise above floodwaters. Seen from 1,200 feet above, Katrina left a scene of near-total devastation. The only sign of life were a few stray cattle that clung to what little firm ground remains, and the rescue boats searching for anyone who might have been foolish enough to think they could withstand the storm" (Moller, 2005).

Damage across the Gulf South

Devastation went beyond the city of New Orleans and into Mississippi, the neighbor next door. In an *Associated Pres*s town-by-town report, U.S. 90 was buried under several feet of sand, communications were down, and transportation systems were destroyed.

In Bay St. Louis, whole neighborhoods were carried away by the surge; highway and railroad bridges to Biloxi were demolished. In Biloxi, Ryans, Red Lobster, Olive Garden restaurants were washed down U.S. 90. Ocean Springs Bridge was washed out; Edgewater Village strip shopping center was devastated. Hard Rock Casino, originally scheduled to open that week, suffered 50 percent damages. At least five casinos were "out of commission." St. Thomas the Apostlic Catholic Church disappeared.

In Gulfport, businesses and homes on Pass Road were damaged or destroyed; dozens of homes were lost on Beach Boulevard. Most buildings along U.S. 90 disappeared; a number of majestic homes were destroyed.

Floodwater surrounded two hotels full of guests in Moss Point, Mississippi. Much of downtown Moss Point was destroyed and inundated with 20 feet of water. In Pascagoula, six blocks of Market Street was destroyed. In Pass Christian, bridges, harbors and beachfront neighborhoods were destroyed.

In some cases, damage was more severe in parts of Mississippi than New Orleans, yet the media's focus conveyed otherwise. Mississippi earned little more than a "footnote" even though hundreds died, thousands of homes were totally destroyed, and an estimated 350 buildings, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, were washed or blown away (Huffman, 2006). Says Huffman in the [Biloxi] *SunHerald:*

> "But, let's face it, New Orleans is New Orleans. Could anything hope to compete with the tragic, cinematic, real-time downfall of one of the sexiest, most tumultuous, colorful and storied cities in the world? Reporters are naturally drawn to the new and the big, and what happened in New Orleans were both, in spades" (Huffman, 2006).

Federal Government Response

Within days of Katrina's landfall, public debate arose about local, state, and federal government's role in the preparations for and response to the storm (Thevenot, Brian; Russell, Gordon, 2005). President George W. Bush and Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, and Michael D. Brown, head of FEMA and the principal federal official to lead the deployment and coordination of all federal response resources and forces in the Gulf Coast region, came under significant criticism for what many say was a lack of planning and coordination. Criticism was also directed at politicians at all levels of local and state governments, including New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, who were criticized for an for not having a good evacuation plan, for a slow rescue of flood victims, and for not

providing the leadership necessary to maintain order in the city. Most of these criticisms were driven mostly by media reports. Media blamed the failures to mismanagement and lack of leadership, while others charged that race, class, and other cause may have contributed to delays in the government's response (Heerden, 2006).

The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina brought about a Congressional investigation which found that FEMA and the Red Cross "did not have a logistics capacity sophisticated enough to fully support the massive number of Gulf coast victims" and shared responsibility of the disaster between the three levels of government (Final Report, 2006). This assessment, from a select bipartisan committee, set up the House of Representatives to investigate the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina, identified failures at all levels of government that "significantly undermined and detracted from the ability of first responders, private individuals and organizations, faith-based groups, and others," said the report. The failure of local, state, and federal governments to respond more effectively to Katrina "demonstrates that whatever improvements have been made to our capacity to respond to natural or man-made disasters, four and half years after 9/11, we are still not fully prepared" (Final Report, 2006).

According to the report, local first responders were largely overwhelmed and unable to perform their duties, and the national response plan did not adequately provide a way for "federal assets to quickly supplement or, if necessary, supplant first responders." Emergency response plans at all levels of government lacked "flexibility and adaptability," said the report.

Hurricane Katrina had a devastating impact on communications in the four counties, or parishes as Louisiana calls them, making up Region 1 in Louisiana. According to Dr. Peter M. Fonash, Deputy Manager, National Communications System, in testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, February 6, 2006, all voice radio communications were lost except for very limited radio-to-radio communications, commonly known as "simplex," a limited mode of communication because it does not take advantage of communication repeaters on towers that greatly extend a radio's reach (Fonash, 2006). In St. Bernard Parish, extreme winds took away communications towers and antennas. Flood waters swamped the 911 center and forced personnel to leave buildings housing communications for Fire and Sheriff's Departments. The government in Plaquemines Parish lost its communications tower and communications center, along with an assortment microwave dishes. The Plaquemines Sheriff's department lost the 911 communications and dispatch center and all towers. It would be almost three weeks before the parish had any means of voice communications. The Jefferson Parish Sheriff's office lost the main tower supporting their communication system and suffered damage to other sites within their system. For a few weeks, antennas were temporarily mounted on the 400 foot boom of a crane (*Business Week*, 2005). During and in the aftermath of the storm, the region's only means of voice radio communications was the use of a few "mutual aid channels." In New Orleans, one tower was made inactive by the storm's water surge. Two other towers had damaged equipment, while others lost power. The city's 911 centers and police, fire, and EMS dispatch centers were also down. Vast areas of the Gulf Coast, from Louisiana to Florida, had no conventional telephone or wireless service. Thousands of the switches

and cell towers that made the region's telecommunications network were unavailable or left without power, if not wrecked (*Business Week*, 2005).

CHAPTER III

EMERGENCE OF UNITED BROADCASTERS OF NEW ORLEANS

"As a Hurricane Betsy survivor, I believe when bad things happen, good things come from it. Now, as a Hurricane Katrina survivor, I believe when devastating things happen, extraordinary blessings will come from it. Although it will take extraordinary efforts, New Orleans will recover and we intend to do our part to aid in those efforts."
Diane Newman, WWL Radio

Newspaper, radio and television were nearly all wiped out in New Orleans and the surrounding area after Katrina marched through the city. Facilities were flooded and transmitter towers were blown down. Most stations lost power, causing what many in the industry described as the longest and largest outage of media facilities in a large U. S. media market.

The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* relocated its newspaper editorial staff to Baton Rouge and Houma, Louisiana, and other temporary centers. Most of the newspapers' reporting was posted on the Web site *nola.com* since its newspaper facility in New Orleans was in a state of disrepair and could not produce paper copies of its publication.

Although WWL TV's transmitter stayed in the air, its news operations were moved to the journalism school at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge just one day before Katrina made its second landfall. The station relayed its signal via satellite but only a limited audience in the New Orleans area could pick up the signal due to a massive power outage in the city.

The Tribune Company decided to keep its New Orleans television station facilities closed, transferring some news staffers from WGNO and WNOL to Baton Rouge where they contributed news stories on WBRZ-TV in Baton Rouge.

Emmis Communications evacuated many of its WVUE New Orleans TV employees in New Orleans to WALA, a sister TV station in Mobile, AL.

NBC affiliate WDSU-Channel 6 lost its transmitter and split its news operation in two groups. One team left New Orleans for Jackson, Mississippi, and another to Orlando, Florida. The station continued operations as a 24/7 Internet and Internet video stream, using a conference room as a news studio (Edmonds, 2005).

Although it briefly lost power the first day of the storm, Entercom-owned WWL, the city's powerhouse AM news-talk station, quickly came back on the air under generator power, broadcasting first from its downtown studios, then from an emergency operations center in nearby Jefferson Parish and finally from Clear Channel Radio's studios in Baton Rouge. WWL delivered continuous news, information and provided coverage of local relief efforts. Its round-the-clock coverage featured live feeds from the streets and interviews and updates from local officials and other relief coordinators. Listeners to WWL became reporters by using a special toll-free 800 number to share news of damage in their neighborhoods and their experiences.

"WWL made for riveting radio, and I found myself listening at all hours, in the car late at night via WWL's booming signal," wrote Marc Fisher in the *American Journalism Review*. "Many of those who were left behind lived on the wrong side of the digital divide, so radio was their lifeline...the tried and the trusted still have an edge" (Fisher, 2005).

WWL AM began broadcasting in 1922 and today broadcasts news, talk and information on 870 KHz AM, a clear channel frequency. With its 50,000 watt signal, the station covers large parts of the Gulf Coast during daylight hours, and much of the United

States at night. In the 1950s and 1960s, WWL was famous for its live broadcasts of local Dixieland jazz bands, including such notables as Papa Celestin, Sharkey Bonano, Irving Fazola, Tony Almarico, and Lizzy Miles. For many years, the station was owned by Loyola University. Today, WWL is owned by media giant Entercom Communications, America's fourth largest owner of broadcast facilities. Entercom also operates four FM stations and one other AM station in the New Orleans market, so called *sister* stations to WWL AM.

The Approach of Hurricane Katrina

This dissertation began its case study of WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans three days before the arrival of Hurricane Katrina.

On August 26, the Friday before the storm, WWL News Director Dave Cohen felt relieved that Katrina was heading the other way, he said in a personal interview for this study. The National Hurricane Center told him Hurricane Katrina would hit the Florida panhandle, not New Orleans. Yet, as the day progressed, the storm's track changed. Cohen got a call from Max Mayfield, director of the National Hurricane Center, who informed him that Katrina's was now headed on a course that would bring the eye of the storm within 150 miles of New Orleans. "In New Orleans, people go home at lunch on Fridays. They're not consuming very much media this late in the week," Cohen said. "It was going to be a problem to get people in the city to adjust and just react to the news." After all, it was Friday night and the NFL football Ravens were in town to play the New Orleans Saints in a preseason game at the Superdome. Who was listening to news? Friday night was also high school jamboree game night, when a number of schools kicked off their first game.

Cohen started airing periodic news briefs on WWL, even breaking into coverage of the Saints' game that night to make announcements about Katrina's shift to the west. By 7 a.m. Saturday, August 27, Cohen's WWL was airing round-the-clock coverage that Katrina was on course, taking dead aim at New Orleans. The city was on the verge of its greatest calamity since Hurricane Betsy, some 40 years earlier. Betsy was one of the most powerful, deadly, and costly storms to hit the shores of the United States. Betsy killed 76 people in Louisiana, triggered $1.42 billion in damage, which when adjusted for inflation, amounted to $10-12 billion in 2005 U.S. dollars.

Soon, a mandatory evacuation order is issued by Parish President Benny Rousselle for Plaquemines Parish, a parish (county) to the southeast. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin appeared at a press conference to warn residents of the storm. Nagin declared a state of emergency in New Orleans, but stopped short of declaring a mandatory evacuation.

As a programming safeguard, Cohen, an engineer, and two reporters scrambled across the Mississippi River to a concrete bunker in Jefferson Parish, just two miles from the transmitter site. Here they set up operations to broadcast reports back to the main studios on Poydras Street via a microwave link. If that link failed, they would send their broadcasts directly to the transmitter, located elsewhere in the city. The emergency studio was supplied with food, a generator, and a small air conditioner. If things went as planned, Cohen and his reporters in the bunker could rotate on-air reports with anchors in the station's main studios downtown.

Cohen's colleagues, especially those who had experienced the wrath of a hurricane before, could easily understand his anxiety about Katrina. Not only was the

storm a bigger than usual hurricane, but its area of impact---some 400 miles wide---was greater than most storms in the past, meaning that, even if the hurricane went left or went right of New Orleans, the city would still sustain serious damage. As most in New Orleans know, a person walking along the riverfront in downtown New Orleans is actually looking *up* at the Mississippi River, not down. Likewise, an individual is looking *up* at Lake Pontchartrain, and looking *up* at the canals. When water flows into this "bowl" New Orleans becomes a lake with tidal action, "with sharks and manatees and all the rest" (Remnick, 2005).

New Orleans Must Evacuate

Late that Saturday night New Orleans Mayor Nagin received a call from Max Mayfield, director of the National Hurricane Center. Mayfield warned Nagin most of New Orleans would be uninhabitable for weeks, perhaps longer and predicted "human suffering incredible by modern standards." With that bit of information, Nagin issued a mandatory evacuation order Sunday morning at 9:30 a.m. for all New Orleans, an order some said came too late because the storm was only 15 hours away.

More WWL staff members were called in to cover the storm, including Garland Robinette, a former TV anchor, who would become a leading force in the broadcast effort for WWL and United Broadcasters of New Orleans. Robinette was joined by anchors Don Ames, Robert Blake, and Dave Cohen. Talk show hosts included John "Spud" McConnell, Deke Bellavia, Vince Marinello, and Heather Blake. Reporters stationed in the streets were Kaare Johnson, Chris Miller, and Richard Hunter.

Robinette, having retired from TV and other business interests to spend more time with family and to catch up on his painting, was only a part-timer at the station before the

storm, and was relatively new to WWL. Only weeks before, he had gotten a call from an acquaintance, David Tyree, a popular talk-show host on WWL, who asked for his help. "David said 'look, I have a second round of cancer, and every once in awhile I need treatments,' so I said I'll go in for a few days until they can get someone to replace him then I'll go home. During that period I probably helped him out once a week," said Robinette in a personal interview for this study. Tyree was suffering from prostate cancer and was buried two weeks after Hurricane Katrina came ashore. In any case, Robinette came in that Sunday night, the night before Katrina, as a favor to Diane Newman, WWL's operations manager. "I figured I'd be there over night and then go home the next day," he said, comparing the approaching storm to all the many brushes he'd had with previous hurricanes (Robinette, 2006).

But, as Sunday night wore on, Robinette's relaxed mood switched to apprehension. Douglas Brinkley in *The Great Deluge* quotes Robinette as blurting out on the air: "You're going to think I'm stone-cold crazy...but the birds are gone. I know the powers that be say not to panic. I'm telling you, panic, worry, run. The birds are gone. Get out of town! Now! Don't stay! Leave! Save yourself while can. Go...go...go" (Brinkley, 2006)! Around eight that Sunday evening, while he was on the air, Robinette began to feel the gale-force winds from Katrina. Around 2 a.m., the eye of the hurricane was passing 130 miles south-southeast of New Orleans. Winds were blowing at almost 155 mph. At 4 a.m., the eye of the hurricane was 90 miles south-southeast of New Orleans. Robinette and operations manager Diane Newman, who was in the studio with Robinette at the time, were startled when the studio windows exploded, spraying bits and pieces of glass into the main broadcast studios in the Dominion Towers, home of six

more Entercom stations. Besides windows, satellite dishes, anchored to the building's rooftop, broke loose and collided into each other, becoming chunks of torn and twisted metal. With Newman holding Robinette's microphone, both retreated down a hallway leading deeper and deeper into the building, out of harm's way. "The microphone looked like it was on an IV stand with wheels," Robinette recalled. "Three people were holding me because of the wind factor. They shoved me down the hallway and stuck me in a closet."

Listeners who heard Robinette's narration of the live-on-air retreat farther inside the building as Katrina gale-force winds pounded away heard what *Times-Picayune* TV and Radio writer Dave Walker called "horrible, wonderful broadcasting---a horror to listen to, but a wonder, too" (Walker, 2005).

Luckily for people along the Gulf Coast, Katrina grew weaker before making its second landfall as a large Category 3 storm at about 6 a.m., August 29 along the Central Gulf Coast near Buras-Triumph, Louisiana. To the east and west, hurricane winds lashed away at Gulf Coast communities, some over 200 miles away.

Katrina was not a direct hit on New Orleans, but close enough to wreak devastation in New Orleans. At eight that Monday morning, a wind surge sent water over the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet and the Industrial Canal, causing instant flooding in St. Bernard Parish. Shortly afterwards, the Industrial Canal was breached, flooding the Lower 9th Ward. At 9 a.m. two holes opened up in the Superdome roof, where some 10,000 evacuees were staying. Around 1 p.m., New Orleans Mayor Nagin announced a breach of the 17th Street Canal. Around 3 p.m., Lakeview, an affluent neighborhood, began to flood with water from Lake Ponchartrain. By 4 p.m., the London Avenue Canal

levees breached in two places. Water was pouring into New Orleans from everywhere. Robinette spent the next few hours giving advice to victims that didn't know what to do. "I was talking with callers who had children in their arms, who were trying to find a way out, who were giving their address so they could be rescued," he said.

Before reports could be confirmed, no one at WWL knew where the flooding was coming from, said Don Ames, a WWL news reporter and anchor, in a personal interview for this study. "We got it [news of the levee breaches] on the air before anyone because we were getting calls from listeners who told us," he said. On the fifth floor of the building that houses WWL and five of its other sister stations, the only thing Ames and his colleagues could see was the immediate area around Poydras Street and the Superdome. Because there were no TV broadcasts, the only perspective they had was what they could see from a few broken windows. "It was not until that we were airlifted out by helicopter that we were able to see the extent of the flooding. I looked around and said 'oh my God' and realized that it was the entire city," Ames added. "We could see people being plucked off of roofs by other helicopters, something you see in a movie, not in real life."

Ames and other WWL staff members instantly went into the "emergency mode." The storm itself had passed but the urgency and the emergency of the situation was still happening. It was rescue and recovery at its peak. For the next 24 hours, the WWL skeleton news crew worked around the clock. When journalists were not performing before a microphone, they worked as helpers, answering phone calls, writing stories, or doing whatever was needed. Ames found it amazing to just pick up the phone and say "WWL" and hear the sigh of relief and gratitude of a caller hearing another person.

"They'd say 'thank you...thank you...' and I'd say 'don't thank me..I'm not sure I can do anything for you.' They were just heart-wrenching calls," he said.

When the storm was at its worse, around 10 a.m. that Monday morning, the emergency generator at the WWL transmitter site shut down. Cohen and his team tried to restart it remotely, but couldn't. He and Dominic Mitchum, one of the station's engineers, drove from the Jefferson Parish Emergency Operations Center, which was not flooded, to the WWL transmitter site, which was flooded because it was outside the levy system. There, they waded through a snake and alligator infested swamp in an attempt to revive the generator and return WWL back to the air. In a personal interview for this study, Mitchum recalled the harrowing experience. "We dodged power lines and climbed over fallen pine trees," he said, "at the same time avoiding live electrical circuits that were still charged with 34,000 volts." To make matters worse, a large black snake swam along, causing discomfort as the duo sloshed their way out to the transmitter site. Fire ants had Cohen and Mitchum scratching bites for days. Because water was about two feet deep, the plan was to use Cohen's jet ski-like craft to motor out to the site. But, that plan didn't work because there was too much debris in the water, leaving Cohen and Mitchum on foot. "The sound of wind blowing through the towers was weird," said Mitchum, referring to two directional towers that soared above the transmitter building, both 582 feet high. "It was a scary sound that I'll never forget." After what seemed hours, Cohen and Mitchum were able to restart the generator and put WWL back on the air.

For all practical purposes, New Orleans appeared to have survived the brunt of the storm, until the station received reports of a breach at the 17th Street canal, a major drainage canal that separates Orleans Parish and neighboring Jefferson Parish. In no time,

water from Lake Ponchartrain was flowing into Lakeview, an upscale neighborhood near where I-10 and I-610 intersected. Cohen took to the microphone, announced eyewitness reports that the "bowl is filling...the bowl is filling!" He warned listeners to get out if they lived east of the Seventeenth Street Canal, which is much the entire city. "Lake Pontchartrain is emptying into the city of New Orleans. The water is rising and it's not going to stop. Get out now," he told the listening audience (Cohen, 2006).

Cohen and his WWL reporters changed into weather gear and charged out into the flooded streets, relaying what they saw in a city drenched and swamped by broken levees. For the first few days of the Katrina crisis, WWL became the dominant voice on the local airwaves as other stations went silent. WWL was programming with what Cohen referred to as a free flow of information. "In other words, it was essentially 'here's what's happening.' We felt the responsibility to keep broadcasting to people...we had to keep taking these calls from people who were standing in chest-deep water in their homes asking us as they're holding their two-month old baby, what should I do? What should I do? The water is coming up."

Residents, who are unable to call 911, called WWL radio instead. Local authorities, including the Mayor of New Orleans and the President of Jefferson Parish, and officials from other municipalities, depended on WWL to get word to their constituents, and to get critical information to their own staffs, as well. "First responders had to rely on WWL...that's how they found out where the stranded were...so they could be rescued...because those people were calling in...and those people were calling in two, three, and four days after the storm...saying 'hey, I'm still here on my rooftop....still waiting to be rescued," Cohen said.

"With a collapsed telephone system, no power and several television stations off the air, the Big 870 has tossed an information lifeline to a drowning city," wrote Jeff Amy, staff reporter for the *Mobile Register* (Amy, 2005). WWL's ability to continue broadcasting was vital for stranded listeners, recorded Sarah McBride (2005) in the *Wall Street Journal.* McBride's article described how Nekosha Bryant, 29, ripped the radio and battery out of her car and tuned in as she waited on her roof for help. Imani Sutton, 34, threw her radio into a supermarket cart and wheeled it, along with other supplies, to the Convention Center, where she and her family listened around the clock. McBride quoted Sutton: "That's all the information we have" (McBride, 2005).

"It was surreal, bizarre, frightening and unbelievable," said Cohen. "We were getting calls from people who we feared would not be with us much longer. It still haunts me to this day. It's never what I expected to do as a broadcaster," he said.

With all the chaos, pandemonium, confusion, and madness, all Cohen and staff could do was provide aid and comfort. Just listening to what people had to say was part of the service. WWL had listeners who just wanted to call up and talk and have somebody listen to them.

In a personal interview for this study, Cohen vividly recalled the early calls, the ones he received moments after the storm had passed and those immediately following the levee breaches. He remembered listeners calling from their attics, from rooftops, from hospitals "where patients were dying left and right." Cohen said he felt he had no choice but to give advice to the stranded about what to do. "It came to a point that we could no longer just tell people 'this is happening'...'that is happening'...we had to become advocates for their lives because we were in a position where we could remain level-

headed...where we could see things clearly," Cohen said. "We could give advice...we didn't have to wait for an 'expert' to come and tell people 'if your home is flooded get out and go to your roof'. Rescue teams in helicopters could see people if they were on their roofs, but if they are hidden in their attics or in their houses, no one would see them and they couldn't be rescued. So, we knew people had to get on their rooftops, had to signal these rescue crews...to let them know they were there."

Listeners Become "Eyes and Ears"

In those early hours of Katrina, the radio listener became the eyes and ears of WWL radio. With the lack of communication and the inability to get around, it was essential to depend on the listener. "Police were making arrests based on calls we were getting from listeners," Cohen said. "'There's gunshots at this apartment complex'" or whatever....the police heard that and made their way there to make an arrest. We were consistently used as listeners reported traffic situations or power outages. We can't be everywhere, but thank God our listeners are."

In a personal interview 10 months after the storm, Diane Newman, WWL operations manager, recalled how everyone was always talking about the damage in the Ninth Ward, one of the poorest parts of the city. But, according to Newman, Katrina was an indiscriminate storm in that millionaires in affluent Old Metairie got flooded, as well. Over 40% of the tax base was in the Lake View and Lake Vista areas "and it looked like a bomb went off," she said.

Broadcasting during the crisis and the aftermath was no easy feat for WWL and its other sister stations in the Entercom chain of stations. It was equally frustrating to

across town rival, Clear Channel, whose cluster of stations competed directly with Entercom's two AM and four FM stations.

Rivals Join Forces

At first, both Entercom and Clear Channel operated little by little on whichever stations their engineers could keep running. However, it didn't take long for the city's two biggest radio companies to recognize that they would have to join forces to keep their signals in the air (Beck, 2006).

Entercom's national news and talk programming director Ken Beck and his equivalent at Clear Channel, Gabe Hobbs, joined forces to find solutions for both enterprises. In a personal interview for this study, Hobbs recalled how he called Beck, a long-time friend, and asked "is there something we need to be doing?" Hobbs figured there might be a smart way to combine resources. Beck offered Entercom's New Orleans news and information programming to Clear Channel, which did not have the same news resources as Entercom. Clear Channel only had a sports station and a cluster of music stations in New Orleans, but no flagship news operation. Clear Channel's Hobbs had a better idea: Why not have Entercom and Clear Channel share staff and news resources and serve the hurricane-stricken region as one collective network, and run it out of Clear Channel studios in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, an area 80 miles away and much drier? Beck and Hobbs shook hands on the deal and began sending their New Orleans staff up north. "We dubbed it the United Broadcasters of New Orleans because it had to have some kind of name so we could explain to people what is going on and why we were doing it," Hobbs said. "We needed to call it something rather than announce a bunch of call letters" (Hobbs, 2006).

WWL Evacuates to Baton Rouge

Once the 17th Street Canal broke and extreme flooding began, conditions worsened to a point where it became obvious that WWL's Newman and her downtown staff were not able to remain on their fifth floor location in Dominion Tower, her directive from corporate was to evacuate everybody to Baton Rouge and follow the new arrangement. This meant Newman and several dozen people, including family members of staffers and their pets, who had gathered at WWL to ride out the storm, had to find a way to get out. Some waded through water to get to a rescue boat, others were airlifted by helicopter. Those with SUV's were able to drive out. WWL reporter, David Blake, his wife Heather, and Richard Hunter, however, were not so lucky. They were left behind. After the helicopter had made a few trips in, it became apparent that further trips would be risky because victims around the Superdome were screaming to get on board. The rescue of the remaining three would have to wait. Hunter's reports had to be redone before they were broadcast. "My news director said I sounded angry and frustrated," Blake recalled. "He felt I had become too emotional" (Barry, 2005B). Cohen, in an interview several months later, didn't remember the conversation taking place. Even so, Blake, his wife Heather, son and a cat, and Richard Hunter continued their stay Dominion Tower, eating food and drinking water that remained. The trio would be stranded at the facility for almost a week before they would be rescued. "We'd go up to the 27th floor of the Hyatt, which was attached to our building, and try to sleep on the floor," said Heather Blake, "but found it difficult because the building was swaying at that height and we were scared."

On that Thursday morning, when all the troops were headed to Baton Rouge, Newman was with Garland Robinette. "I wasn't going to let Garland out of my sight..he was going to stay with me," Newman said. "I got on the phone to let Baton Rouge know we were coming in, and when I put the cell phone down, I put it down in a freshly brewed cup of coffee," she said. "It was that kind of day." As the duo drove out of town toward Baton Rouge, Newman looked back at her flooded city and cried. "Every American should have seen it, because if you didn't see it, feel it, you didn't get it... that it was the biggest disaster in the history of New Orleans."

The network, now known as United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans, represented two groups of radio stations who had combined resources so that each could stay on the air and serve the community through one of its worst catastrophes. Through an unprecedented cooperative effort, the two companies, normally at odds with one another as competitors, put aside everything else so that they could serve the citizens of the greater New Orleans area in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, said Diane Newman in testimony to the FCC, September, 15, 2005. "Logic, necessity and the mutual respect of broadcasters resulted in an unprecedented cooperative arrangement," Newman said. The two groups brought their signal from Baton Rouge into stations in New Orleans via a satellite uplink provided by the Louisiana Network.

The arrangement between Clear Channel and Entercom was historic. Never before had two competing rivals, much less industry conglomerates, combined broadcast resources in such a way. The technical wherewithal of Clear Channel made it possible, and the news gathering skills at WWL made it a success. "We decided we would become friends," said Dick Lewis, Clear Channel's regional vice president. "We wanted our

listeners to have as much information as they could use, and decided that the best way to do it was to work together."

On Wednesday after the hurricane there was a staff meeting between department heads from Entercom, Clear Channel New Orleans, and Baton Rouge. Clear Channel rushed in engineers with tons of equipment. The parking lot at the Clear Channel operation in Baton Rouge was taken up by 18-wheelers, supply vehicles, ATVs, generators, and station vans, essentially a "tent city," according to Hobbs. "We also converted a lot of our offices into bedrooms for a lot of our staff and Entercom's staff," Hobbs said. "We did everything we needed to do to house them and feed them and do whatever we had to do to broadcast from the site. It dawned on us early on that we had to do everything needed to make these people comfortable."

The new network would be located in a studio that was being built for Clear Channel's WJBO news operation in Baton Rouge. "The walls were up and some of the equipment was in place, but none of the wiring had been started," said Steve Davis, Clear Channel's Senior Vice President of Engineering. "So from 5 in the evening until 3 the next morning, the whole studio was put together, and we had United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans on the air." The broadcast arrangement started at 2 a.m. Thursday.

Entercom's chief engineer for all New Orleans stations Kevin Duplantis, in a personal interview for this study some ten months after Katrina, remembered thinking that the WWL staff would not be in Baton Rouge for long, maybe a week or two. Just the same, his job in Baton Rouge was to get Entercom's news people set up and coordinated with the local Clear Channel people. This meant helping set up studios, getting computers in place and loaded with appropriate software, ordering phones lines to get more callers

on the air, and modifying the studios. "Basically doing an overhaul to what they had," he said.

WWL newsman Don Ames had been scheduled for a long three-day vacation starting August 29th, but that changed with the arrival of Katrina. "When Katrina took that last minute turn, I was advised to get on in to the station," he said in a personal interview for this study. Ames was one of the last to be airlifted out of the downtown studios, first to Gonzales, then to Baton Rouge. He was offered a hot meal and shower. According to Ames, he and veteran TV and radio newscaster, Monica Pierre, a Clear Channel announcer from WQUE FM, were the first team on the air for the new United Broadcasters of New Orleans. "We were the guinea pigs," he said. "We were the first persons in a studio that had been put together overnight. It was less than perfect. We had some phone problems. At first, if someone was on hold for X amount of time, they would get dropped. I thought it was there and it wasn't there. It sounded a little rough." Ames said everyone [listeners] were very understanding in what they were going through and knew they were going through the same kind of hardships that other folks were (Ames, 2006).

WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans stayed in emergency mode. They weren't playing commercials nor paying much attention to FCC rules in view of the circumstances in New Orleans, such as lowering transmitter power at sunset or changing the directional feed of their antennas when day turned into night: "Rules that the FCC wouldn't expect you to follow," Hobbs said. The network ran 24 hour news, using six hour shifts of running people in and out, including those in the field that were reporting from emergency operation centers in Orleans, Jefferson and other affected parishes. "We

opened the phones and let our listeners back in New Orleans tell us what was happening or to report in so their friends and family would know they were ok." In one situation, Hobbs said a caller actually died from rising flood waters as the call was taking place on the air. "It was sad, really sad."

After the maiden broadcast effort, Diane Newman, WWL's operations manager, set the broadcast schedule. "My job that Thursday was to find out who at Entercom and Clear Channel were available, make the assignments, and determine how long people would work," Newman said. "I put Garland Robinette on at night because I knew that was the time we would have the biggest audience. Then I said 'let's roll.' Rolling means you've got to get in touch with the emergency operations centers for all the parishes (counties), all state government agencies, the mayors, the parish presidents so you can mass produce news. Rolling also means working with WWL news director Dave Cohen and his news reporters who are scattered in key locations throughout New Orleans so we can get the story."

Management first decided to pair Entercom personnel with Clear Channel staff, and to make certain each was from New Orleans. "It was extremely important that we had New Orleans people on the radio and not Baton Rouge people," said Clear Channel VP, Dick Lewis in a personal interview for this study. "We needed to have on the air those people who lived in this community." According to WWL's Dave Cohen, a person didn't really need to be a talk show host to tell the story of what was happening with Katrina. "Anybody who experienced it could come and tell the story and we had lots of people who experienced it on our staff and the combined staff of the United Broadcasters

of New Orleans. They all brought a different perspective; all had a story to tell that was worth listening to."

The WWL staff included David Blake and Richard Hunter (reporting from Dominion Tower in New Orleans over a cell phone), Chris Miller, Don Ames, Kaare Johnson, John "Spud" McConnell, Vince "Vinny" Marinello, Cohen, Robinette, and Deke Bellavia. WWL's Cohen also brought in reporters from other Entercom stations from across the nation. "The story was too big and we needed more people to help tell it," he said. "While we have the largest radio news staff in the Gulf south, I don't think anyone has a news team big enough to cover a storm that big by themselves...for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 72 days." Reporters came from Seattle, Kansas City, Buffalo, and Boston—all arriving at the worst possible time. There were no flushing toilets, no running water, and few comforts of home available. Personalities from Clear Channel included Ray Romero, Arian Long, Appleberry, Loretta Petit, Eddie Edwards, Gerry Vaillancourt and others. For the first two weeks there was no advertising because there was just too much information to share with listeners, resulting in thousands of dollars in lost revenue for WWL radio alone. By the third week, limited paid advertising, in the form of public service information, was allowed so companies, like insurance agencies, and other relief-driven enterprises, could communicate with people.

For Cohen, the experience of being a newsman on radio during a major disaster was "surreal." The on-air talent and other station staff performed a "life-and-death mission." The engineers went through "nine kinds of hell" to keep the stations on and working. WWL gave permission to any radio station that wanted to carry the United Broadcasters of New Orleans signal. Nearly 30 radio stations outside the United network

broadcast the network's programming, either in its entirety or in parts. Stations carrying the signal included broadcast outlets as close as Birmingham, Alabama and Panama City, Florida, to stations as far away as Rochester, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Lacrosse, Wisconsin; Duluth, Minnesota, and Salt Lake City, Utah. In addition, programming was carried on shortwave station WHRI, allowing the signal to go world wide. Said Newman: "On the air, we were the stage...the platform... the lifeline for local officials, breaking news, live press conferences...the voice of the voiceless...the voice of the authorities try to reach them...the voice of family and friends worried about loved ones" (Newman, 2005).

Network Programming

Programming on the United Broadcasters of New Orleans consisted of continuous news, information and coverage of local relief efforts, and included live feeds from street reporters and interviews and updates from local officials and relief coordinators. A toll-free 800 number was made available to listeners so they could call in with their experiences, eyewitness reports and questions. Radio embraced this "community of voices" more so than any other medium, often "deputizing" listeners as reporters.

WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans covered all stages of the disaster locally, from beginning to end, starting first with the warning phase, all through the storm's impact and local response, and on into recovery. Ken Beck, Entercom's chief of news programming and sports, said the network had long-range, home-town concerns, foundations built by WWL radio over its long history. The network attempted to provide specific, detailed information to area residents, to help them face the crisis. Information included warnings, advice on the best ways to evacuate, location of agencies that could

help with meals and ice, information regarding downed utilities, closings of schools and businesses, where help was available, and difficulties relating to utility outages, etc. In contrast, other local and national media seemed to be less interested in details of the disaster, such as names of people, although many picked up on celebrities such as Fats Domino, a storm victim in his own 9th Ward neighborhood who managed to escape with the help of a friend. Other local and national media seemed more concerned with the overall picture, focusing more on the extent of the impact, the number of dead and injured, and the performance and actions of federal agencies and other national relief parties. "We were the primary source," said WWL news director Cohen. "Anything that happened in the state of Louisiana came through United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans first, and was then disseminated from there."

"The satellite guys didn't do squat other than carry a feed of the Fox News Channel (Sirius)," said Clear Channel's Gabe Hobbs. "There was no local emergency information." Hobbs was quick to point out that with any hurricane kit instructions, one of the things that's always on the list is a battery-operated radio. "It doesn't say a television, or a flat-panel TV... it says a battery-operated radio," he said in a personal interview. For that reason, chains like Clear Channel go to great lengths to make sure their transmitters can stay on the air, that there are back-up studios, transmitters, towers, and auxiliary power, he said.

WWL reporter Chris Miller worked what seemed to be 24 hours a day. "I may have caught a cap nap here and there," he recalled in a personal interview for this study several months after the storm, "but, basically there was no off time." Kaare Johnson, in another personal interview for this study, saw his share of tragedy. "I saw water rising 5

to 7 feet high in the middle-classed Gentilly neighborhood, dogs on the roofs of cars, bodies floating around, and helicopters landing on the Interstates," he said. "Things like that were pretty intense for me." Kaare was in the field reporting the whole time, using a cell phone that never went down. He started reporting before the storm, and continued once the storm had passed. "I bet I was the only person on foot, walking around downtown New Orleans in 110 mile-an-hour winds, doing reports on the radio," Kaare said. His biggest job, however, was that of dodging debris being blown around by the winds or floating in the water. "I ducked from street signs, tree branches, window blinds and curtains from office buildings, like the Hyatt Regency. Panels of corrugated metal and other trash were especially dangerous, because that can take your head off." Kaare picked nooks and crannies for protection in an effort that involved a certain amount of "sneaking around and taking calculated risks."

United Broadcasters kept close touch with first responders including New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, Jefferson Parish President Aaron Broussard; New Orleans Police Chief Eddie Compass; Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee; Emergency managers Dr. Walter Maestri and Terry Ebert and Tab Troxler; St. Tammy Sheriff Jack Strain, St. Bernard Parish President Junior Rodriguez, Plaquemines Parish President Benny Roussell, Senators David Vitter and Mary Landrieu, Congressmen Bobby Jindal and William Jefferson. These and other relationships, developed through the years by WWL radio, proved useful during the network's coverage of Katrina. WWL became the eyes and ears for the first responder community, and the conduit through which they could feed information to the community. In some ways the United Broadcasters of New Orleans became first responders themselves, whether they knew it or not. "There were

rescue personnel monitoring the broadcast to find out specifically where people were," said Ray Romero in a personal interview for this study. "Some people called saying 'we're at this address...or we're stuck in the water here...' First responders used our broadcasts as one of their tools to locate people." At any time of the day or night, said Romero, the United network would get calls from nearby mayors or parish presidents with important messages they needed passed on to listeners. "Obviously, they knew this was the fastest and most efficient way to get the word out," he said (Romero, 2006). Kenner Mayor Phil Capitano said it succinctly in an interview with *Mobile Register* newspaper reporter Jeff Amy: "The best communication we have is this radio station!" (Amy, 2005).

During the storm and afterwards, many public officials were at loss as to what was going on in their district because their communications system was down. "Reality came to us through the phones via our listeners," Beck said. "We would get calls from various neighborhoods telling us exactly what was going on, that would go out over the air. Again, staying in touch with what officials are saying is very, very important, but also staying in touch with what individuals are going through over a large geographic area is something you need to do as well"(Beck, 2006).

Garland Robinette

Garland Robinette was, perhaps, the most humbled by the United radio experience. According to Robinette, it took him a couple of days to understand what was going on. "I barely understood that I was working for Entercom, and wasn't sure who Clear Channel was," he remembered in a personal interview for this study. "All of a sudden I'm in Baton Rouge." For the next few days, Robinette found himself asking

which personality works for Entercom, the company he worked for, and who was with Clear Channel. "I remembered asking 'what do you mean we're working with them? They're the competitor!" Nevertheless, he would walk into a small closet-type studio and play co-host for six hours with someone he had never seen. Why, Robinette often asked, would a major competitor----Clear Channel---be providing his company with broadcast studios so they wouldn't be off the air? "As cutthroat as the radio industry was," he said, "I would have grabbed a janitor and said 'you're a news person.'" To say Robinette was nervous in the early days of United was an understatement. "I really didn't know what I was doing. I had never been in radio before," he said. "I'd say 'how do we do this? What are we doing? Where are we going?' It took me about a solid week to wake up and realize 'this is bad.'" For the 62-year-old former TV anchor, Hurricane Katrina was the strangest event he had every covered. It was an event he likened to his tour in Viet Nam. "In Viet Nam, everyday was a day that anything in the world could happen. That you couldn't plan for it. And your reaction or your comrade's reaction during the day would always be different because of the circumstances."

Robinette went back to 1970, when he was back from combat experience in Viet Nam, and had landed his first job as a reporter for WWL TV. Within a three month period of his hire date, he had covered a Howard Johnson's Hotel shootout, with Huey helicopters and machine gunners flying over head. Next it was a fire in which five women jumped to their death, just feet from where he stood. Lastly there was the upstairs French Quarter bar fire, where 20 people burned to death. Robinette reported them all, but no experience compared with Hurricane Katrina. He was scared and found it difficult to mask his fear, even when on the air. "If I had to do it all over again, the thing I would

have changed would have been me," he said in a personal interview for this study. "I was too emotional and angry. I was way too opinionated" (Robinette, 2006).

"You can't think of it as pressure because if you do, it will cost you," said WWL operations manager Newman in a personal interview for this study. "It's like being in the Army or the Marines: you have to provide the service that is necessary at the time." In her role as "captain," Newman made sure all on-air people had the information they needed to do their jobs, and supervised content to help keep the program moving forward. "Oh, it was ok to let the people sound off [listeners] and express themselves because our radio station is a place to commune, but we also had to keep moving the conversation forward, even while we're letting people emote." Newman's other job was to keep the talk show hosts fresh so they could think clearly and move the assignment forward: "It's was job, so, you couldn't think of it as pressure. That'll kill you."

Two weeks after Katrina, Newman was asked by Entercom officials in New Orleans to testify before the Federal Communications Commission. She would testify alongside competitor Dick Lewis, Clear Channel's vice president of the region. Instantly, she and the station's legal counsel began work on a speech. For Newman, getting ready for the FCC hearing came at a bad time. "It was two weeks after the storm," she said. "I was busy managing 35 employees [between Entercom and Clear Channel stations]. Some could work, some couldn't because they had to set up home somewhere else." Just the same, with no makeup and a dress she purchased last minute from a Wal-Mart, Newman stood before the FCC panel and gave one of the most tear-wrenching testimonies the commission had heard in weeks. "I made the whole room cry because it was the first time I had been able to talk about it and it was the day that my good friend, David Tyree, was

being buried." Tyree, the talk-show host Garland Robinette had replaced a few weeks earlier, had prostrate cancer and had died shortly after the storm's landfall. "But, I insisted on doing it, because I knew David would have wanted me to do whatever I thought I needed to do." Newman's message to the FCC panel was simple: "On the air, we were the stage, the platform, the lifeline for local officials, breaking news, local press conferences, the voice of the voiceless, the voice of the authorities trying to reach them, the voice of family and friends worried about loved ones. I am proud to be a part of WWL and Entercom New Orleans. I am proud to be a broadcaster. I am proud to be a native of New Orleans" (Newman, 2005).

The days in Baton Rouge were long for members of both Entercom and Clear Channel. The morning shift featured WWL's John "Spud" McConnell with Clear Channel's Loretta Petit. The second shift included WWL's Vince Marinello and Clear Channel's Ray Romero. The afternoons were hosted by Clear Channel's A.J. Appleberry and WWL's Deke Bellavia. Clear Channel's Monica Pierre and WWL's Don Ames closed afternoon broadcasts. At night, it was Garland Robinette, sometimes by himself, sometimes paired in rotation with Clear Channel radio personalities. Robinette would lead into a five or six hour block of programming, introducing WWL anchorman Don Ames and the recently rescued David Blake and Richard Hunter. For the first few days, anchors and reporters pounded away at top stories: some 1,600 patients at nine New Orleans-area hospitals hit hard by Hurricane Katrina were still awaiting evacuation. Louis Armstrong International Airport remains closed due to power outages throughout the New Orleans region. New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin says there are likely thousands dead in the city from Hurricane Katrina and the resulting flood. President Bush gets a close-up

look at Hurricane Katrina's path of devastation, as Air Force One dips below the clouds down to 2,500 feet over New Orleans with a view of the Superdome and other flooded neighborhoods. Reports from throughout New Orleans indicate that widespread looting is continuing. About 2,000 people have been rescued in St. Bernard Parish, but there are still people on rooftops. Jefferson Parish Emergency Management Director Walter Maestri breaks down into tears as he broadcasts a call for help from anyone who could offer food or water to officials at the parish's emergency operations center in Marrero (Times-Picayune, 2005).

During the second week the network began running paid public service ads from various organizations, including insurance companies trying to reach those they were serving. The objective for running the ads was not to make money, but provide public service communication.

Facilities Become Cramped

After a couple days on the air, radio personalities began to feel cramped inside Clear Channel's Baton Rouge headquarters. Granted, the Baton Rouge facilities for United were not what Entercom or Clear Channel employees had expected, as indicated in personal interviews conducted for this research some months later. Both chains were accustomed to impressive studios in New Orleans. But, the Baton Rouge facilities were a reception area turned into an on-air studio. The room where the board operator and producer sat was about 8 feet by 8 feet, big compared to the little "closet" where the announcers sat. "When you put two people in there, they would fill the room," said Entercom's Vice President, Ken Beck. "You had to be pretty sophisticated at getting along with people under those conditions." At any time of day, radio personalities and

support personnel from 15 different radio stations were wedged in a space normally designed for far fewer. "We were uncomfortable and had very little space," said Clear Channel's WYLD Christian radio announcer Loretta Petit. "You were right up in a person's face. It was a bit nerve-racking and intimidating." Garland Robinette was uneasy working so closely to "the competitor" but made the best of the situation. Clear Channel's Adrian Long felt self-conscious. Sometimes one of the co-hosts had to leave the room to make room for a guest. For most, there was a longing to return to their own spacious quarters after a few days in Baton Rouge. Vince Marinello, A.J. Appleberry, and Eddie Edwards felt a bit phobic, but managed to keep focus and deal with the tight fit. Close quarters apparently was not an issue for WWL sportscaster, Deke Bellavia. "I once worked at a tiny, little 500-watt station in Amite, Louisiana, so it ain't like the 'closet' was that bad," Bellavia said. "I mean you were close enough to places to get gas and eat, so I'm not going to bitch about the closet, I can promise you that. I mean people are calling in looking for their loved ones, the last thing they want to hear about is someone bitching about being in an air conditioned closet."

Times-Picayune writer Dave Walker was quick to sense the congestion during the few days he was "embedded" with the Baton Rouge staff. According to Walker, the Baton Rouge facilities were not set up for the volume of bodies. Everyone was either working at everyone's desk or shoe-horned into corners. "They had piled equipment from offices out into the hallways so that they would have room to house the news and talk people," he wrote. "It was clearly like a M-A-S-H unit type operation. Strewn around are boxes, plywood boards, computer monitors, office supplies and furniture. Suitcases sit in cubicles" (Walker, 2005).

Emotions Run High

Emotional fragility was evident among the New Orleans staffers, including the Baton Rouge staffers because of the stress of dealing with extra people and working in close spaces. Staffers were sleeping on floors of offices, out in RVs, and in office chairs. Some were wore the same clothes for days on end. "We went to Wal Mart to get some decent T-shirts and shorts, so I would have been surprised if there had not been some tension," Clear Channel's Gabe Hobbs said. Staffers were running on adrenalin and caffeine and were visibly stressed, even those who had not lost their house during the hurricane but were having to deal with the people who did.

In the first days of operation, a number of Clear Channel and Entercom members "marked their turf." Marking turf means a lot of things, such as wanting more air time. "Your adrenalin is pumping so hard during these emergencies that you don't want to rest, you don't want to quit, so you have 20 people who want to be on the air right now," Clear Channel's news programmer Gabe Hobbs said. "We say no. We're going to do this in shifts, otherwise they'll all be burned out in 24 hours, and then nobody is going to want work by Friday." According to Hobbs, management began to mitigate or lessen the marking of turf when people began to understand that there was somebody in charge. Entercom and Clear Channel coordinators quickly established the chain of command, set up shifts, determined on-air content, set up field operations in Jefferson Parish Emergency Operating Center (EOC) and other emergency operation centers.

Cultural Clashes

Interpersonal conflict and tension were the result of two cultural clashes within the network. The first cultural clash came about when Clear Channel's entertainment

culture, one primarily consisting of disc jockeys, combined forces with WWL's news culture, one largely consisting of news anchors, reporters and talk show hosts. A second cultural clash emerged as a result of the different demographic communities or audiences each group served in the market. Half of Clear Channel's stations in New Orleans were largely formatted for an African-American audience, whereby WWL and the rest of the Entercom cluster was primarily programmed for non-African-American audiences. Each radio group essentially was a reflection of its audience.

Some radio personalities were quick to argue, even while on air. "I was in my cubby hole and the next thing I know is one of our announcers walks out of the studio while on the air," recalled WWL's Diane Newman in a personal interview. "When I ask him what happened he tells me he's had an argument with his co-host. Then I say to both: 'You and you can't happen no more! I don't care! You don't have to like each other. You don't walk out the studio, and neither do you!'" WWL's John "Spud" McConnell, who for three seasons was a member of the cast on ABC's *Roseanne Show*, volunteered the story in a personal interview, saying it was he who had walked out. "It was very unprofessional for me to do that. I lost my cool because of comments made by Loretta Petit [his Clear Channel co-host that day], so I decided I wasn't going to take it and walked out." McConnell said he was angered by Petit's comment that "he didn't have enough compassion for the people of New Orleans." Although he went back on the air that day, his relations with Petit remained strained for the duration of the United effort. "When the microphone was off, we didn't speak to each other," he said.

When Hurricane Katrina tore through New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, hundreds of thousands were left behind to suffer the destruction, disease, and even death. The

majority of these people were poor blacks, who waited days for help from the federal government. When it became apparent that the feelings of some of Clear Channel's African-American staff were hurt because members of their race had been "abandoned" in the Superdome and Convention Center and the lower 9th Ward, there were journalistic decisions that had to be made. "Some of our African-American employees said 'hey...come on...let's start screaming about the situation," said Gabe Hobbs, news programming chief for Clear Channel. "It was especially difficult because, in addition to the calls we were getting about 'here I am...send someone to rescue me,' we were getting calls about the federal government's abandonment of blacks and accusations that George Bush didn't like black people." The question Hobbs and his counterpart, Ken Beck, were faced with was: Would the United network keep reporting the news objectively, without bias, or would they switch and become a "voice" for the people, a subjective approach that took on the federal government? "We made the determination early on that we would not do that right away [become subjective and critical of rescue efforts]," Hobbs said. "We certainly allowed analysis, as long as it was fair and objective." Yet, after a few days of objective reporting, hosts began voicing their opinions on the air, something management admitted to eventually and reluctantly letting them do. "It was pretty easy in the first 72 hours to see who was capable of stepping up and removing some of the emotion from this thing, being objective as much as possible, working well under fire" Hobbs said.

On February 3, 2006, Clear Channel Radio's Regional Vice President Dick Lewis was named "America's Best Broadcaster" by *Radio Ink*, an industry trade publication. He was presented the celebrated award at the Radio Advertising Bureau's (RAB) annual

conference in Dallas, Texas for his work in the development of the United Broadcasters of New Orleans. When he accepted the award, Lewis remarked: "I've never been prouder of radio in my 31 years in the business. Satellite didn't do it, TV couldn't do it, and newspapers stopped publishing. Radio was the lifeline, helping the people who were in trouble during the hurricane." In a personal interview for this study, Lewis observed: "There are two things a person wants---a flashlight and a radio. The flashlight provides the light. Radio provides the hope."

At times joining two operations together was a thing of wonder, said Diane Newman, Entercom's WWL operations manager. "It exposed FM-ers to the AM world, and jocks from all of the FM stations became talk hosts," she said. "It was a challenge, but they confront it." Clear Channel's Lewis concurred, painting a rather vivid picture of a 50-year-old conservative "white guy," who is a professional at doing news, sitting next to a 30-year-old African-American disc jockey, whose main job is to play hip-hop and urban music. Said Lewis: "Blending these two cultures is what made it all work." However, David Walker from the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, tended to differ with Lewis' assessment of pairings. At times, some members of the United Broadcast team [disc jockeys], particularly those performing talk show duties, seemed clumsy, amateurish, and incompetent at discussing the issues and, at times, did not fully have a grasp of the severity of what was happening, Walker wrote. In a follow-up personal interview, Walker commented: "It wasn't their job...their normal jobs were to be cool and back-announce music. This was part of the 'casino' aspect of the United Broadcasters of New Orleans...a lot of times it just didn't work. But, when it did work, it was great" (Walker, 2006). Clear Channel's Gabe Hobbs was apologetic for his crew's inexperience:

"Our people were not really trained for this kind of thing. Shame on us for not having them better trained. Perhaps it was never viewed as something they would have to deal with" (Hobbs, 2006).

Ken Beck was the most frustrated at matching individuals on air, saying the United Broadcast staff was "composed of some very interesting combinations in the studio." Beck pointed to those with backgrounds in news operations and others with backgrounds primarily in the entertainment side of radio. "If you're running a rock station, your culture is different from a news talk radio station," Beck said. "If you're running an urban or hip-hop format, it's different from a country format. When you throw all those people together, with all those different cultures, there has to be some accommodations. Frankly, some people couldn't hack it. They were not use to being on the radio for long periods of times [as a talk show hosts are]." According to Beck, "if you are from the entertainment side, you are more than likely a disc jockey, and you're used to working in the short form, namely doing one-liners and similar quick in and quick out routines. A disc jockey, he said, is not trained to do the work of a talk show host. "They simply don't have the experience," he said. An example of this disparity involved Clear Channel's WYLD FM, an urban formatted station, largely programmed for 18 to 24 year-old African-Americans. "When you have talent that is used to programming to that demographic (age group) and pair them in the studio with 40 or 50 year-old-guys who are use to doing news talk all the time to a much older and conservative age group, you have an interesting juxtaposition that has to be worked out," Beck said.

To get around awkward pairings, some FMers would let the WWL host do the interviewing, while they conveyed the basic bits of relief information. "WWL did the

'play-by-play' and the FMer's did the 'color'," said WWL talk-show host Spud McConnell. "We all had strengths and weaknesses, but we helped each other along, and adjusted to each other's style."

Although WWL news director Cohen admitted to noticeable gaps in experience, he preferred to credit the United Broadcast team for doing a great job under amazing circumstances. "These people [the on air hosts] were people who lived in this community, who didn't need to be a talk show host to tell the story of what was happening with Katrina," Cohen said. "Anybody who experienced it could come and tell the story and we had lots of people who experienced it on our staffs...who all brought a different perspective ...and who all had a story to tell...one worth listening to." Many staffers lost their homes, or sustained heavy property damaged, Cohen said. For many, it took weeks before they could return to their neighborhoods and assess the damage.

If some members of the United team sounded as amateurish and inexperienced as Walker made them out to be, then were listeners forgiving? Did this lack of know-how make the radio product less valuable, less credible to the victims of Hurricane Katrina? The answer may depend on the level of dependency for the medium and the kind of news and comfort needed when the lights go out. Garland Robinette commented: "This is cruel to say but I think we could have had an orangutan in those anchor seats and people would have listened. In a lot of occasions it was life and death. Listeners didn't care who they were listening to. What they wanted was information. So, I don't think it really mattered if there were mismatches."

Always the Competitor

Monica Pierre, veteran TV and radio news reporter and motivational speaker, remembered the early days of United in a personal interview for this study. "My city was under water. I had no time to cry," she said. "We were flying by the seat of our pants." Nonetheless, some staff found it difficult to forget they were competitors, even during the most troubling times of the storm. "Some people never could put down the thought of competition," Pierre said. "This was unnecessary. Everyone wants notoriety but we were there to serve...that's what made us a star, serving people." Yet, in the hallways one could hear some radio personalities saying "I didn't like working with this one and that one," Pierre said. "I didn't want to be anywhere else."

Working next to the competitor was no problem for Deke Bellavia. He was doing a job he had been asked to do, and was happy to be a part of the team. Garland Robinette was still uncomfortable broadcasting with a competitor and, quite possibly, never fully adjusted to working alongside anyone from Clear Channel, the competitor.

One week after the storm, anchormen, Don Ames, David Black and Dave Cohen follow the big stories from Mississippi: U.S. 90 buried under several feet of sand, communications down, transportation systems demolished, medical services were crippled, and high-water marks set by Camille were shattered. In Bay St. Louis, whole neighborhoods were washed away. Highway and railroad bridges to Biloxi are demolished. In neighboring, Slidell, Louisiana, Slidell Police and emergency officials continue to mop up after the devastating flooding that overwhelmed much of the southern half of Slidell following the glancing blow from Hurricane Katrina's eye wall. The New Orleans police officer shot in the head by a looter was expected to survive. The officer

was shot by a looter after he and another officer confronted a number of looters at a Chevron store at Shirley and Gen. DeGaulle Drives. The I-10 Twin Span Bridge over Lake Pontchartrain, which links Orleans and St. Tammany parishes, didn't fare well in the hurricane. An aerial view indicated about 40 percent of the structure was damaged, with sections missing or knocked askew, officials said.

The Nagin Interview

Garland Robinette, raised near the small Cajun community of Des Allemands, has been referred to by his radio colleagues as "the voice of the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans." He is probably most remembered for the "get off your asses" interview with New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin that Thursday after the hurricane. On the Tuesday and Wednesday before, Robinette had taken two days off to transport his family to Alabama, far away from the major damage of Katrina. "I was sure that the 'cavalry' would come in to New Orleans and set everything straight," he said, referring to federal relief. "However, when I returned, I was listening to the radio and kept hearing parish presidents say 'we can't get baby formula' and 'our people are dying in ICU units' so I became enraged. By the time I entered the Baton Rouge facility to go on the air, I had been ranting for a good full day, saying some pretty horrible stuff." When Robinette got on the air, Thursday after the storm, he vented his frustration: "I didn't care if I pissed anybody else off," he said. "I didn't care if anyone walked in and said 'you no longer have this job'." Just before the Nagin interview, Robinette went on the air and said: "for the first time in its history of the United States, America cannot help its own...can we get some foreign aid?" Moments later he got calls from Australia and France, where listeners heard the show over Internet streaming channels. When Mayor Nagin called, Robinette

simply transferred his anger to him by asking the mayor: "What the hell is going on?" From that point on Robinette had little to do with that interview. Said Nagin: "There is nothing happening ...they're feeding the public a line of bull and they're spinning, and people are dying down here." He took a breath yelled over the air: "I don't want to see anybody do anymore goddamn press conferences ...put a moratorium on press conferences. Don't do another press conference until the resources are in this city." Nagin ended the interview by saying: "Now get off your asses and do something, and let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country." Both Nagin and Robinette cried on the air. Douglas Brinkley, in his book *The Great Deluge*, quoted city council woman Jackie Clarkson as saying that after the interview, the mayor isolated himself in his office bathroom for thirty minutes and cried out loud (Brinkley, 2006).

"Nagin got a lot of criticism for his comments," Robinette said. "But you can never convince me that that [Nagin's phone call] was not the turning point for the troops and the President to show up at the city. I don't care what anybody says. I know he cursed and got angry, but that was the first time something got done. What he said was 'to hell with all of you...we need help' and he got it the very next day."

Entercom's Ken Beck thought the Nagin interview was radio at its best. Beck's counterpart, Clear Channel's Gabe Hobbs, said the Nagin interview was the mayor's way of saying 'goodbye' and 'farewell' to a New Orleans that would be no more. "Like that was the end of New Orleans as we know it," he said. "Yet, Nagin has to take some of the responsibility himself. He was the one that didn't order the evacuation until Sunday, 15 hours before the storm hit." Hobbs, a veteran of hurricanes at his residence in Miami, said

the attitude in New Orleans was: 'Damn the torpedoes...who knows if there's going to be a tomorrow...let's just live life for today.'

Media Misinformation

Anchormen and talk show hosts at United were aware of the rumors about the Superdome and Convention Center. Many of the rumors turned out to be false after WWL reporters did some checking. Misinformation came from callers and officials, as well. Both Nagin and his chief of police, Eddie Compass, were originators of misinformation. Each told the media that people were dying left and right in the Superdome and Convention Center, and women and children were being raped. Later, the reports turned out to be either exaggerated or untrue. Months later, a special investigative report by the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina and issued by the U.S. House of Representatives, February 2006, determined that "poor situational awareness and its resulting effect on command and control contributed to the negative effects of inaccurate media reports because public officials lacked access to the facts to address media reports" (Final Report, 2006).

Robinette, who served on a panel of journalists, sponsored by the Radio and Television News Editors Association, was asked: "Do you condemn anyone for what happened [the reporting of misinformation]?" Robinette replied: "I told them I had spent 13 months in a place called Viet Nam, and when people are dying, when people are in grave danger, you say and do things you would never do before. You say them and do them on the spur of the moment. There's no cognitive thinking...it's animal reflex. I

don't know how anybody could be criticized unless they did something premeditated that was really bad and I didn't see any of it" (Robinette, 2006).

United Comes to an End

The United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans came to an end after 72 days on November, 9, 2005, when the last of the Clear Channel and Entercom stations returned to their regular formats. "It was appropriate," said Dick Lewis, Clear Channel's regional vice president. "You can over-news people to a certain point. The original function of United Radio was to be in as many places as possible and reach as many people as possible to get the critical information out. We accomplished that goal" (Lewis, 2006).

Stations in the network may have returned to normal programming, but the partnership between Entercom and Clear Channel still continued. Entercom's flagship station WWL stayed in Baton Rouge because of the satellite services it needed, said WWL Operations Manager Diane Newman. "We needed the satellites to connect us to CBS and to everything we needed to do the thing we do. We couldn't leave yet." In the interim, WWL used a Louisiana Network satellite uplink to feed its programming from the Clear Channel Baton Rouge studios back to the New Orleans studios, where commercials were played out of the Dalet system, a computer automation system that all Entercom stations used for commercials. While WWL stayed in Baton Rouge, its news reporters ran their "beats" in New Orleans, gathered material on laptops, and sent their audio reports in electronic file format to Baton Rouge, using the Verizon Wireless' data network. There, Clear Channel loaned WWL a portion of its automation system to store news audio.

For the rest of Entercom's collection of stations, however, a second AM station and four FMs were able to return home, but not to the Dominion Tower. Their temporary home was in the former Jefferson Parish Administration Building (JAB) in Gretna, suburb of New Orleans (Hadfield, 2006). Entercom was able to work out an arrangement with Jefferson Parish President Aaron Broussard to use the facility until the station cluster could return to its former home. One floor of JAB, as it became known, served as general office space for stations WEZB, WLMG, WTKL, WKBU and WSMB AM. The second floor functioned as studios for three of Entercom's FMs. The cluster's fourth FM, WTKL (FM), suffered serious damage at its transmitter site and was being operated from a low-power auxiliary transmitter, simulcasting WWL's news-talk programming. Entercom's WSMB (AM) ran *Air America,* a nationwide automated syndicated talk show format (Hadfield, 2006). Engineer chief Hadfield had each station linked to its respective transmitter site by a simple beam antenna via a UHF Marti transmitter. Later, that link was switched to using a digital phone connection to the main Entercom studios at Dominion, not yet opened for business, but able to function with computer automation. Its "Prophet" system could play music, while its Dalet system could produce voice liners and commercials that were programmed into the system.

Dominion Tower, said Hadfield, was only open during the day. The landlord had concerns about security and the fact that water pressure was low. Nevertheless, day-time hours were all that stations in "JAB" needed to get the station up and running each day. The routine was simple: Every morning, production and traffic workers took the trip to Dominion Tower and spent nearly all day programming the Dalet system with commercials and other on-air items. Across the river at JAB, other personnel reported to

a small studio equipped with just a microphone and a small mixer board and did their show for that day. Talent was able to play commercials from JAB by simply sending tones at the touch of a button to the computer at the downtown studios (Hadfield, 2006).

After the hurricane, Entercom went to work, reconstructing four transmitter sites around New Orleans. The WWL transmitter location was in a bayou south of the city, and experienced very little damage. Entercom installed two new generators, one which powered the station's powerful 50 kW transmitter signal into a directional antenna tower system. The second generator powered a smaller 10 kW transmitter that was used for a backup transmitter (Hadfield, 2006).

WTKL, which long carried the WWL signal, was renamed WWL FM. "To fully service the community you have to work both sides of the dial," Newman said. "We kept getting calls from the community, letter after letter, from people who said they could not get the AM signal in the buildings, computer interference...so we made the flip in formats and renamed WKTL (oldies) to WWL FM."

In March 2006, Entercom's cluster of stations, including WWL, was finally able to move back into its former facility, the Dominion Towers, on Poydras Street.

Relief Efforts Nationwide

While New Orleans was fighting for survival, radio stations across the nation jumped in with several fund raising efforts. The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) kicked off the *Broadcast Unity for Katrina Relief* fundraising effort with a $1 million donation. In addition, the NAB designated Friday, September 9 as *Broadcast Unity Day* when local radio and television station talent held fundraising relief efforts, took telephone calls, held radiothons and telethons (NAB, 2005).

Radio stations headlined their own relief efforts by airing public service announcements that encouraged people to contribute money for victims of Hurricane Katrina. The NAB asked its members to donate equipment to the television and radio stations affected by the hurricane.

Clear Channel radio and television stations across the country aired public service announcements directing listeners to stormaid.com. Visitors to the site were able to make an online donation to support the American Red Cross in its efforts to raise funds to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina (Clear Channel, 2005).

Infinity Broadcasting's KROQ in Los Angeles directed people to the *Network for Good* and offering that any person or business that donated $1,000 or more would get their favorite record play (KROQ, 2005).

WEDG in Buffalo sold music requests for $250 a play. KITS Live 105 in San Francisco sponsored an online auction of things, including a guitar autographed by the members of System Of A Down and a framed *End Of Days* movie poster signed by Arnold Schwarzenegger (WEDG, 2005; KITS, 2005).

Greater Media Philadelphia touting that "a dollar makes a difference," encouraged listeners to give at least one dollar to the American Red Cross. Also, for every dollar Greater Media Philadelphia employees contributed, the company matched the donation for a total of $4,000 for the company contribution (Greater Media, 2005).

Raleigh's WDCG morning show team, *Bob & the Showgram*, spearheaded a relief effort with live broadcasts from three Lowe's Foods locations, asking listeners to donate cash and goods before loading up semi-truck trailers that host Bob Dumas drove to Mississippi (WDCG, 2005).

The WKST Pittsburgh raised $43,560 for American Red Cross Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts in 12 hours. The 96.1 *Kiss For Rent* fundraiser was hosted by air personalities from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on September 1. Significant highlights included Carson Daly pledging $1,000 if *96.1 Kiss Morning Freak Show* hosts Mikey and Big Bob kissed each other. Former WDRQ in Detroit program director Alex Tear pledged $100 to hear music by Detroit natives Eminem and Kid Rock. There was a $100 pledge for 96.1 Kiss mixer DJ Goofy White Kid to mix Neil Diamond and G-unit. And a listener paid $250 to spend Mikey's birthday watching the *American Idols Live* concert with Mikey in his suite at Mellon Arena (WKST, 2005; WDRQ, 2005).

The six Des Moines Radio Group stations sponsored a fund-raising effort involving coupons available at local food store that added an extra five dollars toward their total purchase. All monies went to the American Red Cross Hurricane.

Both Sirius and XM satellite companies simulcast NBC's *A Concert For Hurricane Relief* on Friday, September 2 (Sirius, 2005; XM, 2005).

As of July 2006, these fund raising efforts have raised an estimated $200 million, double what the National Association of Broadcasters had expected, said Kris Jones Manager, Media Relations and Corporate Communications at the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB, 2006).

CHAPTER IV

ENGINEERING AND PROGRAMMING CHALLENGES

Before the United Broadcasters of New Orleans partnership was formed, Clear Channel was already in its proactive and "down to business" stance.

On Thursday, August 25th, after it was established that Katrina might first hit Florida, Clear Channel officials held a "preparation conference call" with over 140 of its employees in Florida and along the Gulf Coast At issue was how to provide uninterrupted live, local news to the community and do it without its usual studio facilities, if need be. Steve Davis, chief of engineering for over 1,200 Clear Channel radio stations, said in a personal interview for this study that it was decided what equipment and supplies would be needed, like fuel, generators, transmitters, satellite phones, satellite uplinks, portable transmitters, antennas, studios, and trucks. Once done, these resources were dispatched to southeast Florida, where landfall was expected. Dick Lewis, regional vice president for Clear Channel stations around the Louisiana area, added that "we set up an e-mail list, a phone chain and circulated a hurricane preparation checklist. We discussed evacuation plans, contingency and emergency operations, communication methods."

Clear Channel positioned its resources close to the affected area, but far enough away from the damaging winds of Katrina. "We called on engineers from outside the area to move in and help our local engineers and broadcasters after the storm had passed," Lewis said in a personal interview for this study.

That Saturday, after Katrina made its first landfall in Florida, and after learning that the storm was likely to re-intensify and hit the Gulf Coast, Clear Channel officials

held another preparation conference call and decided to redirect all the resources that had been intended for southeast Florida be "repurposed" for Mobile, Alabama. On Sunday August 28th, it became clear that Clear Channel workers would have to leave behind their New Orleans studios and head for cover. Before evacuating, however, they made certain that they could feed live local news via satellite to their New Orleans stations from somewhere, anywhere out of market, such as from Baton Rouge. "When it became clear that we would have to leave our studios, we set up our systems in New Orleans where we could 'pipe in' programming from other out of market studios in our chain if we had to," said Clear Channel's senior vice president of engineering, Davis. Once done, New Orleans staff members turned over control to Clear Channel-Baton Rouge and most, if not all, personnel were withdrawn.

At the Clear Channel technical management headquarters in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the chain's corporate location, the response after Hurricane Katrina's passing was immediate. Davis coordinated Clear Channel's broadcast effort from that location. He quickly sent people from the corporate headquarters, along with other Clear Channel regional engineering vice presidents, to Baton Rouge, New Orleans and Biloxi. Their jobs were to assess damage, take care of outages caused by satellite dishes out of alignment, generators stopping, and other matters related to the storm.

Under Davis' supervision, engineers discovered that in addition to broken windows and misaligned or destroyed microwave links, Clear Channel's WYLD AM, a gospel station, lost two of its five broadcasting towers. The two towers actually crashed to the ground. The chain's WRNO (rock format) and WNOE FM (country format) transmitter sites were flooded, even though each was on stilts. The hurricane destroyed

all of the equipment at those sites, forcing Davis to fly in smaller transmitters and use other tower sites in the area. Clear Channel was still operating from those sites, using the smaller transmitters at reduced power some eight months later.

Clear Channel officials hired a helicopter to fly engineers to remote tower sites and studios, and even rescued a local DJ who helped get one station back on the air. Then officials sent the helicopter to help cross-town rival Entercom employees escape from their downtown New Orleans studios.

Power outages were the big problem when Katrina hit. Generators were a necessity to broadcast, and keeping them cranked, running and fueled was the highest priority for Clear Channel. For the company, this was accomplished with the help of its Outdoor Advertising (billboard) division. This division had large trucks and drivers with commercial drivers' licenses and hazardous materials permits, resulting in what Davis called a continuous "bucket brigade." Carrying fuel to Clear Channel generators helped the chain provide uninterrupted services, yet transporting fuel over flooded roads created a dangerous situation until the FCC made arrangements for Clear Channel to have a FEMA escort (Davis, 2006). Clear Channel delivered fuel to a number of places, including what is known as the ATC tower site, which the radio group shares antenna space with other local radio and TV broadcasters. The FCC also helped Clear Channel acquire security passes and clearances, getting federal protection for transmitter sites and studio site locations, and helping Clear Channel obtain needed waivers and special temporary authority to carry on its operations.

Hurricane Katrina damaged or devastated Clear Channel properties outside of New Orleans, including Laurel, Hattiesburg and Biloxi, Mississippi; Pensacola, Florida

and Mobile, Alabama. In Hattiesburg, hurricane winds toppled a 1,000 foot broadcast tower, knocking out two Clear Channel stations. Rebuilding that tower began almost immediately. In the short-term, a spare antenna from one of its stations in Wichita, Kansas, allowed stations WNSL and WUSW to get some kind of transmission out to their audiences (Davis, 2006). Additionally, a fallen microwave tower at a Hattiesburg studio forced Clear Channel to take a feed from one of its stations in nearby Jackson, Mississippi. Journalists at the Jackson, Mississippi station inserted Hattiesburg news into its news mix to accommodate listeners in that area (Davis, 2006).

Entercom-New Orleans Also Struggles

Immediately after realizing the gravity of the situation, Entercom President/CEO David Field chose three of his highest corporate lieutenants to run an emergency crisis center from Seattle. Those chosen included Entercom's Marty Hadfield, Vice President of Engineering; Ken Beck, Entercom's vice president of news and sports programming, and Noreen McCormick, Entercom's vice president of human resources. Together, they coordinated the company's response to Hurricane Katrina from Seattle. "The three of us coordinated the actions of our engineers and programmers in the affected area... more or less directing everyone that's down there on where to go and how to do it," Marty Hadfield said in a personal interview for this study months after the storm. "We made a number of decisions away from the emotional core of the crisis," he added. Having an out-of-area crisis management team in place gave Entercom officials a perspective that couldn't have been obtained had all the decisions been made in New Orleans. "Coordinators there forgot how emotionally fragile they could become," Hadfield said.

"Our engineers told us that having someone in the 'crow's nest' really helps" (Hadfield, 2006).

From Seattle, Hadfield coordinated matters with the Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, Clear Channel representatives in New Orleans, and fuel suppliers. Communication coming from Seattle was more reliable than communications originating in New Orleans, because people in the market couldn't communicate with each via cell phones or landlines, or couldn't do so reliably (Hadfield, 2006).

Keeping Track of People

The biggest challenge, said Hatfield, was keeping track of Entercom people. Some of the company's 135 people in the region were evacuated before the storm's landfall. Some, however, stayed on the job, mostly news people and talent. Tracking them and making sure they were safe and being able to communicate with them was a extraordinary job, he said.

WWL, specifically, had an emergency plan in place, very much like Clear Channel. The WWL plan included having 15 people working the news operations at its downtown studios in Dominion Tower, not the additional 35 or so family members who came along. Fortunately, the water supply held out and supplies were obtained from nearby stores. But, in no time, the Entercom staff and family members had to evacuate, yet getting the last 13 out of harm's way was a bigger challenge than thought. Entercom got help from the National Guard, Jefferson Parish Emergency, even personal bodyguards of the parish president. A parish school bus, guided by an engineer, rescued the remaining people from the building.

Entercom's major strategy was to rotate its engineers in, and then rotate them out---a recycling program of sorts, said Hadfield in a personal interview. "Out-of-market engineers were cycled in, worked alongside a coworker for a day or two, then took over the job so the first person could take much-needed rest away from the affected area," Hadfield said. The recycling program was critical to Entercom's response because of the amount of stress workers experienced. "They were all heroes. They loved their communities. Sometimes they had to be told to stop and sit out for some time. If they go too long they might have needed to be rescued themselves," he added. A lot of the Entercom staff lost their homes in the hurricane, yet all did their best to keep their "radio face" on and deal with their personal issues separate from their work, Hadfield stated.

The "Voices" of New Orleans

Dave Walker, radio and TV editor for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, visited the United Broadcasters of New Orleans hurricane operations center in Baton Rouge. He found the partnership a bit "surreal," stating that Entercom and Clear Channel would have normally be cutting "figurative throats" to compete for every advertising nickel, "but, with the market's economy temporarily submerged and listener lives on the line, had combined to keep an essential stream of news and information flowing to hurricane survivors". Walker wrote: "Hold lights blinked on the studio phone for three days as listeners called in to tell the world about the terrible things that were happening to them. Their minds fogged with fear, they [listeners] ask radio hosts how they should get to their roofs. The answer---climb out on the windowsill. Hand the children up" (Walker, 2005).

Dave Cohen, WWL's news director, played down the station's role as a "lifeline." "If I had a nickel for every time someone said we were a "lifeline", I'd be very,

very wealthy," he said. "We had a job to do, a job we took very, very seriously every single day. What we did during Katrina was the same thing they do everyday--gather information, disseminate information, gather information, disseminate information." Cohen, in a personal interview for this case study some months after the United Broadcasters disbanded, recalled how easy it could have been for everyone connected with the United Broadcasters of New Orleans to think of themselves as the heroes, or saviors, or lifelines or any of the many labels people used to describe them. "But, we couldn't be walking around saying 'hey I'm a lifeline'... I'm a hero.' It was a job that had to be done," Cohen said.

The line-up of personalities worked well, Cohen said, because it was made up of true New Orleanians, people who lived in the community. "They didn't have to be talk show hosts to tell the story of what was happening with Katrina," he said. "Anybody who experienced Katrina could come and tell the story, and tell it with a different perspective. They all had a story that was worth listening to."

Primary members of the WWL staff included Cohen, David and Heather Blake, Chris Miller, Don Ames, Richard Hunter, Deke Bellavia, Vince Marinello, John "Spud" McConnell, Karre Johnson, and former TV legend, Garland Robinette. Cohen also brought in reporters from other Entercom stations from across the nation, and stationed them in New Orleans. "The story was too big and we needed more people to help tell it." According to Cohen, his station and the network were facing the biggest natural disaster in human history, and while WWL radio had the largest radio news staff in the Gulf south, he didn't know of any radio station who had a news team big enough to cover a storm that big by themselves, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 72 days. Reporters were

brought in from Seattle, Kansas City, Buffalo, and Boston. "They came in and stuck it out," Cohen said. "I told them every day to fill their tanks and get two cases of water before they made the trek down to New Orleans, which had none of those items readily available."

One out-of-town reporter, 40-year radio veteran Dan Verbeck, from Entercom-owned KMBZ-AM in Kansas City, spent four days virtually without sleep upon his arrival in New Orleans. He was struck with the magnitude of damage, and overwhelmed like everyone else. Verbeck interviewed elected officials, emergency officials, law enforcement, and whoever came into the Jefferson Parish emergency center, where he rode out the storm with Dave Cohen and others. Verbeck anchored the news from 2 to 5 a.m. "Conditions were primitive," he said. "If you had to relieve yourself, you used a plastic bag, knotted it and then found someplace outside to dispose of it," he added (Barnhart, 2005).

Members of the Clear Channel staff included A.J. Appleberry, Adrian Long, former TV newsperson, Monica Pierre, Loretta Petit, Gerry V, Eddie Edwards, and Ray Romero.

Gerry Vaillancourt was a sports talk-show host on Clear Channel's WODT-AM in New Orleans, but that night he was a talk show host providing comfort and aid on the United network. Hurricane Katrina taught Vaillancourt the value of the transistor radio. "People were in an area that they couldn't get out of, and through having a transistor radio and a cell phone, they were able to tell folks where they were," said Vaillancourt in a personal interview for this study. "The transistor became the lifeline. It wasn't the computer, the lap top, high speed Internet, TV, or cable TV. It was simply radio"

(Vaillancourt, 2006). He recalled the stream of calls: "I can't find my baby! My sister lost her baby! I saw a dead man! I've never seen a dead man! I can't find my 4-year-old son! I can't find my husband" (Barry, 2005A). Vaillancourt, known by his audience as "Gerry V," was humbled by what he heard, and was astonished with the role radio played during Katrina. "There's a family with 15 people in a house with no power, but they can listen," he said. "You're on the next shift, and you're keeping them company, and it's frightening."

Vaillancourt was raised in the Queens section of New York City and played high school basketball and baseball. He left NYC to play college basketball at Gardner Webb University in North Carolina. He also taught English literature and psychology and some physical education classes as a high school teacher for a few years. He also coached at James Madison University in Virginia, Davidson College in North Carolina, and Appalachian State University in North Carolina.

What aggravated Vaillancourt at times were the politicians who came on the air. "I think some politicians got too much air time," he said. "Once the information had been announced they should have been gone. This would have allowed more time for callers, public service announcements, and hurricane information." Many comments made by politicians, said Vaillancourt, had no connection to what was going on. "It was like a soapbox venue," he said.

Eddie Edwards, a long-time radio veteran, lives on the city's Westbank of the Mississippi River in the community of Algiers with his wife Marie, to whom he has been married for over 20 years. He is a spokesman for many local businesses and does stand-up comedy. Edwards, named Country DJ of the Year by the Academy of Country Music

on three different occasions and who is currently a radio personality on Clear Channel's WNOE for 12 years, saw his job as a United Broadcasters of New Orleans talk show host as an easy 'stint.' "What made it easy was the show was coming to you," he said in a personal interview. "The listeners *were* the show. All you have to do as a talk show host was to comment on what they said. It wasn't about how you looked, ratings, the political nature or anything, it was just a real personal level thing. It was like we were the voice of what everybody was going through...we gave them their voice" (Edwards, 2006)

According to Edwards' recollection, the United Broadcasters of New Orleans had a rather large listening audience. "Everywhere you went you could hear United Radio...in a store or standing out in the neighborhood, you could hear it. It had that weird echo thing going on because everybody had it on," he said. "It was in every house...in every business...you could hear it in cars…in trucks...that was all there was"

Edwards said it took a few days before he realized the impact of what he and other members of the United team had on listeners. "If you could take that cast of characters and put them all together, it would have been a great TV movie," he said. "I want Pacino to play me. It was a beautiful thing, man" (Edwards, 2006).

When Kaare Johnson was younger, he played little league football, baseball, basketball, ran track and wrestled. His father, Phil, wanted his son to go into journalism, but Kaare wanted to play soccer instead. In a personal interview for this research, Kaare Johnson described himself as a native New Orleanian, who worked for a station "that just happens to have a 50 thousand watt signal." He grew up in journalism. His father, Phil Johnson, was a three-time Peabody Award winning journalist at WWL-TV in New Orleans, having since retired. "I'm a French fry compared to him," said Johnson, a

member of the WWL staff since 1997. Johnson, 40, spent the days following the storm roaming the city, stopping to phone in periodic reports. "There was no real agenda," he said. "You went into the city at 7 in the morning till around 8 at night and enough crap popped up all the time; 'oh, there's smoke, let me go see what that's about...'oh, there's a helicopter rescuing someone, let me go over there and see what that's about.' ...'I'm going to go to the 17th street canal and check the progress over there.' Every 20, 30 or 40 minutes there was a new thing to cover. You think it's 11 a.m. but it's really 4 in the afternoon. It was basically 'pick and choose your poison' because there was plenty to cover everyday."

Johnson's take on matters at the New Orleans Superdome and the city's Convention Center was that it was all an exaggeration. "Rapes and murders at these places were exaggerated," Johnson said. "A lot of people who were old and elderly died and some of the ones people thought were dead were simply sleeping. It was hot and sanitation conditions were not good. But, without the Superdome and the Convention Center a lot of people would have drowned or died." According to Johnson, about 90 percent of the people at both locations were poor or middle class. "Some didn't have a way out. Some knew had they screwed up and should have left." It was such a tragic event that it overwhelmed everybody, yet the Superdome and Convention saved more lives than hurt people, he said. "We need to cut these facilities some slack."

Deke "the Big Chief" Bellavia, a nighttime sportscaster on WWL-AM, is a leading authority on high school football in southeast Louisiana. "He has a rolling, syrupy accent and an enormous girth, which he is not too shy to mention on the air," wrote *Los Angeles Times* staff writer, Ellen Barry (Barry, 2005A). Barry retold Bellavia's

story: "Deke did not expect to find himself, as he did last week, instructing a dehydrated listener to punch a hole in a can of corn and suck out the liquid, or soothing a woman who called from her cell phone while wading through water that had bodies in it. Bellavia's normal duties were to be a sportscaster. This was not what he was hired to do. "You find a way to get through it because the people need you," Bellavia told Barry.

In a personal interview for this research, Bellavia played down his role with the United Broadcasters of New Orleans. "I don't know if I'd classify it as an experience," he said. "All I know was it was 'welcome to the fire.' I tried to do what I was asked to do. I don't know if it got my blood pumping." Bellavia was quick to admit that after a few days, members of the staff got to know each other rather well. "We did what we had to do, but later on you started learning things about others, like 'Deke comes in here with flip flops on.' After awhile the 'closet' kind of wore and we got cabin fever. I'd be lying if I didn't say there were some people I'd rather work with." Just the same, Bellavia made a lot of friends during the collaboration, even getting a chance to work with some of his most admired radio personalities. "I got to work with A.J. Appleberry," he said, referring to the urban and R & B legend from WYLD FM, a Clear Channel station. "I listen to his show and he has listened some to mine" (Bellavia, 2006)

Monica Pierre, a United Broadcast member from New Orleans hip-hop radio station WQUE-FM, said she's "never been more proud," and labeled the United Radio Broadcasters effort as "historical, needed and necessary." Working with such diverse personalities was easier than expected, she added. "I told myself that it was not really about me, that it was about the information."

Pierre, a veteran talk show host and TV journalist, "took the bull by the horns," said fellow Clear Channel colleague, Ray Romero, in a personal interview for this study. "She was always willing to do anything, and recognized this was a major opportunity to make a difference, to make a mark, and do probably the most important work of her career," he said (Romero, 2006).

Pierre is an Emmy Award winning journalist and author of a number of motivational books. She is also an adjunct professor at Dillard University in New Orleans. "Sometimes you forget about the impact you had on the people who listened," Pierre said in a personal interview for this research. "But, just the other day I got a call from a woman who said 'when I heard your voice on the air I felt I could go on.'"

Making the move from a radio personality to a talk show host was a natural move, said Adrian Long, a mid-day host at WYLD FM, Clear Channel's urban adult station in New Orleans. "I had always wanted to be a talk show host, and now had a chance to be one," she said. "It was like the old days...the theater of the mind. It was right there...something you could always rely on. "We were feeling the pain and agony of our listeners. I believe this came through on the radio."

Long, a graduate of Southwestern University in Louisiana with a degree in mass communication, has been in radio for 10 years. She and her four-year-old child rode out the hurricane alone, while her husband attended to his military duties at the Pentagon. Long lost everything during Hurricane Katrina. "The roof caved in and destroyed everything," she added. Six months after Hurricane Katrina, Long and her child were still living in a FEMA trailer (Long, 2006).

Loretta Petit, often called motivating, witty, and feisty, had been a radio personality for 14 years, mostly in talk and gospel music formats, and is currently a WYLD AM gospel radio announcer. When not on the air, Petit speaks to church and community groups, works as a freelance writer, marketing consultant and a public relations representative. "We became instant talk show hosts and had to learn as we went," said Petit , referring to her many hours on the air with the more experienced news people from WWL radio. "We had to try to take a little bit of that command from them [WWL] so we could feel like an equal. That was a challenge," she added, saying that challenges made her and members of her radio station work harder and do a better job. "We became three-dimensional...we became bigger than what we were pre-Katrina" (Petit, 2006).

Clear Channel's Ray Romero remembers early-on, when the hurricane had passed, that there was still a lot of time to fill, and programming tended to be based more upon opinion than actual information. "I think a very useful role that Clear Channel served was balancing out what you ordinarily got on WWL Radio [commentators and opinion]," he said. "Most of their hosts were very conservative, with a definite right wing point of view....most of our Clear Channel people, you know, those that are politically active, kind of leaned the other way."

A.J. Appleberry, in a personal interview for this study, said Hurricane Katrina gave him the true perspective of the role of radio in a catastrophe. "A lot of radio people lose sight of our real duties, that of serving the community," he said. "The storm shook a lot of people up and brought us to the forefront. We joined forces, doing what we knew we had to do. This was not the time to compete. This was the time to come together."

Appleberry was paired with many Entercom personalities, including favorites Garland Robinette and Deke Bellavia. "Garland was a professional. He shoots straight," Appleberry said. "Deke is genuine. Can't find anyone straighter. He tells it like it is." Working with Robinette and Bellavia helped hide what Appleberry said were his weaknesses on air. "It wasn't my forte [being a talk-show host]. I knew my strengths and weaknesses. I didn't try to be a news person. That was WWL. They were the play-by-play guys. We provided the rest."

Born and raised in Bayou country, Spud McConnell holds a master's degree in acting. His career has taken him to Hollywood for three seasons on ABC's *Roseanne Show* and to a successful run Off-Broadway in the one-man show, *The Kingfish.* The night before Katrina, McConnell could hear the outer bands of rain coming in about six a.m. He pulled another four hour shift, then retired to a room in the adjacent Hyatt Regency that Entercom had secured for workers that night. "I slept for about three hours, and then couldn't sleep anymore, so I went back down to the station and never went back," he added. When not gathering information and doing other station duties, McConnell slept on the floor in his office. It got scary. He saw a pigeon out the window, flapping its wings fiercely but going backwards because of the wind. "No one wants to admit it, but we're all stressed and depressed," said McConnell. "The biggest problem was how to convey a sense of urgency and accuracy to the listening audience without causing a panic. That was the scariest thing of all was not letting my panic come through over the air," he said. Spud, a name he got in the Boy Scouts because of his weight, got a lot of comments from listeners: "'Spud, your voice kept me calm' or 'you kept me from

losing my cool,' 'Your voice was the calm in the storm.' I was thinking when I turned my microphone off was 'if you knew' what I was really thinking and feeling."

For 40-year radio veteran, Vince "Vinny" Marinello, Hurricane Katrina was the most catastrophic news event in the history of the United States "and I was part of it." Speaking in strictly a journalistic context, Marinello would not have missed it for the world. "These are the kind of events you live to cover, if you are a true newsman," he said. "Covering Katrina was the highlight of 40 years of broadcasting for me." Marinello, a veteran TV and radio sportscaster, joined the team in Baton Rouge eight days after the facilities were set up. Because there was no room in either Baton Rouge or facilities provided by Clear Channel, he drove back and forth from New Orleans to Baton Rouge everyday after his 7 p.m. to midnight shift. During the storm, he lost his house of 33 years in the affluent Lakeview neighborhood. Lakeview stayed under water for three weeks. Fortunately, he and his wife had just bought a second home in Harahan and stayed there. "The listeners provided comfort for me, because I had lost everything--- my home, memorabilia, furniture, clothes, and memories," he recalled in a personal interview for this study. "Frankly, being able to help other people helped me take my mind off my own troubles." According to "Vinny," there wasn't anyone he was paired up with that had an ego or was difficult to work with. "Most of the time they were all too happy to let me to be the lead guy because they were disc jockeys," he said. "They would tell me 'Vinny...you handle most of this...it's ok with me.'

WWL street reporter Chris Miller never pictured that his WWL and sister stations would have to leave town and broadcast from Baton Rouge. "I always thought the engineers had contingencies to keep our main studios on line with something like this,"

he said. Additionally, he was amazed at having two highly competitive radio groups partnering and cooperating the way they did. Miller, a 10-year veteran of radio news, didn't have to stay in the RVs in the back parking lot. "I was lucky and had some family-friends in the area that I stayed with," he said. Miller was one of the few on staff that did not lose their home. His Westbank house was not exposed to the levee failures like most of New Orleans.

Chief engineer Kevin Duplantis although not a radio personality, was instrumental in getting broadcast facilities up for the United Broadcast team. He was also probably one of the most vocal non-announcer staff members on hand. He remembered how some radio personalities never let go of "the competitive thing." In a personal interview for this research, Duplantis remembered that "it was uncomfortable because you were with your competitor. After the first half of the day we all said 'yeah, we're here all together but we can't wait to get back home operating separately and hating each other," he said tongue in cheek. "Not that we hated each other but from a competitive standpoint, that's the enemy."

Duplantis found Gerry Vaillancourt as smooth, very knowledgeable. "His worth on United brought him to the forefront," said Duplantis. "Being on United elevated his status and his value." Monica Pierre was another example of someone who elevated their status, he said.

David Blake, a news anchor on WWL, covered Hurricane Frederick's arrival in Mobile in 1979. Frederick had no similarity to Katrina, he said. "It [Katrina] was like broadcasting from Beirut. You would have thought a bomb had gone off. It took the energy out of me. It changed me." Heather Blake, David's wife of 12 years, painted a

picture of her husband as one who was the consummate professional. He left personality at the door and did whatever needed to be done to get the job done, she said.

For WWL's Diane Newman, Hurricane Katrina proved the viability of radio without a doubt. "New technology [Sirius and XM] still cannot compete with traditional, local radio to tell people what's going on in their own backyards," said Newman in a personal interview for this study. "Who can talk better about economic development in the city, the schools, what's going on in the city politically, with crime and concerns like that...than local radio? I think that's the future...period. Everybody has the same concerns about their families, their kids and their communities and that is reflected in radio."

Robinette—The Cornerstone of United

Perhaps the most well-regarded of the United Broadcast staff was Garland Robinette, described by Douglas Brinkley (2006) in his book *The Great Deluge*, as "the most respected broadcaster in Louisiana." Robinette provided some of the most captivating media moments during the Katrina disaster. It was Garland Robinette, who, three days after Katrina, recorded the "get off your asses" interview with New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin. Robinette was expecting a report from the mayor, but what he got was a guest who was frustrated over President Bush and the federal government's slow-moving reaction following Hurricane Katrina (Robinette, 2006). Nagin's interview was carried on all three TV networks. A day later, President Bush made a visit to New Orleans, some say because it was a "camera op." Clear Channel's Dick Lewis thought numerous rebroadcasts of Nagin's appearance was part of the reason President Bush had been to the Crescent City more than a half a dozen times.

Does Robinette plan to stay on at WWL? "If you had asked me that three or four months ago, I would have said 'absolutely not.' I was retired and that's where I wanted to go." When he was in TV, Robinette regarded others in radio as the 'trailer trash' of broadcasting. "I thought radio was a place you went if you wanted low pay and poor benefits, and if you wanted a job where you'd stay for about three months then have to leave, get in radio." However, a day before Robinette interviewed for this study, he received a call on-air from a 79-year-old woman, who called in tears. She could not find anyone to gut her house. "Within 30 seconds, Capital Charities called, got her number, called her, called me back and said they would be there in two days and would do it for free," recalled Robinette. "So I think the immediacy and the power of radio is stunning." For Robinette, it has become more evident every day that the city of New Orleans is in state of siege; radio allows him the ability to seek answers to things that he and others in the city are personally concerned about. "So, the answer is yes. I am going to stay with it until I feel we've done as much as we can or we're losing ground or we're getting near recovery. I'm enjoying it a lot."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Traditional radio has taken quite a whipping the last few years. The medium has been batted around and upstaged by newer media, including satellite competitors, XM and Sirius. IPods and other mp3 players, streaming Internet radio, and Podcasting are all legitimate challengers in the audio market, and a threat to traditional "terrestrial" radio's position in the media ecology.

In his monthly Internet column, Greater Media CEO Peter Smyth (2006) urged the radio industry to stop fighting the assault of the new media tools that are capturing consumers' attention, and instead make use of radio's strengths to take advantage of the changing market. "Radio's biggest strength is its ability to provide local, entertaining and compelling content to consumers," Smyth said. "With iPods, the Internet, satellite and the many other types of new technology available to consumers, radio can truly distinguish itself from the pack by doing what it does best---taking care of the communities it serves on the *local* level" (Smyth, 2006). WWL operations manager Diane Newman agreed: "New technology (Sirius and XM) still cannot compete with traditional, local radio in telling people what's going on in their own backyards," she said. "Who can talk better about economic development in the city, the schools, what's going on in the city politically, with crime and concerns like that, than local radio? Everybody has the same concerns about their families, their kids and their communities and that is reflected in traditional radio."

Traditional radio has persevered from its very beginnings, fighting off threats and proving that older forms of mass media may not necessarily disappear when newer forms

of media emerge. Instead, they adapt. Radio threatened the phonograph player in the 1920s, and television threatened radio in the 1950s. Yet both of these pioneering modes were quick to adjust. When TV came along, radio station owners redefined the radio industry by cutting back expenses, segmenting their audiences into identifiable "niches," and creating the local "DJ," who played prerecorded music. The invention of the transistor and the advent of FM were other factors that helped radio reinvent itself, and regain its stature as an immediate, informative and credible medium.

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the role played by WWL Radio and the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, one of the costliest and deadliest storms to hit the U.S. mainland. The study asked three main categories of questions dealing with the operation of the network, the cooperation between its members, and the evaluation of the effort.

Questions involving the operation of the network included: How did WWL and the United Radio Broadcasters in New Orleans come about? How did they go about doing their jobs before, during and after Hurricane Katrina? How were able to create a makeshift radio network in a matter of hours?

Questions concerning cooperation included: How was each station of the network able to overcome logistical and competitive hurdles? How did each station weathered the strains of working with its competitor?

Questions relating to evaluation included: How did the network's coverage compare with other media, particularly the "new media?" What differentiated coverage by WWL Radio and the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans from other traditional media, such as TV and newspapers? How was the network perceived by other

media, more specifically, national media covering the disaster and recovery from afar? What do the efforts of WWL Radio and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans say about radio and its place in today's media society? Finally, what policy recommendations does this analysis suggest?

Uncovering the answers to these and other questions involved conducting personal interviews with executives, radio program managers, news directors, news anchors, field reporters, and network personalities within the Entercom and Clear Channel radio partnership. Additional research was gleamed from mainstream media accounts and governmental sources.

Category 1: Findings Regarding Operations

When Katrina was at its worst, WWL announcers went into emergency mode. They were determined to be the eyes and ears of New Orleanians who had stayed behind. Once the storm passed, the urgency and emergency of the situation continued, with reporters and anchors delivering the latest flow of information. Residents, who were unable to call 911, called WWL radio instead. In those early hours of Katrina, when WWL could not be everywhere, the radio listener was "deputized" as the station's eyes and ears. Listeners called to report damage in their neighborhoods, traffic situations, and power outages, and were allowed to report their information live over the air, just like real reporters. Local authorities, including the Mayor of New Orleans, the President of Jefferson Parish, and officials from other municipalities, depended on WWL to get rescue and relief information to their citizens. With a collapsed telephone system, no power, and several television stations off the air, WWL provided critical information to a drowning city. WWL, no doubt, was instrumental in saving lives. After operating the best they

could for about a day or two, WWL and its five sister stations combined forces with cross town rival Clear Channel Radio, owner of six FMs in the New Orleans market. Through an unique cooperative effort, the two companies put aside their competitive battle in order to serve the citizens with news and information. Never before had two competing rivals, much less industry conglomerates, combined resources in such a way. The idea was to move both chains to Baton Rouge, some 80 miles away, and house them in Clear Channel's Baton Rouge facilities. Overnight, from 5 p.m. Wednesday to around 3 a.m. Thursday, engineers busily worked at building a studio to house what became known as the United Broadcasters of New Orleans. "United" ran 24 hour news, using six hour shifts of running people in and out, including those in the field that were reporting from emergency operation centers in Orleans, Jefferson and other affected parishes. Entercom personalities were paired with Clear Channel personalities. Programming consisted of continuous news, information and coverage of local relief efforts, and included live feeds from street reporters and interviews and updates from local officials and relief coordinators.

WWL proved itself to be a "proactive" radio organization; it planned ahead for Hurricane Katrina. As a programming safeguard, Dave Cohen, the station's news director, set up emergency studio operations in a second location, far from the flooding, so that WWL would have a backup facility in which to broadcast. Staffing was simple, according to the plan-- all WWL news personnel were to report to the company's facility on Poydras Street and be prepared to work the storm. The plan also called for reinforcements from other Entercom stations across the nation. Although Clear Channel and Entercom started with emergency preparedness plans, each group tended to survive

on intuition and good luck. Clear Channel had all of the equipment it needed but had problems at times getting the equipment into areas around its transmitter sites around New Orleans, said Clear Channel's chief of engineering Steve Davis. "We had credentials that were pretty worthless but were luckily honored by the National Guard. There's no telling if they will be honored again." Davis said he is working on a committee along with others in the industry, including members in cellular and telephone companies, to try to resolve the issue of credentials. "We were lucky that we were able to rent a helicopter so we could get into our transmitter sites," Davis said. "We were the only non-military aircraft able to get air clearance. Again, it was only by chance and luck that we were able to accomplish this."

Category 2: Results Regarding Cooperation

It didn't take but a couple of days for the Clear Channel and Entercom teams to become "cramped" in the Baton Rouge facilities, causing what Clear Channel's Gabe Hobbs called "turf battles." Clear Channel's Loretta Petit was probably the most vocal, saying "we were up in each other's face... that was kind of intimidating." At any time of day, radio personalities and support personnel from 15 different radio stations were squeezed into a space normally designed for far fewer.

Hence, it came as no surprise, as tensions mounted and conflict began to emerge, that the development of two cultural fronts led to strained relationships between Clear Channel and Entercom. On the first front, interpersonal conflict became apparent after two completely different radio cultures had come together—Clear Channel's entertainment culture and WWL's news culture. Clear Channel's Dick Lewis said cultures "blended together," whereby Entercom's Ken Beck disagreed, often sounding

frustrated and agitated at the pairing of individuals on air. Some of the pairings, he said, "simply did not work," due to mismatches in personality, experience, and format traditions. *New Orleans Times-Picayune* media writer Dave Walker may have had the harshest criticisms of announcer pairings and lack of experience among some of the staff. According to Walker, some members of the United team, particularly those from the entertainment side [disc jockeys], who were performing talk show duties, seemed clumsy, sounded amateurish, and incompetent at discussing issues and, at times, did not fully "have a grasp on the severity of what was happening." WWL's Dave Cohen, in defense, preferred to credit all members of the United Broadcast team for doing a great job under amazing circumstances. Garland Robinette, probably the most vocal of all team members on the air, was convinced that an "orangutan" could have been in the anchor's chair and no one would have cared. "It was about the information," Robinette said, "not the smoothness or experience of a professional talk show host."

At times, some announcers could be heard saying they preferred to work with some announcers over others. Some felt a need to "wrestle back control" of the on-air program, to gain "equal footing" with their co-host, meaning to have equal say in the way the program was run.

The strains of mass producing news during a time of disaster and catastrophe created an emotional fragility among all staffers, including Baton Rouge personnel who had moved aside to make way for their radio guests from New Orleans. Although temper tantrums were at a minimum, tensions ran high between those who had lost their homes in the storm, and those that did not. Sometimes conflict evolved from simple personality differences or threats to self-esteem. One member of the broadcast talk-show team

walked out of the studio while on air because his co-host accused him of "not having compassion for the people of New Orleans." He later returned but didn't speak with the co-host when the microphones were off.

On the second front, although the creation of the United Broadcasters of New Orleans was historic, its 72 days of existence may have, in reality, reflected the racial divide that Hurricane Katrina brought out in New Orleans. African-American personnel from Clear Channel were infuriated at what they saw as the apparent neglect of the poor and black residents of the affected area. This group cried "foul" when members of their race, the poor and impoverished, were "abandoned" in the Superdome and Convention Center and the 9th Ward. The desire was to "speak for the people," to say "what gives" although management chose to maintain a non biased point-of-view for as long as possible, which was not for long.

Category 3: Results Regarding Evaluation

What the network did that set it apart from others was that it provided specific, detailed information, whereby other local and national media seemed less interested in details of the disaster, but were more concerned with the picture taken as a whole, focusing more on the magnitude of the impact, the number of dead and injured and the response of federal agencies. In order to set themselves apart from others, WWL and United Broadcast personnel worked what seemed to be 24 hours a day. WWL reporters stationed in New Orleans started their workday at 7 a.m. and reported into the late hours of the evening. Radio personnel in Baton Rouge slept an average of three hours a night on office floors, in RVs parked outside, and in their personal automobiles. They were under pressure to produce news and information for victims in the community, even

though they, themselves had become victims, many losing homes and property to Katrina, with nowhere to go.

The Viability of Radio

In the first several days of the storm's passing, when power was out and communications were down, storm survivors listened intently to battery-operated radios to hear the latest news and information from WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans. The around-the-clock immediacy of "United" became the network's chief advantage. "People are a lot more resilient than we often give them credit for," said Entercom's Ken Beck during a personal interview. "They need to know what's going on. Their biggest enemy is fear of the unknown." According to Beck, once a listener hears a calming voice, "a voice that tells them what's going on, where the storm is, where they need to go," the listener feels a sense of control (Beck, 2006).

Steve Davis, senior vice president of engineering for Clear Channel's 1,200 radio stations, agreed with Beck's assessment. "Just having someone on the radio saying 'hey FEMA is here...we have the National Guard coming in...we're bringing in buses...people should go to the Superdome' ...those kinds of things are helpful in calming people," he said. "This is why having radio in local places, with local broadcasters, is really priceless" (Davis, 2006).

What was remarkable about the United Broadcasters of New Orleans was the listener experience the network provided. *New Orleans Times-Picayune* writer Dave Walker (2006) labeled United's hurricane coverage as "transparent and real-time communication," which translated into something done naturally and spontaneously. According to Walker, reporters called in with live and unedited reports. They were

allowed to freely talk about what they had seen. "It was very raw, unfiltered observational type of reporting," he said in a personal interview. "The news gathering process was completely compelling. It proved what solid reporters they were" (Walker, 2006).

Diane Newman, operations manager for WWL, gave one of the most tear-wrenching testimonies given before the FCC, two weeks after the storm: "We were the stage, the platform, the lifeline for local officials, breaking news, local press conferences, the voice of the voiceless, the voice of the authorities trying to reach them, the voice of family and friends worried about loved ones" (Newman, 2006).

National media, like the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, CBS, ABC, NBC, Fox, were also impressed with WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans, often billing WWL and the network as the "lifeline" for New Orleans."

Dave Cohen, WWL's news director, would play down the station's role as a "lifeline" in a personal interview. According to Cohen, WWL had a job to do, the same job it does everyday: gather information and disseminate information. His line-up of personalities was made up of true New Orleanians, people who lived in the community and had weathered the storm. Most were not talk show hosts but had personal stories they could share, "stories worth listening to," he later said.

Ray Romero, a Clear Channel member of the network, described WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans as a kind of electronic billboard. "People would come on and say who they were looking for, when they last saw them...they would give out their phone numbers and, as a result, some people were reunited" (Romero, 2006).

"Radio is vital because it works," said Dave Cohen in a personal interview. "People can still hear you with battery-operated radios, crank radios, and car radios. Other media don't always have this ability. Radio doesn't need power lines. Radio doesn't need to throw a paper." WWL talk show host, Vince Marinello, agreed: "We're still getting on-air calls from people saying 'thank you for the service you provided.'"

Radio is a personal experience. "I think there is a personal and emotional attachment," said Clear Channel's programming head Gabe Hobbs. "When there's a crisis, when there's an emergency, people know what to do. They punch that button on the radio. They know exactly which station is going to be there for them. They've come to know over the years that they can trust that station."

Clear Channel's Jerry Vaillancourt, known by his sports audience as "Gerry V," was humbled by what listeners told him on the radio, and was astonished with the role radio played during Katrina. "There are 15 people in a house with no power, but they can listen... and you're keeping them company. It's frightening" (Vaillancourt, 2006).

Eddie Edwards, Clear Channel's seasoned radio veteran, said: "It wasn't about how you looked, the ratings, or the political nature of anything. It was just a real personal level thing. It was like we were the voice of what everybody was going through...we gave them their voice."

Although WWL reporter Kaare Johnson described himself as a "French fry" compared to his father, a three-time Peabody winner, Phil Johnson, he too played a vital role in the United team by risking his life to find stories and updates everyday, sometimes walking through flood waters, filled with dangerous debris, and working from early morning until late at night.

Deke "the Big Chief" Bellavia, a nighttime sportscaster on WWL-AM, seemed to "roll with the flow" during the 72 days United Broadcasters of New Orleans were on the air. For Bellavia, WWL was a big time jump from the 500 watt station he once worked in Amite, Louisiana. "I don't know if I'd classify it as an experience," he said. "All I know was it was 'welcome to the fire.'"

Monica Pierre, a United Broadcast member from Clear Channel's New Orleans hip-hop and R & B radio station, WQUE-FM, labeled the United Radio Broadcasters effort as "historical, needed and necessary." Pierre, a veteran talk show host and TV journalist, commented: "It was not about me...it was about the information." For Pierre, it was a major opportunity to make a difference, to make a mark, and do probably the most important work of her career (Pierre, 2006).

Adrian Long, a mid-day host at WYLD FM, Clear Channel's urban adult station in New Orleans, found her membership in the United Broadcast team to be educational. "I had always wanted to be a talk show host, and now had a chance to be one." Long and her four-year-old child rode out the hurricane alone, while her husband attended to his military duties at the Pentagon. They lost everything during Hurricane Katrina (Long, 2006).

Loretta Petit, a Clear Channel WYLD AM gospel radio announcer, and considered by many of her United colleagues as one of the most assertive members of the team, found her role rewarding and challenging. Yet, quite often, Petit had to "wrestle command" of the show so she could equal the playing field. To make the playing field "equal" meant sharing or having an equal voice in the news and information that went out on the air to listeners. Just the same, she contributed a great deal to the effort. "We

became instant talk show hosts and had to learn as we went," said Petit, referring to her many hours on the air with the more experienced news people from WWL radio (Petit, 2006).

A.J. Appleberry, in a personal interview, said Hurricane Katrina gave him a perspective of the role of radio in a catastrophe: "We joined forces and came together for the good of the community," a role Appleberry said radio people have forgotten (Appleberry, 2006).

Bayou-born John "Spud" McConnell recalled that the biggest problem he had as a member of the United Broadcast team was how to convey a sense of urgency and accuracy to the listening audience without causing a panic. It was a battle he would struggle with for over two months, although most of his listeners considered him a natural at relaxing listeners and keeping them calm (McConnell, 2006).

Although Vince "Vinny" Marinello lost his home in the storm, he "wouldn't have missed Katrina for the world." For the 40-year radio and TV veteran, Katrina was the most catastrophic news event in the history of the United States. "These are the kind of events you live to cover, if you are a true news man" (Marinello, 2006).

WWL reporter Chris Miller was amazed at having two highly competitive radio groups partnering and cooperating the way they did. Miller, a 10-year veteran of radio news, didn't have to stay in the RVs in the back parking lot, or sleep on couches and floors like the rest of his radio friends. He and his wife had friends in Baton Rouge who provided accommodations (Miller, 2006).

Chief engineer Kevin Duplantis, remembered radio personalities who had problems letting go of "the competitive thing." Some members of the team, he said,

found it uncomfortable broadcasting "with the competitor." According to Duplantis, people in radio are trained to compete with other stations for listeners and ratings. Sometimes, this competition is fierce and unrelenting and can go on indefinitely, depending on the number of rating periods in a year. When ratings are high, a station can charge more for advertising (Duplantis, 2006).

For David Blake, a news anchor on WWL, Hurricane Katrina was like broadcasting from Beirut. "You would have thought a bomb had gone off. It took the energy out of me. It changed me" (Blake, 2006).

WWL's Garland Robinette was perhaps one of the most dominant personalities to emerge from the United Broadcasters of New Orleans. He was the "voice" of United, and the one most associated with that effort. It was Robinette's "reassuring lilt everybody was listening to as the hurricane approached," wrote Douglas Brinkley in *The Great Deluge* (Brinkley, 2006). Most of United's radio personalities wanted to work with Robinette, to learn, and work along side a legend that had already made a broadcast name for himself at WWL TV. It was Garland Robinette, who, three days after Katrina, conducted the famous "get off your asses" interview with New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin. Nagin was frustrated over President Bush and the federal government's slow-moving reaction following Hurricane Katrina.

During the first, second and third weeks of September 2005, thousands upon thousands of New Orleanians huddled in fear because one of the most catastrophic hurricanes ever to hit the Gulf Coast had skirted past their city, literally sending wave after wave from Lake Ponchartrain into their living rooms, bedrooms, backyards, and kitchens. Misinformation from listeners, public officials, and even media members

themselves, led to what some first responders said was the creation of anxiety in the community. Reports of murder and rape were either exaggerated or completely untrue. WWL's Garland Robinette compared the issue with Viet Nam, saying "when people are dying, when people are in grave danger, they say and do things they would never do before. You say them and do them on the spur of the moment. There's no cognitive thinking...it's animal reflex" (Robinette, 2006).

According to Gerard J. Hoetmer, executive director of the Public Entity Risk Institute, the first thing to disappear in war is truth, and it is no different in a disaster (Hoetmer, 2006). "A crisis lends itself to exaggeration, finger pointing, altruistic behavior, heroism, and among a very small minority of people—dastardly criminality. We saw all of these human responses to Hurricane Katrina, and some to a far lesser degree in Hurricane Rita." Hoetmer said that disaster researchers will be studying and documenting how humans responded to both of these natural disasters for many years to come. "Although research will no doubt uncover unique findings particular to each of these extreme events, most of the research findings will verify and substantiate existing research on how individuals and organizations behave under crisis" (Hoetmer, 2005).

Recommendations

Since battery operated radios can be a person's only source of information when an emergency strikes, it is the recommendation of this study that Clear Channel Radio and Entercom Radio enhance their emergency preparedness capability in order to better serve their listener base before, during and after emergency situations such as Hurricane Katrina. This involves taking a more proactive stance toward technical issues, programming, and staffing.

Emergency planning must consistently become part of the corporate culture at Clear Channel and Entercom. Each organization must look for opportunities to build awareness, to educate and prepare staffers, to get all levels of management, departments and select members of the community involved in planning, and to make emergency management part of what station employee do everyday.

Before Hurricane Katrina, Entercom and Clear Channel acknowledged having emergency plans in place, but neither had provisions for operating broadcast functions remotely should their studios become inaccessible for days. In time, Clear Channel's technical infrastructure allowed for operation from Baton Rouge studios via satellite technology.

What has been learned from this study prompts recommendations in four critical areas: (1) technical, (2) planning, (3) community outreach, and (4) staffing.

Technical Recommendations

Entercom and Clear Channel Radio should:

1. Develop an emergency satellite system to enable local radio studios to broadcast their local programming directly to any of the company's tower sites when microwave links fail or the station is forced to move programming operations out of town.

2. Have fixed and portable radio transmitters, needed studio equipment, power generators, satellite phones, and fuel and supplies on stand-by, preferably stored in locations outside of potential disaster areas like the Gulf South.

Planning Recommendations

Entercom and Clear Channel Radio should:

1. Distribute information via their corporate newsletter, employee manual and employee mailings addressing emergency preparedness.

2. Provide posters or other visual reminders that hang on walls or are part of bulletin boards that stress emergency preparedness.

3. Provide employee training on what should be done during in an emergency situation. This includes employees in an area affected by an emergency and those outside that may provide support. Training would consist of instruction that addresses threats, hazards and protective actions. Protective actions could include evacuation, sheltering and keeping up with employees.

4. Create a group to manage the emergency. This group could be composed of employees in the corporate, accounting, or sales divisions of the company to watch over planning and implementation of the emergency preparedness plan.

5. Persuade all levels of the organization to be engaged in evaluating and revising the emergency response plan at frequent intervals.

6. Offer a way for the emergency management group and response teams to actually implement their emergency response functions.

7. Keep an updated list of addresses and telephone numbers of key emergency response personnel.

8. Verify vital operations and make plans for bringing those operations back on-line. This procedure may require mending and buying new broadcast equipment, moving operations to another location, and partnering with other media organizations.

9. Consider ways to help employees get their families ready for crises. Workers who are prepared at home are better able to carry out their responsibilities on the air.

10. Make plans for helping employees and their families who may need transportation out of the affected area.

Community Outreach Recommendations

Entercom and Clear Channel Radio should:

1. Create an emergency partnership with members of the community, such as leaders and elected officials and administrators, fire, police and emergency medical service personnel, the public works department, hospitals, American Red Cross, and utilities. Purpose: to talk about what the media organization is doing to prepare for emergencies during a disaster.

2. Involve such first responders in media drills and exercises.

3. Create an emergency coalition with other members of the media, those outside radio. Purpose: to talk about what the media organization is doing to prepare for emergencies during a disaster and how the total media community may be able to aid each others' efforts.

4. Develop and maintain on-air educational programming for listeners on the dangers of hurricanes and tips for preparing for one. This is critical if listeners are to know their vulnerabilities and how they must be prepared for disasters and how to overcome them.

5. Partner with first responder community by hosting off-air seminars with the community on the dangers of hurricanes and tips for preparing for one.

6. Partner with other media and the first responder community by providing "Hurricane Survival Kits." These kits would consist of emergency supplies that can be counted on during a time of emergency, when stores are closed and roads are down.

Staffing Recommendations

Entercom and Clear Channel Radio should:

1. Predetermine programming staffing needs in advance of a disaster, and assign specific duties to employees before the storm. Staffing needs include news gathering news, news anchoring and talk show hosting.

2. Predetermine programming staff needs for personnel who may be "drafted" outside of the affective area, and guarantee that these employees receive regular disaster reporting training.

3. Provide continuing news training for employees who are primarily from the entertainment side of programming. This training would consist of news gathering, news anchoring and talk show hosting functions.

4. Encourage station personnel to go beyond news casting responsibilities by actively participating in local relief efforts. This may include fund raising or direct contact with helping victims of the storm.

5. Develop a station-sponsored email chat room or blog on the station's existing web page so that listeners can communicate directly with one another in order to share information and support one another.

Entercom's Ken Beck said all Entercom stations had emergency preparedness plans, but none allowed for operating a station remotely, especially for long periods of time. During a personal interview with Beck, he mentioned that planning sessions were

underway to develop an even more proactive response to hurricanes. To date, there has been no public "roll out" of those plans. Clear Channel, however, has made its newly enhanced emergency preparedness plans available. They include a number of new initiatives. For example, Clear Channel's plans propose multiple "backup hubs" of an emergency satellite system to guarantee communication throughout its radio markets when disasters strike. Radio transmitters, studio equipment and news gathering "packages" have been installed in trucks and RV's at Clear Channel Radio hub cities across the country. The hub cities will also store generators, satellite phones, fuel and supplies, even a portable tower on a trailer. Emergency backup satellite systems will enable any of the company's local radio studios to broadcast their local programming directly to any of the company's tower sites when microwave links or land lines are down or fail. If emergencies force Clear Channel news teams and announcers to leave their studios, the satellite equipment will allow the station crews of affected areas to broadcast from other, nearby locations to provide their listeners with valuable and up-to-date information. Several hub cities have already been set up with a focus on hurricane-prone areas. Remaining hub cities will be in service before the end of the year. The support equipment will be located at Clear Channel Radio hubs cities spanning the U.S., strategically placed to be no more than a day's drive from the local markets. There are six established hub cities: Tulsa, Philadelphia, Orlando, San Diego, Atlanta and Sacramento. The emergency backup satellite systems are now being deployed in all of the Gulf Coast states. "So if Baton Rouge is down, we can broadcast from Shreveport, and so on," said Clear Channel's Steve Davis. The system will act as a backup should Clear Channel's microwave links from studio to transmitter become misaligned or destroyed. "This will

be fairly robust because you'd have to knock the satellite out of the sky for it not to work," Davis added (Davis, 2006).

One question also rises: How can the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and first responders enhance their preparedness as it relates to the dissemination of information over the air? Are there regulations imposed by the FCC that could be lifted during times of catastrophe and disaster so radio stations could perform their job more effectively and without regulatory hindrance? Since most emergency preparedness literature suggests a battery-operated radio, could FEMA or other first responder organizations provide such radios as part of their relief package?

Radio Today

Radio occupies a spot in a natural disaster crisis not held by other media. Radio's portability, its ability for delivering local news in an instant, and battery power, are without comparison once storms hit and the power goes out. This is illustrated in the hurricane season of 2004. Between early August and late September, 2004, both coasts of Florida and the Gulf Coast were hit by a string of hurricanes---Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne. Each storm was destructive, upsetting, and damaging to residents. Radio stations stayed on the air with news and information in an effort to provide aid and comfort. Without electricity, radio proved to be the only source of information, a "lifeline" of sorts, for those with battery-operated radios. Many in the radio industry wondered what impact these hurricanes had on radio listening and decided to conduct a study (ARB, 2005). The study, ARB's 2004 *Audience Perceptual Study*, found that radio was still vital in times of disaster and catastrophe, even when listeners still had access to weather web

sites and television (ARB, 2004). While television is the medium of choice when a storm approaches, radio rules once the storm arrives.

There are more than 13,000 radio stations in the U.S, however, most of them sound the same. Critics say this "homogenous" tendency has come about because of deregulation and consolidation in the industry. To make certain that there were many different viewpoints, the FCC had long limited the number of radio stations one person or business could own to one AM and one FM locally and seven AMs and seven FMs nationally. The reason for such limitations was to keep ownership as diverse as possible and keep the stations' focus of the needs of the community it served. Deregulation of the industry brought about by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, however, changed all that. Now, there are no national ownership limits, and one person or company can own as many as eight stations in one market, depending on the size of the market. As a result, large media conglomerates control a growing majority of local radio outlets throughout the United States. Clear Channel, in particular, owns over 1,200 radio stations.

A key element of a radio station is news. The medium's ability to get essential, breaking information out to people fast, when it happens, when they need it, is one of the most powerful selling points of radio. In the early days of radio, news departments employed staffs of reporters to cover local news. Stations often augment local news coverage with a national network, such as CBS, NBC, ABC or Mutual. Today's radio newsroom is much different. Many local stations say news isn't essential for the audiences they reach or they simply cannot afford to program it.

With deregulation and station consolidation, many radio chains, including Clear Channel and Entercom, have pushed back their commitment to news at any individual

station within a market cluster, choosing in many cases to have one "flagship" news station in each of its markets to feed news to sister radio stations in that market. However, Clear Channel did not have such a flagship in New Orleans at the time of this dissertation's preparation.

During the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s, stations found that news and information *did* play a crucial role in *any* radio format. FM music stations that avoided news suddenly discovered that their listeners desperately wanted to know what was happening in the Gulf. The quickest way for most FM stations to get news information was to take audio feeds from other news stations or from news channels like CNN and MNBC. Unfortunately, once the conflict was over, these radio stations returned to their music format. News was out...again.

This research contends that radio chains like Clear Channel and Entercom, who do not have a clear concentration of news operations in their markets, can strategically place their local stations above from all others, especially in a highly competitive marketplace, by increasing their focus in news, regardless of what audience surveys may tell them. It is further the contention of this research that Clear Channel and Entercom need to acknowledge that a station's local news identity is much more influential and commanding than any music format, especially when one considers the uncertainties brought on by disasters such as New York's World Trade Center attack and Hurricane Katrina. Listeners want to know what is happening. They want to break their fear of the uncertain.

Clear Channel Radio, since Katrina, has converted or is in the process of converting its classic rock station, WRNO FM, into a news-talk format. The station, once

billed as the "rock of New Orleans," will compete head-on with cross-town rival, WWL and WWL FM. WWL FM, originally known as WTKL before Katrina, and later renamed WWL FM, is essentially a simulcast of the WWL AM signal. According to WWL's Diane Newman, "in order to serve your market you have to work both sides of the dial." Did Entercom's WWL convert WKTL into news-driven WWL FM because they caught wind of the Clear Channel decision to change WRNO over to a news operation? It doesn't matter, because New Orleans will now have two more news and information services that will better service a population during times of disaster and catastrophe. Quite possibly, Clear Channel's news entry into the market may provide a much-needed balance to conservative WWL AM and FM.

Epilogue

On August 29, 2005, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Entercom's slate of radio stations, including flagship station WWL AM, and several Clear Channel Radio stations in New Orleans, formed the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans, a 15-station partnership sharing space, airtime and equipment. The two rival companies knew they had to work together to keep programming on the air, and keep members of their listening audience informed. This unprecedented alliance of the airwaves is recognized with saving lives and bringing displaced families back together. United's signal went beyond the local market. Its programming could be heard on the Internet and on a host of other radio stations in the United States, who were helping evacuees in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. Thanks to international shortwave station, WHRI, the voice of United could be heard around the world. "We had a job to do...we took that job

very, very seriously, every single day, said WWL newsman Dave Cohen. "That's who we are...that's the business we're in" (Cohen, 2006).

According to broadcast industry officials, the accomplishments of the United Radio Broadcasters of New Orleans are likely to have a long-term impact on the radio business. "We are seeing a couple of large competing companies doing what's right, joining forces and helping people," said Michael Harrison, publisher of radio trade journal *Talkers Magazine.* "They did so instinctively and didn't wait for the government to tell them that it was OK or for the Federal Communications Commission to make a special proclamation to allow them to do things that under other conditions would be considered monopolistic."

According to the *Systems Dependency Theory,* media effects are more distinct when the audience must depend on the local mass media for information. This was illustrated rather clearly during and after Hurricane Katrina, when survivors of Katrina turned to WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans for news and information. After Katrina, basic community services were interrupted, and people needed to know answers to questions that impacted their survival. WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans were alive and well in the early days of Katrina when other media were silent or darkened, leaving listeners little choice but to listen radio. The more people became dependent on WWL and the United Broadcasters of New Orleans, the more significant the network of stations became. Media Dependency theory states that the more media choices one has, the less dependency he or she has on any one medium. It can only be assumed that the dependency on WWL and United decreased as more and more alternative media came online.

Limitations of Study and Future Research

One limitation of this study is that it measured the viability of radio during only one disastrous event---Hurricane Katrina. It would be interesting to see how the medium performs during other kinds of catastrophe, such as earthquakes.

Recommendations for future study could include studying the effectiveness of this study's' policy recommendations in a real life setting (hurricane or other disaster). Future studies could also involve the investigation of the role radio plays when integrated or partnered with other media during disaster and catastrophe; the role radio plays in its ability to encourage mass evacuation before a storm's landfall; and audience reliance on radio *before* a major storm comes ashore.

The Media Lessons of Katrina

What are the media lessons of Hurricane Katrina? The communication's response of WWL and members of the United Broadcasters of New Orleans have proven that radio still has the staying power and stamina to inform and comfort listeners in times of disaster and catastrophe, and do it instantaneously. For the many people who lived through this nightmare, their battery powered radio may have saved their very lives thanks to this coalition of broadcast giants. It is the recommendation of this study that media consistently communicate the critical need for these devices as part of a citizen's hurricane preparedness kit.

Did consolidation aid or work against United's efforts? It was because of consolidation, said Clear Channel's Dick Lewis, that Clear Channel and Entercom had the resources to create and run the network. "If it were as it was prior to consolidation,

and we were all small independent companies, we'd be off the air...we'd be bankrupt...we'd be gone," he said (Lewis, 2006).

Hurricane Katrina has made the radio industry more aware of its responsibilities to the community, especially during times of disaster and catastrophe. The industry should be conscious of the broader implications that were brought out in New Orleans; that radio's role goes beyond the natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes. Quite clearly, radio is a very viable medium during times of terrorism and war. The United Broadcasters of New Orleans had every reason to be proud of what they contributed to the tradition of radio. They have proven that radio is still vital, especially in times of disaster and catastrophe; that radio, on the local level, and as a collaborative effort among other broadcast outlets, may be the one distinct factor that keeps the public tuned in to the medium, thus keeping it meaningful in the arsenal of other media.

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