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GENERAL INTEREST ARTICLES

God, Gays, and Voodoo: Voicing Blame after Katrina

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Abstract

Much of the public discourse following Hurricane Katrina's devastating impact on Louisiana and much of the Gulf Coast in 2005 focused on placing blame. This paper focuses on those critics who stated that Hurricane Katrina was "God's punishment" for people's sins. Through a narrative analysis of texts surrounding Hurricane Katrina, I explicate the ways in which individuals argued about God's judgment and punishment. I specifically turn my attention to three texts: First, a Repent America press release entitled "Hurricane Katrina Destroys New Orleans Days Before 'Southern Decadence,'" second, a newsletter released by Rick Scarborough of Vision America, and third, Democratic Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin's "Chocolate City" Speech.

Much public discourse in the aftermath of natural disasters and national tragedies focuses on placing blame. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) continues to be blamed for its insufficient 2012 relief efforts related to Hurricane Sandy. In response to mass shootings, including the 2009 attack on Fort Hood, Texas and the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, the public blamed everyone from the National Rifle Association (NRA) to the video game industry. One of the most notable events in recent years to feature such rhetoric of blame was Hurricane Katrina, which had a devastating impact on Louisiana and much of the Gulf Coast in 2005. In the public discourse that followed the storm, many individuals criticized the federal and state governments for not responding to the crisis with swiftness or efficiency. Others criticized local officials, such as New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, for their perceived ineptitude.

While most of the criticism focused on relief efforts, some individuals and organizations passed judgment on what they believed to be the very reasons for the hurricane's destruction. Rather than blaming the failures of levees or evacuation efforts, these critics cried out that Hurricane Katrina was "God's punishment" for people's sins.

Conservative Christians were largely responsible for rhetoric claiming God was punishing the region for its sins. Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Coalition of America, linked Katrina to legalized abortion ("Religious Conservatives Claim," 2005). Charles Colson, a Christian radio-commentator, related the disaster to terrorism saying, "Katrina gave us a preview of what America would look like if we fail to fight the war on terror. 'Did God have anything to do with Katrina?,' people ask. My answer is, he allowed it and perhaps he allowed it to get our attention so that we don't delude ourselves into thinking that all we have to do is put things back the way they were and life will be normal again" (as quoted in "Religious Conservatives Claim," 2005). Others identified LGBT rights activists, the culture of New Orleans, and other issues as the causes for "God's punishment." Black Baptist pastor Dwight McKissic decried, "They openly practice voodoo and devil worship in New Orleans . . . God's wrath may have howled in Katrina's winds because New Orleans thumbed his nose at the Almighty" (as quoted in Crocco and Grolnick, 2008). David Crowe, another minister, echoed these sentiments adding, "We've known for decades and longer that New Orleans has been a place where immorality is flaunted and Christian values are laughed at. It is the epitome of a place where they mock God" (as quoted in Crocco and Grolnick, 2008).

The religious right did not monopolize the conversation, however, as instances of this type of rhetoric occurred on all sides of the political and ideological aisles. Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Chicago-based Nation of Islam, argued God was punishing America for its racism

and classism with Hurricane Katrina (Dyson, 2007). Instead of blaming specific groups or individuals, this type of discourse claimed the hurricane was divine punishment aimed at the nation. Still other discourse of blame came from outside of the country. Ovadia Yosef, a spiritual leader in the Israeli parliament, stated Katrina was God's punishment for America's withdrawal of Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip (Dyson, 2007). Meanwhile, Al Qaida in Iraq issued a statement that "God attacked America and the prayers of the oppressed were answered" (as quoted in Dyson, 2007, p. 180).

Through a narrative analysis of texts surrounding Hurricane Katrina, I explicate the ways in which individuals argued about God's judgment and punishment. I specifically turn my attention to three texts: First, a Repent America press release titled "Hurricane Katrina Destroys New Orleans Days Before 'Southern Decadence'" (2005), second, a newsletter released by Rick Scarborough of Vision America (2005), and third, Democratic Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin's "Chocolate City" Speech (2006). While these three texts are not representative of every point of view expressed by rhetors invoking "God's punishment," they do provide glimpses of strategies used by such rhetors. Herein, this article is broken into four sections. First, I review literature related to theodicies and the rhetoric of blame and victimage. Second, I describe narrative criticism as a method appropriate for analyzing theodic rhetoric and blame-related discourse. Third, I apply narrative criticism to my three chosen texts. Finally, I conclude with an explanation of implications and areas for future research.

Theodicies and Victimage: Invoking God's Judgment

Rhetoric citing God's judgment is not new or unique to Hurricane Katrina. Discourse focusing on wars, HIV/AIDS, and other issues has often claimed that God or a higher power was punishing individuals for their sins. Michael Eric Dyson (2007) notes that many past and present

interpretations of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity cling to the notion that God punishes wicked individuals for their sins. Using the term theodicy (meaning, “the justice of God”), Dyson argues, “theodicies have sprung up in their wake to explain natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, and droughts. Some theodicies maintain that disasters are the wages of sin, some argue that they are signs of the apocalypse, while still others contend that they cleanse evil from the earth” (2007, p. 188). Dyson gives a brief and informal history of this type of rhetoric, stating that it has become less pervasive as scientific investigations have advanced. Dyson argues that the theodicies prevalent in the discourse surrounding Katrina show instances of homophobia and racism. Dyson’s work is insightful, as he briefly examines quotations from various ministers and leaders. However, he stops short of providing an in-depth analysis of any one particular text. In this article, I critically examine several texts employing theodic rhetoric, expanding upon Dyson’s arguments and bringing forth new implications.

An integral part of theodic rhetoric is the concept of victimage, or scapegoating. Kenneth Burke described the scapegoat as, “the ‘representative’ or ‘vessel’ of certain unwanted evils, the sacrificial animal upon whose back the burden of these evils is ritualistically unloaded” (1974, pp. 39-40). Burke explained that one way to scapegoat a person includes, “making him an offender against legal or moral justice, so that he ‘deserves’ what he gets” (p. 40). Relating the ideas of victimage and blame to theodicies, Rountree (1995) wrote “The President as God, the Recession as Evil, *Actus, Status*, and the President’s Rhetorical Bind in the 1992 Election.” Rountree discusses George H. W. Bush’s deflection of theodic blame throughout the 1992 presidential election and offers implications related to “understanding the inventional opportunities and constraints involved when one is charged with responsibility for evil” (p. 345).

Rountree's analysis views rhetoric originating from the individual being blamed and victimized; this analysis instead focuses on the act of placing blame.

While little communication research discusses theodic discourse in relation to disasters and crises, much attention has been paid to victimage and blame during crisis events. For example, Seeger and Ulmer (2002) discuss crisis related discourse as "most often about hard responsibility, fault, culpability, blame, guilt, liability, compensation and victimage" (p. 126). More specifically related to the public discourse surrounding Hurricane Katrina are Cole and Fellows' (2008) "Risk Communication Failure: A Case Study of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina," as well as Davis and French's (2008) "Blaming Victims and Survivors: An Analysis of Post-Katrina Print News Coverage." Cole and Fellows (2008) examined governmental documents, along with local and national media coverage to determine the ways in which risk communication failed during Hurricane Katrina. One of the authors' conclusions was that risk understandings differ among audiences of different ethnicities, classes, genders, and races. Cole and Fellows focused on the effects of discourse that did or did not take these differences into account; my study offers implications related to the reasons these cultural differences were not dealt with appropriately. Davis and French (2008) completed a critical discourse analysis of post-Katrina news stories, finding that the news media largely blamed "victims" and "survivors" for the failures of the area in dealing with the hurricane. The alarming notion that print media shifted blame towards Katrina's "victims" is especially relevant to this analysis. My analysis offers implications related to the fact that both print media discourse and theodic discourse placed blame on "victims."

As evidenced by this literature review, much scholarly attention has been paid to the role of communication during crises and disasters. Specific attention has also been given to Hurricane

Katrina and the role public discourse has in placing blame on groups and individuals. However, little research touches upon theodicies in the aftermath of disasters. As individuals of diverse ideological and political backgrounds made use of theodic rhetoric after Katrina, this topic becomes worth examining. In addition, as Christianity and other religions have vast influence over our communities, it is worth investigating how appeals related to God or a higher power function. Therefore, this analysis seeks to determine how rhetors placed blame on groups and/or individuals in post-Katrina discourse. By examining the rhetorical strategies these rhetors used, this paper offers implications dealing with race, religion, and other cultural variables as they relate specifically to Hurricane Katrina, and more generally to crisis discourse.

The Narrative Approach

This study employs the narrative method of criticism, which originates from Walter R. Fisher's (1984) landmark essay, "Narration as Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument." Fisher explains that human beings are essentially storytellers who create their social realities through the composition of myths and narratives. Fisher argues that narratives enable individuals to make sense of actions, events, and other life experiences. Sonja K. Foss (2004) adds, "Narratives organize the stimuli of our experience so that we can make sense of the people, places, events, and actions of our lives. They allow us to interpret reality because they help us decide what a particular experience 'is about' and how the various elements of our experience are connected" (p. 333). In short, narratives tie our experiences together in coherent ways that provide "truth[s]" about the "human condition," and influence our future beliefs and actions (Fisher, 1984, p. 7).

Narrative criticism involves an analysis of the narratives inherent in artifacts, such as speeches, novels, songs, films, and articles. A critic identifies the dimensions (e.g., setting,

characters, and themes) of the narrative in an effort to determine how the narrative functions. As Gary Selby (2001) points out, “(Narrative) studies share the conviction that narrative is more than simply a rhetorical device used to embellish rational argument” (p. 74). Narratives can play a crucial role in all of human understanding, altering an audience’s perceptions of the past, present, and future, while creating a “sense of collective identity” (p. 73). A narrative’s influence “depends upon establishing the story as the primary context for understanding people and events” (Lewis, 2005, p. 277). A narrative that successfully does this becomes hegemonic through its clarity, completeness, and perceived reliability.

As a narrative is influential and much more than a simple rhetorical device, a narrative critic’s purpose likewise becomes greater than simply uncovering the narrative elements of a text. Timothy A. Borchers (2006) highlights three purposes for critical theorists, which apply more specifically for narrative critics, as well. First, a critic investigates the meaning or meanings of a text as they are related to its contexts and audiences. Second, a critic explores the ways in which a text influences the culture it exists in. Finally, a critic evaluates the text as “good or bad, positive or negative, or desirable or undesirable” (p. 176). With respect to this purpose, critics do not always make ethical judgments on behalf of their readers, but they concern themselves with issues of power in an effort to “hold sources accountable for the influence they wield” (Bennett & O’Rourke, 2006, p. 56). Brummett (2006) explains, “Critical studies examines what power is or what it has been understood to be, and how power is created, maintained, shared, lost, and seized” (p. 101). Narrative critics are interested in the ways in which narratives empower or disempower segments of society.

As a flexible method that allows critics to focus on components of narratives that are most prevalent or significant, narrative criticism allows me to focus specifically on rhetoric

related to blame and victimage. In addition, narratives are central to theodic discourse. The theodic discourse of movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement, has overtly relied on Biblical narratives, such as the Moses/Exodus narrative. Selby (2001) examines the ways in which Martin Luther King, Jr. used the Exodus narrative in “Framing Social Protest: The Exodus Narrative in Martin Luther King’s Montgomery Bus Boycott Rhetoric.” In the article, Selby describes the ways in which King used the narrative to present himself as a “Moses” figure to the African American community, in addition to being “able to explain their present circumstances, urge their engagement in united action, and promise their eventual success” (p. 70). King did this by adapting the Exodus narrative to fit within his rhetorical situation. In similar ways, other rhetors adapt Biblical narratives to fit their situation—and to shape a collective identity, create a common enemy, explain their current circumstances, and predict their future struggles and successes. In my analysis, I observe how theodic discourse during the aftermath of Katrina did this by victimizing (thereby, alleviating blame from themselves), explaining the current post-Katrina situation, and predicting the future (e.g., as a better place because of the lessons from Katrina, or as an apocalyptic world).

Katrina Discourse: Three Theodic Texts

“God destroyed a wicked city”

The first text, a press release called “Hurricane Katrina Destroys New Orleans Days before ‘Southern Decadence,’” was published by Repent America, a large Philadelphia-based Christian organization, on August 31, 2005. The press release provides a scathing outlook of New Orleans and provides hope for a city “full of righteousness” in the future.

The press release’s title shows the primary focus of the text: blaming a celebration of homosexuality for the hurricane’s destruction. The press release states, “‘Southern Decadence’

has a history of filling the French Quarter section of the city with drunken homosexuals engaging in sex acts in the public streets and bars.” Here, the press release clearly defines an enemy: the LGBT community. The release shows the enormity of the enemy by citing the Southern Decadence website which stated that “125,000 revelers” came to the annual event in 2004. Through highlighting the sheer size of the event, combined with alcohol use and public displays of homosexuality, the press release clearly tries to reach an audience of conservative Christians and creates a formidable and alarming enemy. However, the release further expands the size and scope of the enemy in order to more fully justify Katrina as “God’s punishment.” The release states, “New Orleans was also known for its Mardi Gras parties where thousands of drunken men would revel in the streets to exchange plastic jewelry for drunken women to expose their breasts and to engage in other sex acts. This annual event sparked the creation of the ‘Girls Gone Wild’ video series.” The release goes on to discuss the number of abortions and murders in the city to further paint the people of the city as villains.

Importantly, the press release expands the enemy even further to include the public officials of New Orleans. The release states, “The past three mayors of New Orleans, including Sidney Bartholomew, Marc H. Morial, and C. Ray Nagin, issued official proclamations welcoming visitors to ‘Southern Decadence’. Additionally, New Orleans City Council made other proclamations recognizing the annual homosexual celebration.” The text also tells the story of a pastor who sent a video of men at Southern Decadence festivities engaged in sexual acts to city officials, who “ignored the footage and continued to welcome and praise the weeklong celebration as being an ‘exciting event.’” This not only identifies an enemy, but also builds identity and shifts any blame for the situation away from themselves. The pastor represents the group—conservative Christians who tried to help but were turned away. In this narrative, they

did their part but were unsuccessful which led to the current situation where “Hurricane Katrina . . . put an end to the annual celebration of sin.”

Finally, the press release describes the current circumstance faced by group members and provides a glimpse at future successes. The press release quotes Repent America director Michael Marcavage who says, “Although the loss of lives is deeply saddening, this act of God destroyed a wicked city . . .” Again, the current situation is described as an unfortunate necessity in God's plan for the world. Marcavage goes on to say, “We must help and pray for those ravaged by this disaster, but let us not forget that the citizens of New Orleans tolerated and welcomed the wickedness in their city for so long . . . May this act of God cause us all to think about what we tolerate in our city limits, and bring us trembling before the throne of Almighty God.” The current situation is further described as one in which they should assist those affected by the hurricane through prayer and other methods, while remembering that the victims brought the events upon themselves. Future actions are also proposed as audience members are encouraged to stop being tolerant of deeds they deem sinful in their communities. A proposal of intolerance is powerful in that members are called upon to stop certain groups from engaging and even existing. Marcavage additionally says, “From the devastation may a city full of righteousness emerge.” Here lies the goal: that through rebuilding the historic city in a new way and by refusing to tolerate the behaviors of certain groups of people, a city of God will surface.

“When God brings the deluge . . .”

The second text, a September 2005 newsletter written by Rich Scarborough, echoes many of the thoughts published by Repent America. Scarborough of Vision America, a conservative Christian political organization, again makes the case that God is punishing the citizens of New Orleans for their sins.

Scarborough seems understanding and sympathetic as he begins the text saying, “I have many friends living between New Orleans and Mobile . . . I've struggled to choke back tears as I've watched the devastation and followed news accounts. Please keep these precious people in your prayers.” However, he quickly comes to his main point that “disasters . . . are a constant reminder that—by their actions—nations, as well as individuals, are judged.” Scarborough argues that the enemy and the current circumstances coincide. The current circumstance—a nation devastated by Katrina and other unnamed disasters—was caused by the people of the nation. He states,

After September 11, 2001, 'God bless America' was on everyone's lips. But what, exactly, are we asking God to bless - a nation moving a [sic] breakneck speed toward homosexual marriage, a nation awash in pornography, a nation in which our children are indoctrinated in perversion in the public schools, a nation in which most public displays of The Ten Commandments are considered offensive to the Constitution, a nation in which the elite does all in its considerable power to efface our Biblical heritage?

Rather than blaming the specific actions of the citizens of New Orleans, Scarborough casts a larger net and blames the country as a whole. He says, “We are sowing the wind. Surely we shall reap the whirlwind.” He essentially argues that God punished the nation with Hurricane Katrina in response to the nation's actions. Specific blame falls on the nation for embracing (or, at least, tolerating) homosexuality, pornography, and the separation of church and state. Scarborough continues by stating, “One other factor which must be considered: Days before Katrina nearly wiped New Orleans off the map, 9,000 Jewish residents of Gaza were driven from their homes with the full support of the United States government. Could this be a playing out of prophesy (‘I

will bless that nation that blesses you, and curse the nation that curses you')?" Scarborough provides a laundry list of evils that led to the current circumstances, creating a massive enemy. He also expands upon items in the list, describing legislative push for same-sex marriage.

After painting a broad picture of both the current circumstances and enemy, Scarborough looks specifically at New Orleans. He states, "Scriptures teach us that God will not be mocked. The scenes of devastation in New Orleans we're witnessing on the nightly news show us a catastrophe of Biblical proportions . . . If that weren't enough, the chaos that's sweeping the ravaged city is a sad reminder that when God brings the deluge, the floodgates will open and unimaginable evil will wash over us." The author goes on to cite instances of violence that occurred in the aftermath of the hurricane as these examples of "evil" that arose after "God's punishment." He further describes individuals directly involved as "human beasts preying on the most vulnerable of the hurricane's victims."

Although Scarborough identifies the enemy as the entire nation and uses the word "we" throughout the newsletter, he more subtly distinguishes the enemy from his target audience, with whom he establishes a common identity. By calling on individuals to pray and by stating that "God is always speaking to us," Scarborough establishes his audience as a "people of faith." Clearly, this conservative Christian audience is different from the enemy—one led by an elite trying to "efface our Biblical heritage." He then gives specific instructions for his target audience's future struggles and successes. He states, "If you're shocked and saddened as I am by the foregoing—if you understand that it's up to people of faith to save our beloved country, before it's too late there's something important you can do right now." He then asks audience members to register for a Vision America sponsored conference called "Countering the War on Faith." Scarborough's motive is then two-fold. Clearly, there are profit-making intentions, as

Conference-goers must pay registration fees of \$149 or \$259. Secondly, he discusses the goals and outcomes of the conference: to “show Christians how to fight back against militant secularists, cultural polluters, gay activists and Hollywood indoctrinators. The conference will be the start of a year-long Christian voter registration, education and mobilization effort.” The struggles of his audience (fighting the enemies who brought the nation to the current circumstances) will bring successes (a nation redeemed and filled with educated Christian voters).

While Scarborough’s newsletter and the Repent America press release employed similar strategies and comparably victimized citizens of New Orleans, Scarborough expanded the scope of blame to include the entire United States. For Scarborough, the citizens of New Orleans were representative of the rest of the nation and were punished for the nation’s sins, as well as their own.

“Surely God is mad at America”

The third text, a speech given by New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin on January 17, 2006, takes an entirely different take on the post-Katrina situation. While Nagin still claims that the hurricane was God's work, he gives different reasons for the “punishment.” Nagin's speech is also different from the other texts in that it was a campaign speech given months after the hurricane. Additionally, Nagin delivered the speech at a celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday.

Nagin established a common identity with his largely African American audience through a discussion of Dr. King. He goes beyond talking about King, however, and instead insists that as he prepared his speech he spoke “directly to King.” He uses this rhetorical device throughout the speech, giving King's alleged responses to a variety of issues that Nagin claimed

the community was facing. Through this strategy he defines the current circumstances, creates a common enemy, and predicts future struggles and successes.

First, in defining the current circumstances, Nagin states, “I just wanted to know what would [King] think if he looked down today at this celebration. What would he think about Katrina? . . . And he said, ‘I wouldn't like that.’” By referencing an individual who the audience most likely respected, Nagin describes the situation negatively. He continues, “Then I asked him to analyze the state of black America and black New Orleans today and to give me a critique of black leadership today. And I asked him what does he think about black leaders always or most of the time tearing each other down publicly for the delight of many? And he said, ‘I really don't like that either.’” Through these examples, he defines the problem as twofold: first, the overt destruction brought by the hurricane; second, the response of black leaders to that destruction.

He then states,

And then finally, I said, “Dr. King, everybody in New Orleans is dispersed. Over 44 different states. We're debating whether we should open this or close that. We're debating whether property rights should trump everything or not. We're debating how should we rebuild one of the greatest cultural cities the world has ever seen. And yet still yesterday we have a second-line and everybody comes together from around this and that and they have a good time for the most part, and then knuckleheads pull out some guns and start firing into the crowd and they injure three people.” He said, “I definitely wouldn't like that.”

Nagin makes the case that King would define the overall situation as an unhelpful one.

Importantly, Nagin describes the situation in a way that calls for change.

Nagin uses the same rhetorical tactic of conversing with King as a way to define an enemy. He describes groups of people in New Orleans as being met by “attack dogs and machine guns firing shots over their heads” and King replies, “I wouldn't like that either.” Nagin further describes enemy figures as “racists” and “folk . . . on the other side,” seemingly referring to certain white individuals. He then proceeds to describe the larger enemy as the state and federal governments, stating, “What would [King] think about all the people who were stuck in the Superdome and Convention Center and we couldn't get the state and the federal government to come do something about it? And he said, ‘I wouldn't like that.’” He further blames the government for Katrina occurring in the first place noting, “And as we think about rebuilding New Orleans, surely God is mad at America, he's sending hurricane after hurricane after hurricane and it's destroying and putting stress on this country. Surely, he's not approving of us being in Iraq under false pretense.” By placing God against the enemy, Nagin places direct blame for Katrina and the failures of post-Katrina relief efforts directly on the government and other individuals defined as enemies.

While Nagin defines the government and whites as the enemy, he proposes future struggles and successes that deal only with those in black communities. He states that King said, “We as a people need to fix ourselves first” Nagin states, “We're not taking care of ourselves. We're not taking care of our women. And we're not taking care of our children when you have a community where 70 percent of its children are being born to one parent.” The struggles come with dealing with those problems. However, the eventual successes, Nagin argues, are worth the struggles. He states,

It's time for us to rebuild a New Orleans, the one that should be a chocolate New Orleans. And I don't care what people are saying Uptown or wherever they are.

This city will be chocolate at the end of the day. This city will be a majority African-American city. It's the way God wants it to be. You can't have New Orleans no other way; it wouldn't be New Orleans.

Again, Nagin clearly places God on the side of the African American communities and suggests that their successes are inevitable (as they are a part of God's vision for the city).

Nagin closes his speech by again unifying his audience around his vision for the future struggles and successes of the city. He states that King closed his conversation with Nagin by stating, "I never worried about the good people—or the bad people I should say—who were doing all the violence during civil rights time . . . I worried about the good folks that didn't say anything or didn't do anything when they knew what they had to do." He calls for his audience members to unite in dealing with problems within their communities.

In stark contrast to the Repent America press release, Nagin's speech largely absolves the citizens of New Orleans of guilt. Instead Nagin's speech is reminiscent of Scarborough's text in blaming the national government for the hurricane, albeit in very different ways.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of texts produced by Repent America, Rick Scarborough, and Ray Nagin, we can see the diversity of ways in which individuals and organizations placed blame upon victims, citing "God's judgment" as the reason for Hurricane Katrina's destruction. This section further explores the differences between the texts and offers several theoretical implications.

The key difference between Nagin's speech and the two conservative responses to Katrina deals with blame. As Davis and French (2008) note, media sources often blamed victims of the hurricane for failing to appropriately deal with its destruction. This paper also points to

instances when victims were blamed for the very occurrence of Hurricane Katrina. Burke's concept of victimage is equally relevant, as the authors of each text shifted guilt to scapegoats for the hurricane's destruction. The difference between the artifacts is that the Repent America and Scarborough Report pieces blamed (or, at least, partially blamed) the victims of the hurricane for its destruction. While also invoking "God's punishment," Nagin blamed the federal and state governments, rather than the people of New Orleans.

Regardless of the specific identities of the individuals or entities blamed by the rhetors, any issue where people justify an injustice by citing religion or a higher power demands attention. Discourse drawing upon religious themes can become hegemonic because religion is so influential in many people's lives. If the goal of a rhetorician is to point out hegemonic discourse and hold rhetors accountable then special attention should be paid to religious texts. In particular, the conservative Christian texts are guilty of justifying the destruction of an entire city based upon the supposed sins of certain groups and individuals. One component of rhetorical criticism should be to point out the ways that this type of discourse might affect these communities.

The LGBT community was one group clearly called out by both Scarborough and Repent America. Discourse blaming this community reinforces notions of hegemonic masculinity, which Connell (1990) defines as "the culturally idealized form of masculine character" (p. 83). Hegemonic masculinity emphasizes displays of power and force, achievement in the workplace, patriarchy, and other characteristics, while subjugating and marginalizing women and gay men (Trujillo, 1991, pp. 290-291). These texts are particularly disturbing as they promote intolerance towards the LGBT community and make an effort to deny that community a voice.

Classist and racist undertones also plagued each text, but none more so than Nagin's who overtly identified wealthy whites as part of the enemy. Nagin's speech, meant to unite his African American audience, did so by exploiting and heightening already existing racial tensions. While Nagin did not blame victims of the hurricane, he still invoked God in creating an unethical argument.

As Dyson (2007) notes, theodic discourse becomes less common as society experiences scientific advancements. However, major disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes still inspire extreme discourse of this nature. Highlighting the negative consequences of such rhetoric is essential to weakening its influence.

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