

4-2017

Restorative Rhetoric and Community Action in Response to the 2016 Baton Rouge Flood

Madeline Elizabeth Munch

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.lsu.edu/honors_etd



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Munch, Madeline Elizabeth, "Restorative Rhetoric and Community Action in Response to the 2016 Baton Rouge Flood" (2017). *Honors Theses*. 1063.

https://repository.lsu.edu/honors_etd/1063

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ogden Honors College at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact ir@lsu.edu.

Restorative Rhetoric and Community Action in Response to the 2016 Baton Rouge Flood

by

Madeline Elizabeth Munch

Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

Dr. Lillian Bridwell-Bowles

Department of English

Submitted to the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program.

April 2017

Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Restorative Rhetoric and Community Action in Response to the 2016 Baton Rouge Flood

In the history of Louisiana, natural disasters have occupied a place of power and control, shaping the state and its people for thousands of years. Hurricanes, floods, oil spills, and a subsiding coast have always plagued, and continue to plague, those who have settled the state, forcing them to adapt to meet these ongoing environmental threats. While residents of Louisiana have tried to prevent future disasters, notably by fully leveeing¹ the Mississippi River after the Great Flood of 1927, it is, of course, impossible to fully control nature. In the late summer months of 2016, the environment prevailed over humanity once again, creating an atypical and unprecedented weather event that devastated residents of Baton Rouge, Central, Denham Springs, and the surrounding areas². Starting on August 12, 2016, one storm cell inundated these areas with over 4 trillion gallons of water during a two-day period, forcing over 10,000 people into shelters (Wright). While flooding on a wide scale is not uncommon within the state – the aftermath of 2005 Hurricane Katrina demonstrates as much – this flood was unique because it was as an inland flooding event. Flood-prone New Orleans and much of south Louisiana were for once not the center of attention. Rather the rains hit areas far less accustomed to flood events, scrambling the residents of Baton Rouge and the surrounding communities. The response to the event was understandably chaotic at first, creating openings for groups such as the Cajun Navy to

¹ Because the building of levees has such a strong presence in Louisiana's history and present day discussions, those who write about them often use the term "levee" as a verb. I will adopt this usage in my thesis.

² Throughout most of this thesis, I refer to this area as the "Baton Rouge area" and sometimes "Baton Rouge" when referencing my sources, but the rhetoric I have analyzed usually refers to the wider area mentioned here.

take action, but eventually the waters retreated and the flooded cities and rural areas were left to find their footing again. In this aftermath, many people focused not only on ways to rebuild but also on ways to remember, creating documentaries and articles to reflect on this historic storm. One group in particular, the New Orleans Video Access Center’s (NOVAC) Baton Rouge branch, compiled entries about this tragic event and included them in their BetteR documentary project. This small, community-based group made the conscious decision to chronicle the experiences of those who lived through the storm, helping survivors preserve their stories and urging the community at large to come together to tackle the issues that struck the Baton Rouge area during those summer months. With such material available and with the event still fresh in many people’s minds, a rhetorical analysis of these documentaries reveals the character of the city, the themes most prominent in the wake of the flood, and discussions about future action in Louisiana. This thesis will adopt and modify the rhetorical model presented by Donyale R. Griffin-Padgett and Donnetrice Allison in their article “Making a Case for Restorative Rhetoric: Mayor Rudolph Giuliani & Mayor Ray Nagin’s Response to Disaster,” published in *Communication Monographs* (2010), in order to provide a template in which to frame the unique response to the disaster by the Baton Rouge community.

Griffin-Padgett and Allison’s rhetorical model of restorative rhetoric provides a framework for analyzing responses and arguments that arise in the aftermath of a crisis. Their focus on the aftermath of a disaster points to one of the primary concerns of restorative rhetoric: “[helping] victims and others affected cope with the physical and emotional destruction of the crisis” (Griffin-Padgett and Allison 378). In order to do this, Griffin-Padgett and Allison tailor their model to follow the natural progression of crisis management, dividing their focus into the following five sections: (1) initial reaction; (2) assessment of the crisis; (3) issues of blame; (4)

healing and forgiveness; and (5) corrective action and rebuilding through rhetorical vision (380). While this model is appropriate for crises such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the stories and responses of those affected by the 2016 flood do not map so easily into these categories. With some modifications, however, such as adjusting the focus of the sections presented by Griffin-Padgett and Allison, this restorative rhetoric model can be successfully applied to the responses to the Baton Rouge flooding. For these reasons, the third category presented, *issues of blame*, will not be discussed in this thesis. As this phenomenon, while bizarre, was a natural one, there is no one agency or organization that people blame for the storm. Many people have aired frustrations about working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) after the storm, but none have tried to place the blame for the storm on this group as many people did after Hurricane Katrina. Other minor modifications between the model and the material selected do exist and will be noted within the introductory segment of each new section. In spite of the need for modifications to the restorative rhetoric model, this framework still allows for fruitful study of the selected materials and prompts discussions about future disaster and community responses in Louisiana.

The primary material chosen for this thesis is a selection of documentaries within NOVAC’s BetteR community documentary project, articles from Baton Rouge’s local newspaper *The Advocate*, and information taken from three community groups within Baton Rouge. NOVAC has been leading workshops and producing local content for forty-five years, earning them the privilege of being the “longest running media-arts nonprofit in the Gulf South” (“About NOVAC”). Their mission clearly reflects a community focus as they assert, “We believe storytellers empower communities, so we empower storytellers” (“About NOVAC”). The NOVAC Baton Rouge branch (NOVAC: BR) is a newer addition having been founded in

2013. However, their BetteR documentary project clearly refers to NOVAC’s commitment to community and citizen empowerment. As described on their website, BetteR is a “web series produced...with support from the Foundation for Louisiana [that] highlights groups and individuals in the Baton Rouge community that are promoting healing and unity in the aftermath of the events of the summer of 2016” (“About NOVAC”). In order to obtain the community content that they strive for, NOVAC: BR awarded “microgrants to five Baton Rouge filmmakers” to produce content on the summer events of 2016 (“NOVAC Baton Rouge”). On February 9, 2017, NOVAC: BR hosted the premiere screening of BetteR at the Manship Theater in Baton Rouge, but since then has not publicly shown these documentaries again; two videos are available to the public on NOVAC: BR’s website while the rest can be obtained upon request (“Baton Rouge Community Events”). As a series, these documentaries provide a range of depictions of the city of Baton Rouge pre- and post-flood. Some documentaries focus on the violence that struck Baton Rouge, specifically the death of Alton Sterling and the deaths of three Baton Rouge police officers. Four out of the nine documentaries, however, focus exclusively on the flooding in Baton Rouge, reinforcing the impact this storm had on the Baton Rouge community and providing rich, first hand experiences of this disaster. This close link to the disaster at hand makes these documentaries promising material to pursue and interrogate with Griffin-Padgett and Allison’s model. While these documentaries might pose a few problems in the face of a restorative rhetoric model, they also reveal areas where this model needs to adapt in order to address these new voices.

In addition to these documentaries, I will also examine articles from Baton Rouge’s daily newspaper, *The Advocate*, and discuss local, organized, community groups in Baton Rouge. These sources provide strong evidence that can be scrutinized using Griffin-Padgett and

Allison’s model, especially in regards to *healing and forgiveness* and *corrective action and rebuilding through rhetorical vision*. Many articles in *The Advocate* detail the *healing and forgiveness* phase in Baton Rouge while community groups such as Together Baton Rouge, the Green Army, and the Louisiana Environmental Action Network point to final phase of restorative rhetoric, *corrective action*. While these primary sources do not directly reference each other, many themes discussed in the documentaries are echoed in *The Advocate* and these community groups. Thus including these sources that lie outside of the realm of local documentaries demonstrates how this information complements the material in the BetteR documentary project.

In order to explore the relationship between restorative rhetoric, community, resiliency, and the Baton Rouge flooding, I will address the following issues. First, I will establish the *kairos* of Baton Rouge before the flooding in order to provide the proper context and climate of the city pre-disaster. I will then apply the theory of restorative rhetoric to the events of the flood by analyzing the BetteR documentaries, articles from the Baton Rouge *Advocate*, and material generated by local community groups in Baton Rouge. Finally, I will discuss the future implications of the issues raised by the restorative rhetoric model and argue that while community and resiliency are extremely strong and central to the Louisiana disaster response, the communities that create this force should seek to be more actively involved in the Louisiana political sphere in order to inspire better preventative disaster measures throughout the state.

It is necessary to take a brief foray into the terminology and approaches used within rhetorical studies. One of the most influential ancient figures within the rhetorical field is Aristotle, who “identified three different lines of argument, or persuasive appeal[s]” that permeate rhetorical practices (Leith 47). These three appeals are ethos, logos, and pathos. Ethos

focuses on the way that the rhetor, or user of rhetoric, “establishes – both overtly and more subtly – his...connection with the audience” (47). Logos operates as a way to influence an audience with reason while pathos is the way in which a rhetor “seeks to stir them to anger, pity, fear, or exultation” (47). Together, these three appeals form the foundation upon which rhetors build all other arguments.

Also crucial to rhetorical analyses is an understanding of the levels of distinction among rhetors. By detailing a hierarchical structure, it is easier to see the relationships among the multiple rhetors, and therefore multiple stories, contained within this thesis. Primarily, the first rhetor is NOVAC, which created a NOVAC: BR division to continue their mission for community empowerment in Baton Rouge. NOVAC’s primary objective is to “empower storytellers,” so the content that they support will reflect these values, many focusing on local Baton Rouge community issues. After the historic flooding of 2016, NOVAC: BR set out to chronicle this event, offering five microgrants to entice local filmmakers to create engaging content on this storm. The filmmakers studied in this thesis are Margo Clark, Alex Cox, Jillian Hall, Evan Kidd, and Pamela Turner, each producing their own documentaries and in turn acting as the second set of rhetors in this model. For these directors, each documentary provides its own personal argument with elements that can be examined under the restorative rhetoric model. Within these documentaries is the final set of rhetors: the flood survivors themselves interviewed in the films. For many flood survivors, their primary focus is to provide their own story about the flood and to provide understanding for those who were not devastated by the storm. Thus this multi-layered system of rhetors offers us examples of the three primary rhetorical appeals from different perspectives and angles. However, effectively utilizing these appeals requires finesse and a deep knowledge of the issues at hand, typically by studying the particular context, or

kairos, of the audience that they are engaging. In order to better explain this nuanced Greek term, I will discuss it within the confines of the Baton Rouge flood to show how it operates within a defined rhetorical sphere.

To understand the context and response of the city to the flooding, it is useful to construct the particular *kairos* of Baton Rouge leading up to the flood. *Kairos*, as defined by Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee and applied within rhetorical studies, is a “Greek term meaning the right time, opportunity, occasion, or season” (433). The time referenced within *kairos* is not that of a “linear, measurable time,” but rather a situational one; it can “indicate anything from a lengthy time to a brief, fleeting moment” (Crowley and Hawhee 45). This lack of specified time frame contained within *kairos* is extremely important, allowing those conducting rhetorical analyses to understand “the situatedness of arguments in time and place” across a broad historical spectrum (48). In its simplest terms, though, *kairos* can be thought of as context; each issue and each community brings its own historical, political, social, and cultural interpretations with it, and it is a rhetorician’s job to tease out how these influences of the past affect the issue today. Without having this foundational knowledge of time, history, and kairotic opportunity, rhetorical analyses would be extremely limited and shallow. Constructing the *kairos* for the Baton Rouge community before the 2016 flooding is thus crucial to understanding how an event like this fits into the community’s memory and helps to contextualize some of the responses that people exhibited after the storm.

On a smaller temporal scale, examining the events that transpired in Baton Rouge during the summer of 2016 leading up to the flood allows us to understand the community’s *kairos* before being hit with a natural disaster. Before the unprecedented rains, the death of Alton Sterling and the shooting of three police officers in the area already plagued the Baton Rouge

community. Alton Sterling, a 37 year old African American man, was “killed in the parking lot of a convenience store after an altercation with Baton Rouge police officers” on July 5, 2016 (Crisp). Only two days later, a lone gunman attacked six Baton Rouge police officers, killing three and wounding three others (Lau). Tensions in the city, especially racial tensions and tensions between citizens and law enforcement, were especially high. The Baton Rouge community was trying to heal from these major events and what followed “were weeks of talk about coming together as a community after a crisis” (Robertson and Blinder). This reference of “coming together as a community after a crisis” is almost prophetic. No one in Baton Rouge was expecting a natural disaster to hit the city and many were still trying to heal from the violent events that dominated the summer months in the state. The Baton Rouge community pre-flood was therefore a disjointed and splintered one. Knowing about this already tense social and political climate makes the city’s response to the disaster that much more engaging; a sense of community and resiliency ultimately reigned supreme in the wake of the disaster as both citizens and city leaders, rescuers and those saved, noted. Without this kairotic understanding, discussions on the importance of community in the aftermath of the storm as compared to the fractured community before the storm would not be as fruitful.

While understanding the *kairos* of the city pre-flood is extremely important, a larger and more overarching *kairos* involving Louisiana and its notably troubled history with natural disasters begs to be examined. In recent memory, Hurricane Katrina stands out as a disaster that shook not only the people of Louisiana but also of the United States as a whole. However, Hurricane Katrina is not the first major natural disaster to impact Louisiana and the larger United States population. In 1927, an event simply referred to as the Great Flood struck the residents of southern Louisiana as the only partially leveed Mississippi River overflowed its banks into

populated cities. Notable in the wake of this event however, was the national government’s response to flood victims in Louisiana. Never before had the United States government provided financial aid to a city for disaster relief; typically, this was left to the state itself (Barry 497). However, as Louisiana found itself overwhelmed in an attempt to reintroduce its population back to a flooded city, to rebuild the damage done, and to fully levee the Mississippi River to prevent future flooding, they turned to the national government in desperation, effectively providing the first precedent for national assistance in times of major disasters (Barry 497). The Baton Rouge flooding of 2016 contains elements of both of the 1927 flood and Hurricane Katrina. Just as in the wake of the 1927 Great Flood, the citizens of Baton Rouge requested aid from the government after the flood of 2016, this time in the form of FEMA in order to help residents get back on their feet. However, the more recent Hurricane Katrina has had an incredible impact on the cultural memory of Louisiana as many of those affected by the 2016 flooding were victims of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. For them, the *kairos* of natural disasters becomes an almost cyclical harbinger; even though they moved to an area that was supposedly immune to flooding during major storms, they found themselves reliving the trauma they suffered eleven years ago. The timing of the flood also strikes a unique chord for those who suffered through Hurricane Katrina, as the flood ravaged Baton Rouge in August, the same month that Hurricane Katrina descended upon south Louisiana in 2005. The notion of time and *kairos* once again takes on significant meaning and points to the importance that a well-rounded understanding of *kairos* plays in rhetorical analyses.

While allusions to Hurricane Katrina do not occur within the BetteR documentaries selected for this thesis, the incredible weight that this hurricane has exerted on the Louisiana population and history is crucial to a complete rendering of the response to the 2016 flooding. By

examining the links between the two events, we are better able to understand the preexisting mindset and knowledge that the Louisiana community possesses in regards to natural disasters, and viewers of the documentaries are better able to situate the 2016 floods within the cultural memory of natural disasters in the state. Armed with this understanding of natural disasters in Louisiana and the climate of Baton Rouge pre-flood, rhetoricians studying this response to the 2016 flood will now be able to more fully appreciate the BetteR documentaries and their interactions with the restorative rhetoric model.

The first phase outlined in the restorative rhetoric model presented by Griffin-Padgett and Allison is first chronologically: the *initial reaction* phase. This phase is mainly focused on “a definition of the situation, an assertion of a level of control over the damage, and a sincere expression of sorrow” (Griffin-Padgett and Allison 380). While the first two aspects of the *initial reaction* phase do appear within the BetteR documentaries, I have adapted the model in regards to its focus on “a sincere expression of sorrow.” Many flood victims do display sorrow over the horrors that they suffered, but overwhelmingly, those who survived this storm exhibit a strong sense of shock, likely due to the unexpected nature of this disaster. Due to its prominence in people’s reactions, shock will serve as the primary focus of the *initial reaction* phase within this thesis.

The documentary that provides the most robust example of *initial reaction* is Evan Kidd’s “Flooded with You.” As described on the BetteR Vimeo channel, Kidd’s documentary “reveals the inspiring, strong family bond of the Davis family whose homes were flooded and who now live all together in one small apartment.” “Flooded with You” immediately opens with the theme of *initial response* as the opening scene not only focuses on the immense sense of shock that the Davis family experienced but also explores the ways in which this family attempts

to make sense of and define the disaster around them. Kidd opens with a shot of Shavette Davis, the main focus of his documentary, who says, “I’ve lived in Glen Oaks for twenty years and nothing as devastating as this has ever happened in this neighborhood” (Kidd 00:12-00:19). This statement succinctly expresses the shock that many, if not all, of the flood victims experienced. This shock is then paralleled with that of Davis’s mother, Shirley Murray. Murray admits that originally she did not want to leave her house, and it took her daughter’s pleas to convince her to change her mind (Kidd 03:56). Upon returning to her home to survey the damage, however, Murray mentions how she had lived in her house for twenty-eight years and was surprised by the amount of water that the floods brought (Kidd 03:17-03:25). Both Davis and Murray explain to the audience how they were completely shaken by the flooding, citing how long they have lived in the neighborhood in an attempt to help contextualize why this flooding was such a disaster; they both believed they lived “in a non-flood area” and thus did not expect or prepare for such an occurrence (Kidd 03:49-3:51). For homeowners, knowing whether they live in a flood zone determines whether or not they will purchase flood insurance. While many people who live in low risk areas might think that they do not need to purchase flood insurance, Louisiana Flood Insurance’s website notes that “almost 25 percent of all flood insurance claims come from areas with low-to-moderate flood risk” (“Frequently Asked Questions”). Without flood insurance, homeowners are left to pay for the damages from their own funds. Thus the shock these victims experience extends far beyond a lack of warning about the flood; it also encompasses the shock of having a huge, unexpected financial burden placed upon them. The vocabulary used by the victims throughout this documentary reinforces the importance of shock in each victim’s experience; “shocked,” “surprised,” and “I never thought” become some of the stock phrases that many victims, not just those presented in Kidd’s documentary, use. This stock vocabulary

augments the near universal experience of shock that victims of this flood experienced and sets up numerous parallels that exist in victims’ retelling of the events in their own words.

Perhaps one of the most emotionally charged moments in Kidd’s documentary that references the *initial response* phase is each victim’s explanation of the events of the flooding. Davis, only a few seconds after the initial montage of flood damages that dominates the opening of the documentary, offers a caveat that allows the audience to understand how difficult it is for people to properly explain the events of the 2016 flooding. Davis notes, “Sometimes I don’t even have words to... explain.” (Kidd 00:46-00:50). Noticeable in her delivery of this line is the pronounced pause between “to” and “explain.” For many victims, searching for words that allow them to create some form of narrative is extremely difficult. The event itself is a shocking and traumatic one, and attempting to explain the emotions that come with experiencing and recovering from this disaster is no small feat. Pauses can be found in both Davis’s and Murray’s accounts of the flooding, providing a loaded emotional scene that prompts the audience to sympathize with these victims and their struggle. While Murray’s pauses are not as pronounced as her daughter’s, her voice quavers while recounting her story, especially when saying, “It’s really scary, and I wasn’t expecting that,” again pointing to the emotionally taxing process of recounting this unprecedented flood (Kidd 03:25-03:30). Also noticeable within Davis’s speech is her use of simile, supporting the idea that articulating thoughts about this topic is not something that can be expressed in plain speech. When Davis attempts to describe the flood waters, she mentions that “the roads were like rivers,” not only creating a close link between the natural disaster and its influence over humans, but also suggesting that this event must be likened to something greater and more powerful in order to properly inform the audience of the magnitude of this event (Kidd 00:23-00:25). Thus while attempting to define the situation, Davis

is also trying to exert a sense of control over the events that happened to her. Examining the ability of people to articulate what happened to them allows the audience to begin to understand how these survivors view their relationship to the event around them as they try to claim some form of control over the events of the flood. The reactions of the people in Kidd’s documentary are not anomalous. Examination of other documentaries in the BetteR documentary series reveals an overall, consistent rhetorical response in the *initial reaction* phase.

The stories within Jillian Hall and Pamela Turner’s documentaries also provide examples of the *initial reaction* phase. Although these examples are less pronounced than those in Kidd’s documentary, they still provide supporting evidence for this nearly universal response to the 2016 flooding. In Hall’s documentary, Anthony Cox, both a flood victim and a volunteer in the wake of the 2016 flooding, discusses his personal flood experience while driving around the city to help collect supplies for his flood relief volunteer group. When attempting to explain the flood, Cox starts off with an extremely physical reaction, rubbing his face and sighing as he struggles to place the events of the flood chronologically (Hall 01:26-01:30). This physical reaction as he searches for words mimics the pauses in Shavette Davis’s speech, reinforcing the emotional shock that these people experienced during the flood. Cox mimics Davis again while discussing a phone call he received from his parents, noting that “I kinda got concerned because [the water] normally doesn’t do that” (Hall 01:40-01:44). Again, the idea of shock prompted by a disrupted sense of normalcy presents itself, much as Davis and Murray noted in their flood stories, and serves to strengthen the shared emotional experience that flood victims endured.

In Turner and Morris’s documentary, Pamela Turner, the manager and operator for Lee’s Towing, notes that she, too, was not expecting such a storm on the day of the flood. Turner, when starting to explain her flood story, opens with the line, “Well, the day of the flood, I did not

know that it was going to flood. I was just thinking that it was a typical workday” (Turner 00:25-00:31). Again, Turner, like many others in these documentaries, was operating under a false sense of normalcy that day. Furthermore, Turner also uses simile to help contextualize the flooding to the audience, much as Davis did. When describing her experience of attempting to drive through the floodwaters, Turner notes, “As soon as I came out of the S-curve, it was like I drove the truck into a complete lake” (Turner 01:56-02:01). Not only does this simile continue to note the link between the power of nature and the storm, but it also serves to further demonstrate that people are not able to directly articulate the experiences they had; in order to allow people to understand their story, flood survivors have to create a scenario or example that people can identify with, creating a slightly more removed account of the events around them. The parallels within each documentary and their respective stories points to a larger shared experience that victims of a natural disaster experience and allow for an overarching rhetorical argument to develop: the importance of a pathos based response within disaster victims.

In their coverage of the Baton Rouge flood response, many documentarians use the *initial reaction* phase to create pathos-fueled content. By allowing each flood victim to present his or her own story, the directors of each documentary enable the audience to become emotionally invested in each victim’s individual experience. As Max Archer notes in his thesis “Social Movements in Crisis: Locating Disaster Communities in Rhetoric and Rhetoric in Disaster Communities,” “‘most people do not experience disasters first hand,’ but instead rely on others’ accounts to learn about such events” (qtd. in Archer 16). By providing a strong personal and emotional link between the audience and the people in these documentaries, each director provides a crucial foundation upon which to build his or her story. The audience, already moved by the emotional struggle that each victim experienced, is more willing to continue to follow the

events of the flood and is more receptive to the facts that each documentary includes, since they now have a framework within which to place these figures. Establishing pathos as the dominant undertone of each documentary enables each director to better expound upon the next phase in restorative rhetoric: *assessment of the crisis*.

These NOVAC directors provide logical facts and data to support and further contextualize the emotional responses from flood victims, creating an opening in which to address the *assessment of the crisis* phase. Typically rhetors “[include] the assessment of damage and a statement of the immediate needs and other resources” of the community in order to establish the needs of the people post-disaster (Griffin-Padgett and Allison 380). Again, a slight modification is needed here in order to include the possibilities for the multiple rhetors within each documentary. Instead of a singular unified statement of the damage, each director includes the facts that he or she believes necessary to his or her documentary’s focus. Citing numbers and statistics proves to audiences that the scope of this storm is one that merits the term “natural disaster” and allows people to better contextualize the emotional connection that the pathos fueled *initial reaction* phase produced. Some directors also include indirect references to the needs of the victims, but as these needs are specific to each family or person interviewed in the documentaries, they cannot function as an overall statement on the needs of the Baton Rouge community. However, these accounts do provide an accessible example of this second restorative rhetoric phase.

Anthony Cox and Margo Clark’s documentary “Just a House” offers the most blatant and concise examples of *assessment of the crisis*. Cox and Clark open their documentary with numerous facts and figures. The first, and seemingly most dominant due to the disaster’s roots, is the fact “about 6.9 trillion gallons of rain pummeled Louisiana between August 8 and 14, 2016”

(Cox and Clark 00:07). This same figure is also cited in Kidd’s documentary, reinforcing the importance of demonstrating just how much water affected this area in such a short amount of time (02:10). In order to further prove how uncommon and devastating this amount of rainfall is, Cox and Clark follow this fact with the statement, “500 years: expected frequency of a flood this big” (00:37). While this statement is slightly misleading, an idea that will be discussed more in depth later in this thesis, the fact still heralds the magnitude of this event, daunting the audience with its scope and meaning. Progressing chronologically, the documentary then cites the figure “106,000: Households registered with FEMA” (Cox and Clark 00:57). After setting the scene with all of these figures, Cox and Clark progress into the meat of their documentary, which follows “a young woman seeing her grandmother’s flood-devastated house for the first time” (Cox and Clark). For this documentary, it is effective for Cox and Clark to provide such overarching facts before delving into a narrow view of one person’s personal and emotional confrontation with the devastation of her grandmother’s house. Cox and Clark then allow the main focus of their documentary to dominate the scene before quietly closing out their film with the following quote: “Baton rouge [sic] could generate a total of 400,000 cubic yards of debris from the floods in August” (06:46). This figure also appears in Kidd’s “Flooded with You,” again providing a strong parallel for the universal nature of these facts (02:19). By closing out with another figure, Cox and Clark mirror their opening and closing scenes, contrasting the magnitude of these figures with an accessible and narrow story of one woman’s confrontation with the reality behind these figures. While exact facts and figures for the needs of the entirety of the affected areas do not appear within Cox and Clark’s documentary, this documentary, and others, provide small windows into the needs of individual families during the aftermath of this disaster.

Contained in both “Just a House” and “Connecting Dots” are small glimpses into the resources and needs that flood-struck families needed. In Cox and Clark’s “Just a House,” there is a short scene where Clark walks into her grandmother’s shower in her trailer and asks, “Do you want to send clothes home with me? Where we’re staying has a washer and dryer” (04:34-04:38). Simple things such laundry, a statistic that cannot be easily calculated into a definitive figure that would accurately cover the Baton Rouge area, serve as examples of “needs and other resources” that those dealing with the flood struggle to find. Laundry in particular seems to have a strong presence within these areas as one group, the self-titled “Cajun Rosies,” specifically organized in order to help with these seemingly more mundane needs. In doing so, they removed smaller burdens from flood victims so that they could tackle the larger problems that recovery entails (Morris). Clark and Cox, while producers of their own documentary “Just a House,” later serve as subjects in a separate documentary and provide a slightly more detailed list of resources that these flood victims require. In Jillian Hall’s “Connecting Dots,” Cox and Clark serve as leaders in a volunteer effort to provide flood-struck families with items that they require. Many of the shots within this documentary provide a visual representation of the scope of items needed; donations take the form of water bottles, paper towels, toiletries, clothes, towels, shoes, and more, divided into sections to better help the volunteers navigate the mass of donations that they process (Hall 01:12; 02:21). In addition to these visual representations, Cox also offers some verbal statements that help to detail the breadth of resources needed. One particular quote, which serves as a voice over while a montage of Cox and Clark handling donations plays on screen, seems to sum up the needs of the affected communities nicely. Cox says,

Right now, resources are tough to find around town, so like the simple things like toiletries or you know, like a toothbrush, or a bottle of bleach. Like, you can’t find that

stuff like anywhere around. They’re getting truckloads in, but there’s like so many people in need that it’s going right back out. (04:29-4:45)

In this moment, Cox is able to suggest the current needs of the people in Baton Rouge and provide a more accessible account of the *assessment of damage* phase. While many of the larger figures cited might appeal to those viewers skeptical of the emotionally focused *initial reaction* phase, having more narrowed examples such as those in Hall’s documentary provides a balance to the sometimes overwhelming scope of this phase. Thus by providing both large scale figures and small scale examples, the documentaries within the BetteR series are able to cover many of the levels encompassed in the *assessment of the damage* phase within restorative rhetoric.

As stated earlier in this paper, this thesis will not discuss the third theme of *issues of blame* due to the lack of any outside entity influencing this weather event. While some small-scale issues of blame have arisen in the aftermath of this storm, such as the lawsuit over whether or not the Interstate 12 median incurred additional flooding for residents north of the highway, the affected areas as a whole have not blamed one, singular source for this storm (Kinchen). Some outside sources argue that climate change could be seen as the culprit behind this weather event, but discussions on this topic will be saved for the latter half of this thesis. Thus, I will not discuss *issues of blame* and will instead examine the fourth theme within restorative rhetoric: *healing and forgiveness*. Griffin-Padgett and Allison define *healing and forgiveness* as a phase where “the rhetor must guide the wave of resolution toward healing and absolution” (381). As stated before, since the storm was a product of nature rather than a fault of any one agency, *healing and forgiveness* adopts a different form when examining the documentaries surrounding the flood of 2016. The primary focus within the scope of the Baton Rouge flooding is that of *healing*. In this sense, *healing* tends to point to the ability of a community to address, respond to,

and move forward from the trauma inflicted upon them by the storm. In this way, the idea of *healing* becomes strongly associated with the oft-cited word resiliency. As defined by Cutter et al.,

resilience is the ability of a social system to respond and recover from disasters and includes those inherent conditions that allow the system to absorb impacts and cope with an event, as well as post-event, adaptive processes that facilitate the ability of the social system to re-organize, change, and learn in response to a threat. (599)

Numerous studies into coastal communities and resiliency have been published and offer models and methods to increase resiliency in these typically fragile areas, but for the purposes of this thesis, resiliency will focus more closely on its definition rather than its practical application.

The response of those known as the “Cajun Navy” points to a community that has a social system that allows for a citizen based response to react to and cope with a disaster. In doing so, this group plays a large role in the resiliency of Louisiana. In three out of the four documentaries discussed, the Cajun Navy makes some form of an appearance, whether in stock footage of the flood response team or as a guiding mantra on a volunteer coordinator’s white board. Examining the tremendous influence that the Cajun Navy possessed in the wake of this flooding not only allows us to construct and understand the ethos of the group itself, but also how this group represents the broader Louisiana community.

In order to get a better picture of the Cajun Navy, it is necessary to step outside of the realm of documentaries and turn to news sources which covered the disaster and its heroes in detail throughout the response and recovery process. Since the flooding was localized to the Baton Rouge area, the Baton Rouge *Advocate* serves as my primary source for news coverage of the Cajun Navy. Not only does the Cajun Navy make an appearance in a plethora of *Advocate*

articles concerning the flood, but they are also honored in an *Advocate* piece that collected 150 stories of the Cajun Navy. Due to the proximity of the Baton Rouge news source and the flooded areas, this newspaper provides an appropriate link between the community and disaster to allow us to examine the Cajun Navy through a community that witnessed their deeds first hand.

The history of community based rescue groups in Louisiana is a storied one. As far back as the 1927 flood, people nobly took up the banner of rescue efforts, even without the presence of an official sanction. In 1927, fleets of bootleggers, professional fishermen, and “river rats” – or “men who lived on houseboats and survived by fishing and trapping and building rafts of logs” – formed the first iteration of what we today call the Cajun Navy (Barry 276). Perhaps most telling about the legacy of such actions in times of disaster is included in a statement in John Barry’s *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* where he simply notes that “[the] first rescue boat left the city soon after the break, and independent of any organization.” It was, as Barry notes a few lines later, “a time for individual initiative and heroism” (276). This same opportunity for individual initiative appeared during Hurricane Katrina rescue efforts, as many would-be rescuers were turned away by official forces. However, many rescuers found their own way to help, “[pushing] their way through...alternative routes, shortcuts and detours and even [posing] as part of a penitentiary bus convoy” in order to reach those who needed help (Gannon). It is this legacy that has lived on in Louisiana and this legacy that inspires the brave volunteers of the most recent Cajun Navy. In essence, the Cajun Navy is a group of “citizen sailors” made up of “avid anglers, hunters and professional guides” who volunteered their time, talents, and resources to help people escape the rising waters during the flood, neatly paralleling their 1927 and 2005 counterparts (Stole). One anonymous *Advocate* editorial found a way to describe the Cajun Navy in a manner that would resonate with many in

the Louisiana community. While the editorial does offer a more typical rendition of the role of the Cajun Navy, describing them as “an impromptu flotilla of volunteers who had no admiral, no uniforms, no military medals awaiting them for acts of valor,” the author takes this understanding one step further and claims that this Cajun Navy can also be classified as “modern day fishers of men.” This directly points to the Biblical scripture in which “a handful of fishermen without special title or authority find themselves called to be fishers of men” (“Our Views: Cajun Navy rescues our sense of spirit”). This religious allusion is intentional and extremely effective given the intended audience; Louisiana boasts a strong religious population within its borders. Not only does the religious allusion help to elevate the status of the Cajun Navy, but it also points to the community based origin of this group. Many of the volunteers were literally “fishermen without special title or authority” who decided to step up to help those in their community. Finding allusions that lift up the brave citizens of the Cajun Navy is not uncommon. In fact, reading through the numerous accounts of their actions proves that the citizens of Baton Rouge consider those in the Cajun Navy to be nothing short of heroes. Examining these accounts with a rhetorical eye allows us to see that the ethos of the Cajun Navy is not constructed by members of the Cajun Navy itself but rather by the people they saved during the storm.

Characterizing the ethos of the Cajun Navy is deceptively simple. They are heroes. While nearly every student encounters a handout on the heroic cycle at one point in their lives, the heroes of flood victims’ stories do not follow such an arc. Rather, the people lionize the volunteers, lifting them up to the status of a hero and in doing so, suggest that the state as a whole possesses this same volunteer spirit as well. In order to demonstrate how the community created heroes out of these volunteers, I will examine *Advocate* articles that focus on flood

victims honoring the Cajun Navy and analyze these accounts to reinforce the community driven ethos that the Cajun Navy possesses.

Perhaps one of the most unique yet also most Cajun ways of honoring those in the Cajun Navy is that detailed in Darlene Denstorff’s article “Family pays tribute to Cajun Navy with 27-foot bonfire structure.” The tradition of bonfires in Southern Louisiana is a rich one and typically occurs during Christmas and New Year celebrations. The Duplessis family took this already unique tradition and made it their own, “[starting] the tradition of building a nontraditional bonfire 15 years ago to honor the memory of slain family member Luke Villar” (Denstorff). Typically, the family chooses the symbol for their nontraditional bonfires based on current events. They have burned “a 28-foot space shuttle in honor of the end of NASA’s space shuttle program a few years ago and constructed and burned a fleur-de-lis when the Saints went to the Super Bowl in 2009” (Denstorff). The Duplessis family also burned a model Blackhawk helicopter after watching them fly overhead in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (Denstorff). The Baton Rouge flood of 2016 was deemed another event worth commemorating, and the Duplessis family used whatever scrap material and debris they could find to create a life-sized rendition of an airboat. The Duplessis’ chose the airboat in order to honor those of the Cajun Navy who helped during the flood. By honoring the Cajun Navy in such a traditional way, the Duplessis family, like many others, used their own story to lionize those in the Cajun Navy. Being honored in such a personal circle reflects how the Cajun Navy touched the lives of individuals through their actions during the flood. Yet not all honor to the Cajun Navy was restricted to such a personal scope.

Larger festivals, such as the Red Stick Together concert, provide examples of large scale, community-wide honoring of the Cajun Navy. This concert was held on Sunday, September 25,

2016, and operated as both a flood relief concert and an honorary ceremony (Peveto). For this concert, *The Advocate* called for nominations for members of the Cajun Navy to be honored at the event, and after receiving over 150 submissions, it is clear just how profoundly these men and women impacted those in Baton Rouge. *The Advocate* was able to honor a few of the members of the Cajun Navy with checks during the concert and called up others to be recognized before the gathered crowds (Peveto). Noticeable in all of the pictures of this event is how relaxed and community oriented this event was. Those being honored are not wearing expensive clothing and waving to a crowd that simply claps politely. Rather, the people being honored that day wore baseball hats, sunglasses, t-shirts, and shorts, reinforcing their roots as average everyday people stepping up to help out in a time of need. The stories surrounding these honorees, however, shows why the community was so eager to publicly honor these men and women. Marshal “Big Hog” Hoglund, found a loose boat and used it to save his girlfriend’s grandmother, “[tying] a rope around his wrist and [swimming] the boat to her house,” totaling about four miles of swimming (Peveto). Jere Delaune, a Central resident, said that he could not sit idly by while people were in need and drove his boat over to the Baton Rouge area. While saving a woman in his boat, he was asked the question “Why are you helping? Do you have family here?” Delaune humbly replied, “All these people here...They're humans. They're all my family” (Peveto). It is this humility and selflessness in the face of disaster that people wished to honor, and it is this humility and selflessness that allows the Cajun Navy to possess such a strong and influential ethos.

It should come as no surprise then that Cajun Navy spinoff groups and Cajun Navy references in speeches appear in numerous channels after the 2016 flooding. One offshoot of the Cajun Navy is that of the Cajun Rosies, mentioned earlier in this paper. “As with the ‘Cajun

Navy,’ nobody knows exactly how many ‘Cajun Rosies’ there are,” notes article author George Morris, reinforcing the roots and breadth of this community response. The Cajun Rosies were founded by Ashley Hawthorne and Blake Guichet, while “a friend, Beth Hembree, came up with the ‘Cajun Rosies’ name” (Morris). Hembree crafted a name that blends both references to World War II’s famous Rosie the Riveter campaign and the more local Cajun Navy, creating an ethos that seeks to legitimize the actions of women in the aftermath of this disaster. The Cajun Rosies focus on packing lunches and providing laundry services for those who were helping in the flood relief efforts. Hawthorne and Guichet both realized that those who had to watch children might have felt that they were unable to offer some form of service in the wake of the flooding. Packing lunches and doing laundry, while seemingly mundane, are incredibly important tasks; Clark’s conversation with her grandmother during the “Just a House” documentary supports this idea. Thus the Cajun Rosies, while in no way affiliated with the unofficial Cajun Navy, sought to use the same ethos that the word “Cajun” carried in the wake of the flood; in doing so, groups like the Cajun Rosies both reaffirm and strengthen the ethos of the term “Cajun” following the flood. Other examples of the power of the Cajun ethos abound as well.

For many after the storm, the idea of a “Cajun” response became a sort of guiding principle, appearing not only in local spheres of volunteers but also in public officials’ responses to disaster recovery. In her documentary “Connecting Dots,” Hall includes a close-up of a whiteboard with the daily tasks of Cox and Clark’s volunteers written on it, each section bearing a name and an update as to the progress of the task. Bubbled off in a corner of the whiteboard is the phrase: “What do ppl know Cajuns for doing?!?” (Hall 03:54). This motto once again encourages people to imitate the ethos of the Cajun Navy; to be Cajun after the storm is to be

resourceful, willing, and selfless. However, such imitation is not restricted to the community level alone. One *Advocate* article quotes United States Senator Garret Graves saying that FEMA’s response to disasters needs to be “Cajunized” (Allen). In order to clarify this statement, Graves explains that “to Cajunize the response would be to ‘apply common sense’” (Allen). This “common sense” attitude reaffirms the Cajun Navy’s ethos as a no-nonsense, resourceful group of volunteers. Finally, the Cajun Navy ethos crucially includes one major characteristic: humanity. In an editorial titled “Our Views: Cajun Navy rescues our sense of Spirit,” the anonymous author sings the praises of the brave men and women of the Cajun Navy. For most of the article, the author keeps the scope of the Cajun Navy’s influence to the Louisiana community. However, the closing paragraph points to how the Cajun Navy ethos can inspire beyond just the Louisiana borders, as the author notes,

In a time of tyranny abroad, terrorism in our streets and tensions on the campaign trail, it’s easy to feel pessimistic. That’s why the actions of the Cajun Navy deserve praise. These volunteers did more than rescue flood victims. They also rescued our sense of possibility for the human spirit. (“Our Views”)

By referencing “tyranny abroad, terrorism in our streets and tensions on the campaign trail,” the author contextualizes the heroic acts of these everyday people in both a national and international sphere, using *kairos* to help craft a statement with more impact. The author lifts up the pathos-infused ethos of the Cajun Navy as a beacon of hope “for the human spirit” not only in Louisiana, but also for the entire country and even the world (“Our Views”). Given the range of examples of representation of the Cajun Navy and Cajun spirit after the Baton Rouge flooding, from both news sources and documentaries, the Cajun Navy’s ethos serves as a paragon for the incredible influence that a unified community can have following a natural disaster.

The final stage detailed in Griffin-Padgett and Allison’s restorative rhetoric model is *corrective action and rebuilding through rhetorical vision*. This step is a little more nuanced as Griffin-Padgett and Allison explain:

Benoit (1995) introduced the notion of corrective action in his attempt to expand the rhetorical options of apologia. In addition to corrective action, rebuilding is key to restorative rhetoric, especially since it involves crises of physical destruction. But rebuilding here is not just a plan for remounting physical structures; it involves establishing a rhetorical vision for a new state of existence. (381)

Again, this is a step within the restorative rhetoric model that does not map neatly onto the events of the flood. The “rhetorical vision” that Griffin-Padgett and Allison define is not fully solidified in the wake of the Baton Rouge flood; it is an ongoing process in the Baton Rouge area and as of yet has not manifested into a singular, coherent vision. However, some articles from outside sources have offered some suggestions on the direction that *corrective action* might take in Louisiana. Many of these articles call for a conversation about the impact of climate change and its potential link to this unprecedented storm. If Baton Rouge residents determine that climate change truly was a factor within this storm, they can begin to factor in such effects on future flood predictions and attempt to mitigate this flooding in the future as best as they can. By establishing what corrective actions they need to take, the Baton Rouge community can develop a more cohesive rhetorical vision in the wake of the storm. In order to understand the conversations currently surrounding *corrective action*, it is fruitful to analyze outside articles to gauge the discussions of climate change and its influence on the 2016 floods.

Before delving into the central arguments about climate change and its impact on the 2016 flood, it is appropriate to take a brief detour to cover a topic that appears in all of the

articles that discuss this link: rapid attribution studies. Rapid attribution studies are scientific studies that occur immediately after a widespread event in order to quicken the pace of experimentation and data analysis (van der Weil, Karin et al. 2010). The authors of the article in discussion do stress the importance of “attribution studies at a more traditional scientific pace (several months up to a year later)” as they “add to scientific understanding of changing extremes,” but argue that “reporting results recently after an extreme event may enhance the societal understanding of climate change and extreme weather and provide often-requested information for management decisions following the event” (van der Weil, Karin et al. 2010). The reasoning for the use of rapid attribution studies hints strongly at the themes underlying the fifth and final characteristic of restorative rhetoric; by enhancing societal understanding and providing information for decisions in the future, these studies can provide a pathway for *corrective action and rebuilding*. Finding a way to engage the public with this material might take considerable effort and time, as many people are still skeptical as to climate change’s legitimacy, but having such studies provides a foundation for the beginning of these discussions. Thus, this thesis will not go into the specifics of how such experiments and studies are run but will instead focus on media reactions to the information contained in these studies.

Most sources that cover rapid attribution studies and the 2016 Baton Rouge flooding argue strongly for the theory that climate change influenced the creation of this storm system. *The New York Times* ran an article titled “Scientists See Push from Climate Change in Louisiana Flooding” which largely argues that climate change was an important, if not driving, factor behind the 2016 flood. In the second paragraph, Henry Fountain, author of the article, states “researchers... found that global warming increased the chances of such intense rains in the region by at least 40 percent.” This strong verb choice, “found,” with no qualifiers around it,

points to Fountain’s argument that these studies should be taken seriously. Fountain continues to support his argument with logos based appeals, citing facts such as increased storm activity and severity due to warmer air that traps moisture in the atmosphere. He follows this statement a few paragraphs later with a citation from Karen van der Weil, a research associate, who states that the models used in this rapid attribution study were “sophisticated enough to capture the many different elements that contribute to weather in the Gulf Coast region” (Fountain). Thus by providing logos based evidence, Fountain builds the ethos of rapid attribution studies, arguing that climate change truly did impact the weather patterns in southern Louisiana during August. Finally, Fountain closes his article with a two part statement that seeks to convince any undecided readers to strongly consider, and hopefully believe, in the credibility of these studies. He cites a statement from Dr. Barry D. Keim, Louisiana’s state climatologist and a professor at Louisiana State University, who says, “I’m just not convinced that we can attribute any single event to climate change” (Fountain). However, Fountain follows this sentence immediately with the statement, “Nonetheless, he said, ‘there are some general consistencies between this event and climate change.’” By including an only halfhearted statement from a respected climatologist, Fountain urges those who do not believe the impacts of climate change on the storm to consider the fact that even if they are skeptical of rapid attribution studies, just as this professor is, they should err on the side of caution like Dr. Keim. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA) also published their own article supporting Fountain’s claims (Di Liberto). NOAA and Fountain’s articles are not the only articles that advocate for increased discussion on the impact of climate change and the 2016 flooding. A *Time* article also closely mirrors Fountain and NOAA’s argument to the public.

In his article titled “How Climate Change Helped Cause Massive Floods in Louisiana,”

Justin Worland of *Time* magazine argues strongly in favor of climate change as the culprit behind the 2016 flood. Not only does Worland note this direct link in the title of his article, but he also opens his article with the statement, “Climate change significantly increased the chance of last month’s historic flooding in Louisiana...,” a declarative statement that does not soften its argument with qualifiers. This same, confident tone persists throughout the entire article.

Worland supports this overarching claim with numerous facts and figures, referencing how climate change increased the likelihood of such a storm in the region by 40 percent, or possibly more; this figure was also cited in *The New York Times* article. Worland also makes use of the rhetorically dubious phrase “1-in-550 year event.” While this statement seems to hold significant rhetorical weight, positioning the storm as something rare, powerful, and almost something to be feared, the term itself is misleading, an idea that *Advocate* columnist Steve Hardy tackles in his own article. However, Worland does attempt to unpack his usage of the term, noting that as climate change “load[s] the dice,” the chance for these “1-in-550 year” storms increases. In the conclusion of this article, Worland mimics the framework of *The New York Times* article, noting that while

Attributing any one event to climate change has always been difficult...[a] National Academies of Science report from this year determined that climate science has advanced far enough that researchers can now accurately determine how global warming affects extreme temperature events, as well as drought and extreme rainfall.

This expression of doubt followed by a claim from a respected source, the National Academies of Science, seeks to convince the audience of the link between climate change and the extreme weather conditions that caused the floods in Baton Rouge. Both *Time* and *The New York Times* writers seem to agree that there is a strong argument for this link and do so with overall confident

tones. However, local media sources such as *The Advocate* do not react to this information in the same way.

Many articles on the Baton Rouge floods by *The Advocate* fail to include any arguments supporting the role of climate change in the flood. Rather, roundabout mentions of weather phenomena and extremely brief mentions of this phrase dot articles produced by local authors, suggesting that either those in Louisiana do not believe in the link that other outside sources are arguing or that *Advocate* authors are tailoring their articles to a group they perceive as not believing in these outside arguments. The article that comes the closest to tackling the topic of climate change is Steve Hardy’s which, as mentioned earlier, takes the time to unpack the rhetorical weight of the phrase “1-in-500 year event,” a slightly different number from that cited by Worland. Within the first sentence of Hardy’s article, he includes the phrase “a so called 500 year event,” already calling into question the authenticity of the fact. In the following sentence, Hardy makes reference to the fact that many scientists find the phrase “misleading” and provides a link to a recently published paper that supports this claim. Within the linked article, the abstract argues that, “Predicted floods are commonly expressed in terms of the recurrence interval of a flood, such as the ‘100-year flood’” but using “this terminology can be misleading to the public, because it implies a certain magnitude flood will occur once every 100 years, when in fact flood events are assumed to be random” (Paretti et al. 1). In order to combat this, the report clarifies that “flood frequency estimates are now reported as annual exceedance probabilities (AEPs) to reinforce the fact that flood estimates are probabilistic” (Paretti et al. 1). Thus, by calling into question the validity of the statement “1-in-500 year event,” Hardy is able to discredit such a fact and weaken those arguments that use the phrase without offering any explanation of it. Hardy uses this now discredited phrase to subtly attack FEMA, saying, “what the Federal Emergency

Management Agency describes as a 500-year storm is known as a 0.2 percent annual event,” calling into question FEMA’s knowledge of the information that they are using. The rest of Hardy’s article focuses on how this phrase has been used in the Louisiana community, but makes absolutely no reference to climate change at all.

One of the articles that does actually make reference to this phrase and the flooding does so simply to dismiss it. In her article, “Southern Louisiana records warmest February on record, winter temps also high,” Grace Toohey discusses numerous weather events in Louisiana that occurred due to increased temperatures but refuses to provide any link between these events and climate change; in fact she includes the phrase only once in order to dismiss it. The words “climate change” themselves are only found in the following phrase: “...and Lake Charles-based meteorologist Donald Jones said some might argue climate change played a role” (Toohey). The use of the word “some” is rhetorically important as it aims to distance the audience from the group that identifies with those who support the climate change argument. However, Toohey’s argument makes numerous references to how warmer weather affected weather events in Louisiana, such as increased tornado activity and a warm winter, which while agriculturally beneficial, does mean that mosquito season will descend upon the state earlier in the year. Many of these weather phenomena referenced, such as warmer temperatures, increased rainfall, and increased damaging weather events, were cited as effects of climate change in outside articles, such as *The New York Times*. Thus, the vast majority of arguments about the impact of climate change and the 2016 flood occur either outside the state or within specific interest groups, such as NOAA. This lack of dialogue within the affected community perhaps explains why the *corrective action and rebuilding through rhetorical vision* phase is not clearly defined within Louisiana. Some Louisiana communities have taken steps to prevent or mitigate the effects of

future storms, such as improved communication equipment for first responders and a new, science based flood alert system for residents of Central, but few of these advances seek to include how climate change could impact the severity and frequency of future storms (Hardy “Unique Central advanced model”). Without this dialogue, finding ways to take *corrective action* in inland Baton Rouge might be jeopardized by a lack of forward looking, caution focused plans.

While the overall lack of conversation about *corrective action* might seem disheartening, Baton Rouge already boasts a few interest groups that prove the power of community to address issues such as this. The NOVAC team, already discussed, has offered a visually compelling project to prompt discussion within the Baton Rouge community, and other community groups have employed different strategies in order to facilitate these conversations as well. One such group, Together Baton Rouge, “works on issues affecting families and communities, and is a strictly non-partisan organization” (“What are we building?”). This group also prides itself on the fact that they “deliberately...cross the lines of race, religion, neighborhood and political affiliation,” much as the volunteer efforts in the wake of the flooding did as well (“What are we building?”). After the 2016 flood, Together Baton Rouge hosted a “Gut Check Day” where citizens of Baton Rouge could put in a request for volunteers to help them clean and gut their house. General Russell Honoré made an appearance at the event, motivating volunteers and encouraging those who were still trying to recover after the storm. In order to respond more efficiently to the needs of their community, Together Baton Rouge created a survey for flood victims to fill out, allowing Together Baton Rouge to modify their volunteer efforts in light of crucial information, including the revelation that “5% of the 288 house-gutting requests we've received report that they currently are LIVING in homes with serious mold-infestation” (“We are facing a public health crisis”). The fact that this community-based group was able to respond to

the needs of their neighbors so well points to the potential impact that this, and other groups, can have in the wake of a disaster. However, these channels can also be used in preventative measures, such as tackling the mold infestation before it spreads, due to the fact that they already have an established relationship with those in the community. With further discussions, these channels can be turned into an even more powerful tool to help inspire change in not only the local sphere but on a broader, city-wide scale.

Much like Together Baton Rouge, the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) also uses its community roots to help empower local Baton Rouge residents not only to respond to environmental issues in the state, but also to promote active citizen engagement to help foster forward-looking change in their city. In their official statement of purpose, LEAN highlights their focus on “[fostering] cooperation and communication between individual citizens and corporate and government organizations in an effort to assess and mend the environmental problems in Louisiana” (“About Us”). In order to help empower these citizens, LEAN produces literature such as *The Louisiana Citizens’ Guide to Environmental Engagement*, a document that details environmental issues within Louisiana and guides people through the complex forms and processes when trying to address issues in their community (“Tools and Resources”). LEAN has also cultivated an Environmental Atlas for the state of Louisiana, providing an interactive map of the state clearly marked with points of interest. These points include environmental hazards, the location of oil wells, and records of corporation activities that threaten local communities (“Tools and Resources”). By arming people with knowledge, LEAN allows each citizen to gain the necessary skills to engage in legislative activity in order to help inspire change on a political level. LEAN also works closely with the Green Army, another environmentally focused group in Louisiana. The Green Army, as described in its 2014 Legislative Scorecard, “is a state-wide

coalition of organizations, civic groups, and individuals fighting to preserve Louisiana’s culture and environment” (1). Much like LEAN, the Green Army has also created its own resources for Louisiana citizens, notably their Legislative Scorecards. These scorecards present citizens with a list of environmentally focused bills proposed during the legislative session, provides an easy to understand explanation of these bills, and how each state official voted on these bills. By arming people with this knowledge, the Green Army allows their audience to be more informed voters and know how to flex their suffrage to better the environment, effectively creating a pathway for preventative action. With an understanding of how these groups work and how they interact with their community, we can better understand how positive, community-based *corrective action* can evolve in Louisiana.

The Green Army, LEAN, and Together Baton Rouge all provide wonderful examples of how powerful community-based action can be. LEAN’s commitment to environmental protection “and vigilance documenting individuals and their changing health conditions from chemical exposure due to the BP Oil Spill expedited an investigation by the Government Accountability Project” (“Achievements”). Together Baton Rouge helped victims of the 2016 flood and started campaigning “for community policing and criminal justice reform” (“2016 Accomplishments”). The Green Army hosts rallies and provides information on upcoming bills for Baton Rouge residents (“Take Action”). These groups all show how the same community spirit that emerged in the wake of the flood can be turned into a force that creates real, tangible, and positive results in Louisiana. While these groups might still currently lack widespread attention – none of the local documentaries mentioned any of these groups – they provide a much-needed starting point for *corrective action* to take real form in Louisiana. And given the nature of this state, the residents of Louisiana will undoubtedly need such groups in the future.

Louisiana has always faced environmental issues and, until the day that humans are suddenly able to control all of nature, Louisiana always will. The stories provided by the people of the BetteR documentaries illustrate how traumatic and trying such disasters can be on a personal level but also show how community can help tremendously in the aftermath of such an event. Griffin-Padgett and Allison’s model more formally details how a community responds to a natural disaster and, while not originally intended for a community-based response, it still points out important facts: examining the stories of flood survivors concerning the *initial response* phase demonstrates how overwhelmed and scared people were in the face of an unexpected disaster; contextualizing the hard facts of the storm in the *assessment of the crisis* phase allows flood survivors to begin to understand the event that they suffered through and place themselves within the content of that narrative; community efforts and identity are extremely important in providing a way for people to *heal and forgive* in the wake of a disaster; and finally, the lack of a unified *corrective action* response points to the need of stronger community driven groups in the state. It is understandable that many people would rather respond to a crisis than prevent one. Most citizens are not well versed in environmental protection practices or overarching ecological concerns and so gutting houses seems like a more plausible way to offer support. However, I hope that this thesis has provided ways in which the residents of Baton Rouge and the surrounding areas can enter into this conversation and help promote effective environmental protection methods in the state. If the people of Louisiana can come together to discuss how these disasters have impacted them and ways that they can begin to make changes to help prevent or mitigate the effects of future disasters, then ultimately, fewer people will have to suffer through the grief and hardship of losing their homes, their photos, their keepsakes, and even their family members. It will not be an easy journey to motivate people to actively consider

ways that they can influence future actions, but it is a worthy cause. Some channels already exist for people to join and connect with others and provide models for those who might want to establish their own groups. Regardless of how citizens engage with discussions about disaster in Louisiana, it is crucial that they do. The community spirit has always been strong in the state of Louisiana, and with time, and with hope, this very spirit may be the foundation for a new vision of environmental change in Louisiana.

Works Cited

- “About NOVAC.” *NOVAC*. NOVAC, 2017. Web. 27 Mar. 2017.
- “About Us.” *Louisiana Environmental Action Network*. Louisiana Environmental Action Network, n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.
- “Achievements.” *Louisiana Environmental Action Network*. Louisiana Environmental Action Network, 2012. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.
- Allen, Rebekah. “FEMA's response defies common sense, needs to be 'Cajunized,' Congressman Garret Graves says.” *The Advocate*. N.p., 12 Dec. 2016. Web. 12 Feb. 2017.
- Archer, Max. “Social Movements In Crisis: Locating Disaster Communities In Rhetoric And Rhetoric In Disaster Communities.” Kansas State University, 2008. Print.
- Barry, John M. *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*. New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1997. Print.
- “Baton Rouge Community Events.” *NOVAC*. NOVAC, 2017. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.
- Cox, Anthony “Ace” and Clark, Margo, directors. *Just a House*. Southbound Design. 2017.
- Crisp, Elizabeth. “Gov. John Bel Edwards on Alton Sterling, Dallas, Minnesota violence: 'We are better than this'” *The Advocate*. N.p., 8 July 2016. Web. 19 Mar. 2017.
- Crowley, Sharon, and Debra Hawhee. *Ancient Rhetoric for Contemporary Students*. 4th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2009. Print.
- Cutter, Susan L., Lindsey Barnes, Melissa Berry, Christopher Burton, Elijah Evans, Eric Tate, and Jennifer Webb. “Global Environmental Change.” *Global Environmental Change* 18 (2008): 598-606. July 2008. Web. 5 Mar. 2017.
- Denstorff, Darlene. “Family pays tribute to Cajun Navy with 27-foot bonfire structure.” *The Advocate*. N.p., 4 Jan. 2017. Web. 4 Mar. 2017.

- Di Liberto, Tom. “Global warming increased risk, intensity of Louisiana's extreme rain event.” *Climate.gov: Science and Information for a Climate-Smart Nation*. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, 7 Sept. 2016. Web. 20 Mar. 2017.
- Fountain, Henry. “Scientists See Push From Climate Change in Louisiana Flooding.” *The New York Times*. N.p., 17 Sept. 2016. Web. 11 Feb. 2017.
- “Frequently Asked Questions.” Louisiana Flood Insurance. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.
- Gannon, Patricia. “Film recalls Katrina's 'Cajun Navy': Heroic, unselfish despite orders to turn away.” *The Advocate*. N.p. 27 Aug. 2017. Web. 3 Apr. 2017.
- Griffin-Padgett, Donyale R, and Donnetrice Allison. “Making a Case for Restorative Rhetoric: Mayor Rudolph Giuliani & Mayor Ray Nagin’s Response to Disaster.” *Communication Monographs* 77.3 (2010): 376–392. Web.
- Hall, Jillian, director. *Connecting Dots*. New Orleans Video Access Center: Baton Rouge, 2017.
- Hardy, Steve. "Unique Central advanced model to give residents more time to prep for impending floods." *The Advocate*. N.p., 19 Feb. 2017. Web. 4 Mar. 2017.
- Hardy, Steve. "'500-year' flood and perhaps stronger: New evidence shows massive scope of Louisiana's August disaster." *The Advocate*. N.p., 6 Feb. 2017. Web. 3 Mar. 2017.
- Kidd, Evan, director. *Flooded with You*. RockSet Productions, 2017.
- Kinchen, Heidi. "Livingston Parish to join lawsuit over I-12 median wall, believed to have worsened flooding." *The Advocate*. N.p., 26 Jan. 2016. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.
- Lau, Maya. "'They ran towards danger': Emotional leaders give step-by-step account of Baton Rouge shootings." *The Advocate*. N.p., 18 July 2016. Web. 19 Mar. 2017.
- Leith, Sam. *Words like Loaded Pistols: Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama*. New York: Basic Books, 2012. Print.

Morris, George. "Cajun Rosies' use lunches, laundry to help those repairing flooded houses."

The Advocate. N.p., 29 Aug. 2016. Web. 23 Feb. 2017.

"NOVAC Baton Rouge." NOVAC. NOVAC, 2017. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.

"Our Views: Cajun Navy rescues our sense of spirit." *The Advocate*. N.p., 3 Mar. 2017. Web. 23 Mar. 2017.

Paretti, N.V., Kennedy, J.R., and Cohn, T.A.. Evaluation of the expected moments algorithm and a multiple low-outlier test for flood frequency analysis at streamgaging stations in Arizona: U.S. Geological Survey Scientific Investigations Report 2014–5026. Web.

Peveto, Kyle. "'They're all my family': Cajun Navy heroes honored Sunday at Red Stick Together concert in Baton Rouge." *The Advocate*. N.p., 26 Sept. 2016. Web. 4 Mar. 2017.

Robertson, Campbell, and Alan Blinder. "Flooding Compounds Pain of Tragic Summer in Baton Rouge." *The New York Times*. N.p., 17 Aug. 2016. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

"Scorecard: Map." *GreenARMY ScoreCARD*. GreenARMY, 2015. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

Stole, Bryn. "Citizen-sailors, or 'Cajun Navy,' vital to rescue efforts in sunken Baton Rouge." *The Advocate*. N.p., 19 Aug. 2016. Web. 13 Mar. 2017.

"Take Action." *GreenARMY*. GreenARMY, n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

Toohey, Grace. "Southern Louisiana records warmest February on record, winter temps also high." *The Advocate*. N.p., 2 Mar. 2017. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

"Tools and Resources." *Louisiana Environmental Action Network*. Louisiana Environmental Action Network. n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

Turner, Pamela, director. *Untowed Story*. New Orleans Video Access Center: Baton Rouge, 2017.

"2016 Accomplishments." *Together Baton Rouge*. Together Baton Rouge, 2016. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

van der Wiel, Karin et al. "Rapid Attribution of the August 2016 Flood-Inducing Extreme Precipitation in South Louisiana to Climate Change." *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci* 21 (2017): 897–921. Web.

"We're facing a potential public health crisis, and we need your help to address it." *Together Baton Rouge*. Together Baton Rouge, 31 Aug. 2016. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

"What are we building?" *Together Baton Rouge*. Together Baton Rouge, n.d. Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

Worland, Justin. "How Climate Change Helped Cause Massive Floods in Louisiana." *Time*. N.p., 7 Sept. 2016. Web. 12 Feb. 2017.

Wright, Pam. "Louisiana Flood By the Numbers: Tens of Thousands Impacted." *The Weather Channel*. N.p., 15 Aug. 2016. Web. 20 Mar. 2017.