THE NEW ORLEANS NARRATIVES:
A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN SURVIVAL STORIES

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The New Orleans Narratives: A Discourse Analysis of American Survival Stories
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One of the fundamental elements of social interaction and speech is the narrative. Regardless of the culture or language, hardly a conversation goes by between two people without one or more of the speakers recounting a story. The subfield of linguistics that is concerned with analyzing these stories or “narrative discourses” as they are technically called, is the field of narrative discourse analysis. A narrative discourse can be defined as an account of events, usually in the past, that employs verbs of speech, motion, and action to describe a series of events that are contingent one on another, and that typically focuses on one or more performers of actions.

The present work is entitled “The New Orleans Narratives: A Discourse Analysis of American Survival Stories” and is a work inspired by this fundamental pillar of human interaction. The narratives contained within this thesis reflect the struggles of a diverse group of native New Orleanians with the natural catastrophe and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Five individuals representing three dialect groups volunteered to share glimpses of their journeys with the researcher and the stories that resulted from these conversations were recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively/quantitatively analyzed with the goal of answering the following three questions:

1. What are the major dialects of New Orleans and some of their characteristics?
2. How do storytelling methods differ from dialect group to dialect group within New Orleans?
3. Is the success of a narrative contingent upon the inclusion of certain forms of evaluation, and if so, what forms are they?

The purpose of this study is to provide documentation of the dialects of New Orleans, with reference to phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon, but with more attention to narrative discourse methods. The speech of New Orleans residents is unique to their region and merits study as a distinctive American dialect. Storytelling techniques of the varying population of New Orleans are evaluated and interpreted with the motive of better understanding what makes some stories engaging and others not so much. This study not only provides narrative data of the dialects of New Orleans, but it also shares the stories of those affected by the greatest natural disaster in recent American history.
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I would like to express my gratitude to my family for the sacrifices they have made to help me achieve this goal. My mother and father have graciously supported me throughout all of my years of education and I am deeply indebted to them. My beautiful wife Karen has encouraged me all throughout this lengthy process and her prayers and counsel are a constant source of joy in my life. I love you.

I would also like to thank Dr. Underhill, Dr. Poole, and Dr. Pruitt for the time they have taken to review this thesis. Their input has served me greatly and I am pleased to have such brilliant professors work with me on this project.

Lastly, I would like to give all of the glory to the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Despite my imperfections, He has given me grace, salvation, purpose, and a life rich with blessings. I could never express how truly grateful I am for what He has done.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“To be a person is to have a story to tell. Stories have been told as long as speech has existed, and sans stories the human race would have perished, as it would have perished sans water”. These words written by Isak Dinesen (1957, p. 3) call attention to the importance and preeminence of the story in the human experience. One of the fundamental elements of social interaction and speech is the narrative. Regardless of the culture or language, hardly a conversation goes by between two people without one or more of the speakers recounting a story. The subfield of linguistics that is concerned with analyzing these stories, or “narrative discourses” as they are technically called, is the field of narrative discourse analysis. A narrative discourse can be defined as “an account of events, usually in the past, that employs verbs of speech, motion, and action to describe a series of events that are contingent one on another, and that typically focuses on one or more performers of actions” (Loos, Anderson, Day, Jordan, & Wingate, 2004).

The present study is inspired by this fundamental pillar of human interaction. The narratives to be analyzed reflect the struggles of a diverse group of native New Orleanians with the natural catastrophe and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Five individuals representing three dialect groups volunteered to share glimpses of their journeys with the researcher, and the stories that resulted from these conversations were recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively/quantitatively analyzed with the goal of answering the following three questions:

1. What are the major dialects of New Orleans and some of their characteristics?
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The purpose of this study is to provide documentation of the dialects of New Orleans, with reference to phonology and lexicon, but with more attention to narrative discourse methods. The speech of New Orleans residents is unique to their region and merits study as a
distinctive American dialect. Storytelling techniques of the varying population of New Orleans will be evaluated and interpreted with the motive of better understanding what makes some stories engaging and others not so much. A dialect map of the area (see Appendix A) and samples of narratives will be given in the study. While measuring the effectiveness of a narrative can be a highly subjective endeavor, this study will utilize the standard methods of analysis that Labov (1972, 2001), Tannen (1984), and Polanyi (1989) have used in similar studies. Furthermore, this study will not only provide data on the dialects of New Orleans, but it will also share the stories of those affected by the greatest natural disaster in recent American history.

It is the aim of the researcher to not only provide fresh insights into the speech of the New Orleans community and contribute to the field of narrative discourse analysis, but also to lend a voice to those who suffered so greatly on account of the natural and man-made disasters of Hurricane Katrina. Linguists and historians alike can benefit from this data set as a record of the personal experiences of New Orleans residents. It is important to document the stories of Katrina survivors now, before the passing of time drowns out their stories.

The remainder of this thesis will be organized in the following way:

**Chapter 2** will review and highlight the literature surrounding narratives and their structure, purpose, and features, and the unique group of dialects that are found in New Orleans along with a brief discussion of Hurricane Katrina.

**Chapter 3** will explain the methodological approach to the study, with notes on Labov’s “observer’s paradox” and the transcription of the data.

**Chapter 4** will discuss the results of Chapter III’s investigations in both a qualitative and quantitative manner.

**Chapter 5** will provide concluding remarks about the present study and will suggest areas for future research which pertain to the subject at hand.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

All narratives of personal experience are stories about a specific past event (Riessman, 1973). Stories are embedded within interactive communication (Sacks, Schlegoff, & Jefferson, 1974) and as Gee (1985) put it, “probably the primary way human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in a narrative form” (p. 10). Although the art of storytelling has been acknowledged and revered for centuries or even millenia¹, and critical analyses of stories in literature have been around for a long time, it is only within the last fifty years that the components of naturally occurring narratives have been analyzed linguistically and described in detail. Labov and Waletsky (1967) have greatly contributed to the transformation of contemporary linguistic theory beyond the sentence and into extended discourse, which includes narratives.

ELEMENTS OF A NARRATIVE

In the Labovian scheme, the abstract is the first major component of a narrative, albeit an optional one. In essence, the abstract is a sentence or two that summarizes the main point of the story and establishes the main idea of the discourse as a whole before launching into the details of a story. It is uttered at the beginning of a narrative and “not only states what the narrative is about, but why it was told” (Labov, 1972, p. 370). To Labov, the well-formed abstract is one which is not given in place of the story but rather serves as a dramatic component of it. On occasion, “a co-conversationalist supplies an abstract of a story considered worth the telling by way of prompting or inviting another participant to tell it” (Toolan, 1988, p. 154), a process which would require the interlocutor to have sufficient knowledge of the event described. Overall, abstracts serve as the hook to lure the listeners into the story.

¹ A written record of what appears to be ancient storytelling is found in the Egyptian Westcar Papyrus (circa 2000 B.C.). Within it, the three sons of Cheops take turns entertaining their father with strange narratives (Greene, 1996, p. 2).
The second component of a narrative is the **orientation**. The orientation identifies the key participants, places, props, and situations in the story, providing background information and physical descriptions of the setting and salient entities involved. In Labov’s terms, the “person, place, time, and behavioral situation” (Labov & Waletsky, 1967, p. 32) are what is highlighted. The orientation is the principal required element of any narrative. It can be classified as properly being in the descriptive mode rather than the narrative mode (i.e. it does not advance the storyline, is background information), as is discussed by Du Bois (1980) in his Pear Stories article, “Beyond Definiteness: Trace of Identity in Discourse”. It is therefore what Grimes (1975) would call “background”, and thus not evaluation (p. 55). However, an orientation can be strategically delayed for evaluative effect, for example when “the teller himself, as a participant in a sequence of events, only belatedly learned some salient facts of a situation and wants to put his audience in a similar experiential position” (Toolan, 1988, p. 156). Linguistic devices that help to identify the orientation are a frequent use of past progressive (was...ing) and linking verbs (be, become, look, seem).

After the listener has been oriented, the main events of the story line are related in what is known as the **complicating action**. The narrative clauses in this section are often told in the simple past (e.g. “Then he hit the ball.”). The main focus of this section is merely to relate “what is done” (as opposed to “what is said”), that is, the actual physical events as they took place in chronological order. This is referred to as the **Referential Function**. It “recapitulates experience” (Labov & Waletsky, 1967, p. 13) in temporal sequencing of clauses “in the same order as the original events” (Labov & Waletsky, 1967, p. 21). This order is an essential quality for a story to be called a narrative, because according to Labov and Fanshel (1977), “the structure of narrative is established by the presence of temporal junctures between these narrative clauses” (p. 107). **Temporal juncture** refers to the phenomenon that displacing a phrase in a sequence of phrases changes the interpretation of a text. To take an example from Toolan (1988), “John fell in the river, got very cold, and had two large whiskies” and “John had two large whiskies, fell in the river, and got very cold” tell two very different stories. Overall, for a story to qualify as a narrative it must recapitulate past experience by “matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred” (pp. 359-360).
Once the complicating action is finished, then comes the **resolution** which brings a solution or closure to the main action. Oftentimes the resolution can be a succinct statement, indeed there are many cases where “a single narrative clause both emphasizes the importance of the result, and states it” (Labov & Waletsky, 1967, p. 35). **Evaluation** is the next component of a narrative as presented by Labov and Waletsky (1967), but due to its many facets and particular interest to this thesis it will be discussed separately below. It is important to quickly note, however, that Grimes (1975) claims that evaluations “occur in English between the complication part of a narrative and the resolution” (p. 62) although Labov (1972) explains that evaluation permeates a narrative and can occur at any stage in its telling.

Lastly, the **coda** is the component that indicates that the narrative has reached its conclusion. Although the coda is not obligatory, it helps to transition from the narrative “story world” back to the present situation and give more relevance to the story.

In addition to this original framework, Labov (2001) more recently appended more components of narratives, including: the **validation** of the most reportable event by enhancing credibility through the use of objective witness, the **assignment of praise or blame** for reportable events by integration or polarization of participants, the **explanation** through chain of causal relation from the most reportable event to the orientation, the **transformation** of narrative in the interests of the narrator through the deletion of objective events and insertion of subjective events, and the **termination** by returning to the present through the coda.

A salient feature of narratives is the **CHP**, or Conversational Historical Present, meaning verbs morphologically marked as present tense, but functioning as indicators of past tense action set in the time of the narrative. Wolfson (1982) found that “the switch between CHP and past tense serves to partition events from one another, to give structure to the story, and thereby focus attention on the events which the narrator sees as important” (p. 222). The narratives collected for this study did not show much use of the CHP, and in fact it was difficult to isolate instances of its use in the speech of the Blacks because of the zero-affixing on regular past tense verbs (e.g. “I got up and I **walk** to the front door...”
One clear example of the CHP in the data, shown after a use of the past tense, is
found in the following excerpt: “so we went to bed around 8 o’clock 9 o’clock and ‘bout one
thirty in the mornin y’know I get up to go pee and dere’s wata on the ground on the on the
floor in my bedroom (Y1, 53)”. The CHP is an interesting matter to bring up, but pressing
on, let us first examine more closely the previously-mentioned concept of evaluation.

**Evaluation**

Deserving of its own discussion, evaluation essentially consists of the clauses and
linguistic devices throughout a narrative which emphasize significant events over others and
demonstrate a story’s worth to be told. It is the element of a narrative that imparts the
significance of events and expresses the feelings of the narrator (i.e. the **Evaluative
Function**). Any effective story consists of “waves of evaluation that penetrate the narrative”
(Labov, 1972, p. 369), that is to say, that occur throughout the different stages of a narration.
According to Toolan (1988), “evaluation consists of all the means used to establish and
maintain the point, the contextual significance and tellability, or reportability of a story”
(p. 156). It is “the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its raison
d’être: why it was told and what the narrator is getting at” (Labov, 1972, p. 366) or put more
succinctly, evaluation is what answers the question “So what?” (i.e. “Why was your story
remarkable enough to merit the expense of your breath and my time?”). In addition,
evaluation provides justification for the narrative’s claim on a greater portion of
conversation time than is usual, requiring an extended return of speakership to the narrator
until it is finished (Sacks, 1974). Evaluation is important because “a narrative which contains
an orientation, complicating action, and result is not a complete narrative. It may carry out
the referential function perfectly, and yet seems difficult to understand. Such a narrative
lacks significance: it has no point” (Labov & Waletsky, 1967, p. 33).

Evaluation in a narrative is essentially “the process of assigning prominence”
(Polanyi, 1989, p. 14). This assigned prominence can be observed in clauses that deviate

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2 This system will be a way of quickly identifying portions of the data. In the transcription in Appendix B
the end of this thesis, every utterance can be located by first looking at the speaker (N1, N2, Y1, Y1, and S1),
and then the number of the line. For example: (N1, 16) means NOLA Black speaker 1, line 16. The code names
for the speakers will be explained in detail in the methodology and discussion sections.
from the basic syntax of narrative clauses. Labov defines this basic syntax as “independent clauses with verbs in the indicative mood and (in English) one of three tenses: the preterit, the historical present, or the past progressive” often strung together with coordinating conjunctions (Labov, 1982, p. 255). In Labov’s view, evaluation is anything that departs from this basic structure.

According to Labov (1972) the major types of evaluative devices include:

- **Intensifiers** – onomatopoeia, expressive phonology (lengthening and stress), exaggerating quantifiers (adverbs like “really” and “very” that intensify the condition of a physical or mental state or action), repetition, ritual utterances, body gestures;
- **Comparators** – negatives (events that did not happen which yield the “defeat of an expectation” (p. 381)), future tense\(^3\), modals (might, could, should)\(^4\);
- **Correlatives** – which bring together events that occurred separately, progressive –ing form, appended participles (“sittin’, smokin’, thinkin’” (p. 388)), double attributives (“an unsavory-looking passenger” (p. 389));
- **Explicatives** – embedded subordinating time, causal clauses, belief statements (disparity between perception and reality of the event), while, although, since, because, etc.

This four-part model, however, does not take into account the different discourse modes (i.e. narrative vs. descriptive) spoken of by Du Bois (1980, p. 241) and Grimes (1975, p. 56). Explicatives especially do not qualify as evaluation because as Grimes explains, “Much of the secondary information that is used to clarify a narrative (called BACKGROUND for convenience...has a logical sounding structure, frequently tied together with words like because and therefore. It is an attempt to explain” (p. 56). Explicatives, therefore, fall into the descriptive discourse mode. It is for this reason that explicatives are not included as evaluation in the analysis of this present study.

Labov (1972) divides evaluation into two categories: external evaluation and internal evaluation. **External evaluation** is where the narrator “can stop the narrative, turn to the listener, and tell him what the point is” (p. 371). The events of the narrative are held for a moment as the narrator makes a comment such as is seen by the speaker S1, in line 58: “And

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\(^3\) Future tense in English is disputed among linguists because “will” is a modal.

\(^4\) Negatives, conditionals, and futures are often referred to as irrealis clauses—clauses which contain references to events that did not happen, had not yet happened, or might have happened.
you know, we’re just...it was just incredibly stressful.” Fully external evaluation is where the narrator addresses the listener directly, often seen through non-rhetorical questions.\(^5\)

**Internal evaluation** can take many different forms, but all emerge out of the narratives themselves. In the narratives that were collected for this project, direct quotes are used to great effect as a means of internally evaluating. Goffman (1974) points out the effectiveness of this method of evaluation when he says that “whenever an individual during ordinary talk directly quotes someone who is absent, the quoted strip will carry paralinguistic and kinesic efforts to mark the quoted person’s age, sex, class, and so forth, these efforts serving to vivify the presentation” (p. 518). This form of evaluation will be brought up again in the Discussion section of this paper. In summary, “the most highly evaluated form of language is that which translates our personal experience into dramatic form” (Labov, 1972, p. 396), and both external and internal evaluation are involved in this.

**“SUCCESSFUL NARRATIVES”**

Speculations on what makes “successful” narratives must be quickly addressed. Labov (1997) posited that the narratives of working class people as opposed to upper middle class, university-educated speakers have the greatest impact upon audiences because they are sparing in their reporting of subjective feelings and use mostly objective means of expression. What does objectivity and subjectivity mean in this context? “An **objective event** is one that became known to the narrator through sense experience. A **subjective event** is one that the narrator became aware of through memory, emotional reaction or internal sensation” (p. 403). Labov (1997) postulates that transferring one’s experience through objective means makes the audience “become aware of it as if it were their own experience” (p. 405). This only occurs when the narrator refrains from offering his or her own emotional reactions, a process which counterintuitively results in a successful narrative.

Polanyi (1989) points out the fact that storytellers whose stories fall flat suffer a loss of face and bring about socially awkward situations. There is great pressure to tell stories in a way which yields success because storytellers focus the center of attention on themselves

\(^5\) A discussion of this can be seen in the Chapter IV in reference to the Yat speaker Y2.
when claiming the floor for the necessary extended conversational turn. In order for a story to be “successful”, it must conform to three important guidelines; namely, it must:

1. have a relevant point which can be inferred and which grows naturally out of the talk;
2. be integrated smoothly into the preceding talk;
3. must be “recipient designed” (Jefferson, 1979), that is, it must be tailored to the audience.

Tannen (1984) likewise offers a number of factors that contribute to a storyteller’s success in relating a narrative. First of all there must be some thematic progression, i.e., the audience should know what you are getting at when you are telling a story. Beyond this, Tannen makes the claim that successful narratives in conversation are those that feature a high-involvement style on the part of the narrator. This style is characterized by a lack of hesitance, the preference for internal evaluation (wherein the “point of a story is dramatized rather than lexicalized” (p. 31)), and expressive paralinguistics (including expressive phonology, marked pitch and amplitude shifts, marked voice quality, and strategic within-turn pauses).

In order for a narrative to succeed according to van Dijk (1975), it must satisfy one of the “pragmatic conditions of narrative” exhibiting some sense of “remarkableness” (p. 286). These are summed up in van Dijk’s 4 principles of tellability, which are clearly manifested in the New Orleans narratives told within this study:

1. Actions performed in narrative world are difficult;
2. Situation must pose a predicament for the teller;
3. Unexpected events must take place;
4. Some facet of the situated event must have been experienced as strange or unusual.

A reportable or tellable event is one that itself validates the giving of the narrative and the social attention spent needed to relay it. Clearly there are events that are more worthy of reporting than others. Age, social context, and situation all factor in on the reportability of a particular event (Fludernik, 1996; Norrick, 2005). The life-altering events that transpired for the New Orleanians interviewed for this thesis rank high on the reportability scale. As Labov (2010) has pointed out, most narratives are focused on a most reportable event\(^6\). However,

\(^6\) In the present data, the most reportable event was often given directly in response to the researcher’s questioning.
not every narrative is successful merely for having a most reportable event, but the narrative must also possess **credibility**. These two factors exist in inverse relationship with one another: the more reportable, the less credible and vice versa.

To further advance this topic, Labov (2007) explored the idea of **narrative preconstruction**, that is, the process by which a storyteller decides which event is the most reportable and then “proceeds backwards in time to locate events that are linked causally each to the following one, a recursive process...” (p. 1). These events occur in chains which start off with **triggering events**, which drive the narrative along the chain towards the most reportable event (Labov, 2008).

**NEW ORLEANS SPEECH**

There is a New Orleans city accent...associated with downtown New Orleans, particularly with the German and Irish Third Ward, that is hard to distinguish from the accent of Hoboken, Jersey City, and Astoria, Long Island, where the Al Smith inflection, extinct in Manhattan, has taken refuge. The reason, as you might expect, is that the same stocks that brought the accent to Manhattan imposed it on New Orleans. (Toole, 1980, p. 1)

The above quote is the most famous observation about the speech of New Orleans in the realm of pop culture, but as Connie Eble wrote in 2006, “Next to nothing based on scholarly research has been published on the speech of New Orleans.” Other than Eble’s contribution in *American Voices: How Dialects Differ from Coast to Coast*, only a handful of scholarly descriptions of the speech of New Orleans exist.

Blanton (1989) pointed out lexical curiosities such as *chunk* ‘to throw a ball extremely hard’ and idioms with the word *make* (e.g., *make groceries* ‘to shop for groceries,’ *make menage* ‘to clean house,’ *make dodo* ‘to take a nap’) that are unique to the region. He also observed how New Orleanians will use a triple subject with three pronouns for emphasis, as in the sentence “*Me myself, I don’t like to drive over that bridge.*”7 Another characteristic feature of New Orleans speech common in narration that Blanton explored is the replacement of the simple past with *had* plus the past participle of a verb, for instance: *Yesterday afternoon I had run into Sylvia. I had told her we’re thinking about going to*

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7 This phenomenon was not observed by the researcher and is not evident in the data. Perhaps this particular construction was employed for contrastive purposes or is based on a French sentence model.
Dauphin Island for the weekend. And she had said that she'd get in touch with us tonight.

This was found in the speech of both Yats and NOLA Blacks in the data (examples can be found in the discussion section). Lastly, Blanton called attention to some phonological phenomena, such as final /θ/ turning into /t/ (“both” pronounced [bot]) and the devoicing of final /l/ to /ɫ/ (“orange” pronounced [orɛn̪ɛ]). As far as distinguishing between dialects within New Orleans, Blanton has claimed that there is a Yat dialect (allegedly originating from the greeting Where y’at? ‘How are you?’) which finds its origin among the Irish, German, and Slavic workers in the Ninth Ward, and an upper-crust Garden District dialect (those who would pronounce the name of the city as /nuɔrliyənz/). However, two decades later Blanton has stated that,

As for dialects, since desegregation in the late 1950s and subsequent white flight, it has been difficult to connect a dialect to a neighborhood or a Ward. Furthermore, country Blacks moved more and more into the city, bringing their speech patterns with them. I had always associated a dialect with a Ward. Now, I'm not so sure of what I’d do. I suppose a sociolinguistic approach has to take precedence over geography ... Homological Sociolinguistic Clusters is the way to think of dialects here. (personal communication, May 10, 2010)

Bailey (1992) noted many of the same features as Blanton in his brief dictionary entry on the speech of New Orleans. Lexical oddities are shown (e.g. banquette [bɛnˈkɛt] meaning “sidewalk”) as well as features which she claims are common across the whole Southern region, like the tags no (I don’t like that, no!) and hear (I’m having another piece of pie, hear?). Furthermore, Bailey contributes more knowledge about the Yat dialect, claiming that outsiders confuse Yat with Brooklynese, and noting some quasi-phonetic spellings like berlin “boiling”, earl “oil”, and foist “first” (which show rhoticization or in some cases the lack of it, erroneously called the “coil-curl merger” of /ɔl/ and /ɛl/) and mudder “mother” (which shows the phonological transformation of ð to d, which then undergoes flapping).

Bailey (1992) has claimed that “The city has locally well-understood stereotypes based on race, class, and neighbourhood, though linguistic features criss-cross these in complex ways” (p. 690). The results of the present study will bear this claim out.

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8 This is not a “merger” because from the researcher’s experience, the sounds actually trade places in the dialect and do not come together to form one sound.
Elizabeth Gouchnour, a speech pathologist in the film *Yeah You Rite!* (Alvarez & Kolker, 1984) has made the following statement about the dialects of New Orleans: “There are a number of different dialects in the area and there are all shades between them. I think the three major ones certainly are the Downtown White, what is often called the Yat dialect, um, the Uptown White, the upper class, upper educated Southern speech, and the Black dialect. But these shade into one another and there are many features that they have in common.”

Eble (2006), who is quoted above about the paucity of research on New Orleans speech, has herself helped to increase the scholarly linguistic research on the speech of New Orleans in a number of ways. She points out the fact that New Orleans shares many linguistic features with its Cajun neighbors in southern Louisiana. Many words which have been identified as the vocabulary of Cajun Vernacular English are recognized and used by New Orleanians. Among these words and phrases are included *gris gris* “magical formula to bring bad luck”, *lost bread* “French toast”, *mirliton* “vegetable pear”, *cayoodle* “dog of low pedigree” and *lagniappe* “something extra”. Apart from unique vocabulary, Eble also points out the unique dialectic divisions that are found within the “Big Easy”. The three-part division of Uptown white, Downtown white (or *Yat*), and Black is to Eble (2006) somewhat simplistic. She explains that “language variation is much more complex than the three-part division implies, linked in part to a middle-class population that traverses neighborhood boundaries to attend old, established, parochial high schools” (p. 46). In addition to this observation, Eble also traces the origins of the term *Yat* (and its adjective form *yatty*) to Ninth Ward public high school slang in the 1950s, saying that it was firmly entrenched as the name of the dialect by the 1980s. Further facts about New Orleans speech that Eble offers are that it is principally non-rhotic⁹, has special vocabulary surrounding Mardi Gras (*krewe* “members of a carnival organization”), some words are pronounced differently from the standard (*mayonnaise* is [ˌmɛɪ-nəˈzaɪ], *pecan* is [pə-ˈkɔn]), and that stress is sometimes

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⁹ Meaning that syllable or word final r is absent.
placed on syllables that are different from where the stress is placed in the Standard American English dialect (e.g., insurance, umbrella).\textsuperscript{10}

Lemotte (1985) has jokingly referred to the Yat dialect as “unreconstructed Brooklyncese” or the “Cockney” of New Orleans. According to him, the quintessential example of the Yat dialect is found in the St. Bernard Parish to the East of downtown New Orleans. Furthermore, Yat is by no means exclusive to whites, but is spoken by blacks as well, especially in the Creole 7\textsuperscript{th} Ward. Yat is not found, however, in the Garden District, University Section, or AAVE of Uptown black neighborhoods. In attempting to explain the uniquely boisterous and loud prosodics of Yat\textsuperscript{11}, Lemotte waxes poetic and offers the probably spurious suggestion that they arose as a natural, spontaneous solution to the need to communicate above the clatter of hooves and rumble of wheels on cobblestones, the hoots of steam whistles, and the creek and groan of derricks” (p. 12). Some specific features of Yat that Lemotte brings to light are the deletion of –ed on adjectival participles (berl crawfish), the centralization of /u/ to /ə/ (“room” [rəm]), and the present perfect progressive tense (He \textit{bin knowin}).\textsuperscript{12}

Oetting and Pruitt (2005) examined the use of Southern African American English, or SAAE, across groups who ranged in age (preschool vs. adult) and place of residency (rural vs. urban). Their research is of particular interest to the present study because their data came from the “Lousiana versions” of SAAE, in and around the Baton Rouge area (p. 136). Although there are 80 miles that lie between the Baton Rouge area and New Orleans, similar features and patterns can be found in the speech of both studies’ participants. A few notable

\textsuperscript{10} This nonstandard stress shift is actually an attempt to normalize the stress pattern of English for nouns.

\textsuperscript{11} No research has been done on the prosodics of New Orleanian speech, however it can be described, at least in the case of the Yats and NOLA Blacks, as active in its exploitation of volume (i.e. dynamic range), pitch range, and exaggerated intonation contours.

\textsuperscript{12} Corresponding to Standard English “He has known”. The name of this tense was taken from John Rickford’s “Suite for Ebony and Phonics” (1997), which points out “five present tenses of Ebonics”, all supposedly different from Standard English. These include the present progressive (“He runnin” = “He’s running”), the present habitual progressive (“He be runnin” = “He is usually running”), the present intensive habitual progressive (“He be steady runnin” = “He is usually running in an intensive, sustained manner”), the present perfect progressive (“He bin runnin” = “He has been running”), and the present perfect progressive with remote inception (“He BIN runnin” = “He has been running for a long time, and still is”). Another aspect that makes this construction different from Standard English is the fact that the verb “to know” is used in the progressive, a usage which is quite rare in Standard English.
areas of overlap, include the use of zero regular past, zero possessive, zero be, multiple negation, existential it, zero of, zero present progressive, habitual be, ain’t, had + Ved, and existential they.\textsuperscript{13} Characteristics of SAAE that did not emerge in the present data, however, were fixin + verb, Wh-noninversion, zero infinitive to, and zero that. Oetting and Pruitt (2005) themselves say that “overlap extends to speakers of other AAE varieties” (p. 142) and that is born out in the study of New Orleans Black speech here.

Overall, the conclusion that can be drawn from the observations of scholars is that making a clear distinction between the dialects of New Orleans based solely on neighborhood is a difficult if not impossible task. In this study, samples of speech will be examined from different areas of New Orleans and dialectical features will be highlighted in order to see whether clear-cut dialects emerge.

Before discussing the methodology and scope of this study, a few comments are in order about the terms Creole and Cajun, neither of which will play a role in subsequent chapters. As many New Orleanians can tell you, the word “creole” has two basic definitions within the city limits. To whites, the term “Creole” denotes a descendant of the founding Spanish or French families of New Orleans. That is, a child born in the New World from European parents. To blacks, on the other hand, the word “Creole” describes someone of mixed blood, usually of French heritage (Lemotte, 1985, p. 4).

Cajun is a term that describes “a group of people with an enduring cultural tradition whose French Catholic ancestors established permanent communities in Louisiana and Maine after being expelled from Acadia in the late 18th century” (“Cajun,” n.d.). These rural inhabitants speak a peculiar dialect of French known as Cajun and are generally found outside the city of New Orleans mostly in the West and South swampy regions of Louisiana. The term Cajun derives from “Cagian, dialectic pronunciation of Acadian, from Acadia, former French colony in what is now Canadian Maritimes” (Harper, 2010). This study focuses on other dialects found within the city limits of New Orleans, those spoken by people who were impacted directly by the storm. None of the informants identified themselves as Creole or Cajun.

\textsuperscript{13} These are listed in the order they appear in Chapter IV’s discussion of the features of NOLA Black. There each feature will be explained with an example from the data.
HURRICANE KATRINA

On the morning of Monday, August 29th of 2005, one of the most devastating storms in American history struck the city of New Orleans. A Category 3 hurricane which was a vestige of a Category 5 hurricane from the Gulf of Mexico with wind speeds that peaked at 121 miles per hour, Hurricane Katrina devastated the coastline from Florida all the way to Texas, leaving millions of Americans jobless and homeless. More than 1,800 people lost their lives, and more than $81 billion dollars in damages were sustained as a result of the levee failures and subsequent flooding of over 80% of the city. 53 levee breaches occurred within the city limits of New Orleans, which sits below sea level, and the waters that spilled over destroyed the more recent developments built on lower, softer ground. In addition to the oily floodwaters, looting and general lawlessness in the aftermath of the storm contributed to the devastation of New Orleans (Brinkley, 2006). As Pulitzer-prize winning author and editor of the Times-Picayune Jed Horne wrote in his book Breach of Faith (2006), “Hurricane Katrina shredded one of the great cities of the South, and as levees failed and the federal relief effort proved lethally incompetent, a natural disaster became a man-made catastrophe” (p. 1).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The tellers were not known as gifted story tellers; people did not gather to hear
them speak. They were ordinary people in the deepest sense of the word. They did
not manufacture events or elaborate the experience of others. Their narratives
were an attempt to convey simply and seriously the most important experiences of
their own lives. Sometimes the stories had been told many times, but very often
they had not been, or were perhaps told for the very first time. They deal with the
major events of life and death, including the sudden outbreak of violence; the near
approach of death and the witness of it; premonitions of the future...courage in the
face of adversity and the struggle against overwhelming odds; cowardice and the
betrayal of trust. (Labov, 1997, p. 401)

Using the framework set up by Labov (1972, 2001), Tannen (1984), and Polanyi
(1989), the present study analyzes the methods and features of American storytelling in the
area around New Orleans, Louisiana. More specifically, it is a narrative analysis of the
stories of Hurricane Katrina survivors that were told in conversation with the researcher. In
order to obtain an empirical set of data that was both realistic and interesting for comparison,
the researcher asked participants to conversationally relate their personal stories all
surrounding the same event, namely, Hurricane Katrina. The participants in the study varied
in age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, but their stories surrounded the same basic event
and thus have many similarities. Consent forms were provided and those asked to tell their
story were under no obligation to participate in the study and could refrain at any time. Only
audio was recorded under the full knowledge and consent of the participants. Stories were
recorded in restaurants, parks, coffee shops, front porches, and other natural settings using an
Olympus WS-510M Digital Voice Recorder. Narratives were collected from the three major
dialects of New Orleans which have been previously mentioned. The collected narratives
were then transcribed using the transcription conventions shown in Appendix B, adapted
from Conley (1994) and Schenkein (1978).

Five subjects in total were interviewed at length about their personal experience
during the days surrounding Hurricane Katrina. This number of subjects was determined as a
realistic yet solid base for analysis. Transcribing conversations is a time-consuming affair;
having more than 10 conversations to transcribe is an unrealistic and unnecessary task for a project of this sort. Yet having too few conversations would make the data less valid for comparative purposes. Therefore, it was determined that five subjects would be sufficient to represent the various dialect groups of the region. A non-negotiable criterion that was considered in the recruitment of the subjects was that they be native-born to the New Orleans region. These subjects included:

- **N1**: an elderly black female from the lower 9th Ward and speaker of the NOLA Black dialect;
- **N2**: a middle-aged black male from the 7th Ward and speaker of the NOLA Black dialect;
- **Y1**: a middle-aged white male from Gentilly and speaker of the Yat dialect;
- **Y2**: a middle-aged white male from the 3rd Ward and speaker of the Yat dialect;
- **S1**: a 38 year-old white female from the Garden District and speaker of the Uptown White, or Standard American English dialect.

As noted in Chapter I, the primary research questions of this study are the following:

1. What are the major dialects of New Orleans and some of their characteristics?
2. How do storytelling methods vary from dialect group to dialect group within New Orleans?
3. Is the success of a narrative contingent upon the inclusion of certain forms of evaluation, and if so, what forms are they?

To answer the first of these three questions, the data from the conversations were qualitatively analyzed for unique phonological, morphological, and lexical features. These are listed in the discussion section and are individually commented upon.

The second question was approached in a manner more quantitative than the other two. To measure differences in storytelling methods between dialect groups, the various types of evaluation in a modified Labovian scheme\(^\text{14}\) were tallied for each individual speaker. This figure was divided against the total amount of words spoken in each narrative. The resulting ratios were then reduced so that the instances of each type of evaluation were measured per thousand words and then compared.

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\(^{14}\) This modified scheme will be explained in the Discussion section.
The third question returns to a qualitative approach. Taking all of the data from the second research question and pairing it with the criteria for the “success” of a narrative, which is explained further in the discussion section, the researcher’s findings are given and conjectures are drawn.

The most difficult assignment for any linguist in the field is to obtain natural, spontaneous speech to analyze and not to misrepresent it through its very observation. Labov and Fanshel (1973) referred to this problem as the “observer’s paradox” and advised researchers to “break through the constraints of the interview situation by various devices which direct attention away from the speech, and allows the vernacular to emerge...[this being] the style in which the minimum attention is given to the monitoring of speech” (p. 208-209). Too often interviewees are presented a world that is “abstract, fragmented, precategorized, standardized, divorced from personal and local contexts of relevance, and with its meanings defined and controlled by researchers” (Mishler, 1986, p. 120). Apart from this, Wolfson (1978) has shown that differences in sex, age, intimacy, ethnic group, occupation, and social status are all constraining factors that preclude the sharing of narratives.

To avoid the severely limited interactions that can take place within interviewing (Wolfson, 1976), the present narratives were elicited using a conversational approach and what Conley (1994) has referred to as a “spontaneous interview situation” which is characterized by “generic, open-ended questions; extended, uninterrupted speech utterances; and, the absence of formulaic questionnaires” (p. 49). In fact, some of the narratives here included could fall under the category of what Polanyi (1989) has called the “diffuse story”, that is, chunks of story constituents interwoven with chunks of conversation, joint evaluation, multiple speakers collaborating on the main point of the story, and “multiple core plots” (p. 57). This method was used in order to derive speech that shifted towards the vernacular—that is, towards the first-learned style of speech that is used in every-day communication with friends and family (Labov, 2001). When they are thus encouraged, the storytellers are free to talk as they normally would, and some even become “involved in the narration to the extent that (they) seem to be reliving the critical moment, and signs of emotional tension appear” (p. 93), which was seen first-hand by the researcher as one of the narrators broke into tears.
All of the conversations occurred in natural environments. The conversations with the 7th Ward Black male and the 9th Ward Black female both occurred after the researcher finished a day of restoration work on the interviewees’ houses with the Christian relief organization Samaritan’s Purse. The encounter with the Gentilly White male was set up through a friend and took place as the interviewee drove the researcher around the city. This particular research subject was very comfortable as he shared his personal experiences mixed with commentary about the surrounding scenery. The 3rd Ward White male conversed with the researcher after meeting in a bookstore and briefly chatting about local history. The conversation with the Garden District White female took place on the front porch of the interviewee after the researcher struck up a conversation off the sidewalk with her about the nearby aboveground cemeteries. All interviewees agreed to take part in the study, signed the appropriate paperwork, and were fully informed before the actual recording began. While these formalities did stilt the natural flow of conversation to begin with, it was fairly easy to resume the talk and what emerges in the data is heartfelt survival narratives.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Each of the three research questions will now be discussed in turn with their accompanying data and results.

QUESTION #1: WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIALECTS OF NEW ORLEANS AND SOME OF THEIR CHARACTERISTICS?

The earlier distinctions between dialects by Lemotte (1985), Blanton (1989), and Gouchnour (as cited in Alvarez & Kolker, 1984) all seem to have held up in the experience of the present researcher. Although the number of storytellers is small, it is easy to tell that the trichotomy of Yat (Lowerclass White/Black), Black, and Uptown White (essentially Standard American English) holds true within the present data. To differentiate the Black dialect from the African American Vernacular English of other regions of the United States, the term NOLA Black will be employed throughout this study. Let us now look to see what fresh insights into these three dialects can be given from the narratives.

Yat

People from out of state, they hear what we say, they laugh at it, they think it's funny, but we have such a...We have warm, we have love in our voice. Our voice means love. We care for people. We don't have to go put on. That's the main thing. We don't have to go put on for nobody. We just talk good! (Alvarez & Kolker, 1984)

Prosodically, the data of the Yat speakers does contain instances of boisterous and loud speech that bolster Lemotte’s observations, although the qualitative analysis that will soon be given shows a surprising lack of this much-talked about feature of Yat speech. Y1 showed a rapid increase in volume and switch to high pitch on the word “cold” in the following example: “a lady came brought me and my mutha, you know, a popsicle, it was COLD! (Y1, 121)”. Aside from the animated prosodics that the Yat dialect is parodied for, interesting phonological and morphological features of the dialect emerged within the data. Phonologically, flapping popped up in unusual places (in
place of the phoneme /z/ in “it waDn’t like it was all melty (Y1, 123)” and the transformation of η to n was typical (“nothin, uh, I slept during the whole hurricane (Y1, 2)”). The ever present fortition of [θ] and [ð] to [t] and [d] respectively was a common feature (“I get up to go pee and dere’s wata on the ground (Y1, 53)”), even present in the nickname of this hometown to the NFL Saints, the “Who Dat?” nation. Due to its status as a non-rhotic dialect, in Yat-speak the consonant r was dropped at the end of a word (“Yeah cuz it really hit with my brutha (Y1, 4)”) and also in syllabic final clusters (“yeah the Iowa 9th word and areas closa to the wata (Y2, 95)”)15.

Most striking, perhaps, were the morphological oddities such as non-standard zero-affix past tenses (“so, gathered em up togetha and throw em away (Y1, 42)”; “My mutha wind up payin for herself (Y1, 221)”) and omission of auxiliary have (“I’d Ø been cheatin (Y1, 10)” meaning “I would have been cheating”; “I’d Ø been goin nuts (Y1, 235)” meaning “I would have been going nuts”)16. Instead of using the so-called dummy “there” as in “there were”, the phrase “dey had” was used multiple times (“Dey had Thais from Thai Town (Y1, 137)”). The addition of have to strong verbs in the past tense was also found (“We didn’t know anything had broke you know we just thought it was high wata, you know? (Y1, 94)

“Y’all” was used for the 2nd person plural (as it was in the NOLA Black dialect) and a lexical oddity was discovered in “locka”, which in New Orleans apparently means “closet” (“my baseball card collection was up in my locka (Y1, 76)”). Hurricane Katrina was referred to most often simply as “the storm” (“the bulk of the storm hit uh Waveland well Bay St. Louis...(Y1, 7)”), used with the definite article undoubtedly because of its ability to be readily identified.

**NOLA Black**

It is evident that the speech of New Orleanian Blacks differs from the AAVE of other Black dialects in the United States. However, certain features are shared between both

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15 The word “Ward” is a shibboleth of sorts for New Orleanians. It is pronounced /w d/ and its common use in local place names makes it difficult for the non-New Orleanian to blend in when asking for directions!

16 Context provides the evidence that the contraction “I’d” in these occurrences is equivalent to “I would have” rather than “I had”, which is admittedly counterintuitive upon first glance.
NOLA Black and AAVE. Phonologically, cluster simplification was seen ( /kr/ changed to /k/ in “we...procastinated and den laid down (N1, 12)”). Morphologically, the Standard English endings for various forms were often omitted, such as –s (“nobody no know where it come from (N2, 113)”) and –ed (“it look like a nightmare (N2, 11)”). The –s suffix is not present for possesives (“Yeah, a big barge down dere was into people houses (N2, 134)”, “dey even took people children from em (N2, 63)”). In fact, the personal pronoun was often used in the place of the possessive pronoun (“dey didn grab dey stuff (N1, 33)”), which shows that perhaps the NOLA Black speakers do not mark the grammatical category of possessive morphologically but by juxtaposition. Common to both dialects also is the treatment of the “be” verb. It is often omitted as a copula (“he go his tools Ø all stuck togetha (N2, 228)”) and the SAE singular form is often used for the plural (“we was standin up over dere (N1, 51)”), being generalized throughout the whole paradigm. This use of the singular is likewise seen in contractions (“And we talked to him on the phone when we’s in Florida (N2, 154)”). Other singular/plural differences from SAE occurred in the data as well (“he ain’t gonna eat none of dem fruits (N2, 285)”; “job is scarce here right now, anyhow (N2, 56)”). Double negatives were frequently used (“didn go to sleep in pajamas or nothin (N1, 24)” and there is even a triple negative present in the data (“dere didn’t have 17 nothin green nowhere (N2, 33)”). Dummy “there” was replaced by “it” (“it was no hesitatin, I was GONE (N2, 192)”) and was even omitted entirely on one occasion (“Ø wasn’t nobody here at dat time (N2, 136)”), which may be a feature that NOLA Black shares with AAVE. The word “of” was likewise omitted in numerous sentences (“took all the coppa wire out Ø the ceil...out the attic (N1, 95)”, “You still gotta come out Ø dat project (N2, 171)”) as was the word “and” connecting verbs 18 (“He went Ø got up the church dere (N2, 156)"). Furthermore, forms that contain the ending –ing in SAE were found with no affix (“He tried to rush back here think he could save some of his tools (N2, 227)"). The much spoken of habitual aspect of AAVE was seen in a progressive sentence with be + in (“I ain’t be tryin to, you know, look for no job or nothin (N2, 56)"). Lexically, the word “ain’t”, which typifies

17 Notice that this is the negative form of “dey had”.
18 This is an AAVE verb-serialization of sorts!
not only African American speech but also that of the South as a region, was frequently used ("dere ain't no jobs (N2, 41)").

Included in the list of unique features of NOLA Black dialect is the trading places of the sounds /əɪ/ and /ɝ/ exemplified in sentences such as “it had url (meaning oil) in it (N1, 130)” and “everything had a soitan (certain) smell to it (N1, 131)”. The use of had plus the past tense of strong verbs was found in a number of places (“afta the wata had went down it was a stinky mess (N1, 135)”, “the frigerata had fell ova (N2, 246)”, sounding to the SAE speaker like an unnecessary extra form. One feature that is shared with the Yat dialect is the use of “dey had” where SAE would have “there was” (“dey had cars in trees (N2, 36)”). Undoubtedly, the most peculiar and unique forms that were heard within the data are the non-standard, hypercorrected past tense verbs, including “broked (N1, 97)”, “throwed (N1, 103)”, “bursted (N1, 104)”, and “felled (N1, 95)”. Another lexical oddity that may be unique to the region is the word “worser” (“dat was worser than the storm itself (N2, 65)”), which is also a hypercorrection. Furthermore, the word “electric” was used in place of standard “electricity” (“you ain’t got no electric (N2, 174)”) and the phrase “place fire” instead of “set fire” (“placin fire to it or something (N2, 275)”). Hurricane Katrina was likewise most frequently referred to as “the storm” (“we have about 15, 16 times since the storm (N2, 3)”) by the NOLA Black speakers.

**Uptown White**

The Uptown White dialect only varies from SAE in slight ways. Only a few, brief comments will be mentioned. It is principally non-rhotic but the occasional r would surface in some words, perhaps as the product of some environmental factor unknown by the researcher. Some salient features in the data are the like-quotative (“He’s like, ‘O please, O please’ (S1, 20)”) and the go-quotative (“we’re sittin there going, ‘if you stop the bloody leak... (S1, 34)”) which may indeed be generational dialect differences, although the woman who employed them was in her late 30s. It is also quite possible that these features are merely accidental to that one speaker. The Uptown White speaker did refer to hurricane Katrina as “the storm” (“I went to work at one of our remote sites the Thursday after the storm (S1, 59)”), however a term associated with the hurricane that does not seem to have spread to the Yat or NOLA Black dialects is the abbreviation of Katrina to a mere “K”, as in “he was
pretty decent **pre-K**, and **post-K** he’s been totally ineffectual and not there (S1, 126)”. Once again, this particular phenomenon may not be found in the speech of other Uptown Whites and it is doubtful whether the speaker would refer to the hurricane itself as merely “K”.

According to the locals, the place to find the quintessential Uptown White dialect is in the Garden District, which is a big rectangular neighborhood historically lying from St Charles Street to Magazine Street to the North and South, and Louisiana Street to Jackson Street to the West and East.

**QUESTION #2: HOW DO STORYTELLING METHODS VARY FROM DIALECT GROUP TO DIALECT GROUP WITHIN NEW ORLEANS?**

Clearly, storytelling methods will range from individual to individual and therefore this research question has to avoid generalizing in the extreme (especially with so small a sample of storytellers). However, as Labov (1972) has shown, there are very real, measurable, clear-cut distinctions between the narratives of particular groups of people and the following discussion will bring these to light as they pertain to the three major dialect groups of New Orleans. Due to its prime importance and relevance, evaluation will be what is primarily examined here. However, it is necessary to first take a brief look at how the components of narratives, as outlined by Labov and Waletsky (1967) and mentioned earlier in this study, actually appear in the data collected.

**LABOVIAN SECTIONS IN THE COLLECTED NARRATIVES**

In general, the researcher found that Labov and Waletsky’s (1967) sections, more specifically their original partitions of abstract, orientation, complicating action, etc., are oftentimes unclear and some components are altogether lacking in the collected narratives.

**N1**

N1 does not begin her narrative with an abstract\(^{19}\) but instead jumps right into the orientation offering background information on the setting. This takes place from line a all the way to line n until the complicating action is set into motion with a narrative mode

\(^{19}\) It is the researcher who provides the abstract in many cases in the data through his questioning.
statement in line 16 (“I got up and I walk to the front door…”). After the end of this section in line 26, the researcher draws N1 into a diversion story about her neighbors starting in line 27 which segues into more descriptive mode talk all the way to line 42. At line 43, the speaker resumes the main narrative line and tells about her family being discovered and rescued up until line 87. At that point N1 is once again dragged off course by the researcher to talk about looters that came through her house. This diversion carries on until the resolution begins in line 123. From here, N1 begins to wrap up the story by explaining the aftermath of the storm in her home. The coda begins in line 137 in response to a question from the researcher about whether undergoing the experience changed her perspective on life, to which she concludes by stating that, “you know you accumulate a lot of stuff, but really, some of it you don’t really need, you know? So, you get the necessities and hey, you alright.”

N2

N2, like N1, lacked an abstract in his narrative. In fact, it is extremely difficult to find any sort of Labovian narrative structure in N2’s data. This is the result of a couple of factors. First of all, an interlocutor other than the researcher (seen in the data as O) drives the course of the conversation with her questions and does not allow N2 to fully develop his personal story. Secondly, while N2’s property was directly impacted by the storm, he had evacuated to Florida early on and therefore does not offer much in the way of a personal narrative about his experience with the storm. Lastly, N2 has a tendency to tell what could be called “ministories” about his friends and acquaintances and does not dwell on his own story. From line 2 to line 22, N2 describes the road and traffic conditions on his way out of Louisiana. He then launches into descriptive mode and talks about the dreary appearance of the city post-storm (line 23 to 39) and then gives a brief excursus on working and how his aging body is not able to function as well as it used to (line 41 to 57). After this, he relates the horrors of how some victims of the storm were separated from family (line 59 to 79) and how his house was burglarized (line 83 to 89). Some semblance of a personal narrative begins in line 89 when N2 sees his house on television but it is shortlived as speaker O connects what N2 said with another story she had heard. Lines 90 to 151 contain discussion of moving houses, barges, and the interstate. The rest of N2’s data consists of stories of other’s actions and misfortunes (neighbor on the church roof (153-165), secretary in the project (167-181),
mechanic with rusted tools (225-234)). While evaluation can be found throughout N2’s narrative, Labov’s sections are challenging to find.

**Y1**

Y1 is the first narrator who appears to have used an abstract in the telling of his narrative. This occurs in lines 9 to 10 (“I had zero damage to my house, not ten cents of damage, if I’d claim ten cents of damage to my insurance I’d been cheatin (laughs)”). Lines 11 through 29 offer orientation, but are essentially a ramble with some collateral\(^{20}\) (line 15-16) thrown in between background information. The complicating action begins in line 47 where Y1 talks about the night when the water started coming into his house. This carries all the way to line 126 where the resolution begins with the abrupt but meaningful statement, “And uh, so I got dere...” showing that the narrator was finally able to reach safety with his mother. Y1’s narrative does not seem to show a clear coda which brings the story back to real life.

**Y2**

Y2 employed no abstract, but did offer a dramatic and eloquently expressed orientation from lines 1 to 14 beginning with “As the hurricane Katrina was approaching New Orleans...”. The complicating action begins in line 14 when Y2 receives a cautionary phone call from his step daughter. The action continues until the resolution in line 57 where Y2 and his wife decide to come back to New Orleans and rebuild their home. The coda on line 59 is only one sentence long: “So now I’ve been back in my house for a little more than a year.” The narrative is essentially over at this point, but the researcher continues to press the narrator until he extends the action of his narrative (lines 79-90, 99-105). Intermingled with this extended action are portions of background information and local history from lines 66 to 75, and lines 89 to 96. In the end, Y2 gives a second resolution, this time with a tinge of humor, in line 107: “and three weeks ago, three weeks ago I got a doorbell.” The second coda has textbook form and brings the narrative into the present day (line 109: “So we’re still rebuilding for years to come”).

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\(^{20}\) “Collateral” is Grimes’ term for what Labov would call “Comparators”.
S1

S1 likewise lacks an abstract, but does have a brief section of orientation. This occurs from lines 2 to 4, and shows the narrator and her husband planting palm trees in their yard. The complicating action begins in line 4 when the narrator and her husband acquire some plywood and begin to board up their house. Their exodus from New Orleans and subsequent struggles to convince family to evacuate and find out what exactly is happening is continued until line 66. The resolution begins in line 66 and is well constructed in the fact that it mentions the palm trees that the narrator was planting when the narrative began: “so all the yes we were, really were largely undamaged except for 3 of the 4 palm trees that had been planted, fell down...”. At this point, the narrator continues to talk and provides some extensions of the narrative concerning her return to New Orleans (lines 80-92) and the demise of her dog (lines 93-105). To conclude, S1 shares her opinions about the mayor and then gives a coda of sorts with an exclamation about improved public education being a “lasting legacy of Katrina” (line 146).

Evaluation and a Modified Labovian Schema for Analysis

Labov’s (1972) scheme for analysis was adopted here, with modifications that focus on the aims of this particular study. Labov’s original scheme divided evaluation into Intensifiers, Comparators, Correlatives, and Explicatives and tallied their occurrences within groups of adults, adolescents, and preadolescents. The subcategories went as follows:

- **Intensifiers**: Gestures, Expressive Phonology, Quantifiers, Lexical Items, Foregrounding, Repetitions, Ritual Utterances, Wh-exclamations;
- **Comparators**: Imperatives, Questions, Negatives, Futures, Modals, Quasimodals, Or-clauses, Comparatives;
- **Correlatives**: Progressives in be...ing, Appended participles, Double appositive, Double attributive, Participle (Right Handed), Participle (Left Handed), Nominalizations;
- **Explicatives**: Simple (Qualification), Simple (Causal), Complex (Qualification), Complex (Causal), Compound (Qualification), Compound (Causal).

The scheme for the present study has been more selective in some areas and has added some categories as well. It has the following form:

- **Intensifiers**: Expressive Phonology, Quantifiers, Lexical Items, Repetitions, Wh-exclamations;
Comparators: Imperatives, Questions, Negatives, Futures, Modals, Quasimodals, Comparatives;

Correlatives: Appended participles, Double appositives, Double attributives;

Direct Quotes: Self, Other, Unspecified.

Explicatives and certain correlatives (like progressives in being) were left out of the present study’s analysis because current thinking indicates that they are not actually evaluation as Labov thought. Grimes and Du Bois have since then made it quite clear that these categories can be classified as descriptive mode rather than narrative mode, and thus must not be evaluative. A brief explanation of each remaining subcategory and an excerpt from the data will suffice as aids to understanding the upcoming analysis (the featured portion is in bold).

Intensifiers

Expressive Phonology: This is essentially an increase in length or pitch, anything that intensifies a word or phrase by prosodics.

“Ooo it was...all O::VA the city though, the whole city was stinkin (N1, 132).”

Quantifier: This is one of the most common means of intensification and one of the earliest acquired. Quantifiers are determiners that express a referent’s definite or indefinite number or amount.

“Ooo it was...all O::VA the city though, the whole city was stinkin (N1, 132).”

Lexical Item: This is a word that carries with it particular weight. Polanyi (1989) offers a helpful list of what can qualify as an evaluative lexical item: “loaded words” which differ from the register of the narrative, profanity, foreign words, precise use of infrequent words, and words rich in connotation all work in this capacity.

“The corps of engineers fuckered up and that’s the word I have to use, they’re still not doin very well (Y1, 64).”

Repetition: Repeating a word or phrase easily draws attention to it. Repetition shows the audience that the narrator is really trying to get a point across, enough so that he/she deems it necessary to repeat what was already said.

“We had to keep goin’ and comin’, goin’ and comin’ for ova a year or somethin (N2, 38).”

Wh-exclamation: This is an exclamation that uses an interrogative pro-form for dramatic effect. Not necessarily a question, the wh-words that can be used for a wh-exclamation include: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

“Well, what?! (N1, 46)”
Comparators

- **Imperative**: This is a statement in the directive modality, that is to say, it is a command. Imperatives are comparators, “since the force of the command in narrative is frequently: ‘you do this or else...’ (Labov 1972, p. 385)”.

  “Leave now. Just get as far away as you can (S1, 21).”

- **Question**: This is an illocutionary act that has a directive illocutionary point of attempting to get the addressee to supply information. It can be a genuine question to the audience, or a question used merely for rhetorical effect.

  “Is dat hard? (Y2, 64)”

- **Negative**: This is a morphosyntactic operation in which a lexical item denies or inverts the meaning of another lexical item or construction. It is a comparator because it presents a potential reality that did not come to be.

  “I didn’t hear none of my neighbas (N1, 29).”

- **Future**: This is a use of a tense that refers to a time after the moment of utterance. It can be classified as a comparator because it presents events that may or may not occur in the future, which in turn are compared to present events, which are obviously occurring.

  “Just gettin out quick, uh-huh. Not knowin, you know, whateva was goin happen but you know the wata was comin up behind ya... (N1, 40)”

- **Modal**: This is a verbal inflection or auxiliary verb which expresses a speaker’s degree of commitment to the expressed proposition's believability, obligatoriness, desirability, or reality. The modals include: can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, and must.

  “a couple of days before they said it would be best that we would evacuate (N1, 4)”

- **Quasimodal**: This is a word which acts like a modal verb but cannot technically be classified among them.

  “We were GETTIN ready to leave, we were supposed to leave... (N1, 8)”

- **Comparative**: This can be found in various forms, according to Labov (1972), “as the grammatical comparative and superlative in clauses with as, in prepositional phrases with like, in metaphors and similes (p. 386)”. Comparatives are among the most syntactically complex comparators and are used by the most highly skilled narrators.

  “I wasn’t out there like a youngsta like my son and them... (N2, 47)”

Correlatives

- **Appended participles**: In Labov’s (1972) words these are when “one of more verbs in -ing are aligned, with tense marker and be deleted; the action described is heard as occurring simultaneously with the action of the main verb of the sentence, which itself may be progressive” (p. 387-388).
“And we’re sitting there going... (S1, 33)”

- **Double appositive**: This is a construction consisting of two or more adjacent units that have identical referents. They are relatively rare and are used to heighten or deepen the effect of a particular description.

  “And the people of New Orleans like myself, who are middle-class and white, are very outraged when Spike Lee or someone tries to say it’s a conspiracy against the poor, the black people (Y2, 70)”.

- **Double attributive**: This is a construction, surprisingly just as rare as double appositives in everyday speech, which shows an elaboration relation in which a proposition describes two attributes of a referent one right after the other.

  “We had a lotta friends living in toxic, claustrophobic trailers (Y2, 103)”

### Direct Quotes

- **Self**: This is a reutterance of the words of the narrator in the storyworld.

  “I said, ‘Hey Lord, the whole house is underwata?’ (N2, 92)’

- **Other**: This is a reutterance of the words of someone other than the narrator in the storyworld.

  “they kept sayin as we got to five days out, four days out, three days out, two days out, that ‘If you don’t leave this time...YOU...WILL...DROWN’ (Y2, 9).”

- **Unspecified**: This is a reutterance of the words someone said in the storyworld, however, they are not attributed to either the narrator or another character, hence they are unspecified.

  “you hear that there are massive fires in the Garden District and it’s like, ‘where?’ (S1, 46)”.

### DIFFUSE STORIES/STORY SEQUENCES

Before looking at the quantitative data, one brief note must be made about the nature of the recorded narratives in conversation. These stories are by their very nature lengthy and therefore unlike the “fight stories” that Labov (1972, p. 354) collected in his studies. The narratives gathered here instead show the features of **diffuse stories** and **story sequences** as researched in Polanyi (1989). A diffuse story is defined as “blocks of story materials interleaved with blocks of conversation in which points of the story are discussed or amplified” (p. 66). This was a very common way for the subjects to present their narratives. They would tell part of the story, and then stop to discuss this particular point with their audience in conversation. This can be seen in the excerpt below from N2’s narrative where
the event of being picked up from one’s house and dropped off to spend the night on the interstate is given, and then the narrator begins to amplify about the interstate:

N2. (136) Wasn’t nobody here at dat time, no when dat was. Wasn’t nobody (137) and den Mrs. Robinson said she was on top, the boat came and picked (138) her up and put her on top of the interstate thing O. (139) Yeah they spent the night on the bridge or something...two nights N2. (140) The interstate, you know, people complainin years ago when they foist was (141) buildin the interstate dat dey broke up all the houses to make room for (142) the, you know, the interstate but God works in mysterious ways. Thank (143) God for the interstate cuz if it wasn’t for the interstate where people (144) could get up on like dat more people woulda died. O. (145) You’re right.
N2. (146) They had nowhere to go.
O. (147) They were up there for two days.
N2. (148) Yeah, I said “Thank God for the interstate.” We were complainin abou (149) when dey were foist buildin it, it served, you know, it served it’s purpose.
O. (150) Awesome purpose, yes.
N2. (151) Thank God. Dat’s right.

A story sequence, on the other hand, is when “there is more than one story told, and the stories are told as more or less self-contained units, some of which are embedded within others”. Polanyi describes these as “difficult to break down absolutely into its constituent parts” and explains that within these sequences, most of the evaluation is external and there is only one primary narrator. These take place over long stretches of conversation, so it would be burdensome to the reader to place an example here, but a reading of any one of the conversations transcribed at the end of this thesis will bear this observation out. Let us now proceed to the quantitative portion of the analysis.

**QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS**

Shown below in Table 1 are the instances of each one of these phenomena as they occurred in the raw data.

The length of each subject’s narratives were measured in minutes, and can be seen in Table 2.

---

21 O stands for “other” and represents an interlocutor other than the researcher or narrator.
Table 1. Total Instances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N1 (F)</th>
<th>N2 (M)</th>
<th>Y1 (M)</th>
<th>Y2 (M)</th>
<th>S1 (F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTENSIFIERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive Phon.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantifiers</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical Items</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repetitions</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wh-exclamations</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>COMPARATORS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperatives</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatives</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Futures</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CORRELATIVES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appended Participles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Appositive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Attributive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIRECT QUOTES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL INSTANCES</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
<td><strong>180</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Total Elapsed Narrative Time (In Minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N1 (F)</th>
<th>N2 (M)</th>
<th>Y1 (M)</th>
<th>Y2 (M)</th>
<th>S1 (F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.05 minutes</td>
<td>14.23 minutes</td>
<td>12.3 minutes</td>
<td>8.12 minutes</td>
<td>11.2 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be clearly seen from these numbers, each speaker took a different amount of time to relate their narrative. This is natural considering that different speakers talk with different speeds and obviously they are not all telling the same story. In order for the data to exhibit patterns among the speakers that are valid for comparative purposes then, the numbers were normalized. Each instance of evaluation was tallied, the total number of words uttered by the narrator was counted, and then the tally of instances of evaluation was divided against the total amount of words in each narrative (which can be seen in Table 3).
Table 3. Total Words Spoken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N1 (F)</th>
<th>N2 (M)</th>
<th>Y1 (M)</th>
<th>Y2 (M)</th>
<th>S1 (F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
<td>1,322</td>
<td>2,275</td>
<td>2,698</td>
<td>1,429</td>
<td>1,518</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The resulting ratios were then reduced so that the instances of each type of evaluation were measured per thousand words.\(^{22}\) This process yields the data presented in Table 4:

Table 4. Occurrences Per Thousand Words (When Normalized)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N1 (F)</th>
<th>N2 (M)</th>
<th>Y1 (M)</th>
<th>Y2 (M)</th>
<th>S1 (F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTENSIFIERS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive Phon.</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantifiers</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical Items</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitions</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>7.47</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>5.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wh-exclamations</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPARATORS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperatives</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatives</td>
<td>8.32</td>
<td>19.34</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>9.10</td>
<td>7.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futures</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modals</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>15.82</td>
<td>12.97</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quasimodals</td>
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<td>.88</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparatives</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.40</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CORRELATIVES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appended Participles</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Appositive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Attributive</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIRECT QUOTES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMBINED INSTANCES</strong></td>
<td>40.09</td>
<td>79.13</td>
<td>46.32</td>
<td>36.40</td>
<td>32.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are now in the place to comment on the patterns that emerge from Table 4 with the goal of answering our second research question. Before launching into an individual analysis of the three dialect groups, let us first explore the general trends that the numbers

\(^{22}\) Per thousand words will henceforth be abbreviated as /tw.
convey. Of all the intensifiers, quantifiers were used most heavily and frequently by all speakers, which is not a surprise considering that they are one of the first forms acquired and are common in general speech. Repetition was a popular form of intensification and was found in all of the narratives collected. Comparators were by far the most frequently employed manner of evaluation, and of these comparators the most frequent were negatives and modals (in that order). Once again, these are acquired early and are abundant throughout many styles of speech as common constructions. Correlatives were much more sparse throughout the narratives, the most common being the double attributives. What Labov (1972) commented on as rare was just that; appended participles, double appositives, and double attributives were few and far between in the data. Table 5 shows the total of uses per thousand words for all of the narrators combined for each major category and it is plain to see that comparators are used the most frequently. Second most frequent are intensifiers, followed by direct quotes, and then correlatives.

Table 5. Combined Number of Uses Per Thousand Words for All Narrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Combined N1, N2, Y1, Y2, S1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTENSIFIERS</td>
<td>63.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPARATORS</td>
<td>107.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CORRELATIVES</td>
<td>11.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIRECT QUOTES</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yat

With respect to their use of intensifiers, the Yat speakers tended to be quite conservative. They ranked the lowest on expressive phonology, which is very surprising considering the literature made it seem like expressive paralinguistics was essential to Yat speech. Only Y1 made use of any quantifiers or lexical items. Repetitions, on the other hand, were used quite frequently by Y2, who was only outranked by N2 in terms of frequency (5.60/tw versus 7.47/tw).

While the Yats did not rank highest in comparators, they did effectively add questions to their narratives. Observe this portion of Y2’s narrative, starting with line 62:

R. 23 (61) So did it hit pretty hard? Did it hit your area pretty hard?

23 Note how the Researcher is represented by an R.
Y2. (62) 7 feet of wata for 3 weeks. How...How’s dat?
R. (63) yeah (laugh)
Y2. (64) Is dat hard?
R. (65) That’s pretty hard.
Y2. (66) The lowa 9th w’d which all, which all people have heard about from
(67) across the United States, the 9th w’d is about one tenth of one percent of
(68) what flooded.

The researcher asks a question of the narrator, who then turns a series of two
questions back on the researcher. After stunning the researcher with information about the
severity of the flooding (“7 feet of wata for 3 weeks”), the narrator proceeds to drive the
point home by asking two sarcastic rhetorical questions (“How’s dat?” and “Is dat hard?”).
He then begins a discussion about how the majority of New Orleans was “hit hard” and
launches into a tirade against those who think the whole crisis happened because of a
conspiracy against the poor, black neighborhoods of the 9th Ward.

It is interesting to note that over the course of their whole narratives, the Yat speakers
did not employ any wh-exclamations, quasimodals, appended participles, or unspecified
quotes. These are all rare by nature, but all of the aforementioned categories were used by
either the Uptown White speaker or the NOLA Black speakers in their narratives. On the
other hand, the extremely rare double attributive was used disproportionately more by Y2
(4.20/tw) than any other speakers, N1 and N2 only used it .76/tw and .88/tw respectively. In
fact, Y2 also had the highest amount of double appositives in his narratives as well with
1.40/tw. As far as correlatives go, these are the only remarkable statistics for the Yat
narrators. They did not make use of any appended participles.

As a general rule, the Yat speakers quoted others more than themselves. Y1
demonstrated a high level of skill in incorporating quotes into his narratives, and in doing so
displayed more uses of self quotes (2.59/tw) and other quotes (2.97/tw) than any other
speaker. One particularly expert use of quote is found in Y1’s narrative, in the recounted
conversation that takes place from lines 85-88:

(85) had 2 stories...My business partna called me, you know Ellis, everything
(86) was fine in Chalmette at dis point. “Should I book movies for Friday?” I
(87) said, “Well, if we get the electricity back on I’m sure we can get back in
(88) business.” So he said so so I said, “OK”.

In line gggg, after introducing who the speaker of the quote is, Y1 does not feel the
need to segue into the quote by saying the typical “(so and so) said”. Rather, he jumps
straight into the quote ("Should I book movies for Friday?") assuming that the audience (in this case, the researcher) will know from the previous sentence who is doing the talking. By employing this method of quotation, Y1 makes the ensuing conversation much more engaging for the listener.

Overall, Y1 personally ranked highest in modals with 12.97/tw, shortly behind N2 with 15.82/tw. Y1 only ranked highest overall in the aforementioned category of other quotes. Conversely, Y2 personally ranked highest in negatives with 9.10/tw, but was eclipsed in frequency of usage by both N2 (19.34/tw) and fellow Yat speaker Y1 (11.12/tw).

**NOLA Black**

The NOLA Black narrators consistently used more intensifiers in their narratives than their Yat or Uptown White counterparts. For expressive phonology, both N1 and N2 ranked high relative to the other speakers with 1.51/tw and 4.84/tw respectively, although S1 did use slightly more than N1 with 2.00/tw. Both NOLA Black speakers frequently used quantifiers, both more than the other two dialect groups. N2’s use of repetition is much more than the other narrators’ and N1 gave the only instance of the wh-exclamation in her brief outburst in N1, line 46: “Well, what?!”

A remarkable statistic for the NOLA Black narrators in the area of comparators are comparatives themselves. Both N1 and N2 had more than Y1 or Y2, with S1 not having any at all! N2 had a high level of questions, but mostly due to his frequent tag of “you know?” This was employed as a legitimate question, however, and served as a way of monitoring to see whether the audience was alert and following his narrative. The NOLA Blacks were the only participants with quasimodals in their narratives.

Correlatives were an area in which the NOLA Black participants outshined their counterparts in both the number and proportion of appended participles. Here the NOLA Black speakers dominated the numbers, each having more than twice (N1 with 1.51/tw, N2 with 1.32/tw) the amount of the closest narrator (S1 with .66/tw).

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24 Chafe and Danielewicz (1987) label this as a form of involvement, further adding that the phrase “you know” is a speaker’s attempt “to reassure himself that he is getting through to the listener without explicitly requesting confirmation of that fact” (p. 106).
NOLA Black speakers quoted themselves more than others (N1 in fact did not quote anyone than herself). Although the figures for direct quotes are not all that groundbreaking, N2 often employed indirect quotes which consequently do not show up in the data but which were nonetheless intriguing and stylistic. In a number of places N2 calls attention to a previous utterance without directly quoting it by saying, “like I said”. These can be found in the following places:

(N2, 7) You know, but uh when we left, uh, you know we thought we’d jus be gone, like I said, for 3 days but it took us 13 HOURS...”
(N2, 46) “I wasn lookin for no job out dere like I said I’m up in age...”
(N2, 54) “Like I said, I ain’t had a job since the storm.”
(N2, 55) “Like I said, I’m up in age.”
(N2, 78) “...like I said dat was worser than the storm itself.”
(N2, 215) “...but like I said it took us 13 hours to get dere.”
(N2, 237) “Like I said, dat was about 3 or 4 months afta...”

In addition to calling attention to his own utterance, he also does so for the utterance of an interlocutor in one instance:

(N2, 173) “Just like you were jus sayin, you up there and you ain’t got no electric, no food, no water, no nothin’...”

This “like I said, like you said” phenomenon typified N2’s speech and thus was worthy of comment here. Overall, N1’s personal highest ranking was in negatives with 8.32/tw, an amount which is actually the second to last when compared to the usage by the other narrators. N2, like N1, ranked highest in negatives, but used many more than the others with 19.34/tw. Indeed, this was the highest amount used of any evaluative device across all of the speakers and categories.

**Uptown White**

There is not much of note about the Uptown dialect when it comes to intensifiers, other than the fact that the Uptown narrator displayed no penchant for them, ranking relatively high only when it came to repetitions. S1 did, however, have the second highest frequency of expressive phonology at 2.00/tw, just above N1 (1.51/tw) but well below N2 (4.84/tw). As for comparators, S1 had the lowest figures for every subcategory other than imperatives, in which she actually displayed the most at 3.95/tw, and modals, which were still very low at 3.95/tw. All the irrealis subcategories (i.e. negatives, futures, modals, etc.) showed surprisingly low frequencies compared to the other speakers. For correlatives, S1
only used an appended participle, a correlative which cannot be found in the data of the Yat
speakers. Double appositives and double attributives were not found in her speech.

Just like the Yat speakers who quoted others more than themselves, the Uptown
White speaker quoted others more than herself. These quotes were often introduced with the
so-called “like-quotative”. Fascinatingly, S1 employed no wh-exclamations, questions,
quasimodals, comparatives, double appositives, or double attributives in her narrative. Most
of these categories were used consistently by all of the other speakers (Even the lowest score
for comparatives (Y2) ranked at 1.40/tw) so it is definitely striking that S1 did not use them.
Overall, S1 had her personal highest ranking in negatives (just like Y2 and N2), but in reality
used the least amount of negatives per thousand words of any participant.

There is a characteristic of S1’s storytelling that cannot be seen from the numbers, but
in reality was quite effective and is a phenomenon touched upon in Polanyi (1989). Observe
S1, lines 52-56:

S1. (52) went out, but that wasn’t what they were reporting. We had a friend, um,
(53) who neighbor who um, vertically evacuated to a hotel downtown and you
(54) know, on was it Monday after the storm passed, he, you know, came home,
(55) emptied the freezer of its contents, emptied the refrigerator, took a tour
(56) around our house, said everything was fine, and we were like, “Phew!”

In this section of her narrative, S1 is using a quick succession of the simple past tense
(examples in bold). No fewer than five verbs are used without conjunctions here. This
transports the audience into the narrative and gives the impression of rapid action-taking,
which helps to engage the attention of the listener.

**QUESTION #3: IS THE “SUCCESS” OF A NARRATIVE
CONTINGENT UPON THE INCLUSION OF CERTAIN FORMS
OF EVALUATION, AND IF SO, WHAT FORMS ARE THEY?**

This research question is framed in a subjective way; the word “success” can mean
different things to different people. In the present study, “success” can be defined as a
story’s ability to captivate the listener, proving itself worthy of being told and conveying
some remarkable personal episode of the speaker in a relevant, entertaining way. In
Labov’s words, successful narratives are those “which seize the attention of listeners and
allow them to share the experience of the narrator”. Labov (1997) and Polanyi (1989) seem
to believe that some stories are better than others, which seems to be common sense. Even
our ability to name which of our friends or relatives are good storytellers suggests that there must be features these narrators have in common which make their stories interesting. What is it then that makes one narrative superior to another? Previous research seems to indicate that evaluation, whether internal or external, plays a role. This brief discussion will offer a few observations from the data with the aim of pinpointing which particular evaluative devices contribute the most to a “successful” narrative (as defined above).

In Table 6, the amount of total evaluative devices used per thousand words (after normalization, repeated from Table 4, p. 33) yields results which show how often each speaker employs some method of “assigning prominence”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N1 (F)</th>
<th>N2 (M)</th>
<th>Y1 (M)</th>
<th>Y2 (M)</th>
<th>S1 (F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.09</td>
<td>79.13</td>
<td>46.32</td>
<td>36.40</td>
<td>32.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As always, N2 has the highest total of instances, in this case he utilizes 79.13 evaluative devices per thousand words during his narrative. Y1 comes in second with 46.32/tw, N1 in third with 40.09/tw, Y2 in fourth with 36.40/tw, and S1 comes in last with 32.34/tw. From these statistics we can gather that generally speaking, NOLA Black speakers use more evaluative devices per thousand words than the other groups. Yat speakers use fewer evaluative devices than NOLA Black speakers but more than Uptown White speakers. Dogmatic, definitive lines cannot be drawn between the different dialects, however, because Y1 used more evaluation than N1, which shows that a Yat speaker can and may use more evaluation than a NOLA Black speaker. This being true, there also remains the possibility that there are Uptown White speakers who display the ability to use evaluative devices in greater proportions than Yats or NOLA Blacks, but future research will have to bear this out.

From the researcher’s perspective, N2 seemed to possess the best storytelling ability and indeed, the amount of skill and “success” that each narrator displayed seemed to go in descending order proportional to the amount of total evaluative devices they used per thousand words, as shown in Table 5 (p. 34). Overall, it appears that more “successful” speakers simply use more total evaluation, whether it be intensifiers, comparators, correlatives, or direct quotes. Despite being well constructed in the sense that the palm trees in the beginning were again mentioned at the end, S1’s narrative lacked a sense of
remarkableness. Before drawing final conclusions, however, let us examine one more table. Table 7 displays the totals of each major category of evaluation (that is, the added total of the subcategories’ instances per thousand words) for each individual narrator:

| Table 7. Devices Used Per Thousand Words in Categories |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| INTENSIFIERS                    | N1 (F) | N2 (M) | Y1 (M) | Y2 (M) | S1 (F) |
| INTENSIFIERS                    | 12.86  | 24.18  | 9.26   | 6.30   | 9.25   |
| COMPARATORS                    | 22.69  | 48.79  | 31.50  | 22.40  | 17.13  |
| CORRELATIVES                   | 2.27   | 2.64   | 0      | 5.60   | .66    |
| DIRECT QUOTES                  | 2.27   | 3.52   | 5.56   | 2.10   | 5.3    |

Using this data, the following rankings can be seen (with the first being the highest and the last being the lowest):

- Intensifiers – N2, N1, Y1, S1, Y2
- Comparators – N2, Y1, N1, Y2, S1
- Correlatives – Y2, N2, N1, S1, Y1
- Direct Quotes – Y1, S1, N2, N1, Y2

N2 emerges as the only consistent high-ranker for the different categories of evaluation. He displayed the greatest frequency of use in two out of the four major forms of evaluation that were examined and is solidly ranked in the other two categories. It is the opinion of the researcher that N2 possessed the greatest ability in telling an interesting narrative and the numbers seem to bear this out. N2 towered over the other narrators in his use of intensifiers (at 24.18/tw he had twice as many as any other speaker) and comparators (by far the highest at 48.79/tw). However, it is interesting to note that N2 did not display such drastic dominance over the other narrators in his use of correlatives or direct quotes. N2 still had a high frequency of correlatives, but only half as much as Y2. N1, likewise a gifted speaker, also ranked high in this category with 2.27/tw behind N2’s 2.64/tw. Direct quotes, in general, were infrequent and did not seem to directly indicate which narrator had more “success”, although they undoubtedly play an important role in some storytelling.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an analysis of the survival narratives of five native New Orleanians who went through Hurricane Katrina provided valuable data in answering the three principal questions of the present study. The results showed first of all that the three-way division of principal dialects in New Orleans is for the most part accurate and can be bolstered by the data in the current narratives. Phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, and idiomatic features all indicated that there are three main dialects to be found in the city of New Orleans, although idiolects inevitably vary in other ways.

In addition to this discovery, the researcher came to several conclusions about how storytelling methods differ between the three aforementioned groups. Aspects that all of the narratives shared, however, include:

- an abundance of quantifiers
- repetition being used across the board
- a higher use of comparators than any other form of evaluation
- correlatives being generally sparse
- forms deemed rare by Labov (1972) being truly rare (e.g. appended participles, double appositive, and double attributive)
- a descending frequency of comparators, intensifiers, direct quotes, correlatives

Looking at the findings group by group, Yat speakers moderately employed intensifiers, displayed expertise in using questions in their narratives, used rarely found phenomena such as double appositives and double attributives, and quoted others more than themselves, often weaving quotes effectively and expertly into their narratives. NOLA Black speakers consistently used more intensifiers than the other two dialects represented, this was made manifest in their dominance in frequency of expressive phonology, quantifiers, and repetition. They employed many comparatives and tag questions, outshined their counterparts in their amount of appended participles, and quoted themselves more than others. The Uptown White speaker did not employ many intensifiers, showed a general lack of...
comparators with the exception of imperatives, quoted others more than herself, and used no
wh-exclamations, questions, quasimodals, comparatives, double appositives, or double
attributives in her narrative. She told her narrative straightforwardly, employing fewer of the
frills that the other speakers employed.

Lastly, the results of the study also showed that some generalizations can be made
about the storytelling prowess of different dialect groups in New Orleans. The NOLA Black
dialect narrators heavily used all of the varieties of evaluation in their stories and their high
frequency of evaluative devices in general seems to be proportional to their success as
storytellers. One storyteller, N2, emerged as the most gifted narrator in the opinion of the
researcher not only due to the overall volume of total evaluation in his narrative, but possibly
on account of his overwhelming expertise in employing intensifiers and comparatives (in
comparison with the other narrators).

Undoubtedly a larger set of subjects would produce stronger results and patterns. A
larger-scale study with a team of researchers and transcribers would be more equipped to
carry this type of project out. The present researcher would suggest that future research
expand the scope of this study to include smaller local populations such as the Cajuns and
Creoles, who live in the surrounding swampy rural areas. Work on discourse analysis for
either of these two groups is non-existent and would thus contribute to a complete picture of
the discourse represented in New Orleans. Furthermore, little to no research has been done on
the Black dialect of New Orleans, although Oetting and Pruitt (2005) have investigated the
features of the Louisiana varieties of Southern African American English in the Baton Rouge
area. Overall, the differences between NOLA Black, African American Vernacular English,
Southern African American English, and Standard American English need to be looked at in
depth in all of the subfields in linguistics, including phonology, morphology, lexicology,
syntax, and discourse.

Overall, what can be gleaned from the present study is not only a deeper knowledge
of the dialect groups of New Orleans, their narrative methods, and which forms of evaluation
contribute to better storytelling, but also a glimpse into the American spirit. The participants
in this study spontaneously shared their personal struggles, and what emerged through their
narratives were examples of courage, selflessness, and resilience.
REFERENCES


Figure A.1. Map of New Orleans.
APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION
Adapted from Conley (1994) and Schenkel (1978),

1. . falling intonation followed by a noticeable pause; not necessarily the end of a sentence
2. ? rising intonation followed by a noticeable pause; not necessarily a question
3. , continuing intonation; followed by a slight pause
4. ! animated tone; not necessarily an exclamation
5. - pause marker when between two words, and surrounded by spaces
6. ... horizontal ellipses indicates that an utterance could be reported only in part
7. -- false start indicated; speaker breaks off a word, or clause before completing it
8. [ indicates the point where talk by one speaker begins to overlap that of another
9. ] indicates the point where overlapping ends
10. [[] simultaneous utterances
11. = indicates latched speech at the end of an utterance; where there is no pause at the end of one speaker’s utterance as another speaker begins his turn
12. ::: indicates extra length of a vowel sound, or syllable
13. (( )) indicates something that was not transcribed; e.g., laughter, or untimed pause
14. hhh indicates audible aspirations
15. .hhh indicates audible inhalations
16. CAPS displayed in bold print indicates emphasized, stressed segments as shown by increased pitch, or volume
NEW ORLEANS NARRATIVES: TRANSCRIPTION

N1: Lower 9th Ward

N1. 1) Well the days leadin up to it...like...I think...it had start rainin anyhow
2) alrigh y’see? Well, they were tellin us possibly that we would hafta
3) evacuate, until it came down to I guess, a couple of days before dey said it
4) would be best that we would evacuate
R. 5) How...how, do they like come on the TV and say that, or...?
N1. 6) Yeah, it was ova the TV, radio, whateva, yeah....mmmmmm...so every....,
7) y’know, lot of people did get ready to leave. We were GETTIN ready to
8) leave. We were GETTIN ready to leave, we were supposed to leave...two
9) days before, the day afta and whatnot, we kept sayin we was gonna
10) leave and we neva did pack up to leave. We had stuff, we had, cuz I
11) had packed a couple of days clothes and whatnot to leave...but we...
12) procastinated and den laid down, went to sleep, woke up the next
13) morning, and uh...like I said I wasn’t sleepin too good, no way listenin to all
14) that thunda and lightnin and storm
R. 15) uh-huh
N1. 16) so, I got up and I walk to the front door, the front window here to look out
17) to see if, you know, where the wata was. When I looked out though, it was
18) you know like down here. But soon as I turn around to walk back through
19) the house the wata was comin up through the floor.
R. 20) Oh wow. So that means it musta gone like...this much
N1. 21) ...in seconds, and by the time I made it you know half way through the hall
22) way and I told my my daughta and my son and dem, “Y’all betta get up,
23) dat wata’s comin in.” And, as soon as they could just, well dey was fully
24) dressed dey didn go to sleep in pajamas or nothin and, but, soon as dey
25) got up and got up and uh, the wata was risin so fast we had to hurry
26) up and get on, get up in the attic.
R. 27) Didja hear...Were like people...were your neighbors were they like yellin’
28) and stuff?
N1. 29) No no no. I didn’t hear none of my neighbas. Cuz well I think most of dem
30) had left.

R. 31) So you guys took your stuff, you already had some bags packed right?
32) Were you able to save that stuff?

N1. 33) Nah I didn’t, I only had a bag, my daughta and dem dey didn grab dey stuff
34) fast enough cuz the wata was comin too fast.

R. 35) Uh-huh.

N1. 36) All dey could do was scampa up into the attic. Didn’t get a chance to grab
37) nothin, and den, at that particular time by the wata comin’ so fast you’re
38) not thinkin,

R. 39) Yeah, you’re just grabbin, jus movin quickly, uh-huh.

N1. 40) Just gettin out quick, uh-huh. Not knowin, you know, whateva was goin
41) happen but you know the wata was comin up behind ya and before, by
42) the time by the time we got up in the attic the wata was way up. You
43) know. We sat up dere overnight until the next day. We jus, we sittin in the
44) attic, well my son, my daughta, it was big, cuz one was layin dere and the
45) otha was layin on the otha side and we heard people talkin. So i said,
46) “Well, what?! How there someone out there talkin in the wata way up
47) here?” So finally I said, “well y’all betta make, knock, knock a hole in the
48) wall or ceilin or somethin” and uh at that particular time dey um at first
49) dey couldn’t find nothin and some kind of way dey found some kind of
50) somethin and knocked a hole in the wall. Dis was the wall. And dey
51) knocked a hole in the wall…and lata, we was standin up ova dere on the
52) bridge and we saw that dey had guys, uh, in little boats and dey was
53) comin round gettin people out.

R. 54) And then, were there people up on this bridge here?

N1. 55) Yeah, dey had people on the bridge because the guys dat had the little
56) boats…dey just had a couple of guys in boats, in a boat and dey had den,
57) had started goin around the neighborhood gettin people out and…it was
58) the furthest he could bring you to the bridge, the high wata, you know, he
59) really didn know where to bring ya, truly enough, so dey just came got you
60) out your house and we went up on the bridge up dere and my daughta
61) had already parked her car up dere, cuz usually during a rain storm or
62) what, all the neighbas always park dey cars up dere cuz the wata rises
63) up here anyway
R.  64) Uh-huh
N1. 65) and dey had dey cars parked up dere. So, we got on the bridge, stayed up
66) dere two days and uh
R.  67) Oh, so you kind of camped up there?
N1. 68) Yeah, yeah
R.  69) Alright, cuz all that happened in the morning, the, the madness with the,
70) with gettin your stuff and rushin out. That happened in the morning, right,
71) cuz you woke up?
N1. 72) Yeah, yeah...yep
R.  73) So two days and then did it, did the water start goin down after that?
N1. 74) No
R.  75) It stayed for
N1. 76) The wata stayed up. We wasn even here when the wata started goin
77) down. Cuz we had to, we stayed on the bridge until we could get off the
78) bridge and den we had to walk all the way down to the otha end to get in
79) anotha boat to get off the bridge and dey took us ova to the interstate
R.  80) So how long before you guys came back? How long was it just sittin here?
N1. 81) Oh...we didn get back here...when we came...we didn come back to stay we
82) just came back to see what it look like and dat was kinda scary and
83) everything. What happened to, my daughta lived furtha ova that way
R.  84) Uh-huh
N1. 85) And uh when dey was sayin dat dey didn get dat much wata as we got ova
86) here. So, uh, we finally, we came back to see what her house look like, you
87) know. It had got wata in it, not up to the top like we got here...
R.  88) And then the, some looters came through here, right? They went up into
89) your attic and took out the pipes?
N1. 90) No, dat just happened a couple of weeks ago.
R.  91) Oh, a couple of weeks ago.
N1. 92) Yeah, dat just happened.
R. 93) You guys weren’t here when it happened, were you?
N1. 94) No, cuz dey had been workin on the house, yeah. And uh, dey had put the 95) coppa wire pipe up in the attic for the central air and heat...mmm-hmm 96) and dey broke in and took all the coppa wire, coppa wire out the 97) ceil...out the attic...what look like what happened is dey jus broked a hole in 98) the wall to put the stuff through it from what dey were takin out the attic  
R. 99) Oh, OK
N1. 100) dey drop it through there, because dey took all the insulation of the 101) coppa pipe  
R. 102) mmm-hmm
N1. 103) and throwed it down on the floor...when we came, uh, cuz I saw the back 104) window was bursted and uh, dey had opened the back door. Usually Steve 105) got a big board that he puts across dere every evening, but dey had pulled 106) dat off and went back, when dey went back out, dey musta, when dey 107) went back out the back door. Well dey probably came out the front cuz dey 108) had a a a...dey took Steve’s, uh, wet floor vac  
R. 109) uh-huh
N1. 110) and dey had a, what’s it called...the compressa?  
R. 111) oh yeah, the air compressor, uh-huh
N1. 112) no the uh, what you use for electricity if you don’t have elec..  
R. 113) oh yeah, the generator
N1. 114) they took the generata, so dey probably, dey had to open the doors to 115) come out with the generata and uh, and a floor vac cuz Steve had a big ol’ 116) floor vac in dere, dey took dat  
R. 117) Oh so that hole in the ceiling, they just, they just kicked it down, right?  
N1. 118) Yeah, dey probably did, yeah, dey just kicked dat in, just ornery meanness 119) and you know...yeah
R. 120) Yeah, I thought she thought...
N1. 121) Yeah she thought dey just felled in. No, I jus think dey kicked that hole in 122) and throwed the stuff down.
R.  123) When you came back, like, and walked, didja, were you able to walk inside
124) and like look at, look at the stuff?
N1.  125) When I first came back to look at my stuff was all messed up, all tumbled
126) ova...upside down and the slush in the house was so sticky when you
127) walked
R.  128) Oh yeah, it was just mud, huh?
N1.  129) Yeah, dat’s it...well from what I’m understandin cuz by the wata comin in
130) whereva it came from it had url in it and everything and once it got in the
131) house it was all just so sticky and everything. Everything had a soitan
132) smell. Ooo...It was scary. Ooo it was...all O:VA the city though, the
133) whole city was stinkin. Everywhere you go, it was smellin SO bad, I’m
134) tellin you. Really, when you first, when you first came back...when dey
135) finally let you in and you know to come in and see afta the wata had
136) went down it was a stinky mess.
R.  137) Has it, has it kinda changed your perspective on life at all, the whole thing
138) make you think differently about things?
N1.  139) Somewhat, somewhat. Because like I was tellin my daughta and dem,
140) you know you accumulate a lot of stuff, but really, some of it you don’t
141) really need, you know? So, you get the necessities and hey, you alright.

N2: 7th Ward
O.  1) Was it hard to get outta here? Lotta people...
N2.  2) No, well when we left it took us 13 hours to get to Florida, you know,
3) normally cuz we have about 15, 16 times since the storm
O.  4) yeah
N2.  5) goin back and forth, took us 3 hours. So, 3 hours to come here from Florida
6) and to go back, 3 hours. You know, but uh when we left, uh, you know we
7) thought we’d jus be gone, like I said, for 3 days but it took us 13 HOURS to
8) get to somewhere dat we could get to in 3 hours. It took us 10 hours
9) more, in otha words.
O.  10) Cuz, so much traffic, yeah.
N2. 11) Traffic, yeah. I mean TRAFFIC. It look like a nightmare, dat was a 12) nightmare.

O. 13) Yeah, cuz you don’t know if you’re gonna be stuck in your car when the 14) hurricane hits or not, you know.

N2. 15) We’d go all the way up, get to a bridge, the bridge’d be closed and we’d 16) come all the way back. We didn have no police to escort you or tell you 17) nothin

O. 18) Tell that it was down or somethin

N2. 19) No, right. The only thing you could rely upon was people wit dey cell 20) phone. “I heard they done open the bridge back up!” Den we’d get in the 21) car and go, go back the same way we had just come. It was, it was a 22) nightmare, it was terrible.

O. 23) Were gas stations open?

N2. 24) Dey, dey...you see all dat whole gulf thing. All dat...it was open when we 25) foist went. But afta the storm all dat was closed. All the times we would 26) come back and go back we’d have to get gas cuz we didn’t have no gas. 27) Dey opened dat whole gulf...everything was just devastated. It wasn’t 28) just here, it was all along...Biloxi, all dat. You know? Ooo, it was terrible.

R. 29) And it kinda smelled too, huh?

N2. 30) Yeah, specially here.

R. 31) Somebody was tellin me that when they came in it was like oily, the water. 32) When it settled down it was like...

N2. 33) Everything looked petrified...you know, everything looked grey....dere 34) didn’t have nothing green nowhere...everything was just grey...it was scary 35) looking...dere didn’t have no people...no nothing. Dey had cars turned 36) ova in the street...dey had cars on top of houses...dey had cars in 37) trees...dey had boats and stuff...dey had boats everywhere. All ova. 38) We had to go back dere. We had to keep goin’ and comin’, goin’ and comin’ 39) for ova a year or somethin.

O. 40) How did people do it if they had jobs they just had to quit?

N2. 41) Oh, dere ain’t no jobs...I had a job when I left I don’t have...I ain’t been back
42) on the job yet now I can’t even do it see I’m up in age you know... and um...I
43) used to go to work everyday. I would get up and I’d always be stiff you
44) know but when I get to work I loosen up and it was alright but afta we
45) went to...and I did that for years you know...afta I went to Florida I wasn’t
46) doin nothin I wasn lookin for no job out dere like I said I’m up in age I
47) wasn’t out dere like a youngsta like my son and dem get a job and...all I
48) did was just SSSSIT around the hotel and now I can’t even walk a good
49) block...if I had to walk all the way to that corna down dere...I can’t
50) take a breather
51) do it...by the time I get to dat corna I got to stop...and wait a while. I can
52) go furtha but I got to stop! You know I can’t even do the work I did before
53) the storm. I used to work in a garden centa. I’d walk around the yard all
54) day, dat’s somethin I can’t even do no more. Like I said, I ain’t had a job
55) since the storm. Like I said, I’m up in age. I’m almost 70 years old, you
56) know. Yeah. So I ain’t be tryin’ to, you know, look for no job or nothin. Job
57) is scarce here right now, anyhow.
58) Yeah.
59) The place is not back up. At first they brought us to New York...and then
60) yeah...cuz they brought people ALL OVA
61) well they’re probably freezin in New York (laughs)
62) Arkansas yeah...they was just dey just did drop em off you know just
63) separate a lot of families too put em on buses and dey even took people
64) children from em and dey, the people can’t get on the bus ah terrible ah
65) dis place... dat was worser than the storm itself
66) yeah
67) yeah
68) dat was worser than the storm
69) especially if you’re thinkin that there’s help gonna come and then it comes
70) and it’s all
71) and it takes your to...it takes your children away from you
72) yeah dey did
73) and they say no you can’t come on
74) right cuz dere’s a soitain amount that get on the bus and dey makin sure
75) and two children get on the bus but dey can’t put no more and dey might
76) might give you one of your children children or something, you know?
77) yeah that’s crazy I think it was so chaotic
78) chaos, dat’s what it was you know, that’s, like I said dat was worser than
79) the storm itself all the chaos you know
80) Did anybody break in when you were gone?
81) Well
82) try and get stuff, or...
83) Somebody took the, dey took the inside moldin around dere cuz that still
84) was good on the inside dere, dey took that whole panel around dat front
85) window cuz it was kinda antique, kinda old you know. Dey took dat. Yeah
86) dere was stealin, you know, people dyin like dat and dey runnin around
87) dere stealin out dey house...you know...dere wasn’ nothin too much in
88) dere dat could be salvaged you know but whateva could be salvaged the
89) thieves took it it’s terrible. I was in Florida lookin at the TV the next two
90) days you know cuz uh all we talkin on the phone to the people dat was
91) here and somebody said dat all of dese houses was underwata and I
92) said, “Hey Lord, the whole house is underwata?” You know, God fix it, but
93) I was lookin at the TV, in Florida, about three days afta the storm and I
94) saw my house!
95) You did!
96) I saw my house. The boat was comin from dis way and I saw the whole
97) side of my house...I said “Man, I saw our house on TV and the wata’s not
98) ova the house” it was about up the wall up to here.
99) Oh, OK
100) The boat was comin round the street here and I saw the whole shot of the
101) house.
102) see your house on TV, oh man
103) Out of all dem houses in the city...
O.  104) They show yours!

N2.  105) I’m lookin at my own house! But I was relieved to see dat cuz you know 
    106) cuz I thought dat all of em was completely underwata.

O.  107) You don’t know.

N2.  108) I told Anne, I said, “The house not completely underwata” I said...so...

O.  109) Mr. Brown showed us pictures the otha day of like this house that...it 
    110) moved! It took this whole house and it moved it down like a block...

O2.  111) right off the slab

O.  112) and the house is all intact and it moved right next to the other house!

N2.  113) Yeah one around the corna sittin in the middle of the street nobody no 
    114) know where it come from. It had an address on it 19 somethin and and it 
    115) was in the block dat was like a 20 somethin hundred block. Where dat 
    116) house come from? Yeah, a big old house.

O.  117) That’s crazy, houses and cars in trees.

N2.  118) The only reason the house settled right dere is cuz the house went 
    119) sideways in the middle of the street...one, one corna got jammed by a tree 
    120) and on the otha side, dat post ova there...dat post caught the otha side 
    121) of it and it was like it was just stuck dere that’s why it didn’t move no 
    122) more.

O.  123) Oh.

N2.  124) Dey had to break it up. It stood dere for months and months and months. 
    125) Dey had to break dat house up to get it out the middle of the street. Right 
    126) around the corna dere.

O.  127) Man.

N2.  128) It was devastating.

O.  129) Crazy stories, what? man

N2.  130) Yeah, I mean...stuff you wouldn’t believe, you know? You couldn’t imag... 

O.  131) Yeah no kiddin. You couldn’t imagine

N2.  132) All dat

O.  133) Houses movin, and cars in trees, and boats everywhere out of the water.

N2.  134) Yeah, a big barge down dere was into people houses. A big old barge.
O. 135) I heard that crashed into some houses.
N2. 136) Wasn’t nobody here at dat time, no when dat was. Wasn’t nobody
137) and den Mrs. Robinson said she was on top, the boat came and picked
138) her up and put her on top of the interstate thing
O. 139) Yeah they spent the night on the bridge or something...two nights
N2. 140) The interstate, you know, people complainin years ago when they foist was
141) buildin the interstate dat dey broke up all the houses to make room for
142) the, you know, the interstate but God works in mysterious ways. Thank
143) God for the interstate cuz if it wasn’t for the interstate where people
144) could get up on like dat more people woulda died.
O. 145) You’re right.
N2. 146) They had nowhere to go.
O. 147) They were up there for two days.
N2. 148) Yeah, I said “Thank God for the interstate.” We were complainin about
149) when dey were foist buildin it, it served, you know, it served it’s purpose.
O. 150) Awesome purpose, yes.
N2. 151) Thank God. Dat’s right.
O2. 152) Crazy, crazy stories.
N2. 153) And dis fella, he was still here. The fella on the corna dere....he was
154) still here. And we talked to him on the phone when we’s in Florida. Foist
155) he was on top his little house here and the wata was comin up. Know
156) where he went? He went got up the church dere.
O. 157) How do you get on top, like a boat?
N2. 158) He got up dere. No, he got up dere. He CLIMBED up dere. He was up
159) on the top, he knows dat’s high...
O. 160) high ground
N2. 161) he was on top of the church, yeah
O. 162) climb up on top of the roof of the church.
O2. 163) why not? yeah
O. 164) yeah but then you get stuck up there and you’re like, no food, no water.
N2. 165) No nothin, dat’s what I’m sayin
O. 166) That’s another show on TV yeah.

N2. 167) My secretary was in the project on the third floor...and her
168) neighba left. Her neighba gave her the key so she could go up in
169) the apartment cuz dat’s a little higha. I said, “Well shucks. You still
170) gotta come out dat project (laughs).” You know, you can’t get out. So
171) dat lady left, she still up dere....she, she didn stay dere...why you
172) gonna...“How you think you gonna be safe up dere?” Just like you were
173) jus sayin, you up dere and you ain’t got no electric, no food, no wata, no
174) nothin’ and you still gotta leave so dey had to come and get em and dey
175) still had to get out on a boat. You know?

O. 177) Wow.

N2. 178) Some people jus don’t wanna move, you know? Dey don’t want...dey
179) wanna jus stand like dey think somethin gonna happen or it ain’t
180) gonna happen. Everybody had to move, all that wata. It was
181) devastated.

O. 182) You were smart to move when you did, you know?

N2. 183) Yeah, see I knew from before cuz I was here for Bessy. Dey had
184) anotha storm here in ’65 and Bessy...I neva forget, I was sittin down
185) dere I know, like all Uptown people was alright cuz the wata wasn up
186) “dere. I said, Well Lord, I’m in the wrong spot, I shoulda been way
187) Uptown.”

O. 188) the low area

N2. 189) I’m not gonna be, you know, I’m not gonna be in the way of the storm

O. 190) Yeah cuz you’re in a low area

N2. 191) Yeah, you know, so when we first got wind you know dere’s a 5 out dere,
192) you know a Category 5, it was no hesitatin, I was GONE.

O. 193) I’m below sea level, I gotta get outta here!

N2. 194) Dat’s right, I told my wife, “One thing for sure, we not...we not suppose to
195) be here...

O. 196) Yeah you’re right.
N2. 197) and we here.”

O. 198) It sounded like some people would...wanted to leave but they waited a
199) little too long and then when the levees broke it happened SO fast that
200) they couldn’t get out then.

N2. 201) But a lotta poor people felt like it was gonna be like a lotta otha storms,
202) just blow ova and

O. 203) yeah

O2. 204) yeah (inaudible) we can ride it out

N2. 205) right right and dat’s a big mistake, you always sorry

O. 206) yeah I bet

N2. 207) gotta lotta family and friends dat was still stuck in dey houses dat
208) thought dey could ride it out. Dat’s the worst thing you could do...when
209) dere’s something dat devastatin. It was just too much a storm, you
210) know.

O. 211) Plus you are only three hours from Florida

N2. 212) Dat’s all....three hours

O. 213) Three hours is worth the trip....like you said, “I’m only goin for three
214) or four days” right?

N2. 215) Yeah, yeah...but like I said it took us 13 hours to get dere. Mmm-hmm.
216) If I’d take and get my car right now and go to where we were, to Milton,
217) Florida dat’s like Pensacola, you know? It would take three hours,
218) that’s all, three hours.

R. 219) How much different now does it look like from before like was
220) that...everybody have their lawns and stuff, like all green?

N2. 221) Well it comin back now. It growin back now but before, like I said,
222) dere wasn no green. Everything was grey, everything looked petrified, and
223) everything was all, you know dat wata makes stuff all rusted and tight.

R. 224) Yeah.

N2. 225) Like a...you know a friend of mine, mechanic friend of mine do
226) mechanic work...he had all his tools in his shed and things. He tried
227) to rush back here think he could save some of his tools (laughs). He go
(laughs) could look at em, can’t NOTHIN to do with em...they all stuck togetha.

O. twisted, yeah, oh rusted

N2. Dat wata, dat’s salt wata, you know...it take rust and everything and be all balled up in a big knot, yeah.

O. That’s true

N2. Iron, all that stuff, you know

O. Plus anyway sewage and when you have a flood that’s yucky water, it’s not like you know good water.

N2. Dat’s why we...it was stinkin when we foist come back too. Like I said, dat was about 3 or 4 months afta, but the people dat came right afta the storm dey said, ooo, you couldn’t stay just for the stench.

O. You know, it stink too much.

O2. People were sayin like refrigerators

O. Yeah

O. there was refrigerators floatin in the Mississippi river they were
tellin me, you know crazy stuff

N2. We were lucky when we came upon our frigerata door cuz uh, when we
came in the wata had come and the frigerata had fell ova and the
door fell open you know so it was layin open, so it didn’t really stink up
dere like some. Some people dey frigerata dere was still
closed with all dat stuff in it. It...dey were tellin people, “Don’t open

your frigerata when you go. Just tie it up...

O. and get rid of it

N2. and get rid of it.”

O. What did they do with all the stuff?

O2. I know.

O. You don’t wanna know.

N2. No, we had stuff packed. Den you hadda kinda sort some of dat

O. stuff out, like you know, different aerosol cans and all dat

O. yeah toxic
N2. 259) toxic stuff. You had to like put dat to the side by itself. It was a, it 260) was hard y’know?
O. 261) And then you wonder where the city is taking it? Yeah...that would 262) be my question
N2. 263) Like I always said when we was here during dat, you know I said, 264) “Where dey takin all dis stuff?”
O2. 265) Where they takin it
N2. 266) It was workin too, dey was comin. Just as soon as they takin, and 267) and and knock it all down with dem bulldozas and stuff, put it in the 268) trucks and things, we stack it up, yeah dat’s how much stuff we 269) had. Dey come the next day and get dat too. And dat, dis was just 270) one house, you know all around here dey was doin dat everywhere. Dey 271) were workin. I gotta give em dat. I don’t know where dey was bringin all 272) dat stuff.
O. 273) Are they takin it to Florida or are they takin it to the Mississippi River, 274) you know? It’s like, where are they takin it?
N2. 275) Placin fire to it or something. Dere’s gotta be some kind of 276) repurcussions from dat stuff. Oh, Lord.
O2. 277) That’s a good question to find out.
O. 278) Not that the Mississippi was clean before, I mean rivers up by us 279) they’re not crystal clear and then you dump off stuff like that and you 280) don’t know what’s happenin
N2. 281) A lot of people doin stuff dey not supposed to, you know
O. 282) It’s like, I don’t think I’m gonna eat some fish for a while, you 283) know like
N2. 284) A lotta people felt like dat, like some of dese fruit trees in 285) dis thing here. My cousin say he ain’t gonna eat none of dem 286) fruits.

Y1: Gentilly
R. 1) So the...the day of I mean uh...what was that like for you? the
Y1. 2) nothing, uh, I slept during the whole hurricane

R. 3) really? (laughs)

Y1. 4) Yeah cuz it really hit with my brutha, I could give you his phone numba too. I might want to ask you to call him lata, he probably had a couple

5) things he’d like to tell ya, he lives in Diamondhead now but...the bulk of the

6) storm hit uh Waveland well Bay St. Louis, Waveland dere right next...like

7) Minneapolis/St. Paul dere right next to each otha and uh dat’s where it

8) hit....I had zero damage to my house, not ten cents of damage, if I’d claim

9) ten cents of damage to my insurance I’d been cheatin (laughs). My mutha,

10) OK, the ch... the choice we had, my good friend Wayne Pittman called me

11) on Saturday night late at night one or two in the morning, which is unusual

12) for him, I mean nobody calls dat late you know and he said, “Well dis’ll be

13) a big one. Y’all betta get out.” So I called my brutha immediately and my

14) mutha said, “No I’m gonna stay here. If God wants me, he can get me here

15) as well as Bay St. Louis.” If we’d a went to Bay St. Louis she woulda died,

16) cuz my my brutha’s mutha-in-law died but she was a lot worse shape

17) than my mutha. My mutha’s 98 now, she’s livin mainly with my brutha,

18) she used to live with me.

R. 20) Wow.

Y1. 21) But now she lives with my brutha and um, so we stayed...but anyway, um

22) we coulda we coulda stayed you know decided eitha to stay or go with

23) my brutha. If we woulda went with my brutha, my mutha probably dead

24) cuz...dat’s... we had 25 feet above sea level in Bay St. Louis, dat’s the

25) theata I owned, ok? Um...it it just blew away like a like a house of cards,

26) you know? When we bought the theata in ’75 it’d survived the ’69

27) hurricane in Bay St. Louis uh one of the selling points that the ownas gave

28) us dere was...everything was devastated and dere’s the theata standin

29) dere like nothin had happened.

R. 30) Oh yeah. So they were usin that...

Y1. 31) But anyway, OK the Monday morning we still had phone service uh afta

32) the hurricane. For a WHILE we did during 10 or 11 o’clock. My friend
33) Richard Dempsey the fireman called me, he was on duty of course, said everything’s fine, nothing happened. So I said OK good. The minista who 35) lived next...two doors down, he stayed, he didn’t leave and he came by with 36) his wife. Dey had the big boots on, dey walked up Chef highway said dere’s a lotta wata but dey said dere’s floodin’ in the streets. Which, 38) we’ve had floodin’ in the streets but we’ve neva had floodin in the 39) houses...

R. 40) Uh-huh.

Y1. 41) in 51 years. Uh, so everything was fine. So dat day the man next door had 42) some roof tiles off. So, gathered em up togetha and throw em away. And, 43) uh, you know, well I did actually make a record of all my movies, I keep 44) record of all my movies so I did dat so in a way dat saved me cuz I had 45) my record but I didn’t have my...the book that I wrote everything in 46) Uh-huh.

Y1. 47) so I was able to recreate dat lata on but anyway...so, you know, on dat 48) Sunday before the hurricane, I was just watchin DVDs and all dat so I 49) know the electricity was gonna go out so I did dat and Monday I was 50) readin and cleanin up and uh, like I said made my list of movies I’d seen 51) dat year and uh, so everything was fine so you know dere was no 52) electricity so we went to bed around 8 o’clock 9 o’clock and ‘bout one 53) thirty in the mornin y’know I get up to go pee and dere’s wata on the 54) ground on the on the floor in my bedroom.

R. 55) Oh. Inside the room.

Y1. 56) Oh. Inside the whole house, actually.

R. 57) Did it seep up through the floor or?

Y1. 58) Oh yeah it goes through the floor, through the slab. Dat happens...that’s what 59) happens in a flood, if you have a flood anywhere....The hurricane had 60) nothin to do with it dat’s what I keep tellin ya, it’s man-made. The London 61) Avenue canal broke. OK, well we knew, we had known by den dat the 62) Industrial Canal, which I’m gonna show you on my way out to the East, um 63) the levee had broke on the Iowa 9th w d. OK but dat happened all the
64) time, the levees are not made correctly. The corps of engineers fucked up 65) and dat’s the word I have to use, dey’re still not doin very well. But 66) anyway the London Avenue Canal broke and dat’s where all the wata 67) came from, London Avenue down Robert E Lee Boulevard all dat and 68) eventually got here...so it didn’t get here till like, I don’t know what time 69) exactly but 1:30, 2 in the mornin, dere was wata. So I got my mutha up 70) and all dat, it was middle of the night so I couldn’t really save anything, if 71) we’d a known in advance, I coulda saved a lotta stuff.

R. 72) Uh-huh.

Y1. 73) But I went to bed. You know. Slept good, till I got to get up at 1:30 or 2 to 74) pee (laughs). And uh...So anyway, the wata kept gettin higha and higha, 75) it stayed about 5 feet. So I was able to save a lot of my stuff dat was on on 76) shelves, my baseball card collection was up in my locka, so dat didn’t get 77) wet at all.

R. 78) So did it...was it a rapid rise you could see?

Y1. 79) Oh, no no no. Just slow. The dog, we had a dog, he was all bent outta shape. 80) Um, but anyway, as the wata started risin the minista came, y’know tried 81) to help us out, which he did, cuz my mutha y’know was she could walk 82) with a c..walka but she couldn’t walk through 5 feet of wata.

R. 83) Uh-huh.

Y1. 84) So dey came in a little uh inflatable raft got her ova to his house, which 85) had 2 stories...My business partna called me, you know Ellis, everything 86) was fine in Chalmette at dis point. “Should I book movies for Friday?” I 87) said, “Well, if we get the electricity back on I’m sure we can get back in 88) business.” So he said so so I said, “OK”. And when I was talkin to Richard 89) you know the phone just cut off and dat was the end of the phone. Dere 90) was no phone communication period. No...people had cell phones, the 91) otha people with the minista had cell, you know, cell phones dey 92) couldn’t get any...We didn’t know what was goin on, the radio didn’t know 93) anything about it, you know WW all the emergency stations didn’t know 94) anything about it. We didn’t know anything had broke you know we just
95) thought it was high wata, you know? But the wata, you know, kept on
96) getting higha and higha, but you know, who on the second floor...so the
97) first night we stayed on the levee, I’ll show you the levee in a minute, we’re
98) almost dere. Uh, we thought a helicopta or somethin would pick us up.
99) Dey did see us, definitely, but dey didn’t come pick us up. And den the
100) next night we had to walk all the way ova to that shoppin centa, you
101) know where I showed you?

R.  102) Uh-huh.

Y1.  103) and where we evacuated to, to well I go...arranged it cuz the guy I knew
104) was a guy from the movies he’s worked for one of the black radio stations.
105) I was able...I had two olda... elderly women plus my mutha with me and
106) the minista left cuz he said he was gonna come back and get us but he
107) was all worried about these people in the Baptist seminary so I took it
108) upon myself. We got to Morial centa and stayed dere the second night
109) and we thought the buses would come. Dey were afraid dat everybody
110) was gonna rush the buses and overwhelm dem so they didn’t do dat.
111) Our dog, we tried to do the best we can. The minista couldn’t put it with
112) his dogs, he kept his dogs on the second floor, and he couldn’t put his
113) dogs and my dogs else dere’d be a big fight and we weren’t gone be dere
114) obviously we were evacuating. So, we...our dog followed us part of the way,
115) uh uh, to my mutha. What we did we found a thing where you put clothes
116) on, you push it, we had the elderly women who couldn’t walk push it. We
117) walked on the levee all the way to the Chef Hi...chef highway for the
118) most part is where we were before...dat was not flooded. Gettin back to
119) my story, Um second night we stayed in the Morial centa and it was not
120) chaos, nothin like dat. Very nice, mostly all black people, but dey treated
121) us well. At 3 o’clock in the mornin, uh, a lady came brought me and my
122) mutha, y’know, y’know, a popsicle, you know, ice cream bar, it was COLD!
123) It waDn’t like it was all melty it was very, I mean it was one of the best...I
124) rememba eatin dat like it was the best thing I eva had...(laugh). So
125) anyway, the buses didn’t come so the third night uh the guy from uh the
hospice where they had all the AIDS patients and all, he said, “you know
you shouldn’t stay here another night...there might be problems” You
know but there wasn’t any problems, I cannot say that there were any
problems. I could hear a few gunshots but I mean not anywhere near us.
So we filed outta here and we stayed across from Harrah’s, Harrah’s is the
gambling casino uh, we stayed right across the street. I talked to Riley,
who is now the police chief, said, “I gotta get somethin for my mutha,
you know she’s 94 years old and you know she needs to get outta here.”
So we slept there, we saw where the Oakwood...they burned the
Oakwood shopping center. It was all kinda lootin and all down there,
where we went down the Chef highway. I have to give em dat, the blacks
were lootin left and right. Dey had Thais from Thai town.
R. 138) So you actually saw people breakin in to places and stuff?
Y1. 139) No, not actually breakin in but st...goin away with stuff.
R. 140) Yeah.
Y1. 141) The back wall of a black fashion store you know, fell. So dat was
(laughs) dey could walk in, dey didn’t have to break in...the back wall was
gone. But anyway, when we were at the Morial center there was a
drugstore there and my mutha needed some pills, aspirins or somethin, so
the guy there who wor...I didn wanna go in myself, so the guy, a white
guy, who worked there said, “Oh, I’ll go in and get what you want.” I
didn’t feel comfortable doin it myself. But anyway, while we were at
Morial Centa, the guy from the hotel gave me one of those things you put
your bags on and push
R. 150) Yeah a little shoppin cart
Y1. 151) No, well its not a shoppin cart...it’s like, well you know you put the suits
on you hang the suits and all dat
R. 153) OK yeah I know which one it is
Y1. 154) Yeah, it was to push my mutha around. Cuz she could walk with a walka,
I mean with a cane at the time and uh, at the...across the street from
Harrah’s, where you catch the ferry to go across the river and from dere
you could see Oakwood burning. They looted Oakwood shopping centa
and burned it. You could see the big fire and all dat from the...So the
next day, dey picked us up finally in a bus and dey tried to take us, dey
took us to the West Bank, West Bank of Jefferson. All they wanted in
Jefferson were people from Jefferson. Now I had a business in Jefferson,
I coulda bullshitted my way through and said I lived in Jefferson...cuz I
had a business card. Well dey took us to the Interstate and the
Interstate helicop ta’d my mutha and I and all the people in
wheel...you know the people who couldn’t walk, the olda people, to the
airport.
R.  Uh-huh.
Y1. So we stayed at the airport one day. And den afta dat I heard the guy
from the National Guard say, “OK we gonna take everybody on
the gurney.” And my mutha didn’t have a wheelchair, I was tryin to
find her a wheelchair when I found dis out. She was on the gurney,
OK, you know, like they have in a hospital. So the guy, I heard the guy
say, “OK we’re gonna take everybody on gurneys” So I told my mutha,
“Don’t get on a wheelchair, stay on the gurney” So we were the first ones
out, we uh, y’know the person with the olda person could go with ‘em.
So we got on the plane and dey separated us, y’know? I told my mutha,
mutha had a cane, I said, “when you think, see the cane, think of me.”
I’m startin to cry already. But uh (sniffles) but anyway we got to
Nashville, they put us in Mechairie hospital, which is a part of
Vanderbilt University.
R.  Mm-hmm.
Y1. Y’know, I stayed overnight, the first aid, “What can we do to help ya
out?” “I’d like to look in the newspapa. So I saw the newspapa, dere
was my brutha! I didn’t know he’d, y’know, how he was. Y’know
(sniffles), I’m sorry but....but anyway he was fine, y’know, dey had his
picture in the papa. We tried to find out who took the photograph,
R. 188) Mm-hmm.

Y1. 189) So anyway afta a day I was all concerned I thought dey were gonna
190) put us you know in a gym or somethin. But the people at, uh,
191) Vanderbilt, uh, dey found a place for my mutha to stay. It was a, uh,
192) home, you know, an old folk’s home.

R. 193) Mm-hmm.

Y1. 194) And uh...

R. 195) Is this all the way in Tennessee you’re saying?

Y1. 196) In Tennessee, we were put on one of dose troop planes where dey
197) take the wounded soldiers and all?

R. 198) Uh-huh

Y1. 199) And my mutha was on the gurney, you know, where you put a
200) wounded soldia. I was just sittin, you know, not nowhere near on…I
201) knew she was on the plane but I couldn’t go talk to her or nothin, dat’s
202) the part dat I really...was upset about. But anyway we got to Nashville, got
203) reunited, a man at the airport gave me his card, said, “If you need
204) anything, give me a call.” This guy, helped get me a uh, his name was
205) Will Chamberlain...just like Wilt, except it was Will.

R. 206) Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Y1. 207) Will Chamberlain. That’s why I rememba it.

R. 208) How bout that? (laughs)

Y1. 209) But anyway, but anyway the um, the uh, uh, social worka at
210) Mechairie got my mutha in Bordeaux, which is the...which is the uh,
211) owned by city of Nashville. Dey kept me dere for two or three days,
212) too.

R. 213) Uh-huh.

Y1. 214) Until I could find an apartment, and Will Chamberlain helped find me an
215) apartment...it was the same apartment building where his daughta
216) lived. And uh, so i got dere...in the long run I coulda done betta if I
217) went to the hotel cuz FEMA woulda put up the money.

R. 218) Uh-huh.
Y1. 219) But I wound up payin it myself.
R. 220) Yeah.
Y1. 221) Which was, I think, a rip-off. My mutha wind up payin for
222) herself, dey told her it’d be free cuz the government would pay for
223) her at Bordeaux, but dey neva di d. For she...the last two months she
224) was dere she had to give dem her social security and her...our
225) fatha’s pension check.
R. 226) Uh-huh.
Y1. 227) And um, so anyway I found a place to stay. The lady from um, whose
228) name escapes me now, the social worka took me around and dere was
229) anotha man too, Will Will Will Chamberlain, took me around to get
230) a cell phone and...The thing I rememba the best, I went ova to um,
231) the theata, over dere and the manager and I told her I had a
232) theata and all dat so she gave me a permanent pass so I could go
233) dere and see movies all day, which I said, dat saved my sanity.
R. 234) Yeah.
Y1. 235) If it wouldn’t a been for dat, I’d been goin nuts. I mean, I couldn’t
236) afford to pay money all the time to go to movies. So she helped me
237) out.

Y2: 3rd Ward

Y2. 1) As the hurricane Katrina was approaching New Orleans, the local
2) television and radio got stronga and stronga in deir, um, warnings dat
3) it’s really gonna be terrible dis time and you need to leave.
R. 4) Mm-hmm.
Y2. 5) My wife and I neva leave for hurricane, because...
R. 6) They kinda hype it up and
Y2. 7) it’s such an inconvenience and whateva. But um, but dis time, dey kept
8) sayin as we got to five days out, four days out, three days out, two days
9) out, that if you don’t leave dis time...YOU...WILL...DROWN.
R. 10) hmm.
11) It was pretty clear, dat you had to leave this time. Everybody I knew left.
12) Everybody I knew, or I should say nearly everybody I knew
13) evacuated...and uh...so, but we we didn’t wanta go and we...had really
14) did...didn’t really make dat decision till the day before. The hurricane was
15) on a Monday, August 29th and we left, my wife and I on Sunday mornin
16) when my step daughta, who lived next door, called up, and she said uh, at
17) 6:30 in the mornin, Sunday mornin, “It’s Category 5. It’s headed right fer
18) us. We can’t wait any longa, we need to leave.” So we, uh, we agreed we
19) had about an hour to pack what we could and and to and to leave and to get
20) into the gridlock traffic. So uh, my wife and I...it was pretty much
21) everybody just backed, it was just backed up on the way by by Sunday a
22) lotta people had left. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, but of course you still had
23) a lotta people left on Sunday. So we knew when we left we’d get in
24) gridlock traffic and uh...but, you know, dat’s just somethin you had to deal
25) with. And of course we took, we took our dog with us, so we each packed
26) uh, a suitcase of mainly undawear and short sleeves and took what
27) valuable things we could. You couldn’t take much in an automobile.
28) Financial papas, checkbooks, somethin like dat. And den, my
29) stepdaughta and her husband, both paramedics, luckily not on duty, dey
30) left. And uh...we were delayed because uh my son-in-law’s best friend, his
31) mutha, who’s about 80, did not want to leave, but eventually she was
32) convinced dat she had to leave. And so we...it was an extra hour, hour and
33) a half before we almost physically converged...coerced her to leave,
34) so...We had about, we had three cars, about seven people leavin, headin to
35) my brutha-in-law’s house, about 50 miles North of New Orleans right
36) below Kentwood, Louisiana, where Britney Spears comes from. An hour
37) north of here.
38) Claim to fame. (laughs)
39) So we got to dis house, uh, 50, 60 miles north of the city, um...dere was
40) about 30 people dere, young and old, white and black. A lot of people
41) didn’t know each otha. Somebody knew somebody but uh...so, you know,
42) den the storm came, the powa went out, electricity came out, the trees
43) were...whateva. So we watching a little small television with uh, a clothes
44) hanga acting as an antenna when we found out, actually the next day the
45) levees failed, the levee system failed. And dat woulda been on Tuesday.
46) We realized we couldn’t go home because our neighba had flooded. And
47) um...so I told everybody, of dis 30 people, dat we needed to everybody
48) needed to go to different places, stay with friends, relatives. Nobody had,
49) nobody knew what was gonna happen the next day, uh, much less the next
50) week or the next month. So my wife and I left on Tuesday afternoon for
51) Dallas, had to go as far away as Dallas, Texas a day’s drive to get a hotel
52) room. We got there by Tuesday night, um, and uh, Wednesday
53) mornin...Wednesday afta...Wednesday mornin somebody knocked on our
54) door from the Dallas Bible Church and dey wanted to take care of us. And
55) beginning on day 2, I started to have gratitude. Afta exhausting friends
56) and relatives, ova several weeks, by Novemba 1st, we made our way to
57) San Diego, where we stayed for about a year and a half. Afta about a year
58) and a half we decided to come home and rebuild our house, which took
59) about anotha year and a half. So now I’ve been back in my house for a
60) little more than a year.

R. 61) So did it hit pretty hard? Did it hit your area pretty hard?

Y2. 62) 7 feet of wata for 3 weeks. How...How’s dat?

R. 63) yeah (laugh)

Y2. 64) Is dat hard?

R. 65) That’s pretty hard.

Y2. 66) The lowa 9th w d which all, which all people have heard about from
67) across the United States, the 9th w d is about one tenth of one percent of
68) what flooded.

R. 69) Mmm.

Y2. 70) The hurricane affected everybody. And the people of New Orleans like
71) myself, who are middle-class and white, are very outraged when Spike Lee
72) or someone tries to say it’s a conspiracy against the poor, the black people.
Yes, the poor black people of the Iowa 9th ward did lose their houses. So did 80 percent of the people. The hurricane affected everybody, poor, working class, middle class, rich, white, black, young, old, everybody was affected.

R. mmm-hmm

Y2. So...it wasn’t a 

R. What was it like when you first came back to your house?

Y2. I didn’t even visit for seven months. When I visited after seven months, on my first visit from San Diego, it was kinda strange because cuz San Diego is so up-to-date and everything. It’s like going back into a war zone.

R. mmm-hmm

Y2. So uh by then my house had been gutted and there was just a few people in my neighborhood who had started to rebuild. Um, and, um there was still a lot of debris on the ground, and um, houses in the middle of the street, automobiles upside down, boats on top of houses, in different neighborhoods, not so much my neighborhood but yeah the Iowa 9th ward and areas close to the water. And uh, but yeah the hurricane affected everybody but the oldest 20 percent of the city. The city of New Orleans is about 300 years old, the city had existed the first 200 years, did not flood, the French Quarters, the Garden District, the areas close to the Mississippi River, the high ground. What did flood was 80 percent of the city, developed in the last 100 years on the Iowa, softa ground. After we put in a system of pumps and pumping stations, canals and levees on the Iowa softa ground close to Lake Pontchartrain.

R. mmm-hmm

Y2. So everytime I visited after seven months I went back to San Diego and den I had another visit uh after about a year and something...and den let’s see.. about about a year and a half roughly we decided to move home. We stayed in a bed and breakfast owned by tour guide friends of mine for almost a year and a half. We had a bed and breakfast room with no kitchen. We had a lotta friends living in toxic, claustrophobic trailers. and
104) den uh, so now we’re back and uh, in our house and we got 19 out of 21
105) families back in deir house in my block
R. 106) wow
Y2. 107) and three weeks ago, three weeks ago I got a doorbell.
R. 108) (laughs)
Y2. 109) So we’re still rebuilding for years to come.
R. 110) Yeah...great, did it change your perspective on anything, like going through
111) that experience or?
Y2. 112) It changed your perspective in the sense dat if you, what I told people, or
113) what I think think I’m gonna tell people, that if you don’t like New Orleans
114) for all the problems we have, cuz we soiitainly have problems, poverty,
115) literacy, crime, corruption, Lord knows...now’s the time to get out.
R. 116) mmm-hmm
Y2. 117) Go.
R. 118) (laughs)
Y2. 119) Go live in some place like San Diego. Some otha beautiful, wondaful
120) place and a lotta people did dat or tried to do dat. My wife had no otha
121) intention of moving back. But if you love New Orleans, like I do, a native
122) and tour guide of New Orleans, then come on back and be part of the
123) rebuild.
R. 124) Uh-huh.
Y2. 125) When the Saints reopened the SupaDome...not not for the Supa Bowl,
126) I’m talkin about a year afta, the year afta, if you could watch dat, and
127) still not want to come back to the city of New Orleans, then stay
128) whereva you’re staying. Afta den, people like like us said, “You
129) know, we need to go back home. We need to rebuild our city, rebuild our
130) house, rebuild our neighborhood.” So dat’s why, when the Saints won the
131) Supa Bowl a couple weeks ago, 2 days lata we had a victory parade for
132) 800,000 people.
R. 133) Yeah, that was amazing
Y2. 134) Not counting the people stuck in gridlock 5, 10 and 20 miles away. So
when we say, “welcome to who dat nation” it’s somethin dat if you’re not from here, or at least you haven’t visited here, you probably don’t understand. But we hope everybody does understand, so thank you for visiting.

**S1: Garden District**

R. 1) What was it like for you, the days leading up and then the actual day of?

S1. 2) Um...woke up, we actually had four palm trees planted, we started this landscaping job the year before Katrina. We had four palm trees planted in the back the Friday before Katrina. Um, Saturday morning my husband goes to the storage unit where we kept plywood...comes home, you know, after three trips with all the plywood and we started boarding up the house. Um, that took until, we got 36 windows and that took until, I don’t know, like 11 o’clock that night.

R. 9) Oh wow

S1. 10) Um, we loaded up the car and drove to Birmingham, which is where my husband’s parents live. We packed three p...three t-shirts, three um, three pairs of gym shorts, three sets of underwear cuz we were gonna be back in three days.

R. 14) Mmm-hmm (laughs)...not quite

S1. 15) On the way to Birmingham we talked with some very dear friends who live in Ocean Springs on the beach and we are in the Wal-Mart parking lot in Birmingham at 6 o’clock in the morning crying over the phone to them to evacuate and they’re like, “Oh no no. We’re just gonna wait it out here. You know, it’ll just be fine” and you know, my husband just uh, you could see a grown man cry. He’s like, “Oh please, oh please” you know “please leave. Leave now. Just get as far away as you can. You know, come to Birmingham if you need to, whatever.” Um, anyway we um, uh got to Birmingham, took a nap, got to my parent...uh my in-laws’ house, took a nap. I got up that morning, 10 o’clock, went to...(sighs) I’ve forgotten whether it’s Lowe’s or Home Depot and got the last generator.
R. 26) Wow
S1. 27) that they had. Um, went and bought um, you know, ten 5 gallon um, gas
28) cans and went back to their house and watched what was going on.
29) Um...the information was somewhat um, number one un...incomplete, um
30) untrue, and just terrifying, you know. The, the, their talking about one
31) breach on the 17th street canal and they’ve got sandbags trying to fill it
32) and they say, “Oh no. They’re gonna stop” you know “trying to stop this
33) breach and go to search and rescue.” And we’re sitting there going, “If you
34) stop the bloody leak, you don’t need to rescue the people!!”
R. 35) (laughs)
S1. 36) Um, and, you know, certain, it was, you know, much afterwards that we
37) found out that the reason they couldn’t...they didn’t need to stop that leak
38) was that there were so many other ones that uh (laughs) it didn’t matter.
39) Um, it was several days before we talked to our friends and found out that
40) they had at least evacuated from the beachfront house to another house a
41) little further away from the beach. Their beachfront house was levelled.
R. 42) Mmm.
S1. 43) Their next-door neighbors were clinging to trees for 8 hours.
R. 44) Wow.
S1. 45) Um, you know, we’re still in Birmingham and the city is flooding. You see
46) rioting and you hear that there are massive fires in the Garden District and
47) it’s like, “where?”
R. 48) Yeah
S1. 49) As it turns out, it wasn’t in the Garden District. It was on Carrollton across
50) from the seminary. That whole, that whole block went down,
R. 51) Oh ok
S1. 52) went out, but that wasn’t what they were reporting. We had a friend, um,
53) who neighbor who um, vertically evacuated to a hotel downtown and you
54) know, on was it Monday after the storm passed, he, you know, came home,
55) emptied the freezer of its contents, emptied the refrigerator, took a tour
56) around our house, said everything was fine, and we were like, “Phew!” and
57) the city’s flooding and there’s gonna be 10 feet of water on St. Charles
58) avenue. And, you know, we’re just...it was just incredibly stressful. Um
59) (sighs) I went to um, I’m an engineer and I went to work at one of our
60) remote sites the Thursday after the storm.

R. 61) Uh-huh

S1. 62) A, a fella that I work with was renting a place while he and his wife were
63) buying it...were building a house. We moved in with him, helped him and
64) his wife move into their new house and we lived there for a month. Um we
65) came back 10 days after the storm and, um, managed to get the
66) refrigerator, freezer cleaned out you know, so all the yes we were, really
67) were largely undamaged except for 3 of the 4 palm trees that had been
68) planted, fell down (laughs).

R. 69) Ok. That was mostly a wind thing.

S1. 70) Yeah it was a wind thing.

R. 71) Was there water around here?

S1. 72) No, there was no, other than a little water in the street by Touro there was
73) no water in the streets on this side of St. Charles. Um, so, you know, when
74) we bought this house we knew that it didn’t flood. I mean, this, this
75) neighborhood was built before there were levees.

R. 76) Mmm-hmm.

S1. 77) And so, um, yeah we felt comfortable and then its like, “What do you mean
78) there’s gonna be 10 feet of water on St. Charles Avenue?”

R. 79) Yeah.

S1. 80) Um, we came back another time um, we came back 10 days later to get
81) clothes (laughs). Some stuff for our rental place in Zachary and um, as I
82) said, to empty the refrigerator and freezer, turned around, went back to
83) Zachary. I’m working this whole time, which is thankful in a lot of ways.

R. 84) Yeah

S1. 85) We got back the end of September for good. We came back one other time
86) to just start cleaning up, spent the weekend, cooked some jambalaya for
87) the firefighters and the, everybody else. There’s a huge encampment at the
88) fire station and at Salvation Studio area. Um, you know for the most part 89) we put on an incredibly expensive roof years before the storm which kept 90) us from having any more roof damage. Um...from you know just about 91) everything you know we came out really well physically but emotionally 92) it was, you know. We didn’t lose everything, we didn’t lose anything other 93) than, well, we lost our dog.

R. 94) Mmm-hmm

S1. 95) Um we evacuated with our dogs, you know, we would never, we would 96) never leave the, any pet behind. I mean, they’re members of our family but 97) we had a dog that had bone cancer and had lived a year and a half longer 98) than the best projections. We had her on an off-protocol, clinical trial at 99) LSU. She was doing great but she was always a worrier.

R. 100) Mmm-hmm

S1. 101) and the stress of us yelling at the TV in Birmingham, picking up and 102) moving to Zachary, all of that, she just picked up the stress and her little 103) body shut down. So yeah we’ve, if, I don’t, she certainly still wouldn’t be 104) alive today I don’t think but um, you know, it certainly hastened her 105) departure from this world. Um, we just had a lot of friends who just had 106) knee-jerk reactions who didn’t have um you know significant damage to 107) their homes weren’t flooded and still they were like, “We’re outta here. 108) We’re leaving.”

R. 109) Mmm-hmm

S1. 110) We had friends who moved outta town because they saw the rioting, they 111) saw everything else, which turns out the rioting was, was very limited. 112) You know, it, they kept showing it over and over and over again on the 113) TV and you thought it was ongoing. And it was the same, the the same two, 114) you know, the same short..., you know, same little area and 115) same couple of blocks, or

R. 115) same couple of blocks, or

S1. 116) yeah the same couple of blocks, the same people, the same time, they just 117) showed it over and over and over again and you thought it was an 118) ongoing thing as opposed to um something that uh, hadn’t, you know, that
had happened once and was over. Um, we had friends whose houses were flooded out, we had people living with us, um you know, after we moved back we had people living with us after the storm. Um you know it was uh, in a lot of ways it made you understand the important stuff, and learn not to sweat the, you know, don’t sweat the little stuff.

R. Uh-huh. Did it change your perspective on, you know, the city or anything?
S1. Um, I truly believe that our mayor had a mental breakdown. He was, we all he was pretty decent pre-K and post-K he’s been totally ineffectual and not there. Um...

R. He’s about to finish up, right?
S1. yeah yeah yeah yeah he’s about to finish up. Um you know, thank Heaven (laughs). Um, it’s um, we have had a chance to do some stuff right that has been wrong for years.

R. Uh-huh.
S1. and it really looks like we’re doing it. We’re actually, I mean it truly looks like we’re actually getting decent public education.

R. Uh-huh.
S1. Um you know and you had, we had the best education money could buy. As long as you could pay tuition, you could educate your children very well in the city.

R. Uh-huh.
S1. but the public schools with the exception of Blusher, Montessori, and Benjamin Franklin um were training people to be hotel maids and porters and bus boys and dishwashers and it was just criminal the state of public education in the city. And you know not all the new schools are going to survive but a whole bunch of em are and we are just an absolute um experiment in what public education can be and I truly hope that that you know will be a lasting legacy of Katrina.