

ON THE BORDERS OF DISASTER: NATURAL DISASTER AND MASS MEDIA
IN THE MANIPULATION OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

I analyzed how ten weather-related natural disasters in Texas and the Southwest border region between 1899 and 1921 were popularly understood and how newspapers influenced collective memory of disasters. I performed a close textual analysis for language bias in local, state, national, and international newspapers. I found significant variations in descriptions of victims and others based on race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

Newspapers used a wide range of racial and ethnic identifiers before simplifying to white, Black, and Mexican around 1915. They generally described white individuals in detail and flatteringly, while they described other identities by racial or ethnic identifiers and unflatteringly. They frequently identified Black Texans by race only and as objects of white charity. *La Prensa* resisted bias by describing the 1921 Mexican community in language similar to that used for white Texans. Newspapers treated disaster as an opportunity, using sensationalist language to shape the collective memory of disasters and victims, particularly justifying coercion of poor and non-white victims' labor by unsupported accusations of looting and violence.

The biased language was undeniable. The actual influence on the collective memory was indicated by editorials written by those whose understanding of a disaster came from articles and by *la Prensa*'s resistance, while newspapers themselves used prior disasters as gauge of severity. Many of these tactics, conscious or not, are still in use, and modern mass media, including social media, has thrived in an environment with few consequences for bias and misinformation. By studying how these narratives were created in the past, we can educate the public to recognize this bias which creates negative perceptions of marginalized groups and weaken their power to create resentment, fear, and anger.

DEDICATION

To Marissa, Shea, and Lori, who have listened to me ramble about my research over and over
and still cheerfully urged me onwards

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has enthusiastically responded to questions and pointed me to invaluable resources while I tried to identify *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* and *la Sociedad Hidalgo*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Disasters function as cameras whose snapshots in time allow us to see social transactions in a particular moment within an era of change.”¹ These words from Jacob A. C. Remes best capture the value that disasters offer to the historian. My dissertation analyzes how ten weather-related natural disasters in Texas and the Southwest border region were popularly understood. These occurred in June and July 1899, April 1900, September 1900, September and October 1904, May 1908, December 1913, April 1915, August 1915, September 1919, and September 1921.² Specifically, I perform a close textual analysis of newspapers, including visual messages. How did reporters and editors manipulate different responses to victims based on race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender, and class through the language and images they used or did not use? How was that manipulation of race, ethnicity, and other identities contested from the inside by non-white identities? How did newspaper reporters and editors attempt to shape the collective memory of disasters and the people affected by them? Who was important enough to occupy the public space of print journalism in the early 1900s?³ Or perhaps this last question is better phrased as such: how much public space was a particular person allowed to occupy and why?

How people are represented in mass communications is a vital key to understanding how those people are perceived, and not just how they are described but whether or not an identifiable

¹Jacob A. C. Remes, *Disaster Citizenship: Survivors, Solidarity, and Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2016), location 162 of 7531.

²One planned disaster, the 1904 yellow fever epidemic, the last major one in the United States, was dropped due to time considerations.

³Mass media or mass communication in the modern meaning was probably not in use until after the temporal scope of this dissertation. Journalism and the press were the terms used in the early 1900s.

population is represented at all.⁴ Press representation significantly influenced current events and political divisions. Battles over how people are described in modern mass media and whether the representations are accurate are at the heart of the current American culture wars and debates over “fake” news. Viewers of different news outlets take away very different impressions based on how journalists and other news personalities present and describe American racial and ethnic groups as well as ethnic immigrants. In particular, some personalities fan xenophobic fears about Spanish-speaking immigrants and Muslim immigrants as well as driving a new wave of antisemitism. The most biased of these broadcast personalities have created or reinforced a climate of fear, anger, and hatred among a significant portion of the population which has arguably influenced elections.

The fear of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as immigrants runs very deep in the history of the United States, even if the specific populations being targeted have changed over time. It is far too easy to fan such fears back into life. In order to fight bias and historic injustices, we must examine the tools used to justify such injustices in the past, particularly when those tools continue to be used in the present. One of the most significant tools for creating or reinforcing bias has been journalism, which, until the advent of radio, meant newspapers and magazines. White men, those with the most stake in controlling racial and ethnic hierarchies, controlled most of the printed press, and it is useful to examine how they manipulated perceptions of various racial and ethnic groups. Where possible, it is also vital to examine how these marginalized groups represented themselves, as well as regional differences in these

⁴Journalists have used various standards for writing headlines, etc. that dictate whether or not a person is named, etc., which is often used to justify practices in which they identify women as their husband's wife, even when the article is about the woman. However, these supposedly objective standards are not neutral—indeed journalists wrote their own rules with no oversight—and have been a tool to create the biased narratives that this dissertation examines. David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 11–13.

representations. Gender and class are a secondary focus of these questions because these racial hierarchies were also gendered and class based, intersecting in important ways.⁵

Weather-related natural disasters provide a window to examine how ideas of race, ethnicity, and identity were and are created by journalists during catastrophic events that might be expected to promote human commonality rather than human difference. The specific language of race and ethnicity was particularly visible in newspaper reports during these ten Texas disasters in 1899, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1913, 1915, 1919, and 1921, demonstrating how language itself was used to shape and manipulate public perceptions of race and ethnicity and how these perceptions of race and ethnicity interacted with religion, class, immigration, migration, and gender.⁶ These disasters were an opportunity to justify transformations in society, particularly to justify asserting control over potential disorderly elements. Disasters, according to Remes, bring those potentially disorderly elements into focus, a glimpse that is otherwise inaccessible. Also significant are counternarratives that demonstrate how biased language was contested by those who were targeted, often using very similar tools.⁷

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, found an uneven access to the production of historical narratives, and identified four moments in

⁵Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3–6, 145; Richard Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, Number 36, The Centennial Series of the Association of Former Students (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1991), 84–90, 97–101; Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930–1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1989) 204–206; Chris M. Messer, Thomas E. Shriver, and Alison E. Adams, “The Destruction of Black Wall Street: Tulsa's 1921 Riot and the Eradication of Accumulated Wealth,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 77:3 (May 2018), 789–819; Carlos K. Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education in Texas, 1836–1981* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 68–71; Karl Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016); John Mckiernan–González, *Fevered Measures: Public Health and Race at the Texas–Mexico Border, 1848–1942* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), xii–xiv, 1, 7–11, 15, 37, 41–42, 46, 64–65, 165–166, 176, 206, 211; and Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶ There were two separate disasters in both 1900 and in 1915.

⁷ The primary counter-narrative for this dissertation is found in the Spanish-language newspaper, *la Prensa* (San Antonio) after the 1921 San Antonio flood.

which “silences” enter the historical record.⁸ This is a vital theoretical concept for my research because silences are one of the most important tools for manipulating perceptions that I have identified in newspapers. White middle-class newspapermen had almost exclusive control over whose stories entered the public consciousness, how those stories were told, and whose stories were excluded.⁹ The most significant for this dissertation was the first moment, the point of production of the record by newspaper articles, when the specific identities of non-white or immigrant victims are replaced by racial or ethnic language, silencing their individuality. Instead of individuals, the newspaper record produce stereotypes that shape public perceptions of these groups “as dysfunctional, childlike and dependent.”¹⁰ And it is in the way these group identities are rearranged and reorganized over time that the transformations in society during this period can be traced.

⁸Trouillot's four moments at which silences enter the historical record were at moment of fact creation, the moment of fact assembly, the moment of fact retrieval, and the moment of retrospective significance. The most significant for this dissertation was the first moment. White middle-class newspapermen had almost exclusive control over which stories entered the public consciousness and whose stories were excluded. The second moment, the selection of facts to preserve in archives, was also controlled almost exclusively by white middle-class men. Very little material reflecting a first-hand account of a Black person's experience in a disaster survived for retrieval or interpretation, nor did that of most ethnic groups, with the exception of the story of the 1921 San Antonio flood as told by *la Prensa*. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), xix, 26–27.

⁹Most newspapers in Texas were white-owned and managed in the early 1900s, using the broadest definition that includes ethnic Americans although they were often “white” in name only even in 1921. While there were a number of German Texan newspapers, I need help with translation. Future work should include these newspapers. Two non-white-owned Texas newspapers were the Black-owned *Dallas Express* and the Mexican-owned *la Prensa* (San Antonio). *La Prensa* was a daily with extensive reports on the 1921 San Antonio flood. The *Express* was a weekly, and during September 1921, they were still focused on the destruction of Greenwood, Oklahoma, three months earlier. The only mentions of the flooding were brief mentions under the Texas Towns section. Daniel Morales, “*Tejas, Afuera de Mexico: Newspapers, the Mexican Government, Mutualistas, and Migrants in San Antonio 1910–1940*,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 40:2 (Winter 2021): 52–91; Judith Garrett Segura, *Belo: From Newspapers to New Media* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Jacquelyn Masur McElhaney, *Pauline Periwinkle and Progressive Reform in Dallas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998); and Louis Margot, *Dallas Express, a Negro Newspaper: Its History, 1892–1971, and its point of view*, Thesis (East Texas State University, 1971).

¹⁰Murali Balaji, “Racializing Pity: The Haiti Earthquake and the Plight of ‘Others,’” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 28, no. 1 (Mar., 2011): 51.

Background

The river systems in Texas differ from the Mississippi river system, the largest in the United States, in that Texas has several parallel river systems in which each large river is fed by tributary streams, and each major river drains independently into the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippi river system, on the other hand, consists of a number of large tributary rivers which all drain into the Mississippi River which creates a bottleneck for drainage. The Mississippi river system drains most of the interior of the United States between the Appalachian and Rocky mountains, a huge geographical area, with the result that this system can produce particularly catastrophic floods even without extensive flood control efforts, while the Texas river systems are more prone to flash-flooding.¹¹ The El Niño cycle can produce flooding in both areas simultaneously, both regions can experience hurricanes and tropical storms, and both areas experience tornadoes.¹²

The weather-related disaster events in the early twentieth century with the least warning were tornadoes and hailstorms. While sometimes devastating, they were generally localized, often lasted only a minute or two, rarely received much assistance beyond the county, and relatively little was reported about them. At the other extreme temporally were droughts and famines which occur over a long period of time.¹³ Droughts and famines were often reported in

¹¹In fact the approach during the early 1900s, levee-only flood control, may cause floods to be worse. John Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 90–92; and Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xvi.

¹²Caran, S. Christopher, and Victor R. Baker, “Flooding Along the Balcones Escarpment, Central Texas,” *The Balcones Escarpment: Geology, Hydrology, Ecology and Social Development in Central Texas*, Patrick Leon Abbott and C. M. Woodruff, Jr., editors (San Antonio: Geological Society of America, 1986), The Walter Geology Library Online, University of Texas Libraries.

¹³Droughts and famines commonly bridge environmental and natural disaster categories, and most modern famines are primarily produced by human decisions.

collective language rather than reporting on individual victims, and it was often it was difficult to identify reports that were specifically related to drought or famine.¹⁴ For these reasons, I did not include any of these as independent events, though newspaper articles describing tornadoes spawned from a hurricane are analyzed.

People often had little or no warning of flash floods, which were relatively common and sometimes extended for a considerable distance.¹⁵ Warnings were often transmitted by telegraph during river flooding, though how well that information was disseminated generally, and how much warning communities without a telegraph received, if any, varied greatly. Catastrophic flash floods were often part of a longer river flooding event, however, making it difficult and unproductive to separate them.¹⁶ The 1921 San Antonio flood largely began as a flash flood within San Antonio itself, and parts of the 1904 flooding included flash floods. The devastating 1913 flood began with a flash flood that struck Belton, Texas, before dawn, but the state-wide river flooding continued for weeks, and was the result of an El Niño event.¹⁷ These were often the most devastating in terms of property damage.

The most devastating disasters measured by loss of life were usually hurricanes, but people generally knew the impending signs even before the U. S. Weather Bureau began to issue

¹⁴Donald Worster helped establish environmental disaster as a subfield of environmental history. In *Dust Bowl* he is primarily interested in the ways decisions about land use created disaster from a normal drought cycle. Donald Worster, *The Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁵In the simplest terms, the difference between a flash flood and other floods is the suddenness with which a flash flood occurs compared to the slower rise of a river in other floods. Flash floods are often described as a wall of water or similar phrases. These are the most basic classifications of floods used by the U.S. Geological Survey, and adequate for the purposes of this dissertation. “What are the two types of floods,” US Geological Survey, accessed January 11, 2023, <https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-are-two-types-floods>.

¹⁶Newspapers reported that warnings about floods were being transmitted by telegraph as early as 1899. Articles imply that some landowners were more concerned that their laborers might not return promptly if they evacuated than they were about the hazards of floods themselves.

¹⁷El Niño events should be analyzed as a single long event, lasting for months and resulting in multiple flood events and tornadoes. Though dropped from this dissertation for time considerations, the 1905 flooding on the Mississippi River that led to the last major yellow fever epidemic in the United States was caused by an El Niño event. Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

formal warnings. Even with the 1900 hurricane, most people received some warning, however inadequate. They might have received better warning if the U.S. Weather Bureau had not chosen to ignore predictions from Cuban hurricane scientists that the storm was heading toward the Texas coast. However, many of those who died lived in homes that were considered hurricane-proof and would probably not have evacuated even if they had received better warnings.¹⁸ People frequently did not take those signs of a severe storm seriously. However the collective memory of the horrific 1900 Galveston hurricane likely reduced the death toll from the August 1915 Galveston hurricane. After 1900, most coastal communities received a certain amount of warning about hurricanes, as people often did in the case of floods.¹⁹

A natural disaster event, therefore, could occur with no warning, and be over within a matter of minutes, could arrive with minimal warning and last hours or a day or two, or could develop slowly over a period of months. Rescue and relief may require days to months. Rebuilding and recovery can take months or may not ever occur. Entire communities might choose to move rather than rebuild in the same location. However, the ability to do so involved important structural and political issues. The people most likely to be at risk from flash flooding or other risks related to the terrain on which they lived are those who are forced into undesirably high-risk land and housing due to race, ethnicity, immigration status, and economic or social

¹⁸A warning is only effective if people believe it and respond appropriately. Racism was probably the major reason the Cuban warnings were dismissed. The U.S. Weather Bureau was relatively new, while the Cuban scientists, particularly Father Benito Vines and Father Lorenzo Gangoite, had accumulated and studied decades of data, and some personalities at the Weather Bureau saw their expertise as a threat rather than a resource. Erik Larson, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1999), 9, 72, 102–108, 132–134.

¹⁹A third major hurricane during this period, the 1919 Corpus Christi hurricane, has been examined in depth by Mary Jo O'Rear in *Storm over the Bay: The People of Corpus Christi and the Port* and its aftermath in *Bulwark Against the Bay: The People of Corpus Christi and Their Seawall*. However, she primarily examines political responses and long-term mitigation of hazard risks, while I examine immediate community and individual responses and how newspapers describe individual and collective victims, survivors, communities and organizations as an attempt to shape collective memory.

class or some combination of these factors. These victims often have little choice about where they lived, especially poor agricultural workers, and unless they could find work elsewhere, would be forced to move back onto the same high-risk land. In fact, many employers of sharecroppers or other agricultural workers were particularly interested in preventing the mobility of these workers in order to ensure themselves a reliable work force.²⁰

This particular time period also represented the heyday of yellow journalism, giving rise to sensationalized newspaper stories on human suffering, but also enabling recent immigrants to construct a sense of community.²¹ This was an outgrowth of the Penny Press which first rose during the 1830s and built a business model around advertising income.²² These newspapers were no longer primarily platforms for a political party or faction, but instead found themselves dependent on the goodwill of business owners to keep costs low enough to sell to the mass market.²³

This trend continued well into the early twentieth century when yellow journalism hit its heyday. Most of the yellow press, with notable exceptions such as E. W. Scripps' Seattle newspaper, subsidized their low prices by focusing on advertising income which created new biases, often on the editorial pages.²⁴ But they also had to satisfy their target audience, generally middle- and working-class white urban readers.²⁵ Some newspapers resisted this trend, focusing

²⁰See Chapters Two, Three, and Five for analyses of white fears of increasing Black mobility or white control over Black labor's mobility in the aftermath of disasters.

²¹Pulitzer in particular tried to appeal to newly-arrived immigrants. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 1–7. Major Black-owned newspapers in this vein included Fred Moore's *New York Age*, James Anderson's *New York Amsterdam News*, Robert Vann's *Pittsburgh Courier*, and Robert Abbott's *Chicago Defender*. James M. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migration of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 50–54.

²²Spencer places the emergence of the Penny Press precisely on July 24, 1830. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 22.

²³Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 23, 28.

²⁴Aaron Atkins, "Your Paper Saved Seattle: E. W. Scripps and the *Star's* Role in the General Strike of 1919," *Journalism History* 45, no. 2 (May 2019), 157; and Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 22–24, 226–227.

²⁵Atkins, "Your Paper Saved Seattle," 157–158; and Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 23–25, 226–227.

on fact-based journalism, though their own biases became clear as they embraced scientific racism and eugenics as well as contemporary Progressive ideas of professionalism based on “scientific” principles. And they were perhaps more heavily influenced by their reliance on advertising income.²⁶

These trends blossomed in large urban areas in the Northeast or West coast, but the rise of wire services meant that they influenced smaller urban and local newspapers as well. And while the sensationalism of the Penny Press and yellow journalism was concentrated on the crime, immorality, and human suffering of urban life, journalists and men with journalistic aspirations quickly brought the style of reporting to bear on the occasional major catastrophe in the United States. Several people published sensationalist accounts of the Johnstown, Pennsylvania disaster in 1889, with titles such as James Herbert Walker’s *THE JOHNSTOWN HORROR!!! OR VALLEY OF DEATH BEING A COMPLETE AND THRILLING ACCOUNT OF THE AWFUL FLOODS AND THEIR APPALLING RUIN...*²⁷ The triple exclamation points were obviously meant to emphasize the disaster, just in case the rest of the title was insufficient. In fact, the subtitles continued for about twenty more lines, each more sensational than the last, such as “...NARROW ESCAPES FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH...” and “...PLUNDERING BODIES OF VICTIMS....”

²⁶While these broad generalizations are useful, the reality was more complex. For instance, the Dallas *Morning News*, one of my most important Texas newspapers which often reported in biased language, was also notable for its anti-Ku Klux Klan activism in the early 1920s, forced to sell its Galveston newspaper to cover their financial losses when the Klan's boycott cost them a substantial number of subscribers and advertisers. Atkins, “Your Paper Saved Seattle,” 157; Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 22–24, 226–227; and Segura, *Belo*, 10, 30–34.

²⁷James Herbert Walker, *The Johnstown Horror!!! or, Valley of Death...Relief of the Stricken Sufferers* (Philadelphia: H. J. Smith and Co., 1889). I found copies of multiple surviving sensationalistic books on the Johnstown flood and on the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Charles Morris, *The San Francisco Calamity by Earth and Fire* (Philadelphia: J.C. Winston Co., 1906, Facsimile of the first edition, with an introduction (Secausus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1986)); and Willis Fletcher Johnson, *History of the Johnstown Flood Including all the Fearful Record...Bald Eagle Creek*, (Edgewood Publishing Co., 1889).

The last quote is particularly significant as looting and desecration of corpses were recurring accusations after large scale disasters of all sorts, usually targeting a particular racial or ethnic minority as the villains, such as Chinese immigrants in the San Francisco earthquake in 1906 and African Americans after the 1900 Galveston hurricane. Actual evidence of such acts was, according to Patricia Bellis Bixel and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, almost nonexistent—only fourteen total people were verified as shot or arrested for looting, and the race of these looters was omitted from police records. That omission actually weighed against the probability that they were African American as all official records, particularly in the South, always identified African Americans by race. Sensationalist stories of human “ghouls” looting the bodies of the dead primarily rested on word-of-mouth rumors, but served the purpose of demonizing certain victims in order to excuse any actions taken to secure their labor.²⁸

During several of these disasters, most notably the 1899 flooding and the 1900 Galveston disaster, I found that the correspondents frequently wrote sensationalist reports in the style of yellow journalism to describe the floods and people’s experiences. The correspondents and editors clearly were influenced by journalistic literary trends in more urban areas of the country. At the same time, the reliance of newspapers on business advertising meant that editorials and articles at least partly contradicted these sensationalist articles, sometimes on the same pages. Business leaders might be afraid that investors and business partners might be discouraged by negative reports, and large land owners worried about control of their labor.

²⁸“GHOULS ARE BEING SHOT BY TROOPS...,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 1. Also “ghoulish,” “human hyenas” and “curs,” words that can be assumed to imply Black men. “VANDALS ARE AT WORK,” *Audubon County Journal*, September 13, 1900, 1; “Stricken Galveston,” *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 12, 1900, 1; Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5; “FIENDS AT WORK,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 2; “HALF HAS NOT BEEN TOLD,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1; “GHOULS GET IN THEIR WORK,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 1; “THE TWO SIDES OF HUMAN NATURE,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 6; and Patricia Bellis Bixel and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm: Catastrophe and Catalyst* (Austin: University of Texas, 2000), 78.

Methodology

For the purpose of this dissertation, a *natural disaster* is defined as a catastrophic event that is triggered by the natural forces that shape the Earth's surface with consequences for a human population, usually geological or meteorological.²⁹ Hurricane Katrina, for instance, was a natural disaster because a hurricane is a natural meteorological event even though human action and inaction intensified the human costs. An *environmental disaster* is a catastrophic event caused primarily through human action or inaction that primarily affects the natural environment itself, whether or not it also affects humans directly but the damage was not the purpose. The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 was an environmental disaster because the nuclear plant could not have existed without human action.³⁰ A *man-made disaster* is a catastrophic event deliberately caused by human choice, often as an act of terror. The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 was a man-made disaster.

While these are useful categories for analysis, many disasters do not fit neatly into a single category. For instance, Donald Worster argues that while “droughts are an inevitable fact of life on the plains...the “dirty thirties,” as they were called, were primarily the work of man, not nature...the storms were mainly the result of stripping the landscape of its natural vegetation to such an extent that there was no defense against the dry winds, no sod to hold the sandy or powdery dirt.”³¹ By that reasoning, the dust bowl years should be considered an environmental

²⁹This category would include most floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, hailstorms, blizzards, ice storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, etc.

³⁰There is often a time-scale difference. Most natural disasters happen within a short time frame while environmental disasters often develop over months, years, or even decades.

³¹Worster, *The Dust Bowl*, 12–13.

disaster.³² Yet Worster also admits that without the combination of drought and winds, the soil would have stayed in place. A different historian could reasonably take these factors and conclude that the dust bowl event was a natural disaster instead.

Epidemics or pandemics are biological disasters that are difficult to classify. If disease of some sort spreads through a natural system due to human action, killing or damaging plants or animals, it could be considered an environmental disaster.³³ There is also the potential for pandemic as a terror attack, which would make it a man-made disaster. Fire similarly can fall into a gray area.³⁴ Wildfires can be started by lightning, in which case the fire is a natural disaster. But one can also be started by human carelessness, which would be an environmental disaster, or deliberately, which would be man-made.³⁵

This dissertation examines a narrow subcategory of natural disasters: weather-related natural disasters. While these disasters always have natural forces as their trigger, the negative affects on humans are often the result of human choices or pressures. During the 1927 Mississippi River flood,³⁶ the levee built by and protecting St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes was dynamited under coercion in an unnecessary effort to protect neighboring New Orleans. The

³²While Worster attributes bad agricultural practices as the primary cause, he does not assert that it was deliberately done to cause environmental damage, which excludes man-made disaster as a possible category for this event.

³³An example of this was *Cryphonectria parasitica*, the chestnut blight, introduced from East Asia when Japanese chestnuts became a popular import from Asia. This disease wiped out virtually all American chestnut trees between 1904 and 1940, destroying over three and a half billion trees and drastically altering the ecological systems of most of the eastern United States. The environmental and economic effects in Appalachia were devastating. "Chestnut Blight Fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*)," Introduced Species Summary Project, editor James A. Danoff-Burg, Columbia University, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/cerc/danoff-burg/invasion_bio/inv_spp_summ/Cryphonectria_parasitica.htm

³⁴There are other "slow" disasters that are hard to classify such as famine. Most famines are due to human action or inaction rather than simply occurring due to poor harvests.

³⁵Fire disasters involving buildings and other human constructions can similarly fall into any of these categories, though some like the 1947 Texas City disaster can be hard to assign. While it was neither natural nor man-made (it was accidental, though with significant safety and procedural errors,) it does not neatly fit the category of environmental disasters. Hugh W. Stephens, *The Texas City Disaster, 1947* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

³⁶Although the flood itself was a natural disaster, poor decisions that relied on levees-only for flood control played a very significant role in creating human catastrophe.

homes and businesses of thousands of people in both parishes were destroyed although the U.S. Weather Bureau representative, Isaac Cline, had correctly predicted that New Orleans was not in danger because crevasses upriver would alleviate the intensity of the flood before it reached New Orleans. The parishes not only lost the levee they had built with local money, most people were never compensated for more than a fraction of their losses. While this great flood itself was unquestionably a natural disaster, the disaster in these two parishes was man-made.³⁷

In order to generate enough newspaper articles for useful analyses, at least some of these disasters needed to be considered relatively severe. The severity of a natural disaster can be measured using several metrics. Most commonly, they are measured by the number of deaths, the number of people involved, the amount of property damage, the geographic area affected, the intensity of the phenomena, or by some combination of these. Geographic area and intensity are rarely a useful tool for comparing the severity of disasters by themselves.³⁸ In defining what qualified as a disaster for this dissertation, I have given the number of deaths and people affected the most weight, property damage the next weight, then geographic area and intensity. Their level of social harm influences how much reporting they receive in the media, and mass media coverage, specifically newspapers, influence how much they enter the collective memory, either locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally. However, how much a disaster enters the collective memory and at what level also depends very heavily on how the victims are perceived by the larger culture.

³⁷This was an example of a man-made disaster which was not an act of terror, though the event entered the collective memory of poorer Louisianans in this area, and probably influenced their perceptions of hurricanes in which levees failed such as Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, blaming the failure that destroyed their neighborhoods on deliberate action. John Barry, *Rising Tide*, 168, 196, 222, 227, 231–233, 247, 281; and Andy Horowitz, “Hurricane Betsy and the Politics of Disaster in New Orleans’s Lower Ninth Ward 1965–1967,” *The Journal of Southern History* 80, no. 4 (Nov. 2014): 894–899.

³⁸No matter how severe an event, if there is no human involvement or harm and it does not enter collective memory, that event falls outside my definition of disaster. For that reason, these two factors are only important in relation to other factors.

The geographic scope for this dissertation was restricted to disasters primarily affecting Texas. Texas and the Southwest borderlands frequently experience weather-related natural disasters. The state's physical geography is prone to floods and flash floods while hurricanes and tropical storms frequently strike the coastal regions. John A. Adams counted at least twenty floods on the Colorado River alone between 1900 and 1915, four of them severe.³⁹ Three major hurricanes struck the Texas coast in the same two decades.⁴⁰ This large number of disasters had the potential to provide extensive material for comparison and analyses.⁴¹

The region analyzed needed to have multiple newspapers that were published frequently. A weekly or monthly publication rarely printed enough detail on disasters to be useful for analyses.⁴² Although the United States had some large newspapers with national readerships, they published far less about individual disasters than newspapers from the regions affected. Texas daily newspapers in these decades reported meticulously on the weather, especially floods, storms, and their damages, important issues for agriculture, making this an excellent geographic region for analysis.⁴³

The temporal focus of this dissertation required a period of time with several major disasters in Texas and the Southwest borderlands. In 1899, severe flooding that mostly affected the lower Brazos river valley continued for several weeks and was extensively reported in Texas

³⁹John A. Adams, Jr., *Damming the Colorado: The Rise of the Lower Colorado River Authority, 1933–1939* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 10.

⁴⁰One in 1900, one in 1915, and one in 1919. Less destructive hurricanes and tropical storms also made landfall during these two decades.

⁴¹These disasters provided an overwhelming amount of material, only part of which I had time to carefully analyze.

⁴²Most articles I analyzed came from newspapers that were published at least three times a week.

⁴³A typical issue of the Dallas *Morning News* in August 1900 when no disaster was involved included a business page that was primarily devoted to reports on cotton and other agricultural markets, railroad news, and stock prices for companies important to Texas agriculture, and another page on regional news about land sales, crops, weather, and labor, around twenty percent of the newspaper. The other pages were devoted to politics from the local to national, personal ads, and local crimes. The *Texas Almanac*, published by the owners of the Dallas *Morning News*, provided extensive data on weather, climate, agriculture, geography, population, government, and economics in the state, information essential to an agricultural businessman. Morales, “*Tejas, Afuera de Mexico*,” 52–91; Segura, *Belo*, 15–16; and Dallas *Morning News*, August 1, 1900.

newspapers. The primary victims and survivors were Black farm workers.⁴⁴ In 1921, there was a severe flash flood that devastated the Mexican community of San Antonio and fairly extensive flooding in rural areas.⁴⁵ This flood was extensively reported in both English-language newspapers and the main Spanish-language newspaper in Texas, *la Prensa* of San Antonio, offering the opportunity to compare English with Spanish-language reports of a disaster with a large number of Mexican victims.⁴⁶

Midway between these two floods was the great flood of 1913 which involved every major river in the state with the possible exception of the Rio Grande, with some rivers as much as forty miles wide. Several major hurricanes also occurred between 1899 and 1921, including the disastrous 1900 Galveston hurricane, still responsible for more deaths than any other known natural disaster in U.S. history.⁴⁷ All of these disasters were extensively reported in Texas newspapers, and the 1900 hurricane produced large numbers of articles in out-of-state and international newspapers.⁴⁸ Before 1899, while there were some major disasters, they were not

⁴⁴This disaster opens a window on the complex racial and ethnic system still used in newspaper reports in 1899. This disaster occurred shortly after *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, and the emerging twentieth century Jim Crow racial system was not clearly established as an influence on disaster newspaper reports until the 1921 San Antonio flood.

⁴⁵This disaster provided the counterpoint to the 1899 disaster. The rise of Jim Crow, eugenics, xenophobia, and demands for assimilation meant that virtually all ethnic identities had been erased in white newspapers, leaving only Texas's tri-racial system—white, Black, and Mexican.

⁴⁶All Spanish-language articles were initially translated and transcribed in Spanish by me. Some transcriptions were then put through Google Translate to save time typing out the English translation, simply correcting the Google results to match my translations. While I was able to identify and at least partially read several French-language articles, these were then translated using Google Translate. This was adequate as these short articles were brief statements of events and little nuance.

⁴⁷The major hurricanes included the 1900 Galveston hurricane, the 1915 Galveston hurricane, and the 1919 Corpus Christi hurricane. There were several other hurricanes such as one in 1909 and another in 1916, but none with a serious loss of life or major damages. Due to the amount of material to be analyzed for the 1900 hurricane, I was forced to mostly exclude the 1919 hurricane from this dissertation but any future analyses should include this storm as well. Mary Jo O'Rear, *Barrier to the Bay: The Islands of the Texas Coastal Bend and Their Pass* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2022), 134–142.

⁴⁸In addition to in-state reporting on the Galveston hurricane—over 4,500 substantial articles indexed and analyzed—the coverage of the 1900 Galveston hurricane in out-of-state newspapers was also overwhelming. I collected almost 1400 pages of out-of-state newspapers with multiple articles and close to 100 pages from foreign language newspapers published in the United States with articles on the hurricane, in languages including Norwegian, Spanish, Polish, German, French, Italian, Swedish, and Czech. In order to finish the chapter on the

well reported, and the range from 1899 to 1921 was sufficient to identify significant change over time in newspaper reports.⁴⁹

The time period framed by 1899 and 1921 was an important period of transformation of identity in the United States, with major political and social events that reshaped the state and country.⁵⁰ In the wake of the Populist revolt in the 1890s, the political and racial order was restructured from a complex system of racial identities for Black and ethnic Texans.⁵¹ Only recently have historians focused on the United States' Southwest where similar if sometimes less overt processes played out with ethnic Mexicans and Native Americans rather than exclusively African Americans as the targets of this restructuring.⁵² Image and memory were primary tools of this restructuring, and in the case of African Americans and the South, this war of images and memory extended back into the Antebellum South when Southerners created stereotypes of African American slaves in an attempt to combat abolitionist sentiments in the North. Newspapers produced a rich trove of references to identity, directly or indirectly, after disasters.

Based on these criteria and considerations, my dissertation focused on ten weather-related natural disasters which produced substantial newspaper reports which described individual

Galveston hurricane in a timely manner, I severely restricted my pool of articles for that disaster to substantial reports from major in-state newspapers, a few major out-of-state newspapers, and some international newspapers. Any future analyses should examine more of the out-of-state newspapers as well as locating translation assistance with the foreign language newspapers.

⁴⁹The trend of extensive sensationalized newspaper reports on major disasters appeared to gain momentum with the Johnstown, Pennsylvania, flood in 1889, only a decade before the 1899 flood, and the sensationalism of the yellow press was barely two years old. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*.

⁵⁰Some of the events influencing these changes included World War I, the Mexican Revolution of the 1910s, the border violence between 1916 and 1918 that resulted in the lynching of dozens of Mexicans living on the border, Progressive movements, the eugenics movement, Jim Crow, Prohibition, women's votes, and xenophobic laws that tried to enforce assimilation and limit immigration.

⁵¹Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*; Emilio Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 1993); Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education*; Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁵²Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

victims or identities and not simply property damages or collective descriptions, all of which primarily affected Texans. These disasters occurred in June and July 1899, April 1900, September 1900, September and October 1904, May 1908, December 1913, April 1915, August 1915, September 1919, and September 1921.⁵³ Some of these disasters extended into New Mexico, Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, Louisiana, Florida, Colorado, Mexico, and parts of the Caribbean and Canada.

Three disasters receive a particular focus: the June and July 1899 Brazos river flooding, the September 1900 Galveston hurricane, and the September 1921 San Antonio flood. The victims and survivors of the 1899 flood were primarily Black farmers and sharecroppers, estimated to make up 80–99% of all victims for individual counties.⁵⁴ The 1900 Galveston hurricane was almost unique with a particularly devastating death toll and newspapers creating the perception that the victims and survivors were mostly middle-and-upper-class white citizens.⁵⁵ The 1921 San Antonio flood had primarily Mexican victims within San Antonio and different accounts of the relief efforts reported in English-and-Spanish-language newspapers.

My dissertation is an expanding view that required several methodological approaches. At the most granular level of analysis, I closely analyzed the specific racial words and language used, or sometimes not used, in reports for these ten disasters, with a particular focus on the 1899

⁵³The 1904 yellow fever epidemic, the last major one in the United States, was dropped due to time considerations as was the 1919 Corpus Christi hurricane.

⁵⁴Most of these estimates are for specific counties. The vast majority of the flooding was on the lower Brazos River. One of the few estimates for the region asserted that “...at least 96 per cent of the sufferers from the flood on the lower Brazos are colored people...” “THE COLORED SUFFERERS,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 6.

⁵⁵The best current estimate for the total death toll is around 10,000. While there was a much higher percentage of middle-class white victims of this hurricane than in most disasters, there were relatively few upper-class victims and the majority of the dead were almost certainly working class or non-white. The president of the National Afro-American Press Association, Cyrus Field Adams, had an estimate by the African American community of Galveston that 1,500 of their community died, which would have been close to twenty-five percent of the victims for the city. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 164; and “AN APPEAL FOR HELP,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 18, 1900, 3.

Brazos river flood. I then analyzed the physical and human geography, primarily at the local and state level to identify the influence and power white Texans and newspapers exerted over “others.” In my first case study, I analyzed the change over time in reports on Mexican disaster victims in English-language newspapers, then on a comparative level of analysis, I contrasted the dominant reporting on institutional relief efforts during and after the 1921 San Antonio flood with the counter-narrative created by the Mexican community in San Antonio itself. This counter-narrative appeared primarily in *la Prensa* (San Antonio) but other Spanish language newspapers such as *la Prensa* (Los Angeles.) In the second case study at the level of meta-analysis, I examine the role of newspapers in shaping the national collective memory of the 1900 Galveston hurricane as a white middle-and-upper-class disaster as well their direct and indirect involvement in relief efforts. This was the single Texas disaster which was also reported in great detail in national and international newspapers.

Before the rise of digital newspaper archives, such detailed comparative work of so many newspapers and events would have been extraordinarily time-consuming and expensive. A researcher might have had to travel to dozens of physical archives in the hopes of locating missing runs of newspapers. This access puts incredibly detailed comparisons of a large number of newspapers within practical reach, both in terms of time and money. David Perlmutter emphasizes that “modern data-search software has radically simplified the content analysis of word texts”⁵⁶ and gives examples of techniques such as key word searches that are profoundly altering the questions scholars can explore.⁵⁷

⁵⁶David D. Perlmutter, “Visual Historical Methods: Problems, Prospects, Applications,” *Historical Methods* 27, no. 4 (Fall 1994), 167.

⁵⁷However, there is a risk that new search algorithms may bias data searches if adopted by some of these archives, a danger that must be considered in the future.

I identified and made use of both digital and physical archives. My main sources of newspapers are electronic archives which offer access to the originals in digitized formats. One of the most important for research on Texas is the Texas Digital Newspaper Program, part of the Portal to Texas History, hosted at the University of North Texas, and includes the *Abilene Daily Reporter*, *Breckenridge Daily American*, *Brownwood Bulletin*, *Bryan Daily Eagle and Pilot*, *Burleson County Ledger and News-Chronicle*, *Corpus Christi Caller and Daily Herald*, *The Daily Bulletin* (Brownwood, TX,) *El Paso Morning Times*, the *Houston Daily Post*, *San Antonio Express*, *Schulenberg Sticker*, and the *Weekly Democrat-Gazette* (McKinney, TX,) all of which included disaster reporting for one or more of the disasters I am examining.⁵⁸ Their collection also includes a number of photographs and other media related to several of these disasters.

The other critical digital newspaper archive is *Chronicling America*, developed and hosted by the Library of Congress. I used this archive to access disaster reporting in the *Albuquerque Daily Citizen*, *Amarillo Daily News*, *Beaumont Enterprise*, *Bryan Morning Eagle*, *Brownsville Daily Herald*, *Corpus Christi Caller*, *Dallas Express*, *Deming Graphic*, *El Paso Daily Herald*, *Houston Daily Post*, *Guthrie Daily Leader*, *The Jimplecute* (Jefferson, Texas,) *The Morning Astorian*, *Palestine Daily Herald*.⁵⁹

ProQuest provided access to several newspapers nationally, some of them major newspapers: the *Atlanta Constitution*, *Boston Daily Globe*, *Chicago Defender*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Detroit Free Press*, *New York Times*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *San Francisco Chronicle*,⁶⁰ and *Washington Post*. *America's Historical Newspapers* and *NewsBank* provided access to important

⁵⁸However, the exact newspapers hosted by any archive may change over time. Some are or have been hosted by more than one publicly available archive. A few historical newspapers were removed from public access and moved behind a paywall in the last few years.

⁵⁹The names of some newspapers changed over time and I have not included every variation here.

⁶⁰While the *San Francisco Chronicle* was accessed from Proquest's database in December 2014, it appears to no longer be available through Proquest. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* recently moved behind a paywall and is no longer accessible.

Texas sources, the *Dallas Morning News*, the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, and the San Antonio *Daily Express*, as well as the *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.)

La Prensa (San Antonio) published detailed reports on the 1921 San Antonio flood, providing local, first-hand Spanish-language accounts. I accessed *La Prensa* (San Antonio) and *La Prensa* (Los Angeles) through Hispanic American Newspapers, 1808–1980, an archive hosted at the University of Houston. Ideally, I would have included first-hand African American accounts for one or more of these disasters in a similar comparison, however I only found a few mentions of any of these disasters in digitally archived African American newspapers, all in the *Chicago Defender* or the *Dallas Express*.⁶¹ The Hathi Trust provided digital access to a number of American Red Cross reports and magazines published in the early 1900s.

Natural Disaster Historiography

Natural disaster history has often been classified as a subfield of environmental history.⁶² However there are substantial differences between a natural disaster, an environmental disaster, and a man-made disaster that influence the questions that they present and the methodological approaches appropriate to explore those questions, and I believe that these should be considered separate but related fields. Human choices and actions play substantial roles in the deadly scope of disasters, particularly structural inequalities, which often influence who is most at risk from

⁶¹In fact, I found only one mention of the 1921 flooding in the weekly *Dallas Express*, a few lines about the flooding near Cameron. The description was notable only for the fact that the two white victims remained nameless while a Black survivor was named, a pointed reversal of most white reporting. “Cameron,” *Dallas Express*, September 17, 1921, 6.

⁶²J. R. McNeill excludes natural disaster history from environmental history in his essay: J. R. McNeill, “The State of the Field of Environmental History,” *Annual Review of Environments and Resources* 35 (2010): 346; but many others include it, such as Christof Mauch. *Natural Disasters, Cultural Responses: Case Studies toward a Global Environmental History*, Christof Mauch and Christian Pfister, edit. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 1–6.

disasters. More importantly, these events are often exploited in one way or another, such as publicity or the opportunity to rehabilitate devastated areas, often at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable victims.

My research intersects several fields beyond natural disaster, particularly race, ethnicity, and migration. Researchers have rarely considered these fields in connection to natural disaster, much less intersections with class and gender. Most natural disaster history scholarship has focused on governmental and organizational responses. Jeffrey H. Jackson's *Paris Under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910*, John M. Barry's classic *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*, and David Welky's *The Thousand-Year Flood: The Ohio–Mississippi Disaster of 1937* are primarily interested in how governmental institutions helped create disaster and how they responded.⁶³

Scott Gabriel Knowles's *The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America* analyzes how Americans sought to limit risk, primarily through institutional and governmental responses.⁶⁴ Ted Steinberg's *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* examines how governmental and institutional structures function to exploit natural disasters and to justify responses by those political interests.⁶⁵ Julia F. Irwin's *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* analyzes the role of the American Red Cross (ARC) in international conflict and disaster relief as a tool of diplomacy and Americanization in the early 1900s.⁶⁶ Pete O'Daniel's *Deep'n as It Come* is a rich cultural history

⁶³Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Paris Under Water: How the City of Light Survived the Great Flood of 1910* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Barry, *Rising Tide*; and David Welky, *The Thousand-Year Flood: The Ohio–Mississippi Disaster of 1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁶⁴Scott Gabriel Knowles, *The Disaster Experts: Mastering Risk in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

⁶⁵Steinberg, *Acts of God*, xii.

⁶⁶Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–12.

of the 1927 Mississippi river flood.⁶⁷ While categories such as race and ethnicity are sometimes mentioned in these works, they do not receive any close examination or analysis.

Marian Moser Jones has done some of the most significant organizational analysis of natural disaster response in which she critically examines how categories such as race and class influence that response. Her “Race, Class and Gender Disparities in Clara Barton’s Late Nineteenth-Century Disaster Relief” closely examines how the ARC response differed significantly between two disasters, the Johnstown flood of 1889 in Pennsylvania and the 1893 Sea Islands Hurricane in South Carolina. The Johnstown victims were primarily urban and white and middle class or aspiring to that status. The Sea Islands victims were almost exclusively rural and African American and were perceived as poor whether they had been before the hurricane or not. The Johnstown victims not only received significantly more assistance, but the relief was delivered with considerably more respect than given to the Sea Island victims who were viewed with suspicion and often required to perform labor in exchange for relief.⁶⁸

Jones expands this research in *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal*, an analysis of how the ARC struggled to consistently apply their ideals of humanity and neutrality. She finds that these ideals were almost consistently stretched, partly due to local autonomy which accepted the bias of local social customs and economic interests. The ARC has rarely been successful in operating completely “above interests of class, race, and politics”⁶⁹ In fact Jones concludes that these inconsistencies exist because “structural racism and social inequality course through the very heart of American history.”⁷⁰ Jones’s work is one of the few

⁶⁷Pete Daniel, *Deep’n as It Come: The 1927 Mississippi River Flood* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996).

⁶⁸Marian Moser Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities in Clara Barton’s Late Nineteenth-Century Disaster Relief,” *Environment and History* 17, no. 1 (Feb. 2011), 108–109, 119–125.

⁶⁹Marion Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), viii.

⁷⁰Jones, *The American Red Cross*, x.

which analyze the importance of race and class in natural disaster relief, but she does so within an institutional, almost governmental, frame of analysis.

Jacob A. Remes in *Disaster Citizenship: Survivors, Solidarity, and Power in the Progressive Era* may come closest to the focus of my research with his analysis of working-class resistance to organizational and governmental control of Progressive Era relief efforts. His transnational study compares events in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and Salem, Massachusetts, in the 1910s, both communities with large working-class immigrant populations. He has found that disaster produces unusual working-class records of neighborhood and family networks, obligations, and assistance, structures which are rarely recorded in recoverable form.⁷¹ Much of his information comes from traditional sources: charities, the Red Cross, local government, state, provincial, or national government, and the correspondence of their leaders. However, he primarily focuses on the local, more informal level of religious charity, as well as unions and mutual-aid societies. Within the context of Progressive Era ideas and change, Remes also asserts that “Disasters were moments in which ideas of the state’s role in taking care of its citizens changed.”⁷² In one of the rare examinations of media’s role in directly manipulating identity, Martin Doering’s “The Politics of Nature: Constructing German Reunification During the Great Oder Flood of 1997” examines how natural disaster was used to help rebuild a common German national identity after reunification.⁷³

Structural inequalities put certain groups in harm’s way during these disasters, particularly residential segregation which often confines people to high-risk neighborhoods.

⁷¹ While these working-class efforts rarely entered newspapers as first-hand accounts, these working-class systems often appear in second-hand descriptions. The best examples I found were during the 1921 flood when *la Prensa* (San Antonio) frequently described survivors using their own structural systems in preference to the official channels, a sort of community resistance.

⁷² Remes, *Disaster Citizenship*, location 187 of 7531.

⁷³ Martin Doering, “The Politics of Nature: Constructing German Reunification During the Great Oder Flood of 1997,” *Environment and History* 9, no. 2 (May 2003), 195–214.

Similar to Remes and Jones, Andy Horowitz's "Hurricane Betsy and the Politics of Disaster in New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward 1965–1967" found that poor victims resisted efforts by elites to control and reorder them in the wake of disasters. He found that inhabitants of the lower ninth ward of New Orleans widely believed that they were intentionally victimized by the structural systems that forced them into a ward with an extremely high risk of flooding. In fact, they believed that the levee that failed during Hurricane Betsy in 1963 was intentionally destroyed to relieve pressure on levees protecting non-black and more affluent areas of New Orleans. This stemmed partly from historical disasters—the levee protecting St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes was dynamited during the disastrous 1927 flood in order to protect the property of influential people in New Orleans.⁷⁴

Outside of the discipline of history, the intersection of news mass media with race during disaster has received some attention. Murali Balaji examined the mass media news coverage of a recent Haitian earthquake and found "the racialization of pity and the privileging of a white view of the dark world as dysfunctional, childlike and dependent."⁷⁵ Paul Martin Lester compared the ways that catastrophe is exploited for political gain and publicity, particular in his comparison of photography of Herbert Hoover during the 1927 Mississippi flood, a turning point in national disaster response in the United States, and George W. Bush's publicity during and after Hurricane Katrina.⁷⁶

Alice Fothergill has done a sociological analysis of a 1990s Mississippi flood in *Heads Above Water: Gender, Class, and Family in the Grand Forks Flood*. While class was an important category of this work, the community she examined was largely racially

⁷⁴Horowitz, "Hurricane Betsy and the Politics of Disaster," 898–899 and Barry, *Rising Tide*, 246–247, 256–258.

⁷⁵Balaji, "Racializing Pity," 51.

⁷⁶Paul Martin Lester, *On Floods and Photos: How Herbert Hoover and George W. Bush Exploited Catastrophes* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010).

homogeneous, and relatively few people were recent non-American immigrants.⁷⁷ Michele Landis Dauber has examined how disaster has influenced American ideas about the role of government in private and community lives in *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State*.⁷⁸

There is also a growing pool of literature on Texas weather-related disasters, though most are popular histories. Mary Jo O'Rear's books, *Storm over the Bay: The People of Corpus Christi and the Port* and *Bulwark Against the Bay: The People of Corpus Christi and Their Seawall*, examine governmental and organizational responses and mitigation of hurricane hazards after the 1919 Corpus Christi hurricane, but gives little attention to racial or ethnic dimensions of the disaster.⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, most other work examines the 1900 Galveston hurricane. Casey Edward Greene and Shelly Henley Kelly's *Though a Night of Horrors: Voices from the 1900 Galveston Storm* compile first-hand stories using the rich primary sources from the Rosenberg Library archives in Galveston with only light editing.⁸⁰ Erik Larson's biography, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History*, examines the role of Isaac Cline, the Galveston meteorologist in charge of the Texas section of the U.S. Weather Bureau, in the disaster.⁸¹ Bixel and Turner's *Galveston and the 1900 Storm: Catastrophe and Catalyst* is a satisfyingly meticulous analysis of the factors that created the disaster, the events of the disaster,

⁷⁷Alice Fothergill, *Heads Above Water: Gender, Class, and Family in the Grand Forks Flood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

⁷⁸The book was an expansion on an earlier article, "The Sympathetic State." Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012); and Michele Landis Dauber, "The Sympathetic State," *Land and History Review* 23, no. 2 (2005).

⁷⁹She does identify the irony that poor Mexican residents often survived because of the segregated geography of the city. Corpus Christi is laid out on a narrow strip of land, backed by bluffs, and at the time of the 1919 hurricane, most Mexican residents lived in a de facto *barrio* called the Hill, past the wealthiest homes on the bluffs. Their homes escaped the storm surge while those of middle-class white residents did not. O'Rear, *Storm over the Bay*, 34–35, 103–108; and O'Rear, *Bulwark Against the Bay*.

⁸⁰Casey Edward Greene and Shelly Henley Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors: Voices from the 1900 Galveston Storm* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁸¹Larson, *Isaac's Storm*.

and the aftermath of recovery, relief, and reconstruction. They also briefly analyze how this disaster was used to create a narrative that demonized the Black population of Galveston and was used to justify their disempowerment in the city government.⁸²

While there are a few histories on the 1900 Galveston hurricane, there has been little academic work on flood history on Texas rivers. Histories of these rivers have examined the rising demand for navigation improvements and flood control while almost entirely ignoring the major floods themselves between 1899 and 1921 that helped drive this demand. Possibly in the most ironic moment of these disasters, prominent Texans living along the Brazos River had scheduled an 1899 Brazos river navigation convention in Brenham, Texas, during the first week of July, and that week was the peak of the flooding in the region.⁸³ Even at the time, Texans recognized the irony. As the *Houston Daily Post* reported on July 4, 1899, that “The irony of fate has willed that upon this day when the Brazos deep water meeting was to have been held at Brenham, there is more water in the Brazos than ever known before.”⁸⁴

James H. Banks and John E. Babcock’s *Corralling the Colorado: The First Fifty Years of the Colorado River Authority* spends several pages discussing the planning and construction of the first Austin dam, but only briefly discuss the failure of the dam itself in 1900, and essentially ignore the flood it created for those living downstream and the victims themselves.⁸⁵ They expend two sentences on the history of flooding on the Colorado generally, asserting that there were twenty-two major floods on the river between 1843 and 1938, then a single line about the April 1915 flood related to an attempt to rebuild the Austin Dam.⁸⁶

⁸²Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 85–86, 127, 149.

⁸³“EVENTS ARE POSTPONED. Monument Will be Unveiled and Convention Held July 26 and 27,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5; and “SHORT TEXAS SPECIALS,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 2, 1899, 6.

⁸⁴“SITUATION AT HEMPSTEAD,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

⁸⁵James H. Banks and John E. Babcock, *Corralling the Colorado* (Austin: Eakin, 1988), 19–24.

⁸⁶Banks and Babcock, *Corralling the Colorado*, 3, 26.

John A. Adams, Jr., in *Damming the Colorado: The Rise of the Lower Colorado River Authority, 1933–1939*, addresses flood victims briefly, though not the racial and ethnic implications, and includes very little on the major floods in the earlier 1900s that drove the movement to dam the river.⁸⁷ While he mentions the 1900 Austin dam failure and the April 1915 flood, he completely omits others, particularly the most disastrous in December 1913.⁸⁸ A dissertation by Comer Clay about the Lower Colorado River Authority includes one of the few mentions of the catastrophic 1913 flood, limited to two paragraphs, and while he describes a couple of other floods briefly, he includes very little about the damages or victims.⁸⁹

Histories on the Brazos River and the Brazos River Authority demonstrate the same silences. Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., in *The Waters of the Brazos: A History of the Brazos River Authority 1929–1979*, mentions the 1913 flood briefly once, then includes a single paragraph focused solely on property and agricultural damages.⁹⁰ The only other flood from 1899–1922 that he specifically includes is the 1921 flood, mentioned twice in single sentences.⁹¹ He does include a photograph from each of these floods, both of the San Gabriel tributary to the Brazos and focused on bridges, not victims, and certainly not poor farm laborers or racial or ethnic victims.⁹²

⁸⁷Adams, *Damming the Colorado*, 9.

⁸⁸Adams, *Damming the Colorado*, 10–12.

⁸⁹This brief description began on the same page in which he categorically, but incorrectly, states that “major floods are caused by downpours of rain from tropical hurricanes blown in from the Gulf of Mexico,” which was an ironic juxtaposition because the December 1913 flood had its source in an El Niño event, prolonged heavy rainfall that actually dated back to September, culminating in several days of unusually heavy rains that overwhelmed already swollen streams. Like Banks, Babcock, and Adams, he was also vague on identifying the major floods, simply stating there were fourteen between 1843 and 1933. Comer Clay, *The Lower Colorado River Authority: A Study in Politics and Public Administration* (Austin: University of Texas, 1948), 13–14, 16.

⁹⁰Kenneth E. Hendrickson, Jr., *The Waters of the Brazos: A History of the Brazos River Authority* (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1981), 12–13.

⁹¹Hendrickson, *The Waters of the Brazos*, 12 and 14.

⁹²Hendrickson, *The Waters of the Brazos*, photographs between chapters three and four.

Race, Ethnicity, and Class Historiography

The time period framed by the disasters I examine was an important period of transformation of identity in the United States. In the wake of the Populist revolt in the 1890s, the political and racial order was restructured, primarily in the South, but also throughout the rest of the country in some measure.⁹³ Several major movements and events shaped the changes during this period and heavily influenced responses to disasters. Anti-immigrant feeling in the United States was on the rise, resulting in harsh immigration restrictions in the 1920s. Several historians have identified the last decade of the Nineteenth Century and the first three decades of the Twentieth Century as crucial to changes in ideas about immigration and immigrants. Carlos K. Blanton in *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education in Texas, 1836–1981* and Eileen Tamura in *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity: The Nisei Generation in Hawaii* both examine how fears of immigrants heightened during the early 1900s, leading to Americanization campaigns that operated in parallel with campaigns to restrict new immigration.⁹⁴

Mae Ngai in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* examines how the nation was “racially and spatially reimagined”⁹⁵ in a very short space of time, leading to immigration restrictions based on race or ethnicity and the invention of the category of “illegal aliens as a new legal and political subject, whose inclusion within the nation was simultaneously a social reality and a legal impossibility.”⁹⁶ This shift in perceptions of

⁹³Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*; Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*; Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education*; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Grossman, *Land of Hope*.

⁹⁴Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education*; and Eileen Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity: The Nisei Generation in Hawaii* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

⁹⁵Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3.

⁹⁶Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 4.

immigration and immigrants struggles with the principle of *jus soli*, the automatic bestowal of citizenship to anyone born in the United States, an issue that has been a particular topic of renewed debate recently concerning illegal immigrants and their children.⁹⁷ I argue narrative tropes in newspapers about natural disasters played an important role in building support for Americanization campaigns by shaping public perceptions as they shifted from a complex multiracial system to a simplified triracial system that submerged European ethnic identities under “white.”⁹⁸

Related to fears of immigrants, the United States–Mexico border was unstable during the 1910s when the Mexican Revolution created a great deal of fear along the border. Mexican immigrants were sometimes able to cross the border more easily than other immigrants, but often experienced their own unique problems, as examined by John McKiernan–González in *Fevered Measures: Public Health and Race at the Texas–Mexico Border, 1848–1942*. Public health officials used fear of epidemics to control immigration from Mexico and to racialize Mexican immigrants in new ways that helped create an idea of Mexicans as disease carriers and racially undesirable.⁹⁹ In particular, two of his case studies, one in 1898 in Laredo, Texas, and another in 1916 at the El Paso–Ciudad Juárez border crossing, demonstrate that the institution of medical quarantines were used to shape changing public perceptions during this period, particularly at the

⁹⁷Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 5.

⁹⁸While European ethnic identity was usually submerged in newspaper reports by 1921, European ethnic Texans were still often treated as not-quite-white in the early 1920s. While they were technically above the color line as far as Jim Crow laws were concerned, Mexican Texans were “off-white” and often vulnerable to Jim Crow laws. See Chapter Four for an explanation of “off-white” as suggested by Laure E. Gómez.

⁹⁹The use of quarantine was often rooted in eugenicist ideas with the intent of excluding the “inferior.” This belief in an association between non-whites or immigrants with disease was widespread; newspaper publisher William A. Trenckmann casually mentioned an outbreak of smallpox among Black flood refugees in 1899 in his German-language memoir. McKiernan–González, *Fevered Measures*, 1–3, 6–8, 10–17; Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 57–59; and William A. Trenckmann, *Preserving German Texan Identity: Reminiscences of William A. Trenckmann, 1859–1935*, edited by Walter L. Buenger and Walter D. Kamphoefner (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2019), 120.

United States' most significant international border.¹⁰⁰ Miguel Antonio Levario in *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy* argues that mass migration and changing demographics helped lead to the militarization of the border and increasing questions about what made an American.¹⁰¹ I argue that newspaper reporting about disasters reflected and helped influence shifting ideas and fears about race, ethnicity, immigration, border control, and disease, thereby racializing and controlling some survivors on the grounds they presented a threat of epidemic.¹⁰²

Improved transportation allowed the workforce to become far more mobile, with many poor black and white agricultural workers emigrating to take advantage of industrial opportunities to the North and West, while Mexican Americans and Mexicans began emigrating from the region along the United States–Mexico border to the Texas interior to fill the demand for work that this internal immigration created. Of particular importance were railroads that connected northern and central Mexico with Texas and the rest of the United States during this first two decades.¹⁰³ David Montejano in *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* and Emilio Zamora in *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas* both found that there was rapid change in both the population along the international border which began to shift from ranches to crop production and the demographics of agricultural workers in the interior during these two decades.¹⁰⁴ Neil Foley in *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* and James N. Gregory in *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great*

¹⁰⁰McKiernan–González, *Fevered Measures*, 123–164, 165–197.

¹⁰¹Miguel Antonio Levario, *Militarizing the Border: When Mexicans Became the Enemy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁰²Articles in *La Prensa* resisted this form of racialization after the 1921 flood. Their correspondents tried to counter these perceptions by clearly stating that their community was cooperating with health officials and taking necessary measures to prevent any outbreak of disease.

¹⁰³David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 107–110.

¹⁰⁴Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*; and Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*.

Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America identify increasing mobility as a factor in internal migration, particularly of white and black agricultural workers, that led to changing demographics and tensions that helped destabilize the work force.¹⁰⁵ Fears about controlling a mobile work force are expressed frequently during these disasters and increase over time.

This mobility created anxieties about retaining an agricultural work force as well as additional anxieties about immigration, migration, and newcomers that sometimes helped drive a rise in mob violence, particularly toward non-white agricultural workers. Several of the most notorious lynchings occurred during this period, as well as the extralegal violence against Mexicans along the border during the second half of the 1910s. William D. Carrigan in *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836–1916* argues that this destabilization of the work force due to increased mobility, especially the entry of larger numbers of Mexican immigrants into areas of the state where they had been rare, helped lead to the notorious public lynchings in the early 1900s, cresting with the Jesse Washington lynching in Waco, Texas, in 1916.¹⁰⁶ Sensationalized reports on disasters emphasize the supposed criminality of non-whites, particularly their potential for looting, which offered the opportunity to control their movements. Some of this reporting has eerie counterparts to exaggerated reports of violence and looting during Hurricane Katrina and other recent disasters.

World War I also increased tensions and suspicions of possibly radical immigrants from Europe and of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries in the Western hemisphere, heightening fears about border security. Blanton in *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education*

¹⁰⁵ Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*.

¹⁰⁶ William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836–1916* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

identifies the nativism that targeted German Americans and others who were considered threats during World War I as a key factor in attempts to suppress bilingual education.¹⁰⁷ Zamora in *The World of the Mexican Worker* argues that the war presented the opportunity to regulate immigrant labor, not only across the border, but from rural to urban settings.¹⁰⁸ While none of these disasters occurred during United States' involvement in the war, the war was influencing events as early as the 1915 Galveston hurricane and appeared to be a pivotal moment in the shift in racial language found in newspapers.

All of these factors interacted and influenced changing ideas about race, ethnicity, radicalism, and assimilation. Progressive era ideas about charity, social work, and the risks of giving relief to a working class suspected of radicalism, genetic inferiority, and “laziness” also influenced responses to weather-related natural disasters.¹⁰⁹ The extralegal violence found along the border was often expressed during disasters as summary extralegal execution of suspected looters, suspicions largely shaped by economic class, race or ethnic identity, and visible employment status.

Bixel and Turner in *Galveston and the 1900 Storm: Catastrophe and Catalyst* analyzed wide-spread sensationalized reporting in the aftermath of that disaster which targeted African Americans as looters, although police records indicate a much smaller problem and little

¹⁰⁷ The submersion of European ethnic identities into the category of "white," at least in newspapers, was related to these Americanization campaigns. See also Kamphoefner's *Germans in America*. Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education*, 53; and Walter D. Kamphoefner, *Germans in America: A Concise History* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 243–267.

¹⁰⁸ Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 38–39.

¹⁰⁹ The intersection of disaster relief, class, race, and immigration status will be discussed in more detail in the next section, but related sources include James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1934* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Roy Rozenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Stern, *Eugenic Nation*.

evidence that even these looters were African American.¹¹⁰ In fact disasters could provide the opportunity to campaign for restructuring government itself, such the Galveston Plan of commission municipal government, a form which helped dispossess non-whites, a plan implemented in the wake of the 1900 Galveston hurricane and widely adopted across the country.¹¹¹

The experience of most non-white or poor victims and survivors during these disasters were filtered through the lens of white correspondents. Image and memory were primary tools of this restructuring, and in the case of African Americans and the South, this war of images and memory extended back into the Antebellum South when Southerners created stereotypes of African American slaves in an attempt to combat abolitionist sentiments in the North. Only recently have historians focused on the United States' Southwest where similar if sometimes less overt processes played out with Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and Native Americans rather than exclusively African Americans as the targets of this restructuring of identity and government.¹¹²

Julie Leininger Pycior's *Democratic Renewal and the Mutual Aid Legacy of US Mexicans* analyzes the historical influence of *mutualistas* on public policy from the point-of-view of Mexican American communities. *Mutualistas* and Mexican charitable organizations were central to the response of the Mexican community to the 1921 San Antonio flood, particularly *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* whose history Pycior was partly able to reconstruct.¹¹³ Char Miller's environmental history, *West Side Rising: How San Antonio's 1921 Flood Devastated a City and*

¹¹⁰ Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 59, 77–78.

¹¹¹ Remes, *Disaster Citizenship*, location 182 of 7531; Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 149–151; and Bradley R. Rice, “The Galveston Plan of City Government by Commission: The Birth of a Progressive Idea,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (April 1975): 365–408.

¹¹² Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*.

¹¹³ Julie Leininger Pycior, *Democratic Renewal and the Mutual Aid Legacy of US Mexicans* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014).

Sparked a Latino Environmental Justice Movement, traces San Antonio's Mexican American resistance beyond the 1921 San Antonio flood. He links the charitable and mutual aid organizations active in relief in 1921 such as *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* to the rise of an environmental justice organization in the 1970s, Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS.)¹¹⁴

Ordinarily, members of non-white ethnic groups, immigrants, and working-class whites were frequently invisible in newspapers except as disorderly elements. In other words, they were usually only represented negatively. During disasters, these were the populations most often in harm's way, however, sometimes through the institutional structures that formally or informally segregated populations into undesirable areas. Journalists and editors could not ignore them during disasters, so disasters instead became an opportunity to shape perceptions and limit sympathy for the victims by describing them in different language, or sometimes through what is omitted about them. Discovering the voices of the victims or those who are resisting these trends is often difficult but essential.

An analysis of the 1921 San Antonio flood provided exactly that vital opportunity to shift the analytical lens to empower the victims themselves. The majority of victims from San Antonio were Spanish-surnamed. Spanish-language newspaper reporting on this flood produced a striking counternarrative in which the Spanish-speaking community was actively orchestrating their own response through cooperation with local government and various outside organizations, but also through their own organizations, particularly *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* and *la Sociedad Hidalgo*. English-language newspapers omitted or reframed most of this community response to produce a

¹¹⁴ Both *la Cruz Azul* and COPS were dominated by Latinas. Char Miller, *West Side Rising: How San Antonio's 1921 Flood Devastated a City and Sparked a Latino Environmental Justice Movement* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2021).

narrative of passive victims, centering the ARC and the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

The ARC collaborated with *la Sociedad Hidalgo*, but English-language newspapers submerged that society's work under the ARC, rendering their work invisible.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

Newspaper coverage of disasters in the early 1900s, generally through sensationalistic yellow journalism, provides a rare glimpse into perceptions of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities in which they were not being criminalized. Mass communications can have a significant influence over how such groups are perceived, both through description and omission.¹¹⁶ They can provide a tool that reinforces biases and injustices or one that can be used by such groups to resist, within the context of contemporary political and cultural currents. The frequency of major weather-related natural disasters in Texas and the Southwest borderlands that was extensively reported in newspapers make this a rich source for analysis of how these tools were deployed. While there have been some analyses of these disasters, the focus in Texas was primarily on the role of governmental institutions in creating and responding to disaster, but relatively little examination of racial or ethnic dimensions.

¹¹⁵ Julia F. Irwin's *Making the World Safe* analyzes the turning point for the organization during World War I in gaining broad support in the United States, as does Marion Moser Jones' work on the organization. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 67–69; and Jones, *The American Red Cross*, location 3787–3795.

¹¹⁶ Before the introduction of radios, this primarily meant newspapers. Telegraphs were widespread and played a role, but the news they carried was generally disseminated by newspapers. Magazines were published much less frequently than newspapers, so their role in disseminating news of this sort would generally have been limited and only supplemented the first impressions from newspaper reports. The only other significant methods for news to spread to the public in the early 1900s were letters and word-of-mouth, but it is unlikely that most people had access to first-hand accounts from someone involved in a disaster. Even word-of-mouth probably drew on newspaper articles more than letters. Telephones were still limited to businesses and relatively prosperous individuals and were very vulnerable to disruption by disaster.

In the early 1900s, white Texans struggled with the labor needs of cotton agriculture while that labor became increasingly mobile, threatening their control. That mobility was driven by the emerging Jim Crow racial system, racial violence including border violence in the late 1910s, the Mexican Revolution, rising xenophobia and immigration restrictions, eugenics, World War I, and the wide-spread descent into tenancy by poorer farmers. Between 1899 and 1921, newspapers eliminated or simplified the words they used to identify ethnic and non-white victims during these disasters, reflecting both Americanization efforts and the hardening of racial lines. These specific racial and ethnic identity words constantly intersected with gender, class, and other elements of identity. At the same time, the Black middle class was struggling against disenfranchisement, while a Mexican middle-class was beginning to emerge.

CHAPTER II

THE COLOR OF DISASTER: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN DISASTER NEWS

On July 5, 1899, the secondary headline of a Navasota, Texas, article proclaimed “The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor.”¹¹⁷ The correspondent used further language that criticized the survivors themselves and reinforced white ideas that African Americans could not understand their danger and were therefore capable only of being dependents because of their “utter lack of the sense of responsibility.”¹¹⁸ The correspondent's style of writing demonstrated the national influence of the emerging yellow press through his overt manipulation of his readers’ emotions.¹¹⁹ But the correspondent and editors were using this manipulation tactic in a very Southern way: to reinforce the racial hierarchy through the tools of white pity and benevolence.¹²⁰ Even readers who only skimmed the headlines without reading the article itself were reminded of a core tenant of contemporary white Southern ideology, the dependency of Black Southerners.¹²¹

Correspondents and newspapers did, and still do, employ specific language that racializes Black victims, rescuers, and relief workers. News media coverage echoes long-established

¹¹⁷“AT NAVASOTA. The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2. While I frequently use only the primary headline in citations, I have included the secondary headlines, sometimes called “decks,” in many citations because they were descriptive and help support the arguments being made in the material the footnote refers to. Subsequent citations of the same article may omit or include the secondary headlines, depending on their relevance.

¹¹⁸Part of this quote appears later in this chapter, but in the version which appeared in the Houston *Daily Post* that day. “AT NAVASOTA,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2; and “THE SITUATION AT NAVASOTA,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

¹¹⁹Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 1–4.

¹²⁰The use of pity to reduce impoverished and marginalized peoples to a status of childlike and helpless dependency could frequently be found in media during the late 1800s and early 1900s. I analyze the use of pity and sympathy, in which readers do not identify with a victim or grant him equality, as opposed to empathy, in which they do, later in this chapter. Balaji, “Racializing Pity, 50–67.

¹²¹I use the preferred modern identifiers, Black and African American, with Black generally used as an adjective and African American as a noun except when I felt context required an exception.

stereotypes of non-white people as childlike, helpless, passively dependent on white charity during and after natural disasters. Murali Balaji's analysis of media coverage of the January 2010 Haitian earthquake examined the media responses to recovery and relief. Balaji found the efforts to provide relief and recovery assistance to Haiti depended on "the construction of black people as somehow hopelessly dependent upon the charity of whites. Countless images of white aid workers...rescue blacks out of the rubble...."¹²² Balaji then used the definitions of "empathy" and "pity" to assert that "empathy implies a sentiment based on equality. Pity, on the other hand, assumes the one pitying holds the power over the pitied" and believes they share nothing in common, and in fact "race is central to how pity is enacted."¹²³

Black Texans were also most likely to be the victims of river flooding during the early twentieth-century due to historic agricultural patterns.¹²⁴ The richest, most desirable land for cotton farming was in the river bottoms, but that was because they had been frequently enriched by depositions of silt by frequent floods. Large plantations dependent on slave labor developed in the bottomlands first as a matter of economics, and after Emancipation, most freedmen and women were coerced into working this same land as sharecroppers.¹²⁵ Most white landowners

¹²²Balaji, "Racializing Pity," 51. See also Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880–1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xi–xviii.

¹²³A prominent example was Jacob A. Riis who used both photographs and the language of pity to win sympathy for the urban poor, but in ways that created a vision of helpless victims who needed paternalistic benevolence. Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957); Michelle Lamuniere, "Sentiment as Moral Motivator: From Jacob Riis's Lantern Slide Presentations to Harvard University's Social Museum," *History of Photography* 36, no. 2 (April 2012), 137–155; Maren Stange, "JACOB RIIS AND URBAN VISUAL CULTURE: The Lantern Slide Exhibition as Entertainment and Ideology," *Journal of Urban History* (May 1989), 274–303; and Balaji, "Racializing Pity," 51.

¹²⁴Coastal flooding from hurricane storm surge is a related weather hazard, but real estate close to a beach is highly valued, reversing the risks. However, the high costs of acquiring such property means that residents could easily have chosen not to live in the risk zone. Economics and culture still pressure a disproportionate number of Black and other vulnerable Americans onto land that is at particularly high risk for river flooding.

¹²⁵Land on the river also allowed water transportation of crops, another economic consideration. Freedman's colonies often sprang up near county lines, as far from the main white towns and county government as possible, and county lines were often demarcated by rivers or streams. This land was less desirable to white planters because of the distance required to transport crops to rail lines, the higher incidence of mosquito-borne illnesses, and potential flood losses. Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in*

had Black sharecropper housing built in the flood plain while having their own homes built on the highest ground available, further from the river.¹²⁶

The crops grown in these flood plains could recover from a brief inundation, so less serious floods, however frequent, were dismissed as inconsequential in newspapers, despite any losses by sharecroppers. While these minor “rises” were more annoyance to the landowners than serious threat, it is almost impossible now to estimate the recurring household losses of Black victims. Crop losses mattered to the white journalists, not the meager household goods and food animals of African Americans. They simply were not considered important enough to mention or describe in any detail in newspaper articles. Many Black sharecroppers in the bottomlands may have lost virtually all of their possessions every five to ten years.¹²⁷

I closely analyzed newspaper reports covering disasters in Texas and the American Southwest over a period of twenty-two years.¹²⁸ The Brazos River flooding in 1899 primarily affected Black farm laborers, with an abundance of articles using distinctly different language to describe Black and white victims, survivors, and relief workers to produce a biased image of African American.¹²⁹ These differences demonstrated how they chose or omitted specific words

the Time of Jim Crow, Number 15, Jack and Doris Smothers Series in Texas History, Life, and Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.)

¹²⁶The bottomlands close to rivers was also a less healthy environment than higher ground due to mosquito-born diseases like yellow fever, but still believed to be from miasmas during the earliest disasters of this period. Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South*, 23–24; and Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 23–24.

¹²⁷My conjecture is based on the frequent recurrence of floods on the major rivers and the scope of losses for farmers in the floodplain that I found reported by newspapers. Ted Steinberg in *Acts of God* argues that “natural calamities frequently do not just happen; they are produced through a chain of human choices and natural occurrences.....this belief that such disasters stem solely from random natural forces, is tantamount to saying that they lie entirely outside human history, beyond our influence, beyond moral reason, beyond control.” Steinberg, *Acts of God*, xviii–xx.

¹²⁸For the Brazos River, serious flooding occurred in June and July 1899, April 1900, September 1900, December 1913, August 1915, and September 1921. The Colorado River similarly experienced frequent flooding. This very frequency suggests they should not be considered aberrations but a normal part of the environment which should be accounted for. Steinberg argues that “seen as freak events cut off from people’s everyday interactions with the environment, they are positioned outside the moral compass of our culture. As a result, no one can be held accountable for them.” Steinberg, *Acts of God*, xix.

¹²⁹This period started and ended with the two most racialized disasters, the 1899 and the 1921 floods, one Black, one Mexican. The 1900 Galveston hurricane in chapter five was an explicitly white disaster, but it could be argued

in ways that created or reinforced stereotypes and maintained the racial social order.¹³⁰ For that reason, both this chapter and the next focus heavily on the 1899 flood, but other disasters are analyzed as appropriate.

These correspondents and editors wrote in an uneasy climate of rising racial conflict across the country and a struggle for control of black labor.¹³¹ The first section of this chapter examines some of the evidence of that racial climate as it appeared in newspaper reports, particularly during the 1899 Brazos river flooding. They describe abuse of, and attacks on, black industrial workers, particularly those outside the South, which worked in tandem with other stories with a theme of white Southern benevolence. These stories were Southern propaganda aimed at least partly at Black laborers themselves, reflecting white fears of a threat to Southern agriculture due to increased Black mobility.

In the second and third sections of this chapter, I analyze the exact language which was used, or omitted, in describing black victims, language that racialized them and often dehumanized them as the “other.” Explicit linguistic racial (and ethnic) markers were one of the most obvious indicators of social divisions, inequality, and conflict in newspaper reports. Such markers were generally omitted for white native-born men, reinforcing their status as the default majority, while most other people were virtually always identified by race or ethnicity or

that the demographics of the victims led to an uncoupling of racial and class assumptions about disaster victims instead of racializing them more.

¹³⁰In this chapter, I analyze articles through the lens of the Southern biracial system; in Chapter Five, I analyze them through the Southwestern triracial system. In the early 1900s, news about major events were transmitted by telegraph, but were distributed almost exclusively through newspapers. Most oral transmission of news started from someone who read a report in a newspaper, so the exact words used or not to describe people involved in a disaster influenced how it entered the collective memory.

¹³¹I focus specifically on the language used, or not used, to describe African American victims and rescuers in this chapter. The next chapter focuses on more explicit themes of African American labor and white control. Marian Moser Jones examined the ways in which relief efforts in the Sea Island hurricane of 1893 were influenced by race and the perceived need to control black labor and white distrust in black work ethics. Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 107–131.

gender.¹³² The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections of this chapter explore the language through which newspaper reports tried to create an idea of Black victims as dependent on white benevolence, too incompetent to make their own decisions. White Southerners clung to the myths of black dependency and incompetence, paired with white paternalism and benevolence, tools which reinforced inequality and attempted to control black labor and lives.

Color at the Turn of the Century: American Race Relations and Disaster

White fears about loss of control and potential Black emigration helped drive both Texas racial violence and attempts to refocus attention on Northern racial conflicts. When the 1899 flood occurred, Texas newspapers were also reporting on racial violence they sometimes described as “race wars,” often closer to racially based labor disputes. In particular, some mines used Black strike breakers. African Americans were normally excluded from such employment, often by labor unions themselves which did not accept Black members, or at least not on equal footing.¹³³ Because Black miners were excluded from unions, they felt no need to respect strikes and saw a lot to gain by proving they could do the same work. White strikers reacted particularly violently toward Black strike breakers, such as in Blossburg, Alabama, where the strikebreakers “disappeared,” and over 1000 African Americans were forced from Pana, Illinois, by white strikers.¹³⁴ Texas newspapers like the *Houston Daily Post* and the *San Antonio Daily Express*

¹³²Frequently, the only information provided for non-white victims was their status as non-white or their gender or both.

¹³³See Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*; Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 135–136; and Robert H. Zieger and Gilbert J. Gall, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

¹³⁴They also claimed that three African Americans were shot and killed. “ALABAMA RACE WAR IS OVER. THE ARMED NEGROES DISAPPEAR FROM BLOSSBURG: The Deputies Have Returned to Birmingham---No Fears of Further Trouble,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 1; Untitled article, *San Antonio Daily Express*,

crowded over this evidence that the North was no better, possibly worse, in its treatment of Black laborers, in a form of racial propaganda between regions of the country that were competing for the pool of Black labor.

Newspapers sometimes directly tried to convince Black readers to remain in the South. For instance, a Houston *Daily Post* correspondent described a meeting of African Americans in Dallas to organize their own flood relief fundraising. He asserted that “a meeting of prominent negroes held in Dallas this afternoon, and presided over by Rev. A. R. Griggs, passed resolutions declaring the Southern whites to be the best friends of the negro race and advising the people of the North to let the race question alone.”¹³⁵ This resolution may have been spurred by a feeling of betrayal of African Americans by white Republicans.¹³⁶ The resolution may also have been part of an accommodation with local white authorities or an assurance that they would not try to bypass the state racial hierarchy to seek assistance for Black victims from outside the state. However, the exact wording of the resolutions was not made available, which means the actual statement was paraphrased and filtered by white newspapermen.

Southern racial violence was deeply embedded in the culture, largely driven by a fear of weakening white control. While the quantity of known lynchings declined in the early 1900s, the brutality and “spectacle” increased, peaking in Texas with the horrific public lynching of Jesse

July 1, 1899, 4; “WITH THE STRIKES,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 3, 1899, 2; and “NEGROES LEAVING PANA,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 3, 1899, 2.

¹³⁵There is only the word of the correspondent, however, for the actual content of the statement. “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

¹³⁶While the Republican party retained the loyalty of most Southern Black voters, there was more than a little discontent developing with their unwillingness or inability to protect Black rights. “ALABAMA RACE WAR IS OVER. THE ARMED NEGROES DISAPPEAR FROM BLOSSBURG: The Deputies Have Returned to Birmingham---No Fears of Further Trouble,” Houston *Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 1; Untitled, San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 1, 1899, 4; WITH THE STRIKES,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 3, 1899, 2; and “NEGROES LEAVING PANA,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 3, 1899, 2.

Washington in 1916.¹³⁷ But the same decades saw some of the worst large scale racial “riots” in United States history.¹³⁸ Nationally, this surge in racial violence soared just after World War I, including the horrifying riots in Chicago, Illinois, and Greenwood, Oklahoma.¹³⁹ In many race riots such as Greenwood, some of the white rage also stemmed from resentment toward Black economic improvement, indicated by looting and destruction of Black property.¹⁴⁰ Lynching and “whitecapping” are intended to intimidate and terrorize, and victims of lynchings were named, including details of their supposed crimes.¹⁴¹ Texas newspapers routinely, even approvingly, reported Southern lynchings, and sometimes described non-lethal whitecapping as well, but were less approving of whitecapping murders.¹⁴²

Disasters may have offered the opportunity for this less socially accepted racial violence, reported subtly.¹⁴³ In 1899, a Black woman from Navasota died while in Goliad and her body

¹³⁷While public lynchings mostly stopped after about 1921, possibly partly due to the ability to document these events on film, it is unclear how many continued to occur in secret. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 1–3; and Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1–6.

¹³⁸These were not limited to African Americans; during 1915 and 1916, Mexicans and Mexican Americans along the border were killed without repercussions, often in semi-official attacks by Texas authorities. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 162–164, 175–177; Cynthia Skove Nevels, *Lynching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness Through Racial Violence*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007, 1; Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 96–97; and Levario, *Militarizing the Border*, 10–11, 66.

¹³⁹William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), viii, 6–11; Karlos K. Hill, “Community-Engaged History: A Reflection on the 100th Anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre,” *American Historical Review* 126:2 (June 2021), 671–673; and Hannibal B. Johnson, “Tulsa, Then and Now: Reflections on the Legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 40:3 (Summer 2020), 181–185.

¹⁴⁰Messer, Shriver, and Adams, “The Destruction of Black Wall Street, 789–795.

¹⁴¹Recognized lynchings during this period were justified as paralegal justice for a crime and were relatively common and public. Texas newspapers quite openly reported lynchings, and until World War I, were generally uncritical. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 10, 133–134, 138–139.

¹⁴²Carrigan defines whitecapping as a form of racial intimidation and violence “in which a group of disguised men would threaten and terrorize local inhabitants who refused to accede to the mob's wishes.” Unlike lynching, whitecapping did not usually start out with the objective of murder. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 134. By 1921, the *Dallas Morning News* began openly criticizing whitecapping and the Ku Klux Klan, resulting in economic losses which the Belo Corporation weathered by selling off the *Galveston County Daily News* in 1923. Segura, *Belo*, 10, 29–33.

¹⁴³Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 10, 133–134, 138–139.

was shipped home to Navasota for burial. The body was delayed because of the flood, and doubts were raised about the cause of death during the delay.

“The body of Anna Reedy, colored, of Navasota, who died at Goliad Tuesday night, reached here Wednesday night en route to Navasota for interment...as no train went out in consequence of a washout on the road,...its condition was such that it had to be buried here yesterday afternoon.

“When the coffin was opened for embalming the condition of the body was such as to arouse sufficient suspicion as to warrant an investigation being instituted by friends of the deceased as to the cause of death, and the husband of the deceased, Willis Reedy, will arrive here today for that purpose.”¹⁴⁴

Clearly they found something suspicious about her body, but unfortunately, nothing more of this story could be found. That very absence suggested the potential for racial violence.¹⁴⁵ Why was Anna Reedy in Goliad? Was she visiting friends or family or was she employed there while her husband was in Navasota?¹⁴⁶ The use of the identifier, “colored,” suggested a relatively prosperous family, one which had enough money to ship the body home rather than simply having her buried in Goliad. If so, she was unlikely to be a domestic servant, the most common employment for married Black women who were not sharecropping. And if there was something relatively visible on her body, why had the potential crime not been investigated in Goliad before the body was shipped to Houston to be embalmed? It is the latter omission and later silence which suggested possible racial violence.

¹⁴⁴“DELAYED BY THE WASHOUT, A Corpse for Navasota Failed to Reach Its Destination,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 8.

¹⁴⁵There may have been more reported, but I was unable to locate any outcomes of the investigation in newspapers.

¹⁴⁶I was unable to locate a death certificate or census information on Anna Reedy or her husband, Willis.

Paris, Texas, reported an incident which strongly suggested racial violence during the 1900 hurricane. Paris is relatively close to the Oklahoma border, and the weakened storm passed through this area late on September 9 and early on September 10, causing little damage. Yet, a correspondent reported that:

“At daylight this morning John Kines, a negro, was found dead on South Church street, with a live electric wire, which had blown down, wrapped around his neck and clutched in his hand. He had encountered it in passing along the sidewalk and in trying to lift it became entangled. His flesh was cooked to a crisp. Earlier in the morning while Coley Fraught, a dairyman, was delivering milk his team encountered the wire.”¹⁴⁷

Several points about this story were inconsistent. First, the worst winds of the storm only damaged flimsy structures such as awnings in Paris.¹⁴⁸ Someone was routinely delivering milk hours before his death, so the wind would not have been strong when Kines was killed. If he really did grab the wire himself, how did it get wrapped around his neck if it was not the wind? The report stated he was “found” dead but also claimed to know how he died, implying a witness saw him grab the wire. Why were they unnamed?¹⁴⁹

The most telling point against an accidental death was the description of the wire as “wrapped around his neck.” The overall description elicited similar imagery to lynching victims, from the description of something around his neck—a noose—to the physical description of his body as “cooked to a crisped”—burned. While readers were told that Kine's death was an accident, the inconsistencies of John Kines’ death, unusual in that he was named, strongly

¹⁴⁷“BAD STORM AT PARIS,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 2.

¹⁴⁸The storm passed at 1:00 AM. “BAD STORM AT PARIS,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 2.

¹⁴⁹From the mention of Coley Faught, the local residents knew there was a dangerous live wire in that place.

suggested he may have been a victim of a less open incident of racial violence with the description in the newspaper itself meant to intimidate Black readers.¹⁵⁰

A more indirect form of racial violence occurred when white employers required Black employees to remain in a dangerous situation.¹⁵¹ In 1899, rescuers met a Mr. Wade “...and four of his negroes in the usual improvised boats of the bottom people. Mr. Wade sent his men on to guard his house, several thefts having been committed in the neighborhood since the flood, and then boarding one of the relief boats...”¹⁵² From the context, it was clear that his house was flooded or in danger from flooding, but he was more concerned with protecting his property than with the lives of his employees. Wade’s account of their experiences also focused on his own danger, but he did at least moderate this self-centered account by admitting to the rescue party that “the four negroes already mentioned as having been with him had, he said, saved numerous lives during the early days of the flood.”¹⁵³ These men were given credit for heroism, but Wade or the correspondent chose to omit their names.

The Color of Humanity: Explicit Racial Markers in Disaster

During the three disasters in 1899 and 1900, at least six different racial terms were used to segregate African Americans in newspaper articles: “negro,” “colored,” “black,” “darkie,” “nigger,” and “freedman.” “Negro” was by far the most common racial marker used in newspaper reporting, especially for Black farm laborers. “Colored” was also common for urban

¹⁵⁰Victims of lynching were generally identified by name and the crime they were accused of committing. Although this was not identified publicly as a murder, Black people were usually only named in newspaper articles for negative reasons, and the description itself may have been a warning to African Americans.

¹⁵¹Often white employers evacuated their families and left employees to die “guarding” property. Untitled article, *Dallas Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 1. See Chapter Five for additional examples.

¹⁵²W. T. Wade was the manager of a Mr. Briscoe's plantation. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

¹⁵³ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

African Americans or relatively prosperous farmers. “Black” appeared less frequently, usually contrasted with “white.” “Darkie” was clearly considered a derogatory racial identifier even by Southern standards and was used as such in its rare appearances in newspaper reports. It appeared five times in 1899 and twice after the 1900 Galveston hurricane. “Nigger” was not generally used to describe victims, survivors, or rescuers, but was used in a San Antonio newspaper to describe a stock character in a charity performance for the Galvestonian hurricane victims.¹⁵⁴ The rarest racial identifier was “freedman,” found only once in reference to Smith Blackburn as part of a retraction of an earlier story and may have been intended to dilute the respect displayed toward Blackburn in the earlier article.¹⁵⁵ By 1913, “negro” was even more common with only a few uses of “black” or “colored.” Other distinctions vanished parallel to the disappearance of most immigrant identifiers.¹⁵⁶ By 1921, “white,” Mexican, and “negro” were virtually the only racial identifiers being used by newspapers.¹⁵⁷

Correspondents applied the derogatory identifier “darkie” to individuals at the bottom of the racial social ladder. In 1899, a correspondent from Calvert, Texas, contrasted “the wealthy planted (sic) with his thousand acres of fertile bottom land and the cornfield darkey (sic) with his two¹⁵⁸ acres and a mule are both confronted with the stubborn fact that as far as this year’s crop is concerned they are practically ruined.”¹⁵⁹ Here “darkey” was implied to be the social and

¹⁵⁴“BENEFIT PERFORMANCE,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, September 16, 1900, 18.

¹⁵⁵I discuss this sole use of “freedman” under the identifier “colored” because these two were intertwined.

“SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE: THE RIVER HAS FALLEN A FOOT DURING THE DAY,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

¹⁵⁶I analyze this transition in racial systems that eliminated most ethnic identifications in Chapter Four.

¹⁵⁷While this change may have been an attempt to eliminate the most overt racial language from white newspapers, they also pointedly did not choose the term obviously preferred by the Black middle-class in the late 1800s and early 1900s as seen in the names of their leading organizations: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Association of Colored Women. Instead, they choose the term that was most similar to one of the common slurs in use and which had generally indicated a lower social status in 1899.

¹⁵⁸This word is blurred and may have been twenty instead, but the length of the blurred word suggested two instead. However, the exact acreage was not particularly significant.

¹⁵⁹“A RESUME FROM CALVERT: 34,000 CULTIVATED ACRES WERE OVERFLOWED. Some of the Incidents...to 8000 Negroes Destitute,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

economic opposite of the richest white landowners, reinforcing it as the most derogatory racial identifiers in use. Another correspondent from Hempstead, Texas, used the identifier in association with “Mexican”: “Three darkies and a Mexican were taken from a pecan tree in the bottoms half starved and shivering; they had not eaten a mouthful in nearly three days.”¹⁶⁰ These survivors were not even identified by gender, but the correspondent described them as “half starved” and “shivering” to emphasize that their helplessness and invoke pity. Mexican workers were rare in this region in 1899, and only four or five Mexican flood victims total were mentioned in articles.¹⁶¹ The conjunction of this individual with the derogatory racial identifier “darkies” suggested that the few who had migrated into this region were not well-regarded.

Another correspondent described Whitman survivors as “...ninety-one families comprising many of the starved, half-naked frightened darkies who presented a pitiable sight.”¹⁶² Readers are explicitly told that these survivors described by this derogatory term were to be pitied, and used emotional words such as “starved,” “half-naked,” and “frightened,” to emphasize why they should be pitied. He added that “At one point, twenty-five...had to be driven back with oars of the boats to prevent them capsizing their rescuers...”¹⁶³ This description suggested that they were incapable of thinking clearly, to the point of endangering themselves and their would-be rescuers, even evoking imagery of white men driving back panicked livestock.¹⁶⁴ The other survivors were also described as helpless; “Hundreds were found in the

¹⁶⁰“TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOM DID NOT HEED IT. Hempstead Has Her Hands Full Taking Care of the Stricken of that Vicinity,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

¹⁶¹ It was possible that several of these five or six uses of the identifier “Mexican” referred to the same individual, but it is impossible to tell without names or other identifying details. Carrigan found that the 1900 U.S. Census only documented 238 residents of seven central Texas counties who had been born in Mexico. Foley, *The White Scourge*, 42–51; Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 174–5.

¹⁶²“AROUND BRENHAM,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 8, 1899, 2.

¹⁶³“AROUND BRENHAM,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 8, 1899, 2.

¹⁶⁴Or potentially creating imagery of disobedient slaves being driven by overseers.

tops of trees, praying, grieving and hollowing (sic) for help.”¹⁶⁵ These three sentences provided an exceptional example of Balaji's argument for “the construction of black people as somehow hopelessly dependent on the charity of whites” and the power that pitying implies over the pitied and the racialization of pity, especially in conjunction with the derogatory racial identifier.¹⁶⁶

The other derogatory identifier, “nigger,” appeared only once, in a list of stock characters for a benefit performance of “‘Down in Dixie,’ the beautiful military drama,” a character listed as “Susannah, ‘Jis a brack Nigger,’”¹⁶⁷ Clearly, the stock character was supposed to be an illiterate but cheerful African American slave who, based on the quotes around the description, supposedly used the derogatory term herself.¹⁶⁸ This fictional self-identification would have reinforced the desperate desire of most white Southerners by this time to believe in the “faithful slave” narrative, their belief that most slaves had been more contented than freedmen and women until corrupted by Northern scoundrels. The entire cast, in fact, was explicitly described in that narrative's stereotypes, most notably “Helen Trevoir, a Southern heiress,” “Hezekiah Sniffins, a degenerate Yankee,” and “Uncle Mosley, a faithful slave.”¹⁶⁹ But the restriction of this derogatory term to a self-descriptor by a white dramatist reinforced that while the term was not considered “polite,” many white Southerners believed, or wanted to believe, that it was the actual racial identifier used by or at least accepted by some Black Southerners.

¹⁶⁵“AROUND BRENHAM,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 8, 1899, 2.

¹⁶⁶Balaji, “Racializing Pity,” 51.

¹⁶⁷The character was almost certainly played by someone in blackface makeup, a common phenomenon at the turn of the century according to Micki McElya. This phenomenon of derogatory caricature of slaves in a Civil War drama was likely connected with rising idealization of “the Lost Cause” and the rapid expansion of Jim Crow immediately after the legalization of “separate but equal” Jim Crow laws. “BENEFIT PERFORMANCE,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, September 16, 1900, 18; and McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 38–41.

¹⁶⁸In fact, the description used two racial identifiers, which was unusual in itself.

¹⁶⁹“BENEFIT PERFORMANCE,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, September 16, 1900, 18.

“Negro” was the default term for most African Americans throughout this twenty-two-year period.¹⁷⁰ In general, during the 1899 and 1900 disasters, “negro” was the racial identifier used for poor Black rural victims, but sometimes it could be used to moderate a description which did not fit white perceptions. One correspondent reported that “in Washington and adjoining counties there are many well to do negro planters whose possessions are entirely swept away...”¹⁷¹ Here “planter” was used, a term which generally signified men who owned a significant amount of land, if not employing farm labor of their own, and this status was reinforced by identifying these men as “well to do.” “Planter” was virtually never used for Black farmers in disaster reports, so the addition of “negro” as an additional identifier moderated the status of these men to exclude them from the class of white planters.

“Negro” was occasionally used in the same sentence with “white,” in which case the white man was generally named and the Black man was not. A correspondent in Sartartia, Texas, stated that “Brakeman Jones, a white man from Richmond and a negro from Houston did great service in bringing people to places of safety.”¹⁷² One individual was identified by name, gender, occupation, race, and origin in just seven words. The other person had only a race and origin, not even an explicit gender. The correspondent also followed a common pattern of specifically identifying the race of a white man who was mentioned in the same sentence as an African American. The race of white men was rarely identified if someone belonging to another racial or ethnic group was not mentioned, but was almost never omitted if they were included.

¹⁷⁰ The use of “negro” was so ubiquitous that I only focus here on exceptions. The common use of the term appears so commonly throughout the rest of my analysis that analyzing it explicitly would be redundant.

¹⁷¹ The article’s source may have been H. M. Troxow of Washington County, but the article was vague on whether or not this statement was a continuation of Troxow’s earlier report. “THE FLOODS’ RAVAGES: THE TERRIFIC RAINS IN CENTRAL TEXAS CONTINUE UNABATED,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 1, 1899, 1.

¹⁷² Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 1.

When “negro” was used as a contrast to “white,” disapproval of the white victims or survivors was often implied. McQueeney, a railroad superintendent, reported to the *Houston Daily Post* that “...at Richmond...the county courthouse and churches there were full of destitute negroes and some whites.”¹⁷³ McQueeney did not name any of the white survivors, and they were mentioned after the Black victims. Unlike most instances, “white” was not used as an identifier or modifier; “whites” was used as a noun. This possibly indicated a class-based disapproval of these particular people, especially the implication that they may have willingly shared emergency quarters with Black survivors.¹⁷⁴

More frequently, newspapers presented white and black victims in contrast, and in fact, the word “black” was primarily used in sentences in which “white,” or white people without the identifier, were also present. For instance, the *San Antonio Daily Express* quoted the *Guadalupe Gazette* which claimed “the people of Texas have now the best chance in the world to show a Christian civilization whose fruitage is the universal brotherhood of man for Texans by the thousands, black and white, have lost everything they had in the world.”¹⁷⁵ Here the editor makes a claim of equal loss for white Texans.

While “black” was primarily used as an identifier in sentences in conjunction with “white,” “colored” could also be used in conjunction with “white.” A Hearne, Texas, correspondent reported to the *Houston Daily Post* that “the bodies of T. S. Dawson, white, and Steve Blackshear, colored, both drowned in the recent overflow, were reported recovered today. Mr. Dawson’s body was found on the Moreland plantation, a distance of fifteen miles from where he was drowned. Both bodies were in a badly decomposed state.”¹⁷⁶ Both victims are

¹⁷³Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

¹⁷⁴Whether or not they were also “destitute” is left unclear.

¹⁷⁵“ABOUT TEXAS AND TEXANS,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 9, 1899, 12.

¹⁷⁶“Bodies Recovered,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

identified by name and race and the readers were told of the condition of their bodies. But Dawson was then given an honorific, and information provided both on where his body was recovered and a general location for where he was drowned. The readers were not given this information for Blackshear, which must also have been known. This omission implied that the details of Blackshear's death were not considered significant.¹⁷⁷

The identifier "colored" was commonly used through 1913 when the correspondent was describing a prosperous rural or an urban individual. This term may have been a covert acknowledgment that many African Americans had a recent white ancestor who may have given their non-white children a little help acquiring land or starting a business after Emancipation.¹⁷⁸ Southern whites were reluctant to openly acknowledge the frequency of miscegenation, but at the same time, were more likely to want to believe that white ancestry accounted for Black success.¹⁷⁹ Context often implied that "colored" was used in newspapers to indicate people who lighter-skinned, more educated, harder working, and more prosperous.

The most striking example came from Brookshire, when a correspondent reported that "the first victim of the flood was Smith Blackburn, a prominent and influential colored planter, who lost his life while attempting to get some of his more valuable live stock...details of his death are lacking."¹⁸⁰ Blackburn's full name, class, and occupation were given as well as how he

¹⁷⁷In another report on Dawson's death from the San Antonio *Daily Express*, a correspondent described him as "Mr. T. S. Dawson, a merchant doing business at Port Sullivan bridge, was drowned while endeavoring to save live stock." Here Dawson was awarded the honorific with his full name, and the readers were told occupation, origin, and how he drowned, implying that he had been engaged in a worthy endeavor. Immediately following readers were told that "about ten negroes are actually known to be drowned in the bottoms immediately tributary to Calvert and a great many more are missing." They are identified only by race, without age, occupation, gender or origin, much less how they were drowned or if they were recovered. Blackshear's was collectively lumped in with "negroes." "UNHAPPY CALVERT," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

¹⁷⁸Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 10, 19–20.

¹⁷⁹Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), xiv, 80–87.

¹⁸⁰Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1.

died, in terms similar to Dawson. The correspondent implied that he would have included details on his death if they had been available, then he informed readers that Blackburn's family "reached the high prairie land in safety, and although they are at present located somewhere in this vicinity a diligent search on the part of The Post's special correspondent failed to locate them."¹⁸¹ He emphasized that he made a significant effort to locate Blackburn's family in order to include more details on his death, reinforcing his status.¹⁸²

The identifying detail about Blackburn was almost unprecedented in newspaper reports on a Black victim of disaster, and he was given a level of respect in the article that one might have expected for a prosperous white farmer. He was referred to as "prominent," "influential," and a "planter," identities generally reserved for white community leaders. The correspondent refers to his stock as "valuable," which mitigated any criticism of Blackburn for risking himself, or at least put his actions on a level closer to that of white farmers who were often admired for the same thing. Most significantly for an analysis of racial identifiers, the Black disaster victim with the highest social status in this research was described as "colored." The use of "colored" for a man who was treated almost as if he was white suggested that the correspondent was attributing white ancestry to him.

This high level of respect for Blackburn did not last, however. The next day's edition of the *Houston Daily Post* retracted the report of Blackburn's death based on very little evidence. Not only that, he was now described as a "prominent freedman." The word "prominent" still allowed some respect, but "freedman" emphasized that he had been born into slavery. This may have been an attempt to dilute the uncharacteristically respectful report. The newspaper was also

¹⁸¹Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1.

¹⁸²Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1; and "SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE: THE RIVER HAS FALLEN A FOOT DURING THE DAY. Immediate Necessities of the People Have Been Relieved---Reports of Damage Not Exaggerated," *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

quick to retract their report based simply on someone telling the correspondent that he had talked to someone who claimed to have seen Blackburn alive, a third or fourth-hand report at best.¹⁸³

Urban African American residents, especially relief workers, were almost always identified as “colored,” suggesting a white perception of a class difference between rural and urban African Americans.¹⁸⁴ The men who volunteered to travel to the Brookshire, Texas, area from Houston to help with rescue work were carefully segregated as “white” and “colored” in lists of volunteers. “Those aboard the train were..., all white, and the following colored men...”¹⁸⁵ Eleven white men were named, the correspondent identified them specifically as white, then he explicitly identified the nine Black rescuers as “colored men” before listing their names. The racial order apparently required that even their names be segregated into two separate lists.¹⁸⁶

Another correspondent from Sugarland, Texas, reported that “one old, quiet colored man by the name of John Williams worked hard to save people and by himself brought fifty-two people, men, women and children, out of danger. This old man is certainly entitled to great credit for his brave deeds”¹⁸⁷ Virtually everything about this description is remarkable because Black rescuers were almost never given direct credit or even identified by anything other than race or perhaps gender. The word “brave” was almost never applied to a Black man, yet this article admired his courage. But if “colored” quietly suggested someone light-skinned with recent white

¹⁸³While Blackburn may have survived the flood, I was unable to find him in the 1900 census for Waller County. “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE: THE RIVER HAS FALLEN A FOOT DURING THE DAY. Immediate Necessities of the People Have Been Relieved---Reports of Damage Not Exaggerated,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

¹⁸⁴Urban African Americans appeared to be perceived as skilled or at least semi-skilled labor, and in a few cases, as professionals, as opposed to “unskilled” farm laborers.

¹⁸⁵Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

¹⁸⁶I omitted the two lists of names for brevity.

¹⁸⁷“AT AND NEAR SUGARLAND. PROVISIONS WERE CARRIED TO THE REFUGEES FROM HOUSTON. Many Negroes Were Brought Back, but There Are Still Hundreds There,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

ancestry, the proximity of this description to those of white rescuers made more sense. And by modifying his identity with “old,” however, the correspondent was probably invoking an image of a freedman who had once been a “Faithful Slave.”¹⁸⁸

Other identifiers were sometimes used to dilute admiring or flattering comments. For instance, a correspondent described Howard Orendorff of Houston in 1899, as “a bright colored boy.”¹⁸⁹ Orendorff was described as “bright,” but although he was earlier listed with the “colored men” who had traveled to Brookshire, Texas, to help with rescue work, here he was described as a “boy.” This infantilization was not an unusual way for white correspondents to describe a Black man, implying that the individual was not independent, despite their age. The same correspondent later referred to him as “the negro Orendorff.”¹⁹⁰ His choice of identifier was inconsistent, but was consistent with the fact that the *Houstonian* was actually rural-born, from the Brookshire area.

The same correspondent also described a second rescuer in similar terms: “...Robert Thompson, colored, a native Brookshire boy who has been working in Houston, and by one of the white men, who demonstrated before the night was over that he was extremely willing to work, but that he was not well up in the art of handling a boat.”¹⁹¹ Throughout this article which continued for several full columns in the paper, the white rescuers are always referred to as men, not boys. This differentiation by race in whether someone was an adult or not was particularly

¹⁸⁸Surprisingly, the correspondent did not reframe him as “uncle,” a relatively common identifier for respected older Black men with origins in the “faithful slave” narrative, as demonstrated so explicitly in the characters of the benefit performance analyzed earlier: “Uncle Mosley, a faithful slave.” “BENEFIT PERFORMANCE,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, September 16, 1900, 18.

¹⁸⁹Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

¹⁹⁰Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

¹⁹¹Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

striking in this particular instance where the least competent of the rescuers was still referred to as adult, while the more competent Black man was described using a juvenile descriptor.¹⁹²

A few days later, another rescue party from Houston was working the area around Fulshear and Simonton. Again, the rescuers were listed separately by race. Several of the white men were given honorifics while one of the Black men was given the nickname “Uncle,” rooted in the “faithful slave” stereotype.¹⁹³ The hardships for most of the white men were detailed by name: Brayman “...worked painfully and with difficulty with a badly blistered hand during the afternoon...,” while Deutsch had a fever and needed quinine.¹⁹⁴ The Black rescuers, apparently, had no hardships worth noting. In a paragraph that ran for close to a quarter of a column, the only explicit recognition of their efforts was a single sentence reclassifying them from “colored” to “...the negroes, Mack, Orendorff, Thompson and Shaw deserve special mention for their herculean efforts.”¹⁹⁵ While this was praise that may have conceded some heroism, “herculean” primarily recognized their strength at the same time their racial identifier was changed from the more respectable term.

Black ministers, another class with a higher social status and a better education, were often described as “colored pastors” or “colored preachers.”¹⁹⁶ That combination of social status,

¹⁹²The remarkable fact that Thompson was named in this sentence while the white man was not suggested a desire to protect the reputation of the white man and is discussed in more depth elsewhere.

¹⁹³“Aunt” and “Uncle” were identifiers used by white people to avoid any formalities with enslaved people. The terms continued in later use for reliable older Black people, but still implied subordination and lack of independence. McElya finds that the Black community rejected the use of “aunt” and “uncle” in preference for the more respectful honorifics used for white people. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2; and McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 29–30.

¹⁹⁴Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

¹⁹⁵There was not complete consistency in these identifiers, but there were clear patterns in who was usually assigned which racial identifier. It was possible that the inconsistencies were introduced by editors, especially since this particular article was unusually long, continuing for several columns of the newspaper. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

¹⁹⁶“An Appeal to Colored Pastors and Congregations of the City of Houston,” from an untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 6; and “a colored preacher named Jenkins,” from “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE: THE RIVER HAS FALLEN A FOOT DURING THE DAY,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

religious vocation, and urban residence often influenced articles about Black relief work. While white relief committees were generally headed by judges or doctors or large landowners, most Black relief committees were organized and led by Black ministers. In Houston in 1899, “an earnest meeting of representative colored men was held yesterday morning on the market square to hear the report of Rev. Ph. H. Jenkins, pastor of Mount Vernon Methodist Episcopal church and president of the Houston Colored Ministers’ Union....”¹⁹⁷ The special correspondent for this article may have been African American himself, supporting the supposition that “colored” was believed to be the most respectful racial identifier by the Black community itself at the time.¹⁹⁸ There was no evidence of unfiltered reports from rural African Americans in newspapers.¹⁹⁹

Related to specific racialized identifiers, newspaper reports frequently resorted to other Southern stereotypes of African Americans. One of the common racist symbols was an association between Black Southerners and watermelons. During the 1899 Brazos river flooding, watermelons were one of the few foods which refugees were specifically described as eating. A W. B. Fordtran reported that “...200 to 500 negroes had come to Missouri City and Staffords Point and beyond living on watermelons had absolutely nothing to eat.”²⁰⁰

Both of these towns were in Fort Bend County, near Richmond. What was omitted from Fordtran's story was that apparently the white citizens of Fort Bend County had themselves

¹⁹⁷“HOUSTON NEGROES HELP: To Relieve the Distress in the Flooded Brazos Bottom. WORK BEGUN IN EARNEST YESTERDAY. Committees Appointed and meetings Held at the Colored Churches. A Mass Meeting Tonight,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 6.

¹⁹⁸If most of the reports on Black urban relief efforts were sent to the newspapers by committees themselves, that would also explain some of the differentiation between urban and rural racial identifiers.

¹⁹⁹Based on the different treatment of Black urban victims of the 1900 Galveston hurricane as opposed to the Black rural victims of that hurricane, I also believe that newspapers were reluctant to alienate urban Black Texans because they were still perceived to have some political power. *Plessy v. Ferguson* had only been decided three years earlier. The erasure of any term other than negro by 1921 seemed to reflect the growing power of segregation and disenfranchisement of Black citizens, while newspapers may have perceived the Mexican community of San Antonio as gaining political power during that same time period. I discuss these in both Chapter Five and Six.

²⁰⁰Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

distributed watermelons to the Black flood victims. The caption for one surviving 1899 photograph explicitly stated that they photographed watermelons being distributed to the Black flood victims (see Figure 1 below.) The benefactors went out of their way to capture this specific incident because camera speeds were not fast enough to take spontaneous photographs. The white gentleman on the horse with an umbrella was identified as Dr. Bailey, prominent enough in these efforts that a second photograph showed him posed with a Black woman (see Figure 2 below.) This woman was holding two watermelons, with her head covered by a kerchief and wearing a fairly simple dress, almost a stereotype of “Mammy.” Most of the Black women in the other flood photographs wore dresses and hats that would not have been out of place on a middle-class white woman at the time.²⁰¹ While this woman may have been chosen for a personal connection to Bailey, she may also have been chosen for her stereotypical appearance.

²⁰¹I do not know enough about the specific details of fashion to know if their clothing may have been out-of-date, but it was not cheap clothing, nor was it ragged. “Crossing Flood Sufferers (second line illegible),” Fort Bend Museum archives, Fort Bend History Association, Vertical file 71.13.1a–71.13.1EE, examined May 22, 2019.



Figure 1. "Distributing Water-melons to sufferers after the flood," Photograph from 1899 flood, Fort Bend Museum archives, Fort Bend History Association, Vertical file 71.13.1a-71.13.1EE, examined May 22, 2019.



Figure 2. Dr. Bailey on horseback, from 1899 flood, Fort Bend Museum archives, Fort Bend History Association, Vertical file 71.13.1a-71.13.1EE, examined May 22, 2019.

The Color of a Name: Dehumanizing Race

Names were a particularly distinctive signifier of race, class, and gender. Most rural Black victims were identified simply by a racial marker but rarely by name, reducing them to an abstract representative of a racial stereotype, and effectively removing individual Black victims from the collective memory. In some instances, this lack of a name was unremarkable, such as in 1899 when Will Pitts of Pitts Bridge reported to the Bryan *Morning Eagle* that "...the body of a negro passed under the bridge Sunday afternoon."²⁰² In this context, the identity of the African American was very likely unknown. But no other identifier was used. This body had no age and no gender, it was just a "body of a negro."²⁰³

But most Black rural victims were not individually identified even when their names must have been known or available, and few other details were given about who they were or how they died. In July 1899, a correspondent in Bryan, Texas, reported that "...there has been only one death, a negro man, drowned in the Brazos. There are doubtless others, but the number cannot be told until the water recedes and the tenants return to their homes."²⁰⁴ The correspondent informed his readers that only one person died, that he was a Black man who drowned in the Brazos River, but not his name, age, occupation, or residence. Clearly the newspapers knew enough detail to believe that this report was reliable, which suggested that they knew other identifying information and simply did not consider it significant to their readers.

²⁰²"THE RIVERS," Bryan *Morning Eagle*, July 4, 1899, 1.

²⁰³It is not really possible in most cases to know whether these omissions began with the correspondent or whether it was an editorial choice by the newspapers. Very likely, it was some combination of these.

²⁰⁴"BOTTOMS STILL UNDER WATER. ONLY ONE DEATH HAS BEEN REPORTED AT BRYAN. One Estimate Is that Half a Million Bales of Cotton Have Been Destroyed by the Flood," Houston *Daily Post*, July 3, 1899, 5.

Another correspondent from Caldwell, Texas, reported that “one aged negro was drowned yesterday while attempting to rescue two children who pulled him under with themselves.”²⁰⁵ The emphasis was placed on the man’s age and race, and readers only know he was a man by the use of the pronoun, “him.” Nor was he identified by name, though clearly his identity must have been known. No modifiers or descriptors were used to indicate that his rescue attempt should be viewed as a tragic or heroic act; the language is quite business-like. The only thing the correspondent told his readers about the other victims was age: they were children, and even their race was not identified. If they were white, the omission of any other identifying information was curious. But while the correspondent felt the event was significant enough to report, his wording does not attribute any heroism to the man, suggesting these were Black children, not white. An elderly Black man dying in an attempt to rescue white children would probably have been viewed through the lens of the “faithful servant,” the successor to the faithful slave stereotype, in which it was acceptable for a Black man to be describe as courageous.²⁰⁶

Articles in which a white man is named and African Americans are not named in the same sentence were a particularly striking example of who was allowed a name. Dever, from Brenham, Texas, reported that “Finney Clay and two negroes, who went out with the rescuing party, stopped at a two-story house to await the return of the party.”²⁰⁷ Dever, the source for this story, “...accompanied by the Clay brothers and other neighbors....to Clay Station in a boat,”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵“Negro and Two Children Drowned,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 4.

²⁰⁶McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 4–17.

²⁰⁷Finney Clay did not appear in the 1900 census for Washington County under that exact name. However, an E. F. Clay, white twenty-one-year-old landowner, did. A Washington County death certificate in 1961 named an Edward Finney Clay, a retired white farmer and rancher who would have been just short of twenty-one in 1899, very likely the Finney Clay of this story. “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 05, Washington County, Texas, Sheet 11, accessed December 8, 2022; and “Edward Finney Clay, Standard Certificate of Death,” Brenham, Washington County, Texas, accessed December 8, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

²⁰⁸Clay Station, now Clay, Texas, was about twenty miles north of Brenham, Texas. “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

for the purpose of rescue. The “other neighbors” were not named, but were probably the two unnamed Black men who made the trip with Finney Clay. This group of men spent several days together engaged in rescue work, so it was highly unlikely that the names of the two African Americans were unknown to Dever. By omitting their names, he denied them individual recognition for their own heroism in rescue work while granting it freely to the white men.²⁰⁹

When Black victims were named, it was often in an unflattering light. The *Houston Daily Post* reported that, “Horace Robertson, a negro undertook to swim across the river today on a wager of \$3.50, and when he got to the middle of the stream, which was 200 yards wide, he could not cross the current and was carried down against a bridge pier. He...was rescued five miles below the city barely alive.”²¹⁰ This sort of wager during flooding of any sort was common. However Black men were often described in terms which implied that they were foolish, so an African American risking his life for a trivial sum of money would have fit white perceptions of African American morals.²¹¹ This correspondent let the readers draw their conclusions on whether or not he was foolish or whether he needed someone else’s judgment to protect him.

Another aspect of dehumanization through words was the use of “person” and “people.” Black victims and rescuers were rarely described with those words. For instance, in 1899, F. W. McConnico reported to the Bryan *Morning Eagle* that he had traveled by boat to his father’s plantation across the Brazos and “...found some land out of the water, and the white people and

²⁰⁹I make the assumption that the correspondent made the decision to omit identifying information in most cases. However, editors may have made the decision to omit identifying information for some or even most articles.

²¹⁰“THE BRAZOS AT WACO. A Negro Settlement Inundated and Many Are Homeless,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5; and “AT WACO. The Suspension Bridge and the Railroad Ones In Danger---Panic,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, June 30, 1899, 1.

²¹¹\$3.50 was probably as much as a Black laborer could have made in several days. The Galveston relief committee in 1900 paid \$1.50 a day, so \$3.50 was probably two-and-a-half to three days income, certainly enough to tempt someone who was poor to take such a risk. “To Pay Laborers,” *Houston Daily Post*, September 25, 1900, 5.

negroes getting along pretty well, and most of the stock saved.”²¹² The implication here was that only whites could be people and that Blacks were only ever “negroes” who did not rise to the level of personhood worth reporting basic humanity like a name. They might be described in gendered terms—a “negro man” or “negro boy” or a “negro woman”—but rarely as people.

A related form of dehumanizing Black farm workers, or at least signifying that they were lesser humans than white Texans, was to link them with animals, particularly livestock. The *Houston Daily Post* reported from Navasota, Texas, that “rescuing negroes and stock continues with unabatable (sic) vigor...”²¹³ The words “humans” or “people” were not used at all in reference to this rescue work, and the lives of Black survivors were directly equated with the lives of stock for the rescuers.²¹⁴ This characterization dehumanized the Black survivors and emphasized a white belief in their inability to care for themselves, denying them any agency in their own survival.

Similarly, in a different article on the same page, Dever stated that, “...the sounds from the bottom are the most distressing that ever smote on mortal ears. To the cries for aid from the distressed families is added the neighing of horses, the lowing of the drowning cattle and the braying of the mules.”²¹⁵ Black victims and livestock were lumped together in one sentence, and in fact far more words were devoted to the livestock than to the human victims.²¹⁶ He also detailed the rescue of a horse in words intended to elicit sympathy from the readers for the horse:

²¹²“THE RIVERS,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, July 4, 1899, 1.

²¹³The *San Antonio Daily Express* used almost identical wording on the same day, only changing the last word from “vigor” to “rigor,” in an article from Calvert, Texas, rather than Navasota. “BOY WENT CRAZY,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; and “UNHAPPY CALVERT,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

²¹⁴This article also implied Black refugees and hogs were in the same boats, especially since the *Houston Daily Post* included hogs in several sketches of the flood that they printed. Of common large livestock, only hogs could have been transported easily in a boat. “ONE OF THE QUEER SCENES. A sow and seven pigs...,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2; and “THE REFUGEES AT BROOKSHIRE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

²¹⁵This is the same Dever and article as discussed earlier. “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS....A Voyage Through the Overflowed Bottoms by a Party in a Small Boat,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

²¹⁶Almost all victims in 1899 were African American.

“One horse was found that had been swimming for two or three days. The poor animal was entirely exhausted. The rescuing party succeeded in placing the animal on the roof of a floating house.”²¹⁷ Only after stock rescues and losses were described in detail did the correspondent briefly describe the rescue of human victims, and then only in generalized terms, giving more value to livestock than human lives.²¹⁸

The correspondent emphasized the heroism of planters, stating that they were “...nobly helping each other...”²¹⁹ The article then mentioned “The overseer of Rogers' plantation...” suggesting that their employees were actually doing the work of rescue.²²⁰ The lingering use of the term “overseer” itself stressed that Black farm workers were still regarded as little more than resources even if they could not be overtly claimed as property.

Black flood victims were even described like draft animals in descriptions of relief efforts. In order to relieve victims in Juliff, Texas, in 1899, a correspondent reported that:

“This train...went as far as Howden, where the track was found to be in an unsafe condition and the destination for which it started was abandoned so far as pulling the car with the engine. But those in charge were not to be daunted and...twelve or fifteen negroes lent a hand in pulling it to Juliff, where the supplies for that point were taken out and the car will be sent to Sandy Point this morning...”²²¹

²¹⁷ “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS. BRENHAM WILL SEND OUT A PARTY WITH PROVISIONS. A Voyage Through the Overflowed Bottoms by a Party in a Small Boat,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

²¹⁸ For another example equating “help” with stock, see: “TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION. The Losses of the Houston and Texas Central Are Enormous,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²¹⁹ Also, planters were given credit for the rescues, though the wording was that they “sent” the boats, not manning them personally, and the article specifically described a rescue of one family by an overseer. “TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²²⁰ “TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²²¹ “BRAZORIA COUNTY. The Flood Has Now Reached that Section. RIVER IS RISING RAPIDLY. It Is Now Withim (sp) a Mile of Howden Station. A THOUSAND NEGROES CONGREGATED,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

A vivid image of Black farm workers pulling a box car like draft animals was potentially introduced into the collective memory. Clearly, the relief committee perceived Black laborers as appropriate to use for a job normally reserved for draft animals. The track was deemed too unsafe for the engine to go any further, but safe enough for Black laborers to traverse five to six miles while pulling a filled boxcar along that same railroad track.²²² The question here must be why they chose Black labor to pull this boxcar rather than draft animals. Some draft animals must have been available for this purpose without risking human lives. But the loss of additional draft animals would undeniably have represented a personal financial loss to the white community. The loss of one or several of what were temporarily surplus laborers due to the flood would not have represented a personal financial loss for the white community.²²³

The Color of Pity and Charity: Black Dependency, White Paternalism

The 1899 Brazos river flood provided numerous examples of Balaji's racialization of pity.²²⁴ Frequently, Black victims were described in terms which were intended to invoke pity, but demonstrated little empathy in the sense that the correspondents felt any commonality with refugees. One correspondent described refugees in a cotton gin by explicitly invoking pity: "in these small buildings these poor negroes, who had lost their all...were huddled together. They were in a sorrowful condition, most of them having had food only once that day and some

²²² Juliff, Texas, is between Sugar Land, Texas, and Alvin, Texas, south of Houston, Texas, and Sandy Point, Texas, is about three miles south of Juliff. I was unable to locate a source showing Howden's location, however, other than a later statement in the article that it was seven miles from the (Brazos) river, then added that Howden was "five or six miles to the point where the relief parties are needed." "BRAZORIA COUNTY. The Flood Has Now Reached that Section," Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

²²³ In fact, it would have reduced the relief costs for white community leaders. Obviously, it is impossible to confirm how much influence this financial consideration had from the newspaper article, but the possibility must be considered. The idea of surplus Black labor was explicit in some articles.

²²⁴ See also Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, xi – xvi, 12–17.

nothing at all...most of them were very hungry and most of the children were crying piteously.”²²⁵ The correspondent described these victims as “poor,” “huddled,” “in a sorrowful condition,” and “crying piteously.” He emphasized their hunger, then informed his reader that the owner of the gin, Cochran, “killed three hogs and the other citizens of Stafford did all in their power to help the unfortunate negroes.”²²⁶ The Black refugees were to be pitied, and the white citizens were the source of their salvation, a process of “othering” that denied autonomy in a “white view of the dark world as dysfunctional, childlike and dependent.”²²⁷

Another correspondent reported that “in many instances the rescued people are in pitiable condition when found.”²²⁸ In this context, the correspondent was focused on the rescuers’ work, and the victims were described specifically as “pitiable.” The article continued, describing the conditions which the mostly Black victims had endured in purely physical terms, their cold from exposure and hunger. In other words, the purely “animal” suffering of these victims, meant to invoke pity rather than empathy, for victims who were not identified as having actively done anything on their own behalf except cling to a tree top.

A Calvert correspondent described local fundraising, then added, “the citizens of Calvert generally are doing everything in their power to relieve the sufferers who are, in the main, poor negroes, who have been left almost destitute by this devastating flood.”²²⁹ The correspondent’s primary focus was to encourage his readers to admire the largesse of the white “citizens” of Calvert. In order to reinforce their magnanimity, he used terms that portrayed the Black victims

²²⁵ Based on descriptions and sketches in newspapers, cotton gins often had a second floor, or at least a large loft, and were of sturdier construction than tenant houses. They may also have commonly been built on higher ground, and seemed to be the most common shelter for Black farm laborers during floods. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

²²⁶ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

²²⁷ Balaji, “Racializing Pity,” 51.

²²⁸ “WORK OF RESCUE,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

²²⁹ “UNHAPPY CALVERT,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

as objects of pity: “poor negroes” who were “almost destitute.”²³⁰ He described collections for relief, but focused on the act of charity and not the objects of it or their needs, using pity to reinforce the idea of Black dependency on white charity.²³¹

One front page headline informed readers that the “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE TRULY PITIABLE SO FAR AS HOMELESS NEGROES ARE CONCERNED.”²³² The Black victims were again described as “pitable.” A subheadline also asserted that they “...Rely Altogether Upon the White People For Succor,”²³³ another assertion that they were dependent and helpless followed by an invitation for readers to admire the magnanimity of the white residents of the area, linking pity, dependency, charity and race. In the last subheadline, the newspaper added fear by suggesting “Much Sickness Is Bound To Follow, Which Will Add Greatly To the Distress Of the Situation.”²³⁴ The diseases most often feared in the aftermath of this sort of disaster were also those which were recognized as contagious, such as yellow fever and malaria.²³⁵ The vectors for these epidemic diseases were only beginning to be understood, but in the minds of the general public, poor, non-white populations who were perceived as

²³⁰ He also described the victims as “terror stricken.” The contrast here and elsewhere between white citizens and the Black “sufferers” was notable. Citizen was mostly reserved for white native-born middle-and-upper-class residents. “UNHAPPY CALVERT,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

²³¹ In Balaji’s words, “race is central to how pity is enacted.” Balaji, “Racializing Pity,” 51.

²³² “THE FLOOD’S AWFUL RAVAGES: SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE TRULY PITIABLE SO FAR AS HOMELESS NEGROES ARE CONCERNED....They Are Without Shelter, Food Or Clothing and Rely Altogether Upon the White People For Succor. Much Sickness Is Bound To Follow, Which Will Add Greatly To the Distress Of the Situation,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 1.

²³³ THE FLOOD’S AWFUL RAVAGES....They Are Without Shelter, Food Or Clothing and Rely Altogether Upon the White People For Succor,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 1.

²³⁴ THE FLOOD’S AWFUL RAVAGES...Much Sickness Is Bound To Follow, Which Will Add Greatly To the Distress Of the Situation,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 1.

²³⁵ Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South*, 34, 37–38.

unsanitary were to be feared as a breeding ground for epidemics.²³⁶ Readers would immediately have understood the combination of class, race, and deprivation as a threat to public health.²³⁷

The invocation of pity was obvious in the choice of descriptors used for victims. At Richmond, Texas, “the Galveston life saving crew arrived at noon and rescued many of the starved, half-naked, frightened darkies, who present a pitiable sight.”²³⁸ The pity here was explicit; he referred to them as a “pitiable sight.” The adjectives he used to describe them reinforced that: “starved, half-naked, frightened.” “Half-naked” was also dehumanizing because it suggested that they were a lesser human, incapable of understanding and meeting the conventions of polite society. “Frightened” reinforced the image of these victims as child-like. But the use of the derogatory racial identifier, “darkies,” placed these Black farm laborers in the lowest social category, one which was perceived as having little or nothing in common with white people. The correspondent was urging readers to pity them, using terms which were extremely racialized and made them the objects of white benevolence.²³⁹

Correspondents described Black refugees in words which built heavily on a perception of them as incompetent and childlike.²⁴⁰ For instance, Dr. W. H. Oliver reported to the *Bryan Morning Eagle* that, “the negroes were congregated at the gin and enjoying life to fullest extent the circumstances would admit.”²⁴¹ Oliver’s characterization of the Black refugees in the loft of the gin removed all sense of danger or hardship or even urgency from readers’ perceptions. The

²³⁶ Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South*, 159–161. Mckiernan–Gonzalez analyzes the uneven application of medical quarantine at the border based on these assumptions about Mexican and Black migrants. Mckiernan–González, *Fevered Measures*, 3, 5–6, 9–13.

²³⁷ White empathy can most clearly be seen in the detailed losses of white land-owners and businesses which were described in much more detail, while white pity appeared in the form of the vague, even deprecatory descriptions of Black tenants' losses. Analyses of property losses are dealt with in more detail elsewhere.

²³⁸ “RICHMOND IS UNDER WATER. The Town Is Filled with Refugees, and Others Are Being Brought In---Crops Are Absolutely Ruined,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

²³⁹ Examples of Balaji's racialization of pity in disaster. Balaji, “Racializing Pity,” 51.

²⁴⁰ Balaji, “Racializing Pity,” 51.

²⁴¹ “THE RIVERS,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, July 4, 1899, 1.

phrase "...enjoying life to the fullest extent..." implied that these victims were not taking their danger seriously, that they were intellectually incapable of recognizing that danger, and they lacked the sensibility to experience the situation as hardship as a white person would have.

A Navasota, Texas, correspondent similarly subtitled his report with "The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor,"²⁴² claiming that "a visitor among the river bottom scenes will note many instances of humor, pathos and ridicule. Altogether too large a majority of the helpless colored sufferers not only accept the situation as it comes, but do it with every indication of extreme indifference and utter lack of the sense of responsibility."²⁴³ This correspondent criticized their reactions, implying that they were less than adult and incompetent to understand the gravity of their situation. Thus, they were the proper targets both for white pity and for white benevolence and control.²⁴⁴

Black dependency on white benevolence was often emphasized in how the distribution of relief was described. In 1899, relief to the Black refugees at Stafford, Texas, were described in childlike and pitiful terms: "these were the first supplies of any kind that had been sent to the poor negroes, and it made their hearts glad when they found out what was in store for them."²⁴⁵ He used the modifier "poor" to generate pity for the victims, then described their reaction with a phrase one might use for a small child on Christmas morning. This image of a desperate and

²⁴² The *Houston Daily Post* ran an article apparently from the same correspondent on the same day, but with some significant alterations in the reports. "AT NAVASOTA. The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor," *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2.

²⁴³ Part of this quote appears later in this chapter, but in the version which appeared in the *Houston Daily Post* that day. "AT NAVASOTA. The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor," *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2; and "THE SITUATION AT NAVASOTA," *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²⁴⁴ However, correspondents commonly attributed such behavior in white middle-class survivors of the 1900 Galveston hurricane to shock at their experiences. "SOME SURVIVORS REACH HOUSTON," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 4. No correspondent in 1899 suggested that Black survivors might be subject to the same sort of shock, much less that they might be protecting themselves by concealing their feelings from hypervigilant white observers while in a situation where they were more visible and vulnerable than normal.

²⁴⁵ "AT AND NEAR SUGARLAND. PROVISIONS WERE CARRIED TO THE REFUGEES FROM HOUSTON. Many Negroes Were Brought Back, but There Are Still Hundreds There," *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

helpless people was reinforced by adding how long they had been without food, referring to them as “starving.”²⁴⁶ This same correspondent, discussing relief efforts, later suggested that employment be provided and stated that “the negroes are in a bewildered state and know not what to do.”²⁴⁷ Again, he portrayed them as childlike and helpless and not mentally capable of taking care of themselves, in need of white guidance, charity, and control.

Black victims were frequently described in words that suggested they reacted emotionally only. The Houston *Daily Post* stated “...hundreds of men, women and children in the negro district of the Fourth ward are taking refuge on the tops of their houses and screaming for help.”²⁴⁸ The final phrase of this sentence projected imagery of panicked and emotionally childlike people who were dependent and in need of white benevolence.²⁴⁹ A Brenham, Texas, correspondent claimed “to the wails from human beings, perched in trees and on housetops, was added the neighing of horses, the lowing of the drowning cattle and the braying of mules.”²⁵⁰ These Black victims were characterized as wailing, a term most commonly used for infants or for non-white women mourning the dead. Their “wails” were also linked to the panicked noises of livestock in the same sentence, drawing a parallel between Black victims and panicked livestock.

Black helplessness in the face of disaster could be emphasized by giving them agency in negative terms. A correspondent in 1899 reported to the Houston *Daily Post* that “quite a number

²⁴⁶ “AT AND NEAR SUGARLAND. PROVISIONS WERE CARRIED TO THE REFUGEES FROM HOUSTON. Many Negroes Were Brought Back, but There Are Still Hundreds There,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

²⁴⁷ This emphasis on “employment” for Black refugees is tied to exactly how relief functioned in the aftermath of disasters. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. “AT AND NEAR SUGARLAND. PROVISIONS WERE CARRIED TO THE REFUGEES FROM HOUSTON. Many Negroes Were Brought Back, but There Are Still Hundreds There,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

²⁴⁸ “THE BRAZOS AT WACO. A Negro Settlement Inundated and Many Are Homeless,” Houston *Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5.

²⁴⁹ The irony is that the two common ways to alert rescuers was shouting or gunfire. The latter would have been extremely risky if white officials chose to view it as a riot, possibly refusing to send any help whatsoever. Also, generic or invented stories would not have been uncommon for the “yellow” journalism of the time period. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, ix, xi, 4, 88.

²⁵⁰ “AROUND BRENHAM. Wails from Human Beings Perched on Trees---Starvation Rampant,” San Antonio *Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

of negroes have been in Sealy today begging for food.”²⁵¹ Here the Black refugees were described as actively doing something about their situation, but that action was one which would be perceived negatively in the minds of white readers. “Begging” contradicted American ideas about self-sufficient and independent “citizens,” and also invoked images of poor colonized countries or European urban slums, “lesser” people who were to be pitied and controlled.

Someone could describe Black efforts to rescue themselves and their goods but fail to recognize what he was describing. A correspondent in the area of Simonton reported that:

“during the afternoon and evening a number of the boats hastily built by the negroes when the water made their use an absolute necessity, and which were not inaptly termed “coffins” by the members of the relief party on account of their shape, were passed. How some of these unwieldy boxes were kept afloat in (sic) a mystery. Usually they were loaded to the water’s edge with trunks, clothing and household effects and from the sides of many of them placed porkers, shivering fowls or whining cats and dogs looked out over the wide expanse of waters. The boats were as a general rule propelled by the energetic use of plain boards or planks, which in nowise resembled oars, but which seemed to serve admirably the purpose for which they were intended. The blacks in them were those whose household goods had been saved, partially or completely, from the floods and who, their families having been removed to places of safety, were doing all in their power to get their poor effects to dry ground.”²⁵²

²⁵¹ Identical wording appeared in the San Antonio *Daily Express* on the same date. “WORK OF RESCUE AT SEALY. NEGROES ARE BEING MOVED RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE. Everything in the Bottoms Has Been Washed Away and People Are Destitute,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1; and “SAN FELIPE COUNTRY. The River There Nine Miles Wide---Suffering, Aid Badly Needed,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 2.

²⁵² From this article, it was clear that many of these victims tried to save their property, despite claims to the contrary. Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

The correspondent condescendingly belittled the boats and the Black farmers' ingenuity. But just prior to this story in the same article, he had described the physical challenges for proper boats with oars, particularly for the white members of the rescue party, without recognizing the increased difficulty, or any difficulty, in what these Black men were doing for themselves.²⁵³ In fact, they were not even referred to as men, only by race. They were not credited with rescuing their own families; their families were passively "removed to places of safety." Nor did he recognize that here were Black refugees actively doing everything they could to save or recover what they could, both in household goods and livestock, men who were demonstrating resilience and initiative. For him, they were simply a humorous, pitiable story to recount.

At the same time, survivors were blamed for not saving more of their property, an overtly negative aspect of pity as opposed to empathy. A correspondent from Navasota, Texas, reported to the San Antonio *Daily Express* that "in nearly every instance the negroes left their places without the slightest preparation, not even taking down the water bucket that hung on the gallery or stored goods in tops of cabins and barns and providing nothing for stock."²⁵⁴ This was very overt criticism of Black farm workers. He believed they should have delayed evacuating, obviously contrary to many other articles, in order to save more of their goods and livestock even at risk of their own lives. Yet other articles admitted that they had had no time for anything except escape and instead criticized those who drowned because they delayed too long.²⁵⁵ Even

²⁵³ There was also no recognition of the courage or sheer hard work involved in this work. The San Antonio *Daily Express* reported that at Sunnyside, Texas, "...the people are tearing up their sheds and making rough punts. These cannot stand the swift currents and sweeping eddies of the terribly swollen stream..." Obviously, there was a great deal of danger involved in the use of such boats, which went unrecognized by the correspondent from Simonton. Sunnyside was also a freedom colony, and the attempted rescuers were almost certainly African American, a detail which the correspondent omitted. Untitled, San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 2.

²⁵⁴ "AT NAVASOTA. The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2; and "THE SITUATION AT NAVASOTA," Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²⁵⁵ For instance, one article named three Black victims and blamed their deaths on waiting too late to evacuate. "UNHAPPY CALVERT," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

this Navasota correspondent admitted one instance where livestock had been housed in the owner's cabin in the hopes they would survive. Clearly he knew some Black victims had attempted to save some of their goods and livestock, despite his own earlier criticism.²⁵⁶

Apparently it was the loss of livestock which most upset the Navasota correspondent.²⁵⁷ Some of the exact same wording appeared in the Houston *Daily Post*, but in the *Post*, the sentence just preceding this paragraph stated that "...the lack of sufficient work stock is going to be a (unreadable word) hindrance...."²⁵⁸ Without those animals, putting the land back into production quickly was going to be quite difficult. He was quite judgmental throughout the *Post*'s version of the article, in fact, clearly believing that the Black farm workers would be left on charity, not because of the disaster, but because they lacked foresight, energy, thrift, and any sense of responsibility or ambition.²⁵⁹ The correspondent was quite specific, in fact, insisting that "altogether too large a majority of the helpless colored sufferers not only accept the situation as it comes but do it with every indication of extreme indifference and utter lack of responsibility, an imperative qualification of every people with ambition. They are charges that must be nursed and cared for."²⁶⁰ The "helpless" victims were to be pitied and needed white guidance and charity, using pity and disaster to reinforce ideas of Black helplessness.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ Many articles made it clear that the flood level rose significantly higher than previous floods, trapping people who reasonably thought they were safe and drowning livestock which had been moved to what normally was high ground. "AT NAVASOTA. The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2.

²⁵⁷ The conditions of sharecropping may provide the context for this conflict in priorities. Draft animals for plowing were provided by the employer in most cases, and the sharecroppers may reasonably have prioritized saving their own lives and property over the employer's property. While white landowners would have preferred that they save draft animals first since they would be responsible for replacing them.

²⁵⁸ "THE SITUATION AT NAVASOTA," Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²⁵⁹ "THE SITUATION AT NAVASOTA," Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²⁶⁰ Part of this appeared verbatim in the San Antonio *Daily Express* on the same day, but the *Express* version did not include the material explicitly criticizing the supposed lack of ambition and dependency of the African American victims. "THE SITUATION AT NAVASOTA," Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5; and "AT NAVASOTA. The Negroes Indifferent to Their Losses. Pathos and Humor," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2.

²⁶¹ He demonstrated far more sympathy for the white merchants who were going to sustain losses as a result of the loss of crops which had secured loans, but directed no blame at them.

Others who were concerned about the loss of draft animals were more subtle in their criticism. A correspondent from Calvert, Texas, reported to the *Houston Daily Post* that “the negro tenants have lost their all, but the planters generally have saved their work stock and they will thus be enabled to do something to retrieve the great misfortune which has visited them.”²⁶² He drew a direct comparison between African Americans who did not own the land, and possibly not their stock, and the white landowners, implying that the Black farm workers had been negligent. By making this comparison, he then added his opinion that the planters would be able to recover fairly quickly, implying that the desperate situation of the Black farm workers was due to their lack of responsibility. However, the Black tenants almost always lived closer to the river, at much greater risk of danger from the flood waters. And white landowners would have received warnings about the flooding first and may or may not have passed those warnings accurately to their tenants in a timely manner. Some stories suggest landowners may even have required their tenants to save the landowners’ work stock before trying to save their own.²⁶³ Either possibility fits the rural labor system of the time, especially when the tenants were African American.

Newspapers also lacked much sympathy for Black farm laborers who did try to save their property. A Brookshire correspondent reported to the *Houston Daily Post* in 1899 that there were “only two dead negroes; both were drowned in trying to save their property.”²⁶⁴ The victims were unnamed, the exact conditions in which they drowned were not described nor was the reader told what kind of property they were trying to save. This bare statement was passively disapproving,

²⁶² However other stories suggest that the planters themselves may have lost enough livestock to impair their ability to replant. “SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5; “TERRIBLE DESTRUCTION. The Losses of the Houston and Texas Central Are Enormous,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5; and “SITUATION AT HEMPSTEAD,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

²⁶³ “TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOM DID NOT HEED IT. Hempstead Has Her Hands Full Taking Care of the Stricken of that Vicinity,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

²⁶⁴ “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE...THERE WILL BE HARD WORK FOR A YEAR: In Keeping the Poor Negro Tenants Alive, for They Have Lost Their All---The Loss of Life Has Been Very Small, Only Two Men Drowned,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1.

including only the victims' race. Other articles treated attempts to save livestock as almost comical, such as accounts of finding "four cur dogs sitting on a cabin table, a bunch of swine sleeping in the bed and chickens having a happy time among the rafters while household goods floated around on the floor."²⁶⁵ Not only were the Black residents of this home not given credit for trying to save their livestock, possibly in the only way available to them, but they were subtly criticized for putting the lives of their animals ahead of household goods.

Some stories were openly critical. In 1913, the Dallas *Morning News* described John Simpson in unflattering terms. "In his anxiety to save a 220-pound hog, John Simpson, a negro, living in East Waco, forgot for the time being that he had a wife and children. He struggled with the hog for an hour before he brought the animal to high ground. His family was carried to places of safety."²⁶⁶ Unlike most Black flood victims, Simpson was named with details included.²⁶⁷ But the correspondent clearly cast him as having poor judgment; in particular he assumed that Simpson knew or should have known that his family was in danger, and naming him opened him to additional criticism from the community.²⁶⁸

But contrast Simpson in particular with other incidents involving white men such as the death of C. S. Dawson. From Calvert, Texas, Dawson was described as a "cripple" who drowned in an effort to save his horse, and "paid for his humanity with his life."²⁶⁹ Dawson was showing humanity by trying to save the life of a horse. Despite being described as a "cripple," he was

²⁶⁵ This came immediately after a description of Black survivors as helpless, indifferent, and lacking responsibility or ambition who needed white guidance. "THE SITUATION AT NAVASOTA," Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

²⁶⁶ "First Train out of Waco," Dallas *Morning News*, December 5, 1913, 2.

²⁶⁷ Several, possibly most, of the African Americans named individually in reports on disaster were being criticized in some form.

²⁶⁸ The story omitted the possibility that in the man's mind, his family would starve without that hog.

²⁶⁹ It is possible that this is the same person as T. S. Dawson, identified in other articles as a merchant and drowning victim who was trying to save livestock, but without the information that he was disabled. "SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED," Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

granted compassion and empathy for his choice. Simpson not only did not receive any sympathy, he was condemned because someone else rescued his family while he saved an animal on whom their continued survival might depend.

Sometimes correspondents gave a little credit to the Black farm workers for their own actions in a limited way. A Hempstead, Texas, correspondent conceded that "...in justice to these poor negroes be it said that when the flood was wiping out everything they ignored their own household goods, all they possessed in the world, and risked their lives, swimming among the cattle to save dumb brutes from perishing, though not one of them could they call their own."²⁷⁰ Here, in contrast to more common complaints that Black farm workers had failed to save vital stock, the correspondent produced an image of these flood victims risking their own lives for animals that were not even their own. Yet he did not specifically attribute the heroism or humanity to them that was given to white men who did something similar, such as Dawson, but instead invoked pity by calling them "poor negroes."²⁷¹

The Color of Guilt and Innocence: Warnings and Evacuation

Black flood victims were frequently criticized for their decisions on when, or if, to evacuate, especially during the 1899 Brazos river flooding. Some correspondents overtly blamed Black victims, insisting that they had been given adequate warnings without questioning whether, and to whom or even by whom, those warnings had been distributed. In 1899, a correspondent from Hempstead reported that "County Judge Hannay wired to Brookshire early

²⁷⁰ "TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOM DID NOT HEED IT. Hempstead Has Her Hands Full Taking Care of the Stricken of that Vicinity," *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

²⁷¹ This incident is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. "SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED," *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

enough that this overflow was well above the 1885 mark and that only the earliest movements would save them from destruction, but his advice seems to have been unheeded.”²⁷² And in case this was not a strong enough condemnation, the title of the article stated that “TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOMS DID NOT HEED IT.”²⁷³ The article blamed the Black tenants, although there was no evidence that most of them received any credible warning or whether the warning actually included the information that this was a worse flood event than recent severe floods.

The next day, another correspondent from Hempstead, possibly the same man, asserted again that people had refused to listen to warnings. This time he specifically targeted Sunnyside, probably a freedmen’s community, complaining that “they were warned on Saturday last from here to move their stock and get themselves out of the way and notice was given them that the overflow was six feet above the 1885 mark. It seems that they could or would not fully understand.”²⁷⁴ However, the correspondent also admitted that the message had been sent from Hempstead, sixteen miles from Sunnyside, to Brookshire, Texas, ten miles from Sunnyside, by telegraph based on the previous day’s article, and then conceded that Sunnyside was “without any telegraphic or telephonic communication.”²⁷⁵

The article made it very clear that the correspondent was reporting this third or fourth hand at best and had no knowledge who had delivered that supposed warning, to whom it had

²⁷² “TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOM DID NOT HEED IT,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

²⁷³ “TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOM DID NOT HEED IT,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

²⁷⁴ “THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE: THAT COMMUNITY BELIEVED TO BE IN DIRE DISTRESS. People Were Warned to Get Out of the Bottoms, But Would Not Heed It,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

²⁷⁵ In fact other articles conceded that without a telegraph connection, they had not been adequately warned. “THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2; “MANY CATTLE LOST,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5; and “AT HEMPSTEAD. The Loss in the County Will Amount to Over \$500,000,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 4.

been delivered, and what the specifics were of that warning, much less any context for why the residents of Sunnyside might not have trusted that warning. He also admitted that the residents had, in fact, taken measures in response to that warning based on past experiences with flooding in the area, and he strongly criticized Black farmers because they lost stock moved to places which had previously been safe from flooding.²⁷⁶ Yet newspapers were also scornful of Black farm workers in the area who did evacuate in advance of the April 1900 flood, only months later. “It is not thought that there is any danger of an overflow, but negroes are very much excited from fake reports, most of them having moved out of the bottoms, and it will take some time to get them back to work again.”²⁷⁷

In fact, there was no evidence in articles from Brookshire and vicinity that farm laborers in nearby outlying communities such as Sunnyside received any clear warning whatsoever.²⁷⁸ Other correspondents conceded that victims may have been taken completely by surprise by the unprecedented flood levels and placed some responsibility elsewhere. A correspondent from Brookshire, Chief Lineman Lowry, reported to the *Houston Daily Post* that:

“The boats and special trains from Houston and other points have not yet reached Brookshire, they are too late. The people, (word unreadable) will be drowned before they can be saved. This afternoon there were from 300 to 400 persons on a small island near Brookshire, and the water was rising rapidly (unreadable) fear they are drowned by this

²⁷⁶ See also paragraph below with a similar report on Sunnyside. “THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

²⁷⁷ “Negroes are Fleeing,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 11, 1900, 2.

²⁷⁸ See also paragraph on prior page related to “BRAZOS RIVER RAGING. The Water Is Still Rising Very Rapidly and Great Damage Is Being Done. THE "KATY" TRACK WASHED OUT: Rescuing the Flood Sufferers--- Some May Yet Perish,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 8.

time. They had not the slightest means of escape. The river here tonight is six feet higher than in 1885, which was the record (unreadable) the present.”²⁷⁹

Lowry confirmed that the river was significantly higher than in the past, and the relatively mild topography of Texas in that region is such that a difference of six feet in the elevation of the flood would probably have covered a great deal of land which had always been considered safe previously. In his view, they had not only not been negligent, but they could not have evacuated far enough to be safe. While he did create some sense that they were helpless, it was not as pronounced as with other instances and seemed to be in service of creating a greater sense of urgency in sending boats for rescue work.

But he also detached this urgency from the people themselves; they were not criticized but he provided no information about their identity. The victims trapped on this mound near Brookshire must have been almost all African Americans. Virtually every time a group of Black flood victims was mentioned, they were assigned an identifying term, mostly “negro” or “colored.” The absence of those terms here at a moment when the victims were absolved of guilt for their situation, an absence contrary to customary usage, may have left some readers the impression that this particular group was not African American.

Some other correspondents acknowledged that people were not, in fact, given adequate warning of the dangers, but still could not resist hinting at their opinions of the victims. A correspondent from Hempstead, Texas, reported to the *Houston Daily Post* in 1899 that conditions in Sunnyside, Texas, mentioned above, “show a sadder state of affairs than here. Miles away from a telegraph wire, they could not be sufficiently warned. Cattle were taken to apparently safe places Saturday, and by Sunday they were drowned. Many darkies had their

²⁷⁹ “THE STORY OF A LINEMAN. PEOPLE SOUGHT SAFETY ON WHAT IS NOW AN ISLAND. The Relief Train May Be Too Late to Do Them Any Good, He Fears,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

retreat cut off and are missing.”²⁸⁰ He admitted they probably did not receive a sufficient warning of the dangers, pointing out their distance from a point where a telegraphic message would have been received. And because Sunnyside was probably a freedman’s colony, they would very likely have been the last to receive any warnings, and possibly received those warnings several people removed from the source, increasing distortion in the message. He admitted that they had tried to get their livestock to safety, presumably to locations based on past experiences with flooding in the area. But he could not resist the derogatory gesture of referring to them as “darkies,” the most demeaning of the racial identifiers in use in the newspapers, possibly in an attempt to limit any sympathy for them.

Sometimes the criticism was leavened with some superficial respect. On July 4, 1899, the *Houston Daily Post*, in further reporting on several deaths near Calvert which had first been reported on July 1, 1899, the correspondent stated that “two old and highly respected colored men, Tom Tyson and Dave White, who had remained too long in their respective houses on Pidwell creek, were drowned while attempting to swim out, and a colored woman, Rosanna Brown, with her infant clasped in her arms, was found dead in her home on Sandy Creek.”²⁸¹ The two Black men were first identified as “old” and “highly respected” in addition to the more respectful identifier, “colored.” These terms established a certain amount of dignity for these two men, but they were then criticized for not leaving their homes sooner. The correspondent did not

²⁸⁰ A report with virtually identical wording, including the derogatory “darkies,” ran in the *San Antonio Daily Express* on the same day. “MANY CATTLE LOST,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5; and “AT HEMPSTEAD. The Loss in the County Will Amount to Over \$500,000,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 4.

²⁸¹ The *San Antonio Daily Express* ran a report with almost identical language on the same day, possibly through a wire service. “THE HIGH WATER AT CALVERT: Reports that More Than a Score of Persons Have Been Drowned. THE LOSS CAN NOT BE APPROXIMATED NOW,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; and “UNHAPPY CALVERT. Heartrending Scenes and Disastrous Consequences Attended By the Flood,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

directly criticize Brown, but the statement that she and her child were found in her home implied the same criticism—she waited too long and was trapped.

Some newspaper reports conceded that this flood was unprecedented and that the Black victims were not negligent. The San Antonio *Daily Express* ran a report from Calvert, Texas that stated:

“The earlier reports of heavy loss of life in Robertson county, caused by a meeting of the waters of the Brazos and Little Brazos rivers, have been confirmed. The information received here today from Calvert, which is in the midst of the scene of the destruction is meager, but is to the effect that over seventy people are missing. Nine bodies have been recovered. The floods of the two rivers came up so rapidly that the negroes living in between the water courses had no opportunity of escaping. They were caught in the trap and drowned.”²⁸²

When the correspondent was speaking about the dead and the bodies, no racial references were made, although most of the victims were clearly African Americans. He may or may not have intended to dilute any sympathy for these Black deaths. He then admitted that the two rivers had risen exceptionally quickly and trapped the residents of this strip, but spoke of them as “caught in the trap....” By using that particular phrase rather than simply saying they were trapped, he invoked images of animals, dehumanizing the victims even after absolving them of guilt.²⁸³

Reports on losses by prosperous white men explicitly absolved them of guilt, leaving no doubt that they could not have foreseen the flood levels. The Houston *Daily Post* reported that

²⁸² This narrow strip between the rivers has been altered by manmade changes to the course of the Little Brazos River. “FLOOD'S DIRE DESTRUCTION: CALVERT'S FEARFUL RUIN... Negroes Caught in a Trap and Drowned. Property Loss Will reach \$5,000,000,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 3, 1899, 1.

²⁸³ This was the same strip of land where convict miners and white managers and guards were reported to have been cut off by the unexpected rise of the rivers, a topic that needs to be expanded on in future research. The inclusion of the white managers, guards, and their families among those cut off by the rapid rise of the river should have made it difficult to criticize African American victims. “THE FLOOD,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, July 2, 1899, 3.

“our planters do not know what to expect since their places of safety in ordinary overflows are gone.”²⁸⁴ This was one of several reports that acknowledged that past experience with flooding was not enough this time. But the report only mentioned the planters, the large landowners who readers would presume were white. The correspondent did not include the Black farm workers who were blamed in another article on the same page of that edition for not evacuating soon enough or to a safe enough location.

Another article about the Brookshire area reported that “so rapid was the rise that people were driven from their homes without saving anything except such few articles of clothing, etc., as they could gather up and take with them in their hasty flight.”²⁸⁵ This correspondent presented a much different image of the victims than more critical articles. The image created here was one of people frantically grabbing a few things as they tried to get their families out the door and to safety. He did not suggest that they could or should have delayed evacuating to try to save livestock, for instance, and the implication was that had they delayed to try to save more, they probably would have been trapped. But the racial identity of the victims was omitted, mostly African Americans, perhaps to avoid openly directing sympathy to those Black victims.²⁸⁶

Often, criticism of Black victims was relatively subtle. A correspondent from Reagan, Texas, reported to the Houston *Daily Post* that “great work was done by the citizens here, who secured boats and went down the bottom, succeeding in getting out all the negro tenants who had

²⁸⁴ “SITUATION AT HEMPSTEAD,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

²⁸⁵ “BRAZOS RIVER RAGING. The Water Is Still Rising Very Rapidly and Great Damage Is Being Done. THE “KATY” TRACK WASHED OUT: Rescuing the Flood Sufferers---Some May Yet Perish,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 8.

²⁸⁶ Similarly, the San Antonio *Daily Express* ran a report from Brenham that stated that “those on the bottom farms barely escaped with their lives and had no time to look out for stock.” While there was no criticism in this statement, the racial identity of the victims was omitted, though they were almost certainly African American from the context of the rest of the article. “HOMELESS IN BURLESON COUNTY. The People in Absolute Want Without Supplies of Any Kind,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 1.

not come out before the water...flooded the country..."²⁸⁷ This report identified a class division between the people doing the rescuing, "citizens" who were presumably white, and those being rescued, the "negro tenants." The criticism was not direct, but the report implied that the victims should have tried to evacuate before they did.

When the victims were implied to be white, the correspondents omitted any suggestion that they had ignored warnings to evacuate and often directly absolved them of guilt. A correspondent from Richmond, Texas, reported to the San Antonio *Daily Express* that "many who lived in the edges and on the high places, who thought they were safe from high water are compelled to move out today...many houses have three and four families in them."²⁸⁸ Readers were reassured that at least some of these victims lived on high ground, implying that they had been reasonable in not evacuating sooner. In other words, they were not at fault for their situation. But the absence of any mention of their race... was also significant, with their location on high ground implying that these victims were white rather than Black.²⁸⁹ That Richmond residents had taken these particular victims into their own homes reinforced the implication that they were white. Black refugees were generally housed in tents, railroad cars, churches, or occasionally in public buildings, not in white homes.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ "REAGAN SURROUNDED BY WATER," Houston *Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

²⁸⁸ "SITUATION AT RICHMOND. The River Is Rising---No Southern Pacific Trains Run By," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 1.

²⁸⁹ High ground suggested white farmers since most Black farmers and tenants lived in the bottoms. How well-known this geography was and how much it was likely to influence the perceptions of readers is difficult to determine, though Foley asserted that most Blackland prairie landowners were white. Foley, *The White Scourge*, 4, 30-31; and Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 2-3.

²⁹⁰ At least those are the locations mentioned in newspaper articles. The one exception I found was during the worst of the 1900 Galveston hurricane when some non-white residents were allowed into white homes to take shelter, but only until the danger had passed. Often, they were segregated to the most dangerous portions of those homes. In large public buildings, African American victims during the 1900 and 1915 hurricanes were segregated on the lowest, most vulnerable floor of public spaces that acted as shelters, such as train depots. In 1900, an unknown number of people drowned in the Union Depot in Galveston, for instance, so their fears were not unfounded. "Drowned in Union Depot," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1900, 2.

The Color of Heroism: The Rescued and the Rescuers

In the eyes of correspondents, Black victims were not only not heroic, they were open to criticism for acts which were celebrated as heroic for a white drowning victim. In 1899, the *Houston Daily Post* reported that

“the two deaths mentioned were those of Austin Raymond, Jr., and Charles Thompson, both colored, who met their fates in a vain attempt to swim from their homes near Simonton to the prairie on Tuesday. At the time boats which had been hastily constructed when the water began to rise were being gotten into action as rapidly as possible, the families of the two men named were in comparatively (sic) safety and the effort made by Raymond and Thompson to reach the high land on the prairie was, according to those who were on the spot, an unnecessary one.”²⁹¹

These two Black men not only were denied the status of tragic heroes, they were criticized for their lack of patience and implied lack of trust in white relief efforts to rescue their families. The correspondent used the terms “vain attempt” and “unnecessary,” insisting that these men's families were not in urgent danger. But the correspondent ignored the question of whether or not they had any knowledge of relief efforts or that anyone knew that their families were in danger or any reason to believe that the flood waters would not rise high enough to drown their trapped families. While other articles criticized Black disaster victims for failing to help themselves, for their lack of initiative, these two men were criticized because they failed to wait, childlike, trusting that the white population of the region would come to their aid in time, with a parent's

²⁹¹ “IN FLOOD DISTRICT: Perilous Trip Made by Houston Relief Party. BROOKSHIRE TO FULSHEAR. Only Two Persons Were Drowned in that Territory. NEGROES ARE ALL ON THE PRAIRIE. Relief Boats Have Removed Flood Sufferers to Dry Land. FLEET OF FIVE SKIFFS DID GOOD WORK: Party of Negroes,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

mysterious knowledge that a child was in danger. Those who waited for aid were accepting their “proper” dependent role and could be used to highlight white benevolence or could be criticized to reaffirm the idea that they needed white guidance. Those who did not were criticized for refusing to behave dependently and refusing to trust in white benevolence.

In fact, these men drowned on a Tuesday, but their families were not rescued until Thursday or Friday. Aside from the danger of drowning if the flood waters had risen higher during those two or three days, it was very likely that they were almost out of food on that Tuesday.²⁹² So their families actually waited for at least two more days for rescue and relief, while having little or nothing to eat.²⁹³ A third man who had been with the drowning victims, Swans Raymond, actually did reach the prairie safely on Tuesday with word that the families needed evacuation and may well have been the only way anyone knew for certain about the situation at Simonton. The rescue party which finally evacuated the families was not the party using the hastily built boats mentioned above; they were a group from Houston using boats they brought with them.²⁹⁴ The correspondent’s criticism of the two drowning victims was not based on the actual circumstances, but on an offended sense that these two Black men had refused to conform to views of them as childlike and dependent.

²⁹² The men had no way to know how high the water might continue to rise, especially when the flood waters had already risen higher than previously experienced. This newspaper was published on a Saturday and the article stated that their family members were rescued the day before. Assuming the article was submitted on Friday, they were rescued on Thursday. As the families were rescued with a large group of refugees from a gin house, it was extremely unlikely that any of the refugees had been able to bring food with them.

²⁹³ A later article, however, on the next page of that newspaper described the rescue of the group at Simonton, and at that point, the refugees were stewing chicken, probably animals they had brought with them in an effort to save and had been forced to slaughter for food, or possibly drowned animals they had scavenged from the flood waters. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

²⁹⁴ According to a later article, that Houston party was the first ones who had been sent toward Simonton and Fulshear, and clearly without this outside rescue party, the families would have waited even longer for relief. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2; and “IN FLOOD DISTRICT: Perilous Trip Made by Houston Relief Party,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

At least in newspaper reports, African Americans were rescued and played no active role in their own rescue generally. A correspondent from Marlin, Texas, reported that “a colored family, Robert Brockington, was being brought out of Big Creek bottom yesterday in a boat, when the boat capsized in the swift current and two children sand (sic) immediately.”²⁹⁵ The family was being brought out, not playing any active role, to judge by the report. But the lack of names for the rescuers suggested that they may have been African American as well, or at least relatively poor white farmers. The correspondent also failed to state whether or not the family or anyone else made any effort to rescue the two children, a pointed omission when generally readers were reassured that rescuers searched for white victims in similar circumstances.

Articles specifically named many white farm families who were not absolutely known to be safe, including what efforts were being made to reach them. In the same articles, Black families were not individually described in the same way by name or any other details. While large groups of Black refugees stranded on various high points were often mentioned in the aggregate, the correspondent did not describe specific efforts to reach them. In fact, the white victims sometimes used Black messengers to request help, such as “Mr. W. T. Riddick sent a message to the agent at Sartartia by a negro that he needed help, as did Mr. Bertrand.”²⁹⁶ The white men who sent the messages and were threatened by flood waters were named. The African American(s) they sent with the message were not, despite the fact they almost certainly had been in a great deal more danger in making the trip. Otherwise, Riddick and Bertran could simply have removed themselves to safety. Their messenger was reduced to the status of a carrier pigeon with no suggestion of heroism or his danger. White men, by contrast, were generally described as

²⁹⁵ “IN FALLS COUNTY,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 7.

²⁹⁶ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

active participants in saving themselves or had their experiences treated as adventurous. Riddick sent a message, and the Black messenger was simply a vehicle for transporting that message.

An article in the *Houston Daily Post* was headlined “THRILLING EXPERIENCE. Two Men Kept in a Tree for Trirty-two (sic) Hours.”²⁹⁷ The correspondent then described this “thrilling experience” of the two men on a fishing trip in very active terms in which no one else apparently played a role in their rescue. “They were camped on a high bank near the river and at midnight found themselves cut off from the hills by high water. They were soon forced to climb a tree, where they remained until Friday morning at 10 o’clock. They sat in the tree in the rain thirty-two hours without food or protection other than light summer clothing.”²⁹⁸ There was no hint of criticism, though with the weather conditions—up to twenty-one inches of rain for the past week reported in some areas—they should clearly have had reservations about camping next to a river due to flash flooding, very common in Texas.²⁹⁹ In this story, these two white men in a tree were the only actors saving themselves.³⁰⁰ How they got out of the tree and to safer ground was not mentioned at all, although the area would still have been flooded on Friday morning.³⁰¹

The San Antonio *Daily Express* did not shield the men’s identity, “William Jenkins and George Yard.”³⁰² But after that identification, the article reported on the incident in identical

²⁹⁷ “THRILLING EXPERIENCE. Two Men Kept in a Tree for Trirty-two (sic) Hours,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

²⁹⁸ “THRILLING EXPERIENCE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

²⁹⁹ “THE RAINFALL FOR THREE DAYS,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5; “IN BRAZOS COUNTY,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5; “Corn and Fruit Trees Down,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5; “Washouts at Hearne,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5; “Fruit Blown from Trees,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5; “Overflow Looked For,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5; and “DAMAGE IN AND NEAR BRENHAM,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

³⁰⁰ These two men appear in the 1900 census as white. “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, District 72, McClellan County, Texas, Sheet 19A, accessed March 4, 2023, ancestrylibrary.com; and “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, District 67, McClellan County, Texas, Sheet 19A, accessed March 4, 2023, ancestrylibrary.com. NOTE: while there were multiple William Jenkins, only one lived close to a George Yard.

³⁰¹ June 30, 1899.

³⁰² “INCIDENTS OF THE FLOOD. Two Fishermen on the Bosque Remained in a Tree Thirty-two Hours,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

words that emphasized their active role without criticism of their judgment. Nor did either article describe the emotional state of the two men. In other reports, the Black victims in trees were described as “terror stricken people.”³⁰³ They were helpless and unnamed, waiting for heroic white rescuers who were almost always mentioned in conjunction with them.³⁰⁴ When a white family and a single woman, named, were rescued from an elm tree, they were described as shivering and “famished,” but nothing suggesting that even the children were frightened by their experience.³⁰⁵ White victims were described as merely inconvenienced and uncomfortable, and in fact they could have a “thrilling experience.” Courage, fortitude, and adventure were reserved for white men, not Black people.

In other instances, the correspondent simply gave a fact or two about Black victims’ physical location without any information about the conditions the victims themselves were experiencing. A correspondent from Sealy explained that

“on the G. P. Ross farm there is a mound, the only dry place in the bottoms, which has an area of about three acres. On this mound there are 400 or 500 negroes who had gone there for safety. Eight or ten skiffs were put in service and the work of rescuing them gone into. They are being carried away as fast as possible, though...it is three miles to the river proper.”³⁰⁶

³⁰³ This article used “terror” or “terrified” several times when referring to Black victims. “UNHAPPY CALVERT. Heartrending Scenes and Disastrous Consequences Attended By the Flood,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

³⁰⁴ The exact language in this article was “...scores of business men and boys went out on the perfect sea of water formed by the meeting of the turbid waters of the Little and Big Brazos rivers to rescue the terror stricken people dotted about here and there in trees and on the tops of houses.” “UNHAPPY CALVERT,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

³⁰⁵ “UNHAPPY CALVERT,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

³⁰⁶ “WORK OF RESCUE AT SEALY. NEGROES ARE BEING MOVED RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE. Everything in the Bottoms Has Been Washed Away and People Are Destitute,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1.

Up to 500 Black people were stranded on a mound which was only 3 acres in size, and it was the only place of safety for at least three miles. He did not mention livestock, but from other articles, they almost certainly had brought some livestock with them, which means this mound was quite crowded, probably with extremely unsanitary conditions with no means to alleviate those problems. He also did not describe the situation of those stranded on the mound at all, such as whether they had any food or whether the skiffs were bringing food on return trips when the boats were mostly empty. He did not even describe whether or not the river was still rising and an immediate threat to these refugees. The focus was directed toward the work of the white rescuers rather than the survivors themselves, while the only person identified by name was the owner of the land being used by the refugees.

That small mound was not the only location where a sizable group of people were stranded on the highest point, locally, and whose situation was treated rather cavalierly. A correspondent reported “that 100 people on the Grant Jennings place, on Sterling Hill, eight miles from here, were collected on the hill and were unable to get away without assistance.”³⁰⁷ The race of the victims was not specified, but almost every article agreed that there were few victims who were not African Americans. In light of the emphasis on race otherwise, such a large group must surely have been mostly Black flood victims. Based on other reporting, had there been any white victims among this group, the correspondent would also have projected a much stronger sense of urgency in getting a rescue party to that hill. Nothing in the article actually mentioned anything being done to reach these victims, and in fact some of the volunteer rescuers from Houston were returning home, “there being no need of their services.”³⁰⁸ The owner of the

³⁰⁷ The correspondent was probably in Brookshire, Texas. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

³⁰⁸ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

land is the only one named, and the focus is on the helplessness of the Black victims and the work of the rescuers.

A third correspondent identified “At White's Switch, nine miles across from Richmond, 400 negroes in a pasture with only eight small houses to shelter them. They are badly in need of something to eat and have nothing in the world except the clothes upon their backs.”³⁰⁹ These Black refugees near Richmond, Texas, were clearly stranded by flood waters, but the correspondent only requested that people donate supplies for them. Although the correspondent described the need for and movement of rescue boats in other parts of that flooded district throughout this article, no suggestion was made that this group of refugees was even offered evacuation. However, he did name a contact for those who wished to send supplies for their relief, reinforcing their helplessness and white benevolence.³¹⁰

When a victim was white, correspondents often described their rescues in detail. A Richmond, Texas, correspondent described a white woman’s rescue in 1899:

“At 10 o’clock this morning information was received that the residence of Miss Lucy Skinner...was in great danger. County Clerk Fields at once procured a boat and went to her aid. He found Miss Skinner and brother in chairs upon the tops of tables, the water surrounding them in all directions, being two feet over the ground floor. Mr. Fields brought her safely to Richmond, but her brother refused to leave.”³¹¹

The readers were reassured that a rescue was immediately arranged for Lucy Skinner when they learned she was threatened. They were told who went and the situation he found when he

³⁰⁹ White's Switch may have had a freedman’s colony adjacent to it, based on the number of Black victims and the lack of reference to any white planters or landowners. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

³¹⁰ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

³¹¹ “RICHMOND IS UNDER WATER. The Town Is Filled with Refugees, and Others Are Being Brought In---Crops Are Absolutely Ruined,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

arrived, which reassured readers that she had, in fact, needed rescue. Skinner, about forty-six and single, was granted the honorific, “Miss.” Fields was identified once by the title of his public office, and once by the honorific “Mr.” Skinner’s brother, Luther, was not identified by name in the article at all, which was consistent with apparent attempts to shield white men from criticism in newspaper reporting. His choice to remain was reported factually, with no wording that suggested criticism.³¹² This was a direct reversal of Black victims being named and criticized for refusing to evacuate.

Many Black victims were criticized or blamed for their deaths even when unrelated to their decision to evacuate or not. In 1899, a Hempstead correspondent reported on the deaths of Morris and Eans, two Black men working on emergency railroad repairs in the Courtney bottoms, adding “contrary to warnings given them, they were sitting on the end of some ties used in rebuilding the road, and, by a sudden lurch of the track, they fell into the swift rolling current behind them and perished before it was possible to render them any assistance.”³¹³ The readers only had the word of the white correspondent that these workers had received any warning, nor did the correspondent specify exactly what warnings they supposedly received. The correspondent's source may have been someone with a vested interest in placing the blame on the drowning victims. The men were cast as behaving foolishly, protecting the railroad company from any liability.³¹⁴

³¹² The 1900 Census recorded Luther S. Skinner, forty-five and single, living with his sister, Lucy Skinner, forty-seven and single, near Richmond, Texas, on a mortgaged farm. They also lived with a fifteen-year-old nephew, Eugene Freeman, but he was not mentioned in the 1899 article. “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 4, Fort Bend County, Texas, Sheet 4B, accessed January 19, 2023, ancestrylibrary.com.

³¹³ The question of why the railroad track shifted so significantly when there should not have been a train close by is another question that deserves further investigation. “TWO NEGROES DROWNED. They Perish While Repairing the Houston and Texas Central Track,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 4.

³¹⁴ Based on other articles from this disaster, these men were almost certainly temporary emergency labor and probably had been coerced into taking this particular job as a condition of food relief with no railroad experience. Other Black laborers drowned while doing repairs to railroad tracks during the 1899 flood, and it

Mixed race rescue parties offered another opportunity to contrast Black men unfavorably with white men, one in which the name of the Black man helped give the criticism credibility. In 1899, the Houston *Daily Post* reported that the rescue party that went to Simonton:

“...secured the services as a guide of a negro named Mack Williams, who claimed that he knew every inch of the bottom for miles around. At 9 o’clock a start was made for the Mason Brisco gin house several miles to the south. The objective point was discovered by the merest accident about noon. Williams became hopelessly lost early in the game and had it not been for the knowledge of the bottoms possessed by Messrs. Parker and Bemus (sic) the party would have had an extremely hard time in getting out of the timber.”³¹⁵

Unlike white rescuers who proved less than competent, Williams was named and criticized for his inability to navigate the flooded area, while credit for navigating was given to two white men who were named and given honorifics.

However, they actually made relatively good time if they reached the gin house in only three hours, compared to travel on the previous day, and the correspondent ignored the fact that one of those same white men, Bemus (or Bennes) had been forced to admit “that the presence of several feet of water on the bottoms had considerable effect on the knowledge of a guide.”³¹⁶ The correspondent then devoted the next paragraph of the article heavily criticizing “the negro

was possible that the railroad company was feeling defensive. However, some of the drowning victims were Black convict laborers, and this particular article was printed immediately preceding an article in which an African American man was accused of assaulting a young white woman in Terrell, Texas. “Young Lady Assaulted by a Negro,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 4. These factors probably functioned to reduce sympathy or even curiosity about Black drowning deaths on railroad repair during this disaster.

³¹⁵ Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

³¹⁶ The correspondent spelled the last name both Bennes and Bemus at different times in the article, but from context, they both refer to the same local man because he was one of the two white men helping them navigate, but because of his weight, did not help with any of the other work. Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

Williams,” detailing complaints about his supposed incompetence, “...The alleged guide’s ignorance caused no end of trouble. He headed the boats directly up the stream and the crews did herculean work in their main efforts to make headway...the course laid by the new guide was the same as Mr. Bemus thought should have been taken until the negro Williams insisted on another route.”³¹⁷ From this article, it was impossible to conclude whether Williams was simply confused, as Bemus had admitted by the inability to see the surface landmarks by which he normally would have navigated, or whether he may have deliberately misdirected them.³¹⁸ If he was confused, the correspondent criticized him heavily while directly excusing the same difficulty in a white man, eliminating any possibility of heroism for Williams. The article may have exposed him to lingering suspicions and hostility by local white residents.

Correspondents were overt in what environmental conditions they felt were acceptable for white people and for Black people. Near Brookshire, a party of rescuers and two white refugees at Peach Ridge were forced to take shelter with a Black family overnight. The correspondent described the conditions as almost intolerable for the white people:

“...but lying on benches and chairs with mosquitoes innumerable feasting on one’s anatomy, with pigs, sheep, dogs, cats, mules, horses, chickens and other dumb victims of the flood...doing all in their power to make their wants known; and with the noise of the rushing waters forever in ones ears, the wooing of the drowsy god was by no means an easy matter. The negroes slept on undisturbed, but few of the others secured five minutes of consecutive sleep.”³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

³¹⁸ It must be considered that Williams may have engineered a detour to check on African American residents who would have been missed by the most direct route. If so, the attempt would be consistent with the mistrust that many African American residents demonstrated in this article and others. Otherwise, since the survivors at the gin house were almost certainly African American, it is unlikely he would have misdirected them maliciously. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

³¹⁹ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

A contrast was drawn between the ability of the white men and the Black refugees to sleep, a contrast which implied that the Black victims lacked the sensibilities of the white men. The ability of Black refugees to sleep despite the conditions was used to suggest that they lacked the capability to fully appreciate the dangers of their situation, rather than having learned to get what sleep they could despite the conditions. This perceived lack of sensibility subtly implied that the non-white victims were closer to animals than the white rescuers and refugees. The correspondent did not actually explain how he knew who slept and who did not, however.

Later, this same correspondent commented that "...not one word of gratitude was spoken by the poor negroes. But there was a look of dumb misery in their eyes which caused one to lose sight of this fact. They had lost their all, and although it was not much, it was their all."³²⁰ First, he expressed a fairly common complaint about African Americans: that they lacked gratitude. He then described "a look of dumb misery," a term more suited to description of livestock, reinforcing the idea that the Black victims were incapable of understanding that they should, by expectations of polite white society, feel a sense of gratitude, like animals.³²¹ He somewhat excused that description by admitting they had possibly been traumatized, even if he also trivialized their trauma. However, this was also the same party from Peach Ridge, where the African Americans had hosted the rescuers and at least two white refugees. Based on other articles, these survivors may have offered food or drink to the rescue party. From the perspective of the African Americans, this hospitality may have been a fairly equal exchange or even one in which they were the ones owed gratitude.

³²⁰ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

³²¹ Newspaper reports also emphasized white gratitude in contrast. In 1899, the aid sent to Calvert, Texas, by the State was "very thankfully received, for it will assist these helpless people to live until work can be obtained." The white residents were thanking the state, not for relief for themselves, but for relieving them of the costs of non-work based relief. "5000 REFUGEES AT CALVERT. GOVERNOR WILL SEND RELIEF FRR (sic) THAT NUMBER. White Man Reported Drowned Near Gause—Damage Greater Than Anticipated," *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

The comfort of white rescuers was consistently emphasized while correspondents were silent on the comfort of Black rescuers. In 1899, a correspondent at Simonton described taking a party of rescuers taking shelter overnight at a local store, the Bassett and Winston store: “The upper story of the store building was dry and comfortable and the white men of the party were provided with mattresses through the courtesy of Mr. Len McFarland, who is in charge of Mr. Bassett’s business...”³²² The correspondent was silent on what accommodations were offered to the Black members of the rescue party, or even if they were allowed to sleep on the dryer, more comfortable upper floor.

Conclusion

The 1899 Brazos river flooding was reported in the context of a climate of racial violence and white fears of losing control of Black labor. Newspaper reports on Black victims and survivors was characterized by a variety of racial markers, some derogatory, that indicated social status, including a Black urban middle class that vanished from newspaper reports by 1921. Correspondents dehumanized Black victims and survivors, particularly by prioritizing racial markers and omitting names, often denying readers access to any information other than race.

Newspapers described Black survivors with words invoked pity for them, suggesting to white readers that they were emotional, even irrational, and incompetent, in need of white rescue, white charity, and white control. Black survivors were frequently criticized for their decisions, ironically both for risking themselves to save property and livestock and for failing to do so. Black attempts to save themselves, their family, their property, or stock were rarely credited with

³²² Unnamed article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

heroism, a trait reserved for white Texans, and sometimes possibly seen as disrupting social roles. Taken together, newspaper accounts reinforced white Southern beliefs about Black dependency and the Southern racial order, and as the only source of most individuals' news on these disasters, controlled what beliefs about Black flood victims entered the collective memory.

CHAPTER III

THE GEOGRAPHY OF DISASTER

The word “geography” generally evokes mental images of maps and physical topography, but modern geographers also study the interactions between people and that physical geography and how they affect and change each other.³²³ An obvious example of this was the development of cotton agriculture in rich river bottomlands. With that cotton agriculture developed a specific aggro-industrial model dominated by large-scale white planters using enslaved Black labor, later replaced by poor, mostly Black, tenants on those plantations. This produced a society where the white planters, bankers, and merchants dominated the politics and economy of that region and whose highest priority was the control of Black labor. The bankers and merchants put economic pressure on the planters through their debts to bring in the largest crop possible every year, disincentivizing sustainable farming methods. This profit motive and the need to control this labor meant that planters spent the bare minimum on their contractual obligations to their labor, generally providing poor-quality tenant houses while setting up the contractual terms in such a way that the tenants often ended the year in debt.

Tenants had little stake in maintaining the house in which they lived or maintaining the fertility of the soil since they frequently moved within two or three years. Most sharecroppers and other tenants understood that the system offered little chance to save enough money to directly rent, much less buy land, especially since they had to take the word of the landowner as to their debts and the value of their crops. Nor did they have the same economic stake in the

³²³Human geography is “the study of the interrelationships between people, place, and environment....” “Human Geography,” Dartmouth Library, accessed February 18, 2023, https://researchguides.dartmouth.edu/human_geography/main.

mule provided by the landowner as they had in protecting their own livestock, such as a chicken or two or a hog.³²⁴

This debt-based economic system also required extracting the largest crop possible every year, damaging the fertility of the soil. The soil itself was rich due to flooding, and those floods continued quite frequently and could potentially have renewed the fertility to some degree. But the agricultural methods of the time left the soil bare and vulnerable to erosion during floods, and the construction of levees actually intensified the force of floods.³²⁵ So these floods sometimes caused even more damage to soil due to decisions made by humans.³²⁶

Physical geography and cotton culture influenced the patterns of where people lived and who was most at risk from floods. Most sharecropper houses on bottomland farms were built at the edge of the fields near the rivers, in the floodplain, while most white-owned homes were built on high ground.³²⁷ Poor white cotton farmers generally lived on the higher ground of the Blackland Prairies, though some did live in the floodplain. Freedman's colonies, independent Black land-owning communities, generally tried to avoid much contact with white communities. They generally developed in the floodplain on more marginal land, as far from the county seat

³²⁴ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 10; and Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

³²⁵ Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices*, 7–12; Conrad and Sitton, *Freedom Colonies*, 16–18; Foley, *The White Scourge*, 82–83; National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South*, 11, accessed February 9, 2023, through openlibrary.org; and Barry, *Rising Tide*, 163–168.

³²⁶ When floods followed droughts, erosion was particularly aggravated, but agricultural practices first left soil exposed and vulnerable to this erosion. Thad Sitton and Dan K. Utley, *From Can See to Can't: Texas Cotton Farmers on the Southern Prairies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 56–62; Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 12–13; Barry, *Rising Tide*, 37–42; and Charles Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from Hernando de Soto to Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45, 72, 102, 166, 175, 197.

³²⁷ Sitton and Utley found that virtually all agricultural tenant housing was extremely poorly constructed, but those constructed for Black or Mexican tenants were noticeably smaller than those for white tenants. Sitton and Utley, *From Can See to Can't*, 65–67.

and any large community as possible.³²⁸ Race and economics, therefore, played a significant role in who was most at risk, and the incentive, or lack of incentive, for effective flood control.³²⁹

The success of cotton agriculture and the debt culture that developed rested on control over a pool of labor which had few choices. Even good harvest years would still leave them in debt by design, and in bad years, they were likely to lose their crop and everything they owned to a flood. In bad years, they were completely dependent on white charity that was intended to control the workforce and kept them badly undernourished, if not near starvation. By 1899, however, railroads were making laborers more mobile while politically, Jim Crow laws were on the rise. Industrialization in the North and West began luring some poor agricultural workers into emigrating. Northern Black communities often tried to encourage Black Southerners to move to Northern cities. While they might be limited to the poorest paid work in those factories, there was still the potential to begin accumulating property and get ahead.³³⁰

White community leaders recognized by 1899 that their control was weakening. Their charity was meant to create a sense of gratitude and reinforce Black dependency on white landowners as well as limiting Black mobility. At the same time, white newspapers controlled the narratives about disasters, creating images of benevolent landowners and other white community leaders caring for impoverished dependent Black farm laborers which shaped the collective memory of these disasters. Reports minimized Black losses in relationship to those of white landowners and businesses. These disasters and white control of charity may also have offered

³²⁸Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 23–24.

³²⁹Jones and Barry found similar patterns of far more response to white than Black deaths in flooding. Jones, “Race, Class, and Gender Disparities,” 120–122; and Barry, *Rising Tide*, 158.

³³⁰Foley, *The White Scourge*; Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 123, 125–126; and Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis*, xvi–xviii, 57–58, 87, 104.

the opportunity to force Black landowners in freedman's colonies to sell some or all of their land to white landowners.³³¹

Over the twenty-two years between the 1899 Brazos river flood and the 1921 San Antonio flood, white communities struggled to accept the demographic changes. Through 1913, ethnic Americans were generally excluded from whiteness, especially a growing number of Italian immigrants. While few Mexican farm workers were mentioned in 1899, by 1921, they were a significant work force on cotton farms as both Black and white tenants fled to cities. These changing demographics and the uneasiness they created among white Texans who feared a loss of control, were reflected in newspaper language that shifted to embrace some, but not all, ethnic Americans as white by the early 1920s.³³²

Community: White Homes, Black Shacks

Both human and physical geography substantially influenced who was affected by disasters, which was particularly obvious during the 1899 Brazos river flooding. Attempts to avoid sharecropping led some Black farmers to live in risk zones. A relatively high percentage of Black Texans in 1899 lived in what are now often described as freedom or freedman's colonies.³³³ Thad Sitton and James H. Conrad define freedom colonies as "independent rural communities of African American landowners (and land squatters) that formed in the South in the years after emancipation."³³⁴ The percentage of Black Texans living in freedman's colonies

³³¹Black landownership may have been viewed as threatening to white control over the Black labor force. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 14–18; Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 144–145, 173–176; Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis*, 87, 104; and Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 2, 172–176.

³³²Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 170–182; Nevels, *Lynching to Belong*, 1–5; and Foley, *The White Scourge*, 204.

³³³Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 1–3.

³³⁴Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 1.

probably reached their height just after this flood when approximately 31 percent of Black Texans owned their own land.³³⁵ These colonies tended to be invisible even in the newspaper records of disasters since part of their own goal was to remain relatively unnoticed by their white neighbors.³³⁶ But these colonies would also have been more vulnerable to flooding because they were often in less desirable river bottomlands, and that consent to community invisibility was enthusiastically encouraged by white newspapers.

The simplest means to minimize the existence of freedman's colonies was to avoid using any term that suggested an intentional community. In 1899, the San Antonio *Daily Express* reported that "In Washington county several negro families living in a cluster of cabins in the Brazos bottoms are said to have been cut off from all escape by the flood and as the piece of ground on which they lived is under water, it is believed they were all swept into the raging torrent and drowned."³³⁷ From the description of several homes close together, this was very likely a freedman's colony. Had these been sharecroppers' homes, the landowner would almost certainly have been mentioned. Instead, the correspondent avoided any admission that these were a community by describing them as a "cluster" of "cabins" located simply on a "piece of ground."³³⁸ Not only was the community not named or acknowledged, none of the families were identified, nor was there any indication that there had been an attempt to reach these particular families.

³³⁵Obviously not all of these Black farm owners lived in freedman's colonies, but for most, they offered safety and community unavailable to them elsewhere. Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 2–3.

³³⁶Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 2–5.

³³⁷"A HARROWING TALE," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 2, 1899, 1.

³³⁸They were described as "cabins," suggesting a crude building such as used by early white settlers, but also the term frequently used for slave housing. There were at least five freedman's colonies in Washington County, within three miles of the Brazos River: Lott, Spann's Settlement, Post Oak, Graball, and Mount Fall. Lott was less than a mile from the Brazos, so was most likely the one referred to here. "Texas Freedom Colonies Atlas 2.1," The Texas Freedom Colonies Project, accessed January 4, 2023, <https://www.thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com/>.

When they were identified as communities in newspaper reports, freedman's colonies were still rarely named or granted the status of "town" or even "village." For instance, early during the 1899 flood, Calvert, Texas, reported that "the negro settlement suffered the most loss...Some twelve negro houses were washed from their blocks and were distributed to a distance of some 150 yards away. Besides this thirty negro houses were flooded with water and the entire contents soaked and ruined."³³⁹ The use of "negro settlement" and the absence of any reference to victims who were not African American suggests that this was a self-segregated freedman's colony. It is difficult to identify which community the article referred to, but Sneed Chapel was only a couple of miles northeast of Calvert, and less than a mile from the Brazos River, the most likely candidate.³⁴⁰ But the use of the descriptive word "settlement" and the absence of a name suggests that the local source for this article, if it was indeed Sneed Chapel, did not assign the African American community the status of a town. This nameless settlement had at least 42 houses which were damaged, and 150 people who were left homeless, yet some named towns with white residents had fewer houses or families.³⁴¹

The San Antonio *Daily Express* described damages to the same community: "The water overflowed the town, first striking the negro settlement, which was almost wiped out. The bodies of five negroes have been recovered."³⁴² The community was again described as a "settlement," suggesting Sneed's Chapel rather than a segregated section of Calvert itself, while denying the

³³⁹This report was, however, somewhat unique in describing their homes as "houses." "CLOUDBURST AT CALVERT. Five Negroes Were Drowned and Much Damage to Property," Houston *Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5.

³⁴⁰The Freedom Colony Atlas has not located a Black settlement in Calvert, but Hammond, Texas, is only a few miles away, between Alligator and Walnut creeks. "Texas Freedom Colonies Atlas 2.1," The Texas Freedom Colonies Project, accessed January 4, 2023, <https://www.thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com/>.

³⁴¹"CLOUDBURST AT CALVERT. Five Negroes Were Drowned and Much Damage to Property," Houston *Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5.

³⁴²These two sentences were the entire description of Black losses in the article, while the correspondent focused more on the economic loss of cattle, corn, and cotton than on the loss of life, white or Black. "CENTRAL AND SOUTH TEXAS. Resume of the Situation and Amount of Damage Done," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 1, 1899, 1.

community the status of “town.” The community losses must have been devastatingly extensive. They admitted at least five known victims, but the article did not name those victims or suggest that they had tried to get those names.³⁴³ The correspondent then repeated a mere rumor of “...white farmers' families having suffered loss of life from the flood, but so far no names or other particulars have been obtained,”³⁴⁴ which implied that he had tried to get the names of those rumored victims and the details of their deaths. The Black victims could be allowed to remain anonymous, but any white victims without names had to be explained.

Another Black community was described by a correspondent from Hearne, Texas, who reported that “...a few negro huts were washed away....”³⁴⁵ The use of the disparaging word “hut” minimized the losses of Black farm workers. A few days later, another correspondent from Brookshire, Texas, described a house as “...a negro renter’s hut,”³⁴⁶ then indirectly applied the term to another with “...another house of the same character.”³⁴⁷ Not only did he downplay the potential loss to the family by informing readers that they rented their home, he shifted the main material loss from the Black family to the white landlord.³⁴⁸ Later in that same article, he described other homes as “a dozen negro huts,”³⁴⁹ indicating this was his habitual description of Black homes.

In another article on July 4, 1899, the *Houston Daily Post* reported that Sandy and Pidwell creeks in southern Calvert, Texas, had overflowed, “...washing houses from their blocks

³⁴³If they knew that at least five individuals drowned, their names must have been available.

³⁴⁴“CENTRAL AND SOUTH TEXAS,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 1, 1899, 1.

³⁴⁵Identical language appeared in two newspapers. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5; and “AT HEARNE,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 1, 1899, 1.

³⁴⁶Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

³⁴⁷Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

³⁴⁸The use of “renter's” was relatively unique. A sharecropper's residence was not generally described in those terms. This suggested that the Black victims were either not agricultural workers or were leasing land and its home directly.

³⁴⁹Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

and carrying widespread terror and devastation to the humble little homes of the negroes' dwellings in the inundated section."³⁵⁰ Because the correspondent separated the two, the "houses washed from their blocks," were probably white residences. While he did use the word "homes" for the Black residences affected by the flood, he also added the modifiers "humble" and "little" to minimize their material losses. Again, the words he chose possibly ensured that the readers did not feel too much sympathy since their losses were trivial by comparison to white landowners.

Another word that was used to indicate the quality and value of Black housing was "tenement." In 1899, Mr. Dever at Brenham, Texas, reported to the *Houston Daily Post* that "all the small tenement houses contiguous to the river are gone and their occupants are now camped on the prairies."³⁵¹ In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the descriptive term, tenement, had very strong connotations, frequently bringing to mind the photographs of Jacob Riis which portrayed the desperately crowded conditions of poor urban immigrants in tenement slums. These photographs were intended to "evoke an emotional reaction and appealed to his audiences' guilt," but despite the sentimentality, his approach also projected the idea that the residents of these tenements were helpless and morally suspect, in need of outside guidance.³⁵² Dever's use of the words "small" and "tenement" very likely reinforced similar ideas of African Americans as inferior, helpless, deserving of pity but also in need of control of some sort.³⁵³

³⁵⁰The *San Antonio Daily Express* reported with the exact same language on the same day. "THE HIGH WATER AT CALVERT: Reports that More Than a Score of Persons Have Been Drowned," *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; and "UNHAPPY CALVERT. Heartrending Scenes and Disastrous Consequences Attended By the Flood," *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

³⁵¹"RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS. BRENHAM WILL SEND OUT A PARTY WITH PROVISIONS. A Voyage Through the Overflowed Bottoms by a Party in a Small Boat," *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

³⁵² This was an example of Balaji's pity, with poor immigrants being similarly racialized. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*; Michelle Lamunière, "Sentiment as Moral Motivator," 138, 140; and Balaji, "Racializing Pity," 51.

³⁵³ Similar to "renter's hut" above, the use of tenement here is unusual, suggesting a different relationship between the residents and the property owner. If this was not the same Black community as the next article which identified G. Hermann, the omission of any property owners' names suggested this may have been a freedman's colony and the use of "tenement" was not meant to suggest a rental relationship but to evoke that emotional response of pity and its relationship to white benevolence.

However, another article described what were almost certainly the same buildings as losses experienced by a white landowner: “In Waller county, east of the river, G. Hermann of Brenham has 1100 acres under water and today his tenant houses began to float.”³⁵⁴ Here the buildings are dignified with the words, “tenant” and “houses” rather than “tenement,” but the correspondent was also emphasizing the financial losses of the relatively wealthy landowner, not the tenants. Correspondents varied the language they used for buildings based on the race of the people with which the description was associated.

White victims and their homes generally were treated with more respect. A correspondent from Hamilton, Texas, reported to the *Houston Daily Post* that “Mrs. Mary Looney, a widow who lived alone in her little house, was drowned and her house entirely washed away with its contents...the body of Mary Looney was found in a drift. Justice Warenskjold held inquest and the body was carried to Gentry’s mill for burial.”³⁵⁵ There were striking differences in this report compared to those of African American victims. First, she was named and given an honorific, and the correspondent explained the use of her given name rather than her husband’s by informing the readers that she was a widow. A widow could live alone and still be considered respectable. Her home was described as “little,” but it was still a house, and not a hut, shack, or tenement. He included details on how she drowned, where she was found, and the disposal of her body, details almost never included for non-white victims.

³⁵⁴This was probably Gustav Hermann, who had immigrated from Germany in about 1873 and owned a farm. While Hermann's farm was described as being located in Waller County, Brenham is in adjacent Washington County. “AT BRENHAM,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 3, 1899, 2; and “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 5, Washington County, Sheet 3B, accessed January 4, 2023, ancestrylibrary.com.

³⁵⁵“A CLOUDBURST AT HAMILTON,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5. A second article described her and her death in most of the same details, and also referred to her as a widow with the married honorific, suggesting that the correspondent was the source of those identifiers rather than editors. The second article omitted the modifier “little,” however. “BRAZOS RIVER STILL RISING...Heartrending Scenes...,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

While she was presumably poor, judging from her status as a widow living in a “little” house, she was still treated with obvious respect. However this story becomes even more interesting because it was not entirely accurate. Mary (F. Lee) Looney, a white woman, died in the flood in Hamilton and was buried at Gentrys' Mill Cemetery.³⁵⁶ She was married in June 1868 and had a son, Thomas, in 1869.³⁵⁷ However, her husband, a Confederate veteran named Francis Asberry Looney, remarried in 1872, and she is described in the 1880 census as divorced.³⁵⁸ She was thirty-one in the 1880 Census, so she would have been about fifty years old at the time of her death, which was not elderly.³⁵⁹ Her ex-husband was still alive in 1908, so the correspondent was not granting her a sort of honorary widowhood because he had later died.³⁶⁰ Whether the correspondent knowingly misrepresented her marital status or he omitted it and an

³⁵⁶Substantial records were available on Looney who died in Hamilton County, Texas, on June 30, 1899. Some transcription titles use “F” as her middle initial even when the original clearly used “L” or “Lee.” The initial “F” appeared in the 1860 US Census when she was twelve. Her gravestone suggested that she chose to use her maiden name as her middle name after marriage, not uncommon. “A CLOUDBURST AT HAMILTON,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; and “Mary F. Looney,” Find a Grave Index, ancestry.com; and “Mary F. Looney,” “1880 United States Federal Census—Population,” US Census Bureau, District 69, page 38, Hamilton County, Texas, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com; “Mary F. Lee,” “1860 United States Federal Census—Population,” US Census Bureau, Post Office Fort Belknap, Throckmorton County, page 14, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

³⁵⁷“M. F. Lee,” Select County Marriage Index, 1837—1965, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com; and “Mary F. Looney,” “1880 United States Federal Census—Population,” US Census Bureau, District 69, page 38, Hamilton County, Texas, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com. Thomas was ten in 1880 and died in Brazoria County in 1920 in the influenza pandemic. “Thomas J. Looney, Standard Certificate of Death,” Alvin, Brazoria County, Texas, accessed January 4, 2023, ancestrylibrary.com.

³⁵⁸F. A. Looney remarried in McLennan, Texas, and had at least four more children. “F. A. Looney,” Select County Marriage Index, 1817—1965, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com; “Francis A. Looney,” Confederate Pension Application, Rosebud Post Office, Falls County, Comptroller's File No. 13793, ancestrylibrary.com; and “Mary F. Looney,” “1880 United States Federal Census—Population,” US Census Bureau, District 69, page 38, Hamilton County, Texas, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com. NOTE: While his application for a Confederate Pension was approved, there was a handwritten notation to the left that said simply “Deserter.” If so, this could also have potentially have affected Mary Looney's status if known. The handwriting was different, however, and may have been added after approval.

³⁵⁹“Mary F. Looney,” “1880 United States Federal Census—Population,” US Census Bureau, District 69, page 38, Hamilton County, Texas, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com; and “Mary F. Lee,” “1860 United States Federal Census—Population,” US Census Bureau, Post Office Fort Belknap, Throckmorton County, page 14, accessed December 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

³⁶⁰“Francis A. Looney,” Confederate Pension Application, Rosebud Post Office, Falls County, Comptroller's File No. 13793, ancestrylibrary.com. Looney may have died in early 1914 in Rosebud, Texas. “Francis Asbury Looney,” Find a Grave Index, ancestry.com.

editor decided to add that detail without confirming it, this was almost certainly done in order to protect her status as a respectable white woman.³⁶¹

In contrast, that same article reported simply that “a negro boy was drowned four miles from there last night in Davidson creek.”³⁶² This victim was nameless, identified only by race and gender, unlike Looney. No other details were given such as whether or not the body was recovered. The use of the term “boy,” when used by a white correspondent for a Black victim at that time, was not an indication of age but a secondary indicator of race and gender and class dependency. This victim was most likely an adult farm laborer which was perceived as dependent and incompetent. The correspondent gave extensive details about a white woman, including distorting the narrative to present her more sympathetically, while providing almost no details about a Black drowning victim.³⁶³

Sometimes the treatment of a white person’s home and losses was ambivalent. In 1899, a correspondent from Calvert reported that “the frame work of a new cottage owned by Selvin Kennelly was completely wrecked.”³⁶⁴ This was most likely a J. S. Kennerly who appeared in the 1900 United States census. Kennerly lived in Calvert, Texas, a twenty-five-year-old white barber who owned his home, but owed a mortgage on it.³⁶⁵ “Cottage” could be rather ambiguous, but was clearly a less derogatory term than hut or shack or tenement, and the correspondent

³⁶¹A divorced woman was always considered somewhat suspicious even if she never remarried and the divorce was due to desertion or abuse.

³⁶²“BRAZOS RIVER STILL RISING,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

³⁶³Similarly, during the 1900 Galveston hurricane, lists of unidentified bodies explicitly described white victims in minute detail, including age, weight, hair color and texture, clothing, height, build, and items found on the body as an aid to identification, while Black victims rarely were given more description than “a negro boy about 13 years of age.” “TO IDENTIFY THE DEAD,” Houston *Daily Post*, September 12, 1900, 6.

³⁶⁴“SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

³⁶⁵He was married with three children, the oldest of whom was named Selwyn, a close match to the name in the article, suggesting that Kennerly named his son with his middle name and commonly used that name himself. His brother and his brother's wife also lived with the family in 1900. “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, Robertson County, Texas, Sheet 1, accessed December 20, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

explicitly reinforced that by reassuring readers that this was a new structure and that Kennerly owned it as opposed to rented. All of these points of difference from reports about most African American victims connote the respect commonly offered to white victims. But this paragraph had started by explaining that “the region along Sandy creek, in the southern part of the city, is a painful object lesson of the force of the pent up water.”³⁶⁶ The correspondent separated that mild criticism from the description of the actual losses, softening any blame that description implied for choosing this location for their homes. He also concluded the paragraph by adding that the residents of the area blamed the flooding on the inadequacy of a railroad culvert that caused water to back up.³⁶⁷ He mitigated any blame attached to their choice of a flood-prone location by explaining white victims' theory that placed the cause elsewhere, a courtesy not offered to African American victims.

At least as significantly, newspaper reports often dismissed or ignored the losses of African Americans.³⁶⁸ The San Antonio *Daily Express* reported that on Waco Creek in Waco, Texas, “...hundreds of men, women and children in the negro district of the Fourth ward are taking refuge on the tops of their houses and screaming for help.”³⁶⁹ Clearly from the context of the article, their homes and possessions must have been badly flood damaged and any draft animals or small livestock were probably lost.³⁷⁰ But just a few lines later, the correspondent added that “no material loss of property has been reported in the city.”³⁷¹ He qualified the statement with “material,” a term which suggested commercial property, excluding the personal and possibly business property losses by African American residents as too minor for

³⁶⁶“SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

³⁶⁷“SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

³⁶⁸The treatment of Mexican losses are analyzed in Chapter Four.

³⁶⁹“AT WACO...Panic,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, June 30, 1899, 1.

³⁷⁰This was not the only article that indicated that the Fourth Ward was badly flooded.

³⁷¹“AT WACO,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, June 30, 1899, 1.

consideration. He also used language in the first sentence above and later in the article that implied that these particular victims were behaving hysterically, “screaming for help” and “fainted through fright,” descriptors rarely even used to describe white women's reactions at the time.³⁷² When combined with his silence on the property damages and losses, this correspondent was creating an image of child-like African American victims who had no property that was relevant for white men to notice.

In reality, poor farmers and laborers, Black or white, frequently lost everything they had been able to accumulate until this point in their lives, but those losses were minimized in newspapers, if they were addressed at all. The large white landowners still had substantial resources with which to rebuild, including credit which was available to them at a much more favorable interest rate, secured by their larger landholdings. Nor were they likely to ever actually go without food, clothing, or shelter or be forced to accept dangerous work in order to “prove” their worthiness for charity.³⁷³ But many newspaper articles not only focused primarily on the losses of these planters, they sometimes attempted to divert sympathy from the poorest Black victims to those white landowners and businessmen.

For example, in 1899 the *Houston Daily Post* commented that in the area of San Felipe, Texas, “landlords, tenants and merchants alike feel the blow most grievously.”³⁷⁴ A Brookshire, Texas, correspondent shifted the focus further, reporting that

³⁷² Among other statements, the correspondent reported that “one woman was reported drowned, but she had only fainted through fright and fallen into the water and was rescued.” This language was used in at least two newspapers, suggesting the bias was primarily that of the Waco correspondent. “AT WACO...Panic,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, June 30, 1899, 1; and “THE BRAZOS AT WACO. A Negro Settlement Inundated and Many Are Homeless,” *Houston Daily Post*, June 30, 1899, 5.

³⁷³ “Charity” for the large landowning and business class primarily occurred by means of loans, extensions on payments, tax relief, and special priorities from suppliers. This was particularly noticeable in the aftermath of the 1900 Galveston hurricane, as discussed in that chapter.

³⁷⁴ “AT SAN FELIPE. The Whole Bottoms Are Deep Under Water,” *Houston, Daily Post*, July 2, 1899, 6.

“most of the flood sufferers are small negro farmers, whose places are located in the Brazos bottoms, but they will not be the only ones affected by the terrible disaster. The merchants of Brookshire have, as is the custom in most cotton regions in the State, given hundreds of dollars worth of credit to their colored patrons, expecting to make collections when the crops are marketed in the fall. Such of these amounts as will not be entirely lost will be a long time in coming in, as the debtors will be unable to get in any sort of a crop on which to realize enough to pay their indebtedness until next year.”³⁷⁵

The specific wording he used also suggested that these were Black farmers who owned their own land. Brookshire was very close to Sunnyside, a freedman’s colony, a community which had substantial losses.³⁷⁶ The correspondent barely conceded the losses of these Black farmers in the first part of a single sentence, preferring to emphasize the loss to merchants who would might still be repaid, even if delayed by a year. By devoting most of the paragraph to merchants and their indirect losses, the correspondent was redirecting sympathy away from the Black victims.

Another correspondent in the next day’s *Houston Daily Post* reminded his readers, “just think of the loss by merchants who “carry” Brazos bottom accounts and the stagnation in business is paralyzed...”³⁷⁷ Instead of minimizing Black property losses, he wrote a long paragraph criticizing the Black farmers at Sunnyside for failing to move their animals to a higher elevation than needed in previous floods, while admitting they did not have direct telegraph or

³⁷⁵Untitled, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1.

³⁷⁶That impression of Black landownership was reinforced by the later description in the same article of an African American drowning victim, “...Smith Blackburn, a prominent and influential colored planter...” clearly identifying him as a landowner through the use of the term “planter.” The language used to describe Blackburn was highly unusual, and was analyzed in Chapter Two. Untitled, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1. Another article on Sunnyside explicitly states that “...there are lots of negroes who have little places and others who have rented who must be helped.” “THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

³⁷⁷“THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE: THAT COMMUNITY BELIEVED TO BE IN DIRE DISTRESS. People Were Warned to Get Out of the Bottoms, But Would Not Heed It,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

telephone connections and received only a verbal warning.³⁷⁸ The correspondent also admitted there was no ground in the bottomlands that was not under water, raising the question of where the correspondent believed they should have moved their animals in the time they had.³⁷⁹

While discussing the losses of white planters, the same correspondent stated that “...planters in the best of circumstances were made paupers over night and will need help. Comfortable two-story houses and well filled barns were swept away and down the river.”³⁸⁰ Far from assigning any blame for their losses to the white planters, he emphasized that “the planters around here continue to feed their hands and they state that they will continue to do so.”³⁸¹ He encouraged readers to view these planters as generous, even noble, although it was very likely that the planters simply added the cost of supplies to the debts of their farm workers.

He diverted sympathy from the Black farmers of Sunnyside to white planters and merchants, both by emphasizing the losses of white merchants and planters and their nobility, and by criticizing Black farmers for their stock losses and their indebtedness. He exhibited sympathy for the loss of white homes and farm buildings, but omitted any mention of Black structural losses. Most articles excused white planters for the same misjudgment about the severity of the flood when they moved stock to formerly safe elevations. These white planters almost certainly received warnings first and may have controlled what, if any, warning was

³⁷⁸See also the subtitle for this article which clearly placed the blame for losses on the Black victims in Sunnyside. Other newspaper articles admitted that Sunnyside did not get adequate warning due to the lack of a telegraph connection. “THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE: THAT COMMUNITY BELIEVED TO BE IN DIRE DISTRESS. People Were Warned to Get Out of the Bottoms, But Would Not Heed It,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2; “MANY CATTLE LOST,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5; and “AT HEMPSTEAD. The Loss in the County Will Amount to Over \$500,000,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 4. The Sunnyside article was quoted and analyzed in more detail in Chapter Two.

³⁷⁹Additionally, Black residents of Sunnyside may have hesitated to move valuable animals off lands they owned due to fears that white men might claim the animals, either as stolen or simply taking them. Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 172–3.

³⁸⁰“THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

³⁸¹“THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

passed on to Black farmers.³⁸² Yet most sympathy in newspaper articles was for the white planters, not Black farmers who were the majority of victims.

Undeniably, white businesses did have losses from the disasters and did respond to the disasters. A correspondent from Richmond, Texas, in 1899, reported that “business houses are closed and organized committees have been and are now at work.”³⁸³ The threat to the surrounding region was great enough that businesses closed down in order to assist with the relief and rescue. The article added that “citizens,” meaning town residents, were providing for up to 1200 African American refugees.³⁸⁴ While those living in the path of the Brazos River were devastated, the businesses in Richmond responded to the expectation of civic virtue by voluntarily sacrificing some profits to help.

Correspondents occasionally recognized that white planters were going to be much better able to recover than Black farm laborers. In 1899, the *Houston Daily Post*, reported that “the former occupants of the bottoms have lost practically everything they possess and thousands of poor negroes...will exist for the next few months only through the bounty of their more fortunate fellow beings. The white planters, of course, have all lost heavily, but a large percentage of them are wealthy men and are in consequence more or less able, in proportion to the size of their respective plantations, to pull safely through the hard times which the flood has made inevitable. Several of this latter class, notably Mr. T. W. House of Houston, have given instructions to their various foremen to supply the needs of

³⁸²During the February 1916 Mississippi river flood, the *Chicago Defender* stated that “most of the white people on the plantations were warned in time to leave for places of safety, and many left their farm hands behind,” making it clear the Black correspondents or editors for the *Defender* believed that the warning went to the landowners first, and that their Black farm laborers may have been ordered to remain with little or no warning about the flood. “TWO THOUSAND STARVING,” *Chicago Defender*, February 26, 1916, 5.

³⁸³“RICHMOND IS UNDER WATER. The Town Is Filled with Refugees, and Others Are Being Brought In---Crops Are Absolutely Ruined,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

³⁸⁴“RICHMOND IS UNDER WATER. The Town Is Filled with Refugees, and Others Are Being Brought In---Crops Are Absolutely Ruined,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

all of the negroes connected with their plantations...others, it is understood, will take similar action and in consequence it is possible that some of the expected suffering and privation among the blacks will be averted.”³⁸⁵

This correspondent admitted that the African American victims had been devastated and that white planters still had resources with which to recover, despite their losses.³⁸⁶ But he also used the opportunity to invoke pity for the African American victims and to credit their survival to the generosity of the planters as if they were simply giving food away.³⁸⁷ And this passage pointed to something never stated explicitly: African American farmers who owned their own farms were excluded from this most basic form of assistance given to victims, while the Houstonian African American community had no control over the distribution of any relief that they raised, leaving them unable to do very much to help Black landowners directly without risking white ire.³⁸⁸

During this period, most African American farm workers were generally assumed to either lease on shares—either on the halves or on the thirds—or to own a small farm, generally in a freedman’s colony. But a few may have actually rented their farms for cash. A correspondent from Hempstead, Texas, in 1899 reported that while “the planters around here continue to feed their hands...there are lots of negroes who have little places and others who have rented who

³⁸⁵“IN FLOOD DISTRICT: Perilous Trip Made by Houston Relief Party. BROOKSHIRE TO FULSHEAR. Only Two Persons Were Drowned in that Territory. NEGROES ARE ALL ON THE PRAIRIE. Relief Boats Have Removed Flood Sufferers to Dry Land. FLEET OF FIVE SKIFFS DID GOOD WORK: Party of Negroes...River Is Falling,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1.

³⁸⁶However, given the disasters in 1900, many of the white planters, like the merchants, may have found themselves in fairly desperate financial circumstances by 1901.

³⁸⁷The foremen almost certainly added the cost of these supplies to debts as contracts commonly allowed landowners to charge tenants for food. While bookkeeping records may survive for a planter, I would hesitate to rely on those without confirmation of their accuracy from Black records.

³⁸⁸I would argue that the frequent weather disasters in this region of Texas between 1899 and 1921 contributed to the reversal in African American land ownership and descent into tenancy during that period that was noted in Sitton and Conrad's work. But I also believe that newspaper sources imply that white relief committees may also have used the distribution of relief to put pressure on African American landowners. More research is needed on this point, however. Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 172–176.

must be helped.”³⁸⁹ Presumably, the tenants are the “hands” referred to here, a lingering term from the antebellum slave system. And the disparaging phrase, “little places,” in this specific article probably referred mostly to the residents of Sunnyside, Texas, a nearby freedman’s colony. That left African American farmers who had accumulated the resources to directly rent a farm, a status which was less secure than sharecropping and other share arrangements, but theoretically had a much higher degree of independence from control by the landowner. That independence theoretically gave them choice of suppliers and choice of how they marketed their crops. That the correspondent felt that this group was important enough to mention separately suggested that more than one or two people had achieved this status. However, the loss of the cotton crop due to the July 1899 Brazos river flood and again in September 1900 due to the Galveston hurricane may have driven many renters back into tenancy.³⁹⁰

Even when African American or poor white farmers owned their own land, they sometimes experienced environmental damages from floodwaters that effected the productivity of their farms.³⁹¹ While it is possible for floods to deposit silt that improves land, a very fast current such as they were experiencing with this flood and the 1913 flood were likely to erode soil instead. For instance, in 1899, farmers were afraid that “...the treacherous current has cut gullies, sloughs and channels through their bottom farms and completely ruined them.”³⁹²

³⁸⁹“THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE: THAT COMMUNITY BELIEVED TO BE IN DIRE DISTRESS. People Were Warned to Get Out of the Bottoms, But Would Not Heed It,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

³⁹⁰This supposition needs further investigation. Tenancy in general rose among the African American (and white) population during the early 1900s. My assumption is based on the considerable amount of cash that would have been required for a renter to survive the loss of the cash crop for two years consecutively without being forced into tenancy. Presumably any farmer who had that much cash at the beginning of 1899 would already have bought a farm rather than leasing it. Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 172–176; and Foley, *The White Scourge*, 32–35.

³⁹¹The concentration of Black farm workers in the bottomlands and white farmers on the Blackland prairies very likely meant that Black farmers experienced more frequent property and environmental damages.

³⁹²“WAITING PERIOD AT NAVASOTA: A FALL OF SEVEN FEET IN THE RIVER. Now Feared that the Bottom Farms Have Been Badly Cut Up by the Current,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

Beyond these fears of erosion were the actual known damages that did not affect just the bottomlands. A week earlier, Lexington, Texas, reported that “all low lands are flooded, fences washed away in places, hillside farms torn in gullies by torrents of water...”³⁹³

In fact, correspondents reported that farms as far away as Bosque County, northwest of Waco, “have been injured there by washouts.”³⁹⁴ The *Houston Daily Post*, in a report about the region from Brookshire to Fulshear, stated that:

“one of the worst features of the matter is that the damage will be anything but temporary, for the force of the immense volumes of water which have been rushing over many of the plantations for days past has washed the larger portion, if not all, of the fertile soil from the surface, and in consequence many of the farms will for a time be much less productive than before.”³⁹⁵

When these rivers flood, they do not spread out gently, depositing rich soil from further upriver.³⁹⁶ The force of flood waters was stripping the fertile top soil, reducing future crop yields, a fact which the article went on to say was recognized by “...many of the white property owners.”³⁹⁷

The tenants, however, would be the ones to bear the heaviest burden. They would put the same work in for decreased yields while they used the same amount of supplies, obtained from the landowner at the same costs. Their lower return for their work would further reduce what

³⁹³It is possible, even probable, that flood control levees were partly responsible for an increase in this sort of flooding because there were no other measures such as outlets. A levees-only policy tended to concentrate the floodwaters of a stream, speeding the flow and force until the water finds a place it can break through.

“Lowlands Overflowed,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5; and Barry, *Rising Tide*, 38–42, 52–54, 88–92.

³⁹⁴Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

³⁹⁵These would have been bottomland farms and plantations. “IN FLOOD DISTRICT,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

³⁹⁶Cotton plants have a fairly shallow root system and are cultivated with every other plant removed around them, producing ideal conditions for this sort of flood erosion. National Emergency Council, *Report on Economic Conditions of the South*, 9–12, accessed February 9, 2023, through openlibrary.org.

³⁹⁷“IN FLOOD DISTRICT,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

profit, if any, they could eke out of their year's work. Flood erosion, therefore, most likely increased the indebtedness of tenants and accelerated the loss of farms for those who had achieved some independence through land-ownership. Because the farms most affected were bottomlands farms, Black farm workers probably experienced more economic loss from environmental damages.

This fear of damage to the land was real enough to influence cotton speculation at the national level. The San Antonio *Daily Express* reported that some large cotton dealers on the New York cotton exchange were less afraid of damage to this season's crop than "...the probability of the ground being useless for replanting purposes...the cotton trade may for some time be affected to some extent..."³⁹⁸ Presumably, the cotton surplus from prior years meant that the loss of one year's crop from the Brazos river valley would not be significant, but that the loss of that crop for several years would noticeably reduce the surplus. However, their primary concern here was that the Brazos losses would possibly mean higher prices for other areas. No concern was expressed for the farm laborers themselves. Instead, the article refocused attention to the potential losses of shipping lines. The correspondent quoted an unnamed official for the Mallory Steamship line who unequivocally stated that they would have financial losses if they had no Brazos valley cotton to ship.³⁹⁹ Again, sympathy was diverted from the direct victims to businesses who had the resources and flexibility to adapt, using their ships to transport other crops or goods, even if less economically profitable.

Human alteration of physical geography also frequently played a role in who was a victim of disasters. The failure of a dam which was known to be unsafe had caused the

³⁹⁸“SECOND EDITION: 7 A. M. EFFECT OF FLOOD...Texas Will Suffer Losses,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 5.

³⁹⁹“SECOND EDITION: 7 A. M. EFFECT OF FLOOD...Texas Will Suffer Losses,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 5.

Johnstown, Pennsylvania, disaster in 1889, one of the best-known United States catastrophic dam failures. While that disaster involved an unregulated private dam, during the 1800s, the United States government adopted a Mississippi river flood control policy based solely on levees, although engineering analyses as early as 1851 strongly recommended integrating reservoirs and outlets to relieve pressure during floods.⁴⁰⁰ Instead, many natural outlets were closed off on the erroneous theory that increasing the flow of the river would “scour” the riverbed, increasing its capacity during floods.⁴⁰¹ This policy led to the catastrophic 1927 Mississippi River flood, when the lack of any outlets or reservoirs caused the Mound Landing and the Cabin Teele crevasses. These crevasses funneled devastating walls of water toward cotton farms and prosperous towns, with Black farm laborers making up a high percentage of victims, particularly those forced to labor on the levees until too late to escape.⁴⁰²

A more direct human intervention in 1927 was the decision to dynamite a levee below New Orleans in order to protect New Orleans itself without the consent of the two parishes that had built that levee and relied on it.⁴⁰³ Their decision created a man-made crevasse that wrecked the homes and livelihoods of the people of those two parishes, who were only partially

⁴⁰⁰The reasoning for this recommendation by Andrew Humphries was complex. His own analysis of data concluded that outlets and reservoirs would, in fact, help reduce flooding. Officially, he reasoned that the costs of building reservoirs and protecting outlets would outweigh losses. While possibly true at the time because large stretches of the floodplain along the Mississippi were still undeveloped, that reasoning was not revisited as the population increased dramatically. Unofficially, the decision was probably influenced by his rivalry with another engineer, Charles Ellet, Jr., who had written an 1851 report recommending a comprehensive approach to flood control. Ellet's work ultimately proved accurate. Barry, *Rising Tide*, 40–45, 52–54; 90–91.

⁴⁰¹All of the leading engineers involved with Mississippi River flood control, Ellet, Humphries, and James Buchanan Eads, had completely rejected this theory which mistakenly conflated “contraction works,” built into the river bed to speed up flow, with levees, built well back from the natural banks. Barry, *Rising Tide*, 90–91.

⁴⁰²The number of Black victims of these levee failures is unknown, but the deaths of a substantial number of Black men working on levees almost certainly went unreported based on other evidence. Barry, *Rising Tide*, 200–203, 276–278; Daniel, *Deep'n As it Come*, 11–12; O'Daniel, Patrick, *When the Levee Breaks: Memphis and the Mississippi Valley Flood of 1927* (Charleston: The History Press, 2013), 28–29, 56–58.

⁴⁰³During a 1922 flood, this same levee had mysteriously given way under circumstances that left suspicions of deliberate sabotage. Barry, *Rising Tide*, 165.

compensated for their losses at best.⁴⁰⁴ Powerful white men of New Orleans were able to force the prioritization of their own property over that of poorer rural residents to create the outlet that had been neglected by policy through the destruction of the protection they had built and trusted.⁴⁰⁵

Texas had its own disasters related to the human alteration of geography. In April 1900, the Austin dam on the Colorado River owned by Austin, Texas, gave way, releasing a wall of water on the lands downriver from this dam, and killing a number of people who did not get any warning. Like the dam that caused the Johnstown flood in 1889, this dam was inadequately and inappropriately built. The dam was built from limestone and granite, and limestone in particular is quickly eroded by water. The geology of the ground on which it was built was also unsuitable, including more limestone. Worse, the dam was being built on a geological fault with a poor foundation, and several engineers resigned rather than continue working on such a risky project. The geology and construction of the dam almost guaranteed an eventual failure.⁴⁰⁶

Newspapers had already published reports questioning the safety of the dam. During the 1899 flooding, the Colorado River had risen high enough to flow over the dam itself, with at least one newspaper reporting that the dam was investigated to be certain that it was stable.⁴⁰⁷ Despite this shaky public record, some stories implied that the dam failure was unexpected. The

⁴⁰⁴The racial makeup of these victims was unclear, but a large percentage were poor white trappers or small business owners.

⁴⁰⁵This situation was made more tragic by the fact that it was unnecessary. Isaac Cline correctly predicted that there would be crevasses upriver from New Orleans, relieving the pressure before it reached the city. He informed the leaders in New Orleans but not the public. They made the decision to coerce the owners of the levee at least partly to demonstrate they were taking some action to protect New Orleans. Barry, *Rising Tide*, 242–244.

⁴⁰⁶These structural issues were pointed out by a report by J. T. Fanning, an engineer, in 1892, the year before the dam was completed. The first structural problems began to appear before the end of the first month of operation. Once put in operation, the bed of the reservoir quickly silted, possibly up to forty-eight percent by 1900, severely reducing its capacity to contain the water of a flood. Banks and Babcock, *Corralling the Colorado*, 20–22; and Adams, *Damming the Colorado*, 9–10.

⁴⁰⁷“DAM AND POWER HOUSE. No Damage Done By the Recent Flood of Colorado River,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 3.

behavior of Austin residents leading up to the April 1900 disaster additionally suggested that there were widespread rumors that the dam was unsafe.⁴⁰⁸ White spectators had been gathering for several days when the dam gave way.⁴⁰⁹ At least one photographer, in a time when cameras needed to be set up and prepared in a time-consuming process, was able to take a photograph of the first wave of water rushing through the dam.⁴¹⁰ A number of white spectators, in fact, ventured too close and had to be rescued, including several photographers.⁴¹¹ While these presumably middle-class white spectators were rescued, a number of poor white people living in a sort of refugee camp below the dam, were not. Several newspapers reported that “a crowd of poor white people, numbering about thirty, living just below the dam in tents were seen just before the dam broke and have not been accounted for since. It is generally believed that all were swept away.”⁴¹²

There was no suggestion that these people had been warned, and in fact most stories that mentioned them appeared to dismiss them as transients.⁴¹³ The only Texas newspaper to mention these poor white victims stated “About thirty people had camped in tents almost under the crest of the dam, and although the terrific rise in the river should have been sufficient to warn almost

⁴⁰⁸Some newspaper articles stated this explicitly. For instance, “The disaster, however, was not unexpected...it was known to many that it had been leaking for some time in spite of all efforts to check it...it was undermined by the Colorado river...an extremely poor foundation...” “DANGER NOT OVER,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, April 9, 1900, 1.

⁴⁰⁹Several reports claimed that “hundreds of people were collected on the banks of the river when the crash came.” The population of Austin, Texas in 1900 was 22,258. “FLEE FOR THEIR LIVES,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, April 9, 1900, 1; and “DEATH RIDES THE TORRENT,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 8, 1900, 1.

⁴¹⁰These were presumably middle-class white spectators based on the descriptions in the newspapers and the fact that they had the leisure to gather at the site. “The Flood-Wave,” *Harper's Weekly*, April 28, 1900, 392, HarpWeek Web site, <http://app.harpweek.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/>, accessed January 13, 2015.

⁴¹¹“DEATH RIDES THE TORRENT,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 8, 1900, 1.

⁴¹²While a number of white victims and a few Black victims were listed by name, I was unable to find death certificates for any of them. “Houses Float Like Ships,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 8, 1900, 3. Some newspapers omitted the word “poor” but used identical wording. “Great Flood at Austin, Texas,” *The Morning Astorian*, April 8, 1900, 1; and “Thirty People Swept Away,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1900, 1.

⁴¹³The rise of modern recreational camping, enabled by cars, did not really become common until the 1920s, and the working of the articles makes it clear that these victims were living in tents, not enjoying a few days of recreation. Readers would thus have interpreted them as poor white transients even without that being explicitly stated.

any reasonable person of the terrible danger impending they paid no heed. Just before the crash a number of them were seen around there. It is certain that none who were there escaped.”⁴¹⁴ This correspondent went further and characterized them as lacking reason, but if they were transients, they probably had not heard the rumors of the dam's instability. Yet the white spectators who clearly knew there was a risk were not criticized.⁴¹⁵ Class was the only significant difference in identity between the two groups, indicating the growing racialization of poor whites.⁴¹⁶

There were several smaller dam failures in 1899. “Dams had been built at Cunningham, Ellis and the State farms, but these were swept away and the waters cover a great part of each of these magnificent plantations.”⁴¹⁷ The primary victims at the first two locations were stated to be “negroes,” African American farm laborers, while the State farm was worked by convicts who were probably African American as well. They were in the way of this flood because of manmade geography, both the decision to dam a stream and the decision to place them on the land below these dams, whether because they were considered most appropriate to do this specific type of work or those they were most willing to place in a hazardous geographical zone.⁴¹⁸ Their race and class were closely intertwined with their status as expendable convict laborers.

⁴¹⁴Adams states that forty-seven people died in this flood, but that number probably did not include these campers as their numbers and identities were not clearly known. “The Disaster of Saturday,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, April 9, 1900, 1.

⁴¹⁵These poor white victims may not have had anywhere they could move their tents, depending on local issues such as vagrancy and trespassing laws. The white spectators were mentioned without criticism on the same page of the *Daily Herald* as the poor victims. “Flee for their Lives,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, April 9, 1900, 1.

⁴¹⁶Foley, *White Scourge*, 5–7. NOTE: The city of Austin ignored the geological reasons for the dam's failure and contracted a private company to rebuild it in 1912. This dam was never able to pass inspections and also failed, though less catastrophically, in April 1915 during another flood. Adams, *Damming the Colorado*, 11–12.

⁴¹⁷The fact that these dam failures only effected a small area suggested that they were built on small tributaries and not on a river or major tributary. The description of convict farms as “magnificent” was a reminder that many looked back longingly to large slave-worked plantations. “FLOOD HORRORS MULTIPLY...Untold Wretchedness and Poverty Everywhere—Generous Contributions,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 7, 1899, 1.

⁴¹⁸The article only mentioned that the farm laborers were refugees and failed to mention the fate of the convicts at all. “FLOOD HORRORS MULTIPLY...Untold Wretchedness and Poverty Everywhere—Generous Contributions,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 7, 1899, 1.

In 1913, a major levee, often called the Twenty-seven Mile Levee, gave way on the Brazos River near Bryan, Texas.⁴¹⁹ A significant number of the victims were Italian, an ethnic group generally treated as non-white at the time and who were often sharecroppers in similar conditions to Black farm laborers.⁴²⁰ Italian victims of this crevasse generally described in the aggregate in Texas newspapers.⁴²¹ But they were sometimes identified in out-of-state newspapers, such as, “Last night eight miles from Bryan, Lee Cortmelia, an Italian, was heard calling for help from his half-submerged cabin. This morning the cabin had disappeared. Cortmelia, his wife, and several children probably were drowned.”⁴²² Here their home was described as a “cabin,” creating the same patterns of word choices for those who were perceived as not-quite-white as for those who were Black.⁴²³

Relief: White Benevolence and Labor Control

Primary relief and fundraising for disasters occurred locally, was controlled by white community leaders, and often used as a method of labor control. With the exception of the 1900 hurricane, almost all relief came from within the state. The governor exercised heavy influence

⁴¹⁹This Bryan levee was described by various names, but was approximately twenty-seven miles long and protected about 55,000 acres, built with the height of the 1899 Brazos river flood as an expected maximum. The flood topped the levee at about 3:00 PM on December 4, 1913. Sections of the levee washed away over the next few days. “FLOOD REPORTS IN THIS VICINITY,” Bryan *Daily Eagle and Pilot*, December 4, 1913, 1; “FLOOD CONDITIONS ARE WORST EVER KNOWN,” Bryan *Daily Eagle and Pilot*, December 5, 1913, 1; and “FIVE BRYAN CITIZENS PERISH IN THE FLOOD,” Bryan *Daily Eagle and Pilot*, December 8, 1913, 2.

⁴²⁰Nevels, *Lynching to Belong*, 6–7; and Foley, *White Scourge*, 5–7.

⁴²¹The Dallas *Morning News* mentioned a nameless Italian family that was almost certainly the Cortmelia family. “Death Sweeps the Valley,” Dallas *Morning News*, April 9, 1900, 1.

⁴²²I was unable to locate death certificates. “Provisions for Sufferers,” Washington *Post*, December 6, 1913, 9; “Life Savers Arrive,” New York *Times*, December 6, 1913, 1; “More than 50 Flood Victims,” Boston *Daily Globe*, December 6, 1913, 6; and “Relief Train Sent Out,” Atlanta Constitution, December 6, 1913, 1. The *Morning News* used “home,” though they only “occupied” it, while the *Times* demoted it to a “cabin.”

⁴²³The use of the term cabin is similar to that used for pre-Emancipation slave housing. Nevels, *Lynching to Belong*, 6–7; and Foley, *White Scourge*, 5–7. Italian victims are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

and control over disaster relief and fundraising by unaffected Texas communities but was also the primary gate-keeper for out-of-state and Federal assistance.⁴²⁴ When a community unaffected by a disaster raised provisions or money for the relief of disaster victims, the governor frequently assigned them a specific community to assist.⁴²⁵ In theory at least, he was coordinating efforts to prevent all of the relief from going to a single community while others received little or none. But the governor could use his power to ensure that certain communities, especially white communities, were favored over others.⁴²⁶

Primary lines of control for relief and fundraising virtually always filtered through local relief committees, in the hands of white judges, planters, doctors, and merchants.⁴²⁷ When they did accept outside assistance, committees preferred to receive cash with which they could purchase relief supplies locally, thus benefiting the local white business community.⁴²⁸ These committees had the power to decide who was “worthy” and an authentic victim and who was not, providing an opportunity to reinforce white social rules and punish anyone who resisted those rules.⁴²⁹ They also determined how much relief was enough and what form that relief

⁴²⁴ While some out-of-state relief efforts went directly to Galveston after the 1900 hurricane, most went through the governor, and in other disasters, the governor was consulted first by out-of-state governments and organizations as to whether or not relief would be welcomed. A deeper analysis of the governor's role in relief, both in-state and out-of-state, is in the Galveston chapter since his role was most explicit during that disaster.

⁴²⁵ For instance, in 1899, the community of Greenville, Texas, sent their relief supplies to San Felipe, Texas, “designated by Governor Sayers.” Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

⁴²⁶ While newspaper articles suggested this occurred, particularly after the 1900 Galveston hurricane, verifying that would require a very detailed and time-consuming numerical analysis of which supplies were sent to which communities and a calculation of the amount of aid by population, race and ethnicity of victims, and the total number of refugees for that community. This is beyond the scope of this project which primarily analyzes how newspaper articles influenced popular perceptions and the collective memory of disasters and disaster victims.

⁴²⁷ A certain amount of informal community relief did not filter through these committees, particularly in the 1921 San Antonio flooding. But in the 1899 Brazos River flooding and the 1900 Galveston hurricane, the devastation was so wide-spread in local communities that almost all relief came through these committees.

⁴²⁸ These merchants did suffer indirect losses, and newspapers displayed a lot of sympathy as discussed later.

⁴²⁹ They distributed relief rations directly to planters with no supervision, leaving actual distribution in their hands which increased control over sharecroppers and laborers. It was possible that some added the cost of rations to laborers' debts. “(30)00 PEOPLE AT BROOKSHIRE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3. See also analyses of control, moral judgments, and work requirements. Remes, *Disaster Citizen*, 79–87, 109–110, 114–116; and Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 122 – 124, 128, 154. Institutional disaster charity is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

would take, usually by tying relief to labor which benefited the white middle and upper class.⁴³⁰

Relief for the farm laborers on plantations was additionally filtered through the hands of white landowners and their managers.

Distribution was almost always in the hands of white community leaders, sometimes over local Black communities in which they did not reside. In 1899, a correspondent from Sealy, Texas, requested that “contributions should be addressed to Mr. John Hackbar, a leading merchant of Sealy, who will see that proper distribution is made thereof.”⁴³¹ Clearly, all relief was to be filtered through Hackbar who also decided who should receive this charity. But the contributions being solicited were actually for San Felipe, Texas, where most of the Black victims were concentrated. The neighboring white community, Sealy, was able to control the relief that reached the nearby Black community, San Felipe, and exert control over that community.⁴³²

Correspondents frequently focused on reassuring readers that no charity or relief would be distributed to a person who was not “deserving” or “worthy.” The common idea was that most people who were poor and needed charity were morally suspect, and by this period, were

⁴³⁰ While there was very little in the surviving Black newspapers about Texas floods, during the February 1916 Mississippi flood, the Chicago *Defender* reported that “...the whites are looked after first and what is left goes to the race.” Another article asserted that “the white people are supplied with food, but the members of the race are short of supplies,” and added that merchants were reluctant to extend credit to Black victims. While almost certainly true, the *Defender* states this far more explicitly than white newspapers, and suggested this was a widespread belief of Black Americans about white charity. “Many Drown,” Chicago *Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1; and “Race Need Assistance,” Chicago *Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1.

⁴³¹ This was probably John Hackbarth, who in 1900 was a white merchant in Sealy. “WORK OF RESCUE AT SEALY. NEGROES ARE BEING MOVED RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE. Everything in the Bottoms Has Been Washed Away and People are Destitute,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1; and “John Hackbarth,” “Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 3, Austin County, Texas, Sheet 11, accessed December 30, 2022.

⁴³² However, a J. R. Griffin reported that 500 “starving” African Americans had taken refuge on a mound, most of them probably from San Felipe. He asked that supplies be sent to Drs. Ross and Davidson, his son-in-law. While doctors were frequently given control over distribution, the mound was on Ross's farm, suggesting contested local control over relief between the German-American merchant, Hackbarth, and local planters. “APPEAL FROM SAN FELIPE,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 6; and “WORK OF RESCUE AT SEALY,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 1.

beginning to be considered genetically inferior as well.⁴³³ In 1899, a Brookshire correspondent reassured the readers of the *Houston Daily Post* that “there is very little chance of any of the supplies going where they are not needed. The farmers are all well known to the local merchants who see to it that undeserving ones are not served.”⁴³⁴ Apparently, victims could not simply have lived in the path of the flood and lost food, supplies, home, and crops; the individual must also meet a community standard to be “deserving,” a form of social control that enforced an arbitrary set of rules for behavior. In this instance, the “undeserving” may have included any African American who had resisted white supremacy or had failed to show the deference and submissiveness that white residents expected.⁴³⁵

Worthiness for charity apparently could exclude farm owners, probably in the freedman’s community at Sunnyside. He reassured his readers that anyone who owned land where any crops had escaped inundation would not receive any assistance, no matter their losses.⁴³⁶ The victims needed food because they had lost their homes and supplies; any crops in the fields would not provide them with any means to feed themselves for months more. The specificity of this exclusion was curious, suggesting that there were particular individuals who were being targeted. One explanation might be that local leaders hoped to force the more prosperous African

⁴³³ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 7–9.

⁴³⁴ “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE...Immediate Necessities of the People Have Been Relieved,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

⁴³⁵ It may also have been used to punish white Populists who had violated social norms or offended leaders.

⁴³⁶ Someone owning even a single field on the prairie above the flood was excluded, even if they lost all household goods because their home and main fields were in the flood zone. The same correspondent asserted that supplies were only given to heads of families and “bosses of plantations,” then complained that the same Black heads of families spent their time waiting in line for supplies instead of “any effort to better themselves.” “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE...Immediate Necessities of the People Have Been Relieved,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

Americans to sell land, or possibly just viewed Black ownership of land as dangerous or a defiance of social norms that needed to be punished.⁴³⁷

The next day, a correspondent from Brookshire reported that the local relief committee was “doing every(th)ing in their power to prevent unworthy (pa)rties from drawing rations, which under (unreadable) excitement, has been done in a few (ins)tance, but from this time on it will be prevented.”⁴³⁸ He implied that someone had been able to identify at least one person who received relief who was considered “unworthy” by white middle-class community standards. This was unlikely to have meant someone who made a false claim of flood losses because the local community would have been very well aware of whose farms flooded. This individual was probably a flood victim who had violated some social norm that made them “unworthy.”⁴³⁹

He then scoffed that “many soreheads and fuss and feather (ch)aps are bobbing up and complaining (ab)out one thing and another.”⁴⁴⁰ Even though the amount of food being distributed was at a starvation level, and the victims had had relatively little choice about the hazardous locations of their homes, apparently even this grudging level of relief provoked complaints from some white residents of Brookshire. Enough white residents had complained about even this much relief that the correspondent felt impelled to address them and reassure his readers that “the charitable people, who have respond(ed) so liberally to the cries of distress, may (re)st assured that every dollar and all (ar)ticles of food and clothing which have (be)en sent here to relief this distress, will (be) handled properly by the distributing (co)mmittee, which is composed

⁴³⁷ “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE...Immediate Necessities of the People Have Been Relieved,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

⁴³⁸ Part of the number of refugees was blurred in the headline, but was identified in the body of the article itself as 3000. “(30)00 PEOPLE AT BROOKSHIRE: (AR)E NOW BEING FED BY THE RELIEF COMMITTEE. (Sic)kness Has Appeared Among the Refugees and Drugs Are Now Needed,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

⁴³⁹ There is not enough indication in the article to indicate why this person or persons was “unworthy.”

⁴⁴⁰ “(30)00 PEOPLE AT BROOKSHIRE: (AR)E NOW BEING FED BY THE RELIEF COMMITTEE. (Sic)kness Has Appeared Among the Refugees and Drugs Are Now Needed,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

of our most (wo)rthy and upright citizens.”⁴⁴¹ Here, “worthy” community leaders were contrasted with the presumed “unworthy” victims from earlier in the article who had to be barred from receiving any relief.

The supply of food itself could replace moral judgments with direct attempts to control labor. In the aftermath of the 1915 Galveston hurricane, the Chicago *Defender* stated that Black Galvestonians were unable to even buy food, “...as the white people had cornered the market,” suggesting hoarding.⁴⁴² The correspondent asserted that army officials had been involved in buying up all food, then helped force hundreds of Black residents into a prison camp to be used as forced labor.⁴⁴³ In fact, Galveston's mayor had publicly announced that any laborer who was idle or who tried to use the disaster to improve their wages would be arrested and forced to work without pay, which lent credence to the *Defender's* accusations.⁴⁴⁴ The most significant difference in the stories was the framing that they wanted to enter the collective memory: the *Defender* focused on the violation of the rights of Black Galvestonians and their humiliating treatment while white newspapers described it as control over Black labor and preventing the able-bodied from receiving unearned charity.⁴⁴⁵

White community leaders frequently used their power over relief, “charity,” as a means to maintain control of labor and even to compel recovery work from poor victims, particularly

⁴⁴¹ “(30)00 PEOPLE AT BROOKSHIRE: (AR)E NOW BEING FED BY THE RELIEF COMMITTEE. (Sic)kness Has Appeared Among the Refugees and Drugs Are Now Needed,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

⁴⁴² Nothing in other newspaper article stated that there were measures taken against hoarding by individuals in 1915. Army officials seized—and paid for—the retail and wholesale food supply, allowing them to force labor from those who could otherwise have bought food. “PEONAGE SLAVE SYSTEMS STARTS AFTER FLOOD,” Chicago *Defender*, September 25, 1915, 1.

⁴⁴³ It was unclear whether this was the actual U.S. military or the state militia. “PEONAGE SLAVE SYSTEM STARTS AFTER FLOOD,” Chicago *Defender*, September 25, 1915, 1. NOTE: a later article stated that the Secret Service had documented the treatment of Black Galvestonians and that the department of justice was investigating, but I was unable to find any indication that this led to any repercussions. “United States Government Has Matter,” Chicago *Defender*, September 25, 1915, 1.

⁴⁴⁴ I analyze this in more depth in later chapters. “Loss \$4,000,000 to \$8,000,000,” Dallas *Morning News*, August 20, 1915, 2; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 80.

⁴⁴⁵ Also implied was that these men presented a threat as potential looters.

Black labor. At times, a disaster was used as an excuse to extract work in return for nothing more than very insufficient rations. In 1899, a Brenham, Texas, correspondent reported that the community chose a Colonel D. C. Giddings as the chair of their relief efforts, who opposed accepting any outside aid for the victims. “Colonel Giddings stated that it had been suggested in some quarters that outside aid be called for. For his part, he thought the people of Washington county able to take care of their own and he opposed outside aid until such time as our resources are exhausted. This sentiment was applauded.”⁴⁴⁶ This relief effort only represented a single precinct, and rather obviously did not receive any feedback from the victims themselves. Instead, they felt entitled to make this decision for the community, despite the fact that it was clear from other articles that the victims were being supplied with severely inadequate rations.

Giddings then added that

“...work was the proper charity that should be offered the sufferers and that he felt sure the great majority of them would ask nothing more than an opportunity to earn a livelihood. It would not be a good idea to inculcate among the colored people that they are to be supported in idleness. They should thoroughly understand that the supplies sent them are for temporary relief and until work can be furnished.”⁴⁴⁷

Charity for African American farm workers was viewed as dangerous, leading to ideas about “idleness.” In fact, the beneficiaries of this “charity” were actually the businessmen and landowners whose repair work would be paid for largely by charitable donations. Here they transformed employment, probably coerced, into “charity.”⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS. AGREED THAT WORK SHOULD BE FOUND FOR THEM. Some Assistance Has Already Been Given to Relieve the Wants of a Few,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

⁴⁴⁷ “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS. AGREED THAT WORK SHOULD BE FOUND FOR THEM. Some Assistance Has Already Been Given to Relieve the Wants of a Few,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

⁴⁴⁸ Later in the same article, Joe Routt of Chappell Hill, Texas, did draw a distinction between charity and paid work, stating that “...the majority of these people only want work and not charity...” “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS. AGREED THAT WORK SHOULD BE FOUND FOR THEM. Some Assistance Has Already

Disaster and control of charity also provided the potential for long-term control of labor. In 1899, a Hempstead, Texas, correspondent reported that “the large planters, who have lost in some cases over \$50,000, are magnanimously feeding the starved and half-naked negroes and their children...”⁴⁴⁹ This article specifically singled out “large planters,” implying to the readers that this was an act of simple charity. However, based on context in other articles, many if not most of these planters simply added the costs to the debts owed by their tenants. Debt was a major tool of control over the Black labor force, ensuring that they would retain most of their tenants for the next year or two at least. And while they may not have been able to produce much in the way of crops for market that season, they could extract repair work and other labor from these tenants in the meantime.

One of the consequences of this desire for control over African American labor was the production of malnutrition and hunger. In 1899, correspondents confirmed that the rations being issued to the African American victims for an entire week was “...1 1/3 pounds of bacon, 7 pounds of meal or 5 of flour and 1 pint of syrup per capita.”⁴⁵⁰ First, this ration at Brookshire would have been desperately inadequate of protein, which they may not have recognized at that time. But based on simple calories, the highest estimates I could find suggested that this would have provided an adult, doing heavy farm labor, with less than 2,000 calories a day, probably less

Been Given to Relieve the Wants of a Few,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2. This preference for work charity was not limited to Texas plantation owners. In February 1916 during a Mississippi river flood, the *Chicago Defender* reported that “the prevailing sentiment seemed to be against the issuance of free rations, finding work for them on the levees and elsewhere...the white people are supplied with food, but the members of the race are short of supplies.” The article then added that merchants had stock but did not want to extend credit to Black flood victims. Another article indicated that while the U. S. military was involved in rescue and relief, there was a power struggle, with Black victims being denied Federal food relief because plantation owners refused to allow their workers to evacuate. “Race Need Assistance,” *Chicago Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1; “Boats to the Rescue,” *Chicago Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1, 5.

⁴⁴⁹ “TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOM DID NOT HEED IT. Hempstead Has Her Hands Full Taking Care of the Stricken of that Vicinity,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

⁴⁵⁰ “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE...Immediate Necessities of the People Have Been Relieved---Reports of Damage Not Exaggerated,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

than half of what he or she actually needed. The correspondent tried to justify these admittedly “short” rations by assuming that parents would consume part of their children’s rations, although even the full ration provided insufficient calories for any active child over the age of five or six. Most children were also working in the fields, an expectation of landowners, increasing their need for calories. Teenagers have even higher caloric requirements than adults, especially when doing the same field labor.⁴⁵¹

A more realistic ration was distributed by a relief committee from a central point chosen at Stafford, Texas, in 1899. They distributed “a half pound of bacon and two pounds of meal or flour for each adult and half of this for each child thereof. This was considered sufficient to last for the day.”⁴⁵² Based on this ration, the amount distributed for a week at Brookshire, Texas, was half the cornmeal considered necessary in other communities for an adult for a week, and only slightly more than one-third of the bacon.⁴⁵³ Even by regional standards for 1899, Brookshire was distributing barely a child’s normal ration of food to laboring adults.

While some communities explicitly rejected outside help even though the food relief they provided was extremely insufficient, other local authorities simply made it clear that they did not believe it was necessary.⁴⁵⁴ In 1899, E. P. Curry, a county judge for Washington County, sent a telegram to Governor Sayers in response to an inquiry about assistance for the local flood

⁴⁵¹ Using the USDA DRI Calculator for Healthcare Professionals for a twenty-year-old man who was five foot ten inches, weighed about one hundred and eighty pounds, and was very active, the minimum calories for health were 3,814 kcal/day. Very active is not the same as engaged in heavy field labor from sunup to sundown, so the calorie requirement was probably significantly higher, more than twice what was being provided. U. S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Library, <https://www.nal.usda.gov/human-nutrition-and-food-safety/dri-calculator>.

⁴⁵² “AT AND NEAR SUGARLAND. PROVISIONS WERE CARRIED TO THE REFUGEES FROM HOUSTON. Many Negroes Were Brought Back, but There Are Still Hundreds There,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁴⁵³ One-and-one-third pounds is about 1.334 pounds, which is only slightly more than one-third of the 3.75 pounds distributed at Stafford. Stafford did not report distributing the pint of syrup, but there were more than twice the calories in the extra bacon distributed at Stafford.

⁴⁵⁴ I address local and state control over outside charity and relief in more detail in the chapters on the 1921 San Antonio flood and the 1900 Galveston hurricane.

victims: “About 2000 people reported in (de)stituted circumstances. So far, by a no(bl)e response to the demands of human(it)y, our people have been able to relieve (al)l cases of suffering reported. Are or(ga)nized in their work of relief. I am not (au)thorized to decline voluntary offers of (as)sistance...”⁴⁵⁵ He neither accepted or declined the offer of funds to buy supplies for the victims, almost exclusively African American. Instead, he stated that they were relieving suffering and he did not believe he had the authority to decline aid, a statement he was unlikely to make if he had not wanted to decline that aid.

His statement about relieving suffering implied that the general belief was that the only necessary relief was to prevent people from actually starving. If victims had been supplied fully with clothing and household goods at even a minimal level, this would have reduced later sales by local merchants and by planters who sold goods to their tenants on account. A humane level of relief which extended beyond minimal survival would also have broken the debt cycle by which white leaders controlled farm labor in their area.⁴⁵⁶

By refusing outside assistance, the community was creating seriously malnourished families. There may have been a presumption that they would find some way to supplement those rations, but the rations were also dependent on performing labor, and many of these victims had already gone days without food. They had lost any stored food, and areas where they might safely fish or gather wild foods were flooded.⁴⁵⁷ While in the short-term, this probably helped prevent emigration, the Black farm laborers probably recognized that this was a form of control masquerading as charity for which they were supposed to demonstrate gratitude.

⁴⁵⁵ “AT BRENHAM,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

⁴⁵⁶ See my analyses of local and state control of relief in the next two chapters.

⁴⁵⁷ Accusations of trespassing on white-owned land by a Black person who did not work for the landowner had the potential for criminal charges.

While white communities generally made an effort to organize rescues and make certain Black survivors were minimally fed, they also tried to control where these refugees were relocated.⁴⁵⁸ While it was rarely articulated even indirectly, some community leaders were clearly anxious about the risks of large groups of non-white refugees sheltering near mostly white towns if they began to actually starve. Most white Southerners believed that African Americans would quickly turn into violent mobs, and that fear often appeared to be part of the root of their own racial violence against African Americans. In effect, white citizens often became what they themselves most feared: a racially motivated mob.⁴⁵⁹

Collectively, African Americans were often described in passive terms that suggested helpless workers firmly under white control. For instance, the headline for an article from Hearne read: “SITUATION IMPROVING. Negroes to Be Sent Back to the Bottoms.”⁴⁶⁰ African American farmers and farm workers were not returning or choosing to return; they were being sent by unnamed authorities. The subheadline implied that these victims were dependent, not independent, and possibly indicated that the residents of towns wanted the African American population dispersed as quickly as possible because they felt threatened by the concentration of large numbers of Black farm laborers in or near their towns.

White fear of potential African American violence as a motive for relief could be explicit. In 1899, correspondents reported that:

⁴⁵⁸ White townspeople were often very nervous about a sudden influx of Black refugees near their towns. African Americans were generally the last evacuated, and the location of refugees needed to soothe their nervousness, often railroad boxcars with as many as eighty-five reported crowded into a single car. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 1; and “AT AND NEAR SUGARLAND...Many Negroes Were Brought Back, but There Are Still Hundreds There,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁴⁵⁹ While fears of Black violence often drove white violence, during these disasters their reactions apparently were limited to attempts to control Black refugees.

⁴⁶⁰ “SITUATION IMPROVING. Negroes to Be Sent Back to the Bottoms,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

“The starving negroes at and around Fulshear are becoming desperate. They were under the impression that the supplies taken out by the committee were sent by the government and were about to take possession of them by force. They were finally restrained by Mr. Bonner telling them that the supplies were sent out as the result of private subscription and were for those first who were most in need and that if they would but be patient their time would come.”⁴⁶¹

The fear here was explicit: Black farm laborers would resort to force if they were allowed to starve. He also implied that Black Southerners believed that local and state authorities were deliberately denying them assistance from the Federal government. While he tried to make a point about their feeling of entitlement to that assistance, he instead made it quite clear that controlling Black labor and avoiding Black violence was the expected outcome of private relief.

Charity as a form of labor control probably helped drive African American migration from farms to towns and cities, first in Texas, then toward industrial cities in the North and West.⁴⁶² For example, after the December 1913 flooding, the *Chicago Defender* reported Black club women of Champaign, Illinois, were engaged in “helping the large number of flood sufferers who have recently come in their midst from the Southland.”⁴⁶³ The term “large” suggested a relatively substantial number in proportion to the current Black population, enough

⁴⁶¹ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

⁴⁶² During the February 1916 Mississippi river flood, there was an apparent power struggle over evacuation of Black plantation laborers between large white landowners and the military. An engineer, Captain Hetrick, insisted that Black victims must be evacuated before the U. S. Government forces involved in relief and rescue would supply rations or other relief supplies while many plantation owners refused to either allow them to evacuate or to supply their employees with rations themselves as Hetrick insisted. This conflict over labor, movement, and access to food was carried out between powerful white men, with little regard for the cost to the Black flood victims. Untitled article, *Chicago Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1.

⁴⁶³ While the exact origin state for these refugees was not specified, the date of the article strongly suggested that these refugees were from the 1913 Texas flooding. Even if they were not from the Texas flood, their arrival in Illinois supports the theory that disasters helped drive emigration. “PHYLLIS WHEATLEY CLUB NOTES,” *Chicago Defender*, December 13, 1913, 5. NOTE: There are relatively few surviving non-weekly African American newspapers from this period.

that Black middle-class charitable women had formally organized assistance for them.⁴⁶⁴ These Black women may also have been involved in encouraging and assisting them to relocate in a form of chain migration.⁴⁶⁵ The *Defender* was widely read, and this story helped create a perception that Black communities in the North could and would help Black immigrants.

The physical movement of flood victims, voluntary or involuntary, often depended on the intersection of class with race and gender. Railroads provided a primary means to control labor in the aftermath of a weather-related disaster. The expense of a train ticket would have made rail evacuation difficult during disasters, except when free transportation was offered to victims, but who was allowed to take advantage of such an offer was often controlled by local white authorities with a stake in preventing farm laborers from leaving.⁴⁶⁶ Even when poor farm laborers were moved by train, it was sometimes only as far as the nearest high ground where they were all kept together until they could return to their flood-damaged homes.⁴⁶⁷ Galveston was ideally suited for this form of control because the city is on an island that could only be accessed by rail or ship. White middle and upper-class women and children were given first priority in evacuation from Galveston Island after the September 1900 hurricane, and Black Galvestonians were not allowed to leave the city in order to provide a pool of labor.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ This group, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, was primarily a literary society, with some chapters such as one in Fort Worth, Texas, associated with the National Association of Colored Women (NACW.) While white women's clubs eventually took up social causes, though not necessarily charitable work, the NACW never separated "...club work from the older traditions of benevolence and religion..." NACW chapters played an important role in founding the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893–1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 17–18, 141–142; and McElhane, *Pauline Periwinkle and Progressive Reform*, 36, 51–52.

⁴⁶⁵ The Chicago *Defender* actively encouraged Black Southerners to emigrate. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 50–54, 123, 189, 212–215.

⁴⁶⁶ I only found one instance in which Black refugees were evacuated to a city during the 1899 flood: one group of no more than fifty were transported from Richmond to Houston and left in railroad boxcars, apparently for Houston's Black community to assist. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

⁴⁶⁷ In 1899 for instance, the San Antonio *Daily Express* reported that refugees were only moved as far as "the high localities," to wait for the flood to recede and return home. "CUT OFF BY FLOOD...River Reported Falling At Hempstead," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 7.

⁴⁶⁸ See analysis on Galveston in Chapter Five.

Local white authorities could not always prevent the migration of Black farm laborers who took advantage of free rail evacuation on relief trains, but they tried to create grounds for railroads to limit access to such transportation. In 1899, a source reported that “at Clodine 146 negro refugees boarded the train for this city. Mr. Theodore Bering, who spent the day in that vicinity, advised them to stay where they were, but to no avail. Many of them, he thinks, are imposters.”⁴⁶⁹ Clearly Bering attempted to stop these refugees from leaving but was unable to assert his authority sufficiently to overawe them. He then cast doubt on whether or not they were “deserving,” making it clear he believed that African American people were prone to fraud. But the phrase “spent the day in that vicinity” strongly suggested that Bering was not from the Clodine area. The article failed to cite any local white residents who agreed with his statement, casting doubt on his ability to identify actual refugees over those taking advantage of free transportation to migrate to Houston. Since the general coverage of the 1899 Brazos river flooding made it clear that most of the bottomland residents were African American and the upland residents who escaped flooding were primarily white, Bering was almost certainly wrong that “many” of these evacuees were frauds.⁴⁷⁰

The fear of farm labor migration in the wake of a disaster was not limited to Texas. During the February 1916 Mississippi flooding, an African American newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, reported that “the race employes (sic) on the big plantations are the worst sufferers, mainly because the greedy owners are trying to hold them so that they will have sufficient help to drain their lands after the flood subsides. They fear it will be hard to get labor when once it

⁴⁶⁹ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁴⁷⁰ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

leaves.”⁴⁷¹ This correspondent was making his own moral judgment of white plantation owners, assigning both fear and greed as their motives in language very similar to that used to describe Black flood victims. He then added that “owing to the adverse laws and hardships the race man once out of that section makes his way north.”⁴⁷² In another article on the same page, readers were told that “...the plantation owners wish the race men to remain, for when they leave they do not return...,”⁴⁷³ indicating a belief that many, possibly most, Southern farm workers remained with their employers involuntarily. Stories like this would have helped create the perception that Black Southerners would migrate given any opportunity, reinforcing a Northern Black collective memory of Southern racial conditions.⁴⁷⁴

Migration was not the only means by which African Americans exerted resistance to white attempts to control Black labor during disasters. Black individuals and organizations engaged in their own charitable fund-raising, though white newspapers often described them very differently from white fund-raising. Sometimes, the organizations were unnamed, or the leaders of the relief effort were unnamed, or the amounts raised were not listed, unlike almost all white efforts. This tended to create an impression of triviality, that their efforts were tokens rather than genuine. Unlike white relief leaders, however, Black leaders were also not allowed to control the relief funds and supplies that they raised, even when the recipients were supposed to be Black farm workers.

⁴⁷¹ Another statement in the article implied that poor white farmers may also have been afraid of competition for temporary paid work. “FLOOD CAUSES SUFFERING AND DISTRESS IN SOUTHLAND!” Chicago *Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1.

⁴⁷² Yet another article stated that “...the race man and woman are preparing to leave...,” “FLOOD CAUSES SUFFERING AND DISTRESS IN SOUTHLAND!” Chicago *Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1; and “Many Drown,” Chicago *Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1.

⁴⁷³ Untitled article, Chicago *Defender*, February 26, 1916, 1.

⁴⁷⁴ Whether these statements about migration were based on actual observations or correspondence with Black Southerners or on the *Defender's* own attempt to encourage Black Southerners to migrate was unclear.

This lack of control over Black charity was particularly apparent in 1899. On July 6, they published “An Appeal to Colored Pastors and Congregations of the City of Houston,” from Reverend P. H. Jenkins, the president of the African American Minister’s Union of the City of Houston.⁴⁷⁵ In it he described the situation of the Black victims and asked a list of ministers to begin efforts to begin soliciting money and provisions for the victims. But he also stated that he was traveling to Brookshire and that “I shall also confer with the relief committee at Brookshire with a view to having colored men appointed to assist in the distribution of what you give to relieve suffering humanity in this most trying hour of their lives.”⁴⁷⁶ He wanted Black men to be involved in the distribution of the supplies contributed by African Americans. This was a reasonable request on the surface, though it also hinted delicately that the distribution of relief by the white committee might not be entirely even-handed.⁴⁷⁷

However the next day’s *Houston Daily Post* included a report from a correspondent who stated that:

“a colored preacher named Jenkins, who came up from Houston yesterday, approached Mr. Ferguson after having talked with some of the unfortunate negroes, and asked that a colored man be added to the committee in order to look after the distribution of supplies which, he said, were to be sent by the colored people of Houston. The situation was explained to him and he left for another conference with his people. As a result he informed Mr. Ferguson later that, since he understood the matter he realized that his request was out of place and he therefore withdrew it.”⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ This incident was pieced together from articles published over several days. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 6.

⁴⁷⁶ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 6.

⁴⁷⁷ That suspicion may have been well-founded since Governor Sayers did not distribute all the funds raised during this disaster: he retained some of the funds and used it in April 1900 for white flood victims. “Homes Inundated; Many Lives Lost,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 10, 1900, 3.

⁴⁷⁸ “SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

The correspondent framed this encounter as a misunderstanding by Jenkins about the situation, though he did not explain exactly what the minister was supposed to have misunderstood or why his request was out of place. But he admitted that Jenkins first made his request after speaking to some of the victims, which strongly suggested that they told him that there were problems in how the relief was being distributed. Had they told him that they believed the relief was being distributed with an even hand, Jenkins would have had little reason to make this request in the first place. This suggests that the situation that was “explained” to Jenkins was probably a threat to withdraw white relief if the all-white committee did not retain sole control of distribution.⁴⁷⁹

Distribution of Black relief from Galveston was also controlled by white community leaders in 1899. A Galveston correspondent reported that “a number of colored citizens met at St. (Au)gustine's church last for the purpose of raising funds for the relief of the (fl)ood sufferers. A committee was ap(po)inted and the pastors of the different (ch)urches are requested to devote one service during Sunday for raising money for the sufferers. Nearly \$50 was subscribed yesterday. The committee will turn the funds over to Mayor Jones and the relief committee as they are collected.”⁴⁸⁰ The Black community leaders and members of their committee were not named.⁴⁸¹ The amount of money raised on the first day was, at least, identified. But the funds were turned over to the white mayor and his committee who controlled where and how they were distributed, generally through local white relief committees.⁴⁸² This lack of control over Black

⁴⁷⁹ The next day's edition included dismissal of criticism of the distribution by “soreheads and fuss and feather chaps,” and a complaint that people were not grateful for the work of the committee. “(30)00 PEOPLE AT BROOKSHIRE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3; and “THE COLORED SUFFERERS,” *Houston, Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 6.

⁴⁸⁰ “THE GALVESTON RELIEF CORPS. (H)ard Work Is Being Done Near Richmond,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

⁴⁸¹ Some of these leaders and church ministers probably died in the September 1900 Galveston hurricane—African American homes and churches were particularly devastated—but it is impossible to verify without names.

⁴⁸² Before the 1900 hurricane, however, the Black community in Galveston exerted some political influence through their votes, so they might reasonably expect that these funds would be handled fairly. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 85–86, 127, 149.

charitable funds extended nationally. Black communities were urged to send their contributions for Black victims of the 1900 hurricane to John Sealy, the white chairman of the Galvestonian relief committee, though Black donors were also asked to report the amounts to a representative of the Afro-American press, presumably for publication in their own newspapers.⁴⁸³

In general, white-owned newspapers downplayed African American or other non-white relief and rescue work, reducing reports to a few vague lines. But disasters sometimes offered the opportunity to remind white readers of the respectable Black middle-class. In 1899, the *Houston Daily Post* included a story on the organization of relief work by Houston's African American community that was almost a full column in length.⁴⁸⁴ About half of this article was devoted to a report by Jenkins about conditions near Brookshire, in which he expressed appreciation for the white relief efforts in that area.⁴⁸⁵ Jenkins reassured the Black community that J. H. Ferguson, chairman of the committee, was "taking great pains to see that the supplies were properly distributed. Everything sent to him would be sure to find its way to those who needed it most."⁴⁸⁶ Jenkins may have been reassuring the Black community, or he may actually have been performing damage control to reduce backlash to his implication that the white committee might not be even-handed if there was no Black involvement.

This article also included details on the organization of Black relief committees. Unsurprisingly, Jenkins was chosen to chair the efforts, and an H. C. Gray was chosen as secretary, and the article listed all of the men who were chosen for ward relief committees by full

⁴⁸³ "AN APPEAL FOR HELP," *Dallas Morning News*, September 18, 1900, 3.

⁴⁸⁴ Typically, reports on Black charitable work was limited to a few sentences at most. The next day's edition included several consecutive short articles on Black relief efforts. "HOUSTON NEGROES HELP: To Relieve the Distress in the Flooded Brazos Bottom. WORK BEGUN IN EARNEST YESTERDAY. Committees Appointed and meetings Held at the Colored Churches. A Mass Meeting Tonight," *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 6; and "THE COLORED SUFFERERS," *Houston, Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 6.

⁴⁸⁵ This was the same Jenkins who was the president of the Houston Colored Ministers' Union in the earlier stories.

⁴⁸⁶ "HOUSTON NEGROES HELP," *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 6.

name. Most of the men were identified by their first and middle initials, and ministers with the honorific “Rev.” The use of initials, especially a middle initial, was extremely common for prominent white men during this period of time, but virtually unknown for African American men, suggesting that this article may have been submitted by the committee itself and was printed with little editing.⁴⁸⁷

If so, this was an opportunity to remind white readers of the educated Black middle class. A Black businessman volunteered to perform one portion of the work: “Van H. McKinney, the colored job printer, set the pace in the good work by volunteering to print at his own expense 2000 circulars....”⁴⁸⁸ The medical committee was turned over to the “colored physicians of the city.”⁴⁸⁹ One man was identified as “Lieutenant A. J. Wakefield,”⁴⁹⁰ the only use of a military rank for an Black man in disaster reporting, which further supported the idea that there was little editing of this article after submitted. The careful description of the conditions and relief efforts at Brookshire support the likelihood of a Black correspondent who wrote very carefully in order to have it accepted without substantial changes.

Some white people did respond with generosity and compassion, even when the victims were African Americans. In 1899, the Houston *Daily Post* printed an editorial from a “Houston volunteer soldier” that probably referred to soldiers from a campaign in the Philippines. Guy

⁴⁸⁷ “HOUSTON NEGROES HELP,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 6.

⁴⁸⁸ “HOUSTON NEGROES HELP,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 6.

⁴⁸⁹ The African American middle class was social rather than economic, based on education and adherence to white conventions. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 2–4, 13–15, 43–47; and “HOUSTON NEGROES HELP: To Relieve the Distress in the Flooded Brazos Bottom. WORK BEGUN IN EARNEST YESTERDAY. Committees Appointed and meetings Held at the Colored Churches. A Mass Meeting Tonight,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 6.

⁴⁹⁰ White Southerners, especially near Houston at this time, were uncomfortable with any African American soldiers, much less an African American officer. The inclusion of his military rank must have been controversial, though it was also possible that editors assumed that white readers would not read far enough into the article to discover this inclusion. I was unable to find anyone who might be A. J. Wakefield in the Fourth ward of Houston in the 1900 United States Census. “HOUSTON NEGROES HELP: To Relieve the Distress in the Flooded Brazos Bottom. WORK BEGUN IN EARNEST YESTERDAY. Committees Appointed and meetings Held at the Colored Churches. A Mass Meeting Tonight,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 6.

MacLaughlin commented that he had heard that Houston was raising funds for those volunteers, and he countered this idea with, “as one of the soldiers who did not die, I wish to notify the gentlemen in charge of the fund that I am willing for my share to be sent to the flood stricken people perched in trees watching their homes float by in the Brazos bottoms.”⁴⁹¹ This was a man who presumably was viewed as both in need and worthy, but was moved by newspaper reports to point out that there were others in greater need. Even more surprisingly, while his statement was clearly moved by pity for the victims, he did not mention or even imply the race or even the economic or social class of these “people.” Nor did he racialize or trivialize the loss of their homes by referring to them as “shacks” or “huts.” Taken out of context of the rest of the reporting, his letter could have been about any population of people caught in a flood.

Gender: White womanhood and Manhood

Newspaper reports generally treated women, white or Black, as passive recipients of rescue and relief, not someone actively engaged in their own rescue or recovery. While rural Black women were occasionally named, they were rarely identified with honorifics or even their husbands’ names. This, intentionally or not, created doubt about her marital status. For instance, the *Houston Daily Post* reported that in Calvert, Texas, “Five bodies of negroes have been recovered. The names are Dave White, Tom Hyson, Rosana Brown and her infant and an unknown negro.”⁴⁹² Rosana Brown was described as having a child, but she was not given an

⁴⁹¹ I was unable to find him in the 1900 US Census for Houston, but he appeared in the 1910 Census: a white life-insurance agent, 37 years old, and a veteran. “A SUGGESTION,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 6; “Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, Ward 3, Houston, Harris County, Texas, Sheet 9A, accessed January 3, 2023, [ancestrylibrary.com](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com).

⁴⁹² “CLOUDBURST AT CALVERT...Five Negroes Were Drowned and Much Damage to Property,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5.

honorific or identified with her husband's name or even as "the wife of". She may or may not have been married, but when Black women were named, it was usually with their own name and without any indication of their marital status, while honorifics including a husband's name was standard for white women. A woman with children who was not married would have been viewed as immoral and undeserving of charitable help, or at least less deserving.

Gender, race, and age could intersect with marital status to influence the degree of reporting on victims. In 1899, a correspondent from Duke, Texas, reported on four drowning victims, three African American, one white. Readers were told simply a name and race for the two of the African American victims, and only the father's name and race for the third who was not even identified by gender. But for the fourth victim, they were told that "Mrs. Adams, an aged white wo(man), drowned near Oyster creek...Mrs. Adams is better known as (unreadable) Johnson, her name previous to her m(ar)riage. She lived at Oyster creek (unreadable) years."⁴⁹³ The readers were given much more information on Adams than on the African American victims. Like the African American victim Rosana Brown,⁴⁹⁴ no husband was identified or named, but she was not clearly identified as a widow either.⁴⁹⁵ Unlike Brown, Adams was given the honorific, Mrs., and the correspondent included her full maiden name, something which was extremely rare in newspaper reports. This special emphasis on her marital status seemed intended to reassure readers that she had been respectably married, in contrast to African American women, whose marital status was apparently considered either irrelevant or questionable.⁴⁹⁶ Yet as the earlier

⁴⁹³ "FOUR DROWNED AT DU(KE): LIFE SAVING CREW HAS B(EEN) DOING GREAT WORK. Nearly a Thousand Refugees (?) Reported on the Plantations Near that Point," *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁴⁹⁴ See Rosana Brown. "IMMENSE DAMAGE DONE BY THE HEAVY RAINS...Five Negroes Were Drowned and Much Damage to Property," *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5.

⁴⁹⁵ There was a word that was unclear that might have been "widow."

⁴⁹⁶ White widows were generally identified as widows, a gendered term that invoked a great deal of pity. So it was unlikely that Adams was widowed, but the silence about any husband suggested that she had either been deserted or was otherwise separated from her husband. A woman living alone, even an elderly one, who was not widowed, was open to speculation, so the emphasis on her marital status may have been reassurance that she was

story on Looney demonstrated, divorced white women were sometimes identified as married in an effort to protect their status.⁴⁹⁷

Age and gender sometimes intersected with whiteness in newspaper reports. In 1899, a correspondent from Wharton, Texas:

“...was informed by a reliable citizen that Mr. Hudspeth, an aged gentleman living several miles below town, while fishing Sunday morning, discovered the body of a young white girl of about 13 or 14 years of age floating on the swollen waters. The child’s face was easily seen, though partly veiled by long waving hair. Mr. Hudspeth, being alone, was not able to secure the body, and before he could summon aid the body had drifted beyond his reach.”⁴⁹⁸

This particular story passed through several people, and may or may not have been accurate as this body did not appear to have been recovered later. The story was also questionable because the source of the story was a “reliable citizen” who remained unnamed.

Both the person who attempted to recover her body and the victim were described primarily through race, age, and gender. Hudspeth, white, was named and given an honorific, but also the appellation “gentleman,” reinforcing his gender, age, and, indirectly, his race.⁴⁹⁹ The girl was unidentified other than age, race, and gender. The victim's youth was later reinforced twice

respectable, and if deserted, also an acceptable object of pity. “FOUR DROWNED AT DU(KE): LIFE SAVING CREW HAS B(EEN) DOING GREAT WORK. Nearly a Thousand Refugees (?) Reported on the Plantations Near that Point,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁴⁹⁷ See analysis of Looney's marital status earlier in this chapter. “A CLOUDBURST AT HAMILTON,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

⁴⁹⁸ “A "FLOATER." A Young Girl's Body Borne to the Gulf by the Colorado,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

⁴⁹⁹ I was not able to conclusively identify Hudspeth. There were two white men in their fifties living in Wharton County, Texas, with that surname recorded in the 1900 Census, but not enough detail to propose one over the other. But the fact that there were two Hudspeths who fit the description living around Wharton did give some credence to this story. “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, Wharton County, Texas, Sheet 20B, accessed January 3, 2023, ancestrylibrary.com; and “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, Wharton County, Texas, Sheet 2B, accessed January 3, 2023, ancestrylibrary.com.

when she was described as a child.⁵⁰⁰ Her only identifier was her “long and waving hair,” a quality that reinforced her gender, age, and, indirectly, race.⁵⁰¹ What little description the correspondent included may have invoked an image of nineteenth century art, such as Sir John Everett Millais’s *Ophelia*, one of the Pre-Raphaelite artists.⁵⁰² These combinations of race, age, and gender also implied a relatively high social class, Hudspeth as a gentleman, and the girl as a tragic Ophelia-like figure.

Class, race, and gender frequently influenced reporting on victims. Specifically, the use of the gendered identifier, “lady,” indicated both whiteness and a presumed social class. For instance, in 1899, a correspondent from Brenham, Texas, reported that “a lady and her baby in a buggy and a man in a wagon were seen floating down the Yegua yesterday. All were drowned. It was impossible to either identify or recover the bodies.”⁵⁰³ The woman appeared to be classified as a “lady” due to her use of the buggy in which she drowned.⁵⁰⁴ The readers were reassured that those who saw her attempted to identify and recover the bodies by the explanation that it was “impossible” to do so. In very few words, the correspondent provided this unknown white woman with a social class and race that would have been understood by his readers.

Similarly race, class, gender, and age influenced response to several young students from Galveston's Dominican's academy who were stranded by the 1899 flooding.⁵⁰⁵ A W. B. Fordtran

⁵⁰⁰ Hudspeth’s age may have been reinforced by his inability to recover the body. Despite the tragic description and imagery of the girl contrasted with the elderly gentleman, the article itself was titled ““A “FLOATER.”” The romanticism of the article contrasted with the shock of the blunt article title.

⁵⁰¹ A married woman's hair would not have been loose, and a non-white woman's hair would not have been described as “loose and waving.” “A “FLOATER.”” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

⁵⁰² “Ophelia,” John Everett Millais, circa 1851, public domain.

⁵⁰³ “Three Were Drowned,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 4.

⁵⁰⁴ Tenant and other small farm families would almost always have chosen a wagon for its broad agricultural uses, such as the man who was also mentioned.

⁵⁰⁵ This was probably the Dominican Convent where they had about thirty children boarding in September 1900 when the hurricane hit. They survived in their chapel though the roof blew off and at least one wall collapsed. Sr. Madeleine Grace, CVI, *The Episcopacy of Nicholas Gallagher, Bishop of Galveston, 1882–1918* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2020), 97.

from near Duke, Texas, telegraphed the Sisters “to send a special train here. Four girls from the Sisters’ academy have been stopping (at) Fordtran’s plantation. He considers the situation critical. Fordtran reported refugees on Blue Ridge...”⁵⁰⁶ These students were white and at least middle-class if they were taking a train to attend a private academy. In fact they were important enough for a special train, presumably expensive, rather than sending the girls on a train transporting other refugees or relief supplies. To gender, race, and class was added their age and presumed innocence, and Fordtran emphasized the proximity of presumably Black refugees, implying that they posed a danger to the virtue of these white girls.⁵⁰⁷

The presence of Black disaster refugees, in fact, often intersected with gender to invoke tacit racial fears. Articles carried undertones of fear about Black refugees assembling in or near towns during the 1899 flooding. After reporting on the rescue and relief efforts for Black tenants, a correspondent from Richmond, Texas, added that “about four-fifths of the women and children of the town went to Eagle Lake this morning and a large number will leave this evening...nearly all the men remained in town and will look after women and children who remain until the flood subsides.”⁵⁰⁸ The people evacuating were described as townspeople, while the refugees were exclusively identified as African American, making it clear that they were evacuating white women and children from proximity to the refugees. The key to this evacuation appeared to be the fact that, in addition to the use of public buildings, “all houses above water are thrown open

⁵⁰⁶ “FOUR DROWNED AT DU(KE)...Nearly a Thousand Refugees (?) Reported on the Plantations Near that Point,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁵⁰⁷ Fordtran did not identify them as African American specifically, but at least ninety percent of the 1899 flood refugees were African American, and he specified that the refugees were living on green watermelons. Watermelons were often coded references to African Americans. “FOUR DROWNED AT DU(KE)...Nearly a Thousand Refugees (?) Reported on the Plantations Near that Point,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁵⁰⁸ Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

and are filled to their utmost.”⁵⁰⁹ Evacuating white women and children would have freed space, but also prevented them from coming into direct contact with Black refugees.⁵¹⁰

The relief efforts themselves were not only white-controlled but divided by gender. Prominent white men controlled the leadership of most relief committees. Prominent white women were responsible for most of the actual work on the ground, and in this context, correspondents occasionally named them individually. More common, however, was a generic and anonymous description of their involvement. In 1899, the *Houston Daily Post* mentioned that “in Austin a committee of ladies started out today to raise money, food and clothing and got about \$100 as a starter as well as several instructions from points along the Austin and Northwestern to draw for various sums.”⁵¹¹ This correspondent did not name any leaders or members of this committee or give any indication of whether they were connected to a particular church or organization. The only identifier he used was “ladies,” a class-based indication that produced an impression of middle-class white women engaged in charitable works.

White men exclusively controlled the organization of rescue equipment and parties, and they were more likely than white women to be identified as soliciting large donations of money and bulk supplies, which were often given an explicit monetary value. In fact, virtually all cash was converted into supplies, controlling exactly what form the relief took. White women might solicit money and supplies, generally in smaller amounts, but were much more likely than men to organize fund-raising events and they almost exclusively controlled solicitations of clothing for disaster victims. For instance, an Alvin, Texas, correspondent reported to the *Houston Daily Post* specifically that the mayor’s committee had collected cash to be used to purchase supplies for

⁵⁰⁹ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

⁵¹⁰ See also earlier analysis of fears of Black violence.

⁵¹¹ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 1.

victims while “another, the ladies’ relief committee, is at work gathering up clothing...”⁵¹² This correspondent made it very explicit that the relief work had been divided by gender. The mayor was named but none of the women were identified.

Women were also the primary clothing donors. Unlike the ladies’ relief committees that were often anonymous, white women donors were listed with honorifics and an initial which most likely was their husband’s given name. One list in the *Houston Daily Post* in 1899 included Mrs. S. Taliaferro as a clothing donor, probably the wife of S. Taliaferro who led Houston's relief efforts.⁵¹³ The article implied that she and the other white women in the list were women's leaders in the anonymous committees, demonstrating a gendered division of relief efforts within one family. This odd combination of public acknowledgment and anonymity reflected ideas that white middle-class women's charity was not only accepted but assumed, but public activism was still considered inappropriate for a respectable Southern woman.⁵¹⁴

Consistent with the invisibility of white women's relief work, women and girls, especially white women, were rarely credited with courage or resilience in their own survival.⁵¹⁵ After the 1915 Galveston hurricane, a group of ten people were rescued from trees by a relief tug, the *Mary Lee*. The title of the article was “GIRLS CLING TO TREES IN STORM,” but most of the article recounted the “thrilling experience” of a male camper, Joe Berger, and that of a caretaker who was given credit for saving his two children and a niece.⁵¹⁶ The two girls, 17 and 7, while

⁵¹² “Alvin’s Contribution,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

⁵¹³ Taliaferro was appointed to head Houston's relief efforts again after the 1900 Galveston hurricane. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3; and “TIRELESS GALVESTON. Sending Relief With Open Hand to the Flood Sufferers,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 9, 1899, 7.

⁵¹⁴ McArthur, *Creating the New Woman*, 1–6. NOTE: A story on the 1915 Galveston hurricane described Jewish and Catholic girls soliciting contributions in Saint Louis by telephone. However, that newspaper has since been moved behind a paywall and I was unable to verify the details. “Flood Relief Fund Reaches \$7258; \$50,000 Needed,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 25, 1915, 3.

⁵¹⁵ I define donors as passively involved as opposed to relief committees which were actively involved.

⁵¹⁶ George W. Soregga was the caretaker for the “Baker place” on Bush Island which the article states was swept clean of buildings by the storm. While the article gave him credit for saving the three younger family members

named, were very briefly described in words that had distinctly feminine connotations, stating that “both showed signs of the privation and anxiety which they had undergone, and both appeared dazed when put aboard the tug.”⁵¹⁷ The younger girl was further emotionally described: “...tears stained the face of the pretty 7-year-old Bernice as she tried to drink her hot coffee.”⁵¹⁸ The girls were anxious and dazed and had suffered privation, further emphasized by Bernice's tears on an explicitly “pretty” face with no suggestion that their characters had played any role in their own survival. The male survivors were described simply as “ravenously hungry.”

Only one white woman, Minnie Florea, sixteen-years-old, was described as having been somewhat heroically active in her own survival. She and two members of the Brazos Life Saving Station at Quintana floated almost 60 miles to land on Galveston Island during the 1915 Galveston hurricane, the only survivors of the station.⁵¹⁹ Flores was established as middle-class by the fact her family was vacationing as part of a houseparty being hosted by Captain Steinhart of the station.⁵²⁰ She survived by clinging, consecutively, to a door, a log, then a plank, and explicitly stated that she had refused to allow one of the other two survivors, Carl Olson, to tie her to him for fear she might cause him to drown.⁵²¹ Despite attributing that measure of heroism

by lashing them together with ropes, he had not lashed himself to them. Based on bodies found after the 1900 hurricane, using ropes to connect people often resulted in them drowning instead. “GIRLS CLING TO TREES IN STORM,” *San Antonio Express*, August 20, 1915, 4.

⁵¹⁷ “GIRLS CLING TO TREES IN STORM,” *San Antonio Express*, August 20, 1915, 4.

⁵¹⁸ “GIRLS CLING TO TREES IN STORM,” *San Antonio Express*, August 20, 1915, 4.

⁵¹⁹ “GIRL DRIFTED SIXTY MILES,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 22, 1915, 4.

⁵²⁰ This story is supported by headstones for several members of the Florea family dated August 16, 1915, including John Cornelius Florea. Her father was described in the article as J. C. Florea. According to the 1910 U.S. Census, Florea was a county attorney. Also dead were the mother, Jessie, daughters Nellie and Jessie Miriam, and son George. The oldest child, Louise, was twenty-one and was not with the family. Minnie was the third of five children and died just short of her hundredth birthday. “GIRL DRIFTED SIXTY MILES,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 22, 1915, 4; “Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, Richmond, Fort Bend County, Texas, Sheet 12A, accessed January 5, 2023; “John Cornelius Florea and Jessie,” “Nellie D., George Dunlop, and Jessie Miriam Flores,” “Minnie Florea Whittington,” and “Louise Adeline Florea,” Find A Grave, Accessed January 5, 2023, [ancestrylibrary.com](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com).

⁵²¹ Olson, a member of the Lifesaving Station's crew, had also participated in extensive rescue efforts on the Brazos River in 1913 just two years earlier. S. I. Kimball, *Flood in South-Central Texas*. Report to the Secretary of the Treasury, February 3, 1914, Doc. 422, 63rd Congress, 2nd Session, 1914, 14.

to her, the story then moderated that by claiming she survived because “I never could stand to swallow salt water or to get it in my eyes. So I kept my eyes and mouth closed and the wind just blew me in.”⁵²² This statement fit white middle-class expectations for women's motivations and behavior, reducing her courage and resilience to a woman's distaste.

Black women were rarely attributed any heroism in their survival, and in the case of mothers, could judge them unkindly. A correspondent from Calvert, Texas, reported one incident in which an Black mother was only able to save two of her four children:

“On the Brennan (Henderson) farm last Saturday, the 1st, a very thrilling incident in the flood tragedy occurred. The wife of John Daniels, colored, and her four children were passengers in a boat load of thirteen crossing to a place of safety...an occupant of the boat grabbed a projecting limb of a tree, which movement caused the boat to capsize. The mother above referred to seized one child in her left arm and another by the clothing with her teeth; with her remaining arm she clung to a tree while the other two children were drowned in the cruel waters.”⁵²³

The most peculiar element was the word choice, “thrilling,” to describe a family tragedy.⁵²⁴ This correspondent chose to stress the adventure of a capsizing boat over the drowning deaths of two African American children.

⁵²² “GIRL DRIFTED SIXTY MILES,” Dallas *Morning News*, August 22, 1915, 4.

⁵²³ This story was reported several times. Later versions added details and corrected the number of people drowned from three to two. John Daniels, the husband, appeared in the 1900 Census with a wife of ten years named Lillie Daniels. She was the mother of eight children, only three still living in 1900. “AROUND CALVERT,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 7, 1899, 3; “A RESUME FROM CALVERT...8000 Negroes Destitute,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2; “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 1, Robertson County, Texas, Sheet 14B, accessed January 3, 2023; and “THE HIGH WATER AT CALVERT: Reports that More Than a Score of Persons Have Been Drowned,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

⁵²⁴ When this word appeared in articles, the individual was almost always a white male, but most crucially, a survivor who had had an adventure.

Readers were also told that the mother managed to save two of her children and herself in enough detail to make it clear that this was a remarkable feat of bravery, quick thinking, and determination. White male disaster victims who saved themselves and others were described with terms that was admiring or praised their heroism. Instead, his bare description of this Black mother who held onto one child's clothing with her teeth in sheer determination to save that child could be argued to have been meant to invoke an animalistic image of this desperate mother. His final unsympathetic statement about the children she lost reminded the readers that she had been forced to choose which children to save with no indication of her heroism. Yet in the next paragraph, he explicitly assigned "bravery and heroism" to a Black man who got his family and other people taking shelter with him onto the roof of his home, saving them.⁵²⁵ The single difference between the two was gender.

In another incident near Sunnyside, Texas, the correspondent reported that "one negro woman, in attempting to make land with two children, let go the elder and went on with the baby in her arms. Her other has not been heard from and is supposed to have been drowned."⁵²⁶ This woman and her children were not only nameless, but her children were not even identified by gender. Yet she and her children were clearly known since the correspondent was able to add the information that the older child was still missing. The focus was on her race and her choice that led to the loss of the older child rather than her heroism in saving her infant and herself. And the age of the older child could have been an important detail in her choice. A child who was in their early teens and could swim was not as dependent as an infant. He also admitted that the flood waters were so turbulent that homemade "rough punts" could not survive in the flood waters and that more substantial boats were needed. By focusing on the lost child, the implication was that

⁵²⁵ "AROUND CALVERT," San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 7, 1899, 3.

⁵²⁶ Untitled article, San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 2.

the mother should have risked all of them, despite the fact she was caught in flood waters severe enough to tear apart these punts.⁵²⁷

Americanization: The Shifting Color Line

After the 1913 great flood, most explicit ethnic identifications during disasters vanished from newspaper reports. In 1915 and 1921, newspapers limited identities almost exclusively to white, Mexican, and negro. This change can probably be attributed to a number of factors, including World War I, the Mexican Revolution, the Great Migration of poor farm laborers that significantly shifted the demographics of farm workers, and the rise of eugenics and Americanization campaigns.⁵²⁸ Prior to the beginning of World War I, however, newspapers used a rich spectrum of racial and ethnic identities when reporting disasters, especially in 1899 and 1900, most of which were excluded from whiteness.

Before World War I, several words were mostly reserved for use for white non-ethnic Texans, particularly “American.”⁵²⁹ For instance, in 1913, the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* reported that “...an unidentified negro drowned at Columbus, while at Lagrange the bodies of two Americans and three Mexicans floated through the town...”⁵³⁰ African Americans and Mexican Americans were excluded from the identity category of American simply by listing them

⁵²⁷ These were also the only two incidents, excluding the 1900 Galveston hurricane, in which a woman, Black or white, was described explicitly as rescuing others.

⁵²⁸ Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*; Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*; Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education*; Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners*; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*; McKiernan–González, *Fevered Measures*; Stern, *Eugenic Nation*; Trenckmann, *Preserving German Texan Identity*.

⁵²⁹ Foley also concluded that American was only applied to those who were white non-immigrant, and only slowly embraced ethnic groups. Foley, *The White Scourge*, 44.

⁵³⁰ “Danger Points Relieved,” Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, December 6, 1913, 1.

separately. Had the correspondent not intended to exclude them, he would simply have referred to the “American” victims as “white.”⁵³¹

In April 1900, the *New York Times* reported that near Del Rio, Texas, “rescuing parties have been out in boats all day rescuing water-bound Mexicans and Americans.”⁵³² Here Mexicans were excluded from the identity category of American, whether or not they were born in the United States, clearly reserving “American” for “white.” Similarly, in 1921, the *Brownwood Bulletin* reported that “...five houses were washed away, carrying twenty-six Mexicans to their death. Only two Americans are reported dead, a boy of 5 years and a girl of 7...their name was Barfield.”⁵³³ The Mexican victims were explicitly excluded from the identity, “American,” and reported without any other details, while readers were told the genders, ages, and surnames of the white victims.⁵³⁴

While African American and Mexican victims were rarely identified beyond race and sometimes gender, even unidentified white victims were generally described in extensive detail, clearly in the hope that someone would recognize the description and provide that identification. In 1899, a correspondent from Calvert reported:

“the finding of a drowned white man on the Collier plantation near Mumford, a station on the Hearne and Brazos Valley railroad in the southern part of this county. The dead man has not been identified, but is described as being six feet tall, clean shaven, except black moustache; he was in his shirt sleeves and wore black pants and soldier’s leggings, and had a six-shooter scabbard buckled around his waist.”⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Where names can be established, ethnic Americans might be identified by ethnicity, but not as American.

⁵³² “THE BRAZOS ON A RISE,” *New York Times*, April 9, 1900, 2.

⁵³³ “Along San Gabriel,” *Brownwood Bulletin*, September 13, 1921, 1.

⁵³⁴ I only touch on Mexican ethnicity briefly here in its exclusion from “American.” See the next chapter for an analysis of the language used to describe ethnic Mexican victims and relief workers.

⁵³⁵ “5000 REFUGEES AT CALVERT. GOVERNOR WILL SEND RELIEF FRR (sic) THAT NUMBER. White Man Reported Drowned Near Gause—Damage Greater Than Anticipated,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

The last sentence provides enough unique details to allow someone to recognize this victim. Compare that detail with this representative one of an unidentified African American victim: “the body of a negro passed under the bridge Sunday afternoon.”⁵³⁶ This victim may have been unidentified, but the correspondent did not include an indication of age or gender or any identity beyond race.⁵³⁷ Newspapers implied that the identity of white victims was vital, while unidentified African American victims were reported in terms much closer to that of livestock.

Even when there was no overt attempt to solicit the identity of bodies, more detail was provided about white victims. In 1899, a Velasco, Texas, correspondent reported that they had found and buried eight victims who had washed down the river, adding that “four of them were negroes and the other four were a woman and three children.”⁵³⁸ The first half of the sentence identified four victims solely by their race, African American, without adding any identifiers related to age or gender. The other four were implied to be white by exclusion from the first group and were further identified by age, and in one case, by gender.⁵³⁹

In contrast to the lack of non-racial identifiers for most Black victims, honorifics were sometimes used for non-elite white men. A Brenham, Texas, correspondent reported that “Messrs. Attie Dever and James Hays Quarles, who left at daylight Tuesday to carry supplies to those who are homeless and without food...”⁵⁴⁰ Dever was a white “stockman” according to the 1900 U.S. Census, a somewhat vague term. Had he owned his own stock, presumably he would also have had land on which to graze that stock, but he was not recorded as even leasing

⁵³⁶ Will Pitts of Pitts Bridge reported this to the *Eagle*. “THE RIVERS,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, July 4, 1899, 1.

⁵³⁷ In similar instances, the person reported some details about white bodies they saw in the river, such the race, age, and gender of the girl's body with long waving hair described in the last section. “A “FLOATER.” A Young Girl's Body Borne to the Gulf by the Colorado,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

⁵³⁸ “EIGHT BODIES: Lodged on the Beach at Quintana. Four White People,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 4.

⁵³⁹ In fact a subheadline explicitly identified them as white. “EIGHT BODIES: Lodged on the Beach at Quintana. Four White People,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 4.

⁵⁴⁰ “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS. AGREED THAT WORK SHOULD BE FOUND FOR THEM. Some Assistance Has Already Been Given to Relieve the Wants of a Few,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

farmland.⁵⁴¹ So despite the honorific, he did not appear to belong to the social class of landowners and community leaders, even though the article referred to “Mr. Dever’s logging camp.”⁵⁴²

The other man, Quarles, was more obscure, but was probably Jim Quarles who had appeared in the 1880 United States Census, a white boy, age ten, living in Waco, Texas, with Victoria Hayes, his aunt.⁵⁴³ The similarity of her surname to Quarles’ middle name suggests he may have been given that middle name in honor of his mother’s surname. He and Dever were within three years of each other in age, however, suggesting that they may have been friends who teamed up to engage in this rescue work. Either way, the use of the honorifics for these two white men appeared to be respect for relative newcomers who put themselves at risk for the benefit of the community rather than an indication of class.

In 1899, newspapers generally excluded most immigrant ethnicities from “white.” A correspondent in Brenham, Texas, who was reporting to the Houston *Daily Post*, identified multiple ethnic Americans as a different class of farmer in Washington County. He stated that “there are many valuable farms in this county...the county is populated by a class of thrifty Germans, Bohemians and Poles. They do a great deal of their own work, the entire membership of the family joining in the farm work. They make good crops, and they are people in a position

⁵⁴¹ According to the 1900 United States Census, Attie C. Dever was a single twenty-six-year-old white man who boarded with a family in Brenham. He was relatively well-educated: he could read, write, and speak English. “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 3, Brenham, Washington County, Texas, Sheet 3B, accessed January 3, 2023.

⁵⁴² “RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS. AGREED THAT WORK SHOULD BE FOUND FOR THEM. Some Assistance Has Already Been Given to Relieve the Wants of a Few,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

⁵⁴³ Most of the 1890 United States Census was lost in a fire and nothing could be found for any variation on that name in the few counties in Texas for which records survived. While there were one or two James Quarles on the 1900 U. S. Census in other areas of Texas, the information on them was not enough to draw a firm connection to this Quarles. If Quarles was an orphan, he probably had few local ties and may have emigrated in search of greater opportunities by the 1900 Census. “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Waco, McLennan County, Texas, Page 32, accessed January 3, 2023.

to hold the product at times for good prices.”⁵⁴⁴ Three ethnic groups from North Central Europe were identified: Germans, Czechs (Bohemians), and Poles, each with their own languages and cultural roots. In the eyes of the correspondent, though, they were all very similar, a single “class.”

This description was relatively flattering on the surface. They were described as a thrifty class, a trait generally considered admirable in the late 1800s, but in the context of rising anxiety about immigrant groups and assimilation, that term may also have suggested criticism that perhaps they were not engaging in the American consumer economy.⁵⁴⁵ The correspondent added that the farms were almost exclusively worked by their own families, which appeared to be a contrast to white “American” plantations in the region which were primarily worked by tenants and sharecroppers. There was an admiration for their prosperity and ability to withhold crops from the market when prices were too low, possibly a reference to the Populist sub-treasury strategy in Texas.⁵⁴⁶

But while the correspondent was mostly admiring, he also emphasized that they were different from the mainstream “American” population, suggesting that they were not quite white. While he implied that these were immigrant families, some German Americans arrived in the Washington County area by the 1830s.⁵⁴⁷ Some farmers must have been second and third generation German Americans whose families had been in the region for longer than most of the white and black residents. But rural ethnic groups in Texas often retained much of their culture

⁵⁴⁴ “DAMAGE IN AND NEAR BRENHAM: THE FLOOD IS GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE EXPERIENCED. Said to Be Too Late to Replant,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

⁵⁴⁵ Acculturation vs. assimilation was a complicated struggle which was beginning to create significant tensions in the years leading up to World War I. Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity*.

⁵⁴⁶ Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 153–155.

⁵⁴⁷ Kamphoefner, *Germans in America*, 53.

and language, speaking German at home, school, and church through the 1920s or later, though most also spoke English, setting them apart in white minds.⁵⁴⁸

These Washington county farmers were fairly prosperous based on the descriptions, and economic class often played a role in how an ethnic American was described in newspaper reports, especially German Americans who received the greatest variation in treatment of any ethnic group in Texas. For instance, in 1899, the storms feeding the floods also spawned a 100 to 200-foot-wide tornado which touched down northwest of Rockdale, Texas. The primary victim, “Mr. Henry Bauckaus, a prominent German farmer, was damaged to the extent of \$800 to \$1000. He lost a rent house, all barns and outhouses and their contents and a part of his dwelling house.”⁵⁴⁹ His full name was given, he was given an honorific, then he was described as “prominent” as well as “German” and the reader was given enough details of his property losses to establish his social standing. The secondary house on his property is referred to as a “rent house,” rather than a shack or hut or cabin. In 1899 and 1900, it was uncommon for an ethnic farmer to be described in so much detail in a newspaper report. But despite the respect, the correspondent or editor felt compelled to emphasize his ethnicity as not-quite-white-American.

On the same page of the *Houston Daily Post*, another German over 100 miles to the south of Rockdale in Yoakum, Texas, was given his own short article, but little suggested that he had achieved the same social standing. “George Schwabe, an aged German farmer living about six miles west of Yoakum, was drowned in Brushy Creek while on his way home from town

⁵⁴⁸ Kamphoefner, *Germans in America*, 94–97; and Blanton, *The Strange Career of Bilingual Education*.

⁵⁴⁹ Bauckhaus was probably Henry Backhaus who was a German naturalized immigrant, 39 years old, who rented a farm. His wife was at least third generation German American, however. “AT ROCKDALE,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, June 30, 1899, 6; “TORNADO NEAR ROCKDALE. Everything in Its Path Was Demolished,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5; “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 4, Rockdale, Milam County, Texas, Sheet 4, accessed January 9, 2023.

yesterday evening.”⁵⁵⁰ No language was added to suggest he was particularly prosperous, unlike Bauckaus and he was not given an honorific; only his age appeared to be considered important enough to modify “German farmer.” In fact, the tone turned mildly disapproving when the correspondent added, “the stream was greatly swollen from the heavy rains and he drove in with the result that his wagon was turned over.”⁵⁵¹ Age is the only description given of his son at all: “His young son...escaped death by swimming.”⁵⁵² His youth, ethnicity, and apparent social class rendered him nameless.⁵⁵³ His not-quite-white ethnicity apparently rendered his feat unremarkable, while white men and boys were lauded, or at least admired, for surviving such an ordeal.

In contrast to German Americans, Italian Americans were often described anonymously in highly racialized language commonly applied to African Americans. Sometimes Italian and African Americans were identified as a single group, such as the subheadline of an article in 1899, “Five Hundred People, Negroes and Italians, Are Suffering.”⁵⁵⁴ The article described them equally as having lost everything, and made an explicit appeal to white pity, stating “they are quartered around in pitiful groups, with appealing countenances already showing the marks of hunger in their pinched and drawn features,” language strikingly similar to that used to describe Black victims.⁵⁵⁵ Then the correspondent singled out Italian families for a further appeal to pity,

⁵⁵⁰ The article was about thirteen lines, longer than most about Black or Mexican victims. The *San Antonio Daily Express* used identical wording, suggesting that the same correspondent supplied both newspapers. “Man Drowned at Yoakum,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5; and “DEATH AT YOAKUM. Farmer Loses His Life In Swollen Brushy Creek,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, June 30, 1899, 1.

⁵⁵¹ “Man Drowned at Yoakum,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5.

⁵⁵² “Man Drowned at Yoakum,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5.

⁵⁵³ He was probably a teen, judging by his ability to swim safely out of a flooded stream.

⁵⁵⁴ Nevels has identified this struggle to escape the color line as a reason that Italian, Irish, and Czech Americans participated in lynchings around the turn of the twentieth-century in Brazos County. “FLOOD STRICKEN MUMFORD...Five Hundred People, Negroes and Italians, Are Suffering...Children With Drawn and Pinched Features Picking Up Crumbs Left by State Convicts,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 12, 1899, 1; Nevels, *Lynching to Belong*, 1–8.

⁵⁵⁵ “FLOOD STRICKEN MUMFORD,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 12, 1899, 1.

claiming that “a large crowd of Italian children was seen picking up the crumbs left on the ground where the State convicts are fed at noontime...no greater privations exist at Brookshire, Fulshear nor any other point...than can be seen here.”⁵⁵⁶ The correspondent situated Italians so low on the social scale that their children were forced to eat the leftovers of convicts.

Italian Americans were rarely named in Texas newspapers. The *Dallas Morning News* reported “among the houses swept away was one occupied by an Italian family, a man, his wife, and three children.”⁵⁵⁷ However, the names of these Italian victims near Bryan, Texas, were known because they appeared in at least four out-of-state newspapers, using similar details to the *New York Times*: “Last night eight miles from Bryan, Lee Cortmelia, an Italian, was heard calling for help from his half-submerged cabin.”⁵⁵⁸ If his name was well enough known to be printed in New York, the omission in Texas newspapers can only have been deliberate, preferring to stress their ethnic identity over individual ones. But by 1921, these separate identifications of ethnic Americans had been submerged, at least in newspaper articles, under the identity “white.”

One of the rarest ethnicities in newspaper reports of Texas disasters were Chinese Americans. However, at least one small group of Chinese immigrants had found a home in a Black farming community. In 1899, the *Houston Daily Post* reported that “Lee Chop, a Chinaman, and his daughter, Lulu Chop, are missing, and it is supposed that they have been drowned.”⁵⁵⁹ They were identified by name, but just in case the reader had not recognized the

⁵⁵⁶ “FLOOD STRICKEN MUMFORD...Children With Drawn and Pinched Features Picking Up Crumbs Left by State Convicts,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 12, 1899, 1.

⁵⁵⁷ “Death Sweeps the Valley,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 9, 1900, 1.

⁵⁵⁸ In April 1900, names were only included for Italians such as the Tegoni family in out-of-state newspapers while in one instance in 1913, they were named in a Texas newspaper. “Additional Deaths” *New York Times*, April 9, 1900, 1. In 1913, *The Houston Post*, Dec. 6, 1913, 1; “Provisions for Sufferers,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 1913, 9; “Life Savers Arrive,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1913, 1; “More than 50 Flood Victims,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 6, 1913, 6; and “Railroad Losses Heavy,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, December 7, 1913, 1. Cortmelia and his family were mentioned earlier in this chapter in the context of their housing.

⁵⁵⁹ The *San Antonio Daily Express* ran a report with the same wording, but identified her as “Lula Chop” rather than Lulu, on July 4. “THE HIGH WATER AT CALVERT: Reports that More Than a Score of Persons Have Been

ethnicity of the surname, the correspondent added “a Chinaman” as an identifier. Several articles identified Lulu as “a half breed negro-Chinese...”⁵⁶⁰ This distinction seemed to be very important to the correspondents, possibly because it reinforced Lulu's identity as not-white and below the color line. Although they were named, virtually no other information was ever given about them other than race and ethnicity. But her identity as Black was given precedence over her heritage as Chinese, and she was in a list of Black-only victims. The addition of the unflattering term, “half breed,” reflected Southern taboos against racial mixing. Two days later, the *Houston Daily Post* printed a list of the dead from Robertson County that included, “Lula Chop, Chinaman; body recovered.”⁵⁶¹ Curiously, this was the only instance in which she was identified simply as Chinese, without any reference to her mother’s race and her father was not mentioned at all. But her Chinese ancestry clearly troubled the stark binary racial system of the region.

In this instance, the newspaper reports were inaccurate. Both Lee Chop and his daughter, Lulu, survived according to the 1900 U.S. Census the next year.⁵⁶² Chop had arrived in the United States in 1866, and was naturalized. He married Martha, a Black woman, around 1882, and all of their children were identified in the census as Black. While Precinct Two of Robertson County was overwhelmingly Black, about a dozen Chinese immigrants who arrived in the United

Drowned,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; and “UNHAPPY CALVERT,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 4, 1899, 2.

⁵⁶⁰ The *San Antonio Daily Express* ran almost the same list on the same day: “Lulu Chopp, a half bred negro-Chinese, on the Burnett place.” Previously, they had reported her name as Lula Chop. “SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5; and “SITUATION AT CALVERT...Loss of Life Thirty or Forty,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 5, 1899, 2.

⁵⁶¹ At this point, they reported that they had a body, which made it less likely to be simply hearsay, but apparently it was hearsay because both Chops survived. Oddly, Lulu was more often mentioned than her father and no article I found reported that he had, in fact survived. “Roberson (sic) County Victims,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 4.

⁵⁶² Despite the reports, both Lee and Lulu were alive in 1900. Lee or possibly Lu Chop, based on the 1900 United States census. “Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900—Population,” US Census Bureau, Precinct 2, Calvert, Robertson County, Texas, Sheet 9B, accessed January 9, 2023.

States in the 1860s had settled among them, and other Chinese men had married Black women. This meant, under Texas law, that their descendants would legally be Black, and it was likely that their willingness to marry Black women intensified white beliefs in Chinese racial inferiority.⁵⁶³

Conclusion

White Texans largely controlled the geography of disaster, especially the economic and social factors that pushed Black Texans onto land at high risk of flooding. Black victims of the 1899 Brazos river flood lived in the floodplains, either in tenant homes or on their own land in freedman's colonies, available because the flood risk made it undesirable. Correspondents minimized any recognition of Black communities and reserved unflattering terms for Black homes, creating the impression that they had lost little by comparison to white Texans. Through such passive tools as well as active assertions, correspondents deflected sympathy from Black survivors of disasters to white landowners and businesses.

Creating the perception that these white community leaders were the real victims of disaster reduced the probability of criticism of their administration of charity in the aftermath. White community leaders were freely able to refuse most outside aid and to limit charity to the barest minimum, sometimes using its distribution to control and coerce labor. Articles then created the perception of white generosity and Black dependency and justified white control over Black labor while sometimes excluding Black landowners from that charity. Even Black charity had to be filtered through white control. White fundraising was gendered, with men soliciting larger cash donations and purchasing cash supplies from local businesses, while white women

⁵⁶³ There were no references to Chinese Americans in 1921, or any other East or South Asian ethnicity. Based on the national trend, they would continued to have been identified separately from white Americans.

controlled clothing and household goods. While white women were described sympathetically, Black motherhood was denied heroism and even criticized for failing to save every child. In 1899 and 1900, correspondents used a variety of ethnic identities, some of them derogatory and all indicating not-quite-white, then parallel to the homogenization of Black identity, most ethnic identities were submerged under whiteness by 1921. Newspapers were thus able to control narratives about disasters, creating sympathy and respect for white Texans over Black and ethnic Texans that influenced the collective memory of disasters.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BORDERS OF DISASTER: ETHNICITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL RELIEF

“Mrs. Petra de La Garza, aged 35, McAskill avenue.”⁵⁶⁴ At first glance, this appears to be just an ordinary if tragic line in a list of the dead and missing from San Antonio in the aftermath of a devastating flood in 1921, one of many. Yet this line presents a question. As late as 1915, newspaper reports of weather-related natural disasters in Texas rarely ever named, much less bestowed honorifics, on victims who were not white. Women were even more rarely named or provided with details such as age or address. In fact, people of Mexican descent in Texas had rarely been described as individuals at all in disaster reporting. Why, in 1921, do the urban Spanish-surnamed victims in San Antonio suddenly appear in newspaper reports without racial language and with individual details which had previously been reserved for middle-class non-ethnic whites?⁵⁶⁵

Natural disasters are often leveraged to reinforce, strengthen, or contest existing racial and ethnic social systems, often made visible by how newspapers described victims and survivors differently based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender.⁵⁶⁶ A key event that was driving changes in race relations was *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) which legalized the emerging Jim Crow system of legalized segregation and discrimination. During the 1899 disaster, this new system of

⁵⁶⁴“Additional Dead and Missing at San Antonio,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 13, 1921, 14.

⁵⁶⁵This section partly draws on research and conclusions from a thesis which analyzed all racial language for selected weather-related natural disasters between 1899 and 1921 in Texas and the Southwest border region. Robin Roe, “On a Flood of Words: Race and Ethnicity in the Language of Disaster in Early Twentieth-Century Texas,” (MA Thesis, Texas A&M University, 2015). All translations from Spanish are mine.

⁵⁶⁶For this purpose, urban vs. rural can be considered a class difference, and religion was often an element of ethnicity, particularly for those victims who were Catholic or Jewish.

racial control was just gaining momentum, but it was relatively well-developed by 1921.⁵⁶⁷ This system also encompassed ethnic Mexicans⁵⁶⁸ who occupied a third space between white and black. Laura E. Gómez describes their status as “off-white—sometimes defined as *legally* white, almost always defined as *socially* non-white.”⁵⁶⁹ They were frequently forced to accept many of the same legal, economic, and social disadvantages of the African American population.

Emilio Zamora has also identified these years as the period when large numbers of Mexican immigrants began arriving in Texas and other southwestern states. They were partly attracted by the transition of some traditional ranching areas in the Rio Grande Valley to commercial agriculture.⁵⁷⁰ These large agricultural operations were primarily run by white immigrants from the Midwest who wanted cheap labor. But they were often hostile to existing racial accommodations between long-time residents, leading some Mexican Texans in this region to migrate to Central Texas cotton farms and urban areas while some African American and poor white tenant farmers began to immigrate to urban areas.⁵⁷¹ Ben Johnson in *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans* also identifies the period between the 1915–1916 border rebellion in South Texas and the founding of

⁵⁶⁷See earlier chapters for my analysis of the influence of this system on disaster reporting.

⁵⁶⁸The word Mexican was widely used for all ethnic Mexicans in both English-language and Spanish-language newspapers in 1921. Anyone with a Spanish surname or otherwise identified as Mexican will generally be identified as Mexican.

⁵⁶⁹Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 149.

⁵⁷⁰Zamorra, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 10–11, 15–16.

⁵⁷¹Most of the 200+ victims of the 1921 flood were Mexican farm workers or their families in San Antonio or central Texas. There were few Mexican victims reported in weather-related natural disasters outside of the United States—Mexico border in the other disasters. See also Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*; Foley, *The White Scourge*; Mckiernan-González, *Fevered Measures*; George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*; and Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas*.

LULAC in the late 1920s as the period during which some ethnic Mexican people began to identify more strongly as American than as Mexican citizens, particularly the middle class.⁵⁷²

This shift was reflected in newspaper reports on disasters. During floods in 1899, 1900, and even 1913, the racial and ethnic language used in newspaper reports were diverse, with many flood victims identified by ethnicity, such as Italian.⁵⁷³ Significantly, white victims were most often identified by name without the racial identifier while every other group was almost always identified by race or ethnicity but rarely identified by name.⁵⁷⁴ Even the language used to describe African Americans was diverse in 1899 and 1900, with some of the variation apparently indicating the Black urban middle-class. But while any discursive allusion to a Black middle-class vanished by 1921, a Mexican middle-class was emerging.⁵⁷⁵

In 1921, the urban Mexican victims were often identified in detail, while non-white rural victims were not. In 1900, at a moment when Black Galvestonians retained some political power, urban Black victims of the hurricane were sometimes named in lists of the dead, and even occasionally given an honorific.⁵⁷⁶ But death lists in 1900 explicitly included Black identifiers, while the ethnic Mexican victims in 1921 San Antonio were almost never identified explicitly as

⁵⁷²Ben Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression turned Mexicans into Americans* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; M. Garcia, *Mexican Americans*; and R. Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*.

⁵⁷³The difference between race and ethnicity is a complex question that would require a substantial diversion from my arguments.

⁵⁷⁴“White” was explicitly used primarily when a victim’s identity was unknown or when large mixed-race groups were described.

⁵⁷⁵Some of this change may stem from the increasing success in Black voter suppression in Texas. In 1899, white leaders were still concerned about influencing the black vote, while by the mid-1910s, most black voting had been effectively suppressed. Court cases, however, were establishing that Mexicans who were citizens were legally white, which may have made authorities more concerned with the Mexican vote.

⁵⁷⁶In 1900, Galveston's congressman was R. B. Hawley, a Republican, suggesting that there was considerable Black voting strength. The 1900 disaster created an opening through which the local political power of Black Galvestonians was diluted through changes in the city government, suggesting that later changes were an indication that newspapers began to believe they no longer needed to be cultivated. Bradley R. Rice, “The Galveston Plan of City Government by Commission: The Birth of a Progressive Idea,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (April 1975): 365–408; Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 215; Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 149–151; and Remes, *Disaster Citizenship*, 5.

Mexican. Newspaper editors may have simply assumed Spanish surnames adequately identified victims as Mexican. However, the only named Mexican in earlier disasters, Lazaro Amador, was still identified explicitly as “Mexican.”⁵⁷⁷ This omission, the honorifics and the inclusion of other information was a subtle indication of changes in racial and social systems.⁵⁷⁸

While the use of disaster to reinforce or strengthen existing racial systems is relatively easy to discern from newspaper reports, the use of the same disasters to contest those systems is often far more difficult to identify. The 1921 flood presented a unique window into disaster as experienced and reported by or for non-white survivors, rescuers, and relief workers because San Antonio's *la Prensa* allowed a direct comparison between Spanish-language and English-language articles. While I analyzed several English-language newspapers for 1921, the Spanish-language story of the San Antonio flood was primarily dependent on *la Prensa* (SA.)⁵⁷⁹ This disparity is balanced somewhat because *la Prensa* printed more detailed reports over a longer period of time, and I was also able to analyze their reports in light of what is known about the publisher himself, Ignacio E. Lozano.⁵⁸⁰

La Prensa (SA) was first published on February 13, 1913, and was believed to have been the most widely read and most influential of the newspapers published by *ricos* in the United States.⁵⁸¹ Richard Garcia described the publisher, Lozano, as a *rico*, a conservative upper-class

⁵⁷⁷“Flood on Brazos Sets New Record; Rescuers are Busy,” Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, December 4, 1913, 3.

⁵⁷⁸ It also suggests they were most likely getting the list of names, directly or indirectly, from *la Prensa*.

⁵⁷⁹*La Prensa* in Los Angeles predated Lozano's San Antonio newspaper. Both are cited in this dissertation, so are additionally identified by city (either LA or SA) as needed.

⁵⁸⁰The background of *la Prensa* and its publisher, Lozano, are fundamental to analyzing its role in the 1921 flood.

⁵⁸¹There were eventually three major newspapers that Richard Garcia identified as being published by *ricos*. Lozano published two of them. He could not name his Los Angeles newspaper *la Prensa*, however, because a newspaper by that name began publication in Los Angeles in 1911, two years before Lozano's *la Prensa* (SA.) First published in 1926 and now the widest-circulation Spanish-language newspaper in the United States, he named his second newspaper *La Opinión* (Los Angeles.) Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 33, 35, 224; and Pycior, *Democratic Renewal*, 147–153. NOTES: Garcia stated on page 33 that *la Prensa* began publication in 1913, but in the footnote, he stated that it started publication in 1914. The first issue of the first volume published on February 13, 1913, verifying the date on page 33. The anomalous date in the footnote was very likely the date the newspaper switched from weekly to daily publication. While the oldest issue I could find

Mexican exile committed to reminding Mexicans working in the United States that they were still Mexican.⁵⁸² But Lozano also wanted to convince Anglo-Americans to accept middle-and-upper-class Mexicans in the United States as capable, professional, and independent. He hired exiled intellectuals to write for *la Prensa*, such as José Vasconcelos and Nemesio García Naranjo.⁵⁸³ Their influence helped produce a high level of professionalism in reporting compared to many of the English-language newspapers in Texas at the time.⁵⁸⁴

The political views of Lozano and these exiled intellectuals almost certainly influenced the tone and focus of *la Prensa*'s articles about the 1921 flood. They emphasized the relief and recovery work of the Mexican community itself in San Antonio, the volunteerism of Mexican organizations, and the direct support of the Mexican government for the survivors. While they expressed appreciation for Anglo-Texan efforts and encouraged cooperation with city authorities, the Mexican community's efforts, almost invisible in English-language newspaper, was placed at the center of disaster relief.

English-language newspapers commonly described Mexican victims as passive or with emotionally charged language frequently used to infantilize non-white victims and to justify the assertion that they needed white authority to direct them.⁵⁸⁵ *La Prensa*, however, described survivors and the Mexican community as resilient, autonomous, and courageous actors in their own relief rather than dependents. Through this they quietly resisted Mexican infantilization by the English-language press by claiming the language of whiteness. While they may not have had

of *la Prensa* (LA) in *Chronicling America* was dated December 8, 1917, that issue was late in volume 6, placing its first issue around 1911.

⁵⁸²Garcia specifically identifies the *ricos* of San Antonio as conservative refugees rather than *revoltosos*, radical leftists. Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 33, 95, 224.

⁵⁸³Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 35.

⁵⁸⁴The English-language newspapers generally included far less detail about events during this or other disasters. See analysis later in this chapter of "EL "WEST SIDE" QUEDA AISLADO," trans. "The 'West Side' Is Cut Off," *la Prensa*, September 13, 1921, 6.

⁵⁸⁵Balaji, "Racializing Pity, 51.

a direct influence on Anglo readers, English-language newspapers apparently used *la Prensa's* lists of the dead which included more identifying information on individuals, suggesting rising Mexican American political strength in the city.⁵⁸⁶

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the specific wording used to describe Mexican victims and their property during Texas disasters between 1899 and 1921, establishing change over time in the dominant English-language newspapers as well as analyzing differences and similarities in English-language and Spanish-language newspaper articles. The second section analyzes the institutional response to the September 1921 flood with a particular focus on the three central organizations who contributed directly to the rescue, relief, and recovery efforts, especially as reported by *la Prensa* (SA.) Where possible, I also analyze the differences and similarities in Spanish-language and English-language newspaper articles, producing two different narratives, one focused on Mexican-led urban organizations and relief work in urban San Antonio, and the other focused on Anglo-Texan-led organizations and relief mostly in rural areas.

Section I: Borders

Change Over Time

Change over time in the wording used to identify Mexican victims, survivors, and relief workers emerged in two specific forms: identity and residence.⁵⁸⁷ *La Prensa* began publication

⁵⁸⁶I use Mexican American here to indicate citizenship and potential voters.

⁵⁸⁷Residence overlaps the category of property, and a great deal of English-language newspaper reports prioritized property and business losses over people. I was unable to locate a Spanish-language newspaper that had substantial reporting on a weather-related disaster before 1921. At least one San Antonio newspaper, *el Regidor*, began publication as early as 1888; however as a weekly newspaper primarily focused on politics, disasters were only briefly mentioned. *El Democrata Fronterizo*, published from Laredo, Texas from 1896 through 1920, also had little on disasters.

just before the 1913 Brazos river floods, but initially was a weekly newspaper focused on the revolution in Mexico. While it had become a daily newspaper by August 1915, the Galveston hurricane that month was almost ignored in favor of news about the Mexican revolution, border violence, and the war in Europe.⁵⁸⁸ With so little material with which to analyze changes in Spanish-language reporting, most analysis on change examines English-language newspapers.

The only two disasters with a notable number of Mexican victims, 1904 and 1921, frame this period of transition when racial lines were being redefined. The changes for Mexican Texans were more subtle than for Black and immigrant Texans, however, and mostly limited to the omission of the identifier “Mexican.” But Spanish-language articles often adopted the wording normally reserved for white victims and survivors. They also included Mexican relief workers who were minimized or completely omitted in English-language newspapers, resisting the infantilization of the Mexican community. Their awareness of white biases and their resistance through reframing the narrative tried to shape the Mexican American middle-class identity beginning to emerge in Texas and the Southwest.

Many if not most of those affected by the 1904 dispersed flooding on the Rio Grande were Mexican.⁵⁸⁹ English-language newspapers focused on property damages rather than the victims themselves, however. Property damages also received more attention in 1921 in English-language articles, especially compared to rural agricultural laborers, but for the first time, individual urban Mexican victims were described in detail and often without the identifier

⁵⁸⁸The lack of attention to these disasters suggests that there were probably few Mexicans affected. After the September 14, 1919, Corpus Christi hurricane, *la Prensa* (SA) did not begin to report in detail until the 17th when it became clear that some victims were Mexican. Problems with sources and time limitations prevented me from fully analyzing their reports on the 1919 hurricane. Future research should include that disaster.

⁵⁸⁹This flooding extended into Mexico, New Mexico territory, and Colorado. I use the term “victim” for anyone harmed by a disaster, whether by death, injury, displacement, or property loss. I use the term “survivor” to narrow that broad category to victims who survived and needed assistance in recovery. When the two terms are used together, as in this case, “victim” refers solely to those who died in the disaster.

“Mexican.” This level of detail and omission of identifier suggested a newly perceived class difference between some urban and rural Mexican Texans.⁵⁹⁰

Even descriptions of property could be racialized through class-based judgments about the victims. In 1904, the Dallas *Morning News* ran a report from Monterey, Mexico, describing “...considerable damage to crops and to the badly constructed shacks of the poorer classes....”⁵⁹¹ Another correspondent from Eagle Pass, Texas, used similar language, reporting “...much damage has been done by the washing away of innumerable shacks of the poorer classes....”⁵⁹² He then described other homes lost near Laredo as “huts,” and relayed a report from Rio Grande City stating that “...many small huts along the edge of town had been washed away....”⁵⁹³ A correspondent from Rio Grande City claimed that “two or three adobe shacks were washed away.”⁵⁹⁴ “Shacks” and “huts” were terms ordinarily used for Black homes and emphasized their similar status, especially the first example that made the further judgment that they were badly constructed.

Although the 1904 flooding was mostly ignored outside the region, in 1899 the New York *Times* had adopted similar class-based language while reporting that the Rio Grande had flooded a town which “had a population of several hundred Mexicans of the poorer class. Their houses were jackal adobe structures, which quickly melted away when the high water struck them.”⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁰However, some Spanish-language articles indicated that some urban victims in 1921 sometimes engaged in agricultural work or were family members of agricultural workers, so they may have believed that the urban victims were citizens and the agricultural victims were recent immigrants. “La mayoría de los que perecieron en ese desastrosa inundación es de trabajadores o sus familias de los ranchos en el valle.” Trans. “The majority of those who perished in that disastrous flood are workers from the ranches in the valley or their families.” “109 Cuerpos Encontrados en la Ribera del Rio de S. Antonio,” *El Tucsonese* (Tucson, AZ), September 13, 1921, 4.

⁵⁹¹The dateline of the article uses this spelling of Monterey. “Damaged by Rain,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 16, 1904, 1.

⁵⁹²“Rain has Ceased,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 17, 1904, 2.

⁵⁹³“Rain has Ceased,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 17, 1904, 2.

⁵⁹⁴The use of the modifier “adobe” makes this use of “shack” specific to Mexican victims. “Recent Flood at Camargo,” Brownsville *Daily Herald*, October 3, 1904, 1.

⁵⁹⁵Their report was a bit confused, referring to the “old Town of Carrizo, the county seat of Zapak County” which appears to have been an old adobe section of Zapata in Zapata County. These reports date from early in the

The use of “shack,” “hut,” and other unflattering language for Mexican homes used in conjunction with a class-based judgment reflects Balaji’s assertion that pity is racialized, especially in Western media, and “is instrumental in creating an Other.”⁵⁹⁶

However, newspapers did not universally report on Mexicans and their homes in unflattering, class-based terms. For instance, the Palestine *Daily Herald* reported that “the flood is said to have swept away whole settlements of houses occupied by Mexicans between Presidio del Norte and Bosquillas.”⁵⁹⁷ The Brownsville *Daily Herald* also adopted more neutral language when describing Mexican victims on the other side of the river in Camargo, Mexico: “many families were compelled to leave their homes for high ground.”⁵⁹⁸ They then described losses downriver in Garcias where “the whole place was flooded and all the inhabitants are camped on the foothills. The river carried away all the corn stacked in yards and many houses.”⁵⁹⁹ Neither “homes” and “houses” make judgments about the residents.

In 1921, the inclusion of individual street addresses suggested that editors were either more aware of the language being used to describe Mexican homes or they simply used information directly from *la Prensa* (SA.) *La Prensa* resisted negative characterization by consistently using “casas” to describe people's homes rather than less flattering terms.⁶⁰⁰ For

period during which midwestern farmers were beginning to move into the region which transformed parts of this border region, and dams on the Rio Grande have also altered some of the geography. “Jacale” is misspelled “jackal.” “The Rio Grande is Rising,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1899, 1.

⁵⁹⁶Balaji, “Racializing Pity,” 51.

⁵⁹⁷“Rio Grande Rages,” Palestine *Daily Herald*, September 13, 1904, 2.

⁵⁹⁸Rio Grande City and Ciudad Camargo lie adjacent to each other across the border formed by the Rio Grande. There is also a Camargo in Chihuahua, Mexico, and Chihuahua did experience flooding. Flooding in Rio Grande City appeared in articles that also referred to Camargo, however, which strongly suggests they were describing Ciudad Camargo. “Rio Grande Fifteen Miles Wide,” Brownsville *Daily Herald*, September 22, 1904, 4.

⁵⁹⁹Garcias appears to be the town now called Garciasville in Starr County. “Rio Grande Fifteen Miles Wide,” Brownsville *Daily Herald*, September 22, 1904, 4. The Brownsville *Daily Herald*, a border newspaper, was fairly consistent in describing Mexican victims in relatively respectful language. This may again be an indication of a certain amount of perceived political power for the Mexican community in Brownsville.

⁶⁰⁰I found around thirty-five uses of “casa” or “casas” in the September 13, 1921, articles I analyzed. The only alternatives I found were “residencia” and “edificio,” neither of which has a negative connotation.

instance, when Alazan Creek began to rise on Friday night, "...the families prepared to leave their homes and put some belongings into safety."⁶⁰¹ Their residences were not only described as homes, the families are described as actively responding. Non-white victims of floods were frequently criticized for failing to evacuate. This correspondent proactively countered that by stating that they responded to the warning by evacuating, but the creek had flooded up to four times further than in past experience.⁶⁰²

Individual victims were usually identified through published lists, but before 1921, non-white victims were identified simply by race or by race and gender in those lists. Nothing changed for rural victims, but in 1921, most urban Mexican victims were identified in lists by name, address, and age, sometimes with honorifics or other information but without ethnic identifiers. Newspapers commonly used wire services, and virtually identical articles appeared in different newspapers. The most likely explanation for the change in 1921 was that a wire service translated the lists of the dead from *la Prensa* (SA), without altering the detail provided, especially in light of strong similarities between lists in English-language newspapers to those reported by *la Prensa*. If so, this Spanish-language newspaper may have been able, in a small way, to favorably shape white public perceptions about some Mexican victims of the disaster.

Middle-and-upper-class white men were virtually always identified by name and usually with significant personal information, but their race or ethnicity was rarely explicitly mentioned.⁶⁰³ Before 1921, Mexican victims in English-language articles were always identified

⁶⁰¹Original: "...las familias se aprestaban a salirse de sus casas y a poner a salvo algunos enseres." "EL ARROYO DEL ALAZAN" trans. "Alazan Creek," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6.

⁶⁰²"EL ARROYO DEL ALAZAN" trans. "Alazan Creek," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6. Despite their assertions, most residents probably had little or no warning of this flash flood. First-hand accounts by survivors in *la Prensa* did not mention receiving a warning, and several English-language articles stated that the residents were caught without warning, an unusual concession. "Babies Swept Away," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1921, part 1, 2; and "Scenes of Desolation," *Abilene Daily Reporter*, September 11, 1921, 1.

⁶⁰³I verified that a number of people who were named were white through the United States Census or other vital records. See earlier chapters for more detailed analyses.

explicitly as Mexican but almost never named. Two or three unnamed Mexican victims were mentioned outside of the Rio Grande Valley during 1899 and 1900, always in the company of unnamed Black victims. These Mexican victims were probably among the early wave of migrants from the border and may have been performing wage labor on farms side-by-side with African Americans.⁶⁰⁴

In 1899, Louis T. Beerland, a white man who may have owed his life to his Mexican employee when the Colorado River overflowed its banks, was quoted as being “awakened about 11 o’clock last Tuesday night by a Mexican, who worked on my place and lived in one of the bottom fields with his family, rushing into my room with his wife and two children clinging to him. The frightened Mexican told me the river had risen so suddenly that he and his family had barely time to save their lives by running to higher ground.”⁶⁰⁵ The terms used to describe this family, “clinging” and “frightened,” reinforced an image of them as childlike and dependent rather than as heroic or fast-thinking despite their timely warning. While Beerland is named, he reduced his employee to the anonymity of “Mexican,” though he must have known his name. By 1913, a few Mexican victims and survivors were mentioned in the nameless aggregate around Waco, Texas. A Navasota correspondent asserted that “there are now fully 1000 refugees here, most of them being negroes, Mexicans, and Italians.”⁶⁰⁶ Their perceived status as the lowest paid agricultural workers was suggested by their juxtaposition with Black and Italian workers, flattening distinctions among them.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁴“Timely Warning was Given,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

⁶⁰⁵I was unable to find any “Beerland” or a similar name in Texas in the 1900 United States Census. “Rescued from Death,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 11, 1899, 1.

⁶⁰⁶“Many Marooned at Millican,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 6, 1913, 1.

⁶⁰⁷All three groups were frequently portrayed as inclined to criminality. The best known example for Italian Americans was seen in the media coverage surrounding the murder of a New Orleans police superintendent in 1890. Nineteen Italians were accused of the murder, demonized as mafia members. The exoneration of nine of them sparked the lynching of eleven out of the nineteen in 1891, taken from the jail. Sarah Fouts, “The Mafia, *La*

The only Mexican who was named, Lazaro Amador, was identified both as a criminal and a rescuer. In 1913 in Waco, a rescue boat capsized, and “Policeman Joe Carlisle remembered the tales he had heard of Amador’s prowess as a swimmer and sent an automobile to the city jail, where the Mexican was locked up.”⁶⁰⁸ The article conceded that Amador provided a great deal of assistance, swimming with a line out to people which allowed them to be rescued. The readers were not told why he was in the city jail or whether he was, in fact, even given a choice about swimming in dangerous flood waters. Any admiration for his bravery and swimming skill was partly offset by the perception that he was an accused criminal.⁶⁰⁹ The article did laud his selflessness, asserting that when “offered a purse, which had been collected for him last night, the Mexican shook his head and smiled.” However, many poor laborers try to demand higher wages in the aftermath of a disaster, when their services are in particularly high demand, and this may have been an oblique criticism of those laborers. Additionally, the editors may have been encouraging readers to accept Mexican workers as a replacement for poor black and white emigrants who left by strengthening the idea that Mexican workers were not “greedy.”

By 1921 many English-language newspapers carried a considerable amount of nonjudgmental detail on urban Mexican victims. For instance, on September 11, 1921, the *Houston Chronicle* ran a list of over twenty names of victims in San Antonio, such as “Mrs.

Raza, and the Spanish-language Press Coverage of the 1891 Lynchings in New Orleans,” *The Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 3 (Aug., 2017) 509–510; and Nevels, *Lynching to Belong*, 6.

⁶⁰⁸The identification of Amador as a strong swimmer is itself possibly significant. Though 1913 was probably early for the articles to imply a negative connection between Mexicans crossing the Rio Grande into Texas and swimming skill, the possibility cannot be entirely ignored. While this disaster predated broad immigration restrictions, white Texans may have believed that Mexicans were swimming the Rio Grande in order to avoid quarantine stations at the Mexico-U.S. border, and this may have been an indirect reference to that belief. According to Mckiernan-González, American authorities were particularly afraid of typhus and smallpox outbreaks connected to the Mexican revolution during the 1910s, and by 1914, commuters between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo were being required to produce a vaccination certificate in order to cross. “Flood on Brazos Sets New Record; Rescuers are Busy,” Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, December 4, 1913, 3; and Mckiernan-González, *Fevered Measures*, 166, 198–9.

⁶⁰⁹This decade saw a trickle of internal immigration north and west by poor black and white agricultural workers begin swelling into a major phenomenon, as mentioned earlier.

Ramon De Zepeda, 114 South Laredo Street.”⁶¹⁰ Unlike all previous reports, she was not only named, readers were given an honorific and street address for her. No honorifics were given for most men, but their ages and addresses were included, as with “Juan Jose Falcon, 60 years old, 705 San Marcos.”⁶¹¹ Children often received the same level of detail as men, such as “Virginia Cavazos, 10 years old, 212 1-2 North San Saba.”⁶¹² Even the injured were identified explicitly, a courtesy previously reserved for white middle-class survivors.

However, rural Mexican victims were still nameless, limited to “Mexican” as their sole identity. Even the detail used for urban victims could vanish. On the day after the *Houston Chronicle* published the above list, the newspaper reduced the San Antonio victims to an aggregate: “San Antonio, about 45, mostly Mexicans.”⁶¹³ This was the same status of the rural Mexican farm victims in the same list: “Taylor, between 30 and 40 Mexicans drowned on nearby farm,” almost identical to black victims: “Hearne, seven negroes drowned.”⁶¹⁴ But the article then spent a paragraph on two missing white railroad men, F. W. Leatherberry and M. Robinson, and gave a name and details for one young white man: “Guy Frazier, 17 years old, was reported drowned near Wharton.”⁶¹⁵ White victims were frequently named in the same sentence in which non-white victims were unnamed, such as “Nine Mexican bodies, one white man, Eli Cast, and

⁶¹⁰Like almost all other women in English-language newspapers, however, her age was omitted. “The Dead,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1.

⁶¹¹“The Dead,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1.

⁶¹²“The Dead,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1.

⁶¹³“Distribution of Dead,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 12, 1921, 1.

⁶¹⁴“Distribution of Dead,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 12, 1921, 1.

⁶¹⁵I was able to verify that all three of these rural victims were white from death certificates. Guy Frazier was sixteen, however, not seventeen. “Distribution of Dead,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 12, 1921, 1; “Guy Frazier, Standard Certificate of Death,” Glen Flora, Wharton County, Texas, accessed September 15, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com; “Maynard F. Robinson, Standard Certificate of Death,” Temple, Bell County, Texas, accessed September 3, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com; and “F. W. Leatherberry, Standard Certificate of Death,” Temple, Bell County, Texas, accessed September 3, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

ten negroes were recovered...”⁶¹⁶ The lack of a name appeared to signify not only status as non-white but also a perceived lack of political power.

There were sometimes differences in the information included between English and Spanish-language articles. For instance, *la Prensa* (SA) reported “Mrs. Elena T. de Hernandez, 25 years old, who lived at 1820 South Laredo Street,” among the victims.⁶¹⁷ The *Abilene Daily Reporter* streamlined her entry: “Mrs. Elena Hernandez, 1820 South Laredo Street.”⁶¹⁸ The English-language report removed part of her name as well as her age.⁶¹⁹ *La Prensa* also identified the two Hernandez children explicitly as her children while the *Daily Reporter* did not.⁶²⁰ The English-language newspapers, overall, were less accurate than *la Prensa* about exact names, addresses, and other details about the victims.⁶²¹

In fact, the *Daily Reporter* omitted the ages of all women identified with a marital honorific, but gave ages when an adult woman was not given an honorific. For instance, both newspapers listed “Rosa Ramirez, 55 years old, El Paso street.”⁶²² Neither the *Daily Reporter* or

⁶¹⁶ “Flood Waters of San Gabriel Have Subsided,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 14, 1921, 1.

⁶¹⁷Original: “Sra. Elena T. de Hernandez. de 25 años, que vivía en 1820 Sur Laredo St.” “-LA LISTA DE LOS MUERTOS!!!,” trans. “-THE LIST OF THE DEAD!!!,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6. While this was published on September 13, it was a reprint of an article from September 12, an edition I was unable to locate.

⁶¹⁸“The Dead,” *Abilene Daily Reporter*, September 11, 1921, 1.

⁶¹⁹The information reported in *la Prensa* was supported by her death certificate, which also identified Torres as her father's surname. “Elena Torres, Standard Certificate of Death,” Temple, Bexar County, Texas, accessed September 3, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com

⁶²⁰*La Prensa* made a mistake on the age of the son, Adolfo, stating he was eight, while the 1920 US Census show that he should have been four at the time of his death. However, while the *Abilene Daily Reporter* listed his correct age, they identified him as Alfronso rather than Adolfo. “-LA LISTA DE LOS MUERTOS!!!,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6; “The Dead,” *Abilene Daily Reporter*, September 11, 1921, 1; and “Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population,” US Census Bureau, Ward 2, Precinct 7, Bexar County, Texas, Sheet 23A, accessed September 4, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

⁶²¹I compared a number of victims who appeared in both *la Prensa* and in English-language newspapers against death certificates and other vital records when I could locate them. Mistakes were far more common in the English-language newspapers than in *la Prensa*. While these errors indicated a certain carelessness or perhaps a lack of time to edit, new errors tend to be introduced each time material is reused, supporting the theory that *la Prensa* was the original source.

⁶²²“The Dead,” *Abilene Daily Reporter*, September 11, 1921, 1. *La Prensa* also omits the honorific, but identified her as residing on Buckberry, an address supported by her death certificate, as was her age, fifty-five. “EN LA RIEBE UNDERTAKING,” trans. “At Riebe Undertaking,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6; and “Rosa

la Prensa gave her an honorific, and the omission might normally be presumed to be a moral judgment of an older woman who was not married. But her death certificate identified her as a widow who owned a soft drink stand, ordinarily quite respectable.⁶²³ I was unable to identify a reason why she was not given an honorific or at least identified as a widow, a status commonly assigned to other women victims after disasters.⁶²⁴

Interestingly, *la Prensa* was the only newspaper which named the single known Black victim in San Antonio, Gertrude Southhall.⁶²⁵ They used the identifier “*la mujer de color*,” translated as the woman of color, or colored woman, the more respectful identifier for the middle class which had been dropped from English-language newspapers.⁶²⁶ But while *la Prensa* was the only newspaper who named her or identified her explicitly as “colored,” they did not identify most rural victims, even those who were Mexican. These omissions suggest the urban vs. rural division was perceived as important to the Spanish-language correspondents.

Race, Labor, and Class

Race and class often intersect in the United States where the white working-class is often afraid they will lose social status if they unify by class across racial lines. The corollary fear by those belonging to higher social classes is that economic class interests might overcome those

Ramirez, Standard Certificate of Death,” Temple, Bexar County, Texas, accessed September 3, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

⁶²³“Rosa Ramirez, Standard Certificate of Death,” Temple, Bexar County, Texas, accessed September 3, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

⁶²⁴White women could even be given widowed status when divorced. See Mary Looney in Chapter Three.

⁶²⁵Her death certificate identifies her as Willie Gertrude Johnson Southhall. “LA IDENTIFICACION DE OTROS CADAVERES,” trans. “THE IDENTIFICACION OF OTHER BODIES,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 1; “Willie G. Southhall, Standard Certificate of Death,” Temple, Bexar County, Texas, accessed September 10, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

⁶²⁶However, this was the only mention of a Black victim in *la Prensa* which precludes more than speculation.

social class fears, and the resulting cooperation might threaten their control over labor. They then exploit racial and ethnic fears about a loss of social status to maintain or strengthen control over laborers.⁶²⁷ The reporting of weather-related natural disasters was frequently used to reinforce control by reducing non-white laborers to anonymous units of labor. Mexican migration from the border accelerated after the beginning of the revolution in Mexico in 1910 coinciding with increasing Black and white emigration from rural areas. World War I exacerbated a growing labor shortage while conditions on the border often deteriorated.⁶²⁸ The combination of a rural labor shortage and worsening conditions attracted or pushed a substantial number of Mexican immigrants into regions which previously had encountered few Mexicans.⁶²⁹

Neil Foley analyzed the effect of this demographic transformation due to migration in *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*. Foley's main weakness, which he himself admits, was racial homogenization: "Anglo, for example, exists as a label principally in opposition to Mexican and denotes, rather crudely, all non-Mexican whites, thereby conflating widely diverse cultural groups in Texas, such as Germans, Czechs, Wends, Irish, English, Polish, and French—to say nothing of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews."⁶³⁰ His system of identification actually relied on the tri-racial system that emerged by the early 1920s—white, Mexican, and Black, with most ethnic identities lumped together as "white," erasing differences in their experiences. While he identified some class differences between white land

⁶²⁷Foley, *The White Scourge*, 9–11; and David R. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999), 136–139, 144–150, 167–170. I examine the intersection of institutional relief efforts with labor control later in this chapter.

⁶²⁸A push factor was racial violence targeting Mexicans along the border, particularly the extralegal murder of Mexicans during 1915–16.

⁶²⁹This surge in migration has been noted by a number of historians. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American*; Levario, *Militarizing the Border*; Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*; Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*; and Foley, *The White Scourge*.

⁶³⁰Foley, *The White Scourge*, 7–8.

owners and sharecroppers, he rarely did so for other groups. He made no distinction between Mexican citizens and ethnic Mexican American citizens, or “skilled” versus “unskilled.”⁶³¹ These groups were further homogenized because he exclusively examined rural Mexican farm workers, which excluded the emerging urban Mexican middle class and Mexican labor activists.⁶³²

A 1920 Department of Labor report asserted Mexican farm labor was providing a replacement for agricultural labor which had been lost to urbanization and could no longer be replaced by European immigration due to World War I and increasing pressure for immigration restrictions.⁶³³ Disasters may have played a role in these perceived labor shortages. After the 1915 hurricane, farm managers around Sinton, Texas, reported damage to their crops, but complained that “pickers have been very scarce and only a small per cent of the first crop has been picked.”⁶³⁴ This labor shortage most likely existed before the hurricane, but was probably aggravated by farm laborers seizing the opportunity to accept better paying work on clean up or reconstruction or were recruited by better wages to replace farm workers who left to work on the cleanup. Damage reports from Kingsville, Texas, also admitted that some cotton pickers had been injured during the storm, hinting they were afraid they would lose their work force due to these injuries.⁶³⁵ This anxiety was a significant shift from 1899 when some reports casually spoke about a surplus of labor who could be shifted around like pieces on a chess board and with

⁶³¹According to Richard Garcia, in 1923 professional and skilled individuals only made up a little more than four percent of Mexican immigrants to the United States while unskilled laborers accounted for about fifty-four percent. However, more than one-third had no occupation identified. While most of these may have been children too young for agricultural labor, there were likely some skilled or professional immigrants whose occupation was simply not listed. R. Garcia, *Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 34.

⁶³²While farm labor was and often still is considered “unskilled,” as it would have been in immigration records at this time, an experienced cotton picker was quite skilled. Those who immigrated to or migrated around rural areas would have been almost exclusively skilled harvesters and other farm workers while those with respected skills would have moved to urban areas where their skills were in demand, creating a perceived class difference.

⁶³³The increased presence of Mexican workers in central Texas is supported by United States Census data. Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 46–47.

⁶³⁴“Damage in Cotton Fields,” *San Antonio Express*, August 17, 1915, 4.

⁶³⁵“Crop Damage Reported Heavy,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 18, 1915, 2.

as little choice. The 1915 newspaper reports did not identify race directly, but farm laborers had become a racialized class increasingly dependent on Mexican migrants who were also very mobile. These changes threatened white control over the rural labor force.⁶³⁶

Urban authorities often reacted aggressively to any assertion of power by labor after a disaster. During the 1900 Galveston hurricane, officials threatened to arrest laborers who refused work in order to force them to accept work at any wage offered, often framed as work-as-relief.⁶³⁷ After the 1915 hurricane, Galveston's mayor "...announced this morning that anyone asking more than regular wages for his services would be arrested and put to work on the streets, under guard..." and went on to add a prohibition against begging and instating conscription of "...anyone able to work and refusing to do so, and without means of support..."⁶³⁸ Officials issued other threats to conscript poor laborers without pay. Related to this, in 1915 travel on and off Galveston Island and the mainland was tightly regulated in the aftermath of the disaster, suggesting a bottleneck which may have helped prevent laborers from leaving.⁶³⁹

The absence of specific racial language is significant in these threats because poor whites were "...circulating among the negro laborers asking them not to work for less than \$4 a day."⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁶Foley, *The White Scourge*, 11; and Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 46–47.

⁶³⁷"BURIED AT SEA," Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; "To Pay Laborers," Houston *Daily Post*, September 25, 1900, 5; "THE WORK OF RESCUE," Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 19, 1900, 2; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 46–48.

⁶³⁸While martial law allowed broad latitude, there's a strong suggestion that they planned to use vagrancy laws instead to enforce this, which is consistent with reports in 1909 that officials used vagrancy laws against workers trying to get better wages. While the ARC was not allowed into Galveston to help in the aftermath of the 1915 hurricane, authorities forced poor women getting relief directly, only allowed if they claimed to have no male relatives, into the camps and confined them there until they accepted whatever work was offered at the wages offered, whatever their race. This was probably significant to discussion in the next section about the institutional use of refugee camps to control labor and victims' fears of refugee camps. "Loss \$4,000,000 to \$8,000,000," Dallas *Morning News*, August 20, 1915, 2; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 80.

⁶³⁹The Army was accused of buying up all food supplies and then coercing labor for food. "PEONAGE SLAVE SYSTEMS STARTS AFTER FLOOD," Chicago *Defender*, September 25, 1915, 1.

⁶⁴⁰"Nearly all the large employers have agreed not to pay more than twenty cents an hour for common labor." While this may have been above ordinary wages, such cleanup work would have been dangerous. There would most likely have been a lot of rusty nails which would have meant the risk of tetanus, for instance. And then the mayor reinforced that by threatening vagrancy charges of they refused that wage. "Must Clean Up Stores," Dallas *Morning News*, August 22, 1915, part 1, 6.

This threat of interracial class cooperation was used to justify the threat of conscription. While there was nothing explicit in 1915 to indicate that Mexican workers were part of this attempt at labor unity by class rather than by race to demand better wages, they clearly had been during an earlier hurricane in 1909. Bay City, Texas, specifically asked that no one send any relief aid because "...over 100 able-bodied negroes had refused to work, and that they and some Mexicans, and also some whites, were anxiously waiting for free rations to be shipped in, when work at good wages is plentiful."⁶⁴¹ In fact authorities reacted to this attempt at interracial labor cooperation by using vagrancy laws as a fear tactic to force them to accept the wages they offered instead.⁶⁴²

While there was no explicit indication that laborers tried to unite during the massive 1913 flood or were even working in concert to improve conditions, vagrancy laws were used by Waco officials against "...idle, shiftless whites, negroes, and Mexicans."⁶⁴³ The language in which they were described suggests they may have been trying to use the disaster to get better wages. Black and Mexican laborers cooperating with poor white laborers may have occurred without being reported in other instances, but genuine attempts at interracial organizing were rare. Ernest Obadele-Starks noted that white and Black labor generally organized separately. They were more likely to compete directly, and employers used that competition to undermine both groups.⁶⁴⁴ In fact Foley also pointed to intermittent interracial cooperation between white and Mexican farm laborers which was directly a result of white reluctance to cooperate with Black labor, asserting

⁶⁴¹"No Appeal for Public Aid," *Dallas Morning News*, July 26, 1909, 1.

⁶⁴²A vagrancy charge allowed authorities to arrest someone, fine them, then compel them to work at extremely low wages to pay off that fine, effectively a form of indentured servitude. "No Appeal for Public Aid," *Dallas Morning News*, July 26, 1909, 1.

⁶⁴³"Waco Raises \$7,000 for Flood Victims," *Dallas Morning News*, December 6, 1913, 6.

⁶⁴⁴Mexican labor organizing was outside the scope of his study, but the use of race to divide workers almost certainly was used to divide them from white and Black laborers as well as seen in Arizona mines. Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South*, xviii, 40–41, 43; and Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*, 50–51.

“the legacy of antiblack racism in central Texas and of white Southerners’ abhorrence of social equality with blacks led many white farmers to seek political alliances, however reluctantly at first, with Mexican sharecroppers and tenant farmers between 1910 and 1920.”⁶⁴⁵

In 1921, very little was said in the English-language press about Mexican laborers demanding higher wages or using the disaster to improve their working conditions. They were more concerned with measures to ensure people were “legitimate” victims. For instance, the *Houston Chronicle* stated that “The Red Cross has fed over 7000 victims and clothed more than 2000. A systematic card record discourages the professional beggar from attempting to secure succor.”⁶⁴⁶ The use of a “systematic card record” reassured middle-class white readers that the Red Cross was being guided by progressive ideals about professionalism and efficiency. The characterization of non-white or working-class victims of disasters as potential freeloaders was common in English-language newspapers in the aftermath of disasters, and Progressives worried a great deal about corrupting the work ethics of laborers.⁶⁴⁷ Survivors may also have feared being perceived as freeloaders, and pride kept some from accepting help.⁶⁴⁸

In contrast to criticism and suspicion of non-white workers who might try to leverage a disaster to improve their economic status, newspapers admired white men who effectively did the same. The *Houston Chronicle* lauded Martin Menk, 18, of Taylor, Texas, who “owns a little flat boat, capable of carrying himself and three passengers. He is operating it as a ferry and for a

⁶⁴⁵Foley, *The White Scourge*, 11.

⁶⁴⁶The numbers cited in this article are greatly inflated unless they were including work by Mexican organizations under the ARC. See analysis later in the chapter on the work of Mexican organizations being ignored or credited to the ARC. “City Partially Lighted,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 13, 1921, 12.

⁶⁴⁷Conservatives were even more concerned about “Freeloaders,” but Progressive ideas about charity are more relevant when discussing the ARC. This characterization of laborers as lacking work ethics remains a very common strategy, particularly by conservative opposition to any sort of program that might benefit these groups.

⁶⁴⁸La Prensa was explicit about this fear, but instead urged anyone in need to come to the ARC station. “LA CRUZ ROJA LLAMA A LOS DAMNIFICADOS,” trans. “The Red Cross Calls All Victims,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 8.

dime he will put you on the other side. This enterprising youth is doing a land office business.”⁶⁴⁹
Far from criticizing Menk for using the disaster to make a profit, they call him “enterprising.”⁶⁵⁰

La Prensa (SA) demonstrated that its editors were very aware of the common perception of poor victims as lazy, while their own class interests may have led them to sympathize with the employers to a degree. Relatively quickly after the disaster, they asserted that anyone who could not find well-paid work did not want to do so.⁶⁵¹ In fact, the article implied something of a labor shortage due to the high demand for cleanup, repair, and recovery crews both by the city government and private employers.⁶⁵² This was an indirect criticism of anyone who had not yet found work, reinforced repeatedly with reminders that various organizations providing assistance could place people in good jobs.⁶⁵³

La Prensa (SA) differed from English-language newspapers on work-as-relief, however, in their emphasis on putting people back to work in skilled jobs or self-employment rather than simply as laborers. Almost two weeks after the disaster, they described two people who received

⁶⁴⁹“San Gabriel District Hard Hit by Flood,” *Houston Chronicle*, Sept. 15, 1921, 7. The article included the information that he had hired someone to operate the boat at night for him; before whatever he was paying that person, he was clearing at least twenty dollars a day, if the article was correct, five times the amount considered excessive for those engaged in the difficult and dangerous labor of cleanup in expensive urban areas.

⁶⁵⁰While I was unable to locate anyone by this name anywhere in Texas in the 1920 Census, I found a Martin Menk living with his wife's family in Taylor, Texas, in the 1930 Census. As he lists his parents' and his own birthplace as Texas, they were simply missed in the 1920 Census. Martin Menk was white, twenty-seven years old, residing in Taylor, and a carpenter by trade in 1930. The details match very closely with the Menk in the article. “Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population,” United States Census Bureau, Precinct 4, Williamson County, Texas, Sheet 20B, accessed September 17, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

⁶⁵¹Original: “...solo quien no lo desea no encuentra ocupación más o menos bien remunerada,” trans. “...only those who do not wish to do so are not finding more or less well-paid occupation...,” “EL PROBLEMA DEL TRABAJO EN SAN ANTONIO” trans. “The Work Problem in San Antonio,” *la Prensa* (SA), Sept. 16, 1921, 5.

⁶⁵²This suggestion that there was a very high need for laborers may have influenced the military's demand that the ARC move its camp into the city proper, discussed in the second section of this chapter. Original: “...ya en las cuadrillas de trabajadores que operan bajo dirección de las autoridades, ya en las innumerables obras de reparación, particulares, que están llevándose a cabo por los cuatro rumbos de la ciudad.” trans. “...whether in the crews of workers operating under the direction of the authorities, or in the countless repair works for private individuals that are being carried out in the four directions of the city.” “EL PROBLEMA DEL TRABAJO EN SAN ANTONIO” trans. “The Work Problem in San Antonio,” *la Prensa*, Sept. 16, 1921, 5.

⁶⁵³The question of work-as-relief is discussed in more detail in the next section.

this sort of relief, a carpenter and the owner of an express delivery service.⁶⁵⁴ More detail was given about another case, involving a request for a sewing machine to replace one lost in the flood by three “jóvenes señoritas,” young women who had been making mattresses to support their invalid mother and a toddler.⁶⁵⁵ Obviously skilled carpenters would have been in high demand during the rebuilding, the express delivery service was needed almost as much, and home work was a common means for women to support a disabled, possibly widowed, parent.⁶⁵⁶ *La Prensa* reassured their Mexican readers that skilled workers, business owners, and the disabled or their caretakers were being given help to return to their previous work. But alienating their English-language audience might have resulted in the loss of any additional relief funds. To reassure those middle-class white readers, they demonstrated that all relief funds were being administered carefully and professionally through special cases for which most would approve the disbursement of exceptional relief funds, demonstrating an awareness of how to best appeal to their two potential audiences.⁶⁵⁷

Even before 1921, social class could sometimes influence the way English-language newspapers reported on non-Mexican victims with Spanish surnames, giving them equal status

⁶⁵⁴What exactly the owner of the express delivery service needed money to help replace was unclear. Original: “ayer se proporcionó ayuda pecuniaria a un carpintero y al dueño de un express a quienes la creciente llevó los medios que tenían para ganarse la vida,” trans. “yesterday financial aid was provided to a carpenter and the owner of an express to those who the crescent brought the means they had to earn a living.” “UNA INMEDIATA ATENCION RECLAMAN LOS NECESITADOS,” trans. “A Priority, Attention Called to Needy,” *la Prensa* (SA,) Sept. 22, 1921, 1.

⁶⁵⁵Most victims were limited to fifty dollars total relief assistance to replace household goods, clothing, and other necessities. It is not clear whether or not these young women received a machine, only that the ARC committee was studying their situation. The writers may have hoped that someone would volunteer a machine for this family by running the story. “UNA MAQUINA PARA UNA FAMILIA,” trans. “A Machine for a Family,” and “Una inmediata pensión reclaman los necesitados,” trans. “An Immediate Pension Asked for the Needy,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 22, 1921, 1 and 5.

⁶⁵⁶It was not clear whether they were producing mattresses independently or doing piece work for an employer. While the latter would probably have been more common, the fact they owned the lost sewing machine suggested to readers that they worked independently. Not enough identifying information was provided to verify any details about any of those mentioned in this story.

⁶⁵⁷They very carefully did not name the individuals in these three cases, most likely to protect them from humiliation for asking assistance, but possibly to protect them from harassment of some sort.

with prominent white victims. During the 1915 hurricane, the United Fruit liner *Marowijne* was in the Gulf of Mexico on her way to New Orleans, Louisiana, when she went down in the storm. Of the ninety people on board, a few of the prominent passengers were listed, including an Argentinian diplomat, Arturo Belgrano.⁶⁵⁸ The *Sacramento* was delayed by the same storm, and a Brazilian ambassador and a Guatemalan minister were named in articles and described as receiving the courtesies of American diplomats in New Orleans.⁶⁵⁹ A third instance of a named victim with a Spanish surname in 1915 was Galarmino Garcia, a skilled cigar maker from Tampa, explicitly identified as “Spanish.”⁶⁶⁰ All of these victims would most likely have been perceived as “Spanish” or Portuguese rather than Cuban or Brazilian or Guatemalan, a common way to justify giving a person most of the privileges of whiteness.⁶⁶¹

Race and class influenced reporting on rescue workers as well as victims in 1921, especially in rural areas. Rescue and relief for victims in English-language newspapers was frequently framed in class-based condescension, such as, “And it was good clothing, not castoff garments of no value. To see the victims come in, nearly naked, and watch the expressions upon their faces as they were handed garments for their very own, the like of which they had never been able to afford, was a scene that touches the heart.”⁶⁶² The same correspondent, S. Deane Wasson, also extolled the number of prominent white men by name who had gone to search for victims, but briefly admitted that “Americans, Mexicans and negroes are in these searching

⁶⁵⁸“Steamer with 93 Aboard is Missing,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 21, 1915, 2; and “Gulf Being Scoured for Missing Steamer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 23, 1915, 2.

⁶⁵⁹The Guatemalan minister may have received additional sympathy because he had been expelled from Mexico by Mexican revolutionary Venustiano Carranza. “Rough Sea Delays Cardoso’s Arrival,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 16, 1915, 2.

⁶⁶⁰“Tropic Storm Moves Toward Gulf Coast,” *Atlanta Constitution*, August 16, 1915, 5.

⁶⁶¹Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 22–23, 98, 223–4; and Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis*, 131–132.

⁶⁶²Statement by S. Deane Wasson. “Women On the Job,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 16, 1921, 48. This edition no longer available to verify.

parties. Race and color lines are withdrawn in the fields.”⁶⁶³ From the context of the story, however, it was clear that most of the rescue effort was divided by class, mostly along racial lines, with poor workers taking orders and doing most of the physical labor.

Class, race, and labor also played out through sensationalized newspaper reports on looting, an accusation frequently used as a weapon against Black, Mexican, and poor white laborers. The amount of anxiety about looting exhibited by newspapers depended on the amount of white middle-class urban residential and business property at risk. The three disasters with the strongest anti-looting language and measures occurred in the 1900 and 1915 Galveston hurricanes, widely perceived as mostly white middle-class disasters, and the 1921 San Antonio flood, in which the white central business district was badly flooded. All three of these disasters involved white middle-and-upper-class homes and businesses.

For instance, during the 1900 Galveston hurricane cleanup, newspapers ran sensationalized stories about rampant looting and desecration of bodies.⁶⁶⁴ Most reports in both 1900 and 1915 singled out Black Galvestonians as those primarily responsible, such as a report that “twenty-four negroes were shot while pillaging wrecked homes.”⁶⁶⁵ Close analysis of police records from 1900 by Bixel and Turner found little evidence of looting—only fourteen instances, none of which identified the race of the accused looters, at a time in which the race of non-white individuals was virtually always included in official records, particularly if that information could be used negatively.⁶⁶⁶ More importantly, perhaps, soldiers and the militia often shot a non-white person on sight if they even thought they were looting, which put any Black home owner

⁶⁶³Obviously, the latter statement did not include any quotes from the Mexican or Black rescue workers. “Women On the Job,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 16, 1921, 48. This edition no longer available to verify.

⁶⁶⁴Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 183.

⁶⁶⁵Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78.

⁶⁶⁶Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78.

at risk of being shot and killed while cleaning up his own home, as well as Black workers hired to clean up someone else's home or business.

San Antonio hosted several military installations in 1921, a result of militarization for World War I. Those military posts provided servicemen to help in rescue and recovery work by Saturday morning, September 10, but they also immediately began “patrolling the city,”⁶⁶⁷ almost certainly to protect flooded businesses from looting. While one newspaper reported that the Police Commissioner requested and was granted martial law from Col. T. H. Slaven of the Eighth Army Corps,⁶⁶⁸ at least one other stated the next day that “although martial law has not been declared, it was decided to accept the offer of federal troops to assist the police in giving property protection.”⁶⁶⁹ Whether or not it was officially martial law, Camp Travis provided three regiments to patrol the city, clearly imposing a form of unofficial martial law with most of the emphasis on preventing looting.⁶⁷⁰ However, relatively little of their protection appears to have been provided to the westside Mexican community itself, and the American Red Cross (ARC) may have been driven to initially locate their refugee camp outside of San Antonio partly due to fears that poor Mexican victims would engage in looting.⁶⁷¹ While some English-language newspapers ran vague stories about looting in the city, pointing to Mexican perpetrators, there was little substantiation for those accusations. But given the geography of the flooded region, the measures against looting almost certainly targeted the Mexican community.

⁶⁶⁷“Main Business District of San Antonio Flooded and Thousands Made Homeless,” *Brownwood Bulletin*, September 10, 1921, 1.

⁶⁶⁸“Police Chief Says 1,000 Dead,” *Breckenridge Daily American*, September 10, 1921, 1.

⁶⁶⁹“Two Morgues Opened,” *Abilene Daily Reporter*, September 11, 1921, 1.

⁶⁷⁰“38 Bodies Have Been Recovered,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1921, 1.

⁶⁷¹See next section for an analysis of the Red Cross refugee camp and the involvement of the military in selecting its location.

The Struggle for National Identity

The decade between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression saw the simultaneous rise of Americanization campaigns that demanded immigrants and “Others” completely assimilate to white Protestant American culture, with related xenophobic immigration restrictions, and resistance by most of the groups they targeted who believed their self-chosen acculturation made them American enough.⁶⁷² For Mexicans in the United States, this period saw the beginning of a division between those who were beginning to self-identify as American citizens of Mexican descent and those who clung to a Mexican national identity.⁶⁷³ Lozano was a Mexican nationalist, and the reports in *la Prensa* reflected this loyalty by using the term “Mexican” exclusively, a form of resistance to even acculturation. A Spanish-language newspaper in Tucson, however, stated that “A great part were workers from Mexico, but there were many victims from among the American population.”⁶⁷⁴ “American” was reserved for non-ethnic white citizens in English-language newspapers. But the few named victims in San Antonio who were not Spanish-surnamed also had ethnic surnames, suggesting that *el Tucsonese* was drawing a distinction between Mexican immigrants who were not citizens and those who were, indicating the emerging division in national identities.

While there were not enough other Spanish-language newspaper articles to further analyze this emerging struggle between nationalism and acculturation within Mexican

⁶⁷²Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity*, xiii–xv; and Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 1–5.

⁶⁷³As noted previously, the first indications of this in San Antonio death certificates emerged around 1925 when some death certificates began indicating Mexican or white Mexican rather than white for those with Spanish surnames, but most continued to be identified as white. The rise of LULAC in the late 1920s coincided with this emergence of a Mexican American identity. But Mexican Americans often embraced both national identities.

⁶⁷⁴Original: “Una gran parte fué de mexicanos trabajadores, pero hay muchas victimas de entre la población Americana.” “109 CUERPOS ENCONTRADOS EN LA RIBERA DEL RIO DE S. ANTONIO,” trans. “109 BODIES FOUND ON THE SAN ANTONIO RIVERBANK,” *El Tucsonese* (Tucson, AZ), September 13, 1921, 4.

communities, there was a polite battle of competing narratives with English-language newspapers about the disaster and relief efforts. Lozano's national pride was partly reflected in the quality of *la Prensa's* reporting, more professional than most of the English-language newspaper articles. While English-language newspapers reported vaguely on the flood in the Mexican district, *la Prensa* reported the events in precise detail. "Alazan Creek went out of banks at eight-thirty in the evening, then at "at three-quarters past nine on Friday night, Alazán Creek had become a devastating torrent, and the current jumped over the bridge on West Commerce Street....at half past ten at night, the creek reached its highest level, which was seven feet above the level of said bridge."⁶⁷⁵ This precise timeline suggested careful reconstruction from eye witnesses.

By the third day after the disaster, English-language newspapers had shifted their focus from the Mexican urban victims to major commercial losses, to agricultural losses, and to rural victims. *La Prensa* covered those same urban commercial losses while also including small Mexican-owned businesses, absent in the English-language newspapers.⁶⁷⁶ They also gave details about the undertakers receiving the bodies of victims, including exact locations and which undertakers had unidentified bodies, presumably to make it easier for readers to try to locate lost loved ones. For instance, "Guerra Undertakers," which had one unidentified woman's body, was on the corner of West Houston and San Saba streets.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵Original: "A las nueve y tres cuartos de la noche del viernes, el Arroyo del Alazán se había convertido en un torrente arrollador, y la corriente saltaba por encima del Puente de la Calle de W. Commerce..." and "a las diez y media de la noche, el Arroyo llegó a su mayor altura, que alcanzó siete pies sobre el nivel del mencionado puente." "El Arroyo Del Alazan," trans. "Alazan Creek," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6; and "El 'West Side' Queda Aislado," trans. "The 'West Side' Remains Cut Off," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6.

⁶⁷⁶"El Arroyo de San Pedro," trans. "San Pedro Creek;" "Las Comunicaciones Ferrocarrileras," trans. "Railroad Announcements;" and "Un Voraz Incendio," trans. "A Voracious Fire," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6 and 7.

⁶⁷⁷Original: "La Agencia de inhumaciones de Guerra, situada en la esquina de las calles de W. Houston y San Saba," "Mas Cadaveres Han Sido Recogidos," trans. "More Bodies have been Identified," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6.

Perhaps the most significant difference was the language used to describe the response of the Mexican community. English-language newspapers generally described the Mexican population as passive, omitting most of their involvement in rescue, recovery, and relief efforts.⁶⁷⁸ They focused on the city government, fire and police, the military, the ARC, and one or two fraternal organizations. *La Prensa* (SA) however, focused on Mexican community leaders who actively coordinated with the city's response to the disaster. For instance, the city asked *la Prensa* to publish sanitation measures, assuring readers that “the authorities urgently desire the cooperation of the neighborhood in this case and are sure to obtain this.”⁶⁷⁹

La Prensa (SA) was cognizant that some victims might let pride prevent them from seeking help, in contrast to English-language newspapers who worried more about whether or not survivors were deserving or might be freeloaders. While the *Houston Chronicle* expressed fears about “the professional beggar” receiving relief, *la Prensa* urged, “we especially recommend that our compatriots be aware of this matter and come to receive the assistance they need.”⁶⁸⁰ *La Prensa* also conveyed the respect some of the relief workers had for the Mexican survivors and relief efforts, all of which was absent from English-language newspapers. Mr. Harris, in charge of the main ARC station on El Paso Street, praised the Mexican survivors, saying they were serene and orderly and could not be bearing up better than they were.⁶⁸¹ The correspondents were probably well aware that these terms were qualities typically attributed only

⁶⁷⁸See the next section for a broader analysis of Mexican organizational involvement in these efforts.

⁶⁷⁹Original: “la autoridad desea en este caso urgente la cooperación del vecindario y está segura de obtenerla.”

“DISPOSICIONES SANITARIAS,” trans. “SANITARY MEASURES,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6.

⁶⁸⁰“City Partially Lighted” *Houston Chronicle*, September 13, 1921, 12; and “Muy especialmente se nos recomendó hiciéramos saber a nuestro compatriotas este asunto, para que acudan a recibir el socorro que necesitan....”

“Alimentos Para Las Necesitados,” trans. “Food for the Needy,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6.

⁶⁸¹Original: “Mr. Harris hizo elogio especial de la serenidad con que el pueblo se había comportado en la desgracia y del orden perfecto que había visto entre nuestro pueblo ante las críticas circunstancias actuales.” “LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN,” trans. “The American Red Cross in the Alazan Section,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1.

to white American survivors rather than those in Balaji's "white view of the dark world."⁶⁸² A few days later, the newspaper reported that one of the ARC volunteers in charge of a section, "la Señorita Lozano," made a statement reassuring victims that they would not be embarrassed if they came to request help.⁶⁸³ Again, the newspaper made it clear they believed most Mexican victims to be proud and reluctant to accept charity even when they had lost everything. This characterization of survivors as too proud to accept charity was in direct opposition to the English-language newspapers with their fears of "professional beggars," and another form of claiming whiteness.

⁶⁸² Balaji, "Racializing Pity," 51.

⁶⁸³Original: "Tenemos informes---continuo la señorita Lozano---de que hay un gran numero de familias que habiendo quedad casi en la ruina con motivo de la inundación, no quieran venir a recibir la ayuda que la Cruz Roja puede darles, por albergar escrúpulos, temores e ideas erróneas, como las de que no serán atendidas, o que serán avergonzadas en alguna forma, y otras por el estilo," trans. "We have reports --- continued Miss Lozano --- that there are a large number of families who, having been almost ruined by the flood, do not want to come to receive the help that the Red Cross can give them, because they have scruples, fears and misconceptions, such as those that will not be met, or that will be embarrassed in some way, and others like that." "LA CRUZ ROJA LLAMA A LOS DAMNIFICADOS," trans. "The Red Cross Calls all Victims," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 8. While Elisa Lozano's apparent social class and last name suggested a probable connection with the publisher, I was unable to establish that conclusively. Her relatively high social class from the context best matches a college teacher in the 1920 U.S. Census, aged 26. She was born in Texas and spoke English and in the 1930 U.S. Census, by which time she had become a social worker, while her father owned a fruit business and had a home valued at \$5,000 in a primarily white neighborhood, indicating a middle class social standing. "Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population," US Census Bureau, Ward 2, Precinct 9, Bexar County, Texas, Sheet 4B, accessed September 10, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com; and "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population," US Census Bureau, Ward 1, Precinct 1, Bexar County, Texas, Sheet 5B, accessed September 10, 2022, ancestrylibrary.com.

Section II: Organizational Relief

The Relief Organizations

The 1921 San Antonio flood occurred not long after the end of World War I in an atmosphere of turmoil, conflict, and change, and the American Red Cross (ARC) had not been immune to these changes. The ARC had undergone several significant transformations since their involvement in the 1900 Galveston hurricane. The early ARC had been primarily run by middle-class charitable women, individuals who did not meet the professional expectations of businessmen who were major contributors. When Clara Barton was forced out in the early 1900s, socialite Mabel Boardman began the transformation of the organization from one run mostly by charitable women to one which emphasized professionalization—and masculinization—of the leadership. This transformation appealed to businessmen and as a result, increased support from business-oriented charitable donors who were concerned about relief being used efficiently.⁶⁸⁴ This connection of particularly important charitable donors to business-oriented progressive ideas (in particular, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation) had a significant influence on the changes in the organization during the first two decades of the Twentieth Century.⁶⁸⁵

During the first few years of the Twentieth Century, the ARC had developed a very distinct public-private partnership with the Federal government through federally granted

⁶⁸⁴Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 8; Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 97–115.

⁶⁸⁵Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 56–57; and Remes, *Disaster Citizenship*, 5–17, 79. For more on the Rockefeller Foundation's charity in the South, see William A. Link, "The Harvest is Ripe, but the Laborers Are Few": The Hookworm Crusade in North Carolina, 1909–1915," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 67, no. 1 (Jan. 1990); 1–2, 17–20.

charters.⁶⁸⁶ A revised charter was signed in January 1905.⁶⁸⁷ This relationship was strengthened in 1917, when Wilson gave the ARC a “defacto monopoly status” for American voluntary aid organizations.⁶⁸⁸ The organization was mostly put into the hands of leaders from the business and finance world during the war through Wilson’s appointed ARC War Council.⁶⁸⁹ Wilson and others in the Federal government saw the ARC’s international civilian relief efforts as a tool of diplomacy and propaganda abroad, while many ARC volunteers overseas viewed their leadership role in European relief efforts as an opportunity for social engineering, particularly in “backwards” Eastern European countries.⁶⁹⁰

The public image that the ARC tried to build during the war years of its international relief efforts relied on constructing the organization as both masculine—through its efficient management by prominent businessmen on the “War Council”—and feminine—through the ministrations of professional women nurses and social workers.⁶⁹¹ Concurrently, a few upper-class charitable women, such as Mabel Boardman, continued to exert a great deal of influence on the domestic work of the organization. At the end of the war, the organization was again reorganized, and while it retained an element of international relief in its mission, its international efforts refocused primarily on limited assistance in emergencies rather than large scale social engineering projects.⁶⁹² The primary focus of the organization between World War I and World

⁶⁸⁶While the US Senate ratified the Geneva Treaty in 1882 and “authorized the ARC to act as its official relief agency in time of war,” the ARC did not have a federal charter until June 1900. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 22, 27.

⁶⁸⁷Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 30.

⁶⁸⁸Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 73.

⁶⁸⁹Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 74.

⁶⁹⁰The ARC’s popularity and membership peaked during World War I when one-third of all Americans had memberships. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 5–6, 67, 71–2, 97.

⁶⁹¹Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 86–87.

⁶⁹²The role of the ARC in relief work for the 1921 flood requires this background introduction to the organization’s recent history, the changed perceptions of the organization by white Texans, and the grounds for the apparent wariness by Mexican victims. Prior to World War I, Texas officials resisted the interference, even financial contributions, from the ARC, with the exception of the 1900 Galveston hurricane. However membership in the

War II returned to disaster relief in the United States itself, though some educational programs continued. Like the country itself, the organization never entirely returned to a mostly insular focus, and continued to be influenced by earlier Progressive ideals.⁶⁹³

One common ideal of their progressivism, heavily influenced by the related nineteenth-century religious and social doctrines of free will and perfectionism, was that relief should be professionally and efficiently administered. By this, they meant relief should only go to the “deserving” as defined under their white middle-class Protestant standards, and relief should be limited to just enough to allow victims to survive the immediate moment. Relief should not include any “waste” or duplication and victims should be rigidly screened to ensure that no one lazy or immoral should be supported by relief. In particular, they wanted to put the able-bodied to work, whether employed or work-as-relief, as quickly as possible without little consideration for what the individual had been doing before the disaster or the conditions in which they would be expected to work.⁶⁹⁴

Business interests in private relief served—and continue to serve—several purposes. First, businessmen generally preferred an associational (or voluntarism)⁶⁹⁵ model of charity that might avoid a government take-over of relief efforts. Government administered relief would mean tax funds were used while an associational model made their contributions optional.⁶⁹⁶ Second, an associational model kept control of relief distribution in the hands of businessmen, allowing them to pass judgment on who was “deserving” and who was not, and to control the

organization became a patriotic gesture during the war, and in 1919, the ARC played a substantial role in relief after the Corpus Christi hurricane. O' Rear, *Storm over the Bay*, 110–111.

⁶⁹³Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 186–187.

⁶⁹⁴Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 8–10; Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities, 124–128.

⁶⁹⁵At its most simplified, voluntarism was the older model of private charity, while associationalism was an emerging partnership between the private and business sectors and the government. See also Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 3, 7, 36–38; and Jones, *The American Red Cross*, xiii–xiv.

⁶⁹⁶Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 38, 76.

duration and amount of relief received. These judgments allowed them to privilege some groups or areas over others, generally directing funds to people or efforts which would also most benefit the businessmen themselves. Government control of charity would possibly equalize the relief without moral judgments and possibly without regard to which people or projects would most benefit business leaders. Third, an associational model allowed them to publicize themselves as benefactors, which may have been on the minds of some businessmen in 1921 due to the recent class revolution in Russia.⁶⁹⁷ And last, this model of charity allowed businessmen to insist on “jobs as relief,” pressuring people to return to work as quickly as possible if they were able-bodied (coercively, by withholding relief from anyone who did not take any offered work, no matter how dangerous or poorly paid,) and regardless of any losses or other trauma that person had experienced. Even if a person had lost family members, they were not allowed to be “lazy” by taking time to mourn, though class, race, and gender played a significant role in exceptions to this expectation.⁶⁹⁸ A government model might possibly prioritize the victims' needs without discrimination over the interests of businesses.⁶⁹⁹

Most of the leadership of the relief efforts during the 1921 San Antonio flood were white businessmen, some of whom had retained their membership in the ARC after the war.⁷⁰⁰ Unlike

⁶⁹⁷ Relevant to this point was the involvement of the ARC in heavy-handed social engineering attempts to “improve” conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe, with the result that “Russians were not merely unthankful for American generosity; they wholly resented it.” Their failures helped shape American attitudes toward Eastern Europe in the 1920s. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 163.

⁶⁹⁸ Irwin argues that, in the context of international aid, the federal government used this “privately administered organization to carry out overseas assistance on its behalf....accrued the benefits of assistance without making official commitments.” I argue that this applied internally as well. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 39; and Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 126–7.

⁶⁹⁹ For more on the public–private partnership model of charity, see Irwin, *Making the World Safe*; Jones, *The American Red Cross*; Jones, “Race, Class, and Gender Disparities”; and Remes, *Disaster Citizenship*.

⁷⁰⁰ The 1900 Galveston hurricane, when the surviving victims were perceived as primarily white and upper-middle-class and whose characters were assumed to not be threatened by charity, had been the only Texas disaster before the United States' entry into World War I during which the ARC had been welcomed. Texas communities previously resisted any direct intervention by the ARC, even refusing funds from them. This was arguably due to a fear that outside interference would open the door to outside control over how relief was administered. While the general attitude toward outside aid remained negative after World War I, the general attitude in Texas toward

earlier disasters, they worked hand-in-hand with the organization. And the organization's leaders generally accepted the priorities of these businessmen. Newspapers, including the daily Spanish-language newspaper, *La Prensa* (SA,) reported on relief efforts through the lens of these Progressive-era ideals to reassure readers that relief was being distributed as efficiently and professionally as possible and that the relief workers were ensuring that only the "deserving" received aid. There was a particular focus on returning victims to work as quickly as possible. But running underneath this official version, the stories suggest many of the victims were suspicious of the ARC and of their relief camps in particular.

While the ARC's relief efforts in the late 1800s and early 1900s can be described as heroic, they were not without their controversies. In particular, their supposed neutrality based on race, gender, and class was frequently compromised in order to adapt to local customs. In particular, Marion Moser-Jones's analysis clearly demonstrated significant differences in the treatment of primarily poor rural black victims of the 1893 Charleston hurricane, and the primarily white victims of the 1889 Johnstown flood disaster.⁷⁰¹ There is evidence in Clara Barton's own report from the 1900 Galveston hurricane that they were willing to compromise on neutrality of treatment in order to protect the sensibilities of upper-middle-class white women. Barton and her staff may have been trying to justify such deviations from neutrality when Mrs. Fannie B. Ward's report asserted that "It frequently happened that, for days together, there was hardly a thing in stock fit for people of the better class. It must be remembered that we were not supplying tramps and beggars, nor the ordinary applicants for charity:---but ladies and gentlemen, accustomed to the luxuries of life...How could we offer those dreadful wrappers or

the ARC had shifted due to their publicity campaigns. Businessmen had also realized that they could still maintain control over relief through taking leadership roles in the organization because the ARC allowed a great deal of local flexibility in interpreting their rule of "neutrality."

⁷⁰¹Jones, "Race, Class and Gender Disparities, 119–121, 124–129.

bedraggled finery, or soiled and ragged garments which our servants would despise, to ladies of taste, culture and refinement...⁷⁰² This special assistant to Miss Barton asserted that using funds donated to be used at the Red Cross's discretion to buy such clothing was "the only decent thing to do."⁷⁰³ Mrs. Ward then listed several individual cases, without names but described in such terms as "a widow of highest social standing" and "the grand-niece of an ex-president of the United States."⁷⁰⁴ Yet these women very clearly did not hesitate to distribute those same garments they condemned so harshly to other victims, including, it must be assumed, middle-class Black victims since they did not differentiate social classes for Black victims in their reports.⁷⁰⁵

Several historians have examined, at least superficially, the complaints made against the ARC during the 1927 Mississippi River floods, just six years after the 1921 San Antonio flood.⁷⁰⁶ One of the more serious complaints about the Red Cross was that once a Black refugee entered a heavily guarded Red Cross camp, they were unable to leave the camp unless they had accepted employment or were returning to work for their current employer.⁷⁰⁷ According to some complaints, Northern industrial recruiters were excluded from the camps in order to preserve the local labor pool for local plantation owners. While the ARC was not directly involved in relief efforts for the 1915 Galveston hurricane, newspaper reports describe refugee camps in a context

⁷⁰²Fannie B. Ward, "Report of Mrs. Ward," Clara Barton, *Report of Miss Barton*, Red Cross Records, MSS#05-0007, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, 54-5, August 11, 2018.

⁷⁰³Fannie B. Ward, "Report of Mrs. Ward," 54-5.

⁷⁰⁴Fannie B. Ward, "Report of Mrs. Ward," 54-5.

⁷⁰⁵There were relatively few Mexican residents in the coastal region devastated by the hurricane in 1900 or in areas damaged by the other disasters between 1899 and the Corpus Christi hurricane of 1919, so it is quite difficult to find references to any aid being provided to Mexican victims. For that reason, I chose to examine the Red Cross's treatment of Black disaster victims instead for a comparison.

⁷⁰⁶Daniel, *Deep 'n as It Come*, 126; Barry, *Rising Tide*, 313; Lester, *On Floods and Photos*, 175; Jones, *The American Red Cross*, xi.

⁷⁰⁷Jones, *The American Red Cross*, xi; Daniel, *Deep'n as It Come*, 153-156; Barry, *Rising Tide*, 311-317; and O'Daniel, *When the Levee Breaks*, 34-37.

which suggests their primary purposes were to prevent looting and to force Black victims and possibly poor white victims to accept whatever work and wages were offered.⁷⁰⁸ Similar measures were attempted after other disasters, so it is understandable that poor or non-white victims might be suspicious of the purpose of the ARC's camps.⁷⁰⁹

But the ARC was not the only organization involved in relief efforts for San Antonio flood victims. In Spanish-language newspaper reports, *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*, the Mexican Blue Cross, featured at least as prominently.⁷¹⁰ By contrast to the ARC, almost universally known, very little is currently known about *la Cruz Azul*.⁷¹¹ *La Cruz Azul* appears to have been a short-lived organization, though popular with Mexicanas within the United States.⁷¹² However, while the name strongly suggests it was inspired by the Red Cross movement, it was not the officially recognized national Red Cross organization for Mexico. *La Cruz Roja Mexicana*, or the Mexican Red Cross, had received official recognition by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1912.⁷¹³ But rival organizations to the recognized Red Cross societies were not uncommon. For instance, in 1913, Earnest P. Bicknell, National Director of the Red Cross, complained that the formation of a rival White Cross Society in Mexico “divided the strength and prestige of humane Mexico....”⁷¹⁴

⁷⁰⁸“Loss \$4,000,000 to \$8,000,000,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 20, 1915, 2; and “PEONAGE SLAVE SYSTEMS STARTS AFTER FLOOD,” *Chicago Defender*, September 25, 1915, 1.

⁷⁰⁹They were not necessarily wrong, see below for analysis of the focus the ARC put on employment for victims in their camp.

⁷¹⁰Despite its prominence in the relief work for this disaster, I cannot find any mention of *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* in English-language newspaper reports.

⁷¹¹The organization is mentioned briefly by Philis M. Barragan Goertz, *Reading, Writing, and Revolution: Escuelitas and the Emergence of a Mexican American Identity in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2020), 97, 101, 104–107, 110–111; Pycior, *Democratic Renewal*, 17–19; and Miller, *West Side Rising*, 18, 33, 54, 156–162.

⁷¹²This appears to have been the first national Latina organization. Pycior, *Democratic Renewal*, 18.

⁷¹³Julia F. Irwin, e-mail correspondence, July 7–15, 2021; and Ernest P. Bicknell, “Red Cross and White Cross in Mexico,” *The American Red Cross Magazine*, vol. 8, no. 2, April 1913, Washington, D.C., 27 (Google books).

⁷¹⁴Ernest P. Bicknell, “Wide Spread Violation of Red Cross Law,” *The American Red Cross Bulletin*, vol. 8, no.1, January 1913, Washington, D.C., 24 (Google books).

What little is now known about the organization mostly comes from Spanish-language newspapers. The earliest reference I could locate for *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* appeared in *la Prensa* in December 1919, describing an honor guard of young women members of this organization at a Woodsmen of the World camp.⁷¹⁵ While that mention of the organization provided little information beyond suggesting a largely women’s membership, their next mention a month and a half later was more substantial. *La Cruz Azul* was one of the organizations involved in organizing a festival for February 1, 1920, to raise funds for victims of an earthquake in Veracruz, at which it would be formally installed. The article stated that “the Mexican Blue Cross is a charitable organization, made up of ladies from our neighborhood who intend to always aid people in need.”⁷¹⁶ This description was the clearest statement of this organization’s mission that I was able to find, and it also provided a date for the establishment of the San Antonio chapter that would play such an important role in September 1921. Based on a November 1920 article, the full name of the San Antonio chapter was “la Cruz Azul Mexicana del Campamiento “Juárez,”....” or the Juarez Camp of the Mexican Blue Cross. “Campamiento Juárez” of *la Cruz Azul* appears in reports on the 1921 flood relief efforts.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁵“Guardia de Honor Femenina,” trans. “Women’s Honor Guard,” *la Prensa* (SA,) December 7, 1919, 9. The earliest reference to an organization called *la Cruz Azul* that I could find in Spanish-language newspapers was in *la Prensa* (SA,) in July 1915. This was almost certainly a different organization, however, since the correspondent asserted that, in order to remedy the lack of attention to horses on the battlefield by the Red Cross, “Para subsanar este olvido imperdonable se ha creado en Inglaterra una nueva institución que se llama la cruz azul,” trans. “...a new institution called the Blue Cross has been created in England.” “La Cruz Azul,” *la Prensa* (SA,) July 8, 1915, 7.

⁷¹⁶Original: “La Cruz Azul Mexicana es una organización de beneficencia, integrada por señoritas de nuestra colonia, que se propone acudir siempre en auxilio de los necesitados.” “EN TODAS PARTES ORGANIZAN FIESTAS PARA AYUDAR A LA COLECTA DE “LA PRENSA” EN FAVOR DE LAS VICTIMAS,” trans. “Everywhere They Organize Parties to Help La Prensa’s Collection on Behalf of the Victims,” *la Prensa* (SA), January 18, 1920, 15. Char Miller puts forth 1918 as the year the organization was established, but November 1921 as the date it was formally founded. This article suggests that latter date may refer to another chapter unless the February 1, 1920, installation described above failed to occur. Miller, *West Side Rising*, 155. NOTE: the fundraising referenced in the article title was for victims of a recent Mexican earthquake.

⁷¹⁷“UN DETALLE SIGNIFICATIVO” trans. “A Significant Detail,” *la Prensa* (SA,) November 3, 1920, 5. Richard Garcia has identified *el Campamiento Juárez* as associated with Lenadores del Mondo (Woodsmen of the World) while this article seems to connect it to *la Cruz Azul*. Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 92.

Prior to the 1921 flood, other references to this organization appeared in *la Prensa* (LA).⁷¹⁸ New California chapters and elections for officers for local chapters of *La Cruz Azul Mexicana* were described in *la Prensa* (LA) during the late summer and early autumn in 1921.⁷¹⁹ *La Prensa* (SA) mentioned that brigades of *La Cruz Azul* were established in four Oklahoma cities in April of 1921 by an envoy of the Mexican Consul, Jesús Franco —Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Muskogee (sic), and Louton.⁷²⁰ *La Cruz Azul* was frequently involved in Mexican fundraising for festivals, especially for the September 1921 Mexican Centennial, widely celebrated by Mexicans in the United States.⁷²¹

These newspaper reports produce at least a rough outline of the organization and its popularity in Mexican communities in the United States. *La Cruz Azul Mexicana* had the

⁷¹⁸I did not include background on this second newspaper in the introduction because while *la Prensa* (SA) extensively covered the flood, *la Prensa* (LA) was bi-weekly and ran only a small number of general articles on the flood. The Los Angeles newspaper was not directly related to *la Prensa* (SA.) “Gran Jamaica y Concierto de ella (sic de la) Cruz Azul Mexicana,” trans. “Great Jamaica and Concert of the Mexican Blue Cross,” *la Prensa* (LA,) September 3, 1921, 3; and “LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA,” “The Mexican Blue Cross,” *la Prensa* (LA,) August 6, 1921, 3.

⁷¹⁹For instance, a new brigade was installed in Fresno in August 1921. “El domingo de la semana antepasada fue instalada una nueva brigada de la benéfica institución en Fresno, y están ya en formación otras brigadas más.” trans. “On the Sunday of the week before last, a new brigade of the charitable institution was in Fresno, and there are other brigades already being formed.” “LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA,” trans. “The Mexican Blue Cross,” *la Prensa* (LA,) August 13, 1921, 6.

⁷²⁰Original: “En las oficinas del consulado mexicano entrevistamos al señor Jesús Franco, enviado del consulado” trans: “In the offices of the Mexican consulate, we interviewed Mr. Jesús Franco, an envoy from the consulate” and “el Sr. Franco en su gira recorrió las poblaciones de Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Muskogee (sic), y Louton, estableciendo en cada una de ellas Comisiones Honoríficas, y una brigada de la Cruz Azul Mexicana que funciona en conexión con cada una las comisiones instaladas.” trans: “Mr. Franco toured the towns of Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Muskogee (sic), and Louton, establishing Honorary Commissions in each of them, and a brigade of the Mexican Blue Cross that works in connection with each of the installed commissions.” “SE TRATARA BIEN A LOS MEXICANOS EN OKLAHOMA,” trans. “Mexicans will be Treated Well in Oklahoma,” *la Prensa* (SA,) April 12, 1921, 1. San Marcos, Texas, also appeared to have a brigade of *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*. “La Gran Recepcion,” trans. “The Grand Reception,” *la Prensa* (SA,) April 16, 1921, 1. Julie Pycior found that *Comisiones Honoríficas* and *Brigadas de la Cruz Azul* often overlapped, though the former primarily supported cultural and patriotic celebrations and the latter were involved in charitable activities which she compares to the Red Cross. Pycior, *Democratic Renewal*, 17.

⁷²¹“EN TODAS PARTES ORGANIZAN FIESTAS PARA AYUDAR A LA COLECTA DE “LA PRENSA” EN FAVOR DE LAS VICTIMAS” trans. “Everywhere They Organize Parties to Help La Prensa’s Collection on Behalf of the Victims,” *la Prensa* (SA,) January 18, 1920, 15; “UN DETALLE SIGNIFICATIVO,” trans. “A SIGNIFICANT DETAIL,” *la Prensa* (SA,) November 3, 1920, 5; and “‘La Cruz Azul Mexicana’ organizo una Fiesta de Caridad,” trans. “‘The Mexican Blue Cross’ Organized a Charity Festival,” *la Prensa* (LA,) September 18, 1921, 6.

recognition and support of Mexican Consuls and the Mexican national government. They were widespread, with multiple chapters in California, Texas, and Oklahoma, and probably other states. They frequently took part in fundraisers, including those for disasters, and were perceived as primarily an organization staffed by women, though a few men were mentioned. The chief officer of local chapters was given the title, capitana, but at least one woman was referred to as the president. Their membership was often described in language very similar to middle-class to upper-class women in English-language newspapers.⁷²² In fact Julie Leininger Pycior found that the organization was criticized by more radical Spanish-language newspapers for decisions such as holding a benefit dinner in an upscale hotel rather than “in the heart of the barrio,” implying that the organization's membership was primarily relatively well-off.⁷²³

All of these elements resemble the ARC twenty years earlier. *La Prensa* (LA) explicitly classed them with two other Mexican organizations: “La Cruz Roja. La Cruz Blanca. La Cruz Azul,”⁷²⁴ suggesting *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* was a similar organization. But there is no clear reference to this organization having a mission to succor the wounded on the battlefield, which was a fundamental reason for the emergence and spread of the International Red Cross

⁷²²During the 1921 flood there were a number of examples of the women being described in language that separated them from the mostly working-class victims, but the centennial charity festival organized in Los Angeles about the same time by *La Cruz Azul Mexicana* included cultural elements such as overtures and arias that would be more typical of upper-middle-class and upper-class charity events than fundraisers for the general public. “La Cruz Azul Mexicana' organizo una Fiesta de Caridad,” trans. “The Mexican Blue Cross Organized a Charity Festival,” *la Prensa* (LA,) September 18, 1921, 6.

⁷²³The exact date was not included for the article in *El Heraldo de Mexico*, and I was unable to locate it myself. Pycior, *Democratic Renewal*, 149.

⁷²⁴The Mexican Red Cross was the organization recognized by the International Red Cross. Trans. “The Red Cross. The White Cross. The Blue Cross.” “Programa,” trans. “Program,” *la Prensa* (LA,) September 22, 1921, 2.

movement.⁷²⁵ *La Cruz Azul*'s fundraising appeared to be ordinary charity work, unlike Red Cross societies, and *La Prensa* (LA) explicitly described it as a charitable organization.⁷²⁶

Char Miller, in *West Side Rising: How San Antonio's 1921 Flood Devastated a City and Sparked a Latino Environmental Justice Movement* identified *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* as a *mutualista*.⁷²⁷ But according to Emilio Zamora, a *mutualista*, or mutual aid society, was an organization that "sought to meet the immediate material interests of their poor and often destitute members."⁷²⁸ Pycior identifies *la Cruz Azul* as *mutualista*-type group, but modeled on *la Cruz Blanca*, "founded in Laredo by Leonor Villegas de Magnón, initially to aid injured members of Vunstiano Carranza's revolutionary army."⁷²⁹ They often worked hand-in-hand with the cultural and patriotic groups of the *Comisiones Honorificos* and were sometimes established simultaneously by Mexican consuls.⁷³⁰

I would argue that *la Cruz Azul* was primarily an external charity (*una organización de beneficencia*,) focused on the community and world, not internally on its own members as *mutualistas* were, inspired indirectly by the international Red Cross movement.⁷³¹ Both *la Cruz Blanca Mexicana* and *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* were founded during the Mexican revolution

⁷²⁵The absence of any mention of this primary mission does not mean that they did not include it; it simply may not have been relevant in reports on their relief efforts. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 107.

⁷²⁶Original: "...la institución de beneficencia...." "La Cruz Azul Mexicana, organizo una Fiesta de Caridad," trans. "The Mexican Blue Cross Organized a Charity Festival," *la Prensa* (LA,) September 18, 1921, 6.

⁷²⁷Miller, *West Side Rising*, 155–157. Miller also asserts that this organization did not really spread until a San Antonio conference in 1922, but I have found mentions of about a dozen chapters in at least three states before the flood and argue that it had already been gaining popularity among the Mexicana population and the flood simply accelerated its spread. While it was the first nationwide Latina organization in the United States, it was probably relatively short-lived. Miller, *West Side Rising*, 157.

⁷²⁸Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 55, 99–108.

⁷²⁹Pycior, *Democratic Renewal*, 17.

⁷³⁰Pycior, *Democratic Renewal*, 17; and "SE TRATARA BIEN A LOS MEXICANOS EN OKLAHOMA," trans. "Mexicans will be Treated Well in Oklahoma," *la Prensa* (SA,) April 12, 1921, 1.

⁷³¹*La Prensa* explicitly identified them as such: "*La Cruz Azul Mexicana* es una organización de beneficencia, integrada por señoritas de nuestra colonia, que se propone acudir siempre en auxilio de los necesitados." trans: "The Mexican Blue Cross is a charitable organization, made up of ladies from our neighborhood who intend to always aid people in need." "EN TODAS PARTES ORGANIZAN FIESTAS PARA AYUDAR A LA COLECTA DE "LA PRENSA" EN FAVOR DE LAS VICTIMAS," trans. "Everywhere They Organize Parties to Help La Prensa's Collection on Behalf of the Victims," *la Prensa* (SA), January 18, 1920, 15.

during the 1910s. *La Cruz Blanca* was unquestionably a competitor to *la Cruz Roja Mexicana* with complex political roots in the revolution, and Pycior identifies *la Cruz Blanca* as the model for *la Cruz Azul*. *La Cruz Azul* was recognized and given funds by the Mexican government in order to carry out their humanitarian work, funds which were not offered to the other major Mexican organization involved in the flood, *la Sociedad Hidalgo*, a prominent *mutualista* in San Antonio. Without a copy of their charter or other organizing document, it is difficult to definitively answer this question. However, the organization's members may not have seen a clear distinction between a Red Cross-type society, a traditional charitable organization, and a *mutualista*, and certainly *la Cruz Azul* embraced aspects of all three.

The third major organization involved in the relief efforts, mentioned above, was also relatively obscure, *la Sociedad Hidalgo* (also known as *la Sociedad Mutualista "Miguel Hidalgo," la Sociedad Mutualista Hidalgo*, and *la Sociedad "Miguel Hidalgo."*)⁷³² This organization was mentioned in *la Prensa* (SA) as early as February 27, 1913.⁷³³ But in February 1915, *la Prensa* (SA) announced *la Sociedad Hidalgo*'s twenty-second anniversary celebration, placing the date of its foundation around late February 1893.⁷³⁴ As the organization was still very active in September 1921, they were apparently longer lived than *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*.

⁷³²The organization was referred to as "...la Sociedad Mutualista 'Miguel Hidalgo'" in an article detailing the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration. "Celebró su fiesta de aniversario la Sociedad 'Miguel Hidalgo,'" trans. "The 'Miguel Hidalgo' Society party celebrated their anniversary," *la Prensa* (SA,) March 1, 1918, 5.

⁷³³The absence of any earlier references to this local organization is probably explained by the fact that *la Prensa* (SA) only began publication in 1913. I did not find any references to them in the English-language press. "La sociedad mutualista 'Hidalgo...,'" trans. "The mutual aid society 'Hidalgo...'" "Atenta invitacion," trans. "Thoughtful invitation," *La Prensa* (SA), February 27, 1913, 2; "BAILES DE LA SOCIEDAD 'HIDALGO,'" *la Prensa* (SA,) January 18, 1919, 9; and "Fiesta de la Sociedad Hidalgo," trans. "The Celebration of the Hidalgo Society," *el Regidor* (SA,) February 27, 1913, 8.

⁷³⁴"El próximo domingo, 28 del corriente, celebrará la Sociedad Hidalgo, de esta ciudad el vigésimo segundo aniversario de su fundación..." trans. "Next Sunday, the 28th of the current (month,) the Hidalgo Society of this city will celebrate the twenty-second anniversary of its foundation..." "Aniversario de una Sociedad" trans. "Anniversary of a Society," *la Prensa* (SA,) February 25, 1915, 4. NOTES: *la Prensa* reported that the organization was celebrating its twenty-fourth anniversary on 28 February, 1917, which suggests that the organization was founded on February 28, 1893. "ANIVERSARIO DE LA FUNDACION DE UNA SOCIEDAD," trans. "Anniversary of a Society's Foundation," *la Prensa* (SA,) February 24, 1917, 6.

However, until they emerged at the forefront of rescue and relief efforts in 1921, they were primarily a *patriotico-mutualista*, a patriotic mutual aid society that may have been primarily male with a women's auxiliary.⁷³⁵ Their San Antonio *salón* (hall) was at 509 El Paso Street and may have taken up the entire building; *la Prensa* (SA) reported them at that address for at least two and a half years.⁷³⁶ They mostly appeared in *la Prensa* (SA) when they put on patriotic festivals until the summer of 1921 when they began to raise funds for *la Prensa's* campaign to build two "Escuelas del Centenario", schools celebrating the Mexican centennial, in Dolores Hidalgo, Guanajuato.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁵This group was mostly likely fairly conservative and nationalistic because they appeared to have a connection to the publisher of *la Prensa*, Ignacio E. Lozano. He was mentioned as an honorary member, though it was not clear whether he was just an honorary member of the organization or of the board of directors. The latter seems more likely from the context. Also, although *la Sociedad Hidalgo* appeared to be a local group, I found other local groups with a similar name, and a statement that the main offices ("domicilio social" trans. "registered office") were in Eastland, Texas, near Fort Worth. "NUEVA MESA DIRECTIVE DE LA SOCIEDAD HIDALGO DE EASTLAND." trans. "NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE EASTLAND HIDALGO SOCIETY," *la Prensa* (SA,) May 22, 1921, 7. In another possible connection between the paper and the society, during the disaster, *la señorita* Elisa Lozano was one of *la Sociedad Hidalgo* volunteers, in charge of or sharing leadership of one of the ARC relief posts. While she may or may not have been related to *la Prensa's* publisher, Ignacio Lozano, she was almost certainly one of the elite of San Antonio's Mexican community if she was given that position of authority under a white-dominated organization. Her possible relationship to Lozano emphasizes that *la Prensa* may have already been very favorably inclined toward *la Sociedad Hidalgo*. "LA CRUZ ROJA LLAMA A LOS DAMNIFICADOS" "The Red Cross Calls the Victims," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 9. See earlier analysis of Elisa Lozano's identity.

⁷³⁶The building was at least two stories high. *La Prensa* mentioned two floors specifically while describing the ARC use of the building for a relief substation: "En el segundo piso del mismo tiene la Cruz Roja instalado el departamento de vestuarios, el que está dividido en dos secciones, una para señoras y niños y la otra para hombres." trans. "On the second floor of the same (building) the Red Cross has installed the wardrobe department, which is divided into two sections, one for women and children and the other for men." And "El piso bajo de aquel edificio está dedicado a prestar servicios de comedor, cocinas, etc., y allí trabajan las comisiones respectivas." trans. "The lower floor of that building is dedicated to providing dining services, kitchens, etc., and there work the respective commissions." "LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN," trans. "The American Red Cross in the Alazan Section," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1. The street number was mentioned in "...la calle de El Paso número 509,..." trans. "...number 509 El Paso Street,..." "LOS SERVICIOS DE CARIDAD" trans. "The Charity Services", *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1. *La Prensa* used the same address for the society in January 1919. "BAILES DE LA SOCIEDAD "HIDALGO," trans. "The Hidalgo Society Dance." *La Prensa* (SA), January 18, 1919, 9.

⁷³⁷The connection that emerged in May 1921 between *la Prensa's* publisher, Ignacio E. Lozano, and *la Sociedad Hidalgo* suggests a reason that the society suddenly became very active in the fundraising campaign for *las Escuelas del Centenario*, which was a deviation from their prior activities as reported by *la Prensa*. The schools were a nationalistic project to keep alive the pride of Mexicans in the United States for their homeland and to focus their charity on improving that homeland through education, project proposed by Lozano and promoted by *la Prensa*. See later material for background on Lozano and *la Prensa* (SA). For instance, "LA FIESTA DE HOY," trans. "Today's Festival," *la Prensa* (SA,) July 20, 1921, 5.

In light of their history, it is not surprising to find that *la Sociedad Hidalgo* seemed to have been one of the major organizers for the planned Mexican Centennial festivities in San Antonio on September 16, 1921. However, the disaster struck the Mexican district in San Antonio on September 9–10, 1921, a week before the festival was to be held. And it was at this moment that the members of *la Sociedad Hidalgo* unexpectedly appeared in newspaper coverage by *la Prensa* (SA) as leaders in the rescue and recovery and relief efforts by the Mexican community. They were also credited with appealing to the other organizers to postpone the festivities and focus on relief for the victims first.⁷³⁸

La Prensa (SA) retold events, especially the rescue, recovery, relief, and reconstruction efforts, from the point-of-view of the Mexican community in San Antonio, producing a complex narrative tying together the institutional efforts of the *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*, *la Sociedad Hidalgo*, and the ARC, as well as efforts by the Chamber of Commerce, the United States Army, the Catholic Church, and others. But most of the actual work of rescue and relief was done by those first three organizations. *La Prensa* told a very different story of the disaster than the one told by English-language newspapers. I was unable to find any mention of *la Cruz Azul* and *la Sociedad Hidalgo* in the English-language newspapers I examined. They also attribute almost all rescue work to policemen, firefighters, soldiers, and even boy scouts rather than the Mexican community, and virtually no mention is made of relief and fundraising work by the Mexican community. Even the Catholic Church's fundraising was barely mentioned. By September 15,

⁷³⁸As mentioned previously, they appear to have mostly focused on putting on festivals for patriotic holidays. "SE SUSPENDEN LAS FIESTAS PATRIAS Y SE EMPRENDE UNA CAMPANA POR LA S. HIDALGO," trans. "THE FATHERLAND FESTIVALS ARE SUSPENDED AND A CAMPAIGN IS STARTED FOR THE S. HIDALGO," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7. Other organizations mentioned in this article included "la Sociedad "Benevolencia," "la Sociedad Obrera 93," "la Sociedad Allende," and vague "Otras sociedades."

most English-language newspaper reports had refocused almost exclusively on the rural damages and victims.⁷³⁹

The Relief Efforts

From the point-of-view of the English-language newspapers, the only organization directly involved in ministering relief to the victims was the ARC, and they consistently described the organization's work in glowing terms that reflected the shift in Texas's attitude toward the organization during World War I. But as described above, the organization had also delved into progressive-era social engineering in Europe during the war. These progressive-era ideals were heavily influenced by nineteenth-century Protestant ideals, the same ones which had help inspire the creation of the ARC.⁷⁴⁰ They often tried to impose American Protestant-Progressive culture, health practices, and work ethics on the European poor.⁷⁴¹

Some members of the Spanish-speaking community of San Antonio may have been familiar with the ARC's attempts at progressive-era social engineering in Europe and the underlying assumptions of race, ethnicity, and class that drove those ideas. The population of the

⁷³⁹Both the English-language and Spanish-language newspapers demonstrated at least some bias in their reporting. The number of rural victims was quite high in a few counties, and most of the English-language newspapers were naturally extremely focused on the cotton losses. *La Prensa* also reported on the rural victims while naturally keeping most of their focus on their home city of San Antonio, but while they reported on black and immigrant victims in San Antonio, their articles on the rural aspects of this disaster mostly focused on the Mexican victims. Black and immigrant victims, while not given much attention in the English-language articles, were perhaps even more invisible in Spanish-language articles.

⁷⁴⁰Julia Irwin asserts that “Many wider currents in contemporary U.S. society informed the ARC’s global actions, but three broad contextual strains prove especially salient for understanding the place the ARC occupied in the Great War—era United States: progressivism, missionary ideology and activity, and American cosmopolitan and internationalist thought.” Irwin, *Making the World Safe*, 7–9, 107, 127, 135, 146, 157, 159, 162–3.

⁷⁴¹Progressivism was actually multiple movements in the early twentieth century toward reform of American society and politics, usually with an emphasis on placing those with professional expertise in charge. These movements often conflicted on what changes needed to be made, etc. These efforts by the ARC in Europe were typical for many Progressives. See also: William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); and Irwin, *Making the World Safe*.

affected district were predominantly Catholic and Mexican, with Mexican Catholic ideals about charity, culture, family, and work ethics which were sometimes at odds with the Protestant roots of the ARC. Lozano and the intellectuals working for him were probably aware of the mixed feelings of Europeans about these heavy-handed efforts and were probably particularly wary of attempts to “Americanize” the Mexican population, due to their nationalistic views.⁷⁴² At the same time, Lozano and his staff would have been very conscious of how vulnerable the Mexican community in San Antonio would be if they were perceived as being critical of the Red Cross, or even if they did not demonstrate appropriate gratitude.⁷⁴³

For their Mexican audience, they emphasized the rescue, relief, and recovery work of the Mexican community itself in San Antonio, the volunteerism of Mexican organizations, and the direct support of the Mexican government for the victims. For their Anglo-Texan audience, they expressed appreciation for the fund-raising of the Chamber of Commerce and the administration of relief efforts by the ARC. Thus they tried to achieve a balance between appropriately appreciating Anglo-Texan assistance while also promoting the independence and diligence of the Mexican community itself. *La Prensa's* correspondents and editors encouraged the Mexican population to trust the Red Cross and cooperate with authorities, especially sanitation campaigns which explicitly targeted Mexican residents, while trying to make visible the recovery work of the Mexican community, efforts almost invisible in the English-language newspapers.

⁷⁴²Even working-class trade unionists were often involved in transnational movements that corresponded amongst themselves. Sonia Hernández found a transnational anarchist network of workers, often women, were exchanging correspondence and newsletters. The port of Tampico, Mexico, was part of this network and served as a hub connecting Spain, Northern Mexico, Texas, and the Southwest. Less radical labor and fraternal organizations may have had similar formal and informal networks for news, all of which may have contributed to wariness toward the ARC. Sonia Hernández, *For a Just and Better World: Engendering Anarchism in the Mexican Borderlands, 1900–1938* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 40–42, 55.

⁷⁴³They were just as dependent on the good opinion of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, who were managing the collection and distribution of relief funds. “TREINTA Y CINCO MIL DOLARES REUNIDOS,” trans. “Thirty-five Thousand Dollars Collected,” *la Prensa*, September 13, 1921, 1.

Certainly the residents of the Alázan district were also aware of how the local white Red Cross leadership viewed the Mexican population: primarily as uneducated and unskilled, suited only to farm labor, domestic work, or “unskilled” urban labor. They were also probably aware that the Red Cross's “neutrality” depended on the interpretation of local leadership who often applied local customs and racial hierarchies to that interpretation.⁷⁴⁴ A close reading of articles in *la Prensa* (SA) suggests that many, if not most, of the Mexican victims of this disaster did not trust the ARC. Mexican victims themselves appeared to prefer the assistance of *La Cruz Azul Mexicana* over the ARC. In the first few days after the disaster, the Blue Cross’s Camp Juárez relief post was reported to be very popular with Mexican victims.⁷⁴⁵

Compared to English-language reports, there was less emphasis in *la Prensa* (SA) on evaluating every individual survivor for their worthiness. But *la Prensa*’s correspondents and editors appeared aware of the language typically used by white-controlled newspapers to describe both white and non-white victims of disasters. They choose words to describe victims that were self-conscious of presenting the right image of a respectable and industrious Mexican community, not only to bolster the self-image of Mexican readers, but probably with non-Mexican readers also in mind.

The correspondents and editors also emphasized that these volunteers were themselves Mexican, demonstrating that the Mexican community was willing to help itself and not simply rely on outside charity. They might be recovering from a horrible catastrophe, but the community was pulling together and working hard to efficiently raise money and help the survivors get back on their feet. As discussed in earlier chapters, by contrast, non-white survivors were typically

⁷⁴⁴Jones, *The American Red Cross*, x–xiii.

⁷⁴⁵While the local *la Cruz Azul* captain was identified as both Josefina Suárez and Juárez in different articles, the San Antonio chapter was Campamento Juárez, and that was probably the source of this post’s name.

racialized in newspaper reports about disasters as helpless, passive, and in need of outside paternalism⁷⁴⁶ The articles in *la Prensa* (SA) also stressed the respectable middle-class social status of the volunteers and their professionalism, efficiency, and compassion, important elements of Progressivism.⁷⁴⁷

Initially, both the ARC and *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* focused on immediate tangible relief—food, clothing, and medical care, the most urgent needs, followed by housing. Until about September 15, *la Prensa* (SA) emphasized that most survivors preferred and relied on *la Cruz Azul* for their most urgent needs. On the surface, the volunteers of this organization had obvious advantages. They lived in the same section of San Antonio, they knew the area and the victims, they knew the language and culture, especially their food, religion, and clothing. Even though the organization was relatively new, they presumably had enough earlier visibility working in the community to have their respect. And while they may have had class-based biases toward some of the survivors, they otherwise could empathize with them.⁷⁴⁸ The Red Cross did not generally engage in non-disaster charitable activities and most of their leadership would have had little contact with most residents of the district by comparison.⁷⁴⁹

In fact, the early role of the ARC itself was muddled. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the Red Cross was taking care of over 7000 victims as early as Saturday, September 11, 1921.⁷⁵⁰ The correspondent must have referred to the most urgent needs: food, clothing, and medical care. It cannot have referred to a refugee camp because the Red Cross's camp was

⁷⁴⁶Balaji, "Racializing Pity, 51. See also Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, xi–xviii.

⁷⁴⁷For example, see: "LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN", trans. "The Mexican Blue Cross in the Alazan District," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1.

⁷⁴⁸Balaji, "Racializing Pity, 51.

⁷⁴⁹The Red Cross, of course, had the advantage of much better resources and the support and involvement of San Antonio's business and political leaders.

⁷⁵⁰"City Partially Lighted," *Houston Chronicle*, September 13, 1921, 12. Other estimates stated in: "LOCATE 41 BODIES IN WRECKAGE OF FLOOD-SWEPT AREA," *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1; and "RELIEF WORK IN SAN ANTONIO IS UNDER WAY," *Houston Chronicle*, September 12, 1921, 1.

established several days later, serving far fewer people. According to *la Prensa* (SA,) there were only about 46 families of around 130 people total at the Red Cross camp as late as September 17, which means more tents were available than the total number of people willing to enter.⁷⁵¹ While there was an earlier attempt at establishing a tent camp, that camp apparently failed to attract victims because it was established outside of the city, but even this camp was not yet established on Saturday, September 11, 1921.⁷⁵² However the *Chronicle* cited a number of victims assisted, 7000, which is higher than the total number of meals, much less total number of individuals, that the Red Cross posts were feeding several days later.⁷⁵³ The only way to reconcile this estimation by the *Chronicle* with the reports from *la Prensa* was that the *Chronicle* lumped all of the relief work done by *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* and *la Sociedad Hidalgo* under the ARC.⁷⁵⁴ This homogenization of relief work under the Red Cross's umbrella suggested to its readers that the ARC was directly responsible for all relief work while preventing these two Mexican organizations from entering the white collective memory of the disaster.

Regardless of which organization was feeding, clothing, and nursing them, the next priority was housing the hundreds of survivors who were left homeless. It is unclear from the articles in *la Prensa* (SA) whether or not *la Cruz Azul Mexicana* was providing actual housing of

⁷⁵¹“LOS CAMPAMENTOS DE LA CRUZ ROJA DAN YA ALBERGUE A GRAN NUMERO DE FAMILIAS SIN HOGAR”, trans. “The Red Cross Camps already provide Shelter for a Large Number of Homeless Families,” *la Prensa* (SA,) 17 September 21, 1921, 1. The ARC camp only had about thirty tents set up by September 16. “LA CRUZ ROJA LLAMA A LOS DAMNIFICADOS AL NUEVO CAMPAMENTO” trans. “The Red Cross Calls the Victims to the New Camp,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 16, 1921, 1.

⁷⁵²“LOCATE 41 BODIES IN WRECKAGE OF FLOOD-SWEPT AREA,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1; and “RELIEF WORK IN SAN ANTONIO IS UNDER WAY,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 12, 1921, 1.

⁷⁵³“LOS CAMPAMENTOS DE LA CRUZ ROJA DAN YA ALBERGUE A GRAN NUMERO DE FAMILIAS SIN HOGAR”, trans. “The Red Cross Camps already provide Shelter for a Large Number of Homeless Families,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 17, 1921, 1; and “City Partially Lighted,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 13, 1921, 12.

⁷⁵⁴*La Sociedad Hidalgo* began housing and feeding a large number of survivors in their hall during the disaster before the ARC arrived on the scene. While the society later offered use of the building to the ARC, they also provided most of the volunteers for the ARC, resulting in the ARC as the only organization credited for *la Sociedad Hidalgo*'s initial work in English-language newspapers. “LA LABOR DIGNA DE ENCOMIO,” trans. “The Work Worthy of Praise,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7.

some sort for victims. While *la Cruz Azul* did establish *el campamento Juarez*, that term apparently also referred to their chapter name, so did not necessarily indicate a camp providing housing.⁷⁵⁵ But as mentioned earlier, the Red Cross itself did not have a camp set up in the Mexican district for several days. Initially, some victims were housed in the second floor of the public market building which was converted into two *dormitorios* based on gender.⁷⁵⁶ But most victims preferred to remain in private homes or boarding houses, however crowded, over those *dormitorios*. This preference was likely due to fears of families being broken up, with women and children in one dormitory and men in another. In the aftermath of catastrophes, families want to cling together for support and protection and they generally resist separation.⁷⁵⁷

When the ARC did set up a refugee camp, if the newspaper reports were correct, they started off poorly by trying to set up a tent city an unidentified distance west of San Antonio.⁷⁵⁸ In an era with very limited transportation for most people, it would make the most sense to keep people close to opportunities for new urban employment in clean-up and reconstruction or close enough to repair a flood-damaged home.⁷⁵⁹ But a line in an interview with a Mr. T. U. Purcell who was in charge of one of the ARC relief stations suggested a reason for the distance.⁷⁶⁰ When

⁷⁵⁵It seems unlikely that *el campamento Juarez* was actually a tent camp for refugees. The Mexican community itself would need to still have the resources to provide tents and other necessities on short notice, while so much of the community itself was devastated by the flood. "LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN," trans. "The Mexican Blue Cross in the Alazan Section," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1.

⁷⁵⁶Original: "el mercado público" and "fué convertido en dormitorio, habiéndose dividido en dos secciones." While "dormitorio" generally translates to bedroom, in this instance the alternative translation of dormitory or quarters is more appropriate. "LA OBRA DE LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA," trans. "The Work of the American Red Cross," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7.

⁷⁵⁷Jacob Remes, *Disaster Citizenship*, 78–82.

⁷⁵⁸The ARC's reasons for this initial location are unclear from either the newspapers or their annual report.

⁷⁵⁹"UNA CIUDAD DE CASAS DE CAMPANA," trans. "A City of camp houses (tents)," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 14, 1921, 2.

⁷⁶⁰"LOS ULTIMOS DETALLES SOBRE EL SINIESTRO DE LA CIUDAD," "The Latest Details About the City's Losses," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 14, 1921, 2. Note that Purcell was also identified as the director of the Mexican Department of the local Chamber of Commerce in a later article, "UNA OPORTUNIDAD PARA LOS COMERCIANTES MEXICANOS," "An Opportunity for Mexican Merchants," *la Prensa*, September 14, 1921, 2.

asked about the ARC's relief plans for the homeless, he described this camp and added, "...and in this manner it will be easier for the Red Cross to control the situation."⁷⁶¹ The question, of course, was what or who they wanted to control and why. A rural location would limit victims' opportunities to find their own employment in the city or rebuild a lost business, but such a location would provide agricultural employers almost a monopoly on hiring victims. After about 1900, agricultural employers in Texas often struggled to find enough people willing to work under the conditions they demanded. By isolating and controlling the situation, the authorities may have hoped to coerce victims into accepting employment at wages or under conditions less than standard for the time or with employers with a poor reputation for their treatment of workers.

This decision was made by local Red Cross leadership, who were either businessmen or women related to them, lending weight to the idea that the camp was being positioned to give better access to agricultural employers, though clearly not the only possible reasons. Given the contemporary belief in airborne disease ("miasmata",) they may have reasoned that the location was healthier than one close to decaying human corpses and animal carcasses.⁷⁶² There also was, and remains, a belief that the homeless engage in crime at a high rate. Businessmen may have wanted homeless, possibly desperate, victims moved too far away to try to loot damaged businesses in the commercial district.⁷⁶³

While the administrative leadership of the local Red Cross chapter appeared to be men, the Red Cross volunteers performing the actual work of relief were typically white women.

⁷⁶¹Original: "...y de esta manera será más fácil para la Cruz Roja controlar la situación...." "UNA CIUDAD DE CASAS DE CAMPANA" trans. "A City of camp houses (tents)," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 14, 1921, 2.

⁷⁶²Humphries, *Yellow Fever and the South*, 18–23.

⁷⁶³The emphasis on protection from looting was for the central business district. Examples of stated measures against looting: "LOCATE 41 BODIES IN WRECKAGE OF FLOOD-SWEPT AREA," *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1; "Damage \$100,000 at Austin," *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1; and "Troops on Guard," *Houston Chronicle*, September 12, 1921, 1.

During the early 1900s, fears of violence against white women by non-white men was widespread, particularly in the South, and entering such a neighborhood might have threatened the respectability of such volunteers.⁷⁶⁴ These relief leaders may have believed skilled Mexican workers were competing for better paid urban employment with white laborers, and the relief leaders may have wanted to reduce competition.⁷⁶⁵ Mexican small businessmen may also have been considered competition for Mexican customers, and they saw this situation as an opportunity to put some of them out of business.⁷⁶⁶ Most likely all of these reasons played some part in their decision, though access for agricultural employers was probably the most important, judging from the emphasis on agricultural work in articles.⁷⁶⁷

Whatever their reasoning for this decision, the first camp failed because few flood victims were willing to move outside the city. By September 15, *la Prensa* (SA) announced the emergency military Camp Kromer was being set up in the Mexican neighborhood.⁷⁶⁸ Military

⁷⁶⁴This was only a few years after the release of the movie, *Death of a Nation*, and the end of the Mexican revolution of the 1910s. But more importantly for Anglo-Texan perceptions of Mexican violence, only five years after the incidents of *el plan de San Diego* and the border violence involving the Texas Rangers. Typically, Mexicans were not nearly as likely to be accused of sexual crimes against white women as Black Texans, this Westside community did have some Black residents. William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928," *Journal of Social History* 37:2 (Dec. 2003), 420–423; and Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 75, 78.

⁷⁶⁵I assert this is the least likely factor because the business leadership would have been largely responsible for this decision which would have benefited the white working-class in their pursuit of higher wages. While it is possible they might have been trying to placate them in order to keep their political support, there were other ways that would have had fewer potential economic consequences for businesses.

⁷⁶⁶While unlikely to have been an important factor, San Antonio had a history of white attacks on Mexican businesses such as the Cart War, so this possibility should not be ignored.

⁷⁶⁷Without clear records documenting the ARC's reasoning, it is impossible to make a stronger argument for why they made this decision.

⁷⁶⁸"EL CAMPAMENTO MILITAR DE EMERGENCIA KROMER, FUE INSTALADO EN EL BARRIO MEXICANO PARA DAR ALBERGUE A TODOS LOS DAMNIFICADOS," trans. "The Emergency Military Camp Kromer was Installed in the Mexican Neighborhood to Provide Shelter for All Victims," *la Prensa*, September 15, 1921, 1. The military also supplied two camp kitchens for Camp Kromer, located at the end of Frio Street. The ARC planned to close down the relief stations on El Paso and Laredo in order to channel victims to Camp Kromer. Significantly, one was the main station using the building belonging to *la Sociedad Hidalgo* and the other was a substation using the Cárdenas Pharmacy building, both Mexican-owned properties. "La ciudad reanuda sus negocios mercantiles y restablece sus servicios públicos" trans. "The city resumes its mercantile business and restores its public services," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 8.

authorities had overridden the ARC decision to locate the camp outside the city and ordered the camp moved to the west side Mexican neighborhood.⁷⁶⁹ While no clear reason for the military's intervention was given for the move, it seems very likely that the reluctance of victims to utilize this remote camp was at least part of their motivation.⁷⁷⁰ The Red Cross had little choice but to comply because the military was providing guards and significant material resources for the camp: tents, cots, and camp kitchens.

The English-language newspapers were less interested in the details of the military's role in this decision than in who to credit with the camp existence. The *Houston Chronicle* did not mention the earlier camp, but attributed this new West side camp to the efforts of Governor Pat M. Neff and the American Legion, neither of whom was mentioned in *la Prensa* (SA.)⁷⁷¹ The *Breckenridge Daily American* and the *Brownwood Bulletin* also failed to mention the earlier camp. They asserted that San Antonio Mayor O. B. Black asked Governor Neff to formally request that General Hines allow the use of army tents and cots in San Antonio for the flood victims.⁷⁷² However, as mentioned above, the English-language press probably exaggerated the use of these camps.⁷⁷³

The people who the camp was intended to house were not particularly interested in such debates. They were now wary of the ARC camp, whether or not they had been before. They would have recognized that the first location would have limited them to agricultural

⁷⁶⁹This camp was apparently named after Captain Kromer who was helping with the military response. "EL CAMPO KROMER FUE TRASLADADO AL WEST END," trans. "Camp Kromer was Moved to the West End," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 1, 8.

⁷⁷⁰However, the distance also would have complicated the logistics for providing troops during the disaster, with a separate group detached to the more remote camp.

⁷⁷¹"Tent City Thrown Open to Homeless At San Antonio," *Houston Chronicle*, September 15, 1921, 8.

⁷⁷²"Ask Relief for Victims of the Flood," *Breckenridge Daily American*, September 13, 1921, 1; and "To Use Army Tents," *Brownwood Bulletin*, September 13, 1921, 1.

⁷⁷³"LOS CAMPAMENTOS DE LA CRUZ ROJA DAN YA ALBERGUE A GRAN NUMERO DE FAMILIAS SIN HOGAR," trans. "The Red Cross Camps already provide Shelter for a Large Number of Homeless Families," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 17, 1921, 1.

employment as well as cutting them off from their own community resources such as *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*, various Mexican *mutualistas* and fraternal organizations, and the Catholic Church. They wanted access to their own community, or at least someone familiar with that community who had their trust.

One example of a person from outside of their community who had their trust was a Miss Kelly of the American Round Table. In one of the earliest reports in *la Prensa* (SA,) they stated that “...among the ladies was a great inclination for Miss (W.) Kelly with whom they feel more protected, because this lady, who by the way is part of the American Round Table, speaks (Castilian) Spanish perfectly.”⁷⁷⁴ The stress the correspondent placed on the fact she spoke, not just Spanish, but Castilian Spanish, was probably more important than suggested at first glance because it also established her social class to readers and her status as non-Mexican.

At this early point in the disaster, obviously some Mexican victims were making use of the ARC's relief stations which mostly provided food and clothing. Kelly was one of their representatives running that station, which clearly made the Mexican survivors more willing to make use of these stations. And that brings up the question of who was staffing the stations. At least for the first few days after the disaster, those volunteers were mostly Mexican members of *la Sociedad Hidalgo*.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷⁴ Original Spanish: “...entre las señoras una gran inclinación por la señorita Kelly con quien ellas se sienten mas protegidas, porque esta señorita, que dicho sea de paso forma parte de la American Round Table, habla el castellano perfectamente.” The initial W was supplied earlier in the article. “LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN” trans. “The American Red Cross in the Alazan District,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1. The first American Round Table group was organized in San Antonio in 1916, later known as the still-extant Pan American Round Table, so Miss Kelly may have been one of the members of that group. Kelly’s role in working with Mexican women suggests that the women of the Pan American Round table may have been directly involved with the Mexican relief efforts, though she was the only one identified.

⁷⁷⁵ Fears of local white women volunteers related to entering a Mexican neighborhood may have helped produce this acceptance and reliance on non-white volunteers by the ARC, at least initially.

The connection between the ARC's involvement and *la Sociedad Hidalgo's* efforts probably started through the actions of the manager of the society, *el señor* Felipe Borrego. Borrego and his wife opened the hall of the society to the homeless during the night of the flood and served them coffee, and more than 2000 people took refuge there.⁷⁷⁶ *La Sociedad Hidalgo* later allowed the Red Cross to use this same building as a center for relief efforts until the establishment of Camp Kromer. This was almost certainly what the *Houston Chronicle* was referring to with the high estimate of victims that they claimed that the Red Cross was assisting immediately after the disaster: work started by *la Sociedad Hidalgo* before the Red Cross stepped in and took over managing the relief. There was no mention of *la Sociedad Hidalgo* in the English-language newspapers, however, only the Red Cross, even though they were describing work almost certainly done by the society. The ARC itself did not mention the assistance of any Mexican organizations or credit either *la Sociedad Hidalgo* or Cardenas's pharmacy for the use of their buildings in their annual report for 1921–22.⁷⁷⁷

On September 13, the newspaper reported that there were six women and six men from the Red Cross at this main Red Cross post which seemed to have been run by a Mr. Harris.⁷⁷⁸ There were also three relief substations established by the Red Cross in the Alazán district, with Anglo-Texan men in charge.⁷⁷⁹ The substation furthest north, overseen by T. U. Purcell, was

⁷⁷⁶Floods were not uncommon in this area, but this flood was far more extensive than expected. One claim by the *Houston Chronicle* that the Red Cross had been serving over 2,000 victims by September 10 very likely referred to this action by *la Sociedad Hidalgo* instead. The Borregos were assisted by Pablo Erlich. "LA LABOR DIGNA DE ENCOMIO," trans.: "The Work Worthy of Praise," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7.

⁷⁷⁷American Red Cross, *The American Red Cross Annual Report*, War Department, 1922, 21, accessed September 10, 2022, Hathi Trust, <https://www.hathitrust.org/>.

⁷⁷⁸It is unclear whether or not the Hidalgo Society volunteers were included in this number. "...seis señoras y seis hombres de la institución." trans. "...six women and six men from this institution." "LOS SERVICIOS DE CARIDAD," trans. "The Charity Services," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6. Harris was confirmed to be running the main station while any others by the Red Cross were substations. "LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN," trans. "The American Red Cross in the Alazan Section," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1.

⁷⁷⁹"LA OBRA DE LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA," trans. "The Work of the American Red Cross," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7.

located where Buenavista Street met Alazán Creek. The second, overseen by Michel Hogg, was in the Cárdenas Pharmacy on El Paso Street, only about two blocks from a relief post of *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*, “Camp Juarez,” at the intersection of San Fernando and San Marcos streets.⁷⁸⁰

Furthest south, overseen by William Bernam, was a substation at the intersection of Mitchell and South Flores streets.⁷⁸¹ At least two of these four stations were housed in buildings volunteered by the Mexican community, but their absence from English-language newspapers excluded the contributions of the Mexican community from the collective memory of their readers.

Based on the descriptions of who was doing the work, volunteers from *la Sociedad Hidalgo* seemed to outnumber the actual ARC volunteers at the main station, the one for which the most details are included in articles.⁷⁸² All of the women preparing and serving food were members of the society, and young men and women of the society were also identified as those responsible for delivering food to those who could not come to the station itself for meals.⁷⁸³ The

⁷⁸⁰This second instance in which the ARC was given the use of a Mexican building emphasized the cooperation and resources offered by the Mexican community itself. “LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN,” trans. “The Mexican Blue Cross in the Alazan Section,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1. This proximity between a Red Cross substation, the Red Cross main relief station, and the main *la Cruz Azul* relief station suggests that they were serving overlapping groups of people and perhaps contributed to the later pressure on the Mexican organization to close their posts and refocus on charity. Also T. U. Purcell was later identified as the director of the Mexican Department of the Chamber of Commerce, supporting my assertion that the Red Cross's leadership in San Antonio had close ties to business interests. “El mencionado Departamento Mexicano de la Camara de Comercio local...su Director el señor T. U. Purcell...,” trans. “The aforementioned Mexican Department of the local Chamber of Commerce...its Director Mr. T. U. Purcell.” “UNA OPORTUNIDAD PARA LOS COMERCIANTES MEXICANOS,” trans. “An Opportunity for Mexican Merchants,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 14, 1921, 2.

⁷⁸¹“LAS SUB ESTANIONSC,” (sic) trans. “The Substations,” *la Prensa*, September 13, 1921, 7. The main station run by Harris was also on El Paso Street. However, the San Antonio City Directory of 1921 places Farmacia Cárdenas at 922 El Paso Street (prop. A. N. Cardenas) while *la Sociedad Hidalgo's* building, used for the main post, was at 509 El Paso Street. “A. N. Cardenas”, Jules A. Appler's City Directory of Greater San Antonio, 1921, 282, HeritageQuest Online, Proquest.

⁷⁸²For comparison, there were only twelve total ARC members, some or all of whom may have been from *la Sociedad Hidalgo*, at the main relief post, while *la Cruz Azul* had sixty volunteer members at “Camp Juarez.” “LOS SERVICIOS DE CARIDAD,” trans. “The Charity Services,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6; and “LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA MULTIPLICA SU LABOR,” trans. “The Mexican Blue Cross Increases its Work,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 8.

⁷⁸³“LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN,” trans. “The American Red Cross in the Alazan Section,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1.

Mexican women were also involved in the collection and distribution of clothing, which was the majority of the service the relief post provided.⁷⁸⁴ Mr. Harris, who was in charge, thanked their efforts repeatedly and specifically mentioned that the women volunteers from *la Sociedad Hidalgo* had suggested seasoning and preparing food that the victims would recognize and enjoy, resulting in much more enthusiasm from the victims than American food.⁷⁸⁵ None of the work or cooperation from the Mexican community was acknowledged in English-language newspaper reporting or by the Red Cross in their report.⁷⁸⁶

La Prensa (SA) described the volunteers repeatedly as mostly Mexican and emphasized the work of *la Sociedad Hidalgo* and *la Cruz Azul* throughout the disaster. San Antonio's Mexican community had organized to help with the rescue efforts during the flood itself and the recovery of bodies, and some rescuers may have been members of *la Sociedad Hidalgo*.⁷⁸⁷ *La Prensa* listed several community members who were particularly important in the rescue work: Encarnación Dominguez, Alfredo Gutiérrez, Pablo Acuna, Manuel Bernal, Benjamin Martinez, and Pedro Bernal.⁷⁸⁸ *La Prensa* also devoted a very long article just to Alfredo Gutiérrez's

⁷⁸⁴“LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN,” trans. “The American Red Cross in the Alazan Section,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1; and “LOS SERVICIOS DE CARIDAD,” trans. “The Charity Services,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6.

⁷⁸⁵Original: “... hemos principiado a preparar...platos de los que prefiere el pueblo mexicano,...y que empezamos ya a ver que son recibidos con mayor satisfacción que las comidas condimentadas al estilo americano....se la debemos a la iniciativa y a la colaboración de los miembros de la Sociedad Hidalgo...,” trans. “We have begun to prepare...dishes that the Mexican people prefer...and we are already beginning to see that they are received with greater satisfaction than food seasoned in the American style....we owe this to the initiative and collaboration from the Hidalgo Society members...” “VISITANDO EL PUESTO DE LA CRUZ ROJA EN LA CALLE DE EL PASO,” trans. “Visiting the Red Cross Post on El Paso Street,” *la Prensa* (SA,) Special Edition, September 15, 1921, 8.

⁷⁸⁶American Red Cross, *The American Red Cross Annual Report*, War Department, 1922, 21, accessed September 10, 2022, Hathi Trust, <https://www.hathitrust.org/>.

⁷⁸⁷These streams had been known to flood previously, though some reports stressed that this one reached areas previously deemed safe. But it is likely the community had informal plans for responding to floods due to their frequency and based on the newspaper reports, quickly and effectively put them into action.

⁷⁸⁸While I have made the assumption that these men were members of the society from the context of the article, it was not explicitly stated that they were. “LA LABOR DIGNA DE ENCOMIO,” trans. “The Work Worthy of Praise,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7; García, *Mexican Americans*, 28–29; Emilio Zamora, ed., *The World War I Diary of José de la Luz Sáenz*, Emilio Zamora with Ben Maya, trans. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 4; and Zamora, *The World of the Mexican Worker*, 89–90.

heroism, a young soldier who was credited with retrieving eighteen people, mostly women and children, from the flooded creek.⁷⁸⁹ Then on Sunday, September 11, 1921, twenty-five to thirty members of the society organized a systematic search for corpses along the entire length of Alazán Creek and in other areas where they believed bodies might be found.⁷⁹⁰

The authorities restricted access to the flooded districts, but allowed the society members within those boundaries, suggesting the city authorities recognized them and trusted them within the areas where they feared looting. But English-language newspapers attributed almost all search and rescue work to police, fire, and Boy Scouts. The one common English-language story about Mexican heroism was the description of a unnamed “Mexican boy” of about twelve years old who rescued another child.⁷⁹¹ Ironically enough, *la Prensa* ran a more detailed story about a Charlie Thomas, 12 years old, who rescued a toddler.⁷⁹² The level of detail in *la Prensa* compared to the English-language newspaper reports suggests that correspondents for the

⁷⁸⁹This suggested early community activism by Tejano World War I soldiers and veterans who would later make up many of the founders of LULAC. It is unclear how many of these were dead bodies and how many were still alive. Original: “Sacamos del agua 18 cuerpos...entre los que habían varias mujere y niños que no estaban del todo ahogados...,” trans. “We took 18 bodies from the water...among which there were several women and children who were not completely drowned.” “UN JOVEN DISTINGUIDO EN LA OBRA DE SALVAMENTO,” trans. “A Distinguished Youth in the Rescue Work,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7.

⁷⁹⁰Original: “...un cuerpo de 25 o 30 miembros de la misma, de los utensilios necesarios para que, se entregue a una busqueda sistemada de cadáveres a todo la largo de la sección devastada del Arrollo del Alazán, y de otros punto también, de donde se tiene si no la seguridad cuando menos la sospecha fundada de que hay cadáveres.” trans. “...a brigade of 25 or 30 members of the same, with the necessary tools so that...they give (carry out) a systematic search for corpses all along the devastated section of Alazán Creek, and at other points too where they have supposed with less certainty suspicions that there are corpses.” “LA SOCIEDAD HIDALGO BUSCA CADAVERES,” trans. “The Hidalgo Society Searches for Bodies,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7. It is important to note that access to the flooded district was restricted to prevent looting, so the city authorities recognized this society's members as trustworthy. “LA ZONA RESTRINGIDA,” trans. “The Restricted Zone,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 7.

⁷⁹¹“Revised List of Injured,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 13, 1921, 14; and “Mexican Youth Saves Child,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1921, 3.

⁷⁹²There are discrepancies between the two reports; however I find it very unlikely that a Mexican boy would have rescued a young child and been overlooked by *la Prensa*. “UNA ESCENA CHUSCA,” trans. “A Funny Scene,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 14, 1921, 8.

English-language newspapers had been told about an unnamed boy and made the assumption he was Mexican.⁷⁹³

While it is not possible to identify exactly how many ARC members worked on the relief effort, nor what percentage were actually members of *la Sociedad Hidalgo, la Prensa* (SA) gave specific numbers for *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*. By September 15, 1921, there were sixty volunteers at *la Cruz Azul's* primary relief post on the banks of Alazán Creek, forty women and twenty men.⁷⁹⁴ If there were only the twelve volunteers described in *la Prensa* at the ARC's main relief post, *la Cruz Azul* had five times the number of volunteers working in the first days after the disaster.⁷⁹⁵

The language used to refer to these volunteers strongly suggested they were members of the emerging Mexican middle-class in San Antonio.⁷⁹⁶ The main post of *la Cruz Azul* was directed by the chapter president, “doña Marta M. de Acosta.”⁷⁹⁷ This unusual use of the honorific, doña, appeared to emphasize a relatively high social standing and respectability.⁷⁹⁸ The young women volunteers were typically given the honorific, “señorita,” such as *la Cruz Azul* volunteers, “...a group of young ladies from the same organization.”⁷⁹⁹ The same language was

⁷⁹³The only C. Thomas of about the right age I could locate in San Antonio in the 1920 US Census was a Clyde Thomas, listed as white and with nothing to suggest he had recent Mexican ancestry. However if Clyde was the boy described in *la Prensa*, they were not as careful in those details as they were about the deceased because they wrote that he had two brothers, and the census states he had three sisters.

⁷⁹⁴“LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA MULTIPLICA SU LABOR,” trans. “The Mexican Blue Cross Increases its Work,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 8.

⁷⁹⁵The articles never clarify whether or not the number of Red Cross volunteers was separate from *la Sociedad Hidalgo* volunteers, but it seems likely they were not included. Either way, the total number of Mexican relief volunteers was clearly far higher than non-Mexican volunteers. “LOS SERVICIOS DE CARIDAD,” trans. “The Charity Services,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 6.

⁷⁹⁶Garcia, *The Rise of the Mexican American Middle Class*, 3–11.

⁷⁹⁷“LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA MULTIPLICA SU LABOR,” trans. “The Mexican Blue Cross Expands its Work,” *la Prensa*, September 15, 1921, 8.

⁷⁹⁸This honorific was not used for other married women in *la Prensa*, suggesting exceptional standing in the community.

⁷⁹⁹It was the equivalent in social class to “miss” or “young lady” in English at the time. Original: “un grupo de señoritas de la misma asociación....” “LA CRUZ AZUL MEXICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN,” trans. “The Mexican Blue Cross in the Alazan Section,” *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1.

used for the volunteers from the *la Sociedad Hidalgo* who were cooperating with the Red Cross relief efforts, "...a group of young Mexican ladies."⁸⁰⁰ This was the same honorific awarded to Kelly, a prominent young white volunteer, thus claiming an equivalent social class for these young Mexican women volunteers.

At the same time as they were claiming a central role for the Mexican community in the relief effort, *La Prensa* (SA) was very careful in how they presented criticism of white relief efforts. They used humor to point out that the clothing being distributed by the Red Cross was not always appropriate. One article described a victim, Alberto Martínez, who had been presented with a tailcoat, which he had to wear over work trousers. *La Prensa* framed this story as a humorous moment, with onlookers whistling the Mendelsohn's wedding march, to which Martínez joked that now he needed a wife.⁸⁰¹ But this scene was also a very subtle way in which to criticize the suitability of some of the clothing that had been donated and distributed. It was very likely that a great deal of the donated clothing was dirty or badly worn or worse, as evidenced by comments in the Red Cross's report on the 1900 Galveston hurricane.⁸⁰² But open criticism from the Mexican community of the poor quality of such clothing would have been seen as "ungrateful." By instead framing their criticism as a humorous story about clothing that was of inappropriately high quality for a workman, they were able to make their point in a way that offended no one.

Another strategy was to use the words of non-Mexicans to imply mild criticism. For instance, *la Prensa* quoted Mr. Harris of the Red Cross as stating that while the Red Cross had

⁸⁰⁰Original: "...un grupo de señoritas mexicanas," trans. "LA CRUZ ROJA AMERICANA EN LA SECCION DEL ALAZAN," trans. "The American Red Cross in the Alazan Section," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 13, 1921, 1.

⁸⁰¹"UNA ESCENA CHUSCA," trans. "A Humorous Scene," *la Prensa* (SA,) September 14, 1921, 8.

⁸⁰²As most people in 1900 thought they were donating to white people who had been relatively prosperous, it seems unlikely that the quality or condition of the clothing donated in 1921 for the Mexican community was better. Fannie B. Ward, "Report of Mrs. Ward," Clara Barton, *Report of Miss Barton*, Red Cross Records, MSS#05-0007, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, 54-5.

been able to supply some sort of clothing, as late as September 15, they were very limited in the assortment available.⁸⁰³ Very few people would take offense at this mild suggestion that some of the donated clothing had not been appropriate. Or if they did, they would at least not direct any ire toward the Mexican community itself, which might result in relief funds and materials evaporating. The correspondents walked a delicate line between their two potential audiences, Mexican readers who already knew that some of the donations were inappropriate and Anglo-American readers who might be quick to take offense at any sign of ingratitude.⁸⁰⁴

Conclusion

The identity language used by newspapers for urban Mexican victims changed over time through the increased omission of ethnic identity and the increased inclusion of names, ages, addresses, and even honorifics. Before 1921, Mexican victims were racialized through tools similar to those used for Black victims: identification primarily by race with name often omitted and virtually identical terms for Mexican homes that diminished their value. *La Prensa* was resisting this dehumanization by 1921 by appropriating the descriptions used for white victims and may have briefly influenced white readers of English-language newspapers through lists of victims translated into English. While race, gender, and class were important in for urban Mexican victims, rural Mexican labor continued to be described in dehumanized terms similar to those used for Black victims.

⁸⁰³“VISITANDO EL PUESTO DE LA CRUZ ROJA EN LA CALLE DE EL PASO” trans. “Visiting the Red Cross Post on El Paso Street,” Special edition, *la Prensa* (SA,) September 15, 1921, 8.

⁸⁰⁴It seems likely that Lozano and his writers were also partly motivated by a fear of alienating working-class Mexican readers and pushing them toward more radical newspapers and leadership.

Organizational relief during the 1921 flood was funneled primarily through three organizations: the American Red Cross, *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*, and *la Sociedad Hidalgo*. English-language newspapers submerged the work done by the two Mexican organizations under the umbrella of the ARC, effectively preventing them from entering the collective memory of white readers, while emphasizing the role of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce in coordinating fund-raising. *La Prensa*, while crediting the ARC and Chamber of Commerce, placed the work of the two Mexican organizations at the center of the relief work, with *la Sociedad Hidalgo* providing a large percentage of the relief workers for the ARC. Additionally, *la Prensa* made it clear that many Mexican survivors did not entirely trust the ARC and its possible attempts to control labor through their camps, preferring to turn to *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*. This created two very different narratives about the San Antonio flood, and a different collective memory about the disaster among the Mexican community.

CHAPTER FIVE

TEXAS DISASTER AND THE WORLD

Of the Texas disasters between 1899 and 1921, only the 1900 Galveston hurricane entered the national collective memory in any enduring way, largely due to newspaper reports. But Galveston may have been the most widely known city in Texas at the time, or at least the one with the strongest ties to the rest of the country and to Europe.⁸⁰⁵ Throughout most of the nineteenth century, Galveston had been the most important port in Texas, and in 1899, just a year before the hurricane, it had passed New Orleans as the leading port in the world for cotton shipping.⁸⁰⁶ Galveston had also attracted a number of wealthy residents and middle-class vacationers. The other two disasters from this period most firmly entrenched in the collective memory share similar elements: the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco and the 1912 loss of the RSS *Titanic*. All three disasters were memorable for the hubris that helped create the disaster, the lack of practical emergency planning, the high economic losses, and the prominent individuals who were victims or survivors. The last two elements were perhaps the most important in leading to extensive newspaper reports and public interest.

The 1900 Galveston hurricane remains the worst hurricane, and one of the worst natural disasters, in United States history.⁸⁰⁷ Sweeping over Galveston on Saturday, September 8, 1900,

⁸⁰⁵I base this statement on its economic importance as a port and its ties to Europe as an entry point for immigration. San Antonio may have been equally well known, but had stronger ties with Mexico than Europe.

⁸⁰⁶According to an article in the Chicago *Daily Tribune*, Galveston cotton exports in 1899 were valued at one hundred million dollars. "GALVESTON STRANGELY BUILT," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 9, 1900, 2.

⁸⁰⁷As defined by the number of deaths, approximately 10,000. Hurricane Katrina, the costliest hurricane, only caused about 1200 deaths. The Category 4 Galveston storm in 1900 was not the most intense hurricane to hit the United States. The worst as measured by barometric pressure were the 1935 Florida Keys hurricane (a Category 5 storm) and Hurricane Camille in 1969 (Category 5 storm.) While the Galveston hurricane produced storm surges (or storm tides) up to fifteen feet, hurricanes Camille and Katrina produced storm tides of twenty-four point six to twenty-eight feet. However, the high storm surge combined with the extremely low elevation of Galveston and

through into early Sunday morning, the storm caused an estimated 10,000 deaths according to the most recent scholarship.⁸⁰⁸ Six thousand lives were probably lost in the city of Galveston alone.⁸⁰⁹ Large portions of the city were completely destroyed, and even the buildings that survived, mostly in the wealthier central northern section, were generally badly damaged. To get a sense of the scale of the destruction, the cross-hatching in Figure 3 indicates blocks where all or virtually all buildings were destroyed by the storm surge.⁸¹⁰

the unpreparedness of a relatively dense population center to produce particularly deadly results. “Hurricanes in History,” National Hurricane Center, <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/outreach/history/>.

⁸⁰⁸This number includes about 6000 deaths in the city of Galveston, plus about 4000 elsewhere. The storm wrecked ships and caused deaths in Newfoundland, Canada, as late as September 15. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, ix, 33, 57; Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 263–265; Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 5; and “Storm Reaches Newfoundland,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 4.

⁸⁰⁹It is virtually impossible to get an accurate list of the dead. Galveston was a popular resort and a port of entry for immigrants, and recently arrived immigrants and vacationing visitors can only be estimated. Almost all residents of some city blocks were killed, leaving no survivors to indicate how many people lived in which houses, particularly in working-class and Black neighborhoods. Newspapers even admitted that “only a very small number of the negroes who perished in the storm have been reported.” “LOSSES AT GALVESTON,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 19, 1900, 1; “MORE THAN FIVE THOUSAND DEAD,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 1; “PESTILENCE IS GREATLY FEARED,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 1; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, ix, 33, 57.

⁸¹⁰This map does not include the eastern and western parts of the city which were wiped out as well. “Map showing damages to the city of Galveston,” U.S. Weather Bureau report, Vertical file 85-0020, 1900 Storm, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX.

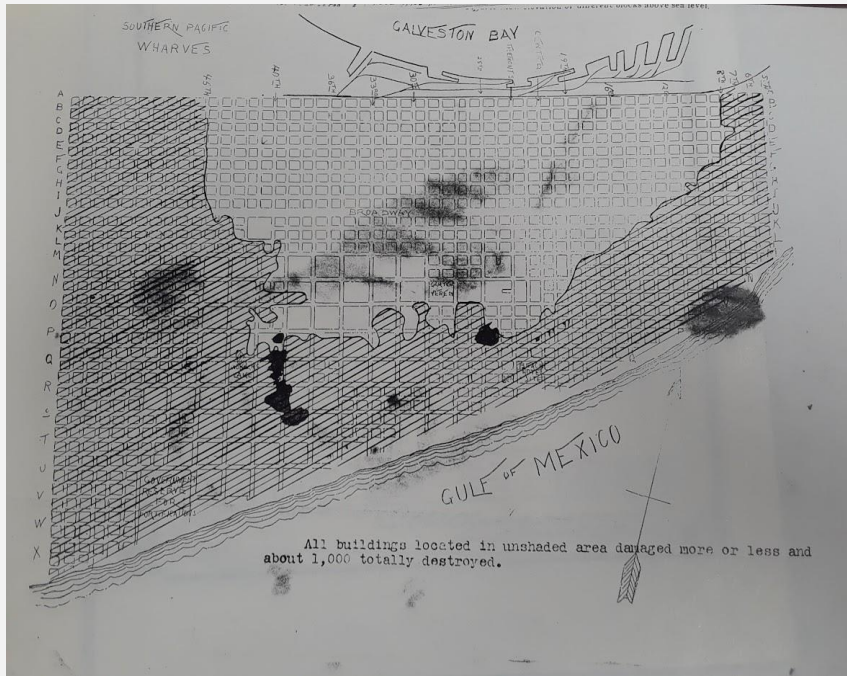


Figure 3. Map showing damages to the city of Galveston from U.S. Weather Bureau report. Source: Vertical file 85-0020, 1900 Storm; Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX; August 10, 2018.

Multiple factors contributed to the shocking death and destruction. The highest point in the city, on Broadway, was only 8.7 feet above sea level, and most of Galveston was barely above sea level. The storm surge during the Category 4 hurricane was at least fifteen feet.⁸¹¹ City leaders had believed Galveston Island was immune, despite earlier severe hurricanes such as the 1875 and 1886 hurricanes that devastated the nearby coastal community of Indianola.⁸¹² Due to this belief in their immunity, no real plans existed for evacuation or for emergency shelters, and many people were unaware until too late that this was anything more than a normal storm. In fact, the local meteorologist for the U.S. Weather Service, Isaac Cline, had assured Galvestonians

⁸¹¹Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, ix; and Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 188. For details about the geology and physical geography of the Texas Gulf Coast sandbar islands, see O'Rear, *Barrier to the Bays*, 3–6.

⁸¹²This led to its abandonment as a port after 1886 and the severe decline of the community itself. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 10; and O'Rear, *Barrier to the Bays*, 70, 74.

that he believed the geography of the island itself would protect it from the worst of any hurricane.⁸¹³

The U.S. Weather Bureau contributed to the disaster when they arrogantly dismissed the scientific observations and interpretation of weather data collected by the Cuban scientists who had pioneered hurricane detection. The Cuban scientists tried to warn that the storm was heading for the Gulf, only to have the Weather Bureau's representative, Colonel H. H. C. Dunwoody, block them from the telegraph lines.⁸¹⁴ Instead, the Weather Bureau insisted that this storm must be traveling up the east coast of North America and their first concession that there might be a tropical storm of some sort in the Gulf was midday on Friday, September 7, the day before the disaster.⁸¹⁵ Cline believed the reports from the U.S. Weather Bureau and ignored indications from his station's weather observations that a serious storm was approaching until midday Saturday, by which point any large evacuation from the island over the bridges was impossible.⁸¹⁶ His brother, Joseph Cline, had begun urging to him to issue stronger warnings by Friday, based on meteorological observations, but possibly due to a growing rivalry between the brothers, Isaac ignored him.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹³In 1900, it was believed that most of the danger from hurricanes was from the wind itself, and people dismissed stories of older storms covering the entire island. Cline had a house “built atop a forest of stilts with the explicit goal of making it impervious to the worst storms the Gulf could deliver,” and so they stayed even after his brother, Joseph, argued they should move to a safer location. The house went down in the storm surge and Cline's pregnant wife, Cora, was one of the victims while Cline, his brother, and his children survived on a floating roof. Two of Cline's three children plus a strange child only survived because of Joseph's heroism. After the tragedy, Isaac made it his life's work to understand hurricanes and was the first to provide clear evidence that storm surge was the greatest danger. Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 7, 12, 15–16, 188, 196–198, 204, 218–219, 270.

⁸¹⁴This was immediately after the invasion of Cuba, and racism was probably the major reason the Cuban warnings were dismissed. The U.S. Weather Bureau was relatively new, with little experience at hurricane forecasting, while the Cuban scientists, particularly Father Benito Vines and Father Lorenzo Gangoite, had accumulated and studied decades of data. Some individuals at the Weather Bureau saw their expertise as a threat rather than a resource. Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 9, 72, 102–108, 132–134.

⁸¹⁵The warning they sent, however, suggested a routine summer storm with possibly some flooding. “STORM'S PATH IS PECULIAR,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1900, 2; and Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 9–10.

⁸¹⁶The bridges quickly became unsafe, and were among the earliest structures destroyed.

⁸¹⁷Joseph was an assistant observer at the station, but had larger ambitions. While Joseph had lived with Isaac's family, their tensions widened into a permanent rift after the storm. Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 8, 68–69.

Economic class played an important role in geographic location and survival in the storm. Despite newspaper reports that focused on wealthy victims and survivors, most of Galveston's richest families lived on relatively high ground along Broadway where Moody Mansion and Ashton Villa still stand.⁸¹⁸ While these homes sustained some damage, most homes and residents in this area survived. Although they generally had some warning, many middle-class families closer to the beach had faith in the construction of homes which had survived other storms. By contrast, poorer neighborhoods may not have gotten accurate warnings, or any warnings at all that this was an unusually severe storm.⁸¹⁹ Even when well-to-do families evacuated to safer quarters, they often left behind servants with orders to protect their property and stock, adding to the death toll among the working class.⁸²⁰ For those who did not evacuate, eyewitness accounts make it clear that small children, the elderly, and the disabled were particularly difficult to evacuate or save if their shelter failed.⁸²¹

While the worst death toll was sustained by the city of Galveston, the rest of Galveston Island, adjacent islands, the Texas Coast and the interior were also devastated with several

⁸¹⁸This relatively high ground was still less than nine feet above sea level and the storm surge was at least fifteen feet. But a variety of factors, including the quality and height of building and the distance inland all played a role in preventing any significant loss of life among Galveston's elite.

⁸¹⁹The storm flag was flown from the Levy Building, which was probably not a location that the working class would have frequented on a Saturday. The warnings did not mention that the storm might be severe. Non-white Galvestonians may have reasonably believed, based on other disasters, that they would not be accepted at most public spaces that could act as a shelter, or would be shuffled into the most dangerous areas. For instance, while the Ursuline convent opened their doors and took in almost 1,000 refugees during the storm, Black Galvestonians were segregated into a section of the building where the north wall fell in. "THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE STORM," Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 1; Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 17–18; and Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 248, 250–251.

⁸²⁰Most of these servants can be assumed to have died because while journals and letters sometimes mentioned that they had left a servant to care for things property or stock and not whether that servant survived. See Section 2 for more detail, including one exception. "A STORY OF HORROR," Dallas *Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 1. While newspapers described this primarily as a white disaster and reluctantly admitted some deaths among Black Galvestonians, it is very difficult to confirm other victims. However, at least one memoir mentioned bodies of Mexican and Chinese victims. Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 99.

⁸²¹Clara Barton was surprised there were few orphans, but children made up a high proportion of the dead victims. Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 244; and "SAYERS OFFERED ASSISTANCE," Atlanta *Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 6.

thousand additional deaths.⁸²² In some towns between the coast and Houston, an area with elevations scarcely higher than Galveston Island, virtually every building was destroyed or too badly damaged to occupy.⁸²³ Stations for the Life Saving Service, a precursor to the modern Coast Guard, were destroyed.⁸²⁴ Ships were found as much as twenty miles inland.⁸²⁵

These survivors on the mainland faced not only shock and grief, surrounded by destruction and bodies, they often lost everything they owned, including virtually all food. At this point in time, towns were very dependent on regular food deliveries by train, and the tracks from Houston to the coast had to be repaired before any trains could be sent. The first trains were all relief trains for Galveston, ignoring the inland towns to judge by newspaper reports. Some of these towns sent repeated desperate pleas for food and other relief supplies, becoming angry that so much attention was focused on Galveston.⁸²⁶ On Galveston itself, the survivors faced a lack of housing for most of its citizens, thousands of bodies and over half the city in ruins to clean up, and a severe shortage of food or drinkable water.⁸²⁷ They were cut off from the mainland, with

⁸²²Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, ix, 33, 57; Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 263–265; Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 5.

⁸²³A few towns identified as devastated included Dickinson, Alvin, Alta Lomo, Texas City, Brookshire, Richmond, Missouri City, Stafford, Pearland, Hitchcock, and Bay City. “THE FIRST RELIEF TRAIN,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 11, 1900, 1; “APPEAL FROM ALVIN,” *Houston Daily Post*, September 11, 1900, 8; “To the Generous Public,” *Houston Daily Post*, September 11, 1900, 8; “HUGE WAVE FROM THE GULF,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 10, 1900, 5; and “INLAND DAMAGE,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 4.

⁸²⁴The Galveston and the San Luis stations were among those reported destroyed, with at least six people missing. Another station was identified as “Fort Point.” “Soldiers Are Drowned,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1900, 1; and “Life Saving Station Wrecked,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2.

⁸²⁵Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 27.

⁸²⁶The situation in some towns became so desperate that one article hinted that people in Richmond may have stormed the relief train when it finally arrived about a week after the hurricane by stating that the number of troops required to guard the shipment had had to be doubled. But this incident was not referred to as a “riot” or a “mob” and race was not mentioned, implying it was the white residents of Richmond involved. “MORE MILITIA,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 18, 1900, 1.

⁸²⁷Galveston's drinking water was supplied by household cistern or by piped water from wells on the mainland. The cisterns and pumping station were destroyed, leaving residents without any water for several days, and with a very restricted supply for several weeks. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 43, 46; Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 10, 1900, 5; “RELIEF WORK,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; and “AN AUTHORIZED STATEMENT,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1.

bridges and ships damaged or destroyed and telegraph connections cut. Even the coastline of the island was significantly changed.⁸²⁸

This disaster was elevated to a national, even international, event almost exclusively through extensive newspaper articles that inspired organized national-level relief efforts. While news traveled by telegraph, news was disseminated by newspapers and determined how much people found out. Most disasters were local events with very little relief from outside the local area or the state.⁸²⁹ Out-of-state newspapers only mentioned most disasters briefly, barely impinging on the awareness of Americans, much less entering the national collective memory. But extensive national, and even international, reporting on the 1900 Galveston hurricane drove public interest and fundraising. Galveston in September 1900 was well-known as the home of wealthy families and a large white middle-class, and as with the RSS *Titanic* and San Francisco disasters, the race and social class of some, if not most, of the victims, intersected with the horrific loss of life to inspire frenzied reporting.

Galveston was not the first disaster to receive national mass media attention. At the heart of Marian Moser Jones' work on the early role of the American Red Cross (ARC) in disaster relief was a comparative analysis between their response to the Johnstown, Pennsylvania, flood in 1889, and the Sea Island hurricane in 1893.⁸³⁰ These were the first serious natural disasters for which the ARC was a central player in relief efforts, and the intense newspaper attention for the first, with mostly white urban victims, and their relative silence about the second, with mostly Black rural victims, clearly a role in fundraising.⁸³¹ Jones found that despite the Red Cross's stated mission to serve everyone equally regardless of race, class, and gender, the Black victims

⁸²⁸“Changes in the Beach,” Brenham *Daily Banner*, September 16, 1900, 1.

⁸²⁹See earlier chapters of this dissertation for analyses of relief funding.

⁸³⁰Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities, 107–131.

⁸³¹In the Sea Islands hurricane, the Red Cross made up the entire relief effort.

received significantly less assistance and were required to earn relief through labor, including Black women, while the white victims of Johnstown had not been.⁸³² In fact, in Johnstown, Barton's priority was on restoring the 'domestic sphere' of white women.⁸³³ Nor did she ignore class; the Red Cross constructed a temporary hotel in Johnstown for people waiting for houses, with luxuries like hot and cold running water, but she rejected poor applicants for housing in these units in favor of the families of professional men.⁸³⁴ Her reasoning was that the poor could survive greater hardships while the middle-class needed more comforts.⁸³⁵

Jones's focused on the 1893 hurricane partly because, as she pointed out, Hurricane Katrina has been used to accuse the government of ineptitude in emergency response, while “the 1893 storm...offers a poignant case study of what happened to a marginalized and impoverished population in the *absence* of a governmental disaster response.”⁸³⁶ Certainly there can be no argument that there was a quantitative difference in aid between the disasters.⁸³⁷ The total relief

⁸³²Even donated clothing had to be earned by participating in sewing circles to repair donated clothing, for which they were paid with a single meal. They were not even guaranteed clothing after helping if they were deemed not “needy” enough, and victims were limited to one or two garments at most. This was in contrast to the Johnstown victims in which they ensured that women received all necessary garments. Both class and race probably played a role in the disparities. Clothing indicated class and the Sea Islands had been an area with some relatively prosperous Black residents. They may have simply ignored or dismissed the existence of a Black middle-class or this may have been an active opportunity to remind the Black middle-class of their racial status. Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 126–7.

⁸³³In particular, she ensured they were also provided with underclothing and toiletries, as compared to the Black victims limited to one or two garments total in the Sea Islands. Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 115–6.

⁸³⁴Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 117.

⁸³⁵Later, in Galveston, there were accusations that she withheld clothing from Black Galvestonians. Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 117, 119; and Larson, “*Isaac's Storm*,” 256.

⁸³⁶Relevant to this, while the residents of Savannah were warned by the US Weather Bureau, the warning was not shared with the Sea Islands, where the population was almost exclusively Black. Yet newspapers later treated the Sea Island victims as responsible for their plight because they “were killed and drowned by not having enough sense left in them to desert their shanties and seek places of safety.” Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 108, 119, 121.

⁸³⁷Briefly considering other disasters, the *New York Times* asserted that the New York Chamber of Commerce alone had sent over one million dollars to Chicago after the Great Fire in 1871 and one quarter million dollars to Charleston after the earthquake in 1886. The source of these numbers, however, cannot be verified and are included only as a reference for what newspapers presented as typical relief funds. “RELIEF WORK IN NEW YORK,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2. Although John Barry was speaking about victims of river flooding in 1913, he similarly found that “the deaths of northern whites sensitized the country in ways that deaths of black sharecroppers did not....” Barry, *Rising Tide*, 158.

distributed in Johnstown totaled around \$2.9 million, while the total relief distributed in the Sea Islands, all passing through the hands of the Red Cross, was around \$30,000. More people were left homeless in the Sea Islands, around 40 to 50 thousand, than in Johnstown, around 35 to 40 thousand. Newspaper fundraising began two days after the Johnstown disaster, while no fundraising started for the Sea Islands victims for fifty-two days, partly due to the outbreak of a yellow fever epidemic. The newspaper coverage for the hurricane was not only a fraction of that for Johnstown, most of it focused on Savannah and ignored the Sea Islands themselves.⁸³⁸

But while this comparison produced convincing evidence that local attitudes still resulted in unequal treatment, the inclusion of the Galveston hurricane might have been even more convincing. They were the same class of disaster and damages as the Sea Islands, but perceived class and race of victims closer to Johnstown's. The class and racial differences in newspaper reporting was vivid, creating international sympathy for the middle-to-upper-class white urban survivors, while Black survivors were frequently demonized and given significantly different access to relief. While ideas about relief were changing, the treatment of Galveston's white victims was much closer to that of Johnstown than the more recent Sea Islands disaster, so ideas about “scientific” charity cannot entirely account for the difference.⁸³⁹ Clara Barton personally oversaw the Red Cross's efforts for all three disasters, and in the case of the Sea Islands, they controlled virtually all of the relief. Newspaper reporting played a significant role in creating perceptions of race and class of victims and drove fundraising.

⁸³⁸As was common when the victims were mostly Black, there are no clear records of the number of people who died in the Sea Islands. The estimates run from 800 to 5000. As the accepted number at Johnstown was 2,209, the number of dead between the disasters was also comparable. Jones closely examined one representative major newspaper, the New York *World* and found that there was only about fifteen percent as much front page coverage. As mentioned, most articles ignored the Sea Islands victims in favor of Savannah. The Red Cross did not get involved in the Sea Islands until the governor asked them about a week after the hurricane. Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 120–2.

⁸³⁹Jones, “Race, Class, and Gender Disparities,” 117–118, 124–125.

Perceptions

Newspaper reports on disasters generally focus an unequal attention on prominent white victims and survivors. In 1900, they projected the idea that most victims of the hurricane were white and middle-class, if not wealthy. One article described the refugees who arrived in Houston in terms that invited middle-class readers to put themselves in the place of the victims.⁸⁴⁰ “Men bareheaded, barefooted, hatless and coatless, with swelled feet and bruised and blackened bodies and heads were numerous. Women of wealth and refinement frequently hatless and shoeless, with their gowns in shreds, were among the refugees.”⁸⁴¹ The repeated emphasis on the loss of hats and shoes for this class of victim was particularly telling.⁸⁴² Even the working-class would have felt humiliated to appear out-of-doors without a hat if they had a choice, much less a respectable person. In sketches that appeared in the Houston *Daily Post* in 1899, white victims and Black adult farm workers who were being rescued from gin attics or trees or trudging along railroad tracks were portrayed with their heads covered.⁸⁴³ Even Black rural

⁸⁴⁰This is an example of Balaji's empathy for white victims based on equality as opposed to pity for non-white victims, based on power over them. Balaji, “Racializing Pity, 51.

⁸⁴¹It seems unlikely that wealthy women suffered such deprivations; their homes may have been damaged, but not lost. The correspondent probably exaggerated the social class of some middle-class survivors to reinforce the idea that this disaster affected people like the readers. “SOME SURVIVORS REACH HOUSTON,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 4.

⁸⁴²For many if not most Texans, there was a moral implication to an older girl or woman being seen barefoot. Even poor families tried to provide shoes for women, and certainly no middle-class person would have been seen in public without shoes after they reached puberty. Sharpless, *Fertile Ground*, 24.

⁸⁴³Photographs from Fort Bend County in 1899 all show adults with their heads covered and many younger people as well. Significantly, however, the clothing of Black flood victims in the photographs was often better quality than that in the sketches. The sketches in the *Daily Post* may have been based on those photographs taken in Fort Bend County because several photographs in the Fort Bend County Museum archives are remarkably similar. “A Rescue Near Brookshire,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2; “Starting For Little Prairie,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 9, 1899, 5; “The Overflow at Sartartia,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 1; “The Refugees at Brookshire,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2; and “Crossing Flood Sufferers (second line illegible),” “Boat Crew Carrying provisions to McCrary's place seven miles from town,” and “(illegible) R.R. Trestle (partly illegible) east of R.R. Bridge,” 1899 flood photographs, Fort Bend Museum archives, Fort Bend History Association, Vertical file 71.13.1a-71.13.1EE, examined May 22, 2019.

children were sometimes drawn wearing hats.⁸⁴⁴ No respectable person was seen outside without a hat, even the poorest adult, so to describe a “woman of wealth and refinement” as hatless signaled the extremity of the disaster, urging readers to put themselves in her place.⁸⁴⁵

Virtually everyone in the sketches in the same newspaper after the Galveston hurricane was also drawn wearing a hat, including the poorest Black laborers, but the style of the hats indicated class. In one sketch, two Black laborers were engaged in physically removing debris, both wearing what seem to be straw hats.⁸⁴⁶ A white man with suspenders and no coat, was watching them, possibly a carpenter or other skilled workman. He and another white man who was also spectating wore derby-type hats—the brim curled up slightly on the sides, there was a broad band, and the crown was rounded.⁸⁴⁷ The only figure who was clearly middle class, however, was a white man centered in the drawing, wearing a suit coat, one foot supported by a box, and wearing a panama, or “boater,” hat, with a flat crown and brim, a hat associated with young, style-conscious middle-class men. Even in the context of such a horrific disaster where victims were routinely described as hatless and shoeless, the artist could not apparently conceive of even conscripted Black laborers being seen hatless in public.

⁸⁴⁴“The Refugees at Brookshire,” Houston *Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 2.

⁸⁴⁵Newspaper artists and editors indicated the importance of clothing as signifiers of respectability and of class through these descriptions. Additionally, women writers of letters and memoirs emphasized giving another woman a hat or buying one for themselves so they could be seen in public. Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 33, 115.

⁸⁴⁶These sketches in the *Daily Post* were probably based on descriptions and older photographs rather than direct access, meaning the clothing was chosen by the artist to convey a message. “Postoffice Street, Looking West From Twentieth Street,” Houston *Daily Post*, September 14, 1900, 1. Photography was banned under martial law, with newspapers reported that photographers were shot and killed: “two more kodak fiends, who insisted on photographing the nude corpses of women, are said to have been shot by soldiers.” Claiming the women’s corpses were nude was the justification for the shootings, suggesting that they were perverts and consistent with the obsession with protecting white women’s virtue. However, this was probably a rumor. The Bryan *Morning Eagle* also stated that “three photographers who ventured out had their instruments smashed and themselves pressed into service burying dead bodies.” “PESTILENCE IS GREATLY FEARED,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 1; “RELIEF WORK GOING FORWARD,” El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5; untitled article, El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 15, 1900, 1; and “Special Dispatch to the Herald,” El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 13, 1900, 1.

⁸⁴⁷Working men were shown without suit coats, but never without a hat.

After the Johnstown flood, the Red Cross was very conscious of the psychological effects on people who had lost their homes and family members in that disaster.⁸⁴⁸ Volunteers recorded “nervous prostration in the most aggravated form, and many cases of temporary insanity’. One man had suffered such serious shock that his hair had turned white and fallen out.”⁸⁴⁹ For what may have been the first time after a disaster, the Red Cross provided mental health care as medical care, at least as far as they understood it.⁸⁵⁰

Newspaper reports on the 1900 hurricane frequently referred to the mental health of the victims generally in sympathetic terms, but almost exclusively for middle-and-upper-class white survivors. In a Bryan *Morning Eagle* article that described middle-class refugees arriving in Houston, one correspondent commented that “They had been wandering aimlessly about the places where their homes had been...It was a surcease, a relief from those horrible scenes which cannot be seen in a nightmare or could not pass through the brain during mania potu.”⁸⁵¹ The article very clearly acknowledged that such a disaster traumatized people and left them in shock, and there was no criticism for their state of shock.⁸⁵² Not all articles attributed mental illness to the traumatic losses of the victims. One Chicago newspaper attributed mental illness to thirst,

⁸⁴⁸While a number of doctors had volunteered to help in Johnstown, their focus was on preventing an outbreak of epidemic diseases like typhoid. Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 117.

⁸⁴⁹Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 117.

⁸⁵⁰How much they were able to do, with the minimal scientific or medical knowledge of the time, is unclear. But even acknowledging and trying to provide care probably helped some people. Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 117.

⁸⁵¹“Mania potu” probably should be “mania a potu,” referring to a delusional state related to excessive drinking. “SOME SURVIVORS REACH HOUSTON,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 4; and STORM MAKES MANIACS OF SURVIVING VICTIMS,” San Antonio Daily Express, September 15, 1900, 1.

⁸⁵²This was far from the only example. For instance, the Chicago *Daily Tribune* reported on “screaming women...bearing the lifeless forms of children in their arms; men, broken-hearted and sobbing, bewailing the loss of their wives and children...” “FIRST ATTEMPT AT RELIEF,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1900, 2. This extended to private correspondence as well, with sympathetic descriptions of the grief-stricken, but very little sympathy for the working class survivors. Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 234, 240; and Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 33, 35, 39, 53, 132.

claiming “people in frenzy from suffering...scores have died since last night, and a number of sufferers have gone insane.”⁸⁵³

But most newspapers recognized that traumatic experiences and loss were responsible for most mental illness. The Bryan newspaper reported that there were “numerous cases of insanity in Galveston as a result of the bereavement sustained by the survivors.”⁸⁵⁴ While the article gave no numbers or indicated what treatment was being extended, if any, it included one notable example, an older man referred to as Judge John Reagan. “Judge Reagan lost every relative in Galveston. He sits hour by hour in pathetic silence. Then he bursts out laughing and his laughter is followed by tears. Perhaps his insanity is a blessing.”⁸⁵⁵ This was a very emotional appeal for readers to sympathize with this middle-class man, and there was no criticism of his obvious mental illness.

Shortly after the disaster, the El Paso *Daily Herald* asserted that “Such scenes drive men to desperation, and in once fair Galveston today are many frenzied people.”⁸⁵⁶ The use of “frenzied” here suggests a meaning like that of “mania potu,” again suggesting empathy, or at least sympathy, for victims without judgment. In the most extreme case, the same article describes, “a number have sought freedom in the death which they so stoutly fought. A young girl who survived to find mother, father, and sister dead, crept out and threw herself into the bay.”⁸⁵⁷ The article clearly attributed her suicide to despair at her losses, and that despair was not limited to those who had been on Galveston Island. At least one elderly man, tentatively

⁸⁵³“DRIVEN INSANE BY THIRST,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

⁸⁵⁴“PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4.

⁸⁵⁵“PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4.

⁸⁵⁶Untitled article, El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5.

⁸⁵⁷As no names or details are provided, it is difficult to be certain this story was true, but even if not, it shows what the expectations were for the mental state of victims. Untitled article, El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5.

identified as Frank McGill of Brownwood, Texas, killed himself in front of a railroad depot, leaving a letter citing the loss of his daughter and three grandchildren at Galveston.⁸⁵⁸

A few days later, the same newspaper asserted that “Many of the refugees are in a pitiable condition, some of them showing unmistakable evidence of insanity.”⁸⁵⁹ No individuals were named and nothing was suggested about any assistance that may have been offered to these victims, but there was no criticism of them either. The descriptions rose into the sensational, however, by September 17, when the newspaper ran a story quoting J. A. Fernandez who claimed that “500 persons have lost their reason on account of their horrifying experiences during the storm. 'Some among them are absolute raving maniacs,'”⁸⁶⁰ This was closer to being critical of the victims, with stronger language, but having the language attributed to an individual instead of the newspaper probably allowed them to distance themselves from that language.

The Dallas *Morning News* shed light on a different way that expectations of people's mental state influenced reports. By September 12, they claimed that the reason newspapers initially ran very conservative estimates of the death toll was because “it was feared that they were exaggerations, hence the report made some allowance for excited mental conditions and cut down a bit.”⁸⁶¹ Then they acknowledged that the original high numbers were actually accurate. Because so many prominent residents of Galveston had relatives or friends in Dallas, the editors may also have hoped to avoid alarming them at first.⁸⁶² And they may have been influenced by

⁸⁵⁸This was the only incident of reported suicide with identifying details. “WITHOUT MONEY OR FRIENDS,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 15, 1900, 1.

⁸⁵⁹From context, this is referring mostly to middle-class victims. Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 15, 1900, 1.

⁸⁶⁰“HUNDREDS OF MANIACS,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 17, 1900, 1.

⁸⁶¹“HALF HAS NOT BEEN TOLD,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1.

⁸⁶²This seems probable because Texas newspapers ran many articles reporting the safety or death of relatives of prominent local residents both after the 1900 hurricane and the 1915 Galveston hurricane. Very rarely were working class or non-white relatives mentioned, however.

the knowledge that many communities preferred that newspapers understate damages and deaths because they might lose investors, and Galveston's port was vital to Texas's cotton economy.⁸⁶³

Clearly, newspapers often described or considered the mental state of middle-and-upper-class white victims, and even that of worried relatives, in sympathetic terms.⁸⁶⁴ But when they wrote about the need for labor in the city, all sympathy for the ordeal and the grief of working-class victims was absent.⁸⁶⁵ In fact, nothing was said to acknowledge that the poor of Galveston were also victims with the same, possibly worse, experiences.⁸⁶⁶ The city needed a workforce to locate and dispose of human bodies and livestock corpses, to clear away the debris, and then to rebuild. In these circumstances, authorities had no patience for working-class trauma.

Worse in the eyes of the white middle-class press, poor men resorted to the only thing available to help them cope with their experiences: alcohol. Any drunkenness was viewed as a sign of flawed character and genetics rather than a reaction to losses and traumatic experiences during the storm. In the context of the growing anti-liquor movements, these poor men's desperation opened the door to unflattering descriptions which were used to help justify some of the martial law measures.⁸⁶⁷ One article describing “many frenzied people,”⁸⁶⁸ was directly followed by an article claiming that “hundreds of desperate men roamed the streets crazed with

⁸⁶³Newspaper reports after disasters frequently printed rumors that exaggerated the numbers of deaths, understated the estimated number of deaths through fear of exaggerations, or initially printed relatively accurate numbers but then retracted those and attempted to understate the number of deaths. The exaggerations were at least partly driven by the fact that tragedy drives newspaper sales.

⁸⁶⁴More sympathy was shown for the mental state of middle-class relatives who were not on the island than for the working-class who were. For instance, relatives trying to get train tickets “...nearly on the verge of hysterics through fears.” “STORM ALONG THE SOUTHERN COAST,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 2

⁸⁶⁵Eventually, there was some grudging acknowledgment for laborers, but not for the Black middle-class.

⁸⁶⁶The poorer sections of Galveston, particularly Black wards, were particularly devastated. It was likely that one of the reasons for the framing of the stories about looting and conscripting labor was that so many laborers were lost, the city leaders needed a justification to ensure they controlled what labor survived and was physically able to work.

⁸⁶⁷The sale of alcohol was banned after other disasters, such as in East Waco during the 1913 flood. “Sell No Liquor in East Waco,” *Dallas Morning News*, December 6, 1913, 6.

⁸⁶⁸Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5.

liquors...,” though the correspondent did concede that “...many had drunk because nothing else could be procured with which to quench their thirst...”⁸⁶⁹ A railroad man told the *Audubon County Journal* that “as soon as the storm subsided the negroes stole all the liquor they could get and, beastly drunk, proceeded with their campaign of vandalism.”⁸⁷⁰ The same person claimed that an old man “under the influence of liquor” had stolen a roll of money.⁸⁷¹ These conditions were part of the justification for martial law, for promising relief on work, and for conscripting able-bodied working-class men for what was initially unpaid labor.⁸⁷²

As suggested by that final example, far from sympathy for poorer victims, newspapers described them as potential or accused looters and vandals. The railroad man did not appear to witness anyone actually stealing or vandalizing; he drew conclusions based on circumstantial evidence. For instance, he assumed that any woman's body without clothing must have been a woman “who wore fine clothes” who had been stripped by vandals, rather than unclothed as a result of the fury of the storm itself.⁸⁷³ His account, which may have passed through several people before being published in this newspaper, also admitted that some poor white men were involved but primarily targeted the Black people of Galveston for dehumanization.

⁸⁶⁹Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5.

⁸⁷⁰It is very unlikely that he had more than rumor for the source of their alcohol or their other supposed crimes. “VANDALS ARE AT WORK,” *Audubon County Journal*, September 13, 1900, 1.

⁸⁷¹The man was probably white as the article explicitly described every other individual with an identifier for Black. Some of his quotes ran in other newspapers. “VANDALS ARE AT WORK,” *Audubon County Journal*, September 13, 1900, 1; “GHOULS GET IN THEIR WORK,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 1.

⁸⁷²For instance, criticism of “criminal classes” and “liquor saloons” were used justify conscripting labor. “BEGINNING TO RECOVER SLOWLY. STENCH IS ALMOST BEYOND ENDURANCE,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 1. In fact, Galveston used these stories to close all saloons. “Stricken Galveston,” *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 13, 1900, 1; and Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 83.

⁸⁷³Some survivors reported that their clothes were torn away, but a desperate person may also have stripped their own clothes because the weight was pulling them underwater. “VANDALS ARE AT WORK,” *Audubon County Journal*, September 13, 1900, 1; Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78; Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 51, 65; and Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 228. Larson also found little evidence of either desecration, looting, or summary executions. Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 242.

Despite dozens of sensationalized stories about large-scale looting and mutilation of bodies, Bixel and Turner found little documentation to support these claims.⁸⁷⁴ Articles often identified these supposed criminals as Black, or sometimes as “ghouls,” a term often coded to mean Black.⁸⁷⁵ While “ghoul” was the most common, there were also references to “human hyenas,”⁸⁷⁶ “curs,”⁸⁷⁷ and simply “criminal classes.”⁸⁷⁸ These terms dehumanized and avoided any sympathy for the people whose labor the city most needed to control during the aftermath.⁸⁷⁹

Newspapers ran graphic stories claiming that hordes of looters mutilated bodies by cutting off fingers or ears to remove the jewelry, or that looters were caught with their pockets or handkerchiefs filled with fingers or ears.⁸⁸⁰ However, all of these allegations were word-of-mouth with little evidence to indicate anyone was actually witnessed doing this. Even if someone stole jewelry by this gruesome method, it was extremely unlikely that a Black person in the

⁸⁷⁴There was only evidence that six people were summarily executed for looting, and maybe eight more arrested for robbing bodies, with no race indicated. At this time, the race of a Black person was almost never omitted, considered the key identifier, suggesting the few documented cases of looters being shot or arrested were most likely white. No investigation appears to have been done as to whether or not the person accused with guilty, understandably a low priority with the situation facing Galveston. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78; and Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 242.

⁸⁷⁵At least one Chicago editorial referred to the summary execution of suspected looters as a form of Southern lynching they could approve, indicating the “ghouls” they referred to were believed to be Black. “GHOULS ARE BEING SHOT BY TROOPS...,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 1. Also “ghoulish,” “human hyenas,” “fiends,” and “curs,” other language that can be assumed to target Black men. “VANDALS ARE AT WORK,” Audubon *County Journal*, September 13, 1900, 1; “Stricken Galveston,” Brenham *Daily Banner*, September 12, 1900, 1; Untitled article, El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5; “FIENDS AT WORK,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 2; “HALF HAS NOT BEEN TOLD,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1; “GHOULS GET IN THEIR WORK,” Atlanta *Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 1; “THE TWO SIDES OF HUMAN NATURE,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 6; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78.

⁸⁷⁶“Stricken Galveston,” Brenham *Daily Banner*, September 13, 1900, 1.

⁸⁷⁷“Special dispatch to the Herald,” El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5.

⁸⁷⁸“STENCH IS ALMOST BEYOND ENDURANCE,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 1.

⁸⁷⁹In fact, Galveston used this disaster to restructure city government, adopting a form of government with commissioners elected at-large rather than aldermen by ward. This became a popular Progressive tactic to weaken voting strength of laborers, particularly where there was a white majority, resulting in a complete loss of representation for the city's working-class and Black citizens. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 85–86, 127, 149; Remes, *Disaster Citizenship*, location 182 of 7531; and Rice, “The Galveston Plan of City Government,” 365–408.

⁸⁸⁰Untitled article, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 2; HALF HAS NOT BEEN TOLD,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1; “GHOULS ROB AND MUTILATE DEAD BODIES AT GALVESTON,” Atlanta *Constitution*, September 13, 1900, 1; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78.

South in 1900 would also keep the body part they had cut off as evidence to be used against them.⁸⁸¹ It was more likely that many of the bodies were missing fingers and ears, either due to decomposition or scavenging animals, particularly since most bodies were washed out to sea for a time.⁸⁸² Many bodies, possibly most of them, were also missing all or part of their clothing, also attributed to looters without actual witnesses to the acts. Far more likely was that this was due to wind or wave forcing debris against the bodies or people stripping off clothing to try to avoid being dragged under, especially women's heavy skirts.⁸⁸³ Those familiar with the depredations of scavengers and the decomposition of bodies would have recognized what they were seeing, but newspapers seized on this damage to drive readership through sensationalized stories which officials used to justify the treatment of Black and working-class Galvestonians.

Many newspapers reported that large numbers of looters had been shot in the act, including either vague or quite specific numbers that ranged as high as one hundred or more.⁸⁸⁴ A Chicago subheadline was particularly sensationalized, describing the situation as “Negroes Looting Wrecked City Are Slain in Battle with Soldiers and Armed Guards.”⁸⁸⁵ The next day, the

⁸⁸¹They would have been very aware of how little evidence was needed to spark a lynching.

⁸⁸²Most of those that were buried were not recovered for several days; the first priority immediately afterwards was finding survivors. They tried burying bodies at sea, resulting in most washing back onto the shore, and bodies of those who had been washed out to sea continued to wash up as well. Obviously they were badly decomposed and frequently scavenged by animals by then. By September 14, less than five days after the hurricane passed, at least one newspaper was admitting that they had to use shovels on the remaining bodies. “Special dispatch to the Herald,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 14, 1900, 1.

⁸⁸³The expectation may have been that women would not have done this on purpose, rather drowning than risking their reputations and modesty, but it seems unlikely that more than a few would have been so concerned in a life-or-death situation. Many of the women on holiday in Galveston would be accustomed to bathing in the sea in much less restrictive clothing, after all. Additionally, many were caught at home at night when they would not have been so overdressed. However, in the aftermath, people were so protective of the modesty of women's bodies that they reported that “two more kodak fiends, who insisted on photographing the nude corpses of women, are said to have been shot by soldiers.” From this phrasing, they were not the only photographers shot. “Special dispatch to the Herald,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 15, 1900, 1.

⁸⁸⁴The *El Paso Daily Herald* claimed that 50–100 looters had been shot, while the *Bryan Morning Eagle* simply put the number of “summary deaths” at half a hundred. “Special dispatch to the Herald,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 12, 1900, 5; and Untitled article, *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 2.

⁸⁸⁵“DEATH ROLL 5000,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 12, 1900, 1.

same newspaper asserted there had been small riots.⁸⁸⁶ In reality, city police only recorded that six people were summarily shot for stealing from the dead, and up to eight others arrested.⁸⁸⁷ In fact, race was not included for any of these accused looters, strongly suggesting that they were not Black. In 1900, virtually no public record omitted the race of a Black person; it was a more important identifier than their name. The absence of race almost always meant that they were white, and it seems extremely unlikely that the police would have omitted information that would suggest to a reader that these accused criminals were white if they were not.⁸⁸⁸

Additionally, most of the “soldiers” in Galveston enforcing martial law were not actually members of the United States Army or Navy. Initially, the city simply created a volunteer militia with no training to patrol almost immediately.⁸⁸⁹ Some later arrivals were from state militia forces: the Dallas Rough Riders, the Houston Light Guards, and the Galveston Sharpshooters.⁸⁹⁰ Their primary purpose was to prevent looting and protect property, and their secondary purpose was to round up anyone from the working class that they perceived as unemployed or idle and force them to work on recovery and cleanup at gunpoint. The members of these forces brought all of their biases with them, and there were rarely, if ever, witnesses to support their stories about shootings.⁸⁹¹ By their own words, they shot some people for things as minor as not

⁸⁸⁶“Rations Only for Workers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

⁸⁸⁷Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78.

⁸⁸⁸Adding to the question of who was looting, if anyone, was at least one article that stated that some “relief” parties to Galveston had themselves been shot and killed for robbing the dead, though in this case, the newspaper admitted that they could not confirm that report. They almost certainly questioned the validity of these specific accusations because relief parties would have been white and middle class. But this may also have justified barring frantic relatives and friends from the island. Considering the paranoia about Black looters, there was virtually no possibility that a Black person would have been allowed onto the island even with a committee. “RELIEF TRAINS START,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1.

⁸⁸⁹Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 46, 48.

⁸⁹⁰“PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND. SCURRY NEED CASH TO PAY LABORERS,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4. In Brenham, the “Signal Corps boys” patrolled for looters. “After the Great Storm,” *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 11, 1900, 1.

⁸⁹¹Not only that, some of the stories seemed extremely unlikely, such as a soldier who claimed to have successfully shot five Black looters who were in a group and shooting at him. However, it is not unusual for people to make

halting.⁸⁹² Some of those accused of looting, and possibly shot, may have been workers hired to clean up private property.⁸⁹³ According to newspapers, these militia forces had orders to shoot on sight, and Black men hired to remove debris from houses in a white neighborhood would have been very vulnerable to being shot as presumed looters with no investigation or consequences.

Not everyone was convinced of the criminality of the Black citizens of Galveston. For instance, one unnamed correspondent accused: "...there have been some deaths for alleged looting that have been undeserved; that the militia shoot innocent negroes for no cause whatever."⁸⁹⁴ On the same day, the *Bryan Morning Eagle* admitted that "several of the very young soldiers have been a trifle overzealous in the matter of guarding the property, carrying their energy to a point which made it somewhat uncomfortable for the people whose property and person they came to guard."⁸⁹⁵ The officer directly in charge of martial law, Adjutant General Scurry, claimed to have "repressed them promptly and several of them have been disarmed."⁸⁹⁶

Admissions of abuses were the exception, however. At the other extreme, a railway freight agent, J. N. Griswold, visiting Galveston when the hurricane struck, stated that "the darkies are doing most of the pilfering. Sunday morning before daylight they were breaking into warehouses and looting stores and saloons particularly. The town was full of drunken negroes

themselves out to be heroic during a disaster. "BURNING HEAPED CORPSES," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2.

⁸⁹²"MORE MILITIA," *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 18, 1900, 1. This was not just the appointed militia: "Private citizens have also endeavored to prevent the robbing of the dead and on several occasions have killed the offenders." A GENERAL REVIEW OF THE CALAMITY AND ITS RESULTS," *Houston Daily Post*, September 12, 1900, 1.

⁸⁹³This is supported by at least one person who stated that some alleged looters were completely innocent. "Special dispatch to the Herald," *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 14, 1900, 1; and "CONDITIONS ARE GROWING WORSE," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 1.

⁸⁹⁴Special dispatch to the Herald, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 14, 1900, 1.

⁸⁹⁵This statement is vague enough that it could either mean that the forces were running off Black workers hired to remove debris from private property or were threatening, in word or behavior, toward property owners themselves. "CONDITIONS ARE GROWING WORSE," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 1.

⁸⁹⁶"CONDITIONS ARE GROWING WORSE," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 1.

Sunday morning at daylight.”⁸⁹⁷ His choice of a particularly negative racial term, so negative that it almost never appeared in newspaper reports of the time, indicated his existing bias toward Black laborers. He proposed that unemployed Black Galvestonians “be sent to the cotton fields of north Texas. Those who will work can be kept there.”⁸⁹⁸ Then he additionally proposed that those who would not go willingly “...should either be killed or made to get out, for one or the other is the grim necessity of the situation.”⁸⁹⁹ While the newspaper did not overtly support his recommendation, simply running his statement without criticism implied support. In the cultural climate in which racially motivated lynchings were relatively common and tacitly supported by many communities, this was clearly threatening to Black communities in Texas.

Perhaps most chilling was the indifference to household servants when reporting about the night of the hurricane. Several diaries and letters mentioned that servants, generally unnamed, were left behind to protect property or livestock while their employers evacuated to safety. Sometimes houses were destroyed, but nothing was said about whether or not the servants survived. Only one of these servants was mentioned by name or admitted he was probably dead.⁹⁰⁰ A Mrs. Wall left her summer home at Morgan's Point to get transportation back to Houston from a nearby hotel. “Mrs. Wall had left William Jones in charge of her house just

⁸⁹⁷He was a visitor to the city on holiday with his wife and did not leave the Washington Hotel between 2 PM on Saturday afternoon until “daylight” on Sunday, meaning he was repeating rumors. Other details in his account of the storm itself did not match other accounts, such as claiming the storm was mostly over by 10 PM on Saturday evening. He also was not involved in relief efforts since he left by Monday at noon. “SCORES OF VANDALS AT WORK,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3. His story may have been rooted in people taking shelter in warehouses that were withstanding the storm after their homes were destroyed.

⁸⁹⁸His Dallas origin suggested a reason he thought they should be sent to that region in particular. “SCORES OF VANDALS AT WORK,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

⁸⁹⁹“SCORES OF VANDALS AT WORK,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

⁹⁰⁰Morgan's Point is located on a spit of land between Tabbs Bay and Trinity Bay, east by southeast of Houston. This story was printed on Monday morning, so they must have received the story on Sunday, while the hurricane went over the coast Saturday night through Sunday morning. Untitled article, *Dallas Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 1.

before dark...” then added “this was the last that was seen of faithful 'Billy Jones.’”⁹⁰¹ Black men were often stereotyped as either a “faithful servant” or a “black brute/black rapist,”⁹⁰² with the term “faithful” generally reserved for Black family servants, so William Jones was almost certainly Black. Communication had not yet been reestablished with Galveston, so the *Morning News* had few first-hand sources by Sunday night when type for the edition would have been set.⁹⁰³ Jones now symbolically stands in for the other Black servants who died, unnamed and unreported, in the storm and was probably only mentioned because the *Morning News* had little other material for readers who were desperate for any news.

Newspaper articles on the Galveston hurricane demonstrated a great deal of concern for the mental and physical well-being and comfort of white middle-and-upper-class victims, campaigning relentlessly for them, while almost excluding all other victims of the hurricane from status as victims at all. At best, they were potentially lazy free-loaders, and at worst, violent criminals who rioted, looted, and desecrated bodies. Thus, the city required martial law and extreme measures, and newspaper reports that shifted the status of the working class as equal victims to dangerous elements who had to be controlled were an important means of keeping public support for these measures. Newspapers played an important role in creating perceptions

⁹⁰¹It was implied in the article, but not stated clearly, that the house was destroyed. Untitled article, *Dallas Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 1.

⁹⁰²“Ghoul” falls under the “black brute” stereotype. Black women were usually categorized as a “Jezebel” or a “Mammy,” which included the “Aunt Jemima” stereotype. The “faithful Servant” was a successor to the “faithful slave” stereotype which included “Mammy” as well. McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 1–5, 45–46, 172–3.

⁹⁰³ I make the assumption that the newspaper type was set before midnight on Sunday because they reported that they delivered newspapers by train to Fort Worth by five o'clock on Monday morning, September 10. The edition had to be set early enough to allow time to print and process the papers and transport them. Certainly the edition cannot have gone to press much later than midnight. “DEMAND COULDN'T BE SUPPLIED,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 8. Another newspaper identified the individuals who died in that area, but omitted any mention, even by race, of William Jones, while naming two women victims, presumably white. “Six Persons Killed at Brazoria,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 10, 1900, 1.

of “good” victims and dangerous laborers, which both drove fundraising and public acceptance of martial law and conscripted labor.

Local Rescue, Recovery, and Relief

Class, racial, and gendered distinctions—middle-class or not, white or not, male or female—defined who was a victim deserving of sympathy and help, and who was a potential threat instead who could therefore be conscripted as labor. Class, race, and gender had a powerful influence on attitudes toward relief for disaster victims, especially in Texas. In general, people believed that white middle-class male victim could safely receive direct charity, that their characters were powerful enough that they would not be corrupted.⁹⁰⁴ White middle-class women needed to be protected from hardships, so could, and should, receive generous help.⁹⁰⁵

But the same theories proposed that non-white and working-class white victims should not be given direct relief because they were perceived as inherently lazy and lacking ambition, otherwise they would not be poor.⁹⁰⁶ Without the threat of starvation, authorities and employers also could not count on them to accept work at the wages offered. These business leaders were able to use food and money donated for relief to coerce the poor to work at low wages, despite a significantly contracted labor pool at a moment of particular need, on projects that mostly benefited these same city leaders.⁹⁰⁷ They defined work that benefited themselves as necessary for the public good and defined the labor that was coerced using relief funds as charity.

⁹⁰⁴ Jones, “Race, Class, and Gender,” 117–118, 124–125. White middle-class men were also often given power over labor under martial law during disasters, enforced with control over charity or with weapons.

⁹⁰⁵ Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 115–7.

⁹⁰⁶ Jones, “Race, Class and Gender Disparities,” 115–7.

⁹⁰⁷ The Central Relief Committee (CRC) was dominated by people in business. Half of them were in business: banker, financier, ship agent, businessman, or editor. Five were government officials and three represented actual charitable services—Clara Barton (ARC,) Dr. George A. Soper, and Reverend Henry Cohen, the rabbi of Temple

The demographics of the victims as much as the scale of the 1900 disaster softened normal public attitudes toward relief and charity, just as they did after the Johnstown flood and the San Francisco earthquake. Correspondents emphasized the strain on the sensibilities of the victims, particularly women, in the aftermath of the Galveston hurricane, but only when they were middle or upper class. Even men from these classes who were demonstrating symptoms that would now be recognized as trauma and shock were described with gentleness and sympathy.⁹⁰⁸ Working-class poor men and women, however, were condemned as shiftless, indolent, or drunken free-loaders if they resisted coercion in the aftermath, with virtually no acknowledgment that they, too, had suffered mental and emotional shock.

While white middle-class men were apparently able to leave the island fairly freely, able-bodied workers were not, and food and other relief was directly used to control the labor of the working-class.⁹⁰⁹ There is no question that Galveston lost a significant percentage of its working class to this disaster, creating a shortage of labor just as the city badly needed an unusual amount of manual labor.⁹¹⁰ Most urgently, they needed to restore water and to dispose of the large

B'nai Israel. It can be argued that the mayor and state senator on the committee were also aligned with business interests, while one of those from the local government, the stenographer, probably had no influence. Even the hospital subcommittee was headed by a ship agent, Daniel Ripley, rather than Soper, Cohen, or Barton, all of whom had direct experience with hospitals. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 47.

⁹⁰⁸ I emphasize men here because the poor treatment of World War I “shell shock” victims demonstrated that even middle-class men's mental health was often dismissed or treated as an unforgivable weakness. “HIS EXPERIENCE IN GALVESTON,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, September 22, 1900, 5.

⁹⁰⁹ While public evacuations favored middle-and-upper-class women and children, several middle-class white men reported leaving the island as early as Sunday by paying for passage on private boats. “AN APPALLING AFFLICTION,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 6; “HALF HAS NOT BEEN TOLD,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1; and “BURIED AT SEA,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4. While Texas newspapers did not comment on this, at least one out-of-state newspaper heavily criticized the owners of private boats who charged “extortionate prices,” but not those who used their resources to escape. “THE TWO SIDES OF HUMAN NATURE,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 6. Some articles indicated that the only “destitute” victims allowed to leave the island were those with relatives elsewhere. This suggests that poor women and children were generally unable to leave the island. “GALVESTON'S APPEAL GETS QUICK RESPONSE,” Atlanta *Constitution*, September 13, 1900, 1.

⁹¹⁰ One neighborhood with a large number of dead was Kincaid (Kinhead) addition. According to Casey Edwards Greene, several reported victims from that neighborhood were skilled laborers such as screwmen and carpenters. “PESILENCE (sic) IS GRAVELY FEARED,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 1; Casey Edwards Greene, “Those Who Fell, Part I,” Galveston and Texas History Center,

numbers of bodies and animal corpses before they caused an epidemic.⁹¹¹ And with both government and businesses facing the expenses of cleanup and rebuilding, they were not inclined to let workers use the high demand for labor to improve their own conditions, even though most workers had lost virtually everything they owned, possibly increasing the gap between rich and poor. These leaders instead chose to control labor through martial law and restricted access to the island and they kept support for martial law through public perceptions of the workers as either lazy or criminal. Individuals involved with the relief committee were quite frank about controlling the labor force. For instance, at a meeting between prominent Galvestonians and city officials to organize the relief effort, the *Dallas Morning News* stated that, “Mr. J. H. Hawley spoke pretty warmly upon this matter, and said no able-bodied man who refuses to work should be given food. Chief of Police Ketchum...said the committee should seize all food supplies in the city at once...Then the committee should take charge of the distribution of these supplies and should permit no able-bodied man to eat unless he worked.”⁹¹² The article did not suggest the city had either means to guarantee or plans to ever pay for work done.⁹¹³

<https://www.galvestonhistorycenter.org/news/those-who-fell-profiles-of-selected-1900-storm-victims>; and Casey Edwards Greene, “Those Who Fell, Part II,” Galveston and Texas History Center, <https://www.galvestonhistorycenter.org/news/those-who-fell-part-2-of-profiles-of-selected-1900-storm-victims>.

⁹¹¹ Rats were also swarming the bodies, adding to epidemic fears, and driving the decision to burn bodies. See earlier analysis of looting for more on body disposal. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 48.

⁹¹² See above for the makeup of the CRC. “BURIED AT SEA,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 46–48.

⁹¹³ On September 19, they were promising workers that they were keeping track of hours worked and that they would be paid eventually, though, if the laborers had access to newspapers, they were aware that the city had received a lot of money already. But the combination of control of food supplies which were then used as partial payment for work, the restrictions on laborers leaving the island, and martial law enforcing their participation gave authorities an enormous amount of control over labor in the aftermath. The relief committee claimed not to have the resources to begin paying a specific wage until almost two weeks after the hurricane struck. “To Pay Laborers,” *Houston Daily Post*, September 25, 1900, 5; and “THE WORK OF RESCUE,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 19, 1900, 2.

Beyond a reasonable fear that they would not be paid even low wages, many working men balked at handling badly decomposed bodies.⁹¹⁴ Later articles asserted that the city's firemen were bringing bodies to the wharf for burial at sea, but "...it was impossible to get any considerable number,...urged that able-bodied men be impressed."⁹¹⁵ At one point, "deputized citizens forced fifty black men at bayonet point to board these barges and to assist with the grim task of body disposal."⁹¹⁶ Several articles admitted that the bodies had quickly decomposed very badly, probably the main reason men were reluctant to assist, especially if they lost family.⁹¹⁷ One article admitted, "this is awful work and few men are found with sufficiently strong nerves to last at it more than 30 minutes at a time."⁹¹⁸

Unlike the sympathy for middle-class white men who showed signs of mental illness after the disaster, there was little patience for the sensibilities of working men.⁹¹⁹ Yet officials were practical enough to acknowledge the horror of the work, if not the trauma these laborers

⁹¹⁴ The weather immediately following the hurricane was extremely hot which meant many bodies were badly decomposed by Monday evening, two days after the disaster. Bixel and Turner found claims in the *Galveston Daily News* that "men refused to touch the bodies. This was especially true of the negroes," possibly trying to suggest they were superstitious. But other evidence appeared to contradict the idea that people were reluctant to work on the cleanup, with the city's unions volunteering their membership to help. As late as September 18, there were reports that the workers had not been paid anything. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78; "PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4; and "BURNING HEAPED CORPSES," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2.

⁹¹⁵ "BURNING HEAPED CORPSES," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2; and "PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4.

⁹¹⁶ Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 48.

⁹¹⁷ However, Bixel and Turner found that, contrary to these newspaper accounts, a lot of working-class Galvestonians, particularly those belonging to unions, voluntarily helped with recovery, disposal, and cleanup. But the newspaper accounts almost universally portrayed working-class Galvestonians as lazy, drunk, and criminal. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78–79.

⁹¹⁸ "CONDITIONS ARE GROWING WORSE," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 1.

⁹¹⁹ Officially, able-bodied men were not allowed to leave the island, though clearly that was not applied to white men who were not working class. The sources for newspaper articles were frequently business or professional men who were able to leave the island in the first three or four days with no criticism, although authorities struggled to evacuate women and children, commenting as late as September 18 that some people still were unable to evacuate, and estimated that some would not be evacuated for up to a week more. Personal letters and journals examined by Greene and Kelly described the ease with which some men left. "PESILENCE (sic) IS GRAVELY FEARED," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 1; "PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4; and Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*.

had already gone through. After soldiers and police swept the city, “every able-bodied man they found was marched to the wharf front. The men worked in relays and were liberally, but not too plentifully, supplied with stimulants to nerve them for the task.”⁹²⁰ After using martial law to close saloons, officials then used control of alcohol to help control the workforce, tacitly acknowledging that this work was taking a mental and emotional toll.⁹²¹

Even the threat of having access to food and alcohol cut off and forced to work at gunpoint was not always enough.⁹²² “Toward night, great difficulty was experienced in handling the bodies of negroes, which are badly decomposed.”⁹²³ The article shied away from identifying the “great difficulty,” but it was very likely that white men refused to handle Black bodies, and Black men may have recognized family from identifying features. As difficult as it was to handle the bodies of strangers, finding the bodies of friends and family was far worse. While the details of what happened were unclear, even disposing of Black bodies caused significant problems.

Correspondents admitted that Black workers encountered bodies of those they knew while doing this work. In the lone instance when a correspondent directly acknowledged the

⁹²⁰ While this might have meant coffee or tea, only alcohol of some sort makes sense in this context. Larson found personal correspondence that not only confirmed thirty-minute shifts, but also that the men assigned to burn bodies “...were allowed all the whiskey they needed to keep going.” Bixel and Turner reported that even a temperance priest, Father, James M. Kirwin, came to the conclusion that no one could do this work without “stimulants,” and admitted supplying them with whiskey. Greene and Kelly quote a personal memoir confirming the conscripts on body disposal were freely given whiskey. Larson, “Isaac's Storm,” 240–241; Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 48; Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 85; and “BURNING HEAPED CORPSES,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2.

⁹²¹ Officials also closed all taverns as part of martial law, theoretically to stop drunken looting and violence, but judging from this article, restricting access to alcohol then gave them an incentive they could also use to control the work force. A hidden feature of this coercive system was the exemption of any working man who was already employed. This gave white businessmen and property owners a great deal of leverage in hiring labor to clean up and repair their property in a situation in which labor was in high demand. Some workers might have been so desperate to avoid handling the decomposing bodies that they accepted work at far less pay than normal for a private employer, but there are unlikely to be surviving working-class sources verifying this.

⁹²² At least one out-of-state newspaper article asserted that some Black men who refused to help dispose of bodies were summarily shot and killed as a lesson to the others. “Killed for Refusing to Work,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

⁹²³ “BURNING HEAPED CORPSES,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2.

trauma of non-white victims, Dr. L. L. Shropshire of San Antonio, Texas, reported to the San Antonio *Daily Express* that:

“I have witnessed many pathetic scenes and one of them still remains with me. An aged negro was helping to remove the debris and wreckage and incidentally the dead bodies where the storm had been most severely felt, when coming to a pile of corpses he, in turning one of them over, recognized in the mutilated remains the body of his only son. The poor old fellow dropped down on his knees and began a prayer such as I’ve never heard before. It was not a long one, but for fervor and faith, albeit laden with agonized grief, it was as intense a petition for light out of darkness as ever fell from inspired lips. His supplication was for the whole city, his stricken neighbors.”⁹²⁴

This was an exceptionally long description of a non-white victim, and an extremely rare example of genuine sympathy for an African American survivor. But several elements of it also stand out; in particular this man was unnamed. If Shropshire actually witnessed the scene, and the man was part of a work crew, as was implied, his name should have been available to him. It was possible that Shropshire simply did not consider a Black man’s name significant. Or this may have been a story made up of elements of things he witnessed or felt he should have seen, gleaned from his observation of multiple surviving laborers. But Shropshire or the editor of the article may also have felt concern that by including identifying information for this victim, he might have been offered individual assistance or relief from outside the city.⁹²⁵ That would have threatened their system of control over labor during the recovery period.

⁹²⁴Shropshire was a doctor who went to Galveston to help with the injured. “HIS EXPERIENCE IN GALVESTON,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, September 22, 1900, 5.

⁹²⁵ This may have been a particular concern due to the national and international attention the disaster was receiving, and Southern fears of Northern threats to their racial order.

Shropshire also implied that recovering dead bodies was “incidental” rather than the primary goal of the clean-up. As a doctor, his word choice was surprising, suggesting that he believed getting the city cleaned up for business was more essential than recovering and disposing of the dead. Even if he did not personally feel any particular concern about survivors' need to know that lost family members had been given some sort of funeral rites, the possibility of an epidemic should have been uppermost in a doctor's mind.⁹²⁶ Authorities, particularly medical personnel, repeatedly emphasized to correspondents the possibility of an epidemic due to decaying bodies on the island and mainland.

But Shropshire’s primary focus was on this survivor's religious response. He described the man’s prayer as “not long”, then used phrases such as “agonized grief,” “fervor and faith,” “intense,” and “inspired.”⁹²⁷ The doctor appeared more moved by his religious expression than by his grief or shock in discovering his son’s body under such circumstances. He also emphasized that the man prayed for the city and his neighbors, rather than his son or himself. This element of his story supports the probability that this may have been a created story rather than a specific incident. He was telling a story as he thought it should have happened, a man turning to religious faith and unselfishly concerned more for his neighbors. Shropshire, or his editor, then failed to continue the story, which one would expect if he was moved by this particular individual's situation, leaving the man’s further response or fate unsaid. Had the man been expected to return to work immediately? Was any help offered to him?⁹²⁸

⁹²⁶ It was, in fact, a major theme in newspaper articles, with a persistent request for more disinfectants, particularly lime.

⁹²⁷ Correspondents after disasters also frequently emphasized Black religious expression as childlike or too emotional which Shropshire's choice of words reinforces. “HIS EXPERIENCE IN GALVESTON,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, September 22, 1900, 5.

⁹²⁸ Earlier in this article, Shropshire also presented a generic story in which an unnamed and emotionless child described his losses, strongly suggesting that he was creating idealized examples to make his points. “HIS EXPERIENCE IN GALVESTON,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, September 22, 1900, 5.

While some people were unquestionably coerced at gunpoint to help with the cleanup, we know from other sources that Black men were not nearly as unwilling to help with the work as the newspapers asserted. For instance, Bixel and Turner found evidence that more than half of the volunteers for one of the first cleanup crews were Black, and some surviving photographs showed mixed Black and white work crews.⁹²⁹ Yet this sketch (Figure 4) summed up the image of the cleanup effort projected by most newspaper stories:

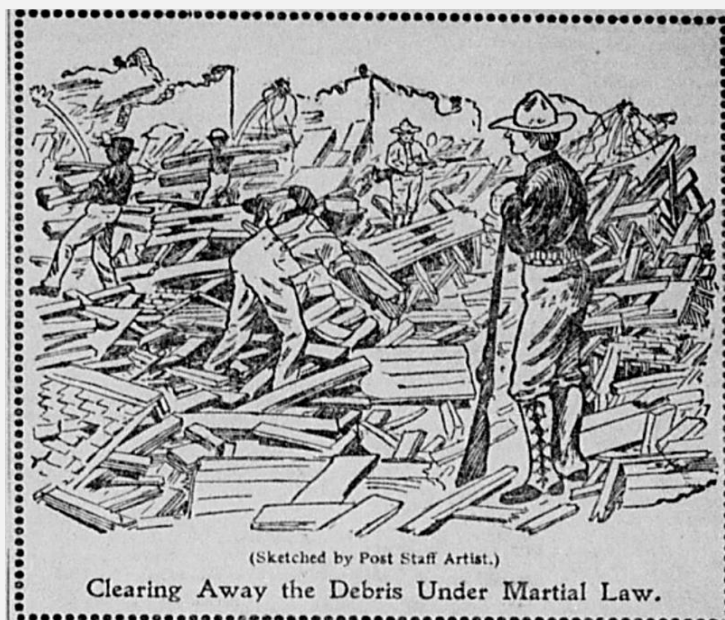


Figure 4. “Clearing Away the Debris Under Martial Law,” *Houston Daily Post*, September 14, 1900, 7, public domain. Source: Chronicling America archive, Library of Congress Web site, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>, accessed November 9, 2014.

Readers were shown three Black men at work removing debris, supervised by two white men in uniforms typical of 1900, one cradling his rifle in front of him as if prepared to shoot at any moment, the other leaning on his rifle. The sketch conveys the unspoken suggestion that the only thing keeping the three workers at their tasks was the open threat of violence.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁹They did not mention whether or not the photographs included state militia holding guns on the workers as did some sketches. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 78.

⁹³⁰The worker on the far left may be intended to appear barefooted. His pants would probably be tucked into boots if he was wearing them, but the drawing is not detailed enough to draw a firm conclusion. “Clearing Away the Debris Under Martial Law,” Sketch, *Houston Daily Post*, September 14, 1900, 7.

This issue of control surprisingly extended to barring outside laborers from coming to the island, ostensibly to avoid looting. It was not until September 16, over a week after the disaster, that the governor and the Galveston relief committee agreed to allow about 2000 outside laborers onto the island. The article asserted this was to allow citizens to clean up and repair their own property, with no mention of the actual working-class laborers who had performed most of the recovery and disposal work thus far.⁹³¹ Officials may have realized that they had pushed laborers to the limits of their physical and mental health.⁹³² They may also have wanted to free up some of the local workforce to work on private property, or they may have found that private employers were luring too many laborers away with better wages or working conditions.⁹³³

Newspaper reports for the Galveston hurricane significantly differed from other disasters because they rarely blamed the victims for their deaths or losses. Victims were, and are, commonly blamed for not evacuating or taking other precautions while authorities also claim that they were warned in most disasters.⁹³⁴ For example, Black farm workers were criticized in July 1899 for not evacuating despite supposed warnings.⁹³⁵ But when talking about large planters

⁹³¹ "SENDING OUT SUPPLIES," Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 1.

⁹³² This did appear in out-of-state newspaper articles. "Workers' Nerves Give Way," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

⁹³³ At this point, the relief committee had not yet made good on their promise to eventually pay for work.

⁹³⁴ This was especially the case for Black victims. There was relatively little blame directed to the Johnstown victims, for instance, especially compared to the Sea Islands. Jones found that, although the U.S. Weather Bureau sent a hurricane warning to Savannah, that warning was not sent to the Sea Islands or South Carolina coast. Yet newspapers reported that Black Sea Islanders died because they did not have "...enough sense left in them to desert their shanties and seek places of safety." Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 52–53.

⁹³⁵ Then they were criticized nine months later in April 1900 for evacuating on their own, based on word-of-mouth warnings. Obviously, nothing they could do could avoid criticism. See also Chapter Two. "THE FLOOD," Bryan *Morning Eagle*, July 2, 1899, 3; "TIMELY WARNING WAS GIVEN: BUT THE TENANTS IN THE BOTTOM DID NOT HEED IT," Houston *Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2; "THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE," Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2; "Negroes are Fleeing," Dallas *Morning News*, April 11, 1900, 2; "BRAZOS RIVER RAGING," Houston *Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 8.

and other white victims, newspapers excused those planters from any blame for their own losses. Overall, white victims were generally excused for ignoring warnings.⁹³⁶

Therefore, it was predictable that in September 1900, there was extraordinarily little victim blaming.⁹³⁷ Most articles sympathized with victims and survivors, and only a few articles asserted that people had been warned and should have gotten to safety. One such article quoted Isaac Cline who assured a correspondent that they had given verbal warnings to those who called by telephone or came by the office to inquire. Clearly he had not suggested the storm was expected to be unusually powerful, however, simply suggesting people on low ground “move to higher ground.”⁹³⁸ The working poor did not have access to telephones and most worked throughout the day on Saturday, indicating that any warnings they received were probably word-of-mouth. Such rumors may have been common and easily dismissed. While nothing in the warnings Cline received suggested that more substantial warnings were indicated, his statement was more a case of justifying himself than blaming victims.

Almost as predictably in light of the sensationalistic reporting, individuals and local communities throughout Texas and the United States rallied to send a prodigious amount of relief to Galveston, unlike most disasters. A more modest amount was sent to coastal communities who

⁹³⁶ “SITUATION AT HEMPSTEAD,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; and “SITUATION AT RICHMOND.” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 1.

⁹³⁷ An important caveat to this is something I discuss later in this section: class and race were used to exclude many people from being considered real victims. And while there was almost no criticism for having been caught in the path of the disaster, these “others,” especially Black victims, were criticized for their behavior during and after the disaster as discussed above.

⁹³⁸ Cline was probably trying to cover himself from blame, but he did not intentionally exaggerate his warnings either, unlike his superior in the Weather Service, Willis Moore, who lied about hurricane signals being flown rather than storm signals, among other things. Afterwards, Moore had Cline promoted to section director in New Orleans, a promotion that Cline came to view as a punishment. Cline apparently held a grudge. In 1913, he handed over damning evidence of Moore's misuse of bureau resources, providing grounds to fire Moore. “PEOPLE WERE WARNED,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 4; “BAROMETER GAVE WARNING,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2; and Larson, *Isaac's Storm*, 250–252, 267–269.

were also devastated.⁹³⁹ Doctors and nurses volunteered to go to Galveston and provide their services to the victims.⁹⁴⁰ The El Paso *Daily Herald* ran a request for undertakers, though given the rapid disposal of bodies due to epidemic fears, the role of those who responded may have been quite limited.⁹⁴¹ Local male volunteers generally focused on raising money and coordinating shipments while women volunteers collected or made clothing, household goods, and food.⁹⁴²

Local Texas communities contributed to the relief efforts in myriad ways, from food or clothing to collecting seeds, candles, medical supplies, and money.⁹⁴³ Some small communities

⁹³⁹ Many coastal communities were clearly bitter about the amount of relief they believed that Galvestonians were receiving. Though not stated explicitly, context suggested that they felt relief favored wealthy victims or Black working-class victims. Judging by some newspaper reports this may have been more perception than reality, especially if they were basing their ideas of the relief sent to Galveston on inflated newspaper reports. For instance, based on population and losses, the amount of the two main food staples, flour and bacon, were distributed fairly evenly by the governor. However, Galveston also directly received a number of train cars filled with supplies from out-of-state, and an exact analysis is probably impossible. Less important than whether or not Galveston received an unfair portion of supplies was whether these communities believed they had based on newspaper reports. "SENDING OUT SUPPLIES," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 1.

⁹⁴⁰ Though a few Texas doctors volunteered, most doctors and nurses arrived by relief trains arranged by newspapers in major United States' cities or through the ARC. By September 15, at least one newspaper asserted that no more doctors were needed. "HIS EXPERIENCE IN GALVESTON," *San Antonio Daily Express*, September 22, 1900; "GIVEN THE ROAD," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 2; Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 11, 1900, 1; Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 14, 1900, 1; Untitled article, *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 14, 1900, 1; "HEARST HELPING," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; "CONDITIONS IMPROVING," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 4; "COTTON EXCHANGE DONATIONS," *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2; and "PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND. SCURRY NEED CASH TO PAY LABORERS," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4.

⁹⁴¹ While most bodies were disposed of by sea burial and burning, some few that were identified were buried, such as Cora Cline whose body was not found until three weeks after the disaster, identified by a ring, and then was buried in Galveston's Lakeview Cemetery. Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 10, 1900, 1; and Larsen, *Isaac's Storm*, 257–258.

⁹⁴² "THE WORK OF RELIEF: Ladies of Brenham Will Send Food and Clothing," *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 13, 1900, 1; "RELIEF WORK," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; "RELIEF WORK AT WACO," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; "SULPHUR SPRINGS' OFFERING," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; and "GATESVILLE SENDS \$300," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

⁹⁴³ I found dozens, probably hundreds, of articles about small communities raising anywhere from a few dollars to thousands of dollars. Untitled article, *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 13, 1900, 1; "Helping the Sufferers," *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 14, 1900, 1; "Vegetable Seeds Needed," *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 18, 1900, 1; "RELIEF WORK," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; "WACO RESPONDS PROMPTLY," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; "Gives Money and Flour," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; "SHERMAN RAISES NEARLY \$3,000," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; "Paris Contributed \$1,500," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; and "COUNTRY TOWNS RAISE \$970," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3.

raised less than fifty dollars, while larger towns sometimes raised thousands of dollars in relief.⁹⁴⁴ Relief shipments frequently included more unusual items such as fodder for the surviving horses on Galveston, desperately needed for the cleanup efforts.⁹⁴⁵ At least one shipment included lemons and lemon syrup, possibly intended to prevent a dietary illness such as scurvy.⁹⁴⁶ I. N. Bettison borrowed a steam launch from Sam Crawford of Austin to ferry people from Galveston to the coast.⁹⁴⁷ Local Texas businesses sometimes contributed in creative ways. In Brenham, Texas, L. F. Grassmuck, pledged to donate ten percent of all sales at the Opera saloon for Friday and Saturday, September 15–16, to the relief efforts.⁹⁴⁸

Newspapers often focused on the role of businesses in disaster relief and reconstruction, particularly transportation and communication companies.⁹⁴⁹ Regional and national businesses frequently offered services rather than, or in addition to, cash or goods. For instance, in 1899, the Houston *Daily Post* informed readers that: “The Wells-Fargo Express company announces that it will carry all donations for the flood sufferers free of charge...This liberality is certainly

⁹⁴⁴ One of the smallest community contributions mentioned was Seagoville which raised forty dollars, while Sherman raised around three thousand dollars and Paris raised at least fifteen hundred. It is difficult to estimate how much the major cities raised because their amounts may have included contributions from small communities sent to a relief committee or newspaper and a great deal of food or other supplies from wholesalers or retailers. But Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Houston all raised relatively large amounts of relief. “COUNTRY TOWNS RAISE \$970,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; “SHERMAN RAISES NEARLY \$3,000,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; and “Paris Contributed \$1,500,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

⁹⁴⁵ Untitled article, El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 14, 1900, 1; “DISINFECTANTS NEEDED,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 4; “CONDITIONS IMPROVING,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 4.

⁹⁴⁶ In no other disaster did I find items like lemons or lemon syrup included in a list of supplies being shipped. If these were shipped for reasons of preventing illness, apparently those illnesses were not considered a concern for the victims of other disasters. That strongly suggests the perceived social and economic class of Galveston victims and survivors was the reason for the addition of these items. “DISINFECTANTS NEEDED,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 4.

⁹⁴⁷ The article says “...to engage in passenger service between Galveston and Houston,” suggesting he may have been selling passage to those who were not a high priority on the official relief ships and boats. Untitled article, Brenham *Daily Banner*, September 16, 1900, 1.

⁹⁴⁸ While it was on the first page, it almost appeared to be a paid advertisement, ending with “call and see us.” This was probably good publicity, especially considering the anti-drinking rhetoric in some articles about the disaster. “For Storm Sufferers,” Brenham *Daily Banner*, September 14, 1900, 1.

⁹⁴⁹ While some of these companies were interstate businesses, the primary support from transportation and communication companies was within Texas.

praiseworthy and commendable, and shows that in times of great disaster like the present there is at least one corporation that has a heart as well as a soul.”⁹⁵⁰ The company was mentioned by name, and the correspondent used this opportunity to praise the company. This was written near the height of public criticism of corporations, especially transportation companies. By offering this service, the company may have improved their public image.⁹⁵¹ Oddly enough, Wells-Fargo was not mentioned by Texas newspapers in 1900, possibly due to the number of railroad companies who were already offering free transportation of supplies. However, the *New York Times* reported that Wells, Fargo & Co. and American Express, among other companies, were transporting supplies addressed to Galveston relief committees for free.⁹⁵²

Railroad companies generally had even more involvement in rescue, relief, and recovery efforts. Newspaper relief cars were moved by railroads for free, enabled by interline cooperation and rewarded by extensive emphasis in articles on these relief efforts. Within the state, for instance, they reported that G. H. Turner, the general freight agent for the International & Great Northern Railroad (I&GN), published a notice to all agents that supplies for the Galveston Relief committee should be moved free of charge on their line.⁹⁵³ They were partly rewarded by sympathetic articles that reminded readers that natural disasters often badly damaged railroad tracks and depots as well as disrupting their normal service, cutting into profits. An I&GN executive, Mr. Trice, estimated total railroad losses at five to six million dollars, including the costs of temporary replacement bridges and then “...a permanent double track steel bridge, to be

⁹⁵⁰ “THE FLOOD SUFFERERS,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

⁹⁵¹ In a similar instance in 1899, the *San Antonio Daily Express* devoted an entire short article to a donation from a Galveston company, Clarke & Courts, of \$100 for flood relief. “\$100 FOR THE SUFFERERS,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 6, 1899, 2. Oddly enough, Wells-Fargo did not particularly receive mention in 1900.

⁹⁵² “COTTON EXCHANGE DONATIONS,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2.

⁹⁵³ He was the General Freight Agent for the C. W. & B. V. and the International & Great Northern railroads. I was unable to identify the first railway, though the B. V. probably stands for Brazos Valley because it was printed in the Bryan daily newspaper. “Free Service,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3.

used by all the railroads entering the city.”⁹⁵⁴ They may also have been worried about a temporary government takeover of some railroads during the disaster.⁹⁵⁵ The only railroad operating between Houston and the coast, the Galveston, Houston, and Henderson railroad, was actually placed under General McKibben's control as part of the martial law decree.⁹⁵⁶

Newspapers also emphasized the role of railroad companies in restoring telegraphic communications, still the primary means of transmitting information rapidly.⁹⁵⁷ The *New York Times* reassured readers that “...the railroads...will do all in their power to reopen communication, and their present plan seems to be to concentrate all forces on the work of reconstruction of one bridge.”⁹⁵⁸ The railroads brought in work crews from as far away as Arkansas to expedite the work.⁹⁵⁹ The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad not only moved personnel and supplies for free, they immediately donated \$5,000 to the relief fund. All of this was very good publicity for railroads in the face of Populist and even Progressive distrust of “trusts,” particularly railroads.⁹⁶⁰ By contrast, while newspapers reported sympathetically about

⁹⁵⁴ He was the vice president and general superintendent of the I. & G. N., and the correspondent reported his statement from Bryan, Texas. “TO BUILD BRIDGES QUICKLY,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1900, 2.

⁹⁵⁵ Many populists urged government control of railroads. Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 17, 146–150.

⁹⁵⁶ This measure controlled access to and from the island, prioritizing the movement of relief supplies and personnel to the coast and refugees from the coast, and blocking hundreds of people trying to reach relatives as well as newspaper correspondents. “MILITIA CONTROL,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 1; and “SAYERS OFFERED ASSISTANCE,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 6.

⁹⁵⁷ Trains were the primary means of moving the mail too, but restoring railroad access to the coast and Galveston would restore that service as well.

⁹⁵⁸ Just a day earlier, General Manager Van Vleck stated that the Southern Pacific had made no agreements on a joint project and planned to rebuild their own, though they would allow other railroads to use it. That same day, Galveston businessmen expressed concern about reconstruction plans by the railroads, particularly the Southern Pacific. Some of this confusion may have been due to the *Times* receiving articles from wire services without context, but the state of communications in the aftermath was probably a bigger factor. “A CONFLICT OF AUTHORITY,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1900, 1; “RUSHING RAILROAD REPAIRS,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2; and “PANIC-STRICKEN RECOVER. GALVESTON BEGINS TO RECOVER SLOWLY,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 1.

⁹⁵⁹ The scope of recovery, disposal, cleanup, and reconstruction and deaths of laborers for railroads to bring in outside labor or compete for a shrunken labor pool in order to move forward on repair work. While reports admired this, it also prevented local laborers from using the disaster to leverage better wages and conditions. “REMOVING THE DEBRIS ON GALVESTON BEACH,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1900, 1.

⁹⁶⁰ Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 17, 146–150.

the loss of ships and damages to shipping, very little was said about private shipping companies' role in relief efforts.⁹⁶¹

The telegraph companies offered the use of wires for relief committees. Western Union's vice president "...tendered free use of its wires to the governor of Texas, the mayors of Galveston and Houston and all relief committees for the transmission of messages in aid of sufferers...."⁹⁶² In order to reach Galveston itself, due to the lines being destroyed by the storm, they had to use a tug service.⁹⁶³ Newspapers also emphasized that they were only able to get the news about Galveston to print as quickly as they had due to railroads, telegraphs, and telephones. The Dallas *Morning News* described in detail the efforts they had made to get the news in time to print on Sunday morning once their own telegraph operator reported that all lines to South Texas, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin were down, finally resorting to contacting Vera Cruz which had had one of the last contacts from Galveston.⁹⁶⁴ They claimed "...a hundred trained and alert newspaper men..." were working with the telegraph, telephone and railroad companies.⁹⁶⁵

While there was less said about telegraphic economic losses as compared to railroads, at least one article asserted that sixty-seven out of seventy telegraph operators in Galveston died in the hurricane, which certainly impeded the restoration of communications.⁹⁶⁶ At the local level, a certain amount of support of this sort was relatively common from railroads and telegraph companies after disasters, but their almost-unlimited national support for the Galveston disaster

⁹⁶¹ Readers were reminded of shipping losses, but the role of Federal ships in relief received more emphasis. But the average person had far more interest in, and possibly antipathy toward, railroads because they were more obviously dependent on them for travel, news, mail, and supplies, and newspapers possibly saw propping up the public image of railroads as more urgent.

⁹⁶² "Free Use of Wires," Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 2.

⁹⁶³ Untitled article, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 2.

⁹⁶⁴ "HOW THE NEWS CAME," Dallas *Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 8.

⁹⁶⁵ This is probably exaggerated, but made for a more exciting report. "HOW THE NEWS CAME," Dallas *Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 8.

⁹⁶⁶ "Workers' Nerves Give Way," Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

was far more substantial, and newspaper articles such as this attempted to convince readers of the important role all of these were playing in the disaster.⁹⁶⁷ At the same time, railroads indirectly controlled the news itself over their telegraph lines, as well as the main means to move people and relief supplies, providing important leverage.

Fund-raising events for disaster relief encompassed a wide spectrum, many of which had class, racial, or religious overtones. They ranged from black-face performances of highly racialized plays and minstrel shows to classical musical performances by opera companies and symphonies.⁹⁶⁸ Similar to many common fund-raisers in 1900, the Houston Baptist church had put on a “musical and literary programme...for the benefit of the flood sufferers,” in 1899.⁹⁶⁹ The venue presented a distinctly religious overtone to the fundraiser which was probably related to this word choice in describing the program. This entertainment was supposed to be morally and culturally uplifting, a middle-class white expectation.⁹⁷⁰ For an upper-class audience with

⁹⁶⁷ Some telephone companies were involved in coordinating relief committee efforts. “MUCH HELP IS NEEDED,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, September 12, 1900, 7. The actual importance of newspapers in the collective memory of this disaster is covered in the last section of this chapter.

⁹⁶⁸ Charity performances in New York City alone included a matinee at the New York Grand Opera House, Weber & Fields, the Herald Square Theatre, the New York Theatre, The Union Square Theatre, and the Harlem Music Hall, as well as other vaudeville benefits. Other cities in which theaters gave benefit performances included Baltimore, Maryland, Providence, Rhode Island, Washington D. C., Savannah, Georgia, San Francisco, California, Seattle, Washington, Akron, Ohio, and Houston, Texas. “COTTON EXCHANGE DONATIONS,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2; “FUNDS IN OTHER CITIES,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1900, 2; “THEATRES AND MUSIC HALLS,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1900, 5; “RELIEF MEASURES HERE,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1900, 2; “AID FOR STORM VICTIMS,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1900, 2; Advertisement for Keith's, *New York Times*, September 16, 1900, 9; “Gave Aid Cheerfully,” *Providence News*, September 11, 1900, 1; “Generous Theatrical People,” *Evening Star* (Washington, DC,) September 12, 1900, 8; “OTHERWISE UNNOTICED,” *The Bee* (Earlington, KY), September 13, 1900, 6; “AID FOR STORM VICTIMS,” *The Times* (Washington, D. C.), September 13, 1900, 2; Untitled article, *Holly Chieftain* (Colorado,) September 14, 1900, 2; “GALVESTON SUFFERERS FUND BENEFIT AT THIRD AVENUE THEATER WEDNESDAY,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September, 15, 1900, 10; “BENEFIT CONCERT,” *Akron Daily Democrat*, September 15, 1900, 3; and “BENEFIT PERFORMANCE, *Houston Daily Post*, September 14, 1900, 7. An example of one performance which was probably racially or ethnically charged was one put on by “the young people of Prospect Hill,” a performance called the “Deestrick Skule of '49.” Untitled article, *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 11, 1899, 7.

⁹⁶⁹ “FOR THE SUFFERERS,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 6.

⁹⁷⁰ In many cities, Sunday performances, even for charity, was somewhat controversial. “Keith's Generous Plan,” *Providence News*, September 12, 1900, 1

different cultural expectations, a charity performance of “Faust” was given at the New York Metropolitan Theatre on Friday night, September 14.⁹⁷¹ Charity performances for the upper-class did not occur after most disasters. However, minstrel shows, a racist form of entertainment in which much of the comedy was based on negative stereotypes of Black Southerners, were relatively common.⁹⁷² Company G performed a benefit minstrel show at Beethoven Hall in San Antonio after the 1900 hurricane.⁹⁷³ The Elks of Texarkana put on their own minstrel show to raise funds for the survivors.⁹⁷⁴

Private fraternal organizations commonly organized fundraising for disasters and were widely reported in newspapers.⁹⁷⁵ Yet the Galveston disaster motivated them to far more extensive efforts on the local, regional, and even national level. Organizations reported to have collected money or other relief included the Masons, Knights of Pythias, Knights Templars, Odd Fellows, Y.M.C.A., Woodsmen of the World, Elks, Red Men, Order of the Eastern Star, Fraternal Order of Eagles, Daughters of the Confederacy, United Confederate Veterans, Woman's Relief Corps, and Grand Army of the Republic, as well as more generic mentions of fraternal organizations and “secret societies.”⁹⁷⁶ Several of these organizations made state or national

⁹⁷¹ “COTTON EXCHANGE DONATIONS,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2–3.

⁹⁷² These were popular with working and middle-class white audiences. McElya, *Clinging to Mammy*, 18, 38–39, 60, 64.

⁹⁷³ “Much Help is Needed,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, September 12, 1900, 7.

⁹⁷⁴ “TEXARKANA HAS RAISED \$3,000,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 17, 1900, 6.

⁹⁷⁵ Presumably, many of the correspondents were themselves members of these organizations. Many of the fraternal organizations raised money specifically for their own members.

⁹⁷⁶ The Civil War oriented organizations were all listed in connection with Waco, Texas. Untitled article, *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 11, 1900, 1; “Knights Templars' Appeal,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 4; “RELIEF WORK GOING FORWARD,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 13, 1900, 1; “RELIEF WORK,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; Untitled article, *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; “The Masons Act,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 3; “ODD FELLOWS TAKE ACTION,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; Untitled article, *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; “WACO RESPONDS PROMPTLY,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; “BAROMETER GAVE WARNING,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2; “ELKS AID GALVESTON,” *Savannah Morning News*, September 13, 1900, 10; and “DENISON RESPONDS GENEROUSLY,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

appeals to their members.⁹⁷⁷ Others, such as the Masons and the Odd Fellows, actively worked to assist their own members who had been victims, such as advertising that they were seeking houses to rent for them in the Bryan, Texas, area.⁹⁷⁸ Black fraternal organizations received little mention, though they were acknowledged to exist.⁹⁷⁹

Black fundraising was barely reported in the white press, often only in generalized and condescending terms. Where the Dallas *Morning News* descriptions for fundraising of fraternal organizations were specific, including the amounts donated and future plans, the same article simply reported that “there was a big meeting of negroes here tonight and they decided to issue an appeal to their race for assistance for Galveston.”⁹⁸⁰ Their participation in relief efforts in Bryan received hardly more notice, simply “the colored people held a meeting at the courthouse last night and took steps for the relief of the people of their race in Galveston.”⁹⁸¹ While the reader was given slightly more information in this case, this brief report also emphasized that they were working exclusively to raise funds for Black victims. Even the detail that they met at

⁹⁷⁷ “SECRET ORDERS WILL HELP,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2; and “PYTHIANS TO CARE FOR ORDER,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 14, 1900, 2.

⁹⁷⁸ “The Masons Act,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 3; “Three Houses Wanted,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 3; “To Come For the Sufferers,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 2; “Three Houses Wanted,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 3; “VETERANS ASKED TO HELP,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; and “ODD FELLOWS TAKE ACTION,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3.

⁹⁷⁹ One such group was mentioned in 1899, the “Independent American Knights of Liberty,” who were involved in fundraising for the Brazos river flood victims. The article simply described them as a charitable organization that first became active in Texas in 1897, but had 60 lodges and about 1,500 members. The state officers were Eva McIntosh and R. W. Wallace. Untitled article, San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 11, 1899, 7. Material on labor union fund-raisers was cut in the interests of length.

⁹⁸⁰ “BAROMETER GAVE WARNING,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 2. However, to do the newspaper justice, there was a more detailed article printed later in that edition that identified the leaders of the Black relief efforts as well as an itemized list of contributions. Untitled article, Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

⁹⁸¹ The next day they printed a more substantial report, including names and amounts raised. Untitled article, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 3; and Untitled article, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 2.

the courthouse may have been to reassure readers that this was a non-threatening assembly, possibly under white supervision.⁹⁸²

On occasion, newspapers gave more details on Black efforts for similar reasons. The Bryan *Morning Eagle* reported that “D. B. Stovall, pastor of the A. M. E. church here yesterday reported that he had collected and had ready for shipment 150 articles of clothing for distribution among the colored storm sufferers of Galveston.”⁹⁸³ While this brief report named the church leader and church, the emphasis seemed to be to reassure readers that clothing from Black donors would only go to Black survivors of the hurricane.

However, sometimes a newspaper reported on Black relief work in the same detail as those for white relief efforts. An article in the next Bryan *Morning Eagle* expanded on what happened at that meeting at the courthouse, identifying R. B. Goosby and M. V. Burgess as those in charge of their relief efforts and mentioning a Willow Springs Lodge No. 48.⁹⁸⁴ The newspaper may have run the first report without enough time to find out what happened at the meeting and then added more, or someone may have noticed and politely submitted the information in such a manner the newspaper felt obligated to run the story. But the amount of these donations that they reported was small enough, sixteen dollars plus supplies, that there was an element of condescension.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁸² Typically reporting on Black fundraising was a simple mention that a city's Black residents appealed for contributions, such as in Houston. “RELIEF WORK,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3.

⁹⁸³ This was the entire report printed in the newspaper. Untitled article, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 3.

⁹⁸⁴ I was unable to identify more information about the Willow Springs fraternal organization. Untitled article, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 2.

⁹⁸⁵ The total amount of cash was either sixteen dollars or twenty-one dollars. It was unclear whether or not a five-dollar contribution from the Willow Springs Lodge was included in the total. Untitled article, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 2. A similar report ran in Dallas on the same day as the generalized article mentioned earlier. Untitled article, Dallas *Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

Progressive ideas about class, race, and gender had a major influence on relief for disaster victims during this period, especially in Texas. The rising Progressive theory guiding relief was “scientific charity,” based on the idea that the moral character of white middle-class victims was strong enough that they would not be corrupted by direct relief, but the working-class poor and non-white victims could not be given direct relief because they were inherently lazy and morally suspect, otherwise they would not be poor.⁹⁸⁶ Combined with the fear that landowners and other employers could not count on the poor to accept work at the wages offered without the threat of starvation, led them to institute coercive work relief instead of direct relief.⁹⁸⁷

Governmental Response

Progressives, normally quick to turn to the government to deal with many problems, were often adverse to governmental involvement in relief, justifying that contradiction by claiming that it was less efficient than private relief.⁹⁸⁸ In almost all disasters before the end of World War I, Texas local and state authorities resisted direct Federal assistance, including the ARC.⁹⁸⁹ In fact, they frequently refused all outside offers of provisions or money, and spread Southern propaganda about the ARC. After the Sea Islands hurricane in 1893, white South Carolinians

⁹⁸⁶ Jones defines “scientific charity” as the idea that “the poor were a morally suspect class that would refuse to work, becoming 'idle paupers,' if given too much for free.” Instead, they promoted work relief. This was even more the case if the victims were in the South and Black. Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 55–56.

⁹⁸⁷ Certainly this was an improvement over earlier work houses, indentureships, and debtor prisons, but it was a theory that also clearly benefited those promoting it by controlling the work force during a period of worker radicalization.

⁹⁸⁸ As discussed above, businessmen wanted to control who received relief and how much, and governmental relief programs took control out of their hands.

⁹⁸⁹ The reasoning for this was complex, including post-Civil War resentment and distrust of the Federal government in the South or any outside interference in local control of health and other issues. But a great deal of their resentment and distrust was grounded in the desire to control Black labor and to protect the racial hierarchy in the South. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 1992, 3–7, 10–16.

claimed that the ARC put Black Sea Island victims over white mainland victims and asserted that they had humiliated white victims by requiring them to ask Black relief committees for help.⁹⁹⁰ In reality the state's governor had specifically asked the ARC to help the Sea Islanders, though he waited several weeks before making that request. When Barton was made aware of the mainland victims, she was unable to get the state government to respond to them, so she stretched already extremely limited resources to try to help them as well. Ironically, the tiny amount of aid she was able to offer them, without the work requirements imposed on the Sea Islanders, simply contributed to white Southern resentment and belief that this mostly Northern organization would favor Black victims over white.⁹⁹¹

This distortion of the situation gained widespread credibility in the South and was probably one reason that their assistance was almost always rejected by Texas before 1919. Some newspapers in 1900 still implied that outside involvement resulted in white middle-class humiliation. A correspondent to the Bryan *Morning Eagle* about a week after the disaster claimed that “in line before the relief stations today I saw women of evident refinement. They were jammed in between negroes and the lowest classes of whites. It must have been a terrible struggle for them to accept succor in such a guise....”⁹⁹² This particular correspondent hammered on the perceived unique suffering of these white women throughout a long article. They added that “...there was no alternative before them. They had to get in line or starve.”⁹⁹³ They appealed

⁹⁹⁰ Despite unequal treatment and disrespect for Black Sea Island victims and perceptions by white Southerners that Black victims were being favored, the ARC did make the attempt, and in early relief work “acted more humanely and equitably than did other organs of private charity or government bodies.” Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 53–56, 59–60.

⁹⁹¹ The Sea Islands, primarily Beaufort County, was ninety-two percent Black. When the mainland victims came to her attention, Barton had so few resources already to care for tens of thousands of homeless Sea Islanders that she asked the governor to help them. The state refused to act, and Barton tried to stretch her resources even further to help up to thirty-four thousand mainlanders. Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 53, 60–61.

⁹⁹² “PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4.

⁹⁹³ “PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4.

to the sensibilities of other women of their class and race to empathize by describing indications of their feelings, “I saw them, now and then, wipe furtively tears from their eyes, and noticed their hands clutching convulsively....”⁹⁹⁴ The correspondent consistently chose emotional language that emphasized perceived differences in race, class, and gender, clearly critical of a system that exposed this particular group of women to the hardships of other people.

This story exemplified one of two major fears in accepting outside relief: that it would threaten established social hierarchies of race, gender, and class.⁹⁹⁵ State and local leaders were also afraid that direct relief might weaken both short-term and long-term control over their local workforce.⁹⁹⁶ The Federal government might ask state and local governments to account for their unequal distribution of Federal relief. If that happened, they could not control who received relief and how much.⁹⁹⁷ In particular, they wanted to limit the amount of relief to ensure that the work force would barely survive, desperate for work. Direct relief might also allow “their” work force to migrate by providing destitute farm workers with enough food and money to survive a trip to find a job elsewhere.⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹⁴ They also made the point that these women were only willing to humiliate themselves because they had hungry babies at home, emphasizing their maternal qualities. Babies were not mentioned in connection to working-class mothers. “PEOPLE LEAVING STRICKEN ISLAND,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 4.

⁹⁹⁵ It is possible that they were afraid that more equal treatment during a disaster at the hands of outside relief agencies would lead to agitation by working-class and Black residents. This was a period of time in which conservatives were particularly worried by growing labor radicalism in the North.

⁹⁹⁶ See previous section for more detailed analysis. Virtually no one suggested the state bear the entire cost of relief and recovery in September 1900 when there was the perception of a large number of middle-class white victims. Instead, newspapers actively encouraged outside donations and publicly thanked those donors.

⁹⁹⁷ Even the few public programs that existed later in the South were often run as a form of patronage, with the bulk of funding going toward communities that strongly supported the politicians who controlled the funds. Black Southerners were either perceived as irrelevant because they had been disenfranchised or likely to vote against those politicians. Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 2005; and Wesley G. Phelps, *A People's War on Poverty: Urban Politics and Grassroots Activists in Houston* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 92–93, 118, 120–121, 137–138, 142–142, 150–151.

⁹⁹⁸ This was the period when the Great Migration, the movement of agricultural workers toward the urban north and west, was just beginning. This migration was partly enabled by rapidly expanding railroad connections that made escape more possible, and iron control over the Southern workforce was beginning to deteriorate. In turn, this migration of white and Black agricultural workers out of the South created a pull for Mexican American and Mexican workers who began moving beyond the border region in larger numbers. In larger scale situations

In Texas as in most of the South, cotton was the primary reason to keep and control a large work force. Cotton production through the 1940s was particularly dependent on intensive hand labor and a lot of “hands.” By 1899, migration of farm workers had become a significant concern for some landowners.⁹⁹⁹ For Black Texans, lynching, legal segregation, and other Jim Crow laws that dis-empowered them were also on the rise as were pseudo-scientific eugenics theories about race, creating pressure to emigrate.¹⁰⁰⁰ Black emigration from Texas created white fears that they would lose control of this vital workforce, possibly the main source of resistance to outside charity.

Texans sometimes resisted even the perception of outside interference. During the 1899 Brazos river flooding, Representative Wheless of Galveston sent a critical telegram to Governor Sayers to insist that the state could handle relief for disaster victims without any Federal help.¹⁰⁰¹ Sayers defended himself by stating he had:

“simply borrowed rations from the war department because he could obtain them there immediately, of the best quality and at the lowest market price. All rations thus obtained will be paid for by the State, the understanding being that at its next session the legislature will be called upon by him to make an appropriation to foot the bill. The governor has no intention of asking for external assistance from any source.”¹⁰⁰²

where relief camps were established, there were incidents where some of those in camps were forced to work, including threats with weapons. See Barry, *Rising Tide*, 277–278, 286–7; Foley, *The White Scourge*, 178–180; Lester, *On Flood and Photo Ops*, 172–176; Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis*, 90–94, 103–105; Sitton and Conrad, *Freedom Colonies*, 172–175; Susan Scott Parrish, *The Flood Year 1927: A Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 112–118; Greene and Kelly, *Through a Night of Horrors*, 83, 85; Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 174–180; Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 54–60.

⁹⁹⁹ Additionally, some Black cotton pickers were resisting their extremely low pay and other working conditions, even organizing at least one strike. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 176.

¹⁰⁰⁰ This theory overlapped with “scientific charity” and similar Progressive ideas.

¹⁰⁰¹ He proposed the governor borrow money from banks to buy supplies privately and rely on the legislature to appropriate the money in its next regular session. Wheless may have been motivated by the interests of grocery suppliers. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 1.

¹⁰⁰² There is irony, of course, in Galveston's congressman making such an accusation barely a year before the Galveston hurricane. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 1.

Both Wheless's demand and Sayers' response were consistent with an effort to control and limit the amount of relief reaching the poor in 1899, mostly African American farm laborers, as well as with general state resistance to Federal involvement in internal state affairs.¹⁰⁰³

Governor Sayers was forced to defend himself more than once from charges he had accepted Federal aid simply by "borrowing" rations from the War Department for relief efforts in 1899.¹⁰⁰⁴ The accusations of Federal interference were strongest in 1899 than any other disaster during this time frame. This was also the only disaster in which the demographics of the victims were so heavily African American.¹⁰⁰⁵ While criticism of Sayers was primarily filtered through white correspondents and may or may not have represented the popular opinion, power in Texas rested primarily with a vocal group of prominent white men who opposed Federal involvement.

Distrust of outside interference even extended to the direct involvement of the state legislature. Sayers consistently refused pressure to call special sessions of the state legislature to address the needs of disaster victims. The Hon. N. G. Kittrell sent a telegram to Sayers in 1899, stating that "Conditions in the flooded district seem to demand State aid. I will gladly respond to call for extra session and claim no mileage and believe other members will do the same. A very brief session will suffice and without mileage the cost will be nominal."¹⁰⁰⁶ Kittrell clearly believed that the funding for a special session was the sticking point for Sayers.¹⁰⁰⁷ This was consistent with a major theme about charity, efficient frugality, but Sayers may have had an additional objection to calling a special session of the state legislature. The state constitution did not give him the power to dictate which bills legislators would consider once they were called

¹⁰⁰³ Memories of reconstruction and Federal occupation were also probably an important factor in this resistance.

¹⁰⁰⁴ "RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS," *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 1. For information on Secretary of War Alger's orders, see: "ALGER INTERVIEWED," *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 4.

¹⁰⁰⁵ The 1913 Great Flood also had a large number of Black rural victims, but the proportion of non-Black victims appeared considerably higher.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 3.

¹⁰⁰⁷ The use of "Hon." as an honorific for Kittrell suggested he was or had been a judge.

into special session, so they might have used the opportunity to consider other legislation. Sayers preferred to simply make an agreement to repay the United States Army for rations and hand the bill to the next session of the legislature, keeping control in his hands.¹⁰⁰⁸

Even in September 1900, Sayers preferred to avoid direct involvement by the legislature. On September 11, he publicly refused to call a special session of the legislature, insisting “the wants of the unfortunates will be amply supplied through the spontaneous generosity of the people of Texas and other parts of the country.”¹⁰⁰⁹ The calls for a special session expanded to include state senators and judges.¹⁰¹⁰ However, Sayers continued to resist.¹⁰¹¹ Instead he sent telegrams to mayors in Bryan, El Paso, Dallas, and other cities, asking them “for aid in the relief work at Galveston.”¹⁰¹² One article explicitly stated that Sayers and Houston's Mayor Brashear had sent messages “notifying the citizens of Waco that relief would be acceptable...,” implying that Waco or other cities would not or should not offer relief aid without such a request.¹⁰¹³

Sayers was not as reluctant to involve the executive branch in disaster response, however.¹⁰¹⁴ He encouraged donations to all be sent directly to him so he could control their disbursement, and saving donations that exceeded the amount he judged the victims to need for

¹⁰⁰⁸ The material on 1899 is necessary to support the assertion that government involvement was a fraught topic by comparison with 1900.

¹⁰⁰⁹ “CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AUSTIN,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4. His resistance despite calls from a number of state legislators was noticed out of state. “EXPECTS \$3,000,000 THIS WEEK,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 3.

¹⁰¹⁰ “Favors State Aid,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; and “THINKS STATE SHOULD HELP,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3.

¹⁰¹¹ “Special sessions and years,” Legislative Reference Library of Texas, <https://www.lrl.texas.gov/sessions/specialSessions/specialsessionYears.cfm>, accessed October 26, 2022.

¹⁰¹² Untitled article, *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3.

¹⁰¹³ Untitled article, *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; “WACO RESPONDS PROMPTLY,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3, and “EL PASO RELIEF MOVEMENT,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 10, 1900, 5.

¹⁰¹⁴ Joseph D. Sayers was a Democrat who won the 1898 governor's election by claiming support for free silver and the railroad commission which appealed to former Hogg Populists, but also was strongly outspoken in favor of “business recovery by individual effort as opposed to government action,” which appealed to those who supported the gold standard. Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 211–214.

the future.¹⁰¹⁵ He thus ensured that victims received just enough money to avoid starvation in the short-term, keeping them firmly under the control of local employers. He did not disburse all of the donations received for the mostly Black flood victims in 1899, using at least \$3,600 from 1899 for the mostly white Galvestonian victims.¹⁰¹⁶

Not every Texan was opposed to outside relief. In 1899, T. S. Garner,¹⁰¹⁷ a correspondent from Monaville, Texas, declared that “the government has aided the people in other places under similar circumstances, and if there was ever a time that the government (ought) to be generous it is to these people of the Brazos and other rivers in Texas.”¹⁰¹⁸ He did not specify whether he meant state government, which could still have been considered internal assistance, or the federal government, which would have been outside assistance. However, he mentioned seeds for replanting which almost certainly referred to the federal government because seed was provided by the agricultural branch of the federal government, according to other articles.¹⁰¹⁹ Garner’s appeal was atypical of most published attitudes, however, and seemed to stem from resistance from white residents to assume complete financial responsibility for Black victims.

Public leaders sometimes reversed themselves on outside help as disasters and relief continued. On July 5, 1899, a correspondent from Calvert, Texas had denied that they needed any

¹⁰¹⁵ “LOSSES AT GALVESTON,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 19, 1900, 1.

¹⁰¹⁶ This was not the only case of funds raised for non-white victims of one disaster to be redirected to the white victims of this disaster. The Kansas City *Star*,” had raised \$14,000 for Cuban reconcentrados, but still had over \$2,000 left in 1900 which was offered to Galveston. “GOVERNOR ACTS PROMPTLY,” Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4. And Kansas redirected \$500 from the Indian Famine Relief committee to Galveston. “Kansas Has Money Ready,” Chicago Daily Tribune, September 12, 1900, 3. Sayers had already used some of the “excess” in April 1900 after the Austin dam failure. “Homes Inundated; Many Lives Lost,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, April 10, 1900, 3.

¹⁰¹⁷ The surname is blurred in the article. This was the closest I could get. Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

¹⁰¹⁸ Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

¹⁰¹⁹ In one instance, the Agricultural Department sent seeds for the 1899 Brazos river flood victims, distributed through local post offices. As most Black communities did not have a post office, this allowed white postmasters to control who received seeds and how much. “SEED FOR TEXAS,” San Antonio *Daily Express*, July 14, 1899, 1.

outside relief, quoting the mayor, C. S. Meredith as refusing all assistance.¹⁰²⁰ Then a couple of days later Mayor Meredith uncharacteristically replied to Governor Sayer's offer of assistance because of "...the number of destitute in this county...at 5000, mostly negroes. Merchants of this city and planters have been feeding them; your proffered offer of assistance badly needed and gratefully accepted."¹⁰²¹ The significant factors here were the sheer numbers of people needing relief and their race. Again, the city seemed overwhelmed by what would be required to assume complete responsibility, and because of the sheer numbers, the county residents may have feared violence if the large number of victims became too hungry.¹⁰²² In fact, the existence of conflicting statements about needs in this community suggested that a large portion of the community was opposed to seeking outside help, but were overruled by those who did not want to pay for all of the relief themselves.

But the Galveston hurricane was a broad exception to resistance to outside relief no matter the hardships or consequences for victims. State and local authorities actively solicited outside relief and assistance, overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster and unwilling to subject white survivors to hardships.¹⁰²³ The focus of the newspaper articles about the survivors and the wording of the appeals for help make it clear that this exception was due to the large number of middle-or-upper-class white survivors. In particular, the fear that genteel white women were

¹⁰²⁰ "SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED," *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

¹⁰²¹ The governor provided \$2000 to purchase supplies for 5000 refugees, an amount which would not have adequately fed that many people for more than two or three days. The governor's miserliness with funds that had been donated during this 1899 flooding is significant to the Galveston disaster because he still had money left from the 1899 disaster when the Galveston hurricane struck in September 1900, despite having used some of the money for a flood in April 1900 that primarily had white victims. "5000 REFUGEES AT CALVERT," *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

¹⁰²² See chapter on race and ethnicity for analysis of a connection between white fears of African American violence with food relief. Eventually, Hempstead, Texas, also requested in-state donations of supplies due to the sheer numbers of specifically African American refugees in 1899. "HEMPSTEAD ASKS AID," *Houston Daily Post*, July 8, 1899, 3.

¹⁰²³ There was no implied criticism in out-of-state newspapers either, simply support for fundraising. "STORM SUFFERERS WILL BE RELIEVED," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 7.

being exposed to hardships was an important motivating factor. Galveston's situation as an island physically cut off from the mainland because the bridges were destroyed meant that these middle-class survivors were forced to endure some hardships in the aftermath of the hurricane, at least until arrangements could be made to evacuate some of them.

The most notable outside assistance was that of the ARC in relief efforts.¹⁰²⁴ Even with the scale of the disaster, Sayers hesitated before accepting the offer of help from Barton for several days.¹⁰²⁵ Despite some implied criticism, their participation has since been memorialized by Galvestonians, including Texas State Historical Marker on the beach.¹⁰²⁶ Clara Barton brought eight members of the ARC with her who took over efficiently administering most of the direct relief, while Barton served on the Central Relief Committee (CRC), made up of prominent men.¹⁰²⁷

This committee not only accepted appeals for outside assistance, they solicited that assistance through appeals and reports published in newspapers, which the ARC coordinated with their own fundraising.¹⁰²⁸ Almost the first communication from the CRC was a message to the president, governors, and mayors nationally, characterizing the population as threatened "...by starvation and disease....," and begging them to "send funds and supplies to John Sealy...."¹⁰²⁹ The *Atlanta Constitution* published another telegram to President McKinley from

¹⁰²⁴ As mentioned previously, the organization has a Federal charter and a quasi-official position in relationship to the U.S. Government, providing annual reports from Congress and has at times managed Federal funds. Irwin, *Making the World Safe*.

¹⁰²⁵ The role of the Red Cross in disasters was examined in more detail in the chapter on the 1921 San Antonio flood. "SAYERS OFFERED HELP," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 6.

¹⁰²⁶ "American Red Cross, Galveston County Chapter," Historical Marker #9921, Seawall Boulevard, Galveston, Texas, Texas State Historical Commission.

¹⁰²⁷ The only other woman closely associated with the CRC was the stenographer. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 47, 62–65.

¹⁰²⁸ Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 47–48, 62–65. See Chapter Four for a more in-depth analysis of the ARC's role in disasters.

¹⁰²⁹ This seems to have been sent by telegram. "PLAIN STORY OF THE STORM," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 2; and "APPEAL FROM GALVESTON," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4. Other appeals were made directly by Galveston's mayor, Walter J. Jones. "MAYOR OF GALVESTON SAYS

Richard Spillane on behalf of the committee, stating that they needed “food, clothing and money...” at once.¹⁰³⁰ A day or two later, the committee stated that “cities further away can serve us best by sending money,” again asking contributions be sent to Sealy.¹⁰³¹ The telegrams showed no reluctance to ask for help from the Federal government.

McKinley responded, not to Spillane, but to Sayers, with telegraphed offers of Federal help and immediately ordering the secretary of war to prepare to supply tents and rations “upon your request.”¹⁰³² When Sayers made the request, General McKibbin, who commanded the Department of Texas for the United States Army, provided at least fifty thousand rations and at least a thousand tents.¹⁰³³ The Adjutant General, Henry C. Corbin, telegraphed Sayers, offering

5,000 ARE DEAD,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 12, 1900, 1. Estimates of destitute survivors ranged up to 25,000. “GRATEFUL TO CONTRIBUTORS,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

¹⁰³⁰ “THE PRESIDENT IS NOTIFIED,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1900, 4.

¹⁰³¹ The messages from Galveston generally bypassed the governor and asked that money and supplies be sent directly to them. This suggested that there may have been a struggle between local and state control of relief, or they may have felt that the situation was too urgent to wait for everything to go to Austin and then to Galveston. However, this pattern probably reduced the amount of funds going to coastal communities that had also been devastated, adding to resentment for Galveston's treatment. “MONEY AND NOT SUPPLIES SHOULD BE SENT THEM,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1900, 1.

¹⁰³² Presumably, he bypassed Galveston's committee for procedural rules as a state's governor generally must be involved in such a request. This obviously gives a state's governor a great deal of control on whether, and how much, relief that disaster victims receive. Interestingly, this ran more often in out-of-state newspapers than those in state. “THE PRESIDENT IS NOTIFIED,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1900, 1; “President Sends Sympathy,” *Adams County News*, September 12, 1900, 1; “WASHINGTON OFFICIALS ACT,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; “WORK OF RELIEF,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4. Many of the same officials and leaders during the 1900 hurricane had also been prominent in relief during the 1899 flooding. For instance, Adjutant General Scurry was given authority over distributing rations to flood victims in 1899 that Governor Sayers “borrowed” from the Federal government, and Scurry was placed in command of the state militia sent to Galveston in September 1900. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 59.

¹⁰³³ Thirty thousand additional rations were planned according to one of McKibbin's staff officers, Lieutenant Ferguson, but it was unclear if they were later shipped or not. Based on vague statements about commissary supplies sent from St. Louis, they were probably shipped. Some later rations may have been shipped from outside the state in order to meet the need. Fifty thousand rations may have been paid for by Helen Gould. “M'KIBBEN'S REPORT,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 2; “President Sends Sympathy,” *Adams County News*, September 12, 1900, 1; “RELIEF WORK,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; “SENDING OUT SUPPLIES,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 16, 1900, 1; “WASHINGTON OFFICIALS ACT,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3; “WORK OF RELIEF,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; “THE ORDER IS ISSUED,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; “RELIEF TRAINS START,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 1; “RELIEF TRAINS FROM ST. LOUIS,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; and “TENTS AND RATIONS SHIPPED,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3. According to one article, Sayers request 10,000 tents, and according to another, it was 6,000. “SAYERS ASKING FOR TENTS,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1900, 1; “Orders 50,000 Army Rations to Be Forwarded to the Galveston Flood Sufferers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 12, 1900, 3; and

any assistance that the law allowed.¹⁰³⁴ A gunboat, the *Bancroft*, and a tug, *Sebago*, were sent from New London to assist in the recovery.¹⁰³⁵ The acting secretary of the treasury dispatched revenue cutters from Norfolk and Wilmington to help supply the victims.¹⁰³⁶ Acting Secretary of War Meiklejohn ordered supplies sent from St. Louis by special train.¹⁰³⁷

Not all of the Federal government's commitments to the area were beneficial to Galveston in the long run, however. While the United States Army Corps of Engineers quickly committed to helping repair bridges and the water front, they also committed to completing the Buffalo Bayou shipping channel at a cost of four million dollars, a project that would result in most commercial shipping moving from the port at Galveston to Houston.¹⁰³⁸ While newspapers were enthusiastic about this project, they generally were careful not to point out the consequences for Galveston that convenient access to a port less vulnerable to hurricanes would present. Galveston's position had been slipping even before the hurricane; the combination of the

"TAKE STEPS FOR PROMPT RELIEF," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1900, 3. NOTE: Newspapers spelled McKibbin's name at least three different ways. McKibbin was the most common.

¹⁰³⁴ Major General Henry C. Corbin, "Still Willing to Help," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 4; and James E. Hewes, Jr., *From Root to McNamara Army Organization and Administration*, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1975), Appendix B, accessed <https://www.history.army.mil/books/root/appB.htm>.

¹⁰³⁵ The tug was to be used as a transport between the island and mainland. "Government Sending Ships," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 3; and "Movements of Naval Vessels," *New York Times*, September 15, 1900, 12. The War Department also allowed a government transport, the *McPherson*, to be used by the relief committee of the Merchants' Association to transport supplies to Galveston. "RELIEF FUND GROWS FAST," *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 3; and "TRANSPORT TO CARRY SUPPLIES," *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2.

¹⁰³⁶ Acting Secretary Spalding. "WASHINGTON OFFICIALS ACT," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3. Treasury ships, mostly revenue cutters, assisting with relief included the *Winona*, *Algonquin*, *Onondaga*, *Galveston*, and *Mangrove*. "GOVERNMENT RELIEF VESSELS," *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 3; and "REVENUE CUTTER GALVESTON SAFE," *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 3.

¹⁰³⁷ The article simply identified the supplies as coming from the quartermaster and commissary, indicating food, but possibly other supplies as well. "RELIEF TRAINS FROM ST. LOUIS," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; and "MEIKLEJOHN, George de Rue," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/M000634>.

¹⁰³⁸ Money had previously been appropriated by the Federal government for jetties and revetments, around \$6,000,000, which they reaffirmed. "GOVERNMENT TO REBUILD," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 2; and "Military Reservation on Gulf," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1900, 3.

hurricane, the shipping channel, and the oil processing boom set off in Houston and Beaumont by the Spindletop gusher in 1901 simply accelerated that process.¹⁰³⁹

Sayers' concern with controlling the funds became at least a minor issue. Complaints began to mount in newspapers that he refused to release an itemized list of donations, largely because the total amount he claimed to have received was significantly different from the total donors reported sending to him. On September 15, the Bryan *Morning Eagle* reported that the donations were over one million dollars and expected to reach one-and-a-half million shortly.¹⁰⁴⁰ The next day, they reiterated the estimate of one-and-a-half million dollars raised, but added that Sayers had not yet published an itemized list of contributions. Two days later, Sayers rebutted these articles, stating that “reports sent out...that \$800,000 or \$900,000 has already been paid in, are absolutely false and made without authority and calculated to do great harm to the needy sufferers on our coast. No such sum of money has been received or anything approaching it.”¹⁰⁴¹ The next day, the newspaper noted that Sayers had “not yet given a statement of money received by him for the storm sufferers,” then asserted that it should be between 900,000 and 1.2 million.¹⁰⁴² While Sayers tried to deflect attention by implying that high estimates might reduce continuing donations, newspapers kept the lack of transparency on how much money he received and what was done with it in the public eye.¹⁰⁴³

¹⁰³⁹ This shift was not immediate. The Buffalo Bayou shipping channel was not complete until 1914. As late as 1912, Galveston was still second only to New York City in imports and exports, ahead of New Orleans and Houston. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 130, 136–137; and “GALVESTON STRANGELY BUILT,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 9, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁴⁰ In fact, a second article in that same newspaper stated that the donations had already reached 1.5 million dollars. “One Million Dollars Raised,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 1; and “The Fund Growing,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 3. As early as September 11, 1900, though, the governor had stated he would release the amount he had received by the next day, which he clearly did not do. “SAYERS OFFERED ASSISTANCE,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1900, 6.

¹⁰⁴¹ “NO SUCH AMOUNT,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 18, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁴² “Money for Storm Sufferers,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 19, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁴³ While an *Atlanta Constitution* headline stated that Sayers estimated that the total would reach 1.3 million, the article itself did not actually attribute that statement to Sayers himself. While Sayers won reelection that year, he

While Governor Sayers refused to call a special session of the legislature to consider state assistance in the disaster, which mostly limited the state's role to receiving, prioritizing, and controlling the disbursement of contributions, other governors were less reticent. Governors of Colorado, Ohio, Kentucky, New York, and Pennsylvania contacted Sayers with offers of help almost immediately.¹⁰⁴⁴ City and town governments were also active in relief efforts, whether through direct appropriations or organizing a committee to raise donations. The Louisville, Kentucky, city council sent \$10,000 for Galveston's relief, a notably large amount matched a few days later by New York City's Tammany Hall.¹⁰⁴⁵ Charleston, South Carolina's city council appropriated \$1,000. Atlanta's city council appropriated \$2,500, then began collecting private donations, enthusiastically supported by Atlanta businessmen.¹⁰⁴⁶ Like Atlanta, those that appropriated city funds also usually set up a fundraising committee of some sort, however most cities limited themselves to relief committees to solicit contributions. This was the only Texas disaster which received this level of national attention and fundraising.

A few people questioned the legality of using city funds for charitable purposes outside the city in which they were raised. For instance, Fort Worth's city council debated the legality, with the city attorney asserting that using tax money would be unconstitutional, supported by

was not reelected in 1902. It was possible that continuing questions on his handling of relief funds may have played a role.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 11, 1900, 1; "New York Will Chip In," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; "Gov. Thomas Sends a Message," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 6; "OHIO OFFERS AID," *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 11, 1900, 1; "GOV. NASH TELEGRAPHS," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; "EXPRESSION FROM KENTUCKY," *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; "HELP FROM PENNSYLVANIA," *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3; and "RELIEF WORK IN NEW YORK," *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2. Ohio's governor was telegraphed a couple of days later, acknowledging help received from them. Untitled article, *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 13, 1900, 1.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Tammany Hall was not precisely the city government itself, but it was the major political institution for the city and equivalent for these purposes. Louisville's contribution was large enough to receive national attention. "MONEY FOR DESTITUTE," *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; "TAMMANY'S DONATION," *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 18, 1900, 1; and "LOUISVILLE PROVES GRATEFUL," *New York Times*, September 13, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁴⁶ "GALVESTON'S APPEAL GETS QUICK RESPONSE," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1900, 1.

Alderman Moreland.¹⁰⁴⁷ The mayor claimed that some private subscribers had done so on the condition that “public moneys should not be used for this purpose.”¹⁰⁴⁸ This was an explicit instance in which businessmen tried to use private charity to prevent direct government relief. However Alderman Orrick retorted that “the universal acceptance of the law in cases of this kind was to err on the side of charity and mercy and make the appropriation.”¹⁰⁴⁹ The council passed the appropriation with only one vote opposed.¹⁰⁵⁰ The city also established a committee to solicit private contributions.

Until the Galveston hurricane, the Johnstown flood was possibly the disaster that had most firmly entered the collective memory of the United States and had triggered an outpouring of nationwide fundraising. Editorials now used that national collective memory to encourage donations to Galveston, stating that “there is nothing in the history of the United States to approach this except the terrible Johnstown flood of 1889.”¹⁰⁵¹ Mayor Woodruff of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, also invoked that comparison. The city had received contributions from Galveston in 1889 after their flood, and the mayor now called on the people of his city to contribute in gratitude for that help.¹⁰⁵² Johnstown's mayor used that collective memory to remind both his own population and those of other cities of the assistance provided in 1889.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Moreland thought it should be used for anyone in Fort Worth who was in need first. There was no indication, however, that he actually proposed a program to do so, suggesting this was simply a way to oppose setting a precedent for the city's direct involvement in relief. “FORT WORTH BUDGET: SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 8.

¹⁰⁴⁸ “FORT WORTH BUDGET: SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 8.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Alderman Henderson had proposed a contribution of \$500 or \$1000, but the exact amount approved was never made clear. “SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 8.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Alderman Moreland was presumably the only one who voted against, but the article did not state that explicitly. “FORT WORTH BUDGET: SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 8.

¹⁰⁵¹ “WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 11, 1900, 2; and Untitled editorial, *Adams County News*, September 12, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁵² “JOHNSTOWN IN LINE,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3.

For long-term recovery, Galveston needed new or continuing investment in the city, which meant the city had to reduce perceptions of risks from another deadly storm.¹⁰⁵³ A board of experienced engineers recommended raising most of the island by several feet, building a seawall higher than the high water of the 1900 storm, and adding an embankment adjacent to this wall, projects that were estimated at 3.5 million dollars in total.¹⁰⁵⁴ In order to finance these improvements, the city had to get voters to approve bonds, despite the loss of taxpayers and taxable property after the disaster. The costs were distributed with the county taking responsibility for the sea wall debt and the city for the grade elevation, while the state legislature redirected taxes from the city back to the city for fifteen years to help finance the grade elevation.¹⁰⁵⁵ This action by the state legislature during regular session was unusual, not only indicating the importance they placed on the recovery of Galveston, but also made possible by the perception of who this funding was benefiting. Newspapers celebrated the success of these projects when another major hurricane struck in 1915. Relatively few people died compared to 1900, and there were few buildings destroyed.¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵³ “IMMENSE SEA WALL,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 19, 1900, 1; Untitled Editorial, *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 2; “MR. LEROY TRICE,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 2; and “GOVERNMENT TO REUILD,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 14, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 94–95.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 95–96.

¹⁰⁵⁶ However, scientists still consider the island to be at significant risk, and the seawall may also give islanders a false sense of security, discouraging evacuations. Additionally, the seawall has resulted in an erosion problem; the 1915 hurricane scoured most of the sand away, a significant problem as the city was becoming more dependent on tourism. They later built rock groins to help limit erosion and now rely on having sand dredged from the sea floor to replace that lost to erosion. Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 102.

National and International Response

Most American disasters rarely received even a brief mention in international newspapers, and international donations for the survivors were even rarer.¹⁰⁵⁷ But the 1900 Galveston hurricane was covered by European newspapers in detail over a period of weeks, possibly benefiting from people's fascination with horrifying events. A relatively generous amount of contributions were sent from Europe to help.¹⁰⁵⁸ However, most of the identifiable contributions in 1900 came from those with economic ties to Galveston, while newspapers played a significant role in maximizing the benefits for contributors.

Formal international attention came from leaders of other nations who sent telegrams to President McKinley. The Mexican government expressed the Mexican people's sympathy through their Ambassador to the United States who spoke with the State Department. While President Diaz of Mexico was named, the ambassador was left nameless in the article, unlike most other diplomats.¹⁰⁵⁹ The Kaiser sent a message on September 13 expressing his own condolences, as well as his expectation that the city would quickly be rebuilt.¹⁰⁶⁰ The *New York Times* ran a single article that reprinted the text of messages from "...the President of Chile, the Spanish Minister, the Belgian Minister, the Mexican Minister, the Peruvian Minister, and the

¹⁰⁵⁷ The other exception to this in Texas was the 1921 San Antonio flood which attracted some support from Mexico due to the number of Mexican victims.

¹⁰⁵⁸ The Galveston disaster may have received a great deal of attention in non-European newspapers as well, but that would have required time and resources to newspapers that I did not have. I was only able to access a relatively small number of European newspapers, and had to rely on Google translate for the non-English articles. Most international involvement was identified through mentions in U.S. newspapers.

¹⁰⁵⁹ According to another article, his name was M. de Azpiroz. "Mexico Expresses Sympathy," *New York Times*, September 16, 1900, 2; and "SYMPATHY OF OTHER NATIONS," *New York Times*, September 19, 1900, 3.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Some German ports had a fairly significant and long-standing economic relationship with the port at Galveston. "KAISER SENDS CONDOLENCES," *New York Times*, September 18, 1900, 3; and Walter D. Kamphoefner, *Germans in America: A Concise History* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 44, 53, 111.

Haitian Minister.”¹⁰⁶¹ The article included a message from the British Embassy conveying Queen Victoria's sympathy, though the British were omitted from the above list.¹⁰⁶²

While no foreign government offered or asked if they could assist in their messages of sympathy, diplomatic staff on American soil sometimes got involved in relief efforts more directly.¹⁰⁶³ The disaster occurred just before the annual celebration of Mexican Independence Day, and the Mexican Consul, Señor Mallen, arranged for thirty-five contribution boxes to be set out during the celebration in order to allow celebrants to contribute.¹⁰⁶⁴ He had initially offered the funds that were to be used for that celebration for relief efforts, but it was unclear whether or not that money was actually redirected because the celebration went forward.¹⁰⁶⁵

President Emile Loubet of France sent a telegram to “tender your excellency heartfelt condolences and send to the families of the victims our deep sympathy.”¹⁰⁶⁶ However, there was no direct offer of help from the French government or even a suggestion that their government would encourage contributions.¹⁰⁶⁷ To judge from United States newspapers, most fundraising in France was organized by Americans either living in Paris or visiting.¹⁰⁶⁸ The Chamber of Commerce organized a committee headed by the United States Ambassador to France, Horace Porter, and identified the other officers of the committee by name. They immediately received

¹⁰⁶¹ “SYMPATHY OF OTHER NATIONS,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1900, 3.

¹⁰⁶² Whether this was an accident or an indication of some hostility toward the British was unclear. “SYMPATHY OF OTHER NATIONS,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1900, 3.

¹⁰⁶³ This statement is based on the articles I found that quoted telegrams. If there was an offer of help, readers of newspapers would not be aware of it based on the way newspapers were reporting international diplomatic responses, creating the belief that these governments had not offered help.

¹⁰⁶⁴ “GALVESTON SUFFERS,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 14, 1900, 5.

¹⁰⁶⁵ “PROMPT ACTION,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, September 11, 1900, 1.

¹⁰⁶⁶ “FRANCE SENDS SYMPATHY,” *Brenham Daily Banner*, September 16, 1900, 1. McKinley responded on behalf of the victims and the American people.

¹⁰⁶⁷ More commonly, newspapers simply reported that France had offered condolences or sympathy. “FRANCE OFFERS CONDOLENCES,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 12, 1900, 3; and “France Expresses Sympathy,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁶⁸ It is difficult to determine whether most of the donations and work for raising funds actually came from the expatriates in Paris or the newspapers simply focused on them. Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, September 14, 1900, 7.

50,000 francs in contributions, with plans to canvass the American colony in Paris.¹⁰⁶⁹ The same article simply stated that “the French papers have also opened subscription lists, many Frenchmen having expressed a desire to subscribe.”¹⁰⁷⁰ The dearth of details on the French fundraising by contrast to the details about the American efforts was hard to miss, and was clearly somewhat dismissive of the French. By September 21, Paris had reportedly raised about 100,000 French francs, from whatever sources.¹⁰⁷¹ However, the exchange rate for French francs to U.S. dollars at the time would have meant that they raised over half a million dollars. Either this amount was deliberately exaggerated to create a good impression of American expatriates in Paris or newspapers assumed the currency was francs.¹⁰⁷²

Among the international donors specifically identified in newspapers, many of them had or potentially had commercial interests in Galveston.¹⁰⁷³ For instance, Liverpool was deeply involved in the importation of cotton. The Atlanta *Constitution* reported that a British Member of Parliament from Liverpool, Robert P. Houston, had donated \$5,000 for Galveston's relief.¹⁰⁷⁴ The

¹⁰⁶⁹ “FUND STARTED IN PARIS,” New York *Times*, September 14, 1900, 3. A Texas newspaper gave the amount as dollars, not francs. 50,000 French francs was approximately 255,000 U.S. dollars (assuming an exchange rate of a bit more than 5 U.S. dollars to the French franc, which seems to be the best estimate I can locate based on the relative value of each in gold in 1900.) The amount was probably in U.S. dollars rather than French francs since a quarter of a million U.S. dollars in donations from expatriates in Paris should have gotten more mention in Texas newspapers. A detailed list of donations received by Galveston or Sayers would help answer this question. Untitled article, Houston *Daily Post*, September 14, 1900, 7.

¹⁰⁷⁰ This was all the article had to say about the French fundraising efforts. “FUND STARTED IN PARIS,” New York *Times*, September 14, 1900, 3. Overall, I found little reference to fundraising by French newspapers in those newspapers. One French newspaper stated that New York's mayor had opened a subscription fund. “L'Ouragan du Texas,” *Journal de Fourmies* (Paris, France,) September 16, 1900, 1, accessed through Gallica archive, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/en/content/accueil-en?mode=desktop>, translated with Google Translate.

¹⁰⁷¹ This very likely refers only to money raised by the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris. A French article stated that the chamber had raised about 75,000 francs by September 16. “Paris Fund Reaches 100,000 Francs,” New York *Times*, September 21, 1900, 2; and “Le Cyclone du Texas,” *La Civilisation*, (Paris, France, accessed Gallica archive <https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/en/content/accueil-en?mode=desktop>), September 16, 1900, 5, translated with Google Translate.

¹⁰⁷² It was also not uncommon for people to pledge money that they never remitted.

¹⁰⁷³ One of the few donors mentioned by name who did not have obvious commercial ties to Galveston or Texas was a minister, T. De Witt Talmage who was living in Paris at the time. “GENEROUS GIFTS FORWARDED,” Chicago *Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁷⁴ “Briton Gives \$5,000,” Atlanta *Constitution*, September 16, 1900, 3.

Liverpool Cotton Association raised £500, while a city meeting raised an additional £1500 in contributions.¹⁰⁷⁵ The Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, however, contented themselves with sending their deep sympathies.¹⁰⁷⁶ The port of Bremen in Germany, another city with a Cotton Exchange, also actively raised funds. The Bremen Cotton Exchange, the North German Lloyd Steamship Company, and the Bremen Chamber of Commerce were reported to be working together to raise funds for Galveston.¹⁰⁷⁷ By September 26, Bremen had sent \$6,444.72 to New York's Chamber of Commerce relief fund.¹⁰⁷⁸

European newspapers often focused on the loss of cotton, the major export from Galveston.¹⁰⁷⁹ British newspapers were most interested in the volatile influence the disaster was having on the cotton market at Liverpool.¹⁰⁸⁰ Prices soared when the news was first received, then declined when rumors started that the disaster had been exaggerated, before climbing again, with speculation that factories would suspend production of thread and cloth temporarily.¹⁰⁸¹

¹⁰⁷⁵ The exchange rate between the British pound and the U.S. dollar was about five dollars to one pound at the time of the disaster, so their £2000 was about \$10,000. In many U.S. cities, the Chambers of Commerce were directly involved in fundraising. “\$10,000 From Liverpool,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1900, 2; and “ENGLISH SYMPATHY PROVED,” *St. Louis Republic*, September 13, 1900, 3.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Local Chambers of Commerce were frequently directly involved in fundraising, and sometimes at the state level as well. The New York State Chamber of Commerce raised \$27,000 in a single short meeting. Considering attendees included men Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller, that amount might be considered rather low. But notably wealthy men, both in the United States and Britain, may have preferred the publicity of making their donations directly. Rockefeller did contribute \$5,000 at that meeting, but some of the most notable names on the committee, John Jacob Astor, J. P. Morgan, and Andrew Carnegie, were absent from the list of donations. A large individual donation often received an article to itself, unlike the donors to the committees who were simply one name in a list. The Carnegie Company contributed \$10,000 separately and hinted that Andrew Carnegie would later personally match that donation. I was unable to confirm whether or not he did so. “\$10,000 From Liverpool,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1900, 2; “RELIEF WORK IN NEW YORK,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2; and “CARNEGIE COMPANY’S GIFT,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁷⁷ “PRODUCE AND COTTON EXCHANGE,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁷⁸ “GALVESTON RELIEF FUNDS,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1900, 14.

¹⁰⁷⁹ They also gave attention to European ships damaged or destroyed in the storm.

¹⁰⁸⁰ This refers almost exclusively to the cotton markets, not the London Stock Exchange. “COMMERCIAL MARKETS,” *Manchester Guardian* (Great Britain), September 11, 1900, 4; “THE AMERICAN COTTON MARKET,” *Manchester Guardian* (Great Britain), September 12, 1900, 4; “THE LONDON MARKET,” *New York Times*, September 13, 1900, 10.

¹⁰⁸¹ The effect on the New York Cotton Exchange was that prices for futures also soared by \$7.50 a bale, a very significant increase, due to a projection that up to ten percent of the U.S. cotton crop was lost. “BOOM IN PRICE OF COTTON,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1900, 3; and “Orders May Not Be Filled,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 11, 1900, 3.

While the increase in price for raw cotton was beneficial for the growers, it was perceived as devastating for the manufacturers.¹⁰⁸² The *New York Times* reported that raw cotton prices had soared so high in Manchester that the textile industry was at a standstill.¹⁰⁸³ At least as reported by newspapers, the British were most interested in the possible economic effects of losing up to a million bales of cotton. These newspaper stories both catered to those most interested in the disaster for local or regional economic reasons and shifted the British focus from the victims and survivors to its effects on British manufacturing.

There were a few substantial international donors who could be identified, both companies and individuals most of whom had obvious commercial ties with Galveston. The Mexican Telegraph Company contributed \$1,000 for the relief efforts.¹⁰⁸⁴ London bankers Barings, Rothschilds, Speyers, and Brown, Shipley & Co., jointly set up a relief fund and contributed a few hundred pounds to that fund.¹⁰⁸⁵ Sir Thomas Lipton sent a cable that expressed his sympathies, followed by with a \$1,000 pledge through his American representative, Robert Mair.¹⁰⁸⁶ These donations together with the funds raised by cotton exchanges may have been partly motivated by a desire to build goodwill and stronger relationships with the businessmen of Galveston, possibly giving them an edge in future business dealings.

Sometimes the distance from Galveston itself influenced the accuracy of reports. Many reports from relatively distant newspapers had misinformation or distortions, most due to

¹⁰⁸² "COMMERCIAL MARKETS," *Manchester Guardian* (Great Britain), September 11, 1900, 4.

¹⁰⁸³ "MANCHESTER'S DILEMMA," *New York Times*, September 12, 1900, 10. A few days later, there were reports that several textile mills in Manchester had closed due to the high cotton prices. "MORE COTTON MILLS CLOSE," *New York Times*, September 18, 1900, 10.

¹⁰⁸⁴ "RELIEF WORK IN NEW YORK," *New York Times*, September 14, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Bankers may not have had a direct involvement in cotton imports but would have been the source of financing for importers and textile mills. "London Bankers' Offer," *New York Times*, September 20, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁸⁶ "AID FOR STORM VICTIMS," *New York Times*, September 12, 1900, 2; "ENGLISH SYMPATHY PROVED," *St. Louis Republic*, September 13, 1900, 3, and "Supplies Shipped to Texas," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 13, 1900, 2.

unfamiliarity with the geography.¹⁰⁸⁷ The Manchester *Guardian* asserted that the town of Alvin was located 200 miles north of Galveston, instead of 20 miles northwest.¹⁰⁸⁸ The New York *Times* estimated the death toll at 12,000 almost two weeks after the disaster, by which time the accepted estimates were five to ten thousand.¹⁰⁸⁹ A French article, published over a week after the disaster, asserted that 4,000 bodies were recovered from demolished houses at High Island.¹⁰⁹⁰ High Island is at least thirty feet above sea level and relatively safe from storm surge, suffering relatively little damage compared to other island or coastal communities. The residents of this resort town helped organize some early relief efforts.¹⁰⁹¹ A week earlier, the newspaper had correctly placed the center of the disaster in Galveston, so they most likely juxtaposed a death toll for Galveston with the damages to the resort at High Island, Texas, or they misunderstood an estimate of bodies found on beaches for bodies found in the wreckage of houses for that community.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁸⁷ A Providence newspaper ran an article quoting a former Galveston resident, John Keenan, who claimed there had been a severe storm in 1895 that hit Galveston. While there may have been a storm that year, I have found no record of such a storm and neither Larson or O'Rear mention any notable storm during the 1890s. The latest notable storm that hit Galveston mentioned by Bixel and Turner was in 1886. Either the newspaper got the wrong year—possibly 1875, the first time Indianola was badly hit by a storm—or Keenan was exaggerating. As he also made claims in another article to heroism by protecting a Black man in New Orleans from a mob using a Winchester rifle, possibly the latter. “HE FEARS HEAVIER LOSS,” *Providence News*, September 12, 1900, 1; “The Storm of 1895,” *Providence News*, September 12, 1900, 1; and Bixel and Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm*, 10.

¹⁰⁸⁸ “FOREIGN,” *Manchester Guardian* (Great Britain), September 11, 1900, 4.

¹⁰⁸⁹ “GOV. SAYERS'S STATEMENT,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁹⁰ The article also stated that 1,000 houses had been destroyed at High Island, which was extremely unlikely given other newspaper reports on High Island. Original French: “... la ville de High-Island... Les équipes de secours ont trouvé plus de 4.000 cadavres dan les décombres.” “...the town of High-Island...Rescue teams found more than 4,000 bodies in the rubble.” “Nouveau cyclone aux Etats-Unis,” *Journal de Fourmies* (Paris, France, accessed Gallica archive <https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/en/content/accueil-en?mode=desktop>), September 20, 1900, 2, translated with Google Translate.

¹⁰⁹¹ “ALONG GULF AND INTERSTATE,” *Houston Daily Post*, September 13, 1900, 3.

¹⁰⁹² High Island was a much smaller community on an island that was above the storm surge but did experience some property damage. “Terrible catastrophe aux Etats-Unis,” *Journal de Fourmies* (Paris, France, accessed Gallica archive <https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/en/content/accueil-en?mode=desktop>.) September 13, 1900, 2, translated with Google Translate.

Whether their reports were accurate or not, major newspapers not only directly shaped national and international perceptions of disasters, they played a central role in the level of relief that poured in. Without newspaper reports, few people would have donated goods or services or money to the victims. But newspapers also often organized themselves as a central point for relief contributions.¹⁰⁹³ They had reported widely on the Johnstown disaster just eleven years earlier, and they commonly organized fundraising for local, regional, or national disasters.

Their involvement was far more substantial after the Galveston hurricane, however.¹⁰⁹⁴ Rather than seeing it solely as a competitive moment, they reported on the efforts of other newspapers as well, a sort of public relations for their own industry. The *Atlanta Constitution* reported that the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* had sent Governor Sayers \$500 and started a fund drive.¹⁰⁹⁵ Other newspapers whose contributions were featured in rival newspapers including the *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Denver Republican*, and the *Columbia State*.¹⁰⁹⁶ The *Bryan Morning Eagle* reported that the *Philadelphia Enquirer* arranged to send an “electrosene,” a piece of equipment that could produce 30,000 gallons of disinfectant each day.¹⁰⁹⁷ Several of the largest newspapers organized special trains with cars of supplies, such as the *Philadelphia North American*, which sent a special over the Southern railway with four cars of “provisions, clothing and medical supplies,” as well as a Pullman car with a doctor,

¹⁰⁹³ This was probably partly self-interest—the disaster clearly helped boost sales—and their involvement in fundraising and relief was good public relations. However while it is difficult to judge whether they may have overblown their own importance to these efforts or not, without newspaper reports, very little relief would have reached the survivors.

¹⁰⁹⁴ And a few years later, after the San Francisco earthquake.

¹⁰⁹⁵ “ST. LOUIS PAPER STARTS HELP,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1900, 4.

¹⁰⁹⁶ “TIMES-DEMOCRAT OFFERS HELP,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1900, 1; “AID FROM NEW ORLEANS,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 4; “GALVESTON'S APPEAL GETS QUICK RESPONSE,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1900, 1; “RELIEF FOR GALVESTON,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 10, 1900, 3; and “Columbia State to Aid,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1900, 2.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Galveston had been begging for more disinfectants in particular, so this was a particularly valuable for the cleanup efforts and showed a responsiveness to what the city specifically requested. “THE WORK OF RESCUE,” *Bryan Morning Eagle*, September 19, 1900, 2.

eight nurses, and several correspondents.¹⁰⁹⁸ With the exception of the correspondents, these were all items that newspapers had reported that Galveston's relief committee needed, so newspapers were assuring their readers that they were responding to the actual needs.¹⁰⁹⁹

Of particular note was the prominent involvement of William Randolph Hearst's New York *Journal* and Chicago *American*. Hearst has often been credited with giving birth to the era known as Yellow Journalism only three years before the Galveston disaster when his "Murder Squad" of investigative reporters uncovered the background of a dismembered body found in the East River and the murderer's identity.¹¹⁰⁰ He had realized that sensationalist reporting, whether of lurid crimes or horrifying disasters, sold newspapers.

Galveston saw the expansion of this idea into a more activist involvement.¹¹⁰¹ While Hearst's newspapers were not the only ones that sent relief trains, what made the involvement of the Hearst newspapers stand out was the mention of Hearst's own direct involvement.¹¹⁰² For

¹⁰⁹⁸ An estimated 300 rail cars of supplies from various sources were sent by September 15. The Southern and other railways involved in moving relief supplies were doing so free of charge and apparently gave such trains priority. This not only was good publicity for the newspapers, but their correspondents were able to access the island as part of a relief team, while most reporters were still not allowed on the island. Other newspapers that sent trains included the New York *Journal*, New York *World*, and the Chicago *American*. "GALVESTON RELIEF TRAIN," Atlanta *Constitution*, September 14, 1900, 9; "RELIEF WORK GOING FORWARD," El Paso *Daily Herald*, September 13, 1900, 1; "CONDITIONS IMPROVING," Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 15, 1900, 4.

¹⁰⁹⁹ In reality, some supplies and a great deal of clothing that was donated was almost unusable according to Barton's report. Fannie B. Ward, "Report of Mrs. Ward," Clara Barton, *Report of Miss Barton*, Red Cross Records, MSS#05-0007, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, 54–5.

¹¹⁰⁰ Lurid crime reporting became popularized in the U.S. press as early as the 1830s with the emergence of the penny press, particularly the scandal and murder of Ellen Jewett, but this earlier sensationalism mostly came from police and court records and the imaginations of the reporters, not investigative journalism. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 1, 24–34.

¹¹⁰¹ There seems to have been an unofficial fundraising competition between the New York *Herald* and the New York *Journal*, suggested by a report in the New York *Times* which gave an itemized list of relief funds. The *Herald* had raised over \$9,000 by September 14, while the *Journal* was just short of \$6,000. The New York *Herald* does not seem to have sent a relief train itself, but the New York *World*, which did, was not mentioned in the *Times* article. The *Times* appeared to be observing, not participating. "RELIEF WORK IN NEW YORK," New York *Times*, September 14, 1900, 2.

¹¹⁰² While publishers and editors of other newspapers were not commonly mentioned in connection to fundraising, the Kansas City *Times* editor, A. A. Leseuer, sent a telegram about the paper's fundraising which was printed. "MR. LESUEUR'S GENEROSITY," September 11, 1900, Dallas *Morning News*, September 11, 1900, 3. At least two separate trains were reported from the New York *Journal* and at least one from the Chicago *American*. Four different newspaper relief trains from unidentified sources arrived on September 13 alone, one of which may

instance, the Brenham *Daily Banner* reported that Hearst sent a telegram to Brenham's mayor stating that relief trains from both his New York and Chicago newspapers were leaving that night with doctors, nurses, and supplies, and a Mallory company ship the next day. Then he asked the mayor what was most urgently needed, going directly to a contact to ensure these needs were met.¹¹⁰³ While most articles emphasized the medical staff, medicines, disinfectants and food supplies, they claimed that Hearst was also sending “luxuries.”¹¹⁰⁴ In any other disaster, newspapers emphasized that only the bare minimum was distributed as efficiently as possible, but in this case, there was no criticism for including non-necessities, almost certainly due to the demographics of the victims.

This relief work was not simply altruism. The Bryan *Morning Eagle* complained that correspondents were unable to get onto the island because of McKibben's martial law orders.¹¹⁰⁵ Relief trains functioned as a way by which to insert journalists into locations where they would otherwise be excluded by such orders, allowing those newspapers to print the earliest eyewitness reports on the disaster, driving sales.¹¹⁰⁶ So this activism served both as self-interested public relations and as competitive investigation and reporting. It is very likely that work such as this also helped play a role in establishing a precedent for journalists being allowed access to not only locations that experienced disasters, but possibly war zones as well.

have been from the New York *Journal*. There may have been more relief trains from Hearst's newspapers, but it is difficult to piece together from newspaper articles.

¹¹⁰³ The fact that his words were printed in newspapers meant good public relations for Hearst. “For Storm Sufferers,” Brenham *Daily Banner*, September 14, 1900, 1.

¹¹⁰⁴ “HEARST HELPING,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 3; “For Storm Sufferers,” Brenham *Daily Banner*, September 14, 1900, 1.

¹¹⁰⁵ “MILITIA CONTROL,” Bryan *Morning Eagle*, September 13, 1900, 1. The need to get access to the island was also probably partly driven by the affect the storm had on wire services and communications. The Austin *Daily Statesman* reported that telegraph lines in the southern and eastern part of the state went down during the storm, and they barely had communications with Dallas. Even as minimal telegraph connections were restored, there was heavy competition for use of these lines, with Western Union prioritizing emergency communications over the Associated Press reports. “BADLY WRECKED WIRES,” Austin *Daily Statesman*, September 10, 1900, 1.

¹¹⁰⁶ The fact that both the New York *Journal* and the New York *World* sent relief trains suggests a level of competitive altruism was also at play.

Conclusion

The 1900 Galveston hurricane was the worst in United States history, one for which newspapers strongly emphasized white middle-and-upper-class victims, influencing the way this disaster entered the national collective memory. While correspondents empathized with those victims' mental health struggles, Black and poor white Galvestonians were villainized as drunkards, looters, and rioters, justifying martial law to those outside. Martial law allowed city leaders to use food relief to coerce labor on recovery and reconstruction, a form of work-as-relief, as well as using contributions on reconstruction projects that benefited white businesses.

Most fundraising was done locally but channeled through the governor, Sayers, who kept control of the distribution and use of those private contributions while refusing to call a special legislative session. The national government worked through Sayers, primarily providing rations, tents, and ships for transportation for relief, but also committed to projects during the reconstruction. Newspapers nationally and internationally ran sensationalist articles on the disaster, while giving positive publicity to large donors and businesses, particularly transportation, who often had economic ties to Galveston. The yellow press thrived on sensationalistic stories at any time, but in the aftermath of the disaster, they made themselves a central point for contributions, organizing relief trains that also served to gain reporters access to areas under martial law. All of these rewarded them with positive publicity and drove readership for their newspapers, while they played a significant role in shaping the national collective memory of this disaster.¹¹⁰⁷

¹¹⁰⁷ Newspapers not only played an important short-term role in the entrance of this disaster into the collective memory, they have helped keep it in the collective memory through various anniversary tributes throughout the years.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Most of these ten disasters between 1899 and 1921 did not enter the long-term collective memory, either nationally or regionally, and some barely encroached temporarily on public awareness nationally as they occurred. Yet in the short-term, they were a driving force for Texans to develop coordinated flood control, such as the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA).¹¹⁰⁸ The worst disasters were cited in newspaper reports for at least two or three decades, used as a standard of measurement for later disasters, indicating that the collective memory of them was strong enough to be a recognizable measure.¹¹⁰⁹ Of all of these disasters, only the 1900 Galveston hurricane became embedded in the collective memory of the state and nation in a significant way, and even that disaster may be less recognizable than the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, for instance. It is likely that some of these disasters entered the collective memory of marginalized groups in a more substantial way than for the dominant white culture, especially Black communities.¹¹¹⁰ However, almost all of the accessible newspapers were controlled by middle-class white men, and Black experiences have had to be gleaned second-hand through biases about Black Texans.

¹¹⁰⁸According to Adams, repeated efforts by private, local, and state authorities failed at resolving the problems of major floods in the West, leading to federal funding of flood control projects. The LCRA and other river authorities in Texas had complicated political roots in debates over “limits of federal authority over navigable rivers, the extent to which states’ rights could limit federal jurisdiction, and the resolution of public interest versus private hydropower conflicts.” Adams, *Damming the Colorado*, xvi, 25–26.

¹¹⁰⁹It is possible, even probable, that faith in the effectiveness of flood control measures by the 1930s and 1940s led newspapers to consider them irrelevant, but some family stories almost certainly persisted.

¹¹¹⁰For instance, Horowitz found that Hurricane Betsy was also a turning point for residents of the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans from upwardly mobile to increasingly poor and marginalized, stories that lived in the collective memory of that ward and resurfaced after Katrina in 2005. Horowitz, “Hurricane Betsy and the Politics of Disaster,” 895–896, 898–898, 908.

Newspapers almost certainly tried to shape and reinforce public perceptions about groups of victims, survivors, and rescuers, particularly the most marginalized Texans in the early 1900s: African Americans. This was done through the specific words used, or not used, whether identifiers or descriptive terms. At this moment in time, newspapers were the only source of most news about disasters for most individuals. Newspapers were almost certainly particularly influential in shaping the understanding of events for those who lived too far away to personally know anyone affected.

Newspapers reported on the Brazos River flooding of 1899 concurrently with large-scale incidents of racial violence directed against Black laborers in both the North and South.¹¹¹¹ Black, white, and Mexican farm workers were beginning to migrate over developing transportation systems, a trend that accelerated over the next two decades, creating white fears about control over Black farm labor. Nationally, ideas about eugenics were feeding xenophobia and creating both a rising demand for immigration restrictions and Americanization campaigns. The Mexican Revolution and World War I created further uncertainty, especially near the border.

In 1899, when the Jim Crow system was still emerging, correspondents used a complex system of race when describing Black Texans, including four racial identities that intersected with economic and social class, and two others that were derogatory. By 1921, when Jim Crow was firmly established, that system had been replaced by a single racial identity. Articles in 1899 dehumanized Black victims and survivors by describing them by race, whether in the aggregate or individually, and omitting most other markers of identity such as name, gender, age, or employment, all of which were regularly used to identify white victims.

¹¹¹¹Though not on the scale that erupted almost twenty years later after World War I in places like Greenwood, Oklahoma, and Chicago, Illinois.

Correspondents infantilized Black survivors with language that invoked pity, while describing white charity as the answer to imagined Black dependency. They denied Black flood victims' agency in their own survival or recovery, and indeed, when correspondents did admit they had played a role, they often criticized their choices. Often no choice they made seemed to escape criticism, such as Black farm workers near Brookshire, Texas in 1899 who were criticized for only evacuating as far as safe refuges from prior floods, then were criticized for evacuating at all during the April 1900 flood.¹¹¹² At the same time, white planters were excused for making similar decisions about when evacuating their livestock in 1899, and sympathy for Black victims was deflected to white landowners and businesses. By dehumanizing and infantilizing Black victims, correspondents reinforced white Southern beliefs about the racial order and influenced the white collective memory of disasters.

The white-dominated cotton culture produced by the floodplain geography disproportionately pressured Black Texans, whether sharecroppers or members of freedman's colonies, onto land at high risk of floods. White communities were clearly identified as such, and white homes were described in respectful terms: homes, houses, or cottages.¹¹¹³ Black communities were reduced to a "cluster of cabins," a "negro settlement," or a "few negro huts," while their homes were reduced to cabins or huts or "small tenement houses."¹¹¹⁴ While Black Texans made up a very high percentage of the 1899 flood victims, correspondents frequently diverted sympathy from their losses to those of white landowners and businessmen, asking

¹¹¹²"THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE," *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2; and "Negroes are Fleeing," *Dallas Morning News*, April 11, 1900, 2.

¹¹¹³"A CLOUDBURST AT HAMILTON," *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5; and "SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED," *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

¹¹¹⁴"A HARROWING TALE," *San Antonio Daily Express*, July 2, 1899, 1; "CLOUDBURST AT CALVERT," *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5; Untitled article, *Houston Daily Post*, July 1, 1899, 5; and "RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS," *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1899, 5.

readers to “just think of the loss by merchants who “carry” Brazos bottom accounts and the stagnation in business is paralyzed...”¹¹¹⁵

The emphasis on white organization of rescue efforts and white benevolence and charity created a narrative in which Black farm laborers lacked the judgment to save themselves while diverting any blame from white landowners who placed tenant housing in the floodplain, serving as a form of social control. In this narrative, Black victims' lack of judgment and dependence on white charity justified white control over Black labor. Correspondents emphasized that “work was the proper charity,”¹¹¹⁶ though this work-as-charity benefited white community leaders. These leaders controlled the use of donations, generally spending them to benefit local businesses. Distribution of charity, even when contributions came from Black urban communities, were securely in the hands of white male community leaders, and some of the food rations issued were dangerously inadequate for survival.¹¹¹⁷

Gender intersected with class, race, and age in newspaper articles, with white women described as passive recipients of rescue, though always quietly dignified. White women necessarily were protected and shown sympathy, and even the heroism of a young white woman, Minnie Florea, was reduced to a properly feminine distaste for getting salt water in her eyes or mouth.¹¹¹⁸ Black motherhood, however, was denied heroism and even criticized for not saving every child, while Black women were described as highly emotional, unlike white women. Fundraising was in the hands of white men, while white women controlled the collection of clothing and household goods. White women determined the quality of clothing distributed to

¹¹¹⁵“THE SUFFERING AT SUNNYSIDE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

¹¹¹⁶“RELIEF FOR THE SUFFERERS,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 6, 1899, 2.

¹¹¹⁷“SITUATION AT BROOKSHIRE,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 7, 1899, 2.

¹¹¹⁸“GIRL DRIFTED SIXTY MILES,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 22, 1915, 4.

Black survivors, allowing them to reinforce their own ideas about class-and-race-appropriate attire.

The identity, “American,” was almost exclusively limited to non-ethnic white Texans in 1899, then mostly vanished as an explicit identity after Americanization campaigns began to submerge European ethnicities under the category of white. Correspondents applied a wide variety of ethnic identities to disaster victims between 1899 and 1913. Some of these identities, such as Italian, were described in very similar language to Black Texans in some articles, while others, such as German, were set apart mostly by an explicit identification as German. Anti-immigrant sentiments and Americanization campaigns gained headway during World War I, and by 1921, correspondents supported these campaigns by submerging European ethnic identities into the category of white.

Despite Americanization campaigns and their legal status as white, ethnic Mexicans were one significant ethnic group who were not submerged into the white identity, emerging as third element of a new racial and social system by 1921. In 1899 and through World War I, they were generally racialized using the same tools as Black Texans: identified primarily by race, whether in the aggregate or as individuals. Occasionally gender was identified, but rarely names or ages. In another parallel, their homes were also described with dismissive language that was sometimes specific to Mexican homes, such as “two or three adobe shacks.”¹¹¹⁹

By 1921, urban Mexican disaster victims in San Antonio were sometimes described almost identically to white Texans. Correspondents identified them by name, often with honorifics for women, with ages and addresses, and most tellingly, without an explicit identifier as Mexican. For instance: “Mrs. Ramon De Zepeda, 114 South Laredo Street.”¹¹²⁰ The initial

¹¹¹⁹“Recent Flood at Camargo,” *Brownsville Daily Herald*, October 3, 1904, 1.

¹¹²⁰“The Dead,” *Houston Chronicle*, September 11, 1921, 1.

lists of the dead probably were translated from *la Prensa* without modifying their appropriation of the tools for claiming whiteness. Since rural Mexican victims continued to be identified in the older racialized styles, this acceptance of *la Prensa's* lists suggested a perception of growing political strength of the Mexican middle-class community, parallel to the urban Black middle-class in Galveston before city reorganization removed their political influence. Additionally, English-language newspapers probably assumed that Spanish surnames were sufficient to identify the victims as Mexican. These humanizing changes, though brief, may have influenced some white readers' perceptions of the disaster.

Most organizational relief was disbursed through three organizations: the ARC, a Mexican women's charitable organization called *la Cruz Azul Mexicana*, and *la Sociedad Hidalgo*, a Mexican *patriotico-mutualista*.¹¹²¹ However, English-language newspapers only reported on the work of the ARC, often crediting them with work carried out *la Sociedad Hidalgo* who offered their meeting hall for the use of the ARC's headquarters and supplied most of the ARC's volunteers, and possibly for *la Cruz Azul Mexicana's* relief work as well. Instead, English-language newspapers emphasized the role of the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce in coordinating and controlling contributions. In effect, English-language newspapers prevented the relief work of the Mexican community from entering the white collective memory of this disaster.

La Prensa resisted this erasure by creating a counternarrative of the disaster in which they articulated gratitude to the ARC and the Chamber of Commerce for their work, but centered the work of the two Mexican organizations and their volunteers. Mexican victims clearly

¹¹²¹“EN TODAS PARTES ORGANIZAN FIESTAS PARA AYUDAR A LA COLECTA DE “LA PRENSA” EN FAVOR DE LAS VICTIMAS,” trans. “Everywhere They Organize Parties to Help La Prensa’s Collection on Behalf of the Victims,” *la Prensa* (SA), January 18, 1920, 15; and “Aniversario de una Sociedad” trans. “Anniversary of a Society,” *la Prensa* (SA,) February 25, 1915, 4.

preferred to access the services of *la Cruz Azul* which had ties to the community, or to access the ARC through volunteers whom they already knew and trusted. *La Prensa* correspondents subtly indicated that many victims distrusted the purpose of the ARC refugee camp, resisting a possible plan to funnel as many victims as possible to agricultural labor. Instead, *La Prensa* supported returning survivors to skilled jobs or self-employment when possible. However Mexican resistance to the dominant narrative was expressed subtly, including using humor to gently criticize inappropriate white clothing donations. Anything more explicit might have alienated any white readers, potentially costing the Mexican community the assistance they needed to recover. But *la Prensa's* counternarrative influenced a different collective memory of the disaster for the Mexican community of San Antonio.

In contrast, the Galveston hurricane of 1900 was perceived as a white disaster. The storm remains the worst hurricane in United States' history, killing around 10,000 people, but newspaper articles focused primarily on the middle-and-upper-class white victims and survivors. They described them in empathetic language for their losses, invited readers to imagine genteel women without hats and shoes, and treated their trauma and suffering with great sympathy.

However, correspondents also drew a stark line between white middle-and-upper-class victims and Black and poor white Galvestonians who were described not as victims, but instead as drunkards, freeloaders, looters, or rioters, occasionally with proposed “solutions” that were chillingly violent.¹¹²² This dehumanization turned them into a threat, preventing outcry at martial law whose harshness was often praised instead. Martial law eliminated the ability of poorer Galvestonians to evacuate, confining them on the island while also giving city leaders absolute

¹¹²²See Chapter Five's story that recommended forcibly relocating some Black Galvestonians or shooting them. “SCORES OF VANDALS AT WORK,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 12, 1900, 3.

control over food and alcohol.¹¹²³ Recovery and clean-up work was coerced both through the direct threat of guns pointed at men perceived as unemployed and the indirect threat of denying food or alcohol, which many needed in order to cope with the horrors they had experienced. The popular idea of work-as-charity allowed city leaders to coerce work and then fund it from charitable contributions meant to help victims.

Governor Sayers refused to call a special legislative session and retained control over a large part of the private contributions received nationally, deciding how they would be spent and who to purchase supplies from. The national government's response also funneled through Sayers: the provision of rations, the loan of tents for shelter and ships for transportation of supplies, and commitments to infrastructure projects. Sayers avoided producing any itemized list of contributions he had received, resulting in some mild criticism, but no obvious consequences.¹¹²⁴

This was the only disaster that received wide national and international attention in newspapers, including detailed, often extremely sensationalized, reporting. The large national and international donors usually had important economic ties to Galveston. While some cities and states contributed to the relief efforts directly, most fundraising was through private contributions which also received favorable publicity for those donors. Correspondents highlighted the relief efforts of transportation companies, particularly railroads, very favorably, providing them with good publicity before a public that was sometimes hostile.

¹¹²³Very few poorer Galvestonians would have had any food supplies that survived, and none was available to purchase. All sales of alcohol were banned under martial law, then alcohol rations were issued to those working to recover bodies.

¹¹²⁴I was not able to find an article in which he ever provided such a list. Since he had previously withheld some funds contributed for the 1899 Brazos river flood victims, such a list compared with his expenditures could provide interesting insights into his priorities.

The yellow press thrived on sensationalism, and the Galveston hurricane offered broad opportunities to drive readership through horrifying, often exaggerated, stories. They also made themselves central points nationally for contributions, organizing relief trains to deliver contributed supplies. That charitable work not only provided these newspapers with good publicity, the relief cars were often staffed by reporters, allowing them access to sites otherwise restricted under martial law. The newspapers of the yellow press benefited through an eager readership, good publicity, and a means to get around martial law restrictions on journalists, all while shaping the collective memory of the disaster, the victims, and the supposed villains.

The biased wording I found in these reports is undeniable. However, it is far more difficult to conclusively prove the degree to which these tools actually reinforced or strengthened the biases and intersections examined: race, ethnicity, gender, and class.¹¹²⁵ One of the more productive indications that the tone of these newspaper reports influenced readers appeared in the newspapers themselves in editorials and reprinted texts of telegrams and messages that offered sympathy and help. Editorials were primarily written by people who had not experienced or witnessed the disasters, and whose knowledge of the disasters was based mostly on newspaper reports.

In 1899, the mayor of Calvert, Texas, C. F. Meredith, “received a telegram from the *Chicago Record* inquiring whether the people of that city could render any assistance... exaggerated reports have gone abroad concerning the condition of the city, some of which have conveyed the impression that the town was almost swept away.”¹¹²⁶ In this instance, the newspaper reports that had reached Chicago had been so sensationalized that they had the

¹¹²⁵However, some journal entries about the 1900 Galveston hurricane used very similar language to these reports, suggesting the writers may have been influenced by newspapers.

¹¹²⁶“SOME NAMES OF THOSE DROWNED,” *Houston Daily Post*, July 5, 1899, 5.

impression of a far worse disaster.¹¹²⁷ Clearly newspapers had to the power to influence how their readers understood these disasters.

While newspapers shaped the collective memory of these disasters in the past, as Reims has said, disasters also provide a brief window into lives often obscure to historians, and into prevailing perceptions of marginalized identities. Most of these disasters did not enter the long-term collective memory, even regionally, and some did not appear to encroach on public awareness nationally even in the short-term. The worst of them were sometimes compared to later disasters in newspaper articles, indicating that the collective memory of them was strong enough regionally to be a recognizable measure, but rarely in any more significant way. While the 1900 Galveston hurricane was the only one to enter the state and national collective memory, it is likely that some disasters entered the collective memory of marginalized groups in a more significant way than the dominant white culture, especially Black and Mexican communities. With the exception of *la Prensa*, almost all newspapers were controlled by white and European ethnic men, meaning Black collective memory must be gleaned at second-hand through their biased perceptions of Black experiences.¹¹²⁸

Consciously or unconsciously, mass media publications have the ability to shape collective memory, and can be used to resist or reinforce negative perceptions of marginalized groups. This power to reinforce negative perceptions is frequently exercised more openly as a response to disasters, creating narratives about these groups often used to justify their neglect or coercion in the aftermath of disasters. But when the public knows how they create these

¹¹²⁷Of course, most of the damages and victims were outside of town, while the mayor assumed the power to refuse any such help on their behalf.

¹¹²⁸It is possible that some families may retain stories of these floods.

narratives, they lose some of their power and can be resisted, as did the Mexican community of San Antonio in 1921.

Mass media today is far more diversified and far less centralized than in the early 1900s, especially if we include social media celebrities who often face little or no real consequences for misinformation or who thrive on “controversy.” Rising anti-transgender campaigns are only the most recent addition to anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic narratives that are often printed in even reputable newspapers with little verification. While a solution to holding these diverse new forms of mass media more accountable for misinformation is difficult to identify, the tactics used have changed relatively little since the early 1900s, and a public well-educated in identifying those tactics to create negative perceptions of marginalized groups will weaken their power to create resentment, fear, and anger.

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Newspaper Articles

All newspapers were accessed through electronic archives of digitized newspapers between November 2011 and April 2023. The following archives were used for the newspapers listed.¹¹²⁹

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Chronicling America (Library of Congress): Albuquerque *Daily Citizen*, Amarillo *Daily News*, Beaumont *Enterprise*, Bryan *Morning Eagle*, Brownsville *Daily Herald*, Corpus Christi *Caller*, Dallas *Express*, Deming *Graphic*, *Democrata Fronterizo* (Laredo, TX,) *El Regidor* (San Antonio, TX,) El Paso *Daily Herald*, El Paso *Herald*, Houston *Daily Post*, The Guthrie *Daily Leader*, *The Jimplecute* (Jefferson, TX,) *La Opinion* (Los Angeles, CA,) *The Morning Astorian*, Palestine *Daily Herald*, *La Prensa* (Los Angeles, CA,) *La Prensa* (San Antonio, TX,) St. Louis *Republic*, *El Tucsonese* (Tucson, AZ).
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<http://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/TDNP/>.

Proquest: Atlanta *Constitution*, Boston *Daily Globe*, Chicago *Defender*, Chicago *Tribune*, Detroit *Free Press*, New York *Times*, St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, San Francisco *Chronicle*,¹¹³¹ Washington *Post*.
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¹¹²⁹ Archives and URLs do not appear with each individual newspaper article in order to simplify the individual citations. Because each newspaper was accessed through a single archive, this summary should be adequate to identify the source of almost all newspapers used. Some of these newspapers were surveyed for racialized language relating to these weather-related natural disasters, but were not specifically quoted.

¹¹³⁰ Some of these newspapers are no longer available through an online archive.

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