Representation of the September 11th Terrorist Attacks in the Online Edition of the *Los Angeles Times*

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Introduction

This paper evaluates the representation of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, by one prominent daily American newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times,* during the first 12 weeks after the disaster, using literature content analytic methods. These attacks were unprecedented experiences for Americans in terms of their scale, the geographical reach and extreme venom of a non-state enemy, and the deliberate targeting of non-combatant civilians. Since 1900, Americans have experienced incidents sharing one or two attributes with the September 11th attacks: several wars overseas with huge casualties, a stunning attack at Pearl Harbor by a state-based enemy nation, natural disasters that have killed thousands of people in one incident (e.g., the Galveston Hurricane of 1900) or destroyed tens of billions of dollars in property and economic activity at once (e.g., the Northridge earthquake of 1994 and Hurricane Andrew in 1992), and the daily backdrop of the unusually high violent crime rate in the United States. There is, thus, a body of media analytic literature on which to draw for guidance on evaluating media coverage of an incident that uniquely combines disaster, war, and crime.

Review of Media-analytic Literature

Media affect the individual perception and social understanding of hazards, crimes, and wars, as well as nearly every other subject, in which public perceptions affect political decision making. Their shaping of Americans'

understanding of and responses to the horrific events of September 11th bears attention by the hazards research community, and this paper is meant to contribute to that discussion.

The role of the media in shaping perception and policy in general and in the area of hazards in particular has been inspected in a large body of literature scattered across a variety of disciplines. Themes in this scholarship include risk amplification (sensationalism) and attenuation, emergency mass communication, biases in coverage, and agenda-setting.

A common criticism is of the sensationalism many media bring to hazard and crime stories, which can amplify public concern about minimal risks or even hamper efforts to respond to a disaster (Bennett, 2002; Elliott, 1989; Fishman, 1978; Friedman, 1994; Kasperson and Kasperson, 1991; Kasperson et al., 1988; Mazur, 1998; Scanlon, 1989; Smith, 1992). Alternatively, by not focusing on an important hazard, media can attenuate the development of public concern and pressure on decision makers to deal with a risky situation (Kasperson and Kasperson, 1991; Rodrigue, 2001a, 2001b).

Some efforts have been made to quantify sensationalism by comparing media coverage with objective measures of damage or danger (Rovai and Rodrigue, 1998; Rodrigue et al., 1997; Sandman, 1994; Singer and Endreny, 1994; Smith, 1992). Others argue that such comparisons are not fair: the media are, in this view, not there faithfully to reproduce in print, radio, or images the exact probabilities or estimates approved by experts. Rather, they are to provide helpful information and education for people to evaluate and reduce their risk (Mazur, 1998; Quarantelli, 1989). Others concerned with the mass media functions argue that they are to report on possible breakdowns in institutional protections for people, and, most importantly, they are to provide a public forum or arena for debate on issues that might not be well encompassed by official statistics (Peters, 1994).

Until now only sporadically linked to hazards literature is a large body of generic media criticism mostly targeted to an educated lay audience with progressive political sympathies (e.g., Bagdikian, 1997; Cohen and Solomon, 1995; Cohen, 1993; Gans, 1989; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Lee and Solomon, 1991; McChesney, 1997; Schechter et al., 1997; Stevens, 1998). This work identifies a variety of filters purported to bias media selection of newsworthy items from the chaos of daily events, of which the most often cited are capital concentration in media and media dependence on advertising revenue.

Approximately 20 corporations control over half the revenue in the global media industry, including television, radio, daily newspapers, magazines, movies, and books (Compaine and Gomery, 2000; Herman and McChesney, 1998). A common concern raised about this centralization is that the narrowness of ownership structure may produce a narrowing of the political spectrum featured for citizens to bring to bear on a given situation of

importance to society. If so, narrowing of the range of views and information available could diminish the informed consent on which effective democratic oversight of policy depends (Bagdikian, 1997; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Herman and McChesney, 1998; Lee and Solomon, 1991). A counterpoint to this concern is that, while narrowing of views may affect traditional media on which citizens depend for the bulk of their news, new companies and new media do arise and can destabilize the situation (Compaine and Gomery, 2000; Rodrigue, 2001c).

Media generate profits through advertising revenue, and this can lead to a skewing of coverage in a disaster towards the interests of the usually more prosperous "desirable demographics" the advertisers are trying to reach or towards editorial perceptions of the needs of the advertisers themselves (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Maher, 1997). If such skewing occurs in the coverage of a disaster, it can lead to media marginalization of the needs of poorer victims or geographical areas, which can affect disaster recovery (Rodrigue et al., 1997; Rovai and Rodrigue, 1998; Rovai, 1994).

Media, while thus arguably prone to biases in coverage and to sensationalism, remain critical to the operations of a democratic society. They influence public opinion by directing audience attention to the particular issues that they emphasize (Brewer and McCombs, 1996; Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Gans, 1989; Iyengar et al., 1982; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The media industry may not, as Bernard Cohen once famously put it, "be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (1963, p. 13). This effect may not be a simple and measurable correspondence between an issue's salience in the media to its salience in public opinion. Rather, it may work through "priming," or activating clusters of associated ideas and values in the readers' or viewers' minds. Media presentation can then make the selected issues particularly "available" for viewers' and readers' reflection and association with other things on their minds, with a variety of often unpredictable effects on public opinion about a given issue or politician's performance (Bennett, 2002; Iyengar et al., 1982; Mazur, 2001).

The selection of news themes by editors itself may reflect a similar process of priming. Mark Fishman, in discussing crime waves, comments that "the chances that an event or incident will be reported increase once it has been associated with a current theme in the news" (1978, p. 535). Editors seek to reduce the chaos of everyday occurrences and reports to a manageable number of story themes to pursue, and this selection process is unavoidably ideological. As Fishman puts it, "This procedure requires that an incident be stripped of the actual context of its occurrence so that it may be relocated in a new symbolic context: the news theme" (1978, p. 536).

Media agenda-setting, while effective in getting items into individual attention and public agendas, is not linearly connected with them. If an issue

does not grab the attention of individuals, they will not read, view, or listen to stories about it; if an issue is important to them but they are confident that they already understand it, they may do little more than scan related stories once in a while. In neither of these situations can media govern the construction of public agendas perfectly. If, however, an issue in the media does tie in with individuals' interests and emotions and they feel uninformed about it, they may well become hungry for stories on such a salient issue; both the content of their concerns and what they think about the issue may be strongly determined by the media's decisions to follow a given theme, which can become a mutually reinforcing dynamic that encourages sensationalism and risk amplification, biased coverage, and poor contextualization (McCombs, 2002).

Issues placed on the public agenda with varying degrees of efficacy may then result in public pressure on elected decision makers. Depending on the presence of issues competing for their attention and the influences brought to bear on them, public pressure can set the agenda for policy makers' debates (Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Brewer and McCombs, 1996). This "pressurization" of policy debate affects all issues, including those of risk management (Birkland, 1996; Rodrigue, 2001a, 2001c).

Research Questions

The foregoing discussion of media sensationalism, biases, and agenda-setting roles establishes a basis for concern about the coverage of the events of September 11th, the effects it may have on readers', viewers', and listeners' understanding, and the pressure of that public understanding on elected officials' debates about the proper assessment of and management of the terrorism risk. It is outside the scope of this study to elicit audience perceptions and politicians' sense of the drift of public opinion in their constituencies. Rather, this study will focus on the post-event coverage itself, evaluating whether the coverage of one prominent daily newspaper's online edition in the 12 weeks after September 11th exhibits three features derived from media-analytic literature in its coverage of these attacks. The front-screen coverage of the *Los Angeles Times* from September 12, 2001, through December 4, 2001, should feature (1) sensationalism over context, (2) a narrow political and ideological framework for public understanding and debate, and (3) socio-economic bias in coverage of victims.

The attacks of September 11th were inherently and intensely sensational, so it is difficult to imagine how media could sensationalize something like this further, given the spectacular nature of the events themselves. The most sober and responsible of media would depict the second plane striking the building, the smoking towers, people falling or jumping out of them, the collapse of the towers, and the devastated population fleeing the impacted

areas. Sensationalism may, in such a sensational event, be usefully explored as inadequate attention to the contexts generating the event. This study, then, determines the prominence of context in the *Los Angeles Times'* post-event coverage to operationalize the concept of sensationalism in coverage of a sensational tragedy.

There is quite a range of opinion in the world today about the roots of Muslim fundamentalism, the role of the United States in directly or indirectly fostering its development, the impacts of economic globalization and military intervention in fomenting resentment towards the United States in particular and the West in general, and ways of reacting to September 11th and managing terrorism. This range of views around the world, part of the mainstream public debates in other countries, is accessible here to the more determined consumer of news information through a sampling of books, speakers at special events, foreign media, some university curricula, and public broadcasting. It is argued here that, as far as the needs of the more time-stressed or casual parts of the "citizen-audience," American commercial media will peripheralize those parts of the debate that fall beyond the current rather short ideological range dividing the two dominant political parties. The *Los Angeles Times* is, thus, not expected to cover a spectrum much wider than this range in its showcased stories, i.e., those on its front page or home screen.

The people working in the World Trade Center and Pentagon and most of the victims of the four plane attacks were a mix— predominantly middle-class and often professionals, largely but by no means exclusively American. The buildings struck in the attacks, however, also had an extensive service staff and small service businesses that employed more blue-collar workers and immigrants. The *Los Angeles Times'* front page might be expected to underplay coverage of the latter. Also, the attacks will have ramifications far beyond the World Trade Center and Pentagon buildings themselves, in economic ripple effects that will strike both corporations and the people doing menial, skilled, technical, professional, and managerial work for them and the many small businesses directly affected by the attacks or vulnerable through their dependencies on larger corporations that were. If the *Los Angeles Times'* coverage resembles media coverage of disasters in general, corporations should be emphasized over their employees and smaller businesses.

Data and Methods

I utilized the online *Los Angeles Times* for the 12-week duration of the project. This is a nationally prominent newspaper, which maintains bureaus in Washington, D.C., and New York, as well as overseas. Its audience, moreover, is geographically removed from the two cities struck by the terrorists, so its coverage could be expected to concentrate on those stories with national appeal.

I used the online edition because of the ease of data collection that it enables. Copying and pasting from the web reduced the need for manual retyping of headlines and lead sentences into the spreadsheet used to record them for further analysis. There were eventually 558 front-screen stories in the database, of which 380 were directly related to the events of September 11th.

The research proceeded through the inductive and iterative development of a dual-level classification system for the central concerns of the articles on the front screen and then summary and analysis of the resulting counts. The dual-level classification resulted when examination of the main concerns of the articles showed that these categories could themselves be further grouped into three more general categories. Similarly, each article was classified by the range of views to which the story exposed the reader as either centrist or alternative views. Also, any article on impacts was classified as focusing on workers and small businesses or focusing on large corporations. This is a literature content analytic methodology, a form of qualitative analysis that yields quantitative characterizations of textual and other material.

Content analysis entails close reading of a text (or, in some variants, images or sounds) and development of categories for the coding of content (Krippendorf, 1980; Weber, 1990). Content may be coded as falling into these categories at a variety of levels: word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, article by article, or image by image. Development of the categories may proceed inductively or deductively and is inherently subjective. While less subjective, coding of text into existing categories, too, occasionally entails difficult judgment calls about particular cases, which can vary among coders. Because of the subjectivity of the classification development process and the possibility of discrepant coding into the classification system, the validity of the results obtained through this method has long been questioned (Berelson, 1952).

In attempts to improve the descriptive and interpretive validity (Maxwell, 1992) of content analysis, some applications have entailed multiple independent coders trained similarly with the calculation of reliability statistics for the discrepancies in their coding (e.g., Neuendorf, 2002). Other variants involve coding independently and meeting to decide democratically on any discrepancies among codings (e.g., Carey et al., 1996).

Given that the funding source for this project, the Quick Response Research Program, specifically precludes wages and salaries for assistants, I opted for a single-coder system. Single coder content analysis may suffer from reduced reliability of coding of each article because it lacks a mechanism for soliciting possibly divergent interpretations of that article's chief concern and then deciding among such interpretations or reporting on their divergence. On the other hand, single-coder content analysis does facilitate consistency in coding from one article to the next as one person

applies a single approach to all of them rather than training others to apply that approach with varying levels of motivation and understanding.

Coding of Front-page Articles

This project concentrated on the 558 articles appearing on the front screen (the home page or front page) of the *Los Angeles Times* for the first 12 weeks after the disaster. The study period, then, ran from September 12, 2001, through December 4, 2001. These are, thus, the stories that the editors of the paper deemed significant enough to showcase on the front screen.

The home page presents the reader with a visually intricate screen, including navigation buttons to other sections of the paper, teaser lines leading to other articles in the paper, advertisements, photographs, and, often, thumbnail images leading to stories elsewhere in the paper or to multimedia presentations (such as video/audio clips from television broadcasts). To be included in this study, the article had to include both a headline and at least one lead sentence on the home page, from which it would be possible to code the major concerns or themes of the article. This normally yielded six to eight articles each day, divided into a top-of-screen section (roughly the above-the-fold part of a paper newspaper) with from three to five articles and, usually, a local or state section, generally with three articles.

The headline and then the lead sentences were highlighted, copied, and then pasted into a spreadsheet (though some shorter ones were simply manually typed or longer words abbreviated). Besides these two variables, other items recorded included the date and key theme. As a backup measure, a hard copy was printed of the home page and the nine main sections of the paper each day. Unfortunately, I did not have access to the internet for two days during these 12 weeks (one day each during the ninth and tenth weeks), importing a small error into the analysis reported here (about 3% of the potential articles are missing).

To develop the main themes, I initially read the headlines and lead sentences and recorded a word that summarized the central concern of the article. I then read through the articles to confirm my categorization. After doing this for a week's coverage as a pilot sample, I sorted the spreadsheet by the key theme category and noted instances where I had used similar but not identical words. I settled on a consistent expression for such cases and then went back through the database, reclassifying and again sorting. After a few iterations of this process, I was consistently naming the main themes. I repeated the process for a couple more weeks' coverage until I was confident I was classifying the stories consistently and then used this system to complete the database for the full 12-week study period. This system yielded 17 key themes, but only 10 of these ultimately included more than five stories each. These are briefly described below.

Ten Key Themes in Front-page Articles

The 10 categories that emerged from this iterative coding process each covered anywhere from six to 103 individual stories.

- **Context** included stories about the cultural and geopolitical background to the terrorist attacks, including Islam, the history of American involvement in the economies and politics of the Middle East, anti-Western and anti-American sentiments around the world that could be organized to support terrorism, the suppression of women in Afghanistan and its tardy valuation as a rationale for confronting the Taliban, the workings of the Al-Qaeda network, and Osama bin-Laden's personal history. Examples of headlines that fell in the "context" category are "Jihad Fervor now Resentment" (December 2), "Sorting out the Terrorists" (October 4), and "Terror's World a Local One" (September 22).

- **Diplomacy** had stories about American negotiations with the Taliban; American efforts to build a multinational coalition against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban; and the varying interests of Pakistan, India, Uzbekistan, and Iran that shaped their responses to American entreaties and pressure. Sample headlines coded under "diplomacy" are "Afghanistan Offers to Free Aid Workers If US Stops Threats" (October 6), "Bush urges UN Members to Back War" (November 10), "Shoring up Saudi Support" (October 3), and "Evidence Impresses Pakistan" (October 4).

- **Impact** included articles about the human toll in lives and business relationships lost; the economic dislocations caused by the attacks in the aviation, entertainment, sports, tourism, and other industries, in governance, and in lower Manhattan. Examples of headlines falling into this category are "Trade Center toll Rises to 6,300" (September 20), "Controlled Chaos Seizes Day at LAX" (September 12), "Hawaii takes a Big Hit as it Waits for Tourists" (October 17), and "State's Economy Seems Unlikely to Dodge Fallout" (October 7).

- **Investigation** took in articles on the progress of the criminal investigations identifying suspects; the history of the suspects in the United States; and the genetic identity of the anthrax strains found in letters. Sample headlines coded as "investigation" are "How did the Hijackers get past Airport Security?" (September 23), "FBI Investigating Florida Anthrax Cases" (October 8), "Pentagon 'Black Boxes' Found" (September 14), "Terrorists' Checklist" (September 28), and "75 Questioned, 4 Held in Widening Probe" (September 18).

- **Military** included stories reporting on airstrikes in Afghanistan, deployment of special forces, deaths of military and intelligence

personnel in combat or while providing support for combat operations, and collateral damage to civilians. Some illustrative headlines in the "military" classification are "US Jets Open 2nd Week of Strikes" (October 15), "Errant Bomb Hits Housing Row in Kabul" (October 14), "Bush Takes CEO Role in Waging War" (September 23), "Aid Workers Airlifted to Freedom" (November 14), "Secretary of Defense Stirs and Delivers" (November 10), and "Both Sides Report Heavy Fighting near Key City" (November 8).

- **Mitigation** refers to stories about the proposal and implementation of heightened security measures in the wake of the September 11th attacks. Examples of "mitigation" stories include "House OKs Airport Security Bill" (October 12), " FAA Plans to Increase Security of Cockpit Doors" (September 18), and "New Push to Centralize Food Inspections" (November 23).

- **Reactions** include stories focussing on grief of victims' families and friends and the nation and world as a whole, commemorations of the victims, such emotions as fear of flying and anger, and attacks on Muslims and people who "look" Muslim. Articles coded under the heading of "reactions" include "Remembering Those Lost" (September 14), "Fear That LA Would Be next Grips Many" (September 12), "Turbans Make Sikhs Innocent Targets" (September 20), "US Keen to Avenge Attacks" (September 16), and "Anti-war Protest" (September 29).

- **Reconstruction** includes coverage of plans for rebuilding the destroyed buildings and the economy. Sample headlines deemed related to "reconstruction" include "Bush Seeks $60 Billion in Tax Cuts" (October 5), and "Free to Plant Opium" (November 22). There were no front-screen stories on rebuilding the World Trade Center or the Pentagon in the first 12 weeks.

- **Response** described stories that dealt with search and rescue operations, evacuations, and workers being sent home by employers. Examples of headlines falling under the "response" category are "How to Help" (September 12), "Rain Hampers NY Rescuers" (September 14), and "Anthrax Terrorism Spreads" (October 16).

- **Restoration** took in stories about the reopening of airports, resumption of sports events, workers returning to their jobs, and restoration of utilities. Headlines in the "restoration category" include "US Aviation Resumes" (September 13), "Residents Warily Return to Lives" (September 13), "Grim Work Continues in NYC" (October 1), and "People Take a Break from Catastrophe" (September 17).

Not all stories about September 11th fell tidily into these 10 areas. There were seven categories that had too few stories to warrant listing separately, so these were grouped together as "other related stories" (n=14). An example would be two stories reporting that Kofi Annan and the UN received the Nobel Peace Prize for "tackling challenges from poverty to terrorism." Another single article was coded as "politics," dealing with an incident in which President Bush embarrassed members of Congress by revealing leaks to the press traceable to some of them.

In addition, as time wore on, other unrelated stories began to return to the front screen of the *Los Angeles Times*. These were recorded as reflecting restoration of more ordinary concerns, but they were not specifically classified beyond "unrelated story." Some of these involved difficult judgment calls. For example, the ongoing Israeli and Palestinian confrontations returned to the front screen late in the fifth week and eventually included 24 headlines out of the 558. While the history of Israeli and Western presence in the Islamic holy places of the Middle East is mentioned by Osama bin-Laden and others as part of what allegedly drove them to terrorism, if these stories of present-day conflicts did not link the incidents they reported with the history of terrorism and the development of the September 11th attacks, they were classified as "unrelated." Examples of these stories include such headlines as "Israeli Cabinet Minister Slain," "Israelis Kill Hamas Leader," "Hamas Supporters Vow Revenge," and "Blaming Arafat, Israel Starts Counterattack." With these qualifications, there were eventually 179 unrelated front-screen stories in the first 12 weeks of *Los Angeles Times* coverage.

The Three Metastories on the Front Page

The 10 categories and the stories in them began themselves to converge into three overarching narratives or metastories: there were stories of the **disaster**, response to it, and recovery from it; there were stories about the **crime** and its investigation; and there were the **war** stories of diplomacy, deployment, airstrikes, and the fall of the Taliban. Each theme was eventually assigned to one of these metastories and then the other related story category was gone through, story by story, with individual stories assigned to one of the three larger narratives. There is a tacit fourth metastory implicit in all the other stories that were unrelated to the disaster, crime, and war. Their presence tells the stories of a nation returning to its more ordinary concerns, and they serve as a harbinger of at least partial recovery.

Range of Ideological Exposure on the Front Page

All 379 stories related to September 11th were further classified by the kinds of views to which they exposed the reader. Stories were coded as

centrist if they reported views that fall within the range of political opinion normally expressed in the two dominant American political parties, Republican and Democrat; the developing international consensus about the appropriateness of American military response to Al-Qaeda; or simply reported incidents without analysis. Examples of such headlines and lead sentences are

- "Evidence impresses Pakistan—For the first time, the only country keeping ties with the Taliban regime has joined the US in directly blaming bin Laden" (October 4).

- Crop-dusting Delay Threatens Agriculture—Officials worry that pests, weeds and disease could get a foothold. Aircraft group members are asked about training inquiries" (September 25).

- "Anthrax Patient Dies; Investigation Continues—Health officials have emphasized that no other cases have been reported and there is no evidence of a terrorist attack" (October 5).

- "President Reasserts Vow to Uproot Terror—As world's attention focuses on the military deployment around Afghanistan, Bush uses radio address to remind nation 'this will be a different kind of war'" (September 29).

- "Thousands Grieve at Memorial—People gathered to mourn those killed in the Sept 11 WTC attack. Above, a NYC firefighter places a family photo on a makeshift memorial" (October 28).

Stories were coded as **alternative viewpoints** if they covered viewpoints that expressed criticism of the United States' foreign policy or domestic reactions to September 11th; represented immigrant, counter-cultural, or oppositional voices within the United States; or emphasized opinions in other countries that are highly divergent from American foreign policy and the international consensus about terrorism and the Taliban. Some headlines and lead sentences falling in this category are

- "Terror's World a Local One—Thousands die around the globe each year in home-grown violence. But US war isn't likely to target these killers" (September 22).

- "Japanese-Americans' Wounds Reopened—Citing WWII internment camps, groups plan candlelight vigil in support of Muslims" (September 26).

- "Bombing alters Afghans' Views—The US, once viewed as a savior, is increasingly being seen as the enemy—and the Taliban as a victim" (November 4).

- "Sharon draws US Rebuke—Rift over claims that Washington is ready to sell out Israel points up the intricacies of the war on terrorism" (October 6).

- "Anti-war Protest—Activists and anarchists chanted "no war" as they took to the streets in Washington today, their anti-globalization cause transformed by the terrorist attacks" (September 29).

Corporations, Employees, and Small Businesses

Forty-seven of the stories addressed business and employees in some manner related to September 11th. Some of the articles dealt only with workers and others only with businesses, while others mentioned both. Within the business-focused stories, it was possible to differentiate larger corporate concerns from small businesses as the focus, while in still others it was not possible to differentiate them or the article covered both scales of enterprise. As a result, six different categories emerged, which are listed below with illustrative headlines and lead sentences.

Employee focused—"Call to Ease LAX Security is Rejected—Officials cite continuing threat in rebuffing pleas from hundreds who say rules have cost them their jobs" (September 26); "Slowdown's Silent Victims—Few laid-off hospitality workers qualify for government aid, and those who do—because they hold temporary work permits—won't apply" (October 21); and "Unemployment Rate Leaps to 5.4%—The biggest one-month jump in more than 21 years is result of 400,000 jobs being lost" (November 2).

Large business focused—"United CEO Forced out as New Turmoil Rocks Airline—A warning that the carrier could 'perish' spread anxiety in an ailing industry" October 28); "Disney Results Expected to be Bleakest since 1993—Bruised by fallout from last month's terrorist attacks, the company is expected to report a major drop in income from its FL operations" (October 27); and "Another Brutal Day on Wall St.—Market suffers its fourth big decline in five days. Dow experiences its worst weekly point drop in history" (September 21).

Small business focused—"Private lots near LAX feel Crunch of Rules—The owners say the public isn't aware they're open and that their shuttles can go to the airport" (September 28); "Weaving a Ribbon of Unity—A local store tries to keep up with demand for the red, white, and blue symbols. Other scenes reveal our changing landscape" (September 16); and "Few Hate Crimes, but Police Act Quickly—In the most serious attack, gunmen shoot at a convenience store owned by a Syrian-American" (September 15).

Undifferentiated business focused— "Local Firms Brace for a Slowdown—Cancellation of the Emmys and sports events is affecting

revenues at hotels and restaurants" (September 14), and "Retail Sales leap Record 7.1%—October sales, driven by heavy discounting, were the highest ever recorded" (November 14).

 Large business and employee focused—"Guards Needed, but Low Pay a Problem—The nation's two largest security firms anticipate hiring a combined minimum of 10,000 to 15,000 new guards" (September 29), and "LA may see Boost in TV, Movie Work—Studios are rethinking plans as actors, executives voice desire to avoid travel" (September 24).

 Undifferentiated business and employee focused—"Anaheim Feeling Pinch—With a travel-wary public, once-popular spots face financial devastation. Above a worker at the Anaheim Convention Center cleans in the lobby" (October 4), and "Stimulus Bill facing Change—The $100 billion package passed by the House must go to the Senate, where greater support exists for additional spending. Above, thousands at the 'Twin Towers Job Expo' in NY today" (October 25).

Coding of Front-page Photographs

Additionally, I examined the front-screen photographs, recording a one-sentence description of the scene and then classifying it by the metastory it illustrated: disaster, war, crime, or unrelated. Visuals can reinforce, amplify, or contradict impressions created by textual information and sometimes are the sole impression taken away by the casual or time-pressed reader.

Coding of September 11th Relevance of Other Major Sections of the Paper

Finally, I went through the other main sections of the paper for the 12 weeks, except for the Travel section, counting up the total number of stories (9,551) and the number that were related to the events of September 11th (2,736). The Travel section, though listed among the main sections, generally consists of one or two stories repeated each day for a week or so and resembles the narrow-theme minor sections (e.g., Health, Arts & Entertainment, and Books) more than it does the paper's main sections (e.g., Nation, California, Business, Editorials).

Findings

In this section, the analysis of front-screen coverage will be broken down by the 10 main themes and the three metastories of disaster, crime, and war, into which the 558 stories fell. The relative abundance of each theme and metastory will be discussed for the 12-week study period as a whole and then broken out by week. Following the findings for the front-page coverage, the balance between September 11th-related and unrelated stories among the main sections of the paper will also be traced by week.

Overview of the First Twelve Weeks on the Front Page

This section considers the 12-week study period as a whole. The 10 themes and then the three metastories are discussed in terms of dominant themes and metastories over the study period. A later section will follow key themes and metastories week by week.

The Ten Main Themes

Three themes were emphasized in the *Los Angeles Times'* front-page coverage of September 11th in the sense that they each received about 10% or more of the first 12 weeks' coverage. Two other themes were drastically de-emphasized, receiving less than 2% of front-page coverage during the study period.

Far and away the dominant concern through the first weeks viewed together was the military category with 103, or 18.5% of the 558 stories (Figure 1). Secondary themes more weakly emphasized were those of the crime investigation (n=57, or 10.2%) and of reactions to the disaster itself (n=55, or 9.9%).

Dramatically de-emphasized were two other themes: context and reconstruction. The context of the events of September 11th received the least front-screen coverage, with just six stories, or 1.1%. The context is an important part of this story and key for Americans to understand and prepare for what is to them a new hazard. In this sense, the attacks of September 11th generated needs for contextualized information similar to those for any disaster, and the weak showing of the context on the front screen here fits with prior work on how media perform in other hazards and disasters (e.g., Singer and Endreny, 1994). Moreover, the context of this disaster was deeply and unavoidably political and ideological at core. Its disappointing treatment here is consistent with the ideological narrowing that some media critics worry comes with corporate concentration in media, but it is also consistent with the long-established media need for drama and simplicity, which contextual information rarely satisfies.

If the 24 stories about the incidents in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict were included in "context," for the sake of argument, still only 30 stories could then be seen as addressing the context. This remains a paltry 5.4% of coverage.

Also receiving very little coverage was reconstruction (n=9, or 1.6%). Given that this study focused on just the first 12 weeks after the attacks, this is not too surprising: This disaster was still at a very early stage in the conventional post-event timeline of response-restoration-reconstruction (Haas et al., 1977).

The tacit story of recovery is seen in the eventual appearance of large numbers of stories that were unrelated to the events of September 11th and

their aftermath. By the end of the 12-week study period, fully 179 or 32.1% of the front-screen stories in the *Los Angeles Times* fell in the unrelated category.

The Three Metastories

Collapsed into the three metastories of disaster, crime, and war, the dominant narrative was the war story, with 168 of the 558 stories, or 30.1% (Figure 2). The disaster was the second most prominent metastory for the 12-week study period, almost a co-dominant at 152 stories or 27.2%. The crime story was the least covered of the grand narratives, with 59 stories or 10.6%.

Images of the Three Metastories

Of the 82 photographs, fully 48 or 58.5%, represented scenes tied to the war story (Figure 3). Examples included a scene of protesters in Pakistan burning an American flag on the second day of airstrikes, a Defense Department image of U.S. troops at an undisclosed location, a head shot of the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at a Pentagon press conference discussing the role of special forces in southern Afghanistan, and two Afghan women in burkas with two children on their way to Pakistan as refugees. Another 22 photographs or 26.8% depicted scenes related to the disasters themselves, such as firefighters hosing down Building 7 of the World Trade Center, the President and First Lady at a National Cathedral commemorative service, Bruce Springsteen at a fund-raising telethon, and a crowd shot of people at the "Twin Towers Job Expo." Only six photographs, or 7.3%, dealt with the crime investigation, such as a head shot of the President thanking investigators at the FBI, and head shot of the attorney general holding up a hijacker's suicide note or checklist, and three boys in Pakistan, sons of a suspect being detained by the United States on immigration charges, being held by the detainee's elderly brother. Images related to September 11th completely dominated the front-page photographs of the *Los Angeles Times* throughout the 12-week study period, comprising 76 photographs or 92.7%.

Range of Ideological Exposure on the Front Page

Of the 379 front-page articles that were related to the events of September 11th, only 48 (12.7%) were classified as exposing readers to alternative viewpoints as defined above. Fully 331 (87.3%) were centrist. This affirms the expectation that American media coverage would report a relatively narrow range, not often reaching outside the ideological spectrum that dominates American political discourse.

Corporations, Employees, and Small Business

Of the 47 front-screen stories that mentioned businesses and employees, 19 focused on employees and 20 on business, while another eight gave attention to both. Among the business-focused articles, 11 concentrated on

Key Themes		CONTEXT	DIPLOMACY	IMPACT	INVESTIGATION	MILITARY	MITIGATION	REACTIONS	RECONSTRUCTION	RESPONSE	RESTORATION	OTHER RELATED	UNRELATED	SUMS
Week 1	#	0	1	5	11	9	1	10	0	5	8	3	0	53
	%	0.0	1.9	9.4	20.8	17.0	1.9	18.9	0.0	9.4	15.1	5.7	0.0	100.0
Week 2	#	1	2	5	8	12	1	16	1	4	1	1	0	52
	%	1.9	3.8	9.6	15.4	23.1	1.9	30.8	1.9	7.7	1.9	1.9	0.0	100.0
Week 3	#	0	6	4	3	5	8	6	0	3	7	0	4	46
	%	0.0	13.0	8.7	6.5	10.9	17.4	13.0	0.0	6.5	15.2	0.0	8.7	100.0
Week 4	#	2	10	3	3	8	1	1	2	0	1	4	13	48
	%	4.2	20.8	6.3	6.3	16.7	2.1	2.1	4.2	0.0	2.1	8.3	27.1	100.0
Week 5	#	1	2	1	5	10	2	0	0	1	0	4	20	46
	%	2.2	4.3	2.2	10.9	21.7	4.3	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	8.7	43.5	100.0
Week 6	#	0	2	3	7	8	0	0	0	1	0	3	19	43
	%	0.0	4.7	7.0	16.3	18.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3	0.0	7.0	44.2	100.0

		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	Total
Week 7	#	0	0	6	5	7	3	2	1	1	1	0	0	20	45
	%	0.0	0.0	13.3	11.1	15.6	6.7	4.4	2.2	2.2	2.2	0.0	0.0	44.4	100.0
Week 8	#	0	2	2	5	7	1	9	1	2	1	0	0	19	49
	%	0.0	4.1	4.1	10.2	14.3	2.0	18.4	2.0	4.1	2.0	0.0	0.0	38.8	100.0
Week 9	#	0	5	0	2	10	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	17	39
	%	0.0	12.8	0.0	5.1	25.6	2.6	5.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.1	43.6	100.0
Week 10	#	0	6	0	2	10	3	4	1	2	1	0	0	15	43
	%	0.0	14.0	0.0	4.7	23.3	7.0	9.3	2.3	4.7	2.3	0.0	0.0	34.9	100.0
Week 11	#	1	0	2	3	9	1	0	2	1	2	1	0	28	47
	%	2.1	0.0	4.3	6.4	19.1	2.1	0.0	4.3	2.1	4.3	2.1	0.0	59.6	100.0
Week 12	#	1	2	4	3	8	2	2	1	0	1	0	0	24	47
	%	2.1	4.3	8.5	6.4	17.0	4.3	4.3	2.1	0.0	2.1	0.0	0.0	51.1	100.0
All 12 Weeks	#	6	38	35	57	103	24	52	9	20	18	17		179	558
	%	1.1	6.8	6.3	10.2	18.5	4.3	9.9	1.6	3.6	3.2	3.0		32.1	100.0

Highlighted cells are those with 10% dominance or more.

Data compiled by C.M. Rodrigue, 2002

Figure 1. Key themes by week.

Metastories		week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7	week 8	week 9	week 10	week 11	week 12	1st 12 weeks
War story	#	11	15	19	21	15	10	10	10	16	19	10	12	168
	%	20.8	28.8	41.3	43.8	32.6	23.3	22.2	22.2	41.8	44.2	21.3	25.5	30.1
Crime story	#	11	8	3	4	5	7	5	5	3	2	3	3	59
	%	20.8	15.4	6.5	8.3	10.9	16.3	11.1	10.2	7.7	4.7	6.4	6.4	10.6
Disaster story	#	31	29	20	10	6	7	10	15	3	7	6	8	152
	%	58.5	55.8	43.5	20.8	13	16.3	22.2	30.6	7.7	16.3	12.8	17	27.2
Unrelated story	#	0	0	4	13	20	19	20	19	17	15	28	24	179
	%	0	0	8.7	27.1	43.5	44.2	44.4	38.8	43.6	34.9	59.6	51.1	32.1
SUMS	#	53	52	46	48	46	43	45	49	39	43	47	47	558
	%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Highlighted cells indicate dominant or co-dominant metastories for that week

Data compiled by C.M. Rodrigue, 2002

Figure 2. Metastories by week.

Metastories		week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7	week 8	week 9	week 10	week 11	week 12	1st 12 weeks
War story	#	1	3	4	4	4	5	5	6	3	5	6	2	48
	%	14.3	42.9	57.1	57.1	57.1	71.4	71.4	85.7	50.0	83.3	85.7	28.6	58.5
Crime story	#	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	6
	%	0.0	14.3	14.3	0.0	14.3	14.3	0.0	0.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.3
Disaster story	#	6	3	2	3	1	0	2	1	1	0	1	2	22
	%	85.7	42.9	28.6	42.9	14.3	0.0	28.6	14.3	16.7	0.0	14.3	28.6	26.8
Unrelated story	#	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	6
	%	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.7	0.0	42.9	7.3
SUMS	#	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	6	7	7	82
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Highlighted cells indicate dominant metastories in that week's front page photographs.

Data compiled by C.M. Rodrigue, 2002

Figure 3. Front-page photographs classified into metastories, by week.

large corporations, four on small businesses, and another four on business in general or large and small businesses together. Of those balancing employers and employees, four dealt with large businesses and another four with both large and small employers. The coverage of workers and businesses, then, was almost perfectly balanced, offering no support for the expectation that the *Los Angeles Times'* coverage would be biased towards business.

Changes in Front-page Coverage over Time

Broken out week by week, there were interesting and revealing shifts and constancies in attention. Only one of the main themes remained salient throughout the study period. More commonly, a few main themes became prominent at one time during the study period and then submerged at other times. In terms of the metastories, the two co-dominant larger narratives switched dominance between the first three weeks and the last nine weeks.

The Ten Main Themes over Time

Only one of the 10 major concerns consistently garnered at least 10% of each week's coverage throughout the study period: military. Its share of weekly coverage ranged from 10.9% to 25.6%, averaging 18.5% .

Investigation was the second most common dominant of each week's coverage. It appeared among the list of categories winning at least 10% of a week's coverage in six weeks out of the 12. Not too surprisingly, the crime investigation was especially salient in the two weeks right after the attacks. It appeared again as a prominent story from the fifth through the eighth weeks, as the anthrax attacks reached their peak and as controversy developed over FBI warnings. It dropped off during the last four weeks of the study period. Figure 4 gives a reference timeline of events.

Two more themes appeared among the salient stories for still shorter periods of four weeks each: reactions and diplomacy. Reactions understandably dominated the first three weeks after the disasters. This theme became prominent again during the eighth week, when the first bin-Laden videotape was released, data confirming the economy had entered recession were published, and the governor of California instituted controversial precautionary measures to protect bridges on the basis of an FBI warning that was later retracted. Diplomacy became salient during the third and fourth weeks as the United States began to launch the air war in Afghanistan, and again during the ninth and tenth weeks (when the Taliban began clearly to fall apart, and the missionary aid workers held by the Taliban were rescued). Restoration was prominent during two weeks of the first month after the disaster (week one and week three) as New York and Washington, D.C., struggled to restore the lifelines and activities on which their safety and livelihoods depend. Two more categories flashed briefly into salience for one

Events that Week	week 1	week 2	week 3	week 4	week 5	week 6	week 7	week 8	week 9	week 10	week 11	week 12
WTC/Pentagon plane-bombings Airports reopen Stock markets reopen	1											
First hate killing in Los Angeles First peace protests First celebrity fund-raiser		2										
Pakistan allies with United States First unrelated story on front page First report of Special Forces in Afghanistan			3									
Anthrax in Florida First airstrikes Russian jet struck by missle				4								
Anthrax in New York First errant bomb kills non-combatants Anthrax in Washington, D.C. (Daschle)					5							
Anthrax in New Jersey First ground force military engagement Shift of bombing from cities to battlefields						6						
Anthrax spreading Air strikes and ground involvement increase FBI warns of new threats							7					
Bin Laden videotape Economic downturn FBI: Warning not credible after CA gov's measures								8				
US diplomacy on several fronts Plane crashes in Brooklyn Taliban defeats									9			
Anthrax seems to be domestic terrorism Hostage aid workers rescued Problems distributing aid to 9/11 victims										10		
Taliban collapsing International terrorism: Madrid, Indonesia Taliban prison revolt											11	
Recession deepening First American to die in combat American Taliban												12

Data from **L.A. Times** compiled by C.M. Rodrigue, 2002

Figure 4. Reference timeline of news events.

week each: impact during week seven, when anthrax seemed to be spreading through the mail enough to alter business mailroom practices, and mitigation during week three as more permanent security measures were being proposed and debated, especially for air travel.

The Three Metastories over Time

Grouping all these into the three larger narratives of disaster, crime, and war, it had seemed that disaster and war were nearly matched in their dominance of the coverage during the 12-week study period (see Figure 2). Broken out week by week, however, a strong shift in emphasis was seen. The disaster story completely dominated the first three weeks of coverage, from

58.5% of the stories in the first week to 43.5% by the third week. Dominance switched drastically in the fourth week to the war story. As airstrikes began in Afghanistan, the war story now won 43.5% of the coverage. Meanwhile, the disaster story dropped to 20.8%. The war story dominated from the fourth week through the sixth, co-dominated with disaster during the seventh week, and resumed dominance from the ninth through the twelfth weeks. The disaster story experienced a flurry of salience in the seventh week, when it matched the war story, and the eighth week when it actually once more dominated coverage. (The seventh and eighth weeks experienced increased numbers of anthrax cases in several places and the first economic data on the downturn associated with the attacks, both of which events briefly refocused attention on the disaster itself.)

The stories unrelated to September 11th first showed up on the third week after the attacks, making up 8.7% of the third week's front-screen stories. This percentage climbed dramatically over the next two weeks, to 27.1% on the fourth week and to 43.5% by the fifth week. It fluctuated from roughly 35% to 44% for the next few weeks, from the sixth through the tenth week. By the eleventh week, this had shot up to 59.6% and, by the twelfth week, to 51.1%. This is not too surprising a trajectory, as the paper's readership became accustomed to the disaster and its aftermath and gradually became interested in other matters going on in the world.

Images of the Three Metastories over Time

The photographs on the front page remained dominated by September 11th-related images throughout the 12 weeks. Images related to September 11th accounted for 100% of the front-page photographs for fully nine of the 12 weeks and, in each of the remaining three weeks, only one photograph was unrelated to September 11th. Images of the World Trade Center disaster dominated for only the first two weeks, a period even shorter than that seen when considering only the textual material on the front page. Unrelated images rose to dominance over the three metastories only in the very last week, compared with the last seven weeks of the textual material. The graphics of the *Los Angeles Times*, then, remained dominated by September 11th long after the front-page stories did, and the war metastory takes over sooner among the three metastories.

September 11th and the Main Sections of the Paper

The 9,551 stories in the Home and other main sections included 2,736 articles somehow related to September 11th, or 28.6% (Figure 5). Not too surprisingly, coverage of the disaster dominated the paper during the first week, with 356 stories related to it out of the 619 articles in the main sections of the paper, or 57.5%. This plummets permanently below dominance by the

second week, with 332 of 820 articles (40.5%) related to the events of September 11th. Coverage drops below a third by the third week, dwindling unsteadily to 19.4% by the last week (Figure 6). This negative exponential trend in coverage is characteristic of coverage in other disasters (e.g., the Northridge earthquake) as media and audience attention shifts to other concerns more typical of the pre-disaster framework.

The prevalence of September 11th-related stories over the total study period varied considerably among the main sections of the paper from a low of 5.4% (Sports) to a high of 90.4% (Nation). Their rate of replacement by non-related articles, however, suggests the recovery of various sectors of society from the September 11th disaster.

The first major section of the paper to recover was Sports (see Figures 5 and 6). Far and away the dominant major section of the *Los Angeles Times* was Sports, with 2,940 stories out of the 9,551 (30.8%). Of the 2,736 September 11th-related stories, though, only 158 (5.4%) fell in the Sports section (Figure 7). Even so, Sports coverage the first week was dominated by the disaster (74 out of 145 stories, or 51.0%), dropping to 11.9% by the second week and then remaining below 5% for the next five weeks and generally below 2% for the remaining five weeks. The first week's Sports coverage was cut roughly in half by the disaster when compared, for example, against the 254 sports stories seen on average in weeks two through twelve. The remaining sports stories that first week consisted mostly of announcements of canceled events, discussion of the deaths of two Kings scouts killed in the hijacked flights, and non-sports activities of sports figures. By the second week, events were being rescheduled, and the Sports reporters finally had something more on their customary beat to report.

After Sports, the second most important major section of the *Los Angeles Times* in terms of the number of stories was Business. Business contained 2,227 of the 9,551 stories in the study period, or 23.8% (see Figure 5). The share of Business stories related to September 11th was about proportional to its share of all stories: 597 of the 2,736 September 11th-related stories, or 21.8%, fell in the Business section (Figure 7). Business coverage devoted to September 11th-related themes declined from 66.4% to 42.8% from the first to the second week but then declined in a steady, nearly linear fashion to 8.6% of stories in the last week of the study period (see Figure 5).

The front page was, obviously, constrained to relatively few stories (generally around 45 stories per week), but these stories were the ones the editors wished to showcase, the ones most likely to tempt the reader's attention. Only 558 stories of the 9,551 fell onto the front screen, or 5.8% (see Figure 5). Of the 2,736 main section stories that were related to September 11th, however, 378 or 13.8% were on the front screen (Figure 7). The events of September 11th and stories related to them dominated the home page for 11

Week / Section	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	6 %	7 %	8 %	9 %	10 %	11 %	12 %	Total 9/11 %	ALL #
Home	100	100	94	72	53	53	57	59	54	65	51	43	68	558
World	12	5	8	4	5	1	12	4	7	9	40	53	14	859
Nation	100	100	95	94	95	97	99	92	89	91	66	68	90	899
Calif	13	42	29	27	19	29	16	20	9	20	10	14	21	887
Business	66	43	43	36	33	27	20	20	14	13	11	9	26	2271
Politics	64	50	44	50	21	69	85	42	18	67	40	18	45	204
Sports	51	12	3	4	1	3	5	2	1	0	2	0	5	2940
Tech	79	42	18	20	18	22	3	7	5	5	6	0	14	438
Op-ed	88	83	74	82	69	71	63	70	60	68	44	43	67	495
Total 9/11-related %	58	40	32	30	26	27	26	22	21	22	26	19	29	9551
Total of all stories #	619	820	853	896	859	858	799	888	721	784	613	841		

Data compiled by C.M. Rodrigue, 2002

Figure 5. Percentage of coverage, by week, in the nine major sections of the Los Angeles Times.
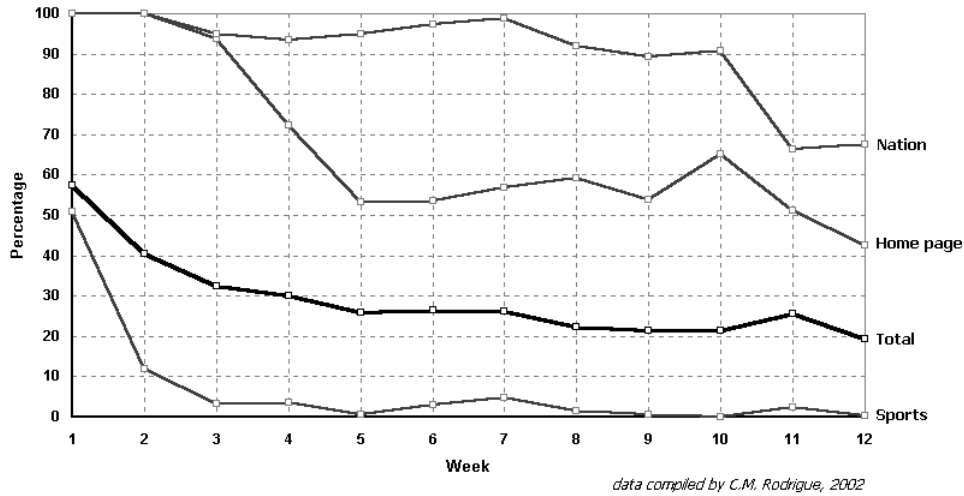
data compiled by C.M. Rodrigue, 2002

***Figure 6. Percentage of* Los Angeles Times *coverage
related to September 11th.***

of the 12 weeks, only dropping below 50% in the last week of the study
period (see Figures 5 and 6).

Op-Ed, the section printing editorials and regular commentaries,
resembled the front screen in terms of September 11th coverage. Another
small section of the paper with 495 of the 9,551 stories (5.2%), Op-Ed
garnered 12.2% of all September 11th-related coverage in the main sections
of the *Los Angeles Times* (see Figure 7). The events of September 11th
declined in importance in an irregular but linear trend from 88.0% of stories
in the first week to 43.2% in the last week (see Figure 5).

The last section of the paper to begin recovering was Nation. Nation
normally occupies a modest part of the paper, steadily running about 11
articles per day in the online edition. Of the 899 articles in the Nation section
over the course of the study period, fully 813 or 90.4% of the stories had to do
with September 11th (see Figures 5 and 6). As a result, the Nation section was
the likeliest venue for September 11th-related coverage, with 29.7% of all
September 11th coverage appearing in this section (see Figure 7). All Nation
stories for the first two weeks after the disaster focused on the attacks.
September 11th accounted for 90+% of Nation stories for some eight weeks
after that, dwindling to about two-thirds in the last two weeks of the study
period (see Figures 5 and 6).

Section	Week 1 Sum	Week 1 9/11	Week 1 %	Week 2 Sum	Week 2 9/11	Week 2 %	Week 3 Sum	Week 3 9/11	Week 3 %	Week 4 Sum	Week 4 9/11	Week 4 %	Week 5 Sum	Week 5 9/11	Week 5 %	Week 6 Sum	Week 6 9/11	Week 6 %
Home	53	53	100.0	52	52	100.0	47	44	93.6	47	34	72.3	47	25	53.2	43	23	53.5
World	77	9	11.7	77	4	5.2	77	6	7.8	77	3	3.9	77	4	5.2	77	1	1.3
Nation	77	77	100.0	77	77	100.0	77	73	94.8	77	72	93.5	77	73	94.8	77	75	97.4
Calif	77	10	13.0	77	32	41.6	77	22	28.6	77	21	27.3	77	15	19.5	77	22	28.6
Business	137	91	66.4	180	77	42.8	157	68	43.3	198	71	35.9	192	63	32.8	202	54	26.7
Politics	14	9	64.3	16	8	50.0	25	11	44.0	24	12	50.0	19	4	21.1	13	9	69.2
Sports	145	74	51.0	269	32	11.9	306	10	3.3	306	11	3.6	291	2	0.7	295	9	3.1
Tech	14	11	78.6	24	10	41.7	40	7	17.5	46	9	19.6	34	6	17.6	36	8	22.2
Op-ed	25	22	88.0	48	40	83.3	47	35	74.5	44	36	81.8	45	31	68.9	38	27	71.1
TOTALS	619	356	57.5	820	332	40.5	853	276	32.4	896	269	30.0	859	223	26.0	858	228	26.6

Section	Week 7 Sum	Week 7 9/11	Week 7 %	Week 8 Sum	Week 8 9/11	Week 8 %	Week 9 Sum	Week 9 9/11	Week 9 %	Week 10 Sum	Week 10 9/11	Week 10 %	Week 11 Sum	Week 11 9/11	Week 11 %	Week 12 Sum	Week 12 9/11	Week 12 %
Home	44	25	56.8	49	29	59.2	39	21	53.8	43	28	65.1	47	24	51.1	47	20	42.6
World	77	9	11.7	68	3	4.4	44	3	6.8	54	5	9.3	77	31	40.3	77	41	53.2
Nation	77	76	98.7	74	68	91.9	66	59	89.4	66	60	90.9	77	51	66.2	77	52	67.5
Calif	77	12	15.6	76	15	19.7	66	6	9.1	66	13	19.7	77	8	10.4	63	9	14.3
Business	201	40	19.9	204	40	19.6	217	30	13.8	194	26	13.4	180	19	10.6	209	18	8.6
Politics	13	11	84.6	19	8	42.1	22	4	18.2	12	8	66.7	10	4	40.0	17	3	17.6
Sports	230	11	4.8	313	5	1.6	180	1	0.6	253	0	0.0	89	2	2.2	263	1	0.4
Tech	40	1	2.5	45	3	6.7	40	2	5.0	58	3	5.2	17	1	5.9	44	0	0.0
Op-ed	40	25	62.5	40	28	70.0	47	28	59.6	38	26	68.4	39	17	43.6	44	19	43.2
TOTALS	799	210	26.3	888	199	22.4	721	154	21.4	784	169	21.6	613	157	25.6	841	163	19.4

Section	All 12 Weeks 9/11 as % of *			All 12 Weeks Section as % of *	
	Sum	9/11	%	Sum	9/11
Home	558	378	67.7	5.8	13.8
World	859	119	13.9	9.0	4.3
Nation	899	813	90.4	9.4	29.7
Calif	887	185	20.9	9.3	6.8
Business	2271	597	26.3	23.8	21.8
Politics	204	91	44.6	2.1	3.3
Sports	2940	158	5.4	30.8	5.8
Tech	438	61	13.9	4.6	2.2
Op-ed	495	334	67.5	5.2	12.2
TOTALS	9551	2736	28.6	100.0	100.0

Data compiled by C.M. Rodrigue, 2002

Figure 7. Number and percentage of stories, by week.

These examples illustrate the recovery of more ordinary concerns in the *Los Angeles Times* and the variability in this normalization among the main sections of the paper and, implicitly, among the social interests related to those sections. Sports recovered almost completely and that very quickly once crowd-drawing events were allowed to resume. The Nation coverage had not recovered anything resembling its pre-disaster character even after 12 weeks, reflecting the ongoing and agonizing decisions to be made by Americans in facing this new (to them) kind of hazard and the opportunity costs in civil liberties to be exacted by zealous application of the precautionary principle. This uneasy persistence of concern about September 11th was seen in other sections of the paper that also provided forums for social debate about managing this new risk, e.g., Op-Ed and the front page.

Discussion

Looking at these findings a little more closely, the rapid shift of attention to the war in Afghanistan, the recovery of non-September-11th-related coverage, and the varying rates of news movement from September 11th nearly concealed another story: the disaster story still affecting the memories and daily lives of New Yorkers and Washingtonians throughout the study period. As seen in Figure 2, the metastory of disaster was displaced by the war story on the front page by the end of the third week after the attacks and in front-page photographs no later than the second week (see Figure 3). The military-related coverage took up 30.1% of the 558 front-screen stories in the first 12 weeks of overall coverage (see Figure 2) and 58.5% of the front-page photographs (see Figure 3). Disaster-related stories (27.2% of all 558 articles) did dominate for the first three weeks of coverage, but they gave way to the war story for most of the last nine weeks (see Figure 2), and their images (26.8% of the 82 photographs) held a dominant position for only the first two weeks (see Figure 3). While the events of September 11th were a stupendous disaster, an audacious crime, and an act of war, the rapid movement from disaster-focused coverage to war-dominated coverage deprioritized the needs of New Yorkers and Washingtonians in recovering from these horrible events.

The September 11th attacks were quite possibly the greatest disaster to befall the United States in the last half century, due to the thousands of deaths, the huge property losses, and the economic and personal disruptions they caused, directly and indirectly. Estimates are that 3,041 people died because of the four hijackings, 2,650 in the World Trade Center, 125 in the Pentagon, and 266 on the four planes themselves (Wikipedia, 2002). Swiss Reinsurance estimates that insured property losses will reach $10-12 billion (Zanetti et al., 2002, p. 8), and business interruption insurance claims have been estimated at $3.5–10 billion (Zanetti et al., 2002, p. 8; Hartwig, 2001). The Congressional Budget Office estimates that insurance payouts for economic losses of all

types will surpass these figures, amounting to at least $30 billion, and could top $50 billion (Torregrosa et al., 2002, p. ix). Uninsured losses add an unknown amount to these huge insured losses (Zanetti et al., 2002; Hartwig, 2001). By comparison, estimates of those killed by the Northridge earthquake range from 57 (e.g., U.S. Geological Survey, 1996, p. 2) to 72 people (e.g., Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1998). The temblor caused $16.6 billion (1999 dollars) in insured property losses (Torregrosa et al., 2002, p. 9), $9.5 billion in federal financial assistance (Torregrosa et al., 2002, pp. 15–16), $6.5 billion (1994 dollars) in business interruption costs (Gordon et al., 1998, p. 21, 28), and $20 billion in hidden uninsured losses, including deductibles paid by insured homeowners, repairs paid out of pocket, and damage to uninsured buildings (Platt, 2000, p. 29). Hurricane Andrew is estimated to have killed 65 people (Rappaport, 1993), produced insured losses of $17.1 billion (1999 dollars) (Torregrosa et al., 2002, p. 10), and $4.4 billion in federal financial assistance (Torregrosa et al., 2002, p. 15) . Given that the September 11th attacks produced a disaster far exceeding the loss of life in the two greatest recent natural disasters in the United States and at least comparable to them in economic costs, the rapid submersion of the September 11th disaster story under the war story seems abrupt.

The change in emphasis from the disaster itself to the war to exact vengeance and dismantle terrorist networks seems disproportionate. This war does not compare to others, from World War II on, in terms of American casualties and other losses. For example, the United States lost 405,399 people in WWII, 36,568 in the Korean Conflict, 58,203 in the Vietnam War (U.S. Department of Defense, 2000, p. 80), and 363 in the Gulf War (American War Library, 2002). By contrast, American casualties in the Afghanistan conflict reached 57 (25 in combat) on April 25, 2003 (Rodrigue, 2003). Even so, the war held most of the media focus after the second to third week, perhaps expressing American anxiety about getting into a potentially endless war.

The crime story is a relatively minor strand in front-screen coverage (10.6% of the 558 stories and 7.3% of the front-page photographs), though it may be the greatest crime ever committed in this country. This relative quiescence of the *Los Angeles Times* may simply reflect the necessary secrecy in which an investigation of this sort must be conducted, so there may not have been much information to report during the study period. Recent FBI controversies after the study period, however, with sensational allegations of blunders and internecine strife, do have elements that draw media attention. The crime investigation story did, thus, become a topic of media interest in May and June of 2002 (e.g., Rowley, 2002; Van Natta and Johnston, 2002).

In short, the September 11th attacks were unique in their combination of crime, war, and disaster. The relative coverage of these events could not be predicted ahead of time due to the unusual combination of these three

elements. The underplaying of the crime aspect is understandable in terms of the secrecy of investigation and the study period ending early in that process. Less understandable and predictable is the magnitude of the shift from the disaster story to the war narrative, given the relative significance of the disaster aspect of the events compared to other disasters of the last half century and of their war aspect compared to other wars of the last 50 years.

In terms of the three expectations formulated from extant literature as the study began, there was support for the expectations that the less sensational context would be little covered and that the ideological exposure would be narrow. There was, however, no support for the expectation that the *Los Angeles Times'* coverage of those affected by the events of September 11th would be disproportionately skewed towards business interests and away from those of workers.

Context *vs.* Sensation

As often seen in the coverage of any disaster, the context of the events of September 11th was poorly drawn out. Only six stories appeared on the front screen of the *Los Angeles Times* about the geopolitical background that produced such murderous men so indifferent to their own and others' lives. Normally, a category with a mere six stories in it would have been lumped into the "other related" category, but the context of a disaster is central to the disaster research and policy communities. Preserving it as a freestanding category with its six paltry entries thus highlighted a serious gap in front-page disaster coverage, in this catastrophe as in so many others.

Sensationalism, a common criticism leveled at the media during disasters, could be argued based on the obsessively repetitive imagery of the plane striking the south tower on television and on the front-page graphics of newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times*. The online format of this edition of the *Los Angeles Times* enabled readers to access the video imagery from the broadcast media. Given the extremely sensational nature of these events, however, such sensational coverage may have been entirely appropriate and commensurate. The anthrax-laden letters mailed to Senators Daschle and Leahy, NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw, the *New York Post,* and the supermarket weekly tabloid, *The Sun*, on the other hand, were sensationalized in the traditional manner often critiqued in analyses of disaster coverage. That is, the coverage of these bioterrorist incidents amplified public concern far above the actual numbers of people exposed, sickened, and killed by mailed anthrax, leading to pressure on physicians for prescriptions of Cipro.

Narrow Ideological Range

The *Los Angeles Times'* coverage of the events of September 11th, as expected, offered a relatively narrow ideological range, rarely taking readers

outside the rather circumscribed American political discourse. Whether this was a function of the concentration of ownership in the American media cannot be answered in this study as it would be impossible to construct how the media would have covered something like this in the days when every town and city sported two dailies and local ownership of the media was the norm. Perhaps the news would have been even more parochial under past conditions. The point of examining the political range in coverage of this story, then, was to draw attention to the narrowness of the perspectives offered on the front screen, no matter whence it derived, because of its possible agenda-setting ramifications. For most stories most of the time, local and national self-interest may be well enough served by a certain parochialism of media content. In a stunningly new kind of geopolitical crisis, however, more high-priority media attention to context and to the ideological range outside the United States might help Americans better understand the nature of the risks they face from terrorism and the long-term consequences of the actions the country might take in mitigating this hazard. The agenda needs to be broadened to include all facets of this hazard, not narrowed when so much is at stake in dealing with an unprecedented new danger.

Bias toward Employers over Employees

Despite the expectations of media criticism literature and to its credit, the *Los Angeles Times* covered impacts on corporations and impacts on workers in roughly equal numbers in front-screen stories during the study period. Of the 47 front-page stories that dealt with job losses or business impacts, 19 focused on workers, 20 on businesses, and eight on both. Among the business stories, small businesses were the concern of four articles and larger corporations of 11, with another four addressing impacts on both large and small businesses. The paper was careful to draw out the job losses cascading from these events, as well as the impacts on a variety of businesses from large international corporations to small local businesses. This example shows that it is possible for a media entity to rise above the various filters that have been argued to bias coverage in an emergency of this scope and do an exemplary and fair job.

Conclusion

For people involved in clearing the rubble, restoring the full functionality of New York and the Pentagon, reactivating and restructuring the national transportation system, rebuilding the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and trying to mitigate the risk of any similar event striking their regions, the disaster stories were soon submerged under the stories of war. While the war took more and more media attention away from the needs of the victimized people and places, their needs did not just gradually and proportionally fade away with the coverage.

Those responsible for recovery from any extreme event have to work to get the media to focus on the needs still lingering after a catastrophe, including this unprecedented paramilitary strike, criminal action, and disaster. The following recommendations follow from other work on media and disasters, in which I have been involved (Rodrigue et al., 1997; Rovai and Rodrigue, 1998; Rodrigue, 2001b; Rodrigue, 2001c).

First, government agencies and non-governmental organizations can actively cultivate personal relationships between particular reporters and particular representatives of their organizations. A good example of this is the relationship of national media with seismologists Kate Hutton and Lucy Jones of CalTech and the U.S. Geological Survey, respectively. Journalists face extreme time pressure during stories like these and work in a competitive environment. Anything that can help them use their time more effectively and promote accuracy in their final product is appreciated. One of the most helpful things for them in doing their jobs quickly and accurately is simply knowing who the peer-respected experts are ahead of time. Many reporters develop particular "beats" and are open to deepening their knowledge of those areas. Agencies and non-governmental organizations with responsibilities for disaster preparation or response will not be wasting their valuable time by sharing it with interested individual reporters on a regular basis.

Second, those in non-governmental and victim advocacy organizations are in a position to play to the media's need for human drama by generating "newsworthy" events, including demonstrations. A common framework for a story is to communicate information through an emotionally engaging human interest angle. The conflict and drama of a demonstration may generate the coverage needed to set issues of victim needs on the political agenda.

Third, the internet can be used to generate public interest in and support for victims' needs and the organizations trying to meet them. Other work has shown the efficacy of internet organizing in public risk debates (Rodrigue, 2001a; Rodrigue, 2001c). While the World Wide Web is all the rage, it is e-mail, listservers, and news groups that proved the most effective channels. These channels enable exponential expansion of a message to reach an audience of a size and geographical scope once the domain exclusively of national media conglomerates. Getting a message onto listservers or news groups can lead to readers' forwarding it to all of their internet friends and contacts, who forward it to theirs, and so forth. The organization of protests around the meetings of the World Trade Organization is just one example of how effective these new media can be. Disaster managers and victim advocates would benefit from studying internet organizing around a variety of political issues and working out similar techniques that might be appropriate to their own mandates.

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