

# **“THE SADDEST DAYS: KATRINA EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE EYES OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS”**

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Facilitators  
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This transcript is a record of group interviews that took place at Xavier and Dillard Universities.



## **XAVIER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS GROUP INTERVIEW**

**KING:** The Southern Education Foundation (SEF) in Atlanta received funds from other foundations that were made available to Historical Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) students to help them after the hurricane (Katrina) and you were recipients or you many not have been. But SEF is interested in documenting the experiences of HBCU students especially the transition from one campus to another. So, you have probably seen questions that we have wanted to talk about and we are interested in what you experienced, how you made it after, and what is happening with you now.

The SEF is also a strong supporter of HBCUs and so we are here representing the foundation and we are especially interested in who you are, what you plan to do, your educational goals and just your general well being.

We had already given you a questionnaire, which I will collect that tells us where you are, and we have your release forms, so this will allow the foundation to use your picture if they decide to include your photo in a report back to the funders and we will let you know if that is going to happen.

Our questions. . .we have biology major, a psychology major and a pre-med biology major. The first group of questions has to do with what we call Katrina: Survivors or Evacuees' Experience. In other words, you stayed throughout the Storm and the aftermath? What was your experience like?

**STEPHANIE:** I am an Evacuee. I was able to leave the city (New Orleans) two days prior to the hurricane.

**KING:** What day was that?

**STEPHANIE:** That was on Saturday

KING: How did you leave?

STEPHANIE: I was notified in my dorm by an RA (resident assistant) telling us we needed to evacuate the city as soon as possible. So I called a friend and we went straight to San Antonio, Texas.

**“I thought I was going to have pay tuition again. I didn’t know where I was going to get the money. I had just paid Xavier a couple of weeks prior.”**

**Stephanie Miles, Redlands, CA  
Xavier (2007), Bio-Pre-Med Major**



KING: Where are you from?

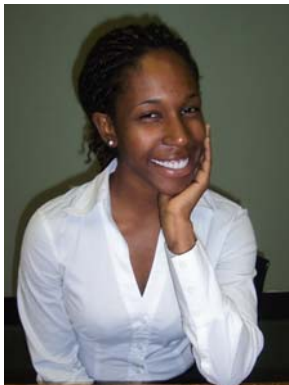
STEPHANIE: I am from California.

ANTONIA: I am an Evacuee, because I did leave New Orleans before the hurricane actually hit.

KING: That would have been like Saturday?

ANTONIA: Yes, around Saturday.

KING: How did you leave?



**“Since I was a senior, I was worried about graduating. You know, would I have to take an extra year?”**

**Antonia Harper, Baltimore, MD  
Xavier (2006), Business/Psychology Double Major,  
African American Studies Minor**

ANTONIA: A couple of friends jumped in a car and headed towards Atlanta.

KING: Is that where you ended up staying? So you and Stephanie stayed where you went initially?

STEPHANIE: No, I went to San Antonio Texas, then I flew home to California then I flew to Atlanta.

KING: To go to school?

STEPHANIE: Yes, to go to school.

CLIFTON: A Survivor. I was one of the students trapped in the field on Xavier’s campus.

KING: Tell us a little bit about that.

CLIFTON: (Laughs). I know a little bit. It wasn’t a pleasant experience. It was basically.

**“I am slowly realizing is that I want to pick a career where I can be more of a real live benefit to somebody and actually help out. . .”**

**Clifton Holland, Seattle, WA  
Xavier (2007), Biology Major**



KING: How is it that you stayed and didn’t evacuate?

CLIFTON: I was being hard headed. I just figured because the year before that in another evacuation didn’t anything happened and I went through so much trouble. I wasn’t leaving this time. I looked out the window, and it was raining real hard. Big trees were leaning 180 degrees like this (uses hands to demonstrate unusually angle of trees). It was two dorms full of students. We moved from this dorm to another to be all in one spot. It was serious. I fell asleep and when I woke up the entire parking lot was full of water. I couldn’t see certain cars I knew were there when I went into the building. So, I wish I had left.

KING: Stephanie and Antonia left with friends who had a place not too far away to go.

STEPHANIE: Like, with traffic and everything just to get to Baton Rouge it usually takes an hour, but it took us four hours to get to Baton Rouge. It takes us a long time to actually get to San Antonio, which is eight hours away. It took us all day.

KING: I was trying to see, Clifton says he was being hardheaded, but you had a friend.

CLIFTON: I had a friend, too. They stopped me a day before as they were leaving. “We’re going to Atlanta, do you want to come?” I didn’t want to go. I didn’t want to leave.

ANTONIA: I really didn't take it seriously. This was a time to party: "I'm going to San Antonio." I had all my cousin's clothes, I didn't really have any clothes, all my clothes were left here at school. So me and my friend--we weren't going to leave. I was thinking: "This is just another hurricane, first of the New Year. . .happens every year. . . it's not going to be anything."

We were looking at the news, and the news anchor was so emotional: "If you can get out, please get out!!" My friend's grandparents called telling us to leave. We still were not going to leave. We have been down here for three years and you haven't been down here yet, so you do not know how it is. So I think by the parents and grandparents calling us and pushing us to go. That is why we left. We were going to Houston, but it didn't make any sense. Everyone was going that way, so we just went to Atlanta. And plus Spelman, Clark Atlanta, and Morehouse loves us.

(Laughter)

KING: Did anybody call you from home to see if you were looking at the news?

CLIFTON: I don't watch television. My mom-I think it was- or someone called saying, "Hurricane coming!" I said, "I'll be fine."

KING: You were really being hardheaded?

(Laughter)

KING: So we have Survivors and Evacuees. So let me switch a little bit. Clifton, let me let you finish up your story. When did you get out Clifton and what was that like?

CLIFTON: We didn't see the food.

KING: I thought the Nuns were cooking.

CLIFTON: We were there for five days and I ate one meal. Not one meal three times a day, but one meal out of the whole time I was there from these Nuns. We had some initial food, like burgers, sandwiches, meat and something like that got bad after a while because the ice melted. It got hot and the food went bad. So they are going out to find food for us. On top of that, they didn't recognize the XUPD for what they did.

KING: How many students were there with you?

CLIFTON: 150 students in the dorm.

KING: OK.

CLIFTON: I want something to be said about that--honestly. It was ridiculous. I was so mad. After four days, I couldn't sleep because it was so hot. They had a big old fire going on. Somebody was arguing under the bridge. We

heard gunshots going off. I was laying in bed praying. That morning the NOPD came. There was a Mrs. Weatherby in that building. Mrs. Weatherby's son, a captain in the NOPD (New Orleans Police Department), was looking for his mother. That was the reason they came and got us out of the building. It was her talking to her son and he got some boats and came to get us. It was because of him they dropped the MRE's we couldn't see. It was because of him those boats came and got everyone in the building. They were not National Guard but NOPD boats. They dropped us on the freeway (I - 10). That is where we were put out.

KING: How long were you there on [the] I -10 ?

CLIFTON: About ten to twelve hours. They came and got us early that morning. They put us on the freeway and we were there until nighttime.



**Xavier University underwater after Hurricane Katrina.**

KING: You could see the water all around?

CLIFTON: You could see everybody out there. I think that is when everyone in the building got a concept of how bad it was. Because before we were evacuated people were trying to leave and I said don't leave. It's bad out there. It is a national disaster. Looking out the window I saw people sleeping out there, sleeping with dogs on the ground. It was still pretty though. It was the first time I had seen stars in New Orleans. (Laughter) I looked out the window and saw a dog run around and a person told the dog to sit on down and they all laid down on the grass and went to sleep. I saw people bathe and jump in dirty water. I urged people to stay inside because we had a roof and a floor.

KING: What was your most vivid memory?

CLIFTON: The ride back to Southern University. They came and got us off the bridge in one of those big, big, big trucks (amphibious vehicles). I never saw tires that big in my life. They loaded us up on something like you see in the war. They rode us out over the water—over the freeway. About an hour, when we saw the buses, I was so happy! They told us to duck down because people were shooting as we drove by, 'cause they saw us getting away and they still were stuck there.

KING: So people were still up on the freeway?

CLIFTON: No. We had to continue to drive by this drop of water to get to the Dome, to get to Southern. I don't know, I was so happy to get on the bus.

KING: Were all Xavier people together on the bus?

CLIFTON: There were several buses. Yes, I remember it was dark. I saw all the destruction, all the houses turned over. Big, big, trees uprooted and broke over. I was glad to go home. I had no more clothes. I had some water. I was ready to go.

KING: So where did you go? Southern? How long were you there?

CLIFTON: A night. We arrived in the morning. I stayed up for two days straight. I finally got a hold of my grandmother who charged my phone again and she called my cousin, and that is what made it so worse. I should have left. I got a whole bunch of family I could have left with and they came and got me and drove me to the airport. I had to argue with those people and then they changed my flight, then I went home for two days, then I went to Morehouse.

KING: How did you all know to go to Spelman or Morehouse? Or wherever you ended up? How did that happen?

ANTONIA: I just wanted to be in Atlanta at the time. I thought it was a nice little vacation. Because I didn't think it would be that serious. So, OK let's just go there to see what all the hype is about.

KING: But to actually go up to register for school. How did that happen?

ANTONIA: Something just told us to go into the administration office and see if we could attend. Cause you know you think because it is a national disaster hopefully people will be understanding enough to let students enter their school.

KING: So you did not have a place to stay either, and you needed some place to live also. OK. What were your most vivid memory or experience of the hurricane? I know you left beforehand, what kind of stands out in your mind?

ANTONIA: Probably while departing the city. I mean like everyone, I have never seen so many people out on the freeway at once. Everyone was out of their cars, because of standstill traffic. Just like conversing. It was that many people trying to evacuate the city. I remember as we were evacuating one of my friends' cars broke down. It overheated because we were just sitting for so long. It was like: “What are we going to do?” So we had to all pile into one car. We had all our stuff and we were all piled into a little small car. And we were evacuating into some part of Texas, I can't remember the exact city. And while we were in the hotel, that was on all the TV. Hurricane Katrina. That was all that we saw.

I remember going down to breakfast in the lounge and everyone was just talking about it, Katrina this. . .Katrina that. I was like: “That's my school. I am the one evacuated from there.” I remember the day the hurricane actually hit, I remember seeing the Dome on TV, and I saw the top of the Dome come apart and everything and all the people, and all the chaos, and my heart went out to them. I was crying and all that. So that has to be my most vivid memory.

(Several participants begin weeping.)

KING: Can you remember why you are crying?

ANTONIA: I had a breakdown. I consider myself a caring person (long pause). And just seeing all those people were out there with no food—how it was taking people a long time being rescued. That hurt me more than anything. You know I had friends that were here and I had never seen Xavier people work together. People you didn't even know were touching you and asking if you were you OK. If you knew a person that was there, “What was their name?” Everyone was just coming together. And then just seeing everything on TV, you know, just those people, which is still stuck out here, that is what hurt the most. You know like little kids, then older people, regardless the age—just people who were stuck with nowhere...

KING: Were you all afraid ever? Did you ever feel fear? Anger?

ANTONIA: Yes, a lot of anger. Those people were just out there. It was ridiculous how long those people were out there. No food, no nothing. Like Bush ought to be ashamed of himself. I think.

KING And you were seeing all this on TV from where you were?

STEPHANIE: And I think a lot of people might not have left. And stayed and thought it was going to be the same thing. I can only think of how Nagin (Mayor of New Orleans) did not call that mandatory evacuation. A lot of people could not leave because if there was no mandatory evacuation, people would be fired from their jobs if they left. And I just felt as though a call for a mandatory evacuation was just late. It was late. And as well as those levees? What are they built for, a category 3?

- KING: Did either of you know anyone who perished in the storm? Or the aftermath of the storm?
- CLIFTON: I know two people who died when we was on the freeway. But other than that, no.
- KING: Did you just see that yourself?
- CLIFTON: I saw them come and take the bodies, but I didn't see the persons. They landed the helicopter on the freeway and picked dead bodies up. I don't know what happened when that person died. It was an older person that died on the bridge.
- KING: Is there anything else you would like to share about your Katrina experience? About the storm itself before we move on to the next question?
- CLIFTON: I will be blunt. That was the first time I have seen Black people working together and being concerned. I remember that there had been a little apartment where people got trapped. They was in their swimming pools and left in their swimming trunks trying to get over there trying to help—trying to grab them, trying to get them over to the bridge. People asking, “What you need?” People taking care of other people's kids. It was truly people working together, trying to get things done.
- KING: You saw that and that's something that really stands out in your mind?
- CLIFTON: Yes, personally. I believe that if black people can get something together like that—or any people for that matter can get together like that on a weekly basis—we can really change the world for real.
- KING: That feeling of “we-ness” that we are all together here and we need to work together.
- I think we are going to move on to post-Katrina, host campus experiences. That is, you got away. The storm is behind you. Now you are on a new campus that is hosting you. How were you initially received on your new campus? What I am trying to get to is: was there any difference in the way you were treated on this campus in the new city compared to how you had felt when you were here in New Orleans?
- STEPHANIE: Well due to the circumstances of Katrina, everyone brought us in with open arms. A lot I would say. They had social gatherings for us. They had clothes drives. They were passing out gift cards for people to go out and get clothes. They paid for all of our books. Like everyone was very warm toward us. I could say it was a very good experience.
- KING: How about you, Antonia. Were you at Spelman?
- ANTONIA: Spelman, yes. I would say the same thing. I was in an apartment over at Spelman Westend. My roommates were two girls and they had two

rooms and that was a problem having someone else to join in the two-room apartment. So that was a problem.

KING: So, you were a guest?

ANTOINIA: Yes, and they treated me like a guest. So, I had to let them know that they could not do that not after what my school has been through. So that was the only thing, but other than that, the students at Spelman, Clark, Morehouse, were very open and kind.

KING: How about you, Clifton?

CLIFTON: I apologize for having to retell my story fifty million times. I was surprised. I thought that when I got there, they were going to be doing me a favor. But, they came out the woodwork with more things than I needed. I was okay. They were really nice. The lady at the registration at Morehouse was like my auntie. Whatever I needed to, I just went to talk to her. If I just needed to talk, I would go to her.

KING: That was my next question. Who and what was most helpful to you in your situation and in your adjustment both academically and socially. You have two things going on - schoolwork and your well being as a person too. Was there any person in particular that was helpful to you?

ANTONIA: This lady's name was Craig. She was the RA for the apartment who did my hair. Now I found a new beautician. So when I come to Atlanta, I go to see her. Another lady, Ms. Zandra Everett, in the Admissions office — whose arms were just opened—she definitely looked out for us. Her arms were always open. She was a new officer at Spelman.

KING: Did you have anybody in mind?

STEPHANIE: I would say Xavier alumni. They came out to Spelman and did many good things for us. They were giving us tokens for the Marta. They just wanted us to feel a little more comfortable.

(new students arrive)

(Group gave names of people who deserved kudos for their help.)

KING: Let us catch up with James and Jason. Jason, were you evacuated or did you stay?

JASON: I left that Friday before the hurricane. I had a funeral to attend in Atlanta.

KING: Did you stay in Atlanta after you saw what was happening?

JASON: Yes, I did.

KING: James, what about you?

JAMES: I evacuated that Saturday about 3 pm that afternoon.

**“Student life at Morehouse was very different from Xavier.”**

**James Woods, Corona, CA  
Xavier (2007), Psychology Major**



KING: How did you leave?

JAMES: I drove. I had just got my car down here. New battery. I had to evacuate and picked up a couple of friends, packed up my car and drove the 10-hour drive from here to Houston with all the traffic.

KING: Where are you from?

JAMES: I am from California, but I had a friend I was staying with.

KING: Who were you staying with, Jason? Where are you from? And did you stay with family, too?

JASON: I am from LA. All my family stays in Atlanta.

KING: We have a couple of questions about on how you left. You left immediately before the hurricane, did you stay in Atlanta when you got there, and then you went on to Morehouse? Tell us how you got to Morehouse.

JASON: My dad [he] had heard they were accepting people for a little while. So, I decided to check it out. At first they were not taking anyone in, but then a couple of days later, they did. So people took applications.

KING: James, you stayed in Houston for how long?

JAMES: I stayed in Houston for about a week. I was trying to find alternative schools out there in Rios. Jason was my roommate here and he told me about Morehouse in Atlanta, so I drove to Atlanta.

KING: Were you still in communication with anybody still here in New Orleans?

JASON: No.

KING: So you all didn't know each other as Xavier students? Just James and Jason. Clifton and Thomas?

JASON: Before the hurricane?

KING: You evacuated, but do you have any memory that stands out in your mind?

JAMES: Really the memories are what I saw on television. They portrayed everyone as criminals [and] showed our school and surrounding areas under water, and showed how the areas I was starting to get familiar with were under water, destroyed. Police came in and people started looting and things like that. And when I started seeing that on TV I realized in real life, I wouldn't be coming back to school any time soon.

KING: What about you?

JASON: Basically the same thing. Just watching everything on the news. Actually, seeing everything that far under water. I couldn't really imagine it at first until I actually saw it on the news. But after seeing it on the news, it was a little shocking to see six feet of water in places like that.

KING: Okay. Let us move on to the post-Katrina campus. How did you feel the reception was? How were you treated at your new campus?

JAMES: Initially, I feel it was a very good reception. They told us where we could get this and this. And they helped us out a lot and still are helping. Throughout the whole time, they gave us tutoring and things like that. And they realized that we had to catch up for school after being out for two weeks. They knew we were going to need to catch up. The administration and the programs like Modern Adams and Tony Rucker—they helped us out a lot. They knew different ways of getting money and getting into different programs, so I could make it at school.

Student life—it was very different from Xavier. Xavier was more of 75% female, as opposed to Morehouse, which was all male. That was very different, but overall I felt accepted there by the faculty and staff.

KING: How about you Jason?

JASON: The faculty and staff really, they really accepted us. But the students—like it wasn't that they didn't accept us. They just kept to themselves. Kind of worked around us somewhat.

KING: Everybody agrees that there was a little separation there.

JASON: They didn't just open up to their little circles or things like that. But as far as the faculty goes, they took initiative to help us out. But the students, like I said earlier, that was an experience, just a different variety of experience.

ANTONIA: It was kind of uneasy. Like everyone has their own groups. These people knew each other for four years and then all of a sudden, these new people appear on the campus and don't know nothing.

KING: Now, Antonia, what year were you? You were a graduating senior. And you, Clifton?

CLIFTON: I was actually a junior at the time.

KING: What about you, Stephanie? Sophomore. OK, Jason?

JASON: Sophomore. I didn't have the same experience. Because I knew somebody before I went there, and I talked to him and then starting meeting other people like that. It was cool.

KING: We are trying to get a picture that compares your experience there as compared to those experiences here. We are interested in finding out what influences made some people decide to come back here and what made others stay. Did you have a job while there? How did your financial aid go, did you get involved in any extra curricular activity. Just what was it like?

STEPHANIE: While I was there I was in a program called “Jump Start”, a community service program. It involved once or twice a week I would go out and tutor with young students at a church. And I was also in the health careers program and they try to keep you on the right track to getting into Medical school. And every Monday I was baby-sitting a close friend's family member. I was kind of involved in school.

KING: You had some connections with people.

STEPHANIE: Yeah. You don't really have any friends there your first week of college. The people who you meet is usually the people you hang out with. So when we first got there, nobody there wanted to accept us. So, I needed to get involved, so I could try to meet new people, meet friends and stuff like that.

ANTONIA: I wasn't really involved. I tried out for Clark's dance team. Only because Xavier—they don't have dance here. So, I was trying to take advantage of the other opportunities out there. I was involved in their Psychology program where it is a combination of all three schools' Psych students together. I was also involved in an internship with Joe Will Entertainment. That helps my marketing skills.

KING: Alright, Clifton, how about you?

CLIFTON: I think the Bonner Scholars Program helped out big time, big time. One, it got me away from school, so I could get around. Two, it was doing community service. It was paid community service and that helped out my financial side. Then I got to meet—it was kind of a bore being there, but we got to interact more we ended up going on trips. That was like one of the big key points of me wanting to stay at Morehouse. But there were too many other things. I said to myself, “Naw, I got to go back.”

KING: So the Bonner Scholarship program took care of you. You became a part of that group. What kind of trips did you go on?

JASON: We went to South Carolina. Gullah Island. Beautiful. Beachfront houses. Real nice. We got paid.

KING: You got paid to go?

JASON: \$1500

KING: What were you doing in beachfront houses and getting paid out there?

JASON: Well, they had a parade out there that they walk in every year, but the actual community service was at the Benjamin E. Mays Middle school helping in the computer labs out there.

KING: How long were you out there?

JASON: About. . . When everything actually got cleared, I would say we were there three weeks.

JAMES: That was a good thing. That was when I got to sit back. I got to meet other people at Morehouse. I remember they had this big ole bon fire and they were standing around telling everybody that was okay. Just being there for a couple of days got me a chance to meet more people. To relax.

KING: Helped to take your mind off other things, too. What were some of your worries while you were trying to get into this new school setting? Did you have some issues?

STEPHANIE: That would have to be the financial part. I thought I was going to have pay tuition again. I didn't know where I was going to get the money. I had just paid Xavier a couple of weeks prior. I know at home, it was all in the newspaper tuition whammy, tuition twice. And then after they had men up, they had all the students who were affected by the hurricane together. They told us that tuition would all be paid up. After that I could sit back and relax. Everything is being paid for.

KING: OK. Same with you, Antonia? Any other worries? Issues? Academics?

ANTONIA: Since I was a senior, I was worried about graduating. You know, would I have to take an extra year? I really wanted to get out of school.

KING: Understood. How about you, Jason and James?

JASON: Socially, I had a lot of my family there in Atlanta, so I was not a burden. I wasn't too worried about that. My financial aid thing, I had not totally cleared paying my tuition at Xavier. I still could have had it switched over to Morehouse if I needed to. More so, I was nervous about being a military guy not having enough to pay Morehouse tuition that it wasn't

going to be enough. It wasn't too stressful being worried about the money.

JAMES: Initially, I was bothered about going to a new school, starting over. I was bothered about getting decent grades.

KING: Let's pause once more. We have a new person coming in.

(Greetings and introductions)

Ms. Kia Jones, from New Orleans. Let me stop.

TOMAS: At Xavier I did some community service and I tried to get into a California club out here. I was all angry and the social thing helped.

KING: When you were a sophomore?

TOMAS: Yeah.



**“And sometimes they would want to change the channel, but I was like, ‘No.’ We just sat around and watched all this news, I said, ‘Wow!’ ”**

**Tomas Pradia, Houston, TX  
Xavier (2011), Business Major**

KING: But you hadn't quite made it. This was going to be your big year. Your no longer a freshman, your coming back to be the big man on campus and the hurricane hit. So when you went to Morehouse did you try to pick up?

TOMAS: No. I really didn't know how the system would be.

KING: What about you Jason, James?

JAMES: Before the hurricane, at that time I wasn't involved in too much up here. Just thoughts of my freshman year I was just coming back . Going to Morehouse, I didn't really plan on getting into too many things, I didn't plan to stay there. Like in the beginning, I was just trying to come back here. So I didn't want to get too involved with all the things that were happening. I didn't try to join any organizations at the school.

ROBERTSON: What did you do here?

JAMES: First year I was in a jazz band. I was going to try to get into the choir, but my classes interfered with that. [inaudible]

KING: What instrument do you play?

JAMES: Saxophone.

KING: OK. So, Kia, you are from New Orleans. We are documenting student's experiences before and after the hurricane. Your academic and social experiences on other campuses and then your return to New Orleans. We are going to move ahead to experiences on the campus you went to. But we would like to know about your Katrina experiences. Were you here during the storm? Or did you evacuate ahead of time?

KIA: I evacuated ahead of time.

KING: When did you leave?

KIA: Saturday afternoon.

KING: How did you move?

KIA: With my mother in a car.

KING: Did your mother just say, “You are going.” ?

KIA: No, actually it is a long story.

KING: OK.

KIA: She met this guy a long time ago. They had planned to get together after I graduated from high school. He came down for my graduation and he proposed to her. When I came to college, she had planned to move to Atlanta after I had settled in, and with the storm coming and all, it just moved everything a little ahead of time. So, he called her and let her know about the storm. So, I guess he thought the hurricane was going to Atlanta too, so we went to Texas first and we stayed in a hotel for a week. Then that was when Rita (another hurricane) was coming. So he didn't want to stay. So we drove all the way to Atlanta, and it was good thing, because the hotel that we were staying in Texas, got blown up by Rita. So Rita was heavy.

KING: So what is your most vivid memory connected with hurricane Katrina? What do you remember, or what stands out in your mind?

KIA: The drive from Texas to Atlanta that took like 20 hours. And it was scary. There was no gas along the way, we had to wait in line for hours for \$2 worth of gas. We had to pray to that we made it to the next stop.

KING: Did you know any body, James or Jason, who perished in the storm?

JAMES & JASON: No.

KING: Well you know, Clifton stayed on campus, so he has another type of story and we already talked about that for a little bit.

KING: While you were on your host campus, did you miss anything from home here in New Orleans?

Voices: Friends, people—started missing everything really. (group laughter) — started missing how much you really liked the school, little things like that.

KING: What were the things about Xavier you missed?

Voices Everything—social life—you could do so many things at Xavier.

JAMES & JASON: It was a comparison to everything once we realized we missed it and wanted to come back.

KING: You mentioned that you were on an all male campus as compared to Xavier or an all female campus compared to Spelman. Where did you go Kia?

KIA: Spelman.

KING: So when you think about that dimension, was there anything in particular that you missed about Xavier?

JAMES & JASON: Being in class two weeks.

KING: With all these dudes?

(Group laughter)

JAMES: Missed being in class with all the females. A lot of stumbling blocks. A lot of stuff was blocked off. You had to show ID to get on campus and all that.

KIA: Yes, Spelman. I went to an all girl high school so it was like going back to an all girl school again. But in the class of music appreciation there were some guys in that class and they just made the class so much better. More interesting—more funny.

ANTONIA: I know, I had a class at Morehouse too, so it was like all guys in there and it was like only a couple of girls. So that was really different. I liked that.

KING: But in general you missed Xavier—the people, New Orleans. What did you miss about New Orleans?

Group: The people, the culture. Sitting and talking, our little clubs. Xavier is really family orientated. You see everybody about a couple of times a day. We all know practically everyone here. That is what I missed about it.

KING: The “culture of New Orleans”. What does that mean?

JAMES: How the people are. I live out in California. Hey—I am shocked just coming out here. The history behind these people. The way they speak. The things that they do is totally different in terms of intimacy.

KING: Did you know that Kia? Yes. (Laughter) You are from New Orleans. What did you miss?

KIA: I missed my family because it was just me and my mom and we didn't know where anybody was or anything like that. Then after a while, I missed the food.

KING: Let me go down the line and ask each one: When did you come back to Xavier?

KIA: January.

STEPHANIE: January also, the beginning of the semester.

**“I joined the military. It's time to get down to business on what we need to do in life. . .”**

**Aften Amey, Atlanta, GA  
Xavier (2008), Military Major**



AFTEN: January.

CLIFTON: I came back in January.

JAMES: I came back in January.

JASON: I came back in January.

TOMAS: I came back in January.

KING: Thomas, were you at Morehouse?

TOMAS: Yes ma'am.

KING: [Introduction of Tomas and interview process explained to him.]

Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experiences on the host campus? Anything come to mind that would be good for us to know?

- KIA: In Atlanta they have a high Muslim culture there. I took an Islam course and so I was able to go to Jumaa and different mosques.
- KING: You did that through Spelman?
- ANTONIA: And just the different environment, you know, dance classes. I am all into dancing, even though I did not make that dance team.
- KING: How did you decide to come back to Xavier?
- JAMES: Initially, we all wanted to stay at Morehouse. [inaudible] At the very beginning, I wanted to stay, but I started realizing that “Naw.”
- (Laughter)
- KING: That “Morehouse Man” thing did not fit you. Just say a little more about that. It’s not what is bad about Morehouse.
- JAMES: It’s just that they already had their way of doing things. Like their freshman year they had their little programs.
- JASON: They had their whole initiation process going on for Morehouse freshman. So they bonded like that. We didn’t go through that. It’s not like we could just connect with them like that.
- KING: So it wasn’t real for you?
- JASON: Yes, it wasn’t real. I always felt like an outsider. I always felt I could get a quality education at Xavier as well and I like New Orleans and would like to come back and see the city rebuild.
- KING: You felt alienated?
- TOMAS: Yes. When we first got there, we were put in a bunch like “those were the New Orleans students.” The weird kids that came in. It really wasn’t a welcoming type experience. We got to get into an organization called the Bonner Scholars Program and there were a few Xavier students in it. So we just kind of stuck together to bond. Nobody would come up to us, except a few who were trying to talk to us to find out what was going on. For some reason, some of the guys thought they were better than us.
- KING: Better.
- ANTONIA: They looked down on us a lot. I know a lot of girls were asking: “So it’s been a lot harder for you now that you are here at Spelman?” I said, “No, it is not!” I have a lot of high honors from my journalism class and my music appreciation class. I have the highest grades in most of my classes. So for them to ask me that—I was offended. A lot of girls asked me that like I was nothing—that really offended me. A lot of people asked me that and no, it was not harder for me.

KING: Let us catch up with Tomas. Tomas, were you an evacuee and you left a little ahead of the storm or did you stay here?

TOMAS: Yes ma’am, I want to say again, “Thank you” to James for me getting a way home.

KING: So you rode out with James?

TOMAS: Yes, he came to my house. I didn’t have my car down here, so that is how we got home. The ride was ten hours. It is usually a four to five-hour drive. It took us ten hours to get home.

KING: What day did you all leave?

TOMAS: Saturday, around 3:30 pm. We had to detour and go all the way up to Louisiana and come down to Baton Rouge and then hook up and go to Texas.

KING: What is your most vivid memory of the whole hurricane thing?

TOMAS: Whenever I think about it, I think when we finally got into Atlanta we reunited with Jason. We would just sit around almost everyday and watched the news. And sometimes they would want to change the channel, but I was like, “No.” We just sat around and watched all this news, I said, “Wow!” We did all this moving around. I went to Texas Southern University for one day and then we left ‘cause we didn’t like that, so we bouncing back from all these cities and like man, Xavier students are still there. I kept looking at that footage on TV basically.

KING: Now let’s switch up. Coming back home—we talked a little about what some of the important differences about your school experience was. Now that you are back, are you glad you got this—glad you got that?

JAMES: I am a person to be glad to be back to be with people I went through freshmen year with, seeing people that I know— people I can wave and say “Hi” to. I started doing things I wanted to do when I was a student. But it is different now. The city is different, the school is different. I know it is a process of me reeling from what happened during the storm. So we have got to work with the school—work with the city. It is back to what we were.

KING: That is James. Anybody else? Kia?

KIA: I am glad to be back home. When I first got here, I was a little upset ‘cause I was by myself and I was used to going home on the weekends, having Sunday dinner with my family and such. And it was just me, but slowly, but surely my family members are coming back here, so I have a place to go, and I am not by myself, you know me being from here. I am glad to be back.

KING: Anybody else? Glad to be back.

ANTONIA: I am glad to be with my friends again who already know how I act with my outgoing personality. I am just happy to be back. I have all my credits.

JASON: I think we got so accustomed to being here, especially if you have been here one full year, you got so accustomed to the whole atmosphere Xavier has and how things should be done. But then when you got out there and see things like from the side, you see things are so much. You see what you don't like and what you do like. It wasn't what I liked. But some of the freshman, I know one or two of them that stayed out there.

KING: They really didn't have an Xavier experience that affected them to make them want to come back to Xavier.

JASON: It was just upon your experience here at Morehouse and what your major was and what you thought was best for you. What was best for your safety and good education.

KING: Stephanie, you were going to say something?

STEPHANIE: I was going to say I know five freshman girls who stayed there at Spelman. That is, because they were not able to experience what we experienced here at Xavier. And just by me explaining to them and trying to tell them Xavier is a lot of fun—they couldn't relate. But, I just missed Xavier a lot. And I am glad to be back.

KING: Was there any particular person who was most helpful in your return? Your transition, your credits whatever?

ANTONIA: Mom.

KING: Your Mom. How did she help? (Group laughter)

KING: OK. You have a deeper appreciation, right?

JAMES: I would say the Morehouse staff. I think it was Dean Darden. He was really down in the trenches with us with this whole struggle.

CLIFTON: These are two people I was trapped in the building with. I decided to call them and get them over here.

KING: So you got them on the phone? So did you all go to school in Atlanta when you left here?

KHALILLAH: No ma'am. I went to school back home in California. UC Berkeley.

AFTEN: I joined the army.

**KING:** We are here interviewing students from the SEF in Atlanta. (Introduction and release form). Khalillah Hill, Aften Amey. Tell us about your Katrina experience.

So our question here about your Katrina experience here. What happened, where were you? What do you remember? Khalillah, you were here in New Orleans? How is it that you did not evacuate?

**“I valued my education here because I learned a lot more and I felt like the other students who were here wanted to learn as well. . .”**

**Khalillah Hill, Berkeley, CA  
Xavier (2007), Broadcast Production Major**



**KHALILLAH:** I had my car, and I packed my bag and I was preparing to go. And two days before the storm, someone stole my car. So because I lived off campus and because it was freshman orientation, the school told my parents that in the event of the hurricane, we will evacuate the students. So my parents told me to stay here and just ride it out with the school, because eventually we thought we would evacuate. Although I saw all the fools in the lobby, I was like: “We are not going anywhere.” But at the time, I really didn’t have a choice as to where I was going to go.

So for a while we just all [inaudible]. So I wasn’t there for a while and about 7 o’clock in the evening, they told us to go over to the Living Learning Center (LLC), which is the other upper classmen dorm. So we went over there and they told us, “OK.



**Living Learning Center at Xavier University.**

We are going to have to stay here and ride out the storm.” So, OK. I’m not happy with this but we’ll deal with it. We never anticipated it being as bad as it was. So, the first day was—everything was fine. The second day—that evening—when the storm hit, everyone started getting real scared. The building was shaking, stuff was falling off the roof and we are looking out the window with like: “What is going on? It still wasn’t that bad. It wasn’t raining very hard. There really wasn’t a lot of water.

The next day I thought everyone was still in very high spirits as there was no water except at sidewalk levels. No electricity, no running water, we didn’t have anything at that point but we thought we would be rescued that day. So nobody was really upset about any thing. And then we realized we were not going to be rescued as soon as night fell. So they fed us with chips and sandwiches. They had some hot dogs and something like that. OK that’s fine. So the next day, food was kind of getting scarce ‘cause people were going a little crazy on the hot dogs and sandwiches, so we were down to chips by the next day. So they started handing out ham sandwiches. I said I wasn’t going to eat any pork that hadn’t been refrigerated, so clearly that is not going to work out.

So my friends and I kept eating Lays potato chips and drinking water and hoping that would be enough sustenance. But then we started running out of chips. So we decided lets go raiding some rooms and try to find some food. We didn’t want to starve. We didn’t find any food there, so we started smoking cigarettes to curb our appetite, so I wouldn’t go to sleep with a stomachache was hard for me. (I don’t want start crying).

On the fifth day we got rescued. We got rescued by boat. We had to walk through the water ‘cause there was no way the boat could get any closer. The bottom would scrape on the cement. So we got on the boats and the boats took us over to I-10 (Interstate 10), over near the Howard exit. And we sat there for maybe eight hours. It started raining. We were still sitting out there like we had no place to go. So then some other native New Orleans peoples came over to the bridge, too, and it was at that point I really became upset with Xavier.



It was at that point that me and my friends really started to just try to help the people who were not from Xavier. So we walked to another end of the Interstate and brought water down to bring to all the different people from New Orleans. We gave them our food that we didn't eat, our clothes, cause we knew we were going home. After that, some army trucks came. Now this is really the sad part, because only Xavier students got on the trucks.

(Khalillah's voice begins to break down.) It was bad to see people really reduced to that. A couple of my friends were dehydrated and I had to deal with that, too. A part of the Interstate was covered with water, so we had to ride the trucks to get through the water. Then we waited on another part of the Interstate for another three hours for buses from Southern to come.

So after that the buses took us to Southern and some of the other buses took us to Grambling and me and my friends went to Southern. And they gave us a place to stay. They opened up their gym for us and gave us cots and gave us food and a place to shower because there was no running water for all those days. Basically me and my friends were taking baths from water bottles. That was my experience, it was very tough. And after that I went home for a while. I am engaged to a native of New Orleanian and for the next three weeks I didn't know where he was, his mother, and his family. I could not contact anybody, so I was really depressed and I laid in my bed for two weeks. . .hardly ate. . .in the dark. My mother eventually told me, “You have to get up...you got to start doing something for yourself.” So that is when I ended up going to UC Berkeley. . .which was another whole experience, but that was just off!

KING: At UC Berkley?

KHALILLAH: Yeah. It just made my experience that much worse. I had to go to therapy. I did not know how to cope with it. After going to therapy and going there and all that, I ended up going to Jackson State, which I hated. Because I felt like, when I went there, it was not the same kind of institution as Xavier. And though I was very upset with the administration here, I valued my education here because I learned a lot more and I felt like the other students who were here wanted to learn as well. At Jackson State it just felt like a fashion show to me and I was miserable.

KING: When did you come back?

KHALILLAH: I just came back this semester because I was just not ready to commence Xavier in January because that's not going to happen. That is when I ended up going to Jackson State.

KING: What year are you?

KHALILLAH: I am a senior and I will be graduating in December. I'll be done in December.

KING: We had talked about a number of things, and we will catch you up as we go through and a couple of people may have to leave and I want to move on a bit. Aften, would you add anything about the experience of staying here and how is it you didn't evacuate?

AFTEN: I was grateful I did get on campus because KiKi (Khalillah) had come to my apartment. I went to work so, it didn't matter about the hurricane. My mom was calling and telling me the hurricane is coming . . .yeah, I'm like. I said you had natives that didn't want to leave. If they can live through this hurricane, then I can stay here, too. She woke me up at one o'clock and I was just not leaving. And she said, "You better get your bags and you need to go." We had a ride to go to Atlanta, which is my hometown and her parents told her to stay in New Orleans. So I stayed with her. Then we found out there were three more of our friends over in LLC and my sister and her friend they had a car, but everybody couldn't fit. Only about three people could fit in Pamaline's car. And I felt bad if she left or I left, so I just continued to stay with no regret or anything. I regret I didn't get enough stuff out my house before it washed away. I had just moved in I wasn't in my apartment no more than three or four months.

KING: Where did you live?

AFTEN: Carriage apartments, across the street. All my stuff. I had officially moved all my stuff out my mother's house and for that to just disappear. . . I went home, after my uncle got me from Baton Rouge. I didn't have anything in my closets. I had nothing in my room that was even remotely what I had before. It was hard. I basically just sat around the house and kind of stared into space a little bit and it took about two months to really contemplate what actually happened because I really did not want to look at it or put emphasis on it or anything.

I kind of got weirded out by a situation that was going in my house because I am a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. But every day I went to sleep, I always set my TV on the same channel, and I always woke up with it on a different channel. It always had Army National Guard commercials every single morning. Kind of freaked me out a little bit, so I decided one night to unplug the television, wrapped the cord up, put it in my drawer. I forgot I had unplugged it and everything and when I got up, I cut the TV on and it actually came on without the plug being in the wall. So it kind of freaked me out, so I did a little research on Army National Guard and enlisted in and after that I had a wonderful experience, because without the army we probably— without Ms Weatherby, without Uncle Pete and a couple of natives who actually brought us food. . .

KING: People from New Orleans brought you food?

Group It was that lady's husband.

AFTEN: Right.

I think it brought all the people who were in the hurricane, I think it brought the kind of notion of it's time to buckle down. It's time to get to worrying. It's no more partying, it's no more trying to do this, trying to do this to get over, or hustle or anything. It's time to get down to business on what we need to do in life and get out of here.

KING: So let me kind of generalize. We have been talking about going away. Khalillah went to several schools. Some had positive experiences in other schools. Morehouse and Spelman. Now you are back in Xavier. Just project about following up on about what Aften said [about] your major.

What do you plan to do in life? Has this experience had an impact on your vision of yourself as a college graduate and where you see you are headed?

Just go around the room and I am asking everybody to comment on that. Who you are as a person getting an education? Maybe what you thought before, where you are now, specifically focusing on your major and what you think you might be doing. Thomas? Do you want to think a bit or are you ready? I will let you think a bit.

KIA: I believe that Xavier is the place for me to continue on with my major. I liked Spelman. I found that over there, it is more of a Liberal Arts school and I wanted to become a doctor, and I realize that wasn't the place for me, and although the people were nice, and helped me out, I explained to the Chemistry chair—I am a Chemistry major—that she wanted me to stay—she offered me the opportunity to stay and help me out while I was there. But I explained to her that Spelman was not the place to me.

KING: Even though your mom was in Atlanta?

KIA: Yes, and we had always planned to be together. That was the little catch or whatever. She was behind me 100 percent, and she told me she couldn't come back because she didn't have any place to stay. But she said if that was what I wanted to do and go back to New Orleans and finish. I was a freshman and I didn't know anything about any activities here, but I figured this is where Xavier is and where I needed to be.

KING: What are you going to be when you finish?

KIA: Chemistry for now, then a pediatric surgeon.

KING: You plan to stay in New Orleans as a pediatric surgeon?

KIA: I am thinking about it.

KING: OK, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE: My major is biology pre- med, and I plan to become an Ob-Gyn. I came to understand a health careers program that I was in at Spelman. I don't think it was as beneficial as the MATS program here at Xavier. So I think my coming back to Xavier is going to help steer me more into a right direction that is instrumental.

KING: OK.

ANTONIA: I would like to become a star—a singer or an actress, and dancing included. You may want the whole package. I think Spelman would have been a great place for me to stay because they do have an excellent dance program. I sat in a couple of their classes and talked to a couple of dance instructors. But Xavier, I basically started here, and I wanted to finish with people who I had started out with, because I just had that relationship with them. My major is psychology, however, I am a double minor in Sales and Marketing and Mass Communication. Right now, I am looking into going into Emerson College in Boston in their integrated Marketing and Communication programs. I think that will be my foot in the door to be the star.

KING: Clifton. My main man.

CLIFTON: What I learned from this whole process is that there is a lot of sharks in the world. A lot people are just trying to take advantage of somebody else. I don't want to be one of those people. So I am slowly realizing is that I want to pick career where I can be more of a real live benefit to somebody—of actually helping out. Because I felt like when that stuff was going on we needed help. I know its not logical to think like that, but everybody thinking about themselves. So people can keep the money from me and I will try to do something constructive with my life and actually try. . .I just look around and there seems like a lot of crazy stuff going on. And I don't want to turn my eye away and keep doing my thing. I kind of actually want to do something to help it. Whether it is a lost cause or not. It took time for it to get like this. . .and it's going to take time to get away from it.

KING: You want to make a change in the world.

CLIFTON: Yeah, I know I'm sounding like I want to try save the world. I want to do something constructive.

KING: Do you have a career orientation along those lines.

CLIFTON: I am looking for it. Now I want to be a jack of all trades so I can just do something to be able to feed me and my family. Then I want to take my time to do something else needs to be done. Let me do whatever I can. I think they need more people to do that stuff. It kind of clicked on me when I was here last summer and that guy some light skinned guy in charge from the NAACP who was speaking at the graduation about how they need more people, black people, or anybody to take their skills that

you develop in schools to come back and help people. You are supposed to be of service to these people and not take advantage of them

KING: You also saw people really step up and go beyond, which is what you are talking about and you also want to be a part of that number that is making a difference.

What are you going to do with all this. Jason?

JASON: I am majoring in psychology and I plan to do research. The psychology field but not sure of what kind of research.

KING: Good.

JAMES: I am also a psychology major and a minor in Public Administration. Maybe I can do some good to get this problem settled. Maybe I can make some changes in life.

KING Be a different type of leader.

JAMES: The whole Katrina thing seems like being African American and being [inaudible] affected us a lot more. And going into other cities and other places where there were other African Americans it was goods to see that some were helping us, but bad to see that some of them wasn't. And as African Americans, that affected the whole country.

KING: It did. It actually did.

ANTONIA: I'm a psychology major with a minor in AMS (African American Studies). So when I went home and saw the way we depicted us. Just to see that dichotomy and see all that wrong-doing—it inspired me to want to do more to change our social condition.

AFTEN: A business major with a minor in Business Administration. I was going to have my restaurant and nightclub business, but now I'm kind of looking at corporate law. Something leaning toward criminal law, or law enforcement, I kind of got the itch for it. What the Army taught was how more and more, how a lot of us fight for things others cannot see yet, or what goes on behind closed doors. And the people don't know—like Katrina—what was going on in the air. And a lot people don't truly know what went on. And you have a lot of people fighting for that to let that be known.

KING: Tomas? Who are you going to be, brother?

TOMAS: Well to start off, whenever I get done, I am going to try to do either surgical pharmacy or some type of international pharmacy where I travel a lot. After that, while I am working, I'll try to put my acting career in motion.

KING: Acting?

TOMAS: Yes ma’am.

KING: OK. Anything else you think it would be important for us to know about the Katrina experience through the eyes of HBCU students?

We had one other theme that came up that I would like to invite you to comment on. And that is: How New Orleans people were received. Now you all are not from New Orleans, but when you go somewhere else. People can see that you are from New Orleans. Did you have any thoughts about that? James?

JAMES: The worst thing I ever experienced in my life was when we were doing volunteer work over at BWM in Atlanta [inaudible]

JASON: It was an Atlanta parent and a New Orleans parent. And they started arguing louder. And one—the Atlanta parent—turned to the other and said, “That is why you’ll got washed away.” We seen that when people from New Orleans went to different places in Atlanta, they were not accepted, not too welcomed with opened arms or whatever.

CLIFTON: Some people from New Orleans were just looked at as a burden.

ANTONIA: Like they’ve impeached them. Like kind of kicked them around

Group: [Inaudible affirmations.]

KING: There are so many people whose lives will never recover and you have something to give and we hope you will be strong and give that. We thank you very much for giving your time. If after today, some of the things we talked about are troubling you, we want to encourage you to seek out some counseling. There are counselors here on campus. Dr. Boutté has made arrangements with the counseling center for people to talk with you, if you need that. So don’t ignore anything that might be an aftermath of today. OK?

We will be in touch with you to let you know if we decide to use your photograph, just to let you know. But I thank you very, much.

Group: Thank you.



## DILLARD UNIVERSITY STUDENTS GROUP INTERVIEW

KING: Michael?

MICHAEL: Shaw:

KING: Let us start with you. What was your life like here at Dillard this time before Katrina? What was your major, what were you into? What were you looking forward to?

MICHAEL: Well before Katrina, it was actually the beginning of my junior year here at Dillard University. I am a computer science major here. Being that this is my third year here at Dillard, I had formed a lot of social ties and also was very active in various clubs in my major, computer science, and a lot of social activities. Katrina really came as a surprise. I was preparing to embark on what I thought was going to be a very active year. I was really ready to come back to Dillard and get involved on campus again.

**“I would say I am thankful for the situation because it was an eye opener to me really. It made me focus on and realize what was really important in life.”**

**Michael Shaw, Birmingham, AL  
Dillard (2007), Computer Science Major**



After being uprooted from here at Dillard, I transferred to Birmingham Southern, a private college, back home where I am from, Birmingham Alabama, which was not an HBCU. So it was total different experience from which I was used to. I didn't at the time realize how much my social environment I had experienced here at Dillard played such a major part of my college experience until I had to transfer and was placed in a totally different environment with totally new surroundings.

KING: When did you come back?

MICHAEL: I came back January 1st, 2006, which is when Dillard reopened at the Hilton.

COURTNEY: Before Katrina, I had actually been here two weeks before and then that one week of school because I was a cheerleader. So we had been helping out with freshman orientation and I was looking forward to an interesting year. I was planning on being involved with many activities like Michael. I really didn't hear Katrina was coming until that Saturday. I don't really watch the news, but I started watching it a lot more since then. I woke up and my roommate actually told me a hurricane was coming and she had a car, so she drove to her house. And I thought it was only going to be a couple of days, so I packed a couple of items and I went and stayed with her for a week.

**“. . . it is our duty to help out our people. That is my biggest thing, I just want everybody to know this, that we need to help our people.”**

**Courtney Bradford, Shreveport, LA  
Dillard (2008), Biology Major**



KING: Where was that?

COURTNEY: Indian River, Louisiana. Close to Lake Charles. When I found out that we weren't going to be able to come back for a while, I went home to Shreveport. I stayed home for about three days, then I transferred to Howard University. It was a miracle that I even got to go there. I had a networking partnership with a man that I had met at a conference the previous summer. When he found out about the storm, he remembered that I went to Dillard here, and he called me and asked what was going on. Did I have school to go to and he got all of my stuff together and all I had to do was just come. It was kind of stressful getting there, when they had already started school. I was really, really sad for a lot of the time that I was there, because of the new environment. I felt like I was a freshman all over again. You really realize how much your social life plays into your school experience when you go to another school. I was not involved in anything and everything had started up and so my grades dropped considerably. I ended up dropping two classes, and I have never dropped a class. It was really very stressful.

KING: OK, Courtney. Ronnell.

RONNELL: What was the question?

KING: What was it like for you as a student here? What were you involved in? How did you experience your school life? Where did you go and when did you come back?

RONNELL: I was very involved on campus and I was a sophomore during that summer. And I was here for orientation week. Sophomore year I was going to branch out and do a lot more things, because as a freshman, I was just feeling out the ropes. So sophomore year I was getting ready to try to get into certain clubs. So I come back two weeks early before school in orientation week, that was cool and then we had a class. I didn't know about the hurricane either. Being on campus we are set off from media a little bit, cause we don't really watch too much TV. My roommate woke me up on Saturday morning, and I was kind of mad because usually Saturday is the day we sleep in. We didn't take it too seriously. Because the previous year I was in Straight Hall, the freshman dormitory for males, and the same thing happened. We thought it was going to be a mini-vacation, so I just packed a little bag and we went to Shreveport, Louisiana to Centenary College.

**“The whole experience has had to do with my mental health—to pay attention to that more and actually have time to rest . . . “**

**Ronnell Perry, Chicago, Dillard (2008)  
International Business Major, Spanish Minor**



We evacuated with Dillard University. I stayed there for about two nights and then I went home to Chicago on a train. So once I got home to Chicago, I was just chillin' and I didn't know if I really wanted to go to school because for the whole summer I had been doing study abroad programs. So I was just studying, studying, and then I came to school and had to do more work. So I was kind of tired. So I wanted to rest and then I figured I should go ahead and apply to a school in Chicago, Chicago University—Villanova of Chicago.

So I went there and I had this notion that I had to prove myself as a student, because I was coming from a HBCU school going to a majority school. So it didn't turn out that way, because I was very, very depressed and I lived on campus. So I just stayed in my room and I ended up not going to any classes really. So it kind of turned out that I didn't really meet the expectation I had for myself. I did that and went on Winter break and I actually started to see a counselor while I was at that school. That was a good thing for me. To not only get the Katrina experience out of my mind but also personal problems I was having before. So then I came back to Dillard in January and it has been pretty cool since there on.

KING: What is your major?

RONNELL: International Business.

KING: And were you overseas studying when you say you were studying all summer?

RON: I was studying in Spain for the summer from July to August.

KING: After your freshman year?

RONNELL: Right, so I had two weeks at home before I came back down here. So I was really, really. . .

LEKISHA: Pre Katrina, the first week I got here, I was so excited because I moved into the sophomore dorm. It was much better, more privacy. I was just excited about the school year. I was part of the student activities committee, so I was getting things ready to plan an exciting year, and then that Saturday morning, I was about to go get my nails done, when I seen people with suitcases.

I was going to get my nails done, but some things were not so important. So I asked: “Where y’all going?” They said, “Dr. Hill said that we could leave. It’s an evacuation.” I didn’t leave with my family that lives here. I stayed and went with the school to Seminary College, and I just packed a few things. While there, we really didn’t know what was going on. We didn’t really have access to the media.

When we finally did get access, we found that the levees broke and some of the people that were from New Orleans, even faculty, were upset. And you really didn’t know how to handle it. Then finally later that week, I stayed for about a week, because I live in Vegas, my family finally got me a ticket and we went to Dallas. And then I flew home from Dallas.

**“I have always wanted to teach. . . recently, when I came back in January, I picked up special education. I think it had something to do with my hurricane experience.”**

**LeKisha Hall, Las Vegas, NV  
Dillard (2008), Elementary Education**



When I went home, I just didn’t feel like doing anything. I thought it was pointless to go to another school to start over, because I love Dillard. Then my mother talked me into going. I almost missed the deadline to start classes. So I went to UNLV.

It was so different because it was so big. The class sizes are huge. I dropped one class because I was behind in reading 600 pages. I didn’t feel like I was a student, I was a number. Here, your Dean knows your

name, the faculty know who you are and there, you were just a number and many of the individuals didn't understand what an HBCU was.

And if you all are in Education, why didn't you know that? That's how I felt. My grades were slipping, because I was so aggravated by the situation. So I just made it through. I got a 3.4, but it was barely 3.4. But it was an experience I wouldn't wish on no one. I came back in January. Things got back to normal as I thought.

**NOBLE:** Before Katrina, I had just moved from Williams, which was the Sophomore dorm, into Jewels. Me and Michael actually roomed together. It was a lot better from the beginning because we had the apartment to ourselves. And not a room in a cubby hole. With more room in the house, I had lots of items I wanted to bring from home.

And I am actually from Mobile, so really close to New Orleans. Before the hurricane, I usually leave to go home, because I am a dance teacher, so I knew nothing about the hurricane. I had heard about it, but I go home every weekend anyway.

So, I think the hurricane hit on a Sunday? I left on Friday, so I left and went home and I only packed what I do when I go and teach dance, and I usually come back on Sunday. But I left that Friday morning, and I tried to come back but they turned us back, so I had the clothes on my back, so I went back home. I bring all my clothes because I live by myself in Mobile as well. I went back home. And didn't know what was happening. I knew it was a hurricane, but I didn't know how serious it was until I got



**Aerial view of New Orleans underwater after Hurricane Katrina.**

home and watched TV. By me being a pre-med major, all I usually do is just study and go to sleep or dance. I had just come back from DC. I had performed at the Kennedy Center. I had to drop my second semester of my sophomore year, and I was already excited about coming back, and I had already dropped a lot of classes that I had to make up for. I started up at Spring Hill College in Mobile. But Mobile got hit by the hurricane and my roof got torn off at my apartment, so I had to stay with my grandma.

KING: In Mobile?

NOBLE: It was really bad; it was flooding as well. We didn't have school for about a month. We didn't actually start back to school until November.

**“ I went back home. And didn't know what was happening. I knew it was a hurricane, but I didn't know how serious it was until I got home and watched TV.”**

**Noble Bradley, Mobile, AL, Dillard (2008)  
Pre-Med Biology Major, Professional Dancer**



KING: Where does your grandmother live?

NOBLE: In Mobile. It's like New Orleans. Some parts high, some parts down low. They had power, but out where I lived, there was no power. So we started and we had to do the whole semester in two months. After that, I finished but I ended up dropping. I didn't come back in January, I was scared of what New Orleans was going to look like.

So I stayed and ended up not going to school for the second semester. I just danced. I actually went to Germany because I was dancing with Debbie Allen in a play. I didn't go to school at all the second semester, and I got way behind. I am supposed to be graduating this year.

KING: Amber.

AMBER: I am a political science major. I think I have a different story from everybody because I was coming in as a freshman, and I was really excited. Me and my parents—we drove up from Indianapolis, Indiana with all my stuff and everything I owned was in that car. And it just so happened that a week of orientation, I met an adorable little girl in the hall and we all became really good friends, and we're just excited all over the yard. That Friday, we wake up into a hurricane.

There are no hurricanes in Indianapolis, it's only tornadoes and stuff.

KING: So you needed a little warning about that.

AMBER: And we get a warning about that. I am never afraid of tornadoes or snow, it's nothing. But a hurricane? So I just packed a bag, saying to myself: “It's not going to be bad.” So I packed a bag. I would have a bag of stuff. We are all joking about it. We are going to have school off for a few days. We will be fine. I was sitting there with the school. It didn't really hit me until I had to go home three days later.

**“I feel for a person becoming educated, I think, it is a part of our duty to help rebuild New Orleans.”**

**Amber Boyd, Indianapolis, IN  
Dillard (2009), Political Science Major**



I had to take the bus to Chicago and my parents had to pick me up. No big deal. It hit me when I had to go to another school. I had only applied to all these HBCUs. I wanted to go to HBCUs. I had to go to HBCUs. They offered what no other school did. So I ended up having to go to City IBY. It is a good school, they had their arms open to me, but it was a different flavor. A different tempo. I didn't feel welcome at home—like it was a family. Me and my friends I lived with, called every day. We were all really sad that we weren't together.

But in January we all came back. We were really excited to come back. I think that half way through the whole time of January, I was thinking maybe I don't need to be at Dillard. After that next semester I didn't want to go anywhere else. I wanted to come back to campus and help continue Dillard, its legacy and even the people of New Orleans.

KING: Joseph.

JOSEPH: Yes ma'am. I have a different story, less drama, I would say. The weekend of the hurricane we had actually came back from Baton Rouge that Friday night from a party. So I was pretty much sleeping in Saturday. My roommate woke me up at 8 o'clock that morning and said that a hurricane is coming and we need to evacuate. I didn't believe him and pulled the covers back over my head and went to sleep. After two years of being here in New Orleans, it's like three days out, and we will be back in by Wednesday. So when we found out it was more serious than we thought it would be, we debated whether or not to go to Houston. Taking I-10 west would be sitting in traffic three or four hours. So it was like, “Where can we go?” So fortunately, my roommate's ex-girlfriend went to Spelman.

KING: Ex-girlfriend? (group laughter)

JOSEPH: Well, this is a mini-vacation. We will be back Wednesday. So, let’s go to Atlanta instead of going home like we always do. So we went to Atlanta Saturday. We didn’t leave here until 6 o’clock—waiting on two of our friends who didn’t get off work, since their jobs would not let them go. We left here at 6 o’clock and got to Atlanta by 2 am. We stayed in a hotel until Monday morning. Then by the next Thursday, my mom called and said, “You better come home, since it is so serious down there. Come home, you can go to school or sit out a semester”.

KING: So where is home?

JOSEPH: Houston, Texas. So I drove from Atlanta —eleven hours to Houston. My roommate stayed in Atlanta with his girlfriend. So we found out that following Friday that Morehouse was accepting students from New Orleans. Monday I drove back another eleven hours. I wanted to go to Morehouse just to get the experience. I had applied there straight from high school.

But at that time, I thought it was too far to drive home every weekend, so I decided to come here, as my sister and mom are both alumnae of Dillard. So they kind of talked me into it.



**“ . . . a lot of times you have to inform people that . . . Canal Street might be ready to come back up, and the French Quarter might be up, but when you take a shot down Gentilly or Elysian Fields, it’s not really like that.”**

**Joseph Goudeau, Houston, TX  
Dillard (2007), Public Health**

So I drove back there, and started school. I actually thought my transition was a little easier. I met my fraternity brothers up there so they helped make it easier. The semester went pretty smooth, besides the fact that I didn’t have anything but a bag and I had to spend money buying clothes to get me through until I could come back down here to my apartment. Just to get a new experience, experience something new, something special was not as hard as I thought it would be.

KING: When did you come back?

JOSPEH: January, 2006.

KING: And you went to the Hilton, too?

JOSEPH: Yes, ma'am.

KING: OK. So then, all of you are Evacuees. You left beforehand. What would you say is the strongest memory that you have about the Katrina experience? Something that really stands out? It may be something you saw, or just what is still with you?

RONNELL: Most unnerving thing to me is watching it on TV and getting to the point where you think, “Hey, I might know that person or that person.” Then you just turn it off. Then my family is asking me questions about it and trying to figure out why I feel I need to go back to Dillard. And even to this day, that is very annoying to me. They do not want me to come back. And they don't even see the purpose. But if you are here, they would understand. So there is a gap in understanding between them and me that still exists about why I want to still be at Dillard.

KING: Something you lived through and it matters to you and you want to be here and they just can't see it? It is like: “Why do you want to be back there?” Anybody else have a memory or something strong that you want to share?

LEKISHA: What really stuck out for me, after I got back home, I thought about how we had an incident. We had about six or seven buses going to Shreveport. One of the buses caught on fire. I kept playing this scene back in my mind, as it looked like something in the movies when the bus went up in flames. I thought about the people, who had small bags, now who had absolutely nothing because of both incidents. And how the people in Shreveport really stretched forth their hands and donated things and really helped out with those students who really lost almost everything. Because, it could have been the bus that I was on. That really sticks out to me, seeing that bus in flames.

KING: Did anyone get hurt?

LEKISHA: No, no one got hurt. Soon as the last person got off the curb, that is when it went up in flames.

KING: But you all saw that?

LEKISHA: Yes, we saw that.

JOSEPH: My thing is, I always think about the “what if?” What if I had went to Houston instead of Atlanta? How would my life be different? What if I stayed here on the third floor apartment complex? Then the second thing would be, we had two classmates who actually stayed or got left behind. They stayed and the stories they told us when they got back about standing on the roof of their apartment building, and standing on the freeway with the rest of the people in the city, and how they went with no food for days at a time was kind of like—my situation was nothing

compared to yours. So it was hard to hear somebody go through that and still be able to walk around here with a smile.

KING: That is why we are talking about survivors and evacuees. Because it is two different experiences, but you still are affected by what you see, what you know has happened and your own emotions are not going to be like: “It didn’t happen to me, so.” Anybody else?

COURTNEY: Personally for me, seeing it on TV was really depressing. I kind of felt sad because when I left, I was really worried about my stuff. But people were not worried about the stuff in their homes, they were worried about at least having a ride out of New Orleans. And I’m sitting here worried about when am I going to get into my dorm room to get meaningless stuff that perishes. And these people are worried about their survival, like living, I had to turn off the TV after a while. It was really surreal.

KING: Anybody else? Michael?

MICHAEL: Like Courtney said, I think it was a very humbling experience for me as I had my own transportation. I was able to act at that exact moment and leave New Orleans. I thought after I got home and I was safe and turned on the news and I thought about all those people who were not able to pick up and leave as easily as I was. It was a very humbling experience to know that I was able to get up any moment and get to safety. There were so many other people that were left behind who were unable to leave at the time.

KING: Any other memories?

NOBLE: The worst memory for me was leaving all my stuff here, going there and then going home where you thought it would be safe and it happened all over again.

KING: Wow.

NOBLE: Kind of like, “Where do you go now?”

KING: Amber?

AMBER: I am still blessed. A lot of times I was at home and my parents were like, “You lost all your stuff.” And I guess I had to tell them in one setting that “I lost all my stuff, but I have you.” I had the ability to go home like a lot of people, and no one else in my family had to go through that experience. So they all helped me. But like a lot of people in New Orleans, and all their family is from New Orleans, and all of them are going through the same thing. So no one can help them or be there for them because everyone is in the same position. And it was a hell of an experience to go through because they need help. And I was getting help and all the time I felt I was really blessed, me myself.

- KING: Before we move on to your school experience in another city or other things, would you say in any particular way that you have been changed by this? That you have been changed for your vision, what you want to do, be? How have you been changed would you say?
- AMBER: For the better. Because I think at the time at first I wanted to be a lawyer. . .but I really care more about people. Not that I didn't care about people before, but I really do. It just showed me that someone has it worse than you. And people do need help. It is not because they don't know, or they are lazy, they don't receive help, but it is other circumstances that they need help.
- KING: Anybody else? How have you been changed?
- RONNELL: I think I have been changed for me. The whole experience has had to do with my mental health to make me pay attention to that more and actually have time to rest yourself. It really changed me, because I was just going, going, going and then this happened, and it made me just sit down and stop doing everything. So that really plays into a point of how I think, now that I really need to get to a point where I get through this semester and just chill out because what is important is your life and being able to function. So, when this happened, it just said, "Ok, now you have to sit down, now you can't do anything." Now I value that attitude toward life a little bit more.
- KING: And you have to be with who you are and not all those other things that distract you from who you are.
- NOBLE: It made me lazy. It did! By me moving to another school and not having to be in all the classes that I was in. I didn't want to take many of my major courses at another university because I know how that deal is, and they won't accept a lot. But by us being in the hurricane and all, I found out later that they would accept them. So I had 9 hours at my other university. And it made me lazy because I didn't have any core classes. And by me being a pre-med major, I am used to eighteen hours of all natural sciences, and studying up to 3 o'clock in the morning. When I got home and had 9 hours of dance, history and English, and that is all I have to take, and I don't have to study, I can stay up all night and I don't have to wake up in the morning, and my first class isn't until later, and I only have class on Tuesday and Thursday. I didn't have class Friday, Saturday, and Sunday so. . .
- KING: You were on vacation?
- NOBLE: Right for a whole semester. So when I came back and had 18 hours of classes and had to wake up at 8 am. . .
- KING: What about your goals in life?
- NOBLE: Oh, they are still the same. I still plan on being a dermatologist, but I have that break, where I dance. That's my passion.

KING: Anybody else thinking about any change. Michael?

MICHAEL: I would say I am thankful for the situation because it was an eye opener to me really. It made me focus on and realize what was really important in life. My values have focused more from the secular things to things that are more important. Those things that will always be there for you like family and values such as that. So I think it was an eye opener experience for me. My goals are still the same, I want to still attend law school and become a lawyer. My goals have not changed, but it also gave me a chance to see how things are different in other institutions and how other people are still striving to obtain those goals also. It made me realize and wake up and see the competition around me. It is not only here in our institution. It is a real competitive world.

KING: Going to a predominately white institution gave you another angle.

MICHAEL: Exactly.

KING: How about you LeKisha?

LEKISHA: I have always wanted to teach. But recently, when I came back in January, I picked up special education. I think it had something to do with my hurricane experience. I helped out in a mental retardation center. It was the best experience ever. I think that made me want to pick up special education also. And it also makes me more marketable, because you need teachers everywhere. I think that kind of helped. Hearing the people on the news talk about it's those who were not educated that wasn't able to get out because they don't have the jobs and the money. I just think that by me being an educator, and helping someone else, it would make somebody's life a whole lot better.

KING: How did you happen to volunteer at a mental health center?

LEKISHA: One of my classes was Foundation of Education at the school at University of Las Vegas (UNLV). We had to go to a school, because I came late, they put me in the research classroom and they had to go the center and help out, and work. I went to the center with them also, and it was very good.

KING: You don't think you would have had other experiences like that at Dillard?

LEKISHA: Oh, I know I would have. When we came back in January, we had to go to take the section Intro to Exceptional Children. We had to go to the [inaudible]. So, it was like a great epiphany confirmation kind of things to go into special education.

KING: Anyone else want to comment on that? Courtney, in terms of your goals, or how you might of changed?

COURTNEY: No, my goals didn't necessarily change. I wanted to be a doctor since I was three or four. I remember having a game called where you try to operate? Usually your mind changes, but I knew that is what I always wanted to be. I think my appreciation for Dillard has gotten a lot stronger. I would complain “Dillard is this, aw Dillard is that. . .” But going to another school, I admire Dillard so much and I appreciate it so much more. I knew that I was coming back in January. I didn't care how I was going to get here, because my mother didn't want me to come back. She was not endorsing it at all. I really do have a heightened appreciation for Dillard.

KING: Did any of you have any contact with Dillard administration, alumni? Did the school keep track of you getting back?

RONNELL: They had a little survey you had to fill out.

KING: On the Internet?

COURTNEY: They had a hot-line up and running where you could call and see what was going on. To make sure you had transferred to another school, or if you had plans to do something else while you were out.

JOSEPH: They also had town hall meetings in different cities where the majority of students were.

KING: So they kind of knew where you were. They tried to keep up with you. OK. Well, that would want to make you want to come back.

RONNELL: We also used the yahoo groups to disseminate information. Because a lot of people needed certain information to use so they could get back to where they were. So using the technology was a good tool to show us how to communicate better.

KING: Did any of you work while you were away off campus or on campus while. Ronnell, are you saying “yes” you were?

RONNELL: When we went back home?

KING: When you left after the storm, were you working in your city where you evacuated? What work did you do?

AMBER: I worked in the GAP clothing store just to pass the time because I wasn't involved in any school activities, because I didn't live on campus. I lived at home.

NOBLE: I just increased my time at the dance studio. I already lived there.

LEKISHA: I worked for a limousine company. Las Vegas limos.

KING: What did you do?

LEKISHA: I dispatched, I did reservations and I handed out keys to the drivers. I did that the summer before. So when I came back, they just let me go ahead. I did the three to eleven hours but I only did it Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and I got so much homework done during those hours, so they really worked with me there. I'll never go back.

(Group laughter.)

AMBER: I worked at the GAP. That was my motivation to go to work. It was fun.

COURTNEY: I didn't work.

JOSEPH: I was just a full time student in that new environment.

KING: So do you know anyone who perished in the storm?

Group: No

COURTNEY: Not personally. But people telling their stories on TV made you think that you know them. I remember the guy who said his wife fell off the roof, or people who said they watched their children slide off the roof. Even though I didn't know anyone personally, I still felt connected to people who didn't survive it.

KING: Have any of you seen Spike Lee's documentary.

Group: Yes, yes. It was gross. I had to stop watching it.

KING: Did you have any sense of being afraid? Did it affect you? LeKisha, you spoke about the bus burning and how that felt. Did you have any sense of immediate danger or fear?

RONNELL: The only time I felt fear was when we were crossing some water, going past Pontchartrain that Saturday. I saw the water all choppy. I said, "Oh, wow. This really might be serious." So, that was the only time I was afraid.

COURTNEY: I think even now of the twin spans. I traveled to Florida this summer. I was nervous. Like: "No even this was like chopped up." Now they have temporary bridges. It is like scary going over there even today. You just feel, "How was this destroyed by a storm?"

KING: How is it being on campus right here with all the rebuilding? You walk right pass these buildings? You walk past the first floor of these buildings and see the water lines. That is kind of a constant reminder. Maybe that is some of the reason some of the parents would ask why you want to go back.

COURTNEY: Although we see a lot of construction going on, Dillard looked a lot worse than this. This looks good to us, I think, minus all the things that are not finished. There is a lot that has progressed since we been here.

KING: OK. Very good. How were you initially received on your new campus if you went to school some places else? How was the reception? Let's start with you, Joseph.

JOSEPH: They welcomed us. I believe the second day, they had a booth of I guess about 100 students from Dillard and Xavier, too. So they had a little welcoming ceremony with the SGU there at Morehouse. They also had a little mixer for us and the rest of Spelman and Morehouse. Like I said, my transition was easy because number one: My roommate had a girlfriend there. So it wasn't just me and him. We got acquainted with her friends and my frat brothers welcomed me, but the school, the faculty and staff really looked out for us and made sure that we were on track with everything. And we had weekly meetings at Morehouse with all the students, and they had counseling services, academic help and tutoring services all during the week.

KING: Did you get involved with any campus activities there?

JOSEPH: Just with my fraternity. That's it.

KING: Like what did you do with them? Like party?

(Group laughter)

JOSEPH: They had community service and we did fundraisers for the MLK.

KING: So you did do some community service while you were there? OK.

AMBER: My school really welcomed me with open arms. Teachers gave me books and it was free to go there. I had a refund check. That was all great for me, but I wasn't really happy because it really wasn't where I wanted to be, because I was back in my mom and dad's house. . .hmm.

KING: Did you get involved on campus?

AMBER: No. They were nice, I just didn't like the school. It wasn't what I wanted at the time.

KING: Was it a predominately white school?

AMBER: Yes, it was a predominately white school.

KING: And you didn't want to make that home?

AMBER: Yes, I was pushing it away. I would go to class, I went home. I never stayed there for long.

KING: You did go to school? How were you received?

NOBLE: I went one semester. It was a predominately white school. The classrooms were four and five hundred people. You know, it really wasn't that many, but it was 150 people in the Biology class, stadium seating, teaching on a megaphone. Just a number, they don't know your name. It wasn't that they didn't welcome me. They just had so many other concerns, that they said "So you here from New Orleans? OK, sit down."

KING: Ronnell, did you say you went to school?

RONNELL: Yes, But I didn't attend the classes regularly like I should. I was received fairly well. We thought initially that we were going to have to pay tuition, but we got a waiver. But I still had to pay for housing, I really could have stayed home with my moms, but I was just too stuck on that college freedom. The African American Academic network bought all my books and some people from Xavier, also. That was cool.

KING: Where were you at school?

RONNELL: The University of Illinois in Chicago.

KING: Ok, you didn't work on campus, you worked off campus in the city?

RONNELL: Yes.

KING: How were you received, Courtney?

COURTNEY: At Howard, they received me with open arms. I didn't have to pay for anything. I went for free. The office of Student Life paid for my books. That was the office of the man that I knew who worked in that office. They paid for my books. I didn't get involved in campus activities. I'd come to school, go to class. I stopped going after a while. I think I just didn't want to give them a chance, because I knew I was coming back to Dillard. And after it was confirmed we were coming back, I have to admit I just completely—like, "I'm going back to Dillard. This doesn't matter." I did get transfer credits. They were electives. I was just out of it. Coming late, not really feeling I'm at my best, after everything that happened. It wasn't the ideal situation because Howard is a great school. I love DC. I got involved in a lot of historical events, like the Millions Man March. I went to that. They have a lot of marches and rallies in DC. I got a chance to get involved in a lot of political things that happened. But as far as school—

KING: How about you, Mike?

MICHAEL: I thought it was an interesting one, coming from a HBCU. I wanted to go to another HBCU. So my experience of trying to register for another HBCU was not a good one. I spent three days at this college (whose name I won't mention) just trying to register and was unable to get anything done. I went to Birmingham Southern, and in one day, I had my books. I had my classes. Everybody was there with opening arms. I got

a tour of the campus, introduction to teachers, everyone knew me by name.

KING: Well, you were the only one.

MICHAEL: No, there was a couple other students there from Katrina and they welcomed us with open arms. Like we also had - like Morehouse did — they did a rally at dinner for us to get us acquainted with everyone else on campus. I would say it was a good experience.

KING: The school that you couldn't successfully complete your registration at— what was the problem? You don't have to say the name of the school, but just what happened.

MICHAEL: They had already started their classes, which was understandable. It was a lot of difficulty getting the finances together. I really can't say what the problem was, but it was really a frustrating process.

KING: And you were trying to be with them both? What was most helpful to you or who was most helpful to you in your transition to the host campus where you went? I know, Courtney, you said, the man that you met really kind of sponsored you. Was there anyone else besides that one relationship you had?

COURTNEY: My family also, even though really they didn't understand because the news kind of makes things look worse. It was really bad, but I think it makes it look worse. My family really supported me, even though they didn't necessarily agree with my decision to come back down here, they supported me. They really kept me strong. They were saying, “It will be OK.”

KING: Anyone else have someone or something that was really helpful to you?

COURTNEY: My whole church family. It is not that big of a church, but everyone was so supportive. They gave money when I was about to quit school. They really, you know, said you should keep going because this might help you. When I found out I was going back to Dillard, they said this will still help you keep going. My mother, she is the best. She just kept me going and supported me in everything. When I wanted to come back to Dillard, she didn't even ask why. She didn't say, “I don't think you should go.” OK. She saw that I wasn't happy. She was saying: “Whatever makes you happy. Just as long as you succeed.”

JOSEPH: A women by the name of Ms. Everett, in the admissions office, and the whole admissions department, the faculty and registrar's office, particularly Ms. Everett, because she would invite us over, or take us out to eat, or if we needed anything, if we needed a ride to Wal-Mart, for those who didn't have cars, she would do that. She would go out of her way to make sure that we were comfortable.

COURTNEY: I would say not just my family, my friends at home, but also like the girls who we all lived on campus together, and we all talked to each other, every night. It was like: “We have to go back to Dillard. We have to go back to Dillard” and just knowing that other people were in my same shoes and they still wanted to go back to Dillard as a freshman just made it better.

KING: So you have had kind of close family—Dillard family ties—that helped you. Anybody else have examples?

MICHAEL: My family. They played an important role in me just deciding to go back to school. My mom kept insisting: “Don’t let it get you down. We are going to make it. This is just one of life’s tests that you have to go through, something you have to overcome.” So my family played a major role in me continuing on. One of my professors, Dr. Taylor—I took two classes from him, Legal Business Environment, and another Marketing class—he was always interested in my well-being. He always made sure everything was running smoothly and that everything was there before me.

KING: This is a professor there at that school?

MICHAEL: Yes, correct.

KING: Very good. Anyone else? Did you have any worries while you were away from New Orleans and Dillard? What was on you mind?

NOBLE: I was—I was worried about my clothes.

KING: You must have had some fantastic clothes.

NOBLE: I am just into clothes. I had a lot of very expensive clothes back in New Orleans, during that time, and luckily none of them were damaged ‘cause I stayed on the second floor.

KING: Wow! You were just worried about your things.

NOBLE: And once you are used to going to your closet and seeing what was in there and what you could put on and then going to your closet and there is nothing in it.

KING: Kind of depressing?

NOBLE: That was all I was worried about, really, I mean mainly. Because everything else was okay. I was alive. My family was okay. All my friends were okay. All I had to worry about was what I was going to put on the next day.

KING: So what was next? Going back to while you were away. Any worries? Go ahead, Joseph.

JOSEPH: I already knew family and friends were okay, but my major concern or worry dealing with school was that I would have to do an extra year. They provided us free schooling and books for that year, but, this was supposed to be my junior year. If I stay here at Morehouse, this is going to be my sophomore year, and I'll have to do an extra year, which is extra money and extra time. That was really the only worry that I had after the fact that I found out everything was okay.

KING: So did you ended up having to do that extra year? How did you manage?

JOSEPH: I actually benefited from going to school that semester. Because I went that semester and then came back in January and we had two semesters back at Dillard. So I did three semesters in one year. So, actually, it put me ahead a half semester. So I'm skating out of here.

KING: Wow! Anybody else have worries of any kind?

COURTNEY: Not being able to come back to Dillard.

KING: You really missed it?

COURTNEY: The way that people were talking, it was like, “New Orleans was going to be closed for at least a year.” But they were saying at a minimum, a year. I really didn't want to stay at Howard, even though they were really nice to me there. I didn't want to go home, but once you go off to college, you don't want to go back home. I really didn't know of any other school I really wanted to be in. So I was like: “What am I going to do?” So that was my major worry - not being able to come back.

KING: Courtney, you mentioned the news media and the portrayal of the storm and the aftermath and New Orleans people were portrayed in certain ways. Did you all run into any of that in terms of how people see you as being from New Orleans.

COURTNEY: Immediately, even to this day, if you mention New Orleans around people who don't know, and its like, it's “the look”. I think people are still fearful of the whole idea of everything that went on during the storm and after. The media really made it look like things had been bad for a very long, long, long time. It will probably be in your best interest if you stayed where you are and not try to come back. So now, people are like: “Why are you back down in New Orleans? Is it safe? Are you scared?” Because they see that someone got shot, or five people died at one time and you get associated with this type of atmosphere because you live in New Orleans. And when you say you go to school there they ask, “They have schools open in New Orleans? They have this?” People don't even know that New Orleans is progressing like it is because people (media) are still showing the abandoned parts of New Orleans and not the parts that are being reconstructed.

KING: Anybody else have a New Orleans kind of experience like that?

JOSEPH: The only thing I can think of is I feel the opposite of what she just said. I feel like they are showing the progressive parts and aren't showing the parts they are neglecting to rebuild. So a lot of times you have to inform people that, “OK, Canal Street might be ready to come back up, and the French Quarter might be up, but when you take a shot down Gentilly or Elysian Fields, it's not really like that.” It's like being an advocate between your family and friends to show them that everything they see on TV is not actually the majority of the city.

KING: Anybody else want to comment on that? In terms of just peoples' perceptions of New Orleans. No one here is from New Orleans, right?

RONNELL: My mother is concerned with, she thinks I am going to get some deadly disease from living down here in this. . .

KING: In the aftermath of the storm.

RONNELL: Right. There is so much pollution down here. To get some fifty thousand shots. . .

KING: Well, have you all had shots? Or something like that?

RONNELL: It was required that we have some. A TB test and a meningitis shot. That is about all.

KING: Now that you are back, have you resumed, or picked up where you left off? Kind of doing more? Doing something different?

LEKISHA: Me personally? I am doing more than I was doing before because of the appreciation I have of Dillard. It is not easy to pick up where you left off, because I have changed, so it wasn't easy for me to pick up where I left off. Now I want to do more than I had planned on doing.

KING: Can you give an example, LeKisha?

LEKISHA: Like before, I didn't want anything to do with the student government and all that. I just wanted to do the planning of activities and stay in the background. Now I am coming out. I plan things. I do things now. Now, I am the junior class Chaplain. Now, I am coming out more now instead of just staying behind the scene.

KING: Anybody else have an experience? Courtney?

COURTNEY: Like LeKisha, before the storm, I liked being involved in kind of taking a backseat. I will help with this, but I do not want to be the actual person that heads it up. But since the storm, I ran for class queen and I won last year (group cheers!). I plan community service events in my class. I started in January, but I am actually doing it this year also.

KING: What kind of community service?

COURTNEY: Any type of events such as helping to gut out homes. . . I was a part of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters last year and I actually had a young child that I mentored last semester. And I plan on hooking that back up this year. Helping out with the YMCA, since after the storm, they are still not up to their capacity before the storm. We are trying to come out and help them sort clothes, a lot of people donated a lot of things to them after the storm that they need help going through the donations. Becoming more involved in the community, I feel it is almost my duty to be a part of the rebuilding process.

KING: For the city. Anyone else?

AMBER: I changed I guess. I wasn't really into community service before coming to Dillard. And I guess seeing the houses. I gutted out a house before. I am involved in a group called Financial Aid, which is a kind of community service-based program sponsored by Dillard University. I am actually taking on a bigger role than I normally would have. I am a committee chair.

KING: What is your committee?

AMBER: A research committee. A kind of a committee like this. Getting people's stories about what they went through in the Ninth Ward. I work with a church in the Ninth Ward, which is who I work with. Yesterday was our first meeting. Like they say [LeKisha and Courtney], I really do want to help and rebuild New Orleans. But I feel for a person becoming educated, I think, it is a part of our duty to help rebuild New Orleans.

KING: Courtney mentioned earlier that leaving New Orleans, she realized how important the friendship network—your social experiences—were to your academic experience. When you came back, did you kind of reconnect with those same friends, and is that an important part of your Dillard experience and your academic experience—the other people around you?

COURTNEY: I re-connected with most of my friends. Some of them did not come back. But it was even exciting. Those people that you see that you weren't real close to, but when you came back, and you see them, you were excited to see them also and you just became closer to everybody. You talk to everybody now, because you never know who you might not see again.

AMBER: Coming back you have your friends but, you just have to see. Because, we all have that bond now. We all been through the same thing, so we understand each other. Going to other schools, it is just like, “I've got to get back to Dillard because we understand like what it is.” When you say, “I go to Dillard in New Orleans,” most people didn't even know about Dillard before the storm. Getting back, you have these students you can relate to. We can talk about the storm and what we went through, since we know what it was to just take a bag, and just think you are coming back in 30 days. Like other people will probably never know what that will feel like.

KING: Is there anything else that would be important for us to know about what has happened to HBCU students through this experience? Anything else you would like to say that we might not have asked you about?

COURTNEY: I think because the majority of the people that were left out, that the media showed were African Americans and as other educated African Americans, it is our duty to help out our people. That is my biggest thing, I just want everybody to know this, that we need to help our people. You know. We get involved in politics and everything, and that is great, but it's like, “I'm just going to be a teacher. I might not ever be seen on the TV, but it is my duty to touch one life.” So if I touch one life, then Ronnell touches two. That is three people who are now just better off.

LEKISHA: This is not pertaining to my future goals, but I have always planned on working at a charitable hospital. And I think since the storm, I am even more adamant about doing that. The storm really made me see that it is so many people in New Orleans that live below the poverty level—live with little or nothing. They can't afford health care, they can't afford basic needs. And I feel like that would be me, doing what I can, being born to get the higher education so that I can give back to them.

KING: We are going to stop now, we have gone a little over the time we have said and we will see you back at five.

.....**AFTERTHOUGHTS (August 2007)**.....



This past school year differed from my Pre-Katrina year in college in that it was a lot easier adjusting to the environment (improvement and disappointments). As far as me facing any challenges, a lot of problems persisted from personal relationships than things related to New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina. Guess you could say things were back to status quo. Although Xavier seems to be pretty much on track, I am sure donations would help. But they have done a **WONDERFUL** job of restoring.

My goals haven't changed but have become more cemented and focused. In two years (light at the end of the tunnel), I plan to be in graduate school at LSU School of Nursing.

-Clifton Holland  
Xavier University



The biggest adjustment for me was getting used to not seeing the familiar faces from my freshman year. Many of my friends from freshman year did not return, and I did not actually realize how many people had not returned until we were back on campus.

There were actually few challenges. The only challenges for me were the construction on campus and minor apartment issues. It was frustrating at times but I realize that it is necessary to restore Dillard.

My career goals are the same. I am currently preparing for the MCAT so that I can pursue my goal of attending medical school and becoming a physician.

-Courtney Bradford  
Dillard University



I feel that there was a slight decrease in student activities because of the storm. Due to the shortage of students, I believe that this may have contributed to the decrease in student activities around campus.

The only challenge that I faced as I returned to Xavier was being in school for the summer. This hindered my opportunities of seeking summer research programs to enhance my chances of getting into medical school. I hope that the medical schools that I applied to will be understanding and accept the fact that I had to enroll in school for the summer to make up for the semester that I missed as a result of the storm.

Xavier University quickly went to work right after the storm so that the students could return and finish their education. All of the credit for the rapid recovery should go to the President, Dr. Norman C. Francis. His quick response in handling the situation showed that he did care about his student's and was concerned about their education. The only thing that I feel the school needs to do is recruit for a bigger incoming freshman class.

Following graduation in May of 2008, I plan to attend medical school. My career goals have not changed since I have been in college. Yes, Katrina did cause several obstacles, but she will not keep me from achieving my goal of becoming a physician. I feel that many people are still using Hurricane Katrina as an excuse as to why they are not following through with their goals. I refuse to act in such a way. Katrina was a disastrous storm and changed the lives of people for the good and bad. Katrina has changed my views in life by further reassuring me that material things can all be replaced, but it is our loved one's who we should cherish the most. After viewing all the doctors who left their families behind to care for other, showed me that that is exactly how I plan to live my life. Despite Hurricane Katrina, I aspire to care for others as a prominent physician in a disadvantaged area.

-Stephanie Miles  
Xavier University

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Dr. Joyce E. King**, one of the facilitators of the interview, is the Benjamin E. Mays Chair of Urban Teaching, Learning, and Leadership in the College of Education at Georgia State University. She has been recognized for her contribution to the field of education and has published several books addressing cultural diversity in education.

**Dr. Clyde Robertson**, a native of New Orleans, also served as a facilitator of the interview and is a visiting professor at University of Houston, African American Studies Program. Prior to the storm, Dr. Robertson was the Director of Africana and Multicultural Studies in the New Orleans Public School System (NOPS).

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