

From: **Sandy Rosenthal** <Sandy@levees.org>  
Date: Sat, Dec 18, 2010 at 5:06 PM  
Subject: Katrina issue  
To: SeniorEditor@nytimes.com  
Cc: "HJ Bosworth Jr." <hjbosworthjr@levees.org>

Dear Mr. Hecker,

How are you?

One of our supporters forwarded us a letter she received from you. She had responded to an article by Felicity Barringer called Effort Falters on San Francisco Bay Delta published on Dec 14, 2010.

She had written urging the New York Times to resist attributing the flooding of New Orleans simply to "Katrina." Speaking on behalf of the New York Times, you told her, "I think we are correct in attributing the cause to Katrina."

We are puzzled by your letter. Your ombudsman addressed this exact issue recently.

"...Like it or not, "Katrina" has become shorthand for a lot: the hurricane itself, the failed levees, the neglect that followed. Maybe The Times should just call it a "disaster," without modifiers, and be as specific as possible when needed...."

[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/opinion/16pubed.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/opinion/16pubed.html?_r=1)

We are puzzled that you dismissed our supporter's concerns with "no hurricane, no damage." While it's ostensibly correct, it disregards what really happened on August 29, 2005. A major American city went underwater and over 1,600 people died.

Utilizing the "no hurricane, no damage" logic would mean one could also say traffic devastated the I-35 bridge that failed in Minnesota, also due to blatant civil engineering mistakes. No traffic, no damage.

<http://www.nts.gov/publicctn/2008/HAR0803.htm>

Keep in mind that three of the major canalwall breaches (17th Street, London Avenue and Industrial Canal) would have occurred in a far LESS severe storm. The walls failed when the water was still five feet below the tops of the canalwalls.

We feel that, especially in this article, it would have been appropriate to note the combination of incompetent levee design and construction that was the heart of the Katrina disaster, especially in an article about a similar potential disaster.

Our supporter urged the Times simply to be more specific on what caused the devastating flooding and we agree with her. We hope the Times will urge its reporters to be as specific as possible when discussing the horrific man-made flood of August 29, 2005.

Sincerely,  
Sandy Rosenthal  
Founder and Executive Director, Levees.org  
1421 Soniat Street, New Orleans, LA 70115  
www.levees.org

