

Joanne Seautelle

Mrs. Jennifer Pust

AP English Language and Composition, Period 3

14 February 2017

Wikipedia Analysis: Hurricane Katrina and Baby Jessica McClure's Accident

"Hurricane Katrina." *Wikipedia*. 05 February 2017. Web. 13 February 2017.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hurricane_Katrina&oldid=763743191> .

Search terms used: wikipedia hurricane katrina

The Wikipedia page for Hurricane Katrina lists the meteorological history, the damage and aftermath, the impact of the storm on the positions of various leaders, and the rebuilding process. The page notes the severity of the storm and says it was both one of the five deadliest hurricanes in United States history and also the most expensive ("Hurricane Katrina"). Even the overview acknowledges the tensions around the mismanagement of the evacuation and the disaster response, noting that federal and state investigations launched, and several key people resigned from their posts ("Hurricane Katrina").

The tone of the page is in keeping with Wikipedia's guidelines and handles controversial subjects in a balanced way, noting that "Some alleged that race, class, and other factors could have contributed to delays in government response" ("Hurricane Katrina"). By saying "some alleged," the Wikipedia authors suggest that there were multiple perspectives, without taking

sides as to whether those who alleged racism were correct. The article also presents various viewpoints and includes direct quotations from public figures such as rapper Kanye West.

The text features the accompany the page are incredibly helpful. Many photographs show the damage and impact of the storm itself, such as the image of the I-10/I-610 West that shows the freeway interchanges almost completely submerged (“Hurricane Katrina”). Also included are short videos from NASA, meteorological maps and radar, and charts showing the FEMA organization responses and other damages associated with the hurricane.

This article contains a whopping 183 references, including two books specifically called out for further reading, *The Katrina Effect* and *Is This America?* Within the list of references, I’m particularly interested in Mary Helen Stoltz’s piece, “Flood Damage After Katrina Could Have Been Prevented, S&T Expert Says,” and that might be a piece I search for next. All in all, this page gives so many linked references that I think it will be a useful place to return to.

The Wikipedia page seems like a wonderful starting place for my research because so many other pieces are referred to and linked, and even the titles showcase their perspectives. I’m more interested in this topic than ever, now seeing that it was in fact one of the deadliest storms our country ever faced. I had the privilege of visiting New Orleans back in 2002, three years before the storm, and remember the restaurants and sights fondly. I watched in horror on television as the same place I once watched a basketball game, the Louisiana Superdome, turned to a nightmare, where people were sick, abandoned, and dying. I want to learn more about Hurricane Katrina, and find out if the racial allegations that were hinted at in this piece are actually true.

“Jessica McClure.” *Wikipedia*. 13 February 2017. Web. 13 February 2017.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jessica_McClure&oldid=765245650>.

Search terms: wikipedia jessica mcclure

This Wikipedia page details the accident and rescue of baby Jessica McClure, who fell in a well in Texas on October 14, 1987 (“Jessica McClure”). The page gives the details of her rescue, an explanation of the aftermath and the impact that the accident had on her life and her rescuers’ lives, and the effects on popular culture. For example, I was surprised to learn that one of the rescuers later killed himself because of post-traumatic stress related to this event (“Jessica McClure”).

The authors try to present this very emotional experience in a neutral and unbiased way, but occasionally cannot help but use adjectives to characterize the intensity of the event. The authors note that “In a sad twist of fate, O'Donnell, battling posttraumatic stress disorder as a result of the arduous rescue effort and struggling to cope with the abrupt decline of the fame and recognition that had been lavished on him following his heroic act, committed suicide” (“Jessica McClure”). By writing “a sad twist of fate,” the authors come dangerously close to expressing their personal commentary; however, it can be argued that this would be sad by any means and thus is acceptable to label as such. The page is accompanied only by a single photograph, of President George H.W. Bush’s holding baby Jessica in the White House; he would have been Vice President at the time of the photograph. No other text features are present.

This article cites nine different sources, including news pieces from *The Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. The site also links to an MSNBC piece aired 20 years later, which might be helpful in further research. Most of these are links directly from the

days of the event in various national newspapers; I will have to look further to find editorial cartoons, photographs, or other documents related to this event.

This article filled in some of my mental blanks on this issue—I remember watching this event on TV when I was ten years old and being very frightened for young baby Jessica. I vaguely remember anniversary coverage of the event, and I was surprised to learn of the impact and aftermath that this event had on her rescuers. I was also surprised to learn that Jessica received \$800,000 in donations as a trust fund, given to her when she turned 25 years old (“Jessica McClure”), and I imagine now that the 24-hour news cycle and social media have become accepted in our daily lives, if an event like this happened today, people from all over the globe would have donated significantly more in a matter of hours. This brings up one of the most interesting tensions of this topic: the “massive media saturation” that the Wikipedia authors allude to. Today, such horrifying stories are commonplace—every day features stories of ordinary people in great danger due to natural disasters or human errors. I wonder to what extent the Baby Jessica experience shaped this phenomenon? I’d like to research things like ratings and see if there were media commentaries about the lasting impact of this event from a storytelling perspective.