



Honors College Theses

4-4-2023

Disproportionate Discourses: Analyzing the Media's Coverage of Police Brutality

Tatyanah Santiago
Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Rhetoric Commons](#), and the [Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Santiago, Tatyanah, "Disproportionate Discourses: Analyzing the Media's Coverage of Police Brutality" (2023). *Honors College Theses*. 829.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses/829>

This thesis (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors College Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Disproportionate Discourses: Analyzing the Media's Coverage of Police Brutality

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the
Department of Communication Arts.

By
Tatyanah Santiago

Under the mentorship of *Dr. Shana Bridges*

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the media covers fatal confrontations between minorities and the police. Since the media is a primary vehicle for interpreting events as they unfold, it is important to recognize the ways news coverage frames these violent encounters. This paper focuses specifically on the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO in August 2014 and George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, MN in May 2020. News articles from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Fox News, and CNN were analyzed to see how authority narratives, witness narratives, and character depictions were reported. Three theoretical lenses (Critical Race Theory, Framing Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis) were used to examine news stories from these outlets. Ultimately, my analysis concludes that media coverage of police brutality provides some evidence of the tenets of Critical Race Theory, which posits that oppression is systemic and sedimented into institutions (including the police and the media).

Keywords: police brutality, media coverage, critical race theory, Michael Brown, criminalization, George Floyd

Thesis Mentor: *Dr. Shana Bridges*

Honors Dean: Dr. Steven Engel

April 2023
Department of Communication Arts
Honors College
Georgia Southern University

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfather, Juan C. Vazquez, who passed away before the work was finished. He supported me until the end and wanted me to graduate doing great things.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my professor and advisor, Dr. Shana Bridges for believing in me and helping every step of the way. I also could not have undertaken this journey without professors Dr. Sarah McCarroll and Dr. Jennifer Kowalewski for generously providing support and constructive criticism for my work. Additionally, this endeavor would not have been possible without Dr. Nathan Palmer, who ultimately was the inspiration for my thesis because he made my sociology classes fun, but knowledgeable.

Thanks should also go to my cohort member, Hailey Coles-Bowen for moral support and for sharing advice and suggestions since we both are finally at the end of our academic journey.

Lastly, I'd like to mention my mom Valerie Vazquez Myles and stepdad Robert Randell Myles for believing that I could finish this paper, listening to my rants, and giving me feedback on my topic. I would also like to thank my boyfriend, Tyriq Howell, and my unborn daughter Isla for all of the emotional support and love.

Disproportionate Discourses: Analyzing the Media's Coverage of Police Brutality

According to the *Washington Post*, even though African Americans “account for less than 13 percent of the U.S. population,” they are “killed by police at more than twice the rate of White Americans” (2021, para. 5). These statistics are reflected in the ubiquitous cell phone footage depicting police violence against Black and brown people. The purpose of this paper is to understand how the media covers fatal confrontations between minorities and police. Since the media is a primary vehicle for interpreting events as they unfold, it is important to recognize the ways news outlets frame these violent encounters. This paper will focus specifically on two case studies: the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO in August 2014 and George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, MN in May 2020. These two particular cases were chosen because of the volume of media attention they received. Michael Brown's death served as a monumental moment that shined the national spotlight on the death of yet another unarmed Black man at the hands of police. George Floyd's filmed murder sparked fervent domestic and global protests against police brutality and racial injustice.

The topic and questions will be addressed using three different theoretical lenses: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Framing Theory (FT), and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). When looking at past literature covering police brutality, the authors tend to use either one or two critical lenses to explain their theory. Whereas this study examines police brutality from a media and societal viewpoint. The present study will focus on news coverage from: Fox News, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and CNN. In the following sections, I provide an overview of the case studies, discuss the concept of objectivity in journalism, and explain the different critical lenses that will be used to

interpret these media stories. The ultimate goal is to better understand why and how these particular violent confrontations between police and minorities are retold. Ultimately, my analysis concludes that media coverage of police brutality provides some evidence of the tenets of Critical Race Theory, which posits that oppression is systemic and sedimented into institutions (including the police and the media).

Case Studies

The circumstances surrounding 18-year-old Michael Brown's death are controversial because there is no footage of the encounter between him and Officer Darren Wilson. Furthermore, Officer Wilson's retelling differed from Brown's friend Dorian Johnson who was also present nearby during the encounter. However, Devereaux (2014) of *The Intercept*, states that most people agreed on several facts.

There was some sort of physical struggle between Brown and Wilson while Wilson was still in his vehicle; Brown ran from confrontation; Wilson got out of the vehicle and fatally shot Brown at least six times from a distance; Brown was unarmed; and his bleeding body lay in the hot summer sun for four hours. (para. 6)

Protests ensued after Brown's death because the grand jury decided not to indict Officer Darren Wilson for Brown's death. According to Queally (2015), Ferguson, MO had already had several "mass demonstrations, looting and property destruction in the months after Brown's death" (para. 14).

The circumstances surrounding 46-year-old George Floyd's death are more straightforward since there was video footage of the incident, however, there are still discrepancies within the retelling. According to *The New York Times* (2020b),

Minneapolis police officers responded to a call from a store clerk who claimed Floyd used a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes. Video footage from nearby cameras as well as the police body cameras showed how George Floyd ended up on the ground with Officer Derek Chauvin's knee lodged between Floyd's head and neck. What we do know is that there was cell phone footage posted on social media and people took to the streets to express their outrage. According to *The New York Times*, the "protests against police brutality and systemic racism" occurred in "more than 150 American cities in the weeks and months that followed" (2020b, para. 1). There were also solidarity protests worldwide.

Literature Review

The gold standard of journalism has long been that of the "objective" reporter. However, scholars have challenged the notion that this ideal has been enacted in media coverage. Jones (2018) reminds us that "media stories limit the audiences' viewpoint" (p.43). They direct our attention in particular ways through language choice, time and space allotted to particular issues, and calculated circulation of information. Thus, news media is always already operating outside of the realm of objective journalism.

Media coverage of racialized events and movements have often been critiqued for questionable depictions of the people involved. For instance, Smiley and Fakunle (2016) argue that media depictions of police brutality often present an incomplete picture that emphasizes the criminality of the minorities being covered. "One dimensional vilification of offenders appears to be a ubiquitous feature of contemporary crime narrative" (Riley, 2019, p. 418). Kil (2020) describes how the increasing "Whiteness of the news industry creates White fear when covering minority issues" that stems from the "overuse of White

elites as sources; disregard for minority organizations or groups; depicting minorities as threats; and dismissing stories about racism” (p.28). According to Kil (2020), neoliberalism in journalism reflects the “focus on individualism to help justify state re-regulations at the bottom of society” (p.28). In other words, state laws that hinder those in poor and minority communities because they reinforce the focus on individual agency rather than acknowledging systemic oppression.

Bock (2016) attributes the rise in “citizen journalism” -- the use of cellphones to document police brutality -- to “the critique that traditional journalism is more loyal to elite concerns than those of every people” (p.16). “Cop Watching” is enacted by citizens to hold police accountable for their actions (Bock, 2016). Efforts to document police brutality are intended for use in the courtroom, a space that Chaney and Robertson (2014) remind us has long upheld discrepant sentences for minorities and police officers. These scholars remind us that objective, colorblind journalism is a myth. Thus, it is important to pay attention to the ways police/minority encounters are portrayed because these stories influence our perceptions of both policing and minority communities.

Critical Race Theory

According to Hiraldo (2010), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is “an analytical framework that stems from the field of critical legal studies that addresses the racial inequalities in society” (p.53). The foundational assertion of CRT -- the primary lens that will be used in this study of the media coverage of police brutality -- is that modern day racism extends from the institution of slavery. The late Derrick Bell became “the [CRT] movement’s intellectual father figure” because he “authored many of CRT’s foundational texts” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 17). This CRT movement is “a collection of

activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p. 15).

Hirald (2010) notes that CRT is derived from five tenets: “counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism” (p. 54). Some scholars used the concept of CRT to support the notion that “Whiteness” is the reason as to why media coverage of police brutality tends not to focus on racial disparities because people believe that racism does not exist. Mueller (2017) explains this by talking about color-blind racism theory, which “rationalizes White supremacy in everyday thought and discourse, supporting Whites’ ability to ignore the significance of racial discrimination and White privilege, as well as engage in everyday racism, even when they are well-meaning and intend to be non-racist” (p. 221). Mueller (2017) disavows the concept of “colorblindness” as a form of racism that feigns ignorance and denies “White privilege, culpability, and structural White supremacy” (p. 220). Kil (2020) states that “CRT is critical of liberalism that treats racism as exceptional and not systemic” (p. 22). This supports the notion of Whiteness and color blindness because “liberalism advances racism in the legal treatment of Whiteness as a type of property” (Kil, 2020, p. 23). This has caused the illusion that Whiteness means freedom and the ability to possess rights, whereas non-Whites do not have that luxury. In a society normalizing this, it has become a growing issue for those who are not deemed as White because society only seems to acknowledge ‘White values’ over those of others. Bell's (1980) idea of the “interest convergence principle,” states “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest

of Whites” (p. 523). This ideal is complicated by the hierarchy that places Whites in power and has been structurally entrenched for centuries.

Several scholars have drawn from Bell’s work to extend the conversation of race and policing. Barthas (2014) draws from various sources (Neocleous, 2014; Foucault, 1975; Bittner, 1970; Saint-Just, 2014) to describe the critical theory of police power as stemming from “a historical genealogy of slavery and colonialism” (p. 3). Chaney and Robertson (2013) also acknowledge that “since the time that Africans were forcibly brought to America, they have been the victims of racist and discriminatory practices that have been spurred and/or substantiated by those who create and enforce the law” (p. 481). Siegel (2020) states, “the [CRT] hypothesis is that racial disparities in the lethal use of force are a consequence of structural racism... that results in police officers viewing and policing not Black individuals but Black neighborhoods in inherently different ways” (p. 1079). These researchers conclude that the Black community will continue to struggle for fair treatment from law enforcement due to systemic racism embedded into the foundation of the criminal justice system.

Morrow, Berthelot, and Vickovic (2018) argue that the “minority threat perspective” is often used to justify police brutality. In their study on changes made to policing since Rodney King was beaten by four L.A. police officers in 1991, Chaney and Robertson (2014) concluded that “the historic and current template of law enforcement and the criminal justice system has demonstrated that interactions with these subsidiary entities is disproportionally race-based” (p. 110). In fact, Chaney and Robertson (2013) argued, “Black...fatalities at the hands of police are higher than they are for the general public” (p. 480). Contrastingly, Fryer (2016) states “very little data exists to understand

whether racial disparities in police use of force exist or might be explained by situational factors inherent to the complexity of police-civilian interactions” (p. 39). This means that, according to Fryer (2016), there is no existing data that explicitly states that racial disparities exist in police use of force or explains situational factors that relate to complex civilian-police encounters. Jones (2018) later critiques Fryer’s research, stating “in the rush to publish what many considered to be a newsworthy finding, the article implied that the research was thoroughly vetted, but it was not” (p. 43). In this case, Jones is referring to one of Fryer’s articles that was featured in *The New York Times* that stated that there was no racial bias in police shootings.

Cojean, Combalbert, and Taillandier-Schmitt (2020) discussed the “psychological and social factors underlying police officers’ decisions to use force” (p. 1). These are: “character and personality, personal characteristics and professional experience, and the decision-making system and physiology” (Cojean et al., 2020, p. 4). Cojean, Combalbert, and Taillandier-Schmitt (2020) acknowledge the argument that “police officers face situations that are highly emotionally charged” (p. 7). Bell (2000) warned against using this excuse to “justify mistreatment of citizens or the use of excessive force” (p. 89).

Critical Discourse Analysis

The media’s framing of police brutality is also a product of historical discriminations against minorities. Many CRT scholars have used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Kil, 2020; Chaney & Robertson, 2014) to show how racial disparities persist through various institutions. According to Wodak (2001), CDA aims to “critically investigate social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse)” (p. 2). Critical Discourse Analysis is broken down into

three concepts: “the concept of power, the concept of history, and the concept of ideology” (Wodak, 2001, p. 3). This lens has proven to be crucial to use in analyzing media sources and how they illustrate social inequalities to society and will thus serve as a useful tool for unpacking media coverage of police brutality.

Kil (2020) used CDA in addition to CRT in order to analyze U.S. newspapers for patterns in discursive strategies. She states that “in CDA, a referential discursive strategy is the most basic strategy in communicating prejudice, and constructs group boundaries and membership categorizations” (Kil, 2020, p. 29). Referential discursive strategies are used by speakers to name an individual or a group of people, through which social memberships are constructed and represented, for the sole purpose of increasing a message’s effectiveness. Chaney and Robertson (2014) remind us that these strategies are invoked to reinforce power structures: “the importance of power differentials is entrenched in the explanation of how all social practices, of which discourse is one, involve the construction of social identities” (p. 113). In other words, those with more power use their perceived credibility to construct the social identities of those below them.

Framing Theory

Framing theory -- the idea that media situate an event or issue within a particular field of meaning -- will also serve as a helpful lens for the present study. Several scholars have extended our understanding of this theory by applying it to various contexts (Adamson, 2016; Fryer, 2016; Kil, 2020; Jones, 2018; Bock, 2016; Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). According to Potter (2004, p. 210), a media frame “limits a person’s view of a total phenomenon and focuses attention on that which fits in

the frame” (as cited in Jones, 2018, p. 43). There are three ways that the media frames news stories:

First, media stories make necessary selections because it is impossible to present everything. As a result, those selections limit the audiences’ perspective. Second, producers purposely constrain the presentation of information to manipulate audiences. Third, audiences bring preconceived biases to a media-use experience which creates a frame that determines what they pay attention to. (Jones, 2018, p. 43)

The concept of media framing reminds us that we are provided a “snapshot” of an event or an issue, rather than a “big picture” view.

In regards to police brutality, it is important to notice how stories are framed because omitting or obscuring certain facts may create a more interesting story, but doing so skews the public’s perception of the event or issue. This means that the media’s tendency to frame stories of police brutality can be used to sway readers’ perspectives either for or against minorities depending on how the media portrays them within the retelling.

Smiley and Fakunle (2016) investigated the ways in which language is used to describe Black men who have been killed by law enforcement. “These narratives play a role in the initial assumption of the victim and can shift the perspective of how these victims are viewed” (p. 362). More specifically, Adamson (2016) focused on Michael Brown’s death and used framing theory to show how multiple news outlets, both online and televised, contributed to an attack on Michael Brown’s character by highlighting the teenager’s deviance as a cause of his own death. “Through ascription of racial or ethnic

identities to crime narratives, and the intentional exploitation of negative stereotypes and identities, the media committed itself to perpetuating both racialized and racist constructions of Blacks...” (Adamson, 2016, p. 191). Smiley and Fakunle (2016) emphasized that framing theory reifies the tenets of Critical Race Theory because, even though the individual reporter may not be aware of it, their White privilege (a byproduct of embedded systemic racism) can inevitably influence the ways they choose to cover these stories.

Bock (2016) discussed the elimination of framing through “Cop Watching” which is described as “smartphones...being used to document events both banal and extraordinary, including events that may be of public interest such as neighborhood arguments, crimes in progress and - notably - encounters with police” (p. 14). This becomes more evident today as smartphones are consistently being used for a multitude of purposes. The purpose of cop watching has been tied to “challenging the authority of the police and traditional media” (Bock, 2016, p. 14). In a time where police brutality situations have pitted authority narratives with eyewitness accounts, it is refreshing to know that the average citizen can participate in something that can be useful in determining the raw truth. Bock (2016) explores “Cop Watching” as an unfiltered look at police brutality and a way to counter the media’s framing of events such as George Floyd’s untimely death.

The research question being considered in this project is: How does media coverage of police brutality depict people of color? To answer this question, news coverage of the deaths of Michael Brown and George Floyd will be examined. The

coverage will be limited to news reports from popular news sites like *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN, and Fox News.

Method

Textual analysis, which describes and interprets the characteristics of a message, is the best way to analyze news stories because it calls for close readings of artifacts to isolate key terms and better understand their broader contexts and implications. This textual analysis of the media's coverage will be conducted using an archive of news stories covering the deaths of Michael Brown and George Floyd from CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and Fox News. Several stories from each of these four media outlets constitute the collection. This sample size was chosen for this particular study because it provides an ample number of texts from a variety of sources for analysis. The time frames of the samples vary depending on the person being discussed. For example, media coverage of Michael Brown is set between 2014 and 2018 to include stories published just after his death as well as information about the three autopsy reports performed in the following years. Most of the coverage of George Floyd's murder is from 2021 and includes information about Chauvin's trial.

Through a close textual analysis of news stories on these events, it can be determined how the media coverage depicted these two men and their brutal deaths at the hands of police. Critical Race Theory will be used as the primary lens for this qualitative textual analysis. The articles will be analyzed to see if the coverage upholds or diverges from the primary tenets of CRT: that racial oppression is systemic and sedimented into institutions (including the police and the media). The principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and Framing Theory also will be employed to better understand how the media

discourses framed police brutality. The articles will be examined for keywords, phrases, and styles of speech to determine if the stories reify or diverge from the tenets of CRT, CDA, and Framing Theory. Looking at this particular topic through these lenses aids our understanding of the ways the media covers police brutality.

Results

The recurring language identified among the varied news outlets revealed a pattern in how they chose to report the altercations and subsequent deaths of Michael Brown and George Floyd. Using this pattern, three primary language categories emerged. The first category consisted of neutral reporting language. This means that the language used was strictly informative and not biased towards either side of the story. These articles reported details and facts from each case. . The second language category consisted of language that showed support or acknowledgement towards the victims. These articles criticized police protocols and focused more on the victim's family and friend statements. There were also statements from officials that only corroborated the notion that the victim was indeed a victim, and shed positive light on the victim's character. The final language category consisted of language that supported the authorities involved. These articles only included statements from police officers, the police department, and facilities that were controlled by the police. The language within these particular articles typically upheld the tenets of CRT as the victims were described negatively and blamed for their own deaths.

Michael Brown

General Media Language

Five Fox News articles used neutral language when explaining the circumstances surrounding Brown's death. Five articles corroborate with Brown being the victim of the incident with statements that criticize the officials' protocol and story. One article describes an interview with Dr. Michael Baden, former New York City chief medical examiner, by a Fox News host and includes victim-blaming language from the host.

Four *Washington Post* articles used neutral language when describing the altercation and the circumstances surrounding Brown's death. Three articles provided witness statements supporting the "surrender" viewpoint, which revolved around Brown's hands being up, and character building depictions from family members. Three articles used language that depicted Officer Wilson in a positive light by describing his personality, family, and including witness accounts that posited Brown as the aggressor.

Four *New York Time* articles used neutral language to describe the events leading up to the altercation, the interaction between Brown and Wilson, and the circumstances surrounding Brown's death. Seven articles used language that favored Brown and acknowledged him as the victim by criticizing Officer Wilson's role in his death. One article favors Officer Wilson by only using witness statements that corroborate with his version of the altercation with Brown.

CNN had 12 articles that used neutral language when describing the events leading up to the altercation, jury reports about what happened, and the circumstances surrounding Brown's death. One article does, however, only talk about what Officer Wilson stated to the jury, but the reporting language is still neutral because the reporter is

only gathering this information for public release. One article favors Brown as the victim by citing his friend Dorian Johnson's witness statement. The article also references another witness who mentioned Officer Wilson's carelessness during the encounter.

Authority Statements

Based on security camera footage, Michael Brown (accompanied by his friend Dorian Johnson) shoplifted Swisher Sweets cigars from a Ferguson convenience store on August 9th, 2014. After leaving the store, the two returned to their neighborhood. According to Chief Tom Jackson, Officer Darren Wilson was in the neighborhood on another call about a choking infant. It is not clear whether Officer Wilson knew about the robbery before encountering Brown and Johnson. Darren Wilson's statements regarding the altercation stayed mostly consistent with some details being added in later recounts. Wilson initially asked the young men -- who were walking in the middle of Canfield Drive -- to move to the sidewalk. Wilson reported that Brown escalated the altercation by "shouting an expletive and refusing to move to the sidewalk" (Kindy & Horwitz, 2014, para. 27). An article from *The Washington Post* also stated that Brown did not allow Officer Wilson to leave his vehicle as he slammed the door shut, trapped Wilson inside, and grabbed his gun (Kindy & Horwitz, 2014). The grand jury report was extensive, but Wilson later added details stating that Brown charged him and he told him to "get on the ground" (Clarke & Castillo, 2014, para. 13).

The authorities in this case are also inconsistent with their statements because they relied on Wilson's narrative since there was no physical evidence depicting what actually happened. Chief Jackson kept changing the story by first stating that Wilson was after Brown because he knew of the suspected robbery, but then he later said that the

robbery and the shooting were not related (Roig-Franzia et al., 2014). The authorities did not have many answers in regard to how the crime scene was processed. For instance, there was no explanation for why Brown's body remained in the middle of the street for four hours (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014). The authorities initially withheld the information about the officer involved in the shooting and decided several days later to release both the officer's name and the security footage from the robbery at the same time. Chief Jackson reported that he released the videotape of the robbery because "he had to" as his hand was "forced by the news media under public record laws" (Vega et al., 2014, para. 21).

Witness Statements

The statements made by the witnesses included sporadic and sometimes conflicting details. No one witnessed the entirety of the altercation. News stories relied on a few witnesses with varying accounts that changed over time. Some witness statements corroborated Wilson's account, but some corroborated Brown's friend Dorian Johnson's account. Multiple news outlets report Johnson's statement that Officer Wilson started the altercation by yelling at them to get off the street, blocking them off in the road, and then grabbing Brown by the neck and pulling him into his vehicle before shooting him (Fisher et al., 2014; Fox News, 2014a, 2014b; Howitz, 2014; Kindy & Horwitz, 2014; Pearson et al., 2014; Robles & Bosman, 2014).

Some witness accounts changed between initial and later statements. In court, statements that seemed to corroborate with Wilson's account were deemed as reliable sources even though most witnesses did not see the altercation from start to finish. For example, one witness reported she saw Brown reaching into Officer Wilson's vehicle and

another reported that Brown was charging towards the officer (Somashekhar & Kelly, 2014). The police department tried to invalidate Dorian Johnson's witness statement by highlighting his previous theft record and the fact that he lied as a way to characterize him as unreliable. There were only three witness statements from people closest to the altercation that were reported. Despite similarities, these statements were dismissed. Somashekhar and Kelly (2014) reported that the "grand jury evaluated witnesses for credibility finding some more believable than others," but that they could not decipher if the witnesses had any "anti-police or anti-Black bias" that could have affected their recountments (para. 30). The most credible eyewitnesses to the encounter between Brown and Wilson were from "African Americans that were in the vicinity of the shooting" (Eckholm, 2014, para. 6).

Character Depiction

Roig-Franzia et al. (2014) reported that Chief Thomas Jackson released video surveillance from the convenience store, which led many to believe that there was a connection between the robbery and the shooting. Later the same day, he states that the events were not connected, however, hours after that statement, he said that Officer Wilson saw the cigars in Brown's hand and assumed that he was the robber (paras. 59 - 61). This skewed the intent of the release of information as a tactic of slander against Brown (Botelho & Lemon, 2014). Benjamin Crump, a lawyer for Brown's family, criticized the police department for the simultaneous release of information because he believed that they were "not trying to solve the murder, but rather justify it" (Bosman et al., 2014, para. 22). Brown's mother, Lezley McSpadden, perceived the release of the tape showing the robbery as the destruction of Brown's character since it did not show

what actually happened nor did it show Brown's earlier visit to the same store (Smith, 2017).

Articles that report police viewpoints tended to use more degrading or racist language to reinforce authority narratives. Most articles that included police statements tended to victim blame and bash Brown's character by making comments alleging that he was the aggressor. An article in *The New York Times* included comments about Brown's character by saying he was a "troubled teen" who just graduated high school and had his whole life ahead of him, yet he smoked, drank, and rapped using derogatory language. This particular article oscillated between good and bad language and presented a mixed view of Brown.

Family and friend statements portrayed Brown's character in a positive light. Most comments were about how he was a good kid and how he was a quiet, friendly giant who stayed to himself (Associated Press, 2014a, 2014b). They mentioned his relationship with God and his future plans to attend a technical college to create a better life for himself. They did not deny that he struggled sometimes, but they did not blatantly slander his character in the process.

George Floyd

General Media Language

Four Fox News articles used neutral language when explaining the circumstances surrounding Floyd's death. Three articles corroborate with Floyd being the victim of the incident with statements from officials and witnesses that explained such. One article villainizes the police officers involved through the use of language that describes them negatively and incompetently. Another article villainizes a medical examiner who

attributed Floyd's death to Floyd himself by describing a debate between medical examiners about the falsification of autopsy results.

Three *Washington Post* articles used neutral language when describing Floyd's death and the circumstances surrounding his death. Two articles recognize that Floyd is the victim and support him by focusing on his friends and family's words describing him as a good person. One article, however, does talk about the negative news coverage from Fox News that villainized and victim-blamed Floyd. Another article focuses on the police and describes them as being incompetent and not following police protocol.

Five *New York Times* articles use neutral language when reporting on the death of George Floyd and the circumstances surrounding his death. Two articles use language that villainizes the officers involved and center Floyd as being the victim of a crime.

CNN had 10 articles that used neutral language when describing the events leading up to Floyd's death, the circumstances, and video evidence. One article talks about Officer Thao's point of view of the altercation and uses language that portrayed him in a positive light as innocent. It could be said that the news outlet is favoring the police. Two articles negatively depict the authority figures involved (police officers and a medical examiner) suggesting that they are acknowledging that Floyd was a victim and that the authorities went about the incident the wrong way.

Authority Statements

The official police report stated that around 8 p.m. on May 25, 2020, officers responded to a call from the Cup Foods store clerk claiming that Floyd bought cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. The officers arrived at the scene and claimed that Floyd resisted arrest and was resistant to being put into the police vehicle. Surveillance video

shows that Floyd complained of claustrophobia as he was being forced into the backseat of the police SUV (Hill et al., 2020). Nineteen minutes later, Chauvin pulled Floyd out of the car, forced him face down onto the ground, and pinned him down with a knee on his neck. The day after Floyd's death, these same police updated the statement that originally claimed that Floyd died from a "medical incident" to say that the FBI was joining the investigation because of newfound evidence (*New York Times*, 2020a, para. 14). This differed from what was shown through video footage because the initial report did not mention that Floyd had Chauvin's knee pinning him to the ground, while the cellphone footage taken by Darnella Frazier, posted on Facebook hours after the police released the report, showed otherwise. The video also displayed that the details from the officers claiming Floyd was physically resisting arrest and seemed to be in medical distress were also false as the video showed 10-minutes of the incident.

The officers' statements regarding the altercation included transcripts from their body camera footage. One of the officers, Thomas Lane, consistently recounted that he asked Chauvin to reposition Floyd so that he could breathe (Bailey, 2020). Officer J. Alexander Kueng was the one who checked Floyd's pulse and told Chauvin that he could no longer feel it (Hill et al., 2020). It was also said that Kueng told Chauvin that he and Lane "found a pipe" on Floyd during his arrest after Chauvin questioned if Floyd was under the influence or high (Bailey, 2020, para. 34).

Autopsies have also been corroborated with statements that were made by both the police and what witnesses said they saw. The autopsy done by Hennepin County suggested that Floyd had underlying heart conditions and the mixing of fentanyl and methamphetamines contributed to his death. A private autopsy conducted by Dr. Michael

Baden, who also did the autopsy of Michael Brown, found that Floyd in fact died from mechanical asphyxia from being pinned down the back (Robles & Burch, 2020). This same private autopsy dismissed the notion that Floyd had underlying heart conditions because it was found that he was actually in good health and the deprivation of blood and oxygen to the brain are what actually killed him. A lung and critical care specialist, Dr. Martin Tobin, explained in great lengths the debunking of the common misconception that if Floyd could speak, he could breathe (Associated Press, 2021). This professional input was included to disprove that what the officers were heard saying in video recordings was false and that “a person could continue to speak until the airways narrow to 15%” (para. 15). Ex-officer Tou Thao’s attorneys argued that the medical examiner in charge of performing Floyd’s first autopsy was coerced into formulating results that were consistent with what the world saw (Wallace, 2021).

Witness Statements

The statements made by witnesses were reinforced through video footage taken at the scene. Darnella Frazier, who recorded the majority of the ordeal on her phone, was the main witness to come forward and the video she took was crucial for documentation of what actually happened during Floyd’s arrest. Several other witnesses were present and also took videos from their cell phones. These witnesses were a high school student, an off-duty firefighter, and a gas station employee. Some of the witnesses that were mentioned, but did not record the scene, stated similar details as the ones depicted in the video footage. Charles McMillian, who was the first witness at the scene, described trying to reason with the officers and attempting to save Floyd by willing him to comply (Levenson & Cooper, 2021). Other forms of witness statements came from surveillance

footage from nearby businesses that clearly showed the beginning of the altercation from the officer's initial interactions with Floyd at his vehicle to the escalation and excessive force used by Officer Derek Chauvin.

Character Depiction

Articles that included officer reports about how the altercation escalated depicted Floyd as resistant, on drugs, and erratic. These articles alluded to the fact that officers thought he was difficult and needed to be restrained in the way that they saw fit.

Margaret Sullivan (2021) of *The Washington Post* reported that “right-wing media keep doing their utmost to make this tragedy about Floyd’s drug use and troubled life” (para. 3). News officials from Fox made slanderous statements that suggest they blamed Floyd for his own death, even after autopsies concluded that his death was due to asphyxiation and thus ruled a homicide. Fox officials misrepresented factual evidence, suggested he was a drug addict, and even criticized the racial justice movements (Sullivan, 2021).

Family members and people who knew Floyd said that he was “a gentle giant who valued peace and unity” (Zehn & Dennis, 2020, para. 24). He was also described as being happy and humble, but also resource deprived. His family indicated that he oscillated between staying in the area to help out his family and wanting a better life elsewhere (Olorunnipa & Witte, 2020).

Discussion

The results of this study provided several implications on the similarities and differences between the coverage of the two men’s deaths. The main similarity was that both Brown and Floyd were criminalized as a way to justify officer actions. This was

evident with articles that reported the victims had drugs in their system and solely focused on the narrative that they were not in their right minds and needed to be subdued. Size was mentioned in articles describing the deaths of both Michael Brown and George Floyd and was also mentioned as being recognized by the police officers that were involved as a way to justify the use of force out of fear for their lives. A positive similarity between the two deaths was the coverage of what family and friends had to say about the victim's character. Both Brown and Floyd were described as gentle giants, friendly, wanting a better life than they were given, and walking a righteous path. Similar verbiage was also used when talking about the victims negatively in which the "not an angel" narrative was used as a tactic to victim blame.

There were also several differences between the coverage of the two deaths. A key difference between Michael Brown's and George Floyd's case is that Floyd's death was clearly established based on video evidence that was lacking in Brown's death. The numerous viewpoints used to piece together Floyd's altercation from start to finish was not an advantage that could have been used in solving Brown's case because the technology and practicality of recording the event were not available. Witnesses were present during Brown's altercation with Wilson, but no footage was recorded. However, in 2020, multiple people contributed video evidence of the police brutality. Another difference is that police were later required to wear body cameras on their person as a form of accountability regarding their interactions with the public (Hutchinson, 2023). This increased need for police to wear body cameras came after Michael Brown's death in 2014.

Implications in reference to the different theories that were used to accomplish this study were slightly more difficult to find as most of the articles used language neutrally, however, there were a few articles that did in fact support the notion that these theories are used when the media reports events about police brutality.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

The results of this study provided evidence that even though some articles upheld the tenets of CRT, most of them did not. To reiterate, there are five tenets of CRT: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism. The first tenet, counter-storytelling, was upheld through the articles describing Michael Brown and George Floyd's character. Counter-stories would be those articles that focused on what family members and friends had to say about them and even articles that used narrative-like language when reporting who these individuals were in their lives. The media outlets that used this tactic wanted the audience to understand the victims' lives and pull them into their world by reiterating their personalities, histories, and familial viewpoints.

The second tenet, the permanence of racism, was upheld in articles that tended to victim blame Brown and Floyd or slander their character by describing their criminal history, drug use, and size as a way of justifying why they were killed or the amount of force that was used. These articles support this notion because it upholds the assumption that Black people and White people are not the same so different tactics must be used when subduing Blacks as opposed to Whites. The third tenet, Whiteness as property, was represented in articles describing the release of information that was limited to police reports or statements. Articles that only reported Officer Darren Wilson and Officer

Derek Chauvin's statements or seemingly favored these viewpoints over the entirety of the reputable witnesses and evidence fit within this tenet.

The fourth tenet, interest convergence, was not upheld as there were hardly any articles depicting the racial equality between Blacks and Whites. In fact, the language used and the coverage of both events consistently indicated that racial equality is not in the interest of the majority racial identity. The last tenet of CRT, the critique of liberalism, which describes lack of color blindness and neutrality within the law, was evident in articles that critique the police department and the officer's tactics used within both deaths.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Throughout the results of the study, in the articles that upheld the tenets of CRT, some of concepts from Critical Discourse Analysis were also upheld. The three concepts: concept of power, concept of history, and the concept of ideology were evident in some of the articles, but not all of them. Concept of power was upheld through articles that focused on the authority viewpoints of Brown and Floyd. This was especially evident in articles about Michael Brown when Officer Wilson's testimony was reported. These articles commented on negative aspects of Brown's character and how dangerous the neighborhood he resided in was. In articles reporting Floyd's death, authority figures upheld the conception of power through autopsy reports. Autopsy reports stating that Floyd had drugs in his system, a heart condition, or reported evidence of victim-blaming all can be categorized as power discourses. The historical concept is maintained through the language usage illustrating discourses of power that remained consistent from Michael Brown in 2014 to George Floyd in 2020.

Ideologies, as defined by Fairclough (2003) are “representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation” (p. 218). In relation to the concept of power, articles that focused solely on authority viewpoints of Brown and Floyd also upheld the concept of ideology. These articles negatively depict people of color and discredit the innocence of Brown and Floyd in their deaths. Since there is an obvious discourse in power, the language used in these articles establish and maintain these discourses, illustrate that authority perspectives dominate over other perspectives in these unfortunate circumstances, and demonstrate exploitation of power in the way that the authority figures would report false information in order to legitimize their actions within these two events.

Framing Theory (FT)

Framing was used throughout the articles that did not report using neutral, informative language. As aforementioned, media stories limit audience viewpoints in various ways. Inevitably they cannot report every piece of information due to space constraints, so they must make calculated choices for what to include and exclude. Articles reporting on Michael Brown’s death found it impossible to present everything because there was not much but witness and authority statements to go off of. Most of the articles only reported evidence deemed as concrete such as police reports in order to relay some kind of information to the public about what happened. In Floyd’s death, we had the news report on information made available by the police department and the video posted on Facebook that revealed the incident in raw form. These articles mainly reported on every possible source because everything was made available on the same day, released several hours apart.

The second way articles are framed is through the manipulative constraint of information. For example, Officer Wilson's statements defending his actions were released to the public prior to accounts that might cause the public to question decisions made by officials. Floyd's death tended to lack this particular framing tactic because there was cell phone and surveillance camera footage available to provide a variety of viewpoints of the incident from beginning to end.

The final way that media limits audiences' viewpoints is by playing on audiences' preconceived biases. In the reporting of Brown and Floyd's deaths, audiences were biased based on the order of the information they received. The biases around Brown were either that he was the aggressor or Officer Wilson had gone too far in the line of action. The biases around Floyd were either that he was at fault for his own death or Officer Chauvin had murdered him. Which narrative the audience believed depended on the frame that aligned with their previous biases. Several articles drew upon biases when reporting on both events because the language used tended to favor one side over the other rather than reporting from all available sources.

Conclusion

By analyzing the media coverage of both Michael Brown and George Floyd's deaths, this thesis has shown that media coverage of police brutality has the potential to depict people of color both positively and negatively. Applying the lenses of Critical Race Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Framing Theory to the language in news reports made it possible to identify when the media coverage strayed from neutral and employed specific frames that aligned with any existing racial biases.

Previous studies on media coverage of police brutality have shown that the media's depiction is often incomplete and puts emphasis on victim criminality (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016; Riley, 2019). This incomplete depiction is presented by past scholars through the reasoning of "Whiteness" in media reporting that assumes race is not mentioned as a factor in police brutality because the majority does not believe racism exists (Mueller, 2017; Kil, 2020; Bell, 1980). Furthermore, previous scholars have tended to explain discourse between people of color and police through historical reasoning (Barthas, 2014; Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Siegal, 2020), differences in power dynamic (Morrow et al., 2018; Chaney & Robertson, 2014), and psychological reasons (Cojean et al., 2020).

The present study clearly illustrates the tenets of Critical Race Theory outlined in previous sections. There is some evidence of an historical aspect and differences in power as mentioned from previous scholars researching the combination of CRT and CDA in media language, but there was no evidence of psychological reasonings as those were not focused on in this particular study. This study analyzed more contemporary examples of police brutality media coverage whereas prior scholarship focused on coverage of events in the more distant past. Prior research has usually focused on one case at a time, whereas this study compared two cases to understand possible similarities and differences in media coverage over time. However, even though the results of this thesis provided evidence CRT is illustrated in several of the news articles examined, evidence of systematic racism embedded in media coverage was not prominent. Overall, the media tends to approach the coverage of these events neutrally to avoid controversy. To better understand the implications of these results, future studies could address the media

coverage of similar events through different news outlets to determine if the pattern exists on a broader scale. Ultimately, this study has shown that media coverage about police brutality is somewhat not completely impartial and therefore can uphold biased assumptions that disproportionately pertain to people of color as compared to other races and ethnicities.

References

- Adamson, B. (2016). “Thugs”, “crooks”, and “rebellious negroes”: Racist and racialized media coverage of Michael Brown and the Ferguson demonstrations. *Harvard Journal of Racial & Ethnic Justice*, 32, 189-278.
- Associated Press. (2014, September 4a). *Juvenile Court lawyer says Michael Brown had no serious delinquency convictions*. Fox News.
<https://www.foxnews.com/us/juvenile-court-lawyer-says-michael-brown-had-no-serious-delinquency-convictions>
- Associated Press. (2014, November 28b). *Michael Brown's legacy: A symbol to some, but others stress the nuances of his life*. Fox News.
<https://www.foxnews.com/us/michael-browns-legacy-a-symbol-to-some-but-others-stress-the-nuances-of-his-life>
- Associated Press. (2021, April 8). *Derek Chauvin trial: Lack of oxygen killed George Floyd, not drugs, expert says*. Fox News. <https://www.foxnews.com/us/derek-chauvin-trial-george-floyd-lack-oxygen-drugs>
- Bailey, H. (2020, July 9). George Floyd warned police he thought he would die because he couldn't breathe, according to body camera transcripts. *The Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/george-floyd-death-transcripts/2020/07/08/a7050efe-c15c-11ea-b178-bb7b05b94af1_story.html
- Barthas, J. (2014). The police and critical theory. *Theoria*, 61(4), 1-4.
<https://doi.org/10.3167/th.2014.6114101>

Bock, M.A. (2016). Film the police! Cop-watching and its embodied narratives. *Journal of Communication*, 66, 13-34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12204>

Bosman, J., & Goldstein, J. (2014, August 23). Timeline for a body: 4 hours in the middle of a Ferguson street. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html>

Bosman, J., Schwartz, J., & Kovalski, S. F. (2014, August 16). A youth, an officer and 2 paths to a fatal encounter. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/16/us/ferguson-mo-michael-brown-and-darren-wilson-2-paths-to-a-fatal-encounter.html>

Botelho, G., & Lemon, D. (2014, August 16). *Ferguson Police chief: Officer didn't stop Brown as robbery suspect*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2014/08/15/us/missouri-teen-shooting/index.html>

Capehart, J. (2014, September 5). Three troubling things exposed by the Ferguson police shooting of Michael Brown. *Washington Post*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/09/05/three-troubling-things-exposed-by-the-ferguson-police-shooting-of-michael-brown/>

Chaney, C., & Robertson, R.V. (2014). “Can we all get along?” Blacks’ historical and contemporary (in) justice with law enforcement. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 38(2), 108-122.

- Chaney, C., & Robertson, R.V. (2013). Racism and police brutality in America. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17, 480-505. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-013-9246-5>
- Clarke, R., & Castillo, M. (2014, November 26). *Michael Brown shooting: What Darren Wilson told the Ferguson grand jury*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2014/11/25/justice/ferguson-grand-jury-documents/index.html#:~:text=Officer%20Wilson%20told%20the%20grand,hit%20him%20with%20his%20fist.&text=%E2%80%9CI%20felt%20that%20another%20of,knock%20me%20out%20or%20worse%20%E2%80%A6>
- Cojean, S., Combalbert, N., & Taillandier-Schmitt, A. (2020). Psychological and sociological factors influencing police officers' decisions to use force: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 70, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlp.2020.101569>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.
- Devereaux, R. (2014, November 20). *A complete guide to the shooting of Michael Brown by Darren Wilson*. The Intercept. <https://theintercept.com/2014/11/20/everything-know-shooting-michael-brown-darren-wilson/>
- Eckholm, E. (2014, November 25). Witnesses told grand jury that Michael Brown charged at Darren Wilson, prosecutor says. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/25/us/witnesses-told-grand-jury-that-michael-brown-charged-at-darren-wilson-prosecutor-says.html>

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*.

London: Routledge.

Fisher, M., Kelly, K., Kindy, K., & Brittain, A. (2014, December 6). In three minutes, two lives collide and a nation divides over Ferguson shooting. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/in-three-minutes-two-lives-collide-and-a-nation-divides-over-ferguson-shooting/2014/12/06/b78b878e-7983-11e4-9a27-6fdb612bff8_story.html

Fox News. (2014, August 11a). *Michael Brown shooting: FBI opens inquiry into case*.

<https://www.foxnews.com/us/michael-brown-shooting-fbi-opens-inquiry-into-case>

Fox News. (2014, August 15b). *Michael Brown was 'primary suspect' in robbery, police say, name officer who shot him*.

<https://www.foxnews.com/world/michael-brown-was-primary-suspect-in-robbery-police-say-name-officer-who-shot-him>

Frank, D.D. (2016). The proof is in the prejudice: Implicit racial bias, uncharged act evidence & the colorblind courtroom. *Harvard Journal on Racial & Ethnic Justice*, 32, 1-55.

Fryer, R. E. (2016). *An empirical analysis of racial differences in police use of force*.

[White paper]. National Bureau of Economic Research.

<https://www.nber.org/papers/w22399>

Hill, E., Tiefenthäler, A., Triebert, C., Jordan, D., Willis, H., & Stein, R. (2020, June 1).

How George Floyd was killed in police custody. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>

Hiraldo, P. (2010). The role of critical race theory in higher education. *The Vermont*

Connection, 31(7), 52-59.

Horwitz, S. (2014, October 18). Authorities say Michael Brown's blood found on gun, inside police car. *The Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/authorities-say-michael-browns-blood-found-on-gun-inside-police-car/2014/10/18/577e1a9a-56f2-11e4-ba4b-f6333e2c0453_story.html

Hutchinson, B. (2023, March 5). *Recent high-profile deaths put police body cameras*

under new scrutiny. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/recent-high-profile-deaths-put-police-body-cameras/story?id=96848683>

Jones, E. K. (2018). “All lies matter!” Revealing misleading information in media stories about police brutality. *Multicultural Education*, 25(3-4), 41-46.

<https://doi.org/10.3386/w22399>

Kil, S. H. (2020). Reporting from the whites of their eyes: How Whiteness as

neoliberalism promotes racism in the news coverage of “All Lives Matter”.

Communication Theory, 30, 21-40. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtz019>

Kindy, K., & Horwitz, S. (2014, October 23). Evidence supports officer's account of shooting in Ferguson. *The Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/new-evidence-supports-officers-account-of-shooting-in-ferguson/2014/10/22/cf38c7b4-5964-11e4-bd61-346aee66ba29_story.html

Lacoe, J., & Stein, J. (2018). Exploring the policy implications of high-profile police violence. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 17(4), 859-863.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12410>

Levenson, E., & Cooper, A. (2021, March 31). *Derek Chauvin's body camera video shows his reaction just after George Floyd left in an ambulance*. CNN.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/31/us/derek-chauvin-trial-george-floyd-day-3/index.html>

McLaughlin, E. C. (2014, August 15). *What we know about Michael Brown's shooting*.

CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2014/08/11/us/missouri-ferguson-michael-brown-what-we-know/index.html>

Morrow, W. J., Berthelot, E. R., & Vickovic, S. G. (2018). Police use of force: An examination of the minority threat perspective. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 31(4),

368-387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2018.1513837>

Mueller, J.C. (2017). Producing colorblindness: Everyday mechanisms of White ignorance. *Social Problems*, 64, 219-238. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spw061>

New York Times. (2020, September 8a). How George Floyd died, and what happened next. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd.html>

- New York Times. (2020, September 8b). What we know about the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. *The Seattle Times*. <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/what-we-know-about-the-death-of-george-floyd-in-minneapolis/>
- Olorunnipa, T., & Witte, G. (2020, October 8). Injustice in life and oppression in death: How systemic racism shaped George Floyd's life and hobbled his ambition. *The Washington Post*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/george-floyd-america/systemic-racism/>
- Pearson, M., Karimi, F., & Martinez, M. (2014, October 20). *New Michael Brown details just one piece of probe, law enforcement official says*. CNN.
<https://www.cnn.com/2014/10/20/justice/michael-brown-darren-wilson-account/index.html>
- Phillip, A. (2020, June 9). *George Floyd protests have made police reform the consensus position*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/09/politics/police-reform-consensus-floyd-protest/index.html>
- Potter, G. (2013, June 25). *The History of Policing in the United States*. ECU Online.
<https://plsonline.eku.edu/sites/plsonline.eku.edu/files/the-history-of-policing-in-us.pdf>
- Queally, J. (2015, March 17). Story so far: Ferguson unrest: What you need to know. *The Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-ferguson-unrest-what-you-need-to-know-20150312-htmlstory.html>

- Riley, J. (2019). Depictions of murder in Maine: The dominant ideology thesis. *Deviant Behavior*, 40(4), 417-434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1431033>
- Robles, F., & Bosman, J. (2014, August 18). Autopsy shows Michael Brown was struck at least 6 times. *The New York Times*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/18/us/michael-brown-autopsy-shows-he-was-shot-at-least-6-times.html>
- Robles, F., & Burch, A. D. S. (2020, June 1). How did George Floyd Die? Here's what we know. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd-autopsy-michael-baden.html#:~:text=The%20county%20attributed%20the%20cause,being%20restained%20by%20law%20enforcement>
- Roig-Franzia, M., Brown, D. N. L., & Lowery, W. (2014, August 16). In Ferguson, three minutes - and two lives forever changed. *The Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/in-ferguson-three-minutes--and-two-lives-forever-changed/2014/08/16/f28f5bc0-2588-11e4-8593-da634b334390_story.html
- Siegel, M. (2020). Racial disparities in fatal police shootings: An empirical analysis informed by critical race theory. *Boston University Law Review*, 100, 1069-1092.
<https://www.bu.edu/bulawreview/files/2020/05/10-SIEGEL.pdf>
- Smiley, C. J., & Fakunle, D. (2016). From “brute” to “thug:” The demonization and criminalization of unarmed Black male victims in America. *Journal of Human*

Behavior in the Social Environment, 26(3-4), 350-366.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2015.1129256>

Smith, M. (2017, March 12). New Ferguson video adds wrinkle to Michael Brown Case.

The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/11/us/michael-brown-ferguson-police-shooting-video.html>

Smith, J. P., & Merolla, D. M. (2019). Black, blue, and blow: The effect of race and criminal history on perceptions of police violence. *Sociological Inquiry*, 89(4), 624-644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12275>

Somashekhar, S., & Kelly, K. (2014, November 29). Was Michael Brown surrendering or advancing to attack officer Darren Wilson? *The Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2014/11/29/b99ef7a8-75d3-11e4-a755-e32227229e7b_story.html

Sullivan, M. (2021, April 7). How right-wing media keeps smearing George Floyd with the racist 'no angel' narrative. *The Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/george-floyd-right-wing-media/2021/04/07/db58716c-9796-11eb-a6d0-13d207aadb78_story.html

Vega, T., Williams, T., & Eckholm, E. (2014, August 15). Emotions flare in Missouri amid police statements. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/16/us/darren-wilson-identified-as-officer-in-fatal-shooting-in-ferguson-missouri.html>

Wallace, D. (2021, May 13). *George Floyd death: Ex-Minneapolis cop Thao defense argues medical examiner 'coerced' to alter autopsy finding*. Fox News.

<https://www.foxnews.com/us/george-floyd-death-minneapolis-cop-thao-defense-medical-examiner-coerced-altering-autopsy>

Wodak, R. (2001). What CDA is about: A summary of its history, important concepts, and its developments. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. (1st ed., pp. 1-13). Sage.

Zehn, T., & Dennis, B. (2020, June 2). George Floyd's death was a homicide, according to two autopsies. *The Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/george-floyds-death-was-a-homicide-according-to-two-autopsies/2020/06/01/1d5b313a-a43b-11ea-bb20-ebf0921f3bbd_story.html