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Black Lives Matter? Public Accounts of Police Officers' Use of Lethal Force

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Black Lives Matter? Public Accounts of Police Officers' Use of Lethal Force

by

AKIV JE'KEL DAWSON
(Under the Direction of Eric Silva)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the manner in which, police application of lethal force is accounted for in the public sphere. The study examines opinion editorials from the New York Times, Washington Post, Contra Costa Times, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and the Salt Lake Tribune. The study applies Altheide's methodology of ethnographic content analysis to opinion editorials written between July 2014 and September 2015 about three specific cases involving the death of an African American male due to police use of lethal force. Each editorial was loaded into an NVIVO 10 project and coded line by line. This study includes one-hundred and seventy-six (176) opinion editorials. The following three questions are the foundation of the current study, (1) How do editorialists assign meaning to racial disparities in police application of lethal force?, (2) How do public accounts frame the Black Lives Matter movement?, and (3) How do contextual factors shape this meaning making process? The following eight themes emerged: (1) Black lives aren't valued, (2) racial roots prevent post-racialism, (3) progress has been made (4) a relationship broken, (5) the nightstick and quick-trigger-finger justice, (6) conversation rules the nation, (7) Black lives matter movement is legitimate, and (8) Black lives matter, but the movement is flawed. Sample limitations and implications for future research are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Police violence, Opinion-editorials, ethnographic content analysis, Black Lives Matter, qualitative

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FORCE

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial

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MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

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DEDICATION

For my mother, Paula,-- my hero. You are my motivation. I hope to become everything you knew I would be. Making you proud has been my greatest accomplishment.

For Akia,-- my sweet sister. I wouldn't be a thing if it wasn't for you pushing me. Thank you for being the *wind beneath my wings*.

For my nieces and nephews, you are my inspiration for seeking social justice. It is my greatest wish that you will make the world a better place than you found it.

To my best friends -- Peraizia and Anslie, you know what all my faces mean. Thank you for being my Stephanie and Paulette. I love you chicks!

In Loving Memory of

Victor Ambrose Chaney

“Uncle Dirt”

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"I can't breathe" were the last words of Eric Garner on July 17, 2014. He choked out these words under the crushing weight of police officers until he wheezed his last breath on a dirty New York sidewalk. Sadly, Mr. Garner's death was not the beginning of the legacy of police violence against African Americans and it certainly was not the end. The number of Black people killed by police officers in "post-racial America" continues to rise (Chaney & Robertson 2015: 46). Police in America kill citizens at a higher rate than any other developed nation (Chaney & Robertson 2015: 46) and because of this, more attention needs to be directed towards this phenomenon. In recent years there has been an increasing amount of media attention being directed towards the relationship between police and communities of color, specifically the treatment of African Americans.

Other incidents involving the deaths of African Americans due to police violence have been the focus of national headlines and social awareness movements such as Black Lives Matter. This particular social campaign is concerned with the fact that African-Americans are not only treated unjustly by the American criminal justice system, but they are also in danger of being killed during encounters with the police. Unfortunately, it seems that the need for campaigns such as Black Lives Matter has continued to grow in recent years. A white officer killing an unarmed African American seems to be not only the template for such incidents, but also the standard of police interaction with African Americans all over the country. Although the movements have done much to bring attention to individual acts of police misuse of lethal force, the number of African Americans killed during encounters with law enforcement continues to rise. This has prompted researchers, from many disciplines, to begin investigating the

phenomenon from an academic perspective. Many of these attempts have been made from a quantitative perspective. These have been focused on the number of people killed by the police and the number of police officers who were indicted in these incidents (Chaney & Robertson 2015); as well as the relationship between race and the probability of being approached by the police (Jacobs & O'Brien 1998); and finally, the relationship between race of the suspect and violent police response (Chua-Eoan 2000).

Furthermore, the Black Lives Matter movement has focused on the media's response to minority victims of police violence. Bonilla-Silva (2014: 9) defines the racial structure as "the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege." The media is an agent of America's racial structure because it reinforces, reproduces and justifies white privilege through disproportionately negative portrayals of racial minorities. This is accomplished through the repeated use of "common frames, style, and racial stories," (Bonilla-Silva 2014: 11) that demonize minorities. These frames create and reinforce beliefs about how the world should or ought to be, by providing citizens with information about whom and what should be feared or supported. Because of this, the media cannot be separated from social institutions; instead, it must be viewed as a social institution that has the ability to reproduce racism.

A large body of literature has examined the pattern of the criminal portrayals of African-Americans in the media. This study builds on this research by examining how police violence is accounted for in newspaper editorial.

Current Study

The purpose of the study is to see how editorialists publishing in widely circulated newspapers produce shared meaning about police use of lethal force against African American

males. The study is important because public communication encourages people to feel and think in certain ways (Loseke 2013: 15) and therefore researchers must critically analyze the message that is being generated. Although the problem of police violence is being discussed in many settings, the current study focuses specifically on the way the issue is discussed in the public sphere. The following three questions are the foundation of the current study, (1) How do editorialists assign meaning to racial disparities in police application of lethal force?, (2) How do public accounts frame the Black Lives Matter movement?, and (3) How do contextual factors shape this meaning-making process? It is important to examine this phenomenon using a qualitative approach because it allows for a focus on the way issues are being framed (Braun & Clarke 2013: 24). Qualitatively, I can assess a deeper understanding of the way editorialists construct reality regarding police violence against African American males. Furthermore, I use a critical perspective to focus on the way editorialists use the impact of language. According to Braun and Clarke (2013: 25), critical qualitative research focuses on how "language gives shape to certain social realities." From this perspective, it is increasingly important to focus on the public sphere, particularly media, since it is our primary source of communication (Loseke 2013).

In the following sections, I will review the theoretical framework of constructionism, with a specific focus on motives and critical race scholarship. Then I will review the literature on the historic and contemporary relationship between African American males and the police and media framing of an African-American male. Subsequently, I will give an in-depth description of the methodology incorporated in the study. Finally, I will discuss my findings and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Motives and Accounts

Using motives as the theoretical framework for examining police misuse of lethal force allows us to understand how cultural norms contribute to and allow for police violence. C. Wright Mills (1940) is at the forefront when discussing vocabularies of motive. He gives us the groundwork for understanding the function and behaviors of motives in our society. According to his criteria, motives are the language that people use after an action has been completed, rather than an impulse or thought that occurs prior to an action. This sentiment is made clear when he (1940: 904) writes, "Human actors vocalize and impute motives to themselves and to others. To explain behavior by referring it to an inferred and abstract "motive" is one thing... The differing reasons men give for their actions are not themselves without reasons." Typically motives are prepared and hopefully accepted responses for answering questions about conduct (Mills 1940: 905). These responses, or rather their acceptability, varies depending on the social setting and circumstances in which they are used because "there are areas of [society] with different vocabularies of motives," (Mills 1940: 906). In consonance with Mills (1940: 905) humans have a proverbial reservoir of motives in which they draw from when confronted with situations in which they need to explain their action in a socially acceptable way, particularly when there are consequences involved. This is the case because motives allow "societal control to operate" (Mills 1940: 906). Conclusively Mills (1940: 907) states: "As a word, a motive tends to be one which is to the actor and to the other members of a situation an unquestioned answer to questions concerning social and lingual conduct. A stable motive is an ultimate in justificatory conversation."

Scott and Lyman (1968: 47) build on Mills (1940) by demonstrating how motives are found in accounts of one's questionable conduct. Accounts usually take the form of excuses and justifications. When a person's action is contested either one or both of these forms of accounts are typically "invoked". The authors define justifications as "accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it," whereas excuses are defined as "accounts in which one admits the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility," (Scott and Lyman 1968: 47). The authors further argue, "excuses are socially approved vocabularies from mitigating or relieving responsibility when conduct is questioned," (Scott and Lyman 1968). This aspect of accounts is particularly pertinent when investigating the language used to explain the use of lethal force by police officers because it illustrates the level of social acceptability of actions based on the actor. Scott and Lyman (1968: 47) use the example of a soldier who kills because he is "under orders", not because he is a bad person, even when he understands that killing is "wrong". In turn, society accepts this justification because he is performing a service to his country. This is similar to a possible account that may be employed by a police officer to justify or excuse his or her actions in the line of duty.

The concepts of motives and accounts have been used to examine how people justify a number of questionable acts. Scully and Marolla (1984) investigate the excuses and justifications that rapists have used when describing their crimes. Their work combatted competing for perceptions that rape was the result of a "psychopathological problem" (Scully and Marolla 1984). According to Scully and Marolla (1984:530), rapists utilize vocabularies of motive to "diminish responsibility and to negotiate a non-deviant identity." Nelson and Lambert (2001) apply Sykes and Matza's "techniques of neutralization" to explore the concept of bullying, and

the justification used by those who engaged in ivory tower bullying. Margolin (1990) used the concept of vocabularies of motive to analyze the way that child abusers use to explain their behaviors. According to Margolin (1990: 373) the justifications and motives offered by the child abuser were rarely accepted or rarely used. Margolin (1990) concludes that some vocabularies of motive are not acceptable. Dunn (2005) uses vocabularies of motive to examine why women who are victims of domestic violence, chose to stay in the relationship. By investigating the ways the women transition from being viewed as victims to survivors, is a result of the vocabulary of motive employed by an activist against domestic violence. According to Dunn (2005:2), "activists create vocabularies of motive for those who are harmed as well as for those who do the harm." Hopper (1993) used the concept of motives to describe the rhetorical strategies used by couples going through a divorce.

Waegel (1984) employs Mills' scenario of avowal and imputation in the use of motives to investigate the justifications used by police officers when they have used deadly force. There have been several explanations offered as to why police use lethal force in the line of duty. One of the most consistent factors in these explanations has been occupational stress (Waegel 1984: 144). Waegel (1984: 144) insists that although this explanation has been routinely employed, it is least likely to adequately account for the decisions of police officers when employing lethal force. This leads him to his overall point that the decision to use lethal force is "rooted in [the] sociology of occupations," (Waegel 1984: 144). This argument is based on the belief that police violence is a result of "the influence of the work environment on attitudes, values, and behavior," (Waegel 1984: 144). The "police subculture" ultimately perpetuates the belief that certain actions, whether legal or illegal, are necessary and acceptable in order to provide a solution to the overall social problem of crime (Waegel 1984:145). According to Waegel (1984: 145), police are

systemically trained to use certain motives as justifications for "appropriate force", even in situations where the use of force is excessive. Waegel's (1984: 145) research included spending "ten (10) months in 1976 and 1977 as a participant observer in a police department in a city in the northeastern United States." The focus of his research was detective work and the sample of his research included interviews with police officers and an analysis of four hundred and fifty-nine (459) police shootings which occurred in Philadelphia between the years of 1970 and 1978. These incidents had previously been compiled by the Philadelphia Public Interest Law Center (Waegel 1984: 145-6). Waegel (1984) examined these cases for evidence of police use of "techniques of neutralization" (prospective) and vocabularies of motives and accounts (retrospective) that officers used when discharging their weapons with the intent to wound or kill a citizen.

Waegel (1984) found common vocabularies of motive used by officers included themes of discrediting the person who was shot, by describing the ways in which the person was "asking for it". This is what Waegel (1984: 148) refers to as "denial of the victim". The author states police accounts were typically filled with stereotypes that the officers used to describe the persons they'd encountered in the line of duty. These included the terms, "animals," "scrotes," and "assholes" (Waegel 1984: 148). Dehumanizing the victim, allows the officer to feel more justified in their decision to use fatal force. This is what Sykes and Matza (1957: 668) refer to as a subtle alchemy that allows the [officer] to move or herself into the position of the avenger (Waegel 1984: 148). These officers often viewed themselves as exacters of extra-legal justice that often went unaccomplished in courtrooms. Although the officers often realized that their actions were wrong, they excused their offenses as a means to a necessary end. Waegel (1984: 148) also found that "blatant racism" was also a factor in which type of justification or account

that an officer would use when providing an explanation of conduct. Officers often felt justified in shootings involving minority victims, because of their deep-seated belief in the innate criminality of minorities. Waegel (1984: 148) contends that because minorities are often devalued by the larger society, they are systematically disregarded as citizens with rights by the police who subsequently view the use of excessive force in interactions with minorities as acceptable. This particular type of cultural acceptance of minority devaluation as normative needs to be further investigated. The current study utilizes motives to examine the manner in which police violence is culturally accepted.

Although the concepts of motives and accounts have been used to analyze several topics, these studies have typically focused on the justifications used by individuals in defense of their own actions, rather than the actions of institutions. Silva (2007:247) uses this approach to discussing the "controversy over Native American mascots." Silva (2007: 247) defines "an institutional practice [as one that] has as a large number of people acting in purposively established and publicly known [ways]." Unlike individual conduct, institutional practices are generally challenged in the public (Silva 2007). Silva (2007:247) is one of the only scholars to investigate how individuals defend contested practices in the "public sphere". Silva's (2007) work is relevant to the current study because police use of lethal force has been reinvigorated as a contested institutional practice, with the rise of the Black Lives Matters campaign. The campaign has publically challenged the recent cases of police use of lethal violence involving Black men in America. This has caused a "public debate" about the acceptability of excessive and lethal force and has challenged the criminal justice system to address the practice due to these high levels of criticisms. Silva (2007: 247) writes that "the study of public accounts provide further insight into how individuals actively work to maintain the social structural

patterns in the face of challenges." This differs from traditional works using the vocabulary of motives framework, because it looks at continued behavior, rather than, "actions [that] have usually concluded before they are called into account," (Silva 2007: 247). The challenging of the contested practice seeks to reduce or "eliminate" the practice. Silva (2007: 247) continues that "the public's definition of the practice will depend on whether people accept or reject the accounts offered in its defense."

Continuum of Sympathy

The current study assumes that there is a continuum of sympathy that exists among the portrayals of victims of police violence. This continuum is arranged based on the level of ambiguity surrounding the details of the case. The level of ambiguity surrounding the case impacts the sympathetic qualities editorialists attribute not only to the victim but also to the Black Lives Matter movement. The continuum of sympathy is based on Donileen Loseke's concepts of emotional response and identifying social problems. Loseke (2003) uses constructionism as the theoretical framework for identifying emotional response and social problems. Loseke (2003) argues that constructionism is the most appropriate framework for this particular work because it answers the questions of how humans—create, sustain, and change the meaning. This work is relevant to the current study because it seeks to answer the question of, "How do editorialists assign meaning to racial disparities in police application of lethal force?" Loseke (2003:4) wrote: "the problems of crime and poverty tend to remain on the public's and policymaker's lists of problems, and racial inequality often is called this country's most enduring social problem." Loseke (2003: 5) continues that social problems are continuously debated because not all sides agree about what actually constitutes a social problem. According to Loseke (2003), this will dictate which side of the social problem we argue from. This characteristic is

relevant to the current study because editorialists represent the competing perceptions about the current issue of police violence against Black men. After identifying a social problem, there must be a way of identifying what is causing or exacerbating the social problem (Loseke 2003: 5).

Loseke (2003) also states that a social problem is a discussion about a condition. People that are currently living or dealing with the conditions of the social problem have a vested interest in the discussion of the problem.

Recently, work by Chaney and Robertson (2015) has taken a quantitative approach to examining police violence against Black people, whereas the current study will provide a qualitative vantage point to the problem. Loseke (2003: 6) notes that social problems are caused by humans and therefore can be changed by humans. Therefore, the way the problem is discussed in the public sphere is increasingly important. Loseke (2013: 24) concludes that socially circulating stories are culturally situated and are built from emotion and symbolic codes. These codes are used as devices to persuade morally and cognitively fragmented audiences (Loseke 2013: 25). Therefore, the qualities that an editorialist attributes to a particular victim or social problem impacts the cognitive and moral response the audience (reader) will have to that victim or social problem. According to Loseke (2013: 25), The more stories are built from the systems of meaning contained in the most widely circulating and the most deeply held symbolic codes and emotion codes, the more persuasive the story potential is. Conversely, the more stories are built upon contested codes, the smaller the approving audience for that story likely will be. Family violence research also confirms that there is a relationship between the presentation of the victim and the response of the audience. Loseke (2013: 18-19) notes that there is a particular type of response given to victims who are "morally exemplary". This is true "especially when violence is done by morally reprehensible offenders." Loseke (2013) continues that this response

occurs at both the private and public levels. This response also prompts the public to deem this violence unacceptable and also make places to correct the problem. Therefore, the response is dependent on the presentation of the victim as good or moral. The persuasiveness or acceptability of a narrative will vary based on many societal factors. Critical Race Theory pushes scholars to consider how racism influences such meaning-making.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a fairly new theoretical framework. According to Delgado and Stefancic (1993: 461), CRT scholarship began in the 1970s when academics and lawyers began realizing the shortcomings of the Civil Rights Movement. At its inception, this scholarship was a means of examining the role of race and racism in American law. Accordingly, CRT began as a critical legal scholarship. Many scholars credit Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman as the originators of this particular type of critical scholarship (Delgado and Stefancic 1993; UCLA School of Public Affairs: Critical Race Studies 2009). The framework places race as the central factor of society and focuses on the ways power structures reproduce institutional racism.

Critical Race Theory has guided the investigation of numerous American social structures. For example, Wun (2014) used CRT as the guiding framework when examining racial disparities in social policy. Wun (2014) specifically focused on the negative impact the No Child Left Behind policy had on African American students. According to Wun (2014: 462), the purpose of the study was to understand "the relationship between No Child Left Behind and racial fantasies of Black youth as problematic others in order to help education reform scholarship and advocacy examine the violence of No Child Left Behind." Leonardo (2013) employed CRT in his examination of the roles of schools in reproducing racism in society. Leonardo (2013) found that here appears to be a set of acceptable rules for Black students and a

separate set for White students. Likewise, Schiffer (2014) used CRT to examine the disparate treatment of African American women in the criminal justice system. Schiffer (2014: 1203) was interested in the reasons why racial disparities in the American criminal justice system "continue to persist" in contemporary American society.

Recently, special attention has been paid to the role of police in America. This is particularly pertinent regarding police violence against people of color. Because a central facet of Critical Race Theory is "story telling" and the use of narratives, most research employing this framework is qualitative. According to Chaney and Robertson (2015: 54), "critical race theory is a useful theoretical approach to examine the deaths of unarmed Blacks in America by police." Chaney and Robertson (2015) recently used Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework for examining fatal shootings of unarmed Black people by police. The authors' (2015: 45) study sought to answer the following three (3) questions: (1) How does the murder of unarmed Black people by police support White Supremacy? (2) What do non-indictments of police suggest about the lives of unarmed Black people? (3) How does the murder of unarmed Black people escalate individual, familial, and communal mistrust of police? Like the current study, Chaney and Robertson (2015) use content analysis, however, they used quantitative methodology. The study conducted by Chaney and Robertson (2015) focuses seventy-eight (78) cases involving the death of an unarmed Black person, which was the result of a police shooting.

Although the study conducted by Chaney and Robertson (2015) did provide beneficial insight regarding the police violence against Black people, it was very broad and included many elements. The time frame for the study was sixteen (16) years (1999-2015). Although this was an effective means of illustrating a pattern of problematic behavior, it was also a limitation because police departments are not "required to submit regional, state, or national reports of misconduct,"

(Chaney and Robertson 2015: 59). The current study adds to existing literature by providing a qualitative perspective on the problem of police violence against African Americans. This study [make sure that a subject follows the word this] will add to the current literature on police violence against African Americans by not only shedding light on the problem, Focusing on public accounts allows for an examination of the narratives that are being produced by editorialists, in regards to police violence against African Americans. Accordingly, the current study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) How do editorialists assign meaning to racial disparities in police application of lethal force? (2) How do public accounts frame the Black Lives Matter movement? and (3) How do contextual factors shape this meaning-making process?

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Race and the Police

Race is not only a determinant of an officer's decision to engage a citizen as a perspective suspect of a crime but also in their decision use deadly force in the commission of police work (Jacobs and O'Brien 1998). Research shows that police officers are more likely to use deadly force when addressing Black men in urban neighborhoods (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2000; Chua-Eoan, 2000). Chiricos and Eschholz (2000: 401) write, "The ramifications of the link between race and crime are well documented. They range from the refusal of pizza delivery in Black neighborhoods and the unavailability of taxicabs to Black travelers (West 1994) to hair-trigger responses that result in shootings of unarmed suspects by police in some urban neighborhoods, (Chua-Eoan 2000)". In keeping with traditional work on racism in community policing Jacobs and O'Brien (1998: 837) assert that based on extant research on the relationship between police decision to use lethal force, "killings committed by the police should be greatest in stratified jurisdictions with more minorities." Their 1998 research on the determinants of deadly force investigates whether or not this pattern is actually generalizable. These authors continue by stating that in most cases, police officers are primarily concerned with "preserving the order rather than enforcing the law" and often times this officer may rely on violence as the most effective and efficient way of achieving this goal (Jacob and O'Brien 1998: 842).

Jacobs and O'Brien (1998) cite perceived threat theories and political explanations for understanding the connections between race and police killings. According to the authors, as the population of minorities in an area increases the prevalence of a perceived threat or fear of crime increases as well. Because of this perceived threat police officers are more likely to use "lethal

force in cities with greater percentages minorities because the threat posed by a large racial underclass may lead to harsh law enforcement measures," (Jacobs and O'Brien 1998: 841). Their research revealed that fifty-three percent (.534) of the of the police killings in their sample involved African Americans. These killings were highly concentrated in cities that had high populations of African Americans. According to Jacobs and O'Brien (1998: 858), there is a disproportionate probability African Americans will be killed by the police because in cities that have a large population of African Americans the law enforcement will be more punitive.

The findings of this research are evident in the Michael Brown killing in Ferguson, Missouri. The city of Ferguson has a very large Black population with nearly seventy percent (67.9 %) of its citizens being African American, yet the city has a police force that is ninety-four percent (94%), White. When the research conducted by Jacob and O'Brien (1998) is considered it appears that Brown's death, Wilson's decision to use fatal force, and the grand jury's decision not to indict Officer Wilson is the result of a recurring structural issue. Because of the perceived threat associated with areas that have a large population of African Americans, Officer Wilson's explanation for using lethal force on Michael Brown is more likely to be accepted.

Waegel (1984) aforementioned study is one of the only investigations of the justifications of fatal force from the police perspective, but this research was conducted 32 years ago and is specifically focused on police shootings. Hirschfield and Simon (2010) conducted a similar study in which they investigated the manner in which newspaper articles in mainstream newspapers legitimized police use of deadly force. The study was an "interpretive content analysis" (Hirschfield and Simon 2010: 155). It included 105 news articles from 23 different newspapers. In order to be included in the study, articles had to be written between 1997 and 2000.

Similarly to the current study, Hirschfield and Simon used the widely publicized police shooting of Amadou Diallo Amadou Diallo, an African immigrant, was shot by 19 times by New York City police officers on February 4, 1999 as a reference point for their research. Diallo was unarmed. His death and the subsequent acquittal of the officers involved caused a series of social protests about racial profiling.

In a process called "temporal variation in semiotic patterns". According to Hirschfield and Simon (2010) if there was little variation between the previous stories and those written after the incident this would show that newspapers were more journalistically constructed (p. 159). Previous scholars have investigated the content of newspapers using the Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA) methodology. These approaches have focused on the presentation of police violence as either systemic or individual problems. In contrast, qualitative researchers have used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to interpret "manifest and latent meanings" in newspaper articles about police violence (Hirschfield and Simon 2010: 160).

Hirschfield and Simon (2010), use elements of both QCA and CDA to investigate the style in which newspaper articles frame police violence. The authors used coding strategies developed from John Thompson (1990). This included the use of seven preset categories: (1) rationalization, (2) expurgation of victim, (3) inclusion of police, (4) euphemization, (5) passivization, (6) objectification, and (7) anonymity and invisibility. These 7 strategies that created the mainstream narrative in the way newspapers depict police violence. These strategies were often used in articles that supported the police. There were also seven strategies that created a counter-narrative that challenged police killings. These included: (1) repudiation, (2) expurgation of police, (3) inclusion of victim, (4) desymphemization, (5) activation, (6) subjectification, and (7) naming and imaging.

The authors found that 95.2% of the articles included text that legitimated police violence while only 59% of the accounts "undermined" the legitimacy of police violence.

Hirschfield and Simon concluded that the framing of police killings changed minimally after the Diallo incident. The newspapers were still supportive of police, however, more civil rights frames were activated. For the most part, however, victims were mostly presented as having caused the officer's violent reaction and the officer was seen as "performing a legitimate institutional role," (Hirschfield and Simon 2010: 176). There is not recent literature that examines the acceptability of police officers' actions from the public's perception.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASES IN THE CURRENT STUDY

I chose to use the Garner, Brown, and Rice case because they all occurred in 2014. These three cases represent three distinct parts of the Black Lives Matter movement: the Garner case occurred before the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter campaign, the Brown case sparked the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter campaign, and the Rice case occurred after the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter campaign. These cases also represent different levels of ambiguity and therefore will invoke different levels of sympathy.

Eric Garner

On July 17th, 2014 Eric Garner, a 43-year-old African-American man, was killed during an encounter with officers from the New York Police Department (NYPD) in Staten Island, New York. Officers Justin Damico and Daniel Pantaleo approached Mr. Garner on the street and attempted to arrest him for the crime of circumventing tax law (selling loose cigarettes). During the encounter Eric Garner attempted to walk away from the officers, stating that he wanted them to leave him alone. In an attempt to restrain Mr. Garner, Officer Pantaleo wrapped his arm around Garner's neck, placing him in an illegal chokehold. Subsequently, more NYPD officers "swarmed" Mr. Garner. Some of them told Officer Pantaleo that he had done enough, but he did not stop. He continued to choke Mr. Garner, even as Garner continuously told the officers that he was having difficulty breathing. In fact, Mr. Garner cried, "I can't breathe" at least eleven (11) times, before losing consciousness.

His "final words ... became the rallying cry for a protest movement" (Baker et al 2015:2). Garner's case was compounded by the fact that the entire ordeal was caught on video. Baker et al (2015: 2) write that "cell phone video gave the world an unobstructed view of the chokehold." The

death of Eric Garner is not the beginning of a legacy of police killings in the African American community, but it did represent the turning of national attention to issues of police misconduct and racism (Baker et al 2015: 2). The sting of the video was amplified by the fact that the officers witnessed Garner lose consciousness and still did not offer immediate aid. Mr. Garner lay on the ground dying and no one prioritized saving his life. Mr. Garner was unarmed at the time of his death. These points have been the subject of much debate and discussion since the death of Eric Garner.

Even though there is a video which clearly shows the events which led to Mr. Garner's death, the general public still disagrees about whether the officer or the victim is at fault. Although Garner's death was ruled a homicide, Officer Pantaleo was not indicted by the grand jury (Sanchez and Prockupecz 2014). Garner's case represents the less ambiguous on a continuum of ambiguity, but because there are certain contributing factors that are questionable (resisting arrest, asthmatic, hypertension) the general public does not always assign sympathetic qualities to Mr. Garner.

Michael Brown

Michael Brown, an eighteen (18) year old African American male, died on August 9th, 2011 after being shot multiple times by Officer Darren Wilson of the Ferguson Police Department (Berman 2014:1) in Ferguson, Missouri. The circumstances leading up to his death are tangled in confusion, conflict, and drama. There are multiple versions about what actually took place moments before Brown was killed. Apparently the incident began when Officer Wilson saw Brown and his friend Dorian Johnson walking in the street. The officer then pulled his cruiser up near the teens and told them to get out of the road. According to Wilson, Brown responded "belligerently" (Pearce 2014: 1). Brown's response prompted Wilson to exit his vehicle, however, when he attempted to open the door Brown pushed the door closed. Brown then reached into the

window and attempted to take Wilson's service weapon from him. During the struggle, the weapon was discharged once (Pearce 2014: 1).

In his report, Wilson states that Brown, or the deceased, turned and ran in the opposite direction. Wilson claims that he then got out of the car and chased Brown. By his account, at some point during the chase, Brown turned around and started running towards him. At this time, he fired several shots into the body of Michael Brown (Pearce 2014: 1). According to Johnson, when Officer Wilson approached the teens in the street he used profanity when talking to them. Johnson maintains that Wilson hit Brown with the car door when he tried to exit the vehicle and then grabbed Brown's shirt, pulling him into the car (Pearce 2014: 2). Johnson continues that the struggle occurred because Brown attempted to pull himself from Wilson's grip. He also states that he heard Wilson tell Brown that he would shoot him. Johnson describes hearing one shot fired during the "tugging" and seeing Brown turn and run from in the opposite direction (Pearce 2014: 2). Wilson then chased Brown and shot him through the back. Johnson recalls Brown turning towards Wilson (a commonality in both accounts) and putting both hands in the air. He says Brown told Wilson that he did not have a gun and begged him not to shoot. Ultimately, Brown was shot multiple times. This narrative is the basis of the "hands up don't shoot" mantra used in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Although there are competing accounts about the details of that night, there are some commonalities in the accounts. These include that there was a struggle between Michael Brown and Darren Wilson, which resulted in one bullet being fired inside of the police cruiser, Darren Wilson did exit his vehicle before firing multiple shots at Michael Brown, Michael Brown was unarmed, and the conflict was not related to allegations that Michael Brown had robbed a

convenience store (stole cigars) (Berman 2014:1). For the second time, in less than a month, news of an unarmed African American being killed by the police filled the headlines.

The death of Michael Brown became the catalyst for the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Suddenly conversations that began over the death of an unarmed teen ventured into politics, race, religion, gender, and class. The transition is a result of decades of tension between Ferguson's predominantly white police department and its predominantly Black residents (Berman 2014:1). Michael Brown's case represents the most ambiguous on a continuum of ambiguity and this characteristic impacts the polarizing qualities of the case. Unlike the Garner case, the incident was not captured on video (Pearce 2014:1). This enormous absence of clarity leaves too many gaps for the general public to fill for themselves. Ultimately, a grand jury declined to indict Darren Wilson for killing Michael Brown (Reily 2014). Because of this, the editorials written about the "Michael Brown" case had the greatest range of sympathetic qualities associated with the victim. Furthermore, the editorials written about the Michael Brown case were more likely to attribute unsympathetic qualities to the victim than editorials written about the other two (2) cases. The purpose of the current study is to analyze the ways the general public discusses the police use of lethal force against African Americans.

Tamir Rice

Tamir Rice, a twelve (12) year old African-American male, was shot and killed at a recreation center in Cleveland, Ohio on November 22, 2014. The shooter was Officer Timothy Loehmann of the Cleveland Police Department. Loehmann and his partner Officer Garmback were responding to a 911 call from a citizen about "a guy" who had a gun at the recreation center

(Stoichet and Newsome 2015). The caller reportedly told the dispatcher that the gun was most likely fake.

According to Loehmann, when he approached the twelve (12) year old, he directed Rice to put his hands up. Loehman reportedly stated that Rice looked to be over the age of eighteen (18) and approximately 185 pounds. The officer stated that when he instructed Rice to "show his hands", the twelve (12) year old reached into his waistband for an object. In his statement to state prosecutors, Loehmann writes, "With his hands pulling the gun out and his elbow coming up, I knew it was a gun and it was coming out. I saw the weapon in his hands coming out of his waistband and the threat to my partner and myself was real and active," (Stoichet and Newsome 2015). Although his partner did corroborate Loehmann's version of events (Stoichet and Newsome 2015), the shooting was still the subject of much controversy. First of all the age of the victim is a major point of contention for many protesters. This is compounded by outrage over the officer's immediate use of lethal force.

The entire incident was approximately two (2) seconds long. Finally, the public is disgusted by the fact that the officers did not offer Rice any form of aid as he lay bleeding on the ground (Stoichet and Newsome 2015). These factors, when combined with the video of the incident had many parents and activists in an uproar. Although Judge Ronald Adrine did find that there was probable cause to indict Loehmann on charges and his partner on negligent homicide charges, the decision is ultimately left to the grand jury (Johnson 2015). The Tamir Rice case represents the least ambiguous of the three cases. The shooting is on video and for many people, there is an understanding that the police should not shoot children. For this reason, the editorialists attribute more sympathetic qualities to Rice than the other two (2) victims.

CHAPTER 5

METHODS

The current study contains elements of both ethnographic content analysis and constructionist thematic analysis, which focuses on the way editorialists construct meaning about the racial disparities in police application of lethal force. The method of ethnographic content analysis was inspired by David Altheide (1987). An ethnographic content analysis (ECA) combines ethnographic research practices with elements of traditional quantitative content analysis. Altheide (1987: 65) proposed that ECA is a research style that can be used for “reflexive analysis of documents.” According to Braun and Clarke (2013: 176), constructionist thematic analysis is “focused on how topics are constructed and also how accounts construct the world.” Although this type of approach has been criticized “as lacking the substance of other ‘branded’ and theoretically driven approaches like interpretive phenomenological analysis and grounded theory” (Braun & Clarke 2013: 180), this limitation is addressed throughout the current study by using existing theoretical frameworks to guide the data.

Compiling a Sample

I compiled the sample for the current study using a Lexis Nexus search. The search was limited to the inclusion of only opinion editorials from United States newspapers. The dates for the editorials had to occur between July 7, 2014 and September 8, 2015. Three separate searches were conducted, using the search terms, “Michael Brown”, “Eric Garner”, and “Tamir Rice”. After conducting the searches, I created a spreadsheet which included all newspapers which had editorials about the three separate cases. I researched the circulation sizes of the top five newspapers (those having the most editorials on each case). I used this spreadsheet to determine the newspapers from which I would use editorials. From this list I chose the New York Times,

the Washington Post, the Salt Lake Tribune, Contra Costa Times, and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. These papers had the most editorials on all three (3) cases. Then, I repeated the process for each newspaper. I began with the first editorial on the list and then selected every odd number result. This was done to narrow down the number of articles that I would be coding, while still capturing at least half the op-eds.

On December 22, 2015 I finished coding all the editorials and cataloging them based on the sympathetic qualities that the editorialist assigned to the victim. The original search and selection yielded three-hundred and thirty-two (332) results. The following information is a description of the sample after the removal of editorials that were: downloaded, but did not match the correct newspaper (46), “letters to the editor” (55), duplicates (55) (those appearing in searches from more than one search term (“Tamir Rice”, “Michael Brown”, and “Eric Garner”) (after they were coded the first time), and those editorials which were not about the context of the three cases (7). After this process the current study includes one-hundred and seventy-six (176) editorials from the five (5) newspapers.

New York Times

Using the “Michael Brown” search term, the results returned seventy-nine (79) articles from the New York Times. After using my selection method, I downloaded forty-five (45) articles from the New York Times about the Michael Brown case. Using the “Eric Garner” search term, the results returned fifty-six (56) results from the New York Times. After using my selection method, I downloaded twenty-eight (28) articles from the New York Times about the Eric Garner case. Using the “Tamir Rice” search term, the results returned twelve (12) articles from the New York Times. After using my selection method, I downloaded six (6) articles from the New York Times about the Tamir Rice case. Of the one-hundred and forty-seven (147) New

York Times results on either of the 3 cases. This study includes fifty-eight (58) op-eds from the New York Times.

Salt Lake Tribune

Using the “Michael Brown” search term, the results returned forty-four (44) results from the Salt Lake Tribune. After using my selection method, I downloaded twenty-two (22) results from the Salt Lake Tribune about the Michael Brown case. Using the “Eric Garner” search term, the results returned twenty (20) results from the Salt Lake Tribune. After using my selection method, I downloaded ten (10) results from the Salt Lake Tribune about the Eric Garner case. Using the “Tamir Rice” search term, the results returned ten (10) results from Salt Lake Tribune. After using my selection method, I downloaded five (5) results from the Salt Lake Tribune about the Tamir Rice case. Of the seventy-four (74) Salt Lake Tribune results on either of the three (3) cases, this study includes twenty-two (22) op-eds from the Salt Lake Tribune.

Washington Post

Using the “Michael Brown” search term, the results returned eighty-seven (87) results from the Washington Post. After using my selection method, I downloaded forty-four (44) results from the Washington Post about the Michael Brown case. Using the “Eric Garner” search term, the results returned thirty-six (36) results from the Washington Post. After using my selection method, I downloaded eighteen (18) results from the Washington Post about the Eric Garner case. Using the “Tamir Rice” search term, the results returned ten (10) results from the Washington Post. After using my selection method, I downloaded five (5) results from the Washington Post about the Tamir Rice case. Of the one-hundred and thirty-three (133)

Washington Post results on either of the three (3) cases, this study includes twenty-six (26) op-eds from the Washington Post.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Using the “Michael Brown” search term, the results returned sixty-nine (69) results from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. After using my selection method, I downloaded thirty-four (34) results from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette about the Michael Brown case. Using the “Eric Garner” search term, the results returned twenty-one (21) results from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. After using my selection method, I downloaded eleven (11) results from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette about the Eric Garner case. (*Written between the dates of July 7, 2014 and September 8, 2015*) Using the “Tamir Rice” search term, the results returned twelve (12) results from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. After using my selection method, I downloaded six (6) results from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette about the Tamir Rice case. (*Written between the dates of July 7, 2014 and September 8, 2015*) Of the 102 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette editorials on either of the three (3) cases, this study includes twenty-two (22) results from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Contra Costa Times

Using the “Michael Brown” search term, the results returned one hundred-thirty three (133) results from the Contra Costa Times. After using my selection method, I downloaded sixty-seven (67) results from the Contra Costa Times about the Michael Brown case. Using the “Eric Garner” search term, the results returned fifty-one (51) results from the Contra Costa Times. After using my selection method, I downloaded twenty-six (26) results from the Contra Costa Times about the Eric Garner case. I began with the first editorial on the list and then selected every odd number result. Using the “Tamir Rice” search term, the results returned nine

(09) results from the Contra Costa Times. After using my selection method, I downloaded five (5) results from the Contra Costa Times about the Tamir Rice case. Of the one-hundred and ninety three (193) Contra Costa Times editorials on either of the three (3) cases, this study includes fifty- one (51) results from the Contra Costa Times.

Coding

All editorials, even those that were removed, in the data set of this study were assigned a unique editorial code. This code included the first and last initial of the person's name whom was used for the search term (i.e. "Michael Brown", "Tamir Rice", or "Eric Garner"), an abbreviation of the newspaper that the editorial came from, and a number representing the order in which the editorial would be coded. For example, in a Lexis Nexis search using "Tamir Rice" as the search term, the fourth result in the New York Times would be assigned the code **TR-NYR-004**. The editorial code, title, author, and date it was written was catalogued in an Excel spreadsheet. Duplicates and "letters to the editor" were identified using this spreadsheet. Each editorial was then loaded into a NVIVO 10 project, using the corresponding editorial code. The remaining data analysis was conducted within the NVIVO project.

Prior to coding each editorial, I read the document twice for familiarization. Initial memos were made on some editorials during this level of the data analysis. Also at this level, editorials that were devoid of relevant context were marked as **DO NOT CODE** and were not included in the sample (n=176) for this study. I then began the process of coding the editorials. For the current study I used complete coding. Braun and Clarke (2013: 206-207) define complete coding as, "identifying anything and everything of interest or relevance to answering [the] research question, within [the] data set." Because this is an inductive study, codes were created from the content of the editorials. When I arrived at relevant text within an editorial, I coded the

text. The text was selected and placed into a descriptive node using the drag and drop feature in NVIVO 10. Some text was coded in multiple nodes. The codes that were created in the initial level of the process were “data-derived or semantic” (Braun & Clarke 2013: 207). At this level in the data analysis, I had not begun interpreting the way editorialists framed the problem of police use of lethal force against African American males.

After all the editorials were coded, I began collapsing the nodes into coding categories. During this part of the process, some of the codes were removed because they did not contain enough information to generate a theme. Furthermore, at this step in the process codes that overlapped in context were merged into single nodes. These nodes were organized based on the way they related to the theoretical frameworks and research questions of the study. According to Braun and Clarke (2013: 207) define researcher-defined codes as “codes [that] go beyond the explicit content of the data.” For example, codes that were related to the ill-treatment of Black men (people) in American society were grouped together in the theoretical code, *Black Lives Aren't Valued*.

The last step of interpreting the editorials began with cataloguing each editorial into categories based on the way the editorialists discussed the victim. Editorials were separated into three categories; sympathetic, unsympathetic, or neither. The **sympathetic category** includes editorials which attributed sympathetic qualities to the victim. These included referring to the person as a victim, stating that the person had not committed a crime, referring to the person as a child or teenager, referring to the person's death as a tragedy (horrible, injustice, etc), using “murder language” (e.g. “slayed”, “murdered”, “killed”) or alluding that the officer should have been indicted for the death of the person (declined to indict, failed to indict, refused to indict). The **unsympathetic category** includes editorials which attributed unsympathetic qualities to the

victim. These included describing the ways in which the victim caused his own death, discussing the victim's death in connection to "Black on Black crime", discussing the difficulties of policing, or discussing the criminality of the victim. The **neither sympathetic or unsympathetic category** includes editorials in which the editorialist discusses issues outside of the victim or contends that the circumstances of the case are too ambiguous to be either sympathetic or unsympathetic.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS

At the conclusion of the ethnographic content analysis there were several themes. These themes can be categorized into macro-level, meso-level, and individual-level categories, based on the approach of the editorialist. The eight (8) major themes being discussed are (1) Black lives aren't valued, (2) racial roots prevent post-racialism, (3) progress has been made (4) a vicious cycle of mistrust, (5) the nightstick and quick-trigger-finger justice, (6) conversation rules the nation, (7) Black lives matter movement is legitimate, and (8) Black lives matter, but the movement is flawed.

BLACK LIVES AREN'T VALUED

The (1) *Black lives aren't valued* theme is a macro-level theme. It includes quotations from editorials which discuss the everyday experience of being African Americans in America. This theme formed from the discussion of education, incarceration, racial injustice, and opportunity; specifically the way African Americans have been impacted in these areas. Many editorialists contended that the contemporary problem of police violence against African Americans (Males) is tied an overall social disregard for the lives of Black people in America.

This theme emerged from the analysis of two major codes, **Black male experience** and **Black children aren't children**. The code, **Black male experience**, included text that addressed the systematic mistreatment of Black people in America. For these writers, inequities in the education system, overrepresentation in the prison system, lack of access to quality education and opportunity not only illustrate that Black lives are not valued; but that this constant devaluation makes them susceptible to police violence. Furthermore, this code includes text that addressed the perceived criminality experienced by Black men in America. Editorialists often

linked this perceived criminality to both the mistreatment of Black men by the police and also the acceptance of this mistreatment by the general public. The **Black children aren't children** code includes text from editorials that discussed the experience of Black children in America. In these editorials the writers often compared the experiences and treatments of Black children and teens with the experiences of their white counterparts. There was also a discussion of perceived criminality within this code. This code was primarily evident in discussions of the Tamir Rice and Michael Brown cases.

Many of the editorialists were highly critical of the actions of the police. This was particularly the case for editorials about Tamir Rice. For many the death of a child at the hands of the police was unbelievable and unacceptable. They could not fathom, that in America a child could be shot in the street and not helped. Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar wrote the following about the death of Tamir Rice:

An extended video released last week of the shooting death of **Tamir Rice** in Cleveland appears to show an unconscionable level of human depravity on the part of the officer who shot him, a stunning disregard for the value of his life and a callousness toward the people who loved him. **TR_NYT_002; Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar**

For some editorials the murder of Black boys and men harkened back to historical problems.

These editorialists concede that Black lives have never been valued in America and Black children have always been in danger. Charles M. Blow writes:

Before Trayvon Martin, before **Michael Brown**, before Tamir Rice, there was Emmett Till. This was the first 'Black Lives Matter' story. It is no wonder, then, that each time we read about another young unarmed Black male being shot down in the street -- unjustly -- by an authority figure, there is the mention of Emmett's name. **-MB-NYT-033; Charles Blow**

Stacey Patton also echoes these sentiments when writing,

Regardless of the case, the police officers' actions in these cases are consistent and predictable: This was not a child. He was a threat. I was afraid and had to defend myself.

The child, stripped of childhood, is framed as a menace that overrides probable cause.
TR_SLT_008; Stacey Patton

Patton's sentiments are basically pessimistic in regards to Black children's interaction with the police. She feels that regardless of how Black children behave or are taught to behave they will still be perceived as dangerous. According to Patton, this is the reality for Black children, because their childhood is not recognized by white America. Patton is also critical of people who conclude that Black children's behavior is what causes them to be accosted by the police. According to Patton, it is dangerous to draw such conclusions based on a few incidents (i.e. "The 2015 Baltimore Incidents"), because the mistreatment of Black children does not begin or end with these incidents. For Patton, the largest contributing factor is the not the behavior of the child but the police perception of Black children that puts them at risk of being killed by the police. Ultimately, Black children are at risk because they aren't viewed as valuable or "worthy". Patton wrote:

It doesn't matter how Black children behave - whether they throw rocks at the police, burn a CVS, join gangs, walk home from the store with candy in their pocket, listen to rap music in a car with friends, play with a toy gun in a park or simply make eye contact with a police officer - *they risk being killed and blamed for their own deaths because Black youths are rarely viewed as innocent or worthy of protection.* **MB_PPG_068; Stacey Patton**

Some of the editorialists continued that Black children in America are in danger from the moment of conception. Although to some this may seem like a hyperbolic statement, but for people like Nailah Ware, a Black woman, this is a very sad reality.

"I pray I never have children. I sit here and watch the news, and there is nothing but foolishness. Trayvon Martin, John Crawford, Mike Brown and **Eric Garner**, to name a few Black men all killed. Their killers continue to walk the streets as free men." **EG-CCT-073; Nailah Ware**

Furthermore, the editorialists continued, this reality is reinforced for young Black men through racialized interactions with the police. According to many of the editorialists, young Black men

have to learn to expect negative treatment from law enforcement. For example, Harold Meyerson wrote:

“But when police departments routinely view young Black men as an enemy population to be stopped, frisked, harassed, humiliated, beaten and occasionally shot, young Black men can't reasonably be expected to respect law enforcement.” **MB-WP-093; Harold Meyerson**

Stacey Patton also continued this sentiment in her editorial, “Black Children don't get a Chance”.

In this editorial Patton discussed the racial disparities between police treatment of Black and white children. Patton felt that the death of Tamir Rice was a constant reminder of a sad reality that she already knew.

“Black America has again been reminded that its children are not seen as worthy of being alive in part because they are not seen as children at all, but as menacing threats to white lives.” **TR-SLT-008; Stacey Patton**

There was also a grave concern for African American adult males. Surviving Black male childhood was only half of the feat. According to many of the editorialists Black male adulthood is also challenging and cloaked in perceived criminality.

“Garner didn't even fit into the "young Black male" category that defines this nation's most feared and loathed citizens. He was an overweight, middle-age, asthmatic man. Now we're told that the man who killed him did nothing wrong” **MB-WP-098; Eugene Robinson**

Robinson's commentary on the Garner case is important because he addresses a stereotype that is perpetuated in America. Robinson contends that the stereotype of Black men as criminals is not only a problem for young Black men, but Black men in general. , and because of this Black men of all ages are in danger of being killed by the police. This is because Black men in America are “feared” and hated. Because this is the predominant opinion of Black males, the police officer who caused Garner's death were not sanctioned.

Many of the writers addressed the continued problem of police violence against Black men. Many of the editorialists expressed cynical viewpoints about the relationship between

citizens and police in African American neighborhoods and cities. According to these writers, the problem is not getting better, but worse. Eugene Robinson wrote the following about police violence against Black men:

There we have the familiar narrative: another unarmed Black man unjustly killed. Brown thus joins a long, sad list -- Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, etc. -- that seems to have no end. *This storyline is unassailable. Anyone who thinks race is not a factor in these fatal encounters should have to cite examples of unarmed young white men being killed by trigger-happy police or self-appointed vigilantes.* **EG-CCT-069; Eugene Robinson**

Charles M. Blow echoed these sentiments in his editorial, "Arrested without Incident" where he addresses the difference between the manner which police officers deal with suspects based on race.

Michael Brown was unarmed. (Some witnesses in Ferguson, Mo., say he had his hands up. Others say he charged an officer.) Eric Garner was unarmed on a Staten Island street. Tamir Rice was 12 years old, walking around a Cleveland park and holding a toy gun that uses nonlethal plastic pellets, but he didn't shoot at anyone. *...But none had the privilege of being "arrested without incident or injury." They were all Black, all killed by police officers.* **EG-NYT-016; Charles M. Blow**

Blow's critique of police treatment of African American males addresses the concern of white privilege. Prior to the aforementioned text Blow, tells the story of Julia Shields, a 45 year old white woman, who "terrorized the streets of Chatanooga" with a hand gun. According to Blow, Shields had been identified by several witnesses and when she was approached by the police she also pointed the gun at the officers. Even through all of this, Shields was not shot and killed by the police. Blow's statement illustrates that he feels that Shields would have been treated differently if she had been a Black male. In this respect, Blow has equated surviving an incident with the police as a facet of white privilege. Furthermore Blow is considerate of the fact that police have to make difficult decisions, but he is critical of the reasons that he believes officers make the decisions they make. For Blow, officers use deadly force against Black males, not

because they are afraid of the *suspect* in that moment; but because they are afraid of Black males in general.

... Police officers are human beings making split-second decisions -- often informed by fears -- about when to use force and the degree of that force. But that truth is also the trap. How and why are our fears constructed and activated? *The American mind has been poisoned, from this country's birth, against minority populations. People of color, particularly African-American men, have been caught up in a twister of macroaggressions and micro ones.* No amount of ignoring can alleviate it; no amount of achieving can ameliorate it. **EG-NYT-016; Charles M. Blow**

RACIAL ROOTS PREVENT POST-RACIALISM

The theme (2) *racial roots prevent post-racialism* is a macro-level theme. It emerged from an analysis of two **non-existence of post-racial America** code, which discussed racial progress in America and the **historical oppression** code, which discussed the racialized past of America. This particular theme is related to the fact that many of the editorialists were pessimistic about racial progress in America. The reference point for this progress was often the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Within this theme, the editorialists used the contemporary problem of police violence against African American men as a primary illustration of a lack of racial progress in America. Furthermore, the text within this theme illustrate a fundamental contempt with the idea that America has reached a post-racial status. This theme differs from the (1) *Black lives aren't valued* theme because it is focused on an evaluation of present-day reality based on the reality of the past. For these writers America's history of racial oppression has greatly stagnated if not completely removed the possibility of post-racialism. Because the cornerstone of this theme is progress, most of the text within this theme make reference to historical oppression. For example,

Why are there so many touchstones of outrage to mark the African-American experience in this country? Why is there so much tension between officers of the law and minority neighborhoods? **EG-NYT-013; Charles M. Blow**

Blow was not the only editorialist who discussed a legacy of mistreatment between African Americans and the police. Many of the writers cited this legacy as a main driving source for the current Black Lives Matter movement. These editorialists often wrote often made connections between the three cases, slavery, and Jim Crow. When discussing the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Robert L. Morris Jr., published the following sentiments,

Unfortunately, the world at large is every bit as troubled today as it was in 1964, maybe even more. Conflict, not peace, is the rule. On the home front, social unrest and even looting and violence have followed the official, grand-jury exonerations of the white police officers who killed African Americans Michael Brown in Ferguson and **Eric Garner** in Staten Island. **EG-CCT-070; Robert L. Morris Jr.**

Alicia Garza had the following to say about America's historic mistreatment of African Americans and the present day treatment of African Americans. She wrote:

Since our arrival in this country, Black people have been treated differently according to the law, first as slaves, then as three-fifths of a person, and then treated separately and unequally under Jim Crow. Even now, de facto segregation continues to persist in schools across the country. **EG-CCT-083; Alicia Garza**

Brent Staples reflected on comments made by President Barack Obama regarding the significance of race in American society. He wrote:

Mr. Obama likened the unfinished struggle for racial justice to the battle against lynching in the Jim Crow South. He recalled Martin Luther King Jr.'s response when critics told him that anti-lynching legislation would never change the hearts of bigots in the South: "He said, well, you can't legislate what's in their hearts but, I tell you what, if you can just stop them from lynching me, that's progress. That's a pretty good thing. And over time, hearts and minds catch up with laws." **EG-NYT-05; Brent Staples**

Bill Press also challenged the façade of post-racialism in his editorial. According to Press it is important to acknowledge the fact that post-racialism is a myth. In his commentary regarding the current state of racial progression in America, Bill Press urges America to acknowledge the problem of racism within the borders of the country. He is critical of people who refuse to “admit” that the problem exists, because this refusal stagnates progress. Essentially, America is

not a post-racial society and cannot reach this status, because the nation has not adequately addressed racism. Furthermore, the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, two decades after the beating of Rodney King, prove that America is not a post-racial society.

We do have a lingering problem with racism in this country. We might as well admit it, and we'd better start dealing with it. We saw it in Los Angeles with Rodney King. We saw it in Sanford, Florida, with Trayvon Martin. We saw it in Ferguson with Michael Brown. And now we see it, once again, on Staten Island, with Eric Garner. Add to these cases that no doubt go unreported every day nationwide. **EG-SLT-029; Bill Press**

Many of these editorialists objected to the belief America is a post-racial society. They even continued that the recent treatment of Black men by the police is a direct proof that post-racial America does not exist. Mr. Blow continues with this rationale in his assessment of post-racial America. For Blow, the concept is optimistic at best. However, the reality of America is that it has not reached a point where race does not matter. Furthermore, Blow is critical of the idea of ignoring the role of race in society, simply for the purposes of achieving the fantasy of post-racialism.

I would love to live in a world where that wasn't the case. Even more, I would love my children to inherit a world where that wasn't the case, where the margin for error for them was the same as the margin for error for everyone else's children, where I could rest assured that police treatment would be unbiased. But I don't. Reality doesn't bend under the weight of wishes. Truth doesn't grow dim because we squint. **EG-NYT-03; Charles M. Blow**

Some of the editorialists discussed the historical relationship between people of color and the police. They draw connections from this historical relationship to explain why the racial tension still exists even in post-racial America. For example, Brent Staples said the following about the way people of color have historically been treated by not only the police, but also American society in general.

The country has historically reacted with doubt or indifference when African-Americans speak of police officers who brutalize -- or even kill -- people with impunity. **EG-NYT-04; Brent Staples**

Because of this, these editorialists often wrote about their disbelief in “post-racial” America.

Stacey Patton concludes that the treatment of Black men in post-racial society are significantly similar to their racialized past. Her description of the present day problem of police brutality as lynching is powerful. In Patton’s opinion, America has not moved beyond race. She wrote the following about the murder of Tamir Rice by the Cleveland police:

Such descriptions, so similar to 19th-century defenses of lynching, are invoked each time a Black child is gunned down in America. **TR_SLT_008; Stacey Patton**

When comparing the present day America to its past, many of the editorialists wrote about the fear that Black parents experience when raising their children. According to them this a fear that has been known to Black families for hundreds of years. Stacey Patton captures this theme in her following sentiments:

We can all appreciate the pain and fear in her cry that "I don't want my son to be a Freddie Gray." This is every Black mother's cry heard over hundreds of years in America. From the plantation moms who whipped their kids so white masters and overseers wouldn't more harshly do the same, to the parents during Jim Crow who beat their children to keep them safe from the Klan and lynch mobs, these beatings are the acts of a people so desperate and helpless, so terrorized and enraged, that heaping pain upon their children actually seems like a sane and viable act of parental protection. **MB-PPG-068; Stacey Patton**

Eugene Robinson also lamented the perils of being Black in America. He published the following:

African American men are being taught a lesson about how this society values, or devalues, our lives. I've always said the notion that racism is a thing of the past was absurd - and that those who espoused the "post-racial" myth were either naive or disingenuous. Now, tragically, you see why. **MB-WP-098; Eugene Robinson**

Another point of contention within this particular theme is the election of President Barack Obama. Many of the editorialists wrote about what the election meant for American society. For some, the election marked the consecration of post-racial America and for others the

election was merely symbolic. For example, Tom Webb had the following to say about Obama's election:

When Illinois Sen. Barack Hussein Obama was elected president of the United States in 2008 to great fanfare, it was popularly believed the country had exorcised the demons of racism from its national character. To be sure, Obama's election was a step forward, and most fair-minded people would probably acknowledge this. The percentage of American voters who entrusted the leadership of their nation to the Hawaii-born senator rejoiced at the vision of hope he painted in those troubled times. For many, the fact that he was of African-American descent seemed to be a double blessing. But Obama's election did not mean then -- nor does it mean now -- that the United States has suddenly been healed from the scars of racism. Far from it. **MB-CCT-168; Tom Webb**

Michael Eric Dyson is also less than hopeful about post-racial America. Dyson recalls the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, but feels that the present state of America is not a reflection of the goals of the movement. He continues that African Americans have been experiencing terrorism since they came to America, however the tactics have changed in post-racial America. The following sentiments are from Dyson's editorial, "Racial Terror, Fast and Slow". First Dyson writes:

Americans are bad at viewing race in real time; we prefer rose-tinted lenses and slow-motion replays in which we can control the narrative and minimize our complicity in the horrors of our history. The racial present is messy, and upends bland racial optimism about how far we've come. **MB-NYT-021; Michael E. Dyson**

In his editorial "Perfect Victim Pitfall" Charles M. Blow continues that the reason racism pervades American society is because citizens do not have honest conversations about the issue. According to Blow, America's history is predicated on racism and simply not discussing the problem will not eradicate it. He urges his readers to understand some basic tenants of racism. He wrote the following:

And yes, racist is the word that we must use. Racism doesn't require the presence of malice, only the presence of bias and ignorance, willful or otherwise. It doesn't even require more than one race. **EG-NYT-03; Charles M. Blow**

PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE: TODAY IS NOT YESTERDAY

The theme (3) **progress has been made: today is not yesterday** is a macro-level theme. It developed from the analysis of two sub-codes within the historical oppression code, (1) everything is not racism, and (2) progress has been made. The everything is not racism sub-code includes text where the writer is critical of the use of racism to explain the contemporary experiences of African Americans. The progress has been made sub-code included instances in the text where the editorialists discussed the progress that has been made towards a post-racial society. Within this theme is text that expresses optimism about racial progress in America. This theme differs from the theme (2) **racial roots prevent post-racialism** because the sentiment within this theme is that the racial progress that has been made indicates that the country is either on its way to becoming a post-racial society or has already achieved that status. Furthermore, the discourse within this theme is critical of people who draw parallels between the contemporary problems involving the police and Black men and those problems that were experienced by African Americans in the past. Like the theme (2) racial roots prevent post-racialism, the Civil Rights Movement was often the reference point for gauging racial progress. These writers did not feel that the current state of America warranted a comparison to pre-Civil Rights America. Many of them were critical of media and movements which drew comparisons between historical racial tensions and the present day. For example in his editorial "Race, Politics, and Lies", Thomas Sowell, a Black man, argues that the current state of the African American community is not linked to its racialized past.

That vision is nowhere more clearly expressed than in attempts to automatically depict whatever social problems exist in ghetto communities as being caused by the sins or negligence of whites, whether racism in general or a "legacy of slavery" in particular. Like most emotionally powerful visions, it is seldom, if ever, subjected to the test of evidence. MB-CCT-149; Thomas Sowell

Moreover, these writers were cautioned against concluding that nothing has changed in America. These writers felt that making parallels between the 1960s and the present-day ignores the progress that has been made since the Civil Rights Movement. Additionally, they contend that ignoring racial progress in America devalues the work that was done during the Civil Rights Movement. Byron Williams cautioned against comparing the present day to the past. According to Williams there is no comparison to be made between the 1960s and today. Williams continues that citizens may be tempted to conclude that nothing has nothing changed based on inflammatory images in the media.

If you spend an inordinate time on Facebook, like I do, you have most likely seen images from Ferguson, Missouri, juxtaposed with iconic photos from the civil rights movement of the 1960s. At first glance, the 21st-century color photos of the military tactics applied by Ferguson police next to the 20th century Black-and-white photos from Oxford, Mississippi, and Selma and Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1960s bear some similarity. The photographs, void of context, make for a powerful comparison to suggest not much has changed. But much has changed. To compare the tragic events in Ferguson with the 1960s demonstrations is a cheap use of history that devalues both efforts. MB-CCT-154; Byron Williams

Rich Lowry also concluded that it is inappropriate to compare the pre-Civil Rights America and present-day America. He is critical of the political agenda involved when making those types of comparisons.

The temptation for the left to live perpetually in 1965 is irresistible. It wants to borrow the haze of glory around the civil-rights movement of that era and apply it to contemporary causes. It wants to believe that America is nearly as unjust as it was then, and wants to attribute to itself as much of the bravery and righteousness of the civil-rights pioneers as possible. MB-SLT-139; Rich Lowry

Although these editorialists often noted the problem of police violence, they still recognized that the country has progressed substantially since the days of Martin Luther King. These writers acknowledged this progress and minimized the contemporary grievances of

African Americans. Robert Morris addresses this concern in his editorial which looked at America fifty years after Dr. King accepted the Noble Peace Prize.

Racial discrimination, segregation, and police brutality were much worse in his day, yet he responded with the peaceful protests that were his hallmark. During the Freedom Summer of 1964, Blacks and whites marched hand-in-hand and went to jail together to promote racial justice in America. Were he alive today, King would surely acknowledge some progress. Jim Crow has pretty much departed, governors no longer block schoolhouse doors, and official segregation is, for the most part, a thing of the past. Robert Morris; EG-CCT-070

A VICIOUS CYCLE OF MISTRUST

The (4) a vicious cycle of mistrust is a mesolevel theme. It includes text from editorials in which the writers discussed the broken relationship between police and communities of color. This theme was discovered by analyzing one major code, police-community relationship, and its three sub-codes: (1) mistrust, (2) anger, and (3) fear. The editorialists frequently discussed this relationship. However, this theme was absent in editorials written about the Tamir Rice case.

Many of the writers talked about the mistrust that exists between members of the minority community and the police. They attributed this mistrust to many things such as historical racial oppression, domestic issues, and lack of minority representation in policing. Several editorialists discussed the problem that having a predominantly white law enforcement department in cities with high minority populations can cause. Ruth Marcus addressed this concern when discussing the 2015 Baltimore Riots. She stated,

That racial imbalance is a recipe for breeding distrust and resentment...It is to understand that a community that feels mistreated and disrespected by those in authority cannot be blamed for feeling resentful when so few of those in authority come from a background of shared experience. Ruth Marcus; MB-WP-105

The writers often saw the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner as a result of the growing tensions between the minority community and the police. Brent Staples echoed the sentiments of Eric Holder stating:

Mr. Holder was on the mark when he said that the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice raised urgent, national questions about the breakdown of trust between minority communities and the police forces that are supposed to serve and protect them. Brent Staples; EG-NYT-04

Donna Brazile referenced historical tensions between the African-American community and the police. She wrote:

The killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner last year saw attention finally focused on the problem of police treatment of communities of color. In 2015, we'll be reminded of how those communities have been mistreated throughout our history.

Even Jonathan Capehart, who is critical of the Black Lives Matter Movement, recognized the significance of Michael Brown's death. According to Capehart, "The unarmed 18-year-old also became a potent symbol of the lack of trust between African-Americans and law enforcement - not just in Ferguson, but in the rest of the country." Proponents of this perspective contend that the mistrust between police and communities of color begins with institutional racism. Lance Simmens wrote:

Here we are nearly a half century later and institutionalized racism is most prominently and spectacularly evident in the deteriorating relationships between law enforcement and communities of color. What makes the issue even more insidious is that it matters little whether the mutual mistrust is real or perceived. Lance Simmens; MB-CCT-158

Some writers even referred to white officers in Black neighborhoods as "occupation" by an outside force. Eugene Robinson wrote, "It is easy to understand how Brown and his peers might see the police not as public servants but as troops in an army of occupation." Richard Cohen also used the invasion analogy in his editorial about the death of Eric Garner, "Black, White, and Blue". He stated, "Clearly, the Black community in New York felt under siege by the police." In his editorial, "New Age Activism", Charles M. Blow also tackles the issue of police occupation.

According to Blow, there needs to be more attention paid to the role of police, especially in communities of color. He wrote:

When is the line crossed from protecting and serving to occupying and suppressing? When do officers stop seeing their role as working for and with a community and start seeing that role as working against and in spite of it? If bias exists in society at large, how do we keep it out of, or at least mitigate the effect of it on, every level of the criminal justice system, from police interactions to prison sentences? Charles M. Blow; EG-NYT-08

Blow's concerns were multifaceted and encompassed many of the concerns of other editorialists as well. Many of the writers went beyond the relationship with the police and addressed the distrust that the minority community has for the criminal justice system as a whole. R. Drew Smith addressed this problem in his review of the Garner and Brown case decisions.

Smith said:

Nevertheless, as in the Brown case, public claim and authority were selectively asserted within a low-income urban neighborhood. And any confidence that aggrieved Black communities may have retained in the legitimacy of public power was dashed by yet another bewildering grand jury verdict. R. Drew Smith; EG-PPG-038

In his editorial "LULAC brings it 86 Year Battle for Equality to Utah", Brent Wilkes addressed the distrust that members of the Black community have towards the American criminal justice system. Wilkes made the following remarks about the grand jury decision not to indict Darren Wilson in the death of Michael Brown:

After the death of another African-American, Michael Brown in Ferguson, an outraged nation voiced its concern through demonstrations from coast to coast. In addition, minority communities were left wondering how to work with a criminal justice system that continues to protect its officers over the welfare of its citizens. Brent Wilkes; EG-PPG-037

Other editorialists echoed the sentiments of Wilkes and drew connections to the tension between the Black community and the criminal justice system. These editorialists attributed both the legitimate protests and the riots to the fact that the African American community feels

voiceless. The New York Times editorial board quoted Mayor de Blasio's remarks made during the Garner protests. He said,

In a democratic society, people act in accordance with how much they feel heard," Mr. de Blasio said. "A lot of times over the years, folks felt aggrieved, and they didn't feel there was an outlet. The very act of active and compassionate listening actually changes people. Editorial Board; EG-NYT-02

Leonard Pitts Jr. also attributed the riots and protests in Ferguson to the fact that the Black community was not being heard. In his editorial "Riots in Ferguson: What they Mean" Pitts expressed understanding about the unrest in Ferguson that followed Brown's death. He wrote:

They choke off avenues of protest, prizing silence over justice, mistaking silence for peace. And never mind that sometimes, silence simmers like water in a closed pot on a high flame. One can never condone a riot. It is a self-defeating act that sells some fleeting illusion of satisfaction at a high cost in property and life. But understanding this does not preclude recognizing that the anger we see in Ferguson did not spring from nowhere, nor arrive, fully-formed, when Michael Brown was shot. It is the anger of people who are, as Fannie Lou Hamer famously said, sick and tired of being sick and tired. Silence imposed on pain cannot indefinitely endure. People who are hurting will always, eventually, make themselves heard. Even if they must scream to do so. Leonard Pitts Jr.; EG-SLT-032

THE NIGHTSTICK AND QUICK-TRIGGER-FINGER JUSTICE

The (5) the nightstick and quick-trigger-finger justice theme emerged from the analysis of one major code, the police problem. Three sub-codes were also analyzed; (1) police react using lethal force too quickly, (2) departments are too militaristic, (3) police aren't held accountable, (4) racial disparities in policing. This theme focuses on the way the editorialists discuss the problems in contemporary policing as well as the need for police reform. These discussions included the topics of police accountability, racism in policing, police reaction, and police training. The police problem is the cause of much of the protests and movements taking place all over the country.

The (1) sub-code police react using lethal force too quickly includes text in which the editorialists discuss the rashness of officer's decision to use lethal force. Within this sub-code was an ongoing discussion of the fact that police in America use lethal force at higher rates than other developed nations. For many of the writers, this problem could be a result of flaws in police training. The (2) sub-code departments are too militaristic developed from the text in editorials in which the writers discussed the paramilitary nature of local police departments. Many of the editorials were critical of the police response following the Ferguson riots. The (3) sub-code police aren't held accountable includes text in which the editorialists discuss police accountability. These writers often attributed the current problem of police violence to the fact that police aren't held accountable for their actions. Within this code, the writers often discussed the police subculture as the main barrier to police accountability. The (4) sub-code racial disparities in policing developed from instances within the text where the writers discussed the disproportionate rates in which minorities have encounters with the police. Furthermore, the writers were concerned about the quality of the encounters. Editorialists were particularly upset by the reaction of the police. Many of them lamented that police officers use force too quickly and that this signaled the need for a change in police training. Eric L. Adams addressed this in his editorial:

There is reluctance on the part of police leadership, which has long believed in the nightstick and quick-trigger-finger justice, to effectively deal with officers who have documented and substantiated records of abuse. These individuals need to be removed from the force. That is an essential component of the larger response we must have to address this history of abuse. EG-NYT-07; Eric L. Adams

In his article "Tamir Rice and the Value of Life", Charles M. Blow addresses this problem. He stated:

One of the officers, Timothy Loehmann, shot Tamir within "1.5 to two seconds" of arriving at the park. Two seconds. So quickly. In the blink of an eye. And yet, according to The

Associated Press, the officers say that they ordered Tamir to put his hands up three times before he was shot. TR_NYT_001; Charles M. Blow

Although Eugene Robinson did not offer an explanation for what causes the police in America to react with deadly force so quickly, he did explicitly state that there is a problem with police reaction. Robinson said,

But any way you look at it, something is wrong. Perhaps the training given officers is inadequate. Perhaps the procedures they follow are wrong. Perhaps an "us versus them" mentality estranges some police departments from the communities they are sworn to protect. Whatever the reason, it is hard to escape the conclusion that police in this country are much too quick to shoot. Eugene Robinson; MB-CCT-150

The Editorial Board of the Washington Post was also critical of police reaction in America. It implied that the reason officers react so quickly is because they do not exercise self-restraint or consider alternative responses. It wrote the following about the Michael Brown case:

St. Louis prosecutors used kid gloves when questioning Mr. Wilson before the grand jury. They practically coached the officer to describe the area where the shooting occurred as hostile to police. They went out of their way to note that Mr. Wilson cooperated with investigators. A more challenging process would have pressed Mr. Wilson on critical details, such as why he got out of his cruiser in pursuit of Mr. Brown after an initial confrontation with the teenager, rather than waiting for backup. That would have required self-restraint, but it also might have prevented Mr. Brown's death. The record brings home how justice would have been better served had Missouri authorities named a special prosecutor to pursue the case. Editorial Board; MB-WP-92

In the editorial, "Holding Police Accountable", the Editorial Board of the Washington Post criticized police reaction from both a legal and social aspect. To the Board, the legality of shooting should not be the only basis for acceptability. It implied that the reason the police default to lethal force so quickly is because they are only required to show that the action was legally justified rather than preventable. According to the Board,

"We have to get beyond what is legal and start focusing on what is preventable," said Ronald L. Davis, a former police chief who heads the Justice Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. New approaches are needed to replace police actions that can escalate minor incidents into violence - such as, according to Mr. Davis,

"chasing down suspects, hopping fences and landing on top of someone with a gun."
Editorial Board; MB-WP-106

Another part of the police problem that many editorialists discussed are the racial disparities in policing. These differences are exacerbated when considering the racial template of many of the mainstream lethal force cases. These often involve a white officer killing a Black person. Stacey Patton wrote the following:

Bias in the system often feels like fog in the morning: enveloping, amorphous and immeasurable. But individual cases, like the recent ones, hit us as discrete and concrete, about particular unarmed Black men killed by particular policemen -- although those particular policemen are representative of structures of power. EG-NYT-08; Stacey Patton

This template was attributed to many different ranging from racism to Black criminality. This discussions make it evident that the general public feels that police perception is skewed about Black men and children. Charles M. Blow wrote the following about the way the police perceived Tamir Rice,

When one of the officers called in the shooting, he said: "Shots fired, male down, Black male, maybe 20." Tamir was 12. TR_NYT_001; Charles M. Blow

Damon Young also discussed the way police respond to Black men. According to Young, this reaction is a result of the criminal designation given to Black males. He wrote,

Because there is a large segment of America who'd see a Michael Brown, a 16-year-old me and a 35-year-old, and see nothing but potential criminals. There are no "good ones" with them. We are all potential Negro Supercriminals, and if there's any type of argument involving one of them and one of us - regardless of how innocuous it is - it's better to kill first.

The writers highlighted the police problem in discussions about the police response to the protests that followed the Garner and Brown cases. Many of the writers felt that the police response to the protesters was too militaristic. These writers were critical of local police departments who used paramilitary strategies against the demonstrators. Furthermore, they were

concerned about the access that local police departments have to military weaponry. David Brooks explicitly condemned the militarization of local police departments stating,

After riots in Ferguson, there was basically a national consensus that police don't need mine-resistant, ambush-protected monster vehicles and military-style grenade launchers. David Brooks; EG-NYT-012

In his editorial, "Ferguson, Watts, and a Dream Deferred, Thomas Edsall also denounced the reaction of the police in Ferguson writing,

The problems uncovered in Ferguson range far beyond traffic court. A new report by the Justice Department, for example, details how the police response to two weeks of street protests heightened the crisis by the flaunting of military vehicles and weapons and by command failures that confused the police officers and public in the streets. Thomas Edsall; MB-NYT-09

To illustrate this criticism the writers often likened the police presence in communities of color to a foreign military force occupying another country. For example, Charles M. Blow used this analogy in his criticism of contemporary policing stating,

When is the line crossed from protecting and serving to occupying and suppressing? When do officers stop seeing their role as working for and with a community and start seeing that role as working against and in spite of it? If bias exists in society at large, how do we keep it out of, or at least mitigate the effect of it on, every level of the criminal justice system, from police interactions to prison sentences? Charles M. Blow EG-NYT-08

Some editorialists felt that the paramilitary response to the protests have what escalated the protests from peaceful to riot-like. Johnathan Capehart, a critic of the Black Lives Matter movement, even criticized the police response. According to Capehart,

... the militarized response to protesters by local police put an exclamation point on demonstrators' concerns. Johnathan Capehart; EG-PPG-045

The New York Times Editorial Board also contended that the police response exacerbated the anger of the protesters writing,

The problems uncovered in Ferguson range far beyond traffic court. A new report by the Justice Department, for example, details how the police response to two weeks of street

protests heightened the crisis by the flaunting of military vehicles and weapons and by command failures that confused the police officers and public in the streets. Editorial Board; MB-NYT-023

CONVERSATION RULES THE NATION

The (6) **conversation rules the nation** theme includes text from editorials in which the writers discussed the kinds of dialogue and honest conversations that need to take place following this current cycle of police violence. Within this theme, the writers often reminded readers that there are lessons taught from the events. Furthermore, these tragedies reveal things about racism and injustice in America.

This theme emerged from the analysis of two major codes and their sub-codes. The first major code, future implications and its eight sub-codes: (1) how we should talk about racism, (2) how we should talk about police misconduct, (3) more police transparency, (4) need for more criminal justice reform, (5) problematic grand jury, (6) need more minority representation, (7) police personnel records should be public, and (8) policy changes; includes text about the areas of American society that will or should be changed or impacted by the outcomes of the three cases. The second major code, inequality, and its two sub-codes: (1) need for justice and (2) need for equality includes text in which the writers discuss the way the events highlight the need for more social equality and justice in communities of color. The key characteristics of this theme are dialogue, admonition, and reform.

Some editorialists argued that the quality of police-suspect interaction is also subject to the perils of white supremacy. For example, when discussing the differences between the treatment of White suspects and Black suspects, Charles M. Blow wrote the following:

Take a moment and consider this. Take a long moment. It is a good thing that officers took her in "without incident or injury," of course, but can we imagine that result being universally the case if a shooter looks different? Would this episode have ended this way

if the shooter had been male, or Black, or both? It's an unanswerable question, but nevertheless, one that deserves pondering. Every case is different. Charles M. Blow; EG-NYT-016

Furthermore, editorialists urged their readers to use the word racism. For many of the writers, the way racism is discussed is problematic. To remedy this problem, the authors encouraged the readers to understand the way racism operates in American society. In his editorial "Perfect Victim Pitfall", Charles M. Blow stated:

And yes, racist is the word that we must use. Racism doesn't require the presence of malice, only the presence of bias and ignorance, willful or otherwise. It doesn't even require more than one race. There are plenty of members of aggrieved groups who are part of the self-flagellation industrial complex. They make a name (and a profit) saying inflammatory things about their own groups, things that are full of sting but lack context, things that others will say only behind tightly shut doors. These are often people who've "made it" and look down their noses with be-more-like-me disdain at those who haven't, as if success were merely a result of a collection of choices and not also of a confluence of circumstances. Charles M. Blow; EG-NYT-03

Other editorialists scolded people who refused to make the connection between recent police violence and racism. These authors were particularly critical of the grand juries who did not indict the officers involved in the cases. About the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, Bill Press wrote:

Yet, despite such clear evidence of police abuse, the grand jury refused to indict Pantaleo, who thereby joined Darren Wilson as the latest white police officers to kill an unarmed Black man and get away with it. Garner, meanwhile, joined Michael Brown as two of their latest victims, neither of whom deserved to die. Michael Brown's crime? Walking down the street in Ferguson. Eric Garner's crime? Allegedly selling loose cigarettes on the streets of Staten Island without a license. Would a young white man have been killed by police for such minor offenses? Bill Press; EG-SLT-029

Unfortunately, many of the writers of the editorials were pessimistic about the current discussion of racism in America. They felt that the debate of racism in America only occurs during times of tragedy. E.J. Dionne Jr. explicitly stated,

The only time we discuss race openly and honestly is when we're forced to - when young Black men are killed for walking down the middle of the street, walking home from the store, reaching for their wallets or whatever. E.J. Dionne Jr.; EG-WP-052

According to Dionne, the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri was a tragedy that should be used to promote genuine conversations about racism and police violence. He was very dismal in his is expectations of the actual dialogue that would be produced by Brown death.

Dionne continues,

The events in Ferguson, Mo., have actually led to that national conversation on race we regularly recommend to ourselves. But it is the same conversation we always have: not a dialogue but entirely separate discussions in which participants reinforce each other in the views they had going in. E.J. Dionne Jr.; EG-WP-052

Moreover, Dionne cautions against repeating the problematic way of discussing racism. He wrote:

But most of all, I wish we could focus on breaking the cycle of violence that leaves so many young Black men dead and on bending the arc of a national conversation in which everyone repeats the same things each time we have a tragedy - and nothing changes. E.J. Dionne Jr.; EG-WP-052

Like Dionne, other editorialists also wrote about dialogue. However, these authors spoke about the need for honest discussion about the role and behaviors of police officers in today's society. These editorialists felt that this particular dialogue was one of the most important implications of the case. This is because the public entrusts much power in the police. Because of this, it is necessary to review police actions. In his editorial, "New Age Activism", Charles M.

Blow made the following remarks about reviewing police behavior:

Yet prejudice is a societal poison; each of us is in danger of ingesting it, and many of us do. We are constantly making judgments, but most of us are not wearing a holster with a gun. That is when the ante is upped about the nature and quality of those judgments: Did they unfairly weigh against any particular groups? How much force was used and how quickly?

Conversations about police behavior can lead to a host of different positive outcomes such as more police transparency, criminal justice reform, and proper police training. For example, it published the following sentiments in its editorial, “Ending Police Secrecy”:

To finally bring this darkness into the light of day, our nation must address the foundation of this crisis. That starts with acknowledging that the training taught in police academies across the country is not being applied in communities of color. After six months in the police academy, that instruction is effectively wiped out by six days of being taught by veteran cops on the streets. Editorial Board; EG-NYT-07

According to these editorialists, a huge barrier to having an honest dialogue about police conduct is police subculture. The writers felt that the subculture, also referred to as “the blue wall of silence”, is a major impediment to actual police reform. These editorialists argue that the first step in addressing the lack of dialogue is to push through the blue wall. About barriers to police reform in New York, the New York Times wrote:

The report, to Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the State Legislature, noted that New Yorkers had "far less access to information about the activities of police departments than virtually any other public agency," even though people encounter police officers in a more direct way than they do other public employees. Robert Freeman, executive director of the committee, told The Times recently that 50-a had essentially codified "the blue wall of silence," making it possible for the police to hide an officer's conduct from the public. Editorial Board; EG-NYT-019

Moreover, editorialists used the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner to open dialogue about possible criminal justice reform. Many of the writers suggested reform on the federal, state, and local level. According to these authors the deaths of Brown, Garner, and also Rice were related to criminal justice issues that left them vulnerable to both a violent police reaction and an unsympathetic reaction from the grand jury. For example, in his editorial “Privilege of Arrest without Incident” Charles M. Blow didn’t dispute the need for the police or the criminal justice system, but he was critical of the police reaction in these cases. He said, “More suspected criminals need to be detained and tried in a court of law and not sentenced on the street to a rain

of bullets.” This perspective is especially evident in discussions about the Tamir Rice and Michael Brown cases. Many editorialists were disgusted by the quickness with which officers used deadly force. For example, Charles M. Blow had the following to say in regards to the Tamir Rice shooting:

One of the officers, Timothy Loehmann, shot Tamir within "1.5 to two seconds" of arriving at the park. Two seconds. So quickly. In the blink of an eye. And yet, according to The Associated Press, the officers say that they ordered Tamir to put his hands up three times before he was shot. According to the original statement released by the police, "The suspect did not comply with the officers' orders and reached to his waistband for the gun." Charles M. Blow; TR-NYT-001

Blow is addressing a key concern of many proponents of police reform. To him, Rice’s death is the result of police officers defaulting to lethal force too quickly. Furthermore, within this same editorial, Blow addressed the fact that the police often have a skewed perception regarding suspects. These are two areas that Blow feels needs to be revisited in police training. Editorialists such as Tammerlin Drummond and Leonard Pitts Jr. expressed that there is a need for more dialogue regarding flaws in police perception. For example, Drummond was critical of police who did not seem to understand the severity of the recent wave of police violence against citizens. She wrote:

There are cops who insist the main takeaway from the Brown and Garner killings is people shouldn't resist arrest. They refuse to acknowledge that aggressive police behavior played a heavy hand in the escalation of violence that resulted in both men's deaths. In all their self-righteousness, they will continue to engage in the very sort of behavior in poor communities of color that makes anyone with a badge -- deserved or not -- viewed as an enemy rather than a public servant there to help them. Tammerlin Drummond; MB-CCT-143

Eugene Robinson summed up the problem of police reaction in one sentence. He wrote,

Whatever the reason, it is hard to escape the conclusion that police in this country are much too quick to shoot.

The most referenced implication of the three cases was the need to reform the grand jury system. Many of the editorialists found it problematic that the officers who were involved in the

Brown and Garner cases were not indicted. There were also some editorialists who concluded that the grand jury system worked just as it was supposed to work. People on either side agreed that there needs to be more conversation about the role of the grand jury.

Those editorialists who found the grand jury felt that the process was very predictable. These writers were pessimistic regarding the fairness of the process. For example, in his editorial, “Angst in Ferguson has its roots in structural racism”, Lance Simmens wrote:

The reaction in Ferguson was so predictable it was predicted. There is no way in hell that the no-probable-cause verdict would be viewed as a thoughtful decision based upon a preponderance of the evidence. In short, the structural racism in American society today preordained that a decision not to indict the officer who killed Michael Brown would inflame the raw passions evident in communities of color. When the process is corrupted, the verdict is similarly corrupted. And that is what we have today, a corrupted system. Lance Simmens; MB-CCT-158

Many of the editorialists who wrote from this perspective often felt that the grand jury should have indicted the officers who were involved in the cases. Alicia Garza blamed the grand jury for letting murderers walk free. She stated:

The editorial board says, "those who engage in illegal behavior should pay a price." Yet the officers involved in the murders of Michael Brown, 18, Tamir Rice, 12, Aiyana Stanley Jones, 7, Eric Garner, 43, Gary King Jr., 20, and so many more have escaped accountability.

Other proponents of this perspective explicitly stated that the grand jury failed to do its job.

Brent Staples was one of the most critical of the grand jury decisions in the Brown and Garner cases. He wrote:

Anger over the police problem coalesced into a national movement after a grand jury in St. Louis County, Mo., declined to indict the white police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager, and a grand jury in New York took the same stance on the white officer who applied the chokehold that killed Eric Garner, who was also Black and also unarmed.

BLACK LIVES MATTER IS A LEGITIMATE MOVEMENT

The (7) **Black Lives Matter is a legitimate movement** theme developed from the analysis of one major code, protests-movements, and three sub-codes, (1) movement is helpful, (2) movement is anti-police violence not anti-police, (3) movement makes police and departments accountable. Within this theme are quotations from editorialists who generally supported and defended the Black Lives Matter movement and the protests that have taken place under the BLM banner.

The (1) sub-code movement is helpful developed from an analysis of text which discussed the benefits of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Within this code, editorialists often congratulated the movement for bringing national attention to the problem of police misconduct. They often commented on the social awareness properties of the movement and were careful to separate the Black Lives Matter movement from the violence of the riots that also took place simultaneously with peaceful protests. The (2) sub-code movement is anti-police violence not anti-police developed from editorials in which the writers defended Black Lives Matter against critics who contended that the movement perpetuates violence against the police. These writers often times explained that the purpose of Black Lives Matter is to invoke social change and police reform and not violence towards or hatred of the police. The (3) sub-code movement holds police accountable is comprised of text in which writers praise the Black Lives Matter movement for holding police officers and departments accountable for their actions. This was especially true concerning the Michael Brown case. Editorialists criticized the Ferguson Police Department for withholding the name of the officer who was involved in Brown's death and supported BLM in their efforts to push the department to be thorough and impartial.

In many instances editorialists emphasized the legitimacy of the Black Lives Matter movement and were careful to separate the riots from the peaceful protests. In his editorial,

“Worlds Collide in Tragedy; Brown and Garner Deaths,” R. Drew Smith discussed the way the Black Lives Matter protests have retained their legitimacy. Furthermore, Smith was careful to distinguish between acceptable protests and unacceptable riots. He stated:

Protesters concerned about the lack of public justice in these cases refuse to allow their concerns to be dismissed or rendered invisible and have been making their case in conspicuous ways. Although a small percentage of protests have involved inappropriate violence, the vast majority have been pursued through creative forms of nonviolent civil disobedience. The mostly younger-generation activists have affirmed core democratic principles about constitutional rights and responsibilities that accompany American citizenship. R. Drew Smith; EG-PPG-038

Smith continued,

Remember, the protesters did not create the conflict; neither would the conflict be any less real in the absence of protest.

Proponents of this perspective framed the Black Lives Matter protests in a positive light. They often praised the ambition of the young members of the movement. In his editorial, “America, Who are We,” Charles M. Blow was very supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement and protests. He wrote,

It was invigorating and inspiring to be among so many young people with so much passion about social justice, young people beginning to feel their power as change agents and brimming to exercise it by disrupting the status quo.

Writers often congratulated the Black Lives Matter movement for bringing attention to the problem of police violence. According to the writers, even if the Black Lives Matter movement does not make a long-term change it has been successful at shining a spotlight on the on-going issue. For example, Leonard Pitts Jr. wrote:

But what's even more noteworthy is that this is not a "Black" protest. To the contrary, images from these demonstrations show us that a rainbow coalition is offended by the message the injustice system sends in refusing to punish these killings, i.e., that it is somehow "OK" to kill unarmed African-American men and boys. Leonard Pitts Jr.; EG-SLT-30

Finally, the editorialists believed that the movement had established its legitimacy because of its impact on legislation. The Washington Post published the following sentiments regarding the legitimacy of the Black Lives Matter movement:

As the leaders consider their next moves, we hope they do not lose sight of an early achievement, which will require attention to bring it to fruition. One test of any social movement is its power to inspire legislation. By that measure, the protests that followed the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner already demonstrated strength. Before adjourning, Congress adopted and sent to The unarmed 18-year-old also became a potent symbol of the lack of trust between African-Americans and law enforcement - not just in Ferguson, but in the rest of the country. Lord knows there have been plenty of recent examples. And the militarized response to protesters by local police put an exclamation point on demonstrators' concerns. But the other Justice Department report, the one on the actual shooting of Michael Brown, shows him to be an inappropriate symbol. President Obama a significant bill that could help provide a crucial missing ingredient for reform: accurate information. Editorial Board; EG-WP-056

BLACK LIVES MATTER, BUT THE MOVEMENT IS FLAWED

The theme (8) **Black Lives Matter, but movement is flawed** developed from the analysis of one major code, Protests-Movements and four sub-codes; (1) protests are built on make-believe, (2) protests are anti-police, (3) some groups promote violence, (4) riots are unacceptable, (5) movement is unorganized. The major code protests-movements includes text which discussed the ways the editorialists perceive the Black Lives Matter movement and protests. Within this major code, there were several sub-codes focused on the dimensions of the Black Lives Matter movement. Unlike, the previous theme (7) Black Lives Matter is a legitimate movement this theme is focused on the negative perception of the Black Lives Matter movement and derived from sub-codes which questioned the legitimacy of the movement.

The sub-code (1) protests are built on make believe formed from the text in which the writer criticized the origin of the Black Lives Matter movement. Within this sub-code, the editorialists discussed the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. In regards to the Michael

Brown case, these writers were unconvinced of the “hands up don’t shoot narrative” and because of this, they categorized the movement as illegitimate. Furthermore, in the discourse surrounding both the Brown and Garner cases, these writers questioned the appropriateness of the movement, because it’s based on the deaths of “criminals” who died while breaking the law. The sub-code (2) protests are anti-police includes text in which editorialists criticized the Black Lives Matter movement because they felt that the movement has an “anti-police agenda.” Within this code is discourse which blames the Black Lives Movement for the 2014 murders of two NYPD officers by Ismaaiyl Abdullah Brinsley as well as violence against police during riots. The sub-code (3) some groups promote violence formed from the text in which the editorialists criticized the Black Lives Matter movement because they feel that it is connected to groups that promote violence as a means of social protests. This sub-code often overlapped with (2) protests are anti-police. The sub-code (4) riots are unacceptable is comprised of text in which the writers discuss the Black Lives Matter movement in conjunction with the riots that have taken place following the police killings of unarmed Black men across the country. Within this sub-code, writers often drew plurality between the movement and the riots. The sub-code (5) movement is unorganized includes text in which editorialists criticized the Black Lives Matter Movement because of it lacks organization and recognizable leadership. Within this sub-code, writers often compared Black Lives Matter movement to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Writers often cited the ambiguity of the Michael Brown case as being the foundation of the movement’s illegitimacy, because the Black Lives Matter movement resurged after the death of Michael Brown. One of the most consistent critics of the Black Lives Matter Movement was Jonathan Capehart. According to Mr. Capehart, the movement lacks legitimacy because the basis

is a lie. Even through this criticism, Capehart did not deny the racial issues of Ferguson. Instead, he attacked the legitimacy of the movement because it was based on Brown's death. He stated:

The unarmed 18-year-old also became a potent symbol of the lack of trust between African-Americans and law enforcement - not just in Ferguson, but in the rest of the country. Lord knows there have been plenty of recent examples. And the militarized response to protesters by local police put an exclamation point on demonstrators' concerns. But the other Justice Department report, the one on the actual shooting of Michael Brown, shows him to be an inappropriate symbol.

These writers attacked the movement because they felt that Brown caused his own death.

Because of this, these writers felt that the Black Lives Matter movement is illegitimate.

Richard Fornear Jr. was critical of the movement and its leaders because of their reactions to Brown's death. Fornear stated,

At what point will the Black community and its leaders admit that Michael Brown was responsible for his own death? Richard Fornear; MB-PPG-070

In his editorial, "Media and the mobs, it is sometimes tough to tell the difference" Thomas Sowell defends the actions of Darren Wilson, the officer who killed Michael Brown. In his writing, Sowell implies that Brown caused his death by attacking Officer Wilson. He feels that Wilson was not only justified in killing Brown but also in shooting him six times. Sowell wrote:

Then there are the inevitable bullet counters asking, "Why did he shoot him six times?" ...By what principle should someone decide how many shots should be fired? The bullet counters seldom, if ever, ask that question, much less try to answer it. Since the only justifiable reason for shooting in the first place is self-protection, when should you stop shooting? Obviously, when there is no more danger. But there is no magic number of shots that will tell you when you are out of danger...Different witnesses give conflicting accounts of exactly what happened in the shooting of Brown. That is one of the reasons why grand juries collect facts. But, if Brown -- a 6-foot, 4-inch, 300-pound man -- was still charging at the policeman, as some allege, there is no mystery why the cop kept shooting. Thomas Sowell; MB-CCT-153

Gene Lyons was also skeptical about the origins of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Specifically, Lyons is critical of the hands up, don't shoot mantra and explicitly calls it make-believe. In his criticism of the mantra he subsequently chastised the people who chose to

participate in the Black Lives Matter movement, based on the death of Michael Brown. Lyons editorial is a build-on to Jonathan Capehart's criticism of the hands up, don't shoot narrative. He writes that he was always critical of the "murdering racist cop version" of the Brown story. Furthermore, he questions the validity of the Dorian Johnson, the case's key witness. Lyons stated,

Mr. Capehart adds that "Witness 101 'made multiple statements to the media immediately following the incident that spawned the popular narrative that Wilson shot Brown execution-style as he held up his hands in surrender.' In one of those interviews, Johnson told MSNBC that Brown was shot in the back by Wilson ... and, like that, 'hands up, don't shoot' became the mantra of a movement. But it was wrong, built on a lie." Strong words, but necessary. Possibly Mr. Johnson came to believe the tale he told. But none of it was real. Thousands of angry protestors from sea to shining sea have spent months chanting an intoxicating slogan based upon sheer make-believe. Gene Lyons, MB-PPG-042

Rich Lowry was also acrimonious about the legitimacy of the Black Lives Matter movement. First, Lowry attacked the movement because it was based on the Michael Brown case. According to Lowry, the movement relies on "dishonesty" and "misinformation". Moreover, he refers to members of the movement as paranoid. Lowry contends that even after members of BLM realized that the Michael Brown case was built on a lie, they continued to attack the justice system.

The case is a tragedy. But it isn't a metaphor for police brutality or race repression or anything else, and it never was. Aided and abetted by a compliant national media, the Ferguson protestors spun a dishonest, or misinformed version of what happened Michael Brown murdered in cold blood while trying to surrender into a meme and a chant ("Hands up, don't shoot"), and then a mini-movement. When the facts didn't back their narrative, they dismissed the facts and retreated into paranoid suspicion of the legal system. Rich Lowry; MB-SLT-120

The criticism of the movement's leadership was a cause of concern for other writers as well. Some editorialists denied the legitimacy of the movement because it is leaderless while others felt that the movement has leaders and that these leaders promote violence within the community and against police. These writers often criticized the Black Lives Matter movement by

comparing it to the Civil Rights Movement. According to these editorialists, the Civil Rights Movement was legitimate, whereas this new contemporary movement lacks direction and justification. Rich Lowry specifically drew from the 1965 incident in Selma, Alabama. In his editorial, “The Real Lesson of Selma” Lowry cautions against comparing Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement. Lowry promulgated the following sentiments:

The protesters who faced off against the police in Selma didn't shout abuse, although they would have been amply justified; they didn't burn down local businesses; they didn't randomly fire guns or throw rocks or stones. The difference between demonstrators in Selma and Ferguson is the difference between dignity under enormous pressure in a righteous cause and heedless self-indulgence in the service of a smear (that Officer Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown as he surrendered). Lowry; MB-SLT-139

Furthermore, Lowry scolded the stars of the 2014 movie *Selma*, because of their support for the Black Lives Matter movement. He did not appreciate the stars showing up to the premier of the movie wearing, “I can’t breathe” shirts. As if this wasn’t problematic enough for Lowry, the actors began drawing parallels between the events that took place in Selma and the events that occurred in Ferguson. In response to this Lowry continued:

As for policing, the worry in 1965 wasn't ambiguous encounters or tragic accidents. It was beatings, or worse. It was whips and forced-marched by cattle prod. It was the violence of police who were the oppressive instruments of a lawless authority. The protesters who faced off against the police in Selma didn't shout abuse, although they would have been amply justified; they didn't burn down local businesses; they didn't randomly fire guns, or throw rocks or stones. The difference between demonstrators in Selma and Ferguson is the difference between dignity under enormous pressure in a righteous cause and heedless self-indulgence in the service of a smear (that Officer Darren Wilson shot Michael Brown as he surrendered). The temptation for the left to live perpetually in 1965 is irresistible. It wants to borrow the haze of glory around the civil-rights movement of that era and apply it to contemporary causes. It wants to believe that America is nearly as unjust as it was then, and wants to attribute to itself as much of the bravery and righteousness of the civil-rights pioneers as possible. Lowry; MB-SLT-139

Other proponents of this perspective felt that the Black Lives Matter movement is illegitimate and unacceptable because of they could not separate the Movement from the riots that also took place as a result of the grand jury decision not to indict in the Garner and Brown cases. For these

writers, the riots were an ineffective means of conveying communal anger, and that these riots were supported by Black Lives Matter. Anthony Yates wrote the following words about the Michael Brown case and the Ferguson Riots:

I would never presume to judge Officer Darren Wilson's actions, since I wasn't there. But as usually happens at these things, the witnesses' versions of this tragedy are 180-degrees opposite. Bottom line for me is, if Michael Brown did indeed fight and grab for Officer Wilson's weapon, then I believe Officer Wilson is 100 percent justified. And, if not, then Officer Wilson should have been charged for the death of Mr. Brown. Besides the tragedy itself, what also disturbs me are people who use this as an excuse to terrorize that community by burning, shooting, looting and doing other things that hurt innocent people. This is nothing more than criminals committing heinous crimes. Anthony R. Yates; MB-PPG-074

Thomas Sowell, another critical voice of the Black Lives Matter movement, also opined about the riots that took place in Ferguson. According to Sowell, the riots were not related to the grand jury decision. Instead, Sowell contends that the decision was just an excuse for people to break the law. He wrote:

The riots, looting and setting of things on fire that some in the media are treating as reactions to the grand jury's decision not to indict the policeman actually began long before the grand jury had begun its investigation, much less announced any decision. Thomas Sowell; MB-CCT-145

He then began to recall similar riots that took place in Detroit in 1960. Sowell continued that the riots in Ferguson, as the Detroit riots, were more about politics than passion. He wrote:

A niece of mine, who had grown up in the same Harlem tenement where I grew up years earlier, bitterly complained about how few stores and other businesses there were in the neighborhood.

There were plenty of stores in that same neighborhood when I was growing up. But that was before the neighborhood was swept by riots.

Who benefits from the Ferguson riots? The biggest beneficiaries are politicians and racial demagogues. In Detroit, Mayor Coleman Young was one of many political demagogues able to ensure their own re-election, using rhetoric and policies that drove away people who provided jobs and taxes but who were likely to vote against him if they stayed. Such demagogues thrived as Detroit became a wasteland. Thomas Sowell; MB-CCT-145

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION

Guided by the theoretical frameworks of motives and critical race theory (CRT), the purpose of this study was to answer the following three questions, (1) How do editorialists assign meaning to racial disparities in police application of lethal force?, (2) How do public accounts frame the Black Lives Matter movement?, and (3) How do contextual factors shape this meaning-making process? To address these questions, I conducted an ethnographic content analysis (ECA) and constructionist thematic analysis (CTA) of opinion editorials in five widely distributed newspapers. The eight (8) major themes that emerged from this study are (1) Black lives Aren't Valued; (2) Racial Roots Prevent Post-Racialism; (3) Progress Has Been Made; (4) A Vicious Cycle of Mistrust; (5) The Nightstick And Quick-Trigger-Finger Justice; (6) Conversation Rules The Nation; (7) Black Lives Matter Movement Is Legitimate; and (8) Black Lives Matter, But The Movement Is Flawed.

The current study differs from previous work conducted on police violence in three ways. First, the study is a contemporary analysis of the public discussion of police violence within the same year of three major cases, as well as an investigation of the framing of the social activism centered on bringing attention to the matter. Second, this study is a qualitative analysis of opinion editorials, rather than newspaper articles on the matter of police violence. Third, the current study does not include the police as a source of explanation for their treatment of minorities. There are several theoretical and practical implications of the findings of this study.

Key Qualitative Findings

These editorials often made connections to the historical oppression of Black men in America and their current treatment by the police. There was a common conclusion drawn; that

implied that the reason the problem of police violence against Black men persists in America is because Black men are not, nor have they ever been valued in America. This finding indicates that white supremacy is vulnerable and challenged within the public sphere.

The (1) Black Lives Aren't Valued and (5) Nightstick and Quick-Trigger Finger Justice themes demonstrate that the political culture of the nation is moving away from the acceptance of police violence as normative. Rather than blame Black pathology or the victims of police violence, most editorials criticized the police. These authors often confronted and acknowledged the problem of institutional racism. Even those writers who were unsupportive of the Black Lives Matter movement, unsympathetic to the victim or both did not deny the existence of institutional racism. Furthermore, the findings illustrate that the ideals of colorblindness and post-racialism are also contested in the public sphere. The (2) Racial Roots Prevent Post-Racialism, (1) Black Lives Aren't Valued, and (5) Nightstick and Quick Trigger Finger Justice themes illustrate that the racial disparities in policing are just a reflection of the general treatment of African American males. The writers discussed multiple dimensions (i.e. education, the prison system, and politics) in which Black men are disproportionately represented. For the writers, this disproportionality is indicative of a lack of colorblindness and post-racialism. Color blind arguments would have consisted of not only ignoring the races of the victims and the officers but also downplaying the significance of race in interactions with the police. Additionally, editorials that invoked color blind arguments would not have acknowledged the legitimacy of the grievances of the African American community. This is due to the premise of the colorblind ideology is to ignore the importance of race to promote an illusion of racial harmony. Color blind frames were rarely activated. The writers openly discussed the existence of a relationship

between racism and police application of lethal force as well as the legitimacy of racial grievances from the African American community.

Moreover, a pattern emerged which suggests that the African American community has accepted mistreatment from the police as normative. In many instances, the Black editorialists discussed how they had been prepared for children on how to navigate through society as a Black person, and how they, in turn, prepare their sons, brothers, and nephews. These lessons were particularly important when dealing with the police. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Dottolo and Stewart in their 2007 study about the formation of racial and gender identity through interactions with the police. According to these authors, “many middle-aged adults (Black) worried particularly about their sons – young Black men who they tried to prepare for repeated harassment by the police, often with no available recourse (Dottolo and Stewart 2007: 360). Editorialists often situated this acceptance of mistreatment as a result of white supremacy and white privilege. Many concluded that although this type of treatment is common in the lives of Black men and is often considered normal, it must be challenged and changed.

This sentiment is the main focus of the (6) Conversation Rules the Nation and (7) Black Lives Matter Movement Is Legitimate themes. The writers not only contested police violence against African Americans as a current problem, but they also worried about the impact that the problem will have in the future. These themes illuminated the importance of bringing attention to not only the racial disproportionality of the application lethal force by the police but also the racial disparities in policing in general. These were the main reasons that the writers were supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement and critical of the police. For many of the editorialists, the deaths of Brown, Garner, and Rice alone were not the catalysts for the Black Lives Matter movement but were manifestations of historical racism, contemporary racism, and

overall structural inequality. To address their concerns about inequality, they often reminded the readers of the opportunities to learn from these incidents. These writers often discussed the necessity for honest conversations about racism, white privilege, and other forms of structural inequality; as well as the need for several policy reforms which could reduce the recurrence of similar cases in the future.

A counter-narrative also developed through the analysis of the (8) Black Lives Matter, But The Movement Is Flawed and (3) Progress Has Been Made themes. In his study, Silva (2007) found that defenders of the use of Native American mascots found it easier to speak about the positive reasons for using the images, rather than confront the concerns of the challengers of the practice (p. 254). There was a similar pattern of indirect support within this study. Rather than being directly defensive of the actions of the police, some editorialists chose to criticize the Black Lives Matter movement, deny the victimhood of Garner or Brown, or ignore the role that race still plays in contemporary America as a means of supporting the police. Although this pattern was evident in only a small portion of the editorials, it is important to note that the subset was present in the study. The writers from this perspective framed the police as an authority figure (Hirschfield and Simon 2010) that should be respected and thanked. Although these writers recognized the role that racism has played in American society, they often minimized the significance of race in these three cases. For these writers, the existence of racism does not contribute to these cases, because the victims caused their deaths.

Continuum of Sympathy and Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement

It is important to note however that these figures have not been subjected to intercoder reliability tests, and, thus, should be read with that limitation in mind. They are a reflection of the

perspectives invoked by the editorialists when discussing both the three cases and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

The (1) Black Lives Aren't Valued theme was activated the most. Although it was present in all five newspapers, it was most evident in both the New York Times and the Washington Post. This could be because these papers have been identified as having mostly liberal audiences and more left leaning ideologies. The editorials in these two papers were more likely to invoke civil rights and historical racism frames when discussing contemporary police violence against African American males. Across the sample, editorialists showed explicit support for the Black Lives Matter Movement in fifty-two percent (.52) of the editorials. The writers were neutral in their presentation of the Black Lives Matter Movement in thirty-three percent (.33) of the editorials. Only fifteen percent (.15) of the editorials were explicitly unsupportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement. There was not much variation in the figures in regards to the attribution of sympathetic qualities to the victim. Fifty-seven percent (.57) of the editorials in the sample were sympathetic to the victims. Thirty-four percent (.34) of the editorials attributed neither sympathetic nor unsympathetic qualities to the victim. Only nine percent (.09) of the editorials across the sample were unsympathetic to the victims.

Although the editorialists were typically sympathetic to the victims, there was some variance by both case and newspaper. The New York Times was the most sympathetic paper and it was also the most supportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement. It attributed sympathetic qualities to the victims in sixty-five percent (.65) of its editorials and was only attributed unsympathetic qualities to the victim in only two percent (.02) of its editorials. Editorials written in the Times were supportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement seventy percent (.70) of the time, followed by the Washington Post, which had the second most sympathetic editorials and

also the second most supportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement. The editorials in the Washington Post attributed sympathetic qualities to the victim in sixty-four percent (.64) of its editorials. Only eleven percent (.11) of the editorials in the Washington Post were unsympathetic to the victims. Furthermore, editorials written in the Washington Post were supportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement fifty-seven percent (.57) of the time. The Salt Lake Tribune was the most unsympathetic paper and it was also the most unsupportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement. It attributed unsympathetic qualities to the victims in thirty-two percent (.32) of its editorials and was sympathetic to the victim in only thirty-six percent (.36) of its editorials. The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette had the second most unsympathetic of all the editorials. The editorials in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette attributed unsympathetic qualities to the victim in nineteen percent (.19) of its editorials and was sympathetic to the victim forty-four percent (.44) of its editorials. Further, the editorials in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette were unsupportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement in twenty-two percent (.22) of the time. Editorials in the Contra Costa Times represented the median in both sympathetic qualities attributed to the victim and support for the Black Lives Matter Movement. The paper attributed sympathetic qualities to the victims in fifty-nine percent (.59) of its editorials. It attributed unsympathetic qualities to the victims in only eight percent (.08) of the editorials. Furthermore, editorials in the Contra Costa Times were supportive of the Black Lives Matter Movement in forty-one percent (.44) of the editorials. Editorials in the paper were unsupportive of the movement in fifteen percent (.15) of its editorials.

Comparison to Previous Literature

Opinion editorials in widely distributed newspapers were primarily critical of the police and the justice system. Unlike the findings in Hirschfield and Simon's (2010) study, majority of

the op-eds in the current study did not regard police violence as rational or acceptable. Instead, the op-eds often offered possible solutions and reforms for the current problems. However, this difference could lie solely within the fact that Hirschfield and Simon (2010) examined newspaper articles, rather than opinion-editorials. This is a very important observation, because as the authors noted in their study, newspaper journalists rely heavily on the cooperation of local precincts for information. Unlike the authors of those articles, opinion editorialists are not beholden to the “official versions of events neatly circumscribed by laws governing deadly force” (Hirschfield and Simon 2010: 176). This particular characteristic of opinion editorials is what allows them to be used as a sort of cultural barometer to gauge the perception of police violence in the public sphere. Furthermore, these editorials help can help readers to construct police violence as acceptable or unacceptable by presenting the action in either a positive or negative light.

Significance and Implications

A deeper analysis of these themes has led to the following conclusions, (1) Opinion editorialists are highly critical of police violence, and often invoke civil rights frames when discussing contemporary police violence against African American males; (2) the public sphere is very supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement; and (3) the meaning-making process is not impacted by contextual factors of violence. The findings of this study are important because public accounts can contribute to the recurrence of a contested practice (Silva 2007). My findings indicate that the public sphere does not find police violence as culturally acceptable. Although the change appears to be happening incrementally, there is an evident decrease in the activation of frames that present the police as infallible. Unlike individual actions, institutional actions are often challenged in the public sphere (Silva 2007: 247).

The main theoretical implication is that editorialists can be more critical than journalists because they are not beholden to the police for information. Opinion editorialists can voice their opinions without just reporting only “the facts.” Often what is to be considered “fact” is directly linked to the empowered rather than the disempowered. Because of this, op-eds can help the form public opinions about what is acceptable or unacceptable. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that the public sphere is moving beyond framing the police as faultless crusaders of the law. Although I thought that the results would be more varied, the findings of this study indicate that there is a normative grounding for reforming the police. However, there is a very little offering of an actual plan for reforming the police. This finding could have two possible implications (1) the public sphere is a place to bring attention to needed changes, but not solutions to social problems, or (2) the public sphere is a place where social problems are contained, by giving the illusion that change is being made.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

One limitation of the study is that there was only one coder. Future research should employ the use of research team. This is because many elements of the research are subjective and more coders would improve the reliability of the project. Another limitation of the study is in regards to the sample size. One hundred and seventy-eight (n=176) editorials is a relatively small sample size for an ethnographic content analysis. Future research should include a sample of at least three hundred editorials. Furthermore, editorials from the New York Times are overrepresented, this could have the sample appear to be more sympathetic or supportive than it has been otherwise. Also in regards to newspapers, the variance in sympathy and support could have been impacted by the political leanings of the newspapers. To address this limitation, I attempted to compile a sample from newspapers with different political ideologies and regional

interests. In the future scholars should analyze local newspapers as well to see if proximity to the incident has an impact on sympathy for victim and support for the movement. Finally, the last limitation of the study is that many of the newspapers included editorials from the same authors. This limited the amount of variance that could appear throughout the sample, and it may have made the sample appear more supportive and sympathetic than it may have otherwise. Future researchers should catalog the political leanings of editorialists by reading their previous work. This can be used to attempt to predict the ways editorialists will frame police violence. A positive prediction of a frame will indicate that editorialists do not typically vary in their responses to similar events. The implication of this finding could be that opinion editorialists simply reproduce racism or recreate the present conversation about racial inequality. Also, future researchers should investigate the frames that editorialists invoke when assigning culpability in police violence. Editorialists were highly critical of the police and challenged the legitimacy of their actions in the three cases included in the study, however, there was a tendency for editorialists to address individual officers rather than the police as an institution. This trend is problematic because the current problem of police violence is indicative of a need for reform at an institutional level.

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