
Evaluating
**Media Coverage of
Structural Racism**

Frisby & Associates, Inc.



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INTRODUCTION

Each day, 44 million Hispanic-Americans, 40 million African-Americans and countless other people of color face invisible barriers as they go to work, attend school, visit their doctors, appear in court and participate in other aspects of American society. These barriers often dictate where they live, the quality of their environment, medical care available and what schools their children attend. Most people of color—but not all—recognize that these obstructions exist, but feel powerless to overcome them. At times, this frustration leads to stress that contributes to unhealthy outcomes—from heart attacks to rage that can make them a danger to themselves and those around them.

We are talking about structural racism. It may not be visible, but its tentacles are everywhere as it quietly works to deprive people of color of their dignity, as well as opportunities to succeed. But this *is* the year 2008. Wasn't the Jim Crow era supposed to end decades ago? Wasn't the Civil Rights Movement supposed to produce a "post-racial" America, where a colorblind society exists? After all, a black man, Sen. Barack Obama, could be the next President of the United States.

According to polling data, the majority of white Americans answer those questions with a resounding "yes." To them discrimination and racism are an ugliness of the past, with little relevance to today's modern world. But those beliefs ignore the actual state of people of color in America. Census and health data tell a far different story:

- The median household income for whites is \$50,700 compared to \$37,800 for Hispanics and \$32,000 for blacks.
- Nearly one quarter (24.3 percent) of blacks in America live in poverty.
- One out of every five, or 7.6 million blacks, don't have health insurance compared to just one out of 10 of the white population, or 21.2 million.
- Diabetes has reached epidemic proportions among Native Americans, with 12.2 percent of all Native Americans over 19 suffering from the disease.
- About 35 percent of Hispanics under age 65 have no health insurance.
- The prevalence of diabetes among blacks is about 70 percent higher than among whites.
- Infant mortality rates are twice as high for blacks as for whites.
- About 9.6 percent of all Hispanics are in poor or fair health.
- Prostate cancer mortality is twice as high in blacks compared to whites.
- The incarceration rate for black males is eight times higher than for white males.
- Hispanic youth are incarcerated at rates seven to 17 times greater than those of whites in Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

These statistics paint a vivid picture that contrasts sharply with the notion that the impact of structural racism is absent from American society. While some foundations and

institutions are committed to mitigating the impacts of structural racism, there is little discussion, and even fewer corrective measures, targeting how the misconceptions about the state of people of color in America are spread. The misconceptions blur not only the actual state of economics, health, housing and criminal justice for people of color, but the very essence of their culture, their values and their humanity.

Structural Racism Is Rarely Discussed

A main culprit is the media. In today's information age, "media" goes far beyond the daily newspaper and network evening news to include bloggers and Web sites, as well as talk radio. Americans use these communications vehicles to get their information each day. And one of the constants among the cited communications vehicles is that structural racism is rarely discussed and that people of color are disproportionately portrayed in negative ways. Clearly, the lack of comprehensive reporting on structural racism and its impacts is one of the reasons that so many Americans believe discrimination has been eradicated from our society or reduced to such a minimum level it is no longer important. These misconceptions are harmful to our nation. They make it more difficult to rally government, private and nonprofit resources to improve the social, health and economic conditions that many people don't even realize still exist.

Frisby & Associates, Inc., with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, has completed a study on how well the media cover structural racism in America. For the purposes of this study, we define structural racism as the discriminatory laws, policies and practices that impact housing, employment, health care, criminal justice and education for people of color, as well as the historical legacy of these things.

Our meta-analysis on this topic demonstrated that, just as structural racism isn't discussed much in the media, researchers have rarely reviewed how the media cover it.

Gregory L. Moore, editor of the Denver Post, directed the meta-analysis, and concludes there "are examples of news magazines and newspapers doing some good work on race issues and even prize-winning coverage that harshly examines America's racial past. But there is agreement from research we reviewed that the Big Media are ill-equipped to sensitively report on issues of race by their very makeup. One aspect of that makeup is the fact that it is largely white and lacks the diversity to reflect the perspectives of poor and black people."

His points were underscored in our content audit of the nation's major newspapers. Conducted by the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, a nonprofit specializing in training individuals and bringing diversity to newsrooms and business sides of the media industry, the content audit found that people of color are underutilized as sources for stories in the major newspapers, and that the media perpetuates many of the negative stereotypes in our society regarding people of color. Sally Lehrman, a Peabody Award-winning journalist and educator, completed our analysis of the content audit.

Lehrman found that while blacks were often quoted in sports stories in the major newspapers, “black sources made up less than 1 percent of those consulted for arts and entertainment and science and technology stories...” White sources enjoyed the biggest voice in stories by far, no matter the subject.

A recent story in the New York Times is all too typical regarding the lack of diversity of sources in major newspapers. In a July 11th article, the Times discussed the impact of the Rev. Jesse Jackson’s demeaning comments regarding Obama for allegedly “talking down” to black voters. But in the newspaper often labeled as “too liberal and left of center,” the story did not quote a single person of color. Instead, white politicians and political analysts discuss the impact on black people. When a newspaper as storied as the New York Times suffers such a lapse of judgment, it underscores the extent to which this is a problem throughout the newspaper industry, as documented by our content audit.

A Lack of Coverage

Our study next measured how well major newspapers, wire services and ethnic newspapers covered stories related to structural racism. Kenneth J. Cooper, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter and editor, used listings of major stories for 2006 and 2007 to determine the most newsworthy events related to structural racism over that two-year period. Cooper then analyzed the coverage of those issues in the nation’s major newspapers, wire services and ethnic papers. Cooper determined that his examination of news coverage of “structural racism during 2006 and 2007 finds that the editors and reporters of the nation’s largest newspapers and main wire services, like most white Americans surveyed in recent opinion polls, appear to believe systematic discrimination based on race or ethnicity is no longer much of a problem.” In other words, the stories didn’t receive the coverage they deserved.

With so many Americans turning to “new media” to get their news and information, Lehrman also researched how well Web sites and talk radio covered and discussed issues related to structural racism. Lehrman examined how the Web covered several recent stories, including the controversial New Yorker magazine cover spoofing Obama.

What Lehrman found is that news stories take on new life on the Web, to the detriment of needed social discussion on structural racism. For instance, she wrote, “In the days that followed, separate conversations continued to develop within the traditional news, the conservative blogosphere and the black blogosphere. Conservative blogs took on liberals as an overcontrolling institution lacking humor. Spurred by a remark by Obama defending Muslims, some traditional outlets continued to examine the question of satire versus reinforcing bigotry. A few blogs and Newsweek asked questions about racism...Anyone reading all of these sites would have enjoyed a rich conversation that ranged from an examination of satire itself to the operation of humor, imagery and expectations in the racialization of Muslims and African-Americans in U.S. society. But each part of the discussion prevailed in a separate portion of the Internet newsphere, with structural racism only emerging in the black-oriented media. This trend raised the question, how many

people cross from the mainstream into niche blogs for communities of color? How many journalists do? If they do not, how does it constrain substantive conversation about race in the news media? If these voices intermixed, how would it change understandings about race in our nation?"

While reviewing the media coverage of structural racism, we also sought the opinions of some stakeholders, people such as academics and community leaders, and media industry executives. Their views range from bitterness towards the media, to assertions from media executives that their news organizations are committed to reporting on structural racism.

Ishmael Reed, an essayist, novelist and activist, said that the lack of coverage in the media "means that certain issues like the disparities in health care, disparities of the criminal justice system or the problems of segregated schools" won't be corrected. "When you are in a post-race period, the message is sent that whatever problems African-Americans experience [are] self-inflicted."

Delores Jones Brown, director of the Center on Race, Crime and Justice, maintained that structural racism isn't "covered well at all" in the media. She added, "The media doesn't fully recognize how they are a part of structural racism."

Our study expands on these and other points, providing new insight on how one of America's valued institutions, its Fourth Estate, deals with a major issue related to race. We hope the study can spur both internal and external efforts to improve media coverage of structural racism and its impacts. There must be a broader understanding that racism still exists in America, that it is a core factor in the unhealthy outcomes plaguing people of color and that the media needs to play a major role in educating the public. Still, the first step is documenting the scope and significance of the media's coverage problem in this area. The following pages help develop that understanding.

PAST STUDIES OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF STRUCTURAL RACISM

After extensive review, it is clear that little research has been done into how America's newspapers address the impact of structural racism on people of color regarding health care, employment, education, criminal justice and housing.

Despite the dearth of scientific research, conclusions can be drawn about the media's coverage of structural racism. Scholarly and industry studies note the media's lack of coverage and the need for vast improvement.

There are some newspapers that have done a creditable job covering race and some have even been awarded Pulitzer Prizes for searing community and personal examinations (most recently the New York Times, the Times-Picayune of New Orleans and Akron Beacon Journal have won). Unfortunately, however, these *are* exceptions.

A prevailing argument from the research that we reviewed is that structural and historical impediments deeply affect how journalism is practiced with regard to people of color and their issues. The research also offers some valuable and informative context that helps explain why the media perform so poorly in this area.

As eloquent as anyone we found addressing the media's interest in covering issues of the poor, which would include a high percentage of people of color, was E.J. Dionne. Dionne, a noted political and social commentator, formerly of the New York Times and now a columnist for the Washington Post op-ed page, was interviewed for a Q&A that appeared in the Columbia Journalism Review earlier this year.¹ Dionne was quoted as saying:

People talk all the time about media bias. I actually think there's a structural bias in the media against the poor. Newspapers are built to cover the wealthy and the famous much more than they are built to cover the working class or the poor. There are entire business sections devoted to what the people running big companies do. There are whole sections that focus on gossip about celebrities and rich sports figures. There are good reasons why all these sections exist, but taken together, this is a very large commitment on the part of journalists to a particular slice of society. There is no part of the newspaper routinely devoted to the coverage of the problems of poor people, or struggling working-class—or even middle-class—people. So anyone who cares about covering these matters knows he or she has to fight this structural issue...I think stories illustrating what these numbers about the lack of health-care coverage mean, or what the imposition of higher co-pays or insurance costs mean to actual people, are compelling stories. I have been a political reporter for a long time, and this critique applies as much to me as to anyone else. We probably don't do enough to take these abstract issues and explain them in light of people's actual experiences. And I think that can be done at every newspaper in the country....

Dionne's view is supported by others who believe the media can be defensive, critical and in a blaming mood when it comes to addressing disparities affecting people of color in health, education, housing, criminal justice and other areas.

Rethinking Race, 2006

The Ronald H. Brown Center for Civil Rights and Economic Development at St. John's University held a symposium focused on this very issue on April 28 and 29, 2006.² The symposium, "Rethinking the Discourse on Race: A Symposium on How the Lack of Diversity in the Media Affects Social Justice and Policy," used Hurricane Katrina to drive home how much race intertwines with public policy.

Linetta Gilbert, senior program officer in the Ford Foundation's Community and Resource Development unit, noted that the storm "exposed the fact that race does matter." She explained, "We learned that economics can save lives. It was the difference in who had a bank account or a credit card that determined who got out of that city and where they stayed once they were out." More importantly, a number of panelists argued that the mainstream media tended to obscure issues of race by downplaying its importance and by minimizing the effects of discrimination and racism.³ This, it was argued, happens time and again.

Marguerite Moritz, director of graduate studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder's School of Journalism & Mass Communication, posited that while Katrina coverage was widely hailed in some quarters for aggressively challenging authorities, there were examples of sensationalism, inaccuracies and racial bias.⁴

Exhibit one, Moritz observed, is the controversy in which similar wire photos of Katrina victims scurrying for food were described through a racial prism. One photo depicted two whites wading through chest-high water with bags of food and a case of soda. The caption described the couple as "finding bread and soda from a local grocery store." The following day, the Associated Press published a nearly identical photo of a lone black man fleeing with food from a flooded market—only the caption described him as "looting a grocery store." The photos still stand as classic examples of the racially biased coverage of the storm's aftermath.

The President's Initiative on Race in America

Another poignant example is the media's coverage of President Clinton's Initiative on Race. Its report is one of the best and well-researched treatises on race that can be found anywhere.

Robert Entman, an expert on media, race and public policy who teaches at George Washington University, talked about his review of media coverage of the initiative. He said the media contribute to the "denial of race," a phrase he used to explain how white-

dominated pop culture and opinion makers refuse to acknowledge that “racial discrimination remains a serious problem in the lives, not just of poor African-Americans, but the majority of black citizens.”⁵

Figure 1
Racially Biased Coverage of Hurricane Katrina



Clinton’s initiative was launched in the summer of 1997 with a seven-member advisory board charged with studying racial disparities in the areas of education, economic opportunity, housing, health care and the administration of justice—and developing policy remedies. Many saw the initiative as the most significant effort to address race in decades. But some critics viewed it as pandering. Entman’s examination of media coverage found much of it focused on perceived procedural defects, while neglecting any substantive discourse, and “labeling it a failure from the beginning.”

Along with Carole Bell, a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Entman analyzed leading newspapers’ coverage, breaking it down into “thematic assertions.” Just 5 percent of the coverage focused on “facts” about race in America or discrimination, while a whopping 95 percent was devoted to missteps in the process to one extent or another. “The initiative is a disappointment and a failure,” he paraphrased the coverage. “It’s a one-sided monologue, not a dialogue. It’s just empty rhetoric, just talk, that’s not enough. It’s a missed opportunity. And on and on.”⁶

Entman noted that critics of the initiative managed to seize control of the coverage early. He acknowledged that out of the gate, committee chairman John Hope Franklin stumbled, dismissing opponents of affirmative action, for example, and not inviting critics to address the commission because he said they would have nothing important to say. House Speaker Newt Gingrich led the charge after that gaffe, labeling the commission's effort a "monologue." But Entman asserts that the media took up the assault from there with the word "monologue" appearing in 40 percent of the articles he studied that were assessing the commission's work.

More interestingly, Entman reported a big drop in newspaper coverage of racial issues outside of the initiative. In the six months after the initiative was launched, he found a 44 percent dip in coverage of race-related issues compared with the previous six months.⁷ The upshot was that the media "wound up reinforcing whites' ignorance and denial," he said of the coverage of the initiative. "Not by direct statement, but by vastly emphasizing process over substance and undermining the legitimacy of the very notion that we should be talking about race and racial discrimination and racial misunderstanding."

While the study offered by Entman is not directly on point with the purpose of this analysis, it is an interesting window into how the media frame racial issues. In that sense, it points to the need for this deep analysis of media coverage in the areas outlined earlier. We believe that if the media were made more aware through data of the systemic deficiencies in their coverage, they might be convinced to improve.

A View of Why This Happens

Entman's tough review of the media's shortcomings on race is oft-repeated. Some of the best reasoning for this behavior, specifically in print publications, was offered, surprisingly, in a graduate study analyzing coverage of black economic issues by Forbes, Fortune and Black Enterprise magazines by Karen Rowley.⁸ The theories she cites crop up in many other pieces of media research.

According to two leading researchers she cites (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995), the media play five critical roles that affect how people of color and their issues are represented. The broadly defined roles are surveillance, correlation, transmission, entertainment and economic service.⁹

Surveillance involves the media serving as a sort of lookout reporting on news events, interesting people and what the researchers referred to as threats to the social order. Minority communities have long complained they are largely ignored on this front and that the media are only interested in crime or cultural festivals when it comes to them.

The second and third roles are correlation and transmission. Correlation involves the media interpreting and linking events for an audience, with blacks often seen as "the other." In the

transmission role, the largely white media help define “the society, its norms, and values” and the cultural bias is frequently apparent.

The fourth role is entertainment. For people of color, this has resulted in portrayals that become the “reality in the minds of those who have seen” minorities on television, but rarely are anywhere else, according to the researchers cited in Rowley’s thesis.

Finally, the fifth role is economic, wherein the media performs as a corporation serving the interests of their shareholders and advertisers to attract an audience that will buy their products. Increasingly, the media have focused on delivering a class of reader that can afford expensive goods and services. That means a news product that is more tailored to them as well. Minorities and the poor tend to not fare well under that approach.

There is room to argue with this analysis, but it is cited again and again to explain the structural bias that E.J. Dionne talked about earlier. And together with the other research we have seen, this analysis offers a plausible argument for why issues of importance to people of color receive such sporadic and uneven attention. Those interests clash in some fundamental ways with those of mainstream media.

There are other studies that help us understand how the media have covered race.

“Racial Discrimination in the News”
Berkeley Media Studies Group, 2005
Lori Dorfman and Elena O. Lingas

A content analysis of 10 newspapers by the Berkeley Media Studies Group for the Ford Foundation in 2005 is particularly revealing. The analysis by Elena O. Lingas and Lori Dorfman set out to determine how often these newspapers’ coverage focused on racial and gender discrimination. The analysis included the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Capital Times (Wis.), Cincinnati Enquirer, Des Moines Register, Detroit Free Press, Miami Herald, Star Tribune (Minneapolis), Philadelphia Inquirer, Rocky Mountain News (Denver) and St. Louis Post-Dispatch.¹⁰

The researchers examined articles for all of 2003. They keyed in on articles that contained words such as “discrimination.” This search produced 2,478 news stories and opinion pieces. The search was narrowed to 1,113 pieces that specifically focused on racial and gender discrimination. The analysis was tightened by randomly selecting every fifth article to create a sample of 222.¹¹

Sixty articles were discarded because they only made a passing reference to discrimination or otherwise were off point. That left 162 stories or opinion pieces. Those stories were coded for placement in the paper, type (opinion or news), length, geographic area, main topic, use of data, byline, structural frames and point of view (i.e., spokespeople or principals).

It is not particularly relevant to get into all of these subcategories, but we will explore what was learned about the structural frames of stories. Lingas and Dorfman refer to two structural frames defined in research by Stanford University political scientist Shanto Iyengar: episodic (events) and thematic (trends, data that provide context to developments). Iyengar argued that readers interpret events differently depending on the frames through which they are presented. Framing stories episodically often results in readers “blaming the victim,” while thematic framing tends to cause readers to see government and other institutions as sharing responsibility for problems and solutions.¹²

Iyengar determined that 80 percent of network TV stories were framed episodically and 20 percent thematically. Lingas and Dorfman found a similar ratio for local TV news and for the 10 newspapers she studied. The ratio was 76 percent episodic and 24 percent thematic. She noted that was consistent with what other research had found in newspapers.¹³

Table 1
Structural Framing of News Articles

Newspaper	Episodic	Thematic	Total
St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)	28	1	29
Miami Herald (FL)	18	7	25
Philadelphia Inquirer (PA)	17	7	24
Detroit Free Press (MI)	14	1	15
Star-Tribune (MN)	10	3	13
Rocky Mountain News (CO)	7	6	13
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (AR)	9	3	12
Des Moines Register (IA)	6	5	11
Capital Times (WI)	7	3	10
Cincinnati Enquirer (OH)	7	3	10
Total	123	39	162

Source: Dorfman & Lingas, 2005

The other takeaway was that discrimination generally was not front page news for any of these newspapers, though some good and deep work was done by some. Coverage was dominated by the huge debate over affirmative action at the University of Michigan, which was before the Supreme Court. There were also obituaries of noted people of color. And there were many lawsuits alleging racial or sexual discrimination in the workplace as well as coverage about health issues and housing discrimination.¹⁴

Finally, the research revealed that most of the stories were rooted in the present or the past; there was very little about the future. Perhaps that is not surprising since so much of the coverage was episodic. But the authors noted news coverage that is thematic and probing can result in stories that make a real difference.

“It is possible that news coverage of recent events like the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the U.S. Gulf states could offer a different picture....” That is coverage that asked pungent questions about the future. As we see, that is indeed what happened as reporters challenged officials and asked why the levees were not better able to protect largely black neighborhoods and why so many were left to fend for themselves.

Table 2
Topics That Dominated Coverage

Topic area	Dem-Gazette	The Rocky	Miami Herald	Des Moines	Free Press	Star-Tribune	Post-Dispatch	Cincy Enquirer	Philly Inquirer	Capital Times	Total
Sexual harass	0	47	8	10	1	4	3	6	11	4	94
Employment	7	6	6	4	5	5	9	2	12	8	64
Title IX/sports	2	5	3	4	3	10	7	2	9	2	47
Augusta golf	0	0	7	0	4	6	4	1	8	3	33
Civil rights	0	0	4	0	2	1	3	0	2	7	19
Wal-Mart	4	0	2	0	0	1	4	0	2	3	16
Other	4	15	11	8	7	14	21	5	11	8	104
Total	17	73	41	26	22	41	51	16	55	35	377

Source: Dorfman & Lingas, 2005

“News Coverage of Diet-related Health Disparities Experienced by Black Americans: A Steady Diet of Misinformation”

Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, March 2007

John Sankofa and Wendy L. Johnson-Taylor

This article makes trenchant observations about press coverage of nutrition issues as it affects black Americans. Blacks experience greater morbidity and mortality compared to whites for such diet-related issues as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stroke and obesity. Dietary behaviors among blacks certainly contribute to these outcomes. But mainstream media overly focus on behavior, the authors concluded, while largely minimizing other factors that influence health status.¹⁵ To make health coverage more relevant to blacks, a discussion of these other factors is paramount.

The authors acknowledge that health reporting is difficult, notwithstanding race. The researchers noted that reporters are much different than scientists who strive to be methodical in weighing variables and limitations of the research. But reporters on deadline often set aside variables as too nuanced, and this can frequently result in sensationalism and oversimplification. Nevertheless, mainstream media fail the black community with an approach that is *not* nuanced and tends to blame the victim for health outcomes, according to the authors.¹⁶

To be sure, it is documented that blacks eat fewer fruits and vegetables and more fast and fried foods, but pointing this out as principal reasons for high blood pressure and other physical ailments is not the whole story and is not productive, the authors concluded. They argue that black newspapers are better at reporting on health disparities between blacks and whites. These papers, they wrote, have a history of advocacy and interpretation and deliver a health message that is perceived as relevant.¹⁷

Blaming the Victim

Additionally, mainstream health news seems to focus on health-care developments instead of causality. When the news does focus on causality, the victim gets blamed much of the time. The authors say using behavioral and/or cultural characteristics as the primary explanation for racial disparities in diet-related disease is prevalent and counterproductive. A more complete examination¹⁸ of factors for these disparities should focus on:

- Cultural factors. Food selection, preparation, use and family help shape dietary norms. For example, “soul food” and social meals after church are two longstanding cultural traditions. Soul food is typically high in sodium and saturated fat—dietary factors linked to chronic disease processes.
- Socioeconomic factors. Food affordability is important. Low income black people tend to have less economic capacity to buy expensive, nutritious food and therefore tend to have unhealthy diets.
- Environmental factors. Food availability is also a factor. Supermarkets are a source for fresh fruits and vegetables, yet black communities have a dearth of supermarkets compared to white neighborhoods. A researcher analyzed 216 U.S. Census tracts in four states (North Carolina, Mississippi, Maryland and Minnesota) and found supermarkets are four times more common in predominantly white neighborhoods. In some black Cleveland neighborhoods, gas stations do big business in bread and milk.
- Psychological factors. Racism is said to stimulate unnatural and self-destructive behaviors. The authors cited a 1999 study that determined exposure to discrimination is associated with excessive drinking, smoking and lack of medicine compliance. That research also argued that food industry marketing and advertising influence food preference, food selection and product loyalty. For example, studies show that black-oriented prime-time television shows are twice as likely as mainstream ones to air food ads.
- Health system factors. An Institute of Medicine report entitled “Unequal Treatment” noted that different access and service delivery contribute to different health outcomes. The report said this fact is often left out of mainstream media health

reports regarding blacks. As a result, blacks end up more distrustful of the system and are less likely to heed any medical advice.

While this study did not examine content of newspapers, it drew valuable conclusions about what needs to happen to produce better health news for black people. "Considering the significant role of media in delivering health messages," the Journal report said, stories need to include an honest examination of all reasonable explanations for health disparities. Journalists, sociologists, health educators and other care providers should be trained to report health findings in culturally sensitive ways. Finally, the black media's approach to health-related issues should be a model.

**"News in Black and White: National Media Coverage of Race Relations in America"
Media Monitor, February 1990
*The Center for Media and Public Affairs***

Media Monitor is published 10 times a year by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a nonprofit and nonpartisan research center based in Washington, D.C. The center conducts scientific research on how the media covers political and social issues.

This study looked at how national television and weekly newsmagazines covered issues pertaining to race in 1989. It was a year dominated by crime, with racial assaults in the Bensonhurst neighborhood of New York, and a reported racially motivated murder of a pregnant woman in Boston that turned out to be a hoax. There was coverage of politics, with black men running for mayor of New York and governor of Virginia. And affirmative action was a front-burner issue with set aside programs before the Supreme Court. According to the study, the media spent a lot of time covering these issues, and a fair amount of attention was focused on issues of institutional racism. The institutions most frequently cited in stories for bias were business, the justice system, the schools, government, religion and sports.

To determine how national media covered race relations, the center analyzed all stories that discussed race throughout 1989. The study found that the three major TV networks devoted a total of 204 stories to race relations for a total airtime of 6 hours and 24 minutes. The newsweeklies printed a total of 114 stories for a whopping 2,302 column inches of type.¹⁹

In these publications, the study found, the issues of racial bias and racism were discussed extensively. Meaning the stories contained assertions about America's racist past through facts and data, or quoted individuals to that effect. More than 25 percent of stories flat-out argued that America is a racist country. One story in Time magazine quoted a New York official saying: "No matter what I accomplish as an individual, I will always be judged by what people see first—my color."

The study examined the issues of structural racism in the political/economic system; for example, asking the question “Do we live in a system designed by and for whites that necessarily discriminates against minorities?” The overwhelming conclusion of sources quoted in articles was yes. A U.S. News & World Report article quoted a report that stated: “African-Americans...have all been victims of an intellectual and cultural oppression that has characterized the culture and institutions of the United States...for centuries.” This study offers supporting evidence for the broad indictment that institutional bias or structural racism exists. And there are times when the media reports those assertions without acknowledging them, as this study illustrates.

Media Monitor has done some outstanding work quantifying how the media cover a multitude of issues, including those involving race. They are not applicable to our review, but are interesting nonetheless.

Conclusion

There is not much research that addresses the question of how the media covers structural racism. There are examples of news magazines and newspapers doing some good work on race issues and even prize-winning coverage that harshly examines America’s racial past. But there is agreement from research we reviewed that the Big Media are ill-equipped to sensitively report on issues of race by its very makeup. One aspect of that makeup is the fact that it is largely white and lacks the diversity to reflect the perspectives of the poor and people of color.

Furthermore, most of what newspapers write focuses on episodic or event-driven news stories that by their very nature lack context. One way to get better coverage of issues affecting black people is to offer more thematic coverage that would delve into the reasons for disparities in areas such as housing, education and health care. By doing that, the media would get beyond the behavioral factors that contribute to those disparities. We believe there is a lot of room for deeper analysis of the media’s coverage of discrimination as it pertains to blacks in housing, education, health care, the criminal justice system and employment.

The aforementioned studies and surveys shed some light on the practices of some newspapers and reflect people of colors’ attitudes towards mainstream media. The piece of research we have included that talks about the media’s increasing proclivity to focus coverage on more affluent readers could mean trouble for gaining greater attention for the poor.

Does that argue for more effort to improve black-oriented newspapers? Perhaps it does. But it is possible that given the increasing multicultural transformation of America, the mainstream press might be convinced to improve its coverage of minority issues if confronted with data exposing their shortcomings.

We are reminded of E.J. Dionne’s observations that there are many good stories out there exploring the disparities confronting the poor. The question is whether Big Media can be pushed to find them.

Figure 2
Allegations of Bias against Institutions

Allegations of bias against institutions

■ Stories involved charges of discrimination ■ Stories denied discrimination

Of all 121 stories about **institutions**



Of 23 stories about **business and the economic sector**



Of 21 stories about **schools**



Of 19 stories about the **justice system**



Of 14 stories about **tests**



Of 12 stories about **government**



Of 10 stories about **sports**



Of 7 stories about **churches**



Of 15 stories about **other institutions**



Source: An analysis by the Center for Media and Public Affairs of all stories published in national news magazines or broadcast on network evening newscasts in 1989 concerning race relations between blacks and whites

Methodology

A wide net was cast across the Internet and library resources for surveys, studies and databases that addressed how the media explains structural or institutional racism's impact in the coverage of racial disparities in education, the criminal justice system, housing, employment and health care.

First, we began by grouping the sources. We checked established media think tanks and organizations, as well as special interest groups such as the Hoover Institution, the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, the Center for Media and Public Affairs, American Journalism Review, NewsWatch at San Francisco State University, Aspen Institute, Freedom Forum, Columbia Journalism Review, and Editor & Publisher.

Second, commercial databases LexisNexis and Factiva were combed for published news accounts with any mentions/citations/pointers to such studies. The searches included such key words and phrases as: HLEAD((PEOPLE OF COLOR) OR (RACE OR RACIAL W/3 DISCRIMINAT! OR PROFIL! OR STEREOTYP! OR PREJUDICE OR BIGOT!)) AND ATL3(COLOR OR RACE OR RACIAL AND DISCRIMINAT! OR PROFIL! OR STEREOTYP! OR PREJUDICE OR BIGOT! and COVER! OR MEDIA OR TELEVISION OR TV OR RADIO) AND STUDY OR SURVEY! OR ANALY! OR REVIEW! OR POLL! OR REPORT! OR RESEARCH! W/10 COVERAGE OR (MEDIA OR TELEVISION OR TV OR RADIO W/3 COVER! OR ROLE EPRESENT! OR RESPONSIB! OR ACCOUNTAB! OR APPROACH!).

Third, a simpler search string of terms (university research study news "mainstream media" racial discrimination employment) was plugged into various search engines: Yahoo, Google, Dogpile and Google Scholar, a specialty search engine for academic research. A similar search string was employed in the Denver Public Library's Academic Premier database of scholarly journals.

Finally, the Aspen Institute, the Pew Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, the Clinton Library and Berkeley Media Studies Group were contacted directly for specific online paths to published research.

END NOTES

¹ Schoonmaker, M. E. (2008). Keeping Poverty on the Page: Covering an old problem in new ways. *Columbia Journalism Review*. Q&A with E. J. Dionne.

² “Rethinking the Discourse on Race: A Symposium on How the Lack of Diversity in the Media Affects Social Justice and Policy” was held at St. John’s University School of Law at the Ronald H. Brown Center for Civil Rights and Economic Development. The Center performs legal studies, research and projects focusing on underrepresented people.

³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸ Karen M. Rowley, a 1981 undergraduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, submitted her thesis “A Textual Analysis of Comparing the Content of Black Enterprise, Forbes and Fortune Magazines and the Message Each Presents to Its Readers” to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College as part of degree requirements for a Master of Mass Communication in the Manship School of Mass Communication.

⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰ Lori Dorfman and Elena O. Lingas of the Berkeley Media Studies Group conducted a “Racial Discrimination in the News” analysis for the Ford Foundation, October, 25, 2005.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹² Ibid., p. 3.

¹³ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵ Sankofa, John and Johnson-Taylor, Wendy L. (2007). New Coverage of Diet-related Health Disparities Experienced by Black Americans: A Steady Diet of Misinformation. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. S43.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. S43.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. S42.

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CONTENT AUDIT

Journalists have an important job in our society. They get to ask questions of everyone from the trash collector to the President of the United States. And most take their tasks very seriously, too. That's why reporters have gone to jail rather than reveal their confidential sources, and will risk their lives working in a war zone or trying to solve a murder. Their charge is to keep government accountable, and to inform the public about issues and events in a way that allows them to participate in our democracy.

These ideals motivate and guide journalists. But at the practical level, they are rather general. Every working journalist has to make decisions every day about who and what deserves his or her attention. Usually, "Participate in democracy?" is not the measure they consciously apply. Who or what journalists choose as central to stories and the context in which they highlight these people and institutions emerges from two primary instincts. One is the professional standards that every journalist learns in the newsroom or classroom, then applies and protects as part of a working community. Another is the interpretations and ideas they bring to these standards through the prism of their own experience.

Here is where, unfortunately, even well-intended journalists fall down. Their newsroom environment is predominantly male and white, and what the public reads in the newspapers across the country reflects the collective biases of the news judgments made by this demographic group. When the newspaper lands in the mailbox or driveway each morning, it contains all of the stories about politics, international affairs, local news and culture that they deem to be significant.

Decisions on Sourcing

Equally important, journalists make decisions about whom, and what sources, they will use to tell these stories. Both consciously and subconsciously, their decisions on sourcing influence the ways in which readers perceive others. If Asian-Americans are repeatedly quoted as authorities in computer technology, it reinforces the stereotype that they are proficient in that field. At the same time, if African-Americans are repeatedly quoted only in sports stories, it feeds impressions that blacks are good at sports but not much else. This "sourcing" aspect of the media is frequently overlooked. But as we closely examine how the media covers structural racism in America, sourcing issues can be an important barometer for determining the extent to which the media fuels negative stereotypes of black people and other minority groups.

Journalists make subjective decisions about the news value of the stories they report on, and in turn, which sources to use. Generally, they know to apply norms and measures that reflect their institution's priorities. Who and what is "important?" A big employer and its top executive, a powerful politician, and the public-transportation system would qualify. When does an event have "impact?" When it affects a lot of people, especially in a big way.

But even the answers to these questions are not as straightforward as they might seem. They are made within the context of a specific culture and a specific life. Newspaper reporters work within the infrastructure of the newsroom, vying with other reporters for attention to their stories, pitching editors on ideas and negotiating with them for time to pursue these, and responding to the needs of filling the daily “news hole” with quality journalism. They know what kinds of stories will grab the attention of the editors in the front office, and which ones will be met with silence or even a raised eyebrow.

The variety of people who staff a news operation and who occupy its ladder of hierarchy matters greatly in building the shared culture that helps journalists decide what’s newsworthy and what’s not. Independently and collectively, reporters and editors bring the context of lived experience into the room and apply it to their news judgment. The Maynard Institute for Journalism Education uses a Fault Lines framework to explain this context—the forces that shape our lives, experiences and the social tensions within society. The late Robert C. Maynard, one of the Institute’s founders, identified these central forces as race, class, gender, generation and geography.

The Fault Lines mold the ways in which we assess the importance and meaning of issues and events. Together, they can be seen as the prism through which journalists—and their newsrooms as a whole—decide what to cover and how.

Used as an analysis, the Fault Lines can help journalists extend beyond their personal experience when covering the news. They can bring fresh insight to the reporter’s task of interpreting and writing about social developments. In our extensive review of sourcing by major newspapers, we deploy the Fault Lines to evaluate the framework through which newspapers present the nation, its residents and their central concerns.

Methodology

Our sample incorporates front-page news stories from each of five major metropolitan dailies: the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, USA Today and Los Angeles Times. In order to free the story sample from the influence of big news events or season, we constructed two weeks of randomly selected days (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc.) for each of 2006 and 2007. We coded the front page of each of our newspapers from identical days of the two randomly selected weeks.

We focused on front-page stories because these have been judged by editors to be the most important news of the day. Audiences also give front-page news priority. According to one recent analysis by Scott Althaus and David Tewksbury of the University of Illinois, front-section news accounted for two-thirds of the articles that print audiences read.¹ As top stories, we can also assume these choices have a good chance of inclusion on newspaper Web sites and in Internet news aggregators. Their impact, then, likely reaches beyond print subscribers. While online editors do seem to give preference to the fast-breaking as

opposed to “important,” front-section news stories still accounted for 41 percent of stories read by Web audiences in the Althaus-Tewksbury study.

It is reasonable to assume that newspaper front pages emphasize national, international and political news more than other topics. Our decision to focus on front pages thus may have limited the overall topic range, offering only a limited window on source use. But there are advantages, too. The news values we describe above are applied even more stringently to front-page news, and a small group of top news editors make the placement decisions. As a result, front-page sourcing focuses our attention on newsroom culture as a whole, rather than decision making by individual reporters.

We used the Maynard Institute content-audit software to facilitate the coding. Working closely with the original programmer, we altered the coding fields somewhat in order to develop measures more closely tailored to our goal of understanding structural racism. Maynard’s traditional analysis includes story section, type, topic, placement and geographic location by the five fault lines (race, class, gender, generation, and geography). We adjusted these to add three additional story characteristics: story tone, frame and central character. All three of these latter measures can offer insight into the impact of coverage choices on public perceptions. Communication researchers have found that race and framing interact to influence audiences’ risk assessment² and policy decision making. David Domke at the University of Washington, for instance, tested reader reaction to stories about immigration. He found that they made very different political judgments when presented with material, compared to ethical, or moral, frames.³ Material frames activated stereotypes, which readers then applied in making decisions.

We also reviewed and amended the field choices in class, occupation, generation and race in order to narrow coding alternatives and promote improved coding consistency. For the analysis itself, we manually compiled the sums from each paper automatically generated by the software. We also manually compared some of the data that were available only on spreadsheet due to our adjustments to the coding system.

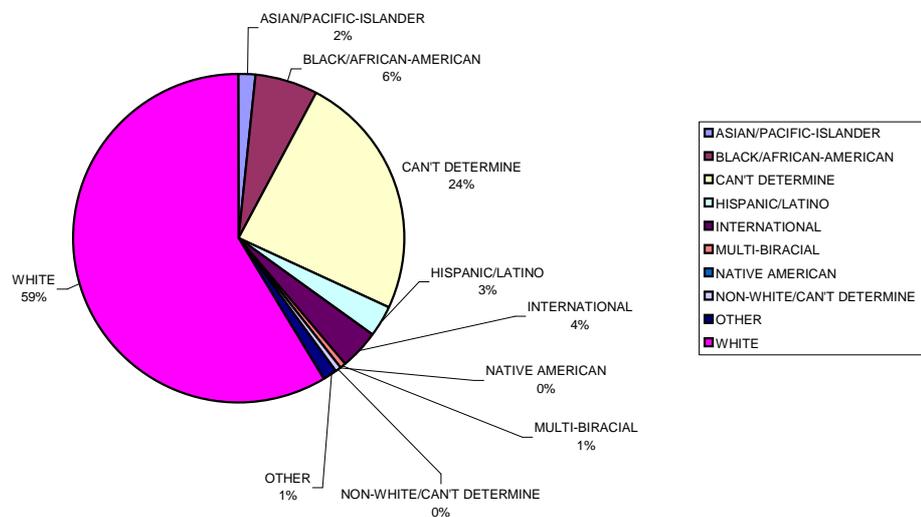
Our coders identified 2,988 sources in our four-week sample of front-page stories in five newspapers. We sorted our results by the Maynard Institute’s Fault Lines.

Race

We asked our coders to be extremely careful in identifying race and not to make guesses. They attempted to reach each source by phone or email in order to verify source characteristics. As a result, we concluded the study with a high proportion of “can’t determine race” results (24%). Nevertheless, we were able to conclude that reporters in our sample overwhelmingly relied on whites as sources (59%). The second most common source group, African-Americans, trailed that by a huge margin at just 6 percent. Hispanics made up 3 percent of all sources, and Asian-Americans followed at 2 percent. Native American sources did not appear often enough to reach even 1 percent of sources. There

were only three across the entire sample. International sources, who could be of any race but lived outside of the U.S., made up 4 percent of sources. In this analysis we concentrate on trends among black, Asian-Pacific Islander, Hispanic and white sources because of the low number of sources in the other groups we tallied. The pie chart in figure 3 shows the overall breakdown of source use by race and ethnicity across all the newspapers we studied.

Figure 3
Race of Sources



The preponderance of white sources held up over all story topics except one: immigration. The 11 immigration stories in our sample featured 76 sources overall. These were mainly Latino, white, and black voices (see table 3).

Table 3
Immigration Story Sources by Race and Ethnicity (Sources=76)

RACE/ETHNICITY	SOURCES
Asian, PI	4%
Black/African-American	9%
Hispanic/Latino	32%
White European	29%
Can't determine, other	26%

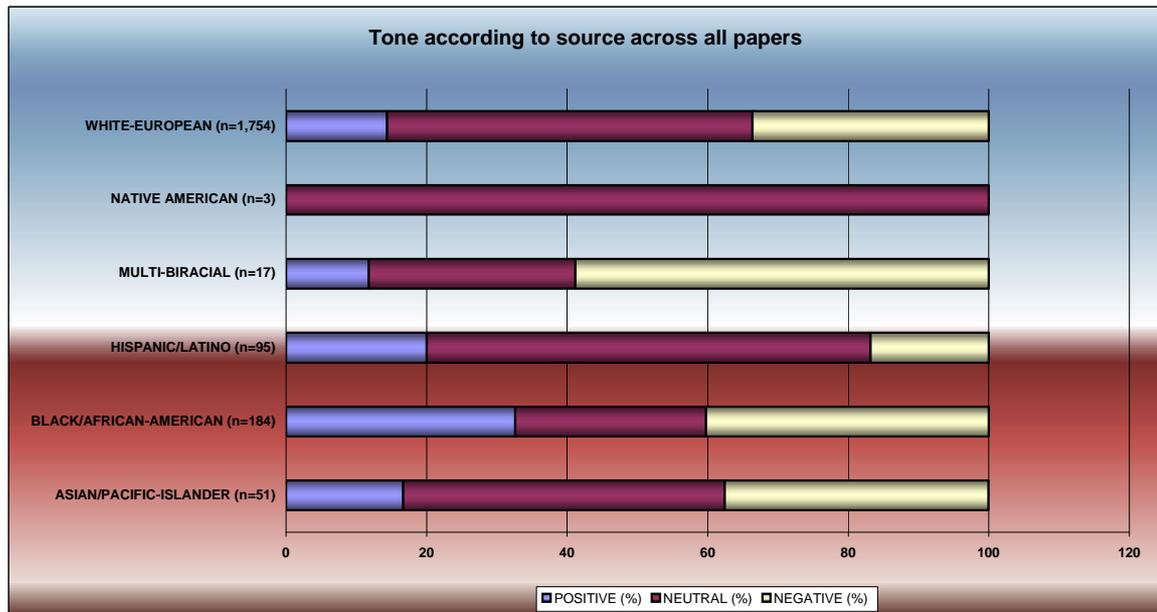
Tone According to Source Group

For this part of the analysis, we evaluated the tones that dominated within each source group. Coders evaluated tone by determining whether it communicated a positive, neutral or negative association. They relied on the content text and any emphasis on positive or negative word choices for this judgment, not on the topic itself.

Hispanic/Latino sources appeared most often in stories with a neutral tone (43 percent). Neutral stories also were the norm for white sources (52 percent), although negative stories also outweighed the positive (34 percent vs. 14 percent). Asian-Pacific Islander sources found themselves primarily in neutral (46 percent) or negative (36 percent) stories. African-American sources were also weighted toward negative stories (40 percent), followed by positive (33 percent). They garnered less attention in neutral stories (27 percent). Native Americans appeared as sources in such small number we did not evaluate tone (see Figure 4).

Our findings seem to indicate that journalists may be over-selecting both Asian-Pacific Islanders and African-Americans for stories with a point of view. In stories with a positive tone, Asian-Americans in particular did not seem to come to mind. For neutral stories, black sources were not usually contemplated. Even disproportionate presence in positive stories can distort perceptions of these groups, with the sources featured being perceived by audiences as exceptional.

Figure 4
Tone according to source across all papers in selected racial/ethnic groups.



Frames According to Source Group

We analyzed story frames in the same manner in which we analyzed tone—by examining whether reporters tended to place certain racial or ethnic groups of sources into certain frames. We analyzed how often each source group was used in stories that emphasized consequences, human interest or morality; or that framed the news or issue as primarily the result of individual, institutional or structural responsibility or action.

The framing analysis identified some trends. Consequences were a popular frame for all racial and ethnic groups, involving about one-quarter of stories for each. Another one-quarter of stories emphasized human-interest frames in all groups except whites. Asian-American voices were placed most often in stories framed around institutional responsibility, with the least voice in those focused on morality, or individual or structural responsibility. Black and Latino voices also were framed regularly within individual or institutional-responsibility stories, but not as often in stories with a structural emphasis. Hispanic voices were rarely applied within morality frames (see figures 5-8).

Figure 5
Frames Used for Asian-Pacific Islanders

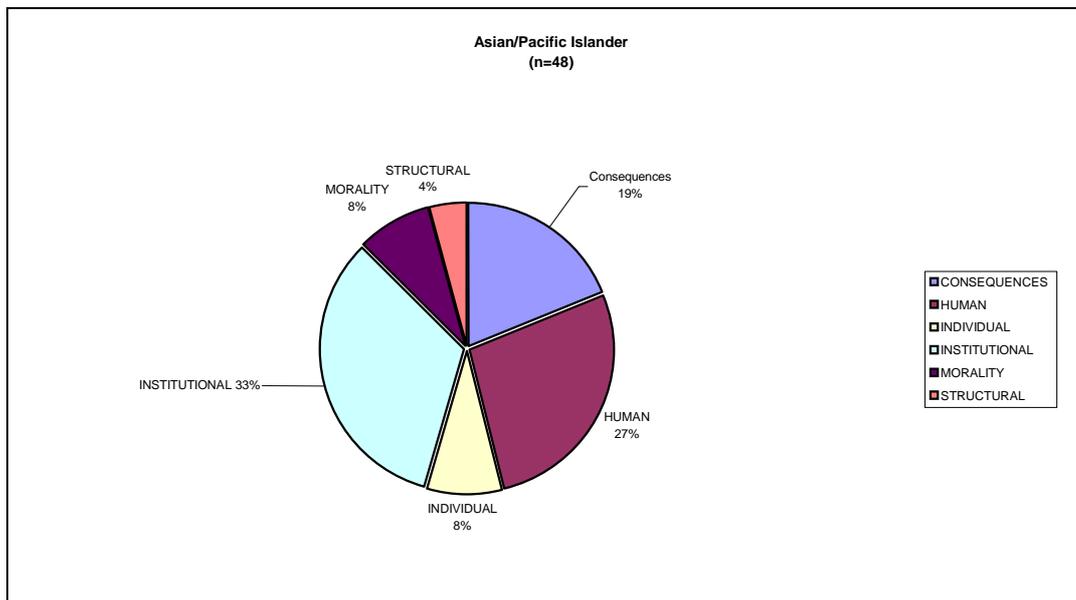


Figure 6
Frames Used for African-Americans

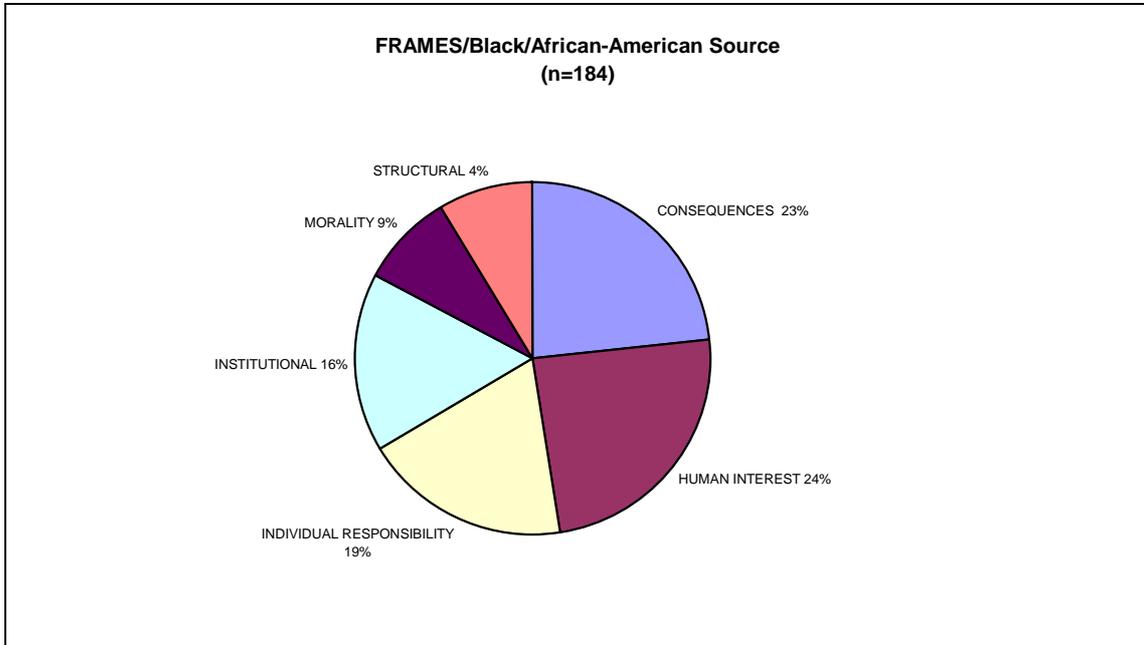


Figure 7
Frames Used for Hispanics

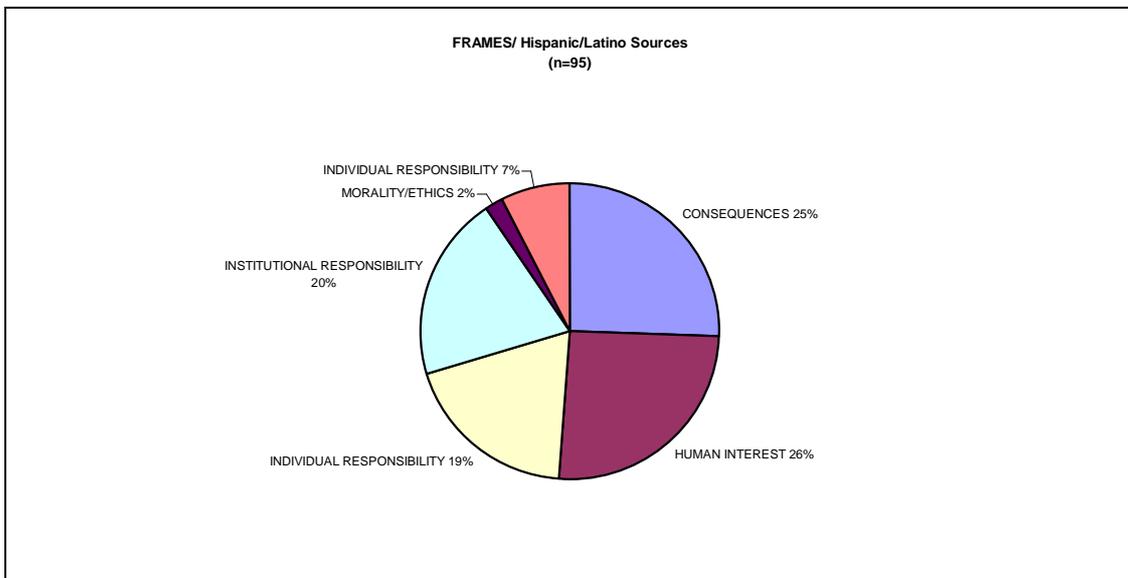
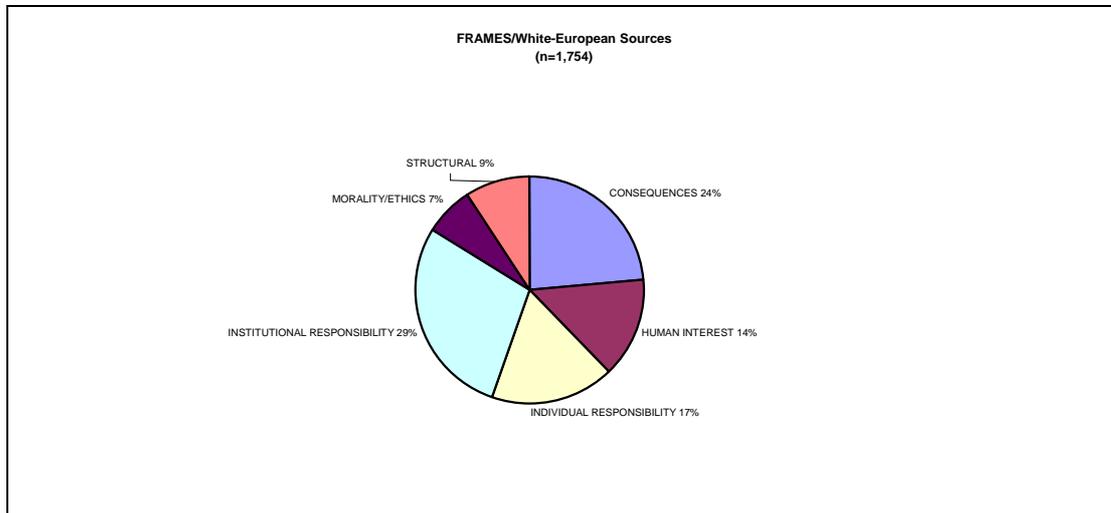


Figure 8
Frames Used for whites



Topic

The high proportion of white sources in our sample clouded our ability to sort out other demographic choices reporters make when working on specific topics. Even so, we found it valuable to assess the topics in which some groups held a slightly stronger voice, and where they were missing entirely. Higher education, workplace and race/ethnicity stories across all five papers each included fewer than 10 sources so these were dropped across all Fault Lines and measures. Weather was also excluded because of a high proportion of “can’t determine” race (63 percent), and accidents for the same reason (31 percent). We also removed accidents because of a coding error. Across our 27 remaining topics, we were able to identify some trends.

African-American sources rose above their average use by reporters (6 percent) in local government, sports, civil rights, parenting/families, immigration and courts/criminal justice (see Table 4). Black sources made up less than 1 percent of those consulted for arts/entertainment and science/technology stories in this sample.

Table 4
Black Sources and Number of Stories in Topic Area

TOPIC	Total Sources	# Stories	Percentage Black/African-American
Local Government	34	6	44%
Sports	92	12	34%
Civil Rights	86	12	21%
Parenting/Families	27	5	11%
Immigration	76	11	9%
Courts, Criminal Justice	96	18	8 %

Asian-Pacific Islanders made up a proportionately larger share of sources on the topics of religion (4 percent of 50 sources) and science/technology (6 percent of 135 sources) than their average (2 percent) across all stories in the sample. Their voices were almost entirely missing from stories about arts, beauty, consumer, courts, housing, local government, obituaries, parenting, state government, travel and war.

Latino sources reached a higher proportion than their average (3 percent) in stories about civil rights (5 percent), crime (4 percent), international topics (12 percent), and religion (16 percent) than their average across all story types (3 percent). In immigration stories they dominated at 32 percent of all sources used. Hispanics were all but absent as voices in stories about arts, beauty, the presidential campaign, environment, local government, obituaries, parenting/family and travel.

The topics in which white voices dropped to lower than 45 percent were education K-12, immigration, local government, parenting/family, religion and science/technology. They made up 45 percent to 50 percent of sources in beauty, environment and sports. White voices reached their highest proportion in the obituaries (82 percent).

We did not include Native Americans, multi- or biracial, international or other nonwhite sources in this analysis because they were used so rarely.

When considering use of sources by race and ethnicity, a comparison to cultural and social stereotypes can be useful. Why do Asian-Americans emerge disproportionately in science/technology stories, while African-Americans are absent? Why do Latinos rise to a larger proportion in immigration, religion and international topics, but disappear in stories about the environment or travel?

As many other source audits have shown, reporters think of calling and quoting African-Americans when it comes to sports and civil rights. In addition, numerous studies have found African-Americans to be overrepresented as criminal suspects, especially in connection with violent crime.⁴ In our 31 crime stories, we did not find African-American voices to be out of proportion to their use overall. Parenting and local government reflect two interesting areas where black voices emerge in this study, but the source samples were fairly small.

When observing these patterns, we also might consider beat practices. Some of the “softer” beats, such as religion and parenting, seem to include more diversity in sourcing. These are also newer, less traditional topic areas for the news.

Class

Reporters also consulted the class groups we surveyed in a somewhat consistent pattern. Whether positive, negative or neutral; no matter the frame or part of the country, professional and executive sources dominated. Professionals were somewhat more popular

with reporters than executives, however. These two classes dominated across almost all topics, with other groups making up less than one of 10 sources. In some topics we did find one or two additional classes of sources brought in slightly more often:

- Beauty (line workers 19 percent, small business 13 percent)
- Education K-12 (managers 14 percent)
- Environment (managers 15 percent)
- Housing (managers 11 percent)
- Immigration (line workers 24 percent)
- Parenting (managers 11 percent)
- Travel (managers 12 percent).

Crime and features included the most egalitarian mix of classes. Crime included executives, 19 percent; line workers, 10 percent; managers, 11 percent; no paid employment, 14 percent and professionals, 29 percent. Features included administrative workers, 3 percent; executives, 23 percent; line workers, 11 percent; no paid employment, 11 percent; professionals, 30 percent and small business, 3 percent. Weather included 48 percent in the “can’t determine” class. Workplace and race/ethnicity stories included 10 or fewer sources, so these were dropped from the sample. One group was almost never consulted on any topic: minimum-wage workers.

Gender

We found a surprisingly consistent pattern in the gender of sources by topic. Across all the topics we evaluated, men appeared in greater proportion than women at a ratio of about three to one (see tables 5-7). Topics that showed more gender balance were education K-12, with women included as sources 47 percent of the time, and environment, with women included 48 percent of the time. However, women were the dominant sources in stories about beauty at 72 percent and parenting/family at 67 percent.

Story type and tone did not influence the use of women as sources. The proportion of men to women in positive, negative and neutral stories remained close to the same ratio of 3:1. Representation remained at close to the same proportions regardless of story frames, although women appeared as sources slightly more often (30 percent of sources) in human-interest stories and less often (16 percent) in stories that focused on institutional responsibility.

Table 5
Highly Male Dominant Topics (Over 80%)

TOPIC	MALE SOURCES
Sports	95%
War/Military	90%
International	88%
Federal gov't	85%
Business/Finance	86%
Economy	84%
Weather	85%
Arts/Entertainment	83%
Housing	82%

Geography

Here again we found a fairly consistent pattern. Regardless of our measure, most of the stories relied on urban sources—typically about 60 percent to 70 percent of those consulted. Suburban sources made up a relatively large proportion of positive stories (21 percent), compared to their role in negative (13 percent) and neutral (16 percent) stories. Urban sources played a larger role than suburban or rural sources across almost all topic areas, with a few exceptions, shown in table 6. Sourcing was geographically balanced only on the topic of environment.

Table 6
Geographic Sourcing by Topic

	Crime	Environment	Immigration	Parenting
Can't Determine	16%	25%	11%	15%
Rural	15%	21%	13%	11%
Suburban	35%	24%	22%	33%
Urban	35%	29%	53%	41%

Note: Crime, n=198 sources; Immigration, n=76; Environment, n=62; Parenting, n=27

Discussion

Because of the volume of data and the heavy skew in our results toward white sources, we limited our final analysis to single source characteristics (race, class and gender, for example), instead of attempting to identify trends in combination (gender or class choices within race, for example). Cross-analyzing sourcing in this way might yield further interesting insight into the ways in which journalists select particular types of voices for their stories. A larger sample or oversampling of sources that are not white would also likely be a productive strategy to better understand how and when they are used. We also have

only partial data on our stories' central character, or subject. We intend to revisit this question once we have corrected the coding error responsible.

When contemplating our data, it is necessary to take into account the pool of potential sources available to reporters. Journalists look to sources for a mix of reasons, but usually they ask people to comment on an event or issue for one of four reasons: The source may be an expert on the news event or issue, be involved in it, be a knowledgeable observer or be directly affected in some way. Because of this range of purposes applied to sources, it is hard to evaluate just who should be considered as qualified candidates. The proportion of experts in a particular field, say, or those employed by a certain company does not suffice. That is why it is common in sourcing studies simply to consider sourcing patterns in the context of the population that a particular publication serves. Arguably, because of their national scope, these papers aim to serve all of the cities listed in table 7 plus other major population centers throughout the U.S. The racial/ethnic demographics of the primary cities in our study, as well as the U.S. as a whole, are shown in the table.

Table 7
Racial/Ethnic Demographics of Primary Cities by Percentage

	Asian-American, Pacific Islander	Black/African-American	Hispanic/Latino	White European	Native American	Multi- or Bi-Racial
United States	4.5	12.4	14.8	73.9	0.8	2.0
Los Angeles	10.6	9.6	48.9	47.1	0.6	2.9
New York	11.7	25.1	28	43.9	0.3	2.0
Washington, D.C.	3.4	55.4	8.2	34.5	0.3	1.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

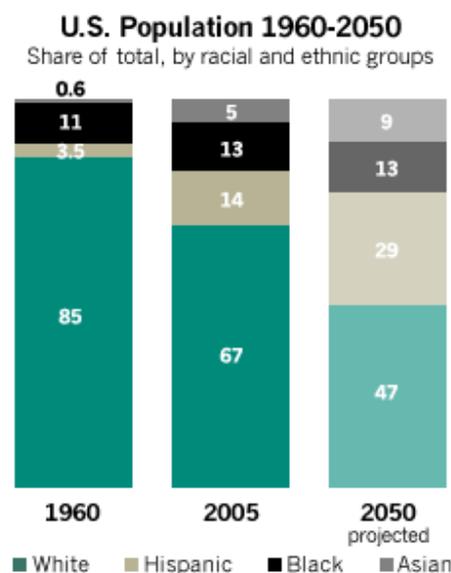
The diversity of these cities would seem to require a diversity of sources. At the same time, we argue that the diversity within a specific geographic area should not be the sole measure of adequacy in source diversity. After all, the news media seeks to inform the democratic enterprise, which stretches across the country and includes areas of great diversity as well as more homogeneous locations. Furthermore, the U.S. population rapidly is becoming more diverse, and not just in selected cities. By 2050, according to the Pew Research Center's projected trends, 20 percent of U.S. residents overall will be immigrants, 30 percent Hispanics, and a minority (49 percent) will be white. African-Americans will make up 13.4 percent of the population, and Asian-Americans, 9 percent (see figure 9). This compares to the sourcing pattern we identified of 3 percent Latino, 6 percent African-American, 2 percent Asian-American, and almost no Native American sources.

Presumably, journalists do not seek to inform some people about some groups, or even some groups about all people. Rather, they seek to inform all the people of this country in

order to give them the tools to participate in a democratic society in a full and informed manner. Thus, it is central to the mission and values of news to include all aspects of U.S. society, and all its peoples, fairly and accurately. Based on the results of this study, however, journalists are not succeeding in realizing this mission.

The trends that emerge in sourcing across all the Maynard Fault Lines in this study point back to a reliance on automatic decision making. News reporting takes place at a fast pace, with little time for reflection or correction along the way. Reporters select sources for their knowledge, voice and perspective, as well as their accessibility. The people journalists rely on when reporting on a particular topic tend to be whoever comes to mind first. In the news business, this is a dangerous practice because it leads to predictable patterns more reflective of implicit bias than the facts and circumstances reporters aim to cover.

Figure 9
U.S. Population by Race and Ethnicity



Source: Pew Research Center

Cognitive psychologists have measured the power of reflexive thinking in the Implicit Association Test.⁵ If we do not apply our conscious minds, we all have a tendency to act on stereotypes that pervade our culture: Asian-Americans as good at science and technology or women as the obvious choice for stories about beauty. Would a minimum-wage worker know something about the environment or politics? Why ask a black American about science, or an Asian-Pacific Islander about the courts? “We get put on these socially constructed railroad tracks that we’re not aware of and we think we can go anywhere,” says Mahzarin Banaji, a Harvard University experimental psychologist who is one of the test inventors.

Instead, of course, we end up sticking to the program. The effect, she says, can be as simple as reacting to whatever type of person you saw last. Even if a journalist has consciously constructed a diverse source list, if she interviews one white, male marine biologist at a conference, she is likely to choose the same source demographics for her next. Working in a newsroom surrounded by 87 percent white men and women might limit her instinct to reach for the phone number of a Latina or American Indian.

What should give journalists even more pause, however, is the impact of this speed thinking. Substantial research indicates the power of news media to not only create stereotypes, but also to activate existing ones.⁶ “The thing about this is its contagion value, with each one of the things that led into it not really seeming that important,” Banaji says. When readers are presented with a certain set of people in a certain set of roles, according to Banaji, most do not question the sample—they assume it represents the whole.

Framing choices such as those we observed have had measurable effects. Latinos in our sample rarely appeared in stories that emphasized moral frames, and yet dominated in immigration stories. This is a recipe predisposed toward priming readers’ stereotypes about Hispanics themselves when they contemplate immigration policy, according to Domke’s findings. When the consequences or human-interest frames dominate the voices of all racial or ethnic groups except whites, skewed perceptions can take hold. Racial inequities may appear to be the consequence of individual action, and public attention turns away from the powerful role of structural interactions. Without enough context both heroic stories and stark evidence of disparities can further stigmatize the people involved.⁷

When reporters push open the boundaries of which groups have a voice in which situations, it matters. Story sourcing that steps outside of unconscious limitations in turn offers fresh opportunities for audience insight. Collectively, opportunities can expand. The public will be inspired to open up new areas of inquiry and knowledge, Banaji proposes, and ultimately, will make better decisions. And an informed public that can make solid decisions, after all, is journalists’ highest goal.

END NOTES

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COVERAGE ANALYSIS OF MAJOR NEWSPAPERS

One of every five Hispanics doesn't get enough nutritious food to eat. A state commission recommends paying reparations for a white riot in a North Carolina city and declares the violent episode of 1898 the only successful municipal insurrection in American history.

A white serial killer pleads guilty to murdering eight black women in Peoria, Ill., after police are charged with conducting a lackadaisical investigation because of the victims' race and criminal histories. The NAACP files a lawsuit accusing a dozen lenders of "institutionalized, systematic racism" in steering African-Americans to subprime mortgages with high interest rates.

If all of that is news to most Americans, they are not to be blamed. Those true stories over the past two years were underplayed—if they played at all—in the nation's mainstream print media.

An examination of news coverage of "structural racism" during 2006 and 2007 finds that the editors and reporters of the nation's largest newspapers and main wire services, like most white Americans surveyed in recent opinion polls, appear to believe systematic discrimination based on race or ethnicity is no longer much of a problem.¹

The coverage of seven mainstream media was reviewed in a content analysis: two wire services, Associated Press and Reuters; and five daily newspapers, the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, USA Today, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post. The first question explored was whether the print outlets covered 20 major stories about structural racism, 10 each in 2006 and 2007, pertaining to discriminatory laws, policies and practices that impact housing, employment, health care, criminal justice and education for racial-ethnic minorities. These 20 stories led to the publication of a total of 273 articles in the seven media. The articles were categorized by their page placement, type of article, use of racially explicit language and the identity of their principal sources.²

A Few Familiar Stories

A few of the major stories received broad media exposure and may be familiar to many Americans, such as the shooting death of Sean Bell by New York police on his wedding day in 2006 and the protest last year in Jena, La., against heavy criminal charges brought against six black teenagers who became known as the Jena Six. Other major stories received less coverage in media of all kinds and are likely to be unfamiliar even though they involved such important national issues as the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, police torture, school desegregation and minority health disparities. The entire list of the top stories, by year, is in the Appendix.

The content analysis found that the stories were rarely front-page news, and when they were, the racial angle was frequently buried or stated in indirect language. The words “racism” or “discrimination,” or their derivatives, were rarer still in news stories, opinion columns and editorials. This pattern of understatement is a countertrend in an era when news media have become more explicit, for instance, about the truthfulness of political statements and the details of sex acts.

It is true that the structural racism of the 21st century is not as open and conscious as it was before the Civil Rights Movement of the last century. Policies and practices are generally not fashioned with a stated intent to discriminate, though their creators may be guided by unexpressed assumptions and shared biases that produce that effect. As a whole, the mainstream media examined have failed to devote adequate reporting resources or tap the best sources to uncover and expose “what is really going on.”

The bulk of the coverage of this subject has arrived in spot stories, with miniscule numbers of analytical, investigative and feature articles that probed beneath the surface and humanized the principals in the news. The coverage has relied too much on officials as the first source, whose quotes framed a story, and the primary source, whose words were given the most space. At the same time, civil-rights leaders and academic researchers, who together could have brought a depth of knowledge about structural racism, have virtually disappeared as news sources. Why bother to quote people devoted to opposing or studying something journalists believe no longer remains a problem?

The overall result of the mainstream media approach is coverage that is underplayed, understated, imbalanced and superficial.

What’s Covered Is Limited

To select major stories about structural racism, lists of “top stories of the year” compiled by mainstream and ethnic media were reviewed. From this review, two limitations of the coverage were clear.

First, news media paid considerably more attention to stories about criminal justice than any other system with racial-ethnic disparities. Stories about education, employment, health and housing were few. To balance the list of 10 major stories culled for each year, the archives of a specialty online publication, the Kaiser Weekly Health Disparities Report, and a general reference book, the Facts on File compilation of “Major World News,” were surveyed. Still, five of 10 stories from 2006 and four of 10 from 2007 concerned criminal justice.

Second, the news covered about structural racism was overwhelmingly about African-Americans—despite the emergence of Hispanics since 2000 as the nation’s largest racial-ethnic minority. This dominant pattern may have reflected, in part, mainstream media not broadening their focus to fit changing demographics. Nomenclature may also have come

into play. Because Hispanics may be of any race, conceiving of systematic discrimination against them as “racism” is imprecise at best, though Hispanic-owned newspapers sometimes have used the term inclusively. There is a need for a new coinage for anti-Hispanic bias.

Finally, the biggest story that concerned Hispanics in both years was immigration reform, which is difficult to categorize as a matter of structural racism. But the enforcement of immigration law can be discriminatory, as reflected in one story selected. As a result of these patterns in news coverage, stories primarily about Hispanics are underrepresented on the lists selected for 2006 and 2007, even after the inclusion of two found in a general web search of “Hispanic news.” Some stories, about school desegregation and health disparities, for example, broadly related to racial-ethnic minorities, including Hispanics.

If and How Stories Played

The seven mainstream print media covered an average of 75 percent of the structural racism stories. That relatively high average is based on a generous definition of “coverage” that counts a one-sentence brief, a paragraph in a larger story and an opinion column that is the only article in a daily paper to mention a news event.

Not surprisingly, a wire service, Associated Press, offered the broadest coverage, reporting 95 percent of the stories, or all but one. AP was followed by the New York Times at 90 percent, and the Washington Post and Los Angeles Times, both at 85 percent.

Coverage was the least comprehensive in the Wall Street Journal, which reported 35 percent of the stories. USA Today and Reuters were also below average at 65 percent.

It might be expected that the Wall Street Journal, with its focus on business and economy, would have covered the fewest stories. The paper has, for instance, little interest in the kind of crimes involved in the criminal justice stories considered. But neither did the Journal bite on stories that directly related to business or the economy.

The paper did not report the NAACP’s lawsuit against subprime mortgage lenders in July 2007. Nor did the Journal devote a line of space on the Supreme Court rebuke in February 2006 of a lower court for its adverse ruling on a job discrimination lawsuit filed against Tyson Foods Inc. by two black employees passed over for promotions. With that ruling, an increasingly conservative Supreme Court that has made it more difficult to win a race discrimination lawsuit showed it would go only so far in that direction—striking down an appellate ruling that a disparity in qualifications must be “so apparent as to virtually jump off the page and slap you in the face.” Ultimately, Tyson paid about \$800,000 in a settlement.

Lack of Health Coverage

The least covered stories both concerned health. Only the Washington Post covered a December 2007 report by the National Council of La Raza that found nearly one in five Hispanics lacks sufficient access to nutritious food. The civil-rights group concluded poverty was not the only cause, also citing linguistic, cultural and legal barriers to Hispanics enrolling in federal antihunger programs.

Only AP covered the federal report on minority health disparities released in January 2007. It was the fourth annual report about a life-threatening problem that the Institute of Medicine documented is partly caused by racism in the health-care system.³ Government reports issued year after year can be repetitive, the AP story acknowledged, and therefore less newsworthy over time. The AP reporter took a fresh angle: disparities in preventive care.⁴

Most of the mainstream media did not cover the May 2006 report on the white riot in Wilmington, N.C. That the panel recommended that business as well as government pay reparations was not enough to stimulate coverage by the Journal or Reuters, both of which have a particular focus on business news. Given the statute of limitations has so far stymied lawsuits seeking reparations for slavery, there was news value in an officially sanctioned report that embraced a moral obligation to pay compensation for the loss of life and property during a white insurrection that occurred in the same century that slavery ended.

Besides the Journal, the NAACP lawsuit was not reported by two other papers, USA Today and the Post. The filing of a lawsuit is not often major news. But the subprime mortgage crisis was a big story in 2007, and a legal complaint in federal court from the nation's oldest and largest civil-rights organization that African-Americans were unfairly forced into that market—possibly increasing foreclosures and contributing to damage to the nation's economy—was worthy of coverage.

Even when mainstream media “covered” the story, they sometimes did not write about the structural racism angle. In February 2006, all media but the Journal in this study published articles about the U.S. House of Representatives releasing a tough report that criticized the government's inept responses to Hurricane Katrina. The 500-page document identified, sometimes in structural terms, the causes of what it called “mistakes, misjudgments, lapses, and absurdities.”

In the immediate aftermath of the natural disaster followed by a man-made one, many media commented on whether the inept federal response owed to the fact predominately black, poor residents were left behind in New Orleans, some to die. This coverage in 2005 amounted to accusations of structural racism, which at bottom means an institution or an individual acting through an institution assigns less value to the lives of members of racial-ethnic minorities.

Missing the Obvious

In covering the House report on Katrina, not one newspaper or wire service mentioned this obvious racial angle or quoted a New Orleans official or academic who made that observation. If the story was that an all-Republican special committee did not explore a possible cause of the disastrous government response, that omission would have been the basis for a telling article about a literal whitewash.

In August 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau issued an annual report on Americans who live in poverty, in one set of statistics, and those who lack health insurance, in another. The mainstream media in this study made different decisions about whether to emphasize the new data on the impoverished or the uninsured. This was a judgment call.

Whichever emphasis was chosen, it is notable that only one paper mentioned the disparity in health coverage that affects racial-ethnic minorities. That reference was in the LA Times and came in a single sentence: “Latinos were more likely than any other ethnic group to be uninsured, with more than a third lacking coverage.”⁵ That level was about twice the national rate.

When the structural racism angle was included in other articles, it was sometimes buried. For two decades, civil-rights leaders and members of the Congressional Black Caucus have tried to eliminate a criminal justice disparity that sentences crack cocaine offenders to much longer terms in federal prisons than powder cocaine offenders. About 85 percent of federal inmates sentenced on crack-related charges were African-Americans. In December 2007, the Supreme Court made it clear that trial judges do not have to abide by the sentencing guidelines responsible for a lesser part of the sentencing disparity.

Astonishingly, the front-page article in the New York Times on the Supreme Court decision did not bring up the racial disparity in sentencing until the 28th paragraph.⁶ A significant percentage of readers do not read an entire front-page article that continues on an inside page. The racial disparity should have been mentioned in the part of the article on the front page, where the emphasis was on the implications for judicial discretion. The Associated Press, by contrast, referred to the disparity in the first paragraph of versions of its article for the next morning’s newspapers.⁷

Where Stories Played

Stories about structural racism made the front page an average of 20 percent of the time. The Los Angeles Times fronted the most stories, 30 percent, followed by the New York Times at 25 percent. The Post hit the average of 20 percent, while USA Today at 15 percent and the Journal at 10 percent were subpar.

The stories for 2007 were displayed more prominently, making front pages 32 percent of the time. The figure for the previous year was 8 percent. The major news was stronger in

2007 than 2006, accounting for some of the wide difference in prominent play. Some portion of the difference, though, can be attributed to mainstream media underplaying stories in 2006.

Only three of the 20 stories, or 15 percent, made the front page in the same paper twice. The LA Times, New York Times and Post gave that treatment on consecutive days to the crack cocaine disparity, reporting on Dec. 12, 2007, the U.S. Sentencing Commission's decision to making it possible for judges to reduce sentences retroactively for about 20,000 inmates.

In 2007, the Post fronted its advance story and then its next-day report on Sept. 21 about the civil-rights protest in Jena, La., against the heavy charges a white prosecutor brought against six black students who assaulted a white student at the local high school. The assault occurred in a racially-charged atmosphere after two nooses were hung from the "white tree" where only white students sat, traditionally.

On Nov. 28, 2006, the New York Times put out front its first story about city police killing Sean Bell and wounding his two companions in a barrage of 50 bullets that undercover officers fired at the black and Hispanic men outside a Queens nightclub on the same day Bell was to be married. On the front page four days later was an analytical follow-up that focused on the perils of undercover officers and recounted, in one paragraph, "the depressing roll call" of unarmed black residents who were killed when New York police unleashed deadly force in "questionable" circumstances.⁸

In the total count of articles placed on the front, including major stories given that prominent display more than once, the LA Times and New York Times led, tied with seven. The Post was next with six. Other major stories were clearly underplayed, particularly in 2006. The perfunctory treatment given the Wilmington, N.C., report has already been noted.

The sentencing of the Peoria serial killer of black women to life in prison was a wire brief in four papers. The story did not get even that in the Journal, or on the Reuters wire. The lack of mainstream media interest in probing why police in Peoria, Ill., were disinterested in pursuing a white serial killer of black victims reflects, in the extreme, media inattention to structural racism. Using Peoria as a symbol of the nation is a well-established convention of newspaper journalism, though overdone at times.

The Sean Bell story was another that got underplayed, except as a local story in the New York Times. From the fatal shooting through the five weeks until the end of 2006, the LA Times and Post ran only a single wire brief, and USA Today published the equivalent in a staff story about a broader subject.

The Post covered three of the 10 major stories in 2006 solely with wire briefs. A fourth story, about Florida boot camp guards beating to death a 14-year-old black boy, Martin Lee

Anderson, was covered with five wire briefs and a short wire story when seven guards and a nurse were charged. (They were acquitted last year.)

None of the five newspapers put on the front page the release of a report by special prosecutors in Chicago that corroborated allegations that a police unit had routinely used torture against suspects, mostly black, to coerce confessions. The four-year investigation found credible half of the 148 torture claims from the 1970s and 1980s, but concluded the statute of limitations precluded any new prosecutions. The lack of interest in prominently displaying that story, or probing it more deeply, contrasted with the heavy media attention given beginning in 2004 to the alleged torture used on Iraqi detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad. Those revelations touched off a continuing national debate about American use of torture. But the mainstream print media examined in this study did not turn the intensity of that debate on a pattern of torturing African-American suspects in one of the nation's largest cities.

Direct Wording Avoided

The wire services and big daily papers rarely used the “r-word.” About 9 percent of the 273 articles examined used the words “racism” or “racist.” Most often they appeared inside quotes. In articles about the Senate vote in May 2006 to declare English as the national language, all but the Journal published Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid’s quote denouncing the amendment to the immigration bill as racist.

A New York Times editorial backed away from such a forceful condemnation, calling the amendment “potentially discriminatory” and “xenophobic.”⁹ Was it really about a fear of foreigners in general, or as Senator Reid’s “racist” quote suggested, ethnic antipathy specifically towards Hispanics?

In other major stories, such quotes were sometimes denials from white sources. For example, the white quarterback at Jena High School told the LA Times for its Sept. 20, 2007, article ahead of the protest march: “We’re now on the map as a racist town, but the town I know, everyone pretty much gets along.”¹⁰ Mychal Bell, one of the Jena Six, who was initially charged in adult court with attempted murder, had played in the same backfield with the white quarterback on the football team. Bell obviously did not get along with Justin Barker, the white student he helped beat unconscious.

“Discrimination” does not have the edge that “racism” has, but was used only slightly more often, in about 13 percent of the stories. Again, the usage of “discrimination” sometimes came in quotes from white sources who were actually denying structural racism remains a problem—at least for racial-ethnic minorities.

In June 2007, the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional voluntary desegregation plans in Seattle and Louisville, Ky., that considered race in making student assignments in an effort to achieve racial balance in public schools. Most of the mainstream media quoted this

sentence from the plurality opinion of Chief Justice John Roberts: “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” Roberts appeared to be asserting that white students that were not assigned to their chosen school, because their transfers would not promote racial balance, were being discriminated against. His meaning in the Seattle case, at least, was more ambiguous. The plaintiffs were black and white, but none of the mainstream media described them that way.

Instead of “racism” or “discrimination,” mainstream media often preferred euphemistic phrases to describe the phenomenon. The LA Times story in advance of the Jena march said the attempted murder charge against Mychal Bell was “raising criticism that justice in this predominantly white Southern town is not colorblind.”¹¹ Such critics as Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and commentators in black-oriented media were using more direct language than “not colorblind.”

Two wire stories about the Jena march that moved the same day as the LA Times story was published were unusual in their prominent use of direct wording—outside quotes. The first paragraph of the AP story referred to nooses as “symbols of Old South racism.” In the Reuters story, the third paragraph put the Jena Six prosecution in this context: “The case has become a symbol for many blacks of a wider struggle against racism and perceived discrimination against black males by the criminal justice system.”

Who Got Quoted

Reporters have good reason to exercise caution in describing, on their own, a situation as a matter of racism. Important facts may be unknown, for one. A rush to judgment, as in the Duke University rape case in 2006, can damage the reporter’s and newspaper’s credibility. It is much safer to let a source characterize a situation as a matter of racism, though caution still needs to be exercised with quotations to avoid potentially libeling individuals.

But reporters do not often turn to the civil-rights leaders and academic researchers most likely to judge a situation as racist and provide quotes that make that conclusion. In both 2006 and 2007, the mainstream media in this study quoted officials first, and at the greatest length, in an average of 70 percent of their articles that touched on structural racism.

This overreliance on officials to frame and explain this kind of news can be avoided, as three news organizations partially did in 2007. In the LA Times, slightly less than half of the first sources were officials, and exactly half were in Reuters wire stories. Just over half of the main sources were officials in USA Today. These three media achieved that level of balance primarily by quoting ordinary people, who overall accounted for 20 percent of the sources for all articles in the sample.

Representatives of civil-rights organizations constituted an average of about 6 percent of the first sources quoted and 5 percent of the main sources for articles. Researchers affiliated with colleges or think tanks, including individuals who might deny the persistence

of racism, comprised 2 percent to 4 percent of sources. Lawyers were 1 percent to 2 percent of sources. That limited level of sourcing of civil-rights activists, academic researchers and lawyers was reflected in a general lack of depth in stories. Generally, reporters were not trying to dig deep—and they didn't.

Types of Stories

Excluding editorials and opinion articles, about 86 percent of the articles were spot news stories based on an event. The remaining 15 percent were news analysis, features or the rare investigative article. The absolute numbers perhaps illustrate the imbalance even more than the percentages. In two years, the seven mainstream media combined offered about three dozen nonspot news articles on the 20 different stories. That is less than two articles per major story, from seven different outlets. Given those small numbers, the analytical or investigative piece that provides insight and depth stood out. The New York Times was the leader on this small playing field.

In their opinions on voluntary school desegregation, Supreme Court justices debated which side in the 5-4 decision was following the legacy of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in 1954. The legal affairs reporter for the New York Times turned to the most authoritative sources alive—the justices who voted for the unanimous opinion in *Brown* are all dead. Adam Liptak interviewed three lawyers who argued the consolidated *Brown* case for the NAACP. They all said the Roberts-led majority misinterpreted *Brown*. One of those lawyers, federal Judge Robert L. Carter, said Roberts misconstrued in his opinion a quote from Carter's argument to the court in *Brown*. Another, Columbia Law Professor Jack Greenberg, called the chief justice's interpretation "preposterous" and a third, William T. Coleman Jr., branded the majority decision "100 percent wrong."¹²

The New York Times also obtained the preliminary police report in the Sean Bell shooting and ran a 3,500-word reconstruction on its Metro front that, among other details, reported an undercover officer at the shooting scene "believed the men in Mr. Bell's car knew he was a police officer because he had made contact with one of them. The report says Lieutenant Napoli could not articulate why he believed that."¹³ Ultimately, the New York police officers involved in the Nov. 25, 2006, shooting were acquitted.

In October 2007, the New York Times did an investigative, localized follow-up to the NAACP lawsuit filed that summer, documenting similar patterns of higher-income African-Americans receiving subprime mortgages in New York City. The report cited "a new analysis of home-loan data by researchers at New York University" and "a separate analysis of mortgage data by the New York Times." The article on the Metro Front, however, followed the pattern of understatement identified in this study by avoiding the words "racism" and "discrimination," even in a reference to the NAACP lawsuit that had charged lenders with "institutionalized, systematic racism."¹⁴

In 2006, the Associated Press moved two stories that were notable in the distance they went beyond spot coverage. An investigative article in March, though of modest length, cited documents from a county sheriff's office that indicated the use of force was routine in the Florida boot camp where Martin Lee Anderson received a videotaped beating that led to his death the next day.¹⁵

An analytical piece in May, at 1,100 words a long article for AP, put in historical context the Senate proposal to make English a national language. The article harked all the way back to the postindependence era and a John Adams proposal for a national academy to "purify, develop, and dictate usage" of English. Another paragraph reported: "Making English the nation's official language won wide support during and after World War I, when German-speaking immigrants constituted the nation's largest minority."¹⁶ The reporter left it to readers to see the obvious parallel between that language and Germans in that period, and English and Hispanics in the America of 2006. The AP might have noted, though, the high degree of anti-German sentiment in the country throughout the World War I era.

More Analysis Is Needed

More analytical and investigative articles like these five examples, plus more feature stories to humanize newsmakers, would greatly improve mainstream media coverage of structural racism. But they won't be written in any great number unless newspaper and wire service journalists re-examine their assumptions about the persistence of systematic racism, and open their ears and minds to knowledgeable civil-rights leaders and academic researchers.

This study has sought to document patterns that may already be apparent to alert, thoughtful readers. In a September 2006 op-ed column in the Washington Post, freelance writer Amina Luqman, an African-American, made this assessment of mainstream media coverage of the Jena Six:

Mainstream media outlets long ignored the Jena 6 or gave the case cursory summations. Their silence shows how mainstream journalists remain unwilling to tackle the issue of race. At best, racism is addressed when it is overt and simplistic, one ignorant act against an unsuspecting victim. Mix in the institutionalized racism of a town's criminal justice system, and journalists' eyes glaze over. When what happened in Jena has been reported, the media's language has been tepid—marked by such phrases as 'a town in turmoil' or 'racial strife rips a town apart.'¹⁷

That assessment could be applied more broadly to mainstream media coverage of structural racism over the past two years.

END NOTES

¹ See Nagourney, A. & Thee, M. (2008, July 16). Poll Finds Obama Isn't Closing Divide on Race. *New York Times*, p. 1. The Times poll found: "Four in 10 blacks say that there has been no progress in recent years in eliminating racial discrimination; fewer than 2 in 10 whites say the same thing. And about one-quarter of white respondents said they thought that too much had been made of racial barriers facing black people, while one-half of black respondents said not enough had been made of racial impediments faced by blacks."

² Other information was collected about the date, length, origin and frames of the articles. The frames were deemed too abstract for spot stories, which dominate the sample. The date and origin (staff, wire or contributor) were gathered as identifying information. Because the average length of stories varies in the media outlets, this data set was held for further analysis. Both wire services and USA Today, for instance, generally publish shorter stories than the four other newspapers examined.

³ See *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care* (2003). Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

⁴ Bridges, A. (2007, January 11). Government: Quality of Health Care Improving, but Prevention Remains a Missed Opportunity. *Associated Press*.

⁵ Gosselin, P.G. & Alonso-Zaldivar, R. (2007, August 1). Income Up, but There's a Catch; Data Show Households Are Earning More by Working Longer. Also, 5% More People Lack Health Insurance. *Los Angeles Times*, p. 1.

⁶ Greenhouse, L. Justices Restore Judges' Control over Sentencing. (2007, December 11). *New York Times*, p. 1.

⁷ Sherman, M. High Court Says Judges Have Leeway to Reduce Disparity in Crack and Powder Cocaine Sentences. (2007, December 10). *Associated Press*. Also see Sherman, M. Commission Votes to Allow Retroactive Easing of Crack Cocaine Sentences. (2007 December 11). *Associated Press*. Lexis-Nexis time stamps wire stories according to Greenwich Mean Time. Both versions of this story moved in time for publication in the morning papers of December 11, 2007.

⁸ Haberman, C. (2006, December 1). Plain Clothes, Perilous Choices. *New York Times*, p. A1.

⁹ Editorial. (2006, May 20). Press One for English. *New York Times*, p. A12.

¹⁰ Jarvie, J. (2007, September 20). In La., Thousands to Rally for 'Jena Six'; Activists Are Expected to Converge on This Tiny Town, Protesting the Stiff Charges for Black Teens Who Beat a White Youth. *Los Angeles Times*, p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Liptak, A. (2007, June 29). The Same Words, but Differing Views. *New York Times*, p. A24.

¹³ Rashbaum, W.K. & Baker, A. (2006, December 11). 50 Bullets, One Dead, and Many Questions. *New York Times*, p. B1,

¹⁴ Fernandez, M. (2007, October 15). Racial Disparity Found among New Yorkers with High-Rate Mortgages. *New York Times*, p. B1.

¹⁵ Nelson, M. (2006, May 17). Documents: Use of Force Routine in Florida Juvenile Boot Camp Where Guards Struck Teen. *Associated Press*.

¹⁶ Geller, A. (2006, May 20). The Debate over English Renews Questions That Are About Much More Than Words. *Associated Press*.

¹⁷ Luqman, A. (2007, September 21). Jim Crow Comes for Our Kids. *Washington Post*, p. A19.

COVERAGE ANALYSIS OF ETHNIC NEWSPAPERS

Black-owned and Hispanic-owned newspapers, mostly weeklies, practice a community journalism that focuses on the concerns of the racial or ethnic group they serve. One of those community concerns is discrimination against members of that group.

Along with other ethnic newspapers, Hispanic papers have experienced growth in recent years as advertising has become more targeted and gravitated away from mass-circulation dailies. Hispanic newspapers saw their advertising revenue grow by 43 percent from 2002 to 2006, a period when that source of income fell at mainstream metro dailies.¹ Some black papers have also seen increases,² but there are still complaints from African-American media professionals the papers do not receive a share of advertising dollars that matches their marketing reach.³

Because of their limited financial resources, black and Hispanic papers tend to have small newsroom staffs.⁴ These are local papers that do not try to cover national news in a comprehensive way. They supplement the news readers get elsewhere.

Coverage Not as Broad

As a result, ethnic newspapers, which might be expected to do a fuller job of covering structural racism, actually do not. The coverage in black and Hispanic papers during the last two years, on average, was about a third as broad as that found in the mainstream papers and wire services.

Five African-American and four Hispanic papers were examined in a content analysis of the same design as the one conducted of mainstream print media, evaluating how the ethnic papers covered identical lists of major stories about structural racism in 2006 and 2007, 10 for each year. These stories related to discriminatory laws, policies and practices that impact housing, employment, health care, criminal justice and education for racial-ethnic minorities. A total of 166 articles about these major stories were identified. The same information about page placement, type of article, use of racially-explicit language and the identity of their principal sources was collected.⁵

A few of the major stories received broad media exposure and may be familiar to many Americans, such as the shooting death of Sean Bell by New York police on his wedding day in 2006 and the protest last year in Jena, La., against heavy criminal charges brought against six black boys who became known as the Jena Six. The death of black teenager Martin Lee Anderson after being beaten by guards at a Florida boot camp received television coverage because the incident was videotaped. Other major stories are likely to be unfamiliar. The entire list of the top stories, by year, is in the Appendix.

The African-American papers examined are: the Atlanta Daily World, Chicago Defender, New York Amsterdam News, Philadelphia Tribune and St. Louis American. All were weeklies in 2006 and 2007, except the Tribune and Defender. The Defender published four times a week, the Tribune three times. In recent years, their peers have voted the Tribune the best black paper seven times and the American six times.

The Hispanic papers included in this study are: Diario Las Americas in Miami, El Diario/La Prensa in New York City, La Opinión in Los Angeles and La Prensa de San Antonio. El Diario/La Prensa is the country's oldest Spanish-language daily; La Opinión, the largest in circulation. The other two are weeklies. La Raza, a Chicago weekly, was the fifth paper selected, but a digital copy of its archives was not available before this study was completed.

The ethnic newspaper with the broadest coverage, the Chicago Defender, covered only half of the major stories. The four Hispanic-owned papers reviewed appeared to be the least comprehensive, perhaps unfairly. All nine ethnic papers tended not to pay much attention to news involving other racial-ethnic groups, and news about African-Americans dominates the lists of major stories. The Hispanic paper with the widest coverage ran articles on about a quarter of the stories.

Front-page play of the major stories was also lower in ethnic papers than in big mainstream papers. This comparison may not reflect stories being underplayed, though, particularly in nondailies. A weekly does itself no favor by fronting a story that broke days ago and will strike readers as old news, unless the paper delivers fresh information. Also, three of the ethnic papers are tabloids that do not run stories on the first page. Frequently, the only articles in black papers about a particular story were opinion pieces, which always run on inside pages.

The better measure for ethnic papers may be the overall count of articles about a major story. By that standard, black newspapers played two stories the hardest—the Sean Bell shooting in 2006 and, even more so, the Jena Six protest the next year.

With a far lower article count, the Senate vote to make English the national language was the top story for Hispanic papers. The same pattern of multiple articles about a major story was present in Hispanic papers, if there was a local angle.

Wording Is More Direct

When ethnic papers covered a major story, they were much more direct in their wording than mainstream print media, using “racism” or related words about twice as often. Hispanic papers used those words less frequently than black papers, but still more often than the mainstream outlets. Possibly because of the preference for racism and its derivatives, “discrimination” was used slightly less in black and Hispanic papers than in the mainstream media.

As with the big dailies and wire services, coverage was dominated by spot news articles, slightly more so in ethnic papers. Much of the spot coverage did not go much beyond chronicling community protests and incremental developments. Enterprising reporting was minimal and most often an interview of a victim's relatives or lawyers. There was, similar to the mainstream media, a dearth of news analysis and feature articles. Not one investigative piece was identified in the ethnic press sample.

Sourcing, on the other hand, was much more balanced. Officials were the first or primary source of an article almost half as often as in the mainstream media. The words of representatives of civil-rights organizations shaped articles three times more frequently. Ordinary people, many protestors, were quoted about twice as much as in mainstream outlets. More lawyers were also important sources, but fewer academics and other researchers. The lawyers quoted were usually representing aggrieved African-Americans or Hispanics.

Overall, ethnic newspaper coverage of major stories about structural racism was quite limited, shallow and, in the case of the black press, opinionated. But the coverage was also more direct and, in its sourcing, better balanced in a way that increased clarity.

Coverage Is Even More Limited

The nine ethnic papers studied were selected to represent the quality publications of each press and the geographic spread of the racial or ethnic population that press serves. They are established papers that are well-known in the communities where they publish.

The last two years, the African-American and Hispanic papers covered the major stories about structural racism about 25 percent of the time, compared with 75 percent in the mainstream media. The coverage figure was about 30 percent for black papers, and about half that for Hispanic papers.

Among the black papers, the Chicago Defender reported 50 percent of the stories, followed by the New York Amsterdam News at 35 percent. The Philadelphia Tribune hit the average of 30 percent. The St. Louis American at 25 percent and Atlanta Daily World at 15 percent were below average.

El Diario/La Prensa was the most comprehensive Hispanic paper, at 25 percent, followed by Diario Las Americas at 20 percent. At 15 percent, La Opinión was about average. La Prensa de San Antonio, which covered only one of the 20 stories, was below par at 5 percent.

Of the four, only La Opinión covered all three stories that were Hispanic-centered—in 2006, a report on high levels of Hispanic hunger and the Senate vote to make English the national language and, in 2007, a federal judge's decision to block the government from sending letters to employers requiring them to verify that the Social Security numbers of workers matched the names on official records. El Diario reported the last two, but not the hunger

report. *Diario* and *Prensa* covered one of the three stories. *La Opinión* ran the English-language amendment story on the front twice and the hunger report once.

Among black papers, all covered the Jena protest, although the *St. Louis American* appears to have been the only one to send a reporter to the Louisiana town to cover the demonstration. The *American's* reporter went on the bus carrying local protestors, an affordable option for papers with limited travel budgets. All but one paper (*Atlanta World*) reported the Sean Bell shooting, and all but one (*Philadelphia Tribune*) reported a Supreme Court decision in 2007 against voluntary school desegregation based on race. None of the ethnic papers published anything about the Supreme Court decision on the Tyson Foods discrimination case, including the *World*, curiously. Atlanta is home to the federal appeals court that was overruled.

The scant interest in news about other racial-ethnic groups was reflected in no black paper covering the Hispanic hunger report and the decision on Social Security letters. The papers, black or Hispanic, also did not cover another federal court decision last year allowing selective private schools endowed by a Hawaiian royal to continue favoring native Hawaiians in admissions.

Crossing Racial-Ethnic Lines

Hispanic papers were more willing than black papers to report across racial-ethnic boundaries on stories with a local angle.

In the last five weeks of 2006, *El Diario* in New York published 29 articles about the Sean Bell shooting. Much of its coverage focused on black-led protests. The Spanish-language daily, notably, more than once described the context as police overuse of deadly force against young men who were African-American *and Hispanic*, sometimes including Asians. The paper's perspective was shaped only in part by the fact a Bell companion, Joseph Guzman, who was seriously wounded, is Hispanic. *El Diario* characterized his background more fully than either the *New York Times* or the *Amsterdam News*, noting early on that Guzman was the son of an African-American mother and Puerto Rican father.⁶

Beyond that, an editorial cited "a series of ugly racial incidents that resulted in the abuse or deaths of young African-American, Latino or Asian men" under former mayor Rudy Giuliani.⁷ Another editorial lucidly called the problem "structural."⁸ An opinion column reported an increase in civilian complaints of police abuse and concluded it was "dangerous to be black or Latino and young in this great city."⁹

An enterprising article reported a reflective, emotional interview with a Hispanic mother whose son was killed in 1994 by a police officer, who was later sentenced to seven years for violating the son's civil rights.¹⁰ Many of *Diario's* stories of the Sean Bell shooting ran in the tabloid's most prominent spots on page 2 or 3.

In Miami, *Diario Las Americas*, though its coverage began months late, published four articles about the fatal beating of Martin Lee Anderson, a black boy, in a boot camp in northern Florida. Though the news broke far from the circulation territory of *Diario Las Americas* in south Florida, the story became a state political issue.

Covering Protests

Like *El Diario/La Prensa* in New York, the black-owned weekly *Amsterdam News* published a large number of stories on the Bell shooting—20 in five weeks. The story ran on the front three weeks in a row, though not the first issue after the shooting. The early articles tended to be long, upwards to nearly 1,700 words. At least half the 20 articles were spot stories about protests, with quotes from a large number of civil-rights leaders and demonstrators. Police abuse was generally cast as specifically a problem for black men, with “racism” and “racist” sprinkled liberally in quotes in news stories and in opinion columns.

Largely because of the *Amsterdam News* coverage, the Sean Bell story had the second highest number of stories in black papers, 25. The Jena Six was first, generating exactly twice that number between the Sept. 20 protest and the end of 2007. The *Chicago Defender* led the pack, publishing 18 articles about the Jena Six. Half of them, though, were opinion pieces. The *Defender*’s news articles were about local protests or developments in Jena, the last gleaned from the AP wire. The coverage had volume, but not heft, except on the opinion pages.

In the four black papers that do run stories on their front pages, major stories about structural racism played there about 3 percent of the time in 2006 and 8 percent in 2007. This compares unfavorably with the 8 percent in 2006 and 32 percent the next year in the mainstream press, but may not be the best measure of story prominence. For a local weekly, publishing anything at all about a national story makes an editorial statement. No front-page percentage was computed for Hispanic papers because two of the four are tabloids.

Because of the protest reporting and high proportion of opinion articles, the ethnic press coverage overall was more direct and explicit than in the mainstream media. The word “racism” or its derivatives were used in about 20 percent of articles, or about twice as often as in the mainstream outlets (9 percent). The figure for the black papers only was 22 percent, and 13 percent for Hispanic papers.

Some articles in the black press overused “racism” or “racist.” One or the other appeared a dozen times in a November 2006 column in the *St. Louis American* that mentioned the Sean Bell case.¹¹ The next month, a *Philadelphia Tribune* column about Bell and local instances of police abuse, “racism” or variants were used 10 times in less than 950 words—six times in a single paragraph.¹²

In the ethnic press, spot coverage was more predominant—92 percent of news articles, versus about 86 percent in the mainstream outlets. The African-American and Hispanic papers together ran fewer than 10 feature and news analysis articles, and not one investigative piece.

Two of the best nonspot stories were reprinted from other publications. A November 2006 analysis in *Diario Las Americas* assayed the reasons juries rarely convict law enforcement officers in cases like the beating of Martin Lee Anderson, foreshadowing the verdict in that case. The weekly republished the article from the *St. Petersburg Times* in Spanish.¹³ A year later, the *Chicago Defender* ran a textured feature about Genarlow Wilson’s mother awaiting the young black man’s release from prison in Georgia on a charge of having oral sex with a minor. Unfortunately, the article from *Trumpet* magazine ran in the *Defender* two weeks *after* Wilson’s release.¹⁴

Breaking News in Opinion Pieces

One journalistic problem detected in the ethnic press—primarily black papers—was a tendency generally not present in the big mainstream papers of delivering news of a story only through opinion columns. Editorials and columns comprised almost 40 percent of the same of 166 articles in ethnic papers. Sometimes an opinion piece contained the first—or only—news that a paper’s readers got about a major story.

A *Philadelphia Tribune* column offered the only information in the paper during 2006 about the state panel’s report on the 1898 insurrection in Wilmington, N.C.¹⁵ The next year, the *Defender* ran six columns from different perspectives on the Supreme Court decision against voluntary school desegregation, but not a single news story.

Columnists select facts to support their argument, often leaving out countervailing information. When the news is delivered only in columns, a paper never gives its readers, as a senior *Washington Post* editor used to say, “one clear shot at the facts.”

Balancing Sources

Compared with mainstream media, the ethnic papers did a better job of balancing their sources. Officials were the first or main source for less than 40 percent of their articles on structural racism, versus about 70 percent in mainstream outlets. Ordinary people, often protestors, were important sources in a third or more of stories, compared with a fifth in wire services and the biggest dailies. Ethnic papers relied more on lawyers, who were the main source of 10 percent of stories versus 1 percent in the mainstream media. Academics were important sources slightly less frequently.

The relative clarity of the coverage in ethnic papers came from quoting civil-rights leaders much more. About three times as often, they were first source (19 percent versus 6 percent) or the main one (15 percent versus 5 percent).

The coverage of the Sean Bell shooting in the Amsterdam News provides an example of the journalistic value of talking to civil-rights leaders about structural racism.

Some protest leaders defined the problem in terms that did not appear in the New York Times, where department policy was mentioned as an underlying issue that could be solved with a review and revisions.¹⁶ The New York Police Department has revised its policy on deadly force in the past, in similar circumstances. Still, fatal shootings of unarmed, minority men have continued. Two sources for articles in the Amsterdam News called for a deeper look—and in another direction.

“I think it’s a culture in the police department,” Hazel Dukes, president of the NAACP New York State Conference, was quoted on Dec. 14, 2006.¹⁷ George Turner, a retired police lieutenant and member of 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, was quoted, more ambiguously, two weeks later: “Not that the police department is racist, but there is a culture in the NYPD that doesn’t respect black people.”¹⁸

Both the NAACP’s Dukes and Turner, whose organization is concerned about civil-rights issues related to policing, were calling for an examination of the values that shape a military-style organization whose collective culture is shaped in the formal and informal indoctrination of the police academy and then the squad car. If that culture is the underlying problem, it is a deeper one than words spelling out a policy on the use of deadly force.

A small newspaper like the Amsterdam News could explore that issue by asking its perceptive sources to elaborate on their comments. But it may also be a difficult story for ethnic papers, with their small staffs, to investigate. It is certainly not beyond a resourceful paper like the New York Times—if its editors were so inclined. Or metropolitan dailies in Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia, other big cities where instances of police abuse of African-American and/or Latino men have recurred.

For their part, ethnic newspaper editors could also devote less staff time to repetitive coverage of protests and more energy to developing enterprise stories that match their resources and missions.

END NOTES

¹ Kirk Whisler & Latino Print Network, Carlsbad, Calif., cited in “The State of News Media 2008: An Annual Report on American Journalism,” the Project for Excellence in Journalism. See <http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2008/chartland.php?id=656&ct=col&dir=&sort=&c1=1&c2=0&c3=0&c4=0&c5=0&c6=0&c7=0&c8=0&c9=0&c10=0&d3=0&dd3=1>.

² Fitzgerald, M. (2004, November 26). The Revival of the Black Press, *Editor & Publisher*. Ken Smikle, president of Target Market News, is quoted as saying: “black newspapers are doing great.”

³ Jackson, C. V. (2008, July 1). Black Buying Power Touted. *Chicago Sun-Times*, p. 14.

⁴ Kirk Whisler & Latino Print Network, Carlsbad, Calif., cited in “The State of News Media 2008,” indicate Hispanic weeklies had an average staff of 11 in 2006 and had essentially remained stable for four years. The average staff of the smaller number of Hispanic dailies had grown by 22 percent during that period to 110. See <http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2008/chartland.php?id=661&ct=col&dir=&sort=&c1=1&c2=1&c3=1&c4=0&c5=0&c6=0&c7=0&c8=0&c9=0&c10=0&d3=0&dd3=1>.

⁵ Other information was collected about the date, length, origin and frames of the articles. The frames were deemed too abstract for spot stories, which dominate the sample. The date and origin (staff, wire or contributor) were gathered as identifying information. Data on the average length of stories was held for further analysis.

⁶ Acosta, J. (2006, November 28). *El Diari/La Prensa*, p. 2.. The version archived in the Ethnic NewsWatch database appears to have the wrong headline attached: “Mayor Regrets Death.”

⁷ Editorial, (2006, November 28). *El Diario/La Prensa*, p. 22.

⁸ L. Barrios, (2006, December 3). *El Diario/La Prensa*, p. 17. Column from contributor.

⁹ Borrero, G. (2006, December 1). *El Diario/La Prensa*, p. 3, “Under Fire” column by staffer.

¹⁰ Acosta, J. (2006, November 30). *El Diario/La Prensa*, p. 3.

¹¹ Rogers, J. (2006, November 30). Reloading Racism. *St. Louis American*. The number of the page where an article ran is not appended in the newspaper’s online archives.

¹² Washington Jr., L. (2006, December 5, 2006). *Philadelphia Tribune*, p. 7A.

¹³ Vansickle, A. (2006, November 30). Sera Largo el Camino para Condenar a Los Ochos Guardias Acusados (It Will Be a Long Road to Convict the Eight Accused Guards). *Diario Las Americas*. The number of the page where an article appeared is not appended in the newspaper’s online archives.

¹⁴ Brown, R.L. (2007, November 9-11). *Chicago Defender*, p. SS9.

¹⁵ Washington Jr., L. (2006, June 13). *Philadelphia Tribune*, p. 7A.

¹⁷ Mfuni, T. (2006, December 14-20). *New York Amsterdam News*, p. 1.

¹⁸ Allen, Z. (2007, December 28 - January 3). *New York Amsterdam News*, p. 30.

NEWS ON THE WEB

It is clear that the public regularly heads online for news, whether as a supplement¹ to traditional sources or as a replacement. Nearly three-quarters of Internet users have consulted the Internet for news at one time or another, according to a July 2008 update by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, with 39 percent going online for news every day.² In a spring 2008 sample of 15,923 U.S. adults by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, two out of five people interviewed (42 percent) said they had gone online for news about the current presidential campaign within the past two weeks.³

The increasing importance of the Internet as a source for news has raised troubling questions about the sustainability of journalism as it is currently practiced, the credibility of news sites and the impact of online consumption habits on public discourse. Many online news sites maintain the same standards and practices as any print or broadcast news outlet. But what about the 78 million blogs created by individuals who may or may not share traditional journalism values? What about the news and commentary sites that take a political stance? Democracy rests on the principle that an informed public can make wise decisions for the good of all. How does the variability of news on the Web affect the public's ability to remain informed?

As illustrated in the preceding analysis, newspapers often fail in their mission to reflect all of America fully—despite traditional media standards of accuracy and fairness. This in turn skews perceptions and taints decision making in the public sphere. It is possible that the migration to the Web for news could present fresh opportunities for inclusive newsgathering and accurate representation. Readers can choose from a multitude of sites and participate in the newsgathering process through their comments. Furthermore, bloggers pride themselves on correcting what they see as misrepresentations by the mainstream media.

But news on the Internet may also simply replicate old habits in new forms. Worse, readers may choose a narrow set of news sources that reinforce their own political views and assumptions about others. Communications researchers Debra Burns Melican and Travis L. Dixon studied trends in online news usage in the context of “modern racism,” in which bigotry goes underground but remains active. Under this belief system, as social scientists define it, whites insist that discrimination no longer occurs, resist policies designed to overcome inequities and believe that black people make illegitimate demands and don't adhere to the American values of hard work and self-reliance.⁴

In Melican and Dixon's interactive Web survey of 432 participants, those who saw nontraditional Internet news sites as more credible also scored higher on a scale of this modern racism than those who rated traditional news sites as more credible. The authors concluded that nontraditional news sites may offer a means for people to seek out only the

sort of information that supports their existing beliefs. “This in turn may feed the growth of racism and racial animosity,” they argue.

Readership

Who is on the Internet and where are they turning for news? As a whole, white people are the most likely to go online (71 percent), followed by African-Americans (60 percent), and Latinos (56 percent). But the digital divide shrinks dramatically among the highly educated. About 90 percent each of black, white and Hispanic college graduates use the Internet. English-dominant and native-born Hispanics maintain a high presence online at more than 75 percent each, and young African-Americans go online equally as often. Rankings vary depending on research methodology. But traditional media, whether aggregated on a site such as Yahoo or directly from MSNBC, commands the greatest attention as a source for news as table 8 shows.

Table 8
Readership of News Sites, Traditional and Aggregators

Traditional News Sites*	All News Sites**
1. MSNBC	1. Yahoo News
2. CNN	2. MSNBC
3. NYTimes.com	3. CNN
4. Fox News	4. AOL News
5. USAToday.com	5. NYTimes.com
6. CBS News Digital	6. ABC News Digital
7. Washington Post	7. USAToday.com
8. ABC News Digital	8. Fox News
9. Newsweek	9. CBS News Digital
10. Wall Street Journal Online	10. Washington Post

* Source: Mediasmith

**Source: Nielsen

Note: Differences between the two rankings are highlighted in bold.

Among Hispanics and Latinos, the news sites that draw the most users are largely the same as in table 8, except that Google rises higher on the list (see table 9).

Table 9
Top News Sites for African-Americans and Hispanics

Top News Sites for African-Americans	Top News Sites for Hispanics
1. Washington Post	1. Yahoo
2. Google News	2. AOL News
3. Yahoo News	3. New York Times
4. AOL News	4. USA Today
5. CNN Digital Network	5. MSNBC
6. New York Times	6. CNN Digital Network
7. MSNBC	7. CBS News
8. USA Today	8. Google News

Source: Nielsen.

Note: Newspaper company aggregates eliminated.

The top blogs for news vary according to the measure selected, but three consistently rise close to the top: Huffington Post, Think Progress and Daily Kos.

Huffington Post is arranged like a newspaper, with a news story lead, links to news sites and contributions from an array of columnists and bloggers. Think Progress and Daily Kos use a more typical collaborative blog format, with contributors adding posts sequentially. All three lean left and involve a variety of contributors, although Think Progress is written by staff members of the Center for American Progress. Daily Kos operates more along the lines of a citizen journalism site. On the conservative side, “The Corner” on National Review Online ranks consistently very high, with Gateway Pundit, Right Wing News and RedState also very popular. Blogs and news sites oriented toward communities of color tend to have much lower readership.

Influence

Blogs serve as a place of refuge for people looking for specialized news and like-minded opinion. In a 2006 Pew Internet & American Life survey, about 33 percent of U.S. Internet users said they read blogs, compared with 27 percent the year before and 17 percent in 2004.⁵ As blogs grow in popularity and number, a general consensus has developed that they play an important role in encouraging and facilitating public debate.

Only 11 percent of Pew respondents said they read blogs on a typical day. Political scientists Henry Farrell and Daniel W. Drezner asked why blogs have such power, when traditional news media sites have a much larger readership. At least in regard to political issues, Farrell and Drezner found that a few, high-profile blogs command extraordinary attention—from journalists and political commentators in particular. The networked nature of blogs, they argue, allows interesting posts and breaking news to rise quickly to the top tier. Mainstream journalists then turn to these blogs for breaking news within a blogger’s specialty and for a “summary statistic” about opinions on a given issue. Bloggers influence journalists’ ideas

about what issues are important and how they should be framed, Farrell and Drezner concluded.

If bloggers have the influence that Farrell and Drezner suggest, can we expect new perspectives and voices to begin to break into the mainstream? Or will online networks replicate the power structure that operates within print and broadcast? In this part of the study, we explore online news media and its potential effect on the public's perceptions about the ways in which race operates in U.S. society. Do new voices challenge the old paradigms of race in news coverage? Or do online news sources potentially aggravate stereotypes, divisions and misperceptions?

Methodology

The universe of traditional online news sites is large, and the news blogosphere even larger. In order to learn more about the approaches of each, their interaction with one another and their possible influence on public perception, we developed a sample that incorporated three types of online news outlets: traditional mainstream news sites, general news blogs and news blogs oriented toward specific communities.

Because the print portion of this project examined black and Latino-oriented ethnic media, we confined our community-specific sample to blogs that targeted these groups. We did want a sense of the broader online ethnic media voice, however, so we incorporated New America Media into our analysis. This consortium of over 700 U.S. ethnic media maintains a news Web site featuring work produced by its own staff and ethnic media members.

We developed a traditional news sample by combining the top ten rankings of Mediasmith, a digital-advertising media agency, and Nielsen, a media market-research company. We added the Los Angeles Times because they are among the five papers studied in our source audit. The 13 general news sites and news aggregators we reviewed included: Yahoo News, MSNBC, CNN, AOL News, the New York Times, Fox News, USA Today, CBS News, the Washington Post, ABC News Digital, Newsweek, the Wall Street Journal and the Los Angeles Times.

We included the news aggregators Yahoo News and AOL News, which generally run headlines, briefs and news from external sources instead of original content, because they are such a popular source for current affairs information. Then we added ethnic news media of interest to this list: Univision.com, Impre.com (home to La Opinión, the largest circulation Spanish-language daily newspaper, and nine other Spanish-language newspapers), EbonyJet.com, and The Root, an online news and commentary magazine owned by the Washington Post.

We again combined various rankings in order to create a sample that included both liberal and conservative news blogs. Among these high-ranking blogs, most emphasized politics but did touch on other subjects. We favored sites with multiple contributors, although we

did include some single-contributor sites among the black- and Hispanic-oriented blogs. Our general news-oriented blogs included: Huffington Post, Daily Kos, Think Progress, The Corner on National Review, Crooks and Liars, Gateway Pundit, Hot Air, Talking Points Memo, RedState and Right Wing News. Our sample of African-American blogs, again selected based on popularity, included Pam's House Blend, Jack and Jill Politics, and Stereohyped. The Latino blogs were Latina Lista, VivirLatino and Man Eegee - Latino Político. We added Citizen Orange for a Latino-oriented perspective on immigration.

We followed these sites and collected screen shots of their opening pages for 14 days, although screen shots from July 8, the first day of the study, and many sites from Sunday, July 20, were lost due to technical problems.

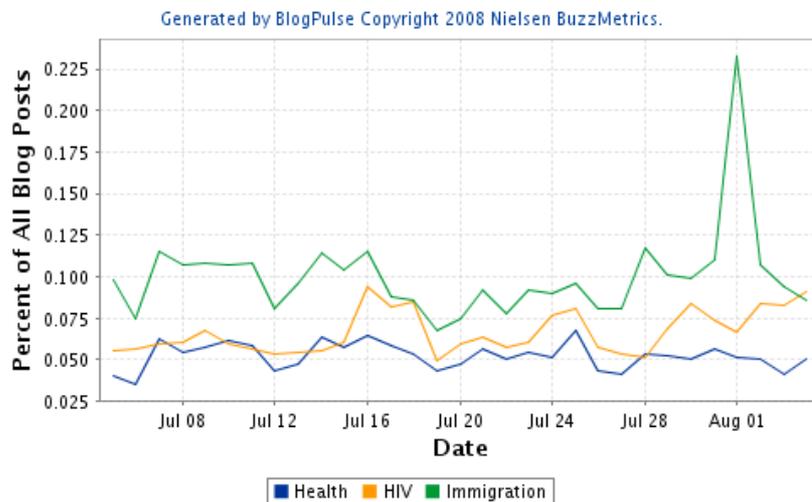
In this study we are especially interested in the ways in which online news media play a role in expressing and thus encouraging debate on issues related to structural racism. Therefore we chose to follow a defined set of stories as they made their way through our Internet sample. Structural racism, or the interaction of institutional practices, public policies and cultural norms within a historical and social hierarchy, operates across every news beat imaginable, from entertainment to education. But some areas of news coverage call out for special attention to America's racial structure. Substantive, informed public debates about social inequities and related policies require it.

We selected two broad issues in the news over our sample period that fell into this category: health disparities and immigration. In addition, because we chose to select sequential days over two weeks, we took specific news developments into consideration. We identified two top stories that involved race and followed them: Jesse Jackson's off-air remarks about Barack Obama, and the New Yorker cover satirizing Obama and his wife, Michelle.

The Nielsen trend tracker illustrates the attention given to health disparities (measured by the terms "health access," "health disparities" or "health insurance") during our study period (July 8, 2008 – July 21, 2008) and the following days (see figure 10).

In order to begin to develop a picture of these online stories' influence on public perceptions and awareness of structural racism, we pulled all relevant stories across all sites and coded them according to tone and news theme. We measured tone as "positive," "negative" or "neutral" not based on the nature of the news, but on the overall context and the use of positive, negative or neutral wording. "News theme" can be seen as a type of frame—the overall story line that conveys the importance of the news item and how it fits into the larger world. One journalism text simply calls the news theme the story's "basic idea."⁶ Then, we evaluated the frame of responsibility developed in the story.

Figure 10
Coverage of Health Disparities, HIV and Immigration



Frames are a recognized tool for examining media content and understanding the interaction between media and public opinion.⁷ In news content, frames can be understood as a central organizing idea or pattern of selection and emphasis intended to help audiences make sense of an issue. As described by Robert Entman, a communications researcher at George Washington University, frames highlight and link information in order to “define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies.”⁸

To understand how the stories and blog items in our sample framed issues related to race, we asked whether they shaped a problem primarily as a matter of “individual responsibility,” “institutional responsibility,” or “structural, social and/or historical responsibility.” For example, did the story emphasize an *individual’s* success or bad luck? Did it blame an *institution* for problems such as poor math scores among Latino and black students, or for border enforcement actions that separated parents from their children for days? Or did it bring in *historical, social or structural* explanations that helped readers understand the interaction of policies and institutions? We looked for these distinctions because the presence of the first two frames can inhibit audiences from interpreting racial inequities in a broader social context.

Stanford University political scientist Shanto Iyengar similarly sorts frames into individualized “episodic” frames, which can lead readers to blame the victim, and more structural “thematic” frames, in which larger society clearly needs to be addressed.⁹ In U.S. society, our core values about individualism and personal responsibility can often overshadow attention to the structures that may limit opportunity for a given individual.¹⁰ We also looked for morality and consequences frames, which if not operating together with structural concepts, also can divert attention from social responsibility and place it on the individual.

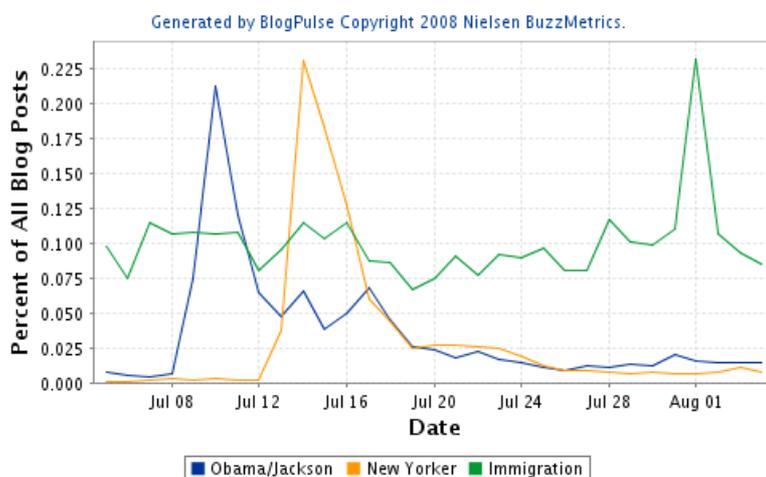
Legal and civil-rights expert John Powell, who directs the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University, prefers the term “structural racialization” in order to emphasize the ongoing process of this social phenomenon. In the U.S., ideas about racism as a one-on-one, perpetrator-on-victim process remain our default way of thinking. Instead, Powell suggests that we can better address modern racism by understanding it as a web of relationships and processes that have multiple effects from both action and inaction. The effects can be immediate, or delayed and distant.¹¹

In order to report honestly and accurately about issues such as health disparities, then, it’s not enough to write the occasional story about one institution’s ability to offer interpretation services, for instance, or to cover the latest report on how often black women get mammograms. In order to reflect the way health disparities operate in U.S. society, coverage must place an individual or institution’s experience within the context of access, environment, health policy, cultural competence among healthcare workers and the cumulative consequences of discrimination in health-care delivery. Not every story, of course, can combine all of these elements, but even one or two contextual paragraphs and coverage amassed over time can accomplish this task.

In this part of the study, we aimed to find out whether the systemic, cumulative and mutually supportive effects of structural racialization emerge in stories about immigration and health disparities. We also aimed to see whether specific stories involving race tend to introduce concepts that call to mind and help illustrate the ways in which structural racialization operates.

The two developing stories attracted more online news site attention than the ongoing news topics of immigration and health disparities during our study period, according to Nielsen measures:

Figure 11
Blog Coverage of the Jackson Comments, New Yorker Cover and Immigration



Case 1: New Yorker Cover

On July 13, the New Yorker released its satirical cover for the following week: a caricature of Barack Obama in a turban and Arab dishdasha, standing in the Oval Office with his wife Michelle, who is sporting a huge Afro, wearing combat fatigues and has an AK-47 slung over her shoulder. The two are fist-bumping in triumph as a portrait of Osama bin Laden looks on and a U.S. flag burns in the fireplace.

The reaction was swift and furious, and made its way through news sites and blogs over a five-day period, with many sites running more than one story each day. We chose to follow the news response (n=43 stories) because it rapidly focused on bigotry, racism and the impact of editorial content on public perceptions. Fox News, two conservative blogs, Huffington Post and Jack and Jill Politics hit the story first. The bloggers called attention to the politics of bigotry—with the conservatives decrying the attack on their own as well as noting the “fear-mongering (against Obama) from the left.” The Huffington Post took a more traditional journalism approach, writing about the consequences of the controversy and interviewing New Yorker Editor David Remnick about the reaction.

Over the first two days, online news media of all types focused on the consequences of the imagery to Obama’s campaign. The discussion on the traditional news sites quickly moved to why, as generally agreed, the satire didn’t work and whether it was offensive. USA Today and three ethnic-oriented sites (New America Media, Stereohyped and The Root) began to raise questions about racialization and racism. Several sites worried about the imprinting of “rumors” and misperceptions about the Obamas in the public mind.

On July 15, the conversation seemed to split. EbonyJet and our sample of the black blogosphere shifted to a social/structural frame and focused on race, power, and the imagery of blacks in America applied historically and more generally. Dayo Olopade, a columnist for The Root described the troubles cartoonists are having with Obama, complete with illustrations. Olopade highlighted the stereotypical features, troubles with skin tone, images of Obama as a performer and even one depiction of Obama as “Uncle Fester” that have characterized illustrations during the campaign. “Drawing a black man—either seriously or satirically—it appears, is damn difficult,” she wrote. Through humor and analysis, Olopade subtly reminded readers of the operation of implicit bias in news media, racial barriers in the U.S. and the ways in which popular media helps prop up those barriers.

EbonyJet took a more serious but comparable approach by placing on its front page a historical illustration attacking the Freedman’s Bureau and featuring a grotesque image of a reclining, dark-skinned ape-man.

only emerging in the black-oriented media. This trend raised the question, how many people cross from the white-dominated mainstream into niche blogs written for communities of color? How many journalists do? If they do not, how does it constrain substantive conversation about race in the news media? If these voices intermixed, how would it change understandings about race in our nation?

Table 8
Frames for New Yorker Cover Stories

FRAME	#
Individual responsibility	10
Consequences	16
Morality	3
Institutional responsibility*	15
Structural, social	4

*Note: *Usually the institution deemed responsible is either the New Yorker itself or “liberals” collectively, and in two cases, the media. If two frames were strongly present, they were both coded.*

Table 9
Tone for New Yorker Cover Stories

TONE	#
Positive	1
Negative	23
Neutral	15
Humorous	3

Case 2: Jesse Jackson on Barack Obama

When Jesse Jackson made some crude remarks about Barack Obama and the candidate’s speeches at black churches off the air while taping a show, Fox News released an edited version. Several days later, the blog “TV Newser” released an even more inflammatory portion of his comments, which included the use of the “n-word.”

Over the first two days of the story, five blogs representing the conservative, liberal and black niches weighed in, plus New America Media and The Root. Traditional news sites including Yahoo, New York Times, Washington Post, ABC News, Time, CBS and CNN all ran stories about Jackson’s apology. Fox featured the video on July 10 and then an interview with Jackson. In five cases, traditional media used AP stories, signaling that they felt the story was important enough to feature prominently, but not enough to report independently.

The first iteration of this story primarily focused on individual responsibility and morality. A couple of pieces highlighted the consequences for Jackson and/or the Obama campaign. In his apology, Jackson raised points about structural racism and the tendency for the news

media to explain problems in the black community by pointing to individual responsibility. Only AP and the conservative blog Hot Air quoted that position at any length. Most instead highlighted the nature of the original unsavory comments, purported jealousy on the part of Jackson, or more often, a rift between the black civil-rights generation and younger black Democrats. Some speculated that Jackson’s remarks would help Obama with white voters.

As with the New Yorker cover story, separate conversations began to develop in the various online news media niches. The traditional news and general interest blogs stuck to the individual responsibility theme. Black columnists and news media intended for black audiences began to approach the issue differently. Writing in *The Root*, Jack White described a “social, political and psychological vertigo” that Americans were experiencing because of Obama’s success. He also pointed to the stirrings of a new consensus among black people to talk about personal responsibility in the public sphere. In the *Washington Post*, black columnist Colbert I. King took an institutional frame and challenged the mainstream news media’s enthusiasm about the story and its attempt to decipher a monolithic “black” position on anything. Eric Easter, on *EbonyJet*, wished for a dialogue about Obama’s “appeal to mainstream voters and what that means.”

The black blogosphere also began asking broader social and institutional questions. Marc Lamont Hill, writing on *The Root*, insisted that America live up to its democratic promise and meet its own responsibility “to expand opportunity, promote justice and protect the vulnerable.” He raised the structural issues of police brutality, redlining and predatory lending. Brian Gilmore, in *EbonyJet*, highlighted his concerns that the needs of the black poor and working poor have been subsumed by the hullabaloo over Jackson’s “street corner words,” and worried that an important voice on poverty had been muted.

The traditional news media on the Web asked for a reaction by Spike Lee and other prominent black leaders, moving into discussions about “black responsibility.” As the black community-oriented *Jack and Jill Politics* pointed out, *MSNBC.com* held “the obligatory” dialogue about race in America with only white people on the panel.

Table 10
Frames for Jackson/Obama Story

FRAME	#
Individual responsibility	25
Consequences	5
Morality	8
Institutional responsibility	4
Structural, social	10

In this portion of the Obama/Jackson story (n=48), 22 stories had a negative tone (46 percent), 21 were neutral (44 percent), two were mixed and two were positive. Six applied emphatic language or name-calling (13 percent).

The blogger TV Newser breathed new life into the Obama/Jackson story July 16 with a report that the rest of the Jesse Jackson tape included the “n-word,” quoting him as saying “Barack...he’s talking down to black people...telling n__s how to behave.” Five traditional news sites ran an AP story about the revelation. The conservative and black blogospheres weighed in. Not surprisingly, considering the subject matter, all but one approached the story through an individual responsibility and/or morality frame. Some were gleeful about Jackson’s embarrassing moment. The one exception to the individual frame focused on Fox News’ behavior in releasing the tape.

The next day, Elisabeth Hasselbeck dissolved into tears during a discussion about Jesse Jackson’s remark on “The View.” She had been calling attention to what she considered a double standard and attempting to explain that “we’re all in the same world” and thus people of all races should drop the term. The incident stirred another two days of discussion in conservative and black blogs, which expressed frustration about what the video seemed to illustrate: the limited conversation between white and black people about race and racism. Most did not go much further than taking a side on the use of the n-word, while one conservative and one black-oriented site used a broader social frame. Conservative blogs called blacks who use the word duplicitous and attacked identity politics, while on The Root, Jimi Izrael reveled in the word’s personal resonance for him. Within our subsample (n=25) about the n-word, 17 stories (68 percent) took a negative tone, eight (32 percent) were neutral, and there were no positive stories. Seven used name-calling or an emphatic tone.

Table 11
Frames for “N-word” Stories

FRAME	#
Individual responsibility	11
Consequences	0
Morality	13
Institutional responsibility	2
Structural, social	2

Table 12
Coverage of “N-Word” Stories

COVERAGE	#
AOL	4
Other traditional	5
Black blogs, The Root	6
Conservative blogs	9
General news blogs	1
Latino blogs	0

Case 3: Health disparities

During our study period, most coverage related to health disparities (n=12 stories) involved unfavorable comparisons of the U.S. health system to that of other nations, access to health insurance, and one story each about diabetes, psychological care, translation services and organ transplants. Five of the 12 stories appeared on traditional sites, two were featured on blogs and the rest were in ethnic media. Three-quarters (9) took an institutional or structural approach to this topic area. Of those, four focused on institutions as responsible for inequities. Five stories did address structural issues but did not highlight racial disparities, offering at most a brief mention. Instead they described overall problems with access, quality of care and cost. The five stories that appeared on ethnic media sites were much more likely to take on both structure and race.

Table 13
Frames for Health Disparities Coverage

FRAME	#
Individual responsibility	2
Morality	1
Institutional responsibility	4
Structural, social	5

Health disparities stories during this sample period can be seen as an opportunity missed. Even as racial disparities remain a core, well-recognized problem in the U.S. health system, stories about inequities within that system neglected to incorporate race. As a result, racial disparities in health status and care may be interpreted by the public as separate and apart from the system as a whole.

We also pulled 16 news stories about developments in HIV and AIDS because it is an example of an epidemic that is hitting African-Americans and Latinos disproportionately hard. Here we found a surprisingly high proportion of stories with a negative tone (8 out of 16), often due to an emphasis on bias against people with the disease. Four breaking stories occurred during our study period: the scale-back of an AIDS vaccine trial, the lifting of visa restrictions on people with HIV, a scrap about the naming of an international AIDS relief bill after Jesse Helms and the discovery of a gene variant that seemed to make Africans more susceptible to HIV but also prone to slow disease progression. Even so, HIV/AIDS rarely made the opening page of traditional news sites. Instead, blogs and ethnic media provided most of the coverage in this area. We also did not observe any pattern of the stories moving from blogs to the mainstream.

Writers most often framed this story as social/structural, but often solely in reference to a political context. Two stories about African HIV susceptibility used a biological frame of

responsibility that we categorized as “an external force” because it operates outside of social structures and institutions.

Table 14
Frames for HIV/AIDS Coverage

FRAME	#
Individual responsibility	5
External force	2
Institutional responsibility	3
Social, structural	6

In this sample of stories and blog items, writers rarely offered context about the populations hardest-hit by HIV/AIDS. The exceptions were Impre.com, which focused on one vulnerable population—Latinos over 50 years old—and Right Wing News, which ridiculed statistics about the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. The genetic susceptibility stories required some mention of race. The New York Times version, however, did not quote any Africans or African-Americans despite their central position in the story. Once again, this small sample reflects a missed opportunity to enhance understanding or encourage discussion about the operation of structural racialization in health and health-care delivery.

Of the general health disparities and HIV stories combined (n=28), 13 (46 percent) were negative in tone, 11 (39 percent) were neutral, and three (11 percent) were positive.

Case 4: Immigration

Over our study period, attention to this topic in the traditional news sites was rare. On the other hand, conservative bloggers, Latino bloggers and Spanish-language news sites maintained consistent coverage. Out of our sample (n=42), the largest number on one topic (18) dealt with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency. Most pieces (12) reported on an immigration raid or its aftermath. A slightly smaller number (7) followed other types of enforcement actions or new local laws related to enforcement. The remainder focused on broad policies and politics, with only scattered coverage of other immigration topics.

The Spanish-language media approached immigration with much more diversity in story approach and topic, and tended toward interpreting the news through a systemic frame. Other news media and bloggers relied mainly on an institutional frame, identifying the U.S. government, a particular agency such as ICE and cities or companies as primarily responsible for the problem at hand. Conservative bloggers often described immigration as an institutional or structural issue. Many outlets of all types also used an individual responsibility frame, relying especially on a victim/villain (11 stories) or hero/villain (5) dynamic. Stories about lawbreakers—both companies and immigrants themselves—also received emphasis (8).

Table 15
Frames for Immigration Coverage

FRAME	#
Individual responsibility	11
Morality	2
Human interest, Service	2
Institutional responsibility	16
Social, structural	12

Five immigration stories focused on racism. One on Fox News emphasized emotions, pitting “cries of racism” against residents who are “sick and tired” of lax enforcement. More than half of the stories were neutral in tone (22, or 52 percent), while a little over a third (16, or 38 percent) applied a negative tone. Nearly one-fifth used emphatic language and name-calling (7, or 17 percent). Stories in the Spanish-language media were consistently balanced and almost always neutral in tone. One piece in Right Wing News used “America’s promise” as an argument that everyone should learn English, calling on a shared values frame.

Discussion

The news media play a central role in stimulating discussion on social issues, framing events and public concerns¹² and guiding the nation’s policy agenda. Its members not only have a responsibility to address race, but also cannot avoid it. Racial disparities continue to pervade U.S. society and often have been the focus of national policy debates. Race also plays an unspoken role in many aspects of U.S. life, shaping the world we see and how it sees us. Journalists’ choices about subjects, sources and frames almost always convey ideas about race—intentionally or not.

Passivity and Racialization in Framing

The frames journalists use when talking about race carry tremendous power. They can trigger ideas about overt discrimination by individuals, malfeasance by institutions or unconscious bias by individuals. A structural or social frame emphasizes the cumulative effects of history, institutions and policy as they interact. Journalists use frames to organize information and ideas, but frames work in part by calling up assumed facts, cultural ideas and arguments that are never mentioned.¹³ Frames also call forth particular solutions, often to the exclusion of others: the individual and institutional responsibility frames, for instance, suggest laws and enforcement against discrimination. The unconscious bias frame might suggest activities to uncover implicit associations and activate the conscious mind. The fourth frame listed above, which emphasizes social and political structures, suggests solutions that reach beyond the individual and recognize the currently unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. Structural frames might call for collective, organized or social action, including from the government.

When the news media regularly overlook the structural racism and the fourth frame, they leave audiences with an incomplete picture. Frames that focus on individual responsibility or institutions outside of ourselves can render the public helpless. We feel incapable of changing individual attitudes or behavior, especially by someone beyond our personal circle of acquaintances. We know we cannot fix a hospital or the public-transportation system. With such frames, “the media pushes us away from taking appropriate action, it pushes us into passivity,” legal and civil-rights scholar John Powell explained in an interview. “It distracts us.”

Communications researchers have identified a direct connection between news frames and racial attitudes. When journalists call attention to an individual’s plight or a harmful villain, they apply the “individual responsibility” frame and also an “episodic” frame, which features a concrete event in the life of one person. These episodic or individual frames divert audiences from social solutions, found political scientist Shanto Iyengar when he analyzed the ways in which such frames influence political decision making. In stories about poverty, for instance, study participants who learned about a homeless or unemployed person’s situation were more likely to blame failings like laziness. In contrast, “thematic” frames, which offered broader context such as statistics or other evidence, called government policies or other social solutions to mind.¹⁴

Iyengar and a number of other researchers have looked specifically at the role of race within framing. William Delehanty and Donald Haider-Markel explored the effects of racialized coverage of Hurricane Katrina in which the dominant media frame focused on black storm victims. Their findings supported the argument that the media emphasis on race in turn strongly shaped public attitudes—among African-Americans, likely inducing more negative views about the government response to the storm and less confidence in its ability to deal with a future disaster.¹⁵ This outcome may represent the interaction of racializing and individualistic frames, Powell suggests. If we lose faith in our government and are overly individualistic in our thinking, pessimism and a feeling of helplessness can begin to dominate.

Influencing Public Support

Iyengar also experimented with racial cues in Katrina coverage and found that episodic, individualized framing influenced public support, depending on the race of the victim who was emphasized. Exposure to a white, rather than African-American, victim led to the view that the federal government should jump in to assist, rather than private relief organizations or individual victims—and for a longer time. Iyengar attributed this effect to the implicit discourse of race in U.S. society. In this situation, news media framing encouraged the public to rely on racial stereotypes, he concluded. “In policy areas that do not directly address the relationship between whites and blacks,” he wrote, “whites respond favorably to policies that harm racial minorities.”¹⁶

When the news media use racializing approaches they make it harder for audiences to see all the peoples of America in all their diversity and complexity. They make it harder for us to see ourselves. Like the break in the levees, the structural arrangements of race in our society are likely to depress the outcome for all—but unequally, Powell points out. He urges journalists to develop an expanded understanding about race.

Clearly, the ways journalists talk about race—and don't talk about race—in U.S. society have a powerful impact. As blogs become an important source for news reporters and for discussions about the news, it seems reasonable to assume the effects will be equally strong. In this study of traditional news sites, niche sites and the blogosphere, we focused on two issue-oriented topics associated with race, racial disparities and racial ideas, and two news developments in which race played a clear role. On the issues of health disparities and immigration, we found a large proportion of structural and social responsibility story frames—but little mention of race, despite its centrality to both. On the immigration topic, many stories took a hero/villain/victim approach, which according to Iyengar, steers the public away from social solutions. In the health topic area, some stories reached beyond the social and the individual to an even more distant—and difficult to address—force: biology.

In the stories that revolved around race and racial ideas, we found little attention to structural, social or historical issues; only ethnic-niche outlets ventured into this broader arena. Traditional media again used the individual, episodic frame—focusing on individual failings or successes and overlooking the opportunity to pull in the broader causes and consequences of the ways race operates in U.S. society.

In the cases where racism was directly addressed in the Internet news arena, it often devolved into name-calling. Stories about discrimination strayed to the absurd, such as the July 19 piece on Fox News' site about a Missouri woman who sued Wal-Mart for discriminating against her pet monkey. A university's charge that a janitor's book about the Ku Klux Klan constituted "racial harassment" made a run through USA Today and a couple of blog items. Fox News, Stereohyped and Right Wing News had fun with John Wiley Price, a Dallas County Commissioner who interrupted a public meeting to complain that a colleague's use of the term "black hole" was racist. On the other hand, a New York Times/CBS News poll about race relations and discrimination found sharp disagreement on race and discrimination between African-Americans and whites. It garnered little attention. A few traditional news sites and news aggregators in our sample dutifully made it a one-day story.

Separate Conversations

An equally important finding as the lack of structural frames was the very separate conversations taking place on the traditional, Spanish-language, conservative, black and Latino-oriented news sites. Each of these spheres often started out on a story of mutual interest in a similar fashion, but they soon diverged. The conservative, black and Latino sites did align in an interesting way, all more often applying institutional and structural frames

than the mainstream news sites. The traditional news sites leaned toward the individual responsibility frame. On the stories we studied, the black and Latino blogs, which did approach issues in similar ways, rarely offered crossover coverage.

Much concern has focused on this apparent segregation among ideas and voices. Our study offers some reason for optimism. First, the niche sites are pushing story frames in new directions and offering information and perspectives not seen on white-oriented mainstream sites.

Cheryl Contee, a founder of Jack and Jill Politics, says this is exactly why she and Baratunde Thurston started the site in 2006. “There really weren’t enough voices out there in the blogosphere that represented what African-Americans were actually thinking and saying. I felt there were a lot of misperceptions in the mainstream media and even among other bloggers,” she explained in an interview. Jack and Jill Politics often has a range of opinions on a single topic, such as the three very different posts (and hundreds of comments) about the New Yorker cover. Regarding the Jackson flap, the blog entered a “completely different realm” than mainstream news, she said. Instead of focusing on the comment itself or the personal relationship between Jackson and Obama, Jack and Jill bloggers focused on the validity of the civil-rights leaders’ comment and on black leadership more generally.

María Treviño, who started Latina Lista in 2004, is a journalist who has long felt that Latina issues and voices were not represented in the mainstream media. “When I was little and looked through the obits, I never saw a Hispanic face,” she recalled in an interview. “I thought we never died.” As a freelance op-ed writer, she also ran into a problem with newspapers that seemed to think one Latina voice each month was enough. In addition to her blog, Treviño produces a newsletter that goes out to 40 newspapers with original content targeting the Hispanic community. It includes a profile, book review and opinion piece. “My idea is, because of all the cutbacks at the newspapers, they’re not going to be able to cover their communities like they should,” she said.

Lack of Knowledge, Limited Sourcing

Treviño collaborates with a consortium of other Latino bloggers interested in immigration, and she feels they have collectively been able to improve other bloggers’ coverage of this issue area and its intersection with race. Progressive bloggers have begun paying more attention overall to immigration, she says, and are inviting contributions from blogs like Latina Lista to their own sites. As for traditional news, Treviño senses a fear of revisiting the topic too often. A lack of knowledge and limited sourcing, too, also leads to narrow themes of coverage and an overemphasis on enforcement and job security. Treviño has noticed how Spanish-speaking media, on the other hand, describe the ways in which the community as a whole is affected by local laws, federal policy, and enforcement—and the reverberations of these in institutions such as schools.

Until recently, Kay Madati served as vice president of marketing for Community Connect, a social-networking company that targets African-American, Hispanic, Asian, LGBT and religious communities with independent sites. He has observed what he considers a “dumbing down in news, in how people are portrayed and issues discussed.” Mainstream news organizations believe they must make sure that issues of interest to “niche” audiences such as the black community also resonate with the general audience—which they think of as white, he explained in an interview. Is the story or concern “universal” enough, they ask, and often interpret the answer through the lens of their personal experience—more often than not, as white people who remain in a white world. Cautious of challenging their audiences, they stick to the familiar. “These [niche] outlets wouldn’t be getting the traffic they get if they weren’t bringing a different kind of conversation to the table,” Madati said.

But will niche blogs or commentary sites manage to influence or mingle with the traditional news media? Will their emphasis on social and structural responsibility begin to resonate in general reporting? For The Root, challenging the general news concept of a black monolith and helping new black columnists diversify the mainstream is an important goal, according to editor Lynette Clemetson. Although the site is still young, she said traditional media outlets have indeed begun calling on voices from The Root. Jack and Jill Politics’ Contee has been surprised by the interest from mainstream news outlets and bloggers. “I never imagined it would resonate as strongly as it has,” she said. Contee believes one-third to one-half of her readers are not black.

Latina Lista’s Treviño finds herself regularly approached by the traditional media to comment on issues such as the Latino vote and immigration. Reporters also use Latina Lista and other Latino blogs to keep up with immigration developments and call her for story leads. She deliberately writes provocative headlines that she hopes will prompt a call from a news director. In turn, Treviño follows Spanish-language media and aims to facilitate the crossover of their coverage into the mainstream. Her Latino blogger consortium put out a set of 38 questions to the presidential candidates about comprehensive immigration reform, the treatment of migrant workers, trade and U.S. legislation affecting Latin American countries. They promoted the request and while they did not get answers, they did get attention from CNN, the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post.

Conversation among these niche blogs and commentary sites, ethnic media and traditional media would be of great benefit to this country’s ability to understand and address its internal inequality, much research suggests. Journalists need to help America out of its archaic, static understandings about race. “The public is trying to grapple with a new racial reality, but the press keeps trying to snatch us back to this old moment,” says civil-rights scholar John Powell. A conversation that purports to be mainstream but leaves out multiple perspectives results in misdiagnosed problems and misplaced solutions, he explains. But communication about structural racialization can be very effective, according to Powell, when we write “about you, me and us within a larger structure.” The personal must be linked to the structural, the individual to our shared histories and values. The systems of

inequality affect us all. As journalists, our job is not to avoid complexity, but to tell complex stories in a way that makes them seem simple.

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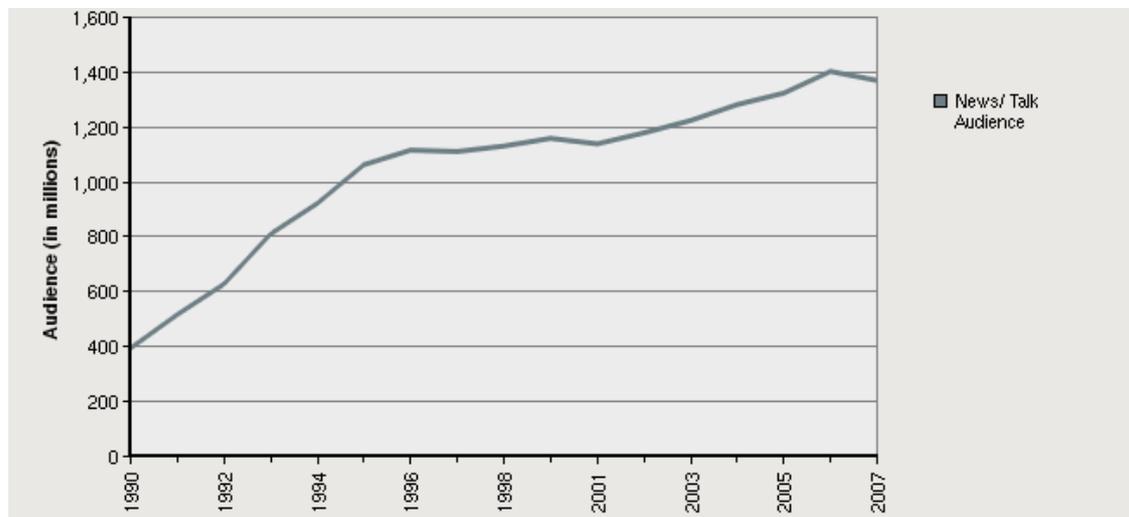
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TALK RADIO

Throughout the day and across the night, talk radio claims an influential voice in its audiences' lives. Commercial talk radio first assumed its place as a powerful genre in political communication in the early 1990s.¹ The news/talk/information format has continued to grow dramatically since then, commanding 10.7 percent of the national radio audience in 2007—the No. 2 radio format in the nation after country music.² Fully 16 percent of respondents in a Pew Research Center survey, for example, said they “learned something regularly” about the 2008 presidential campaign from talk radio.³

Figure 13
News/Talk Radio Audience Growth



Source: Pew Research Center

We reviewed the latest data on talk radio, its hosts and its audiences in order to fill out our picture of news media coverage and how it shapes the conversation about race in America.

Hosts and Audiences

From a demographic standpoint, commercial news/talk is white radio for white people. White male conservative voices dominate, by far. Each year, industry magazine *Talkers* analyzes Arbitron data and designates its “Heavy Hundred” hosts. The rankings aim to reflect more than audience size alone, taking into account factors such as “impact,” “longevity,” “recognition” and “talent.” Conservative hosts comprise eight of the top 10 hosts in the 2007 rankings. Only one libertarian and one liberal voice rank in this powerful circle (see table 19).

Table 16
Top 10 News/Talk Radio Hosts

Host	Politics
1. Rush Limbaugh	Conservative
2. Sean Hannity	Conservative
3. Michael Savage	Conservative
4. Laura Schlessinger	Conservative
5. Glenn Beck	Conservative
6. Laura Ingraham	Conservative
7. Don Imus	Shock/Conservative
8. Ed Schultz	Progressive
9. Mike Gallagher	Conservative
10. Neal Boortz	Libertarian

Source: Arbitron

Just four liberal voices made the top 20 hosts, with a financial advice genre and a shock jock occupying the remaining nonconservative spots. Their meager presence, nevertheless, represents a major shift from a complete absence a few years ago. In the 2005 Heavy Hundred, fourteen hosts took a conservative or libertarian stance, with Alan Colmes the one liberal in the mix at No. 19. There was one moderate, three hosts focused on finances and one on relationships.

Of the top 100 hosts, only five are people of color. Four of these take a liberal point-of-view and all are African-American. They are Joe Madison at WOL (#18, liberal), Bev Smith at American Urban Radio Networks (#41, liberal), Lincoln Ware (WDBZ, #59, liberal), Larry Elder (KABC, #67, libertarian), and Larry Young (WOLB, #95, liberal). There are 13 women on the Top 100 list, four of which are co-hosts.

When measured solely by audience, conservative voices loom even more dramatically above all others. Rush Limbaugh, with 14 million weekly listeners, and Sean Hannity, with 13 million, dominate the airwaves. Michael Savage and Laura Schlessinger follow, with 8.25 million. Glenn Beck garners 6.5 million. By comparison, Ed Shultz, the top-rated liberal voice, pulls in 3 million.

Like its hosts, the national talk radio audience is extraordinarily white. Black people make up 5.6 percent of listeners (measured by the quarter hour), with Hispanic listeners 4.3 percent of the markets that Arbitron tracks.⁴ The commercial news/talk audience is larger than that for public radio across every age demographic. Those in the largest group, age 35 to 64, spent 9 hours each week listening to commercial talk and news, compared to 7.25 hours spent by public radio listeners. Slightly more than half of commercial talk audiences are men.

Impact

Talk radio has been given credit for shifting the immigration debate, to the point of one host contributing language to a Senate bill last June, according to the Associated Press. Individual hosts have been found to move whole audiences in their attitudes. In an analysis of Rush Limbaugh's influence, researchers gauged his ability to activate opinion against President Clinton and government spending, and to win support for Bob Dole over the period of 1994-1996. They concluded that Limbaugh was especially effective at inducing hostility toward particular ideas, personalities and groups. He also seemed to mobilize support somewhat well.⁵

The structuring of ideas and community that talk radio performs no doubt plays a role in not just the conversation about structural racism or lack thereof, but also the system itself. What does it mean to create a clearly defined "white space" for the discussion of news? How does this racially segregated space also create boundaries around ideas and experience?

A Shared Ideology

In explaining the pull of conservative talk radio, Harvard University political scientist William G. Mayer points to a felt need among its audiences. Talk radio offers information and perspectives that conservatives think mainstream media refuses to provide. Since at least 2001, 45 percent of those surveyed by Gallup have said the media was too liberal. In 2007, just 18 percent thought it was too conservative.⁶ One conservative operation, the Media Research Center, is founded upon highlighting and publicizing what it sees as evidence of liberal media bias, collecting news stories as well surveys of journalists about their political views and voting habits.

This perception of news bias helps draw more conservatives to talk radio than liberals—who are not likely to share this view. Only 16 percent of Democrats described the news media as "too liberal." Most, or 59 percent, described it as "just about right." "Liberals, in short, do not need talk radio," Mayer writes in *Public Interest*.⁷

Listening to news talk, however, does not necessarily make one better informed. In a study of knowledge gained through the medium, Stephen Earl Bennett found that exposure to political talk radio was not a significant predictor of political knowledge once other influences had been taken into account.⁸ One explanation, Bennett writes, could be the "mis-information" cultivated by talk radio identified in a separate study. That study, by Hofstetter and colleagues, found conservative talk radio listeners less likely to hold accurate beliefs about even nonideological facts than others.⁹ At the same time, they were confident in their beliefs and more likely to be engaged in politics.

Listeners to conservative talk, the authors suggest, may rely on inferences they draw from bits and pieces of information delivered within the overall ideological environment of

programs. Importantly, the researchers point out in another study of audience characteristics, these listeners are not alienated and isolated, as earlier research had concluded. Instead, they act on their views.¹⁰

Michael Harrison, publisher of *Talkers*, dismisses the idea that talk radio has a powerful conservative influence, arguing that talk radio encompasses a multitude of voices with multiple opinions. And an exit poll by Edison Media Research concluded that—at least in the Republican presidential nomination—talk radio did less to change listeners’ minds than to gather together those who already agreed. But there is great power in an assembled community of people with shared belief systems.

Polarization and Identity

Talk radio hosts mobilize their audiences through specific techniques. They cultivate a sense of camaraderie as society’s underdogs, the protectors of American values in an environment of ideological oppression. Hosts regularly pin belittling nicknames on Democratic political figures. They apply labels such as “liberals,” “whiners,” “wackos” and “radicals” to those with alternative viewpoints. Many pride themselves on insensitivity, announcing their refusal to bow to what they call “political correctness.”

Conservative hosts deliberately construct “highly polarized group identities,” independent scholar Kathryn Ruud concludes in a qualitative analysis of their shows.¹¹ In comparing their discourse to war-time propaganda, she identifies a number of techniques:

- Labeling to generalize and assign negative characteristics to nonconservative, nonlisteners
- Creating dichotomy in moral qualities between the “good” group and the “bad”
- Presenting “in-group” members in a positive light
- Scapegoating
- Exaggerating negative behavior and statements by outsiders.

These techniques have a power to radicalize, Ruud says, by constructing oppositional social and cultural groups out of political disagreement. In one recent example, Glenn Beck commented on the California wildfires with this: “I think there is a handful of people who hate America. Unfortunately for them, a lot of them are losing their homes in a forest fire today.”¹²

Race Talk

While talk radio listener identity is constructed around political ideology, not race, race does enter the equation. On several occasions in recent years, hosts have drawn fire for racially charged remarks. In September 2007, Bill O’Reilly “couldn’t get over the fact” that when he went to a famed Harlem restaurant, “there wasn’t any kind of craziness at all.”¹³ He attended an Anita Baker concert and seemed surprised, according to the *New York Times*, to find the crowd well-dressed. Earlier in the year, Don Imus lost his contract with

CBS Radio after making racially and sexually insulting remarks about the Rutgers women's basketball team.

Racial ideas also played a role in two popular topics on talk radio last year: immigration and domestic terrorism. On talk radio, immigrants often become an invading, alien force that threatens American values. Michael Savage puts it bluntly, "We, the people, are being displaced by the people of Mexico. This is an invasion by any other name."¹⁴

Domestic terrorism as a topic can lead to a hostile discussion about Islam and its adherents. Among other remarks, Glenn Beck has warned Muslims that they should be put in internment camps if they don't volunteer to fight in Iraq in order "to shoot the bad Muslims in the head." Neal Boortz joins Beck in his anti-Muslim rhetoric, calling Islam a "violent, violent religion."

Racial slurs repeatedly make it on the air, and yet hosts frame their critics as racist themselves. After Cho Seung-Hui killed more than 30 people at Virginia Tech, Rush Limbaugh insinuated that political correctness helped cause the massacre. "The guy is Korean. He's Asian. How many people refused to do anything about it or even complain about it because they would be tagged as racists?"¹⁵

Ethnic and Smaller markets

Some black and Hispanic hosts have broken through the mainstream narrative to claim their own voices. Joe Madison of WOL-AM in Washington, D.C., who is No. 18 on the Talkers Heavy Hundred, contributes regularly to CNN and joined XM Satellite Radio in May 2008. He speaks plainly about structural inequities in the United States. Bev Smith, No. 41 on the list, came up through traditional journalism and was once the consumer affairs investigative reporter for the NBC affiliate in Pittsburgh, WPXI Television. She now works for the American Urban Radio Networks and brings straight talk about race onto the airwaves as part of a variety of issues, including some with an investigative bent. "I want this show to be the voice of the African-American community. I want to be able to vocalize every aspect of the community so that I introduce to some, familiarize to others, educate to all, on who African-Americans are as a people, and what their contributions have been to make America what it is today," she told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2005.¹⁶

Talk is not a dominant genre on black radio, but it does attract 2.2 million listeners every week. English-language news talk lured 1.85 million Latino listeners in 2007 and followed only country as the primary format on stations targeted to the Hispanic market. Spanish-language news talk pulled in 1.7 million listeners, or 3.3 percent of Latino listeners.¹⁷

Black and brown hosts also have achieved strong ratings in regional markets. Larry Elder, a black libertarian host, commands high ratings in Los Angeles and recently started an hour-long political commentary show on Fox News. While Elder may not agree with Madison or

Smith on a multitude of points, none shy away from engaging their audiences directly in discussions about the racial structures that operate in U.S. society.

Race Maintenance

While this is not an argument that white conservative talk show hosts are racist, they do promote racialization on the airwaves through a range of subtle to overt expressions. As “white space,” the talk news genre seems to create a comfortable place for participants to defend racial boundaries.¹⁸ Instead of engaging with political ideas as individuals, listeners are bound into an artificial political alliance built upon exaggerated difference. At minimum, talk radio’s systematic emphasis on distinctions can be assumed to reinforce unconscious stereotyping. Labels and boundaries also shut down the empathetic space that allows a society to identify and address structural disparities.

In this way, much of talk radio helps maintain the racialized structures in this country and the social categories of race these depend upon. If the white racial experience is defined by creating an “other” that is viewed with fear and exclusion, as theorist John Powell suggests, then talk shows seem to do a very good job.

END NOTES

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STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Ishmael Reed is one of today's pre-eminent—and controversial—African-American literary figures and has written novels, essays and poems since the 1960s. Reed's literary style is best known for its use of parody and satire in attempts to create new myths and to challenge the formal conventions of literary tradition. He attended the State University of New York at Buffalo and founded the East Village Other, an underground newspaper that received national attention in the 1960s. He has since taught at numerous prestigious universities around the country, including Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth and University of California at Berkeley.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. I think they do a pretty good job, especially when they use public reports about foundations, for instance, reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is the opinion pages that are the problem because they frame public perceptions. When they use public reports—for instance, reports on sentencing—I use those reports. But it's the day-to-day news stories, the unscientific, unfiltered reporting that have become a problem for me. It's the cold hard facts that I rely upon. Those are what I use. I rely on reports. So far, African-Americans haven't built those institutions to take these issues on. There needs to be an awareness that the media influences public policy and influences the hardships of African-Americans.

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. It has led to a post-race period. You have a black candidate pushing that, Obama, and we're in a feel-good post-race environment. You have Corey Booker in Newark, and a whole generation of African-Americans who think that race is something that should be put in the background. It means that people of a certain class will benefit. It means that certain issues like the disparities in health care, disparities of the criminal-justice system or the problems of segregated schools won't be realized. When you are in a post-race period, the message is sent that whatever problems African-Americans experience are self-inflicted.

Q. What is wrong with the way that the mainstream media covers structural racism and its lingering historical effects?

A. They blame the victim, and they don't portray the variety of African-Americans that exist.

Q. How would it change our society if the mainstream media did a better job of covering structural racism and its effects?

A. If there was an opportunity to challenge the lies, I would settle for that, but we don't have that. We're shut out of the media. We have no power in the media. If they would stop perpetuating myths, there might be some improvements. As it is now, my drastic answer would be that media should be charged with hate crimes. Not like Bosnia or Rwanda—I wouldn't go that far. But it is getting to the point where African-Americans are going to have to decide what they're going to do with institutions that put their lives in jeopardy every day.

Q. How well do the ethnic media cover structural racism and its effects?

A. They do very well as a matter of fact. When the press became segregated, then there was a big problem. I read the Final Call and the local newspapers and you get stuff there you don't get anywhere else. I think the ethnic press does a good job. They show that domestic violence isn't just a black issue. I read a number of different publications. I get a better picture of what is going on in the country when I read those papers. I think the ethnic media plays an even more important role.

Q. What would help the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. More money and more subscribers. But if you look at the glory days of the ethnic media, those people were very influential, and as a matter of fact the government tries to break them...up.

Q. How effective is it when the African-American media provide commentaries (editorials, op-ed, opinion pieces) on issues related to structural racism?

A. I love it when they are not beholden to right-wing editors. They do a great job.

Q. Should the African-American media do more or fewer commentaries on structural racism? Or would you rather see more coverage of structural racism on their news pages?

A. They do a good job, or rather they do a great job. Jet magazine will print statistics that others won't print (i.e. domestic violence has declined, I found that out in Jet Magazine).

Q. Do some ethnic newspapers do a better job of covering structural racism than others? Which ones—African-American, Spanish-language, Asian, etc.—do the best job of covering structural racism?

A. Amsterdam News and the Final Call.

Q. What could the ethnic media do better to cover structural racism?

A. If more African-American journalists would go work for them, it should be considered like AmeriCorps, like going into the inner city and setting up a media practice. That is how dire the situation is.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the mainstream media to cover?

A. I would like to see an in-depth story on this mortgage crisis, because they just try to blame it on black people in the inner-city. The hidden subtext is that black people are deadbeats. I would like to see some in-depth reporting on how structural racism led or contributed to this mortgage crisis that is costing African-Americans so much. It's because we were denied conventional loans, loans that were available to whites. And 50% of the people who were denied had good credit—and it's the banks that get bailed out.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the ethnic media to cover?

A. I'd liked them to continue to cover racial disparities and the criminal-justice system; 70% of those arrested are in white or rural America, but they don't end up in jail. Those charges vanish.

Q. What is a good example of covering structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. Chicago Tribune did a good job with a series they did on prosecutorial misconduct. Once in a while they do a good job, and the LA Times has done a good job covering police corruption in the LAPD.

Q. What are some examples or aspects of structural racism that go uncovered in the mainstream media?

A. I think the way that black people are invisible in the media. The media focuses on important situations like politics and they write it as though blacks don't exist. They're not being inclusive in their coverage.

Q. What are some examples or aspects of structural racism that go uncovered in the ethnic media?

A. They should do more about toxic products like illegal guns, how they are aimed at the black community from the outside. The white media isn't going to hold them blameless. A lot of people have been covering black pathology but not covering yellow and white pathology. They emphasize the black pathology for entertainment.

Q. How are communities of color affected by the lack of coverage of structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. Well, they're treated with hostility by the white population and there will be less superstitions by African-Americans in everyday life. The idea that blacks are the only ones on welfare causes a lot of damage.

Q. How are white people affected by the lack of coverage?

A. They think that this is a paradise.

Q. What are the overall risks if the news media ignores structural racism?

A. It means that we can't get access to capital. And it means that the banks can continue to redline without being penalized.

Q. If the coverage of structural racism improved in the mainstream media, would it help to curtail structural racism and its ongoing legacy?

A. I think so.

Q. Are you aware of any countries where mainstream media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. I get the BBC every day and at the BBC I can hear from African intellectuals and leaders. I can get the news about the world. I don't have to hear about Paris Hilton. With the BBC we don't have anything like this....

Delores Jones-Brown is an associate professor of Race and Crime and Juvenile Justice at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She received a B.A. from Howard University, an M.A. and Ph.D from Rutgers University and a J.D. from Rutgers University School of Law-Newark.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. I don't think it's covered well at all. The media doesn't fully recognize how they are a part of structural racism. When the Sean Bell shooting took place, one of the major papers started the article about officers by saying Michael Oliver, one of the officers, is tall and handsome. What did that have to do with it? Nothing. But it set up the best scenario where it was easy to identify with the police. Then the New York Times and other papers represented the club Kahlua with the word sleazy. And of course, that says something about the victims in this case if they attended a sleazy bar. There are lots of subtle ways that the media participates in structural racism and they don't realize how their wording sets up scenarios that make the victims of color seem undeserving of sympathy and

empathy. People of color are perpetrators and they (media) use animalistic language. When young whites are perpetrators, it's far more individualized. The papers suggest they have an individual problem versus a group identity that is attributed to black offenders.

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. It creates the notion that certain kinds of victims are undeserving of empathy and reinforces existing stereotypes of who they should fear. And if the perpetrator is white, no racial identity is specified, but if it's a person of color, they specify that the person is black or Asian like in the Virginia Tech shooting. There was a lot of coverage about the perpetrator being Asian. Our typical fear of the other is that they can't be trusted...But they don't talk about how the online [gun] dealer is a white guy and why are guns and this type of ammunition available online? The same dealer supplied the Omaha mall shooter with guns and one paper covered that fact. It didn't get a lot of attention.

Q. How would it change our society if the mainstream media did a better job of covering structural racism and its effects?

A. I think for people who are willing to set aside existing stereotypes, it might change the way they think about things. For people who have bought into the stereotypes about racial and ethnic identity, not so much. You hear people say I'm tired of talking about race. There's this dominant culture desire to ignore it and when you put it in their face, they react negatively versus positively and it influences how mainstream news media cover it and see it as newsworthy. Then you have the kinds of things that are considered stories, like the young white girl who gets killed and is a grad student. We did some coverage of an Afro-Caribbean woman in New York who was killed, but it did not get the same level of reaction or concern (that was in New York City). Producers make decisions about what they're going to say.

Q. How well do the ethnic media cover structural racism and its effects?

A. I think that the reason why most of the ethnic media exists is because of the existence of structural racism and how they make decisions about what is newsworthy and how they cover that story. And my understanding is that in fact, the reason why it came into existence was because of what they saw as the deficit in the coverage in what they saw in mainstream media. So they do a better job.

Q. Do the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism than the mainstream media?

A. Yes, and they should.

Q. What would help the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. I think a pet peeve of mine is that some of the ethnic media needs to pay more attention to details, like correct grammar and spelling. I think it takes away from people's ability to hear the message when the stories aren't done in a professional manner.

Q. Specifically, how well does the African-American media do in covering structural racism?

A. Around issues in crime and justice in particular, they do present the stories in a way that, in my opinion, should make people think differently about how we present information about offenders and about victims and the notion that it's just an allegation until it's been proven or disproven in court. Too often—in particular when we deal with interracial crime when the offender is of color and the victim is white—there is a rush to judgment, except in the Duke Lacrosse [rape] case. But the way many stories are written, the person is guilty by virtue of allegation, and other ethnic media do a better job of not presenting the information that way.

Q. How effective is it when the African-American media provide commentaries (editorials, op-ed, opinion pieces) on issues related to structural racism?

A. To me it depends on who it is that does the commentary. I think that mainstream [media] in white culture are much more accepting of certain personalities. And if it's a personality they trust they're willing to at least consider the viewpoint. I avoid blogs. The majority of Americans still don't want to believe racism is an issue and [believe] that success comes from individual effort. They don't believe that there is such a thing as structural racism. They say what do you mean, if you take the SAT, there is a score, and that means that there is a level playing field. They don't want to take into consideration the historical implications that mean that some people don't score well; that there's still racism in the design of the tests themselves.

Q. Should the African-American media do more or fewer commentaries on structural racism? Or would you rather see more coverage of structural racism on their news pages?

A. I think both things are necessary. I think there is a need to see a specific series of ongoing commentary on structural racism helping to understand how it works and impacts people. Particularly in the criminal justice area, there needs to be a pointed addressing of structural racism when it comes up in that context; how the alleged victim is being portrayed and [for example,] how people try to act like O.J. Simpson...was the first case in modern time when we [saw] racism in America and it was not.

Q. Do some ethnic newspapers do a better job of covering structural racism than others? Which ones—African-American, Spanish-language, Asian, etc.—do the best job of covering structural racism?

A. I'd say one of my favorites...Amsterdam News, does a decent job. They don't always make the safest decisions, and I see news there that I don't see in other places.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the mainstream media to cover?

A. Criminal justice, education bias, definitely criminal justice issues from the perspective of the offenders and victims, [and] issues of housing. The whole debate over affirmative action, to me has not been covered well in terms of the intentions behind affirmative action legislation and how it has played out in everyday life. Primarily in mainstream media, I don't know if they have intentionally sought out a lot of comments. I have a difficult time trying to see the fact that prior to affirmative action, very well-qualified people could not get jobs and that litigation was intended to remedy that. So many people of color have bought into this notion that somehow the race situation will get better if they dismantle affirmative action even though many people have been the beneficiary of [it]. And the fact that educated people cannot talk effectively about why this was created and is necessary in order to really attempt to dismantle structural racism sort of surprises me, and that they can't come up with a decent conversation about how we ended up where we are and why it's necessary to continue to practice it given the legacy it was intended to remedy.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the ethnic media to cover?

A. The housing market. I think people are very much unaware of how much structural racism affects where people live and who lives where and how they think about residence. I live on a street and in 16 years, my family is the only one of color and there is a racialized history.

Q. What is a good example of covering structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. The New York Times and others have done single stories about the mortgage practices among people of color. There have been some decent stories about race and the death penalty.

Q. How are communities of color affected by the lack of coverage of structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. I mean particularly in the housing area, people still believe segregation is OK, and that is the norm and the practices that they should be objecting to.

Q. How are white people affected by the lack of coverage?

A. Like all people, not all white people are the same. And for liberal whites who are willing to think about and entertain and see these issues, it will become difficult to win their colleagues over to their side because they don't have the ammunition they think they need.

They've never had to deal with these realities. And then there are people for whom ignorance is bliss until you have to deal with that ignorance. There are people who believe in hate crimes based on misconceptions that people are successful because of their own efforts. It fuels the hate groups who don't know or understand how much the structure of America has contributed to the state of certain people.

Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez is an associate professor at the University of Texas at Austin's School of Journalism. She has more than 17 years of daily news experience, mostly as a reporter for the Boston Globe, WFAA-TV in Dallas and the Dallas Morning News. Rivas-Rodriguez's research interests include the intersection of oral history and journalism, U.S. Latinos and the news media, both as producers of news and as consumers. She received her Ph.D. as a Freedom Forum doctoral fellow from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her master's degree is from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and her bachelor of journalism degree is from the University of Texas at Austin.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. There has been a vast improvement over the years—and I believe newspapers and some news magazines have led the way in outlining the relationships between, say, income levels and educational levels, criminal justice and race/ethnicity. But those stories are usually tremendously long works, written over the course of several months by veteran reporters. Where there is still great room for improvement is in the day-to-day reporting, in which journalists often fail to connect the dots. It's as if the institutional racism and classicism is only something that we think about when we pause and ponder the question: Why is it that there are more African-Americans and Latinos on death row? Or why is it that prison sentences are often longer for minorities? It's not an easy thing to accomplish, to provide that context, but it is necessary for us, as journalists, to provide our readers, or viewers that background—particularly in a democracy, such as ours.

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. Not that I'm disagreeing with you—but that's a leading question! The effect is very profound and broad. The media don't cause the structural racism, but they are part of it, part of the institutional racism that pervades our social system. So, because that inequality is not part of our everyday discourse, some people think it's an exaggeration that it even exists. It is the reason you hear phrases such as "politically incorrect"—the very real concerns of people of color. I do think we are stopping short of a goal of a more just world if we stop at addressing racism and we don't think of addressing sexism, and discrimination of gay/lesbian/transgender people. Basically, I think our goal must be a more just world, for all

of us. I don't think it advances us as a people if we take care of prejudice against black, brown, yellow and red people, and then there is racism against white people. We're all in this together, this thing called life.

Q. What is wrong with the way that the mainstream media covers structural racism and its lingering historical effects?

A. Take for example the Ken Burns/PBS issue that many Latinos were involved with in 2007. The overarching issue was the structural racism that pervades many different systems: PBS, the NEH, the corporate structure that funded the documentary, the book publishing business, which published the final book based on "The War," which included not a single mention of Latinos or Hispanics. There were some excellent articles by individual news reporters, and some opinion writers. But in general, what was missing was that deeper issue: Why have Latinos been left out of books/movies, to begin with? How does that omission relate to PBS, and all the other entities involved? Why has Ken Burns repeatedly left Latinos out of his documentaries on baseball, jazz, etc? I was totally disgusted when reporters either didn't ask the question, or took his word for it, that everyone was happy with what he had done. That complicity was the evidence of how the news media too often walk hand-in-hand with those in power. It's completely contrary to the role that the news media should play in a democracy.

Q. How would it change our society if the mainstream media did a better job of covering structural racism and its effects?

A. Minorities would feel more of a sense of ownership and belonging in their own country. Of course, the racists of the world, which have a pretty big stage, won't give up happily and the heat will be turned up.

Q. How did we get where we are today, where people are so ignorant of the roles of various ethnic/racial groups in the U.S.?

A. School textbooks—how well do they cover key issues [and] events in American [and] world history? Reports on how structural racism is related to capitalism, the great obstacles it poses for a democracy.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the ethnic media to cover?

A. Same as above.

Q. What is a good example of covering structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. I would have to research this, and don't have the time. Sorry.

Q. How are communities of color affected by the lack of coverage of structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. They don't feel ownership/belonging, and I think that might lead to participation in the democratic process.

Q. How are white people affected by the lack of coverage?

A. They sometimes don't take our concerns seriously—as if it's much ado about nothing.

Q. What are the overall risks if the news media ignores structural racism?

A. Our country's demographics are changing. The news media must reflect its population, and show all Americans what the concerns and issues are.

Q. If the coverage of structural racism improved in the mainstream media, would it help to curtail structural racism and its ongoing legacy?

A. Good question. It will help. The consciousness of some people will be raised and that will curtail it. Will it eliminate racism? No. But that can't keep us from trying.

Angela Oh is an attorney and activist best known for her role as spokesperson for the Korean-American community after the 1992 Los Angeles riots. She has served on numerous commissions and boards, including the Federal Judicial Nominations Committee for U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer, the Federal Magistrate Judge Selection Panel for the Central District of California, and the California Commission on Access to Justice. In 1997, she was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the President's Initiative on Race. Oh is a graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles, where she earned her B.A. and Master's in Public Health degrees. Her J.D. is from King Hall, the University of California, Davis School of Law.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. My experience in 1992 (L.A. riots) showed me how the white media has really fanned the flames of fear and prejudice. With the Central Park Jogger, she was gang raped, and the story of the woman who drowned her kids, it was always a black assailant. I travel around the country talking about race. When it comes to how the media covers structural racism, there are huge regional differences in places like southern California because it's so diverse. We've educated the press here but there are still issues. Right now, there's a huge need for there to be opportunities for journalists to stretch themselves to learn. There are a number of nonprofits that try to focus on educating the media and how to cover certain subjects

without getting into stereotyping. It's too easy to go to the sensational and racialize stuff when it's consistently shown that poverty and lack of jobs is the culprit.

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. It provokes riots. There is outrage.

Q. What is wrong with the way that the mainstream media covers structural racism and its lingering historical effects?

A. I think there's a lack of information. Few people are willing to be straight up about what they know. That is why Barack's speech on race was so powerful. He could talk about what he knows.

Q. How well do the ethnic media cover structural racism and its effects?

A. They don't at all. [Stories] are also colored by that individual's experience and that's usually not the whole picture. You have to get off the hamster wheel to get the whole picture.

Q. Do the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism than the mainstream media?

A. They don't. I think all media are limited. They are part of an apparatus that are about making money. People who tell the truth are scary, and if you tell the truth as much as everyone says they want the truth, we also know some people don't want to know the truth.

Q. What would help the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. Funding and resources would help. Most ethnic media are mom and pop shops.

Q. How effective is it when the African-American media provide commentaries (editorials, op-ed, opinion pieces) on issues related to structural racism?

A. I think people pay attention to some voices that are known, like Earl Hutchinson, and he's not someone who is willing to stretch himself...But that's why I think people like John Hope Franklin are great because they have intellectual power, have a certain amount of privilege, and understand that they have an obligation to give back. He's brilliant and has had opportunities, but he's still a black male in America.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the mainstream media to cover?

A. Well it's really interesting right now, with the whole green movement and how communities of color are impacted by this movement. I would like to see more on that.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the ethnic media to cover?

A. They should be covering the same stories the mainstream media are covering, but they are definitely going to be experiencing the news in different ways. Analysis of the news is going to be very different. And my only really detailed knowledge is in L.A. with Korean immigrants. With the Latasha Harlins [shooting] story, the Korean community thought it was terrible, but they had no idea that the entire community was blamed for that. But that is what happens when a person of color commits a crime. It's interesting how communities of color digest that.

Q. What are some examples or aspects of structural racism that go uncovered in the mainstream media?

A. Certainly, the real human stories about the everyday people that are beautiful—they don't get covered at all. But probably the more every day interactions we should be hearing about. People like Oprah Winfrey are in an exceptional position to make advances in that area. I view her as an important civil-rights figure who has a consciousness. She's moving with a new analysis of civil rights. She has command of a diverse audience, has a lot of money and has a special obligation to make life better for more people.

Q. How are communities of color affected by the lack of coverage of structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. We are terribly impacted and we are enormously impacted by the lack of coverage. The truth of the matter is that communities, unfortunately, cannot advocate very effectively for themselves.

Q. How are white people affected by the lack of coverage?

A. They remain ignorant as a consequence and some of them are suffering just as much as blacks are because of it. But the consciousness of each person has to change, and that's more than a lifetime's worth of work. People don't want to get their hands dirty. And when those who do want to make a change get involved with politics—once you get it, it demands that you become corrupt because the system is corrupt.

Q. Are you aware of any countries where mainstream media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. No, this is a unique American concept. We are unique in our obsession with race and racism. Others are not obsessed with figuring it out and making it better.

Kalahn Taylor-Clark is a senior associate (and PhD, MPH) for the Engelberg Center for Healthcare Reform, HVHC Initiative. She has a PhD in Health Policy and Political Analysis from Harvard University. Her areas of expertise include public health, communication in politically and socially marginalized populations, women, gender and health, and the political factors that influence policy to ameliorate health disparities. She recently led a study that found that while newspapers are increasing their coverage of racial differences in health care, the bottom line on who bears responsibility for these disparities varies widely from story to story.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. I'm in health care, and from that perspective, structural racism isn't covered at all. And ultimately there are a couple of ways we think about this. And some experts talk about the need to have thematic framing when we talk about racism. Episodic framing will talk about the welfare mother who is a black woman and they show the picture, and in the white mind, they say that all [black] women are that way. And no, I don't think they're covering structural racism well, because there is a lot of episodic framing when we talk about structural racism. They're not covering the causes of these. And statistical outcomes in crimes might be 45% of African-Americans are in jail, for instance, that is technically a thematic discussion.

But what they're not doing is telling you a context for understanding the context of that. And what the people will do when it comes to race, they will short cut...and blame the individual. And I've done studies in health care and it shows in education and in crime, but if people believe that the individual or individuals are responsibility for their inequality, they will be less likely to want anyone to do anything about it. When I did a health-care disparities piece, I asked people what are the major causes of health-care disparities...And you have a horrible push away from dealing with and addressing the issues of racism, but that you end up blaming racist outcomes on the individual themselves, and that's a major problem. And no, the media isn't covering it well. And part of the reason they're not covering it well is because they're using episodic frames and there's also emphasis on personal responsibility.

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. What you have is an emphasis on larger, systemic structures addressing issues of racism and inequality. When you have an emphasis on personal responsibility, and if you have inequality in a crime and racism is one of the causes, that is not being discussed early. But in its place are issues about personal responsibility and you say, oh well, those black men are lazy. That emphasis takes the focus off governments and systems to address the problem and places the blame on the individual.

Q. What is wrong with the way that the mainstream media covers structural racism and its lingering historical effects?

A. I don't think they cover it. I don't think that they do it, and in the health-care sectors...they're not talking about a system in which African-Americans and other minorities have been systematically left out. The news media aren't talking about that. There's a real emphasis on the individual and if there's an issue of racism, it's episodically framed, not thematically framed. [In the case of Tuskegee black men being injected with syphilis] the individual physician happens to be racist. And the news media had the piece on Tuskegee and they only interviewed the one physician that was responsible for the whole study. And you walk away thinking that it was just that one physician that gave these guys syphilis and the news media covers it episodically and don't even talk about how the system was set up to ever allow this one scientist to do this.

Q. How would it change our society if the mainstream media did a better job of covering structural racism and its effects?

A. I think it would be more of an emphasis from both political sides on understanding equity in a more holistic way. Right now, there is so much divisiveness about what should be done to address race and racism. It would be covered better if you would bring a large number of stakeholders to the table, to really do something. There would be a more pointed interrogation of the system. In the case of the Tuskegee black men who were infected with syphilis, as opposed to focusing on that one scientist that was responsible, you would talk about a system that would allow a scientist to do that if you really wanted to change the public-health system and its racist foundation.

Q. How well do the ethnic media cover structural racism and its effects?

A. My guess is that ethnic media are going to deal with it even less than broad media... some sort of structural racism might be implied by the story, but it doesn't necessarily bear out and it doesn't necessarily bear out the story about how the systems are affecting people. My assumption is that there's an implicit understanding among minorities that the system is failing us. And that's partially why, I think, it's not covered well in the ethnic media. And another reason is that ethnic media has more constraints of their editors and publishers and they have five beats instead of two. They have a lot more they're trying to grapple with and it makes it really hard to delve into structural causes and structural racism and how it influences and that requires a lot more research.

Q. Do the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism than the mainstream media?

A. I can't answer that definitely. What I can say, if I were to answer you at all, is that they may do a poorer job of it, not because they're not trying, but because they are resource restrained. And ethnic media are often following the mainstream media, but giving it the ethnic bend.

Q. What would help the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. One, additional resources would help, and two...the difficulty for them for covering racism and discrimination is that there are no numbers and no way to measure the technical impact of these things and you can't measure whether somebody went to the doctor or not.

Q. How effective is it when the African-American media provide commentaries (editorials, op-ed, opinion pieces) on issues related to structural racism?

A. We do know that trust in the source is a good thing and self-interest is a reality. If an African-American is writing this thing about racism, a white person is going to take it with a grain of salt for the most part...we know definitely that the source absolutely matters and it also matters for minorities. And there's not been any quantitative testing of that, and I don't know if there has been any qualitative and quantitative testing on the effects of this. But I will tell you that editorials and things like that go a long way to affect opinion as do news stories and opinion pieces and they're very widely read.

Q. Should the African-American media do more or fewer commentaries on structural racism? Or would you rather see more coverage of structural racism on their news pages?

A. I think that general coverage will get you more bang for your buck if you will, in the sense that black people and minorities have been outraged forever about racism and it hasn't done too much. You really have to infuse the entire society to talk about how racism is influencing the system at the broader level. And it means they are ultimately part of the process. My suggestion would be that structural racism needs to be covered, but the New York Times needs to do a better job given the amount of resources they have.

Q. Do some ethnic newspapers do a better job of covering structural racism than others? Which ones—African-American, Spanish-language, Asian, etc.—do the best job of covering structural racism?

A. I know that the Latino population is less likely to believe that racism is a problem...and we can suggest that those [papers] aren't doing a great job at covering these things, but I don't want to say that definitively.

Q. What could the ethnic media do better to cover structural racism?

A. I would suggest not episodically framing the issue and getting really into how HIV really happened. And it really happened because it was white, wealthy, gay people who were able to address it in their community when there was no interest in the government to do this for minorities. And I believe when you're talking about problems and political issues, and when you talk about poor outcomes, you can absolutely talk about the causes of those by framing it in a systematic way and not in an individual way or an episodic way.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the mainstream media to cover?

A. Crime, specifically in the prison population and the link to HIV, would be something that needs to be covered. These programs and the policies more negatively affect black men who are coming out of prison. Entry and re-entry systems are racist and white people are able to get jobs much faster with the same education and the same background, and I would like to see those kinds of things in the media. I would like to see more stories about racism. We're talking about how systems have affected the ability and inability for minorities to enter the system of medical education. Right now, there is a push, but since 1963, the increase of African-Americans into the health profession went up 3% as medical doctors suggest there is some sort of structural racism.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the ethnic media to cover?

A. I would say the same thing and unfortunately, my emphasis wouldn't be on ethnic media, it would be on broad, well-resourced media. And why blame ethnic media organizations when they really don't have the capability to do a lot of things that we're asking them to.

Q. What are some examples or aspects of structural racism that go uncovered in the mainstream media?

A. I think the prison industrial complex issues are the worst, and I think in terms of health, I think it's really poorly covered.

Q. How are communities of color affected by the lack of coverage of structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. They believe that they're responsible, and even they do not interrogate the system that is set up to completely fail most of them. And I think it really weakens our understanding of the problem. I have family in the South who say they need to work up from the bootstraps, and these are blacks in the South, they're not wealthy and there's this blaming. These are

regular people, not well-educated, and they're just regular people. And even you can see in them a real attitude of individual responsibility.

Q. How are white people affected by the lack of coverage?

A. Even worse, they put it on individual responsibility.

Q. Are you aware of any countries where mainstream media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. Racism isn't exactly defined in other countries the way it is in the United States and France, and if we're looking in a European context and France, if you have a left-leaning French news organization then potentially yes, they do a better job. I can't tell you yes absolutely. I will tell you that they have better programming in addressing issues of health care.

Pamela Newkirk is an associate professor of journalism at New York University, where her specific topics of interest include urban issues, politics and the history of minorities in the media. A former daily journalist, Newkirk was part of a team that won the Pulitzer Prize for Spot News at New York Newsday in 1992. Professor Newkirk has written a number of books, including A Love No Less: Two Centuries of African American Love Letters and Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media. She holds a B.A. in journalism from N.Y.U. and an M.S. in journalism from Columbia University.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. If by structural racism you mean historical inequities that continue to reverberate in public education, housing, mental and physical health indexes, and the like, I would say the media generally fails to connect past social policies and practices to current conditions in African-American communities. The media also generally neglect to show how the neglect of inner-city communities, particularly the public education system, results in despair, and ultimately, crime. Who is looking at the state of preparedness of black and brown people for the workplace? Who is examining the dearth of opportunities for the scores of African-American men being released from prison? What news outlets are chronicling the colossal failure of so many public schools to properly educate children of color, and who has given sustained attention to the appallingly high drop-out rates of African-American and Latino youngsters across the country? Why are these schools failing and why is there no state of emergency?

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. Before I respond to this question I must say that I believe the term “structural racism” closes off avenues of understanding. While there are actions that were clearly motivated by racism, others are the result of custom, or habit, or ignorance and should not be characterized merely as “structural racism.” It is far more instructive to assume that some of the problems can be resolved between people of goodwill. If the problems stem from racism, it’s safe to assume that logical discourse will not allow us to overcome the problem. The impact of this media failing on American society is manifold. We are all affected by the lost potential of young people who will either be productive citizens, or will be a source of fear or loathing for the rest of society. None of us live in hermetically sealed communities and we all must deal with the consequences of neglect, whether it’s in higher taxes, higher crime rates or the loss of the country’s competitive edge. Other countries invest in their youth. We are not in a position to discard our own.

Q. How would it change our society if the mainstream media did a better job of covering structural racism and its effects?

A. Many, if not most Americans rely on the media to help them understand the world. If most Americans are led to believe that poor people are poor because they’re lazy, or that black kids are undereducated because they’re uneducable, or that black men are inherently dishonest, many will never overcome their racial biases.

Q. What would help the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. Many are too underfunded to provide the kind of in-depth reported that is needed.

Q. Do some ethnic newspapers do a better job of covering structural racism than others? Which ones—African-American, Spanish-language, Asian, etc.—do the best job of covering structural racism?

A. Most members of these communities already know about systemic biases and don’t need their media to constantly report on them. On the other hand, these publications can help galvanize their communities to clear major hurdles.

Philip Tegeler is the president and executive director of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council, a civil-rights policy organization with a primary mission to help connect advocates with social scientists. A civil-rights lawyer with more than 20 years experience in fair housing, educational equity, land use and institutional reform litigation, Tegeler has also worked as the legal director for the ACLU of Connecticut, where he litigated a number of major cases on school and housing desegregation, as well as cases involving the First

Amendment, gay rights, voting rights, criminal justice and prison reform. Tegeler has written extensively on federal housing policy and has also taught in the University of Connecticut Law School clinical program. He is a graduate of the Columbia Law School and Harvard College.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. There are two issues, which I'll address separately. The first issue is the insistence of the most grotesque forms of discrimination that tend to reinforce the intentional discrimination paradigm in everyone's minds and allow those to feel like they're off the hook for bias. That is the most fundamental problem in the media. Discrimination of the most sensational kind is easier to cover, but they let everyone off the hook. That is problem number one. Problem number two is more subtle. Most reporters in the print media and also on radio and TV are more than willing to pursue the structural elements of the story. I think a lot of journalists do it quite well. But they strip the structural story of its racial elements and it becomes a story of structures disadvantaging people without the disparities to highlight. I sort of feel, in a way, that everyone is post-racial. Newspapers are very happy to dig into the meat of the story of how people are getting screwed by legal or social or systemic structures. They portray poor people as victims but don't go for the racial punch-line. They veer away from that, they avoid it, and I believe that has to do with editorial judgment. They want to make stories universal. They want it to appeal to all readers and not have it be a niche race story. And leading mainstream liberal organizations do not want to mention race. They want to be more universal in their approach. To me, the issue is that the liberal media is more than willing to do stories on deep structural stories on poverty and systemic issues but they avoid race. Just like progressive liberal organizations avoid expressing things in racial terms....

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. What are implications? It reinforces the notion that it is okay to not talk about race. By not raising it, it makes it easy to avoid. And somebody needs to be talking about it. It's becoming an invisible, marginalized issue because no one is talking about it; it's pretty simple.

Q. What is wrong with the way that the mainstream media covers structural racism and its lingering historical effects?

A. Is it wrong? I'm not sure. To say it's wrong, is, I think an open question. Take the Obama campaign; is it good for the Obama campaign to not be talking about race? The devil is in the details of structural racism. If you're dealing with the effort to reduce poverty, they really don't need to talk about race as well. I respect the views of folks who think it's better not to talk about it and to deal with it behind closed doors; that if you want to cut poverty

in half, it's better to talk about it as universal issues, as [there are] more poor white people than people of color. But poverty is disproportionately black and Latino. That is an example of avoiding structural racism in the discussion. I think there are plenty of people who think it's a good choice and that it's more important for Barack to be pure in our framing of the discussion.

Q. How would it change our society if the mainstream media did a better job of covering structural racism and its effects?

A. I think if we're truly effective, we need to have the kind of coverage so that ordinary Americans will see the important conspiracy surrounding them for a day. White Americans would see white privilege and how the invisible become visible. That would be a positive thing; it would help transform our country. In the absence of that coordinated effort to educate people, and let people—especially white people—see these structures, how they offer advantages to whites and disadvantages to blacks, you would see a backlash. If the general public saw this and understood it so people saw it and understood it from that perspective, it would be great if everyone was able to share that perspective. There's a lot of backlash and pain.

Q. What types of stories related to structural racism would you like the mainstream media to cover?

A. It has to be something that seems really unfair. I think it has to be really unfair and really easy to follow. And that's not really a description of most structural racism analysis. It has to be a foreclosure crisis that doesn't allow you to blame the victim. The loss of value in more segregated neighborhoods is a good example of how home prices have fallen much more dramatically and predominately in minority communities, and it's hard to do that and it's too complicated. The unfairness of it isn't clear because people immediately go to the narrative that the person had no business getting a mortgage. And you know health disparity is a pretty powerful narrative and people just flip the channel.

Q. What is a good example of covering structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. The health disparities have been the best coverage of structural racism. I think we were getting close with all the media around the Louisville and Seattle [school desegregation] decisions. I really don't know how much of that got into the mainstream media. I was too close to it all. But just the fact that how minority children—typically black and Latino—tend to be in failing schools and why that is the case, I think some of that really came through in the Louisville-Seattle discussions.

Q. What are some examples or aspects of structural racism that go uncovered in the mainstream media?

A. Well, I think that the work that we do, much of our work is around desegregation or the social structures that create and maintain these highly segregated patterns are just not mentioned, they are ignored. Any stories about something happening in an inner-city neighborhood should be accompanied by a reminder about how that neighborhood got that way, if you have a really responsible newspaper. They might throw in a reminder every time there is a story about a shooting in the Fifth Ward, that there's a reason the neighborhood became that way. If you have a paragraph to remind readers it's not the fault of the people living there that would help.

Q. How are communities of color affected by the lack of coverage of structural racism by the mainstream media?

A. I think that without consciousness of structural racism from the general public it becomes harder to justify special interventions in poor neighborhoods of color. There are less compelling reasons why you should target special resources if you're not giving compensation for some injustice to some community. Without a public consciousness of the unfairness, there's not really a political basis for anyone to respond. People just see it as a bunch of people making bad choices living together.

Q. How are white people affected by the lack of coverage?

A. It permits them to not acknowledge responsibility or the benefits they receive as whites. Structural racism privileges whites, and so it maintains an artificial system of privilege that is harmful to everybody. But in short, it benefits whites.

Clayborne Carson is a professor of history at Stanford University and a director of its Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute. Under Carson's direction, the King Papers Project, a component of the Institute, has several volumes of The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.—a projected 14-volume comprehensive edition of King's speeches, sermons, correspondence, publications and unpublished writings. While an undergraduate at UCLA, he participated in civil rights and antiwar protests, and many of his subsequent writings reflect his experiences by stressing the importance of grassroots political activity within the African-American freedom struggle.

Q. How well do the mainstream media cover structural racism and its impact both as a news story and in providing context about the lingering historical effects in areas such as criminal justice, education and housing?

A. Media doesn't talk about history. The media is a broad term, and mainstream media tends to be oriented to what's going on right now and not interested in providing historical background. That's the problem.

Q. How does the lack of media coverage on structural racism by the mainstream media impact American society?

A. Let's take affirmative action. Affirmative action makes no sense unless you look at it as a way of making up for past injustices. So if you don't talk about past injustice, it just comes off as though you're giving preferential treatment to a group in the present. I think that's one example where historical context is everything.

Q. What is wrong with the way that the mainstream media covers structural racism and its lingering historical effects?

A. The whole notion of institutionalized racism isn't really examined in the press. Coverage tends to suggest that racism tends to be a problem of institutionalized psychology and not a structural injustice.

Q. How would it change our society if the mainstream media did a better job of covering structural racism and its effects?

A. The media is such a large entity. I don't think our main problem is that people aren't getting answers. It's just most people don't care enough to look deeply for answers to our social problems. The information is out there. You can find information if you want, especially with the Web these days.

Q. How well do the ethnic media cover structural racism and its effects?

A. I don't think they go very deep—some do and some don't.

Q. Do the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism than the mainstream media?

A. Yes, but again, that's a generalization. I wouldn't say Ebony does. But I think you can be more sensitive...your understanding is rooted in your own experience.

Q. What would help the ethnic media do a better job of covering structural racism?

A. They would say resources and money and that helps all media cover things better if you have money to pay for in depth reporting.

INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

Robert Rosenthal is the executive director of the Center for Investigative Reporting. He is a former executive editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer and former managing editor of the San Francisco Chronicle.

Q. How much do you and your staff think about structural racism as part of your ongoing coverage or in conceiving special projects?

A. Not enough. I think in my past I've been involved in stories almost completely based on this, particularly around police abuse. Then that was a core focus, to look at discrepancies based on race. [Also at the Philadelphia] Inquirer, [we did a project] around voting and around police abuse. At the [San Francisco] Chronicle we did a project around police use of force. I think there are some subject areas where we're aware of the history like criminal justice, police abuse, [and] housing-rights issues; that you have to look at that from that framework almost from the inception of the project because that generally is the basis of any inequity. But I think on the day-to-day coverage, the less thoughtful and reactive coverage, you tend to either not have the time or the reaction or the reflex really to put it in that context.

Q. Which reporters on your staff tend to write stories on this topic? What are their beats or assignments?

A. (At both the Chronicle and the Inquirer there were beats that tended to cover structural racism.) Yes, usually around courts, criminal justice, police/crime and education. As newsrooms get smaller it's much harder to get these stories done because in some newsrooms the focus is completely on breaking news and the enterprise or the investigative reporting is not done. For example, at the Inquirer there was a time when we had police reporters covering the breaking news and then had someone covering police administration, which was not breaking news at all but the kind of stories you're talking about.

But there are other beats, too, that lend themselves to structural racism. You can expand those areas—the environment beat has issues of racial justice that should be looked at. The prison system obviously [has issues]. But some of those issues aren't even being covered now by news organizations.

Q. Does your paper make a conscious effort to include editors, reporters and photographers in the conception and execution of stories about structural racism?

A. Definitely.

Q. What are some examples of stories your paper has done on structural racism that have had a definite impact on your community? What kind of impact?

A. In Philadelphia, what we did on the police really revealed all kinds of patterns, and in the courts. The African-American community had a different set of justice when it came to police data and how they kept crime reports. They didn't report crimes that happened in some areas.

We changed the whole system of how rape was handled in Philly because we showed how they weren't investigating the rapes, especially in the black community. We found women who were raped and reported it, and we found there were no police files. So the reporting of rape was much lower than it should have been, same as other crimes, especially in black neighborhoods in Philly. In San Francisco, we did the whole thing on use of force, and showed how even though San Francisco had one of [the] smallest African-American communities, the black population was beaten up a lot more than it should have been. There were astonishing statistics that showed how they were singled out. Those lead to changes in the department and in some suspensions.

You could do transportation. That's a whole other area showing where the money goes and doesn't go.

Q. What challenges does your paper face in covering issues related to structural racism?

A. Sometimes resistance from [the paper's] executives, in the sense that when your push is to cover the suburbs, for example, and you're doing highly focused stories on the black community in Philly, sometimes [you] face not so subtle pressures. People might say "why don't you find something to investigate in the suburbs."

Q. What role, if any, does diversity of your staff play in your ability to report on stories involving structural racism?

A. It's crucial to have diversity. People of color can go out in the community and maybe are told things or have access to things that a white staffer wouldn't be able to do. At the same time, there were white reporters who were able to get the information because good reporters also hear things. Also, a person of color will, from their perspective, know things which you aren't even thinking about and frequently enhance the sophistication and context of the story.

Q. How often do community leaders and readers suggest story ideas about subjects related to structural racism?

A. Not as much as I would think. I was always a little disappointed because personally I would always go out into different communities in Philly and meet with people, go to their places, to their office [or] their meetings. Often they only wanted to yell at me, but I told them my door [was] open, don't assume I know about these issues, and I did not get enough push back.

Q. To what extent do you detect your readers and, for that matter, your staffers, believe that structural racism is a thing of the past or are weary of the subject?

A. I think there's always that. Less on my staff, in my experience, because most reporters know a good story and understand abuse and want to expose it. I think the readers, they vote by not buying the paper or are less interested in the story. But if you did the story right, the outrage factor came from all sides of the track.

Q. How well do you feel your paper has covered this subject, compared to papers of comparable size?

A. In the past, I think the Inquirer did as good a job as anybody and the Chronicle made some valiant attempts but could have done things better. And I also think in the future these things will be looked at less and less. It's happening already because of cutbacks and time and trying to figure out who the audience is and what our role is.

Q. Do you see a public benefit from covering issues related to structural racism?

A. Yes, generally these issues are not disclosed and have huge costs to communities in wasted money, degradation of people and in creating a belief that government doesn't function or is abusive. They also frequently contribute to ongoing poverty and creating social problems that affect everybody.

Q. Do you see improving your coverage as a priority? If so, how do you plan to accomplish that goal in this era of newsroom retrenchment?

I think it should be a crucial part of any sizable news organization or small ones. I think new models have to be created to address these issues. In my new job at CIR, a key issue is these kinds of stories and issues to show these kinds of systemic failures that frequently revolve around race and social justice.

Thomas A. Silvestri is the president and publisher of the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Q. How much do you and your staff think about structural racism as part of your ongoing coverage or in conceiving special projects?

A. By the mere complexity of issues you cited, we have to think about structural racism in understanding the problem and why certain solutions are being assembled. My example in Richmond is affordable housing and health care. They are omnibus problems. If we start writing and reporting on affordable housing, there's a good chance you will hit those issues

[of structural racism], and by the same token you will deal with socioeconomic issues. The label may not be there but the ingrained fact will be there.

We're really plugged into the issues. In a town like Richmond, where race is involved in everything, both on the surface and in the grassroots and in the history, we're going to bump into that issue over and over again.

Q. Which reporters on your staff tend to write stories on this topic? What are their beats or assignments?

A. Yes, where would they be coming from? [Those stories] might be coming from the medical beat. It's not unusual for the business reporters to hit on it. I've seen it coming out of court cases. Also, reporters covering the region touch on it, and I've also seen it come out of real estate. Don't leave out our editorial people who have an unusual section for a paper on our size. Our commentary on Sunday is written by the community. Our editor will frame an issue and invite people to write an article and [issues of structural racism] will be picked up there also. We invite the community to sound off or sound in on those topics from that point of view. (These op-ed writers are experts in their fields and not just the local busybody who happens to have an opinion).

Q. Does your paper make a conscious effort to include editors, reporters and photographers in the conception and execution of stories about structural racism?

A. From my perspective, yes, I think that's the case, but that sounds like more of a question for inside the newsroom.

Q. What are some examples of stories your paper has done on structural racism that have had a definite impact on your community? What kind of impact?

A. Any of those stories we discussed earlier will have an impact. Just recently there was a dedication for a Civil Rights monument at the Capital. It's the first monument dedicated to someone other than a white male. All during the ramp-up we had stories about "why now, and why has it taken so long?" We also had the anniversary of Brown versus the Board of Education. Then there was the issue over the apology for slavery. Virginia was one of those that debated that and we covered the full area. We are reminded quite frequently of the history and the current response, and also projecting out what kind of society or community we want to live in.

I'm chair of Leadership Metro Richmond, which is one of those organizations training the leaders of the future, and I've had editors go through the program...Glenn [Proctor]...is conducting a race forum against the backdrop of the presidential election. He's going to invite people in and have the conversation to dig deeper to see what's going on in the community as much to report on it as to see how we're doing in coverage. We're active participants whether in the paper or in the community.

Another thing I like about Leadership Metro is that there's a place we can have these conversations. I do represent the papers in those areas. Because of my presence there I have a lot of ambassadors. As a result, if people do question how we report on something they'll call us up and are not out there in the community bashing us. We used to be aloof and now we are part of it.

Q. What challenges does your paper face in covering issues related to structural racism?

A. That's a great question; from a business standpoint, the ability to have time and resources to dig deeper on issues. Just the huge volume of things we're covering. Also, there is probably some reticence in the community in some sectors to really deal with these issues in an honest and open way. There's a lot of code here. Internally, the challenge is our fractured attention span. Externally, there's a trust factor which may also have people say that's such a complex topic for public view. Then there's a schizophrenic aspect where some people can't stop talking about the past and others who want to move on. And with the nature of any complex issue, our instincts should be to come back to it without being trite. Think that's a matter of reading the paper everyday and saying what's next.

Q. What role, if any, does diversity of your staff play in your ability to report on stories involving structural racism?

A. I think it has a lot. You have starting parts for conversations internally. Newsrooms are creatures of internal conversations. An open mind is also equally important. Funny [how] we do our own forums, and when you go out with the journalists, darn it if they don't answer the question by saying, "Well, we were talking the other day inside the newsroom," and you think darn, you just lost your audience. It doesn't matter what you were saying inside the newsroom. Open mind and open thinking is what really separates the excellent journalist from the average journalist.

Q. How often do community leaders and readers suggest story ideas about subjects related to structural racism?

A. Again, I'm the publisher, and it's funny how much the conversation changes when you're the publisher. In simple terms, they're telling you so you can filter what they want to see in the paper. I hear much more as publisher than I did as an editor. People come up to me and say this is what your paper's missing. If I were an editor, they may feel like whatever they tell me might go right in the paper. Also, when I wander into meetings and start asking questions, I don't have a notepad out.

Q. To what extent do you detect your readers and, for that matter, your staffers, believe that structural racism is a thing of the past or are weary of the subject?

A. The older they are, they're tired of it. The natives of Richmond are just tired of it, but if something comes up, if a Rodney King comes up, it surprised me how many people wanted to talk about it again. So if it's something new and worth re-examining, they'll put it back on the table, but if [it's the] same old, same old, they don't want to talk about it.

The younger people are probably ready to have the conversation and don't think it's structural racism. They are just dealing with stuff. But [it] also requires the gatekeeper to characterize whether it's urgent...a lot of people did wrong in the past and don't want to be reminded of it. Nobody wants to dredge up old wounds. Other people will say that until we do that, we won't know the remedies. Richmond is the master of codes. Coding and innuendoes and indirection will just wear you out. Then there are professional baiters on this. Don't think it's a monotone. I think it's very complex and layered. I think there's something of everything.

Q. How well do you feel your paper has covered this subject, compared to papers of comparable size?

A. I think we've done a pretty good job...there's so much to cover that has equal importance. I think we're aware of it. I'm content, but then again, I think it's something that we have to keep our eyes on and an open mind to.

Q. Do you see a public benefit from covering issues related to structural racism?

A. Tough question. Yes.

Q. Do you see improving your coverage as a priority? If so, how do you plan to accomplish that goal in this era of newsroom retrenchment?

Better question for the editor. From the publisher's standpoint I would only expect that we are relevant, engaging and balanced. We are relevant, if we're going to go into this area it's something the community desires us to cover or it's adding to the coverage. It needs to be fair and balanced, and engaging, and you have to have as many sources as possible to allow for the layering of the context.

Kathleen Carroll is the executive editor and a senior vice president of the Associated Press.

Q. How much do you and your staff think about structural racism as part of your ongoing coverage or in conceiving special projects?

A. I think it is an undercurrent that bubbles up pretty frequently. About a year and a half ago, two-years ago, we did a very big project on pollution and built a national database. Big surprise, we found more present sites and more sites left unclean in neighborhoods of people of color. We built a database that allowed people to search blocks and zip codes to

search whether there was contamination in their neighborhood. [Structural racism] is certainly an undercurrent in a number of stories we do about a number of subjects, whether it's politics, and whether the laws that government passes are serving the people well and are they doing what was intended.

Q. Which reporters on your staff tend to write stories on this topic? What are their beats or assignments?

A. There's no one who has a beat quite like that. We certainly have beats built around diversity both on a national and regional scale. The question of structural racism is a part of what they cover, but obviously it's only a part. It's not the dominant theme unless it is the undercurrent of the issue. Issues of diversity are different in different parts of the country. So it's hard to quantify how much its part of people's beat, but I can think of people finding stories all the time that fall under that subject.

Q. Does your paper make a conscious effort to include editors, reporters and photographers in the conception and execution of stories about structural racism?

A. We do that, and for us that would also include video and multimedia.

Q. What are some examples of stories your paper has done on structural racism that have had a definite impact on your community? What kind of impact?

A. I think the two we discussed, the [United States Department of Agriculture] reaction after the land series and the impact of the pollution project that was probably localized because we were doing a national trend story that allowed people to drill down and understand and take action if they chose regarding their own circumstance.

Q. What challenges does your paper face in covering issues related to structural racism?

A. No more so than any other topic that is complex for us. Because we're all over the country, [a challenge for us is that] a rubric that works in Southern California might not work in Detroit might not work in rural Alabama. So we have to look for whether policies and practices and laws and their enforcers are serving the people equally, fairly and consistently. When we find they are not we have to expose that and go after reasons why, and that's different from location to location.

Q. What role, if any, does diversity of your staff play in your ability to report on stories involving structural racism?

A. I think it's extremely important. I wouldn't begin to argue that only people who have been victim of it or have felt sting of it can see it, but do think [it helps] having a staff that has a variety of backgrounds and variety of experiences—all of the ways that you want to have a wide variety of experiences of backgrounds and races and cultures at the table,

because people conceive of things differently. If you conceive of stories that aren't the acts of God and man then you are conceiving stories of idea...the more kind of life experiences you have at the table, the more fertile your story conversation is going to be.

Q. To what extent do you detect your readers and, for that matter, your staffers, believe that structural racism is a thing of the past or are weary of the subject?

A. I'm not sure that point of view would be expressed to me. If I had to guess, I would say you probably have some of that view in some places, and probably like with most [things] in life, it's held by people who have not encountered it, or who feel it's not as bad as [it] used to be. But I'm just guessing.

Q. How well do you feel your paper has covered this subject, compared to papers of comparable size?

A. We probably didn't do a very good job in the Civil Rights Movement except for a couple of exceptions. Like many organizations, we were largely white and male and not as open as we are today. But certainly by the 1970s, when there was quite a bit of AP engagement on urban issues, I think we were in the game. But if I go back, we were mixed to not doing a great job.

Q. So you see a public benefit from covering issues related to structural racism?

A. Of course, it is a facet of American life that is as important as any other and deserves the attention of the press so people don't come to think whatever vestiges may remain are inadvertent and that all problems are solved.

Q. Do you see improving your coverage as a priority? If so, how do you plan to accomplish that goal in this era of newsroom retrenchment?

Well the retrench is not as much of an issue for us. I don't mean to imply that we aren't affected by the current economic climate. Since I've been editor I have been focused on going beyond writing what was said, but to really bring some measure of account on behalf of the reader regarding the institutions that affect their lives: both businesses and governmental. That framework is one that we're doing a lot to train and drive more stories and coverage in that direction.

Caesar Andrews is the executive editor of the *Detroit Free Press*.

Q. How much do you and your staff think about structural racism as part of your ongoing coverage or in conceiving special projects?

A. In a market like this, we would think in terms of home ownership, this current crisis with mortgages. We would ask “who are the people who wound up with these poisonous arrangements, these subprime loans, and lo and behold what’s the pattern?” We would certainly—and this is probably as searing as anything else I can think of—we would certainly cover it in terms of graduation rates in the public-school system here. The outstandingly low overall rate and the almost tragically small numbers when you start to parse out by race. So I would say it’s a frequent part of what we cover and what we think about, though the labeling and heading is not always just racism. Whatever the driving force is at a given moment might change. But for some of it, the racism is never far away. So it’s not always covered as pure racism, sometimes covered as a hell of a mess, but if you dig deeper...it’s hard to get away from racial disparities.

Q. Which reporters on your staff tend to write stories on this topic? What are their beats or assignments?

A. Again, almost have to put the upfront racism aside, but in terms of coverage areas I’d say the education reporters would be knee-deep in all these issues—sometimes explicitly connected to race, sometimes race just in the room—even though the focus is on something else. Court reporters, the municipal beats [and] business in the broad sense.

Q. Does your paper make a conscious effort to include editors, reporters and photographers in the conception and execution of stories about structural racism?

A. The answer is yes to coverage, but because our framing hasn’t been the way you describe it. We don’t say let’s talk about racism in this area. That’s not how it comes across. It might be let’s brainstorm on this abysmal graduation rate. So I think bottom line is yes, but we’re coming at it in a different way. One of the issues is that in Detroit it doesn’t matter what the topic is, you don’t even have to say words. You don’t have to say African-American. You don’t have to say race. If you say let’s talk about small businesses, let’s talk about neighborhoods, let’s talk about police relations, the core is going to include race, race, race. So yes, in effect, but not as an organizing principle.

Q. What are some examples of stories your paper has done on structural racism that have had a definite impact on your community? What kind of impact?

A. We have done a number of stories on the housing crisis. Some of it reporting on the stats, some of it dealing with how do you get out of this ditch as an individual homeowner. The impact would be awareness, education and—we hope—people being able to reach out and get help. Education, it is so raw I think most of what we’ve done is just expose issues

and problems aggressively. I don't know that this has taken on a "can't we all do something and fix this" because we're still so busy pointing out "can you believe this? Get a load of that."

Q. What challenges does your paper face in covering issues related to structural racism?

A. Think one of the problems here is just the scale of the problems, and even for best of newspapers, you really have to have some solid ground somewhere to stake your flag, but there is so much broken that frankly I don't know where to start and stop. So scale is part of the problem. Another issue with trying to get at racism in any form is that the overlay is the deep economic problems. A lot of racism gets masked by the economic issues that are so cavernous. So that while you know you need to concentrate specifically on racist elements, there's so much happening that's not part of that but that is just as urgent, it has the effect of minimizing efforts to get at these racial divides.

One other challenge that I will mention...is insisting that we also report on the contrary evidence. Even in a place dealing with as many problems, there are organizations and individual pockets of progress and success, including attempts to deal with racial tension, and those things don't always get front and center treatment. God knows we try and the newspaper has done some specific things, not just rhetorical. We started some awards last year named after Neal Shine and we recognize people doing good things in the community. It's not a good news for race awards, but that's part of the criteria.

Q. What role, if any, does diversity of your staff play in your ability to report on stories involving structural racism?

A. I think it's massive, huge, monumental. I know it's theory in a lot of places. I think here the ability to cover things we must cover is inseparable from our ability to develop and make use of a diverse staff.

Q. How often do community leaders and readers suggest story ideas about subjects related to structural racism?

A. I would say it's regular, comes with letters to the editor with direct appeal from activists. Would say there is no shortage of people willing to point the way.

Q. To what extent do you detect your readers and, for that matter, your staffers, believe that structural racism is a thing of the past or are weary of the subject?

A. I don't know the answer to that because I'm not engaged in those conversations. If I were guessing, I would say here it would largely follow the pattern of many parts of the country. I would say African-Americans and Hispanics would say it's probably really not solved, and I would say many others would say we've come a long way, baby, even as we acknowledge there are still issues. One thing is that it would be hard to live anywhere in this

region and not have a sense that we still have miles to go. I think when dealing with the kind of economic insecurity, the loss of jobs, concern about the least of those among us really takes a back seat even among people who care. I do also think in the minds of a lot of people, it became valid to say yes, there may be problems....

Q. How well do you feel your paper has covered this subject, compared to papers of comparable size?

A. I think overall the Free Press does as well as others and better in some regards. In part, because we live it so deeply based on the makeup and dynamics of this community. You just stumble across it in the process of walking to work. It's a part of the air here.

Q. Do you see a public benefit from covering issues related to structural racism?

A. I do. Our role is to tell the story, and people need not only to hear it, but to be in the position to connect with it so they can do something about it.

Q. Do you see improving your coverage as a priority? If so, how do you plan to accomplish that goal in this era of newsroom retrenchment?

A. I think we have to, the battle just got harder. The odds just got longer and good will just doesn't quite do it. For all of the obstacles and difficulties, I think it just has to remain a priority. Will it be enough? Will it be compromised by shifts in staffing? Yes, but if it's an honest priority, that means we're guaranteed to at least rotate around to it.

Martin Reynolds is the editor of the Oakland Tribune.

Q. How much do you and your staff think about structural racism as part of your ongoing coverage or in conceiving special projects?

A. We don't use those words but we are endeavored to be a more solution-orientated, issue-orientated newspaper that takes on the issues that are most important to the lives of our readers. I would say structural racism and the elements that make up structural racism are very important.

Q. Which reporters on your staff tend to write stories on this topic? What are their beats or assignments?

Kamika Dunlap covers East Oakland; Cecily Burt, who covers downtown and West Oakland and economic development; Katie Murphy, who covers the schools. To a lesser degree, our city hall reporter, Kelly Rayburn, and Kristen Bender, who covers general assignment in Berkeley, [cover issues of structural racism]. Really you could argue every reporter with

every beat on the metro side will come across these issues in one way or another, even though we don't explicitly call it that.

Q. Does your paper make a conscious effort to include editors, reporters and photographers in the conception and execution of stories about structural racism?

A. For projects we certainly involve people up and down the lines of production.

Q. What are some examples of stories your paper has done on structural racism that have had a definite impact on your community? What kind of impact?

A. Our Oakland homicide series that ran in May 2008 looked at, in particular, the mental-health aspects of violence and the overall mental health of the community, as well as some individuals who are succeeding despite the presence of structural racism. Another one would be a series we did on child exploitation that looked at the horrible reality of how much child sex exploitation is going on, or child prostitution.

Q. What challenges does your paper face in covering issues related to structural racism?

A. Perspective is one. I think we could stand to have a greater pool of perspective at times, and we have good journalists who go about their work very diligently. But I think we could benefit greatly from a more diverse pool of perspectives and approaches.

Q. What role, if any, does diversity of your staff play in your ability to report on stories involving structural racism?

A. It plays a huge role. Access is a huge issue. Have people who blend in and make sources more comfortable. We need more. We have some but we need more, especially when talking about different ethnic groups. There are language issues, specifically in the Asian community, huge language barriers and cultural barriers.

Q. How often do community leaders and readers suggest story ideas about subjects related to structural racism?

A. Again, we don't use those words. But we get calls all the time from people wanting to see certain stories that certainly touch on those elements that make up structural racism.

Q. To what extent do you detect your readers and, for that matter, your staffers, believe that structural racism is a thing of the past or are weary of the subject?

A. Well, I get calls. I got a call from a guy, definitely an older reader, definitely a white male, and he said, "You got an awfully colorful paper these days," because we have worked to get the paper to reflect the community and its diversity. We also get some calls from people

saying racism is a thing of the past. But we get an even greater number of calls from people who are outraged at various actions they would consider part of structural racism.

Judith Martinez-Sadri is the editor of Atlanta Latino Newspaper, which has a weekly circulation of 20,000.

Q. Do you believe it is important for your paper to report on structural racism and its impacts on American society?

A. Yes.

Q. How well would you say your publication reports on structural racism and its impacts?

A. Fair.

Q. Do stories about structural racism in your publication better inform your readers about the challenges that other ethnic Americans face in their daily life?

A. Sometimes.

Q. Please tell us which ethnic group your paper is more likely to report about incidents of structural racism—African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders or Jewish Americans?

A. Hispanics.

Q. How well would you rate your coverage of structural racism involving ethnic groups that are not the majority of your readers?

A. We focus primarily in stories that affect our Hispanic readers.

Q. Do you think it is important for your readers to have a better understand of the challenges that other ethnic groups face in America?

A. Yes.

Q. Are your readers often impacted by structural racism in their daily lives?

A. Yes.

Q. How well do you report on their struggles against structural racism?

A. Good.

Q. Do you consider reporting on your readers' struggles against structural racism to be a main objective of your publication?

A. No.

Q. Do you think more intensive reporting on structural racism by major and ethnic media can make a difference in American society?

A. Yes.

Q. What resources would your paper need to do a better job reporting on structural racism and its impacts?

A. Maybe grants to develop a special section reporting on these issues.

Q. What impact would it have on relationships between various ethnic groups if ethnic papers did more reporting on how structural racism impacts all the groups?

A. It will be very beneficial so other groups could understand more the struggles that minorities face in this country.

Gregg Morris is an assistant professor at Hunter College, City University of New York.

Q. Do you believe it is important for your paper to report on structural racism and its impacts on American society?

A. Absolutely.

Q. How well would you say your publication reports on structural racism and its impacts?

A. The Word [hunterword.com] about a year ago started publishing anecdotal information of the weekly newsletter, Race Relations Reporter (RRR), which is operated by the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. RRR is a weekly electronic bulletin of news, surveys and a chronicle of race-related incidents of discrimination, hate crimes and hate-group activity from across the United States. The Word is also planning this semester to develop a project with the New York Civil Liberties Union. It also has been working with New America Media and the New York City Community Media Alliance because of this editor's view that issues and policies affecting immigrant and ethnic communities are reflected in structural racism. Other projects are being considered.

Q. Do stories about structural racism in your publication better inform your readers about the challenges that other ethnic Americans face in their daily life?

A. I believe it can be instructional because of its commuter college/university audience and because of the students who publish stories.

Q. Please tell us which ethnic group your paper is more likely to report about incidents of structural racism—African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders or Jewish Americans?

A. Hunter College, where this publication operates, is the most cultural and ethnically diverse four-year college of the City University of New York. No group can be left out though we don't have that many Pacific Islanders and Native Americans at the campus.

Q. How well would you rate your coverage of structural racism involving ethnic groups that are not the majority of your readers?

A. I, the editor, have only recently in the last year started experimenting with this theme so it's too early to tell, yet. I expect to know a lot more at the end of the academic year.

Q. Do you think it is important for your readers to have a better understanding of the challenges that other ethnic groups face in America?

A. Absolutely. That goes for accomplishments and successes too.

Q. Are your readers often impacted by structural racism in their daily lives?

A. Absolutely, my students and their families and friends and neighbors, which is one of the reasons I will be working with the NYCLU this coming academic year.

Q. How well do you report on their struggles against structural racism?

A. As I said, I have only recently begun experimenting. However, for a number of years, my students have been publishing profiles of other students about their struggles and accomplishments. Again, Hunter is very diverse so the profiles have been making a contribution, I would like to believe.

Q. Do you consider reporting on your readers' struggles against structural racism to be a main objective of your publication?

A. Not the main, but a significant one. Also, the question inquires about struggles. Accomplishments and overcoming adversity should also be reported.

Q. Do you think more intensive reporting on structural racism by major and ethnic media can make a difference in American society?

A. Absolutely.

Q. What resources would your paper need to do a better job reporting on structural racism and its impacts?

A. Funding to send students to conferences. Funding for panel discussions that would help generate information and communication. Funding to bring in guest speakers (not just limited to journalists, but perhaps scholars and activists).

Q. What impact would it have on relationships between various ethnic groups if ethnic papers did more reporting on how structural racism impacts all the groups?

A. I love the idea of ethnic news media sharing their stories on structural racism. I also think something needs to be done to get student publications to do more reporting.

Ray Hanania is a columnist with the National Arab American Times/Arab American Writers Syndicate.

Q. Do you believe it is important for your paper to report on structural racism and its impacts on American society?

A. Yes.

Q. How well would you say your publication reports on structural racism and its impacts?

A. Despite limitations, we have been covering issues on structural racism and its impact, and how the city or state or community organizations have been doing in order to respond to this issue. We try to address it when we can put it into community perspective and context.

Q. Do stories about structural racism in your publication better inform your readers about the challenges that other ethnic Americans face in their daily life?

A. Occasionally.

Q. Please tell us which ethnic group your paper is more likely to report about incidents of structural racism—African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders or Jewish Americans?

A. Jewish Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics.

Q. How well would you rate your coverage of structural racism involving ethnic groups that are not the majority of your readers?

A. Minimal coverage.

Q. Do you think it is important for your readers to have a better understand of the challenges that other ethnic groups face in America?

A. Yes, but not at the expense of our own challenges.

Q. Are your readers often impacted by structural racism in their daily lives?

A. Every day. We experience more discrimination in the Arab community than non-Arabs.

Q. How well do you report on their struggles against structural racism?

A. We try to report on it often.

Q. Do you consider reporting on your readers' struggles against structural racism to be a main objective of your publication?

A. Probably not the main objective, but one of the major ones. It is one of the main priorities of my writing.

Q. Do you think more intensive reporting on structural racism by major and ethnic media can make a difference in American society?

A. I think the real problem is that mainstream media only partially address the issues by focusing on certain popular ethnic and racial groups like blacks, Hispanics, Asians, etc, and do not cover discrimination in the Arab community adequately.

Q. What resources would your paper need to do a better job reporting on structural racism and its impacts?

A. We need more writers, programs to encourage more Arab-Americans to enter journalism to explore issues of racism, funding and public support. We rarely get it.

Q. What impact would it have on relationships between various ethnic groups if ethnic papers did more reporting on how structural racism impacts all the groups?

A. It would help if they included all the groups, but other ethnic groups do not adequately cover Arab-American concerns and often confuse issues such as Arab and Muslim. They need to be more inclusive and they are not.

CONCLUSION

The question of how the media cover minority communities and issues related to race has long been debated. In the aftermath of the devastating riots of the 1960s, the Kerner Commission put some of the blame for the civil disorder squarely on the shoulders of the news media: “The painful process of readjustment that is required of the American news media must begin now. They must make a reality of integration—in both their product and personnel. They must insist on the highest standards of accuracy—not only reporting single events with care and skepticism, but placing each event into meaningful perspective. They must report the travail of our cities with compassion and in depth.”

Perhaps 40 years later, the media has lost sight of the importance of fair and comprehensive reporting on issues related to race. This lapse has had a clear impact. Among the American public, particularly white Americans, there is a huge gap between the perception of the state of minorities in America and their actual status. The data we cited in our introduction documents that there are still two American experiences for people of color—the one they live and the one whites think they live. By failing to provide comprehensive coverage of the discriminatory practices and their impacts, the media have helped perpetuate misconceptions about the state of minorities in America.

That’s why improving media coverage must be a priority for those seeking to end structural racism and its impact: How can you ever end something if people don’t know it exists?

Bias in Sourcing

Our study shows that the media do not do a creditable job covering structural racism. We have identified a bias in the way that people of color have been used as sources in stories, and documented that newspapers have not consistently provided comprehensive coverage of stories related to structural racism.

What’s more difficult to gauge is how much of this is intentional or just the result of bad decisions by news managers. Certainly, our interviews with top editors and publishers indicated a willingness to do a creditable job covering stories related to structural racism.

But one of the major reasons for the lack of coverage and stereotyping in sourcing is the makeup of their staffs, particularly the supervisors—the people who assign the stories, approve the stories and decide where they appear: online or in print. This group of news managers remains predominantly white and male.

It has long been accepted by most newspaper executives that improving the diversity of their staffs will improve coverage of issues related to race and minority communities.

To its credit, the newspaper industry has made efforts to increase staff diversity. However, the industry has fallen short of its goals, and is now challenged with how to achieve, maintain and diversify at a time when falling revenues are forcing layoffs and buyouts. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) pledged back in 1978 to have minority representation at newspapers equal the percentage of minorities in the population by the year 2000. But newspapers fell well short of that timetable, and the parity goal has been extended to 2025. ASNE reports that 13.62 percent of the nation's print journalists were minorities in 2007, while 10.9 percent of supervisors were minority, according to their annual survey. As of 2005, the U.S. Census said 33 percent of the population was minority (see table 17).

As daunting as those figures may be, an even bigger problem may be developing with Web sites and talk radio. Our study noted, for instance, that of the top 100 radio talk show hosts in the country, only five are people of color. The clear danger is that while the push is on for better coverage of stories related to structural racism, the media may be less equipped to report those stories.

Raising Awareness

What's needed is a comprehensive approach that raises awareness of the deficiencies in sourcing and coverage. Corrective measures should include training for current newsroom supervisors on how to recognize and report these stories, as well as increasing the pool of minority journalists ready to be reporters and supervisors.

To be sure, this study can serve as an important educational tool. We recommend that it be shared with news media executives as well as journalism schools. More than likely, it will spur some self-examination at newspapers that will result in better coverage and wider use of diversified sourcing in stories. Moreover, the participants in the study are willing to meet with media executives to discuss the findings and work with them to find ways to improve.

There also needs to be a renewed effort to train minority journalists as supervisors and news managers, and to prepare minorities for a variety of roles related to the new media. Thirty years from now, we do not want the Internet news sites to be in the same position that newspapers are in today.

There is evidence that increasing the pool of people prepared to be journalists and supervisors is a strategy that works. In fact, the Maynard Institute was started in 1978 to help train minority journalists because newspaper editors said they couldn't find enough qualified minorities to fill positions. In 1978, only four percent of journalists were people of color. With a variety of training programs, the Maynard Institute played an instrumental role in increasing the number of minority journalists to the current level of 13.6 percent.

Table 17. Minority Employment in Daily Newspapers

Minority employment in daily newspapers Projections based on responses to annual employment census (numbers rounded)			
	Total Work Force	Minorities In Work Force	% Minorities In Work Force
1978	43,000	1,700	3.95
1979	45,000	1,900	4.22
1980	47,000	2,300	4.89
1981	45,500	2,400	5.27
1982	49,000	2,700	5.51
1983	50,000	2,800	5.60
1984	50,400	2,900	5.75
1985	53,800	3,100	5.76
1986	54,000	3,400	6.30
1987	54,700	3,600	6.56
1988	55,300	3,900	7.02
1989	56,200	4,200	7.54
1990	56,900	4,500	7.86
1991	55,700	4,900	8.72
1992	54,500	5,100	9.39
1993	53,600	5,500	10.25
1994	53,700	5,600	10.49
1995	53,800	5,900	10.91
1996	55,000	6,100	11.02
1997	54,000	6,100	11.35
1998	54,700	6,300	11.46
1999	55,100	6,400	11.55
2000	56,200	6,700	11.85
2001	56,400	6,600	11.64
2002	54,400	6,600	12.07
2003	54,700	6,900	12.53
2004	54,200	7,000	12.95
2005	54,100	7,300	13.42
2006	54,800	7,600	13.87
2007	57,000	7,800	13.62

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Table 18
Numbers and Percentage of Whites and Minorities by Job Category

2007	Total Work Force	Minorities		Whites	
		No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.
Supervisors	14,349	1,561	10.9	12,788	89.1
Copy/Layout Editors/Online Producers	11,547	1,414	12.2	10,133	87.8
Reporters	25,139	3,778	15.0	21,361	85.0
Photographers/Artists/Videographers	5,947	1,011	17.0	4,937	83.0
Totals	56,982	7,763		49,219	

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Today, programs such as Maynard need to retool their missions beyond newspaper and television to prepare minorities to work at Internet-based news outlets and to become radio talk show hosts.

Moreover, it is also important that reporters and supervisors know how to research stories about structural racism and that they know who to contact for information. There should be resource guides available for the media— yes we must guide them to water. And just as seminars have been held for journalists on how to improve health, business and investigative reporting, some should be developed on how to better cover structural racism and its impact.

For meaningful change to occur, the media must be willing to recognize the deficiencies and make changes to address them. It won't be easy. But the foundation of a responsible media has always been the facts. In this case, as established in our study, the facts show that the media have not lived up to their standards and our democracy has suffered because of it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Sally Lehrman, a veteran journalist, is Santa Clara University's first Knight Ridder-San Jose Mercury News Endowed Chair in Journalism and the Public Interest. She is author of *News in a New America*, a fresh take on diversity in coverage and staffing. Lehrman was a 1995-96 John S. Knight Fellow and shares a 2002 Peabody, a Peabody/Robert Wood Johnson Award for Excellence in Health and Medical Programming and a Columbia/Du Pont Silver Baton.

Kenneth J. Cooper, a reporter and editor who spent 30-years working on daily newspapers. He shared a Pulitzer Prize in 1984 for "The Race Factor," a Boston Globe series that examined institutional racism in Boston. In spring 2008, Cooper was a Fulbright Scholar at Cairo University in Egypt, where he is conducting a statistical analysis of the domestic content of three Egyptian daily newspapers.

Gregory L. Moore, editor-in-chief of the Denver Post newspaper, is one of the highest ranking African-Americans in the newspaper industry. Moore is the former managing editor of the Boston Globe and is a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board and served on the board of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Michael K. Frisby, president of Frisby & Associates, Inc. is an award-winning journalist and the former White House correspondent for the Wall Street Journal. Frisby spent 22 years as a newspaper reporter and has been a public-relations executive for the past 10 years. Frisby & Associates leads image, media, public affairs and minority-outreach campaigns for industry leaders and nonprofit organizations.

Dori J. Maynard, president and CEO of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. Prior to being named president in January 2001, she directed the History Project which leads the way in preserving and protecting the contributions of those courageous journalists of color who broke into the mainstream media against the backdrop of the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. The nonprofit organization operates editing and management programs that have trained hundreds of editors, news managers, reporters and strategists who develop coverage that crosses and explores the "fault lines" of race, class, gender, generation and geography in our nation.

Francine L. Huff, publisher and editorial director of Super Savvy Publishing, LLC is a former Spot News bureau chief and news editor for the Wall Street Journal. Huff is the author of *The 25-Day Money Makeover for Women* and a gifted motivational speaker. Super Savvy Publishing provides writing and editing services to a variety of publications and organizations.

EVALUATING MEDIA COVERAGE OF STRUCTURAL RACISM

APPENDIX

PAST STUDIES OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF STRUCTURAL RACISM

Columbia Journalism Review

http://www.cjr.org/q_and_a/keeping_poverty_on_the_page.php

The Ronald H. Brown Center for Civil Rights and Economic Development at St. John's University

<http://www.stjohns.edu/media/3/d4e71df2ca674d59b703b9ce91a8133a.pdf>

The President's Initiative on Race

http://clinton4.nara.gov/media/pdf/PIR_main.pdf

Karen Rowley Thesis

http://etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-1114101-111710/unrestricted/Rowley_thesis.pdf

News Coverage of Diet-related Health Disparities Experienced by Black Americans: A Steady Diet of Misinformation

<http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S1499404606005914>

National Media Coverage of Race Relations in America

http://www.cmpa.com/files/media_monitor/90feb.pdf

Center for Media and Public Affairs

http://www.cmpa.com/media_monitor.html

CONTENT AUDIT

Maynard Structural Racism Project
Prepared by Alvin David and Kevin Lee
Story Entry Field Choices

Date

Story subject: Race/ethnicity of primary character(s)

1. Asian-Pacific Islander
2. Black/African-American
3. Can't determine
4. Hispanic/Latino
5. Institution or thing (like a school, government office, etc.)
6. Multi-/Biracial
7. Native American
8. Nonwhite/Can't determine
9. Other
10. White—European

Tone: Neg, Pos, Neutral

Headline Key Words: Manual entry

Story Type: (See definitions)

1. Breaking/spot news
2. Brief
3. Feature
4. Investigative/explanatory
5. News analysis
6. Opinion/commentary

Topic:

1. Accident/natural disaster
2. Arts/entertainment/review
3. Beauty/fashion/décor/dining
4. Business/finance
5. Campaign
6. Civil rights/discrimination
7. Consumer issues
8. Courts, criminal justice
9. Crime
10. Economy

11. Education pre-K-12
12. Environment
13. Feature/human interest
14. Federal government
15. Health/medicine
16. Higher education
17. Housing
18. Immigration
19. International
20. Local government
21. Obituary
22. Parenting/family
23. Politics
24. Race/ethnicity
25. Religion
26. Science/technology
27. Sports
28. State government
29. Travel
30. War/military
31. Weather
32. Workplace/labor/employment

Frame/Theme:

1. Consequences
2. Human interest
3. Individual responsibility
4. Institutional responsibility
5. Morality/ethics
6. Structural/systemic/historical

Location:

1. International
2. Midwest
3. National
4. None
5. Northeast
6. Southeast
7. Southwest
8. West

Maynard Institute Structural Racism Project (July 2008)

Contributed by Lilly Havstad

Story Types

Breaking/spot—Stories that cover events that just happened or are just about to happen, often events considered to be of wide public interest. These can be ongoing stories or one-time events.

Investigative/Explanatory—Stories that result from in-depth or investigative reporting on a topic. Investigations may focus on criminal justice, corruption, etc. Explanatory stories may take on a current topic such as campaign finance law, stem cell research, or disparities in education or health, but don't necessarily involve traditional "investigative" techniques.

Feature—Stories are profiles, human-interest stories, novelty and "soft" news that have less immediacy than breaking/spot news. These stories generally focus on people, places and the issues that affect people's lives. Features can be about a news event, but take a human-interest angle. They can be more narrative in style and structure. The ledes in feature stories are often more creative stylistically. They may strive to set a scene, as opposed to providing the "5 Ws" as in breaking-news stories.

Brief—Briefs are very short items, often covering smaller areas within a broader issue framework. They are usually about a paragraph long.

News Analysis—News analysis refers to reports that take a perspective and offer more in-depth analysis of issues and topics than a breaking story might include. Normally, they are marked with the tag "analysis" somewhere near the headline.

Opinion/commentary—Articles usually found in the op-ed section of newspapers. These pieces offer a viewpoint on current events in the news.

Maynard Institute Structural Racism Project (July 10, 2008)

Developed by Nicole Berger, Kevin Lee, Spencer Hagan and Sally Lehrman

Class Categories

Rather than measure “class” by numerical categories, we are using social categories that help us incorporate the various factors that make up class in our society, including income and social capital.

The strongest factor is social capital. Social capital, much like race, is a fluid social construction that can be divided into self-perception and others’ perceptions. For simplicity’s sake, we define social capital as how much credibility or weight people give to certain individuals. Certain attributes affect credibility, among them:

- Type of job/position
- Length of position held
- Educational degree(s) attained
- Pay level
- School(s) attended
- Award(s) received

These are described below in general order of social capital and status:

Minimum Wage

Low-paying, heavily supervised jobs that need minimal training. These include poorly paid service jobs; any job that can be obtained without a high school diploma. (Fast food, subsistence occupations, custodial services.)

Administrative (and clerical)

Entry- to mid-level office jobs, not involving leadership as part of job description. (Secretaries, administrative assistants, receptionists, various office support.)

Line Worker/Blue Collar/Service

Jobs that fall into the so-called blue collar category, but are not managerial and do not afford a high level of autonomy. Jobs that may need specialization or training, but not necessarily a college degree. Examples include jobs in production industries (factories, tradesmen) and where workers employ physical labor and intelligence but are not small business owners (construction, farming, carpentry, plumbing). Unionized jobs, including highly skilled workers (police, teachers, nurses). Soldiers fall into this category unless they are high-ranking (in which case they are managers or executives, depending on the rank, or if they are working in a professional capacity). Better-paying service jobs, if they are not administrative (protective service, health service—see <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ocs/ocsm/comMOGK.htm>).

Manager

“Middle management.” Managers oversee a group of people for a limited set of tasks, but can be subject to a high-level boss/supervisor. Jobs that represent a promotion from “line worker” or “administrative” but are not “executive.” (General manager of a restaurant, manager of a branch for a corporate grocery store, manager of a factory production area, office manager, etc.)

No paid employment

Includes students, homemakers, criminals and homeless people.

Small business owner

Individuals who run their own company and take responsibility for its activities.

Entrepreneurs, unless they have struck it big. (Small Internet start-ups, niche retail, owner of an independent music label, small service companies. Owners of farms, construction companies or trade businesses such as plumbing.)

Professional

Jobs requiring higher levels of education or technical skill, and that allow for autonomy on the job. Usually require advanced experience, education or training. Anyone with a Ph.D. or MD in use on a job. This category generally overrides others—so a university department chair would be a “professional,” not a “manager.” (Doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, nurses, athletes, artists, actors. See professions listed in <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ocs/ocsm/comMoga.Htm#teach.>)

Executive

An “executive” differs from a “professional” in that an executive makes decisions for an organization and is expected to provide leadership for it. Anyone with a high-power, highly paid job in any field; member of the elite. (Governors, presidents, CEOs, COOS, deans of large universities, directors, vice presidents, and presidents or executive directors of nonprofits.)

Structural Racism Content Audit

Source Field Choices

Race

Asian-Pacific Islander

Black/African-American

Can't determine

Hispanic/Latino

International

Multi-/Biracial

Native American

Nonwhite/Can't determine

Other

White-European

Gender

Can't determine

Female

Male

Class

Administrative

Can't determine

Executive

Line worker

Manager

Minimum wage

No Paid Employment

Professional

Small business owner

Generation

Baby Boomers (44 to 62 years old)

Can't determine

Generation X (27 to 43 years old)

Mature (63 years or older)

Millennials, Gen Y (15 to 26 years old)

Youth (Under 15 years old)

Geography

Can't determine

Rural

Suburban

Urban

Random Sample of Constructed Weeks

Note: Each constructed week is comprised of a randomly selected Sunday, a randomly selected Monday, etc. This technique is used, instead a random sample of days or weeks in a year, because the content of a newspaper varies by the day of the week and the season of the year. Two constructed weeks is a valid and reliable sample of a daily newspaper's content, based on the results of similar studies done of American newspapers over the last 50 years.

2006

Sunday	June 18
Monday	Feb. 13
Tuesday	Nov. 14
Wednesday	Mar. 29
Thursday	Sept. 14
Friday	Jan. 20
Saturday	April 29

Sunday	Dec. 3
Monday	Sept. 18
Tuesday	Oct. 10
Wednesday	Aug. 2
Thursday	Nov. 23
Friday	June 9
Saturday	Sept. 2

2007

Sunday	Nov. 4
Monday	Dec. 10
Tuesday	Jan. 16
Wednesday	April 18
Thursday	Oct. 4
Friday	Jan. 19
Saturday	Jan. 6

Sunday	March 25
Monday	Aug. 27
Tuesday	Jan. 30
Wednesday	Dec. 26
Thursday	Sept. 20
Friday	March 23
Saturday	Nov. 24

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Major Stories on “Structural Racism,” 2006 - 2007

2006

Jan. 15: At a boot camp in Panama City, Fla., guards administer a severe beating to a 14-year-old black juvenile offender, Martin Lee Anderson, who dies the next day. A video of the beating surfaces on Feb. 17 and creates an uproar. (Facts on File)

Feb. 15: The U.S. House of Representatives releases a critical report on the response to Hurricane Katrina. The 520-page document, titled “A Failure of Initiative,” finds that the reaction to the disaster was inept at every level of government. “Our report is a litany of mistakes, misjudgments, lapses, and absurdities all cascading together,” the report says. (Fact Monster.com, World Almanac, CBS Top Network News Stories)

Feb. 21: Supreme Court unanimously strikes down an unfavorable ruling on a discrimination lawsuit filed by two black employees of Tyson Foods Inc. who said they had been passed over by two less qualified white men. An appellate court in Atlanta had ruled “the disparity in qualifications” must be “so apparent as to virtually jump off the page and slap you in the face” and had dismissed a manager’s use of “boy” as evidence of discrimination.” (Facts on File)

May 18: The U.S. Senate votes to designate English as the national language on a 63-34 vote, adding the provision to immigration legislation. The Senate also approves a weaker, less-binding alternative declaring English the nation’s “common and unifying” language, on a 58-39 vote. (Hispanic News newspaper)

May 30: Serial killer Larry Bright pleads guilty to murdering eight black women between 2003 and 2004 in the Peoria, Ill., area and is sentenced to life without parole in a deal to avoid the death penalty. Bright, who is white, burned four bodies in his backyard and dumped four others along roads. Police had been accused of conducting a lax investigation because the victims were black and had histories as drug abusers or prostitutes. (Facts on File)

May 31: A state panel established in 2000 to study the Wilmington, N.C., race riot of 1898 concluded it was a planned insurrection by white merchants and former Confederates against a black- and Republican-led government. The panel described the riot as the only successful municipal rebellion in U.S. history, and called for reparations from government and business. (Facts on File)

July 19: Special prosecutors in Chicago concluded a four-year investigation of police torture allegations dating to the 1970s and 1980s by saying half of 148 torture claims were credible

but the three-year statute of limitations prevented any new charges. Nearly all who were coerced into giving confessions were black. (Facts on File)

Nov. 25: Five New York police officers spray 50 bullets at a car containing three unarmed black men in Queens, killing 23-year-old Sean Bell, whose marriage was scheduled the same day. The killing, reminiscent of the 1999 shooting of African immigrant Amadou Diallo, reignites protests against police brutality. (The Crisis magazine)

Dec. 5: A federal appeals court in San Francisco rules that Hawaii's private Kamehameha Schools can limit admissions to native Hawaiian students. The full bench overruled, 8-7, a ruling by a three-judge panel that the policy amounted to discrimination against nonnative Hawaiians. (Facts on File)

Dec. 20: The National Council of La Raza releases a study that finds nearly one in five Hispanics lacks sufficient access to nutritious food, and one in 20 regularly goes hungry. The "food insecurity" rate of Hispanics is nearly as high as that of non-Hispanic blacks and substantially greater than that of non-Hispanic whites. As with African-Americans, poverty appears to be the main factor. But Latinos also often face linguistic, cultural and legal barriers to enrolling in federal hunger programs. (Hispanic News)

2007

Jan 12: Millions of U.S. residents do not receive necessary preventive care, according to two reports released by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. According to the fourth annual reports on national health-care quality and disparities, although the quality of the health-care system continues to improve overall, lower-income and minority residents continue to receive a lower quality of care than other residents. (Kaiser Weekly Health Disparities Report)

April 1: A 15-year-old black girl from Paris, Texas, Shaquanda Cotton, is released from 12 months in a juvenile facility for shoving a hall monitor in school. (Black America Web)

June 29: In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court strikes down as unconstitutional voluntary desegregation in public schools. The narrow 5-4 ruling rejects using race as a criteria for assigning students to different schools, ending plans designed to achieve racial balances in schools in Seattle and Louisville, Ky. (Democracy Now radio show, Essence magazine, World Almanac)

July 11: The NAACP files a class-action lawsuit in Los Angeles against a dozen subprime mortgage lenders, alleging they "engaged in institutionalized, systematic racism." The civil-rights organization charged the lenders steered African-American borrowers into the high-interest mortgages while giving white applicants more favorable rates. Lenders named in the suit include Wells Fargo, Citigroup and Washington Mutual. (Democracy Now, Essence)

Aug 29: The number of uninsured people in the U.S. increased from 44.8 million in 2005 to 47 million in 2006, with minorities being among those hardest hit, a Census Bureau report says. About a third of Hispanics lacked health insurance, the highest rate for any racial-ethnic group. (Kaiser Weekly Health Disparities Report)

Sept. 4: Housing advocates occupy the public-housing office in New Orleans. Two years after Hurricane Katrina drove out more than half of New Orleans, the battle over the right of return rages on. Prior to the hurricane, over 5,000 families lived in public housing. (Democracy Now) On Dec. 20, police use chemical spray and stun guns on protesters in New Orleans outside a City Council meeting where members unanimously support demolition of 4,500 public-housing units for redevelopment. (AP, Democracy Now)

Sept. 20: A major civil-rights march is held in Jena, La., to protest the heavy charges that white prosecutors brought against six black teenagers—known as the Jena Six—who beat a fellow white student. The assault occurred during a series of racial conflicts at the local high school after a black student sat beneath a tree that had traditionally been a gathering spot for whites only. Afterwards, two nooses were hung from the tree in the school yard. (Black America Web, CNN, Democracy Now, Essence, World Almanac) On Dec. 4, Jena Six defendant Mychal Bell reaches a plea deal with prosecutors, receiving an 18-month sentence to a juvenile prison and credit for time served. Initially, he had been charged as an adult with attempted murder. (Democracy Now)

Oct. 10: In San Francisco, U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer stops implementation of a federal plan to send letters to employers and require them to fire workers if their Social Security numbers could not be verified within 90 days. Because of mistakes in the database, Breyer rules the policy designed to identify undocumented immigrants could cause "irreparable harm to innocent workers and employers." Hispanic leaders say sending the letters could lead to discrimination against Hispanic workers. (Fact Monster.com)

Oct. 26: The Georgia Supreme Court frees Genarlow Wilson, saying his 10-year sentence for consensual oral sex with a 15-year-old girl was cruel and unusual punishment. Wilson, who is black, was 17 at the time. (AP)

Dec. 10: The Supreme Court rules on federal sentencing guidelines and, 7-2, relaxes a 1986 law that mandated a crack dealer get the same sentence as a cocaine dealer who had sold 100 times as much of the powder. The justices hold lower courts do not have to follow guidelines that account for a lesser part of the disparity. (Facts on File)

NEWS ON THE WEB

News Sites

Traditional News Sites	Aggregators	Ethnic Online
MSNBC	Yahoo News	Univision
CNN	AOL News	Impre
New York Times		TheRoot
Fox News		EbonyJet
USA Today		La Opinión
CBS News Digital		New America Media
Washington Post		
ABC News Digital		
Newsweek		
Wall Street Journal Online		
Los Angeles Times		

Note: Listed by popularity rankings, except ethnic media

Blogs

Liberal, Progressive	Conservative	Black Focus	Latino Focus	Black, LGBT Focus
Huffington Post	The Corner on National Review	Jack and Jill Politics	Latina Lista	Pam's House Blend
Think Progress	Hot Air	Stereohyped	Vivir Latino	
Daily Kos	Gateway Pundit		Man Eegee - Latino Politico	
Crooks and Liars	Talking Points Memo		Citizen Orange	
	Right Wing News			
	Redstate			

Recurring Topic Areas Reviewed During Web Study Period

1. Banks
2. Blogging
3. Discrimination
4. Economy
5. Health Disparities
6. HIV
7. Home foreclosures
8. ICE
9. Immigration
10. Mexican Comic
11. Muslim
12. National Council of La Raza
13. New Yorker Cover
14. Obama/Jackson
15. Obama/Jackson "n-word"
16. Oil drilling
17. Racial Divide
18. Racism

Blog Summaries

Citizen Orange

www.citizenorange.com/orange/

Founder: Social change activism, immigration advocacy, communications

Contributors: 7

Founded: 2007

Focus: Organizing around global justice, with an emphasis on immigration

Jack & Jill Politics

www.jackandjillpolitics.com/

Founders: Cheryl Contee (Jill Tubman), Baratunde Thurston (Jack Turner)

Background of founders: Technology, Web communications

Contributors: 6

Founded: 2006

Focus: Politics, current events from an African-American, middle-class perspective

Latina Lista

www.latinalista.net/palabrafinal/

Founder: Marisa Treviño

Background of founder: 15 years in journalism

Contributors: 1

Founded: 2004

Focus: The impact of issues and events on the Latino community

Man Eegee - Latino Político

maneegee.blogspot.com/

Founder: Manuel Guzmán

Contributors: 1

Founded: 2005

Focus: News and politics from a Latino perspective

Pam's House Blend

www.pamshouseblend.com/

Founder: Pam Spaulding

Background of founder: Information technology manager at Duke University Press

Contributors: 6

Founded: 2004

Focus: Politics, current events from a LGBT and black perspective

Stereohyped

www.stereohyped.com/

Founder: David Hauslaib, Jossip Initiatives

Background of founder: Journalism, black studies

Contributors: 2

Founded: 2007

Focus: Fashion and beauty, news, political commentary, and entertainment coverage aimed toward young and well-educated African-American men and women.

Vivir Latino

<http://vivirlatino.com/>

Founders: Jennifer Woodard Maderazo, Maegan “la Mamita Mala” Ortiz

Founder Background: Communications and marketing (Maderazo), freelance writing (Ortiz)

Contributors: 4

Founded: 2005

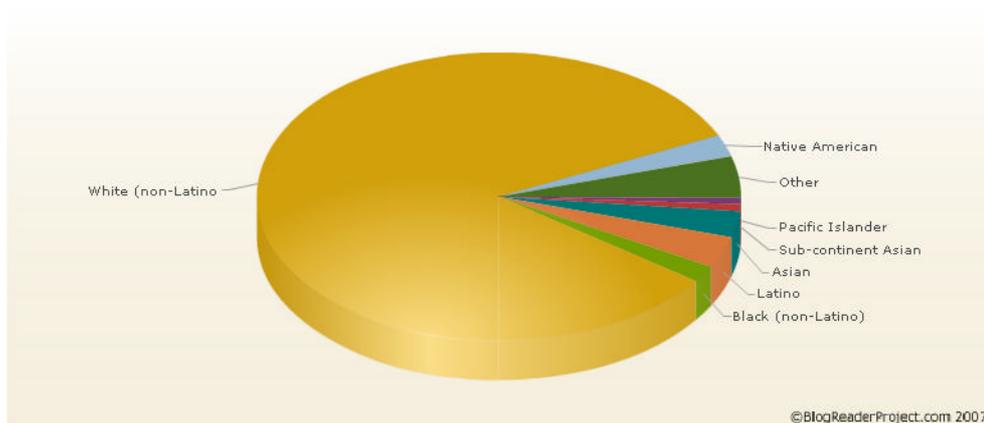
Focus: Politics, culture and entertainment with second- and third-generation Latinos in mind.

Blog Reader Demographics

Source: Blog Reader Project, August 15, 2008

Based on self-reports from 186,918 readers of 1,593 participating blogs

Figure 1. Race



Data for Figure 1

Race/Ethnicity	%
White (Non-Hispanic)	83
Native Americans	2.4
Other	4.7
Pacific Islander	0.7
Sub-Continent Asian	0.8
Asian	2.9
Latino	3.5
Black	1.9

Figure 2. Generation

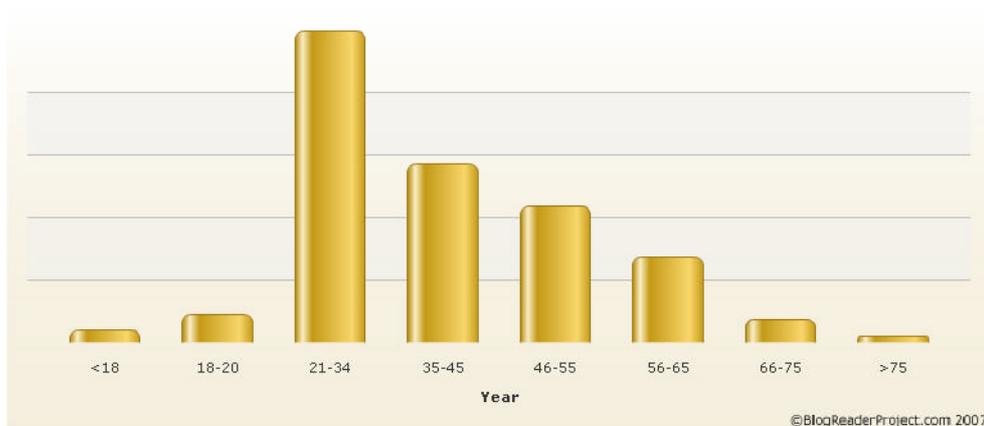


Figure 3. Sex

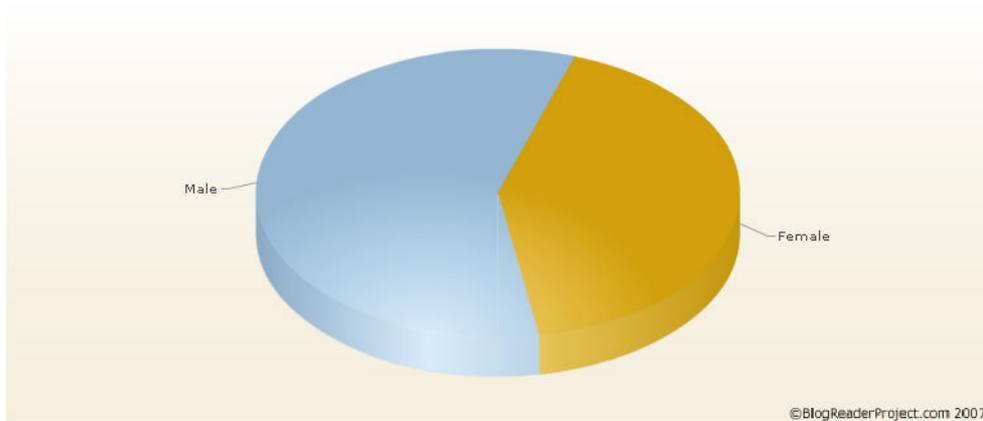


Figure 4. Geography

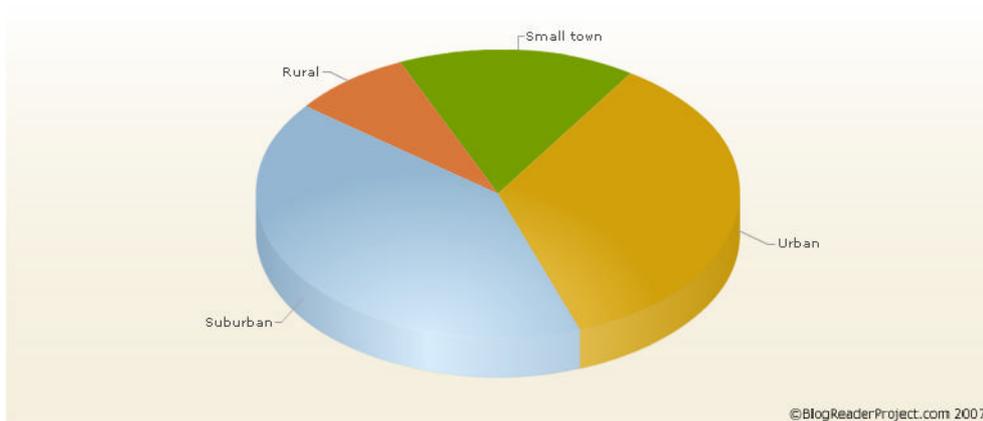
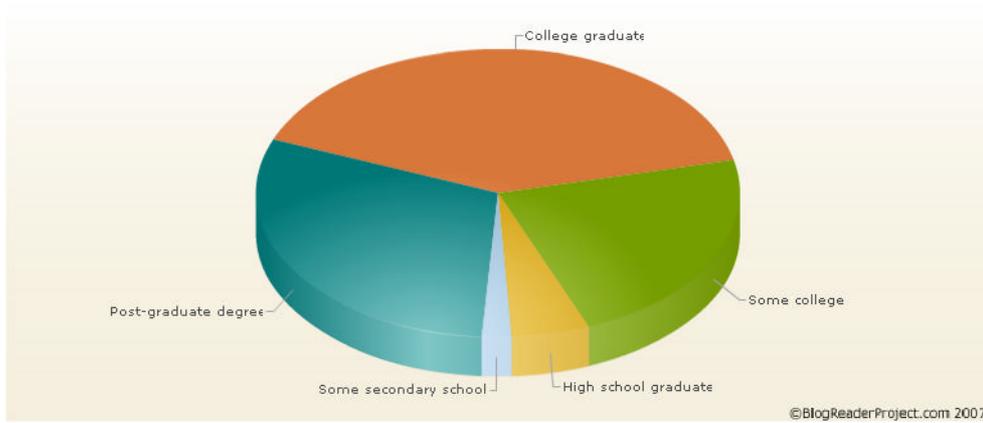


Figure 5. Income



Figure 6. Education



Top-Ranked Black-Oriented Blogs

Villager's Black Blog Rankings (Electronic Village, July 2008, 1,329 blogs)

1. Pam's House Blend (www.pamshouseblend.com)
2. Bossip.com (www.bossip.com/)
3. Nah Right (www.nahright.com/news/)
4. Concrete Loop (www.concreteloop.com)
5. Oliver Willis (www.oliverwillis.com)
6. Young, Black, and Fabulous (<http://theybf.com/>)
7. Crunk & Disorderly (<http://www.crunktastical.net/>)
8. Jack and Jill Politics (www.jackandjillpolitics.com)
9. Sandra Rose (<http://SandraRose.com>)
10. The Angry Black Woman (<http://theangryblackwoman.wordpress.com/>)

Note: To select our sample, we omitted celebrity gossip blogs and gave preference to multicontributor blogs.

Blogger Associations and Conferences

AfroSpear (<http://afrospear.wordpress.com/about/>)

Community of progressive bloggers of African descent

Bloggng While Brown (<http://bloggingwhilebrown.blogspot.com/>)

Conference for bloggers of color

BlogHer (<http://www.blogher.com/>)

Community for women who blog

NetRoots Nation (www.netrootsnation.org)

Community of progressive bloggers

Pajamas Media (<http://pajamasmedia.com>)

Begun in 2005 as an affiliation of 90 conservative blogs, now also syndicates news and opinion from correspondents featured on its site and produces a weekly XM radio show

Right Online (www.rightonline.com)

Conference for conservative bloggers organized by the Americans for Prosperity Foundation

The Sanctuary (<http://promigrant.org>)

Community of promigrant, human-rights, and civil-rights bloggers and online activists, including The Unapologetic Mexican, Citizen Orange, Latino Politico, ¡Para Justicia y Libertad!, Migra Matters, Zuky and Institute for Progressive Christianity

TALK RADIO

Top 10 Radio Audiences

Conservative hosts command the largest news/talk radio audiences by a large margin. Only one progressive and one moderate make the 2008 Talkers magazine list of top 10 markets, compared with 16 conservatives. The rest of the hosts focus on specialty topics: finance, unexplained phenomena, computer technology and sports.

	Host	Politics or Focus	Weekly Audience (millions)
1	Rush Limbaugh	Conservative	14.00+
2	Sean Hannity	Conservative	13.00+
3	Michael Savage Laura Schlessinger	Conservative Conservative	8.25+
4	Glenn Beck	Conservative	6.50+
5	Laura Ingraham Mark Levin	Conservative Conservative	5.25+
6	Neal Boortz Dave Ramsey	Libertarian Finance	4.25+
7	Mike Gallagher Michael Medved	Conservative Conservative	4.00+
8	Jim Bohannon Clark Howard Bill O'Reilly Doug Stephan	Moderate Consumer Advocate Conservative Libertarian	3.25+
9	Bill Bennett Jerry Doyle George Noory Ed Schultz	Conservative Conservative Unexplained Phenomena Progressive	3.00+
10	Rusty Humphries Kim Komando Lars Larson Jim Rome	Conservative Computer Technology Conservative Sports	2.25+

Top 50 Talk Show Hosts (Talkers magazine)

1	Rush Limbaugh	Conservative
2	Sean Hannity	Conservative
3	Michael Savage	Conservative
4	Dr. Laura Schlessinger	Conservative
5	Glenn Beck	Conservative
6	Laura Ingraham	Conservative
7	Don Imus	Conserv - Shock
8	Ed Schultz	Progressive
9	Mike Gallagher	Conservative
10	Neal Boortz	Libertarian
11	Bill O'Reilly	Conservative
12	Dave Ramsey	Finance
13	Howard Stern	Conserv - Shock
14	Mancow	Libertarian
15	Mark Levin	Conservative
16	Alan Colmes	Liberal
17	Opie & Anthony	Shock
18	Joe Madison	Liberal
19	Bill Handel	Liberal
20	Michael Medved	Conservative
21	Doug Stephan	Moderate
22	Jim Bohannon	Moderate
23	Thom Hartmann	Liberal
24	Jerry Doyle	Conservative
25	Bill Bennett	Conservative
26	George Noory	Neutral
27	Lars Larson	Conservative
28	Stephanie Miller	Liberal

29	Jim Rome	Sports
30	Clark Howard	Neutral
31	Lionel	Liberal
32	John & Ken	Morning: Neutral to Conservative
33	Tom Leykis	Shock - morning
34	Jack Rice	Neutral
35	Dennis Prager	Conservative
36	Kim Komando	Computers
37	Dr. Joy Browne	Psychology
38	Spike O'Dell	Morning: Neutral
39	Doug McIntyre	Morning: Conservative
40	Randi Rhodes	Liberal
41	Bev Smith	Liberal
42	Mike & the Mad Dog	Sports
43	Rusty Humphries	Conservative
44	Michael Smerconish	Conservative
45	Bob & Tom	Morning: Comedy
46	Dennis Miller	Conservative
47	Mike & Mike	Sports
48	Roger Hedgecock	Conservative
49	G. Gordon Liddy	Conservative
50	Ronn Owens	Liberal

News Talk Radio Listener Characteristics

Characteristic	Commercial News/Talk	Public Radio News/Talk
College graduate	44.7%	71.6%
Income over \$75K	40.8%	52.6%
Owns home	83%	78%
Likely to vote	Above average	Above average
Married	68%	???
No children in household	67%	???

Source: Arbitron