

2020

## #IfTheyGunnedMeDown: A Narrative Analysis of News Media Coverage

Zoe Deal

Western Washington University, [zoe.deal@wwu.edu](mailto:zoe.deal@wwu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/orwww>



Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), and the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Deal, Zoe (2020) "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown: A Narrative Analysis of News Media Coverage," *Occam's Razor*. Vol. 10 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/orwww/vol10/iss1/2>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Western Student Publications at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occam's Razor by an authorized editor of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact [westerncedar@wwu.edu](mailto:westerncedar@wwu.edu).



# #IFTHEY GUNNED MEDOWN

## A Narrative Analysis of News Media Coverage

By Zoe Deal

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the 2014 media coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, an early example of hashtag activism driven by the social media sub-community Black Twitter in response to the murder of a Black teenager, Michael Brown, Jr., by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Reacting to national reporting on the event, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown criticized the mainstream media for promoting racially prejudiced representations of Brown and utilized this example to critique two historical patterns in American news coverage: the pattern of stereotyping Black Americans as violent to justify police brutality and the pattern of representing journalism informed by a hegemonically white perspective as “objective.” Under the lens of Critical Race Theory and following Sonja K. Foss’s method of narrative analysis, this research identifies, organizes and compares models of reporting on #IfTheyGunnedMeDown in mainstream national, mainstream regional and Black American-centered news media outlets. The emerging narratives, grouped under the terms “Empowerment” and “Information,” reveal that the mainstream media often evaded addressing the critiques of its institutional practices while Black American-centered publications illustrated the historical significance of digital counterpublics in advocating for social change. These results suggest the ongoing need to diversify mainstream media institutions and fundamentally transform their traditional approaches to news narratives.*

## INTRODUCTION

On August 9, 2014, around noon, the doors of Ferguson Market and Liquor swung open as Michael Brown, Jr. and his friend, Dorian Johnson, departed with a pack of allegedly stolen cigarillos in hand (Bosman & Goldstein, 2014). Following an altercation with Officer Darren Wilson, fatally shot Brown with six bullets. In the hours and days that followed, tensions in the city of Ferguson rose; at the candlelight vigil the next night, thousands of chanting mourners were met with hundreds of law enforcement officers in riot gear sparking weeks of protest in what became known as the Ferguson Uprising (Bosman & Goode, 2014). This local event quickly turned national as Brown's killing was publicized by the **Black Lives Matter** movement and contextualized with an ongoing history of violent police brutality and murder of Black youth. The news media scoured Brown's social media in the days that followed, pulling details of his life and death from the posts of friends and Ferguson locals.

As media coverage grew and images of Brown's face spread across the nation and world, the photo did not reflect the face his family recognized, the face of a high school graduate—it showed the face of an “intimidating” man holding up what some perceived as a gang sign (Callahan, 2014). This negative portrayal was chosen by regional news media, such as *The St. Louis American*, and national legacy news media, such as *USA Today* and NBC News. Like many Black victims of gun violence, Brown's story was shaped by visuals that fed into historical stereotypes of Black men as “animalistic and brutish” (Smithsonian, n.d.). Members of Black Twitter publicly reasoned that this choice joined a longstanding pattern of

**AS A HASHTAG MOVEMENT, #IFTHEYGUNNEDMEDOWN REMINDED THE NEWS MEDIA TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE CHOICES IN THEIR COVERAGE; BY CHOOSING A PHOTO THAT DISPLAYS A PERSON IN A SOCIALLY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE WAY, THE NEWS MEDIA HAS THE POWER TO SWAY THE PATHOS OF THE PUBLIC.**



media prejudice in reporting on Black victims, a way of “justifying the use of lethal force on an unarmed teen” (Serwer, 2014). The group identified this decision as an example of the mainstream media's enduring white-by-default coverage, denouncing the media's conceptions of objective reporting as informed by a white perspective.

On the morning of August 10th, C.J. Lawrence posted on Twitter, challenging the media's erroneous representation of Brown. He tweeted, “Yes let's do that: Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunned-MeDown” and included two juxtaposed images: one of him speaking at the 2003 Tougaloo College commencement beside former President Bill Clinton and the other of Lawrence on Halloween dressed as Kanye West (Chappell, 2014). The hashtag pointed to the bias in the news media's coverage of Black people compared to white people and addressed the economies of power at play in the media's facilitation of public judgment concerning whose life had value. In the biased coverage of Brown's killing, Black Twitter was particularly outraged by and responsive to the extensive coverage of Darren Wilson, the Ferguson police officer who killed him.

On social media, *The New York Times* found itself the subject of mass critique and outrage after a photo of their front-page spread went viral; profiles of Wilson and Brown ran side-by-side, intertwining their stories and initiating a game of legitimacy (Sullivan, 2014). *The Times* public editor Margaret Sullivan (2014) admitted, “In my view, the timing

### BLACK LIVES MATTER:

In response to continued trends of police brutality against Black Americans and spurred by the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2013, the online community #BlackLivesMatter was founded to demand change. It has since grown to a vast network spanning more than 40 communities around the globe.

### SUBALTERN COUNTERPUBLIC:

Discursive arenas created under the significant exclusions of dominant public spheres where members of subordinated groups revise discourses to form new interpretations of identity.

### PUBLIC SPHERE:

A realm of discourse between society and the state where public opinion is formulated and, Jürgen Habermas noted, "access is guaranteed to all citizens."

### DIGITAL COUNTERPUBLIC:

a digital form of Fraser's subaltern counterpublic, where diverse communities generate critical discourse apart from the dominant public sphere

of the article (on the day of Mr. Brown's funeral) was not ideal. Its pairing with a profile of Mr. Wilson seemed to inappropriately equate the two people." Many also noted that the photo of Darren Wilson used widely by the news media (including *The New York Times*) featured him smiling in uniform, begging the question: What is the media's responsibility in representation? As a hashtag movement, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown reminded the news media to make responsible choices in their coverage; by choosing a photo that displays a person in a socially positive or negative way, the news media has the power to sway the pathos of the public.

The hashtag erupted on Black Twitter and within 24 hours had been used more than 100,000 times (Judah, 2014). Simultaneously, #Ferguson flew up to the most used social-issues hashtag in Twitter's 10-year history, and as of March 2016, had been tweeted over 27,200,000 times (Sichynsky, 2016). With the support of Black Twitter, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown joined the ranks of other burgeoning hashtag movements, including #BlackLivesMatter, #WeAreTrayvon and #IdleNoMore, demonstrating the potential of social media to act as a catalyst for nation-wide socio-political movements.

Twitter users responded to the Ferguson uprisings before national news media could get on the scene. Through social media, civilians shared what they were seeing and experiencing. Sichynsky (2016) of *The Washington Post* wrote that "social media became a critical component of balanced coverage of the protests in Ferguson." Sichynsky added that the use of Twitter and hashtags amplified the voices of a community often left unheard. This was a movement by Black people for Black people and a wake-up call to traditional news media as well as white Americans. Within days, the mainstream news media had no option but to respond to #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. It was not the first time Twitter users had forced the media to consider their errors, and it would not be the last. In the years to follow, more examples of hashtag activism would join #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, including #TakeAKnee, #Metoo, #MarchForOurLives, #OscarsSoWhite and #DefundThePolice, demonstrating the power of social media as a rapidly growing platform for news consumers to create and publicize narratives of change.



This article is devoted to an analysis of how the U.S. mainstream news media covered #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. It centers around online-available news stories focused entirely on discussing the hashtag movement. Under the lens of Critical Race Theory, this study analyzes a select group of texts from mainstream national, local and historically Black American news media to explore the dominant narratives in news coverage and understand the direct result of this protest at a news-room level.



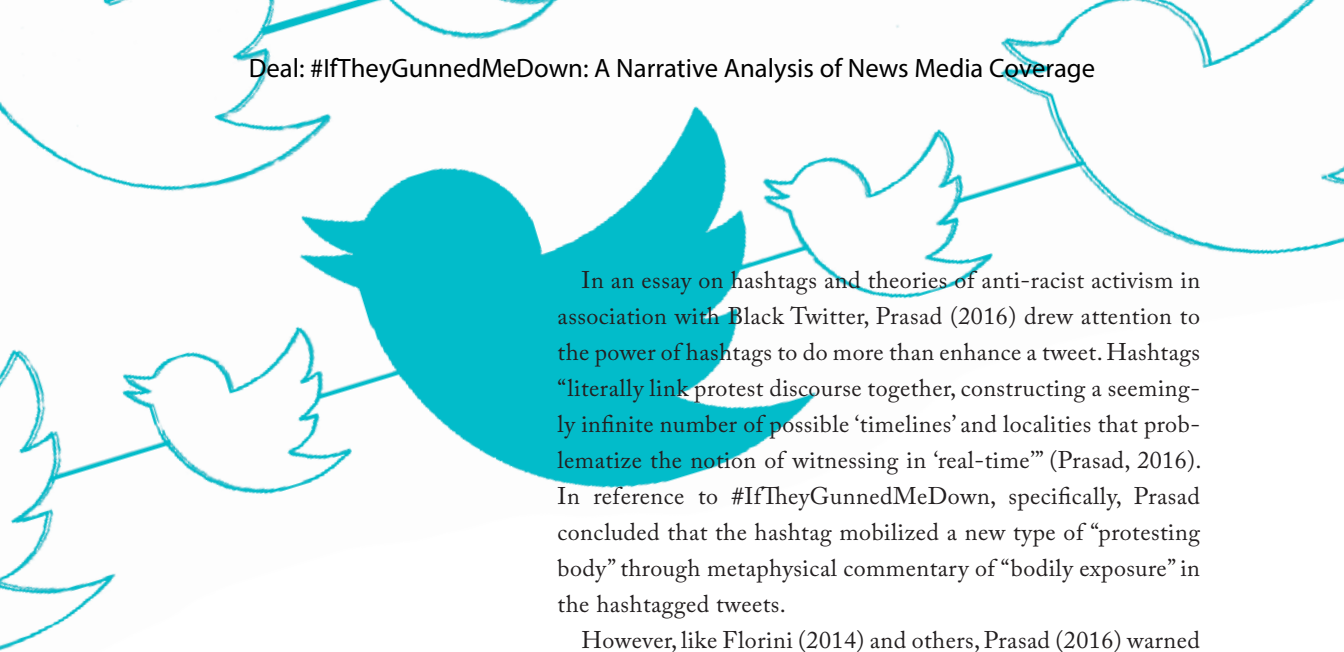
A key facet of this study is an analysis of how social media can push a story onto the national agenda—a reverse agenda-setting technique that requires consideration in the social media era. This research illustrates the importance of news media transparency by interrogating how the field of journalism traditionally responds to issues in their coverage of race and misrepresentation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### BLACK TWITTER

Black Twitter is a subset of Twitter often characterized by “short-lived internet memes, often in the form of ambiguous racialized humour” and recognized as “a space created to expose systemic injustices” (Sharma, 2013, p. 48; Stevens & Maurantonio, 2018). Florini (2014) described Black Twitter as, “the substantial Black presence on Twitter,” built off of a 2009 Pew Internet and American Life Project report which found that 26% of Black Americans use Twitter and/or social media, compared with 19% of white Americans. An Edison Research and Arbitron study found that Black Americans comprised 12-13% of the U.S. population, yet made up 24% of 17 million U.S. Twitter users (Webster, 2011), a population discrepancy which drives Pew’s findings even further.

As a community of narratives, Black Twitter builds upon what Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) calls “signifyin’.” Florini (2014) explained signifyin’ as “a catch-all term for various Black American oral traditions.” Put simply, it is an “alternative message form” that fosters collective solidarity in Black American communities (Florini, 2014; Mitchell-Kernan, 1999). In this medium, meaning is often placed outside of lexical and syntactical bounds and requires “certain forms of cultural knowledge and cultural competencies” (Florini, 2014). As an extension of Fraser’s (1990) **subaltern counterpublic** and Habermas’s (1962) notion of a “**public sphere**,” Hill (2018) has put forward the term “**digital counterpublic**” to characterize Black Twitter. Hill explained that Black Twitter is a modern alternative to traditional locals, like Black barbershops and churches, as a place to “generate critical racial political discourses outside the gaze of the White mainstream.” The resultant online community has therefore acted as a forum for protest and social critique (Carney, 2016). Florini (2014) observed that hashtags similarly serve this function.



In an essay on hashtags and theories of anti-racist activism in association with Black Twitter, Prasad (2016) drew attention to the power of hashtags to do more than enhance a tweet. Hashtags “literally link protest discourse together, constructing a seemingly infinite number of possible ‘timelines’ and localities that problematize the notion of witnessing in ‘real-time’” (Prasad, 2016). In reference to #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, specifically, Prasad concluded that the hashtag mobilized a new type of “protesting body” through metaphysical commentary of “bodily exposure” in the hashtagged tweets.

However, like Florini (2014) and others, Prasad (2016) warned that quantifying Black bodies and framing Black identity as a monoculture “risks reifying the racial categories of White and Black.” Not all Black American Twitter users categorize themselves under the umbrella of Black Twitter, and not all Black Twitter users identify as Black. For this reason, the nuances of Black Twitter and the Black digital counterpublic must be kept at the forefront of analysis.

### **CRITICAL RACE THEORY**

Advanced out of legal scholarship, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a lens through which scholars in all fields analyze race and institutionalized racism. Alarmed when the forward momentum of the civil rights movement shuddered to a halt and even rolled back, scholars in the 1970s built CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 4). The theory considers conventional civil rights in a wider context that takes into account self-interest, feelings and history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), and so “foregrounds a concern with the historical, political and socio-economic position of Black Americans relative to white American society” (Breen & Meer, 2019). For the purposes of this study, five key points have been pulled out that specifically relate to journalism and #IfTheyGunnedMeDown:

1. Racism exists and is, in fact, ordinary (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7).
2. Under the “social construction thesis,” society has invented the concept of race and races, as neither correspond to genetics or biology. (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 8).
3. The resulting society/public sphere has been historically constructed through “a series of tacit agreements mediated by images, tales, and other scripts” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 8, 48).

4. Due to different histories and experiences with oppression, people of color have the ability to speak on the subject with a presumed competence and should be given a chance to do so (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p 10).
5. And so, counternarratives center the experiences of people of color, allowing for amplification of often silenced perspectives, thereby pushing the bounds of white supremacy (Dixson & Anderson, 2006).

#IfTheyGunnedMeDown and the Ferguson protests must be contextualized within the history of race and power in the United States. The large number of Black Americans on Twitter led to the subcommunity “Black Twitter,” which has partially replaced traditional modes of discourse in the Black community for younger generations of Black Americans. This trendsetting, challenging platform has empowered previously silenced voices to speak out against injustice. As social media surmounts traditional print newspapers as the top source of information for media consumers (Shearer, 2018), hashtags became the method by which community and protests can form; they offer a unique channel that continues to transcend geographic boundaries and unite strangers in a common goal. Guided by the tenets of CRT and the context of Black Twitter, this study seeks to answer the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ 1: What were the prominent narratives of mainstream, local and Black American-centered news media in their coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown?
- RQ 2: Did Black Twitter’s efforts to promote #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and challenge misrepresentation in mainstream media force a conversation between the two parties?
- RQ 3: Did the media respond to the concerns of Twitter users in their coverage?

## METHODS

### NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis is a family of approaches with which scholars explore various forms of storytelling. Some analysts have looked at the function of narratives, while others analyzed interactions between creator, audience and performative elements (Riessman, 1993); these various methods are utilized based on the nature and type of text. Narrative “functions as an argument to view and understand the world in a particular way” and is used by writers to “help us impose order on the flow of experience so that we can make sense of events and actions in our lives” (Foss, 1989). To study narratives is to study how humans understand existence and recognize broad themes that define each generation.

The idea of creating order is primarily noteworthy in looking at media coverage. In the modern century, journalists cater to the changing narrative needs of the population (American Press Institute, n.d.). Richardson observed, “At the individual level, people make sense of their lives through the stories available to them, and they attempt to fill their lives with available stories. People live by stories” (as cited in Barnett, 2005). As media gatekeepers, journalists also play a significant role in actively influencing and guiding these narratives, to both positive and negative effects. There are only so many stories, and so many ways to create those stories, often journalists are pushed to “use and reuse ... story lines” and “take comfort in the old formulas” (Hanson, 2001), even as these formulas may engage in bias and enforce misrepresentation. As online clicks become more important to the financial success and profit of the news media, these repeated narratives have become more sensationalized, leading to the prevalence of the term “fake news” and the degradation of media trust (Brenan, 2019). As a result of the cursory modernization of these old formulas, the field of journalism has often shown an implicit bias in coverage and a failure to offer adequate coverage to the diverse communities they serve (Armstrong, 2018).

In analyzing the following coverage, narrative analysis offers the means by which to identify themes and characteristics of individual texts. Foss's (1989) guided questions for narrative criticism structured the analysis of these texts, specifically focusing on her sample questions on **causal relations**, as well as audience, **characters**, narrator and theme. Scholars have previously used Foss's questions to frame analysis of media coverage on topics such as eating disorders (Bishop, 2001) and women who perpetrate violence (Barnett, 2005). Foss's method is the best to employ here due to its flexibility, which extends fewer constraints on analysis and allows for extended interpretations of stories.

## MEDIA SELECTION

### MAINSTREAM NATIONAL SELECTION

The character and influence of each traditional news media outlet were critical in choosing articles and publications. After #IfTheyGunnedMeDown went viral, many media outlets quickly swapped their photos of Brown, making it difficult to track which organizations originally shared the negative depiction. Due to this issue, visual elements did not affect article selection in this study.

*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were central to the national corpus. In terms of national coverage, these rival news outlets were the most likely to offer in-depth coverage of social issues, regardless of proximity. With a diverse reader base and strong global identity, *The New York Times* is a legacy paper that drives national conversation and is widely considered to be the newspaper of record for the United States (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019). The company reports 78.1 million unique visitors each month online with 3 in 4 readers consuming news exclusively online (*The New York Times*, n.d.). *The New York Times* also emphasizes having an affluent reader base of "Opinion Leaders," c-suites, millionaires and business decision-makers. In this realm, the newspaper reports a circulation of 4.6 million and

readers with an average \$191,000 annual income. With a similar audience, style and content, *The Washington Post* (n.d.) self-reports that it is one of the fastest-growing news sites in the world. Each month washingtonpost.com reports an average 66 million unique visitors and, as of 2017, the newspaper's print circulation hit an average 359,158 daily and 551,360 on Sundays (Washington Post Media Kit, n.d.).

The other publications in the national corpus are NPR and MSNBC. NPR is first and foremost a public radio outlet, serving a wide demographic of national consumers. With a growing online presence, however, NPR has redefined itself as a credible online-only national news outlet (NPR, n.d.). The organization reports 41.6 million monthly users and characterizes their audience as influential and curious (NPR Audience, n.d.). As small, local newspapers and radio news outlets have diminished in size and scope, NPR has continued to have "a major role in the American journalistic landscape" (Fallows, 2010). With 34 bureaus worldwide and more than 1,000 local member stations broadcasting their content, NPR has managed to sustain national and international influence without sacrificing its quality content and ample mission to promote a more informed public.

MSNBC is a television network offering live news coverage at all hours of the day (Comcast Spotlight, 2019). Though it was founded independently by Microsoft and General Electric's NBC unit in 1996, it is now a manifestation, or brand, of NBC News (Weprin, 2012). While NBC is focused on news and entertainment, MSNBC found a niche reporting national and international news primarily focused on politics and society. MSNBC has grown rapidly in audience viewership over the past few years, reporting double-digit growth from 2017 to 2018 as it consistently barreled ahead of rival CNN, though remaining



well below Fox News (Katz, 2019, Jan. 2). In 2018, it reported more Black American and Asian American viewers than any other cable network. Though their online content is less likely to reach as many readers as other outlets, MSNBC remains a valuable asset for research as a broadcast-focused news outlet.

It is important to note that, while these organizations are not quick to release information about audience demographics, a large body of research shows that the modern newsrooms of the mainstream news media do not reflect the diversity of the communities they cover (Section 4, 2012; Chideya, 2018; American Society of News Editors, 2016). In America, where roughly 40% of citizens identify with a minority group, the percentage of minorities in the overall workforce of traditional daily print and online-only organizations is about 17% (American Society of News Editors, 2016). Black and Hispanic Americans in particular tend to be the most underrepresented in newsrooms (Atske, Barthel, Stocking & Tamir, 2019). In analyzing work from these outlets, it is essential to recognize that traditional reporting practices often continue to position journalistic narratives in a de facto white perspective.

### **BLACK AMERICAN-CENTERED MEDIA**

History and audience were important factors in choosing articles from Black American-centered media outlets. The publications included in this study are either historically significant and well-known Black American-centered media news organizations or news outlets founded on catering news to an often-underserved population. These news outlets have each established credibility and community as they have been devoted to reporting about injustices against Black Americans and keeping communities informed and bound together.

*The Chicago Defender* has long been the nation's most influential Black newspaper, supporting the great migration of Black Americans to the north in the early 1900s (History of *The Chicago Defender*). It is now the flagship weekly publication of Real Time Inc., the publisher of five other Black American-centered regional weekly newspapers.

Another longstanding newspaper included is *The Philadelphia Tribune*. Established in 1884, it is the longest continuously running Black American-centered newspaper in the country (*The Philadelphia Tribune*, n.d.). Founder Christopher James

### **CHARACTERS:**

When reporting on an event, journalists must make choices about what people to include, how to characterize them, and how to connect this characterization with the overall meaning or focus of story. Important questions to ask when considering the role of characters in journalism include: What aspects of these people are included in the reporting? Who is allowed to speak? What are people reported as saying and what message is being communicated about their speech? Are these characters dynamic and given a stake in the story or are they characterized as flat, formulaic, and utilized only to fill a narrative need?

### **CAUSAL RELATIONS:**

The cause-and-effect relationships between events as presented in a journalistic article

Perry, Sr. once said to his father, “For my people to make progress, they must have a newspaper through which they can speak against injustice” (The Philadelphia Tribune, n.d.). The newspaper is now published five days a week and has been honored with the John B. Russwurm Award seven times since 1995 for “Best Newspaper” in America.

Originally a collective of church publications, the *Baltimore Afro-American* is the longest-running Black American family-owned newspaper in the United States, established in 1892 (About Us, n.d.). For a time, as many as 13 editions of the newspaper circulated across the country, though that number has dwindled to two as of 2019: Baltimore and Washington, D.C. (Rienzi, 2008).

The odd addition to this collection is an article from *The Root*, an Black American culture-focused online magazine created by *The Washington Post* in 2008. The magazine set itself apart from similar websites through more highbrow, culture-focused coverage (Pérez-Peña, 2008). The magazine’s founder Henry Louis Gates, Jr. sees *The Root* as a way to bring back the once thriving dissemination of Black American-centered news media. In his childhood, he recalls, “We would get in the Black barbershops both *The Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Baltimore Afro-American*” and people would read and discuss the news (Pérez-Peña, 2008). By catering to the digital-first younger generation of media consumers, *The Root* sets itself apart from the organizations that paved the way for Black American-first media outlets.

### REGIONAL MEDIA

One local article from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Missouri’s major regional newspaper, was included in this study. Ferguson is a mere 20-minute drive from St. Louis; reporters from the station were likely the first on the scene when events in Ferguson became a national issue. The newspaper reports 5,350,958 unique visitors each month on their website STLToday.com (2019 Audience Scorecard, 2019). This regional coverage was included to mediate

### NATIONAL NEWS PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION (NNPA):

A longstanding collection of Black American media publishers.

the national and Black American-centered news outlets. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*’s circulation level sits between the two other categories, and its audience is regional and community-based. This text was included to determine whether coverage from a regional paper aligned more with patterns in the mainstream media or those of Black American-centered news media. Due to small sample size, the findings of this category cannot be indicative of all Missouri-based or other regional outlets.

### SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

Articles from well-known national news media were found and collected by searching the Nexis Uni database using the search terms “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown” and “If They Gunned Me Down.” While there are many news outlets based in Missouri, a regional paper was chosen because it was the only one found with coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. Ferguson’s newspaper, *The Ferguson Citywalk*, did not provide coverage available online. To find instances of “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown” and “If They Gunned Me Down” in Black American-centered news media, every site recognized by the **National News Publishers Association (NNPA)** was searched through individually. Roughly 200 community newspapers are affiliated with the NNPA; of the eight articles devoted to discussing #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, four were chosen (NNPA, n.d.).

Stories included in this study were empirically hand-picked based on the depth of their coverage. Those that mentioned #IfTheyGunnedMeDown in passing were disregarded, as well as any stories outside of the period marking the first four weeks of the Ferguson Unrest—from August 9, 2014 to August 25, 2014. Though most of the articles included were published between August 10th and August 15th, the time frame was extended to the supposed end date of the first wave of Ferguson Unrest—the day of Michael Brown, Jr.'s funeral—to accommodate weekly and monthly publications. Nine news articles were coded: four national, four Black American-centered and one regional.

### CODING

Each article was read numerous times, guided by Foss's (1989) sample questions of narrative structure, to determine and understand the narratives presented. Key subtopics intrinsic to media coverage, including characters, causal relations, themes, narrator and audience, were then identified. Myths and language, as well as how the texts introduced and named characters, were also analyzed. Notes on these topics were recorded in a color-coded spreadsheet for each article, using each subtopic to inform an understanding of the story's dominant narrative. Finally, due to each story's uniqueness, the intricacies of each narrative were examined and grouped under a broader narrative.

### FINDINGS

In U.S. news coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, two opposing narratives appear. The first collection of stories focuses coverage on Black Twitter and movements of resistance and empowerment. The second category looks at the effect of negative media stereotypes surrounding Black victims of police brutality and gun violence, addressing the media's potential to perpetuate systemic violence. These narratives were informed by an intensive analysis of nine stories focused on #IfTheyGunnedMeDown published between August 9 to August 25, 2014. The purpose of this research is to find the prominent narratives in coverage of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown between news media types to see whether a conversation ensued between the protestors and the media and whether the media was reflexive in its response.

### EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVE: BLACK TWITTER AS A FORUM FOR EMPOWERMENT

Stories under this category ascertain that the unjust killing of Michael Brown, Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014, fueled unrest that was amplified by his unsympathetic and inaccurate representation in the mainstream media. These stories viewed Black Twitter users as responding to an unjust event and fairly pushing the mistakes of the news media into a national conversation on stereotyping and (mis)representation. They accomplished this through including young Black sources, specifically from Black Twitter, and the occasional professional source. In coverage from each Black American-centered news outlet, the authors spoke from experience and used self-inclusive language, such as “us” and “we,” to unite Black Americans. The main theme of these stories was positive, and by focusing their attention on the movement's creators and constructing a narrative about shifting power dynamics and social media as a counterculture, these news media outlets found their coverage in historically-significant research while looking toward the future.

In coverage by *The Root* published on August 11, 2014, visceral, potent language set the tone for Black Americans to rise up to the task of sharing their “accurate narrative.” Author Yesha Callahan (2014) wrote: “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown is not only a sad commentary on what it means to be black in America but also shows that in order to have our own narrative correctly reported, we have to

do the reporting ourselves.” Other articles similarly used #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to address the burgeoning power of Black users on social media. In an article published in *The Philadelphia Tribune* on August 17, 2014, Bobbi Booker wrote, “As social media networks evolve, ‘Black Twitter’ proves to be the underground railroad of activism as it’s hashtag messages dominate Twitter timelines 140-characters at a time.” These articles included statistics on the high percentage of Black Americans on social media platforms from the Pew Research Center, alongside details about Twitter use. Visual examples were included in each story via embedded tweets. The text-heavy stories with this narrative from Black American-focused media outlets included only the first use of the hashtag by C.J. Lawrence. On the other hand, *The Chicago Defender* story relied heavily on visuals, embedding five tweets as examples of the hashtag (Editor, 2014).

A question appeared in the underlying structure of some stories in this category: Is social media activism really activism? Each story answered with a strengthening quote from a source stating that, yes, social media activism is activism. Other articles came to this conclusion immediately and spent the rest of the story discussing how the newfound power of marginalized groups in social media reflects a changing global dialogue surrounding race and the literal breaking of systemic, hegemonic narratives. These stories asked, “What does #IfTheyGunnedMeDown say about the influence of Black Americans on culture and society today?” Authors and sources alike shared their experiences and opinions about the transforming landscape of digital conversation. While writers at *The Root* and *The Chicago Defender* relied on their own voices as sources for the issue, articles from the NNPA, *The New York Times* and *The Philadelphia Tribune* weighed their narratives

on the movement’s actors, including highly-followed Twitter users and those who have used and created this and other hashtags. The only high-profile source used by texts in this narrative is President Obama, whose statement on the shooting appeared in *The New York Times* coverage.

*The New York Times*, as a traditional mainstream media outlet, is an outlier within this narrative, which is defined by ingroup language and motivations. Yet, with its angle, temporal relations and characters, *The New York Times* coverage is clearly within the bounds of the Empowerment Narrative. While journalists writing for Black American-centered news media utilized their own voices as group insiders to create their narratives, *The New York Times* took to interviewing people from around the country to build the story. This was likely done because *The New York Times* doesn’t speak for or with any community in particular, and so the voices important to raise were the ones from the community that drove the story. Yet, by assigning this story to a woman of color who specializes in issues of race and representation, *The New York Times* was able to diverge from traditional coverage methods and position itself within a new movement of diverse coverage. Tanzina Vega (2014) of *The New York Times* wrote, “the social media chatter and anguish have become part of a complicated sea of viral words and images [...] that have created a new and charged environment for social activism.” Among the many quotes included in the article, Vega chose to end on the words of Yemisi Miller-Tonnet, 19, a student at Spelman College in Atlanta: “Hashtag activism is activism. We might be tweeting from a couch, but we’re also getting up and doing the work that needs to be done.”

**INFORMATION NARRATIVE: U.S. NEWS MEDIA IS IGNITING A LARGER TRADITION OF BIAS AND HARM AGAINST BLACK AMERICANS**

Stories within the second narrative focused on the mission of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to change the habits of the mainstream news media. Four of the nine stories included in this study partly or fully subscribed to the Information Narrative by analyzing how media stereotyping might impact society and individuals. The causal relations (cause-and-effect) in these stories show a clear understanding of the potential damage of negative media representations, and the underlying theme is largely informative. This narrative has multiple veins and the stories within this category have as many differences as they do similarities, but all aim their analyses at the faults of the news media.

In coverage by *The Washington Post* and MSNBC, journalists brought up respectability politics as the key theme and/or catalyst of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. *The Root's* Damon Young (2016) defines respectability politics as “the idea that if [Black Americans] walk a little straighter and write a little neater and speak a little clearer, then white people will treat us better.” Soraya Nadia McDonald (2014) catered to this point in *The Washington Post* by structuring her article’s narrative around the media’s error in portraying Brown and **Trayvon Martin** as “violent thug[s] who had it coming.” In the wake of Brown’s murder, many recalled Martin’s murder and the subsequent media frenzy; not only were the events tragically similar, but the misrepresentation of both victims by the media broached respectability politics. McDonald (2014) addressed this by sharing a quote from talk show host Geraldo Rivera in a *Fox & Friends* segment as an example of stereotyping at its highest potency. Rivera said, “I think the hoodie is as much responsible for Trayvon Martin’s death as George Zimmerman was” (as cited in McDonald, 2014). The story then focused on its driving narrative: That the mainstream news media is actively passing judgment on victims as it sifts through potential photos. MSNBC’s coverage mirrored *The Washington Post* in its headline, in which it referenced victims’ “trial by social media” (as cited by Serwer, 2014). The story reflected on past cases when Black

**TRAYVON MARTIN:**

Trayvon Martin was a Black American high school student killed by George Zimmerman in February 2012. In 2013, the acquittal of George Zimmerman on the charge of murder sparked the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter which would later expand into a national organizing movement.

**THE MAIN THEME OF THESE STORIES WAS POSITIVE, AND BY FOCUSING THEIR ATTENTION ON THE MOVEMENT’S CREATORS AND CONSTRUCTING A NARRATIVE ABOUT SHIFTING POWER DYNAMICS AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS A COUNTERCULTURE, THESE NEWS MEDIA OUTLETS FOUND THEIR COVERAGE IN HISTORICALLY-SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH WHILE LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE.**





shooting victims were “tried” or judged over social media as a result of the news media’s choice of visual representation, giving evidence in the form of links, embedded videos and studies on racism and criminal justice policies. This is one sign of the second element of the Information Narrative—looking to the future. While The Washington Post and MSNBC articles referenced the past and made conclusions about the present, they failed to offer apologies or solutions.

NPR and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, on the other hand, pushed the topic by mentioning the stakes of making errors and referencing the need for future growth in media coverage. NPR’s brief coverage of the movement relayed events, referenced its parallels with Trayvon Martin and ended with a voice from Black Twitter: “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown Tweets should be required reading in every journalism class in America,” said one tweeter” (Chappell, 2014). The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* broke ranks by allowing two guest columnists to author its coverage. In the story, Salem State University communications professors Robert E. Brown and Rebecca Hains (2014) commented on the state of the media and responded to #IfTheyGunnedMeDown outright: “Selecting such unsympathetic photographs to represent young men who have been forever silenced through death — who can never tell their side of the story — is unjust” (Brown & Hains, 2014). The rest of the story was a call to action to journalists: #IfTheyGunnedMeDown should be “breaking news for the news media” (Brown & Hains, 2014). As gatekeepers, the article noted, the news media must be aware of the detrimental consequences of publishing inaccurate photographs, because the image choices have influence over the pathos of the public. While other stories in this narrative used embedded #IfTheyGunnedMeDown tweets, the only visual in this story was one of Michael Brown, Jr. in cap and gown in his high school graduation photo.

## DISCUSSION

By comparing multiple veins of the news media, this study has the potential to stir a larger conversation about how different news media outlets react to and remedy errors publicly. Though Black Twitter pushed #IfTheyGunnedMeDown to the forefront of social media, stories within the Empowerment Narrative did not respond directly to accusations and spoke from an “Us vs. Them” perspective. Black American-centered outlets wrote as Black Americans, not members of the media, isolating mainstream media as the perpetrators. *The New York Times*, in speaking from a similar place, deflected the issue of the media’s wrongs and focused on hashtag activism and Black Twitter. All other mainstream news media fit conveniently into the Information Narrative as they focus on the cause of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown and the future implications and impacts.

A past study by Araiza et al. (2016) on journalists’ tweets further explained the “Us vs. Them” approach taken in the Empowerment Narrative. The study found that journalists often framed protesters using language such as “angry mob,” “defiance” and the generalizing “they,” and that the use of this language “disassociated journalists from the protesters and aligned them with the police and the social order” (Araiza, Sturm, Istek & Bock, 2016). The heated, distrustful angle of the Empowerment Narrative, then, is extended by understanding that many journalists set themselves apart from the public through their actions in Ferguson. When journalists at Black American-centered news outlets called for continued efforts from Black Twitter users to build an accurate narrative, they referenced this media tradition of bias. The media’s negligence and biases were shown clearly in tweets from the scene; using a misrepresentative photo of Brown was merely one of the news media’s mistakes.

The national and local mainstream news media,

**WHILE THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA  
GENERALLY FOLLOWS A STANDARD  
METHOD OF COVERAGE, THE BLACK  
AMERICAN-CENTERED NEWS MEDIA  
TURNS THE FOCUS AWAY FROM THE  
HASHTAG TO THE PEOPLE BEHIND IT.**



bar *The New York Times*, followed a distinct and largely unwavering narrative. At a baseline, they reported on the issues (*NPR*), talked about the context socially and episodically (*The Washington Post*, MSNBC) and looked to the future (*St-Louis Post-Dispatch*), offering that choosing less distorted images to represent young Black men “could go a long way toward mitigating prejudicial tendencies in news coverage” (Brown & Hains, 2014). Though they covered the movement, most of these outlets did not apologize, respond to allegations directly or offer plans to change the hegemonic narrative practices which have led to misrepresentation. *NPR*, *The Washington Post* and MSNBC’s coverage of the hashtag movement commented on the importance of the issue but neglected to recognize their roles as media outlets and engage with Black Twitter. The lack of exchange between the two parties signals that there was no conversation, or, at least, not on a large scale. *The St. Louis Post Dispatch* (2014) article was the sole story in the corpus to devote its entire narrative to changing the media landscape and was not even written by the publication’s reporters. The coverage, as a whole, shows startling discrepancies in understanding the larger societal themes that sparked #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. While some texts treat #IfTheyGunnedMeDown as a passing movement, an example of hashtag activism, others put the event into context and remark on the past and the future of United States race relations.

The key difference between the two narratives is perspective. While the mainstream media generally follows a standard method of coverage, the Black American-centered news media turns the focus away from the hashtag to the people behind it. In doing so, the Empowerment Narrative looks past the moment to look to the movement. This shift in perspective from the effect to the cause is the primary way coverage in the Empowerment Narrative strove to explain the complexity of this multifaceted social media movement. On the other hand, the mainstream news media largely failed to cover this issue in a personal and provocative way. None of the articles in the Information Narrative used ingroup language regarding the media or took time to recognize their part as members of the news media. Instead, they placed blame on other news outlets that had made errors—their commentary broad and their objective, third-person writing style not inclusive of the speaking party. While various articles spoke on the “court of public opinion,” they overlooked the role of journalists as the gatekeepers of the national agenda. The lacking coverage reflects a missed opportunity to spark a greater conversation about media stereotyping and diversity in news reporting and narrative perspectives.

**CONCLUSION**

This sample of #IfTheyGunnedMeDown coverage reveals tangible differences between coverage of events from Black American-centered news media and mainstream/regional news media. The stark contrast in focus between the Empowerment Narrative and the Information Narrative offers insight into how Black American-centered news media operates with a strong cultural and community focus, whereas mainstream news media approaches coverage from a strictly journalistic, hegemonic white perspective. Black American-centered news media reported subjectively on the power of Black Twitter and their digital counterpublic (Hill, 2018); mainstream

national and regional news media reported on the dangers of stereotyping and the Ferguson Unrest in an objective, third-person style and, thus, rarely acknowledged the institution's role in formulating and maintaining these biased narrative practices.

By reporting introspectively and looking toward the future, some articles in the Empowerment Narrative addressed how Black Twitter users could orient media gatekeepers' decisions, leading to "moments of forced reflexivity" (Carr, 2012). Black American-centered news media furthered Black Twitter's efforts by offering a more detailed analysis of the strength of Black communities on social media to drive trends and movements. In his study on the power of cyberspace to subvert conventional media gatekeepers, Carr (2012) found "when acting in large numbers, the gated have a powerful ability to act as gatekeepers to spread stories that would otherwise receive limited exposure in traditional media." Though mainstream media failed to take the opportunity to speak transparently, in some instances, such as in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *The New York Times*, coverage reveals that when pressured by activism, media may respond by taking steps to diversify the stagnated, white storytelling tradition of the American news media. Narrative studies of more recent race-related coverage in mainstream journalism—as well as more recent encounters between online protesters and media—are necessary to evaluate the long-term effects of social media activism in the transformation of harmful institutional practices.

**THE STARK CONTRAST IN FOCUS BETWEEN THE EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVE AND THE INFORMATION NARRATIVE OFFERS INSIGHT INTO HOW BLACK AMERICAN-CENTERED NEWS MEDIA OPERATES WITH A STRONG CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY FOCUS, WHEREAS MAINSTREAM NEWS MEDIA APPROACHES COVERAGE FROM A STRICTLY JOURNALISTIC, HEGEMONIC (AND WHITE) PERSPECTIVE.**

#### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This article was written in the spring of 2019, five years following the Ferguson Unrest and a year prior to the 2020 murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of the police. At the time of this article's publishing, white-centered ideas of "objectivity" in journalism ethics are as present as ever. While this article did not delve into the media coverage of the Black Twitter-led 2020 protests, I encourage the reader to consider how media reflexivity and methods of movement within the digital counterpublic have or have not evolved.

- About Us. (n.d.). Afro. <https://www.afro.com/about-us/>
- American Society of News Editors. (2016). 2016 Diversity Survey. <https://members.newsleaders.org/diversity-survey-2016>
- Araiza, J. A., Sturm, H. A., Istek, P., & Bock, M. A. (2016). Hands Up, Don't Shoot, Whose Side Are You On? Journalists Tweeting the Ferguson Protests. *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, 16(3), 305–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616634834>
- Armstrong, L. (2018, Apr. 18). Why diverse online communities don't trust journalists and seven ways to fix it. Knight Foundation. <https://knightfoundation.org/articles/why-diverse-online-communities-don-t-trust-journalists-and-seven-ways-to-fix-it>
- Atske, S., Barthel, M., Stocking, G. & Tamir, C. (2019, August 9). 7 facts about black Americans and the news media. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/07/facts-about-black-americans-and-the-news-media/>
- Barnett, B. (2005). Perfect Mother or Artist of Obscurity? Narrative and Myth in a Qualitative Analysis of Press Coverage of the Andrea Yates Murders. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 29(1), 9–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859904270053>
- Bishop, R. (2001). The Pursuit of Perfection: A Narrative Analysis of How Women's Magazines Cover Eating Disorders: *Howard Journal of Communications*: Vol 12, No 4. <https://doi.org.ezproxy.library.wvu.edu/10.1080/106461701753287732>
- Booker, B. (2014, Aug. 17). 'Black Twitter' activism grows. *The Philadelphia Tribune*. [https://www.phillytrib.com/lifestyles/black-twitter-activism-grows/article\\_41b3c2b2-5c4d-52fd-940a-239c9150df1e.html](https://www.phillytrib.com/lifestyles/black-twitter-activism-grows/article_41b3c2b2-5c4d-52fd-940a-239c9150df1e.html)
- Bosman, J. & Goode, E. (2014, Aug. 11). F.B.I. Steps In Amid Unrest After Police Kill Missouri Youth. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/12/us/looting-and-unrest-follows-vigil-for-st-louis-teenager.html>
- Bosman, J. & Goldstein, J. (2014, Aug. 23) Timeline for a Body: 4 Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html>
- Breen, D. & Meer, N. (2019). Securing whiteness?: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the securitization of Muslims in education. *Identities*, 26(5), 595–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2019.1589981>
- Brenan, M. (2019, September 26). Americans' Trust in Mass Media Edges Down to 41%. Gallup <https://news.gallup.com/poll/267047/americans-trust-mass-media-edges-down.aspx>
- Brown, R. E. & Hains, R. (2014, Aug. 13). Media's choice of photos creates a split-second bias. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. [https://www.stltoday.com/opinion/columnists/media-s-choice-of-photos-creates-a-split-second-bias/article\\_5117983f-86a6-5a29-8a4f-bdca701c62c8.html](https://www.stltoday.com/opinion/columnists/media-s-choice-of-photos-creates-a-split-second-bias/article_5117983f-86a6-5a29-8a4f-bdca701c62c8.html)
- Callahan, Y. (2014, Aug. 11). #IfTheyGunnedMeDown Shows How Black People Are Portrayed in Mainstream Media. *The Root: The Grapevine*. <https://thegrapevine.theroot.com/iftheygunnedmedown-shows-how-black-people-are-portraye-1790885638ye-1790885638>
- Carney, N. (2016). All Lives Matter, but so Does Race: Black Lives Matter and the Evolving Role of Social Media. *Humanity & Society*, 40(2), 180–199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597616643868>
- Carr, J. (2012). No Laughing Matter: The Power of Cyberspace to Subvert Conventional Media Gatekeepers. *International Journal of Communication*, 6(0), 21.
- Chappell, B. (2014, Aug. 11). People Wonder: "If They Gunned Me Down," What Photo Would Media Use? *The Two-Way*: NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/08/11/339592009/people-wonder-if-they-gunned-me-down-what-photo-would-media-use>
- Chideya, F. (2018, May 22). 'This deepening division is not inevitable': The failing diversity efforts of newsrooms. *Columbia Journalism Review*. <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/newsroom-diversity-failing-efforts.php>
- Lawrence, C. J. [CJLawrenceEsq]. (2014, Aug. 10). Yes let's do that: Which photo does the media use if the police shot me down? #IfTheyGunnedMeDown [Tweet]. <http://t.co/NgOpUkWhr>
- Comcast Spotlight. (2019). Advertise on MSNBC. <https://comcastspotlight.com/content/overview/msnbc>
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2012). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Second Edition. NYU Press.
- Dixon, A. D. & Anderson, C. R. (2006). *Critical race theory in education: all God's children got a song*. New York: Routledge.
- Editor. (2014, Aug. 11). #IfTheyGunnedMeDown What Picture Would They Use? Sparks A Vulnerable & Potent Discussion On Black Image Portrayal In The Media. *Chicago Defender*. <http://chicagodefender.com/iftheygunnedmedown-what-picture-would-they-use-sparks-a-vulnerable-potent-discussion-on-black-image-portrayal-in-the-media/>
- Fallows, J. (2010, October 24). Why NPR Matters (Long). *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2010/10/why-npr-matters-long/65068/>
- Florini, S. (2014). Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin': Communication and Cultural Performance on "Black Twitter." *Television & New Media*, 15(3), 223–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476413480247>

- Foss, S. (1989). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. *Social Text*, (25/26), 56-80. doi:10.2307/466240.
- Gates, H. L. (1988). *The signifying monkey: a theory of Black American literary criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1962). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. MIT Press.
- Hanson, C. (2001, January/February). All the news that fits the myth. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 39(5), 50–53.
- Hill, M. L. (2018). “Thank You, Black Twitter”: State Violence, Digital Counterpublics, and Pedagogies of Resistance. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 286–302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917747124>
- History of the Chicago Defender. Chicago Defender. (n.d.). <http://chicagodefender.com/history-of-the-chicago-defender/>
- Judah, S. (2014, August 11). #BBCTrending: The two faces of Michael Brown. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-28742301>
- Katz, A. J. (2019, Jan. 2). 2018 Ratings: MSNBC Was the Only Top 25 Cable Network to Post Double-Digit Audience Growth. *Adweek*. <https://adweek.it/3bGuD6O>
- McDonald, S. (2014, Aug. 11). After Michael Brown's killing, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown shows how selfies shape history. *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/08/11/after-michael-browns-killing-iftheygunnedmedown-shows-how-selfies-shape-history/?utm\\_term=.5aa81b763506](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/08/11/after-michael-browns-killing-iftheygunnedmedown-shows-how-selfies-shape-history/?utm_term=.5aa81b763506)
- Mitchell-Kernan, C. “Signifying, Loud-Talking and Marking (1999).” Signifyin (g), sanctifyin’, and slam dunking: A Reader in Black American Expressive Culture. 309-330.
- Moscato, D. (2016). Media Portrayals of Hashtag Activism: A Framing Analysis of Canada’s #Idlenomore Movement. *Media and Communication*, 4(2), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v4i2.416>
- NPR Audiences. (n.d.). National Public Media. <https://www.nationalpublicmedia.com/npr/audience/>
- NNPA | Black Press of America. National Newspaper Publishers Association. <https://nnpa.org/>
- Prasad, P. (2016). Beyond rights as recognition: Black Twitter and posthuman coalitional possibilities. *Prose Studies*, 38(1), 50–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440357.2016.1151763>
- Pérez-Peña, R. (2008, January 28). Washington Post Starts an Online Magazine for Blacks. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/28/business/media/28post.html>
- Rienzi, G. (2008, Mar. 17). “Mining the ‘Afro-American’ Archives”. *The Gazette*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Section 4: Demographics and Political Views of News Audiences. (2019, December 31). <https://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/section-4-demographics-and-political-views-of-news-audiences/>
- Serwer, A. (2014, Aug. 11). Michael Brown case: Black shooting victims face trial by social media. MSNBC. <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/black-shooting-victims-face-trial-social-media>
- Sharma, S. (2013). Black Twitter?: Racial Hashtags, Networks and Contagion. *New Formations: a journal of culture/theory/politics*, 78, 46-64. doi: 10.3898/NewF.78.02.2013.
- Shearer, E. (2018, Dec. 10). Social media outpaces print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/>
- Sichynsky, T. (2016, March 21). These 10 Twitter hashtags changed the way we talk about social issues. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2016/03/21/these-are-the-10-most-influential-hashtags-in-honor-of-twitters-birthday/>
- Smithsonian. (n.d.). Popular and Pervasive Stereotypes of Black Americans. National Museum of Black American History and Culture. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/popular-and-pervasive-stereotypes-Black-americans>
- 2019 Audience Scorecard. (2019). St. Louis Post-Dispatch. <https://bloximages.newyork1.vip.townnews.com/stlto-day.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/5/b3/5b-3655be-d683-11e5-b0dc-db9e4bd9c639/5c7ee29b-6ba96.pdf.pdf>
- Stevens, L. & Maurantonio, N. (2018). Black Twitter Asks Rachel: Racial Identity Theft in “Post-Racial” America. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 29(2), 179–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2017.1354789>
- Sullivan, M. (2014, August 25). An Ill-Chosen Phrase, ‘No Angel,’ Brings a Storm of Protest. *Public Editor’s Journal*. <https://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/25/an-ill-chosen-phrase-no-angel-brings-a-storm-of-protest/>
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2019, Apr. 11). The New York Times: History & Facts. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-New-York-Times>
- The New York Times Media Kit. (n.d.) The New York Times. <https://nytmmediakit.com/index.php?p=newspaper>



The Philadelphia Tribune. (n.d.). Our History. <https://www.phillytrib.com/site/about.html>

This is NPR. (n.d.) NPR. <https://www.npr.org/overview>

Washington Post Ad Media Kit. (n.d.). The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/mediakit/platform-digital/>

Webster, T. (2011, May 29). The Social Habit 2011. Edison Research. [https://www.edisonresearch.com/the\\_social\\_habit\\_2011/](https://www.edisonresearch.com/the_social_habit_2011/)

Weprin, A. (2012, July 16). A Brief History Of MSNBC. com And NBCNews.com. TVNewser. <https://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/a-brief-history-of-msnbc-com-and-nbcnews-com/138671/>

American Press Institute. (n.d.). What is the purpose of journalism? <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/purpose-journalism/>

Vega, T. (2014, Aug. 12). Shooting Spurs Hashtag Effort on Stereotypes. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/13/us/if-they-gunned-me-down-protest-on-twitter.html>

Young, D. (2016, March 21). The Definition, Danger and Disease of Respectability Politics, Explained. The Root. <https://www.theroot.com/the-definition-danger-and-disease-of-respectability-po-1790854699>



BLACK LIVES MATTER