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ABSTRACT

Police Brutality and Black Lives Matter Protests: Portrayal in the Mainstream Media and the Effects on Audience Perception examines newspaper coverage of the #BlackLivesMatter protests following the police killings of Baltimore resident Freddie Gray in 2015 and Korryn Gaines in 2016. The thesis seeks to analyze newspaper articles written by journalists of mainstream presses and Black American presses to interrogate the audience's perception of #BlackLivesMatter protests. In other words, how is the audience's perception about #BlackLivesMatter protests cultivated after reading the news? Through qualitative research, findings determined that *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* occasionally published articles associating unlawful acts with African American protestors without properly contextualizing the #BlackLivesMatter movement's intentional civil disobedience. The thesis utilizes Critical Race Theory to address the narrow analysis of newspaper content to ascertain *The Baltimore Afro* and *The Washington Informer's* approach to the protest coverage alongside the mainstream newspapers. Alongside discussing acts of rebellion among protesters, *The Baltimore Afro* and *The Washington Informer*, independent Black newspapers known as "The Black Press," published interviews with community members about how they were personally affected by the protests, providing a humanitarian touch to the news story that suggests the subtle ways Black newspapers are intentional about the concerns of their readership. Conversely, among the mainstream newspapers and The Black Press, what is lacking in their coverage is a dedication to African American women victims of police brutality and the protests in their memory. Therefore, this thesis argues for the necessity for journalists to accurately depict #BlackLivesMatter protests and the intentionality of African American protests, particularly when creating newsworthy narratives that affect audience perception.

Police Brutality and Black Lives Matter Protests: Portrayal in the Mainstream Media and the
Effects on Audience Perception

by

Tyriana Evans

B.A., The George Washington University, 2019

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Pan African Studies

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Introduction

Police Brutality and Black Lives Matter Protests: Portrayal in the Mainstream Media and the Effects on Audience Perception analyzes onlookers' comprehension of civil unrest following the 2015 police killing of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland. Over the course of many days, Baltimore residents and #BlackLivesMatter activists took to the streets to express their dismay of Gray's death and the subsequent handling of the case. The Baltimore protests revealingly shed light on the adversarial relationship between activists and journalists reporting for mainstream media. The portrayal of Black people protesting in the streets by journalists of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* centered the narrative on immediate stereotypical lenses of African Americans rather than understanding their civil disobedient actions as a merit of their constitutional rights. This kind of journalistic treatment of African Americans directly relates to the historical misrepresentation that has long been a feature in the American press.

For example, dating back to the 1900s, African American journalists such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett wrote "Lynch Law in America" to combat harmful portrayals of African American men who were lynched (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 71)., This thesis provides an in-depth examination of the American press and their portrayal of African American protestors involved in Baltimore's #BlackLivesMatter marches, with a focus on the continued harmful portrayals of African American protestors in the mainstream coverage of Black Lives Matter protests. I analyze the depiction of Black protestors in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Afro*, and *The Washington Informer* to interrogate these presses' characterizations of Black protestors and how those descriptions influence their readership. Through a mixed-methods approach of Critical Race Theory, quantitative and qualitative analysis, and the black digital humanities, I seek to answer the following questions: How does the mainstream media

frame the issues spurring the protests, such as police brutality, in their coverage? What dynamics contributed to the urgency for activists to disseminate information on social media instead of mainstream media? And finally, what are significant differences and similarities between the media coverage of Freddie Gray and Korryn Gaines?

These research questions apply a Critical Race Theory lens to explore the American press's coverage of police brutality and the protests it incited more closely. Critical Race theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw have written extensively about the shift to present a new model to understand racial injustice. The purpose of Critical Race Theory is to reimagine how race has been projected onto society not only in legal studies but also in American culture (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. xiii). Moreover, the purpose of Critical Race Theory is "to remind its readers how deeply issues of racial ideology and power continue to matter in American life" (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. xxxii). According to Casarae Gibson and Venetria Patton (2012), Critical Race Theory is defined as follows:

[a] sub-division of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) that emerged in the early 1990s as a response to the lack of critical attentiveness of legislation, affirmative action, criminal sentencing, and discrimination in hiring and educational practices that could not be resolved from 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights theories and methods. (p. 71)

Comparatively, in line with Gibson and Patton's analysis, Critical Race Theory calls for a reframing of the way race is explored in legal and educational areas. Moreover, my thesis extends their analysis by exposing the journalism industry for its lack of accurate portrayals of #BlackLivesMatter marches in its reporting that largely narrates African American protesters. Critical Race Theory provides an understanding of how racism is structural within our society, so it assists in understanding why the media coverage of Freddie Gray protests is primarily negative

and the Korryn Gaines protests went unreported by newsrooms. The media coverage of Freddie Gray and the lack thereof for Korryn Gaines attribute to a structural issue in newsrooms. Who is writing these stories, and how have the stories about Black people been reported? Critical Race Theory relates to the research because, within American media mainstream newspapers, there has been a history of racism, especially in news coverage about African Americans (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 70). As newspapers and television news are prevalent and influential in society, they play a crucial role in informing the views and opinions of their audiences. All members with an active role in journalism have to contextualize their coverage to include the history of the societal challenges African Americans have been forced to confront.

Similarly, intersectionality is applied as an expansion of Critical Race Theory to address the interwoven impacts of race and gender. In examining the lack of media coverage about Korryn Gaines's case as compared to Freddie Gray's, intersectionality assists in explaining the discrepancies. Crenshaw (1996) notes that when you examine modern civil rights, the narrative only applies to African American men, and an analysis of "mainstream feminism" only includes stories discussing white women's experiences (p. 354). African American women are forced out of two traditional narratives, while intersectionality seeks to include their experiences: according to Crenshaw, "intersectionality provides a basis for reconceptualizing race as a coalition between men and women of color" (p. 377). The above quote can be perceived as a challenge to journalists and media organizations for their reporting about the injustices of police brutality to include African American women, and that the news coverage does not differ from that received by African American men who are victims of police brutality. Revealingly, throughout the thesis, the newspapers mentioned above misconstrued and misinformed its readership about the origins of African Americans participating in #BlackLivesMatters protests in Baltimore to raise

awareness about Freddie Gray. Moreover, the misinformation presented a pejorative narration of #BlackLivesMatters protests, particularly on topics relevant to police brutality. For instance, new coverage isolating incidents of police brutality to only signal that it happens to Black men such as Freddie Gray overlooks African American women victims such as Korryn Gaines of Baltimore, who died in a related case of police brutality. As I will explain in the succeeding chapters, Gaines's case did not receive equal attention to Gray's case, which points to the male-centered nature of how #BlackLivesMatter protests are framed even though the movement is led by queer Black women.

To address the lack of media coverage for Korryn Gaines, an African American woman also killed by Baltimore police relative to the substantial media coverage of Freddie Gray, I enlist the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (2015) for the African American Policy Forum (AAPF). The #SayHerName report emphasizes the minuscule media coverage on the African American women killed by police brutality (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1). In Chapter 3, I examine news coverage of Korryn Gaines, revealing how there are far fewer news stories about her than articles published about Freddie Gray. Such underrepresentation of Gaines connects with Crenshaw's #SayHerName report to raise awareness about African American women who have been killed at the hands of police. Thus, such awareness assists in explaining the apparent discrepancies between the news coverage of African American men and women victims of police brutality due to the media's frames (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1). However, troubling media coverage is not a new occurrence.

In a 1968 *Esquire* interview, James Baldwin, a respected American novelist, was asked if "riots can be considered in another light?" He responded by saying, "we call it riots, because they were black people. We wouldn't call it riots if they were white people" (*Esquire* Editors,

2017). As Baldwin challenged journalists to reevaluate the terminology used to describe African American protesters, this thesis further examines how negative terms such as “riot” can impact audiences’ perception of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. The research specifically focuses on the police killing of Freddie Gray in 2015, which initiated a wave of protests in Baltimore, Maryland, and across the country. Gray was arrested by police officers and was found to have a knife in his pocket (Peralta, 2015). Six officers were charged in the death of Freddie Gray (Aratani et al., 2015). Eventually, all charges were dropped against the officers. Baltimore State’s attorney, Marilyn Mosby, said the decision for the prosecution to end was “something that I’ve been grappling with for some time” (Rector, 2016, para. 5).

Although this research primarily focuses on Freddie Gray and analyzes various news articles and the words they used regarding the protests and protestors, there is also an intersectional approach to the research; the newspaper coverage for Korryn Gaines, an African American woman killed by Baltimore police, is also analyzed and contrasted to the news coverage for Freddie Gray. This analysis is imperative, as police brutality impacts both African American men and women. The lack of news coverage about the incidents of police brutality against African American women leaves the general public, including politicians, unaware of this disturbing trend stalling change. Articles about Korryn Gaines protests were searched for in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Afro*, and *The Washington Informer*. Between August 2016 and February 2018, *The New York Times* published three articles about Korryn Gaines and did not address any protests in her honor. *The Washington Post* published nine articles about Korryn Gaines but only discussed the barricade situation and the lawsuit against Baltimore City police. Similar results were found in the Black Press as well. *The Baltimore Afro* published four articles about Korryn Gaines, two of which were opinion pieces

about her case. No articles were published in *The Washington Informer* about Korryn Gaines except for an article about the work Crenshaw has done to elevate the stories of African American women killed at the hands of police (WI Web Staff, 2017). Numerous articles were found about Freddie Gray, and it is appalling there were so few articles about Korryn Gaines, especially considering her child was injured as a result of the standoff with police officers. Both mainstream newspapers and the Black Press have to report not only on the African American male victims but also the women victims.

Review of Scholarly Literature

This section will discuss literature and research on the portrayal of Black Lives Matter protests—more specifically, it will provide a brief overview of scholarly research on the media portrayal of African American protestors in the aftermath of a police-involved shooting, the role of social media, and gender. It will also discuss the noted research on #SayHerName to raise awareness about African American women who have been killed at the hands of police.

Researchers Linda Steiner and Silvio Waisbord (2017) found that journalists covering the protests made a common mistake by including an emphasis on violence, and they have proposed that the terms “protest” or “rebellion” replace “riots” (p. 11). As journalists reported on the protests, they often failed at contextualizing the injustices happening in Baltimore before Freddie Gray’s death (Steiner & Waisbord, 2017, p. 14). This research connects to the thesis as it discusses how the media uses violent terms to describe protests involving African Americans, as well as why it is imperative for journalists to accurately contextualize stories. Another study, Fridkin et al. (2017), has research findings on the media framing of police brutality articles and the potential effects on the audience (p. 3395). The researchers, utilizing a police brutality case in Arizona, found the media reported on the events using three specific frames: law and order,

police brutality, and race (Fridkin et al., 2017, p. 3402). A significant finding of Fridkin et al. is that audiences are influenced by the frames of police brutality and law and order (p. 3410). Their research supports this thesis as they also found a high frequency of specific terms attributed to violence and the potential consequences for the audience. Also, this thesis had similar findings as Fridkin et al. in terms of the significant number of articles discussing the police force used against protestors that will be further addressed in the results.

Similarly, researchers Leopold and Bell (2017) analyzed Black Lives Matter articles and their incorporation of the protest paradigm, which is a negative portrayal of protests (p. 720), and determined that a substantial number of the mainstream media articles reviewed used the protest paradigm in their coverage (p. 727). Leopold and Bell's research proved the media failed to contextualize the purpose of the protests properly. A finding of this thesis is that the mainstream media's coverage did not contextualize the protests when compared to the Black Press coverage.

Social media was crucial in not only the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement but also as a gatekeeper for activists to disseminate information. Freelon et al. (2016) found that activists posted on social media more frequently than being interviewed by traditional news sources to offer their perspective (p. 1006). This finding aligns with this thesis as the Black Press provided a different perspective, one which included interviews from community members. Journalists and news companies must ensure news coverage about African American men and women is equal and the terms used to describe the protests are an accurate depiction for the news consumers.

As this thesis discusses the lack of media coverage for Korryn Gaines, an African American woman also killed by Baltimore police, in considering the substantial media coverage of Freddie Gray, the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (2015) for the African American Policy

Forum (AAPF) is enlisted. The #SayHerName report emphasizes the minuscule media coverage on the African American women killed by police brutality (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1). The section in Chapter 3 of this thesis on the news coverage of Korryn Gaines notes there are far fewer news stories than articles published about Freddie Gray; this finding connects with Crenshaw's #SayHerName report, which assists in explaining the apparent discrepancies between the news coverage of African American men and women victims of police brutality due to the media's frames (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1).

Research Methods

To understand the framing of #BlackLivesMatter marches and the Freddie Gray and Korryn Gaines cases that sparked them, newspapers were collected and analyzed using a black digital humanities approach. According to Kim Gallon (2016), the black digital humanities includes the tradition of Black studies in examining the humanity of the people studied within new technology (p. 1). Gallon posed the question, "What aspects of the digital humanities might be made more 'humanistic' if we were to look at them from the perspective of blackness?" (p. 4), and argued that as digital tools often remove the social construct of humanity, a Black studies approach prevents this from happening (p. 3). Other researchers of black digital humanities have discovered this field can elevate African Americans' stories, ensuring they gain acclaim (Noble, 2019, p. 30).

The black digital humanities is incorporated into the research by reviewing the definitions of the words used to describe African American protesters. Using the data analysis software MAXQDA to retrieve the frequency of the specified terms, a black digital humanities analysis was conducted by reviewing the context of the words used in the newspaper articles and examining how Black people's humanity was portrayed. The use of knowledge and

understanding of how African Americans have historically been depicted in newspapers and previous research about the Black Lives Matter movement assisted in informing the analysis of the newspaper articles after using the digital analysis tools. To gain a deeper understanding of the media coverage of the Freddie Gray protests, 200 articles from four different newspapers were analyzed. The newspapers included two mainstream papers, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, and two Black newspapers, *The Baltimore Afro* and *The Washington Informer*, which were used to compare and contrast with the mainstream newspapers' coverage of the protests. For the selected newspapers, the dates range from April 2015 to November 2016. The newspaper articles were found on their respective websites using keyword search terms such as "Freddie Gray" and "Freddie Gray protests." Upon retrieval, the articles were stored in a spreadsheet and organized by title, date, and link. The articles were then inputted and reviewed with the qualitative data analysis tool MAXQDA. MAXQDA listed the frequency of the terms with the articles listed in table form. The core aspect of the qualitative research is to understand the word frequency of terms such as "thug," "riots," "protest," and "protester" in the newspapers chosen for analysis. Below are the results of the in-depth research organized by newspaper.

For *The New York Times*, 50 articles were analyzed. "Riot" and its variations appeared approximately 80 times. The term "riots" was used to discuss property damage, but it was often directly quoted by elected officials in Baltimore. The term "protests" appeared 72 times throughout the *The New York Times* articles analyzed for this research, and was typically used to describe the general social movement after the police killing of Freddie Gray. The word "thug" appeared 12 times throughout the articles analyzed; out of these 12 times, journalists for *The New York Times* never referred to any demonstrators as a "thug," and it was only directly quoted. Although initially my research was focused on the keywords of "thug," "protests," and "riots,"

upon analyzing the top frequency words, I discovered “Police” was one of the most frequently used words over the initial compiled list for the research. “Police” appeared 756 times in *The New York Times* articles analyzed, and was mentioned in numerous ways throughout the articles. For example, “Police” appeared in front of words such as custody and treatment (Stolberg & Oppel, 2015).

The word “riot” appeared throughout *The Washington Post* articles 133 times. Similar to *The New York Times* articles, the journalists reported on comments made by President Obama about the early days of the protests. “Rioter” appeared in *The Washington Post* articles 29 times. Governor Larry Hogan was quoted saying the rioters were “roving gangs of thugs” (Hermann et al., 2015). The word “protester” and the variations appeared throughout the articles 76 times. Following suit, some of the articles had quotes from political figures and the head of the police union as well, who was quoted saying he was disappointed with the protesters and they needed to wait until all of the facts were revealed in the case (Schwartzman, 2015). The word “thug” appeared eight times throughout *The Washington Post* articles and was never used by the journalists to describe Baltimore’s protesters. The word “police” appeared 595 times throughout the articles. The majority of times, “police” was used to generally discuss Freddie Gray’s killing.

The term “riot” and its variations appeared 101 times throughout the articles for *The Baltimore Afro*. *The Baltimore Afro* wrote stories following up on the charges people faced for their participation in the “riots.” “Rioter” appeared in *The Baltimore Afro* articles seven times. The articles where “rioter” was present discussed the massive amounts of damage that occurred in Baltimore. The word “protest” appeared 52 times throughout the articles analyzed. The articles discussed targeted protests specifically aimed at elected officials. The term “protester” appeared 33 times throughout *The Baltimore Afro* articles. The word “thug” appeared throughout

the articles nine times. Similar to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, the articles discussed the “thug” comments made about the protesters from Mayor Rawlings-Blake. The term “police” appeared 373 times throughout the articles. The articles discussed the prominent civil rights leaders, such as Reverend Al Sharpton, who desired to support the community during a difficult time for Baltimore residents.

The term “riot” and its variations appeared 131 times throughout the articles analyzed from *The Washington Informer*, with one article providing additional information about how the “riots” occurred. The term “rioter” appeared 23 times throughout the articles, and the term “protest” appeared 70 times. One article examined how television news coverage covered the protests. The term “protester” and its variations appeared throughout the articles 42 times, and the term “thug” appeared 16 times. As previously mentioned in the other newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Baltimore Afro*, the term “thug” was directly quoted from President Obama and Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. The term “police” appeared 628 times throughout the articles. Similar to other newspapers reviewed for this thesis, *The Washington Informer* discussed the police’s role in not only the killing of Freddie Gray but also in their interaction with protesters.

The research found that between the Black newspapers and mainstream newspapers there was no significant difference in the use of specific terms such as “thug” and “riots.” This finding is attributed to the use of newswires, such as the Associated Press. Another finding is that the context and subjects of the stories varied significantly between the mainstream newspapers and the Black newspapers. Mainstream newspapers reported on the Freddie Gray protests with daily developments and quotes from notable figures, while the Black newspapers interviewed local

community members and friends of Freddie Gray to further understand how the city was impacted by the protests.

Additional Research Supporting This Thesis

This section will discuss additional literature and reports used to ensure this is a comprehensive thesis. Accordingly, Benedict Anderson (1983) formulated the notion that newspapers can contribute to supporting nationalism and making people feel as though they are members of an “imagined community” (p. 6). A report by Bell et al. (2011) found the stereotypical media portrayal of African American men directly correlates to the lowering life expectancy of African American men (p. 13). Another media report by Travis Dixon (2017) discussed how African American men are often overly portrayed as criminals in comparison to their white counterparts (p. 24). Both Bell et al. (2011) and Dixon (2017) provide tangible evidence supporting the thesis argument that journalists must ensure coverage about African Americans is free of stereotypes and contextualizes the systemic issues inspiring people to protest. When articles fail to tell the story correctly, it is further perpetuating harmful stereotypes, directly harming the quality of life for Black Americans in the US. To contextualize the impact newspapers have in society, Michael Barthel (2019) found millions of people read the newspaper weekly. The Pew Research Center interviewed people about their views on the media portrayal of Black Lives Matter protests in Baltimore and found 44% of participants said yes when asked if “news organizations gave too much coverage to the unrest and violence?” (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). James Robinson (2019) has researched how journalists often are unaware of the audience they are writing for and instead appeal to an imagined audience (p. 38). Audiences also may not be aware of the cases involving African American women.

To discuss the disparity in the media coverage of African American women in comparison to African American men, Crenshaw et al. (2015) and the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) created a report showing the flaws by traditional media when their stories go untold. Barbara Ransby (2018) has written extensively about the lack of media coverage of the Korryn Gaines protests in comparison with the protests for Freddie Gray, which is interesting when considering the pivotal role of Black feminists (p. 89). Michelle Jacobs (2017) and her research also found the lack of media coverage on African American women victims of police brutality contributes to continued stereotypes about racism (p. 52). As African Americans have turned to social media to disseminate information about police brutality cases instead of the traditional media, these apps have also silenced the stories about African American women victims of police brutality. Alissa Richardson (2020), in her book *Bearing Witness While Black: African Americans Smartphones, and the New Protest #Journalism*, has written about the role of censorship in the Korryn Gaines case as she streamed her standoff with police officers but was taken down by social media administrators (p. 79). Joyce et al. (2015) found journalists must report on the protests from Baldwin's perspective of understanding the protester's desire to have their voices heard on the injustices they faced (p. 2).

Additionally, Social Media played a pivotal role in the Black Lives Matter protests, and activists used it as a preferred dissemination tool rather than mainstream media. Researchers Brown et al. (2017) have found the #SayHerName hashtag assists with providing space online for the stories of African American women, which often go untold in the media (p. 1832). Although social media is pivotal for disseminating information on the Black Lives Matter protests, Brown et al. concluded that journalists must ensure when they are reporting on the stories that they provide essential information on the origins of the movement, as many people

are uninformed (p. 1851). Freelon et al. have conducted two studies on the power of social media in the Black Lives Matter movement: their first study (2016) discussed the far-spread reach social media had in educating numerous people about police brutality across the country (p. 70), and their second (2018) found that BLM was the most powerful organization for tweets being liked compared to those from mainstream news (p. 991).

Analysis of Research Findings

As previously written, Anderson (1983) supports this thesis argument about the importance of newspapers creating solidarity among citizens (pp. 35-36). The thesis reimagines Anderson's notion of "imagined communities," potentially as a way for newspapers to disseminate information on stories about police brutality to hopefully raise consciousness about the issue. As Black Lives Matter gained prominence on social media, Brown et al. (2017) discusses the necessity of taking an intersectional approach when researching #SayHerName (p. 1834). The previously mentioned research is imperative as it addresses the importance of the tweets about Black women victims of police brutality and of journalists being knowledgeable about finding this information.

As this research is rooted in African American history, the literature and scholarly analysis of James Baldwin's (1963) book *The Fire Next Time* was invoked. Joyce et al.'s (2015) research draws comparisons to the media coverage of the Freddie Gray protests and Baldwin's sentiments about the media's coverage of the "riots" in the aftermath of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination (p. 2). When discussing the controversial media coverage of African Americans, the research of Travis Dixon and Bell et al. showcased the precedent and the necessity for more journalism that accurately contextualizes stories (Bell et al., 2011, p. 23; Dixon, 2017, p. 24). Richardson's book from 2020, *Bearing Witness While Black*, discusses

African Americans' role in documenting the videos used in the media coverage of police-involved incidents (p. 7), and attributes the increase in social media postings of the videos to the discontentment many African Americans harbor against the media and their depiction of the events (p. 4).

Richardson's research assists the thesis by showcasing the urgency for media organizations to consider why numerous Black Lives Matter activists have avoided using the traditional news as their platform and have instead turned to social media (Richardson, 2020, p. 4). As Richardson's book highlights the pivotal role of social media, Freelon et al. (2016) discuss how social media outperformed traditional media in reaching users with information about the protests after Freddie Gray's murder (p. 75). However, there was a disconnect with the media's lack of explanation of the BLM movement's origins resulting in audiences being uninformed about crucial information (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 70). To support the arguments made in this thesis about the audience's discontent with the media's portrayal of the BLM protests in Baltimore, surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center expressed the views of people across the country (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 9). Every resource mentioned in the material provided essential information on the coverage of protests in the aftermath of the murder of African Americans by police.

Observations Drawn from This Research

After reviewing 200 articles combined from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Informer*, and *The Baltimore Afro* using the data analytical tool MAXQDA, two significant observations were made. It is essential to note the newspapers rarely used the words "thug" and "riot" in their articles except when directly quoting a political figure or an interviewee.

Upon analyzing the 200 articles, there were a few differences between the content and context of mainstream articles and the Black Press. All newspapers reported breaking news events about businesses burning and tense moments between protesters and law enforcement; however, there were differences in the coverage of Baltimore's events between the Black Press and the mainstream newspapers. For example, *The New York Times* articles discussed how elected officials were navigating the unrest in Baltimore. *The Washington Post*, whose offices are in closer proximity to Baltimore, would occasionally cover the story from a local angle, and their journalists wrote about their experiences living in Baltimore (Fletcher, 2015). However, the articles in *The Baltimore Afro* and *The Washington Informer* took a different approach. *The Baltimore Afro* discussed events organized by prominent figures in the African American community, such as the concert hosted by Prince and the healing event with Iyanla Vanzant (Cornish, 2015b). *The Baltimore Afro* also dedicated an article to highlighting the civil rights advocate Reverend Al Sharpton's anticipated arrival. Regarding context, *The Baltimore Afro* had an article about the misinformation on social media concerning the "looting" (Cornish, 2015a). For *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* articles reviewed, none discussed the misinformation online about the looting.

Another observation made during my analysis was that many of the articles from the Black newspapers were outsourced from other news organizations. For example, although published by and listed under the respective website for *The Baltimore Afro* and *The Washington Informer*, the articles originated from the Associated Press and other news organizations, including *Politico*, *The New York Times*, and *Entertainment Tonight*. Other articles published on *The Baltimore Afro* and *The Washington Informer* were from another newspaper wire, the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), which consists of "200 African American-

owned community newspapers from around the United States” (NNPA). From World War II to now, the NNPA is the only African American newspaper wire service, as the last competitor dissolved in 1970 (NNPA).

There was also a notable difference in choice of persons interviewed between the mainstream newspapers and the Black newspapers. Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* interviewed prominent figures or directly quoted them. The most often quoted figures included President Barack Obama, Mayor Rawlings-Blake, and Governor Larry Hogan. Other notable figures interviewed included Attorney General Loretta Lynch. Also, the comments were about the “riots” in Baltimore and the perception of “criminals” and “thugs.” However, in the mainstream newspapers analyzed, there were rarely any interviews with local members of the community or “man on the street” interviews with protesters included to understand the protesters’ motivations and the disappointment with the Baltimore Police department by residents. However, it was different for the newspaper coverage by the Black Press.

For *The Baltimore Afro* and *The Washington Informer*, the articles featured a wide array of interviews, and it is imperative to emphasize how the Black Press articles demonstrated sound journalistic norms for interviewing elected officials. However, the articles also featured interviews with other families who tragically lost a loved one to police violence (Muhammad, 2015). The African American newspapers also featured interviews with the most vulnerable population: youth. Other interviews for the newspaper included friends and acquaintances of Freddie Gray, providing the opportunity to reflect on his life and legacy (Shipp, 2015). Overall, the Black Press made a concerted effort to make the events surrounding Freddie Gray’s death more relatable to the community.

Lastly, I also observed the unique perspective of the events in Baltimore taken by the Black Press in comparison to the mainstream media. For example, *The Baltimore Afro* reported on the uplifting events in Baltimore during a difficult time for many people in the community, and *The Washington Informer* had a few articles as well that provided different perspectives about the events in Baltimore. The provided examples from the Black Press show how news organizations such as the mainstream press should consider varying their perspective on the coverage of protests.

Chapter 1 – Newspaper Audiences: The Importance of Reporting News Accurately and Freddie Gray’s Case

As the previous chapter discussed the findings of my research, there are a few imperative questions that must be considered about the newspaper’s audiences: Who are the newspaper’s audiences? Is this the actual audience or the imagined audience by the journalists? And, most importantly, why is knowing the actual audience crucial to newspaper coverage of the Freddie Gray protests and the portrayal of African Americans? This chapter addresses these questions as well as the historical legacy of the Black Press and the role of addressing the needs and concerns of African Americans that often go neglected by mainstream newspapers.

An example of the role newspapers have in not only informing people but also forming kinship amongst people, as noted in the introduction, is Benedict Anderson’s (1983) research on the role of newspapers in forming relationships. Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” explaining he uses the term “imagined” because, even though no individual will meet all of the people in their community, that individual envisions a shared connection (p. 6). Anderson argues the invention of the newspaper contributed to the “imagined community” (p. 25), and that when people read the newspaper, they can imagine their neighbors also reading the paper while additionally participating in similar daily activities (p. 35-36). Anderson’s notion of newspapers creating “imagined communities” with a commitment to a nation assists in understanding why it is so imperative for newspapers to ensure their reporting is accurate. People are formulating opinions about the movement based upon the news stories they are reading and will then align themselves with an “imagined community” sharing their views which are either correctly informed or misinformed.

A study by James Robinson (2019) found journalists at times appeal to an “imagined audience” and are disconnected from the people who actually read their articles. Journalists must have knowledge about the demographics of their readers and the real-life consequences for African Americans when they are consistently portrayed negatively in news stories. This chapter provides statistics and information about the readership of U.S. newspapers, the disconnect between journalists and their readers, and the effects on the daily lives of African Americans when they are portrayed negatively in the media. Additionally, examples of prior research studies are provided in this chapter that demonstrate a direct correlation between the media portrayal of African Americans and their lifespan. The chapter ends with recommendations for how journalists can form a relationship with readers.

The section below discusses the effects the negative media portrayal of social movements led by African Americans can have on audiences, beginning with James Baldwin’s sentiments on how the media covers protests.

Lessons from James Baldwin on How Journalists Can Report on Uprisings

As the research is rooted in Pan African theories, James Baldwin’s work can inform journalists how to properly report on uprisings. Researchers Justin Joyce, Dwight McBride, and Douglas Field (Joyce et al., 2015) discuss Baldwin’s viewpoints on the media coverage of protests that are majority African American. The researchers note that, during the height of the protests in the aftermath of Freddie Gray’s arrest and shortly after his death in police custody by Baltimore police officers, many national news organizations referred to protestors as “thugs” (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 1). Additionally, they note that President Obama said in a statement that the actions of the protestors could be viewed as “criminal” (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 2). The authors cite a 1968 *Esquire* interview with James Baldwin about the “riots” that were happening due to

the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in which Baldwin addresses the media's use of the word "looter" and explains that people who are participating in the acts are not doing so to get a new television but are instead acting out of desperation (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 2). The people have an urge to be seen and recognized as for too long they have gone unnoticed by society (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 2). Baldwin, in his interview, suggests journalists take a step back and reflect on how they discuss the events, and notes that journalists must evaluate the root of the actions taken by African American citizens and why they are desperately trying to have their voices amplified (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 2). Joyce et al. include a direct quote from Baldwin's interview where he says, "you're accusing a captive population who has been robbed of everything of looting. I think it's obscene" (p. 2).

Joyce et al. (2015) use another essay by Baldwin, written in 1960, to discuss the events in Baltimore. The excerpt from the essay discusses the tension between police officers and demonstrators. Baldwin writes about when police officers are sent in to control the people's actions and how, when they are forced to come face to face with the detrimental living conditions, they choose to turn a blind eye (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 3). Eventually, the protests become violent, and many stories and articles are written about what occurred and the events leading up to the moment, but Baldwin writes that the answer from the community is very simple: "What happened is that Negroes wanted to be treated like men" (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 3). Joyce et al. also indicate that Baldwin provided information on steps towards reconciliation that can be applied to reporting (p. 3).

In his 1963 book *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin discusses how journalists can assist with educating society about the injustices African Americans face:

Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. (p. 105)

Joyce et al. (2015), citing the excerpt above, observe how Baldwin is offering a different perspective on how traditional news organizations should report on racial unrest (p. 3). As Baldwin notes, anyone who is “conscious” must awaken the consciousness of other individuals regardless of their ethnic background. Journalists can serve as the “conscious” for society, but the reporting has to go in-depth. Although breaking news has a role in informing the public, longer stories are necessary. For example, news stories with extensive research on historical background information will provide readers with the knowledge to awaken their consciousness. Joyce et al. (2015) point out how the aforementioned excerpt stands in stark contrast to the previously mentioned statement by President Barack Obama: as President Obama describes the activity in Baltimore as “criminal,” Baldwin digs deeper to understand the people’s actions (p. 2-3).

Joyce et al. (2015) additionally note that Baldwin also described the role of the legal system within America as a “criminal power,” and that he believed people who are writers can reveal the corruption in society (p. 3). Baldwin implores writers to first research the various laws and then to unearth ideas that are often accepted in society but are rarely challenged, because once writers have conducted their research and discovered the assumptions held by numerous people, they can then successfully educate the public (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 3). If journalists are educated about African American culture and history, it can inform their reporting.

The next section will discuss the role of the Black Press in appealing to an audience that often is overlooked or misrepresented in mainstream news stories.

The Black Press's Role in Dignifying African American Stories

The Black Press has played a pivotal role in providing a platform to share the stories of African Americans throughout history. As discussed in Burrowes (2011), on March 16, 1827, John Russwurm and Samuel Eli Cornish founded the *Freedom's Journal* as a counter-response to the racist reporting of Mordecai Noah, an editor of two papers, the *New-York Enquirer* and the *New-York National Advocate* (p. 131). Russwurm and Cornish were incredibly brave, embarking on the creation of a newspaper during a time when journalists were attacked and killed while traveling (Burrowes, 2011, p. 131). The first publication of *Freedom's Journal* featured a renowned quote that eloquently described the purpose of the newspaper: "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us" (Burrowes, 2011, p. 131). The quote demonstrates the disappointment many African Americans had with the reporting on events directly impacting them by the white newspapers. The newspaper also instilled a sense of cultural identity within ancient Egypt for African Americans (Burrowes, 2011, p. 132). Two years later, in March of 1829, the *Freedom's Journal* ceased publishing (Burrowes, 2011, p. 132).

African American women have also made significant contributions to the Black Press. Journalists Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Ida B. Wells-Barnett worked tirelessly to advocate on behalf of African Americans. Dunbar-Nelson's career as a journalist lasted for 30 years, and over the course of this period she wrote four columns for the African American press (Emery, 2016, p. 288). At the newspaper *Courier*, which Dunbar-Nelson wrote for, she insisted that African American successes should be covered in an attempt to counter the distorted narratives in white

newspapers (Emery, 2016, p. 288). Twenty years after the first publication of the *Freedom's Journal*, abolitionist Frederick Douglass published his newspaper titled *The North Star* in December 1847 (Shortell, 2004, p. 83). At the top of *The North Star*, Douglass had the motto printed, "Right is of no sex – Truth is of no color – God is the father of us all, and we are all Brethren" (Shortell, 2004, p. 83). The four-page weekly newspaper amassed 3,000 subscriptions; eventually, the newspaper took on Douglass's name, and the last paper was published in 1860 (Shortell, 2004, p. 83).

As Russwurm, Cornish, and Douglass desired to uplift African American men, Dunbar-Nelson empowered African American women in her columns. Her columns spoke out against the sexism that was present within the African American community (Emery, 2016, p. 289). An example of Dunbar-Nelson utilizing her newspaper platform to educate her readers is the 1927 column titled "The Negro Woman and the Ballot" in *The Messenger* (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 85). At that time, Black women had had the right to vote for six years, and her column was attempting to answer the question, "What has the Negro woman done with the ballot since she has had it?" (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 86). Dunbar-Nelson noted when Black women received the right to vote, they were given the opportunity not to be influenced by factors such as fighting in the Civil War and have their vote respected (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 87). However, Dunbar-Nelson wrote that when African American women gained the right to vote, they could become leaders for Black men in hopes of challenging their reasoning behind the political party they supported (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 87). Instead, Black women blindly followed Black men into supporting Republican candidates (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 87). It is imperative to note African American women still played a pivotal role in the party and were not merely on the sidelines (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 87).

Another prominent figure in the Black Press was Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, embarked on a journalism career in 1892 as an editor for the newspaper *Memphis Free Speech* (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 69). During her time as an editor, she lost three of her male friends to horrific lynchings (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 87). Wells was compelled to write “Lynch Law in America” to counter the false information on the cause of lynchings (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 69). Throughout “Lynch Law in America,” Wells argues there is an “unwritten law,” resulting in the death of numerous African Americans without a trial (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 70). Wells notes a common misconception associated with lynchings is they were more prevalent in the South, but there were also cases in the North (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 71). African Americans exercising their right to vote were kidnapped by “red-shirt” bands and murdered in hopes of intimidating other Black voters (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 71). African American women were lynched for not providing information on the whereabouts of family members (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 72), and under the “unwritten law,” there was a notion that African American men were lynched when accused by a white woman of assault (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 72).

Wells in “Lynch Law in America” discusses the active role the press played in the lynchings of African Americans; she wrote, “the leading journals inflame the public mind to the lynching point with scare-head articles and offers of rewards” (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 73). The case of Sam Hose, an African American man who killed his boss in self-defense, was misreported by a number of newspapers (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 74). Out of the 500 newspapers reporting on the lynching of Hose, nine-tenths assumed he was guilty (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 75). “Lynch Law in America” was Wells’s scathing analysis of America’s “national crime” (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 75). As Wells dedicated her life to raising awareness about lynchings, she was only recently recognized in a prominent mainstream newspaper for her life’s work. *The*

New York Times series “Overlooked” posts obituaries (beginning from 1851) of people who, although influential at their time of death, were not featured due to their race and gender. In 2018, *The New York Times* published an obituary for Wells, citing “her commitment to chronicling the experience of African Americans in order to demonstrate their humanity remained unflinching” (Dickerson, 2018, p. 4).

While I have up to this point discussed the Black Press’s historic role in providing an often untold perspective on stories concerning African Americans from the inception, it is important to emphasize that the legacy continues to this day in both print and digital media. New media, such as the internet and social media, have presented new challenges for the Black Press, while continuing their crucial work. Traditional Black newspapers still in existence include *The Chicago Defender* and *The Baltimore Afro*; yet, over the last few years, other newspapers have emerged, such as *The Root* and *TheGrio*. *The Root* is an online publication owned by Univision Communications, and the editor-in-chief is Danielle Belton (Neason, 2018, p. 11). Belton, in an interview, noted the Black Press still has the same responsibility to ensure stories concerning African Americans are covered: “There is this perception that the only person who can be objective is a white man, even though he comes with his own prejudices and background” (Neason, 2018, p. 11). Neason (2018) also discussed the main differences between *The Root* and traditional mainstream newspapers:

The difference between *The Root* and a more mainstream publication is that we are honest with the fact that we bring with us our blackness, our femaleness, maleness, when we are reporting. A lot of people make the mistake of thinking the *Root* is a left-leaning blog. It’s a pro-black blog. (p. 11)

Another Black publication working to provide an alternative lens to how news stories are told is *TheGrio*. Owned by Byron Allen, the publication says their goal is “to satisfy the need of African-Americans to stay informed and connected with our community” (TheGrio). *Blavity*, a website for Black millennials, and *The Undeclared*, a sports publication, are additional examples of the Black Press evolving on digital platforms (Douglas, 2020, pp. 5-8). News stories told from a Black perspective allow African American readers to know their stories are just as important and deserve to be told even if they are overlooked by other news companies. Mainstream news companies must work to ensure their newsrooms are a reflection of the diversity within this country to include numerous viewpoints. The next section will discuss how newspapers occasionally appeal to an “imagined audience,” robbing readers of having access to crucial information.

Newspaper Journalists and “Imagined Audiences”: How Stories Often Go Untold

Robinson (2019) conducted a case study on journalists reporting on education in New York City and the knowledge about their readers in which he interviewed 14 journalists covering the education beat at eight newspapers from 2016–2017 (p. 38). He found the journalists only knew the audience as consisting of “(1) the institutional audience; (2) colleagues, peers, and sources; (3) friends and family and (4) ‘vocal strangers’” (p. 3). When the journalists were asked, “who do you feel are the audiences for your work?,” answers varied from, “the parents and families of NYC public school children” to “wealthier school parents” (Robinson, 2019, p. 45). Although technology has evolved and journalists have access to their audiences via social media and analytical tools, Robinson found there was still a disconnect in knowing their online readers (p. 48).

According to Robinson (2019), a significant consequence of not appealing to readers includes limiting resources on the particular beat, ultimately diminishing news coverage (p. 46). The author provides two main suggestions from the study to assist news organizations with actively understanding their audience: shifting away from analyzing the number of readers of a single article to determining whether the intended audience is being reached (Robinson, 2019, p. 55), and increasing diversity in the newsroom. A newsroom with more diverse journalists can reference their personal experiences while simultaneously introducing colleagues to other ways of life (Robinson, 2019, p. 56). However, diversity is not a final solution to understanding or appealing to the audience. Instead, it is a process of “uprooting deep-seated habits and preconceptions ... [that] requires a conscious reconsideration one’s own audience perceptions” (Robinson, 2019, p. 56). The next section will discuss why knowing the audience is important.

Media and News Portrayal of Black Men and Families: Real World Consequences for African Americans

The Opportunity Agenda and Bell et al. (2011) conducted a study about “the troubling link between media portrayals and lowered life chances for black males” (p. 13). The researchers illuminated three components of the media’s storytelling of African American males and its lasting effects on them: first, the misrepresentation of the lived experiences of African American males; second, the role of media in misconstruing audience’s perceptions of African American men; and third, and most consequentially, the effect these media portrayals have on their everyday lives (Bell et al., 2011, p. 22).

According to the Bell et al. (2011), every story about African American men has five components, “distorted portrayal of black (male) lives/experiences, why media patterns are distorted, causal link between media and public attitudes, documentation of the public’s bias-

both conscious and unconscious—against black males, and practical consequences for the lives of black males” (p. 22). The researchers noted a study conducted by Entman and Rojecki where they found African American men were rarely invited as experts on television cable news shows to discuss various topics, at a startling statistic of only 3% (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, as cited in Bell et al., 2011, p. 23). Also, at times the media exaggerates certain lived experiences of Black men.

An important finding of Bell et al.’s (2011) research included a lack of positive portrayal of African American men in the media; for example, African American men are not portrayed as father figures but are often portrayed as athletes and physically fit, which puts an emphasis on the Black men’s physical capability rather than their humanity as a husband, son, and brother (p. 24). Media representation of African American men also does not include the effects of systemic racism on their livelihoods, as stories are rarely told about the role of racism in the employment of young African American men and the historical context (Bell et al., 2011, p. 26).

The third component noted by Bell et al. (2011) concerning the portrayal of African American men is the connection between the images and the public’s perception. The more audiences watched the news about criminal activity, the more likely they were to endorse the death penalty, although the race of the perpetrators was never identified (Bell et al., 2011, p. 28). Furthermore, the negative portrayal of Black men in the media also has the potential to have them view their life through a negative lens (Bell et al., 2011, p. 29).

The fourth component of media representation of African American men is the “documentations of bias—conscious and unconscious—against black males” (Bell et al., 2011, p. 30). The researchers noted that tests such as “Implicit Association Tests” found “most non-blacks have negative unconscious associations with Black males, even if they have no

consciously biased attitudes” (Bell et al., 2011, p. 30). The authors cited a related study conducted by Smith-McLallen et al. that found white people will associate positive words such as “love” and “pleasure” with the faces of other white people; however, when shown photos of Black people, words such as “awful” and “horrible” were associated with them (Smith-McLallen et al., 2006, as cited in Bell et al., 2011, p. 31). Similar to white people and the implicit bias against other ethnic groups, African Americans can have a bias against someone of the same ethnicity (Bell et al., 2011, p. 31).

The last and most consequential component noted by Bell et al. (2011) of the lasting effects of the media’s portrayal of African American men is its impact on their daily lives. Researchers suggest white people’s implicit bias can affect various experiences, from how African American men are treated for medical conditions to how they are taught in school (Bell et al., 2011, p. 32). The most detrimental consequence of the negative portrayal of African American men in the media is the stereotypes influencing actions that result in their lives possibly being cut short. A simulation where people were shown footage of police video found participants were more likely to “shoot” Black men regardless of if the men were holding a gun or not in comparison to white men (Bell et al., 2011, p. 32). Bell et al. also noted how producers of television news and movies are missing feedback from African American viewers (p. 33) and that reliable sources for news lack diversity, which is counter to traditional journalistic values such as offering a wide range of viewpoints (p. 33).

Bell et al. (2011) also noted that, although it is important to bring awareness to the media’s portrayal of African Americans, the issue goes deeper than representation in the media; for example, structural racism and the notion that African Americans are less than white people contribute to not only media coverage but their everyday experiences as well (p. 41). Another

factor is causation vs. correlation when studying social science and the discrepancies between African Americans and other ethnicities (Bell et al., 2011, p. 42). A significant portion of research focuses on outcomes such as low test scores in African American boys; however, the cause of the low test scores can be attributed to prejudice against African American males in educational settings (Bell et al., 2011, p. 42). Finally, a significant limitation of communication is the inability to actually contribute to in-person interactions between people (Bell et al., 2011, p. 45).

Bell et al. (2011) conclude their report with the following recommendations on how to diversify media coverage of Black men: First, the most important change that must be implemented is that African American men must be accurately portrayed in media and news reports. Second, it is imperative that African Americans have roles in media organizations, especially in the role of production. Third, news stories and the media should highlight systemic racism and the role within society—for example, a 2009 study examined the effects of news coverage on the alarming graduation rates of African American male high schoolers, and the researchers found the awareness of this disparity among high schoolers contributed to politicians such as President Barack Obama adding the issue to his platform (Losen, 2009, as cited in Bell et al., 2011, p. 47).

The final suggestions by Bell et al. (2011) included sharing more positive stories on African Americans (p. 48). They explained how potential stories can explore factors contributing to a successful outcome for African American men; that showcasing the successful stories not only applies to journalists but fictional television shows as well; that as the often untold stories about African American males began to be shared, audiences are offered a new perspective; and that as the stories about African American males become more common, audiences'

preconceived notions about African American males are challenged (Bell et al., 2011, p. 48). As noted in the report, communication messages such as the effects of smoking on the lungs have been successful in changing behavior, so the accurate depiction of African American males similarly has the potential to successfully encourage interpersonal relationships between people from diverse backgrounds (Bell et al., 2011, p. 48).

Another study also examines the media's portrayal of African American males in their roles as fathers and their dynamic within the family unit. Dr. Travis L. Dixon, a communications professor at The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, conducted research co-commissioned by the Color of Change on the distortion of Black families. Dixon's (2017) study consisted of analyzing news stories between the period of January 2015–December 2016 and concluded that “the findings of the study indicate that news and opinion media do, in fact, perpetuate inaccurate representations of Black families across several different areas of coverage” (p. 3). Some key findings of the study were that African American families were portrayed as impoverished more than white families and that news organizations overly represented Black men and their families as criminals when reporting on crimes (Dixon, 2017, p. 3). The study closely examined how the news portrayed African American families through data and context, and the news stories examined determined if journalists, when reporting on African American families, utilized stereotypes or provided background information on the systemic racism and the effects of it (Dixon, 2017, p. 17).

Dixon (2017) additionally found that the media overreported Black people as criminals by 11% in comparison to white people, while white people and their association with criminal activity were underrepresented by 39% (p. 24). Due to the portrayal of African Americans and criminality, Dixon determined there are two major consequences: first, that the more viewers

watch television news, the more likely they are to support racist crime policy; and second, that the more the false notion of Black families is reported in the media, the more likely the general public is to be misinformed (p. 24).

Another data source cited in Dixon (2017) was the U.S. Department of Justice crime reports. The U.S. Department of Justice, in 2015, found similar findings on the media representation of Black criminals (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, as cited in Dixon, 2017, p. 37). Dixon notes the research only focuses on the portrayal of Black men in the media and does not analyze the over-policing of African Americans and longer sentences in comparison to white people (p. 37). An example of the exaggerated criminality of African Americans in the news includes a story aired on *World News Tonight* on May 22, 2015 (Dixon, 2017, p. 38). Dixon's research still aligns with the purpose of this thesis, which is to raise awareness about how African American men have been historically covered in the media. The most controversial aspect of the portrayal of the criminal was the lack of historical context on the role of capitalism and racism (Dixon, 2017, p. 38). The reporter for *World News Tonight* described the Black man as "angry" and "troubled" with a long criminal history (Dixon, 2017, p. 38).

Not only is ABC News wrong with their portrayal of Black men and criminal activity, but according to Dixon (2017), other news organizations have also fallen short in their coverage, some more than others (p. 38). In a ranking of three networks for their over-portrayal of Black people as criminals relative to white people, Dixon concluded that Fox News overwhelmingly ranked first, with a ratio of coverage of Black criminals in comparison to white criminals of 7 to 1, especially on the show *O'Reilly Factor* (p. 38). ABC was ranked second, with a ratio of 4 to 0, and NBC was third with a ratio of 3 to 2 (Dixon, 2017, p. 39). Although NBC was ranked third for their coverage, they were ranked second on the television show list for their program *Meet*

The Press (Dixon, 2017, p. 40). Another news source, according to the study, often portrays African Americans as criminals is the conservative website *Breitbart* (Dixon, 2017, p. 38).

Dixon (2017) explains that the negative portrayal of African Americans detailed in his study has effects on two facets: one theoretical and the other on policy (p. 51). Regarding the first, theoretical effect, a 2009 study found media has the potential to form a person's perspective of the world, viewing reality through a fictional lens of a television show (Shrum, 2009, as cited in Dixon, 2017, p. 51). As the aforementioned study discusses the effect of television on audiences, Dixon also suggests the same can be determined about viewers of news, as the news portrayal of African Americans association with crime and the perceived instability of the Black family unit has the potential to misconstrue audiences (p. 51). Dixon writes, "in general, news and opinion consumers would come to see a false world populated with Black family dysfunction, poverty, welfare dependence, criminal behavior, and absentee fathers" (p. 51). Regarding the second effect on policy, Dixon notes how the television news portrayal of impoverished African Americans and use of welfare influenced the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 (p. 51). The researcher also suggests there are consequences due to the inaccurate news reports, with harsher regulations of government resources and the requirement for drug tests at places of employment being just a few of these (p. 51).

One of Dixon's (2017) suggestions for future research includes having a larger sample of television news and newspapers to review for content about the portrayal of African American men and their families (p. 52). Another of his suggestions is that more research must be conducted on the effects of media on policies in the United States (Dixon, 2017, p. 52).

As the studies by Dixon (2017) and Bell et al. (2011) demonstrate, the media can have severe implications on the livelihoods of African American males. As media has the ability to

reach audiences around the country, the two studies showcase the effects and their consequences, such as people's general perception of the humanity of African Americans (Bell et al., 2011, p. 32). The next section discusses the concept of Reciprocal Journalism, where journalists have a mutual relationship with readers.

The Importance of Newspaper Companies Reporting and Appealing to Their Audience

The aforementioned studies provide a detailed understanding of how journalists approach their news coverage, occasionally their "imagined audiences," and their actual audiences. Why is knowing the actual audience important in relation to the newspaper coverage of the Freddie Gray protests? The "Newspapers Fact Sheet" from the Pew Research Center states, "the estimated total U.S. newspaper daily circulation (print and digital combined) in 2018 was 28.6 million for the weekday and 30.8 million for Sunday," and the top 50 newspapers had an "average of 11.6 million monthly unique visitors (across all devices)" (Barthel, 2019). How police brutality cases and protests are framed in the media can either challenge or support readers' preconceptions. As the majority of the news coverage focused on the "protests" and "riots," one must question if coverage was also dedicated to the circumstances motivating people to demonstrate in the streets. It is imperative to note that journalists cannot report every injustice occurring in a city. Nor can they tell readers how they should feel about current events. However, they can work to tell stories that accurately and historically contextualize the systemic racism deeply rooted in our country.

To avoid repeating similar downfalls to those journalists committed when reporting on lynchings of African Americans in the 1900s, context and the human element are essential (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). The primary purpose of this thesis is about Freddie Gray and the media coverage of his protests. A study by the Pew Research Center (Doherty et al., 2015) found many people

were upset with how the protests in Baltimore were portrayed. Researchers Carroll Doherty, Alec Tyson, and Rachel Weisel conducted a survey to understand people's views on the media portrayal of the Freddie Gray protests; the survey consisted of a random sample of 1,000 adults 18 and older in the United States who were interviewed either on a landline or a cell phone (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 9). The interviewees were asked about their views of the news coverage on the unrest in Baltimore, and 44% of participants said "news organizations gave too much coverage to the unrest and violence" (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). When participants were asked about the news coverage of the "non-violent protests over Freddie Gray's death," 37% of participants said there was too little coverage in comparison to 22% who said there was too much (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7).

However, the most revealing part of the study by Doherty et al. (2015) on the audience's perception of the Freddie Gray protests is from the interviewees between the ages of 18 and 29. Fifty-six percent of individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 said yes when asked if the "press gave too little coverage to non-violent protests?" and only 13% said there was "too much coverage of the non-violent protests" (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). Thirty-nine percent of participants ages 65 and older said the press had the right amount of coverage on the non-violent protests (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). The study also included demographics of political parties and ethnic groups; for example, 42% of the participants identifying as Democrats in the survey said the "media gave too little coverage to the non-violent protests," while in stark contrast just 23% of surveyed Republicans concurred (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). Thirty-eight percent of both Black and white participants agreed there was "too little coverage on the non-violent Freddie Gray protests," and for the same question, 29% of Hispanics agreed (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). The study demonstrates the disappointment many people had with the coverage of the Freddie

Gray protests. With these statistics in mind, it is essential now to examine how journalists can learn to engage with their readers.

The concept of Reciprocal Journalism, as explored by Lewis et al. (2014), suggests exchange should occur between the journalists and the audience (p. 229). Lewis et al. identified a framework for journalists to apply the concepts of Reciprocal Journalism to engage with the audience outside of traditional journalistic norms (p. 229). Currently, audiences can engage with readers of online articles through commenting and sharing on social media platforms (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 231). Adding elements of Reciprocal Journalism to this, according to this study, is beneficial in community journalism, in part to the mainstream news's inability to take risks (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 231).

Lewis et al. (2014) define Reciprocal Journalism as consisting of three forms: direct, indirect, and sustained (p. 229). Direct reciprocity is the first step journalists can take to engage with their audience (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 233). The researchers suggest a benefit to direct reciprocity is building a relationship between the journalists and the readers, with examples including journalists reposting the tweets of readers and posing questions to their followers (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 233).

The second form of Reciprocal Journalism defined by Lewis et al. (2014) is indirect reciprocity, which occurs when the person who is on the receiving end returns the favor not to the giver but to another person within the social network instead (p. 234). Users on social media are often unaware of how they were impacted by indirect reciprocity, yet studies have shown it is more successful than direct reciprocity (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 234). Examples of indirect reciprocity include social media users sharing hyperlinks while simultaneously inquiring about information on a certain topic, and using hashtags on Twitter as not only a tool for users to

disseminate information but as a way to interact with other people interested in similar topics (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 234).

The third form of Reciprocal Journalism is sustained reciprocity, which consists of a combination of both the aforementioned direct and indirect reciprocities, with the main difference being that sustained reciprocity does not occur immediately and is a lengthier process (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 235). An example of sustained reciprocity is when a local newspaper utilizes their Facebook page as not only a platform to disseminate stories but as an ongoing site for engagement with the paper and other individuals (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 235). Reciprocal Journalism offers a solution to the disconnect between journalists and their readers (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 238).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how journalists in their approach to reporting at times miss the mark due to having trouble connecting with the actual audience and not to one of their imagination (Robinson, 2019, p. 48). Journalists must have knowledge about the demographics of their readers and the real-life consequences for African Americans when they are consistently portrayed negatively in news stories. The chapter began with noting the notion of newspapers creating “imagined communities” amongst the readers, so even if they do not meet each other, they feel a kinship with others (Anderson, 1983, p. 25). However, as the findings in the report by Robinson (2019) highlight, journalists actually know who their “real audience” is and instead report on stories from a perspective they believe their “imagined audience” could relate to (p. 38). Journalists must understand how their reporting can either reinforce or challenge misconceptions about African American protestors. As the primary purpose of the research is about Freddie Gray, a study by The Pew Research Center found many people were disappointed

with the coverage of the protests in Baltimore, and that 44% of participants said that “news organizations gave too much coverage to the unrest and violence” (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7).

James Baldwin’s essays provide invaluable information about how journalists should cover social unrest. To Baldwin, the downfall in the media coverage can be attributed to the lack of historical information on the racist history of the United States that is affecting African Americans until this very day. He challenges journalists to reevaluate their use of words such as “looters” and “riots” (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 1). Baldwin’s request of journalists is to look deeper than the property damage and to closely examine the pain. Why are people damaging buildings? What led to people’s desperation to destroy property? When the layers are peeled back, journalists are confronted with a story about people who were stolen from their homes and have continued to be disenfranchised as citizens. Most importantly, Baldwin’s insight is a direct solution to the problematic news coverage previously mentioned. When stories are told about the disparities in the criminal justice system and educational system, people are forced to confront a tarnished American legacy (Baldwin, 1963, p. 105). News stories that depict “rioters” as humans fighting for the right to be treated as such will, according to Baldwin, awaken the consciousness of others and dramatically change the United States for a better future (Baldwin, 1963, p. 105).

As Baldwin emphasized the importance of journalists reporting on underlying issues within communities, the research report by Dixon (2017) provided examples of how traditional media perpetuates stereotypes about African American families (p. 3). Findings by Dixon included African American men being more likely to be portrayed as criminals than their white counterparts, leading to more people supporting racist crime policies (pp. 3-24). Bell et al. (2011) also mentioned a direct correlation between people being shown footage of police activity and an increased likelihood of potentially shooting a Black man (p. 32). African American men are

overly portrayed as criminals in the news by around 11% in comparison to white people, who are underrepresented for their criminal activity by 39 % (Bell et al., 2011, p. 28). Bell et al. also noted that only 3% of men are invited onto cable news networks as experts to discuss current events (p. 23). Not having the African American male perspective, especially for topics that directly affect them, such as police brutality, is a disadvantage not only to men but the audience as well, who suffers in not hearing that perspective. When the audience is not provided the opportunity to have access to information that can assist with informing their notions, they continue to be uninformed. Journalists and television news cannot be left unaccountable for inaccurately reporting on news stories or using stereotypes in their writing, as millions of people are potentially influenced. This is not a minor repercussion; the stakes are high, and the lives of African Americans are at risk. Journalists must be taught about the impact and influence their reporting can have on people around the country.

So the false representation of African American males in television news and in newspapers has direct consequences on their livelihoods. Every time they step foot out of their residence, African American men are forced to face a world where people who do not know them personally will judge them based upon the information they received from the news. People in positions of power are also influenced by the media, and policies on Capitol Hill can also be shaped by the most popular news stories (Dixon, 2017, p. 51). If news stories are reported accurately and offer a perspective from interview subjects, politicians can be influenced to demand changes in the law, and the average person as well can be forced to have their preconceived notions challenged by the correct portrayal of current events such as Black Lives Matter protests.

As the studies discussed in this chapter have demonstrated, it is important to tell stories within the proper context of the current events. The Black Press was created to ensure stories about African Americans that often were overlooked by other news organizations were reported. Newspapers such as *The Freedom's Journal* and Frederick Douglass's *The North Star* paved the way for future Black journalists. Not only were African American men in the forefront as trailblazers of the Black Press, but African American women significantly contributed, including Dunbar-Nelson and Ida B. Wells-Barnett (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, pp. 70, 86). At a time when African American men were being lynched at a disturbing rate, Ida B. Wells-Barnett used her journalism skills to release a paper challenging the falsified information being published by the mainstream newspapers and disseminated to communities (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 69). Although some Black newspapers are no longer in existence, the legacy of the Black Press continues. Publications such as *The Root* and *Blavity* are online publications reporting on current events from the perspective of how African Americans are impacted (Douglas, 2020, pp. 5-8; Neason, 2018, p. 11).

An important point of this chapter is reimagining how stories are told and providing suggestions for journalists to interact with their audiences. As mentioned, Reciprocal Journalism is an intentional way for journalists to have a relationship with their readers (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 235). When journalists build a relationship with their readers, they can receive feedback on their stories and suggestions for future stories. Underdeveloped relationships between journalists and their readers will hinder the progress of ensuring news stories that accurately portray African Americans, especially coverage about social unrest. A mutual relationship is also beneficial, as readers will have a role in holding journalists accountable for their depictions of protestors and historical information.

This chapter has offered evidence as to why it is imperative for journalists to properly contextualize their stories when reporting on African American protestors. An extension of this importance includes how people will understand events such as the Black Lives Matter protests in the future based upon the newspaper articles. Just as historians today have access to newspaper archives to gain a deeper understanding of past historical events, the current newspapers' reporting on Black Lives Matter protests and on Freddie Gray will be examined in the future. How will historians understand the events surrounding the Black Lives Matter protests when reading these newspapers? When people read mainstream newspapers, will they miss the context of the events leading up to Freddie Gray's death and only read about "riots?" As Baldwin noted, people are mobilizing as they desire to be seen and heard (Joyce et al., 2015, p. 2). The danger is the news stories become about people in the streets with no purpose, just seeking to destroy property. When stories are distorted, the audience is unaware of the urgency of the lived reality many African Americans are confronting. It is absolutely imperative for the stories about Black Lives Matter protests to shed light on the injustices occurring within society.

This chapter also emphasized how the responsibility for in-depth reporting cannot just be a burden placed upon the Black Press. To clarify this point, the Black Press is still needed today, as it has been a constant in ensuring specific stories that may not be deemed "newsworthy" in the mainstream press but were important to African Americans were reported. All newspaper companies and journalists have a responsibility to their readers to report truthfully about the systemic inequalities creating a microcosm such as the Black Lives Matter protests. As the Pew Research Center report noted, the disappointment by numerous people on the focus on violence and not the communities coming together to support one another as they mourn the loss of a person tragically taken away, serves as a reminder that readers are expecting newspapers to

provide information about both the positive and negative aspects of the events (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). The next chapter will discuss the role of social media within the Black Lives Matter movement and why many activists used it as their preferred platform to disseminate information over traditional media.

Chapter 2 – Social Media and the ‘New’ Press and Its Portrayal of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement Protests

While the previous chapter discussed the coverage of Black Lives Matter protests by journalists and their frequent disconnect with their real audience, this chapter focuses on the role of social media, as the rise of social media within the movement appeals to overlooked audiences. The following sections will discuss the research conducted on the prominent use of social media to disseminate information on the Black Lives Matter movement, which at times was more commonly used than traditional mainstream media. Social media platforms allow activists the opportunity to share their experience without possibly having their purpose or mission be misconstrued. Journalists must ensure they are listening to activists and founders of the Black Lives Matter movement and using social media to include all aspects of the protests. This chapter will also discuss how the mainstream news companies can learn from the activists’ use of social media in ensuring their reporting is inclusive of all aspects of the movement.

Social Media and Black Lives Matter Protests

Researchers Deon Freelon, Charlton McIlwain, and Meredith Clark conducted research on social media in protests (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 990). Using Tilly’s concept of WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment), the researchers analyzed 40.8 million tweets about police brutality from 2014–2015 (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 991). However, the researchers are using only three of Tilly’s concepts, excluding worthiness due to difficulty with identifying various characteristics as “mothers with children,” as not everyone who is a mother identifies as one on social media (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 993). The researchers used keyword hashtags such as #freddiegray and #BlackLivesMatter to search the 40,815,975 tweets (Freelon et al., 2018, p.

997). The tweets were divided into three communities: BLM (Black Lives Matter), MN (Mainstream News), and PC (Political Conservatives) (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 999).

A major finding from the research by Freelon et al. (2018) is that, on the power metrics scale, BLM was the most prevalent among the tweets (p. 1000). The results of their research found news outlets not associated with a certain political party increased their chances of having “elite” recognition than BLM and MN (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 1005). Their results also found BLM tweets assisted with garnering media coverage (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 1005). The strongest of Tilly’s concept for the tweets was “commitment,” as it was more productive than the number of people who tweeted and the number of times a hashtag was used (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 1005). Researchers additionally found it impossible to separate the effectiveness of protests in the streets and posts online (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 1005).

The study concludes by noting the two significant contributions of the research. The first contribution is a “falsifiable model of social media power as exercised by social movements and others interested in a given issue,” which disproves other research conducted on the actual influence of social media in movements such as BLM (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 1006). The second and final contribution is “an innovative methodology for measuring” the influence of tweets in society (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 1006). The aforementioned research assists in showing that tweets in today’s society are just as powerful and even more so than the traditional mainstream media in raising awareness on the BLM protests.

Another study by Deon Freelon, Charlton McIlwain, and Meredith Clark examines how activists used Twitter to educate the public about the BLM movement (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 5). The researchers credit the popularity of BLM on Twitter over other social movements because of their “success in eliciting elite responses” (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 7). The research was

conducted by analyzing 40.8 million tweets through a research software program and interviewing 40 activists associated with the BLM movement (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 10).

Although Freelon et al. analyzed several BLM movements, such as those for Ferguson and Eric Garner, for this thesis, the primary interest is their research on Baltimore (p. 11).

The research questions of the study sought clarity about the most heard users and the most commonly used hashtags (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 11). The researchers found that during the height of the Freddie Gray uprising Twitter was used to share sentiments about the tension between protestors and law enforcement and condemn the mainstream news coverage (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 70). Most noticeable is the activists' use of Twitter to provide their followers a personal view into their daily experiences on the frontlines (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 70).

The events in the aftermath of the police-involved killing of Freddie Gray were covered by various networks on social media (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 70). The networks on social media included the general BLM movement (BLM 1); the second movement (BLM 2), which consisted of tweets from activist Deray McKesson; and the Baltimore Locals (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 70). From the period of April 19 – May 31, 2015, there was a total of 3,949,473 tweets about the Freddie Gray protests (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 70). The top hashtags for the Baltimore movement included 1. #FreddieGray, 2. #BlackLivesMatter, 3. #baltimore (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 72). Although some of the photos showed an interaction between the police and protestors, activists also circulated photos of unity among community members (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 72). For example, a photo was tweeted that showed rival gang members of the Crip and Blood standing side by side at the protest (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 72).

Conservative news outlets implemented a different approach in their coverage of the Freddie Gray protests than activists. Conservative news outlets and journalists from other news

sites condemned the protests on social media (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 73). The conservative media coverage primarily focused on their perspective of “rioters” who were impatient in awaiting the trial (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 73).

The main findings of the report by Freelon et al. (2016) included that the majority of the tweets attracting the most attention were “Black-led” (p. 75). The researchers also noted that of the ten most popular BLM Twitter accounts researched for updates on the events, only one woman’s account made the list (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 75). Also noted in the research was the use of Twitter to counter mainstream media narratives. The BLM activists on Twitter made public their dismay with the media’s use of photos with the officers in uniform and the use of a mugshot of the African American victim if they had been previously arrested (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 78). The media’s choice of including prior charges of the police brutality victim was used “to demonstrate that certain media outlets were in fact taking sides despite their editorial stance of neutrality” (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 78). However, the researchers reiterate the trust built among many activists and journalists to assist with disseminating the purpose of their cause to the masses (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 75). The next section will discuss how many people are misinformed about the origins of Black Lives Matter.

The Importance of the Origins of the Black Lives Matter Movement Being Reported

Researcher Jonathan M. Cox (2017) discusses how tweets for Black Lives Matter informed the public. Cox’s research assisted in filling the research gap on how thoroughly people understood the information via social media (p. 1848). This study consisted of interviewing 70 students from college attending universities in Washington, DC (Cox, 2017, p. 1850). Cox’s purpose for the research was “to investigate the ways in which millennials utilize or reject

colourblind racial ideology based on their racial identities” (p. 1850). The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between half an hour to two hours (Cox, 2017, p. 1850).

The students were asked about their knowledge of BLM and the source of information (Cox, 2017, p. 1850). The findings of the research determined that 24 of the 35 students received information about BLM from social media (Cox, 2017, p. 1850). The students also received news from television networks such as CNN (Cox, 2017, p. 1850). The most intriguing aspect of the research was the lack of awareness about the origins of BLM among the students (Cox, 2017, p. 1851). A significant number of participant’s perceptions of the origins of BLM believed it was a direct response to the police-involved killings of unarmed Black people; however, BLM was founded in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African American teenager by neighborhood watch George Zimmerman (Cox, 2017, p. 1851). Another important fact many of the students were unaware of included not knowing that the founders of BLM are queer African American women, as only three students shared this existing knowledge (Cox, 2017, p. 1851). Cox concludes his research by noting, “social media is very likely highly skewed or severely limited in terms of information acquisition” (Cox, 2017, p. 1851). He suggests more research must be conducted on the conclusions about BLM made from highly edited social media posts (Cox, 2017, p. 1852). The next section will provide information on how hashtags on social media furthered the awareness of BLM across the world.

The Power of Hashtags and Police Brutality Videos on Social Media

Jelani Ince, Fabio Rojas, and Clayton Davis researched the framing of the #BlackLivesMatter resulting from how people interact with the hashtag on Twitter (Ince et al., 2017). The purpose of the research was to understand the framing used in social media, specifically African American-led social movements (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1816). Social media

allows users to “index” or (#) their messages to make them accessible to other users, as hashtags allow for easier searching of posts that align with various viewpoints, such as BLM with cases of police brutality (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1817). The researchers emphasize the importance of indexing on social media, as it organizes and separates out unrelated tweets (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1818). The researchers analyzed 66,159 tweets about BLM from 2014 with hashtags such as “#BlackLivesMatter and #BlackLivesMatterFerguson” (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1819). The results of their research found that #BlackLivesMatter did not grow exceptionally until after the police shooting of Michael Brown (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1822).

Ince et al. (2017) found that based upon the frequency of the hashtags, the majority of the tweets showcased the core aspects of the Black Lives Matter movements, such as the denouncing of police brutality and solidarity among activists (p. 1822). The researchers also found the tweets supporting BLM were framed as supportive of the mission, and that as BLM grew more popular on social media, the counter-movements grew as well (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1825). The researchers concluded “that social media allows a broad audience to alter and manipulate the movement’s construction of meaning, a process that we call distributed framing” (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1827). Another finding of the research is that the media was more prominent in their coverage of Ferguson with Michael Brown in comparison to the Trayvon Martin case (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1827). Michael Brown’s killing by police highlighted the downfalls of law enforcement around the country (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1827).

A suggestion made by Ince et al. (2017) for future research is to determine the context of tweets and if they are supportive or critical of the movement (p. 1828). As social media assisted with raising awareness about the BLM movement, the activists also had the opportunity to change the narrative often told by mainstream news about African American men and families.

Once crucial way African Americans used social media to change that narrative was to put the spotlight on police brutality across the country by posting videos online. Author Allissa Richardson has researched the phenomenon of African Americans recording police brutality incidents ultimately changing the traditional media narratives. Richardson (2020) identifies three common occurrences whenever a video is posted online about a police brutality incident (p. 7). The first occurrence is that people immediately began to investigate a video, inquiring about details leading up to the moment (Richardson, 2020, p. 7). People after, watching the video, begin advocating for the person involved in the incident (Richardson, 2020, p. 7). The second occurrence is that African Americans often went to safe spaces online to discover more information about a police brutality incident and deciphered the information online as factual (Richardson, 2020, p. 7). The third occurrence is that video footage of a police brutality incident is often posted not only for the local community to have a clear understanding but also for general audiences on social media and worldwide to know the facts about the case (Richardson, 2020, p. 7). Richardson also explains the rise of Black Twitter, which significantly contributed to posting more videos of police brutality incidents online.

Richardson (2020), for her book, interviewed Dr. Meredith D. Clark about her research on Black Twitter. Clark's research on social media notes the similarities between Black Twitter and the founders of the Black Press; Black journalists created the Black Press to tell their own stories, and Black Twitter has a similar purpose of correcting the inaccurate portrayal of stories about African Americans on police brutality (Richardson, 2020, p. 16). Clark uncovered the following six ways that African Americans used Twitter to become storytellers of their generation (Richardson, 2020, p. 16):

1. African Americans became involved on the social media platform to engage in other conversations centered around the experiences of Black people.
2. Users self-identified as African American, which could be fulfilled by users posting an avatar of a Black person.
3. African American Twitter users used specific terms often said within the community.
4. African Americans used hashtags in their tweets that could be considered “Black.”
5. Users participated in the online social equivalent of the “call and response” in the form of reacting to tweets in much the same way as when, in African American churches, if the congregation agreed with something the pastor said, they responded by saying “Amen” or “Preach.”
6. Users of Black Twitter sought recognition if they were the founder of a popular saying by posting it in their bio to ensure another person would not take credit for their creation.

Clark noted that not everyone who participates in Black Twitter is considered “Black,” but many of the prominent figures in the Black Lives Matter movement are Black Twitter members (Richardson, 2020, p. 17).

Richardson (2020) also discusses how Freddie Gray’s killing influenced her to write her book and provides her observations on the censoring of Korryn Gaines on social media (p. 4). As this thesis focuses on Freddie Gray’s killing and the media coverage afterward, Richardson was inspired to write her book to explain the outrage many African Americans experienced due to the images they viewed on television and social media (p. 4). She notes that it is not a new phenomenon for African Americans to be forced to face the reality of police brutality in the United States, then shares a powerful quote from her father about why African Americans were

so upset with the Rodney King trial verdict: “Because they had proof, but no one cared” (Richardson, 2020, p. 4).

As Richardson (2020) watched the news coverage of the Baltimore protests, she had a simple desire: for a journalist to eloquently state where the pain and agony stemmed from, which was the evidence of Gray’s arrest video (p. 4). She compares the collective outcry by African Americans over police brutality footage to a traditional African philosophy known as Ubuntu (Richardson, 2020, p. 5). Ubuntu is the belief that “I am because we are” and encourages others to share the burden even if they have not experienced it themselves (Richardson, 2020, p. 5). The same applies to celebrations as well (Richardson, 2020, p. 5). In contextualizing the theme of Ubuntu, African Americans have been forced to carry the burden of police brutality footage, which she says carries a “moral, legal, and even spiritual weight” (Richardson, 2020, p. 5). Richardson notes that “Black witnessing” is a form of a gaze and has the capability to mobilize African Americans to take action, further explaining that the major difference between media witnessing and witnessing while Black is that people are not just simply watching a news story on police brutality; they are forced as well to reconcile with the knowledge that they could be the person in the video (p. 5). Richardson’s book assists in supporting this thesis argument that social media is a preferred platform for many activists as they do not have to fear censorship by mainstream media. The next section will explore how race is discussed on social media based upon people’s ethnicities.

Social Media and Race

A year after Freddie Gray’s death, Anderson et al. (2016) at the Pew Research Center conducted a study to understand how people held conversations about race on social media. They found among survey participants that Black social media users (68%) are roughly twice as likely

as white users (35%) to say that most or some of the posts they see on social media are about race (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 2). The Pew Research Center conducted a content analysis of public tweets to determine the most frequent conversations and found that during the period of January 2015 – March 2016, the software Crimson Hexagon found 995 million tweets discussing race (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 9). A tweet was deemed to have discussed race “if it included an explicit reference to blacks, whites or the concept of race in general” (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 9). The researchers found with their determining factors that the tweets discussing racial issues consisted on average of around 66 million tweets a month (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 9).

To contextualize the most prominent tweets discussing race, Anderson et al. (2016) created a chart listing the “ten most active days on Twitter discussing race from Jan 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016” (p. 9). The first most active day on Twitter during this period was the day after the Black church shooting in Charleston, S.C., as there were 4.3 million tweets about the tragedy (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 9). The second most active day on Twitter is related to this research as it concerns Freddie Gray; the protests in Baltimore garnered approximately 3.4 million tweets (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 9).

This is an important point as it demonstrates the significant amount of people discussing the protests in Baltimore; as the other research has demonstrated, social media transcended state lines, allowing people nationally (and globally) to gain an understanding of the events in Baltimore in the aftermath of Gray’s death. At the time of publishing for the Pew Research Center, the #BlackLivesMatter was the third most commonly used hashtag in the history of Twitter, and was directly used by Twitter users when discussing Freddie Gray (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 14). The report by Anderson et al. also found how social media assists with elevating certain events to the forefront of the news stories covered. As the report shows, millions of

people believed it was important to contribute to the conversation about Black Lives Matter, especially in relation to the case of Freddie Gray.

In addition to the impact of discussions of race on Twitter and the emerging importance of #BlackLivesMatter, it is crucial to examine the images on social media from the Black Lives Matter protests and how they motivated people to lend their voice to the conversation.

Researchers Andreu Casas and Nora Webb Williams (2019) found images of Black Lives Matter mobilized people to participate in social movements as they tug on people's pathos (emotions) (p. 360). The researchers selected a Black Lives Matter protest in New York during the spring of 2015 and analyzed tweets surrounding the events (Casas & Williams, 2019, p. 365). The main variables for the research consisted of "original tweets and retweets" (Casas & Williams, 2019, p. 366). After using a computer software program to analyze the images from the protests, Casas and Williams determined there were "9,458 unique images" (p. 367).

To determine the impact of an image, Casas and Williams (2019) labeled the emotional response to the image (p. 367). The four emotions researchers associated with the images included anger, enthusiasm, fear, and sadness; for example, the image for enthusiasm shows people protesting in the streets holding a banner, and the image for fear shows police officers in riot gear patrolling the streets (Casas & Williams, 2019, p. 368). The findings of the research determined that images associated with "enthusiasm" motivated people to become more involved with the protests in New York (Casas & Williams, 2019, p. 372). They also associated similar findings with images deemed to increase "fear," and photos associated with "sadness" left Twitter users feeling unmotivated about possibly participating in the Black Lives Matter protests (Casas & Williams, 2019, p. 372). The researchers concluded further research should be conducted on the images associated with additional social movements for their effects on people

pondering if they should participate (Casas & Williams, 2019, p. 372). This research aligns with the main point of this chapter as audiences are motivated to participate in social movements due to the images they see on social media. The next section will discuss the role of social media and the Black Lives Matter movement in providing another perspective of the narratives surrounding the movement.

The Mobilizing Power of Social Media

Marcia Mundt, Karen Ross, and Charles M. Burnett (2018) have determined Black Lives Matter can serve as a case study of a social movement forming bonds between activists and shifting the narrative around the movement. The researchers first identified 362 social media accounts that were queued from search findings for #BlackLivesMatter (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 4). The time period of the search findings from Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram fell between January 2017 and April 2017 (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 4). The results from their search were organized and “included location, date when the social media account was started (when available), and stated affiliation (or not) as a chapter of the BLM network (when this information was available)” (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 4). The researchers also interviewed a few of the people behind the Black Lives Matter organizations on social media to better inform their research (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 6).

Once the interviews were conducted, Mundt et al. (2018) were able to determine three factors that contributed to the organizers using social media for mobilizing people (pp. 4-6):

1. Social media tapped into resources within their networks and those outside of their organizations.
2. Social media could be used to form an alliance with not only other Black Lives Matter organizations but organizations with similar ideologies as well.

3. Social media could be used “for controlling the narrative of the movement” (p. 6).

Mundt et al. provided several examples in support of these factors. For the first point above, the researchers interviewed a local Black Lives Matter organizer who said social media “allows people in another region to be like, Okay I send solidarity” (p. 7). Social media also garner “external resources,” quickly gaining necessary support online (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 7). Regarding the second point, the researchers found that 9 out of the 11 organization leaders interviewed emphasized the use of social media to organize protests (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 8). In support of the third point, an activist interviewed for the research said, “social media provides us a platform to tell our story as real, as raw, and as relevant as it may be, without the worry of a filter being put on, or someone else’s perspectives and biases” (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 9). Another interviewed activist shared how they believed social media directly countered mainstream media portrayal of the events (Mundt et al., 2018, p.10).

A Black Lives Matter activist from the Mid-Atlantic shared with Mundt et al. (2018) their experience during the protests after the police killing of Freddie Gray; the activist said they were in Baltimore, and they personally believed Twitter was more accurate about the events happening compared to the mainstream media (p. 10). The interviewee also discussed how Baltimore changed their perception of the mainstream media:

Before you were taught to trust the media, to trust the source like the *Washington Post*, like the *New York Times*. You couldn’t cite the internet before ... you can actually cite Twitter, now you can actually cite Facebook and it’s because now there’s more credibility, there’s more exposure. (p. 10)

The interviewee went on to say when you follow and watch the live streams of activists and then read about the events in the media, you can reach the conclusion “that did not happen” (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 10).

Additionally, Mundt et al. (2018) found that social media increases security threats against many activists due to being accessible online, and activists are at risk of having people discover where they live or socialize (p. 11). One interviewee also shared how they have been contacted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) after posting about organizing a vigil for an individual who had lost their life (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 11). The researchers conclude by stating those interviewed for the research agreed social media was more beneficial than harmful as they are fortunate enough to connect with other activists.

The research of Mundt et al. (2018) was incredibly important to this thesis as the interviews exemplified why many activists distrust the mainstream media, especially during the protests surrounding Freddie Gray’s death. As the research stated, many preferred social media over traditional media, as they believed the media was not being truthful about the situation. The next section will discuss how researchers can find data on Black Lives Matter on social media to ensure it is accurately represented in history.

Studying Black Lives Matter Tweets to Understand Black Culture and Lessons for

Journalists

Carson Byrd, Keon Gilbert, and Joseph Richardson Jr. (2017) have researched how Black Lives Matter can be studied to gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of Black culture. The researchers argue that social media can be used to assist scholars with their research on “gun violence, public health, and higher education” (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1873). The researchers also argue that social media has been helpful in gaining a better understanding of how the Black

community is handling prevalent issues (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1874). As the researchers note, traditional data sources include using information from *The Washington Post*, which had real-time data on gun violence; and now, social media can be used as an additional source (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1874). An example provided by the researchers included the use of Twitter by medical professionals to assist with fighting against the National Rifle Association (NRA), which was preventing the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from studying gun violence (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1874).

The other benefit of social media is the ability to determine how people are immediately affected by gun violence instead of waiting for the information to be disseminated through traditional media (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1874). The researchers give the example of Philando Castille, who was killed by police officers after being pulled over in Minnesota (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1875). Castille's death was streamed live on Facebook, allowing researchers and the general public to reach a conclusion about their views on police brutality (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1875). Social media is holding organizations such as the NRA accountable in order to improve data collection on the toll gun violence has taken on the country (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1875).

Byrd et al. (2017) next analyzed the role of social media in discussing public health concerning African Americans (p. 1875). The researchers make the comparison between social media highlighting health disparities and television news during the civil rights movement recording the atrocities committed against African Americans fighting for integration (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1875). The researchers offer the example of studying how stereotypes commonly associated with African American men affect their daily lives (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1876). Often researchers use social media to identify people to include in their various studies; however, Byrd et al. argue that, rather than using social media to get contact information for study participants,

they should instead use social media to understand grievances within the Black community (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1876). To accomplish this, the researchers introduce the concept of photovoice, where talking and taking photographs is used to interview subjects (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1876).

Byrd et al. (2017) conducted a photovoice project with African American middle- and high-schoolers to understand how education directly impacts their heart health (p. 1876). It was possible for the photos taken by participants to mirror the images found in media; however, the researchers compared the photovoice to social media, as the images can take on a non-traditional meaning very similar to hashtags on social media where context is imperative (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1876). As the authors explained, “we can utilize social media data as a way of understanding how black men and boys, for example, navigate their social worlds and how these experiences shape their racial and gender identities” (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1876). This point connects to the other issues raised throughout this thesis about how social media is not only a place where journalists can directly quote activists but also a means to understand the concerns many of them raise on social media.

The final aspect that Byrd et al. (2017) decided to examine was the lens of social media on the “racial disparities in higher education” (p. 1877). The researchers argue that social media data can be used to gain insight into the Black student experience at historically white institutions, and the example is given of possibly studying African American students pursuing doctoral degrees in sociology programs throughout the country (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1877). If a researcher were to take on the project, they would first have to identify social media conversations about the institution being studied (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1878). Not only does social media allow the researchers to identify possible student participants but also to become

more familiar with the racial injustices occurring at the specific university (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1878). A hashtag used as an example to better understand the experience on campus is #blackoncampus, which a researcher could start with analyzing tweets (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1878). The final example for the study was to associate specific events geared towards the research group and the conversation online; for example, if the researchers were conducting a study on doctoral students studying sociology, they could review online discourse about the American Sociological Association (ASA) meeting, and if students were upset about the representation at the conference, they could possibly start a #ASAsowhite to share their grievances about the annual meeting (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1878). The researchers go further by asking, “how can social media be used within academia for institutional and social change?” (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1878). The researchers provide real-world examples such as #inclusiveASA, a hashtag used to discuss the experiences of minorities within the professional organization (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1877). Byrd et al. conclude by emphasizing the importance of incorporating social media into their research not only now but especially in the future; by incorporating social media into the research, it can become more impactful, as it includes the human element (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1879).

The research of Byrd et al. (2017) addresses two significant points in this thesis. The first is the importance of including social media in the research. As this chapter focuses on the use of social media in the Black Lives Matter movement by activists, it is imperative for researchers to first study the subject matter, which is Black Lives Matter online. Just as the Byrd et al. (2017) piece discusses how the civil rights movement was televised to show the violent acts committed against African Americans, the equivalence now in modern times is social media (p. 1875).

Social media, as all the research cited in this chapter has discussed, is at times an alternative to the narrative in mainstream media.

The second important point is how social media can be used to understand important aspects of Black culture. The #BlackLivesMatter started online and eventually became a social movement spurring protests across the country (Cox, 2017, p. 1851). Excluding social media from the research just because it is a new medium would erase an important aspect of the social movement and the discourse surrounding it online. Especially as this thesis is rooted in Critical Race Theory and the black digital humanities, analyzing the role of social media will ensure in the future that historians have a comprehensive understanding of all the events that occurred during this movement. People's honest opinions on how they were treated by law enforcement when protesting or tragically recording cell phone footage of the killing of an unarmed Black person are all relevant aspects that cannot be overlooked in future research on media coverage of BLM protests.

The research cited in this chapter has discussed the distrust between activists and the mainstream media when covering Black Lives Matter protests. It is therefore imperative to discuss how journalists can work with activists to accurately portray their movement. First, journalists must be willing to listen to the concerns many activists have about the various injustices they are fighting. As the research by Byrd et al. (2017) notes, social media can be used to gain more knowledge on Black culture and norms (p. 1873). Many of the interviewed activists in the cited research did not believe they were being listened to when sharing their concerns on mainstream media (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 9). However, when activists used their preferred platform, as an interviewee noted, they perceived it as free of misinterpretation or biases by journalistic reporting (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 10). As suggested by Byrd et al., journalists should

go on social media to understand their perspective on the events occurring in their city, especially from local members.

Another suggestion is for journalists to report on the events leading up to the protests and other concerns from community members. Questions should be considered, such as “does the police department have an alarming history of the mistreatment of African Americans?,” and, “what other concerns could have possibly spurred the movement, such as poverty and lack of gainful employment for people to take care of their families?” Additionally, police brutality stories must be reported in the proper context. Listening to activists and community members not only on social media but also in person will allow journalists to report the news in a way where people outside of the community can understand what led up to the moment with protests. The second suggestion is directly connected to the first point, but journalists have to ensure their reporting is accurate. Reporting on the destruction that occurred in Baltimore was an aspect that needed to be covered in the reporting.

However, it was not the only concern that needed to be reported. Occasionally, more in-depth stories have to be reported and not just “breaking news.” As the findings of the research conducted for this thesis found, both the mainstream press and the Black Press reported on the breaking news. However, the Black Press also interviewed community members and activists. The local perspective provided community members the opportunity to discuss the challenges they were facing, such as their property being damaged during the protests.

The reporting by the Black Press offered a full perspective of what was happening in Baltimore during the protests. Also, mainstream media tended to get a majority of their interviews and quotes from people in prominent positions, such as the mayor of Baltimore at the time, Rawlings-Blake, and the Governor of Maryland, Larry Hogan. The inclusion of more

voices not only offers different perspectives but also ensures the story is accurately representing other people who are impacted. The implementation of these lessons will assist in rebuilding the relationship between activists and mainstream media, not overnight but over time.

The last lesson is for journalists to understand how African Americans use social media. As the Byrd et al. (2017) research stated, it is important for researchers studying African Americans to understand how they have used social media over the years. The same ideology must be implemented by journalists when conducting preliminary research on social media about the protests. As Richardson (2020) wrote in her book, social media has transformed how police brutality incidents are perceived by the general public, noting as well that African Americans have always been knowledgeable about being killed by police across the country.

However, the invention of cell phones and social media has forced the world to actually confront the incidents. Just as the Black Press provided African Americans the means to advocate for themselves, social media is doing the same for this era. Social media has given African Americans a tool on which they can share with people around the world, “This is happening to us; what can be done to ensure this never happens again?” Journalists must understand that throughout history African Americans have often not had the tools or the legal freedom to discuss the tragedies they were encountering on a daily basis. Social media has provided a platform to tell their story beyond a neat three-minute package on the news, as just a raw video with evidence. All of the lessons listed will help journalists not only better report but also learn how to appeal to activists and citizens who often turn to social media as their preferred platform instead of traditional media.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement on social media and how it became a platform for the activists to disseminate their stories without the gatekeeper of traditional media. Journalists must ensure they are listening to activists and the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement and using social media to include all aspects of the events. As the previous chapter discussed how occasionally newspapers had difficulty appealing to their audiences, especially in their coverage of the Freddie Gray protests, many people made social media their preferred platform to share their perspectives (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 7). This chapter also discussed the role of social media and BLM protests, especially when considering the inaccurate media coverage. Due to many activists having turned to social media to raise awareness about their cause, the Freelon et al. (2018) study noted that BLM activists are very influential and powerful on social media (p. 1000).

As previously mentioned, traditional news narratives of events such as the Freddie Gray protests are framed negatively. However, social media has assisted with shifting power away from traditional newspapers and television news. Traditional news organizations are no longer the gatekeepers vetting interviewees, as social media has provided a platform for anyone with a phone and internet access to share their experiences with people around the world. Freelon et al. (2016) found at the height of the Freddie Gray protests that, although news organizations were tweeting about the events, the most popular tweets were “Black-led” (p. 75). Social media also assists with addressing the previous concern about the lack of representation of African American men lending their voice to addressing the disparities such as employment opportunities. Additionally, activists such as Deray McKesson amassed a massive social media following of both community members and celebrities (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 70).

Although social media is another source for people to receive information about BLM protests, not everyone is aware of the purpose of the movement and the origin story.

Unfortunately, tweets can alter the information on the purpose of the social movement. For example, a significant number of college students are aware of the BLM movement, yet they only associated the movement with police brutality and not with the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman (Cox, 2017, p. 1851). For social media to continue being a powerful source for BLM, tweets must be contextualized so followers who retweet do not lose the background information on the movement while working to spread awareness.

Other research discussed the prominence the Black Lives Matter movement gained through social media. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement not only gained popularity but also furthered the main mission of the organization, which was to raise awareness about police brutality (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1822). Richardson (2020) discussed how live streaming and cell phone footage have changed how police brutality is perceived by people around the world (p. 7). The Pew Research Center study found that “Black social media users (68%) are roughly twice as likely as whites (35%) to say that at least some of the posts they see on social networking sites are about race or race relations” (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 2). Other researchers have indicated the power of images posted to social media in motivating people to participate in the Black Lives Matter movement (Casas & Williams, 2019, p. 360).

Social media, unlike traditional media, had the ability to connect activists with one another even outside their state of residence (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 7). Activists also discussed the differences in what they witnessed in Baltimore in the aftermath of Gray’s death and the mainstream news coverage on Twitter (Mundt et al., 2018, p. 10). The last referenced article

discussed how social media could be incorporated into current and future research to accurately understand African American culture (Byrd et al., 2017, p. 1873).

The research also discussed three points to help journalists better report on Black Lives Matter protests. The first point is journalists have to listen to the activists. As research cited in this chapter stated, many of the activists did not feel the mainstream media would accurately represent their purpose in organizing the protests. The second lesson for journalists is to ensure they were accurately reporting on the events. Some activists occasionally discussed in their interviews with the researchers their disappointment with the majority of the coverage on the violence. When journalists report additional stories about the socio-economic disadvantage of families in an area, it assists with properly contextualizing the events such as the BLM protestors. The final lesson is for journalists to understand why many African Americans turned to social media. Historically, African Americans have rarely had a platform to disseminate their experiences, such as a wrongful encounter with a police officer. Social media is a tool where African Americans do not have to be granted access by the gatekeepers of traditional media and instead publish their information to social media instantly.

All of these lessons will help journalists ensure they report on the police brutality incidents involving African Americans accurately and respect the dignity of their lives. The next chapter will discuss the differences in the media coverage between Freddie Gray and Korryn Gaines, as well as the lack of media coverage and why the cases of so many African American women and girls often go unreported.

Chapter 3 – Korryn Gaines: The Role of Intersectionality in the Media and Social Media Coverage of Her Story

The previous chapters have discussed Freddie Gray's case and the media portrayal of the protests surrounding it, as well as the shift many activists made in disseminating their information on social media rather than through traditional news sources. This chapter discusses the significant differences between Freddie Gray and Korryn Gaines' media coverage—most notably, the lack of media coverage of Gaines's case. Freddie Gray had numerous articles discussing his death, the protests, and the court case. In the review of the four newspapers analyzed for this research (*The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Afro*, and *The Washington Informer*), there were only a few articles about Gaines addressing her standoff with police (see the Introduction of this thesis, p. 5). Historically, African American women have received less media coverage than white women if they went missing or were murdered (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 53). News organizations must ensure equal media coverage is allocated to the African American men and women killed by police officers, and the coverage should be free of stereotypes. Resources such as the #SayHerName project and social media can help journalists uncover information about lesser-known cases to ensure their stories have equal representation in the media (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1; Richardson, 2017, p. 17). As more media coverage is dedicated to the cases of police brutality and African American women, the public's awareness is increased, and the necessary parties can be held accountable for their actions.

Historical Examples of Media Coverage of African American Women

Michelle Jacobs has researched the alarming rate of African American women impacted by police brutality (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 40). M. Jacobs (2017) begins her research paper by discussing the historical context of stereotypes often associated with African American women

(p. 39). The state's violence has been a burden on African American women dating back to enslavement; during enslavement, Black women were raped by slave masters to produce more enslaved people, and it was considered legal (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 44). During the Jim Crow period, African American women continued to endure state-sanctioned violence (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 45). This period marked a point where African American women received little to no protection from the law and were "killed and sexually assaulted" (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 45). Stereotypes of African American women emerged during this period, which unfortunately are still in existence (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 46).

M. Jacobs (2017) determines three prominent stereotypes about African Americans found in current times, and the aspect of society most influenced by these stereotypes is the courts (p. 46). African American women are often considered by jurors and judges as being sexually provocative, which is a stereotype used to place blame upon them for being sexually assaulted (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 46). Worse still, due to this stereotype, the judges and jurors often question if Black women can even be sexually assaulted (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 46). The second main stereotype outlined by M. Jacobs is the lack of credibility of African American women, with the primary consequence being that Black women, in discussing their stories of sexual assault or domestic violence, are often deemed unreliable and are not believed (p. 46). The final stereotype is that African American women are innately violent (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 46). When judges and jurors evaluate which party is guilty, African American women are deemed as playing a role in the violence inflicted upon them by their partner (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 46).

M. Jacobs (2017) also addresses the difficulty of providing a platform for the stories of African American women who have been directly impacted by police violence (p. 52). The lack of media coverage on the killings of African American women by police is, according to M.

Jacobs, attributable to the racism within society, including in the media and the police department; and even though African American women's stories are considered "newsworthy," unfortunately, due to their race, the stories often do not make the newscast (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 52). An example M. Jacobs cites is a show hosted by Nancy Grace, who previously was a prosecutor (p. 52). The women whose cases were featured on Grace's show were all white (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 52). Upon realizing this, the late news anchor Gwen Ifill named this phenomenon "missing White woman syndrome," which can be used to "describe the media's exclusive focus on White women" (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 53). M. Jacobs also notes that although #BlackLivesMatter has entered the mainstream media coverage, there is still a considerable lack of coverage about African American women and their experiences with police brutality (p. 53). She also references the previously mentioned #SayHerName report, noting there are very few news stories about the 28 women highlighted (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 53). The following section will discuss the information about Korryn Gaines's case.

Korryn Gaines's Story

Korryn Gaines was shot and killed by police on August 1, 2016, in Baltimore, Maryland, when the police were serving a warrant due to her not appearing in court for charges concerning a traffic stop (Stevens, 2018, p. 3). Her boyfriend at the time, Kareem Courtney, was also receiving an arrest warrant for an assault charge; he was not, however, present during the standoff (Stevens, 2018, p. 3). Gaines and her 5-year-old son were in the apartment during the standoff, which was streamed live on social media (Stevens, 2018, p. 3). Shortly before the fatal shot was fired, the police requested Facebook deactivate Gaines livestream (Stevens, 2018, p. 3). During the standoff, Gaines had a legally purchased shotgun in her possession (Chirbas et al., 2016). The officers fired the first shot, striking Gaines and her son (Stevens, 2018, p. 3). Her son

was shot in the face and his elbow (Stevens, 2018, p. 1). No officers had body cameras (Chirbas et al., 2016).

The Gaines family was awarded \$38 million in damages by a jury (J. Jacobs, 2019). The basis of the decision was “the first shot the officer had fired at Ms. Gaines was not reasonable” (J. Jacobs, 2019, para 3). However, a Baltimore County judge overturned the jury’s decision (J. Jacobs, 2019). Judge Norman stated, when reviewing the case and determining if the police officer used excessive force, that “the facts must be examined from the perspective of the officer” (J. Jacobs, 2019). The judge, in his 78-page decision, wrote that Gaines did not drop her shotgun and positioned herself behind a wall placing officers at a disadvantage (J. Jacobs, 2019). The judge also determined that the officer did not intentionally shoot Gaine’s son, and it was not deemed a battery (J. Jacobs, 2019). At the time of Gaines’s killing, she had a pending lawsuit against a Baltimore rental owner for lead poisoning (Lopez, 2016). An evaluation from a doctor had found “signs of neurocognitive impairment” possibly attributed to lead poisoning (Lopez, 2016, para. 7). The next section will discuss the lack of media coverage on Korryn Gaines compared to the Freddie Gray coverage.

Korryn Gaines Media Coverage

Barbara Ransby has researched the Black Lives Matter movement and the contributions of Black feminist politics. In Ransby’s 2018 book, *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the 21st Century*, she discusses the challenges Baltimore faced in the aftermath of Freddie Gray’s murder at the hands of police (p. 81). Ransby notes that even with African Americans holding positions such as the mayor and state prosecutor, there was no guarantee for justice for Freddie Gray (p. 87). A Department of Justice (DOJ) report found women were not exempt from mistreatment by the Baltimore police (Ransby, 2018, p. 87; U.S. Department of

Justice, 2016). If a woman attempted to report sexual misconduct by police officers, they were referenced in derogatory terms by the officers (Ransby, 2018, p. 87). Another finding of the DOJ report is that Baltimore police performed 60 strip searches that violated numerous people's rights (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 62; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016). The report also possessed discrepancies with how men and women were identified when discussing police brutality (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 62).

As described by M. Jacobs (2017), within the DOJ report, whenever police brutality happened to African American men, they were racially identified; however, when African American women were labeled as victims of police brutality, they were not racially identified, and if the African American woman was identified in a police report, she was labeled a "Black b***h" (p. 62). One specific Baltimore police case covered by the media never identified a woman as African American (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 62). An African American woman was pulled over for a broken headlight, and the police performed a strip search on her in the street within direct view of the public (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 62). Both the DOJ and *The Washington Post* did not identify the woman as African American; however, a blog titled BLACKMATTERSUS identified the woman's ethnicity (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 62). Although considered a simple note by the blog, this assisted in contextualizing the story (M. Jacobs, 2017, p. 62).

Two months after Gaines was killed by police, another standoff occurred, but there were drastically significant differences in how the standoff was handled by police and the perception of the public. Ransby (2018) explains how seven individuals staged a six-week standoff against the government at a wildlife reserve in Oregon owned by the government; the individuals, however, were acquitted for their actions, whereas Gaines was not afforded the same opportunity (p. 88). Ransby also points out a startling detail about Gaines's case, which was the myriad of

online comments made by both Black and white people about her actions that claimed the fatal incident was due in part to her “alleged stupidity and recklessness” (p. 89).

As discussed by Ransby (2018), protests for Korryn Gaines were considerably smaller than the Freddie Gray protests; however, both protests for Gaines and Gray were led by Black feminists (p. 89). The organizers advocated for Gaines by pushing the narrative that she did not cause harm and was punished simply due to her taking a stand against the mistreatment from police officers; however, the organizers were forced to confront notions about Gaines not being an innocent victim (Ransby, 2018, p. 89). A few months after Gaines’s death, organizer Charlene Carruthers and other protesters from BYP100 (Black Youth Project) and Baltimore Bloc demonstrated outside the Fraternal Order of Police Officers in Baltimore, wearing shirts reading “Remember Korryn” (Ransby, 2018, p. 89). Outside of Baltimore, other organizations supported the cause for ensuring Korryn’s legacy would continue. An organization based out of Atlanta, Black Feminist Futures, hosted events to construct memorials in Gaines memory, as well as hosting “visioning salons” to provide a space for African Americans to heal from the trauma of numerous killings by police officers (Ransby, 2018, p. 90).

This section has exemplified how Gaines’s case went underreported by many newspapers and journalism organizations in the Baltimore area. Although many of the activists were also involved with the Freddie Gray protests and saw significant support in the aftermath of his killing, this solidarity, unfortunately, did not happen for Gaines. The upcoming sections will go more in-depth into the reasons why this happened, not only in Gaines’s case but for countless other African American women victims of police brutality, and will include an analysis of the number of articles written about Korryn Gaines in the same four newspapers analyzed for Freddie Gray, which included *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Baltimore Afro*,

and *The Washington Informer*. First, though, I will provide information about the origins of #SayHerName and the purpose for the hashtag.

#SayHerName

In 2015, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Critical Race theorist, and the African American policy forum (AAPF), alongside a group of researchers, created a report on the #SayHerName campaign (Ransby, 2018, p. 108). The hashtag #SayHerName was created in 2014 by the AAPF and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) to center the stories of African American women affected by police violence (AAPF, n.d.). The report discusses the statistics of African American women killed by police officers, which often go unreported by numerous media organizations (Ransby, 2018, p. 108).

The #SayHerName report starts by noting how in 2014, during the height of the BLM movement, police violence became a national talking point; however, there were killings of African American women such as Tanisha Anderson going unreported by the mainstream media (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1). The perpetrators of these crimes against African American women suffered similar fates as the police officers who murdered African American men: being acquitted of their charges. For example, in 2010, Aiyana Stanley-Jones was shot and killed by a Detroit police officer while sleeping; after two trials, Officer Weekly was acquitted of all his charges and returned to work in 2015 (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 20). The researchers determined the main factor as to why African American men receive significant media coverage is due in part to framing (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1). As the racial justice movement has grown in prominence, media organizations have determined a frame for reporting police brutality cases involving African Americans in which they attribute the police killings to over-criminalization transcending economic status; however, when African American women are subjected to similar

hardships as their male counterparts, the media does not have a frame for reporting their stories (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 1). The #SayHerName report provides recommendations for how the media and other researchers can tell the stories of the African American women victims of police brutality (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 4).

The #SayHerName report has two main themes. The first theme is for media organizations to understand they can report on police brutality of African American women through the same frame they use for African American men, and the second theme identifies other aspects of violence against African American women that are not included in the current frame (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 5). Historically, African American women have held leadership positions in the fight against police brutality; dating back to the underground railroad and extending up to the present moment with the Black Lives Matter movement, Black women have always been at the forefront of the movement (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 7).

Crenshaw et al. (2015) continue by providing examples of how African American women's experiences can fit within the current frames used to describe the state-sanctioned violence against African American men (p. 7). The first frame experienced by both men and women is "Driving While Black" (p. 8), and the second frame is "Policing Poverty: Police Brutality at the Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class" (p. 12). African Americans are disproportionately economically disadvantaged and are often subjected to violent encounters with police officers as a result (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 12). The researchers offer an example of a homeless African American woman who was wrongly shot and killed by police officers in California in 1999 (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 13).

The third frame is "Casualties of the War on Drugs: Black Women as Drug Mules" (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 14). The researchers provide examples of African American women

being falsely accused and murdered for allegedly swallowing drugs (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 14). The fourth frame discussed is “Violence Instead of Treatment: Police Killings of Black Women in Mental Health Crisis,” through which the researchers brings awareness to the lack of mental health resources at the disposal of African Americans, as police officers are often the first to arrive on the scene and deploy deadly force (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 16)

The fifth frame is “Death in Custody: Black Women as ‘Superhuman’ and Incapable of Feeling Pain” (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 18). This frame discusses the circumstances surrounding the deaths of African American women in police custody (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 18). The researchers list three cases from 2013–2015 of women dying in police custody after being denied immediate medical attention (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 18).

The sixth frame discussed by Crenshaw et al. (2015) is “Guilt by Association: Black Women as ‘Collateral Damage’,” which highlights the danger African American women are placed in when police officers conduct drug raids (p. 20). The researchers provide the example of Tarika Wilson, who was shot and killed by police officers as they conducted a raid searching for her boyfriend, who was accused of drug dealing (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 20). Her 14-month-old son was wounded when the officers were shooting, although his mother was not involved in selling any drugs (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 20). Sergeant Chavalia, who killed Wilson, was acquitted of two charges, negligent homicide and negligent assault, and Wilson’s family was awarded a \$2.5 million wrongful death settlement (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 20).

The next section of the #SayHerName report by Crenshaw et al. (2015) discusses the violence African American women experience by police officers due to their gender (p. 21). The first gender-specific frame they examine is “Police Killings in the Context of Responses to Violence”; the researchers note when African American women are involved in domestic-related

incidents, the police officers called to the scene continue to harm the women (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 22). The case of Yvette Smith is a tragic example of this frame. In 2014, police were dispatched to respond to a domestic dispute between two men in Smith's home, and as Smith opened the door for the officers, she was shot twice (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 23). Police officers claimed Smith was holding a gun; however, their statement was deemed false the day after, and Deputy Smith was later indicted on a murder charge (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 23). Researchers also note that members of the LGBTQ+ community have also been violently targeted by police officers (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 24). Additionally, as previously mentioned in this thesis about the violence against women in Baltimore by police officers, the researchers for the #SayHerName report state this is a significant problem plaguing police departments across the country (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 26).

The second gender frame Crenshaw et al. (2015) examine is "The Use of Excessive force against Black Mothers and Their Children," in which known interactions between police officers and the Black mothers and children are no less violent (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 28). The researchers site as an example the Alesia Thomas case: in 2012, Thomas brought her children, who were 3- and 12-years-old, to a Los Angeles Police Department due to not properly caring for their well-being, and she was later arrested by LAPD on charges of child abandonment (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 28). She was beaten by police officers and went into cardiac arrest as she sat in the back of the police cruiser, and upon arrival at the hospital, she was pronounced dead (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 28). Officer O'Callaghan was convicted in 2015 for her role in Thomas's death (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 28).

The last frame is "No Sympathy: Police Terrorize Black Women Who Demand Justice"; the researchers provide examples of the African American women and girls who, after losing

loved ones to police violence, were subjected to violence as well (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 29). The sister of Tamir Rice, Tajai Rice, was handcuffed and arrested by police officers after witnessing the shooting of her brother (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 28). The researchers write, “The officers’ neglect of the dying child and their refusal to heed the cries of his sister reflect a profound devaluing of Black life and of the loving bonds that exist between Black people” (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 29).

In the report’s conclusion, Crenshaw et al. (2015) implore the media and activists when discussing African Americans who have lost their lives to police violence to ensure the unjust killings of African American women are included (p. 30). The researchers suggest the coverage of these stories must include an “intersectional, Black feminist perspective,” and that journalists covering these stories must acquire the knowledge and understanding necessary to discuss the numerous ways African Americans have been affected by police brutality (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 30). When raising awareness about police brutality, other aspects of violence against African American women must be incorporated (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 30). According to the report, “domestic violence is a leading cause of death for Black Women aged 15–34,” and more awareness and dedication has to be directed into various organizations (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 30). The following section will discuss the newspaper coverage of Korryn Gaines in both the Black Press and the mainstream newspaper.

Newspaper Coverage of the Korryn Gaines Case

As my research on the Freddie Gray protests focuses on the terms used to describe the social demonstrations, I briefly searched for a number of articles on the newspaper websites about Korryn Gaines (see the Introduction of this thesis, p. 5). *The New York Times* published only three articles about Korryn Gaines from August 2016 – February 2018. The fourth article

was an opinion piece written by Kimberlé Crenshaw about African American women killed by police officers and how it relates to the intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw, 2019). For *The Washington Post*, nine articles were published about Korryn Gaines that discussed details of the barricade and the lawsuit. For *The Baltimore Afro*, four articles were published online about Korryn Gaines and two opinion pieces, and for *The Washington Informer*, there were no articles published about her.

The findings on the lack of articles about Korryn Gaines and the circumstances surrounding her killing show how the police killings of African American men received more coverage than those of African American women, which was expounded upon in the #SayHerName section with the concept of intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw. The next section will explain how #SayHerName can be researched by scholars.

The Role of Social Media in Elevating the Stories of African American Women

Researchers Melissa Brown, Rashawn Ray, Ed Summers, and Neil Fraistat (Brown et al., 2017) have researched the importance of scouring information on social media from an intersectionality approach. Brown et al. provide the origins of intersectionality and how it has expanded on social media. Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1991, coined the term intersectionality as a theoretical lens through which to explain the relationship between power systems and people's identities (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1832). Additionally, the concept of political intersectionality addresses the challenges faced by people who belong to various identity subgroups (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1832). More recently, Terriquez researched modern social movements and the use of social media to expand their platform and determined that present-day activists are more comfortable participating in movements with an online presence (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1832).

Brown et al. (2017) then “argue #SayHerName serves as a case study of intersectional social media activism through social psychological analysis” (p. 1832). The researchers desired to answer one question, “How does intersectional mobilization emerge in social media activism?” (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1832). Examining tweets using #SayHerName, the researchers desired to understand how the hashtag helped bring visibility to the African American women who have either been killed or injured from police brutality, then they conducted a quantitative content analysis to examine the #SayHerName report (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1834). The data set for the research included 463,957 tweets containing #SayHerName posted between January 2016 and October 2016 (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1834). The tweets were collected through Twitter’s application programming interface (API) and stored with software known as “Twarc” (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1835). The database had the capability to determine the “top ten retweeted users per day, numbers of hashtags used per day, and a number of media files (URLs and images) used per day” (Brown et al., 2017 p. 1835).

The analysis of #SayHerName conducted by Brown et al. (2017) consisted of the following four steps (p. 1835):

1. Determine how many tweets included #SayHerName throughout the day within the date range.
2. Determine which organizations or users were the most active on social media and how often they were retweeted. No users whose accounts were deleted or lacked identifying information were included in the dataset.
3. “Compare the percentage of top retweeted users in each category to the percentage of retweets each category received over the entire period.”

4. Organize the tweets and determine how frequently the #SayHerName appeared between January 2016 and October 2016.

The results found Twitter users implemented “intersectional micromobilization and intersectional consciousness” (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1836). As defined by Brown et al., micromobilization refers to the relationship between people and cultural norms (p. 1832), while intersectional consciousness refers to the process of how people collectively determine the meaning behind the action to be taken for a social movement (p. 1832). The researchers findings also include the following: first, the hashtag #SayHerName was frequently used in the aftermath of an event correlated to the meaning; second, the content in the tweets often included photos of the women who were victims of police brutality and links to additional information on the case; and third, the tweets were inclusive of all women, including those who identified as one, and extended geographical borders (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1836).

Regarding how Korryn Gaines’s case received the most tweets with the #SayHerName, Brown et al. (2017) found the following: the average daily number of tweets including the hashtag #SayHerName between January 2016 and October 2016 totaled 2,090 tweets, and the most significant single day for the tweets in this date range was on August 2, 2016, when there were 30,716 tweets, with the most retweeted tweet about Korryn Gaines (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1836). The second highest occurrence of tweets about #SayHerName happened on July 23, 2016, when 25,888 tweets included #SayHerName (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1837). The most retweeted tweet on this day was from the *Huffington Post Black Voices* and discussed the anniversary of the death of Sandra Bland, reading simply, “today marks one year since #SandraBland died in a Texas jail cell. Let us never forget to #SayHerName” (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1837). The tweet also had accompanying images of Bland (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1837). The majority of the

tweets with the #SayHerName were used to bring awareness to African American women's deaths due to police brutality (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1837).

Brown et al. (2017) also determined the backgrounds of the users who tweeted the most with #SayHerName (p. 1837). The leading group consisted of activists and accounted for around 27.2% of the tweets; one account in particular within this group, @ImBlackIMatter, had the most retweets (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1837). The second most tweeted group was categorized as "Other" and accounted for 19.5% of the tweets; individuals that fell into this category included people who were not affiliated with a specific organization (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1838). The third most tweeted group was the "media/news," contributing 18.3% of tweets; and from this group, the most prominent organization for retweeting #SayHerName was *Huffington Post's Black Voice*, with *BET* (Black Entertainment Television) coming in second (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1838). While the aforementioned news outlets were the most prominent, other lesser-known media organizations such as *Global Grind* and *Mic* contributed between 4,000-6,000 tweets about #SayHerName (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1838).

Another major group contributing to the conversation included people in academia and working in other careers, with academic scholars contributed to the #SayHerName conversation by 17.1% (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1838). A surprising finding is that, although celebrities have significant followers, they only contributed 8.1% to retweets, and the most retweeted celebrities are white men (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1838). The last category of people tweeting about #SayHerName was politicians contributing only to 1% of the conversation, including politicians such as Bernie Sanders and Jill Stein, who used the hashtag #SayHerName during the 2016 Democratic National Convention (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1838).

The researchers also identified 13 standard frames commonly associated with #SayHerName, but only the top three will be discussed here; they are as follows (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1839-1840):

1. The first frame, “Consciousness Raising,” consisted of positive reinforcement and quotes to remind African American women of their value.
2. The second most used frame included the name of the victim; the most commonly associated hashtag with this frame was #KorrynGaines.
3. The third frame was honoring the legacy of the victims; the most commonly associated hashtag with this frame was #neverforget.

The researchers conclude by saying further research should incorporate a greater emphasis on the role of African American women using social media to disseminate information about their movement to control the narrative without relying on traditional media outlets (Brown et al., 2017, p. 1842).

It is crucial now to examine the significance of Korryn Gaines’s livestream being censored while those of other African American victims of police brutality were not. As Richardson (2020) notes, Korryn Gaines’s case demonstrates social media’s capability to disseminate videos of police brutality, but it also shows social media censorship becoming a tool of oppression. The social media platform Facebook has been used by many African Americans to livestream incidents of police brutality and post videos; however, Facebook can be considered a double-edged sword (Richardson, 2020, p. 78). Richardson points out that while African Americans have used the platform to post videos of police brutality, they are often censored more than any other ethnicity on the website; in fact, Mark Luckie, a former employee at Facebook, resigned from his job due to concerns about how African Americans were treated on

the website (Richardson, 2020, p. 78). According to Luckie, 63% of African Americans utilized Facebook to talk with family members, and African Americans are the most monitored by Facebook moderators, who are often white and who would label conversations or posts about a police-involved shooting as “hate speech” (Richardson, 2020, p. 78). As a result, the users would have their accounts deactivated or their posts taken down (Richardson, 2020, p. 78). In Luckie’s public resignation letter, he wrote, “but to continue to witness and be in the center of the systematic disenfranchisement of underrepresented voices, however unintentional, is more than I’m willing to sacrifice personally” (Richardson, 2020, p. 78).

A month before Korryn Gaines attempted to livestream her standoff with police officers, Philando Castille’s partner, Diamond Reynolds, livestreamed his killing by a police officer (Richardson, 2020, p. 79). Mark Zuckerberg posted a statement after Castille’s murder stating he hoped another video of a similar incident would not have to be shared on the platform again, at one point stating, “While I hope we never have to see another video like Diamond’s, it reminds us why coming together to build a more open and connected world is so important—and how far we still have to go” (Richardson, 2020, p. 79). However, the same opportunity was not afforded to Korryn Gaines (Richardson, 2020, p. 79).

As previously mentioned, Gaines’s livestream was turned off after the Baltimore County police requested Facebook deactivate her accounts (Richardson, 2020, p. 79). Richardson (2020) notes that Gaines’s case is an example of not having the opportunity to bear witness: “Gaines was unable to bear witness to her own death. The social medium that would have empowered her instead silenced her” (p. 79). Additionally, Safiya Umoja Noble, a technology researcher, has written on how racism is hardwired into the internet, noting that racism is built into computer codes and AI (Artificial Intelligence) (Richardson, 2020, p. 80). Similar to journalism, social

media has also taken on the role of gatekeeper to information, determining what videos can be posted (Richardson, 2020, p. 80). The next section will discuss how it is imperative for newspapers to report on missing and murdered African American women.

The Power of Newspapers Reporting on Missing and Murdered African American Women

Very often, African American women will go missing or are murdered, and although this is considered “newsworthy,” their stories often go unreported. Cheryl Neely (2015) has written and discussed how crucial the media is in increasing awareness about the African American women who have tragically lost their lives. Neely notes that when victims of horrendous crimes have their stories reported in the media, the public can become more aware of the crimes, and the police department can become motivated to tirelessly work to find the perpetrators (p. 18). If newspapers provide personal details about the homicide victims alongside photos, readers empathize with the circumstances and the loved ones affected, and the newspaper coverage can also affect the outcome of a trial (Neely, 2015, p. 18).

Neely (2015) concludes her chapter by noting the importance of media covering the stories of missing and murdered African American women (Neely, 2015, p. 14). Her research found the chances of African American women getting news coverage increases if the family knows a journalist from a national news show, and provides the example of journalist Star Jones, who assisted with getting other news stations to report on the disappearance of a friend (Neely, 2015, p. 55).

While up to this point this thesis has mostly discussed state-sanctioned violence and mistreatment, it is also important to discuss the institution-sanctioned violence enacted on African American women, including disregard for well-being and police brutality committed by campus officers on college campuses. Previous sections have discussed how police officers have

violently mistreated African American women, but the following example showcases the harm placed upon African American women when campus police fail to take threats seriously (Patton & Njoku, 2018, p. 1168).

Patton and Njoku (2018) detailed the case of a 2014 attack on a Black woman assistant professor, Ursela Ore, who was violently forced onto the ground by a campus police officer at Arizona State University (p. 1171). The university failed to support Ore and instead resorted to punishing her; her summer course for the year was canceled, and the reason given was for her arrest (Patton & Njoku, 2018, p. 1171). As a result of the incident, Ore believes it caused a toxic work environment consisting of stress and fear for her job security (Patton & Njoku, 2018, p. 1171). Ore's case has also been studied in terms of how the media framed her incident by Fridkin et al. (2017), as discussed in the introduction (p. 3402). Fridkin et al. found that audiences are influenced by the frames of police brutality and law and order (p. 3410). The next section will discuss how journalists should report African American women victims of police brutality.

Reimagining How Black Women Victims of Police Brutality Should be Covered in the Media

Andrea Ritchie, who has written about police violence against African American women, was interviewed by the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 2017 to discuss how the media should report on these incidents. Ritchie notes an increase in the media coverage of African American women who were victims of police brutality and credits this increase to more African American women diversifying newsrooms and advocating to have these stories published (Emmanuel, 2017, p. 3). In her interview, she also explains that she noticed white women also published stories about police brutality's effect on Black women, and that women journalists are often the ones covering these stories because they can relate to the topic due to personal experiences with

law enforcement (Emmanuel, 2017, p. 3). Ritchie additionally suggests that journalists follow the #SayHerName campaign and review or attend civilian complaint review board meetings, since often at the meetings, women share their encounters with police officers (Emmanuel, 2017, p. 3).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the differences and similarities in the media coverage of the police killing of a woman in Baltimore, Korryn Gaines, as compared to a man, Freddie Gray. The sections of this chapter discussed Korryn Gaines's story, the historical background of the media coverage of police brutality cases involving African American women, and notable differences between Gaines' media coverage and that of Freddie Gray. The chapter also highlighted the role of social media in highlighting these stories through the #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName. Over the years, there has been an increase in police brutality cases involving African American women. However, many of the cases rarely receive any mainstream media coverage and instead receive attention through social media. For journalists to report on the cases of police brutality involving African American women, as the previous chapter mentioned, they must start on social media to find these stories and understand gender discrimination and bias. Journalists and news organizations must ensure equal media coverage is allocated to the African American men and women killed by police officers without using stereotypes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis seeks to deeply understand how the mainstream media compared to the Black Press reports on the protests spurred by the police killings of African Americans, specifically Freddie Gray. Historically, the Black Press has sought to report on the events directly affecting their communities, as eloquently stated by John Russwurm and Samuel Eli Cornish, founders of the *Freedom's Journal*: “We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us” (Burrowes, 2011, p. 131). Journalists must ensure news coverage about African American men and women is equal and the terms used to describe the protests are an accurate depiction for the news consumers. As a result of journalists accurately reporting and contextualizing the stories of African American men and women victims of police brutality in the 21st century, the public and, most importantly, the future archives will know the truth about the events leading up to the protests.

The thesis findings further expound upon the cited published research on the journalism and news coverage of Black Lives Matter protests. The theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and the black digital humanities informed the analysis of the newspaper articles and assisted in understanding the racism rooted within mainstream newspapers. As the findings show, the language used to describe the protests and protesters, such as “riots” and “thugs,” did not differ dramatically in comparison to Black newspapers due to the use of newswires (see the Introduction, p. 17). Also, a significant difference found by this research in the coverage between the Black Press and the mainstream newspapers is the emphasis on how the protests impacted local community members (see the Introduction, p. 12). However, a possible correlation to the mainstream media’s lack of interviews with community members is African Americans disseminating their views themselves on social media platforms and avoiding the gatekeepers of

traditional media (Freelon et al., 2018, p. 1006). In the media's coverage of the Freddie Gray protests and the Korryn Gaines protests, the four newspapers analyzed did not cover any protests in Gaines's honor. This finding aligns with the research of Kimberlé Crenshaw (2015) on the lack of media coverage of the African American women victims of police brutality (p. 1). For comprehensive media coverage, journalists and news organizations must work to include African American women's narratives. There have been numerous African Americans who have tragically lost their lives to police brutality and their stories deserve to be shared with people across the country and the world. African Americans need to be portrayed in the media, and their humanity displayed respectfully, so that readers become knowledgeable about the purpose driving people to protest for Black victims of police brutality.

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Biographical Narrative

Tyriana Evans was born and raised in Prince George's County, MD. She is a graduate student at Syracuse University in the African American Studies Department. Tyriana earned a B.A. in Journalism and Mass Communication from The George Washington University in May 2019. Tyriana's research interests include journalism and media studies and African American studies. Tyriana plans to work in the broadcast journalism industry.