African American celebrity dissent and a tale of two public spheres: a critical and comparative analysis of the mainstream and black press, 1949-2005

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated with a full and grateful heart to my mother Jeanie Shipley and in memory of Squire John Jackson Jr., Melissa Garduno, and Ronald E. McNair.

Table of Contents

List of Tables……..iv

List of Figures…… ……v-vi

Introduction…….....1

Chapter 1: Paul Robeson at Peekskill, 1949……...……28

Chapter 2: Eartha Kitt, the White House, and Vietnam, 1968…….…66

Chapter 3: Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the Olympics, 1968…….97

Chapter 4: Sister Souljah and the Future President, 1992……..……..…..…137

Chapter 5: Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf and the Star Spangled Banner, 1996……....…183

Chapter 6: Kanye West and Hurricane Katrina, 2005……...…..234

Conclusion…….……..…….270

Bibliography….……..…….……284

Tables

Table 1: Primary Frames by Case and Press…….……..…….273

Figures

Figure 1: (Paul Robeson) Frequency of stories by black press source…….....33

Figure 2: (Paul Robeson) Frequency of stories by mainstream source…….…..34

Figure 3: (Paul Robeson) Number of stories compared to totals by type and press……....35

Figure 4: (Paul Robeson) Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press……36

Figure 5: (Paul Robeson) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press.....37

Figure 6: (Paul Robeson) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press….51

Figure 7: (Eartha Kitt) Frequency of stories by black press source……...….….69

Figure 8: (Eartha Kitt) Frequency of stories by mainstream source……70

Figure 9: (Eartha Kitt) Number of stories compared to totals by type and press…….71

Figure 10: (Eartha Kitt) Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press……..….…72

Figure 11: (Eartha Kitt) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press…….…….73

Figure 12: (Eartha Kitt) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press…....83

Figure 13: (Smith and Carlos) Frequency of stories by black press source…….102

Figure 14: (Smith and Carlos) Frequency of stories by mainstream source……..…..103

Figure 15: (Smith and Carlos) Number of stories compared to totals by type and press….....104

Figure 16: (Smith and Carlos) Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press…….105

Figure 17: (Smith and Carlos) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press……..……106

Figure 18: (Smith and Carlos) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press……122

Figure 19: (Sister Souljah) Frequency of stories by black press source……..144

Figure 20: (Sister Souljah) Frequency of stories by mainstream source…….…….145

Figure 21: (Sister Souljah) Number of stories compared to totals by type and press……...146

Figure 22: (Sister Souljah) Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press……....147

Figure 23: (Sister Souljah) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press……..…….148

Figure 24: (Sister Souljah) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press……...166

Figure 25: (Abdul-Rauf) Frequency of stories by black press source……..….189

Figure 26: (Abdul-Rauf) Frequency of stories by mainstream source……..190

Figure 27: (Abdul-Rauf) Number of stories compared to totals by type and press. ….....191

Figure 28: (Abdul-Rauf) Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press……..…..191

Figure 29: (Abdul-Rauf) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press……...…….…192

Figure 30: (Abdul-Rauf) Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press….217

Figure 31: (West) Frequency of stories by black press source……236

Figure 32: (West) Frequency of stories by mainstream source…….…….….238

Figure 33: (West) Number of stories compared to totals by type and press……...…239

Figure 34: (West) Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press……240

Introduction

This dissertation examines news media coverage, from dominant and African American print media, of black athletes and entertainers who inserted themselves into public debates about race and nation through explicit criticisms of the status quo at various points in U.S. history. While the actions of my subjects initiated significant public controversy and debate, attention to the ways in which media makers understood and constructed the role of African American celebrities in discourses of race and nation is a largely undocumented topic. This research is important because it contributes to understanding journalistic norms for covering intersecting issues of controversy and celebrity while endeavoring to complicate and advance our understanding of how mass media construct political and social dissent by raced figures for the public.

My primary theoretical frameworks for this project are public sphere theory and framing theory. I also rely on scholarship in the areas of critical race theory and celebrity. I draw on scholarship that identifies news media in a modern society as a central public location (or sphere) in which important topics are debated and discussed in order to support democratic decision-making. At the same time, I utilize critical scholarship that points to the idealized nature of the public sphere noting that media makers in the United States have often excluded the perspectives of certain groups from mainstream news. In turn, this has necessitated the establishment of counterpublic spheres by marginalized groups. My research explores the black press as an example of such a counterpublic space; functioning both independently from and in response to normative discourses within the dominant public sphere.

At the same time, framing scholarship asserts that even 'objective' newsmakers make (often unconscious) subjective choices in their decisions to include or exclude certain interpretations of reported events via their use of particular discursive constructions. Specifically, because of the largely taken-for-granted white and upper-middle-class worldviews of most mainstream journalists, news discourses often reify problematic dominant ideologies about race and national belonging. News that targets African American audiences is similarly subject to framing; however, because of its differing history and social locations of its producers and consumers, black media may make use of alternative discourses to those common in mainstream news. This research will scrutinize the framing similarities and differences of coverage of my subjects' dissent between and within the mainstream and black press.

Critical race theory contributes to this discussion by interrogating the evolution of mainstream essentialist discourses of African American identity that reinforce oppression. The ways in which media have contributed to defining and redefining race as both ideology and social institution are particularly important to this project. Scholars have noted the manner in which black bodies have become sensationalized sites of ideological struggle over various identity-based issues in public discourse and the ways in which such struggles shift depending on the political and social climate of the nation. Given my focus on examining news coverage of black celebrities who presented challenges to the dominant discourse that, in part, defined their public personas, critical race theory contributes valuable perspective to mediated constructions of my subjects and to understanding the possibilities and limits of their role in larger discursive constructions of race and nation.

Along with critical race theory, celebrity scholarship further illuminates the role African American athletes and entertainers can play in shaping public discourses as well as the limitations placed upon them by media makers and larger American society. Scholars have documented the differential ways the American public perceives black celebrities compared to their white counterparts. African American celebrities who achieve crossover success are often constructed in public discourses as either exceptional within their racial group or as deviant according to common racist stereotypes. In either case, dominant public discourses around African American celebrities tend to reinforce the idea of the general deviance of the black community. However, it is also important to note that given their public location and crossover influence African American celebrities have unique access to mainstream debates around race and nation and thus possess a level of agency for influencing such debates rarely allowed or achieved by other African Americans.

Together, public sphere theory, framing, critical race and celebrity scholarship work together within this project to illuminate the conditions of news production regarding publicized, celebrity-centered, debates around race and nation. By locating my research at the intersections of this scholarship this project contributes to assessing the impact of African American celebrities in such debates and the impact various media makers have on constructing public understandings of both these figures and their topics of dissent.

My subjects include; Paul Robeson, Eartha Kitt, John Carlos and Tommie Smith, Sister Souljah, Mahmoud Abdul Rauf and Kanye West. While these individuals certainly are not the only African American celebrities to have engaged in public dissent, I chose

these particular subjects because of the explicitly racial and/or political stance each took at specific points in his/her career, and the non-traditional spaces and discourses these subjects chose to publicize their dissent. In addition this range of subjects allows for the examination of how gender as well as specific historical conditions and varied celebrity persona contribute to mediated constructions of black dissent.

A familiar case

Muhammad Ali (nee Cassius Clay) is, without a doubt, the most easily recalled case of non-traditional, black celebrity dissent. Before Cassius Clay beat Sonny Liston in the 1964 world heavyweight championship, media makers constructed him as a likeable, all-American kid (Remnick 1998). These representations insisted on constructing Clay's boisterous personality as harmless entertainment and framed the fighter as an underdog who was grateful and patriotic. Such paternalistic framing of Clay in dominant discourses allowed for the maintenance of dominant ideologies that contended that black Americans should be content with their place in society (Spivey 1985).

Importantly, the image of the likable Clay was bound by the boxer remaining largely silent and good-humored, especially on civil rights issues. However, when Clay after defeating Liston, insisted on speaking for himself rather than through white managers at the post-fight press conference acknowledged his membership in the Nation of Islam and announced his initial name change to Cassius X, the tone of media representation of the fighter changes almost immediately (Spivey 1985; Remnick 1998; Farred 2003). Journalists compared the so-called "Black Muslims" to the Ku Klux Klan and Hitler, suggesting that the organization was "a vanguard of a violent revolution against whites" and argued that Clay was un-American and ungrateful because of his

affiliation with this "racist sect" and was using boxing "as a weapon of wickedness" (Spivey 1985; Remnick 1998; Marqusee 1999). Often left out of media accounts of the press conference was Clay's detailed and conscientious attempt to provide the reporters present with a great deal of information about Islam and its importance all over the world including to many Americans (Farred 2003).

The intense and negative shift in media discourses about Ali following his public affiliation with the NOI demonstrates the tenuous position even the most celebrated African American celebrities must reckon with and the ways in which dominant constructions of these figures depended upon racist (and xenophobic) constructions. As long as Ali accepted his role as an entertaining but politically silent line tower his national belonging remained unquestioned, however his deviation from such dominant understandings of what it meant to be a "good" black American resulted in punishment.

Most relevant to the subject at hand is Ali's 1967 public refusal to participate in the Vietnam War despite being drafted, his political and religious justifications and his famous (and historically disputable[1]) proclamation that "No Viet Cong ever called me 'nigger'." Ali took the proper steps to file for conscientious objector status on the grounds that his religion, Islam, was a peaceful one that did not ally itself with war or the colonization of oppressed people of color (i.e. the Vietnamese). However, media makers were reluctant to acknowledge a link between the Vietnam conflict and American racism and simply constructed Ali as a draft dodger (Farred 2003). Ali's complete fall from public grace and subsequent expulsion from participation in the sport on which he depended for his livelihood was directly linked to media discourses that framed the boxer

[1] Some accounts contend that Ali's statement was "I ain't got no quarrel with the VietCong," while others report variations of both.

as foreign, dangerous and thus a national threat (Spivey 1985, Hauser 1991, Zang 2001, Marqusee 1999).

Even African-American publications like *Ebony* magazine published negative coverage of Ali, contending that his beliefs were "a deterrent to the civil rights fight." However, unlike the white press, the black press presented a balance of critiques of Ali with George Schulyer, Jackie Robinson and Leroi Jones publishing columns that contextualized Ali's membership in the NOI. They argued he had every right to his religious and political opinions and set a good example for other Blacks through his sincerity and commitment (Marqusee 1999). Importantly, Ali did receive sympathetic coverage by several members of the white press including Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times* who noted that Ali "refused to play the mild and politically uninvolved sports-hero," and Howard Cossell who was labeled a "white Muslim" by some of his colleagues for his apparent friendship with Ali (Farred 2003).

The negative and almost engulfing mainstream coverage of Ali discussed above is likely unfamiliar to a contemporary audience given the shifts in political consciousness that took place around race and the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and 1970s. As the war dragged on, white and black Americans became more frustrated, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy began to shift public opinion towards a more sympathetic perspective of Ali's stance (Farred 2003). In addition, many younger journalists who allied themselves with the social movements their older colleagues dismissed and denigrated began to print columns constructing Ali as a righteous figure (Spivey 1985). Eventually, the very mainstream publications that had demonized Ali

instead became critical of his treatment by the government and boxing establishment (Zang 2001).

Eventually media coverage of Ali turned to that familiar to many today; journalists constructed Ali as a man who had been ahead of his time, a heroic figure to be celebrated. Importantly, this re-embrace of Ali was couched within discourses that insisted on maintaining the superiority of dominant American values while often ignoring the oppressive realities of such values. Thus media makers discursively constructed Ali as "a symbol of America's capacity to embrace—even if only post-ipso facto—racial, religious, and ideological differences" while ignoring their own role in the social, political and economic sanctions that had been levied against him (Hauser 2001, Farred 2003). Rather than contextualizing Ali's original dissent within the experiences of the African American community or larger anti-colonial movements, such discourse constructed Ali as representative of the spirit of American independence and individualism (Zang 2001).

Scholars contend that the general tone of contemporary media coverage of Ali suffers from a historical amnesia that depoliticizes the boxer by ignoring the great amount of hatred and backlash that was levied against him and without sustained racial or social critique other than sanitized and passing accounts of the "tumultuous" 1960s and 1970s (Powell 2008, Baker 2003). That contemporary representation of Ali in public discourse falls short of identifying the ironies and failures of America's dominant values illustrates the role media play in constructing and maintaining discourses that reflect the dominant needs and values of American society.

I suggest here that Muhammad Ali can work as a cipher through which to understand the other subjects I investigate in this project. Ali's case reveals the impact and limits of African American celebrity dissent on public debates around race and nation, the tangible consequences of this dissent for the celebrity involved, and the ways such dissent is reinterpreted across time. While Ali's relationship with the media and the impact of this relationship on public discourses of race and nation has been frequently interrogated (e.g. Farred 2003; Marqusee 1999), I suggest that the question of how limited (or not) the power of a black celebrity is to transform media discourses at particular historical moments is best illustrated with the additional cases I examine here. The inclusion of these cases allows for a larger systematic critique of the role of mainstream and black journalists in constructing public understandings of race and nation by considering both male and female figures at different historical moments and within shifting cultural and political definitions of race, nation and celebrity.

Like Ali's embrace of Islam and criticism of the Vietnam war, my subjects' actions and words were deemed radical or controversial by many in mainstream culture—in part because of their content, in part because their location, and in part because of the particular identities of the celebrities involved. Each of these figures chose to challenge the existence of the mythic American ethos of equality in ways that fell outside of what was seen as "acceptable" black activism. Each, because of his or her high visibility in American popular culture, was able to bring media attention to a particular social or political perspective that was largely outside of those considered acceptable in the mainstream. Moreover, each levied their claims in locations which seen (although technically public) as illegitimate spaces for racial dissent.

I have intentionally not included subjects and moments of dissent here that fall into the clearly marked spaces and rituals of the traditionally understood Civil Rights Movement. While surely the subjects considered here contribute(d) in various degrees to the ongoing African American Freedom Struggle[2], they did so in subversive ways. Their celebrity brought them to unique spaces not considered acceptable places for protest: concert stages, White House dinners, Olympic podiums, presidential campaigns, sporting arenas, and televised fundraisers. Using these spaces, they brought unique attention to discourses that were not an accepted part of the dominantly understood civil rights tradition. Examining media coverage of subjects whose actions were seen as outside of that and/or more radical than traditionally celebrated black protest is important given that: 1) these subjects have had little scholarship focused on their contributions to public discourses of race and nation; and 2) such dissent was often deemed seditious and therefore forced to the margins of ongoing struggles for human rights.

This project includes case by case discussion of the particular historical moment in which each figure's moment of dissent took place in order to contribute a socio-historical understanding to the project. I briefly discuss the biographies of the celebrities examined in order to contribute additional context. Primarily however, this project examines how these figures, like Ali, presented challenges to discourses of race and nation and the ways media makers in the mainstream and black public spheres made sense of such challenges for their audiences. Additionally, I will address the question of

[2] From Ward (2001) who defines the African American Freedom Struggle as a post WWII on political, cultural and artistic movement of which the Civil Rights and Black Power movements were only a part of a larger move by African Americans to express resistance and publicize the validity of their identities and cultural forms in a variety of ways.

how these media makers made sense of black celebrity dissent given the particular institutional, social and political demands of the public spheres in which they functioned.

Ultimately, this project locates the stakes of the figures and controversies examined at the center of the contested practices of media discourse. The taken-for-granted rules and worldviews of mainstream and black media in covering social and political controversy involving raced figured is illuminated. The similarities and/or differences of these rules at different historical moments and concerning different subjects reveals larger trends in the construction and maintenance of racial discourse within two of America's most influential public spheres.

The research questions that guided this project are as follows;

> RQ1: What similarities and/or differences exist between mainstream and black news in framing black celebrity dissent? What do such similarities and/or differences tell us about the role multiple public spheres play in an identity-based hierarchical culture?
>
> RQ2: How has the framing of black celebrity dissent in both the mainstream and black news media changed (or not) over time and what do these changes (or lack thereof) reflect about the evolution of discourses of race in the public sphere(s)?
>
> RQ3: What role have black celebrities played in the construction of public discourses around protest, race, inequality and nation? What role has the relationship between black celebrities and the media who cover them played in the publicization of such discourse?

Literature Review

Public Sphere(s)

The concept of the public sphere is rooted in the work of Habermas (1989), who detailed the value of a public space in which citizens can come together as private persons, debate the activities of the state and act, in turn, in an advisory capacity to the state in democratic societies (Asen and Brouwer 2001). In a contemporary and

increasingly large society that disallows the practicality and possibility of in-person meeting and debate, forms of mass mediated information dispersal such as newspapers, magazines, and television news are understood as the nearest thing to this idea public sphere (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1992; Squires 2001). Like Habermas' public sphere, these information-based media assume an ideal in which access is granted to anyone willing to engage, debate is open and rational, and the topics of debate are those of general interest to the public but with the implicit knowledge that only certain segments of society will engage and make value judgments as to the importance of specific topics (Baker 1994).

Habermas' idealized public sphere has fallen subject to critics who recognize that he was writing about a moment in history in which the term "public" itself was subject to class, race and gender hierarchies. Therefore, the public sphere was never an egalitarian space but an elite one, accessible only to upper class, educated, white, property-owning men—a critique applicable in many ways to modern mainstream media. In turn, the assumption that issues debated in the public sphere reflect(ed) those of general interest and concern to the "public" is fatally flawed when we recognize that the public have always been highly diversified in "general interest," social understandings and access to public debates (Squires 2002; Asen and Brower 2001).

Given this, there is a need to recognize that a singular public sphere is not only overly idealistic but also simply infeasible given the variety of publics that actually exist[3]. Specifically, the concept of counterpublics has been established by critical scholars who recognize that there exist "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated

[3] Importantly, Habermas in turn has responded to such critiques by acknowledging the reality of multiple publics (Habermas in Calhoun 1992).

social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser 1992).

Counterpublics, then, foster the identity based publicization of oppositional discourses, the introduction of counternarratives into the wider public arena through alternative mediums and spaces, and/or the specific spaces that have fostered discourses that reflect non-dominant social understandings. Thus, just as the mainstream press has served in the formation of the dominant public sphere in America, the African American press, with its roots in providing counternarratives to racist discourse and counter-representations to racist stereotypes can be seen as an essential part of an African American counterpublic space (Baker 1994).

Mainstream & African American Journalism

I would like to clarify what I mean when referring to the "mainstream" press and "black" press in the context of this project. The mainstream press could be termed, perhaps more accurately, the dominant press in that it includes all mediums of news reportage based in dominant culture (Squires 2007). By dominant culture, I refer, in the United States, to white American culture, the norms of which have and continue to control the primary economic, political and logistic means of information creation and dispersal.

Like other central institutions in the United States, the field of journalism has a history of both intentional and unintentional exclusion of and disregard of people of non-European decent (Newkirk 2000). As a result, the acceptance and perpetuation of certain worldviews that ally themselves with whiteness have been the norm in the mainstream press. Additionally, mainstream journalists have understood their audiences to be much

like themselves, white, educated, and male and therefore these journalists have written with certain assumptions about who *is not* consuming the news (Stabile 2006).

On the other hand, the black press was founded as a response to both the professional and representational exclusion of the African American community in the mainstream press. Squires (2002) considers the black press a "subaltern counterpublic" that has functioned as a safe, separate space for African Americans to discuss their group identity interests without interference or oppression. The first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, was published in 1827 in New York City and stated, "Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations of things which concern us dearly. From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented" (quoted in Newkirk 2000).

The black press then is not only a place in which its founders and contributors sought to right the wrongs of racism in the mainstream press, but also one of the first regularly published ventures into media criticism. Newkirk (2000) notes that as a result the black press was required to have a type of double-consciousness reporting not only on the activities of the black community, but also on those of the white community and its' press because of the profound effect of dominant institutions on black life.

Additionally, Jacobs (2000) notes that the early black press understood itself to be a supplement to information gathering, and that many black newspaper editors and journalists hoped that their existence would speed the physical and ideological integration of the mainstream press. Given this history, public sphere theory and framing root this project because of their direct relevance to understanding the social and political roles of both the mainstream and black press. At the same time, critical race theory calls upon us

to locate these roles in larger cultural constructions of race in America while celebrity scholarship contributes to formulating an understanding of the unique positions and contributions of black public figures.

Critical Race Theory

For the purposes of this dissertation, race is defined as a sociohistorical phenomenon that "signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (Omi & Winant 2000). Importantly then, race is understood according to a constructivist approach, which identifies it as an ideology for which conceptualization has been primarily in the hands of dominant groups in our society and is highly dependent on political, social and economic contexts (Marshall 1993; West 2002).

Importantly, ideologies have social consequences and thus race has played a real and important role in creating and maintaining social structures. Specifically, the construction of binaries has served to justify unequal power relations in our society by constructing that which is considered outside of the dominant norm to be foreign and pathological. This norm has been socially constructed as white, male, heterosexual and upper-middle class according to dominant Eurocentric ideals (Collins 2006).

Given this, media function as a particularly important social structure in the cultural representation of race while being simultaneously subject to these representations and the social and political structures they reinforce. Thus, race should be understood to exist both structurally and ideologically and news media understood to play a significant role in constructing, interpreting, reorganizing, and explaining the linkages between racial ideologies and social structures in our society. Importantly, social institutions like

media must be considered in their historical contexts given the influence of shifting constructions of race on their practices and organization. Thus, a project such as this that investigates discursive practices around race must also locate such practices in their structural and historical context (Omi & Winant 2000).

Clearly important to this project then are the ways manifestations of racism and racial inequality have evolved in American culture over time. Racial domination characterized by slavery and genocide morphed after the post-WWII "racial break" which included a drastic shift in racial politics in America in response to global shifts in economics and politics and domestic social protest (Winant 2004).

Following this sprung the modern embrace of ideologies like multiculturalism and colorblindness that claim to embrace equality but often do little at the institutional level to enforce it (Woodard 1999). This "modern" or "enlightened" racism tends to ignore the deep and lasting legacy of race while holding up the achievements of a few African Americans up as evidence that racial problems have been solved. Implied in such discourse is that the continued marginal position of African Americans is a result of cultural failure and deviance, thus justifying continued racial hierarchy while upholding racist stereotypes about black culture (Lipsitz 1998; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Hartmann 2006).

For example, Hoberman (1997) contends that media's modern insistence on celebrating the talents of African American athletes and entertainers, but not black contributions to other sectors of society, feeds essentialist stereotypes and maintains the basic assumptions of white racial domination. These stereotypes depend on racial ideologies that credit black success in athletics and entertainment to historical articulations of blacks as "essentially physical and thus primitive people" naturally

opposed to civility, order, and intellect. Hoberman thus contends that such modern media discourses "probably do more than anything else in our public life to encourage the idea that blacks and whites" are inherent opposites (p.xxiii).

Importantly, the media discourses examined in this project range from just post-WWII—the point at which Winant (2004) places the beginning of a cultural shift from racial domination to racial hegemony—through the culmination of this shift in the 1960s, and into the "enlightened" modern era. Given the media's role in representing race to the American public and given the problems of political agency and action that are inherently intertwined with definitions of race, these historical shifts in constructing race both ideologically and socially are likely to be reflected in the news coverage examined here.

This work recognizes that the intersectionality between race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship manifests itself in media representations and must be carefully observed and considered if an adequate conception of the ways in which race functions and has functioned in popular culture are to be understood (Collins 2000). For example, Jackson (2006) argues that because of media's location as a dominant social institution that contributes to definitions of nationhood it has the potential to validate or challenge the citizenship of African Americans who present public challenges to normative racial ideologies. Given this, at various points in my project, discussion of media frames regarding class, gender, sexuality and citizenship arise because of the various identities of the subjects examined.

Framing

Given that media are primarily ideological cites that work towards certain ideologies through representation, mainstream media function as hegemonic sites for the

creation and maintenance of dominant forms of knowledge, like those around race, that have been defined by the powerful (Hall, 1980). Specifically, mainstream mass media most often perpetuate cultural frames which serve to make existing structures of power and oppression in society seem natural (Hall 1997; Entman and Rojecki 2001; Squires 2002). In turn, these dominant frames can maintain unjust and harmful understandings of specific races and classes of people and their political interests by influencing the way individuals interpret marginalized groups and perspectives (Gorham 1999). Such frames seem to be truth because challenges to them are difficult to levy due to unequal distributions of knowledge and power both in the newsroom and society at large (Hall 1997).

Robert Entman (1993) defines framing as the process in which newsmakers "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation of an issue or event" (p.52). In other words, framing can be thought of as the embedding by journalists of certain discursive, visual and thematic devices and the disregard of other such devices (either consciously or unconsciously) within a given news story (Kinder & Sanders 1990; Scheufele 1999).

Subsequently, framing effects occur when a communicators' "emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations when describing an issue or event causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions" (Druckman 2001, p.1042). Reese (2007) argues that frames are embedded in a "symbolic environment" that is not only larger than individual level cognitions but also than media

institutions--our culture. Frames reflect larger ideologies and value judgments within our culture and in turn can become ideology themselves by binding political debate so strongly to certain assumptions that they become a normalized part of the way our society understands its place in the world.

Various scholars have presented evidence of mainstream media frames which tend to blame the African Americans victims of poverty and disaster for their own misfortunes despite inequality in institutional structures while simultaneously framing African Americans as criminal and socially parasitic in news coverage of various policy issues (Dixon 2000; Iyengar 1990; Entman 1995; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley 1997, 1999). Such frames have been found to influence the racial resentments of whites and their support of various policy and minority-framed issues (Mendelberg 2001; Kinder & Sanders 1996; Gamson & Modigliani 1987).

While my dissertation focuses on examining the material act of framing, which results in particular mediated interpretations of black celebrity dissent, it is important to keep in mind the possible effects that frames within both the mainstream and black press can have on individual and cultural understandings of this dissent[4]. Issues deeply rooted in questions of social power, such as those involving race, have more strongly established cultural frames given the symbolic power with which such issues have been historically and culturally coded (Hall 1980; Entman & Rojecki 2001). Thus, it is important to recognize the overlapping role that symbols and stereotypes play in the construction of

[4] Importantly, by all accounts most black readers of the black press use(d) it as a supplement to the mainstream press, therefore gaining exposure to the frames of both, whereas white readers of the mainstream press have not usually engaged the black press (Jacobs 2000).

media frames and in turn the construction of social reality (Nelson & Oxley 1999; Gitlin 1980).

Spectacle & Symbol

Specifically, Jackson (2006) contends that the black body, as represented by popular culture, is the primary cite of racialized representation in America. Jackson, using a similar concept to that of framing, interrogates media's role in the process of "scripting" whereby ideological discourses that primarily benefit whiteness are played out on the objectified bodies of African Americans. Jackson traces the mass media's inscription of the black body with specific racialized political and cultural meanings to histories of racism that, in a contemporary context, implicitly resurrect and reinforce the white supremacist assumptions behind this history. Black bodies in media therefore have become the contested sites of identity politics that seek to define the Other against normative Whiteness.

Additionally, the manner in which media present black lives as natural spectacle tends to pathologize blackness in the mainstream public sphere. Jackson (2006) finds this construction of black bodies as spectacle to be disturbingly similar to the constructions that historically allowed for the naturalization of the slave auction and lynching as communal activities of racial social control. Spectacle, similar to the "normative gaze," has continued to link via discourse and symbolism a constructed ideology—race—to biology, making the unequal treatment of black bodies appear natural (Hall 2000).

Along these lines, Jackson (2006) equates the social consequences that befall publically scripted black bodies who dare to challenge dominant scripts to lynching—black public figures who act outside prescribed definitions of "normal behavior" which,

of course, is defined hegemonically according to racial power relations which assume the normative gaze, are "demonized and made spectacular" via discursive frames. Further, discourse that seeks to discipline black figures commonly pits African American public figures who are constructed as deviant against other black public figures who are constructed as modeling acceptable social and cultural behavior—a modern discourse disturbingly familiar to the slave era Coon and Tom (Hoberman 1997).

This demonization and disciplining is clear in the above discussion of mediated discourse of Muhammad Ali, and, like Ali the subjects investigated in this project are in danger of similar consequences. Despite assumptions that the celebrity and economic status of such figures might somehow shield them from racist scripts, Knight, Giuliano, Sanchez and Ross (2001) have demonstrated that while celebrity status functions as an advantage for whites facing public scrutiny, for African Americans celebrity status is often a liability. These scholars suggest that the embedded racial resentments of our society are often heaped upon African American public figures exactly because of their high profile status.

Other scholars have also found that media are a powerful force for defining parameters of legitimate discourse and debate over alternative beliefs, values, and worldviews—a force which tends to favor consensus with the status quo. In an investigation of media coverage of protest events, Smith, McCarthy, McPhail and Augustyn (2001) found that even when protests that present challenges to the status quo succeed in gaining media attention, the reporting of such protests can undermine social movement agendas because of the dominant understandings applied by journalists in their descriptions.

Thus, public challenges to the American Dream are often framed as the ramblings of the misguided and/or sinister within dominant media discourse. In particular, when claims of racism and racial inequality are made against elites or elite institutions these claims are often quickly discredited (Druckman 2001). At the same time, dominant discourses have made racial hierarchies in our society invisible further allowing accusations of racism to be deemed illegitimate (Mukherjee 2006; Bonilla-Silva 2001). By promoting such dominant articulations of the social world and discrediting alternative articulations, the media not only shape shared understandings but effect individual level consciousness and action regarding the varying political ideologies and interpretations with which society is forced to contend (Jackson 2006; Sage 1998).

Therefore, media frames constructed via discourse must be critically deconstructed in order to understand how media texts signify issues of race and nation (Jackson 2006). According to this view, media interrogation that identifies the producers of media texts, the contexts of production, and the historical and contemporary political ideologies and motivations inherent in these texts contribute to resistive attempts to reframe and re-inscript black bodies according to evolving and progressive understandings of race and national culture.

The Possibility for Alternatives

While the above discussion details the large amount known about the culturally hegemonic potential of mainstream media frames, less scholarly work has examined the counter hegemonic potential of African American-targeted news. However, Jacobs (2000) has found evidence that black newspapers provide a more historicized and social impact-based critique of particular news items and events, often explicitly recalling

histories of racism and poverty and their continued effects on the black community in news analysis of racial conflicts. Given the differing historical contexts, resources and power dynamics between the mainstream and the black press, the presence of differing (and similar) frames can be understood as a result of each press' unique location as a sphere for a particular audience and the role producers of each press understand themselves to play in the publicization of narratives and counter-narratives (Squires 2007).

Accordingly, discursive frames within black-targeted media can be understood to represent both oppositional discourses that present counternarratives to those in the mainstream press, and intragroup debates about particular preferred social understandings that may or may not align themselves with dominant ideologies. Additionally, the black press, because of its marginalized position, has sometimes had to temper particular oppositional discourses in light of censorship and intimidation by dominant cultural institutions (Squires, 2002; Baker, 1994).

Similarly, despite the sometimes ominous tone of research on mainstream media, it too cannot only be seen as a location that constructs a singular framework for understanding a particular social issue or event. The dominant news value of "objectivity" (problematic in that it ignores the subjectivity of other news value judgments) is often the reason for attempted inclusion of various perspectives in mainstream discourses as is the modern embrace of multiculturalism (Gans 2003). Further, individual newsmakers possess different ideological standpoints (Hall 1981). For these reasons, it is important to note that despite the hegemonic nature of the mainstream media the publicization of alternative discourses is possible and does occur.

Celebrity & Public Debates

Specifically, the public visibility of black athletes and entertainers in both public spheres via their "newsworthiness" can provide opportunities for public articulations that challenge normative worldviews regarding race and nation (Sage 1998). The significance of coverage of such African American celebrities by the mainstream media is the possibility it opens up for the consideration and debate of alternative world views that seek to radically shift ideological and concrete power structures in American society (Jackson 2006).

Scholars of celebrity note that, like constructions of race, the public construction and understanding of celebrity figures reflects the particular conditions of the social order at specific moments in time. Given this, public discourse, and especially media as representatives of the normative discourses in the public sphere, works as tribunals for celebrities in which their value in society is constantly debated, reestablished and/or denied (Ogden & Rosen 2008). Thus, the celebrity status of African Americans is particularly tenuous given the ways in which it overlaps with racialized discourses that apply simplified notions of good v. bad, deserving v. undeserving, threatening v. docile, and so forth.

Additionally dominant gaze treats both celebrities and raced subjects as spectacle further complicating the position of black public figures. Because celebrity status is marked by instability and spectacle, the influence of celebrities on public debates is based on the attention they garner as subjects of public gaze not concrete institutional power (Meyer & Gamson 1995). I suggest this phenomenon is even more acute in the case of black celebrities who, by way of their race, are even further removed from access to

institutional power than their white counterparts. Despite these challenges, it is essential to recognize black celebrities as agential cultural producers who, given their public status, have the opportunity to introduce unique public discourses and foster dialogic relationships with newsmakers in both the mainstream and African American press.

The work of scholars like Hill (2008), Rhodes (2006) and Gray (2005) demonstrate that a sole focus on the power—albeit tenuous—of black celebrity dissent to influence and contribute to dominant discourses of race and nation is inadequate given what we know about the limits such discourse places on black cultural expression generally. Given the purpose of such dissent to advance the state of their particular community and draw attention to marginalized discourses and experiences it is equally important to acknowledge the ways in which black celebrities speak and are spoken to by discourses within the communities whose causes they champion.

Together, public sphere theory, critical race theory, framing and celebrity scholarship work simultaneously in the investigation of the frames presented by news media texts given journalist's understandings of the public(s) these texts serve and larger cultural constructions of celebrity and race at particular historical moments. In assuming certain identity-based expectations from their readership, newspaper producers also assume the appropriateness of certain frames for understanding the social world and in turn contribute to the reification or disintegration of such worldviews in larger culture.

Finally, this project is intended as a small but hopefully significant answer to the call by scholars like Collins (2000) for the integration of oppositional worldviews into the Eurocentric knowledges of academia. By examining the standpoints of black celebrities

and members of the black press on equal terrain to those of the mainstream press, I hope to contribute to non-dominant ways of understanding and studying public discourse.

Method

This project is critical and comparative, evaluating coverage from mainstream and African American news sources. This entails examinations of some of the most well-known and respected mainstream newspapers and news channels (e.g. the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, etc.) as well as the examination of African American-targeted news (e.g. *The New York Amsterdam News, Ebony,* etc.). Data was collected from physical, microfilm and online archives provided by the University of Minnesota library system, Proquest, Lexus Nexus and various source specific websites.

The data was rigorously analyzed via a two-step coding process that included a content analysis and an emergent discourse analysis. Content analysis is a quantitative process in which the contents or characteristics of a specific media are counted and compared in order to garner a better understanding of how meaning is constructed through language (Jensen, 2002). Thus, I first examined each article, column, editorial and letter to the editor in each case sentence-by-sentence for the word choices used to describe the celebrity in question and his/her dissenting action. The texts were then coded as positive, negative, or neutral based on their commonly understood implications within the English language and counted[5].

In the case of stories in which both positive and negative statements were made about the figure in question and/or his/her dissent, an equal number of each resulted in the story being coded as neutral while a predominance of one or the other resulted in the

[5] See appendix A for examples of positive, negative and neutral examples from each chapter.

story being coded in that either positive or negative. The goal of this content analysis was the discovery of with what frequency words and terms with explicitly understood cultural value attached to them were used by newsmakers to covey underlying assumptions and understandings about black celebrity dissent.

Following this line-by-line coding of each article, emergent discourse analysis was used to discover the ways journalists included or excluded certain ideas, descriptions and cultural understandings in order to generate the larger narrative or storyline of each story. Discourse analysis, as a qualitative process, insists on interrogating media text not simply for the numerical presence or absence of certain characteristics but for the larger ideological frameworks implicated. During this process, each article was examined holistically for the overall frame presented to readers to make sense of the celebrity and dissent in question. Emergent coding was ideal for this research because it allowed me to approach the texts in question without pre-established expectations that might otherwise limit the story the data is able to tell.[6]

Each text was examined on three dimensions; 1) the characterizations of the particular celebrity in question, 2) the frames applied to the act of the protest/dissent itself, and 3) the overall plot frame that encompasses, connects and makes relevant the characterizations of these individuals and their actions. Together, frames were determined by discursive examination of the words, referents, tone, narrative connections to other people and events, reported meaning of figures and their dissent and the

[6] Because each of my subjects is so different and because of the historical specificities in both politics and media culture it was important to this project that I approached my data with an open mind that would allow for unanticipated trends.

inclusion and/or exclusion of certain casual interpretations and historical, social, and political contexts.

Together content analysis and discourse analysis allowed for in-depth investigation of the way the news texts examined here reflected the social, cultural, and political norms of their producers and the larger society they claim to reflect. According to Schroder (2002), "an important, if implicit ambition of many discourse and content studies has been to infer from the properties of media texts to…their relative contribution to social and cultural processes at large, with specific reference to public opinion or the reproduction of ideology" (p. 116). Given what previous literature has revealed as to the individual and social impact of media frames about race and my interest in examining how news texts perpetuate certain ideological discourses and counter- discourses around African American celebrities and racial dissent in the public sphere, these methods were ideal.

Given that texts cannot be removed from the social, cultural and political conditions in which they are created, my chosen methods enabled a thorough linkage to my theoretical approach through what Hall (1996) calls a "conjunctural analysis." Specifically, by grounding the racial discourse of both the black and mainstream public spheres in their material conditions—the political and ideological structures of media, and by recognizing and exploring differences in this discourse from a historically specific and comparative perspective, this project illuminates important trends in the framing and reproduction of racial ideology to and by various publics.

Chapter 1: Paul Robeson at Peekskill, 1949

Paul Robeson, the son of an escaped slave, was arguably the first African American to obtain cross-over celebrity status and, according to Spohrer (2007), the first modern celebrity of any race in the United States. The Rutgers University football star turned stage and screen actor was known and loved among Americans for his deep and distinctive baritone and his adeptness with Shakespeare and Negro spirituals alike. Robeson believed early on in his career that his inclusion in traditionally white public arenas was a step toward the larger social and political integration of African Americans. Thus the star, while supportive of popular civil rights initiatives like anti-lynching laws, was largely silent on controversial issues in his early career.

As a result, mainstream discourses around Robeson the man constructed him much like the stereotypical personas he performed in his early acting career—as a non-threatening, happy and musically inclined "darkie." At the same time, because of his popularity with white audiences many in the black community saw Robeson as a torch bearer whose integrationist perspective represented the successful path toward racial progress (Sphorer 2007). Further, Godonoo (2008) notes that Robeson's celebrity occurred at a historical moment in which entertainment was shifting from a participatory culture to a consumptive one, enabling the commodification of Robeson's blackness and thus rendering it non-threatening to whites.

However, as Robeson's popularity grew so did his agency within the entertainment world and his frustrations with the lack of concrete racial progress in America. With the influence of his friend (and famed social theorist) W.E.B. DuBois among others, Robeson took a particular interest in African liberation and labor

movements (Marable 1998). Further, Robeson recognized that his celebrity allowed him access to audiences that the African American intellectuals he admired could not reach (Godonoo 2008).

When Robeson began to speak publically on these issues, consciously representing himself in ways that were not consistent with dominant "safe" black stereotypes, and as his personal life (including affairs with white women) became public, dominant public opinion of the baritone began to shift. Once Robeson clearly articulated his politics—including stanch anti-racist and pro-labor perspectives and sympathies with the Soviet Union—Robeson was constructed as a threat and an outsider. However, because of Robeson's celebrity his newsworthiness went unquestioned even as public understandings of the star became more and more negative. Thus he was able to introduce alternative discourse into both the mainstream and black public spheres (Spohrer 2007).

On August 27th, 1949, Robeson, now labeled a "Communist sympathizer" and under the constant surveillance (and harassment) of the CIA, was scheduled to give a concert in Peekskill, New York. Robeson had been invited by labor leaders and the proceeds of the concert were to benefit the Harlem chapter of the Civil Rights Congress. While Robeson had performed in the area three times in previous years with no difficulty, 1949 was different. The Cold War was escalating, anti-Communist sentiment was running high, and McCarthyism was stifling freedom of expression by persecuting

Communists, socialists and virtually anyone known to support a liberal agenda [7](Duberman 1988; Dorinson & Pencak 2002).

In this context, the local veterans associations in the Peekskill area, riled-up by the editorializing of the local *Peekskill Evening Star*, organized a protest outside the entrance to the grounds where the Robeson concert was to be held (Walwik 2002). While the veterans publicized the protest as one that would be a peaceful attempt to communicate community distaste for a "Communist-sympathizer," there were more nefarious anti-black, anti-Jewish, and anti-labor undertones to the subsequent actions of the protesters. Before Robeson could arrive to perform the waiting concertgoers were assaulted with loud, often racist jeering and a cross set a blaze on a nearby hill. Without police intervention, concert goers were assaulted for two hours by the concert's protestors who set fire to concert goers' belongings and threw rocks at them as they tried to exit the scene (Fast 2002).

Eventually police arrived and the rioters disbursed. The concert organizers quickly rescheduled the show for a week later and enlisted local white labor leaders and several black World War II veterans as security for Robeson and the concert grounds. Because of the previous violence, the second Robeson concert became a symbolic protest to many of those who were fans of Robeson and/or sympathetic to his politics, including Jewish vacationers in Peekskill, union members, and African Americans who drove in from New York City. While those on the Left saw the second concert as a move against violence and infringements on freedom of speech and assembly, Peekskill's conservative

[7] It is worth noting that during the 1930s thousands of Americans black and white joined the Communist Party because of what they believed to be its commitment to racial equality and labor rights (Dorinson & Pencak 2002).

residents and their supporters were determined to protest the "Russia-loving Negro" and his fans who they constructed as anti-American (Walwik 2002).

The second concert, protected by a line of arm-in-arm trade-unionists, went on as planned. However when concert goers tried to leave the grounds, their cars were again assaulted by hurling rocks which broke through car windows hitting passengers. The second riotous assault lasted five hours and resulted in over a hundred physical injuries and extensive property damage. Many of the pro-Robeson eyewitnesses contended that this time, rather than looking on in apathy, police joined in the assault. Conversely, anti-Robeson protesters publically blame the violence on concertgoers' political affiliations and their supposed desire to stir up trouble (Fast 2002).

This chapter examines news coverage of the Peekskill riots in the *New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Time* and *Newsweek* in the mainstream press and the *New York Amsterdam News, Chicago Defender, Los Angeles Sentinel, Negro Digest* and *Ebony* in the African American press. For each of these sources data was collected via Proquest Historical Databases online, microfilm holdings from the University of Minnesota and other public universities, and the online archives of several specific sources. The data in this analysis was published between August 27, 1949, the date of the first riot, and October 13, 1949—a two month period.

The discourse used by these papers is important to examine because covering Peekskill can be understood as an early moment in which journalists had to engage in explicit reporting of celebrity-centered political dissent and its entanglement with issues of race and nation. Drawing on previously reviewed literature, this investigation seeks to understand how the Peekskill riots were conceptualized by newsmakers, and how these

conceptualizations reflect the social understandings, needs and histories of the black and white press and members of the publics they sought to inform.

Data Overview:

In the black press, the *Chicago Defender* presented the most stories covering the Peekskill riots (n=15), followed closely by the *Amsterdam News* (n=13). The *Los Angeles Sentinel* ran only four stories that addressed the riots. *Ebony* did not publish any mention of Robeson or the riots while *Negro Digest* alluded to Robeson's politics in passing twice without explicitly evoking the riots. For example, in the September 1949 issue of *Negro Digest*, which would have hit newsstands before the first riot, the editors accurately predicted that "Paul Robeson will be the victim if taboos in several cities this Fall as a result of his Negroes-won't fight-Russia speech…"[8]

The absence of coverage of Peekskill in *Ebony* is unsurprising given founding editor John H. Johnson's "ironclad" rule that had gone into effect in 1946 that no "race riots" would be covered by the magazine because of complaints he had received from white advertisers that such coverage portrayed whites negatively (Stange 2001).

[8] The Associated Press had reported in April of 1949 that Robeson while attending the Congress of World Partisans for Peace in Paris had stated "it is unthinkable that American Negroes would go to war on behalf of those who oppressed us for generations against a country [the Soviet Union] which in one generation has raised our people to the full dignity of mankind." There has been some confusion as to if this was actually what Robeson says as many of the original reports on the speech in international papers quoted him as saying he spoke "on behalf of all American workers," who "shall not make war on the Soviet Union." Robeson never publically disavowed either version of the comment (Duberman 1988).

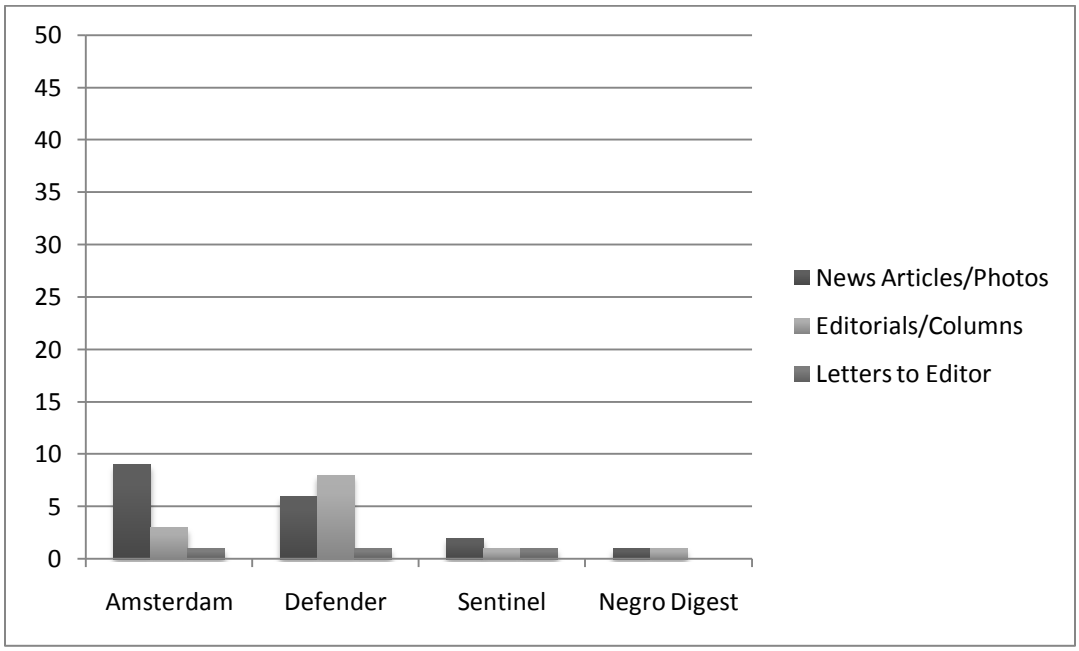

Figure 1: Frequency of stories by black press source.

In the mainstream press, the *New York Times* published the overwhelming majority of stories on the events at Peekskill (n=49) with the *Chicago Tribune* (n=21) and *Los Angeles Times* (n=26) printing less than half the stories as the New York based paper. The significant coverage in the *New York Times* is unsurprising given its close proximity to the geographic location of the riots as well as familiarity with the various New York-based organizations involved. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* published three articles addressing the riots.

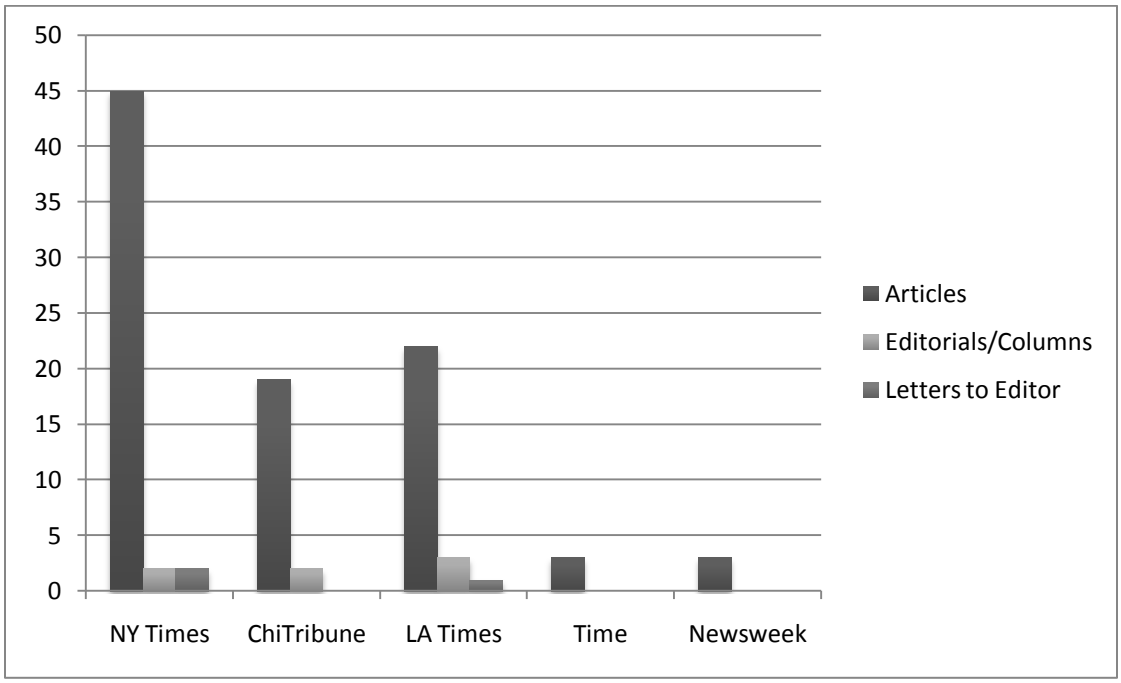

Figure 2: Frequency of stories by mainstream source.

In total, the black press published thirty-four (N=34) stories that addressed Robeson and the Peekskill riots with nearly forty-four-percent of those being opinion-based stories including editorials, columns and letters to the editor. The mainstream press published three times as many stories on the riots (N=102) as the black press, the majority of these, as previously mentioned published by the *New York Times*. Of the stories published by mainstream sources less than ten-percent were explicitly opinion-based (i.e. editorials, columns, and letters to the editor).

Thus while readers of the mainstream press received more coverage of the riots, readers of the black press were exposed to significantly more explicit editorial analysis of the events at Peekskill. This is not to say that significant editorializing did not occur in

the mainstream press, as will be discussed below, but that content labeled as opinion was a small percent of mainstream coverage.[9]

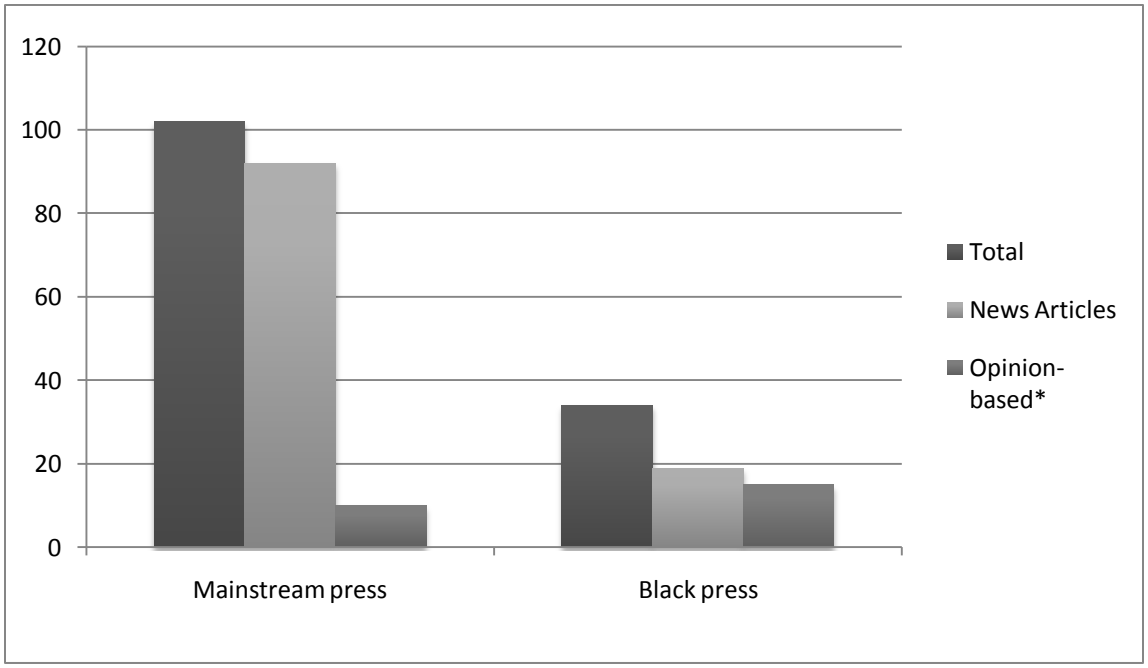

Figure 3: Number of stories compared to totals by type and press. (*Opinion-based includes editorials, columns and letters to the editor.)

The data above was analyzed via the two-step coding process described in the introduction of this project. The results of both the content and discourse analysis are discussed in detail below.

Although first-level coding found that both the mainstream and black press predominantly presented explicitly neutral characterizations of Robeson and his relationship to the Peekskill riots, distinct frames for making sense of Robeson and the riots were presented by each press. Below I discuss the frequency of positive, negative and neutral descriptors applied to Robeson by each source and how they fit into the overall frames in the mainstream and black presses. I will also discuss the similarities and

[9] It is important to note that by all accounts most black readers of the black press use(d) it as a supplement to the mainstream press therefore gaining exposure to the coverage of both whereas white readers of the mainstream press have not usually engaged the black press (Jacobs 2000).

differences that existed within and across press type and the implications of these findings.

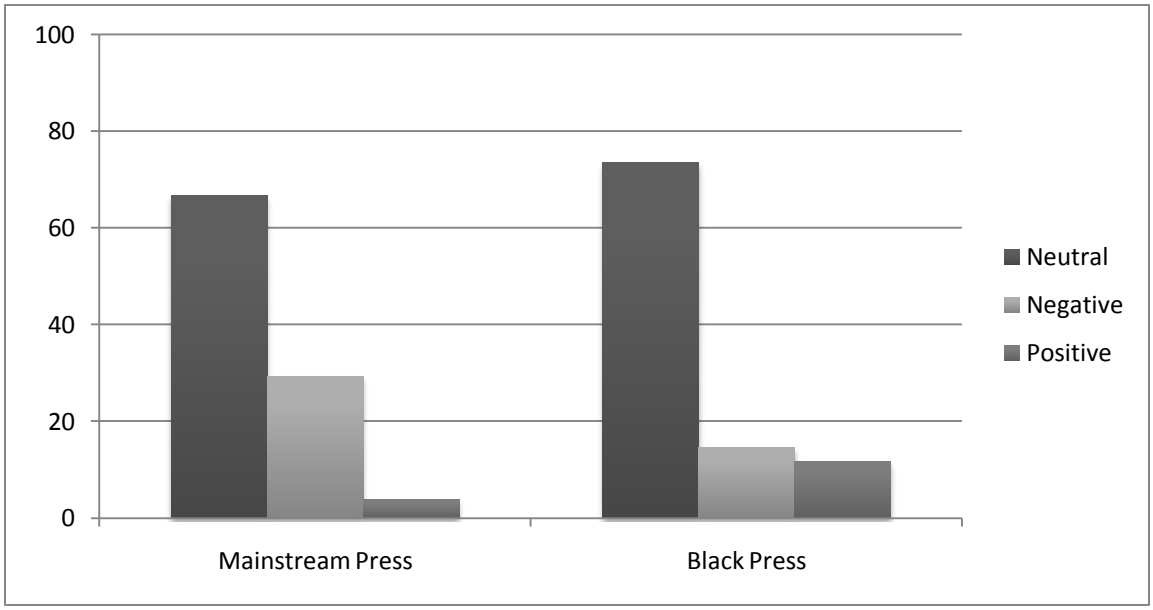

Figure 4: Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press.

Mainstream Findings:

Trends in Positive & Negative Coverage

The majority of negative mainstream characterizations of Robeson and his Peekskill concerts characterized the singer as "pro-communist," a "communist sympathizer" or as "pro-Soviet," with the concerts being described as "pro-Communist meeting(s)" being held to intentionally "stir up trouble." Overall thirty-percent of mainstream press coverage explicitly labeled Robeson and his intentions with negative descriptors. Only four-percent of coverage applied positive descriptors to Robeson with the majority of this positive coverage being published by the *New York Times* and none being published by the *Chicago Tribune* or either mainstream newsmagazine.

While the overall majority of explicit valuations of Robeson in the mainstream press were neutral (sixty-seven percent), it is interesting to note that of the sources

examined here only the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* printed primarily neutral coverage of the singer. On the other hand, the other sources, while publishing less content on the Peekskill riots generally, presented predominantly negative coverage of the singer. Figure 5 reveals the percent of explicit valuations of Robeson within total coverage presented by mainstream sources:

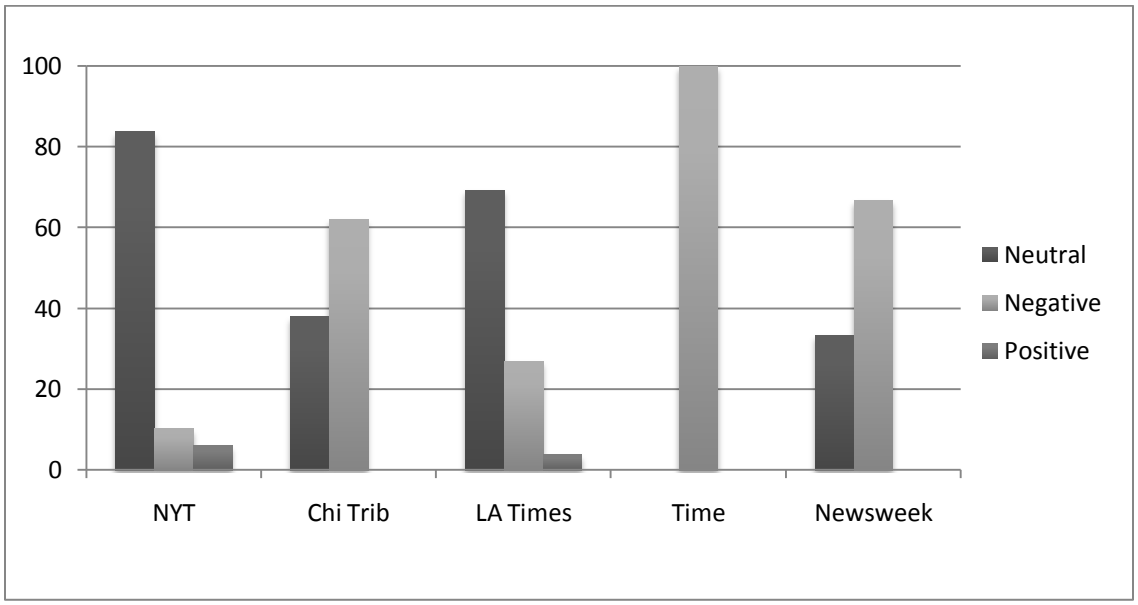

Figure 5: Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press.

Of the mainstream newspapers examined here, the *Chicago Tribune* not only published the most negative coverage of Robeson but also explicitly raced him most often. While The *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* described Robeson as a "Negro" in less than one-percent of their total stories the *Chicago Tribune* used the descriptor in nearly every mention of Robeson in coverage of the riots at Peekskill. Notably the *New York Times* used "Mr." in nearly all of its coverage of the riots when referring to Robeson. Because this title of respect was applied uniformly in *New York Times* coverage it suggests that the paper's editors were engaged in a conscious effort to standardize the treatment of subjects, thus affording African American subjects with

similar titles to white subjects and presenting a more progressive, or at least equitable, discursive politics.

Despite these differences the mainstream press shared several characteristics in reporting on the riots. This includes a reliance on official sources, especially New York state police and government officials at all levels—resulting, perhaps unsurprisingly, in a lack of African American sources. The mainstream press also had a tendency to substitute the term "riot" with other terms in describing the violence that took place at Peekskill. For example the terms "incident," "battle," "flare-up," "melee," "fist-fight," and "fracas" were popular with mainstream press journalists. Such terms minimize the violence that took place at Peekskill by suggesting it was either engaged in by equal parties or was not very serious. Perhaps most disturbingly some of these terms suggested that the riots were lighthearted and fun, for example the *Chicago Tribune* labeled it, "the song and slug fest."

Each mainstream paper also repeatedly printed an interview with Eleanor Roosevelt in which she stated "I disagree violently with Paul Robeson" but went on to say that she would be willing to attend one of his concerts if he did not use "his art for political propaganda."[10] The reoccurrence of this report is significant given its basic assumption that a black celebrity living in a country in which members of his ethnic group are not afforded equal rights should be apolitical and, that if such a celebrity chooses to dissent politically, such a choice furthers "propaganda." Certainly labeling the largely racial-identity based dissent of Robeson as necessarily "propaganda" undermines

[10] "Robeson's Talks—Not Songs—Annoy Eleanor," Los Angles Times, Sep. 1 1949. Accessed via ProQuest Historical Archives.

the validity of any criticism he might levy and reveals the way in which dissent by black public figures is demonized.

Along with these discursive similarities, two primary frames for understanding the riots were presented by mainstream journalists; 1) the claim and/or suggestion that Robeson and/or members of his fan base intentionally planned the concerts for the sole purpose of instigating violence, and 2) that the riots represented an ideological battleground between the values associated with democracy and communism.

Mainstream Press Frame #1: Robeson and his fans as instigators

This frame, present in nearly thirty-percent of stories in the mainstream press, was presented commonly in two ways: 1) that communists (including Robeson and/or some of his fans) had intentionally instigated violence at Peekskill as part of a larger campaign to overthrow American values; and 2) that Robeson and/or his fans represented a real physical threat that required physical containment and defeat.

In language commonly used by the mainstream sources examined here, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that "Paul Robeson, controversial Negro singer provoked riots" with his "recent appearance in Peekskill, N.Y." Similarly all the mainstream sources examined here published a quote from New York Governor Thomas Dewey that "the entire incident was obviously provoked by Communist groups." District Attorney George M. Fanelli was reported by the *New York Times* as saying that "the evidence" he had "indicated that the violence was provoked by those who came to hear Mr. Robeson." Thus, the consistent use of the word "provoked" in mainstream coverage of the riots explicitly constructed Robeson and his fans and the precipitators of the violence while displacing blame from the anti-Robeson crowd.

Likewise, the *New York Times* repeatedly reported Dewey's conclusion that "the meeting was held deliberately to incite disorder" and the view of Capt. John A. Gaffney, Superintendent of State Police for New York, that a clash between the two groups had been unavoidable as the Robeson group had come "to provoke" and the veterans were "too willing to be provoked." While this last report placed some responsibility for the violence on the anti-Robeson groups involved in the clash, this responsibility is minimized by the suggestion that ultimately the primary error of the veterans was only in being provoked by a group dead set on causing unrest.

The *New York Times* noted that prior to the riots Governor Dewey had "ordered state police into the Peekskill area to prevent violence as a result of the Robeson meeting." This language—"as a result of the Robson meeting"—places blame on Robeson and his fans for any violence that might occur even before it actually did! Dewey's order for state police surely could have been equally reported as an effort "to prevent violence as a result of anti-Robeson [or anti-Communist] sentiment by local groups planning to protest," but such constructions, which would have implicated others than Robeson and his fans, never occurred in the mainstream press.

Likewise, the *Chicago Tribune* stated that "the situation was precipitated when Robeson and his backers insisted on giving the concert," and a column in the same paper asked "Why should Mr. Russia, Paul Robeson, be allowed to create riots all over the land?" Again, the alternative possibility that the violence was "precipitated" by the veterans' "insistence" on demonstrating against Robeson or that anti-Communist groups were being "allowed to create riots," was not presented by mainstream discourse.

While much mainstream discourse constructed Robeson as intentionally perpetuating violence and communist propaganda, some also constructed him as simply being used as a pawn by unidentified (but threatening) Communist powers in a larger plot. An editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* noted that "The Commies are taking Robeson on a cross-country tour—on a traveling riot, they hope," suggesting that the violence at Peekskill was but one part of a larger communist conspiracy to make the United States appear to be full of "native fascists." Similarly, an articles in the same paper reported that "the recent riots were fomented by Communists and fellow travelers as part of a 'party line program'," and the (unsubstantiated) contention of veteran organization leaders that "'goon squads of Reds' were sent to Peekskill before the concert to stir up the populace."

Even mainstream coverage that was critical of the veterans' actions perpetuated the theory that ultimately those actions were the natural result of a communist conspiracy. The *New York Times* noted that "those who participated in the anti-Communist demonstrations fell into a Communist 'bear trap'." Such conspiracy discourse in the mainstream press allowed for the possibility that, at best, Robeson and his fans were dupes of a larger organized move against American values—at worst they remained active traitors.

Along with the frame of Robeson as instigator or puppet for "communist causes," many stories in the mainstream press also suggested that Robeson's fans had not only come with the intent of instigating "trouble" but the intent to commit violence. For example, the *Chicago Tribune* constructed the concert goers and the handful of volunteers who were charged with protecting the singer at the second concert as a hostile military force. The *Tribune* reported that the preparation for "the Negro singer's" concert

was "in line with the operation of the Russian commissar system" and that "many of the Robesonites were recruited." This use of sensational and militaristic language makes it seem not only natural but necessary that a force was raised to battle Robeson, or as the *Tribune* put it—"the Robesonites had as their opponents in battle, 3,500 veterans."

Multiple mainstream sources also reported that at the second concert "Robeson men…were armed with baseball bats," with few providing the context that Robeson fans might feel legitimate fear for their personal safety given the events of the first riot and judge it necessary to be prepared to defend themselves given the negligence of police to act. It is also notable that the mainstream press commonly constructed the Robeson crowd as being solely composed of adult men when in fact the Robeson concert-goers included many women and children, some of who sustained injuries during the riots. Certainly a large crowd of "armed" and "recruited" (and supposedly black) men could more easily be constructed as a violent threat needing suppression than a multi-racial crowd made up of families.

Included in discourse that constructed the pro-Robeson group as a physical threat, the mainstream press repeatedly reported on injuries sustained by anti-Robeson war veterans while rarely acknowledging injures on the other side. For example, one *Chicago Tribune* editorial contended that the veterans held "a patriotic parade" "in protest against" Robeson's "communist propaganda" and that "two of the veterans or 'peaceful pickets,' were hospitalized, one critically stabbed by some music lover." Similarly the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "one Robeson supporter reportedly attacked a policeman with a

baseball bat" and that "the only two hospitalized were war veterans who had participated in a protest parade against the concert.[11]"

This construction of Robeson concert-goers as violent and armed and veterans as victims of their violence directly contradicts what investigative and firsthand accounts suggest about the events at Peekskill. Beyond the fact that the charges are unsubstantiated in news reports, historical and contemporary investigations of the events reveal no record of Robeson supporters carrying weapons, maintain that the anti-Robeson crowd was solely responsible for instigating the violence[12], and suggest that the wounded among the concertgoers included women and that many of the Robeson concert goers only fought after attempting to flee for their safety and being prevented from doing so by the anti-Robeson crowd and police barricades (Walwik 2002, Fast 2002).

Together, along with being largely based in hearsay and thus dubious in fact, constructions of Robeson and his fans as intentional instigators who preplanned an attack at Peekskill ignored and displaced any responsibility the anti-Robeson crowd had for the riot. This construction of veterans as the only victims of the riots, and the complete disregard for the real injuries that members of the Robeson crowd received, exonerates the veterans, allowing them victim status, while simultaneously implicating Robeson and his fans and denying their victimhood.

This "blame the victim" discourse is eerily like reports in mainstream papers about lynching in which black victims and communities were blamed for stepping out of

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[11] The same article reported later that "one unidentified Negro was reported beaten and thrown over a fence into a nearby cemetery"—apparently this man did not need/receive medical care based on the report. The *Los Angeles Times* also directly contradicted their own reporting of the story from the day before which had stated that "13 persons white and Negro were treated for bruises and cuts at a hospital." Over all the sources examined here there never seemed to be any clear agreement on the number of injuries sustained in the first or second riot with the reported numbers varying from two to "hundreds."

[12] The only criminal charges filed were against various anti-Robeson demonstrators.

line or otherwise provoking violence (Tolnay & Beck 1995). In this case by focusing on wounded veterans, along with presenting discourses within this frame that constructed Robeson and/or his concert audience as violent instigators, the mainstream press essentially justified the violence committed against them while simultaneously largely refusing to acknowledge it.

Mainstream Press Frame #2: Ideological battleground

The Peekskill event and site was framed as an ideological battleground between communism and American values in over forty-percent of mainstream stories. This frame can be seen to some extent in the discussion above regarding the ways in which Robeson and the concert-goers were discursively linked with supposed communist agendas. However, various other constructs were used by newsmakers in the mainstream press in framing the riots as solely about an ideological disagreement in which "pro-communist" forces were pitted against "anti-communist" forces. This frame undermined the possibility that there were other motivations (beyond sympathy or distain for communism) behind the violence that occurred at Peekskill.

For example, The *Los Angeles Times* reported on the riots as solely a "battle" between "anti-communist demonstrators" and "supporters" of "singer Paul Robeson, advocate of Communism." While *Time* magazine reported that at a "demonstration protesting the appearance of Communist-tuned Singer Paul Robeson…the [Robeson] audience defiantly burst into the chorus of the old radical marching song, We Shall Not Be Moved [sic]," upon which "the veterans charged." While acknowledging that it was in fact the veterans who "charged," labeling Robeson "Communist-tuned" while describing

the audience as "defiant" and "radical" serves to justify their actions while perpetuating both a frame that the violence was instigated and motivated on political grounds.

Additionally, *Time*'s choice to call "We Shall Not Be Moved" "radical" reveals an explicit linkage by the mainstream press of anti-communist frameworks to raced figures. Thus, a song with a history in slave-era, Christian, Negro-spiritual traditions that explicitly promoted the peaceful pursuit of freedom is linked with that which is constructed as threatening and un-American. Without a doubt such discursive linkages illustrate the ways in which anti-communist sentiment was used as an implicit cover for anti-black sentiment in dominant discourses of the time.

Labeling a song that is culturally and politically tied to histories of and efforts toward racial equality as "radical" and thus insinuating that it has ties to Communism evidences the way political dissent around race was conflated with Communism and thus undermined during the McCarthy Era. In addition, by labeling a song with a rich tradition in black civil rights efforts as "radical," *Time* ignores the possibility that singing the song was relevant or meaningful in the moment to Robeson fans for reasons completely unrelated to subversion and entirely based in democratic principles.[13]

It is also worth noting the ways in which this early articulation of black civil rights with communism foreshadows the later labeling of high profile African American figures as communist and anti-American. It seems that long before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (and much later President Barack Obama) would be called communists by their opponents, Robeson, a high-profile African American with cross-over appeal who presented challenges to status quo understandings about race and national belonging was

[13] For example, they may have felt it was an appropriate song because they were supporting the equal constitutional rights of an African American man to express himself free from threat.

labeled anti-American.[14] Squires (2001) has noted the way in which black dissent during World War II was labeled sedition in dominant discourses but it appears that the McCarthy Era contributed the unique and lasting political construction of black dissent as communist.

In its critique of the rioters' actions, the same *Time* article noted that "the communist-line Civil Rights Congress quickly denounced the sorry affair as an attempt to 'lynch Robeson.' It was hardly that. But it was as example of misguided patriotism…" This statement again marginalizes and undermines the role of race in the events at Peekskill. By labeling the Civil Rights Congress as "communist-line," *Time*, along with many of the sources examined here perpetuated the work of the House Un-American Activities Committee, which by labeling the organization "subversive," undermined the explicitly racial goals of the organization alongside the labor and political ones (Dudziak 2000).

Time's labeling of the Civil Rights Congress as Communist also serves to implicitly undermine their claim that the anti-Robeson crowd may have intended to lynch Robeson—a fairly reasonable fear given that most people alive at the time had lived during the heyday of "lynching era" and given that African Americans continued to be lynched for much smaller (but often equally imagined) crimes than being a communist or a riot inciter (Tolnay & Beck 1995). However the explicit "it was hardly that," undermines the validity of this fear.

Certainly whether any of the rioters intended to lynch Robeson cannot be known definitively but many in the Robeson crowd felt this was the obvious intent and thus any

[14] For more on news constructions of Martin Luther King see Lentz (1990) work "Symbols, the News Magazines and Martin Luther King."

feeling to the contrary is also exactly that, a feeling, not a fact to be reported as undeniable by *Time* journalists (Fast 2002)[15]. Instead, the violence at Peekskill is simply constructed as "misguided patriotism" and no room is made for the possibility that the very nature of such patriotism could be motivated by race and/or class hostilities.

Assuming "left-wing" as the opposite of "anti-Communist," the *New York Times* reported that "Westchester County war veterans' organizations arranged for a second anti-Communist demonstration in conjunction with the appearance near Peekskill of Paul Robeson, baritone and left-wing political storm center," and noting that "the veterans asked residents of the area to display flags before their homes." Thus the veterans are constructed as embracing and perpetuating patriotism while once again Robeson's politics are implicated as the opposite.

Such constructions in the mainstream press problematically conflated leftist politics with communism. Like the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* also reported; "anti-Communist veterans clashed with the left-wing singer's audience," thus suggesting that the opposite of being against communism was being left politically. Considering "left-wing" politics have generally been understood to be sympathetic toward minority rights, such constructions contribute further to undermining the politics behind equal rights struggles while simultaneously avoiding them in name and subsuming them under "subversive" ideologies.

In an interesting twist that perfectly illustrates the way motivations of racial bigotry were ignored in the mainstream press, the *Los Angeles Times* also reported that

[15] If certainly seems relevant and newsworthy that effigies of Robson had been found burned and hung by the neck (i.e. lynched) around Peekskill leading up to the concerts but *Time* did not report this (cite from original articles that did report this).

the "Imperial Wizard" of the Ku Klux Klan had declared that "crosses would be burned in a crusade against Communism and to give support to the veterans of Peekskill, N.Y., involved in a riot last Saturday." The article presents no response or opposition to the idea that it is perfectly reasonable for the Klan to be burning crosses or that their primary motivation is anti-Communist.

By taking the KKK at its word that its actions following Peekskill would be about patriotism, the *Los Angeles Times* allows for the association of a terrorist group in the business of committing racial violence with a positive value. The fact that the *Times* was willing to include, without interrogation or critique, the word of the Klan but not the perspectives of Robeson, his supporters or anyone who explicitly saw the veterans motivations at Peekskill as based in racial hatred, not only undermines the value of fairness supposedly at the root of journalistic practice but allows for a disturbingly sympathetic and inaccurate understating of the KKK.

Like the sources above, *Newsweek* reported on the "ruckus," as "the Peekskill class war games" in which "anti-Communist hotheads" had confronted "Communists, sympathizers and the pro-Communist Negro," and made no mention of the possibility of racial motivations for the event. Later, in explaining the two riots, a *New York Times* article reported that "over the past two week-ends there has been violence in the Peekskill area over the 'Communist issue'" and that "Paul Robson, Negro baritone and outspoken Communist sympathizer" was prevented from singing by "demonstrations by veterans' groups" representing "a mood of growing hostility toward communism and Communists." Similarly, a *Chicago Tribune* editorial reported that "Paul Robeson, the Negro singer whose Communist propaganda has been vigorously repudiated by members

of his own race" was protested by "a patriotic parade" held by "Westchester county veterans."

As demonstrated above, the mainstream press' insistence on labeling Robeson, the concert goers and most organizations or individuals who spoke out for them as communist-affiliated went hand-in-hand with the persistence of labeling the anti-Robeson forces as "veterans." According to most historical accounts (and noted infrequently in news accounts examined here) the anti-Robeson crowd was not only made up of members of veterans' organizations but also civilians from Peekskill and the surrounding areas.

The mainstream press' insistence on focusing on the veterans and constructing their motivations as based in patriotism preserved the construct that the violence was purely political—the patriotic vs. the subversive—while undermining the possibility for criticism of the anti-Robeson forces. Without a doubt the veterans being veterans and being identified as such by all sources examined here recalls discourses of patriotism and American wars for democracy and righteousness, but the mainstream press' use of explicitly political discourse like "patriotic" in defining them goes farther toward constructing the anti-Robeson crowd as defenders of American values (and thus not deserving of harsh criticism), leaving Robeson's concert goers and Robeson himself to be presumably the opposite.

Thus across mainstream press accounts the two sides were largely constructed as being made up of two types of individuals—the "veterans" who "paraded to protest" and "Paul Robeson and his Communist-line followers." Thus the possibility that there were non-communists who simply enjoyed Robeson's music or supported his right to free

speech was undermined while also undermining the possibility that the anti-Robeson crowd included unscrupulous individuals (some of whom may have been veterans) whose motivations were not entirely honorable.[16]

Black Press Findings

Trends in Positive & Negative Coverage

In the black press, coverage of Robeson and the events at Peekskill was overwhelmingly neutral (seventy-four percent). While explicitly negative characterizations of Robeson were present half as often in the black press as in the mainstream press, like the mainstream press the black press also presented more negative characterizations of Robeson than positive ones. This trend is primarily due to the coverage of the Peekskill riots in the *Chicago Defender* that, while predominantly neutral (sixty-percent), was nearly thirty-percent negative. The *Chicago Defender* was also the only black press source examined here to present more negative characterizations of Robeson and his motivations than positive ones.

These finding parallel those in the mainstream press where the *Chicago Tribune* presented more negative coverage than any of its counterparts and suggests that despite the presence of alternative discourses for making sense of the riots, journalists in the black press were not immune to the specific ideological climates of their region.

[16] The majority of mainstream press coverage also ignored the fact that there were some veterans in the pro-Robeson crowd who had come to the second concert to protect Robeson and thus American heroes were present on both sides.

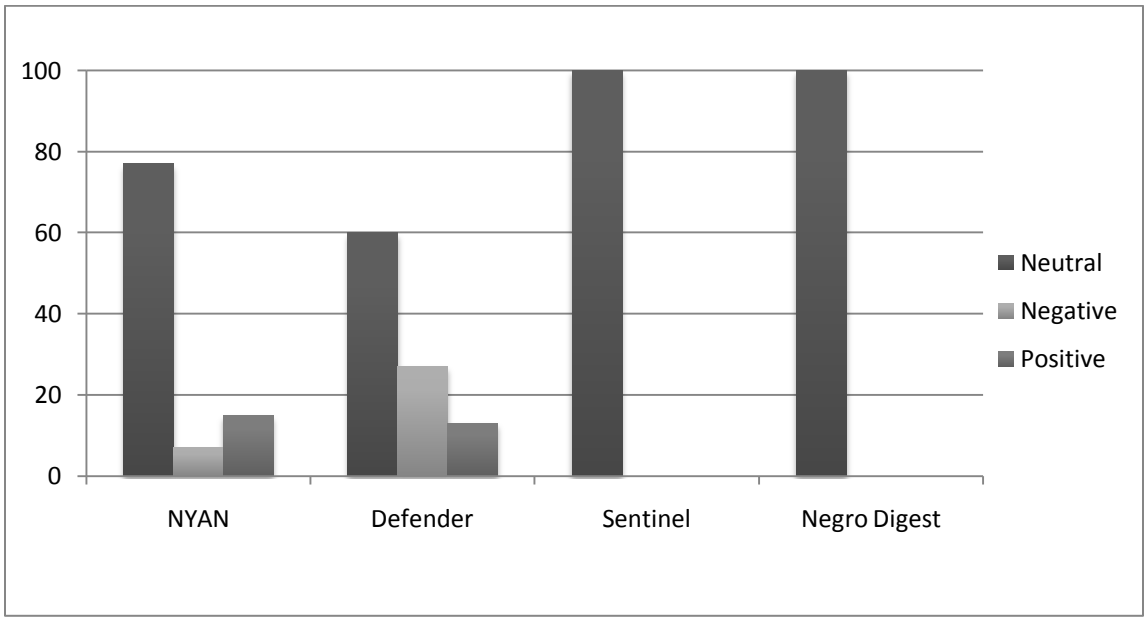

Figure 6: Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press.

The negative coverage in the *Defender* primarily focused on denouncing Robeson's politics. The *Defender*'s editorial characterized Robeson as "unpatriotic" and stated that "we agree with Jackie Robinson that Paul Robeson sounds 'silly' and we are confident that, save for a small fringe group of screwballs, Mr. Robeson will remain without an army." Similarly, *Defender* columnist A.N. Fields stated regarding the riots that "if not a Communist, he [Robeson] might as well be one," and that he "courts such episodes" by acting "especially obnoxious."

While both of these accounts are undoubtedly negative in tone toward Robeson, two things are important to note. First, while denouncing Communism and Robeson's supposed affinity for it, *Defender* journalists do not construct Robeson as a threat but rather use terms that minimize his politics to childishness—"silly" and "obnoxious." While accepting the dominant discourse that Robeson is "unpatriotic" this coverage explicitly attempts to convey that Robeson is not a viable threat—he "will remain without

an army." Thus the newsmakers at the Defender walk a line that while accepting some dominant understandings of Robeson also seek to minimize the idea that Robeson posses any sort of legitimate threat to America.

Second, *Defender* criticisms of Robeson also included strongly-worded denunciations of the Peekskill rioters. For example the editorial also stated that the perpetrators of the violence at Peekskill should be "brought to justice" because using "force to crush unpopular views… is the Russian way." Likewise, the column by Fields labeled the perpetrators of the violence at Peekskill "hoodlums" who in seeking "to silence him [Robeson] by forcible means might as well be Fascists," noting that such action "does the same violence to democratic principles as the crackpot communist." Thus while denouncing Robeson the *Defender* presents a larger critique of the ideologies that incited the Peekskill riots and contends that these ideologies, and their resulting actions, pose a larger threat to the nation than Robeson—a perspective largely missing from mainstream criticisms of Robeson.

On the other hand, the few explicitly positive characterizations printed in the black press tended to focus on linking Robeson's popularity and achievements with his political beliefs and actions. A column in the *New York Amsterdam News* listed "Mr. Robeson" as "one of the few Negros to have burst the bounds of oppression and succeeded," suggesting that "knowing this is probably one reason why he is now saying and doing the things he does." Similarly, in the *Defender* Langston Hughes described Robeson as the "world's most exciting singer" in whose "honor" "thousands of Americans braved mob violence." Hughes goes on to acknowledge that while Robeson's opinions are "unpopular" in America they are "held by millions of people in the Soviet

Union and China—areas much larger and more populous than the U.S.A., and where race prejudice, poverty, and Anglo-Saxon scorn are booked to go."

Thus, positive coverage in the black press, while in the minority, attempted to celebrate Robeson's achievements while contextualizing his political outlook within a larger frame of a sincere desire to make a difference for his fans, and particularly African Americans who have not "burst the bounds of oppression" and are still subject to "Anglo-Saxon scorn."

Together, black press sources presented overwhelmingly negative representations of anti-Robeson demonstrators, often describing them as "a raging mob." Black journalists had no qualms with describing the events at Peekskill as a "riot" and overwhelmingly used this term in their descriptions. At the same time, many opinion-based stories in the black press included terms that constructed the violence as intense, dangerous and one-sided (unlike the minimizing descriptors in the mainstream press).

For example, an editorial in the *New York Amsterdam News* characterized the rioters as an "ignorant and vicious mob," a letter-to-the-editor in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* described the violence as "mayhem," and news articles in the *Chicago Defender* characterized the actions of the veterans as "an attack on the Robeson audience" "waged with such primitive weapons as fence rails, tree limbs, bottles, chairs and sign standards." And unlike reports of the violence in the mainstream press, the black press carried reports of wounded on the anti-Robeson side, often personalizing these reports by listing along with names the professions and ages of the wounded. Characterizations of the anti-Robeson crowd as threatening and the ensuing violence as "primitive" and uncontrollable

along with the acknowledgement of Robeson-follower injuries allowed Robeson and his fans victim status in the black press.

Overall, the black press presented two primary frames for making sense of the events at Peekskill. Nearly forty-five-percent of black press coverage presented the frame that the riots, while partially motivated by ideological differences, reflected a larger climate of violent racism in America. Second, in thirty-percent of stories published in the black press, journalists presented the frame of neglect and complicity by various local, state and federal officials who were constructed as indifferent toward and sometimes perpetuating the violent persecution of Robeson, his fans and minorities generally.

Black Press Frame #1: Violence part of larger racist climate

This frame was constructed by African American journalists by discursively connecting the violence at Peekskill with other violent acts committed against blacks throughout the United States. While this frame focused on examples of general anti-minority sentiment, lynching and various acts by the Ku Klux Klan were also frequently recalled. For example, news articles in the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Los Angles Sentinel* and *Chicago Defender* focused on reports of "a fiery cross—emblem of the Ku Klux Klan—burned on a hillside nearby" during the riots and discussed in-depth the "anti-Negro expression shown by the rioters." These papers also reported on firsthand and official NAACP accounts of attacks on black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers who were simply passing through the area at the time of the riots and had not attended the concerts.

Editorials and columns in the black press used even stronger language to contextualize the riots as part of a larger set of racist trends, commonly referring to the

anti-Robeson crowd as a "lynch mob." In a column titled "Violence American Style," *New York Amsterdam News* writer Earl Brown noted that because "Communists are looked upon with about as much scorn and hate as Negroes" the Peekskill "attackers" were provided "with two reasons to attack." Noting that "in the U.S., there is a racial pattern" in which Americans are willing to "continue racial hate and oppression at the expense of democratic institutions," Brown goes on to detail two recent cases of violence against blacks in which one man was unjustly murdered and another kidnapped by whites and forced to work as a "peon on their farm."

In this context, Brown contends that "when the Westchester mob beat up persons who attended Mr. Robeson's concert every colored person was symbolically assaulted." Other opinion pieces in the *Amsterdam News* suggested that "the act in Peekskill was not unlike the act of a lynch mob in Georgia" and that the "group of veterans actually provoked the riot and were the aggressors" and thus "slapped democracy down by acting like the Ku Klux Klan." A letter-to-the-editor in the *Amsterdam News* further contended that the "war veterans were not against Paul Robeson politically and ideologically one tenth as much as they were racially" and that they had acted like "Klansmen" by attacking Robeson who "symbolizes 13,000,000 comparatively defenseless Negro Americans."

Similarly, a letter-to-the-editor published by the *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted the continuing segregation in various veterans' organizations by calling the American Legion an "100 percent American and 99.44 percent Jim Crow organization" and contended that the "cross-burning riots" were motivated by those "who thought a Negro had no right to speak his mind" and thus would "fight anything of benefit to the working man or of the

Negro." A *Chicago Defender* column written by literary legend Langston Hughes noted that "nobody in Peekskill or elsewhere threw stones or burned fiery crosses when" other notable Americans like Ezra Pound criticized their country, "but Robeson is a Negro. It has long been the fashion in this American country of ours to keep Negroes from doing things that other citizens may do with impunity." By presenting this double-standard regarding the political allowances available to white celebrities but not Robeson, Hughes takes as a given the role of race in the persecution of Robeson and his fans.

The black press also contained multiple reports of the burning and hanging of effigies of Robeson and the yelling of "racial insults" at concert-goers. These reports directly contradict the mainstream press' tendency to use discourse that downplayed charges regarding intentions to lynch Robeson and ignored racist language.

According to a firsthand account of the events at Peekskill by novelist Howard Fast, although the pro-Robeson crowd was mostly white (with a large percentage being Jewish) this did not spare them from being labeled "niggers" by the anti-Robeson crowd. The shouts were simply adapted to include "white" so the popular slur became "white niggers" (Fast 2002). Fast's account is supported by black press reports from the time that while focusing on anti-black sentiment among rioters also reported on general ethnic and class bigotry.

For example, the *New York Amsterdam News* ran a photo of an anti-Robeson protester holding a sign reading "Commies and skunks not wanted, phew![17]" and published a quote from "Mrs. Paul Robeson" that "the battle at Peekskill was a typical

[17] To the best knowledge of this researcher, after consulting various non-scholarly resources (because a scholarly publication on racial slurs does not exist) and being permanently scarred by googling "racial slur dictionary," a "skunk" was an early 20th-century slur for a white person who felt it was okay to mix with black people or for the general mixing of the races (via skunks have white and black stripes).

example of the violence directed in my country against Negroes, Jews and labor unions…" The presence of anti-Semitic sentiments as a factor in the riots was further noted by several black press news reports that "one of the worst features of the riot was the anti-Negro and anti-Jewish remarks heard among the veterans and their supporters."

A strongly-worded column published on the first page of the editorial section of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted that "the violence attending the appearance of Robeson at Peekskill" was an example of "the pattern of a Nazi state transpiring before our eyes," and argued that "Klanism, whether masked or unmasked, is a symptom of Nazism." By equating the violence at Peekskill with Nazism, the column's author, Dean Gordon B. Hancock, discursively called on the recent memory of World War II and dominant discourses of the righteousness of destroying fascism and its connections to racism.

The author went on to contend that "there was a lynching in Peekskill just as surely as there are lynchings here and there about the south." The column then explicitly presents the question at the root of much of the black press' criticism regarding the role of race in the supposedly anti-Communist violence at Peekskill—"Why is being a Communist so much more damnable in Negroes than in others? Why a white Communist can sit in the halls of Congress and a Negro Communist cannot sing to an American audience?"

By framing the Peekskill riots as rooted in racial prejudices the black press both reflected the perspectives of members of the black community and presented a counter-discourse to those in the mainstream press that refused to acknowledge racism. However, given the political climate of the period and the integrationist goals of black journalists, the black press also embraced dominant discourses that demonized communism as a

political ideology. However, unlike in the mainstream press, these discourses simultaneously acknowledged the potential of anti-Communist fervor to subsume prejudices against African Americans, Jews and laborers and constructed this potential as an equal threat to democracy as communism.

Black Press Frame #2: Complicity of officials

Black press coverage of the Peekskill riots repeatedly focused on accounts of participation in the riots by the police who were supposed to be maintaining order along with evidence of neglect by local officials who had warning that violence would occur but did not act. For example, the *New York Amsterdam News* reported that "police evidently sided with the hoodlum mob of attackers" and editorialized that "it was plain that officers responsible for law and order in the Peekskill community were entirely sympathetic to the veterans' plans and publically encouraged, rather than checked them."

The black press also frequently noted in news reports that the very group of officials "investigating" the riots "had been charged with keeping order" and "have themselves been criticized for their handling of the riot situation." The *Chicago Defender* reported that Gov. Tom Dewey's insinuation that "Paul's followers caused the violence is supported by some police who, everyone agrees, failed to do their duty." This construction allows the *Defender* to report on dominant accusations that the riots were the fault of Robeson fans while summarily discrediting this accusation by noting that those who present it "failed to do their duty" and "everyone" knows it. Thus the *Defender* implicitly implicates an ulterior motive on the part of Dewey and Peekskill police that suggests the placing of blame on Robeson, et. al. benefits white officials by absolving them from their own responsibilities.

A letter-to-the-editor in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted that "policemen gave them [veteran's groups] their full cooperation" and several news articles noted that "state and local officials will be sued for failure to protect persons who attended the meeting." Similarly, an observer interviewed by the *Amsterdam News* contended that "The riot seems to have been prearranged. The city officials put the veteran's organization wise." And the *Defender* reported that "some police" "had said frankly that they helped the anti-Robeson group 'whip commie heads'."

Together such reporting on the part of the black press calls into question one of the primary mainstream frames—that of Robeson and his fans as instigators—by suggests that in fact officials had colluded with anti-Robeson rioters to cause violence. At the same time, such constructions undermine the credibility of the very officials whose reports and comments on the riots both presses were forced to primarily depend but who the mainstream press seemed reluctant to challenge.

An explicit example of this can be seen in an editorial published by the *Amsterdam News* that contended "District Attorney Fenelli, Sheriff Ruscoe and other county officials had a clear-cut responsibility to protect the Robesonites in exercise of their rights" given that "anyone who was not deaf and blind realized fully the kind of demonstration that the veterans groups was promoting was almost sure to end in disorder." The *Amsterdam News* editors thus recommend "immediate action by Governor Dewey to discipline District Attorney Fenelli and Sheriff Ruscoe and any other public officials whose negligence contributed to the Peekskill disgrace."

Likewise the *Defender* noted in a news article under the headline "…Police Failed to Prevent Disorder," that "though plans for the demonstration by the Joint Veterans

Council of Westchester County which developed into a full-scale riot were known in advance, no effort was made to prevent it." Additionally, the black press repeatedly emphasized the fact that the six men eventually indicted with rioting charges were members of the anti-Robeson crowd and included at least one veteran and "the son of a Peekskill police chief." Noting the participation of the son of the Peekskill police chief in the riots and the fact that he faced criminal charges serves, in very few words, to hit home the black press frame that officials were somehow involved in the riots.

Along with these critiques of the official handling of the riots by politicians and police, columnist Earl Brown of the *New York Amsterdam News* presented an explicit acknowledgement of the role mainstream (i.e. official) newspapers played in the continuing (mis)handling of the situation. Criticizing the *Los Angeles Times* and "all such conservative papers" for proving that they are "not for civil rights and other so-called inalienable rights of the people by subtly playing up in its news and editorial columns events in a non-objective way," Brown details the ways in which the *Times* in particular had blamed the Peekskill riots on Robeson while failing to critique the rioters as the "hoodlums" and "aggressors" that they were. By contending that the *Times* and other mainstream papers "misinformed the public," Brown offers a critique of the official role newspapers are supposed to play as public conveyers of truth and contends that their failure to fulfill this role "encouraged such mobs by never taking a stand for what is right in such cases."

Together, the black press' focus on the links between racism and the Peekskill riots, and the negligence or collusion of public officials in handling them, presented discourses virtually invisible in the mainstream press. These discourses acknowledged

historical and continuing racial violence and oppression against blacks, the prominent role of Robeson's race in white constructions and judgments of his politics, the easy way in which discourses of patriotism and anti-Communism slip into racism, and the reality of the role government play in such trends.

At the same time, the black press was limited in what alternative discourses it could present because of its very real vulnerability at a historical period in which it was not unusual for minority interests who presented to liberal a perspective to be silenced by the ideological witch hunt of McCarthyism. Additionally, members of the black press had had direct experience with censorship and threats of shut down because of perceived sedition by the federal government during World Wars I and II (Squires 2001; Washburn 1986). Thus while certainly Robeson and many other Americans, black and white, had an alternative understanding of Communism than that constructed by dominant discourse, the level of public fear generated around the idea that Communism was necessarily seditious and threatening made the term a weapon of conformity (Beeching 2002).

It is notable then that while black journalists attempted to present alternative discourses for understanding the motivations and responsibilities for the events at Peekskill, they did not take an active role in attempting to challenge the idea that Communism was a legitimate threat to American values nor even that Robeson (who was never a card carrying member of any Communist or socialist party) was a Communist.

Discussion

The white and black press accounts of Robeson's concerts and the subsequent riots exhibited several similarities, including: negative constructions of communism; a concern about the violence at Peekskill aiding Communist propaganda; and the positive

valuation of constitutional rights. However, even these agreed upon principles were framed differently, and as such each press imbued the riots with very different meaning. Take for example a comparison of the editorials run by the *New York Times* and the *New York Amsterdam News*:

The *New York Times* editorial on Peekskill from September 4, 1949 a week after the first riot and the day of the second reads in part:

"…Mr. Robeson has a right to assemble his followers peaceably, sing and, if he wishes, make a speech. The veterans likewise have a right to hold a parade…This is the principle of the First Amendment to the Federal Constitution, of Article I of the Constitution of the State of New York and of similar provisions in the constitutions of other states…The rights involved Mr. Dewey said 'must be respected, however hateful the views of some of those who abuse them'…Mr. Robeson could not hold a meeting or publically sing one note in Russia if his views differed from those of the Moscow bosses. If Mr. Robeson is allowed to hold his meeting in peace today, that very fact will answer the Communist lies more than any words could."

The editorial on Peekskill in the *New York Amsterdam News* published September 17th, 1949 reads in part:

"It might easily be that the two riots occurring within the space of a few days have been the biggest gifts placed in the hands of American Communists since the beginning of WWII. Now they have a clear cut case of gross and inexcusable violation of constitutional rights because of political belief. Robeson and his left-wing supporters were clearly within their constitutional rights…officials had a clear-cut responsibility to protect the Robesonites in exercise of their rights…It certainly was not the mob's fault that no fatalities resulted. Its members where driven by a blind bigotry in an attempt to deprive American citizens of their constitutional rights. They chose intimidation and violence…Their action was a disgrace to the city of New York and wounded the very democracy which the veterans were supposed to have defended in the recent war."

Clearly, both of these editorials deploy dominant American values such as democracy, free speech, and peace; and both present communism and violence as negative forces. However, the difference in the application of these values demonstrates how editors serving racialized public spheres varied in worldview. Both editorials express

a fear that the violence at Peekskill will help the communist cause, but differences in the framing of who and what is to blame for the riots—in the mainstream Robeson and his "hateful" views which support "Communist lies", in the black press the white "mob" and their bigotry—result in differing representations of the violence and, perhaps most disturbingly, the question of whether Robeson is truly deserving of the rights that the constitution guarantees.

Thus while both presses negatively framed Communism, the black press did so within frames that present a violation of constitutional rights, or as they often described it, "fascism," perpetuated by "mobs" or "officials," as equally negative. On the other hand, as noted by Walwik (2002) the mainstream press "did not protest the violence because of the injuries suffered, or even because of the violation of civil liberties, but because violence played into the hands of Communist propagandist."

While both presses included some information that could be read as counter to their dominant frames, the minimal inclusion of such information and the overwhelming presence of information to the contrary, squelched the potential for alternative discourses. For example, the *Chicago Defender* ran an editorial claiming that the riots "did not have origin in racial prejudice" and were "anti-Communist outbursts, pure and simple." Given that this was the only one of all thirty-four stories published by the black press that made this claim and considering the strong language and respected authors (like Langston Hughes) who made the exact opposite claim in nearly forty-five percent of black press stories, the *Defender* editorial is an outlier.

Likewise, a handful of mainstream press articles about the riot made passing mention of "reports" of racist discourse and burning of crosses but the lack of space,

time, analysis or connection of these occurrences to a specific group marginalized their significance in making sense of the meaning and motivation behind the riots compared to discourses of political ideology and threat.

The mainstream press not only largely ignored the issue of racism in reports on the Peekskill riots, but also completely ignored the perspectives of blacks whose opinions on and experiences about the riots were absent from mainstream coverage other than an occasional quote from Paul Robeson. Without a doubt, mainstream press coverage of Peekskill contributed to and rearticulated dominant discourses of race and nation that many marginalized American citizens would have regarded as discourses of persecution. To the mainstream press, Peekskill represented a political battle over Communism instigated by Robeson and his "fellow travelers," to the black press the violence was political, social, and personal representing the continued struggle of African Americans to be free from victimization whether for their beliefs, their group identity, or the blackness of their skin.

Unfortunately the mainstream response to Robeson's attempts at alternative discourse was largely that of vilification. Eventually the black press, though long a defender of Robeson, restrained by the historical and political implications of McCarthyism as well as internal community debates that saw Robeson's agentially created alternative discourses as being too radical and thus counterproductive to "positive" images of African Americans, would largely abandoned him (Spohrer 2007; Beeching 2002)

According to Dorinson and Pencak (2002), "Robeson's international prominence made him a logical target of the zealous anti-communists," and the star was eventually

blacklisted, ostracized, and legally forbidden to travel internationally. With the revocation of his passport, the United States government symbolically stripped Robeson of his American identity, his place in the nation and despite his incredible record of accomplishments, Robeson became, in effect, a non-person, intentionally ignored and silenced in dominant discourses. The case of Paul Robeson's rise and fall, according to Godonoo (2008) can be understood as an example of the toll on African American celebrities who truly believe in the American Dream while spontaneously finding it morally impossible to sit by in silence as it is consistently denied. Despite the demonization of Robeson, his loss of career and freedom, Marable (1998) argues that Robeson was more influential as a cultural and political symbol of resistance than any other figure of the time.

Robeson's pro-labor, pro-Soviet stances during the heyday of McCarthyism made it impossible for him to be constructed within dominant discourse as anything but a threat, a threat that the United States government and the media deemed large enough to require control via disciplinary measures which effectually destroyed the privileges his early celebrity status had afforded him. Robeson's story clearly demonstrates the bind faced by black celebrities in that so long as they fulfill their role as a spectacle to be consumed by an audience they are deemed acceptable in public discourse, but, once this role is challenged they are subjected to treatment that assumes them to be a threat needing to be controlled, treatment that is inextricably linked to and aggravated by their race. Like Muhammad Ali, twenty-years later, Robeson faced the institutional denial of basic rights as a result of his attempts to offer new discourses to public understandings of race and nation.

Chapter 2: Eartha Kitt, the White House, and Vietnam 1968

Like Paul Robeson, Eartha Kitt achieved a level of cross-over popularity that was unusual for black entertainers of her time. Perhaps best known today for her portrayal of Catwoman on the 1967 *Batman* series, Kitt began her career as a cabaret performer and was highly accomplished as a singer and dancer as well as an actress. Like Dorothy Dandridge before her and Halle Berry after, as a mixed-race, African American actresses Kitt's crossover success often required her to depoliticize her racial identity while simultaneously being celebrated as an example of the progress and possibility of Hollywood in mainstream discourse (Dagbovie 2007).

While Kitt was popular with both black and white audiences, she was never fully embraced by either. At the same time that Kitt's crossover celebrity allowed her unprecedented access to elite spaces, her race and gender kept her disempowered within the entertainment industry (Haggins 2007). Most of Kitt's roles constructed the star as a sophisticated and racially ambiguous sexual temptress. Thus while she challenged dominant stereotypes of African American women as being unattractive and unrefined (e.g Collins 2000), her sex-kitten image and seeming willingness to play into stereotypes of African American women's hypersexuality generated criticism from some in the African American community.

In January of 1968, in a sociopolitical climate that included much unrest regarding both the Vietnam War and Civil Rights, Kitt was invited to attend a luncheon for prominent "women doers" with the First Lady of the United States. The event, billed as a women's problem solving meeting regarding youth unrest and delinquency was one part of President Johnson's larger initiative regarding urban crime. The luncheon

included fifty high-profile women in political, social and entertainment circles, forty-six of whom were white. Kitt had been invited because of her work with D.C. based youth organizations and in inner city neighborhoods, particularly the Watts area of California.

The event went as planned with the women reportedly discussing the planting of flowers and installations of streetlights and possible solutions to inner city unrest. During a question and answer session with the First Lady near the end of the event, Kitt raised her hand and was called upon by the First Lady herself. In her comments Kitt, a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, criticized the Vietnam War—in particular the draft—and linked it to racial and social unrest among youth in America's inner cities (Blackwell 2004). Her attempt to convey the frustration felt by young people in urban centers regarding the war to the President of the United States—while in his home and addressing his wife—was received with both adulation and ire. Kitt instantly became a hero to many in the antiwar movement and a traitor to those who supported conservative political agendas (Radano 1999, in Hine).

This chapter investigates how mainstream and black news sources framed Kitt's comments and explained their place in public debates around race and nation to their audiences. The sources included in this chapter are; the *New York Times, New York Amsterdam News, Washington Post, Pittsburgh Courier, Chicago Tribune, Chicago Defender, Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Sentinel, Time, Newsweek, Ebony* and *Negro Digest*. For each of these sources data was collected via Proquest Historical Databases online, microfilm holdings from the University of Minnesota and other public universities, and the online archives of several specific sources. The data in this analysis was published between January 19, 1968—the day after Kitt's comments to the First

Lady—and March 19, 1968, two months later[18]. Importantly, two weeks after this ending date Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King was murdered by James Earl Ray and mainstream and African American publications along with the rest of the nation became consumed with making sense of this national tragedy.

Data Overview:

In the black press, the *Chicago Defender* presented the most texts that addressed the incident at the White House (n=13) followed by the *Amsterdam News* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* (n=7, n=6) and the *Pittsburgh Courier* (n= 3). The frequency of *Defender* coverage is unsurprising given its daily publication in 1968 compared to the weekly publication of its counterparts. Neither *Ebony* nor *Negro Digest* discussed the incident within their pages resulting in a dearth of African American-produced magazine news coverage of Kitt's words to the First Lady.

This absence in *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* can be explained in several ways. First, John H. Johnson, the founder of both *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* made a choice early on in his career to avoid topics which might be viewed as politically controversial, especially in terms of race, in order to maintain the support of the white bankers, printers, advertisers and distributors who made his business possible. While by 1968 *Negro Digest*, under the editorial control of Hoyt Fuller, had largely abandoned the controversy-skirting approach of other Johnson publications, it maintained its uniqueness as a literary magazine which focused on producing intellectual and artistic thought by and for an elite class of African

[18] Preliminary analysis revealed that like the other cases examined in this project the newsworthiness of the event largely dropped off after a 60 day period. While Kitt was occasionally mentioned after this ending date in summaries of television appearances, other entertainment matters and her attendance at Martin Luther King's funeral services, mention of her dissenting statement at the White House was rarely a part of this coverage.

Americans (Hall 2001). Thus while *Negro Digest* was presenting pieces by the likes of Frantz Fanon, Alice Walker, Leroi Jones and Nikki Giovanni, there was little reason to report on Kitt.

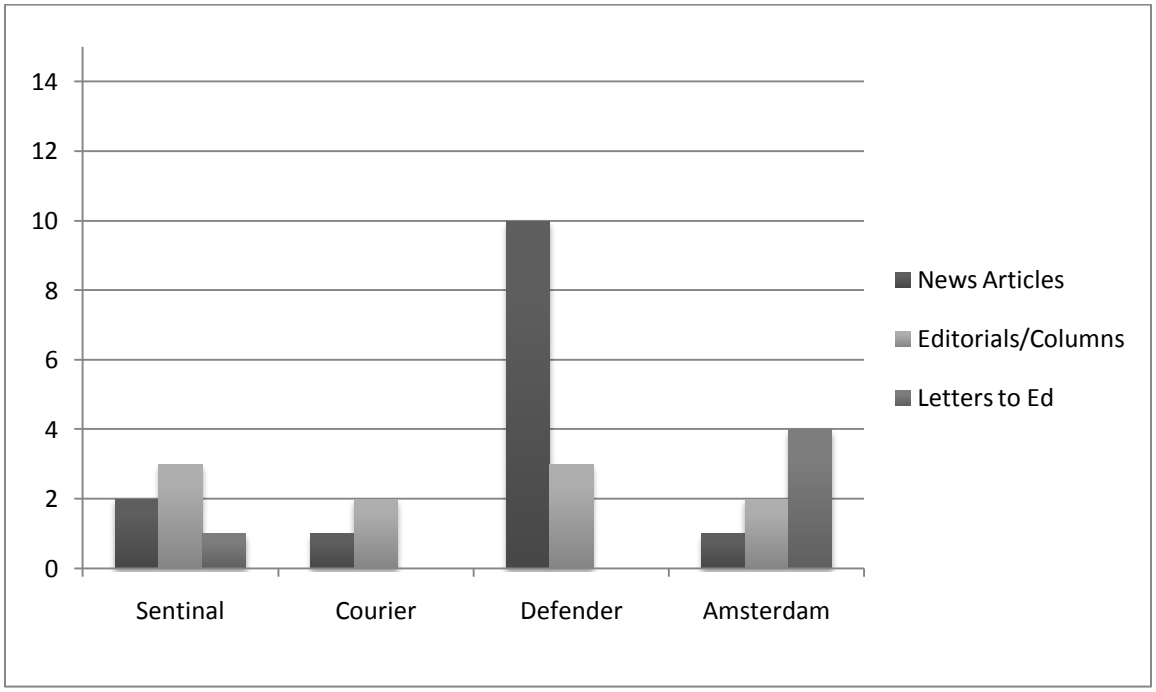

Figure 7: Black newspaper coverage by source and type.

In the mainstream press the *Los Angeles Times* presented the most stories about Kitt's words at the White House (n=21) followed by *The Washington Post (*n=18). These numbers likely reflect a judgment of newsworthiness by mainstream journalists in the nation's capital where the event took place and the nation's entertainment capital where celebrity news was likely seen as particularly relevant. Interestingly, the *New York Times* contained only half the number of texts addressing the controversy (n=11) as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* fell in between these with fourteen (n=14) texts. The mainstream magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* both contained only one article that focused on the events of the White House luncheon. *Time* mentioned it in passing in

several subsequent articles, and *Newsweek* included four letters-to-the-editors regarding the event.

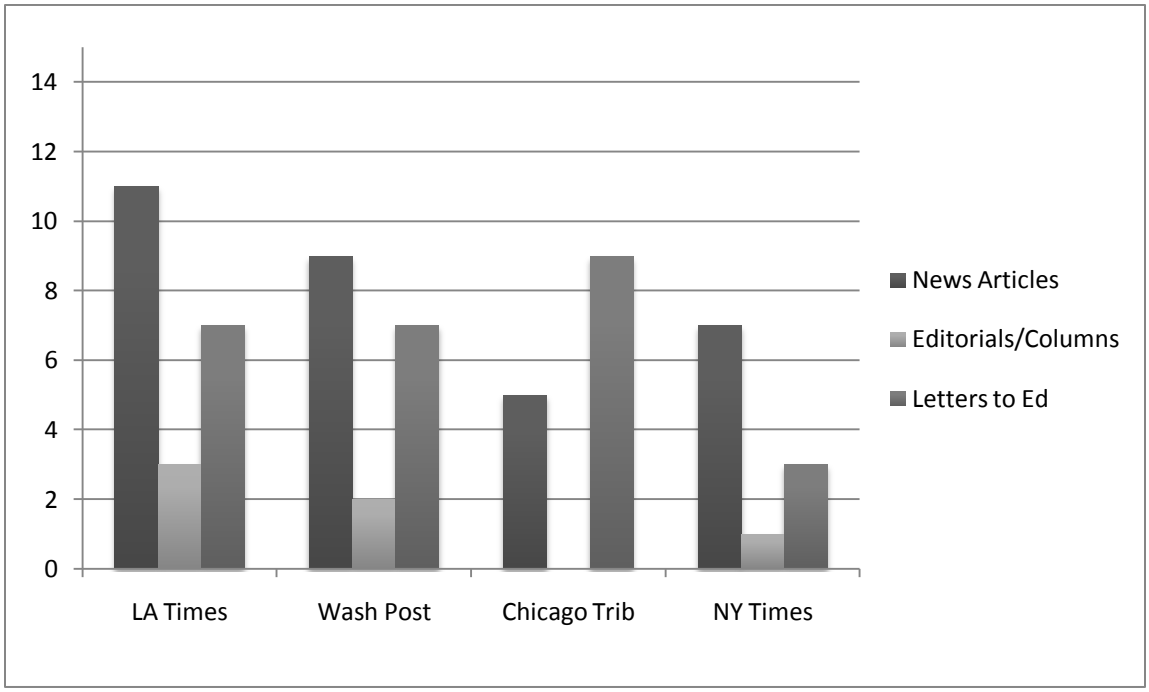

Figure 8: Mainstream newspaper coverage by source and type.

In total, the black press contained twenty-eight (N=29) texts that addressed Kitt's White House speech with just over fifty-percent of those being presented as opinion (in the form of editorials, columns and letters-to-the-editor). The mainstream press presented over twice as many texts as the black press (N=72) with fifty-percent of these being editorials, opinion columns or letters-to-the-editor. Overall the mainstream press presented its audience with more coverage of Eartha Kitt's conversation with Mrs. Johnson (likely due, in part, to the more frequent publication, longer format and economic and employment resources of mainstream publications) but within each press readers received about the same ratio of news stories versus opinion stories.

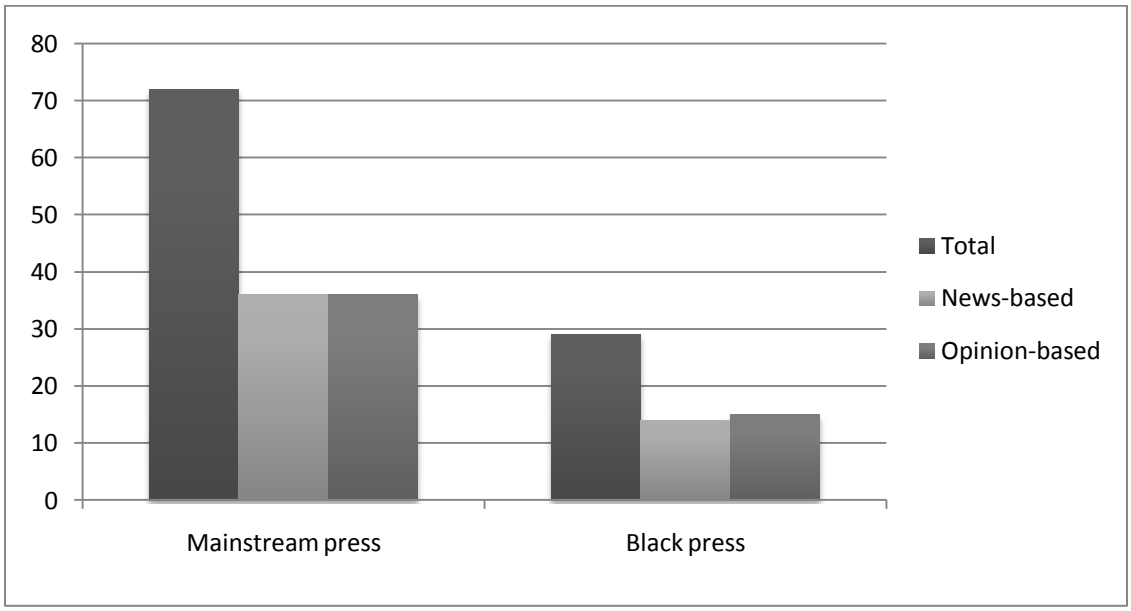

Figure 9: Mainstream and Black press coverage by type.

Overall, the mainstream and black press presented their audiences with distinct frames for making sense of Eartha Kitt's words at the White House. However, the difference in frames by press does not mean that similarities did not exist across press types nor that differences did not exist within press types. Below I discuss the frequency of positive, negative and neutral descriptors applied to Kitt and how they fit into the common frames in the mainstream and black presses. I will also discuss the similarities and differences that existed within and across press type and the implications of these findings.

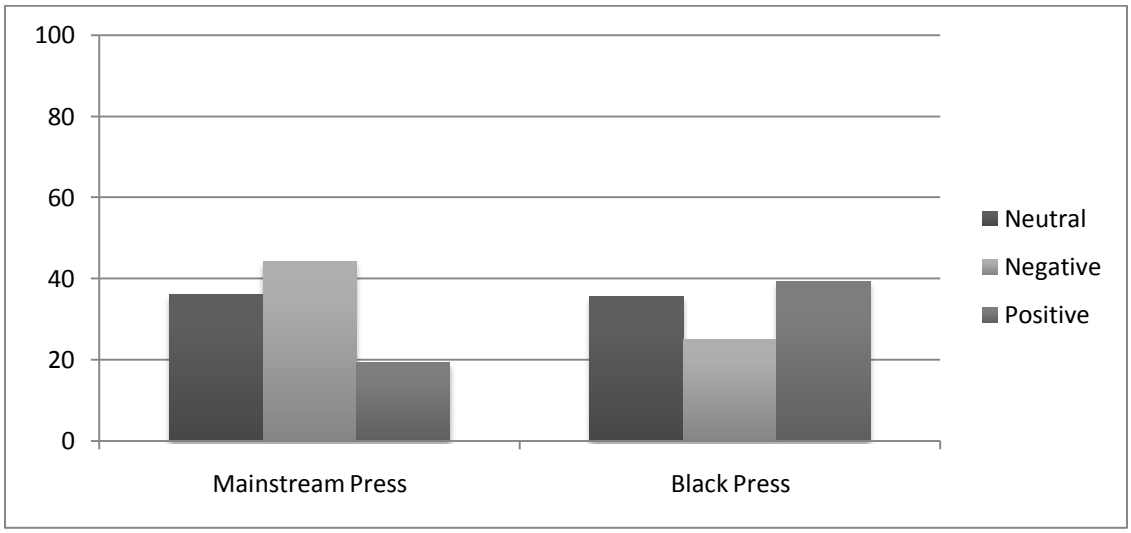

Figure 10: Mainstream and Black Press Coverage by value judgments of Kitt.

Mainstream Press Findings:

Trends in Positive and Negative Coverage

As reflected in the above chart, the mainstream press negatively framed Kitt's speech at the White House; nearly forty-five percent of its coverage represented her comments as inappropriate. Conversely, less than twenty-percent of the coverage of Kitt's dissent in the mainstream press was positive in its descriptions.

While mainstream press coverage of the event was mostly negative it is important to note the diversity that existed by region within these sources. For example while the *Chicago Tribune* presented the most critical coverage of Kitt's comments with nearly sixty-five percent of their stories applying negative frames, less than fifty-percent of *Los Angeles Times* and under forty-percent of *New York Times* coverage was negative. Mainstream press coverage of Kitt in the *New York Times* was most positive followed by that in the *Los Angeles Times*. These trends can be seen in the table below:

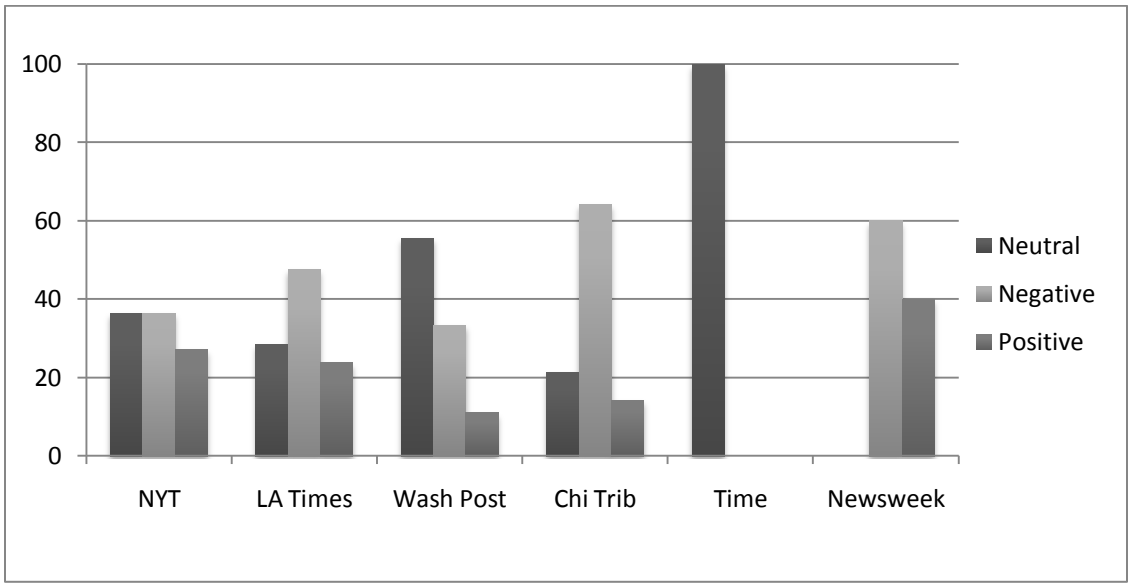

Figure 11: Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press.

Also notable is that of the mainstream newspapers examined here, *The Washington Post* was the only source that did not print mostly negative coverage of Kitt's dissent. Instead, *Post* coverage was mostly neutral.[19] Interestingly a column published in three of the black newspapers examined here lauded the *Post* for doing the best job of covering the event and for its sensitivity to its African American readers stating; "Credit the dovish *Washington Post* for the most able job of fence straddling in the issue. Geared principally to whites, but sensitive to it enormous Negro readership potential in the District, the Post, time and time again faces this dilemma…"

In the mainstream press, newsmakers relied on two specific frames for representing Eartha Kitt's comments at the White House: (1) that Kitt's words were a personal attack against the Johnsons-particularly Mrs. Johnson; and (2) that Kitt's speech was a breach of proper social behavior given both the setting and the audience.

Mainstream Press Frame #1: Kitt on attack

[19] Importantly however, only 11% of Post coverage was supportive with over 33% of the stories being negative, thus still skewing toward negative understandings of Kitt's dissent.

This frame appeared in thirty-three percent (n=24) of mainstream stories on Kitt's words at the White House and was particularly common in news articles. Eight-three percent of the occurrences of this frame were in news stories. This frame constructed Kitt as the antagonist against whom the protagonist, Lady Bird Johnson, was forced to battle and in many cases who needed others to come to her aid in this fight. In this frame, Kitt is constructed as a shrewish attacker, imagery consonant with the Sapphire stereotype of black women. This characterization of Kitt's interaction with the First Lady not only reinforced the stereotype, but drew focus away from—and in some cases, eliminated—discussion of the substance of her questions about the draft and youth of color.

For example, rather than focusing on the fact that Kitt's words were a part of a larger discussion that included many individuals, mainstream papers constructed them as a part of a one-on-one during which the First Lady was attacked without warning. *The Washington Post* ran the headline "Eartha Kitt Confronts the Johnsons: Startled First Lady Responds to Singer's Attack on War." This headline's use of "confronts" and "attack" as descriptors of Kitt's words and the characterizing of Ladybird Johnson's "startled" response constructs Kitt as aggressive and intentionally catching the First Lady unawares. The article goes on to characterize the conversation between Kitt and Johnson as "an impassioned confrontation," and "the dramatic confrontation," in which Kitt "pointed a finger to Mrs. Johnson."

A day later *The Washington Post* ran the headline "Mrs. Johnson Chides Eartha Kitt: 'Shrill Voice' Jars First Lady." This article also characterizes Kitt's statements as a "confrontation." Like the last, this headline constructs Johnson as a victim "jarred" by the "shrill voice" of Kitt. Further, it allows Johnson the power an adult is usually understood

to have over a misbehaving child—"chides" suggests both that Kitt's actions were childish and irresponsible and that they required a denunciation from a motherly figure (i.e. Johnson) who is described in the article as "expressing indignation at Miss Kitt's actions." Further, the use of the gendered term "shrill" to describe Kitt's voice demonstrates the way outspoken female voices are unique denigrated in public discourse.

The Washington Post further framed the incident as a "women's issue" by publishing over half of its news articles on the subject of Kitt's words at the luncheon in the "For and About Women" section of the paper. This both assumes a gendered interest in what Kitt had to say and justifies a focus on the interpersonal relationship (and social etiquette) between two women, Johnson and Kitt, rather than the serious domestic and military issues which were at the heart of Kitt's statement.

The *Los Angeles Times* constructed this antagonist/protagonist relationship with even stronger language. One article begins "Eartha Kitt's Tirade on War Leaves First Lady in Tears" and goes on to mention that "Miss Kitt's angry tirade brought tears to the First Lady's eyes" three more time before its conclusion. In addition, Kitt is described once again as a near-violent attacker—"her eyes flashing in defiance while she puffed on a cigaret (sic) and jabbed a finger at her audience" as she "delivered an emotional tirade."

Like the multiple mentions of Johnson's tears, descriptors of Kitt in mainstream sources as "angry" and "emotional" and her speech as an "outburst," "blast" and 'tirade" in which she "shouted," "jabbed her finger at a startled Lady Bird Johnson" and "told off the First Lady" are repeated frequently. Such descriptors not only construct Kitt as an attacker but as an uncontrolled and irrational one. She is a sapphire-like instigator, angry

and uncontrollable. Further descriptors of Johnson as victim—"shocked," "shaken," "stunned," tearful" and "trembling"—are repeated with similar frequency.

Despite the heavy reliance on direct quotations from Kitt's White House speech, her message is all but subsumed by the idea that she personally attacked the beloved figure of Lady Bird Johnson. Thus, poverty, inner city unrest, and the Vietnam War—the topics of Kitt's words—become tangential in mainstream news reports that focus on was is constructed as a war of words between an irrational and aggressive woman and a controlled and respectable one.

The New York Times also joined in this Kitt vs. Johnson storyline, though with less sensational language. Its initial headline, "Eartha Kitt Denounces War Policy to Mrs. Johnson" seems much more even-handed than that delivered by the *Chicago Tribune*—"Eartha's Shouts Stun Lady Bird into Tears." The *Tribune* contends twice more in the same article that Kitt "shouted" her words at Mrs. Johnson although none of the press members representing other mainstream newspapers seemed to come away with the impression that anything was shouted.[20] The *Tribune* notes that in response to "the confrontation between the Negro singer and the President's wife," Mrs. Johnson considers Kitt "the shrill voice of anger and discord" and that other guests at the luncheon "came to Mrs. Johnson's defense." The idea that Mrs. Johnson needed defending reinforces the construction of threat from Kitt and simultaneously dismisses her "shrill" and "angry" words as irrational.

Together, the various iterations of the "Kitt on attack" frame worked discursively to silence the actress. Rather interrogating the content of her statements to Mrs. Johnson,

[20] Interestingly, in the black press the *Chicago Defender* also claimed Kitt's words were shouted but like the mainstream press none of the other sources reported these supposed shouts.

this frame's focus on the supposed threatening and irrational nature of Kitt's statements allowed mainstream news coverage of the event to ignore the social critiques raised by Kitt. At the same time, focus on the First Lady's supposedly rattled state resulting from the statements constructs the story along the lines of protagonist vs. antagonist with the sympathetically constructed, white, elite woman playing the former role and Kitt, an African American woman with little concrete social power as the later. In this way, Kitt and Johnson are constructed according to the prescribed racial binaries of black wench and white lady, roles that reinforce gendered racial norms while undermining Kitt's dissent.

Mainstream Press Frame #2: Breach of etiquette

A second common frame, appearing in thirty-eight percent (n=27) of the stories, constructed Kitt's words as a breach of etiquette. This frame appeared in news articles, but predominated in opinion-based pieces: sixty-percent of occurrences appeared in editorials, columns, and letters-to-the-editor. This frame primarily depends on dominant social constructions of "polite," "ladylike" behavior and characterizes Kitt's "outburst" as both "rude" and threatening to basic concepts of civility. As with the previous frame, this presentation of Kitt's dissent draws from larger social discourses that frame black women as failing to fulfill the requirements of womanhood[21].

For example, in one of two opinion pieces published by The *Los Angeles Times*," columnist Joyce Haber characterizes Kitt as "an ill-bred lady with a great big chip on her

[21] In a contemporary and alternative reading of Kitt's comments, Joyce Blackwell (2004) has described them as an example of peace activism "in the traditional sphere of motherhood or womanhood" because of Kitt's explicit attempt to appeal to the a female audience and descriptions of her audience and herself as mothers whose concern for their children's safety and futures should result in an anti-war, anti-poverty agenda.

shoulder." A letter-to-the-editor published by Newsweek opined that "You say that there were 50 ladies present at Lady Bird Johnson's White House luncheon…Judging from Eartha Kitt's behavior and her remarks to the gathering, there were 49 ladies present plus Miss Kitt." As a result of this gendered language Kitt is presented as lacking not only in basic manners but those qualities that supposedly evidence sophistication and class in women.

Similarly, nearly seventy-percent of the letters-to-the-editor published by the *Chicago Tribune* focused on denouncing Kitt's supposed breach of etiquette. These denounced Kitt's "public display of anger" as "the epiteme [sic] of vulgarity," "bad manners," "discourteous," "shameful," "poor manners" and noted that it is "inexcusable" and a "breach of etiquete [sic]" "to be rude to one's hostess." It is important to consider here that certainly no newspaper publishes every letter-to-the-editor it receives but rather must select those that the editors feel most adequately reflect the various opinions (or lack thereof) of its readers. In the case of the mainstream sources analyzed here it appears that the editors deemed the social appropriateness rather than the substance of Kitt's words to be of utmost concern to their readers.

Editorials in both The *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*—presenting something of a sympathetic take of Kitt's actions—deemed a national dialogue around race, poverty, and the Vietnam War necessary. However, within these same editorials the editors of the *Times* and the *Post* also labeled Kitt's comments as a "rude confrontation" that "disturbed a polite White House luncheon." Thus, even mainstream coverage that supported, at least in small parts, what Kitt had said at the White House found it necessary construct Kitt as rude and impolite. This frame carried over into many news

articles in the mainstream press that frequently reported on quotes from Lyndon Johnson's pastor Rev. George R. Davis that called Kitt's actions "ill-mannered[22]" and Katherine Penden, the only woman member of Johnson's Commission on Civil Disorders, who referred to Kitt's actions as "the rude interruption that shocked the Nation."

It is important here to note that in addition to the gendered criticism of Kitt in the mainstream press the reporting of this criticism by Davis and Penden (both white) additionally raced Kitt in such a way that she was constructed as an (uncivilized) stand-in for all African Americans. In Davis' repeatedly published harsh criticism of Kitt he apologized to President Johnson for "those Negroes who are ill-mannered, stupid, and arrogant," while Penden was reported as believing that Kitt had done a "disservice" to women and civil rights. Here we see media coverage of Kitt's dissent dominated by whites who are taken as acceptable judges of what is acceptable for blacks to say while fighting for civil rights. This is a "blame the victim" strategy that focuses on the actions and mannerisms of the oppressed rather than the power held by the dominant group.

The idea that Kitt interrupted to make her statement and the constant use of the word "outburst" in the mainstream press is also interesting considering the (rarely reported) fact that Kitt had waited for all the other women at the luncheon to speak before she raised her hand and was called on to speak by Mrs. Johnson herself. Thus,

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[22] In an anticipatory article on the Rev. George R. Davis, *Time* reported on Feb. 4 1966 that "As senior minister of Washington's National City Christian Church, the Rev. George R. Davis of course favors equal rights for Negroes—but he has grave doubts about most of the methods Negroes use to get them."

characterizing Kitt's actions as unexpected or as an interruption was not only cueing racial and gender stereotypes, but also was inaccurate and misleading.

Like the previous frame, part of this frame portrayed Kitt as angry and out of control, acting on impulse rather than careful thought and at the whim of her emotions. Ultimately she appears uncivilized. By focusing on a constructed battle between Kitt and the First Lady and questions of etiquette rather than the substance of Kitt's words, the mainstream press revealed: 1) a tendency to gender the issue and attempt to domesticate Kitt; 2) a reluctance to address the substance of Kitt's words; and 3) a strong defense of dominant ideologies regarding the speech borders around gender, race and social status—especially for a black woman.

Mainstream coverage lacked any interviews with everyday African Americans as to their views on Kitt's action or the topics of her dissent. However, writers were quick to employ the names –but not the voices--of famous African Americans to structure their arguments against Kitt. For example, columnist Joyce Haber of the *Los Angeles Times* included more black people than any other mainstream writer by listing Ella Fitzgerald, Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte as examples of "exceptional ladies and gentlemen" in comparison to the "ill-bred" Kitt. This construction draws on the long tradition of discursively reprimanding and marginalizing dissenting black voices by using token examples of successful and seemingly content "good" black Americans to undermine the possibility that there is any cause for dissent (Jhally & Lewis 1992; Jackson 2006).

In addition to condemnations of her behavior in the form of comparisons to other African American celebrities, every mainstream newspaper compared Kitt's words to those of another White House luncheon guest, Mrs. Richard J. Hughes. It was reported

that the wife of the Democratic Governor of New Jersey, "came to Mrs. Johnson's defense" stating that "youth are not rebelling because of the war." These reports also noted that the First Lady of New Jersey had lost her first husband in WWII and had eight sons none of whom "smoked marijuana" or "wants to go to Vietnam but all will go." Further Hughes is reported as stating that she "will kiss" these sons "good-bye as contribution to my country."

Thus, the white Mrs. Hughes is constructed as an ideally patriotic wife and mother who has properly raised her children to be drug-free and be willing to sacrifice for their country despite their reservations. Further Mrs. Hughes herself is constructed as willing to sacrifice not only a husband but her children for her country. These reports, then, construct a binary between the performed womanhood of Mrs. Hughes and that of Kitt who thus appears not only to be lacking manners but patriotism as well.

In a further twist on this comparison, the *Chicago Tribune* made the point in reporting that Eartha Kitt's only had "a 6-year old daughter" in comparison to Hughes' eight military eligible sons. The implication of the *Tribune*—that compared to Hughes, Kitt has nothing to lose (and nothing to contribute) to the war effort because of her young, female child—seems to take an even harsher ideological dig both at the validity of Kitt's comments (after all why should she care if she has nothing to lose personally) and her womanhood (One daughter vs. eight sons! Clearly someone is the real woman here!).

A complete reliance on elite sources by the mainstream press largely explains the frequency of both of its most common frames. Given that no non-elite citizens, black or white where consulted about Kitt's actions, it is unsurprising that high-status political officials and those with close ties to them (like their wives and religious leaders) found

Kitt's criticisms unacceptable. The only acknowledgement of support of Kitt in the mainstream press came in the form of several reports of "long-haired hippies" who passed out flyers pointing out the hypocrisy of calling Kitt "rude" while "slaughtering women and children in Vietnam." The labeling of such sentiments as restricted to the unfavorable social realm of hippie-dom certainly does not offer this perspective much credence. In this way, Kitt's remarks were yoked to common stereotypes of the anti-war movement in addition to being undermined by stereotypes of black women.

Black Press Findings:

Overall, the black press framed Eartha Kitt and her words most often in a supportive (41%) or neutral (35%) way. Just under twenty-five-percent of stories in the black press were predominantly critical, negative, or unsupportive of Kitt. Like the mainstream press, regional differences occurred with the black press regarding the frequency of positive versus negative characterizations of Kitt and her actions. The *New York Amsterdam News* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* were overwhelmingly supportive of Kitt; neither contained any text that was entirely critical of her or her actions. On the other hand, *The Chicago Defender* carried only two stories supportive of Kitt and the *Pittsburgh Courier* printed none.

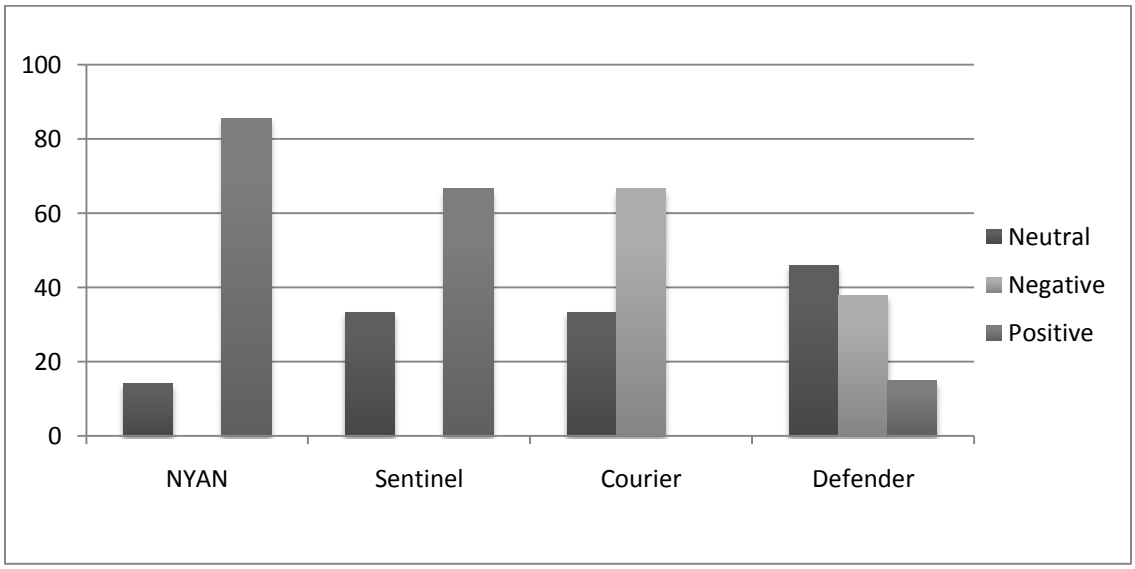

Figure 12: Black Press regional value judgments of Kitt.

These findings suggest that in the black press the *Defender* and *Courier* tended to have a more conservative approach in covering Kitt's dissent while the *New York Amsterdam News* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* presented their readers with more oppositional discourses for understanding the event[23]. Importantly these differences align themselves with those found in the mainstream press with the New York and Los Angeles papers presenting the most positive coverage of Kitt and the Chicago-based paper presenting the most negative. Thus, even as the mainstream press leaned toward dominant and thus negative interpretations of Kitt's dissent and the black press leaned toward more oppositional understandings, differences in regional differences appeared to impact newsmakers in each press similarly.

This finding reflects the ways in which the public sphere can differ depending upon the ideological groundwork present for conversations about sensitive topics in

[23] Notably John H. Sengstacke, editor of the *Chicago Defender* had purchased the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1965. Thus both papers were under similar editorial control. (http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html), accessed September 29, 2010.

various regions. Thus while it is clear that black journalists often felt compelled to respond to critical coverage of Kitt in the mainstream press it also appears that both mainstream and black journalists were limited ideologically by the popular discourses of the regions in which they worked.

While gendered language certainly existed in mainstream coverage of Kitt as previously discussed, it is interesting to note that while there was little explicit sexual objectification of Kitt in the mainstream press (other than the *Chicago Tribune*'s noting of her "tight-fitting" dress at the luncheon), three out of the four black press sources that covered Kitt included descriptions of her as "sultry," and a "sex kitten," with one *Pittsburgh Courier* article referring to her as a "tigress" five times. The *Pittsburgh Courier* also included the condescending and sexist statement at the end of its scathing editorial about Kitt that "who will deny that if you get a group of fifty women together, even in the White House, many things are possible."

The two most common frames for making sense of Kitt's words in the black press focused on: 1) gauging the political validity—or truth—of Kitt's words (rather than their social appropriateness); and 2) an emphasis on the value of freedom of expression.

Black Press Frame #1: Truth-telling

The most common frame of Eartha Kitt's words at the White House in the black press was that they were a form of truth-telling. This frame occurred in over forty-percent of black press coverage, most commonly in opinion-based content but also in news articles. The idea that Kitt told the truth was presented as a defense of any criticism that might be levied at her. For example, while much of the black press coverage mentioned

the possible offense Mrs. Johnson may have taken to Kitt's words and the question of etiquette, this coverage also upheld truth-telling as more central than these concerns.

For example, letters-to-the-editor in the *New York Amsterdam News* contended that "Miss Eartha Kitt's statement was right to the core," and asked rhetorically is response to criticisms of Kitt "How can you do harm with the truth?" Similarly, the *Los Angeles Sentinel*'s singularly published letter-to-the-editor stated "I see little cause or reason to rise up in indignation over reflective remarks such as those made by Kitt. Surely there was much truth and responsibility in them." Columns in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Amsterdam News* contended that Kitt had "fearlessly" "spoken the truth" and noted that you can "always depend on Eartha Kitt to tell it like it is."

Clearly not impervious to the dominant discourses that led in to the framing of Eartha Kitt's words at the White House as a personal clash between the actress and Mrs. Johnson, twenty-percent of all coverage in the black press presented this idea. However, it is of interest to note that while this frame occurred with the same negative connotations in the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* as in the mainstream press, in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *New York Amsterdam News* the personalization of the story overlapped with the truth-telling frame.

For example, the *Sentinel* and *Amsterdam News* suggested that the reported tears of Mrs. Johnson were the result of being moved by the truth of Kitt's words rather than fear or offense. The *Sentinel* reported a quote from Kitt stating "that 'because Mrs. Johnson is a mother, as am I, what I said about youth moved her,'" and a letter-to-the-editor in the *Amsterdam News* contended that "Mrs. Johnson was moved to tears knowing how many people are against her husband on account of the war."

Even in the *Chicago Daily Defender,* which presented more negative coverage of Kitt in relation to her White House visit than positive, the frame of truth-telling appeared. For example in an editorial that criticized Kitt for a breach of social etiquette, the truth of Kitt's words was noted: "Though the logic she advanced as the motivating factor in today's juvenile delinquency may be historically correct, the vehemence with which she said [it] was vexing and irritating."

Through this statement the *Defender* reflects the main point of difference between framing approaches in each press with most dominant discourse being concerned about *how* Kitt communicated her concerns and African American discourse being primarily concerned with the *content* of these concerns. Similarly, the *New York Amsterdam News* editorial staff noted that people "claim that she [Kitt] said words at the wrong time, at the wrong place, and in the wrong way, culminating in bad taste. There are others who think Miss Kitt was the only guest who added *truth* to the luncheon menu. *With this group we align ourselves*" (emphasis added).

The most positive coverage of Kitt printed in the *Defender* focused on the fact that Dr. Martin Luther King considered Kitt's comments "appropriate both to content and to place," and a reflection of "the feelings of many persons." Similarly, other news articles that applied the truth-telling frame did so primarily though interviews and quotes from African American citizens on their perspective of Kitt's actions. This is particularly interesting because of the lack of anything but elite, white sources quoted in the mainstream press. The *Chicago Daily Defender* quoted several citizens including a chauffeur and housewife who felt that Kitt's experiences had "put her in the enviable position of knowing what young people are thinking," and that Kitt "let Mrs. Johnson

know how young men who are about to be drafted feel…" In both cases the emphasis of the news report is that Kitt's standpoint was valid because it reflected a truth regarding the opinions of various members of the African American community.

Likewise, the opinions of "Angeleno women" run by the *Sentinel* contended that Kitt was "courageous" "because she told the truth." While criticism of Kitt's manners appeared in these interviews with a group of African American women it was again tempered by the truth-telling frame: "What she said was the truth, but how she said it was the bad thing." The *Sentinel* noted in another article that "the consensus was that any 'rudeness' that occurred was the unexpected injection of harsh facts of life into a discussion that revolved around 'planting flowers'…"

Within the truth-telling frame in the black press there existed a unique trend absent from mainstream press coverage; the use of Christian imagery and biblical discourse in justifying the holding up of truth over social expectations. For example, a letter-to-the-editor in the *New York Amsterdam News* noted of Kitt that "…if she is for the right as God is for the right, then whoever is angered by the truth of the matter can cast his lot with the devil, that old Satan." Another *Amsterdam News* letter noted that to suggest "it rude for her [Kitt] to think of the millions of Negroes who are unable to speak for themselves…is enough to make God angry and sick."

Similarly, a letter to the *Los Angeles Sentinel* suggested that Johnson's pastor "peruse through his scriptures and read the story of Queen Esther. She also chose a gala affair to embarrass a symbol."[24] And an article in the *Sentinel* noted that some felt "Christ

[24] According to the book of Esther in the Old Testament, Queen Esther saved the Jews from annihilation when she revealed to her husband, King Ahasuerus, at a banquet that she herself was of Jewish blood and

Jesus spoke the truth and was crucified. So Eartha Kitt shouldn't feel badly because she is criticized." One *Amsterdam* news reader noted that "open confession is good for the soul and body…May God Bless you, Miss Kitt."

Overall the truth-telling frame depended on the idea that ultimately telling it "like it is" was a righteous thing no matter if it made others uncomfortable. This focus on truth-telling as righteous reflects the differing understandings journalists in the black press brought to covering Kitt's actions. In this case, her actions were seen as part of a larger, righteous battle to communicate the reality of the feelings and experiences of the black and urban poor to the powers that be in America. The idea that truth is often unpopular but ultimately is worth ire in pursuit of justice was a theme taken up consistently within the various parts of the African American freedom struggle and is particularly reflected in the use of Christian and biblical rhetoric.

Black Press Frame #2: Freedom of expression

Although not appearing as frequently as the truth-telling frame in the black press, a frame that emphasized America's basic commitment to freedom of expression, particularly speech, was presented in nearly twenty-percent of black press coverage of Kitt's White House visit. Like the truth-telling frame, this frame appeared as a response to arguments that Kitt should not have said what she did, or that she should have edited her comments given her audience and location. This frame predominately occurred in news articles.

For example, the *Amsterdam News* reported that "Ladies in New York" felt that "'Miss Kitt, of course, is entitled to her opinion and to the free expression of it.'"

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the King's close official Haman, whom the King had trusted, was plotting to destroy her cousin Mordecai and all Jewish people.

Likewise the *Sentinel* reported that "The effects of the Miss Kitt's [sic] exercising her inalienable right to speak freely in a democratic country at the White House—the citadel of freedom—has caused all kinds of reaction," and went on to report the opinions of several women who felt "She [Kitt] has a right to dissent like any other American," and that "everyone has the right to speak their mind in America." While explicitly calling on the basic American value of freedom of expression, these constructions also implicitly suggested that Kitt was being subjected to a double-standard in the application of this value that the majority (i.e. "other Americans," "everyone") was not.

The *Defender* printed the opinions of several interviewees that "as freedom of speech is an important principle in our country" Kitt as an "American citizen should be able to talk to her [the First Lady] just as she would to anyone else." Unlike the truth-telling frame found in the black press which focused on the content of Kitt's words at the White House this freedom of expression frame makes the central issue one of basic freedoms. In this frame an emphasis is placed on the ideal application of principles of freedom of expression, which as a right of all American citizens, should clearly apply to Kitt, an African American and a woman, without any suggestion that she is somehow less deserving of this right for taking advantage of it.

While not present in the majority of stories in the black press it is also significant that the black press printed multiple stories which focused on conveying the opinions of everyday people rather than elites.[25] In particular African American women's opinions about Kitt's visit to the White House were focused on. This is worth noting given the

[25] Fourteen-percent of black press coverage.

complete lack of anything but elite sources in the mainstream press which completely excluded the perspectives of this very group.

In an interesting example of the sometimes apprehensive relationship between the black community and black celebrities who are perceived as catering to much to the mainstream, three stories published in the mainstream press explicitly noted previous concerns about Kitt's allegiances and praised her for demonstrating that she was invested in her community. For example, a letter-to-the-editor in the *Los Angles Sentinel* noted that Kitt's recent actions were "wonderful" considering that "only a few years ago she seemed reluctant to identify with the masses and, in particular the Negro masses."

Interestingly, despite the welcoming of Kitt's apparently new found activism, several members of the black press apparently remained skeptical about her intentions. For example, an article by Ethel L. Payne that was printed by both the *Defender* and *Courier* noted that the question remained answered as to "why the pussycat [who] had never expressed any views on Vietnam before had turned herself into a tigress and chosen the White House to vent her fury," asking "Could it have been publicity or was it sheer frustration?"

Thus there was some disagreement among members of the black press as to if Kitt's actions were a reflection of a genuine concern for "the masses" or for herself (with the split once again appearing between the *Defender/Courier* and *Sentinel/Amsterdam News)*. This finding may reflect a phenomenon of collapse between the public understanding of Kitt and her persona in which her personal convictions are regarded with cultural, political and racial suspicion given the seemingly conflicting "sociopolitical predispositions" of Kitt's apolitical celebrity persona (Haggins 2007).

Overall the mainstream press and black press shared several trends in the construction of various frames. Both presses depended heavily on quotes in reporting the story of Kitt's visit to the white House. These quotes included those from Kitt, Johnson and other attendees at the luncheon as well as later quotes from Kitt, Johnson and other celebrities and politicians as to the meaning and intention behind Kitt's word. It is interesting to note the general infrequency in which either press reported on Martin Luther King's support of Kitt and also that in the two reports in the mainstream press he was referred to as an "anti-war leader" as opposed to the "civil-rights leader" the one black press article on the subject described him as.

An overwhelming common characteristic in both the mainstream and black press was the representation of Mrs. Johnson as a likable, sympathetic figure. While the mainstream media primarily accomplished this by representing the First Lady as a victim who handled herself with composure while under attack, the black press accomplished the same by praising both Eartha Kitt for her truth-telling and the class and poise with which Mrs. Johnson handled the unexpected situation. It is interesting to note that the quote from Mrs. Johnson focused on several times in the mainstream press which labeled Kitt as the "shrill voice of anger and discord" only appeared once in all the black press stories in a *Defender* article.

Given that Lyndon Johnson was the President who ultimately got the Civil Rights Act passed and who began the War on Poverty, it is unsurprising that the tone of black press coverage reflected a genuine admiration and respect for both the First Lady and Mr. Johnson on behalf of African American newsmakers.

Discussion

According to Blackwell (2004), Kitt's dissent can be understood as an example of the unique discourse that African American women contributed to the anti-war movement in that her criticisms not only focused on the Vietnam War but on its connections to American racial injustice. Given this, these findings reflect several trends regarding the way black celebrities are framed in dominant and marginal public spheres, and the ways in which race, gender and concepts of nation intersect in the construction of these frames. First, it is clear that journalists in the mainstream press adopted dominant discourses which viewed black challenges to the political status quo—embodied here by Lady Bird Johnson—as both threatening politically and inappropriate socially.

While the framing of Kitt as a political threat is unsurprising given previous scholarship on challenges to the status quo (see Druckman 2001, Smith, et. al 2001) her construction as a threat to appropriate social behavior appears uniquely linked to her gender. Unlike Muhammad Ali or Paul Robeson—who also presented public critiques that linked American imperialism and American racism during wartime, and who were also framed as threats to an ideal American way of life because of their dissent—Kitt was simultaneously constructed as lacking in the qualities that define the feminine ideal. Thus questions of rudeness and manners and a focus on interpersonal relationships undermined Kitt's womanhood by locating her outside of normative social hierarchies that require women to perform publically in a constrained manner and keep their conflicts in the private sphere in order to be eligible for the full citizenship.

Certainly Kitt's race intersected with these mainstream discourses and contributed to constructions of her as a threat to both governmental and gender hierarchies. The mainstream press commonly identified Kitt as "Negro singer" in their coverage of her

visit to the White House while failing to identify the race of any of the European American figures involved in the story.[26] According to Haggins (2007), this is a common practice when African American women who have otherwise been de-raced in dominant discourses present challenges to dominant understandings of race, class or gender which appear to contradict the apolitical nature of their dominant public persona. Thus, the mainstream press contributed to re-racing Kitt and thus disciplining her socially, culturally and politically because of her choice to challenge and make salient national understandings of poverty, race and nation.

On the other hand the black journalists, while not immune to the dominant discourses that framed Kitt negatively in the mainstream press, attempted to present at least two primary counterdiscourses. These frames of truth-telling and freedom of expression allowed black journalists to respond to dominant criticisms of Kitt by constructing and reinforcing the idea that there are principles higher than those focused on by the mainstream press. Without always denying that some might view Kitt's actions as an attack on the Johnson's or as rude behavior, the black press focused on the idea that Kitt was both within her rights as an American citizen and ethically and morally right in her contentions.

Thus, black press frames did the direct work of challenging mainstream frames that constructed Kitt as less then American because of her dissent by explicitly evoking the Bill of Rights and pointing out Kitt's deserving of it while criticizing those that would seek to silence any "American citizen." At the same time the black press undermined

[26] This is interesting both because everyone of course knew Kitt was a "Negro" given her popularity and thus there was no legitimate reason to remind people of it but also because of how ridiculous it would sound to refer to, for example, Lady Bird Johnson as the "White First Lady."

mainstream attempts to dismiss Kitt's words because of the way there were conveyed in favor of reinforcing their validity because of their content. While freedom of speech and truth are both doubtlessly abstract concepts, the black press' reliance on them was smart in that it would be difficult for critics of Kitt to justify arguments against these concepts without themselves seeming un-American or in violation of moral sensibilities.

While not sparing Kitt criticism (and thus not necessarily being on her side), the black press successfully presented its readers with alternative discourses that allowed Kitt, as a dissenting black woman, to both maintain her citizenship and moral standing in the face of dominant discourses which suggested otherwise. At the same time African American journalists gave voice to a whole segment of the population largely ignored by the mainstream press—non-elites, particularly black ones,—and thus were able to construct Kitt as a representative of the thoughts of everyday people.

Notable in this coverage, despite the differences found between public spheres is the diversity of opinion that existed within each press. A call for a more complicated understanding of public sphere theory which takes into consideration the popular discourses and ideologies in various geographic regions as well as the particular editorial control of various sources is supported by several findings. First, in the mainstream press, *The Washington Post* was uniquely able to present predominantly neutral coverage of Kitt while all other mainstream sources presented mostly negative coverage of the actress' words. Second, in the black press the *New York Amsterdam News* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* reported on the story without once focusing on solely negative constructions of it while the *Pittsburgh Courier* was overwhelmingly negative in its coverage of Kitt in comparison to other sources.

Thus, ideological diversity existed in both public spheres to such an extent that readers of mainstream and black newspapers were likely exposed to various understandings of Kitt and her actions even if these understandings were limited by larger frames. These findings reveal the nuances and sometimes contradictions of framing done by and for citizens/readers of different public spheres—especially during a tumultuous political era like the 1960s. This also reflects the differences that can be expected given the various cultural backgrounds of reporters, subjects and readers within each press. However, while social and professional factors of each press will likely vary with each historical context and case examined here, what does remain stable is that understandings of race, history and the validity of black dissent differ greatly in white and black public spheres. And, that at the same time, wholesale support of a black celebrities' remarks is not a given in either sphere, despite cross-over success or level of affinity within the Black community.

Ultimately, while the interpretations of Kitt's actions were limited by the frames presented in both the mainstream and black press, the extensive coverage of them and large amount of editorial content dedicated to them in both presses reflects the impact Kitt was able to have, if briefly, on public discussions around war and urban unrest. While the *content* of Kitt's words never became the focus of intense debate, and thus her intended impact on policy regarding urban unrest was perhaps lost, she did accomplish something unique by using her celebrity access to publicizing the worldview of an African American woman in an elite space that would otherwise altogether ignore such perspectives. Or, as one Cathy W. Aldridge of the *New York Amsterdam News* put it at the time: when Kitt "confronted the President and Mrs. Johnson with thought provoking

questions, usually reserved for more intimate gatherings, she spoke for the ages—daring to place all the hurt felt by Afro-Americans everywhere…this verbal exchange in the hallowed White House broke a barrier for the first time in the mansion's history. There is much to be said for that…"

Ch. 3: Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics

"It is very discouraging to compete with white athletes. On the track you're Tommie Smith, the fastest man in the world, but off it you are just another nigger"—Tommie Smith, September 1967

Like Eartha Kitt's White House dissent nine months before, the 1968 Olympic victory stand demonstration by Tommie Smith and John Carlos can be understood as one of many events that punctuated public discourses of black unrest in the 1960s. The black stocking feet, raised fists, and bowed heads of the gold and bronze medal winners have been ascribed a variety of cultural meanings. As one of the mostly widely circulated images of the 1960s, the demonstration has, in retrospect, been labeled "sheer expressive genius" and "one of, if not the most, memorable moments in modern American sport history" (Hartmann 2003; Hill 2008)[27].

As Tommie Smith's quote heading this chapter reveals, his and Carlos' experiences as black athletes from poor families on an overwhelmingly white, upper-middle class campus in the late-1960s significantly informed their understanding of American race relations. Along with these personal experiences, the athletes' activism and racial critiques were influenced by their educational experiences with Professor Harry Edwards. Edwards, a major player in sport-centered racial protest activities, was one of the few African American professors at San Jose State University at the time—both Smith and fellow Olympian Lee Evans had taken courses on race relations and black leadership from him. Inspired, Smith, Evans, and later Carlos, would become active in various projects that focused on confronting racial inequalities in higher education and sport through student activism. In the years leading up to the 1968 Olympics, the Olympic Project for Human Rights grew from these projects (Hill 2008; Hartmann 2003).

[27] These opinions are not limited to academia—In 1996 TV Guide ranked the demonstration #38 in its one-hundred most memorable television moments.

While the initial OPHR idea of a large-scale boycott of the Olympic Games by black athletes failed to gain sufficient support, Smith, Carlos and Evans, along with other black—and some white[28]—American athletes continued on speak to issues of inequality and publicize the goals of the OPHR in the days leading up to the Games (Hartmann 2003). The sustained activism of these, and other, student athletes is important in understanding the context of Smith and Carlos' demonstration as well as the larger cultural discourses around race and activism they faced in 1968.

Stabile (2006) notes that by the late-1960s a backlash against the Civil Rights movement was occurring in American society, and in particular, in media discourses of black activism. Considering the legal ban on racial discrimination instituted by the 1964 Civil Rights Act and media framing of racism as a purely Southern issue, by 1968 many white Americans felt that America's racial problems were well on their way to being solved. At the same time, the continued de facto racism throughout American society frustrated a younger generation of black activists who, in response, began to turn from passive to more active forms of resistance and protest. Within this context, the previously sympathetic media discourses around civil rights figures like Martin Luther King shifted and began to construct black liberation movements as a threat to Northern norms and values and thus to a larger idealized American society.

Thus, the moment of Smith and Carlos' racial dissent can be understood as one in which the black public sphere was struggling with identifying successful means for continued racial progress in the wake of the assassination of Dr. King while the

[28] In particular members of the Harvard crew team released a statement in August of 1968 offering their full support of any action OPHR members might take at the Olympics because of a "moral commitment to support our black teammates."

mainstream public sphere was moving farther from sympathy and closer to resentment in its understandings of the African American experience (Hartmann 2003).

In addition to this unique context, the examination of mainstream and black media coverage of the 1968 Olympic medal stand demonstration by Tommie Smith and John Carlos presents several unique challenges. First, unlike the other cases examined here, Smith and Carlos' celebrity came primarily as a result of their dissent rather than preempting it. Given this, before their now famous moment on the medal stand the runners were more limited in their access to institutional channels of discourse than the other figures I examine and thus had perhaps the least amount of control over their images.

As a result, constructions of Smith and Carlos' personas in both the black and mainstream public spheres are almost entirely dependent on the simultaneous construction of the meaning of the demonstration. Additionally, while several of the other celebrities examined in this project presented critiques that called upon discourses of internationalism (Ali and Robeson in particular), Smith and Carlos' dissent is the only case examined here that, while focusing on domestic issues, occurred on foreign soil.

Considering the political expectations and cultural meanings ascribed to the Olympic Games, Smith and Carlos' dissent can be seen as particularly daring given their explicit attempt to bring international attention to the unrest of African Americans in a space where a national image of cohesiveness was of utmost importance (Tomlinson and Young 2006). Further, it is important to recognize that the investigation of mediated discursive frameworks around a single ritualized and highly symbolic event (such as the

Olympics) can provide evidence of larger social understandings and tensions within an ever transforming civil society (Kertzer 1988).

Hartmann's (2003) examination of the demonstration reveals that dominant social and political ideologies of "sport as special" significantly influenced media coverage of the pair. Leading up to, during, and following the 1968 Olympics, journalists at traditional news outlets, and sports writers and sport publications in particular, treated sport as a Utopian space devoid of politics and free from inequality. Such treatment of the Games thus tended to suggest Smith and Carlos' actions, and the general actions of the OPHR were illogical and unreasonable (Hartmann 2003).

Informed by such previous findings, this chapter systematically elucidates the various interpretations of Smith and Carlos's actions that were presented to the American public, in the *New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Time* and *Newsweek* in the mainstream press and the *New York Amsterdam News, Chicago Defender, Los Angeles Sentinel, Negro Digest* and *Ebony* in the African American press. For each of these sources data was collected via Proquest Historical Databases online, microfilm holdings from the University of Minnesota and other public universities, and the online archives of several specific sources. The data in this analysis was published between October 16, 1968—the day of the demonstration—and December 16, 1968—a two month period.

Data Overview

In the black press, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* printed the most stories covering the Olympic protest (n=13) with the *Chicago Defender* publishing about half that number (n=7) followed by the *New York Amsterdam News* (n=5). Initially I hypothesized that

these results might reflect a regional interested in the San Jose-based track stars not shared by the journalists at the *Defender* and *Amsterdam News*. However, a search of all coverage of the runners, Harry Edwards, the Olympic Project for Human Rights and/or the proposed Olympic boycott beginning in 1965 and leading up to the 1968 Olympics revealed that in every case, the *Defender* presented more coverage than the *Sentinel*.

The fact that the *Defender* presented half the amount of coverage of the actual demonstration than the *Sentinel* suggests a reluctance by the paper's editor to devote time to Smith and Carlos' dissent, especially considering the *Defender*'s daily publication as compared to the other black press sources. This finding supports those of the previous two chapters that suggest that the *Defender* served as the most conservative African American newspaper, reluctant to reward non-traditional black activism.

Ebony printed two articles in the time frame examined here. The article published in *Ebony*'s October issue would have been published several weeks before Smith and Carlos' demonstration took place and thus does not address it specifically. However, the six-page article of mostly photos of African American Olympic athletes preparing for competition does explain that the proposed OPHR boycott by black athletes has been "called off" and that while black athletes would compete many also "plan symbolic anti-bias protests." The primary focus of the article is on the athletic achievements "of America's black athletes" and the fact that "they are almost sure to win." Despite carrying quotes from and detailing the achievements of various black athletes, only one sentence of the article mentions Tommie Smith (misspelling his name Tommy) and at no point is Carlos mentioned.

This focus on sure success over the more politically controversial figures involved in the Olympic boycott movement is consistent with *Ebony*'s editorial orientation of focusing on black achievement and downplaying controversy. However it is notable that unlike any of the other figures examined here, the publishers of *Ebony* would later (in their December issue) discuss Smith and Carlos' dissent in detail and offer a critique of institutional responses to it.

Negro Digest published no stories about the Olympic stand demonstration in the time frame examined here, unsurprising given their focus on literature and the arts and Carlos and Smith's lack of preexisting high profile status.

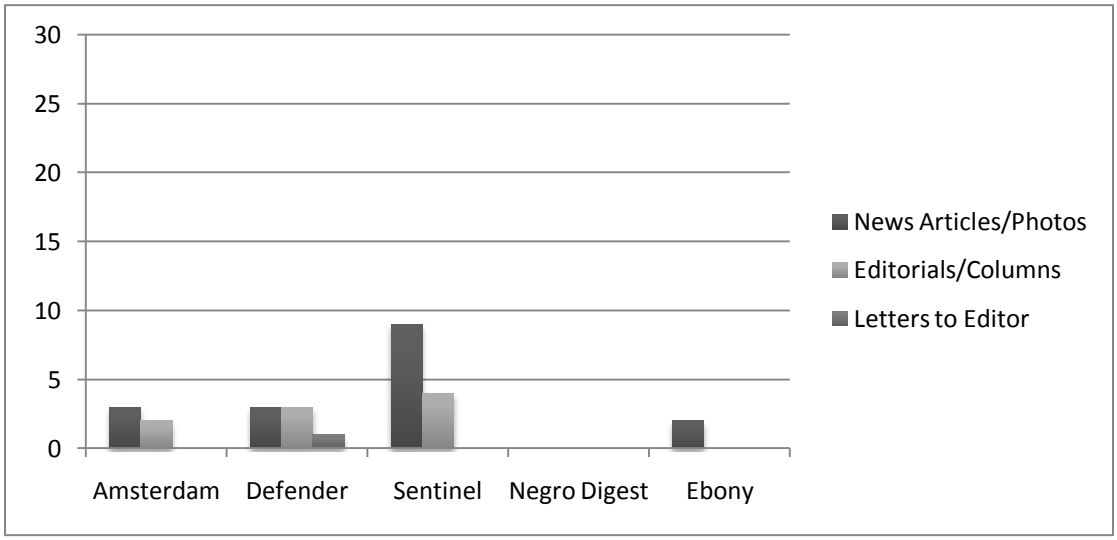

Figure 13: Frequency of stories by black press source.

In the mainstream press, the *Los Angeles Times* published the overwhelming majority of stories on Tommie Smith and John Carlos' protest (n=42) with the *Chicago Tribune* (n=21) printing half the stories as the Los Angeles-based paper. The *New York Times* published sixteen (n=16) stories on the subject. These finding align with those in the black press in which the Los Angeles-based paper carried the most coverage of the dissent followed by the Chicago and New York-based papers. However, unlike in the

black press, in the three years leading up to the Olympics, mainstream coverage of the runners, Harry Edwards, the Olympic Project for Human Rights and the proposed boycott was also mostly published in the Los Angeles paper. *Time* published four stories that addressed Smith and Carlos' actions and *Newsweek* published one.

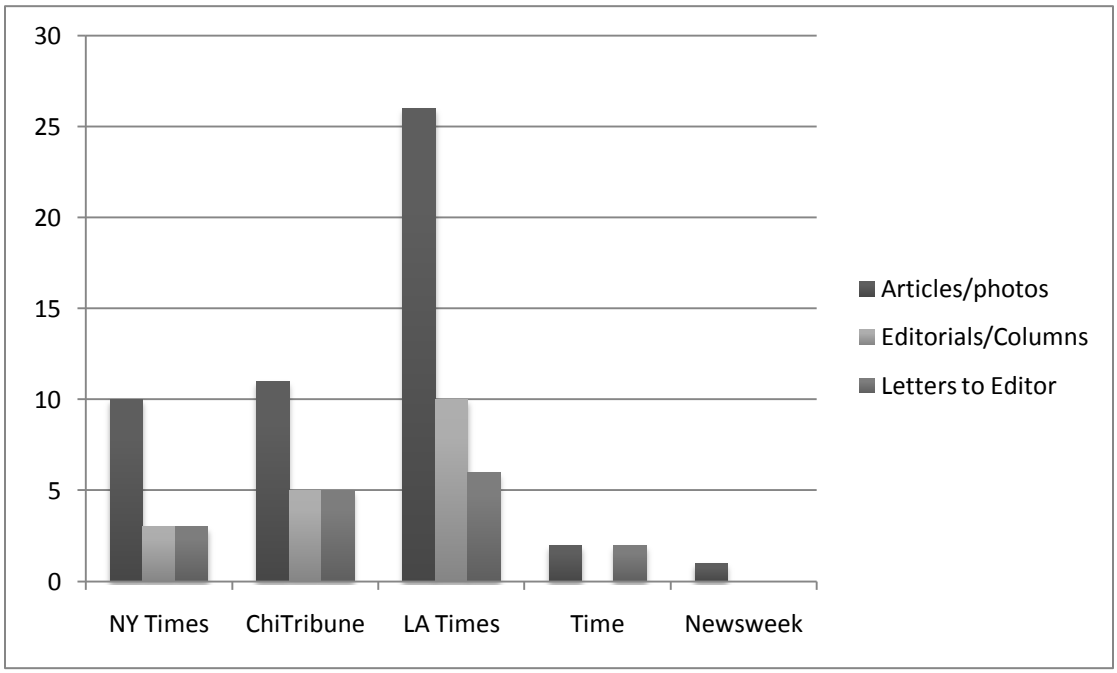

Figure 14: Frequency of stories by mainstream source.

In total, the black press published twenty-five (N=26) stories that addressed Smith, Carlos and the Olympic protest with just over sixty-percent of those being opinion-based stories including editorials, columns and letters to the editor. The mainstream press published over three times as many stories on the protest (N=84) as the black press. Of the stories published by mainstream sources forty-percent were explicitly opinion-based (i.e. editorials, columns, and letters to the editor). As previously noted, the difference in frequency of coverage in the black press versus the mainstream press can be primarily attributed to the weekly publication of most black press sources as compared to

the daily publication of mainstream press sources as well as differences in economic resources and social and political access.

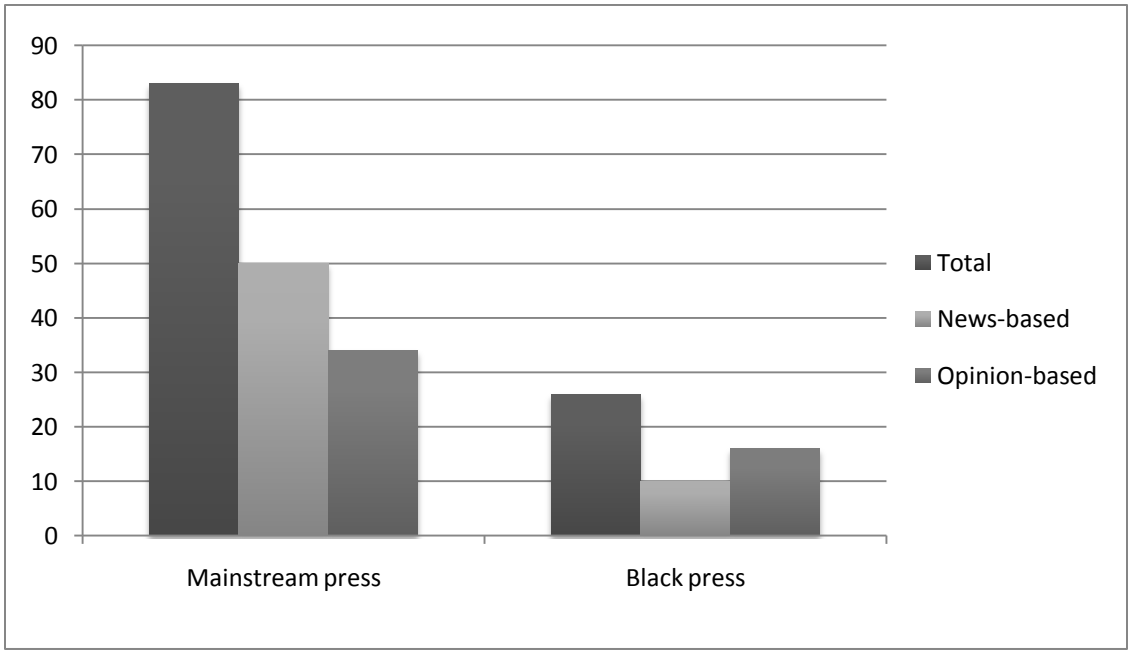

Figure 15: Number of stories compared to totals by type and press.

Preliminary coding found that mainstream coverage of Smith and Carlos was about fifty-percent negative, forty-percent neutral and only twelve-percent positive. On the other hand, black press coverage of the athletes was mostly neutral at forty-two percent, followed by thirty-five percent positive coverage and just under a quarter negative. Below I discuss the characterizations applied to Smith and Carlos and how these fit into the overall frames presented by the mainstream and black presses. I will also discuss the similarities and differences that existed within and across press type and the implications of these findings.

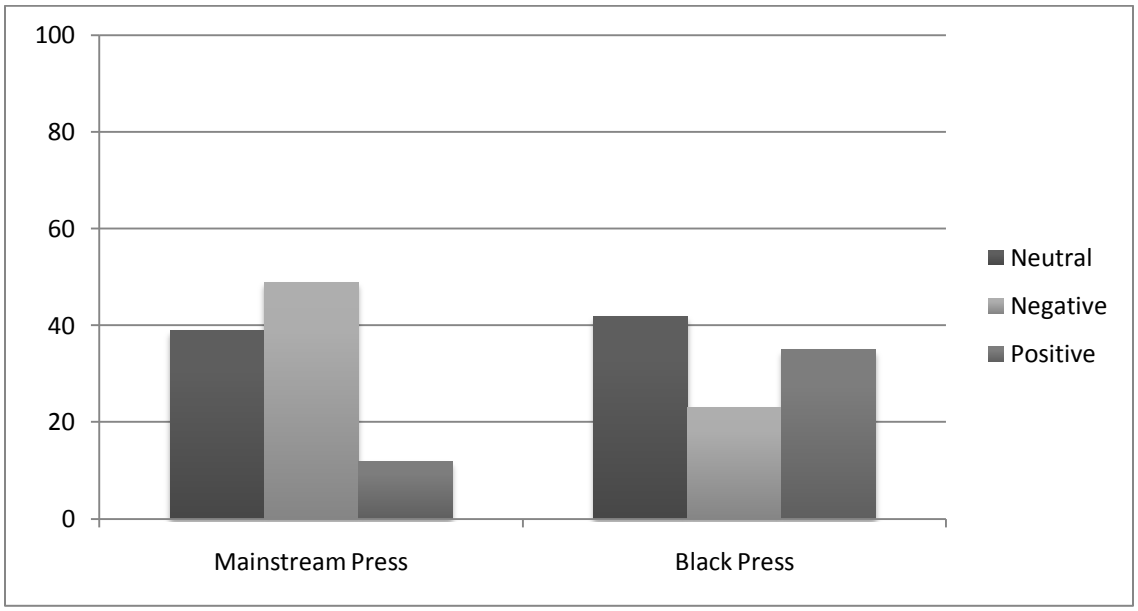

Figure 16: Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press.

Mainstream Press Findings

Trends in Negative and Positive Coverage

Unsurprisingly given the way newsmakers, and especially sportswriters, derogatorily constructed even the possibility of any type of racial protest being included in the Olympics (Hartmann 2003), the mainstream press leaned strongly negative in their coverage of Carlos and Smith with nearly fifty-percent of stories dominated by negative descriptors of the athletes and their actions. The protest was variously described as "an insult to the host country," "discourteous," "rude," "irresponsible," and "immature." Editorials and letters to the editor in the mainstream press tended to characterize the two runners as "ungrateful" and "unpatriotic," and news articles characterized the protest as a threat to the "need to maintain order." Such negative constructions in the mainstream press outnumbered positive ones 4-to-1.

Notably, the *New York Times* presented a significantly smaller percentage of negative constructions of Smith and Carlos than its' mainstream counterparts—

presenting mostly neutral coverage of the protest and an equal amount of positive and negative constructions. On the other hand, the *Los Angeles Time*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Time* magazine each published stories on the protest that were over fifty-percent negative in their constructions of Smith and Carlos' dissent.

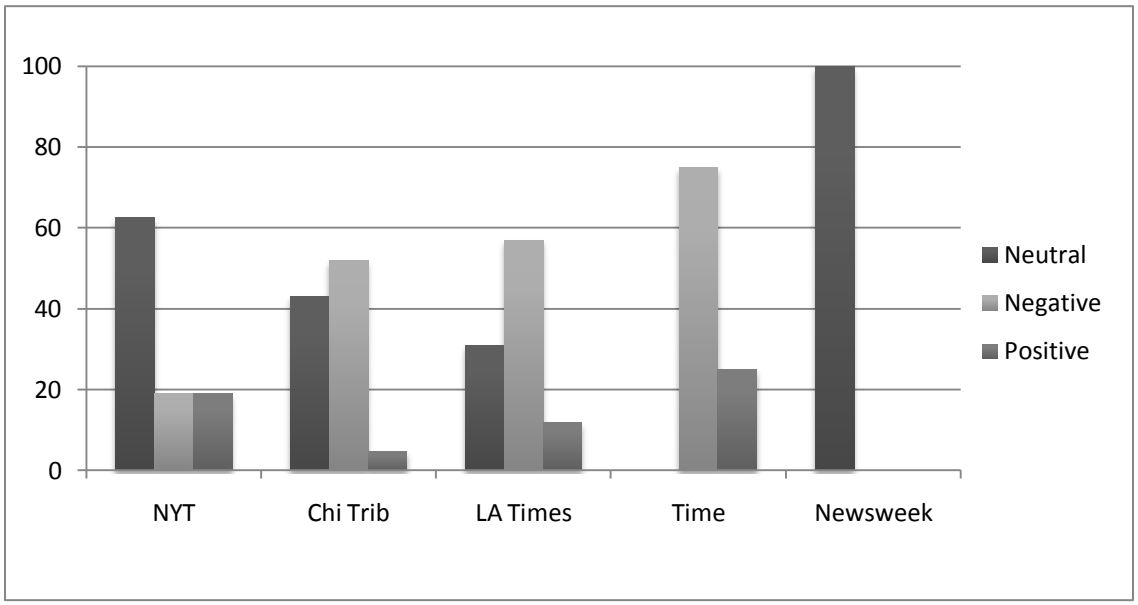

Figure 17: Mainstream characterizations by source

Consistent with findings from the previous two chapters, the *New York Times* was also the only mainstream newspaper examined here that did not regularly use the descriptor "Negro" or "Negroes" before or after naming Smith and Carlos.[29] All mainstream press sources examined here insisted on using the term "militant" to describe Smith and Carlos. The use of the term "militant" by the mainstream press, while not explicitly negative, constructs the politics of Smith and Carlos represent a threat, and the frequency with which it was used is reminiscent of the use of the term "subversive" in descriptions of Paul Robeson and his supports in Chapter One. In both cases, such

[29] Only 12-percent of NYT stories did this.

discursive labeling of African American critics of the racial and class status quo in America served to marginalize and disparage their dissent.

Mainstream Press Frame #1: Sports & Politics Don't Mix

In nearly forty-five-percent of mainstream coverage of the Olympic demonstration, journalists presented their audience with the construction of the natural incompatibility of athletic competition and political debate. This was accomplished through two primary discursive constructions; first, mainstream stories often explicitly stated the incompatibility of the two and the idea that sport represented a pure institution while politics (particularly racial politics) represented a dirty one; second, the mainstream press perpetuated the idea that any insertion of politics into an athletic competition represented an unwelcome intrusion and evidence of disrespect toward sport. This frame in particular aligns with Hartmann's (2003) findings of the way public discourse in general, and especially popular magazines like *Life*, sport magazines like *Amateur Athlete*, and various U.S. newspapers constructed "sport as special" in coverage of the Olympic protest movement.

In reporting on the protest, the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* all depended heavily upon official statements from the International Olympic Committee that "Smith and Carlos deliberately violated a universally accepted Olympic principle by using the occasion to advertise domestic political views," and from the United States Olympic Committee that Smith and Carlos' dissent was a "violation of the basic standards of sportsmanship." All of the repeated instances of publication of these statements in news articles in the mainstream press treated the sentiments they

reflect as fact, thereby immobilizing the possibility of interpreting the elite statements as anything but the most logical and factual interpretation of Smith and Carlos' dissent.

Discourse in the two mainstream newsmagazines likewise successfully framed the protest as an inappropriate interruption of the otherwise jubilant and achievement-filled games. *Time* noted that Smith and Carlos' "display of petulance" "turned the high drama of the games into the theater of the absurd," and that "the saddest thing about the ruckus raised by Tommie Smith and John Carlos was that it dulled the luster of a superlative track and field meet…" *Newsweek*, in a largely neutral and very in-depth article on the protest, noted that the "controversy" that resulted from Smith and Carlos' protest "almost over-shadowed all the brilliant performances and personal dramas of the XIX Olympiad," and that "the furor interrupted a week of some of the most brilliant Olympic feats in the history of the Games." Such discourse also notably presents the runners' dissent as uncontrolled and violent ("ruckus," "furor").

Chicago Tribune journalists wrote as fact that "one of the basic principles of the Olympic Games is that politics play no part whatsoever in them. This principle has always been accepted with enthusiasm by all, of course, including the competitors" and that Smith and Carlos showed "discourtesy by departing from tradition." The irony of this discourse is that the *Tribune* and the other newspapers examined here often quoted Jesse Owens opinion that Smith and Carlos had chosen the "wrong battlefield" by protesting at the Olympics while making no mention whatsoever of the arguably purely political nature of the 1936 Olympic Games in which Owens competed. Games that were hosted by a fascist, Nazi state dead set on annexing its geographical neighbors and ridding the world of the inferior races (like the one Owens' belonged to).

By ignoring the history of ethnic (and other) politics in the games while evoking a well-known black athlete with cross-over popularity like Jesse Owens to criticize Smith and Carlos this discourse both denies the place of the political in sport and provide a comparison "good" African American that could be embraced while simultaneously marginalizing any blacks who aligned themselves with Smith and Carlos. At the same time this discourse ignores the fact that in his heyday Owens' nemesis was the racism of Nazi Germany.

Likewise, the *New York Times* reported that some "American black athletes" at the Games "resent the mixing of sport and politics, especially at this crucial point in their lives." And the *Chicago Tribune* published an interview with African American track coach Stan Wright in which he states that although Smith and Carlos' action took "courage" they protested in the wrong place because "I have talked to Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe and as many people as I could who've competed in the games and they all assured me that the Olympics have always been based entirely on merit."

The *Los Angeles Times* published interviews with white Olympians Sue Gossick and Bill Toomey that contended that at the Olympics "It's people, not politics, that is important," and that "the Olympics are strictly for competition." Almost entirely ignored in mainstream coverage of the demonstration was the support of white Australian, silver medal winner Peter Norman who was present for the planning of the demonstration and, in solidarity, wore an Olympic Project for Human Rights pin on his uniform during the ceremony that had been given to him by Smith and Carlos (Hartmann 2003)[30]. Thus the

[30] The bond between Norman and Smith and Carlos would last a lifetime. In 1996 the gold and bronze medal winners served as pallbearers at the Australian silver medal winners funeral (Smith & Steele 2007).

two primary groups with which Smith and Carlos are identified, blacks and athletes, are called upon to reaffirm discourses that suggest their dissent was inappropriate.

In a common theme in the mainstream press that constructed the protest by Smith and Carlos as both inappropriate given the athletic context and as an isolated incident, the *Los Angeles Times* called their dissent the "one discordant note during the Games." Such discourse suggests that besides Smith and Carlos' dissent there was no "discord" present at the otherwise apolitical Olympics. Thereby completely ignoring that the 1968 Olympics were plagued with political controversy before they ever started including contentions international debate about the inclusion or exclusion of apartheid-ruled South Africa, the massacre of countless students and civilians protesters by the Mexican government in the days leading up to the Games, and the highly political nature of Cold War discourses about athletic competition with communist governments like the Soviet Union and Cuba (Hartmann 2003).

Again, this failure to acknowledge either the historical or contemporary politics linked to the Olympic games denied mainstream readers the possibility of understanding Smith and Carlos' action as simply one part of a larger trend in which athletic competition stood in symbolically for the diplomatic and adversarial political discourses among and within nations.

Smith and Carlos's action was not only constructed as inappropriate given its "intrusion" on sport according to elite institutions, fellow blacks and fellow athletes but also according to general public opinion. A letter to the editor in the *Los Angeles Times* explicitly constructed sport and politics as binaries by stating that "to stain the purity of the Olympics with mere politics is unthinkable." Letters to the editor published by the

Chicago Tribune made this point even more sensationally by stating that the Olympics represented the "rare atmosphere where sportsmanship and good manners exhibit the dignity of all men" but "Tommie Smith and John Carlos used the Olympic games a s a political arena" and thus showed "flagrant disrespect for the competition." Other *Tribune* letters contended that "their [Smith and Carlos'] action was degrading and the Olympic committee should disqualify these two from all further competition and return the awards they have won," and that "Politics belong in the United Nations. Sports belong in the Olympics. It is not racist to enforce that simple rule."

Together the publication of such letters reflects what these papers felt was the most common sentiments of their readers, sentiments that were also reflected in multiple opinion columns written by mainstream newsmakers. For example, *Los Angeles Times* sports columnist Jim Murray contended that Smith and Carlos "have mistaken the International Olympic movement for the hierarchy of the state of Mississippi" and that their protest violated "the purpose of the Olympics to foster international goodwill and fellowship among men." Murray's fellow *Times* columnist Charles Maher was more sympathetic to Smith and Carlos but also noted that the protest was wrong "not on the grounds that it was in itself offensive but that the occasion was inappropriate," and that "it is clearly understood by everyone that the Olympics are not supposed to be used for political purposes." In a scathing critique of the runners, *New York Times* columnist Arthur Daley stated that "Smith and Carlos brought their other world smack into the Olympic Games, where it did not belong, and created a shattering situation that shook this international sports carnival to its very core."

Likewise, mainstream sources examined here constructed the frame of the natural opposition of politics and sport as not only as general truth for all Americans but for the whole world. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that French journalists "came to the conclusion that the Olympic arena should not be used for any political or racial demonstrations" and that British, Japanese and Indian journalists felt that while Smith and Carlos' feelings were "understandable," "bringing their grievance into the Olympic arena" was "cheap," "out of place," and "not the platform from which to state grievances." Similarly the *New York Times* reported that a member of the Puerto Rican Olympic delegation felt that "regardless of the Negroes' reasons, politics should not be brought into the Olympics," and included (perhaps most ironically) a quote from the Soviet track coach that "We don't mix sports and politics."

Together the frames presented by mainstream discourse constructed sport and the Olympics in particular, as naturally void of political sentiment and somehow purer than other institutions in their ability to provide opportunities for success to all people. This mainstream mythological discourse of sport as a bastion of equality has played a powerful role in dominant public understandings of race, often being called upon to undermine claims that society remains unequal (Hartmann 2003). Further, the idea that the natural state of athletic competition is apolitical ignores its roots in nationalistic, militaristic and religious ideologies (Sugden & Tomlinson 2002; Higgs 2004, 1995; Hargreaves 2002).

Mainstream Press Frame #2: Unpatriotic

Presented almost as frequently as the frame that that the inclusion of political expression in the Olympics represented a breach of basic athletic philosophy, mainstream

journalists presented the frame that Smith and Carlos' actions represented a direct threat to basic American values in over forty-percent of coverage. This frame depended upon constructions that suggested Smith and Carlos' behavior reflected a personal lack of respect and appreciation for their country and that any political philosophy that supported them was similarly un-American. While discourses of patriotism were the primary means of constructing this frame in the mainstream press, it was also enabled through discourse that explicitly linked the politics of Smith and Carlos to Nazism and other threatening political ideologies.

For example, a *Los Angeles Times* article described Smith and Carlos' downcast eyes on the medal stand as a "refusal to look at the American flag" and explained that "Smith thrust his gloved right hand and Carlos his black-sheathed left toward the sky in a Nazi-like salute." Similarly, after discussing the financial costs of the Olympics for the "American people," *Los Angeles Times* columnist Jim Murray noted that "they could have gotten someone to insult the flag cheaper than that" and that if the Olympic victory stand was a place "where a man is his own judge, jury, and law…we may get our next Hitler out of Lane 4." A letter to the editor published by the *Chicago Tribune* noted that Smith and Carlos' expulsion from the games was right because "if a white athlete raised a George Wallace sign he would justifiably be given a ticket home."

This association of non-violent African American critique of the status quo with Hitler and the Ku Klux Klan is disturbing (and hugely ironic). Such discourse marginalizes struggles for racial and economic justice and self-empowerment by presenting raced figures like Smith and Carlos as both outside of mainstream American values ideologically and agents of racial violence. Affiliating Smith and Carlos with such

violence justifies their disciplining within mainstream discourse and presents and eerily familiar and early version of the "reverse racism" discourses that would become popular in the later part of the twentieth century.

In what Hill (2008) has called an "unsophisticated association" that continues to this day, mainstream journalists commonly described Smith and Carlos' upraised fists as a "Black Power" "salute" or "sign," and the event itself as a "Black Power protest." Notably as the rising tide of black liberation movements in the late 1960s gained momentum, the Black Panther Party had become the face of the Black Power movement and had been branded in mainstream discourse as a dangerous and violent threat. While the politics and performances of the Black Panthers have been investigated elsewhere (see Rhodes 2007; Jones 1998), the association of Smith and Carlos with this group allowed their intended message about poverty, equality, and black uplift to become forever linked with a perceived social threat (Hill 2008).[31]

The *Chicago Tribune* in particular constructed Smith and Carlos' protest as a dangerous and deliberate attempt to undermine American values. A *Tribune* article stated that Smith and Carlos "sought to bring discredit to the United States," and an editorial contended that the athletes "deliberately waited for the award presentation to put on an act contemptuous of the United States." "Unfortunately" the *Tribune* editorialized, "when these renegades come home, they will probably be greeted as heroes by fellow extremists." The labeling of Smith and Carlos as "renegades" and "extremists" paints them as violent figures while the assumption that their intent was based in "contempt"

[31] At the time and to this day Smith, Harry Edwards and others have insisted that the OPHR was exactly that, a project for "Human Rights" and categorically "not the Black Power movement" (Smith & Steele 2007; Hill 2008).

and a desire to "discredit" America completely ignores the actual intent of the protest according to the men who performed it.[32]

Again mimicking discourses of the "good" vs. "bad Negro," Smith and Carlos' patriotism (or lack thereof) was consistently compared to that of others, particularly other black athletes. For example, *Los Angeles Times* columnist John Hall dedicated a column to comparing Smith and Carlos to a young George Foreman who after his Olympic victory "pulled a little American flag from his glove and waved it proudly" as a symbol of "American power." Hall used this column to compare Forman's actions to those "rooted only in hatred and bitterness" by Smith and Carlos, and further described the protest as "black racism" and "bigotry" noting that fortunately "Foreman's stand" "is really the majority stand." Through such discourse, Hall simultaneously (and ironically) uses pro-American and anti-racist discourse to denigrate the intent and action of Smith and Carlos while constructing them as deviant from "the majority" of "good" blacks.

Similarly, *New York Times* columnist Arthur Daly described Smith and Carlos' action as a "defiant refusal to look at the American flag while it was being raised" and compared this action to that of black runner Lee Evans who "stood with chin held high during the flag-raising ceremony." This point of comparison is particularly misinformed given that in fact Evans was not only completely sympathetic with Smith and Carlos but was equally involved in the Olympic Project for Human Rights and that he (and the two other black Americans who ran with him) wore a black beret (also emblematic of a

[32] Smith explained in an interview with Howard Cossell after the demonstration that, "My raised right hand stood for the power of black America. Carlos's raised left hand stood for the unity of black America. Together they formed an arch of unity and power. The black scarf around my neck stood for black pride. The black socks with no shoes for black poverty in racist America. The totality of our effort was the regaining of black dignity." While this quote would be included in later academic examinations of the protest (see Edwards 1969; Hartmann 2003; Smith & Steele 2007), at the time not a single mainstream publication printed this explanation.

"militant" black philosophy) and raised his fist on the medal stand (Hartmann 2003). However according to Daly's account Smith and Carlos were the solely "defiant" black athletes at the games.

Without a doubt the comparison of Smith and Carlos to other black athletes—while complimenting these figures for their patriotism—served two functions in mainstream discourse. First, it allows for a critique of racial protest and a denial of claims of inequality and unrest by suggesting that Smith and Carlos represent a political or social fringe within a black community that is otherwise content with the status quo. Second, it allows the white authors of such pieces to avoid claims of racism as a result of their criticism of Smith and Carlos by demonstrating that there are some blacks folks who they feel are decent people. Again, such discourse appears to be an early iteration of the "modern racism" that would become common within public discourse in the later twentieth century (Entman 1990, Jhally & Lewis 1992).

Several mainstream stories also explicitly suggested that if Smith and Carlos felt the need to criticize the American status quo there was no place for them in American society. The *Los Angeles Times* ran a quote from John Carlos in which he stated that he was "not concerned about the national anthem" because "it was written for white people." Assuming Carlos actually said this, reporters covering it had the unique opportunity to directly address the white supremacist history of America that only allowed white males full citizenship. Instead, the comment is presented in the context of discourse that constructs America as infallible and quotes black Olympian Bob Seagren's view that "if they [Smith and Carlos] don't like the United States, they can always leave." Thus, the mainstream press summarily dismisses Carlos' critique of the national anthem while

disciplining him and Smith with exclusion from the nation at the hands of one of their own.

Mainstream discourse also constructed the United States as providing plenty of opportunity to African Americans and thus deserving of their love. Such discourse contributed to undermining Smith and Carlos claims of inequality while contributing to constructions of their un-American nature. A *Los Angeles Times* editorial that contended that as a result of "a tremendous barrage of anti-white, anti-United States nonsense by their senior black indoctrinators" Smith and Carlos "used the victor's stand as a propaganda platform to denigrate their homeland" noted that "one wonders where else in the world their chances would be any better." A letter to the editor in the *Chicago Tribune* called their action "a betrayal of the very system which allowed them to pursue their studies and develop into great athletes…The system that is the envy of every person in every country of the world" and suggested that "those who are not happy here leave our shores for a place more to their liking. Most of us like it the way it is."

A letter to the editor in *Time* contended that "there are many South African Negroes who could tell these men things that would make them appreciate their freedom—yes freedom!" Similarly, a *Chicago Tribune* editorial suggested that a Czech girl who "turned away and bowed her head" as the Russian flag was raised was justified because "Russia had recently marched into Czechoslovakia to crush stirrings of limited freedom" but that because Smith and Carlos "deliberately insulted their own flag, anthem and country," their action was "disgraceful."

Obviously such discourse ignored the real crushing of black freedom that commonly existed in the United States while perpetuating the idea that blacks who

criticized America must have been "indoctrinated" with "anti-white, anti-United States nonsense." Together such discourse suggested that Smith and Carlos should be grateful for the American status quo in which blacks apparently have plenty of "freedom" and opportunity. Of course the ideological work that publishing such discourse contributes to is the denial of claims of racial inequality in general, by Smith and Carlos in particular, and the perpetuation of the idea that African Americans should be content with their place in American society.

In addition to discourse which construct Smith and Carlos as not deserving of American citizenship as a result of their supposed lack of patriotism, multiple stories in the mainstream press also suggested that no matter their athletic ability they were also undeserving of the opportunity to compete athletically. For example, a letter to the editor in the *Los Angeles Times* argued that "we should make it totally impossible for them to participate in any way whatever unless they have enough patriotic decency to refrain from such degrading demonstrations." against "the great and wonderful United States of America." And a letter to the editor published by the *New York Times* noted that the author was ashamed "of any American who cannot look at the flag as it is being raised. I would rather not have these men represent my country." *Chicago Tribune* columnist William Carsley stated that Smith and Carlos "obviously achieved no satisfaction from competing for their country" and "occupied places on the United States team that could have gone to athletes who cared." The possibility that Smith and Carlos protested exactly because they loved their country and did care is obviously completely excluded from such interpretations.

Like the politics and sports don't mix frame popular in mainstream coverage of Smith and Carlos, a significant amount of mainstream discourse that was assumed to reflect popular opinion was published that constructed the athletes as un-American. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* printed various opinions from members of the international community (though in this case the opinions only reflected those of European members of this community) that Smith and Carlos' actions had been "unforgivable" because "they ignored their own flag" and did not "behave like Americans." Letters to the editor published by the *Chicago Tribune* stated that Smith and Carlos "showed flagrant disrespect for their country" and "should return their medals, since they have dishonored all Americans," and labeled their action as "the communist clenched fist salute…a cardinal insult to all Americans and to the nation as an entity."

Articles about Smith and Carlos also included multiple references to the support Cuban athletes had expressed for members of the Black Panther movement in the United States. Thus, without explicitly linking Smith and Carlos to Communism (as discursively represented by Cuba) or the Black Panther Party (which had been deemed a danger to American society by the U.S. government) the inclusion of these entities implicitly suggests a relationship between them and the actions of Smith and Carlos. Likewise, the mainstream press' consistent use of the term "salute" to describe the action of Smith and Carlos on the medal stand constructed it as both political and military in nature—thus a threat. In union with discourses that questioned Smith and Carlos' place in the nation these discourses not only suggest that Smith and Carlos are unpatriotic and but that their lack of "patriotic decency" represents a political and militaristic threat to the United States.

Overall the two most common mainstream press frames of Smith and Carlos' dissent overwhelmed the small amount of positive coverage presented in the mainstream press. This overwhelmingly and immediate negative framing set the groundwork for contemporary discourses that "effectively trivialize, dilute, or even erase altogether" the deeper social meaning of the demonstration (Hill 2008; Hartmann 2003). The use of loaded discourse and the construction of Smith and Carlos' as individual actors whose sentiments existed at the margins of normal society displaced and disallowed the possibility of mainstream news coverage that, by acknowledging continued inequalities in the Unites States and growing support for the black liberation movement, could have presented a more complex and sympathetic context for their actions.

Notably, and for the first time in the cases examined here, there appeared to be some evidence of the beginnings of integration of black journalists and sources in the mainstream press. The *Los Angeles Times* ran a column contrary to all its others by NAACP leader Roy Wilkins, the *Chicago Tribune* ran several interviews with black track coach Stan Wright, and all three mainstream sources ran quotes from other black athletes on the subject of Smith and Carlos' dissent. However, this material step toward integration did not necessarily translate into more positive coverage or alternative ideological coverage since the quotes from other black athletes were used largely to demonstrate disapproval of Smith and Carlos and the *Tribune* followed up its interviews with Wright with a scathing editorial response that discredited the claims he made about a racial double standard existing in the treatment of Smith and Carlos.

Black Press Findings

Trends in Negative and Positive Coverage

As reflected in the chart below, the distribution of coverage in the black press was more evenly dispersed than that of the mainstream press with the majority of characterizations of Smith and Carlos being neutral and positive. Like its counterpart paper in the mainstream press, the *New York Amsterdam News* was the most neutral and least negative in its coverage of Smith and Carlos within the black press. Positive characterizations of Smith and Carlos in the black press described the "sincere gesture" as "courageous," "noble," "profound" and an attempt to assert their "manhood." Most black press coverage however did not apply any explicit value-ridden characterizations to Smith, Carlos and the protest but rather focused on contextualizing it.

Notably, and despite this mostly neutral and positive coverage, the black press presented negative coverage of the athletes' dissent at twice the ratio of positive coverage in the mainstream press with the *Chicago Defender* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* using negative constructions in thirty-percent of their coverage. The presence of this amount of negative coverage may reflect both the ideological limitations African American newsmakers were under as a result of their dependence on white institutions of publishing and advertising or a genuine willingness by these newsmakers to present their audience with a diverse set of interpretations.

It is also important to remember that in the late-1960s intense debate was occurring within the African American community regarding the appropriate means of obtaining racial equality with a rift forming between the old-school proponents of integrationist civil rights and the new school proponents of black liberation theory. It is likely that some elder members of the black press, who would have also enjoyed the most

editorial control, fell into the former category and genuinely disagreed with Smith and Carlos approach to addressing issues of racial inequality

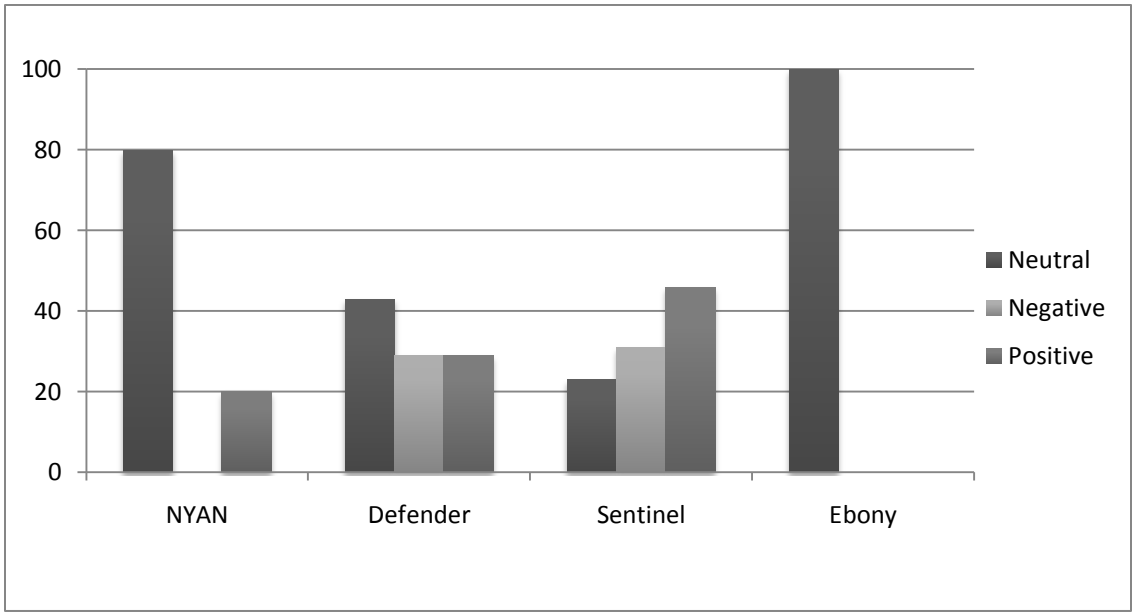

Figure 18: Characterizations by black press source

Significantly however, the negative constructions of Smith and Carlos presented in the black press were largely dissimilar to those presented in the mainstream press. While one *Los Angeles Sentinel* column aligned discursively with much of the dominant discourse in the mainstream press, contending that Smith and Carlos had been "disrespectful" and given a "Hitler-like salute," the majority of criticism of the runners in the black press focused more on an internal community debate as to whether the protest was productive to larger African American struggles for equality and integration. This trend will be discussed in more detail below.

The overwhelming majority of coverage of Smith and Carlos' dissent in the black press fell into two primary frames. The first frame focused on contextualizing Smith and Carlos' actions as part of a larger movement for black solidarity and uplift. The second frame constructed the expression of dissent by the runners as a moment of truth-telling

that, like Eartha Kitt's previous moment of blunt discourse, was valid because of its reflection of authentic experiences and sentiments in the black community. Unlike the primary frames in the mainstream press, both these frames acknowledged and interrogated a larger context of racial inequality for African Americans, and people of African descent in general, that existed systemically in various cultural institutions including government and sport.

Black Press Frame #1: Community Solidarity & Uplift

Sixty-five-percent of black press coverage of the 1968 Olympic victory stand protest focused on concepts of unity and uplift in the black community. Journalists in the African American press presented this frame of Smith and Carlos' dissent within discussions of 1) the demonstration as representative of the sentiments of the black masses who were otherwise voiceless, 2) larger trends of black achievement and protest, and 3) community debates around the most productive means for achieving equality for all black folks[33]. Thus, while reporting on the raised fists of Smith and Carlos, the black press presented its readers with a larger call to action for black pride and against all forms of racial and economic apartheid.

Los Angles Sentinel columnists Clint Wilson Jr. and Jack Tenner contended variously that "Smith and Carlos' actions were for YOU; the humble Negro clerks, custodians, gardeners, laborers and unemployed who are 'trying to make it' because YOU can't run 200 meters in 19.8," that Smith and Carlos evidenced that "black men have the dignity to show the world that they possess more than world-class athletic ability

[33] I use "black" here to emphasize that these discourses of solidarity were not limited to the African American community but recognized the linked histories and struggles of all African diasporic communities.

but also a love for their people that transcends politics and fear for their future careers in a white dominated society," and that "in an "identification with the unskilled, the uneducated and the untrained. They spoke for and to millions of black people who identified with them. It was perhaps incidental that white people were able to witness this relationship."

The *Chicago Defender* explicitly stated that Smith and Carlos had made the "gesture" to "show blacks are united," and *Ebony* explained that "they were saying that they were black Americans who had performed to their best of their ability and that they protested the way their black brothers have been treated in the very country they represented." This discussion of Smith and Carlos from *Ebony* came only after describing in detail the various athletic achievements of male and female, black and white, athletes at the Olympics with a specific focus on the world records set by Bob Beamon and Wyomia Tyus. Thus *Ebony* couched their discussion within a larger context of black success and acknowledged the popularity of Smith and Carlos' actions with other high achieving "militants [like] Lee Evans."

Similarly, nearly every newspaper article that discussed the demonstration did so in a context that focused on the athletic achievements of Smith and Carlos alongside those of other black athletes, male, female, American and international. The *New York Amsterdam News* ran the now famous photograph of Smith and Carlos on the victory stand on its front page alongside two other photos of African American athletes protesting at the 1968 Olympics. The caption notes that Lee Evans, Larry James and Ron Freeman "who finished 1-2-3 for the U.S. in the 400 meter in world record time" also raised their fists on the medal podium and that Bob Beamon and Ralph Boston

subsequently protested the "expulsion of Smith and Carlos" by ascending the medal stand "in bare feet."

Through this side by side display of black expression, the *Amsterdam News* presents its opening coverage of Smith and Carlos' dissent as part of a larger movement in which other black athletes are in explicit solidarity. Every black newspapers examined here also noted the political discourse of other black athletes, including Jim Hine and Charlie Greene, who had expressed dismay at the possibility of having their medals presented to them by Avery Brundage, "the man who fought for the admission of [apartheid-ruled] South Africa to the 19th Olympiad" and thus according to one Jamaican athlete "should live in South Africa" rather than "the free world."

Rather than running the now famous photograph of the runners on the medal stand with firsts raised, the *Chicago Defender* ran a large front-page photograph of Smith and Carlos accompanied by their wives "giving a sign of unity following their performance in the 200-meter[34]" in which Smith "won the gold medal with new world record time." This image and caption serves to frame the story of Smith and Carlos as one about two things—"unity" and achievement.

In addition to discourse that focused on the support Smith and Carlos had from other black American athletes, the frame of black solidarity and achievement was also constructed through the recognition of achievement by and sympathy from African athletes and the use of "black is beautiful" discourse.[35] For example, the *Los Angeles*

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[34] This "sign of unity" can best be described as a fist-bump or as explained recently by various mainstream news outlets after President Obama and his wife did it at the Democratic National convention "the new high five"—clearly not "new" since black folks were doing it back in 1968.

[35] While this construction was absent in mainstream press coverage of Smith and Carlos' dissent, it would become a common chant of the black cultural revolution of the 1970s.

Sentinel reported that "many black athletes…were ready to pack and pull out" in support of Smith and Carlos and that "the Jamaicans, Nigerians, French and other teams were ready to follow." The same "Olympic Exclusive" article reported that "Black is truly beautiful to the Mexico City natives. The brown brothers on the other side of the border roll out the red carpet for American blacks."

Sentinel sports editor Brad Pye Jr. described the raised-fist gesture given by Smith and Carlos as "the black power or black is beautiful sign," noting that "There were other black demonstrators too. And all their demonstrations were black and beautiful." Pye contended that "the first real true black demonstrators were the three black men who swept the 10,000, an event black people aren't supposed to win…But with Kenya's Neftali Temu, Ethiopia's Mamo Wolde and Tunisia's Mohammed Gamoudi running one, two, three, this myth was destroyed…"

In detailing the success of African athletes at the Olympics, Pye wrote "As these black men from the black countries of the planet paraded…they seemed to echo the words of James Brown's No. 1 hit: 'Say It Loud! Say It Clear! I'm Black and I'm Proud!'" By linking the success and pride of African athletes and an American song rooted in the cultural shift toward self-empowerment in the black American community to the demonstration by Smith and Carlos, Pye links all black people no matter their country of origin to a larger movement for solidarity around a black identity[36].

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[36] Unfortunately Pye also genders this movement by only mentioning "black men" despite the accomplishments and involvement of African American women in the Olympics and Olympic protest movement. While the marginalization of women in the Olympic protest movement and larger movements toward racial equality is well documented (see Hartmann 2003, Bass 2002), Pye's ignoring of female athletes seems particularly callous considering the photo accompanying his article was of female medal winners Barbara Ferrell and Wyomia Tyus.

New York Amsterdam News columnist Gertrude Wilson wrote that she could not understand why anyone would "flip their lids" just because Smith and Carlos wore black gloves on their "beautiful brown skins."

An internal community debate about the best ways to achieve uplift for African Americans was also a significant theme within this frame of uplift and unity. For example, John H. Sengstacke, editor of the *Chicago Defender* wrote that the Olympic protest by Smith and Carlos was "tragic" not for any of the reasons presented by the mainstream press but because of reports that John Carlos had rejected the active involvement of white Olympic athletes who reportedly "feel deeply about the treatment of black men in the United States and want to help." Rather than suggesting that the political goals, intentions or location of Smith and Carlos' protest were inappropriate or threatening, the *Defender* editor levies his criticism of the runners on the contention that more could have been accomplished with a more progressive results if black and white U.S. athletes had presented an "integrated fraternal force" at the Olympics.

A column also in the *Chicago Defender* condemned "these Negroes who criticize every effort of black Americans to carve out an identity of their own" by "constantly striving to say what he thinks the 'great white leaders' will have him say." Noting that such "Negroes'" "cries" "have rung out loud and long, this past week against the action taken by Olympic champions, Tommie Smith and John Carlos." Further, the author contends that "What they [Smith and Carlos] did took more courage than all the do-nothing Negroes will do toward the salvation of the black man the rest of their lives. May God give us more Tommie Smiths and John Carloses….AMEN!"

Here the author specifically calls out black Americans who are accomodationist in their politics as being counterproductive to "the salvation of the black man" and calls for more rallying around Smith and Carlos and the performance of actions like theirs. In a candid example of the way dominant discursive constructs are rearticulated by the African American community, the author notably only uses the mainstream term "Negro" to refer to those who "do-nothing" while making a point to refer to the larger community as "black Americans."

Like the *Defender* editorial, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* also ran an editorial critical of Smith and Carlos but not in disagreement with their sentiments, it stated, "We are all in favor of racial pride," but suggested that Smith and Carlos were not the best equipped to be leaders of "our cause." Rather, they stated, "we firmly believe it is far past time for American Negroes to place more emphasis on basic, nitty-gritty issues…and we are in dire need of truly-great, dedicated, hard-working leaders who can bring to us, activate, and maintain the basic programs through which we can achieve our goal of full equality in our country."

Together, discourse that constructed Smith and Carlos' dissent as being based in a desire to speak for the disenfranchised black community and as having the support of other athletes of African descent allowed for a frame that acknowledged the larger movements and sentiments that inspired the demonstration—something altogether absent from mainstream coverage. At the same time, couching this discourse in calls of "black is beautiful" and for community consensus around the appropriate way to gain rights "for all black people," resulted in a black press frame that further located the protest in larger discourses of black solidarity and uplift.

Black Press Frame #2: Truth-telling

In a frame that mimicked the representation of Eartha Kitt's dissent by the black press, sixty-five percent of stories framed Smith and Carlos actions on the medal podium as a form of truth-telling and thus criticisms of it illogical. This frame focused of presenting evidence of social inequality, and at times specifically inequality in athletics, as context for a general mood of unrest within the black community. Through this frame, the black press presented its readers with a context that constructed Smith and Carlos' dissent as a direct result of the profound need of African Americans to communicate the realities of their lived experiences.

For example, a book review in the *New York Amsterdam News* for "The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story," detailed the "dehumanized, exploited and discarded" experiences of African American athletes who are reportedly treated by white coaches as "watermelon eating idiots." The article concludes that "the disillusioning truths concerning the treatment of the Negro in both College and professional sport…is expected to help the American public understand the troubled mood of the black community, the manifestations of which have included a threatened boycott of this month's Olympic Games by the nation's most talented Negro amateur athletes."

Similarly, *Ebony* noted that "U.S. officials" "seemed bent on tarnishing the names of black athletes" and thus the ruling institutions of sport "must make sure that black amateurs are treated as fairly as white amateurs. If this is done then the 1972 Olympics might be contested with no demonstrations of any kind." *Chicago Defender* columnist John A. Helem stated that Smith and Carlos' "courageous action said to the world, 'Even though we can win international championships and prove to be the best in the world, at

home we are not accepted on an equal basis, or judged strictly on how well we perform as human beings." This discourse within the truth-telling frame in the black press specifically contradicted the common idea in mainstream coverage that sports represented a platform in which all people competed on equal terms and without bias.

The black press also published stories on Smith and Carlos that focused on general racial inequality as the subject of their truth telling. For example, an editorial cartoon in the *Defender* titled "Flag Raising" depicted Smith and Carlos' raised, gloved-fists lifting the American flag to unveil the word "racism" in huge, capital, block letters imposed on a partial map of the U.S. and a building resembling the White House. This image profoundly suggests that Smith and Carlos' action represented a moment of truth-revealing in which the cloak of patriotism (symbolized by the American flag) was lifted to reveal the huge omnipresence of racism in United States society.

A column extremely critical of the negative reaction to Smith and Carlos' protest written by *New York Amsterdam News* columnist Gertrude Wilson[37] constructs the truth-telling frame in similar terms. Wilson writes that Smith, Carlos and other black athletes demonstrated at the Olympics "to symbolize their problems…and proclaim that they were black Americans bringing honor to their country…a country which spits on their blackness." Through this discourse, Smith and Carlos are constructed as heroic figures who despite the "humiliation" they face in their own country competed on its behalf wishing only to express the reality that "we are Americans who are brown skinned, who are rejected even when we carry the flag of our country to triumph."

[37] Who, along with Los Angeles Sentinel columnist Jack Tenner, was white.

Likewise, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* quoted Los Angeles councilman Billy G. Mills asking "How do you, with freedom, prevent a man who has fought every inch to maintain his self respect in becoming an Olympic champion, and who must leave the platform of champions to fight ever harder to stand silently when he knows, and wants the world to know, that all is not well?"

The black press also evoked histories of truth-telling within the African American community in framing Smith and Carlos. For example, *Los Angeles Sentinel* columnist Jack Tenner directly quoted from the first issue of *Freedoms Journal* when he wrote that Smith and Carlos "spoke eloquently" to the fact that they "feel themselves sorely aggrieved under the existing state of things" and that at the Olympics "they plead their own cause." The *New York Amsterdam News* evoked the tradition of Christian-based protest and truth-telling within the African American community by running the headline "Spreading the U.S. Gospel Elsewhere" over the image of the protesting athletes. Labeling the Olympic dissent of Smith, Carlos and other black athletes as "the U.S. Gospel" makes explicit reference to religious discourse that defines the Gospel as the word of Christ and its spreaders as truth tellers. Thus Smith and Carlos are implicitly constructed not only as telling an infallible truth but also performing a type of holy work in doing so.

Together this truth-telling frame worked alongside the community uplift frame (and literally overlapped with it in several stories) to present black press readers with alternative interpretations of Smith and Carlos' actions from those presented by mainstream discourse. In particular these frames acknowledged both the reality of inequality in the United States and the need for cohesive community action in response to

it. Notably even discourses which took issue with Smith and Carlos' dissent did not undermine the legitimacy of the black experience nor the need for social change.

Discussion

These findings show that, while often the dominant frames in the mainstream press and those in the black press were different in many ways, the larger discursive arena of each public sphere was much more complicated than a simple binary. While the mainstream press primarily told its audience that Smith and Carlos' dissent represented a dangerous politics that was severely misplaced, the black press told theirs that Smith and Carlos' politics were a valid part of a larger movement against racial inequality that needed publicization in all places by all black people.

Thus, two primary points of disagreement between the two presses as to the meaning of the demonstration were 1) how successfully the United States was (or wasn't) fulfilling its promises of liberty and justice for all, and 2) what Smith and Carlos personal intentions had been. Black newsmakers took as fact that equality was being actively obstructed, that overcoming this obstruction would take a relentless and united community effort, and that Smith and Carlos acted in the spirit of this effort.

On the other hand, mainstream newsmakers primarily constructed the United States as successfully working toward fulfilling the promise of equality and not requiring any extra push to get there, especially not from "militants." Further, a striking finding in mainstream coverage of Smith and Carlos' dissent is the appearance of "reverse racist" and "modern racism" discourses that suggested the runners were bigots and thus a threat to an egalitarian America while simultaneously celebrating non-controversial African American figures as evidence that white racism was all but dead. Such discourses are

usually identified as having evolved in the post-civil right era—particularly in the 1980s—but this research shows it was, in fact, present while Jim Crow was being dismantled.

These differences undoubtedly reflect the differences in the communities journalists in each press understood themselves to serve. The mainstream press perpetuated dominant discourses that worked toward the maintenance of a status quo that, of course, was nowhere near beneficial to all, while the black press proposed alternative discourses that reflected the growing frustration of a community constantly being told to wait for full inclusion in the nation.

An ongoing trend within this project, found here and in regard to Paul Robeson and Eartha Kitt, is the black press' scathing criticism of mainstream coverage of the dissent of African American celebrities. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted that it was "quite distressed over the reaction of some of our local White Press." Two columns in the *Sentinel* were dedicated to directly responding to the critique of Smith and Carlos published by *Los Angeles Times* columnist John Hall who "exemplified the very attitudes they [Smith and Carlos] were protesting," and was not "the only local journalist to express an unenlightened disapproval of the incident." Other black press articles contended that mainstream reporting was "contorting and ignoring" the truths behind the demonstration and chastised mainstream journalists for targeting black athletes at the Olympics with "explosive and volatile questions, viciously tied together to produce a damaging answer."

Interestingly, and for the first time in this project, the mainstream press also published several moments of self-reflexivity. While this was minimal, the *Chicago*

Tribune did poke fun at the Olympic press conferences at which athletes were asked so many questions by journalists that responses became muddled and unclear, and the *Los Angeles Times* reported on Smith and Carlos being forced to flee crowds of "pursuing members of the news media" upon their return to the states.

Despite the differences in the most commonly used frames in the mainstream and black presses some similarities in meaning-making did exist. Both presses commonly described the gesture by Smith and Carlos as representing "black power" but did so in largely different contexts that in one presented the concept as a threat and the other as a form of racial identification and unity.

Newsmakers in both presses constructed the International Olympic Committee and United States Olympic Committee as having overreacted with their expulsion of Smith, Carlos and their wives from the Olympic Village and the revocation of their travel visas. However while the black press saw this overreaction as an example of hypocrisy and the double-standard with which blacks who breached "orthodoxy" were treated by the powers that be, the mainstream press largely saw the overreaction as problematic in the sympathy it generated for Smith and Carlos and the extra tension it created among athletes at the games.

Both presses evidenced the beginnings of newsroom integration. The mainstream press included black sources in their coverage of the demonstration and published pieces authored by Roy Wilkins and Stan Wright. However despite this inclusion, the sentiments of blacks who supported Smith and Carlos and levied criticism of dominant institutions were overshadowed by the overall tenor of mainstream coverage.

The black press included editorial content by whites; the *Los Angles Sentinel* printed the transcript of a radio broadcast by KABC's Allin Slate and a column by Jack Tenner and the *New York Amsterdam News* printed (in what would become a regular column titled White-On-White) the sentiments of Gertrude Wilson. Unlike the inclusion of black opinion in the mainstream press, which ran counter to its dominant discourses, the editorial content of white-authored pieces published by the black press tended not only to be in line with the discourse of the black public sphere but present some of the most supportive coverage of Smith and Carlos.

Overall, while Smith and Carlos' dissent was taken up amid larger discourses of and sometimes contentions debates about the best means to the end of racial progress with the black public sphere, their impact on mainstream discourses of race and nation appears to have been severely limited by dominant protocol and custom as to the proper behavior of Olympic athletes—particularly, black Olympic athletes. However it is clear that Smith and Carlos in some ways succeeded in drawing marginal discourses closer to the center if only because their action forced dominant discourses to acknowledge them and respond.

Notably, the focus by the mainstream press on the spectacle of the Olympic stand demonstration and the complete disregard of the far reaching movement behind it, mimics the ways in which mainstream media and dominant historical memory underrepresented the organized, long-standing networks of black resistance that give breadth and depth to such mediated moments.

As Hartmann (2003) has noted, mainstream discourse insisted that the Olympic stand demonstration was the "spontaneous act of two isolated, impetuous individuals"

despite all evidence to the contrary. In this way, Smith and Carlos were made celebrities (and pariahs) because of one gesture rather than being understood as figures encased in a community of activism.

This problematic understanding of the protest remains popular today and is common in dominant discourses of civil-rights era figures (like Rosa Parks) who are constructed within individualistic discourses that both minimize the larger black freedom movement and incorrectly suggest that the sudden and unexpected expression of discontent by individuals brings about social change. According to Ogden and Rosen (2008), the nation still has not fully come to terms with Smith and Carlos' demonstration. There remains a wide range of conjecture, assumptions, and opinion about the meanings of the demonstration and its effect. While the legacy of these figures continues to be struggled over, in is disheartening that the very conditions and sustained work that prompted the demonstration, as in the case of the labor and African liberation movements that inspired Paul Robeson and the anti-war movement that inspired Eartha Kitt, have been all but forgotten.

Chapter 4: Sister Souljah and the Future President , 1992

Nearly twenty-five years after Eartha Kitt, Tommie Smith and John Carlos attempted to influence public understandings America's (failed) promises of equality, the Unites States once again erupted in fiery debate regarding race and nation. In 1992, the racial contradictions of what Neal (2002) and George (2004) have described as a "post-soul" America were everywhere. Many Americans had come of age in a country that while appearing fully integrated and celebratory of African Americans was simultaneously scaling back the de jure efforts towards equality established during the civil-rights era. Marable (2002) suggests that the 1990s represented "the culmination of a thirty-year ideological and political war against the logic of the reforms of the 1960s."

While the *Cosby Show*, featuring an all-black cast, was the most popular program among Americans of all races, Reaganism had brought about the scaling back of affirmative action programs and the raced "War on Drugs" (Jhally & Lewis 1992). The current President, George H.W. Bush, had defeated his democratic opponent by running an ad that explicitly played off stereotypes of African American men as the violent, uncontrollable rapists of white women, the billboard charts were dominated by African American artists, and the successes of these musicians and black athletes like Michael Jordan were hailed as the climax of racial progress (Mendelberg 2001; Hartmann 1996). The era of what scholars have variously labeled "modern" and "enlightened" racism was in full swing (Entman 1990; Jhally & Lewis 1992).

According to Bonilla-Silva (2001), within this contemporary era "colorblind racism" has become the most pervasive and problematic form of racial ideology. While, by 1992, countless moderate reforms had been made to appease the demands that rose

from the cultural politics of the 60s and 70s civil, more radical antiracist movements had been systematically dismantled and suppressed (West 2002). According to Winant (2004), while this new period of racial hegemony "touted 'color blindness' and claimed largely to have achieved racial equality, the U.S. racial state had hardly transformed the fundamental social structures of race and racism. It was simply managing white supremacy in a significantly updated and revised fashion."

It was within this ideological and political environment that, on April 29, 1992, news of the acquittal of the four white LAPD police officers who had been tried for brutally beating unarmed black motorist Rodney King reached the nation. The rage of the African American community was tangible; Los Angeles erupted into the worst riots since 1964 and newsmakers across the nation faced the challenge of making sense of it all to their readers.

According to Jacobs (2000), the not-guilty verdicts returned in the Rodney King trial served as a "reality check" to mainstream journalists who tended to romanticize the "liberal-progressive belief in the power of news publicity," while reinforcing for journalists in the black press "an ongoing suspicion about the racialized limits of the public sphere." Thus in covering the violence that followed, the mainstream press focused on the disheartening condition of the urban poor and the seeming inability of politics to generate improvement. The black press also discussed these ideas but further focused on the persistence of white racism and the problematic nature of white responses to the violence. Both presses tended to present these discussions within frames of tragedy and fatalism that Jacobs argues disabled interpretations that concrete action might solve for the circumstances that led to the beating, the verdict, and the riots.

Two weeks after the not-guilty verdict, *Washington Post* reporter David Mills asked a little-known rap artist named Sister Souljah to explain the mindset of the rioters and in particular the gangbangers of Los Angeles who used the riots as an opportunity to loot and kill with impunity. Souljah gave an extensive answer in an attempt to explain what she saw as a disregard for black life and the hypocrisy of a politicians and a media who only became concerned with the inner city violence of Los Angeles when white interests seemed in peril. She stated in part, "White people, this government, and the Mayor were well aware that Black people were dying every day in Los Angeles under gang violence. So if you're a gang member and you would normally be killing somebody why not kill a white person," and including the tongue-in-cheek comment that "I mean, if Black people kill Black people every day, why not have a week and kill White people?"

The undoubtedly unapologetic comments initially received marginal attention. However, a month later, interest in Souljah surged when then presidential hopeful, Bill Clinton, in attendance at a meeting of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, cited Souljah's comments as an example of "racial hatred"—comparing the rapper to Ku Klux Klansman David Duke. Suddenly Souljah was thrust into a media spotlight as media makers struggled to make sense of the contemporary politics of race.

Souljah's comments, as a form of black celebrity dissent, provide several unique challenges to this project. On the surface, Souljah's dissent, in its oft-published truncated form, might be interpreted as many of the things Clinton claimed it to be. However, this decontextualization of her words ignores the line of questioning to which she was responding—she was asked to speak from the perspective of a gangbanger—as well as the intense frustration and anger felt by many the African Americans not only as a result

of the Rodney King verdict but also due to the larger racially regressive reforms of the 1990s[38].

After the controversy erupted, Souljah held a press conference in an attempt to put her comments in their proper context. According to the *New York Amsterdam News*:

> She said her statement was taken out of context…she said she made reference to the mindset of gang members. She described them as people accustomed to a hostile lifestyle. They murder at random she explained. In that mindset where gang violence accounts for the daily death of children, grandmothers, and women, she asked why would it be inconceivable for those same gang members to murder Whites. Her point, she said, is that in America black lives are valueless and it is only when the threat of death to Whites is voiced that politicians act responsibly[39].

Despite this attempt at clarification the mainstream press continued to report Souljah's words according to Clinton's rather than her version of their intent. While this marginalization of Souljah's self-described intent and meaning led to the comments being widely misquoted and misunderstood, newsmakers also ignored Souljah's primary persona as a rap artist who drew on the long tradition of nuance and exaggeration in musical storytelling generally, and, hip hop specifically. While largely accepted in mainstream culture today, hip hop, and rap music in particular, was only beginning to be acknowledged by mainstream society in the early 1990s.

Further, hip hop was also not fully embraced by the cultural elites of the African American community. Neal (2002) has suggested that rather than accepting the traditional civil-rights era constructions of "good" versus "bad" public representations of blackness, in the modern struggle to shift public debates around race, members of the

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[38] In particular Lipsitz (2006) has labeled California, the state wear the Rodney King events and riots took place, "the Mississippi of the 1990s" because of the way in which institutionalized racism was not only largely accepted but furthered by the political reforms of 1990s.

[39] Price, Vincent K. (Jun. 20, 1996). "Sister Souljah raps Dems and Clinton." *The New York Amsterdam News*; pg.1.

"post-soul intelligentsia," including hip hop artists, have chosen to forgo this binary in order to push critical interrogations of race in a society that largely considers racism a thing of the past. Thus, Neal argues, hip hop rhetoric (like that presented by Souljah), can be understood as a form of black cultural expression that serves as a conduit to introduce marginal discourses, on their own merit, into mainstream discourse.[40]

Similarly, Boyd (2003) suggests that the shifting generational experience of being black in America has created a rift between the civil rights generation and the hip hop generation in understandings of the best means to the end of racial justice. At the same time, long before hip hop was accepted (and domesticated) by mainstream white audiences, it had become a significant contributor to the black public sphere, reflecting the continued veiled position of African Americans—particularly inner city youth—and the reality that counterpublics are not static or ideologically cohesive (Harris-Lacewell 2004). Thus, Souljah's dissent should be understood as an artistic expression of the frustrations experienced by African American youth in a so-called "colorblind" society that fails to protect their rights.

The motivation behind the *Post*'s choice to interview Souljah is unclear. At the time of her interview, her celebrity status was limited largely to a small group of citizens familiar with political hip hop, and many *Washington Post* readers had likely never heard of her. It seems likely given the strong rhetoric of her music that newsmakers at the *Post* were aware that they would receive passionate anti-establishment discourse from Souljah. It is also likely that the motivation to interview Souljah grew, at least in part, from a larger climate in which rap music in particular had come under attack from political

[40] At the same time it is important not to ignore the complicity of successful cross-over forms of Hip Hop with what Neal (2002) calls "engines of global capitalism."

elites. For example, Ice-T's "Cop Killer" had been publically attacked by Dan Qualye, Ice Cube's "Black Korea" had been labeled racist, 2LiveCrew had recently been tried for obscenity, and "gangsta rap" films like "Boyz in the Hood" and "Juice" had recently been released.

In this tumultuous climate, Souljah contributed her perspective to the *Post*. This timing around the Rodney King events, dominant cultural attacks on rap, and the contentious presidential primary season, created an explosion of news coverage once the Democratic favorite publically took issue with Souljah's words. The way newsmakers characterized and contextualized Sister Souljah's comments within this larger climate can reveal how an especially unapologetic form of celebrity-centered political dissent, intended to call out inequalities in social perceptions regarding the value of raced life, was understood in mainstream and black discourses.

This chapter examines coverage of Souljah's comments in the *New York Times, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Time* and *Newsweek* in the mainstream press and the *New York Amsterdam News, Washington Informer, Los Angeles Sentinel, Jet, Essence* and *Ebony* in the African American press. The inclusion of the Washington, D.C.-based newspapers in this case is necessary given the publication of the original interview by *The Washington Post*. Also added for this case is *Essence* magazine, which began publishing in 1970 and focuses on African American women's issues. For each of these sources data was collected via Proquest Historical Databases online, microfilm holdings from the University of Minnesota and other public universities, and the online archives of several specific sources. The data in this analysis was published between May

13, 1992, the date the interview with Souljah was published by the *Post*, and July 13, 1992—a two month period.

Data Overview:

In the black press, the *New York Amsterdam News* presented the most stories covering Souljah's words and the criticism of them by Clinton (n=11). The *Washington Informer* published eight stories on the topic and the *Los Angeles Sentinel* seven. Given that Souljah hailed originally from New York and was active in the African American community there, the increased coverage of her by the *Amsterdam News* may reflect a judgment of newsworthiness on behalf of *Amsterdam News* journalists given their audiences' more likely familiarity with Souljah.

Ebony did not publish any mention of the Souljah controversy despite a lengthy article in their July issue discussing the meaning of the verdict and the riots for black Americans titled "The Rodney King wake up call: Which way America?" *Essence* published one article, also in July, which, while containing an interview with Souljah on the meaning of the Rodney King verdict and post-verdict violence, did not mention the controversy around the *Washington Post* interview. *Jet* published two stories on the Souljah controversy.

The absence of coverage of Souljah in *Ebony* despite their coverage of the Rodney King trial and subsequent violence is consistent with the findings in this project thus far regarding *Ebony*'s attempt to avoid coverage of African Americans at the center of "negative" controversy. At the same time, the inclusion of Souljah in *Essence* on the subject of Rodney King but without mentioning the controversy appears an attempt by the editors of that magazine to provide Souljah the opportunity to contribute to

discussions around the meaning of the trial and riots without a singular focus on her *Post* comments.

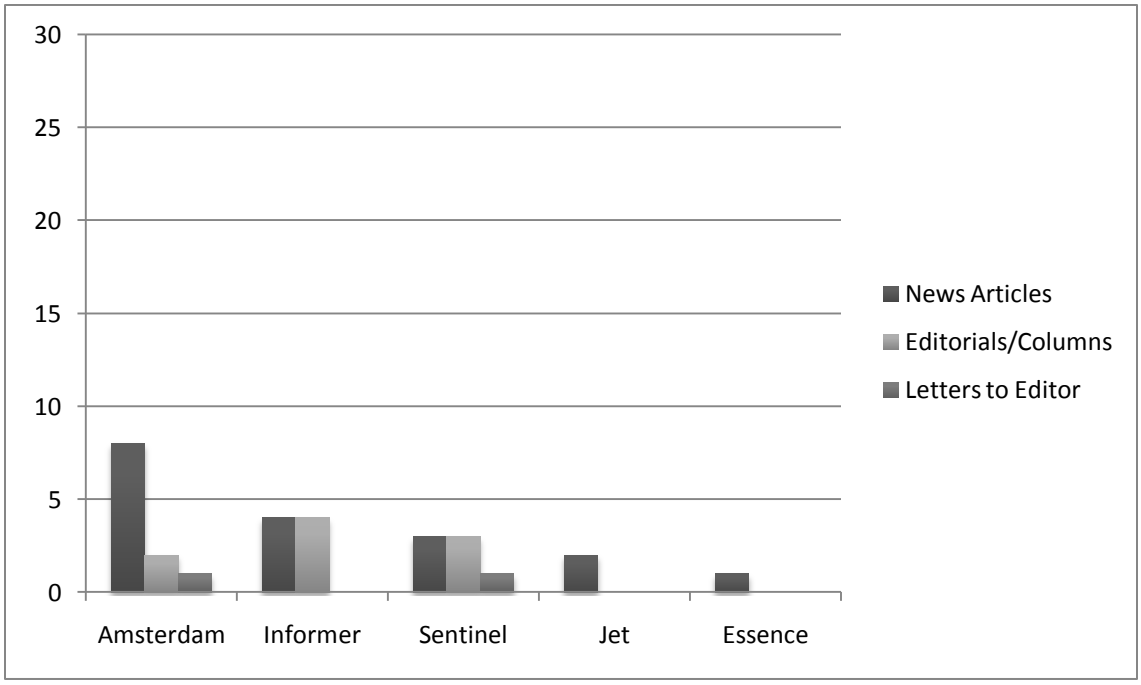

Figure 19: Frequency of stories by black press source.

In the mainstream press, *The Washington Post* published the majority of stories on the Souljah controversy (n=55), which is unsurprising given its role as the original venue for the interview. The *Los Angeles Times* published nearly as many (n=49) stories on the subject followed by the *New York Times* (n=32). Interestingly each of these papers printed approximately the same number of articles as one another but the *Post* and *LA Times* published significantly more opinion-based pieces than the *New York Times*. *Newsweek* published five articles on Souljah's comments followed by *Time* with two.

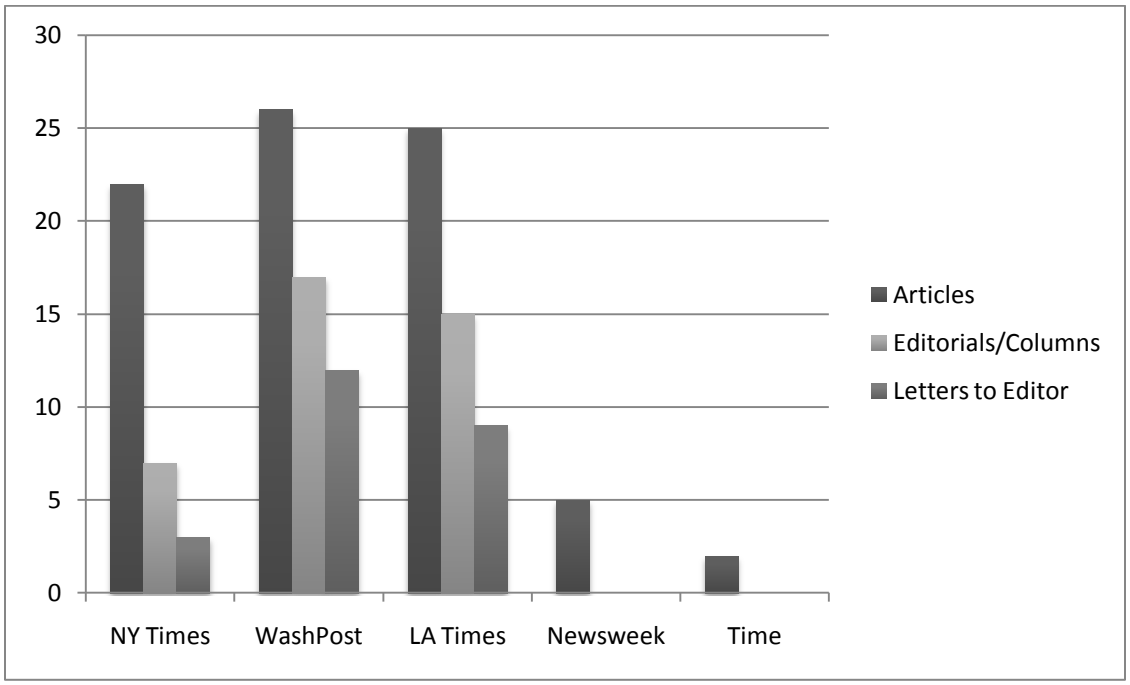

Figure 20: Frequency of stories by mainstream source.

In total, the black press published twenty-nine (N=29) stories that addressed Souljah, her comments, and Clinton's criticism with thirty-eight percent of these being opinion-based stories including editorials, columns and letters to the editor. The mainstream press published five times as many stories on Souljah (N=143) than the black press with forty-four percent of these being explicitly opinion-based.

This mainstream press coverage outnumbers that of any of the other cases examined here and the black press coverage of Souljah is numerically tied for second with that of Kitt (Paul Robeson received the most black press coverage of any of the cases examined here). This large amount of coverage in both the mainstream and black press suggests that the controversy around Souljah's comments, despite her limited celebrity, was deemed especially newsworthy. While in the mainstream press this is likely a result of the newsworthiness of the other players involved—Bill Clinton and Jesse Jackson in particular—, the frequency of coverage in the black press despite its

significant decline by this point in time suggests that black newsmakers felt a particular need to contribute alternative understandings to the story.

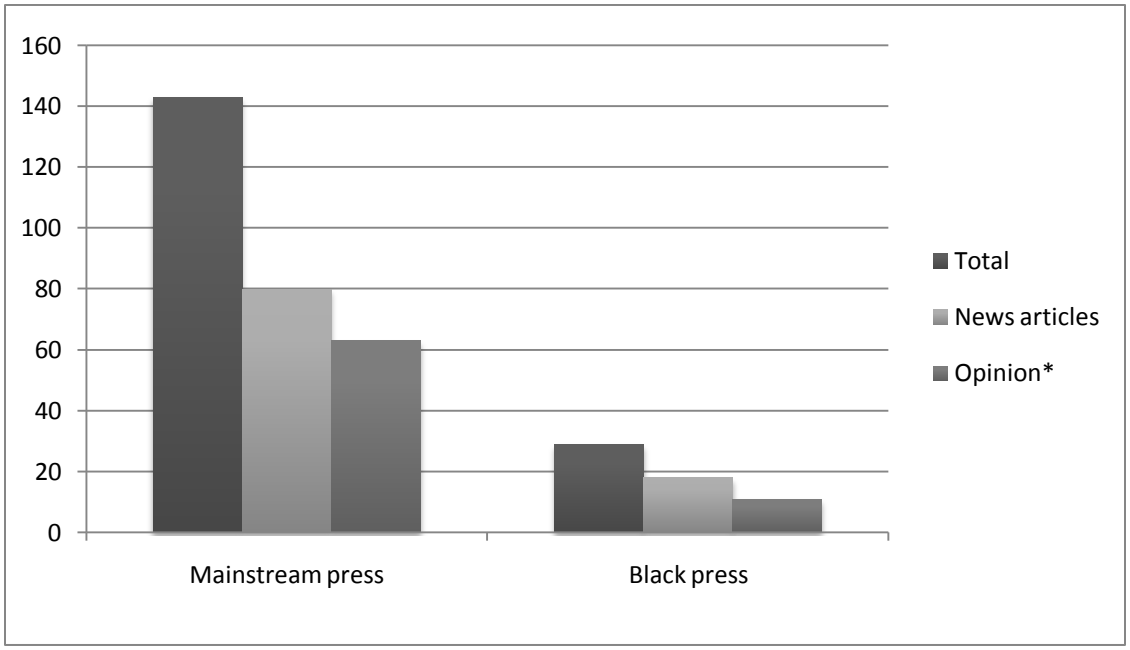

Figure 21: Number of stories compared to totals by type and press. (*Opinion reflects editorials, columns and letters to the editor combined.)

While the black press covered Souljah's comments and the resulting attention paid to them by Bill Clinton in the 1992 presidential campaign in neutral terms in nearly seventy-percent of stories, neutral coverage in the mainstream press (forty-eight percent) was overtaken by negative coverage (fifty-percent). Thus, mainstream coverage of Souljah was the most negative in the mainstream press of any case examined here (followed closely by coverage of Smith and Carlos). Below I discuss the use of explicitly negative and positive constructs in each press and how these constructs fit into the popular frames used by the mainstream and black press to make sense of Sister Souljah and her words to their readers.

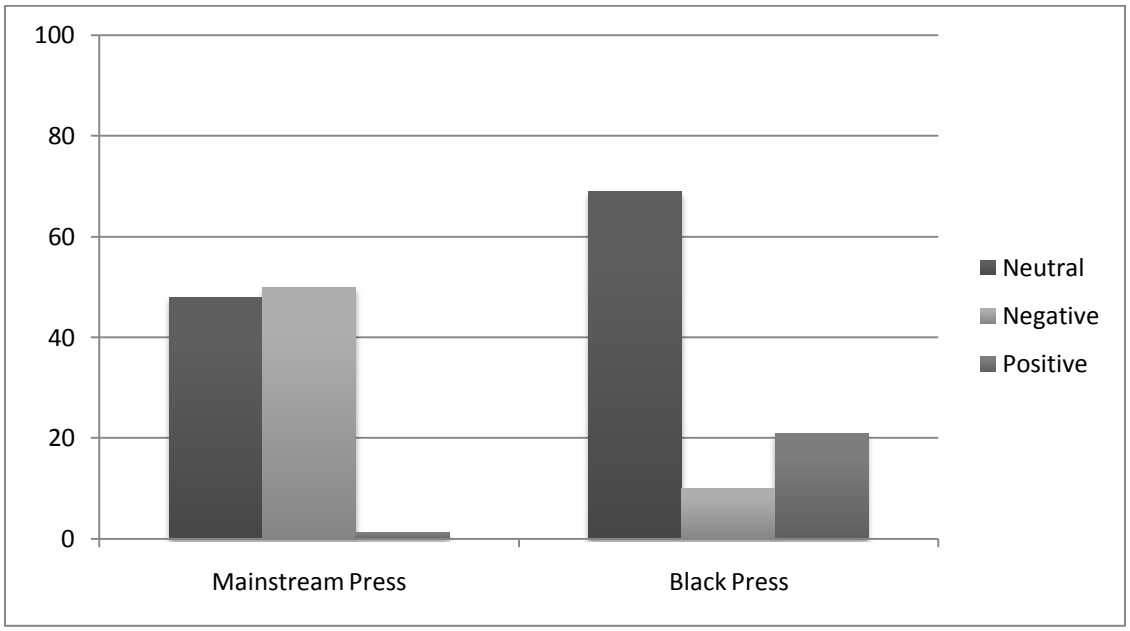

Figure 22: Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press.

Mainstream Findings:

Trends in Positive & Negative Coverage

As previously mentioned a majority of characterizations of Souljah and her statements were negative in mainstream coverage. This level of negativity likely reflects the intense reaction Souljah's particular brand of commentary evoked in mainstream discourse. However, as Smith, McCarthy, McPhail and Augustyn (2001) have noted, the presence of drama and extremes on the part of dissenters should not preclude journalists, who are supposed to attempt objectivity, from incorporating some discussion of the underlying social tensions that motivate such dissent.

A tiny one-point-four percent of mainstream coverage presented positive characterizations of Souljah and/or her comments. Notably, this tiny margin was due only to the *Washington Post's* inclusion of one letter-to-the-editor that regarded Souljah's words as "righteous anger" and one positive column written by African American

political scientist Ronald Walters. Walters argued that through "hyperbole and exaggeration" Sister Souljah had represented "an authentic expression…of the pain and dehumanization of black people." Besides these, no other article, column, editorial or letter-to-the-editor in the mainstream press presented Souljah in a positive light.

These two positive descriptions in the *Washington Post* were overwhelmed by negative stories in fifty-six percent of *Post* coverage. In contrast to previous findings in this study, even the *New York Times* presented its audiences with more negative coverage of Souljah than neutral (fifty-three percent vs. forty-seven percent). The *Los Angeles Times* presented its' audience with the most neutral coverage in the mainstream press at sixty-three percent. It may be that *Times* journalists were able to present more neutral coverage of Souljah because of their familiarity with the symbolism and drama of the entertainment industry generally and/or their proximity to the poignant emotions that arose from all members of the Los Angeles' community in the wake of the King verdict. Both newsmagazines presented overwhelmingly negative coverage of Souljah.

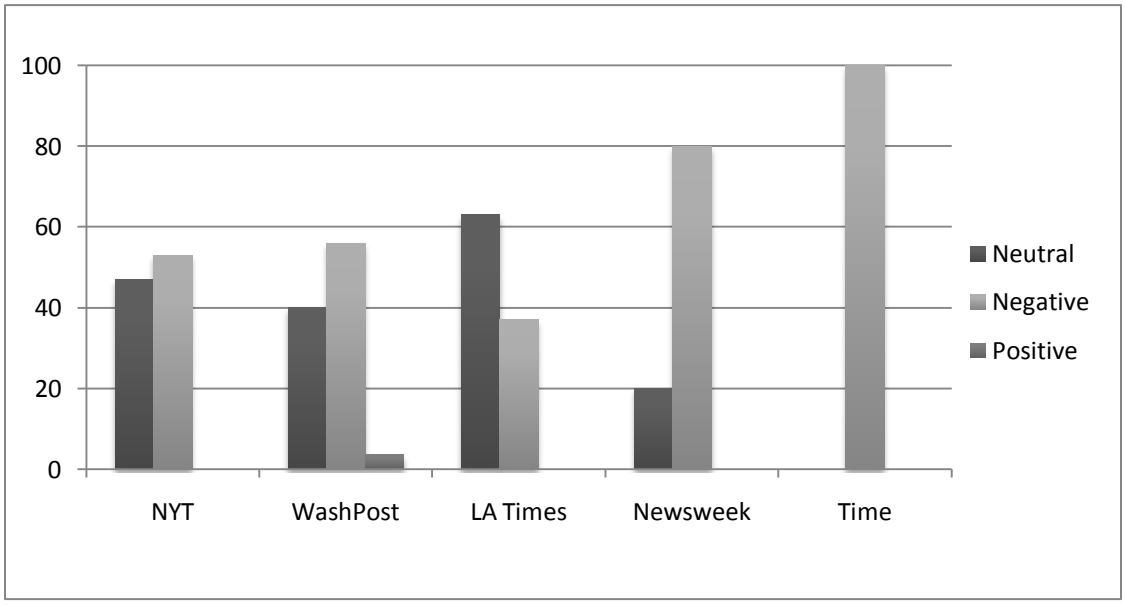

Figure 23: Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press.

The mainstream press relied heavily on an extremely truncated quote from the original *Washington Post* interview, reporting frequently and without context that Souljah had asked "If black people kill black people every day, why not have a week and kill white people?" The possibility that this question was entirely rhetorical and hyperbolic in nature was apparently lost on mainstream newsmakers, who reported her question as if it was a literal suggestion. Only two stories on Souljah in the mainstream press presented the full interview from which the quote was drawn, and both of these were in the *Washington Post*.

As a result, the mainstream press depended largely for their understanding of Souljah's words on what Clinton claimed Souljah had meant. This acceptance of Clinton as a reasonable social commentator on black America reveals the way white subjectivities are assumed by newsmakers to reflect an objective knowledge rather than understood as the sentiments of those in the dominant social position (Hartmann 2007).

Notable also is that despite Souljah's follow-up clarification in which she explained exactly the point she was trying to make with her words, the mainstream press almost entirely disregarded this interpretation. In fact, the mainstream press hardly ever reported that Souljah had held a press conference to clarify her words at all, effectively silencing Souljah's worldview while dissecting seventeen words. This silencing along with the mainstream press' failure to present its audience with the larger context of the interview, or the context of Hip Hop discourse as a location for the dramatized expression of black anger, made the possibility for positive or even neutral understandings of Souljah's words inaccessible.

Bill Clinton's contentions that Souljah's words were "filled with hatred" and his comparison of her to David Duke—"if you took the words 'white' and 'black' and reversed them, you might think David Duke is giving a speech"—were repeated frequently throughout news coverage of the controversy. The mainstream press also depended on the interpretations of other elites, particularly politicians, for their understanding of Souljah's words resulting in uniformly negative and unsympathetic characterizations of them. Of the 143 mainstream stories examined here, only one article (in the *Los Angeles Times*) reported Clinton's follow-up remarks where he "said he understands the anger behind the songs of rap singer Sister Souljah. 'She obviously believes that the system values white people's lives over blacks'," he said. 'I think that's the point she was trying to make.'"

The literal interpretation of Souljah's words in mainstream stories resulted in them being characterized frequently as an "incitement to murder." Souljah was characterized as "divisive," "racist," and "angry" and her opinions as "inflammatory," "pointless hatred." In complete disregard of the realities of her education and experiences as a political and social activist and educator in various cities, a *Washington Post* columnist described Souljah as "having the political sophistication of a ficus tree," and a *New York Times* column labeled her a "lonely crank" and "a woman who thinks with her mouth" who had "already gotten more attention than her talents as a rap artist or a social commentator merit."

Not surprisingly, mainstream coverage also tended to treat rap music with general distain despite several noble attempts to interrogate its cultural and political value. A column in the *Washington Post* characterized rap music in general as "separatist" and

"antisocial" and another noted that "rappers were incapable of making a point without profanity, or a move without holding their crotches." Within such discourse Souljah became a convenient flash point to reignite recurrent debate about the value of hip hop and the (implied) deviance and pathology of black culture.

In an incredibly insensitive use of rhetoric for someone criticizing the "imbecilic images" of "unfocused and semi-literate" rappers, *Los Angeles Times* columnist Greg Braxton stated that some "would like to put a noose around the neck of rap music." Using a lynching metaphor while criticizing the supposedly "offensive" content on rap music and levying particular criticism against supposedly racist discourse in the black community seems comically unaware and ironic. Apparently Greg Baxton suffered from historical amnesia regarding the actual fact of the thousands of African Americans who had nooses put around their necks during a period in which white culture celebrated lynching in much the same way as it did the county fair (Tolnay & Beck 1995).

Unlike previous cases examined here, the mainstream press included numerous African American sources in their coverage, a trend clearly reflecting the dynamics and expectations of post-civil rights era newsrooms. However, these African American sources remained almost entirely in the elite realm of politics with a few academics sprinkled in. Sister Souljah herself was rarely quoted or interviewed in mainstream coverage other than the reprinting of the truncated *Washington Post* quote and thus, as previously mentioned, became a marginal figure in the very stories that addressed her words.

Additionally, as will be discussed in detail below, the mainstream press' insisted on making the Sister Souljah story into one about relations between Bill Clinton and

Jesse Jackson. Souljah was also often compared to rapper Ice-T and her words to the lyrics of his song "Cop Killer," with some articles moving almost entirely into this discussion rather than one on Souljah. Thus, an overall male-centric nature appeared in the coverage subsuming the female figure of Souljah and her dissent into discourse by better-known (and more powerful) males.

Two primary frames for understanding Souljah's dissenting words were constructed by mainstream journalists; these included 1) that Souljah's words were an example of "black racism", and 2) that debate about Souljah's words was being used by Bill Clinton and Jesse Jackson in a politics-as-usual strategy of opportunism and posturing.

Mainstream Press Frame #1: Sister Souljah the Racist

Forty-three percent of stories in the mainstream press framed the story of Sister Souljah's comments as one about "black racism." According to this frame, Sister Souljah's discourse was an example of "reverse racism" and Clinton was right to criticize her for the "killing-white-people quote." This frame depended heavily on the interpretation of Souljah's words that Clinton offered in his original criticism at the Rainbow Coalition meeting and comments from members of the Clinton campaign who claimed that his criticism of Souljah was part of a larger trend in which the candidate "attacked racism" in all forms.

This frame primarily appeared in the form of discourse that either 1) constructed Souljah as having incited racial violence against whites, or 2) constructed her as a hypocrite for using "racist" language and violence to criticize the same. Thus, rather than including understandings of Souljah's words based on what she claimed her intentions

were or what members of the Hip Hop and/or black community understood them to mean, this frame was entirely dependent on an assumption that Souljah's words should be taken literally and understood according to the terms set by Clinton and his surrogates.

Additionally the contention by Clinton and others' that by criticizing Souljah he was demonstrating a larger commitment to anti-racist ideology that required all people to be treated equally is a clear example of the problematic nature of "colorblind" rhetoric within enlightened racism. The idea that Souljah's words should be equally attacked alongside instances of white racism ignores the reality of people of color as the primary victims of individual and institutional racism, confuses minority responses to this racism with the problem, and reinforced the idea that black culture produces deviant ideologies and cultural forms (Marable 2002). Or as Hartmann (2007) puts it, not only does this type of colorblind rhetoric "blind regular folks to existing racial injustices and inequalities, it can make it seem as if the existing racial status quo and White supremacy itself is acceptable."

Further this discourse of an (imagined) incitement of black on white crime is rooted in ideologies that have traditionally been used to justify racial retribution against blacks as a pre-emptive measure. Such fanaticizing of a violent black threat against the larger white populous can be seen historically in justifications for lynching and films like *Birth of a Nation*. Thus, constructing Souljah as a dangerous reverse racist allowed mainstream discourses to simultaneously justify sanctions against her.

For example, the editors of *The Washington Post* praised Clinton for taking issue with "the rapper who uses the rhetoric of race war to defend the Los Angles rioters," contending that Souljah's "angry and hate-filled thought" "is a form of racism and

deserves to be publically criticized." Columnist Mary McGrory of *The Washington Post* wrote that it was "brilliant" for Clinton to take on Souljah's suggestion "that black men kill white men." *Los Angeles Times* columnist Dianne Klein praised "Bill" for "rapping Sister Souljah for mouthing a racist line" and *Newsweek* wrote that Clinton "stuck to his guns" by criticizing Souljah's "racist statement."

Every mainstream source examined here used the terms "black racism" and "reverse racism" alongside the terms "incendiary" and "inflammatory" to describe Souljah's ideologies constructing the rapper as not only a racist but also an instigator of race-based violence. A *Time* article contended that Souljah's "eye-for-an-eye message is unmistakable" and the *New York Times* described Souljah as having an "open hatred for whites." The *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post* variously contended that Souljah was "fueling racial tensions" and made an "incendiary call to kill." Every mainstream source repeated without question Clinton's claim that Souljah had "advocated racial violence" with her "racially-divisive remarks."

Through this discourse Souljah was constructed as a violent "militant" threat to a supposedly tolerant racial social order. By taking Clinton's interpretation of her words as a valid, holistic understanding, the debate around their meaning was presented in the ridiculous terms: whether or not black people should in fact kill white people. This approach completely missed the nuanced point behind Souljah's words, made any defense of her (or alternative interpretation of her words) seem morally indefensible and, perhaps most importantly, overshadowed the fact of the real recent and historical violence committed by whites against blacks (rather than the other way around).

While relying heavily on Clinton's initial interpretation of the truncated *Washington Post* quote, many mainstream journalists also attempted to present additional interpretations of the quote's meaning to their audience. Unfortunately, these interpretations were also dependent on taking Souljah's statement as a literal suggestion rather than as a dramatic but entirely rhetorical question given in response to a prompt from a reporter.

A *New York Times* article explained that Souljah was "suggesting that whites should be killed in proportion to blacks," while another stated that Souljah had been quoted "as saying that blacks would be justified in killing whites." The *Los Angeles Times* explained to its readers that the controversy was the result of "rapper Sister Souljah urging blacks to kill whites instead of each other" and *Washington Post* columnist Eve Zibert contended that Souljah "professes to find the murder or economic ruin of whites rational and even righteous redress for the historical exploitation of blacks." None of these interpretations reflected words Souljah actually had said or, least of all, attempted to present Souljah's intended critique about the social value of black lives in comparison to white.

Letters to the editor published by the *New York Times* labeling Sister Souljah a "hard-core hater" "poison[ing] all efforts toward interracial reapproachment [sic]" seem tame compared to a letter published by the *Los Angeles Times* that suggested "they should stop debating Sister Souljah and simply put her in jail for inciting felonies and genocide." A *Washington Post* letter-to-the-editor called Sister Souljah a "hate-spewing bigot" who "is an insult to her own race for fueling the fires of bigotry and hatred." In one of the few acknowledgements of the relevance of free speech rights in the

mainstream press, a *Los Angeles Times* letter-to-the-editor determined that Souljah's "encouragement to murder is a flagrant abuse of any right to free artistic expression." Additional letters to the editor published by mainstream sources characterized Souljah as "incoherent," "ignorant," "sick" and "cowardly."

Mainstream editorial staff also contributed extremely strong denunciations of Souljah. The editorial on the subject in the *New York Times* described Sister Souljah as "a careless voice for violence," and *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis called Souljah's words "the language of hate and murder." Russell Baker, also of the *New York Times*, argued that Souljah presented an "apocalyptic vision of interracial relations" and "oratory extolling bloodshed" that was the equivalent of "throwing around kerosene when your house is on fire." A column by Colman McCarthy in the *Washington Post* contended that Souljah the "motor mouth" was "pushing violence and hate as solutions to conflict" and thus "worsen[ing] the lives that this hot-blooded rapper pretends to care about."

Reverse racism

The existence of reverse racism and its presumed parity to white racism was assumed throughout the mainstream press as a part of framing Sister Souljah as a racist. The *New York Times* noted that "some critics" of Souljah "characterized [her] as racist and anti-feminist." The *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post*, apparently oblivious to the irony, ran a quote from Senator Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) (former Klan member and outspoken segregationist), that Clinton should be "commended for 'his rebuke of such blatantly inflammatory rhetoric and for reminding the country that no race has a monopoly on racist provocation and demagoguery." Similarly a column in the

Washington Post by Richard Cohen argued that "racism is not a white monopoly" and that Souljah's words were "bigotry pure and simple."

The incongruity of presenting the words of a black woman with virtually no social power as a racist and thus a threat to the social structure seemed lost on most journalists. Further, the lack of criticism of racism on the part of other relevant figures (like Byrd whose anti-black record speaks for itself, Clinton who had recently played golf at an all-white country club or the police who got away with nearly killing Rodney King) is blaring and demonstrates the way challenges to white hierarchy are, as Lipsitz (2006) notes, treated "much more seriously than the millions of directly racist actions by public and private actors in society every day."

Only one article of all those presented by the mainstream press presented the argument that "black racism" was not only not a real problem in American society and according to many scholars of race could not significantly impact society, if it existed at all, given the lack of institutional power available to African Americans. This account, however, was subsumed amid a larger article in which various figures labeled Souljah's words as unquestionably racist.

One *New York Times* journalist felt it important to note that "many blacks said they have no real sympathy for the rap performer" and did not believe that "anybody should kill whites." The fact that a journalist felt the need to clarify in a news article that most black people did not want to kill white people is not only incredible but reflects the way in which rhetoric deemed threatening from an individual black celebrity is assumed to represent the sentiments of the entire black community unless otherwise stated.

The *Washington Post* published a quote from a white citizen who felt that "The KKK is for terrorizing black people. She's [Souljah] doing the same thing on the other side," while *New York Times* columnist A.M. Rosenthal opined "I doubt even Mr. Duke has been that vile in public." Constructing Souljah's words as not only equivalent to but worse than the actions of the historical and present-day Ku Klux Klan not only requires a misinterpretation of them, but assumes she and her statements has the potential to do the same sort of damage that racially motivated violence at the hands of oft-state sanctioned militias has done against blacks for generations. Such discourse minimizes the actions of the Klan by equating their organized terrorist activities with "racist" words; confusing speech with actual murder. Further, these commentators suggest that Sister Souljah had the power to lead (or spark) a willing and ready mass rebellion of black people in the torturing and murder of white people, an idea that severely misconstrues the African American community as a single-minded, vengeful, and easily swayed mass.

By framing Sister Souljah as the most extreme kind of racist mainstream newsmakers made the story one in which an African American was under presumably justified scrutiny from a morally superior status quo opposed to racism. This frame not only turned the tables of the point Souljah was trying to make with her comments but on the real consequences of racism in the United States. By defining racism as the problem of an individual, in this case Souljah, the larger political and social establishment was able to discursively absolve itself from responsibility for racism (Hartmann 2007). Critiques of the hypocrisy of a status quo in which the justice system acquitted those who actually committed race-based violence and politicians and the media denigrated those whose only power to express their frustration resulted in the destruction of their own

communities and the occasional rhetorical lashing out at the power structure was lost in such mainstream discourse.

In the midst of all the literal interpretations of Souljah's statements only one mainstream story took the time to note that "of course, no white people were killed" in the Los Angeles riots. Given the way newsmakers treated Souljah's statements as a valid threat that would actually result in white death; mainstream readers could have easily missed this fact.

Additionally, the insistence of mainstream newsmakers in reprinting Clinton's original interpretation of Souljah in which she is demonized but the lack of coverage of his later more sympatric quote (noted above) is a startling omission. The fact that even when their original elite source, the future president of the United States, was willing to offer a more realistic and nuanced interpretation of Souljah's words the mainstream press failed to change their tune in constructing Souljah as a racist, while ignoring the questions she posed about the cultural value of black life, is striking and disturbing.

Mainstream Press Frame #2: (Racial) Politics as Usual

The frame of Sister Souljah as a pawn in a politics as usual game within the Democratic Party was presented in nearly thirty-percent of mainstream stories and appeared in two specific forms; one that Clinton made Sister Souljah an issue as a political move to show his "independence" from "special interests," and two, that Jesse Jackson made Clinton's criticism of Souljah an issue as a political move to try to levy influence in the election. Like the previously discussed frame, within this frame Sister Souljah herself became entirely voiceless despite the focus on her words. Instead any mention of her relevance was relegated to the roles Clinton and Jackson were presumably

using her to play in a game of political goal-tending. Significantly, the majority of instances of this frame presented Clinton in a positive light and suggested his game playing had constructive ends while constructing Jackson as disingenuously egotistical and destructive to the political process.

Almost uniformly, stories in the mainstream press that made use of this politics as usual frame suggested that Clinton had criticized Souljah at Jackson's Rainbow Coalition meeting in an effort to "woo" "middle-of-the-road and conservative white voters" who might otherwise be turned off by Clinton's friendly relationship with the African American community. While much has been said about the ways in which such constructions pit black and white voters against one another in campaign coverage (see Squires & Jackson 2010; Entman & Rojecki 2000; Peer & Ettema 1998), it is notable here that this construction assumes it natural for white voters to distain Jackson particularly and black concerns and frustrations generally.

For example, in referring to Clinton's statements on Souljah, the *Washington Post* reported that "Clinton campaign officials had been looking for a way to break the candidate's image among voters as a loyal supporter of Democratic orthodoxy, and a number of his key strategists argued that a confrontation with Jackson was the best mechanism to achieve this goal." Similarly, in the wake of Clinton's criticism the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton pursued a two-pronged strategy Monday, featuring a combative approach to a flap over remarks by a rap singer and a separate effort to charm voters during a two-hour show on CBS." The *Washington Post* reported that by criticizing Souljah at the Rainbow Coalition meeting Clinton had demonstrated "that he was willing to tell important groups what they don't want to hear."

When Jackson eventually endorsed Clinton, the *Washington Post* wrote that "the factional struggle between center and left has been won by the center" and thus Clinton had succeeded in his "larger strategy when he criticized controversial rapper Sister Souljah." Through such reporting, the mainstream sources examined here constructed Sister Souljah and her statements as relevant only in terms of the role they played in Clinton's campaign strategy and his political relationship with Jackson.

The mainstream press largely constructed Clinton's inclusion of Souljah in the campaign as a positive form of political manipulation, thereby rewarding Clinton for politicizing the rappers comments. Russell Baker of the *New York Times* wrote regarding Clinton's statements on Souljah at the Rainbow Coalition meeting that "by deliberately embarrassing Reverend Jackson, Mr. Clinton was declaring independence." Similarly, articles in the *New York Times* contended that "both Walter S. Mondale in 1984 and Michael S. Dukakis in 1988" had to "placate" Jackson but "Mr. Clinton has served notice that he does not intend to do so," and that "Gov. Bill Clinton, reaching for a symbol that would demonstrate his desire not to be held captive by special interests, used a conference sponsored by the multiracial Rainbow Coalition to attack statements made by a popular rap artist."

Washington Post columnist Mary McGrory stated that "Clinton gave politicians in the Democratic Party important reassurance" in criticizing Souljah by "suggesting that Jackson is not infallible." Thus the entire story of Souljah's words and Clinton's criticism of them becomes one is which Clinton's criticism was a means to the political end of putting Jesse Jackson in his place in the hope of gaining more support. The intent and/or meaning of Souljah's statements are, again, completely ignored in this frame.

Mainstream press columnists also presented Clinton's criticism of Souljah amid discourse that was generally cynical of the political process as a whole. Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post* wrote that "no doubt Clinton had some political purposes in mind—not the least of them being just getting back in the news," and *Los Angeles Times* columnist Dianne Klein noted that "this being an especially political season, we've been peppered with lots of images lately" that "professionals are paid dearly to drop," such as Bill Clinton's appearance on Arsenio Hall and criticism of Sister Souljah. In comparing Clinton's criticism of Souljah to Dan Quayle's criticism of Ice-T, *New York Times* columnist Jon Pareles snarked, "both candidates clearly believe that the contrast between a politician in a suit and a rapper in street clothes works to their advantage."

While characterizations of Clinton that suggested he was using Sister Souljah to further his political career were largely positive or neutral toward Clinton a few levied critiques of the candidate. A letter-to-the-editor published by the *Washington Post* noted that despite praise of Clinton for projecting "an image of independence from Democratic party orthodoxy" by criticizing Sister Souljah the fact was that "to turn on one's constituency and embarrass one's supporters in order to appear tough is simply spineless opportunism" and "contrived."

Similarly, Dorothy Gilliam, an African American columnist at the *Washington Post* explained that Clinton's criticism of Souljah was used "coldly" by the candidate "to show that he could 'contain' Jackson and appeal to 'forgotten' Democrats who left the party to become Reaganites." Gilliam goes on to suggest that the resulting "calculated, well-orchestrated" "brouhaha" reflected that "Clinton was concerned neither about

freedom of expression nor some young people feeling they do not have a stake in this society."

In the *Los Angeles Times* columnist Janette Beckman wrote that "whether or not Sister Souljah was advocating racist violence or merely replicating a gangbanger's inner thoughts is entirely beside the point. Having made his decision to strike aside Jackson's outstretched hand, Clinton would have used any pretext," and thus his attack on Souljah was "vulgar opportunism." Alexander Cockburn, also of the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote of Clinton that "the Sister Souljah affair displayed his calculated contempt for the core constituencies of Jackson's campaigns in the 1980s."

A column by Gwen Ifill of the *New York Times* reflected the way Clinton's insertion of Souljah into the campaign was constructed as political strategy, and the way in which Jackson's taking issue with Clinton for doing so was commonly maligned in the politics as usual frame. Ifill wrote of Clinton and Jackson's disagreement over Souljah; "the latest round with Mr. Jackson, who has made plaguing Democratic nominees something of an art form, has continued just long enough to risk becoming a long-term liability that could outweigh the short-term benefit Clinton strategists had hoped to gain…"

As apparent in the quote above, unlike Clinton, when Jackson was constructed as using the Souljah controversy for his political gain characterizations of the leader were overwhelmingly negative. Both *Newsweek* and *Time* published lengthy articles making use of the politics as usual frame that constructed Jackson as having a negative effect on the political process by disagreeing publically with Clinton on the Souljah issue. In discussing Clinton's "goal" "to secure Jackson's support without getting caught up in his

agenda," *Newsweek* noted that within this "game" while Jackson had "another card to play" with the entry of Perot into the campaign, Clinton "sent a quiet, but firm, message to Jackson that he wasn't in the mood to mess around" by criticizing Souljah at the Rainbow Coalition meeting. The article goes on to suggest that Jackson was using this incident as "a weapon of ongoing struggle" but "that this isn't *really* about high-minded ideas and downtrodden masses[41]. It's mostly about the ego and needs of Jesse Louis Jackson."

Similarly, *Time* constructed Jackson as jealous of Clinton's success, stating that while Clinton's "sin is that he wants to win and that he understands victory requires his adopting centrist positions" (thus "dictating" his "rebuke of Souljah"), Jackson, the "megalomaniac" "denounced Clinton's courage" and "flirted with Perot" in what the article suggest is a "move" to control Clinton and further his own political power.

Mainstream newspapers similarly used the politics as usual frame to denounce Jackson. The *Los Angeles Times* stated that Jackson "kept alive his feud" with Clinton by criticizing him for criticizing Souljah thus making it seem that it was Jackson rather than Clinton who had inserted the controversy around Souljah's words into the campaign. Similarly, an article in the *Washington Post* reported that "the escalating feud between Clinton and Jackson has simmered for many months. If Jackson attempts to use Sister Souljah to keep it alive, the controversy could disrupt next month's Democratic National Convention…"

A column in the *Washington Post* by Richard Cohen noted that "the Sister Souljah flap has become, to no one's surprise, all about Jesse Jackson." Cohen describes

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[41] Original emphasis

Jackson as "menacing," "turbulent" and "petulant" while explaining that Jackson's initial refusal to endorse Clinton was not so much about "the residents of America's inner cities" but "Jesse Jackson's pride." An article in the *Washington Post* reported that by "deliberately picked a fight with Jesse L. Jackson" in his criticism of Sister Souljah Clinton "gave Jackson a taste of his own medicine" given Jackson's history of "hijacking attention" in the Democratic Party.

That the blame for the "feud" that threatens the Democratic Party is displaced from Clinton to Jackson reveals the way raced controversies are placed in the laps of black politicians, a trend well documented to impact how voters understand race and political figures (Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings & White 2002). Additionally, That African Americans are construed as a "special interest" group along with those in the Democratic Party who lean left constructs the issues they raise as the concerns of bodies outside established society and not those of citizens.

Overall, Sister Souljah's marginalization in this frame is clear; she is named often, but only in passing and only in relation to the way she is being used for gain by two high profile male members of the Democratic Party. Rather than being constructed as agential, she is a pawn, a tangent, a play thing, and her words, when quoted, are regarded simply as one of many semi-relevant issues being used by two men in a game of political strategy. Any discussion of their meaning regarding Rodney King, the Los Angeles uprising, or race relations in general is lost by this marginalization.

Black Press Findings

Trends in Positive & Negative Coverage

In the black press, coverage of Souljah and her dissent was almost seventy-percent neutral followed by positive coverage (twenty-one-percent) and negative coverage (ten-percent). Notable here is the maintenance of explicit neutrality for the most part by the black press as compared to the mainstream press. Perhaps unsurprising is the presence of more positive coverage of Souljah in the black press but notable is the fact that the black press presented negative coverage at almost ten times the rate the mainstream press included positive coverage. As previously found in this study, this suggests that the black press was more willing than the mainstream press to present its audience with alternative interpretations to those most common among its newsmakers.

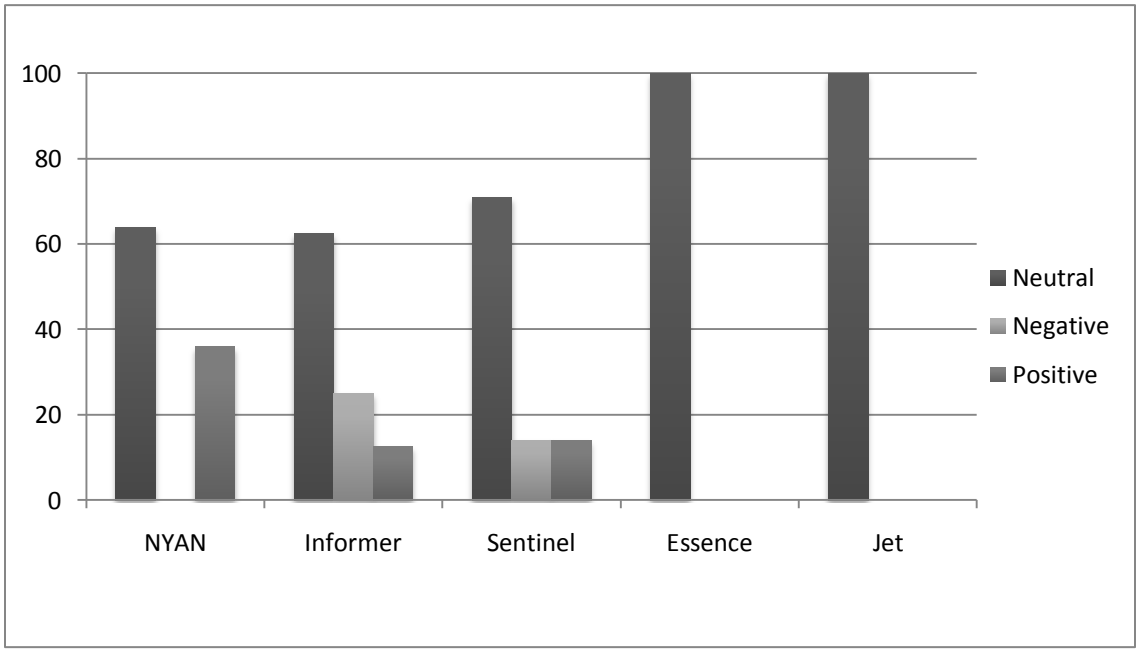

Figure 24: Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press.

Negative coverage of Souljah in the black press was used far less sensational language than that in the mainstream press. For example, in a column by Abiola Sinclair in the *New York Amsterdam News*, the author writes "As for Sister Souljah, I'm not going to defend her rap. I guess I know what she meant, but it seemed rather awkwardly put. In

any event, it's been said before." The criticism levied against Souljah here is one that, while contending that her language in communicating her point was inappropriate, does not suggest that the sentiment behind it was wrong and in fact acknowledges that the disparate valuation of black vs. white lives in American society is old news to the black community.

In a more negative characterization of Souljah, *Los Angeles Sentinel* columnist Jim Cleaver characterized her as a "foolish little rap singer looking to make a fortune from our anger and despair" by making "ludicrous" statements. Notable even in this strong denunciation of Souljah's statements is the treatment of "anger and despair" in the black community as real and justifiable given that, according to the author, "there can be no question that African Americans in this nation have been ill-treated."

A few negative characterizations of Souljah in the black press aligned with mainstream discourse. *Washington Informer* columnist Calvin Rolark characterized Souljah's words as "racist exhortations" in one column and wrote in another that "if indeed Sister Souljah did make those remarks, such a blatantly racist and incendiary exhortation is indefensible." The *Los Angeles Sentinel* included a quote from one member of the community who felt that "the stuff she's [Sister Souljah] talking about is creating problems," although this quote was subsumed by a larger context in which other members of the community explained that the quote was not to be taken "literally" and that her point that "we're flesh and blood just like white people" was "right."

Much of the positive coverage of Sister Souljah in the black press side-stepped the content of her controversial quote, and instead focused on positive personal characteristics of the rapper and her history of community work. For example, the *New*

York Amsterdam News variously described her as a "rising star," "intelligent," articulate," "fearless" and a "learned, organized and confident young woman" who was "not at all the typical rapper" in their coverage of the controversy. The *Washington Informer* described her as "a strong African American woman with a strong message," and the *Los Angeles Sentinel* contended that Sister Souljah's "outspoken stance against racism and oppression…made her a hero to young Blacks."

Stories in every black news source examined here freely reported that the Souljah quote had been "misunderstood" or taken "out of context" and several reported Clinton's version of the quote as something Souljah was "alleged" to have said casting doubt on the interpretations of the comments offered by the future president. These sources offered an alternative interpretation to the one dominant in the mainstream press that aligned with the point Souljah herself had maintained she intended to make with her words.

The *Los Angles Sentinel* wrote that "Sister Souljah poignantly pointed out the double standard involved in White America being appalled at the attacks of Black gang members on Whites in L.A., while accepting the daily reality of Blacks [sic] gangs killing Blacks as routine and normal." The *New York Amsterdam News* published a letter-to-the-editor that noted "for we audience, we understood very well that her remark did not imply that we should go out and kill White people," and an article that explained "Her point…is that in America Black lives are valueless and it is only when the threat of death to Whites is voiced that politicians act responsibly." Such interpretations and contextualizations of Souljah's *Washington Post* quote were absent from mainstream coverage of the controversy.

Like mainstream press coverage, the black press commonly subsumed coverage of Souljah in a discussion of the political relationship between Clinton and Jackson and freely compared the controversy to that over lyrics by rapper Ice-T. Despite this however, the black press presented multiple stories that focused solely on interviewing Sister Souljah about the intention of her words, the criticism from Clinton and other subjects. As a result Souljah was given a more agential voice by newsmakers in the black press and her social and political understandings were treated as newsworthy and viable interpretations.

Overall, the black press presented two primary frames for making sense of Sister Souljah's words in the *Washington Post* interview and the subsequent criticism of them; the first framed Bill Clinton as the personality at fault in the story by questioning his loyalty to and respect for the Black community, the second framed the focus on Sister Souljah's words by Clinton, other politicians and the mainstream media as a diversion from larger and more consequential political and racial issues.

Black Press Frame #1: Bill Clinton the Betrayer

A majority—sixty-two percent—of stories on Sister Souljah's words focused on the possibility that Bill Clinton's criticism of them at the Rainbow Coalition meeting represented an attack on the black community and its political agenda. Unlike the mainstream press that generally used the term "criticizing" to described Clinton's comments on Souljah while constructing Souljah as a violent force, the black press sources examined here commonly framed Clinton as the aggressor having "attacked," "lambasted," "insulted" and "dropped a bomb on" Souljah, Jesse Jackson and the

Rainbow Coalition as a whole. Within this frame, Souljah, and especially Jackson, were constructed as symbolic representatives of the black community.

For example, a *Washington Informer* article contended that as a result of his recent criticism of Souljah and "refusal" to address the National Newspaper Publishers Association[42] "Bill Clinton and the nation's Black voters are squaring off." While running the quote from Clinton in which he labeled Souljah's words as "hatred" the article goes on to explain that "Clinton was referring to Souljah's earlier comments in which she made headlines for denouncing 'White racism…'" The article noted that "the candidate's criticisms of the rap singer immediately drew uproar from several quarters of the Black community across America," and that an attendee at the Rainbow Coalition luncheon disagreed "with him going someplace where he had been invited to embarrass the host like he did."

Notable is that Souljah's words are explained as a denunciation of racism (rather than as racism as they commonly were described by the mainstream press) and that Clinton's criticism is framed as both uproar-worthy to "the Black community" generally and insulting to his "host," Jesse Jackson specifically. Similarly, the *New York Amsterdam News* described Clinton's comments on Souljah as a "diatribe" through which Clinton "usurped the hospitability extended" by Jesse Jackson and "acted like an unruly guest" in an effort to "appease White conservatives." The article also includes charges by Souljah that Clinton is "unfamiliar with inner-city youth and rappers" and shows "distain for women."

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[42] Founded in 1940, the National Newspaper Publishers Association, also known as the Black Press of America, is a 69-year-old federation of more than 200 Black community newspapers from across the United States. (NNPA, http://www.nnpa.org/, accessed July 8, 2010)

Other news articles in the *Amsterdam News* suggested that Clinton's criticism of Souljah was a "political poly," and noted that the "verdict by a number of African American leaders" was that Clinton "put his foot in his mouth when he rebuked rapper Sister Souljah." Labor leader Dennis Rivera was quoted by the *Amsterdam News* as feeling that "he [Clinton] insulted Rev. Jackson and the rainbow…he is playing with the politics of suicide by attacking his own political base among Blacks and labor," and others described Clinton's words to the Rainbow Coalition about Souljah as "cold calculation," a "dumb move" and "outrageous."

As the above *Amsterdam News* quote reflects, the black press sources examined here made a point of the importance of the black vote to Democratic presidential candidates in their criticisms of Clinton. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* noted that "Clinton should not bite the hand that is helping to feed him" and that his criticism of Souljah at the Rainbow Coalition meeting "seemed off-color to some of his own supporters" and that "political experts" felt it was "grandstanding" "to appeal to Whites and anger Jackson." *Jet* found Clinton's actions "shocking" and a letter-to-the-editor in the *Amsterdam News* contended that "Clinton's intentions are in demeaning Rev. Jesse Jackson, the Rainbow Coalition and the Black people."

In some of the most searing condemnation of Clinton in the black press, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* printed two editorials addressing his criticism of Souljah and contending variously that "this was not only a blatant attack against Sister Souljah, it was an 'in your face' insult to Rev. Jesse Jackson at his own convention. Beyond that it was an affront to Black people and progressives" and that "Clinton has disrespected too many black people along the campaign trail" including "trying to belittle the significance of the Rev. Jesse

Jackson" in "his broadside attack of Sister Souljah." Unlike the mainstream journalists who were at times congratulatory in their descriptions of Clinton's "insult" to Jackson, labeling him "courageous" for criticizing Souljah at the Rainbow Coalition meeting, the *Sentinel* framed this action as a reflection of Clinton's "arrogant attitude."

One *Sentinel* editorial went on to argue that "Bill Clinton should know that reaction to racism is not the same as racism" and that the "attack on Sister Souljah" was just one example of the fact that "Bill Clinton is bad news for Black people, minorities workers [sic] and poor and working people." The editorial staff then proceeded to list Clinton's "failure" to pass a civil rights bill in Arkansas, his support of the death penalty and his golfing at a segregated country-club in addition to the recent criticism of Souljah and failure to appear at a National Newspaper Publishers Association meeting as evidence of his "pathetic stance on issues of importance to Blacks…"

Columnists for the *Washington Informer* also questioned Clinton's motives and framed his criticism of Souljah as an intentional disregard of the black community. Noting that many African Americans felt that Clinton had "exhibited bad taste by using the Rainbow Coalition conference as a forum to air his views on Sister Souljah" Calvin Rolark wrote that "Bill Clinton chose to embarrass Jesse Jackson" because "Clinton feels entirely confident that he will get overwhelming support from Black voters with or without Jackson's help," felt it necessary to speak to "blue-collar White Democrats who supported Ronald Reagan and George Bush because of their misguided belief that the Democratic Party has been directing its attention more to issues of concern to Blacks[43]"and had "been having trouble attracting press attention." Fellow columnist

[43] The mainstream press tended to treat this "misguided belief" as a natural fact.

Lillian Wiggins wrote that "what Governor Clinton did was seize upon a moment for political reasons" and his "own aggrandizement" and that "his attack on Sister Souljah was untimely."

Many of the articles and opinion pieces published by the black press within this frame noted a sense of fatigue and frustration within the African American community regarding treatment by politicians. A letter-to-the-editor published by the *Los Angeles Sentinel* stated that "If Bill Clinton's move on Sister Souljah was intended to distance himself from Black voters in the eyes of white voters, he succeeded because I no longer intend to vote for him. I am completely fed up with black people being used as scapegoats and targets whenever the need arises for some politician to boost his standing in the polls."

The previously mentioned editorials in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* expressed this fatigue and frustration perhaps most clearly in stating that "Black people are tired of being lied to by politicians" and that "the African-American community is tired of being treated as the whipping boy to appease white ethnics and southerners." Likewise, *Amsterdam News* columnist Abiola Sinclair noted that "it's regrettable that Governor Bill Clinton took the opportunity to thrash rap artist Sister Souljah at the Rainbow Coalition Convention" given that previously "most Blacks were generally of the opinion that Clinton…was the lesser of assorted evils." An *Amsterdam News* article noted that "when the Arkansas governor had finished raking Sister Souljah over the coals what hope had been alive among the many of the 1,000 summit participants from the ranks of labor, community activist and seasoned politics, had been severely shaken."

Thus, journalists at African American publications framed the story of the controversy over Souljah's dissent as one about the neglect, abuse and betray of the African American community by white politicians. While Bill Clinton was named in the majority of the coverage as bearing a particularly large amount of guilt because of his claims of friendship with the black community and antiracist goals, this frame levied a larger critique against the American political system for ignoring the needs of black voters while simultaneously using racial ploys to rack up votes from segments of the white population that traditionally exhibited anti-black attitudes.

Black Press Frame #2: Distraction from Real Issues

Forty-five percent of stories in the black press presented the criticism of Souljah by Clinton as a distraction from more important political issues in general, and racial issues in particular. This frame constructed the fury of attention paid to Souljah's words and Clinton's words about them as distracting from concrete efforts to bring about progress in economic and racial equality. Both the *New York Amsterdam News* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* described Clinton's criticism of Souljah and the resulting media frenzy around her words as a "smokescreen." These sources and the other black press sources examined here either explicitly used the term "diversion" or implied as much by contextualizing the debate about the Souljah/Clinton controversy as insignificant compared to larger questions of racism and political efficacy.

Amsterdam News articles noted that "there are serious problems Clinton could have addressed…" but that "instead of addressing" the "vital subject" of Jesse Jackson's "$500 billion plan for revitalizing the inner-cities", "Clinton did the Souljah moonwalk away from the issues on the table. Jesse was pissed and rightly so." Both the *Amsterdam*

News and *Jet* articles reported that Jackson was "baffled by the diversion" from the "critical issues being discussed" including "how to get Americans back to work." Columnist David R. Jones of the *Amsterdam News* opined that "instead of dealing patiently and thoughtfully with the hard issues of survival facing millions" one presidential "hopeful" had recently "attacked rapper Sister Souljah."

In a front page story, the *Amsterdam News* also reported that according to "one delegate" present at the Rainbow Coalition meeting where Clinton spoke "'There was this reporter next to me, and he was dictating this story and it was completely about Sister Souljah, not one word about the program we've been here talking about for three days." "One effect of Clinton's bombshell address," the article explained, was that "the summit's 'Rebuild America' urban development program would get short shrift in the major media."

Focusing on race-based problems facing the country, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* reprinted on its front page a letter-to-the-editor originally printed in the *Los Angeles Times* that noted that amid all the criticism of Souljah's and Ice-T's words the author was "still waiting to hear one word of concern of any of those individuals [Clinton, Dan Qualye and city councilwoman Joan Milke Flores] of the actual killings of blacks and Latinos by police," as a lead in to an article detailing the recent killing of a(nother) black motorist by a white motorcycle police officer. The *Amsterdam News* also published a letter-to-the-editor arguing that Clinton's criticism of Sister Souljah was evidence of "how ignorant the so-called peace advocates are of the political problems and plight of Black people everywhere in this nation."

Likewise, columns by Lillian Wiggin in the *Washington Informer* mentioned the Souljah/Clinton "misunderstanding" amid various examples of historical and contemporary racism against minority groups. This included detailing the neglect of African American members of the armed services and noting that "there are many stories of this kind" that might "educate those Whites in our society who ask repeatedly, 'What does the Black man want?'" in the wake of events like the uprising in Los Angeles and controversies like that around Souljah. The answer Wiggins noted is "Justice for all."

In another column, Wiggins made this point about the way the Souljah controversy distracted from more important questions of racism even more explicit by stating that "all this to-do about Sister Souljah, Presidential Candidate Bill Clinton and Rev. Jesse Jackson" was "much a do about nothing." Wiggins goes on to detail the "different standards" by which Souljah's words were treated by "elected officials and the major media" compared to the "passive comment" "discriminatory remarks" by "prominent White gentlemen" receive. She compares this differential treatment to the way "White police officers in California seen brutally beating a Black man on video are acquitted" but black rioters caught on videotape were subject to harsh legal and social persecution, concluding that both examples evidence "bias against one race of people."

Wiggins goes on to suggest that "politicians and leaders in this country [are] turning their backs to the resurgence of Nazism, hatred and bigotry" and that "Gov. Clinton and Rev. Jackson" and other politicians should "speak about this kind of injustice" by taking issue publically with "the David Dukes of the world" and "the hate groups who are training young White children to shoot guns and kill 'niggers' and 'Jews.'" With this type of discourse Wiggins, and other members of black press editorial

staff, constructed that the mainstream controversy over Sister Souljah's supposedly racist words was insignificant and even insulting compared to the realities of racism experienced by African Americans.

This frame also made use of calls for community self-sufficiency and improvement rather than focus on the Souljah controversy. *Los Angeles Sentinel* columnist Jim Cleaver called the controversy that erupted around Clinton and Souljah "much ado about an inconsequential issue" and suggested that rather than concerning themselves with it the black community would be better off "setting up our priorities and taking functional control of our neighborhoods" since "white America" only responds temporarily "when black folk take to the streets" but always "slip back to business as usual."

Similarly, the July issue of *Essence* magazine dedicated a five- page report to questions of what the black community could do in the wake of the Rodney King verdict and the continued "hegemony of the white world" as evidenced by a list of various examples of institutional racism. This report contained an interview with Sister Souljah that did not touch on her controversial words or the criticism by Clinton but rather how "African people" as "victims of white supremacy" could "move to more collective action." By completely ignoring the controversy that had been the forefront of coverage on Souljah for months leading up to its' publication, the July issue of *Essence* made a point about what was important by simply ignoring what was not.

Overall and similar to the other cases examined here, the black press presented both alternative interpretations to those available to mainstream audiences and extensive criticism of the construction and publication of mainstream discourses. The *Amsterdam*

News reported that "More than 3,000 people converged on Harlem's famed Abyssinian Baptist Church last Sunday in support of and to pay tribute to Sister Souljah for the unkind and unfair treatment accorded her by the print media and television" and reported in a column titled "Media Watch" that "The media is involved in this whole Clinton-Souljah business in a very insidious way" noting that "the White press put him down" and turned "particularly mean" by suggesting "he was pandering to Blacks" because of his appearance on Arsenio Hall thus prompting Clinton to use Souljah as "damage control."

Likewise the *Washington Informer* noted that the "major media" barely reacted to racist utterances by white public figures who were against the celebration of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and noted that had "the press" not "seized upon the opportunity to make a national issue of" the Souljah's words "uttered in an enclosed environment," "the matter would have died and been buried without too much complication."

Ultimately through a critique that presented the controversy over Souljah's words as an unfair distraction from important issues and real instances of racism, the black press told its readers that, as the *New York Amsterdam News* put it, "the community should make their own decisions regarding the Sister Souljah/Bill Clinton controversy."

Discussion

Overall several similarities existed between mainstream press and black press framing of Sister Souljah's words. Other than *The Washington Post* in the mainstream press, all the sources examined here only covered the story after Bill Clinton took issue with the content of the original interview. As a result the majority of stories in both

presses focused on Clinton's interpretation of Souljah's words. Notably however, while the mainstream press tended to treat Clinton's literal interpretation of Souljah's words and his claims about them as factual, the black press largely Clinton's interpretations as illogical and insensitive.

Both presses tended to treat Jesse Jackson as a representative of the entire African American community, though again, in the mainstream press this resulted in negative characterizations of Jackson while in the black press explicit characterizations of Jackson were largely absent in favor of presenting him and the Rainbow Coalition as the symbolic face of the black community.

While Souljah was not explicitly gendered in coverage of her dissent like Eartha Kitt before her, the focus on the male players in the story effectively marginalized her lone female voice. Extensive discussion of Clinton and Jackson and the frequent comparisons of the Souljah controversy to that around Ice-T's "Cop Killer" resulted in male-centric frames in both presses. However, because journalists in the black press published several articles in which Souljah was asked to speak for herself and in which her word were reported on extensively, this marginalization was less extreme.

Interestingly, and largely because of the focus on Clinton's role in the controversy, neither press spent much time discussing Souljah's words in the context of the post- Rodney King verdict violence and the social construction of the values of black and white life that they intended to address. Instead, the intentions of the *Washington Post* interviewer who asked about the mentality of gangbangers and the nuance of Souljah's response were lost because of Clinton entering the story. While the intent behind Souljah's words was apparently "old news" in the African American public

sphere, had the mainstream press focused on what Souljah later explained to meant by her comments the possibility for greater understanding of the despair that motivated the unrest that followed the King verdict and the reality and validity of black frustration could have been enabled in the mainstream public sphere.

A notable difference between coverage in the mainstream and black press is the amount of space and emphasis given to discussing Sister Souljah's good works in the African American community. Black newsmakers spent significant time on accounts of Souljah's educational volunteerism and community activism, repeating regularly that she had demonstrated a genuine concern and commitment to the well-being of black youth. On the other hand, the mainstream press largely ignored this history or couched it in discourse that undermined its relevance to character judgments of Souljah.

Also interesting in this case is the amount of coverage Souljah received in the mainstream press despite her marginal celebrity. Souljah acknowledged herself that "many White people had not heard of her prior to Clinton's condemnation of her post-riot comments."[44] Souljah's celebrity persona then was primarily constructed in the mainstream press after her comments were denounced by Clinton. This, in addition to larger dominant denunciations of rap music, likely contributed to mainstream constructions of Souljah as a one-dimensional and dangerous public figure who embodied the supposed deviance of inner-city African American culture.

On the other hand, the more friendly treatment of Souljah by the black press likely reflects their familiarity with her philosophy of black uplift, educational background and good works within the African American community. This in addition to

[44] New York Amsterdam News, Jul 11, 1992, pg.4

a more complex understanding of hip hop, including its activists roots and increasing role as a major player in the black public sphere, allowed black newsmakers to see around the militant persona Souljah's words reflected and construct her as a three-dimensional person with valuable insights to offer.

This case represents the first included here in a so-called "post-civil rights" America. The more integrated newsrooms of the mainstream press sources examined here as compared to their 1949 and 1968 counterparts speak to this[45]. However, the way in which black and white political interests were assumed to be naturally at odds by both presses and the lack of nuanced understanding by mainstream newsmakers of African American expressive forms presents a pessimistic view of how well a post-civil rights news force informed its audience about issues having to do with race.

The strength of the "reverse racism" frame in mainstream understandings of Souljah especially reveals the continued lack of complex understandings of racial power and hierarchy in the 1990s. Equating Souljah's comments to the state-sanctioned terror many blacks experienced at the hands of whites well into the 1990s (as Rodney King can attest) reinforces what scholars have suggested about the political aura of "modern racism" that existed from the 1980s forward. Significantly however, the findings of this project up to this point suggest that the roots of "modern racism" were well in place well before Sister Souljah came on the scene. Mainstream discourses, while less explicitly, also contended that Tommie Smith and John Carlos were racists for believing in "Black Power" and that Paul Robeson was as great of a threat as "Nazis and fascists" for

[45] However, while increased newsroom diversity in the 90s compared to the 60s or 40s is certainly the case, Newkirk (2000) has detailed the ways in which the goals of a fully integrated press force established just after the civil-rights movement were largely abandoned by the 1990s because of the dismal progress that had been made so far.

dissenting against the status quo. At the same time these discourses cited support for African American celebrities and athletes who did not rock the boat.

Similarly this case, along with that of Paul Robson's, reflects the way dominant racialized discourse assumed that blacks, as an unquestioning mass, will follow black celebrities into all sorts of violence and mayhem simply because of the expression of a few words. Further, these findings contribute to work that interrogates and details the implicit way post-civil right politicians and the media that cover them use "enlightened" rhetoric to prime ideologies that insist on the deviance of black culture while simultaneously claiming an investment in anti-racist philosophy. In the post-civil rights era Clinton's Sister Souljah might very well be regarded as a tool of political manipulation in the way that Reagan's "welfare queens" and "crack babies," and Bush's Willie Horton have come to be understood.

Chapter 5: Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf and the Star Spangled Banner, 1996

For a black public person to be both gifted and true to himself is first, neither automatic;…and second bound to be subversive by extending the scope and expressive range of black humanity in mainstream culture – Gerald Early

For the majority of the 1995-1996 NBA season Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (née Chris Wayne Jackson), a well-regarded player for Denver Nuggets, had stayed seated or waited in the locker room during the playing of the national anthem. By his own account, Abdul-Rauf quietly sat out the "Star Spangled Banner" for over sixty games without much public attention. However in early March, a Nuggets fan raised the issue of Abdul-Rauf's absence during the anthem with local Denver talk radio personalities. The disc jockeys ran with the story, creating an increase in local media scrutiny of the player.

Once confronted by journalists, Abdul-Rauf made public his reasons for avoiding the anthem. The point guard had converted to Islam in 1991 and told questioning reporters that standing for the anthem conflicted with his conscience and his religious beliefs. Abdul-Rauf stated that Islam forbid him to worship idols, as reverence was reserved for Allah, and that he considered the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner" and the accompanying reverence shown to the American flag a form of worship. The devout basketball went on to state:

> The flag is a symbol of oppression, of tyranny. This country has a long history of that. I don't think you can argue the facts. You can't be for God and for oppression. It's clear in the Koran, Islam is the only way. I don't criticize those who stand, so don't criticize me for sitting. I won't waiver from my decision.[46]

In a later television interview the same day Abdul-Rauf stated:

> In my religion, in my way of life, Islam, when another brother hurts, when another brother is oppressed, I feel the same. I'm able to make a lot of money in the United States. I'm from here and I'm not saying, again, that it represents everything bad. I never said that. I'm just saying that it also represents the bad. I just don't look at the Muslim issue; I look at the Caucasian American and I look

[46] Diamos, Jason. (Mar. 14, 1996). "Abdul-Rauf Vows Not to Back Down From the N.B.A." *The New York Times*.

> at the African American being oppressed in this country and I don't stand for that.[47]

The above statements generated a significant discussion among journalists and sports fans and intense professional scrutiny on the usually private player from the National Basketball Association. Citing a rule that all players must stand "in a dignified posture" for the national anthem, Abdul-Rauf was suspended without pay by N.B.A. officials who contended that "All our rules apply equally to all our players." The suspension was brief; two days later Abdul-Rauf and N.B.A. officials reached a compromise in which the point guard would stand with the other players for the national anthem but would be allowed to close his eyes, lower his head, and offer "prayer for those who are suffering." While this can be understood as a compromise by both parties it is notable that the N.B.A. agreed to repay Abdul-Rauf all of the salary he was originally docked under the suspension (many legal scholars had publically suggested the league might otherwise be sued for religious discrimination).

Abdul-Rauf finished the season with the Nuggets, the target of occasional fan booing, and was promptly traded (despite being dubbed early in the year as "having the best season of his career"[48]) to the Sacramento Kings. He played with the Kings for two seasons and then left the N.B.A. to play basketball in Europe, returning for one season to play with the Vancouver Grizzlies and then to an overseas basketball career which took him to Russia and Saudi Arabia.

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[47] CBS Morning News (Mar. 13, 1996). "Sports Report," and Hodges, Jim (Mar. 13, 1996) "N.B.A. Sits Abdul-Rauf for Stance on Anthem." *Los Angeles Times.*

[48]MacMullan, Jackie. (1996). The N.B.A.. *Sports Illustrated.* Accessed 12/2/2008 http://vault.sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1007681/2/index.htm

According to journalist Robert Sanchez, Abdul-Rauf's "not standing for the anthem virtually killed his career."[49] Abdul-Rauf would eventually return to the United States and open a now abandoned (thanks to Hurricane Katrina) Mosque in Mississippi where his home was vandalized, marked with white supremacist symbols, and eventually burned down—all unsolved crimes. Abdul-Rauf currently lives in Atlanta with his family (Sanchez 2007).

Abdul-Rauf is unique among the figures examined here as his dissent, by his own admission, was intended as private and personal. The publication of this dissent was directed by zealous conservative talk radio disc jockeys. Notably, while Abdul-Rauf never intended to create any sort of public protest, once under public scrutiny he did not shy away from clearly communicating his beliefs. Thus, much of the public, including newsmakers, interpreted his statements as a political protest rather than a statement of personal religious conviction.

This chapter examines how the mainstream and black press explained and located the public controversy that erupted around Abdul-Rauf's critique of the history of America's disfranchisement of people of color and its intersections with American patriotism. While such a critique by a black athlete, combining issues of religion, race, imperialism and sport, was not new to American newsmakers (e.g. Muhammad Ali's anti-Vietnam stance), this particular event and figure have gone largely uninterrogated in scholarly work. While the issue of Abdul-Rauf's physical location and conduct during "The Star-Spangled Banner" was settled in a matter of days, it solicited extensive coverage and commentary from sport and general media. The ways in which Abdul-

[49] An assertion supported in the findings of this chapter.

Rauf's dissent compelled American newsmakers to explicitly address alternative readings of normative patriotic displays is worth examining.

Historical context

The historical moment of the Abdul-Rauf national anthem controversy is marked by an increased public awareness and demonization of Islam. The historical othering and denigration of Islam in Western discourse is well documented (See Shaheen 2001); moreover, recent events like the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the Gulf War had created a cultural atmosphere in which Islam was regularly being linked to violence and anti-American sentiment (McCallister 2005). Additionally, just a few months prior to Abdul-Rauf's dissent becoming public, newsmakers throughout the nation had constructed the Million Man March—largely through their focus on controversial Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan—as a reflection of deviant political ideology and racism in the black community (Watkins 2001).

Further, the outing of Abdul-Rauf by Denver local talk radio coincided with the announcement that the Oklahoma City bombing trial would take place in Denver. Thus, Bass (2002) suggests that public scrutiny of Abdul-Rauf for his interpretations of Islamic law "likely filled a symbolic void left by Timothy McVeigh" whose his white-Christian background did not allow for the usual linking of terrorism and anti-democratic ideals to the foreign Other in dominant discourse.

These larger contexts regarding Islam are particularly important to this case because of the well documented ways in which Islam has been racialized in public discourse. Within this process, the supposedly deviant threat of Islam has been articulated with larger dominant discourses that frame Arabs and blacks as monolithic, "always

foreign" groups (Naber 2000; Semanti 2010). Thus, Abdul-Rauf's religious and racial identity should be understood to have work intersectionally in mainstream reactions to his perspectives on the national anthem and flag.

Further, the contemporary hold of "enlightened racism" would evidence itself in the later irony of Muhammad Ali being celebrated as an American hero during the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. By this point, Ali's political dissent and complicated character had been buried under amnesiac dominant discourses that depoliticized him while simultaneously using him to demonstrate the supposedly tolerant and inclusive nature of American society (Spivey 1985; Bernstein & Blaine 2003). Despite this token celebration of a Parkinson's riddled Ali some thirty years after he was constructed as the most un-American man in the nation, the simultaneous scrutiny of Abdul-Rauf can be understood to reflect U.S. society's continued refusal to accept either Islam or black dissent as legitimate.

Data Overview:

This chapter examines news coverage of the controversy that erupted around Abdul-Rauf's stance in the *New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Denver Post, Time* and *Newsweek* in the mainstream press and the *New York Amsterdam News, Los Angeles Sentinel*, Denver-based magazine *Urban Spectrum, Jet* and *Ebony* in the African American press. For each of these sources data was collected via Proquest Historical Databases online, microfilm holdings from the University of Minnesota and other public universities, and the online and physical archives of several specific sources.[50] The data in this analysis was published between March 12, 1996—the day Abdul-Rauf's

[50] Special thanks to Terry Nelson at the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library in Denver, Colorado for helping me locate back issues of the *Urban Spectrum*.

suspension was announced—and May 12, 1996, a two month period. After presenting the results for these news publications I will also briefly discuss some notable findings on coverage of Abdul-Rauf in the mainstream and black popular presses including *Sports Illustrated*, *Essence* and *Black Enterprise* magazines.

In the black press, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* presented the most stories covering Abdul-Rauf's suspension by the N.B.A. (n=3), followed by the *New York Amsterdam News* (n=2). The *Urban Spectrum* published two stories focusing on Abdul-Rauf in their March edition but both of these would have appeared before the controversy and resulting suspension. *Jet* published one story addressing the controversy and *Ebony* none.

In total the black press sources examined here presented only seven stories that focused on Abdul-Rauf and/or the controversy that erupted regarding his statements about the anthem and flag. This minimal coverage, the least of any cases examined here, is notable and likely reflects the documented decline of the black press in the last part of the 20th- century (Vogel 2001). However, the significantly greater black press coverage received by Sister Souljah just four years earlier suggests other factors were also at play.

Given Abdul-Rauf's modest level of celebrity compared to other basketball players of the time, and the Denver-based location of his team, it is likely that compared to the nationwide controversy that erupted around the Rodney King beating and verdict, Souljah's comments on the Los Angeles uprising and Clinton's inserting them into public debate, Abdul-Rauf's dissent was simply deemed less newsworthy by members of the black press. Also, because the mainstream press primarily framed the story as one about religion rather than race, it may not have been deemed as relevant to respond to as the

Souljah controversy considering the traditional role of the black press as a location for counter-narratives around race (but not necessarily other identity constructs like religion).

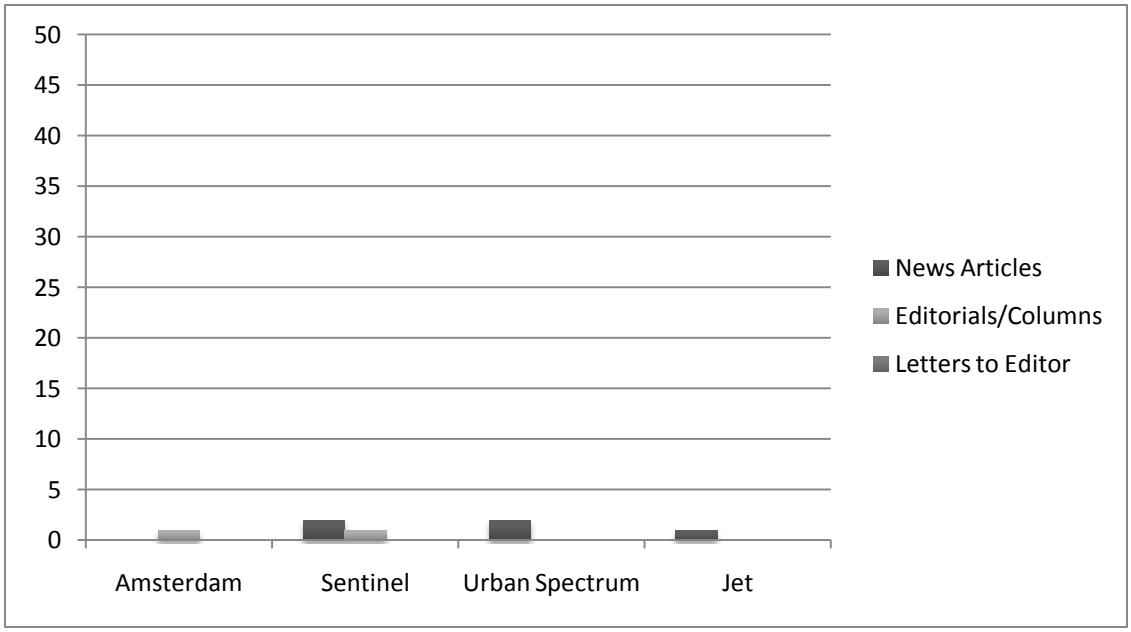

Figure 25: Frequency of stories by black press source.

In the mainstream press, the *Denver Post* published the greatest number of stories on Abdul-Rauf's perspective on the anthem and his suspension (n=68) with the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* covering the story with about the same frequency (n=29, n=26). The significant coverage in the *Denver Post* is unsurprising given its location in the city where Abdul-Rauf lived and played. *Time* ran no stories on the controversy while *Newsweek* ran three.

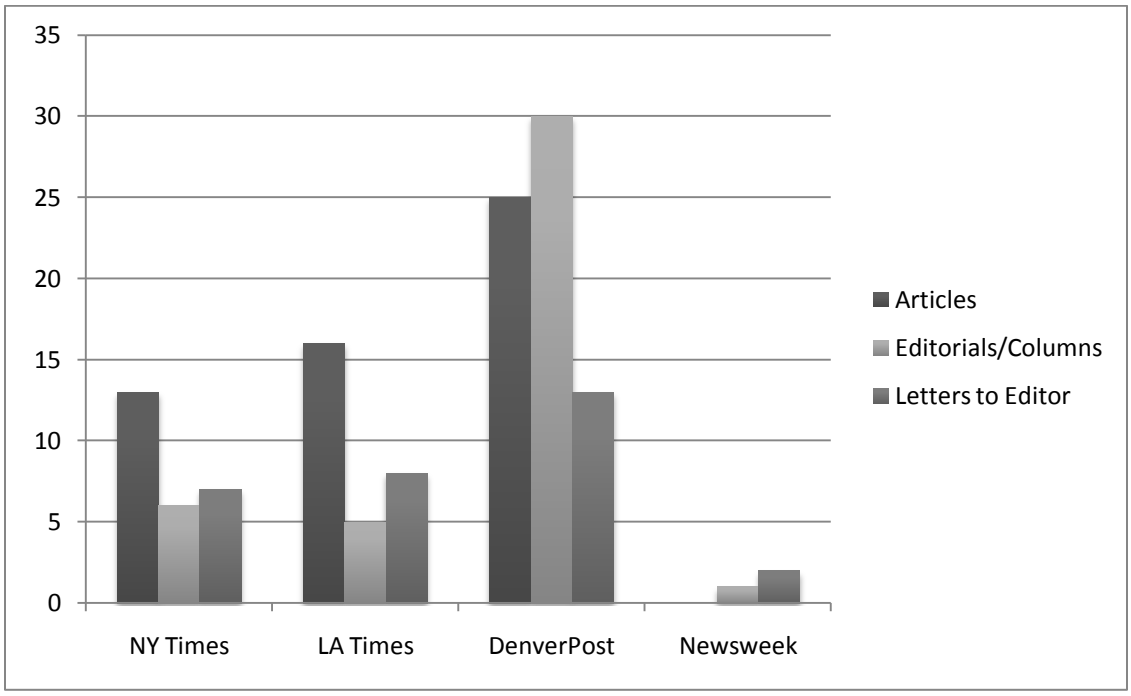

Figure 26: Frequency of stories by mainstream source.

In total, seventy-percent of the stories on Abdul-Rauf published by the black press were news articles; thirty-percent were editorials or opinion columns. Notably, and for the first time found here, the black press published no letters-to-the-editor on the subject of Abdul-Rauf and the anthem. The mainstream press published eighteen-times more stories than the black press, the majority of these, as previously mentioned, by the *Denver Post*. Of mainstream stories, the majority, fifty-seven percent, were explicitly opinion-based (i.e. editorials, columns, and letters-to-the-editor). Thus, despite its minimal coverage, the black press tended to be more news-centered than the mainstream press, which primarily presented opinions on the controversy.

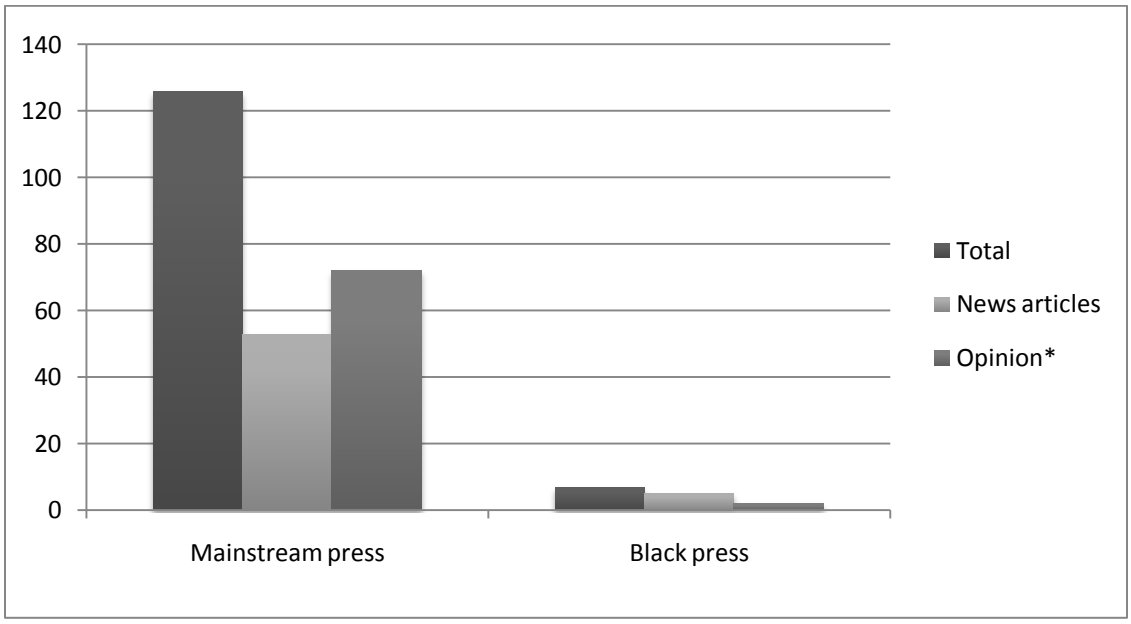

Figure 27: Number of stories compared to totals by type and press. (*Opinion includes letters-to-the-editor, opinion columns and editorials)

Below I discuss the frequency of positive, negative and neutral characterizations of Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf and his dissent and how these characterizations fit into the overall frames presented by each press.

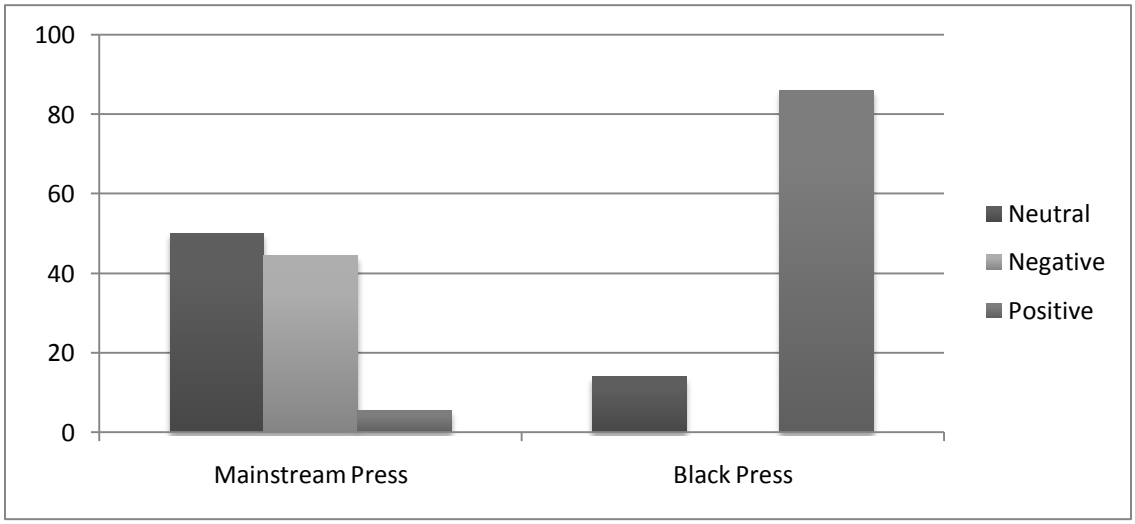

Figure 28: Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press.

<u>Mainstream Findings:</u>

Trends in Positive & Negative Coverage

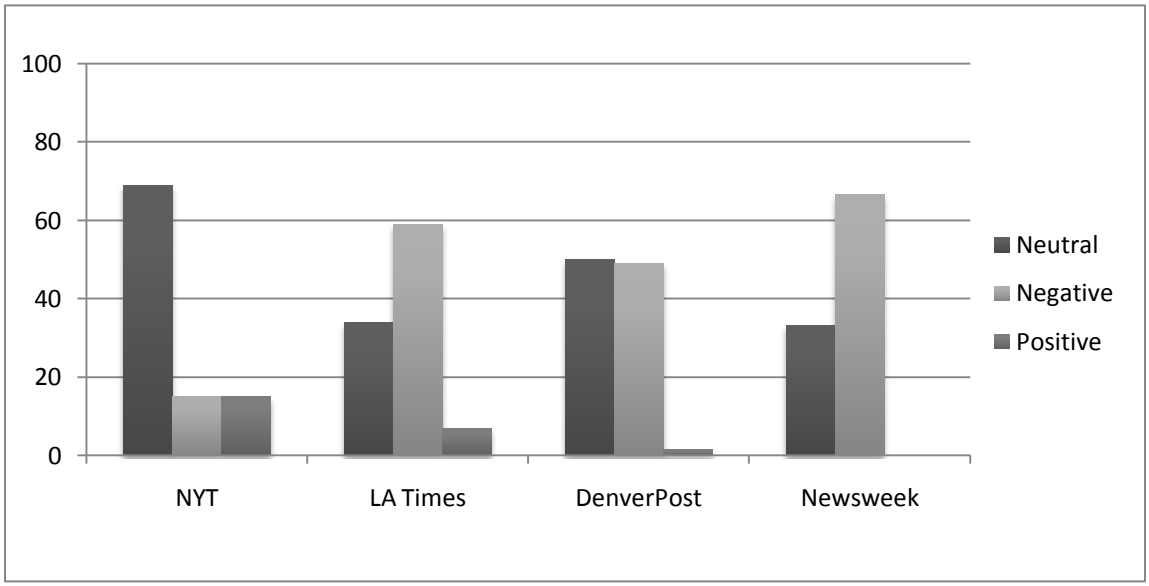

Figure 29: Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source; mainstream press.

Nearly forty-five percent of mainstream characterizations of Abdul-Rauf and his statements and actions regarding the national anthem were negative. These characterizations included a range of descriptions of Abdul-Rauf that framed him as either a "militant" "deserter" or a "misguided" "kid." Similarly, while most negative coverage of Abdul-Rauf agreed that his position on the anthem was "disrespectful" and "insulting," this supposed lack of respect was sometimes constructed as "bad judgment" while other times likened to "treason." Thus, negative mainstream media coverage of Abdul-Rauf contained tones of political outrage and paternalism.

This second set of characterizations, which treated Abdul-Rauf as childlike and confused, is unique from the findings for the other subjects here and may reflect a shift in how dominant discourses responded to challenges to the status quo as the millennium neared. However, this paternalistic discourse remains hegemonic by reinforcing

stereotypes that tend to treat black athletes as "dumb jocks" and undercutting Abdul-Rauf's autonomy and ability for political and intellectual labor (Hartmann 2003).

Abdul-Rauf was commonly described by all the mainstream sources examined here as having "refused to stand for the national anthem." This language is notable given the use of the word "refused" over more neutral descriptors like "chose not to…," "does not…" or "didn't participate in…" "Refused" effectively constructs Abdul-Rauf as a deviant and obstinate figure thus justifying sanctions against him. *Newsweek* stated that Abdul-Rauf had "treated the national anthem badly" and described him as "frail," "melancholy" and "calculated." *Denver Post* columnist Woody Paige labeled Abdul-Rauf "a disruption, a distraction and a dissenter." Such language simultaneously constructs Abdul-Rauf as a threat in need of control and a delinquent in need of punishment.

On the more extreme end of these negative characterizations were those that constructed Abdul-Rauf as violent by comparing his actions to war and crime. The *Los Angeles Times* stated that Abdul-Rauf had started a "siege," and a letter-to-the-editor contended that "If all Americans, including Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, the *black* basketball player, honored our flag and all it stands for, there would be a lot less *crime*, no rampaging *gangs* and fewer *senseless murders*" (emphasis added). Such discourse linked Abdul-Rauf's race to larger implicit discourses of the supposed criminality and deviance of black culture (Entman & Rojecki 2001), thereby constructing Abdul-Rauf and other members of his culture who failed to emulate dominant norms as a threat to American society.

Of the mainstream newspapers examined here, the *Denver Post* not only published the most coverage of Abdul-Rauf but also contained the most explicitly and

strongly negative discourse. While the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* reported that Abdul-Rauf "compromised" with the N.B.A. on his original position, the *Post* reported that he "relented." The other sources examined here were almost always neutral or positive in describing Abdul-Rauf's athletic ability even when criticizing him for his position on the anthem, however, the *Post* contained multiple denigrating descriptions of his athleticism. The *Post* was also the only source here to frequently imply that the injuries Abdul-Rauf sustained that kept him from playing for several games after the controversy were faked. For example, one *Post* columnist wrote that "Abdul-Rauf's sore foot is as sincere as Babe Ruth's belly ache."

Additionally, the *Post* ran multiple articles suggesting outright that because of his opinions regarding the national anthem Abdul-Rauf should no longer be a part of the Nuggets team. Sports columnist Woody Paige wrote that Abdul-Rauf "must never be permitted to play in Denver again" and fellow columnist Mark Kiszla rhymed "The Stars and Stripes are forever. Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf is done in Denver."

Other *Denver Post* columns stated that "surely the Nuggets can get something for Abdul-Rauf" in trade and argued that his "weak character" and "fragile psyche" "need proper handling" "somewhere else." One column stated "His protest against the national anthem sent one, clear message to the Nuggets, Denver fans and the N.B.A.: Abdul-Rauf is more trouble than he's worth." Another noted that Denver "will be able to get something of value for the little fella when they shop him around the N.B.A. at year's end. Surely, Denver won't be in the Mahmoud for his services after April."

Such language, essentially constructing Abdul-Rauf as a possession to be bought, broken and sold based not necessarily on his abilities but his disposition (and implicitly

his political beliefs), is disturbingly familiar to slave-era rhetoric that normalized the reprimanding of "unruly" slaves by selling them away from their homes and families and deeper into the South. Such rhetoric supports the contentions of scholars like Hoberman (1997) and Bass (2002) that in modern society sport often serves as a stand-in for the role slavery played in the objectification and controlling of black masculinity. Further, suggestions that Abdul-Rauf had become "more trouble than he's worth" and thus should be made into a public example both reproduce discourses of biological racism that place the value of black life purely on its physical benefit to the status quo and is alarmingly similar to discourses that justified public violence against African Americans for centuries (Jackson 2006).

Thirteen-percent of mainstream coverage also constructed Abdul-Rauf's dissent as having a specifically negative impact on the institution of sport or the larger Islamic community. This discourse focused on critiques of Abdul-Rauf levied by members of these communities. The *Los Angeles Times* printed the opinion of one Muslim leader that Abdul-Rauf's position "will damage the Muslim position in this country" with the author noting that "It won't help the Nuggets position in the N.B.A. standings, either." An editorial in the *Denver Post* contended that "mainstream Muslims deplored Abdul-Rauf's protest" without giving any substantiating evidence to this effect. At least one story in every mainstream source quoted N.B.A. "superstar" and "fellow Muslim" Hakeem Olajuwon felt that Abdul-Rauf's perspective was "hard to understand" and "misunderstood the tenants of Islam."

These comparisons of Abdul-Rauf to other Muslims reflect the "good Muslim" vs. "bad Muslim" binary popular in contemporary constructions of Islam in America.

Within such constructions Muslims, regardless of their citizenship, are considered "bad" unless they go above and beyond to prove their loyalty to the nation (Mamdani 2004). Thus, Abdul-Rauf is made "bad" and foreign because of his apparent unwillingness to assimilate through displays of patriotisms, especially considering the apparent defense of such displays by "good" Muslims like Olajuwon (Alsultany 2007).[51]

Notably, this comparison of Abdul-Rauf to other Muslims is also a reflection of larger discourses of colorblind racism that, as previously discussed in this project, uses the embrace of "good" individuals with marginal identities to justify the neglect and denigration of their larger membership group (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Similarly, mainstream discourses regularly reported on denunciations of Abdul-Rauf by other black athletes including Mike Tyson and Michael Jordan who reportedly felt that Abdul-Rauf's actions were "disrespectful."[52]

Findings also revealed that the mainstream press occasionally (eight-percent of coverage) made references to Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith and John Carlos in coverage of Abdul-Rauf's dissent. These recollections tended to lack historical context and several were factually inaccurate. *New York Times* writer Jason Diamos incorrectly asserted that Smith and Carlos were "stripped of their Olympic medals," and Jim Hodges of the *Los Angeles Times* incorrectly listed Smith and Carlos with Ali "among Muslim athletes" who had ignited controversies in sport.

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[51] While Mamdani and Alsultany locate the popularity of such discourse as having primarily taken root post-September 11th, these findings reveal that discourse requiring the explicit stating of allegiance to the nation by American Muslims in order to be (relatively) free from social sanction was well in place before that tragic event.

[52] The hypocrisy of reporting on Tyson's denunciation, given that the year before had been released from prison after serving time on rape charges (and who we would later discover is also a wife-beater and ear-biter), was apparently lost on mainstream journalists.

However, even the passing inclusion of these figures suggests some acknowledgement by mainstream newsmakers as to the alternative perspectives African-American public figures traditionally bring to questions of citizenship and national belonging. For example, John Young of the *Denver Post* wrote that "in a controversy with the same tones and undertones of Muhammad Ali's refusal to fight in Vietnam, the National Basketball Association suspended Abdul-Rauf without pay for refusing to stand for the American flag."

Interestingly, several of these discussions suggested that because Abdul-Rauf compromised with the N.B.A. on his original position he was not comparable to Ali or Smith and Carlos. *Post* columnist Mark Kiszla credited lack of character as the reason not to compare Abdul-Rauf to these figures, stating that Abdul-Rauf was "badly miscast as a rebel, when he was far too confused and fragile to be the next John Carlos."

Only Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times* (who had sympathetically covered Ali, Smith and Carlos thirty years before) contextualized Abdul-Rauf's compromise as understandable when compared to these sport legends. Lipsyte wrote that contemporary athletes like Abdul-Rauf;

> …had seen what happened to great athletes who thought they were free to express their individualism. The refusal of Muhammad Ali on religious grounds to be drafted and the relatively mild Olympic black power demonstrations of Tommie Smith and John Carlos were met with brute power; Ali lost nearly four years of work, and Smith and Carlos never received the endorsement contracts that their medals and personalities deserved. Athletes got the message; you can paint your hair blue and draw pictures on your backside, talk trash or sniff it, even wear clown pants so long as you don't get too big for them.

As evidence of the amnesia (or perhaps willful ignorance) with which contemporary journalists remember past black dissent, Terry Frei of the *Denver Post*

contended that the Smith and Carlos "incident" at the Olympics "didn't set off the international media firestorm that Abdul-Rauf's non-standing stance did…" Such contentions are in stark contrast to the historical facts of the response to the 1968 Olympic stand demonstration as well as the detailed findings of this and many other scholarly studies on the subject.

Comparisons of Abdul-Rauf not only to contemporary "good" black celebrities but to historical figures like Smith and Carlos leverages an inaccurate vision of the Civil Right Era while undermining black dissent in the present. Like the contemporary conservative nostalgia around the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King which conveniently forgets how the mainstream media framed him as an agitator and communist, Smith and Carlos are framed as having not caused much controversy or as having posed much of a threat despite the complete opposite being the case (Baker 1994). Such constructions can be understood as a "strategic rhetoric of whiteness," enabling modern racism through the selective retelling of the past (Nakayama & Krizek 1995).

While the mainstream press frequently described Abdul-Rauf as the Nuggets "leading scorer," many of the same articles described the controversy that erupted around Abdul-Rauf as a "distraction" to other players and having other negative impacts on his team and the sport of basketball generally. *Newsweek* reported that "the demons that Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf of the Denver Nuggets loosed on sport last week when he refused to stand for the anthem were raw and disturbing." The romanticization of sport as a realm that should exist above the "demons" of racial, religious or political dissent, and ideology Hartmann (2003) argues works to "obscure, erase, or mystify" issues of inequality, thus remained popular with journalists in 1996 whose conjecture about Abdul-Rauf's negative

impact on basketball mimicked denunciations of Tommie Smith and John Carlos' "insult" at the Olympics thirty years prior.

In comparison to the frequently negative characterizations presented by mainstream newsmakers, just 5.5-percent of stories in the mainstream press presented positive coverage of Abdul-Rauf. This positive coverage was found largely in the *New York Times* and suggested that Abdul-Rauf's "devotion" to Islam was a reflection of positive characteristics like selflessness and "commitment." This coverage also tended to focus on Abdul-Rauf's biography by discussing his "rise from poverty in Mississippi" and his struggle to overcome the effects of Tourette's syndrome.

For example, one *Times* article praised Abdul-Rauf for rising above "the heartless derision he has put up with while battling Tourette's syndrome," noting that "now it will be much worse" despite the fact that his faith and beliefs regarding the anthem were "intended to be no one's problem" and were "not hurting anyone." Columnist Chris Foster of the *Los Angeles Times* also suggested that compared to the bad behavior of professional athletes like Reggie Miller and Dennis Rodman, Abdul-Rauf "taking a stand for a personal belief" made him a more fitting choice for a "role model."

Had such perspectives and biographical facts been discussed more by mainstream journalists, Abdul-Rauf could have been linked to the ideology of the American Dream, placing the values of independence, the overcoming of adversity and determination as representative of a uniquely American character. Instead, Abdul-Rauf was largely demonized and othered by the failure of mainstream journalists to construct his as a three dimensional figure with multiple admiral qualities and experiences.

An also notable 5.5-percent of mainstream coverage critiqued the inclusion of the anthem at N.B.A. games and/or critiqued those who demonized Abdul-Rauf for his position. While a small minority of the coverage of the controversy, these critiques, presented mostly in columns and letters-to-the-editor, presented a clear alternative discourse to the majority of coverage by characterizing the inclusion of the anthem at basketball games as "anachronistic" and critics of Abdul-Rauf as "bigots." Less than one-percent of mainstream coverage actually praised Abdul-Rauf for his position on the anthem.

It is also notable that of the mainstream sources examined here only the *New York Times* presented more than fifty-percent neutral coverage, with coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* being predominantly negative (fifty-nine percent) and the *Denver Post* splitting its negative and neutral coverage evenly. *Newsweek* contained no positive coverage of Abdul-Rauf and the *Los Angeles Times* and *Denver Post* hardly any, thus the even split in positive and negative coverage presented by the *New York Times* and its predominantly neutral coverage suggests that, despite its negative coverage of Sister Souljah in '92, the New York paper continued to present the most even-handed coverage of black celebrity dissent in the mainstream press.

Overall the mainstream press shared several additional commonalities in reporting on Abdul-Rauf and the anthem controversy. These include only passing mention of the death threats Abdul-Rauf received and the construction of these threats as insignificant, constructions of Abdul-Rauf as the party who compromised rather than the N.B.A., and, perhaps most interestingly, an almost complete disregard of any discussion of race,

racism or racial inequality despite Abdul-Rauf's explicit mention of the "oppression" experienced by African Americans in explaining his dissent.

This disregard of the topic of racial inequality by journalists covering the story one again reflects the reluctance of mainstream newsmakers in the post-civil rights era to acknowledge the complicated issue. This reluctance has been found to be particularly acute in coverage of athletes because of the continual dominant construction of sport as space in which colorblind ideology has been fulfilled (Hartmann 2007). Further, while mainstream journalists avoidance of race reflects the hold of colorblind discourse in American society, the equally complicated social constructs of religion and nationality remained acceptable vectors for denigrating people of color, and operate as surrogates for race.

Along with these trends, two primary frames for understanding Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's position on the national anthem were presented by mainstream newsmakers; these include 1) a focus on the economics of the situation and 2) a strangely contradictory valuation of religious freedom and constitutional rights.

Mainstream Press Frame #1: It's all About the Benjamins, Baby

Every mainstream source examined here focused at some point on the $11.2 million contract under which Abdul-Rauf played, often breaking it down in detail to $2.6 million dollars a year, $665,653 for the remainder of the season, and $31,707 a game. This frame—that at its core the issue of whether Abdul-Rauf should stand for the national anthem was about money—was presented in thirty-percent of stories in the mainstream press. Two iterations of this frame most often appeared: first, that the reason Abdul-Rauf changed his mind about sitting out the "Star-Spangled Banner" was because of the fines

levied by the N.B.A. as part of his suspension; and second, that because of the millions of dollars Abdul-Rauf made as an N.B.A. player he was unreasonable and ungrateful to raise questions of oppression in the United States.

Money over conviction

By framing Abdul-Rauf's decision to compromise with the N.B.A. and stand as the result of his desire to not lose money, mainstream discourses undermined and trivialized the actual intentions behind his original refusal to stand and his later shift of position. This ultimately framed Abdul-Rauf as a figure whose character was more ruled by greed than personal ethics. Such discussions tended to ignore the fact that Abdul-Rauf had not given up his perspective on the flag or anthem but simply agreed to continue ignoring both albeit in an upright position rather than a seated one, while performing an Islamic prayer—something he had not been doing before and that might have alternatively been viewed as a victory for Abdul-Rauf.

For example, the day after the controversy broke a *Los Angeles Times* front page story began "The N.B.A. and Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf have fixed the price of his stance on—or refusing to stand for—the national anthem. Its $31,707 every time…That's the per-game portion of Abdul-Rauf's $2.6 million annual salary," and a subsequent letter-to-the-editor after the compromise was reached stated that it was "abundantly clear that money supersedes his declared faith."

Columnist Gil Spencer of the *Denver Post* wrote that although Abdul-Rauf would likely win if he took his case to court on constitutional grounds, "it takes a while-years-to get a case before the Supreme Court, and if Mahmoud remained riveted to his principles, he wouldn't be playing basketball at $31,000 a game for a long time. So he's

back to playing basketball…" Thus the implication is that Abdul-Rauf gave up on his "principles" for the money.

Similarly, *Denver Post* sportswriter Terry Frei noted that despite Abdul-Rauf's assertion that "my beliefs are more important than anything," when "called on it and told that it would cost him nearly $32,000 for each worknight [sic] he missed if the National Basketball Association's suspension remained in force, he rationalized an accommodation." This proved, Frei concluded that Abdul-Rauf's position was "more egocentric and less deeply rooted" than protests by athletes in the 1960s (including "John Carlos' and Tommie Smith's black-gloved, head-bowed protest").

Michael Booth of the *Post* wondering if "Loyalty is dead?" noted that "Nuggets star Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf says he won't stand for the national anthem because of loyalty to his Islamic beliefs, but he reverses that decision after the N.B.A. suspends him for breaking rules. Why press the point when your self-described loyalty could cost you your paycheck?" Another column contended that "Abdul-Rauf rethought his religious philosophies and decided that a silent prayer is probably worth $30,000-plus a night after all. And those of you helping to pay his $2.5 million a year tyranny and oppression stipend are free to respond."

Woody Paige of the *Post* wrote that "Abdul-Rauf, who converted to the Islamic faith in 1991, didn't stand on his religious principles, but he can stand on his wallet now." Kevin Simpson also of the *Post* wrote that "Abdul-Rauf's respect for dead presidents curiously fits into his personal, religious and political ideology where the national anthem does not."

The idea that Abdul-Rauf was somehow disloyal to the nation because of his large salary reflects what Bass (2002) has describe as the way "the athlete as commodity" works in conjunction with larger dominant discourses of citizenship. Thus, criticisms of Abdul-Rauf that focused on his income can be understood as a modern iteration of that which appeared in coverage of Smith and Carlos in 1968 and linked opportunity in sport for blacks to a required patriotism. If Smith and Carlos' case, they were expected to be grateful and patriotic for the mere opportunity to participate, in Abdul Rauf's case, because of the modern commercialization of sport, he is framed as ungrateful and unpatriotic because he gets paid to participate in sport.

Rather than explicitly or implicitly suggesting that Abdul-Rauf compromised because of the $31,707 in pay he would be docked per game, the *New York Times* stated neutrally that "the league and players association worked out a settlement for the pay that Abdul-Rauf was docked during the suspension." Of all the mainstream sources examined here only the *New York Times* reported (once) that "The decision to go back to work had nothing to do with money" but "was based on a better understanding of the situation."

You're rich! (What oppression?)

The second iteration of this frame focusing on Abdul-Rauf's large N.B.A. salary erased any need to address his original statements regarding his reasons for not standing other than to commonly assert that he was unqualified to speak on "oppression" because of the opportunities professional basketball allowed him. This frame constructed Abdul-Rauf as the beneficiary of an idealized American system in which he became a millionaire with little to no effort and therefore was indebted to the country and thus to majority opinion.

For example, the *New York Times* quoted New Jersey Nets player Jayson Williams that "…the man has to remember he's made a lot of money in this country" and reported that "Denver fans" were "complaining that a player making $2.6 million this year should be more appreciative of the United States." Similarly an article in the *Denver Post* quoted a local high school sociology teacher's feeling that "if the United States was so oppressive, Abdul-Rauf would not have become a multimillion-dollar professional athlete."

Denver Post columnist Woody Paige wrote that "by not standing for the national anthem, [Abdul-Rauf] is showing disrespect to others, the flag and the country in which he was born—the same country where he has no problem taking $2.6 million this year to play a game." Fellow *Post* columnist Mark Kizla wrote that "when a U.S. citizen who drives a Ferrari and lives in a big house hears the lyrics to the 'Star Spangled Banner,' tyranny and oppression somehow come rushing to Abdul-Rauf's tortured mind."

Newsweek described Abdul-Rauf as "bereft of any obligation to the public that pays him $2.6 million a season," and *Los Angeles Times* columnist Allan Malamud found it "extremely difficult to sympathize with Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf when he is making $2.6 million a year and being treated like a hero in a country whose flag he says is a 'symbol of oppression, of tyranny'."

A letter-to-the-editor in the *Los Angeles Times* regarding Abdul-Rauf stated that the "the United States of America" had "afforded him the opportunity to capitalize on his natural athletic ability to achieve a level of economic success the average citizen can only dream of," going on to suggest that Abdul-Rauf be "barred from professional sports in this country." A similar letter-to-the-editor in the *Denver Post* contended that "everything

Abdul-Rauf has achieved, his education, the millions of dollars he makes every year playing basketball…he owes to this country…he should have his citizenship revoked and bank accounts frozen…"

Various other letters published by the *Post* argued that "the man formally known as Chris Jackson is a hypocrite who professes Muslim beliefs while enjoying a well-paid celebrity lifestyle…"[53], suggested he move to "Iran, Iraq or Saudi Arabia" but "it's doubtful he would be making millions of dollars in any of those countries…", and recommended as a solution to the controversy that "we should eliminate all taxpayer subsidies to professional sports teams. There is no reason that the taxpayers should subsidize these millionaires." As if these letters published by the *Post* had not succeed in making the point, a final letter called Abdul-Rauf a "driveling, dribbling millionaire who has no idea how privileged he is to live in the United States."

The *Los Angeles Times* reported the take of comedian Argus Hamilton that "For $2.6 million a year, you'd think he could fake it for two minutes a night. Princess Di did." Not only are the misogynistic tones of this statement disturbing via the work it does to naturalize not-quite consensual sex, comparing Abdul-Rauf to a wealthy princess simultaneously ignores his very real life experiences with poverty and emasculates him.

Once again presenting a rare challenge to this view, Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times* called the idea "that for $2.6 million a year he should abide by league rules and fake allegiance to the flag to keep the peace," a kind of "grotesque logic."

Denver Post columnist Mike Rosen, after contending that Abdul-Rauf's "religious argument was unfounded," argued that "Mahmoud's fallback argument- oppression-

[53] The two apparently being mutually exclusive.

didn't hold up very well, either, coming from a millionaire who dropped out of college." Fellow columnist Woody Paige of the *Post* unsympathetically wrote that Abdul Rauf was a "quitter" because he "quit on the loyalists who for six years had cheered him and bought tickets to watch him. He quit on the club's ownership which royally paid him and promoted him," noting that while "collecting his paycheck" Abdul-Rauf should have contemplated "what others who are fortunate enough to have a career in sports have done" but instead "took the money and walked."

Sports columnist Mark Heisler of the *Los Angeles Times* noted that the N.B.A.'s "objection to Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's protest was grounded in economics" going on to state that the N.B.A. was most concerned with saving face for the benefit of ticket-buyers and investors. However, Heisler also derided Abdul Rauf stating that "At least, Abdul-Rauf has learned the price" of his "peculiar interpretation of Islamic teachings" for "a man making a fortune in a spectator sport--$31,000 a game." Similarly, a letter-to-the-editor in the *Los Angeles Times* noted that "basketball is a business and is dependent on its customers to pay the bills," thus, the author concludes "the customer is always right." The *Los Angeles Times* also quoted a Methodist pastor who, while more sympathetic than most commentators on the subject undermined this sympathy as soon as it was spoken—"Abdul-Rauf, likely the victim of some oppression, has also been able to earn millions of dollars in America essentially engaging in a recreational activity."

This frame, which individualized Abdul-Rauf and questioned his personal ethics through a focus on his pay also constructed him as undeserving of his financial success because of a lack of patriotism and suggested that he was both overpaid and had been essentially done some kind of favor by being allowed to become an N.B.A. player.

Abdul-Rauf, such discourse contended, should be grateful for being paid for his "natural ability" at a "recreational activity" (thus ignoring Abdul-Rauf's hard work and determination, not to mention the physical toll of his profession and having overcome his background as a poor, black kid with a neurological disorder from Mississippi).

Together this discourse individualizes Abdul-Rauf's claims of oppression, something he never did, effectively ignoring the fact that he spoke of his "brothers" in his comments about oppression and the treatment of African Americans. This frame presents the argument, clearly rooted in discourses of enlightened racism, that because Abdul-Rauf—one Black Muslim American—is a millionaire claims of inequality were null and void.

Hartmann's (2006) critical interrogation of the cultural meaning making around basketball, and Michael Jordan in particular, demonstrates that such enlightened racism and the accompanying colorblind rhetoric of the 1990s allowed the public embrace of figures like Jordan, and the larger success of African Americans in basketball, to reinforce the problematic idea that the "oppression" Abdul-Rauf spoke of was no longer a reality in the United States.

Mainstream Press Frame #2: Individual Rights

This frame, appearing in twenty-seven percent of stories in the mainstream press reflected the deep contradictions mainstream journalists faced in denouncing Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's position regarding the anthem while maintaining a commitment to dominant American values of individual freedom, particularly those of religion and speech. Every occurrence of this frame reaffirmed the value of these freedoms. Thus, Abdul-Rauf was commonly constructed as being "within his constitutional rights" as an American citizen not to stand for the anthem, to express his political views and to observe

his religious consciousness as he saw fit. While it might be expected that this frame and its required acknowledgement of Abdul-Rauf's individual rights would result in positive or at least neutral framing of his actions this was not necessarily the case as discourse within this frame frequently suggested that his Islamic identity might justify an exception to these rights.

In a seeming contradiction to their own valuation of personal freedoms, many of the mainstream stories that applied this frame simultaneously framed Abdul-Rauf as being in the wrong for his perspective; essentially stating that while he had the technical right not to stand for the anthem he was wrong for doing so. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "civil libertarians are behind Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf in his refusal to stand for the playing of the national anthem on religious grounds, but leaders of the faith that he embraces said Wednesday those grounds might be shaky," thus acknowledging his rights but questioning the legitimacy of his reasons.

Similarly, John Young of the *Denver Post* wrote that "the American flag is worthy of respect, and of saluting. Abdul-Rauf wins no allies calling it 'a symbol of oppression'" but that "at its root," America is all about "the freedom to differ," simultaneously acknowledging Abdul-Rauf's rights and undermining his opinion. *Denver Post* editorialist Kevin Simpson wrote that the Abdul-Rauf/anthem controversy "could well end up being about high-minded concepts in contract and constitutional law," but was also "the latest in a long line of exhibits pointing to the death of common courtesy."

Simpson goes on to call Abdul-Rauf a "delusional," "pathetic," "artless boor" but concludes that "acting like a lout during the anthem isn't criminal." Such descriptors construct Abdul-Rauf as having engaged in explicitly disrespectful acts during the

playing of the anthem despite the reality of his quiet bench sitting or invisible locker room waiting. The author thus constructs constitutional rights and manners as equally valuable to society—with Abdul-Rauf having the first by default but certainly not the second due to lack of character.

Another *Post* columnist, Gil Spencer, did not question Abdul-Rauf's manners, his understanding of religious practice or his patriotism, but made the argument that despite the violation of constitutional rights the N.B.A.'s rule was harmless; "The league has a national anthem rule that is about as constitutional as a baloney sandwich. But it's sort of nice, and it hasn't been a problem." Mark Kiszla of the *Post* wrote that "Every American should be entitled to freedom of expression. But it is Abdul-Rauf's privilege to be cast as ungrateful and hateful in newspapers from sea to shining sea." In other words, while the *Denver Post* maintained that Americans have a right to dissent, this type of dissent deserved severe social sanctions.

Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* published interviews with a Muslim community leader who felt that Abdul-Rauf being required to stand for the anthem did not "compromise" his "1st Amendment rights," and a Christian minister who stated that although "like religious belief, patriotism is a matter of personal choice" that "cannot be legislated," Abdul-Rauf was "hiding his anger against a group of people under a religious façade." The article did not elucidate what group of people Abdul-Rauf was apparently angry with (but the implication is Christians and/or whites).

Such discourse undermines Abdul-Rauf's position by denigrating his intentions while also using pro-First Amendment discourse. The *Los Angeles Times* also published a letter-to-the-editor informing Abdul-Rauf that "the constitution of the land you so despise

gives you the right not to stand up when the national anthem is sung or when the flag is saluted," the point apparently being that because Abdul-Rauf was actually using his constitutional rights that meant he hated America.

In a critique of the NBA's suspension of Abdul-Rauf, *Denver Post* columnist Woody Paige wrote that "The United States was born on the principles of freedom of speech and religion" and thus that "the league acted improperly and, probably, unconstitutionally." Despite this, Paige also writes that Abdul-Rauf was "showing disrespect" by not standing and "could have prevented the action weeks ago by choosing to avoid a confrontation." Thus, despite Paige's acknowledgement of Abdul-Rauf's first amendment rights, he simultaneously undermines these rights by suggesting that Abdul-Rauf using them is "disrespectful" and the cause of "confrontation."[54]

The message of such discourse, as detailed by Yoshino (2006), is that while mainstream society has come to consensus that people should not be legally penalized for their cultural differences, they should also concede to "covering" or muting these differences if they present challenges to mainstream culture. Such discourse, while condemning violations of First Amendment rights, requires Abdul-Rauf, as a Muslim and a black man, to surrender to the needs and expectations of white, Christian ideology.

The *New York Times* consistently framed the controversy as a "clash between the rules and authority of a private organization and the civil liberties and religious freedom reserved for individuals." Multiple experts were consulted by the mainstream sources examined here and nearly all of them reported in one form or another that Abdul-Rauf had a "right" to stay seated during the anthem. There was some debate as to whether this

[54] This also ignores that it was talk radio hosts who caused the "confrontation" by publically outing Abdul-Rauf.

right was guaranteed by the 1st Amendment of the Constitution or the Civil Rights Act which stipulates against employer discrimination based on religion.

Interestingly, so long as newsmakers framed Abdul-Rauf's position as one based in religion, which they did most often, there was no questioning of his rights, but when individuals suggested that Abdul-Rauf's position on the anthem was about politics[55] suddenly mainstream journalists appeared to have less of a grasp on constitutional rights.

For example, the *New York Times* quoted a "Manhattan attorney" that "there is a difference between religious and political beliefs. If it's religious, he has an absolute right to do it…but to the extent that the religious and political become intertwined, you may find yourself in a situation where there is a clear and present danger," going on to suggest that a political stand might lead to a "riot" and thus might meet an "exception" of First Amendment protection. The suggestion that Abdul-Rauf's refusal to stand on political grounds might cause violence or danger seems particularly sensationalistic in this case but is notable considering the way dissent by African Americans and the mere presence of Islam are linked to imagined violence.

The editorial staff at the *Denver Post* apparently disagreed with their news staff about the extent of Abdul-Rauf's legal rights, running an editorial that stated he was "entitled to hold those views. But his chosen method of expressing them puts him clearly in breach of his NBA contract" on the same day as a story titled "NBA suspension may be afoul of law" in which staff writer Arthur Hodges reported that the NBA's rule "specifically" conflicted with "the Civil Rights Act of 1968." A week later Mike Rosen of the *Post* wrote the legally flawed statement that "The First Amendment protections

[55] Which this author very much thinks cannot be separated from religion (see Higgs & Braswell 2004; Hargreaves 2002; Higgs 1995).

they [NBA players] have off the court, as citizens, don't necessarily apply on the job" along with the historically debatable one that "No country on Earth has done more to accommodate racial, ethnic and religious minorities than ours." Again, such discourse conveniently ignores that "accommodations" for minorities (like the Civil Rights Act of 1968) were the product of generations of bloody struggle and sacrifice by said minorities in a nation that was unwilling or unready to embrace them as equals.

The majority of letters-to-the-editor published by the *New York Times* made religious freedoms and individual rights their main point, even when disagreeing with Abdul-Rauf. For example, one letter writer wrote that "Abdul-Rauf has the Constitutional right…but he would do well to ponder what would happen to him if he attempted a protest against the Government in some Islamic countries." Another wrote that "The reason why I stand up during the playing of the national anthem is that we have the right to sit down," and while one writer found the N.B.A.'s actions a "blatant example of discrimination on the basis of religious belief," another felt that "regardless of individual freedom of expression if some standards of respect are not adhered to, all rules of conduct will fall by the wayside."

The *Denver Post* also published several letters acknowledging the basic freedom's America was founded on but these tended to simultaneously powerfully undermine Abdul-Rauf. "I honor and respect Abdul-Rauf for remaining seated for what he believes to be true and important," stated one letter, "But…I doubt he could justify his choice." The writers' implication? Either Abdul-Rauf was lacking the ability to present an intelligent explanation for his beliefs, or his beliefs were unjustifiable.

Another *Post* letter writer "support(ed) Mahmoud Abdul Rauf's right to remain seated" because "I have strong feelings for my country and the people who have died for the rights we enjoy"—the implication being that Abdul-Rauf had no such feelings. Another reader wrote that "Abdul-Rauf has forgotten the very reason for the founding of this country: religious freedom. He should be praising God that he lives in a country where he can worship openly. If he dislikes this country that much, he should live in those countries that are truly oppressive." Thus, while recognizing Abdul-Rauf's right to freedom of religion, the author simultaneously suggests that he has no place in America if his religion leads him to a dissenting perspective.

Such discourse in mainstream opinion content again repeats a theme common in public discourses around alternative political and religious perspectives but especially around Islam. This rhetoric suggests that Muslims should be happy they are allowed to worship in the United States and out of appreciation for this right should do so invisibly and far from spaces deemed sacred by dominant American (read white-Christian) customs.[56] Further, such discourse also reinforces stereotypes of Muslim nations as barbaric, backward and despotic. Thus, despite an attachment to First Amendment rights by journalists, Abdul-Rauf's exercising of rights considered sacred to American citizenship was easily framed as inappropriate because of the way his religion was Othered and made to seem "foreign" in coverage of his dissent (Bass 2002).

The mainstream sources examined here occasionally quoted The ACLU and player's union on the topic of the constitutionality of Abdul-Rauf's stand, both organization siding with Abdul-Rauf's rights "whether you agree with his position or

[56] Such discourse has been at the forefront of the recent "Ground Zero Mosque" debate.

not." The same articles usually included quotes from N.B.A. officials who did "not feel [the requirement to stand during the anthem] is inconsistent with anyone's right to freedom of expression or religion." The *New York Times* noted that "a lawsuit would have put the N.B.A. on shaky legal ground," and the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "the law may be on Abdul-Rauf's side if he decides to press the issue in court." Mark Heisler of the *Los Angeles Times* commented that "A court would have to decide if his [Abdul-Rauf's] contractual pledge to obey unspecified rules [in the NBA operations manual] abrogates First Amendment rights."

The *Los Angeles Times* also published a rather long and very thorough letter-to-the-editor that directly quoted the Supreme Court's finding regarding the illegality of requiring Jehovah's Witness school children to recite the Pledge of Allegiance—"The action of the local authorities in compelling the flag salute and pledge transcends constitutional limitations on their power and invades the sphere of intellect and spirit which is the purpose of the First Amendment to our Constitution to reserve all official control."

Thus, this frame did allow for the presentation of alternative discourses for understanding patriotism with several opinion-based pieces comparing Abdul-Rauf being forced to stand for the anthem to anti-Democratic ideals. The *Los Angeles Times* published a letter-to-the-editor stating that "Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf is not some plantation owner's lackey. As a free man in a free country, he is protected against forced participation in political displays not of his choosing." A letter published by *Newsweek* noted the "never-ending ridicule and harassment imposed on anyone whose invocation of First Amendment rights is critical to the country." "Instead of questioning Abdul-Rauf's

integrity," the author wrote, "we should ask ourselves why we feel so threatened by the Constitution in action."

Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times* wrote that Abdul-Rauf's "religious freedom can't be in question." Peter Steinfels of the *New York Times* reported that "the N.B.A.'s action might violate the Civil Rights Act, which requires employers to accommodate the religious beliefs of employees if it can be done without hardship" and praised "the devout athlete" for giving "the nation a moment of reflection on religion, politics, patriotic rituals and the demands of conscience." A letter-to-the-editor in the *New York Times* commented that the reaction to Abdul-Rauf's not standing was "troubling" and "makes you contemplate the thin line between patriotism and the conditions for totalitarianism."

A scathing critique of the N.B.A.'s actions published by the editors of the *New York Times* stated that "the [national anthem] ceremony is meant to honor a nation that respects freedom of expression, and the right of individuals to hold personal and religious beliefs that may depart from the mainstream…The real issue in the dispute all along was not the wisdom or accuracy of Mr. Abdul-Rauf's view of the flag…It was the N.B.A.'s blindness to the fact that trying to force participation in a patriotic exercise undermines democratic values."

Calling the inclusion of the national anthem at sporting events an "absolutely idiotic tradition," columnist Harvey Araton of the *New York Times* wrote that "You want to renounce what Abdul-Rauf is saying, go right ahead. Boycott his games. You don't have to go any more than he has to stand up…" In one of the only acknowledgements of the "history of oppression and tyranny" of which Abdul-Rauf spoke, Andrew Tonkovich

of the *Los Angeles Times* listed "My Lai, Manzanar, slavery" and the experiences of American Indians as examples of just that, noting that the "attack on Abdul-Rauf inspires the unlikeliest flag waver (me) to wrap himself in one. If only to point out that it's how you use it."

Black Press Findings

Trends in Positive & Negative Coverage

In the black press, coverage of Abdul-Rauf was predominately positive, with eighty-six percent of the stories characterizing the point guard and/or his interpretation of the anthem positively. No stories in the black press primarily characterized Abdul-Rauf or his actions negatively. As previously discussed, there was a minimal amount of coverage of the Abdul-Rauf/anthem controversy in the black press sources examined here.

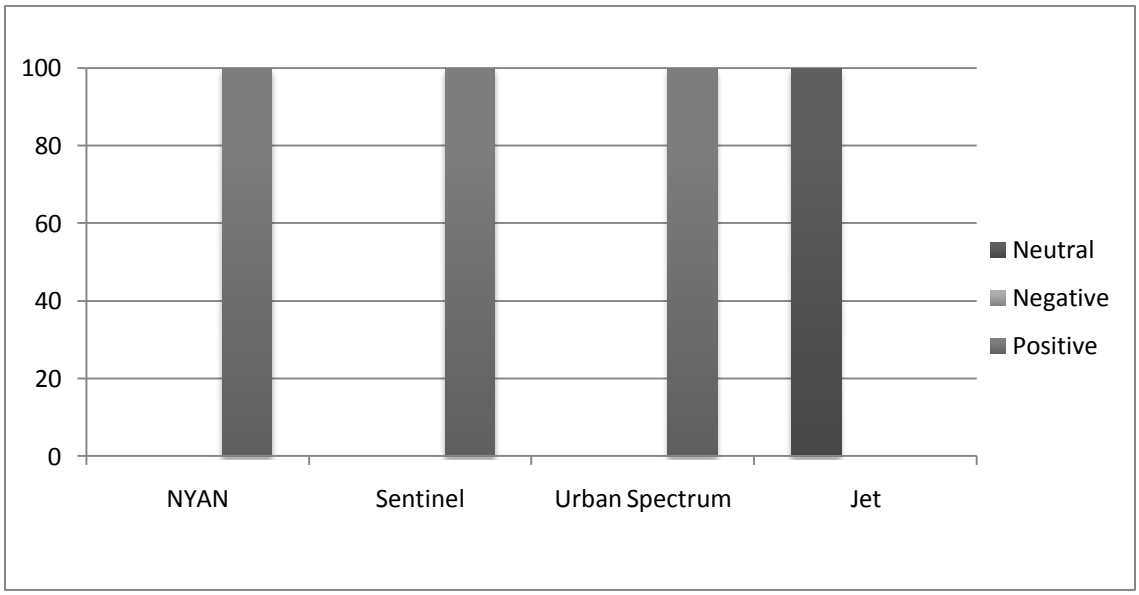

Figure 30: Percent coverage by explicit valuation and source, black press.

The *Urban Spectrum*, Denver's only local publication by and for "people of color," ran two articles about Abdul-Rauf in their March issue which focused on the topic

"Religion and Spirituality: Is it the question or the answer?" This issue was published before the national anthem controversy erupted in mid-March, and, notably, *Urban Spectrum* writers did not discuss Abdul-Rauf or the controversy in its April and May issues.

Both articles in the March issue of the *Urban Spectrum* were authored by Montoya Clemmons and positively characterized Abdul-Rauf. These articles made use of a frame that focused on the positive influence of Islam for individuals and communities. Abdul-Rauf was constructed as an inspirational figure who was disciplined, educated, and respectful and brought much needed wisdom and perspective to those around him including his teammates, friends and family as a result of his commitment to Islam. Islam was characterized as a unifying force that brought individuals of various races together to "drink from the same cup and help solve each other's problems…as brothers and sisters."

Because the newsmakers at *The Denver Urban Spectrum* choose not to address the anthem controversy in subsequent issues I have not included this positive framing of Islam in my larger discussion of black press frames below. The below discussion relies on the characterizations and frames used to make sense of the controversy by the remaining publications; the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Jet* magazine. To buttress this data I will also discuss the framing of the controversy by the black popular press, including *Essence* and *Black Enterprise* in the conclusion of this section.

Jet avoided any explicit characterizations of Abdul-Rauf or his position on the anthem instead running a photo brief of the player praying "during the National Anthem" after his reinstatement by the NBA. In what is perhaps the most neutral and concise

description of the controversy of any sources mainstream or alternative examined here Jet explain "Abdul-Rauf said praising the U.S. flag was against his Islamic faith and was suspended without pay for one game for sitting during the National Anthem. The NBA and Abdul-Rauf reached a compromise. He agreed to stand during the anthem while in prayer."

Notably, and like the overwhelming majority of mainstream press coverage this description by Jet completely ignored the issues of race and oppression raised by Abdul-Rauf, instead focusing solely on his "Islamic faith." Unlike the mainstream press however, Jet represented both Abdul-Rauf and the NBA as having compromised and avoided any value judgments of Abdul-Rauf, his actions, or the actions of the NBA.

Overall, the remaining articles in the black press presented two primary frames for making sense of the controversy that erupted around Abdul-Rauf's understanding of the anthem; the first focused on the hypocrisy of the application of basic American freedoms- especially given racial considerations, and the second focused on legitimizing Abdul-Rauf's relationship to Islam.

Black Press Frame #1: The Hypocrisy of Constitutional Rights and Inequality

This frame, making up just over thirty-percent of black press coverage, was found in the opinion columns of both the *New York Amsterdam News* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and focused on the ways in which race and other socially constructed identities influenced both historical and contemporary understandings and applications of the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.

David Andrew Love of the *Amsterdam News* wrote a scathing column titled "When black men try to leave the plantation." Love deemed the mainstream

characterization of Abdul-Rauf as "unpatriotic when his religious convictions precluded him from standing during the playing of the national anthem," as one example of a larger trend in the way "this country always has sought to control the thoughts and movements of Black folks." Love explicitly linked this treatment of Abdul-Rauf to "the tenets of white supremacy."

Several things are immediately evident in this characterization of the anthem controversy. Unlike the mainstream press which almost entirely avoided addressing issues of race in their coverage and which provided no structural critique of any type of inequality, the black press made these things their explicit goal. In doing so, black newsmakers provided context for both Abdul-Rauf's opinions and his resulting persecution. Also notable is that at no time are Abdul-Rauf's "religious convictions" brought into question as anything but legitimate and the use of loaded terms like "refused to" is avoided. Instead, Abdul-Rauf not sitting for the anthem is constructed as an action forced upon him by these "convictions" rather than one he forced on society.

Primarily however, the *Amsterdam News* column focused on what the author calls the "contradictions in a land that preaches freedom of speech yet changes the rules when Black folks try to exercise that right." The author goes on to cite examples of how blacks have been denied the rights of "self-ownership" from slavery through the early and mid-20th century and into the present. These examples include a discussion of the efforts made to silence figures like Marcus Garvey, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, along with Louis Farrakhan and Robert Johnson ("the first Black D.A. in New York State history").

Such discourse by black newsmakers reflects the "critical memory" with which the black press addresses issues of race, celebrity and dissent in comparison to the "conservative nostalgia" of the mainstream press that denied the historical demonization of black public figures who engaged in dissent while simultaneously denigrating their contemporaries (Baker 2001). Ultimately, the author suggests that the "attacks" on all these figures represent a kind of "hypocrisy" in the application of laws and rights in which "African-American men" are made a "whipping boy because he sassed a white man."

In specific regard to the "negative attention in the mainstream media" about Abdul-Rauf, Love wrote:

> The situation of Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf exemplifies the racist image of the ungrateful, unpatriotic Negro. In this country, people of color are good enough to strut their stuff on the basketball court, but are not allowed to use their mind and formulate an opinion… While whites cite the countless people that died for this country, others take note of those who died in this country. Besides, how can any young African-American man in 1996 (especially one aware of the current assault on his people) engage in some empty, false sense of patriotism? We built this country, and others should not dictate how we interpret our own reality.

In a similarly framed column in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* titled "Autopsy not pretty," Al Brown suggests that Abdul-Rauf's stance regarding the anthem has "placed America on an autopsy table" and "brought the term 'patriotism' before the nation for evaluation." Brown goes on to point out that Abdul-Rauf's position "is well within his constitutional right—the one that talks about the freedom of religion" and that "Abdul-Rauf's position is similar to another common kind of freedom of expression called 'flag-burning,' which has stood up to many legal challenges."

After making the point that he is within his rights to not stand for the anthem, the author points out that despite this "Abdul-Rauf has withstood some vile media abuse" including "one writer suggesting he take his ball and move to a more perfect country. I wonder if that same writer will tell the Klansman in South Carolina, who recently opened a KKK novelty shop, to pack up his crosses and robes and take them to a more perfect country?" By comparing the treatment of Abdul-Rauf to that of flag burners and Klansmen—whose freedoms of expression have historically been upheld and whose actions are constructed as much more un-American than those of Abdul-Rauf—the author succinctly demonstrates the hypocrisy of mainstream discourses around Abdul-Rauf.

Brown explains that Abdul-Rauf "points out that to stand during the playing of the national anthem in a country that treats its majority population of poor people with disfavor in its economic, judicial, and educational arenas, is against his religious beliefs." This explanation of Abdul-Rauf's position, like that provided by Love in the *Amsterdam News* goes above and beyond the basketball player's actual words to treat as fact contemporary inequality and as legitimate those who prefer not to ignore it.

To further this point, Brown states that "Abdul-Rauf choose to expose an ugly side of America – a side patriotic extremists don't want to discuss. The truth is that America is a nation far from getting over 400 years of discrimination and racial degradation. The truth is we are a nation intoxicated by arrogance and power. Not the power of freedom, which so many of us profess; but the power of control." By labeling Abdul-Rauf's position as reflective of "the truth" Brown again presents the contradictory nature of a nation that values "freedom" but seeks to "control" those who point out when

it is not being applied equally, particularly in the case of the "poor" and those subject to "racial degradation."

Together these members of the black press presented a frame that constructed as the main take away from the Mahmoud Abdul Rauf/national anthem story the unequal way in which basic American citizenship rights were applied to raced figures. On as Bass (2002) has detailed, "how quickly the rules of national belonging change if an individual does not subscribe to the tenets of citizenship in the sanctioned way."

Further, by focusing on the persecution of Abdul-Rauf and of larger minority communities in American society, the authors contrast dominant discourses that assume a colorblind society and claim to value individual rights with the realities of continued racial and economic discrimination in the United States. Like much of the other black press coverage examined in this project, this frame included mainstream media makers as among those most guilty of this hypocritical behavior and insisted on the historical and social contextualization of the controversy.

Black Press Frame #2: Abdul-Rauf and Islam

The second most popular frame in the black press sources examined here is similar that presented in the Denver *Urban Spectrum* before Abdul-Rauf's beliefs came under public scrutiny. This frame primarily focused on legitimizing Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's relationship with Islam and was found in just over thirty-percent of black press coverage of the anthem controversy. Notably, had the two articles appearing in the *Denver Urban Spectrum* been counted toward this frame it would make up a majority—nearly sixty-percent—of coverage of Abdul-Rauf in the black press.

This frame detailed the evolution of Abdul-Rauf's relationship with Islam and focused on the idea that the differential interpretation of Islamic faith, like other forms of faith, is legitimate and dependent on its individual followers. For example, an article in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* focusing on the opinions of "Islamic leaders" in regard to the national anthem controversy lead with the statement that "Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf's decision not to stand for the national anthem should be respected as an act of religious conscience." The article goes on to characterize the belief by some Islamic leaders that "standing for the national anthem is a secular act that does not contradict Islamic principles," as an "opinion," explaining that ultimately "the decision is also one Muslims must make for themselves since Islam is a monotheistic religion that teaches all acts of worship are special only to God."

Thus, while acknowledging that some Muslims disagreed with Abdul-Rauf and viewed standing for the anthem as perfectly acceptable, such discourse simultaneously asserts as fact that it remains perfectly acceptable for other Muslims to believe the opposite. Such discourse in the black press provided an alternative to the monolithic representation of Islam in the mainstream press and allowed for the individuality and agency of its worshippers.

Discourse in the black press further supported this idea by noting that "the Koran does not address the issue directly" and that "Islamic law is not clear on the issue." Additionally the black press included interviews with religious scholars whose beliefs were excluded from mainstream representations of Islam. These scholars reportedly contended that Abdul-Rauf "should not be pushed to go beyond what his beliefs dictate," that "the decision of whether to stand for the anthem and flag is a subjective one, and

believers are responsible to their own consciences," and that "we should support him in his conviction, whether we agree with his specific interpretation or not." Again, such framing never questions the legitimacy of Abdul-Rauf as a "believer" in Islam and allows for the possibility that not standing for the anthem is a legitimate interpretation of this belief, a possibility not allowed for in the majority of the mainstream press.

The *Sentinel* also dedicated an article to discussing the positive influence Islam had had on Abdul-Rauf's life. The article begins; "He recites five obligatory prayers every day, faithfully observes his religion's holy days and helps tutor younger Muslims in the tenants of Islam." Immediately, such discourse constructs Abdul-Rauf's relationship with Islam legitimate and not only reflective of his own positive "faithful" characteristics but also a positive force in other people's lives.

The article goes on to describe Abdul-Rauf's "embrace" of Islam and comments that Abdul-Rauf "has managed to thrive in the glitzy world of pro basketball while drifting closer to the spiritual Islamic world in which he feels increasingly more comfortable." Such discourse constructs Islam not as a threat, but something to be "embraced." Further, the article goes on to explain that given his faith "it came as no surprise to his Denver Nuggets teammates and friends that when it came down to either basketball or his religion, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf chose Islam." This discourse is particularly important considering the way Abdul-Rauf's interpretation of Islam was constructed as a rejection of his American citizenship in the mainstream press. Instead, the black press simply suggests not that Abdul-Rauf was choosing Islam over his country but over his career, a choice that would likely evoke much more understanding for Abdul-Rauf's fellow citizens black or white.

The *Sentinel* article also noted that before the controversy Abdul-Rauf had lost both money and personal relationships as a result of his faith. The author noted that "his religion apparently made him less marketable," given the shoe contract Nike chose not to renew after his conversion, and that "his faith also cost him his first marriage" as a result of his ex-wife's disinterest in converting. Such discourse constructs Abdul-Rauf as a figure to be admired, and perhaps even pitied, as a result of the personal and financial losses he was willing to endure because of his "commitment" to Islam.

Further, and in sharp contrast to the way Abdul-Rauf's interpretation of Islam was constructed as a "misunderstanding" or less important to him than money within mainstream discourse, the article contends that "no one has questioned the sincerity of Abdul-Rauf. As if characterizing Abdul-Rauf as a sincere figure who is willing to sacrifice and help others in the name of his faith is not enough, the author concludes that "the name Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf means 'Elegant and praise worthy, most merciful, most kind'," noting that soon the name "Mujahid," meaning "striver for truth," will be added to Abdul-Rauf's first name.

Such explicitly positive discourse in characterizing Abdul-Rauf and his relationship with Islam reflects a clearly oppositional perspective of his dissent than that presented in dominant discourse. Additionally, this concluding hail to "truth" emulates discourses within black press coverage of Eartha Kitt, Tommie Smith, John Carlos and Sister Souljah all of whom were understood within the black press as representatives of some basic truths within the black experience.

Together these articles construct Abdul-Rauf's relationship with Islam as sincere and his interpretation of its tenets legitimate. Notably Islam is generally presented as a

positive force which leads Abdul-Rauf to be more faithful, humble and self-sacrificing than the average person or average player in "the glitzy world of pro-basketball." Thus, while mainstream constructions of Islam tended to separate "mainstream Islam" from Abdul-Rauf's version, which was constructed as illegitimate, insincere and incompatible with American democracy, black newsmakers constructed Abdul-Rauf as a model Islamic citizen.

Coverage in the black popular press:

Because of the minimal coverage of Abdul-Rauf in the traditional black press, I became curious as to if members of the black popular press covered the controversy and if so how and to what degree. To answer these questions I collected data from *Black Enterprise* and *Essence* magazine both of which carried one story mentioning Abdul-Rauf. Both of these stories were published after the time period considered above but both referred back in later articles on other topics during 1996.

In July, *Black Enterprise* published an article titled "Keeping the faith while keeping your job" that detailed how to handle workplace religious discrimination. While focusing on the practical "dos and don'ts" of handling religious discrimination in the workplace and offering statistics from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on its prevalence, the article lead read; "When his religious beliefs conflicted with NBA policies, Denver Nuggets guard Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, a devout Muslim, was suspended…While Rauf's situation played out in grand proportions, many workers in America face less publicized standoffs between their religious beliefs and the edicts of the workplace. Almost 3,000 charges of religious discrimination were filed last year…"

While only mentioning the anthem controversy in passing and presenting neutral descriptions of Abdul-Rauf and his actions, *Black Enterprise*, like the other African American publications discussed above, constructed the experience of Abdul-Rauf as part of a larger trend of "discrimination" in American society (in this case in the workplace in particular). Thus, without presenting explicit value judgments, *Black Enterprise* constructed Abdul-Rauf's treatment, his suspension by the N.B.A. in particular as morally wrong.

Essence magazine, which targets African American women, made no mention of Abdul-Rauf until the end of the year when they listed him in their November issue as among "More men we love." The list, which placed Abdul-Rauf at number three, carried the subheading "Because they defy the odds and enlighten others by any means necessary, we present to you ten more barrier-breaking brothers!" This discourse is clearly both celebratory and based in the political rhetoric of the civil rights movement (e.g. "any means necessary"). Thus, to the editors of *Essence*, Abdul-Rauf's dissent had made him a barrier-breaker, a praiseworthy characterization that simultaneously works as an acknowledgement of the still existing barriers needing breaking in American society.

Notably, as number three on *Essence*'s list Abdul-Rauf was preceded only by famed journalist Ed Gordon and Roy Decarava who was the first African American to win a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. Among those following Abdul-Rauf on the list of "men we love;" gospel singer Kirk Franklin, Randall Robinson, one of the founders of the Free South Africa Movement, Nobel Prize winner Derek Wolcott, and Hugh B. Price, then President and CEO of the National Urban League. Thus, the editors of *Essence* magazine felt that Abdul-Rauf, who "wasn't afraid to go 'one-on-one' for his

Muslim beliefs" was a positive and influential figure in the African American community deserving of acknowledgement alongside those who had broken racial barriers.

Discussion

For the first time in this study, two of the primary frames used by the mainstream and black press had a similar focus—basic civil liberties, particularly those guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution. However, even in sharing this focus the discourse used within the two presses varied and resulted in different understandings of these very values. In the mainstream press the guarantee and application of individual freedoms for all was treated as existent even as news makers struggled with presenting this idea alongside criticisms of Abdul-Rauf. In the black press individual freedoms were also idealized but there was an explicit discussion of the ways in which American culture failed to fulfill these freedoms—particularly for African Americans—despite rhetorical guarantees.

Thus, the mainstream press, while idealizing constitutional rights and other civil liberties, sent a mixed message that praised the United States for guaranteeing these liberties while discursively justifying the marginalization of an American citizen making use of these rights. To do this the mainstream press constructed Abdul-Rauf as outside of normative society and thereby undeserving of the very rights they idealized. He was constructed as weak-willed, greedy, ungrateful, and confused about the tenants of his own beliefs. Any interpretation of Islam that might enable critique of the American status quo was constructed as threatening and illegitimate.

Further, the mainstream press almost entirely ignored the existence of any of the "oppression" and "tyranny" that Abdul-Rauf spoke of—certainly a necessity when

idealizing constructions of the nation and denigrating its critics. On the other hand, the black press insisted on the existence on inequality and the legitimacy of Abdul-Rauf's religious and political interpretations. Additionally the black press insisted on Abdul-Rauf location in the nation, constructing him as a caring member of an American community.

The moment of the outing of Abdul-Rauf's national anthem dissent can be understood as one in which the contradictions of race and religion in a society that continues to pretend it is not white-Christian dominated erupted. This particular eruption evidences an early version of the discourse that has become rampant in America since September 11, 2001 and evinces that as a society we have not come to any agreement on what multiculturalism and secular government mean. The mainstream press in this case presented a near consensus that; one, the presence of millionaire black athletes means there is no real racial oppression in contemporary society and that; two, that Islam (or at least the visible kind that influences how its worshippers understand and interact with the world) is not an American religion.

A handful of mainstream press columnists challenged the dominant version of patriotism and nation that the rest embraced and pointed out the seeming hypocrisy of valuing the freedoms on which the nation was founded while persecuting Abdul-Rauf. While this is worth noting it is also important to recall that even in 1949 a few members of the mainstream press pointed out that while Paul Robeson's opinions were wrong he had the right to hold them and that persecuting him violated basic American values.

Thus, it does not appear that significant progress has been made in the way mainstream journalist make sense of black dissent, especially as it is related to issues of

nationhood. Nearly fifty-years after Robeson's beliefs were framed as illogical and un-American; Abdul-Rauf's were as well. In both cases, some mainstream voices, while in the minority, spoke out for their rights to hold these beliefs, but in both cases these same voices also perpetuated larger discourses that treated the expression of alternative political, social and cultural understandings as a threat that would ideally be silenced.

If the question is, how much have things changed in the evolution on media coverage of African American dissent, this study suggests that the more significant changes can be seen in the black press. In 1992 the black press felt free to openly and vigorously defend Sister Souljah despite the clearly intense and unapologetic nature of her words while taking to task a future president of the United States. In 1996 members of the black press felt free to offer a scathing critique of "white supremacy" while coming to the defense of an African American whose religious views did not match those of most members of their community. Such coverage is clearly less limited than the careful and often implicit ways in which black newsmakers discussed the hypocrisies that existed in dominant responses to the politics of Paul Robeson and the way most black newsmakers in 1949 were compelled to offer denunciations of Communism as unrepresentative of the ideologies of the African American community.

However, questions regarding the role of various public spheres in constructing meaning for members of the nation remain tangled. If the black press has progressively experienced more editorial freedom, it has also seen a sharp decline in readership. While mainstream newsmakers continue to fail to offer their readers sustained interrogation of news stories that intersect with issues of racial inequality, more Americans of every background depend on them for information. If the presence of some alternative

perspectives in the mainstream press is evidence of social progress, we must ask ourselves why these perspectives remain in the minority and what ideologies, and social groups, continued benefit from this.

Chapter 6: Kanye West and Hurricane Katrina 2005

In the fall of 2005, rapper Kanye West was experiencing an unprecedented level of popularity. His sophomore album, "Late Registration," debuted at number one on the Billboard charts, selling a stunning 860,000 copies in just one week. West's first single from the album, "Gold Digger," was the number one billboard single for over two months. He had been hired by both Pepsi and the NFL for ongoing public campaigns and, among countless other coverage in various media outlets, *Time* magazine featured a cover story on the rapper/producer on August 29, 2005—the same day Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans—titled "Hip-Hop's Class Act: Defying the rules of rap, Kanye West goes his own way. Why he's the smartest man in pop music."

West's cross-over celebrity along with his relatively new arrival on the music scene and unique image insured him media publicity on many fronts. Thus it was no surprise that NBC chose West as one of many celebrities to play a leading role in their September 2nd telethon to raise money for the victims of the recent hurricane. During the live telethon Kanye West went off-script while presenting with Mike Meyers to provide commentary on what he saw as racial disparity in media coverage of the hurricane's victims. West stated: "I hate the way they portray us in the media. If you see a black family it says their looting. If you see a white family, it says they're looking for food."

While Meyers, clearly surprised, attempted to return to the script, West ignored him. He continued, criticizing himself for not donating to the relief efforts sooner, and then offered an institutional level critique that hit on issues of American racial and economic inequality, the Iraq war and racialized violence:

> You know it's been five days because most of the people are black…America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off as slow as

> possible…We already realize a lot of the people that could help are at war right now…And now they've given them permission to go down there and shoot us…

Despite the complexity and length of these comments, what was most recalled by the media and what became most remembered by the public about West's comments was his closing statement that "George Bush doesn't care about black people." Certainly at this stage of George W. Bush's presidency, public criticisms and condemnations of his job performance were neither unusual nor necessarily deemed entirely inappropriate in dominant discourse. Thus the media's focus on the rapper's president-specific comments should be understood to reflect judgments of newsworthiness based largely on the story of Katrina, West's celebrity, and specifically, the challenge West's dissent presented to normative expectations regarding celebrity behavior at times of national crisis.

This chapter focuses on how the mainstream and black press covered Kanye West's comments, what frames were applied in this coverage and how this coverage can be understood within the larger body of this project. The sources examined include the *New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, Time* and *Newsweek* in the mainstream press and the *New York Amsterdam News, Chicago Defender, Los Angeles Sentinel, Jet* and *Ebony* in the African American press. For each of these sources data was collected via Lexus Nexus Databases online, physical holdings from the University of Minnesota and other public universities, and the online archives of several specific sources. The data in this analysis was published between September 2, 2005, the day West made his comments, and November 2, 2005—a two month period.

Data Overview:

In the black press, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* presented the most stories on West's dissent (n=4), followed by the *Chicago Defender* (n=3) and the *New York Amsterdam*

News and *Jet* (n=1 each). While *Ebony* published several stories on Hurricane Katrina, and had profiled West in detailed articled in both June 2004 and April 2005, its editors did not cover West's Katrina dissent. In total, the black press sources examined here published nine stories addressing West's charges of racial inequality in the relief efforts.

While this is a small number of stories compared to the coverage that figures like Robeson, Kitt and Smith and Carlos received in the black press it is consistent with the minimal coverage found in the case of Abdul-Rauf and can likely be attributed, at least in part, to the general decline of the black press. I would also suggest that as in the case of Abdu-Rauf, West's particular brand of dissent was not deemed particularly newsworthy by black newsmakers who likely treated his comments as reflecting sentiments already familiar to their readers.

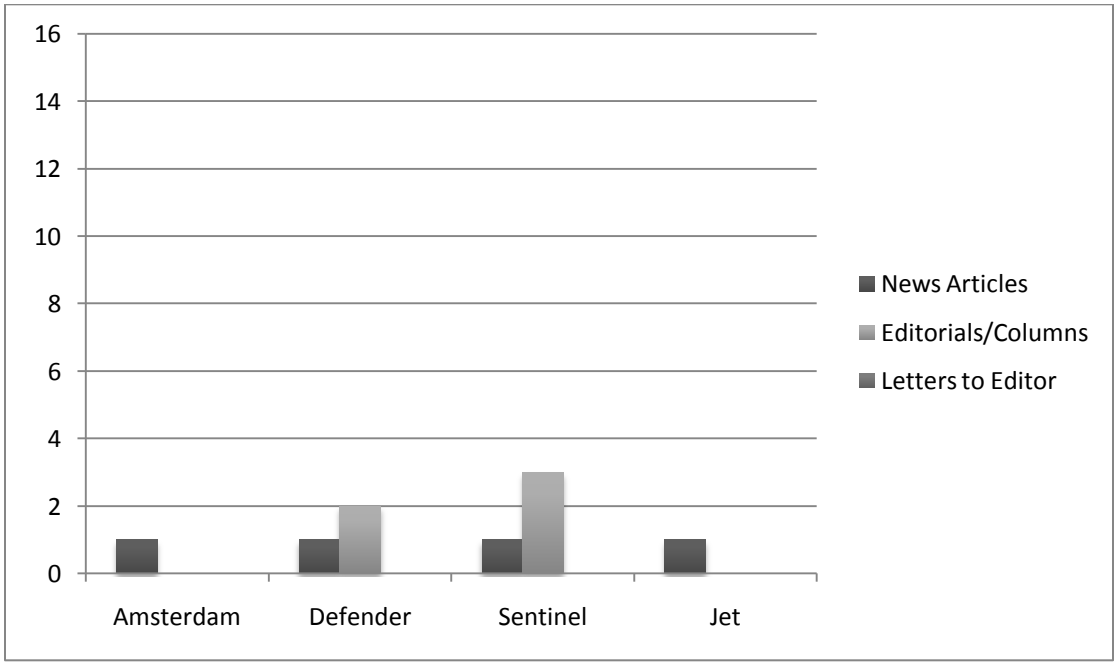

Figure 31: Frequency of stories by black press source.

In a seemingly incongruent amount of coverage compared to that generated by the dissent of the other celebrities examined here, the mainstream press published only forty-

two (N=42) total stories that specifically addressed Kanye West comments about the hurricane relief efforts. The *New York Times* published fifteen stories (n=15), followed by the *Chicago Tribune* with twelve (n=12), the *Los Angeles Times* with nine (n=9), *Time* published five stories and *Newsweek* one. This decrease in coverage, while still far outnumbering that in the black press, likely reflects several trends in public understandings of celebrity, and in particular West's celebrity, in the twenty-first century.

It is notable that by 2005 the competition for news created by the twenty-four hour television news cycle and the internet had created and normalized news coverage of celebrity scandal as part of a larger trend in the commercialization of journalism (McChesney 2004; Marshall 2005). This trend, in addition to the millennial hold of "reality" TV, contributed to a media environment in which West's dissent may not have been understood as protest or even especially controversial but rather a simple case of celebrity bad behavior. With coverage of celebrity sex tapes, legal troubles, affairs, deaths and drug habits in full saturation in the media environment, it is likely that the expression of outrage by a popular celebrity like West at a moment when much of the nation was also upset by the images of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina simply did not register as particularly new, sensational or profitable information.

Further, West had constructed a public image that allowed him to be both safe and rebellious in dominant discourses. He was a preppy, pink polo shirt wearing rapper who had attended college (although later dropped out) and sang about Jesus while also embracing the antiestablishment roots of rap music. This image had been lauded in mainstream discourse as a new and positive form of rap music, one that reflected West's

suburban, middle-class background.[57] At the same time, West's occasional moments of acting out were contextualized much as those of the young Cassius Clay—the symptom of youthful indiscretion and ego but a reflection of legitimate talent and not threat.[58] Thus while producers at NBC were no doubt surprised by West's dissent it is also likely that media makers as a whole did not find his actions particularly inconsistent which his image nor particularly radical.

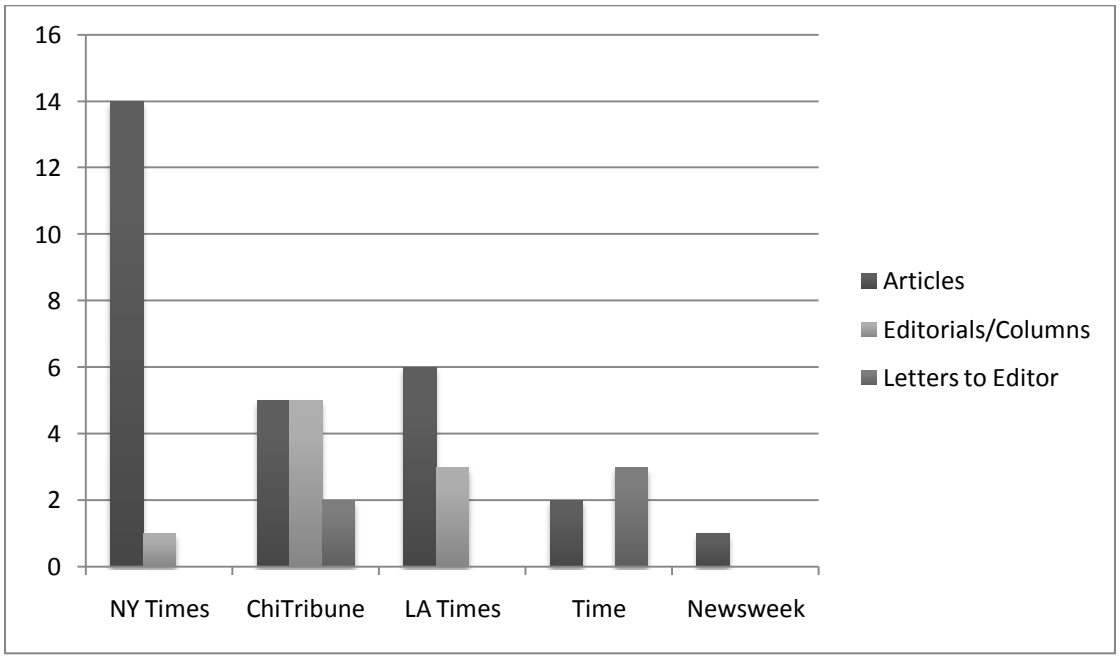

Figure 32: Frequency of stories by mainstream source.

Unlike the other cases examined here there appears to be no correlation between region and frequency of coverage in either the black or mainstream press. Given Kanye West's roots in Chicago one might expect the Chicago-based papers to most frequently cover him, however this was not the case. In the black press most of the coverage fell in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* suggesting perhaps a larger concern with celebrity-centered

[57] Tyrangiel, Josh (Aug. 21, 2005). "Why you can't ignore Kanye Wesy," *Time*. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1096499-1,00.html
[58] DeRogatis, Jim. (Dec. 26, 2004). "The Best & The West; An ever changing list in final form," *Chicago Sun Times*.

issues than the other papers. However, if this is the case it did not apply in the mainstream press where, the *Los Angeles Times* ran the least coverage of the newspapers examined here and the *New York Times* ran the most.

In the black press just over fifty-five percent of the stories that addressed Kanye West's dissent were opinion-based (editorials and columns). However, again and in common to coverage of Abdul-Rauf, no black press source examined here published a letter to the editor on the topic. The mainstream press, with its forty-two stories outnumbering the nine in the black press by almost five times, published just over thirty-percent opinion stories (editorials, columns, and letters to the editor). Thus the mainstream press presented its audiences with mostly (sixty-seven percent) news-based stories on West's comments while the black press primarily presented opinion-based stories on the topic.

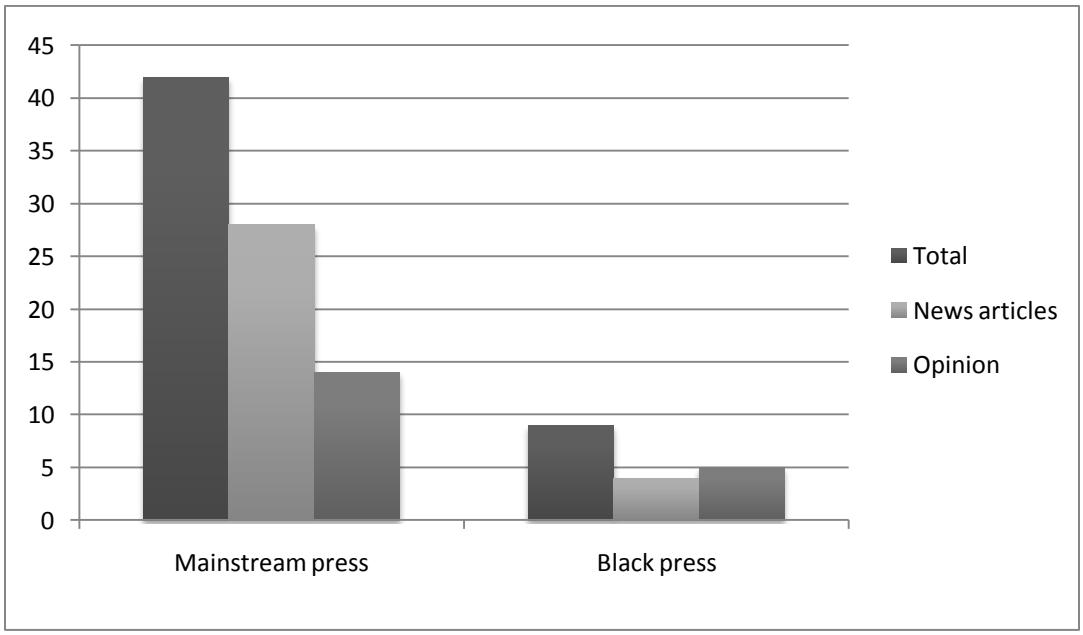

Figure 33: Number of stories by type and press.

Together, mainstream sources presented predominantly neutral characterizations of West and his comments followed by negative and positive characterizations. The black press presented an equal amount of positive and neutral characterizations of West and his comments and a minority of negative coverage. Below I discuss these positive, negative and neutral descriptors and how they fit into the overall frames in the mainstream and black presses.

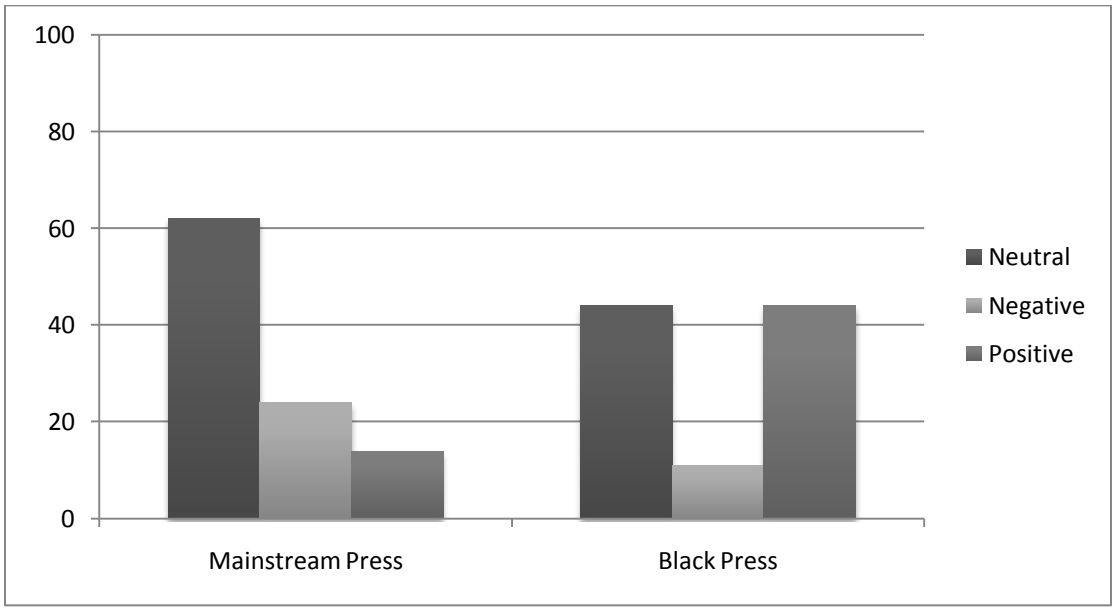

Figure 34: Percent of total stories by explicit valuations and press.

Mainstream Findings

Trends in Positive and Negative Coverage

The majority neutral coverage in the mainstream press tended to describe West's dissent in terms that avoided the used of value-based descriptors. For example it was reported frequently that "Rapper Kanye West *said*…" a shift from terms like "shouted," and "ranted" that were used to describe Eartha Kitt's dissent. West's dissent was also regularly described as "ad-lib remarks," "unscripted comments" and/or a "criticism" of George Bush. Such terms do not imply the positive or negative value of such remarks and

criticisms and were therefore coded neutrally along with the terms "declared" and "expressed frustration."

West was sometimes negatively reported as having "accused" or "attacked" Bush with his "off-script" "outburst." However, despite such characterizations negativity on their own many of the articles containing them also reported on opinions or facts that aligned with West's sentiments, neutralizing the sting of such language. For example, *Time* reported that "…rap artist Kanye West accused President Bush of not caring about black people" but then reported in the next sentence that "it was a long time before the President met with the Congressional Black caucus, and he's never appeared before the NAACP," thus contextualizing the "accusation" and making it seem at least some-what reasonable.

The quarter of mainstream press stories that characterized West's dissent entirely negatively did so most often by describing his comments as volatile, inappropriate and/or out of order. For example, a column by Ned Martel of the *New York Times* reported that "Mr. West is getting criticism from all quarters," describing West as having "raged" at Bush in a "startling rant" and a "blast." This discourse is similar almost to a word to the majority negative descriptions of Eartha Kitt's dissent nearly forty-years earlier. Similarly, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that the rapper had "lashed out," and needed to "turn down the volume." Steve Hochman of the *Los Angeles Times* characterized West's dissent as "inflammatory" and linked it to his supposed "sense of entitlement."

A letter-to-the-editor published by the *Chicago Tribune* argued that West was "wasting time" by "attacking the government." Letters published in *Time*, responding both to the previous week's cover story and West's comments, labeled the "stunt" an

example of West's lack of "class." Every mainstream news source examined here except *Newsweek* printed suggestions that West's dissent could pose a "distraction" to fundraising efforts and/or deter potential donors.

Positive characterizations in the mainstream press were often the result of reports on other Black celebrities' opinions of West's comments. The *New York Times* reported that Joseph Simmons (aka Reverend Run of Run-DMC) felt that "Kanye is a prophet… There was lots of wisdom to what he said." The *Chicago Tribune* reported that R&B singer Usher felt that "if it wasn't for his comments, there would not be an open dialogue about the underserved people in the Gulf region," and the *Los Angeles Times* reported that hip hop mogul Russell Simmons felt "that's what rappers are supposed to do—say what the masses are thinking."

The reporting of mostly positive opinions from other African American celebrities in response to West's dissent stands in sharp contrast to the way black public figures have been pitted against black celebrity dissenters in mainstream discourse in every other case examined here. However, this trend continues to reflect the way black celebrities are treated as the primary opinion leaders of the black community by mainstream journalists, thus largely ignoring the perspectives of African American politicians, community activists, academics or average black citizens on West's comments.

When addressed by the mainstream press, West's work as a musician and producer was nearly always characterized positively. When it came to his career and talent, West was a "popular" "bestselling artist" with an "explosive career" and a "mix of bluster, earnest and creative reach," an "innovator" with "remarkable passion and charisma" and "immense range."

For the most part the mainstream press characterized West's statements as sincere even in stories that characterized his dissent as inappropriate. For example, while it was frequently suggested that West's statements were a distraction from the goal of raising money for hurricane relief and "may have offended you," it was also frequently reported that West was "obviously impassioned" and several stories included follow-up quotes from West who later insisted that he'd said "what I really feel" and "let my heart speak."

Importantly, literature on the way mainstream newsmakers came to understand and represent the story of Hurricane Katrina demonstrates that: 1) patterns of representing blacks in New Orleans post-Katrina were negative and that newsmakers did become self-reflexive about this to some extent; and, 2) some members of the mainstream press also became critical of the federal government's response to the hurricane (Berger 2009; Durham 2008; Kahle, Yu & Whiteside 2007). Thus, it is likely that such coverage reflects some agreement with West's beliefs about the government response to Katrina despite the prevalence of mainstream opinion that his dissent was inappropriately timed and placed.

For example, the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* contended that while "No one who watched the suffering and chaos and devastation…could feel good about how long it took before relief arrived," the "finger-pointing" of West and others "can wait for later" and could cause "divisiveness"—simultaneously expressing sympathy with West's frustration and labeling it untimely and inappropriate. The *Los Angeles Times*, which contained the most positive characterizations of West, also sympathetically reported that West felt "heartache over the struggle of the flood victims" and credited his dissent to an

"underdog impulse" that resulted from watching his grandmother's unsuccessful battle with cancer.

Perhaps the most significant element of mainstream press coverage of West's comments is the attention paid by newsmakers to only a small of his statement. West's quote "George Bush doesn't care about black people," or paraphrases of it, was included in over seventy-five percent of the stories examined here. On the other hand, only twelve-percent of mainstream news coverage of West's dissent included a direct quote or paraphrase of his criticisms regarding media inequality in covering black "looters" versus white "finders,[59]" and less-than-five percent of mainstream coverage made reference to the portion of West's statements claiming structural and institutional inequality in the way in which America is "set up."

Only one of the forty-two stories examined in the mainstream press included West's quote that "America is set up to help the poor and the black…as slowly as possible," and this article in the *Chicago Tribune* also characterized West's comments as "a rant" and "blast"—undermining the entire idea by making it seem volatile. Not a single mainstream press source quoted or discussed the portion of West's comments in which he pointed out that American troops who might have otherwise been helping the citizens of New Orleans were instead in Iraq, or the portion of his statement in which he drew attention to the very real violence that was occurring at the hands of authorities against black Katrina survivors.[60]

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[59] Though only 1 article (or two-percent of all mainstream articles) actually focused on interrogating media representations of Hurricane victims.

[60] Campbell, Robertson. (Jul. 14, 2010). Police charged in 2005 killings in New Orleans, *New York Times.* Lee, Trymaine. (Aug 27, 2010). Inquires give credence to reports of racial violence after Katrina. *New York Times.*

Thus, in the wake of twenty-five percent negative coverage and some positive and empathetic coverage, this choice to focus on the "Bush doesn't care about black people quote" is extremely significant to understanding how mainstream newsmakers tackled covering West's statements. The focus on the Bush quote effectively trivialized and marginalized the intent of West's statements by treating them as they hyperbolic expression of frustration rather than a valid socio-cultural critique. Thus, mainstream news makers successfully avoided any impetus West's comments might have otherwise produced to address the observable impact of racial and economic inequality on New Orleans, or the ways in which the military, and other government-run armed bodies like the police, could serve as both domestic protectors and terrorists in the wake of a natural disaster that primarily impacted the disenfranchised.

Newsweek was the only source in the mainstream press to present an in-depth critique of the class and race angles involved in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This article acknowledged the realities of both the historical neglect of African Americans and the poor by the government and the continuation of individual racism. However, no mainstream press source gave support to the idea that the lack of response to Katrina in 2005 was an example of contemporary institutional racism. Rather, most mainstream coverage avoided the topic of racism altogether while sometimes expressing sympathy with the "frustration" of those, like West, who might see it that way.

Mainstream Press Frame #1: Are You Not Entertained?

The majority of mainstream press coverage of Kanye West's post-Katrina dissent appeared in stories in the arts, entertainment and culture sections of the newspapers examined here rather than in sections focusing on national news or politics. In the *New*

York Times, nine of the fifteen total mentions of West's dissent were published from the Arts/Culture desk and only two from the National Desk. In the *Los Angeles Times* seven of the nine total articles on West's dissent were in the "Entertainment" section of the paper with only two published in Section A. The *Chicago Tribune* ran less of such content overall but fifty-percent of their coverage also included West's dissent in entertainment based stories.

Thus, rather than spending time interrogating the content or meaning of West's words, mainstream coverage of West's dissent presented a unique frame not seen in the other cases examined in this project: a discussion of the entertainment value offered by West in spite of (and sometimes exactly because of) his dissent. This frame, appearing in forty-five percent of stories, addressed West's dissent in relation to his larger career trajectory, his involvement with other telethons for Katrina relief, the opinions of other celebrities about his comments and the Kanye-inspired protest song titled "George Bush doesn't care about black people" released by Houston rap group Legendary K.O.

For example, the *Los Angeles Times* ran two "Pop Music Reviews" of West's concert performances, one occurring a week after his dissenting statements and another a month later. In both concert reviews the authors, Steve Hochman and Robert Hilburn, offer complimentary descriptions of West's musical style and primarily focus on reviewing the content of his concerts. The authors only mention in passing "the controversy that followed" West's "criticism of President Bush." In both stories, the authors frame West's dissent as relevant only in relation to the content of his musical performances. Hilburn, after a long and highly complimentary review of West's concert, notes that West "paused after one number and expressed sympathy for the Katrina

victims, but he didn't mention Bush again," and Hochman noted that at an "MTV-sponsored concert" West "provided context for his earlier swipe at Bush."

Columnist Geoff Boucher of the *Los Angeles Times* focused on the impact, or lack thereof, of West's dissent on his career asking "how can Kanye West go on national television and passionately accuse Bush of not caring about blacks one week and still be riding high the next as a bestselling rapper and corporate pitchman?" The author spends the remainder of the lengthy column answering this question with explanations about West's fans view of him as an "independent-minded artist" and suggestions that West's "popularity" and cultural "credibility" make him irresistible to corporate interests and fans alike. Not surprisingly the author spends no time interrogating questions about institutional racial or economic inequality. Such coverage of West's dissent reflects the way celebrity culture in the twenty-first century, with a focus on fame in and of itself as the news, influenced mainstream meaning making of West's dissent.

The *New York Times* mentioned West's dissent in passing in their review of the 2005 Emmy Awards, noting that "there were few unscripted moments, and nothing came close to Kanye West's impromptu 'George Bush doesn't care about black people' outburst on NBC's recent hurricane relief telethon," then quickly shifting to a discussion of the winners of the evening. In announcing the Madison Square Garden Katrina fundraiser concert, "From the Big Apple to the Big Easy," featuring many of the "best-known New Orleans musicians," the paper briefly noted that "the disaster and its aftermath gives musicians plenty to talk about, as Kanye West memorably demonstrated."

The *New York Times* also ran articles about various public and television appearances and concerts by rappers David Banner, Nelly and Reverend Run that contained brief and largely agreeable comments from their subjects on West's dissent. Similarly, the *Chicago Tribune* reported on R&B singer Usher's supportive comments regarding "Kanye's comments about Hurricane Katrina relief efforts," and joked in passing that Kanye West's appearance on the NFL's kickoff show on ABC proved that the network "does indeed care about hip-hop artists in preppy clothing."

Every mainstream newspaper examined here dedicated at least one article to the West inspired rap song "George Bush doesn't care about black people" by Houston rap group Legendary K.O. and the various YouTube video mash-ups it subsequently inspired. These stories focused on the technological and copyright angles of the story along with commentary on the tradition of sampling "in the rap world" rather than issues of race or class. Similarly, every mainstream newspaper included reviews of the various telethons held after the initial NBC telethon where West spoke off-script, mentioning his comments in passing but focusing on West's and other celebrities' musical and comedic contributions to these various fundraisers.

This focus on entertainment, and particularly West's entertainment value when reporting on his comments, allowed the mainstream press to present a frame that while not necessarily negative in its regard for West's actions, completely ignored the complicated issues of inequality he had addressed. This frame made West's comments tangential to the central going-ons of the entertainment world and rarely reported on West's words in any detail.

Thus, this frame reflects an apparently new mainstream strategy for the undermining of black political and racial dissent. Rather than treating West's comments as dangerous, subversive, or even newsworthy, framing them as simply entertainment-worthy opens up an allowable location for black celebrity dissent in the mainstream while simultaneously disavowing the relevance of its content. By essentially refusing to take West's dissent seriously even when reporting on it, mainstream newsmakers created a marginal space in which political claims that might otherwise require a sustained critique of the racial or economic status quo were displaced in favor of a focus on entertainment value.

It is possible that such framing represents a larger adaptation within dominant discourses to black dissent, particularly black dissent levied by hip hop artists who by 2005 were impossible to ignore or entirely denigrate in mainstream discourse due to the enormous hold of hip hop culture on the economy of the mainstream entertainment industry (Boyd 2003). Thus, in the thirteen years since Sister Souljah was easily constructed as deviant and unrepresentative of any set of public sentiment, hip hop artists, especially those like West with such enormous cross-over appeal, could not be constructed as belonging to the fringe but rather are strategically constructed as welcome in the center so long as there is no expectation that they be taken seriously for anything other than entertainment.

Additionally, such discourse allows for the perpetuation of colorblind, post-racial rhetoric that insists that African Americans have been fully integrated into the nation. By insisting on embracing West's music and artistic contributions, mainstream discourses appear fully enlightened while simply ignoring the fact that these very artistic

contributions rise from the needs of black and poor youth to express their frustration over continued racial and economic disparities (Kitwana 2006).

Mainstream Press Frame #2: Politics Doesn't Mix with Charity…or Entertainment

This frame occurred in nearly thirty-percent of mainstream press coverage of West's dissent. It is strikingly similar to the Politics and Sports Don't Mix frame of the 1968 Olympic dissent by Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Within this frame, successful entertainment, and specifically entertainment for the purpose of charitable causes, is constructed as being mutually exclusive to the expression of political dissent. This frame appeared primarily in stories in the mainstream press that constructed West's comments as untimely and/or as a distraction to efforts to help the people of the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina. It also appeared in stories that West's role as an entertainer was more valuable than his role as a social commentator, and that the later somehow polluted the former. This frame is particularly contradictory given Hip Hop culture's founding tradition as a location for the expression of marginalized racial voices.

A letter-to-the editor published by *Time* argued that "West is certainly entitled to his opinion, but there's a time and place for that…" "our first priority should be rescue and recovery." While another *Time* letter more forcefully stated that "now is not the time to play the race card. Kanye, please sit down, shut up and get out your wallet." Here the suggestion is clear; West cannot criticize the government and fulfill his obligation to help Katrina victims. Further such discourse reflects the way dominant ideologies expect black celebrities to perform according to the needs of the majority regardless of what their "first priority" is. West is expected to cater to dominant decorum by reading words written for him and avoid challenging the status quo just as Eartha Kitt was expected to perform like

a “lady” (i.e. be silent) at the White House and Carlos, Smith and Abdul-Rauf were expected to perform patriotism and gratefulness at the Olympics and in the N.B.A.

Similarly, a letter to the editor published by the *Chicago Tribune* named West as one of “many people” who were “wasting too much time attacking the government” and who should “focus on the priority: rescuing people and helping the Gulf states return to some semblance of normalcy.” Again the suggestion is that criticism of the government cannot exist alongside successful aid efforts and that somehow West should be personally “rescuing people” and reconstructing the Gulf. Such language also individualizes responsibility for Hurricane Katrina victims rather than acknowledging that race and class disenfranchisement is the result of institutional factors and must be solved institutionally.

The *Chicago Tribune*’s masthead editorial echoed the discourse in the *Time* letters. While sympathizing with West’s “frustration,” the editors stated “that can wait for later…the present, however, is the time for banding together, not for divisiveness,” labeling West’s comments “finger-pointing.” Again the explicit point is that there is no legitimate space for institutional level critique or blame if the goal is to help people. Additionally, such discourse labels attempts to acknowledge institutional inequalities as “divisive” while presenting charity simultaneously as apolitical and a progressive social force. This type of neoliberal rhetoric, which suggests that the market can fix complex social issues, ignores and demonizes the need for structural government intervention in dominant social institutions if events like those that took place after Hurricane Katrina are to be avoided.

Similarly, the *Tribune* and *New York Times* ran articles about West's appearance at the National Football League's opening weekend events, noting that West "would stick to entertainment" by making his appearance "more about music than politics" and thus not "causing a distraction." Thus, for West's musical appearances to reach their full value they are constructed as needing to be void of political critique. Columnist Ned Martel of the *New York Times* suggested that after his initial dissent, other broadcast network producers worried that West might "need to be muted lest he drop some polemic" noting that his "role was to perform, not pontificate." The use of the loaded terms "polemic" and "pontificate" by the author suggest that the insertion of political or social criticism by West into his role as a performer was combative, condescending and dogmatic—and thus censorship-worthy.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported in several articles on the editing of West's comments from the West Coast broadcast of the NBC telethon, reporting that "producers feared his comments would distract from the aim of the program," and that "to politicize the concert" might "dissuade viewers from donating." These articles also quoted the executive producer of another telethon on which West would be appearing who contended that "people know that politicizing will certainly not be a smart thing to do as far as inspiring people to want to call in and rally around this cause." Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that later telethons had "an emphasis on music rather than commentary" and thus kept "the focus on victims' needs rather than politics." Of course the obvious misnomer here is that the two have nothing to do with each other when of course the needs of the victims of Hurricane Katrina were directly linked to—if not the

direct result of—a legacy of political and social neglect of the poor and black in the United States.

Other reports assumed that somehow West would cost the people of the Gulf Coast aid because American viewers would be so offended by his opinions that they would consciously withhold help. This view certainly does not give the American public much credit. At no point did any member of the mainstream press entertain the possibility that West's comments might actually inspire and motivate some members of the population to take action. Additionally, at their core such assumptions about the audience of Katrina fundraisers suggest that they were entirely made up of white conservatives who loved both President Bush and the mainstream media. Given that between September and November of 2005 between 50 and 60-percent of Americans disapproved of the job Bush was doing, more Americans identified themselves as Democrats or Independents than Republicans, and around 35-percent of Americans identified racially as non-white or as Latino such assumptions certainly did not reflect the political or ethnic demographics of the nation at the time.[61]

Along with framing West's value as purely based in entertainment, framing his dissent as a violation to charitable values reflects what Gilroy (2000) and Winant (2004) have described as a modern hegemonic strategy for continuing the maintenance of racial hierarchies in modern society. In this case, rather than producing explicitly racialized appeals like those which attempted to regulate the expression of Paul Robeson, an

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[61] U.S. Census Bureau (http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&qr_name=PEP_2006_EST_DP1&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=PEP_2006_EST&-_lang=en&-format=&-CONTEXT=qt) accessed October 18, 2010; Gallup (http://www.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx and http://www.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx), accessed October 18, 2010.

avoidance of any discussion of race while making claims for larger progressive goals allows for the implicit ideological disavowal of racism while simultaneously failing to critique the structures that maintain it. Thus, reaction to West's dissent in mainstream news can be understood as once which reinforced systems of domination through silence and diversion rather than overt acknowledgement of accepted racial hierarchies.

Black Press Findings:

Trends in Positive and Negative Coverage

The black press presented an equal amount of positive and neutral characterizations of West and his dissenting comments following Hurricane Katrina, nearly forty-five percent of each. Only eleven percent of black press coverage constructed West's dissent as negative—about the same amount of positive characterizations in the mainstream press. This negative coverage appeared solely in the *Chicago Defender*, reinforcing the previous findings in this project that suggest the *Defender* tends to reflect a more conservative view than other African American news sources. This negative characterization occurred in a column by Joseph C. Phillips who described West's comments as "the petulant complaint of a child to a parent."

Importantly, while West's comments were framed negatively, Phillips still acknowledged a history of "pernicious racism" in the United States and made a direct call for action to "Black people." The author constructs a paternal relationship between African Americans and the government, suggesting that this is something that must be overcome as "the responsibility and the power to change our communities" is "in the hands of Black people." Phillips argues that the only responsibility of government is to be "deliberate in its duty to secure our natural rights." Thus, while offering a critique of

West's comments, the author acknowledges the inequality faced by African Americans, the government's responsibility in solving for this inequality, and makes a call for community uplift—a common frame to be discussed in more detail below.

The positive descriptions of West in the black press primarily constructed his comments as a form of truth-telling and West as a spokesperson for those who might otherwise be voiceless. The *New York Amsterdam News* described West as "one of the more politically aware rap artists." An article in the *Chicago Defender* and column in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* both labeled West's comments as "truth." A report of the opinions of black public figures including Al Sharpton, Russell Simmons, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson and NAACP president Bruce Gordon in *Jet* referred to West's dissent as exposing the "double standard in the mainstream media when it comes to Black folk" and "absolutely right."

Jet noted that these high profile figures described West's comments as reflecting "bravery," "courage," and a "passion and care for his people." Further, West was reported as having become "a spokesperson for a lot of voiceless Americans," many of whom now regarded him as a "hero." Multiple interviewees expressed in some form the idea that "Kanye said what a lot of us have been saying and should be supported and protected for having the nerve to say it." Thus, the black press tended to use laudatory language in its positive characterizations of West while constructing his motivations as selfless and rooted in a genuine concern for the Black community. Further, West is constructed as having contributed a valuable and traditionally ignored perspective to mainstream post-Katrina discussions.

The neutral characterizations of West in the black press were very similar to those of the mainstream press, with his dissent being labeled “comments” and a “critique.” The occasional appearance of more value-laden terms like “rant” and “bellowed” did occur in the black press but were immediately followed by reports that contended that “almost all African Americans polled” agreed with West’s statements and/or noting his continuing rising popularity, skyrocketing record sales and the support of others.

An overwhelming eighty-six percent of black press stories examined here contextualized West’s comments amid a larger frame of community uplift and self-sufficiency. While this frame was articulated in different ways among the various papers and journalists, the idea that the readers of the black press were members of the same community as the victims of the disaster that followed Katrina and thus had a special responsibility to their fellow social group members was clearly articulated.

In addition to this community solidarity frame the stories examined here also commonly presented West’s comments alongside historical contextualization of institutional racial and economic inequality. Nearly forty-five percent of black press stories constructed West’s comments, and the plight of Katrina’s victims with which he was concerned, within a framework that acknowledged the contemporary legacy and persistence of these inequalities.

Black Press Frame #1: Community Uplift & Solidarity

This frame appeared primarily it two iterations in the black press. These included 1) a general call to action to an African American “community” not just in terms of helping the Hurricane victims but in improving the self-sufficiency of African Americans generally; and 2) a characterization of Hip-Hop culture, and particularly rap music, as

being based in the African American community and therefore its representatives bearing a particular responsibility to expressing the sentiments of and improving the lives of less fortunate African Americans.

Coverage of West's dissent in articles and columns in the black press often became tangential to these larger calls for black uplift. For example, every story that mentioned West's comments in the *Chicago Defender* focused on a larger concept of community self-sufficiency. The article addressing West's comments in the *Defender* reported Illinois Department of Human Services secretary Dr. Carol Adams' feeling that "Kanye told the truth, but we don't have time to be insulted. It's time to get busy and prepare for ourselves." While West's comments are regarded as "truth," the overall frame of the article suggests that rather than focus on the general negligence of the federal government, the black community must "get busy" and take care of themselves.

The *Defender* article presents a detailed discussion of "Operation Save Us," a program run by the Reverend Al Sampson that focused on "mobilizing a Black response" to Hurricane Katrina. This program is explained as including black mayors, ministers, contractors, architects, and lawyers in an effort "for Blacks to take control of their own destiny," so that no hurricane victims "feel alone as long as the doors of the African American church are open." Such discourse presented a clear call for a ground-roots response to the Hurricane based in the black community. Implicit in such discourse is that larger society cannot be counted on to come to the aid of African Americans facing crisis and disaster.

Such discourse in the black press is troubling because of the ways it dovetails with neoliberal critiques of the "welfare state" as a debilitating force that infantilizes its

citizens and robs them of their initiative. In particular this approach suggests that; 1) Black civil society possesses the resources to solve problems rooted in legacies of institutional inequality; and, 2) implies that rather than pressuring the government to correct its' benign neglect African Americans should simply accept the shortcomings of the status quo and "take care of our own."

Similarly, and more forcefully, two columns in the *Chicago Defender* by Joseph C. Phillips argued that even if "West is correct. Who cares?" The author goes on to argue that "Government is not supposed to be our friend" but is simply supposed to fulfill "a duty to protect our lives and property," something they failed at "at every level." Together the columns argue that "The compact we have with our family, friends and neighbors is slightly different….we 'care about' one another." Thus Phillips explains "we lend a helping hand where and when we are able with the knowledge that in our time of need, the community will likewise support us." Thus, the author argues, it is "the community" for which "we can rely" for "compassion."

Phillips concludes, "it is better for intellectuals and entertainers to ask: do Black people care about Black people…?" and that "the difference between" that question and "those of Mr. West is that one places responsibility and the power to change our communities in the hands of Black people—Black men—and does not rely on the benevolence on the government." Phillips then concludes his second column with a quote from Fredrick Douglas requesting that "the Negro" be given "a chance to sand on his own two legs!"

The patriarchy explicit in this discourse is troubling because of the way it positions black men as the sole leaders of the black community. Such discourse reflects

the way traditional and largely conservative discourses of black uplift continue to be popular within the black public sphere. Together these columns, while not ignoring the neglect of the government in fulfilling their responsibilities to the citizens of New Orleans and thus allowing West's comments a semblance of validity, suggest that ultimately with or without a responsible government the African American community, and according to Phillips, black men in particular, must rally their own resources and provide for one another rather than waiting on "the lords of the administrative state."

Similarly, a column by Asadullah A. Samad in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* addressed West's comments in passing as "truth," but primarily suggested that "We know the deal, and now all of America knows the deal. We, as Black Americans, have to step up like never before, in contributions, donations, giving up rooms in our homes, to help our people while they are in the process of being 'helped'." This call to "Black Americans" to help "our people" and the acknowledgement that the "truth" of West's words is something that has always been know in the black community once again presents a frame primarily centered in a philosophy of community uplift.

Samad represents the "help" provided from outside the black community as dubious (as demonstrated by his insertion of quotation marks around the word) and after discussing the ways in which "the government and the media got us lookin' real crazy right now," notes that "it's time for all Black America to step up to demonstrate that we're not as crazy as they're trying to make us look." Again the repeated use of the word "us," like "we" and "our people" constructs the plight of the victims of Hurricane Katrina as being one experienced by all of "Black America" and thus requiring all members of this community to "demonstrate" their responsibility to one another. Additionally

Samad's "got us lookin' real crazy" provides a critique of mainstream representations of Hurricane Katrina survivors in parity with that levied by west and calls on a tradition of urban language and familiarity with the African American community.

A call to Hip Hop's roots

In a different iteration of this frame, *Jet* framed West's dissent as a cry for help for "his people" and thus representative of the power and responsibility hip-hop artists have to the black community. Russell Simmons is quoted that "Black, poor people depend on rappers to express their frustrations and point of view. When one of those poets became empowered, he became the spokesperson for a lot of voiceless Americans. Kanye West is a hero to many of them." Thus West's comments are constructed as being reflective of not only the larger sentiments, but needs of the African American community, and hip hop is constructed as a form of communal expression that can work toward uplift.

Similarly, Michael Eric Dyson is quoted as feeling that West's dissent "was hip hop at its best. Thank God hip hop took a break from the booze, the broads and the bling to once again find its conscience and to raise up a voice that is clear, blunt and articulate in the best of its hip-hop tradition…It captures the sentiments of Blacks. A child shall lead them, and it took a hip-hopper to articulate that view point." Again such discourse constructs hip hop music, and Kanye West as a result of his comments, as having the potential to uplift the "conscience" of the black community by articulating its needs via mass media.

Congresswoman Maxine Waters is also quoted in the article as hoping that "he [West] will serve as an inspiration to other hip-hoppers who are making money and have

forgotten how to open their mouths and talk about what they said was on their minds when then got into hip hop." These discourses call on hip hops activist roots and recognize its unique and important role both in the black and mainstream public sphere as "the black CNN."[62]

The single article in the *New York Amsterdam News* that reported on Kanye West's comments presented a similar version of this frame by focusing on what West and New Orleans rapper Juvenile were personally doing to help those effected by Hurricane Katrina and how its readers, like these hip hop figures, could make a difference in the lives of Katrina victims. The article briefly mentions West's quote about George Bush but the majority of space is dedicated to discussing West's previous charity work with Live 8. Unlike mainstream newsmakers who did not report on West's self-criticisms about hesitating to give to the relief efforts and his subsequent commitments to help, the *Amsterdam News* reported that West was "calling my business manager to see what is the biggest amount I can give [sic]."

The *Amsterdam News* article goes on to explain that although rapper Juvenile lost his house in the Hurricane, he still considered himself "one of the fortunate ones" compared to those who "have nobody to reach out to for support." Juvenile is quoted with the request to "please keep our city, its people and our families in your prayers." While this coverage of West and Juvenile's personal crusades for the victims of Hurricane Katrina might be seen as perpetuating an individualist tone like that appearing in the mainstream press, importantly, the article goes on to construct these two figures as part of a larger community initiative to save the people of New Orleans. Specifically, the article

[62] This description is infamously credited to Public Enemy founder Chuck D. The earliest use of the Chuck D quote I can find is from an article titled "Yo! mtv unwrapped" in *Spin* magazine, Sept. 1991.

lists in detail what type of donations the Red Cross needs most; encouraging readers to lend "support to their fellow citizens."

This discourse frames West and Juvenile as members of a larger community with a responsibility to aid "our city, people and families" and their "fellow citizens," thus once again calling upon members of the black community who are "fortunate" to stand in solidarity with those who are less so not because of a neoliberal agenda that assumes charity not government can solve the problem, but because of an obligation to African Americans who share a common set of struggles.

Black Press Frame #2: Legacies of Institutional Inequality

Forty-five percent of black press coverage of Kanye West's post-Katrina dissent contextualized his remarks within discussions of the historical institutional neglect and discrimination experienced by African Americans, and how these histories were relevant to contemporary understandings of the hurricane's aftermath.

For example, *Jet* reported on comments by NAACP President Bruce Gordon that "Kanye's description of the way the media treats us is absolutely right. The double standard in the mainstream media when it comes to Black folk and others is long standing. This is just the Katrina version of bias." By characterizing a mainstream media "double standard" as being "long standing," Gordon and *Jet* provide a context for West's dissent that was largely overlooked in mainstream accounts. According to this frame, racist media depictions are only one example of an ongoing "bias" institutional bias.

Likewise, *Jet* quotes Gordon that "the likelihood of those on the bottom" of the "income scale" being black "is pretty high" and that therefore the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans reflects "that poor people are not at the table…and their needs

are not taken seriously." Again, *Jet*, via the words of a respected leader in the African American community, contextualizes the aftermath of the Hurricane as being the result of institutional factors whereby those who are "at the table" ignore of the "needs" of the poor and black.

Articles in the *Chicago Defender* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* compared Katrina's aftermath with other documented cases of racial neglect and abuse by the federal government. In both these cases, West's dissent was mentioned as a transition to a larger critique of institutional racism. The *Defender* quoted Representative Bobby Rush that "We have never seen Black bodies lying in the streets, even during the heyday of the Ku Klux Klan and lynchings," and noted the "pernicious racism" of "the 1940s and 50s" as an example of governmental abuse of "Black people." Similarly, reflecting on the lack of government response to the victims of Hurricane Katrina the *Sentinel* noted that "Blacks, historically, have never gotten their fair share out of government assisted relief efforts," going on to describe the failures of the Freedman's Bureau after the Civil War, National Recovery Assistance during the Great Depression, riot relief in the 1960s and 1990s, and the recovery efforts around other natural disasters that affected the lives of African Americans.

This type of large-scale institutional critique of racism was absent in mainstream coverage of West's comments. In the case of black newsmakers West's dissent was treated not only as valid but supported by historical documentation and memories of lived experience within the African American community. Thus, while the mainstream press largely ignored the portions of West's dissent that focused on broader trends in institutional inequality, the black press made these trends a primary topic of discussion.

Even when presenting a more individualist understanding of racism and poverty, the black press insisted on linking these issues to larger ideologies held by those with institutional power. For example, the *Sentinel* published an editorial on West's comments that focused primarily on discussing the potential impact of comments by two high profile white government figures in comparison to West's. The *Sentinel* editors reported on Barbara Bush feelings that because Katrina survivors being housed in the Houston Astrodome were "underprivileged anyway" things were "working very well for them," and those of "a Republican Louisiana politician" who had reported stated that "Katrina cleaned up all these black people in the projects like we have been trying to do for years."

While the *Sentinel* editors treated West's comments mostly neutrally, noting that he was not necessarily "an effective on-the spot spokesperson for the African American community" despite his musical successes, they simultaneously contended that both Barbara Bush and the unnamed Louisiana politician clearly "lived in the public/political arenas" and thus likely did reflect the views of members of their community. This focus on reporting the continued misunderstanding of and outright revulsion to poor blacks within elite government circles allowed *Sentinel* editors to implicitly support West's observations about the institutional "setup" of America without doing so outright. Ultimately, the editors argued, the comments of Bush and the Louisiana politician should be treated with much more ire than those of West because of their potential to do real harm to the African American community as a whole.

This frame constructed West's comments about the way in which "America is set up to help the poor, the black…as slowly as possible," as being old news to the African American community and something demonstrated regularly in the present day. While

this undoubtedly validated West's comments, rather than focusing much space on them journalists used the newsworthiness of the dissent as an opportunity to provide context about the very real institutional neglect of African Americans and the poor at institutional levels throughout American society.

Together, the two primary frames used by the black newsmakers in stories addressing West's dissent offered little specific discussion of his comments but rather focused on the given truth of inequality in the hurricane response, the political and social context of this inequality and the role African Americans could play in helping to uplift their community following the hurricane and in general. These frames can be understood as reflecting the unique marginalized position and history of African Americans and the black press.

Also notable here is that over forty-percent of stories in the black press presented explicit critiques of the mainstream media, interrogating dominant characterizations of Katrina survivors and to some extent those of West. There was also an overwhelming reliance on elite black sources in the black press stories examined here. In comparison to the mainstream press, where the African Americans asked to speak to West's dissent were also members of the entertainment industry, the black press mostly presented responses from black government officials, intellectuals and community leaders.

Discussion:

Despite the prevalence of mainstream frames that tended to ignore the critical content of Kanye West's dissent or frame it as being levied at an inappropriate time and place, it is notable that mainstream coverage of West's comments represents the least negative of any examined in this project. While on the surface it might be assumed that

this reflects a trend in which over time the dissent levied by African American celebrities has been constructed less and less negatively, or at least that dominant discourses have developed less explicit strategies for their marginalization, the results of this project show that this is simply not necessarily the case.

If fact, mainstream coverage of Sister Souljah and Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf was equally negative to coverage of Smith, Carlos and Kitt some twenty-five years prior. In fact, mainstream coverage of Souljah in 1992 presented the least amount of positive interpretations of any case in this project, and, the most popular frame used in constructing Souljah's dissent, that she was a reverse racist intent on initiating real violence against white Americans, was as sensational as frames that constructed Paul Robeson as a secret communist agent bent on tearing down American democracy. Thus, these findings suggest that mainstream interpretations of celebrity dissent are not only dependent on the progress of larger discourses of inclusion and equality in American society but how the racial and national politics at a particular historical moment, how a given celebrity is (mis)understood, and to some extent, the content of their dissent.[63]

Given this, I suggest that Kanye West, as a hip hop artist in 2005, was uniquely positioned in his celebrity because of the way hip hop's antagonistic relationship with the status quo had come to be accepted, and sometimes celebrated, in public discourses (Harris-Lacewell 2004). While West was not constructed as a valid or relevant contributor to political and social understandings within mainstream frames, research has shown that mainstream newsmakers did increase the frequency with which they

[63] After all, Robeson reportedly suggesting that African Americans would not fight for their country and Souljah reportedly suggesting that African Americans killing white Americans wasn't a big deal (although both misunderstandings of intent) can be understood as the most explicitly unapologetic and alternative discourse of any examined here.

addressed issues of racial and economic inequality in relation to Hurricane Katrina, even if problematically, after his dissent occurred (Stabile 2007; Jackson 2007).

Further, it is notable that prior to West's impromptu comments, African American leaders had not been successful in introducing a sustained discussion of racism into dominant discourses around the hurricane's aftermath. Thus, it appears that West's celebrity, while making it easy for mainstream newsmakers to dismiss him directly, also generated a space into which mainstream newsmakers felt it necessary to respond to the larger claims of inequality being levied from the margins at the time. Because mainstream viewers were likely familiar with West and witnesses to his dissent, mainstream newsmakers, while ignoring West's agency as a producer of political thought, nevertheless eventually tackled his claims (Jackson 2007).

These findings support Neal's (2002) assertion that hip hop as a third stream of black thought has been more successful at penetrating mainstream discourses than more traditional institutions of the black public sphere, such as the black press or members of the black intelligentsia groomed at historically black colleges and universities. Further, these findings suggest that while mainstream discourses remain problematic in their constructions of the role of African American celebrities might play as commentators on political and social issues, hip hop's mainstreaming in the twenty-first century may create a space in which black rappers in particular are less penalized for dissent than their counterparts in other realms of the entertainment industry.

This case can be understood as reflecting how the cross-over popularity of hip hop, and the simultaneous mainstream admiration of black cultural expression, can open up locations for the introduction of marginalized viewpoints in the mainstream public

sphere. At the same time, mainstream news makers explicit refusal to take West's comments seriously in their coverage of them demonstrates the way this admiration does not necessarily result in racially progressive understandings of African Americans as social agents (Ward 2001).

Of course, the fact that just thirteen years earlier, Sister Souljah, also a rapper and member of the hip hop generation of black thought, became the most maligned of the subjects examined here must be contextualized within a historical moment in which rap had not yet been accepted as a legitimate form of cultural expression and in fact faced various attacks from cultural elites. Further, in 1992 the nation as a whole was on the edge of racial warfare both ideologically and in some cases physically because of the events surrounding the beating of Rodney King.

Also, West should perhaps be understood in mainstream constructs as an answer to the "radical" threat that the rhetoric of figures like Souljah, Public Enemy, Ice-T and other's presented in the early 90s. West's "collegiate" suburban style of hip hop has been lauded in a way in mainstream discourses that "gangsta" styles and explicitly political styles likely never will be. Thus perhaps, West's celebrity persona, at least as it was constructed in mainstream publications, reflects a domesticization of the threat that more radical and unapologetic rappers pose to dominant social constructions of race and nation,

By constructing his comments within dominant limitations that only recognized their value to contribute or detract from entertainment and fundraising, West's dissent was spared from the most common denunciations received by the other celebrities examined in this project. Despite levying critiques of national shortcomings during

wartime, West was not accused of being un-American like Robeson and Kitt were. While Smith and Carlos' dissent was deemed un-American because of its display on a national stage and Abdul-Rauf's deemed so because of its links to symbolic ritualized displays of American patriotism, West's dissent was never constructed as reflected a lack of care or consideration for his country. In perhaps an irony only Eartha Kitt could appreciate, West's comments were rarely (less than ten percent of stories) primarily constructed as an affront to the President of the United States despite the fact that only he, and not Kitt, actually did make claims against an American President.

Conclusion

The press is a political instrument…It orders, shapes and directs the collective consciousness of its readers…The newspaper or periodical is not only a collection of facts and attitudes, it is a social experience, and its continual publication is itself a political process…One could accurately regard a newspaper as a printed rally.
—Theodore G. Vincent, p.15

As Vincent detailed, the creation and dispersal of news is inherently political. Despite the supposed striving of journalists for "fairness" and "objectivity," the decision of what to report, how to report it, and who to report it for is itself a value-laden process. Plentiful research has demonstrated that news framing of raced topics and figures can have a profound effect on individual opinions which, in turn, impact political and social behavior (Iyengar 1991; Gamson & Modigliani 1994; Mendelberg 2001; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997; Kinder & Sanders 1996; Entman & Rojecki 2001). Given this, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the role the press, mainstream and African American, has played in supporting the evolution of certain worldviews about race and black celebrity since before the civil rights movement.

The actions of the subjects at the core of this research demonstrate the way members of oppressed collectives can not only individually resist dominant understandings of race and nation but, in the case of celebrities who have unique access to dominant spaces, also publicly challenge such constructions. As Hartmann (2003), Bass (2002), and Hall (1992) have noted, the sport and entertainment industries have provided the few, and undoubtedly the most visible, places for agential action by African Americans and the introduction of forms of expression based in African American experiences to mass audiences. Thus, African American celebrities, while often limited in

institutional power can and have used their own bodies, the access granted to them because of their specific talent and the way their identities are understood in relation to this talent, to interject "blackness" into spaces and conversations that otherwise "had no place for nonnational identities such as race, class, religion, or gender" (Hartmann, p.xv).

Data Comparisons

Comparisons of the characterizations of black celebrity dissent by the mainstream and black press reveal some intriguing trends. Contrary to expectations that might assume that overtime the mainstream press would cover black celebrity dissent less negatively, this was not the case. In fact, the mainstream press' coverage of black celebrity dissent in the 1990s was less positive than, and about equally negative to, coverage of such dissent in the 1960s. The fact that mainstream newsmakers provided the most (although still small amounts) of positive coverage of black celebrity dissent in the 1960s suggests that mainstream journalists were more aware and sympathetic to the experiences of black Americans in the 1960s than they were twenty years before *or* twenty years later.

This finding is consistent with Winant's (2004) tracing of the shift from racial domination to racial hegemony in U.S. culture. That mainstream newsmakers clearly had little sympathy for alternative views of race and nation expressed by African Americans in the 1940s is unsurprising given the still widespread acceptance of racial domination (e.g. segregation) during the era. However, as de jure forms of domination were broken down during the civil rights movement and U.S. society in general struggled with integrating itself, not only in terms of race but counterculture in general, in the 1950s and 1960s, mainstream journalists' coverage evidences more sympathy with and understanding of the black experience than at previous times.

Importantly, the 1960s was followed by a cultural backlash in which dominant discourses aligned themselves against attacks of de facto racism, insisting that racial progress had been accomplished during the civil rights movement and any further activism by blacks was too radical. Thus, these findings reflect that by the 1990s such discourses of racial hegemony had not only taken a hold on national discourse in general but journalists' understandings specifically so that contentions of inequality and challenges to concepts of nation were treated as completely unreasonable and undermined through a reliance on colorblind rhetoric and an ideological amnesia that ignored ongoing inequality.

On the other hand, negative coverage of black celebrity dissent in the black press did decrease across time. This is likely due to the freedom black newsmakers experienced as de jure forms of racial domination were overturned and threats of censorship and other political consequence for presenting counter-normative interpretations lessened. In fact, two of the figures the mainstream press offered the least amount of positive characterizations of—Souljah and Abdul-Rauf—were treated the least negatively in the black press. However, coverage of Souljah in 1992 was less positive than coverage of either Kitt or Smith and Carlos some twenty-five years earlier in the black press. Thus, it appears that as well as evolving professional freedoms, the form of dissent also influenced black newsmakers ability to present such dissent positively, with seemingly explicitly militant dissent, like Souljah's, disabling positive characterizations.

Notably, in most of the cases examined here, the black press presented more neutral and/or a more even distribution of positive, negative and neutral coverage than the mainstream press suggesting that the black press aligns more strongly with the concept of

a democratic public sphere, where multiple perspectives are made available to the public it serves, than the mainstream press. The variety of perspectives presented by the black press reflects a greater diversity of opinion and acknowledgement of internal community debates among newsmakers at the black press as well as the marginal professional positionality of such newsmakers who often had to rely on dominant officials and sources for information about figures and events and therefore could not avoid the presentation of dominant as well as alternative discourses in their coverage.

Framing Trends

	Paul Robeson	**Eartha Kitt**	**Carlos & Smith**	**Sister Souljah**	**Abdul-Rauf**	**Kanye West**
MS Frames						
	Communist Instigator	Attacker	Sport & Politics don't Mix	Reverse Racism	Money=No Oppression	Entertainment Value only
	Ideological Battle Ground	Breach of Etiquette	Unpatriotic	Politics as Usual	Guaranteed Rights (but don't use them)	Politics & Charity/ Entertainment don't mix
BP Frames						
	Racist Climate	Truth-teller	Community Uplift/ Solidarity	Bill Clinton Betrayer	Guaranteed Rights VS. Inequality	Community Uplift/ Solidarity
	Complicity of Officials	Freedom of expression	Truth-tellers	Mainstream Distraction	Islam as Complex and Valid	Legacies of Racial neglect

Table 1: Primary Frames by case and press.

The above chart lists the primary frames each press constructed for understanding each case examined in this study. While these frames are in many ways specific to the

historical moment and the identities of the celebrity in question, several trends are apparent. First, the mainstream press tends to present frames that 1) construct African American celebrities who present challenges to the status quo as a physical and/or ideological threat to the majority of the country or its representatives and, 2) fixate on how the introduction of alternative discourses violate normative expectations of behavior.

Further mainstream framing tends to severely exaggerate the amount of power black celebrities have over other African Americans and the fate of the nation as a whole. Paul Robeson is constructed as having the power to bring about the downfall of democracy, Sister Souljah is constructed as having the power to initiate a mass murderous uprising, Kanye West is constructed as having the power to stop people from donating to those in need. Also, mainstream press frames tend to suggest that the mere existence of African Americans celebrities, especially in sport, undermines the validity of their claims of inequality—in Smith and Carlos' case sport is treated as a sort of Eden of fairness and understanding in which race should not be acknowledged, while Mahmoud Abdul Rauf's ability to make millions of dollars is assumed to be a contradiction to the existence of oppression.

The primary frames in each case in the black press, while unique in some ways, also reflect several similar understandings across time. Black newsmakers tend to contextualize black celebrity dissent within 1) the reality of ongoing institutional level inequality and 2) community-level debates about the appropriate means to and possibilities for racial progress in American society. Both of these constructions are largely absent from the mainstream press across time and at their root focus on treating black experiences as valid and important. The primary frames in the black press also

regularly seek to specifically respond to dominant discourses. Notably, at no historical moment examined here did the mainstream press appear to respond to discourses with in the black public sphere, a reflection of the privilege at work in the relationship between the two spheres.

Further, it appears that the concept of celebrity itself is understood differently within the black and mainstream public spheres. The black public sphere tends to construct celebrities as valid spokespeople for the African American community who should tell it like it is on issues of race as experienced by this community. On the other hand, the mainstream public sphere appears to define celebrity solely based on the role they are expected to perform as entertainers, which at its root requires black celebrities to embrace an apolitical persona.

Limitation & Future Directions

Limitations of this study include the obvious specificity that each case must be treated with given the particular historical and political contexts and the celebrities involved. However, despite contextual difference similarities remain regarding the general trends in the mainstream and black press for covering non-normative black celebrity dissent.

This study does not present an uninterrupted linear historical analysis as I have not included cases from the 1950s, 70s or 80s. However, this is a limitation I plan to address in the future as I continue with this research. I anticipate that the inclusion of cases from these decades will only make the findings presented here stronger.

Lastly, I did not examine any newspapers published in the Southern United States in this project but rather compared coverage from America's largest and most influential

news centers. However, I plan to also address this limitation in the future and am excited by the possibilities of the difference and similarities that may exist in ideological framing between Southern sources and those already examined here.

Discussion

In every case examined here, African American celebrities were reprimanded in mainstream news for bringing counter-discourses into traditionally dominant spaces. Dissent expressed by black celebrities that fell outside of the expected norms of protest traditionally assigned to African Americans was consistently constructed as a threat to normative concepts of nation. Thus, there has been little change in the sharp negative reaction to black celebrities who choose to leverage their access to mass audiences to explicitly address racism and other inequalities.

Further, the non-normative forms and spaces of the dissent examined in this project became central to how the messages being communicated by the celebrities in question were understood. Because these celebrities did not rely on traditional Civil Rights actions, like marches, or expressions, like Negro spirituals or Christian-style preaching, the spaces in which their dissent took place was often fixated on. In mainstream discourse, concert stages, white house dinners, Olympic podiums, newspaper interviews, basketball courts and disaster fundraisers were all framed by media makers as spaces that should be entirely void of dissenting political opinion. Of course, such frames ignore both the innately political nature of many of these spaces and essentially leave no public location in which it is acceptable for a black public figure to express dissent.

At the same time, specific constructions of decorum, tradition, and ritual dominantly articulated to particular spaces all play a significant role in mainstream

understandings of black celebrity dissent and a violation of any of these reason enough for severe denunciation. Further, the forms of these denunciations clearly depend upon the social identities of the celebrity in question with intersectional factors like gender and religion playing a significant role in how such violations are constructed. In Kitt's case, her "breach of etiquette" was simply a gendered way of representing her as a violator of idealized constructs of white womanhood. Abdul-Rauf's "confused" position on the anthem was such because it violated dominant white, Christian narratives of citizenship. West violated dominant boundaries of charity and entertainment and Carlos and Smith violated dominant discourses that constructed sport as an apolitical and egalitarian institution.

Thus, in every case the presence of an African American entertainer or athlete was only acceptable in mainstream discourses so long as this presence did not violate the expectations of black celebrities to operate as spectacle and the subject of dominant gaze. While dominant discourses suggested that the opportunities and successes of the likes of Smith and Carlos and Abdul-Rauf demonstrated the nation's commitment to egalitarian values, any dissent that used the access granted by opportunity and success to suggest these values were mythical and unfulfilled was constructed as unreasonable and unrealistic. At the same time, such constructions clearly morph over time in ways that line up with political events and hegemonic shifts in racial representation and discourse.

Thus, black celebrities have and continue to be subject to a unique set of social criteria for mainstream acceptance that expects them to perform their crafts according to sanctioned scripts while ignoring their identities as members of a still oppressed group. The severe sanctions that befell once well-liked figures like Robeson and Abdul-Rauf

demonstrate "how quickly the rules of national belonging change if an individual does not subscribe to the tenets of citizenship in a sanctioned way" (Bass 2002).

Overall, mainstream news coverage of African American dissent continues to suggest that in order to be free of social sanction by dominant white society black celebrities must remain silent on the issues that affect their communities most. Thus, African American celebrities remain severely limited when it comes to addressing issues of race, class and nationhood in mainstream discourses with hegemonic discourses constantly evolving to insure this. Fifty-five years after Paul Robeson was demonized and destroyed for refusing to shut up and sing, black celebrities are still being reprimanded for being true to themselves and alternative discourses are still being treated as unreasonable.

Certainly the limitations placed on the dissent of black celebrities have opened up within the mainstream public sphere—Kanye West was likely never in danger or being lynched as Paul Robeson was. However, severe economic sanctions, as well as real physical threats, continue to befall black celebrities who speak out against dominant ways of understanding—Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf could most easily speak to this. While crossover fame gave every subject examined in this project the opportunity to insert alternative ways of understanding into dominant discourses, once a moment of alternative expression by a black celebrity is over they have virtually no power to influence how it is understood, often not even being called on by mainstream journalists to offer further comment or explanation.

At the same time, it appears that in the case of a black celebrity like Kanye West with crossover fame and real institutional power (he runs his own record label) in the

entertainment industry, black public figures do have the power to insert alternative discourses into the mainstream public sphere without losing their livelihoods. Thus, I suggest that what allowed the severity of the dominant social sanctions that befell other celebrities like Smith and Carlos or Robeson and Abdul-Rauf can be linked to the lack of concrete institutional power many black celebrities have despite their high levels of visibility. Undoubtedly, a figure like West being able to own his own record label and the rights to his music is a reflection of some progress in terms of both race and labor in the United States.

Certainly, had Paul Robeson owned the rights to "Old Man River," been allowed to be a voting member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, or been listed contractually as a creative partner in productions of "Othello," it would have been more difficult, at least in the entertainment industry, to simply ignore his citizenship rights. Further Robeson's location as a lone black crossover celebrity made his position particularly vulnerable (Duberman 1988). In 1949, no portion of the entertainment industry was dependent economically on the production of black superstars, as the music industry is today, and Robeson had no cohort of celebrity or political power players to come to his aid. By the late 20th-century black celebrities undoubtedly have more cultural capital and the increasing integration of political and entertainment realms has allowed for their backing by powerful allies like Jesse Jackson (in Souljah's case) and Russell Simmons (in West's).

Further, while intersections of social identity worked to confine media interpretations of black celebrity dissent, this project also found that these intersections worked to open up unique opportunities for expression. For example, Kitt's celebrity

status was based largely in her persona as a “sex kitten” and her presence at the White House justified primarily in terms of her gender rather than her race. Thus, the concept of intersectionality should be considered in future research not only in terms of the way it constructs experiences and public understandings of particular groups and figures (Collins 2000), but also in terms of how it allows figures access to unique spaces from which to speak.

As for the black press, the findings of the cases examined in this project support the work of Squires (2002) and others who have identified the black press as an alternative public sphere that offers its members counter-narratives unavailable in dominant media. In particular, coverage of dissent by black celebrities is given a level of credibility and validity in African American news sources that remains absent from dominant constructions. By providing the black experience and black cultural expression primacy, the black press accepts racism and institutional histories of neglect as a given. This larger contextualization of inequality in America makes the black press a space in which actions like Kitt’s, Smith and Carlos’, West’s and Souljah’s are not seen as out of place or dangerous, purely entertainment, or inappropriate.

Rather, the black press consistently treats the non-traditional dissent of African American celebrities as part of a larger discussion of efforts to advance the needs of the black community. Within this context, black celebrities’ statements are not always celebrated, in fact sometimes some members of the black press, as in the cases of Robeson and Carlos and Smith, have found such dissent counterproductive in the larger battle for racial equality. Other times, black journalists have not found the dissent of

black celebrities particularly relevant one way or the other as was the case in *Chicago Defender* coverage of West.

Thus, black newsmakers tend to contribute a more diverse set of constructions for understanding the role of black celebrity dissent and a more sustained critique of institutional inequalities at various levels of U.S. society. Further, the black press has consistently, even when under extreme political pressure, as in 1949, offered a critique of the mainstream press' constructions of black celebrity dissent. Within this critique, black newsmakers, while making sense of particular moments of dissent with varying rhetoric and intensity have contended that: 1) a double standard exists in the treatment of blacks who offer dissenting opinions in comparison to white members of society; and 2) that often the very ideas deemed inappropriate in dominant discourses are simply a reflection of the truth of hierarchies of race and class within our nation. Such framing of black celebrity dissent as truth-telling draws on what Godonoo (2008) has described as the African American tradition of "speaking truth to power." Such understandings construct criticisms that demonize black celebrity dissent as illogical and as significant contributors to the maintenance of ideologies that perpetuate inequality by ignoring its existence.

While the alternative frames presented by the black press have undoubtedly contributed invaluable understandings to members of the black public sphere, what remains troubling is that these understandings have never been widely consumed by the majority of members of society outside of this sphere and that over time the black press has lost more and more of its reach and readership (Jacobs 2000; Vogel 2001). At the same time, the goal of the original founders of the black press, that eventually integration

in the mainstream press would make the black press obsolete, appears to have only been partially fulfilled.

Certainly, since the founding of the black press in 1827, mainstream newsrooms, in both labor and editorial control have become more diverse and mainstream news content more racially progressive and inclusive. However one must wonder how Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm would feel about the coverage of the victims of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and of the countless other documented misrepresentations of the African American community that continue to occur (Berger 2009; Caliendo & McIlwain 2006; Jackson 2006; Entman & Rojecki 2001; Mendelberg 2001). Such coverage along with the stagnation of efforts to diversify mainstream newsrooms some hundred and eighty years after Cornish and Russwurm wrote that "Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations, in things that concern us dearly," is sobering to say the least (Newkirk 2000).

Thus, in the twenty-first century, those of us concerned with issues of equality and the public sphere must face a society in which the primary traditional voice for black counter-narratives struggles to survive while mainstream narratives that continue to perpetuate problematic understandings of race and nation that marginalize entire segments of the population make claims to be "post-racial." At the same time, the question of the power an individual celebrity has to progressively influence dominant discourse must be understood within the complicated power relations that construct both race and celebrity and limit media economies in our society.

Given the always limited and shrinking reach of the black press, a celebrity whose goal is to draw widespread attention to a particular issue must engage with the

mainstream public sphere no matter how problematic subsequent understandings might be. While expression of frustration and racial fatigue have never been treated as particularly surprising or new by black journalists (who struggle to contribute to anti-racist discourses every day), in mainstream culture these expressions continue to be deemed newsworthy because of the challenges they create to the otherwise seamless ideologies that continue to privilege whiteness in our society. While such moments of dissent may be treated as relevant purely on the basis of celebrity involvement and controversy they nevertheless reach audiences and generate discussions that might be otherwise be altogether invisible.

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