

Committing a Movement to Memory: Media, Civil Rights, and American  
Collective Memory

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Margaret and Edward Manning, Elvina and Edward Buckley and Edward Manning, Jr. and Gerard Manning, both of whom the universe took far too soon.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	2
Chapter 2: The Selma to Montgomery March .....	35
Chapter 3: The March on Washington .....	73
Chapter 4: The Chicago Freedom Movement .....	139
Chapter 5: Open Housing Fights in Milwaukee .....	175
Chapter 6: Conclusion .....	199
Works Cited .....	223

## List of Tables

Table 1 .....	82
Table 2 .....	83
Table 3 .....	116
Table 4 .....	117

## List of Figures

Figure 1 .....	39
Figure 2 .....	40
Figure 3 .....	76
Figure 4 .....	77
Figure 5 .....	146
Figure 6 .....	147
Figure 7 .....	182
Figure 8 .....	183

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Rosa Parks greatly revered the work and philosophies of Malcolm X.<sup>1</sup> She also supported causes that resonated with Black Power groups, sat on the dais at the 1963 March on Washington, spoke at the rally that ended the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march, and attended seminars on community organizing at Tennessee's Highlander Folk School before and after she chose to remain seated on a Montgomery, Alabama bus. If one were to rely on popular media accounts alone for an understanding of Parks' life, it is unlikely that one would be familiar with all, or perhaps any, of these storylines. Despite her position as a universal symbol of the Southern front of the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, we collectively know very little about her life, her work outside of Montgomery, and her contributions to the African American freedom struggle beyond 1955. Newspaper coverage produced at the time of her death parroted a familiar narrative: Parks sat one day on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, thus launching the civil rights movement and the career of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.. As the "mother of the civil rights movement," Parks is remembered in a decidedly gendered manner as "quiet," "small," "individual," "a seamstress" and her act a "simple" one.<sup>2</sup> This version of Parks' life is more akin to an "inspirational fable" than anything Parks actually lived.<sup>3</sup> As historian Janet Theoharis has most recently shown, Mrs. Parks is better remembered as a strong, courageous activist who dedicated her life to social justice issues in the United States and around the world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jeanne Theoharis, "The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 319-320. References throughout for Malcolm.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 7-13, and numerous articles unearthed in this study.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., references throughout.



Ella Baker represents another glaring omission from the collective canons of civil rights memory. In fact, media outlets do not acknowledge Baker's legacy in any meaningful capacity. Her life-long dedication to community organizing and activism is punctuated by its variety. Her efforts encompassed Northern groups, Southern fronts, many decades, and cooperation with an array of people fighting for varied causes. Baker began her work in Harlem during the 1930s, joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) staff in the 1940s, helped Martin Luther King, Jr. launch the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the 1950s, served as an anchor for the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in the 1960s, and supported campaigns to free Angela Davis and end apartheid in South Africa during the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Despite this expansive list of civil rights projects, media outlets rarely mention, let alone commemorate, Baker, even on the passing of notable civil rights anniversaries. The disparity in media presence between these two figures cannot be understated. For example, a search in ProQuest Newsstand for "Rosa Parks" brings up over 40,000 entries; a search for "Ella Baker" returns a mere 1400.<sup>6</sup> This imbalanced treatment speaks volumes about the type of civil rights figures media choose to incorporate into popular commemoration narratives.

As illustrated by the above examples of Rosa Parks and Ella Baker, our nation collectively remembers a highly selective version of the civil rights chapter of the African American freedom struggle. These selections are codified along the axes of gender,

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<sup>5</sup> Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1998).

<sup>6</sup> ProQuest Newsstand was used because it contains substantial collections of both African American and white-dominated newspapers.

geography, the urban, the rural, direct non-violence, and Black Power, among others. As a result, certain events like the March on Washington are lionized yearly while others—local campaigns in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Albany, Georgia, for example—receive limited, if any, commemoration. Similarly, Southern civil rights efforts are positioned decidedly within civil rights movement frameworks while Northern struggles are characterized as part of the Black Power era or, as is more often the case, largely left out of civil rights narratives. Scholar Houston Baker points to the realm of memory as one place where these inclusions and omissions become solidified. Baker argues that the perpetuation of "nostalgic memories" within the public sphere, such as the superficial representations of Martin Luther King, Jr. that surface during many national civil rights commemorations, may contribute to the myopic versions of civil rights history that frequently circulate within American society.<sup>7</sup> These nostalgic portrayals present a uni-dimensional view of the past concentrated on "golden virtues, golden men, and sterling acts."<sup>8</sup> Additionally, this "purposive construction" of nostalgia "writes the revolution as a well-passed aberration" and "actively substitutes allegory for history."<sup>9</sup> Despite the nostalgic character of many civil rights narratives, American society routinely invokes civil rights history, icons, and symbols to make sense of contemporary events. A recent *Time Magazine* cover juxtaposing a black and white image of anti-police brutality protests in Baltimore, Maryland with the caption "Baltimore, 1968, 2015" illustrates this phenomenon well.<sup>10</sup> This practice largely discounts ebbs and flows in racial progress occurring between the movement's end and today and generates concrete societal

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<sup>7</sup> Houston, Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture*: 7(1), 1994.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Cover, *Time Magazine*, April 29, 2015.

implications for people of all races and ethnicities because commemoration and utilization of memory can influence politicians, public policy, national discourses, and personal attitudes about race.

Media outlets and those who produce media texts are in a unique position to create, convey, and perpetuate versions American collective memory—nostalgic and otherwise—surrounding the civil rights movement.<sup>11</sup> As Stuart Hall notes, media texts and the language embedded within them constitute a primary vehicle for the "production and exchange" of cultural meanings.<sup>12</sup> Through their work as a "system of representation," "discursive formations" give cultural "objects, people, and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation that we bring to them" and thus work to:

"define what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject or site of social activity; what knowledge is considered useful, relevant, and 'true' in that context; and what sorts of persons or subjects embody its characteristics."<sup>13</sup>

According to Hall, "the main point is that meaning does not *inhere* in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is a result of a signifying practice—a practice that *produces meaning*, that *makes things mean*."<sup>14</sup>

Following Hall's paradigm, civil rights memory and the media outlets that perpetuate those memories constitute a contested cultural terrain on which meanings about race are not fixed, but created. The ways in which these media outlets articulate the movement's legacy and the important ways these outlets define "the construction of

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<sup>11</sup> Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, ed. *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), Genevieve Fabre and Robert O' Meally, ed. *History and Memory in African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), , Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction," *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall (London, Sage Publications, 1997), 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

identity and the marking of difference" influence which versions of civil rights history prevail in American society and which are relegated to more subaltern discursive spheres.

<sup>15</sup> For example, when notable media outlets such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Huffington Post* characterize Black Lives Matter demonstrations prompted by the killings of Mike Brown, Eric Gardner, and Freddy Gray as a "modern civil rights movement," "today's civil rights movement," or a "21st century civil rights movement" or when the same outlets link the death of Trayvon Martin and with the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, they perpetuate meanings about present racial issues directly rooted in a specific, nationally palatable civil rights history.<sup>16</sup>

Because media texts function as warehouses for memory and archives about the past, media outlets are often actively involved in what scholar Michael Kammen describes as the routine distortion of the American past to preserve national unity.<sup>17</sup> The "silence" of the press and other media in the two decades following the Civil War provides one example of this tendency. Only around the 25th anniversary of major battles did mediated conversations about the war begin to occur.<sup>18</sup> These conversations, first interrogated by W.E.B. Du Bois in *Black Reconstruction in America*, were quickly sanitized of "the history of racial issues in general and slavery in particular...Partial

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>16</sup> Numerous dominant media articles included in this study's sample for the March on Washington chapter linked Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin. For an example of this linkage see: Martin Luther King, III, "My Father's Dream is Still Unrealized," *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel L. Schacter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 334. See also: Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How we Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), Carolyn Kitch, *Pages from the Past: History and Memory in American Magazines* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), among others.

<sup>18</sup> Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion," 334.

amnesia became the order of the day."<sup>19</sup> Du Bois notes that Civil War histories, especially those penned within 100 years of the war, "tend to discuss American slavery so impartially, that in the end nobody seems to have done wrong and everybody was right. Slavery appears to have been thrust upon unwilling, helpless America, while the South was blameless in becoming its center."<sup>20</sup> The common narrative emerging after the Civil War all but eliminated the triumphs of emancipation from white America's consciousness. Fifty years following the civil rights movement, the common narrative locates the South as the lone site of civil rights struggle and Southern racism as the paramount "enemy." Despite being the site of numerous civil rights marches, protests, housing campaigns, and riots, the Northern civil rights front is rarely commemorated in the same way as the Southern arena. This fundamental disconnect embodies one way society, and the media that circulate its narratives, articulate meanings about America's racial turning points through cultural systems of representation.

The recent and approaching 50th anniversaries of landmark civil rights movement events such as the 1963 March on Washington present an important opportunity to examine and reflect on this cache of memories—some of which are decidedly nostalgic—and the purposes for which they have been deployed.<sup>21</sup> Today, how we commemorate and remember civil rights through journalistic media—and, as illustrated above, how we do not—remains largely uninvestigated.<sup>22</sup> What do media outlets describe when they

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<sup>19</sup> Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion," 334. See also, W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 714.

<sup>21</sup> Romano and Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, Fabre and O' Meally, *History and Memory in African American Culture*, Brian E. Ward, ed., *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> While scholars have addressed civil rights commemoration in film, literature, performance, and to some degree television, fewer studies have looked at journalistic media such as newspapers, television news, or

write about the "civil rights movement?" Has invoking the movement always meant the same thing? Who do media producers consider actors within this movement? Why are those people granted a place in the discourse and not others? What are the legacies for this movement as articulated by media outlets? How might the above conceptions, accounts, and legacies differ among different communities? Failure to assess these questions puts media outlets at risk of perpetuating a uni-dimensional view of the civil rights movement unable to fully serve the needs of publics that celebrate the movement's triumphs, utilize its legacy, and continue to seek equality through its lessons. Because many movement participants have passed away or are nearing the end of their lives, few exist with the knowledge and experience to contest these uni-dimensional representations or provide alternative narratives.

The goal of this research is to more fully understand via the lenses of collective memory and critical race theory how newspapers frame their commemorations of the civil rights movement and how those commemorations may influence media's role in generating meanings around American collective memory of that era. The work social movements do in the world does not end upon a movement's "official" conclusion. Moreover, the contested terrain of cultural meaning-making about social movements through discourse shifts continuously as social political, and historical conditions change. Therefore, as a society we need to investigate not only how media portrayed the civil rights movement during its so-called "active period" but also how institutions of the press continue to portray its memory and legacy in the years since its "end." Through a mixed-methods comparison of African American press and dominant media coverage of

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magazines. See *The Civil Rights in American Memory, History and Memory in African American Culture*. Jill A. Edy's study *Troubled Pasts: News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest* perhaps comes the closest to this work's approach, though Edy does not focus specifically on the civil rights movement writ large.

meaningful civil rights milestones, this study also seeks to uncover similarities and differences in content between the two types of publications.<sup>23</sup> As Stuart Hall and numerous other scholars of media and race have illustrated, "the media are not only a powerful source of ideas about race. They are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated."<sup>24</sup> Jane Rhodes notes that "throughout the 150 years since the abolition of slavery...the media has been instrumental in circulating and reifying racialized ideas and images and in maintaining a social and political climate that reinforced blacks' second-class status."<sup>25</sup> The African American press often highlights different people, facets, and causes of given historical events than dominant media and as such provide a "counterhegemonic" force within the process of cultural meaning-making.<sup>26</sup> As Catherine Squires explains, African American press texts work to "transform or destroy dominant definitions of African American identity as part of the struggle against legal and social oppression in America."<sup>27</sup> To unearth a nuanced assessment of the civil rights movement, we must examine and understand how marginalized voices might consider the movement because "groups on the margins of

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<sup>23</sup> Catherine Squires provides useful framework for distinguishing between "Black-owned," "Black-oriented," and "Black-related" media in *African Americans in the Media* (2009). This study will adhere to Squires' framework when discussing African American press publications.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*, edited by Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA), 1995, 20.

<sup>25</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Catherine R. Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line: The Press and Multi-Racial America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Ronald Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.: A Detailed and Understanding Report on what the Black Press is and How it Came to Be* (Ames: Iowa State Press, 1989), Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), among many others.

<sup>27</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 3.

society—political, racial, and economic minorities—seek to refute mainstream interpretations and insert their own voices into how things are remembered."<sup>28</sup>

Today, racially oriented conflict is manifesting itself within America's social fabric in ways eerily reminiscent of the civil rights era. The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Freddy Gray, and others reveal the troubling persistence of many of the racisms civil rights activists sought to eradicate during the 1950s and 1960s. As illustrated above, well-known media outlets themselves are connecting past and present in ways that demonstrate how little media discourses about race have changed in the intervals between the civil rights movement and our current moment.<sup>29</sup> Understanding the ways media generate and perpetuate cultural meaning surrounding civil rights memory sheds light not only on where we as a nation have been, but also the direction in which we are—perhaps imminently—headed.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the above considerations, this research investigates the following questions:

RQ 1: How do newspapers, both white-dominated and Black-oriented, commemorate the civil rights movement? What facets of the movement do they write about? Who do they designate as important figures? How do the facets of the civil rights movement invoked in media coverage of civil rights commemorations change over time in both types of media?

RQ 2: What similarities and differences exist between Black-oriented and white-dominated press coverage of civil rights movement anniversaries and commemorations? What can differences in this coverage tell us about how collective memory of the civil rights movement may differ between readers of ethnic and white-dominated media publications?

RQ 3: What can African American and dominant press newspaper framings of civil rights commemorations tell us about media's role in constructing and perpetuating cultural meanings about the movement in the years after its traditionally accepted end? What

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>29</sup> "Cover," *Time Magazine*, April 30, 2015.



impacts might these collective remembrances and the meanings associated with them have on American race relations at different points our nation's history?

## **Literature Review**

This study combines a critical media studies paradigm with literature from the realms of collective memory and critical race theory. Together, these bodies of knowledge highlight the attributes and importance of collective memory, the centrality of race to American society, the intersectional nature of identity, and the significant role media play in shaping perceptions of our world.

### *Collective Memory*

Collective memory theory draws its influences from many different disciplines and fields of study. Researchers agree, however, that the primary inquiry of any piece of collective memory scholarship should revolve around "who wants whom to remember what, and why."<sup>30</sup> Because of the "living" quality of memory, "societies are both constituted by their memories and, in their daily interactions, rituals, and exchanges, constitute these memories."<sup>31</sup> Scholars also largely concur that this process functions in spite of individual differences. Frameworks for what societies remember or commemorate are sustained by prominent institutions that "clearly support some histories more than others, provide narrative patterns and exemplars of how individuals can and should remember, and stimulate public memory in ways and for reasons that have little to

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<sup>30</sup> Alan Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," in *The Collective Memory Reader* ed. Jeffrey K. Olicks, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 198. See also: Peter Burke, "History as Social Memory," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, 191 and Kendall R. Phillips, Introduction to *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, *Framing Public Memory*, 2.

do with the individual."<sup>32</sup> Which institutions facilitate so called "official and unofficial" memories differ with each case study, however, it must be noted that "official and unofficial memories of the past may differ sharply and the unofficial memories, which have been relatively little studied, are sometimes historical forces in their own right."<sup>33</sup> Because many representations of civil rights memory are state-sanctioned in some form, it is vital that researchers examine what comprises these memories. Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford stress that "state actors seek, with varied success, to shape historical memories to suit their perceived political and ideological agendas."<sup>34</sup>

The difference between history and memory is a fundamental question that must be answered when employing a collective memory paradigm. Clearly, the realms of memory and history are deeply intertwined, and thus are rarely viewed as wholly separate by contemporary memory scholars.<sup>35</sup> Maurice Halbwachs represents one of the first scholars to juxtapose the two fields. He contends that memory comprises "a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive...History, however, gives the impression that everything...is transformed from one period to another."<sup>36</sup> Paul Ricoeur extends Halbwachs' contention by noting three steps for articulating the relationship between memory and history: "First, memory establishes the meaning of the past. Second, history introduces a critical dimension into

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<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey K. Olicks, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, "Introduction," *The Collective Memory Reader*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Burke, *The Collective Memory Reader*, 191.

<sup>34</sup> Romano and Raiford, "Introduction," *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, xvii

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Nora, a highly respected leader in the rebirth of collective memory studies in the late 1980s, wholly separated history and memory. More recent scholarship has moved away from this stance, recognizing the fundamental connection between the two areas of study.

<sup>36</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, "The Collective Memory," *The Collective Memory Reader*, 142-143.

our dealings with the past. Third and finally, the insight by which history...enriches memory is imposed on the anticipated future through the dialectic between memory's space of experience and the horizon of expectation."<sup>37</sup> Memory ultimately "asserts its priority over history" claims Ricoeur, because memory "ensures a consciousness of...continuity between past and present and a feeling of belonging."<sup>38</sup> Utilizing this body of theory therefore allows researchers "to shift our focus from time to temporalities, and thus to understand what categories people, groups, and cultures employ to make sense of their lives"<sup>39</sup>

Several other key components of memory must be briefly outlined: its social character, its grounding in the present, and its relationship with media texts. Social understandings of collective memory tradition begin with Emile Durkheim's idea of a "close connection between mechanisms of collective memory on the one hand, and institutions guaranteeing the collective identity in social life, on the other."<sup>40</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, Durkheim's student, augmented and refined Durkheim's premise noting that "often we deem ourselves the originators of thoughts and ideas, feelings and passions, actually inspired by some group...we are unaware that we are but an echo."<sup>41</sup> As time progresses, argues Halbwachs, "memories become generalized [and] require a social context for their preservation."<sup>42</sup> Michael Schudson understands memory as purely social, never individualized because it is substantiated "in the form of rules, laws, standardized

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Memory—History—Forgetting," *The Collective Memory Reader*, 476.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

<sup>39</sup> Olicks, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy, *The Collective Memory Reader*, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Werner Gephart, "Memory and the Sacred: The Cult of Anniversaries and Commemorative Rituals in the Light of *The Elementary Forms*" in *On Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life.*, ed. Allen, N.J., Pickering, W.S.F., Miller, W. Watts (Routledge: London, 1998), 129.

<sup>41</sup> Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory Reader*, 139.

<sup>42</sup> Jeffery K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge Press, 2007), 19.

procedures, and records, a whole set of cultural practices through which people recognize a debt to the past"<sup>43</sup> To study the social formation of memory "is to study those acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible"<sup>44</sup> According to Paul Connerton, memory is reproduced and legitimated in commemorative ceremonies which "claim continuity with an appropriate historic past" and influence our unconscious perceptions and thoughts about particular historical moments.<sup>45</sup> These are what Pierre Nora refers to as *les lieux de memoire*, or "sites of memory." These sites of memory are created by a push and pull that "are moments of history torn away from the movement of history then returned."<sup>46</sup>

Media texts constitute one such "act of transfer" or "site of memory." Media content is considered one of the primary and most public vehicles for conveying, shaping, and therefore studying collective memory.<sup>47</sup> Wulf Kansteiner encourages all scholars of memory studies to "adopt the methods of communication and media studies" because "memories are always mediated phenomena."<sup>48</sup> Michael Schudson notes that "in the absence of any stronger commemorative form, the media-recognized anniversary keeps alive the memory."<sup>49</sup> As personal memories fade, then, media outlets become one of several cultural artifacts able to reconstruct, reinvigorate, and rearticulate collective notions of a given historical moment. The ability of media outlets to recognize certain moments over others combined with the editorial capacity to dedicate differing amounts

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in *Memory Distortion*, 346-347.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 39.

<sup>45</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 51. See Also, Schudson, *Memory Distortion*, 347.

<sup>46</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Reflections*, no. 26 (1989): 7.

<sup>47</sup> Barbie Zelizer, "Why Memory's Work on Journalism Does not Reflect Journalism's Work on Memory," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2008): 79-87. See also: Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory*, 1993, Schudson, *Memory Distortion*, 346-364, and Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, 300-303.

<sup>48</sup> Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 179, 190.

<sup>49</sup> Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory*, 60.

of coverage to particular anniversaries imparts media organizations substantial influence in forming collective memories. Edward P. Morgan's work on collective memories engendered by newsmagazine and newspaper accounts of major civil rights anniversaries illustrates this media function well. Morgan concluded that the media's version of the movement lifted "some aspects of the struggle to the level of iconic myth, attributes others to demonic forces that seem beyond comprehension, and obscures portions of the civil rights struggle that challenge hallowed beliefs about American traditions of tolerance and equality."<sup>50</sup>

The influence of media texts on collective memory does not end at mere selection. Carolyn Kitch stresses that the "version of history as it is told and retold in journalism and other types of media will increasingly shape Americans' future memory of the present, as well as of the national past."<sup>51</sup> Barbie Zelizer reminds us that "in both commemoration and recollection, memory's collective dimensions have forced us to reassign group loyalties, constituting new groups as wide ranging as the neighborhood book club and the nation-state."<sup>52</sup> As media technologies change, so does the process Kitch and Zelizer outline. Therefore, scholars must reexamine how media reflect, perpetuate, and construct collective memories as new technologies warrant.<sup>53</sup> In my study then, we must look, if only briefly, at new media technologies.

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<sup>50</sup> Edward P. Morgan, "The Good the Bad and the Forgotten: Media Culture and Public Memory of the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> Carolyn Kitch, *Pages from the Past: History and Memory in American Magazines* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 184.

<sup>52</sup> Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 218,219).

<sup>53</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Finally, it is imperative to underscore that collective memory is always rooted in some present need or circumstance. Why do certain civil rights movement figures resonate with one generation and not another? Why are some movement events revisited every year while others barely get a mention on tenth anniversaries? Why do we "discover" new stories and voices of the movement at particular times? Indeed, "the form and significance of remembered events, like the extension and velocity of physical objects, will vary with the time and place of the observer."<sup>54</sup> Barry Schwartz emphasizes that "because the present is constituted by the past, the past's retention as well as its reconstruction must be anchored in the present."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, within the construction of each collective memory, "different elements [become] repressed, forgotten, and reshaped only to reemerge later in the conversation in a new form" when present needs warrant.<sup>56</sup> Collective memory theory, then, helps researchers account for and make sense of the changing social, political, and cultural factors that undergird how the legacy of the American civil rights movement is commemorated, invoked, and utilized to serve a particular purposes at particular moments in U.S. history.

### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical race theory provides a second meaningful framework through which to view newspaper commemorations of civil rights events. This body of theory directs attention toward power relationships, structural racism, white privilege, interlocking components of identity, marginalized voices and other frequently overlooked facets of American race relations. Critical race theory grew out of scholarship at the intersections

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<sup>54</sup> Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Barry Schwartz, "Social Change and the Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington," *American Sociological Review* 56, No. 2, (1991): 234.

<sup>56</sup> David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *The Journal of American History* 75, No. 4 (1989): 1127.

of race, law, and power, but has since been utilized by scholars in many fields including media studies. Primary tenets focus on the centrality of race in American social relations, the importance of giving voice to marginalized groups who can in turn tell their own stories, avoiding essentialist constructions of race and identity, and rejecting a “colorblind” approach to race relations.<sup>57</sup> A facet of critical race theory shared among other areas of scholarship concerns the socially constructed nature of race stemming from historical, social, political and institutional components of society. Omi and Winant define the “racial formation” process “by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings.”<sup>58</sup> Omi and Winant also stress that “the presence of a *system* of racial meanings and stereotypes, of racial ideology, seems to be a permanent fixture of US culture.”<sup>59</sup>

An extremely influential component of that system is what George Lipsitz calls “the possessive investment in whiteness.” Whiteness, says Lipsitz, is “the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.”<sup>60</sup> Over time, this investment in whiteness leads to a widespread “white privilege” which, often silently, opens doors “for certain people through no virtues of

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<sup>57</sup> Patricia Williams, *Seeing a Colorblind Future: The Paradox of Race* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*, (New York: Routledge 1986), 61.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>60</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), 2006, 1.

their own.”<sup>61</sup> An insistence on white, heteronormative identity as the quintessential “American” identity has prevailed and remained integral to the American socio-political system throughout history though specific articulations, parameters, and challenges vary according to historical era. Nikhil Paul Singh notes that despite challenges by marginalized groups, the construction of the citizen remains anchored in racist assumptions that constitute “an ever-active ideological formation that has structured market behavior and social movements within the constitution and governance of the U.S. nation-state.”<sup>62</sup> Genevieve Fabre and Robert O’ Meally, illuminate the ongoing “paradox” tied to American identity and citizenship contending “that even as Blacks have been excluded from most written accounts of American history, they nonetheless have been indispensable makers and shapers of the American cultural and sociopolitical legacy.”<sup>63</sup>

When discussing identity, it is important to underscore that facets of one's identity such as race, class, and gender do not work independently of each other in the world. Oppression based on interlocking identity components is “most often experienced simultaneously.”<sup>64</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw notes that “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account” cannot sufficiently examine the ways in which people are

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<sup>61</sup> Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2004), 166.

<sup>62</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>63</sup> Fabre and Meally, “Introduction,” *History and Memory in African American Culture*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* ed. Zillah Eisenstien (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979).



discriminated against based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.<sup>65</sup> This notion of intersectionality is especially relevant when considering the position of African American women within the civil rights movement. Despite their invaluable contributions to the movement and self-asserted "right to speak both as African-Americans and as women," Black women historically "have not held top leadership positions in Black organizations and have frequently struggled within them to express Black feminist ideas."<sup>66</sup> Ella Baker played an integral part in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, yet routinely "had to defer to the decision-making authority of the exclusively male leadership group."<sup>67</sup> Activist Septima Clark and Black Panther Party leader Elaine Brown—among countless others—experienced similar treatment throughout their movement careers.<sup>68</sup>

This dismissive treatment within civil rights efforts combined with the extreme marginalization of women of color throughout the 1960s women's movement and beyond helped engender the theoretical traditions of Black feminist thought and women of color feminism.<sup>69</sup> bell hooks reminds us that "by calling attention to the interlocking systems of domination—sex, race, and class—Black women and many other groups of women

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<sup>65</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *Chicago Legal Forum*, (1989): 140.

<sup>66</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Engagement*, 2nd Ed., (New York, Routledge, 2000), 7

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 7. Elaine Brown discusses sexism in the Black Panther Party at length in her autobiography *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story*. Septima Clark worked in several civil rights organizations and is often referred to as the "Queen mother" or "Grandmother" of the civil rights movement. See Jacqueline A. Rouse, "We Seek to Know...In Order to Speak the Truth: Nurturing the Seed of Discontent, Septima P. Clark and Participatory Leadership" in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 95-120.

<sup>69</sup> Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," *Capitalist Patriarchy*, 1979, Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2000, and bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, (Boston, South End Press, 1989).

acknowledge the diversity and complexity of female experience, of our relationship to power and domination."<sup>70</sup> Because of this study's focus on the African American civil rights struggle, Black feminist scholarship proves highly instructive. Patricia Hill Collins observes that "knowing that the minds and talents of our grandmothers, mothers, and sisters have been suppressed stimulates many contributions to the growing field of Black women's studies."<sup>71</sup> "Reclaiming" the contributions and identities of African American women involves several components: 1.) "discovering, reinterpreting, and, in many cases, analyzing for the first time the works of individual U.S. Black women thinkers...and the ideas of subgroups within the larger collectivity of U.S. Black women who have been silenced," 2.) "reinterpreting existing works through new theoretical frameworks" and 3.) finding guidance in "alternative institutional locations and among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals."<sup>72</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham underscores that all feminist scholars "especially those of African-American women's history must accept the challenge to bring race more prominently into their analyses of power."<sup>73</sup> This is because "Black women have a history of their own, one which reflects their distinct concerns, values and the role that have played as both Afro-Americans and women. And their unique status has had an impact on both racial and feminist values."<sup>74</sup> "By fully recognizing race as an unstable, shifting, and strategic reconstruction" this study aims to "inform and confound many of the assumptions currently underlying afro-American history and women's history" so that mediated commemorations of African American

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<sup>70</sup> hooks, *Talking Back*, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>73</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, (1992): 252.

<sup>74</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, Bantam Books, 1984), 6.

women's role in the civil rights movement may be examined with patriarchal and racist hierarchies of power in mind.<sup>75</sup>

Completion of this task involves investigation of previously marginalized voices. Historically, the African American press has been the voice of Black populations across the United States.<sup>76</sup> While we cannot point to a single unified Black public sphere, we can turn to the African American press texts as an informative resource for an African American perspective. Catherine Squires locates media outlets as "part of the process of racial formation."<sup>77</sup> According to Squires, "racial projects...rest upon particular conceptualizations of racial identities and how these identities and the meaning of race itself are communicated."<sup>78</sup> She notes that alternative and ethnic media—including the institution of the Black press—"have provided important counter points to mainstream definitions and understandings of racial and ethnic identities and the political projects affecting them."<sup>79</sup> Squires underscores the divide between white-dominated and alternative media conceptions of this process contending that "dominant social institutions, including mainstream media" have "upheld, reinforced, and disseminated oppressive characteristics stereotyping African Americans as unfit for citizenship in order justify White hegemony."<sup>80</sup> We can say, then, that "the struggles over the memory of the civil rights movement are not a diversion from the real political work of fighting for

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<sup>75</sup> Higginbotham, "Metalanguage of Race," 274.

<sup>76</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society*, Vogel, *The Black Press*, Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, among many others.

<sup>77</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 3

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. This study accepts and makes use of Antonio Gramsci's understanding of hegemony and structural relations of force. For more on hegemony see: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971).

racial equality and equal rights in the United States; they are key sites of that struggle."<sup>81</sup> Moreover, media—including white-dominated outlets, the ethnic press, and the alternative press—are integral components of this understanding process. As Stuart Hall eloquently directs us, “the media play a part in the formation, in the constitution, of the things they reflect. It is not that there is a world outside, ‘out there,’ which exists free of the discourses of representation. What is ‘out there’ is, in part, constituted by how it is represented. It is, to coin a phrase, ‘media-mediated.’”<sup>82</sup> While scholars have addressed the connections between media and memory generally, they have not given great focus to comparisons between white-dominated media and media geared toward groups with shared identities.

### *Framing*

Inherent in this research project is the assumption that the media, particularly newspapers and the journalists who produce their content, play an active role in shaping views of the public. Through a process of selection and emphasis, “the routines of journalism, set within the economic and political interests of the news organizations, normally and regularly combine to select certain versions of reality over others.”<sup>83</sup> This process has been characterized by scholars from a variety of disciplines as “framing.” For most journalists, framing “is a necessary tool to reduce the complexity of an issue, given the constraints of their respective media related to news holes and airtime”<sup>84</sup> Frames

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<sup>81</sup> Romano, and Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, xxi.

<sup>82</sup> Stuart Hall, “Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies,” *Rethinking Marxism* 5, no. 1 (1992): 14-15.

<sup>83</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in The Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 4.

<sup>84</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, and David Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda-setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models,” *Journal of Communication*, 57, no. 1, (2007): 12.

"enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely."<sup>85</sup> Despite adherence to the norm of objectivity, "frames are unavoidable, and journalism is organized to regulate their production."<sup>86</sup> Frames deserve scholarly attention because, although part of the journalistic "routine," they can make connections between events or issues "so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation or solution."<sup>87</sup> Substantive frames, as defined by Robert Entman, perform two or more of the following tasks: define effects or conditions as problematic, identify causes, convey a moral judgment, or endorse remedies or improvements.<sup>88</sup> Frames thus have the potential to determine "whether most people notice or how they understand and remember a problem, as well as how they evaluate it and choose to act upon it."<sup>89</sup>

Though frames are not likely to have a universal impact on audiences, past research indicates they do influence large portions of it.<sup>90</sup> Because frames call attention to certain aspects of an issue, they by nature direct attention away from others. These omissions of "potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience."<sup>91</sup> Due to the overwhelmingly white, middle-class background of journalists and the routines embedded in news as an institution, these omissions and suggested ways of thinking about a situation often neglect the views of marginalized populations and make inequalities embedded in existing structures of power

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<sup>85</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 7.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2004), 5.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication*, 43 (1993): 52. See also, Paul D'Angelo, "News Framing as a Multiparadigmatic Research Program: A Response to Entman," *The Journal of Communication*, 52(2002): 870-888.

<sup>89</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification," 54.

<sup>90</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification," 54. See Also, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Choice, Values, and Frames," *American Psychologist*, 39: 1984, 341-350.

<sup>91</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification," 54.

seem "natural."<sup>92</sup> In news coverage of race-based issues like civil rights, "consciously or unconsciously, most mainstream journalism reinforces the racial status quo and dominant understandings of racial categories."<sup>93</sup> "Specifically for racial issues," Catherine Squires notes "the dominant news values that steer mainstream journalists to cover extraordinary and deviant events often results in dependence upon stereotypes and readily available frameworks that reinforce hegemonic views of racial minorities."<sup>94</sup>

In her examination of news coverage of the Black Panthers, Jane Rhodes found that narrow, uni-dimensional media frames produced by the mainstream media "told the public little about why the organization existed, its appeal to black youth across the nation, or its relationship to the nation's racial crisis."<sup>95</sup> Media representations of the Panthers also neglected to address the group within the context of the larger demand for civil rights. Instead, the frames defined "the problem as young black males who used inflammatory rhetoric," identified the cause as "a spirit of lawlessness and a hatred of whites," made the moral judgment that the Panthers constituted a "national threat," and declared the remedy to be adoption of "the more palatable model of protest exemplified by the southern civil rights movement."<sup>96</sup> According to Catherine Squires, this type of coverage "does not allow for sustained attention to the complex web of history, culture, politics, and institutions that underlies even the most sensational race conflict stories."<sup>97</sup> These types of framings remain persistent in media treatments surrounding all facets of the civil rights movement and its offshoots. Without substantive examination of how media outlets frame the movement and its

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<sup>92</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>95</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 87.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>97</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 6.

varied legacies, we risk perpetuating hegemonic, often misguided interpretations of one the United States' most important periods.

## **Method**

This study explores the following areas of the relationship between collective memory and media: 1.) facets of the civil rights movement appearing in both white-dominated and African American press agendas on important anniversaries and during other notable periods of commemoration 2.) themes emerging from a qualitative discourse analysis of the above content 3.) implications the above results may have for American collective memory. Because this study investigates a complex, multifaceted social movement involving varying viewpoints, positions in the power structure of dominant societies, and habits of media consumption this research employs triangulation—a method which seeks "convergence of meaning from more than one direction"—and examines both white-dominated and African American press texts.<sup>98</sup> The addition of ethnic media helps alleviate the relative absence of marginalized community perspectives from white-dominated media coverage. In this case, a white-dominated/African American press comparison will help determine how collective memories of the movement might differ between mainstream and largely African American readerships.<sup>99</sup>

Four case studies focusing on particularly important sites of memory (*les lieux des memoire*) have been chosen to assess different facets of the movement while operating

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<sup>98</sup> Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods, Second Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 240.

<sup>99</sup> Lindlof and Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 240, Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, and Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*.

within the constraints of the dissertation format.<sup>100</sup> These case studies include: an investigation of why the Selma to Montgomery march is relatively forgotten in media treatments, an examination of why the March on Washington remains universally remembered even 50 years after its occurrence, an exploration of how media outlets explicate contentious open housing fights in Chicago during the summer of 1966, and an analysis of memories about a 1967-68 local struggle over housing segregation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In order to explore differences in dominant themes during the above moments, this study pairs ethnic and white-dominated press outlets in a variety of American cities: the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *LA Times*, the *New York Amsterdam News* and the *New York Times*, *Chicago Defender* and *Chicago Tribune/Chicago Sun Times*, the *Atlanta Daily World* and *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Milwaukee Courier* and the *Milwaukee Journal*.<sup>101</sup> While the individual newspapers examined may be adapted to each case study, the system of comparison serves as the central framework throughout the dissertation. News articles were collected through a combination of resources: the ProQuest Newspapers database, the Lexis Nexis database, EthnicNewsWatch, and microfilm. This research analyzes articles, headlines, and other relevant info-graphics such as maps or diagrams.

This study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to balance discrepancies in production schedule, readerships, access to media platforms, and regional differences of the publics interested and involved in the movement. Because

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<sup>100</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*.

<sup>101</sup> As discussed in Jane Rhodes and Ronald Jacobs' work, regional differences in movement coverage will be influenced by the proximity of a given location to important movement events, therefore, regional comparisons will be employed as case studies warrant.



civil rights figures and events are often discussed and commemorated outside of notable anniversaries, a mixed method approach also allows an opportunity to pursue leads presented by "snowball" style searching. For example, when a local civil rights leader is mentioned frequently in anniversary coverage of Milwaukee's open housing struggle, further searching related to that figure was performed to explore his/her role in greater depth.

The quantitative portion of data analysis provides a snapshot of what constituted important content at a particular historical moment, shapes "snowball" searching, and guides qualitative inquiry.<sup>102</sup> If a high frequency of articles about a person or event appears in a particular paper at a particular time, further research via qualitative analysis was performed. Quantitative data will also illuminate "what was left out" of the story in striking and meaningful ways. Often, a numerical analysis can be the most definitive way of illustrating differences in coverage between white-dominated and ethnic/alternative media.

Qualitative discourse analysis in the tradition of Norman Fairclough facilitated the discovery and appraisal of "implied meanings" present in media coverage of the civil rights movement and also helped situate these meanings in appropriate historical, social, cultural contexts. Fairclough views the relationship between language and power in the Foucauldian tradition and contends that "analysis of texts and practices should be mapped on to analysis of the institutional and wider social and cultural context of media practices including relations of power and ideologies."<sup>103</sup> For Fairclough, the crux of discourse analysis is interpretation of the interplay between text, discourse practice (text production

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<sup>102</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 26.

<sup>103</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33.

and consumption), and sociocultural practice, or “the economics of media, the politics of media, and the wider cultural context of communication in the mass media.”<sup>104</sup>

"Grounded theory," which views coding categories as not predetermined, but emergent and flexible throughout the coding process, guided this study's discourse analysis.<sup>105</sup>

While no researcher can be completely free of pre-existing biases, "the goal is to be as true to the data as possible."<sup>106</sup> A grounded theory approach lets the researcher utilize the social, cultural, and historical contexts of given moments to deconstruct the presence of certain memorializations at that time, while also allowing room to discover emergent themes. When comparing news coverage across time and ethnic/white-dominated publications, understanding these contexts is imperative because media content is a product of whatever historical moment or cultural context it is produced in.<sup>107</sup>

Qualitative analysis began with several careful read-throughs of each article. During these readings, sources, names of civil rights leaders used, important or conflicting information, dominant article themes, and questions that arose during the reading were noted. This process is referred to as open-coding—a research strategy where one considers all possible important categories then looks for overlap and commonalities among them.<sup>108</sup> As I progressed through my samples, I kept a running list of themes, sources, and questions and determined overlap within and across chapters. As connections and disparities emerged, I related them to social, historical, cultural, and political contexts as well as journalistic practices and norms. During the coding process

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>105</sup> Lindlof and Taylor, 219-221.

<sup>106</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 2006.

<sup>108</sup> Lindlof and Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 219-221. See also: Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 24.

special attention was paid to treatments of violence/non-violence, constructions of gender, differences in claims about the Northern and Southern civil rights fronts, which civil rights figures get mentioned frequently, how mentions of those figures change across regions and time, how media define "civil rights," differences in Black and white-dominated press accounts, who media outlets turn to as sources for their stories, and what official sources put forth as the American nation-state's version of civil rights. Usage of grounded theory and open-coding assured the ability to adequately investigate any important information revealed during the quantitative analysis.<sup>109</sup>

The complex arenas of collective memory, media, race, and civil rights necessitate a nuanced inquiry into what elements of a particular movement remain salient for the dominant culture, explanations of dominant themes present and how, if at all, salient elements differ among white-dominated and ethnic press media outlets. By utilizing a variety of methodological approaches, this study is able to account for the multiple, divergent, contradictory, changing publics associated with civil rights.

### **Case Studies**

The goal of the following four case studies is to highlight how, at varied historical moments and in different forms, white-dominated and African American media outlets help engender, perpetuate, and sustain collective memories of the civil rights movement. All four case studies involve events, actors, or accounts directly tied to the traditionally accepted time period of the American civil rights era (1955-1968) and seek to understand how the themes of violence, gender, race, and location are articulated under different circumstances by different media outlets. Undergirding these case studies is the assumption that the perceived "accuracy" of memories is less important than how, why,

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<sup>109</sup> Lindlof and Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*.

and under what social, political, cultural, and racial climates these memories are formed.<sup>110</sup> The importance of memory to an individual, nation, or group at a particular historical moment is key to understanding collective memory because a present need or circumstance often dictates society's use and conception of a particular memory at a particular point in time.<sup>111</sup>

### 1. The Selma to Montgomery Marches

Despite its weeks long grip on the nation's conscious, the rare support of rights leaders, the American populace, *and* federal government officials, as well as its instrumental role in the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, anniversaries of the Selma to Montgomery marches are not moments when we collectively reflect on the state of American race relations.<sup>112</sup> As scholars, it is important not only to document the recent past, but also to examine which facets of that past fall out of memory as time progresses. The Selma to Montgomery march represents a nationally recognized, yet marginally commemorated *lieux de memoire* of the civil rights era. As such, it represents an important component for analyzing what facets of the movement we as a society neglect to commemorate.

This case study examines coverage of the Selma to Montgomery marches on the 20th, 30th, and 45th anniversaries in both Black and dominant presses in order to better understand the following aspects of civil rights memory: how patterns in commemorative newspaper framings of a largely forgotten civil rights moment differ between dominant

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<sup>110</sup> Thelen, "Memory and American History," 1127. Hawlbachs, "The Collective Memory," *The Collective Memory Reader*, 139.

<sup>111</sup> Thelen, "Memory and American History 1127, Schwartz, "Social Change and the Collective Memory," 234.

<sup>112</sup> Meagan A. Manning, "Assessing the Dream: The March on Washington, Selma, and American Collective Memory" (master's thesis: University of Minnesota, 2011).

and African American newspaper accounts; what these framings indicate about the type of historical events that get forgotten; how standards for news gathering influence or dictate the type of movement narratives that fall out of collective memory over time; what pushes Selma from media spotlight to a profile lower than that of the March on Washington; and what present needs or circumstances might prompt this shift. Analyzing coverage of a prominent, yet infrequently commemorated civil rights event sheds light on why some historical events are not significant forces in the canons of public memory and provides insight into what types of contemporary social, political, and cultural circumstances influence that compromised position.

## 2. March On Washington

The March on Washington represents the most universally remembered civil rights event, and as such constitutes an essential site of memory, or *lieux de memoire*, for understanding how we commemorate—and neglect to commemorate—the civil rights movement as a nation. This event also showcases how media outlets characterize, invoke, and utilize the specter of Martin Luther King, Jr., the movement's most prominent icon.

This case study investigates coverage of the March on Washington from the 20th and 50th anniversaries in well-known Black and dominant press newspapers. The 20th anniversary was chosen due to a large commemoration march attended by over 250,000 people. The 50th anniversary marks a major commemorative milestone in American culture and also allows examination of how newspapers might connect the legacies of Barack Obama, the United States' first African American president, with the civil rights movement. This case study sheds light on the following aspects of civil rights memory: how patterns in commemorative newspaper framings of the March differ between

dominant and African American newspaper accounts; what these framings indicate about the type of historical events that get commemorated year after year; what factors might influence or dictate which type of movement narratives have long-term staying power in news discourses; and what present needs or circumstances might prompt these types the March on Washington to remain such a singular focal point of civil rights commemoration. Investigating how memories of such an axiomatic event evolve with contemporary social, political, and cultural circumstances illuminates the varying purposes for which movement memories are deployed and the provides insight into the underlying process of how American society commits contested historical events to memory.

### 3. *The 1966 Chicago Freedom Movement*

Despite involvement of the movement's most notable icon and significant contemporary media attention, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Chicago Freedom Movement has earned no entry in the canons of civil rights collective memory. In truth, the Northern civil rights front writ large is rarely commemorated to the degree of its Southern counterpart even when numerous civil rights marches, protests, housing campaigns, and riots provide evidence of those events' centrality to the African American freedom struggle.<sup>113</sup> Fifty years on, prevailing narratives almost exclusively locate the South as the lone site of struggle and Southern racism as the paramount "enemy." Moreover, the issue of equality in housing, also referred to as "open housing" and "fair

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008), Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodward, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2003), and Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

housing," has largely been displaced from these scant Northern histories despite its fundamental position on the civil rights agenda.

This case study addresses 1.) the degree to which the Chicago Freedom Movement is remembered in both dominant and Black press newspapers; 2.) what differences might exist between African American and dominant newspaper coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement and its open housing campaigns; 3.) what facets of this open housing campaign are remembered as we move forward in time; and 4.) how both dominant and Black newspapers engage with civil rights claims related to the private sphere of the American home. Due to low volumes of news coverage about the Chicago Freedom Movement, this analysis incorporated content from the entire ProQuest Newsstand database as well as the Ethnic NewsWatch.

#### 4. *Housing struggle in Milwaukee* (local, northern, innocence/violence)

This case study investigates news coverage of the campaign for open housing rights in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with the aim of providing a local contrast to the analysis of the nationally backed Selma, March on Washington, and Chicago events. This case study also intentionally targets a struggle for equality in the northern part of the United States. The issue of open/equal housing represented a fundamental goal of the movement, but discussions and remembrances of this issue often fail to be included in mediated commemorations of the era.

The Milwaukee case study assesses 1.) the degree to which the Milwaukee open housing campaigns are remembered via both Black and dominant newspapers; 2.) what differences might exist between African American and mainstream media coverage of Milwaukee's open housing fight; 3.) what facets of Milwaukee's housing struggles are

remembered as we move forward in time; and 4.) to illuminate how a civil rights campaign and based in a northern city and its leaders gets commemorated on both local and national levels. Due to low volumes of news coverage about the Milwaukee open housing campaigns, this analysis incorporates content from the entire ProQuest Newsstand database and from Ethnic NewsWatch. Because the legacy of segregation continues to wield influence on present debates over race, public policy, and inequality—like those surrounding recent events in Ferguson, Missouri—it is imperative to examine the position of Northern-based rights struggles within those dialogues.



## Chapter 2: The Selma to Montgomery March

*"If the worst in American life lurked in its dark streets, the best of American instincts arose passionately from across the nation to overcome it. There never was a moment in American history more honorable and more inspiring than the pilgrimage of clergymen and laymen of every race and faith...to face danger at the side of its embattled Negroes."*

-- Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., "How Long, Not Long" speech, Montgomery, AL, 1965

Into the late-1960s signs on the Jefferson Davis highway outside of Selma, Alabama welcomed members of the Ku Klux Klan into the city limits.<sup>1</sup> Local officials governed the sleepy, black belt town guided by ideals from the antebellum era, and not many white residents cared for anything different.<sup>2</sup> While Black activism in Selma commenced long before Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers arrived, Bloody Sunday on March 7, 1965 elevated the city's struggles to the national stage, pitting Selma's Black and progressive white residents, SCLC members, and SNCC advocates against Selma's Sheriff, Jim Clark, the city's Public Safety Director Wilson Baker, Alabama Governor George Wallace, and segregationist whites.<sup>3</sup> The events of Bloody Sunday—caught on film in their entirety—aired across the nation on all three network television stations the evening of March 7. ABC even interrupted its "Sunday Night Movie" to show fifteen minutes of footage.<sup>4</sup> An uneasy tension gripped the nation during the three weeks between Bloody Sunday and dusk on March 25, the day the Selma to Montgomery march ended. Wall-to-wall media coverage damning racist Southern customs and supporting

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<sup>1</sup> "Selma's Violence is Rooted in Old Families, Old Ideas," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 14, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Thornton, J. Mills, III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (The University of Alabama Press: Tuscaloosa, AL, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Gene Roberts and Hank Kilbanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 386-387.

protesters consumed American airwaves and print media pages.<sup>5</sup> Civil Rights demonstrators mourned Jimmie Lee Jackson, a young black man from nearby Marion, Alabama shot dead by a state trooper on February 26.<sup>6</sup> The national guard combed Selma's streets under federal directives to maintain order. Murders of a white Boston minister and white, female Detroit homemaker only solidified national perceptions of a violent, backward South.<sup>7</sup> When 25,000 people finally arrived in Montgomery, Alabama after these weeks of tension, Martin Luther King, Jr., A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, John Lewis, Rosa Parks, and other leaders celebrated momentary victory and urged demonstrators to maintain non-violent civil rights action.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of its weeks long grip on the nation's conscious, the rare support of rights leaders, the American populace, *and* federal government officials, as well as its instrumental role in the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Selma anniversaries are not moments when we collectively reflect on the state of American race relations.<sup>9</sup> We do not revisit the text of speeches by Hosea Williams and Rosa Parks given in March 1965 like we revisit "the Dream." Nor do we mourn the deaths of Jimmie Lee Jackson, James Earl Ray, and Viola Liuzzo collectively as a nation in the way we recollect how Rosa Parks "sat" one day on a Montgomery, Alabama bus.

As scholars, it is important not only to document the recent past, but also to examine which facets of that past fall out of memory as time progresses. The Selma to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 486.

<sup>7</sup> Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 488.

<sup>8</sup> Roy Reed, "25, 000 GO TO ALABAMA'S CAPITOL; WALLACE REBUFFS PETITIONERS; WHITE RIGHTS WORKER IS SLAIN: DR. KING CHEERED," *New York Times*, March 26, 1965. See also: Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 488, Janet Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013), 249 and image on front cover.

<sup>9</sup> Meagan A. Manning, "Assessing the Dream: The March on Washington, Selma, and American Collective Memory" (master's thesis: University of Minnesota, 2011).

Montgomery march represents a nationally recognized, yet marginally commemorated *lieux de memoire* of the civil rights era. As such, it represents an important component for analyzing what facets of the movement we as a society neglect to commemorate. Because media texts aid in shaping, reflecting, and circulating national level discourses news coverage represents crucial component for scholars civil rights memory.<sup>10</sup> How might patterns in commemorative newspaper framings of a largely forgotten civil rights moment differ between dominant and African American newspaper accounts? What might these framings indicate about the type of historical events that get forgotten? How might standards for news gathering influence or dictate the type of movement narratives that fall out of collective memory over time? What pushes Selma from media spotlight to a profile lower than that of the March on Washington? What present needs or circumstances might prompt this shift? Analyzing coverage of a prominent, yet infrequently commemorated civil rights event sheds light on why some historical events are not significant forces in the canons of public memory and provides insight into what types of contemporary social, political, and cultural circumstances influence that compromised position.

In order to address the above questions, this case study examines newspaper coverage of a monumental but less well remembered event, the Selma to Montgomery marches. Black press coverage comes from the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *Chicago Defender*, and *Washington Informer*. The *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Atlanta Constitution/Journal-Constitution*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post* represent the dominant press outlets

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How we Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), 5.

examined. Articles were located via ProQuest newsstand, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, and microfilm. Coverage of the Selma to Montgomery marches was collected on the 20th, 30th, and 45th anniversaries. Coverage was gathered for the entire month of March in both the Black and dominant presses.

The remainder of this chapter establishes differences between commemorations of the Selma to Montgomery marches in black and dominant press newspapers and examines discursive patterns in news and editorial coverage. Based on those results, this chapter discusses how significant trends in coverage shift over time and across presses. It then connects these differences with American social, cultural, and economic trends in order to assess why the Selma to Montgomery march is largely forgotten in American collective memory.

### **Coverage by the Numbers**

#### March 1965

Coverage volumes of the Selma to Montgomery march from the civil rights era represent an important compliment to examination of anniversary coverage. Somewhat surprisingly, Selma received much more media attention than the March on Washington during the period when each event occurred. One study found that *The Chicago Tribune* and *Milwaukee Journal* published a combined 420 news articles or images about the Selma to Montgomery marches during March of 1965.<sup>11</sup> The same two newspapers published only 183 articles about the March on Washington between August 1 and September 15, 1963—less than half of the attention Selma garnered.<sup>12</sup>

#### Selma Anniversary Coverage

An analysis of commemorative newspaper coverage of the Selma to Montgomery march from the 20th, 30th, and 45th anniversaries reveals a distinct shift in stature from

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<sup>11</sup> Manning, "Assessing the Dream," 109.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

the 1960s. Black press newspapers examined generated 31 articles across all three anniversaries while dominant newspapers published 89 pieces (see Figure 1).

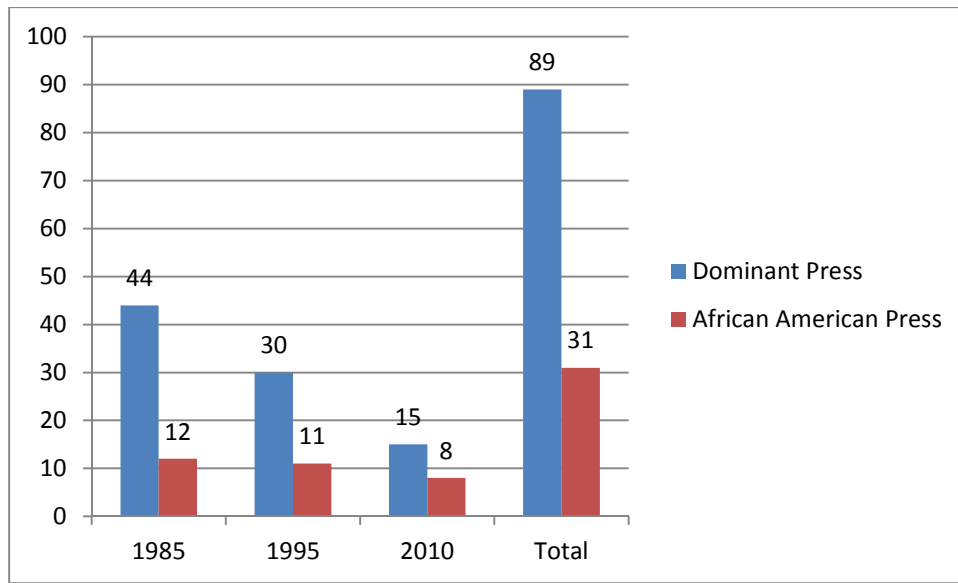


Figure 1: Dominant and African America press article totals, Selma (N=118)

In both presses, the Atlanta based newspapers—the only Southern outlets in the sample—produced the most stories, indicating a regional dimension to anniversary reports.<sup>13</sup> The geographical skew of newspaper coverage is more pronounced in the African American press. The *Atlanta Daily World* published 19 articles across the all anniversaries studied accounting for 61.3 percent of all Black press content about Selma.<sup>14</sup> In comparison, all other African American press papers produced a combined 12 articles. The most noteworthy trend seen in Selma anniversary coverage is that in both presses, the number of articles penned about Selma *steadily declines* with each

<sup>13</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution/Journal-Constitution* produced 25 articles across the three time intervals. The *Atlanta Daily World* produced 19.

<sup>14</sup> This total includes four United Press International stories published in 1985.

anniversary (see Figure 1). African American and dominant press outlets produced 12 and 44 articles respectively in 1985 (see Figure 1). By 2010, each press produces less than half that number, with only 19 articles published in total among the 11 newspapers studied (see Figure 1).

Across both presses and all anniversaries, news coverage comprises the overwhelming majority of story type. Between 86 and 60 percent of dominant press articles were classified as news (see Figure 2). African American papers generated a similar proportion of news stories, with all papers publishing between 75 and 66 percent news content (see Figure 2). In dominant press outlets, the amount of news stories declines with each anniversary (see Figure 2). This is accompanied by an increase in the proportion of editorial content (see Figure 2). Letters to the editor comprised between two and 13 percent of dominant press content (see Figure 2).

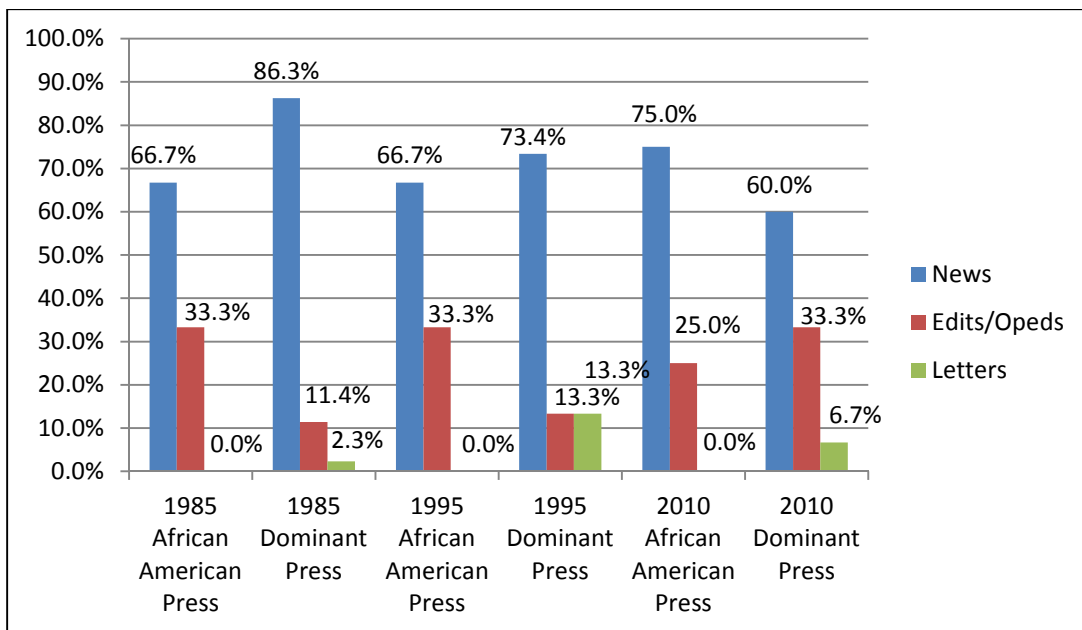


Figure 2: Percentage of total articles about Selma by type, 1985, 1995, and 2010 (N=118)

The proportion of editorial content in African American press newspapers remains consistent across the 20th and 30th anniversaries (33.3%) and declines slightly by the 45th anniversary (25.0%). African American press outlets did not print any letters to the editor about Selma (see Figure 2). It is important to note that dominant press article counts include a substantial proportion of "Almanac," "this day in history," and other short "news brief" stories. These shortened accounts made up 25 percent of dominant press content in 1985, 33.3 percent in 1995, and 13.3 percent in 2010.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Black press newspapers printed one "news brief" story during all anniversaries examined.<sup>16</sup> The fact that abbreviated coverage comprises up to one-third of an already small pool accentuates Selma's diminished presence in dominant press news coverage compared to the March on Washington and provides insight into the limited importance of Selma anniversaries to dominant press news outlets.

In sum, the number of articles commemorating the Selma marches declines steadily as we move forward in time. This is true for both dominant and African American news outlets. Additionally, coverage of Selma overwhelmingly aligns with traditionally accepted definitions of "news" content. Over 60 percent of both dominant and Black press stories can be considered news. This emphasis on news content is somewhat surprising considering that historically Black press outlets' content trends away from traditional journalistic norms and story distributions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Almanac and/or "news brief" stories totaled 11 articles in 1985, 10 in 1995, and 2 in 2010.

<sup>16</sup> The *Washington Informer* included a mention of the Selma to Montgomery marches in its 2010 "Black History Journal" feature.

<sup>17</sup> Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.: A Detailed and Understanding Report on what the Black Press is and How it Came to Be* (Ames: Iowa State Press, 1989), Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), Catherine R. Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line: The Press and Multi-Racial America* (Albany: State University of

## Dominant Press

As stated earlier, substantial proportions of dominant press news accounts commemorating the Selma to Montgomery marches took the form of short "news in brief" stories. The following framings are largely evident in more extensive treatments. Two primary frames emerged in dominant press coverage of the 20th and 30th anniversaries of the Selma to Montgomery marches: 1.) Selma as a marker of progress "away from;" 2.) rearticulation of the meaning of Southern white male identity. Coverage from the 45th anniversary was distinctly different in tone and content than the previous two intervals studied. In 2010 coverage a single frame emerged: Selma as a bridge to elsewhere. The remainder of this section discusses and provides examples of coverage typical to each frame draws conclusions based on those findings.

*Marking Selma anniversaries as progress "away from."* Dominant press outlets routinely utilized Selma's anniversary to identify just how far beyond the staunchly segregationist 1960s contemporary society had moved. This frame was present in 20th and 30th anniversary coverage. By emphasizing progress "away from," dominant newspapers directed reader attention to what had already been accomplished, positioning Selma distinctly in the past and displacing contemporary state sanctioned violence against African Americans and other marginalized groups. Moreover, this characterization neglects goals and reasons for the 1965 protest as well as larger systemic factors contributing to both past and present inequalities. Dominant press reports studied do not entirely disregard lingering racial inequalities, however, content strongly conveyed

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New York Press, 2007), Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Ronald Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), among many others.



that American society had decidedly, and unarguably, moved past the racist conduct of the 1960s South.

A 1985 *Atlanta Constitution* article defined "progress away from" by juxtaposing a segregationist past with contemporary remorse for past wrongdoing. The author contended that the Selma to Montgomery marches forced Americans "to recognize a new and more powerful set of weapons. Non-violence in the face of violence. Organized protest in the face of established chaos. Right and righteousness in a head on collision with ways and ideas that were shown to be blatantly, fatally wrong."<sup>18</sup> The reporter concluded that "because of what happened here 20 years ago, Selma and the Deep South it symbolized will never be the same."<sup>19</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* letter to the editor suggested that Soviet and US leaders negotiating arms reduction would benefit from seeing photos of George Wallace and Joseph Lowery embracing at the 20th anniversary march. The author wondered how this photograph might be possible "just 20 short years after Wallace and MLK were engaged in a bitter racial struggle."<sup>20</sup> A second *Times* piece proclaimed "the contrast to 1965...striking," noting that "police officers, black and white, now protected and escorted the marchers, clearing traffic so they could continue unhindered."<sup>21</sup> The article also quoted marcher Rufus Venable who proclaimed that "the people who were beating your heads are out there protecting us."<sup>22</sup>

A *Washington Post* article from March 5, 1985 highlighted physical manifestations of progress by describing changes to Selma's historic landmarks. The

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Childress, "Bloody Sunday's Horror Changed a Nation," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 4, 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to the Editor, S. Dell Scott, "Two Historic Photographs Would Help in Geneva," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1985

<sup>21</sup> Jim Yardley, "March of remembrance ends in Alabama; Civil rights veterans urge renewed efforts," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 12, 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

author noted that "the chinaberry bushes in front of Brown Chapel Church are gone, replaced by a monument to Martin Luther King Jr. The Albert Hotel, integrated by King in 1965, has been torn down too, replaced by a new City Hall."<sup>23</sup> The author then moves on to more abstract conceptions of progress noting that "in Selma 20 years ago, Americans could be turned away with cattle prods and night sticks for trying to register to vote."<sup>24</sup> This statement implies that in 1985 America, such brazen violence would be unthinkable. Consistent with Barbie Zelizer's assertion that "collective memory is predicated upon a dissociation between the act of remembering and the linear sequencing of time," commemorating moments of racial progress through a comparison of past ills and the contemporary state of American race relations compresses civil rights history into "now" and "then."<sup>25</sup> Additionally, in marking the present as triumphant and the past as nefarious, the above declarations of progress embody a "hero/villain" paradigm akin to civil rights era news framings.<sup>26</sup> As W.E.B. DuBois and David Blight have illustrated with respect to historical memories of the Civil War era, these types of treatments can erase interim and ongoing racially motivated violence from the narrative and supplant accountability for racist actions with markers of achievement.<sup>27</sup>

Another device used by dominant newspapers to frame Selma commemorations in terms of "progress away from" centered on assessing changes in Selma's racial fabric

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<sup>23</sup> George Lardner Jr., "Blacks Recall Selma Events 20 Years Ago," *Washington Post*, March 5, 1985

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 222.

<sup>26</sup> Edward P. Morgan, "The Good the Bad and the Forgotten: Media Culture and Public Memory of the Civil Rights Movement," in Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, eds. *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), Richard Lentz, *Symbols, the Newsmagazines, and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), Jill A. Edy, *Troubled Past: News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), among others.

<sup>27</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1998), David W. Blight, "W.E.B. DuBois and the Struggle for American Historical Memory," in *History and Memory in African American Culture*, eds. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, 45-71.

through the voices of local officials and marchers. A *USA Today* piece highlighted Selma Mayor Joe Smitherman's version of progress—a new Selma, with "no racial tension."<sup>28</sup> The reporter also parrots Smitherman's contention that "Blacks now serve on everything from the police department to the city council and the school board."<sup>29</sup> Smitherman's evaluation of change culminated in his labeling Selma "Mecca, a holy city for Blacks."<sup>30</sup> The use of sources to mark "progress away" from 1965 also entered into debates beyond Bloody Sunday and the subsequent march to Montgomery. In a 1995 article discussing the appropriateness of flying the Confederate flag, Mendel Rivers Jr., "whose family epitomizes Southern conservatism," told the *Atlanta Constitution* that he considered civil rights activists "professional victims."<sup>31</sup> Rivers lamented that "we endlessly wave the Confederate flag and cheer, while blacks endlessly rebroadcast the crossing of the Selma, Ala., bridge in 1965 and become angry, or feminists endlessly hold weepy support sessions to remind us how unfair it all is."<sup>32</sup> Rivers declared that "it's time to let go. The Confederacy, like the Soviet Union, the British Empire and the Third Reich, is dead."<sup>33</sup> The *Constitution* contrasted Rivers' anti-flag stance with that of Charleston, South Carolina's African American police chief, Reuben Greenberg who had no issue with the Confederate symbol's display.

News outlets also turned to civil rights veterans for judgments about the level of racial change in Selma and across the nation. A 1995 op-ed piece penned by John Lewis

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<sup>28</sup> Carol Clurman, "Selma Revisited: Spirit of Cooperation Rules as 1965 March is Retraced," *USA Today*, March 1, 1985.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Alan Sverdlik, "Around the South; Flag fight takes odd twists; Time to let go, says son of Old South; let it fly, says black police chief," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 19, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

declared that "the idea of being elected to Congress was laughable to me in 1965. Yet, it happened just 21 years after passage of the Voting Rights Act."<sup>34</sup> Lewis goes on to declare that "indeed, during the past 30 years, a political revolution has unfolded in this country. Bloodshed on the Edmund Pettus Bridge nourished the seeds of political participation and democracy for millions of new voters. A new and deeper sensitivity has arisen, a new politics has replaced the old, and thousands of minorities now hold political office, mostly in the South."<sup>35</sup> Lewis did mention present day racial issues in his column, namely Republican efforts toward "gutting the ability of the federal government to act on behalf of all its citizens."<sup>36</sup> However, Lewis ultimately determined that "we have come a great distance since that Bloody Sunday in Selma. We live in a different country—a better country. We are a step closer to building a truly interracial democracy."<sup>37</sup>

The preceding examples establish how journalists utilized opinions of individuals closely associated with Selma to denote positive shifts in the city's racial landscape. At times, both journalists and quoted sources extended these estimations to the South writ large. The traditional journalistic practice of reliance on official sources—particularly those officials once dedicated to maintaining segregation like Selma Mayor Joe Smitherman—greatly influences how dominant newspapers tell the story of Selma. The inclusion of these official sources works to delimit parameters of discussion about the meaning and legacy of 1960s civil rights gains to the meanings put forth by those with institutional associations. In turn, this practice moves the narrative away from conceptions of change, progress, and racial equality outside institutional boundaries.

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<sup>34</sup> John Lewis, "No retreat from past victories," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 12, 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, the journalistic practice of juxtaposing official narratives with sources that disagree with that narrative works to maintain the hero/villain paradigm present in civil rights era news coverage throughout contemporary accounts.

*Colorblind Versions of Progress "Away."* In 1995, a series of letters to the editor printed by the *Atlanta Constitution* defined progress in terms illustrative of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls "colorblind racism."<sup>38</sup> Bonilla-Silva suggests that in the post-civil rights era, white Americans deny overtly racist attitudes yet maintain inherently racist beliefs, thus creating a society where racism exists "without racists."<sup>39</sup> Bonilla-Silva defines four avenues of colorblind racism rooted in the idea that race is no longer a basis for lingering inequality—abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism.<sup>40</sup> All letters printed on the 30th anniversary appeared in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* and each of the four contained colorblind racist rhetoric. A March 9 letter expressed exasperation at John Lewis' "moaning about what happened in Selma 30 years ago" and pointed to "the mayhem and murder that takes place daily and nightly at the ghetto housing projects, where black thugs have taken over and so many innocent people and small children are the victims" as the "real" issue.<sup>41</sup> The writer commanded Lewis to "go down there...and see what is happening. It is a disgrace. Marching there might just scare out the hooligans."<sup>42</sup> A second letter chastised a recent story on Selma that claimed "Time heals hurts of violent era" in a similar manner.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Thomson, "Fayette Voices; Readers' Letters," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 9, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Bobby R. Lerch, "LETTERS," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 23, 1995.

writer asked "where has this person been living—on Mars? The '60s were peaceful compared with today's get-off-the-street-by-9 and deadbolt-the-doors era."<sup>44</sup> The above letters to the editor exemplify both the "minimization of racism" and "cultural racism" frames outlined by Bonilla-Silva. The writer's suggestion that John Lewis quit "moaning about what happened in Selma 30 years ago" implies that "discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances."<sup>45</sup> The letters' comments on violence and "hooliganism" within urban African American neighborhoods exhibit Bonilla-Silva's "cultural racism" frame, wherein particular groups of people are presumed to intrinsically or inherently possess certain attributes based on cultural markers.<sup>46</sup>

A March 13 letter praised the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march as "a courageous event that began an almost bloodless revolution that has resulted in a remarkable change in our society," but decried contemporary government efforts toward racial equality.<sup>47</sup> The author singled out affirmative action and racial quotas contending that in the future, people of color "will be regarded far better if affirmative action, set-asides and racial quotas are 30 years in the past."<sup>48</sup> The letter writer chided that "weaning involves discomfort and pain, but it is always necessary for independence and full development. It certainly is necessary for the freedom and self-esteem so necessary for human dignity."<sup>49</sup> A final letter drew readers' attention to a sign from the 30 anniversary Selma commemoration that read "If you don't vote, you don't count."<sup>50</sup> The author noted recent

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>47</sup> F. James Funk Jr, "Letters; We don't have the money for entitlement programs," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 13, 1995.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Leslie D. Gerber, "Voices; Readers' Letters," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, March 30, 1995.

complaints against Republican party cuts to social programs aimed at helping marginalized populations then alleged that protests produce "great sound bites and media attention, but the facts remain: Politicians respond to those who put them in office, not those who stay home in droves."<sup>51</sup> The author then questioned why "the poor don't vote" and wondered if some "conspiracy...keeps them locked away on election day?"<sup>52</sup> The writer went on to declare that "the attitude of victimization and being owed something without assuming any responsibility is reflected by the abysmal turnouts during elections and the subsequent howls of protest afterward."<sup>53</sup> The second two letters embody the "abstract liberalism" trope of Bonilla-Silva's color-blind racism paradigm, wherein the victim is blamed for disparity and "central elements of liberalism have been rearticulated in post-Civil rights America to rationalize racially unfair situations."<sup>54</sup> The emphasis on personal action as remedy for inequality gained prominence throughout the late 20th century and still persists today. Catherine Squires asserts that this shift has pushed Americans to answer the question "Does race (still) matter?" with a firm "No."<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the inclination of media outlets to neglect deeper contextual nuances, like factors that determine voter turnout, offers audiences "scant foundation for reconciling the conflicting sentiments" about race in America.<sup>56</sup>

*Rearticulating the meaning of Southern white male identity.* A strong focus on repentant former Southern, white, segregationist officials and law enforcement ran throughout dominant press coverage from 1985 and 1995. These accounts frequently

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 105.

highlighted how various officials' attitudes about race had shifted to be more accepting of non-white communities. Fifty percent of 20th anniversary coverage mentioned either George Wallace, Joe Smitherman, or Sheriff Jim Clark.<sup>57</sup> By the 30th anniversary, this proportion fell to 33 percent.<sup>58</sup> This framing positions apologetic, reformed stalwarts of Jim Crow as a primary component of Selma's legacy. Interestingly, not a single story about the 45th anniversary mentions Wallace, Smitherman, or Clark. This may be due to fact that by 2010, all three men had passed away. Barack Obama's rise to the White House may also play an important role in this narrative shift. Perhaps, Obama's presidency signaled the end of the need for a narrative of white redemption in Selma anniversary coverage in the same way Obama's inauguration represented fulfillment of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "dream" to many news outlets.<sup>59</sup> The remainder of this section highlights examples of rearticulated white male identity and assesses impacts of this framing on Selma's position within the civil rights narrative.

A 1995 *USA Today* piece noted that Joe Smitherman, "a white segregationist mayor in 1965 who now admits he was wrong and continues to hold the top job in a city that is majority black," provided John Lewis and Hosea Williams with keys to the city on Selma's 30th anniversary.<sup>60</sup> The article also included a quote from the repentant Smitherman: "I thought they were outside agitators and if they would go away we could handle our own problems, which I know now we couldn't have...looking back I realize

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<sup>57</sup> Twenty-two of the 44 articles examined in 1985 contained at least one reference to Wallace, Smitherman, Clark, or Baker.

<sup>58</sup> Ten of the 30 articles examined in 1995 contained at least one reference to Wallace, Smitherman, Clark, or Baker.

<sup>59</sup> Meagan A. Manning, "Assessing the Dream: The March on Washington, Selma, and American Collective Memory" (master's thesis: University of Minnesota, 2011), 43-90 and Catherine R. Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 53-54.

<sup>60</sup> Tom Watson, "A returning point for rights activists," *USA Today*, March 6, 1995.



that had I been black I would have been out there marching, too."<sup>61</sup> A 1985 *Chicago Tribune* piece also quoted a reformed Smitherman who said "we tried to run them out of town; we were wrong...we recognize now, from the governor's office on down, that every American should have the right to vote."<sup>62</sup> A *USA Today* piece from the same year noted the "spirit of cooperation, not confrontation" between marchers and authorities and included a Smitherman quote that called Selma, "a Mecca, a holy city for Blacks."<sup>63</sup>

George Wallace was the primary former segregationist highlighted by dominant press outlets. All newspapers, including the *New York Times*, dedicated prominent stories to Wallace's "conversion." While many of these stories included quotes from reenactment marchers skeptical of Wallace's sincerity, no article framed Wallace's attempts at apology in a negative light. One *USA Today* piece declared that "the 65-year-old paraplegic governor who meets with black leaders in Montgomery today has shed his segregationist image."<sup>64</sup> The article then quoted an Alabama State Representative who questioned Wallace's commitment to racial equality. Ultimately, however, the author reinforced the legitimacy of Wallace's conversion with an affirmative statement from "one of Wallace's press secretaries who is black."<sup>65</sup> A 1995 *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* account sketched a scene of Wallace and Joseph Lowery making "peace on doorsteps of yesteryear's hatred" by singing We Shall Overcome together.<sup>66</sup> As the song progressed, the reporter explained that "Wallace, nearly deaf, seemed bewildered. Lowery lifted Wallace's hand in triumph as if they were two politicians running for office. The crowd,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Hirsley, "A 20 Years Later, Law Joins Marchers in Selma," *Chicago Tribune*, March 4, 1985.

<sup>63</sup> Clurman, "Selma Revisited: Spirit of Cooperation Rules as 1965 March is Retraced," *USA Today*.

<sup>64</sup> David Bauman, "George Wallace, Revisited," *USA Today*, March 7, 1985.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Yardley, "Around the South," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*.

nearly all black, roared. The symbolism was powerful and intentional: Wallace, 75, the old segregationist himself, was forgiven."<sup>67</sup>

A *New York Times* Wire Service article that ran in both the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* noted that “the marchers swarmed around the old man in the wheelchair, some to tell him he was forgiven, some to whisper that he could never be forgiven, not now, not a million years from now.”<sup>68</sup> The piece equated Wallace’s name with “shorthand” for Southern rights injustices, but went on to endorse his conversion and apologies for the past.<sup>69</sup> The piece quoted several lines from a statement from Wallace that read “a great deal has been lost and a great deal has been gained, and here we are. My message to you today is, Welcome to Montgomery. May your message be heard. May your lessons never be forgotten. May our history be always remembered.”<sup>70</sup> The same quote appeared as the *New York Times*’ “Quote of the Day.”<sup>71</sup> The article incorporated several opinions from marchers unconvinced of the former governor's transformation, however, these quotes were placed in the last third of the article, long after Wallace's voice is heard.

The above articles attempt to humanize George Wallace by drawing attention to his failing health and strive to reinforce that his conversion is welcome—to both African Americans and U.S. society writ large. Interestingly, while quotes from rights marchers were included in news content, albeit often near the end of articles, few attempts were seen to humanize civil rights leaders or march re-enactors through personal narratives in the way these newspapers treated Smitherman and Wallace. This phenomenon is

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Rick Bragg, “Emotional March Gains a Repentant Wallace,” *New York Times*, March 10, 1995.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> “Quote of the Day,” *The New York Times*, March 11 1995.

especially noteworthy given 1965 newspaper framings that focused heavily on articulating the position of civil rights activists. When present in commemorative coverage, anecdotes personifying rights activists take a distinctly different form than those about former segregationists. An Associated Press article printed in the *Chicago Tribune* focused on the small crowd noting that "Saturday's crowd barely took up the street in front of the Capitol, even though police had blocked off an entire city block."<sup>72</sup> The article also utilized discussions of weather to humanize the marchers: "On a sunny day with temperatures in the mid-70s, at least one woman appeared overcome by the heat. Some of the crowd wandered away after Jackson and Lowery finished their speeches...Afterward, the 73-year-old Lowery, appearing tired and worn, rested atop a box of electronic equipment and pledged-as he did five years ago-that this would be his last Selma-to-Montgomery march."<sup>73</sup> "If I'm living, they might drag me back down here in a wheelchair. But I'm not leading it. This one about killed me," the supporting quote from Lowery read.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps, in the absence of a singular "leader" with a stature deemed equal to Mayor Smitherman, journalists lack normative avenues for conveying the perspective of civil rights activists.<sup>75</sup> In civil rights era news accounts, Martin Luther King, Jr. figured prominently enough to compete with entities like Joe Smitherman for space within dominant press narratives.

In 1995, *The Washington Post* ran an editorial essentially absolving Wallace of past ills. The tone of the editorial is noteworthy for its mythic and moralistic qualities as

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<sup>72</sup> Associated Press, no author listed, SELMA MARCH ENDS WITH A WARNING PAST CIVIL RIGHTS GAINS AT RISK, SPEAKERS SAY, *Chicago Tribune*, March 12, 1995.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997).

well as its use of civil rights rhetoric to clear Wallace's name. The piece began: "In the annals of religious and political conversions, few shiftings were as unlikely as George Wallace's. In Montgomery, Ala., last week, the once irrepressible governor—now 75, infirm, pain-wracked and in a wheelchair since his 1972 shooting—held hands with black southerners and sang 'We Shall Overcome.'"<sup>76</sup> The *Post* characterized the act as a "reaching-out moment of reconciliation, of Wallace's asking for—and receiving—forgiveness" and supported that characterization with a public endorsement of Wallace's conversion from SCLC President Joseph Lowery.<sup>77</sup> The piece then pauses to ask: "Was Wallace, the one-time spewer of venom, sincere?"<sup>78</sup> Using several examples of Wallace's public gestures toward African Americans as corroboration, the *Post's* editorial staff determined that "the evidence suggests genuineness."<sup>79</sup> The editorial's most significant aspect for scholars of civil rights may be the *Post's* choice to close their endorsement of Wallace by identifying him as a "living example...in word and act" of a 1957 Martin Luther King, Jr. speech centered on forgiveness.<sup>80</sup> The King speech defined forgiveness as not "ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship... While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community."<sup>81</sup> The *Post* extended King's definition to a reflection on present circumstances deciding that:

"George Wallace is as much a part of that community as any other repentant who seeks and receives forgiveness. Wallace didn't create segregation. For much of his early

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<sup>76</sup> Editorial, "George Wallace-From the Heart," *Washington Post*, March 17, 1995.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

political life, anti-black racism was constitutional, as it has been for most of America's life. How many more Wallaces still need to come forward and show the courage of asking forgiveness? Whatever the number, no shortage exists of large-hearted blacks like Joe Lowery willing to ask God's blessings for them."

The *Post's* 1995 editorial signifies the degree to which large portions of American society were desperately looking to move beyond components of the civil rights movement—like Selma—that reflected negatively on the majority of Americans. Throughout their editorial, *The Washington Post*—arguably the second most prominent newspaper in America—employs civil rights rhetoric and statements of African American leaders like Lowery to justify the forgetting of civil rights era violence. Furthered by the appropriation of African American voices, the specter of the white Southern male triumphantly comes full circle in the form of Wallace's conversion and Smitherman's welcome attitude toward reenactment march participants. Because these men had mended their ways, so to speak, they could no longer remain accountable for violent actions of the past. Kelly J. Madison demonstrates similar treatment of Southern white males in 1980s and 1990s cinematic renderings of the civil rights movement. Madison illustrates how filmmakers introduce rearticulated, "co-optive collective memories" of historical moments that initially represented gains for Africans and African Americans by highlighting white heroes, marginalizing black agency, and obscuring the deeper structure of white capitalist domination.<sup>82</sup> By actively endorsing the transformation of former segregationists, the *Post* and other dominant press outlets studied perpetuate the erasure of the brutality carried out by state actors from Selma's legacy. As with concentrating on "progress away," obscuring state sanctioned violence in commemorative content helps build a collective memory free of past viciousness.

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<sup>82</sup> Kelly J. Madison, "Legitimation Crisis and Containment: The "Anti-Racist White Hero Film," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16, no. 4 (1999): 400.

*The 45th Anniversary.* The tone and content of dominant newspaper reports about Selma's 45th anniversary contained distinctly different attributes than the previous two moments studied. Not a single article mentioned a former segregationist official and articles attempting to mark "progress away" did not figure prominently in newspaper accounts. Only one article, a short piece in the "Nation & World" section of the *Chicago Tribune*, dealt directly with Selma's anniversary.<sup>83</sup> The brief outlined Bloody Sunday events and quoted a statement from President Obama claiming "more still needs to be done."<sup>84</sup> A letter to the editor encouraged readers to remember John Lewis' role in Bloody Sunday, but was not in and of itself a full commemoration.<sup>85</sup> The remainder of coverage tied Selma to outside phenomena—namely passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), education reform, immigration, and Lee Daniels' film "Selma"—resulting in a framing of Selma's 45th anniversary as "a bridge to elsewhere." Focus on the Affordable Care Act and education reform was largely spurred by a House of Representatives' ACA vote and a speech made by Obama's Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, commemorating the 45th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday. In the speech, Duncan outlined new efforts to revitalize the Education's Department's Office of Civil Rights.

Coverage related to these two events tended to lead with details surrounding the vote or speech before incorporating references to Selma. Stories about the ACA likened Democrats' protestor-lined walk to the Capitol for the ACA vote to civil rights activists'

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<sup>83</sup> No author listed, NATION & WORLD, *Chicago Tribune*, March 8, 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Bob Van Wicklin, "Letter to the Editor, Remember civil rights pioneer in Selma march tribute," *USA Today*, March 11, 2010.

walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday.<sup>86</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* story described a pre-walk "pep talk" given by John Lewis, "a veteran of the civil rights movement who, the day before, had been the target of racial epithets from a crowd of protesters," during which "Lewis reminded the assembled lawmakers Sunday that they were voting on the 45th anniversary of one of the famous civil rights marches."<sup>87</sup> A *New York Times* editorial on education reform lauded Secretary Duncan's recent achievements and goals then noted that "Mr. Duncan announced his goals during a speech commemorating the 45th anniversary of the 'Bloody Sunday' civil rights march in Selma, Ala., during which demonstrators were bludgeoned by police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge."<sup>88</sup> The piece also observed that Duncan invoked Martin Luther King's name claiming that King "would be pleased by the racial progress that the country has made but 'would have been angered'" by lingering inequality within the United States' education system.<sup>89</sup>

Dominant press coverage also mentioned Selma in a quote from Reverend Samuel Rodriguez, the leader of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, who referred to a Washington, D.C. immigration rally as "our Selma."<sup>90</sup> A book review showcasing David Remnick's biography of President Obama contained a 2009 John Lewis quote that asserted "Obama is what comes at the end of that bridge in Selma."<sup>91</sup> The remaining articles discussed various players' roles in the Lee Daniel's cinematic

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<sup>86</sup> Noam Levey and Janet Hook, "HEALTHCARE OVERHAUL; HOUSE PASSES HISTORIC HEALTHCARE OVERHAUL," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 2010, Howard Blume, "LAUSD is target of rights inquiry," *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Levey and Hook, "HEALTHCARE OVERHAUL," *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>88</sup> Editorial, "Civil Rights in Education," *New York Times*, March 16, 2010.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Julia Preston, "At Rally, Call for Urgency on Immigration Reform," *New York Times*, March 22, 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Douglas Brinkley, "BOOK REVIEW; Obama's path across bridge of history; David Remnick offers a definitive account of the first black U.S. president," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 2010.

rendering of "Selma" and a split within SCLC leadership wherein Selma was mentioned as an important event in the organization's history.<sup>92</sup>

One article penned on the 45th anniversary shared similarities with content from the previous two time periods analyzed. An op-ed piece by well-known *Washington Post* columnist George F. Will contested strategies outlined in Education Secretary Arne Duncan's Bloody Sunday commemoration speech with counterpoints indicative of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's "minimization of racism" frame. Will charged that Duncan "like many liberals, seems afflicted by Sixties Nostalgia Syndrome, a longing for the high drama and moral clarity of the civil rights era."<sup>93</sup> Will contended that unlike during the 1960s, "today's complexities of equity are complex because they are not about 'rights.'" <sup>94</sup> Instead, argued Will, "the pertinent lesson of the 1960s is the futility of casting today's problems of social class, as Duncan does, in the anachronistic categories of the civil rights era."<sup>95</sup> With respect to education reform, Will alleged that "plainly put, the best predictor of a school's performance is family performance—qualities of the families from which the students come."<sup>96</sup> Ultimately, Will concluded that "no segregationist politician is blocking schoolhouse doors against D.C. children," therefore, Secretary Duncan "should spare us the exhibitionism of explaining problems of social class in the '60s vocabulary of civil rights violations."<sup>97</sup> In keeping with Bonilla-Silva's findings, Will's insistence on differentiating between past and present inequality combined with his desire

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<sup>92</sup> Marc Sachs, "HOT LIST; MY FAVORITE WEEKEND: Lenny Kravitz; He's always on the run," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2010, No author listed, "That's a wrap for Lee Daniels as Oscar countdown ends," *USA Today*, March 8, 2010, Cameron McWhirter, "SCLC faction to 2 leaders: Resign: Half the board urge chair, treasurer to quit amid criminal probe," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 7, 2010, and No Author Listed, "RED HOT," *Chicago Tribune*, March 5, 2010.

<sup>93</sup> George F. Will, "Democrats' education blockade," *Washington Post*, March 21, 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



to shift the burden of responsibility for education performance onto individuals works to minimize the importance of civil rights gains, lingering barriers to parity, and the state's role in perpetuating inequity.

The content of the above column is not entirely surprising given the known conservative political leanings of its author. However, following a trend outlined by Catherine Squires, it runs counter to "post-racial" sentiments prominent in media treatments during Barack Obama's campaign and the early years of his presidency.<sup>98</sup> The persistence of color-blind racism, absence of reformed segregationists, and framing as "a bridge to elsewhere" create a relatively superficial, uni-dimensional commemoration of Selma's 45th anniversary. While the impetus for this uni-dimensional commemoration cannot be directly attributed to previous media treatments, one must wonder if past emphasis on progress away, colorblind renderings of progress, and forgiveness of former segregationists might contribute to the relatively sanitized version of Selma presented dominant press outlets in 2010. Additionally, Obama's rise to the presidency and the subsequent heralding of a "post-racial era" may have minimized the importance of commemorating Selma for dominant newspapers.<sup>99</sup>

Examination of Selma anniversary coverage in the dominant press revealed three frames. Newspaper content from the 20th and 30th anniversaries tended to frame Selma as a marker of progress "away from" and attempted to rearticulate the meaning of Southern white male identity. In a departure from the first two time intervals, 45th anniversary coverage focused on Selma as a "bridge to elsewhere." Although dominant press treatments recount Bloody Sunday and provide quotes from civil rights leaders and

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<sup>98</sup> Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique*, 64-70.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

reenactment marchers, commemorations are ultimately framed more around moving beyond Selma than relishing its legacy—more on forgetting than remembering. Forgetting allows the goals, stories, and everyday lives of Selma's "footsoldiers" as well as the level of discrimination and prejudice that prompted Bloody Sunday's violence to become obscured as we move forward in time. It is especially troubling that commemorative newspaper accounts do not attempt to "humanize" marchers and activists in the same way they do former segregationist officials and white southerners.

Commemorations that obscure pieces of the past also shape incomplete understandings of the present.<sup>100</sup> With respect to Selma, uni-dimensional newspaper framings displace contemporary narratives that dispute hegemonic versions of progress and/or forgiveness of Bloody Sunday's perpetrators, the majority of lingering raced-based inequalities, and the everyday racisms still faced by people of color in the United States.<sup>101</sup> It is very conceivable that mediated civil rights commemorations could do this work, but as the above analysis shows, dominant press newspapers largely do not take the conversation in that direction. Instead, these media outlets compress histories of racism into "then," "now," "good," and "evil," erase previous and ongoing racially motivated violence, and supplant accountability for racist actions with markers of achievement. As Catherine Squires asserts, these type of "white-oriented progress narratives" neglect "counter-memories" from people of color in favor of "a paltry type of multiculturalism in

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<sup>100</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory*, Carolyn Kitch, *Pages from the Past: History and Memory in American Magazines* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), Paul Ricoeur, "Memory—History—Forgetting," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, 476. Barry Schwartz, "Social Change and the Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington," *American Sociological Review* 56, No. 2, (1991): 234.

<sup>101</sup> Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique*, 209.

the service of national unity."<sup>102</sup> A focus on forgetting the past and neglecting all voices involved negates crucial opportunities to consider contemporary events that bear all too eerie similarities to the state sanctioned violence carried out by Alabama law enforcement on Bloody Sunday, 1965—namely, the murders of Mike Brown, Eric Garner, and other African Americans by police officers—in light of Selma's lessons.

### African American Press Framings

The two frames emerged in Black press content from Selma's 20th and 30th anniversaries: 1.) the consequences of complacency and 2.) disconnects within American democracy. These two framings differ substantially from those of the dominant press. Any sense of "moving beyond" or forgetting Selma as well as the "redemption" narrative seen in the dominant press did not make an appearance in Black press accounts. While 58.3% of African American press articles mention Wallace, Smith, or Baker in 1985 and 18.1% mention those men in 1995, undercurrents of forgiveness and redemption surfaced in only two articles.<sup>103</sup> In 45th anniversary coverage, African American press outlets framed the Selma anniversary largely in localized terms leading to a "local connections" framing. Because the *Atlanta Daily World* published 61.3 percent of all Black press articles commemorating the 45th anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery march, these framings heavily reflect the purview of the *World*. The remainder of this section discusses and provides examples of coverage typical to each frame draws conclusions based on those findings.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 204-205.

<sup>103</sup> No Author Listed, "Bloody Sunday Peaceful, Leaders Warn of New Peril, *Atlanta Daily World*, March 9, 1995, No Author Listed, "Wallace, Lowery Meet Again at Alabama Schoolhouse Door," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 14, 1995. Both of those articles contain writing style and content nearly identical to United Press International and Associated Press stories examined in the dominant press samples. It is highly conceivable that these two pieces drew heavily from wire service content.

*The Consequences of Complacency.* Instead of concentrating on "moving beyond" Bloody Sunday's atrocities, African American press coverage from Selma's 20th and 30th anniversaries emphasized the consequences of neglecting Selma's legacy by connecting the brutal violence exacted upon Selma's demonstrators with civil rights era legislative gains and the repercussions of failing to exercise voting rights in contemporary eras. This framing dovetails with a long history of Black intellectual thought encouraging African American active participation in American democracy as a strategy for combating racism. A 1985 *Los Angeles Sentinel* column written by Marian Wright Edelman recounted Selma's history, but noted that despite "new challenges and new strategies," African Americans in 1985 "must make sure that we use the vote" Selma demonstrators "paid so dearly to achieve."<sup>104</sup> Rev. Willie T. Barrow referred to a Chicago election day as "our 'Bloody Tuesday,'" in an effort to rally Black Chicagoans to vote in the 1995 Mayoral election between Richard M. Daley and Roland W. Burris.<sup>105</sup> The *Atlanta Daily World* publicized a "Voting Rights Participation and Voter Registration Month," by noting Selma's place in voting rights history. The article then went on to warn readers that "the fight is not over."<sup>106</sup> The piece highlighted "the many attempts being made throughout the South to reduce and undermine Congressional representation and the decline of voters in state and national elections" and encouraged readers to not only register to vote, but to "instill the vital importance of this civic responsibility in their children."<sup>107</sup> These articles' choice to invoke Selma's legacy to illustrate contemporary challenges to African American equality and encourage active voter participation as remedies for those

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<sup>104</sup> Marian Wright Edelman, "Song of Selma" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 28, 1985. Marian Wright Edelman is best known for founding The Children's Defense Fund.

<sup>105</sup> Chinta Strausburg, "Ministers Call Apr 4 'Freedom Day,'" *Chicago Defender*, March 15, 1995.

<sup>106</sup> No Author Listed, "Voters in March Spotlight," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 19, 1995.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

challenges vividly underscores how, for African Americans, fundamental challenges to political equality clearly linger long beyond Selma.

Several other articles described Selma's violence and contemporary consequences in more vivid terms. *Los Angeles Sentinel* contributor Betty Pleasant began her column by listing civil rights demonstrators who died en route to the Voting Rights Act's passage. Pleasant then highlighted a recent Lynwood California election wherein Black voters "stayed home in droves and passively relinquished control of their smug little lives to the city's white minority."<sup>108</sup> Pleasant concluded that it "ought to be a sin that bars you from Heaven if you're Black and don't vote. If that were the case, and new name would be added to the annals of iniquity: Sodom, Gomorrah, and Lynwood."<sup>109</sup> A 1995 *Atlanta Daily World* column sketched a detailed history of Bloody Sunday and the march to Montgomery then explicitly emphasized that "a Black man and a White man lost their lives in those bloody days."<sup>110</sup> The piece concluded that Selma demonstrators made "a sacrifice that we dare not forget" and asked readers, "Are you registered to vote?"<sup>111</sup> The *World* continued its 1995 push resurrect Selma's relevance through an editorial expressing how "greatly concerned and disgusted" civil rights era demonstrators were that Selma's "gains 30 years ago may be lost through the failure of the benefactors to use their hard-fought for rights."<sup>112</sup> The *World* informed readers that those who braved Bloody Sunday "are disgusted with those who sit down and do nothing but gripe after election days."<sup>113</sup> The editorial cited contemporary "threats and actions to dismantle and

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<sup>108</sup> Betty Pleasant, "Soulvine," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 14, 1985.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Bernice Powell Jackson, "Remembering Bloody Sunday," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 9, 1995.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Editorial, "Bloody Sunday Participants Disgusted," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 12, 1995.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

discard the framework of laws and executive orders under which we advanced to a respected place on the stage of citizenship equality" as the primary impetus for urgency.<sup>114</sup> The piece concluded that "anybody who thinks his or her vote 'won't matter' is as wrong as wrong can be. No amount of moaning and wailing can change things. Only the wise exercise of the ballot and economic networking power can save us from a 'Second Reconstruction.'"<sup>115</sup> The "fierce urgency of now" present in the above content cements a commemorative sentiment wherein society should not be focused on moving away from Selma, but instead desperately fighting to keep its legacy and hard earned voting rights gains alive.

As illustrated above, Black press content does not echo the rhetoric of an unequivocally "changed" South voiced in dominant press accounts. Indeed, Black press commemorations vehemently argue that American society has not shifted enough to leave Selma in the past. By focusing on the perils of forgetting Selma rather than moving beyond it, the African American press highlights ongoing challenges to equality as opposed to "how far we've come." This framing's importance is two-fold: 1.) the compression of time seen in dominant press treatments is far less prevalent, meaning that ongoing challenges to equality are not displaced from Selma's narrative; 2.) the goals and sacrifices of Selma's "footsoldiers"—as well as the level of discrimination and prejudice that prompted Bloody Sunday's violence—retain a prominent position in the narrative despite the passage of time. The urgent need to remember seen in Selma commemorations directly echoes earlier eras of Black press activism. For the Black press

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

and its readers—even during the late 20th-century—forgetting means a return to Jim Crow, Reconstruction, or perhaps at worst, specters of the anti-bellum South.

*Disconnects within American Democracy.* A second frame present in African American press coverage of Selma's 20th and 30th anniversaries focused on unfulfilled promises within the United States' political system. This frame ties the systemic denial of equal rights directly to contemporary structures and functions of American government. A 1995 *New York Amsterdam News* report stressed that "thirty years after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker and others led the historic march to Selma, Ala., in a civil rights protest, Rev. Al Sharpton has shown that today's Blacks have to take those walking shoes off the shelf, dust them and have them resoled."<sup>116</sup> The article cited "protest" of New York Governor George Pataki's "threatened budget cutbacks in services and programs vital to many New York citizens, especially the poor, homeless, infirm and powerless" as the march's cause.<sup>117</sup> The *Amsterdam News* quoted Jesse Jackson, one of the march's organizers, who warned readers that "it's time to take a good look at both political parties because each has failed Blacks, Latinos and the poor masses."<sup>118</sup> An *Atlanta Daily World* piece encouraged readers to disregard dominant press reports of "low numbers" at the 1985 reenactment march because "regardless of numbers involved, 20 years ago and last Monday those participating are due an undying tribute in the most effective way to bring this country more in line with her noble principles."<sup>119</sup>

Tony Brown, host of "Tony Brown's Journal," a long-running television program dedicated to African American history and issues, took aim at the limits of constitutional

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<sup>116</sup> J Zamgba Browne, "Sharpton walks to the state capitol: Hundreds of demonstrators lend support across state," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 11, 1995.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> No author listed, "Don't Worry About Low Numbers," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 8, 1985.

guarantees in a 1985 edition of his weekly *Washington Informer* column. Brown recounted how a bomb threat caused the cancellation of a Montgomery screening of his film, "The Longest Struggle," just "10 days before the anniversary of the famous March On Selma."<sup>120</sup> Brown tied the callers' "terroristic" threat to essential American freedoms asserting that "the terrorist unilaterally cancelled the fundamental guarantees of the Constitution of the United States, as amended, to freedom of speech, press and assembly."<sup>121</sup> Brown then asked, "Was this cowardly act connected to Selma's "Bloody Sunday" 20 years ago?" A local NAACP Branch President noted that similar threats coincide "with any activity that works towards securing human dignity and justice for all Americans. A spate of these acts occur annually around the anniversary of the Selma March."<sup>122</sup> Each of the proceeding articles illustrates specific modes—political parties, democratic philosophies, and freedom of expression—through which fundamental guarantees of American democracy taken for granted by white Americans have failed to be extended to Americans of color. In highlighting these disconnects, the Black press provides variety of counter-memories that challenge collective "progress" narratives prevalent in dominant press accounts. By neglecting to meaningfully incorporate these civil rights counter-memories, dominant press outlets perpetuate notions of universal American equality in news discourse despite a host of scholarly and popular evidence that indicates these aims are yet to be realized.

Gus (Augustus) Hawkins, a long-serving African American Congressman and civil rights champion from California, typified disconnects within American democracy in the greatest detail. Hawkins used a *Los Angeles Sentinel* column to explicitly point out

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<sup>120</sup> Tony Brown, "Tony Brown's Comments," *Washington Informer*, March 20, 1985.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*



that Bloody Sunday's violence "was sanctioned by the state authority."<sup>123</sup> Hawkins then cited "the terror and emotion of Selma" as catalysts for "positive social legislative and judicial measures advancing equal opportunity."<sup>124</sup> In contrast to dominant press stories that routinely neglected positive impacts of federal government legislation, Hawkins noted that "economic and social" gains made by people of color in the 20 years since Selma were "largely because of anti-discrimination laws and regulations."<sup>125</sup> Hawkins warned that "although blatant and overt discrimination is less visible today, more subtle systemic barriers are still pervasive in our society."<sup>126</sup> The Congressman went on to outline proposed legislation reinstating full penalties for educational institutions found guilty of discriminatory practices and asserted that "it should be made very clear that the federal government should not tolerate 'a little discrimination.'"<sup>127</sup> Hawkins encouraged readers to commemorate Selma's "dehumanizing violence" by renewing "our commitment to a new agenda that seeks to protect the laws for which they courageously marched."<sup>128</sup> Hawkins' column explicitly acknowledges the state sanctioned nature of Bloody Sunday's violence, the integral role of federal government intervention in improving the lives of Americans of color, and existing *systemic* barriers to equality much differently than the majority of dominant press accounts. Rather than championing a move "beyond" Selma in the name of national unity, Hawkins encourages readers to rally around foundational shortcomings of the United States' governmental system in the name of better opportunity for all. Including more counter-memories such as Hawkins'

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<sup>123</sup> Gus Hawkins, "Selma, Alabama, and Civil Rights Today," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 14, 1985.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

would shift dominant press news narratives away from hegemonic versions of progress toward discussions of lingering raced-based inequalities and everyday racisms still faced by people of color in the United States.<sup>129</sup> Because of his position as a Democratic congressman, a dominant press outlet could have incorporated quotes or a column from Hawkins and remained well within accepted norms of journalistic practice for the mid-1980s. This analysis revealed no such material.

In sum, the Black press commemorated Selma's 20th and 30th anniversaries in a manner very different from the dominant press newspapers examined in this study. Instead of declaring the African American freedom struggle largely complete, the Black press highlighted specific examples of its contentious, ongoing nature. These divergent treatments illustrate a fundamental disconnect in how white Americans and many outside that dominant racial group collectively remember and commemorate the civil rights movement. As Nikhil Pal Singh explains, in dominant discourses the movement is often "represented as part of an achieved national, political consensus shattered only when Blacks themselves abandoned the normative discourses of American politics."<sup>130</sup> However, as outlined above, contributors to the Black press continued to underscore the necessity of mobilization against racist behavior, laws, and democratic processes deep into the 1990s.

*The 45th anniversary.* As in the dominant press, news coverage of Selma's 45th anniversary differed considerably from earlier commemorations. In 2010, only half of Black press articles mentioning Selma dealt with the event's history or legacy in any detail. The remaining articles indistinctly referenced Selma in discussions of other

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<sup>129</sup> Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique*, 209.

<sup>130</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6.

individuals or occurrences. Interestingly, the Black press did not tie Selma to the Affordable Care Act's passage or Education Secretary Arne Duncan's speech about education reform as was the case in many dominant press accounts. Instead, the Black press newspapers studied chose to localize Selma resulting in a 45th anniversary framing of "local connections." The *Daily World* chronicled local legend John Lewis' commemorative walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, an Atlanta-based King Center event, and general estimations of African American equality from prominent Atlanta leaders.<sup>131</sup> References to Selma also appeared in a *Los Angeles Sentinel* interview with actor Lenny Kravtiz and a *Chicago Defender* profile of local minister Reverend Willie T. Barrow.<sup>132</sup> The *New York Amsterdam News* and *Washington Informer* produced slightly less local content, but remained relatively superficial in their discussions. As in 1995, the *Amsterdam News* highlighted Jesse Jackson's commemoration of Selma.<sup>133</sup> The *Informer* printed only a short "almanac" paragraph marking the march to Montgomery in its weekly historical feature, "Black History Journal."<sup>134</sup> Black press news outlets presented an extremely decentralized narrative about Selma on the 45th anniversary, largely choosing to focus on local figures and issues. This localized, cursory treatment cements the diminished stature of Selma's memory suggested by the steady decline in articles about Selma outlined in earlier portions of this chapter.

*Lessons from Selma.* While the dominant press actively reinforced hegemonic understandings of Selma, Black press outlets broke out of that framework in extremely

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<sup>131</sup> Associated Press, "John Lewis Remembers Bloody Sunday March," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 11-17, 2010, No author listed, "Tour Marks Bloody Sunday's 45th Anniversary," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 4-10, 2010, and Editorial, "An Appeal for Human Rights: 1960-2010," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 18-24, 2010.

<sup>132</sup> Kam Williams, "Let Lenny Rule," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 18-24, 2010 and Kathy Chaney, "Rev. Willie T. Barrow: 'Little Warrior' Doing Big Things for Social Justice," *Chicago Defender*, March 24-30, 2010.

<sup>133</sup> Herb Boyd, "45th anniversary of 'Bloody Sunday,'" *New Amsterdam News*, March 11-17, 2010.

<sup>134</sup> Robert Taylor, "Black History Journal," *Washington Informer*, March 18-24, 2010.

meaningful ways, especially on the 20th and 30th anniversaries. By the 45th anniversary, however, neither press commemorated Selma in a substantial way. Even Black press outlets were not actively remembering the event as they had in previous years. The deaths of Selma's essential actors may partially account for the decrease in substantive commemorations—particularly when journalistic sourcing practices and Michael Schudson's notion of collective memory as measured in units "the lifetime" are considered.<sup>135</sup> Perhaps, when principal historical actors pass away, news outlets—in both the dominant and African American presses—have trouble keeping alive memory, especially on non-landmark anniversaries like the 45th.

### **Conclusion**

Dominant media outlets marked Selma's 50th anniversary in a manner similar to the junctures addressed in this chapter. Commemorations published in March 2015 focused on redemption and progress despite the recent dismantling of key provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and active efforts to bar African Americans and other citizens of color from America's voting booths. An *Associated Press* (AP) piece running in the *New York Times* noted that "thousands of people crowded an Alabama bridge on Sunday, many jammed shoulder to shoulder, many unable to move, to commemorate a bloody confrontation 50 years ago between police and peaceful protesters that helped bring about the 1965 Voting Rights Act."<sup>136</sup> Both the *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post* led with a highly similar characterization of the landmark civil rights moment.<sup>137</sup> While these articles mentioned the 2013 Supreme Court ruling that negated the most meaningful

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<sup>135</sup> Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory*.

<sup>136</sup> Lucas L. Johnson II, "Bloody Sunday 50th Anniversary: Thousands Crowd Selma Bridge," *New York Times*, March 8, 2013.

<sup>137</sup> No author listed, "Bloody Sunday 50th anniversary: Thousands Crowd Selma Bridge," *Washington Post*, March 8, 2015 and Matthew Teague, Ann M. Simmons, and Matt Pearce, "In Selma, Thousands Join Commemorative 'Bloody Sunday' Civil Rights March," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 2013.

portions of the Voting Rights Act, the bulk of the coverage focused on President Obama's remarks, speeches by other African American leaders, and remembrances of those who participated in the 1965 journey to Montgomery.<sup>138</sup>

Two months prior to Selma's 50th anniversary, Ava DuVernay's characterization of former President Lyndon Baines Johnson in her film *Selma* generated a much larger debate about the meaning and legacy of that civil rights milestone. DuVernay's portrayed Johnson as reluctant to demand a comprehensive voting rights act despite demands by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights organizers. This treatment drew criticism from prominent *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd who claimed that "DuVernay had plenty of vile white villains...there was no need to create a faux one" in Johnson.<sup>139</sup> Dowd also attacked DuVernay directly, asserting that "the director's talent makes her distortion of L.B.J. more egregious."<sup>140</sup> Dowd's sentiments embody both an attempt to rearticulate Selma's legacy and the desire to redeem white Southern figures who impeded the civil rights cause. This contest over historical "accuracy" is clearly more fundamentally tied to perceived *collective memories* about a given historical event than historical facts themselves. The type of hegemonic investment in collective memories about the movement illustrates that tendencies uncovered by Kristin Hoerl and Kelly Madison in 1990s cinema remain alive and well in 2015.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Maureen Dowd, "Not Just a Movie," *New York Times*, January 17, 2015.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Hoerl, "Mississippi Burning into Memory? Cinematic Amnesia as a Resource for Remembering Civil Rights," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 1 (March 2009): 54-79, Kristen Hoerl, "Mississippi's Social Transformation in Public Memories of the Trial Against Byron de la Beckwith for the Murder of Medgar Evers," *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 1 (January-March 2008): 62-82, and Kelly J. Madison, "Legitimation Crisis and Containment: The "Anti-Racist White Hero Film," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16, no. 4 (1999): 399-416.

Perhaps partially due to the above controversy, film critics have argued that *Selma* was "snubbed" in the Oscar nominations. Although it was certainly one of a handful of top tier films released in 2015, the Oscar committee nominated *Selma* only for best song and best picture, overlooking Duvernay and David Oyewolo for best director and actor categories. According to an anonymous member of the Oscar committee *Selma* "never had a chance" at taking home the award for best picture.<sup>142</sup> In an interesting contrast, *12 Years a Slave* took home film of the year honors from the Oscars, Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild, and British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA) in 2014.<sup>143</sup> In addition, individual actors from the film took home hardware from the Oscars, Golden Globes and BAFTAs.<sup>144</sup> The Oscars and Golden Globes also nominated "12 Years a Slave" for best screenplay and best director.<sup>145</sup> The above contradictions exemplify how American society celebrates only racial history that can be codified as a "well past aberration."<sup>146</sup> The above example also illustrates the ways popular media—and communities like the Academy that support that media—not only perpetuate, but *actively fight* to keep nostalgic memories alive within societal discourse. The charges against DuVernay and *Selma*'s academy treatment are even more insidious in a moment when the United States Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act, opening the door for 21st century strategies to suppress black and Latina/o American votes.

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<sup>142</sup> Gregory Kreig, "Judging by the Academy Voter's Quote, 'Selma' Never Had a Shot," *Mic*, February 22, 2015, <http://mic.com/articles/111076/this-quote-from-an-academy-voter-reveals-just-how-bad-hollywood-s-race-problem-is>.

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2024544/awards>

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.

### Chapter 3: The March on Washington

*"There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge."*

-- Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream" speech, March on Washington, 1963

Despite the myriad civil rights campaigns that spanned weeks, months, and sometimes years, a single afternoon in 1963 remains the most universally remembered moment of the civil rights movement in America. Within that moment, the majority of memories focus on several lines from a single speech. Organizers of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom—which drew over 250,000 people to the nation's capital on August, 28 1963—purposefully emphasized unity, non-violent protest, and other elements they hoped would draw positive public attention to the civil rights cause. The favorable response to the March along with well publicized confrontations in Birmingham, Alabama earlier that year helped make 1963 a crucial turning point in the movement's drive for national recognition and an essential period for collectively remembering the American civil rights struggle.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as the opening lines of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Dream" speech predict, the March on Washington would "go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation."<sup>2</sup>

The March on Washington represents the most universally remembered civil rights event, and as such constitutes an essential site of memory, or *lieux de memoire*, for understanding how we commemorate—and neglect to commemorate—the civil rights

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<sup>1</sup> William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013). See also: Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1988), and Renee C. Romano, Renee C., Raiford Leigh, eds. *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream Speech," given August 28, 1963 at The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

movement as a nation. As Schudson, Zelizer, and others have argued, media play a significant role in shaping, reflecting, and circulating national level discourses—especially as personal memories fade.<sup>3</sup> In light of this, news coverage represents an important text to scholars of civil rights memory. Mediated commemorations are powerful tools for discerning which movement events remain popular in anniversary news coverage as well as which events fade away. How might patterns in commemorative newspaper framings of the March differ between dominant and African American newspaper accounts? What might these framings indicate about the type of historical events that get commemorated year after year? About those that get forgotten? Examination of these phenomena helps illustrate what factors might influence or dictate which type of movement narratives have long-term staying power in news discourses. What present needs or circumstances might prompt these types the March on Washington to remain such a singular focal point of civil rights commemoration? Investigating how memories evolve with contemporary social, political, and cultural circumstances illuminates the varying purposes for which movement memories are deployed and the provides insight into the underlying process of how American society commits contested historical events to memory.

In order to address the above questions, this case study examines newspaper coverage of the movement's most universally remembered event, the March on Washington. Black press coverage is drawn from the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *Chicago Defender*, and *Washington Informer*. Dominant press outlets studied include the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Atlanta*

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How we Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), 5.



*Constitution/Journal-Constitution, Chicago Tribune, USA Today, and the Washington Post.* Articles were gathered using ProQuest newsstand, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, and microfilm. Coverage about the March on Washington was gathered on the 20th and 50th anniversaries. Coverage was gathered between August 1 and September 15 in Black press newspapers. Because of the daily publication schedule of all dominant press outlets studied, the timeframe was shortened to two weeks—August 21-September 4. The 20th anniversary was chosen due to a large commemoration march attended by over 250,000 people. The 50th anniversary marks a major commemorative milestone in American culture and also allows examination of how newspapers might connect the legacies of Barack Obama, the United States' first African American president, with the civil rights movement.

The remainder of this chapter establishes differences in volume and type of stories produced about the March on Washington in black and dominant press. It also analyzes discursive patterns in commemorative news and editorial coverage. Based on publication frequency and analysis results, this chapter discusses how newspaper coverage changes over time, across presses, and across events. It then connects these differences with American social, cultural, and economic trends in order to assess why the March on Washington is perpetually at the forefront of American collective memory surrounding the civil rights movement.

### **Coverage by the Numbers**

#### August 1963

Because this study deals with how media treatments of the civil rights movement shift over time, it is useful to briefly highlight coverage volumes of the March on Washington from the civil rights era. Somewhat surprisingly, the March on Washington

received substantial attention in newspapers, but did not to the level one might expect given its stature in contemporary eras. One study found that *The Chicago Tribune* and *Milwaukee Journal* published only 183 articles about the March on Washington between August 1 and September 15, 1963—less than half of the attention the Selma to Montgomery march garnered.<sup>4</sup> While breaking news events arguably have a tendency to generate a larger number of stories than commemorations, the volume comparison is still useful to establish the media prominence of the March in the 1960s.

### Anniversary Coverage

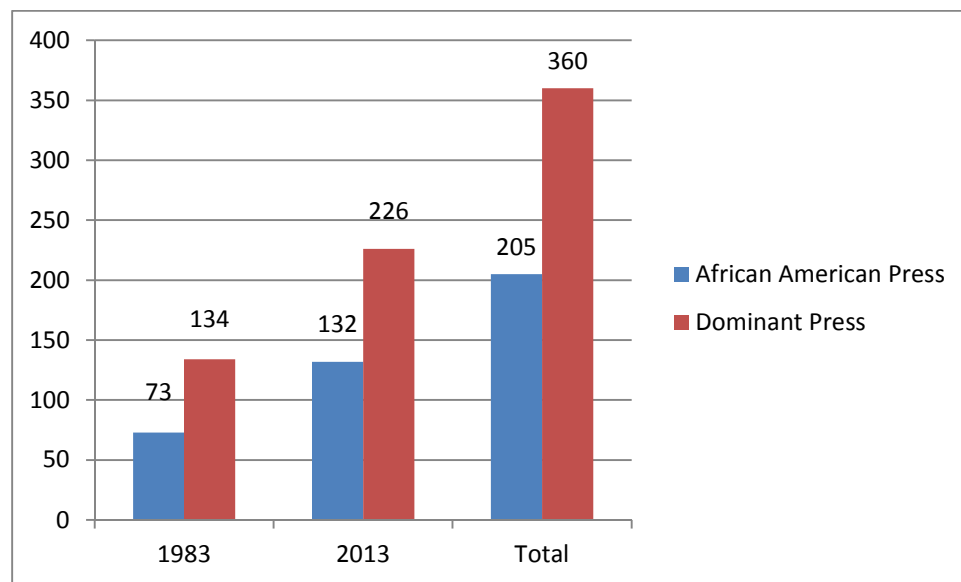


Figure 3: Dominant and African America press article totals, March on Washington (N=565)

Coverage of the March on Washington increases over time with the same voracity that marks Selma coverage declines. Despite a significantly smaller crowd size at the 2013 event, both black and dominant press outlets printed more articles on the 50th

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<sup>4</sup> Meagan Manning, "Assessing the Dream: The March on Washington, Selma, and American Collective Memory," (master's thesis, University of Minnesota, 2011), ProQuest, 55.

anniversary of the March on Washington than the about 20th.<sup>5</sup> In total, black press outlets published 132 articles and dominant press outlets produced 226 articles during the 2013 interval. This compares to 1983 totals of 73 and 134 respectively in the black and dominant presses (see Figure 3). Regional variations in coverage also appeared in March on Washington coverage. In both presses and time intervals Washington, D.C. based newspapers produced the largest number of stories.<sup>6</sup> Examination of totals across presses reveals that the dominant press unsurprisingly produced the larger number of articles in both 1983 and 2013, nearly 150 more than the African American press (see Figure 3).

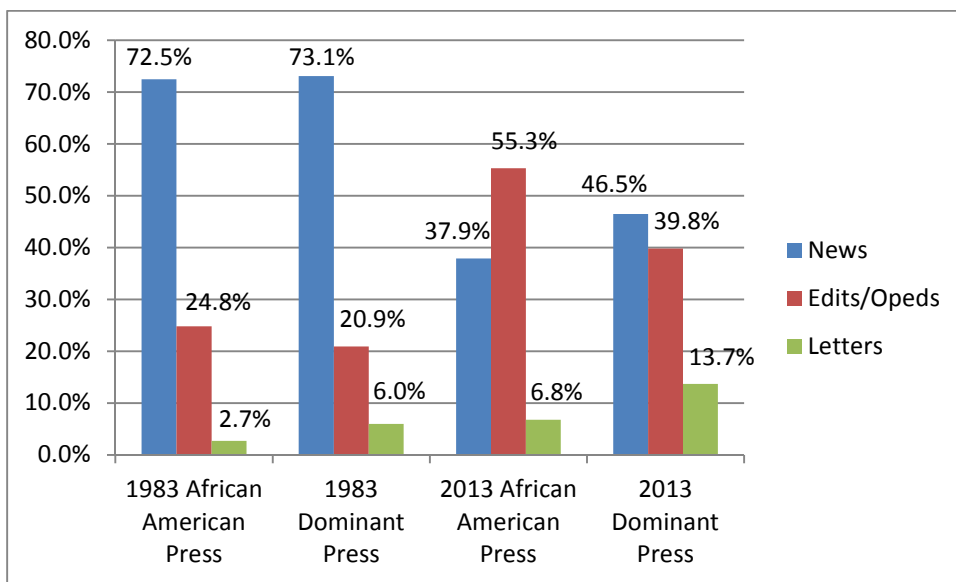


Figure 4: Percentage of total articles by type, 1983 and 2013 (N=565)

Black and dominant press outlets published similar percentages of news stories and editorial content in 1983. Just over 72 percent of all Black press articles from the 1983 time frame were news stories (see Figure 4). This nearly mirrors the percentage for

<sup>5</sup> *The Guardian* newspaper and *Associated Press* reports put the crowd at "tens of thousands" in 2013. See: Paul Lewis, "Thousands March on Washington to Remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Dream," *The Guardian*, August 24, 2013 and Suzanne Gamboa and Andrew Miga, "Obama Inspires Many in 50th-year King Remembrance," *Associated Press*, August 29, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> The *Washington Post* produced 164 articles across the three time intervals. The *Washington Informer* produced 84.

dominant press content published in 1983 (see Figure 4). Approximately one quarter of each press' content that year was editorial in nature (see Figure 4). Letters to the editor constituted less than six percent of all content in 1983 (see Figure 4). In a distinct shift from 1983 coverage, news stories accounted for nearly 40 percent of Black press content in 2013 while editorials and columns made up 55 percent (see Figure 4). Conversely, news stories constituted 46 percent of 2013 dominant press content while editorials and columns equaled just under 40 percent (see Figure 4). Letters to the editor made up approximately seven and 14 percent of Black and dominant press content respectively in 2013 (Figure 4). The 2013 proportions more closely mirror the type of article distribution seen in other research on African American and dominant press newspapers while in 1983 readers of the Black press received an amount of "news" oriented coverage similar to that received by dominant press audiences.<sup>7</sup>

The above data overview highlights several key trends: 1.) the decline in Selma coverage and the rise in March on Washington coverage in both presses (similar to my thesis); 2.) Atlanta and Washington, D.C. based outlets produced more content than newspapers in other locations in both presses and time intervals, pointing to the existence of some regional differences in coverage of both events (Jacobs, Rhodes) 3.) the African American press outlets produced much greater proportions of news content in 1983, 1985, 1995, and 2010 than previous studies might suggest.

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<sup>7</sup> Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.: A Detailed and Understanding Report on what the Black Press is and How it Came to Be* (Ames: Iowa State Press, 1989), Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), Catherine R. Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line: The Press and Multi-Racial America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Ronald Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society: From Watts to Rodney King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), among many others.

Unlike Selma, both black and dominant press newspapers studied produced more articles about the March on Washington as we move forward in time. For some reason, the March on Washington elicits a continued, relatively universal "willingness to remember" in all newspapers examined. The following section explores this "willingness to remember" and how it might differ between the dominant and Black presses. When taking in these frames, it is important to keep in mind that the notion of marching on Washington in the name of equality for African Americans did not begin with the 1963 march, but in the early 1940s during the March on Washington Movement headed by A. Philip Randolph and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car porters.<sup>8</sup> Another often forgotten connection to 1963 is a 20th anniversary commemoration march on Washington, sometimes hailed as "March on Washington II" in newspaper coverage, that drew close to 300,000 back to the nation's capital. Despite high attendance, this analysis unearthed only one mention of the 1983 march in 2013 coverage, underscoring just how infrequently the 1983 event presents itself in contemporary reflections on the past.

### Dominant Press Framings

Dominant press framings of the March on Washington change relatively little between 1983 and 2013. While prominent figures, the scope of inclusion, and specific areas of concern differ somewhat between 1983 and 2013, the majority of coverage shared three important similarities: 1.) discussions rooted in *national* level issues such as

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<sup>8</sup> Randolph launched the March on Washington Movement during the early 1940s to combat high unemployment rates among Black Americans. Though supporters never demonstrated in the streets of the nation's capital, the mere threat of such a large scale event exacted Executive Order No. 8802 from President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 25, 1941. For more information on the March on Washington Movement see Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), Manning Marable, *Beyond Black and White: Transforming African-American Politics* (New York: Verso, 1995), and Dwight MacDonald, *War's Greatest Scandal: The Story of Jim Crow in Uniform*, March on Washington Movement Publication, 1943.

the United States' progress toward equality since 1963; 2.) connections between the federal government and American race relations, and 3.) assessments of remaining inequality nationwide. A primary difference between coverage of the two anniversaries centered on the "active" status of the civil rights movement. In 1983, dominant press newspapers treated the movement as an active, ongoing effort. By 2013, these newspapers discussed the movement as an expressly historical phenomenon. To that end, 20th anniversary coverage questioned if the 1983 march could be deemed a "success" and speculated about legislative outcomes of the gathering in ways not relevant by 2013.

A second major difference emerged in the scope of historical actors included in each anniversary's narrative. Somewhat unsurprisingly, 50th anniversary coverage mentioned significantly more historical actors than reports penned on the 20th anniversary. For example, in 1983, 5.2 percent of dominant press articles mentioned march organizer A. Philip Randolph. By 2013, Randolph's name appeared in 13.3 percent of dominant press pieces.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Bayard Rustin garnered mentions in 7.5 and 11.5 percent of articles in 1983 and 2013 respectively.<sup>10</sup> Articles referencing Medgar Evers increased from 3.7 to 8.4 percent between 1983 and 2013.<sup>11</sup> Despite these increases, prominent civil rights figures largely remain at the margins of dominant press coverage. Even principal organizers Randolph and Rustin are mentioned in less than 15 percent of all dominant press content.

A third fundamental difference between anniversaries revolved around which marginalized populations journalists included in discussions of American progress toward equality. Commentary penned about the March on Washington in 1963 framed

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<sup>9</sup> Randolph is mentioned in seven articles in 1983 and 30 articles in 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Rustin is mentioned in 10 articles in 1983 and 26 articles in 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Evers is mentioned in 5 articles in 1983 and 19 articles in 2013.

fighters against discrimination within a Black/white binary.<sup>12</sup> By 1983, newspapers expanded that binary to include women, LGBT groups, and occasionally Latinos.<sup>13</sup> Fiftieth anniversary commemorations incorporated a wide array of marginalized groups. For example, President Obama's 2013 commemoration speech maintained that through the March "America became more free and more fair, not just for African-Americans but for women and Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, for Catholics, Jews and Muslims, for gays, for Americans with disabilities."<sup>14</sup>

The above trends are reflected in the three primary frames that emerged in dominant press' coverage of the 20th and 50th anniversaries of the March on Washington: 1.) King the Universal, yet Ambiguous Icon; 2.) Assessing Dr. King and the Dream; and 3.) A Moment of Racial Harmony on the Way to a Better Racial Future. The remainder of this section discusses and provides examples of coverage typical to each frame.

*King the Universal, yet Ambiguous Icon.* As one might predict, Dr. Martin Luther King and his "I Have a Dream" speech comprised the most prominent subjects in dominant press commemorations of the March on Washington. Over 75 percent all articles mentioned Dr. King, other King family members, and/or "the Dream" on both the 20th and 50th anniversaries (see Table 1). In comparison, March organizer A. Philip Randolph was included in less than 15 percent of all articles.<sup>15</sup> King's dominant and consistent presence points to a fixed collective memory of the March that relies more heavily on King and the Dream than some might imagine.

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<sup>12</sup> Manning, "Assessing the Dream," 56-65.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 68-82.

<sup>14</sup> "President Obama's speech on the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington," *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Randolph was mentioned in 13.3 percent of articles in 2013 coverage and 5.2 percent of coverage in 1983.

	<b>1983</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Headline</b>	21 (15.7%)	51 (22.5%)
<b>Article</b>	101 (75.3%)	170 (75.2%)
<b>N=</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>226</b>

Table 1: Mentions of Dr. King, the King Family, or "The Dream" in March on Washington Anniversary Coverage

Despite his huge presence, content rarely included substantive descriptions of King. Instead, dominant press outlets routinely used King's name as a stand in for the civil rights movement writ large and selectively quoted speeches and other written works to establish the icon's legacy. Between 67 and 75 percent of articles that mentioned Dr. King also incorporated at least one of his speeches or written works (see Table 2). The "I Have a Dream" speech is overwhelmingly the most often mentioned.<sup>16</sup> While this fact is hardly surprising, the interesting counterpoint is how infrequently King's other speeches and works appear in newspaper reports. Dominant press outlets connected King with a non-Dream text in a mere 3.9 percent of articles published in 1983 (see Table 2). That proportion increased to a larger, but still paltry 12.9 percent in 2013 (see Table 2). The "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and the speech given at the conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery march constitute the most often mentioned "other" texts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Only one article in 1983 and two articles in 2013 commented on another King work without also mentioning the "I Have a Dream" speech.

<sup>17</sup> The Selma to Montgomery speech was mentioned five times. It is of note that these mentions are quotes from President Obama's remarks at the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was mentioned twice across both dominant press intervals. Other speeches mentioned include the "Mountain Top" speech, the book "Why We Can't Wait," and several "anti-Vietnam" speeches.



	<b>Dominant Press 1983</b>	<b>Dominant Press 2013</b>
<b>Any King Speech or Written Work</b>	68 (67.3%)	128 (75.3%)
<b>I Have a Dream Speech</b>	67 (66.3%)	126 (74.1%)
<b>All Other King Speeches and Written Works</b>	4 (3.9%)	22 (12.9%)
<b>Post-1963 Moment</b>	24 (23.7%)	41 (24.1%)
<b>N =</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>170</b>

Table 2: Mentions of Speeches, Written Works and Post-1963 Civil Rights Events in Articles Discussing Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dominant press coverage also rarely discussed King's post-1963 accomplishments.

Anniversary content studied connected King with *any* post-1963 civil rights event in only 24 percent of articles (see Table 2).<sup>18</sup> This indicates that King's later years, and the more controversial stances that accompanied them, are displaced from discourse despite 50 years of reflection, scholarship, and debate available to enrich newspaper treatments.

The above analysis illustrates that despite the wealth of scholarship produced about the complexity, variety, and nuance of the civil rights movement, the news narrative of the dominant press remains astonishingly focused on Martin Luther King, Jr. during March on Washington commemorations. Additionally, this analysis shows the degree to which reports and editorial pieces focused on the "I Have a Dream" speech and commemorated a "pre-March" King rather than the more controversial activist emerging during the late-1960s. Ultimately, then, the King commemorated on March on Washington anniversaries is decidedly uni-dimensional and largely embodies the mythic figure frequently outlined by other scholars.<sup>19</sup> Even in the 30 years between time points,

<sup>18</sup> The most often mentioned "post-1963 moments" included King's death, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

<sup>19</sup> Catherine R. Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), Edward P. Morgan, "The Good the Bad and the Forgotten: Media Culture and Public Memory of the Civil Rights Movement," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, Richard Lentz, *Symbols, the Newsmagazines, and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge:

the central positioning of King has an equally strong potential to displace other memories and/or counter-memories.

*Assessing Dr. King and the Dream*

Across both time points the majority of articles lacked definitive descriptions of King and/or his aims. Commemorations of King also focused heavily on the extent to which American society had achieved "The Dream" and routinely sought to "quantify" American progress toward equality. These elements appeared in news stories, editorials, and quoted source material used by journalists. Civil rights leaders' own use of the Dream paradigm helped perpetuate what facets of King's vision newspaper coverage focused on. Organizers of the 1983 March on Washington including Coretta Scott King, Jesse Jackson, and Walter Fauntroy routinely framed their event's celebration and goals around "fulfillment" of the Dream. Similarly, the National Urban League hosted a 50th anniversary "Redeem the Dream Summit" and the National Action Network titled their 2013 commemoration "National Action to Reclaim the Dream."<sup>20</sup> Dominant newspapers also interviewed King family members on both anniversaries, often asking King's wife and children how much progress had been made toward achievement of the civil rights leader's objectives.<sup>21</sup>

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Louisiana State University Press, 1990), Houston A. Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture*: 7(1), 1994, Tim Wise, "We Twisted King's Words, Now We Live with His Nightmare," *Colorlines*, Jan 17, 2011, <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/we-twisted-kings-dream-so-we-live-his-nightmare>, among others.

<sup>20</sup> Marc Morial, "National Urban League to mark 50th anniversary of the March on Washington," *Chicago Defender*, August 14-20, 2013 and Carol Morello, "Events marking 50th anniversary of March on Washington to emphasize dreams unfulfilled," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Coretta Scott King is interviewed only in 1983. She passed away in 2006.

Remembrances of King embodied characteristics of what Houston Baker terms "nostalgic memories" to a much greater degree than other civil rights actors.<sup>22</sup> Dominant press outlets routinely defined the roles of other movement participants—even well known figures such as John Lewis and Rosa Parks—by providing a short "definition" of that person's contribution. For example, an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* passage published on the 50th anniversary of the March positioned Parks as "the woman" who "sparked" the 1955 bus boycott and noted that Lewis is not only a congressman, but "one of the most prominent" civil rights icons:

"One day in late July, John Lewis sat a few feet from a statue of Rosa Parks, the woman whose courage sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott. On the dais with him in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall were the leaders of both houses of Congress, there to mark the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. Lewis was working both his jobs that afternoon: civil rights icon and member of Congress. These days, more than ever, those dual roles put Lewis --- one of the most prominent veterans of the civil rights era, and the only one with a vote in Congress—in near constant demand."<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, journalists clearly assumed readers needed little information beyond what they already possessed to make meanings about King and interpret their content's suggestions and commentary. As such, commemorations of King and the Dream concentrated on "golden virtues, golden men, and sterling acts."<sup>24</sup> A 20th anniversary *Atlanta Constitution* article claimed that "dominating today's observance too, will be the sweet inspiration of Martin Luther King, Jr. It was King who 20 years ago stood at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial and gave impassioned voice to the movement's goals and stirred the nation's conscience from a long, neglectful sleep."<sup>25</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* chose to provide readers excerpted quotes about "how speakers at Wednesday's

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<sup>22</sup> Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Malloy, "MARCH ON WASHINGTON: 50 years later, Lewis marches on: Lawmaker, civil rights icon in demand as race issues take center stage," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, August 23, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.

<sup>25</sup> Editorial, King's Dream: A Beginning, *Atlanta Constitution*, August 27, 1983.

ceremonies in Washington honored the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech" instead of quotes related to how those speakers commemorated the March on Washington as a whole.<sup>26</sup> The *Tribune* recap of President Obama's 50th anniversary remarks framed the commemoration in a similar manner. The article declared that "standing on the steps where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of his dream of racial equality, President Barack Obama on Wednesday described a half-century of uneven progress toward colorblind justice and tried to rally a new 'coalition of conscience' to complete the unfinished work."<sup>27</sup> The *Washington Post's* principal story about 50th anniversary events imparted a comparable sentiment in its lede: "A half-century to the hour after the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his clarion call for justice from the Lincoln Memorial, it was the nation's first black president who stood on that hallowed marble step, hailing the 50 years of racial progress that made his election possible but warning Americans that King's dream remains unfulfilled."<sup>28</sup> By concentrating primarily on "golden virtues, golden men, and sterling acts," the above commemorations work to compress time and erase large swaths of both the success and struggle that took place between 1963 and 2013.<sup>29</sup> This ambiguity opens the door for myriad interpretations of King and his vision for a more just society—including interpretations far afield from what King himself would have condoned. Conversely, redefining the roles of John Lewis and Rosa Parks is more difficult if the news media habitually tell us who they are.

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<sup>26</sup> QUOTES, *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 2013

<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Hennessey, Richard Simon, Alexei Koseff, "'WE WILL WIN THESE FIGHTS,'" *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 2013

<sup>28</sup> Steve Hendrix, David Nakamura, Ashley Halsey III, "King's call for justice is celebrated, renewed," *Washington Post*, August 29, 2013

<sup>29</sup> Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.

Houston A. Baker contends that nostalgic memory also “writes the revolution as a well-passed aberration” and “actively substitutes allegory for history.”<sup>30</sup> A 1983 *New York Times* story epitomizes Baker's understanding of substituting allegory for history in its proclamation that “the vision of that dream brought home to people everywhere what the civil rights movement was all about...It may have been the purest, broadest moment of the movement, and the march.”<sup>31</sup> In 2013, the *New York Times* lede echoed the paper's 20th anniversary use of allegory through references to King's “iconic dream of a colorblind society” and “a day of overcast skies and misty rain” when “tens of thousands of Americans—black, white and every shade in between—returned to the site of Dr. King's “I Have a Dream” speech to listen to the nation's first black president pay tribute to the pioneers who paved the way for his own ascension to the heights of American government.”<sup>32</sup> The *Times* piece went on connect the legacies of Obama and King, praising Obama's rise to the presidency for its symbolism rather than actual impact: “The symbolic journey from Dr. King to Mr. Obama on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial animated the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom more than any oratory. While Mr. Obama's line about the White House changing was his only reference to his unique place in history, the power of his presence was lost on no one.”<sup>33</sup> It is telling that the only change in rhetoric about Dr. King put forth in 2013 by the United States' national paper of record is the extension of nostalgic treatment to President Barack Obama. While the *Times* published a variety of opinion pieces that treated King and the Dream in a substantial, nuanced manner, it is important to note that their main

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Dudley Clendinen, For Rights Rally, Nostalgia Edged With Disillusion, *New York Times*, August 27, 1983

<sup>32</sup> Peter Baker, Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Saluting a Dream, and Adapting It for a New Era,” *New York Times*, August 29, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

hard news recaps—the pieces printed on the paper's front page—present a similarly nostalgic treatment of King on both anniversaries.<sup>34</sup>

A 1983 *USA Today* editorial reflected on the Dream allegorically in a number of different ways and is worth close examination. The editorial labeled the Dream "a simple vision—an America where people were judged on the basis of character rather than color; where the idea of equality had true meaning; where the last vestiges of slavery were erased; where the millions who were discriminated against were freed from their shackles, and where the millions who discriminated were freed, at last, from the chains of prejudice."<sup>35</sup> In a particularly nefarious form of nostalgic remembering, the piece actively dismissed other portions of March on Washington history as "well past aberrations" while simultaneously highlighting the Dream as the culmination of the movement. The editorial intoned that "all but forgotten now are the searing words of A. Philip Randolph, the sensitive words of Roy Wilkins, the passionate words of John Lewis, the provocative words of Walter Reuther and the thoughtful words of Whitney Young."<sup>36</sup> The piece further cemented the March on Washington's bygone position by asking "Who remembers the tension that gripped the nation's capitol as 250,000 black and white Americans marched to protest Jim Crow justice in the South, discrimination in every corner of the country, and the federal government's failure to right the wrongs of racism?"<sup>37</sup> The editorial firmly supplanted the past mentioned above by drawing attention back to the Dream: "few remember, but who can forget the Dream? Two decades later our reflections on that massive march are dominated by echoed by the power and

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<sup>34</sup> Both pieces mentioned appeared on the *New York Times*' page 1 the day they were published.

<sup>35</sup> Editorial, "Freedom Can't Ring While Chains Remain," *USA Today*, August 26 1983.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

presence of Martin Luther King. His words. His hopes for his people—and for all of us."<sup>38</sup> Through this treatment, *USA Today* relegates certain events to a distant past, thus telling readers very overtly that the salient memory of the March on Washington revolves only around King—not those who society has forgotten. This treatment subverts alternative understandings that other elements may well trump King and delimits reader perceptions of anything beyond the Dream.

A second troubling aspect of the *USA Today* editorial centered on writing the 1983 commemoration as a "well past aberration" before the event had even taken place. The piece noted that "the thousands who march tomorrow will listen to the words of new leaders. But they will be thinking again of his dream, evaluating anew its promise, and weighing once more its prospect of fulfillment."<sup>39</sup> The editorial mentioned a handful of contemporary inequalities, namely existing segregation in housing and differences in income between Blacks and whites.<sup>40</sup> Rather than suggesting remedies for those issues, however, the editorial returned to the King refrain, insisting that because "the dream remains unfulfilled" the 20th anniversary march represented "a memorial, not a celebration."<sup>41</sup> In the minds of many organizers, March on Washington II was neither a memorial nor a day for celebrating progress. The event represented an important component of a still active African American freedom struggle complete with legislative demands including establishing a national Martin Luther King holiday. In framing the 1983 march a "memorial," *USA Today* foreclosed any such characterization of the 20th anniversary event before a single speaker graced the podium. These dismissals of the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

20th anniversary march's importance likely contribute greatly to the utter absence of the that commemoration from the canons of public memory.

Dominant press newspapers also questioned both directly and rhetorically if the Dream had been fulfilled and wondered "What would Martin Luther King think about \_\_\_\_\_ today?" A *USA Today* section titled "Voices from Across the USA" asked a Americans from across the United States if they thought "King's Dream had been realized" in 1983.<sup>42</sup> Like other dominant press treatments, *USA Today* assumed readers already possessed enough knowledge to assess statements about the Dream's fulfillment and did not define the parameters of King's vision for the interviewees or readers. A 21-year-old tire salesman from California, the only interviewee who felt society had come close to achieving the Dream, claimed that "the Dream sure has come true. Positively. To me, people have equal opportunity."<sup>43</sup> He listed his encounters with "Hispanic and Black teachers, business executives, lawyers, and tire salesman" as evidence.<sup>44</sup> Beverly L. Smith, a homemaker from California, resided at the other end of the spectrum. She acknowledged that "we've come a long way from the unrest of the 1960s," and in a departure from most uses of informal sources, claimed the Dream was "so idealistic it probably can never be fully realized."<sup>45</sup>

A 2013 *Washington Post* piece that asked "What would the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. march for if he were alive today?" demonstrates how dominant press papers speculated about what Dr. King would advise during their particular historical moment.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> No author listed, "Voices from Across the USA: Do You Think Martin Luther King's Dream Has Been Realized?" *USA Today*, August 26, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Dreier, "Where Would He Lead Us Today," *Washington Post*, August 25, 2013.



The article noted that "America has made progress on many fronts" since 1963, but asserted "there is still much to do to achieve his vision of equality."<sup>47</sup> With the type of nuance often seen more in 50th anniversary commemorations, the article remarked that "King began his activism as a crusader against racial segregation, but he soon recognized that his battle was part of a much broader fight for a more humane society."<sup>48</sup> Author Peter Dreier went on to imagine that in 2013, King would be fighting against denials of voting rights, gun violence, mass incarcerations, women's reproductive rights, immigrant rights, national spending priorities, income inequality and the working poor, housing and predatory lending, and LGBTQ equality. By asking what King would do without defining his positions, journalistic representations like the one above perpetuate nostalgic applications of King's legacy and pave the way for widely varying understandings of King's hopes for American society.

Dominant press outlets also regularly "quantified" progress toward the Dream. Often, these estimations revolved around differences in median income or diverging unemployment rates among Blacks and whites. Other statistical measures discussed by the dominant press included college enrollment demographics, teenage pregnancy rates, measures of family composition, high school graduation rates, and shifts in Black and white attitudes about equality. In order to provide context for lingering inequalities, a 1983 *Los Angeles Times* editorial noted that "broadly based *achievement* in school and in the workplace too often remains unequal. For example, in 1963 11 percent of blacks were unemployed; today, 17 percent of blacks are out of work."<sup>49</sup> The editorial went on to highlight statistics from a National Urban League report outlining recent decreases in the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Editorial, "Keeping the Promises," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1983. Emphasis in original.

median income of African Americans as well as variance in high school and college enrollment rates.<sup>50</sup>

A *USA Today* piece from the 20th anniversary touched on disparities in the realm of employment as well, noting that "Black unemployment is now 17.9 percent, nearly twice the national figure."<sup>51</sup> *USA Today* journalist Jay Harris quantified the current state of Black families, citing "recent reports" that "half of all Black children live in households headed by women, most of them crucibles of a new generation's poverty."<sup>52</sup> The story also commented on "disproportionately high levels" of teenage pregnancy within the African American community" and claimed that "nearly half of all Black 17-year-olds are illiterate."<sup>53</sup> *USA Today* did not list specific sources of their information or provide comparable statistics for the white population.

A 1983 *New York Times* assessment focused more on changes in attitudes than other measures. The article quoted an early August poll asking both whites and Blacks if they were "satisfied with their personal lives."<sup>54</sup> Over 80 percent of whites responded affirmatively while only 50 percent of African Americans "expressed the same satisfaction."<sup>55</sup> The article also touched on youth perceptions, noting that "a recent Gallup Youth Survey... found that white teenagers and black teenagers were about equally optimistic and satisfied with their personal lives."<sup>56</sup>

This study uncovered a great deal of continuity in the statistical measures highlighted by the dominant press in 1983 and 2013. As on the 20th anniversary,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Jay Harris, "Blacks find freedom yes; equality no," *USA Today*, 1983.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ronald Smothers, "Poll Finds Split in Mood of Whites and Blacks," *New York Times*, August 28, 1983.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

coverage from 2013 focused heavily on unemployment rates, high school and college attendance, and female-oriented assessments of Black family structure. A 2013 *New York Times* example comparing census figures from 1960 and 2011 underscored that "56 percent of black Americans lived below the poverty line around the time of the march, compared with 18 percent of whites. By 2011, the number had dropped to 28 percent for blacks, though the percentage was still double that for white Americans."<sup>57</sup> The story then pointed out that the "percentage of blacks who graduated from high school jumped to 85 percent in 2012, from 25.7 percent in 1964, while the number of black Americans with at least a bachelor's degree rose to 5.1 million from 365,000."<sup>58</sup> The piece went on to describe "other changes, particularly in black family life, that are not so clearly positive."<sup>59</sup> The author compared Black and white marriage rates claiming that the "percentage of blacks who had never married rose to 49 percent in 2011, from 23 percent in 1963, a jump that far outstrips the rise in that category among whites," and commented that "Black households headed by a woman jumped by nearly 12 percentage points at a time when similar households for whites rose just under 4 percentage points."<sup>60</sup>

As in 1983, 50th anniversary assessments also detailed shifts in how Americans felt about race relations in the United States. A *Washington Post* report embodies a common treatment. The *Post* piece led by declaring that "African Americans are increasingly pessimistic that progress is being made toward achieving the vision of racial equality outlined by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. 50 years ago, according to a survey

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<sup>57</sup> Rick Lyman, "50 Years After March, Views of Fitful Progress," *New York Times*, August 24, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

released Thursday."<sup>61</sup> The article based its declaration on information from the well circulated Pew Research Center study titled "King's Dream Remains an Elusive Goal." The story cited Pew Center findings that "only 26 percent of African Americans said the situation for black people has improved in the past five years, and 21 percent said things have gotten worse."<sup>62</sup> The *Post* piece also noted that "whites had a much more positive opinion of Black progress, with 35 percent saying things have gotten better in the past five years."<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the *Post* piece highlighted Pew findings that "roughly half the African Americans polled cited racial disparities in virtually every aspect of daily life - in the workplace, in stores, in restaurants and in public schools, and while voting and receiving health care."<sup>64</sup> "Whites see things differently," the *Post* wrote; "only about one in seven whites said blacks were treated less fairly than whites in those settings."<sup>65</sup>

The above examples reveal a number of striking insights into how American society conceives of and measures equality as well as how civil rights commemoration impacts understandings of race in the United States. Akin to trends in Selma coverage, dominant press reports about the March on Washington compared statistical measures of "progress" only between the present moment and the 1960s. As Barbie Zelizer explains, this treatment works to compress civil rights history into "now" and "then," erasing any interim events.<sup>66</sup> An additional point of interest lies in the uniformity in which statistical measures dominant press newspapers considered newsworthy. While the rhetoric of political leaders and dominant press coverage incorporated a variety of marginalized

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<sup>61</sup> Carol Morello, "Poll: Racial Progress Lacking, Blacks Say," *Washington Post*, August 23, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 222.

groups by 2013, quantifications consistently focused only on Black and white racial groups. This points to a remarkably fixed sense of how we as a nation have collectively envisioned equality throughout the past 30 years.

An especially alarming and problematic facet of this vision relies on a gendered commentary about Black family structure—and Black female bodies in particular—rooted in the 1965 Moynihan Report.<sup>67</sup> Journalistic focus on teenage pregnancy rates, percentages of married African Americans, and proportions of "female-headed households" illustrates lingering, unique implications of the movement's history of sexism for African American women.<sup>68</sup> This treatment places an unequal and unfounded burden on African American women because these statistics imply "responsibilities" for Black women that they do not for any other group. This finding underscores the importance of approaching movement commemorations with the intersectional nature of African American women's identities at the fore.<sup>69</sup> As a whole, the above quantitative measures imply that our society understands "equality" as residing somewhere within the matrix of employment and incomes, family structure, and attitudes about personal satisfaction. By focusing specifically on these types of measures, we erase day-to-day elements of inequality from discourse and keep goals for justice within a very specific framework.

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<sup>67</sup> The Moynihan report focused heavily on the impact of female headed households on African American progress toward equality. For an excellent commentary on the Moynihan Report See Singh, *Black is a Country* for a detailed account of the Moynihan Report and its impact.

<sup>68</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *Chicago Legal Forum*, (1989): 140. Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* ed. Zillah Eisenstien (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Engagement*, 2nd Ed., (New York, Routledge, 2000), 7, and bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, (Boston, South End Press, 1989), 6.

<sup>69</sup> Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex, 140. Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 7, hooks, *Talking Back*, 6.

*Alternative Readings of King and the Dream*

While the majority of dominant press reports embodied nostalgic commemorations of the Dr. King and the Dream, this study unearthed notable exceptions to this trend—particularly in coverage of the 50th anniversary. In keeping with Catherine Squires' findings, the editorial pages of dominant press newspapers served as important "interruptions" to "dominant racial discourse" about the March on Washington.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, many of these interruptions were the work of journalists and academics of color, underscoring the importance of diverse newspapers staffs. Two op-ed pieces penned by African American columnists and a *Los Angeles Times* editorial represent important deviations from other 20th anniversary reports. *Washington Post* writer Courtland Milloy's column "Dreamless" constitutes the only dominant press piece penned in 1983 to largely reject the Dream's prominent position within 1983 March on Washington commemorations.<sup>71</sup> Interviews with several "entrepreneurs at 14th and W streets in NW" comprised the bulk of column.<sup>72</sup> Milloy detailed the extreme, ongoing poverty faced by the men and noted that "the tone out here was raw and the language far removed from that used during Saturday's March on Washington...No Dream could change the reality that some of these people are lost forever."<sup>73</sup> Milloy also asked the men about Jesse Jackson's potential presidential run during the interview. One of the men connected Jackson with a perception of Martin Luther King that did not surface in any other dominant press article: "They'll let Jesse run. But if it even looks like he might win,

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<sup>70</sup> Catherine R. Squires, "Bursting the Bubble: A Case Study of Counter-framing in the Editorial Pages," *Critical Studies in Communication* (28) No. 1, (2011): 30-49.

<sup>71</sup> Milloy still actively contributes to the *Washington Post* as a columnist. See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/people/courtland-milloy> for current examples of his work.

<sup>72</sup> Courtland Milloy, "Dreamless," *Washington Post*, August 29, 1983.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

they'll knock him off. 'Like King,' says the shirt salesman. 'It would be the vote of death.'"<sup>74</sup> The sentiment that the federal government may have been complicit, if not actively involved, in King's death represents a distinct countermemory that rarely surfaced in dominant discourse.

Longtime *Chicago Tribune* columnist Vernon Jarrett provided a second alternative take on the Dream. Jarrett led his column by thanking civil rights leader Benjamin Hooks for "not permitting us to ignore" W.E.B. DuBois, "one of the monumental figures of the civil rights movement" and pointed out that DuBois died just one day prior to the 1963 March on Washington.<sup>75</sup> Jarrett underscored the position of King, noting that "the dominating remembrance at the 20th anniversary of the Great March on Washington Saturday was that of the martyred Martin Luther King, Jr.. As expected, there were constant references to the unforgettable 'dream.'"<sup>76</sup> Jarrett then asked that readers consider facets of civil rights history beyond King, demanding that "at some point the Great March and the Great Man of 20 years ago must be placed in the context of that inspiring history of other great marches and other great men and women. And let the message be known that the march will continue only if its benefactors fall in line one by one every day—not just once every 20 years."<sup>77</sup> Jarrett's column positioned the March on Washington within the "long civil rights movement" in a manner more typical of Black press accounts than dominant discourses.<sup>78</sup>

A 1983 *LA Times* editorial also provided readers with an alternative take on the Dream. The editorial board incorporated portions of King's "I Have a Dream" speech

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Vernon Jarrett, "March was Just Tip of an Iceberg," *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1983.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 69-70.

absent from other 20th anniversary coverage, including King's verse about African Americans living on a "lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of prosperity."<sup>79</sup> The *Times* observed that "Americans still feel compelled to march in Washington on many of the very same issues that took them there before."<sup>80</sup> The piece also drew attention to memory specifically by asserting that "when Americans remember the March on Washington, they particularly remember King's ringing cadences when he spoke of his Dream of brotherhood and equality, his dream of a nation in which his children would 'not be judged by the color of their skin but the content of their character.'"<sup>81</sup> "In the same speech," the *Times* stated, "King also said that the Marchers had come to Washington that day to 'cash a check,' a promissory note that all Americans were guaranteed certain unalienable rights. America started to honor that pledge of equality with real vigor in the wave of feeling generated by the March on Washington."<sup>82</sup> The editorial concluded that although "the easier, obvious steps have been taken" and "the tough, long-embedded roots of disadvantages will be harder to rip out," it was "time to restore that spirit of '63 and keep the remaining promises."<sup>83</sup> The above *Los Angeles Times* editorial illustrates how dominant news outlets *could* approach March on Washington commemorations and demonstrates that substantive, "critical" commemorations lie within the boundaries of journalistic norms that govern production of dominant press content.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, this piece embodies the manner in which editorial

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<sup>79</sup> Editorial, "Keeping the Promises," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1983.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.



pages can function as a space for meaningful reinterpretations of prevailing collective memories.<sup>85</sup>

Coverage from the 50th anniversary contained a larger proportion of alternative commemorations of King and the Dream than the 20th anniversary sample. As in 1983, many of these alternatives were opinion pieces written by people of color. These distinctive counterpoints focused on deepening understandings of King, expanding perceptions to speeches other than the Dream, and directly confronting "mythic" remembrances of the March on Washington. *Chicago Tribune* columnist Clarence Page sought to introduce readers to the "rest of King's speech." Page led with several familiar historical illustrations: "Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. Christopher Columbus discovered America. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. had a 'dream.'"<sup>86</sup> Page then quipped that "we like to remember history in short, snappy bumper-sticker sound bites. Real life is a bit more complicated."<sup>87</sup> Page also acknowledged that the "Dream has since come to define King's entire career in our collective memory."<sup>88</sup> "King did have a 'dream,'" Page argued, but more importantly, "he had an agenda."<sup>89</sup> The columnist directed readers toward the March's broader aims including the Voting Rights and Fair Housing Acts for a more holistic understanding of that agenda.<sup>90</sup> Finally, Page directly confronted nostalgic uses of King's legacy by "conservatives on talk radio and cable TV"

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<sup>85</sup> Squires, "Bursting the Bubble," 30-49.

<sup>86</sup> Clarence Page, "Don't Forget the Rest of King's Speech," *Chicago Tribune*, August 25, 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

charging that they "praise King's memory today. But if he were still around, I imagine they would be accusing him of waging 'class warfare' and 'playing the race card.'"<sup>91</sup>

Charles M. Blow, a columnist at the *New York Times*, called King's Dream "an aching, idyllic, rhetorical masterpiece," and expressed anxiety that "as we get closer to a society where explicit bias is virtually eradicated, we no longer have the stomach to deal with the more sinister issues of implicit biases and of structural and systematic racial inequality."<sup>92</sup> Blow elaborated on this fear by emphasizing that "in this topsy-turvy world, those who even deign to raise the issue of racial inequality can be quickly dismissed as race-baiters or, worse, as actual racists."<sup>93</sup> Blow concluded his column on somber note saying "I want to celebrate our progress, but I'm too disturbed by the setbacks. I had hoped to write a hopeful, uplifting column to mark this anniversary. I wanted to be happily lost in The Dream. Instead, I must face this dawning reality."<sup>94</sup>

*Los Angeles Times* guest columnist Jonathan Rieder, a professor of sociology at Barnard College, juxtaposed the "Dream" speech with "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in order to portray a multifaceted King absent from most 2013 accounts. Rieder highlighted portions of the "Letter" wherein "King entertained no illusions that soaring rhetoric alone could stir the conscience of whites...King embraced 'extremism' in the 'Letter'; in Washington, he reveled in 'marvelous new militancy' and trumpeted 'the fierce urgency of now.'"<sup>95</sup> "King's efforts to speak from within the American tradition," Rieder instructed, "testified not to the nation's greatness but its failure to achieve it...To affirm the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Charles M. Blow, "50 Years Later," *New York Times*, August 24, 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Jonathan Rieder, "King Dreamed but Took Nothing for Granted," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 2013.

declaration, King had to rewrite it."<sup>96</sup> Rieder encouraged readers to bypass "self-congratulations about how far we've come or faith in the destiny of American democracy" and "hero worship of a mythologized Moses as if he alone led his people out of bondage with his golden tongue" in their commemorations of King.<sup>97</sup> Instead, Rieder challenged readers to recognize the "struggle, civil disobedience, bloody sacrifice and even death" of the civil rights movement and acknowledge that "the nation most white Americans thought they lived in would not exist until black people created it."<sup>98</sup> By providing an alternative view of King and diverting attention away from nostalgic memory, Rieder subverts the optimism most often associated with Dream and pushes the boundaries of what we collectively consider King's primary attributes.

Only one dominant press story—a *Washington Post* piece written in 2013—dedicated itself entirely to female civil rights participants. *Post* contributor Krissah Thompson reminded readers that "the sisters were almost forgotten."<sup>99</sup> Thompson stressed that "women were ubiquitous in the trenches of the civil rights movement but were nearly left off the official program of the historic 1963 March on Washington." "The list of female pioneers in the movement was long," Thompson wrote, "but men ran the show. Scratch that: Women ran the show too, but mostly out of public view."<sup>100</sup> She argued this was largely because "it was a commonly held belief that a woman's place was in the home—even though most black women worked outside their homes."<sup>101</sup> Thompson also discussed the late addition of a "Tribute to Negro Women" to the March on

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Krissah Thompson, "1963 March Left Women in Back Seat," *Chicago Tribune*, August 27, 2013.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Washington program "after some of the women who had the ear of march organizers protested" and brought to light that "female activists, many of whom had risked their lives alongside men, were assigned to walk with the wives of civil rights leaders" during the March.<sup>102</sup> Other counter narratives in dominant press coverage of the 50th anniversary drew reader attention to oft forgotten elements of the March such as Randolph and Rustin's economic aims and pre-march fears that violence would break out during the March, common "myths" surrounding the March, and a discussion of the "Global Civil Rights Movement" by scholar Mary Dudziak.<sup>103</sup>

Qualitative analysis revealed that aside from a handful of notable exceptions, commemorative coverage in the dominant press—and the discussions of race and equality embedded within it—remained lodged within the paradigm of the Dream on both anniversaries studied. This absolute focus on a handful of words from a single hero allows journalists to fluidly perpetuate the mythic nature of King and employ an "ambiguous," malleable version of "The Dream." This practice likely contributes greatly to questionable interpretations of the civil rights movement's legacy. Additionally, reliance on the paradigm of the Dream means that discussions of the civil rights movement, its legacy, or its meanings never move beyond the parameters of King himself. For example, dominant press outlets could have imagined what A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, or Medgar Evers would have thought of contemporary issues, but this study did not uncover treatments of that nature. While there is certainly merit in celebrating both King and the March, ultimately, reliance on the Dream paradigm locks

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> William P. Jones, "What Happened to Jobs and Justice," *New York Times*, August 28, 2013, William P. Jones, "Five Myths About the March on Washington," *Washington Post*, August 25, 2013, and Mary Dudziak, "The Global March on Washington," *New York Times*, August 28, 2013.

American society into an "eternal quest" for a vision of equality we are loathe to actually define.

*A Moment of Racial Harmony on the Way to a Better Racial Future.* The primary framing uncovered in dominant press stories about the March on Washington centered on lionizing the 1963 event as a moment of national unity on the way to an better, as yet unachieved, racial future. According to many dominant press reports, the March ushered in a better future not just Black America but for *all Americans*. Articles heralded "that day in 1963" as a rare moment when a multi-racial effort in our nation's capital caused the social conscience of white America to greatly shift. This framing induces overwhelmingly positive, celebratory portrayals of the March in commemorative coverage. Not a single article presented the March in a negative light or suggested the March had a damaging impact on the nation. While prominent figures, the scope of inclusion, and specific areas of concern differ somewhat between 1983 and 2013, framing of the march as the pinnacle of American racial harmony in a perpetual quest for racial change remains consistent across the 20th and 50th anniversaries. This framing appeared in the commemorative statements of government officials, remembrances penned by journalists, and informal source accounts, pointing to a widely accepted collective memory about the March on Washington.

Reprinted statements of then sitting presidents Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama constitute some of the most robust perpetuations of this framing. Reagan's prepared statement proclaimed that "although the emphasis of the 1963 march on Washington was on the rights of Black Americans, the values that were appealed to are shared by us

all."<sup>104</sup> He called the march "a moving moment in American history" and noted that marchers "asked only what all of us ask for our country; that it live up to its high ideals, those cherished ideals of freedom, human dignity, opportunity, and brotherhood that gave birth to the United States."<sup>105</sup> The president characterized America as "mankind's last, best hope for freedom...a special place, a place where so many dreams have come true."<sup>106</sup>

Barack Obama's commemoration speech delivered at the Lincoln Memorial 30 years after Reagan wrote contained more nuance—especially with regard to the stories of the movement's "footsoldiers"—but still strongly mirrored Reagan's assessment. Obama also emphasized the multi-racial makeup of the marchers and connected the march to American ideals. Obama stressed that "men and women, young and old, blacks who longed for freedom and whites who could no longer accept freedom for themselves while witnessing the subjugation of others...assembled here, in our nation's capital, under the shadow of the great emancipator, to offer testimony of injustice, to petition their government for redress and to awaken America's long-slumbering conscience."<sup>107</sup> The President incorporated all Americans in the march's impact because through the March, "America became more free and more fair, not just for African-Americans but for women and Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, for Catholics, Jews and Muslims, for gays, for Americans with disabilities. America changed for you and for me."<sup>108</sup> According to Obama, "the March on Washington teaches us that we are not trapped by the mistakes of

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<sup>104</sup> A Statement from the President, *The New York Times*, August 28, 1983.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> "President Obama's speech on the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington," *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2013.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

history, that we are masters of our fate. But it also teaches us that the promise of this nation will only be kept when we work together."<sup>109</sup> Like Reagan, Obama used the March on Washington commemoration to reiterate America's position as a world leader, noting that "the entire world drew strength" from that historical moment.<sup>110</sup> While nation-centric rhetoric can be expected from state political leaders, these statements are remarkable for their consistency and universal inclusion. The consistency points to the existence of an official, nation-centric collective memory of the March—a memory so unified that the presence of our first African American president has relatively little impact on the official narrative. Unlike in the case of Selma, an event where history has not looked favorably on certain actors, the March on Washington's overwhelming racial unity, expressed in a distinctly American way, must be included in the canons of public memory. By focusing on the ideals of "all Americans" despite the unequal burden of inequality faced by people of color, lingering tension surrounding race in America can be momentarily swept aside in favor of embracing August 28, 1963 as a day *all* Americans can be proud of.

Framing the march as in terms of racial harmony and inclusion also prevailed in journalistic assessments. This is likely driven at least in part, by official sources like Reagan and Obama. A short paragraph from the *Washington Post's* 50th anniversary coverage succinctly demonstrates how journalists characterized the march in news reports: "The massive assembly that was the March on Washington on Aug. 28, 1963, a peaceful congregation of blacks and whites demanding equality for the descendants of slaves, holds a powerful place in the cultural, legal and political history of the country. It has inspired human rights movements around the world. It was a day of soaring hope in a

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

summer of strife, set in a decade of violence, rancor and upheaval that reverberates today."<sup>111</sup> The *Post's* summary also reflected on the nature of racial change in American contending that "understanding that day in all its dimensions underscores what the nation's first African-American president, Barack Obama, said in 2011, in dedicating the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial: 'Change has never been simple, or without controversy. Change depends on persistence. Change requires determination.'"<sup>112</sup> This journalistic rendering reinforces official statements that the March brought "black and white" together as Americans and inspired people at home and across the world to fight for a greater future. This *Post* piece also explicitly sheds light on why we remember the march on Washington: it was "a day of soaring hope in a summer of strife, set in a decade of violence, rancor and upheaval."<sup>113</sup> The March is a isolated bright spot amid an era of deep national turmoil. A third point of importance in this piece is the choice to reproduce Obama's statement that "change has never been simple" and explicitly identify him as "African American." This paring works to delimit the idea that equality might actually be easy through the voice of someone still subject to discrimination. It seems that in a "post-racial" America, some dominant accounts may still propagate the "tranquilizing drug of gradualism."

Even on the rare occasion when journalists provided some variety of historical background, the context served largely to reinforce the elevated, almost sacred position of the March. Like official and other journalistic statements described above, these articles touted the amity and collaboration of the March on Washington as what set it apart from

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<sup>111</sup> No author listed, "'The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice .' - THE REV. Martin Luther King Jr.," *The Washington Post*, Aug 25, 2013.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



other moments in the African American freedom struggle. An *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter observed that "the distance from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial is about 4,000 feet, but for those who came to make the walk on Aug. 28, 1963, the journey began miles away and years earlier."<sup>114</sup> The journalist then briefly outlined post-Reconstruction era discrimination, the March on Washington Movement, President Harry Truman's 1948 desegregation of the Armed Forces, and numerous civil rights era events. Immediately following this contextualization, the author contended that "many who participated in the civil rights movement have labeled the March its high-water mark."<sup>115</sup> The piece then specifically highlighted how "not only African-Americans, but whites opposed to the ongoing inequality in American society, piled aboard hundreds of buses and train cars to make the journey to Washington."<sup>116</sup> The journalist also quoted a promotional pamphlet from 1963 billing the March as something that would "speak out to Congress and the nation *with a single voice*."<sup>117</sup> In its closing passages, the article reflected on the last 50 years asserting that "other movements have tried to replicate its success with events such as the 1995 Million Man March. But none of those events has reverberated like the day that King declared, 'Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.'"<sup>118</sup> This article illustrates two important points: 1.) that original organizer intents have remained, at least to some degree, alive in memory and have helped shape narratives about the March 50 years on; and 2.) how providing historical context was routinely used

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<sup>114</sup> Bill Steiden, "'Manacles of segregation,' 'Whirlwinds of revolt,' 'I have a dream,' 'The urgency of the moment,' 'Now is the time': March embodied long struggle," *The Washington Post*, August 25, 2013.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

to showcase the gravitas of the March on Washington—not to praise or underscore the importance of the "long civil rights movement" as whole.<sup>119</sup>

A 1983 article praising a 20th anniversary speech by Louis Farrakhan employed historical context to articulate a similar display of accord. The article connected the Nation of Islam with Malcolm X and noted that both parties boycotted the 1963 march.<sup>120</sup> However, the article quickly transitioned to celebrating Farrakhan's 1983 remarks for their expression of "willingness to work in partnership with other groups, including whites."<sup>121</sup> The article noted that "his speech, while not new in its conciliatory tone, was the most public declaration to date that Black Muslims are willing to join forces with other groups, irrespective of race and religion to work for social and political change."<sup>122</sup> The article did print passages of Farrakhan's speech critical of the federal government, but these quotes largely also supported a vision of American protest comprised of "Christians and Jews and Muslims and agnostics and atheists and black men and white men and brown men and yellow men and women."<sup>123</sup> Dominant press interest in Farrakhan's speech did not stem from his stance on how to improve American race relations. Farrakhan garnered attention because he represented a historically controversial figure reinforcing the prevailing, hegemonic narrative

Informal sources also contributed to framing the March on Washington in terms of its universal harmony. A 1983 *New York Times* article leaned on "a 53-year-old

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<sup>119</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, The Long Civil Rights Movement and Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 91, No. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

<sup>120</sup> Karlyn Barker, "Speech by Black Muslim Leader Hailed as Best at March on Washington," *Washington Post*, September 3, 1983.

<sup>121</sup> Karlyn Barker, "Speech by Black Muslim Leader Hailed as Best at March on Washington," *Washington Post*, September 3, 1983.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

maintenance worker from Queens" to underscore the amiable nature of the 1963 march. The Queens resident noted that the upcoming 1983 commemoration march "had given him a vision of the world's possibilities."<sup>124</sup> The maintenance worker also declared that "there weren't only black people" at the 1963 event, "there were a lot of white people and everyone got along so beautifully sitting side-by-side. That's the way the world should be, everybody side-by-side and going forward together."<sup>125</sup> A 2013 *Los Angeles Times* piece exuded similar sentiment through the vehicle of a 1963 march attendee. The *Times* headline read "MARCH ON WASHINGTON: 50 YEARS LATER; A day of dreams; After Martin Luther King gave his 1963 speech, Vernon Watkins' life was never the same."<sup>126</sup> Early on in the piece, the *Times* journalist established that Watkins, "didn't go for the reason most people might think;" that he "wasn't there to see King."<sup>127</sup> However, the *Times* directly attributed Watkins' conversion to King's speech asserting that "King prodded him to imagine an America racially unified instead of divided."<sup>128</sup> Finally, the piece reflected on "the camaraderie, the thoughtfulness, the feeling that if a gathering like this could take place, it was time for Watkins to expand his horizons."<sup>129</sup> While there is certainly value in the voices of informal sources and truth in how dominant press newspapers characterized those individuals, the overwhelming journalists emphasis on "camaraderie" displaces narratives of informal sources who were disappointed in the March, inspired by speakers other than King, or who considered other aspects of the

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<sup>124</sup> Kenneth B. Noble, "March in Capital Seen as Spurring Vast Coalition," *New York Times*, August 29, 1983.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Kurt Streeter, "MARCH ON WASHINGTON: 50 YEARS LATER; A day of dreams; After Martin Luther King gave his 1963 speech, Vernon Watkins' life was never the same," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 2013.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

march—such as the resulting 1964 Civil Rights Act—more important than displaying unity. It is interesting that the *Times* made a specific point to showcase Watkins' "conversion" from someone attending the March for reasons beyond seeing Dr. King to someone who embraced more conventional qualities of the march 50 years on.

Dominant press commemorations of the March on Washington desperately underscored that the nation—composed of a multitude of races—could always take to the steps of its most revered federal monuments in order to strive for a better future. This desperation is sustained on both anniversaries and in all newspapers examined. Even articles that provided nuanced renderings of the civil rights movement largely defeated that context's contribution by reinforcing the singularity of the March on Washington as a moment of racial harmony on the way to a more unified racial future. Because commemorations by nature mirror their earlier iterations, the fact that discursive devices used by the dominant press remained largely grounded within the paradigm of the 1963 March and recycled symbolic devices from that day is not entirely surprising.<sup>130</sup> However, persistent framing around "eternal progress" toward a better, *national* racial future is problematic because we displace the rest of the movement in favor of the momentary racial unity and united vision embedded in the March on Washington. Additionally, this treatment supplants events like the 1983 March that attempt to replicate that moment; journalists do not treat any successive march on its own terms, therefore, subsequent marches are judged as nothing more than placeholders in a historical narrative as opposed to significant forces for change in their own right. Clearly, at least part of the reason society willingly remembers the March on Washington is due to its position as *the*

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<sup>130</sup> Barry Schwartz, "Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington," *American Sociological Review* 56 No. 2 (1991): 221-236.

*moment* when we all agreed about the status of race in America. The March on Washington is the only real instance of *national consensus* we can reflect on within the window of the civil rights movement—and perhaps within our nation's entire history. *Dismissal of Countermemories*. A number of dominant press commemorations not only displaced, but wholly dismissed alternative interpretations of the march. Journalists and quoted sources quickly struck down these countermemories and directed the narrative back toward understandings of the march's significance as that of a moment of racial harmony on the way to a more unified racial future. A *Washington Post* feature story focused on Johnny Williams, one of the first arrivals to the 20th anniversary commemoration. The piece's lede noted that "twenty years ago, Johnny Williams was, but his own admission, a violence prone black teenager who believed more in 'Burn Baby Burn' than 'I Have a Dream.'<sup>131</sup> The article quickly negated the validity of the Black Panther slogan in favor of the Dream, however, saying that "maturity, experience, and a college education...combined to convince him that the American Dream is within reach."<sup>132</sup> By marking the Black Panthers and the American Dream as mutually exclusive the *Post* writes the Black Power component of civil rights out of the movement's history and reinforces the central position of both King and the Dream.

A notable letter to the editor functioned in a similar capacity. The letter expressed great concern that the 1983 march did not meet his expectation of what a civil rights commemoration should look like. R.P. Hodges of Alexandria, Virginia "expected to hear inspiring words of hope for a better future in America" during the 1983 March on Washington commemoration. Hodges complained that "there weren't any suggestions for

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<sup>131</sup> Portraits in the Crowd, "20 Years Later, the Dream Lives On," *Washington Post*, August 28, 1983.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

curing the ills of America; it was a free-for-all to criticize President Reagan."<sup>133</sup> Instead, Hodges claimed "what I saw were words and threats with connotations of hatred, ugliness, and revolution—and it frightened me very much."<sup>134</sup> As in the previous example, dominant press content defines certain types of protest as illegitimate modes for expressing dissatisfaction with the current state of American society.

A *Chicago Tribune* article quoted several 2013 event speakers who discussed areas where aspirations of racial equality had fallen short. The piece shifted tone quickly, however, underscoring that "despite the talk of unfinished work, the mood of the day was often celebratory."<sup>135</sup> The *Tribune* story claimed this "spirit was reflected in a common message that emerged from the disparate voices Saturday: Unite to improve conditions for *everyone*."<sup>136</sup> A quote from Donna Payne, a member of the LGBT rights group Human Rights Campaign, fortified this understanding. Payne noted that "there's been many attempts to tell us we can't work together because we're too different...Don't believe the hype!...It's about all of our civil rights, for everyone."<sup>137</sup> While the *Tribune* did give voice to commemoration speakers expressing an alternative view—and certainly Payne's quote contains positive aspirations—offsetting counterexamples with the dominant narrative dilutes the scope of inequality and works to mask persistent disparities.

In a 50th anniversary review of William P. Jones' latest book, *The Forgotten History of the March on Washington*, reviewer Jonathan Yardley rejected Jones' attempt to historically situate the March and shared a personal story to refute Jones' broader

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<sup>133</sup> R.P. Hodges, "Letter to the Editor," *Washington Post* September 4, 1983.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Alexei Koseff, "March Relived, Fight Renewed," *Chicago Tribune*, August 25, 2013.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

notions about the March's relevance. Yardley contended that Jones had "a solid grasp of his subject and writes lucidly," but characterized the work as "a peculiar and ultimately disappointing book."<sup>138</sup> Yardley lamented Jones choice to dedicate "so much space to hashing over events and controversies dating back more than two decades before the march" as a primary reason for his negative review. Yardley also argued that Jones neglected "to grasp that the King speech really was the centerpiece of the March on Washington, that it has echoed and reverberated through the subsequent half-century while the other demands made during the march, important but prosaic and unrealistic, were solely of the moment."<sup>139</sup> Yardley juxtaposed Jones' treatment with an individual memory, remembering that "on Aug. 28, 1963, a Wednesday, I was working in New York and unable to join the many New Yorkers both black and white who went to Washington by train, bus and car, but I watched on television and was powerfully moved."<sup>140</sup> The author mentioned listening to speeches by Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph as well as the day's musical line up, but ultimately concluded that King's speech touched him "most of all."<sup>141</sup> For Yardley, the speech "appealed to the best instincts of all Americans and played a crucial role in pressing the country toward enactment of the civil rights laws of 1964 and '65." Yardley concluded that "this is not to say that the economic and employment aspects of the march didn't matter, only that they faded away as King directed our attention to the gut issues that demanded resolution... In the end, though, what matters most is King's great speech and the better impulses it helped awaken in the nation. It's too bad that Jones, for all his earnestness and good

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<sup>138</sup> Jonathan Yardley, "The lost motive behind the march," *Washington Post*, August 25, 2013.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

intentions, fails to give King his full due." In keeping with Barbie Zelizer's findings about journalistic commemoration of John F. Kennedy's assassination, this analysis also uncovered instances when journalists inserted themselves into commemoration narratives, at times wholly dispelling meaningful counter-memories.<sup>142</sup>

In sum, dominant press framings of the March on Washington remain relatively consistent across both anniversaries studied. While specific components of coverage shift somewhat between 1983 and 2013, coverage remained fixed on *national* level issues, linked the federal government and American race relations, and routinely assessed to what degree American society had conquered remaining inequality. Dominant newspaper framings focused on mythic representations of Martin Luther King, Jr., speculated to what extent the United States had achieved King's Dream, and characterized the March on Washington as an overwhelmingly positive display of racial harmony en route to an unrealized racial utopia. While meaningful exceptions to these framings surfaced, particularly on the 50th anniversary, dominant press commemorations largely reified "white-oriented progress narratives" in favor of "a paltry type of multiculturalism in the service of national unity."<sup>143</sup> At times, this concentration actively rejected important counter-memories in order to maintain and bolster the legitimacy of nostalgic treatments.<sup>144</sup>

### **Black Press Analysis and Frames**

The overwhelming "willingness to remember" the March on Washington seen in dominant press coverage persisted in Black Press content as well. However, Black

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<sup>142</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>143</sup> Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique*, 204-205.

<sup>144</sup> Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique*, 204-205, Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.



newspapers veered away from "nostalgic" framings of the March and instead embraced "critical" tributes. According to Houston Baker, "critical" memory perpetuates a version of history that "judges severely, censures righteously" and "renders hard ethical evaluations of the past that it never defines as well-passed."<sup>145</sup> In keeping with Baker's assertion, critical commemorations of the March on Washington's anniversary generated more nuanced conceptions and descriptions of movement actors and the historical context surrounding their contributions. Critical readings also fostered increased criticism of both contemporary and past civil rights leaders and strategies. Additionally, consistent with other analyses of Black newspapers' role within African American societies, critical framings acknowledged multiple Black public spheres and encouraged readers to actively engage in both local and national commemorative events.<sup>146</sup> These trends remained consistent across both anniversaries studied.

As in the dominant press, a primary difference between 20th and 50th anniversary coverage centered on the "active" status of the civil rights movement. Black press outlets characterized the movement as ongoing in 1983, but by the 50th anniversary the same newspapers positioned the "civil rights movement" decidedly in the past. In a variation from dominant press treatments, Black press coverage suggested that in 2013 a "new iteration" of the movement was growing in the face of rollbacks to the 1965 Voting Rights Act and Trayvon Martin's murder. A wider variety of historical actors also appeared in Black press accounts published on the 50th anniversary. For instance, Black press content mentioned march organizer A. Philip Randolph in 9.4 percent of 20th

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<sup>145</sup> Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.

<sup>146</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society*, Vogel, *The Black Press*, Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, among many others.

anniversary articles.<sup>147</sup> By 2013, Randolph surfaced in 18.1 percent of pieces.<sup>148</sup>

Similarly, Bayard Rustin appeared in four percent of articles in 1983 and 14.4 in 2013.<sup>149</sup>

It is noteworthy that even in the African American press, principal organizers Randolph and Rustin appear in less than 20 percent of stories commemorating the March. The above trends and differences are reflected in the three primary frames emerging in Black press coverage of the 20th and 50th anniversaries of the March on Washington: 1.) King the universal, yet *largely* ambiguous icon; 2.) Beyond the Dream; and 3.) The Fierce Urgency of Now. The remainder of this section discusses and provides examples of coverage typical to each frame.

*King the universal, yet still largely ambiguous icon.* Dr. Martin Luther King and his "I Have a Dream" speech constituted the most central subjects of African American press commemorations of the March on Washington. On both anniversaries, Black press content mentioned Martin Luther King, Jr., other King family members, and/or the Dream in nearly 80 percent of stories (see Table 3). This is actually a slightly higher proportion than in dominant press content.<sup>150</sup> King's dominance of Black press coverage points to a collective memory overwhelmingly centered on King and the Dream—a memory that numerically varies little from dominant press conceptions.

	<b>1983</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Headline</b>	4 (5.5%)	16 (12.1%)
<b>Article</b>	59 (79.7%)	105 (79.5%)
<b>N=</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>132</b>

Table 3: Black Press Mentions of Dr. King, the King Family, or "The Dream" in March on Washington Anniversary Coverage

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<sup>147</sup> Randolph is mentioned in seven articles in 1983.

<sup>148</sup> Randolph is mentioned in 24 articles in 2013.

<sup>149</sup> Rustin is mentioned in 3 articles in 1983 and 19 articles in 2013.

<sup>150</sup> Dominant press outlets mentioned King, a family member, or the Dream in 75 percent of stories in both 1983 and 2013.

Between 61 and 73 percent of articles that mentioned Dr. King also incorporated at least one of his speeches or written works (see Table 4). Like dominant press outlets, the Black press mentioned the "I Have a Dream" speech most often (see Table 4). Interestingly, the Dream speech received a larger number of mentions on the 50th anniversary than the 20th (see Table 4). Only one story incorporated a King text outside the Dream in 1983 (see Table 4). By 2013, the proportion of King's non-Dream writings rose to 14.2 percent (see Table 4). The "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and "Mountain Top" speech, given in Memphis just before his assassination in 1968, constitute the most often mentioned "other" texts.<sup>151</sup> How the Black press' remembers the March on Washington remains overwhelmingly grounded in discussions of the Dream despite King's large body of work and fifty years worth of scholarship and debate. Allowing the Dream to continually constitute the fundamental component of March memories almost completely displaces King's other speeches and texts from the narrative.

	<b>1983</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Any King Speech or Written Work</b>	36 (61.0%)	77 (73.3%)
<b>I Have A Dream Speech</b>	36 (61.0%)	74 (70.4%)
<b>All Other King Speeches and Written Works</b>	1 (1.7%)	15 (14.2%)
<b>Post-1963 Moments</b>	10 (16.9%)	42 (40.0%)
<b>N =</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>105</b>

Table 4: Black Press Mentions of Speeches and Post-1963 Civil Rights Events in Articles Discussing Martin Luther King, Jr.

<sup>151</sup> The "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was mentioned three times, all in 2013. The "Mountain Top" speech was mentioned three times across both intervals. Other texts mentioned include a 1965 interview Dr. King did with *Playboy Magazine*, his last Sunday sermon titled "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution" which was delivered at the National Cathedral on March 31, 1968, and King's "Where do we go From Here?" speech delivered at the 1967 SCLC Convention.

The most noteworthy quantitative difference between anniversaries lies in the proportion of stories connecting King with a "post-1963 moment." Black press outlets referenced these later moments in nearly 17 percent of stories in 1983. By 2013, however, 40 percent of articles discussing King also made mention of some event occurring after the March itself (see Table 4). This contrast suggests that commemoration narratives broadened significantly in the 30 years between 1983 and 2013. As a point of contrast, 2013 dominant press commemorations discussed "post-1963 moments" in only 24 percent of stories (see Table 4). These differences illustrate the critical nature of 50th anniversary commemorations published in Black newspapers and indicate the Black press' increased willingness to discuss the more controversial stances voiced during King's later years.

In sum, Black press commemorations relied on the vehicle of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Dream to a slightly larger degree than those of the dominant press. Black press newspapers also largely focused on the Dream speech rather than King's other texts. In a departure from 50th anniversary commemorations in dominant newspapers, 2013 African American press coverage connected King with later movement events to a larger degree, by virtue likely highlighting his more progressive stances. However, the above analysis demonstrates that on the whole, Black press narratives remain astonishingly focused on King and the Dream during March on Washington commemorations and neglect to discuss most of King's body of work.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique*, Singh, *Black is a Country*, Morgan, "The Good the Bad and the Forgotten" in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, Lentz, *Symbols, the Newsmagazines, and Martin Luther King*, Baker, "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," Wise, "We Twisted King's Words, among others.

*Beyond the Dream.* Although Black press outlets relied heavily on the vehicles of King and the Dream, qualitative analysis revealed that across both time points Black press journalists most frequently invoked the icon to underscore neglected civil rights components and to discuss why these neglected facets of the movement needed to be commemorated and remembered. These outlets did not employ the specter King to reify mythic understandings of his legacy. Instead, they utilized "nostalgic" constructions prominent in dominant discourses as the start of a counterpoint. As stated above, the newspapers studied did not discuss of a wide *variety* of King's works. However, they did engage in highly detailed conversations about King's life and the legacy of his Dream. This combination allowed the Black press to somewhat "save Dr. King from arrest in a golden allegory of the past" and produce memories distinctly counter to dominant press narratives.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, Black press commemorations expanded anniversary accounts to include other movement leaders and positioned the March not as a pinnacle of civil rights, but as another episode within the larger African American Freedom Struggle. In doing so, these media outlets worked toward "the cumulative, collective maintenance of a record that draws into relationship significant instants of time past and the always uprooted homelessness of now."<sup>154</sup>

A 20th anniversary *New York Amsterdam News* commemoration claimed that "what is now being billed as the anniversary of 'Martin Luther King, Jr.'s march' is, in reality, a tribute to the vision and daring of A. Philip Randolph as Dr. King would be the first to admit."<sup>155</sup> Similarly, a 1983 *Chicago Defender* story expressly stated that Randolph organized the 1963 March and that King merely "joined up and helped

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<sup>153</sup> Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.

<sup>154</sup> Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," 3.

<sup>155</sup> Editorial, "Twenty Years Ago," *New Amsterdam News*, August 27, 1983.

persuade Randolph to broaden the target from employment to the whole range of civil rights issues."<sup>156</sup> A more detailed *Washington Informer* analysis from the same year asked "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up as a raisin in the sun or is it allowed to fester and explode?"<sup>157</sup> The article declared that "minorities see the King dream, after removing legalized discrimination, as not only being allowed to dry up and fester, but the Reagan Administration as injecting the festered dream with...a total attempt to turn back the clock on all civil rights gains and place the economic burden on those who can least afford it, while favoring, economically, the rich."<sup>158</sup> In sharp contrast to dominant press framings, the piece concluded that "the dream has not dried up, but it has been denied."<sup>159</sup> The columnist also chided "the white news media and white panelists" for producing coverage that "'whited' out the success" of the 1983 march.<sup>160</sup>

*Chicago Defender* columnist Ronald E. Childs lamented that in 2013 many people understood King "solely through the prism of his speechmaking, and varying accounts of his assassination." "Too often," Childs argued, "he's perceived merely as a caricature of Black History Month—a name to be recalled and repeated on-demand, like vague, repetitive dates in a history book."<sup>161</sup> In a rearticulation of dominant discourses, the piece went on to clarify that "Dr. King didn't 'give his life' for the Movement—it was taken."<sup>162</sup> The author also disputed prevalent conceptions of King's prescription for contemporary times, concluding that "King would challenge us not to wait; not to be patient. He would

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<sup>156</sup> Robert MacKay, "March on Washington Lacking," *Chicago Defender*, August 20, 1983.

<sup>157</sup> Alfreda L. Madison, "Dream Not Dead, But Festering To Explode," *Washington Informer*, September 15, 1983.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Ronald E. Childs, "The Content of Our Character: King's Dream Deferred?" *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 2013.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

tell us to rise from our slumber, and while he'd likely applaud the galvanizing impact of the March's 50th anniversary, he'd then most certainly ask us all to stop holding each other's hands and singing about overcoming, and just do it."<sup>163</sup>

A 50th anniversary commemoration from the *Atlanta Daily World* illustrates how Black press outlets drew attention to King's more contentious moments. The piece examined King's contributions the Selma to Montgomery march, highlighted his anti-Vietnam declarations, and noted his belief that "‘compensation'... would be the only way to close the economic gap between African Americans and Whites."<sup>164</sup> In a rare mention of King's Poor People's Campaign, the article emphasized that at the time of his death, King "was organizing the Poor People's Campaign, envisioned as a way to bring tens of thousands of people to Washington, D.C. to demand that each department of the federal government recognize and ameliorate poverty issues in housing, education, health, and other areas."<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Marian Wright Edelman, *Washington Informer* guest columnist and founder of the Children's Defense Fund, asserted that 50th anniversary commemorations "have sanitized and trivialized" King's "message and life."<sup>166</sup> She bemoaned collective memories that "remember Dr. King the great orator but not Dr. King the disturber of unjust peace; memories" that "applaud the Dr. King who opposed violence but not the Dr. King who called for massive nonviolent demonstrations to end war and poverty in our national and world house."<sup>167</sup> She also argued that "while we love to celebrate his dream and great oratorical skills, we ignore his fears and repeated warnings about America's...missing God's opportunity to become a great and just nation

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Julianne Malevaux, "After the March on Washington," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 30, 2013.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Marian Wright Edelman, "Where Do We Go From Here?" *Washington Informer*, September 5, 2013.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

by sharing our enormous riches with the poor and overcoming what he called the 'giant triplets' of racism, materialism, and militarism."<sup>168</sup>

A 2013 *New York Amsterdam News* piece, one of the small proportion of stories to invoke a King speech outside the Dream, recollected King's "A Time to Break Silence" address which "assailed the Johnson administration for its war policy in Vietnam."<sup>169</sup> The article pointed out that "at the heart of King's opposition to the war in Vietnam was the wasteful use of money so vitally needed for the poor people of America" and that King "was equally disturbed by the role of the U.S. as the world police, intervening in global affairs and, in the end, merely exacerbating the conflict."<sup>170</sup> The column also criticized President Obama suggesting that while "Obama admitted that his speech could never match King's soaring oratory...the president still has the opportunity to match King's moral resolve."<sup>171</sup> The piece contended that the United States had no business intervening in the ongoing Syrian civil war and proposed that "Obama would do well to heed the words" of King.<sup>172</sup> The multifaceted portrayals of King prominent in the Black press' March on Washington anniversary coverage actively embody Baker's notion of "critical" remembrances and, in turn, push against more hegemonic, uni-dimensional profiles of King entrenched in dominant discourses about the civil rights movement.

Black press outlets also took commemorations of the March on Washington "beyond the Dream" by widening narratives to include counter-memories about figures and events not directly linked to King. *New York Amsterdam News* columnist Herb Boyd noted that "while King's words deserve all the praise we can muster, there were other

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Editorial, "Heeding the words of Dr. King," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 5, 2013.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.



events that occurred 50 years ago that should not be ignored."<sup>173</sup> Boyd discussed the murder of Medgar Evers Jr, assassination of John F. Kennedy, the death of W.E.B. Du Bois, and "one the most unforgettably heinous murders in the nation's history" the deaths of four little girls in a bombing of a Birmingham, Alabama church just two weeks after the March on Washington.<sup>174</sup> A 1983 *Los Angeles Times* column listed Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman, William Monroe Trotter, W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X, and Paul Robeson as icons present day leaders would do well to emulate."<sup>175</sup>

A 1983 letter to the *Amsterdam News* suggested the "real" attendance at the 1963 march actually topped 400,000. The author surmised that the lower figure of 250,000 "became the accepted one because it was announced from the Lincoln Memorial by A. Philip Randolph."<sup>176</sup> The author did not "correct the record at the time out of respect to Mr. Randolph and because we believed the message and the enormous impact of the march was more important than exact figures as to how many people came."<sup>177</sup> A similar nod to Randolph appeared in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* on the 50th anniversary. The article described Randolph as "a multi-faceted, multitalented Black leader renowned for his organizing skills and access to powerful people, including two United States presidents" and underscored Randolph's ability to bring many groups of people together.<sup>178</sup> The piece outlined a long list of Randolph's accomplishments including his role in passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Civil Rights Act of 1968, 1948 desegregation of the Armed Forces, and the 1941 March on

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<sup>173</sup> Herb Boyd, "Four Little Black girls Dressed in White," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 12, 2013.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> LeGrand H. Clegg, "Present 'Leaders' Are Weak," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 1, 1983.

<sup>176</sup> Seymour Posner, "More than 250,000 attended," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 10, 1983.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Larry Aubry, "A. Philip Randolph: Cultural Grounding Key to His Success," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 12, 2013.

Washington Movement wherein "the first 'March on Washington' was never held because the president of the United States had yielded to the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters!"<sup>179</sup> The piece labeled the March on Washington only as "another high point in Randolph's struggle for equality for Blacks and other oppressed people."<sup>180</sup>

*Washington Informer* staffer Lee A. Daniels emphasized the movement's "masses" proclaiming that on August 28, 1963 "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wasn't there by himself." The article stressed that March leaders did not "speak their powerful words to an empty outdoor auditorium of the National Mall," but to "the masses of the movement—a quarter-million strong in Washington that day, and millions more glued to television sets and radios around the country...to White America for the masses of the movement."<sup>181</sup> Daniels observed that these masses functioned "largely out of the somewhat protective spotlight of the national media, in scores of Southern cities, towns and hamlets. And they did so at a great cost."<sup>182</sup> The *Informer* columnist warned that ignoring the masses "obscures the reality of the civil rights movement era [and] glosses over the fact that the March itself was bracketed by two terrible acts of racial violence"—the murder of Medgar Evers and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham.<sup>183</sup> Daniels encouraged readers to commemorate "the hallowed moment of the 1963 March on Washington" by remembering "not only who was on the podium but also who made up the vast throng surrounding the Lincoln Memorial—the ones who in

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Lee A. Daniels, "Celebrating the "Masses" of the Mass Movement," *Washington Informer*, August 22, 2013.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

equal measure made it an event for the ages."<sup>184</sup> By incorporating a variety of figures into March on Washington commemorations, the Black press worked to position the March within the larger context of the civil rights movement itself. This reframing allows the event to be understood as *one of many* important moments rather than *the singular* culmination of racial harmony lauded in the majority of dominant press accounts.

Black press newspapers also probed deep into the historical significance of the March through discussions of Black history writ large and underscored the March's position as "a decisive moment in the Black freedom struggle."<sup>185</sup> *Chicago Defender* columnist William H. Lamar unequivocally claimed that "history is a political enterprise. All who set out to chronicle the past are motivated by ends that some are honest enough to disclose, and others are deluded enough to deny."<sup>186</sup> Lamar noted that he "prepared for the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom by reading serious works of history."<sup>187</sup> The author suggested David J. Garrow's "magisterial" *Bearing the Cross* and William P. Jones' *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* as two important pre-march reads. Lamar also connected a cornerstone institution of the Black community with the cultivation of civil rights leaders by attributing "the intellectual formation of those who led..and participated in" the March on Washington to their education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). "Who taught them? What did they read? What ideas fed their activism? What fueled the critical machinery that allowed them to judge truthfully

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ron Daniels, "D.C. March Leaders Lacked Boldness," *Washington Informer*, September 12, 2013.

<sup>186</sup> William H. Lamar, "The role of HBCUs in the March on Washington," *Chicago Defender*, September 4, 2013.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

themselves, this nation, and this world?" Lamar wondered.<sup>188</sup> Lamar contended that the ideas behind the March "were emblematic of the social engineering that characterized HBCUs for generations prior and in the best instances characterize HBCUs today."<sup>189</sup> By accentuating the history of HBCUs, Lamar conveyed that civil rights icons did not just appear—they grew out of a longstanding institutional tradition of developing Black leaders.

Elinor Tatum of the *New York Amsterdam News* declared that "as we commemorate the speech that may be among the most well-known in our history, we have to ask ourselves why are we commemorating it and why is it important."<sup>190</sup> For Tatum, the answers are "simple and, at the same time, very complicated."<sup>191</sup> She explained the simple answer was understanding "that every right and every achievement have been fought for, and that blood has been shed for something we must hold dear."<sup>192</sup> While "it is wonderful that our children will not know a world where they can't be president," Tatum argued, "we need to instill in them what it took to get there."<sup>193</sup> Tatum counseled readers to engage deeply with the long history of the March because "while King had a dream, we have a mission, and that mission is to make sure our children understand the dream so that they may continue to fight for it. Let not our struggle be in vain."<sup>194</sup>

In an explicit confrontation of the "possessive investment in whiteness," Dr. Maulana Karenga, African Studies scholar and creator of Kwanzaa, reminded *Los*

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Elinor Tatum, "Dr. King's Dream is our Mission" *New York Amsterdam News*, August 29, 2013.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

*Angeles Sentinel* readers of the "strange but constantly occurring" tendency of America "to appropriate our history and culture as simply another expression of the self-congratulatory narrative the American established order."<sup>195</sup> Karenga argued that:

"The established order's misinterpretation, manufacturing and manipulation of the history and memoirs of the March begins with diverting almost all conversation and media coverage to a discussion of Dr. Martin Luther King's 'I have a Dream Speech.' This, of course, allows them to define and create a diluted and adulterated 'reality' that allows even the Right to embrace a reconstructed King and claim appreciation of him and the March now narrowly defined and focused. For unrevised, they could not accept or concede, King's real critique of America as racist, materialistic and militaristic; the greatest purveyor of violence in the world; and an unrepentant bouncer of bad checks. Nor could they agree to his contention that we have both the right and responsibility to rebel against unjust laws."<sup>196</sup>

Karenga introduced the legacies of Paul Robeson, Mary McLeod Bethune, A. Philip Randolph, Frederick Douglass, and Marcus Garvey as counter-memories of Black history's position as a "serious and ceaseless struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves and to live good and meaningful lives."<sup>197</sup> Karenga argued that when March commemorations take these contributions into account "the March must be seen as due commemoration of the Black Freedom Movement in its Civil Rights phase that, in 1965, would transform into its Black Power phase."<sup>198</sup> Moreover, "rightly remembered and read," the "significance of the March lies first in its role and reality as a...massive act of rejection and resistance, to segregation, exploitation and oppression."<sup>199</sup> In the above passage, the ways in which "the meanings of race itself are communicated" take on a wholly different character than in dominant press remembrances of the March.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Dr. Maulana Karenga, "Making the March Meaningful: Re-Reading and Reaffirming Our History," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 29, 2013.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 3.

Through a concise, yet detailed analysis of Black history *writ large*, Karenga introduces a counternarrative with that transforms the meaning of the March from "display of racial harmony" to one more phase of active Black "rejection and resistance."

While Black press content mirrored dominant press accounts numerically, a close reading revealed that each press ultimately voiced very different meanings about the March's leaders and historical significance. African American newspaper commemorations also invoked "nostalgic" memories directly from dominant narratives to engage in the process of recovering "countermemories" of the King, the movement, and Black history. This more critical framing broadened the scope of actors deemed relevant to March commemorations and drew attention to the ongoing nature of the African American freedom struggle as opposed to delimiting struggles against injustice to the past.

*The Fierce Urgency of Now*. In contrast to the dominant press which primarily produced "passive" remembrances, Black press content embodied an extremely "active" form of commemoration focused on the fierce urgency of looming contemporary inequalities. This frame centered on encouraging readers to commemorate the March on Washington by engaging in the opposition of discrimination and oppression both nationally and in their own communities. These calls often debated tangible outcomes of commemorative events and asked American governmental bodies for concrete legislative measures targeting steps toward racial and economic parity. In doing so, Black press outlets defined "protest" as an appropriate and highly meaningful way to commemorate this major civil rights milestone.

*Los Angeles Sentinel* columnist Chico Norwood wondered about the "purpose" of the 1983 commemoration and claimed the event represented a "show of unity among Black people," but efforts would not be "worth a plugged nickel if we don't go out and vote when the time comes."<sup>201</sup> Norwood maintained that "we don't need talk: we're all talked out. We don't need rhetoric. We need answers."<sup>202</sup> Norwood called not for remembrance, but for change, insisting that the 1983 March "might have 'made a statement,' but what good is a statement when Blacks are starving, dying, and losing hope."<sup>203</sup> Norwood then turned to outcomes, inquiring "what happens after this march? Will more Blacks get jobs? Will the banks give us money to start our own businesses? Will Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday become a national holiday? Just exactly what has been accomplished here?"<sup>204</sup> "I'll tell you what happened," concluded Norwood, "the oil companies got richer due to the massive numbers of cars traveling to Washington DC. The airlines increased their profits as did the trains, bus lines, hotels, and restaurants."<sup>205</sup> Norwood's closing statement represents a type of negative, almost cynical, assessment of the 1983 event rarely present in dominant press treatments.

A *Washington Informer* article from 1983 characterized the march as a protest—rather than a celebration or memorial—aimed at "making their elected officials accountable."<sup>206</sup> The piece quoted march organizer Walter Fauntroy who billed the event as "a tremendous example of the people exercising their rights to question government officials' actions and to hold these officials responsible for legislating and executing laws

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<sup>201</sup> Chico C. Norwood, "What Was Gained In D.C.?" *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 1, 1983.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> Alfreda L. Madison, "Dream Not Dead, But Festering To Explode," *Washington Informer*, September 15, 1983.

that make the American Dream of promoting life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness meaningful to them."<sup>207</sup> The *Informer* named specific legislative demands sought by march organizers including the establishment of a national King holiday and expansion of social programs for the unemployed. In a complete departure from dominant press commemorations, perhaps because there is no inclination for the African American press to uphold a "possessive investment in whiteness," the article closed with an analysis of white opinions about the 20th anniversary event.<sup>208</sup> "In questioning some whites about the march," the author wrote, "the conclusion can be drawn that whites become frustrated when Blacks stand up boldly and express their ideas and let the white power structure know that nothing less than full equality, justice and a guarantee of human rights will be accepted. President Reagan has ignored the voices of these people, but he should give heed to their marching feet."<sup>209</sup>

A *Washington Informer* piece penned 30 years later made similar demands for active commemoration of the March. The column argued that "to cast King in the light of a dreamer allows people to be convinced that substantive change resulting from clear vision and direct action is not necessary."<sup>210</sup> The author characterized 50th anniversary events as "a wonderful commemoration and tribute to the past," but expressed dismay that commemorations "failed to articulate a legislative agenda and plan to pressure the Obama administration and Congress to address disparities in mass incarceration, home foreclosure, unemployment or education" as leaders did during both the 1963 and 1983

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), 2006.

<sup>209</sup> Madison, "Dream Not Dead, But Festering To Explode," *Washington Informer*.

<sup>210</sup> Wilmer J. Leon, "1963 vs. 2013: From Aggressive Peaceful Activism to Tranquilizing Gradualism," *Washington Informer*, September 5, 2013.



marches.<sup>211</sup> The article contrasted President Kennedy's decision to watch the 1963 on television out of fear that "the March would turn into a riot" with President Obama's position as the "keynote speaker" at 50th anniversary events.<sup>212</sup> The author acknowledged Obama's presidential position as "progress," but challenged that Obama "did not propose any substantive legislative initiatives to address the suffering of today and ask those in attendance to go back to their homes and hamlets and work with him to defeat legislative gridlock...He offered the 'tranquilizing drug of gradualism.'"<sup>213</sup> A second *Washington Informer* article from 50th anniversary coverage suggested "the enactment of an Economic Bill of Rights" and "boycotts as a non-violent means to change the hearts and minds of obstructionists" as apropos avenues for commemorating the March.<sup>214</sup> The author voiced solidarity with Stevie Wonder's decision not to perform in Florida until Stand Your Ground laws were undone and, as was often done in previous eras, called on readers to "utilize Black dollars as a weapon in the Black freedom struggle."<sup>215</sup>

In keeping with traditional functions of the Black press, civil rights leaders directly appealed for active commemorations through pages of Black newspapers. Reverend Al Sharpton of the National Action Network affirmed that "we, the people, are re-energized to tackle injustice head-on."<sup>216</sup> Sharpton asked Congress to "deal with a voting rights bill that guarantees the protection of all citizens, regardless of their race, class, socioeconomic background, geographic location, religion, gender, orientation or beliefs...without delay, as several states have already engaged in voter suppression

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ron Daniels, "D.C. March Leaders Lacked Boldness," *Washington Informer*, September 12, 2013.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Al Sharpton, "Now that we have marched, let's get to work," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 29, 2013.

methods."<sup>217</sup> Sharpton contended that "we are tragically hearing much of the same talk of states' rights as we did decades ago. We must have federal laws that protect us against states' nullifying and interposing their will over federal protections for all... We cannot allow this kind of history to repeat itself."<sup>218</sup> Sharpton instructed readers that "it's not enough to commemorate" 1963 March leaders. Instead, readers "must emulate them and do what they did in our time... anything less will be a disservice to the memory of this great leader and all those who paved the way 50 years ago... Let's get to work."<sup>219</sup>

Similarly, National Urban League President Marc H. Morial highlighted his organization's 50th anniversary "Redeem the Dream" summit aimed at "bringing together civil rights legends and new generation leaders for spirited discussions of the work that lies ahead as we confront both the progression and regression of equal opportunity in 21st century America."<sup>220</sup> Morial also outlined a "domestic policy agenda" that included attaining "economic parity for African Americans," ensuring voting rights for all in the United States, and embarking on wholesale reform of the American criminal justice system.<sup>221</sup> Morial closed the column by connecting the successes of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act with the show of force displayed at the March on Washington, telling readers that "we cannot wave the flag of victory when so much work remains to be done. These injustices have, in fact, sparked the flame of a revitalized 21st Century Civil Rights Movement."<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Marc H. Morial, "National Urban League and civil rights coalition announce 21st Century Agenda for Jobs and Freedom during March on Washington," *Chicago Defender*, September 4, 2013.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

To a somewhat lesser but still meaningful degree, Black press journalists criticized African American leaders, the Democratic Party, and the commemoration events themselves in a way absent from dominant press accounts. While dominant press reports implied the existence of a singular, uni-dimensional "Black community" with an "agreed upon" slate of leaders, Black press commemorations recognized multiple black public spheres.<sup>223</sup> Columnist and television personality Tony Brown deemed the 1983 March on Washington a "failed" endeavor "because it was a Democratic Party political rally and not a call to self-reliance of Black Americans to defeat racism with group power under the direction of leaders capable of focusing on reality."<sup>224</sup> "Moreover," wrote Brown, "this 1983 version proved that the majority of nationally known Black leaders do not understand the basic problem of Afro-Americans and, consequently, do not have an intelligent approach to solving it."<sup>225</sup> Brown concluded that the 20th anniversary March represented "a step backward" from 1963 because "it was so conspicuously out of tune with the demands for a new direction—and a new leadership for Blacks."<sup>226</sup>

Writing for the *Los Angeles Sentinel* in 2013, Larry Aubry contended that media treatments of 50th anniversary commemorations served only as "a salve on an unhealed wound" and "blurred the unsettling fact that full civil and legal rights are still not a reality for Black people, in particular, in America."<sup>227</sup> Aubry argued that "Black leadership must play a central role in the movement for transformative change. For some time, Black leaders' patented insolence and ineffectiveness have been the norm which the Black

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<sup>223</sup> Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (November 2002): 446-468.

<sup>224</sup> Tony Brown, "Tony Brown's Comments; 1983 March Marches Backwards," *Washington Informer*, September 14, 1983.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Larry Aubry, "Still Marching Fifty Years From Now, Unless...," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 5, 2013.

community allows by failing to hold them accountable."<sup>228</sup> Aubry rhetorically asked "will the recent mobilization around the 1963 March on Washington be sustainable? Will Black leadership rise to the task of properly representing the needs, concerns and desires of the people?" Aubry hoped "there will be no need to march for jobs, justice and freedom" 50 years on, "but whether such a march will be necessary depends largely on conditions" African Americans "allow or do not allow, and what we do or fail to do about it. The choice and responsibility is ours."<sup>229</sup>

*Washington Informer* columnist William Reed took specific aim at Congressman John Lewis and traditionally accepted African American "allegiances" to the Democratic Party suggesting that Lewis was "possibly part of Black peoples' problems."<sup>230</sup> Reed claimed that Lewis "epitomizes African Americans 'marching in place'" because "in reality, Blacks' economic condition shows no change since Lewis spoke on the National Mall in 1963."<sup>231</sup> "At minimum," argued Reed, "longtime politicians and officeholders such as Lewis, the Democratic Party and the roles they've played must be scrutinized." Reed held all African Americans "complicit in our own demise" since "we refuse to hold Lewis, Black elected officials and executives that became post-civil rights movement power brokers accountable...To experience a 'change' in our status, Blacks must make decisive changes."<sup>232</sup> Acknowledging differing opinions among African Americans about how to best remember the March on Washington and continue work to overcome existing inequality belies notions of a "monolithic" Black community often present in dominant

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> William Reed, "Surviving John Lewis," *Washington Informer*, September 1, 2013.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> William Reed, "Surviving John Lewis," *Washington Informer*, September 1, 2013.

media portrayals of African Americans.<sup>233</sup> This treatment also illustrates one avenue through which Black newspapers sustain representations that "transform or destroy dominant definitions of African American identity as part of the struggle against legal and social oppression in America."<sup>234</sup>

In framing commemorative coverage around urgent contemporary injustice and concrete action for extinguishing those inequalities, Black newspapers prompted readers not only to remember the March on Washington, but to engage in a commemorative process that involved vocally challenging and demonstrating against injustices the March did not solve. This framing legitimates forms of Black protest often left off pages of dominant newspapers. As Jane Rhodes notes, dominant press outlets often "portray any resistance to the state in a negative light" thus displacing methods for expressing dismay with dominant society deemed outside accepted mainstream norms.<sup>235</sup>

In sum, Black press outlets approached commemorations of the March on Washington from a much more critical perspective than dominant press institutions. In fact, trends that resided at the most progressive margins of dominant press content proved central to Black press accounts. Black press outlets also routinely invoked nostalgic commemorations directly from dominant media in order to "refute mainstream interpretations and insert their own voices" into commemorative narratives about Martin Luther King, other movement leaders, and Black history writ large.<sup>236</sup> Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, Black press newspapers utilized the March on Washington anniversary not only to "passively" assess and remember history, but to "actively"

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<sup>233</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*

<sup>234</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 3.

<sup>235</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 55

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

demand immediate and substantive change from American society. This framing encourages and legitimates forms of Black protest deemed unacceptable in dominant discourses. These framings indicate that traditionally accepted functions of the Black press remain intact throughout the late-20th century and are arguably more alive and well today than in the recent past.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter illustrated that the March on Washington is so widely commemorated because it represents—to those with the power to create and perpetuate narratives—the key moment in American history when "everyone" agreed on how to move forward in American race relations. The immense volume of coverage the March on Washington garners year after year also highlights the importance of *national consensus* in which civil rights events, and by proxy which components of American race relations, receive media attention. While Black press outlets incorporated a wider variety of viewpoints and historical actors, the figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. and a mythic interpretation of the March as an idyllic gathering in our nation's capital to ask for the redress of grievances as allowed by our constitution remain the fundamental meanings articulated even 50 years on. In perpetuating these largely hollow cultural meanings, dominant newspapers work to anchor the March as a palatable, axiomatic benchmark of American race relations writ large. By neglecting the systemic ills targeted by the 1963 march's organizers, dominant cultural narratives of the movement's anniversaries engender concerted amnesia and bypass the contemporary presence of lingering systemic inequality. This treatment denies opportunities for powerful counternarratives and rearticulations of March memory to circulate in popular discourse and indicates that

media outlets not only "create, reflect, and perpetuate" cultural narratives but also hold the power to significantly *contain, stifle, and delimit* articulation of counternarratives.<sup>237</sup>

In contrast to the relatively superficial treatments in the dominant press, Black press content began generating meaning where the most progressive of dominant press content left off. African American newspapers rejected "nostalgic" framings typical in dominant press accounts instead opting for "critical" commemorations. These critical commemorations provided more refined descriptions of movement actors and contained a larger amount of historical context. Interestingly, Black press outlets consistently drew directly upon nostalgic commemorations from dominant media in order to "refute mainstream interpretations and insert their own voices" into March remembrances.<sup>238</sup> Black press newspapers also employed the March's anniversary to "actively" demand meaningful progress on racial issues. "Active" commemoration generates discursive space for the rearticulation of collective memory based on the present needs and circumstances of a "counterpublic" sphere and championed avenues of Black protest often deemed unacceptable in dominant discourses.<sup>239</sup>

Finally, both presses neglected to mention the large, well covered 1983 March on Washington in commemorations of the event's 50th anniversary. Only one Black press article referenced the 1983 gathering, and that piece did so merely in name. The treatment indicates the existence of a "fragmented" middle ground between Houston Baker's conceptions of "nostalgic" and "critical" memory.<sup>240</sup> By entirely neglecting the 1983

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<sup>237</sup> Stuart Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies," *Rethinking Marxism* 5, no. 1 (1992): 14-15.

<sup>238</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 14.

<sup>239</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

<sup>240</sup> Baker, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere," 3.

event, both presses did more than overlook a piece of civil rights history. These media outlets created a discursive space for a wholly rearticulated conception of civil rights history to news narratives surrounding the most universally remembered civil rights milestone.



## Chapter 4: The Chicago Freedom Movement

*"We also come here today to affirm that we will no longer sit idly by in agonizing deprivation and wait on others to provide our freedom. We will be sadly mistaken if we think freedom is some lavish dish that the federal government and the white man will pass out on a silver platter while the Negro merely furnishes the appetite. Freedom is never voluntarily granted by the oppressor. It must be demanded by the oppressed."*

*-- Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Chicago Freedom Movement Rally" Soldier Field, Chicago, July 1966*

After Selma's successes direct civil rights action across the South waned, and the attention of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) shifted from combating de jure segregation in mid-sized Southern towns to ending de facto segregation in Northern urban areas. In late 1965 King and the SCLC settled on Chicago as the location for their inaugural Northern campaign. Decades of racial housing covenants, race riots fueled by geographic disputes, and other means of segregating "the neighborhood" lay at the heart of racism and discrimination within Chicago's city limits. Racialized struggles over housing in Chicago and elsewhere across the United States date back generations—quite probably to America's founding. As David Theo Goldberg maintains, “racisms become institutionally normalized in and through spatial configuration, just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and drafted in racial terms.”<sup>1</sup>

In Chicago, decades of immigration crafted racialized spatial configurations that pushed residents of color to the South and West sides of the city. African Americans from the rural South flocked to Chicago in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, largely at the behest of industrial recruiters. This workforce's arrival fueled both spatial and economic

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<sup>1</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 185.

tensions, especially in neighborhoods where newly settled Blacks now vied with working class immigrants for living accommodations and jobs. In her examination of race, space, and riots in the city of Chicago, Janet Abu-Lughod characterized the period between 1919 and 1968 as an era of “border wars” resulting in “a state of almost constant sniping over turf that occasionally flared up into significant battles from suppressed, but never quenched, embers.”<sup>2</sup> These tensions ignited violent disquiet that consumed Chicago’s South side for 14 days in the summer of 1919.<sup>3</sup> Racial hostilities continued to manifest themselves in scattered altercations between African Americans and their white neighbors throughout the next decade. Hoping for a “peaceful and progressive” end to the problem, Chicago’s leaders implemented “The Atlanta Solution,” which sought to calm frequent scuffles through segregation of urban space via racially restrictive housing covenants.<sup>4</sup> In addition to limiting housing opportunities for people of color, namely African Americans, the covenants also sought to encircle established black residential areas in an attempt to deter their expansion into adjacent neighborhoods. Though never an official decree, racial housing covenants and shows of force by Neighborhood Improvement Associations largely maintained racialized geographic boundaries within the city. Chicago’s foray into restrictive covenants lagged behind that of many other northern cities, but once embraced, their use proliferated and dominated the city’s urban landscape into the 1940s.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> The first racially restrictive housing covenant recorded in Chicago dates to 1927. To effectuate a covenant, between 75 and 95 percent of a given area’s residents agreed to bar people of color to rent or purchase homes.<sup>5</sup> In their analysis of city and county property deeds, Truman H. Long and Charles S. Johnson uncovered 222 housing covenants on Chicago’s South side alone, covering more than 11 square

Covenants fell out of both legal and social favor by the mid-1940s, but their lasting effects on the geography of Chicago and the quality of life of area residents remained profound. Within these divided communities, population density soared, schools struggled, and a pattern of racially inspired violence prevailed on the fringes of South side neighborhoods. Renewed African American migration to Chicago during World War II compounded tensions associated with the city's racialized spaces. In 1940, African Americans accounted for 4.2 percent of Chicago's population. By 1960, this figure rose to 22.9 percent.<sup>6</sup> Previous spatial management practices forced the majority of this new wave of migrants to settle on West side of the city. Post-World War II public housing initiatives implemented by the Chicago Land Clearance Commission in 1949 promised "urban renewal," though actual practices leaned more toward "slum clearance."<sup>7</sup> These initiatives relocated low income, primarily Black residents to housing projects and destroyed their existing homes to clear space for University of Illinois expansion, the Dan Ryan Expressway, and other industrial endeavors. Clay Risen notes that these construction projects "created a literal wall of poverty between the black South Side and the white ethnics of the city's vast southwest."<sup>8</sup>

In early 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC entered into this matrix of racialized space with the aim of "ending slums."<sup>9</sup> King moved his family to Lawndale,

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miles.<sup>5</sup> The majority of agreements targeted those with 1/8 or more of African American ancestry, were almost expressly directed at black citizens, remained in effect from 20 to 25 years, and intriguingly, did not apply to servant's quarters. For a full discussion of Chicago's housing covenants and their legacy see Truman H. Long and Charles S. Johnson, *People vs. Property: Race Restrictive Covenants in Housing*. Nashville (Tennessee: Fisk University Press, 1947).

<sup>6</sup> Clay Risen, *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2007), 145.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Risen, *A Nation on Fire*, 146. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots*, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Lou Finley, "The Open Housing Marches in Chicago," in *Chicago 1966: Open Housing Marches, Summit Negotiations, and Operation Breadbasket* ed. David J. Garrow (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing,

a neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, in January, formally launching a battle against housing segregation that would formally last through late 1966.<sup>10</sup> King's "Chicago Freedom Movement" ultimately ended in with an agreement between community members and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley that made it "clear to almost everyone that the Freedom Movement had seriously compromised its position."<sup>11</sup> Overtly racist opposition and violence filled the path to this agreement. Resistance peaked in July and August of 1966 when anti-Black violence occurred routinely during open housing marches through white neighborhoods. On August 5, a particularly notable march through Chicago's West side resulted in many arrests and injuries, including Dr. King being struck in the head with a rock.<sup>12</sup> In many ways, history remembers King's Chicago efforts as a largely failed endeavor.<sup>13</sup> The agreement reached between King and Daley did little to immediately advance the cause of open housing. However, the groundwork laid by both King and local community organizers before, during, and after the Chicago Freedom Movement sparked a variety of local initiatives including Operation Breadbasket which continued into the early 1970s.<sup>14</sup>

Despite involvement of the movement's most notable icon and significant contemporary media attention, the SCLC's Chicago Freedom Movement has earned no entry in the canons of civil rights collective memory. In truth, the Northern civil rights

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1989), 5 and 33. See also: Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 237-269.

<sup>10</sup> Finley, "The Open Housing Marches in Chicago," in *Chicago 1966*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Finley, "The Open Housing Marches in Chicago," in *Chicago 1966*, 33. See also: Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 237-269.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson and Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line*, 208-236.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson and Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line*, 365.

<sup>14</sup> Gary Massoni, "Perspectives on Operation Breadbasket," in *Chicago 1966: Open Housing Marches, Summit Negotiations, and Operation Breadbasket* ed. David J. Garrow (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 245.

front writ large is rarely commemorated to the degree of its Southern counterpart even when numerous civil rights marches, protests, housing campaigns, and riots provide evidence of those events' centrality to the African American freedom struggle.<sup>15</sup> Fifty years on, prevailing narratives almost exclusively locate the South as the lone site of struggle and Southern racism as the paramount "enemy." Moreover, the issue of equality in housing, also referred to as "open housing" and "fair housing," has largely been displaced from these scant Northern histories despite its fundamental position on the civil rights agenda. James Ralph, Jr. argues that "although eventually the principle of equality of results and its attendant remedies such as affirmative action and busing further defined and extended cleavages on racial issues, it was the dispute of fair housing that first dramatically exposed the limits of the civil rights consensus."<sup>16</sup> According to Ralph, these fissures hinged on "white resistance" to the expansion of racial equality into "the more private realms of American life."<sup>17</sup>

Issues surrounding housing represent an integral component of the "rules, laws, standardized procedures" and "cultural practices through which people recognize a debt to the past."<sup>18</sup> The civil rights movement itself and subsequent iterations of Black Power emerged, in part, out of the hostilities produced from the overt segregation of African Americans from white spaces in the South and more subtly in the North. Additionally, remnants of unfinished civil rights era open housing fights reside at the center of many

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008), Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2003), and Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> James Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in *Memory Distortion*, 346-347.

lingering American inequalities. Contemporary phenomena such as the housing bubble associated with the Great Recession, persistent segregation and poverty in American urban areas, and aggressive policing tactics resulting from those long term urban disparities are deeply rooted in the very elements King and the SCLC sought to combat in Chicago in 1966. As such, this chapter argues that open housing campaigns and the contested racialized spaces on which these battles took place comprise essential *les lieux de memoire*, or “sites of memory” for understanding how dominant and Black press newspapers collectively remember the civil rights movement.<sup>19</sup> Mediated commemorations of these practices shed light on meaningful socially formed expectations and norms at the intersections of race, space, and the most fundamental unit of American domestic life—the home. The omission of these housing struggles from mediated civil rights memory signifies troubling limits on what are considered acceptable parameters for discussions about race in America.

In order to dig deeper into the above matrix, this chapter focuses specifically on commemorative newspaper coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement from both dominant and Black press outlets. This chapter assesses 1.) the degree to which the Chicago Freedom Movement is remembered in both dominant and Black press newspapers; 2.) what differences might exist between African American and dominant newspaper coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement and its open housing campaigns; 3.) what facets of this open housing campaign are remembered as we move forward in time; and 4.) how both dominant and Black newspapers engage with civil rights claims related to the private sphere of the American home.

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<sup>19</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Reflections*, no. 26 (1989): 7.

Due to low volumes of news coverage about the Chicago Freedom Movement, this analysis incorporated content from the entire ProQuest Newsstand database as well as the Ethnic NewsWatch. The phrase "Chicago Freedom Movement" was searched in both databases. The only date restrictions placed on the search were to limit articles to the 10th anniversary—January 1, 1976—and beyond. While the resulting sample is limited to content available in ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch, this approach was deemed best for examining coverage volumes, spikes in coverage, and levels of local and national coverage across a wide variety of newspapers and over the course of a lengthy time frame. If greater time and resources were available, this study would have consulted local, brick and mortar archives in order to garner a fuller picture of ethnic press coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement. Despite recent advances, the cataloging of ethnic and alternative press publications still lags significantly behind records of dominant press media. These discrepancies speak volumes about what is considered worthy of preservation, and thus what materials are seen as important to the telling of historical stories. In a manner similar to media texts, these archival omissions prove "instrumental in circulating and reifying racialized ideas and images and in maintaining a social and political climate that reinforced blacks' second-class status."<sup>20</sup> As this archive expands, increased opportunities exist for "groups on the margins of society...to refute mainstream interpretations and insert their own voices into how things are remembered."<sup>21</sup>

The remainder of this chapter outlines volumes of coverage in dominant and Black press newspapers, examines how these newspapers framed the Chicago Freedom

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<sup>20</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, 14.

Movement, and connects these framings to contemporary issues surrounding race, space, and American culture.

### **Commemorative Coverage of the 1966 Chicago Freedom Movement** Coverage by the Numbers

In total, newspapers located in ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch published 163 articles about the Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM). Dominant press outlets generated 128 pieces while the Black press printed 35 (see Figure 1).

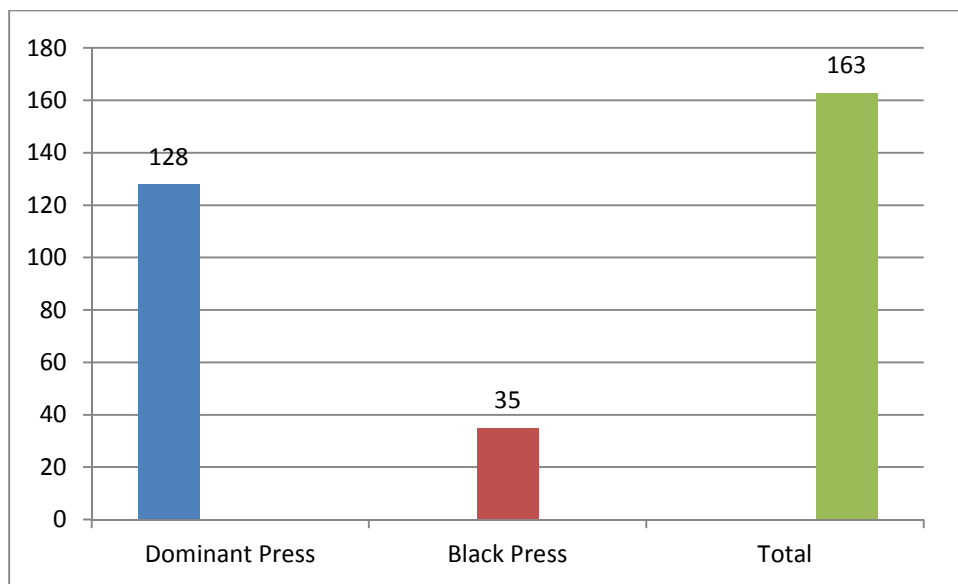


Figure 5: Dominant and Black Press Article Totals for Newspaper Content Commemorating the 1966 Chicago Freedom Movement (n=163)

Dominant press stories falling in line with traditionally accepted definitions of "news" comprised 56 percent of stories (see Figure 2).<sup>22</sup> "Calendar" listings promoting events related to Chicago Freedom Movement commemorations comprised the next largest proportion of article type in the dominant press. Nearly one-third of all dominant press content published about the CFM appeared in some sort of event listing or community calendar (see Figure 2). This indicates that local and national *events* are key

<sup>22</sup> Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), among many others.



sites for resurrecting memories of the Chicago Freedom Movement. The dominant newspapers studied produced a relatively small proportion of editorial stories; these types of articles accounted for 3 percent of content (see Figure 2). Newspapers outside of Chicago and its immediate suburbs produced more than half of all dominant press coverage about the Chicago Freedom Movement. Non-Chicago papers produced 72 stories, or about 56 percent of dominant press stories examined (see Figure 2). Non-local stories often contained only a brief mention of the CFM as opposed to discussing the campaign in any detail. For example, the *New York Times* included a quote from a CFM participant in an article about a Justice Department lawsuit involving a Chicago housing complex, and the *Washington Post* mentioned the CFM in contextual grounding of a story about a famous soul food restaurant located on Chicago's West Side.<sup>23</sup>

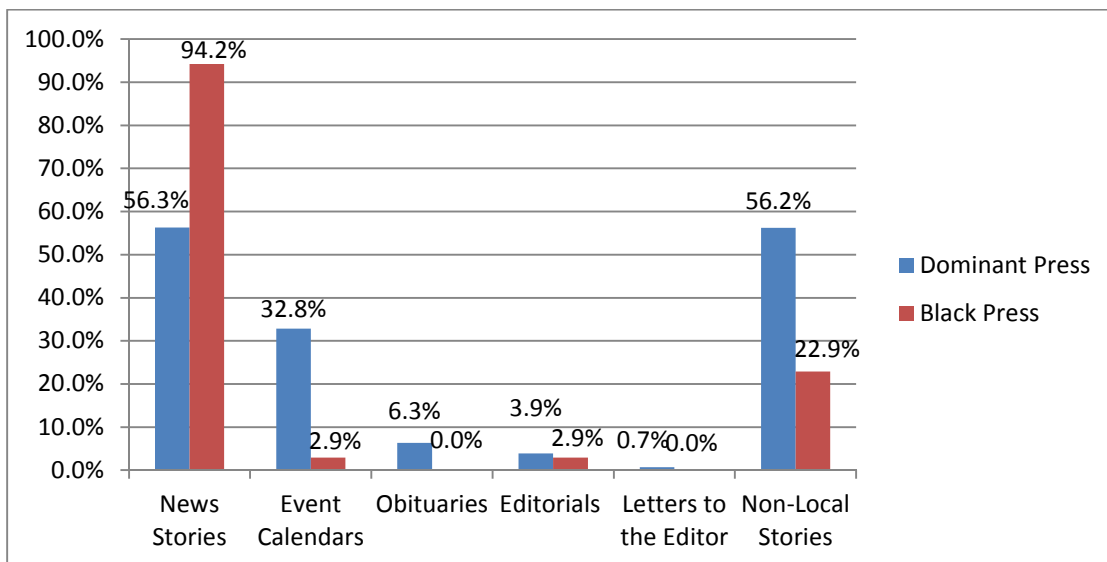


Figure 6: Percentage of Dominant and Black Press Article Types for Newspaper Content Commemorating the 1966 Chicago Freedom Movement (n=163)

<sup>23</sup> Dirk Johnson, "U.S. Sues Integrated Housing Complex in Chicago on Use of Racial Quotas," *New York Times*, July 24, 1987 and "South Side Story; Starring Barack Obama, Emmett Till, Richard Wright, Mahalia Jackson, Martin Luther King Jr., Muddy Waters, Harold Washington, Richard J. Daley And a Cast of Thousands," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2008.

The Chicago Freedom Movement also garnered significant attention in the Black press. In total, Black press newspapers penned 35 stories (see Figure 1). Interestingly, nearly all stories aligned with traditionally accepted definitions of "news" (see Figure 2).<sup>24</sup> African American newspapers generated one only editorial piece and one "calendar" listing. The other 92 percent of stories fell under the category of "news" (see Figure 2). Non-local newspapers penned approximately one-fourth of all Black press content written about the Chicago Freedom Movement (see Figure 2).

#### Dominant Press Framing Analysis:

Three frames emerged in analysis of ProQuest Newsstand content related to the Chicago Freedom Movement: 1.) Local Movement, National Hero; 2.) Commemorating the Seeds of Activism; and 3.) Violent Undertones. The remainder of this section provides examples of these framings and connects portrayals to larger academic discourses. As stated above, national newspapers rarely treated the CFM in substantive ways. Therefore, these framings largely stem from content produced by newspapers based in Chicago and its surrounding suburbs.

*Local Movement, National Hero.* Articles in both local and national newspapers tended to place the nationally recognizable figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. at the center of commemorations related to the Chicago Freedom Movement. Of the 24 articles that discussed the CFM in depth, 23 mentioned King. Interestingly, dominant newspapers did not mention King's "Dream;" references to King pertained only to the individual himself. Moreover, dominant press outlets failed to include the more controversial stances King espoused during the later years of his life even though Chicago Freedom Movement demonstrations occurred during 1966 and 1967. This framing engendered clusters of

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<sup>24</sup> Tuchman, *Making News*, among many others.

articles around the January King Holiday. Of the 128 dominant press articles studied, 31.2 percent ran during the month of January.<sup>25</sup> In comparison, articles printed during month of February—when Black History Month observances might also be likely to prompt discussions about open housing—accounted for only 5.4 percent of content studied.<sup>26</sup> The focus on King is not entirely surprising given his iconic stature and his integral role in Chicago's push for open housing. However, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of CFM commemorations occur around a moment focused entirely on King as opposed to during calendar months more closely related to the CFM events themselves. This strong focus on the nationally known King also displaced local civil rights activists from the narrative and shifted the story toward individual actions rather than systemic inequality. Consistent with the dominant press' focus on Martin Luther King, Jr. in this study's analysis of the March on Washington, the existence of nuanced histories about Chicago's civil rights battles did little to shift coverage away from King's contributions to the CFM in a significant way.<sup>27</sup>

Dominant press coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement also juxtaposed Dr. King with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley in a binary, "hero/villain" fashion also seen in commemorations of the Selma to Montgomery marches. This treatment induced a moral judgment that Mayor Daley and his entrenched political machinery—not long standing systemic factors combined with virulent white racism—were largely to blame for the

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<sup>25</sup> In total, the dominant press newspapers studied printed 40 articles during all Januarys included in the date range.

<sup>26</sup> Dominant press outlets generated 7 articles during all months of February examined.

<sup>27</sup> For detailed histories of the Chicago Freedom Movement see: Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years 1965-1968* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006), *Chicago 1966: Open Housing Marches, Summit Negotiations, and Operation Breadbasket* ed. David J. Garrow, Anderson and Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line*, and Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest*.

"failure" of the 1966 Chicago campaign.<sup>28</sup> This tendency persisted across all time periods analyzed. A 2006 *South Bend Tribune* article positioned King between locals and Daley noting that "some black leaders opposed King. Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley treated King cordially, but he felt the protests would stir up trouble in the neighborhoods. Daley repeated his claim that there were no slums in Chicago, and said King and the CCCO had no program to address what problems did exist."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, a 2009 *Chicago Tribune* story contended that King's South Side apartment served as a locale where "King and his advisers strategized ways to win aid and other concessions for impoverished African-Americans from Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley."<sup>30</sup> In 1989, the *Tribune* claimed that "for the city's young black activists, the prospect that King was targeting Chicago was the fulfillment of a dream: to spark a movement to break the local power structure headed, of course, by Mayor Richard J. Daley and his Democratic Machine... For many other blacks, those who had found a measure of success and security in exchange for fealty to the Machine, the prospect was unsettling."<sup>31</sup>

In 2008, a *Washington Post* piece summarized the Chicago Freedom Movement in the following manner: "In 1966, Martin Luther King Jr. moved to Chicago determined to attack its segregated housing policies. South Siders, abetted by a contingent of Black Panthers and college students turned civil rights activists, rallied behind him. It was called the Chicago Freedom Movement. The Daley machine and police officials assailed

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm." *Journal of Communication*, 43 (1993): 51-58.

<sup>29</sup> Howard Dukes, "The long fight; Movement's Impact on Racism in Housing Slow in Coming," *South Bend Tribune*, February 28, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Antonia Olivo, "King historic district may rise from ashes," *Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Locin and Joel Kaplan, "I Never Did Think I Would Ever Be Really Involved in Politics," *Chicago Tribune*, February 1, 1989.

King and his lieutenants. Riots broke out in 1966, then again in 1968."<sup>32</sup> In pairing Daley and King, journalists aid in maintaining the hero/villain paradigm present in civil rights era news coverage long beyond the movement's end. As illustrated by W.E.B. DuBois and David Blight, these types of treatments obscure interim and ongoing racial inequalities from historical narratives, instead replacing those inequalities with markers of achievement.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, this pairing supplants long standing systemic injustices embedded in the very social fabric of Chicago in favor of a narrative that highlights a single prominent individual resistant to change.

Journalists also employed the nationally recognized King as a bridge between the Chicago Freedom Movement and its Southern civil rights counterparts. A 1989 *Chicago Tribune* report declared that with the Chicago Freedom Movement, "King's civil rights marches and rallies in faraway places such as Mississippi and Alabama came North."<sup>34</sup> Another *Tribune* lede called the shift North "a next logical step to" to the Southern front's "notable victories in challenging de jure segregation in public education, accommodations, and voting rights."<sup>35</sup> A 2006 *Tribune* feature declared that "until Chicago, King had waged his civil rights campaign almost exclusively in his native South...By 1966, he and his movement were on a roll throughout the Old Confederacy. Jim Crow segregation was falling to earth, its wings clipped in places like Montgomery,

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<sup>32</sup> No author listed, "South Side Story," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel L. Schacter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 45-71. See also, W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

<sup>34</sup> Michael Locin and Joel Kaplan, "I Never Did Think I Would Ever Be Really Involved in Politics," *Chicago Tribune*, February 1, 1989.

<sup>35</sup> Kale Williams, "Dr. King's Work in Chicago Continues Today," *Chicago Tribune*, February 12, 2004.

Birmingham, and Selma."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the *Chicago Sun-Times* stated that "when compared with King's historic achievements in Montgomery and Selma, his efforts in Chicago are often minimized."<sup>37</sup> The *South Bend Tribune* also characterized the choice to demonstrate in Chicago as "the next logical step."<sup>38</sup>

While connecting Northern and Southern battles for African American equality represents a reasoned device for journalistic commemoration, the directness of this comparison is problematic in a number of different ways. First, invoking King's work on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line reifies nation-wide civil rights narratives, diverting attention from local Chicago activists and the years of civil rights groundwork that came before and after King's visit.

Additionally, framing de facto segregation in Northern urban areas as *equal to* battles against de jure segregation in the South presents readers with oversimplified similarities between different types of civil rights crusades. Finally—and perhaps most integral to understanding the ways journalists commemorate Northern sites of civil rights protest—utilizing the vehicle of King to bridge Southern and Northern struggles illustrates that journalists seek to directly link the Northern and Southern fronts under the umbrella of a single "civil rights movement." As Paul Ricoeur explains, a fundamental connection between history and memory exists in "the dialectic between memory's space of experience and the horizon of expectation."<sup>39</sup> Guiding readers to perceive Chicago as "the next logical step" in the fight against American racial injustice reinforces hegemonic

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<sup>36</sup> Don Terry, "Northern Exposure: Nothing He'd Seen in the South Prepared Martin Luther King for the Streets of Marquette Park in 1966," *Chicago Tribune*, January 15, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Steve Neal, "King's Influence Still Resonates in Chicago," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 17, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Howard Dukes, "The Long Fight: Movement's Impact on Racism in Housing Slow in Coming," *South Bend Tribune*, February 28, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Memory—History—Forgetting," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, 476.

conceptions of demonstration and protest against inequality by implying that Northern protest must mirror the type of non-violent direct action that succeeded across the South. Through this limiting of the "horizon of expectations," other forms of protest—such as demonstrations by those supporting Black Power or the Nation of Islam—are written out of what we as a society recognize as "civil rights struggles."

*Commemorating the Seeds of Activism.* In lieu of tangible legislative or other outcomes, the second frame found in analysis of remembrances of the Chicago Freedom Movement juxtaposed the "failures" of the CFM with celebration of the efforts *begun* by activists during the summer of 1966. Framing coverage around the seeds of activism planted by the CFM allowed Chicagoland journalists to acknowledge the shortcomings of local organizing while simultaneously celebrating activist work. This framing was particularly prominent in *Chicago Sun-Times* accounts and also factored heavily into the *Chicago Tribune's* 40th anniversary coverage. A 1986 *Chicago Sun-Times* piece called 1966-1967 housing fights "one of the most painful chapters in the city's history"—a chapter that left Martin Luther King "frustrated and depressed."<sup>40</sup> The article tempered these bold claims by claiming that the period "was also, some say, a political revolution that would culminate in the election of Chicago's first Black mayor."<sup>41</sup> Two years later, the *Sun-Times* asserted that the "the common wisdom has been that the Chicago campaign was a failure; that [King] went up against the Chicago power structure, headed by Mayor Richard J. Daley, and lost."<sup>42</sup> The paper named "the picture of King, down on one knee struck in his head by a rock thrown by white counter-demonstrators in

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<sup>40</sup> Lillian Williams and William Braden, "A Bitter Showdown in Chicago in 1966, He Collided With Daley," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 19, 1986.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Chris Chandler, "King's Chicago Crusade: Dramatic Events of 1966 Left Their Mark on City," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 17, 1988.

Marquette Park" as an iconic "symbol of that supposed failure."<sup>43</sup> Several sentences later, however, the *Sun-Times* remarked that "there is by no means universal agreement" on the CFM's impact, and "a number of participants in that campaign feel that its impact has still not fully been felt."<sup>44</sup> The *Sun-Times* expressed similar sentiment in the year 2000 noting that the Chicago Freedom Movement "was not the great triumph that the Selma and Birmingham campaigns had been...on the local level, the Chicago Freedom Movement did not accomplish its goals."<sup>45</sup> Immediately following this negative assessment, the article contended that "King, though, did considerable good in this town by launching a political movement that would have long-term impact" and pointed to the election of Mayor Harold Washington as the "culmination" of King's 1960s efforts.<sup>46</sup>

A 40th anniversary *Tribune* commemoration announced that "the prevailing view of the Chicago Freedom Movement's impact" centered on "failure."<sup>47</sup> The article then went on to quote local activist Leroy Cobb who claimed that "the successes might not have been apparent when the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. left Chicago in the summer of 1966. But...the attempt to end housing discrimination in Chicago had an impact."<sup>48</sup> "Perhaps the Chicago Freedom Movement could force Congress to adopt federal fair housing legislation. Such activism had made a difference in the past," the *Tribune* speculated.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, however, the newspaper concluded that "the success of the Chicago Freedom Movement was in *the consciousness it raised on the issue of housing*

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Steve Neal, "King's Political Influence Still Resonates in Chicago," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 17, 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Dukes, "The long fight," *South Bend Tribune*.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



*discrimination*."<sup>50</sup> A second 40th anniversary piece from the *Tribune* claimed that "the movement failed, it opened doors for tomorrow, it was sold out, it planted the seeds for the election of the city's first black mayor, Harold Washington, King lost, Mayor Richard J. Daley won."<sup>51</sup> The article then characterized the CFM as "a Herculean effort to change decades of pervasive racism," but decided that "the movement came up short. So did the city."<sup>52</sup> The *Tribune* reinforced this statement with a quote from local activist Kale Williams who lamented that "we have to admit, while there has been some progress in creating integrated housing and neighborhoods in Chicago, we still have a very large problem...The [commemorative] events of 2006 are not in any sense a celebration of victory, but an attempt to revitalize the activism necessary to address these lingering issues."<sup>53</sup> A third *Tribune* article from the 40th anniversary imagined the CFM as "one of the most ambitious civil rights efforts in the North."<sup>54</sup> The story also noted that the effort is "considered a victory by some and a failure by others," but fundamentally, "the Chicago Freedom Movement helped spawn decades of northern rights activism."<sup>55</sup>

Journalists' tendency to frame the legacy of the Chicago Freedom Movement around the "seeds of activism" contains any failures or gains made by the CFM to a hyper-local level. National newspapers' neglect of the Chicago Freedom Movement also speaks to the local character of CFM commemorations. It is telling that newspaper reflections on the CFM limited its impact to the Chicago area despite King and the SCLC's national stature. Perhaps due to news routines that encourage episodic framings,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Terry, "Northern Exposure," *Chicago Tribune*.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Josh Noel, "Activists Look Back, but Plan for Future," *Chicago Tribune*, July 24, 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

the newspapers studied also failed to associate effects of CFM activist work to any campaigns outside of Chicago even though numerous civil rights, Black Power, and local movements remained active during that time period.<sup>56</sup> This omission reveals how media treatments of civil rights anniversaries reinforce a collectively celebrated "national," American civil rights movement while neglecting the reality that myriad local efforts—including Selma, Birmingham, Albany, and Montgomery—actually comprised that movement. In displacing the movement's interconnectedness from mediated commemorations, journalists artificially separate campaigns that often involved the same organizers, instead relying on the figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. to bridge different movements.

The "seeds of activism" framing also provides meaningful insight into how newspaper journalists address civil rights campaigns with few legislative, legal, or immediately tangible outcomes. The newspapers studied clearly articulated a collective memory that the CFM embodied a "failure." In order to commemorate this "failure," journalists needed to somehow frame the Chicago Freedom Movement in a positive light. Therefore, reporters consistently directed attention toward the important, yet somewhat minimal, groundwork laid by CFM efforts—namely the 1983 election of African American Mayor Harold Washington—and away from the lack of tangible change produced by the campaign. This indicates that remembering tangible legislative outcomes such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act may prove an easier, and perhaps more desirable, commemoration story for journalists to tell.

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<sup>56</sup> Shanto Iyengar, and Adam Simon, "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion: A Study of Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing," *Communication Research* 20 (1993): 365-383.

This focus on the positive facilitates commemorative content palatable for readers, but is problematic because it also enables wholesale forgetting of important components of Chicago's racial history. As scholars have outlined elsewhere, Harold Washington's election proved highly contentious and generated extremely racist responses from many white Chicagoans.<sup>57</sup> Washington ascended to the Mayor's office largely through the building of coalitions among Blacks, Latinos, and wealthy white Democrats—not solely because of the groundwork laid by Chicago Freedom Movement participants. The oversimplified, erroneous memory put forth in CFM commemorations illustrates Barbie Zelizer's contention that journalistic adherence to news routines "has produced a gravitation toward simplistic narratives, a tendency to record without context, and a minimization of nuance and the grey areas of a phenomenon, all of which restrict journalism's ability to account for the past."<sup>58</sup> Journalistic bypassing of "failure" to remedy many of same ills that still linger in American urban areas obscures history, mutes potential civil rights lessons, and illuminates the reluctance of American society to resolve fundamental inequalities within the matrix of race and urban space.

*Violent Undertones.* A third framing unearthed in dominant press coverage about the Chicago Freedom Movement underscored violent attributes of King and the SCLC's open housing fight. Of the 24 articles that substantively addressed the CFM, 79.2 percent discussed either the summer 1966 riots or violent acts that occurred during peaceful protests organized by CFM participants.<sup>59</sup> This framing persisted throughout all time

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<sup>57</sup> Gary Rivlin, *Fire on the Prairie: Harold Washington, Chicago Politics, and the Roots of the Obama Presidency* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012) and Lenita McClain, "How Chicago Taught me How to Hate Whites, *Washington Post*, July 24, 1983, among others.

<sup>58</sup> Barbie Zelizer, "Why Memory's Work on Journalism Does Not Reflect Journalism's Work on Memory," *Memory Studies* 1 (January 2008), 82.

<sup>59</sup> Nineteen articles mentioned violent aspects of the Chicago Freedom Movement.

intervals studied. Although discussions about violence did not always comprise the most central element of news stories about the CFM, these conversations appeared consistently throughout dominant press coverage regardless of article topic.<sup>60</sup> This indicates that while journalists covered the CFM from a variety of different angles, the subject of violence undergirded a substantial portion of commemorations, thus cementing violent summer disturbances as a fundamental legacy of Chicago's open housing fights. It is also of note that dominant press outlets employed relatively general terms including "mobs" to describe whites demonstrating against King and associated these groups with traditionally recognized symbols of white supremacy such as the Confederate Flag.

In 2002, *Daily Herald* journalists noted that "there were scary moments" among the political battles waged by Chicago Freedom Movement participants.<sup>61</sup> The paper contended that "fear and tension were constant companions, but the group pressed on."<sup>62</sup> The piece also quoted local activist Kwame Porter, who said "people got shot. People got killed...That didn't stop the movement...it was frightening...but it was something that had to be done."<sup>63</sup> A 20th anniversary *Chicago Sun-Times* article characterized the most active period of the Chicago Freedom Movement as "a long, hot summer" and noted that the CFM "was given new life when it turned to a new tactic: vigils and marches in all-white, ethnic, working-class neighborhoods."<sup>64</sup> The article stated that during these marches King and his supporters "were stoned and jeered by angry whites. Their cars

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<sup>60</sup> Articles discussed what progress, if any, had been made in the years since 1966, prominent local leaders and CFM participants, and the state of the Lawndale neighborhood where Martin Luther King, Jr. and his family lived while in Chicago.

<sup>61</sup> Tracy Boutelle, "Overlooked by History Books, Chicago Minister Who Helped King Will Visit Naperville," *Daily Herald*, January 21, 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Lillian Williams and William Braden, "A Bitter Showdown in Chicago in 1966, he Collided with Daley," *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 19, 1986.

were set afire and pushed into a Marquette Park lagoon."<sup>65</sup> The *Sun-Times* also discussed how a white demonstrator struck Dr. King's in the head with a rock and proclaimed that:

"a screaming mob pelted the marchers with rocks, pop bottles and cherry bombs. Somebody threw a knife that missed King and injured a white youth. Whites waved Confederate flags and shouted: 'White power!' They yelled at King: 'Kill him! Kill him!' They fought with police, who fought back with swinging clubs. White youths, streaming blood, were dragged to paddy wagons while the mob chanted: "Police brutality!"<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, a *Chicago Tribune* report from the same year approached that summer's violence from a different perspective. The *Tribune* referred to the summer violence only in an analysis of ties between King, the SCLC, and Chicago's neighborhood street gangs. The article focused on the SCLC's deliberate selection of Lawndale, the neighborhood where King and his family took up residence during 1966, because "it was dominated by street gangs."<sup>67</sup> The article featured a quote from SCLC organizer James Bevel who noted that "we wanted to introduce the gang members to nonviolence, and we wanted them to have access to King's apartment and be able to come in and hear about nonviolence, not just from the pulpit, but from the kitchen table, too."<sup>68</sup> The piece lauded "the gang members-turned-marshals" for heeding King's non-violent philosophy, contending that "when a brick or a bottle came flying from the hostile crowd, the marshals would catch it, lay it on the ground and continue marching peacefully."<sup>69</sup> No other dominant press article discussed the contributions of local gang members to the CFM. This extremely sympathetic presentation of individuals that often receive negative coverage in media venues illustrates one way journalists can provide nuanced portrayals

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Don Terry, "King Led a Crusade from a Chicago 3-Flat," *Chicago Tribune*, January 20, 1986.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

of activists while remaining within the bounds of traditionally accepted news norms and routines.

Coverage of violence within the Chicago Freedom Movement spiked during 2006, coinciding with a number of local 40th anniversary commemoration events. The *Chicago Tribune's* feature piece from that year led with an extended examination of brutality occurring in Marquette Park on August 5, 1966—only in its latter half did the article touch on issues and progress related to open housing. The piece also outlined the stories of several other march participants including a local Catholic priest and a former CFM organizer. Additionally, the *Tribune* focused heavily on the actions of white demonstrators opposed to the Chicago Freedom Movement. The article's lede declared that "the rock that shamed Chicago must have flown out of the massive mob over on the knoll. Some of those young tough guys in their T-shirts with their slicked-back hair had been getting ready to make their move on Marquette Park for hours, jacking themselves up on beer, driving around in convertibles, waving Confederate flags, shouting 'White Power!'"<sup>70</sup> The piece went on to detail others in the crowd:

There were thousands of suspects in and around the park, screaming for blood like Romans in the Coliseum. It could have been those punk kids up in that tree. Or maybe it was that 50-ish white woman, the one looking so bitter and betrayed. She'd been yelling her head off at the nuns and priests, accusing them of being traitors to their church and their race for standing shoulder to shoulder with a pack of lousy Negroes, only she used another word that starts with "n."<sup>71</sup>

Later in the same article, *Tribune* staff included a quote from one of the white counterdemonstrators. The interviewee—who refused to disclose his name or an image of himself—argued that CFM demonstrators "should not have been surprised" by whites'

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

violent reaction to open housing marches.<sup>72</sup> The man also asked the reporter how they would "feel if somebody you didn't like started marching in your neighborhood? The people only wanted to protect their property. Do you know how long white people been fleeing blacks? This was the beginning of the end."<sup>73</sup> This inclusion mitigates some of protective anonymity violent white demonstrators of the 1960s often receive in media accounts, nonetheless, journalists permitted the source to remain publicly unidentifiable. The anonymity granted to white demonstrators throughout dominant press coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement is noteworthy because this treatment allows condemnation of racist white actions without pointing fingers at specific groups of Chicagoans. This anonymity also firmly confines white racist actions to the past despite evidence that racism lingers—albeit more subtly—today. In this muted, yet meaningful way, the dominant newspapers studied augment the "possessive investment in whiteness" articulated by George Lipsitz and in turn reinforce hierarchies of power and Otherness within media discourses about civil rights.<sup>74</sup>

In the years after 2006, dominant press outlets sporadically covered the Chicago Freedom Movement, however, violence remained a key tenet of coverage. A 2009 *Chicago Tribune* story discussing new housing development in the Lawndale area where King and his family lived in 1966 noted that "for 40 years, the site where King and his family moved in January 1966 has served as little more than an ironic footnote to stories about Lawndale's long struggle to recover from the riots" that took place during the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), 2006.

summers of 1966 and 1968.<sup>75</sup> King hoped to end. In 2010 the *Tribune* called "scene" in Marquette Park "volatile" and marked that the rock that struck Dr. King in the head caused a "bleeding 2-inch cut."<sup>76</sup> Several articles profiling Bernie Kleina, a Catholic priest who photographed many of the 1966 marches, appeared in both local and national newspapers. These stories graphically described the actions of white counterdemonstrators as well as the virulent racism they displayed. Kleina remembered the summer demonstrations as "a wakeup call."<sup>77</sup> Kleina also recalled "brutality" of the marches, "noting 25 people were injured by bottles and stones thrown at demonstrators during an Aug. 1, 1966, Chicago demonstration. Some cars were set on fire, at least two were thrown into a lagoon and numerous windshields were smashed."<sup>78</sup> A quote from the former priest also contended that "people were opposed to the whole movement...Dr. King was surprised at the resistance and violence he ran into in the north."<sup>79</sup> A 2014 *McClatchy-Tribune Business News* story emphasized images of "helmet-wearing police officers flanking both sides of a march down Kedzie Avenue," "a band of angry white men preparing to throw items at a parked car," and "projectiles thrown by spectators upset at King's demonstration and the message that everyone should have access to affordable housing."<sup>80</sup> Kleina noted local "Catholic parish names on the clothing of the mob members."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Antonio Olivo, "King Historic District May Rise from Ashes," *Chicago Tribune*, April 1, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Angie Leventis Lourgos, "King and Chicago, Then and Now," *Chicago Tribune*, January 18, 2010.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Ann Ford, "Eye-opening Exposure: Photo Exhibit Chronicles Civil Rights Movement," *McClatchy Business Tribune News*, January 17, 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Ann Ford, "Eye-opening Exposure: Photo Exhibit Chronicles Civil Rights Movement," *McClatchy Business Tribune News*, January 17, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Mitch Smith, "Chicago Photos of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Smithsonian," *McClatchy Tribune Business News*, August 7, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



As Todd Gitlin argues, "the media divide movements into legitimate main acts and illegitimate sideshows, so that these distinctions appear 'natural' matters of 'common sense.'"<sup>82</sup> These divisions "largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports."<sup>83</sup> By consistently organizing memories of the Chicago Freedom Movement around its violent aspects, journalists guide readers to logically link civil rights and violence in problematic ways, namely reifying hegemonic understandings of demonstrations against the state as violent and directing attention away from systemic racism and discrimination. This troubling practice continues in our current historical moment. News coverage of contemporary demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri, Baltimore, Maryland, and elsewhere across the United States routinely concentrates on exchanges of violence, rarely making room for the systemic reasons behind the demonstrations themselves.<sup>84</sup>

In sum, the dominant press heavily relied on a milquetoast specter of the nationally recognized Martin Luther King, Jr. in its framings of the Chicago Freedom Movement. This sanitized rendering of King illustrates that dominant press newspapers neglect King's later, more controversial views even when those stances comprised an integral part of the civil rights venture being commemorated. As Nikhil Pal Singh

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<sup>82</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and The Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Timothy M. Phelps and Michael Muskal, "Nearly 100 Baltimore Officers Hurt in Freddy Gray Protests, Police Say," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 2015, Kevin Deutsch, "Freddy Gray Protest Unite Baltimore Gang Members," *Newsweek*, April 28, 2015, Alan Blinder and Richard Perez-Pena, "Baltimore Police Finish Inquiry into Death of Freddy Gray," *New York Times*, April 30, 2015, "Baltimore Riots: Looting, Fires Engulf City After Freddy Gray's Funeral," *CNN*, April 28, 2015, Jeremy Stahl, Josh Voorhees, and Eliot Hannon, "Baltimore Schools Closed on Tuesday and Unrest from Freddy Gray Protests Continues," *Slate*, April 28, 2015, among many others.

explains, "just as King's antiwar stance has been forgotten, so has the steady incorporation of currents of democratic socialism and black nationalism into his thinking."<sup>85</sup> The newspapers studied also characterized the CFM as failing in its immediate goals, but laying the groundwork for future gains in the arena of racial equality. Finally, while discussions of violent responses to CFM protests rarely comprised the sole subject of commemorative pieces, journalists consistently incorporated descriptions of those events in a variety of story types—largely without personifying white counterdemonstrators. Within these framings, two noteworthy examples stand out: the *Chicago Tribune's* 1986 discussion of with King's relationship with the city's street gangs and the *Tribune's* 2006 conversation with an anonymous white counterdemonstrator. Both of these treatments represent avenues dominant press newspapers could take to provide readers with more nuanced retrospectives of the CFM and its actors. Most tellingly, none of the three frames emerging in analysis of the dominant press deal directly with open housing, its causes, its consequences, or solutions to remaining housing inequalities. Instead, dominant press outlets focused on personalities, overt political gains such as the election of election of Harold Washington, and violent confrontations instigated by racist, white counterdemonstrators. Despite the specificity of the Chicago Freedom Movement's goal, its aims and the majority of the activist work done by CFM participants failed to be included in commemorative newspaper coverage published in the dominant press.

### Black Press Framing Analysis

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<sup>85</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) 3.

As mentioned above Black press outlets included in the ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch databases produced 35 articles about the Chicago Freedom Movement. The *Chicago Defender* produced 14 of these articles. While Black press outlets generated fewer articles than the dominant press, these articles contained a substantially more nuance about Chicago's Black community, its history, and the actors who participated in the Chicago Freedom Movement. The Black press also featured W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, and other prominent African American intellectuals and activists that influenced the Chicago Freedom Movement. As in dominant press treatments, newspapers outside of Chicago rarely provided in depth commemorations of the CFM. Most often these outlets briefly mentioned King's visit to Chicago as contextual background within stories about unrelated topics. Therefore, the majority of qualitative examples are drawn from Chicago-based newspapers. Two frames emerged in Black Press coverage: 1.) Local Movement, National Hero and 2.) Continuing the Struggle. The remainder of this section provides examples of these frames and discusses the implications of these particular ways of characterizing the Chicago Freedom Movement.

*Local Movement, National Hero.* Similar to dominant press coverage, Black press reports placed Martin Luther King, Jr. at the center of Chicago Freedom Movement commemorations. All 16 articles that discussed the Chicago Freedom Movement in substantial depth referenced King in some way. African American newspapers published a smaller, but still substantial portion of articles in concert with Martin Luther King holiday celebrations. Of the 35 Black press articles studied, 20 percent ran during the month of January.<sup>86</sup> Articles printed during month of February—when Black History

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<sup>86</sup> In total, the Black press newspapers studied printed 7 articles during all Januarys included in the date range.

Month observances might also be likely to prompt discussions about open housing—accounted for 14.3 percent of content studied.<sup>87</sup> These articles tended to recount the history of the CFM through the prism of Dr. King's actions. A 2010 *Chicago Defender* editorial stressed that "we don't want to forget Dr. King's impact here in Chicago."<sup>88</sup> The piece also explained that:

"Dr. King was not just a frequent visitor to Chicago. He set up residence here for his family in a West Side ghetto apartment and spoke loudly for open housing. Dr. King led marches into all-white neighborhoods during a two-month campaign. White residents stoned him during one of those marches, but he was not deterred. The open-housing marches succeeded in bringing city leaders to the table to promote fair housing and an agreement was reached to end the marches, which had drawn a national news audience (including extensive coverage here in the *Chicago Defender*.)"<sup>89</sup>

In 2014, the *Defender* dedicated an entire article, aptly titled "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr...in Chicago," to describing King's contributions to the 1966 open housing campaign. The story discussed King's reaction to white resistance to demonstrations, King's move to Lawndale, King's injury in Marquette Park, and the King-Daley Summit Agreement that in effect ended the SCLC's work in Chicago.<sup>90</sup> The article briefly mentioned local activist Al Raby, but incorporated no other civil rights personalities.<sup>91</sup> A 2001 *Chicago Independent Bulletin* feature also described CFM events via Dr. King's involvement. The story provided a detailed history of local efforts to encourage King and the SCLC to select Chicago as their flagship Northern campaign, highlighted King's partnership with the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO), and

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<sup>87</sup> Black press outlets generated 5 articles during all months of February examined.

<sup>88</sup> Editorial, "Reinvigorate King's Desires for the People," *Chicago Defender*, January 13, 2010.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Ronald E. Childs, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr...In Chicago," *Chicago Defender*, January 15, 2014.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

recounted several speeches King made while visiting the city.<sup>92</sup> Although the *Bulletin* story included numerous references to other local activists and organizations beyond King and the SCLC, King's actions drove the narrative. As stated above, the focus on King is not entirely surprising given his central role in Chicago's push for open housing. As in dominant press accounts, the level of Black press attention devoted to King pushed local civil rights activists to the margins of commemorations and illuminated individual actions over systemic inequality.

Despite invoking King in a similar proportion of stories to dominant press newspapers, Black press accounts provided much more nuanced descriptions of the icon and his civil rights work. A 1998 *Philadelphia Tribune* story directly compared King with Malcolm X, noting that despite differing approaches, both leaders had the "same goal."<sup>93</sup> The author pointed out that during Chicago Freedom Movement efforts, King "made a speech resembling Malcolm X's style of rhetoric."<sup>94</sup> The piece included a quote from that speech which read: "the purpose of the slum...is to confine those who have no power and perpetuate their powerlessness...The slum is little more than a domestic colony which leaves its inhabitants dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated, and humiliated at every turn."<sup>95</sup> In a distinct departure from dominant press accounts, the article also emphasized King's late-career rejection of capitalism, calls for equal distribution of wealth, and belief that democratic socialism would best solve inequality in America.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Kwame John Porter, "Among the First to Invite Dr. King's Movement to Chicago," *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, March 15, 2001.

<sup>93</sup> Kareen Jordan, "King and Malcolm: Same goal, Different Paths," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 16, 1998.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

In 2001, the *Chicago Independent Bulletin* drew attention to King's interactions with local gang members noting that "the SCLC chapter recruited over 25 Disciples gang members for Dr. King's nonviolent housing marches. On the Westside and in Englewood, Dr. King won gang members lasting respect by shooting pool with them and taking pictures with them."<sup>97</sup> The piece also discussed the respect gang members showed for King following his assassination. Local activist Kwame John Porter recalled that "when Dr. King was assassinated in 1968 a core of gang members came to my home and asked me 'Should we burn 63rd and Halsted down to honor what they did to Dr. King?'"<sup>98</sup> Instead of vandalizing the residence where King stayed in Chicago during the CFM, the gang members protected the property from any damage.<sup>99</sup> Although the Black press narratives leaned heavily on the specter of King to commemorate the Chicago Freedom movement, Black press newspapers produced alternative conceptions of King that worked to rearticulate popular, often "nostalgic" memories of the civil rights leader.<sup>100</sup> By adding dimension to King, the Black press perpetuated what scholar Houston Baker terms "critical memories," helping to "save Dr. King from arrest in a golden allegory of the past" and produce memories distinctly counter to dominant press narratives.<sup>101</sup>

*Continuing the Struggle.* In contrast to the dominant press which focused heavily on Chicago's past, Black press articles utilized Chicago Freedom Movement remembrances to outline and confront existing inequalities. As has historically been the case in the Black press, this frame honored past accomplishments, but also challenged

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<sup>97</sup> Kwame John Porter, "Among the First to Invite Dr. King's Movement to Chicago: Part II," *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, March 15, 2001.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Houston A. Baker "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture*: 7(1), 1994, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

readers to actively continue the fight against racism and its discriminatory practices.<sup>102</sup> In keeping with their commemorations of the March on Washington, Black newspapers studied championed continued "activism" as an appropriate and highly meaningful way to commemorate Chicago's contributions to the civil rights movement. This framing was particularly prevalent in the *Chicago Defender*. A 1996 *Independent Bulletin* article contended that Chicago represented "the most residentially segregated large city in the nation" and therefore, "became Dr. King's symbol."<sup>103</sup> The piece went on to connect this segregated past with present issues noting that "the journey to racial and economic justice continues 30 years later and The Community Renewal Society is engaging in a time of remembering, bridging and celebrating the journey from Selma to Chicago."<sup>104</sup> The article also called for a renewed "commitment to build a bridge between symbol and substance," and encouraged "the continued movement for racial and economic justice in metropolitan Chicago."<sup>105</sup>

*Chicago Defender* source Timuel Black, a prominent Chicago historian, noted that "the movement has not come far enough since that time and more work needs to be done."<sup>106</sup> Black also stated that "there needs to be a coming together of a dedicated, informed people of all groups to take charge of the politics in this city. The community as a whole began to lose ground in education, employment and housing after Dr. King was

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<sup>102</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society*, Vogel, ed., *The Black Press*, Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, PWashburn, *The African American Newspaper*, among many others.

<sup>103</sup> No Author Listed, "From Selma to Chicago," *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, May 2, 1996.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Kathy Chaney, "40th Anniversary of Chicago Freedom Movement Explored at Washington Cultural Center," *Chicago Defender*, July 21-23, 2006.

assassinated, and again after Harold Washington died."<sup>107</sup> The story also incorporated quotations from community leaders highlighting "a number of local young activists that are working hard to make a difference," the need for new movement "strategies and tactics," and appeals for younger generations to "take responsibility for addressing disparities education and unemployment."<sup>108</sup> A *Defender* piece detailing the Chicago Freedom Movement's 40th anniversary conference recapped remarks from Rev. Reginald Williams, justice minister of Trinity United Church of Christ. The article emphasized that "the struggle continues, in many ways, for fairness in housing and jobs, some 40 years later."<sup>109</sup> Williams also "compared the condition for the poor and African Americans today in Chicago, with situation he faced going to a Jewel's grocery store late a few days ago."<sup>110</sup> Williams specifically stressed remaining economic inequality contending "that statistics show that more than 30 percent of the residents of Chicago make less than \$15,000 a year. He said to let big box stores, such as Wal-Mart and Target into the city without requiring them to pay a living wage, is unacceptable."<sup>111</sup>

A 2010 *Defender* editorial pointed out that "many of Dr. King's assertions have not come to fruition" in the decades since his assassination.<sup>112</sup> The paper articulated that "our schools have resegregated and housing remains segregated in many neighborhoods. Good jobs at good wages still elude too many of our citizens, resulting in a Black unemployment rate over 20 percent."<sup>113</sup> The editorial concluded by directing reader

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Demetrius Patterson, "Soldiers in '60s Chicago Freedom Movement Reminisce," *Chicago Defender*, July 24-July 25, 2006.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Editorial, "Reinvigorate King's Desires for the People," *Chicago Defender*, January 13-January 19, 2010.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



attention to the need to remain active in the fight against inequality saying "Dr. King was adamant about ending that kind of slavery. As we pause on this day, his holiday, we can reaffirm his quest for freedom."<sup>114</sup> The *Defender* expressed similar sentiment in a 2011 piece covering the building of a sculpture honoring Martin Luther King's work in Chicago. The article maintained that "just as the sculpture installed Saturday was created through a collaborative effort and depicts a time when people had to come together to effect change, dealing with today's housing issues—in the face of today's economic challenges—will require a concerted effort too."<sup>115</sup> The article also drew attention to ongoing construction of new affordable housing sites and how, as during the 1960s, it would take a community-wide effort to combat disparities within Chicago's unequal housing landscape.<sup>116</sup>

By framing commemorative coverage around urgent contemporary housing issues and concrete, community-wide actions for extinguishing those inequalities, Black newspapers prompted readers not only to remember the Chicago Freedom Movement, but to engage in a commemorative process that involved vocally challenging and demonstrating against injustices the CFM did not resolve. This "active" quality represents a fundamental departure from the "passive" forms of commemoration conveyed in dominant press accounts. By characterizing the movement as "active" and encouraging participatory commemoration, the Black press works to rearticulate popular notions of collectively remembering as a "past" phenomenon, instead employing contemporary anniversaries as a meaningful site of protest and resistance.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Rhonda Gillespie, Art imitates life of housing struggle, *Chicago Defender*, August 24-30, 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

On the whole, Black press outlets studied placed Martin Luther King, Jr. at the center of Chicago Freedom Movement commemorations in a way similar to their dominant press counterparts. However, Black press coverage contained significantly more detail about King himself as well as other actors involved a variety of chapters in the African American freedom struggle. Additionally, Black newspapers examined employed Chicago Freedom Movement remembrances to articulate and confront existing racially motivated inequalities both within the city and across the United States. In doing so, Black press outlets largely embodied Catherine Squires' call for Black-oriented media to provide "discursive and other resources that foster counterpublic consciousness that precedes coordinated political activism."<sup>117</sup>

### **Conclusion**

For the dominant press, the legacy of the 1966 Chicago Freedom Movement revolved around the contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr., a juxtaposition of initial "failure" and future political gains, and the campaign's violent moments. Black newspapers also foregrounded King's role, but also encouraged readers to commemorate the CFM by speaking out against contemporary racial injustice related to housing. The focus on King in both presses is understandable. However, this focus on a single, male individual speaks to James Carey's assertion that in American news narratives aligned with traditional journalistic norms, "names make the news, and explanations in the news pretty much come down to the motives of the actors in the political drama."<sup>118</sup> This

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<sup>117</sup> Catherine R. Squires, "Coloring the Bubble: Perspectives from Black-Oriented Media on the (Latest) Economic Disaster," *American Quarterly* 64 (3), September 2012, 547.

<sup>118</sup> James Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism," in *Reading the News* ed. Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 156.

notion is especially apt given the tendency of dominant press papers to describe the relationship between King and Mayor Richard Daley via a "hero/villain" binary.

In many ways, differences between the dominant and Black presses can be summarized through examination of what is absent from Black press accounts. African American newspapers did not suggest that Mayor Daley represented the biggest impasse to acceptance of fair housing practices in Chicago, did not express sentiments that the Chicago Freedom Movement "failed," and included few discussions of the campaign's violent aspects. An additional difference lies in the emergence of an "active" form of Black press commemoration. Black press outlets encouraged readers to not only remember the Chicago Freedom Movement, but to commemorate that moment through active engagement with community functions aimed at combating existing discrimination. This finding is consistent with the traditional role of Black press outlets within African American communities, however, this study expands this function from history to the realm of collective memory.<sup>119</sup>

A detailed treatment of open housing itself is glaringly absent from the frames emerging in this analysis. Neither dominant nor Black press newspapers actively discussed causes of housing inequality, steps to remedy housing issues, or long term implications of neglecting to solve racially based housing discrepancies. Newspapers examined failed to "assess" housing issues in the same way they assessed King's Dream in March on Washington coverage. They also did not mark "progress away" in the manner present in coverage of Selma anniversaries. Even fifty years on, newspapers

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<sup>119</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, 2007, Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society*, 2000, Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press*, 2001, Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, 1989, Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 2006, among many others.

largely founder to grapple with the most intimate representation of American domestic life—the neighborhood and the home. As James Ralph postulates, this dissonance "says as much about the diminished expectations and constricted imagination of our own age as it does about the lack of realism of the Chicago crusaders of the mid-1960s."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest*, 2.

## Chapter 5: Open Housing Fights in Milwaukee

Just a few hours north of Chicago, activists in Milwaukee, Wisconsin waged their own battle for open housing legislation throughout the late-1960s. Milwaukee's fights suffer from an even greater omission in the canons of collective memory than the Chicago Freedom Movement. The two campaigns share many similarities, however. Like Chicago, Milwaukee has endured a long history of racial segregation and discrimination in housing fueled by waves of immigration and racially restrictive housing practices. Milwaukee is unique from Chicago due to the overwhelming proportions of foreign born immigrants that flocked to the city for industrial jobs during the latter half of the 19th century and into the early years of the 20th century. Neighborhood boundaries and the tensions they reinforced revolved largely around "ethnicity, religion, and class, not race" into the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> In 1910, foreign born residents comprised nearly 80 percent of Milwaukee's total population.<sup>2</sup> For these immigrants, "the house and the connections between white and immigrant neighborhoods provided the most apt symbols of inclusion" in American society.<sup>3</sup>

As was the case for many other Northern urban areas, African American migration to Milwaukee took place in two intervals. Initial waves of migration occurred during World War I, as the need for industrial laborers rose due to wartime production needs.<sup>4</sup> A second influx of African Americans following World War II precipitated more

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 15. See also: Kevin D. Smith, "From Socialism to Racism: The Politics of Class and Identity in Postwar Milwaukee," *Michigan Historical Review* 29 (Spring 2003), 71-95.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 15.

<sup>3</sup> David Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 163.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 18.

substantial increases in the proportion of Black residents living within the city. Within a 25 year period, the city's Black community "grew over 700 percent," rising from under 2 percent of Milwaukee's population in 1945 to almost 15 percent by 1970.<sup>5</sup> Despite the availability of jobs, "hiring discrimination, union restrictions, and unequal wages and benefits" plagued many of the city's African American residents during this period.<sup>6</sup>

Inadequate housing options also constituted a fundamental issue for African American migrants. Most of these new African American residents settled in the "inner core," a neighborhood located on Milwaukee's near North side.<sup>7</sup> Housing shortages and substandard living conditions persisted within the inner core's boundaries during the early waves of African American migration. Affluent and middle-class "white flight" to nascent American suburbs in the years following World War II only compounded the inner core's housing issues, further exacerbating neighborhood tensions and existing racialized boundaries. David Theo Goldberg explains that during this era of American history, "exclusion and exclusivity were internalized within the structure of city planning throughout the expanding (cos)metropolises of the emergent West and the housing project high rise became the appropriate image of racialized urban space."<sup>8</sup> In this historical moment, "the racial poor were simultaneously rendered peripheral in terms of urban location and marginalized in terms of power."<sup>9</sup> Patrick D. Jones argues that "white flight" inflamed racial tensions in Milwaukee "through the creation of an 'iron ring' of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>8</sup> Goldberg. *Racist Culture*, 188.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

eighteen overwhelmingly white communities safely outside the geographic grasp of city leaders."<sup>10</sup>

Migration to Milwaukee's incipient suburbs greatly impacted neighborhood stability for remaining white, largely blue-collar residents leading these Milwaukeeans to perceive their African American neighbors as "a threat to their homes, their jobs, their unions, their schools, and their traditional way of life."<sup>11</sup> According to Patrick Jones, "by the mid-1950s, Milwaukee contained the necessary preconditions for significant racial conflict."<sup>12</sup> A contested 1956 mayoral election between Socialist incumbent Frank P. Zeidler and conservative Democrat Milton J. McGuire drew once dormant racial tensions into open view, setting the stage for protracted opposition to open housing demands in the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> The construction of Interstates 43 and 94 in the early 1960s aggravated racialized demarcations of space "by cutting a swath through the heart" of an already tense inner core.<sup>14</sup> The neighborhood lost over 14,000 housing units during construction with African American families accounting for more than half of those displaced.<sup>15</sup>

Milwaukee's Black community responded to these amplified social and cultural stresses through concerted activism. Civil rights era organizing efforts began in 1958 and continued into the 1970s.<sup>16</sup> The push for open housing legislation in Milwaukee, championed largely by African American Alderwoman Vel Phillips, grew out of successful efforts to desegregate the city's public school system and less productive protests against the "whites only" membership policies of the city's prestigious Eagle's

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<sup>10</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Smith, "From Socialism to Racism, 71-73.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, references throughout.

Club.<sup>17</sup> Marches and pickets outside of prominent Eagle's Club members' homes began in late summer 1966 and continued into 1967.<sup>18</sup> Gradually, attention shifted toward passing citywide open housing legislation. Community leaders including Phillips utilized momentum from the school campaigns and Eagle's Club protests as a springboard for addressing housing concerns.<sup>19</sup>

While a variety of community groups contributed to open housing demonstrations, the NAACP Youth Council (YC), the council's militant arm "the Commandos," and their mentor Rev. James Groppi occupied the role of most defiant agitators.<sup>20</sup> Groppi participated in a number of Southern civil rights campaigns and was particularly influenced by Dr. King's strategy in Selma, Alabama.<sup>21</sup> The Commandos blended Rev. Groppi's Roman Catholic teachings, Black Power philosophies, and a modified non-violent ethos termed "not violence."<sup>22</sup> In the words of Commando Joe McClain, "not-violence meant we didn't carry weapons and we didn't start nothing, but we also didn't take nothing. If the police or the white crowds came after us or the marchers, we weren't afraid to mix it up. We fought back."<sup>23</sup> The group also routinely posted armed defenders outside of their headquarters, the Freedom House, and sold buttons carrying the slogan "Burn, Baby, Burn" to raise money for the open housing cause.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 80-131.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 116-142.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 59-78.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 169-170.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 80-108.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



White frustration with months of local demonstrations and unrest elsewhere across the nation fueled rising racial tensions within Milwaukee during the summer of 1967. On July 30 these tensions boiled over into a riot that flared throughout the inner core. Rioting began in the late night hours of the 30th and gradually tapered off over the next several days.<sup>25</sup> In total, the riot left five dead, 100 injured, resulted in 1,740 arrests, and caused approximately \$570,000 in damage.<sup>26</sup> The riots received significant coverage in local newspapers. Kristin Simonetti notes that this coverage "relied heavily" on official sources and narratives but also discussed underlying systemic inequality as an important component of the riot's impetus.<sup>27</sup>

Several days after Milwaukee's mayor lifted a riot induced curfew, Groppi and the YC amplified their open housing demands with a march across the 16th Street viaduct—a boundary referred to by Groppi as "Milwaukee's Mason-Dixon line."<sup>28</sup> A crowd of 5,000 whites yelled racist epithets at the demonstrators as they marched. Violent clashes ensued, leaving 22 injured.<sup>29</sup> In response to Milwaukee whites' violent reaction to that August 13 demonstration, the YC declared that they "would march until the Common Council enacted an open housing measure."<sup>30</sup> For 200 consecutive nights between August 1967 and March 1968, the YC took to the streets, garnering substantial national media attention in the process.<sup>31</sup> The combination of national media pressure and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 143-148.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>27</sup> Kristin M. Simonetti, "Framing and Sustaining Collective Memory of the 1967 Milwaukee Race Riots in Contemporary and Retrospective Newspaper Coverage," (master's thesis: University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2008). 39.

<sup>28</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 170.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 196-203.

local demonstrations ultimately contributed to the passage of a local open housing ordinance in April 1968 that mirrored the federal 1968 Civil Rights Act.<sup>32</sup>

Milwaukee's open housing fight embodies several highly meaningful objects of study for scholars of race, media, and civil rights. First, while the NAACP nominally supported the Youth Council, the YC and the Commandos lacked backing from any other national civil rights group; the youth, under Groppi's direction, largely charted their course of action unilaterally. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Groppi, the YC, and the Commandos employed a combination of Roman Catholic doctrine, Dr. King's non-violence, Black Power ideology, and their own "not-violence" mantra. While popular memory divides movement campaigns into mutually exclusive adherence to non-violence *or* Black Power, the varied strategies used by Groppi, the YC, and the Commandos illustrate how civil rights activists routinely blended and rearticulated contemporary approaches to fit their own circumstances and situations. Third, examination of Milwaukee, a modestly sized American city, provides insight into commemorations of the civil rights movement through the prism of "local" media outlets. The *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* and Milwaukee's African American newspaper the *Milwaukee Courier* do not hold the national stature and name recognition of the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Defender*, or, arguably, the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Low volumes of news coverage about the Milwaukee open housing campaigns necessitated incorporation of content from the entire ProQuest Newsstand database and from all sources in Ethnic NewsWatch. The terms "Milwaukee" AND "open housing" AND 1967 were searched in the ProQuest Newsstand. The only date restrictions placed on the search were to limit articles to the 10th anniversary—January 1, 1976—and

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 208-209.

beyond. While the resulting sample is limited to content available in ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch, this approach was deemed best for surveying coverage volumes, spikes in coverage, and levels of local and national coverage across a wide variety of newspapers and over the course of a lengthy time frame. Ideally, this study would have consulted local, brick and mortar archives including the "March on Milwaukee" collection housed within the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee libraries. Milwaukee's dominant and Black press news sources suffer from archival omissions of an even greater degree than their Chicago counterparts. As discussed in the previous chapter, despite recent advances, the cataloging of ethnic and alternative press publications still lags significantly behind records of dominant press media. These discrepancies are compounded for research analyzing local events because places such as Milwaukee are not recognized as sites of national history and memory in the same way metropolitan areas like Chicago are. As scholars, we must remember that what is considered worthy of preservation—and thus what materials are seen as important to the telling of historical stories—is influenced by myriad factors including race and geography.

This project focuses specifically on commemorative coverage in order to assess 1.) the degree to which the Milwaukee open housing campaigns are remembered via newspapers; 2.) what differences might exist between African American and dominant media coverage of Milwaukee's open housing battles; 3.) what facets of Milwaukee's housing struggles are remembered as we move forward in time; and 4.) how national media address a local civil rights campaign based in the North.

### **Commemorative Coverage of the 1967 Milwaukee Open Housing Campaign** Coverage by the Numbers

Newspapers in ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch published 82 articles about Milwaukee's 1967 open housing campaigns. Dominant press outlets generated 80 pieces. The Black press printed two (see Figure 1).

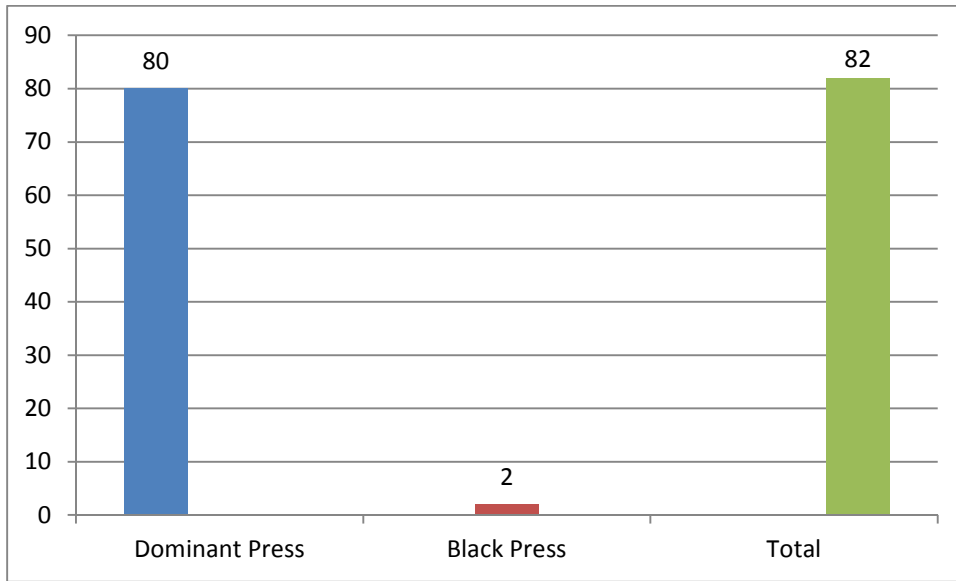


Figure 7: Dominant and Black Press Article Totals for Newspaper Content Commemorating Milwaukee Open Housing Campaigns (n=82)

Stories aligning with traditionally accepted definitions of "news" comprised 63.7 percent of dominant press stories (see Figure 2).<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, obituaries containing mentions of Milwaukee open housing campaigns made up the next largest proportion of article type in the dominant press, mirroring the position of "calendar" stories seen in the Chicago sample.

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<sup>33</sup> Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), among many others.

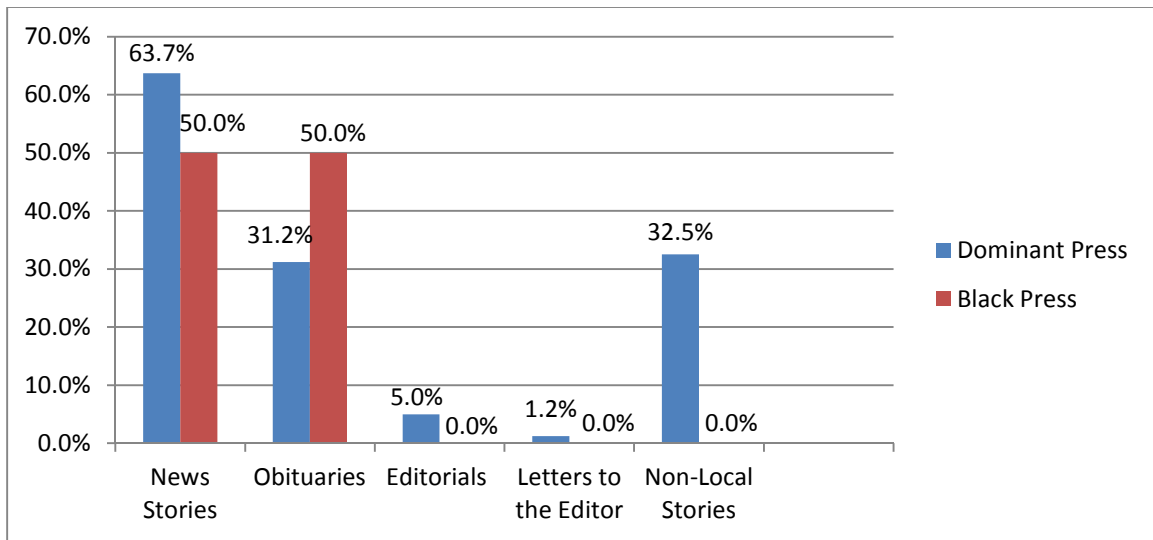


Figure 8: Percentage of Dominant and Black Press Article Types for Newspaper Content Commemorating Milwaukee Open Housing Campaigns (n=82)

Nearly one-third of dominant press content published about the 1967 movement appeared in some sort of "death notice" or obituary (see Figure 2). This indicates that deaths—usually of local activists or politicians—represent an extremely prominent moment for commemorating open housing issues in Milwaukee. The dominant newspapers studied produced five editorial stories or letters to the editor, accounting for just over six percent of content (see Figure 2). Additionally, coverage of Milwaukee open housing marches proved extremely local in nature. Dominant press newspapers outside of the Milwaukee and Madison metropolitan areas produced 24 articles stories, comprising approximately only 32 percent of content studied. This trend represents an interesting deviation from the immense national media support Milwaukee's open housing demonstrators garnered during the 1960s.<sup>34</sup> Only two Black press stories surfaced in all content (see Figure 1). The *Milwaukee Courier* printed one news story and one obituary related to Milwaukee's open housing fights (see Figure 2). This is somewhat surprising considering the wide

<sup>34</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, 196-203.

array of Black and ethnic press newspapers included in ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch publication offerings.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, it can be inferred that Milwaukee's open housing campaigns did not generate broad appeal across the Black press.

#### Dominant Press Framing Analysis

Two frames emerged in analysis of ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch content related to Milwaukee open housing campaigns: 1.) Rev. Groppi is King; and 2.) Evolution from "Violence" to "Riot." The remainder of this section provides examples of prominent framings and connects those portrayals to larger academic discourses.

*Rev. Groppi is King.* As was the case for the Chicago Freedom Movement, commemoration narratives about Milwaukee open housing largely revolved around an lone, male "leader." Roman Catholic Rev. James Groppi spearheaded organization of the Milwaukee NAACP Youth Council and participated in many demonstrations in Milwaukee and across Southern Wisconsin, often getting arrested alongside Youth Council members.<sup>36</sup> Coverage of Milwaukee open housing spiked around both Groppi's death and the premier of a play written by Groppi's wife. Additionally, Groppi's death received substantial attention in national newspapers. Groppi obituaries appeared in the *Milwaukee Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Long Island's Newsday*, and the *Sun Sentinel*. Obituaries most frequently highlighted Groppi's role in leading 200 consecutive nights of housing marches between August 1967 and March 1968. The *Sun-Sentinel* labeled Groppi "an activist" in its obituary and noted that Groppi "gained national attention in the

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<sup>35</sup> The ProQuest database includes large runs of the *New York Amsterdam News*, *Chicago Defender*, *Washington Informer*, *Philadelphia Tribune*, and *Baltimore Afro American*, among other papers. EthnicNews Watch incorporates a large variety of ethnic press publications across ethnicities and locations.

<sup>36</sup> Jones, *The Selma of the North*, references throughout.

1960s by leading 200 consecutive daily open housing marches through the streets of Milwaukee."<sup>37</sup> The piece also highlighted the 1968 passage of open housing legislation in Milwaukee, Groppi's later "attention to American Indian rights, anti-Vietnam War activities, and the rights of welfare mothers," and his choice to leave the priesthood in order to marry.<sup>38</sup>

Focus on Groppi's legacy also spiked during a 1987-88 bid to name the 16th Street Viaduct the "James E. Groppi Unity Bridge." The naming debate became a local controversy with then Mayor Maier and supporters lining up against renaming the structure and those who had marched with the Reverend supporting the commemorative measure. A veto by Mayor Maier ultimately quashed the renaming effort. Newspapers studied produced five articles about the controversy. A December 1987 *Chicago Tribune* story proclaimed that "old political resentments have flared here over a proposal to name a city bridge for James E. Groppi, the 1960s-era civil rights activist and former Catholic priest."<sup>39</sup> The story called Groppi "a long controversial figure" and noted the continued persistence of segregation in the city of Milwaukee and its suburbs.<sup>40</sup> The piece also included a description of Mayor Maier's veto rationale and the Common Council's "concerns" that a name change "would open old wounds between the city's whites and blacks."<sup>41</sup> According to the *Tribune*, Maier "based his decision on 'in-depth analysis' and 'experience' that led him to conclude Groppi 'does not merit having the viaduct named

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<sup>37</sup> *Associated Press*, "J. Groppi, 54: Was Activist," *Sun-Sentinel*, November 5, 1985.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Rogers Worthington, "MOVE TO HONOR '60S ACTIVIST REAWAKENS ANGER," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec 6, 1987.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

after him."<sup>42</sup> Maier also considered Groppi's "motto" of "agitate, agitate, agitate" and the priest's lengthy arrest record as reasons for denying the bridge renaming.<sup>43</sup>

Several days later, a second *Tribune* report claimed that "sixties-era civil rights activist James Groppi was alternately denounced and praised Monday, as Mayor Henry Maier and supporters of the late former priest called news conferences to state their positions."<sup>44</sup> At the press conference, Mayor Maier linked Groppi with "radical Black activists" H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael, claimed Groppi possessed "no redeeming qualities," accused the priest of "stirring the flames of discord," and called Groppi "sympathetic to rioting by young urban blacks."<sup>45</sup> The *Tribune* also provided space to Groppi's supporters who contended that Mayor Maier represented "a master of taking things out of context."<sup>46</sup> A follow up story printed by the *Tribune* in early 1988 declared that "a time warp, a prolonged glimpse into the 1960s, has been served up to Milwaukeeans these last few weeks. It is a past some recall with bitterness, others with pride. But whatever else, it is a past that teaches about Milwaukee and America in the throes of social change."<sup>47</sup> The article characterized the late-1960s as "a time when the frustrations of urban blacks teetered between nonviolence and rioting as a means of expression."<sup>48</sup> Open housing, argued the *Tribune*, "became a rallying point for North Side blacks, a cause célèbre for white liberals and a specter for white South Siders."<sup>49</sup> In a departure from the *Tribune's* earlier stories, this article connected past housing disputes

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Rogers Worthington, "WAR OF WORDS HEATS UP OVER ACTIVIST GROPPi," *Chicago Tribune*, December 9, 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Rogers Worthington, "MAYOR'S VETO RIPS OPEN WOUNDS FROM '60S CIVIL RIGHTS WAR," *Chicago Tribune*, January 5, 1988. The same story also ran in the *Houston Chronicle* on January 10, 1988.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



with contemporary inequality noting that "twenty years later, few suburbs have their own open housing ordinances. Discrimination has become much more subtle: waiting lists, preferential security deposits, self-limits set by perception and misinformation. And homeowners are moving out of the city at an alarming rate, according to a recent city study."<sup>50</sup>

The *Wall Street Journal* represents the only national newspaper to publish a staff written piece about the bridge naming controversy. The paper argued that "for 20 years, controversy has swirled around this city's 16th Street viaduct."<sup>51</sup> The paper referred to Groppi as the "leader" of Milwaukee's housing "rallies" and mentioned that Mayor Maier felt Groppi a "divisive" figure. The article also conjectured that "for many here, the 16th Street viaduct symbolizes the divisions between blacks and whites in this city...the situation in Milwaukee shows that many of the issues raised by the Kerner Commission in 1968 continue unresolved today."<sup>52</sup> The rest of the piece outlined lingering "de facto" racial segregation within Milwaukee and its suburbs and detailed a variety of problems including poverty rates engendered by de facto segregation.<sup>53</sup> The act of naming landmarks after prominent figures is an extremely fundamental *les lieux de memoire*, both with respect to civil rights and more broadly.<sup>54</sup> In the case of Rev. Groppi, the naming debate had the power to draw out dormant racial tensions and highlight contemporary problems unsolved by the city's 1968 open housing legislation. For

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Alex Kotlowitz, "Long Bridge in Milwaukee Symbolizes The Continuing Racial Divisions There," *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 1988.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Derek H. Alderman, "Street Names as Memorial Arenas: The Reputational Politics of Commemorating MLK in a Georgia County," in Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford, ed. *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 100-120.

scholars of civil rights and memory, the naming controversy illustrates a problematic occurrence of rearticulation for collective memories about Groppi. Mayor Maier served as the principal instigator of this rearticulation by connecting the priest to a variety of phenomena—namely Black Power icons H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael, urban unrest, and "agitation"—popularly perceived as outside the boundaries of "the civil rights movement." This example denotes one fashion in which present needs and circumstances influence "who wants whom to remember what and why."<sup>55</sup>

Later treatments of Milwaukee open housing initiatives tended to direct commemorative narratives toward Groppi's life story and accomplishments, thus displacing emphasis on other local leaders and systemic issues. A typical portrayal characterized Milwaukee's open housing marches as "black activists led by a white Roman Catholic priest, Father James Groppi" who "attracted nationwide attention as they demonstrated against racial discrimination and segregation in housing."<sup>56</sup> A 2001 piece in Madison, Wisconsin's *Capital Times* noted that "a priest named James Groppi—now deceased—jumped into the civil rights fray in Milwaukee in 1965."<sup>57</sup> The article went on to mention that "after meetings with black conservatives failed to lead to local action on open housing, Groppi led a march over the 16th Street Viaduct, described in some quarters as the longest bridge in the world. A tear-gas filled confrontation with angry whites followed and then 200 days of marches. An open-housing ordinance was passed by the City Council at the end of 1967, though it was still much less than Groppi hoped

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<sup>55</sup> Alan Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," in *The Collective Memory Reader* ed. Jeffrey K. Olicks, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 198.

<sup>56</sup> Jack Norman and Georgia Pabst, "Majority minority Seeds of city's future lie in its diversity Wisconsin 2000," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 22, 1999.

<sup>57</sup> Anita Weier, "Rights Struggle Hit Milwaukee, Housing Was Explosive Issue," *Capital Times*, June 15, 2001.

for."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, a retrospective celebrating Wisconsin's sesquicentennial featured Groppi in a section about the "1967 Civil Rights Riots." The piece remembered that "it was on July 30, 1967, that Milwaukee joined other American cities in what had become a long, hot summer. A civil rights riot broke out in the inner city... Shortly after that, a white Catholic priest, Father James Groppi, began leading a series of open housing marches to the south side. Angry whites responded with rocks, bottles and eggs, and the size of the marches grew, giving the city even more notoriety."<sup>59</sup> It is noteworthy that newspaper accounts frequently mention Groppi's race. By drawing attention to Groppi's whiteness in commemorative coverage, journalists employ Groppi as a "bridge between Black and white" in the same way King operated as a bridge between North and South in coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement.

Journalistic focus on a single, male individual speaks to James Carey's contention that within American news narratives "names make the news, and explanations in the news pretty much come down to the motives of the actors in the political drama."<sup>60</sup> This framing displaces countless "footsoldiers," including African American alderwoman Vel Phillips, and organizations beyond the NAACP Youth Council who contributed to the passage of open housing legislation. This framing choice also perpetuates a narrative centered on Groppi's "whiteness." Routinely reminding readers that Groppi was not Black provides space for white audiences to feel a certain connection and investment in Milwaukee's civil rights era history regardless of these whites' actual participation in

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Jan Uebelherr and Eldon Knoche, "Visionaries Paved Way for Young Growing City: Milwaukee 150/1846-1996," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 4, 1996.

<sup>60</sup> James Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism," in *Reading the News* ed. Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 156.

Milwaukee's housing struggles or racial views. This treatment illustrates just how subtle dominant press reifications of the "possessive investment in whiteness can be."<sup>61</sup>

*Violence, from Passing Reference to Centerpiece:* A second frame emerging in analysis of commemorations of Milwaukee's open housing campaigns revolved around distinctions between "violence" and "riots." In coverage published prior to 1999, journalists referred to "violence" and "riots" surrounding Milwaukee race relations and open housing efforts but did not explicate these violent acts in any detail. In these articles, journalists quickly moved beyond event based descriptions toward emphasis on systemic and economic issues. In contrast, coverage from 1999 to the present outlined violent occurrences in considerable depth rather than focusing on systemic components of the open housing issue. A 1984 report about the city's civil rights era police chief noted that the chief "assumed command just in time to witness bloody open-housing marches led by the Rev. James Groppi, Vietnam War protests and unrest in the city's growing black community—including a 1967 riot."<sup>62</sup> The piece mentioned no other details or descriptions of riots or violence. A *Chicago Tribune* story from 1987 revealed that Milwaukee Mayor Henry Maier "was deeply concerned, when those marches started, about a race riot."<sup>63</sup> Despite the fact that Maier's fears became reality in July 1967, the article noted only that "violence did erupt in Milwaukee, and the state National Guard was called in."<sup>64</sup> Groppi's motto of "agitate, agitate, agitate," and a suspected "trashing"

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<sup>61</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Tom Masland, "TRYING TO LAY DOWN THE LAW TO AN AUTOCRATIC POLICE CHIEF," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 23, 1984.

<sup>63</sup> Rogers Worthington, "Move to Honor '60s Activist Reawakens Anger," *Chicago Tribune*, December 6, 1987.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

of Maier's office by Youth Council members represent the only other references to remotely "violent" acts mentioned by the *Tribune*.<sup>65</sup>

A 1988 *Wall Street Journal* feature fully ignored Milwaukee's violent past instead choosing to differentiate the city from other locales dealing with 1960s unrest. The *Journal* report claimed that "what makes Milwaukee an even more compelling example is that it has long been admired by many civil-rights leaders for its progressive tradition...And where the 1967 civil disturbances led to numerous deaths in cities such as Newark and Detroit, Milwaukee received national praise for pacifying demonstrators before they got out of hand."<sup>66</sup> The only other acknowledgment of the July riot was a reference to marchers walking across the 16th Street Viaduct while "opponents assaulted the demonstrators with rocks, dirty dishwater, and racial epithets."<sup>67</sup>

Two pieces focusing specifically on the "militant" Commando unit of the NAACP Youth Council also played down constructions of violence. Newspapers studied did not frame the Commandos as an anomaly or threat to the status quo; instead, newspaper coverage defined these individuals as community members making highly meaningful contributions to Milwaukee's social fabric. Dominant press coverage also never asked individual Commandos to "recant" their previous militant tendencies or make apologies for past behavior. As is rarely the case in dominant press account, these articles focused more on celebrating the Commandos' contributions than condemning certain kinds of resistance. A 1980 *New York Times* piece profiled Jesse Wade, once known as "Hook." The article noted that Hook "wore military fatigues, a black beret, black ascot and black

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Alex Kotlowitz, "Long Bridge in Milwaukee Symbolizes the Continuing Racial Divisions There," *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 1988.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

boots. He was a Commando, a member of the security force of the Youth Council of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People."<sup>68</sup> The article also contended that "to black youth, the Commandos were a symbol of strength. To many whites, however, they were a symbol of fear and hatred."<sup>69</sup> The piece quickly changed tone, however, asserting that "today the once-militant Commandos are Milwaukee's largest inner-city social service agency. Whites now respect it and the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce helps support it."<sup>70</sup> The *Times* went on to detail the social services provided for by the Commandos including "an adult and youth counseling program, a youth employment program, vocational training programs for ex-offenders, a prison work-release job placement program, group foster homes for Cuban refugee youths, a community improvement program and a high school, the Commando Academy."<sup>71</sup>

The Commandos appeared in coverage again in 2002, this time in a dual obituary for two former members that died on the same day. The *Journal-Sentinel* obituary characterized the two men's role in the group as "protesting discrimination and putting their lives at risk to defend other marchers" and described the Commandos as merely "a group that formed in 1966 to protect the city's civil rights marchers."<sup>72</sup> The piece used phrases like "popular individual," "a prankster, who blended humor with a seriousness of purpose," and "looking the part" to reflect on the men.<sup>73</sup> The obituary's

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<sup>68</sup> Special to the New York Times, "Milwaukee Commandos Succeed in Social Service," *New York Times*, December 30, 1980.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Mark Johnson, "Side by Side at Marches in 60s," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 24, 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

author did not imply a single negative connotation of fear, violence, or overt militancy in the entire obituary.

The turn of the 21st century marked a distinct shift in the tone and level of detail journalists included in their commemorations of civil rights era violence in Milwaukee. A 1999 *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* story mentioned the "nationwide attention" Groppi garnered through his demonstrations then quickly segued into an exhaustive description of the riot occurring on July 30, 1967. The *Journal-Sentinel* declared that "on July 30, 1967, a riot erupted in the black community. When it was over five hours later, three were dead, 100 injured and 1,740 under arrest—mostly for violating the mayor's curfew. The governor sent in the National Guard to quash any further violence. But for months afterward, there were marches across the cultural divide of the Menomonee Valley, as the push to desegregate housing continued."<sup>74</sup> A 2001 *Capital Times* report included a similar description. The journalist contended that "thousands of whites came out in response" to a protest at the Eagles Club, a prominent local civic organization, "and the National Guard was called in."<sup>75</sup> The author asserted that following the Eagles Club unrest, "a Black Power group called the Commandos was formed, saying they will not start violence but will respond. White people were frightened."<sup>76</sup> The piece segued into descriptions of the riot itself noting that "a riot occurred in 1967 and martial law was declared. Three people died, 100 were injured, 1,740 arrested and a half million dollars in

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<sup>74</sup> Jack Norman and Georgia Pabst, "Majority Minority Seeds of City's Future Lie in its Diversity," *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, August 22, 1999.

<sup>75</sup> Anita Weier, "Rights Struggle Hit Milwaukee, Housing Was Explosive Issue," *Capital Times*, June 15, 2001.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

property destroyed...A tear-gas filled confrontation with angry whites followed and then 200 days of marches."<sup>77</sup>

By the 40th anniversary, two retrospectives focused solely on 1967's violent incidents. An extensive feature on the city's July 1967 riot tapped a variety of local, informal sources to paint an extremely thorough picture of that night's events. Near the beginning of the spread, the *Journal-Sentinel* declared that "activists predicted that Milwaukee's racial discomfort could lead to disorder similar to what had just erupted in July in Detroit and Newark, N.J., where a combined 66 people were killed and almost 1,900 injured."<sup>78</sup> The authors then included a quote from Rev. Groppi swearing that without improvements in Black living conditions, "Milwaukee could become a holocaust."<sup>79</sup> "Violence broke out five days later—lootings, brawls, shootings and fires," the paper intoned. The article also observed that "a few hours after the earliest disturbances occurred, Mayor Henry W. Maier proclaimed a state of emergency, and the city was under curfew for the next nine days."<sup>80</sup> The second *Journal-Sentinel* piece informed readers that "rioting was breaking out in one city after another across America in what the news media labeled 'the long, hot summer' of 1967. Detroit and Newark witnessed major conflagrations. The start of the Milwaukee disturbances had a copycat feel. They seemed to be instigated by restless young men who believed in the slogan, 'Burn, baby, burn!'"<sup>81</sup> The article also reminded readers that "the metro area must not

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Lori Price and Jan Uebelherr, "A Time of Unrest: Milwaukee's Riots and Their Legacy: Flashpoint, Racial Tension in the Summer of 1967 Fueled Deadly Violence, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, July 30, 2007.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Stanford, "A Time of Unrest: Milwaukee's Riots and Their Legacy," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 1, 2007.



forget there were two sets of riots that summer—the second occurring when white south-siders attacked the racially diverse open housing marchers."<sup>82</sup>

The above coverage initially devoted minimal attention to the violent outbreaks that accompanied Milwaukee's largely non-violent open housing movement—even in articles specifically mentioning the Youth Council's self-described "militant" Commandos. As we move forward in time, however, the newspapers studied paid increasing attention to violent portions of the historical narrative rather than the systemic inequalities comprising large parts of initial treatments. By the 40th anniversary, newspaper coverage connected the July 30 riot directly to the open housing campaigns, discussed the two events in tandem, and in some ways conflated the July 30 riot with later open housing violence. In effect, newspaper coverage moved from minimizing violence in the 1980s to relishing that same violence by the 40th anniversary in 2007. It is impossible to determine exactly what precipitated this shift. However, potential influences may include: 1.) gravitation away from societal acknowledgment of the systemic nature of inequality prevalent during the during the late-1960s and 1970s due to President Johnson's "Great Society" initiatives; 2.) nationwide reinvestment in liberal individualism during the Reagan and Bush eras, and/or; 3.) changing news routines.

### The Black Press

Only two Black press articles surfaced in this analysis. Milwaukee's local African American newspaper, the *Milwaukee Courier*, published both stories on the same day—January 8, 2011.<sup>83</sup> One article announced an upcoming Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> This timing could be simply be due to which *Milwaukee Courier* issues are included in Ethnic NewsWatch. January 8, 2011 is not a significant anniversary or other milestone within Milwaukee history.

rally honoring "the Milwaukee Commandos who marched over 200 days with Fr. James Groppi for an Open Housing Ordinance in Milwaukee in 1967/68."<sup>84</sup> The second piece eulogized Velma L. Coggs. The obituary highlighted Coggs' active role in the NAACP Youth Council, school desegregation campaigns, and Eagle's Club protests.<sup>85</sup> The piece also mentioned her participation in the YC's 200 consecutive nights of housing marches wherein "the young people were pelted with rocks, eggs, tomatoes and were occasionally tear-gassed to discourage them from marching."<sup>86</sup> The obituary concluded by noting that Coggs "also wore out several pairs of shoes marching for civil rights and justice."<sup>87</sup> It is of note that both *Courier* articles do not dwell on Groppi or violent components of Milwaukee open housing fights. Instead, these reports commemorate the Commandos and a female "footsoldier." While further archival research is needed to fully ascertain Black press estimations of Milwaukee's open housing movement, the dearth of Black press content in ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch—databases with significant collections of African American newspapers—underscores the invisibility of Milwaukee's housing struggle within Black press circles.

## **Conclusion**

Coverage focused heavily on a single, male individual on all anniversaries studied. Newspaper accounts promoted the role of Rev. James Groppi, a white Catholic priest who mentored the local NAACP Youth Council. As was the case in Chicago with King, this speaks to James Carey's assertion that in American news narratives aligned

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Additionally archival research is needed to better understand why the only two Black press articles were published on the same day.

<sup>84</sup> No author listed, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Justice Rally and March!" *Milwaukee Courier*, January 8, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> No author listed, "Velma L. Coggs: Her Story," *Milwaukee Courier*, January 8, 2011.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

with traditional journalistic norms, "names make the news, and explanations in the news pretty much come down to the motives of the actors in the political drama."<sup>88</sup>

Additionally, newspaper coverage related to Milwaukee's civil rights era bloodshed gained prominence in coverage around and after the turn of the 21st century. This process represents a fundamental example of how present needs or circumstances can dictate shifts in collective memory. As narratives about violence in Milwaukee were "torn away and returned," from memory, systemic concerns related to housing in Milwaukee became "repressed, forgotten, and reshaped," left to resurface when present needs warrant.<sup>89</sup>

Milwaukee's open housing fight embodies several highly meaningful objects for scholars of race, media, and civil rights. First, while the NAACP nominally supported the Youth Council, the YC and the Commandos lacked backing from any other national civil rights group; the pair largely charted their course of action unilaterally under Groppi's direction. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Groppi, the YC, and the Commandos employed a combination of Roman Catholic teachings, Dr. King's non-violent philosophy, Black Power ideology, and their own "not-violence" mantra. While popular memory divides movement campaigns into mutually exclusive adherence to non-violence or Black Power, the strategies used by Groppi, the YC, and the Commandos illustrate how civil rights activists routinely blended and rearticulated contemporary approaches to fit their own circumstances and situations. Third, examination of Milwaukee, a modestly sized American city, provides insight into commemorations of the civil rights movement through the prism of "local" media outlets. The *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* and Milwaukee's African American newspaper the *Milwaukee Courier*

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<sup>88</sup> Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism," 156.

<sup>89</sup> David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *The Journal of American History* 75, No. 4 (1989): 1127.

do not hold the national stature and name recognition of the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Defender*, or arguably, the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Persistent discrepancies in housing equality—a fundamental, yet largely forgotten demand of civil rights demonstrators—reside at the core of today's Northern urban landscape. Journalists' inability to acknowledge lingering systemic housing inequality in Milwaukee and elsewhere across the North neglects the institutionalized conventions that actually maintain racisms in this country. Additionally, this framing disregards the deliberate, decades long construction of a matrix of "racialized space" that helps naturalize and institutionalize structural racism in Northern urban areas.<sup>90</sup> Because media creators cannot neatly relegate present day racisms to the "past" or group phenomena such as urban poverty, unemployment, civil unrest, and de facto segregation into binaries of "good/evil," or "hero/villain," perhaps they simply choose to forget.

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<sup>90</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell), 1993.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

As this analysis has illustrated, the nation's dominant press collectively invokes the movement, its actors, and its aims at selective commemorative milestones, largely to reify hegemonic conceptions of race that support the American nation-state's liberal democratic frameworks. Additionally, American media outlets, especially dominant press voices, routinely draw overt parallels between civil rights era frameworks for thinking about race and contemporary, ongoing challenges—largely without acknowledging ebbs and flows in racial progress occurring during between the movement's end and a given historical moment. This practice contributes to the creation of cultural meanings about the American civil rights era marked more by the fragmentation of memory than remembering itself. The discursive spaces created through fragmentation are particularly noteworthy because this new space permits the *rearticulation* of meanings about the movement and illustrates a primary avenue through which dominant media outlets help maintain the hegemonic racial order of American society via discourse about civil rights.

Examination of cultural meaning-making in newspaper coverage about the Chicago Freedom Movement provides a revealing example of this "fragmented" middle ground between Houston Baker's conceptions of "nostalgic" and "critical" memory. In their commemorations of the CFM, media outlets studied did not universally write the failure to achieve open housing as a "well past aberration" or present a memory "that judges severely" or "censures righteously."<sup>1</sup> Instead, both Black and dominant press papers consistently asserted that the Chicago Freedom Movement laid the groundwork

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<sup>1</sup> Houston A. Baker, *Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere*, *Public Culture*, 1993, 3.

for the 1983 election of Chicago's first African American Mayor, Harold Washington. As scholars have outlined elsewhere, Washington actually ascended to the Mayor's office largely through the building of coalitions among Blacks, Latinos, and wealthy white Democrats—not because of Chicago Freedom Movement efforts.<sup>2</sup> In perpetuating this linear segue between the CFM and Washington's election, and thus fragmenting collective memories about the Chicago Freedom Movement's contribution to later political gains, both Black and dominant press coverage created a discursive space for wholly rearticulated—and in this instance—untrue, memories to become deeply lodged in news narratives. The oft circulated notion that American civil rights progress is linear and traceable back to the actions of Martin Luther King, Jr. repeats itself in the linkage of the housing battle—which was a loss—to the eventual election of a Black mayor. However, this easy, linear narrative of King's dream realized in a black elected official papers over the ugly truth of Northern style electoral racial politics. In reality, Washington had to fight a highly contentious election, and the campaign was fraught with episodes of overt racist white backlash. Interestingly, today Washington's achievement is not commemorated alongside those of other prominent, urban African American leaders like Cory Booker or Michael Nutter.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, this absence of commemoration rests on the hesitancy of dominant society to confront the racial ills of its all too recent past.

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<sup>2</sup> Gary Rivlin, *Fire on the Prairie: Harold Washington, Chicago Politics, and the Roots of the Obama Presidency* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012) and Lenita McClain, "How Chicago Taught me How to Hate Whites," *Washington Post*, July 24, 1983, Catherine R. Squires, *The Post-Racial Mystique*.

<sup>3</sup> Rivlin, *Fire on the Prairie*, McClain, "How Chicago Taught me How to Hate Whites," and Squires, *The Post-Racial Mystique*.

Journalists' inability to acknowledge lingering Northern racisms like those faced by Washington in the 1980s permeates the entire body of Northern civil rights commemorations examined in this study. This research illustrated how media coverage cannot neatly consign these lingering racisms to the "past" or condense the issues of urban poverty, unemployment, civil unrest, and de facto segregation into binaries of "good/evil," or "hero/villain." Instead, the media outlets studied characterized cultural meanings and collective memories about the North in terms of "formulations that naturalize the Northern racial order as not a racial system like the South's but one operating on class and culture with racial discrimination as a byproduct."<sup>4</sup> Doing so obscures not only the contributions of Northern activists, but also disregards the deliberate, decades long construction of a matrix of "racialized space" that helps naturalize and institutionalize structural racism in Northern urban areas.<sup>5</sup> Persistent discrepancies in housing equality—a fundamental, yet largely forgotten demand of civil rights demonstrators—reside at the core of this "racialized" Northern landscape even today. As Lawrence Lanahan's recent *Colorlines* piece reminds us, continued de facto segregation across the North "pays dividends to white Americans in the wealth their homes generate, how they are policed, and many other ways. It did under Jim Crow, and

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<sup>4</sup> Janet F. Theoharis, "Introduction," in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South: 1940-1980* ed. Janet F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 3.

<sup>5</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell), 1993.

it does in the 21st Century. There are just more clever ways of maintaining that segregation now."<sup>6</sup>

Neither the Chicago Freedom Movement to "end slums" spearheaded by Martin Luther King, Jr. nor the SCLC and Milwaukee's homegrown housing drive received substantial commemorative coverage in national dominant or Black press newspapers. In both cases, existing mediated memories were confined to local newspapers, local actors, and local outcomes. Even in locally produced commemorative coverage, the outlets studied generated cultural meanings that displaced the multivalent nature of many Northern open housing battles by framing each campaign largely through the prisms of a lone, male leader, violent moments, or local politics. Additionally, both dominant and Black press outlets did not incorporate substantial discussions about the issue or history of housing inequality, remedies for housing issues, or long term implications of unequal housing practices. These framings neglect the institutionalized conventions that actually maintain racism in this country by foregoing systemic reasons behind lingering inequality and persistent entrenchment of de facto segregation. Instead of employing a "thematic" framing strategy that would have better addressed deeply entrenched housing inequality, journalists utilized highly episodic frames focused on individual leaders, violent events, and politically oriented outcomes.<sup>7</sup> It is telling—and perhaps largely reflective of an unwillingness to address still deeply entrenched housing issues—that

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Lanahan, "Let's Not Forget Northern Racism—the Kind That Almost Gutted Fair Housing," *Colorlines*, June 25, 2015, <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/lets-not-forget-northern-racism%E2%80%94kind-almost-gutted-fair-housing>.

<sup>7</sup> Shanto Iyengar, and Adam Simon, "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion: A Study of Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing," *Communication Research* 20 (1993): 365-383.



episodic framings persist even in retrospective and commemorative coverage that is far removed from the need to employ breaking news frameworks.

While Northern civil rights struggles are largely purged from the canons of American civil rights movement memory, the March on Washington is universally remembered via a variety of media outlets year after year. As this study revealed, this is because it represents—to those with significant narrative constructing power—the key moment in American history when "everyone" agreed on how to solve the great "American dilemma."<sup>8</sup> Although the March on Washington is considered one of the movement's largest successes and produced some of the era's most widely distributed symbolic icons, only certain facets of that hot day in August 1963 enter the canons of collective memory. The figure of Martin Luther King, Jr. and a mythic interpretation of the March as an idyllic gathering in our nation's capital to ask for the redress of grievances as allowed by our constitution serve to anchor this agreement as a palatable, axiomatic benchmark of American race relations writ large. The immense volume of coverage the March on Washington garners year after year illustrates the importance of *national consensus* in what civil rights events, and by proxy what components of American race relations, receive media attention. To this end, anniversary commemorations of the March attempt to assess the "state of race" in America and mark progress toward a particularly narrow interpretation of "King's Dream." While our nation can work toward our "children not having to be judged by the color of their skin," we cannot collectively remember and reflect upon the "bad check" written for African

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<sup>8</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Publishing, 1944).

Americans by our own government. Similarly, the nation neglects to address structural and systemic factors surrounding racial discrimination; many of those factors exist in forms similar to when A. Philip Randolph and other organizers highlighted them as a central component of the 1963 march. Rather than utilizing commemoration of the March to urge progress on these systemic ills, dominant cultural narratives of the movement's anniversaries purge these unflattering phenomena from our national register. Purging these elements from our collective narratives engenders concerted amnesia and works against the circulation of counternarratives and rearticulations of March memory. This phenomenon illustrates that media outlets not only "create, reflect, and perpetuate" cultural narratives but also hold the power to significantly *contain, stifle, and delimit* articulation of counternarratives.<sup>9</sup>

Selected Southern movement milestones gain entrance to the United States' collective civil rights memory, albeit in more diminished, truncated forms than the March on Washington. As illustrated above and throughout this study, even 50 years removed from most landmark civil rights era events, collective memory treats the South as the primary site of civil rights era racial struggle and Southern racism as the paramount evil to be overcome. This geographic distinction is an example of how media commemorations of civil rights attempt to compartmentalize the movement into episodes of racism that can be decidedly relegated to the "past" because dominant segments of American society desire to move beyond memories of overt discrimination toward a

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies," *Rethinking Marxism* 5, no. 1 (1992): 14-15.

better racial future. Therefore, although Selma is remembered to a greater degree than Northern struggles over housing, its anniversary does not serve as a moment when we collectively assess our racial progress in a manner similar to March on Washington remembrances. Instead, we bury this moment as a "well-past aberration" by marking progress away from past racial ills and granting forgiveness to white segregationist figures like George Wallace who featured prominently in hero/villain constructions of Southern civil rights battles. Upon the conferral of forgiveness, these figures—and along with them commemorations of Selma itself—disappear from media coverage.<sup>10</sup>

Memories running counter to this accepted marking of progress away from "Southern" racism often face resistance in both popular culture and the media texts that circulate cultural narratives.<sup>11</sup> Public criticism of Ava DuVernay's portrayal of President Lyndon Johnson's hesitance to demand a comprehensive voting rights act in her film "Selma" represents the most recent example of this phenomenon. *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd claimed that "DuVernay had plenty of vile white villains—including one who kicks a minister to death in the street—and they were no doubt shocking to the D.C. school kids. There was no need to create a faux one" in Johnson.<sup>12</sup> Dowd also attacked DuVernay directly, asserting that "the director's talent makes her distortion of L.B.J. more egregious. Artful falsehood is more dangerous than artless

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<sup>10</sup> Baker, *Critical Memory*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Kirsten Hoerl, "Mississippi Burning into Memory? Cinematic Amnesia as a Resource for Remembering Civil Rights," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 1 (March 2009): 54-79, Kristen Hoerl, "Mississippi's Social Transformation in Public Memories of the Trial Against Byron de la Beckwith for the Murder of Medgar Evers," *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 1 (January-March 2008): 62-82, and Kelly J. Madison, "Legitimation Crisis and Containment: The "Anti-Racist White Hero Film," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16, no. 4 (1999): 399-416.

<sup>12</sup> Maureen Dowd, "Not Just a Movie," *New York Times*, January 17, 2015.

falsehood, because fewer people see through it...On matters of race—America’s original sin—there is an even higher responsibility to be accurate.”<sup>13</sup> This instance illustrates how contests over historical "accuracy" can be more fundamentally tied to perceived *collective memories* about a given historical event than historical facts themselves. Moreover, Dowd's column and subsequent analogous coverage demanded that DuVernay publically clarify "motives" behind her choices about Johnson, in effect forcing her to justify her countermemory. This practice highlights dominant media reinforcement of Lipsitz's notions about the "possessive investment in whiteness" and showcases Catherine Squires' contention that dominant media often perpetuate "white-oriented progress narratives" about civil rights rather than productive countermemories.<sup>14</sup> The type of hegemonic investment in collective memories about the movement noted above works to fuel the resolve that we are somehow "beyond" needing the movement's lessons—or for example, certain provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act implemented in Selma's wake. The charges against DuVernay are even more insidious in a moment when the United States Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act, opening the door for 21st century strategies to suppress black and Latina/o American votes.

### **The Black Press as a Site of Countermemories**

The Black press often provides counternarrative to dominant discourses, thus helping to challenge the “racial formation” process “by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), 2006 and Squires, *The Post-racial Mystique*, 204-205.

they are in turn shaped by racial meanings.”<sup>15</sup> As Catherine Squires notes, the institution of the Black press, along with other ethnic and alternative media outlets develop “important counter points to mainstream definitions and understandings of racial and ethnic identities and the political projects affecting them.”<sup>16</sup> Black press publications also work to mitigate the hegemonic force George Lipsitz calls “the possessive investment in whiteness.”<sup>17</sup> This analysis found that generally, Black press newspapers filled this role throughout all time periods examined. For example, Black press newspapers commemorated Selma's 20th and 30th anniversaries in a very different way from dominant press newspapers examined. As opposed to focusing on relegating the African American freedom struggle to the past, the Black press highlighted specific examples of its contentious, ongoing nature. At times, however, Black press accounts mirrored narratives of dominant press content. Coverage penned on Selma's 45th anniversary paralleled the steady decline in articles about Selma prevalent in the dominant press and put forth localized, cursory estimations of Selma's legacy.

The largest gulf between Black and dominant press news coverage existed in commemorations of the most universally recognized civil rights milestone, the March on Washington. In fact, trends that resided at the most progressive margins of dominant press content proved central to Black press accounts. While Black press newspapers provided substantially more attention to the March than any other case study, African American newspapers veered away from "nostalgic" framings of the March typical in the

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s*, (New York: Routledge 1986), 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 1998.

dominant press and instead primarily produced "critical" commemorations. In keeping with Houston Baker's assertion, these critical commemorations included more sophisticated descriptions of movement actors and historical context. Black press outlets routinely invoked nostalgic commemorations directly from dominant media in order to "refute mainstream interpretations and insert their own voices" into commemorative narratives about Martin Luther King, other movement leaders, and Black history writ large.<sup>18</sup> Critical readings also acknowledged multiple Black public spheres through criticism of both contemporary and past civil rights leaders and strategies.<sup>19</sup> The most fundamental difference between dominant and Black press accounts of March on Washington anniversaries revolves around forms "passive" and "active" commemoration. Black press newspapers utilized the March's anniversary to "actively" call for substantive change from American society. In contrast, dominant press outlets directed readers to "passively" assess King's Dream and lament how much America has yet to achieve in the arena of racial equality. Black press newspapers' fiftieth anniversary content especially embodied the engaged sentiment. This "active" commemoration opens spaces for the rearticulation of collective memory based on present needs and circumstances of a "counterpublic" sphere.<sup>20</sup> In the case of the March on Washington, this rearticulation

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<sup>18</sup> Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of A Black Power Icon* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*, Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers*, Jacobs, *Race, Media, and the Crisis of Civil Society*, Vogel, ed., *The Black Press*, Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, among many others.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

legitimated forms of Black protest deemed unacceptable in dominant discourses in extremely meaningful ways.

Black press coverage of the Chicago Freedom Movement embodied traits of dominant press coverage to a larger degree than commemorations of either Selma or the March on Washington. As in the dominant press, Black press newspapers outside of Chicago did not cover the open housing campaign in any detail. Local Black press outlets foregrounded Martin Luther King, Jr. in a manner highly similar to the city's dominant newspapers. Black press coverage did present increased detail about King and incorporated actors involved the African American freedom struggle overlooked by the dominant press. Black newspapers also utilized Chicago Freedom Movement commemorations to define and challenge contemporary racially motivated inequalities both to a larger degree than dominant press accounts. Only two Black press articles surfaced in analysis of Milwaukee's 1967 open housing campaign. Milwaukee's local African American newspaper, the *Milwaukee Courier*, published both stories on the same day—January 8, 2011.<sup>21</sup> It is of note that both *Courier* reports commemorate the Commandos and a female "footsoldier" as opposed to the fixations with Rev. James Groppi and violence running throughout dominant press accounts. While detailed archival research is necessary to better understand Black press commemorations of Milwaukee's open housing movement and the influence of post-civil rights era economic decline at Black newspapers must be taken into account, the modest amount of African

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<sup>21</sup> This timing could be simply be due to which *Milwaukee Courier* issues are included in Ethnic NewsWatch. January 8, 2011 is not a significant anniversary or other milestone within Milwaukee history. Additionally archival research is needed to better understand why the only two Black press articles were published on the same day.

American press stories in ProQuest Newsstand and Ethnic NewsWatch—databases with significant collections of African American newspapers—is striking.

On the whole, Black press outlets answered Catherine Squires' call for Black-oriented media to provide "discursive and other resources that foster counterpublic consciousness that precedes coordinated political activism" throughout all periods examined in this research.<sup>22</sup> The countermemories and discourses present in Black press content showcase continual mobilization against racist behavior, laws, and "democratic" processes of the American nation-state as part of an ongoing African American freedom struggle. This framing underscores the lasting presence, importance, and vitality of Black press institutions as a counterpublic sphere in our current moment—a moment long after many histories of the Black press allow. Interestingly, the strongest counterdiscourses and divergence from dominant press narratives appeared in commemorations of the March on Washington—the most prominent anniversary studied. This suggests that more entrenched national collective memories may generate more robust counterdiscourse from African American press outlets.

The unique viewpoints present in this study's analysis of Black press remembrances and commemorations of the civil rights movement also shed light on fundamental divisions between the collective memories of white Americans and those outside that dominant racial group. In the words of Nikhil Pal Singh, dominant discourses often render the movement "as part of an achieved national, political consensus shattered

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<sup>22</sup> Catherine R. Squires, "Coloring the Bubble: Perspectives from Black-Oriented Media on the (Latest) Economic Disaster," *American Quarterly* 64 (3), September 2012, 547.



only when Blacks themselves abandoned the normative discourses of American politics."<sup>23</sup> For whites, Manning Marable contends, the "past by its nature is removed from the present" therefore, white Americans can often "afford to evade or deny the deep ironies and contradictions embedded in their racialized democracy."<sup>24</sup> For African Americans, however, "the past is not simply prologue; it is indelibly part of the fabric of our (African Americans') collective destiny."<sup>25</sup> In light of this distinction, "the struggles over the memory of the civil rights are not a diversion from the real political work of fighting for racial equality and equal rights in the United States; they are key sites of that struggle."<sup>26</sup> Because "the media play a part in the formation, in the constitution, of the things they reflect" and collective memories themselves cannot circulate "free of the discourses of representation," Black press texts can at least partially work to dictate how movement discourses are collectively memorialized.<sup>27</sup>

### **Collective Oversights: Directions for Future Study**

Within the of the four cases addressed in this research, several important facets of the movement proved glaringly absent from both dominant and Black press commemorations. As such, these collective oversights represent fruitful directions for future research in the realm of media, civil rights, and memory.

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<sup>23</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America's Racial Future* (New York: Basic Books) 2006, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Renee Romano, and Leigh Raiford, "Introduction," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, xxi.

<sup>27</sup> Stuart Hall, "Race, Culture, and Communications: Looking Backward and Forward at Cultural Studies," *Rethinking Marxism* 5, no. 1 (1992): 14-15.

*Women's Role in the Movement.* The role of women in the movement remains starkly and troublingly absent from commemoration narratives even 50 years beyond the traditionally accepted end of the civil rights era. The intersectional nature African American women's identities combined with the movement's history of sexism complicates their representations in media and differentiates their commemorations from those of male movement icons.<sup>28</sup> Movement sexism denied female rights pioneers the national spot light. Male leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., stymied recognition of women like Baker despite her role as the SCLC's first executive director.<sup>29</sup> Similar treatment by male Montgomery leaders prohibited Rosa Parks from publicly addressing the first mass meeting following her December 1955 arrest.<sup>30</sup> Instead, the majority of women served—like Baker and Parks did—as "bridge leaders" who, unseen by the cameras, mobilized individuals into local networks stretching across a number of rights organizations and causes.<sup>31</sup> As bell hooks explains, "unlike the black male preacher whose speech was to be heard, who was to be listened to, whose words were to be remembered, the voices of black women—giving orders, making threats, fussing—could be tuned out, could become a kind of background music, audible but not acknowledged

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<sup>28</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *Chicago Legal Forum*, (1989): 140. Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* ed. Zillah Eisenstien (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979). Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Engagement*, 2nd Ed., (New York, Routledge, 2000), 7

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 172-192. Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, "The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 142-145.

<sup>31</sup> Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? : African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36.

as significant speech."<sup>32</sup> This placement of males as the "ones to be heard" bred an emphasis on electoral politics and legal status of African Americans as opposed to causes—such as welfare reform—championed by women activists.<sup>33</sup> No case study examined in this analysis revealed Black or dominant press engagement with these types of issues. Even during March on Washington commemorations, the most substantial reflection on American race relations, assessments and commemorations remain decidedly grounded in measures of political equality, statistical disparities in achievement, and progress toward a nationally recognized "Dream" that neglects the specific needs of women of color.

As Todd Gitlin notes, news coverage of social movements tends to "divide movements into legitimate main acts and illegitimate sideshows, so that these distinctions appear 'natural' matters of 'common sense.'"<sup>34</sup> With respect to the civil rights movement, gender fuels "common sense" distinctions on three fronts: 1.) initial movement narratives rooted in the sexist climate of the 1950s excluded women from the "legitimate main act" before discourses even reached news media outlets and 2.) once in the mediated realm, news media framing practices further marginalized female movement actors, and 3.) relegation of women to crucial, yet "feminized" activities such as phone calls, secretarial

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<sup>32</sup> bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, (Boston, South End Press, 1989), 6.

<sup>33</sup> Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women's Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia," *Gender & History*, Vol 11, No. 1, (April 1999): 113-144, Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina, 1940-1970* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), Laurie B. Green, "Challenging the Civil Rights Narrative: Women, Gender, and the Politics of Protection," in *Civil Rights History From the Ground Up: Local Struggles, A National Movement*, edited by Emilye Crosby, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2011. pgs. 52-80.

<sup>34</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and The Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 6.

work, feeding and housing prominent movement leaders, and/or behind the scenes event planning.<sup>35</sup>

Both scholars and popular media have begun to resurrect the stories of female movement participants absent from initial master narratives. Janet Theoharis illustrates how the gendered "matriarchal" characterizations of Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King put forth by the movement during the 1950s and 1960s still dominated collective memory at the time of each woman's death despite fifty years of scholarship to contradict those uni-dimensional personas.<sup>36</sup> Katherine Nasstrom chronicles the erasing of women from historical memory in a study about a 1946 voter registration drive in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>37</sup> While initial news coverage highlighted the drive's female rights leaders, newspaper commemorations and scholarly accounts penned after 1946 focused on male electoral gains and racial harmony within the city of Atlanta, effectively erasing contributions of local female participants from the narrative.<sup>38</sup> By the 1970s, Nasstrom argues, scholars and news outlets had facilitated a "near complete reversal in the meaning of the voter registration drive of 1946" in historical memory.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, eds. Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), *Women, Men, and News: Divided and Disconnected in the News Media Landscape*, eds. Paula Poindexter, Sharon Meraz, Amy Schmitz Weiss (New York: Routledge, 2008), *News, Gender, and Power*: edited by Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston, and Stuart Allan, (New York, Routledge, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, "Accidental Matriarchs and Beautiful Helpmates: Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, and the Memorialization of the Civil Rights Movement" in *Civil Rights History From the Ground Up: Local Struggles, A National Movement*, edited by Emilye Crosby, Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2011 pgs 385-418.

<sup>37</sup> Nasstrom, "Down to Now."

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-135.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Because commemorations build upon past narratives for their authority, the three-fold exclusion of women outlined above persists in contemporary media reflections on the movement. Indeed, movement women routinely disappear from commemorative news coverage or, as with Parks and King, are commemorated in highly gendered ways by news organizations. A comparative examination of how both dominant and Black presses produce and circulate historical memories surrounding female movement icons such as Rosa Parks and Ella Baker constitutes an important site for studying how media treat civil rights heroines. Fruitful research questions in this arena might include: What prompts commemorative news coverage of these civil rights heroines? What facets of these women's lives and histories of political activism do these newspaper frames include? What do these newspapers define as each woman's lasting contribution to civil rights? Exploring news coverage of these women also tests how news media, bound to certain journalistic norms and conventions, tell two different types of stories. Parks represents one of the most universally mentioned movement women, but little is known about the details of her life. Baker's legacy remains almost wholly neglected despite her contributions to myriad civil rights causes. Can news media—both African American and dominant—articulate women's "bridgework" contributions while working within established news routines that tend to favor specific events and nationally recognized leaders? How might news routines delimit the story of movement women that can be told? What are the implications of these practices for collective memories about women in the movement?

*The Northern Civil Rights Front.* Northern civil rights struggles represent one of the most forgotten and under examined components of the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. This exclusion permeates both academic scholarship and mediated commemoration. Often, Northern campaigns become bundled with displays and narratives of Black Power in ways that minimize the multifaceted nature of Northern movements. Milwaukee activists' blend of Roman Catholic doctrine, Dr. King's non-violence, Black Power ideology, their own "not-violence" mantra, and NAACP backing illustrates this multifaceted nature well. Further investigations into Northern activism will likely yield similar variance in and rearticulations of contemporary approaches. A second meaningful aspect of Northern civil rights contributions ripe for examination lies in the distinct similarities between struggles over "racialized" urban space in the 1960s and a resurgence of those same tensions today in Baltimore, Ferguson, Missouri, New York, and elsewhere. Reflection on outcomes and mediated responses to Northern civil rights movements may prove highly instructive for understanding, chronicling, and solving contemporary race based challenges and tensions. Our society has largely yet to address the Northern front's lessons and lingering racisms. Because of this, both scholars and media creators would do well to understand *why* we—perhaps intentionally—forget these historical moments and what that forgetting denotes about both our society's and our media's capacities for dealing with race.

*Representations of "Whiteness" in Civil Rights Discourse.* Comments made by actor/comedian Chris Rock in a November 2014 *Vulture* interview succinctly illustrate

the importance of understanding how "whiteness" is portrayed in mediated civil rights discourse:

**Reporter: What would you do in Ferguson that a standard reporter wouldn't?**

Rock: I'd do a special on race, but I'd have no black people.

**Reporter: Well, that would be much more revealing.**

Rock: Yes, that would be an event. Here's the thing. When we talk about race relations in America or racial progress, it's all nonsense. There are no race relations. White people were crazy. Now they're not as crazy. To say that black people have made progress would be to say they deserve what happened to them before.

**Reporter: Right. It's ridiculous.**

Rock: So, to say Obama is progress is saying that he's the first black person that is qualified to be president. That's not black progress. That's white progress. There's been black people qualified to be president for hundreds of years... There have been smart, educated, beautiful, polite black children for hundreds of years. The advantage that my children have is that my children are encountering the nicest white people that America has ever produced. Let's hope America keeps producing nicer white people.<sup>40</sup>

While somewhat audacious, Rock's commentary inverts traditional parameters for discussing race and shifts understandings of what steps constitute productive avenues toward racial progress. In some ways, Rock is unpacking society's "possessive investment in whiteness." In civil rights commemorations, namely those present in dominant media, white segregationist figures and violent white counterdemonstrators receive minimal attention. When dominant media addressed "whiteness" in this analysis, these outlets focused on several troubling phenomena: 1.) forgiveness of former segregationist officials such as Alabama Governor George Wallace, Selma Mayor Joseph Smitherman, and Alabama State Troopers; 2.) maintaining the anonymity of violent white counterdemonstrators by using terms like "mobs," "crowds," and "groups" despite the fact that white counterdemonstrators often initiated violent behavior, and 3.) perpetuating colorblind racist rhetoric that places blame for inequality on victims as opposed to the

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<sup>40</sup> Chris Rock, interview by Frank Rich, *Vulture Magazine*, November 30, 2014.

white majority or national, hegemonic systems of oppression. The above trend is a startling reminder of the ways dominant media outlets often reify "white-oriented progress narratives" in favor of "a paltry type of multiculturalism in the service of national unity."<sup>41</sup>

*Expansion Beyond a Black/White Binary.*

Both scholarship about and media renderings of the civil rights movement too often limit their treatments to a binary juxtaposition of "Black and white." Relegating discussions of the movement to this paradigm obscures the contributions of participants from other marginalized groups and overlooks the impact the movement had on social justice efforts such as the Chicano Movement, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer fights for equality, and women's movement. While some scholars have drawn connections among and between the movement and tangential struggles against injustice, more work in this realm is desperately necessary.<sup>42</sup> Mike Huckabee's recent choice to invoke the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. in his call for civil rights era-esque resistance to the legalization of gay marriage in the United States illustrates the ubiquity of the movement's legacy as a model for "change."<sup>43</sup> An especially fruitful arena for study lies in examination of how ethnic media outside of the African American press

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<sup>41</sup> Squires, *The Post Racial Mystique*, 204-205.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Delgado, "Four Reservations on Civil Rights Reasoning by Analogy: The Case of Latinos and Other Black Groups," *Columbia Law Review* 112, No. 7 (2012): 1883-1915, Sonia Song Ha Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), Frank Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), among others.

<sup>43</sup> No author listed, "Mike Huckabee invokes Martin Luther King to Criticize Same Sex Marriage," *The Guardian*, June 28, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/28/mike-huckabee-predicts-gay-marriage-ruling-will-prompt-civil-disobedience>.



covered the movement and its goals, actors, impacts, and legacies. Catherine Squires' *Dispatches from the Color Line: The Press and Multiracial America* is one guide such a study might use to meaningfully incorporate and analyze multiple presses at a variety of historical moments.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, popular media outlets of all varieties could expand their commemorative content by incorporating viewpoints and experiences from many racial groups and other marginalized communities.

*Digital Media and Commemoration.* As media technologies change, so does the process through which the movement commemorations are constructed and circulated. This study did not incorporate digital or new media forms in its analysis, however, assessing how digital media forums—which are often presumed to open up new spaces for marginalized populations—represents an important arena for scholars of civil rights and memory. Because "new media" content relies heavily on "old media" narratives for information, understanding which, if any, old media representations migrate online is another key to recognizing forms future civil rights commemoration will take. Such a study might compare major, "go to" websites for historical information like Wikipedia, the Library of Congress website, and History.com with content from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) website, the Root.com, or Civil Rights Movement Veterans.org. Researchers would do well to examine differences between old and new media accounts of civil rights discourse, assess how, if at all, prominent Internet websites may open new spaces for "unofficial memories" or

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<sup>44</sup> Catherine Squires, *Dispatches from the Color Line*.

previously marginalized civil rights accounts, actors, and events, or work to determine the order in which websites are retrieved by a Google search for "civil rights movement."

### **Lessons for the Present: Lasting Impacts of Mediated Civil Rights Commemoration**

As American society and the media outlets that serve as its voices confront yet another racially motivated murder—this time of nine African Americans in a historic church in Charleston, South Carolina—the specter of the civil rights movement and the meanings we as a nation have cultivated about it again reside at the forefront of American discourse. The undeniable prevalence of civil rights era legacies in mediated interpretations of racial tensions here and now add renewed urgency to investigation of civil rights collective memory. In times of national turmoil, media outlets play an especially important role as "crucial fields for the definition of social meaning—partially contested zones in which the hegemonic ideology meets its partial challenges and then adapts" during<sup>45</sup> This study has shown how even during these critical moments of cultural meaning-making:

cultural industries, including the news organizations, produce self-contradictory artifacts, balancing here, absorbing there, framing and excluding, and disparaging, working in complicated ways to manage and contain cultural resistance, to turn it to use as commodity and to tame and isolate intractable movements and ideas.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time respected media outlets such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* are characterizing Black Lives Matter demonstrations as a "modern civil rights movement," "today's civil rights movement," or a "21st century civil rights movement," these outlets are enabling the legacy of one of the most

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<sup>45</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 292.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

substantial moments in American history to be manipulated in ways aimed at reinstating the very same interpretations of the American racial landscape the movement itself sought to rewrite.<sup>47</sup> As W.E.B. DuBois and Michael Kammen have demonstrated with respect to collective remembrances surrounding the Civil War, neglecting to remember, or perhaps choosing to forget, allows the specters of past injustice to surface again, only slightly modified. Interestingly, the Confederate Flag, a racist symbol dating back to that antebellum era, comprises a key component of contemporary struggles in Charleston and represents a microcosm our nation's inability to confront its racist past. Failure to associate the United States' long history of horrific racial violence with lingering inequality in our own time engenders "partial amnesia" at a juncture when our history's legacies and lessons prove particularly apropos.<sup>48</sup>

The "production and exchange" of cultural meanings about race in America and the "frameworks of interpretation" surrounding the civil rights movement and other national symbols of social change continue to pervade America's discursive landscape.<sup>49</sup> As Hall and many other scholars have shown, media play an integral role in "creating, reflecting, and perpetuating" dominant cultural narratives about race.<sup>50</sup> This study illustrated that the Black press, and more rarely the dominant press, *can* produce nuanced,

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<sup>47</sup> Jay Caspian Kang, "Our Demand is Simple: Stop Killing Us," *New York Times*, May 4, 2015, Danielle Allen, A new civil rights movement is stirring, but it doesn't need an MLK, *Washington Post*, May 11, 2015, and Matt Pearce, "Modern civil rights movement expands on classic methods," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1992). See also, Michael Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History," in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel L. Schacter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction," *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall (London, Sage Publications, 1997), 2-6.

<sup>50</sup> Hall, *Race, Culture, and Communications*, "14-15.

informed discussions about race. However, on the whole, these mediated discourses fell short. Media outlets must challenge themselves to productively reinvestigate and rearticulate meanings about our society's racial past in order to move toward achievement of universal equality. To claim that they work in the public interest, media need to incorporate and serve all publics—not just dominant ones. These outlets have a unique opportunity to rearticulate the fragmented landscape of American collective memory about civil rights *in our current moment*—a moment when a so-called "21st century civil rights movement" is pushing the boundaries of "acceptable" discourse about American race relations. Who will be the Ella Bakers, A. Philip Randolphs, Claudette Colvins, and Jimmie Lee Jacksons of our time? We must preserve their contributions in the canons of public memory now so they will not be buried in the past when our society needs them most in the future.

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