The Rhetoric of Protests in Los Angeles Local News 1965-2014

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Los Angeles is a diverse city made up of many minority communities; however, LA’s rich diversity may also be the source of its periodic conflicts. LA has a long history of dissent with some of the major protest movements taking place in LA’s African American communities. One of the most infamous in our nation’s history took place in LA in 1965, when the city erupted into chaos during a period often referred to as the Watts riots or Watts rebellion. Almost thirty years later, in 1992, LA was once again the scene of a rebellion that received national news coverage. This occurred in the aftermath of the acquittal of the officers accused in the beating of Rodney King. It has been over twenty years since the 1992 rebellion, and recently LA has experienced additional civil unrest. In 2014 protesters marched the streets of LA once more, this time to protest police shootings. Each of these protests was a reaction to some kind of conflict between white police officers and young black men. With each protest in the city, the Los Angeles Police Department is called to the scene, at times resulting in conflicts that may end in violence. When police and protesters collide, the media often narrates the events to the public. This paper seeks to analyze the rhetoric of two local Los Angeles newspapers: the Los Angeles Times, a widely circulated newspaper, and the Los Angeles Sentinel, a smaller newspaper with a targeted African American readership. In this analysis, I will look at the language used to characterize protesters and the framing of the articles during three major LA uprisings: the 1965 Watts rebellion, the 1992 uprising, and the recent 2014 protests. By analyzing the rhetoric used in the three protest movements, I aim to better understand the underlying ideology of each newspaper. Although my study reveals that the Los Angeles Times tends to reify the status quo, there have also been examples of the Times reporter questioning the prevailing social views. The Los Angeles Sentinel, however, consistently gives credence
to the grievances of the African American community, providing greater context for each incident.

While not many scholars have examined the work of the smaller *Sentinel*, a long history of scholars have documented and analyzed the journalism of the *Los Angeles Times*. Mike Davis, who negatively portrays the newspaper and its history in *City of Quartz*, is critical of much of the *Times* coverage of issues taking place in minority communities. Davis criticizes the newspaper’s 1975 retrospective assessment of the Watts uprising; quoting a reporter who described the black community as a dying “Black ghetto,” Davis describes the *Times* as out of touch: “Seen from a perspective fifteen years further on, it is clear that the *Times*, and other contemporary observers, did not fully appreciate the complexity of what was happening in South Central Los Angeles” (302). For Davis, the *Times* is a mega cooperate machine crushing smaller newspapers in its path—a “Goliath, which, before anti-trust laws prevented it from doing so, routinely squashed competition by buying up smaller regional newspapers” (139). Tracking the evolution of the *Times* and its efforts to stay in power, Davis marks the newspaper’s conscious shift in the 1960s toward liberalism in order to appeal to the market of college-educated readers. Davis follows the *Times* through to its contemporary struggles to maintain its liberal audience, while also capitalizing on readers in more affluent communities (140). This struggle for a broader readership could influence the way the *Times* frames its coverage of protest movements. However, it is important to note that the *Times* was twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize for spot coverage of LA’s major riots, once for the 1965 Watts rebellion and again for the 1992 uprising. The Pulitzer Prize was awarded for “balanced” and “comprehensive” coverage (Shaw). Clearly not everyone shares Mike Davis’s perspective; the Pulitzer Prize shows that the *Times* is widely respected within the journalistic community. Despite the Pulitzer’s recognition, other scholars have been critical of the *Times* coverage of race relations in LA. In an analysis of the *Times* ten year anniversary coverage of the 1992 uprising, Jane L. Twomey criticizes the newspaper’s efforts to use the memories of the “riots” to support current hegemonic hierarchies by using memories of the past to explain away the city’s current economic and social issues. Twomey claims that in multiple articles the
*Times* creates a narrative about Korean-Black racial tensions in order to support the city’s current power structure: “framing current race relations in the city as the result of Korean-Black animosity, white social and economic interests would be protected” (90). Both of these scholars argue that its corporate interests influence the *Times* and that its coverage ultimately serves to uphold the status quo in the city, which is White hegemony.

**The Media Influence on Public Perception**

Many scholars have documented the influence the news media has on public perception (e.g. Allen et al.; Dower & Zawilski). We often think of news media as a neutral force merely delivering facts about events to an audience; however, research suggests that the media does much more than that, transmitting and reinforcing cultural norms of the dominant ideology for its audience. According to one study of media consumption, research indicates that the media serves as a tool for socializing groups, noting that media becomes “an important tool of cultural transmission that [is] employed by corporations and the state to teach individuals about the hegemonic values of the state, interpersonal relationships, individual and collective identities, and the identities of ‘the other(s)’” (Dowler and Zawalski 195). This indicates that the media is not a neutral purveyor of information, but rather a powerful force in shaping citizens’ views and beliefs.

Often, the media transmits ideology through the framing of a news story. Framing can be the news angle used to give context to a story, often referred to as the “spin” on the story (Campbell et al. 164). According to Barbara Barnett, framing may also refer to the organization of a story: what elements are emphasized, and how the news story/article makes sense of a series of events (18). Research of political news coverage has indicated that framing in or out of a larger context can influence the audience’s views greatly; an issue may be presented as a single isolated episode, or it may be discussed as a part of a larger social issue (Allen et al. 507). The framing can reinforce stereotypes and dominant ideologies and privilege certain groups and their
agendas (Barnett 18). Thus, the media creates public “knowledge” through the framing of a news story.

In the case of articles and reports specifically about protests, existing research indicates that the news media routinely sways public perception of protesters as positive or negative; the way the media chooses to frame protests is often the deciding factor in whether the public views a protest as legitimate or illegitimate (Campbell et al. 163). Public support is important to a protest movement because in order to enact real social change, the movement must have mass public support. According to Ana, López, and Munguía, television news reports of the attack on marchers in Selma, Alabama in 1965, “reversed national opinion and eroded political opposition to the Voting Rights Act” (70). The video footage of police beating peaceful marchers in Selma was so shocking to the national audience, it garnered support for the movement. While their example depicts the protesters as heroic, all too often, according to Ana, López, and Munguía, protesters have been vilified. The media’s choice of what to include and what to leave out influences the public’s acceptance or rejection of a protest movement.

Past analyses have indicated that local news has a particularly strong impact on public perception. Local news remains the dominant media source for Americans, with a much larger total audience than that of national news (Allen et al. 507). Local news is particularly important to the community it serves, as it has a significant impact on citizens’ political views. According to Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckman, local news focuses predominantly on crime and violence because it makes for low cost, entertaining news (758). Local crime news tends to reinforce minority stereotypes among white viewers who live in homogenous white neighborhoods, but the same news has little influence on the views of those living in heterogeneous neighborhoods (Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckman 770). Therefore, the media may indoctrinate white viewers, who do not have regular physical contact with minorities, into believing stereotypes because they have little real life experience to use as a frame of reference. Other studies have suggested that the media is responsible for the framing of minority stereotypes on prime-time news (Ana, López, and Munguía 70). While not every protest is related to race, many protests emerge from within marginalized, often minority-
dominant communities. These studies suggest that if protesters are framed as perpetrators of social disorder or even criminals, viewers who have little contact with that community are likely to absorb those stereotypes into their ideology. This makes the news coverage particularly important to protest movements, which rely on public support outside of their immediate community in order to enact policy changes. This impact would be of particular importance in an ethnically diverse city such as Los Angeles, which is home to many different minority groups.

Parameters of the Study

While some studies have looked at national news coverage of protests in Los Angeles, few have focused on the local newspaper coverage (Ana, López, and Munguía; Campbell et al.). In examining print media, I have been able to access archives dating back to the 1965 Watts rebellion from two local newspapers: the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Sentinel. The Los Angeles Times has been in existence since 1881 and is one of the nation’s most widely circulated papers, with an audience of 4.1 million readers weekly; also, as of 2006, 61% of those daily readers were white ("Circulation and Readership"). The Los Angeles Sentinel is a weekly newspaper and a self-described African American paper that “puts emphasis on issues concerning the African-American community and its readers" (Los Angeles Sentinel). The Sentinel was founded in 1933 and currently has more than 125,000 readers. I specifically choose these two newspapers because, first, they have both been in existence for all three events I will focus on, and second, they have two very different audiences. The Times is a mainstream newspaper, whereas the Sentinel is a smaller paper that specifically serves a minority community. The three protests I am analyzing are conflicts largely between Los Angeles’s African American community and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD); therefore, looking at an African American newspaper provides a unique opportunity to analyze differences in coverage when compared to the more mainstream Times.

I chose to conduct a qualitative textual analysis and a genre analysis to look at patterns in framing, narrative, and other rhetorical functions of the text. While
newspaper articles convey most of the narrative through the body of the paragraph, the title accompanying the article also has an important function; it draws in the reader’s interest and informs the reader about the article’s topic. These are important elements to analyze because they give the reader the first impression of the story and can be tools to transmit the underlying ideological framework at play. Within the journalism genre, writers often follow several conventions, revealing the rhetorical strategies shaping an article. In addition to the title, articles will contain a lead sentence at the very beginning. The purpose of the lead is to grab the reader’s attention, explain the main point of the story, and include the basic facts such as: who, what, when, where (Cappon 23). Through a genre analysis, this paper seeks to examine what ideologies are reinforced in the various articles reviewed.

Research Criteria

To examine the rhetoric of the two local newspapers, I selected articles covering each of the three protests. I created a few criteria when selecting articles. First, the articles had to appear in the local editions of each newspaper; second, they had to directly report on actions taking place during the protests (I was interested in the direct coverage of the protests). The third criteria I chose were to limit my analysis to articles that were published within two weeks of the initial event because I wanted to analyze the immediacy of the journalistic response.

Findings

1965 Watts Rebellion

The Watts rebellion remains one of Los Angeles’s, and the nation’s, most iconic uprisings. It started on August 11, 1965 when a young black man, Marquette Frye, was pulled over by highway patrol on suspicion of drunk driving (Upton and Rucker 367). Sources conflict on what exactly took place between the two officers and Frye, but it is clear that as the incident with Frye and his family took place, a crowd began to form; at one point, the officers called for back up. The crowd began throwing rocks and bottles at police; the situation got out of the officer’s control and soon hundreds of residents of
Watts were openly challenging law enforcement (Saul 149). Before long, California’s National Guard was called in to put an end to the unrest. Many members of the Watts community claimed police brutality was to blame, while law enforcement laid blame on a small group of disobedient citizens within the black community. By analyzing the news coverage from the days following the riots, we can see how our view of history is shaped through the rhetoric and framing the media uses. In my analysis of the Watts rebellion, I found that the two newspapers had startling differences in framing. Rhetorically, the papers make two very different arguments about the protests, representing fundamentally different ideologies.

In my analysis of the *Times*, beginning with the titles used, I found that the articles fitting my criteria focused heavily on the violence and destruction caused by the riots. One such title emphasizes the loss of life the rebellion caused and connects that violence to race: “Negro Riots Rage on: Death Toll 25: 21,000 Troops, Police Wage Guerrilla War: 8 p.m. Curfew Invoked” (Berman). This militaristic rhetoric appears throughout the *Times* coverage. Following this pattern, the leads tend to invoke war imagery. Within the journalism genre, the lead is meant to state the article’s main point; thus, it would seem that the *Times* considers the damage to property and the racial makeup of the rioters to be the most significant fact about them. For example, one article leads with the following description: “The guerrilla war of south Los Angeles claimed its 25th victim Saturday night as bands of armed Negro looters took to the streets and snipers defied the efforts of 21,000 national guardsmen and law officers to bring peace to the area” (Berman). The rhetoric is reminiscent of 1960s Vietnam War coverage, pitting one side as the protectors of civil order, and the other as an enemy force. The use of language such as, “bands of Negro looters,” brings to mind the image of an unstoppable enemy. The war rhetoric emphasizes racial tensions and property destructions, generating images of an unstoppable enemy in the minds of readers. The articles also employ the same militaristic rhetoric in the body of many of the articles. Frequently the crowds were labeled “Negro rioters,” “Negro mobs,” or “Negro youths” as in this example: “Rioters were reportedly firing guns at policemen and civilians as bands of Negro youths and adults roamed the turbulent neighborhoods” (McCurdy and
Berman). The use of the term “bands” of protesters is reminiscent of guerrilla warfare, where the enemy is not one unified army, but is hiding everywhere. The rebellion is frequently described as an unstoppable force: “Violence was mushrooming out over an ever-increasing area of the city Thursday night” (Hartt). These Times articles all refer to the uprising as a “riot,” which is rhetorically significant because the word riot connotes violence and vandalism. The framing of the stories focuses on the violence and connects it to race, creating an association between the black community and violence. In all these articles, only one, “Anatomy of a Riot: Minor Incident Ignited Violence” (Davis), explains what started the unrest. This article does explain the police arrest of the Frye brothers, which ignited the community uprising; however, the article, as its title suggests, treats the uprising as a gross overreaction to a minor incident. While this may very well have been the case, this article and the other Times articles fail to place the crowd’s frustration in a larger context or explain that the incident may have been a part of a pattern. These articles seem to fall into the category of sensationalized news. While the information may be accurately reported, it seems as though its focus is on shock value rather than information.

While all the Times articles fall into the more sensationalist crime-reporting genre, the Sentinel articles do not fall into any one easily identifiable genre. The articles cover a variety of topics related to the rebellion. Beginning with the titles, my research found that none of the 1965 Sentinel articles focus on the destruction. Two of the article’s titles call attention to factors responsible for sparking the rebellion—one title focuses on the initial police incident involving the Frye brothers: “Watts Brothers Tell Incident That Triggered Riot” (Los Angeles Sentinel). The article goes on to describe the incident that triggered the uprising. Told almost entirely from the brothers’ perspective, it focuses on the direct start of the riot; the entire article covers the Frye brothers’ story about their arrest, which turned violent. The family and the community are the central focus of the article. Another article title addresses an underlying issue that was a possible cause of the unrest: “Poverty: An Underlying Factor” (Lane). The article describes in detail how poverty influenced the rioters: “Besides the ever-stated pangs of anger which have been long smoldering in some areas of the Los Angeles Negro community against the police
department, there is another underlying spark behind the riots which shook this city to its foundations. That hidden factor is poverty” (Lane). Here, the rebellion is framed as the product of a long standing issue, not the outcome of one incident between police and an African American motorist.

Similar to the articles from the *Times*, the *Sentinel* uses the word “riot” to describe the rebellion; however, in contrast to the *Times*, the emphasis is not on the destruction, but rather on the reasons for the rioters’ actions. These titles are less shocking than the *Times* titles because their focus is not on the vast size of the riot or how many were killed. Like the titles, the leads do not center on one consistent topic; they tend to concentrate on different possible causes. One article leads with a criticism of LAPD’s handling of the riot: “Chief William H. Parker and his Los Angeles Police Department can take lessons from Chief William J. Mooney and his Long Beach Police Department on how to quell a riot, how to save lives, and how to project an image conducive to soothing the rage of a minority group” (Pleasant). This lead contains clear criticism of the LAPD’s handling of the rebellion and gives specific details of what the department needs to work on. By claiming the LAPD could learn from Long Beach Police Department’s interactions with a minority community, the lead implies the LAPD does not interact well with the African American community. These articles provide different possible causes for why the rebellion started in the first place. The articles also tend to explore possible reasons for the riot, rather than employing the war/destruction framing used in the body of the *Times* articles, though the *Sentinel* articles do also mention violence and looting. The *Sentinel* articles cover a variety of issues. I found that all the articles manage to frame the rebellion in a different way; they give a variety of possible causes for the rebellion, none of which are mutually exclusive. Given the *Sentinel*’s commitment to serving the African American community, who were the most affected by the rebellion, it is no surprise that the articles covering it would want to give readers some context for what they were experiencing. These residents would likely crave information on the status of the rebellion and the causes behind the rebellion, rather than the destruction, which they would have been able to see for themselves as it was taking place in mostly African American communities.
After comparing the various components of the *Times* and the *Sentinel* coverage of the 1965 uprising, I came to the conclusion that the *Times* articles tend to fit well into the genre of crime news, which is common to local news (Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckman). The war rhetoric and the emphasis on property destruction and violence reinforced a black/white binary, whereas the *Sentinel* articles emphasized the grievances of the African American community. Therefore, the *Sentinel* articles do not fit the genre of crime reporting that is so prevalent in local news. The difference in reporting style and genre at the two papers signals a difference in ideology. Given the time period, with the civil rights movement taking place, the issues of the day likely influenced both organizations. The *Times* ideology supports the status quo through the law and order ideology they project and the descriptions of the protesters as an enemy force, depicting them as enemies to civil order. The *Sentinel*, in contrast, projects a community ideology; the paper focuses on the reasons for the rebellion, emphasizing a need for change in the community.

1992 Uprising

Fast forward almost thirty years, and Los Angeles found itself in the midst of another major rebellion, which, like the Watts rebellion, was also ignited by an incident between an African American motorist and a LAPD officer. The “riots,” as they are commonly referred to, began April 29, 1992 following the court case in which a Simi Valley jury declared a verdict of not guilty in the case of the officers involved in Rodney King’s beating (Saul 156). What made this verdict particularly outrageous to many in the community was the fact that the beating had been captured on videotape (Upton and Rucker 377). Unlike the Watts case, the video evidence created more widespread support throughout LA for King to be viewed as a victim. Aside from anger over the verdict, scholars argue that other issues contributed to the unrest, such as a history of racial profiling and the use of excessive force by the LAPD (Upton and Rucker 377). There was also high unemployment in Los Angeles’s black communities: “Reaganomics hit the lower-class areas of Los Angeles hard, especially the demographic of young black men” (Upton and Rucker 377). Most scholars agree that the uprising was not
caused by the jury verdict alone, but that multiple factors created a perfect storm of unrest within the community, and the Rodney King verdict merely acted as the spark that ignited the uprising (Upton and Rucker; Saul).

In many ways, the *Times* and *Sentinel* articles from the 1992 uprising following the jury decision in the beating of Rodney King adhere to the same patterns as the coverage from the 1965 uprising. I discovered that many of the 1992 *Times* articles used similar framing methods as they did in the 1965 articles, but there were also important differences. My research found that many of the article titles focus on the looting, arson, and violence following the not guilty verdict, such as “Looting and Fires Ravage L.A. 23 Dead, 572 Injured; 1,000 Blazes Reported Unrest: Troops Begin Deployment and a Dusk-to-Dawn Curfew is Clamped in the Second Day of Violence” (Braxton and Newton). Again, war rhetoric is at play, with the use of the words “troops” and the death toll prominently featured. This article emphasizes the violence, damage, and police action to deter the rioting. The leads also tend to focus on the chaos the city experienced. Most leads mention violence, rioting, fires, or looting: “At the height of the recent riots, when fires were raging uncontrolled and looters were taking just about whatever struck their fancy, merchants throughout Los Angeles raced to preserve what they could of their piece of the American dream” (Lazzareschi). The rhetoric used to depict the threat to local businesses, which was also a prominent feature in the *Times* 1965 articles, portrays the protesters as attacking capitalism itself. The reference to the protesters stealing the “American dream” frames them as un-American. Most of the *Times* leads create a criminal-versus-victim binary in the leads: while it is correct that starting fires and looting are criminal acts, coverage of the reasons why the community felt the need to riot might make protesters seem less deviant. Given the leads of the *Times* articles, it is no surprise that the body of most the articles focus heavily on the violence and looting. The content of most of the articles is restricted to descriptions of property damage and violence, highlighting sentences such as, “At least three people from South Los Angeles County died in the violence” (Blume) and “Downtown, a racially mixed group of protesters massed outside Parker Center, eventually hurling rocks and setting fire to a small kiosk” (Lacey and Hubler). The *Times* sensationalizes the protests
when the coverage focuses so heavily on the physical damage caused by the uprising; however, unlike the 1965 coverage, in which all the articles fit into the crime news genre, the *Times* does offer some articles that provide greater context for the uprising.

While most of the articles offer very little change from the 1965 collection, there are a few articles that don’t fall into the pattern. One article titled, “Verdicts Greeted with Outrage and Disbelief Reaction: Many Cite Videotape of Beating and Ask How Jury Could Acquit Officers. A Few Voice Satisfaction” (Wallace and Ferrell), ties the emotion felt in L.A. to the trial. The mention of the video of the beating gives a broader perspective to protesters’ frustrations. Giving a more comprehensive background makes the uprising more understandable, garnering greater sympathy from the readers. Another article leads by connecting the trial to the national issue of police brutality: “Four Los Angeles police officers won acquittals Wednesday in their trial for the beating of black motorist Rodney G. King, igniting renewed outrage over a racially charged case that had triggered a national debate on police brutality” (Serrano and Wilkinson). Here, by using the phrase “renewed outrage,” the reporters make it clear that this is not an isolated incident, but that it is part of a nationwide issue that existed before the trial verdicts. The articles that do not fit the crime news genre contain varied reactions from the community. The article goes on to focus on the jury decision and describes some of the issues surrounding the trial, including the almost all-white jury and the secrecy during the trial (Serrano and Wilkinson). The increased variation in coverage may be due to the fact that the Rodney King case included video evidence of the beating, and the tape created more public support than the Frye case had in 1965. This meant the public support stretched beyond the African American community and created more widespread outrage throughout L.A.

The *Sentinel*, as with its 1965 coverage, offers more diverse subject matter and viewpoints in its coverage of the 1992 uprising. One article title focuses on the financial cost of the damage caused by looting: “Inglewood Reports $10 Million in Damages Due to Recent Rioting.” LA residents reading these titles would know that Inglewood is a predominantly lower income African American community. Concentrating on that community is logical considering the *Sentinel’s* target audience is predominately African
American. The *Sentinel* also highlights positive actions during the rebellion within the minority community; for example one article is titled: “Truck Driver’s Beating Shows Mob Cruelty; Rescue Shows Kindness.” By concentrating on those who remained peaceful, the reporter sets them in contrast to the rioters and shows that not all protests were violent. Peace and violence are contrasted with one another, creating a more complex picture of the community by showing the mixed reactions of individuals. The leads also create a mixed picture of the riots. The leads focus less on the violence; the destruction to the city is mentioned, but in connection to outrage over the trial outcome: “The large, chanting crowd stood by shouting, ‘Rodney King, Rodney King, Rodney King,’ as they overturned a police car on the downtown urban street not far from City Hall” (Dungee). Like the titles of these articles, the leads have a tendency to focus more on how the community has been affected and what the grievances of the community are. The articles tend to provide context for the uprising. Most of the articles mention the Rodney King case: “And last Wednesday they marched into the East Ventura County Courthouse and delivered what many are calling a stunning blow to a dwindling belief in the American justice system (Shifflett). The articles mention violence and looting, but most provide background on the frustration the community felt: “This sense of futility has been mounting for years in South Central as the recession has taken its toll and as case after case against police and LA’s citizenry who commit crimes against Blacks have ended with little justice for African-Americans” (Mitchell). These articles do not fit the genre of local crime news because they tend to provide a more comprehensive view of the violence and destruction by linking it to underlying causes.

Compared to the coverage from 1965, the *Sentinel’s* news coverage remains relatively unchanged. The paper continues to report on a variety of possible causes for the uprising and focuses on the effect on the local African American communities. While the *Sentinel* remained consistent, the *Times* coverage changed somewhat over the years. Many of the articles continue to sensationalize the violence and destruction, but some of the articles provide a more comprehensive view of the community’s reactions. With the African American communities in LA facing high unemployment, the *Sentinel’s* focus on the context and underlying reasons for the uprising supports its community
ideology. Just as in 1965, the Sentinel seeks to support and improve the lives of the community of which they are a part. The Times has a less consistent ideology. For the most part, these articles fit within the law and order ideology, yet some of the articles do present a more complex and multifaceted view of the issues. This is likely because of the cross-section of public support in the Rodney King case, as well as a shared understanding of the socioeconomic inequalities many minority communities were facing at the time. In contrast, in the more recent 2014 protests, which were in reaction to a grand jury decision outside of LA, there was much less community support for the protesters within LA. In this recent case, most LA residents were far removed from whatever the socioeconomic situation is in Ferguson, Missouri, where the incident took place, and there was no videotape to provide evidence. These factors seem to have influenced the way the Times reported on the LA protests that were held in reaction to Ferguson.

2014 Protests

In November 2014, L.A. found itself experiencing yet another massive protest linked to a jury decision involving a young black man and a white police officer. This case was different than the 1965 and 1992 uprisings in that the trial and incident were not based in LA. However, there had been several similar shootings around the country, including one in LA, during the same time period. The protests were sparked by the decision of a grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri, not to indictment a Ferguson police officer in the shooting death of Michael Brown, an unarmed, black 18-year-old man (Bihm). The announcement led to protests in Ferguson and around the nation, including several in Los Angeles, California.

Many of the Times articles had titles that centered on the LAPD's actions, such as “183 Arrested During Ferguson Protest in Downtown L.A.” (Winton et al.) and “The Protests in L.A.; Patient to a Point; LAPD Officers Have Given Activists a Wide Berth – Until a Line is Crossed. Then Come Mass Arrests” (Jennings, Mejia, and Goldenstein). The arrests of the activists and the LAPD's actions are the main angles presented in these titles. Rhetorically, these titles discredit the ethos of the protest movement by
connecting them with the arrests. The lead in each of the 2014 *Times* articles tends to focus on the large number of protesters present. The lead is meant to state the article’s main point, so then it would seem that the *Times* considers the size of the protests to be the most significant fact about them. For example, one journalist reports: “Jasmyne Cannick blended into the throng of protesters as they reached 7th and Figueroa streets, the crowd swelling to several hundred” (Stevens and Ceasar). Some of the articles do include mention of the Ferguson decision in the lead, but only after some description of the protest’s size, such as: “Hundreds of people marched in downtown Los Angeles on Wednesday afternoon, the third day of protests against a Missouri grand jury’s decision not to indict a Ferguson police officer for the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager” (Mejia et al.). The emphasis on the number of protesters shows that there is support for the protests, but it also makes the protesters seem more threatening. While several of the articles mention that most of the protesters were peaceful, the focus is on the protest’s disruption of social order, including citing the road closures and the few protesters who were violent. The articles describe the protesters as disorderly; they frequently mention the use of obscenities from the crowd and each contains mention of the specific number of arrests at each protest. Conversely, the LAPD is framed as upholding social order: “The crowd began to dwindle, as police thwarted attempts to block the freeway and intersections” (Jennings, Mejia, and Goldenstein). Police actions are described as necessary and measured. The article emphasizes the disruption of social order and largely frames the protests as isolated issues, as there is very little context given to connect it to a national issue. The writers make no effort to connect the protests in Los Angeles to the national discussion of racial inequality or police shootings.

In contrast to the *Times* coverage, the *Sentinel* articles tend to focus on the shootings that motivated the protests and frame them as part of a national crisis. For example, one title is “Protesters Rally Against Police Shootings in Los Angeles and the Nation” (*City News Service*), and another is “Violence Erupts after Michael Brown Announcement” (Bihm). Though violence is mentioned in the second title, it is closely linked to the grand jury decision. Following this pattern, the *Sentinel* leads contain
specific details about the officer-involved shootings, which are the motivation for the protests. Bearing in mind the standards of the genre, these leads indicate that the Sentinel considers the shootings to be the main focus of their articles. For example, one article leads with: “Violence and protests erupted across the nation this week after the announcement that no probable cause exists: to file any indictments against officer Darren Wilson for any crimes related to the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown” (Bihm). Here the specifics of the case and the victim are the central focus. In the Sentinel articles, the emphasis is consistently on the reasons for the protests, and less on the actual events of the protests. Roughly half of each article is spent explaining the details of the police shootings that ultimately inspired both protests. Little time is spent on police and protester conflicts; only one sentence mentions the actual protest march: “About 7:30 pm Pacific time, protesters made their way down Crenshaw Boulevard, in a peaceful demonstration denouncing the verdict” (Bihm). It makes brief mention of a few citations issued by police, but does not describe any other police presence. The Sentinel articles are heavily framed within the context of a broader, national issue. The emphasis is not on conflicts that arose during protests, but on the larger issue of police shootings of young, unarmed black men.

There remains a strong contrast between the Times and Sentinel coverage in the recent Ferguson protests. The Times coverage continues to predominantly focus on violence and destruction, which places the articles into the crime news genre. The Sentinel, in contrast, has a tendency to place more stress on the reasons for the protesters’ actions, while sideling the issue of destruction caused by the demonstrators. Again, the two papers communicate dramatically different ideologies while covering the same events. As in 1965, the Times has a consistent law and order ideology, supporting the cultural hegemony. The Times depicts protesters as dangerous criminals, which delegitimizes their cause; the Times has a much broader readership to appeal to, and with the Ferguson grand jury decision being removed from the local community, it is likely that there was not much understanding of those events among their readership. The Sentinel must appeal to the African American communities, who clearly felt a connection and could relate to what those in Ferguson were experiencing.
This may have influenced the way each newspaper chose to frame their coverage. As in previous protest coverage, the *Sentinel* focuses on what is happening in their community. Their ideology projects a need for change by highlighting the national issue of police shootings because it is an issue that their readership cares about. The *Times* readership may not have the same fears, or rather, is more concerned with the local destruction to property or inconvenience caused by the protests.

**Conclusions**

Newspapers consider themselves to have an editorial perspective, but they also see themselves as seeking the truth. Both the *Times* and the *Sentinel* provide factual coverage of events, but they communicate different truths. Through the framing of each story, the choice of emphasis, and use of rhetoric, they tell different narratives of the same events. It is clear that the articles not only employ different rhetorical strategies, but also reflect different ideologies. While the articles do represent somewhat of a shift over time, the *Times* articles from all three periods tend to reinforce the dominant social ideology of law and social order. For the most part, they fit well within the genre of crime reporting. My analysis found consistent emphasis on violence and property destruction; the articles tend to sensationalize the protests with vivid details of violent acts or crowd damage and looting of businesses. Throughout the *Times* articles, protesters are framed as causing social unrest, while law enforcement is portrayed as enforcing social order; this is accomplished through the war rhetoric the *Times* often employs when describing protesters. When a reporter fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the issues behind the protests, the reader has no context for the protesters’ actions, and so their actions seem illegitimate and disruptive. In contrast, the *Sentinel* promotes what I would term a community ideology, specifically within the African American collective. Therefore, the articles frame the protests as a part of a larger movement. In each case, throughout the years, they focus heavily on providing context for the protests, so that it is very clear why the protests are happening. While the *Sentinel* articles often condemn the violence, they also give some legitimacy to the protesters’ grievances by explaining why the community is frustrated and what issues led up to the uprisings. By providing a
reason for their anger, the protesters seem less like common criminals, and more like participants in a social movement. After analyzing the ideologies from each newspaper, I would argue that the main differences are likely due to the newspapers' attempts to appeal to their two distinctive constituencies, resulting in the more mainstream Times supporting the current cultural hegemony, whereas the Sentinel raises the social issues that may subvert that legacy. Both newspapers are clearly committed to telling the truth, but that truth is also shaped by the focus on their readerships.
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