
The Black Press Centering on Injustice (1938)

An Afrocentric Analysis of Black Newspaper Coverage

ABSTRACT This is a content analysis of coverage by the *Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the *Seattle Star* (mainstream papers), and the *Northwest Enterprise* (NWE, a Black press weekly newspaper) of the 1938 Berry Lawson police brutality case in Seattle, Washington. This study proposed to answer three research questions: (1) How did each type of news organization, Eurocentric and Black, frame the Lawson case? (2) Are these frames the same for both types of papers? (3) If not, how do the papers frame the case differently? The NWE's frame was Afrocentric. The mainstream papers' frame was Eurocentric.

KEYWORDS: Afrocentricity, Lawson, *Seattle Times*, *Northwest Enterprise*

Speaking of his theory of Afrocentrism in a 2015 interview, Molefi Kete Asante, a leading figure in the fields of African American Studies, African Studies, and Communication Studies, said: "It is a paradigm that suggests all discourse about African people should be grounded in the centrality of Africans in their own narratives."¹ That naturally applies to Africans in the diaspora (i.e., African Americans).

As a primary institution of that discourse, the African-American, or Black, press has always attempted to provide its readers with an understanding of unfolding events from the perspective of the members of the African-American community. It has aimed to reflect and reinforce the values of the Black community in the telling of the story in the presentation of the news.

Since well before the Civil War, publications owned and operated by African Americans have provided an important alternative perspective to Eurocentric media, sometime called mainstream media. The first African-American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal* (NY), was founded in New York City in 1827 by John B. Russwurm and Samuel E. Cornish "as a means of answering attacks on African-Americans" by the proslavery newspaper *Enquirer*.² According to Alice Tait, "Between 1827–1896, the common theme of the Black press was a quest for a national identity and a response to White racism and assertion of self-determination. During World War I, a sizable number of newspapers advocated

1. George Yancy and Molefi Kete Asante, "Molefi Kete Asante: Why Afrocentricity?" *The Stone*, *New York Times*, May 7, 2015, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/molefi-kete-asante-why-afrocentricity/>.

2. Alice A. Tait, "African-American Press" in *People to People. An Introduction to Communications*, edited by Kathleen Fearn-Banks and A. Chan (Washington, DC: University of Washington, 1997), 36–39.

retaliation, blood for blood, life for life. During World War II, the Black press was the single most important information source for African-Americans.”³

In the late 1940s, the Black press focused coverage on NAACP lawsuits, integration, and voting rights for African-Americans. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Black press further focused on integration, demonstrations, sit-ins, and Africa. In the 1970s and 1980s, the crusade against racism was the most successful of any campaigns by the press. Contemporary Black press continues to celebrate African-American culture and covers politics, government, fashion, and music from an African-American perspective, although it has faced some criticism for not adopting a more Eurocentric perspective of objectivity.

How might the news coverage of a controversial event be framed from a Black press perspective as opposed to a Eurocentric one? As an example, in the same 2015 interview referring to the actions of a Black woman during the Freddie Gray unrest, Asante explained:

The Baltimore mother who reacted emotionally to save her son from arrest by beating him away from the protests appeared to do something wholly parental because she was saying that she was not going to lose her son [from an Afrocentric perspective]. However, the [Eurocentric] media saw the beating of the black male body, not the mother’s love, as the main story.⁴

In 2004–2006, Guy Meiss and Alice Tait edited a three-volume series, *Ethnic Media in America*, that examined the available research into the negative and exclusionary portrayals of ALANA (African, Latina/o, Asian, and Native Americans) in mainstream (i.e., Eurocentric) mass media news, information, and entertainment content as well as how those groups attempt to gain control of their own narrative. In their introduction to volume one, subtitled *Building a System of Their Own*, Burroughs and Tait write:

The contributors to this volume significantly advance our knowledge of how different groups in America seek to participate in the creation of their own realities within a larger American context. . . . ALANA groups need to own their own systems to reinforce not only their culture and values, but also their distinct worldviews. Eurocentric media’s “objectivity” and “universalism” are, in reality, White corporate constructs which reinforce White hegemony, even with ALANA participation in Eurocentric media as reporters, editors, producers, etc.⁵

Asante’s cultural theory presumes that modern African Americans identify with their African heritage, however physically removed, and find value in translating elements of it into their own individual and community experiences.

3. Tait, “African-American Press,” 36.

4. Yancy and Kete, “Why Afrocentricity?”

5. Guy T. Meiss and Alice A. Tait, “Introduction,” *Ethnic Media in America* vol 1 (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2006), xiv.

Media scholars have applied that cultural theory to African-American public affairs programming,⁶ mass media images,⁷ radio,⁸ and television.⁹ This article applies the theory to traditional Black newspaper coverage by selecting three major elements from Asante's Afrocentric paradigm, as discussed below, and relating them to a case study of the news and editorial treatment of a significant race and social justice trial.

The three elements of Afrocentrism this article emphasizes are:

- (1) Create African-American group solidarity by promoting social activism to change or improve conditions of African-Americans on the community, city municipality, and national and/or international level; by encouraging them to recognize their self-interest in news events (e.g., depressed economic conditions, racism, and/or racist policies and instructions) and to reject socio-cultural oppression; and by emphasizing personal responsibility to the African-American community by acknowledging its contributions, as well as challenging derogations to the community and providing correctives.¹⁰
- (2) Employ subjective analysis as opposed to Eurocentric objective analysis, eliminating sharp distinctions between news and editorial content and emphasizing African-American community self-determination, self-definition, and self-interest. Self-determination is the desire of African Americans to control institutions that affect their lives. Self-definition is the desire of African Americans to identify symbols and identities that represent their culture as viewed through their own eyes and experience, in terms of customs, language, definition of beauty, dress, behavior, activities, etc. Self-interest (i.e., specific or special needs) of the African-American community refers to discussing issues in terms of the social integration of African Americans or impacts on their cultural orientation. This means news and editorial content that provides qualitative and interpretive analysis of current news and issues based on these interests.¹¹
- (3) Emphasize a collectivistic social, political, and geographical orientation to diminish any artificial distinctions such as social and economic class and geographic location among members of the African-American community and to educate about the advantages of standing as one group and on how to translate that solidarity into collective empowerment (e.g., promoting

6. Alice A. Tait, "Ethnic Voices," in *Cultural Diversity and the U.S. Media*, edited by Yaya R. Kamalipour and Theresa Carilli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 149–156; Julie Ann Winkfield, "Agenda Setting and Uses and Gratifications: Implications of Afrocentricity in Public Affairs Television Programming," Master's Thesis (Michigan State University, 1955.)

7. Alice A. Tait, "Our Message Is Not on the Media," in *Ethnic Media in America Vol 3, Images, Audiences and Transforming Forces*, edited by Guy T. Meiss and Alice A. Tait (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2004), 149–165.

8. Todd S. Burroughs, "Drums in the Global Village: Gatekeeping and Agenda-Setting by Afro-Centric Radio Broadcasters, 1980–2003," in *Ethnic Media in America Vol 2, Taking Control*, edited by Guy T. Meiss and Alice A. Tait (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2005), 103–117.

9. Alice A. Tait, J. T. Barber, and Todd S. Burroughs, "Afrocentric/Capitalistic Television: The Power, Paradox, and Promise of Black Entertainment Television (BET), 1979–2005," in *Ethnic Media in America. Vol 1, Building A System of Their Own*, edited by Guy T. Meiss and Alice A. Tait (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 2006), 171–191.

10. Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1989), 32.

11. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 46.

cohesiveness among socioeconomic classes; emphasizing removal of obstacles such as tribal, religious, and ethnic affiliations; and renouncing non-Afrocentric divisive moral and social codes).¹²

CASE FACTS

Shortly after midnight on March 27, 1938, three Seattle police officers arrested Berry Lawson, a 27-year-old African-American male, in a downtown hotel. The officers were responding to a complaint about a prowler and found Lawson asleep in a chair in the lobby of the hotel and arrested him. Lawson arrived at the police station severely injured with multiple head lacerations. Police officers Patrick E. Whalen, Fred H. Paschal, and W. F. Stevenson claimed that Lawson fell down a flight of stairs while resisting arrest. Roughly two hours after Lawson arrived at the police station, he was taken to Seattle City Hospital and died shortly thereafter. The NAACP helped find a key witness in the case who said that the officers beat Lawson. Upon hearing testimony from this new witness, the state decided to prosecute the officers. On May 28, Whalen, Paschal, and Stevenson were convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to twenty years in the state prison. After their appeal was denied, Paschal and Stevenson were granted full clemency based on Whalen's admission that only he had beaten Lawson to death. On December 20, 1939, Whalen was granted a pardon because he had been hospitalized with heart ailments since the original conviction.

We have chosen as a case study coverage of the Berry Lawson trial in 1938 Seattle, Washington. A Black man killed in police custody, the officers on trial, and the community in turmoil—a story of racism, policing, and social justice that might just as easily be a “ripped from the headlines” twenty-first century episode of television's *Law and Order*. For as Asante has said: “The question of the killing of black men by police is not a recent one; it is more in view now because of the new social media.”¹³ It is a twentieth century story of Black Lives Matter.

Race is integrated into most aspects of our lives. It is an enduring, institutionalized, and fundamental part of social interactions. In a word, it is inescapable. Many academics agree that race is socially constructed.¹⁴ Overt racism has been, and remains, a monumental problem in United States society. Underlying the overt discrimination is a Eurocentrically based social structure that contributes to disproportionate opportunities for all racial minorities.

Historically the mainstream news media has been criticized for either completely ignoring or marginalizing minorities when they did receive coverage.¹⁵ Mediated representations of minority criminals contribute to a stereotypical manufacturing of race.¹⁶ Thus, media

12. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 62.

13. Yancy and Kete, “Why Afrocentricity?”

14. Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race. Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998); Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Hancy-López, *White Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

15. Paul L. Fisher and Ralph L. Lowenstein eds., *Race and the News Media* (New York: Praeger, 1967).

16. William A. Gamson, David Croteau, William Hoynes, and Theodore Sasson, “Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (August 1992): 373–393; and Vincent Sacco, “Media Constructions of Crime,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 539 (May 1995): 141–154.

historiographies that investigate the relationship between news representations of minorities and crime assist in the scholarly understanding of the social construction of race.

In 1938, most Black papers were weeklies and, like their Eurocentric daily counterparts, faced economic trouble caused by the Depression.¹⁷ Journalism research into Black newspapers of that period has identified four major editorial goals: (1) to provide news that was excluded by the mainstream press; (2) to highlight incidents of racial violence; (3) to work in collaboration with civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, to increase the social status of racial minorities; and (4) to provide social commentary on civil rights and injustices committed against African Americans.¹⁸ The Berry Lawson case study helps illuminate how a news organization creates a framework for its readers in its actual coverage when Black ownership articulates a perspective on news and editorial treatment—in this case, by establishing editorial goals, all of which are consistent with Afrocentric theory.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

News is created from competing information, making it important to examine news content considering what is published and what is missing. This article therefore borrows from other academic fields including criminology and race relations, in addition to communications, race, and criminal justice.

During the 1920s and 1930s, police reform was a major facet of most criminal justice institutions. It was during this period that the philosophy of police as professionals was instituted and continues today.¹⁹ Influenced by Roosevelt's FBI and the war against crime, policing shifted toward standardization, crime control, and detection.²⁰ Scientific methods and technology became common tools during police investigations. Industrialization and the depression forced many people to migrate to urban centers, and saw the middle class relocate to the suburbs.²¹ Even though crime rates were low, police departments aggressively pursued criminals, particularly minorities, in metropolitan areas.²² At the same time, many departments were accused of racist patrol and arrest practices. Police brutality plagued many cities resulting in violence against minority citizens. Samuel Walker suggests that this pattern of police brutality stems from the epidemic of inner-city riots during the first quarter of the twentieth century where extensive force was employed to

17. Vishnu V. Oak, *The Negro Newspaper* (Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1948); and Roland E. Wolsley, *The Black Press USA* (Ames, IA: Iowa University Press, 1990).

18. Charlotte G. O'Kelly, "Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement: Their Historical Relationship, 1827–1945," *Phylon* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 1–14.

19. David R. Johnson, *American Law Enforcement: A History* (St. Louis, MO: Forum, 1981); and Nathan Douthit, "Police Professionalism and the War against Crime in the United States, 1920s–1930s," in *Police Forces in History*, edited by George L. Mosse (London: Sage, 1975), 317–333.

20. Johnson, *American Law Enforcement*.

21. Douthit, "Police Professionalism."

22. Robert Fogelson, *Big-city Police* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Samuel Walker, *A Critical History of Police Reform. The Emergence of Professionalism* (Toronto: Lexington, 1977); Stephan L. Chorover, *From Genesis to Genocide. The Meaning of Human Nature and the Power of Behavioral Control* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979).

quell the disturbances and the prevailing social stereotype of minorities having a biological propensity toward violent behavior.²³

The problem of police brutality was particularly concerning for Seattle's African-American residents. While Black Seattle was spared from the onslaught of lynch mobs that plagued the south, racial bias across many White civic institutions created a climate of segregation and fear.²⁴

Mainstream Journalism and Crime News

During the early twentieth century, Eurocentric or mainstream newspaper content shifted from political affiliations to general news stories including news of crime.²⁵ In fact, highly sensational stories of crime and the courts contributed to the success of many papers. Departing from political affiliations, journalists attempted to be impartial, defined as a focus on news and information instead of editorial content, keeping the two separate. Many beats were established in order to adequately cover a multitude of potentially newsworthy events occurring on any given day.²⁶ The police beat became a major source of news. Inherently, the beat system relies on state institutions for information. The serial nature of the criminal justice system assists journalists during story production. Journalists can write a story after an arrest, during a trial, at a sentencing hearing, etc. Institutionally, journalistic and criminal justice occupational patterns coincide, focusing on specific events such as a murder and assault. Both also aspire to highlight injustices in society, as defined from a Eurocentric perspective, and function to repair social ills. Accordingly, their occupational patterns are similar²⁷ and both claim to pursue justice and advocate for the public good.²⁸ However, it must be noted that some authors question whether either the legal system or the media is objective in those pursuits²⁹ and caution that the press can become a tool for the state, supporting political elites and the status quo. In effect, the Eurocentric or mainstream news media often shields the state from public scrutiny by creating the illusion that the press is acting adversarial.³⁰

Mainstream newspapers were striving for professionalism, in part defined as reporting objectively or presenting both sides of an issue.³¹ Numerous academic journalism schools

23. Walker, *Police Reform*.

24. Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle WA: University of Washington Press, 1994).

25. David Krajicek, *Scooped! Media Miss Real Story on Crime while Chasing Sex, Sleaze, and Celebrities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Bernard Weisberger, *The American Newspaper Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

26. Frank Luther Mott, *The News in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

27. Richard V. Ericson, Patricia M. Baranek, and Janet B. L. Chan, *Representing Order: Crime, Law, and Justice in the News Media* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

28. J. Edward Gerald, *News of Crime. Courts and Press in Conflict* (Westport, CO: Greenwood Press, 1983).

29. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow. Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* (New York: New Press, 2012); Jared Ball, *I Mix What I Like! A Mixtape Manifesto* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011); Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002); Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality. The Politics of News Media* (Independence, KY: Cengage Learning, 1992); and Bruce Wright, *Black Robes, White Justice* (Secaucus, NY: Lyle Stuart, 1987).

30. 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).

31. William D. Sloan and James D. Startt, *The Media in America. A History* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 1996), 110.

emerged, and in 1922 the American Society of Newspaper Editors developed a code of ethics for journalists. Responsible journalism was stressed in order to assist the general public in their search for enlightenment.³²

Shortly before Lawson's death, both the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and the *Seattle Star* experienced major strikes. Even though the strikes lasted for months, the papers' recoveries were quick with normal operations taking place by the time of the Lawson stories.³³ The *Seattle Times* was in competition with the other two dailies under editor C. B. Blethen, who had significantly reduced the amount of sensational journalism that characterized the *Times* under his father Alden Blethen.³⁴ All three papers tended to emphasize crime news and Eurocentric objective reporting.

Black Press and the NAACP

By the late 1930s, most Black newspapers sought to provide news that the mainstream press excluded as well as to highlight incidents of racial violence. Working in conjunction with civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, they also acted to increase the social status of racial minorities. Often labeled the "protest function" in Eurocentric analysis, Black papers utilized editorials to provide social commentary on civil rights and injustices committed against African Americans.³⁵

African-American businesses flourished in Seattle in the early twentieth century. Numerous Black-centered businesses, including beauty salons and grocery stores, catered to the local Black community. The *Northwest Enterprise (NWE)*, a Black press weekly, was one of the most successful and extensively known Black businesses in Seattle. It was founded in 1920 by William H. Wilson and soon expanded to regional Black communities as far as Billings, Montana, and Eugene, Oregon. By emphasizing civil rights and social justice, the *NWE*'s news perspective was consistent with the general profile of Black papers in the United States.³⁶ With circulation above 2,000, reaching 2,500 in 1941, the *NWE* was the dominant minority paper in the Pacific Northwest.³⁷

During the early twentieth century, African Americans in Seattle created local branches of numerous national organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League. The NAACP was a major player in the advance of civil rights in the Puget Sound Area. The *NWE* paid particular attention to civil rights leaders, utilizing local leaders from the Seattle Urban League and the NAACP as sources for many stories. Often these organizations worked in conjunction with each other to highlight racial issues and problems within the Pacific Northwest.³⁸

32. William E. Ames and Roger A. Simpson, *Unionism or Hearst: The Seattle Post-Intelligencer Strike of 1936* (Seattle, WA: Pacific Northwest Labor History Association, 1978).

33. Sharon A. Boswell, Sherry Boswell, and Lorraine McConaghy, *Raise Hell and Sell Newspapers: Alden J. Blethen and the Seattle Times* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1996), 244–250.

34. Boswell, Boswell, and McConaghy, *Raise Hell*, 244–250.

35. O'Kelly, "Black Newspapers," 1–14.

36. Taylor, *Forging Black Community*, 79–99.

37. Ayer Directory: Newspapers and Periodicals (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer, 1941): 31.

38. Taylor, *Forging Black Community*, 79–99.

DESIGN AND METHODS

This content analysis focuses on the three mainstream papers in the Puget Sound area: the *Seattle Times*, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, and the *Seattle Star* (hereafter all three papers will be conglomerated and labeled “mainstream papers”). Combined, these papers published 56 news stories on the Lawson case from March 27, 1938, to April 20, 1940. The *NWE* published 46 news stories on the Lawson case from April 1, 1938, to February 2, 1940.

To investigate the news values embedded in the mainstream papers’ and the *NWE*’s coverage of the Lawson case, we proposed the following research questions: (1) How did each news organization, Eurocentric and Black, frame the Lawson case? (2) Are these frames the same for both sets of papers? (3) If not, how do the papers frame the case differently? To assist in the frame analysis, a quantitative coding schema was employed. All articles were coded producing a total of 104 cases. Ten percent of the cases were multiple coded to assess instrument reliability. The Holsti R value was .89 for this test.

Social construction of race can be understood using an analytical device called frame analysis. Media frames are the organizational forces that help journalists inscribe preferred meanings to diverse events.³⁹ Content producers select aspects of perceived reality and utilize them to define events.⁴⁰ Frames are consistent themes that reside in media discourse that contribute to reality construction by highlighting certain aspects of reality over others. Frames tend to coincide with existing cultural beliefs and provide a basis for which social identities are compared.⁴¹ One result is that the public is influenced by normative social structures, where these values are equated with common sense knowledge.⁴² So where cultural beliefs differ, as in Eurocentric and Black-owned media organizations, framing practices will as well.

Frames in both Eurocentric and Black-owned media are continually transforming the news process in which stories are often altered to fit existing frames. Social actors who desire media attention, such as political leaders, supply their own frames to journalists in the attempt to gain positive treatment in the news. Current stories or issues are sought by media agencies that attempt to derive information from diverse perspectives. Source selection has tremendous impact on story framing.⁴³ As news features develop, journalists tend to rely on institutional norms and standards while investigating and writing stories. Often the practices of news gathering, processing, and circulation position content into news frames that journalists follow. This process is often unknown to the reporter.⁴⁴

Framing involves three functions. First is the selection and highlighting of social events that embody media discourse. Second is the use of these events to construct arguments and causal inferences about social problems and phenomena. Third, media frames resolve

39. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

40. Scott Coltrane and Kenneth Allan, “New’ Fathers and Old Stereotypes: Representations of Masculinity in the 1980s Television Advertising,” in *Masculinities* 4 (1994): 43–66.

41. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 18.

42. Muriel Cantor and Joel M. Cantor, *Prime-Time Television: Content and Control* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992).

43. Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, and Sasson, “Media Images” (August 1992): 384–390.

44. Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, 2nd ed. (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1996).

problems and evaluate the contextual social reality from which the mediated messages were drawn.⁴⁵ In sum, media frames highlight and provide commentary on social issues that tend to agree with previously established cultural perspectives.

Erving Goffman defined a frame as a means of organizing experience.⁴⁶ Stuart Hall indicates that news discourse tends to emphasize certain aspects of reality while ignoring others.⁴⁷ Furthermore, news stories are viewed as bundles of information that interpret, shape, and construct meaning from issues.⁴⁸ Culturally, news frames stem from normative social structures and news organizational norms and standards.⁴⁹ News stories have established narratives that resonate into themes over time.⁵⁰ News frames are the specific themes that tend to be duplicated in news. Thus, frames are often unique to discourse about specific events, defined by the worldview of the media organizations.

RESULTS

The news frames were different for the Eurocentric (mainstream) papers and the *NWE* (Black-owned) paper. Characteristic of the era, the mainstream press was striving for its conception of objectivity. In doing so, it relied on official sources, which in turn produced a news frame that supported the criminal justice system and ignored questions of social justice. This orientation was found throughout the mainstream coverage of the Lawson case, and will be called the status quo frame. The *NWE* coverage differed, providing a critique of official responses to the case. Acting as advocates for civil rights and the NAACP, the paper utilized the case to highlight social injustices that were rampant in the United States during the late 1930s. This Afrocentric frame was evident throughout the *NWE*'s coverage of the Lawson case.

Eurocentric (mainstream) Coverage and the Status Quo Frame

Nearly every article in the mainstream press employed public officials as primary news sources. Official sources such as the county coroner, judge, and general court records were the primary means of information collection. The prosecutor and defense attorney were equally as likely to be sourced for the mainstream press, exemplifying an aspiration for objective journalism. The news articles tended to summarize specific litigation facts and court reactions. In effect, the coverage acted as a passive information transfer system. Some examples include:

45. Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1993): 51-58.

46. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 6.

47. Stuart Hall, Introduction to *Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935-1965*, edited by A. C. H. Smith et al. (Totowa, NJ: Macmillan Education, 1975): 11-24.

48. William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructivist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (July 1989): 1-37.

49. William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

50. Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication* 10, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1993): 55-75.

A coroners jury yesterday afternoon exonerated Police Patrolmen W. F. Stevenson, Fred H. Paschal and Patrick L. Whalen of blame in connection with the death of Berry Lawson.⁵¹

Agnew's opening statement came late in the afternoon after the day had been spent in Superior Douglas' court in selecting a jury and with it came the revelation of the asserted payment to the witness.⁵²

H. Sylvester Garvin, defense attorney, then sought, and was granted, permission to reopen the case after the jury visits if the defense wishes to do so.⁵³

These examples demonstrate that the mainstream papers focused on official responses to the case. Using official sources effectively promotes viewpoints from the criminal justice system and highlights and emphasizes a discourse from a criminal justice perspective.

The NAACP was rarely (5.7 percent) used as a primary source by the mainstream press. The few references to the organization trivialized their participation in the case. The NAACP was a key player in exposing the police brutality in this case. The NAACP actively disseminated information to the Black community about this case. In fact, the NAACP often used this case to highlight systemic problematic behavior of Seattle area police officers. However, the mainstream press failed to source this reputable organization.

Descriptions of the three police officers involved in the Lawson beating support the distinct news frame for each of the mainstream papers. The three defendants were often described in unison by the mainstream press and the articles tended to consistently report the officers as positive (38.1 percent), neutral (32.7 percent), or negative (29.2 percent), when considering them as a group. Positive portrayals often included their history as officers or their versions of the incidents that led up to Lawson's death. For example:

Whalen, 52, of 925 Yakima Ave., is married, the father of five children, and is a world war veteran. He has been wounded four times in duty during his twenty years as a police man.⁵⁴

This "new evidence" purports that W. H. Stevenson and F. H. Paschal had no part in fatally beating Berry Lawson.⁵⁵

These examples demonstrate that the mainstream papers did not question the motives, attitudes, opinions, etc. of the officers. Simple statements regarding their presumed innocence provided a perspective that the officers acted appropriately. Neutral characterizations were inclined to state case facts, often summaries of official records. In addition, many articles presented both the prosecutor's and defense's arguments during the trial. Since these articles provided both positive and negative descriptions that were coded as neutral. Some illustrations include:

The officers were arrested in connection with the March 26 death of Berry Lawson, twenty-eight-year-old [sic] Negro, who was fatally injured following his arrest in a hotel on

51. "Inquest Jury Decides Negro Died from Fall," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 1, 1938.

52. "Attorney's Clash Opens Police Trial," *Seattle Times*, May 23, 1938.

53. "Police Defense Rests, Witness List Called," *Seattle Times*, May 26, 1938.

54. "Police Exonerated at Inquest in Death of Young Prisoner," *Seattle Times*, March 3, 1938.

55. "Three Police Take Plea to Martin," *Seattle Star*, May 31, 1939.

Yesler Way. . . . The officers have consistently denied that Lawson was mistreated in any way during the arrest and claim that he suffered his fatal injuries in a fall down the stairs.⁵⁶

The state is contending that these officers beat Lawson while arresting him. The defense theory is that Lawson broke from their grip and plunged headlong down a flight of stairs in attempting to escape.⁵⁷

Once again the neutral descriptions of the officers located them within official responses to the case. Since official accounts of the case are deemed as truthful these neutral accounts show that the mainstream papers simply funneled information from official sources to the public. Stories focused on events and information that surfaced during the trial that were published as facts. This status quo orientation resulted in overall coverage that presented the defendants merely as litigants in a trial. Also, neutral descriptions of the officers present the criminal justice system as an impartial social institution searching for truth and justice.

In both mainstream papers, Lawson was described with only his name, demonstrating objective reporting. However, these papers did depict Lawson in a negative manner in 25 percent of the articles, including saying in over 14 percent (14.3 percent) of the stories that Lawson was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Negative references included referring to him as a transient, a thief, and dangerous. For instance:

I shook him real hard but he wasn't in a natural sleep and when he got up he showed the strength of three men, [the statement continued by Stevenson]. He was evidently under the influence of marijuana.⁵⁸

The tendency to characterize Lawson as a derelict meant presenting misleading and erroneous information. And publishing opinion as fact with statements such as "he wasn't in a natural sleep" suggests that Lawson was dangerous and not in control of himself. At the same time, they tended to present Lawson solely as a participant in a violent incident. The coverage identified him as "Berry Lawson, 27-year-old Negro." These representations show the papers' tendency to rely on police sources and report official statements as factual information and as examples of objective journalism. Thus, their reliance on official sources reinforces the status quo by marginalizing criminal suspects. In this case, official accounts described Lawson as a criminal deserving of punishment.

By focusing on the criminal justice system's account of Lawson's death, the mainstream papers behaved as a dispersion agent of official facts about the case. Prior to the witness put forth by the NAACP, the officers were exonerated from any blame regarding Lawson's death. Over one-fifth (20.4 percent) of the mainstream articles stated that Lawson was resisting arrest, which caused his "fall" down the stairs. Some examples include:

Berry Lawson, twenty-eight [sic], a Negro, died early this morning in City Hospital from injuries said to have been received while resisting arrest about an hour earlier.⁵⁹

56. "Police Exonerated at Inquest in Death of Young Prisoner," *Seattle Times*, March 3, 1938.

57. "Jury Debates Fate of Police in Death Case," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 28, 1938.

58. "Arrested Man Escapes Police, Falls to Death," *Seattle Times*, March 27, 1938.

59. "Trial of Three Policemen on Monday," *Seattle Star*, May 21, 1938.

The officers testified that Lawson, whom they had been asked to remove from the hotel, resisted them and broke away before his fall.⁶⁰

In these examples, the arresting officers' testimony is taken as fact without questioning the validity of their statement and further legitimizes their accounts of Lawson's death by excluding the actuality that the story is based purely on police testimony.

During the trial, the mainstream papers were inclined to publish both the prosecutor's and defense attorney's rendition of the events that led to Lawson's demise. Over half (53.7 percent) of the articles stated that either Lawson or the police were responsible for the incident. In effect, by presenting both sides of the case the newspapers reinforced the adversarial nature of our court system. At the same time, mainstream accounts of the trial never condemned the officers for their involvement in this situation. This is notably evident in the coverage after their convictions, for example:

Three former Seattle policemen, Fred H. Paschal, Patrick L. Whalen, and W. F. Stevenson, were found guilty of manslaughter by a Superior Court jury last night. In a compromised verdict, three former Seattle police men accused of beating a Negro prisoner to death last March were found guilty of manslaughter last night in Superior Judge Malcom Douglas' court.⁶¹

The mainstream papers focused on the verdicts in these cases. In doing so, the papers emphasized a procedural resolution and de-emphasized potential racist behaviors by the police officers. They also focused on defense appeals and pardon hearings in the articles that explicitly stated that the officers caused Lawson's death. Specifically:

They have announced the intention of appealing to the state supreme court if denied a new trial.⁶²

Whalen declared he is not through fighting for his freedom but his next move will be "after the dust settles."⁶³

R. C. Suran, agent-in-charge of the Seattle Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Rev. Dr. E. Raymond Attebery, pastor of Grace Methodist Church have asked Gov. Clarence D. Martin to pardon W. F. Stevenson and Fred H. Paschal, former Seattle policemen.⁶⁴

These examples demonstrate how the mainstream press highlighted the pardon requests by two officers involved in the police brutality. It may be true that these officers did not participate in the beating, however they were present during the attack. By focusing on the pardons, they nearly excused the behaviors of these officers. While the stories were more likely to hold the officers responsible for Lawson's death, the discourse was in the context of the criminal justice system. The tendency to report on the defendants' appeal process combined with a cursory fact analysis projects the viewpoint that justice prevailed.

60. "Police Defense Rests, Witness List Called," *Seattle Times*, May 26, 1938.

61. "Ex-Officers Face Terms of 20 Years in Jail Death," *Seattle Times*, May 29, 1938.

62. "Three Policemen to Ask for New Trial," *Seattle Star*, May 30, 1938.

63. "Stevenson, Paschal Seek Police Posts," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 8, 1939.

64. "Three Police Take Plea to Martin," *Seattle Star*, May 31, 1939.

Altogether, an overwhelming majority of the mainstream articles were about actions taken by the criminal justice system. Consistent with the previous results in this analysis, the stories reiterated facts that were brought up in official proceedings without necessarily assessing their accuracy. Issues such as police brutality, racism, or injustice were never considered in the mainstream papers. Once again, this superficial reiteration of findings produced by state agencies with no analysis or review opposes the presumed “watchdog” purpose of newspapers.

NWE's Coverage and the Afrocentric Frame

NWE's coverage advocated for Lawson's civil rights, promoted the NAACP's social activism on his behalf, and acknowledged the organization's contributions to the African-American community. It projected to its readers how a unified African-American community could empower itself and combat forces of social injustice that were rampant during the period. The following editorial allows *NWE* to frame the Lawson case in Afrocentric terms. In doing so, African-American owned media blends news-centered editorial content in a way that Eurocentric media does not. An editorial reads: “Don't let the Berry Lawson case slip your mind—keep fighting for justice at all times.”⁶⁵

Media events potentially have enormous impact on audiences.⁶⁶ Pervasive news stories such as the Lawson case qualify as a media event. Events are powerful because the extensive coverage elevates the stories into public consciousness solidifying their importance. *NWE* often framed the Lawson case as a very important event in the lives of African Americans. This increased the impact of the event as a means to advance civil rights. The net effect is that media events are powerful because they fit within a preexisting social structure—advancement of civil rights in this case.⁶⁷

NWE coverage stressed the NAACP's key investigative role exposing the police brutality. At the same time, the NAACP disseminated information to the Black community on its own and acted as a source for *NWE* reporters. In fact, the NAACP and its interpretation of events were key elements in over one-fifth (21.8 percent) of the *NWE* stories. And, in further Afrocentric framing, both the newspaper and the NAACP used this case to highlight systemic problematic behavior of Seattle area police officers toward African-American citizens. The following headline suggests that community collaboration: “NAACP Vice President Uncovers Damaging Evidence in Lawson Case.”⁶⁸ Later in the same article:

After being placed in charge of the investigation by the committee, Mr. Jackson (NAACP-VP) left no stone unturned until he had unearthed new evidence that caused the prosecutor to file charges.⁶⁹

These examples demonstrate that social justice could prevail and the NAACP acted as a major advocate in the case.

65. “Resolution Signed by Organizations Given Prosecutor,” *Northwest Enterprise*, May 8, 1938.

66. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992): 6.

67. Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (New York: Sage, 2010).

68. “NAACP Vice-President Uncovers Damaging Evidence in Lawson Case,” *Northwest Enterprise*, April 8, 1938.

69. “NAACP Vice-President Uncovers,” *Northwest Enterprise*, April 8, 1938.

In the following examples, the paper tries to further unify the community by mobilizing and energizing readers in support of the NAACP, by expanding awareness of the issues to the White citizenry, by encouraging readers to increase campaign resources to the NAACP, and by recognizing how such activities were in their own self-interest. This example of Afrocentrism's collectivistic orientation illustrates how a single media event, in this case the Lawson trial, can be constructed to speak to the whole African-American community's interests.⁷⁰ The *NWE* published news stories that were persuasive calls for action.

One April 1938 news story tries to further unify the community by mobilizing and energizing readers in support of the NAACP by expanding awareness of the issues to the White citizenry. The article states: "Let's finish the job: Join the NAACP. Buy or subscribe for your own race paper, read it and hand it to one of your white friends and tell him or her to read also."⁷¹ The next two stories meant to unify the community by asking the community to increase campaign resources, and recognize how such activities were in their own self-interest:

Money is needed by the NAACP to publish a pamphlet giving all the facts about Lawson and his death.⁷²

Mr. J. S. Jackson vice-president of the NAACP had adroitly led us out of a maze of difficulties and cloaked that organization with honors, never heretofore enjoyed in Seattle.⁷³

Nearly every story that utilized the NAACP or Jackson as sources accentuated their engagement in the case, particularly their bringing forth new evidence to prosecutor Agnew (Agnew was the prosecutor in the case against the officers). Further, 55 percent of all *NWE* articles mentioned the NAACP as actively contributing to the case. In doing so, the *NWE* consistently upheld the NAACP as a momentous social actor in the fight for racial justice in the Pacific Northwest.

In the Afrocentric style of editorially incorporating personal feelings in reportage, *NWE* articles did not talk in objective or neutral terms like the Eurocentric media when referring to the White police officers. Afrocentricity is a way of framing a story. A major purpose of Afrocentricity is to look at any issue or event from the experience, and therefore perspective of African Americans. On average less than ten percent (9.1 percent) of the *NWE* stories contained positive depictions of the defendants and this number was elevated only by references to Stevenson when it was determined he did not participate in the beating. Overwhelmingly the *NWE* coverage condemned the actions of all three officers and vigorously made clear their actions were merely another example of ongoing police misconduct.

There was not any doubt as to the guilt of the former officers, two who had been ringleaders in a wave of terror perpetrated against Negro citizens.⁷⁴

70. Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, 6.

71. "NAACP Deserves Support," *Northwest Enterprise*, April 15, 1938.

72. "Many Pledges Are Now Paid," *Northwest Enterprise*, April 29, 1938.

73. Gayton, L. C., "Many Spirited Clashes add Highlights to Court Trial of Three Policemen," *Northwest Enterprise*, May 27, 1938.

74. "NAACP Vice-President Uncovers Damaging Evidence in Lawson Case," *Northwest Enterprise*, April 8, 1938.

Evidence produced at the trial proved that Lawson, an itinerant waiter, was awakened from sleeping in the lobby of a cheap downtown hotel, roughly handled, and finally beaten after arrival in the police station basement.⁷⁵

Paschal, Stevenson, and Whalen were convicted of manslaughter for the brutal slaying of Berry Lawson.⁷⁶

By attributing blame to the police, these news stories show how the *NWE* used the case to publish information that inspires readers to recognize police misconduct. The implication is that police brutality is widespread and African Americans' safety and freedom are in peril.

NWE editors and reporters incorporated subjective analysis in their coverage, focusing news and editorial discussion on the special needs of the African-American community. In this case, that meant using powerfully negative terms to describe the White officers, not only because the Lawson beating was so injurious to him and so offensive to the African American community, but also because they saw it as one more example of systematic racism in the Seattle police department. News and editorials include:

Not today, not yesterday, but every day since these three madmen roamed the range. And if perchance you do now know, this column may carry a chronological review of the brutal beating administered not only to men of my race, but to many poor forgotten whites as well.⁷⁷

Testimony showed that Lawson was badly beaten at the hotel for no reason, they marched across the street to the prowler car where he was subject to more abuse . . . Officers Fred Paschal and Pat Whalen were noted for their cruelty.⁷⁸

The very fact that he had been a police officer for eighteen years, is evidence he should not have stood by and watched two cowardly brutes beat a poor helpless Negro to death.⁷⁹

One news article presented another incident of police brutality: "Plaintiff John Follings, 48 years old, accused Fred Paschal and Pat Whalen of cursing and severely beating him when they arrested him on October 26."⁸⁰ The language in these examples is strong and emphasized the violence of the case. The language highlights racism in the police department and promotes social activism by questioning the criminal justice system. Subjective analysis is a tenant of Afrocentrism. These editorials demonstrate how the *NWE*'s loaded language content pushes the problem of police brutality into social conscious.

Other criminal justice officials were condemned. The *NWE* also criticized the judgment of the county coroner, Otto H. Mittlestadt, who exonerated the defendants in news stories:

75. "Prosecutor's Office Receives Praise for Splendid Work in Lawson Case," *Northwest Enterprise*, June 3, 1938.

76. "Decision on Convicted Officers Soon, Supreme Court Hearing Last Month," *Northwest Enterprise*, December 9, 1938.

77. Editorial, *Northwest Enterprise*, April 29, 1938.

78. "Three Police Plead Guilty to Charges," *Northwest Enterprise*, April 15, 1938.

79. "Vigilance Must be Out Watchword!" *Northwest Enterprise*, August 12, 1938.

80. "Follings Begins Suit Against Ex-Policemen Paschal, Whalen," *Northwest Enterprise*, March 24, 1939.

Coroner Mittlestadt was biased, attempting to discredit the points of his testimony. . . .
If ever a man deliberately betrayed an entire race in order to outrage Justice, that man is
Otto H. Mittlestadt.⁸¹

The *NWE* consistently criticized the actions of public officials who participated in the Lawson case, demonstrating the paper's tendency to reflect the subjective analytical base by providing qualitative and interpretive analysis of current news and issues based on the interest of African-Americans and acting as an advocate for civil rights and social justice. Hence, the case was elevated above the status of news and adopted as a vehicle to mobilize public opinion regarding the status of African-Americans in the Seattle area—representing the unification role by educating African-Americans on the advantages of standing as one and how that translates into collective empowerment.

Similarly, specifics of the Lawson case were used to advocate social justice. The *NWE* often connected Lawson and the case with police brutality and/or civil rights, or portrayed Lawson as a victim. The news content demonstrated these connections:

Berry Lawson [was the] victim of police brutality who met death March 25 while in the custody of three police officers.⁸²

The truth is Berry Lawson was arrested about 2:15 a.m. and dragged into the booking room dead about half an hour later.⁸³

NWE's refutation of the officers' claims that Lawson was under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs fulfills the engaging and relational aspect where the newspapers point out derogations of the African-American community by representatives of hostile social institutions. The officers' claims that Lawson was under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs were derogatory statements designed to taint Lawson's character and to imply that his death was due to the drugs, or that he was an addict and an alcoholic. That negative depiction of Lawson's character suggested that he did not die from the beating he experienced from the officers. Afrocentricity emphasizes the responsibility to the African-American community by challenging derogations to the community and providing correctives. In the following news article, the *NWE* refutes the officer's derogatory claims by reporting the results from the autopsy that showed that there was no alcohol in Lawson's system. A news story demonstrates this: "However, the autopsy report showed no alcohol in the body, and a full stomach, something a drug user never has, according to the county doctor."⁸⁴ Such negative characterizations in the news and editorials of Lawson motivated the *NWE* to question actions taken by law enforcement officials in his case, but also to examine the social, political, and cultural context as it affected the larger African-American community.

The *NWE* added to its critique of official responses to Lawson's death with numerous editorials (33.3 percent) and readers' letters (12.5 percent) stating their objections to the outcome of the case. Another aspect of the opinions focused on what the community

81. "NAACP Vice-President Uncovers Damaging Evidence in Lawson Case," *Northwest Enterprise*, April 8, 1938.

82. "Mass Meeting Fills Church," *Northwest Enterprise*, May 8, 1938.

83. "Resolution Signed by Organizations Given Prosecutor," *Northwest Enterprise*, May 8, 1938.

84. "Just to Remind You," *Northwest Enterprise*, July 1, 1938.

should do about the Lawson case. In these instances, the *NWE* defined and advocated appropriate community action and, in so doing, reflected the Afrocentric collectivistic socio-political orientation. Two editorials made the following claims:

It was agreed that the NAACP and other groups would cooperate in headlining the movement.⁸⁵

We think that Mr. E. I. Robinson and his associates did a mighty fine piece of community work when they called the Berry Lawson mass meeting that later was turned over to the NAACP under the direction of J. S. Jackson, its vice-president.⁸⁶

Once again, those editorials show the *NWE*'s operationalizing of two previously discussed Afrocentric news values: (1) unifying the African-American community (i.e., connecting the NAACP to the Lawson Case to model collective empowerment), and (2) emphasizing the NAACP's show of responsibility to the African-American community.

The *NWE* attempted to locate this case within a broader social context of racial discrimination. Their specific associations with NAACP leaders indicated that police brutality was a major concern that warranted attention from a national civil rights organization.

At times, the paper attacked the case's coverage in Seattle's mainstream news. By focusing on their inadequacies, the *NWE* publicized how mainstream news often missed social issues with event centered reporting, employing the relational-level news value of posing follow-up questions on an issue of importance to African Americans when it is not adequately addressed by the mainstream media. One editorial and one news story exemplify criticisms of mainstream news:

The daily papers have not attempted to color their news relative to the case, or have they injected the color question.⁸⁷

This coming Monday, the case goes to trial, and to date the daily press has made no to do about it.⁸⁸

The case took an unexpected turn and the *NWE* responded appropriately and published news stories and editorials with African-American interests in mind. Specifically, exculpatory evidence emerged when Officer Whalen admitted to beating Lawson and testified that Officer Stevenson was not in the area during the attack. *NWE* accurately reported the confession and during the law enforcement reinstatement hearings it investigated Stevenson's past and reported on his honorable history as an officer, especially when interacting with African Americans.

However, a large number of race businessmen and residents of the south end have repeatedly told us that officer W. F. Stevenson was one of the finest men ever to patrol the district.⁸⁹

85. "NAACP Vice-President Uncovers Damaging Evidence in Lawson Case," *Northwest Enterprise*, April 8, 1938.

86. "Robinson Sends Open Letter to Seattle Police," *Northwest Enterprise*, April 29, 1938.

87. Editorial, *Northwest Enterprise*, April 29, 1938.

88. "Vigilance Must be Out Watchword!" *Northwest Enterprise*, August 12, 1938.

89. "New Statement Clears W.F. Stevenson, Whalen Gives B. Gary Warner Dope," *Northwest Enterprise*, February 17, 1939.

Negro businessmen located on his beats have only the highest praise for his courteous and kindly manner, declaring that they did not believe he took part in the slugging of Lawson which caused his death.⁹⁰

The *NWE* showed compassion. Afrocentrism emphasizes responsibility to the African-American community. These examples demonstrate how responsibility is broadened to include an apparent misjudgment of Officer Stevenson and highlighted a socially responsible reaction to the case. The *NWE* news and editorial coverage often discussed the Lawson case in terms of fairness, truth, and justice, insisting on discovering appropriate resolutions to Lawson's death. But throughout their extensive coverage, the *NWE* maintained that inequitable treatment from official agencies had occurred in this case.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study proposed to answer three research questions: (1) How did each news organization, Eurocentric and Black, frame the Lawson case? (2) Are these frames the same for both sets of papers? (3) If not, how do the papers frame the case differently?

It was found that the mainstream coverage of the Lawson case directly reported information obtained from official sources within the criminal justice system. While this procedure is consistent with Eurocentric news norms of objectivity and accuracy in the late 1930s, the mainstream papers excluded important aspects of the case and the official responses to it. As a whole, the Lawson case represents much more than a single police brutality case. Two of the three officers had significant histories of police misconduct, and much of it involved racial violence. The officers attempted to conceal this horrible deed by tampering with witnesses and perjuring themselves. The mainstream paper's superficial examination of these issues legitimized the dominant social structures, specifically the Seattle institutions of social justice.

Operating from a Eurocentric news frame, court news allowed mainstream editors and reporters to hide institutional bias, even though they might not have been aware of it, behind a professional adherence to objectivity. Since court officials feel it is imperative that the media convey the purposes of the courts to audiences beyond the court itself, projecting images of fairness, balance and blind justice—legal objectivity—and organizational forces of the media share that same view, mainstream news becomes an agency to promote and support the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. Even though the mainstream journalists highlighted problems in the administration of justice, they were presented as aberrations not signifiers of a larger systemic problem. Criminal justice officials therefore praised these stories.

Official support of this situation is rooted in the idea that the “watch dog” function illustrates that the courts are improving and the press acts as an agent to the general public assuring that the criminal justice system is functioning properly. The *Northwest Enterprise* questioned the actions of the public officials involved in the case. Valid inquiries into the underlying problem of state functions resulted from their news reports. When

90. Letters to the editor, *Northwest Enterprise*, February 24, 1939.

appropriate, the paper praised officials who acted in accordance with broad social interest in mind, including those of the African-American community. The primary function of the Afrocentric *NWE* was, however, to be an advocate to and for its readers, an ethical aspiration that Eurocentric newspapers profess, but are often inhibited from doing when news and editorial content are divorced by the concept of objectivity and when their news perspective sees the White community exclusively as their readership. The *NWE*'s role in the eventual prosecution of Whalen, Paschal, and Stevenson is not definitive, yet their accusations of witness tampering presented evidence that assisted in the eventual conviction of the officers. Without this information, a severe racial injustice would have occurred without public knowledge or punishment.

Throughout this analysis, both the mainstream newspapers and the Black newspaper framed the story from its own worldview perspective. The mainstream's tendency to report official accounts of the incident legitimize(s) and reinforced the dominant criminal justice system. The case was described as a single prisoner who was mistreated by the arresting officers. Even though the mainstream papers never condoned the officers' actions, their exclusive focus on legitimate system responses and procedurally closing the case—without investigating thoroughly for contrary evidence as the *NWE* did—suggested that an impartial verdict had been rendered and justice had been served. The Afrocentric *NWE* was never satisfied with the case outcome, engaged in investigative reporting with different sources, attempted to find exculpatory evidence, and intentionally exposed the social problems underlying the Lawson case. Highlighting racial inequalities in the Seattle area, the *NWE* demonstrated that racist officers tarnished the Seattle police department and proclaimed that they were not an aberration but rather a symbol of systemic racism. Even further, the *NWE* coverage criticized primal justice system responses to the case and linked them to deeply rooted bias toward the Seattle African-American community.

By highlighting these racial injustices in the Seattle criminal justice system, the *NWE* advanced the Seattle and Northern Pacific civil rights movement. Its discourse also helped mobilize public thought, generating a network of information around the Lawson case and demonstrating its role as a leader in the African-American community. Clearly, the mainstream press did not perform this service. In fact, it avoided any mention of racial discrimination. This evasiveness only contributed to socially constructed stereotypes of race within its White readership. Essentially, the police brutality in the Lawson case represents a larger institutionalized racism that was prevalent in 1938 and continues to this day.

While the mainstream press failed to recognize and discuss the systematic racial biases in Seattle's criminal justice system, *NWE*'s role as an advocate to the people sufficiently provided information about these problems, furthering the pursuit of social justice. In effect, the mainstream and the Black press were at odds with each other because of the cultural perspectives from which they operated. The mainstream papers promoted the status quo and reinforced faith in the criminal justice system among its readers. The *NWE* combated the racially biased criminal justice system and its coverage by the mainstream press and advocated in the interest of the African-American community.

It is evident that the advocacy nature of *NWE's* news frame was consistent with the Afrocentric cultural perspective. Throughout the coverage, the paper followed an editorial policy that blended news stories and editorial commentary that was consistent with the Afrocentric news model discussed above. *NWE's* coverage of the Barry Lawson case reflects an editorial commitment to the four major goals enumerated earlier, goals they shared as a Black media organization of the period and that are in sync with the history of news treatment throughout the history of the Black press: (1) to provide news that was excluded by the mainstream press, (2) to highlight incidents of racial violence, (3) to work in collaboration with civil rights organizations such as the NAACP to increase the social status of racial minorities, and (4) to provide social commentary on civil rights and injustices committed against African Americans.

In this case study, the *NWE* editorial practice was, at its heart, Afrocentric before Asante formalized and articulated his theory in the 1980s, demonstrating that the concept was not developed in a vacuum, but rather has a strong connection to the past. The Lawson case also highlighted long-term systemic racial and ethnic biases within Eurocentric social institutions.

These same biases and resulting social problems exist today. Numerous recent examples of police brutality, publicized in both the mainstream and Black press, as well as over social media, helped spawn the Black Lives Matter movement and echo the issues raised in the Lawson case coverage. In fact, Black control of social media content, advanced from an Afrocentric perspective, shows striking similarities to the *NWE* approach in 1983.

The Afrocentric model offers three major analytical elements derived from traditional African communication: create African-American group solidarity; employ subjective analysis; and emphasize a collectivistic social, political, and geographical orientation. Each of those, in turn, was parsed and applied as frames to the *NWE's* coverage of the Lawson case. That process demonstrated that the Afrocentric cultural perspective pervaded their editorial decision-making.

We believe it would be useful for publishers, editors, and journalists who control the news process on Black newspapers and other media as well to reflect on Asante's Afrocentric paradigm and how it pulls together elements of historical Black news coverage. It could be a useful tool in setting editorial goals and objectives, in defining policies and procedures, and in training staff.

Leaders of mainstream media might well use studies like these to examine themselves and their institutions. In this period of media fragmentation, niche outlets, and special interest journalism, industry groups might find answers to questions such as: What might a truly multicultural news and editorial perspective look like for the diverse communities we seek to represent? How can we revise organizational structures, policies and procedures, hiring and training methods, and the like so that our readers and/or viewers see themselves in what we offer?

Finally, this case study demonstrates that the mainstream newspapers and the Black newspaper covered the same highly charged trial using the same facts, but provided different interpretations based on their separate and distinct cultural perspectives, operationalized in institutional policies and practices that each perceived to be in the service of its

readers. We need to know whether this is the pattern over time. Further research can give us the answer. But having reviewed the history of Black newspapering, we have concluded that the Afrocentric reportage seen here better reflects the interests of Black America than that of mainstream media. And there is evidence in the media criticism of other ethnic groups, as reported in Meiss and Tait's *Ethnic Media in America* series and elsewhere, that articulating a comparable cultural perspective might be useful for them as well.

As the United States moves toward a minority majority population and social media platforms offer a publishing alternative, we believe it is time to revisit the established theory of the press taught in journalism schools and proclaimed by mainstream media organizations. The generally accepted philosophy is that the free press is based on the marketplace of ideas where, when the facts are known, truth will compete and win out. And objectivity is the key to that victory. But, as we know from recent political experience, objectivity often leads to false comparability. As this case shows, even when journalists can agree that there are objective facts from which to start their reporting, the selection and framing of those facts is never really objective.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Content analysis is a descriptive research technique and therefore has certain limitations. The frame analysis has provided a scientific sample of news coverage, so what was available to readers is clear. We have also attempted to address some of the limitations by providing a cursory narrative of some background issues in the sociopolitical landscape of the period, but a fuller understanding of the issues facing the Black community and the power manifestations of White supremacy in Seattle and the other areas serviced by the two newspaper groups would be helpful.

We also would benefit by looking at (1) editorial statements of newspaper policy, often published in the masthead or on the editorial page, to see how they line up with coverage and our frame interpretation; (2) reminiscences, biographies, and similar documentary evidence of editorial decision-making; (3) archival data from the NAACP and other community advocacy groups; and (4) official police and court documents, reports, and related studies. These standard historical sources might shed additional light on this case and other social justice and the media case studies, including questions of the effects of coverage on readers and the mainstream and Black communities.

As we have noted, there have unfortunately been a plethora of similar cases over the intervening decades and, recently, an identifiable number of spectacularly controversial incidents that would lend themselves to a similar analysis for comparison. It would be easier to broaden the analysis of the intersection of media, racism, and social justice in such cases by introducing interview research data. Additionally, further research could expand from newspaper coverage to broadcast and social media coverage.

For anyone interested in exploring Asante's Afrocentric model, a useful study would be surveying Black media publishers, editors, and reporters about how they select and process news and quantify their assessments of whether the parsed elements of the Afrocentric model introduced here are operationalized in their coverage and, if not, why not. That

data would be useful in journalism education and newspaper/media management—for both mainstream and Black organizations.

Finally, an inquiry into the media effects on readers and views of an Afrocentric editorial perspective for modern day media and social justice cases would be valuable in itself. It is additionally a validity check on the effects of the assumptions we made in the Lawson case analysis. ■