

2003

Reporting the movement in black and white: the Emmett Till lynching and the Montgomery bus boycott

John Craig Flournoy

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations



Part of the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Flournoy, John Craig, "Reporting the movement in black and white: the Emmett Till lynching and the Montgomery bus boycott" (2003). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 3023.

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/3023

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

REPORTING THE MOVEMENT IN BLACK AND WHITE:
THE EMMETT TILL LYNCHING AND THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

By
Craig Flournoy
B.A., University of New Orleans, 1975
M.A., Southern Methodist University, 1986
August 2003

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to thank several members of the faculty of the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University for their help and inspiration in preparing this dissertation. Dr. Ralph Izard, who chaired the researcher's dissertation committee, has been steady, tough and wise. In other words, Dr. Izard is that unique creature—a good boss. The other three members of the dissertation committee each made special contributions. Dr. Renita Coleman did her best to rid the dissertation of flabby vagueness and replace it with concrete analysis. Where this occurs, she is primarily responsible. Dr. Laura Lindsay taught the researcher to see civil rights leaders as advocates rather than saints, an invaluable lesson for anyone aspiring to do social science. Dr. Wayne Parent was a treasure trove of knowledge regarding politics, the black experience and the nexus between the two. He also reminded the researcher that good writing and good social science are not mutually exclusive. Given their steady hands and sharp humor, all four would make fine godparents. The researcher also would like to thank Dr. Jack Hamilton, the dean of the Manship School. It was his vision that created the Manship School doctoral program. He also was primarily responsible for raising the money that provided the researcher with a fellowship so that he could give up his day job as a reporter.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
List of Tables.....	iv
List of Illustrations.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Chapter	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature Review.....	8
3. Theory and Methodology.....	32
4. Invisible Criminals: Mainstream Media Coverage of Black Americans, 1900-1950.....	50
5. Covering a Mississippi Murder Trial: The Emmett Till Lynching.....	81
6. Covering a Mass Protest in Alabama: The Montgomery Bus Boycott.....	110
7. Summary and Conclusions.....	153
Bibliography.....	196
Vita.....	213

List of Tables

1. <i>New York Times</i> Articles about the Emmett Till Case (listed chronologically).....	155
2. Persons Quoted in <i>New York Times</i> about the Till Case by Race (with Findings).....	157
3. <i>Birmingham World</i> Articles about the Emmett Till Case (listed chronologically).....	159
4. Persons Quoted in <i>Birmingham World</i> about the Till Case by Race (with Findings).....	160
5. Persons Quoted in <i>New York Times</i> about the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Race (with Findings).....	168
6. Persons Quoted in <i>Birmingham World</i> about the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Race (with Findings).....	171

List of Illustrations

1. Initial Stories in the <i>New York Times</i> and the <i>Birmingham World</i> on the Till Case (September 2, 1955).....	86
2. Photograph in the September 15, 1955 Issue of <i>Jet</i> magazine Showing Emmett Till's Mutilated Head.....	93
3. Map of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta.....	96
4. Photograph from October 3, 1955 issue of <i>Life</i> magazine Showing J.W. Milam Playing with his Sons during Murder Trial.....	102
5. Artist's Illustration in <i>Look</i> magazine Showing Emmett Till Moments After Being Shot by J.W. Milam (January 24, 1956).....	107
6. Initial Story in the <i>New York Times</i> on the Montgomery Bus Boycott (December 6, 1955)	118
7. Initial Stories in the <i>Birmingham World</i> on the Montgomery Bus Boycott (December 13, 1955).....	119
8. The First Photograph Published by the <i>New York Times</i> in its Coverage of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (January 12, 1956).....	128
9. Opening of February 9, 1956 <i>Jet</i> Story on the Montgomery Bus Boycott.....	136
10. Photograph from <i>Life</i> Magazine's Coverage of the Bus Boycott (March 5, 1956).....	140
11. Front Page Stories in the <i>New York Times</i> Reporting that the Buses in Montgomery Had Been Desegregated (April 24, 1956 and April 25, 1956).....	144

Abstract

This dissertation examines media coverage of two events in the Civil Rights Movement—the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 and the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955-56. The study focuses on three publications aimed primarily at white audiences (*Life*, *Look* and the *New York Times*) and two aimed primarily at black audiences (the *Birmingham World* and *Jet*).

The dissertation seeks to answer several questions. How did mainstream news organizations cover black Americans in the decades prior to the 1950s? In reporting on the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott, did coverage by mainstream news organizations change? If so, in what ways? And, most important, which news organizations did the best job covering the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott? The researcher defined best as those publications that quoted a diversity of sources, provided historical context and identified the central problem while following accepted journalistic routines such as attribution and balance.

The researcher examined every story and photograph published by the five news organizations about the Till lynching and the Montgomery bus boycott. The researcher used textual analysis as the primary methodology. The study also incorporated two mass communication theories—framing and cultural studies.

The dissertation found that the black-oriented publications produced the most accomplished journalistic coverage by providing a greater range of sources, broader context, more depth and a clear statement of the central problem. The study showed that

during the first half of the twentieth century, mainstream news organizations largely ignored blacks or presented them as criminals. But this changed during the Till murder case and the bus boycott. The dissertation found that in reporting on these events, *Life*, *Look* and the *New York Times* adopted new frames—first presenting blacks as the innocent victims of deadly racial hatred and later as nonviolent protestors.

These findings challenge the widely held opinion that the *New York Times* provides the best journalistic source of information on key historical events. This study also challenges the widespread view that the black press is a “fighting” press that uses its news columns to advance a political agenda.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation will examine media coverage of the 1955 Emmett Till murder case and the 1955-56 Montgomery bus boycott, two events that helped launch the Civil Rights Movement. A number of scholars have suggested the movement had a more profound impact on American life than any other social protest of the twentieth century.¹ Prior to the movement, Southern blacks lived in an apartheid society, one that stripped them of their right to vote, relegated them to inferior schools and proscribed their movements in virtually all public spaces.² Underlying this state-sanctioned system of segregation was the threat of violence against anyone who challenged it, a threat that the Ku Klux Klan and other white terror groups enforced with the rope, the razor and the bomb.³ The movement destroyed the Jim Crow system of race relations. Lynching was no longer tolerated. Congress outlawed segregation in public accommodations in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. One year later, lawmakers ensured that southern blacks would be enfranchised through the Voting Rights Act of 1965.⁴

¹ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947): 623-624; Fred Powledge, *Free at Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991): xx.

² Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Vols. I & II (New York: Random House, 1944).

³ In Mississippi whites lynched 539 black Americans between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the movement. See Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 7.

⁴ On the day he signed the voting rights bill into law, President Johnson said, "Today is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that has ever been won on any battlefield. Yet to seize the meaning of this day, we must recall darker times. Three-and-a-half centuries ago the first Negroes arrived at Jamestown. They did not arrive in brave ships in search of a home for freedom. They did not mingle fear and joy, in brave expectation that in this New World anything would be possible to a man strong enough to reach for it. They came in darkness and they came in chains. And today we strike away the last major shackle of those fierce and ancient bonds. Today the Negro story and the American story fuse and blend" Johnson as quoted in Robert Mann, *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996): 476.

Activists and journalists have said the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till marked the emergence of the civil rights revolution.⁵ A number of officials, journalists and scholars have said the Till case was particularly important to the nascent movement because of the media attention it attracted.⁶ Other scholars, activists and journalists date the Civil Rights Movement from the Montgomery bus boycott.⁷ The boycott marked the first time in American history that tens of thousands of black citizens forged a nonviolent protest for more than a year that helped achieve an important political goal. It also profoundly affected how many whites viewed segregation.⁸ Like the Till case, the boycott attracted a tremendous amount of media attention.

This dissertation is important for several reasons. First, it will address a subject (media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement) and events (reporting on the Till case and the Montgomery bus boycott) that merit additional scholarly attention. This researcher was able to find two published scholarly studies that examined media coverage of the Till case. Warren Breed, a sociologist, examined the *New York Times* and ten other newspapers.⁹ John R. Tisdale interviewed three reporters who covered the Till trial.¹⁰ In

⁵ See Amzie Moore Interview in Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: Penguin, 1977): 235. Moore was a black World War II veteran who helped spearhead efforts by the NAACP and later the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi. See also Simeon Booker, "Thirty Years Ago: How Emmett Till's Lynching Launched Civil Rights Drive," *Jet* 17 June 1985, p. 12.

⁶ See David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993) and Bill Minor as quoted in the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 25 August, 1985, Sec. A., p. 1. Minor covered the case for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. See also Robert Patterson Interview in Howard Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 298-299. Patterson was a white World War II paratrooper who helped found the first Citizens Council in Mississippi.

⁷ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961): 378; Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1958): 9, 70, 190; and Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984): 51.

⁸ This was true even in Montgomery. As King observed, "By the end of the bus struggle it was clear that the vast majority of Montgomery's whites preferred peace and law to the excesses performed in the name of segregation." See King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 10.

⁹ Warren Breed, "Comparative Handling of the Emmett Till Case," *Journalism Quarterly* (Summer 1958): 291-298.

addition scholars have presented at least two papers examining media coverage of the Till case. Jane Rhodes provided an overview of news reporting and editorial commentary by mainstream news organizations in their coverage of the Till trial.¹¹ And Gerald Baldasty and seven co-authors conducted a content analysis of four newspapers—two in Mississippi and two in Chicago—that covered the Till case.¹² This researcher has not found a scholarly analysis of media coverage of the bus boycott. This study will attempt to address these important scholarly challenges.

Second, this dissertation will test two widely accepted scholarly tenets. One is that the *New York Times*, as the nation's newspaper of record, provides the best journalistic coverage of historical events, particularly those in the twentieth century.¹³ The other is that the black press consistently has been a "fighting" press more interested in advancing a point of view than in providing superior news reporting.¹⁴ By comparing and

¹⁰ John R. Tisdale, "Different Assignments, Different Perspectives: How Reporters Reconstruct the Emmett Till Civil Rights Murder Trial," *Oral History Review* 20 No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2002): 39-58.

¹¹ Jane Rhodes, "Racial Coverage of the 1950s Print Media and the Case of Emmett Till" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Texas, August 1987).

¹² Gerald Baldasty, et. al., "News, Race and the Status Quo: The Case of Emmett Louis Till" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Journalism Historians Association, Portland, Oregon, October 1999).

¹³ Scholarly reliance on the *Times* can be confirmed by consulting the endnotes of hundreds of works of American history. This is particularly true regarding historical accounts of the Civil Rights Movement. Studies covering three decades have found that the vast majority of American intellectuals, the political elite and newspaper publishers and editors consider the *Times* the nation's best newspaper. See Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974): 140-141; Leon V. Sigal, *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973): 47; Ernest C. Hynds, *American Newspapers in the 1980s* (New York: Hastings House, 1980): 284-285; and *Columbia Journalism Review* Web site www.cjr.org, CJR Survey, "America's Best Newspapers," (November/December 1999).

¹⁴ Scholars have been advancing this idea for at least the past six decades. See Jinx C. Broussard, "Savior or Scalawags: The Mississippi Black Press' Contrasting Coverage of Civil Rights Workers and Freedom Summer, June-August 1964," paper submitted to *American Journalism* (undated copy in author's files): 3, 4; Charlotte G. O'Kelly, "Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement: Their Historical Relationship, 1827-1945," *Phylon* 43 No. 1 (First Quarter 1982): 1, 6, 11; Myrdal, "The Negro Press" in *An American Dilemma*, pp. 908-926; Tisdale, "Different Assignments, Different Perspectives," p. 41; and Thomas W. Young, "Voice of Protest, Voice of Change" in *Race and the News Media*, edited by Paul L. Fisher and Ralph L. Lowenstein (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967): 125-132. The credo of the black-oriented National Newspaper Publishers Association was to be a crusader and an advocate for

contrasting the *Times* with two black-oriented publications, this study will test both assumptions using criteria to measure their coverage of two seminal events in the early years of the movement.

Third, this project presents an excellent opportunity to study the accomplishments and shortcomings of major news organizations in reporting on social movements and black Americans. A relative handful of scholars have examined critically media coverage of American social movements.¹⁵ This is particularly true of black protest movements.¹⁶ This study will attempt to document important changes and ongoing problems in the mainstream media's coverage of black Americans and protest movements.

This dissertation will examine five publications. They are the *New York Times*, *Life*, *Look*, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet*. The focus will be to compare coverage of the Till case and the Montgomery bus boycott in the black and white press. The researcher chose three publications aimed primarily at white audiences (the *Times*, *Life* and *Look*) and two aimed primarily at black audiences (the *World* and *Jet*). There were other reasons for selecting these publications. The *New York Times* has long been considered the nation's most influential newspaper. For example, three opinion polls taken in 1960 and 1961 asked 335 editors, 331 publishers and 125 journalism professors to rank the best newspapers in the country. The *Times* ranked first in all three polls.¹⁷ *Life* was the

civil rights; see Benjamin F. Clark, "The Editorial Reaction of Selected Southern Black Newspapers to the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968," Ph.D. dissertation, 1989, Howard University, p. 5

¹⁵ An exception is Todd Gitlin who wrote a superb account of the poor quality of mainstream media coverage of an important anti-war organization during the early 1960s. See Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

¹⁶ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward provided an excellent account of why the movement was successful in *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977): 181-263. But they paid little attention to media coverage.

¹⁷ Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978): 461-462.

nation's best-selling weekly magazine throughout the 1950s. Its penetration was enormous: The magazine estimated that in 1955 it reached more than one-third of all American families.¹⁸ *Look* was an enormously popular magazine; in addition, it was in some instances among the most courageous mainstream publications in reporting on race. The *Birmingham World* was one of the best black newspapers in the country regarding civil rights coverage.¹⁹ *Jet* was one of the nation's most influential black magazines. In addition, *Jet* publisher John J. Johnson was seeking to change the longstanding perception of the black press as primarily a "fighting" press.²⁰ The dissertation will focus on those stories that appeared in these five publications between September 1955 (when the initial news stories about the murder of Emmett Till were published) and December 1956 (when news stories appeared regarding the desegregation of Montgomery's bus system).

To compare and contrast coverage by these five publications, the dissertation will examine a number of research questions. Of the five news organizations, which ones did the best job reporting on the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott? This researcher defines best as those publications that quoted a diversity of sources, provided historical context and identified the central problem while following accepted journalistic routines such as attribution and balance. How did mainstream news organizations cover African-Americans in the decades prior to the Till murder case and the bus boycott? In

¹⁸ Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All: America's Coming of Age with the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 80, 170.

¹⁹ Lamont Yeakey, who wrote a massively-detailed doctoral dissertation examining the Montgomery bus boycott, said *Birmingham World* managing editor Emory O. Jackson was "the most astute and best informed reporter covering the boycott." See Yeakey, "The Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott, 1955-1956," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1979, p. 465. David J. Garrow, author of a Pulitzer-Prize winning biography of Martin Luther King Jr. echoed this observation in a January 2002 telephone conversation with this researcher.

reporting on the Till case and the bus boycott, did coverage by mainstream news organizations change when compared to their coverage of blacks in previous decades? If so, in what ways? What social conditions may have contributed to these changes? The dissertation will attempt to answer these questions by conducting a textual analysis of the five news organizations' coverage of the Till case and the bus boycott and by employing two mass communication theories—framing and cultural studies. The research plan calls for a close reading of all stories about these two events by these five publications and then comparing the coverage to assess their relative strengths and weaknesses. The researcher also will examine how each news organization framed the key issues and actors in the Till case and the bus boycott as well as social and cultural factors that influenced their coverage.²¹

The answers to these questions could provide a better understanding of mainstream news organizations and the black press. In so doing, the dissertation will test the widely held opinion that the *Times* remains the best journalistic source on key historical events, particularly the movement. Some of the *Times*' most distinguished reporters, including Harrison Salisbury and David Halberstam, adamantly maintained that John N. Popham, the *Times*' Deep South correspondent from 1947-1956, did a better job of reporting on the South in those years than any other journalist in the country. In Salisbury's view, "To not a few reporters Popham didn't just cover the South—he *was*

²⁰ Adam Paul Green, "Selling the Race: Cultural Production and Notions of Community in Black Chicago, 1940-1955," Ph.D. dissertation, 1998, Yale University, pp. 150-157.

²¹ For a more detailed explanation of the theory and methodology employed in this dissertation, please see Chapter 3.

the South.”²² Claude Sitton, Popham’s successor, said, “Popham knew the South’s Negro leaders better than they knew each other.”²³

The dissertation also will test the widespread view that the black press is a “fighting” press that uses its news columns to advance a political agenda. In addition, the dissertation will seek to assess the degree to which mainstream news organizations’ coverage of the movement represented a break from past practices in their coverage of African-Americans. A number of scholarly studies have documented that prior to the movement, major news organization in this country either ignored blacks or portrayed them primarily as criminals. The researcher’s analysis of the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* and their coverage of the Till case and bus boycott will test the degree to which this changed in terms of quantity. The dissertation also will examine how these news organizations portrayed African-Americans in their coverage of these two events and whether their reporting represented a break with the past.

²² Harrison Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor: The New York Times and Its Times* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980): 358. (emphasis in the original)

²³ *Ibid*, p. 353.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There has been a flood of scholarship over the past two decades examining the Civil Rights Movement. Some works have been recognized as superb scholarship. Taylor Branch's two volumes provide an outstanding overview of the movement set against the backdrop of black nationalism and the Vietnam War.¹ David Garrow has assembled the most thorough study of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.² Diane McWhorter produced a detailed examination of race relations in Birmingham in the twentieth century.³ Branch and Garrow included anecdotes about media coverage but neither devotes extensive attention to the subject. McWhorter's narrative suggests that local and national media coverage played an important role in the success of the 1963 Birmingham campaign but this was not the focus of her work. Each author was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

This researcher did not find an in-depth scholarly examination of media coverage of the entire movement. However, some scholars have attempted to address this subject. Charles Payne has a critical annotated bibliography that provides an excellent overview of media coverage of the movement.⁴ David R. Davies has written a chapter devoted to

¹ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988) and Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

² David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986).

³ Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham Alabama: The Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001). See also Enrique Dubois Rigsby, "A Rhetorical Clash with the Established Order: An Analysis of Protest Strategies and Perceptions of Media Responses, Birmingham, 1963," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1990. Rigsby found that the demonstrators' rhetorical strategies during the Birmingham campaign and media coverage perceptions were crucial to the success of the protest.

⁴ Payne, "The Rough Draft of History" in *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, pp. 391-406.

general trends in newspaper coverage of the early years of the movement.⁵ The researcher was unable to find a scholarly examination of many of the movement's important campaigns and events, including the Montgomery bus boycott, the integration of the University of Alabama, the Little Rock desegregation crisis, the Freedom Rides, the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi and the Birmingham campaign. A number of researchers have noted the relatively small amount of scholarly attention regarding media coverage of the movement, particularly how the former influenced the latter. This was the conclusion of the historian Charles Eagles in 1986.⁶ Paul Murray, also an historian, found much the same in 1993. In his words: "One critical area which has been barely touched is the impact of the mass media on the movement."⁷ Thomas C. Leonard, associate dean of the graduate school at the University of California at Berkeley, concluded in a 1995 book that scholarly study of the media and the movement was ground not plowed.⁸ Davies, head of the journalism department at the University of Southern Mississippi, found few works that had examined the interaction between the media and the movement in his 1997 study.⁹ And in 1998 mass communications scholar Susan Dente Ross observed, "Discussion of the role and effects of the mass media is virtually absent from civil rights literature."¹⁰ Some scholars disagree with this assessment. Jinx Broussard, an associate professor of mass

⁵ David R. Davies, "Newspapers and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1957" in "An Industry in Transition: Major Trends in American Daily Newspapers, 1945-1965," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1997: 179-220.

⁶ Charles W. Eagles, "Bibliographical Essay," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986): 177.

⁷ Paul T. Murray, *The Civil Rights Movement: References and Resources* (New York: MacMillan, 1993): 12.

⁸ Leonard, *News for All*, pp. 80, 170.

⁹ Davies, "An Industry in Transition," p. 10.

communication at Dillard University, argued that there has been a great deal of scholarly work regarding media coverage of the movement.¹¹

What scholarly work that has been done examining media coverage of the movement, however, provides an opportunity to examine what various scholarly publications and university programs consider to be acceptable research. Two scholars have published articles examining media coverage of the Till case. Breed conducted a content analysis of the *New York Times* and ten unnamed newspapers, five in the South and five in the North and West.¹² He concluded that all but one provided objective coverage. The work suffers from several significant flaws. First, Breed provided no literature review. He never explored previous works that examined media coverage of race relations nor did he examine earlier works that have explored the question of objectivity in American journalism. As a result, he failed to provide context for his own work. Second, he based his analysis on a content analysis of seven “symbols” or “themes” including “brutal, reign of terror, lynching, all-white jury, white supremacy, insulting remarks and arm around waist.”¹³ But the author never explained whether he considers the use of these to be objective or non-objective. This makes it impossible to determine how he concluded that all but one newspaper was objective in its reporting. Third, Breed mixed news stories, photographs, editorials and letters to the editor in conducting his content analysis. This presents obvious methodological problems. The

¹⁰ Susan Dente Ross, “‘Their Rising Voices:’ A Study of Civil Rights, Social Movements, and Advertising in the *New York Times*,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 75 No. 3 (Autumn 1998): 518-534.

¹¹ Email from Jinx Broussard to Renita Coleman, 18 September 2002. Email in author’s files.

¹² Breed, “Comparative Handling of the Emmett Till Case.”

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 293, 295. Breed never explained what he means by “insulting remarks” or “arm around waist” nor their origin. Breed could have handled this in a footnote by noting that Carolyn Bryant, the wife of one of the accused killers, told the judge during the trial that Till made insulting remarks to her and tried to put

prevailing standard for a news story in American journalism is that it be objective. No such standard exists for editorials and letters to the editor, which are overtly opinionated. Breed mixed the two and in some cases concluded that a newspaper lacked objectivity based on statements in its editorial columns.¹⁴ *Journalism Quarterly* published Breed's work in 1958. The journal did so despite the fact that Breed corrupted his independent variable (the content of the newspapers) by mixing editorials and letters to the editor with news stories and photographs. He did not define his dependent variable (objectivity) nor did he explain how he intended to use the seven elements of his content analysis to determine objectivity.

More recently, Tisdale interviewed three reporters who covered the Till trial.¹⁵ He concluded that each reporter recalled the trial differently because of different story assignments, organizational expectations and audiences. Tisdale made a number of assertions he did not substantiate fully. He said "all three wrote for different audiences" yet the reporters—all white men—reported on the trial for readers in the Deep South.¹⁶ He said all three had the same "biases" but provided no evidence to support this nor did he identify the biases.¹⁷ Tisdale provided no assessment of their coverage of the Till case nor did he cite a single instance in which their memories contradicted one another.

his arm around her. The judge did not permit the jury to hear this testimony and no other witness supported it.

¹⁴ Breed said that "Mississippi B"—the one newspaper that he said did not provide objective coverage—described the Till murder as a "rape attempt case" and then Breed added "in an editorial." (p. 297) At another point, he argued that this newspaper was "most protective of southern ways" and then cited as evidence five editorial statements ranging from criticism of the NAACP to attacks on the idea of race mixing. (p. 296)

¹⁵ Tisdale, "Different Assignments, Different Perspectives."

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 40.

Tisdale's work is valuable. The interviews he conducted represent one of the few instances in which reporters who covered the Till trial recounted their experiences.¹⁸

This researcher found few scholarly studies that examined media coverage of the movement from the perspective of the white and the black press. An exception is the work of Bonnie Lou Ross.¹⁹ She studied news coverage in the *New York Times* and two black-oriented publications, the *Chicago Defender* and the *New York Amsterdam News*. Ross relied on what she termed an “interpretative content analysis” to investigate a sprawling landscape of sixteen events—including riots, legal decisions and protests—spanning four decades. Her hypothesis is that the white and black publications presented radically different frames of these events. However, for the majority of these events, she analyzed only the stories in the *Times*. Her footnotes illustrate this disparity. She listed twelve articles in the *Chicago Defender*, the same number for the *Amsterdam News* and more than 150 stories in the *Times*. In addition, she failed to include archival records, interviews and even secondary sources to buttress her arguments. She convincingly argued that the *Times* was more likely to express the views of the political elite and too often neglected the black perspective. However, she failed to prove her assertion that the *Times*' coverage was pervaded by “racism” including “stereotypic representations, paternalistic attitudes, inferences of inferiority, and by simply ignoring blacks.”²⁰ As an example of the newspaper's alleged racism, Ross cited its coverage of the Montgomery bus boycott. Ross argued that the *Times* peddled “traditional

¹⁸ The three reporters are John Herbers, the United Press bureau chief in Jackson, Mississippi in 1955; Harry Marsh of the *Delta Democrat-Times* in Greenville, Mississippi; and William F. “Bill” Minor of the *New Orleans Times Picayune*.

¹⁹ Bonnie Lou Ross, “Interpretations of the Black Civil Rights Movement in the Black and White Press.” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1985.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42. She repeats this charge on page 174.

conceptions of blacks,” including its identification of the boycott leaders as young and black.²¹ They were, of course, both.

A few scholars have attempted national studies of media coverage of the movement. Sharon A. Bramlett examined how ten newspapers—five in the South and five in the North—covered the lunch counter sit-in movement.²² Her purpose was to test the “literature-driven assumption that southern newspaper performance was less socially responsible, in terms of balance and fairness, than northern newspaper performance.”²³ Bramlett conducted a content analysis of stories published over six weeks. She found that the southern newspaper stories contained significantly more quotes from black sources than their northern counterparts. She also found no difference in how the publications played the stories. As a result, Bramlett concluded that the “literature-driven assumption” regarding southern newspapers was wrong. The reason for this assumption, Bramlett said, was that Southern critics used a “flawed methodology” that relied on “largely anecdotal impressions of southern newspapers rather than from systematic research.”²⁴ Bramlett’s assumption is that the newspapers she chose—the *Atlanta Journal*, the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, the *Miami Herald* and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*—provide an accurate portrait of southern newspapers. Bramlett’s list did not include a single newspaper in Alabama or Mississippi, the two states where most of the important civil rights battles took place.²⁵

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

²² Sharon A. Bramlett, “Southern vs. Northern Newspaper Coverage of a Race Crisis—The Lunch Counter Sit-In Movement, 1960-1964: An Assessment of Press Social Responsibility,” Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1987.

²³ *Ibid*, p. vi.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8.

²⁵ Bramlett chose two cities—Dallas and Miami—that experienced relatively few sustained protests during the movement. Of her five cities, only Atlanta was the scene of repeated sit-in demonstrations.

A number of scholars have produced studies examining how daily newspapers in a specific state covered the movement. Roy E. Carter conducted a content analysis of news stories and editorials to examine how eighteen newspapers in North Carolina covered the school desegregation controversy during February and April of 1955.²⁶ He found the news stories were balanced generally and contained few stereotypical descriptions of blacks.²⁷ However, Carter never explained how many of the news stories were provided by the wire services, making it impossible to determine whether reporters working for the local publications or those employed by national news organizations were responsible. Several researchers have examined how editorial writers in a particular state treated the movement. Thomas Browing Cox III studied selected editorials in various newspapers in Georgia between 1954 and 1964.²⁸ He found that the editorial writers were more moderate than the state's politicians and overwhelmingly called for peaceful compliance with desegregation orders and laws. In his words, "The Georgia press generally contributed to the calm acceptance of civil rights measures."²⁹ Andrew McDowd Secrest examined editorials in four South Carolina newspapers, including the state's three largest papers, between 1954 and 1964.³⁰ Secrest described his method as one of qualitative content analysis. The author concluded that the editorial writers did not offer enlightened leadership nor did their work meet accepted professional standards. In his words, "The press as a whole was at best irrelevant in the struggle for equal rights in

²⁶ Roy E. Carter, "Segregation and the News: A Regional Content Study," *Journalism Quarterly* 34 (Winter 1957): 3-18.

²⁷ Carter also found the stories quoted relatively few blacks. The newspapers included eight published on a daily basis and eleven published weekly. All were presumably targeted primarily at white audiences.

²⁸ Thomas Browing Cox III, "The Georgia Press Reacts to the Civil Rights Movement," Masters thesis, University of Georgia, 1974.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 97.

³⁰ Andrew McDowd Secrest, "In Black and White: Press Opinion and Race Relations in South Carolina, 1954-1964," Masters thesis, Duke University, 1971.

South Carolina and, at worst, an exacerbating, agitating element in the situation.”³¹ Hugh David Graham examined thousands of editorials published in 150 newspapers in Tennessee between 1954 and 1964.³² Graham concluded that among editorial writers, state politicians and Tennessee citizens, moderation ruled. “By preserving intact an atmosphere of free and open discussion while under the intense conformist pressure generated by the desegregation crisis,” Graham wrote, “Tennessee’s newspapers served the interests of all the state’s citizens, white and black alike.”³³

Tennessee newspapers and their coverage of the Civil Rights Movement produced at least two other scholarly studies. Frank D. Durham examined how eight mainstream Tennessee newspapers covered the Highlander Folk School from 1932 to 1940, a period of labor unrest, and from 1953 to 1961, a period of civil rights protests.³⁴ Durham examined almost 700 news stories, editorials, columns and letters to the editor regarding the Highlander School, which served as a training ground for labor and civil rights activists. He argued that the dominant media frame of Highlander was Communism.³⁵ A 1939 series in the *Nashville Tennessean* epitomized this, he said, by using fabricated quotes to support such headlines as: “Using Grundy County as Laboratory, School Spreads Communist Doctrines in State.”³⁶ However, in examining the 1953-1961 period, Durham found that the *Tennessean*, the *Chattanooga Times* and the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* challenged numerous attempts by officials to link the school to Communism.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. xiii.

³² Hugh Davis Graham, *Crisis in Print: Desegregation and the Press in Tennessee* (Vanderbilt: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

³³ *Ibid*, p. 316.

³⁴ Frank D. Durham, “Anti-Communism, Race, and Structuration: Newspaper Coverage of the Labor and Desegregation Movements in the South, 1932-40 and 1953-61,” *Journalism & Communication Monograph* 4 No. 2 (Summer 2002): 49-107.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 69.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 77.

David Sumner's study of local newspaper coverage of the Nashville Student Movement of 1960 found that reporters at the *Tennessean* did an admirable job while its editorial writers said little of significance.³⁷ In his words, "The *Tennessean*'s editorials about the sit-ins appeared tentative and vacuous in contrast with its aggressive, sympathetic news coverage of them."³⁸ Indeed, David Halberstam—who won a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Vietnam War—told Sumner that his coverage of the sit-ins for the *Tennessean* remains his proudest journalistic moment. Sumner's study included a content analysis, oral history interviews and a thoroughly-researched history of the sit-ins. The work also benefits from Sumner's decision to concentrate his attention on the four months when the protests took place.

Mississippi was the scene of several of the most important struggles of the movement. Not surprisingly, a number of researchers have studied media coverage of civil rights activism in that state. W. Lance Conn examined the editorials and news stories concerning civil rights activities and the local black community published between 1961 and 1964 in the *Enterprise-Journal*, which served the small town of McComb.³⁹ He found that the newspaper—under the direction of J. Oliver Emmerich, its editor and publisher—provided few stories on local blacks and had a mixed record on its editorial pages. And yet, according to Conn, the *Enterprise-Journal* was progressive compared to other media in Mississippi. In the early 1950s, it reported that a deputy sheriff had beaten several black prisoners, prompting one reader to attack Emmerich. The

³⁷ David E. Sumner, "The Local Press and the Nashville Student Movement, 1960," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1989. See also David E. Sumner, "Nashville, Nonviolence, and the Newspapers: The Convergence of Social Goals with News Values," *Howard Journal of Communications* 6 Nos. 1-2 (Oct. 1995): 102-113.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

³⁹ W. Lance Conn, "Crises in Black and White: The McComb, Mississippi *Enterprise-Journal*'s Coverage of Racial News, 1961-64," Masters thesis, University of Mississippi, 1991.

Enterprise-Journal began using courtesy titles for blacks long before most Mississippi newspapers did so. And in 1964, Emmerich published more than a dozen editorials urging compliance with the newly enacted Civil Rights Act.⁴⁰ “Despite the *Enterprise-Journal*’s restriction and slanting of black news and its conspicuous editorial silences, the newspaper remained moderate by Mississippi standards,” Conn wrote.⁴¹ Robert Wright Hooker studied how four Mississippi daily newspapers, one black-oriented weekly and a television station covered the movement from 1962 to 1964.⁴² The author found that each news organization failed to provide objective reporting, and that their editorials repeatedly called on residents to maintain the white supremacist status quo. Hooker showed that hostility to the movement was not limited to the white media. The black oriented Jackson *Advocate* used its news columns and editorials to denounce the Brown decision, Meredith’s decision to enroll at the University of Mississippi and the white college students and black activists involved in Freedom Summer.

More than 30 years later, Jinx C. Broussard studied news stories, columns and editorials in three black publications in Mississippi during Freedom Summer.⁴³ Her purpose was to determine if the coverage of those events fulfilled what Broussard termed the traditional advocacy role of the black press. The author found that one (the Jackson *Advocate*) denounced the northern civil rights workers as modern-day scalawags, a second (the Mississippi *Enterprise*) largely ignored movement activities and a third (the Mississippi *Free Press*) “championed equality and social justice for African

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 1-3, 7-8, 128.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 126.

⁴² Robert Wright Hooker, “Race and the News Media in Mississippi, 1962-1964,” Masters thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1971.

⁴³ Broussard, “Saviors or Scalawags.”

Americans.”⁴⁴ Broussard concluded, “While the *Free Press*’ position and coverage reflected the traditional advocacy and uplift role of the black press, the content of the *Advocate* and *Enterprise* clearly did not.”⁴⁵

Susan M. Weill produced three studies of Mississippi newspapers and their coverage of blacks. One examined the state’s white-owned newspapers and their coverage of African Americans over a 40-year period.⁴⁶ A second one analyzed how the white press in Mississippi covered the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown decision.⁴⁷ The third examined the state’s twenty daily newspapers and their coverage of several important civil rights-related events over 20 years.⁴⁸ In the latter, Weill focused on editorials. She found that the newspapers did not encourage or condone violence against civil rights activists between 1948 and 1968. “Not once,” she writes, “was advocacy or support of violence found in any of the Mississippi daily newspapers.”⁴⁹ Weill maintained that her study runs “contrary to what media critics have reported about the promotion of violence to suppress civil rights activity in the Southern press.”⁵⁰ Yet she did not cite a single example of a scholarly study that said editorial writers in Mississippi advocated or promoted violence. As for general interest publications, Weill quoted just one to that effect—a 1963 article in the *Nation* that said the “Mississippi press goes on to

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Susan M. Weill, “African Americans and the White-Owned Mississippi Press: An Analysis of Coverage from 1944 to 1984,” Masters thesis, Jackson State University, 1993.

⁴⁷ Susan M. Weill, “Conserving Racial Segregation in 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Mississippi Daily Press,” *American Journalism* 16 No. 4 (Fall 1999): 77-99.

⁴⁸ Susan M. Weill, “‘In a Madhouse Din’: Civil Rights Coverage by Mississippi’s Daily Press, 1948-1968,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 1998.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 382.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. ii.

incite violence.”⁵¹ The historical record provides considerable evidence to support the accuracy of the *Nation*’s assertion.⁵²

Tisdale examined how eight daily newspapers in Mississippi covered Medgar Evers, the NAACP civil rights activist who was shot to death outside his home in June 1963.⁵³ Tisdale concluded that while many of the state’s newspaper publishers and editors slanted the news to discredit Evers and promote segregation, four tried to provide fair-minded news coverage of his activities and used their editorial pages to denounce white supremacist groups. Among the strengths of Tisdale’s work are the interviews he conducted with a number of journalists who reported on civil rights activism in Mississippi as well as with many of those who participated in the protests.

Some scholars have studied how African-American editorial writers assessed the movement. Benjamin F. Clark studied the editorials in the *Birmingham World* and ten other black newspapers in the South between 1954 and 1968.⁵⁴ He found that the editorial writers expressed diverse opinions, particularly on the subject of tactics. For example, each of the newspapers applauded the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in *Brown v.*

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 15. Weill took the quote from “Belting One Down for the Road,” *Nation*, 10 June 1963, p. 190.

⁵² A few days after a federal judge ordered the University of Mississippi to admit James Meredith as its first black student, Gov. Ross Barnett vowed defiance and called for the resignation of any state official who intended to comply with the order. The next day a headline on a front-page editorial in the Jackson *Daily News*, the state’s third-largest newspaper, proclaimed: “We Support Gov. Barnett.” A few days later, Fred L. Beard, the general manager of one of Jackson’s two television stations and a Citizens’ Council member, went on the air and urged university trustees to back the governor. “These men are to be envied by all for the heroic opportunity that comes to a man only once in a lifetime whereby he can, if necessary, sacrifice his life for his state and, in turn, save his country.” Whites in Mississippi responded en masse. When they learned that Meredith had secretly registered, hundreds stormed the campus. The mob of rioters wounded 160 federal marshals using high-powered rifles, shotguns, iron spikes, Coke bottles, rocks and Molotov cocktails. They executed a reporter working for a French news service. One of their stray bullets killed a local juke-box repairman. It took 23,000 soldiers to restore order. See Hooker, “Race and the News Media in Mississippi,” pp. 3-4; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 664-672; and Claude Sitton Interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, p. 380.

⁵³ John R. Tisdale, “Medgar Evers (1925-1963) and the Mississippi Press,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Texas, 1996.

⁵⁴ Benjamin F. Clark, “The Editorial Reaction of Selected Southern Black Newspapers to the Civil Rights Movement, 1964-1968,” Ph.D. dissertation, Howard University, 1989.

Board of Education. But only six of the eleven newspapers overtly supported the 1955-56 Montgomery bus boycott. The others resisted, Clark said, because of their concerns over the protestors' use of civil disobedience. John H. Hanson examined editorials covering the same period in sixteen African-American newspapers from across the country.⁵⁵ Using a content analysis, he found that the newspapers' editorials were favorable toward established civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, negative regarding more radical groups such as the Black Panther Party, favorable toward nonviolent protests and negative regarding riots.

A number of researchers have examined how modern general interest magazines portrayed blacks. Some have studied how *Life* covered the movement. Valerie Stephanie Sadler conducted a content analysis of selected issues of *Life* and *Ebony* between 1955 and 1965.⁵⁶ She found that *Life* provided more extensive coverage than *Ebony*. Why? "The researcher feels that *Life* was able to cover more civil rights events mainly because it was a weekly magazine" while *Ebony* was published monthly, Sadler wrote.⁵⁷ She failed to provide footnotes. She also confused the Birmingham and the Selma campaigns.⁵⁸ On the other hand, John Kaplan provided an excellent overview of the work of *Life* magazine photographer Charles Moore.⁵⁹ And Wendy Kozol drew on critical

⁵⁵ John H. Hanson, "An Evaluative Assertion Analysis of the Black Press during the Civil Rights Era: 1954-1968," Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 1997.

⁵⁶ Valerie Stephanie Sadler, "A Content Analysis of *Ebony's* and *Life's* 1955-1965 Reporting on Black Civil Rights Movement Issues," Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1984.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 64.

⁵⁸ "In Selma, King and his civil rights leaders were jailed, a man was killed and dogs and hoses were turned on would-be registrants." (p. 42) These events took place during the Birmingham campaign.

⁵⁹ John Kaplan, "The *Life* Magazine Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore, 1958-1965," *Journalism History* 25 No. 4 (Winter 1999-2000): 126-139

theory in her analysis of the photographs that appeared in a five-part series in *Life* in 1956 exploring life in the Jim Crow South.⁶⁰

Photography was central to media coverage of the civil rights protests. Larry Spruill examined the role of photography in the movement from its early years through the assassination of King.⁶¹ Spruill argued that “the vast majority of the photojournalists covering the southern civil rights movement” abandoned objectivity in favor of advocacy journalism as their encounters with segregationists became more violent.⁶² But his canvas is so broad, 1955-68, that he failed to back up this assertion. Spruill’s work is valuable. It includes the transcripts of his interviews with three important photojournalists who covered the movement. Spruill also used archival records to profile a little-known group of photographers who effectively erased the line between the movement and the media: They worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, an important protest group, and sold their work to major magazines such as *Look* and *Life*. Steven Kasher assembled a powerful collection of civil rights photographs that demonstrate the power of that medium to communicate the violence of white supporters of segregation and the courage of the protestors. However, his writing focused on events rather than media coverage.⁶³

Scholars have put together a handful of essay collections examining the media and the civil rights revolution. Not surprisingly, three were published in 1967-68 when the nonviolent protests of Montgomery and Selma gave way to riots in Los Angeles and

⁶⁰ Wendy Kozol, “Gazing at Race in the Pages of *Life*,” in *Looking at Life Magazine*, edited by Erika Doss (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 2001): 159-174.

⁶¹ Larry Hawthorne Spruill, “Southern Exposure: Photography and the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1968,” Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1983.

⁶² *Ibid*, pp. v-vi.

⁶³ Steven Kasher, *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996).

Detroit. One was based on a symposium held by the UCLA Department of Journalism in 1967 that focused on media coverage of blacks in Los Angeles.⁶⁴ The slender volume includes transcripts of comments made by historians, social scientists and activists. A second was taken from a conference held by the University of Chicago in 1968 that focused on media coverage of urban riots.⁶⁵ It includes eight essays from journalists, mass communication scholars and historians. The third was produced by a conference at the University of Missouri in 1967 that examined media coverage of the movement.⁶⁶ It includes nineteen essays, most of them by editors and reporters who covered the movement. The journalists agreed the movement was the country's most important postwar domestic story but, in covering it, most news organizations largely sought to maintain the status quo, employed almost no blacks and emphasized crisis coverage. Several essays stand out. George P. Hunt, the managing editor of *Life*, helped frame race reporting in the South by recalling its historical antecedent—the promotion of white supremacy. Ted Poston, a *New York Post* reporter who covered the Montgomery bus boycott, concluded that movement coverage by most Southern newspapers often was a disaster, creating “one of the most disgraceful decades in American journalism.”⁶⁷ Bill Monroe, Washington bureau chief of NBC News in the 1960s, argued that network television was uniquely equipped to cover the movement because it was a national medium that could bring racial violence into the living rooms of middle-class Americans. “Negroes are the architects, bricklayers, carpenters, and welders of this revolution,” he

⁶⁴ *The Black American and the Press*, edited by Jack Lyle (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1968).

⁶⁵ *The Media and the Cities*, edited by Charles U. Daly, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

⁶⁶ *Race and the News Media*, edited by Paul L. Fisher and Ralph L. Lowenstein (Washington: Frederic A. Praeger, 1967).

⁶⁷ Ted Poston, “The American Negro and Newspaper Myths” in *Race and the News Media*, p. 63.

wrote. “Television is their chosen instrument.”⁶⁸ More recently, David Davies edited a collection of nine essays by scholars who examined the careers of several Mississippi newspaper editors and publishers during the movement.⁶⁹

King, the central media figure of the movement, has drawn the attention of some scholars. Richard Lentz examined the newsmagazines’ coverage of King from Montgomery to Memphis.⁷⁰ Lentz argued that *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* transformed King into a symbol for black America—the newsmagazines honored him when he sought basic rights for black Americans but criticized him for opposing the Vietnam War and suggesting the need to redistribute the nation’s wealth. Glenda Einetta Suber explored the evolution of King’s media strategy.⁷¹ Her thesis was bold: From Montgomery on, King was a revolutionary pioneer in using the media, particularly television, to accomplish the goals of the movement. In her words, “Well ahead of John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, Dr. King, I shall argue, must be credited as the framer of the strategy of political media.”⁷² Her evidence was thin. For example, she noted that during the bus boycott King used news conferences, press releases and speeches to gain press attention. This was hardly a pioneering approach—local officials in Montgomery employed the same techniques. Indeed, it could be argued that King did not try to use the media in dramatic new ways to highlight black oppression until the Birmingham

⁶⁸ William B. Monroe, Jr., “Television: The Chosen Instrument of the Revolution,” in *Race and the News Media*, pp. 83-84.

⁶⁹ *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement*, edited by David R. Davies (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

⁷⁰ Richard Lentz, *Symbols, The News Magazines and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). Lentz plowed similar ground in his study of local newspaper coverage of King and the Memphis garbage collectors’ strike of 1968. See Lentz, “Sixty Five Days in Memphis: A Study of Culture, Symbols, and the Press” in *We Shall Overcome: The Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1950’s and 1960’s*, Vol. II, edited by David J. Garrow (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1989): 547-548. This work was originally published in *Journalism Monographs* 98 (August 1986).

campaign of 1963. Even then, James Bevel and Diane Nash had to prod a reluctant King to agree to allow an army of children to march in protest of segregated accommodations in what became the defining moment of that struggle.⁷³ Suber's work is not without merit. It included four interviews with activists who discussed King's relationship and strategy in dealing with the media.

Researchers have had a difficult time assessing the role of television in the Civil Rights Movement because of a lack of original material. No institution regularly taped and saved national news broadcasts until Vanderbilt University started doing so in 1968. Nevertheless, in recent years scholars have produced a number of works exploring the influence of television on the movement. Laurie Hayes Fluker studied NBC's coverage of the movement from 1955 through 1965.⁷⁴ She did a solid job of showing how the network's news coverage came of age during these years. Like Suber, Fluker has a bold thesis: Because of its civil rights coverage, NBC "ultimately assumed the position of America's moral conscience."⁷⁵ How she arrived at this conclusion is questionable. The vast majority of NBC news programs from 1955-65—including newscasts, talk shows and documentaries—are not available. As a result, Fluker based her account on NBC program analysis cards and logs rather than the actual programs. And no records exist for 1963 and 1964. This limited evidence is all that Fluker provided to support her assertion. Robert J. Donovan and Ray Scherer also put forth a bold argument—that network

⁷¹ Glenda Einetta Suber, "The Eclecticism of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Media Style: An Exegesis of Media Consciousness and Strategy," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1994.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁷³ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, pp. 756-792.

⁷⁴ Laurie Hayes Fluker, "The Making of a Medium and a Movement: National Broadcasting Company's Coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1996. Fluker found a dearth of scholarship regarding television and the movement. In her words, "A review of related literature revealed that past research and scholarly work concerning television's coverage of the civil rights movement have been sketchy, superficial, and inadequate." (p. 261)

television provided black protestors with an unprecedented weapon to highlight white violence.⁷⁶ Television was, wrote Donovan and Scherer, “a perfect tool for organizing a revolution.”⁷⁷ Rodger Streitmatter echoed this theme.⁷⁸ In his words, “The images that television news conveyed to its viewers moved the conscience of a nation and helped propel the people of the United States to take concrete steps toward leveling the playing field in this country.”⁷⁹ However, neither Streitmatter nor Donovan and Scherer provided the evidence to support their assertion. Part of the problem is that each attempted to analyze television and the entire movement in fewer than 30 pages. In addition, the authors viewed the movement and television independently, isolated from politics, the economy and the work of other news organizations.

Garrow avoided both mistakes in his account of the interaction between protestors, the news media and the nation’s lawmakers during the Selma campaign.⁸⁰ His thesis is that the protestors accomplished their political objective by using the media to highlight the legitimacy of their goal and the vicious opposition of white supremacists. “The crux of the movement’s struggle at Selma, as well as Birmingham, concerned its efforts to convey to the national audience certain perceptions of its conduct and certain perceptions of its opponents’ conduct,” he wrote. “Therein lay the heart of the SCLC’s strategy of protest, and therein lies the explanation for why that strategy proved so

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. ix.

⁷⁶ Robert J. Donovan and Ray Scherer, “Police dogs, firehoses and television cameras: shockwaves from the south” in *Unsilent Revolution: Television News and American Public Life, 1948-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 3-22.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

⁷⁸ Rodger Streitmatter, “Pushing the Civil Rights Movement onto the National Agenda” in *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History* (Boulder: WestView Press, 1997): 170-186.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 186.

⁸⁰ David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978). See especially chapters 2-5.

effective in February and March of 1965.”⁸¹ He based his account on congressional hearings, federal lawsuits, presidential archives, dozens of articles in newspapers, magazines and scholarly journals and scores of books on civil rights protests, mass communication, politics and race relations. He focused on a single civil rights campaign—the Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march. He provided historical background, beginning with *Smith v. Allwright*, the 1944 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that said states could no longer exclude blacks from voting in primary elections because of their race. He provided political context, pinpointing the problem of weak voting rights provisions in the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960 and 1964.⁸² He provided a point of reference, comparing and contrasting the march in Selma with the Birmingham campaign.⁸³ He traced the Johnson administration’s quiet legislative maneuvering to hammer together a voting rights bill months before the events in Selma captured the nation’s attention.⁸⁴ Only then did Garrow recount what happened on “Bloody Sunday” at the Edmund Pettis Bridge and the media response.⁸⁵ Garrow then detailed the political

⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp. 230-231.

⁸² All three depended on the courts. But few federal judges were willing to battle recalcitrant fellow whites so that blacks could get access to the ballot box. *Ibid*, pp. 28-30.

⁸³ Garrow argued that the Selma campaign had a more powerful impact than Birmingham for three reasons. One, the goal in Selma was singular and quintessentially American—voting—whereas activists in Birmingham tried to push six separate goals. Two, demonstrators in Selma were virtually all peaceful, which was not the case in Birmingham. Three, King was more adept in his use of the national media in Selma. Media coverage demonstrated these differences. In Birmingham, photographers captured police dogs biting demonstrators *and* the bloodied face of a police official struck by a rock. These types of conflicting events and images did not take place in Selma. *Ibid*, pp. 143, 230-231.

⁸⁴ “Bloody Sunday,” the infamous attack on peaceful marchers, took place on March 7, 1965. Garrow provides records showing that as early as December 1964, Johnson was making plans to introduce a voting rights bill. *Ibid*, pp. 38-40.

⁸⁵ ABC interrupted its Sunday night move, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, to air a lengthy film clip showing dozens of state troopers, many of them on horseback, charging into 600 peaceful protestors with nightsticks, whips and tear gas. It was the lead story in Monday’s *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

repercussions in Washington, D.C.⁸⁶ And he provided empirical evidence suggesting the impact that Selma had on members of Congress.⁸⁷

Garrow, like Sumner, has produced an example of superb scholarship. Each concentrated on a specific campaign. By contrast, of the other 28 studies examined in this literature review, 15—or more than half—cover periods ranging from 10 years (Cox, Donovan and Scherer, Fluker, Graham, Sadler, Secrest and Streitmatter) to 40 years (Ross and Weill).⁸⁸ Garrow and Sumner employed defensible methodologies. On the other hand, twelve of the other 28 studies rely on flawed methodologies including those used by Breed (mixing news stories with editorials to determine objectivity), Carter (failing to take into account the role of the wire services) and Bramlett (relying on a questionable sample of newspapers). Garrow and Sumner put forth a specific thesis they supported. Several of the other scholars made bold assertions they did not substantiate including Fluker (NBC was “America’s moral conscience”), Suber (King pioneered the use of television for political objectives) and Streitmatter and Donovan and Scherer (television made the movement).

Studies of media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement are journalism histories. Several of those studies exhibited the problems found in other works of journalism history—the absence of a critical perspective and the failure to fully address the issue of race. The distinguished historian Allan Nevins pointed out the former more than 40 years

⁸⁶ Within days, hundreds were picketing the White House. One week later, Johnson announced he would send a voting rights bill to Congress, adding, “What happened in Selma was an American tragedy.” A few days later Johnson delivered the first presidential message on a piece of domestic legislation in almost two decades to an audience estimated at 70 million Americans. He compared Selma to Lexington, Concord and Appomattox. “Outside this chamber,” he said, “is the outraged conscience of a nation.” *Ibid*, pp. 101, 107.

⁸⁷ Garrow examined congressional speeches following the Birmingham and Selma protests. He found that twelve times as many lawmakers denounced the events in Selma compared to Birmingham. *Ibid*, p. 145.

⁸⁸ The other six are Spruill (14 years); Clark, Hanson and Kasher (15 years); Durham (16 years); and Weill (20 years). The total number of studies listed does not include the four collections of essays.

ago. Journalism history, he wrote, “is deplorably uncritical and some of it is dishonest.”⁸⁹

Fifteen years later, mass communication scholar James Carey echoed the concerns of Nevins. Carey said most accounts of the development of journalism amount to “whig history,” meaning they pictured the history of journalism as the “slow, steady expansion of freedom and knowledge.”⁹⁰ And 14 years after Carey, David Paul Nord, another mass communications scholar, lamented the continuing failure of journalism historians to critically examine the past, particularly the nexus between journalism and power. In Nord’s words,

“What’s needed is a new and more critical evaluation and interpretation of those individuals and institutions that have so long been central to journalism history. The centrality of economic and political power must not be lost in the seductive but futile search in the press for the ‘consciousness’ of the people. The consciousness *in* the press is the consciousness *of* the press—of powerful and peculiar historical actors and institutions.”⁹¹

The need for a more critical evaluation can be seen in many of the studies in this literature review. Twelve of those studies focused on mainstream newspapers in the South. Six—or half—had positive findings regarding the performance of the southern press in covering the movement.⁹² These studies include the only two published in *Journalism Quarterly*. Those studies, by Breed in 1958 and Carter in 1957, reached much the same conclusion: The southern newspapers examined were objective and balanced in covering civil rights-related events. Breed criticized coverage by black newspapers, charging that they “dramatized Negroes as heroic and devoted, and used the [Till] case as

⁸⁹ Allan Nevins, “American Journalism and Its Historical Treatment,” *Journalism Quarterly* 36 (Fall 1959): 419.

⁹⁰ James W. Carey, “The Problem of Journalism History,” *Journalism History* 1 (Spring 1974): 4.

⁹¹ David Paul Nord, “A Plea for *Journalism History*,” *Journalism History* 15 (Spring 1988): 14 (emphasis in the original).

⁹² Four were critical. The other two were either neutral or were both critical and positive regarding the performance of the southern press.

ammunition for their protest campaign.”⁹³ Carter praised mainstream southern newspapers for their coverage of blacks: “News content contained few references to stereotypes of the American Negro, and such references were completely missing from editorials.”⁹⁴ Thus, if a researcher were to assess how the white media in the South covered the movement based on what *Journalism Quarterly* published, the researcher would conclude that the southern press was fair, objective and avoided African-American stereotypes. That was not the view of Charles Evers, a longtime activist with the NAACP in Mississippi and the brother of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers. “The press has been and is one of the worst enemies, along with the police, that the Negro has in Mississippi,” he said at a 1967 conference sponsored by the UCLA Department of Journalism. “Every newspaper in Mississippi—with one exception—has damned the Negro.”⁹⁵

Until recently, mass communication scholars have paid relatively little attention to racial ideas in mainstream newspapers.⁹⁶ Indeed, the index covering the first 40 years of *Journalism Quarterly* (1924-1963) does not include “minorities” or “race” as a subject heading. This researcher was able to find only a handful of articles in the index that addressed the issue of race in news coverage. The researcher found one article that explored racial ideology in news writing.⁹⁷ Roy E. Carter conducted an experiment in which researchers at five universities—including three in the South—assigned journalism students to write a crime story. In one version, the suspect was identified as black and in

⁹³ Breed, “Comparative Newspaper Handling of the Emmett Till Case,” p. 298.

⁹⁴ Carter, “Segregation and the News,” p. 17.

⁹⁵ “Comment by Charles Evers” in *The Black American and the Press*, p. 68.

⁹⁶ Domke argues that this remains the case. See “The Press, Social Change, and Race Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century,” pp. 21-22.

⁹⁷ Roy E. Carter, “Racial Identification Effects upon the News Story Writer,” *Journalism Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1959): 284-290.

the other as white. The findings supported Carter's hypothesis: "Consistently, across groups, the *white* suspect was judged more clearly guilty than the Negro suspect."⁹⁸ In other words, if a researcher were to assess the effects of racial ideology in news writing based on what *Journalism Quarterly* published during its first 40 years, the researcher would conclude that to be identified as black in a crime story was positive and to be identified as white was negative. Carter concluded that more racial labeling by the media was needed. "The results of the racial news experiments suggest that the gain to be made from Negro identification in the case of favorable stories might actually be greater than any harm done by the same practice in stories of crime or violence," he wrote in 1959.⁹⁹ That was not the view of eight black editors and publishers fourteen years earlier.¹⁰⁰ They argued that racial labeling serves to reinforce racial prejudice. "The thing that disturbs me is that there still is the identification of race in crime. It is Negro everything," said Frank L. Stanley, publisher of the *Louisville Defender*. Stanley called on the white press to provide a "universal treatment of people in the news and to forget about race identification."¹⁰¹

Jane Rhodes has argued that the relative absence of a critical perspective in journalism history and the failure by mass communication scholars to address racial ideologies in mainstream media coverage are intimately linked.¹⁰² Journalism historians,

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 285. (emphasis in the original) Carter does not identify the race of the students but indicates they are white since he describes the experiments as "tests of anti-Negro prejudice." (p. 285)

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 290. Carter follows this by applauding mainstream southern newspapers coverage of race: "Recent studies of Southern press treatment of the segregation issue indicate that newspapers are doing a reasonably responsible job, overall." (p. 290). He cites his 1957 *Journalism Quarterly* article and Breed's 1958 study in the same publication.

¹⁰⁰ "Dailies' Cooperation Asked in Solving Negro Problem," *Editor & Publisher*, 4 August 1945, pp. 7, 60-61, 67.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 60.

¹⁰² Jane Rhodes, "The Visibility of Race and Media History," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 No. 2 (June 1993): 184-190.

she said, have “focused on the celebration of technological achievement and financial success.” But, said Rhodes, this is not the whole story: “The struggle between the transmission of racist ideology and dogma, and the efforts of oppressed groups to claim control over their own image, is part of the legacy of the American mass media.” Rhodes called this “the darker side of media history,” one of “a national institution encumbered by a racist past.” Unfortunately, she concluded, media historians have paid so little attention to this that “students of mass communication receive little exposure to this legacy.”¹⁰³ This dissertation represents an effort by the researcher to address that legacy.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 185.

Chapter 3: Theory and Methodology

Theory

The principal methodology in this dissertation is textual analysis. Researchers who use textual analysis often incorporate two mass communication theories—framing and cultural studies.¹ This dissertation will use both theories. The researcher will examine scholarly works that examined the performance of mainstream news organizations prior to the Emmett Till murder case to identify the dominant media frames of blacks. The researcher will examine the *New York Times*, *Life*, *Look*, *Jet* and the *Birmingham World* from September 1955 to December 1956 to identify the primary media frames of blacks presented during the Till case and the Montgomery bus boycott. The researcher will then compare the 1955-1956 images with those presented in earlier mainstream media coverage. There are two purposes for doing this. First, the framing exercise will allow the researcher to compare with previous years how mainstream news organizations covered blacks during the 1955-1956 period. Second, it will allow the researcher to examine how the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* covered blacks during the Till case and the bus boycott and compare this with coverage by black publications, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet*.

The esteemed journalist Walter Lippmann was among the important early theorists in what later came to be known as framing. In *Public Opinion*, he argued that an individual's direct knowledge of the world is extremely limited. "Inevitably our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things than we can

directly observe,” he wrote. “They have, therefore, to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine.”² To compensate, individuals must rely on the news media. Lippmann argued that a host of external factors and decisions limit the accuracy and completeness of work done by news reporters. “Every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have,” he wrote. “There are no objective standards here. There are conventions.”³ In addition, said, Lippmann, a journalist’s mindset also influences coverage. In his words, “We do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see.”⁴

This last concept served as the foundation for the work of Erving Goffman, who pioneered the study of framing more than fifty years after the publication of Lippmann’s book.⁵ Goffman, a sociologist, argued that in any situation, the first question a person asks is: “What is it that is going on here?”⁶ Goffman contended that individuals employ frames, based on past experience and perspective, to define social situations.

Gaye Tuchman and Robert Entman were among the early scholars to apply Goffman’s theories to the study of mass communication. Tuchman argued that certain institutions, such as the news media, are not simply neutral transmitters of facts; rather, they make decisions that define events and give them meaning. In Tuchman’s words,

¹ Robert Entman has argued that framing is unavoidable if one is conducting a textual analysis: “The major task of determining textual meaning should be to identify and describe frames.” See Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43 No. 4 (Autumn 1993): 57.

² Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1922): 53.

³ *Ibid*, p. 223.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. XII.

⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

“When journalists choose content and frame it, they are constructing reality for their audiences.”⁷ Entman argued that framing is a process in which the journalist emphasizes certain aspects and downplays others.⁸ Entman identified four main elements of journalistic framing—the definition of the problem, identification of the cause, the moral judgment and the recommended solution. As an example, he cited American media coverage of international conflict during the Cold War. Problems abroad (war and civil unrest) had a single cause (Communist aggression), a clear moral judgment (Communists sought world domination) and an obvious solution (U.S. support for whoever opposed the Communists). Each news story, according to Entman, contains a primary frame and one or more secondary frames. The primary frame is critical, he argued, because it serves as the central organizing idea in a news story. Entman suggested that the best way to assess the frames in a news story is by comparing separate accounts of the same event. “Unless narratives are compared, frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably, because many of the framing devices can appear as ‘natural,’ unremarkable choices of words or images,” he said.⁹ This dissertation will adopt this approach, comparing reporting on the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott in the white and the black press.

Do journalists force certain frames on audiences in an effort to persuade them to think a certain way? Some researchers have said the evidence does not support this

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8. The answer is not necessarily clear-cut. Each person, said Goffman, has and will mistake reality for what is actually a joke, an accident, a dream, a deception, a misunderstanding or a movie.

⁷ Gaye Tuchman, “Content and Meaning: What’s It All About,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 33 No. 2 (1989): 147. See also Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

⁸ Entman, “Framing,” pp. 51-55.

⁹ Robert Entman, “Framing U.S. Coverage of International News: Contrasts in Narratives of the KAL and Iran Air Incidents,” *Journal of Communication* 41 No. 4 (Autumn 1991): 6.

proposition.¹⁰ Other researchers have contended that even if journalists tried to do so, they would not succeed because audience members largely take what they want from the media and use it to construct their own interpretation of an issue.¹¹ However, some scholars have maintained that the media do frame issues in an attempt to sell a certain point of view to their audience.¹² And a growing number of researchers have argued that regardless of journalists' intent, media frames strongly influence public opinion. These scholars have supported this perspective with persuasive research.¹³

Scholars are divided over the performance of the media in reporting events. Some have suggested that the media present a "mirror" of society.¹⁴ Others have argued that the media "distort" reality.¹⁵ Lippmann compared the media to the "beam of a searchlight."¹⁶ For Gitlin, the most appropriate description was that of a "funhouse mirror."¹⁷ While mass communication scholars and sociologists have disagreed on the best metaphor,

¹⁰ Dhavan V. Shah, David Domke and Daniel B. Wackman, "To Thine Own Self Be True: Values, Framing, and Voter Decision-Making Strategies," *Communication Research* 23 No. 5 (October 1996): 509-560. The authors nevertheless found that the "textual frame of a news story . . . influences an individual's processing and interpretation of the issue in question." (532)

¹¹ W.R. Neuman, M.R. Just and A.N. Crigler, *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹² Entman, "Framing U.S. Coverage of International News," pp. 6-27.

¹³ David P. Fan examined how the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and United Press International covered the issue of drugs between 1985 and 1994. He found that the public came to regard it as the country's most significant problem primarily because of media coverage. See Fan, "News Media Framing Sets Public Opinion that Drugs Is the Country's Most Important Problem," *Substance Use & Misuse* 31 No. 10 (1996): 1413-1421. Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder used a series of experiments and questionnaires to measure the impact of network news broadcasts and found that television news was a powerful influence in determining the public agenda and the public's view of political performance. See Iyengar and Kinder, *News that Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Nayda Terkildsen and Frauke Schnell used content analysis and experiments to examine the three major newsmagazines' coverage of the women's movement from 1950 to 1995 and found each major frame had a strong impact—positive or negative—on public attitudes. See Terkildsen and Schnell, "How Media Frames Move Public Opinion: An Analysis of the Women's Movement," *Political Research Quarterly* 50 No. 4 (December 1997): 879-900. See also McCombs and Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36 (1972): 176-187.

¹⁴ Edward J. Epstein, *News from Nowhere: Television and the News* (New York: Random House, 1973). See especially 13-18.

¹⁵ Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People* (Los Angeles: Diversity Press, 1971).

¹⁶ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 229.

¹⁷ Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, p. 164.

many have agreed that the media help define reality for their audience by the daily decisions they make. Which events will they cover and which ones will they ignore? Which persons will they interview—and quote—in a news story and which ones will be passed over? What pictures will they use? Frames are, in the words of Nayda Terkildsen and Frauke Schnell, “the ‘maps’ or the internal story patterns reporters and editors draw for their readers.”¹⁸ Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki have argued that these decisions can have great impact on audiences. “Choices of words and their organization into news stories are not trivial matters,” they write. Indeed, “they hold great power in setting the context for debate, defining issues under consideration, summoning a variety of mental representations, and providing the basic tools to discuss the issues at hand.”¹⁹ For this dissertation, the researcher will carefully review the applicable news stories and photographs in the five publications to determine which frames receive the greatest emphasis. Particular attention will be paid to issue frames and news frames including conflict and personalization frames and the “episodic” versus the “thematic” frame.²⁰

Several proponents of framing theory have argued that the media serve the interests of the elite by what they choose to cover and how they frame events. In Gitlin’s words, “Simply by doing their jobs, journalists tend to serve the political and economic elite definitions of reality.”²¹ This view is at the heart of the cultural studies tradition.

¹⁸ Terkildsen and Schnell, “How Media Frames Move Public Opinion,” p. 881.

¹⁹ Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki, “Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse,” *Political Communication* 10 (1993): 70.

²⁰ See Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); T.E. Nelson and Z.M. Oxley, “Issue Framing Effects on Belief Importance and Opinion,” *Journal of Politics* 61 (1999): 1040-1067; and V. Price and D. Tewksbury, “News Values and Public Opinion: A Theoretical Account of Media Priming and Framing,” in *Progress in the Communication Sciences*, xiii, edited by G. Barnett and F.J. Boster (Greenwich, Conn.: Ablex, 1997): 173-211.

²¹ Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, p. 12.

Among its important early theorists was Antonio Gramsci.²² Gramsci, an Italian, argued that there were two forces fundamental to understanding the media—ideology and hegemony. Ideology, he said, represents the sum total of public attitudes and beliefs regarding a country's politics, economy and other key social institutions. Hegemony, he said, represents the ability of the elite to shape that ideology so that the dominant class persuades most citizens that they share the same interests.

Several scholars have argued that the media play a crucial role in how the elite maintains hegemony.²³ According to Herbert Altschull, the media throughout history have provided a “particular conception of the social order” that supported those in power.²⁴ Journalists are successful, these scholars have said, to the degree that they present—and the public accepts—the ideology of the dominant class as common sense. Hall has argued that common sense is important “because it is the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed. It is the already formed and ‘taken for granted’ terrain.”²⁵ In this view, the media can play an important role in promoting racial ideas. Indeed, Hall argues that the “media construct for us a definition of what *race* is.”²⁶

A number of critical cultural theorists maintain that the dominant class does not impose its ideology automatically. William Gamson has said that certain ideas go

²² See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and translated by Buntin Hoard and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971).

²³ See William Gamson, David Croeau, William Hoynes and Theodore Sasson, “Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992): 373-393; Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, pp. 10, 252-282; and generally Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

²⁴ Herbert Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs* (New York: Longman, 1984): 201.

²⁵ Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 No. 2 (1986): 20.

unchallenged, which he has termed the “hegemonic” realm. In his words, “They appear as transparent descriptions of reality, not as interpretations, and are apparently devoid of political content.”²⁷ In other cases, according to Gamson, one or more groups in a society may challenge the ideology of the elite, producing what he terms the “contested” realm. Gamson has argued that a researcher who conducts a chronological study of how the media portray core ideas will find examples of ideology that move from the contested to the hegemonic realm and vice versa: “By studying symbolic contests historically, examining media discourse over time, one can trace movements between realms in either direction.”²⁸

Thus, in the view of several scholars, the media play an important role in how the public views events, institutions and racial groups in an ongoing contest of ideas. Fundamental changes in society—and in the media—can have a powerful effect on these social debates. For example, the rise of the penny press and technological innovations helped create vast new audiences for newspapers. In 1833, the largest American newspaper had fewer than 5,000 subscribers. By 1860, the circulation of the New York *Herald* stood at 77,000; at the New York *Weekly Tribune*, the figure was 200,000.²⁹ The Civil War and Reconstruction had a similarly powerful impact on the black press.

²⁶ Stuart Hall, “The Whites of Their Eyes: Racial Ideologies and the Media,” in *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, edited by Gail Dines and Jean M. Hemez (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995): 20 (emphasis in the original).

²⁷ Gamson, Croeau, Hoynes and Sasson, “Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality,” p. 382.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 383-384.

²⁹ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941): 303. See also “The Revolution in American Journalism in the Age of Egalitarianism: The Penny Press” in Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978): 12-60.

Between 1827 and 1864, publishers launched 35 black newspapers. In the 35 years following the end of the Civil War, they started nearly 1,200 black newspapers.³⁰

The period that is the focus of this dissertation also was one of great social and technological change, one that included unprecedented national economic prosperity, landmark U.S. Supreme Court rulings regarding race and the emergence of television, deemed by many scholars the most powerful new communication device since the printing press. These changes had the potential to reshape the social debate over the character of African Americans and how the media portrayed them. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the mainstream media had either ignored blacks or portrayed them primarily as criminals during the first half of the twentieth century.³¹ This was in keeping with the assumptions that underlay white supremacy, the dominant or “hegemonic” ideology. But the changes cited earlier had the potential to move the debate from the dominant to the “contested” realm. It also is important to remember that scholars working in this tradition have emphasized that the historical network of relationships created by the media can be as powerful as the content provided by news organizations. In the words of John Nerone:

The press is thought to have power when editors, journalists, politicians or advertisers direct a message at an audience and produce a desired reaction. But if we think of media as networks of relationships, we can see that each of the actors in this transaction has been constructed historically. In a single instance a message affects an audience, perhaps. But the network of relationships that is a medium is acting all the time. Its existence is intimately bound up in all its clients do. Its power is thus not manifested so much in persuading voters to elect Mr. Deeds as it is in reinforcing the definition of citizens as voters in the first place. It is not important so much in marketing [products] to the public as it is in reinforcing the definition of the public as consumers.³²

³⁰ Armistead S. Pride, “Negro Newspapers: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” *Journalism Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1951): 179:188.

³¹ See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for a detailed discussion of this.

³² John Nerone, *Violence Against the Press: Policing the Public Sphere in U.S. History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 14.

Nerone stressed that the media do not define citizens as voters or the public as consumers; rather, a nation's political and economic systems accomplish this. The media's role, in his view, is one of reinforcing these cultural constructs. Cultural studies thus offers a theoretical framework for examining how the media portrayed blacks in the Till case and the bus boycott and how this compares with earlier media presentations. This researcher, following the suggestion of a number of scholars working in this tradition, will examine those presentations over time and in the context of larger social, economic and political changes. The dissertation will analyze a wealth of scholarly studies that have examined media coverage of black Americans during the first half of the twentieth century to address the question of how mainstream news organizations covered African-Americans during this time period. The dissertation will analyze how the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* reported on the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott to address the question of how these publications covered blacks and how this coverage compared with earlier mainstream media coverage of African-Americans.

A favorable media image in the years following World War II was particularly important for black Americans as a political and social resource. For most of the twentieth century, the mainstream media had either ignored African Americans or covered them when they were charged with breaking the law. The vast majority of blacks did not have the economic or political clout to define a positive image. It is little wonder that in 1942, a poll found that only 41 percent of Americans believed that blacks "are as intelligent as white people—that is, can . . . learn things just as well if they are given the

same education and training.”³³ Black Americans needed to find a way to highlight their oppression and project a favorable image. The Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott offered them these opportunities.

Methodology

The dissertation will analyze all news stories and photographs about the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott published in the *New York Times*, *Life*, *Look*, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* between September 1, 1955 and December 31, 1956. The primary methodology used will be textual analysis, also known as literary-critical or linguistic or stylistic analysis.³⁴ A scholar using textual analysis examines text and photographs for recurring patterns and omissions to uncover implicit messages.³⁵ In this case, the purpose is to determine whether each publication addresses certain fundamental questions regarding the Till case and the bus boycott and, if so, the effectiveness of the reporting. The units of measurement will include all stories and photographs published in the *New York Times*, *Life*, *Look*, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* between September 1, 1955 and December 31, 1956 that focus on the Till case or the bus boycott. Stories that mention the Till case or the bus boycott in passing will not be included. The researcher will examine each issue of *Life*, *Look*, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* during this time period to determine which articles and photographs meet the criteria. As for the *New York Times*, the researcher will consult an index to the newspaper for the period in question; in addition, the researcher will consult the endnotes of several

³³ Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997): 104. By 1956, the figure had risen to 77 percent.

³⁴ Mass communication scholars have produced few studies using textual analysis compared to those relying content analysis. For example, the cumulative index for *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* for 1984-1993 lists more than 140 articles under the subject heading of “content analysis.” The index has no subject listing for “textual analysis.”

³⁵ Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, p. 303-305.

scholarly studies that examined the Till case and the bus boycott. The researcher did not find any scholarly studies of the Civil Rights Movement that relied on textual analysis as the primary methodology.

The units of measurement will include historical context, individuals singled out for praise by the reporter, a sense of the larger issues being contested, the atmosphere of the city or town where the event is taking place and information regarding the black community in that city or town. The researcher will examine each story to determine if these subjects are addressed and, if so, how effectively the reporter delves into the issue. The dissertation also will include a textual analysis of photographs, a relatively recent development based on the idea that words and pictures form a whole that should be studied as such.³⁶ The units of measurement cited above will serve as the analytic codes that the researcher will rely on to categorize and sort the information presented in the news stories and photographs, an approach recommended by John Lofland.³⁷ The researcher will use this information as part of an investigation into the journalistic quality of each news organization's coverage of the Till case and the bus boycott.

Two research centers in Great Britain have demonstrated the potential of textual analysis.³⁸ Among the leading proponents of textual analysis is Stuart Hall, who previously served as director of one of these research organizations, the Center for

³⁶ E. Lester, "Buying the Exotic 'Other': Reading the 'Banana Republic' Mail Order Catalog," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 16 No. 2 (1992): 74-85.

³⁷ John Lofland, *Analyzing Social Setting: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1971): 186-195. The researcher also will prepare the "elemental" and "sorting" memorandums recommended by Lofland to analyze and further refine the findings and observations.

³⁸ See Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980) and Glasgow University Media Group, *Bad News* (London: Routledge, 1976).

Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England.³⁹ Hall has argued that researchers using textual analysis or content analysis both begin with what he called a “long preliminary soak” in the materials.⁴⁰ After this, according to Hall, the two depart. The researcher using content analysis selects certain words, phrases, sources, attitudes (such as bias or objectivity) or some combination of these, constructs a code and then attempts to record each instance where these are used. “Content analysis,” wrote Hall, “assumes repetition—the pile-up of material under one of the categories—to be the most useful indicator of significance.”⁴¹ A researcher using textual analysis concentrates on finding representative passages and analyzes them for word choice, context and implicit patterns.

A scholar using textual analysis pays as much attention to what is not mentioned—and who is not quoted—as to sources cited and content covered. In Hall’s view, both content analysis and textual analysis rely on evidence and repetition. The advantage of the latter, he argues, is that it allows the researcher to discern more clearly what is being emphasized and ignored. In Hall’s words,

Literary/linguistic and stylistic analysis also employs recurrence as one critical dimension of significance, though these recurring patterns may not be expressed in quantifiable terms. The analyst learns to ‘hear’ the same underlying appeals, the same ‘notes’ being sounded again and again in different passages and contexts. These recurring patterns are taken as pointers to latent meanings from which inferences as to the source can be drawn. But the literary/linguistic analyst has another string to his bow: namely, strategies for noting and taking account of emphasis. The really significant item may not be the one which continually recurs, but the one which stands out as an exception from the general pattern—but which is *also* given, in its exceptional context, the greatest weight.⁴²

³⁹ Stefan Cellini, “Social Analyst with Solid Street Credentials,” *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 31 March 1996, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Stuart Hall, “Introduction” in A.C.G. Smith, *Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935-1965* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975): 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid* (emphasis in the original).

This dissertation will rely on textual analysis as its primary methodology because it allows the researcher to examine each news organization's body of work and specific stories for implicit patterns, points of emphasis and omissions. This research method is particularly well suited to these tasks. In the words of one scholar, textual analysis "yields a rich and deep sense of media messages and an understanding of the context in which they are produced."⁴³ Two of the best examples are separated by 60 years. The first is Charles Merz and Walter Lippmann's classic study of the *New York Times*' coverage of the Russian Revolution.⁴⁴ The second, published in 1980, is Gitlin's *The Whole World Is Watching*. In each case, the authors painstakingly compared and contrasted news reports with the historical record to highlight deficiencies in coverage and to identify each news organization's dominant themes or frames. A number of other scholars have published studies that ably demonstrate the strength of textual analysis as an analytical tool.⁴⁵ However, the researcher did not find any published studies of media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement that relied on textual analysis.

In addition, a number of unpublished mass communication studies have employed textual analysis. Two recent works demonstrate how scholars used the methodology to map racial ideology and to pinpoint hegemonic frames in news coverage. Jane L.

⁴³ H. Shah, "News and the 'Self-production of Society': Times of India Coverage of Caste Conflict and Job Reservation in India," *Journalism Monographs* (December 1993): 142.

⁴⁴ Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, "A Test of the News," *New Republic* 4 August 1920 reprinted in *Killing the Messenger: 100 Years of Media Criticism*, edited by Tom Goldstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989): 86-106.

⁴⁵ See Lisa Duke, "Black in a Blonde World: Race and Girls' Interpretation of the Feminine Ideal in Teen Magazines," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77 No. 2 (summer 2000): 367-392; Elfriede Furisch and E.P. Lester, "Science Journalism under Scrutiny: A Textual Analysis of 'Science Times,'" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13 (1996): 24-43; and Elli P. Lester-Roushazamir and Usha Raman, "The Global Village in Atlanta: A Textual Analysis of Olympic News Coverage for Children in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 76 No. 4 (winter 1999): 699-712.

Twomey examined how the *New York Times* and four other newspapers covered the 1992 Los Angeles riot, which left 58 persons dead and resulted in almost \$800 million in property damage.⁴⁶ She found that all five newspapers—particularly the *Times*—repeatedly used racial ideology in their news columns to portray blacks as solely responsible for the violence. The heart of her work consisted of a careful examination of all riot-related stories in the five publications during the week that the upheaval occurred. Ilia Rodriguez studied how the most influential newspaper in Puerto Rico reported on a 16-year economic development program directed by United States government.⁴⁷ The author found that American foreign policy goals so dominated news coverage of the industrialization program that the newspaper often presented them as one and the same. Central to Rodriguez’s work was the identification of frames, which the news stories presented as ostensibly obvious goals and which implicitly served American foreign policy interests. A number of other unpublished works have relied on textual analysis to examine print and television news coverage.⁴⁸ But here again, the researcher did not find any unpublished studies of media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement that relied on textual analysis

⁴⁶ Jane L. Twomey, “Constructing the Riot: An Ideological Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot in Five Newspapers,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland at College Park, 1998.

⁴⁷ Ilia Rodriguez, “Journalism, Development, and the Reworking of Modernity: News Reporting and the Construction of Local Narratives of Modernization in Puerto Rico during Operating Bootstrap (1943-1963),” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Ann Burch, “Framing an Environmental Controversy in India’s English-language Press: A Study of Text in Context,” Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1997; Mary Frances Corey, “The World Though a Monocle: The *New Yorker* Magazine and Postwar American Culture, 1945-1953,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996; Kevin Petrich, “A Content and Textual Analysis of ABC’s ‘World News Tonight’ and PBS’ ‘MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour’ Coverage of the Clinton Health Care Plan,” master’s thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 1995; Angharad N. Valdivia, “Gender, Press and Revolution: A Textual Analysis of Three Newspapers in Nicaragua’s Sandinista Period, 1979-1988,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991; and Jung Hye Yang, “Mainstreaming America and Media Hegemony: How Network Television News Constructs the Meaning of the Toxic Waste Movement,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999.

The dissertation also will include an analysis of news sources—that is, which persons are being quoted and photographed in each publication’s coverage of the Till case and the bus boycott. The researcher will use this information as part of an investigation into the journalistic quality of each news organization’s coverage of the Till case and the bus boycott. The units of measurement will include all stories and photographs published in the *New York Times*, *Life*, *Look*, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* between September 1, 1955, and December 31, 1956, that focus on the Till case or the bus boycott. Stories that mention the Till case or the bus boycott in passing will not be included.

The units of analysis will include the person or persons quoted in each story, the person or persons pictured in photographs, the group each person represents and the race of each person or persons quoted or pictured. Answering the latter is relatively easy. Most news reporters rely on public officials for information. In the Till case and the bus boycott, those officials overwhelmingly are southern and thus invariably white. When quoting a black, the *Times* often identified that person as a “Negro.” The researcher will compile these data into tables for purposes of comparison. For example, one table will show the total number of persons quoted in each *New York Times* article about the Till case and the race of each person. Another will record the same information for the *Birmingham World*. The tables will show the number and diversity of sources each publication used in individual stories and in its body of work.

This approach will provide the researcher with several qualitative and quantitative measurements of news coverage of the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott—news sources for information and photographs; the race of those sources; the

historical context of an event; individuals that the reporter singles out for praise as well as criticism; the identification of the larger issues being contested; a description of the atmosphere of the city or town where the event is taking place; and information regarding the black community. The dissertation will critically examine the performance of each publication in addressing these various measurements in its coverage of the Till case and the bus boycott to answer the question of which ones provided the best news coverage. Textual analysis can be a particularly helpful methodology in this instance because it highlights what is missing or is underplayed as well as what is addressed and emphasized.

The dissertation also will include an historical account of key events, organizations and actors independent of the published news stories. Such an account is necessary in to provide a framework for a critical appraisal of journalistic coverage and to provide background. Todd Gitlin used this approach with great success in his study of media coverage of the Students for a Democratic Society. By drawing on sources independent of the two news organizations he examined, Gitlin documented how the *New York Times* and CBS repeatedly demonized or trivialized the activities of the SDS. Among the materials the researcher will use are autobiographies,⁴⁹ interviews,⁵⁰ theses and dissertations⁵¹ and secondary sources.⁵²

⁴⁹ For example, Fred Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice: Changing the System by the System* (Montgomery: Black Belt Press, 1995); John H. Johnson, *Succeeding Against the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989); King, *Stride Toward Freedom*; Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987); and Salisbury, *A Time of Change: A Reporter's Tale of Our Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) and *Without Fear or Favor*. Gray was the attorney who represented Rosa Parks, King and the Montgomery Improvement Association during the bus boycott. Johnson was the founder and publisher of *Jet*. Salisbury was a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the *Times*. Robinson was the unheralded force who spearheaded the launching of the boycott. She wrote her memoir of the boycott shortly after it concluded but it lay unpublished for three decades until Garrow discovered it and helped prepare it for publication. He called it

To examine the quantity and quality of mainstream media coverage of African-Americans during the first half of the twentieth century, the researcher will rely on a number of scholarly studies.⁵³ To track changes in social conditions in the 1940s and 1950s that may have impacted this coverage, the dissertation will examine important decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court⁵⁴ and secondary sources, particularly political science studies. After surveying this historical backdrop, the researcher will compare it with the amount and type of coverage that the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* devoted to the Till case and the bus boycott.

Counting sources, providing an historical account and drawing on previous oral history interviews should enrich the research for this dissertation. Nevertheless, they are meant to complement textual analysis, the primary methodology of this study. The foundation of this dissertation remains the news—what is emphasized, what is ignored

“perhaps the most important participant-observer account of the Montgomery protest that students and scholars of the American black freedom struggle might ever have available.” (xi)

⁵⁰ For example, “Covering the South: A National Symposium on the Media and the Civil Rights Movement,” University of Mississippi, April 3-5, 1987; Steven M. Millner, “The Montgomery Bus Boycott: A Case Study in the Emergence and Career of a Social Movement,” in *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56*, edited by David Garrow (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989); Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: Penguin, 1977); and Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

⁵¹ For example, Hugh Stephen Whitaker, “A Case Study in Southern Justice: The Emmett Till Case,” masters thesis, Florida State University, 1963, and Yeakey, “The Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott, 1955-1956,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1979. Whitaker provided the best historical account of the Till case. Much of his work is based on the trial transcript, which is no longer available. He also interviewed attorneys for the state and the defendants, law enforcement officers involved in the case, several jurors and William Bradford Huie, the journalist who later paid the accused killers to confess.

⁵² For example, Branch, *Parting the Waters*, pp. 143-205; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, pp. 11-32, 49-82; and Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1988).

⁵³ For example, Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study in Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922); Noel P. Gist, “The Negro in the Daily Press,” *Social Forces* 10 No. 3 (March 1932); Carolyn Martindale, “Changes in Newspaper Images of Black Americans,” *Newspaper Research Journal* (Winter 1990), pp. 40-50; George E. Simpson, *The Negro in the Philadelphia Press* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936); and Southern Regional Council, *Race in the News: Usage in Southern Newspapers* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1949).

⁵⁴ For example, *Smith v. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944) and *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. (1954) per Findlaw Web site at <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com>.

and how these commissions and omissions reflect the culture in which they were produced. In the words of Michael Schudson:

Any literary genre, news or novel or epic poem, has to be read on its own terms, has to be understood as a social and linguistic construction operating according to its own rules, in dialogue not only with the 'real world' but with literary conventions and traditions. Looking at the newspaper in this way, as a text, requires a kind of closeness to the material that, I think, can be very revealing (however painstaking it may be).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Michael Schudson, "Critical Response: A Revolution in Historiography?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4 (December 1987): 407.

Chapter 4: Invisible Criminals—Mainstream Media Coverage of Black Americans, 1900-1950

“The press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates.”
-- Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm,
Four Theories of the Press

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the brilliant black scholar and editor W.E.B. DuBois had no doubt about the central question facing the United States. “The problem of the twentieth century,” he wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1901, “is the problem of the color line.”¹ The color line was more than symbolic. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the ghetto emerged as a new phenomenon in American cities.

The most widely accepted measure of residential segregation is the index of dissimilarity, which examines the degree to which blacks and whites are dispersed in cities. It is based on a scale of 0 to 100 with 0 representing full integration and 100 representing complete segregation. Studies of eleven cities in the North, West and Midwest found that the index of dissimilarity rose from 45.7 (in 1860) to 59.2 (in 1910) to 89.2 (in 1940). Studies of eight cities in the South showed an even more dramatic rise—from 29 (in 1860) to 38.3 (in 1910) to 81 (in 1940).² Based on these findings, racial residential segregation increased 95 percent in the North, West and Midwest between 1860 and 1940 and, in the South, 179 percent. In the American century, blacks and whites lived in separate worlds.

¹ Dubois as quoted in Doris Meadows, “Creed of Caste: Journalism and the Race Question during the Progressive Era, 1900-1914,” Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1984, p. iv.

² Douglas A. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). See especially Chapter 2, “The Construction of the Ghetto,” pp. 17-59. Massey and Denton also demonstrated conclusively that immigrant enclaves were far more heterogeneous, far less encompassing and much shorter-lived than black ghettos. (see pp. 32-33)

The physical separation between whites and blacks underscored the importance of the mainstream new media. News organizations possessed a profound capacity to influence white views of blacks and the nation's race problem. As much any other institution, they had the power to bridge the gulf between the races. There certainly was no shortage of news, particularly outrages committed by whites against blacks. Between 1890 and 1900, southern states systematically disfranchised black voters by instituting property and literacy tests, poll taxes and the white primary. The results were nothing short of astonishing. In Louisiana, for example, the number of registered black voters dropped from 130,334 in 1896 to 1,342 in 1904—a 99 percent decrease.³ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, southern cities and states also approved an elaborate system of Jim Crow laws. These laws segregated blacks and whites on street cars, in railway waiting rooms, at theaters and boarding houses, at toilets and ticket windows, parks and prisons, hospitals and hotels, telephones and toilets. As late as 1953, animal cemeteries in the nation's capitol were racially segregated.⁴

White violence against blacks was pervasive. Lynchings declined. But the proportion of black victims increased—from 72 percent in the 1890s to almost 90 percent during the first decade of the twentieth century.⁵ Nevertheless, as the following discussion will show, the mainstream news media in the United States showed little interest in stories of white terrorism against blacks and the establishment of an apartheid society in the

³ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

⁴ Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995): 280. See also *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South*, edited by William H. Chafe, Raymond Gavins and Robert Korstad (New York: New Press, 2001).

⁵ Tuskegee University figures as cited in Appendix 1 of Mark Curriden and Leroy Phillips, Jr., *Contempt of Court* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999): 354. Tuskegee has the country's most extensive collection of documents on lynching.

nation's cities and throughout the South. When news organizations did cover black Americans, the most common portrait was that of a criminal.

Media interest in the affairs of African Americans had actually begun to wane in the latter half of the nineteenth century. After the Civil War ended, many of the nation's largest newspapers devoted a great deal of attention in their news columns and editorial pages to an examination of constitutional amendments to end slavery and to ensure equal rights for black Americans. Many newspapers, in the South as well as the North, supported the abolition of slavery. Over the next quarter century, the papers significantly shifted their positions and attention. In 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1875, the last such piece of legislation approved during Reconstruction. A study of fourteen of the nation's largest newspapers found that with one exception, all supported the ruling, including newspapers in Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.⁶ An editorial in the *New York Times* championed the idea of doing away with the law, which prohibited racial discrimination in theaters, public transportation, inns and other public accommodations. According to the *Times*, the law had "kept alive a prejudice against the negroes and against the Republican Party in the South, which without it would have gradually died out."⁷ Thirteen years later, the U.S. Supreme Court issued *Plessy v. Ferguson* which enshrined the legal fiction of "separate but equal" as the law of the land.⁸ In this case, only one of the fourteen

⁶ David Domke, "The Press, Race Relations, and Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 51 No. 2 (June 2001): 317-344. The only newspaper to oppose it was the *Boston Globe*.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 331.

⁸ Findlaw Web site at <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com>, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). There are numerous instances of fallacious legal reasoning in the majority ruling, but one stands out: "We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it." (p. 8) In the view of the nation's highest court, black paranoia was responsible for whatever was

newspapers opposed the decision. Newspapers outside the South devoted considerably less news coverage to *Plessy* than they had to the debate over the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 to abolish slavery and the 1883 Supreme Court ruling. One study examined the *New York Times* and ten other newspapers in northern and border states. It found that over a week they published just thirteen stories about the *Plessy* decision—one-seventh the number they published about the Supreme Court’s 1883 ruling and less than one-tenth the number published about the Thirteenth Amendment.⁹

What happened over the next half century is one of the great ironies of American journalism: As conditions for blacks worsened, the press paid less and less attention. This included the new breed of investigative journalists known as the “muckrakers” who emerged during the first decade of the twentieth century. The muckrakers believed the first duty of a journalist was to challenge injustice, particularly social injustice. Ida Mae Tarbell took on the monopolistic practices of John D. Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company in a series of stories in *McClure’s* magazine in the early 1900s. Lincoln Steffens used the same magazine to expose municipal corruption in St. Louis, Philadelphia, Chicago and New York in 1902 and 1903. Upton Sinclair revealed the unsanitary and inhumane working conditions in Chicago’s meatpacking industry in 1906. Margaret Sanger started the birth-control movement in the United States when she launched *Woman Rebel* magazine in 1914.¹⁰ But the muckrakers’ concern did not extend

discriminatory about Jim Crow laws. The reality, as pointed out by Justice John Marshall Harlan, was quite different: “Every one knows that the statute in question had its origin in the purpose . . . to exclude colored people from coaches occupied by or assigned to white persons.” (p. 11) Such a law, he concluded in his lone dissent, “puts the brand of servitude and degradation upon a large class of our fellow citizens.” (p. 13)

⁹ David Domke, “The Press, Social Change, and Race Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1996: 251-253. See also Domke, “Strategic Elites, the Press, and Race Relations,” *Journal of Communication* 50 No. 1 (Winter 2000): 115-140.

¹⁰ Carl Jensen, *Stories that Changed America: Muckrakers of the 20th Century* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000). Includes excerpts from the works of Tarbell, Steffens, Sinclair, Sanger and 16 other

to lynching and other injustices suffered by black Americans. During the first ten years of the twentieth century, white mobs lynched 885 Americans. Of these, 791—or almost 90 percent—were black.¹¹ Yet the muckrakers paid relatively little attention to these gruesome, racially charged murders. One study examined the five most influential muckraking periodicals from 1902 to 1912 and found that none attacked it with the zeal reserved for oil giants, corrupt municipal bureaucrats or unhealthy meatpacking plants.¹² Two ignored the practice. The other three condemned it but also excused it on racist grounds. In 1901, *Collier's* called lynching “one of the worst blights of our civilization,” then added, “The Negro is a being apart from the whites—a creature of incomprehensible morals and practices.”¹³

Daily newspapers paid significant attention to lynching. Most treated it as a gory and justifiable spectacle. That was certainly the case with the 1899 lynching of Sam Hose, a laborer who allegedly murdered his employer, Georgia planter Alfred Crawford. According to contemporary news accounts, Hose—a “fiend incarnate”—crept into the Crawford’s home and “with uplifted ax advanced from the rear and sank it to the hilt in the brain of the unsuspecting victim.” Then Hose—a “monster in human form”—grabbed Crawford’s baby and “flung it into the pool of blood oozing from its father’s wound.” Finally, Hose—a “black beast”—raped Crawford’s wife while she was “swimming in her husband’s warm blood.” Hose remained in hiding for two weeks while “the entire state waited with impatience for the moment when the negro would pay the penalty for his

investigative reporters. See also Judith and William Serrin, *Muckraking! The Journalism that Changed America* (New York: The New Press, 2002).

¹¹ Tuskegee University figures as cited in Appendix 1 of Curriden and Phillips, *Contempt of Court*, p. 354.

¹² Maurine Beasley, “The Muckrakers and Lynching: A Case Study in Racism,” *Journalism History* 9 Nos. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1982): 86-90.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

fiendish deeds.” The *Atlanta Constitution* offered a \$500 reward for information about his whereabouts. After Hose was caught, “fully 2,000 people surrounded the small sapling to which he was fastened and watched the flames eat away his flesh, saw his body mutilated by knives and witnessed the contortions of his body in his extreme agony.” For souvenir hunters, “small pieces of bones sold for 25 cents, and a bit of the liver crisply cooked sold for 20 cents.” A private detective who investigated the case reached very different conclusions. He found that Hose killed Crawford in self-defense. Afterwards, Hose never saw Crawford’s wife. And, he wrote, the *Atlanta Constitution* “exaggerated every detail of the killing, invented and published inflammatory descriptions of a crime that was never committed, and by glaring headlines continually suggested the burning of the man when caught.”¹⁴

The *Constitution* was hardly alone. Burning a black alive became so common that newspapers referred to the act as a “Negro Barbecue.”¹⁵ Torture often preceded execution, which journalists described in detail. A reporter for the *Vicksburg Evening Post* recounted in 1904 what a mob of 1,000 Mississippians did to Luther Holbert and his wife before burning them at the stake: “Some of the mob used a large corkscrew to bore into the flesh of the man and woman. It was applied to their arms, legs and body, then pulled out, the spirals tearing out big pieces of raw, quivering flesh every time it was

¹⁴ Detective report as quoted in Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002): 16. News accounts taken from the following: “Sam Holt Burned at Stake,” *Kissimmee Valley (Florida) Gazette*, 28 April 1899; “Negro Burned Alive,” *Springfield (Massachusetts) Weekly Republican*, 28 April 1899; untitled editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 April 1899, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, edited by Ralph Ginzburg (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1962): 10-21. Contemporary news stories spelled the alleged rapist’s last name as “Holt.” Several historians who have studied lynching spelled his name Hose, which this author used.

¹⁵ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998): 286.

withdrawn.”¹⁶ Reporters were careful to include other details to humanize their stories. A reporter for the *Chattanooga Times* noted that among the 1,500 spectators at the lynching of Jim McIlherron in Tennessee in 1918 were “women with babies in their arms and little children hardly able to toddle.” The reporter used present tense to give his account a sense of immediacy: “A red-hot crowbar is brought forward by a masked man, who jabbed it at the negro’s body. The negro grabs it with his bare hands and the odor of burning flesh fills the atmosphere. McIlherron groans and curses.”¹⁷

Newspapers were careful to distinguish between lynchings that were uncontrolled and those they considered civilized. A mob led by a member of the South Carolina legislature lynched a black man in 1911 near Charleston. A local newspaper said it had acted in the “most approved and up-to-date fashion.”¹⁸ The Memphis *Commercial Appeal* praised members of a Tennessee vigilante group in 1917 after they forced police to hand over Ell Persons, burned him at the stake, cut off his head, photographed it and sold the pictures for 25 cents. The newspaper said that during “the entire proceedings there was perfect order.”¹⁹ The morning newspapers had advertised the Persons lynching, a frequent occurrence at the time. In October 1934, a mob overwhelmed police and abducted Claude Neal, a black farmhand, after he allegedly murdered Lola Cannidy in Jackson County, Florida. Newspapers in Alabama, Florida and Georgia carried stories announcing the lynching as did The Associated Press. According to a story in the *Macon*

¹⁶ “Lynched Negro and Wife Were First Mutilated,” *Vicksburg (Mississippi) Evening Post*, 8 February 1904, and “Negro and Wife Burned,” *New York Press*, 8 February 1904, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁷ “Blood-Curdling Lynching Witnessed by 2,000 Persons,” *Chattanooga Times*, 13 February 1918, and “Gruesome Details Given on Estell Springs Lynching,” *Chattanooga Times*, 14 February 1918, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, pp. 114-118.

¹⁸ As quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, p. 292. See also “Governor Commends Lynchers,” *Birmingham News*, 13 November 1911, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, pp. 74-75.

Telegraph, “All white people are invited to the party.”²⁰ At the lynching, according to the *Birmingham Post*, the mob cut off Neal’s penis and testicles, then forced him to eat them. The headline on the story read: “Lynching Carried Off Almost as Advertised.”²¹

A black man who was lynched usually got the attention of mainstream daily newspapers. This was not the case for the vast majority of African Americans. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, newspapers largely ignored black Americans. This was true in the North and the South, the West and the Midwest. A study of the white press in Philadelphia between 1908 and 1932 found that the newspapers there devoted less than 1 percent of their news columns to coverage of blacks.²² A study of the two main newspapers in Los Angeles from 1892 to 1954 arrived at the same conclusion.²³ Studies of the *New York Times* covering the years 1900 to 1953 found that with a few exceptions, the nation’s pre-eminent newspaper devoted no more than one-half of 1 percent of its average daily content to coverage of blacks.²⁴ This was better than the *Boston Globe* and the *Chicago Tribune*.²⁵ Blacks also were largely invisible in

¹⁹ As quoted in Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, pp. 234-235. See also “Grim Reminder,” *Chicago Defender*, 8 September 1917, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, pp. 112-113.

²⁰ “Big Preparation Made for Lynching Tonight,” *Macon (Georgia) Telegraph*, 26 October 1934, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, pp. 221-222. See also Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, pp. 344-353.

²¹ “Lynching Carried Off Almost as Advertised,” *Birmingham (Alabama) Post*, 27 October 1934, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, pp. 222-224.

²² George E. Simpson, *The Negro in the Philadelphia Press* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936). Simpson found that of the stories that were written about African Americans, between half and three-quarters focused on crimes allegedly committed by blacks.

²³ Paula B. Johnson and David O. Sears, “Black Invisibility, the Press and the Los Angeles Riot,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 76 No. 4 (January 1971): 698-721.

²⁴ Carolyn Martindale, “Changes in Newspaper Images of Black Americans,” *Newspaper Research Journal* (Winter 1990), pp. 40-50. Martindale sampled 66 issues of the *Times* from 1950-1953 and found that coverage of blacks accounted for no more than .5 percent of the average daily total. See also Martindale, “Coverage of Black Americans in Five Newspapers since 1950,” *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (Summer 1985): 321-328, 436, and Ross, “Interpretations of the Black Civil Rights Movement in the Black and White Press.” Ross examined the annual index of the *New York Times* from 1900 to 1950 and found that with a few exceptions, the newspaper devoted less than two-tenths of 1 percent of its column inches to coverage to blacks. Both Martindale and Ross found a significant increase in coverage in the 1960s.

²⁵ Martindale, “Changes in Newspaper Images of Black Americans,” p. 44. Between 1950 and 1953, stories about blacks in the *Globe* and the *Tribune* accounted for one-tenth of 1 percent of their news coverage.

newspaper photographs. One study showed that between 1937 and 1952, only about 1 percent of the photographs in the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* pictured African Americans.²⁶ For an enterprising young reporter, the lesson was clear: At mainstream newspapers, blacks had little or no news value. This was the experience of Ben Bradlee, who would later become a legendary editor. After the *Washington Post* hired him in the late 1940s, Bradlee said he soon learned that the local press had no interest in the black community. “I remember listening to the police radio describe a crime soon after I came to work, and asking the night city editor if he wanted me to go out on it. ‘Naw,’ he answered. ‘That’s black.’ ”²⁷

This was true even when gross injustice had taken place. For example, in March 1931, authorities in Alabama arrested nine black youths ranging in age from eight to 20. Two weeks later, all but one were sentenced to die for allegedly raping two white women on a freight train. The U.S. Supreme Court later ordered new trials for the defendants—known as the “Scottsboro boys”—because they had been so poorly represented.²⁸ A study of 19 newspapers found that many provided spotty, uneven and sometimes wildly inaccurate coverage of the case.²⁹ According to one story, the “black brutes” had “chewed off one of the breasts” of Ruby Bates, one of the alleged rape victims. Bates later changed her story and said she had not been sexually assaulted.³⁰

During the same years the *Atlanta Constitution* devoted 1 percent of its average daily content to coverage of blacks; at the time blacks accounted for more than one-third of the city’s population. See Martindale, “Coverage of Black Americans in Five Newspapers since 1950,” p. 326.

²⁶ Paul Martin Lester, “African American Photo Coverage in Four U.S. Newspapers, 1937-1990,” *Journalism Quarterly* 71 No. 2 (Summer 1994): 380-394.

²⁷ Bradlee, *A Good Life*, p. 125.

²⁸ For the best account of the case see Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

²⁹ Daniel W. Pfaff, “The Press and the Scottsboro Rape Cases, 1931-1932,” *Journalism History* 1 No. 3 (Autumn 1974): 72-76.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 72.

While the case often received poor coverage by the American press, it attracted significant international attention. As *The Nation* magazine observed at the time, “Almost nobody in the United States realized that the Scottsboro case has become a matter of tremendous moment all over Europe and in Moscow.” The magazine said American consulates in Europe were under siege “because of a case of which probably not one in a hundred thousand Americans beyond the Ohio has ever heard.”³¹

Most popular magazines expressed similar disinterest. A study of *Life* magazine from its inception in 1936 to 1946 found that it largely ignored black Americans. When *Life* did cover blacks, it tended to portray them as violent criminals, as a social problem, as objects of sexual voyeurism, and as athletes, entertainers and in menial roles. The magazine often used terms such as “mammy” and “pickaninny” to describe black Americans. Such words—combined with the magazine’s dramatic use of photographs—had a powerful impact on *Life*’s white readers. In the words of one author, “The stereotypes conveyed through photographic images made practically indelible impressions on a public consciousness.”³²

The performance of mainstream newspapers in the South was no better. Ira Harkey, Jr., the Pulitzer Prize-winning editor and publisher of Mississippi’s *Pascagoula Chronicle* from 1948 to 1963, observed, “The only time a black man ever got in the paper was if he were in trouble. He’d been arrested for something, he’d been accused of something, he’d been executed [or] he was being searched for as a fugitive. Particularly

³¹ “Eight Negroes Must Not Die,” *The Nation*, 3 June 1931, pp. 608-610 as cited in Pfaff, “The Press and the Scottsboro Rape Cases,” p. 75.

³² Bill Gaskins, “The World According to *Life*: Racial Stereotyping and American Identity,” *Afterimage* 21 No. 3 (Summer 1993): 14. See also Mary Alice Sentman, “Black and White: Disparity in Coverage by *Life* Magazine from 1937 to 1972,” *Journalism Quarterly* 60 No. 3 (Winter 1983): 501-508. Sentman found that the magazine devoted less than 1 percent of its coverage to blacks from 1937 to 1952.

in the smaller newspapers, there was never a positive story about a black—blacks winning honors, graduating from school, getting scholarships and so on, nothing of that sort appeared in the newspapers.”³³ Harkey saw this firsthand during his years at the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, where he worked before and after World War II. As a matter of policy, the newspaper did not publish photographs of blacks. As Harkey recalled, “Photos of street scenes were scrupulously scanned by picture editors and every perceivably black face was either incised by scissors or erased by air brush.”³⁴ Over the next decade, conditions did not improve much in the North or South. In 1955, Simeon Booker, a reporter for *Jet* magazine, said he and his colleagues spent a part of each day looking at newspapers to examine their coverage of blacks. They found no obituaries of African Americans and no news coverage of black businesses, churches or civic clubs. “It is shocking,” Booker wrote, “to appraise the sum total of the so-called Negro news.”³⁵

A handful of southern newspapers made an effort to cover the black community. They did so by segregating the news on a special page in the “colored” or “black star” edition, named for the practice of using one or more stars on these newspapers. However, southern newspaper publishers were careful to distribute these only in the black community.³⁶ The *Montgomery Advertiser* and the *Alabama Journal* published special

³³ Ira Harkey, Jr., “Jim Crow Days—The Way We Were,” Speech delivered 28 October 1992 at Bennett Auditorium, University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg) as cited in David Davies, “An Industry in Transition: Major Trends in American Daily Newspapers, 1945-1965,” pp. 183-184.

³⁴ Ira B. Harkey, Jr., *The Smell of Burning Crosses: An Autobiography of a Mississippi Newspaperman* (Jacksonville, Illinois: Harris-Wolfe & Co., 1967): 52. Between 1937 and 1952, blacks appeared in one-tenth of 1 percent of the photographs in the *Times-Picayune*. See Lester, “African American Photo Coverage in Four U.S. Newspapers,” p. 388.

³⁵ Simeon Booker, “The New Frontier for Daily Newspapers,” *Nieman Reports* (January 1955): 12.

³⁶ Maxwell R. Brooks, *The Negro Press Re-Examined: Political Content of Leading Negro Newspapers* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1959): 63; “Integrating the News,” *Time* (21 June 1963): 45; Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 915.

editions for African-Americans throughout the 1940s and the 1950s.³⁷ Even in the early 1960s the Jackson *Daily News* stopped its “white” press run each day, cut a column or two of financial news and substituted news about blacks. For its Saturday editions, the newspaper often would publish a full page of news about the black community. The newspaper’s self-styled “Colored Circulation Department,” headquartered in a rundown building in a black neighborhood, delivered these newspapers to African-American households.³⁸ Whites in Jackson never saw these news accounts.

Charles Butts, editor of the *Mississippi Free Press*, a liberal weekly that died a quick death, said the practice of prohibiting stories on the black community from ever reaching white readers served only to widen the gulf between the races. “The white community,” he said, “never sees a Negro face in a newspaper and has no way of knowing of any church, civic, and social groups existing within the Negro community.”³⁹ Lee Blackwell, a journalist with the highly-regarded black newspaper, the Chicago *Daily Defender*, echoed this view in 1963. “If you only read the regular press,” he said, “you’d think Negroes were never born, never got married, and didn’t die.”⁴⁰

The sociologist and editor Charles S. Johnson had made this same point more than a quarter-century earlier. In his words:

The traditional visitor from Mars reading our papers, attending our theatres and movies, or listening to our radios would never guess that one-tenth of the American people and nearly one-fourth of the people of the South are Negroes, engaged like whites in the ordinary daily occupations in church and home, in school and sports, in work and

³⁷ Roger M. Williams, “A Regional Report: Newspapers of the South,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (Summer 1967): 26-35.

³⁸ Interviews with Sarah M. Stevens, “colored correspondent” for the *Daily News*, 25 July 1970, and Kinard D. Hensarling, *Daily News* assistant circulation manager, 31 July 1970, as cited in Hooker, “Race and the News Media in Mississippi,” pp. 77-78.

³⁹ Charles Butts, “Mississippi: The Vacuum and the System,” in *Black, White and Gray: Twenty-one Points of View on the Race Question* edited by Bradford Daniel (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964): 109.

⁴⁰ Blackwell as quoted in “A Victim of Negro Progress,” *Newsweek*, 26 August 1963, p. 51.

welfare, in civic and political activities, and loyal and brave to the nation in all its battle fronts in times of war.⁴¹

It was for precisely these reasons that John H. Johnson founded *Negro Digest* and *Ebony* in the 1940s and *Jet* in the 1950s. “If you had relied on the white press of that day, you would have assumed that blacks were not born because the white press didn’t deal with our births,” he recalled in his autobiography. “You would have assumed that we didn’t finish school, because the white press didn’t deal with our educational achievements.”⁴²

When the media did report on blacks during the first half of the twentieth century, they overwhelmingly presented them negatively.⁴³ One scholar studied 25 popular magazines and 12 scholarly journals between 1900 and 1914 and found that almost without exception, the publications said blacks were inherently inferior to whites and that white supremacy was in everyone’s best interest.⁴⁴ The author concluded that the media played a crucial role in creating a “creed of caste” so pervasive that whites accepted racist attitudes as common sense.⁴⁵

The dominant image of blacks in newspapers was that of a criminal. A commission in Chicago examined 1,338 newspaper articles about blacks published in 1916 and 1917 by the city’s three major white newspapers. It found that almost half dealt with riots, crimes or vice. According to the commission, “Constant identification of Negroes with certain definite crimes could have no other effect than to stamp the entire Negro group in the

⁴¹ Charles S. Johnson, *In the Main Street: A Survey of Best Practices in Race Relations in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947): 198.

⁴² John H. Johnson, *Succeeding Against the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989): 157-158.

⁴³ Joseph Boskin, “Denials: The Media View of Dark Skins and the City,” in *Small Voices and Great Trumpets: Minorities and the Media*, edited by Bernard Rubin (New York: Praeger, 1980): 141-147.

⁴⁴ Meadows, “Creed of Caste.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. ii, vi, 5-6, 395-396.

public mind as generally criminal.”⁴⁶ A study of three Columbus, Ohio, newspapers in the early 1920s reached a similar conclusion.⁴⁷ Headlines in the Columbus newspapers often were overtly racist. As in “Negro Liar Has No Chance in Judge Tarbel’s Court.” And “Out n’ Dat ‘Er Prison Winda? Nassuh, Captin, Ah Wak Out N De Dooh.”⁴⁸ Texas newspapers also were obsessed with the idea of the African American as a criminal. A 1935 study examined 28 newspapers in the state, including 16 urban and 12 rural publications. The study found that among rural newspapers, 60 percent of the news articles about blacks concerned crime; in the city newspapers, the figure topped 84 percent.⁴⁹

Newspapers treated whites far better as demonstrated by a study of the *New York Times* and eleven other metropolitan newspapers in 1928 and 1929. It measured the amount of space devoted to news stories about anti-social behavior—including violent criminal acts, drug dealing and breaking out of jail—versus general news—such as politics, education, sports and obituaries. For whites, 12 percent of the news stories involved anti-social behavior. For blacks, the figure was 41 percent, or more than three times the white percentage.⁵⁰ The author sent questionnaires to editors to determine why they portrayed black behavior as primarily pathological. Virtually every one gave the same reason—“news value.” White editors, in other words, defined a black American’s

⁴⁶ Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study in Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922): 524, 635.

⁴⁷ J. Prather Houser, “Treatment by Columbus Daily Newspapers of News regarding the Negro,” Masters thesis, Ohio State University, 1925. Houser found that 55.7 percent of the stories about blacks involved crime or vice. (p. 8) He wrote, “This emphasis on individual crimes specifying Negro in each offense tends to stamp the entire Negro group as criminal.” (pp. 112-113)

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 51.

⁴⁹ Ira B. Bryant, “News Items about Negroes in White Urban and Rural Newspapers,” *Journal of Negro Education* (April 1935): 169-178.

news value based on whether he or she had been accused of committing a criminal act. The author concluded the editors were giving white readers what they wanted. In the words of the author, “If the newspapermen have distorted Negro news, if they have emphasized that which is bizarre and pathological in Negro life, then it is probably because of their hyper-sensitiveness to the wishes and interests of their white readers.”⁵¹

Many years later, some newspapers publicly acknowledged racist past practices and their impact. As part of a 1993 series on race, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* examined its 131-year history. The article of nearly 6,000 words said the city’s newspapers had been the single most important factor in shaping racial attitudes in New Orleans. “And for the greater part of its years,” the story said, “the newspaper gave readers an image of black people as intellectually and morally inferior, relegated to a lower social caste than white people and often little more than lazy or criminal.”⁵² The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* took a hard look at its history in one installment of a 2002 series examining the Jim Crow era. The newspaper found that it “helped perpetuate the oppressive system” of segregation by “demeaning blacks with its opinions, its language, its invisible coverage of their communities.” The headline on the story—“Our Own Sins.”⁵³

These social attitudes were not only expressed intellectually, nor were they restricted to lynching and acts of violence against individual blacks. During the first half of the twentieth century, the United States experienced racial conflict of unprecedented

⁵⁰ Noel P. Gist, “The Negro in the Daily Press,” *Social Forces* 10 No. 3 (March 1932), pp. 405-411. The other newspapers were in Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Kansas City, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Topeka and Washington, D.C.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 411.

⁵² Chris Adams, “New Orleans’ Newspapers Give White View of the City,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 17 June 1993, Sec. A, p. 18.

scope—the race riot. One researcher has identified at least 33 major interracial disturbances during the first half of the twentieth century, including eighteen between 1915 and 1919.⁵⁴ These were not like the riots of the 1960s in which blacks in Los Angeles, Chicago, Newark and Detroit exploded in rage against white racism and destroyed their own neighborhoods.⁵⁵ In the earlier riots, mobs of whites stormed through black communities, killing residents and destroying their property. In some cases, local newspapers precipitated the violence by reporting that blacks were assaulting white woman and conspiring to murder whites. In September 1906, the newspapers in Atlanta published several sensational front-page stories claiming that black men had assaulted white women, creating, in the words of one newspaper, “an intolerable epidemic of rape.” On September 22, the newspapers issued multiple special editions with banner headlines like “Angry Citizens in Pursuit of Black Brute Who Attempted Assault” and “TWO ASSAULTS” and “THIRD ASSAULT.” That same day more than 10,000 whites went on a four-day rampage. The results: 26 dead (including 25 blacks), more than 200 seriously injured (most of them black) and hundreds arrested (mostly black). Later, the *Atlanta Constitution* blamed the riot on “recent criminal assaults made by brutal negroes on defenseless white women” which “inflamed the people beyond endurance.”⁵⁶

⁵³ See *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* Web site at www.dfw.com. Tim Madigan, “Our Own Sins,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 10 October 2002.

⁵⁴ A.D. Grimshaw, “A Study in Social Violence: Urban Race Riots in the United States,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1959.

⁵⁵ See generally U.S. Riot Commission Report, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).

⁵⁶ Mark Bauerlein, *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001); Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, pp. 315-319; and Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, pp. 162-167. By their own accounts, two of the women were never assaulted. One said she discovered a black man in her barn. Another said she saw a black man looking through her window. A third said a black man grabbed her arm and said, “Come on, honey, and go with me.” See Bauerlein, *Negrophobia*, pp. 142-145. (capitalization of all letters in original headlines)

One scholar examined local news coverage of eleven riots between 1917 and 1943 and found that in the majority of cases, the newspapers presented biased accounts that unfairly and inaccurately blamed blacks.⁵⁷ In at least two cases, the press helped precipitate riots. In 1917, newspapers in St. Louis falsely claimed that the killing of two detectives in a black neighborhood was part of a murder plot. White mobs responded in a wave of violence, killing 39 blacks and eight whites and displacing 6,000 persons. The St. Louis *Republic* later claimed the killings averted a citywide black murder conspiracy. Its headline read: “25,000 Whites Were ‘Doomed’ in Negro Murder Plot.”⁵⁸ In 1919, the Washington, D.C., press falsely reported seven assaults by black men against white women, prompting four days of rioting in the nation’s capitol. That same year, a race riot in Chicago left 38 persons dead and 1,000 homeless. In the months prior to the violence, Chicago newspapers repeatedly portrayed blacks as criminals. In the days during and after the riots, they falsely reported that blacks were planning an armed revolt. Racist paranoia was not confined to local coverage. On July 23, 1919, the *New York Times* suggested the Washington riot would never have happened a few years earlier when, it said, most blacks “admitted the superiority of the white race, and troubles between the two races were undreamed of.” Six days later, the *Times* asserted that the riots in Washington and Chicago were the result of a left-wing conspiracy involving “intelligent direction and management.”⁵⁹

At the midpoint of the twentieth century, the mainstream media had largely erased the black American from the national consciousness, except as a criminal or a fool. In a

⁵⁷ Terry Ann Knopf, “Race, Riots, and Reporting,” *Journal of Black Studies* 4 No. 3 (March 1964): 303-327.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 303-04, 307-310, and Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, pp. 234-235.

⁵⁹ As quoted in Knopf, “Race, Riots, and Reporting,” pp. 310-312, 315-317.

1949 study, the Atlanta-based Southern Regional Council examined more than one thousand stories in southern newspapers and concluded that most continued to ignore blacks unless they committed a crime. The group of black and white educators concluded, “There are notable and laudable exceptions, but in general Southern newspapers constitute the single greatest force in perpetuating the popular stereotype of the Negro.”⁶⁰ The 1946-47 class of Nieman fellows at Harvard University echoed this view on a national scale. It included a *Time* magazine associate editor, a CBS correspondent, a United Press International war correspondent and the political editor of the San Francisco *News*. It also included the Sunday editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, a Chicago labor reporter, an Associated Press state editor, a former weekly newspaper publisher and a former investigative reporter and decorated combat veteran. At the end of a yearlong study, this remarkable group concluded, “North and South, most newspapers are consistently cruel to the colored man, patronizing him, keeping him in his place, thoughtlessly crucifying him in a thousand big and little ways.” As pictured in many newspapers, the Negro is either an “entertaining fool, a dangerous animal, or (on the comparatively rare occasions when a Negro’s achievements are applauded) a prodigy of astonishing attainments, considering his race.”⁶¹

Race. For journalists, skin color was the sine qua non of covering black Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. The vast majority of news organizations in the country routinely identified blacks by race. Jim Crow, in other words, also ruled journalism. This might have been less of a problem if the mainstream media presented a

⁶⁰ Southern Regional Council, *Race in the News: Usage in Southern Newspapers* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1949), p. 2.

⁶¹ *Your Newspaper: Blueprint for a Better Press*, edited by Leon Svirsky (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 23-24.

full-fledged portrait of African Americans. But they did not. Newspapers were most likely to report on blacks if they were accused of committing a criminal act. To reinforce the connection, news organizations were careful to connect criminal behavior with black skin color. As a 1947 headline in one newspaper put it: “Negro Sentenced for Killing Wife.” And in the same newspaper: “Expectant Mother Attacked by Negro.” The newspaper provided different treatment for whites who committed crimes. In the same month, the headline on one of its stories involving whites read “Youth Guilty of Killing Brother.” Another involving whites read “Holdup Man Slays Victim.”⁶²

There were improvements. In 1946, a *New York Times* editorial announced that it would no longer use racial designations in referring to black Americans. “This may seem like a small thing,” said the August 11 editorial. “The Negroes don’t think so.”⁶³ Indeed, blacks considered the practice a major problem. One year earlier, eight influential black editors and publishers had told leaders of the nation’s most influential journalism trade publication that racial identification of blacks in news stories, particularly crime stories, was one of the mainstream media’s worst practices.⁶⁴ According to the *Times*’ new policy, news stories would not refer to race unless there was an overriding purpose such as a report on a race riot.

Harkey, editor and publisher of Mississippi’s *Pascagoula Chronicle*, was one of the earliest Southerners to follow suit. In 1949, he eliminated virtually all references to an

⁶² Robert B. Eleazer, “Churchman Sees Peril in ‘Negro’ Headlines,” *Editor & Publisher*, 27 December 1947, p. 24. Eleazer cited these and more than two dozen similar headlines in his examination of one newspaper over a month. The newspaper published 39 crime stories involving blacks; in 34, the headline referred to “Negro” or “Negroes.” The newspaper published 133 crime and court stories apparently involving white suspects but never once referred to their race in the headlines.

⁶³ “Race in the News,” *New York Times*, 11 August 1946, p. 8E. See also “Answer,” *Time*, 19 August 1946, p. 60.

⁶⁴ “Dailies’ Cooperation Asked in Solving Negro Problem,” *Editor & Publisher*, 4 August 1945, pp. 7, 60-61, 67.

individual's race. Harkey, who wrote or edited every news story that appeared in the *Chronicle*, did not mention the new policy to his staff or to the public. The local community remained unaware of it until 1950. That year, the *Chronicle* carried several stories about a local man who had beaten his four-year-old stepson so savagely that the child was hospitalized. Indignant letter writers flooded the *Chronicle* until The Associated Press purchased a photograph that showed the father and son were black. Interest in the story melted away. One local white attorney told Harkey, "If you have to write about niggers, call 'em niggers right up at top so I don't waste my time reading about 'em."⁶⁵

Some journalists saw significant progress. In 1952, the editor of the Columbus, Georgia, *Ledger* conducted a survey of 34 newspapers in 10 southern states. Robert W. Brown found that more than half used courtesy titles for blacks and almost one-third published a daily or weekly column of "Negro news." The results impressed Brown. "These facts disclose a significant change in attitudes of the press toward the Negro in the last decade," he wrote.⁶⁶ A close reading of the full survey suggests otherwise, at least in the context of employment. Only one newspaper, the *Winston-Salem Journal*, employed a black reporter.⁶⁷ As for the future, executives at half the newspapers—including those in Baton Rouge, Charlotte, Chattanooga, Dallas and Fort Worth—told Brown the same thing: "Employs no Negro and has no plans to."

⁶⁵ Harkey, *The Smell of Burning Crosses*, p. 54-55, 60-62, 65.

⁶⁶ Robert W. Brown, "Newspapers of Deep South Liberalize Negro Policies," *Editor & Publisher*, 13 December 1952, p. 9.

⁶⁷ Brown said "ten of the 34 newspapers have Negro reporters on their staffs." However, his survey shows that with one exception, these "reporters" actually were weekly columnists or editors who assembled the "Negro news" sections. All were part-time employees. *Ibid*, pp. 9, 76.

That had long been the record of the mainstream media. At the midpoint of the twentieth century, few blacks were working in the nation's newsrooms. The number of black journalists at mainstream newspapers grew haltingly—15 in 1948, 12 in 1952, 21 in 1955.⁶⁸ Those 21 black journalists represented a fraction of the estimated 80,000 persons working in the newsrooms of the nation's 1,784 general daily newspapers and 9,770 general weekly newspapers.⁶⁹ As these numbers suggest, getting a job as a journalist at a white newspaper was not easy for an African American. As a reporter working for the *Louisville Defender*, a black newspaper, Fletcher Martin had been the first black to win a Nieman Fellowship, the nation's most prestigious study program for professional journalists. When Martin later applied for a job with the all-white *Louisville Courier-Journal* in the early 1950s, the newspaper turned him down. The executive editor told Martin that he personally favored hiring him but that the rest of the staff would never accept a black journalist. As the editor bluntly put it, "I honestly think they would walk out."⁷⁰ Robert Maynard, who later became editor and publisher of the *Oakland Tribune*, applied to more than 300 newspapers over a decade. Every single one turned him because, Maynard maintained, of his skin color.⁷¹ Ben Holman applied to almost 100 newspapers before landing a police reporter's job with the *Chicago Daily News* in 1953,

⁶⁸ Armistead Scott Pride, "Low Man on the Totem Pole," *Nieman Reports* (April 1955): 21. Thirteen years later, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders wrote, "The journalistic profession has been shockingly backward in seeking out, hiring, training, and promoting Negroes. Fewer than 5 percent of the people employed by news businesses in editorial jobs in the United States are Negroes. Fewer than 1 percent of editors and supervisors are Negroes, and most of them work for Negro-owned publications." See "Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders," p. 364.

⁶⁹ Pride, "Low Man on the Totem Pole," p. 23.

⁷⁰ "How Integration Worked on One Newspaper Staff," *Nieman Reports* (October 1956): 39. The *Chicago Sun-Times* subsequently hired Martin.

⁷¹ "Profile: Robert Maynard," *Washington Journalism Review* (April 1981): 44.

making him one of the first black journalists hired by one of the city's four daily newspapers.⁷²

Studies suggest that during the 1950s, newspapers in the Northeast, Midwest and the West were far more likely than those in the South to hire black journalists.⁷³ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* made Robert A. Thomas its first full-time black reporter in 1952.⁷⁴ By the middle of the 1950s, daily newspapers in Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Denver, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Newark, New York, Portland, Providence, St. Louis and Toledo had at least one fulltime black journalist. Of these newspapers, 12 were in the Midwest, six were in the Northeast and two were in the West.⁷⁵ By contrast, it was not until 1968 that a Texas newspaper hired its first black reporter. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* broke the color barrier by hiring Cecil Johnson.⁷⁶ The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* did not hire a fulltime black reporter until the early 1970s.⁷⁷ There were exceptions in the South. The *St. Petersburg Times* hired its first full-time black reporter in 1951.⁷⁸

If landing a job at a mainstream news organization was tough for a black journalist, keeping it was tougher. On his first day as a reporter for the *Chicago Daily*

⁷² Pamela Newkirk, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media* (New York: New York University Press, 2000): 60.

⁷³ Davies, "An Industry in Transition," pp. 187-189.

⁷⁴ See *Philadelphia Inquirer* Web site at www.philly.com. Sally A. Downey, "Robert Thomas, Pioneer Reporter," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 January 2003.

⁷⁵ In the Midwest: the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Chicago Sun Times*, the *Chicago Herald American*, the *Cleveland News*, the *Cleveland Press*, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*, the *Illinois State Journal and Register*, the *Milwaukee Journal*, the *Minneapolis Tribune*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *Toledo Blade*. In the Northeast: the *Newark Evening News*, the *New York Post*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Providence Journal and Evening Bulletin*, the *Chester (Pennsylvania) Times* and the *Clifton (New Jersey) Leader*. In the West: the *Denver Post* and the *Portland Oregonian*. The *Cleveland Press* was the only one with two black journalists. See Pride, "Low Man on the Totem Pole," p. 21.

⁷⁶ Madigan, "Our Own Sins."

⁷⁷ Adams, "New Orleans' Newspapers Give White View of the City," p. 18.

⁷⁸ Robert N. Pierce, *A Sacred Trust: Nelson Poynter and the St. Petersburg Times* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1936): 146.

News, Holman strode into the press room at police headquarters and said hello to his fellow journalists. “They all got up and literally walked out of the room,” he recalled years later, adding, “I didn’t know what to do.”⁷⁹ The *New York Times* hired its first full-time black reporter in 1945. Before then George Streater had worked solely for advocacy publications such as *The Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP. Streater’s editors said his work was sloppy, biased and, in one case, included fabricated quotes. Streater’s bosses soon fired him. Employment opportunities for blacks at the *Times* improved slowly. In 1955, there were no black journalists at the *Times*. By 1961, the newspaper had two black reporters.⁸⁰ Simeon Booker, the second black to win a Neiman Fellowship, became the first black reporter at the *Washington Post* in 1952. The experience was, in Booker’s words, a “nightmare.” Initially, editors refused to give him assignments. When they relented and had him cover a robbery, the police decided he was a suspect and almost arrested him. He asked his bosses if he could cover a demonstration against segregated bathrooms at Hecht’s, a department store and an important *Post* advertiser. They refused. Colleagues would write racial slurs on his copy. In June 1953, Booker resigned. “God knows I tried to succeed at the *Post*,” he said. “I struggled so hard that friends thought I was dying, I looked so fatigued. After a year and a half, I had to give up. Trying to cover news in a city where even animal cemeteries were segregated overwhelmed me.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Newkirk, *Within the Veil*, pp. 60-61.

⁸⁰ Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the New York Times* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999): 276-277, and Pride, “Low Man on the Totem Pole,” pp. 21, 23.

⁸¹ Booker as quoted in Bradlee, *A Good Life*, p. 280. See also Howard Bray, *The Pillars of the Post: The Making of a News Empire in Washington* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980): 160-161.

The virtual absence of blacks in the newsrooms of the nation's daily newspapers was no happenstance. That, at least, was the view of the American Newspaper Guild. That organization approved a resolution in 1951--a policy that remained in effect for at least the next four years—that said mainstream newspapers had chosen proactively to refuse to hire black journalists. The resolution declared, “The most general type of discrimination is the virtual barring of Negroes from white-collar departments—editorial and commercial—of daily newspapers, despite an occasional single Negro reporter on a large daily.”⁸² The editor of a newspaper in Indiana said the primary reason that his colleagues at the vast majority of mainstream newspapers refused to hire black journalists was clear. “It is certainly true that opportunities for the Negro in that field have been very limited in the past and that very few Negro journalists have found jobs in it,” he said. “For this, there are several reasons, the principal one, no doubt, being plain old-fashioned race prejudice.”⁸³

Blacks found it equally tough to gain entry into professional journalism organizations. Those responsible for Harvard University's Nieman Fellowships waited until 1946 to select the first black recipient.⁸⁴ In 1947, the U.S. Senate Press Gallery admitted its first black correspondent, Louis R. Lautier of the *Atlanta Daily World*, at the time the country's sole black daily newspaper. Admission was not easy. Initially, the all-white Standing Committee of Correspondents rejected the application. Lautier was not eligible, the correspondents said, because he also wrote stories for a group of black non-dailies and thus did not meet the requirement that a reporter's “chief” responsibility be to a daily. However, the Senate Rules Committee overruled the correspondents and ordered

⁸² Pride, “Low Man on the Totem Pole,” p. 23.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 23.

them to admit Lautier.⁸⁵ It would be several more years before the American Society of Newspaper Editors admitted a black member. ASNE officials said the group remained all white because there were few black dailies. As James S. Pope, ASNE president and *Louisville Courier-Journal* editor, put it in 1955, “I don’t believe there would be more than one Negro editor, or maybe two, in the country who would be eligible.”⁸⁶ Pope’s explanation did not address the question of why virtually no black editors could be found at the nation’s more than 1,700 white-run daily newspapers.

There were scattered signs of progress. The *New York Post* hired Ted Poston as its first black reporter in 1937. He worked there for more than thirty years and often wrote about racial injustice. In a 1949 series, he showed that Florida authorities had tortured and won rape convictions against three young black men despite little or no evidence.⁸⁷ Earl Brown, a graduate of Harvard University, became the first black reporter at *Life* magazine in 1940. Over the next three years, Brown wrote stories for *Life* and *Harper’s* that examined racial unrest in Detroit, black resentment over segregation in the military and the increasing importance of the black vote. A panel of scholars and journalists later selected the stories by Poston and Brown as two of the most important works of American journalism in the twentieth century.⁸⁸ In 1949, *Life* hired Gordon Parks as its first black photographer. Over the next two decades, he used photo-essays to examine the

⁸⁴ Gilbert W. Stewart, Jr., “He Erased the Color Line,” *Nieman Reports* (October 1947): 12.

⁸⁵ “Negro Gets Press Card by Appeal to Senate,” *Editor & Publisher*, 22 March 1947, p. 13.

⁸⁶ *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1955 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (Washington, D.C.: The Society, 1955): 93.

⁸⁷ *Race and the News Media*, edited by Fisher and Lowenstein, pp. ix, 63-72; Newkirk, *Within the Veil*, pp. 57-59; Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, 2nd edition (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971): 242-243.

⁸⁸ Felicity Barringer, “Journalism’s Greatest Hits,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1999, Sec. C, p. 1; Newkirk, *Within the Veil*, pp. 52-54, 57.

country's racial problems, particularly life for blacks in the Jim Crow South.⁸⁹ Carl Rowan, one of the first blacks to serve as an officer in the U.S. Navy, worked for the Minneapolis *Tribune* from 1948 to 1961 as a copy editor, reporter and foreign correspondent. In 1951 he embarked on a 6,000-mile trip through 13 southern states examining segregation and its pervasive influence. His subsequent series, "How Far from Slavery," was published over three weeks. *Time* magazine and *Editor & Publisher* said it made a significant contribution to a better understanding of race relations in the South.⁹⁰

Not surprisingly, these journalistic steps followed several significant social changes in the 1940s and early 1950s that helped undermine support for the Jim Crow system of segregation and thrust the problem of southern oppression of blacks on the national agenda. The economy of the South was changing from agricultural to industrial. Market incentives and the need for skilled workers replaced a serf labor force. As a result, white leaders in the South had far less need for a political system that disfranchised and terrorized blacks.⁹¹ A massive demographic shift also was continuing: Blacks were leaving the South in unprecedented numbers. At the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 90 percent of blacks lived in the South; by 1960, only about half did.⁹² In the South, this meant that whites had less reason to fear blacks as a political threat. In the North, most blacks moved to big cities where the Democratic Party could not ignore their electoral presence. In Chicago, the hometown of young Emmett Till, the

⁸⁹ Erika Doss, "Visualizing Black America: Gordon Parks at *Life*, 1948-1971," in *Looking at Life Magazine*, edited by Erika Doss (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 2001): 221-241.

⁹⁰ The series was later reprinted in book form with a new title. See Carl Rowan, *South of Freedom* (New York: Knopf: 1952). See also Pride, "Low Man on the Totem Pole," pp. 21-22, and Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, pp. 223-224.

⁹¹ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977): 189-193.

⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 189, 193.

percentage of blacks doubled between 1930 and 1950. By 1960, almost one in four Chicago residents was black.⁹³

Southern blacks began to claim political power. The key impetus was the U.S. Supreme Court's 1944 decision in *Smith v. Allwright*. In that case, the court ruled that blacks could not be prohibited from voting in primary elections because of their race.⁹⁴ The impact of this and other decisions outlawing all-white primaries was significant. In 1940, the percentage of blacks registered to vote in the eleven southern states stretching from Florida to Texas was little different than it had been at the turn of the century—3 percent. By 1952, it had risen to 20 percent—a nearly sevenfold increase.⁹⁵

The executive branch of the federal government—or, more specifically, President Truman—threw his influence behind the push for racial justice in a manner not seen since Lincoln. In October 1947, a presidential commission issued a report that said racial segregation was a failure. *To Secure These Rights* called for a federal anti-lynching law, abolition of poll taxes, the establishment of a permanent commission on civil rights, an end to segregation in public housing and accommodations, the halting of federal funds to any public agency that practiced segregation and the desegregation of all branches of the military. It denounced lynching, which, it suggested, amounted to terrorism as a means of social control. “Lynching is the ultimate threat by which his inferior status is driven home to the Negro,” the report said.⁹⁶ One historian said it is difficult to overstate the importance of the report. “Never before had an official agency of the United States

⁹³ Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 33.

⁹⁴ Findlaw Web site at <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com>, *Smith v. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).

⁹⁵ David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 6-9.

⁹⁶ Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1947): 6.

government uttered an explicit rejection of racial segregation and its philosophical and legal foundations,” wrote John Egerton. “President Truman, in his acceptance of the report, strongly endorsed its findings—and thus placed the executive branch in formal and official opposition to segregation for the first time.”⁹⁷ Truman did more than lend his voice to the battle against Jim Crow. In 1948 he issued Executive Order 9981 which required “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services.”⁹⁸

That same year African Americans won an important victory in their fight against housing discrimination. Since the turn of the century, white neighborhoods throughout American cities had required homeowners to sign restrictive covenants. These agreements prohibited the white property owner from selling to a black. If violated, another property owner could sue the seller in state court and collect damages. But that changed on May 3, 1948 when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its opinion in *Shelley v. Kramer*. In that case, the court held that it was unconstitutional to use state courts to enforce restrictive covenants designed to exclude blacks. In its decision, the justices firmly rejected the contention that restrictive covenants were color-blind and could be used to exclude whites. “The parties have directed our attention to no case in which a court, state or federal, has been called upon to enforce a covenant excluding members of the white majority from ownership or occupancy of real property on grounds of race or color,” the decision states.⁹⁹ The ruling represented a significant departure from the court’s earlier position on legalized segregation. In the 1896 *Plessy* case, only one judge

⁹⁷ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994): 416.

⁹⁸ As quoted in Karin Chenoweth, “Taking Jim Crow Out of Uniform: A. Philip Randolph and the Desegregation of the U.S. Military,” *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 13 No. 13 (August 21, 1977): 30.

⁹⁹ Findlaw Web site at <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com>, *Shelley v. Kramer*, 334 U.S. (1948).

had argued that a Jim Crow law was designed to exclude blacks. In *Shelley*, a majority of the court adopted this view.

Blacks seeking to escape exploitation and terror found another powerful ally in American foreign policy and the Cold War. Since the end of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union had pushed radically different visions of the best society: the former emphasizing democracy and capitalism, the latter stressing Communism. The plight of southern blacks increasingly became an embarrassment to American officials. The Cold War forced them to pay attention to the Till case, the Montgomery bus boycott, the Freedom Rides and the campaigns in Birmingham and Selma. They had little choice. The Soviets trumpeted America's racial injustices. So did the international media. As one scholar has observed, "Efforts to promote civil rights within the United States were consistent with and important to the more central U.S. mission of fighting world communism. The need to address international criticism gave the federal government an incentive to promote social change at home."¹⁰⁰

The judicial branch took the biggest step in that direction on May 17, 1954. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine in the nation's public schools as unconstitutional.¹⁰¹ In the words of Chief Justice Earl Warren, "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." The decision applied to public schools. But its legal reasoning could be applied to any area of government-mandated segregation. In *Plessy*, the court had explicitly rejected the assertion that "enforced separation of the two races stamps the

¹⁰⁰ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. (Princeton: Princeton University, 2002): 12.

colored race with a badge of inferiority.” The claim was specious, the court found, one which arose “solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it.” In *Brown*, the court said Jim Crow segregation damaged black children precisely because they understood its intent. “Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children,” the decision states. “The impact is greater when it has the sanction of law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group.”

By 1954, the social position of black Americans had begun to change significantly. They were slowly gaining legal and political rights even as the harshest forms of racial discrimination became both unnecessary and, on the world stage, a liability. These social changes provided the media with the opportunity to report on southern blacks in a new, sympathetic manner. What was required was not so much brilliant investigative reporting as a simple willingness to report on white laws and actions that had abused blacks for decades.

The Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal recognized this in *An American Dilemma*, his brilliant study of American race relations published in 1944. In his words, “*To get publicity is of the highest strategic importance to the Negro people.*”¹⁰² The American novelist Ralph Ellison came to the same conclusion in *Invisible Man*, his 1952 masterpiece. “Nothing, storm or flood, must get in the way of our need for light and ever more and brighter light,” he wrote. “The truth is the light and light is the truth.”¹⁰³ The social scientist and the novelist arrived at the same finding—the battle against racial

¹⁰¹ Findlaw Web site at <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com>, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. (1954). See also Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

¹⁰² Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p. 42. (italicized in the original)

discrimination in the United States required exposure. This was particularly true in the South, where whites had used terrorism—particularly lynching—as a means of social control for decades. There were no officially recorded lynchings in the United States in 1952—the first time this had happened in the twentieth century. Nor were there any recorded in 1953 or 1954.¹⁰⁴ This was not the case in 1955. The case of Emmett Till presented the media with the opportunity to provide the exposure called for by Myrdal and Ellison. They responded, often in unexpected ways.

¹⁰³ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: New American Library, 1952), p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ “End of Lynching,” *Washington Post*, 2 January 1954, in *100 Years of Lynchings*, p. 240.

Chapter 5: Covering a Mississippi Murder Trial--The Emmett Till Lynching

On August 28, 1955, two white men appeared at the home of Mose Wright, a 64-year-old black sharecropper who lived outside the small northwest Mississippi town of Money. The men, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, were armed with .45 Colt automatic pistols. They demanded that Wright turn over Emmett Till, his 14-year-old nephew from Chicago who was spending a few weeks in Mississippi. Bryant and Milam, who were half-brothers, were livid. Bryant's wife Carolyn claimed that four days earlier, Till had asked her for a date. As the men left with Till, Milam told Wright, "If you know any of us here tonight, then you will never live to get to be 65."

On August 31, Garland Melton, a Tallahatchie County deputy sheriff, pulled the decomposed, naked body of a young black man from the shallow waters of the Tallahatchie River. Someone had administered a beating so vicious that one side of the skull had been crushed. Above the right ear was a hole the size of a bullet. A 74-pound cotton gin fan was tied around the neck with barbed wire. Mamie Till Bradley later identified the body as that of her only child, Emmett Till.¹ He was found fifteen miles from where she had been born.²

Till was the victim of a lynching, according to the Tuskegee Institute's definition: "There is no process for establishing the guilt of the accused; the punishment is death,

¹ Hugh Stephen Whitaker, "A Case Study in Southern Justice: The Emmett Till Case," masters thesis, Florida State University, 1963, pp. 102-105, 109-111, 117-119. Whitaker provides the best historical account of the Till case. Much of his work is based on the trial transcript, which is no longer available. He also interviewed attorneys for the state and the defendants, law enforcement officers involved in the case, several jurors and William Bradford Huie, the journalist who later paid Milam and Bryant for their confessions.

² Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 22.

often accompanied by torture and other sadistic acts, applied in many instances to persons charged with offenses which according to the ordinary standards of civilization are of a minor character.”³ That hardly made Till’s murder different. Over the previous 83 years, more than 3,600 African Americans were lynched in the South.⁴

But the events that followed the Till lynching were unprecedented. Bradley put her son’s body in an open casket at a Chicago funeral home on Saturday, September 3. An estimated 10,000 persons paid their respects that day. Thousands more did so on Sunday and Monday. A black newspaper in Cleveland polled the nation’s major black radio preachers and found that five of every six of delivered sermons about the Till case; half wanted something done immediately.⁵ On Tuesday, September 6, a grand jury of 18 Mississippi white men returned indictments against Milam and Bryant, charging them with murder and kidnapping. The murder trial began on September 19 and took five days. It was Mississippi justice. Ruby Hurley, who had opened the first NAACP office in the Deep South, attended the legal proceedings. “It was like a circus,” she recalled. “The defendants were sitting up there eating ice-cream cones and playing with their children in court just like they were out at a picnic.”⁶

A jury of twelve white men acquitted Milam and Bryant. Media coverage suggested the verdict was a sham. In January 1956, Milam and Bryant confessed to the murder in *Look* magazine after an author paid them several thousand dollars.

³ “The Lynching Records at Tuskegee Institute,” in *Eight Negro Bibliographies*, No. 7 edited by Daniel T. Williams (New York: Kaus Reprint, 1970): 1,2, 4.

⁴ Curriden and Phillips, *Contempt of Court*, pp. 354-355.

⁵ Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987): 44.

⁶ Ruby Hurley Interview in Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 132.

Milam—who stood six feet, two inches and weighed 235 pounds—said he told Till his murder had a message. “ ‘Chicago boy,’ I said, ‘I’m tired of ‘em sending your kind down her to stir up trouble. Goddamn you, I’m going to make an example of you just so everybody can know how me and my folks stand.’ ”⁷ Because of *Look*, that message was delivered to more than three million households.⁸ A few months later, *Reader’s Digest* printed an excerpted version of the murder confession for its eleven million subscribers.⁹

Activists, officials and journalists have said the Till murder, particularly the response in the black community and in the media, marked the emergence of the civil rights revolution.¹⁰ “Personally, I think this was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi in the twentieth century,” said Amzie Moore, a black World War II veteran who helped spearhead efforts by the NAACP and later the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi.¹¹ Robert Patterson, a white World War II paratrooper who helped found the first Citizens Council in Mississippi, said the Till case led to unprecedented media attention. After that, Patterson lamented, “Whenever something happened to a Negro in the South, it was made a national issue.”¹²

Many of the journalists who covered the Till case said they were profoundly affected by the experience. “I had covered the courts in many areas of this country, but the Till case was just unbelievable,” said James Hicks, a reporter for the *Amsterdam*

⁷ William Bradford Huie, “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” *Look* 20 (January 24, 1956): 50. For description of Milam, see Whitaker, “Case Study,” p. 108.

⁸ Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All: America’s Coming of Age with the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 170.

⁹ Huie, “The Shocking Story,” in *Reader’s Digest* 68 (April 1956): 63-68.

¹⁰ See David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993). He wrote, “The murder of Emmett Till and the trial of the two men accused of murdering him became the first great media event of the Civil Rights Movement.” (p. 437)

¹¹ Amzie Moore Interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, p. 235.

¹² Robert Patterson Interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 298-299.

News and the Negro Press Association. “I just didn’t get the sense of being in a courtroom.”¹³ Dan Wakefield, a reporter for the *Nation*, was struck outside the courtroom by the omnipresent shadow of race and violence. “On one side red-necks with faces shaggy from lack of a shave sat on benches, on the other side Negroes sat on the burnt grass beneath a Confederate statute dedicated to ‘the cause that never failed,’ ” he wrote. “Deputies wearing gun belts ambled in and out, as if it were the set of a TV western, and frisked everyone who entered the courtroom. One of our band of outsiders from a New York daily stood on the courthouse steps, surveyed the scene, and said, ‘Faulkner is just a reporter.’ ”¹⁴

More than 70 reporters and photographers attended. Among the news organizations represented were the *New York Times*, the three television networks, *Life*, *Look*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and the black press. Together, they provided unprecedented national coverage of a lynching.¹⁵ The *New York Times* alone published more than three dozen articles about the murder. Moore was not overstating matters when he called the Till case “the best advertised lynching that I had ever heard.”¹⁶

Pre-Trial Coverage

The *New York Times* and the *Birmingham World* began coverage of the Till case on the same day—September 2, 1955. One was the pre-eminent newspaper in the United States; the other was a black semiweekly whose circulation barely topped 10,000.¹⁷ Their coverage could hardly have been more different.

¹³ “The Black Press at the Trial: An Interview with James Hicks” in Williams, *Eyes on the Prize*, p. 51.

¹⁴ Dan Wakefield, *Between the Lines: A Reporter’s Personal Journey Through Public Events* (New York: New American Library, 1966), p. 145.

¹⁵ Whitaker, “Case Study,” pp. 124, 131, 142-148.

¹⁶ Moore Interview, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 234-235.

¹⁷ Studies in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s have found intellectuals, the political elite and journalists consider the *New York Times* to be both the best and the most influential newspaper in the United States. As if to

The first story in the *Times* appeared on the next-to-last page of that day's final edition below two other race-related articles.¹⁸ The Associated Press story carried a one-column headline: "Mississippi to Sift Negro Boy's Slaying." The brief story quoted one person, Mississippi Governor Hugh White. The story reported that in a telegram to the NAACP, White promised that the "court will do their duty in prosecution." The story also reported that in a press conference, White denied Till had been lynched. "This is not a lynching," the Governor said. "It is straight-out murder." That first story would set a pattern for the newspaper's coverage of the Till case: The *Times* would rely on few sources, provide little context and seldom include interviews with blacks.

Not so with the *Birmingham World*. Its first story included statements from five persons—Sheriff George Smith of Leflore County, where Milam and Bryant kidnapped Till; NAACP head Roy Wilkins; a deputy sheriff; an NAACP spokesman; and Till's uncle.¹⁹ The front-page story described the killing as a "murder" but reported that an NAACP spokesman said it "appeared to 'qualify as a lynching.'" Wilkins was incensed. "The state of Mississippi," he said, "has decided to maintain white supremacy by murdering children." Officials and journalists at the time severely criticized Wilkins for

emphasize the point, the *Times* was awarded seven Pulitzer Prizes in 2002, twice as many as any newspaper had ever won in a single year. On the influence and eminence of the *Times*, see Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978): 461-462. Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974): 140-141; Leon V. Sigal, *Reporters and Officials* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973): 47; Ernest C. Hynds, *American Newspapers in the 1980s* (New York: Hastings House, 1980): 284-285; and *Columbia Journalism Review* Web site www.cjr.org, CJR Survey, "America's Best Newspapers," (November/December 1999).

¹⁸ "Mississippi to Sift Negro Boy's Slaying," *New York Times*, 2 September 1955, p. 37. The story incorrectly lists Till's age as 15. It ran below other two articles: a one-column story on an increase in black college students, and a two-column story by future *Times* editor Max Frankel on a meeting of scholars to redefine the meaning of equality.

¹⁹ "Battered Body of Boy, 14, Found in River in Miss.," *Birmingham World*, 2 September 1955, pp. 1, 8.

BATTERED BODY OF BOY, 14 FOUND IN RIVER IN MISS.

New York Times

MISSISSIPPI TO SIFT NEGRO BOY'S SLAYING

GREENWOOD, Miss., Sept. 1 (P)—The Governor of Mississippi called today for a complete investigation of the kidnap-killing of a Negro youth who allegedly had whistled at a white woman.

In a telegram to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in New York, Gov. Hugh White said: "Parties charged with the murder are in jail. I have every reason to believe that the court will do their duty in prosecution."

In discussing the killing with newsmen, Governor White said, "Mississippi deprecates such conduct on the part of any of its citizens and certainly cannot condone it."

"This is not a lynching," the Governor said, "it is straight-out murder."

Emmitt Louis Till, 15 years old, was taken early Sunday morning from the tenant farm home of his uncle, Mose Wright. The boy was shot and the body was dropped in a river. The kidnapping came a few hours after the boy was reported to have whistled at Mrs. Ray Bryant, wife of a white storekeeper near Money, Miss.

The storekeeper and his half-brother, J. W. Milam of Glendora, Miss., are being held in Leflore county jail in connection with the kidnapping and slaying.

Two Held In Connection With Chicago Lad's Death

GREENWOOD, Miss., (AP)—Possible murder charges are being held up today while authorities make an effort to determine in which county a 14-year-old Chicago Negro youth who allegedly "talked ugly" to a white woman was killed.

The battered body of the youth, who had been visiting relatives here, was found Wednesday near Greenwood in the Tallapoosa River. The youth was identified as Emmitt Louis Till, whose abduction from his tenant-farmer uncle's home has already brought kidnapping charges against two white men.

Sheriff George Smith said murder charges will be placed against the two men pending the determination in which county young Till was killed. If the place of death is not definitely determined, the sheriff said, murder charges would likely be filed in Tallapoosa County where the body was found.

DISAPPEARED SUNDAY

The 14-year-old Chicago youth had been visiting on uncle at the home by community of Money before his disappearance early Sunday. After young Till was found, officers said he had been shot once in the head, bludgeoned and his body whiplashed with a cotton gin pulley fastened to him with barbed wire.

It marked the third murder of a Negro in recent months in Mississippi. A Belmont, Miss. minister, Rev.

(Continued From Page One)

ing, said later he now believes only two men and woman were involved. The woman has not been arrested, but the search for her is continuing, the sheriff said.

The sheriff said Bryant admitted taking the boy from the house. The accused man told officers the boy was released, however, when his wife failed to identify him as the one who had "talked ugly" to her.

Deputy Sheriff A. W. McCord said the post-mortem examination Wednesday afternoon disclosed the youth's head was "badly battered." He said it had not been determined which came first, the beating or the shooting. Some of the head wounds, he said, could have been caused by objects in the water. But, he added, the boy had been struck "much more" than might have been necessary to knock him unconscious.

Labeled "LYNCHING"

In New York City, a spokesman for the NAACP said the case appeared to "qualify as a lynching." While the last previous established case of lynching in the US occurred in 1932, the NAACP has tabbed other mysterious killings in Mississippi and elsewhere as modern-day lynchings.

William Henry Huff, chairman of the association's legal defense committee, wrote Mississippi Gov. Hugh White after the body of Till was found in the river.

"Those who commit such dastardly acts are themselves enemies to our country and those who do nothing toward bringing such criminals to justice are themselves parties to the crime."

Earlier this week after Till was reported missing, Huff called for an FBI investigation. He promises to reiterate the appeal for federal intervention.

Illustration 1: Initial Stories in the New York Times and the Birmingham World on the Till Case (September 2, 1955)

making that statement, and several scholars subsequently joined them. But journalists and scholars did not criticize William Faulkner when, prior to the trial, he issued a statement from Rome to United Press International that echoed Wilkins's words. The Nobel Prize-winning novelist concluded, "If we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, then we don't deserve to survive, and probably won't."²⁰

The *World* story also provides important context: It noted that Till was the third black killed in Mississippi in recent months in a race-related case. "A Belzoni, Miss. minister, Rev. George Lee was shot to death because he had urged Negroes to register and vote," the story said. "And Lamar Smith, another Negro urging Negroes to vote in the recent Mississippi primary, was killed on the court-house grounds earlier this month."²¹ The Tuskegee Institute, the nation's most authoritative source on lynching, determined that Lee and Smith, like Till, were the victims of lynching.²² Lee's killing appeared to be carefully planned. As he was driving home late one night, a shot was fired into one of his tires. When Lee slowed down, another car pulled alongside him and a shotgun blast tore away much of his face. Ike Shleton, sheriff in the Delta town of Belzoni, initially said Lee died in a traffic accident. An FBI autopsy found that lead pellets had struck Lee, causing a fatal hemorrhage and asphyxiation. Shelton then

²⁰ William Faulkner, "Faulkner Calls Lynching Test of Man's Survival," *Chicago Defender*, 17 September 1955, p. 3.

²¹ "Battered Body of Boy, 14, Found in River in Miss.," *Birmingham World*, p. 1.

²² "4,733 Mob Action Victims Since '82, Tuskegee Reports," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 26 April 1959 in *100 Years of Lynching*, p. 244.

theorized that light-skinned blacks had killed Lee.²³ Smith was shot to death while climbing the courthouse steps in Brookhaven in southwest Mississippi at 10 in the morning on August 13, 1955—just 15 days before Till was kidnapped.²⁴ Yet, reporters for the *Times* never included information on the murders of Lee and Smith in their coverage of the Till case. In fact, not one of the *Times*' stories on the Till case addressed Mississippi's history of lynching.

The Scott Newspaper Syndicate produced the story in the *World*. W.A. Scott, a black newspaper publisher based in Atlanta, launched the syndicate and the *Birmingham World* in 1931. The *World* quickly became the dominant black newspaper in Alabama and remained so for four decades.²⁵ The syndicate published newspapers in more than a dozen cities and from these publications Scott created a black wire service.²⁶ The *Birmingham World* relied on it for much of its coverage of the Till case.

The *Times* published eleven Till stories in the weeks leading up to the trial. The wire services produced seven of these. The second appeared on September 4 deep inside the newspaper, as did virtually all the Till stories in the *Times*.²⁷ The brief Associated Press story reported that an estimated 10,000 persons had turned out in Chicago to pay their respects to the dead boy. The story quoted one person, an unidentified black minister. In the story's only direct quotes, the minister denied any Communist

²³ Simeon Booker, *Black Man's America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964): 161-163 and Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 37-39.

²⁴ Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002): 426, and Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, pp. 39, 41.

²⁵ Allen Woodrow Jones, "Alabama," in *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979*, edited by Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983): 43-46 and Alton Hornsby, Jr., "Georgia," in *The Black Press in the South*, pp. 127-128.

²⁶ Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1997): 144.

²⁷ "Slain Youth's Body Seen By Thousands," *New York Times*, 4 September 1955, Sec. 5, p. 9.

connections, asserting, “We don’t need Communists.” Three days later, another Associated Press story in the *Times* reported that a grand jury had indicted Milam and Bryant on charges of murder and kidnapping.²⁸ On September 13, United Press reported that Till’s mother had agreed to testify.²⁹ The next Till story in the *Times* carried the byline of John N. Popham, the newspaper’s chief correspondent in the Deep South.

Popham, 45, was unique. Based in Chattanooga, he was the sole national newspaper correspondent covering the South fulltime. Turner Catledge, the managing editor of the *Times*, had assigned Popham the beat in 1947.³⁰ The reporter and the editor shared a common heritage: Popham was born in Virginia; Catledge was a native of Philadelphia, Mississippi. Their heritage was hardly unique at the *New York Times*. Southerners—including Edwin L. James from Irvington, Virginia and Clifton Daniel from Zebulon, North Carolina as well as Catledge—held the top editor’s position at the *Times* from 1932 to 1968.³¹ Popham soon became a legend among white journalists and southern officials. Both groups regarded him as the quintessential southern gentleman. His dignified manners beguiled local politicians. Journalists loved hearing his stories. Claude Sitton, who succeeded Popham as the chief correspondent for the *Times* in the South, wrote of the man he replaced:

²⁸ “2 Held for Trial in Slaying of Boy,” *New York Times*, 7 September 1955, p. 19.

²⁹ “Mother to Testify,” *New York Times*, 13 September 1955, p. 28.

³⁰ Turner Catledge, *My Life and the Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971): 219.

³¹ James was managing editor from 1932-1951, Catledge from 1951-1964 and Daniel from 1964-1969. Catledge was the first executive editor at the *Times* (1964-1968). Adolph Ochs, the publisher who pushed the *Times* to greatness after he purchased it in 1896, considered Chattanooga, Tennessee his hometown. Howell Raines, the current editor, was born in Birmingham, Alabama. See Catledge, *My Life and the Times*, pp. 185-186, 285, 305; Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the New York Times* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999): 5-7, 30-40; Harrison Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor: An Uncompromising Look at the New York Times* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980): 354; and Gay Telese, *The Kingdom and the Power* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1969): 38-39, 338-341, 534.

Eyes popping, eyebrows arching, knuckles cracking—all in furious concentration on the tale at hand—Popham launches into a soaring soliloquy. His delivery and Tidewater accent approximate nothing so much as dollop of sorghum syrup spat from a Gatling gun. This tidal wave of sound has been know to levitate a listener who, transfixed by the onrush of oratory, rises up on tip toes, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. The man comes as close as most to matching the legend, an elfin figure with a twinkle of Irish con in his eyes.”³²

In the view of a number of reporters, Popham was without peer in covering the South. Harrison Salisbury, the Pulitzer Prize-winning foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*, observed, “To not a few reporters Popham didn’t just cover the South—he *was* the South.”³³ Some reporters approached him with something akin to hero worship. Author David Halberstam, who wrote a story about another Mississippi lynching the year after the Till case, said, “Popham was a true American original: a Virginia aristocrat with a secret radical heart.”³⁴ That the *New York Times* was devoting this much attention to a southern lynching was radical. The content of Popham’s stories was less so.

Popham published three stories prior to the trial. His most extensive appeared on the eve of the proceedings.³⁵ He began with the obvious, noting that a “sordid murder case has focused the glare of national attention” on race relations in Mississippi. His story concentrated on the reaction among Southern whites, though he quoted only one person by name, Sheriff Smith. Initially, Popham wrote, “The white community of Mississippi reacted to Till’s slaying with sincere and vehement expressions of outrage.” But this was followed by a backlash fed by fears regarding the NAACP. “Public speakers and writers of letters-to-the-editor have blanketed the state with assertions that the NAACP is a ‘Communist-led organization’ that seeks to ‘mongrelize’ the races,” Popham wrote.

³² Sitton as quoted in Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, p. 353.

³³ Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor*, p. 358. (emphasis in the original)

³⁴ David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993): 437.

Thus, two of the pre-trial stories in the *Times*—one by the AP, the other by Popham—raised the specter that black groups involved in the Till case may have Communist connections.

The *Birmingham World* published five stories prior to the murder trial. None mentions possible Communist involvement, and since then, no evidence has emerged that suggests such involvement. The *World* provided more detail and more named sources than the *Times*. In its story on Till's funeral, the newspaper draws a far clearer picture of the thousands of mourners who stood inside and outside the Church of God in Christ on the South side of Chicago. "Services at the church were carried by loud speakers to the huge group of mourners standing in the street," it said. "The church, which seats 1,800, was filled to capacity."³⁶ Arichbald Carey, a minister and former Chicago alderman, asked for forbearance. "A mob in Chicago is no better than a mob in Mississippi," he said. Unlike the *Times*, the *World* story noted the international implications of the case. It concluded by quoting Bishop Louis Ford, who told mourners, "Our country is spending millions trying to win the good will of colored people in Africa and India." But, said Ford, President Eisenhower "ought to be seeking the good will of colored people in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia."

The *World* also published several powerful photographs covering the full cast of characters in the case. On a single day, it ran eleven—Bryant and Milam staring stolidly ahead at they enter the courtroom; Carolyn Bryant posing with a winsome smile; Wright lifting his gaunt face to the camera beneath a straw hat; 270-pound Tallahatchie County

³⁵ John Popham, "Racial Issues Stirred by Mississippi Killing," *New York Times*, 18 September 1955, Sec. 4, p. 7.

³⁶ "50,000 View Body of 14-Year-Old Boy Found Slain in Mississippi," *Birmingham World*, 6 September 1955, p. 1.

Sheriff H.C. Strider serving a subpoena on Till's mother, their eyes locked as though in combat.³⁷ The photos used by the *Times* were much like its stories—focused almost exclusively on whites. During its four-month coverage of the Till case, the newspaper published three photos of Bryant, two of Milam and one of a defense attorney. It published one photograph of African Americans involved in the case.

The *World* did not publish the most famous photograph in the Till case. That distinction fell to *Jet*, a four-year-old magazine that covered celebrities and civil rights and packaged it into a pocket-sized weekly. John H. Johnson, who previously had launched *Negro Digest* and *Ebony*, founded *Jet*.³⁸ It was an immediate success. Six months after its inaugural issue, the black news magazine was selling 300,000 copies weekly.³⁹ On September 15, *Jet* published a four-page spread about the Till murder that included a half-dozen photographs.⁴⁰ One was a close-up of Till's savaged head that resembled a bloated death mask. Johnson had reservations about publishing the photograph. But the *Jet* publisher, based in Chicago, believed it was his responsibility to include it. The issue sold out immediately.⁴¹ The photograph of Till had a profound impact on black Americans. U.S. Rep. Charles C. Diggs Jr., a black congressman from Michigan who attended the trial, recalled years later, "I think the picture in *Jet* magazine showing Emmett Till's mutilation was probably the greatest media product in the last

³⁷ "Raymond F. Tisby, "Lynch-Murder Victim's Mother Appears at Miss. Murder Trial," *Birmingham World*, 23 September 1955, pp. 1, 4.

³⁸ Carla Hall, "John H. Johnson: From Office Worker to Millionaire Publishing Mogul," *Washington Post*, 14 September 1980, p. L1; Raoul V. Mowatt, "Jet Magazine Finds Niche, Manages to Stay Afloat in Difficult Time," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 December 2001, Sec. K, p. 4.

³⁹ John H. Johnson, *Succeeding Against the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989): 207.

⁴⁰ "Nation Horrified by Murder of Kidnapped Chicago Youth," *Jet*, 15 September 1955, pp. 6-9. *Jet* also relied on a broader range of sources than the *Times*. The magazine's September 15 story included statements from seven persons, black and white.

⁴¹ Johnson, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, p. 240.



Close-up of lynch victim bares mute evidence of horrible slaying. Chicago undertaker A. A. Raynor said youth had not been castrated as was rumored. Mutilated face of victim was left unretouched by mortician at mother's request. She said she wanted "all the world" to witness the atrocity.

Illustration 2: Photograph in the September 15, 1955 Issue of *Jet* magazine Showing Emmett Till's Mutilated Head

forty or fifty years, because that picture stimulated a lot of interest and anger on the part of blacks all over the world.”⁴²

Popham’s final pre-trial story reported that Wright would testify.⁴³ The article is significant because it was the only one in which Popham interviewed and quoted a black American. Even then, he used a single paraphrased statement—that Wright could identify one defendant as the man who took Till from his home. Popham added, “The interview was arranged through one of the defense attorneys, a development that puzzled observers.” Puzzling, of course, because Wright would be the prosecution’s key witness. Popham’s decision to reveal the circumstances of this “interview” is equally puzzling. It represents the only instance in his ten Till stories in which Popham explained how he obtained an interview. Equally puzzling was Popham’s failure to quote Wright. Standard journalistic practice calls for a reporter to provide a direct quote to substantiate a paraphrased statement, particularly in an important matter such as a murder trial.⁴⁴

Jet’s final pre-trial article focused on whether Till’s family could expect justice.⁴⁵ As the headline put it: “Will Mississippi Whitewash the Emmett Till Slaying?” The article includes seven interviews—five whites and two blacks. It provided context, noting that Till was the third black murdered in Mississippi in four months in a race-related case. According to the article, Sheriff Strider “has repeatedly said he doubts that the body found in the river is Till’s,” a contention that would become the defense team’s key argument in seeking acquittal. In addition, the story said, Strider had launched a campaign to divert attention from the murder by suggesting that the NAACP had

⁴² “An Interview with Congressman Charles Diggs” in Williams, *Eyes on the Prize*, p. 49.

⁴³ John N. Popham, “Slain’s Boy Uncle to Testify,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1955, p. 50.

⁴⁴ The author of this dissertation, a reporter for 25 years, based the last statement on his own experience.

⁴⁵ “Will Mississippi Whitewash the Emmett Till Slaying?,” *Jet*, 22 September 1955, pp. 8-12.

“planted” Till’s body in the Tallahatchie River. The article provided balance, noting that John Cothran, a Leflore County deputy sheriff, and Till’s mother strongly disagreed. Said Bradley, “I’ve seen the body and what mother wouldn’t know her own son.” It concluded with a quote from an editorial in the *Clarksdale Press Register*: “Mississippi may as well burn all its law books and close its courts if the maximum penalty of the law cannot be secured in this heinous crime.”⁴⁶

Trial Coverage

Because authorities recovered Till’s body in Tallahatchie County, the trial was held in Sumner, the county seat. Blacks accounted for almost two-thirds of the 30,000 residents of Tallahatchie County.⁴⁷ But the twelve jurors and one alternate were all white men—ten farmers, a carpenter, an insurance salesman and a retired carpenter.⁴⁸ They lived in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, a fertile plain encompassing more than 7,000 square miles and bounded by the Mississippi River on the west, a line of bluffs on the east and stretching from just below Memphis to Vicksburg.⁴⁹

Ever since white planters and black slaves had settled the area, the Delta had encapsulated extremes--white wealth and black poverty, white violence and black suffering, white power and black survival.⁵⁰ For the historian Rupert Vance, the Delta embodied the Old South more than 60 years after the end of the Civil War. “Nowhere are antebellum conditions so nearly preserved than in the Yazoo Delta,” he wrote in 1932.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁴⁷ Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta*, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Whitaker, “Case Study,” p. 145.

⁴⁹ James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 3-5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 28, 153, 183, 198, 231.

⁵¹ Rupert Vance, *Human Geography of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932): 270.



Illustration 3: Map of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta

The novelist Richard Wright, born near Natchez in 1908, spent part of one summer as a boy in the Delta and was astonished by the ignorance he found among black children. “I had been pitying myself for not having books to read,” he wrote, “and now I saw children who had never read a book.”⁵² Simeon Booker, who covered the Till trial for *Jet*, found most blacks in the Delta ruled by lethargy and fear. Recalling the funeral for Rev. Lee, Booker said a white detective moved through the crowd without touching a single black. “A pathway opened automatically as if the Negroes, even with their backs turned, could feel the presence of an approaching white man,” he wrote.⁵³ The novelist Robert Penn Warren visited the Delta one year after the Till trial and came away with a deep sense of foreboding. Warren described it as “sad and baleful,” an area of “ruined, gaunt, classic clay hills, with the creek bottoms throttled long since in pink sand.”⁵⁴ Yet the Delta was hardly a cultural wasteland. The Delta produced more early blues performers—including Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters—than any other area of the country.⁵⁵ Richard Ford, a writer who lived in the Delta for a time, said it was Mississippi in miniature. “What the South is to the rest of the country, the Delta is to the Mississippi,” said Ford. “It is the South’s South.”⁵⁶

The atmosphere of the Till murder trial bordered on the surreal, a mixture of palpable tension and comic opera. *Jet* best captured it in a five-page spread entitled “The Strange Trial of the Till Kidnappers.”⁵⁷ This was not surprising. Johnson assigned four journalists to cover the trial—three black reporters and a white photographer, a group that

⁵² Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966): 151.

⁵³ Booker, *Black Man’s America*, p. 164. For a fascinating account of how Booker and two white news reporters helped locate two witnesses for the prosecution in the Till case, see Simeon Booker, “A Negro Reporter at the Till Trial,” *Nieman Reports* 53/53 (Winter 1999-2000): 136-137.

⁵⁴ Robert Penn Warren, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South* (New York: Random House, 1956): 5.

⁵⁵ See “‘The Blues Is a Lowdown Shakin’ Chill,’ ” in Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth*, p. 325.

⁵⁶ Ford as quoted in Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth*, p. 325.

almost certainly represented the only inter-racial team to report on the case.⁵⁸ The article described Judge Curtis Swango sipping a Coke during jury selection, while two spectators drank beer. Other spectators ate box lunches during testimony. Milam's children crawled about restlessly. According to the story, "One of them played a solitary game, waving his toy water pistol at a sheriff and shouting 'boom, boom, boom.' Another time, little Harvey Milam amused himself by slipping a rope around his brother's neck and tugging at it." The *Jet* article included seven photographs. One showed the "Jim Crow press table" where black reporters and photographers were forced to sit. As Sheriff Strider passed by the table, the story reported, he "liked to demonstrate his friendliness with Negro reporters covering the trial by greeting them each day with: 'Good morning, niggers.'"⁵⁹

The defining moment came on the trial's third day when Wright took the stand. A prosecutor asked Wright if he could identify the men who had come to his house and taken Till. Wright rose from his chair, extended his right arm, pointed to Milam and said, "Thar he." Then he gestured at the man sitting next to Milam and said, "And thar's Mr. Bryant."⁶⁰ Murray Kempton, a columnist for the *New York Post*, described it as "the hardest half hour in the hardest life possible for a human being in these United States."⁶¹

The *New York Times* published ten stories about the trial. Popham wrote seven. They largely failed to capture the drama—and buffoonery—of the proceedings. His articles were straightforward and focused primarily on testimony. He quoted blacks in

⁵⁷ "The Strange Trial of the Till Kidnapers," *Jet*, 6 October 1955, pp. 6-11.

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Succeeding Against the Odds*, p. 240.

⁵⁹ "The Strange Trial of the Till Kidnapers," *Jet*, p. 8.

⁶⁰ "An Interview with James Hicks" in Williams, *Eyes on the Prize*, 50-51, 54; Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002): 705.

⁶¹ Murray Kempton, "He Went All the Way," in *America Comes of Middle Age: Columns, 1950-1962* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962): 135.

two stories, in each case relying solely on what they said in court.⁶² The *Birmingham World's* trial coverage highlighted several points that the *Times* overlooked. In its initial story, the newspaper explained why the jury included no blacks (none was registered to vote) or women (Mississippi law prohibited this).⁶³ The story also identified what would become the defense team's key argument in asking for an acquittal—that the boy's body could not be positively identified. After the jury handed down its verdict, the *World* ran a package of four stories. Again they contained historical background absent from the *Times*. One noted that no jury in Mississippi had assessed the death penalty against a white man accused of killing a black since 1890.⁶⁴ The stories also highlighted the defense team's use of race in its closing arguments. Attorney John W. Whitten denounced activists, who, he said, had injected race into the case. As he told the jury, "They would not be above putting a body in the river in the hopes it might be identified as Emmett Till."⁶⁵

Popham's most ambitious piece followed the acquittal of Milam and Bryant.⁶⁶ It was the only Till story to appear on the front page of the *Times*. Popham quoted ten persons, all white. Two items revealed the depths of racial prejudice in Mississippi. The first came from jury foreman J.A. Shaw, Jr. after some jurors said they reached a not guilty verdict because they believed the state had not proven the dead body was that of

⁶² Here is Popham's account of Wright's testimony: "The cotton farmer twice rose from the witness chair and singled out the defendants, Roy Bryant, 24, and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, 36, with the words, 'There he is. That's the man.' " Liberal protocol probably accounted for the decision by the *Times* not to use Wright's dialect. Still, by changing Wright's words, Popham whitewashed the testimony of its powerful simplicity. See John Popham, "Slain Boy's Uncle on Stand at Trial," *New York Times*, 22 September 1955, p. 64.

⁶³ "Two White Men on Trial for Murder of Youngster," *Birmingham World*, 20 September 1955, p. 1.

⁶⁴ "No White Man Given Death for Killing in Miss. Since 1890, Writer Observes," *Birmingham World*, 27 September 1966, p. 6

⁶⁵ James L. Kilgallen, "Miss. Acquits Till Death Suspects," *Birmingham World*, 27 September 1955, p. 6.

Till. Asked about his mother's testimony, which contradicted this, Shaw replied, "If she had tried a little harder, she might have got out a tear." The second came from Whitten. During his closing argument, he said the Till case "had brought notoriety and national newspaper coverage to Sumner." But, Whitten told the jurors, "He said he was 'sure that every last Anglo-Saxon one of you has the courage to free these men in the face of that pressure.'"⁶⁷

Despite such blatantly bigoted statements, Popham concluded that the jury acquitted Milam and Bryant not because of racial prejudice but rather because of bureaucratic bungling. In his next story, Popham wrote, "Perhaps the clearest lesson of the trial is the need for improvements in law enforcement machinery."⁶⁸ Here was a case in which a dozen white men acquitted two other white men of murdering a 14-year-old black youngster in Mississippi after a white defense attorney implored them to remember their Anglo-Saxon roots, and the *Times* concluded that race was not the central issue. For their part, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* hammered away at racial prejudice as the central issue. The magazine poignantly captured this in its final paragraph on the trial:

When it was over and the jury had announced its 'not guilty' decision, the mass of sweating, shirt-sleeved, cotton-farming spectators arose to go, but first turned a damning glance toward the handful of Negroes who sat crowded around their press table. And in that single, hate-filled look it was obvious that to these white southerners, some of whom had never seen television or could believe that a Negro Congressman was not a violation of federal law, 'white supremacy' had again triumphed. It was their way of letting it be known that no white man in the state had been punished for the murder of a Negro in 65 years.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ John Popham, "Mississippi Jury Acquits 2 Accused in Youth's Killing," *New York Times*, 24 September 1955, pp. 1, 38.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁶⁸ John Popham, "The Mississippi Trial Is Deep South Drama," *New York Times*, 25 September 1955, Sec. E, p. 8.

⁶⁹ "The Strange Trial," *Jet*, p. 11.

Life did not shy away from race in its coverage of the case, which it described as a “national *cause celebre*.”⁷⁰ It had a weekly circulation that exceeded five million.⁷¹ The magazine’s formula for success relied on a minimum of text accompanied by a rich mixture of illustrations and photographs. The Till case was no exception. The story, just four paragraphs, never loses sight of the centrality of race. It began by pointing out that “the prosecution was up against the whole mass of Mississippi prejudice.” It concluded by noting that “the undertones of racial hatred in the case came out when the defense suggested that the whole thing was a plot by outsiders to help destroy ‘the way of life of Southern white people.’ ”

The decision by the nation’s best-selling magazine to devote three pages to a lynching was unheard of. The magazine commissioned artist Franklin McMahon who produced six black-and-white drawings. The largest and most powerful shows Wright rising out of his chair to identify the kidnappers and pointing a long black finger at Milam, who glares back while Judge Swango looks on impassively.⁷² Another shows the all-white jury, each man looking down sullenly. In a third, Bradley wears a look of defiance when she testifies, “I just know that it was my boy.”

The magazine also published a half-dozen photographs. One showed the Bryants’ general store in Money where, the caption read, “Emmett gave a wolf-whistle at Bryant’s pretty young wife Carolyn.” Another shows a ring with the initials “LT.” The caption reads: “Emmett’s ring, found on the body, belonged to his father, Louis, killed in France in 1945.” The largest photograph shows Milam seated in the courtroom, smiling and

⁷⁰ “Emmett Till’s Day in Court,” *Life*, 3 October 1955, pp. 36-38.

⁷¹ Leonard, *News for All*, p. 170.

⁷² *Jet* published an equally powerful, though much smaller photograph that shows Wright standing ramrod straight and leveling a finger at Milam. See “The Strange Trial,” p. 9.



AS TRIAL BEGAN, the two defendants had their families with them. From left are Juanita and J. W. Milam and sons Harvey, 2, and Bill, 4; Roy and Carolyn Bryant and one of their sons, Roy Jr., 3.

Illustration 4: Photograph from October 3, 1955 issue of *Life* magazine Showing J.W. Milam Playing with his Sons during Murder Trial

playing with his two young sons, both shirtless. Just below it is another that captures Milam and Bryant just minutes after being acquitted. Each has an arm draped about his wife's shoulder. Milam wears an expansive smile punctuated by a large cigar jutting from the right corner of his mouth.

If there is a hero in *Life's* coverage, it is Wright. Popham also finds a hero in the Till case—the white judge. “The dominant figure in the case was Judge Swango, 47 years old, handsome and impeccably groomed, a blend of judicial dignity and great natural charm,” wrote Popham. “His voice was cultured, precise in grammar and soft in tone. His commitment to the law and its search for equal justice was total.”⁷³

The *World* and *Jet* found a richer collection of heroes, black and white. Bradley for focusing media attention on the lynching of her son. Judge Swango for his handling of the case. Wright for identifying the kidnapers. Both publications gave special praise to Tallahatchie County District Attorney Gerald Chatham, especially the newspaper in a story written by Hicks. “Here was a southern-born white man facing an all-white jury and asking that jury to render a verdict which would hang two white men for killing a Negro,” he wrote. “It was a challenging and difficult moment in the career of Mr. Chatham but . . . he rose to the challenge with all the ability at his command.”⁷⁴ Chatham said testimony clearly showed the body recovered from the Tallahatchie River was that of Till. “If there was one ear left, one hairline, one part of his nose, any part of Emmett Till's body, then I say to you that Mamie Bradley was God's given witness to identify

⁷³ Popham, “The Mississippi Trial Is Deep South Drama,” *New York Times*, Sec. E, p. 8.

⁷⁴ James Hicks, “Writer Reviews Passionate Closing Plea of Till Case Atty.,” *Birmingham World*, 27 September 1955, pp. 1, 2.

him,” he said. When Chatham concluded, Bradley whispered to Hicks, “He couldn’t have done any better.”⁷⁵

Post-Trial Coverage

After the verdict was returned, coverage by the *New York Times* and the *Birmingham World* remained dramatically different. The *Times* published 17 follow-up articles. The wire services provided most of the stories, which the *Times* buried deep inside the newspaper. The final eleven stories did not quote a single black American; eight of these relied on a single white source, usually a public official. A request by the governor of Illinois that the federal government intervene in the Till case.⁷⁶ A U.S. Justice Department announcement that it would not intervene in the case.⁷⁷ A statement by Deputy Attorney General William P. Rogers that Till’s murder was a “serious black mark” for the country.⁷⁸ Of the 17 stories, blacks were quoted in four. Two involved protests.⁷⁹ The lesson in hindsight is clear: Minorities who want to get their message into the mainstream media should take to the streets.

The black-oriented publications had a broader, less predictable focus. The *World’s* first post-trial story examined the international reaction to the case.⁸⁰ It noted that rightwing and Communist publications alike denounced the verdict. “*L’Aurore’s* report on the trial of the accused kidnap-murderers of Emmett Till called the court proceedings ‘an awful comedy,’ ” the *World* reported. “Paris’ pro-Communist *Liberation* said the trial ‘scandalized all honest people in America.’ ” Similarly, the story noted,

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Associated Press, “Till Case Inquiry Asked,” *New York Times*, 11 November 1955, p. 17.

⁷⁷ United Press International, “U.S. Bars Till Action,” *New York Times*, 25 October 1955, p. 27.

⁷⁸ “Till Case Decried by Brownell Aide,” *New York Times*, 5 January 1956, p. 22.

⁷⁹ “10,000 in Harlem Protest Verdict,” *New York Times*, 26 September 1955, p. 10, and “Boycott Is Urged in Youth’s Killing,” *New York Times*, 12 October 1955, p. 62.

⁸⁰ Chester M. Hampton, “World Shocked by Till Trial,” *Birmingham World*, 30 September 1956, p. 6.

London's *Daily Mirror* carried the verdict in a three-column headline of heavy black type. Ironically, the *Times*, which has long prided itself on its international coverage, paid almost no attention to the reaction abroad.⁸¹

Jet detailed what happened to several key participants after they testified. Soon after the trial ended, the black news magazine published a gripping first-person account by Wright explaining how he escaped from Mississippi.⁸² A month later, *Jet* examined the impact of the case on Bradley and other principal figures.⁸³

The most sensational post-trial story appeared in a most unlikely publication—*Look* magazine. *Look* published the story in January 1956.⁸⁴ It was entitled “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi.” The author was William Bradford Huie, an early practitioner of checkbook journalism. Huie paid Milam and Bryant approximately \$4,000 to tell their version of the truth about the Till case.⁸⁵

Bryant and Milam described kidnapping Till intending only to “scare some sense into him.” They pistol-whipped him, repeatedly smashing his face with their revolvers. But, they said, Till wouldn’t scare. “Bobo,” as Till was nicknamed, was full of “poison,” according to Milam, adding, “He was hopeless. I’m no bully. I never hurt a nigger in my

⁸¹ This is all the more amazing considering the depth and range of the criticism. *Le Figaro* in France called the verdict “scandalous” and said it was certain to “arouse worldwide indignation.” The Vatican’s *L’Osservatore Romano* in Rome expressed outrage. So did *Das Freie Volk* in Germany, which said the verdict showed that “the life of a Negro in Mississippi is not worth a whistle.” See Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta*, p. 46. The *Times* finally addressed international reaction almost one month after the verdict, but it relied on second-hand information. In an October 22 story, the newspaper reported that the American Jewish Committee had issued a report that said the Till case had seriously damaged the nation’s prestige. The group based its finding on a survey of public reaction in North Africa and Europe. The story provides no details about the report’s findings abroad. See “Survey Finds U.S. Hurt by Till Case,” *New York Times*, 22 October 1955, p. 40.

⁸² Mose Wright, “How I Escaped from Mississippi,” *Jet*, 13 October 1955, pp. 6-11.

⁸³ “How the Till Case Changed Five Lives,” *Jet*, 24 November 1955, pp. 10-13.

⁸⁴ Huie, “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” pp. 46-50.

⁸⁵ William Bradford Huie Interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, p. 389.

life. I like niggers in their place. I know how to work ‘em. But I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice.”

There was a problem. Milam needed something to weigh down the body. He recalled recently seeing a discarded cotton gin fan, so they drove to get it. “When we got to that gin, it was daylight, and I was worried for the first time,” Milam said. “Somebody might see us and accuse us of stealing the fan.” So he and Bryant told Till to load the fan into Milam’s pick-up truck. Then the three drove to a clearing on the Tallahatchie River where Milam sometimes went squirrel hunting. Milam ordered Till to carry the fan to the riverbank, then had him strip. This was followed by their last exchange.

Milam: ‘You still as good as I am?’

Bobo: ‘Yeah.’

Milam: ‘You’ve still ‘had’ white women before?’

Bobo: ‘Yeah.’

That big .45 jumped in Milam’s hand. The youth turned to catch that big, expanding bullet at his right ear. He dropped.

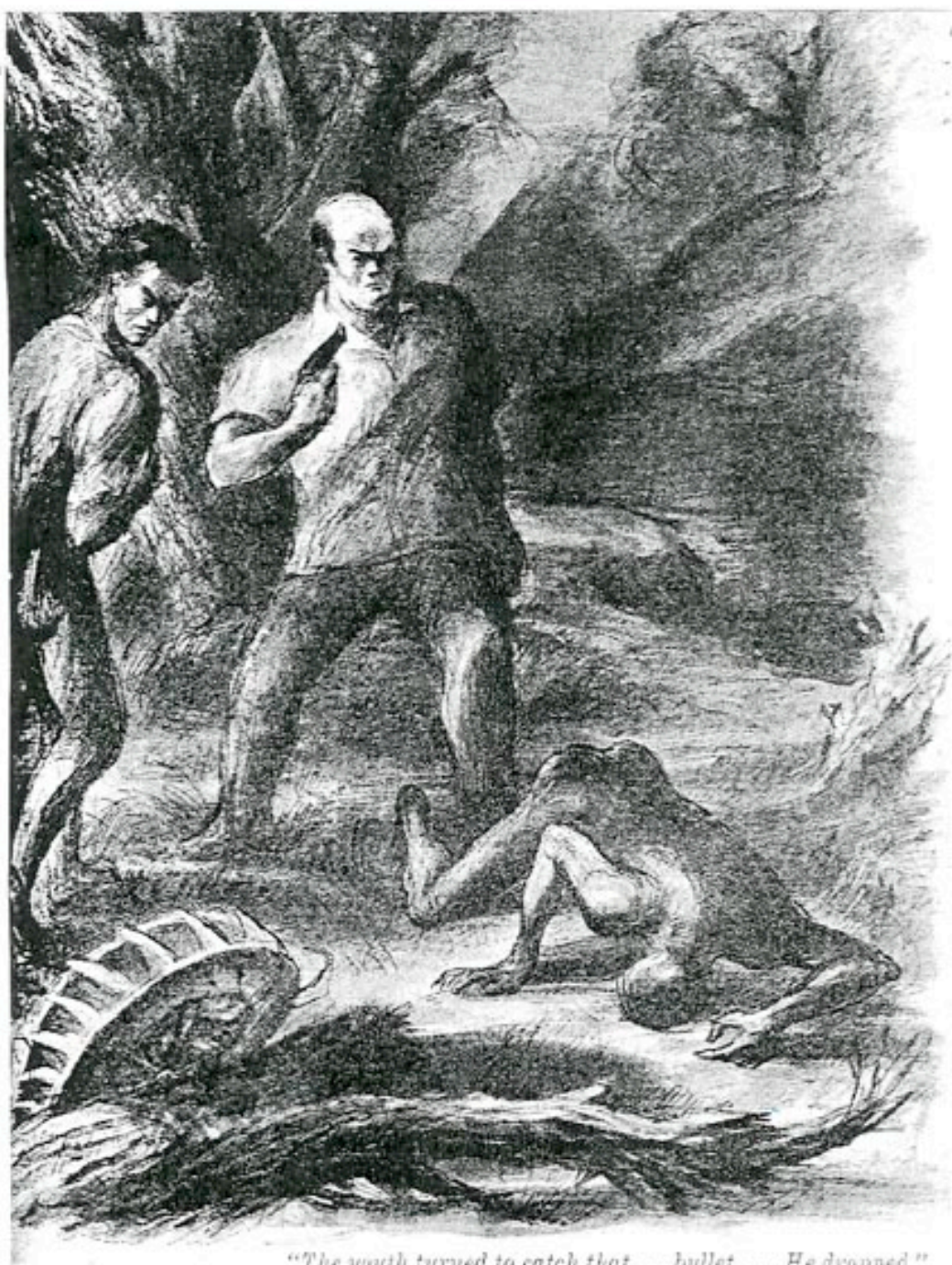
They barb-wired the gin fan to his neck [and] rolled him into 20 feet of water.

For three hours that morning, there was a fire in Big Milam’s back yard: Bobo’s crepe-soled shoes were hard to burn.⁸⁶

Six photographs accompany the four-page story. A small one shows Till looking expectantly at the camera. Another larger one shows Milam laughing with his wife Juanita. There also is a drawing that takes up more than half of one page. It shows Milam holding his pistol and standing over Till’s naked body as it collapses to the ground. The caption below reads: “ ‘The youth turned to catch that . . . bullet He dropped.’”

The combination of the killers’ confession, the photographs and the artwork make for a powerful magazine package. Still, there are two fundamental journalistic problems with Huie’s account. First, he makes no mention of having paid the killers to talk.

⁸⁶ Huie, “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” p. 50.



"The youth turned to catch that . . . bullet. . . . He dropped."

Illustration 5: Artist's Illustration in *Look* magazine Showing Emmett Till Moments After Being Shot by J.W. Milam as Roy Bryant Looks On (January 24, 1956)

Second, the article includes no quotes from blacks, though the brazenness of Milam's confession begs for comment from Bradley, Wright, Wilkins and others. *Look*, like other mainstream news organizations, gave the Till case unprecedented publicity but remained largely one-dimensional in its coverage.

If Milam and Bryant had expected accolades from whites for murdering Till and a business-as-usual attitude among blacks, they were badly mistaken. Blacks struck them in the pocketbook. In the Delta, the Milam and Bryant families owned several country stores that depended on black customers. But after the trial and the killers' confession, few blacks continued to do business at their stores in Money and Glendora and Sharkey. In little more than a year's time, the families closed or sold the stores in all three towns.⁸⁷ Whites ostracized the men. Bryant, unable to find work, moved to east Texas. Milam tried farming and bootlegging, then eventually followed Bryant and his family to east Texas.⁸⁸ History's verdict would be no better for Bryant and Milam. Till is remembered as an early civil rights martyr, they as racist murderers.⁸⁹ Why? The frames—those of society and the media—had changed.

Which publications provided the most accomplished journalistic coverage of the Till murder case? This study shows that the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* provided more depth, a greater range of sources, a clear statement of the central problem and broader context than the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* while following accepted journalistic

⁸⁷ Whitaker, "Case Study," p. 160.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁸⁹ A 1994 study of the case describes Till as "the sacrificial lamb of the civil rights movement." See Glenora Hudson-Weems, *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement* (Troy, Michigan: Bedford, 1994) and Hudson-Weems, "Resurrecting Emmett Till: The Catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, No. 2 (November 1998): 179-188.

routines such as attribution and balance. The black publications also provided a set of frames for the central characters that was more diverse and nuanced than that of the mainstream publications examined. This was particularly true in their coverage of the black community. In that case, the primary frame employed by the *Times*, *Life* and *Look* was that of a victim. The *Birmingham World* and *Jet* captured this as well as portraits of blacks as activists, heroes and leaders. Despite their shortcomings, the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* demonstrated significant change in their coverage of the Till case in two ways. First, they gave unprecedented national publicity to a lynching. Second, they presented the black victim in a uniformly sympathetic manner. Bill Minor, who covered the case for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, said that because of the Till case “for the first time you couldn’t have a quiet little lynching without getting real attention.”⁹⁰

Three months after that Mississippi murder, events in a neighboring state provided the media with another dramatic opportunity to examine race relations in the South. But where the death of Emmett Till was but the latest in a long line of lynchings, almost everything about the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, would be new.

⁹⁰ Minor as quoted in the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 25 August, 1985, Sec. A., p. 1.

Chapter 6: Covering a Mass Protest in Alabama—The Montgomery Bus Boycott

The year 1943 was memorable for Rosa Parks. She joined the Montgomery branch of the NAACP, where she got to know E.D. Nixon, a local NAACP leader and a Pullman porter.¹ That same year, she twice attempted to register to vote but without success. On the second attempt, she boarded a bus at the front. James F. Blake was the driver. Blake, his hand near the pistol on his hip, ordered Parks to exit the bus and re-enter through the rear door. Parks refused. Blake told her to get off the bus. She did, vowing never again to ride a bus driven by Blake. She kept that vow until Thursday, December 1, 1955.²

That day, Parks had just left her job at the Montgomery Fair department store, where she worked as a seamstress.³ Parks sat just behind the seats reserved for whites. When more white passengers boarded the bus, Blake told Parks and three other black riders to move so that a white passenger could sit down. “Y’all better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats,” he said. The three blacks sitting on the same row as Parks moved but she did not. Blake ordered her to get up. “No, I am not,” she answered. Blake called the police. They arrested Parks and charged her with violating the

¹ E.D. Nixon interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, p. 44, and David J. Garrow, “The Origins of the Montgomery Bus Boycott,” in *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56*, edited by David Garrow (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989): 609. Parks distinguished herself in ways beyond her political activism. She also held a high school diploma. In 1940, just seven of every 100 black adults in Montgomery had graduated from high school. See Rosa Parks, *Quiet Strength* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994): 12, and Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks* (New York: Penguin, 2000): 41-42.

² Brinkley, *Rosa Parks*, 58-59, and Garrow, “The Origins of the Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 610-613.

³ Fred Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice: Changing the System by the System* (Montgomery: Black Belt Press, 1995): 36-37.

local segregation ordinance.⁴ City and state law required racial segregation on city buses in Montgomery.⁵ Later that evening, Nixon helped bail Parks out of jail.⁶ Activists had approached Nixon earlier in 1955 about challenging Montgomery's bus segregation ordinance after police arrested Claudette Colvin, a 15-year-old black student, for refusing to give her seat to a white passenger. Nixon refused, noting that Colvin was pregnant, unmarried and also had been charged with assault for resisting arrest. Now, in December, Nixon saw Parks as the ideal plaintiff—married, employed, active in her church and respected in the community. Nixon told Parks she should fight her case in court. She agreed. Later that night Nixon told his wife the black community should boycott the buses.⁷

Jo Ann Robinson was excited when she heard about the arrest of Parks.⁸ Robinson—president of the Women's Political Council, a group of politically active black women in Montgomery—had been waiting for the right case for months. When she heard about Parks, Robinson called Fred Gray, one of two black attorneys in Montgomery. Robinson told him she was considering having the Women's Political Council distribute thousands of fliers the next day calling for a boycott of the buses. "Are

⁴ Brinkley, *Rosa Parks*, p. 2; Parks, *Quiet Strength*, pp. 23-25; Rosa Parks interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 40-42; and Rosa Parks interview in Steven M. Millner, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott: A Case Study in the Emergence and Career of a Social Movement," in *The Walking City*, pp. 561-562.

⁵ J. Mills Thornton, "Challenge and Response in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56," in *The Walking City*, pp. 323-380.

⁶ Nixon Interview in Millner, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott," p. 546.

⁷ Nixon interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 38-39, 43-45; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, pp. 15-16.

⁸ In a letter dated May 21, 1954—four days after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the *Brown* decision—Robinson asked Montgomery Mayor W.A. Gayle for three changes in bus service including a new city law that would allow whites to sit from front to back and blacks from back to front as was already being doing in Mobile. If these changes were not made, Robinson suggested that black riders might boycott the buses. "More and more of our people are already arranging with neighbors and friends to ride to keep from being insulted and humiliated by bus drivers," her letter said. "There has been talk from twenty-five or more local organizations of planning a citywide boycott of buses." Robinson wrote the letter on behalf of the Women's Political Council in Montgomery. It is reproduced in Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The*

you ready?” Gray asked. Robinson said yes. Then she went to work.⁹ She drafted a 15-sentence notice. It called on every black in Montgomery to stay off the buses on Monday, December 5—the day scheduled for Parks’ trial. Robinson, a professor of English at Alabama State College, and two students distributed several thousand copies on Friday, December 2.¹⁰

That same day, Nixon called the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1954 King and his wife Coretta had moved to Montgomery where he became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Nixon asked King and several other black ministers to support a boycott and to meet later that day. At the meeting, held at King’s church, the group agreed to support the one-day boycott and to hold a mass meeting to determine how long to continue the protest. A committee headed by King also composed a new flier. It represented a significant improvement over the initial one. The first sentence announced the boycott; Robinson’s did not mention staying off the buses until the ninth sentence. The new flier was just five sentences, one-third the length of its predecessor. It also announced the mass meeting on Monday, December 5. On Saturday, December 3, a church secretary made 7,000 copies of the new flier and they were distributed that same morning. Another committee contacted the black taxi companies, each of which agreed to transport passengers on the day of the boycott for 10 cents, the regular bus fare. On Sunday, December 4, the ministers announced the boycott from their pulpits.¹¹

Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987): viii.

⁹ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*, 45-47; Jo Ann Gibson Robinson interview in Millner, “The Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 569; and Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice*, p. 55.

¹¹ Nixon interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, p. 45; King, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1958): 22-24, 46-49; Nixon Interview in Millner, “The Montgomery Bus Boycott,” p. 547.

The city's two newspapers, the *Montgomery Advertiser* and the *Alabama Journal*, also helped publicize the boycott. Each published two front-page stories about the protest before it began.¹² In the case of the *Advertiser*, Nixon helped arrange what amounted to free publicity. He tipped off Joe Azbell, a reporter and the paper's city editor. The *Advertiser's* front-page stories quoted the new flier's call to boycott the buses on Monday. One article reported that police were concerned about the threat of "Negro goon squads" that had supposedly been organized to keep blacks off the buses. In response, officials said there would be "two police behind every bus in the city." In addition, radio and television reporters carried reports throughout the day on Sunday, quoting the Montgomery police commissioner warning about the alleged goon squads. All this, Nixon later observed, helped the boycott leaders in two ways. First, the news reports ensured that virtually every black household in Montgomery knew about the boycott. Second, the decision to assign police to every bus—and to announce those plans publicly—helped to keep blacks off the buses. "Monday morning, the black folks come out there and saw two police . . . behind every bus," Nixon recalled years later. "They just went the other way."¹³

The initial results were astonishing. In the early morning hours of Monday, December 5, King and Coretta stared with almost unbelieving eyes as the first bus of the morning rolled past their house with no black passengers. The scene was repeated over and over throughout the day. Blacks who owned cars gave rides to any black they encountered on the street. Black children gleefully stuck out their tongues as the empty

¹² *Montgomery Advertiser*, 2 December 1955, Sec. A, p. 9; 4 December 1955, Sec. A, p. 1; 5 December 1955, Sec. A, p. 1; *Alabama Journal*, 2 December 1955, Sec. C, p. 6; 3 December 1955, Sec. A, p. 1; 5 December 1955, Sec. A, p. 1.

buses rolled by. One elderly black man sat on his front porch and laughed heartily each time an empty bus passed. A woman said happily that the buses moving past her house were “as naked as can be.” At Montgomery City Hall, hundreds of blacks gathered outside. Inside, Parks, represented by Gray, went on trial for violating the city segregation law. She was found guilty and fined \$10. That evening Parks attended a meeting where she and thousands of blacks voted overwhelmingly to continue the protest.¹⁴ The Montgomery bus boycott had begun.

White officials in Montgomery were confident the boycott would unravel quickly. As King recalled, “They were certain that the first rainy day would find the Negroes back on the buses.”¹⁵ As a result, city officials refused to seriously consider the protestors’ demands. But the more than 17,000 Montgomery blacks who had ridden the buses twice daily did not return. Many had longstanding resentment about bus service. The drivers, all white, often refused to pick up blacks on rainy days because white passengers did not want them on the buses. In many cases, drivers would require a black passenger to pay at the front, exit and enter again at the back; often the driver would take off before the passenger reached the rear door. By law, the first ten seats were reserved for whites. Blacks—who comprised three-quarters of the ridership—were not allowed to sit in these seats even if all were empty. To do otherwise was to invite trouble. A black mother found this out one day. There were no white passengers. When the woman placed her two babies on a seat to search her pocketbook for the dime fare, the driver exploded, demanding that she remove the “black, dirty brats.” Before she could take them, the

¹³ Nixon interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 45-46; Nixon interview in Millner, “The Montgomery Bus Boycott,” p. 547; Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*, p. 57.

¹⁴ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 53-55; Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*, pp. 58-61; and Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice*, pp. 55-56;

driver punched the bus forward, throwing the children to the floor. The incident was hardly unique. If African Americans mistakenly sat in one of the first ten seats, drivers would lash out, calling them “black bitches” and “black apes,” “whores” and “niggers.”¹⁶

Once the boycott began, protestors held meetings twice each week at churches where they sang and prayed and heard their leaders tell them they were making history.¹⁷ Whites grew impatient and angry. Speaking before the Montgomery Junior Chamber of Commerce, one city official announced a “get-tough” policy. The mayor abruptly ended negotiations to settle the boycott. King’s home was bombed.¹⁸ But boycott leaders urged protestors not to strike back. And to stay off the buses until they achieved their goal—integrated buses. Desegregation was not an initial goal but it became the overriding one.

White opposition hardened. Authorities indicted more than 100 boycott leaders including King for violating a state law prohibiting boycotts. When the protestors filed a federal lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of local and state bus segregation laws, the city fought it all the way to the nation’s highest court. White officials also sought an injunction in state court to ban the system of carpools that was key to the boycott’s success. On the day that hearing began, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it had affirmed a lower court decision striking down bus segregation in Montgomery as unconstitutional. And still Montgomery’s blacks stayed off the buses. They did not return until the high court’s decision reached Montgomery and the buses were desegregated—381 days after the protest began.

¹⁵ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 108.

¹⁶ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*, pp. 33, 36; King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁷ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 85-89.

¹⁸ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*, pp. 116, 119, 130-133.

The Montgomery bus boycott presented the news media with a far more difficult challenge than the Till murder case. The Till case came down to four days in which two white men went on trial in a Mississippi courtroom on charges of having killed a black teenager for being too forward. For a reporter, it was singularly focused, straightforward and sensational. The Montgomery bus boycott played out over more than a year. The goals of the protestors shifted significantly. The cast of characters numbered in the thousands. For a reporter, it was complex, lengthy and not given to easy explanations. This chapter will examine coverage of the boycott by three white publications—the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look*—and two black publications—the *Birmingham World* and *Jet*. The *Birmingham World* appeared twice each week. The three magazines—*Life*, *Look* and *Jet*—were weeklies. The *Times* is a daily.

Boycott Coverage—December 1955: The Protest Begins “A pocketbook attack with prospective legal action”

The *New York Times* provided relatively little coverage of the boycott during its early stages. In December it published just four boycott stories, all produced by the Associated Press or United Press.¹⁹ Each appeared deep inside the newspaper. Three stories were three paragraphs or fewer. The stories quoted no blacks by name and never mentioned King.

The *Birmingham World* recognized the importance of the boycott early on. In December the newspaper published seven stories and four news analyses about the protest. Two of the first three articles carried the byline of Emory O. Jackson, the managing editor of the *World*. His lead on a page-one story captured what would become

¹⁹ “Buses Boycotted Over Race Issue,” *New York Times*, 6 December 1955, p. 31; “Shots Strike Negro Homes,” *New York Times*, 9 December 1955, p. 23; “Bus Boycott Continues,” *New York Times*, 10 December 1955, p. 13; and “Negro Bus Boycott Still On,” *New York Times*, 20 December 1955, p. 33.

the boycott's central themes: "A pocketbook attack with prospective legal action in the background was being used by civic leaders here in a protest over alleged injustices on the Montgomery City Bus Lines."²⁰ The story noted that the arrest of Parks for refusing to give up her seat had sparked the boycott. Jackson paid particular attention to the December 5 evening meeting where he reported that a crowd estimated at 5,000 had crowded into Holt Street Baptist Church. The story then turned to King's keynote address, a speech that would launch his career as a civil rights leader. According to Jackson, King told the crowd that the boycott was a public-spirited response to decades of abuse: "There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled by the iron feet of oppression." Jackson said King emphasized the importance of remaining nonviolent. "We do not advocate violence," said King. "We are Christian people. Our weapon is the weapon of protest." King contrasted this approach with the tactics of the Ku Klux Klan and the white citizens councils. "He said there had not been and there would not be any cross-burnings, no lynchings, no defying the Constitution of the nation, no violence and no attack on the United States Supreme Court," Jackson wrote. The days ahead would not be easy, said King, but the boycott would succeed. As Jackson wrote, "In a flash of ringing oratory, he contended, 'If we are wrong, justice is a lie.' But he added, 'We are not wrong.' "

Another story in the *World* reported that boycott leaders had met with city officials and assured them that they were not attempting to desegregate the buses.²¹ Three

²⁰ Emory O. Jackson, "Leaders Hit Injustices on Montgomery City Bus Lines," *Birmingham World*, 13 December 1955, pp. 1, 6.

²¹ "Montgomery Bus Co. Suspends Services in Negro Neighborhoods," *Birmingham World*, 13 December 1955, p. 1.

BUSES BOYCOTTED OVER RACE ISSUE

Montgomery, Ala., Negroes
Protest Woman's Arrest
for Defying Segregation

MONTGOMERY, Ala., Dec. 5 (AP)—A court test of segregated transportation loomed today following the arrest of a Negro who refused to move to the colored section of a city bus.

While thousands of other Negroes boycotted Montgomery city lines in protest, Mrs. Rosa Parks was fined \$14 in Police Court today for having disregarded last Thursday a driver's order to move to the rear of a bus. Negro passengers ride in the rear of buses here, while

passengers in front under a municipal segregation ordinance.

An emotional crowd of Negroes, estimated by the police at 5,000, roared approval tonight at a meeting to continue the boycott.

Spokesmen said the boycott would continue until people who rode buses were no longer "intimidated, embarrassed and coerced." They said a "delegation of citizens" was ready to help city and bus line officials develop a program that would be "satisfactory and equitable."

Released Under Bond

Mrs. Parks appealed her fine and was released under \$100 bond signed by an attorney, Fred Gray, and a former state president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, E. D. Nixon.

Mr. Gray and Charles Langford, another Negro lawyer representing the 42-year-old department store seamstress, refused to say whether they planned to attack the constitutionality of segregation laws affecting public transportation.

The Supreme Court in Washington already has before it a test case against segregation on buses operating in Columbia, S. C. The United States Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., has ruled in this case that segregation must be ended. If the Supreme Court sustains the decision, the effect will be to outlaw segregation in all states and cities.

Mrs. Parks was charged first with violating a city ordinance that gives bus drivers police powers to enforce racial segregation. But at the request of City Attorney Eugene Lee, the warrant was amended to a charge of violation of a similar state law. The state statute authorizes bus companies to provide and enforce separate facilities for whites and Negroes. Violation is punishable by a maximum fine of \$500.

Other Negroes by the thousands, meanwhile, found other means of transportation or stayed home today in an organized boycott of City Lines Buses, operated by a subsidiary of National City Lines at Chicago.

The manager, J. H. Hagley, estimated that "80 or maybe 90 per cent" of the Negroes who normally used the buses had joined the boycott. He said "several thousand" Negroes rode the buses on a normal day.

Illustration 6: Initial Story in the *New York Times* on the Montgomery Bus Boycott (December 6, 1955)

Leaders Hit Injustices On Montgomery City Bus Lines

By EMORY O. JACKSON

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A pocketbook attack with prospective legal action in the background was being used by civic leaders here in a protest of alleged injustices on the Montgomery City Bus Lines.

A crowd estimated at 5,000 Monday night, December 5 which overflowed the Holt Street Baptist Church pastored by the Rev. A. W. Wilson, and poured into the surrounding streets, heard a tornado of freedom oratory from a trio of distinguished ministers, promise leadership that enable them from being "trampled by the iron feet of oppression."

The crowd came ther to "get further instructions" for withholding patronage from the bus line a mass protest growing out of November 1 arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks, seamstress, church worker, and civic leader. The protest was also expanded to include Fred Daniels, a 19-year-old student of Alabama State College, was reportedly arrested on Dec. 5 on charges of allegedly trying to prevent a woman from catching the bus.

BACKGROUND

Following the bus segregation violation incident, unsigned mimeographed circulars appeared on the street asking the group to "stay off the buses Monday (Dec. 5) in protest of the arrest and trial" of Mrs. Parks.

Two descriptions of the bus segregation designations have been made. That Montgomery buses have a small metal plate which folds over the seating indicating "white" and "Negro sections." Civic leaders deny this.

The other is that white passengers sit front of the bus toward the rear and Negro passengers from the rear toward the front. "The line of demarcation is a fluid one—moving forward or to the rear depending upon the number of passengers of either color." The latter version is the one accepted by civic leaders.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Ph. D. degree, pastor of fashionable Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, presided and delivered the keynote address. The audience sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Learning on the Everlasting Arm" to open the meeting.

Daniel was cleared Wednesday, December 7, before Judge John H. Battle. He was charged with preventing a woman from boarding a bus. Police Officer Ralph Harmon testified that a woman was running to catch the bus and Daniel grabbed her arm. But Mrs. Leva Percival, who the officer said looked like the woman, testified that she was not trying to catch the bus.

The Rev. Mr. King, in stating the purpose of the meeting, described it as "serious business" growing out of a determination as "American citizens to exercise our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning."

He said the time had come to remove the idea of freedom from "thin paper to thick action." We have come, he declared, "to get this bus situation corrected."

He asserted that the alleged treatment-on-buses problem had "existed over endless years" and had "a paralysis which is crippling the spirit."

"There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled by the iron feet of oppression," he asserted.

The moment Dr. King then retold what he called erroneous version of the incident. "There is no reserved section on the bus." (Stories published in the general press said that Mrs. Parks would not surrender her seat and move back into the colored section of the bus when the bus driver instructed her to do so.) He said legal scholars had informed him that the Montgomery bus seating law had never been clarified.

He then mentioned the circumstances under which "this fine, Christian woman of integrity and character" was arrested and carried to jail.

Dr. King urged the group "to work together and stick together." He said there was coming a "daybreak of justice, freedom and equality." He added, "Justice is love in calculation." He asserted they were ready to use the "tools" of persuasion although there comes a time when legislation and coercion have to be used.

"Work and fight until justice runs down like water," he urged, but perform peacefully, within the law, and as law-abiding citizens, he asserted. He counseled the gathering to "work together and stick together" in order to "gain justice on buses of the city." Then in a flash of ringing oratory he contended, "If we are wrong, justice is a lie." But, he added, "we are not wrong." He warned the fellowship that "In all our action we must stick together."

Throughout his speech ran the emphasis on peaceful action, orderly protest and the Christian approach.

"Unity," Dr. King admonished his hearers was the key to success. He declared the group's leadership was determined "to gain justice on the buses of the city of Montgomery." Bitterly he assailed those who would compare their techniques with KKK and WCC. He said these

Illustration 7: Initial Stories in the *Birmingham World* (December 13, 1955) on the Montgomery Bus Boycott (illustration continued)

The Tip-Off

BY EMORY O. JACKSON

MONTOOMERY, Ala. — (BNS)—The "riders' strike" against the Montgomery Bus Lines, an affiliate of a Chicago corporation is incidentally a protest against segregation.

That is the first observation, it seems to me, which should be emphasized and kept in mind. What has happened is the release of pent up resentment over the recurring, unceasing and unrelenting abuse, humiliation and disrespect accorded Negro passengers, especially the lady folk. It seems to me.

Monday, December 5, there began a fall away of Negro riders on the bus, obviously in protest of the arrest, and booking of Mrs. Rosa Parks, a woman in whom one can find nothing to question. She was a victim of the new revision over segregation laws.



From reports she was riding the bus as a paying passenger. The operator, after she had boarded the bus and deposited herself in a seat, asked her up, it is said. The driver reportedly asked her to get up and give her seat to a white man. She refused to do this. And that was it. Police came and arrested her. Bus drivers under Alabama Segregation Law must supervise passenger seating. Failure to do so makes bus drivers liable to prosecution.

Now, how was it reported in the responsible, the free, the sober and the press. Mrs. Parks was represented as refusing to move back in the "colored section." Having ridden Montgomery buses I know first-hand that the city buses are not departmentalized, sectionalized or marked up. Yet there must be a "mind's eye" section, a kind of invisible "colored place" which was reported, a creation of the typewriter.

Montgomery Bus Co. Suspends Services In Negro Neighborhoods

MONTOOMERY, Ala. — A five-day protest of "humiliation" growing out of the Nov. 1 arrest and conviction of Mrs. Rosa Parks on charges of violating bus segregation laws had resulted Nov. 16 in the suspension of bus service in predominantly Negro communities.

1. In paid advertisement statement the Montgomery Bus Lines, an affiliate of a Chicago corporation said that "Since numbers of our patrons have refused to use our services unless we operate in violation of the law, it is useless for us to continue to operate buses into those neighborhoods."

2. Reserve policemen after some buses allegedly had been fired upon were escorting the boycotted city buses through heavy Negro districts. (The reserve police system was set up in Montgomery in March, 1952. The limit is 50 and they can only be called into action by the chief of police and serve without pay.)

3. Home of a Negro policeman and that of a civilian were reportedly fired on the night of Dec. 1. However, authorities said the incident had nothing to do with the boycott. The homes were identified as those of Patrolmen A. G. Worthy and Willie James Temple.

4. Slave Isler, reporter for the Montgomery Advertiser on Dec. 8 swore out a warrant charging C. L. (Cad) Beale, welder and reserve policeman, in connection with Beale's allegedly tearing off the reporter's religious medal. The reporter was reportedly checking on the reserve police at Police Headquarters.

5. Conferences of bus and city officials with civic leaders failed to work out a solution for ending the boycott. Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Pastor M. L. King, Jr., Bus Company Atty. Jack Crenshaw, Civic Group Atty. Fred D. Gray, Bus Company Manager J. H. Bogley and Mayor W. A. Gayle were reportedly in the conference.

Dr. King said in the conference, "We are not trying to change segregation laws. But we are trying to peacefully arrange a better economic situation for the Negro community."

The civic leaders suggested two plans, both which were rejected by company officials namely: Seat on a "first come, first served" plan. 2. Use Negro bus operators on lines running in predominantly Negro communities.

A few days before this incident, a secret, anti-Negro group known as the White Citizens Council had met in a closed session formed the Central Alabama Citizens Council, and elected a Black Belt politician as its leader. To understand something about negative forces of this kind; their evil ideology, their clever operation, their hidden-hand tactics, one has to read the five-part series on the "WCC" menace written by James Desmond in The New York City Daily News (Nov. 22-26).

Incidents often crawl behind the hostility whipped up by such ugly forces.

Most of the reported incidents, at least the two claiming the most attention, have involved bus drivers and Negro women. One of the other cases had to do with a teen-age, school-attending girl. She was convicted on disorderly conduct, conduct unbecoming segregation and was placed on probation.

In any bus row, the accused can just about expect conviction. This reason is obvious or should be. Conviction often demolishes the possibility of liability. Or it makes the legal way difficult because the convicted comes to battle with marks on him.

For placid, conservative yielding Montgomery leadership to get worked up into what has been described as a "boycott" had to be something that touched more sharply than racial segregation, must have been a reaction from segregation more painful than the more shameful practice of an on-going discrimination.

I sat at the press table during the quoted mass meeting Monday night, December 5 at Holt Street Baptist Church. Most of the speakers I knew personally. I knew Mrs. Parks.

I knew the segregation laws and how fanatical some people can get over them. I had witnessed the Thanksgiving Day parade in Montgomery and marvelled over the absurd one-day showing of democracy.

There was no written or printed program. The presiding officer merely assumed his position and the program went off. The names of all of the speakers with the exception of the presiding officer, were called. I believe. At least my notes show it. A recording of the proceedings was made and the record will speak for itself.

days later, Jackson expanded on this. He reported that the protestors were asking for the adoption of a new policy by which blacks would seat themselves from the rear forward and whites from the front backward.²² Under this “first-come, first-served” arrangement, no passenger would have to surrender a seat to someone else. But in a news analysis, Jackson suggested segregation was, in fact, the main issue. The refusal by Parks to give up her seat was an example, he wrote, “of the new revulsion over segregation laws.”²³

In a news analysis published on December 20, Jackson outlined the protest leaders’ three demands.²⁴ None challenged segregation. Instead, they asked for more courteous treatment for black passengers, the hiring of some black drivers on buses in black neighborhoods and seating from the rear forward for blacks and from the front backward for whites. The “first-come, first-served” seating arrangement was hardly radical. Deep South cities such as Mobile, Macon and Savannah had followed this policy for years.²⁵ In his analysis, Jackson pointed out that several white citizens in Montgomery had written letters to the local newspapers in support of the protest. One reader, Juliette Morgan said, “Negroes pay full fare for fourth class treatment.” Another, Helen R. Goss, pointed out that segregation laws were not enforced against whites when they sat in the back of the bus: “In that case I have again and again seen white patrons occupy seats in the colored section without being questioned by anyone.”

The *Birmingham World* did not ignore the perspective of boycott opponents. In one story, the *World* reported that some reserve police officers accompanying buses in

²² Emory O. Jackson, “Montgomery Leaders Set for 3rd Meet on Bus Situation,” *Birmingham World*, 16 December 1955, pp. 1, 8.

²³ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 13 December 1955, p. 6.

²⁴ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 20 December 1955, p. 6.

²⁵ Robinson includes this information in her extraordinary May 21, 1954 letter to Mayor Gayle. It is reprinted in Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*, p. viii.

black neighborhoods said they had been fired upon.²⁶ On December 20, the newspaper reported that Mayor W.A. Gayle had met with protest leaders and urged them to end the boycott.²⁷ At the same meeting, K.E. Totten, the vice-president of the private company that operated Montgomery's buses, suggested the demands of the protest leaders were misguided. "Mr. Totten argued that alleged discourtesy comes from both white and Negro and is national in character; that hiring Negro drivers had to be conditioned to custom; and that seating had to be in accord with their agreement with the City of Montgomery," the story said.

On more than one occasion, the *Birmingham World* was the first news organization to reveal important information. On December 23, the newspaper reported that protest leaders were formulating plans for a yearlong boycott if necessary.²⁸ The story also said that a committee appointed by Mayor Gayle to negotiate with the boycott leaders included the head of the Montgomery White Citizens Council. The citizens council movement began in Mississippi in 1954 in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Its members often included prominent businessmen and politicians. They sought to maintain Jim Crow through organized resistance but without the violent tactics of the Klan. It soon became a political force in much of the South.²⁹

Life and *Look* devoted no coverage to the boycott in December. Not so with *Jet*. On December 22, it published a four-page spread on the boycott. The lead was wordy but nicely captured the determination of the protestors:

²⁶ "Montgomery Bus Co. Suspends Services in Negro Neighborhoods," *Birmingham World*, 13 December 1955, p. 1. No evidence ever surfaced to substantiate these allegations.

²⁷ "Montgomery Leaders to Meet Again with Bus Co. Officials," *Birmingham World*, 20 December 1955, p. 1.

²⁸ Emory O. Jackson, "Montgomery Bus Strike Still Going Strong; Race Holds Out," *Birmingham World*, 23 December 1955, pp. 1, 8.

One morning last week when the temperature skidded to a freezing 22 degrees in Montgomery, Ala., Negroes—who make up 75 percent of the city transit system customers—stood shivering on corners in ‘the Cradle of the Confederacy’ and waved off the big yellow city buses that rumbled to a stop to pick them up. The reason: Some 5,000 Negroes voted at a mass meeting to stay off the buses until a satisfactory arrangement is worked out in a dispute over Jim Crow seating.³⁰

The story covered the highlights of boycott. That it was costing the Chicago corporation that owned the transit system \$3,200 per day. That the protestors had begun organizing car-pools to replace the bus system. That police were accompanying buses in some black neighborhoods after officials said shots were fired at four buses. That boycott leaders continued to stress the importance of non-violence at mass meetings. The story noted that some white reporters were impressed by what they witnessed at these gatherings. It said that after attending the first mass meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, *Montgomery Advertiser* reporter Azbell concluded, “It proved beyond any doubt there was a discipline among Negroes that many whites had doubted.”³¹

Several photographs accompanied the *Jet* story. Some were revealing, such as the one that showed the protestors packed into a church at a mass meeting. Others were ironic, such as the one that showed an almost-empty bus rumbling through a neighborhood. A sign on the side of the bus read “Ease that squeeze.” The magazine attempted in its photographs to fairly represent the two sides of the dispute, publishing six photographs of equal size and an accompanying caption. On one page were photographs of three whites—Gayle (“wants a solution”), transit system manager J.H. Bagley (“wants bus revenue”) and Montgomery City Attorney Jack Crenshaw (“wants

²⁹ Interview with Robert Patterson in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 297-303. Patterson was a founding member of the first citizens council and later served as spokesman for the entire organization.

³⁰ “Negroes Stop Riding Alabama Buses in Protest Over Jim Crow,” *Jet*, 22 December 1955, pp. 12-15.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 15. See also Joe Azbell, “At Holt Street Baptist Church,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 7 December 1955, p. 1.

law obeyed”). On a facing page were photographs of three blacks—King (“wants justice”), Gray (“wants client free”) and David Williams, a service station owner who gave free gas to car pool drivers (“wants to help”).

Jet, like the *Birmingham World*, outlined the protestors’ three demands. Though none challenged segregation on the buses, officials rejected them. *Jet* followed this with quotes from King and Crenshaw that would prefigure the coming legal battle over Jim Crow seating on the buses:

‘Should we continue to stay off the buses or attack the segregation law?’ King asked. Crenshaw bounded: ‘If you can get the law changed, it will suit us fine. We will obey the law.’³²

Boycott Coverage—January 1956: The White Opposition Hardens “We want to love our enemies”

The *New York Times* continued to pay little attention to the bus protest. In January, the newspaper published three boycott stories, including two by the Associated Press and one by an unnamed special contributor. All appeared deep inside the newspaper. The first provided a recap of the boycott to date.³³ It appeared to rely on little or no original reporting.³⁴ The *Times*’ next boycott story appeared on January 22.³⁵ The seven-paragraph wire service story said Montgomery officials had offered a proposal to settle the boycott and that a group of black ministers had agreed to accept it. It quoted King as saying he was unaware of any proposal or settlement. The story did not say how the protest began, why blacks were boycotting the buses or the terms of the alleged settlement. The story also was wrong. Montgomery officials did announce a settlement,

³² *Ibid*, p. 14.

³³ “Negroes’ Boycott Cripples Bus Line,” *New York Times*, 8 January 1956, p. 71.

³⁴ The story cites no records, provides no quotes and includes no new information. It appears to be what is known in newspaper circles as a “clip job,” meaning the author took the information from other news stories without confirming it.

but boycott leaders had not been contacted about it nor had they agreed to it.³⁶ The next story in the *Times* appeared on January 28. The three-paragraph wire service story reported that police had arrested King on a speeding charge.³⁷

The *Birmingham World* published eight stories and two news analyses about the bus boycott in January 1956. Several focused on negotiations—and public posturing—by the two sides. Mayor Gayle met with a local civic group and told them that blacks were not riding city buses out of fear.³⁸ King suggested that principle was a more accurate reason. Other stories indicated a hardening resolve on the part of boycott opponents. On January 13, the *World* reported that Public Safety Commissioner Clyde Sellers, one of three officials in charge of Montgomery city government, recently had joined the Central Alabama White Citizens Council.³⁹ This particular citizens council, according to Jackson, had been formed a few days before the arrest of Parks.⁴⁰

The last week of January saw three important developments. Each suggested that boycott opponents were losing patience. The *World* gave extensive coverage to all three. One: On January 24, the newspaper reported that city officials claimed to have settled the protest, but boycott leaders rejected that claim as “completely false.”⁴¹ The *World's* coverage of the alleged settlement made clear it was a transparent effort by white officials to try to divide boycott leadership and to mislead the rank-and-file protestors. Two: Three days later, the *World* said all three Montgomery city commissioners had joined the

³⁵ “Alabama City Asks End of Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1956, p. 68.

³⁶ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 124-126.

³⁷ “Speeding Arrest Protested,” *New York Times*, 28 January 1956, p. 36.

³⁸ “Bus Riding Protest in 46th Day,” *Birmingham World*, 20 January 1956, p. 1.

³⁹ “Negroes ‘Sitting Tight’ in No Ride Bus Fight in State,” *Birmingham World*, 13 January 1956, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 13 December 1955, p. 6.

⁴¹ “Brands Report of Settlement of Montgomery Bus Drive ‘Misleading,’ ” *Birmingham World*, 24 January 1956, p. 1.

Central Alabama White Citizens Council.⁴² The story also said Mayor Gayle had angrily announced that city officials had stopped negotiating with boycott leaders. Three: On January 30, King's home was bombed. The *World* published the bombing story under a six-column headline that read: "Montgomery Mayor Promises Protection after Bombing."⁴³ According to the story, "The explosion shattered windows, ripped a hole in the cement porch and narrowly missed injuring the young minister's family." The story said that soon after the explosion, more than 400 blacks, some armed, descended on the home but King quickly calmed the crowd. He told them:

We are not advocating violence. We want to love our enemies. I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them know you love them. I did not start this boycott. I was asked by you to serve as spokesman. I want it to be known the length and breadth of this land that if I am stopped, this movement will not stop. If I am stopped our work will not stop. For what we are doing is right. What we are doing is just, and God is with us.

The crowd dispersed. King's calm eloquence that night—like his impassioned speech at the initial mass meeting on December 5 at the Holt Street Baptist Church—helped cement his reputation as the non-violent leader of the boycott. The *World* reported on each event in great detail. The *New York Times* missed both stories. The *Times* carried four stories about the boycott in December, but none mentioned the mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church. And its brief account of the bombing did not include a single statement from King.⁴⁴

The *World* story said Mayor Gayle and the other two members of the Montgomery City Commission immediately posted a \$500 reward for information on those responsible for the bombing. In addition, according to the story, Gayle apologized

⁴² "Refuse to Ride Bus Leaders Not Intimidated by Whites," *Birmingham World*, 27 January 1956, p. 1.

⁴³ "Montgomery Mayor Promises Protection After Bombing," *Birmingham World*, 3 February 1956, p. 1.

⁴⁴ "\$1,000 Reward Offered," *New York Times*, 1 February 1956, p. 64.

for his recently announced “get-tough” policy in which he said officials were through “pussyfooting around with boycotters.” On the same day the *World* reported the bombing of King’s home, it also reported that bombers had struck the home of Nixon.⁴⁵

The *New York Times*’ coverage of the bombing of King’s home was perfunctory, consisting of a three-paragraph story by a wire service.⁴⁶ The article reported the bombing in an oddly indirect manner. The headline—“\$1,000 Reward Offered”—and the first two paragraphs said that two white citizens councils in Alabama had offered rewards for information regarding the bombers. The story did not mention King and his family until the final paragraph.

The *Times* published its first photograph involving the bus boycott on January 12.⁴⁷ It was not accompanied by a story. The three-column photograph at the top of the page showed the Rev. Robert S. Graetz, a slender young man with an earnest expression wearing a high white collar and black robe. A caption described Graetz as pastor of a Lutheran church in Montgomery and “an active backer of Negroes’ boycott of segregated bus lines there.” The caption added, “Mr. Graetz is shown talking to one of his parishioners, all of whom are Negroes.” Graetz, the only person facing the camera, is white. The caption never mentioned that Graetz, the pastor at a black church, was the sole white preacher in Montgomery who publicly supported the boycott⁴⁸

⁴⁵ “2nd Montgomery Home Bombed,” *Birmingham World*, 3 February 1956, p. 1.

⁴⁶ “\$1,000 Reward Offered,” *New York Times*, 1 February 1956, p. 64.

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, 12 January 1956, p. 13.

⁴⁸ L.D. Reddick, “The Bus Boycott in Montgomery,” *Dissent* (Winter 1956). Reprinted in *Reporting Civil Rights: Part One, American Journalism, 1941-1963* (New York: Library of America, 2003): 258.



SUPPORTS FIGHT ON BIAS: The Rev. Robert S. Graetz, pastor of a Lutheran church in Montgomery, Ala., and an active backer of Negroes' boycott of segregated bus lines there. Mr. Graetz is shown talking with one of his parishioners, all of whom are Negroes.

Illustration 8: The First Photograph Published by the *New York Times* in its Coverage of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (January 12, 1956)

Boycott Coverage—February-March 1956: The Legal Battle Intensifies
“Defining . . . the Negro’s response to the present crisis in race relations”

On February 22, more than two-and-a-half months after the bus boycott began, the protest finally made the front page of the *New York Times*.⁴⁹ Tough legal action by Montgomery officials catapulted the boycott on to the front page. The Associated Press story said a grand jury in Alabama had indicted 115 boycott leaders for violating a state law prohibiting boycotts. According to the story, the grand jury had issued a report warning that “violence was inevitable unless race relations improved.” According to the report, “Distrust, dislike and hatred are being taught in a community which for more than a generation has enjoyed exemplary race relations.” The story included no quotes from boycott leaders or any indication that efforts had been made to contact them. The story strongly suggested that black protestors in Montgomery were breaking the law and fostering violence. The story made no mention of the fact that the only persons whose homes had been bombed were black.

The following day the *Times* gave the boycott its most prominent display yet.⁵⁰ Again the story involved a legal assault against the protestors. A three-column headline at the top of page one said: “Negro Leaders Arrested in Alabama Bus Boycott.” Beneath this was a photograph showing a white police officer fingerprinting Parks, who appears calm and solemn. The Associated Press story said Montgomery police were arresting dozens of boycott leaders on criminal charges. The story also said the local draft board had reclassified as 1-A attorney Fred Gray, noting that he recently filed a federal lawsuit challenging the legality of city and state bus segregation laws. The story said a Montgomery grand jury had indicted Gray for allegedly filing the lawsuit without the

⁴⁹ “Alabama Indicts 115 in Negro Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1956, pp. 1, 14.

permission of one of the plaintiffs. Gray, who represented Parks when she was convicted of violating the local bus segregation law, was described in the story as a “25-year-old unmarried Negro lawyer.”⁵¹ The story included no quotes from Gray, other boycott leaders or any blacks in Montgomery.

The *Birmingham World* reported on the Gray indictment two days before the *Times*.⁵² The story included quotes from Gray and King. It said that the plaintiff in question withdrew from the lawsuit because she said threats had been made against her. *Jet* published a photograph of the woman, Jeanette Reese, a week before the *Times*’ story.⁵³ Reese told *Jet* that because of her involvement in the lawsuit, she had lost her job and been threatened. The *World* carried three stories regarding the mass indictment and arrest of boycott leaders. Unlike the *New York Times*, the *World* quoted white officials and protest leaders in its stories. For example, a February 24 story quoted Sheriff Hamilton Baker and the Rev. Ralph Abernathy.⁵⁴ Four days later, the *World* revealed that the White House had told U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell to determine whether the federal government should intervene in the case of the boycott.⁵⁵

The first boycott story by a *New York Times* reporter appeared on February 24.⁵⁶ The story by Wayne Phillips said protest leaders pledged to continue the boycott despite the mass arrests. This was the first *Times* story in which a reporter went into a black

⁵⁰ “Negro Leaders Arrested in Alabama Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1956, pp. 1, 23.

⁵¹ Gray and Bernice Hall were married on June 17, 1956 at the Holt Street Baptist Church, the site of many large gatherings during the boycott. “It was just like a mass meeting,” Gray recalled. “It was a Protest Wedding.” See Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice*, p. 87.

⁵² “Indict Montgomery Attorney in Connection with Bus Protest,” *Birmingham World*, 21 February 1956, p. 1.

⁵³ Robert E. Johnson, “Bombing, Harassment Don’t Stop Foot-Weary Negro Boycotters,” *Jet*, 16 February 1956, p. 12.

⁵⁴ Pat J. McDonnell, “Montgomery Police Launch Mass Arrest Drive Against Bus Protest,” *Birmingham World*, 24 February 1956, pp. 1, 8.

church to cover a mass meeting of the protestors. It was the first *Times* story that quoted boycott leaders at length. And it was the first *Times* story to emphasize the nonviolent approach of the protestors. Phillips quoted King as telling the protestors, “Don’t ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them. We must use the weapon of love.” A few days later, Phillips returned to two black churches in Montgomery.⁵⁷ Again, he quoted at length from sermons delivered by King and Abernathy. The story said desegregation had taken center stage. As King told worshipers at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where he served as pastor, “Integration is now the great issue of our age, the great issue of our nation and the great issue of our community.” Neither story contained quotes based on interviews.

In early March, Phillips wrote a story seeking to put the bus boycott in perspective.⁵⁸ It is a news analysis, though it is not labeled as such. It detailed the role of key players in the boycott but did not include a single quote. It recounted major events in the protest but never mentioned the bombing of the homes of King and Nixon. Phillips concluded that a modified form of segregation could have settled the dispute “but a compromise proposal only a hair’s breath from that was rejected because the Negroes and city officials could not get together. As a result the city officials washed their hands of any attempt to settle the problem, and the Mayor and city commissioners publicly enrolled in white citizens councils.” This account contains at least two factual errors.

First, there is no evidence that officials and boycott leaders had negotiated a compromise

⁵⁵ Pat J. McDonnell, “Justice Department Studies Mass Arrests in Bus Case,” *Birmingham World*, 28 February 1956, pp. 1, 4.

⁵⁶ Wayne Phillips, “Negroes Pledge to Keep Boycott,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1956, pp. 1, 8.

⁵⁷ Wayne Phillips, “Negro Pastors Press Bus Boycott By Preaching Passive Resistance,” *New York Times*, 27 February 1956, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Wayne Phillips, “Montgomery is Stage for a Tense Drama, Negroes Adopt a Policy of Passive Resistance to Segregation,” *New York Times*, 4 March 1956, Sec. E, p. 6.

that was a “hair’s breath” from being accepted. The protestors had adopted a set of three demands on December 5—none of which challenged segregation on the buses—but city officials consistently rejected them. Second, the statement that Montgomery’s commissioners joined white citizens councils after breaking off negotiations is wrong. Sellers, the city’s top law enforcement officer, had joined the Central Alabama White Citizens Council by January 13—two weeks before Gayle announced that the city had cut off all negotiations with boycott leaders. Phillips’ assertion that a compromise “was rejected because the Negroes and city officials could not get together” is poorly written and misleading. By using passive voice—“was rejected”—the reporter avoids identifying who rejected the so-called compromise. By claiming that blacks and officials “could not get together,” the reporter implies both are responsible. In fact, the seating arrangement proposed by the protestors preserved segregation, but city officials rejected it.

Phillips concluded that extremists had taken command of the opposing sides in the boycott. “The drift away from the middle,” he wrote, “meant an immeasurable weakening of the moderates.” As an example he pointed to two rallies in Montgomery. At one, staged by white citizens councils (WCC), 10,000 persons heard a “fiery defense of segregation.” The other, staged by the Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR), attracted 200 persons; the story did not report what was said at the meeting. In this setting, wrote Phillips, the “only open path to work toward better relations” are biracial groups. “If those commissions can be set up, if they can find leaders of both communities to take part in them, if they can compromise, and if they can sell the public on compromise, some good might come of them,” he concluded. “But those are big ifs.”

Emory Jackson had written about the two rallies more than two weeks earlier in the *Birmingham World*.⁵⁹ His news analysis carried information not in the *Times*. “The WCC meeting was all white. The ACHR was interracial,” he wrote. “The WCC meeting barred Negro reporters. The ACHR opened its meeting without barring any reporters.” Those at the white rally heard a ringing defense of segregation. Jackson reported that at the interracial rally, Dr. Walter D. Agnew, the former president of Huntington College, used social science studies to dismantle the doctrine of white supremacy. “He counseled members of the Negro group to throw off any feeling or belief in racial inferiority,” Jackson wrote. This was not the solution envisioned by the *Times*. “At the very beginning,” Phillips had written, “the boycott could have been settled by revision of the segregation rules.”⁶⁰ But, he said, the two sides failed to adopt this compromise. Now, Phillips concluded, “bettering race relations” meant finding moderates to forge another compromise between segregationists and protestors. Phillips’ clear implication was that a solution would have to be acceptable to both sides and would preserve segregation in some form. Agnew, on the other hand, argued that improving race relations required an equal relationship based neither on white supremacy or racial inferiority. Agnew’s clear implication was that the only solution acceptable to the protestors now was desegregation.

L.D. Reddick, a 44-year-old historian at Alabama State College, had made many of these same points in a speech in early February that was covered by the *Birmingham*

⁵⁹ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 14 February 1956, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Phillips, “Montgomery is Stage for a Tense Drama,” Sec. E, p. 6.

World.⁶¹ The story was written by William Gordon, managing editor of the *Atlanta Daily World*, the flagship newspaper of the Scott Newspaper Syndicate, which also owned the *Birmingham World*.⁶² Reddick, who earned his doctorate at the University of Chicago, was in a unique position to assess the boycott. He attended the first mass meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, 1955 and took extensive notes. He continued to do the same over the next 13 months. He also interviewed several of the key leaders in Montgomery during the protest.⁶³ In his speech Reddick said the bus boycott was succeeding because its grievances were real, its demands moderate, its leaders united and its method non-violent.⁶⁴ He said the boycott represented a “classic struggle for democracy and human dignity” and could well become a model for challenging the nation’s racial status quo. In his words, “It may well be that the Negroes of Montgomery are defining for us all, the form and the nature of the Negro’s response to the present crisis in race relations.” For these reasons, according to Reddick, “national newspapers and magazines have taken an interest in current issues” in Montgomery.

Phillips wrote four more bylined stories, all involving King’s trial and conviction for violating the state’s anti-boycott law.⁶⁵ Three of the four relied solely on testimony.

⁶¹ William Gordon, “Dr. Reddick Analyzes Ala. Bus Situation,” *Birmingham World*, 7 February 1956, p. 7. For Reddick’s background, See *Reporting Civil Rights: Part One, American Journalism, 1941-1963*, p. 942.

⁶² Alton Hornsby, Jr., “Geogia,” in *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979*, edited by Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983): 125-126. The man who launched the *Atlanta Daily World*, the *Birmingham World* and the Scott Newspaper Syndicate was W.A. Scott, who was murdered in 1935 at the age of 31. See Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971): 99. Wolseley says Scott was “assassinated.”

⁶³ L.D. Reddick, “How This Book Was Written” in *Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper, 1959): 235-237. *Crusader Without Violence* was the first full-length biography of King.

⁶⁴ *Reporting Civil Rights: Part One, American Journalism, 1941-1963*, p. 942.

⁶⁵ Wayne Phillips, “First Negro Tried in Bus Boycotting,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1956, pp. 1, 24; Wayne Phillips, “Negro Bus Trial Upheld by Court,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1956, p. 28; Wayne Phillips, “Montgomery Negroes Tell Court of Abuse by City Bus Drivers,” *New York Times*, 22 March

His work was part of an effort by the *New York Times* to significantly increase its boycott coverage in February and March of 1956. During that period, the *Times* published 19 stories about the boycott, almost three times as many as it had published during the first two months of the boycott. Despite the increase in coverage, the *Times* missed one of the most important bus boycott stories—the filing of the federal lawsuit that challenged the constitutionality of Montgomery’s bus segregation ordinance. *Jet* got the story. In February, the magazine reported that five black women had sued in federal court seeking to have the Montgomery and Alabama bus segregation laws declared unconstitutional.⁶⁶ The lawsuit provided important legal support for the boycott by subjecting the constitutionality of these laws to federal scrutiny. But as *Jet* pointed out, the lawsuit did not supplant the boycott. As one protestor told *Jet* reporter Robert E. Johnson:

‘While they’re juggling that hot potato (the suit),’ remarked a Negro laborer who has walked 335 miles to and from work since the bus protest, ‘I’ll keep on footing it. Walking is awfully hard on shoes (he’s worn out two pairs), but riding them buses would be harder on my conscience.’⁶⁷

The four-page spread in *Jet* included eight photographs illustrating the determination of blacks to stay off the buses. A smiling Mary Williams shown soaking her feet after her daily walk of four miles. Dr. R.H. Harris directing car pool drivers by phone while filling prescriptions. James Bailey, who operated a shoe-repair business, standing next to shelves piled high with a record number of shoes. Horbbie Ridge moving stoically down the street on two crutches and one leg “so we can be free.”

1956, pp. 1, 24; and Wayne Phillips, “Negro Minister Convicted of Directing Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 23 March 1956, pp. 1, 28.

⁶⁶ Robert E. Johnson, “Bombing, Harassment Don’t Stop Foot-Weary Negro Boycotters,” *Jet*, 9 February 1956, pp. 8-12.

⁶⁷ Johnson, “Bombing, Harassment,” p. 11.

HOW ALA. NEGROES ARE WINNING THE BUS FIGHT BOMBING, HARASSMENT DON'T STOP

By ROBERT E. JOHNSON

One night last week in Montgomery, Ala., a sleepy-eyed housewife stumbled across her darkened bedroom, picked up the telephone and heard a threatening voice demand: "I want to talk to that nigger who's running the bus boycott."

"My husband," the wife calmly answered, "is asleep and does not wish to be disturbed. He told me to write the name and number of anyone who called to threaten his life so that he could return the call and receive the treat in the morning when he wakes up and is fresh."



During early morning rainfall, Mrs. Addie Phillips walks to her job as maid in the city's home for aged women.

Illustration 9: Opening of *Jet* Story on the Montgomery Bus Boycott
(February 9, 1956)

The five women filed the lawsuit, known as *Browder v. Gayle*, two days after King's home was bombed.⁶⁸ Gray, who had represented Parks when she was arrested for violating the local segregation ordinance, represented the five women. The *Jet* story that reported on the lawsuit opened with an anecdote about the bombings, suggesting that the violence of boycott opponents and the federal lawsuit filed by the protestors were linked.

The story began:

One night last week in Montgomery, Ala., a sleepy-eyed housewife stumbled across her darkened bedroom, picked up the telephone and heard a threatening voice demand: 'I want to talk to that nigger who's running the bus boycott.'

'My husband,' the wife calmly answered, 'is asleep and does not wish to be disturbed. He told me to write the name and number of anyone who called to threaten his life so that he could return the call and receive the threat in the morning when he wakes up and is fresh.'⁶⁹

Did the bombings contribute to the decision to file the lawsuit? Historian David Garrow, the most thorough and insightful scholar regarding the boycott, said the answer is yes. In his words, "The white violence, coming on the heels of eight weeks of official obstinacy, convinced the black leadership that the time had come for a direct attack upon the segregation statutes."⁷⁰ Thus, by January 31, boycott leaders had decided they had no recourse other than to challenge the bus segregation laws in court. This decision came more than one month before the publication of Phillips' story in the *New York Times* suggesting that the "only open path to work toward better race relations" lay in forming a biracial group that could convince the opposing sides to compromise.⁷¹ Phillips might well have found out the actual position of boycott leaders had he bothered to interview them for his story.

⁶⁸ Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice*, pp. 68-73.

⁶⁹ Johnson, "Bombing, Harassment," p. 8.

⁷⁰ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, p. 61.

In March, *Jet* published an article about the mass arrest of protest leaders on charges of having violating Alabama's anti-boycott law.⁷² The story provided unique context for the legal assault. It noted that just a few months earlier, a black grocer in Selma named John Smitherman had been driven out of business after white wholesalers banded together and refused to sell to him. Why, the *Jet* story asked, did Alabama authorities do nothing about this? Alabama Attorney General John Patterson told the magazine that Smith had lodged a complaint but that "we have not turned the matter over to a grand jury because we can only enter a case when the local law enforcement machinery breaks down." In Patterson's view, law enforcement officials in Montgomery who had black boycott leaders indicted and their counterparts in Selma who took no action against white wholesalers doing the same were both following the law.

The *Jet* story also sought to capture the atmosphere of a mass meeting of protestors held shortly after the mass arrests. Abernathy spoke to a crowd estimated at 5,000 "which jammed the church and spilled over into the streets." He told them that they should walk to work to protest the indictment of their leaders. According to the story, "When he clutched his fist and again intoned that 'we will walk everywhere we go,' the crowd responded with a hymn: *Onward Christian Soliders*."⁷³ The story then turned to King, who once again urged protestors to remain nonviolent: "We have chosen our weapons: the Bible, not bombs; the Constitution, not Communism; law books, not lawlessness; valor, not violence."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Phillips, "Montgomery is Stage for a Tense Drama," Sec. E, p. 6.

⁷² "Say Boycott Law Wouldn't Work for Negroes Who Were Victims," *Jet*, 8 March 1956, pp. 8-11.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

Three days prior to the March story in *Jet*, *Life* magazine published its first article on the bus boycott.⁷⁵ Like the *Jet* story, the article in *Life* focused on the mass arrest of boycott leaders and the plan to protest by walking to work. Though the four-page spread included a minimum of text, some of it was wrong. The first sentence termed the Montgomery bus boycott the “first bold organized resistance to the present ways of southern segregation.”⁷⁶ In fact, it was not even the first bus boycott. In June 1953, blacks in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, had launched a boycott of city buses. Though the protest failed to eliminate segregated seating, boycott leaders were successful in convincing the black community to avoid the buses for more than a week.⁷⁷ The story in *Life* also said that Montgomery was “a city where race relations had been notably amiable.”⁷⁸ Black residents had a different view. According to Gray, King, Parks and Robinson, blacks in Montgomery resented segregation but kept quiet out of fear and apathy. In Robinson’s words, “The bus boycott originated in the demeaning, wretched, intolerable conditions that black citizens experienced in a caste system commonly called segregation.”⁷⁹

Life’s photographs did a much better job of capturing the quiet defiance of the boycott. The largest one on the first two pages shows an audience of protestors at a mass meeting, many smiling broadly and arms outstretched, clapping in support of the plan to walk to work to protest the indictment of their leaders. On the third page are photographs of black businessmen and maids walking to work in the rain. A single photograph takes up the fourth page. In the background is the classical architecture of the Alabama state

⁷⁵ “A Bold Boycott Goes On,” *Life*, 5 March 1956, pp. 40-43.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 40.

⁷⁷ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 75, and Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ “A Bold Boycott Goes On,” p. 42.

⁷⁹ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, p. 8. See also Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice*, p. 19; King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, pp. 34-37, 42; Parks interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, p. 40, and Parks interview in Millner, “The Montgomery Bus Boycott,” pp. 561-562.



ESTABLISHED THEIR APPROVAL, THE AUDIENCE... THE MASS MEETING CHOSE THE PLAN FOR BUSBOYS TO SHOW THEIR SOLIDARITY BY STAYING, NOT RIDING, EVERY PLACE THEY GO THE FOLLOWING DAY

Illustration 10: Photograph from *Life Magazine's* Coverage of the Bus Boycott
(March 5, 1956)

capitol where, as the caption below states, “Jefferson Davis was inaugurated president of the Confederacy.” Standing in the foreground are 83 of the indicted boycott leaders, their dark skin contrasting with the white building behind them.

This would be the only boycott story that *Life* published during the yearlong protest. Three months earlier, *Look* magazine had published the most explosive story regarding the Till lynching—the confession of the two men who admitted to murdering the black youth. But *Look* did not publish a single article about the bus boycott in Montgomery. If someone had depended upon *Look* magazine for coverage, the Montgomery bus boycott never happened.

Boycott Coverage—April–December 1956: The Boycott Succeeds
“*Plessy v. Ferguson* . . . has been so impaired as no longer to be the rule”

Jet stayed on the story. In April the magazine published two articles about the boycott. One profiled King.⁸⁰ The other detailed testimony from blacks about their experiences riding the buses in Montgomery.⁸¹ Each had a horror story to tell. Georgia T. Gilmore said that two months prior to the boycott, she boarded a bus, paid her fare and noticed two whites sitting near the front. “The driver said, ‘Come out, nigger, and go around’ to the rear.” After she left the bus and headed for the rear door, the driver took off. Sadie Brooks recalled a black man asking that his dollar bill be changed so he could pay his fare; the driver responded by grabbing a pistol, pointing it at the man and telling him to get off the bus. Martha Kate Walker said that in early 1955, she was climbing aboard a bus with her husband, who lost his sight in Germany during World War II. She told the court: “His left foot was on the ground, but his right foot was on the step when the bus started suddenly. I screamed and a white lady on the bus told the driver to wait a

⁸⁰ “Youthful Minister’s Humility Gives Boycotters New Spirit,” *Jet*, 12 April 1956, pp. 22-26.

minute but he kept on going.” Ella Perkins testified that white bus drivers often called she and other African-American women “ugly black apes.” When the judge asked her why she had stopped riding the buses, she replied, “Because we all were mistreated. All of us 50,000 Negroes in Montgomery.” In response, according to the article, “Explosive applause rang out from the 200 Negro spectators in the courtroom.”

The *New York Times* published two front-page stories in April that reported momentous information about the boycott—the buses in Montgomery had been desegregated. There was just one problem: The stories were wrong. The headline on the first read: “Montgomery Line Ends Seating Bias.”⁸² The Associated Press story, published on April 24, said the private company that operated the bus system in Montgomery had “ordered an end to segregated seating on buses effective tomorrow.” The story was based on a notice on the company’s bulletin board. The company issued the notice after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to overturn a bus desegregation order in Columbia, South Carolina. The following day, the *Times* published a United Press story on its front page under the headline “Bus Companies in 13 Cities of South End Segregation.”⁸³ The story—datelined Montgomery, Ala.—opened this way: “Bus lines ended segregation rules today in at least 13 cities, including this Deep South stronghold where Negroes have boycotted the buses for twenty weeks.” Above the story was a three-column photograph showing three bus riders, two black and one white, sitting next to one another. The caption read, “Integration: Negroes and whites had equal rights yesterday on this Norfolk bus.” The front-page photograph and stories are misleading. A reader living

⁸¹ “30 Witnesses Tell World Why They Don’t Ride Ala. Buses,” *Jet*, 5 April 1956, pp. 8-10.

⁸² “Montgomery Line Ends Seating Bias,” *New York Times*, 24 April 1956, p. 1.

⁸³ “Bus Companies in 13 Cities of South End Segregation,” *New York Times*, 25 April 1956, p. 1.

outside Montgomery who was not a student of the boycott almost certainly would have concluded the protest was over. It was not.

Neither story quoted a single expert to support its conclusion that the buses had been desegregated or to assess the implications of the bus companies' actions. Both stories noted that Montgomery and Alabama officials vowed to continue to enforce bus segregation laws. And a second April 25 story, though brief, reported that boycott leaders planned to continue the protest.⁸⁴ However, the clear implication of the two front-page stories—particularly the headlines, leads and display—was that the buses had been desegregated, thus ending the need for the boycott. Two follow-up stories in the *Times* sought to clarify the situation. The stories carried the byline of *Times* reporter John N. Popham. Though Popham was the newspaper's chief correspondent in the South, these were the only boycott stories he wrote during the yearlong protest. Popham reported that Montgomery officials would continue to enforce local and state bus segregation laws and that protestors would continue to boycott the buses.⁸⁵ However, both of Popham's stories appeared deep inside the newspaper.

The *Times*' handling of these four stories was indicative of a larger problem—the newspaper was not tracking the protest closely and seldom assigned its own reporters to cover the story. Of the 31 boycott stories published in the *Times* between April and November, just three were written by *Times* staffers. And only five appeared on the front page during this eight-month period. For readers, this served to underscore the importance of page-one stories that distorted the course of the boycott such as the two

⁸⁴ "Boycott Continues," *New York Times*, 25 April 1956, p. 27.

⁸⁵ John N. Popham, "Bus Boycott Firm in Alabama City," *New York Times*, 26 April 1956, p. 27, and John N. Popham, "Negroes to Keep Boycotting Buses," *New York Times*, 27 April 1956, p. 15.

MONTGOMERY LINE ENDS SEATING BIAS

Official of Boycotted Buses
Says He Has 'No Choice'

By The Associated Press.

MONTGOMERY, Ala., April 23—The Montgomery City Lines tonight ordered an end to segregated seating on buses effective tomorrow.

A notice on the company bulletin board said the desegregation order was the result of the United States Supreme Court's ruling today, which said that segregated seating was unconstitutional.

The notice was signed by J. H. Bagley, the manager of the bus company. Mr. Bagley's family said he was not available to confirm the desegregation decree.

Mayor W. A. Gayle said he had not studied the court case as yet. However, he said he would continue to enforce state and city ordinances in regard to segregation on buses.

"We are going ahead and enforce segregation on buses just as we have been doing," he said.

Mr. Gayle's statement was made before the bus company's notice was posted. He was not available for comment on the bus company's action. The manager's letter "to all employees" said:

"We have been advised that today the Supreme Court of the United States rendered a decision, the effect of which is to hold unconstitutional segrega-

Continued on Page 22, Column 4



Associated Press Wirephoto

INTEGRATION: Negroes and whites had equal rights yesterday on this Norfolk bus

Bus Companies in 13 Cities Of South End Segregation

By The United Press.

MONTGOMERY, Ala., April 24—Bus lines ended segregation rules today in at least thirteen cities, including this Deep South stronghold where Negroes have boycotted the

buses for twenty weeks. Montgomery bus operators immediately were threatened with prosecution.

Although the integration order went into effect on the line here and boards marking the Negro and white sections came down, the boycott continued.

Only a few Negroes, who said they had not taken part in the boycott, rode buses today. They took their customary places toward the rear.

Both the city of Montgomery and the State of Alabama declared that their own segregation laws were still in effect.

The desegregation activity followed a ruling by the United States Supreme Court yesterday in a South Carolina bus case. The Court's ruling is expected to remove eventually the color restrictions on intrastate transit lines in the South.

Other bus lines began to follow the integration policies of the National City Lines, which operates in eight Southern or "border" cities where segregation has traditionally been practiced, including Montgomery.

Virginia Company Acts

The Virginia Transit Company said that enforced segregation would be discontinued tomorrow on its lines in Richmond and Norfolk. "It is hoped . . . that good judgment will be used by all passengers in order to continue to maintain good relations," the line said.

A spokesman for the Virginia company said that the Portsmouth, Va., Transit Company also would adopt the new policy. Operators were being instructed tonight in Richmond and Norfolk to discontinue enforcement of the state segregated seating law.

[A few bus drivers in Virginia permitted mixing of the races on their buses Tuesday, The Associated Press reported.]

In North Carolina, the Duke Power Company said that it also was integrating but did not expect any great change in its bus operations at Durham and Greensboro. A spokesman said no reaction or opposition was

Continued on Page 27, Column 2

Illustration 11: Front Page Stories in the *New York Times* Reporting that the Buses in Montgomery Had Been Desegregated (April 24, 1956 and April 25, 1956)

published on April 24 and 25. For the newspaper, the almost total reliance on the wire services meant that there was no continuity of coverage by its own reporters.

The *Birmingham World* gave far less coverage to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the South Carolina case. Its story about the decision appeared inside the newspaper.⁸⁶ In the story, Mayor Gayle argued that the ruling was narrowly tailored and applied only to the Columbia bus system. The story described the decision as a “paper policy” because blacks continued to boycott the buses, and white officials threatened to arrest anyone who attempted to desegregate the buses.

Those officials could not ignore *Browder v. Gayle*, the federal lawsuit that sought to have the Montgomery and Alabama bus segregation ordinances declared unconstitutional. The *New York Times* had missed the story when the lawsuit was filed in February. The *Times* also failed to cover the May hearing when the *Browder* case went before a panel of judges. Emory Jackson of the *Birmingham World* was there. In a May 15 news analysis, Jackson said the three-judge federal panel would decide the constitutionality of two bus segregation laws.⁸⁷ In his words, “All of the issues, facts, law and defense arguments on the question of intra-city bus segregation are now before a three-judge federal court here.” Jackson based his article on court records along with oral arguments and testimony presented at the hearing. He reported that attorneys for the plaintiffs—including Robert L. Carter with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund—based their argument not on the Columbia, South Carolina, ruling but rather on court decisions and executive orders that had desegregated the Army, VA hospitals, the U.S. Post Office

⁸⁶ “Bus Bias Ordered Replaced,” *Birmingham World*, 27 April 1956, p. 8.

⁸⁷ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 15 May 1956, p. 6.

and federal courtrooms. “The *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine, Carter argued, has been so impaired as no longer to be the rule,” Jackson wrote.

The three-judge federal panel agreed. In June it ruled that segregation on Montgomery’s buses was unconstitutional. This time the *New York Times* and the *Birmingham World* put the story on the front page.⁸⁸ The stories were similar. Both said the federal panel held that bus segregation violated the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment. Both said city and state officials would appeal the ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court. And both said the boycott would continue.

It did, though the protest itself received virtually no coverage in the *New York Times*. Prior to the federal appeals court ruling, the *Times* paid relatively little attention to the details of the boycott. After the ruling, it completely lost interest. This was not the case with the black publications. *Jet*, for example, published a four-page spread in October titled “What’s Happening in Montgomery?”⁸⁹ The story by reporter Robert E. Johnson said that protestors recently had faced a critical challenge when insurance companies cancelled the policies on the 20 church-owned station wagons that served as the backbone of the free car pool system. The protestors responded by assembling a fleet of 224 private cars to provide transportation. “Ten days later, they had the stations wagons back on the streets, insured at a cost of \$3,225 annually by Lloyd’s of London, world largest insurance company,” the story said. Money was a continuing problem. King told *Jet* the cost of providing free transportation and other expenses was \$6,000 a week but that contributions had fallen to less than \$700 weekly. Police were ticketing as many as 50 car pool drivers daily. But the conviction of the protestors remained strong. “The

⁸⁸ “U.S. Court Voids Bus Segregation,” *New York Times*, 6 June 1956, p. 1, 27; “Montgomery Bus Segregation Is Ruled Unconstitutional by Court,” *Birmingham World*, 8 June 1956, pp. 1, 8.

Lord's got a hand in this thing, son," Mittie Taylor, a 73-year-old seamstress told Johnson. "He brought us together and made us have more respect for each other. Even wine heads are now going to church and putting money in the collection plate. It's getting so you can't tell a wine head from a preacher or teacher on Sunday."

Several photographs accompanied the story. One showed dozens of blacks standing in a parking lot in downtown Montgomery awaiting a ride. Another showed King sitting in his office, his desk piled high with papers. Still another showed several black women making their way through a thunderstorm to attend a mass meeting. The caption below reads: "Despite lashing rain, Negroes still attended mass meeting, soul of boycott."

In November, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Montgomery and Alabama laws mandating segregation on intrastate buses were unconstitutional. Once again, the stories about the ruling by the *New York Times* and the *Birmingham World* appeared on the front page.⁹⁰ Both the *Times* and the *World* said the high court had affirmed the ruling by the federal panel. However, the coverage by the *World* included crucial information not in the *Times*. The *World* reported that on the same day the Supreme Court issued its ruling, Montgomery Circuit Judge Eugene Carter granted a temporary injunction prohibiting the use of carpools in the bus boycott.⁹¹ King told the *World* that Carter's order would not end the boycott. "The car-pool will stop, but the boycott will not," he said. King said the protest would not end until the Supreme Court order arrived in Montgomery. The timing of the two legal decisions was not lost on those leading the protest. In his account of the

⁸⁹ Robert E. Johnson, "What's Happening in Montgomery?," *Jet*, 11 October 1956, pp. 6-9.

⁹⁰ Luther A. Huston, "High Court Rules Bus Segregation Unconstitutional," *New York Times*, 14 November 1956, pp. 1, 22, and "Supreme Court Rules Segregation on City and State Buses Is Unconstitutional," *Birmingham World*, 17 November 1956, p. 1.

bus boycott, King said that when he arrived for the injunction hearing, he expected to lose. That prospect, said King, threatened everything that protestors had accomplished. In his words, “Would we then be forced to admit that the protest had failed in the end?”⁹² News of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision altered the landscape. “The darkest hour of our struggle had indeed proved to be the first hour of victory,” he wrote. “Tuesday, November 13, 1956 will always remain an important and ironic date in the history of the Montgomery bus protest. On that day two historic decisions were rendered—one to do away with the pool; the other to remove the underlying conditions that made it necessary.”⁹³ The *Birmingham World* reported both decisions together. The *New York Times* did not.

The protestors had won. They would continue the boycott only until the Supreme Court decision arrived in Montgomery. Yet even as the boycott moved into its final days, interest by the *New York Times* rose significantly. This was not new. From the beginning, the *New York Times* framed the Montgomery bus boycott as a legal contest. During the first twelve months of the boycott, eleven stories about the boycott appeared on the front page of the *Times*. All but one dealt with legal matters.⁹⁴ Five in February and March reported on the arrest and trial of the boycott leaders.⁹⁵ Two in April reported on

⁹¹ “Car-Pool Prohibited in Montgomery, Ala,” *Birmingham World*, 17 November 1956, p. 1.

⁹² King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 158.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 169.

⁹⁴ That one story said Alabama Gov. James Folsom had proposed the formation of a bi-racial commission to resolve the boycott. He made the proposal before 75 of the state’s publishers and editors, 74 of whom were white. Emory O. Jackson, the sole black editor from Alabama at the meeting, had not been invited. See Wayne Phillips, “Folsom Proposes Bi-Racial Group to Fight Tension,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1956, pp. 1, 10.

⁹⁵ “Alabama Indicts 115 in Negro Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1956, pp. 1, 14; “Negro Leaders Arrested in Alabama Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1956, pp. 1, 23; Wayne Phillips, “Negroes Pledge to Keep Boycott,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1956, pp. 1, 8; Wayne Phillips, “First Negro Tried in Bus Boycotting,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1956, pp. 1, 24; and Wayne Phillips, “Negro Bus Trial Upheld by Court,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1956, p. 28.

responses by southern bus companies to federal desegregation rulings.⁹⁶ Two in June reported on court rulings including the decision by the three-judge panel declaring segregation on Montgomery's buses unconstitutional.⁹⁷ One in November reported that the U.S. Supreme Court had upheld the lower court decision.⁹⁸

For the *New York Times*, the justices' decision gave the boycott newsworthiness it previously had not had. The first boycott story did not appear on the front page of the *Times* until two-and-a-half months into the protest. Between April 28 and November 13, a period of six-and-one-half months, the *Times* did not publish a single story about the boycott that carried the byline of one of its reporters. During that same period, just one boycott story appeared on its front page. But all this changed after the Supreme Court decision on November 13. Between November 14 and December 31, the *Times* published 16 stories about the boycott. Four carried the bylines of *Times*' reporters. Five appeared on page one.

Only one bus boycott story appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*. It was published on December 16.⁹⁹ It was written by George Barrett, whose byline had not previously appeared on a story about the protest. It began with an anecdote. Three members of the Ku Klux Klan were walking on a street in downtown Montgomery. A black mother and her 8-year-old son watched them. So did a black couple just emerging from a drugstore. And two black teenagers about to cross a street. Then, according to Barrett:

⁹⁶ "Montgomery Line Ends Seating Bias," *New York Times*, 24 April 1956, p. 1; and "Bus Companies in 13 Cities of South End Segregation," *New York Times*, 25 April 1956, p. 1.

⁹⁷ "U.S. Court Voids Bus Segregation," *New York Times*, 6 June 1956, pp. 1, 27; and "NAACP Barred from State Activity by Alabama Court," *New York Times*, 2 June 1956, pp. 1, 8.

⁹⁸ Luther A. Huston, "High Court Rules Bus Segregation Unconstitutional," *New York Times*, 14 November 1956, pp. 1, 22.

A moment of suspended movement, a moment of puzzlement and disbelief. Then all of them looked unflinchingly at the robed men and began to smile, then to laugh.

There were whites too on the corners of Court Square and grins of amused incredulity were on most of their faces. One of them scratched his chin as he watched the hooded Klasmen and said, 'Looks like they been lost outa one of them old movies.'

One man, a white man, did not laugh. He was an airman in town on pass from Maxwell Air Force Base. He walked up to the three cloaked Kluzers, stood in their path and spat on their shoes. His hands clenched into fists. The Klansmen gave way, moving around him and walked swiftly up the street.¹⁰⁰

For Barrett, whites and blacks in Montgomery had no stomach for racial prejudice. In his view, the protest over bus segregation had been a misunderstanding. Indeed, according to Barrett, Montgomery was really no different from any other city in the United States. In his words:

It is a common fallacy to assume that places as Deep South as Montgomery must be Deep South in all measurements.

'It's the stock images—what we call the mildew-and-magnolia approach—that depress us,' a native of the city says. The reality is that outside of a few trees with hanging moss, the 'Heart of Dixie' tourist slogans on the license plates and the brass star imbedded on the front portico of the Capitol to mark the spot where Mr. Davis became the First Confederate President, Montgomery, Ala. could just as easily be Hartford, Conn. or Des Moines, Iowa.

Events would prove otherwise after the buses were integrated. An unidentified person fired a shotgun into King's home. Snipers shot at four buses in three nights. One of the shots struck Rosa Jordan, a 22-year-old black laundry worker, the bullet passing through one leg and lodging in the other. Alarmed by the attacks, Montgomery officials temporarily banned night bus service. In subsequent days, four black churches were bombed as were the homes of Abernathy and Graetz. One bomb tore off the front door at Graetz's home; police found another, containing 11 sticks of dynamite, that did not

⁹⁹ George Barrett, "Montgomery: Testing Ground," *New York Times*, 16 December 1956, Sec. 6, pp. 88-9, 48-50.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 8.

explode. Following this outbreak of violence, city officials halted all bus service for one week.¹⁰¹

Barrett's story depends heavily on unnamed sources. He quotes a white man, a woman, a native of Montgomery, a storekeeper, a white lawyer, a college professor and a "Negro mother of six." He also includes four quotes that he said he heard so often that "it is almost as though a master button had been pushed to hear the same phrases come from every lip."¹⁰² He does not quote any person by name. His assessment of the origins of the boycott is quite simple. In his words, "The Negroes here decided suddenly last December to stand up against Southern Jim Crow."¹⁰³

Eight days earlier, Jackson published another analysis of the bus boycott in the *Birmingham World*.¹⁰⁴ Unlike Barrett, Jackson had covered the boycott since its inception. He had attended the first mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church. He had sat in on negotiating sessions between city officials and protest leaders. He attended the hearings when King was convicted of violating the state's anti-boycott law. He read the trial transcripts and attended the federal court hearing regarding the lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Montgomery's and Alabama's bus segregation laws. He had interviewed boycott and city leaders, state officials and those in the front ranks of the protestors, quoting each one by name. Still, after a year covering the boycott, his column contained more reporting than opinion. He focused on a study of the boycott conducted by Dr. Preston Valien, a sociologist at Fisk University. According to Jackson,

¹⁰¹ George Barrett, "Shot Hits Home of Bus Bias Foe," *New York Times*, 24 December 1956, p. 6; "Negro Wounded on Alabama Bus," *New York Times*, 29 December 1956, pp. 1, 16; "Montgomery Bans Bus Runs at Night," *New York Times*, 30 December 1956, pp. 1, 20; and "Bus Runs Halted in Alabama City After Six Bombings," *New York Times*, 11 January 1957, pp. 1, 13. See also "Bombs Hurts 3; Jail Ala. Negro Critics of Cops," *Jet*, 7 February 1957, p. 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 8.

Valien said he was interested in the bus boycott because it provided a “rare natural laboratory for the study of a social movement.” After reading interviews with the protestors, Valien came to very different conclusions than Barrett:

The noted sociologist, on the basis of field and shelf research, concluded about the movement that it started not as the result of a single event but an accumulation of them; the masses were far ahead of the leaders in wanting a change for the better; there was unity among those making up the movement; and that the movement is undergirded by moral and political forces.¹⁰⁵

Jackson said Valien’s analysis should have included one additional item—the mass meetings. It was in the mass meetings, he said, that the leaders and the followers in the protest encouraged one another, educated one another, instructed one another. In Jackson’s words, “The mass meetings are a kind of freedom revival.” This was a point that the *Birmingham World* emphasized repeatedly. The *World* covered the arrests and indictments, the hearings and the court decisions. But the newspaper devoted even more space to the mass meetings, the bombings, the sermons, the economics and the day-to-day operation of the boycott. For the *Birmingham World*, the Montgomery bus boycott was a social movement that eventually allied itself with a legal challenge. Jackson put it best days after the bus boycott began. In his words, “A pocketbook attack with prospective legal action in the background was being used by civic leaders here in a protest over alleged injustices on the Montgomery City Bus Lines.”¹⁰⁶ That one sentence, published eight days after the protest began, represented a more accurate summary of the bus boycott than anything the *New York Times* would publish over the next 13 months.

¹⁰⁴ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 8 December 1956, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Jackson, “Leaders Hit Injustices on Montgomery City Bus Lines,” p. 1.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusions

This study examined media coverage of two early events in the Civil Rights Movement. One involved the racially charged murder of a 14-year-old black youth in rural Mississippi highlighted by the four-day trial of two white men who were found innocent. Relatively few people were directly involved in the Emmett Till murder case. The other involved a protest against Jim Crow seating arrangements on city buses in the capital of Alabama that was most forcefully expressed in a 381-day bus boycott. Thousands of people were involved in the protest. These events posed very different journalistic challenges. This study examined coverage of these events by five publications. Three had national audiences that were predominantly white—the *New York Times*, *Life* magazine and *Look* magazine. Each of the other two had a much smaller circulation and was aimed primarily at black readers—the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* magazine.

Which News Organization Did the Best Job Reporting on the Till Murder Case and the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

The initial question posed in this dissertation was: Of the five news organizations examined, which ones did the best job reporting on the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott?¹ This study found that the black-oriented publications produced the most accomplished journalistic coverage by providing a greater range of sources, broader context, more depth and a clear statement of the central problem while following accepted journalistic routines such as attribution and balance.

¹ This researcher defined best as those publications that quoted a diversity of sources, provided historical context and identified the central problem while following accepted journalistic routines such as attribution and balance.

Coverage of the Emmett Till Murder Case

An examination of the persons interviewed by each publication provides one important measure of their journalistic quality. In covering the Till murder case, the *New York Times* published 38 stories (see Table 1). Of that number, one-third contained quotes from more than one person (see Table 2). The *Birmingham World* published 15 stories about the Till murder case (see Table 3).² Of that total, 80 percent contained quotes from more than one person (see Table 4). In other words, one in three stories about the Till case in the *Times* relied on multiple sources compared to four of every five in the *World*.

The black publications also drew on a broader, more diverse range of sources. The *Birmingham World* published 14 stories about the Till case in which at least one person is quoted. Whites are quoted in 13—or almost 93 percent—while blacks are quoted in twelve, or almost 86 percent (Table 4). Thus, the *World* quoted blacks almost as often as it quoted whites. The *New York Times* had a decidedly different record. It published 31 stories about the Till case in which at least one person is quoted. Whites are quoted in 25, or 80 percent, while blacks are quoted in twelve, or less than 39 percent (Table 2). Thus, the *Times* quoted whites twice as often as it quoted blacks. Many of these stories were produced by the wire services. However, the record of John N. Popham, the southern correspondent for the *Times* who covered the murder trial, was no

² On the surface, the number of stories suggest the *New York Times* gave far more attention to the Till case than the *Birmingham World*. However many of the 38 stories in the *Times* were brief: 19 were one to seven paragraphs. Only one of the 14 stories in the *World* had fewer than nine paragraphs. The biggest difference between the two was in post-trial coverage—the *Times* published 17 stories, the *World* four. The *Times* was, of course, much larger than the *World* and published daily. The *World* was published twice a week.

**Table 1: *New York Times* Articles about the Emmett Till Case
(listed chronologically)**

PRE-TRIAL COVERAGE

- 1) Associated Press, "Mississippi to Sift Negro Boy's Slaying," September 2, 1955, p. 37.
- 2) Associated Press, "Slain Youth's Body Seen by Thousands," September 4, 1955, sec. 5, p. 9.
- 3) Associated Press, "Report on Slaying Due," September 6, 1955, p. 52.
- 4) Associated Press, "2 Held for Trial in Slaying of Boy," September 7, 1955, p. 19.
- 5) United Press, "U.S. Urged to Halt 'Fury in Mississippi,' " September 8, 1955, p. 10.
- 6) Associated Press, "Murder Trial Date Set," September 10, 1955, p. 5.
- 7) "Murder Most Foul," September 11, 1955, sec. 4, p. 2.
- 8) United Press, "Mother to Testify," September 13, 1955, p. 28.
- 9) John N. Popham, "Trial Tomorrow in Boy's Murder," Sept. 18, 1955, p. 50.
- 10) John N. Popham, "Racial Issues Stirred by Mississippi Killing," September 18, 1955, sec. 4, p. 7.
- 11) John N. Popham, "Slain Boy's Uncle Ready to Testify," September 19, 1955, p. 50.

TRIAL COVERAGE

- 12) John N. Popham, "Trial under way in Youth's Killing," September 20, 1955, p. 32.
- 13) John N. Popham, "Trial Is Delayed in Boy's Slaying," September 21, 1955, p. 24.
- 14) John N. Popham, "Slain Boy's Uncle on Stand at Trial," September 22, 1955, p. 64.
- 15) John N. Popham, "State Rests in Youth's Killing," September 23, 1955, p. 15.
- 16) John N. Popham, "Mississippi Jury Acquits 2 Accused in Youth's Killing," September 24, 1955, pp. 1, 38.
- 17) Associated Press, "Boy's Mother 'Not Surprised,' " September 24, 1955, p. 38.
- 18) John N. Popham, "Mississippi Seeks Kidnapping Count," September 25, 1955, p. 32.
- 19) "Mississippi Jury Denounced Here," September 25, 1955, p. 33.
- 20) John N. Popham, "The Mississippi Trial Is Deep South Drama," September 25, 1955, sec. 4, p. 8.
- 21) "Case of Emmett Till," September 25, 1955, sec. 4, pp. 33-34.

POST-TRIAL COVERAGE

- 22) "10,000 in Harlem Protest Verdict," September 26, 1955, p. 10.
- 23) Associated Press, "Mississippi Pair Seeking Freedom," September 30, 1955, p. 18.
- 24) United Press, "Mississippi Men Released on Bail," October 1, 1955, p. 40.
- 25) Associated Press, "Negroes Protect Two in Till Case," October 2, 1955, p. 56/
- 26) Associated Press, "Till Trial Protested," October 8, 1955, p. 7.
- 27) "Boycott Is Urged in Youth's Killing," October 12, 1955, p. 62.
- 28) "Survey Finds U.S. Is Hurt by Till Case," October 22, 1955, p. 40.
- 29) "Day of Mourning Asked," October 24, 1955, p. 24.
- 30) United Press International, "U.S. Bars Till Action," October 25, 1955, p. 27.

(table continued)

- 31) "Till Case Linked to Negro's Plight," October 30, 1955, p. 86.
- 32) Associated Press, "Till Case Moves into New Phase," November 6, 1955, p. 82.
- 33) Associated Press, "2 Negroes Testify in Till Kidnap Case," November 9, 1955, p. 39.
- 34) United Press, "Grand Jury in Till Case Fails to Indict Two White Men Accused in Kidnapping," November 10, 1955, p. 31.
- 35) Associated Press, "Till Case Inquiry Asked," November 11, 1955, p. 17.
- 36) Associated Press, "U.S. Aide Deplores Delay in Till Case," November 21, 1955, p. 33.
- 37) United Press International, "Federal Action Ruled Out," December 7, 1955, p.30.
- 38) "Till Case Decried by Brownell Aide," January 5, 1956, p. 22.

Table 2: Persons Quoted in *New York Times* about Till Case by Race (with Findings)

- 1) The *New York Times* published 38 stories about the Till murder case between August 1955, when the murder occurred, and January 1956.
- 2) There are seven stories with no quotes. There are 18 stories with one quote. There are 13 stories with more than one person quoted or 34 percent of the 38 stories.
- 3) There are 25 stories in which at least one white is quoted or 80 percent of the 31 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 4) There are twelve stories in which at least one black is quoted or 38.7 percent of the 31 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 5) There are five stories in which at least one white and at least one black are quoted or 16 percent of the 31 stories in which persons are quoted.

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
1) "Mississippi to Sift Negro Boy's Slaying" (9/2/55)	1	--
2) "Slain Youth's Body Seen by Thousands" (9/4/55)	--	1
3) "Report on Slaying Due" (9/6/55)	1	--
4) "2 Held for Trial in Slaying of Boy" (9/7/55)	2	1
5) "U.S. Urged to Halt 'Fury in Mississippi' " (9/8/55)	1	--
6) "Murder Trial Date Set" (9/10/55)	1	--
7) "Murder Most Foul" (9/11/55)	--	--
8) "Mother to Testify" (9/13/55)	--	1
9) "Trial Tomorrow in Boy's Murder (9/18/55) *	2	--
10) "Racial Issues Stirred by Mississippi Killing" (9/18/55) *	1	--
11) "Slain Boy's Uncle Ready to Testify" (9/19/55) *	--	1
12) "Trial under way in Youth's Killing" (9/20/55) *	1	--
13) "Trial Is Delayed in Boy's Slaying" (9/21/55) *	3	--
14) "Slain Boy's Uncle on Stand at Trial" (9/22/55) *	3	1
15) "State Rests in Youth's Killing" (9/23/55) *	6	4
16) "Mississippi Jury Acquits 2 Accused in Killing"(9/24/55) *	10	--
17) "Boy's Mother 'Not Surprised' " (9/24/55)	--	2
18) "Mississippi Seeks Kidnapping Count" (9/25/55) *	4	--
19) "Mississippi Jury Denounced Here" (9/25/55)	2	2
20) "The Mississippi Trial Is Deep South Drama" (9/25/55) *	--	--
21) "Case of Emmett Till" (9/25/55)	--	--
22) "10,000 in Harlem Protest Verdict" (9/26/55)	--	3
23) "Mississippi Pair Seeking Freedom" (9/30/55)	1	2

(table continued)

24) "Mississippi Men Released on Bail" (10/1/55)	2	--
25) "Negroes Protect Two in Till Case" (10/2/55)	--	1
26) "Till Trial Protested" (10/8/55)	--	--
27) "Boycott Is Urged in Youth's Killing" (10/12/55)	2	2
28) "Survey Finds U.S. Is Hurt by Till Case" (10/22/55)	--	--
29) "Day of Mourning Asked" (10/24/55)	--	--
30) "U.S. Bars Till Action" (10/25/55)	1	--
31) "Till Case Linked to Negro's Plight" (10/30/55)	1	--
32) "Till Case Moves into New Phase" (11/6/55)	1	--
33) "2 Negroes Testify in Till Kidnap Case" (11/9/55)	--	--
34) "Grand Jury in Till Case Fails to Indict Two" (11/10/55)	1	--
35) "Till Case Inquiry Asked" (11/11/55)	1	--
36) "U.S. Aide Deplores Delay in Till Case" (11/21/55)	1	--
37) "Federal Action Ruled Out" (12/7/55)	1	--
38) "Till Case Decried by Brownell Aide" (1/5/56)	1	--

Key: * -- story carries the byline of *New York Times* reporter John N. Popham

**Table 3: *Birmingham World* Articles about the Emmett Till Case
(listed chronologically)**

PRE-TRIAL

- 1) Scott News Service, "Battered Body of Boy, 14, Found in River in Miss.," September 2, 1955, pp. 1, 8.
- 2) "50,000 View Body of 14-Year-Old Boy Found Slain in Mississippi," September 6, 1955, p. 1.
- 3) Scott News Service, "Possibility of Early Trial Looms for Miss. Lynch-Murder Suspects," September 9, 1955, pp. 1, 8.
- 4) E.J. Mays, "Rites Held in Chicago for Victim as Hearing Goes On," September 9, 1955, pp. 1, 8.
- 5) E.J. Mays, "Accused of Kidnap-Death of 14-Year-Old Chicago Boy," September 13, 1955, p. 1.

TRIAL COVERAGE

- 6) "Two White Men on Trial for Murder of Youngster," September 20, 1955, p. 1.
- 7) Raymond F. Tisby, "Lynch-Murder Victim's Mother Appears at Miss. Murder Trial," September 23, 1955, pp. 1, 4, 6.
- 8) James L. Kilgallen, "Miss. Acquits Till Death Suspects," September 27, 1955, pp. 1, 4.
- 9) James Hicks, "Writer Reviews Passionate Closing Plea of Till Case Atty.," September 27, 1955, pp. 1, 2.
- 10) "Principals in Emmett Till Case May Face \$100,000 Suit," September 27, 1955, p. 6.
- 11) Scott News Service, "No White Man Given Death for Killing in Miss. Since 1890, Writer Observes," September 27, 1955, p. 6.

POST-TRIAL COVERAGE

- 12) Chester M. Hampton, "World Shocked by Till Trial," September 30, 1955, p. 6.
- 13) "2 Till Kidnap Suspects Released on \$10,000 Bond in Greenwood," October 4, 1955, p. 1.
- 14) "Miss. Reporter Says Witness 'Captive,'" October 14, 1955, p. 5.
- 15) "Moses Wright Makes Appearance Before LeFlore County Grand Jury," November 11, 1955, p. 1.

**Table 4: Persons Quoted in *Birmingham World* about Till Case by Race
(with Findings)**

- 1) The *Birmingham World* published 15 stories about the Till murder case between August 1955, when the murder occurred, and January 1956.
- 2) There is one story with no quotes. There are two stories with one quote. There are twelve stories with more than one person quoted or 80 percent of the 15 stories.
- 3) There are 13 stories in which at least one white is quoted or 92.8 percent of the 14 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 4) There are twelve stories in which at least one black is quoted or 85.7 percent of the 14 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 5) There are eleven stories in which at least one white and at least one black are quoted or 78.6 percent of the 14 stories in which persons are quoted.

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
1) "Battered Body of Boy, 14, Found in River in Miss." (9/2/55)	2	4
2) "50,000 View Body of 14-Year-Old Boy" (9/6/55)	1	1
3) "Possibility of Early Trial Looms" (9/9/55)	4	2
4) "Rites Held in Chicago for Victim" (9/9/55)	3	2
5) "Accused of Kidnap-Death of Chicago Boy" (9/13/55)	2	2
6) "Two White Men on Trial for Murder of Youngster" (9/20/55)	3	1
7) "Lynch-Murder Victim's Mother Appears at Trial" (9/23/55)	1	2
8) "Miss. Acquits Till Death Suspects" (9/27/55)	5	--
9) "Writer Reviews Closing Plea of Till Case Atty." (9/27/55)	1	1
10) "Principals in Till Case May Face \$100,000 Suit" (9/27/55)	--	1
11) "No White Man Given Death in Miss. Since 1890" (9/27/55)	2	1
12) "World Shocked by Till Trial" (9/30/55)	1	4
13) "2 Till Kidnap Suspects Released on Bond" (10/4/55)	1	--
14) "Miss. Reporter Says Witness 'Captive,' " (10/14/55)	2	4
15) "Wright Makes Appearance Before Grand Jury" (11/11/55)	--	--

better. Popham wrote nine stories for the *Times* about the Till case in which at least one person is quoted. He quoted whites in eight and quoted blacks in three. In every instance save one in which Popham quoted a black American, he based it solely on testimony at the murder trial. Popham interviewed and quoted an African American once, using a single paraphrased statement.³ In Popham's most ambitious piece, which examined the acquittal of the two defendants, he quoted ten whites and no blacks.⁴

The magazines displayed a similar disparity. *Life*, in its coverage of the Till case, published one story. It used a minimum of text and quoted no one.⁵ *Look* also published one article about the Till case, a sensational expose in which the journalist William Bradford Huie paid Till's killers, J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, for their confessions.⁶ This was a particularly egregious example of checkbook journalism because *Look* did not inform its readers how Huie got the story. In the article, Huie quoted Milam and Bryant—two white men—and no one else. *Jet* published seven stories about the Till murder case. Many contained a broad range of sources. A September 15, 1955, story included interviews with four blacks and three whites.⁷ A story published one week later included interviews with five whites and two blacks.⁸

The photographs published by the *New York Times* and the *Birmingham World* about the Till case mirrored their written coverage. The photographs in the *Times*, like its news stories, were dominated by whites. The newspaper published three photographs of Bryant, two of Milam and one of a defense attorney. It published one photograph of

³ Popham, "Slain Boy's Uncle to Testify," *New York Times*, 19 September 1955, p. 50.

⁴ Popham, "'Mississippi Jury Acquits 2 Accused in Youth's Killing,'" *New York Times*, 24 September 1955, pp. 1, 8.

⁵ "Emmett Till's Day in Court," *Life*, 3 October 1955, pp. 36-38.

⁶ Huie, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi," *Look*, 24 January 1956, pp. 46-50.

⁷ "Nation Horrified by Murder of Kidnapped Chicago Youth," *Jet*, 15 September 1955, pp. 6-9.

⁸ "Will Mississippi Whitewash the Emmett Till Slaying?," *Jet*, 22 September 1955, pp. 8-12.

African Americans involved in the case.⁹ The *Birmingham World* published far more photographs, ones that represented the full cast of characters in the case. On a single day, it published eleven photographs.¹⁰ Among those pictured were the defendants, Milam and Bryant; Bryant's wife Carolyn; Mamie Till Bradley, Till's mother; Mose Wright, the key prosecution witness; Charles Diggs, the black congressman from Michigan who attended the trial; Gerald Chatham, the chief prosecutor in the case; Sheriff H.C. Strider, the tough-talking law enforcement officer who eventually helped bolster the defense team's case; Judge Curtis Swango; and a shot of dozens of whites and blacks milling about on the grounds outside the courthouse. Like the *World*, *Jet* published a wealth of photographs that portrayed the diversity of actors in the murder case. It also published the most famous one—a close-up of Till's savaged head that resembled a bloated death mask.¹¹

Life magazine did a better job illustrating the Till case than in reporting it. The magazine published six photographs and six drawings. Both captured blacks and whites in powerful moments. The black-and-white illustrations included one that showed Wright identifying Milam and Bryant as the men who kidnapped his nephew. Another captured the twelve members of the all-white jury wearing sullen expressions. *Look* failed to include a single quote from Bradley, Wright or any other black associated with the Till case. But it published a powerful artist's rendering of Milam as he was about to put a bullet in Till's brain. And it included a half dozen poignant photographs of blacks and

⁹ The photograph, published on the eve of the murder trial, shows Mamie Till Bradley, Till's mother, talking to Mose Wright, her uncle and a key prosecution witness. See "Trial Is Delayed in Boy's Slaying," *New York Times*, 21 September 1955, p. 24.

¹⁰ Raymond F. Tisby, "Lynch-Murder Victim's Mother Appears at Miss. Murder Trial," *Birmingham World*, 23 September 1955, pp. 1, 4.

¹¹ "Nation Horrified by Murder of Kidnapped Chicago Youth," p. 9.

whites, including one showing Milam laughing with his wife Juanita and another showing young Till, wearing a white shirt and dark tie, smiling at the camera.

Covering a news story involves several important tasks. A reporter should identify the key players and issues in a story. The journalist also has a more general responsibility to provide context for the actors and issues by examining their history, their communities and the social questions posed by the events at hand. From the inception of its coverage of the Till case, the *New York Times* failed to meet these challenges. Its first story included no interviews with blacks, provided no context and quoted a single white official.¹² The *Times*' story also incorrectly gave Till's age as 15. By contrast, the first Till story in the *Birmingham World* included statements from five persons—a sheriff, a deputy sheriff, the head of the NAACP, an NAACP spokesman and Till's uncle.¹³ Early in their coverage, the *Birmingham World* and *Jet* provided important context for the Till case, noting that he was the third black murdered in Mississippi in four months in a race-related case.¹⁴ The two publications also examined Mississippi's long history of sanctioning white violence against blacks. For example, after the jury acquitted Milam and Bryant, the *World* reported that since 1890, no jury in Mississippi had given the death penalty to a white man accused of killing an African American.¹⁵ The *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* never reported the recent murders nor did they address Mississippi's history of lynching.

The black publications did a better job identifying the central issue in the Till case. *Jet* said the fundamental problem that led to the acquittal of Milam and Bryant was

¹² "Mississippi to Sift Negro Boy's Slaying," *New York Times*, 2 September 1955, p. 37.

¹³ "Battered Body of Boy, 14, Found in River in Miss.," *Birmingham World*, 2 September 1955, pp. 1, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1, and "Will Mississippi Whitewash the Emmett Till Slaying?," *Jet*, p. 9.

racial prejudice.¹⁶ Popham, the *Times*' chief southern correspondent, concluded that the jury acquitted Milam and Bryant not because of racial prejudice but rather because of bureaucratic bungling. In his words, "Perhaps the clearest lesson of the trial is the need for improvements in law enforcement machinery."¹⁷

The *New York Times* raised issues that had little or no relevance. On two occasions it reported on possible Communist involvement in the push to have Milam and Bryant stand trial. The first came in the form of a denial at Till's funeral service—a wire service story quoted a minister as denying any Communist connections.¹⁸ Later, Popham reported that many whites in Mississippi were convinced the NAACP was responsible for the uproar over the slaying and that it was a "Communist-led organization."¹⁹ The *Birmingham World* did not mention possible Communist involvement. No evidence has emerged since then that suggests such involvement.

After the verdict, the *New York Times* published 17 stories about the Till case (see Table 1). The wire services provided most of the stories, which appeared deep inside the newspaper. None carried the byline of a *Times* reporter. The final eleven stories did not quote a single black; eight of these relied on a single white source (see Table 2). Each reported some incremental step in the case. None provided perspective. The black publications published fewer stories but continued to best the national publications in

¹⁵ "No White Man Given Death for Killing in Miss. Since 1890, Writer Observes," *Birmingham World*, 27 September 1955, p. 6.

¹⁶ See "The Strange Trial of the Till Kidnapers," *Jet*, 6 October 1955, p. 11.

¹⁷ Popham, "The Mississippi Trial Is Deep South Drama," *New York Times*, 25 September 1955, Sec. E, p. 8.

¹⁸ "Slain Youth's Body Seen by Thousands," *New York Times*, 4 September 1955, Sec. 5, p. 9.

¹⁹ Popham, "Racial Issues Stirred by Mississippi Killing," *New York Times*, 18 September 1955, Sec. 4, p. 7.

covering the case. *Jet* detailed what happened to several participants after they testified.²⁰ The *Birmingham World* examined the international reaction to the case, noting that newspapers in foreign capitals from London to Paris denounced the verdict.²¹ That a tiny black newspaper in the Deep South could trump the most influential newspaper in the country in documenting the international reaction to the case is astonishing.

The black publications did a better job than the mainstream news media in covering the Till case in areas other than depth, sources, context and reaction. The primary frame employed by the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* was that of a victim.²² *Look* epitomized this. The magazine did so with words as when it quoted Milam telling Till, “Goddamn you, I’m going to make an example of you just so everybody can know how me and my folks stand.”²³ *Look* did so with art, such as the illustration that showed Milam holding his pistol and standing over Till’s naked body. These events did happen, and *Look* found a compelling—though journalistically dishonest—way to present them. But because the magazine did not examine what Bradley (Till’s mother) and Wright (the chief prosecution witness) and Diggs (the black congressman from Michigan) and other blacks did after Till was murdered, *Look* failed to provide a complete picture.

The *Birmingham World* and *Jet* provided a set of frames for the central characters that was more diverse and nuanced than that of the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look*. This was particularly true in their coverage of the black community. They graphically captured Till the victim, epitomized by *Jet*’s horrific photo of his savaged head. They also found

²⁰ Wright, “How I Escaped from Mississippi,” *Jet*, 13 October 1955, pp. 6-11, and “How the Till Case Changed Five Lives,” *Jet*, 24 November 1955, pp. 10-13.

²¹ Hampton, “World Shocked by Till Trial,” *Birmingham World*, 30 September 1956, p. 6.

²² There were exceptions, such as the story in the *Times* and the drawing in *Life* regarding Wright’s testimony identifying Milam and Bryant as the men who kidnapped Till.

²³ Huie, “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” *Look*, 24 January 1956, p. 50.

black activists (Bradley), heroes (Wright) and leaders (Diggs and NAACP chief Roy Wilkins) along with white allies (Chatham, the Tallahatchie County district attorney). The Till case was a rehearsal for the civil rights revolution. The black publications captured this.

Coverage of the Montgomery Bus Boycott

The Montgomery bus boycott provided news organizations with an opportunity to report on black Americans in a unique way. The reason was simple: African Americans originated the action and refused to quit until they achieved their objective. Others played important roles. The local officials who negotiated with the protestors. The law enforcement officials who brought indictments against them. The persons who bombed the homes of the protest leaders. The attorneys who represented them in court and the judges who ruled on their cases. But all of these actors were responding to the decisions by thousands of black residents in a southern community to boycott the buses. In Montgomery, black Americans assumed a non-traditional role in American history—lead actors. They were not a white southerner's chattel property. They were not victims of lynching. The protestors in Montgomery decided what they were going to do and how they were going to do it.

This might have presented a problem to reporters had the protestors held secret meetings. Or if their leaders were reluctant—or ill equipped—to talk publicly. But this was not the case. From the inception of the bus boycott on December 5, 1955, the protestors held mass meetings twice a week that were open to the public. Among their leaders was one of the most eloquent speakers in modern American history along with outspoken ministers, attorneys and activists. The information was there for any journalist

willing to seek out those in the black community. The *Birmingham World* and *Jet* repeatedly did this. The *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* seldom did so.

The *Birmingham World* published 46 stories about the bus boycott in which at least one person is quoted. Blacks are quoted in 39, or 85 percent, while whites are quoted in 27, or almost 59 percent. The *New York Times* published 42 stories about the Montgomery bus boycott in which at least one person is quoted. Whites are quoted in 32, or 76 percent, while blacks are quoted in 21, or 50 percent. In other words, the *Times* quoted whites in significantly more stories than blacks, just as it had done in its coverage of the Till murder case. The *Birmingham World* also relied on far more sources than the *New York Times* in its coverage. The *World* published 52 stories about the bus boycott.²⁴ Of that total, 28—or 54 percent—contained quotes from more than one person. Of the 67 stories in the *Times* about the boycott, 16—or 24 percent--contained quotes from more than one person. In other words, one in four stories about the bus boycott in the *Times* relied on multiple sources compared to more than half in the *World*.

These disparities in coverage emerged during the first month of the protest. In December, the *New York Times* published four boycott stories; *Life* and *Look* none. Three of the stories in the *Times* were three paragraphs or fewer. Each of the four quoted one—or no—named source. That same month the *Birmingham World* published seven news stories and five news analyses about the boycott; *Jet* ran a four-page spread. The briefest story in the *World* was seven paragraphs. Of the newspaper's twelve stories and news analyses, six quoted four or more persons.

²⁴ In addition to the 52 news stories, Emory O. Jackson, the managing editor of the *World*, wrote 17 columns or news analyses about the boycott.

Table 5: Persons Quoted in *New York Times* about the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Race (with Findings)

- 1) The *New York Times* published 67 stories about the bus boycott between its inception in December 1955 and December 31, 1956.
- 2) There are 25 stories with no quotes. There are 26 stories with one quote. There are 16 stories with more than one person quoted or 23.8 percent of the 67 stories.
- 3) There are 32 stories in which at least one white is quoted or 76 percent of the 42 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 4) There are 21 stories in which at least one black is quoted or 50 percent of the 42 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 5) There are 11 stories in which at least one white and at least one black are quoted or 26.2 percent of the 42 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 6) The byline of *New York Times* reporter Wayne Phillips appeared on nine stories about the bus boycott. They were published in February and March 1956.
- 7) The byline of *New York Times* reporter John N. Popham appeared on two stories about the bus boycott. They were published in April 1956.
- 8) The byline of *New York Times* reporter Luther Huston appeared on one story about the bus boycott. It was published in November 1956.
- 9) The byline of *New York Times* reporter George Barrett appeared on four stories about the bus boycott that were published in December 1956.

(table continued)

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
1) "Buses Boycotted Over Race Issue" (12/6/55)	1	--
2) "Shots Strike Negro Homes" (12/9/55)	1	--
3) "Bus Boycott Continues" (12/10/55)	1	--
4) "Negro Bus Boycott Still On" (12/20/55)	--	--
5) "Negroes' Boycott Cripples Bus Line" (1/8/56)	--	--
6) "Alabama City Asks End of Bus Boycott" (1/22/56)	1	1
7) "Speeding Arrest Protested" (1/28/56)	--	--
8) "\$1,000 Reward Offered" (2/1/56)	--	--
9) "Jury Investigates Boycott" (2/14/56)	1	--
10) "Alabama Indicts 115 In Negro Bus Boycott" (2/22/56)	--	--
11) "Negro Leaders Arrested in Alabama Bus Boycott" (2/23/56)	--	--
12) "Negroes Pledge To Keep Boycott" (2/24/56) *	--	3
13) "Folsom Proposes Bi-Racial Group to Fight Tension"(2/25/56)* 5	5	2
14) "Negro Pastors Press Bus Boycott By Preaching Passive Resistance" (2/27/56) *	--	2
15) "Negro Lawyer Wins Dismissal of Suit" (3/3/56)	1	--
16) "Montgomery Is Stage For A Tense Drama" (3/4/56) *	--	--
17) "Boycotted Line Cuts Routes" (3/10/56)	--	--
18) "Folsom Makes Plea" (3/14/56)	1	--
19) "93 Negroes Face Trial Tomorrow" (3/18/56)	--	--
20) "400 Pastors Back Negro Bus Fight" (3/19/56)	1	--
21) "First Negro Tried in Bus Boycotting" (3/20/56) *	2	1
22) "Negro Bus Trial Upheld by Court" (3/21/56) *	2	2
23) "Battle Against Tradition" (3/21/56)	--	1
24) "Montgomery Negroes Tell Court of Abuse by City's Bus Drivers" (3/22/56) *	--	4
25) "Negro Minister Convicted of Directing Bus Boycott" (3/23/56) *	1	3
26) "Conviction Spurs Negroes' Boycott" (3/24/56) *	--	--
27) "Bus Line Is Denied Negroes in South" (4/3/56)	1	1
28) "Montgomery Line Ends Seating Bias" (4/24/56)	2	1
29) "Bus Companies In 13 Cities of South End Segregation" (4/25/56)	1	--
30) "Bus Boycott Firm in Alabama City (4/26/56) ^	2	1
31) "Negroes to Keep Boycotting Buses" (4/27/56) ^	--	2
32) "Talks Fail to End Stalemate on Buses" (4/28/56)	1	--
33) "Jim Crow and Buses" (4/29/56)	--	--
34) "Buses Segregation Upheld in Alabama" (5/10/56)	1	--
35) "Court's Bus Ruling Disputed in South" (5/11/56)	--	--
36) "Draft Status Up for Review" (5/26/56)	--	--

(table continued)

37) "NAACP Barred from State Activity by Ala. Court" (6/2/56)	1	--
38) "U.S. Court Voids Bus Segregation" (6/6/56)	1	1
39) "Writ Bars Bus Bias" (6/20/56)	--	--
40) "Negro Lawyer Drafted" (8/7/56)	--	--
41) "'Slickness' Cited as Modern Evil" (8/13/56)	--	1
42) "Bus Case to High Court" (8/24/56)	--	--
43) "Alabama Home Bombed" (8/26/56)	1	--
44) "Draft Officials Quit" (9/18/56)	1	--
45) "Negro Draft Explained" (9/19/56)	1	--
46) "Draft Delay for Negro Scored" (9/20/56)	1	--
47) "Negro Deferment Snags Draft Call" (9/22/56)	2	--
48) "Draft Aides Rebuffed" (10/4/56)	1	--
49) "Court Holds Key to Bus Boycott" (10/14/56)	--	--
50) "Draft Board Balks" (10/27/56)	1	--
51) "Negroes Keep Car Pool" (10/30/56)	--	--
52) "Negro Car Pool Fought" (11/3/56)	--	--
53) "High Court Rules Bus Segregation (11/14/56) Unconstitutional" (11/14/56) +	--	--
54) "Bus Boycott's End Voted by Negroes" (11/15/56)	--	1
55) "Montgomery Firm on Bus Bias Policy" (11/16/56)	--	--
56) "Negroes Bid Court Rush Bus Mandate" (11/18/56)	--	--
57) "No 'Jim Crow' Seats" (11/18/56)	1	--
58) "Negroes Mark Boycott" (12/7/56)	--	--
59) "Montgomery: Testing Ground" (12/16/56) #	4	1
60) "Alabama Bus Edict Affirmed by Court" (12/18/56)	1	--
61) "Montgomery Segregation Plea" (12/20/56)	--	1
62) "Negroes Will Ride Montgomery Buses In Bias Test Today" (12/21/56)	1	1
63) "Bus Integration in Alabama Calm" (12/22/56) #	--	1
64) "White Dissidents Stir Bus Clashes" (12/23/56) #	--	--
65) "Shots Hit Home of Bus Bias Foe" (12/24/56) #	--	1
66) "Negro Wounded on Alabama Bus" (12/29/56)	1	--
67) "Montgomery Bars Bus Runs at Night" (12/30/56)	--	--

Key: * -- story carries the byline of *New York Times* reporter Wayne Phillips
^ -- story carries the byline of *New York Times* reporter John N. Popham
+ -- story carries the byline of *New York Times* reporter Luther Huston
-- story carries the byline of *New York Times* reporter George Barrett

Table 6: Persons Quoted in *Birmingham World* about the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Race (with Findings)

- 1) The *Birmingham World* published 69 articles about the bus boycott between its inception in December 1955 and December 31, 1956. This includes 52 news stories plus 17 columns by Emory O. Jackson, the managing editor of the *World*.
- 2) There are six stories with no quotes. There are 18 stories with one quote. There are 28 stories with more than one person quoted or 53.8 percent of the 52 stories.
- 3) There are 27 stories in which at least one white is quoted or 58.6 percent of the 46 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 4) There are 39 stories in which at least one black is quoted or 84.8 percent of the 46 stories in which persons are quoted.
- 5) There are 19 stories in which at least one white and at least one black is quoted or 41.3 percent of the 46 stories in which persons are quoted.

	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>
1) "Leaders Hit Injustices on Montgomery City Bus Lines" (12/13/55)	2	4
2) "Montgomery Bus Co. Suspends Service in Negro Neighborhoods" (12/13/55)	--	1
3) "The Tip-Off" (12/13/55) *	--	--
4) "Montgomery Leaders Set for 3 rd Meet on Bus Situation" (12/16/55)	1	--
5) "The Tip-Off" (12/16/55) *	--	--
6) "Montgomery Leaders to Meet Again with Bus Co. Officials" (12/20/55)	4	2
7) "The Tip-Off" (12/20/55) *	4	--
8) "Montgomery Bus Strike Still Going Strong; Race Holds Out" (12/23/55)	5	1
9) "The Tip-Off" (12/24/56) *	--	4
10) "Montgomery Bus Stay-Off Drive By Race About Same" (12/27/55)	3	2
11) "The Tip-Off" (12/27/55) *	1	2
12) "Montgomery Bus Situation Same" (12/30/55)	2	1
13) "Civic Leaders Watching Bus Appeal from Montgomery Mayor" (1/3/56)	1	--
14) "Seating May Bring End to Montgomery Refuse to Ride" (1/10/56)	--	1

(table continued)

15) "The Tip-Off" (1/10/56) *	--	--
16) "Negroes 'Sitting Tight' in No Bus Ride Fight in State" (1/13/56)	1	2
17) "Montgomery, Negroes Still Refuse to Ride Buses; Leaders Receive Threats" (1/17/56)	1	1
18) "Bus-Riding Protest in 46 th Day; Renewal of Franchise Postponed" (1/20/56)	--	1
19) "Brands Report of Settlement of Montgomery Bus Drive 'Misleading' "	--	2
20) "The Tip-Off" (1/24/56) *	--	--
21) "Refuse to Ride Bus Leaders Not Intimidated by Whites" (1/27/56)	2	--
22) "Dr. M.L. King Jr. Arrested, Released on Speeding Charge" (1/31/56)	1	1
23) "Montgomery Mayor Promises Protection After Bombing" (2/3/56)	2	2
24) "2 nd Montgomery Home Bombed" (2/3/56)	--	--
25) "Dr. Reddick Analyzes Ala. Bus Situation" (2/7/56)	--	1
26) "The Tip-Off" (2/14/56) *	--	--
27) "Indict Montgomery Attorney in Connection with Bus Protest" (2/21/56)	--	2
28) "Montgomery Police Launch Mass Arrest Drive Against Bus Protest" (2/24/56)	1	1
29) "Justice Department Studies Mass Arrests in Bus Case" (2/28/56)	1	2
30) "Editor Expresses Caution for Rep. Powell Movement" (2/28/56)	--	2
31) "Montgomery Grand Jury Returns 115 Indictments in Bus Protest" (2/28/56)	--	1
32) "The Epic Out of Montgomery" (2/28/56)	--	--
33) "Montgomery Bus Protest Discussed by E.O. Jackson" (3/2/56)	--	1
34) " 'Walkers' Urged to Hold Out in Protest" (3/2/56)	1	2
35) "NAACP Support Pledged to Bus Protest Victims" (3/2/56)	--	2
36) "Two New Developments Mark Bus Strike Row" (3/13/56))	--	--
37) "12 Montgomery Bus Lines Discontinued" (3/13/56)	1	--
38) "The Tip-Off" (3/13/56) *	--	1
39) "Folsom Fails in Six Bus Protest Halt Attempts" (3/16/56)	1	1
40) "Passive Resistance of Bus Protest Praised" (3/16/56)	--	1
41) "The Tip-Off" (3/16/56) *	--	--
42) "'Negroes Tell of Bus Treatment at Trial" (3/23/56)	1	2
43) "New Witnesses Are Called in Trial of First of 90 in Protest" (3/23/56)	--	1

(table continued)

44) "Montgomery Protest Trial Halted; Pastor Fined \$500" (3/27/56)	2	4
45) "Passive Resistance Goal to Continue" (3/27/56)	--	1
46) "Paper Will Pay Fine for Pastor" (3/27/56)	1	--
47) "All Levels Testify at Montgomery, Ala. Bus Trial" (3/30/56)	--	5
48) "Thousands Take Part in Nationwide Prayer for Deliverance" (4/6/56)	1	1
49) "The Tip-Off" (4/17/56) *	1	--
50) "Bus Bias Ordered Replaced" (4/27/56)	3	1
51) "The Tip-Off" (5/15/56) *	2	2
52) "Montgomery Bus Segregation Is Ruled Unconstitutional by Court" (6/8/56)	1	2
53) "Rev. King Says Protest Not Halted" (6/8/56)	--	1
54) "The Tip-Off" (10/6/56) *	--	--
55) "Supreme Court Rules Segregation on City and State Buses Is Unconstitutional" (11/17/56)	--	--
56) "Car Pool Prohibited in Montgomery, Ala." (11/17/56)	1	--
57) "Rev. King, Jr. Lauds Decision of Supreme Court" (11/17/56)	--	1
58) "Segregation Struggle Seen Failure Bound" (11/17/56)	2	--
59) "Brownell Calls Meeting to Study Ways to End Bus Bias" (11/24/56)	1	--
60) "Institute on Non-Violence, Social Change Set Dec. 3-9" (11/24/56)	--	2
61) "Court Leaves No Doubt in Rule Against Bus Bias" (11/24/56)	--	--
62) "The Tip-Off" (11/24/56) *	--	--
63) "Bus Protest Group Prays for Freedom in Montgomery" (12/8/56)--		2
64) "Two Scholars Outline the Meaning of Bus Protest" (12/8/56)	--	3
65) "The Tip-Off" (12/8/56) *	--	2
66) "The Tip-Off" (12/15/56) *	1	1
67) "The Tip-Off" (12/17/56) *	--	1
68) "Order Received in Montgomery Ending Segregation on Buses" (12/22/56)	1	1
69) "Injustice Is Target, Montgomery Leader Says" (12/22/56)	--	1

Key: * -- column by Emory O. Jackson, managing editor of the *Birmingham World*

A close analysis of the stories published during the first month shows a decided difference in how the news organizations reported the boycott. The lead on the first story in the *New York Times* did not focus on the boycott. Instead, it said “a court test of segregated transportation loomed today” though the story did not quote any person as saying he or she planned—or even contemplated—taking legal action.²⁵ The *Times* would continue to focus on the courts rather than the protest throughout the boycott. The wire services provided the four stories. No evidence suggests the wire service reporters made an effort to penetrate the black community. None of the stories quoted blacks. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s name was not mentioned.

The *Birmingham World* focused on the boycott from its inception of its coverage. Its articles during the first month were based on a diversity of sources. Blacks—and whites—are each quoted in eight of the twelve stories and news analyses. The stories detailed the arrest of Rosa Parks, the one-day protest that became the boycott, the protestors’ demands and the negotiations. King was quoted in eight articles. Several stressed his emphasis on nonviolence. The *World* likened his nonviolent approach to Gandhi’s philosophy as early as December 23.²⁶ The *World* paid particular attention to the mass meetings. Indeed, eight of the twelve articles included information on what happened at one or more mass meeting. One reason for this was the continuity in the *World’s* coverage by a reporter on the scene. Jackson, the newspaper’s managing editor, wrote eight of the twelve articles. He was present at the first mass meeting and returned repeatedly to report on them. Even during the initial stages of the boycott, Jackson

²⁵ “Buses Boycotted over Race Issue,” *New York Times*, 6 December 1955, p. 31.

²⁶ “What he [King] seems to be trying to do is to find a suitable adaptation of the Gandhi philosophy and method and apply it to the Montgomery problem.” Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 23 December 1955, p. 8.

recognized that these mass meetings were the glue that held the protest together. As he wrote in one news analysis, “Attend one of the informational mass meetings and you come away with a feeling that the leaders know what they want, how to go after it and the price they will have to pay to get it.”²⁷ Jackson also saw early the potential power of a social movement. As he wrote in a column published eleven days after the boycott began, “All these events could have the power of a great questioning, an awakening which would culminate in a challenge of undisturbed laws.”²⁸

In January and early February the *Birmingham World* continued to provide more extensive coverage of the bus boycott than the *New York Times*. During this period, the *World* published nine news stories and two news analyses. The *Times* published four stories, all produced by the Associated Press and United Press. Several had problems. A January 22 story in the *Times* said Montgomery officials had offered a proposal to settle the boycott and that a group of black ministers had agreed to accept it.²⁹ The story gave the impression the boycott had been settled. It had not. The *World's* story on the alleged settlement included quotes from protest leaders who said there was no deal.³⁰ Shortly after this, King's home was bombed. The *Times'* story on the bombing focused on rewards offered by city officials and did not mention King's name until the last paragraph.³¹ In its coverage, the *World* detailed the bombing, the damage and, more important, what happened immediately afterward—King's impromptu remarks stressing

²⁷ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 23 December 1955, p. 8.

²⁸ Emory O. Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 16 December 1955, p. 8.

²⁹ “Alabama City Asks End of Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1956, p. 68.

³⁰ “Brands Report of Settlement of Montgomery Bus Drive ‘Misleading,’” *Birmingham World*, 24 January 1956, p. 1.

³¹ “\$1,000 Reward Offered,” *New York Times*, 1 February 1956, p. 64.

the importance of nonviolence that calmed an angry crowd and helped cement his reputation as the leader of the boycott.³² The *Times*' story made no mention of this.

Photographs can make a powerful impression in conveying a story. The three national publications had a mixed record in their selection of photographs to illustrate the bus boycott. The *Times* published its first boycott photograph in January. The photograph, not accompanied by a story, showed a white minister greeting black parishioners.³³ A caption described the minister as an "active backer of Negroes' boycott of segregated bus lines here." The caption never mentioned that the minister was the sole white preacher in Montgomery who publicly supported the boycott. *Look* magazine ignored the boycott. It did not publish an article or photograph about the protest. *Life* magazine published a single, four-page spread.³⁴ Some of its photographs were powerful, particularly a crowd shot of one mass meeting. But the brief accompanying text included two factual mistakes.³⁵ *Jet* magazine provided the most accomplished photojournalistic coverage of the bus boycott. During the boycott's first four months, *Jet* published three articles about the protest, each richly illustrated. The first covered the early highlights and included ten photographs.³⁶ The second correctly linked the bombings with the filing of

³² "Montgomery Mayor Promises Protection After Bombing," *Birmingham World*, 3 February 1956, p. 1.

³³ *New York Times*, 12 December 1956, p. 13.

³⁴ "A Bold Boycott Goes On," *Life*, 5 March 1956, pp. 40-43.

³⁵ The first sentence incorrectly termed the Montgomery bus boycott the "first bold organized resistance to the present ways of southern segregation." In fact, it was not even the first bus boycott. In June 1953, blacks in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, had launched a boycott of city buses. Though the protest failed to eliminate segregated seating, boycott leaders were successful in convincing the black community to avoid the buses for more than a week. See King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 75, and Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, p. 27. The story in *Life* also said that Montgomery was "a city where race relations had been notably amiable." However, a number of boycott leaders—including King, Parks, Fred Gray and Jo Ann Robinson—said blacks in Montgomery resented segregation but kept quiet out of fear and apathy.

³⁶ "Negroes Stop Riding Alabama Buses in Protest Over Jim Crow," *Jet*, 22 December 1955, pp. 12-15

the federal lawsuit.³⁷ It included eight photographs illustrating the determination of blacks to stay off the buses.

In some cases, the *Times*' coverage of the bus boycott violated its own policies. In 1946, the newspaper adopted a policy that it would no longer use racial designations in referring to black Americans.³⁸ According to the policy, news stories in the *Times* would not refer to race unless there was an overriding purpose such as a report on a race riot. But a February 22, 1956, story that appeared on page one described Fred Gray, the attorney who represented Parks, as an "unmarried Negro lawyer."³⁹ There were other problems with the article. It reported that Montgomery police were arresting dozens of boycott leaders on criminal charges. But the story did not include quotes from those leaders or give any indication that an effort had been made to contact them for a response. The story also said that a Montgomery grand jury had indicted Gray for allegedly filing a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of city and state bus segregation laws without the permission of one of the plaintiffs. The story did not include any quotes from Gray or give any indication that an effort had been made to contact him for a response. The Associated Press provided the story. But the *Times* published it without changing the reference to Gray as an "unmarried Negro lawyer" or apparently making an effort to get a comment from him and other boycott leaders. Reporting that an individual has broken the law without giving him or her a chance to respond violates a basic tenet of twentieth century American journalism.

³⁷ Robert E. Johnson, "Bombing, Harassment Don't Stop Foot-Weary Negro Boycotters," *Jet*, 16 February 1956, pp. 8-12.

³⁸ "Race in the News," *New York Times*, 11 August 1946, p. 8E. See also "Answer," *Time*, 19 August 1946, p. 60.

³⁹ "Negro Leaders Arrested in Alabama Bus Boycott," *New York Times*, 23 February 1956, pp. 1, 23. The story makes no attempt to explain the relevance of Gray's marital status.

The *Birmingham World* reported on the Gray indictment two days before the *Times*.⁴⁰ The story included quotes from Gray and King. It said the plaintiff in question withdrew from the lawsuit because she said threats had been made against her. The *World* carried three stories regarding the mass indictment and arrest of boycott leaders. Unlike the *New York Times*, the *World* quoted white officials and protest leaders in its stories.

February 24, 1956, marked an important day in the *Times*' coverage of the bus boycott. That day a story appeared in the newspaper written by Wayne Phillips, the first reporter for the *Times* whose byline appeared on a boycott article. Phillips did something no *Times* reporter had done in covering the bus boycott—he attended a mass meeting. There, along with 2,000 protestors, he listened as King and Ralph Abernathy and other boycott leaders vowed to continue the protest despite the mass arrests. Phillips' story was the first in the *Times* to report firsthand on a mass meeting.⁴¹ A few days later, Phillips attended services at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and First Baptist Church where he listened to King and Abernathy deliver sermons promising that the boycott would succeed. He wrote a story about this.⁴² It would be the last time Phillips attended a mass meeting or visited a black church and wrote about the experience in his boycott coverage. In fact, only one other *Times* reporter would follow in his footsteps. In late April, Popham wrote a story about a mass meeting that was held after King was convicted of violating

⁴⁰ "Indict Montgomery Attorney in Connection with Bus Protest," *Birmingham World*, 21 February 1956, p. 1.

⁴¹ Phillips, "Negroes Pledge to Keep Boycott," *New York Times*, 24 February 1956, pp. 1, 8.

⁴² Phillips, "Negro Pastors Press Bus Boycott by Preaching Passive Resistance," *New York Times*, 27 February 1956, p. 17.

Alabama's anti-boycott law.⁴³ That would be the last time the *Times* published a boycott story in which the reporter attended a mass meeting.

Nor was this surprising. The *New York Times* framed the Montgomery bus boycott not as a social movement but as a legal contest. The vast majority of the boycott stories that the newspaper chose to put on page one involved indictments, arrests, convictions and rulings by federal judges. Yet a comparison of its coverage with that of the *Birmingham World* suggests that the black newspaper did a better job than the *Times* in covering key legal developments during the bus boycott.

For example, the *Times* published front-page stories on two consecutive days in April that said the private company that operated the buses in Montgomery had ended segregation.⁴⁴ The headlines—"Montgomery Line Ends Seating Bias" and "Bus Companies in 13 Cities of South End Segregation"—clearly suggested that the battle over Jim Crow seating was finished. So did the leads and front-page display of the stories. But the battle was not over. The stories came immediately after the U.S. Supreme Court declined to overturn a bus desegregation order in South Carolina. The *Birmingham World* did not give prominent play to the ruling. It published a single story, with a one-column headline, inside the newspaper.⁴⁵ The story described the decision as a "paper policy" because segregation remained the rule on Montgomery's buses. Two weeks later, a three-judge federal panel held a hearing to listen to arguments regarding the constitutionality of the bus segregation laws in Montgomery and Alabama. This was the hour of legal reckoning for the boycott. The *Times* did not carry a story about the

⁴³ Popham, "Negroes to Keep Boycotting Buses," *New York Times*, 27 April 1956, p. 15.

⁴⁴ "Montgomery Line Ends Seating Bias," *New York Times*, 24 April 1956, p. 1, and "Bus Companies in 13 Cities of South End Segregation," *New York Times*, 25 April 1956, p. 1.

⁴⁵ "Bus Bias Ordered Replaced," *Birmingham World*, 27 April 1956, p. 8.

proceedings. The *World* did. Jackson's article, based on court records and the hearing itself, suggested the plaintiffs had a strong case based on a number of court decisions and executive orders.⁴⁶ Three weeks later, the three-judge panel ruled that segregation on Montgomery's buses was unconstitutional.

The *Birmingham World* also did a better job than the *New York Times* in analyzing the boycott's central issue, leadership and solution. In March, the *Times*' Phillips wrote a news analysis. In it, he suggested that the central issue in Montgomery was one of maintaining social order. He lamented that a modified form of segregation could have settled the protest "but a compromise proposal only a hair's breath from that was rejected because the Negroes and city officials could not get together."⁴⁷ He complained that as a result, extremists had taken command of the opposing sides in the protest. Phillips concluded that a biracial group was the "only open path to work toward better race relations."⁴⁸ His story contained no quotes.

Jackson's coverage challenged every point made by Phillips. He said the central issue was racial prejudice. He pinpointed this in his initial column published eight days after the boycott began: "What has happened is the release of pent up resentment over the recurring, unceasing and unrelenting abuse, humiliation and disrespect accorded Negro passengers, especially the lady folk."⁴⁹ He saw the boycott leaders as civic-minded, committed and—far from pushing the protest into extremism—struggling to keep pace with the activism of the foot soldiers.⁵⁰ Jackson did not advocate a solution but rather

⁴⁶ Emory O. Jackson, "The Tip-Off," *Birmingham World*, 15 May 1956, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Phillips, "Montgomery Is Stage for a Tense Drama," *New York Times*, 4 March 1956, Sec. E, p. 6.

⁴⁸ This is exactly what Alabama Gov. Jim Folsom had proposed a week earlier. See Wayne Phillips, "Folsom Proposes Bi-Racial Group to Fight Tension," *New York Times*, 25 February 1956, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Jackson, "The Tip-Off," *Birmingham World*, 16 December 1955, p. 8, and Jackson, "The Tip-Off," *Birmingham World*, 8 December 1956, p. 8.

⁵⁰ Emory O. Jackson, "The Tip-Off," *Birmingham World*, 13 December 1955, p. 6.

reported the evolving demands of the protestors, from the early call for a modified form of segregation to the subsequent legal attack on Jim Crow laws after city officials called off negotiations and the homes of King and Nixon were bombed.⁵¹

A large body of historical evidence suggests Jackson's analysis holds up better than Phillips. No evidence exists to support Phillips' claim that a compromise proposal almost solved the boycott. The protestors offered one during the early stages of the boycott but city officials consistently rejected it. Nor is there any evidence to support his claim that extremists took charge of the protest. The leaders of the boycott—King, Abernathy, Gray, Nixon, Parks and Robinson—remained essentially the same throughout the protest. As for these leaders being extremist, one need only recall King's words to an angry crowd shortly after his home was bombed: "We believe in law and order. Don't get panicky. Don't do anything panicky at all. Don't get your weapons. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword. Remember this is what God said."⁵²

Barrett was the only other *New York Times* reporter who attempted to analyze the boycott. In a December magazine piece, he tried to explain the origins of the boycott, race relations in Montgomery and the key to the success of the protest.⁵³ Barrett said the boycott was spontaneous. In his words, "The Negroes here decided suddenly last December to stand up against Jim Crow."⁵⁴ Barrett presented racial prejudice as an alien, largely insignificant force in Montgomery in the 1950s. For example, he opened the story with an anecdote in which a group of Klan members who had come "to town to hold a

⁵¹ Jackson, "The Tip-Off," *Birmingham World*, 20 December 1955, p. 6 and Jackson, "The Tip-Off," *Birmingham World*, 15 May 1956, p. 6.

⁵² King as quoted in "Montgomery Mayor Promises Protection After Bombing," *Birmingham World*, 3 February 1956, p. 8.

⁵³ Barrett, "Montgomery: Testing Ground," *New York Times*, 16 December 1956, Sec. 6, pp. 8-9, 48-50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8. Barrett, to make certain he had made his point, wrote in the next paragraph that blacks in Montgomery "simply decided to stop riding the buses."

council of race-war” were met by blacks who laughed at them and whites who spat on them. Adopting a wider perspective, Barrett said that by 1956, Montgomery had effectively severed itself from its white supremacist history as the “Cradle of the Confederacy” where Jefferson Davis took his oath of office. Today, he wrote, “Montgomery, Ala. could just as easily be Hartford, Conn. or Des Moines, Iowa.”⁵⁵ Indeed, according to Barrett, the boycott—far from dividing Montgomery—had brought the races together: Local blacks and “most members of the White Citizens’ Councils” have nothing but “amused contempt” for the Klan which “frankly confesses it has lost 1,000 of its members in the past year.” Barrett concluded that the buses would be desegregated for the same reason that the boycott succeeded—victory in court. In his words, “The Federal court is the real key to what will probably happen here in Montgomery.”

How did Barrett reach his conclusions? It is difficult to tell. His story did not cite a single court document or other record. He gave no indication that he attended a mass meeting or any other formal gathering in Montgomery. With the exception of King, he relied entirely on anonymous sources.⁵⁶ In some cases, his quotes read like rank speculation. Here is how he described the attitude of local whites at the beginning of the boycott: “Most of the white community pooh-poohed the Negro boycott and predicted that ‘them shiftless, no-account niggers’ would not last the week before they would start climbing back into the buses at the rear.”⁵⁷ Barrett said that when he interviewed whites after the protestors won, “it is almost as though a master button had been pushed to hear

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 48.

⁵⁶ It is difficult to tell if Phillips interviewed King. He has but one direct quote from King—“Segregation, brothers and sisters, is a stench in the nostrils of Almighty God”—but Phillips does not say where or when King made the statement. (*Ibid*, p. 50)

the same phrase come from every lip.”⁵⁸ He followed this with four quotes, not attributed to anyone, including one with another “niggers” reference. The *Times*’ decision to assign Barrett to write the story is something of a mystery. Though the boycott had been in force for more than a year, this was his first story on the protest.

The *World* painted a very different picture than that presented by Barrett. In news stories, it reported that historians (including Dr. L. D. Reddick), sociologists (including Dr. Preston Valien) and other scholars concluded that the boycott was a carefully organized response by the black community to an accumulation of grievances.⁵⁹ In news stories and columns, the newspaper exposed the deep division between the races and showed that white supremacy largely governed social relations between blacks and whites in Montgomery. The *World*’s coverage showed that the black community, in launching the bus boycott, fundamentally challenged that system. In February, for example, Jackson reported that in the space of 24 hours two rallies were held in Montgomery. One was an inter-racial gathering with a few hundred in attendance; the other was a rally of white citizens’ councils that drew a crowd estimated at 10,000 to 15,000.⁶⁰

Barrett claimed the boycott prompted 1,000 persons to quit the Klan though he provided no evidence to support his assertion. The *World* showed that the boycott increased the membership and influence of the white citizens’ councils. On December 13—eight days after the boycott began—Jackson wrote that white supremacists had

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Gordon, “Dr. Reddick Analyzes Ala. Bus Situation,” *Birmingham World*, 7 February 1956, p. 6, and “Two Scholars Outline the Meaning of Bus Protest,” *Birmingham World*, 8 December 1956, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 14 February 1956, p. 6. Phillips, the first *Times* staff writer to cover the bus boycott, reported on this rally some weeks later. See Phillips, “Montgomery Is Stage for a Tense Drama,” *New York Times*, 4 March 1956, Sec. E, p. 6.

formed the Central Alabama White Citizens Council.⁶¹ One month later the *World* reported that Montgomery's top law-enforcement official had joined the group.⁶² Two weeks later the *World* said all three of Montgomery's top city officials had joined the white citizens' council.⁶³ At virtually every step, according to Jackson, the white citizens' councils had orchestrated the city's response to the boycott:

The WCC has enlisted the Montgomery city officials on its side. It has a so-called local "labor journal" propagandizing for it. It has drawn into its ranks powerful "respectable" citizens. It suggested the legal action which led to the court halting the share-the-ride pool. WCC leaders seem to call the shots.⁶⁴

There is no mystery about where Jackson and other reporters working for the *Birmingham World* got their information. They relied on named sources. They attended numerous mass meetings of protestors and services at black churches in Montgomery. They sat in on negotiating sessions between city officials and protest leaders. They were in Montgomery when the homes of King and Nixon were bombed. They attended the trial when King was convicted of violating the state's anti-boycott laws. They attended the hearing before the three-judge federal panel regarding the constitutionality of Montgomery's and Alabama's bus segregation laws. They spent months interviewing boycott and city leaders, those in the front ranks of the protestors and scholars who studied the boycott. No member of the *Times*' staff had done all or even most of these things. The *Times* relied mainly on the wire services in reporting on the boycott. Over the course of a year, it assigned four different reporters on its staff to cover the protest. Each contributed a handful of stories. Some of those reporters took important steps, particularly Phillips when he attended a mass meeting and services at two black churches.

⁶¹ Jackson, "The Tip-Off," *Birmingham World*, 13 December 1955, p. 6.

⁶² "Negroes 'Sitting Tight' in No Bus Ride Fight in State," *Birmingham World*, 13 January 1956, p. 1.

⁶³ "Refuse to Ride Bus Leaders Not Intimidated by Whites," *Birmingham World*, 27 January 1956, p. 1.

But this was the closest the *Times* came to penetrating the black community in Montgomery.

No one on the *New York Times*' staff came close to matching the journalistic legwork of the *World's* Jackson. And the *Times* did not publish a single story in which a scholarly researcher analyzed the boycott. The *World* published news stories and columns exploring the work of three scholars who studied the boycott.⁶⁵ The author of one of these stories was William Gordon, the managing editor of the *Atlanta Daily World*. In a subsequent news analysis, published less than three months after the boycott began, he argued that the meaning of the boycott could be found not in the courts but in the black community—that in the act of protesting segregation, black Americans had changed. In his words, “The South faces a new kind of Negro—the kind who wants no more and naturally no less than what every other American citizen is entitled to.”⁶⁶ King delivered the same message at a Washington, D.C., church in December 1956. “Today the South is witnessing a new Negro in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and South Carolina,” he said. “When we hear the South shouting about manifesto, circumventing the Supreme Court and outlawing the NAACP, we are only hearing death groans from a dying system.”⁶⁷ Black publications like the *World* understood and reported this. White publications like the *Times* did not.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 24 November 1956, p. 8.

⁶⁵ William Gordon, “Dr. Reddick Analyzes Ala. Bus Situation,” *Birmingham World*, 7 February 1956, p. 7; Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 14 February 1956, p. 6; “Two Scholars Outline the Meaning of Bus Protest,” *Birmingham World*, 8 December 1956, p. 8; and Jackson, “The Tip-Off,” *Birmingham World*, 8 December 1956, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Gordon, “The Epic Out of Montgomery,” *Birmingham World*, 28 February 1956, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Alice A. Dunnigan, “Injustice Is Target, Montgomery Leader Says,” *Birmingham World*, 22 December 1956, p. 1.

⁶⁸ In the last third of his magazine piece, Barrett mentions “the ‘new Negro,’ the Negro that the Old South never knew” but only in passing. He never defines them, their origin nor the implications of their emergence. See Barrett, “Montgomery,” p. 49.

How did mainstream news organizations cover black Americans in the decades prior to the 1950s? In reporting on the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott, did coverage by mainstream news organizations change? If so, in what ways?

During the first half of the twentieth century, mainstream news organizations largely ignored black Americans. This was true of newspapers throughout the country.⁶⁹ When the media did report on blacks during these decades, they overwhelmingly presented them negatively. Indeed, the dominant image was that of a criminal.⁷⁰ Significant journalistic problems are evident in how *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* covered the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott. But there also were great strides. Southern whites had lynched hundreds of blacks without getting widespread or sustained national publicity. That changed with the Till murder case. Over a four-month period, the *New York Times* published 38 stories about the case, about one story every three days. *Life* magazine devoted a three-page spread to the trial and traced the acquittal of Milam and Bryant to “racial hatred.” *Look* magazine published the sensational confession of the killers including Milam’s statement that he murdered Till because “I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice.” The unprecedented coverage underscored two points. One, that white violence threatened southern blacks daily. Two, that southern whites who assaulted and killed blacks now faced unprecedented exposure.

⁶⁹ Ira B. Harkey, Jr, *The Smell of Burning Crosses: An Autobiography of a Mississippi Newspaperman* (Jacksonville, Illinois: Harris-Wolfe & Co., 1967): 52; Paula B. Johnson and David O. Sears, “Black Invisibility, the Press and the Los Angeles Riot,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 76 No. 4 (January 1971): 698-721; Carolyn Martindale, “Changes in Newspaper Images of Black Americans,” *Newspaper Research Journal* (Winter 1990): 40-50; and George E. Simpson, *The Negro in the Philadelphia Press* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936).

⁷⁰ Ira B. Bryant, “News Items about Negroes in White Urban and Rural Newspapers,” *Journal of Negro Education* (April 1935): 169-178; Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study in Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922): 524, 635; Noel P. Gist, “The Negro in the Daily Press,” *Social Forces* 10 No. 3 (March 1932): 405-411; Southern Regional Council, *Race in the News: Usage in Southern Newspapers* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1949): 2; and *Your Newspaper: Blueprint for a Better Press*, edited by Leon Svirsky (New York: Macmillan, 1947): 23-24.

It is little wonder that activists like Diggs and Amzie Moore, segregationists like Robert Patterson and journalists like John N. Popham and David Halberstam said the Civil Rights Movement began with the Till case.⁷¹ Indeed, reporters of both races recognized this. Simeon Booker, who covered the case for *Jet*, said it launched the civil rights revolution.⁷² Bill Minor, who covered the case for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, said that because of the Till case “for the first time you couldn’t have a quiet little lynching without getting real attention.”⁷³

This was an important gain. White violence against blacks without legal consequences had long been the norm in the South. As Myrdal noted, “Any white man can strike or beat a Negro, steal or destroy his property, cheat him in a transaction and even take his life, without much fear of legal reprisal.”⁷⁴ This was still true in 1955 in the Delta and large areas of the rural South. In the space of six months, four blacks were lynched in Mississippi. The Rev. George Lee and Lamar Smith for voter registration activism.⁷⁵ Till for, in the memorable words of Robert Penn Warren, “showing off before the country cousins.”⁷⁶ And Clinton Melton, a black service station attendant, after a disagreement with a customer about how much gas he wanted. Elmer Kimbell, a cotton-gin manager and Milam’s best friend, put two bullets in Melton’s head. Kimbell claimed self-defense; three witnesses said otherwise. A Tallahatchie County jury acquitted Kimbell of murder despite testimony from the white owner of the gas station and two

and

⁷¹ Moore Interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, pp. 234-235; Diggs Interview in Williams, *Eyes on the Prize*, p. 49; Patterson Interview in Raines, *My Soul Is Rested*, p. 239; Popham as quoted in the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 25 August, 1985, Sec. A., p. 1; and Halberstam, *The Fifties*, p. 437.

⁷² Simeon Booker, “Thirty Years Ago: How Emmett Till’s Lynching Launched Civil Rights Drive,” *Jet* 17 June 1985, p. 12.

⁷³ Minor as quoted in the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 25 August, 1985, Sec. A., p. 1.

⁷⁴ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p. 559.

⁷⁵ Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, p. 426.

black witnesses that Melton was unarmed.⁷⁷ When Milam said he wanted to set an example by murdering Till, he might have been speaking for the other killers as well. Lynching, as the NAACP's Walter White has observed, "is much more an expression of Southern fear of Negro progress than of Negro crime."⁷⁸

But the time-sanctioned technique of white violence could not withstand the growth in black political power coupled with national media coverage. There would be more race-related murders, to be sure, but they would become national scandals. National coverage meant that the perpetrators, for the first time, faced real consequences. The movement eventually provided southern blacks with an unprecedented measure of personal safety. Some political analysts consider this the movement's single greatest accomplishment. According to Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "In the South the deepest meaning of the winning of democratic political rights is that the historical primacy of terror as a means of social control has been substantially diminished."⁷⁹

Historically, the nation's mainstream news media had either ignored black Americans or portrayed them primarily as criminals. And this was, in fact, how the *New York Times* treated the black protestors during the first two-and-a-half months of the boycott. It published a handful of stories buried deep inside the newspaper. The wire services produced the stories. In many cases they presented the black protestors as lawbreakers. The first boycott story the *Times* put on page one reported that Montgomery police were arresting dozens of boycott leaders on criminal charges. The story did not

⁷⁶ Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 30.

⁷⁷ David Halberstam, "Tallahatchie County Acquits a Peckerwood," *The Reporter* 14, 19 April 1956, pp. 26-30; Whitaker, "Case Study," p. 172.

⁷⁸ White as quoted in Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p. 563.

⁷⁹ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977): 182.

include a response from a single boycott leader.⁸⁰ That same story described Gray as an “unmarried Negro lawyer” who had filed a desegregation lawsuit on behalf of a phantom client. The story had no response from Gray nor was there any indication that the wire service reporter or the *Times* had attempted to contact Gray for a response. Since the stories lacked context, the actions of the protestors were portrayed as misguided at best and trumped up foolishness at worst. These early stories portrayed white officials as reasonable and conciliatory: They had tried to settle the boycott, provided reward money for information on bombing suspects and openly worried that Montgomery’s “exemplary race relations” were being torn asunder by lawbreaking black protestors.

But the coverage eventually changed in quantity and quality. Over a 13-month period, the *Times* published 67 stories about the boycott—twice as many as it published about the Till case. The *Times* also gave far more prominent display to the boycott. The newspaper put eleven stories about the bus boycott on page one compared to just one involving the Till case. The *Times* and other national news organizations also did something else that was of tremendous importance, something they had begun doing in covering the Till case: They did not present blacks as criminals.

This was particularly true once the *Times* assigned its own reporters to cover the bus boycott. Phillips attended a mass meeting of protestors and services at two black churches and wrote stories about what he saw and heard. In both, he quoted King and Abernathy at length. The stories—“Negroes Pledge to Keep Boycott” and “Negro Pastors Press Bus Boycott by Preaching Passive Resistance”—presented the black protestors as engaged in a historic mission to improve their lot using the tool of passive resistance.⁸¹ A

⁸⁰ “Negro Leaders Arrested in Alabama Bus Boycott,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1956, pp. 1, 23.

⁸¹ “Negroes,” *New York Times*, 24 February, pp. 1, 8; “Negro,” *New York Times*, 27 February 1956, p. 17.

profile of King in March described him as “a rather soft-spoken man with a learning and maturity far beyond his twenty-seven years.”⁸² Barrett’s story, published in December, described King as a “scholar of Hegel and Kant” who “has shattered traditional concepts here as profoundly as his famous namesake shattered sixteenth-century concepts in Europe.”⁸³ In its coverage of the Till case, the *Times* and other mainstream publications had framed blacks primarily as victims. In its coverage of the bus boycott, the *Times* on several occasions framed the boycott leaders in positive, proactive terms—educated, intelligent, courageous, committed and peaceful. To be sure, such portrayals were the exception, not the rule. And once the boycott concluded, the *Times* returned to its victims’ frame. After the buses were desegregated, the next six stories in the *Times* focused on assaults, shooting and bombings directed at blacks in Montgomery; the newspaper displayed three of these on page one.⁸⁴ But this too represented progress. These stories were another reminder that the most powerful newspaper in the country considered it news—indeed, front-page news—when a white southerner bombed or assaulted or shot at a black southerner. This was altogether new.

Why? Because, as the Till murder case foreshadowed, the mainstream media were willing to abandon their longstanding treatment of African Americans. Beginning with the Till case, those news organizations adopted a new frame in reporting on blacks—neither invisible nor criminals. The *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look* portrayed blacks as the innocent victims of deadly racial hatred. In their coverage of the

⁸² “Battle Against Tradition,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1956, p. 28.

⁸³ Barrett, “Montgomery,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1956, Sec. 6, p. 49.

⁸⁴ “White Dissidents Stir Bus Clashes,” *New York Times*, 23 December 1956, p. 14; George Barrett, “Shot Hits Home of Bus Bias Foe,” *New York Times*, 24 December 1956, p. 6; “Negro Wounded on Alabama Bus,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1956, pp. 1, 16; “Montgomery Bans Bus Runs at Night,” *New York Times*, 30 December 1956, pp. 1, 20; Clarence Dean, “A Sniper Fires on 4th Alabama Bus,” *New York*

Montgomery bus boycott, the *Times* and *Life* continued to portray black Americans as innocent citizens seeking equal rights but with a new face—the peaceful protestor, nonviolent even in the face of shootings and bombings. This is the image that became the most powerful media tool in the civil rights struggle. King understood the power of the media as tools to fight injustice. As he wrote in his 1964 book on the Birmingham campaign, *Why We Can't Wait*, “The brutality with which officials would have quelled the black individual became impotent when it could not be pursued with stealth and remain unobserved. It was caught—as a fugitive from a penitentiary is often caught—in gigantic circling spotlights. It was imprisoned in a luminous glare revealing the naked truth to the whole world.”⁸⁵

The political scientist E.E. Schattschneider has noted that conflict is the heart of politics and that in every conflict, the audience plays the central role. In his words, “If a fight starts watch the crowd, because the crowd plays the decisive role.”⁸⁶ In the Till case and the bus boycott, the media provided black Americans with a powerful new instrument with which to attract a crowd. Once that happened, Jim Crow did not have a chance.

Implications, Strengths and Weaknesses of this Study and Future Research

The findings of this dissertation have implications for other researchers. In assessing the relative value of research materials, this study suggests that scholars should look beyond mainstream media publications. Scholars have long considered the *New York Times* the nation's newspaper of record. This attitude cuts across a variety of

Times, 1 January 1957, p. 15; and “Bus Runs Halted in Alabama City After Six Bombings,” *New York Times*, 11 January 1957, pp. 1, 13.

⁸⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 39.

disciplines from history to mass communication to political science. Given this perception, it is not surprising that many scholars interested in researching historical events, as well as media coverage of those events, begin with the *Times*. The findings of this dissertation suggest that scholars should bear in mind two considerations before embarking on their research. The first is that lesser-known publications may do a significantly better job journalistically than their better-known counterparts in covering certain events. The second is that the *New York Times*' view of news, like all news organizations, is determined by a host of factors—including ownership, editorial leadership, staff, audience, historical time period and social world view—that can play a significant role in shaping its coverage.

A number of scholars have argued that journalistic conventions serve to homogenize the news so that it reinforces the status quo. In their view, reporters' routines trump all other factors. Herbert Gans conducted a study of the *CBS Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, *Newsweek* and *Time* and concluded that reporters want sources that are trustworthy, reliable and, above all, authoritative.⁸⁷ Gaye Tuchman observed the activities at an unnamed daily newspaper with a circulation of about 250,000 and concluded that reporters rely on "objectivity"—presenting conflicting sides of an issue, quoting sources and including supporting facts—to deal with the inherent "dangers" in writing a news story.⁸⁸ Michael Schudson studied presidential State of the Union addresses and concluded that certain journalistic conventions—including the summary lead, the

⁸⁶ E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 3.

⁸⁷ Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 128-130.

⁸⁸ Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notion of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology* 77 No. 4 (1972): 660-671.

inverted pyramid structure and the focus on the highlights of an important speech or study—are relatively new devices designed to buttress the political status quo.⁸⁹ In his words, “Their function is less to increase or decrease the truth value of the messages they convey than to shape and narrow the range of what kinds of truths can be told.”⁹⁰ Todd Gitlin examined how the *New York Times* and CBS News covered an important anti-war group during the 1960s and concluded that certain journalistic assumptions about news value serve to sustain the legitimacy of the current political system.⁹¹ Those assumptions, Gitlin wrote, are: “That news involves the novel event, not the underlying, enduring condition; the person, not the group; the visible conflict, not the deep consensus; the fact that ‘advances the story,’ not the one that explains or enlarges it.”⁹² The underlying effect of these routines and conventions, according to several scholars, is to reinforce the existing values of the elite.⁹³ In the words of Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, “The media apparently support the powerful, not only in terms of the content of what is published but also in the types of newswork procedures that have been allowed to endure as professional practice.”⁹⁴

Possibly. On the other hand, the sociologists may have cast too wide a net. In their view, all news organizations are forced by journalistic convention into producing a homogenized news product that serves the interest of the dominant class. However, all of

⁸⁹ Michael Schudson, “The Politics of Narrative Form,” in *The Power of News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995): 53-71. Schudson also suggests two other recent journalistic conventions: “That a news story should focus on a single event rather than a continuous or repeated happening” and “that a news story covering a political event should convey the meaning of the political acts in a time frame larger than that of the acts themselves.” (p. 55) This researcher chose not to cite them above because they appear to contradict one another.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁹¹ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 263, 270-273.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 263.

⁹³ Gans, *Deciding What’s News*, pp. 61-62; and Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, pp. 12, 258-260.

these scholars examined mainstream media. None examined an alternative news organization. Nina Eliasoph did. She worked for two years at what she terms an “oppositional” radio station in Berkeley, California, and found that reporters there largely followed journalistic conventions—covering events rather than long-term conditions, relying on officials for information, maintaining balance, leading with the most important fact and refraining from editorializing.⁹⁵ Despite this, reporters at the station presented stories that often challenged the status quo because the station ownership, reporters and audience consciously sought alternative points of view. In her words, “Routines accomplish different things in different contexts.”⁹⁶

This study has demonstrated much the same thing. The *Birmingham World* and *Jet* followed accepted journalistic routines such as providing balance and attribution, relying on authoritative sources and largely following a pyramid style of writing. Yet they presented a very different picture of the Till murder case and the Montgomery bus boycott because they consistently sought alternative news sources, e.g. black Americans. This has important implications. It suggests that following journalistic routines does not guarantee that the product—news coverage—will serve the interests of the status quo. At a minimum, this should encourage mass communication scholars who plan to conduct comparative studies to look beyond established news organizations.

The strength of this study was the researcher’s choice of news organizations. By selecting mainstream media—such as the *New York Times*, *Life* and *Look*—and comparing their performance with black-oriented publications—such as the *Birmingham*

⁹⁴ Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, “Accidental News: The Great Oil Spill as Local Occurrence and National Event,” *American Journal of Sociology* 81 No. 2: 258-259.

⁹⁵ Nina Eliasoph, “Routines and the Making of Oppositional News,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (1988): 313-334.

World and *Jet*—this dissertation could pursue its two central questions. In the process, the study charted the very real progress of the mainstream media in reporting on black Americans while demonstrating that the smaller, less well-known publications provided more accomplished coverage of the Till case and the bus boycott. There are two primary weaknesses in this study. First, the researcher did not conduct interviews with any of the reporters and editors who worked at the publications examined. The reason for this was simple: None of them are alive. Nevertheless, it remains a weakness. In addition, the researcher did not examine whatever archives may be available regarding the five publications. Those archives could provide important clues about newsroom decisions that shaped journalistic coverage of these two important events.

Scholars interested in studying media coverage of other important events and campaigns in the Civil Rights Movement should make an effort to address both weaknesses. There are a wealth of movement campaigns and events in need of study. This researcher was unable to find a scholarly examination of media coverage of the integration of the University of Alabama, the Little Rock desegregation crisis, the Freedom Rides, the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi, the Birmingham campaign and the rise of the Black Panthers and the emergence of Black Power. Indeed, it would almost certainly prove worthwhile to apply the approach of this dissertation—white and black media coverage—to any significant event and movement in the history of American race relations. If this study has demonstrated one thing, it is that journalism produced by black Americans is valuable for all Americans.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 315.

Bibliography

Books

Herbert Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs* (New York: Longman, 1984).

Mark Bauerlein, *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001).

Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961).

Simeon Booker, *Black Man's America* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964).

Joseph Boskin, "Denials: The Media View of Dark Skins and the City," in Bernard Rubin, ed., *Small Voices and Great Trumpets: Minorities and the Media* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

Howard Bray, *The Pillars of the Post: The Making of a News Empire in Washington* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980).

Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

Maxwell R. Brooks, *The Negro Press Re-Examined: Political Content of Leading Negro Newspapers* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1959).

Charles Butts, "Mississippi: The Vacuum and the System," in Bradford Daniel, ed., *Black, White and Gray: Twenty-one Points of View on the Race Question* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964).

Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

Turner Catledge, *My Life and the Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1980)

William H. Chafe, Raymond Gavins and Robert Korstad, eds., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell about Life in the Segregated South*, (New York: New Press, 2001).

James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago: A Study in Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922).

Robert Cirino, *Don't Blame the People* (Los Angeles: Diversity Press, 1971).

Mark Curriden and Leroy Phillips, Jr., *Contempt of Court* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999).

Charles U. Daly, ed., *The Media and the Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

David R. Davies, ed., *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

Robert J. Donovan and Ray Scherer, *Unslient Revolution: Television News and American Public Life, 1948-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Erika Doss, "Visualizing Black America: Gordon Parks at *Life*, 1948-1971," in Erika Doss, ed., *Looking at Life Magazine* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 2001).

Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002).

Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. (Princeton: Princeton University, 2002).

Charles W. Eagles, "Bibliographical Essay," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986).

John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: New American Library, 1952).

Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978).

Edward J. Epstein, *News from Nowhere: Television and the News* (New York: Random House, 1973).

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

John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947).

Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986).

David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

Glasgow University Media Group, *Bad News* (London: Routledge, 1976).

Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Hugh Davis Graham, *Crisis in Print: Desegregation and the Press in Tennessee* (Vanderbilt: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Buntin Hoard and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971).

Fred Gray, *Bus Ride to Justice: Changing the System by the System* (Montgomery: Black Belt Press, 1995).

David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993).

Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racial Ideologies and the Media," in Gail Dines and Jean M. Hemez, eds., *Gender, Race and Class in Media* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).

- Ira B. Harkey, Jr, *The Smell of Burning Crosses: An Autobiography of a Mississippi Newspaperman* (Jacksonville, Illinois: Harris-Wolfe & Co., 1967).
- Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement* (Troy, Michigan: Bedford, 1994).
- Ernest C. Hynds, *American Newspapers in the 1980s* (New York: Hastings House, 1980).
- Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News that Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Carl Jensen, *Stories that Changed America: Muckrakers of the 20th Century* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000).
- Charles S. Johnson, *In the Main Street: A Survey of Best Practices in Race Relations in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947).
- John H. Johnson, *Succeeding Against the Odds* (New York: Warner Books, 1989).
- Charles Kadushin, *The American Intellectual Elite* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974).
- Steven Kasher, *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996).
- Murray Kempton, *America Comes of Middle Age: Columns, 1950-1962* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962).
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1958).
- Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: New American Library, 1964).
- Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).
- Wendy Kozol, "Gazing at Race in the Pages of *Life*," in Erika Doss, ed., *Looking at Life Magazine* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 2001): 159-174.
- Richard Lentz, *Symbols, The News Magazines and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990).

- Richard Lentz, "Sixty Five Days in Memphis: A Study of Culture, Symbols, and the Press" in David J. Garrow, ed., *We Shall Overcome: The Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1950's and 1960's*, Vol. II (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1989).
- Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All: America's Coming of Age with the Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1922).
- Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).
- John Lofland, *Analyzing Social Setting: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1971).
- Jack Lyle, ed., *The Black American and the Press*, (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1968).
- Robert Mann, *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996).
- Douglas A. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham Alabama: The Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).
- Steven M. Millner, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott: A Case Study in the Emergence and Career of a Social Movement," in David J. Garrow, ed., *The Walking City: The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989).
- Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984).
- Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).
- Paul T. Murray, *The Civil Rights Movement: References and Resources* (New York: MacMillan, 1993).
- Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Vols. I & II (New York: Random House, 1944).
- John Nerone, *Violence Against the Press: Policing the Public Sphere in U.S. History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

W.R. Neuman, M.R. Just and A.N. Crigler, *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

Pamela Newkirk, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Rosa Parks, *Quiet Strength* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994).

Robert N. Pierce, *A Sacred Trust: Nelson Poynter and the St. Petersburg Times* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1936).

Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

Fred Powledge, *Free at Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991).

V. Price and D. Tewksbury, "News Values and Public Opinion: A Theoretical Account of Media Priming and Framing," in G. Barnett and F.J. Boster, eds., *Progress in the Communication Sciences* xiii (Greenwich, Conn.: Ablex, 1997): 173-211.

Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1997).

Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1955 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Washington, D.C.: The Society, 1955).

Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: Penguin, 1977).

L.D. Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper, 1959).

Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1947).

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

Carl Rowan, *South of Freedom* (New York: Knopf: 1952).

- Harrison Salisbury, *A Time of Change: A Reporter's Tale of Our Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).
- Harrison Salisbury, *Without Fear or Favor: The New York Times and Its Times* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980).
- E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960).
- Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).
- Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- Judith and William Serrin, *Muckraking! The Journalism that Changed America* (New York: The New Press, 2002).
- Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1963).
- Leon V. Sigal, *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973).
- George E. Simpson, *The Negro in the Philadelphia Press* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936).
- A.C.G. Smith, *Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935-1965* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975).
- Southern Regional Council, *Race in the News: Usage in Southern Newspapers* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1949).
- Rodger Streitmatter, *Mightier than the Sword: How the News Media Have Shaped American History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).
- Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983).
- Leon Svirsky, ed., *Your Newspaper: Blueprint for a Better Press* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).
- Gay Telese, *The Kingdom and the Power* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1969).
- Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones, *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind the New York Times* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999).

Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

U.S. Riot Commission Report, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).

Rupert Vance, *Human Geography of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932).

Dan Wakefield, *Between the Lines: A Reporter's Personal Journey Through Public Events* (New York: New American Library, 1966).

Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965).

Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1988).

Daniel T. Williams, ed., *Eight Negro Bibliographies*, No. 7 (New York: Kaus Reprint, 1970).

Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, 2nd edition (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971).

C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

Legal Cases

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. (1954) per Findlaw Web site at caselaw.lp.findlaw.com.

Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896) per Findlaw Web site at caselaw.lp.findlaw.com.

Shelley v. Kramer, 334 U.S. (1948) per Findlaw Web site at caselaw.lp.findlaw.com.

Smith v. Allwright, 321 U.S. 649 (1944) per Findlaw Web site at caselaw.lp.findlaw.com.

Magazine Articles

"Answer," *Time*, 19 August 1946, p. 60.

"A Bold Boycott Goes On," *Life*, 5 March 1956, pp. 40-43.

"A Victim of Negro Progress," *Newsweek*, 26 August 1963, p. 51.

Maurine Beasley, "The Muckrakers and Lynching: A Case Study in Racism," *Journalism History* 9 Nos. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1982): 86-90.

Warren Breed, "Comparative Handling of the Emmett Till Case," *Journalism Quarterly* (Summer 1958): 291-298.

Simeon Booker, "A Negro Reporter at the Till Trial," *Nieman Reports* 53/53 (Winter 1999-2000): 136-137.

Simeon Booker, "The New Frontier for Daily Newspapers," *Nieman Reports* (January 1955): 12.

Simeon Booker, "Thirty Years Ago: How Emmett Till's Lynching Launched Civil Rights Drive," *Jet*, 17 June 1985, p. 12.

Robert W. Brown, "Newspapers of Deep South Liberalize Negro Policies," *Editor & Publisher*, 13 December 1952, p. 9.

Ira B. Bryant, "News Items about Negroes in White Urban and Rural Newspapers," *Journal of Negro Education* (April 1935): 169-178.

James W. Carey, "The Problem of Journalism History," *Journalism History* 1 (Spring 1974).

Roy E. Carter, "Segregation and the News: A Regional Content Study," *Journalism Quarterly* 34 (Winter 1957): 3-18.

Roy E. Carter, "Racial Identification Effects upon the News Story Writer," *Journalism Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1959): 284-290.

Karin Chenoweth, "Taking Jim Crow Out of Uniform: A. Philip Randolph and the Desegregation of the U.S. Military," *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 13 No. 13 (August 21, 1977): 30.

Columbia Journalism Review Survey, "America's Best Newspapers," (November/December 1999) at CJR Web site at www.cjr.org.

"Dailies' Cooperation Asked in Solving Negro Problem," *Editor & Publisher*, 4 August 1945, pp. 7, 60-61, 67.

Lisa Duke, "Black in a Blonde World: Race and Girls' Interpretation of the Feminine Ideal in Teen Magazines," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 77 No. 2 (summer 2000): 367-392.

David Domke, "The Press, Race Relations, and Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 51 No. 2 (June 2001): 317-344.

David Domke, "Strategic Elites, the Press, and Race Relations," *Journal of Communication* 50 No. 1 (Winter 2000): 115-140.

Frank D. Durham, "Anti-Communism, Race, and Structuration: Newspaper Coverage of the Labor and Desegregation Movements in the South, 1932-40 and 1953-61," *Journalism & Communication Monograph* 4 No. 2 (Summer 2002): 49-107.

Robert B. Eleazer, "Churchman Sees Peril in 'Negro' Headlines," *Editor & Publisher*, 27 December 1947, p. 24

Nina Eliasoph, "Routines and the Making of Oppositional News," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (1988): 313-334.

"Emmett Till's Day in Court," *Life*, 3 October 1955, pp. 36-38.

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

Robert Entman, "Framing U.S. Coverage of International News: Contrasts in Narratives of the KAL and Iran Air Incidents," *Journal of Communication* 41 No. 4 (Autumn 1991): 6-27.

David P. Fan, "News Media Framing Sets Public Opinion that Drugs Is the Country's Most Important Problem," *Substance Use & Misuse* 31 No. 10 (1996): 1413-1421.

Elfriede Furisch and E.P. Lester, "Science Journalism under Scrutiny: A Textual Analysis of 'Science Times,'" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13 (1996): 24-43.

William Gamson, David Croeau, William Hoynes and Theodore Sasson, "Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992): 373-393.

Bill Gaskins, "The World According to *Life*: Racial Stereotyping and American Identity," *Afterimage* 21 No. 3 (Summer 1993).

- Noel P. Gist, "The Negro in the Daily Press," *Social Forces* 10 No. 3 (March 1932).
- David Halberstam, "Tallahatchie County Acquits a Peckerwood," *The Reporter*, 19 April 1956, pp 26-30.
- Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 No. 2 (1986).
- "How Integration Worked on One Newspaper Staff," *Nieman Reports* (October 1956): 39.
- "How the Till Case Changed Five Lives," *Jet*, 24 November 1955, pp. 10-13.
- Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Resurrecting Emmett Till: The Catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, No. 2 (November 1998): 179-188.
- William Bradford Huie, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi," *Look* 20 (January 24, 1956): 50.
- William Bradford Huie, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi," *Reader's Digest* 68 (April 1956): 63-68.
- "Integrating the News," *Time* (21 June 1963).
- Paula B. Johnson and David O. Sears, "Black Invisibility, the Press and the Los Angeles Riot," *American Journal of Sociology*, 76 No. 4 (January 1971): 698-721.
- Robert E. Johnson, "Bombing, Harassment Don't Stop Foot-Weary Negro Boycotters," *Jet*, 16 February 1956, p. 12.
- Robert E. Johnson, "What's Happening in Montgomery?," *Jet*, 11 October 1956, pp. 6-9.
- John Kaplan, "The *Life* Magazine Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore, 1958-1965," *Journalism History* 25 No. 4 (Winter 1999-2000): 126-139.
- Terry Ann Knopf, "Race, Riots, and Reporting," *Journal of Black Studies* 4 No. 3 (March 1964): 303-327.
- E. Lester, "Buying the Exotic 'Other:' Reading the 'Banana Republic' Mail Order Catalog," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 16 No. 2 (1992): 74-85.
- Paul Martin Lester, "African American Photo Coverage in Four U.S. Newspapers, 1937-1990," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 No. 2 (Summer 1994): 380-394.

Elli P. Lester-Roushanzamir and Usha Raman, "The Global Village in Atlanta: A Textual Analysis of Olympic News Coverage for Children in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 76 No. 4 (winter 1999): 699-712.

Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, "A Test of the News," *New Republic* 4 August 1920 reprinted in Tom Goldstein, ed., *Killing the Messenger: 100 Years of Media Criticism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989): 86-106.

Carolyn Martindale, "Changes in Newspaper Images of Black Americans," *Newspaper Research Journal* (Winter 1990), pp. 40-50.

Carolyn Martindale, "Coverage of Black Americans in Five Newspapers since 1950," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (Summer 1985): 321-328, 436.

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36 (1972): 176-187.

Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, "Accidental News: The Great Oil Spill as Local Occurrence and National Event," *American Journal of Sociology* 81 No. 2.

"Nation Horrified by Murder of Kidnapped Chicago Youth," *Jet*, 15 September 1955, pp. 6-9.

"Negro Gets Press Card by Appeal to Senate," *Editor & Publisher*, 22 March 1947, p. 13.

"Negroes Stop Riding Alabama Buses in Protest Over Jim Crow," *Jet* 22 December 1955, pp. 12-15.

T.E. Nelson and Z.M. Oxley, "Issue Framing Effects on Belief Importance and Opinion," *Journal of Politics* 61 (1999): 1040-1067.

Allan Nevins, "American Journalism and Its Historical Treatment," *Journalism Quarterly* 36 (Fall 1959).

David Paul Nord, "A Plea for *Journalism* History," *Journalism History* 15 (Spring 1988).

Charlotte G. O'Kelly, "Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement: Their Historical Relationship, 1827-1945," *Phylon* 43 No. 1 (First Quarter 1982).

Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication* 10 (1993).

Daniel W. Pfaff, "The Press and the Scottsboro Rape Cases, 1931-1932," *Journalism History* 1 No. 3 (Autumn 1974): 72-76.

Armistead Scott Pride, "Low Man on the Totem Pole," *Nieman Reports* (April 1955): 21.

Armistead S. Pride, "Negro Newspapers: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Journalism Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1951): 179-188.

"Profile: Robert Maynard," *Washington Journalism Review* (April 1981): 44.

L.D. Reddick, "The Bus Boycott in Montgomery," *Dissent* (Winter 1956). Reprinted in *Reporting Civil Rights: Part One, American Journalism, 1941-1963* (New York: Library of America, 2003).

Jane Rhodes, "The Visibility of Race and Media History," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 No. 2 (June 1993): 184-190.

Susan Dente Ross, "'Their Rising Voices': A Study of Civil Rights, Social Movements, and Advertising in the *New York Times*," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 75 No. 3 (Autumn 1998): 518-534.

"Say Boycott Law Wouldn't Work for Negroes Who Were Victims," *Jet*, 8 March 1956, pp. 8-11.

Michael Schudson, "Critical Response: A Revolution in Historiography?" *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4 (December 1987).

Mary Alice Sentman, "Black and White: Disparity in Coverage by *Life* Magazine from 1937 to 1972," *Journalism Quarterly* 60 No. 3 (Winter 1983): 501-508.

H. Shah, "News and the 'Self-production of Society': *Times of India* Coverage of Caste Conflict and Job Reservation in India," *Journalism Monographs* (December 1993).

Dhavan V. Shah, David Domke and Daniel B. Wackman, "To Thine Own Self Be True: Values, Framing, and Voter Decision-Making Strategies," *Communication Research* 23 No. 5 (October 1996): 509-560.

Gilbert W. Stewart, Jr., "He Erased the Color Line," *Nieman Reports* (October 1947): 12.

"The Strange Trial of the Till Kidnapers," *Jet*, 6 October 1955, pp. 6-11.

David E. Sumner, "Nashville, Nonviolence, and the Newspapers: The Convergence of Social Goals with News Values," *Howard Journal of Communications* 6 Nos. 1-2 (Oct. 1995): 102-113.

Nayda Terkildsen and Frauke Schnell, "How Media Frames Move Public Opinion: An Analysis of the Women's Movement," *Political Research Quarterly* 50 No. 4 (December 1997): 879-900.

John R. Tisdale, "Different Assignments, Different Perspectives: How Reporters Reconstruct the Emmett Till Civil Rights Murder Trial," *Oral History Review* 20 No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2002): 39-58.

Gaye Tuchman, "Content and Meaning: What's It All About," *American Behavioral Scientist* 33 No. 2 (1989).

Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newmen's Notion of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology* 77 No. 4 (1972): 660-671.

Susan M. Weill, "Conserving Racial Segregation in 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Mississippi Daily Press," *American Journalism* 16 No. 4 (Fall 1999): 77-99.

"Will Mississippi Whitewash the Emmett Till Slaying?," *Jet*, 22 September 1955, pp. 8-12.

Roger M. Williams, "A Regional Report: Newspapers of the South," *Columbia Journalism Review* (Summer 1967): 26-35.

Mose Wright, "How I Escaped from Mississippi," *Jet*, 13 October 1955, pp. 6-11.

"Youthful Minister's Humility Gives Boycotters New Spirit," *Jet*, 12 April 1956, pp. 22-26.

"30 Witnesses Tell World Why They Don't Ride Ala. Buses," *Jet*, 5 April 1956, pp. 8-10.

Newspapers

Birmingham World

Chicago Defender

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Jackson Clarion-Ledger

Montgomery Advertiser

New Orleans Times-Picayune

New York Times

Philadelphia Inquirer

Washington Post

Unpublished Studies

Gerald Baldasty, et. al., "News, Race and the Status Quo: The Case of Emmett Louis Till" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Journalism Historians Association, Portland, Oregon, October 1999).

Sharon A. Bramlett, "Southern vs. Northern Newspaper Coverage of a Race Crisis—The Lunch Counter Sit-In Movement, 1960-1964: An Assessment of Press Social Responsibility," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1987.

Jinx C. Broussard, "Savior or Scalawags: The Mississippi Black Press' Contrasting Coverage of Civil Rights Workers and Freedom Summer, June-August 1964," paper submitted to *American Journalism* (undated copy in author's files).

Elizabeth Ann Burch, "Framing an Environmental Controversy in India's English-language Press: A Study of Text in Context," Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1997.

Benjamin F. Clark, "The Editorial Reaction of Selected Southern Black Newspapers to the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968," Ph.D. dissertation, 1989, Howard University.

W. Lance Conn, "Crises in Black and White: The McComb, Mississippi *Enterprise-Journal's* Coverage of Racial News, 1961-64," Masters thesis, University of Mississippi, 1991.

Mary Frances Corey, "The World Though a Monocle: The *New Yorker* Magazine and Postwar American Culture, 1945-1953," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996.

Thomas Browning Cox III, "The Georgia Press Reacts to the Civil Rights Movement," Masters thesis, University of Georgia, 1974.

David R. Davies, "An Industry in Transition: Major Trends in American Daily Newspapers, 1945-1965," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1997.

David Domke, "The Press, Social Change, and Race Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1996.

Laurie Hayes Fluker, "The Making of a Medium and a Movement: National Broadcasting Company's Coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1996.

Adam Paul Green, "Selling the Race: Cultural Production and Notions of Community in Black Chicago, 1940-1955," Ph.D. dissertation, 1998, Yale University.

A.D. Grimshaw, "A Study in Social Violence: Urban Race Riots in the United States," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1959.

John H. Hanson, "An Evaluative Assertion Analysis of the Black Press during the Civil Rights Era: 1954-1968," Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 1997.

Robert Wright Hooker, "Race and the News Media in Mississippi, 1962-1964," Masters thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1971.

J. Prather Houser, "Treatment by Columbus Daily Newspapers of News regarding the Negro," Masters thesis, Ohio State University, 1925.

Doris Meadows, "Creed of Caste: Journalism and the Race Question during the Progressive Era, 1900-1914," Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1984.

Kevin Petrich, "A Content and Textual Analysis of ABC's 'World News Tonight' and PBS' 'MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour' Coverage of the Clinton Health Care Plan," Masters thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 1995.

Jane Rhodes, "Racial Coverage of the 1950s Print Media and the Case of Emmett Till" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Texas, August 1987).

Enrique Dubois Rigsby, "A Rhetorical Clash with the Established Order: An Analysis of Protest Strategies and Perceptions of Media Responses, Birmingham, 1963," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1990.

Ilia Rodriguez, "Journalism, Development, and the Reworking of Modernity: News Reporting and the Construction of Local Narratives of Modernization in Puerto Rico during Operating Bootstrap (1943-1963)," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999.

Bonnie Lou Ross, "Interpretations of the Black Civil Rights Movement in the Black and White Press," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1985.

Valerie Stephanie Sadler, "A Content Analysis of *Ebony's* and *Life's* 1955-1965 Reporting on Black Civil Rights Movement Issues," Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio University, 1984.

Andrew McDowd Secrest, "In Black and White: Press Opinion and Race Relations in South Carolina, 1954-1964," Masters thesis, Duke University, 1971.

Larry Hawthorne Spruill, "Southern Exposure: Photography and the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1968," Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1983.

Glenda Einetta Suber, "The Eclecticism of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Media Style: An Exegesis of Media Consciousness and Strategy," Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1994.

David E. Sumner, "The Local Press and the Nashville Student Movement, 1960," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1989.

John R. Tisdale, "Medgar Evers (1925-1963) and the Mississippi Press," Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Texas, 1996.

Jane L. Twomey, "Constructing the Riot: An Ideological Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Riot in Five Newspapers," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland at College Park, 1998.

Angharad N. Valdivia, "Gender, Press and Revolution: A Textual Analysis of Three Newspapers in Nicaragua's Sandinista Period, 1979-1988," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991.

Susan M. Weill, "African Americans and the White-Owned Mississippi Press: An Analysis of Coverage from 1944 to 1984," Masters thesis, Jackson State University, 1993.

Susan M. Weill, "'In a Madhouse Din': Civil Rights Coverage by Mississippi's Daily Press, 1948-1968," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 1998.

Hugh Stephen Whitaker, "A Case Study in Southern Justice: The Emmett Till Case," Masters thesis, Florida State University, 1963.

Jung Hye Yang, "Mainstreaming America and Media Hegemony: How Network Television News Constructs the Meaning of the Toxic Waste Movement," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999.

Lamont Yeakey "The Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott, 1955-1956," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1979.

Video Transcripts

"Covering the South: A National Symposium on the Media and the Civil Rights Movement," University of Mississippi, April 3-5, 1987.

Ira Harkey, Jr., "Jim Crow Days—The Way We Were," Speech delivered 28 October 1992 at Bennett Auditorium, University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg).

Vita

Craig Flournoy is an assistant professor of journalism at Southern Methodist University. He was an investigative reporter for the *Dallas Morning News* for 22 years. Flournoy's work has been recognized with more than 50 state and national awards for journalistic excellence including the 1986 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting—the first Pulitzer ever awarded to the *Dallas Morning News*.

He graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in history with honors in 1975 from the University of New Orleans where he studied under Dr. Stephen E. Ambrose. He graduated with a master's degree in history in 1986 from Southern Methodist University. In 1997-98, he was the Phillip G. Warner Professor of Journalism at Sam Houston State University, the only working journalist ever to hold that endowed chair. In 2003 he became the first person to earn a doctorate from the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.