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# **“Power, Poison, Pain & Joy”: Applying a Critical Race Conceptual Model of Implicit Racial Bias to Narratives Framing Blackness in Black Sports Columns, Black Music, and Black Journalism**

Christina Lauren Myers

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**“POWER, POISON, PAIN & JOY”: APPLYING A CRITICAL RACE CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF  
IMPLICIT RACIAL BIAS TO NARRATIVES FRAMING BLACKNESS IN  
BLACK SPORTS COLUMNS, BLACK MUSIC, AND BLACK JOURNALISM**

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## **DEDICATION**

To my Heavenly Father, God, and Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, thank you for your unmerited Grace and Mercy. I owe all that I am to You. Team Myers – Mom, Dad, Robert, David, Kristian and David, II (Button) – thank you for your unwavering love, persistent prayers, and endless encouragement. And to my ancestors – who endured so that I could thrive, fought so that I could take flight and shouldered the burdens so that I could be bold in my convictions in pursuit of academic excellence – thank you for your sacrifices. I dedicate this dissertation to you, with love.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Great is Thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

The words of this hymn – pinned by Thomas Chisholm – illustrates the sentiments of my heart during this doctoral journey as I am overwhelmed with immense gratitude for this tremendous blessing I have been afforded. I often reflect on all those who have come before me, allowing my path to be a little easier – Georgiana Simpson, Sadie Alexander and Eva Dykes – Black women and Black scholars who have defined their moments in history thus treading a clearer path for myself and others who have endeavored on this academic journey. I also often reflect on those who may come after me, inspired to use their intellect and passion for scholarship to make a profound impact and foster equitable opportunities for those who have been systemically silenced, ignored, and undervalued. And while my passion for this work inspired and provided the catalyst for my dissertation journey, if it were not for my faith, my family, and my village, it would not have been possible.

Thank you to the Myers Family – my gift from God – who have been a constant source of support during this journey. Every dream, every vision, and every possibility I have conceived has been met with much love, prayer, and encouragement from you. I

share this victory with you with sincere love and appreciation. Thank you to my village which includes a host of church members, longtime friends, colleagues as well as University of South Carolina J-School professors and instructors who have cheered me on during this process. Your support during this endeavor has been much appreciated. And last, but certainly not least, thank you to my dynamic dissertation committee. Dr. Leigh Moscovitz, thank you for your guidance during this journey, helping me to dig deeper in my exploration of the intersections of race and sports. Dr. Allison Anders, thank you for always creating space, allowing your passion for scholarship and empathetic sentiments shine bright during tough times in our society when issues of race and systemic racism captivated our attentions, and for always sharing the simple yet powerful statement that “life is full.” Dr. Mary Anne Fitzpatrick – my Dean – thank you for your mentorship, for always having my best interest at heart and for being a leader with a sincere passion for shaping the minds of young scholars. You serve as an exemplar for what I hope to accomplish in academia. And to the best Committee Chair, Dr. Kenneth Campbell, thank you. Your impact – your mentorship – has meant more to me than words can describe. You have demonstrated to me the significance of being a Black scholar through your teaching and guidance. Thank you for always allowing space for me to share, being unselfish with your time and for inspiring me to pursue professorship. Representation matters, and as my first Black professor, you have made a lasting impact.

I have long felt that my purpose in life is to make a profound impact on other people’s lives, and through the gift of journalism I continue to realize my vision. As I

enter the next phase of my academic journey with my new family at Michigan State University, I realize this purpose-driven work will continue to make the impact I have long desired. My research, this dissertation – this doctoral degree – is not for me. It's bigger than me. I do this work for my family, my village and for future generations in honor of my ancestors who were deprived of scholastic and professional opportunities.

Great is thy faithfulness. Thank you, God, for your grace and mercies.

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation presents a Critical Race Conceptual Model of Implicit Racial Bias to representations of African Americans in mass media to illustrate how stereotypical depictions and racist ideologies arise in media content, including by Black content creators. By bridging the concepts of implicit bias, framing theory and concepts from critical race theory through the conceptual model, I contend that content creators implicitly share racially biased beliefs. Moreover, Black content creators in expressing the authentic experiences of the Black community also do the same. Thus, Black content creators further stereotypes, majoritarian narratives as well as deficit perspectives about the Black community while defining Blackness for outside groups. I apply my Critical Race Conceptual Model of Implicit Racial Bias to illustrate how implicit racial bias reveals itself in three different types of content created by varied Black media content creators: Kendrick Lamar's album DAMN., Black sports columns in *Andscape* and in my journalistic coverage on the Black community.



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## INTRODUCTION

Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological “race” ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before (Morrison, 2007, p. 63).

Racism in the United States of America endures and has been sustained through generations (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, 1990; Crenshaw, 1995; Lopez, 2020). And mass media is a principal and powerful authority for this endemic treatment of marginalized individuals because of its unrelenting role in ascribing meaning, shaping perceptions and constructing elitist societal definitions of race wherein the implications have disproportionately impacted Black and brown people (Martindale, 1996; Hall, 1999; Gorham, 1999; Fujioka, 2005). Systemic racism is a byproduct of the vestiges of slavery, and is maintained through government policies and institutions, social and cultural practices, and mass media practices that support systems of White supremacy which have been oppressing and silencing the Black community since their African ancestors' capture and enslavement to this land (Lopez, 2020). Much of what society has construed as the Black experience in the United States began with the institution of slavery in 1619 that was based on White supremacist and racist ideologies which

suggest Black physical bodies were born inferior due to the hue of their skin (Crenshaw, 1990; Feagin, 2020; Hall, 1997; Hannah-Jones, 2021). The hegemonic function of mass media, through its representation of Blacks over the years, has perpetuated dominant White racial consciousness that upholds the systemic and historical subordination of Black people and conscious disregard of the authentic Black experience in the United States thus allowing for racist ideologies about Black social positioning and intellect – every aspect of the Black experience including in-group and out-group perceptions (Du Bois, 1903; Feagin, 1999, 2020; Hall, 1997; Hall, 2000). Critical race theory (CRT) scholarship recognizes the pervasiveness of racism suggesting it is a permanent, “common, everyday lived experience for people of color” and individuals in society are “socially constructed based on a system of power relations that favors the majority” (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 7-10). As a primary arbiter of upholding such systems of domination in mainstream media – a cultural powerhouse – orchestrates narratives about race and racism that is are then shared to audiences in various forms (Lopez, 2020). Critical cultural scholar Stuart Hall suggests the media are the “main sphere of operations,” a catalyst by which ideas about race are developed and disseminated as their imagery provides a place where “ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated” (Hall, 2003, p. 20; Hall, 2020, p. 271). Hall (2020) states: The media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the ‘problem of race’ is understood to be. They help to classify our world in terms of the categories of race (p. 273).

In mass media, Black people are often subjected to negative stereotypical depictions of their lived experiences (Castañeda, 2018; Fuochi, 2020; Stamps, 2020) in a society that has been shaped by discriminatory practices and principles deeply ingrained in what became U.S. culture since the institution of slavery (Du Bois, 1903; Feagin, 1999; Salter et al., 2017). The lingering vestiges of slavery have had a reverberating effect on the perceived realities of Black people in the U.S., realities which can be further personified in mass media by the transferring of demeaning, stereotypical representations, and judgments. Such inaccurate and disturbing perceived realities can be consequential when considering the collateral damage those depictions may incite as they become the realities on which people, regardless of race, operate and understand society (Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Martindale, 1996; Hall, 1999; Gorham, 1999; Coover, 2001; Fujioka, 2005).

Literature on stereotypes and mass communication (Patierno & Talreja, 1997) has indicated how mass media is an “undeniable contributor” to the racial environment to which people’s “attitudes and decisions” about racial ideals are based (Fujioka, 2005, p. 464). What is reflected through mass media, according to Stuart Hall, a critical culture scholar who is a leading thinker on ideology in mass media content, are not only explicit racial representations, or stereotypes, but also implicit racial representations that present what Hall would characterize as the “double syntax of racism” (Hall, 2006, p. 9), where double-sided, inconsistent and conflicting representations about Black people are constantly being shared.

Implicit racial representations are the automatic and unconscious racial attitudes about a racial group. To study implicit racial representations in mass media content, this dissertation applies concepts from Implicit Racial Bias literature and concepts from critical race theory to framing representations of Black people in mass media in order to better understand and explain the persistent presence of stereotypical depictions and racist ideologies in mass mediated content. To the myknowledge, this will be the first scholarship to meld concepts of implicit racial bias, critical race theory and mass communication's framing theory in the study of racial representations in the media. The concepts will be used to explain how implicit racial ideologies continue to perpetuate a distorted perception of the essence and realities of being Black in the United States. These interpretations, this dissertation suggests, may be based on implicit biases of the content creator, which are unconscious attitudes that typically go unrecognized or unacknowledged by the content creator themselves. This is of considerable importance as racial representations have become so naturalized in society – and furthered by mainstream media – that what is the perceived reality of Black people is solidified as fact and the interlocking structures of privilege and power create systems of oppression though not explicitly identifiable (Collins, 2004; Hall, 2006; Hall, 2020). Hall (2006) emphasizes this complex duality – especially for Black people – by noting:

[R]epresentations of Blacks keeps at different times exhibiting this split double structure. Devoted, dependent, childlike, the Blacks are simultaneously unreliable, unpredictable, and undependable, capable of turning nasty, plotting treachery as soon as you turn your back. And despite being the object of an infinite benevolence, they're inexplicably in a society predicated on freedom, given to escaping from us along the Freedom Trail. (p. 9)

Guided by critical race theory, my dissertation seeks to confront systemic racism in mass media while promoting systemic changes in the communications industry by assessing narratives on depictions, or frames, of Blackness. Critical Race theorists argue that systemic racism impacts every facet of society. Its concepts confront and challenge the way race and racial power are manifested, wielded, represented and exerted in U.S. society (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Critical Race theorists seek to dismantle, disrupt and confront racist ideologies and institutional structures (West, 1995) and many critical race scholars do so by engaging in social justice scholarship with aims of liberation, engaging initiatives that challenge dominant ideologies and center the experiences of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Not only are media content creators who are not Black subject to the influence of systemic racism, Black media content creators may also be influenced given the powerful ubiquitous presence of the media. For that reason, I focus on the influence of Black content creators.

Through the multiple lenses of critical race theory, framing theory, and the concept of implicit bias, I analyze representations of Blackness in media content created by Black content creators. Specifically, I selected music lyrics by a Black artist – whose Hip-Hop album earned the highest distinction in literary works – and sports media commentary by Black analysts. In a unique approach to this area of analysis, I will also provide a reflexive examination of my journalism practices in stories about Blackness. In all three examples, the purpose is to assess how implicit racial bias manifests in media work, as an indication of the invisible but powerful role this concept plays in real life.

Additionally, my analysis makes a significant contribution to critical race and mass communications scholarship by introducing a conceptual model that explains the creation and presence of implicit racial bias in media content. The conceptual model I created will be used to build theory that bridges critical race theory to concepts in mass communication's framing to provide better understanding on the intersection of media, race and stereotypes. Often, literature tries to explain cognitive processes associated with behaviors of those who are exposed to mass media content, and not of those who create it (Devine, 1989; Abraham, 2011; Dukes, 2017; Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). The author suggests implicit racial bias, stereotypes and racist ideology, which are shaped by the historical, cultural and societal influences (Dovidio et al., 2013; Salter et al., 2017; Payne et al., 2019) of content creators, allow for inherently prejudiced belief systems to be disseminated and reinforced by mass media. The authors' conceptual model explains that presence of implicit racial bias is indicative of the subtle insertions of stereotypical imagery and racist ideologies in mass media. Thus, this dissertation examines racial narrative creation among Black content creators.

Although many framing studies examine race and media representations (Brunken, 2006; Campbell & Wiggins, 2015; Feagin, 2003; Feagin, 2020; Hall, 2003; Haider-Markel et al., 2007; Lane et al., 2020; Moody-Ramirez & Cole, 2018) and implicit bias scholarship has focused on issues of race (Benjali & Greenwald, 2013; Eberhardt, 2019; Fiarman, 2016; Jacoby-Senhor et al., 2016; Ryn & Saha, 2011), utilizing the two concepts – alone – were deemed insufficient for the purposes of this dissertation. The inclusion of critical race theory as the foundational lens for this study, allows for a more



robust and impactful approach and analysis to this dissertation as the hegemonic function of racist ideologies and White supremacy underscore the persistence of negative stereotypes and which may also explain the presence of implicit racial bias in mass-mediated content. While framing theory scholars have introduced the concept of power in mass media (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Entman, 2007), it falls short of connecting the significance of institutional and organizational structures to historical hegemonic structures that suppress Black people. Similarly – to my knowledge – this discourse is lacking in implicit bias scholarship.

Storytelling is essential to preserving the rich cultures, traditions, values and voices of generations (Salter et al., 2018). However, endemic to the foundations of this country is the persistence of deficit perspectives and majoritarian narratives in textual and visual narratives (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Deficit perspectives identify the cause of race-based inequities in mass media – such as stereotypes and racist ideologies – as a “function of ‘deficits’ within marginalized communities” while a majoritarian narrative “distorts and silences the experiences of people of color” (Cabrera, 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Yosso (2005) notes:

CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. (p. 69)

Mass media serves as an institutionalized practice of silencing people of color by its negligence to center their experiences in message creation (Lawrence-M, 1987; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Systemic erasure of narratives evolved from the early

foundations of this country through the establishment of the court system, and since its inception, European-descendant, White perspectives have controlled such accounts (Lawrence, 1987; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Yosso et al.'s (2004) exploration of color-blind affirmative action suggests there are societal systems in place that seek to silence "the history of racism in the United States and dismiss the contemporary experiences of people of color" (p. 13). The court system is rooted in the foundations of U.S. democracy, solidifying precedence that serves as the historical archives for narrative creation (Lawrence-M, 1987; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), thus serving as the authoritative, White-washed voice of society. The law serves as a means of authority in which the judicial system determines whether an entity will receive justice for presumed wrongdoings. Having such control of civil liberties by determining which individuals or entities receive justice means that current and perceived wrongdoings are held to a standard based on previous ideals of what constitutes legality from White framers.

The critical race theory framework "confronts race-neutrality" and "acknowledges the value of the Black voice that is often marginalized in mainstream theory, policy and practice" (Hylton, 2009). Kimberlé Crenshaw, a principal figure in critical race scholarship, suggests identity categories such as race and gender "are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination...as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Delgado et al. (2017) offer the following assumptions for critical race theory:

- (1) Racism exists in everyday society and operates to benefit the White elite

- (2) Racism advances interests of Whites thus causing them to be unmotivated to eliminate it
- (3) Race is a social construct, created and manipulated by society.
- (4) Minority groups are “racialized” by society as a means to benefit the dominant group (p. 5).
- (5) Individuals do not have single, easily identified identities.
- (6) Centering the experiences of Black and brown individuals allows for their voices to be heard through counter-storytelling.

Critical to understanding the perspective of the Black athletes includes having an understanding of the cognitive processes through which they perceive themselves in context to the society they’re in. Black identity theory seeks to explain this dynamic by examining how one’s perceptions of self is exemplified because of societal circumstances which may be reinforced by communications and contribute to power dynamics that are already implicit in a White, dominant society. “Individuals view themselves in relation to their group,” (Richardson et al., 2013, p. 1078), and self-conception or self-identity of African Americans has largely been attributed to the vestiges of slavery, creating a duality and psychological turmoil within the Black community. “Du Bois recognized that African Americans could forge a healthy, strong self-concept even with the stigma of being devalued by the larger society,” (Sellers, 1998, p. 21). Self-identity development is based in part by how people view themselves which is subjective and significantly affected by social, political and cultural experiences

(Miller, 2010). Du Bois (1903), spoke to this ideal in his famed literary work, *The Souls of Black Folk*:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. (p. 9)

Du Bois (1903) introduced the revelatory concept of double consciousness to illustrate the dynamics surrounding race, which describes the, “power of White stereotypes in Black life,” “practical racism” that shunned Black Americans from mainstream society and reconciling one’s identity as Black and American (Bruce, 1992). Bruce (1992) in the study “Du Bois’ Idea of Double Consciousness,” suggests DuBois sought to provide, “a reference point” to understand racism (p. 307). “...Du Bois was attempting a rhetorical synthesis of his own...between two key senses...one created by racism; the other, by conflicting perspective on life,” (Bruce, 1992, p. 306). This longing and internal strife characterized by Du Bois, one could argue, is compounded by the racial tension, mistreatment and neglect of Black lives by power systems or mechanisms designed to continue to oppress the oppressed. The turmoil as experienced by Black people is not adequately and accurately articulated in mass media due to implicit ideologies that contribute to the meaning attributed to content creation and typically serve to maintain the status quo. These realities, however, could most likely be identified and precisely communicated through the words of those who live and breathe

the experiences. Considering this, the exclusive exploration and narrative analysis of messaging from Black content creators serves as a viable means to understanding how Black creators can either further majoritarian narratives and/or bolster deficit perspectives.

In response to the social struggles and civil rights movements of the 60s and 70s, there was a critical cultural turn in mass communication scholarship where scholars began to focus on representations and ideologies pertaining to class, gender, race and ethnicity in mass media (Kellner, 2015; Taylor & Lindlof, 2017). And these scholars were among the first to study the media as cultural agents producing cultural products and cultural effects of influence on its audiences (Hall, 2018; Kellner, 2015; Taylor & Lindlof, 2017). Critical studies seek to illustrate how media culture speaks to dominate ideologies in society. Centering the Black experience, race and racism is essential to critical race theory scholarship as it helps to establish counter narratives or stories formed by predominate, White society (Lopez, 2003, p. 84). Leading scholar in critical race theory in higher education, Milner (2008), suggests, “knowledge can and should be generated through the narratives and counter narratives that emerge from and with people of color. Critical race theory’s advancement of the narrative and counter narrative centralizes race for the knower and for the known” (p. 343). Building this counter narrative that is prevalent in American society, involves examining the predominate messages that contribute to these accounts in mass media. Racial inequities that are represented in the media mirrors racial inequities in society, and in order to “understand racially biased media images, we must look at the underlying

patterns of racial inequality” (Sonnett et al., 2015, p. 331). In the 2020 book “Race and Media: Critical Approaches,” Lopez suggests that critical analysis requires understanding the media industry as racist, adding:

Racial inequalities are upheld through the conscious and unconscious decisions made by those in power; by the recurrent patterns that have been established over time and whose impact spans generations; by the policies, architectures, infrastructures, geographies, and technologies that uphold the decisions of their creators long after those individuals are gone; and by the educational materials and mediated narratives that convey our understanding of the world. (p. 17)

Understanding media effects is, of course, a major component of mass communication scholarship; however, this dissertation specifically examines what circumstances give rise to the creation of media effects. Specifically, this work is concerned with what environmental and/or societal circumstances contribute to the process of creating the content that highlights deficit perspectives and furthers systemically held, dominant narratives concerning the black experience. As such, Chapter one will present a literature review that examines literature on framing theory, ideology, Black stereotypes in mass media, implicit racial bias and concepts from critical race theory central to the project by explicating its theoretical framework and providing a comprehensive history of the concepts. Chapter two will present my critical race conceptual model of implicit racial bias as a tool for explaining how implicit racial bias arises in media content. The chapter will end with a presentation of the research questions. Chapter three will present the methodology, which will be a qualitative textual analysis. Chapters four and five will provide exemplars in sports media and Black music demonstrating how racist ideologies arise in media content. Chapter six will include a narrative on the author’s journalistic experience in the context of this

dissertation. Chapter seven will discuss the practical and theoretical implications and significance of this work as well as the contributions of my conceptual model.

## **CHAPTER 1: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

Slavery, “the root of all prejudice,” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 10), legally sanctioned segregation and discrimination against Black people developed out of the racist ideologies of White, European colonizers who settled on this land, crafted our courts, solidifying historical narratives that produce racist ideologies and stereotypes. Narratives are “the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11) which allows individuals “to interpret new experiences as narrative and life imitate and emulate one another (Souto-Manning, 2014). Racism justified by the subordination of Black people has been rationalized in society through racist ideologies and stereotypes that have historically become normalized (Crenshaw, 1990). Crenshaw (1990) adds:

Throughout American history, the subordination of Blacks was rationalized by a series of stereotypes and beliefs that made their conditions appear logical and natural. Historically, White supremacy has been premised upon various political, scientific and religious theories, each of which relies on racial characterizations and stereotypes about Blacks which have coalesced into an extensive legitimating ideology. (p. 112)

Media assigned to Black people in mass media content is widely shaped by individuals who have little exposure to or understanding of the experiences of Black people (Feagin, 1999; Hall, 1997; Hall, 2003). As such, these content creators may not be able to escape an unconscious consciousness that is molded by the underpinnings of racism in American society (Hall, 1997; Hall, 2003; Schalk, 2011; Dovidio et al., 2013;



Salter et al., 2018; Payne et al., 2019). That unconscious consciousness plays out in the form of explicit and implicit racial bias. Lane et al. (2020) suggests:

Mass media meets recommended or endorsed biases at the most fundamental levels – consistent framing in favor of capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, individualism, consumerism and White privilege – that help allocate power in American history. (pp. 19-20)

Thus, this dissertation examines the circumstances that contribute to narrative creation, critical to understanding the power of mass media. And in order to understand these dynamics, an exploration of framing theory, critical race theory, implicit racial bias and its intersections will be employed to determine how racist ideologies, stereotypes, deficit perspectives and majoritarian narratives contribute to the perceptions of Blackness in society.

### **1.1 Framing Theory**

Framing theory has been selected for the dissertation to address conscious and unconscious cultural and cognitive connections in the process of mass communications, particularly related to meaning assignment and meaning making by content creators. This dissertation contends that the work of the content creators is expressed in frames, which influence, if not outright determine, the meaning ascribed by media consumers. Therefore, framing theory is significant guidance for this dissertation.

The concept of framing is credited to sociologist Erving Goffman who coined the term in his 1974 book, *Frame Analysis*. He operationalized frames as culturally determined definitions of reality that allow people to make sense of objects or events; frames, he posited, are the product of the larger culture shared within a culture. Goffman suggests that frames operate subconsciously so that individuals can sort

through collections of information in order to ascribe a meaning to navigate through life and makes sense of society (Goffman, 1974; Lane et al., 2020). Gitlin (1980) suggests that media frames are largely unrecognized but have the ability to shape one's understanding of the world for both the individual who creates the narrative as well as for those who rely on the message. Gitlin (1980) viewed frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse" (p. 7). His conceptual understanding of framing focused on the material that is left out of reporting and what that may suggest about the formation of the frame and ultimately the meaning ascribed to the content. An important conceptualization of framing – and one that will be used in this dissertation work – is that of Entman's (1993). In his popular definition -- which was the most widely cited in framing research published in communication journals between 1990 and 2005 (Matthes, 2009) -- Entman suggests that frames are scattered conceptualizations in which one aspect of reality is made more salient than another, which may promote a particular problem definition, causal interaction, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation. In other words, fully developed frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). Entman later extended his definition in his 2007 study titled "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," explaining framing as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (p. 164).

Framing analysis “examines the selection and salience” of an issue through images, stereotypes, messages, metaphors and key individuals (Matthes, 2009, p. 349). The transfer of prominence, issue salience, or attributes in the minds of the audience is why McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (2007) consider framing an extension of agenda-setting, which posits that the media tells the audience what to think when media place greater significance on certain news stories over others. Second-level agenda setting, the term McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (2007) use for the concept of framing, describes the impact of issue salience on audiences’ understanding of the news (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997). Entman, too, spoke to issue salience in communication, suggesting it is evident through the placement or repetition of textual information or by associating issues to familiar cultural symbols (Entman, 1993). Framing shapes the audience’s interpretations through priming, which Entman defines as raising the perceived “importance of certain ideas, activating schemas” that encourage an audience to act, think or feel a certain way (Entman, 2007, p. 164).

Frames can guide an individual’s thoughts about an event or issue in “predictable ways to predictable conclusions” by making certain features of an event salient or more visible (Gross & D’Ambrosio, 2004, p. 3), but media frames must be always in negotiation with individual frames, which can be operationalized as people’s predispositions. In an experiment in 2004, Gross and D’Ambrosio compared the emotional responses of students when exposed to newspaper articles about the 1992 Los Angeles riots that emphasized underlying social conditions as the cause of the riots. They found that individual’s predispositions or biases can mediate the effect of frames

on opinions. Their research supports the idea of “affective effects of framing,” revealing frames may influence an audience’s opinions and emotional responses often mediated by racial and ideological predispositions (Gross & D’Ambrosio, 2004). Media consumers have their own, individual frame(s) prior to consuming media content. Iyengar (1991) noted, “framing effects are limited or enhanced by built in preferences for particular attributions” (p. 117). In other words, framing effects are dependent on predispositions or preexisting attitudes.

Therefore, it can be expected that journalists and other media content creators also have individual frames highlighting their racial consciousness, which may influence their decision-making. For example, journalists reporting the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana – a predominately Black parish – indicated news coverage skewed their experiences, overwhelmingly, negatively toward issues of rape and violence, and these racially infused frames play a significant role in how this latent political and social economic issue was perceived in the media (Bureau, 2021; Brunken, 2006; Harider-Markel et al., 2007). Campbell and Wiggins’ (2015) analysis of columns published by three Black Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists found that their framing of the first African American President, Barack Obama, indicated a duality where racial consciousness shaped the narratives of their opinion pieces. In the context of this dissertation, it is worth noting the racial identity of the columnists as the findings indicate the historical, racial elements that have long been attached to the Black experience in the United States. Campbell and Wiggins (2015) support this notion, adding:

To ignore it does not remove it but rather creates a different frame of race, such as a post-racial frame that race is no longer an issue in politics and society. The fact that the African American columnists chose it, consciously or not, indicates the power of race as the basis of a frame...(p. 193).

Nelson and colleagues argue that the emphasis on the process of framing is not necessarily on issue salience, but how frames influence opinions through stressing specific values or facts, intimating a greater perceived relevance to the issue which may not be apparent under an alternate frame (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997). This idea that framing may involve a process of selection, prominence and omission was first introduced by Gitlin (1980) and furthered by subsequent scholars (Edelman, 1993; Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007; Coleman & Chen, 2020). Entman and Rojecki (1993) note “in analyzing frames, it is as necessary to identify omissions in coverage as inclusions,” and “describing voids” involves critical analysis (p. 157). As such, the unconscious decision to either eliminate or include certain perspectives frames the message or narrative in a lens that may be implicitly formed by self-perception, biases and ideologies. Crenshaw, in her exploration of the intersectionality of race and gender in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*, surmises this idea of framing – without using such term – in the movie *The Color Purple*. Crenshaw (1990) notes:

[R]epresentations of Black violence – whether statistical or fictional – are often written into a larger script that consistently portrays Black and other minority communities as pathologically violent. The problem, however, is not so much the portrayal of violence itself as it is the absence of other narratives and images portraying a fuller range of Black experience. Suppression of some of these issues in the name of antiracism imposes real costs. (p. 1256)

Journalistic frames, which Brüggemann (2014) defined as cognitive patterns of interpretation by individual journalists, create the news frames. News frames, defined as “patterns of meaning articulated in news content” by Brüggemann (2014, p.63), can be conceptualized as either generic or issue-specific frames (Iyengar, 1991). Generic frames include the *conflict frame*, which emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest; the *human interest frame*, which brings an emotional angle to the presentation of the event, issue or problem; the *economic consequences frame*, which reports events, problems or issues in terms of their economic consequences; the *morality frame*, which puts the issue in the context of religious or moral tenets; and the *responsibility frame*, which attributes the responsibility, cause or solution to the problem to either the government or individuals (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Frames can be classified as Thematic or Episodic. Episodic frames focus on an individual event while thematic frames cover the issue in terms of its larger historical context. Framing of an issue can be influenced by social, structural or organizational variables as well as individual or ideological variables (Scheufele, 1999). Brüggemann (2014) suggests there are two journalistic framing practices – frame setting and frame sending. “Frame setting implies that journalists mostly frame their coverage in line with their personal interpretations of what is at issue,” and “frame sending denotes the practice of merely relaying the frames as presented by different public actors” (Brüggemann, 2014, p. 64). The actors are the sources used in news coverage. Brüggemann’s (2014) study identifying the mechanisms and factors that determine journalistic framing suggests that journalists draw on issues

that are “culturally and cognitively” available to them while creating a news frame (p. 68).

Framing is effective in shaping the considerations people consider as they are “cognitive misers” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 117), susceptible to the very frames formulated in content creation. And for those who control the narratives – the elite – they are able to “wage a war” by using their privilege in crafting frames as a form of subordination as “they know *their* frame becomes the dominant way of thinking about a particular problem” controlling “the battle” of public opinion (Nelson & Kinder, 1996, p. 1058). Previous literature has alluded to the contention that journalists are also “cognitive misers,” using mental shortcuts to make judgements or draw conclusions, equally susceptible to frames (Scheufele, 1999, p. 117). “There is a reciprocity in framing that the top-down depiction omits,” according to Rhodebeck (1998, p. 5); the top-down characterization refers to framing as a hierarchical process starting at the top with elites, then to interest groups or mass media (Scheufele, 1999). Reese defines frames as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.” He clarifies that a “frame is not the same as the texts through which it manifests itself” (Reese, 2001, p. 5). Rather, he says, a frame is an abstract understanding shaped by cultural logic that provides the structure or meaning of the texts (Shahin, 2014). Reese (2001) argues that “framing is concerned with the way interests, communicators, sources and culture combine to yield coherent ways of understanding the world, which are developed using all of the available verbal and visual symbolic resources” (Reese, 2001, p. 5). Reese’s definition

emphasizes the persistent and “routine” use of the frame over time, which is of considerable importance in the context of the conceptual model that will be introduced in this dissertation.

Scholarly literature on media framing has widely focused on the use of framing in mass media in relation to the political climate and how media is leveraged or contributes to embolden messages of the elite, the frame influencing the exertion of political power in news text (Entman, 1993). Nelson and Kinder in their 1996 study, “Issue Framing and Group-centrism in American Public Opinion,” suggests that framing is invented by the elites, carried out by mass media and influences public opinion by defining the considerations the audience takes seriously. The Nelson and Kinder study involved a series of experiments interviewing Americans of voting-age about their beliefs on three issues: assistance to the poor, federal spending to fight AIDS and their preferences on hiring and promoting African Americans. The authors concluded that symbols or visual cues connected the given issues with deeper beliefs of the individual, attitudes that they were not consciously aware of or considered relevant. “Arguments or images that spotlight social groups may activate stereotypes and prejudice. Group sentiments then become the dominant guideposts for evaluation of public policy, crowding out other, perhaps more worthy considerations, such as the cost and effectiveness of the proposed policy of the principles the policy might advance” (Nelson & Kinder, 1996, p. 1074). In the study, “Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power,” Entman examined agenda setting, framing and priming under the umbrella of bias in an attempt to advance the understanding of the media’s role in distributing



power in political communication. He sought to explain the role of mainstream media as political actors and conservatives leveraging the idea of a “liberal” mainstream media for their advantage. Entman defines the terms slant and bias to illustrate what he perceives as a clear distinction between the concepts. According to Entman, slant “characterizes individual news reports and editorials in which the framing favors one side over the other in a current or potential dispute,” while bias is “consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts over the use of government power” (Entman, 2007, p. 166).

Entman later modifies his definition of slant in his study, “Media Framing Biases and Political Power: Explaining Slant in News of Campaign 2008,” to clarify the media’s emphasis on one side’s preferred frame and ignoring another side’s in a political conflict (Entman, 2010). According to Entman, “the media’s decision biases operate within the minds of individual journalists and within the processes of journalistic institutions, embodied in rules and norms that guide their processing of information and influence the framing of media texts” (Entman, 2007, p. 166).

Whether it is the “selection of aspects of perceived realities” or “culling a few elements of perceived reality,” this dissertation suggests framing involves making choices which may be influenced by personal prejudices shaped by societal, environmental and biological factors such as race, culture, economics and media organization. This process of consciously and unconsciously determining what aspects to re-present is a concept critical cultural scholar Stuart Hall (2003) emphasizes in his work on ideology and representations in the media. The way the media depict issues relevant

to the realities of the Black community is an important consideration as readily acceptable ideals – or stereotypes – in society are already rampant and contributing to a negative conception of African Americans, which is personified in mass media. Hall's "The Whites of their Eyes" addresses the idea of "mental frameworks," suggesting the presentation of events is a representation of an aspect of society which is culturally defined and shaped by the ideologies of the individual(s) who are presenting the message (Hall, 2003).

Mass media has the power to create, produce, reproduce, validate and solidify anti-Black and racist ideologies in society (Feagin, 2013; Lane et al., 2020). Race and gender sociologist J.R. Feagin's exploration of institutions spearheaded by white privilege has contributed to broader understandings of white, stereotyped racial framing and counter-framing through the conceptual framework of "white racial framing," which he described as a "centuries-old" white, worldview that involves persistent "racial construction of social reality by White Americans." It is a reality that furthers racist stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions and reactions to language accents as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate" (p. 4, 11). Feagin (2020) argues this White dominant racial frame in society has rationalized and legitimized systemic racism and supremacist ideals. In other words, White privilege coupled with power asserted in society allows White elitists to continue to frame oppression, systemic racism and discriminatory practices in society as justifiable – seemingly legitimizing White racial terror in the United States. Stereotypes and ideologies about African Americans that are socially constructed by dominant racial

groups wield their power to construct identities around race (Lane et al., 2020). Their pervasiveness and control in society allows for this white racial framing to appear as the norm, becoming naturalized in societal discourse.

For the purposes of this dissertation, framing is defined in the context of Gitlin's conceptual definition – the intentional inclusion and unintentional exclusion of textual and visual content that is shaped by the explicit and implicit influences of the creator of the media content. Consequently, framing creates the biased media content. Framing theory raises questions about not only how frames of race are created, but also their continued existence and possible influence. To begin to address those questions, the dissertation now turns to critical race theory.

## **1.2 Critical Race Theory and Bridging Mass Communication Perspectives**

Critical race theory (CRT) – a field of theoretical concepts that addresses the pervasiveness of racism in society – serves as the theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation, providing the lens to which this research is being analyzed (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado, 1989; Yosso et al., 2004). As such, it will provide context and guidance for the application of framing theory and implicit bias. Specifically, CRT concepts provide the language to address the pervasiveness of race and systemic racism and its intersections with historical, cultural and societal influences – critical in the understanding and application of my conceptual model which is to be presented. I suggest that implicit racial bias is inevitably present in mass-mediated content because of the foundations of the society to which content creators operate in – and this is irrespective of racial identity. Therefore, critical to this strong position is an

understanding of how endemic racism is in the United States, a project CRT scholars address.

Critical race scholarship arose in the early 1970s out of legal studies scholarship that sought to examine the underlying issues of power, White privilege and racist ideologies deeply ingrained in societal institutions and systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race work questions the “liberal order” as well as explores the intersections of “race, racism and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3) that contribute to the systemic oppression and silencing of narratives from Black and brown individuals. Critical analysis of deficit perspectives aids in critical race scholars’ pursuit of dismantling political and structural barriers that seek to impede equitable, social justice work. Critical race theory is widely inspired by the works of CRT pioneer and legal scholar Derrick Bell, whose expertise in law as a civil rights attorney during desegregation and leadership in legal scholarship on race relations and racism in the United States informed the movement.

Critical race scholars believe racism is normal, embedded in the fabric of the United States and “is a common, everyday lived experience for people of color” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7); race is a product of social thought and relation; believe in an anti-essentialist conception of identity which suggests sharing an identity trait does not intimate similar lived experiences; and narratives – centering the experiences of Black and brown individuals – can lead to a greater understanding of their authentic realities while combating majoritarian narratives that have historically operated to craft and affix a White-washed perspective to their realities.

### ***Counter-storytelling***

Critical race scholars contend storytelling is essential to the “survival and liberation” of oppressed individuals as society assaults Black and brown people with racist, stereotypical imagery they internalize (Delgado, 1989). The remedy to the pervasiveness of racism in a predominant, White society is through shared narratives of deficit perspectives. Richard Delgado – a foundational scholar in critical race scholarship as well as a leading thinker on critical race theory – provides analysis in his 1989 essay concerning storytelling by oppressed people, which he calls opposition narratives. He suggests “by becoming acquainted with the facts of their own historic oppression – with the violence, murder, deceit, co-optation, and connivance that have caused their desperate estate – members of outgroups gain healing” (p. 2437). Majoritarian stories are messages or narratives that indicate racial privilege or suggest racial privilege is natural. Majoritarian stories also “carry layers of assumptions that persons in positions of racialized privilege bring with them to discussions of racism, sexism, classism and other forms of subordination” (Solórzano and Yosso, 2020, p. 28).

Counter-storytelling is a method of sharing the narratives or experiences of marginalized individuals which are often left untold. Critical race scholars Solórzano and Yosso (2002) – building off the foundational work of Richard Delgado – suggests counter-storytelling is a “tool for exposing, analyzing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” and challenging the “dominant discourse on race” and “racial reform” (p. 32). The critical race scholars posit counter-storytelling allows the opportunity for individuals who have long been silenced to have their experiences

heard. And more than a tool for giving a voice to the oppressed, counter storytelling centers their experiences which “can help strengthen traditions of social, political and cultural survival and resistance” (p. 29).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) suggest counter-stories serve four main purposes:

1. They build community among the marginalized;
2. They challenge perceived knowledge of marginalized individuals by providing understanding and transformative ideologies through narratives;
3. They provide new perspectives into the realities of the lived experiences of people of color; and
4. They offer a new construction of reality by merging existing beliefs with actual experiences of those who have been silenced.

Critical race scholar Charles Lawrence, III (1987) indicates that oppressors do not recognize their oppression. As such, critical race theorists suggest in order to counter racist narratives, ideologies concerning people of color and challenge power structures shaped by a white perspectives, counter-stories, anecdotes and parables must be employed. This allows one to uncover the “self-serving” and traumatic purposes of the majoritarian narratives. Lawrence (1987) furthers this notion by stating that racism has historically and culturally played a dominant role in America, suggesting “because of this shared experience, we also inevitably share many ideas, attitudes and beliefs that attach significance to an individual’s race and induce negative feelings and opinions of nonwhites” (p. 322).

Delgado's contributions to discussions on systemic racism and the suppression of Black and brown voices could be attributed to his upbringings as the son of a Mexican American father who immigrated to the United States. "The Rodrigo Chronicles: Conversations about American and Race" is an example of Delgado's approach and application of counter storytelling – illustrating this method aimed at dismantling a majoritarian narrative. Delgado emphasizes the necessity of diverse voices and perspectives in all aspects of societal storytelling, whether it's in the context of legal case or in mass media. Delgado (1989) indicates that this component of critical race theory scholarship is intended to "suspend judgement" (p. 2415), furthering that notion by stating:

Counter stories...can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. They enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone. Counter stories can quicken and engage conscience. Their graphic quality can stir imagination in ways in which more conventional discourse cannot. (p. 2415)

The art of storytelling is essential to preserving the rich cultures, traditions, values and voices of generations. Counter-narratives disrupt, state what the majoritarian narrative is and delegitimizes it. However, Critical Race scholars argue that endemic to the foundations of this country is the practice of silencing people of color. And with the elimination of languages comes the elimination and subsequent lack of value in individual and collective identity that breeds diversity within a society. Thus, Critical Race scholars contend, the need for a new method of combating this systemic erasure of narratives is essential. Counter storytelling is a theoretical concept (Torres & Milun, 1995; Lawrence, 1995) and method (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) in CRT that

underscores the importance of sharing the narratives or experiences of marginalized individuals which are often left untold.

One area where the critical race theory concept of counter-narratives has been used effectively is the legal area, which is where CRT began. In the relative absence of CRT examples in mass communications scholarship, examples in the legal area are important for this dissertation because they identify the origins of majoritarian narrative creation and show how racist ideologies work to suppress people of color. One specific example, is the Mashpee case, where the White townspeople in hoping to keep stolen lands from the Mashpee sought to impose White cultural definitions of race and territory over the definitions of culture and territory that Indigenous Mashpee people have for themselves. From the critical race theory perspective and significant to the present research, the White townspeople of Mashpee win their case against Indigenous Mashpee people when the judge decides to apply White cultural definitions rather than Mashpee to the case. The experience of the Mashpee Indians illustrates how White culture becomes reproduced as norms in a court of law and contribute to “grand stories” or grand narratives in our larger social systems (Torres & Milun, 1990, p. 629).

Torres and Milun (1990) suggest the courts offer a mirror to society where laws are the mechanism of “recording a culture’s practices of telling and listening to its stories” (p. 178). The Mashpee people were seeking to recover their tribal land taken from them for over 200 years, which was in violation of the Indian Non-Intercourse Act of 1790 that requires federal approval before Native land could be sold and transferred to non- Native people. The tribe contended the land was taken from them and sold to



non-Indians (the Town of Mashpee) without federal approval. The town countered by saying the Indians were not protected by the act because they were not considered a “tribe.”

Having to adjust their language in order to adequately adhere to legal discourse and formulate their arguments is a prejudicial and oppressive byproduct of a system – built and framed by the white colonizers who stole their land. Torres and Milun (1990) characterize this as “the confrontation between irreconcilable systems of meaning produced by two contending cultures” (p. 178). Conforming one’s narratives or lived experiences in order to be acceptable and digestible for another, illustrates how the judicial system is skewed toward the white elite who control the rules, and thus the narratives of society, and dictate what is acceptable or right. Those in power have curated the “grand stories” or narratives that justify their actions and because they control the courts – the laws of this land – they are able to dictate what is and is not acceptable in this society. The power of this institution allows for the silencing and oppression of those deemed inferior, and this silencing renders Black and brown individuals powerless. Laws dictate the artifacts and culture of society which is problematic considering who is constructing and dictating what reality is or what it should be. With such control over the narratives, the true essence and experiences of those who must go through the system, renders their identities and cultures absent and lacking in the storybooks of this America.

The legal system dictates how one must tell their stories through the insertion of rules and decorum, thus ultimately controlling the narratives that are shared, which are

binding and archived. In the case of the Mashpee, the courts reinforced white settler colonial definitions of tribal identity by requiring the Mashpee to demonstrate their tribal existence based on the ruling in *Montoya v. United States*, which defined a tribe as “a body of Indians of the same or similar race, united in community under one leadership or government and inhabiting a particular, though sometimes ill-defined, territory (p. 180). At the time, there was no consensus among social scientists as how to define tribe. This legal definition is fused with the notion of racial purity, what constitutes leadership or authority as well as determining absolute positioning on land. The legal categorization of what defines race and culture did not align with the Mashpee Indians’ lived experiences, thus making them unable to adequately define who they are – their identity – in the eyes of government. Proving one’s identity to the same system of government, constructed by the white colonizers who stole their land, is a privilege afforded by the courts in upholding and validating their elitist and supremacist ideologies. This racial hierarchy is reified in archaic legislation that seemingly continues to hold their culture and livelihood hostage. Thus, systemic oppression is intertwined in the laws of the land, which seek to stifle the progress of minority groups who must incessantly adhere to the parameters crafted to continue to oppress and prevent progress in society. Torres and Milun (1990) suggest:

Cultural identity is integral to individual self-identity. To maximize the range of life choices and to preserve the capacity for individual integrity requires, in the context of aboriginal claims, that the cultural integrity of tribes be maintained. The law as presently structured allows no clear way to achieve that end. (p. 189)

Without a “true” cultural identity in the eyes of federal government, their identities are rendered obsolete, thus warranting their experiences and narratives

insufficient and lacking credibility. Their material presence vanishes with the lack of recognition. This mechanism is a means of silencing a culture, thus eliminating their existence from history. The notion of legal precedents is set forth based on the European, white settler colonial majoritarian ideologies, thus reflecting and impacting current narratives which have historically shaped society in America. Torres and Millun (1990) state it simply “[I]n a system that uses previously decided cases as the foundation for authoritative statements...what facts are recognized as proof of the legal claim” and “what facts are recognized as legally determinative in the search for an authoritative example (p. 183).

Torres and Milun argue they are not simply presenting a different story, but a story silenced by European precedence set forth through the court system – a majoritarian narrative. Torres and Milun (1990) state cultural identity is essential to an individual’s self-identity. However, the identity of indigenous people is contrived through the lens of European, white colonial settlers who have controlled the narratives of people of color through European precedent and legal discourse. Thus, the Mashpee history, tribal identity and authentic experiences can only live through the tongues of their tribal people though not solidified in the historical context as government entities control how they are actualized in society. As precedent dictates the course of reality, the law has systemically excluded the experiences of people of color, as the system was not designed to seek justice for those who are insignificant to the framers of the system. Historically, the courts have served as a form of solidifying narratives. In the same sense, mass media has served as practitioners of creating meaning and articulating what

society is to deduce from circumstances or events presented which is infused with the same racist ideologies and stereotypes the framers of society elicited.

Another which illustrates the collective identity that can be fostered through shared narratives. This is an important consideration as this dissertation seeks to illustrate the hegemonic influences of systemic racism in narrative creation. In the 1991 article “The Word and the River: Pedagogy as Scholarship as Struggle,” Lawrence introduces the Word paradigm. Lawrence characterizes the Word as an “articulation and validation of our common experience” through the interdisciplinary tradition of teaching, preaching and healing, which seeks to articulate, validate, unify and uplift the oppressed by speaking to the commonalities in our lived experiences (p. 336). In the traditions of the church – and from my perspective, the Black, Baptist church – the Word is referred to the Bible and its written text. Often, the message imparted to the congregation is referred to as the sermon or hearing the Word of God. In the context of the traditions and culture of the Black church, healing, restoration and empowerment was sought inside the sanctuary as teaching is intertwined in the preaching of the Word. As such, the message received within the confines of the church walls is meant to be shared outside of those confines. This form of evangelism – sharing the “good news” – is part of the mission of practicing Christians. In the same vein, engaging the Word in pedagogy – this marriage between teaching and scholarship – has taught Lawrence to encourage and allow a space for his students to articulate their lived experiences as his legal profession has systemically stifled such articulations. This practice of

empowerment and combating a system to which Lawrence is a part of, speaks to the power and methods to which counter-storytelling can be exercised.

Lawrence (1991) states “the story that is told within the dominant discourse has systemically excluded the experiences of people of color and other outsiders, and where we are trained to believe that the story told by those in power is a universal story” (p. 337). Word as praxis, applied in the classroom setting. Lawrence suggests one of the gifts of the Word is identity. As such, Lawrence suggests subjectivity is essential to operating from a Word paradigm and addresses it in three ways: (1) positioned perspective; (2) embracing non-neutrality; and (3) standing in the position of the subject. The idea of positioned perspectives is important in the Word because it requires one to acknowledge their privileged perspectives, recognizing that dominant legal discourse is prejudiced upon the notion that it is a neutral and objective truth. Because of this, Lawrence demands that one rely on their own instincts, experiences and feelings of existence to counter the universal “dominant accounts of social reality” (Lawrence, 1991, p. 339). Taking a positioned perspective, Lawrence contends, allows us to “write our own histories: to tell the silenced stories, the unrecorded perspectives, of our foremothers and forefathers” (p. 339). This is significant as authors of United States history generally have not included the narratives of the enslaved and marginalized people of color. Historically, white men have reproduced white supremacist ideologies through their definitions and classifications in the court of law based on their biases associated to classism and racism based on skin-tone, cultures and languages. The practice of litigation is “highly formalized” in tradition, which is in contrast to the

methods to which African Americans – other people of color – share their stories. For the Black community, their stories are traditionally verbalized, rich in detail, providing context and filled with emotion. The contractual formalities of the legal process bind narratives to text which lacks the nuances of the spoken word – largely absent of the experiences of people of color. This absence in legal literature yields an “invisible and unheard” narrative in legal discourse (Lawrence, 1991, p. 344).

The most important aspect of this Word paradigm is the role of narratives in the Gift of the Dream. In the context of this piece, Lawrence suggests the Gift of the Dream lies in the ability of African Americans to see beyond current circumstances to a better future. The dream is something that cannot be taken, changed or manipulated by society nor can it be hindered by systemic mechanisms that seek to burden and hinder the progress of the Black community. The dream is the narrative we tell ourselves to self-empower and encourage our community. As Lawrence states “Black Americans, as a people and a culture, have been dreamers, we have valued our dreams and respected their power” (p. 350). The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” message speaks to the power of a narrative to inspire generations. The powerful, emphatic declarations of an aspirational future, continues to resonate in the hearts and minds of people of various racial, cultural and economic backgrounds. The pervasiveness of that message is indicative of the power of communication through the spoken word. The dream is something that is not yet realized though it is not beyond conceivability. Those beliefs that are secured in one’s heart and mind mean there is a chance and where

there is possibility, there is hope for change. This demonstrates the power of counter narrative creation and its ability to unify individuals who are systemically oppressed.

Understanding the ability of counter narrative is essential to understanding how narratives that negate these ideals is harmful to subordinated people. Deficit perspectives – which would suggest that the plight of marginalized individuals is based on their own doing and not institutional structures that work to oppress – as well as racist ideologies allow for the persistence of privileged and White-washed storytelling. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) suggest racist ideologies maintain a “master narrative.” In the context of mass media messaging, this could suggest ideologies arising from the mass-mediated content that justify privileged ideals which exclude and silence people of color (p. 27). Majoritarian narratives arise from this place of privilege. Scholars use the term “legacy” indicating the historical and generational establishment of racial narrative dominance spurred from the White, European colonizers who settled on this land and designed the framework of how we realize American society today. However, this is not to assume people of color are absent of majoritarian narratives as narratives are more a matter of readily accepted ideologies in society than simply a matter of white privilege. For example, U. S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is problematic in the context of critical race theory scholarship and his positioning on the High Court. Though a Black man, his judicial record is indicative of efforts that counter the progress of civil rights for women and people of color. Thomas operates within a system that has systemically controlled the narratives of the marginalized, people of color, and his racial identity does not preclude him from supporting and propagating a system that silences and

omits the experiences of his African ancestors. Racism and unacknowledged white privilege defend and sustain the majoritarian narrative (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). As such, storytelling from people of color who ignore the urgency of sharing the voices of marginalized people also further the prevalence of dominant ideologies readily accepted in society as truth, thus contributing to the pervasiveness of racist stereotypes in mass media.

Majoritarian narratives give rise to stereotypes as they have become naturalized in United States society, thus contributing to consciously held explicit biases and implicit biases unconsciously held today. The power and pervasiveness of these narratives allow for them to continue to exist because they impact our subconsciousness, thus our way of thinking and behaving. In order to combat this, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) suggest the art of storytelling can be used as a form of resistance through counter-storytelling – “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 32). Such methods include personal narratives from the individuals experiencing it, sharing other people’s stories of racism or through “composite stories” that “recount the racialized, sexualized and classed experiences of people of color” (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 33). Critical race scholars were able to create their own forms of counter-stories, in part, through cultural intuition (Delgado, 1998), professional and personal experiences.

More than a tool for amplifying a voice ~~to~~ of the oppressed, counter-storytelling centers their experiences which “can help strengthen traditions of social, political and



cultural survival and resistance” (p. 29). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) indicate there are three common approaches to counter storytelling in critical race work:

- (1) The use of personal stories or narratives where the individual recounts their personal experiences dealing with race and racism;
- (2) Sharing another person’s story about race and racism through a bibliographic account; and
- (3) Through composite stories or narratives where depictions of experiences with race and racism are taken from various reference points to illustrate the totality of the dynamic.

Scholarship in mass communication on the depictions of the Black experience often infer its counter storytelling ability, yet, it is not often explicitly mentioned as a methodological tool for conducting scholarship. In fact, George Gerbner’s Cultivation Analysis Theory, which has been popular for studying media and race, is based in Gerbner’s notion of the media, especially television, as storyteller. Gerbner specifically addresses media’s stories about race, positing that the media create a reality about race that although inaccurate it becomes the world of heavy consumers of media. But storytelling as a methodology is not reflected in cultivation analysis research. For example, Danielle Kilgo’s (2020) work on the media’s coverage of protest movements – specifically Black Lives Matter – illustrates the failings on the part of major television networks in the coverage, thus subsequent perceived depictions of the social causes to which individuals participate in such demonstrations. In her scholarship, though highlighting the assumptions of mainstream media and their presumptions surrounding

policing, defunding the police and police brutality, her scholarship provides a counternarrative to these superficial preconceived notions by speaking to the core issues/purpose of their grassroots efforts which shed light on the purpose and role of such movements. The framework and power of mainstream media outlets lie in the hands of White men, and historically, editorial practices allow for the silencing and absence of diverse voices. Lopez (2020) suggests the media are primary contributors to upholding systems of oppression, wielding its “cultural power” in its depictions of race narratives (p. 17). Budd et al. (1999) suggests individual biases are endorsed or supported through mainstream media via patriarchal and White privilege-laden content which corroborates elite power structures and distribution in society. This coincides with the Marxist perspective that mass media serves the “ruling class” and “hegemonic interests” of the White elite (Lane et al., 2020, p. 794). This critical paradigm coincides with the commitments of critical race theory, which will be the umbrella that informs every aspect of the conceptual model to be presented – guiding this dissertation. The closest mass communication research comes to using storytelling is historical research. Counter-narratives are often aspects of stories of significant people of color in journalism history who have overcome discrimination and other challenges to practice their craft. More recently, Boling (2021) published “We Matter”: Cultural Significance of a Counter-Narrative Black Public Affairs Program which illustrated how a South Carolina, locally-produced Black public affairs presented counter narratives about the civil rights movement which focused on the issues of the movement which went beyond the coverage of protests and demonstrations in mainstream media. Boling (2021) states:

Strategically presenting a counter-narrative to the portrayals of African Americans on local news, these shows had the unique ability to elevate the conversation beyond protests and demonstrations, and deeply discuss issues that could potentially alter the Southern mind-set of stereotypical Blacks. (p. 366)

Moody-Ramirez and Cole (2018) used critical race theory to examine framing in the representation of two Black men – Eric Garner and Michael Brown – who were killed by White police officers. Employing a counter narrative analysis of Twitter posts, the scholars found that racial stereotypes were used to negatively characterize the victims of the murder (Moody-Ramirez & Cole, 2018). They noted that “media constructs reality as traditional frames of Black men emerged that align with White privilege narrative,” (p. 402). A counter narrative toward policy changes, victimization and social justice emerged on Twitter. However, the sharing of messaging on Twitter that reaffirmed the “media’s construction of reality and stereotypes of Black males,” and this replication of messages can lead to the spread and apparent acceptance of racist ideologies.

Feagin (2020) notes that repetition coupled with generations of people hearing, observing and acting upon such notions, leads to this systemic trend of White, racial domination. Lane et al.’s (2020) framing analysis of mainstream media’s coverage of Trayvon Martin – a 17-year-old Black male who was followed and murdered by Hispanic, neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman – and the Black Lives Matter movement documents pro-White/anti-Black framing that persists today. My findings demonstrated framing that had a “positive orientation to whiteness and a strong negative orientation to Blackness” as well as stereotypical depictions of Black social movement and Trayvon Martin (Lane et al., 2020, p. 805). Their analysis is significant because the findings

further Feagin's conceptual contribution that racist framing is prevalent and explains centuries-held domination of racist narratives in mass media concerning Black people and their lived experiences through white racial framing. Lane (2020) suggests that existing beliefs in society as well as pervasive stereotypes about Black people have legitimized "systemic racism, racial oppression and discrimination" for generations, adding [T]his dominant racial frame has encompassed both a strong pro-White subframe and a strong anti-Black subframe that possibly de-legitimize voices of racial resistance (p. 793).

Counter narratives serve as a means for centering the experiences of Black people. And if consciously employed by content creators, there can be a great shift toward an alternate narrative of the Black experience that works to dismantle the systemic stories about Blackness that persist today. However, since racist ideologies are embedded in the foundations of this society, an attempt to correct this course means combating the powerful institutions and systems that have historically prevailed.

### **Racist Ideology and Hegemony**

Critical race theory suggests that hegemony allows for White privilege and racist ideologies to be normalized in society to include narrative creation, thus a discussion on the concepts is essential to understanding how narrative creation is implicitly biased due to the historical vestiges of White racial domination (Cabrera, 2019; Crenshaw, 1995). Hegemony – in the context of CRT work, is the "normalization of power relations that privilege ostensibly White behavior, curricula, and standards of scholarly inquiry (Cabrera, 2019, p. 221; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In this section, the concept of

ideology – explicated by mass communication scholars – will be bridged with CRT conceptions of ideology and how White racial dominance wields its power through these systemically held beliefs.

Neo-Marxist scholar Stuart Hall, who is considered a leading thinker on ideology meaning making in mass media content, defines ideology as, “those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and ‘make sense’ of some aspect of social existence” (Hall, 1981, p. 168). Hall suggests that the news provides an “ideological reference” to which specific events are grounded in, and news photography “repress their ideological dimensions by offering themselves as literal visual-transcriptions of the real world” (Hall, 1981, p. 241). In actuality, Hall argues that these ideological meanings that are shaped by beliefs, world views and societal circumstances, dictate the meaning associated to an image captured. Hall suggests:

Once we know who the story is about, how he figures in the news – once, that is, the text has added the themes to the image – the photo comes into its own again, refracting the ideological theme at another level. Now we can read the meaning of its closely-cropped, densely compacted composition. (p. 242)

Media studies scholar Gorham (1999), in his analysis of stereotypes, suggests that ideology is “a kind of collective symbolic self-expression that works to promote and legitimize the interests of social groups” (p. 230). For Gorham, a scholar in media stereotypes from a psychological and cultural perspective, a particular ideology is expressed in a stereotype, such as inferiority of Black people. Considering this, stereotypical images in the media can certainly convey messages about what are not

only appropriate thoughts for members of particular social groups, but also what are appropriate actions and roles” (Gorham, 1999, p. 230).

Hall (2003) indicates that ideologies are “mental frameworks” reflective of “the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation - which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works,” (p. 29). These mental representations, or “network of beliefs,” work within individual consciousness and associate legitimacy and “knowledge claims about the way the world is or about what has value” (Shelby, 2003, p. 157). These claims, or social thoughts, are widely shared among members within a society, which contributes to ideological beliefs and a “larger systematic outlook” of society (p. 159).

The conceptual framework of ideology has been articulated in various forms; its conceptual framework in critical theory is of most relevance to the present research when considering how individual worldviews or beliefs of content creators shape media content, thus making mass media’s perceptions of reality a powerful tool. Hall (1981) suggests:

- (1) “Ideologies do not consist of isolated and separate concepts, but in the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set or chain of meanings” (p. 168)
- (2) “Ideological statements are made by individuals: but ideologies are not the product of individual consciousness or intention. Rather we formulate our intentions *within ideology*” (p. 169)

(3) “Ideologies ‘work’ by constructing for their subjects (individual and collective) positions of identification and knowledge which allow them to ‘utter’ ideological truths as if they were their authentic authors” (p. 169).

Bernstein, a critical and social theory philosopher, states ideology is “systematically distortive” reflecting “reified powers of domination” (Bernstein, 1976, p. 109). This suggests ideology can be a byproduct of systems in place that promote societal power structures. This context would suggest that ideology is premised on false social constructions of reality or understandings individuals are cognizant of that are based on misrepresentations. Shelby (2003), who is an expert in critical philosophy of race, introduces the idea of implicit bias as it relates to ideology, without explicitly using the terminology of implicit bias. Shelby states:

To hold a belief with a false consciousness is to hold it while being ignorant of, or self-deceived about, the real motives for why one holds it: the individual who suffers from a false consciousness would like to believe that she accepts a given belief system (solely) because of the epistemic considerations in favor of it, but, as a matter of fact, she accepts it (primarily) because of the influence of noncognitive motives that operate ... without her conscious awareness. (p. 170)

Shelby’s conception of ideology suggests that unconscious awareness, or implicit biases, shapes the beliefs audiences accept from mass media, serving content creator’s “non cognitive interests.” For the purposes of this study, the author suggests this interest, or that of mass media content creators, is based on systemic mechanisms in place that unconsciously misrepresent the lived experiences of African Americans in mass media. The insertion of race into the principal ideologies of individuals presents an issue of racist ideology, which inherently promotes the racial domination of a racial group while delegitimizing another through representative exclusion (Shelby, 2003).

Racist ideologies stem from either overt or “inferential racism,” which Hall (2003) defines as “naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race ... which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions” (p. 91). Hall suggests these assumptions do not take into consideration the racist grounds they stem from, a notion seemingly supported by Shelby (2003):

[T]he charge of ideology—again, like the charge of racism—can be directed at symbolic representations that are embodied, not in the consciousness of individuals, but in discourse and cultural products, such as slogans, jokes, print media, film, theater, music, art, advertisements, television programming, web sites, and the like. For example, speech acts and cultural forms that invoke the imagery of the ‘black sex-machine’—such as urban vernacular expressions, comedic routines, blaxploitation films, commercials, and popular music—may properly be called ‘ideological’. (p. 158)

Scholars in psychology suggest that implicit bias is a “modern conception of prejudice” whose historical foundations shift through societal interpretations (Payne et al., 2019, p. 11697). This suggests the mere exposure to specific interpretations portrayed by mass media speaks to the powerful role it plays in society, shaping understandings by implicitly inserting subtle, racial cues associated with Black people. History’s inextricable attachment to the concepts of ideology, implicit racial bias and stereotypes speaks to the racial undertones that are introduced in mass media.

In the study, “Explicit and Hidden Racial Bias in the Framing of Social Problems,” Drakulich (2015) examined whether polarizing ideologies of social issues, criminal justice and inequality are based out of racial hostility, anger toward African Americans, or racial bias. Drakulich, who has published a series of studies on race and criminology, suggests that racial bias on the part of the decision-makers and content creators triggers the frames individuals hold about mass media’s seemingly overrepresentation of African



Americans in poverty and in the criminal justice system. The implications of these frames may manifest itself in public policy as the framing of social issues tends to align with ideals of the status quo, mainly Whites, in an effort to continue perpetuating biases toward African Americans. These perceptions coincide with racial stereotypes of African Americans, stemming from the prohibition of slavery where African Americans were seen as criminals, lacking work ethic and submissive to the white race (Drakulich, 2015).

Critical legal scholars who aligned with a Neo-Marxism viewed White-dominant “ideological control” as a form of hegemony – “the means by which a system of attitudes and beliefs, permeating both popular consciousness and the ideology of elites, reinforces existing social arrangements and convinces the dominated classes that the existing order is inevitable” (Crenshaw et. al, 1995, p. 108). Kellner (2015) suggests ideologies “construct the superiority of one class or group over others (i.e., men over women, Whites over people of color, ruling elites over working-class people) and thus reproduce and legitimate different forms of social domination” (p. 13). Crenshaw (1995) explores the issue of power and racist ideology – or “white race-consciousness” – in “Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law.” Crenshaw suggests the dismantling of Jim Crow laws and implementation of civil rights policies to secure the liberties of Black individuals did not eliminate the supremacist ideal that hinder progress of such individuals. It only publicly condemned what has long been unconsciously and popularly accepted and expected in individual, White consciousness. Crenshaw (1995) notes:

The end of Jim Crow has been accompanied by the demise of an explicit ideology of White supremacy. The White norm, however, has not disappeared; it has only

been submerged in popular consciousness. It continues in unspoken form as a statement of the positive social norm, legitimating the continuing domination of those who do not meet it. Nor have the negative stereotypes associated with Blacks been eradicated. the rationalizations once used to legitimate Black subordination based on a belief in racial inferiority have now been reemployed to legitimate the domination of Blacks through reference to an assumed cultural inferiority. (p. 115)

The justification of Jim Crow as well as other explicit forms of segregation was due to this racist ideology that “Whites were an inherently superior race of people” (Cabrera, 2018; Omi & Winant, 1994). Mills (2003) suggests its “de facto” (Mills, 2003) White supremacy which maintains power and system of domination “masked by hegemony of Whiteness” – Whiteness evolving to something normalized (Cabrera, 2018, p. 222). Sociologist and thought-leader on hegemony C.W. Mills suggests that White supremacy is embedded in the cultural, political and socio-economic systems of society which requires a new method of dismantling systemic racism. Mills (2003) noted:

If the past few hundred years have been marked by the hegemony of White racist ideology and by global White domination with enduring effects, then the shape of the world needs reconsideration and remaking. A radical rethinking of inherited narratives and frameworks, and the prescription of corresponding measures of corrective racial justice...would seem to be called for. But if they have not, then the current shape of the world can be otherwise explained, and no such dramatic reconceptualization, no such policies of social reconstruction and moral rectification, are necessary. (p. 220)

### **1.3 Historical Oppositional Dualities**

According to Crenshaw (1995), White, racist ideologies and its hegemonic function serve to create this system of racial hierarchy that subordinates Black people, creating this historical oppositional duality that seeks to contrast Black from White correlating racial positioning to negative and positive stereotypes respectively. In this

section, I will discuss how these ideologies work to bolster this White domination, establishing and sustaining negative stereotypes of Black people.

Hall (1981) suggests that ideologies are constructed through chains of meaning political discourse and social practice within a society give rise to the conditions one associates and articulates meaning. Individuals unconsciously collect, make sense, and give rise to meaning within ideological structures already established in society that “pre-date individuals, and form part of the determinate social formations and conditions in which the individuals are born” (p. 19). This collective process of unconsciously building social consciousness helps us to construct meaning, thus causing us to believe what we experience in society as “naturalized,” shaping knowledge and deeming them “ideological truths” – such as race (p. 19). Essential to understanding how these beliefs are solidified as truths in society is understanding what critical race scholars have indicated as the catalyst to racist ideologies of people of color, and a notion to which mass communication scholar such as Hall have hinted. Hall notes that ideologies are “grounded in the relations of slavery, colonial conquest, economic exploitation and imperialism” (p. 42). Going further, critical race scholars are interested in examining the pervasiveness of institutional power structures that yield these supremacist beliefs, understanding that racism is a hegemonic force in the United States (Crenshaw, 1995).

White domination is not merely a matter of White individuals sticking together, but a common understanding that the “other” group is not the norm, thus warranting them subordinate to the dominate group, reinforcing in-group identification (Crenshaw, 1995). “Racism helps to create an illusion of unity through the oppositional force of

symbolic 'other'" (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 112-113). Power works to protect the existing order (Crenshaw, 1995; Miles, 2019). As such, racial stereotypes serve a hegemonic function which reinforces White ideals. Hierarchical classifications imposed through Western thoughts function to allow for negative and racist ideologies to persist in society, historically assigning oppositional categories to Black people while simultaneously assigning counter, positive images to Whites. Laws and customs created what we now know as "race," establishing racial categories and subsequent meanings. Crenshaw (1995) notes "[W]hites were characterized one way and associated with normatively positive characteristics, whereas Blacks were characterized another way and became associated with the subordinate, even aberrational characteristics" (p. 113).

Power through racial consciousness started with the institution of slavery, and the very system where Whites subordinated Black and brown people into slave class served against their own economic interest. Yet, the mere perceived dominance of the slaveholding class did not preclude other Whites from falling in line with elitist ideology (Crenshaw, 1995). This race consciousness persisted through post-Reconstruction, labor movements in the North as well as through modern political discourse as the othering of Black people persistently yielded racist ideologies that Black people, and their experiences were invalid and inferior to Whites. State-sanctioned racially discriminatory practices such as separate entrances, bathroom facilities, water fountains, and restaurants that "reinforced a racist ideology that Blacks were simply inferior to Whites and were therefore not included in the vision of America as a community of equals"

(Crenshaw, 1995, p. 114). This “symbolic subordination” – the denial of political and social equality – differs from what Crenshaw also terms as “material subordination,” which characterizes the economic subordination of Black people (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 114). Crenshaw suggests the civil rights movement provided a false sense of equality for the Black community. While the visible manifestations of Black subordination, White dominance and supremacy, was explicitly removed from plain sight through legal reform, the White subconscious, racist ideologies and negative stereotypes assigned to Black people still persist consciously and subconsciously because of the deeply ingrained and historical practices of White supremacists. Crenshaw (1995) notes:

The rationalizations once used to legitimate Black subordination based on a belief in racial inferiority have now been reemployed to legitimate the domination of Blacks through reference to an assumed cultural inferiority (p. 115).

The historical dualities that reified the legitimization of Black racial subordination through genetic rationale of inferiority persists now through cultural inferiority – an unspoken White social norm that accounts for the social power or hegemonic method in the United States (Crenshaw, 1995). Stuart Hall (1997) in “The Spectacle of the Other” suggests this exertion of power and establishment of racial “difference” manifested during slavery and centered around two main stereotypes:

First was the subordinate status and innate laziness of Blacks – naturally born to, and fitted only for, servitude but, at the same time, stubbornly unwilling to labour in ways appropriate to their nature and profitable for their masters. Second was their innate primitivism, simplicity and lack of culture, which made them genetically incapable of civilized refinements. (p. 244)

Hall (1997) adds that by naturalizing difference through White race consciousness, the ideological contextualization indicates that if the difference between Black and White people is cultural, it is subject to change by those in control. However, if race is natural, it is permanent and attached in history. This difference created between Black and White races cannot be manipulated, thus solidifying racist and stereotypical meanings established and affixed to Black people. The ideologies of White supremacy are reflected in a White race consciousness suggesting Blacks are inferior to Whites, Blacks and Whites have equal opportunities (a myth of meritocracy), and the “market is operating fairly and impartially” (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 116). This myth of racial equity that is deep-seated in White consciousness allows for racist ideologies to persist, reinforcing the status quo. The othering of Black people established a racial difference and system of hierarchy that despite legal interference, still normalizes and allows Black subordination, which is perpetuated through White race-consciousness (Crenshaw, 1995). There are continuing powerful, White racist ideologies that serve to obstruct and construct the Black experience, and the unconscious nature that these ideological “truths” function may be indicative in the narrative representations in mass media.

With the application of critical race perspectives, the manifestation of such racist ideologies as ascribed by Feagin can be clearly traced through the historical remnants of racist foundations shaped by racist ideologies birthed from European, white colonization. While Feagin’s conception of the White racial frame indicates how racism persists in society through a White lens, it is worth examining how framing furthers such racist conceptions though not specifically applicable to White individuals. The

application of this concept allows me to draw direct connections between Framing theory and critical race theory as not previously noted in mass communication scholarship. This understanding of historical oppositional dualities, too, helps to bring into context the origins of racial stereotypes that persist today.

#### **1.4 Implicit Racial Bias and Racial Stereotypes in Mass Media**

The violence, aggression, hatred implicit in racist representation is not to be denied, but we understand very little as yet about its double-sided nature, its deep ambivalences. (Hall, 2006, para. 35)

With an understanding of the historical implications of White hegemony on racist stereotypes pervasive in society – as ascribed by critical race scholarship – it is now important to illustrate how these racist ideologies as well as implicit biases persist in mass media.

Implicit biases are unconscious, “gut-level evaluations” (Arendt et al., 2017, p. 527), attitudes or associating stereotypes that influence an individual’s decision-making process (Arendt et al., 2017; Implicit Bias, 2020); it is a process of activation, which allows something to come to mind automatically without cognition (Arendt et al., 2016). The concept of implicit bias was widely popularized by social psychologist Mahzarin Banaji, who examines how the concept intersects with issues of race, gender and sexual orientation. The theory has been examined and applied in various disciplines such as criminal justice (Benaji & Greenwald, 2013; Eberhardt, 2019), higher education (Ryn & Saha, 2011; Fiarman, 2016) and medicine (Green et al., 2007; Hannah & Carpenter-Song, 2013). However, there is a paucity in mass communications literature; only XX studies to the author’s knowledge, which will be discussed later. Implicit bias is based on concepts

in cognitive psychology which suggest that behaviors are a result of propositional and associative processes (Arendt, 2013). According to Florian Arendt, a leading cognitive psychology scholar, propositional processes are the foundations of explicit attitudes, which are judgements that validate one's currently held evaluations and beliefs.

Associative processes, according to Arendt, are the foundations of implicit attitudes, which are automatically activated when one encounters a relevant stimulus. These associative evaluations can be activated regardless of whether the evaluations are accurate; associative evaluations depend on the pre-existing memory structures and external stimuli (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Individuals "harbor mental associations based on race, gender and other social categories" that lead to racialized judgements regardless of whether the person is aware of their presence (Payne et al., 2017, p. 233). Thus, unconscious, implicit evaluations influence the decision-making process (Arendt et al., 2017; Implicit Bias, 2020).

While explicit bias has been the focus of considerable research in mass communications, particularly as it relates to stereotypes, only recently has implicit bias garnered attention in mass media research. Literature in psychology suggests that implicit bias can be attributed to historical, cultural, and societal influences. Social psychologist Payne and colleagues consider implicit bias to be a "social phenomenon" that reflects the accessibility of concepts associated with a social category (Payne et al., 2017, p. 233). The accessing of concepts linked to cultural associations allows for implicit bias to serve as a "psychological marker of systemic prejudice in the environment," which can be used as a mechanism to translate and transfer "systemic prejudice into



individual discrimination” (Payne et al., 2017, p. 236, 239). Robin DiAngelo, a critical discourse analysis scholar and author of “White Fragility,” suggests implicit bias is absorbed by everyone just by living in a culture where individuals consistently receive different messages, which are internalized for a lifetime, contributing to unconscious biases (CNN, 2020). Vernā Myers, an author, activist, and diversity and inclusion strategist, furthers this notion by intimating that one’s history and position within societal systems pre-positions their assumptions about certain racial groups, which contributes to unconscious cognitive thinking (CNN, 2020).

The concept of implicit bias is increasingly being used to address the understanding of cognitive patterns that impact one’s actions when race is a factor, leading to the concept of “implicit racial bias” which is largely studied in psychology, healthcare and law enforcement (Cooper et al., 2017; Blair et al., 2013; Eberhardt, 2020). As implicit bias relates to the depictions and understandings of the Black experience, Banaji (2013) states:

[I]mplicit bias is too compelling for us to conclude that Black disadvantage is caused exclusively by explicit, overt prejudice. And, given the relatively small proportion of people who are overtly prejudiced and how clearly it is established that automatic race preference predicts discrimination, it is reasonable to conclude not only that implicit bias is a cause of Black disadvantage but also that it plausibly plays a greater role than does explicit bias in explaining the discrimination that contributes to Black disadvantage. (p. 209)

Implicit racial bias is prevalent in American society, “even among individuals who explicitly reject prejudice” (Payne et al., 2019, p. 11693). The bias is manifested in stereotypical thinking (Thiem et al., 2019) as well as unintended racially influenced actions. While unconsciously conceived, implicit racial bias occurs through subtle

undertones of media content (Sue et al., 2007). It can be characterized as microaggressions, which are defined as the “everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Sue, 2010, p. 3). Payne et al. (2019) suggest that the historical foundations of implicit racial bias are entrenched in the White supremacist practices of slavery. Payne and colleagues’ found significant correlations between the percentage of enslaved populations in a southern state in 1860 and the modern-day instances of implicit bias in the state. This suggests that implicit racial bias is generationally transmittable, and unconscious attitudes about race are based on systemic oppression that was put in place centuries ago in the country’s legal and political systems and cultural norms. This is significant when considering how societal and cultural linkages contribute to racial group stereotypes concerning the African American community. Negative associations seem a byproduct of a racially charged system. “The historical legacy of discrimination has created structural inequalities that may continue to cue stereotypical associations long after official legal barriers have been removed” (Payne et al., 2019, p. 11694). Implicit racial biases are signaled by “structural inequalities,” which include the infrastructure of mass media corporations that are disproportionately comprised of individuals who are not Black (Payne, 2019, p. 11694). Considering the unavoidable nature of implicit racial bias, it would be conceivable that its presence can also be found in mass media.

Although Sue et al. (2007) and others have suggested that implicit racial bias occurs through subtle undertones of media content, as noted earlier the concept of implicit bias, or implicit racial bias, has been little used in mass communications scholarship. One exception is Renita Coleman's "Color Blind: Race and the Ethical Reasoning of Blacks on Journalism Dilemmas" (2011). Coleman, a mass communications scholar in race and ethics, explored whether prospective African American journalists demonstrated a tolerance toward African Americans in developing news stories pertaining to social issues and ethical dilemmas. A positive finding would suggest race is implicitly part of the storytelling process as people identify by racial groups. This would indicate a cognitive process of evaluation and treatment of an individual due to their race classification. Coleman (2011) found the student journalists' ethical decision-making was not influenced by their racial identity and eliminating race from the subjects of the story did not lead to better ethical reasoning. However, previous literature that focused on the decision-making of White students indicated the opposite (Coleman, 2003). The findings of this study suggest that the creation and dissemination of communications involves both an explicit and implicit consideration of race, making racial associations inevitable in shaping perceptions of African Americans articulated in mass media.

It is important to understand the difference between implicit racial bias and explicit racial bias in order to demonstrate their presence in mass media. Explicit bias are "deliberate, consciously controlled biases" (Leitner et al., 2016). Explicit racial bias is visible, intentional, demeaning attitudes, behavior and representations based on race,

such as racial stereotypes. While racial stereotypes existed prior to the onset of mass media (Abraham, 2011), their appearance within the context of mass media production reinforces the stereotypical understandings of racial groups in society. A number of studies in the literature on stereotypes of African Americans in entertainment media highlight the racially charged motion picture “The Birth of a Nation,” a 1915 silent film directed by D.W. Griffith, which accentuated negative depictions of mythical Black characters, assigning to them sexual prowess, anger, ignorance, laziness and other negative connotations (Neale, 1993; Stanley & Brown, 2003; Abraham, 2011).

Mainstream mass media has continued presenting variations of those stereotypes to the present day with frequent associations to, but not limited to, physical superiority coupled with intellectual inferiority, abnormal sexual desire, violence, drugs and criminal activity (Martindale, 1996; Harris, 2006; Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Moskowitz & Carter, 2018). Frequently, sometimes implicitly, associations to violence, drugs and criminal activity are made synonymous to the Black experience. Stereotypical images construct a social “reality” that predetermines societal understandings of racial groups (Gorham, 1999). The unconscious cognition provides a conceptual linkage between implicit racial bias and stereotypes.

Stereotypes serve a hegemonic function that operates within a culture. Hall (1997) indicates that a key consideration in how we understand stereotypes is the element of what’s left unspoken or unrepresented, which could deduce a meaning attached to the stereotype.

[S]tereotypes refer as much to what is imagined in fantasy as to what is perceived as ‘real’. And, what is visually produced, by the practices of

representation, is only half the story. The other half – the deeper meaning – lies in what is not being said, but is being fantasized, what is implied but cannot be shown. (p. 263)

Stereotypes have been widely studied in mass communication literature (Devine, 1989; Tutt, 2011; Drakulich, 2015; Dukes & Gaither, 2017; Thiem et al., 2019; Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). Its definition in social psychology, as stated by Greenwald and Banaji (1995), operationalizes stereotypes as a “socially shared set of beliefs about traits that are characteristic of members of social category” and a “guide judgment and action” (p. 14). The definition also introduces the concept of implicit stereotypes when it indicates stereotypes are “introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate attributions of qualities to members of a social category” (p. 15).

In their study *Racial Prejudice and Racial Stereotypes*, psychologists Katz and Braly (1935) suggest that a stereotype is “a fixed impression, which conforms very little to the fact it pretends to represent, and results from our defining first and observing second” (p. 181). Snyder (1981), a scholar in behavioral sciences, states:

[I]n stereotyping, the individual: (1) categorizes other individuals, usually on the basis of highly visible characteristics such as sex or race; (2) attributes a set of characteristics to all members of that category; and (3) attributes that set of characteristics to any individual member of that category. (p. 415)

Stereotypes, which are based on encoded social information automatically accessed by the individual (Devin, 1989), create identifications and produce knowledge (Patierno & Talreja, 1997). Stereotyping may arise outside of one’s consciousness and is triggered by thoughts about a racial or social group (Moskowitz & Carter, 2018). Mass media “positively sways the perception” of ethnic and minority groups (Dukes &

Gaither, 2017, p. 804). In a “largely segregated American society,” stereotypes supplied and reinforced by the media can have a profound impact on individuals who oftentimes lack “first-hand knowledge” about the Black experience (Abraham, 2011, p. 92). As it pertains to the negative associations attributed to African Americans present in mass media that have historically stigmatized Black people (Abraham, 2011), the presence of stereotypes further exemplifies the faulty foundational and troublesome rationale attributed to Black people stemming from the racist underpinnings of American society.

According to Gorham:

Racial stereotypes in the media can influence our interpretations of media content in a way that supports dominant racial myths. By automatically priming racial stereotype-congruent interpretations of subsequent media texts, and by doing so repeatedly and consistently, stereotypes in the media can maintain unjust, harmful, and dominating understandings of race by influencing the way individuals interpret media texts. Such automatic priming can occur whether or not the individual involved necessarily endorses the stereotype. (Gorham, 1999, p. 244)

These associations have been so ingrained in the mass media where symbolic representations still appear in subtle forms, even as overt racist practices would be otherwise disdained (Abraham, 2011). This would suggest that stereotypical images construct a social “reality” of a select group of individuals who are not representative of a diverse society. This group’s representations predetermine our societal understandings of racial groups, which are then blindly accepted (Gorham, 1999). Mass media solidifies racial understandings and power dynamics within society, swaying the perceptions of racial and minority ethnic groups without conscious intent (Gorham, 1999; Dukes & Gaither, 2017). The unconscious cognition provides a conceptual linkage between implicit racial bias and stereotypes.

The concepts presented in this chapter – critical race theory, implicit bias and framing theory – operate at different levels of analysis. In the next chapter, I propose how they cofunction providing for implicit racial biases and racist ideologies to present in narrative creation.

## **CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL RACE CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF IMPLICIT RACIAL BIAS**

The literature presented suggests depictions of Black people in mass media are influenced by not only explicit racial bias, particularly stereotypes, but also implicit racial bias and racist ideologies as ascribed by the stereotypical understandings of the race due to historical and oppositional dualities by way of White racial consciousness. These components encompass the historical, cultural and societal influences that create the implicit racial biases, stereotypes and racist ideologies that are then personified through mass media content. This messaging or narrative that is then created either furthers or reinforces a majoritarian narrative or highlights a deficit perspective of the Black experience.

The concepts presented in the previous chapter – framing theory, critical race theory and implicit bias – though assessed in different disciplines, all present common threads concerning the function of hegemony, subconscious elements and societal circumstances contributing to narrative creation as well as the substantial implications of racial identity – as determined by the White elite – on the prevalence of systemic racism and oppression of Black people. Elements of framing theory are apparent in all concepts as the premise of critical race theory is the notion that White, European colonizers crafted or “framed” the society that we now know today, entrenched in racist ideologies and stereotypes that present a White-washed narrative of the experiences of



people of color. The basis of implicit bias indicates the unconscious racialized impact in the treatment of individuals. And the three elements taken together gives rise to Implicit Racial Bias that is inevitably present in mass mediated content.

Guided by the critical race and framing literature presented, I present a conceptual model for content creation that explains the presence of implicit racial bias, racist ideologies and stereotypes in the representation of Black people in mass media. The existence of stereotypes or stereotypical language and majoritarian narratives could be evidence of racialized ideologies, as the concepts of implicit racial bias and ideology suggest they are intrinsically linked.

Media-centric operational definitions for concepts within the model (Figure 2.1) follow:

- Implicit Bias – Implicit biases are unconscious attitudes or associating stereotypes that influence an individual’s decision-making process (Arendt et al., 2017; Implicit Bias, 2020).
- Implicit Racial Bias – Unconscious, automatic associations attributed to a racial group as ascribed by stereotypical understandings of the race due to historical, cultural, societal dynamics.
- Racist ideology – Racist, oppressive beliefs or worldviews about Black people in society reaffirmed by White racial consciousness and mass media content.
- Hegemony – Power wielded by the oppressor as framed through laws and customs in White, socially constructed systems and institutions.
- Meaning Making – The unconscious cognitive step before assigning meaning.

- **Meaning Assignment** – The meaning assigned due to a set of circumstances shaped by the content creator’s implicit racial biases, ideology and stereotypical understandings about a racial group that contributes to the creation of media content.
- **Framing** – The intentional inclusion and unintentional exclusion of textual and visual content that is shaped by the explicit and implicit influences of the creator of the media content (Gitlin, 1980).
- **Deficit Perspectives** – Messaging or narratives that implicitly or explicitly deduce the oppressed are deficient in comparison to the oppressor.
- **Majoritarian Narratives** – Messaging or narratives that indicate racial privilege or suggest racial privilege as natural (Solórzano and Yosso, 2020).
- **Counter Narratives** – Stories of individuals who have systemically been silenced in mass media which expose and challenge “majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).
- **Stereotypes** – Accepted negative societal understandings of a racial group, developed and/or reinforced through concrete, explicit representations in mass media.

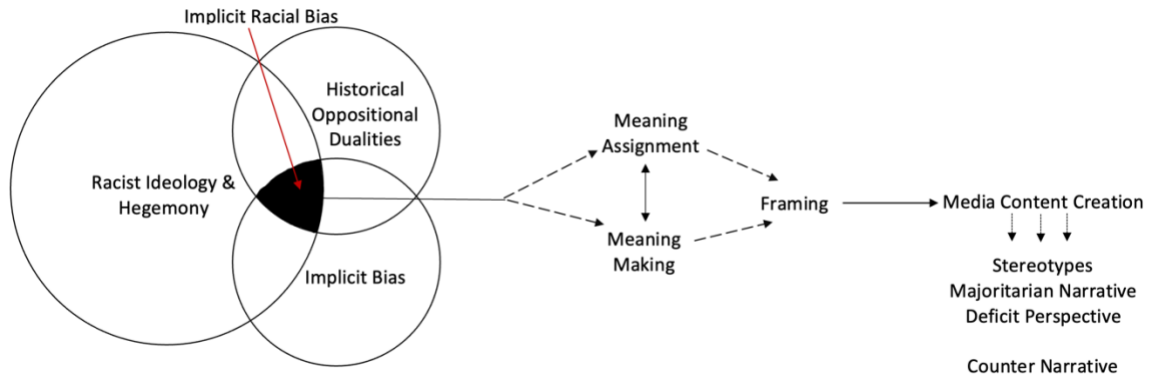


Figure 2.1: Critical Race Conceptual Model of Implicit Racial Bias in Content Creation

The conceptual model begins with the context of critical race theory, which posits that racism is pervasive in the political and social institutions of the United States society which allows for racist, White supremacist, privilege-infused ideologies to prevail which disproportionately prejudice Black people. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the context which ultimately produces implicit racial bias in media content. That context involves historical and oppositional dualities, racist ideologies and power wielded by White racial consciousness as well as implicit biases that stem from White, European colonization and the institution of slavery. In the model, I suggest the overlap of the critical race theory concepts – Racist Ideology & Hegemony, Historical and Oppositional Dualities – and Implicit Bias ultimately produces implicit racial bias. The implicit racial bias component of the conceptual model primarily stems from literature by scholars in the field of psychology. This would suggest that negative associations are embedded in society and are an implicit and coincidental byproduct of the system. Explicit racial bias is the main contributor to implicit racial ideologies society is facing now. Their results shed light on the impact history has on the prejudiced mindsets of present society.

The remaining components of the Venn diagram, 'Racist Ideology & Hegemony' and 'Historical Oppositional Dualities' were primarily identified through Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1995) "Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law." The size of the racist ideology & hegemony circle is significant as this indicates the extensiveness of White supremacist ideologies that have yielded the laws and customs that enforce the White racial power over Black individuals. This dynamic is the driver of this conceptual model as systemic racism is the foundations to which implicit racial bias and stereotypes are manifested in narrative creation. The role of power in culture is supported through the works of social psychologists Salter et al. (2018) and Dovidio et al. (2013). Salter and colleagues' exploration of the cultural psychology of racism in, "Racism in the Structure of Everyday Worlds: A Cultural-Psychological Perspective," surveys the "cultural artifacts, ideological discourse and institutional realities" that have sustained systemic racism in society (p. 150). The authors suggest that racism, or contemporary racial identifications and understandings of racial groups, has origins in "cultural-psychological roots in colonization and the transatlantic slave trade" (Salter et al., 2018, p. 151), and cultural tools such as schools, textbooks, representations of history or commemorative practices and societal mechanisms, which "promote ignorance about racism" (p. 152). This ignorance feeds discriminatory and racist practices that continue to shape perceptions of racial groups. In an overview of the cognitive processes that underscore prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination, Dovidio and colleagues again speak to the systemic mechanisms formed out of racist ideologies to justify racial discrimination. They suggest "cultural

discrimination is deeply embedded in the fiber of culture's history, standards and normative ways of behaving" (Dovidio et al., 2013, p. 11). They explain:

It involves not only privileging the culture, heritage, and values of the dominant group, but also imposing this culture on other less dominant groups. As a consequence, everyday activities implicitly communicate group-based bias, groups may adopt system-justifying ideologies propagated by the dominant cultural group that distract attention from group-based disparities and inequities. Thus, members of a disadvantaged group may develop a 'false consciousness' in which they not only comply with but also endorse cultural values that systematically disadvantage them. (p. 11)

This sense of "false consciousness" harkens to Du Bois' conception of double-consciousness and supports the notion of how external forces contribute to not only the identity a Black individual perceives for themselves, but also the identity that society imposes. The context of these historical, cultural and societal influence leads to the presence of stereotypes or stereotypical language which could be evidence of such racist ideologies, as these concepts, based on the operationalized definitions of the concepts, suggest they are intrinsically linked. The proposed model depicted above illustrates the origins and relationships between the concepts of implicit racial bias, racist ideology and stereotypes.

Moving to the next step in the model, it shows that ideologies work to affix meaning by constructing reality and framing it as ideological truths which are transferred unconsciously (Hall, 1997; 2003). Stuart Hall suggests mass media are involved in ideological productions in society by articulating "chains of meanings" through implicitly biased interpretations produced by their content concerning African Americans (p. 89). Events have multiple meanings, or interpretations; when media present an event, according to Hall, media are actually "re-presenting" the event with a

specific, individualized meaning associated to it (Hall, 1997). In doing so, media content creators are influenced by ideology while producing ideology that seeks to fix a specific meaning to an event. The model explains that absent of explicit bias, implicit racial bias may guide meaning that is assigned to media content by media creators – a process that occurs simultaneously. This assignment of meaning can create an interpretation of the event which aligns with their individual implicit racial bias, stereotypes and ideologies, informed by their historical, cultural and societal positioning. Hall (2007) posits that culture creation speaks to the shared, conceptual understandings within a society, and it is through the shared group experience that contributes to the shared meaning it beholds. Media content creators, being a powerful entity due to its widespread reach, attempt to make meaning of a circumstance which is implicitly shaped by their individual implicit racial biases in order to assign a specific meaning to frame the media content created. The content creator's set of circumstances gives rise to the creation of meaning and understanding. The additional layer of meaning assignment shifts the context from the multitude of possibilities the event could assimilate. As such, a particular frame is attached to the event's or circumstance's meaning, and the manifestation of the message or narrative either furthers stereotypes, majoritarian narratives and/or deficit perspectives concerning the Black experience.

My conceptual model suggests implicit racial bias contributes to these narratives as privilege can hinder one from recognizing and understanding the power “conferred upon” them (p. 27). Majoritarian narratives arise from this place of privilege. People of color can propagate majoritarian narratives as they are a matter of readily accepted

ideologies, not only white privilege. This supports the notion that progressive, well-trained, well-educated journalists can promote implicit racial bias, or in other words, may prime a stereotype though they may not intend to do so. Racism and unacknowledged white privilege defend and sustain the majoritarian narrative. With this in consideration, storytelling from people of color may also further the prevalence of dominant ideologies readily accepted in society as truth, thus contributing to the pervasiveness of racist stereotypes in mass media. The message portrayals indicate an underlying ideology in the presence and absence of messaging (Crenshaw, 1991; Moody-Ramirez & Cole, 2018). This dissertation seeks to understand how framing, majoritarian narratives and counter narratives are exemplified in mass media content. One way to illustrate the usefulness of this model is to apply it to analysis of content created by Black journalists and media creators as it was important for me to examine Black content creation to illustrate how inevitably implicit racial biases present themselves in content which foster deficit perspectives, majoritarian narratives and stereotypes that continue to oppress members of their own racial community.

## **2.1 Research Questions**

While instances of explicit racial bias are personified through intentional, stereotypical representations of African Americans (Leitner et al., 2016), I suggest that implicit racial biases held by content creators, formed knowingly or unknowingly, frame stereotypical race-centric content about the Black experience or Black culture. Though perhaps not deliberate, the effects of implicit bias are inevitable. However, this is not to suggest that implicit racial bias only applies to other racial groups as the premise of this

concept indicates its inescapable nature. Black content creators are not absent of such implicit racial biases, and one cannot assume that racial association to a community precludes them from such predispositions. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) suggest racist ideologies are reproduced through majoritarian narratives that tell stories of oppressed people and communities from deficit perspectives. In the context of mass media messaging, this could indicate racist ideologies arising in the mass media messaging, too, justify privileged ideals which shun deficit perspectives from Black people. As such, I seek to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Are implicit racial bias and ideologies of Blackness represented in Black sports columns, Black music and Black storytelling?

**RQ2:** If present, how do implicit racial bias and ideologies of Blackness in Black sports columns, Black music and Black storytelling propagate a majoritarian narrative of the Black experience?

Critical race theory asserts that ideologies of White supremacy infiltrate all aspects of society – the legal system, institutions, education, and mass media (Bell, 2004). At the individual level, psychologists argue that we have both explicit and implicit biases concerning race. Explicit biases are easily detectable. However, implicit biases often operate on a subconscious level for the individual though having great influence and implications on a variety of outcomes. Critical race theory suggests that there is a deep well of implicit biased assumptions and racist ideologies influencing society and individuals. Media content creators are not immune to these forces. The impact of critical race theory and implicit bias can be detected in the framing of media content.



I suggest that in expressing the authentic experiences of the Black community – which includes systemic racism and oppression – Black content creators may also implicitly share biased beliefs of their own racial group, furthering a negative narrative about the community, defining Blackness for outside groups. Through a critical cultural perspective (Taylor & Lindlof, 2017) using a qualitative approach, this dissertation will examine the depictions of Black people in selected mass media – Black music, Black sports columns and Black journalism – to explain how implicit racial bias and racialized ideologies manifest in the content. The application of my critical race conceptual model of implicit racial bias in media content will guide the analysis to answer the research questions.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter of the dissertation, I will present my positionality, epistemology – which guides my theoretical approach to this dissertation – as well as discuss the qualitative and critical method through which the textual units of analysis in music, sports and journalism will be examined.

### **3.1 Positionality and Epistemology**

As a Critical Race scholar and professional communicator, I pursue purpose-driven work, seeking to accomplish the following:

- (1) Confront systemic racism by exposing societal mechanisms and communication practices in mass media that oppress and silence African Americans, people of color and other marginalized groups.
- (2) Amplify the voices of those who have long been silenced in mainstream mass media by highlighting their authentic experiences through scholarship.
- (3) Offer an avenue for critical discourse on race to foster equitable communication practices and solutions as well as an equitable academic environment.

As such, this dissertation follows in the traditions of critical race scholars presented in the literature review who pursue social justice work through their scholarship. Using a qualitative approach and critical race theory perspectives – which

contend racism is a present and prevailing evil that infiltrates every aspect of society – the research seeks to understand how implicit bias, racist ideologies, historical and oppositional dualities as well as hegemonic forces work to formulate ideas of Blackness and perceptions of the Black experience.

Identifying as a postmodern critical culturalist, I acknowledge how my positionality influences my involvement with this dissertation. Postmodern researchers take an interpretivist approach in seeking understanding of the given phenomena being observed while acknowledging the subjectivity of their work, shunning the notion of objectivity or neutrality (Glesne, 2016). Starting in the 1980s, communication scholars who aligned with the interpretive paradigm used critical theories to explore social structure, power and agency (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Glesne (2016) describes this research approach as work that positions the experiences and perspectives of oppressed groups in a social and historical context, which reveals how conditions may work to serve certain groups and not others. A postmodern critical cultural perspective challenges power structures and their oppressive nature. In the context of mass communication and the present research, this could indicate that mass media perpetuates a system that promotes dominant powers given that meaning attributed to a message is dependent upon the societal circumstances one finds themselves. Qualitative scholars who align with this paradigm use an iterative process to develop theory instead of engaging in hypothesis testing, and rather than relying on methodological tools as a means for analysis, the interpretivist approach demands a reliance on both lived experiences and the experiences of others to observe and

interpret their unit of analysis. Interpretivists cultivate knowledge through persistent engagement and interactions with the social settings. This practice allows for an intimate relationship with what is being studied as socialization as well as cultural identities such as race, gender and class act as reciprocal relationships, influencing the interpretation of what's being observed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Naturally and rather instinctually, researchers emphasize and substantiate the realities that are known or common to them, thus requiring engagement with groups or matters that may be less familiar.

As a Black woman, I recognize racial, cultural and gender biases that inform my approach as the intent of this scholarship is to specifically focus on the depictions of the Black experience and how stereotypical conceptions of this racial and cultural group are manifested through the media. My positionality also includes my middle-class upbringing – primarily in the South – matriculating in higher education with background in both physical and social sciences as well as a professionally trained and experienced journalist who covered issues pertinent in Southern politics and the intersections of race, culture and policy. Having experienced varying levels of explicit bias in the form of blatant racism, discrimination and microaggressions during my professional and academic endeavors, I have a strong perspective on how racial bias and systemic mechanisms throughout history have shaped how I view racial bias within this society as well as the subsequent treatment of Black and brown people. I recognize that my lived experiences have shaped my interest and approach to this dissertation work as my “insider” perspective allows for the articulation of sentiments, narratives and realities of

being Black in this America. Bernal (1998) suggests one's "cultural intuition" allows for deep analysis into issues of race and racism, which "extends one's personal experience to include collective experience and community memory, and points to the importance of participants engaging in the analysis of data" (pp. 563-564). Having a deep understanding of the cultural nuances that align with these racist ideologies is essential to the success of this dissertation work.

Researchers who align with critical paradigms analyze power and often examine political ideology; many believe reality is constructed through power relations which are historically shaped over time (Taylor & Lindlof, 2017). Qualitative methods used with this approach seek to examine power, discourse, overlapping representations with no specific singular methodology that explains such means of analyzing data (Taylor & Lindlof, 2017; Tracy, 2020). Critical scholars also believe knowledge is distorted due to dominant, institutionalized ideologies that determine what is acceptable in society. Taylor & Lindlof (2017) in their exploration of critical studies suggests "media culture articulates the dominant values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era. It conceives of U.S. culture and society as a contested terrain, with various groups and ideologies struggling for dominance" (p. 8).

Tracy (2021) characterizes the purpose of a critical paradigm as illustrating cultural life that is "a constant tension between control and resistance" (p. 52-53). Critical scholars believe it is their ethical duty to help those who are oppressed by creating equitable spaces and opportunities through their research, focusing on

emancipation and transformation within society. They do this through a variety of methodologies including qualitative methods such as narrative analysis.

Similarly, the post-modern paradigm examines “discourse of power, multi-faceted ways of being, slippage of text and discourse” (Tracy, 2021), which indicates the presence of dominance and oppression while acknowledging the ability for resistance and change. Post-modern researchers avoid notions of objectivity, neutrality and concerns of bias because, they argue, reality is multi-faceted and knowledge is relative. Post-modern scholars believe all research is subjective; they contend everyone brings some form of bias to their research projects, even in the decision-making process of choosing a research topic itself.

### **3.2 Qualitative Textual Analysis**

This dissertation will use qualitative textual analysis to examine media content. Qualitative analysis allows a researcher to rely on “symbolic qualities” to “trace the antecedents, correlates or consequences of communications” (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 403) in order to interpret or make sense of a phenomena “in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 3). Helen Hickson (2016) notes that the qualitative approach allows scholars in the social sciences to explore and understand “the ways people construct meaning of their experiences, interpretations and perceptions” (p. 381) Media content “often reflects the cultural temperature of a society,” and a qualitative content analysis of media allows for examination of “broader cultural contexts to situate media messages” (Smith, 2019, p. 185). The method allows for the researcher to focus on the text from a specific perspective (Kellner, 2015), which

makes it appropriate to use in research grounded in the critical perspective. Kellner (2015) suggests the application of textual analysis – “the description and interpretation of the content, structure, purposes and consequences of existing verbal or visual texts” (Tracy, 2021, p. 80) – in cultural studies “combines formalist analysis with critique of how cultural meanings convey specific ideologies of gender, race, class, sexuality, nation and other ideological dimensions (p. 13). Critical studies scholars focus on “textual analysis of cultural artifacts, examining how meaning is multiple, ambiguous and dependent on its audience and connection to other texts” (Gibbs, 2018; Tracy, 2021, p. 81). A critical case purposeful sampling method (Patton, 1990) – which was employed in this dissertation – “proves or exemplifies the main findings, searching deliberately for confirming ... and typical cases serve to increase confidence in conclusions” (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014, p. 32). This sampling method also allows for generalizations to be made in order to explain the phenomenon exhibited in the analysis. For this dissertation, I explore three mass-mediated areas of interest – Black music, Black sports commentary and news content written by myself.

### **3.3 Units of Analysis**

The first units of analysis being observed to answer the research questions will cover the area of Black music. Music is essential to “establishing allegiances among disparate groups” (Danaher, 2010) and is essential to “inspiring and solidifying” (Bohonos et al., 2019, p. 257) interracial coalitions, surpassing society-driven obstacles that divide among racial and socioeconomic lines. Black music was selected because for generations, songs arising from oppression in the Black community have served as a

source of inspiration and survival, and music is still being used as a form of communication through expression of struggle, sorrow or empowerment, especially as it relates to revealing consciousness within the Black community (Danaher, 2010; DuBois, 1903; Joyner, 1999). For marginalized individuals and communities, music can be a way to reclaim and take ownership of their experiences through lyrical storytelling (Delgado, 1989; Lawrence-M.,1987). By exploring music lyrics of a Black artist, that idea can be brought into the forefront. Specifically, I will analyze song lyrics from a prolific Black rapper whose work has been hailed for its authentic and uninhibited delivery. Kendrick Lamar – a Black, Grammy award-winning rapper from Compton, California, which is known for its violence, inequitable policing practices and socioeconomic disparities among the Black community – received a Pulitzer Prize for his 2017 album DAMN. The Pulitzer Board hailed Lamar’s 14-track album as “a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life” (*DAMN.* by Kendrick Lamar, 2018). This feat was significant considering it was the first time the elite group awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music to an album outside of the jazz and classical genres, and the fact that it was in the controversial genre of rap. However, while the album was praised for its authenticity, my Critical Race Conceptual Model of Implicit Racial Bias in Content Creation will be used to examine the messaging in the song lyrics to reveal whether this attempt at explaining the realities of being Black in America promotes implicit racial bias. Previous research examining music lyrics to determine the prevalent themes expressed through song employed a qualitative textual analysis of



song lyrics in order to examine the ideologies that speak to societal dynamics and highlight behavioral depictions of society during the time (Allen & Randolph, 2019; Danaher, 2010; Denisoff, 1969; DuBois, 1903; Morant, 2010; Sickel, 2005). Similarly, this dissertation will critically analyze the following track's lyrics on Lamar's album – DAMN. – in order to answer the research questions posed: (1) BLOOD.; (2) DNA.; (3) YAH.; (4) ELEMENT.; (5) FEEL.; (6) LOYALTY.; (7) PRIDE.; (8) HUMBLE.; (9) LUST.; (10) LOVE.; (11) XXX. (12) FEAR.; (13) GOD.; and (14) DUCKWORTH. Kendrick Lamar was involved in the composition and performance of songs listed.

The second source of analysis is Black sports commentary. I chose this area of mass media because like music, sports transcends racial, cultural and economic barriers. And while popular athletes are hailed for their athletic abilities, they are often criticized in the realm of public opinion and mass media for vocalizing their displeasures with a prejudicial system, systemic racism and police violence (Agyemang, 2011; Frederick et al., 2018; Kilvington & Price, 2017; Martin & McHendry, 2016; Park et al., 2019; Peterson, 2009; Sanderson et al., 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018; Smith, 2019). The scrutiny attached to Black athletes and coaches who are vocal about these issues is highlighted through mass-mediated content (Lomax, 2002; Martin & McHendry, 2016; Wolfson, 2018). The National Football League has been widely scrutinized for their handling of Black-centric issues from on-field demonstrations in support of Black Lives Matter to the dismal absence of Blacks in head coaching positions though the majority-White institution implemented a failing policy – The Rooney Rule – which requires franchises to interview people of color for head coaching and senior operations positions (Collins,

2007; DuBois, 2015; Fanning Madden & Ruther, 2010; Click et al., 2021). In early 2022, recently fired Miami Dolphins coach Brian Flores called out the failings of the NFL, suing the league and three teams for what he called discrimination during the interview process (Louis-Jacques, 2022). This section will examine sports commentary from Black reporters associated with Andscape – a Black-led media organization founded in 2022 and formerly known as ‘The Undefeated’ – whose writers covered the story. According to Andscape’s “About” section on their website, they are:

[D]edicated to creating, highlighting and uplifting the diverse stories of Black identity. Magnified by the power and reach of The Walt Disney Co., the Andscape umbrella includes an editorial division, book publishing arm, film and television division, and music publishing group, each united by the shared mission of illuminating the culture and experience of Blackness. (andscape.com)

The articles selected for analysis were published on Andscape’s website February 1, 2022 – the day mainstream media first reported Flores’ discrimination class action lawsuit against the NFL – and February 2, the day following the aftermath of the report. The articles were found using a simple keyword search of “Brian Flores” on the digital media outlet’s website, and only the two articles concerning Flores’ lawsuit and its implications on the NFL’s role in dealing with race-related issues were selected. The purpose of this is to determine whether common racial identity precludes one from fostering implicit racial representation of the Black NFL coach. The articles for critical analysis are as follows:

- (1) Brian Flores’ lawsuit shines a brutal light on the NFL’s hiring practices’ by Jason Reid

(2) Will the Brian Flores lawsuit force a racial reckoning for the NFL? by William C. Rhoden

Lastly and in the same vein, I will apply my understandings of how implicit racial bias manifests itself in journalistic content by providing a narrative following a critical analysis of my selected work. This component of the dissertation is important as I'm suggesting that implicit racial bias can afflict the most aware of us because it is a product of one's internalized influences, not one's intellect, heart or good intentions. In order to understand how I may have unconsciously furthered implicit racial biases about the Black experience – which is indicative of deficit perspectives and a majoritarian narratives – I analyzed four “The State” Newspaper articles I published (N=4) between September 29, 2020 and February 10, 2021 that centered on the experiences of Black people in South Carolina. At the time, I was employed part-time as a journalist with the newspaper while pursuing my doctoral studies. This timeframe for the articles was selected because it was at this point in my journalistic career that I developed my own reporting area that focused on the intersection of race, culture and policy – the first position designated to issues of race and culture for the news organization. Not only will I employ a critical analysis of my work, but I will also discuss the circumstances surrounding the assigning, reporting, writing, editing and publishing of the stories when relevant. A critical narrative analysis of my journalistic work will allow for a reflexive understanding of how my experiences as a Black writer and interactions with the data impacted the research (Bernal, 1998; Hickson, 2016; Parisi, 1998; Souto-Manning, 2014). The use of field notes – The articles for analysis are as follows:

(1) Twin pandemics: Leading historically Black colleges through social unrest, COVID-

19

(2) From segregation to celebration: SC historical, all-Black Lakeview school honored

(3) 'Trailblazers' Johnson, Felder, Fielding: 50 years since integrating SC Legislature

(4) 'Still surreal': Black SC mayors leaving legacy as firsts to lead their towns

### **3.4 Counter Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis allows individuals to associate “microevents with broader discourses and contexts with the intent of asserting the construction of social experiences through narratives” (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 162). This approach to analyzing the text of interest will allow me to provide a critical examination while offering a reflection based on how I align myself with the analysis (Hickson, 2016). This is significant as “personal narratives are constructed and situated in social and institutional realms – yet by large, they are analyzed apart from issues of power and/or institutional discourse” (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 163).

Narrative analysis explores how mass media has functioned to naturalize “systemic social inequalities” through their depictions of issues of race, gender, class and sexuality (Soderlund, 2002, p. 442). For example, Parisi’s (1998) narrative analysis on a 3-part series published by The New York Times on a block in Harlem – a predominantly Black neighborhood – found that what appeared to be a “rich social narrative” filled with compassion and in-depth reporting on the plight of minorities, was actually a ideological failure in which personal framing illustrated a common discourse concerning race in the press (p. 247). Parisi (1998) refers to this discourse as “modern

racism” (p. 247) while emphasizing how this method is essential to uncovering a journalistic practice where “personalization plus standard news categories” equals “racist stereotyping” adding “in the quest for counter-stereotyping journalism, the foundational understandings of narrative and discursive approaches to communication show rich possibilities for sharpening discussion of contemporary journalistic practice” (p. 249).

Lieblich et al. (1998) suggests there are four ways to approach narrative analysis, one of which is the holistic-content reading method that will be employed for this dissertation’s analysis of narratives in Black music, Black sports commentary and Black journalistic work. This approach “looks at the meanings provided by the whole narrative, focusing on the one or two particular themes that emerge from through the narrative or focusing on specific sections of the text within the context of the entire narrative (p. 203).” Centering the Black experience, race and racism is essential to critical race theory scholarship as it helps to establish counter narratives to majoritarian stories formed by predominant, White society (Lopez, 2003, p. 84). Milner (2008), a leading scholar in critical race theory in higher education, suggests “knowledge can and should be generated through the narratives and counter narratives that emerge from and with people of color. Critical race theory’s advancement of the narrative and counter narrative centralizes race for the knower and for the known” (p. 343). Building this counter narrative in American society involves examining the predominate messages that contribute to these accounts in mass media. Guided by Solórzano and Yosso’s 2002 article “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical

Framework for Education Research,” this dissertation will employ a counter narrative analysis to understand how deficit perspectives and majoritarian narratives are upheld through the presence of implicit racial bias in Black content creation. Counter narrative analysis is used in critical race scholarship as a methodology for understanding how central race and racism is to the subordination of Black and brown people (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This methodology, according to Solórzano & Yosso, 2002:

[R]elies on stock stereotypes that covertly and overtly link people of color, women of color and poverty with ‘bad’ while emphasizing that White, middle- to upper-class people embody all that is ‘good.’ Morally, the silence within which assumptions are made about good versus bad describes people of color and working-class people as less intelligent and irresponsible while depicting White middle-class and upper-class people as just the opposite (p. 29).

And while critical race methodology has traditionally been applied to “identify, analyze and transform” cultural and structural facets in education that uphold “subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom (Matsuda, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), its application to this dissertation is essential as it allows those who have been “injured by racism and other forms of oppression” an understanding that they are not alone in their plight. Solórzano and Yosso (2020) adding “they become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed, and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves” (p. 27).

In Souto-Manning’s (2014) “Critical Narrative Analysis: The Interplay of Critical Discourse and Narrative Analysis,” the scholar in early childhood education offers critical narrative analysis as a methodology for identifying, highlighting and understanding how colonization and the power associated with it shapes language and perception. This

methodology centers the experiences of individual lived experiences, while recognizing how power and social structures influence those realities. Souto-Manning (2014) suggests that critical narrative analysis serves the following functions:

- (1) Allows qualitative scholars to understand how “people create their selves in constant societal interactions at both personal and institutional levels, and how institutional discourses influence and are influenced by personal everyday narratives” (p. 163);
- (2) Affirm “the power of institutional discourses” rather than to “verify the presence of recycled institutional discourses” underscoring the text (p. 163);
- (3) “Allows for critical analysis of narratives... – the everyday stories people tell – within the context of institutional discourse. Analytically deconstructing the different institutional discourses threaded in these narratives allows researchers to deal with real-world issues and develop critical meta-awareness – demystifying the social construction of reality, challenging commonly accepted (and often monolithic) definitions of critical, and reframing social interactions as places for norms to be challenged and changed” (p. 163).

Since I’m applying my conceptual model to understand how implicit racial bias and ideologies of Blackness are represented in media content, the dissertation will take an etic or deductive approach as I want to “make sense of the contextual behavior” through the lens of critical race theory and framing theory (Tracy, 2021, p. 27). With this approach, scholars (1) begin with a theory; (2) “make an educated guess or hypothesis about the social world based on this theory; (3) tests the hypothesis; and (4) “either

confirm or disconfirm the original theory” (Tracy, 2021, p. 27). This theoretical insight allows me to give meaning and weed-out other data being observed in order to provide understanding. Through the process of coding and analysis, I will be able to identify and develop relationships across elements or tenets of interest as the data is analyzed while being collected. This approach is deductive in design and practice.

### **3.5 Narrative, Counter Narrative Analysis Procedure**

In order to determine how Implicit racial bias and racist ideologies are represented in the content of music and sports commentary, I first employed a thematic analysis – a method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Tracy, 2020) – where the critical examination was focused on what is explicitly said in the text rather than how it is being told (Riessman, 1993). Constant comparative analysis is “circular, iterative and reflexive” where the researcher is constantly reviewing their codes and “their explanations and slightly modifying them or creating new ones along the way” (Tracy, 2020, p. 220). Focusing on what is explicitly said suggests the presence of explicit racial bias. The comparative analysis process, constantly reviewing, also allowed me to look for implicit racial bias – that which is hidden and possibly unintended but effectively communicates racist ideology. Similarly, to Harter et al. (2006) in their counter-narrative analysis of disability, the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar’s album as well as the transcripts of commentary from Black sports commentary and my journalistic work were read in their entirety “to develop a sense of the discourses as a whole” (p. 9). This approach allows for “themes that represented recurring patterns of behavior and meaning to emerge” from the text (Harter et al., 2009, p. 9). A manual



coding of the lyrics and transcripts, paying close attention to the actual words being used in reference to issues concerning race, racism and challenges directly related to Blackness will allow me to indicate how racist ideologies and implicit racial bias is represented in the textual elements.

Next, I coded for majoritarian narratives and counter narratives in order to document the deficit and racist perspectives ideologies in the content. A coding process involving a combination of in vivo, descriptive and emotion coding will allow me to move toward categories that can reveal patterns that may speak to the implicit racial biases and ideologies concerning the Black experience (Saldaña, 2011). Through this method of inquiry, I seek to understand how implicit racial bias is personified by individuals who share in the racial group to which they speak of. During first level analysis of the narratives, coding was first conducted using in vivo – using the exact language of the text (Tracy, 2020 – descriptive and emotion coding (Saldaña, 2016). Emotion coding is an appropriate method for exploring, “intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions, especially in matters of social relationships, reasoning, decision-making, judgment and risk-taking,” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 125), and the use of descriptive coding helps identify the important topics of the passage (Saldaña, 2016). These coding methods are appropriate for capturing the rich commentary as the strong emotional elements of the text lend to in vivo coding in order to capture the depth of the textual elements. During second-level analysis of the narratives, words, phrases and themes from the narratives were combined and categorized into subthemes. Predominate narratives that arose from the synthesis and

integration of subthemes formed the final coding categories for third-level analysis, all pertaining to race-centric narratives. After developing themes, I will then document how the Black content creators challenge or uphold majoritarian narratives through deficit perspectives. As explained in the critical race conceptual model of implicit racial bias, implicit bias, racist ideologies and historical, oppositional dualities influence the framing of content creation, thus what content creators articulate concerning race and racism is already hindered.

## **CHAPTER 4: IMPLICIT RACIAL BIAS AND IDEOLOGY IN BLACK MUSIC**

In this chapter of the dissertation, I will present literature on race, media and Black music followed by analysis on representations of Implicit Racial Bias and Ideology in framing the Black experience in Hip Hop music.

### **4.1 Black Music and the Black Experience**

Music is a “ubiquitous social phenomenon” (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003, p. 1236) and cross-cultural, pervasive activity that is a unifying factor which strengthens human interconnectivity. Music supersedes economic, societal and cultural systems despite generational mechanisms that divide based on race, ethics and ideology (Rentfrow, Goldberg & Levitin, 2011). The role music plays in cultural, religious and military experiences is indicative of its value in establishing behavioral cohesiveness among groups of people (Roederer, 1984). Music is essential to forming and strengthening social relationships, cognitive development, identity (Abrams, 2009) and shapes social and physical environments to reinforce self-views (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003).

Black expression through music provides a unique perspective and intimate insight into the lived experiences of Black people, speaking to the cultural experiences unique to this racial group which literature has revealed is largely skewed by the insertions of largely negative, stereotypical language and imagery. These ideologies unique to the Black experience are often reflected and shared through song. For

enslaved Africans in the United States, expressing their stories of oppression through song was affirming a hope and promise of freedom “on Earth and in Heaven” (Delgado, 1989; Lawrence-M., 1987, p. 385). Spirituals have traditionally operated as a form of sharing these experiences and grievances (Lawrence-M, 1987; Danaher, 2010), and even today, Black music serves as a form of communication, often used as an expression of struggle, empowerment and a counternarrative to elite power dynamics within a society built on systemic racism and prejudicial principles (DuBois, 1903). Black scholar and activist W.E.B. DuBois, whose foundational work on the Black experience as shaped by the power dynamics and systemic mechanisms of the White elite, speaks of the influence of Black song, still felt to this day in his pivotal 1903 book, “The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches:

[T]hese songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world. They tell us in these eager days that life was joyous to the black slave, careless and happy...They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways. The songs are indeed the siftings of centuries; the music is far more ancient than the words, and in it we can trace here and there signs of development. (DuBois, 1903, p. 181)

DuBois continues by illustrating of the significance and immeasurable impact that Negro spirituals, hymns and recitations had on the lives of Black people:

I know little about music and can say nothing in technical phrase, but I know something of men, and knowing them, I know that these songs are the articulate message of the slave to the world. They are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways. (p. 253)  
For Black artists, music is a means of storytelling – narrative creation –

reclaiming and taking ownership of their stories through song. These lyrical narratives open “new windows into reality” sharing the “possibilities for life other than the ones”

one may live (Delgado, 1989, 2414). Narratives through song are a “powerful means for destroying mindsets” while imparting knowledge and shared experiences in the midst of a society of political and legal discourse (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413). A prejudicial society, disenfranchisement, as well as denial of civil liberties – all mechanisms that oppress the Black community – propel Black artists to express their experiences as a means of fulfilling “cultural self-determination” (p. 282). Black music provides a unique perspective and historical understanding into the Black experience, and its musicians offer a voice for an oppressed people – providing insight into the struggles yet triumphs, joy and faith of a culture. This production of a cultural perspective through music emphasizes the intersections between social movement and societal dynamics that shape these interpretations (Eyerma & Barretta, 1996). Beyond mere entertainment, Black artists serve as thought-leaders and poetic narrators of history (Morant, 2010). Black music solidifies “societal concerns” of generations by offering glimpses into the historical and social conditions of society disproportionately impacting African Americans (Morant, 2010, p. 72). Popular Black music artists, especially in the Hip Hop and Rap genres, have used their music to give consciousness to the Black experience that continues to propel Black social justice causes.

The Black experience as told through music is driven by remembrance or nostalgia. Samuel Floyd (1997), a leading scholar on Black music, suggests that political commentaries permeate the lyrics of Hip-Hop songs – a genre dominated by Black people. The lyrics “consist of explicit or implicit descriptions or assessments of the social, economic and political conditions of people of African descent as well as the

forces creating these conditions” (Floyd, 1997, p. 196). Floyd’s 1997 study, “The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States,” suggests that the Black community responds to music because of the expressions of struggle and success that establishes collective identity and awareness of social causes (Floyd, 1997). Writer and philosopher Alain Locke’s 1936 scholastic anthology of Black music suggests its content is ingrained in the fabric of America and predominant Black music genres reflect the social and political environment as well as how it disproportionately impacts Black people.

#### **4.2 Ideology and Music**

Ideology, which is often referred to as a structured belief system or worldview of a society or social group (Shelby, 2003), is prevalent in music, especially Black music. It is an intermediary between ideas and mass society (Lylo, 2016) that explains social conditions. Scholars suggest ideologies also help people understand their place in society while providing a social and political agenda (Ball, Dagger & O’Neill, 2020). Ideology coincides with political culture which involves society’s “deepest values and expectations of its people, and is developed through an amalgam of history, religion, race, ethnicity, gender relations and economic factors” (Sickel, 2005, p. 315). These deep values are disseminated and reinforced by communication, therefore, suggesting that the political messages expressed through music is reflective of societal sentiments. While literature has focused on the messages and themes in music (Fox & Williams, 1974; Sullivan, 2003; Sickel, 2005; Smith, 2019; Allen & Randolph, 2019), surprisingly to

my knowledge, a paucity of research explores the ideologies expressed in music as it relates to the Black experience which literature indicates is often misunderstood.

Essential to understanding the expression of such ideologies through music, is the understanding of its implications on those who receive that message. Critical race theory work challenges dominant racist ideology and explores the narratives and counter narratives that relate to and impact people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Lopez, 2020; Milner, 2008). Delgado (1989) champions the concept of counter-storytelling in critical race scholarship which is a tool and method to share and explore the experiences of marginalized racial groups as well as evaluate and challenge narratives of white society. Such storytelling inspires the listener who may share in similar thoughts and experiences but hesitate to share their voice due to systemic mechanisms that seek to silence their voice. As it relates to social justice for marginalized groups, Delgado (1989) suggests:

Stories are useful tools for the underdog because they invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story's point, and test it against his or her own version of reality. This process is essential in a pluralist society like ours, and it is a practical necessity for underdogs: All movements for change must gain the support, or at least understanding, of the dominant group, which is white. (p. 2440)

The literature indicates it is then essential for members of society that are not a part of the Black community to listen to these messages in order to strengthen their own experiences while not continuing to propagate stereotypical and uninformed representations of the Black experience which is largely formed by individuals in mass media who have little understanding of these realities (Delgado, 1989; Feagin, 2000; Hall, 1999, 2003).

Historically, music originating from the Black community has included a “subculture reflective of the political, social and economic conditions of the time” (Cummings, 2009, p. 510; Peretti, 2008), and Hip Hop has become a “global cultural and entertainment movement” (Cummings, 2009, p. 512) transcending racial barriers. However, prior the successes and popularity many Hip Hop artists are now benefiting from, White America as well as the local federal government agencies such as the FBI and CIA tried to censor and outlaw artists expressions of racism, police brutality and violence, deeming them aggressive and unfit for the ears of the youth (Cummings, 2009; Seach & Levinson, 2020). Hip Hop artists such as Public Enemy and the N.W.A. received widespread criticism from White America for not only their “explicit political and violent countercultural” storytelling through song, but also because their messages were reaching inner-city and White-suburban youth across the United States (Cummings, 2009; Edgar, 2016; Walser, 1995). In Cummings’ (2009) comparative analysis of the relationship between critical race theory and Hip-Hop, the researcher notes:

In furiously challenging American norms, CRT advocates for and Hip-Hop artists brashly suggest a reality completely different from the rest of the country and the world. Through narrative storytelling and funky base lines, CRT and hip hop seek to educate, inspire, and motivate a generation. Despite weaknesses in both movements, CRT and hip hop have informed and changed society in compelling ways. (p. 576)

Kendrick Lamar – a 34-year-old rapper from Compton, California – is widely celebrated for his masterful music which confronts societal issues that plague the Black experience. In doing so, he illustrates “an intense, beautifully blemished picture of his struggles to overcome, yet often succumbing to, peer pressure, misogyny, alcoholism and violence” (Love, 2016). Love (2016) suggests Lamar’s music illustrates how Hip-Hop



culture can create elicited storylines of resistance in an unconscious way through his lyrics.

Love (2016) adds:

[T]he ways in which he marshals in narratives of resistance that indict a system for the creation of mad cities that penalize good kids, to me, establishes Lamar as a voice of the current Hip Hop community providing the soundtrack for young people in the fight for justice. (p. 320)

Lamar's ability to capture the essence of the Black experience through lyrical narratives on the intersections of race, culture and policy earned him a 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Music – the first for a Hip-Hop album. In a 2018 Time magazine article, the Grammy-award winning rapper acknowledged how this recognition served as validation for the artistry, representing more than a genre but a way of life:

It took a long time for people to embrace us – people outside our community, our culture – to see this not just as vocal lyrics, but to see that this is really pain, this is really hurt, this is really true stories of our lives on wax. (Lang, 2018, para. 4)

Significantly, the Pulitzer committee – a majority is not part of the Black community – called his 2017 recording of DAMN. “a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life” (DAMN., by Kendrick Lamar). This characterization of this album led to my inquiry as to what narratives represented in song illustrate an understanding of the Black experience.

#### **4.3 Implicit Racial Bias and Ideology Analysis in DAMN. by Kendrick Lamar**

In answering RQ1, there is evidence that Kendrick Lamar's references to issues of poverty, love of money, drug use, violence, gang activity, lust and promiscuity are indicative of implicit racial bias and racist ideologies that are commonly associated to

the Black experience which are indicative in all 14 songs: *BLOOD.*, *DNA.*, *YAH.*, *DAMN.*, *ELEMENT.*, *FEEL.*, *LOYALTY.*, *PRIDE.*, *HUMBLE.*, *LUST.*, *LOVE.*, *XXX.*, *FEAR.*, *GOD.*, and *DUCKWORTH.*. While Lamar's mentions of these matters reflect his authentic experiences growing up in Compton, California, the references automatically trigger normalized and long held perceptions of the Black experience in this country. Though Lamar's reality, he is implicitly feeding into the racist ideologies concerning the Black experience. As shown in the model, framing occurs through Lamar's reflections of his lived experiences, having been framed as a Black man in society. For example, in the track "Lust," Lamar (2017) begins the song describing a sexual encounter with a woman before taking account of the lustful actions of a Black man:

*Wake up in the mornin', thinkin' bout money, kick your feet up  
Watch a comedy, take a shit, then roll some weed up  
Go hit you a lick, go fuck on a bitch, don't go to work today  
Cop you a fit or maybe some kicks and make it work today  
Hang with the homies, stunt on your baby mama  
Sip some lean, go get a pistol, shoot out the window  
Bet your favorite team, play you some Madden  
Whatever you doing, just make it count (I need some water)*

In this excerpt, Lamar describes a Black man's "typical" day where he smokes weed, robs someone, engages in sexual intercourse, avoids going to his place of employment, shows off – "stunt" – in front of the mother of his children, drinks alcohol, starts a shootout, gambles and plays video games. The use of derogatory terminology such as "fuck" to describe a sexual encounter and "bitch" to describe a woman perpetuates a negative perception of Black men being lazy, thug, drug addict, absent father and incapable of committing to their partners. Afterward, Lamar states "whatever you doing, just make it count" as if he is not necessarily condoning such

activities, but suggesting that in whatever one does in life, it needs to be done with purpose.

Additionally, on the track “ELEMENT.” in which Lamar highlights his passion for rapping, he continues to make references to criminal activity, violence and incarceration by making statements such as “my daddy commissary made it to commas,” which references the canteen within a correctional facility where relatives are able to place money on their relatives account to make purchases inside a prison and “I’ll take your fuckin’ life for this shit, nigga” – referencing his ambition and passion for rapping that would drive him to kill in order to protect it. On the track “HUMBLE.” – which starts as a braggadocios account of success, before declaring the need to be unpretentious – Lamar reminisces about his early life filled with poverty, hustling and violence by stating, “I remember syrup sandwiches and crime allowances / Finesse a nigga with some counterfeits, but now I’m countin this.” Though Lamar is documenting his own lived experiences and uses these references to make a point about the plight of the Black community by intentionally acknowledging these stereotypes as means to turn a mirror on his own people, through this conscious lyrical decision, the perception of Black people it personifies feeds into racist ideologies about the Black experience that is being solidified through the narratives of one of the greatest rappers of this generation.

#### *Expressing Black Reality to Counter Racist Perceptions*

It’s important to note that while there were some indications of implicit racial bias and racist ideologies in the lyrics of Lamar’s DAMN. album, the overall message of the album and individual tracks indicates strong narratives that center the experiences

of the Black community – passion, pride, faith, success, systemic racism and oppression and White racial terror. For example, in the song “DNA.” Lamar describes pride in his Black heritage and all that entails:

*I got, I got, I got, I got –  
Loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA  
Cocaine quarter piece, got war and peace inside my DNA  
I got power, poison, pain and joy inside my DNA  
I got hustle, though, ambition flow inside my DNA  
I was born like this, since one like this, immaculate conception  
I transform like this, perform like this, was Yeshua new weapon*

In this excerpt, Lamar describes a rich African heritage that flows in his blood, loyalty indicating unity among Black people and royalty being an ancestor of African kings and queens. He continues to juxtapose the Black experience by describing the extremes of being a people of power and joy while suffering great trauma, pain and poison which is indicative of death. Lamar’s reference to “hustle” and ambition indicates hard work and determination despite the racist systems and mechanisms stacked against him and the Black community overall. Additionally, Lamar’s reference to the “immaculate conception” or the birth of Jesus Christ in Christianity, denotes his position and acknowledgement that he is a son of God providing privileges and an authority in his faith. Lamar, again, makes a Biblical reference by stating he’s Yeshua’s – the Hebrew name for Jesus – new weapon. In other words, Lamar views his craft – rapping – and status in society as a vessel for doing the Lord’s work or a form of discipleship. The repetitive refrain that includes all the triumphs and trials associated to the Black experience “inside my DNA” signifies the pride and perseverance that is meant to encourage the Black community despite the “power, poison, pain” inflicted upon them.

Not only does Lamar counter narratives about the Black experience by acknowledging and taking ownership in the pride he has for the Black community, but he also confronts systems of oppression and generational trauma induced by government policies. These narratives were prominent throughout the song “XXX.”:

*America  
God Bless you if it's good to ya  
America, please take my hand  
Can you help me underst –*

In this excerpt, Lamar suggests that the United States has not been a safe place for Black people and is pleading for the United States to embrace the Black community it has long marginalized. Lamar’s phrasing “America, please take my hand” illustrates an emotional appeal to a country that has not embraced Black people since the institution of slavery. The intimate gesture of grabbing hold of a hand suggests a wanted partnership, trusting partnership with society. In the following line, Lamar intentionally and abruptly cuts off the word “understand” which may indicate the lack of understanding in this country as it relates to issues of race and systemic racism inflicted upon the Black community. Without communication and embracing the experiences of the Black community, this society cannot reach understanding as blind eyes and deaf ears preclude societal change toward racial equality.

Lamar (2017) continues by stating:

*Throw a steak off the ark to a pool full of sharks  
He'll take it  
Leave him in the wilderness with a sworn nemesis  
He'll make it (He'll make it)  
Take the gratitude from him, I bet he'll show you somethin'*

Again, this excerpt, Lamar makes a Biblical reference to Noah's ark. Noah was a man favored by God, and the ark represents a place of privilege where those who entered did not perish to the great flood that covered the Earth. Here, Lamar is illustrating that those who may be in this place of privilege will use their position and luxury to hinder others from attaining such levels of influence and power. Lamar equates this to the plight of Black men, where he's offered something that looks good and will take it despite the danger it may impose as that is all he is being offered, and it's needed to survive. Lamar's reference to the "wilderness with a sworn nemesis" illustrates this as well, suggesting Black people are constantly operating in a space where they are placed in precarious and sometimes dangerous situations where they are forced to endure and ultimately come out victorious.

Later in the song, Lamar moves on to discussing the implications of systemic racism on a teenager who has been convinced by societal standards that what he sees around him is what he is supposed to be:

*Johnny don't wanna go to school no mo', no mo'  
Johnny said books ain't cool no mo' (No mo')  
Johnny want be a rapper like his big cousin  
Johnny caught a body yesterday out hustlin'  
God bless America, you know we all love him*

In this excerpt, Lamar describes this young man who decides he wants to be rapper – the epitome of success for a Black man as deemed by society – and is killed while working in the streets. Lamar's quip "God bless America, you know we all love him" is a sarcastic delivery in which Lamar mocks the notion that the country loved Johnny to death – presenting an image of him that led to his demise. This reference to

“God bless America” – a common phrase and song that praises the country while requesting protection of her – suggests that the “America” that is often hailed is not the same “America” that cares about the murder of a Black boy in his own community.

Lamar continues making strong political statements that further the notion that the United States is not a safe place for Black and brown individuals – suggesting, instead, that the country is a place of chaos and madness.

*Hail Mary, Jesus and Joseph  
The great American flag is wrapped in drag with explosives  
Compulsive disorder, sons and daughters  
Barricaded blocks and borders – look what you taught us  
It’s murder on my street, your street, back streets, Wall Street  
Corporate offices, banks, employers, and bosses with  
Homicidal thoughts, Donald Trump’s office*

Lamar begins this verse by soliciting a blessing and prayer to intercede on his behalf. He continues to describe the United States as a country disguised as an instrument of peace when in actuality it is an uncontrollable weapon of violence. Mentions of barriers and borders is a nod to immigration, the country using these barriers to keep Black and brown individuals out of the country as well as symbolizing the class system in the United States where gated communities protect the wealthy while keeping the poor out. Additionally, Lamar’s reference to murders on his street to those on Wall Street suggests the killings of Black and brown individuals has permeated the “streets” of corporate America as politics, money and greed that fuel corporations such as the gun manufactures are equally culpable for these lives being taken.

Lamar adds:

*It’s nasty when you set us up when roll the die, then bet us up  
You overnight the big rifles, then tell Fox to be scared of us*

*Gang members or terrorists, et cetera, et cetera*  
*America's reflections of me, that's what a mirror does*

Lamar suggests that the government uses Black people as a pawn to continue to feed racist ideologies of their experiences by conspiring with media organizations such as Fox News – a conservative-based network – to portray the Black community as violent and criminals. Fox News is known to use their platform to spread racist and stereotypical depictions of Black people, framing Black Lives Matter protestors as rioters and terrorists. As such, Lamar ends the excerpt by stating “America’s reflections of me, that’s what a mirror does” indicating all that America is suggesting he is as a Black man is not what the mirror, his own reflection, is suggesting. In other words, society is trying to place a narrative about his lived experiences as a Black man – all the negative connotations that are associated to it – but there is a disconnect between what society expects and perceives of him and how Lamar perceives himself. Lamar exposes the listener to the plight of the Black experiences while illustrating how the media uses these characterizations as a scare tactic to distract and vilify Black people though their circumstances are attributed to the systemic oppression and undervaluing of these communities.

Of great consideration while analyzing this album was understanding how Lamar’s persona as a rapper aligns with the authenticity of a Black man who grew up in government housing to a single mother where violence, drug addiction, alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, and police brutality was his reality. And in speaking to those realities, Lamar is centering his experiences as well as the experiences of Black youth, men and women who grew up under similar circumstances or who can relate to systems



of oppression that seek to hinder progress of the Black community. Lamar uses stereotypical representations of the Black experience as a means to flip them on their side and illustrate how society uses the circumstances forced upon them as a means to retaliate, neglect and condemn the Black community as a people. And as illustrated in the model, the meaning that is created and assigned to narrative creation is both consciously and unconsciously biased by societal circumstances that shape our implicit racial biases.

## **CHAPTER 5: IMPLICIT RACIAL BIAS, IDEOLOGY AND RACE IN BLACK SPORTS COLUMNS**

In this chapter of the dissertation, I will first present literature on race, media and professional sports followed by analysis on representations of Implicit Racial Bias and Ideology in framing the Black experience in sports columns by Black writers.

### **5.1 Race, Media and Professional Sports**

The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor as well as the murder, mistreatment and abuse of other Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement and White supremacists spurred protests across the country in 2020, causing anguish and re-exposing a wound within the Black community as national conversations and media coverage center on the harsh realities of race and racism in the United States (Austin, 2020; BBC News, 2020; Beason, 2020; Samuels, 2020). In the realm of professional sports, Black athletes and their coaches have been taking a stance on racial injustice by using their voices and platforms to bring attention to the causes that directly impacts the policies which disproportionately affect the Black community (Pelak, 2005; Demby, 2012; Martin & McHendry, 2016; Schmidt et al., 2018). Black athletes and coaches have long operated as agents for social change, often criticized in the realm of public opinion and mass media for vocalizing their displeasures (Pelak, 2005; Smith, 2019). However, “when institutions like sport become complicit in institutionalized racist acts, it no

longer takes the efforts of rogue actors or right-wing organizations when racism is intentionally or unwittingly perpetuated” (Hylton, 2009). Sports leagues have attempted to tackle issues of race by promoting efforts of the Black Lives Matter Movement such as in the National Basketball Association where league officials allowed their athletes to change the name on their uniforms to words they believed empower the Black community such as, “equality,” “justice” and “unity” (The Undefeated, 2020). In the National Football League, Commissioner Roger Goodell allowed players to wear social justice adornments on their helmets as well as allowing the Black national anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” to be performed prior to kick off during Week 1 of the 2021-2022 NFL season. However, league-wide support of these Black athletes and coaches who have been vocal about racial oppression has not always been met with acceptance, but rather criticisms by league officials, members of the general public and even members of mass media (Lomax, 2002; Martin & McHendry, 2016; Wolfson, 2018). The move toward supporting the efforts of Black Lives Matter has been a tenuous one for those who are a part of professional franchises, as leagues and individual teams are only now visibly promoting and supporting racial justice. Despite the initial backlash and seemingly gradual tolerance after nationwide outcry following Summer 2020 protests, many Black coaches and athletes have remained firm in their activism, seeking opportunities to participate in the protests, whether in the streets or on the field and basketball court (Deb, 2020; Scott, 2020).

Race and sport has been largely examined through the lens of critical race theory which posits that “racism is an influential and pervasive force in American society and

has become normalized to the extent that power differences between Whites and Blacks are reinforced to the point where such inequality is rarely questioned” (Frederick et al., 2018, p. 5). Literature in sports sociology acknowledges the fundamental, hegemonic role mass media plays in promoting ideologies about race, class and gender in the construct of sports (Birrell & Donnelly, 2004; McDonald, 2006; McElroy, 2014; Rowe 2004). Ferguson (1998) states “at its most effective and efficient, hegemonic domination enlists cultural institutions like sports and media to do power’s bidding through ethical rather than political and authoritative means” (p. 20). Critical race theory’s application in the discourse of race and sports provides a logical conception of its theoretical underpinnings that seek to demonstrate the “exceptional and irregular rather than routinely ubiquitous and deeply ingrained” racial inequality in sports that is prevalent in society as a whole (Mirza, 1999, p. 112). And widely publicized demonstrations by Black professional athletes and coaches concerning the mistreatment of Black lives have long taken the spotlight in mass media, often met with criticisms while drawing attention on the world stage as athletes advocated for social change. Peterson (2009) examined print media coverage of protests during the 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City, where Black medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos famously wore Black gloves, raising their fists in solidarity with the Black community and in protest of the ongoing struggles during the Civil Rights Movement for racial equity. The Black Power salute of Smith and Carlos’, who were members of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, Black power salute drew sharp criticism from sportswriters, as members of the media perceived the United States sprinters as

violating “the sanctity of sports by inserting their own politics” (Peterson, 2009, p. 101). Peterson attributed the media’s discontentment with the Black athletes’ actions to an “unwritten rule or norm in sports that its participants leave their politics and social activism at the arena or stadium gate” (p. 101); the widespread backlash that resulted ultimately led to the U.S. Olympic Committee as well as the International Olympic Committee suspending them from the remaining of the games and the country’s official team.

## **5.2 Implicit Racial Bias and Ideology Analysis in Black Sports Column- Brian Flores vs. NFL**

The case of Brian Flores, however, introduces a unique glimpse into the battle that wages within the institution of professional sports where those in leadership – the White majority – are tangled in their own web of systemic, racist practices while those who are pawns in their bureaucratic system of oppression – most of whom in the NFL are Black players – are suffering professionally (Reid, 2022; Rhoden, 2022). The NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, himself, stated in 2020:

Without Black players, there would be no National Football League. And the protests around the country are emblematic of the centuries of silence, inequality and oppression of Black players, coaches, fans and staff. We are listening. I am listening, and I will be reaching out to players who have raised their voices and others on how we can improve and go forward for a better and more united NFL family. (AP Wire, 2020, para. 5)

And while this statement would suggest efforts to reforming a system, there are policies within the NFL, such as the Rooney Rule, that on the surface appears to remedy Black oppression and absence of Black leadership within the league through affirmative action. However, it is a failed attempt to remedy a prevailing problem in the NFL,

making the plight of stories such as Brian Flores’ – former Black NFL head coach suing the league for discrimination – void to reality. The Rooney Rule, which was instituted in 2002 after years of criticism for the lack of Black head NFL head coaches (Collins, 2007), requires NFL teams to interview at least two external minority candidates when interviewing for head coaching positions (Fanning Madden & Ruther, 2010). According to the NFL, the Rooney Rule “promotes diverse leadership among NFL clubs to ensure that promising candidates have the opportunity to prove they have the necessary skills and qualifications to excel” (NFL.com). Black columnists Jason Reid and William C. Rhoden covered the Flores’ lawsuit for *Andscape*, and their writings suggests a significant implication for those who share a racial identity with an individual who is suppressed by the system.

### **5.3 Majoritarian Narratives, Deficit Perspectives Furthered Through Black Sports Columns**

In answering the first research question – are implicit racial bias and ideologies of Blackness represented in Black sports commentary – *Andscape* Black sports columnists – whose catchphrase is “Where Blackness is Infinite” – indicate implicit racial bias and ideologies in their writing about the lawsuit filed by former Miami Dolphin’s head coach Brian Flores. Black columnists disseminated racist beliefs through the following majoritarian narratives/deficit perspectives:

- (1) Prevailing, dominant function of White institutions. These were framed by a narrative indicating the reproduction of power and mentions of the NFL as a predominantly White-owned institution.

- (2) Silencing Black Voices, Paternalism, and the Status Quo. This was illustrated through a narrative framing the hierarchy between predominantly White owners and Black coaches and players, referencing a material threat and fear of retribution and an articulation of fear for livelihood on behalf of Black coaches.
- (3) Whiteness as Property: Whiteness demanding loyalty and exclusive use of leadership to meet White ends. This was illustrated through framing whiteness as property in the possession and demands of loyalty and use of Black coaches and Black players for the benefit and enjoyment of a predominately White institution.
- (4) Exceptions and Tokenism. Narratives framing exceptions as exemplars in Black head coaching representation that ignores systemic, structural inequality and racial disproportionality in hiring such positions.

These racist ideologies were best exemplified in the article “Brian Flores’ lawsuit shines a brutal light on the NFL’s hiring practices,” which was published the day the class action lawsuit was made public through mass media, February 1, 2022.

#### *Prevailing, Dominant Function of White Institutions*

Throughout the column published by Black sports columnist Jason Reid, he hints of how dominant and powerful the NFL is as an institution, setting the tone for the textual piece. The narrative starts with a notion of hope, legitimating the Black coach’s pending lawsuit as it stated “Brian Flores came with receipts” (para. 1). In Black culture, “receipts” means proof. Reid is suggesting that while the “truth” may be on the side of

Flores, Reid suggests there is no way for the Black coach to win his case. He states, “feelings aren’t proof” (Reid, 2022, para. 11) indicating that emotional trauma is not enough as a Black person to prove their oppression to a White, elitist system or their oppressor. McElroy (2014) in her textual analysis of sports columnists framing of overnight sensation Jeremy Lin, Taiwanese American, found columnists highlighted the differences between Black and Asian American athletes – at times pitting their social and racial hierarchy against each other –instead of focusing on “their shared struggle as culturally and politically underrepresented groups” (p. 446). McElroy (2014) noted “this suggests that sports and op-ed commentators would reflect frames consistent with hegemonic domination of race and sports” (p. 434). This is apparent in Reid’s piece, where he uses phrases such as “impenetrable American institution” (para. 12) to illustrate how indestructible the NFL as a league is. The columnist also ends the article with a quote from Flores which states:

*God has gifted me with a special talent to coach the game of football, the need for change is bigger than my personal goals...[M]y sincere hope is that by standing up against systemic racism in the NFL, others will join me to ensure that positive change is made for generations to come. (para. 33-34)*

The inclusion of this quote supports the previous idea that the fight against White patriarchy for racial equity is a sacrifice for Black people, both personally and professionally. Historically, Black people have had to lose something – their jobs, freedom or life – in order to garner change, and this idea has been sustained since slavery, through the Civil Rights Movement and now during the modern Black Lives Matter movement. Framing the hegemonic functions of White institutions in a manner that makes their approaches seem acceptable and simply a byproduct of being Black in



this country, neglects the opportunity to challenge and dismantle these powerful attempts at suppressing members of the Black community, especially those in the professional sports arena.

*Silencing Black Voices, Paternalism and the Status Quo;  
Whiteness as Property: Whiteness demanding loyalty and exclusive use of leadership to meet White ends*

The promotion of Black silence is more an unconscious encouragement as Reid does not explicitly state that Black people should remain silent during times of oppression. However, it is evident through the framing of this article. Reid (2022) states:

*In filing this lawsuit, Flores' NFL career is most likely over. It's difficult to envision a scenario in which another team would hire Flores after he, well, turned against the family. At only 40, Flores, who can flat-out coach, understood the potential consequences of his actions. (para. 32)*

In this excerpt, the columnist predicts that the Flores will be persecuted for challenging the system suggesting Black people cannot challenge and win against dominant White power – an assumption that has been naturalized in society thus contributing to the silencing of Black voices during times of great emotional turmoil. Therefore, stating “Flores’ NFL career is most likely over” subconsciously reinforces the idea that remaining silent is the best option when working against a system like the NFL and other White-dominant institutions. Reid notes that “at only 40,” Flores “understood the potential consequences of his actions” again reinforcing this idea of silencing, indicating that Flores’ professional career is over due to speaking up and out about what he deemed as systemic racism. This feeds into a narrative that when Black and fighting against a White institution, you will inevitably lose the battle. And while this has seemingly become the all too real experience of being Black in the United States,

furthering that ideology, that Black people can not beat the system when against White patriarchy, is problematic although may be the reality of being Black. Additionally, the writer equating the league to a family by stating “...he, well turned against the family” indicates this mob mentality and expectation that Flores should have remained loyal to an institution that worked against him. The writer clearly paints this “us” – the White, institution that is the NFL and those who are complicit in their actions – vs. “them” – Black people and others marginalized by their oppressive system – sentiment concerning this issue of racial equality. This implicit promotion of Black vocal suppression frames a deficit perspective, aiding a narrative that hinders Black societal progress.

#### *Exceptions and Tokenism*

This idea of highlighting false allyship is demonstrated through the Black columnist’s inclusion of efforts the NFL has made – whether monetarily or symbolically – toward issues concerning the Black experience or systemic racism. Reid (2022) begins the midpart of his column by highlighting the “progress” the NFL has made toward issues of racial equity. Reid (2022) writes:

*The NFL has made progress in hiring general managers. This cycle, the Vikings hired Kwesi Adofo-Mensah, formerly the Cleveland Browns’ vice president of football operations. The Bears named Ryan Poles, who previously served as the Kansas City Chiefs’ executive director of player personnel, to fill their position. There were some gains made in the front office in the previous cycle, too. (para. 19)*

A few paragraphs later, the columnist writes the following:

*Back in 2020, as the nation grappled with the legacy of systemic racism and police brutality spurred by the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer, commissioner Roger Goodell admitted the league had erred in how it*

*handled peaceful NFL player protests of police brutality and systemic oppression. Goodell condemned racism and affirmed that Black lives matter, pledging his allegiance to the players in the battle for equal justice under the law. (para. 22)*

This is a change in tone for the Commissioner who was once adamantly against former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick's decision to take a knee during the National Anthem, telling the Associated Press "I don't necessarily agree with what he is doing" (Wells, 2017). Kaepernick's kneeling garnered strong reactions from members of the media and sports world, with his actions often labeled as unpatriotic and disrespecting the country and armed service members (Peter, 2016; Schmidt, et al., 2018). However, Reid failed to acknowledge Kaepernick's prominent role and public discourse on the field and off concerning police violence and murders of Black people. This omission would seem to be a logical approach to countering Goodell's claims of allyship. Instead, Reid's inclusion of Goodell's condemnation of racism and affirmation of Black lives mattering neglects the fact that Goodell's actions do not align with his own words thus failing to hold this individual of power accountable for this false premise of being an advocate for Black causes. Framing theory indicates that what is left in mass-mediated content may be as important as what is left out, and by excluding the experience of Kaepernick – even if briefly mentioned – and by focusing only on the supportive actions of the NFL's Commissioner, Reid implicitly is affirming a deceptive allyship instead of using this as an opportunity to counter the "well intentioned" actions, masking a systemic problem within the league.

Reid (2020) later adds:

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" traditionally known as the Black national anthem, was performed before every Week 1 NFL game. "It Takes All of Us" and "End Racism"

was stenciled in end zones. Players were allowed to wear social justice patches on their helmets. (para. 23)

Reid's decision to insert information about what the NFL has done to address racial inequality and social justice – while it may be factual – encourages this notion that the League is “at least” putting effort toward helping the Black cause. This acknowledgement and specific insertion to the article overshadows the underlying systemic issue at play and the overall premise of the article. The selection of words such as “progress” and “some gains made” negates the fact that all these efforts – whether well intentioned or not – have not resulted in the equitable hiring of Black leaders in the NFL. In a patriarchal system where White privilege is used as a hegemonic function to oppress, suggesting that the NFL is making progress by making a sporadic handful of hires and donating money to a few charitable organizations centering the Black community, is problematic. The permeative measures taken by League officials to indicate some unity among their Black players and its emphasis in the article implies a conscious directional shift toward racial equity when these measures do not change the fact that Black coaches are interviewing for head coaching jobs, yet, are not filling them (Reid, 2022; Rhoden, 2022) – evidently to meet an institutionalized Rooney Rule quota which has no real bearings in the League. Indications suggest that since the implementation of this rule, Black coaches have seen some benefits (Collins, 2007; Fanning Madden & Ruther, 2010), but as of recently, no tangible outcomes.

Overall, this article illustrates that White racial domination – exhibited by the NFL – is working. This understood, naturalized idea that speaking up, as illustrated in this piece, validates this often implicit and unspoken weapon of oppression that is

working in White, dominated systems, institutions, and organizations. As indicated in the model, furthering these ideas of Blackness and the plight of systemic racism through the framing of this narrative is especially problematic coming from a Black content creator who has the ability to counter such notions of truth through narratives. This is not to suggest that Reid, a Black writer who inevitably has faced systemic racism himself working in his field, purposefully intended to endorse a privileged perspective on Brian Flores' class action lawsuit. However, as exemplified in the critical conceptual model of implicit racial bias, there are historical, cultural and societal circumstances that contribute to this unconscious framing of narratives that further negative stereotypes and majoritarian narratives from a deficit perspective.

#### **5.4 Centering the Black Experience Through Black Sports Columns- Counter Narrative**

The second sports commentary column, "Will the Brian Flores lawsuit force a racial reckoning for the NFL?" by William C. Rhoden, was published the day after Flores' class action lawsuit. It is an example of how Black sports columnists can counter narratives about the Black experience. RQ 1 sought to determine whether implicit racial bias and ideologies of Blackness are represented in Black sports commentary, and the textual analysis of this column indicates the answer is yes. However, contrary to the first example, while indications of implicit racial bias and ideologies are present, the author framed the article in a manner that highlights the systemic issues concerning race relations within the NFL, centering Flores' experiences while not diminishing the implications of the discrimination lawsuit. Rhoden (2022) was able to accomplish this by:

(1) Inclusion of Black voice, Experience of Oppressed

(2) Highlighting History of Systemic Oppression/ Racism within White Institution

*Inclusion of Black Voice, Experience of Oppressed*

Rhoden (2022), the author of the article in question, begins the article with an excerpt from Brian Flores' lawsuit documents:

*In certain critical ways the NFL is racially segregated and is managed much like a plantation. Its 32 owners – none of whom are Black – profit substantially from the labor of NFL players, 70 percent of whom are Black. (para. 1)*

Starting the article with this specific quote from Flores frames the overall narrative – the inequitable treatment of Black people in a White-dominated system of power, privilege and prestige – as the NFL is equivalent a modern-day institution of slavery. This bold inclusion immediately puts the reader in the mind frame that the NFL abuses their majority-Black constituency while profiting off their labor. As the reader, you have a sense of what this lawsuit is about through the eyes of an individual who has been victimized by a systemic racist practice that plague the League. The selection of this critical perspective provides a voice and first-person account of the oppression Flores felt was inflicted on him, which is different from the Reid's column where Reid selected quotes from the lawsuit that emphasized the hegemonic weight of the oppressor rather than the experiences of the oppressed. This approach of including Black voices/experiences of oppressed is also reflected in the following quote from Flores which emphasizes the awareness on the part of the oppressed that fighting a powerful institution is a sacrifice which may yield systemic changes within the NFL:

*I may be risking coaching the game that I love and that has done so much for my family and me. My sincere hope is that by standing up against systemic racism in*

*the NFL, others will join me to ensure that positive change is made for generations to come. (para. 5)*

This acknowledged risk suggests a careful consideration on the part of Flores as to the magnitude of confronting the oppressor presents. This insight into the systems of hierarchy as used in this column contrasts to the previous column by Reid. Rhoden's words in conjunction with the framing of this column does not present Flores plight as hopeless and detriment to his career, but more a notion of a heroic act that can trickle down into systemic changes within the NFL.

Another excerpt from Flores' lawsuit included in Rhoden's column furthers the Black coach's positioning and primary complaint of racism in the League:

*'The NFL remains rife with racism, particularly when it comes to the hiring and retention of Black Head Coaches, Coordinators and general Managers. Over the years, the NFL and its 32-member organizations have been given every chance to do the right thing. Rules have been implemented, promises made – but nothing has changed. In fact, the racial discrimination has only been made worse by the NFL's disingenuous commitment to social equity.'* (para., 20)

The intentional selection of this quote which features words and phrases such as "racism," "disingenuous," "racial discrimination" and "social equity" underscores, again, the experience of Flores which is at the heart of this newsworthy action. In this quote, Flores is naming the oppression inflicted upon him, decrying the Leagues attempts at hiring Black coaches – the Rooney Rule – as insincere and a façade as well as the historical failings of their biased practices. Rhoden focused the column around the words of the oppressed while holding the oppressor accountable through the words of others who have been victimized by the NFL's practices. For example, Rhoden (2022) interviewed another former Black NFL coach – Tony Dungy, the only Black coach to win

a Super Bowl – who further supported the tensions facing Black coaches in the NFL and the blind resolve those in power have become comfortable with:

*‘You can tell by the reaction, most people are in total denial,’ Dungy told me Tuesday. ‘It’s going to be tough for people to grasp what he is saying. It’s frustrating what these guys see,’ Dungy added, referring to the Black coaching candidates. ‘They see a double standard of how things are done. He’s just bringing his thoughts out in the open.’ (para. 11)*

This interview adds validity to the struggle Flores has faced within the League as a Black man by amplifying his voice through the voice of another Black man who has been a victim of the NFL’s racist practices, whether such practices are intentional or not. This journalistic choice underscores the critical need to center the experiences of Black people through their own words, and not taking the comfortable or easily acceptable approach of invalidating their words by an over emphasis of how the plight of Black people has improved over the years.

#### *Highlight History of Systemic Oppression/Racism within White Institution*

In addition to countering narratives of the plight of systemic racism in the NFL by centering the voices of Black men who have been directly impacted by the practices of the institution, Rhoden also provides examples of this systemic oppression by accounting for the historic pattern of disenfranchisement that has been established by the League. Rhoden illustrates this apparent systemic attack on Black coaches and athletes by briefly discussing what happened to former Quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who was seemingly blackballed from the NFL for his vocal and visible protests bringing attention to police brutality and violence against African Americans while also noting the “sham” of a system the Rooney Rule policy covered up. Rhoden (2022) writes:



*The lawsuit contains a number of damning accusations that, if proven to be true, confirm what many of us always suspected but could never prove. For example: That in many cases, head-coaching decisions were already made before Black candidates came in for interviews. That Black candidates were often put through sham interviews so teams could fulfill the Rooney Rule requirements, then hire the White coach they wanted all along. (para. 15-16)*

Rhoden continues by stating:

*[The] relationship between Black people and the NFL has often been a marriage of convenience, with progress only being brought about by pressure (para. 21).*

Adding:

*From the time it was formed in 1920, the NFL, first known as the American Professional Football Association, has had a complicated relationship with Black players. A 'gentleman's agreement' among the owners kept Black players out of the NFL from 1934 until 1946. (para. 22)*

Including these facts about the NFL furthers the claim being upheld in this column which suggests that systemic racism has prevented the professional ascent of Black people into leadership positions with the League. These excerpts indicate that the suspicion of misconduct by League officials – as it relates to equitable opportunities for Black people – has long been understood as the norm within the institution and this legal suit could be the catalyst to exposing these wrongs. Also, this brief history corroborates the race-centric challenges within the NFL as it was yet another institution in the United States whose foundations did not include Black people on an equal basis. The NFL was not meant for Black athletes, coaches or personnel, thus predictably, their challenges “integrating” individuals who were not meant to be a part of the club of privilege is indicative of the decades of the hesitant embrace of Black coaches. Ironically, the same court system that Brian Flores’ must prove his case before, is the same system that has been framed by White, European colonizers whose original conception of social

justice did not have Black people in mind. However as indicated in the model, while Rhoden speaks to issues of White oppression and systemic racism, Rhoden's framing of this narrative, led by Brian Flores' voice, provides a sense of compassion, optimism and empathy for the oppressed while highlighting historical and systemic oppression of an industry that is widely respected.

## **CHAPTER 6: A REFLEXIVE MOMENT IN BLACK JOURNALISM**

In this final chapter, I will offer a reflexive narrative on my practice as a journalist writing stories about the Black experience and how I, too, unconsciously furthered stereotypical narratives about the Black community though it was not my intention. Additionally, I will illustrate how the application of critical race perspectives in framing news articles can provide a counternarrative to the dominant racist ideologies and stereotypes about Black people.

Actively dismantling privileged and majoritarian narratives that have been propagated and accepted in society became my professional obligation as a journalist. And disrupting the pattern of silencing Black voices by White, bureaucratic entities – while finding my own voice as a professional writer – became the driving purpose behind my journalistic practices. This natural yearning to combat systemic practices within the culture of a news organization that seemingly neglected to center the Black experiences due to editorial decisions became a personal, emotional and almost exhaustive practice. I found myself reconciling my Black identity within a White institution that seemingly was holding an elitist forcefield around their dominant narratives that propagated White privilege while shunning the experiences of marginalized groups. Black critical scholar and activist W.E.B. DuBois speaks to a

constant reconciliation of identities as Black people – a weighing of identity to which they conform within an oppressive system. DuBois (1903) states:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others...an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose doffed strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 9)

By rediscovering my identity and professional role within the organization, a sense of urgency awakened my resolve and commitment toward racial equity, diversity and inclusion, and this was accomplished by reshaping the narratives and perceptions of the Black community in society through intentional selection and publications of little-known stories concerning the Black experience. Shouldering the burden of what it entailed to combat these predominate narratives was not an easy task, and the means to which navigating the corporate structures toward social justice efforts was one that was ever evolving, especially in 2020 following nationwide outrage and protest over the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. As a Black woman, the intentional selection of stories concerning the Black community allowed me to control some aspect of the Black narrative. However, an attempt to dismantle systemic practices in mainstream media which often perpetuates negative stereotypical ideologies of Black people could in of itself further negative aspects of the Black experience. Parisi (1998) examination of The New York Times supports this notion:

[T]he search for compassionate, multi-racial coverage requires more than simply hiring Black reporters. To be sure, black journalists are amply qualified to use their backgrounds and perspectives to encourage mutual social understanding, but such a benefit does not accrue automatically from racial identity (or even social class). (p. 248)

Journalists have been forced to navigate tensions of traditional storytelling in a modern age, which poses both opportunities and challenges for the industry (Evans, 2016). Prior literature has also examined changes in the newsroom focused on organizational culture, especially as it relates to diversity, equity and inclusion practices. Cultural changes have taken place in this type of organization, including training journalists to focus on the elements of producing a quality product, achieved through editing and design (Gade & Perry, 2003). However, meaningful difference in organizational culture involves changing the perceptions of newsroom employees from one of judgment to collaboration, a practice that has not been typically followed in this industry (Gade & Perry, 2003). Private and public ownership, too, contributes to the functioning of news organizations, and publisher policies, as outlined by ownership, have the greatest impact on the newsroom's identity, especially considering the decision makers are of the White, elite (Gade & Perry, 2003). Argyris' three-year analysis of the largest newspaper newsrooms in the country indicated that editors and members of management are the most resistant to organizational changes (Argyris, 1974). Industry-wide changes in the field of journalism has been decades in the making however societal and economic influences continue to dictate the success of its operations. Campbell as cited in Gade and Perry states, "If newspapers kept a keener eye on readers and the marketplace, then the newsroom would work more closely with the business side of the organization, with each having the same goal-a product that matters" (Gade & Perry, 2003, p. 331).

Counter storytelling is a method of sharing the narratives or experiences of marginalized individuals that are often untold, and is also a “tool for exposing, analyzing and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race scholars Solórzano and Yosso, indicate counter-stories begin by, “unearthing sources of data,” and suggest this approach is an attempt to shatter majoritarian narratives and challenge the “dominant discourse on race” and “racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). They suggest it is a method for both challenging majoritarian narratives while allowing the opportunity for individuals who have long been silenced to have their experiences heard. More than a tool for giving a voice to the oppressed, counter storytelling centers their experiences which “can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These majoritarian stories, put quite simply, promote and sustain White privilege in societal narratives, centering the White experience and diminishing and/or ignoring the true, lived experiences of minoritized groups who have been oppressed by the actions of this dominant group. Yosso et al. posit that, “majoritarian stories claim to be race neutral and objective, yet they implicitly make race-based assumptions and form race-based conclusions” (Yosso et al., 2004). Additionally, their exploration of color-blind affirmative action suggests there are societal systems in place that seek to silence “the history of racism in the United States and dismisses the contemporary experiences of people of color” (Yosso et al., 2004). Racism and unacknowledged white privilege defend and sustain the majoritarian narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The creation of counter stories is essential to combatting systemic racism as it aids in building harmony

and a culture of “shared understandings” (Tate, 1997). In his analysis of the historical and theoretical implications of critical race theory in education, Tate indicates counter storytelling “reveals hypocrisy and increases discomfort” for the listener (Tate, 1997).

Critical race scholar Yamamoto indicates that critical race praxis permits for insight and adequate interpretations of race and culture “into operational ideas and language for anti-subordination practice,” allowing theory to shed light on actual experiences. Yamamoto further states:

[N]arratives...derive meaning not from their objective truth, but from how they facilitate self-definition by those often ignored and from how they galvanize and support multifaceted racial group actions against subordination in places and at levels at which subordination is experienced and contested. (Yamamoto, 1997)

Mills (2016) suggests qualitative narrative accounts transcend individual troubles and parallel wider, societal issues which is an important consideration in organizational communication scholarship. In one example, Vickers’ (2007) ‘truth’ narrative recounted workplace bullying, illustrating how isolated instances of harassment contributed to a toxic workplace environment. Bochner (1997) suggests narratives are unique to qualitative scholarship as “they promise the companionship of intimate detail as a substitute for the loneliness of abstracted facts, touching readers where they live and offering details that linger in the mind” (p. 434). This level of intimacy into lived experiences is richly captured through this qualitative method as informed, layered understandings of experience include feelings and not just abstractions. Sensemaking, a reflective process of understanding or interpreting an event, as well as my reliance on memory and observations aided in the development of this reflexive narrative (Vickers, 2007; Weick, 1995; Williams, 2005). My intention was to leverage my personal agenda

of sharing the experiences of those who have been systemically silenced – members of the Black community – while meeting organizational goals of reaching new readership. However, as will be illustrated, the effort to highlight Black voices that have long been overlooked gave way to highlighting both a majoritarian narrative of the Black experience as well as a counter perception.

### **6.1 The Intersection of Race, Culture and Policy: A New Journalism Beat**

While employed as a journalist with a South Carolina newspaper with statewide coverage areas, I expressed the desire to contribute to the growth of the company by filling a gap in coverage by telling the stories of underrepresented members of the community as well as the issues that directly impact their wellbeing culturally, economically, and socially. With the blessing of my editor, I crafted a new beat that covering the intersection of race, culture and policy having the greatest impact on minorities. Through the implementation and execution of this position, I sought to do the following through my writing:

- (1) Fulfill the vision of the company while maintaining my voice in news coverage.
- (2) Contribute a voice/perspective to the company that is representative of a gap in coverage specifically as it relates to the organization's desire to tell more stories/issues concerning the Black, underserved, and underrepresented members of our community.



- (3) Introduce a new audience to the company by identifying and reaching prospective readers who are drawn to the story coverage that is representative of their communities.

Admittedly, my primary goal of taking on this challenge was to create a shift in coverage of the Black community – the community with which I identify with – in order to provide a different narrative and a positive perspective on being Black in the South. Considering the intent of such narrative creation, critically examining the articles I wrote during the period that this ‘Equity Beat’ position was crafted will allow me to critique my own work to determine, in retrospect, how I framed Blackness.

RQ1 seeks to determine if implicit racial bias and ideologies of Blackness are presented in the narratives, and if present, RQ2 asks how those concepts further majoritarian narratives. In response to the questions, my journalistic writing while on the Equity Beat indicates the presence of implicit racial bias and ideologies which furthers majoritarian narratives the following ways:

- (1) Diminishing Racism as Prevailing Problem to Adhere to Normalized Journalistic Practice; and
- (2) Avoiding Explicitly Naming Systemic White Violence/Trauma as Cause of Racism
- (3) Providing Historical Account of Black Success Despite Oppression

#### *Diminishing Racism to Adhere to Normalized Journalistic Practice*

The murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor that spurred protests in the Summer of 2020 brought to focus the issues of systemic racism and an

unjust criminal justice system that disproportionately impacts Black people.

Compounding these very real challenges facing the Black community was a heightened awareness on how the pandemic highlighted the disparities in public health as it became apparent how disproportionately the coronavirus was impacting Black and brown communities. South Carolina news coverage of the pandemic and how it was impacting every sector of society was well documented and executed by my colleagues. However, there was a missing piece in the coverage – how the coronavirus was specifically impacting the Black community.

Having grown up in the geographical area of interest, I noticed all too often over the years that when one of the five Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the area was featured in the news, it was typically surrounded by issues of controversy, such as the institution in financial ruins, or inappropriate behavior by administration, or violence on campus. While not an HBCU alumna, I was seeking to share a different narrative as relatives and colleagues who are alums of these institutions have voiced their concerns surrounding these narratives. Admittedly, and rather selfishly, my goal was to combat these persistent negative narratives by sharing a new perspective about the plight of young, Black college students seeking an education in the midst of two sweeping matters plaguing their community – systemic racism and COVID-19. Thus, I proposed a story to address these issues.

When published, the story headline read: *‘Twin pandemics’: Leading historically Black colleges through social unrest, COVID-19*, while the story was newsworthy and timely – two tenets essential to the traditional practices of journalism – the element I

wanted to focus on was the traumas attached to being Black in the midst of racial unrest and a pandemic. That approach started with the headline. As accustomed to good journalistic practice, having strong news headlines for articles helps capture the readers' attention and encourage them to read the piece. A common editorial practice is to create captivating headlines, and when appropriate, to pull a strong quote from the body of the story text to help illustrate the essence of the article. The intention is to capture the reader's attention so that they feel compelled to continue reading the piece. For example, the phrase "twin pandemics" was pulled from the following excerpt of the article and led the headline:

*'My inability to get my arms around them during the crisis drove me nuts. It was really difficult.'*

*Not only has the pandemic made addressing social unrest difficult – we're dealing with both issues at the same time, [the HBCU president] added.*

*'This is a critical moment in our country. We are dealing with twin pandemics – racial unrest (driven by incidents of violence against Black Americans) and COVID-19,' ... (Myers, 2020b, paras. 5-7)*

First, the use of the phrase "twin pandemics" in the headline, while not my phrasing, the framing of this would suggest that systemic racism and violence against Black people is equivalent to that of the coronavirus pandemic. White racial terror, White supremacy and racist ideologies that allow for the continued mistreatment and murders of Black and brown individuals for centuries cannot be equated to a viral pandemic, though having killed nearly a million people in the United States. Still, that does not compare to the capture and enslavement of Africans who were beaten, murdered, separated from their families, raped and sold as housemaids and fieldhands. COVID-19 does not compare to the countless Black men and women who have been

lynched, wrongly accused, beaten, attached by dogs, fire hoses, batons all because of the color of their skin. COVID-19 does not compare to the institution of politics and legislation that separated Black children and adults in educational institutions, from using bathrooms, water fountains and restaurants. The use and intentional placement of that phrase in such a prominent position in the article greatly misappropriates the traumas associated to the vestiges of slavery and systemic racism.

*Avoiding Explicitly Naming Systemic White Violence/Trauma as Cause of Racism*

Additionally, the lede of the story – the first paragraph of the narrative – too misconstrues the prevailing issue of systemic racism:

*With the onset of COVID-19, leaders of South Carolina HBCUs say their institutions are dealing with two issues disproportionately impacting their communities: social unrest and COVID-19. (Myers, 2020b, para. 1)*

This excerpt suggests the concurrent issues are COVID-19 and “social unrest” – a phrase also featured in the headline – instead of COVID-19, racism and police violence toward Black people. Indicating that “unrest” is a pandemic seems to marginalize the Black Lives Matter movement which protests racial inequity and violence stemming from White vigilantes and police officers. The “unrest” is not killing Black people across the country. Police officers as well as domestic terrorists are killing Black people. Social unrest does not equate to systemic racism as the word “social” modifies the activity, lessening its potential impact on communicating the prevailing issues surrounding Black hatred.

Also, the order of the article prioritizes COVID-19 as if it is the more prominent or pertinent issue at hand. For example, the first section headline of the article “Coping

with COVID-19 on HBCU Campuses” comes 18 paragraphs before the subsequent section headlines of “HBCUs are shelter in time of storm” and “Black lives have always mattered here” which feature candid narratives from Black students and faculty who express their authentic experiences. Yet, even in those accounts and in my contributions to creating the arch of the story, there were no mentions of specific terms that give credence to the Black experience such as using the phrase “social unrest” instead of “systemic racism,” “death” instead of “murder” and “police brutality” instead of “police violence.” That is best exemplified in the following excerpt:

*...African Americans make up 27% of South Carolina’s population but account for 35% of coronavirus deaths, according to the state’s health agency – but they also have been bearing witness to social unrest sweeping the nation in response to African Americans dying in violent encounters with law enforcement and others.*

*The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and others have spurred protests across the country, re-exposing a wound within some in the Black community. (Myers, 2020b, paras. 2-3)*

Additionally, the phrase “dying in violent encounters with law enforcement” makes the murders of Black individuals in police custody seem casual, at best, seeming as if the Black victim was an equal participant in the confrontation. This phrasing diminishes the brutality of their murders and shifts the sole accountability of their deaths from the White officers and vigilantes.

Toward the end of this same article, it reads:

*Despite the circumstances, a fervent resolve shared among faculty and staff of HBCUs is the need to communicate to their students how valuable their abilities and lives are to society, the schools’ leaders say. (Myers, 2020b, para. 38)*

Again, without the explicit recognition of what the “circumstances” are – though outlined throughout the article – it again poses a missed opportunity to solidify the

overarching purpose of this article which was to highlight the experiences of the students and administrators of HBCUs who are dealing with compounding, though very different, issues – systemic racism impacting the emotional wellbeing of their students as well as the coronavirus impacting the physical wellbeing of their students. The apparent omission of using more critical language to name the racist threads that persist was an unconscious failure to call attention to exactly what the issues concerning the Black experience entails. Now, it is important to note the editorial interference that traditionally leads to the final publication of articles as typically news articles go through several iterations before being published online or in print. However, to my knowledge, the selection and use of terminology in these articles were mostly steered by me which allows the critical analysis of my own work essential to understanding how members of the same racial community can implicitly further negative conceptions of their race. The conscious decisions I made in writing this article includes framing the story to lead with the most “news worthy,” “most impactful” or immediate source of information, and in this case it was the implications of COVID-19. As accustomed to print journalism, keeping our audience top-of-mind is key, and in this case, my audience is a predominantly White subscriber readership. Knowing this implicitly caused me to share a narrative that would underrepresent the plight of systemic racism and its impact within the Black community to meet the expectations of my readership as well as my news organization. The implications of this pandemic on the Black experience, in this case, was subordinate to the need to perform my job in the manner I’m expected to.

### *Providing Historical Account of Black Success Despite Oppression*

Essential to understanding how critical race concepts aid in the framing of news stories is understanding how to use those same perspectives to challenge one's own approach to narrative creation. A prominent method I employed in centering the experiences of the Black community through storytelling was by providing a historical anthology of Black success in the midst of systemic racism by highlighting the personal accounts of those who lived through them. For example, "From segregation to celebration: SC historical, all-Black Lakeview school honored" is a story about a formerly segregated grade school for Black children – now a community resource center – honored with a historical marker in a county that was known by locals as the capital of the KKK. The lead of the story reads:

*In the heart of a West Columbia community lies a hidden treasure whose beginnings were birthed out of the dark history of segregation in the South, but its foundation is rooted in the resilience and successes of the harvest it helped yield. It's unassuming presence and seemingly ordinary building was the safe haven which cultivated the young minds of Black children in the Brookland-Cayce School District – a place that alumni say instilled a sense of purpose and self-worth during a time when Black lives were undervalued. (Myers, 2020a, paras. 1-2)*

As the reader, one can have a clear understanding of the framing of this narrative as well as the prevailing issues at hand – segregation in a racist South and the success that was still birthed out of this system of oppression. I wanted to document the significance of this historical dedication by highlighting the issues of racism documented through the words of graduates of the former all-Black school. One of those instances is highlighted in this excerpt:

*Peeping through the windows of his home, a home surrounded by a fence hand-built by his father to protect his family...then a child, could witness the harsh realities of racism in his West Columbia community, painful and vivid memories he still reflects on today.*

*'I grew up in Lexington County with the frightening experience of watching members of the KKK burn crosses in the field next to where we lived...painful experience. We actually saw it...but knew that it was part of the intimidation.'* (Myers, 2020a, paras. 14-16)

Naming the White supremacist group as the source of pain, intimidation and trauma for a Black community – especially for the innocent children who were subjected to this prejudicial treatment – exemplifies the dynamics of growing up in a racist South during the '60s. The interviewee's own account of watching "members of the KKK burn crosses" near his home which was protected by a wooden barrier built by the interviewee's father provides the emotional tone that only one who has experienced such White racial terror can articulated themselves. Thus, centering the voices of the Black community by allowing them to share their authentic experiences, without the barrier of individual interpretation framing or bias, adding richness to a narrative that is seeking to provide a voice to the systemically voiceless in mainstream media.

Acknowledging these hate symbols and White opposition was also an approach I took while telling the success story of three Black legislators that integrated the South Carolina State Legislature post Reconstruction. The Black former lawmakers featured in the story "Trailblazers' Johnson, Felder, Fielding: 50 years since integrating SC Legislature" highlighted White political intimidation:

*'The first couple of weeks, we were ignored. It was like we were furniture in the room...initially it was just cold warfare as you might say'. (Myers, 2021b, 19-20) [D]espite earning their prominent position of power inside the chambers – a seemingly positive move toward progress – the prominently displayed Confederate flags atop the State House dome and hanging inside the chambers*



*were daily reminders of how far the state needed to grow in terms of race relations.*

*'The flag was an issue. As a matter of fact...we wouldn't go into the chamber until after they recited the pledge of allegiance each day because in the House chamber, the Senate chamber and on the dome, you had the Confederate flag'* (Myers, 2021b, para. 21-22)

And racist governmental policies that precluded Black political positioning:  
*'The impact (of the election) was significant in that it was the last election under an archaic system that had been designed to keep African Americans from ever getting elected. We had something called the Full Slate Law.'* (Myers, 2021b, para. 11)

All of these mechanisms to hinder Black political ascent illustrates the systemic issues that are foundational in racist practices, and the inclusion of such rhetoric provides a different perspective as to why there are few Black individuals in elected offices. A society has indicated, it may not be an issue of qualifications such as education, intellect or work ethic, as the former lawmakers interviewed have an extensive resume to include being attorneys, entrepreneurs and service members, but rather because of the color of their skin which is a barrier to access that has been prevalent for generations. Again, the narrative of this story intentionally focused on achievements of these gentlemen while touching on the systems of oppression that have been plaguing the Black community. Framing the arch of the story through the historical vestiges of systemic racism allowed me to highlight the areas of White oppression while not overshadowing the achievements intentionally being highlighted in the article.

Lastly, in the article "Still surreal: Black SC mayors leaving legacy as firsts to lead their towns" I emphasized, again, the historic nature of having more than two dozen

Black men and women being elected into political positions in towns where White males dominated in local political office for generations.

*Across South Carolina, African American leaders are defining their moments in history – shaping the beliefs, aspirations and identity of generations to come while accomplishing a feat only made possible through the sacrifices of their ancestors who preceded them. Those moments can be found in small, quaint towns throughout the Palmetto state, the backdrops of humble beginnings and where community elders still celebrate and echo praise of the generations who came before them, who could not have conceived such a feat were possible – Black political leaders who are the epitome of living their ancestors’ dreams.* (Myers, 2021a, paras 1-2)

I would not want to surmise to know my ancestors’ dreams, but this often-used phrase was intentionally included in the narrative to add weight to the accomplishments of the Black mayors featured in the article. This is not to be presumed as an overstatement, as the conjecture could very well be indicative of the sentiments of a people who were in bondage for nearly three centuries. However, Aligning the success of the Black mayors’ elections to that of historical proportions does two things: (1) It highlights the historical implications of their reign as mayor while also (2) underscoring the racist barriers that have precluded Black ascent in political offices, particularly in the South. Though generations removed from Reconstruction, the notion that even now Black people are making history as the “firsts” in this nation brings to mind greater implications as to how society is still rampant with racist ideologies and systems of racism and oppression that makes the chances of Black people earning a political position in the South challenging. One mayor emphasized how the socioeconomic barriers growing up in a small, rural town forced him to excel which was demonstrated in this excerpt:

*'I'm thankful for what God has blessed me with. Being an African American male with all the challenges that I've been faced with...everything from my childhood to how I was raised up. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.'*  
*And his humble beginnings provided him the strength to withstand the challenges he would face throughout his life – from being homeless for a week, sleeping in his car having not enough money to pay for his college tuition to almost losing a child from a horrific car accident five years ago. (Myers, 2021a, paras. 43-44)*

Black people historically have had to do more with less as limited or no access to equitable professional, education and financial opportunities have forced members of the Black community to be innovative to attempt to attain some measure of what their White counterparts have been privileged to. While I contend that this was a proper anecdote to positively frame the narrative of the story, I would not want to dismiss that the fact that the absence of explicitly stating how the individual mayors dealt with issues of racism could have provided an avenue for discourse on the institutional challenges of being a Black, ambitious political hopeful. The absence of such narratives was overshadowed by my desire to “positively” highlight Black success – a narrative often absent in mainstream media.

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION**

We can recognize miracles that we did not plan and value them for what they are, rather than measure their worth only by their likely contribution to our traditional goals. There is, then, good news that is like water to a thirsty soul. It is the opportunity existing all around us to recognize the injustices that exist and to accept the challenge to make things better. Success is not guaranteed, and failure is all but certain. But the victory goes to those who accept the challenge and, against all the odds, go forward (Bell, p. 7, 2007).

Nearly 300 years of institutionalized trauma, terror, abuse, murder, separation and displacement of Black men, women and children at the hands of White supremacists has greatly impacted the trajectory of the Black experience in the United States, and its vestiges permeates every facet of Black society in mass media where racist ideologies and stereotypical depictions of the Black experience infiltrate its mediums (Boskin, 1980; Du Bois, 1903; Hall, 1999, 2003; Martindale, 1996; Feagin, 1999; Salter et al., 2018). This dissertation seeks to meet the challenge as posted by activist, legal and critical race scholar Derrick Bell by offering a mechanism – a critical conceptual model of implicit racial bias – to illustrate how societal, cultural and environmental circumstances allow for these negative perceptions to persist. Society has been predisposed to presume what it means to be Black as mass media crafts narratives concerning Black culture, Black intellect, Black trauma and Black success largely by individuals who are not a part of this racial group (Crenshaw et al., 1995). However for those who identify with the Black community, including myself, how narratives are framed concerning the

Black experience pose greater implications for outside groups especially as the United States continues to reconcile its “past” of systemic racism with its current pervasiveness in academia, politics and criminal justice.

The framing of all mass-mediated content is prejudiced by race, implicit racial bias and racist ideologies. With this in consideration, if how content creators present something influences the way the audience perceives or interprets the content, this would mean mass media – a powerful entity – aids in shaping dominant narratives. What is shaped through the framing of content is already consciously and unconsciously infused with racist ideologies and perceptions that meet the implicit racial biases of the audience receiving the message. This either solidifies or counters their already held perceptions of race reality.

“Conceptually, framing emphasizes how ideas shape our understandings of social reality” thus bridging framing theory with critical race concepts to illustrate the hegemonic functions of systemic racism in content creation (Sonnett et al., 2015, p. 328). Critical race scholarship indicates that centering the experiences of Black people leads to dismantling perceptions about their experiences, offering an authentic insight into their reality which counters stereotypical conceptions their racial group. By offering exemplars of counter narratives with each area of interest, I was illustrating how this method can be executed to focus on the voices of those who have been systemically silenced by society. Analysis of exemplars in Black music, Black sports columns and Black journalism indicated narratives that furthered majoritarian narratives through a deficit perspective by unconsciously framing narratives in the following ways:

- (1) Prevailing, Dominant function of White Institutions;
- (2) Silencing Black Voices, Paternalism, and the Status Quo;
- (3) Whiteness as Property: Whiteness demanding loyalty and exclusive use of leadership to meet White ends;
- (4) Exceptions and Tokenism;
- (5) Diminishing Racism to Adhere to Normalized Journalistic Practice; and
- (6) Avoiding Explicitly Naming Systemic White Violence/Trauma as Cause of Racism.

Conversely, counter narratives were executed in the following ways:

- (1) Expressing Black Reality to Counter Racist Perceptions;
- (2) Inclusion of the Black Voice, Experience of Oppressed;
- (3) Highlighting History of Systemic Oppression/Racism within White Institution;  
and
- (4) Providing Historical Account of Black Success Despite Oppression.

Additionally, upon further reflection and discussion with my committee, it became even clearer of the connections in how Black content creators employ counter narrative methods across all three areas of consideration though approached differently. As this project continues to evolve, I will address the counter narratives in a more substantive manner in order to illustrate the parallels in Black content creation that are implicit and inevitably a part of sharing our Blackness.

Understanding one's ideology and how it impacts behavior is essential when considering that musicians have the platform to share their beliefs to a broad audience.

These implications may become greater when considering the message that is being communicated and how societal circumstances influences those notions. Kendrick Lamar is uniquely positioned to address civil discourse by leveraging his songs as a weapon for change while bolstering the authentic truths of being Black in the United States. While artists do not automatically carry this authority, music lyrics have the power to provide insight into cultural, social and political discourse reflective of society (Eyerman & Barretta, 1996). As for the Black sports columns, the presentation of factual information can easily undermine the framing of a narrative, hindering the essence of the articles, when issues of race are presented and the oppressor is framed in a manner that invalidates the oppressed. Campbell and Wiggins (2015) in their analysis of framing in Pulitzer prize-winning Black columnists' articles about the first presidential campaign of Barack Obama, found that Black racial pride was a leading frame in Obama's election while White columnists skirted framing race as the predominant issue. I noted that frames convey how a columnist wants the reader to think about the issue being presented, and in many instances, the frames presented in these narratives may contain unconscious and specific frames which can be more powerful than "objective" news stories. My journalistic work, too, revealed indications of implicit racial bias and racist ideologies. However, it's important to note that my immersion in critical race scholarship during the time of executing stories, allowed me approach my journalistic work with a critical lens. Thus, requiring me to be more cognizant of how word choices, quote selection and phrasing may frame the narratives of Black success, oppression and systemic racism in a manner unintended. I suggest that in expressing the authentic

experiences of the Black community, which includes systemic racism and oppression. Black content creators can also implicitly share biased beliefs of their own racial group, furthering a negative narrative about the community, defining Blackness for outside groups. It's only in the articulations of those actual, lived experiences when implicit racial bias is present. Once uttered or shared through narrative, that messaging triggers or activates our normalized conceptualizations of the Black experience in the United States. And because of its foundations, the capture and enslavement of Black people, the narrative of the Black experience is impacted by the White framers of our country – the orchestrators of our historical anthology of Blackness. And because these narratives have been ingrained and have shaped our lives even today, it's inescapable for Black content creators to speak of our authentic experiences without including the implications of White domination, White supremacy, and racist ideologies which are indelibly a part of our narrative as a society.

There has been great political debate concerning critical race theory and its place in this nation's discourse on race and systemic racism. Through the application of the conceptual model of implicit racial bias presented in this dissertation, there can be a greater understanding of how critical race theory helps to provide a lens and understanding as to why the framing of media content yields racist ideologies and negative stereotypes of the Black experience. As illustrated in the exemplars in Black music, Black sports columns and through my reflexive account, narrative creation is biased toward that which is normalized in society. This normalizing of messages is ingrained in the fabric of this nation and unconsciously permeates through every aspect



of society – institutional and organizational discourse, the educational system, politics and mass media. It's important to note that this conceptual model is applicable to all racial groups and is irrespective of the individual – no matter how well trained or “objective” they may presume themselves to be. My personal account is evident of this very notion. A Black woman whose primary mission was to dismantle systemic racism through the careful selection and articulation of stories specific to the Black experience, is too, complicit in sharing narratives that illustrate the unconscious but prevalent hegemonic functions of White privilege, racist ideologies and implicit racial biases of society – working to affix a specific narrative of the Black experience in society. Considering this, where do Black content creators go from here? Since implicit racial bias is inescapable, even for the individuals who are the most impacted by its premise, the answer is for Black content creators to keep doing the work. Black content creators must continue to tell the stories of their community, their lived experiences, as it is through their articulations that individuals from outside groups are exposed to the traumas and plight of political, societal and economic implications of this country on the Black community. Inevitably, all that encompasses the Black experience – the power, poison, pain and joy – has to be documented to ensure a complete narrative about the Black experience is realized. It is only through the articulations from the Black community – those who experience the nuances of systemic racism – that these realities are accounted for.

As accustomed to most research, this study had some limitations. A critical cultural perspective challenges power structures and its oppressive nature suggesting

that mass media perpetuates a system that promotes dominate powers as well as the acknowledgement that meaning attributed to a message is dependent upon the societal circumstances one finds themselves. As a Black woman, I recognize and embrace the biases that inform my research approach, specifically as it relates to this particular study and my synthesis of racially charged issues impacting the Black experience. This study focused solely on Black content creators to illustrate the inevitable hegemonic function of implicit racial bias in content creation. Future research could provide further insight into indications of implicit racial bias in content crafted by other racial groups. It is also important to mention again that I'm not suggesting that the framing in Kendrick Lamar's music and the Black sports columns intentionally crafted to further negative and racist ideologies about the Black experience as it is unrealistic to assume that I know the psychological processes to which these specific content creators crafted their narratives. However, that is why I felt it essential to critically analyzing my own work as the conceptual model is indicating that the mechanism to which implicit racial bias appears in mass-mediated content occurs in the same process. While the critical analysis of Lamar's DAMN. album and Black sports columns were used to illustrate the presence of implicit racial bias and ideologies in mass-mediated content, the critical analysis of my own journalistic work was used to demonstrate how the content creator can be more cognizant and critical of their own work to foster a more conscious and analytical approach to narrative creation. In the context of our mass communication scholarship and practice, this is significant considering the urgent desire to implement diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. However, a principle of critical race theory would

suggest the prevalence of interest convergence – which posits racial equality is only pursued when it meets the interests of whites – masks solutions toward systemic issues within the workplace (Ballard et al., 2020; Milner, 2008). This impacts the progress and welfare of Black employers. Ballard et al. (2020) states:

A focus on inclusion will require...incorporating the rich tradition in discourse analysis from the communication discipline, which can provide insights about how people interact with each other across social category differences, a sociological perspective on the structural factors that govern how people are integrated into their organizational units, or insights from a critical theory perspective that social identity and dimensions of diversity are fluid, evolving, and contextually-based. (p. 596)

Implicit racial bias in content creation is inescapable. The Black experience is all of the power, poison, pain and joy Kendrick is referring to in his album DAMN. The Black experience is the constant, internal struggle of owning a word that has been weaponized and employed by supremacists and racist idealists. The opening of Schomburg's (1925) "The Negro Digs Up His Past" states:

The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro. For him, a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice. History must restore what slavery took away, for it is the social damage of slavery that the present generations must repair and offset. So among the rising democratic millions we find the Negro thinking more collectively, more retrospectively than the rest, and apt out of the very pressure of the present to become the most enthusiastic antiquarian of them all. (p. 214)

The Black experience involves an endless cycle of highlighting silenced voices and perspectives while simultaneously reinforcing the notion that Black people are oppressed because of White-instituted democracy that did not have Black people in mind during its inception. Because racism is a part of our history, the conception of

what Black people are or who they're supposed to be has already been shaped allowing for both conscious and subconscious ideologies of the Black experience to persist and be inescapable in every institution and organizational system shaped within this society. Critical race scholars suggest that oppressed people can, too, further the narratives of the oppressed. Structures of oppression are built into societal norms – including in the realm of music, sports and journalism – which exert powerful influences on even those who eschew racist tropes and have dedicated themselves to that practice. Emphasizing this within the Black community can help Black content creators – including myself – be more accountable when we are thrust into positions where we craft the narratives of our own racial group. Because of this long-held, deeply ingrained conception of racism and what defines Blackness in mass media, institutional and systemic changes must occur in order to demolish what has been deeply rooted in this industry (Lane et al., 2020)

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