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**From Negro to African-American - A study of  
Misrepresentation in the U.S. Press**

Por

Maria Elizabeth da Costa Gama

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Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Dr<sup>ª</sup>. Barbara O. Baptista  
COORDENADORA

---

Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer  
ORIENTADOR

BANCA EXAMINADORA:

---

Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer

---

Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Dr<sup>ª</sup>. Ana Zilles

---

Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Dr<sup>ª</sup>. Viviane M. Heberle

Florianópolis/SC, 25 de setembro de 1998.

**Abstract**

**From Negro to African-American: A Study of Misrepresentation  
in U.S. Press.**

**Maria Elizabeth da Costa Gama**

**Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina**

**1998**

**Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer  
Supervisor**

This research work critically analyses aspects of the role the U.S. Press performs in the reproduction of stereotypes that support existing racial and social inequalities. Based on Van Dijk's claim (1988) that minorities are often associated in the media with violence and crime, I carry out a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) of twenty news reports on three allegedly racially-driven crimes from six white and four African-American newspapers. The most recurrent lexical choices as well as the prevailing system of transitivity (Halliday, 1985) are examined both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Although contemporary racism is very subtle when compared to the 'old-fashioned racism' (Van Dijk, 1988), the results suggest the evidence of misrepresentation of African-Americans in the U.S. Press. This study contributes to increase readers' and writers' awareness of the role of the Press in the reproduction of racism.

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## **Resumo**

### **From Negro to African-American: A Study of Misrepresentation in the U.S. Press.**

**Maria Elizabeth da Costa Gama**

**Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina**

**1998**

**Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer  
Orientador**

Este trabalho de pesquisa analisa criticamente aspectos do papel que a imprensa americana desempenha na reprodução de estereótipos que sustentam desigualdades raciais e sociais nos Estados Unidos. Partindo da afirmativa de Van Dijk(1988) que as minorias são sempre associadas na mídia à violência e ao crime, realizo uma análise crítica do discurso (Fairclough,1992)de vinte reportagens sobre três crimes supostamente causados por questões raciais. As reportagens são retiradas de seis jornais brancos e quatro jornais afro-americanos. As escolhas lexicais mais recorrentes bem como o sistema de transitividade predominante(Halliday, 1985) são examinados tanto em termos quantitativos quanto qualitativos. Embora o racismo contemporâneo seja muito sutil quando comparado ao 'racismo ultrapassado'(Van Dijk,1988), os resultados sugerem que existe uma representação distorcida dos afro-americanos na imprensa dos Estados Unidos da América. Este estudo visa contribuir para a conscientização de leitores e escritores do papel que a imprensa desempenha na reprodução do racismo.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us.  
(*Freedom's Journal*, believed to be the first African-American newspaper in the USA, 1827)

#### **1.1- African-Americans in the American Press**

Recent research in the American Press has confirmed that although overt racism may be said to be rare, its

covert counterpart has assumed at least two distinct forms: invisibility and **stereotyping**. The former is accomplished through the exclusion of African-Americans from most news depicting the positive side of American society, apart from sports and entertainment (cf. Campbell, 1995). The latter is accomplished through reports of crimes, which help accentuate the portrait of African-Americans as a menace to society, a group of people who are not able to fulfill the American Dream of social and economic equality. Obviously, the disparity between African-Americans' invisibility in positive news and their level of visibility in police reports help to create a negative stereotype which

Americans of all colors and races are presented with in the daily press.

Likewise, the 'positive' representation of African-Americans exclusively as entertainers or athletes not only helps to sustain the myth that color-based racism belongs to the distant past<sup>1</sup>, but also subtly misrepresents African-Americans as a people whose natural endowments for sports and arts far exceed their intelligence.

The product of African-American representation in the mainstream media remains the white man's standpoint thirty years after the 1968 Kerner Commission recommendations<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, although the proportion of minority groups' personnel in the mainstream media has also increased ever since, about 50% of the daily newspapers in the USA do not employ African-Americans. Moreover, 95% of all newspaper journalists are white (Campbell, 1995).

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<sup>1</sup> McConahay (1982) coined the term 'old-fashioned' racism whenever it is associated with pre-civil war stereotypes. This kind of racism not only recognizes the white Americans as a superior and privileged race, but also segregates the other minorities. Contemporary racism, also known as 'modern' (McConahay, 1986) or 'symbolic' (Sears, 1988), presents as its main features a resistance against blacks' political demands and a belief that racial discrimination has been eradicated from the USA since the civil rights movements of the 60's.

<sup>2</sup> The Kerner Report was a study designed by President Lyndon Johnson to investigate the causes of the 60's civil disorders in the USA. The Kerner commission concluded that the news media- dominated by white journalists had contributed to the violent riots by inappropriately describing the black society through 'white men's eyes'.

What seems to be at stake here is that language may be covering discrimination through a social practice or discourse (news) whose 'facticity' (Tuchman, 1978) and search for credibility should make newswriters insensitive to any kind of bias. Notwithstanding, there is a double issue involved in the so-called newswriters' impartiality and objectiveness. The first involves the fact that every human being must undergo cultural and cognitive processes that build his or her view of the world and of the people who inhabit it. White journalists, no matter how unbiased or impartial they intend to be, are brought up too far from the realities of the African-American society. Their point of view seems to be, under the circumstances, based either on the media itself or on a few personal experiences they may have had with 'people of color'. This lack of familiarity may explain, in part, the reason why white journalists often discard African-Americans in their selection of news items. The second issue has to do with ideology. Since newswriters (no matter what their color) work for socially, economically and politically engaged institutions with whose ideas and beliefs they are expected to conform, pure objectivity and impartiality are liable to be tainted by controversy and skepticism.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the distorted vision or even the invisibility itself are, in

fact, a result of 'common-sense' assumptions held by newswomen who belong to a society that has 'preferred' readings. In other words, journalists are not only writing about what they think may interest the audience, but also sharing their world 'schemata' with their readers (Rumelhart, 1980; Meurer, 1991).

### **1.2- The Purpose of the Study**

While it is acknowledged that some genres are more liable to pass on more ideology than others, news is a kind of discourse that provides us with plenty of data to demonstrate how bias can pervade both language and society. The existence of racism and invisibility has been demonstrated by countless pieces of research in the fields of Linguistics and Mass Media in the USA (McConahay, 1982; Van Dijk 1988; Campbell 1995, among others). The present work aims at investigating aspects of how the U.S. Press represents African-Americans and whites when both 'races' are associated with violence and crime.

In order to achieve this goal, twenty reports of three allegedly racially-driven crimes were analyzed from the perspective of ten U.S. newspapers, four of which claim to represent the African-American voice in the USA.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that although recent research on the American journalists in the 1990's (Weaver, D., 1996) suggests that American journalists are representative of the American society as a whole, African-Americans represent only 3.7% of the American mainstream news media workforce.

The African-American newspapers whose reports are analyzed in this work are the *Chicago Defender*, *The New York Amsterdam News*, *The Black News Voice* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. The White newspapers, in turn, are represented by *The Press Enterprise*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *USA Today* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

Following Van Dijk's premise (1988:12) that 'Minority groups are often associated with crime, whereas crimes against them, such as racism or violent attacks are under-represented', my hypothesis lies on the premise that blame is either omitted or transferred from non-black attackers of blacks by means of linguistic strategies such as choice of transitivity (Halliday, 1985) and lexical choices ('Naming'). Conversely, when reporting blacks' misdeeds against whites in U.S. newspapers, it is expected that responsibility may be accentuated by 'terms of abuse' (Fowler, 1991:110) and agent role prominence.

### **1.3- Motivation for the Selection of the Reports**

The issue of violence is neither new in society nor in literature. In fact, since the biblical reference to Abel's murder by his brother, several recurrent themes have been found in literature throughout the centuries.

Violence has been widely represented in our society by movies, video games, television, magazines and newspapers. Even more recent popular music like rap and funk are said to instigate the youth to act violently. Children and teenagers' over-exposure to the media representation of violence may be of special concern to parents and educators. Nonetheless, whenever violence is represented as factual news rather than fiction, it is important that its discourse be analyzed and the mechanisms through which representations of reality become 'facticity' be thoroughly understood.

According to the Committee on the Status of Black Americans of the National Research Council (apud Van Dijk, 1991:31) 'the overall preponderance of the evidence indicates that the existence of significant discrimination against blacks is still a feature of American society.' In the search for linguistic evidence of racial bias in the U.S. Press, the following reasons determined the selection of the reported crimes:

1- Two of the crimes evidenced African-Americans as victims of persecution by the U.S. police.

2- One of the crimes involved an African-American as a criminal. Moreover, not only was his crime racially-driven, but also closely associated with another report analyzed in this work.

3- Due to their racist connotations, the chosen crimes were widely reported by the American Press.

### **1.3.1- The crimes**

- **Rodney King**

The first crime analyzed in this thesis took place in Los Angeles on March the third, 1991. Rodney King, an African-American driver, was brutally beaten by four white officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) after being stopped for speeding. The beating, captured on videotape by a bystander, was broadcast by a Los Angeles television station and shown nationwide by Cable News Network. The Rodney King Beating became internationally known after widespread rioting and rebellion in Los Angeles. This rioting was motivated by the first verdict acquitting the four officers who beat King of state federal charges. During the rioting more than 40 people were



killed, more than 2,000 were injured and nearly \$1 billion in property was destroyed.

- **The Rubidoux Case**

The second crime occurred in November 1995. Randall Craig Tolbert, an African-American who lived in Rubidoux, California, was killed in the confrontation with the sheriff's SWAT team of the police of Riverside, California, on a Thanksgiving Day. This crime is related to the first one because the pivot of the crime, Stacey Koon, was one of the officers who beat Rodney King five years earlier. According to the reports, Tolbert could not tolerate that Koon spend the last days of his sentence in a Halfway House placed in the black community. So, he stormed the Halfway House, took three hostages and threatened to kill them unless former police Sgt. Stacey Koon appeared. As this did not happen, Tolbert shot one of his hostages dead and was killed himself by the police.

- **Jonny Gammage**

The third crime took place in Pittsburgh on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1995. Jonny Gammage, also an African-American driver, was stopped by the police while driving a Jaguar owned by

his cousin and commercial partner Ray Seals. After he got out of his car, Gammage was beaten and suffocated by the police officers, who said they were trying to control him with blows from flashlights and pressure from batons.

On October 16<sup>th</sup>, an autopsy testified that Gammage suffocated when pressure was applied to his chest and neck. Nevertheless, the District Attorney Bob Colville did not follow the coroner's jury's recommendation to file criminal homicide charges against all five police officers involved. Instead, only three officers (Lt. Milton E. Mulholland, John Vojtas and Michael G. Albert) were charged with third-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter.

### **1.3.2- The Newspapers**

In total, twenty news reports were analyzed in the present dissertation. Nine reports about Rodney King's beating, five about the Rubidoux Case and six about Jonny Gammage.

Three primary reasons guided the selection of the newspapers that reported the crimes. First of all, the newspapers had to be representative of the white and African-American Press in the United States of America. Unfortunately, due to economic constraints, most African-American newspapers had weekly or fortnightly issues that

prevented them from reporting some of the crimes discussed in this work. As a result, only seven (35%) of the analyzed reports were taken from African-American newspapers.

Secondly, newspapers like, for instance, *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune* were favored for their geographical diversity and national credibility (Weaver, D., 1996).

The third criterion for the selection of the newspapers was their proximity to the places where the crimes took place. In Rubidoux, for instance, a city in the county of Riverside where both the white *The Press Enterprise* and the African-American *The Black News Voice* are located, Randall Tolbert took hostages, killed one of them and was eventually killed by the police.

### **1.3.3- The Social Participants**

**Social participants** or, in Van Leeuwen's (1996) terms, **social actors**, are the people who are represented in an instance of a particular kind of discourse.

In this work four kinds of social participants were analyzed in the reports of the three crimes: the victims, the attackers, the authorities and the witnesses.

Rodney King and Jonny Gammage, two African-Americans, may be said to be the protagonist victims, for most news reports are centered on what happened to them.

The victims of the Rubidoux case are the people who were either taken hostage, wounded or killed by Randall Tolbert, also an African-American. Although they are also the victims of somebody's violence, the news reports about the Rubidoux killings concentrated on the African-American attacker rather than on the victims.

Despite the fact that Tolbert could also be analyzed as a victim of police violence, he, unlike the other victims, acted as a criminal by taking hostages and killing a man. For this reason, and also for the sake of comparing the representation of white and African-American attackers in the U.S. Press, Tolbert was analyzed only as an attacker.

The white officers involved in King's and Gammage's beatings as well as Randall Tolbert are the attackers. It is interesting to notice that Tolbert's present and past misdeeds are the central theme of the news reports about the Rubidoux case. The victims, unlike in King's and Gammage's beatings, are just secondary actors whose names are not given prominence.

The authorities are represented in the three crimes by well-known politicians, high ranking officers, lawyers,

prosecutors, doctors, civil rights representatives, federal institutions and departments.

The witnesses are mainly the people who are portrayed as having watched the crimes. Relatives and friends of criminals and victims are also regarded as witnesses in this study. In the reports about King, for instance, George Holliday and his videotape of the beating are considered the main witnesses. In the Rubidoux ones, the main witnesses are the people who were taken as hostages but survived. In Gammage's beatings reports, however, there are no witnesses who had actually witnessed the crime. Close relatives like his mother and cousin, as well as the results of his autopsies, are what is most closely related to the concept of witness.

#### **1.4- Data Collection**

In order to investigate the hypothesis that African Americans are misrepresented in the U.S. Press, the twenty reports of crimes involving African-Americans and whites as victims and/or attackers are analyzed from the standpoint of white and African-American newspapers, as I explain below.

For thirty days, from June to July 1997, I collected the data at the Thomas Rivera Library at the University of California in Riverside. Starting with the reference 'racial crimes', the Melville database of the Thomas Rivera Library provided me with a list of racially-driven crimes. This list contained the names of victims and criminals as well as the places and dates of the crimes.

After selecting the three crimes that I found most suitable for the purpose of this work (Cf.1.3), the next step was to analyze the microfilms of the newspapers issued twenty-four hours after the crimes had taken place. I scanned the newspapers searching for the reports. If the news reports about the crimes could not be found from one to five days after the crimes, my next procedure was to browse the issues that followed the date of the crime for about three or four weeks. Nevertheless, with the exception of Gammage's reports (which cover the criminals' trial), Rodney King's beating and the Rubidoux Case were widespread in the American Press from three to five days after these crimes had taken place.

I did not find all the crimes in the same newspapers. In general, the ones that affected the whole country (in other words, were as newsworthy as Rodney King's beating) could be easily found in the highest selling and most popular newspapers such as *The New York*

*Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. If the attacker or the victim lived close to the place where the newspaper's main office is located (Randall Tolbert in the Rubidoux Case, for instance) the reports about them were most easily found in the local newspapers such as *The Press Enterprise*, the *Los Angeles Times* or the African-American *The Black News Voice*.

It is worth noting that most African-American newspapers have not yet reached a nationwide audience and are not issued daily. To highlight this statement, *The Black News Voice* can be brought up as an example: despite its proximity to Rubidoux and the relevance of the crime to the black community, *The Black News Voice* report about Randall Tolbert's killing was issued only a week after the crime had become a national concern.

In fact, one of the main problems encountered during the organization of the data was to declare a newspaper either African-American or white. This was the case because to my knowledge there was no previous survey on the prominent ethnicity of the newswomen in the studied newspapers. As a result, it was decided that the African-American newspapers would be those which clearly indicated their Afro-Americanization, either by exclusive African-American news or by such expressions as "the

largest black-owned newspaper in the West" (*Los Angeles Sentinel*)

#### **1.4.1- Data Analysis**

In general, the analysis of the data followed a quantitative criterion. However, this quantitative analysis was always followed by a qualitative interpretation of the data. While the former (quantitative) is concerned with the number of times relevant linguistic choices occurred, the latter (qualitative) tries to explain possible motivations for the occurrences and their consequent implications to the present study.

The lexical choices made up for the participants were recorded into tables (Cf. Appendix 2). Whenever a recurrent pattern was found, each occurrence was counted and its implications were interpreted on a qualitative basis.

Next, the transitivity choices (Halliday, 1985; 1994) were analyzed in relation to the participants in material and verbal processes (section 2.4.1). The participants (victims, attackers, authorities and witnesses) were put into tables according to their roles as Actors, Goals or Sayers (Appendix 2). After the tables were filled in, a quantitative analysis was followed by an



interpretation of the most recurrent features (or absences) and their consequences for the present study<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.5- Overview of the chapters

**Chapter 2** conceptualizes the '**hard news**' in the Press, assumes it as a **genre** and focuses on a set of criteria known as '**newsworthiness**'. The **theoretical rationale** for this work, mainly grounded on Fairclough and Michael Halliday, can also be found in that chapter.

**Chapter 3** demonstrates how '**Naming**' or the lexical choices by which the participants are referred to are a powerful tool to indicate the newspapermen's bias and ideologies. Similarly, the choices of transitivity analyzed in **chapter 4** evidence the ways in which **blame or lack of responsibility** and the prominence of a **participant** are used to construct a biased and distorted reality.

**Chapter 5** makes the final considerations concerning the **limitations** of the present research and its possible **practical applications in the educational and media fields**.

The **bibliographical reference, appendices** with Naming and Transitivity tables as well as the **news reports** themselves are found in this order after chapter 5.

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<sup>3</sup> The methodological procedures will be better illustrated in chapter 2.

## Chapter 2

### News as Social Practice

and

### Theoretical Rationale

Just as we were called 'colored', but were not that, and then "Negro" but were not that, to be called 'black' is just as baseless. Just as you have Chinese Americans who have a sense of roots in China ... or Europeans, as it were, every ethnic group in this country has a reference to some historical cultural base ... To be called African American has cultural integrity. (Jesse Jackson, December 1988)

This chapter is subdivided into two parts. The first introduces a general account of the contemporary concept of news, redefines it as a 'genre' and details the journalistic concept of 'newsworthiness'. The second presents the theoretical rationale upon which this work is grounded.

#### **2.1- The Concept of News in the Press.**

The concept of novelty is straightforwardly connected with that of press news. Broadly speaking, press

news could be defined as the reporting of events, which took place within the twenty-four hours preceding a newspaper's daily edition. In fact, the major distinction newswriters seem to make when trying to define news is between '**hard news**' and '**soft news**'. According to Bell (1991:14), 'hard news' would be the very heart of news output, consisting mainly of 'reports of accidents, conflicts, crimes, announcements, discoveries and other events which have occurred or come to light since the previous issue of their paper or programme'. On the other hand, whenever the report of news is not immediacy-bound, we have what is known as 'soft news' of which Features are the most evident example. Features are longer articles that besides providing background may also present a writer's personal opinion and are usually bylined with the writer's name.

As this work is mostly concerned with crimes that were reported right after they occurred or came to light, it can be said that, in the main, the corpus deals with 'hard-news', a genre of press that not only imposes some constraints on the format of the news reports, but also has much to do with the content itself, i.e., which among so many crimes are going to become news in the next issue.

## 2.2- 'Hard News' as a Genre.

When reading a report of a crime one can easily be reminded of some stories he or she was once told. In fact, **the lead** or first paragraph (an obligatory element in hard news) summarizes the central action and sets out the main point of the news story. In addition, it is the focus of the evaluation encoded in the news story, for it determines the importance of the reported event and justifies the reason why the journalist is claiming the floor and the reader's attention (Bell, 1991).

As in most stories, in the news story the reader is informed of who is involved in the action (**the characters**), what happened (**the plot**), and when and where it took place (**the setting**). However, news stories do not present the actions chronologically. In fact, the order of the news text follows 'relevance of topics' rather than a chronological order (Van Dijk, 1988). The result of the action (for instance, someone's murder) generally precedes the motivating action (for instance, revenge) in **the headline** - 'a one-word catchline or slugline' (Bell, 1991:186) which is in most cases a summary of the lead and the work of sub-editors.

Likewise, news stories (by contrast with other stories) cannot always present a **resolution** like 'the

victim survived' or 'the suspect was sentenced to five years'. One of the reasons is that unlike the fictional story, the hard news story depends on apparently real facts taking place just in time to be written and printed in the next newspaper's edition.

Another reason seems to be that journalists are by no means the sole authors of their stories. On the one hand, journalists re-tell, by paraphrasing and/or quoting, what different written or spoken sources have informed them. On the other hand, hard news authorship is shared by the journalist (who writes the first copy), the chief reporter (who checks it) and the copy editor (who decides on the story's length, prominence and the sequence of events).

Accordingly, it is up to the copy editor to decide which parts of the story will remain unaltered and which will be cut or re-ordered. As the journalist knows that stories are often cut up from the bottom upwards (cf. Bell, 1991), the resolution (if there is any) is likely to appear in the lead, where the central facts of the story are placed.

### 2.2.1 - News and its Social Goals.

So far, I have broadly discussed some of the invariant elements in the hard news story (the **headline** and the **lead**), that according to Hassan (1978) should characterize a specific genre. Taking for granted, however, that different kinds of texts may be realized through different genres, such as news stories and fairy tales (Virtanen, 1992), it is quite clear that although the text type - story - may have some invariant elements, the hard news story differs considerably from fairy tales and has its own formal schemata.

Although acknowledging that the contextual configuration of each story may also determine its structure (Hassan, 1989), this work follows Swales's (1990:46) assumption that 'genres are communicative vehicles for the achievement of social [my adding] goals.' Following this perspective, it is assumed that the communicative purpose of the hard news story (to inform) would determine both its conventional structural form and substance as well its lexicogrammatical realization.

## 2.3- Hard News as the Representation of Values

### 2.3.1- The Concept of 'newsworthiness'.

Although we may assume that hard news is a genre whose primary communicative purpose would be to merely inform, one cannot disregard the fact that human language is the codification of systems of signs which are the product of society. Following this semiotic perspective (Kress, 1989; Halliday, 1978), one cannot neglect at least two essential facets of newspaper language: first of all, every single report, no matter how impartial it may seem to us, carries at its core the ideologies which help those who detain the power to exert control over the powerless (cf. Fairclough, 1989). Far more striking is the fact that news structure and news function (which are indivisible) follow a set of criteria known as '**newsworthiness**', i.e., values which help newswriters not only to decide what kind of events should become news, but also to identify what should be given more emphasis, and how it could be more effectively accomplished (cf. Bell, 1991).

According to Bell (1991), the first studies of news values date back to the sixties when Galtung and Ruge (1965, apud Bell, 1991) proposed twelve factors which, in

their opinion, are likely to determine the media selection of news.

Although Bell divides news values into three different categories, we shall restrict our analysis to the first of them, i.e., **the nature of the events and actors in the news**. The belief that events (actions) and actors (agents) would have a much more direct impact on the structure of news than, for instance, competition (related to the news process) or even clarity (related to the news text) is the root of such a choice. Here is a list with the twelve factors that according to Bell (1991) influence the media's selection of news:

1- **Negativity**- although the reason why negative events make news is unclear, negative events (such as crimes, disasters and accidents) constitute the prime element of 'spot news'.

2- **Consonance**- has to do with the compatibility of a story with preconceptions about the social group or nation (ethnicity) from which the news actors come. It applies well to the reports to be considered throughout this work, showing that journalists and editors may have not only



stereotypes for African-Americans but also mental scripts on how the crimes were committed.

3- **Personalization**- this value implies that concepts, processes and generalizations are not so newsworthy as news which is represented in personal terms. It is very easy to confirm how headlines and leads are structured so as to place a news actor first. Indeed, unless there is a special reason for omission of the news actor, personal comments seem to be much more newsworthy than generalizations.

4- **Recency**- It is in the very essence of the news that **the day** is the news cycle for the press. Thus, something that happened a month ago is not likely to be as newsworthy as yesterday's events.

5- **Proximity**- In simple terms, it means that geographical closeness can intensify the news value. In the context of this work, it can be said that a crime that occurs in Rubidoux tends to be much more reportable in Los Angeles than in Chicago.

6- **Unambiguity**- The 'facts' must be very clear and based on respectable sources.

7- **Unexpectedness**- this value is closely related to the idea that the unpredictable or the rare is much more newsworthy than the expected routine.

8- **Superlativeness**- unusual things like the most terrible crime or the fattest man in the world are likely to be covered by the press.

9- **Relevance**- Achieving relevance means to find a story whose contents are very close to the audience's lives or experiences. Relevance and proximity are not necessarily the same thing.

10- **Eliteness**- Famous people such as actors, politicians or royal families, make the news headlines in matters that would be generally ignored among common people. The elite nations of the so-called First World are usually considered more newsworthy than the non-elite nations of the South.

11- **Attribution**- the source of the story should be highly valued, i.e., a socially validated authority. Unaffiliated individuals are not regarded as a faithful source.

12- **Facticity**- a journalistic device used to show the readers (by means of names, addresses, occupations, numbers, etc.) how factual a story is.

Fowler's claim (1991:12) that 'the more newsworthiness criteria an event satisfies, the more likely it is to be reported' contributes to explain why so few among so many crimes are selected as a new event.

Notice, as an example, the following case. On September 9<sup>th</sup> 1991, Mike Tyson, the famous former heavyweight boxing champion, was indicted for having raped Miss Black America pageant Desiree Washington. The 1992 trial and conviction provided the North-American Press with a huge amount of coverage (Lule, 1995:181).

One can identify in Mike Tyson several of the newsworthy criteria mentioned above: He was an **elite-person** from non-elite sports, who was suspected of something as **negative** as a rape. The **eliteness** of the criminal (his fame) as well as the **personalization** and **consonance** with pre-established racial stereotypes and

scripts, remarkably contributed to the selection and maintenance of this news story in the headlines of the most respectable and highest selling newspapers in the USA before, during, and after Tyson's judgment and indictment by the American Court.

#### **2.4- Theoretical Rationale**

This work draws heavily on recent social theory which recognizes the social, ideological and political dimensions of language. Particularly, it relies on Fairclough (1989; 1992), whose approach to critical discourse analysis makes straight connections between language, society and power relations.

Looking at language as a social practice, Fairclough sets up the concept of discourse and suggests that studies on language cannot be dissociated from the social facets of the world. In his argument, it is implied that language shapes and is shaped by society in a kind of dialectical relationship. When 'socially shaped', language use reproduces and maintains existing social conventions by reflecting social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief. The shaping or 'socially constitutive' side of language, on the other hand, breaks

with the established social conventions in a creative and transformative way.

Fairclough (1995:55) sums up his view on the binary relationship between language and society when he says: 'Critical discourse analysis explores the tension between these two sides of language use, the socially shaped and the socially constitutive, rather than opting one-sidedly for one or the other.'

One of Fairclough's most important contributions to the field of discourse analysis is his three-dimensional approach to discourse: text, discursive practice and social practice.

In very general terms, the analysis of the first dimension, text, takes into account the traditional linguistic categories such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion or text structure. However, Fairclough does not look at these categories in a traditional way. Rather, his critical textual analysis helps us to unveil inequalities and misrepresentation (as in the representation investigated in this research) by concentrating on the grammatical categories related to the **ideational**, **interpersonal** and **textual** metafunction of language (Halliday, 1985).

The second dimension, discursive practice, mediates texts and social practice through the analysis of

text production and text consumption. The third dimension, social practice, presupposes the analysis of several levels of societal organization, and it deals more closely with the issues of power and ideology.

Fairclough's main contribution to this work, however, seems to lie in his recent argument that media texts represent **versions** of a reality, which are constructed according to the **interests** and **objectives** of the people who produce them. As a matter of fact, Fairclough's critical approach to discourse aims to unveil the hidden connections between language, ideology and the exercise of power. In Fairclough's own words in a chapter on representation in documentaries and news (1995:104),

The analysis of the representational process in a text, therefore, comes down to an account of what choices are made - what is included and what is excluded, what is made explicit or left implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded, what is thematized and what is unthematized, what process types are drawn upon to represent events, and so on.

#### **2.4.1- Naming**

An important tool for critical analysis of discourse is '**Naming**' (Fowler, 1979;Clark, 1992) i.e., the study of the lexical choices made consciously or unconsciously by writers in their texts. Taking into consideration that words are not only conventional signs for identifying people and objects, but a way of

reflecting, reinforcing and reproducing ideologies that help maintain the existing 'status quo', the quotation from Jackson's speech at the beginning of the present chapter seems to corroborate the idea that a shift in terminology may imply a shift in people's perception of reality.

According to Fowler (1978:23) the '**naming conventions**' through which the participants are referred to in English are very regular and revealing of the writer's formality, intimacy, respect, admiration, sympathy or non-commitment.

Clark (1992:209) argues that **naming** is not only a 'powerful ideological tool', but also 'an accurate pointer to the ideology of the namer'.

In a recent article Grant and Orr (1996) questioned, among other things, whether the shift in terminology from 'Negro' to 'Black' (as one of the results of the civil rights struggle of the 60's) and from 'Black' to 'African-American' in the late eighties, really affected white stereotypes of black Americans. The authors' conclusion that white's stereotypes of blacks remain the same despite the new naming seems to lack empirical evidence. However, their claiming that 'the social gap between black and white well-being persists'

(1996: 148) is well grounded on the history of racial nomenclature that dates back to the USA colonialism.

What is distinctive about this 'hyphenated American' label is that it replaces the notion of race implied by the word 'black' for that of ethnicity. The idea behind this change in nomenclature is to make African-Americans as fully recognized and accepted, as, for instance, Irish-Americans seem to be.

The question remains whether different names represent different ways of disguising reality. In fact, in some cases reality can be immediately forged by the media determining 'subtle positive or negative associations with the respective news actors involved' (Van Dijk, 1985:12). Former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson, as pointed out earlier, provided the American Press with a transparent amount of coverage during his trial for the rape of Miss Black America pageant contestant Desiree Washington. According to Lule (1995), Tyson was always depicted either as a savage or as a victim of society. The accusers named him as 'animal', 'monster', 'combination of Jack the Ripper and Bluebird', 'beast', etc., leaving no space for the human being. The defendants portrayed him as 'dinner of blacks by white cannibals' (Lule, 1995:186).



Although Tyson's punishment may be, in part, attributed to the way newspapers depicted him, no one could deny his culpability. What is remarkable, however, is the prominence current society reputed to a crime involving black-on-black violence. As a matter of fact, in the thirties black-on-black offenses (especially against their women) were considered '... a waste of judicial time and money' (Clarke 1996). If seen from this angle, Tyson's incrimination may represent a step towards racial equality in the USA.

#### **2.4.2- Transitivity**

Critical Discourse analysts have succeeded in blending Fairclough's three-dimensional model with Halliday's (1985) systemic functional grammar in order to make a critical analysis of texts. Halliday's grammar is called 'systemic' because language users are seen as having at their disposal different linguistic choices in order to refer to their inner and outer experiences. It is also called 'functional' due to the assumption that language is also used to achieve social goals (Halliday & Hassan, 1989).

According to Halliday, the grammatical system through which the 'ideational or experiential' function of

the clause is achieved is called **transitivity**. From the perspective of the transitivity system, as conceived by Halliday, the clause is seen as a way of representing reality through 'patterns of experience' realized by means of **six** different **processes: material** (process of doing), **mental** (process of sensing), **relational** (process of being), **behavioral** (process of behaving), **verbal** (process of saying) and **existential** (process of existing).

As the **material** process conveys the notion that **some 'entity'** (not necessarily a person) **'does' something** to **some other 'entity'**, it is likely that the reports of crimes involve Actors and Goals as the main participants in the process. The **Actor** is the one that **does** the deed, while the **Goal** is the entity that **suffers or undergoes the process**.

In **material** clauses, the **social participants** (victims, criminals, authorities and witnesses) may be represented either as **Actors** or as **Goals**:

**Randall Craig Tolbert, 35, shot and wounded one of the halfway house's resident.** (Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*)

In the example above, Tolbert is the **attacker** who performs the role of the **Actor** by means of two **material** processes: shooting and wounding. One of the halfway

house's residents is the **victim** who takes the role of the **Goal** by undergoing the material process, i.e., he is shot and wounded.

It is grammatically expected that **victims** take the **Goal's** role (the one on whom the action is carried out), whereas the **criminals** take that of the **Actor** (the one that performs the action). **Witnesses** and **authorities**, on the other hand, are much more expected to perform the role of the **Sayer** in a **verbal** process:

The **verbal** process is the process of '**saying**' which includes broader semantic categories, for instance, **saying, telling commenting, asking, showing, adding**, etc. The most important participant is the '**Sayer**', who does not necessarily need to be a conscious participant, but '**...anything that puts out a signal...**' (Halliday, 1994:140):

**Lohman** {human **Sayer**} **said** {verbal process} Tolbert, a Rubidoux resident, had an extensive criminal History'... (Text 11- *Los Angeles Times*)

**He** {human Sayer} **added** {verbal process} that Tolbert apparently killed the hostage shortly after police burst into the home. (Text 11-*Los Angeles Times*)

**The tape** {human-like Sayer} **shows** {verbal process} what appears

to be three officers swinging their nightsticks and ....

(Text 4- *The Washington Post*)

The verbal process is realized through **primary clauses** either in **direct quotations** or **indirect reporting**:

['I am as shocked and outraged as anyone'], [Bradley **said**]  
secondary clause primary clause

(Text 1- *The Press Enterprise*)

[The police **said**] [the gunman killed a 60-year old man...]  
primary clause secondary clause

(Text 12- *The New York Times*)

The secondary or subordinate clause, which is not investigated in this work, indicates the 'content' of saying (Martin & Painter, 1997) and may be a process of any kind.

Besides the **process** itself and the **participants** involved in it, the system of transitivity as devised by Halliday also includes the **circumstances** associated with the process such as **Manner, Cause, Location, Extent**, etc.:

**Tolbert** **shot and grazed** **the man** **in the head**  
(Actor) (material process) (Goal) (Location circumstance)

(Text 11- *Los Angeles Times*)

Although this work is mostly concerned with *processes* (**material** and **verbal**) and *participants* (**Actor, Goal** and **Sayer**), some *circumstantial* elements that, in my opinion, cannot be dissociated either from the process or

the participants when highlighting misrepresentation are used in the analysis.

In conclusion, this chapter attempts to make it evident that hard news is a genre whose communicative goal transcends that of merely informing newspaper readers. Rather, some of the writer's linguistic choices such as the system of transitivity employed and the naming of the social participants (see next chapter), effectively point to the ideologies and prejudices which help make news a dangerous political and influential instrument of power and inequality.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Analysis of Naming**

Bearing in mind that naming conventions are not random, but a significant instrument to reflect, reinforce and reproduce power relations, in this chapter I focus on the analysis of the lexical choices or naming of the social participants in the three crimes analyzed in this work.

Before the actual analysis could be started, I recorded the lexical choices made up for the victims, attackers, authorities and witnesses in tables, after having summarized each newspaper report. This summary included the date of the issue, the page(s), the news source and the headline.

Table 1 below is an example of the tables that can be found in Appendix 2.

After the tables were analyzed and a pattern was found, i.e., whenever the analysis of the data demonstrated that the participants were recurrently and systematically named, the occurrence was quantitatively examined through percentages and the category was interpreted on a qualitative basis.

**Table 1- An Example of the Tables in APPENDIX 2-**

**First Crime: Rodney King**

**A- SUMMARY**

**B- NAMING**

<b>the victim</b>	<b>The officers</b>	<b>The authorities</b>	<b>The witness(ES)</b>
A black motorist	LA police	The FBI	Neighborhood resident
Mr. King	LA police officers	The District Attorney's Office	A bystander
Rodney Glenn King, 25	Officers	Deputy Police Chief William Booth	Lake view Terrace resident George Holliday, 31
King, a resident of Altadena	Police officers	FBI agents	Holliday
King	Police	Spokesman Fred Reagan	
		The District Attorney's Special Investigations Division	
		Office Spokesman Sandi Gibbons	
		Police Chief Daryl Gates	
		Gates	
		Gibbons	
		Ramona Ripston, of the American Civil Liberties Union	

The analysis of naming carried out in this work follows Van Leeuwen's(1996)analysis of the representation of social actors in English discourse.

### 3.1- The African-American victims

The two African-American victims, Rodney King and Jonny Gammage were both driving their cars when some white police officers stopped them for speeding. Both King and Gammage were brutally beaten by the officers, only King having survived the beating.

In terms of the lexical choices made up for the African-American victims, the data indicate that they are **formally nominated** (Van Leuween, 1996) in 93.33% of the analyzed reports (see Graph 1 below) through the use of **proper names** whether followed or not by **titles**:

The victim of the beating, **Rodney Glenn King**, ... (text 3- *The New York Times*)

**King** also appears to have been subdued with a Taser gun ... (Text 5- *Chicago Tribune*)

**Gammage**, 31, died Oct. 12, while in custody... (Text 19- *USA Today*)

Officers said they had to sit on **Mr. Gammage** and beat him with flashlights. (Text 17- *The New York Times*)

Witnesses said **Mr. King** had not fought the officers ... (Text 3- *The New York Times*)



The data also reveal that the African-American victims are recurrently described 'in terms of the identities and functions they share with others' (Van Leeuwen, 1996:52). This **categorization** (ibid.) assumes at least two different forms: First of all, the African-American victims are often '**functionalized**' (ibid.), i.e., they are described according to their (lack of) **occupations** in 33.33% of the reports analyzed in this work:

Mr. King, who is **unemployed** ... (Text 3- *The New York Times*)

King, **unemployed** since leaving prison... (Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

Gammage, **31**, a cousin and **business partner** of Pittsburgh Steelers defensive lineman Ray Seals ... (Text 20- *Chicago Defender*)

Secondly, the African-American victims are also identified according to social attributes such as **age** (86, 67%), **gender** (100%) and **provenance** (26.67%) (see graph 1 below):

Rodney Glenn King, **25**, of **Altadena** ... (Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

A videotape of a group of police officers allegedly beating a **man**... (Text 4- *The Washington Post*)

The **man**, Jonny Gammage, died Oct. 12 after the officers pulled

him over in the **Pittsburgh** suburb of **Brentwood**. (Text 17- The New York Times)

Gammage, **31**, was a cousin of **Pittsburgh** Steelers' defensive end Ray Seals. (Text 18- *The Washington Post*)

All the categorizing attributes mentioned above help newswriters add credibility to their stories and are also related to facticity (Tuchman, 1978), one of the most important news values.

Another very important **identification** feature (ibid.) employed by newspapermen when referring to African-Americans is **race**. Every one of the newspapers analyzed includes **race** in their description of the African-American victims (see graph 1 below). Besides including the race of the victims, the African-American newspapers capitalize the letter "b" in black.

King is **black**: police did not release the identities or races of the officers (Text 5 *Chicago Tribune*)

A two-minute amateur videotape of the beating of a **black** motorist (Text 3- *The New York Times*)

Two white policeman were charged with murder Monday in the death of a **black businessman** (Text 1- *The Press Enterprise*)

A group of white police officers seen on a television video beating and kicking a **Black** man (Text 7- *Chicago Defender*)

**Deviance** is another usual **identification** feature attributed to the African-American victims. Actually, 80% of newspapers selected for this research make references to the victims' past misdeeds (see graph 1 below). Although it cannot be proved these references are used consciously, they may be a journalistic device to make the reader understand the officers' behavior and attenuate their responsibility in the beatings.

King, a **convicted robber**... (Text 4- *The Washington Post*)

The man who was beaten turned out to be a **convicted felon** with a lengthy criminal record (Text 6- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

King was booked for investigation of evading police officers, a felony, and investigation of a parole violation on a 1989 **robbery conviction**. (Text 5- *Chicago Tribune*)

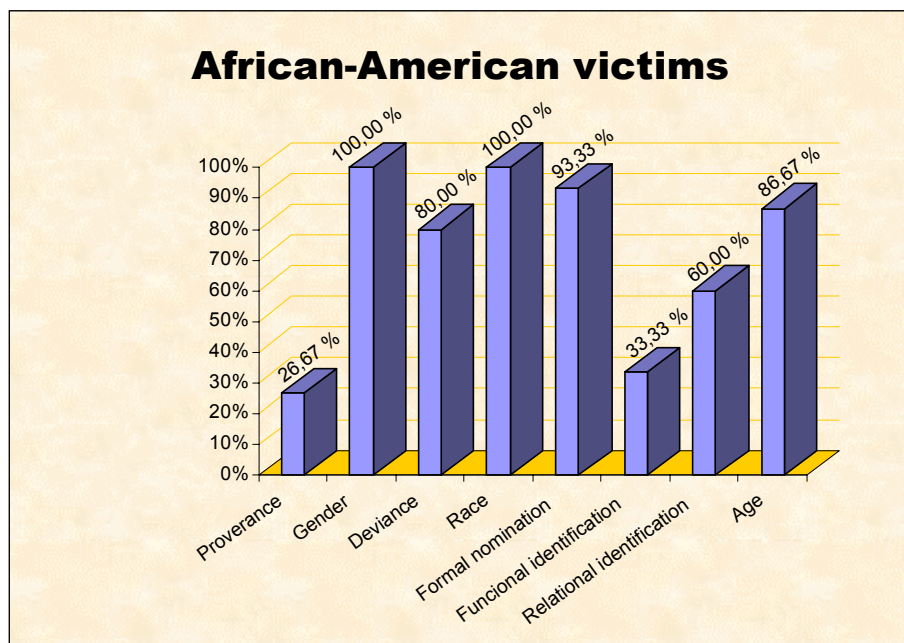
As far as deviance is concerned, three out of the five African-American newspapers analyzed in this dissertation do not follow the naming pattern for the African-American victims. In the articles of these newspapers, Rodney King is socially nominated (name, age, race and provenance) and there are no references to his present or past misdeeds. Rather, he is often identified as the 'victim of beating':

The lawyers representing **beating victim Rodney King, 25**, told reporters... (Text 7- *The Chicago Defender*)

'I don't believe **Mr. King** will ever, ever be a normal man again after they whipped him like a dog.' (Text 8- *The New York Amsterdam News*)

The tape ended with a call for an ambulance, an unknown voice is heard to yell, '**Victim of a beating.**' (Text 9- *The Black News Voice*)

Overall, as shown by Graph 1 below, the African-American victims are nominated by their names, categorized by their (lack of) occupations and identified by age, gender, provenance, and race in most white and African-America newspapers.



**Graph 1**

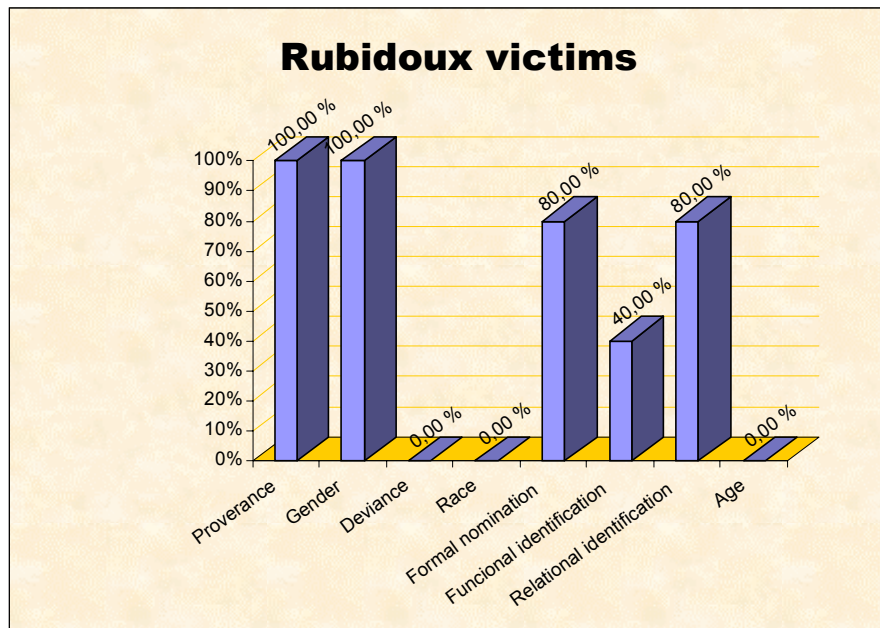
Three out of five American-newspapers (60%), however, do not include the 'deviance' feature in their identification of the victim.

### **3.1.1- The Rubidoux Victims**

Seeking former LA police sergeant Stacey Koon, convicted in the Rodney King beating in 1991, the African-American from Rubidoux, California, Randall Tolbert, burst into the Halfway House of Riverside on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1995. There, Tolbert took some hostages, wounded two of them and killed one.

Randall Tolbert's fatal victim of Rubidoux was Karl Milan, one of his hostages. Milan's friend, Lynn Enyard, and a second hostage, an unidentified security guard, were not injured. A male resident, whose name was not announced, as he was a federal prisoner, had a gunshot wound. Maria Artalejo, a visitor, got some stitches for a wound at the back of her head. Tolbert released Jose Gonzalez, who lived very close to the Halfway House, with no injuries.

The percentages in Graph 2 below refer to the number of newspapers that mention the identification features related to the Rubidoux victims.



Graph 2

Although Randall Tolbert's victims are also categorized by both varieties of newspapers in terms of social traits **such as functions and identities** (proper name, surname, age, provenance and occupation) **skin color** is **never** mentioned:

Once inside, he shot and injured a **33-year-old resident** and hit a **48-year-old woman, Maria Artalejo**. (Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*)

The dead hostage was identified as **Karl Milan, 67, of Phoenix**, (Text 11- *Los Angeles Times*)

The police said the gunman killed a **60-year-old man** who was at the house to help friend service vending machines. The unidentified **Arizona man** was shot in the head. (Text 12- *The New York Times*)

A local daily newspaper reported Tuesday, November 28th, Tolbert shot and killed Karl "Griff" Milam, 67, of Phoenix, Az) (Text 14- *The Black News Voice*)

Tolbert fired a bullet that grazed the head of a **33-year-old male resident** and pistol-whipped **Maria Artalejo, 48**, with the butt of his gun (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

If one compares the absolute exclusion of the skin color of the Rubidoux victims with the integral presence of the African-American victims' ethnicity in both varieties of newspapers, one is led to conclude that the identification feature 'race' may have a far more significant linguistic function than that of merely identifying the social participant to the reader.

In fact, the question of why race is included so systematically for the African-American victims and omitted for the Rubidoux victims in white and African-American newspapers may have at least two possible explanations.

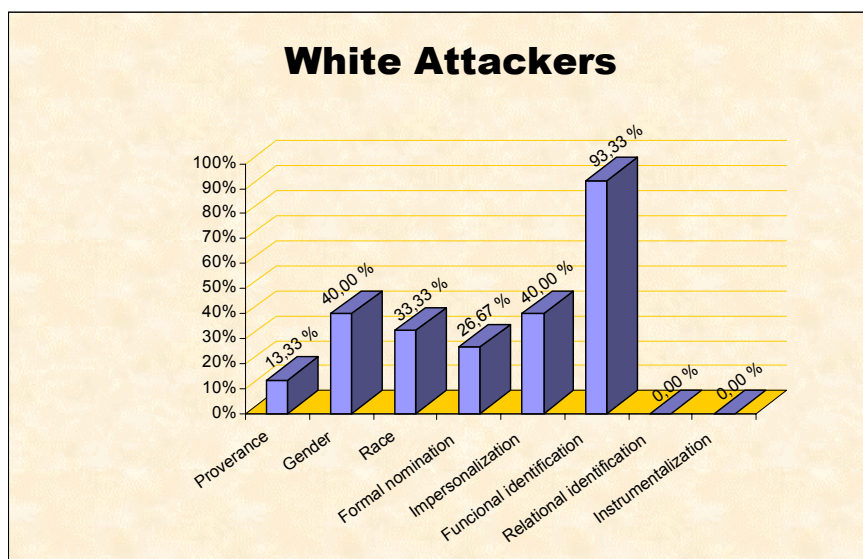
On the one hand, the prominence given to the race of the African-American victims by white newspapers is followed by indications of their deviant behavior and may well be a starting point to challenge the neutrality of these newspapers. On the other hand, the African-American newspapers seem to have assimilated such a discriminatory practice, not only by insisting on including the race of

the African-American victims and attacker, but also by recurrently capitalizing the 'b' in 'Black'.

### 3.2- The White Attackers

The white attackers are the officers involved in the beatings of Rodney King and Jonny Gammage. While Sergeant Stacey Koon and officers Laurence Powell and Timothy Wind are related to the first crime, officers John Vojtas, Michael G. Albert and Lt. Milton Mulholland are associated with the second.

Overall, Graph 3 below reveals that the white attackers of the two African-American victims are **formally nominated** in only 26,67% of the reports investigated.



Graph 3

In fact, the white attackers' description is functionalized (Van Leeuwen, 1996) in 93,33% of the



reports, being typically realized in terms of their **occupations**:

A videotape of **a group of police officers...** (Text 4- *The Washington Post*)

The Mayor said the **police officers** involved... (Text 3- *The New York Times*)

A bystander's videotape that captures **Los Angeles police officers.**  
(Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

The prosecutor charges **Brentwood police Lt. Milton Mulholland...**  
(Text 15- *The Press Enterprise*)

Obviously, there is no relationship between the white officers' atrocious deeds and the way they are named. As a matter of fact, being named as officers provides them with a certain degree of respectability. Such respectability is somewhat enhanced by the comparison with the recurrent dubious and incriminating representation of the African-American victims already mentioned in the previous section.

Moreover, it is also revealing that while only **20%** of the white newspapers show the **white officers' names**, they are mentioned in **60%** of the African-American reports about the crimes. The data also demonstrate that as far as **skin color** is concerned, the numbers reveal a minor

statistical difference. **50%** of white newspapers indicate the officers' skin color and so do **60%** of African-American newspapers.

Table 2 below shows in percentage the absence or presence of the **involved officers' names and skin-color** in white and African-American newspapers:

Table 2: **Presence or Absence of the white attackers' names and skin-color in white and African-American newspapers.**

**XXXXX** means that the newspaper was not analyzed for that specific crime.

<b>WHITE NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>OFFICERS' NAMES (20%)</b>		<b>OFFICERS' ETHNICITY (50%)</b>	
	Gammage	Rodney K	Gammage	Rodney K
<i>LOS ANGELES TIMES</i>	NO	NO	YES	NO
<i>THE PRESS ENTERPRISE</i>	YES	NO	YES	NO
USA TODAY	NO	XXXXX	YES	XXXXX
NEW YORK TIMES	YES	NO	YES	NO
<i>CHICAGO TRIBUNE</i>	XXXXX	NO	XXXXX	NO
<i>THE WASHINGTON POST</i>	NO	NO	YES	NO

<b>BLACK NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>OFFICERS' NAMES (60%)</b>		<b>OFFICERS' ETHNICITY (60%)</b>	
<i>LOS ANGELES SENTINEL</i>	XXXXX	NO	XXXXX	NO
<i>CHICAGO DEFENDER</i>	YES	YES	YES	YES
<i>THE NEW YORK AMSTERDAM</i>	XXXXX	NO	XXXXX	YES
<i>THE BLACK NEWS VOICE</i>	XXXXX	YES	XXXXX	NO

As can be seen in Table 2, Jonny Gammage's beating reports differ considerably from those of Rodney King. First of all, while a 100% of the reports mention the ethnicity of Gammage's attackers, only 2 African-American newspapers (22% of all the reports) follow the same procedure when describing King's attackers:

The police chief here said he will file criminal charges against a group of **white** police officers seen in a television video... (Text 7- *Chicago Defender*)

Like a klaven of kluxxers, a squadron of uniformed **white** cops surrounded a Black man, ... (Text 8- *The New York Amsterdam news*)

Secondly, unlike King's beating where white officers' names can only be found in two African-American newspapers (less than 25% of all the reports), 40% of the reports about Gammage in white newspapers do make reference to the officers' **names**:

Officer **Michael Albert** of Baldwin was charged with involuntary manslaughter. (Text 15- *The Press Enterprise*)

Officer **John Vojtas** testified that they had told Mr. Gammage to get out of the car (Text 17- *The New York Times*)

Lastly, the inclusion of the officers' names and skin-color has much to do with the fact that the reports about Gammage cover the trial of the officers and not the crime itself. This suggests that once the officers were criminally indicted, there was no plausible reason for leaving this out of the news reports.

Since blatant prejudice is not a feature of contemporary racism, offensive naming is rarely employed in the twenty analyzed reports. Actually, just one African-American newspaper (10% of all the newspapers researched) emphasize the white **police brutality** by making use of **offensive naming**:

Like a **klaven of kluxxers**, a **squadron of uniformed white cops** surrounded a Black man, while **three of the throng** took turns beating and kicking him. (Text 8- *The New York Amsterdam News*)

Thus, despite the restrictions of the limited data, some conclusions can be drawn. Overall, there is no correlation between the brutality of the white attackers and the way they are named even in most African-American newspapers. Secondly, the white attackers are seldom identified by their proper names in white newspapers. Instead, their description is often functionalized and they are described as officers, which certainly helps provide them with a certain degree of respectability.

The data also confirm that if both types of newspapers are taken together, 60% of the African-American and 50% of the white newspapers reveal the attackers' ethnicity.

However, the paradoxical fact that only 2 African American newspapers (22.2% of the 9 newspapers analyzed) present the ethnicity of King's attackers, while all newspapers do so when describing the African-American victims, suggests that the issue of including the feature 'race' in people's descriptions deserves consideration from newspapermen of all colors.

### **3.2.1- The African-American attacker**

Randall Tolbert, the Rubidoux African-American, stormed the halfway house, took hostages, injured two of them and killed one. In the end, he was shot to death by the SWAT team of the Riverside Sheriff's Department.

The results confirm (see Graph 4 below) that Randall Tolbert is **formally nominated** (Van Leeuwen, 1996) and identified according to **social attributes**, in particular his **age** and **provenance** in all the reports analyzed for this crime (100%):

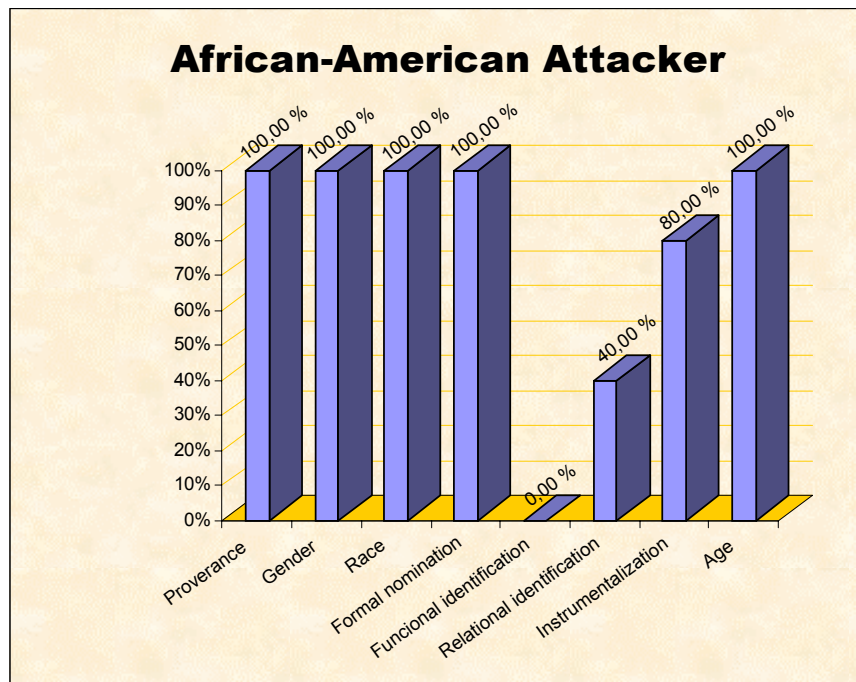
The man, **Randall Craig Tolbert, 34, of Rubidoux...** (Text 12- *The New York Times*)

**Randall Craig Tolbert, 35,** shot and wounded... (Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*)

The gunman **Randall Craig Tolbert, 35** ... (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

**Tolbert, 35** was killed by the SWAT team of the **Riverside** Sheriff Department. (Text 14- *The Black News Voice*)

**Mr. Tolbert,** who is black, fired a shot at a 33-year old unidentified resident. (Text 12- *The New York Times*)



**Graph 4**

Notwithstanding, Graph 4 also indicates that unlike the white attackers of African-Americans, Tolbert is

'**instrumentalized**' (Van Leeuwen, 1996) and identified in relation to the instrument (gun) used to carry out his crime. As a matter of fact, Tolbert is represented as a **gunman** in 4 (80%) of the five newspapers analyzed:

A **gunman** stormed a Riverside County Halfway House ... (Text 11- *Los Angeles Times*)

A **gunman** demanding to see Stacey Koon ... (Text 12- *The New York Times*)

There, he was confronted by the **gunman**, who was pointing a handgun at his chest. (Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*)

A **gun-wielding** black ex-convict high on PCP burst into a Riverside County (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

*The Black News Voice* is the only newspaper that does not present Tolbert as a gunman. This African-American newspaper identifies the attacker by his social attributes, in particular his name, age and provenance. What is remarkable, however, is that unlike the other newspapers, Tolbert is informally nominated (Van Leeuwen, 1996) and referred to in terms of a familiar nickname:

**Randy's** father, Mr. Tolbert, said...

They said **Randy** told them to leave after her asked where was Koon  
According to Brown, **Randy** said he was barricaded...

Graph four also reveals that Tolbert's ethnicity is always present, no matter whether a white or African-American point of view is analyzed. The data also demonstrate that skin color may be disclosed either by means of a relative clause or by an attributive adjective:

... Tolbert, who is **black** (Text 11- *Los Angeles Times*)

A gun-wielding **black** ex-convict... (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

A friend said Tolbert, a **black**, started talking Wednesday night about killing Koon. (Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*)

Tolbert's ethnicity is also revealed by his picture display in most newspapers. It is noteworthy, however, that the non-capitalization of the letter "b" in black (as it is usually done by the *Los Angeles Sentinel*- see example above) may indicate that the African-American newspaper's point of view is similar to the white ones as far as Tolbert's culpability is concerned.

Comparing the representation of the white attackers with that of the African-American, several points can be made: First of all, unlike the white officers, Tolbert is often nominated and his picture is displayed in three of the five news reports. Secondly, while white attackers are portrayed as officers, which provides them with some

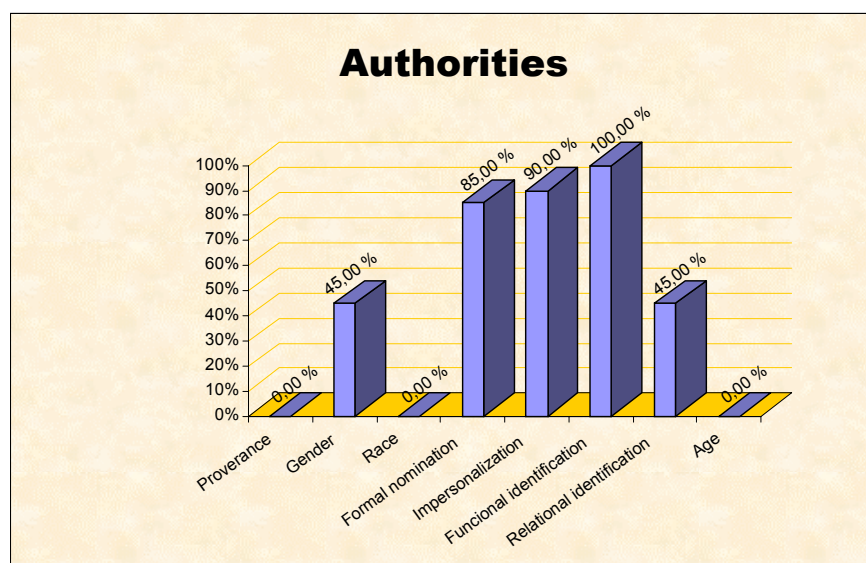


respectability, Tolbert is mostly identified as a gunman. Thirdly, if ethnicity proved to be a somewhat irrelevant feature in the portrayal of white attackers, both types of newspaper recurrently represent Tolbert as an African-American.

### 3.3- The Authorities

The authorities, as regarded in this study, are important politicians, high-ranking officers, civil rights representatives, lawyers, prosecutors, doctors or federal institutions and departments.

Graph 5 below indicates that the authorities are described in terms of **formal nominations** (85%), **functionalization** (100%) and **impersonalization** respectively



Graph 5

in 85%, 100% and 90% of the reports analysed.

The authorities are **formally nominated** (Van Leeuwen, 1996) by proper nouns and **functionalized** (ibid.) according to the **positions** they hold:

**Police Chief** Daryl F. Gates called the tape "shocking..." (Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

'This is something we cannot and will not tolerate,' **Mayor** Tom Bradley said after viewing the video (Text 5- *Chicago Tribune*)

**The mayor** said the police officers involved ... (Text 3 - New York Times)

**Capt.** Thomas McBride, commander of the Foothill Division said... (Text 4- *The Washington Post*)

**FBI spokesman** Jim Nelson ... (Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

Ramona Ripston, **executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California**... (Text 3- *The New York Times*)

When they are representatives of police departments, national institutions and civil rights organizations, authorities are **impersonalized** (Van Leeuwen, 1996) by means of reference to the well-known institutions or organizations they may represent:

... investigations were announced by the **Federal Bureau of Investigation**, the **Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office**, ... (Text 3- *The New York Times*)

The **FBI** said that it is investigating. (Text 5- *Chicago Tribune*)

**The Police Department's Internal Affairs Division** which has a copy of the tape...(Text 4- *The Washington Post*)

**The American Civil Liberties Union** ... (Text 8- *The New York Amsterdam News*)

He said he saw the **SWAT** team storm the building. (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

'That is, unfortunately, standard fare for the **Los Angeles Police Department**' (Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

Rodney King, The Black Man who was brutally beaten in Los Angeles by the **LAPD** has filed a \$56 million lawsuit. (Text 9- *The Black News Voice*)

The lexical choices representing the authorities in African-American and white newspapers have at least two implications as far as journalism is concerned. On the one hand, if authorities are impersonalized, their identities are backgrounded, which certainly makes it easier for the journalists to account for some inaccuracies that may inevitably happen in the reports. The **functionalization** of the authorities, on the other hand, may reveal a journalistic concern about the eliteness of the sources. Such socially validated support not only helps to avoid

libel suits against news organizations but also provides the report with marks of veracity and credibility.

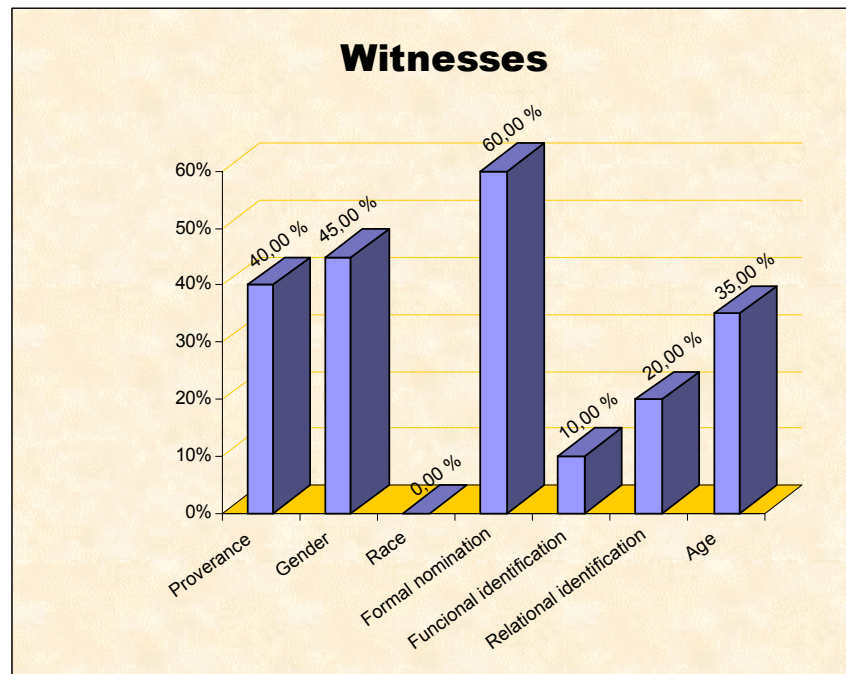
Recurrent identification features (age, gender, provenance and ethnicity) used for victims as well as attackers do not make up the representational choices which characterize authorities in both types of newspapers.

Actually, there are no apparent differences in the way the authorities are named by African-American and white newspapers. This similarity may support the claim that the authorities, no matter whether functionalized or impersonalized, have the journalistic function of adding credibility to the news story. As a matter of fact, authorities are, in journalistic terms, a faithful source that reduces the possibility of having libel suits against the newspaper.

### **3.4- The witnesses**

The witnesses in this study are not merely the people who witnessed the crimes. Relatives or friends of victims and criminals are also included in this category because some of them were very close to the site of the crime, though not allowed to interfere (cf. The Rubidoux case).

As it can be attested by Graph 6 below, the witnesses' ethnicity is **never** mentioned.



Graph 6

It can also be verified by the results shown by graph 6 that the witnesses are often formally nominated(60%) (Van Leeuwen, 1996) and identified by their age(35%), functional identification(10%) and provenance(40%), which again may confirm the journalists' concern with credibility:

**Maria Gonzalez, 15**, said she looked out of her window... (Text 10-  
*The Press Enterprise*)

**Ann Grace, 65** who lives **across the street from the halfway house...**(Text 10- *Los Angeles Times*)

**Clinton Cooper**, who **lived at the halfway house** six months, said he was inside when he saw Tolbert. (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

'He was trying to improve himself...' said his father, **David Tolbert** 65. (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

**Lake View Terrace resident George Holliday, 31**, said he videotaped... (Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

'I never saw him offer any resistance,' said **Eloise Camp 65, a retired schoolteacher**. (Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

*The Black News Voice* and the *Los Angeles Sentinel* often identify Tolbert, The African-American attacker, in relation to his kinship. According to Van Leeuwen (1996:56) the relational identification is realized by a closed set of nouns denoting relations such as 'friend', 'aunt', 'colleague', etc.':

One of **his brothers**, David Tolbert Jr., said his brother ... (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

Emogne, **his mother**, said, 'I told him he had a cake to bake...' (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

Randy's **father**, Mr. Tolbert, said, ... (Text 14- *The Black News Voice*)

'It was like a slap in the face to have him beat a Black man unmercifully then place him in the Black community...', said Micki Brown, **sister-in-law of** Randall Tolbert. (Text 14- *The Black News Voice*)

### **3.5- Conclusion to the chapter**

The analysis of naming seems to corroborate the hypothesis that African-Americans are misrepresented in the U.S. Press.

Although the victims analyzed in the present work are all nominated and described in relation to their identities and functions (age, gender, provenance and occupation), the fact that the feature 'race' is never mentioned for the victims of the African-American attacker contradicts this apparently similar representation. Moreover, except for most of the African-American reports, Rodney King is often associated with a criminal past and present misbehavior.

The representation of the attackers does not contradict the hypothesis that the U.S. Press may be racially biased. First of all, despite the clear evidence of police brutality against the two African-American drivers, the police officers involved in the beatings are all socially identified, with a clear emphasis on the respectability of their occupations. Secondly, unlike the African-American attacker, whose ethnicity permeates every newspaper article analyzed in this dissertation and is recurrently portrayed as a gunman, the police officers' ethnicity and real names are very rarely mentioned.

In conclusion, the overall data show that the feature 'race' seems to be specifically connected to the African-Americans, whether victims or attackers.

Authorities and witnesses have no references to their ethnicity, making it clear that naming someone 'white' or 'black' is definitely not a linguistic practice to describe the social participants. Rather, it seems to be a discriminatory strategy used to show the differences and associate it with deviance.

What is unexpected is the fact that most African-American newspapers, which should be fighting **against** discrimination, seem to follow the same naming conventions employed by the white newspapers. A plausible explanation may be that due to poorer economic conditions resulting in weekly editions, the newspapermen who work for African-American newspapers have no way out but to trust the same attributions used by white newspapers when writing their stories. This seems to be so, especially when the event being covered occurs far away from the offices of the newspapers. Notice, however, that when the crime occurred in Rubidoux, a Riverside county where *The Black News Voice* office is located, Randall Tolbert, the attacker according to every white newspaper, was not portrayed as a delinquent gunman but almost as an African-American community hero.



## Chapter 4

### The Analysis of Transitivity

Representation in clauses is not only a matter of vocabulary (Fairclough, 1995), but a way of conveying one's perception of the world. Chapter 4 concentrates on how the English grammar can encode misrepresentation and bias when **victims, attackers, authorities** and **witnesses** are described as **Actors, Goals** and **Sayers** in **material** and **verbal** processes (cf. theoretical rationale in 2.4.2).

In order to analyze the system of transitivity (Halliday, 1985) used in the reports analyzed in this work, the number of times each social participant performed the roles of Actor, Goal or Sayer in verbal and material processes was counted, as represented in the tables in Appendix 2.

The quantitative analysis was based on four graphs, which were formed according to the number of times each social participant was referred to in white and African-American newspapers. After the quantitative analysis had been carried out, the most recurrent choices and any unexpected absences were interpreted on a qualitative basis.

The presentation of the results does not follow the order of the crimes. Rather, it concentrates on the social participants and appears in the following order: the African-American victims, (i.e. King and Gammage), the Rubidoux victims, the white attackers, the African-American attacker (i.e. Randall Tolbert), the authorities and the witnesses.

Graphs 7, 8, 9 and 10 respectively show the frequency with which the victims, the attackers, the authorities and the witnesses are portrayed as Actors, Goals, and Sayers in white and African-American reports of the analyzed crimes.

#### **4.1- The victims**

If the victims are compared among themselves, **Graph 7** below shows that they can be divided into two main categories: the African-American and the Rubidoux victims. As a whole, the Rubidoux victims (whose ethnicity is omitted in all newspapers) are almost evenly represented as Actors, as Goals:

<b>Both the man and the woman</b> (Actors)	<b>escaped out</b> (material process)
a back door (circumstance)	and <b>ran ... to the nearby fire station</b> (material process) (circumstance)

(Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*)



Speaking from a wheelchair and wearing a cast on one ankle, **Mr. King**  
(Sayer)

**said**, "I was scared for my life, so I lay down real calmly and took  
(verbal process)

it like a man.'

Although it is grammatically expected that the victims take the place of the Goal, both King and Gammage (the African-American victims) are definitely not portrayed as the victims of police brutality. On the contrary, it is their possible **criminal past or misconduct**, which is really stressed as a **Goal** and highlighted by the **circumstance**:

After **being treated** at two hospitals, **King, a convicted robber**,  
(material process) (Goal)

**was jailed** on investigation of a **parole violation**.  
(material process) (circumstance)

(Text 4- *The Washington Post*)

**Rodney King, 25**, of Altadena, who **was released** from prison in  
(Goal) (material process)

December after **serving** time for a **second-degree robbery conviction**  
(material process) (circumstance)

(Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

Officers said they **had to sit** on **Mr. Gammage and**  
(material process) (Goal)

**beat** **him** with flashlights  
(material process) (Goal)

**to stop** **him** from **flailing after**  
(material process) (Goal) (material process)

**they stopped** **him** for **driving**  
(material process) (Goal) (material process)

**erratically**. (Text 17- *The New York Times*)  
(circumstance)

Contrary to what should be expected, most African-American newspapers seldom represent the African-American

victims as filling in the position of the Goal. On the few occasions that this representation occurs, prominence is then given to the **circumstance** associated with the **process**. In other words, when representing the African-American victims as Goals, most African-American newspapers call the readers' attention not only to the **violence** used by the officers but also to the fact that the victims could have been arrested and beaten **under a pretext**.

**Rodney King**, who was **brutally beaten** in Los Angeles by  
(Goal) (circumstance) (material process)

**LAPD...** (Text 9- *The Black Voice News Voice*)

**King was stopped allegedly** for **speeding...**  
(Goal) (material process) (circumstance) (material process)

(Text 9- *The Black News Voice*)

The videotape beating lasted nearly two minutes before **the man**  
(Goal)

**was handcuffed.** (Text 6-*Los Angeles Sentinel*)  
(material process)

Gammage ... died Oct 12... after **a Brentwood officer**  
(Actor)

**pulled him over for allegedly driving**  
(material process) (Goal) (circumstance) (material process)

**erratically.** (Text 20- *Chicago Defender*)  
(circumstance)

The Rubidoux victims, unlike the African-Americans, are not presented to the readers according to their previous behavior. Their representation as Goals by white newspapers

emphasizes their suffering at the hands of a **violent African-American attacker:**

**Artalejo**, wearing a bloodied blue sweatshirt and blood spotted blue  
(Goal)

jeans, **was released** .. after **getting stitches** for a wound to the back  
(material process) (material process)

of the head. (Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*).

**The unidentified Arizona man** **was shot** in the head.  
(Goal) (material process)

(Text 12- *The New York Times*)

**Tolbert** **shot and grazed** **the man** **in the head**,  
(Actor) (material processes) (Goal) (circumstance)

then **pistol-whipped** the **female visitor** before the couple were able to  
(material process) (Goal)

escape. (Text 11- *Los Angeles Times*)

Although the quantitative analysis shows that the African-American victims are mostly represented as Goals, the qualitative interpretation of the data confirms their misrepresentation in white newspapers. Actually, while the African-American victims have their misconduct emphasized as a possible journalistic strategy to attenuate the white officers' culpability, the prominence these same newspapers give to the suffering of the Rubidoux victims seems to amplify the brutality of Randall Tolbert, the African-American attacker.

## 4.2- The attackers

**Graph 8** below shows that both Randall Tolbert and the white officers are almost proportionally represented in the position of Actor. However, while the former is mainly shown as a transgressor, a menace to society, the latter are often portrayed as officers who were carrying out their duties:

**The man, Randall Craig Tolbert, 34, of Rubidoux, wounded two people**  
(Actor) (material process) (Goal)

in the halfway house where Mr. Koon lives. (Text 12- *The New York Times*)

**Tolbert ran** to the front of the house and **took**  
(Actor) (material process) (material process)

**the security guard, Enyard and Milan** hostage.  
(Goals)

Text 10- *The Press Enterprise*)

The Episode began Sunday as **California High Patrol**  
(Actors)

**tried to stop a car.** (Text 1- *The Press Enterprise*)  
(Material process) (Goal)

He got out of his car after **he was stopped**  
(Goal) (material process)

by **a suburban Pittsburgh police lieutenant.** (Text 18- *The Washington Post*)  
(Actor)

... An altercation..., ... that began after a **Brentwood officer**  
(Actor)

**pulled him over** for **allegedly driving**  
(material process) (Goal) (circumstance) (material process)

**erratically.** (Text 20- *Chicago Defender*)  
(circumstance)

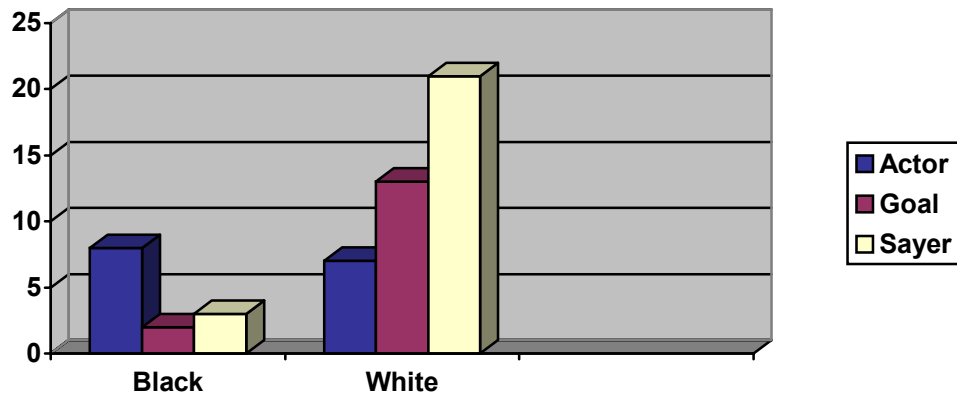
While the Actor's position is an expected representation for criminals, it is revealing that for white

attackers, the representation as a Goal (the likely position for the victims) exceeds that of the actor's.

In the melee, **one officer's ankle was broken**  
 (Goal) (material process)

and **a second one had** his thumb **bitten** to the bone.  
 (Goal) (material process)

(Text 19- USA Today)



**Graph 8: The Attackers**

This unusual representation of white officers as a Goal is particularly true for the reports about Jonny Gammage. In these reports, the white newspapers represent the white officers in two different ways. Firstly, as a possible indication to the reader that the white officers had no intention to kill Gammage, there is a tendency to show that the officers are not likely to suffer severe penalties:



**Four of the accused officers** **have been placed** on leave and  
(Goal) (material process)

**one** **has been assigned** to a desk job. (Text 18- Washington Post)  
(Goal) (material process)

**Prosecutors** **have decided not to file** first or second-degree murder  
(Actor) (material process)

charges against **five white policemen** in the beating and suffocation  
(Goal)

death of a black motorist. (Text 16- *Los Angeles Times*)

**All three charged officers were released** on their own recognizance.  
(Goal) (material process)

(Text 15- *The Press Enterprise*)

Secondly, the white officers are described as people who got '**involved**' in an incident created by a '**traffic stop**' (an **inanimate agent**), as though they had no responsibility for what they did. Besides there being no comments about the officers' violent behavior, blame is also transferred to Gammage himself by the claim that the officers were also hurt while trying to arrest him:

**Five white policemen** **involved** in a *traffic stop* that *resulted in*  
(Goal) (material process)

*the death* of a black motorist ... (Text 19- *The USA Today*)

In the melee, **one officer's ankle** **was broken** and  
(Goal) (material process)

**a second had** his thumb **bitten** to the bone. (Text 19- *The USA Today*)  
(Goal) (material process)

Unlike Tolbert (who was killed by the Swat Team of the Riverside Police Department), the white attackers are

more frequently portrayed as the **Sayers** in a verbal process (see Graph 8) than as Actors or Goals. When holding this position, the white officers are given voice to defend themselves:

**The officers testified** they tried to restrain Gammage with blows  
(Sayers) (verbal process)

from flashlights and pressure from batons. (Text 16- *Los Angeles Times*)

**Officers said** they had to sit on Mr. Gammage and beat him with  
(Sayers) (verbal process)

flashlights to stop him from flailing after they stopped him for driving erratically. (Text 17- *The New York Times*)

**Officer John Vojtas testified** earlier ...he had told Mr. Gammage to  
(Sayer) (verbal process)

get out of his car because Mr. Gammage had refused to keep his right hand visible. (Text 17- *The New York Times*)

**The officers said** they had to fight to subdue him.  
(Sayers) (verbal process)

(Text 15- *The Press Enterprise*)

The African-American newspapers also represent white attackers as **Sayers** both in King's and Gammage's reports. However, in neither of these reports are the white officers given voice to defend themselves. *The Black News Voice*, for instance, presents a front-page report where, by means of a transcription of a police tape, the white officers are heard to say compromising details about the beating as a journalistic proof of the officers' culpability:

**Sgt. Stacey Koon**, officer in charge, **said**: "You just had a **big time**  
(Sayer) (verbal process)

**use of force** ... tazed [sic] and beat the suspect of CHP pursuit, big  
time.' The response from headquarters was, ' ...Oh, well ... **I'm sure**  
**the lizard didn't deserve it.** há há[sic] I'll let them know. OK.' ...  
A minute

later the response came, '**I haven't beaten anyone** this bad in a long  
time'.

(Text 9- *The Black News Voice*)

In a similar attempt to show the white officers' criminal responsibility for Gammage's death, the African-American *Chicago Defender* compares the officers' testimony to that of the coroner's, possibly so as to leave no doubt that Gammage's fight for air was mistaken by the officers for an attempt to get free:

**The officers testified** they didn't intend to harm Gammage, but they  
(Sayers) (verbal process)

had to subdue him when he began fighting. {*The coroner's office has ruled Gammage died from compression of the neck and chest, which cut off his blood flow.*} **The officers testified** they knelt on Gammage,  
(Sayers) (verbal process)

hit him with a flashlight and pressed a baton against his neck to subdue him.

(Text 20-*Chicago Defender*)

If an overall picture of this section is taken, several points can confirm the African-Americans' misrepresentation. To begin with, while the African-American attacker is mostly represented in the Actor's position as someone who is a menace to society, the white attackers are

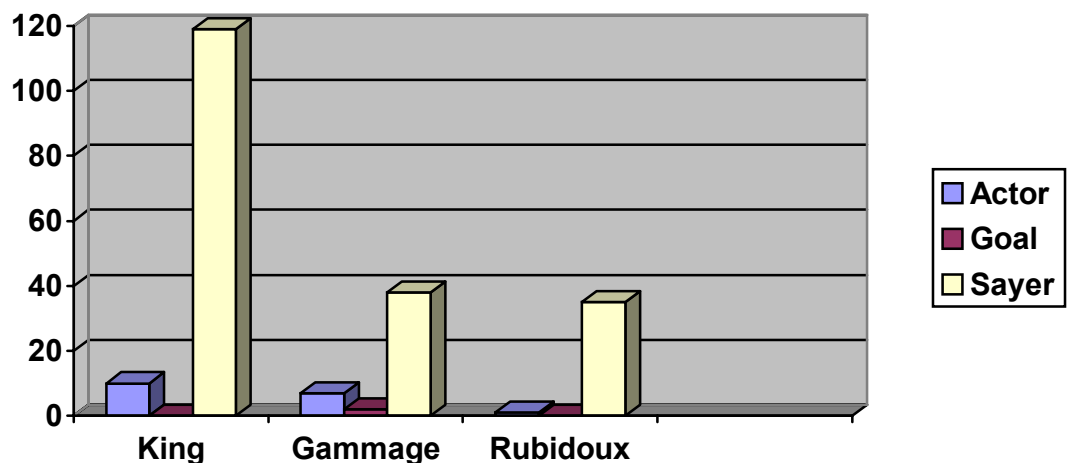
portrayed as officers who were carrying out their duties. Moreover, the white officers are unexpectedly much more represented as Goals (the victim's position) than as Actors (the attackers' position). Finally, although the quantitative analysis confirms that the white attackers are mostly portrayed as Sayers by both kinds of newspapers, the evaluative analysis of the reports clearly evidences a conflicting picture. On the one hand, the white newspapers allow the white officers to defend themselves. On the other hand, they are depicted as violent and sarcastic criminals by the African-American newspapers.

#### **4.3- The Authorities**

**Graph 9** below shows the role the authorities perform in the three different crimes, i.e., King, Rubidoux and Gammage. As a matter of fact, there are a great number of occurrences (about 120 in King's reports) portraying the authorities as Sayers in verbal processes. This remarkable portrait as Sayer may support Van Dijk's (1991) claim that the African-Americans resent the Press for reporting what the officials are doing and saying rather than the opinions and actions of African-American citizens.

In the twenty news reports analyzed in this work, authorities **said, announced, described, added, suggested,**

*commented, refused to say, told, confirmed, explained, testified, recommended* and *criticized* more than any of the other social participants. In King's case, for instance, it is strange that he (as the living victim) has so little space to say something (see the discussion about the victims). Also curious is that his friends, who were in the car with him, have not been heard at all by newswomen.



**Graph 9: The Authorities**

It is worth mentioning, however, that no matter what the 'color' of the analyzed newspapers, the same authorities are regularly quoted and/or reported. Mayor Tom Bradley's claim that he is not only **'outraged and shocked'**, but also that the authorities **'cannot and will not tolerate'** incidents like Rodney King's permeate almost all news stories about the beating (Texts 1,2,4,5,6 and 8). Riverside

Sheriff's spokesman, Mark Lohman, is either quoted or reported about the Rubidoux incident in every one of the analyzed newspapers. Coincidentally, **Mark Lohman** is the central narrator (Sayer) of the story in the *Los Angeles Times*:

**Paragraph 7:** The drama began about 12:30 p.m. when Tolbert, who is black, entered the halfway house... **said Riverside sheriff's spokesman Mark Lohman.**

**Paragraph 8:** Lohman said he was not aware of Tolbert making any reference to King, whose beating at the hands of Koon ...

**Paragraph 10:** **Lohman said** Tolbert confronted a male resident and a female visitor as they sat in the dining-room...

**Paragraph 11:** Moving into another area of the house, Tolbert took three hostages- a security guard, a vending machine servicewoman and her friend, a man from Arizona. The gunman then made telephone calls, ... **said Lohman.**

**Paragraph 12:** 'He said if he [Koon] didn't appear there, he was going to start shooting the hostages,' **said Lohman.**

**Paragraph 13:** Meanwhile, officers barricaded nearby streets and ordered neighbors to find cover ..., **said Lohman.**

**Paragraph 15:** **Lohman said** Tolbert, A Rubidoux resident, had an 'extensive criminal history' ... . **Lohman said** Tolbert was on parole from prison at the time of Thursday's incident.

**Paragraph 16:** The dead hostage was identified as Karl Milan, 67, who

decided ... before joining her family for Thanksgiving dinner, **said Lohman. He added** that Tolbert apparently killed the hostage shortly before the police burst into the home.

**Paragraph 17:** ... **Lohman said** he was aware that the former officer's Presence had stirred some tension in the neighborhood, which is heavily black and Latino.

**Paragraph 18:** 'I've heard some people were upset that Mr. Koon was placed here, but there haven't been any problems up until this point since he's been here,' **said Lohman.**

In the very few instances authorities are presented as **Actors in a material process** by white newspapers, it is done so as to indicate that the police and other authorities are **carrying out their responsibilities:**

... and the **FBI is investigating...** (Text 3- *The New York Times*)  
(Actor) (material process)

**District Attorney Robert Colville... can either accept or reject**  
(Actor) (material processes)

recommendation ... (Text 17- *The New York Times*)

**Prosecutors have decided not to file** first or second degree murder  
(Actors) (material process)

charges against... (Text 18- *The Washington Post*)

Contrary to the pattern presented by white newspapers, whenever authorities are portrayed in the role of **the Actor in a material process** by African-American newspapers, there may be the implication those with

responsibility for the police departments **are not fully carrying their responsibilities** and must be replaced:

... **Speaker of the House Willie Brown, Senator Diane Watson** and  
(Actor) (Actor)

**heads of organizations** all over the country **are calling for** Gates to  
(Actor) (material process)

step down. (Text 9- *The Black News Voice*)

After completing the analysis of the most recurrent transitivity pattern for authorities, it can be concluded that the authorities are largely represented as Sayers in a verbal process in both types of newspaper. This role prominence can undoubtedly affect the reader's perception of the news story and favor the white attackers, for most of the authorities quoted or reported are representatives of the police departments whose officers were involved in the crimes.

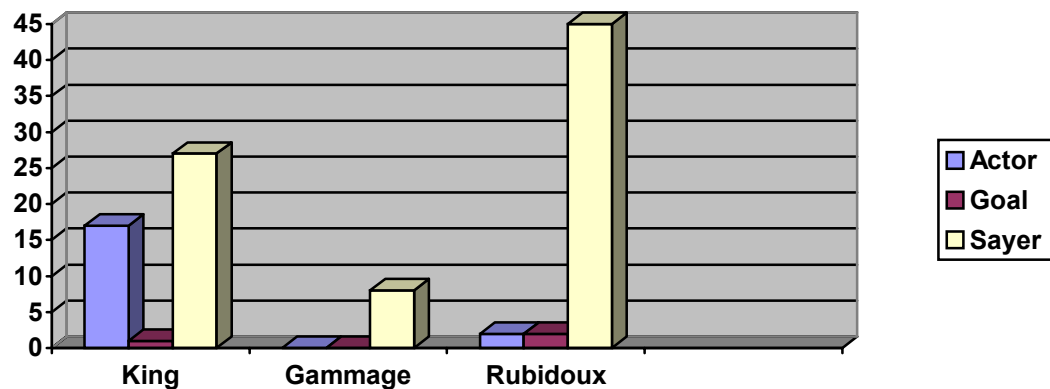
Corroborating what was said in the concluding section for the analysis of naming (section 3.5), the poorer economic conditions of the African-American newspapers, which result in weekly editions and compel them to write their reports based on second-hand attributions, may probably explain the reason why authorities of the kind mentioned in the above paragraph are so often employed to help narrate the news story.



#### 4.4- The witnesses

The last social participants to be discussed are the witnesses. Although they are not as profusely quoted or reported as the authorities, **Graph 10** below shows that the witnesses also help newsworkmen tell the stories.

However, it must be pointed out that the verbal processes generally used to describe the witnesses' point of view (**said** and **told**) are very neutral when compared to the authorities' **recommendations, announcements, criticisms, comments, suggestions, explanations** or **confirmations**.



**Graph 10: The Witnesses**

As far as the choice of witnesses is regarded, it is important to notice that in Rodney King's case, for instance, two friends who were in the car with him at the

moment King's car was stopped by the police, were never quoted or reported. In fact, most newspapers opted for quoting or reporting George Holliday, the bystander who incidentally recorded the beating.

In fact, Holliday and his video are sometimes treated as two separate witnesses. When the tape itself becomes the narrator, it unusually appears in the Actor's position and concentrates on that angle of the story that places the LAPD under suspicion:

**A two-minute amateur videotape of the beating** of a black motorist by  
(Actor)

a group of police officers **has jarred** Los Angeles and **revived** charges  
(material process) (material process)

that the police department has failed to confront an allegedly  
pattern of police brutality. (Text 3- *The New York Times*)

**The violent images** **produced** an immediate *public outcry* and **brought**  
(Actor) (material process) (material process)

the police department *under an intense criticism*.

(Text 2- *Los Angeles Times*)

**The tape** **ended** ... and one of the voices is heard to yell,  
(Actor) (material process)

"victim of beating." (Text 9- *The Black New Voice*)

Graph 10 also makes it evident that the Rubidoux witnesses are extensively quoted and reported as compared to King's and Gammage's witnesses.

While in Gammage's and King's reports the authorities take the role of the narrator in both kinds of

newspaper, the witnesses' point of view permeates the African-American news stories about the killings in Rubidoux. The reason for there being such copious number of witnesses heard by the African-American *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *The Black News Voice* is probably due to the short distance between Rubidoux and the main headquarters of both newspapers.

Unconstrained by the economic difficulties of sending their newspapermen to distant places, the African-American newspapers are more able to choose their own sources and tell their own versions of the Rubidoux incident.

As a result, the African-American attacker's relatives and close acquaintances are placed among the main witnesses and add a different connotation to the news story:

**The senior Tolbert said** his son wanted to start a business  
(Sayer) (verbal process)

videotaping wedding and parties. (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

**Tolbert Junior said** the night before Thanksgiving his brother spoke  
(Sayer) (verbal process)

about making 'a point about Stacey Koon being there. The fact that he was here was eating all of us. (Text 13- *Los Angeles Sentinel*)

**Brown concluded,** '... I don't believe he shot the man. The officers  
(Sayer) (verbal process)

pushed me out of the way and went in and shot him like an animal...'

(Text 14- *The Black News Voice*)

**Randy's father, Mr. Tolbert, said,** 'They were wrong for not letting  
(Sayer) (verbal process)

us talk to him especially when they promised us that we could.'

(Text 14- *The Black News Voice*)

In the above examples, Tolbert is portrayed as someone who was defending his community against the offense of having Stacey Koon, the former white officer who beat Rodney King, living in the Rubidoux halfway house. Besides being represented as a community hero, Tolbert is also portrayed by Brown, his sister-in-law, and by his father as a victim of the police willingness to negotiate:

It is worth mentioning that *The Black News Voice* also made use of an **inanimate witness**, i.e., another newspaper to report the event, as the Sayers of the verbs **indicated** and **reported** below show:

The incident (shooting) seemed to be triggered by a television news reporter who was on the phone with Tolbert, questioning him about what happened..., **indicated** *The Press Enterprise*. (Text 14)

A local daily newspaper **reported** Tuesday, November 28<sup>th</sup>, one of the witnesses Lynne Enyart, said Tolbert shot and killed Karl 'Griff' Millam... (Text 14)

Coincidentally, except for Mark Lohman's point of view, it is only through the quotation of *The Press-Enterprise* that Tolbert is presented as a real criminal by *The Black News Voice*. Actually, the fact that white and

African-American papers reported radically different perceptions of what really happened inside the halfway house causes us conclude that the so-called objectivity to which newspapermen are committed has a lot to do with their choices involving who is going to perform the role of Sayers in a report.

#### **4.5- Conclusion to the chapter**

This study seems to confirm the hypothesis that African-Americans are misrepresented in the American Press. In terms of transitivity, misrepresentation is a fact both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Since the analyzed news stories deal with crimes, it is first expected that their most important social participants (attackers and victims) be frequently represented as the ones who respectively perform and undergo actions.

If a quantitative analysis cannot not completely deny this expectation in relation to the victims, a qualitative study of the processes demonstrates that although the African-American victims are represented as Goals, prominence is then given to their present or past misdeeds to the detriment of their suffering.

Moreover, the data also show that not only are white attackers more often represented as Goals than as Actors, but also that when represented as a Goal, blame is either transferred to the victims themselves or to inanimate objects.

This study shows that on the whole, the reports are presented through verbal processes in which witnesses and authorities (the police, leaders of important government organizations, lawyers, prosecutors and doctors) present their viewpoints of the crimes. As a matter of fact, having people saying, declaring, criticizing, recommending, etc., not only prevents newswomen from 'showing their faces' but helps them to pass on an image of high degree of credibility and impartiality as well. As a consequence, the Sayers in the verbal actions (witnesses and authorities) are used as a powerful journalistic strategy to legitimize the reports, and to incriminate and declare people innocent without involving actually themselves or the newspapers.

The choices that were made regarding who would be selected from the social participants to tell the news stories pointed to the ideologies held by newspapermen. First of all, the involvement of the police in the crimes is often associated with the victims' misconduct and with fate itself (apud Fairclough 1995; Fowler et al. 1979; Hodge and Kress 1979). Secondly, most of the authorities selected to

tell the stories belong to the same police departments whose officers were involved in the crimes. Lastly, the witnesses, such as the people who were present at the time the crimes took place, relatives and friends of victims and attackers, are seldom heard compared to authorities.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Final Remarks**

Starting with the concept of contemporary racism, this chapter summarizes the principal findings, limitations and implications of this research work. Suggestions for further research are also considered.

#### **5.1- Contemporary Racism**

From the analysis of the twenty news reports on the three allegedly racial crimes examined here, it is possible to conclude that the portrayal of African-Americans is subtly and indirectly constructed. Actually, the data contain no blatant derogatory naming identifying African-Americans with the idea of crime and deviance, as it was a common practice in the days of 'old racism' (Cf. footnote 1, page 2). However, the amount of details (skin color, (lack of) occupation, misconduct and a possible criminal past), as well as a choice of transitivity that subtly



omits or transfers the white attackers' responsibility, may help the reader to form a mental model that reinforces the stereotypical presentation of African-Americans as associated with violence and crime.

### **5.2- The Principal Findings**

The main objective of this research work was to investigate aspects of how the U.S. Press represents African-American and whites when both are associated with violence and crime. The underlying hypothesis was that blame would be omitted or transferred from white attackers of African-Americans by means of a linguistic strategy known as 'choice of transitivity'. Lexical choices or 'Naming' would also serve as tools to either attenuate or accentuate the attackers' responsibility.

Whether or not the purpose stated in the introduction was fully achieved deserves some consideration. First of all, the data analyzed supported the claim that the U.S. Press misrepresents African-Americans. Secondly, this misrepresentation proved to be carried out in both the lexical and transitivity options.

There was a paradox, for while the white attackers were neutrally named, the African-American victims had their

misdeeds highlighted. The African-American attacker, on the other hand, was mostly named according to his crime.

The most impressive conclusion derived from the data is that victims and attackers were under-represented when compared to the authorities, whose angle, whether reported or quoted, pervaded most of the news stories. This selection is of fundamental importance when the subject of misrepresentation is dealt with, for an impressive number of these authorities belonged to the departments involved in the crimes.

The final consideration about whether African-Americans are misrepresented in the analyzed reports cannot help avoid contemplating the subtlety of misrepresentation in contemporary racism.

Firstly, the omission of important perspectives such as that of the African-American living victim. Second, the practice of including the ethnicity of African-American social participants while disregarding the same feature when describing white attackers, witnesses and authorities. And finally, the emphasis on African-American marginalization is as dangerous and inhuman as the blatant racial insensitivity with which traditional racism portrayed African-Americans.

### **5.3- Limitations of the Study**

A possible drawback is associated with the African-American newspapers analyzed. Although a comparison of the data in white and African-American newspapers was carried out, except for a few relevant points concerning the victims and attackers, contrastive analysis in both King's and Gammage's reports proved not as productive as I had expected it to be.

As mentioned in the two preceding chapters, the reason for such similar viewpoints in most news reports seems to lie on the recurrent use of the same attributions. In fact, the less prosperous African-American newspapers have weekly editions, which are either based on white newspapers, or on the same elite sources on which white newspapers rely on.

As a matter of fact, the striking differences in viewpoint among both varieties came about during the Rubidoux killings. *The Black News Voice's* main office was so close to the incident that it was not necessary for their journalists to consult other sources. On the other hand, as the prime research subject was the American Press as a whole, the few American newspapers researched would be insufficient to support any claim regarding similar or contrastive viewpoints.

Starting from the well-known principle that the meaning of any text is a negotiation between the reader and

the writer, this work is also limited for not having analyzed other text interpretations besides that of the researcher. The comparison between a critical and an 'ordinary' reading of the news texts analyzed in this work would certainly have enlightened the results.

#### **5.4- Possible Implications**

Like many other studies in the field of discourse analysis, this research has demonstrated how the critical reading of texts may reveal the central role language plays in the reproduction of the dominant white society's bias. This work has specifically concentrated on the linguistic choices made by newswomen as a way of showing biased discourses which may disguise themselves as factuality.

Bearing in mind the enormous potential of language to reproduce ideologies and sustain social and economic inequalities, this work is particularly relevant for the educational area in Brazil, where 'language awareness' has been neglected in the curriculum of schools and universities.

Meanwhile, native and foreign language teaching professionals inadvertently decide every new academic year on which textbooks their students are going to read. Unfortunately, most of this teaching materials are evaluated

purely for their excellence in developing language skills, with little or no regard as to whether these books, for instance, reflect as 'obvious' class, race or gender stereotypes. Although not based on previous research, my empirical experience as a teacher of English attests that textbooks have either ignored or under-represented ordinary colored people. More recently, however, some textbooks (such as the Interchange Series), have challenged this stereotype. A common reaction I have witnessed as a teacher and researcher in the classroom has been very coherent with the concept of contemporary racism. Despite denying any kind of color prejudice with disclaimers such as '**I'm not a racist but...**', young middle-class white students could not help showing their amazement when, in a dialogue, an African-American woman was presented as the vice president of a large company. I did not once notice the same reaction when white people or famous black artists and athletes were represented as successful people.

This kind of reaction may evidence that it is high time educational textbooks, on the whole, be critically read so as to avoid not only the perpetuation of inhuman stereotypes, but also so as to prevent students and teachers being exposed to some embarrassing classroom situations.

This work also hopes to raise questions about the potential of daily newspapers to contribute to perpetuating racial stereotypes.

In Western countries readers are provided with a wide selection of newspapers, some of which reach a circulation of millions. Actually, reading the daily newspaper has become a daily habit for the majority of people and is second only to television 'as a window to the world' (Fowler, 1991:121).

As the news reporting institutions are socially, economically and politically engaged, news should conform to a perspective, which must not contradict the ideologies of the elite group that dictates the newsroom practices and values.

Although journalists would deny traces of a racist discourse in their writings (Campbell 1995), the invisibility for so long imposed on the positive side of the African-American reality has ended up by creating for African-Americans stereotyped images (associated with deviance and crime) on which contemporary white American journalists so often rely.

What is at stake is that if racism is commonsensically exercised in language through news, which claims to be the very keystone of a true democratic and egalitarian society, critical language awareness would be an

effective tool in the development of a freer and less discriminatory press.

### **5.5- Further Research**

While carrying out this work I have asked myself what the conclusions would have been if Brazilian and U.S. news practices had been compared in relation to racist stereotypes and social classes. Equally challenging would be to research Brazilian Portuguese textbooks as a native and as a foreign language to check if and how the selection of texts help reproduce the ideologies of the dominant classes.

As a matter of fact, any discourse expressing and/or conveying negative social representations about minorities should be considered racist and, therefore, must be fully explored by critical discourse analysts.

On completing this work my hope remains that the recent change in nomenclature proposed by Jesse Jackson in December 1988 - from black to African-American-, be one among other expressive steps towards the cultural, social and economic equality for which the USA's largest racial minority has been fighting since colonial times.

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UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS - INGLÊS

**From Negro to African-American - A study of  
Misrepresentation in the U.S. Press**

Por

Maria Elizabeth da Costa Gama

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa  
Catarina para obtenção do grau de MESTRE EM LETRAS

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Esta Dissertação foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês para obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

LÍNGUA INGLESA

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Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Dr<sup>ª</sup>. Barbara O. Baptista  
COORDENADORA

---

Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer  
ORIENTADOR

BANCA EXAMINADORA:

---

Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer

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Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Dr<sup>ª</sup>. Ana Zilles

---

Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Dr<sup>ª</sup>. Viviane M. Heberle

Florianópolis/SC, 25 de setembro de 1998.

**Abstract**

**From Negro to African-American: A Study of Misrepresentation  
in U.S. Press.**

**Maria Elizabeth da Costa Gama**

**Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina**

**1998**

**Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer  
Supervisor**

This research work critically analyses aspects of the role the U.S. Press performs in the reproduction of stereotypes that support existing racial and social inequalities. Based on Van Dijk's claim (1988) that minorities are often associated in the media with violence and crime, I carry out a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) of twenty news reports on three allegedly racially-driven crimes from six white and four African-American newspapers. The most recurrent lexical choices as well as the prevailing system of transitivity (Halliday, 1985) are examined both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Although contemporary racism is very subtle when compared to the 'old-fashioned racism' (Van Dijk, 1988), the results suggest the evidence of misrepresentation of African-Americans in the U.S. Press. This study contributes to increase readers' and writers' awareness of the role of the Press in the reproduction of racism.

Number of pages: 98

## **Resumo**

### **From Negro to African-American: A Study of Misrepresentation in the U.S. Press.**

**Maria Elizabeth da Costa Gama**

**Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina**

**1998**

**Prof. Dr. José Luiz Meurer  
Orientador**

Este trabalho de pesquisa analisa criticamente aspectos do papel que a imprensa americana desempenha na reprodução de estereótipos que sustentam desigualdades raciais e sociais nos Estados Unidos. Partindo da afirmativa de Van Dijk(1988) que as minorias são sempre associadas na mídia à violência e ao crime, realizo uma análise crítica do discurso (Fairclough,1992)de vinte reportagens sobre três crimes supostamente causados por questões raciais. As reportagens são retiradas de seis jornais brancos e quatro jornais afro-americanos. As escolhas lexicais mais recorrentes bem como o sistema de transitividade predominante(Halliday, 1985) são examinados tanto em termos quantitativos quanto qualitativos. Embora o racismo contemporâneo seja muito sutil quando comparado ao 'racismo ultrapassado'(Van Dijk,1988), os resultados sugerem que existe uma representação distorcida dos afro-americanos na imprensa dos Estados Unidos da América. Este estudo visa contribuir para a conscientização de leitores e escritores do papel que a imprensa desempenha na reprodução do racismo.

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