ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	THE SHIFT IN NEWS MEDIA FRAMING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ASIANS IN AMERICA: THE VINCENT CHIN MURDER CASE AND ITS LEGACY
	Sara Renee Browning, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024
Dissertation directed by:	Professor Sarah Oates, Philip Merrill College of Journalism

The dissertation research project draws on the events surrounding the murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin on June 19, 1982, to examine changes in news framing of violence targeting Asian Americans from 1982 to the present. This dissertation argues that the Vincent Chin murder case, which lasted from 1982-1987, can be considered a critical turning point in news framing of the criminal motive for violence against Asians in the U.S. as well as framing of the Asian victims of such violence. The dissertation further posits that the case played an important role in drawing attention to anti-Asian racism as a widespread, persistent problem in America, helping to shape news framing of more recent cases of criminalized violence against Asians in the U.S., especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of this research is to explore how journalists took notice of Asian Americans' place in U.S. society as Asians in America transitioned from "fully assimilated model minorities" to racial scapegoats in the public mind.

The dissertation accomplishes its purpose using a content analysis of news frames of the

Vincent Chin murder case from June 19, 1982, the date of Chin's death, to December 31, 2022, the last full year of news coverage of the case. The content analysis investigates shifts in news framing of the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's murder from a random crime unrelated to race to a hate crime. Content analysis also helps to examine shifts in framing of Chin from a hot-tempered young man whose own reckless behavior led to his tragic end to a vulnerable victim worthy of racial justice. Furthermore, the study assesses correlations between key events of the murder case from 1982-1987 and shifts in press framing of the criminal motive and the victim. Lastly, the dissertation uses content analysis to examine similar trends between framing of Chin's murder and framing of the murders of six Asian women at three separate spas in Georgia on March 16, 2021. This analysis uncovers how the Chin case played a role in more contemporary framing of violence against Asians in America.

The research findings inform journalism studies scholarship concerning how news framing of criminalized violence targeting Asian ethnic groups in the U.S. gradually evolved. The study interprets the findings within the context of framing theory and worthy victim theory. Results indicate that although journalists initially both downplayed and ignored anti-Asian racism as a possible motive for Vincent Chin's slaying, nationwide pan-Asian advocacy group protests played a significant part in drawing news reporters' attention to the racial aspect of the crime. By the end of the Chin case in 1987, many journalists not only relied on sources to allege a racial motive for Chin's death, but they also directly condemned anti-Asian racism in their news stories. Thirty-five years following Chin's death, journalists continued to revive and retell Chin's story in news reports covering the Georgia murder case. Journalists exhibited little hesitancy in stating directly that the Georgia murders were racial crimes representative of a chronic and intensifying problem.

THE SHIFT IN NEWS MEDIA FRAMING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST ASIANS IN AMERICA: THE VINCENT CHIN MURDER CASE AND ITS LEGACY

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Foreword

“The first step toward success is taken when you refuse to be a captive of the circumstances in which you first find yourself.” – Mark Caine

“Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day-in and day-out.” — Robert Collier

“Successful people do what unsuccessful people are not willing to do. Don't wish it were easier; wish you were better.” — Jim Rohn

Dedication

To my father & mother for their unwavering support, spiritual guidance, and prayers.

Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation has been an eight-year journey. Several unexpected setbacks, detours, and struggles often made the road rugged and the outcome uncertain. Yet, there were particular faculty members along the way who pushed me past the milestones and deserve a debt of gratitude.

I began my education at the University of Maryland in the Department of Government and Politics before transferring to the Journalism Studies program at Philip Merrill College. I would like to thank Dr. Mike Hanmer for his steadfast encouragement and recognition of my strength as a writer. It means a great deal that he remembers my academic writing years after serving as my instructor. Additionally, Dr. Hanmer was conscious of the fact that political science was not my niche and helped me locate a department that was a great fit for my skills and interests.

Upon being admitted into Philip Merrill College, Dr. Mark Feldstein was tremendously gracious. He acquainted me with faculty, took me out to lunch, and assisted me in finding my footing in a new environment. In many ways, he served as a mentor, familiarizing me with the tenants of Journalism History, which would become my main focus area. In his Journalism History course, Dr. Feldstein oversaw the writing of an academic paper analyzing news coverage of Chinese immigrants in America. This paper not only won two awards at the American Journalism Historian Association (AJHA) Conference in 2018 but also introduced me to the topic that would form the foundation for this dissertation. Additionally, Dr. Feldstein temporarily became my committee chair and guided my successful completion of

comprehensive exams. I owe him a debt of gratitude for welcoming me into the Philip Merrill College community.

I would like to give special recognition to Dr. Christopher Hanson who spoke on my behalf to the Journalism faculty for the purpose of allowing me to remain in the Journalism Studies program at a time when new committee leadership became necessary. He graciously took on the responsibility of guiding my project. As my new committee chair, Dr. Hanson was instrumental in helping to locate an appropriate dissertation topic and in guiding my project through the successful defense of the prospectus and beyond. Moreover, Dr. Hanson largely informed my understanding of academic writing. His expertise further elevated the clarity and organization of my work. I am forever grateful for his faith in me and for the *time* he spent on this project to ensure its success. I would not be "Dr. Sara Browning" today were it not for his willingness to help in time of need.

I am incredibly grateful to Dr. Sarah Oates (a.k.a. the other Sarah) for serving as my committee chair during the final leg of this marathon and for cheering me across the finish line. From day one, Dr. Oates was ever-encouraging and complimentary. I'll never forget one of her earliest impressions of my dissertation: "My God, you're a good writer!" During the final stages of this project, when I felt exhausted and overwhelmed, Dr. Oates' humor and fun-loving personality were a breath of fresh air. She played an active role in speeding up the final stages of the project, giving it renewed energy. Most notably, Dr. Oates' positive attitude always reassured me there was nothing to fear. Whatever the obstacle, the job would get done. She is, undoubtedly, one of the best advisors I have ever had.

A special thanks also to my dissertation committee members for imparting their knowledge, support, and wisdom as necessary. Dr. Kalyani Chadha, Dr. Patrick Chung, Dr. Rob Wells, and Dr. Janelle Wong, thank you for your guidance and support. Dr. Wells was especially helpful during the coding process, "tutoring" me in Microsoft Excel to facilitate the long and, at times, arduous process of analyzing hundreds…and hundreds… of news frames!

Additionally, thanks to the entire Merrill College community—deans, faculty, administrators, and support staff—who always offered a friendly wave and encouraging smile in the halls during long days at the office when I needed it most. Dean Rafael Lorente was a constant presence in the face of unexpected events, resolving issues and keeping the pathway clear.

The past eight years in this dissertation program have been some of the most challenging—but also most rewarding—years of my life. Much of this time was spent in quiet isolation obsessing over grades, evaluations, deadlines, and defenses. The pressure, at times, felt insurmountable. Hence, a giant THANK YOU to my family—Dad, Mom, and Jessie, who endured my insane moods, obsessive devotion to work (even on holidays), and sporadic temper tantrums. Your love—and constant prayers—keep me going. Lastly, thanks to my three kittens who kept me from feeling lonely and brought much joy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Vincent Chin Murder Case

On the night of June 19, 1982, in a McDonald's parking lot in Highland Park, Michigan, a Chinese-American man was mercilessly bludgeoned to death. Michael Nitz, a 23-year-old laid-off Chrysler worker, pinned the victim's arms behind his back. Nitz's stepfather, Ronald Ebens, who had also been laid off by Chrysler, slammed a Louisville Slugger into the victim's legs, chest, and skull "as if he were going for a home run."[1] After multiple blows, the victim collapsed in a pool of blood and cerebral matter. The victim's friend, cradling him as he lay dying, recalled his last words, spoken in Chinese: "It's not fair."[2]

The victim, a 27-year-old engineering draftsman named Vincent Chin, had first set eyes on Ebens and Nitz just minutes earlier at Highland Park's Fancy Pants Tavern, a strip club where Chin and three of his friends were celebrating his bachelor party. Upon spotting Chin inside the tavern, Ebens had yelled: "It's because of you little motherf--ers that we're out of work!"[3] Two of Chin's friends would later testify

[1] Paula Yoo, *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2021), 14.

[2] Ibid., 14.

[3] Ibid., 10. Ronald Ebens' remark was in reference to the Japan-America "trade-wars" of the 1980s when an increase in American consumer purchases of imported Japanese cars in the U.S. led to the loss of hundreds of U.S. automotive jobs. U.S. society responded with "Buy American" campaigns as well as "Japan-bashing" events. These events were held at auto manufacturing centers where people were encouraged to smash Japanese-imported vehicles with baseball bats to express their anger and frustration with Japanese competition.

in court that they heard one of his assailants use the words *Chink* and *Nip,* and a fight had then ensued.[4] Chin's friends testified that he provoked the fight by shoving Ebens in the chest.[5] After the tavern's bouncers had escorted the men outside, Chin, "pumped up on alcohol and adrenaline, taunted Ebens," yelling: "Come on, you chickens--ts, let's fight some more!"[6] Ebens then grabbed a baseball bat from the trunk of his vehicle and began chasing Chin.[7] Chin fled on foot with one of his friends to a nearby McDonald's parking lot while Ebens and Nitz pursued him in their truck. At the McDonald's, the two men grabbed Chin from behind, and Ebens swung the bat furiously at Chin. Two policemen who happened to be at the McDonald's rushed toward the assailants, pistols drawn, shouting at Ebens to drop the bat. They arrested Ebens and Nitz who were both charged with second-degree murder on June 25, 1982.[8] The charge was plea bargained down to manslaughter on February 8, 1983.[9] Chin's assailants denied the attack was racially motivated.

In the days following the attack, Detroit news outlets framed the deadly assault, not as a hate crime, but as a barroom brawl that spiraled into tragedy. On July 1, 1982, *The Detroit Free Press,* one of the city's two leading newspapers, quoted Detective Donald Roberts, the lead investigator in the murder case. Roberts claimed

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid..

[7] Ibid., 11.

[8] Ibid., 33.

[9] Ibid., 316.

that police were "not sure exactly what happened" except that "something was said that offended Mr. Chin."[10] A week later on July 7, 1982, after more details of the crime were uncovered, *The Detroit Free Press* reported in a 200-word page 4 article that the murder resulted from an "argument" among patrons that led to a "scuffle" outside the front door of the tavern. The report also stated that following the slaying, Ebens was arrested and was later "free on $5,000 bond."[11] The only suggestion of a hate crime in the article was Vincent's last name.[12]

As a victim of violent crime, many local and national news publications framed Vincent Chin as blameworthy for his fate, focusing on his reckless behavior in the minutes leading up to his slaying. For example, a *Detroit Free Press* article published on July 7, 1982, reported that Chin began the "scuffle" that led to his death.[13]

Following the July 7, 1982, news article, local Detroit newspapers did not report on Vincent Chin's murder again until March 18, 1983.[14] Two days earlier, on March 16, Michigan Circuit Court Judge Charles Kaufman had imposed an extraordinarily lenient sentence of just three years' probation and a fine of $3,000

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[10] Brian Flanigan, "Slaying Ends Couple's Dream," *The Detroit Free Press*, July 1, 1982, 1, Newspapers.com.

[11] "Hearing in Fatal Beating," *The Detroit Free Press*, July 7, 1982, 4, Newspapers.com. Nitz never went to jail. Ebens spent the night of Saturday, June 19, in jail and was released the next morning on bond.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 60.

plus $780 in court costs for Ebens and Nitz to be paid over three years.[15] In justifying his sentence, the judge emphasized the defendants' absence of criminal records. He claimed: "You don't make the punishment fit the crime; you make the punishment fit the criminal. . . . These weren't the kind of men you send to jail."[16]

Judge Kaufman's sentence and his public statements both jolted and energized local, regional, and national news outlets as well as members of the Asian American community who condemned the judge's ruling and demanded prison time for Chin's killers. Yet, journalists continued to avoid asserting directly that the fatal assault was a hate crime and, instead, relied on news sources to allege that racism was the criminal motive.[17] For example, on April 26, 1983, *The New York Times* quoted Kin Yee, then-president of the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council. Yee claimed the defendants' fine offers "a license to kill for $3,000, provided you have a steady job or are a student and the victim is Chinese."[18]

Two federal civil rights prosecutions took place during the Vincent Chin case. In a description of the first federal civil rights prosecution in which Ebens and Nitz stood trial, a *Washington Post* journalist reported on June 29, 1984, that "a federal

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[15] Yoo, *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry*, 316.

[16] Ibid., 114, 104.

[17] An angry opinion editorial written by local news reporter, Nickie McWhirter, condemned anti-Asian racism. She berated Judge Kaufman's lenient sentence in *The Detroit Free Press* on March 25, 1983. McWhirter mentions race as she addresses Judge Kaufman: "You have raised the ugly ghost of racism, suggesting in explanation of your sentence that the lives of the killers are of great and continuing value to society, implying they are of greater value than the life of the slain victim.", cited from Nickie McWhirter, "A Lesson and a License that Kids Should Never Get," *The Detroit Free Press*, March 25, 1983, Newspapers.com.

[18] Judith Cummings, "Detroit Asian Americans Protest Lenient Penalties for Murder," *The New York Times*, April 26, 1983, NexisUni. Part of the quote refers to Michael Nitz who was a college student and held a steady part-time job.

grand jury . . . alleged that Ebens and Nitz beat Chin because of his race." Additionally, the report stated that "Prosecutor S. Theodore Merritt said the beating represented 'years of racial hostility unleashed. This was a lynching, but with a bat instead of a rope.'"[19]

Only gradually and over time did journalists begin directly asserting that Vincent Chin's race motivated his fatal beating instead of relaying the words of sources to make this claim. For example, on April 28, 1987, Roger Daniels, a guest columnist for *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, stated that Chin's murder is but one of "an escalating series of racially inspired events" that took place against Asians throughout America's history."[20] The article characterized Chin as a victim of racial injustice, drawing attention to Chin's vulnerability to his attackers: "The older man [Ebens] beat him [Chin] with a baseball bat so severely that he died," according to the news report.[21] Yet, overall, journalists' direct assertions of anti-Asian racism were rarely visible in news coverage of the Chin case. (Key events of the Vincent Chin case are located in Table 1, Appendix A.) As journalism framing of Vincent Chin's murder shifted over the decades, the case eventually became an iconic event for Asian Americans and a reference point that drew attention to the widespread, serious problem of anti-Asian violence.

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[19] "Asian American Slayer Guilty on Rights Charges," *The Washington Post*, June 29, 1984, 2A, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

[20] Roger Daniels, "The Case of Asian Americans," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 28, 1987, Newspapers.com.

[21] Ibid.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

Why did journalists covering the Vincent Chin murder case largely downplay and, in many instances, completely ignore anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive for his death? In the weeks and months following his death, local, regional, and national news publications framed Chin's fatal assault episodically, as little more than a barroom brawl in a city known for its high crime rate. News reporters depicted Chin, not as a victim of bigotry, but as a hot-tempered young man who deliberately provoked his attackers to rage. Even after evidence of racial slurs from Chin's killers surfaced and was made public by Asian American activists in Detroit in May 1983, journalists themselves almost never called out and condemned the racism motivating Chin's killing. More frequently, news reporters relied on sources to allege that anti-Asian animus was the criminal motive.

Journalists' hesitancy to pay attention to the legitimacy of anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive in Vincent Chin's murder broadly underscores the historic lack of journalistic attention to Asian Americans as a group targeted because of race and, more specifically, as a group that endured racial violence both prior to and during the Chin murder case. For example, in the 1970s, news coverage of the fire bombings targeting Vietnamese fishing boats in Texas coastal cities framed the violence as mere local crimes.[22] Some journalists reported that the spate of attacks was the result of "intense economic competition" with local White fishermen—not racial animosity,

[22] Hien Duc Do, *The Vietnamese Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999).

according to social science professor Hien Duc Do.[23] Similarly, the violent eviction of Chinese and Filipino immigrant tenants from the International Hotel in San Francisco in 1977 swept up considerable media attention.[24] Yet, rather than frame the incident in terms of dominant verses subordinate racial groups, news reporters characterized the fight as a battle between big city developers and low-income residents. Reporters never mentioned the tenants' race.[25]

Both non-scholarly and scholarly writings have identified reasons that may help explain why journalists rarely condemned anti-Asian racism as a motive for violent crime prior to and during the Vincent Chin case. First, a non-scholarly analysis by the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) explores Asian American isolation from mainstream media. In a brief summation of the Chin case on its web site, AAJA claims: "Up until then [Vincent Chin's murder in 1982], the Asian American community had been largely mute" and essentially cut off from mainstream media society."[26] Along this same line, author and activist Helen Zia adds that Asian

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[23] Molly Ivins, "Killing Sharpens Texas Feud on Vietnamese Fishing," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1979. This article claims that the motive for the violence "has always been economic," a "case of misunderstanding," and "a clash of economic interests." It represents how many journalists framed the attacks.

[24] Harvey C. Dong, "The Origins and Trajectory of Asian American Political Activism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1968-1978," PhD diss., (University of California, Berkeley, 2002). The fight to evict minority group members from the International Hotel, a building known for its association with the Asian immigrant community, took place from 1968-1977. Property owners sought to build a parking lot to replace the hotel. All tenants were elderly Chinese and Filipino immigrant residents with no place else to live. Protesters of all racial backgrounds came together. On eviction day, August 4, 1977, over 2,000 community activists nine rows deep locked arms in front of the hotel and endured clubbings and repeated charges by over 300 mounted officers, sheriffs, and fire department employees. Many protesters were injured. Once inside, officers used axes to knock in the doors and damaged and stole tenants' property. Tenants were carried by their wrists and ankles and left on the pavement outside.

[25] Ibid., 116.

[26] "A Timeline of the Chin Case," Asian American Journalists Association, last modified May 22, 2013, accessed September 30, 2021. According to AAJA, the Vincent Chin case spotlighted the

Americans in cities like Chin's hometown of Detroit composed disorganized networks that made it challenging for Asians in the U.S. to reach out to the predominantly White mainstream journalism community. Hence, during the 1970s and 1980s, Asian Americans had little recourse to alert mainstream journalists to the anti-Asian racism motivating violent crime against Asian ethnic groups.[27]

Second, scholarly analyses have investigated how the model minority stereotype shaped journalists' perceptions of Asian Americans as having overcome racism. One particular study focuses on the role this stereotype played in shaping journalists' inaccurate characterizations of Southeast Asian students as financially and academically successful. The study finds that journalists overlooked the financial insecurity and racial discrimination this ethnic group has faced.[28]

Stanford political science professor Shanto Iyengar examines how newsroom practices could help explain why reporters rarely asserted that anti-Asian hatred motivated violent crimes against Asian victims.[29] He investigates how television

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difficulty for Asian Americans and other minorities "to be heard and heeded by news media." AAJA is an organization that advocates for members of the Asian American Pacific Islander community for greater representation in U.S. mainstream media newsrooms and greater inclusion in media, according to its web site.

[27] Zia, *Asian American Dreams*, 79. One chapter in Zia's study discusses jury selection for the second civil rights trial connected to the Vincent Chin case. Zia claims that during this period (late 1980s) Asians were "near invisible" in Cincinnati. To illustrate, she explains that when jurors were asked about their contact with Asians, out of 180 Cincinnati citizens in the jury pool, "only 19 had ever had 'casual contact'" with Asians in the city.

[28] Bic Ngo and Stacey J. Lee, "Complicating the Image of Model Minority Success: A Review of Southeast Asian American Education," *Review of Educational Research* 77, no. 4 (2007): 415.

[29] Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 149. He claims that in an effort to simplify unwanted factual knowledge about a political issue into "commonsense knowledge," TV producers reduce complex political issues to sensationalized discussions of who is responsible for the issues.

broadcast journalism's use of sensationalism and episodic frames to focus on individual actors as either victims or perpetrators linked to specific events obscures television producers' understanding of such issues as symptoms of broader social problems and issues such as race.[30] Iyengar's study is important to understanding how press coverage of Vincent Chin's murder, which focused on the actors involved and the sensational nature of the crime, initially neglected the broader issue of anti-Asian racism as a serious problem in the U.S.

This dissertation argues that the Vincent Chin case can be considered a critical turning point in news framing of violence against Asians and Asian victims in the U.S. as well as in journalists' acknowledgement of anti-Asian racism as a legitimate motive for such violence. The dissertation further posits that the case played a role in drawing attention to anti-Asian racism as a widespread, serious problem in America, helping to shape news framing of more recent cases of violence against Asians in the U.S. To illustrate this point, thirty-five years following Chin's death, journalists continued to revive and retell Chin's story in news reports covering cases of violence against Asian Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In such news stories, journalists exhibited little hesitancy in stating directly that the murder was a racist crime, a seminal hate crime, and a chronic and intensifying problem. For example, *The New York Times* printed over twenty news stories mentioning the Chin case that foregrounded racial hatred of Asians. On October 18, 2021, a *New York Times* journalist reporting on the challenges of being

[30] Ibid., 150.

Asian American during the rapid rise in racial violence during the pandemic marked Chin's murder as the event that "spark[ed] a second wave of Asian American activism" against anti-Asian violence in America.[31] Similarly, nearly a dozen news stories in *The Washington Post* reporting on the upsurge in anti-Asian violence in the U.S. during Covid-19 underscored the racial motivation behind Chin's brutal slaying. On March 26, 2021, *The Washington Post* referenced the Chin case as a glaring moment in America's history of race hatred that is comparable to current-day hate crimes sparking social unrest: "Until we understand the ways in which the Asian American story is, in many ways, like the African American story, we won't be able to reckon with tragedies like Atlanta."[32]

Journalists have an obligation to identify and turn public attention toward newsworthy events, especially when these events represent symptoms of serious, widespread social issues. When professional journalists fail to draw attention to such issues and pose solutions to them, they risk losing their integrity as news providers in a democracy. The Vincent Chin murder case served as a significant tool in spotlighting the issue of anti-Asian racism and its newsworthiness for journalists. Moreover, the Asian American advocacy group that emerged from the Chin case, American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), helped draw journalists' attention to the cultural resonance of such racism for media audiences.

Hence, the dissertation explores several broad questions that will be revisited

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[31] Jay Caspian Kang, "The Myth of Asian American Identity," *The New York Times,* October 18, 2021, NexisUni.

[32] Michael Eric Dyson, "Why Don't We Treat Asian American History the Way We Treat Black History?" *The Washington Post,* March 26, 2021.

in greater detail later in this chapter. How did journalism framing of the Vincent Chin case change over time during the case itself from 1982-1987 and in the subsequent decades from 1987-2022? How did news framing of the Chin case play some role in news framing of more recent cases of violence against Asians in the U.S.? Ultimately, what does news framing of the Chin murder case and more recent murder cases involving Asian American victims reveal about how journalists paid attention to anti-Asian racism in the U.S. and, more broadly, to Asian Americans as a racial group?

This dissertation has two main objectives. First, it draws on the Vincent Chin murder case to shed light on the extent to which newsrooms paid attention to Asian Americans as targets of racism over time. The dissertation examines changes in news framing of the criminal motive for Chin's murder and his victimhood. In particular, the dissertation explores how key events of the case, such as a lenient sentence of probation for Chin's killers from a Michigan Circuit court judge, two federal civil rights trials, and Asian American advocacy group protests, played their parts in shifting framing of Chin's slaying from an ordinary murder in a violent city to a hate crime. The dissertation also explores how these events played some role in shifting framing of Chin from a blameworthy victim who started the altercation with his assailants to a victim who was worthy of racial justice.

Second, the dissertation evaluates the extent to which news framing of the Chin murder case played a role in shaping framing of the shooting of six Asian women at three different spas in Georgia on March 16, 2021. Overall, the dissertation places special emphasis on how journalists took notice of Asian Americans' place in U.S. society as Asians in the U.S. transitioned from "fully assimilated model

minorities" to racial scapegoats in the public mind. The dissertation draws on specific theories and methods to accomplish these objectives. The theoretical, historical, and methodological contributions are explained in the following sections.

1.3 Theoretical Contribution

The dissertation contributes to scholars' theoretical understanding of media studies by engaging with framing theory and worthy victim theory. Sociologist William A. Gamson understands framing theory as "a central, organizing principle or idea" by which journalists give meaning to relevant events.[33] The dissertation engages with framing theory for three reasons. First, it uses framing theory to create eight specific news framing categories to understand how journalists framed the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's murder (a non-racial crime or a racial crime) and his victimhood (a blameworthy victim or a helpless victim of racial injustice) during specific time periods. These eight framing categories are discussed in detail in Chapter 5: Methods.

Second, when combined with a content analysis of news frames, discussed later in this chapter, framing theory uncovers the extent to which specific trends in framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood from 1982-1987 reappeared in news framing of the Georgia Spa shootings in March 2021. Some news reports covering these shootings revived Chin's story and frequently quoted Asian American activists to frame the murders as hate crimes. Similar trends between framing of the historic Chin case and more contemporary cases of violence against Asians in the

[33] William A. Gamson, and Kathrn E. Lasch, "The Political Culture of Social Welfare Policy," in *Evaluating the Welfare State: Social and Political Perspectives.* Ed. Spiro E. Shimon & Ephraim Yutchtman-Yaar (San Diego: San Diego Academic Press, 1983), 16.

U.S. help illuminate the extent to which Chin's murder played a role in drawing journalists' attention to anti-Asian racism as a persistent, widespread issue in America.

Lastly, the dissertation engages with framing theory to help scholars understand the connection between news frames and news narratives. News narratives are discussed in detail in the review of scholarship in Chapter 2. Journalistic narratives serve as plot lines that aid news reporters in telling a story regarding a particular person or event. Plot lines allow media audiences to understand how journalists interpret, or make sense of, particular issues.[34] Narrative plot lines encompass a story arc comprised of conflict, suspense, and resolution as well as characters, including a villain, a victim, and a hero.[35] For example, *crime and punishment, captivity and rescue,* and *hard work and reward* are popular news narratives.

The narrative journalists choose based on their interpretation of particular issues, such as a motive for a violent crime, determines the frames they use for their news story.[36] Hence, when news narratives shift, one frame can replace another frame as the dominant frame in a news article. Frames that characterize violent crimes as racially motivated frequently become dominant frames in news stories when evidence of racial hatred surfaces. Racism frames can replace frames that characterize criminal

[34] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (New York: Random House, 1957), *Attitudes Toward History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950).

[35] Philip Seargeant, "The Art of Political Storytelling: Why Stories Win Votes in Post-Truth Politics," (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 103-106.

[36] Ibid.

motives for violence as unrelated to race. Frames characterizing violent crimes as motivated by race prejudice frequently become dominant frames because racial hatred is culturally resonant with media audiences and, therefore, is more likely to initiate a public response than episodic framing of violence.[37]

Understanding changes in news narratives and news frames using framing theory undergirds my argument that the Vincent Chin case can be considered a critical turning point in news framing of violence against Asians in the U.S. For instance, journalists reporting on the beating death of an Asian American man by two White men in a bar may use the narrative: *man slain in drunken brawl at strip club* based on interviews with police who claim that no direct evidence of racism existed. Journalists would likely frame the crime as a barroom brawl in a violent city. However, if Asian American activists organized protests and press conferences during which they condemned anti-Asian racism as motivating the crime, journalists would be likely to shift to a hate crime narrative. Furthermore, by privileging activists' viewpoints over those of local police in the news article, reporters could position the hate crime frame as the dominant frame in their news story.

Additionally, the dissertation engages in worthy victim theory to help explain why journalists choose to frame violent crime victims as either worthy or less worthy of racial justice. Journalists consider worthy victims—elderly women, young children, and expectant mothers—to be persons who are "vulnerable, defenseless, and

[37] Noam Tirosh, "Dominant News Frames, Society's Memory, and the African Asylum Seekers' Protest in Israel," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 4 (April 2018): 405.

innocent," according to scholar Chris Greer.[38] Conversely, journalists are more likely to frame young men or those "existing on the margins of society," such as drug addicts or alcoholics, as less worthy of justice because the public tends to perceive such individuals as less innocent, according to Greer.[39]

The dissertation uses worthy victim theory for two reasons. First, the theory helps scholars adequately comprehend the criteria journalists use to decide how to frame violent crime victims as either worthy or less worthy of justice, including racial justice. An understanding of how journalists make decisions regarding victim framing, especially framing of minority group victims of violent crime, can uncover how news reporters characterized Vincent Chin as a victim of violence during the murder case from 1982-1987. Understanding how journalists framed Chin as a victim of violence situates my argument that the Chin case could be considered a turning point in framing of Asian victims of criminalized violence in the U.S.

When deciding whether to frame a violent crime victim as worthy or less worthy of racial justice, journalists consider the victim's conduct[40] and the victim's race and ethnicity.[41] Non-White violent crime victims are frequently "devalued in news coverage" due to the negative stereotypes attached to particular racial minority groups, which make such victims less newsworthy than White victims of violent

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[38] Chris Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," in *Victims, Crime, and Society*, edited by P. Davies, P. Francis, and C. Greer. (London: Sage, 2007), 22.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Danielle C. Slakoff, and Pauline K. Brennen, "The Differential Representation of Latina and Black Female Victims in Front-Page News Stories: A Qualitative Document Analysis." *Feminist Criminology* (December 2017): 11-12.

[41] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 21.

crime, according to scholars Kristen Gilchrist and Anna Gekoski, Jacqueline M. Gray, and Joanna R. Adler.[42] A lack of newsworthiness produces news frames that "highlight the negative traits" of such victims, according to Slakoff and Brennen.[43]

Secondly, the dissertation uses worthy victim theory to understand the correlation between framing Asian Americans as hate crime victims *and* as worthy victims of violent crime in the same news story. Identifying and calling out racism resonates with media audiences' interest in posing solutions to racial division in society.[44] Hence, the resonance of a racial motive for a violent crime assists in "transforming a violent local incident of apparently limited newsworthiness into an issue of public importance," according to scholars Eugene McLaughlin, and Karim Murij.[45] The news appeal of the violent crime leads journalists to emphasize the minority group victim's positive characteristics in order to reinforce his or her "elevated status" as worthy of racial justice, these scholars explain.[46]

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[42] Kristen Gilchrist, " 'Newsworthy' Victims? Exploring Differences in Canadian Local Press Coverage of Missing/Murdered Aboriginal and White Women," *Feminist Media Studies* 10, no. 4 (2010): 377; Anna Gekoski, Jacqueline M. Gray, and Joanna R. Adler, "What Makes a Homicide Newsworthy?" *British Criminology Journal* 52 (2012): 1229.

[43] Slakoff and Brennen, "The Differential Representation," 15.

[44] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

[45] Eugene McLaughlin, and Karim Murij, "Ways of Seeing: The News Media and Racist Violence," in *Understanding Social Problems: Issues in Social Policy,* ed. Margaret May, Robert Page, and Edward Brunsdon (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 270

[46] Ibid.

1.4 Literature Review

A large body of published academic scholarship provides context for and reinforces the findings of this study. The dissertation's literature review surveys and synthesizes that scholarship. The chapter highlights gaps in the research that the present study fills. First, I trace the history of Asian immigration to the U.S. prior and subsequent to passage of the 1965 Immigration Act. This milestone legislation rolled back the restrictive national origins quotas the federal government placed on Asian immigration to America with the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and allowed Asians of all ethnic groups to enter into the U.S. Importantly, the law ended immigration restriction in the U.S. based on race and ethnicity. Of particular interest to the dissertation's endeavor is the history of racial backlash against Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian immigrants in America.

This portion of the literature review lays bare the roots of racial hatred and aggression against Asian minorities, informing scholars why cases of race violence, such as the violence against Vincent Chin, have persisted over the centuries. The dissertation examines academic studies that trace the history of diverse forms of racism against the earliest immigrants from Asia. These forms of racism include the arson and murder inflicted upon Chinese migrants by White settlers of the American West in the mid-1800s and the internment of Japanese Americans stereotyped as "foreign enemies" during the Second World War.[47] While scholar Beth Lew-

[47] Philip Sheldon Foner and Daniel Rosenberg, *Racism, Dissent, and Asian Americans from 1850 to the Present: A Documentary History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993); Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007); Scott Zecsh, "Chinese Los Angeles in 1870-1871: The Makings of a Massacre," *Southern California Quarterly* 90,

Williams provides a detailed account of events leading up to the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882),[48] of special importance is the work of scholars Gail P. Kelly and Paul Rutledge, which illustrates how the Hart-Cellar Act (1965) tempered—yet did not eradicate—anti-immigrant racism in U.S. policy.[49] Although the law embodied a humanitarian approach to Asian immigration, White Americans continued the practice of targeting Asian Americans, such as Vincent Chin, with racial violence long after 1965. For example, Kelly finds that economic uncertainty and war-related perceptions of Southeast Asian refugees in the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s led to violence targeting Indochinese refugees in the form of "rock throwing and street fighting."[50]

The literature review also considers scholarship examining the role that political populism played in stoking violence against Asians in the U.S. from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Studies examining populist political rhetoric against Asian ethnic groups during this period provide a broad but important context for the dissertation's argument because both Vincent Chin's murder and the violence against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic took place during periods of political

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no. 2 (Summer 2008): 109-158; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[48] Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 2018.

[49] Gail P. Kelly, "Coping with America: Refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the 1970s and 1980s," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487, (September 1986): 138-149. Kelly explores the resettlement patterns and economic prospects of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians in the 1970s and 1980s in New Orleans, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York City. Paul Rutledge, *The Vietnamese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). Rutledge explores race relations between Whites and Vietnamese refugees in Texas and Oklahoma between 1975 and 1980.

[50] Kelly, "Coping with America," 148.

attacks targeting Asian ethnic groups. The dissertation draws parallels between American populists of the past who scapegoated Chinese immigrants as the source of epidemics and pandemics and right-wing politicians of the present-day who blamed China for unleashing the Covid-19 virus into the U.S. To illustrate, historian Nayan Shaw recounts the narratives of White labor politicians characterizing Chinese immigrants as a "medical monstrosity" in response to the onset of bubonic plague in San Francisco's Chinatowns in the 1890s.[51] Similarly, scholars Daniel Ian Rubin and Faith Wilson explore President Donald Trump's use of populist rhetoric to characterize Covid-19 as the "Wuhan virus," "China virus," and "Kung flu," mirroring the tactics of his historic predecessors with the goal of winning re-election in 2020.[52]

The literature review transitions into a survey of scholarship assessing the role of the American press in fomenting, exposing, and condemning anti-Asian discrimination in the U.S. This body of scholarship provides important context for the dissertation's argument because it uncovers journalists' response to the populist rhetoric vilifying Asians in the U.S and the nuances in news framing of Asian immigrants that characterized this response. As this dissertation demonstrates, such nuances in framing are present in press coverage of the Vincent Chin case.

A broad range of scholarship examines news framing of Asians in America

[51] Nayun Shaw, *Contagious Divides* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 63. Guenter B. Risse, "A Long Pull, A Strong Pull, and All Together: San Francisco and Bubonic Plague, 1907-1908," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 66, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 260-286.

[52] Daniel Ian Rubin and Faith Wilson, *A Time of Covidiocy: Media, Politics, and Social Upheaval* (Boson: Brill), 2021.

from the onset of Asian immigration in the mid-1800s to the surge in xenophobia targeting Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, scholar San Hea Kil investigates how some newspapers framed Chinese immigrants as "cruel murderers," "evil heathens," and "celestial invaders," echoing politicians who used such descriptors in an effort to garner public support for Chinese exclusion from America.[53] Conversely, historian Philip Chin finds that other U.S. journalists during the same period who advocated a higher standard of moralism for press coverage condemned news framing that engaged in populist bigoted rhetoric to characterize Chinese immigrants.[54] At the time of Vincent Chin's death in 1982, both regional and national newspapers, such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, condemned Japanese Americans, framing them as foreign enemies during the 1980s U.S.-Japan trade war, as historian M.J. Heale finds.[55] News coverage of the populist rhetoric targeting Asian Americans during President Donald Trump's re-election campaign rallies was more nuanced. Political science professors Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon find that some news reporters widely condemned Trump's descriptions of the Covid-19 virus as xenophobic and as needlessly stirring up hatred against Asian Americans. Yet, these same scholars argue that as conservative news outlets, such as Fox News, widely circulated Trump's descriptions of Covid-19 as "the China virus," these journalists shaped racial

[53] San Hea Kil, "Fearing Yellow, Imagining White: Media Analysis of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882," *Social Identities* 18, no. 6 (November 2012): 663-677.

[54] Sara Browning, "An Unlikely Ally: Ambrose Bierce, the Press, and America's Most Hated Minority" (unpublished manuscript, October 4, 2021), typescript.

[55] M.J. Heale, "Anatomy of a Scare: Yellow Peril Politics in America, 1980–1993," *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 19-47.

division.[56]

Additionally, journalists covering President Trump's rhetoric during the U.S.-China trade war (2016-2020) escalated racial tensions, according to Boylan et al.[57] Following China's announcement that it would place new tariffs on $75 billion worth of American goods, President Trump tweeted that U.S. businesses were "ordered" to find alternatives to China and that he would increase tariffs even higher on goods manufactured in China. National news outlets consistently aired news stories focused on Trump's anti-China rhetoric. For example, on April 5, 2018, *The New York Times* ran a story headlined "Trump Doubles Down on Potential Trade War with China."[58] The *Times* reported that President Trump said "the United States would consider slapping tariffs on an additional $100 billion in Chinese goods" due to China's $50 billion worth of tariffs on American soybeans and pork. According to *The Times* article: "Trump said in a statement that he was responding to 'unfair retaliation' by China: 'Rather than remedy its misconduct, China has chosen to harm our farmers and manufacturers,'" *The Times* quoted Trump.[59]

Additionally, academic studies investigate the nuances in news framing of criminalized violence and its victims. These victims include African Americans in the

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[56] Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, "Donald Trump: Aggressive Rhetoric and Political Violence," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 5 (2021): 3.

[57] "As president, Trump oversaw the establishment of economic policies that launched a trade war, placing tariffs and nontariff restrictions on Chinese imports," cited in Brandon M. Boylan, Jerry McBeath, and Bo Wang, "US–China Relations: Nationalism, the Trade War, and COVID-19," *Fudan J. Hum. Soc. Sci.* 14, no. 1 (2021): 23–40.

[58] Ana Swanson and Keith Bradsher, "Trump Doubles Down on Potential Trade War with China," *The New York Times,* April 5, 2018.

[59] Ibid.

1890s and 1900s, Latinos in the 1940s, and Asians from the 1910s to 2011. Scholarship examining press coverage of non-Asian minority groups serves as a point of comparison. This body of scholarship lies at the crux of the dissertation's argument that the way journalists paid attention to news framing of Asian victims of criminalized violence, particularly Vincent Chin, changed over time. For example, scholar G.C. Wright finds that some news stories in *The New York Times* at the turn of the twentieth century condemned the lynching of African Americans in Kentucky as "an outrage" while other *Times* articles during the same period ignored the racist hatred motivating the violence and blamed the African American victims for committing offenses against White women.[60] Scholarship uncovers similar disparities in news framing of violence against Asians in the U.S. While communications scholar Harvey C. Dong uncovers how journalists ignored the racial aspect behind the violent eviction of Chinese and Filipino immigrants from San Francisco's International Hotel (I-Hotel) on August 4, 1977,[61] scholar Alexander Lu finds that some newspapers during the 1970s framed violent crimes against Asians as racially motivated and characterized the Asian victims as hate crime victims.[62]

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[60] G. C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings,"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). Perloff, "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans."

[61] Harvey C. Dong, "The Origins and Trajectory of Asian American Political Activism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1968-1978," PhD diss., (University of California, Berkeley, 2002). The 150 mostly Filipino and Chinese tenants were elderly immigrant residents.

[62] Alexander Lu, "Newspaper Portrayals and Emotional Connection Strategies: Commemorating Model Minority Murder Victims," in *Asian Americans, Education, and Crime: The Model Minority as Victim and Perpetrator,* ed. Daisy Ball and Nicholas Daniel Hartlep (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 85-99.

While the reasons some journalists failed to recognize and condemn the racism motivating criminalized violence lie beyond the scope of this dissertation, the present study traverses a body of scholarship unearthing potential explanations for journalists' nuanced attention to such violence. This section of the literature review allows scholars to speculate why some journalists covering the Vincent Chin case initially failed to denounce the racism motivating the slayings. Comparative culture professor Hiroki Ichinose claims that a shortage of Asian American journalists in mainstream media newsrooms can shape "patterns of biases" that "promote xenophobia" in news framing of criminalized violence against Asians.[63] Additionally, newsgathering and reporting routines designed to enhance circulation by catering to the interests of specific media audiences can shape whether journalists choose to frame White, African American, Latino, and Asian American victims of violent crime sympathetically or by using derogatory stereotypes, according to scholars Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz.[64]

The dissertation also reviews literature concerning how minority group victims of criminalized violence become news symbols. This body of scholarship undergirds the dissertation's argument that Vincent Chin became a news symbol of the widespread issue of anti-Asian violence in America. Scholars W. Lance Bennett and Regina Lawrence define a news symbol as a person who "lives on beyond" his

[63] Hiroki Ichinose, "Examining Journalistic Discourses of Asian Americans in the News: A Qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis of News Coverage of the Atlanta Massage Parlor Shootings," Master's Thesis, (2021), 1, 48. The study examines journalism discourse in 42 stories covering the shootings in *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* Fox News, CNN, NPR, and *The Wall Street Journal* from March 16-18, 2021 and finds that stories used a "White racial frame."

[64] Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz, 'Race and the Misrepresentation of Victimization on Local Television News," *Communication Research* 27, no. 5 (October 2000): 549.

original news story as journalists re-introduce him into subsequent news stories in the decades following the original event.[65] In so doing, journalists use news symbols to "recount stories" reflective of broader social problems.[66] The transformation of a news figure into a symbol occurs when journalists recognize the story surrounding a particular person as a "decisive moment" that "pushes" broader social issues "to the forefront of a news agenda" because of the "drama" surrounding the event, according to Bennett and Lawrence.[67] The news figure's representations in popular culture draw national media attention to the event, which enables the figure to stand alone as a symbol of a broader social problem when journalists consistently re-introduce his story.[68]

Lastly, the literature review examines scholarship exploring news coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case and remedies gaps in this scholarship. For instance, academic studies including the late scholar Andrew Chen's conference paper[69] and book chapters compiled by author Helen Zia[70] and Ethnic Studies professor Yen Lee

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[65] W. Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 20, 24.

[66] Ibid., 25.

[67] Ibid., 25, 26., cited from Susan Moeller, *Shooting War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 15. Moeller cites renowned photographer Henri Cartier Bresson who coins the term "decisive moment" to describe an event that highlights broader social problems.

[68] Ibid., 25.

[69] Andrew Chen, "Who Killed Vincent Chin? A Case Study of Media Ethno-Violence" (paper presented at the International Conference on Violence in the Media, St. John's University, Queens, New York, 3 October 1994).

[70] Zia, *Asian American Dreams*., 55-81.

Espiritu, explained in detail in Chapter 2,[71] do not investigate changes in news framing of the Chin case. Scholarship exploring the Chin case also does not provide an exploration of whether similar trends in framing exist between coverage of his murder and coverage of more recent violent crimes against Asian Americans. The dissertation addresses these gaps in scholarship by examining changes in framing of Chin's murder and his victimization from 1982-2022 and by expounding on the role that shifts in framing of the Chin case played in a broader shift toward framing of violence against Asian Americans as a national problem. Additionally, the dissertation analyzes how the frames journalists used in coverage of Chin's murder and his victimhood reappear in coverage of murder cases involving Asian victims during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.5 Historical Background of News Coverage

For the purpose of understanding shifts in news framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood during the period of the Chin case from 1982-1987, it is necessary to understand historic press treatment of diverse Asian ethnic groups in the U.S., both as immigrants and, later, as naturalized American citizens. While the dissertation's literature review probes scholarship investigating the response of the press to populist political rhetoric targeting Asians in the U.S. and the violence against Asians spurred by such rhetoric, the historical background delves deeper into press coverage. It provides a window into how journalists vilified Asians in America during key historic

[71] Yen Lee Espiritu, "Racial Killing or Barroom Brawl? Multiple Explanations of the Killing of Vincent Chin," in *Riots and Pogroms,* ed. Paul R. Brass (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 221-234.

events that move beyond populist politics. By examining press coverage of major events, such as the White labor movements against Chinese immigrant workers in the 1800s and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the historical background informs scholars' understanding of how journalists translated national anti-Asian sentiment—and anti-Asian violence—into news. This understanding, in turn, lays the groundwork for comprehending initial news framing of the violence against Vincent Chin.

First, the historic background provides an overview of how the press framed Chinese immigrant laborers adversely during the nineteenth century. To illustrate, *The New York Tribune* echoed the anti-Chinese sentiment of some White labor groups on the East Coast who viewed Chinese workers as job competition. Scholar Mary Cronin finds that on September 18, 1870, *The New York Tribune* praised Chinese laborers for "mastering the shoemaking trade" yet stated that their non-Christian, alien culture made the Chinese "too great a threat" to allow them permanent residence in the U.S."[72] Similarly, American journalists on the West Coast drew on disparaging stereotypes of Japanese immigrants in the mid-twentieth century. The December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor intensified U.S. hostility to Japanese American citizens. Scholar Thomas H. Heuterman finds that on the day following the Japanese air raid, *The Los Angeles Times* framed Japanese American citizens as foreign threats: "Treachery and double-dealing are major Japanese weapons" *The Times* reported. A

[72] Mary M. Cronin, "When the Chinese Came to Massachusetts: Representations of Race, Labor, Religion, and Citizenship in the 1870s Press," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 79, 97, cited from *The New York Tribune* September 18, 1870, No Headline. Cronin's analysis of 15 East Coast newspapers centers on framing of Chinese strikebreakers in 1870. Like Miller, she uncovers the influence of White labor competition on framing of the Chinese.

few weeks later, *The Times* called for the internment of Japanese Americans in January 1942.[73]

Next, the historical background explores how press stereotypes of Asians in the U.S. as job competitors led Chinese, Japanese, and Southeast Asian immigrants to become vulnerable to criminalized violence. The mainstream press justified this violence. Scholar Beth Lew-Williams finds that on February 13, 1885, *The Stockton Mail* legitimized the looting and arson of Chinese immigrants' homes and businesses by White labor groups. The newspaper debased Chinese workers in Eureka, California as an "obnoxious alien element" who were stealing jobs from hardworking Americans.[74] Chinese laborers who were not reviled by the mainstream press were ignored. Similarly, the U.S. press, viewing Japanese immigrant workers in California as a threat to American job prosperity, villainized Japanese victims of violent crime at the hands of White nativists in San Francisco and Los Angeles. In 1920, *The Los Angeles Times* justified physical attacks against Japanese immigrants, reporting that Japanese assimilation in the U.S. is "unthinkable," "morally indefensible," and "biologically impossible," scholar Thomas H. Heuterman finds.[75]

Journalists covering the violence targeting Southeast Asian immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s ignored anti-Asian racism, framing the attacks as arising from

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[73] Thomas H. Heuterman, "The Japanese Americans," in *U.S. News Coverage of Racial Minorities: A Sourcebook*, ed. Beverley Ann Deepe Keever, Carolyn Martindale, and Mary Ann Weston (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 225.

[74] Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 113-136. Quote cited from *The Stockton Mail*, February 13, 1885. During the 1880s, Chinese homes and businesses were either damaged or destroyed in Nevada, Colorado, South Dakota, Wyoming and other states or territories.

[75] Heuterman, "The Japanese Americans," 217-219.

economic competition rather than racial animosity.[76] For example, some journalists covering the fire bombings of Vietnamese fishing boats in Texas coastal cities during the 1970s blamed the Vietnamese victims for "stirring up trouble" by "stealing" the best fishing locations from poor White fisherman, as scholar Hien Duc Do explains.[77] On August 8, 1979, *The New York Times* downplayed anti-Asian racism in its coverage of White Americans' violent attacks against Vietnamese fishermen in Seadrift, Texas by reporting that since the arrival of refugees in Seadrift in 1976, "the friction has always been . . . a clash of economic interests," according to Do.[78] An exploration of news framing of violence against Southeast Asians in the decades leading up to Chin's death informs scholars' understanding of how journalists in the 1980s initially characterized Vincent Chin's murder as a random, ordinary crime unrelated to race.

In the decades following the Vincent Chin case, journalists gradually began paying increasing attention to anti-Asian racism. Journalism framing of violence against Asian Americans slowly evolved in several key ways. First, some journalists began to avoid using an official frame that ignored or played down racism as a possible criminal motive for violence against Asian Americans. Additionally,

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[76] Al Santoli, "To Bear Any Burden: The Vietnam War and Its Aftermath in the Words of Americans and Southeast Asians." (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986). Saltori draws on the perspectives and experiences of American and Southeast Asian Vietnam War veterans, Southeast Asian refugees, and officials during and after Vietnam. The book includes refugees' experiences in the U.S. facing racial discrimination and violence.

[77] Do, *The Vietnamese Americans*, 16.

[78] Ibid., Do cites an article by Molly Ivins, "Killing Sharpens Texas Feud on Vietnamese Fishing," *The New York Times,* August 8, 1979, p.16. According to the article, Vietnamese refugees had begun arriving in the small town of Seadrift, Texas in 1976. The Texas shrimpers, crabbers, and oystermen "believe that their bays were overcrowded before the Vietnamese arrived."

reporters began framing specific cases of such violence within the context of a serious and persistent problem of anti-Asian racism in the U.S. Lastly, journalists began routinely relying on the viewpoints of pan-Asian American advocacy group leaders as news sources.

The historical discussion dissects how journalists gradually paid increasing attention to anti-Asian racism in news framing of specific instances of criminalized violence involving Asian victims in the decades following Chin's murder. For example, in coverage of the Jim Ming Hai-Loo murder case that occurred just two years following the resolution of the Chin murder case in the summer of 1989, journalists used an official frame that acknowledged anti-Asian racism as a possible criminal motive for Hai-Loo's murder.[79] They also interviewed Asian American advocacy group members who condemned the killing as an act of racism when framing Hai-Loo as a victim of racial injustice. News coverage of this case is significant, illustrating reporters' application of an anti-Asian racism frame that developed during the Chin case and that signaled a shift in how journalists paid attention to Asian Americans as a racial group

The historical background concludes with a discussion of how journalists increasingly condemned anti-Asian racism in framing of violence against Asians

[79] On July 29, 1989, Hai-Loo, a Chinese immigrant, was murdered outside a bar in Raleigh, North Carolina. As Loo and his Vietnamese friends played pool, two White brothers, Lloyd Piche, 29, and Robert Piche, 35, who mistook Loo as Vietnamese, began blaming them for the deaths of Americans in Vietnam. Witnesses claimed that Lloyd Piche had directed racial slurs at Hai-Loo. After the bar's manager asked Robert and Lloyd to leave, the two men waited outside. When Loo and his friends exited the bar, a fight ensued, and Robert Piche hit Loo over the head with a gun, knocking him unconscious. Loo died in the hospital from brain damage on July 31, 1989. Cited from *Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s: A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights.* University of Illinois: Champaign, Illinois, 1992, 26-28.

during President Donald Trump's and President Joe Biden's administrations. National news reports reviving Chin's story during the Covid-19 pandemic used the anti-Asian racism frame to call attention to the similarities between the violence against Chin and pandemic-related violence against Asians in the U.S. For example, on May 11, 2020, a *New York Times* report noted that a PBS documentary "covers an expansive arc" of violent crime targeting Asians in the U.S. from the 1850s until the pandemic.[80] *The Times* report quoted the documentary's producer, Daniel Dae Kim. Kim told *The Times* that the Chin case, examined in his film, is one of many stories of anti-Asian violence that replays itself as new cases of pandemic-related violence targeting Asians continue.[81]

1.6 Research Questions

My research questions strive to explain how the Vincent Chin murder case, which began as a small and insignificant news story about a barroom brawl, became a case representative of the nationwide problem of anti-Asian violence. The research questions probe how Chin, whom journalists initially characterized as blameworthy for his slaying, gradually became a nationwide symbol of racial injustice as journalists framed and reframed the case over time. The dissertation is guided by the following research questions, which are listed in greater detail in Chapter 5:

[80] Brandon Yu, "Telling Asian American Stories," *The New York Times,* May 11, 2020, Nexis Uni Database.

[81] Ibid.

1. What news frames did journalists employ to characterize Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood?
2. Did the framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood change from June 1982 to December 2022?
3. Did any distinctive trends in news framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood emerge among the separate news outlets under analysis from June 1982-December 2022?
4. Did correlations exist between key events during the Vincent Chin murder case and increases or decreases in the specific types of frames used?
5. What news narratives did journalists employ in news stories reporting on the Vincent Chin murder case from June 19, 1982 to December 31, 2022?
6. Do any similarities in news framing exist between the Vincent Chin murder case and more recent cases of violence against Asians in the U.S. that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.7 Methods

I developed methods to test and explore the research questions. I chose quantitative content analysis, a type of textual analysis that helps scholars understand how individuals, including journalists, "make sense of the world" within "particular contexts" and "at particular times," as scholar Alan McKee explains.[82]

A quantitative content analysis of news frames proved useful for examining

[82] Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 1.

news reports covering the Vincent Chin case for several reasons. First, content analysis revealed the specific frames journalists chose to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood. Second, content analysis uncovered the frequency with which journalists used specific frames to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood across time. By examining different media outlets, I was able to analyze how coverage differed across newspapers. Third, the method allowed me to locate possible correlations between key events of the Chin case (federal civil rights trials) and increases or decreases in the frequency of specific frames. Lastly, content analysis uncovered similar trends between news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case and the Georgia murder case involving the shooting of six Asian victims that occurred on March 16, 2021. (The Georgia murder case is discussed in detail later in this chapter.)

Applying Content Analysis to the Vincent Chin Murder Case

The following steps explain how I used a quantitative content analysis to examine news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case. First, I collected data from five local, regional, and national print news outlets: *The Associated Press, The Cincinnati Enquirer, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The New York Times.* News articles were collected from the date of Chin's slaying on June 19, 1982 until December 31, 2022. I included in my sample all news articles that contained the name "Vincent Chin" or "Chin" at least once within the text of the news article. My total sample yielded 478 news stories covering the Chin case. Second, I "cleaned" the data by weeding out any duplicate articles. The final sample was 382 news stories broken down as follows: *The Associated Press* (n= 89); *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (n= 18); *The Detroit Free Press* (n= 156); *The Lansing State*

Journal (n= 63); and *The New York Times* (n = 56). My unit of analysis was the paragraph of the news article because I identified news frames paragraph by paragraph.[83]

Coding Scheme

Third, I developed a coding scheme with eight specific categories of news frames journalists used in coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood. I also developed descriptions for each category. The framing categories are discussed in detail below.[84] I created the categories by reading through approximately one hundred news articles from the total sample of the 382 news stories covering the Chin case and taking notes regarding specific categories of frames that emerged from the sample.[85] I made certain that the individual description for each framing category was mutually exclusive from the individual descriptions of the other framing categories to avoid hindering the study's reliability.[86] The final coding scheme included the list of eight framing categories below. I describe these categories in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Framing Categories

News Frames Characterizing Vincent Chin as a Victim of Violent Crime

Good Person Frame. According to scholar Kristen Gilchrist, the Good Person frame

[83] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 280-82, 288.

[84] Ibid., 283-285.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 288.

casts the victim as "worth saving or avenging" based on his personal traits.[87] News stories that fit this frame might describe the victim as friendly, intelligent, or hardworking.

Physically Vulnerable Frame. Journalists characterize physically vulnerable victims as innocent victims.[88] Innocent victims are physically weak, defenseless, unarmed, vulnerable, and helpless to their assailants.

Bad Conduct Frame. Journalists are more likely to frame victims as less worthy of racial justice when victims engage in bad conduct.[89] Examples include "sex work," such as prostitution or stripping, hiring prostitutes, and frequenting strip clubs or other establishments that engage in sexual activities, according to scholars Danielle C. Slakoff and Pauline K. Brennen.[90]

Reckless Conduct Frame. Journalists are more likely to frame victims as less worthy of racial justice when victims engage in reckless behavior. These victims appear blameworthy and less worthy of racial justice than a non-risk-taking victim.[91] News articles with references to victims engaging in excessive drinking, using inflammatory language, and provoking fights fit this frame.

News Frames Characterizing the Criminal Motive for the Violence

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[87] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims," 376, cited from Marian Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* (Sage, Newbury Park, 1997), 375.

[88] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22-23.

[89] Slakoff and Brennen, "The Differential Representation," 11.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., 14.

Sources Allege Racism Frame. Journalists using this frame quote or paraphrase at least one source claiming explicitly and directly that the alleged perpetrator had a racist motive for Vincent Chin's murder.

Journalists Assert Racism Frame. Journalists using this frame assert, without attribution, that racism is the motive for the murder *as if it was an indisputable fact.*

No Racism Frame. Several types of news content fit this frame.

— Direct denials. An alleged assailant, the assailant's lawyer, or a law enforcement official or investigator denies the attack was racially motivated and claims it was the result of a barroom brawl.

— Descriptions of a federal court case or its outcome. Defense attorneys claim there is insufficient evidence for a racial motive in the first federal civil rights trial because an Asian American civil rights group allegedly rigged the case to make a racial motive seem indisputable by coaching or influencing witnesses.

— Observations of others. The news article quotes witnesses to the crime as claiming they did not recall the perpetrator making any racist remarks.

News Frames Characterizing Vincent Chin as a News Symbol of Anti-Asian Violence

Chin as Symbol. Reporters sometimes depict violent crime victims as news symbols representing a trend of violence against the racial, ethnic, religious, or ideological group to which a particular victim belongs. Scholars Bennett and Lawrence define a news symbol as a person who "lives on beyond" his original story as journalists re-introduce him into subsequent news reports decades later "to recount stories" about

broader social problems.[92] Journalists frequently reintroduced Vincent Chin's story in news reports covering violence against Asians in the U.S. decades following Chin's murder. In news reports using the Chin as Symbol frame published decades following his murder, reporters or their sources may state that Chin had become representative of the cause of preventing anti-Asian violence.

Another coder and I performed an intercoder reliability test to evaluate the reliability and validity of the coding scheme using a sample of twenty-four news articles taken from the original data sample of articles (N= 382 total news stories covering the case). Overall, the two coders disagreed 2.6 percent of the time and agreed 97.4 percent of the time on all framing categories. I discuss the inter-coder reliability test in further detail in Chapter 5.

Coding Procedure

Lastly, I coded the news frames in the entire sample of news articles covering the Vincent Chin case (N=382 total news articles covering the case) and recorded the count for each frame in an Excel spreadsheet. In order to simplify the analysis, I coded only frames within the text of the news article and did not code frames in the article headlines or photo captions. Step-by-step instructions for coding the news frames are listed in Appendix B.

Applying Content Analysis to the Georgia Murder Case

I conducted a separate quantitative content analysis of news coverage of the shooting

[92] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 20, 24, 26.

deaths of six Asian victims in Cherokee and Fulton Counties in Georgia.[93] The purpose of this analysis was to uncover any similar trends between news framing of the Georgia murder case from March 16, 2021, the date of the shootings, to December 31, 2022, and framing of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-1987. The analysis traced whether journalists recycled the frames they used to characterize the motive for Chin's murder and his victimhood in coverage of the Georgia murder case. Similarities in framing between the two cases served as some evidence of the extent to which present-day journalists pay attention to anti-Asian racism in news coverage of violent crimes against Asian Americans.

The content analysis involved three steps. First, I collected data from the set of five news outlets I used for the content analysis of the Vincent Chin murder case: *The Associated Press*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Lansing State Journal*, and *The New York Times.* For this particular analysis, I also included *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* because it is the only major daily newspaper in the city where some of the murders took place. I also added *The Washington Post* because it contains a high amount of news coverage of the Georgia murder case. I used the search term "Robert Aaron Long" because the search returned the highest number of news articles within each news publication.

[93] The Georgia murder case involved the shooting deaths of six Asian women, one Caucasian woman, and one Caucasian man at three Georgia spas by 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long on the evening of March 16, 2021. A ninth victim, a Hispanic gentleman, was shot in the head but survived. Long, who is Caucasian, was apprehended and taken into police custody where he informed law enforcement that he committed the crimes due to his sex addiction and his desire to eliminate sexual temptation. Such temptation conflicted with his evangelical beliefs. Long also told police he habitually satisfied his sex addiction by visiting Asian spas where sexual favors were allegedly bought and sold. He had previously sought treatment for his addiction in a mental health clinic for evangelicals. Long denied a racial motive for the shootings.

Second, I "cleaned" the data by weeding out any duplicate articles. I began with a sample of 317 news stories. After omitting the duplicates, the final sample was 218 news stories broken down as follows: *The Atlanta Constitution* (n = 63); *The Associated Press* (n= 38); *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (n= 9); *The Detroit Free Press* (n=4); *The Lansing State Journal* (n=4); *The New York Times* (n=40); and *The Washington Post* (n=60).

Lastly, I coded the news frames in the entire sample of news articles covering the Georgia murder case (N=218 total articles covering the case). I only coded frames within the text of the article. I followed the same set of step-by-step coding instructions as I used for the content analysis of the Vincent Chin murder case in Appendix B. I recorded the count for each frame in an Excel spreadsheet.

1.8 Dissertation Chapter Overviews

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Chapter 2 traverses the substantial body of published academic scholarship that serves as a foundation for an analysis of news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case. The literature review provides a survey of this scholarship and highlights gaps in the research that this dissertation addresses. First, the chapter covers the history of Asian immigration to the U.S. both prior and subsequent to passage of the 1965 Immigration Act. This law opened U.S. borders to all Asian ethnic groups and effectively ended America's anti-Asian immigration policy. This section of the dissertation traces the disparate stories of Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asian, Korean, and other Asian immigrant groups in America and surveys the turbulent

racist backlash these ethnic groups endured in the form of exclusion, violence, and, at times, murder. The chapter then extends the analysis of Asian immigrants to other racial minority groups. It looks at scholarship probing the populist political rhetoric targeting U.S. minorities, among them Black Americans, Latinos, and Asians in the U.S. This scholarship is key to situating my dissertation's argument because both Vincent Chin's murder and the more recent violent crimes against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic took place during periods of verbal political assaults aimed at Asian ethnic groups.

The role of the American press in fomenting, exposing, and, eventually, condemning the populist political attacks against Asian Americans is then discussed. From here, the chapter transitions into a review of how the press framed violent crimes targeting Black Americans in the 1890s and 1900s, Latinos in the 1940s, and Asians from the 1910s to 2011. Specifically, it considers scholarship examining the extent to which journalists framed violent crimes against these minority groups as racially motivated crimes and framed the victims as targets of racial hatred. The literature review analyzes the reasons for journalists' hesitancy to call out and condemn the violence as racist. Among these reasons are a lack of newsroom diversity, journalistic practices of catering news content to specific audiences, and prevailing stereotypes that are detrimental to how journalists pay attention to racial minority groups. The chapter ends with a review of scholarship explaining how violent crime victims in the news transform into news symbols and martyrs representing broader social problems. This scholarship situates my argument within the narrative that Chin became a news symbol of anti-Asian violence and played a

role in drawing journalists' attention to such violence in more recent cases of Asian murders since 2020.

Chapter 3. Media Theory

Chapter 3 examines how framing theory and worthy victim theory are key elements in scholarly understanding of shifts in news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case and, more broadly, framing of violence against Asian Americans. This section of the dissertation defines both theories and lays out specific reasons why each theory is functional to the present study. First, the chapter explains framing theory's effectiveness in guiding the creation of eight specific categories of news frames. These categories shed light on how journalists characterized the criminal motive for Chin's death (a non-racial crime or a racial crime) and his victimhood (a blameworthy victim or a helpless victim of racial injustice) during specific time periods. Additionally, the chapter clarifies how framing theory, when combined with a content analysis of news frames, is operationalized to uncover similar trends between framing of the Chin case and framing of specific cases of violent crime against Asian Americans during the pandemic.

The chapter concludes its discussion of framing theory by explaining its usefulness to understanding how dominant frames in news stories change as news narratives shift. An explanation of the connection between news narratives and news frames undergirds my argument that the Chin case can be considered a turning point in framing of violence against Asians in the U.S. In addition, Chapter 3 discusses the significance of worthy victim theory to understanding why journalists choose to frame some racial minority group members who are violent crime victims as racial

scapegoats and others as victims of non-racial, random crimes. The chapter explores two reasons the dissertation draws on worthy victim theory. First, the theory helps scholars understand how a victim's behavior and a victim's race play a role in whether journalists frame him as newsworthy and, hence, worthy of racial justice. Second, the theory allows scholars to understand why minorities who are framed as hate crime victims are frequently framed as worthy of justice. Worthy victim theory helps scholars understand how framing of Chin's victimhood evolved from a blameworthy target of a random crime to a victim of race hatred.

Chapter 4. Historical Background

Expanding on the history of Asian immigration to America covered in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 examines scholarship exploring historic journalism coverage of Asian immigrants and immigration from the mid-1800s to the present. The purpose of the chapter is to illustrate how journalists paid attention to Asian immigration in America and to anti-Asian racism as a motivating factor in violent crimes targeting Asian ethnic groups. First, the chapter analyzes scholarship examining late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century newspaper framing of Chinese and Japanese immigrants as unassimilable, undesirable, untrustworthy, and, ultimately, un-American. The dissertation looks at the negative stereotypes the press applied to Chinese immigrants whom White Americans cast as "diseased filth"[94] and "uncivilized assimilators."[95]

[94] Nayan Shan, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 21, cited from *the Daily Alta California*, August 15 and 22, 1854.

[95] San Hea Kil, "Fearing Yellow, Imagining White: Media Analysis of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882," *Social Identities* 18, no. 6 (November 2012): 667. Kil analyzes journalism support for the Chinese Exclusion Act in *The San Francisco Chronicle* between January and December 1882. The Act was passed on May 6, 1882 and was the first immigration law in U.S. history to exclude persons based

The study also examines how the press vilified Japanese American citizens as foreign enemies, relocating them to internment camps during World War II. Next, the chapter assesses press characterizations of Southeast Asians in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s and how many journalists framed the bombing of Vietnamese fishing boats in Texas coastal cities and other violent crimes as related to economic rather than racial tensions.

The chapter then broadly explores the diverse reasons for journalists' failure to condemn anti-Asian racism as a legitimate problem motivating violent crimes. Among these reasons are Asian Americans' isolation from mainstream journalists and newsroom routines that belied the widespread racial divisions in the country. As part of this analysis, the chapter tackles how journalism framing gradually evolved in the decades following Vincent Chin's murder in the 1980s. Slowly and over time, news reporters began to consider racism as a possible factor motivating violence against Asians and to privilege the voices of Asian American activists in news stories who condemned racism. National news outlets' frequently and consistently referenced the story of Chin's death in reports on anti-Asian violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. Such references to Chin's story illustrate the importance of his murder in drawing journalistic attention to anti-Asian hatred as a persistent, national problem.

Chapter 5. Methods

Chapter 5 outlines the dissertation's methods and methodology. First, the chapter lists the study's research questions. The questions aim to explain how news framing of

on their race and ethnicity. In addition to the stereotypes listed above, Kil finds that newspapers called Chinese immigrants "coolie slaves," "celestial invaders," and "overwhelming deluge." (667).

Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood shifted over time from a barroom brawl for which Chin was responsible to a hate crime in which Chin became a martyr of racial injustice targeting Asians in America. Moreover, the questions endeavor to uncover similarities between framing of the Chin case and framing of the Georgia murder case involving the shooting of six Asian American women at three different spas. Next, the chapter lists the local, regional, and national press publications that serve as data sources for news reports covering the Chin murder case and the Georgia murder case. This section explains why the publications were chosen and identifies the digitized archives that house them.

The chapter then transitions into a discussion of quantitative content analysis and defines the method as a type of textual analysis that helps scholars understand how individuals, including journalists, interpret the world within specific contexts and during specific times.[96] The section lists the steps involved in quantitative content analysis, among them deciding on a unit of analysis to examine, developing a coding scheme with coding categories for organizing content, and quantifying the number of times content falls under specific categories and across particular time frames. The chapter discusses how the dissertation adapts quantitative content analysis to a study of news frames using framing theory. This methodology is useful for allowing scholars to examine how the type and frequency of specific frames change during particular periods and for uncovering potential correlations between changes in the type and frequency of news frames and key events across time.

[96] Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 1.

Lastly, Chapter 5 outlines *why* a quantitative content analysis of press frames is useful for studying shifts in framing of Chin's murder and victimhood from 1982-2022 and for exploring changes in framing of the Georgia murders and the six Asian victims slain on March 16, 2022. The chapter lists four reasons describing the usefulness of this method to the present study. First, content analysis detects the frames journalists chose to characterize the criminal motives and the Asian victims in each murder case over time. Second, it reveals the frequency of these frames during specific periods. Third, it pinpoints any correlations between key events of the murder cases and increases or decreases in the frequency of specific frames. Lastly, content analysis uncovers similar trends between news framing of the Chin case and the Georgia case. The chapter explains how similarities in framing between the two cases could serve as some evidence that the Chin case became a dominant case shaping how journalists paid attention to anti-Asian violence. Chapter 5 concludes with a step-by-step explanation for *how* the dissertation uses content analysis to analyze shifts in framing of both the Chin case and the Georgia case over time.

Chapter 6. Results

Chapter 6 analyzes the results of the content analysis of Vincent Chin murder case news coverage from 1982-2022 within the entire sample of news publications examined in the dissertation. The news publications this chapter examines are as follows: *The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer.* The chapter answers the following research questions: Which specific news frames did journalists use to characterize Chin's murder, his victimhood, and his status as a news symbol to

support particular news narratives in coverage of the Chin murder case? How did key events during the case, such as pan-Asian American advocacy group protests and two federal civil rights trials, play some role in shaping shifts in framing? First, Chapter 6 summarizes the results for news framing of the criminal motive for Chin's murder and finds that framing supported the racial injustice narrative. The chapter highlights results demonstrating that journalists relied predominantly on sources to allege anti-Asian racism as the motive for Chin's slaying. However, over time and especially in the decades following the murder case, a significant uptick occurred in journalists' assertions that racial hatred was the criminal motive.

Additionally, the chapter explores how the increase in journalists' assertions of anti-Asian racism coincided with a decrease in frames downplaying anti-Asian racism in news coverage of Chin's murder across time. Next, the chapter summarizes the results for news framing of Chin as a victim of violent crime. Similar to framing of the criminal motive for Chin's murder, news characterizations of Chin's victimhood supported the racial injustice narrative. Across the forty-year timespan, journalists predominantly framed Chin as physically vulnerable. The visibility of frames depicting Chin as a victim were much lower compared with the visibility of frames characterizing Chin's murder. The chapter speculates that these results suggest an increasingly intense journalistic interest in Asian Americans' place in U.S. society as a racial group. This section concludes with a discussion of framing of Chin as a news symbol of anti-Asian racism in America. Journalists paid attention to Chin as a symbol to a far lesser extent than predicted. The chapter infers that the legacy of the Chin case was not that he became a symbol of a broader problem of anti-Asian hatred

in the U.S. but that his story played a role in the creation of an anti-Asian racism frame that present-day journalists use as a tool for condemning such hatred.

Chapter 7. Results

Chapter 7 presents the results of the content analysis of Vincent Chin murder case news coverage from 1982-2022 within the five separate news outlets under study including *The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer.* The results help to answer the following research questions: Which of the eight news frames characterizing Chin's murder, victimhood, and status as a news symbol of anti-Asian violence predominated within each of the five news publications from 1982-2022? Do any trends in the frequency of news frames emerge in each of the five news outlets during this forty-year period?

Regarding news framing of Vincent Chin's murder, the chapter discusses how each news publication relied predominantly on sources to allege that racism motivated his slaying. While *The New York Times* used the Sources Allege Racism frame more than any of the other four news outlets in news reports covering the Chin case from 1982-2022, *The Lansing State Journal,* a local publication, relied on sources to allege racism less than any other newspaper examined in the dissertation during this period.

Chapter 7 also discusses findings pertaining to the extent to which journalists themselves condemned Chin's murder as racially motivated. Surprisingly, *The New York Times* never "led the charge" against anti-Asian racism, suggesting that progressive newspapers trumpet some social issues but not others. Instead, reporters

working for *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* a small local paper, condemned the racism motivating Chin's slaying more than any other news outlet. Across the five news outlets, results indicate a trend toward characterizing Vincent Chin's murder as a racial crime.

Next, Chapter 7 reviews the results for news framing of Vincent Chin's victimhood and explains that each of the five news outlets paid less attention to the details surrounding Chin's victimhood than to the motive for the violence. Even the Physically Vulnerable frame, which remained prominent in each of the five news outlets, displayed a gradual downward trend in visibility in news reports over time. *The Lansing State Journal* used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any of the other four news outlets in press reports covering the Chin murder case while *The New York Times* used the Physically Vulnerable frame less than any of the other four news outlets. Frames characterizing Chin as engaging in reckless behavior and bad conduct also displayed downward trends in visibility in nearly all of the five news publications.

The chapter concludes by summarizing results for how journalists framed Vincent Chin as a news symbol of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. News reporters paid the greatest attention to Chin as a symbol during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, in each of the five news outlets, overall visibility for this frame in news coverage was much lower than expected during this period.

Chapter 8. Results

Chapter 8 analyzes the findings of the content analysis of news frames used in coverage of the March 2021 Georgia murders of six Asian female victims.[97] It compares results for trends in news framing of the Georgia murder case from March 16, 2021, to December 31, 2022, with trends in framing of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-1987. By comparing these two murder cases, the chapter assesses the extent to which news framing of the Chin case played a role in shaping news framing of more recent cases of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. during the Covid-19 pandemic. Chapter 8 begins with a discussion of the broadest overview of findings indicating how and to what extent journalists covering the Georgia case used the eight news frames characterizing the criminal motive and the Asian shooting victims in the following seven news outlets: *The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Atlanta-Journal Constitution, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer.* Next, the chapter analyzes framing results within each of the seven news publications to uncover which frames, if any, predominated within each publication across time and whether any trends in the frequency of news frames emerged across the seven publications from 2021-2022.

Overall, results uncover both similarities and differences in framing trends between the Georgia case and the Vincent Chin case. As expected, news reporters relied overwhelmingly on sources in coverage of both murder cases. Conversely, the visibility of Journalists Assert Racism frame trended upward over time in coverage of

[97] The details of the Georgia murder case are explained in the discussion of the study's methods in Chapter 5.

the Chin case yet remained steady over time in coverage of the Georgia murders. The fact that news reporters never relied predominantly on their own assertions of anti-Asian racism in their descriptions of the motive for the Georgia shootings was surprising as Asian American activists consistently held press conferences condemning such racism in the aftermath of the shootings. Also surprising was the fact that the No Racism frame never completely disappeared in Georgia murder case coverage.

The chapter then transitions into a discussion of victim framing. News reporters covering both murder cases framed the victims as physically vulnerable to a greater extent than they framed them as good persons or as displaying reckless behavior or bad conduct. In news reports covering both cases, the evolution of Asian Americans' place in society from a model minority to a group that endured racism received more attention from journalists than Asians as individual victims of violent crime. Chapter 8 concludes with an exploration of themes embedded within specific news frames in coverage of the Georgia murder case. The theme of the "doting Asian mother" (Good Person frame) frequently undercut the theme of the "Asian sex worker" (Bad Conduct frame) within the same news story, resulting in characterizations of the Asian shooting victims as worthy of racial justice. Hence, framing of the Georgia shooting victims was more nuanced than framing of Chin as a victim of violent crime.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation by presenting a broad overview of the main findings and discussing the major contributions of the study, its limitations, and

avenues for future research. Overall, the dissertation shows that journalists gradually transitioned from downplaying or ignoring anti-Asian racism in coverage of the Vincent Chin case to relying predominantly on sources to allege that anti-Asian prejudice motivated Chin's slaying. Furthermore, as journalists awakened to the persistent, serious problem of anti-Asian hatred in America, news reporters themselves began directly calling out and condemning such hatred in their coverage of Chin's death, framing Chin as a victim who was worthy of racial justice.

Next, Chapter 9 reviews the similar trends in news framing over time between the Chin case (1982-1987) and the Georgia murder case (March 16, 2021-December 31, 2022). The conclusion then presents qualitative reflections on the significance of the Chin case to framing of four specific murder cases involving Asian victims of pandemic-era violence in the U.S. These cases encompass the murders of Yao Pan Ma, Michelle Go, Christina Yuna Lee, and Vicha Ratanapakdee. Chapter 9 evaluates how trends in framing of the Chin case resurfaced in framing of each of the four murder cases. Journalists relied predominantly on sources to allege a racial motive for each of the slayings, and news reporters themselves condemned anti-Asian racism increasingly over time. Even so, journalists covering each murder case continued to quote local police who claimed that evidence of a racial motive was lacking. News coverage of these four murders demonstrates that contemporary journalists placed anti-Asian racism front and center in news stories.

Chapter 9 concludes with an exploration of the study's main contributions as follows. First, the study demonstrates how the broad paradigm of framing theory, when combined with a content analysis of news frames, can be successfully adapted

to understand the evolution of news framing of anti-Asian racism across time. Second, the dissertation shows how an exploration of Asian immigration history in America contributes to an understanding of how journalists drew on the context of their time, slowly changing how news reporters framed Asians as a racial group. Lastly, the dissertation contributes to academics' understanding of current-day journalism framing of violence against Asian Americans. While Chin's story largely disappeared from news coverage of more contemporary cases of violent crime targeting Asians in the U.S., his legacy survives. America's journalistic toolkit now includes an anti-Asian racism frame that can be traced to the advocacy group protests and court cases that arose during the Chin case.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 traverses the substantial body of published academic scholarship that serves as a foundation for an analysis of news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case and anti-Asian violence. The literature review provides a survey of this scholarship and highlights gaps in the research that the dissertation fills. The review of scholarship covers three main categories of literature. I outline these three categories below and justify their importance for understanding the dissertation.

The first category of scholarship encompasses the history of Asian immigration to the U.S. and the press' response to the influx of newcomers from the East. The scholarship traces the disparate stories of Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asian, Korean, and other Asian immigrant groups in America and surveys the turbulent racist backlash these ethnic groups endured in the form of legalized exclusion, violence, and murder. Additionally, scholars analyze the political populism that scapegoated Asian immigrants and other racial minorities in the late 1800s and early1900s. Lastly, this scholarship examines the response of the mainstream press to populist scapegoating and the press' role in fomenting, exposing, and combatting violence against Asians.

Academic analyses in this category are significant to my study because there exists a rich history of anti-Asian racism in the U.S. Yet, while the bigotry targeting other racial groups was also endemic, racism against Asians in America was never condemned or even discussed during its time by most journalists. Rather, it was tolerated by nearly all members of the mainstream press and public as a social norm.

The vituperative language and negative stereotypes with which the historic press responded to America's Asian immigrants provide the groundwork for understanding how journalists initially framed Vincent Chin.

The second category of scholarship explores the extent to which journalists framed violent crimes against Asians in the U.S. as racially motivated crimes and framed the victims as targets of racial injustice. Additionally, scholarship in this category explores framing of criminalized violence against Black Americans and Latinos as a point of comparison with Asians. This scholarship is significant to my study as it demonstrates that, unlike the violence targeting other racial minority groups, mainstream journalists paid little serious attention to violence against Asians in the U.S. as racial violence. Journalists were hesitant to call out and condemn such violence as a justifiable indicator of racial hatred in the decades leading up to Vincent Chin's murder in 1982. Hence, journalists either framed violence against Asians as related to economic competition or completely ignored it. Salient among the reasons for such framing was a stereotype that characterized Asians as fully assimilated model minorities. Additionally, a lack of Asian Americans employed in newsrooms in particular regions of the U.S. shaped news framing of violence against Asians.

Worth noting is that there exist regional variations in the number of Asian Americans employed in newsrooms across the United States. West Coast newsrooms, in particular, have much higher representations of Asian Americans than other areas of the U.S.[98] The Asian American Journalist Association (AAJA) web site lists the

[98] "Asian American Pioneers in Journalism: Remembering Our Roots," Asian American Journalists Association, December 24, 2010, Accessed May 16, 2024, https://www.aaja.org/40th/honor-roll/

Asian American pioneers of journalism—the first Asians to "practice journalism professionally for a news organization or create a journalistic vehicle using the English language in the . . . mainstream news media field."[99] Asians filling diverse journalistic professions, including writers, filmmakers, photojournalists, producers, directors, copyeditors, and several other roles worked at news outlets in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, some of which include *The Pacific Citizen Editor, The LA Times Sunday Magazine, The Saturday Evening Post,* and *The Sacramento Union.*[100]

These academic studies inform scholars' understanding of the reasons for the slow evolution of framing of Vincent Chin's slaying over time. During the five-year duration of the Chin murder case, advocacy groups, prosecuting attorneys, and other factors gradually drew press attention to anti-Asian hatred as a legitimate motive for Chin's murder. Hence, this scholarship undergirds my dissertation's argument that the Chin case can be considered a critical turning point in framing of violence against Asians.

The last category of scholarship reviews the process whereby violent crime victims in the press transform into news symbols representing broader social problems. This scholarship is important to the dissertation because it situates my argument within the narrative that Vincent Chin became a news symbol of anti-Asian violence. Indeed, Chin played an important role in drawing journalists' attention to such violence in coverage of specific murder cases involving Asian victims during the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, even during the pandemic when journalists revived Chin's

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

story and framed him as a representation of racial injustice toward Asian Americans nationwide, journalists continued to rely more on source allegations of anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive than on their own direct assertions of such hatred.

The following two chapters provide further context for my study. Chapter 3 explains how journalists create and choose specific frames to describe Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood using framing theory and worthy victim theory. Chapter 4 takes a deeper dive into historic press characterizations of Asians and Asian immigration that extend beyond the journalistic responses to populist political rhetoric reviewed in Chapter 2.

2.2 The History of Asian Immigration to the U.S. Prior and Subsequent to Passage of the 1965 Immigration Act

A substantial amount of scholarship examines the history of Asian immigration to the U.S. prior to the 1965 Immigration Act.[101] Much of this work is useful in terms of providing the historic context in which the U.S. media operated in covering Asian Americans and their communities. This context is important for understanding initial news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case and, hence, how framing slowly changed over time.

The chief influx of Chinese immigration was located on the American West Coast between 1849, during the California Gold Rush, and 1882, when Congress began imposing restrictions on Chinese entry.[102] Chinese immigrants were frequently

[101] This law will be discussed in greater detail later in the literature review.

[102] Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 59.

assigned the most dangerous responsibilities while working on the Transcontinental Railroad, including carving out a rail bed across the treacherous Sierra Nevada Mountain range, a feat that killed an estimated 1,200 Chinese workers forced to dig tunnels beneath 40-foot snowdrifts, according to historian John Hoyt Williams.[103] Once the railroad was completed in 1869, Chinese immigrants settled in ethnic enclaves and worked in light industry trades, such as laundry, cigarmaking, and shoemaking. High demand for such low-wage jobs led to an estimated population of 105,465 Chinese immigrants and their descendants in the U.S. [104]

Similar to Chinese immigration to the U.S., the chief influx of Japanese immigration was located on the American West Coast. Many Japanese immigrants arrived in California as agricultural laborers under contract between 1900 and 1920, a few years before the U.S. Congress began passing laws to severely restrict Japanese immigration to America in 1924, as discussed below.

Historians John E. Van Sant and Roger Daniels explore the beginnings of Japanese immigration to the U.S. by examining Japanese contract labor in Hawaii and the subsequent importation of Japanese laborers to California.[105] Between 1869 and 1884, American growers recruited approximately 150 Japanese farmers to work as contract laborers on Hawaiian sugar plantations. After 1884, Americans recruited

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[103] John Hoyt Williams, *The Transcontinental Railroad* (Newbury: New World City, 2019).

[104] Ibid., 3. This number was taken from the 1880 census.

[105] John E. Van Sant, *Pacific Pioneers: Japanese Journeys to America and Hawaii: 1850-1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 3. According to Van Sant, "In 1890, the census counted 2,039 Japanese in the United States; 24, 326 in 1900; 72,157 in 1910, and 111,010 by 1920."(3) Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life.* (Princeton: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1990), 250.

another 30,000 Japanese farmers and tenant farmers.[106] Japanese immigrants arrived in Hawaii in hopes of earning money and, after a few years, returning home to reunite with their families. However, after America annexed Hawaii in 1898 and gave it territorial status in 1900, Americans on the mainland in San Francisco and Seattle began recruiting Japanese agricultural workers and some light industry laborers. Most Japanese immigrants were males until Japanese 'picture brides' began arriving in the U.S. during the 1900s. By 1930, there were an estimated 125,000 Japanese and their descendants in the U.S.[107]

Scholarship analyzing the racial backlash Asian immigrants endured upon their arrival to America shapes an understanding of why cases of race violence, such as the violence against Vincent Chin, have persisted over the centuries. In 1854, just a few years after the Chinese began arriving in the U.S., boundaries were already set in place by the California Supreme Court to protect White Americans who committed violent crimes against Chinese immigrants in the state. In *People v. Hall*, the California Supreme Court ruled that testimony by a Chinese man who witnessed a murder by a White man was inadmissible in court.[108] *People v. Hall* involved the racial murder of Ling Sing in 1853. Sing was a Chinese miner slain by George Hall, a White man who supported excluding Chinese immigrants from the country.

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[106] Daniels, *Coming to America*, 250.

[107] "The U.S. Mainland: Growth and Resistance," Library of Congress, accessed on December 1, 2021, https://www.scribbr.com/chicago-style/website-citations/. "The turn of the century saw the beginning of a great 25-year surge of immigration, in which more than 100,000 Japanese nationals arrived in the U.S."

[108] *People v. Hall, 1854*, Caselaw Access Project, Harvard Law School, accessed on November 1, 2022.

Following his trial, Hall appealed the guilty verdict that had been issued by Chief Justice Hugh Murray. The verdict was largely based on the testimony of three Chinese witnesses. The 1854 ruling by the California Supreme Court effectively freed Hall who had been convicted and sentenced to death. The court's ruling set a legal precedent that made it nearly impossible for Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans to receive justice for violent crimes committed against them by Whites in California.[109]

Asian immigration historians Philip Sheldon Foner, Daniel Rosenberg, and Jean Pfaelzer recount multiple instances of White brutality against the Chinese during the mid- to late-1800s. Foner and Rosenberg provide a comprehensive analysis of anti-Chinese racism and the Chinese opposition from the time of the Chinese arrival in the U.S. to the 1980s.[110] Pfaelzer's analysis is more focused, centering on specific instances of racial violence when Chinese merchants, miners, prostitutes, and fieldworkers were banished from their homes at gunpoint, beaten, starved, and hanged as White American nativists attempted to force all Chinese persons from the U.S.[111]

Asian American Studies scholars Beth Lew-Williams and Scott Zesch conduct an extensive analysis of Chinese immigrants' experiences with violence in the U.S. While Zesch focuses primarily on anti-Chinese violence in California, Lew-Williams

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[109] Ibid.

[110] Philip Sheldon Foner and Daniel Rosenberg, *Racism, Dissent, and Asian Americans from 1850 to the Present: A Documentary History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993).

[111] Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007).

examines how Chinese immigrants were attacked during race riots in the U.S. West in the late 1800s.[112] The Chinese Massacre took place on October 24, 1871, in Los Angeles, California. The attack resulted from the accidental shooting death of Robert Thompson, a White resident of the city.[113] Thompson was fatally shot after he was caught in the crossfire during a business altercation between two rival Chinese organizations: the Nin Yung and Hong Chow. Thompson had been working with local police to break up the confrontation when he was accidentally shot by a Chinese man during the fight.[114] In response to Thompson's death, more than 500 White and Hispanic rioters who resented the growing presence of Chinese immigrants in Los Angeles and considered them foreigners laid siege to L.A.'s Chinatown. Nearly twenty Chinese men and boys were hanged from various locations in Chinatown, including on makeshift gallows. A grand jury in L.A. returned thirty-seven indictments against the White men involved in the riots, including twenty-five indictments for the murder of the Chinese men and boys who were hanged. However, only eight of the rioters were convicted of manslaughter, and those convictions were eventually overturned.[115]

Scholar Beth Lew-Williams posits that anti-Chinese violence in the U.S. West

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[112] Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 1. Lew-Williams explores how nativist White settlers who believed the U.S. Western territories belonged to Whites resorted to violence to prevent Chinese settlement. According to Lew-Williams, race riots took place in Denver, Rock Springs, Wyoming, among other locations. Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 170, 242-243.

[113] Scott Zecsh, "Chinese Los Angeles in 1870-1871: The Makings of a Massacre," *Southern California Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 109-158.

[114] Ibid., 133-134.

[115] Ibid., 144.

was a form of "violent racial politics."[116] She defines violent racial politics as a form of anti-Chinese violence initiated by White Americans in the U.S. West in the mid-1880s as a tool to pressure Washington politicians to support restrictions against Chinese immigration to America.[117] As Lew-Williams explains, "gaping economic disparities between workers and capitalists" in the U.S. West, the racial division of labor, and "a pervasive belief in White supremacy" led to multiple uprisings between White vigilante settlers and Chinese immigrants in America's Western territories.[118] Anti-Chinese spokesmen in Western towns constructed a narrative that Chinese immigration threatened White settlement in the U.S. West. Hence, violence against Chinese immigrants was justifiable from White vigilantes' perspective.[119]

The Rock Springs Massacre in Rock Springs in Wyoming Territory on September 3, 1855, serves as an important example of violent racial politics. The massacre was the result of White Americans' resentment against Chinese miners who, Whites believed, were stealing jobs from White American miners. In September, approximately 150 White vigilante settlers arrived in Rock Spring's Chinatown carrying shotguns, ordered the Chinese to leave, and began burning their homes and businesses. The White vigilantes killed several Chinese persons as they ran from their homes.[120]

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[116] Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 7.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., 115.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid., 117.

Lew-Williams claims that "the Rock Springs Massacre was the deadliest outbreak of anti-Chinese violence in the country until 1855. In a single day, White miners had achieved the complete expulsion of Chinese from their town."[121] Part of the reason for the severity of the massacre was the element of surprise.[122] "Racial violence against the Chinese relied on the power of surprise," and the Chinese never knew "when threats would turn to violence," according to Lew-Williams.[123] Twenty-eight Chinese miners were killed.[124]

Violent racial attacks against Chinese immigrant laborers in the U.S. West pressured Congress into passing several restriction laws against Chinese immigrant workers. The U.S. Congress had previously passed the Chinese Restriction Act in 1882. Signed into law by President Chester Arthur on May 6 of that year, the law was the first of its kind in U.S. history to exclude an immigrant group from America solely on the basis of race and ethnicity. However, the law did little to curb the influx of Chinese immigrants into America because while laborers from China were restricted, Chinese teachers, merchants, and tourists continued immigrating to the U.S. [125]

Congress passed subsequent laws tightening and prolonging restrictions on all Chinese immigrants coming to the U.S. To illustrate, the Scott Act of 1888,

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid., 93.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid., 117.

[125] Ibid., 171.

introduced by Congressman William L. Scott (D-Penn.), amended the Chinese Restriction Act. The law disallowed Chinese immigrants who had previously lived in the U.S. to return to the country after visiting China unless they had relatives living in America.[126] In 1892, the Geary Act "prohibited the migration of Chinese to the United States in absolute terms" and mandated that Chinese Americans and Chinese immigrants carry certificates of residence with them at all times or risk deportation to China, according to Lew-Williams.[127] The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904 made Chinese exclusion permanent until the Magnuson Act of 1943 overturned Chinese exclusion laws when the U.S. sought an alliance with China against Japan during WWII.

Japanese immigrants faced similar resistance. Asian immigration historian Mae Ngai explores the influence of the Alien Land Laws on Japanese farmers in the early 1900s.[128] Japanese Americans in California succeeded in establishing farms, but White Americans, threatened by Japanese land ownership, targeted Japanese farmers by passing laws in 1913 and 1920 that banned the Japanese from owning and leasing land in California.[129]

Discrimination against Japanese immigrants prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor peaked when Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924, terminating nearly all Japanese and other Asian immigration to the United States. The Johnson-

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[126] Ibid., 185-186.

[127] Ibid., 202.

[128] Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[129] Ibid., 116.

Reed Act excluded Japanese immigrants based on their ineligibility for naturalization and even placed national origins quotas on European immigration. Japanese immigrants' ineligibility for naturalization derived from the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Ozawa v. U.S.* in 1922. In its ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court found that Takao Ozawa, a graduate of a U.S. college living and working in Hawaii with his family, could not become a U.S. citizen because he was non-White. The ruling stemmed from the Naturalization Act of 1870, which allowed only Whites and Blacks in the U.S. to naturalize.

Scholars Stephanie Reitzig and Yu Tokunaga examine the internment of Japanese immigrants and citizens in the U.S. during World War II.[130] After Japan's surprise attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 permitting the United States government to intern 120,000 U.S. citizens and legal resident aliens of Japanese descent. The executive order mandated that Japanese immigrants and citizens be transported from California, Washington, and Oregon to states within the interior of the U.S. for internment with the intension of preventing espionage on U.S. shores. Most prisoners were released after Tokyo surrendered in 1945. Tokunga focuses on how Japanese internment inflicted "a grave injustice" on Japanese immigrants and marked "a key moment" of racial discrimination toward Japanese

[130] Yu Tokunaga, "Japanese Internment as an Agricultural Labor Crisis: Wartime Debates over Food Security versus Military Necessity," *Southern California Quarterly* 101., no. 1 (Spring 2019): 79-113. Stephanie Reitzig, " 'By the Code of Humanity': Ralph Carr Takes a Stand for Japanese American Rights in World War II," *The History Teacher* 51, no. 1 (November 2017): 105-122.

persons born on U.S. soil.[131] As a product of anti-Japanese racism and "wartime hysteria," some Japanese Americans were shot by military guards for allegedly resisting orders while others died due to inadequate medical care, according to Tokunga.[132]

Using a different approach to Japanese internment, Reitzig examines how Ralph Carr, the Republican Governor of Colorado elected in 1939 and "the only Western state governor to take a stand for Japanese Americans" during WWII, advocated for racial tolerance between Whites and Asians in the U.S.[133] In a public address as governor on February 28, 1942, Carr denounced discrimination against Japanese immigrants and their families, refused to intern Japanese immigrants and citizens in Colorado, and "stressed the ethical cost of violence against such people," according to Reitzig.[134] Reitzig contrasts Carr's racially tolerant stance toward Japanese Americans with that of other governors, particularly Wisconsin's governor Julius P. Heil. In a political address in January 1941, Heil threatened that if hundreds of Japanese persons were brought into Wisconsin from California to be interned, as was stipulated under President Roosevelt's executive order, "I promise you they will be hanging from every tree."[135] Carr's rhetoric also contrasted with that of Colorado residents, "many of whom threatened violence toward Japanese Americans,"

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[131] Ibid., 79.

[132] Ibid., 80.

[133] Reitzig, " 'By the Code of Humanity' ":105.

[134] Ibid., 107.

[135] Ibid., 108.

according to Reitzig.[136] For example, "a 1942 report from the Immigration and Naturalization Service described how one Colorado resident planned to go 'Jap hunting'" in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Reitzig explains.[137] Carr's belief in the unconstitutionality of interning Japanese American citizens in the absence of any crime committed enabled over 2,000 Japanese Americans to avoid internment by fleeing to Colorado in February 1942 before relocation of Japanese persons from the West Coast officially began.[138]

Historian Erika Lee posits that America's "post-WWII superpower status" and civil rights movements of the 1960s "exposed the hypocrisy" of regulations on Japanese and Chinese immigrants.[139] During the Cold War between the U.S. and Russia, pressure grew on Washington politicians to reform immigration restriction laws in an effort to help America conform to the image of a racially tolerant global power. Hence, Washington lawmakers designed the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act to treat immigrants, especially those from Asia, more humanely.[140] The law included provisions to promote family reunification, sanctuary for refugees, and the abolition of a national origins quota system that had discriminated against migrants from Asia

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[136] Ibid., 107.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Ibid., 108.

[139] Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, 247.

[140] The Hart-Cellar Act replaced the national origins quota restrictions on European immigration under the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act with overall caps on immigration according to specific hemispheres. The U.S. issued 170,000 visas for migrants from Europe and 120,000 for migrants from the Western Hemisphere. In 1978, this system of caps was changed to a global ceiling of 300,000 and a cap of 20,000 visas per country for every country globally.

and Southern Europe under the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924.

While Chinese and Japanese immigration dwindled,[141] immigration from the South and East of Asia dramatically increased. For example, "600,000 Koreans arrived between 1965 and 1989," according to Asian immigration scholars Hyun Sook Kim and Pyong Gap Min.[142] Asian Studies author Helen Zia adds that "more than 1 million Southeast Asians came to America after 1975," mostly refugees from wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.[143] Zia claims that due to the Refugee Assistance Acts of 1975 and 1980, "the numbers of Asian Americans grew from 877,934 in 1960 to 1.4 million in 1970, 3.5 million in 1980, and 7.3 million in 1990.[144]

Although the Hart-Cellar Act was designed to promote a humanitarian approach to Asian and other immigration, White Americans continued the practice of targeting Asian Americans, such as Vincent Chin, with racial violence after 1965.[145]

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[141] Due to immigration controls by Chinese authorities lasting until 1978, only 51,000 Chinese immigrants arrived between 1965 and 1980. Only 91,000 Japanese immigrants came to the U.S. in this period, according to "Chinese Immigration Statistics: 1960-2021," Macrotrends, accessed December 3, 2021, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/immigration-statistics. "Japan Immigration Statistics: 1960-2021," Macrotrends, accessed December 3, 2021, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/JPN/japan/immigration-statistics.

[142] Hyun Sook Kim and Pyong Gap Min, "The Post-1965 Korean Immigrants: Their Characteristics and Settlement Patterns," *Korean Journal of Population and Development* 21, no. 2 (December 1992), 123.

[143] Zia, *Asian American Dreams*, 51.

[144] Ibid.

[145] Gail P. Kelly, "Coping with America: Refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the 1970s and 1980s," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487, (September 1986): 138-149. Kelly explores the resettlement patterns and economic prospects of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians in the 1970s and 1980s in New Orleans, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York City. Paul Rutledge, *The Vietnamese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). Rutledge explores race relations between Whites and Vietnamese refugees in Texas and Oklahoma between 1975 and 1980.

Immigration scholars Gail P. Kelly and Paul Rutledge find that economic uncertainty and war-related perceptions of Southeast Asian refugees in the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s led to violence targeting Indochinese refugees in the form of "rock throwing and street fighting."[146] Similarly, scholar Jeremy Hein emphasizes how stereotypes of Hmong refugees eating dogs led to many of these refugees sustaining "threats" and "beatings."[147]

2.3 Political Populism and Scapegoating of Black Americans, Latinx, and Asian Immigrants

Studies examining populist political rhetoric targeting U.S. minorities provide important context for this dissertation because both Vincent Chin's murder and violence against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic took place during periods of political attacks targeting Asian groups. With the departure of the Union army of occupation from the South following the Civil War, White southern politicians regained local political control by stoking fear and hatred of Blacks among the poor White citizenry.[148] Similarly, the three-time Democratic presidential nominee, William Jennings Bryan, a populist orator from Nebraska, rallied poor White farmers and industrial workers with attacks on Chinese immigrants as "machine-like

[146] Kelly, "Coping with America," 148.

[147] Jeremy Hein, *Ethnic Origins: The Adaptation of Cambodian and Hmong Refugees in Four American Cities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).

[148] Gerald H. Gaither, "Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the 'New South,'" PhD. diss., (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1977). Gaither examines efforts to disenfranchise southern Blacks in 11 Confederate states. Robert M. Saunders, "Southern Populists and the Negro: 1893-1895," *Journal of Negro History*, 54 (July 1969): 246. Saunders examines politicians' attitudes on issues "ranging from equal protection before the laws to [Blacks'] rights on public transportation." (246) He finds that populists supported lynching and the segregation of public transportation.

laborers" and "celestial foreigners" who usurped American jobs, according to scholar Roger Daniels.[149] Bryan also targeted Chinese workers as tools of Republicans who preferred low-wage migrants they could easily control over independent White Americans.[150]

Politicians sought White nativist support by attacking Japanese immigrants in the early 20th century and by targeting the influx of Japanese auto imports into the United States in the 1980s.[151] As Japan surpassed U.S. car manufacturers to dominate auto sales, American candidates for office and some labor leaders resurrected stereotypes of Japanese persons as an "alien, subhuman, contemptable foe," according to scholar John W. Dower.[152] For example, in his analysis of Washington leaders' discrimination against the Japanese, Dower quotes the head of a congressional trade delegation to Japan in 1983 who referred to the Japanese as "the little yellow men, you know, Honda."[153]

Several studies document how American populists of the past scapegoated Chinese immigrants as the source of epidemics and pandemics just as right-wing politicians of the present-day blame China for unleashing the Covid-19 virus into the United States. Asian immigration scholars Nayan Shaw and Guenter B. Risse analyze

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[149] Roger Daniels, "Williams Jennings Bryan and the Japanese," *Southern California Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1966): 227.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Zia, *Asian American Dreams*, 57-58.

[152] John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 313.

[153] Ibid.

political narratives in response to smallpox and bubonic plague in San Francisco's Chinatowns in the late 1800s and early 1900s.[154] For example, Shaw explains how White labor politicians who were fearful of the growing population of Chinese in California in the late 1800s helped create the image of San Francisco's Chinatown as a "noxious and degraded space" by emphasizing the "medical monstrosity" of the "Chinatown slum."[155] Shaw quotes a local politician, San Francisco's city supervisor Willard Farwell, who claimed that Chinatown was the "perfect network of contagion" and "a veritable octopus of disease."[156]

Similarly, scholar Guenter B. Risse analyzes how politicians and local health officials blamed San Francisco's entire Chinese community for an outbreak of bubonic plague in the city that began on March 6, 1900 when the "lifeless body of a Chinese immigrant was discovered in the basement of a Chinatown hotel," according to Risse.[157] After the San Francisco Board of Health imposed a "total quarantine" of Chinatown, local health officials carried out a house-to-house inspection during which some private property of Chinatown residents was destroyed, Risse explains.[158] Local politicians touted the dangers of infected immigrants from China and required all Chinatown residents to be injected with an experimental vaccine known to have

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[154] Nayun Shaw, *Contagious Divides* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Guenter B. Risse, "A Long Pull, A Strong Pull, and All Together: San Francisco and Bubonic Plague, 1907-1908," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 66, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 260-286.

[155] Shaw, *Contagious Divides,* 63.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Risse, "A Long Pull, A String Pull, and All Together," 262.

[158] Ibid.

severe side effects.[159] Additionally, President William McKinley issued an executive order requiring all Chinese and Japanese persons to present a health certificate confirming they had been vaccinated if they were planning on traveling out of state.[160]

Nativists retold versions of anti-Chinese narratives and used them to target Latinos as the source of "tuberculosis, chicken pox, scabies . . . and Ebola" from 1995-2015, according to sociology professors Jackie Hogan and Kristin Haltinner.[161] Hogan and Haltinner's study examines populist narratives used by Washington politicians who described Latinos as carrying "dangerous, communicable diseases" and "sick children and adults" as being allowed into the country and "dumped" in cities and towns across the U.S.[162]

Additionally, studies examine President Donald Trump's use of populist racist rhetoric. Employing phrases such as "Wuhan virus," "China virus," and "Kung flu" to describe the Covid-19 pandemic that originated in China, Trump mirrored the tactics of his historic predecessors, rallying White conservatives in an attempt to win re-election.[163] A similar research analysis performed by scholars Lindsay Y. Dhanani and Berkeley Franz analyzes the effects of President Trump's "stigmatized language"

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[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Jackie Hogan and Kristin Haltinner, "Floods, Invaders, and Parasites: Immigration Threat Narratives and Right-Wing Populism in the USA, UK, and Australia," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 36, no. 5 (2015), 530.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Daniel Ian Rubin and Faith Wilson, *A Time of Covidiocy: Media, Politics, and Social Upheaval* (Boson: Brill), 2021.

describing the Covid-19 virus.[164] For example, some of Trump's discourse surrounding the virus "centered on criticisms of Chinese cultural practices, sensationalized depictions of Chinese food outlets, and skepticism of the Chinese government," these scholars explain.[165] Dhanani and Franz persuasively argue that such language resulted in an uptick in violence against Asians in the U.S.[166]

Other studies analyze how Trump's rhetoric shaped anti-Latinx discrimination. Newman et al. find that Trump's 2015 presidential campaign rhetoric targeting Latinos as the source of disease and crime helped instigate a rise in anti-Latinx violence.[167] These scholars find that Trump's rhetoric had an "emboldening effect" among a "subset of citizens holding prejudiced attitudes."[168] For example, Newsman et al. cite the Southern Poverty Law Center, finding that in the month following Trump's presidential win in December 2016, there were 1,094 "bias-related incidents" in the U.S. with anti-immigrant violence at the forefront of such incidents.[169] Similarly, Trump's remarks in response to the violence that occurred when White nationalists clashed with counter-protesters at the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 12, 2017, sparked controversy. Republicans in

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[164] Lindsay Y. Dhanani and Berkeley Franz, "Why Public Health Framing Matters: An Experimental Study of the Effects of COVID-19 Framing on Prejudice and Xenophobia in the United States," *Social Science and Medicine* 269 (2021): 1.

[165] Ibid., 1.

[166] Ibid., 2.

[167] Benjamin Newman et al., "The Trump Effect: An Experimental Investigation of the Emboldening Effect of Racially Inflammatory Elite Communication," *British Journal of Political Science* 51 (2021): 1138-1139.

[168] Ibid., 1138.

[169] Ibid., 1139.

Congress and most mainstream media outlets took issue with Trump's failure to directly denounce White supremacism. Instead, Trump claimed during a press conference that there was "hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides."[170]

Non-scholarly analyses have also examined Trump's racist rhetoric. A study by the American Psychological Association (APA) explores Trump's attacks against Latinx immigration as creating a platform that promotes negative immigration rhetoric and behavior. The study argues that the perceived threat of immigration has shaped "individual and systematic bias" against Latinos in the U.S., leading to a "hostile environment" for Latinx and other immigrant minority groups.[171] APA finds that "two weeks after [Trump's] presidential election, anti-Latinx hate crimes reported in major U.S. cities increased 176%."[172]

These examples illustrate that racism has long roots in American history and is still alive and well today. The extra-judicial killings of Black Americans spotlighted by Black Lives Matter further exemplify the endemic racial hatred that persists in the U.S. The killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, by Derek Chauvin, a White Minneapolis police officer, on May 25, 2020, is one example. Local police apprehended Floyd following an incident with a store clerk in which the clerk

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[170] "White Nationalist Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia Sparks Violent Clashes, Turns Deadly," ABC News, August 13, 2017. During the Unite the Right rally, a car plowed into a group of counter-protesters, killing a 32-year-old woman and injuring 19 others. The driver was later charged with murder. Republicans in Congress expressed regret that Trump did not condemn the incident as a terrorist act.

[171] Angel D. Armenta, Miriam J. Alvarez, and Michael A. Zárate, "Wounds that Never Heal: The Proliferation of Prejudice toward Immigrants in the United States," in *Trauma and Racial Minority Immigrants: Turmoil, Uncertainty and Resistance*, ed. Pratyusha Tummala-Narra (American Psychological Association, 2021): 16, 17.

[172] Ibid., 16.

suspected Floyd of paying with a counterfeit 20-dollar bill. Chauvin slowly suffocated Floyd by leaning on his back and neck for over 9 minutes. In a similar case of police violence, Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old Black man, was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a White police officer, in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014. Wilson claimed that Brown attacked him in his police car in an attempt to grab Wilson's service pistol. A struggle ensued, and the pistol fired, killing Brown.[173]

2.4 The Role of the U.S. Press in Fomenting, Exposing, and Combating Violence against Asians in the U.S.

While the studies cited above discuss a range of racist stereotyping, this section will focus on the relationship of the U.S. press with violence against Asian Americans. Understanding the press response to populist political attacks against racial minorities is important to understanding how this response played a role in framing of Vincent Chin during the 1980s. During the 1980s, the so-called U.S.-Japan "trade wars" escalated racial tensions between White Americans and members of diverse Asian ethnic groups. Some Asian Americans were mistaken for Japanese Americans and became victims of violence.

Scholarship exploring journalists' response to populist racist rhetoric and negative race stereotyping of Asians in the U.S. uncovers the nuances in journalists'

[173] "This Day in History: Michael Brown is Killed By a Police Officer in Ferguson, Missouri," History.com, last modified May 6, 2021. "There are many different accounts of the incident, including the testimonies of Wilson and of Brown's friend, Dorian Johnson, who was with Brown at the time. Many details differ, but most accounts agree that Wilson saw Brown and Johnson walking in the street, demanded they get on the sidewalk, then stopped his police SUV in front of them in order to confront them. He and Brown had an altercation through the open window of the car, during which Wilson fired twice. Brown and Johnson tried to leave, Wilson exited his car to pursue them, and at some point Brown turned back around to face Wilson, who then fired 12 shots, six of which hit Brown. Wilson claimed he fired in self-defense as Brown charged him, which Johnson denied."

treatment of Asian immigrants in the United States. This section examines news framing of Asians in America from the onset of Asian immigration to the rise in violence against Asians under President Trump's administration. Asian American Studies scholar San Hea Kil explores how West Coast newspapers in 1882, the year Congress passed the Chinese Restriction Act, justified populist racist rhetoric by framing Chinese immigrants using negative racial stereotypes.[174] These news frames were largely in response to the significant population of Chinese immigrants, especially in California, in the late 1800s.[175] Kil primarily focuses on *the San Francisco Chronicle* and finds that the newspaper stereotyped Chinese immigrants using the following news frames: "coolie slave," "cruel murderer," "evil heathen," "celestial invader," "uncivilized assimilator," "overwhelming deluge," and "diseased filth."[176]

Other analyses, however, examine how a handful of White American journalists who advocated a higher standard of moralism for press coverage of Asian immigrant minorities in America condemned some journalists' use of populist bigoted rhetoric.[177] For example, original research conducted by the author of this dissertation finds that San Francisco journalist Ambrose Bierce framed Chinese immigrants favorably in *The San Francisco Illustrated Wasp, The Argonaut,* and *The*

[174] San Hea Kil, "Fearing Yellow, Imagining White: Media Analysis of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882," *Social Identities* 18, no. 6 (November 2012): 663-677.

[175] Ibid., 667.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Sara Browning, "An Unlikely Ally: Ambrose Bierce, the Press, and America's Most Hated Minority" (unpublished manuscript, October 4, 2021), typescript.

San Francisco Newsletter between 1868 and 1886. The study posits that Bierce's understanding of journalism as a moral weapon compelled him to defend Chinese persons who were victims of racist violence in San Francisco, a city that served as the main port of entry for Chinese immigrants. Reporting for *The Wasp* after one of many violent riots targeting San Francisco's Chinese population, Bierce condemned the corruption of local law enforcement for "hanging only one out of twenty of the White scoundrels who committed obvious and unprovoked assassination of Chinese immigrants," as reported in Bierce's weekly column.[178] Indeed, Bierce claimed: "The Chinese on the Pacific Coast are not treated with that delicate consideration and hospitality which is accorded to rattlesnakes and tarantulas."[179]

Scholar Philip Chin conducts a similar study, analyzing Samuel Clemens' newspaper reporting in defense of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. Chin traces Clemens' sympathy for the Chinese in his news reports to Clemens' initial observation of White American cruelty: a Chinese laundryman who was randomly stoned to death by a group of White Americans as he walked down the street carrying his bundle.[180]

Mass communications scholar Bradley Hamm and historian Thomas Heuterman explore the nuances in journalism framing of Japanese immigrants in

[178] Ambrose Bierce, Editorial, *Wasp,* June 12, 1886, "The Archive of American Journalism," HistoricJournalism.com, Historic Journalism, January 7, 2021.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Philip Chin, "Humanizing the Other: Roughing It- Mark Twain and the Chinese in 1872," Chinese American Heroes, last accessed September 29, 2019.

mainstream U.S. newspapers.[181] Hamm investigates how mainstream newspapers in the 1920s ostracized Japanese immigrants by racially stereotyping them as "incompatible aliens," "economic overachievers," and "invaders."[182] In contrast, Heuterman's analysis focuses on the evolution in newspaper framing of Japanese immigrants over time. As Japanese immigrants began migrating from Hawaii to the U.S. mainland in California, some journalists initially contrasted the kind and well-mannered Japanese immigrant with the foreign threat from China.[183] However, as the population of Japanese persons rapidly rose in California from approximately 2,000 Japanese immigrants in 1890 to nearly 111,000 Japanese persons by 1920, fears of White American worker displacement and a Japanese invasion of the U.S. during the second World War caused many journalists to decry the Japanese as a foreign menace and a yellow peril.[184]

Mainstream news media attitudes toward the Japanese did not improve by the time of Vincent Chin's death in 1982 when *The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal,* and other mainstream newspapers regularly echoed populist narratives targeting Japanese Americans as foreign enemies during the 1980s U.S.-Japan trade war. In the 1980s, an increase in Japanese car imports to the U.S.

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[181] Bradley J. Hamm, "Redefining Racism: Newspaper Justification for the 1924 Exclusion of Japanese Immigrants," *American Journalism* 16, no. 3 (1999), 53-69. Thomas H. Heuterman, "The Japanese Americans," in *U.S. News Coverage of Racial Minorities: A Sourcebook,* ed. Beverley Ann Deepe Keever, Carolyn Martindale, and Mary Ann Weston (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 216-248.

[182] Hamm, "Redefining Racism," 59, 62, 63. Hamm analyzes framing of Japanese immigrants in 60 editorials across seven daily newspapers nationwide from April-May 1924.

[183] Heuterman, "The Japanese Americans," 218.

[184] Ibid., 218, 233.

produced layoffs for hundreds of American auto manufacturers and sparked widespread hatred for Japanese and other Asian American groups. Historian M.J. Heale examines press coverage during this period. He finds that *The Washington Post* quoted politicians whose rhetoric helped stoke anti-Japanese hatred among Americans.[185] To illustrate, Heale finds that during the 1980 presidential campaign, *The Post* quoted presidential candidate Gov. John Connally (D-TX) who exploited the emerging unease over Japan by claiming during a speech: "It's time we said to Japan: "If we can't come into your markets with equal openness . . . you had better . . .sit . . . in your little Datsuns . . . . because we've had all we're going to take!"[186]

A series of scholarly studies finds that journalists covering President Trump's populist racist rhetoric targeting Asian Americans and other minority groups fell short in their treatment of race issues. Political science professors Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon find that the press widely publicized Donald Trump's attacks against minority groups during his campaign for re-election to the White House, and, in so doing, unintentionally shaped racial division.[187] For example, their study examines news coverage of Trump's speech during a re-election campaign rally held in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2020. One news report described Trump "celebrating his base as 'good Americans' while simultaneously excommunicating [BLM protesters] from the community of 'real patriots'" because these protesters

[185] M.J. Heale, "Anatomy of a Scare: Yellow Peril Politics in America, 1980–1993," *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 19-47.

[186] Ibid., 23, 37. cited from Martin Schram, "Big Fritz." *The Washington Post*, October 7, 1982.

[187] Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon, "Donald Trump: Aggressive Rhetoric and Political Violence," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 5 (2021): 3.

allegedly stoked violence and hatred in the country, according to Nacos et. al.[188]

Like Nacos et. al, scholar Katherine M. Bell finds that journalists fell short in their coverage of Trump's controversial statements regarding minority groups by reporting on his statements using "a White racial lens" and failing to exercise sensitivity to minorities.[189] For example, Bell maintains that journalists assumed "racialized positionalities rooted in Whiteness" when reporting on Trump's verbal attacks.[190] To illustrate, she explains that in coverage of Trump's rhetoric, journalists sometimes bought into the idea that terrorism threats can only be attributed to foreign "others" by failing to acknowledge that right-wing conservative hate speech can be a form of domestic terrorism.[191]

In a different approach, professors Stephen M. Croucher, Thao Nguyen, and Diyako Rahmani conduct a study examining the detrimental effects of the dissemination of racist rhetoric over social media. Their online participant survey analysis examines how social media perpetuated anti-Chinese prejudice during the Covid-19 pandemic. They find that social media users' belief that the news they receive is "fair" and "accurate" is correlated with users' view of Chinese Americans as posing "a realistic and symbolic threat to America," according to Croucher et al. [192]

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[188] Ibid.

[189] Katherine M. Bell, "By Any Other Name: Media and White-Supremacist Terrorism in the Trump Era," in *The Trump Presidency, Journalism, and Democracy,* ed. Robert E. Gutsche, Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 12.

[190] Ibid., 12-13.

[191] Ibid., 13.

[192] Stephen M. Croucher, Thao Nguyen, and Diyako Rahmani, "Prejudice Toward Asian Americans in the Covid-19 Pandemic," Frontiers in Communication, last modified June 12, 2020.

Individuals that do not use social media everyday are less likely to hold such a negative view of Asian Americans, the study finds.[193]

2.5 U.S. News Framing of Violent Crimes and Crime Victims: Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians in the U.S.

Scholars have explored U.S. news framing of violent crimes and crime victims involving racial minority groups, including African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. This section reviews scholarship exploring to what extent news media framed violent crimes targeting minority group members as racially motivated crimes and framed racial minority group victims as victims of racism deserving of sympathy and compassion. This scholarship is significant to my study. It demonstrates that, unlike the violence targeting other racial minority groups, the press paid little attention to violence against Asians in the U.S. as racial violence in the decades leading up to Vincent Chin's murder in 1982.

Communications and race scholar Richard M. Perloff conducts a systematic analysis of the shift in mainstream news media framing of violent crimes targeting African Americans in the U.S. South in northern and southern newspaper articles and editorials in the late 1800s and early 1900s.[194] In the 1890s, some mainstream media journalists in the North and South ignored the racism motivating the lynching of African Americans and blamed African American victims for allegedly raping and

[193] Ibid.

[194] Richard M. Perloff, "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans," *Journal of Black Studies,* 30, no. 3 (January 2000): 319.

murdering White women.[195] For example, on October 6, 1895, the daily business newspaper *The Memphis Commercial Appeal* described the lynching of a Black man in Memphis accused of allegedly raping a White woman. The news report framed the violence as "the usual punishment" for such "criminals" because the "bestiality of the crime" was "almost without parallel," according to *the Commercial Appeal*.[196] Moreover, the news report framed the African American victim as a "ravisher" who had committed a series of "horrific" crimes against White women, as reported in this newspaper.[197]

Perloff expounds on two reasons behind journalists' framing of the violence and its African American victims. First, some editors "harbored strong racial prejudice" and were very unlikely to condemn the violence as an act of hatred, Perloff claims.[198] Second, journalists considered sensationalized stories of lynching as newsworthy because lynching was "guaranteed" to "uphold a social order that was dependent on the systematic oppression of Blacks by Whites," Perloff explains.[199]

Scholar G.C. Wright conducts a similar study to Perloff's analysis. Both scholars examine the gradual shift in news media framing of lynching and African American victims in local and national newspapers in the North and South after the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

[195] Ibid., 321.

[196] Ibid.

[197] Ibid.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid., 322.

(NAACP) on February 12, 1909.[200]

To illustrate, scholar G.C. Wright examines framing of African American lynching victims in *The New York Times* at the turn of the twentieth century.[201] He finds that some news stories framed the Kentucky lynching of an African American man named Richard Coleman on December 6, 1899 as "a deplorable act of hatred" and as "an outrage so terrible and so shameful that it can only be explained as an outbreak of popular delirium."[202] Yet, Wright claims that some news stories and editorials in *The Times* during this period ignored the racist hatred motivating the violence and assumed that Blacks who were lynched were guilty of committing an offense against White women. For example, on September 30, 1899, a *Times* editorial reported that southern Blacks are "peculiarly prone" to rape and murder White women.[203] Conversely, Perloff finds that local and national newspaper coverage of lynching and African American victimization in northern U.S. regions "began using words such as 'accused' and 'alleged' when describing Black victims of mob violence" while framing the violence itself as a form of "White brutality" against Blacks.[204]

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[200] G. C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings,"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). Perloff, "The Press and Lynchings of African Americans."

[201] Ibid, 95.

[202] Ibid.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Perloff, "The Press and Lynching of African Americans," 326.

In some southern states, the shift in news framing of lynching and African American victims was evident during the 1910s and 1920s.[205] This shift derived from the new spirit of Progressivism in the South that promoted racial harmony and rejected the slavery-based plantation system of the antebellum period, although Jim Crow continued to remain alive and well.[206] Hence, racist mob violence "tarnished the image of the New South that business elites—including editors—were working hard to cultivate," according to Perloff.[207] *The Atlanta Constitution* published several news reports in 1916 that framed lynching as "mob violence against Blacks" that should be "curbed" and characterized African Americans who were lynched as victims of "harsh injustice," Perloff claims.[208] In 1918, "several of Georgia's urban dailies supported a state antilynching law" and sympathized with Black victims who required legal protection against "a regrettable form of White lawlessness," according to Perloff.[209]

Scholars Melissa A. Esmacher and Antonio Franco explore mainstream news framing of Latino victims of violence in 1940s Los Angeles. These scholars find that newspapers stereotyped Latino victims as criminals to legitimize White mob violence as a justifiable form of policing urban neighborhoods.[210] Esmacher explores news

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[205] Ibid., 325.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Melissa A. Esmacher, "The Riotous Homefront: Contested Racial Spaces in World War II Los Angeles, Detroit, and Harlem," (PhD diss., University of Hawaii, 2013). Antonio Franco, "Threads of

framing of the Zoot Suit Riots, a series of violent clashes between Whites and Latinos lasting from June 3 to June 8, 1943. During these riots, mobs of U.S. servicemen in the Second World War brutally attacked Latinos who wore men's wool suits with high-waisted trousers and long coats. These suits used prolific amounts of fabric and were popular mainly among Latino American youth. At a time when the U.S. War Production Board was rationing wool, silk, and other textiles, many White soldiers and U.S. Navy servicemen took umbrage against Latinos who wore zoot suits and criticized them for their "extravagance, materialism, and vanity," according to Esmacher.[211]

However, the root of the Zoot Suit Riots stemmed more from racial tensions than fashion.[212] Latino youth in Los Angeles frequently wore flashy zoot suits and paired these suits with gold watches and other jewelry. Affluent Whites began stereotyping Latinos as criminals, gang members, and rebellious teenage delinquents who acquired their jewelry by illegal means.[213] While some Black and Latino zoot-suiters did commit crimes, the number of such criminals in L.A. was "greatly exaggerated" by police, according to Esmacher.[214]

Racial tensions peaked on May 31, 1943, when a group of White U.S. Navy servicemen stationed in Los Angeles randomly attacked a group of

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the Zoot Suit Riots: How the Initial Explanations for the Riots Hold Up Today," *Chapman University Historical Review*, 10, no. 1. 2018: 1-29.

[211] Ibid., 59.

[212] Ibid., 60.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

Latino youth wearing Zoot suits on the street. The altercation resulted in the beating of a U.S. sailor as well as several Latino youth. In retaliation, on the evening of June 3, 1943, approximately 50 White servicemen from the U.S. Naval Reserve Armory brandishing clubs began searching L.A.'s streets for Latinos dressed in zoot suits, pulling them out of movie theatres and restaurants. Latinos were stripped naked, beaten, and left bleeding on the streets. On June 8, 1943, the U.S. military terminated the violence by mandating U.S. servicemen remain in their barracks.[215]

Esmacher finds that local news media largely ignored the racial motives behind the violence and framed the victims unsympathetically using negative racial stereotypes.[216] To illustrate, on June 19, 1943, a news story in *The Science Newsletter* in Los Angeles defended the White mobs as protecting the city from a Latino crime wave.[217] Esmacher claims that "the overall tone of the article was condemnatory [toward the Latino victims]" and linked "the zoot suit phenomenon to juvenile delinquency."[218] Similarly, *The San Antonio News* published a series of news stories that portrayed the riots as "solely against delinquent zoot-suiters and not as racially motivated," according to Esmacher.[219]

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[215] History.com Editors, "Zoot Suit Riots," History.com, April 20, 2023.

[216] Esmacher, "The Riotous Homefront," 85.

[217] Ibid.

[218] Ibid.

[219] Ibid., 106.

News reports of the Zoot Suit Riots at the national level ignored the racial motives of the White Navy officers and blamed Latino victims for the violence.[220] In a news story on June 7, 1943, *The New York Times* explained the attacks on zoot suiters as the product of a larger "clean-up campaign" by U.S. Navy servicemen designed to decrease crime in Los Angeles, according to *The Times*.[221] *The Times* explained that the clean-up campaign was retaliation against an assault by Latino zoot suiters on two U.S. Navy wives in East Los Angeles in early June 1943, according to the article.[222] The news report did not provide any evidence to support the statement.[223]

Scholar Antonio Franco's analysis of news framing of the Zoot Suit Riots and the Latino victims of the violence does not refute Esmacher's findings. Franco analyzes news media framing of the riots in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Los Angeles Examiner* and finds that both newspapers ignored the racial motive behind the violence and framed the Latino victims as criminals and gangsters. *The Los Angeles Times* "put the blame for the violence on the shoulders of the zoot suiters," Franco explains.[224] For example, an *L.A. Times* report on June 7, 1943 quoted L.A. police officers who had been falsely informed by a group of U.S. Navy

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[220] Ibid., 60.

[221] Ibid., 93., cited from "28 Zoot Suiters Seized on Coast After Clashes with Servicemen," *The New York Times,* June 7, 1943, 15.

[222] Ibid., 93-94.

[223] Ibid.

[224] Franco, "Threads of the Zoot Suit Riots," 1.

servicemen that the riots began after Latinos wearing zoot suits had attacked the servicemen on May 31, 1943.[225] *The Times* framed the zoot suiters as persons who were "looking for trouble," Franco explains.[226] Bystanders would later confirm that the Navy sailors had initiated the fight.[227]

Additionally, *The Los Angeles Examiner* ignored the racism motivating the riots and blamed the Latino victims for allegedly stirring up trouble in the city.[228] To illustrate, Franco explains that *The Examiner's* news stories "falsely painted the zoot-suiters as blood-thirsty criminal gangsters" and framed the Navy sailors as fighting back in self-defense.[229] In a news report on June 4, 1943, the day after the riots began, *The Examiner* claimed that the zoot suiters have been "on a rampage, attacking numerous servicemen with no provocation."[230] In reality, groups of White servicemen roamed the streets with clubs searching for Latinos wearing zoot suits.[231]

The news media's reliance on members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) played a significant role in framing of the riots and the

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[225] Ibid., 2., cited from "Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fights with Servicemen," *The Los Angeles Times,* June 7, 1943.

[226] Ibid., 3.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid.

[230] Ibid., cited from "Zoot-suiters in Hiding as Drive Starts," *The Los Angeles Times,* June 4, 1943.

[231] Ibid.

Latino victims.[232] The LAPD circulated its views using local and national newspapers and radio broadcasts.[233] For example, in a local radio broadcast on June 9, 1943, L.A.'s Deputy Chief E.W. Lester gave an address to the city in which he blamed the Latino zoot suiters for instigating the riots as a way of garnering increased attention from news media due to their "desire for recognition," according to Lester.[234] Lester then asserted that the Latino zoot suiters "came from neighborhoods where the standards of social conduct were poor and gangster activity was normal behavior," according to Franco.[235] Hence, Lester blamed Latinos for initiating the violence because they were persons who were "socially and morally at fault," Franco explains.[236] In actuality, only a small percentage of Latinos in L.A. were gang members.[237]

Communications scholars Harvey C. Dong and Alexander Lu explore news framing of violence against Asians and Asian victims in the U.S. Dong investigates news framing of the eviction of low-income Asian immigrant tenants from San Francisco's International Hotel (I-Hotel) on August 4, 1977 and

[232] Ibid., 5.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid., 6.

[236] Ibid.

[237] Ibid.

finds that journalists frequently ignored anti-Asian racism.[238]

The I-Hotel's 150 tenants, most of whom were elderly Chinese and Filipino immigrants,[239] had engaged in "a nine-year eviction dispute" with their landlord, Walter Shorenstein, from 1968-1977, according to Dong.[240] Shorenstein sought to tear down the I-Hotel and build a multi-story parking garage.[241] Due to structural racism that deprived Asians of "decent housing" in San Francisco, the Chinese and Filipino tenants "refused to move" from the I-Hotel, Dong explains.[242] Localized protests from The United Filipino Association had succeeded in delaying the eviction for years by pressuring the city to influence Shorenstein to continue extending the tenants' lease.[243]

However, the 1965 Immigration Act caused San Francisco's Filipinos, and especially, Chinese populations to rapidly increase because the city served as the main port of entry for Chinese immigration. The rising populations "served to reinforce the notion that Asians were foreigners who were in conflict with the [economic] interests of local Whites," according to Dong.[244] The increasing racial

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[238] Harvey C. Dong, "The Origins and Trajectory of Asian American Political Activism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1968-1978," PhD diss., (University of California, Berkeley, 2002). The 150 mostly Filipino and Chinese tenants were elderly immigrant residents.

[239] Ibid., 93.

[240] Ibid., 80.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Ibid., 81.

[243] Ibid., 94.

[244] Ibid., 37, 81. According to Dong, "census population figures in 1970 show a marked increase in Chinese immigration [to San Francisco" due to the 1965 immigration law changes. . . . The total Filipino population in San Francisco was 24,694 or 3.5% of the total city population. In contrast . . .the

tensions between White Americans and Asians in the city led Shorenstein to mandate the removal of all tenants from the I-Hotel by August 4, 1977. The eviction was announced in June 1977, and tenants were given two months to vacate the property.[245]

According to Dong's account of the eviction, at 3 a.m. on the morning of August 4, 1977, over 500 Asian and African American community activists "locked arms in rows of twelve deep" in front of the I-Hotel entrance and endured beatings with clubs and repeated charges by over 300 mounted riot police, sheriffs, and fire department employees.[246] The repeated charges eventually broke through the lines of protesters, injuring dozens. Once inside the I-Hotel, officers used axes to knock in the doors of tenants' living spaces and damaged and stole tenants' property. Police carried tenants who refused to leave by their wrists and ankles and threw them onto the pavement outside.[247]

Dong finds that some local journalists ignored anti-Asian racism in San Francisco and placed little importance on the Asian victims.[248] For example, in his analysis of *The San Francisco Progress,* an independent weekly newspaper that sided with San Francisco's city developers, Dong finds that on January 12, 1977, *The Progress* framed the violence as the result of the behavior of young "radical

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growing Chinese population in San Francisco was 58,696 or 8.2% of the total city population," according to Dong. (81)

[245] Ibid., 122.

[246] Ibid.

[247] Ibid., 122-126.

[248] Ibid., 116.

activists"—not racism.[249] Even after Chinese and Filipino tenants were clubbed and dragged from the I-Hotel, *The Progress* failed to acknowledge the possibility that racial hatred was the source of the violence. Instead, these news stories focused solely on the eviction as "a battle between big city developers and low-income residents," Dong explains.[250]

Similar to local coverage, some national news sources never mentioned the racial tensions between White Americans and Asians in San Francisco and framed the Asian tenants in a disparaging light.[251] For example, editorials in *The New York Times* published in the months leading up to the eviction framed the Asian tenants as foreigners and used derogatory stereotypes to characterize them as undesirable in America. For example, an editorial on July 2, 1977, approximately one month before eviction day, framed the Asian tenants as "pitiful" and as "self-excluded, social deviants," according to *The Times.*[252] Additionally, *The Times* editorial admonished the Asian protesters for becoming "too emotional" over the inhabitants of a "fleabag hotel," according to the news report.[253]

Unlike Shah and Dong, scholar Alexander Lu finds that some newspaper journalists framed violent crimes against Asians as racially

[249] Ibid. Dong's dissertation does not focus heavily on media coverage and references only *The San Francisco Progress*, an independent weekly, as an example of local coverage. The I-Hotel eviction received minimal national coverage.

[250] Ibid., 117.

[251] Ibid.

[252] Ibid.

[253] Ibid.

motivated and characterized Asian victims as hate crime victims deserving of sympathy and compassion.[254] Lu posits that when news media frame Asian American victims as "victim minorities," a term Lu defines as victims who "continuously experience . . . racist prejudice, discrimination . . . and violence," such victims receive less news coverage than when journalists frame them as both victim minorities and model minorities.[255] Lu defines the Asian model minority as a stereotype that portrays Asian Americans as "a group that excels academically and professionally because of their . . . adherence to traditional family structures that value education, diligence, and conformity."[256] The "combined imagery of Asian Americans as a model minority and a victim minority" is newsworthy for journalists because the image "conveys a successful [Asian ethnic] group" that not only faces racism but also "overcomes its victimhood experiences," Lu claims.[257] Journalists frequently emphasize the positive characteristics of such victims, making them sympathetic model and victim minorities.[258]

Lu compares news framing of the murders and victimization of Won-Joon Yoon and Deepak Sharma. According to Lu, Yoon, a 26-year-old Korean immigrant and PhD student at the University of Indiana, was fatally shot by White supremacist

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[254] Alexander Lu, "Newspaper Portrayals and Emotional Connection Strategies: Commemorating Model Minority Murder Victims," in *Asian Americans, Education, and Crime: The Model Minority as Victim and Perpetrator,* ed. Daisy Ball and Nicholas Daniel Hartlep (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 85-99.

[255] Ibid.. 85.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Ibid.

[258] Ibid., 85-86.

Benjamin Smith in Bloomington, Indiana on July 4, 1999 as Yoon was walking to Korean United Methodist Church. Deepak Sharma, who immigrated to Indianapolis, Indiana in 2010 from Haryana, India to support his family financially, was fatally shot in the chest in the parking lot of a nightclub on July 11, 2011.

Local news media framed Yoon's murder as a racially motivated crime and framed Yoon as both a model minority and a victim minority. Lu analyzed coverage of twenty-eight news stories that appeared in *The Bloomington Herald-Times.*[259] On July 4, 1999, *The Herald-Times* framed Yoon's murder as a hate crime, quoting Yoon's ex-girlfriend, Abbie Baker: "[F]or this [murder] to be . . . a hate crime seems so ridiculous. There was nothing to hate about Won-Joon," the news report stated.[260] Similarly, on the same day, Lu finds that a *Herald-Times* editorial quoted United Methodist Pastor Philip Amerson who stated: "I am acutely aware that [Yoon] was gunned down because of his ethnicity."[261] Journalists framed Yoon as a victim minority in a news report on July 13, 1999 that quoted then-U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno who visited Bloomington in the wake of Yoon's murder.[262] Reno characterized Yoon as a "victim of hatred and prejudice" whose death resulted because he "looked different," according to *The Herald-Times* report.[263]

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[259] Ibid., 90.

[260] Ibid., cited from Joel Eskovitz, "Tragic Slaying Links Two Students," July 4, 1999, *The Bloomington Herald Times.*

[261] Ibid., cited from Philip Emerson, "React to Lost Innocence with Nonviolent Courage," July 4, 1999, *The Bloomington Herald-Times.*

[262] Ibid., 92.

[263] Ibid., cited from Mike Wright, "Voices Rise Against Hatred," July 13, 1999, *The Bloomington Herald-Times.*

Additionally, news stories described Yoon as a model minority by emphasizing his educational achievements and assimilation into U.S. society.[264] In a news story on July 7, 1999 headlined: "Victim Very Diligent and Very Honest," *The Herald-Times* focused on Yoon's master's degree in economics and his pursuit of a PhD.[265] The news report quoted Korean United Methodist Pastor Byung Chill Hahn who described Yoon as "academically gifted" and also quoted one of Yoon's former university instructors who claimed that his "mathematical skills were excellent," according to *The Bloomington Herald-Times.*[266] On July 6, 1977, *The Bloomington Herald-Times* emphasized Yoon's "eagerness to assimilate into American culture," Lu claims.[267] According to the news report, Yoon was well accepted in the community, "participated in a young adult Bible study group, and held down a part-time job at the library."[268] Hence Yoon was "a sympathetic model and victim minority," Lu explains.[269]

Framed as both a model minority and a victim minority, Lu finds that Yoon's murder received "significant" local news coverage and that journalists emphasized his

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[264] Ibid., 87-88.

[265] Ibid., cited from Joel Eskovitz, "Yoon Was 'Just Beginning to Blossom'," July 7, 1999, *The Bloomington Herald- Times.*

[266] Ibid., cited from Joel Eskovitz, "Yoon Was 'Just Beginning to Blossom'," July 7, 1999, *The Bloomington Herald- Times.*

[267] Ibid., 89, cited from Joel Eskovitz, "In a Short Time Victim had Begun to Establish Himself in Community," *The Bloomington Herald-Times.*

[268] Ibid., 88, cited from Joel Eskovitz, "In a Short Time Victim had Begun to Establish Himself in Community," *The Bloomington Herald-Times.*

[269] Ibid., 89.

newsworthiness by highlighting Yoon's positive characteristics.[270] (A limitation to Lu's study is that national news coverage is not mentioned.) On July 7, 1999, *The Herald-Times* quoted Yoon's father who described his son as "sincere . . .amicable and . . . hospitable to all" and as someone who "sacrificed himself to prevent Benjamin Moore from killing innocent people anymore."[271]

By contrast, Lu finds that journalists did not frame Sharma's murder as the result of racial animus but, rather, as a random mugging.[272] Moreover, journalists did not frame Sharma as a victim minority who consistently faced racial discrimination or as a model minority victim. Unlike Yoon, Sharma had never attended college, and he held "a low-status job," according to Lu.[273] A report in *The Hindustan Times* merely stated that Sharma "worked in a shopping mall in Indiana," according to Lu.[274] Furthermore, Lu finds that news reports limited discussion of Sharma's positive character traits, stating only that "Sharma had never reported of enmity with anyone," according to a report in *The Pravasi Herald*.[275]

Lu attributes the differences in crime coverage and victim coverage of Sharma's and Yoon's murders to "the background [of the victim] and the

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[270] Ibid., 86.

[271] Ibid., 89, cited in Joel Eskovitz, "Yoon was 'Just Beginning to Blossom,'" July 7, 1999, *The Bloomington Herald-Times.*

[272] Ibid., 89.

[273] Ibid.

[274] Ibid., cited in Vishal Joshi, "Kurukshetra Man Shot Dead in US," *The Hindustan Times*, 2011.

[275] Ibid., 89, 97, cited in "Deepak Sharma from India Shot Dead in Indianapolis," *The Pravasi Herald,* 2011.

circumstances of his murder."[276] For example, Sharma was shot late at night outside a nightclub by an unknown criminal. Conversely, Yoon was shot in broad daylight outside the church he attended by a man known for his history of racial violence.[277] While both men were middle-aged Asian immigrants, unlike Sharma, Yoon was academically accomplished and involved in his community.[278]

It is important to acknowledge that Lu's study does not present as convincing an argument for journalists acknowledging violence against Asians as racially motivated as Dong's study because Yoon was shot by a White supremacist. For this reason, journalists were obligated to report on the fact that the victim was of Asian nationality.

2.6 Explaining Weaknesses in Press Conduct Related to News Framing of Violent Crimes and Racial Minority Group Victims

Scholarship has explored four possible reasons why the press has fallen short of recognizing and condemning racism when reporting on violent crimes and crime victims involving African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. These reasons are important to the dissertation because they shed light on diverse possibilities why journalists' initial framing of the Vincent Chin case did not describe Chin's death as an ordinary crime rather than an act of racism.

First, scholars have analyzed how a lack of newsroom diversity can help explain weaknesses in press conduct related to news framing of violent crimes and

[276] Ibid., 87.

[277] Ibid., 86-87.

[278] Ibid.

crime victims. The lack of diversity has made it challenging for journalists to "produce a wider range of perspectives" regarding the potential role of racism in news stories reporting on specific cases of violent crimes against minorities, according to a study by the Pew Research Center.[279] Reports published in 2021 by *The Washington Post, USA Today, The New York Times,* and The Associated Press reveal that African Americans compose only 17.8 percent, 13.6 percent, 10 percent, and 7 percent of all newsroom staff, respectively.[280] The same reports reveal that Latinos compose only 6.5 percent, 10.1 percent, 8 percent, and 8 percent of newsroom staff, respectively.[281] Lastly, these reports uncover that Asian Americans compose a mere 8.8 percent, 7 percent, 14 percent, and 6 percent of newsroom staff, respectively.[282]

Communications scholar Tanya Serisier finds that a shortage of African American representation in mainstream media newsrooms shapes weaknesses in press conduct related to framing violent crimes and crime victims by facilitating journalists' use of stereotypes of Black females as promiscuous.[283] When covering

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[279] "Journalists Give Industry Mixed Reviews on Newsroom Diversity, Lowest Marks in Racial and Ethnic Diversity," Pew Research Center, June 14, 2022.

[280] No Author, "The Washington Post's Workforce Demographics." *The Washington Post*, last modified June 28, 2021, accessed October 2, 2021. Nicole Carroll, "The Backstory: USA Newsroom Now Majority Female, Sees Gains in Black, Hispanic, and Asian American Journalists." *USA Today*, last modified September 1, 2021, accessed October 2, 2021. No Author, "A Call to Action: Building a Culture that Works for All of Us." *The New York Times* Company, accessed December 19, 2021. David Bauder, "Efforts to Track Diversity in Journalism are Lagging." AP News, last modified October 14, 2021, accessed October 2, 2021.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Ibid.

[283] Tanya Serisier, "Sex Crimes and the Media," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology* (January 2017): 10.

violent sexual offenses committed by White men against Black women, White journalists are less likely to frame the rape as an act of White supremacism and more likely to frame the incident as a random crime.[284] Such framing results from stereotypes of African American women as sex objects or prostitutes. These stereotypes make it easier for White journalists to "focus on the actions and responsibility of the victims," and to suggest that the so-called "bad conduct" of Black female victims, including "drinking heavily, flirting, or being in the 'wrong place at the wrong time,' precipitates sexual violence," according to Serisier.[285]

Similarly, scholarship examines how a lack of Asian American journalists in U.S. mainstream newsrooms can lead to weaknesses in press conduct related to framing violence against Asians and Asian victimization. In his analysis of coverage of the Atlanta massage parlor shootings in *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal,* Fox News, CNN, and NPR, comparative culture professor Hiroki Ichinose claims that a shortage of Asian American journalists in newsrooms shaped "patterns of biases" in initial news reporting of the case that "promoted xenophobia" and encouraged the use of a "White racial frame."[286] In initial coverage of the Atlanta shootings, the White racial frame encouraged characterizations of violence against Asian women that either questioned or

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[284] Ibid., 1.

[285] Ibid.

[286] Hiroki Ichinose, "Examining Journalistic Discourses of Asian Americans in the News: A Qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis of News Coverage of the Atlanta Massage Parlor Shootings," Master's Thesis, (2021), 1, 48. The study examines journalism discourse in 42 stories covering the shootings in *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* Fox News, CNN, NPR, and *The Wall Street Journal* from March 16-18, 2021 and finds that stories used a "White racial frame."

downplayed anti-Asian racism by quoting law enforcement officials who claimed that evidence of racial animus was lacking.[287] In such news stories, journalists framed the Asian victims—not as hate crime targets—but as victims of a crime motivated by a killer with an alleged sex addiction.[288]

Conversely, communications scholars H. Denis Wu and Ralph Izard find that the presence of Asian American reporters in newsrooms strengthens press conduct related to framing Asian Americans and leads to news stories representing Asians' "interests and needs."[289] The study incorporates a content analysis of news stories from nine U.S. mainstream newspapers between June and November 2004.[290] Wu and Izard find that the greater the number of Asian American newsroom staff each newspaper employs, the greater the number of news stories covering Asian Americans the newspaper will likely produce.[291] Additionally, the study finds that the context of news coverage of topics related to Asian Americans, including crime and violence targeting Asians, improves.[292] Lastly, the study finds that Asian American reporters are more likely to use Asian Americans as sources in such news stories,

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[287] Ibid., 6.

[288] Ibid.

[289] H. Denis Wu and Ralph Izard, "Representing the Total Community: Relationships between Asian American Staff and Asian American Coverage in Nine U.S. Newspapers," *Journalism and Mass Communications Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2008): 99, 100.

[290] Ibid., 104., The newspapers in this study are as follows: *The Seattle Times, The Los Angeles Times, The San Diego Union-Tribune, The Boston Globe, The New York Times, The Raleigh News and Observer, The Milwaukee News and Sentinel, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch; The Baton Rouge Advocate.*

[291] Ibid., 106.

[292] Ibid.

increasing the variety of minority group perspectives in news reporting.[293]

Non-scholarly analyses explore how a lack of Asian journalists in mainstream media newsrooms can lead to weaknesses in press conduct related to news framing of violent crimes targeting Asians. A non-scholarly analysis by Nielsen, a global leader in data analysis of media audiences, finds that the small number of Asian Americans in broadcast journalism has undercut Asian representation in television programming and the diversity of Asian experiences portrayed on T.V.[294] In 2021, ViacomCBS reported that Asian Americans compose only 7.14 percent of top CBS executives while Caucasians compose 75.83 percent.[295] The result is programming portraying Asians as the stereotypical doctor or lawyer, or, at the other extreme, a victim of the "Wuhan virus."[296] Similar to the stereotypes journalists used to characterize African American victims, anti-Asian stereotypes in news reports cause journalists to overlook the racial hostility Asian Americans face, including racial violence.[297]

A second non-scholarly analysis sheds light on the value of the Asian American journalist's perspective, experience, and cultural expertise to improving press conduct related to framing of violence against Asians and Asian

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[293] Ibid., 110.

[294] "What You See Isn't What You Get: The Role of Media in Anti-Asian Racism," Nielsen, last modified March 17, 2021.

[295] Rebecca Sun, "ViacomCBS Releases 2021 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report," *The Hollywood Reporter Magazine*, last modified December 1, 2021, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/viacomcbs-diversity-report-2021-1235055378/

[296] Ibid.

[297] "What You See Isn't What You Get," Nielsen, March 17, 2021.

victimization. Sun quotes CNN anchor Amara Walker who calls the Asian American perspective "an asset" to cases of violence against Asian Americans, such as Vincent Chin, and asks: "Who's going to report on [racist incidents] if they don't even recognize them?"[298] Importantly, the journalists who documented the Vincent Chin case were Asian American reporters, such as author Helen Zia, one of the founders of the pan-Asian activist group American Citizens for Justice.[299] Today, with few Asian American journalists to report on the Asian American community, Sun warns, some coverage of violence against Asians is "sporadic and scattered" and solely "driven by Asian Americans in the newsroom."[300]

A second possible explanation for weaknesses in press conduct regarding news framing of African American, Latino, and Asian American victims of violent crime is the role of journalists' newsgathering and reporting processes. Scholars Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz posit that such journalistic practices designed to generate and maintain a substantial media market by catering to the interests of specific media audiences can shape whether journalists choose to frame White, African American, and Latino victims of violence sympathetically or using negative stereotypes.[301] Dixon and Linz surveyed all local television news programs aired in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, both of which have majority-White populations. These scholars

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[298] Rebecca Sun, "Asian Americans in Media: You Can't Extricate the Humanity of Yourself from the Journalists." *The Hollywood Reporter Magazine,* last modified April 15, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021.

[299] Ibid.

[300] Ibid.

[301] Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz, 'Race and the Misrepresentation of Victimization on Local Television News," *Communication Research* 27, no. 5 (October 2000): 549.

find that when the majority of media viewers were White, reporters were more likely to either stereotype Black and Latino victims as criminals or ignore them as victims.[302] Furthermore, portrayals of Latino victims were "largely absent" on television news while White murder victims were more likely to be framed sympathetically. [303]

Similar to communication scholars Dixon and Linz's analysis, Stanford political science professor Shanto Iyengar examines how newsroom routines may account for deficiencies in press conduct related to news framing of violent crimes. Iyengar explores how newsroom practices can mask the broader trends that underlie national problems, such as the national problem of violence against African Americans and Asian Americans in the U.S.[304] His study investigates how T.V. news producers use sensationalized detail and episodic frames to focus on individual actors as either victims or perpetrators of political issues. This journalistic approach muddles T.V. producers' understanding of the "wider social forces and problems" at work, according to Iyengar.[305] A much more detailed discussion of framing is included in a future chapter.

A third possible factor explaining weaknesses in press conduct related to news

[302] Ibid., 558, 559.

[303] Ibid., 547.

[304] Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 149. He claims that in an effort to simplify unwanted factual knowledge about a political issue into "commonsense knowledge," TV producers reduce complex political issues to sensationalized discussions of who is responsible for the issues.

[305] Ibid., 1460.

framing of violent crimes and crime victims is a minority group's isolation.[306] For instance, prior to the death of Vincent Chin, the Asian American community appeared to lack knowledge of how to organize politically and stage press conferences and protests for the purpose of drawing media attention to the racism targeting Asians in Chin's hometown of Detroit.[307] One challenge to Asians' political organization was that up until the time of Chin's slaying, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in Detroit and other U.S. cities had never united as a cohesive group of Asian Americans in support of racial injustice. Hence, Asians were "largely mute" on the topic of racism, according to a discussion of the Chin case on the Asian American Journalists Association web site.[308]

Asian ethnic groups were not only isolated from themselves but from White Americans. Hence, Asian Americans were hesitant to reach out to White mainstream journalists, according to Asian studies scholar Helen Zia.[309] As a result, Zia explains, "many people had a hard time believing that Asian Americans experienced any kind of racial prejudice, let alone hate violence."[310] Vincent Chin's slaying would later

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[306] "A Timeline of the Chin Case," Asian American Journalists Association, last modified May 22, 2013, accessed September 30, 2021. AAJA is an organization that advocates for members of the Asian American Pacific Islander community for greater representation in U.S. mainstream media newsrooms and greater inclusion in media, according to its web site.

[307] Ibid.

[308] Ibid.

[309] Zia, *Asian American Dreams,* 79. One chapter in Zia's study discusses jury selection for the second civil rights trial connected to the Vincent Chin case. Zia claims that during this period (late 1980s) Asians were "near invisible" in Cincinnati. To illustrate, she explains that when jurors were asked about their contact with Asians, out of 180 Cincinnati citizens in the jury pool, "only 19 had ever had 'casual contact'" with Asians in the city.

[310] Ibid., 78.

spotlight the difficulty for Asian Americans and other minorities "to be heard and heeded by news media," the AAJA web site claims.[311]

A fourth possible factor explaining weaknesses in press conduct related to news framing of violent crimes and crime victims is the model minority stereotype. Scholars Bok-Lim C. Kim, George T. Endo, Connie Kubo Della-Piana, Bob H. Suzuki, and Qin Zing agree that by the 1970s, many journalists appear to have accepted the myth that Asians in the United States had become a model minority.[312] According to this stereotype, through hard work and perseverance, Asians in America achieved success academically and economically. Moreover, they became well-integrated and well-accepted into America's mainstream society and culture as U.S. citizens.[313]

The extent to which the model minority stereotype fosters weaknesses in press conduct in coverage of violence against Asians and Asian victims has been a topic of much scholarly debate. To illustrate, scholars Frieda Wong and Richard Halgin examine Michael Delucchi and Hien Duc Do's case study comparing the diverse ways students and the administration on one University of California campus reacted to racial incidents involving Asian American and African American students in 1995. Based on Delucchi and Do's study, Wong and Halgin posit that "the perception of

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[311] "A Timeline of the Chin Case," Asian American Journalists Association.

[312] Bok-Lim C. Kim, "Asian Americans: No Model Minority," *Social Work* 18, no. 3 (May 1973): 44-53; George T. Endo and Connie Kubo Della-Piana, "Japanese Americans, Pluralism, and the Model Minority Myth," *Theory into Practice* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 45-51; Bob H. Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the 'Model Minority': Outdoing Whites? Or Media Hype?" *Change* 21, no. 6 (1989): 12-19, quoted in Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the Model Minority," 14.

[313] Qin Zhang, "Asian Americans Beyond the Model Minority Stereotype: The Nerdy and the Left Out," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 1, no. 3 (2010): 24.

Asian Americans as a model minority can cause indifference and even nonaction when Asian Americans are victims of racial intolerance," including violence on college campuses targeting Asians.[314] Wong and Halgin base their hypothesis on Delucchi and Do's claim regarding the "implicit acceptance of the model minority myth" on "more than one University of California campus."[315] As evidence of the acceptance of this myth, Delucchi and Do cite scholar Jayjia Hsia's study of Asian Americans in higher education, which finds that both students and administrators on University of California campuses "have voiced concerns about the alleged over-enrollment of Asians" on these campuses due to higher college entrance exam scores for Asians compared to Caucasian and African American applicants.[316] Students and administrators have claimed that enrollment statistics on California campuses should not reflect the "privileged status" of one racial group, such as Asians, over more "oppressed" racial groups, such as African Americans, according to Hsia's study.[317]

Delucchi and Do's study uncovers different perceptions of racial attacks against Asian and African American students among both students and administrators

[314] Frieda Wong and Richard Halgin, "The Model Minority: Bane or Blessing for Asian Americans?" *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 34 (January 2006): 46. Wong and Halgin cite M. Delucchi and H. D. Do, "The Model Minority Myth and Perceptions of Asian Americans as Victims of Racial Harassment, *College Student Journal, 30, no. 3 (1996),* 411-414, Communications and Mass Media Complete Database.

[315] Delucchi and Do, "The Model Minority Myth," Communications and Mass Media Complete Database.

[316] Jayjia Hsia, *Asian Americans in Higher Education and at Work.* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 1988, cited in Delucchi and Do, "The Model Minority Myth," Communications and Mass Media Complete Database.

[317] Hsia, *Asian Americans in Higher Education and at Work,* 119.

on one University of California campus.[318] For example, the study finds that when members of a White sorority decided to "paint its [Caucasian] members Black and sell them to students as 'slaves' in a 'slave auction'" as a charity fundraiser, students and administrators "clearly and immediately denounced the incident as racist," according to Wong and Halgin's summary of Delucchi and Do's study.[319] Moreover, the campus newspaper ran a story condemning the actions of the sorority students as acts of racial hatred.[320]

Conversely, when acts of hate on the University of California campus involved Asian Americans, students and administrators were "less willing" to condemn the incidents as racist than when acts of hate involved African Americans, according to Delucchi and Do.[321] To illustrate, these scholars explain how a White male student "assaulted and battered" a Vietnamese American student in a dormitory recreation room on campus.[322] According to a doctor's statement that accompanied the report from local law enforcement, the Vietnamese student sustained multiple cuts to his face as well as a swollen eye. His nose was also broken.[323] The police report did not cite any evidence of racism motivating the attack. The White assailant was

[318] Delucchi and Do, "The Model Minority Myth," Communications and Mass Media Complete Database.

[319] Wong and Halgin, "The Model Minority: Bane or Blessing for Asian Americans?," 47.

[320] Ibid.

[321] Delucchi and Do, "The Model Minority Myth," Communications and Mass Media Complete Database.

[322] Ibid.

[323] Ibid.

arrested and charged with assault and battery but was released on bail and returned to campus.[324] The following day, the assailant again "initiat[ed] several acts of harassment" toward the Vietnamese student and threatened to "inflict bodily injuries," according to Delucchi and Do.[325] In response, the Vietnamese student again filed charges with local police and also sought support from the Asian Student Coalition (ASC). The ASC assigned him a fellow student to accompany him throughout each day.[326]

Several Asian students viewed the continued harassment as racially motivated and requested that the university take action to curb further intimidation. However, after reviewing the case and finding no direct evidence of racism, such as racial slurs, "the Dean of Students characterize[d] the episode as an 'unfortunate' act of violence, i.e., the incident was a fight and not racially motivated," according to Delucchi and Do.[327] Hence, the administration concluded that local police should handle the matter. Moreover, after the ASC attempted to persuade campus newspaper editors to publicize the assault as an act of racial animus, the editor refused to run the story, "citing a lack of information" regarding a racial motive, Delucchi and Do explain.[328]

Campus administrators finally acknowledged the role of racism motivating the harassment of the Vietnamese student after several Asian students began receiving

[324] Ibid.

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid.

[327] Ibid.

[328] Ibid.

hate mail from anonymous sources.[329] These letters "denigrated Asians, touted the superiority of Whites, and threatened violence against the students," according to Wong and Halgin's analysis of the study."[330] Only then did the campus newspaper begin publishing stories and letters to the editor that denounced the violence as racially motivated.

Nonetheless, several White students pushed back against the idea the attacks were racist in the Letters to the Editor section of the campus newspaper. These letters attributed the violence—not to racism—but to White students' resentment of Asian economic success.[331] One letter stated that "Asians should not be considered an underprivileged group because they have acquired economic equality with Whites," according to Wong and Halgin.[332] The study concludes that perceptions of Asians as model minorities led to indifference toward Asians as victims of racial intolerance in the absence of direct evidence of a hate crime.

An interesting aspect of the model minority myth is that the stereotype can be a double-edged sword for Asian Americans. While perceptions of Asians as academically and economically prosperous have led journalists to frequently overlook Asian ethnic group members as victims of racism, the stereotype has worked to the benefit of Asian Americans in their interactions with law enforcement. For example, police tend to target Black Americans more frequently than Asian Americans. For

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[329] Ibid.

[330] Wong and Halgin, "The Model Minority: Bane or Blessing for Asian Americans?," 47.

[331] Delucchi and Do, "The Model Minority Myth," Communications and Mass Media Complete Database.

[332] Wong and Halgin, "The Model Minority: Bane or Blessing for Asian Americans?," 47.

example, an Associated Press News investigation of the use of police force against persons of diverse racial groups provides strong evidence that, in cases of lethal restraint, Asians were far less likely to die than Blacks. The study surveyed separate years between 2020 and 2021.[333]

Some scholarship suggests that Black and Hispanic youth are more likely to experience an arrest than young people who are White. Studies have found that this is partially the result of "the differential deployment of law enforcement to areas with higher Black and Hispanic concentrations as well as stereotyped attributions of dangerousness and threat implicitly assigned to these suspects by police before and during encounters."[334] A study drawing on data from a sample of youth from the 2018 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (N = 54,611) uncovered that the greatest number of arrests occurred among Haitian, West Indian, Dominican, and non-Hispanic Black youth.[335]

2.7 "Making Sense of the World": The Power and Structure of Narrative[336]

Scholars Burke, Seargeant, Patterson and Monroe, and Gutsche and Salkin examine the structure of narratives and how individuals, including journalists, use them. Narratives are important to my study because the news narratives journalists chose to

[333] "Lethal Restraint," *The Associated Press*, Advancing the Power of Facts, Accessed May 13, 2024, https://apnews.com/projects/investigation-police-use-of-force/all-cases/#list.

[334] Peter S. Lehmann and Ryan C. Meldrum, "Disparities in Youth Arrests across Racial and Ethnic Subgroups," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 22, no. 1 (2024): 22-45. https://doi.org/10.1177/15412040231186337

[335] Ibid.

[336] Molly Patterson and Kristen Renwick Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 1 (1998): 315.

describe Vincent Chin's murder determined how they framed the violence as either racially motivated or as an ordinary crime unrelated to race. Patterson and Monroe define narratives as "the stories people tell."[337] Narratives consist of several key elements.[338] The first element of a narrative is a familiar plot line—a beginning, middle, and end—with "human beings as characters or actors" who "have a place in the plot, a role in the story," according to Patterson and Monroe.[339] These characters include familiar archetypes—the villain, the hero, the victim, the martyr—who work to achieve specific goals.[340] A narrative's plotline consists of five rhetorical elements: act (what happened), scene (conditions in which it happened), agent (who acted), agency (for whom he or she acted), and purpose (why the act occurred).[341]

The second element of a narrative is a specific problem in society the speaker highlights.[342] The speaker chooses a narrative to magnify a particular problem by emphasizing his view of what is "ordinary and right" according to social norms and by "remarking on" what is the "exception" to the status quo, according to Patterson and Monroe.[343] By highlighting what is normal and what is unacceptable in a particular society, "narrative suggests an interpretation for what the state of the world

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[337] Ibid., 315.

[338] Ibid., 316.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Robert E. Gutsche, Jr. and Erica Salkin, "'It's Better than Blaming a Dead Young Man' Creating Mythical Archetype in Local Coverage of the Mississippi River Drownings," *Journalism* 14(1) 64.

[341] See David Birdsell, "Ronald Reagan on Lebanon and Grenada: Flexibility and Interpretation in the Application of Kenneth Burke's Pentad," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (August 1987): 267-279.

[342] Patterson and Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," 316.

[343] Ibid.

ought to be," these scholars explain.[344] For example, the speaker might select specific words or phrases to draw attention to the issue of racial violence to frame such violence as the exception to the status quo in a democratic society. The narrative might use phrases including *threat to democracy* or *harmful to American ideals of justice and equality.*

The final element of a narrative is the speaker's perspective of the events taking place.[345] By including the speaker's perspective, the narrative sheds light on how the speaker sees himself—both as an individual and in relation to other groups—within a particular culture.[346] By highlighting how persons or groups understand their place in the world, or their place in reality, the narrative becomes "an invaluable tool" for scholars examining how identity plays a role in constructing behavior, Patterson and Monroe explain.[347]

The way a group views its place in reality shapes its behavior "in response to or in anticipation of political events," these scholars say.[348] For example, narrative sheds light on how Asian identity helps construct Asian political organization. At the time of Vincent Chin's murder at the hands of two White men who allegedly shouted racial slurs at Chin, most non-Asians conceived of Asians in America as a model minority. This stereotype encompasses the idea that Asian Americans do not face

[344] Ibid., 321.

[345] Ibid., 316.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Ibid., 315, 316.

[348] Ibid., 315.

racism because they have assimilated into U.S. society, achieving economic and academic success. However, Asian Americans at the time of Chin's murder in 1982 viewed themselves—both individually and in relation to Caucasians and African Americans—as targets of race discrimination deprived of civil rights.[349] Hence, Asian Americans manufactured a narrative contesting the model minority stereotype. Asian activists in the 1980s and today use this narrative during speeches, protests, and rallies organized in opposition to anti-Asian racism.

The narrative of Asian American activists pushing against the model minority stereotype illustrates how narratives can serve as "sites of cultural contestation," according to Patterson and Monroe.[350] Narratives provide a way for individuals and groups to "locate [themselves] within the broader culture," these scholars explain.[351] Hence, a pan-Asian movement contesting Asian Americans' place in society as a model minority challenges the prevailing cultural understanding of Asian Americans—and the dominant narrative of Asian success on which society bases these understandings.[352]

Importantly, as political movements, such as Asian American activist groups, challenge society's dominant narratives, these narratives may undergo several revisions and gradually change over time. One example is when marginalized groups in the U.S. challenge the dominant narrative of the achievability of the American

[349] Zia, *Asian American Dreams,* 46-47.

[350] Patterson and Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," 321.

[351] Ibid.

[352] Ibid.

Dream.[353] Racial minorities who feel "left out of the American way of life" due to experiences with poverty or racial violence might reject the dominant narrative of American exceptionalism and manufacture narratives that "discard the Founding" as "hypocritical" or "deceitful," according to Patterson and Monroe.[354] When racial violence succeeds in destroying "a common identity" and "a common narrative" for Americans, the country's "unity" is "threatened," these scholars say.[355] Evidence of disunity often takes the form of political organization as the racially targeted group uses its narrative to protest against the legitimacy of American equality, diversity, and justice for all.[356] Hence, narratives help individuals and groups understand their place in society and construct how they behave.[357]

In another illustration of the power of narrative in politics, scholar Philip Seargeant examines how Donald Trump's perception of himself as the "political outsider" candidate played a role in constructing his behavior during the 2016 presidential campaign.[358] Trump used his speeches and statements during the campaign to manufacture a narrative that positioned him as an emerging leader, or hero, who battled the political establishment on behalf of America's working class.[359]

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[353] Ibid., 322.

[354] Ibid., 323.

[355] Ibid.

[356] Ibid.

[357] Ibid., 322.

[358] Philip Seargeant, "The Art of Political Storytelling: Why Stories Win Votes in Post-Truth Politics," (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 110, 111.

[359] Ibid., 111.

Like most heroes, Trump overcame multiple obstacles before achieving success.[360] One obstacle emerged in the form of uncovered video footage from 2005 showing Trump giving "crude and sexist detail about his seduction habits," Seargeant explains.[361] Rather than acknowledge the inappropriateness of his behavior, Trump targeted Bill Clinton for his infidelity, "insist[ing] that the expectations of the office of president should change," according to Seargeant.[362] In so doing, Trump's behavior remained "consistent with the [political outsider] character he'd established for himself," Seargeant says.[363]

Trump's perception of himself as the hero opposing the villains in his narrative helps explain his political behavior during his 2020 reelection campaign.[364] The political outsider narrative is linked to the idea that minority groups pose a "threat" to Americans and the American way of life. To illustrate, the villains in Trump's narrative during his campaign were groups that "threaten American prosperity": "foreigners," "liberals," "career politicians," and, during the Covid-19 pandemic, China and Chinese Americans, Seargeant says.[365] By manufacturing a narrative of himself as heroically defending America against Covid-19, Trump's hero

[360] Ibid., 102. According to Seargeant, heroes may "suffer a setback which threatens to jeopardize all they've achieved so far." The hero's setback could result from her negligence, lack of professional experience, weakness, or untruthfulness for which she may "make a vague apology" and/or defend her actions (105).

[361] Ibid., 116.

[362] Ibid., 117.

[363] Ibid.

[364] Ibid., 114.

[365] Ibid.

persona allowed him to rally his base using terms such as "China virus" and "kung flu" to describe the pandemic. Hence, Trump's hero identity allowed him to tap into the emotions of the electorate who viewed him as an "essentially trustworthy" protector against Communist China, according to Seargeant. [366] This perception of trustworthiness helped voters overlook Trump's "lapses of fact" and "misjudgments," Seargeant says.[367]

Journalists centered Trump's campaign around the story he narrated through his words and actions.[368] How journalists incorporated Trump's narrative into their coverage "relied in great part on his interactions with the media and how they reported on this interaction," Seargeant explains. [369] For example, Trump's rhetoric attacking Asian Americans during Covid-19 clashed with the mainstream media's narrative. Mainstream journalists were quick to defend Asian Americans by condemning Trump's statements describing the pandemic as the "China virus" and "kung flu." Journalists reporting for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* deplored Trump's rhetoric, framing his 2020 campaign using words such as *racist, fearmongering,* and *divisive* and frequently quoting Asian Americans who condemned Trump's anti-Asian statements in news stories.

2.8 Changing and Competing News Narratives: Creating Dominant News Frames

[366] Ibid., 113.

[367] Ibid.

[368] Ibid., 111.

[369] Ibid.

Changes in news narratives are important to understanding shifts in news media framing of violent crimes and crime victims and can assist in explaining why one news frame replaces another news frame to become the dominant frame in a news story. Understanding dominant frames is important to understanding how specific frames became prominent over other frames in news coverage of the Vincent Chin case. Scholars James Ettema and Theodore Glasser examine *Washington Post* reporter Loretta Tofani's nine-month investigation of gang rapes and sexual assault victims in the Prince George's County, Maryland Detention Center in 1982. [370] Tofani's early drafts of news reports covering inmate-on-inmate rape constructed the narrative of *villain targets victim*.[371] Yet, Tofani's editors believed that *Washington Post* readers would likely fail to view convicted inmates as victims. Her editors claimed that reports of inmates "who have committed high crimes" and who have been raped in jail do not make "as great a story," according to Ettema and Glasser.[372]

Further investigation into the assaults led to a change in the news narrative and, hence, a change in news framing of the victims from persons who were perpetrators of high crimes to persons who were worthy of compassion and sympathy.[373] After Tofani discovered several cases of assault "in which the victim had been arrested for a relatively minor offense, had not yet been tried, or was later

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[370] James Ettema and Theodore Glasser, "Narrative Form and Moral Force: The Realization of Innocence and Guilt through Investigative Journalism," *Journal of Communication* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 13.

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid.

[373] Ibid.

acquitted," she began writing news stories using the narrative of *a miscarriage of justice by "the system,"* Ettema and Glaser explain. [374] Drawing on this narrative, Tofani was able to "dramatize" the "terrible injustice" the inmates experienced as rape victims and "properly define" the inmates as innocent victims, according to these scholars.[375]

Tofani emphasized the innocent victim frame as the dominant frame in her news reports by characterizing the victims as authoritative news sources. She conducted multiple one-on-one interviews with "twelve carefully selected victims," Ettema and Glasser explain.[376] During the interviews, Tofani "highlight[ed] . . . details of the victim's experience" and juxtaposed the victims' graphic descriptions of their rape and battery with positive characteristics.[377] For example, she described them as having held good-paying jobs prior to their arrest, as having committed only minor offenses, such as shoplifting, and as having been well-liked in their community.[378]

While Tofani also interviewed a few medical personnel who had examined the victims following their assault, her decision to keep the personal experiences of the victims at the center of her reporting allowed her to "dramatize" their innocence and push the innocent victim frame to the forefront of her reporting, according to Ettema

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[374] Ibid.

[375] Ibid., 14.

[376] Ibid.

[377] Ibid.

[378] Ibid.

and Glasser.[379] For example, Tofani dramatized the innocence of one rape victim by characterizing him as someone who had suffered from severe mental illness prior to his arrest and incarceration.[380] According to the *Washington Post* report, the victim was "a 31-year-old air force lieutenant who developed mental problems after leading rescue workers in the gruesome six-day-long job of sifting through [aircraft] wreckage and identifying the dead."[381] This description portrayed the victim as someone with whom the public could sympathize. The innocent victim narrative proved to be newsworthy, arousing outrage from *Washington Post* readers and initiating demands for prison reform.[382]

Scholar Noam Tirosh explores how journalists create dominant news frames from two competing narratives using specific journalistic techniques to bring one narrative to the forefront.[383] When diverse news sources, such as activists and government officials, create diverse narratives regarding people and events in the news, the media can serve as "sites of memory contestation," helping to determine how the public remembers specific events by emphasizing one narrative and its frames over others, Tirosh explains.[384]

Tirosh's study explores the media's characterization of asylum seekers in

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[379] Ibid., 13.

[380] Ibid., 14.

[381] Ibid.

[382] Ibid., 14-15.

[383] Noam Tirosh, "Dominant News Frames, Society's Memory, and the African Asylum Seekers' Protest in Israel," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 4 (April 2018): 405.

[384] Ibid., 408.

Israel between December 1, 2013 and January 30, 2014.[385] Analyzing 180 news articles in four Israeli daily newspapers during this period, the study finds that media framing of asylum seekers escaping their war-torn African countries often challenged asylum seekers' perception of themselves as refugees. Israeli media "maintained the power to shape and construct the debate [over whether asylum seekers' were refugees] in ways that did not always support the refugees' claims," according to Tirosh.[386] Hence, Tirosh finds that the dominant frame in the four newspapers under study was that of asylum seekers as "migrants" and "infiltrators," not as refugees.[387] Israeli media created this dominant interpretation by privileging the viewpoints of official Israeli state actors over the viewpoints and experiences of asylum seekers using different journalistic techniques, explained below.[388]

The Israeli government denied the idea that asylum seekers were, in fact, refugees, creating tension between these individuals and official state actors.[389] Many times, the Israeli government merely granted asylum seekers "collective protection," Tirosh explains.[390] Such protection encompassed confining refugees to detention camps that did not include adequate living conditions.[391] In an act of civil

[385] Ibid.

[386] Ibid., 405.

[387] Ibid., 417.

[388] Ibid., 411.

[389] Ibid., 406.

[390] Ibid.

[391] Ibid., 406, 407.

disobedience and in protest of their living conditions, asylum seekers walked to the Israeli city of Beer Sheva from their detention center in Holot. After asylum seekers were arrested and returned to their camp, they began a "Freedom March" to Jerusalem where they were again arrested and returned to their detention center.[392] In response, protests began across Israel.

During the protests, the Israeli state government and asylum seekers and refugee rights activists created two competing narratives aligned with their inverse perspectives regarding asylum seekers' status in Israel.[393] Asylum seekers and refugee rights activists drew on the Nazi Holocaust narrative in support of improving living conditions for asylum seekers as opposed to detaining them in camps with inadequate food, shelter, and medical care. Conversely, the Israeli state government advocated for "the importance of maintaining a Jewish majority in Israel (thus negating the presence of asylum seekers), as it is the only safe haven for Jews from all over the world," as Tirosh explains.[394]

Israeli journalists used three techniques to privilege the narrative of Israeli state government officials over the narrative of asylum seekers. In so doing, journalists created the dominant frame of asylum seekers as non-refugees.[395] First, newspapers negated asylum seekers as news sources by burying their statements on the inside pages of newspapers. Asylum seekers' statements told their story of having

[392] Ibid., 407.

[393] Ibid., 408.

[394] Ibid.

[395] Ibid., 414.

"survived genocide and escaped to Israel due to the risks they faced in their home countries," according to Tirosh.[396] However, these narratives were always relegated to the inside pages of the newspapers. According to Tirosh: "There was not even one instance in which the term 'refugees' appeared on the newspapers' front pages, and it appeared only in one article's headline."[397] By contrast, journalists nearly always placed the statements of Israeli state government agents and civil society actors on the front page and in headlines.[398] These statements often characterized asylum seekers as "illegal labor infiltrators who shall be brought to justice,"[399] as "existential threats,"[400] and as "economic migrants" who had "illegally infiltrated the Israeli border," according to Tirosh.[401] Israeli state government narratives proved insufficient for recognizing asylum seekers as refugees.

The second technique Israeli newspapers used to create the dominant frame of asylum seekers as non-refugees was "preliminary mediation," Tirosh finds.[402] Tirosh defines this term as "the moment in which the newspapers introduce the [source] quotations with preliminary information about the quoted [source]. Preliminary mediation can highlight, alter, or even dismiss the narratives conveyed by quoted

[396] Ibid., 417.

[397] Ibid., 414.

[398] Ibid., 413.

[399] Ibid., Prime Minister Netanyahu is quoted on the first page of *Israel Hayom*, January 7, 2014.

[400] Ibid., 416.

[401] Ibid., 417.

[402] Ibid., 415.

agents."[403] In so doing, preliminary mediation can downplay the importance of asylum seekers as news sources. For example, on December 22, 2013, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* introduced Nazer, an asylum seeker, as a "migrant from Sudan," before quoting him as stating: "I'm not here [to earn money]. I am here because I am a refugee."[404] In this instance, the introduction to the quote discredits Nazer's claim to refugee status.

Lastly, Israeli newspapers created the dominant frame of asylum seekers as non-refugees by "echoing the existential threat" narrative of Israeli state government agents that characterized asylum seekers as dangerous infiltrators, according to Tirosh.[405] When journalists echoed the threat narrative, they gave it "much more dominance" over the asylum seekers' narrative of refugees fleeing persecution, Tirosh explains.[406] For example, on January 6, 2014, the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Acharonot* dedicated "half of its front page" to a photo of Rabin Square in Tel-Aviv, which was "teeming with protesting refugees," according to the article. The article's headline read: "Infiltrators Occupied Rabin Square," according to Tirosh.[407] In response to the unusually large presence of asylum seekers in Rabin Square, the article's subtitle magnified the alleged threat, reading: "Tens of thousands of Africans sprang out in the boulevards, filled the square, and demanded refugee rights,"

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[403] Ibid.

[404] Ibid., 416., quoted from *Haaretz*, December 22, 2013.

[405] Ibid.

[406] Ibid.

[407] Ibid., cited from "Infiltrators Occupy Rabin Square," *Yediot Acharonot*, January 6, 2014.

according to the news story.[408] By privileging the narrative of Israeli state actors over that of asylum seekers in news coverage of the protests, Israeli newspapers created a dominant frame that made "a statement about what should be considered, in the future, as having mattered today," Tirosh explains.[409]

The aforementioned scholarship helps inform the dissertation's examination of changes in news narratives and their frames in coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case over time. For example, advocacy group leaders, prosecuting attorneys, and Chin's loved ones helped construct the narrative of Chin as the innocent victim of a racially motivated crime. Conversely, defense attorneys and some judges pushed the narrative that Chin was the unfortunate victim of a barroom brawl that he initiated and that had no connection to racial animus targeting Asians. This study examines how journalists dealt with these competing narratives by analyzing the types of news frames journalists used, how journalists incorporated statements from advocacy group leaders and other sources when manufacturing specific frames, and how frequently journalists used specific frames over time in coverage of the Chin case.

2.9 How Crime Victims Become Media Symbols

Scholarship has analyzed how journalists characterize violent crime victims as symbols. This section defines news symbols, explains why they are powerful, and discusses the process whereby news figures become symbols over time. This

[408] Ibid.

[409] Ibid., 409., cited from Carolyn Kitch, "Placing Journalism Inside Memory and Memory Studies," *Memory Studies*, 1, no. 3 (2008): 311-312.

scholarship is important to the dissertation because it situates my argument within the narrative that Vincent Chin gradually became a news symbol of anti-Asian violence.

Scholars W. Lance Bennett and Regina Lawrence define a news symbol as a person in a news report that "lives on beyond" his original story as journalists re-introduce him into subsequent news stories in the months, years, and decades following the original event.[410] For example, some journalists re-introduced the story of George Floyd's murder in news reports covering new cases of anti-Black violence years following Floyd's death.[411] By re-introducing news symbols into subsequent news stories, journalists can use them "to recount stories" about broader social problems, such as the ongoing issue of anti-Black racism in America, Bennett and Lawrence explain.[412]

News symbols are powerful because they resonate with the values of media audiences, such as racial justice and "triumph over adversity," according to Bennett and Lawrence. [413] In so doing, symbols "generate great audience interest," these scholars explain.[414] By capturing audience interest, symbols become newsworthy.

The transformation of a news figure into a symbol happens gradually over

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[410] W. Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 20, 24.

[411] George Floyd was an African American man who was murdered on May 25, 2020, when Derek Chauvin, a police officer in Minneapolis, knelt on Floyd's neck for over nine minutes. Floyd eventually died of a lack of oxygen. Following the murder, advocacy groups protested against police brutality nationwide and globally. Activists rallied around Floyd's last words, "I can't breathe."

[412] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 25.

[413] Ibid., 22.

[414] Ibid.

time and involves three key steps.[415] First, journalists begin to pay attention to the news figure and his or her story as a "decisive moment," according to Bennett and Lawrence.[416] A decisive moment is an event that "pushes" broader social issues, such as racial hatred toward a specific group, "to the forefront of a news agenda" because of the "drama" surrounding the event, these scholars explain.[417] For example, drama might take the form of extreme violence against an Asian American crime victim, racial slurs shouted by the victim's killers, or injustice in the legal system, such as a probation sentence for the perpetrators. Such drama helps push the issue of anti-Asian racism to the forefront in news coverage. Additionally, advocacy group press conferences and protests frequently play a role in helping draw journalists' attention to the event as a decisive moment that represents a serious social problem.[418] The drama surrounding the event often causes the event to "spill outside the bounds of news" sometimes leading the news figure to become the subject of film documentaries, movies, books, screenplays, and artwork, Bennett and Lawrence claim.[419]

Second, the news figure's representations in popular culture draw massive media audience attention to the event, which usually includes national attention.[420] In

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[415] Ibid., 26.

[416] Ibid., 25., cited from Susan Moeller, *Shooting War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 15. Moeller cites renowned photographer Henri Cartier Bresson who coins the term "decisive moment" to describe an event that highlights broader social problems.

[417] Ibid., 26.

[418] Ibid.

[419] Ibid.

[420] Ibid.

national newspapers, journalists maintain audience interest by "publicizing different points of view" and various "reactions" to the event to keep the story alive, according to Bennett and Lawrence.[421] For example, national television producers might invite the family members of an Asian American murder victim on a talk show to intrigue the public by evoking emotion, memories, and reactions from the victim's loved ones.[422] Advocacy groups can also help sustain public attention to the event as they use the news figure "to publicize issues of concern to them" during rallies, protests, and public commemorations of the anniversary of the victim's death, Bennett and Lawrence explain.[423]

Third, increasing public interest combined with popular culture representations of the news figure enable the figure to "stand alone" as a symbol of a broader social problem when journalists re-introduce his story into subsequent news contexts, according to Bennett and Lawrence.[424] For example, by re-introducing the name "George Floyd" into a news report covering a new case of violence against Black Americans that took place two years after Floyd's death, journalists link "otherwise isolated events" under the broad theme of anti-Black racism, these scholars explain.[425] Sometimes, when journalists re-introduce news symbols in later news stories, the symbols become "historical markers" that highlight a turning point

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[421] Ibid.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Ibid.

[424] Ibid.

[425] Ibid.

in a nation's history, according to Bennett and Lawrence.[426] For example, some journalists have referred to Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in news stories covering African American civil rights issues as a turning point in the fight for civil rights.[427]

The murder case of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till provides a case study of the transformation of a news figure to a symbol.[428] Till was an African American teenager who was brutally murdered in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly making flirtatious advances toward a Caucasian woman in a grocery store. While visiting from Chicago, Till stayed with relatives for two weeks during his summer vacation in the small town of Money. On the evening of August 24, 1955, Till went into a local shop to buy a pack of bubblegum.[429] A small group of his friends waited outside. Till's friends had allegedly dared him to flirt with the wife of the store owner, twenty-one-year-old Carolyn Bryant, who stood behind the checkout counter. After Till paid for his gum, he allegedly whistled at Bryant and called her "baby."[430]

On the night of August 28, 1955, Carolyn Bryant's husband, Roy Bryant, and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, kidnapped Till from the home of his great uncle, Moses

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[426] Ibid., 22.

[427] Lentz, Richard, Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 338.

[428] Emmitt Till was abducted, tortured, and lynched on August 24, 1955, for allegedly making flirtatious advances toward a White woman in a grocery store in Mississippi. His mother insisted the casket remain open to show the gruesome nature of the crime and the horrors of anti-Black racism and White supremacy. The crime became a rallying point for African American civil rights.

[429] Jaqueline Goldsby, "The High and Low Tech of It: The Meaning of Lynching and the Death of Emmett Till," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9, no.2 (Fall 1996): 249.

[430] Ibid., 245-282.

Wright. Accounts differ as to what transpired next. According to Carolyn Bryant's original court testimony at an evidentiary hearing in September 1955, she testified under oath that she never saw Till again after August 24, 1955, when he whistled at her as he left her store. In 2022, the discovery of an unserved warrant for Bryant and the release of her sealed draft memoir revealed that, in 2005, she changed her story of the events that had transpired on the night Till was murdered. In 2005, Bryant told the FBI her husband brought Emmett to her home late on the night of August 28th after he had removed Till from his great uncle's house. She explained to the FBI that she told her husband she could not identify Till that night. Her draft memoir claimed that Till then looked at her, smiled, and said: "Yes, it was me."[431]

Carolyn Bryant's husband then drove Till to the banks of the Tallahatchie River where Bryant and Milam tortured and then shot Till in the head. The two men weighted Till's lifeless body with a cotton gin fan and threw him into the river. When Till's body unexpectedly floated to the surface three days later, the face was nearly unrecognizable. The body was shipped in a wooden box to Till's Chicago residence where his mother, Mamie Bradley, insisted that the casket remain open at the funeral. She claimed: "Let the people see what I've seen," according to Harold and DeLuca.[432] Local journalists and photographers flocked to Till's funeral.

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[431] Justin Gamble, "A Timeline of Emmett Tilll's Accuser's Changing Stories," CNN.com, July 26, 2022, https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/26/us/timeline-emmett-till-accuser-changing-stories-reaj/index.html.

[432] Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8, no. 2 (2005): 275, quoted from Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime that Changed America* (New York: Random House, 2003).

Journalists helped transform the news photograph of the open casket bearing Till's lynched and mutilated body into a symbol of the African American civil rights movement.[433] The Till murder case illustrates the three-step process by which a news figure becomes a symbol of a widespread serious problem, such as racial injustice.

First, the murder case encompasses several dramatic elements characteristic of a decisive moment in time. The first dramatic element in the Till case that helped characterize it as a decisive moment was the heinous nature of the crime.[434] Till's body told the story of how his killers had tortured him. Till's tongue appeared "as if it had been choked out of his mouth, and his nose looked as if it "had been chopped, maybe with a meat cleaver," as Harold and DeLuca explain.[435] One eye looked as if it had been "plucked out," according to these scholars.[436]

The extremely violent images illustrating Till's murder helped push the broader social issue of racial inequality between Whites and African Americans to the forefront in news coverage.[437] For example, in 1955, the image of Till's body appeared in the Black press, including *Jet, The Chicago Defender, The Pittsburgh Courier, The New York Amsterdam News, The St. Louis-Argus,* and *Crisis*.[438] Some of these newspapers juxtaposed the image of Till's body alongside a different

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[433] Harold and DeLuca, "Behold the Corpse," 263.

[434] Ibid., 263-264.

[435] Harold and DeLuca, "Behold the Corpse," 263-264, cited from Mobley and Christopher Benson, *Death of Innocence,* 135-136.

[436] Ibid., 264.

[437] Ibid., 265.

[438] Ibid., 273.

photograph of Till taken just months earlier looking happy "in his Christmas suit," Harold and DeLuca explain.[439] According to these scholars, "the photographic image of Emmett Till's corpse put a shocking and monstrous face on the most brutal extremes of American racial injustice" and "articulated the ineffable qualities of American racism.[440]

Another dramatic element of the Till murder case that helped characterize it as a decisive moment was the racial injustice brought by the Mississippi legal system. After standing trial, Till's two White killers, Bryant and Milam, were acquitted by an all-White jury after approximately one hour of deliberations.[441] News text and photographs reporting on the trial in the Black press "became a crucial visual vocabulary" for the racism ingrained in the Mississippi justice system, Harold and DeLuca explain.[442] For example, some newspapers circulated photographs of Till's uncle pointing his finger at his nephew's killers from the witness stand. The photo caption quoted him as claiming: "Dar he."[443] The Black press also circulated images of the "segregated Mississippi courtroom" in which members of the African American community, including journalists, were "herded into an unventilated corner in the sweltering summer heat," as Harold and DeLuca explain.[444]

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[439] Ibid., 265.

[440] Ibid.

[441] Ibid., 264.

[442] Ibid., 265.

[443] Ibid.

[444] Ibid.

The dramatic elements of the Till murder case led the Black community to view the case as "a call to action" and also helped inspire several reproductions of the case in popular culture, according to Harold and DeLuca.[445] To illustrate, advocacy groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as African American leaders including Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out on behalf of justice for Emmett Till.[446] Additionally, the Till murder case became the subject of two books that reprinted the death photo and a 2003 PBS documentary that did the same.[447]

The second step in the process by which the press helped transform Till into a symbol of the African American civil rights movement was the attention the national press paid to the Till murder case, including press publication of the views of Black advocacy groups regarding the case. For example, *The New York Times* covered the trial of Till's killers in depth from September 3, 1955, the day Till's body was displayed in the open casket, until the conclusion of the trial on November 10 of the same year. In order to keep the story of Till's murder alive in the press and in the public mind, some newspapers published the views of Black advocacy groups, such as NAACP leaders.[448] One of these newspapers, *The Montgomery Advertiser*, gave

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[445] Ibid., 273.

[446] Ibid.

[447] Ibid., 265-266, 273. "In 2003, PBS aired the documentary, *The Murder of Emmett Till*, as part of its American Experience series, and Random House published Mamie Till-Mobley's *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* . . . . These projects came on the heels of the powerful book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, a collection of photographs that continues to tour U.S. museums and galleries," according to scholars Harold and Deluca (266).

[448] Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Resurrecting Emmett Till: The Catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 180.

Till's story "prominent display" in several front-page stories, according to scholar Clenora Hudson-Weems.[449] Three months later, Montgomery's Black population boycotted their municipal bus system.[450] The event drew widespread public attention to racial injustice against Black Americans.

The third step by which journalists transformed Till into a news symbol of the Black Civil Rights Movement involved journalists reintroducing the story of Till's murder into subsequent news stories covering specific cases of anti-Black racism. For example, forty years following Till's death in 1995, *The Los Angeles Times* and other regional newspapers published articles re-introducing Till's murder in news reports covering the broader issue of anti-Black racism in California.[451] For example, on August 27, 1995, *The Los Angeles Times* published an Associated Press article that characterized the Till case as having initiated the Civil Rights Movement: "Emmett's name lived on, invoked by Martin Luther King, Jr. and others as they began the civil rights in earnest."[452] The press revived the image of Till's body again in 2004 when CNN and *USA Today* covered the case.

2.10 Scholarship Examining News Coverage of the Vincent Chin Case

Although the murder of Vincent Chin drew national and long-lasting attention, there has been very little scholarly analysis of news coverage of the murder and its

[449] Ibid.

[450] Ibid.

[451] Ibid., 187.

[452] Ibid.

aftermath. The scholarship discussed in this section contains gaps that my dissertation remedies. The late scholar Andrew Chen's conference paper conducts a well-organized analysis of the media's role in helping and harming Vincent Chin and the Asian American community within the context of the model of media-ethno violence. This model explains how personal and environmental factors facilitate a relationship between the media's depiction of Asian Americans and public aggression toward them.[453] Similar to my dissertation analysis, Chen examines the Vincent Chin case within the broader context of violence against Asians. However, unlike my study, Chen's main focus is the "direct causal relationship between mass media and aggressive behavior" targeting Asian Americans, as Chen explains.[454] Importantly, Chen conducts his study in the absence of any analysis of media framing of the

[453] Andrew Chen, "Who Killed Vincent Chin? A Case Study of Media Ethno-Violence" (paper presented at the International Conference on Violence in the Media, St. John's University, Queens, New York, 3 October 1994). Model: The model of media ethno-violence assesses the personal and environmental factors that place persons and ethnic group members at risk for perpetrating violence or becoming victims of violence. The model assumes that the mass media has an influence on these factors. Chen draws on the model to subdivide his analysis into four sections. Section One examines the media's historic use of negative stereotypes concerning Asian Americans and the omission and trivialization of Asian Americans in media that influenced public perception of this minority; Section Two explores media scapegoating of Japanese Americans during the 1980s, the U.S.-Japan trade wars, and how these circumstances helped influence Ronald Ebens to kill Vincent Chin; Section Three analyzes the media's response to Vincent Chin's murder (the media demanded justice) and the effect of this response on the two civil suits connected to the case (united Asian Americans); Section Four explores the impact of the Vincent Chin case on the media (The case gave the media a more sensitive attitude toward Asian Americans) and the impact of the case on the Asian American community (The case gave Asian Americans a new sense of identity and pushed them into greater ethnic group collaboration against racism.).

Media Coverage: Chen lists a handful of news headlines reporting on Asians in the U.S. from newspapers and magazines. Only 7 of these report on the Chin case. The study includes only one excerpt from one news report (*The Detroit Free Press*) with no in-depth analysis of coverage. Chen's study lists media headlines from *Time Magazine, Newsweek, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post,* The Associated Press, and *the Detroit Free Press*. The methodology includes interviews with 8 Asian American leaders (no journalists) and a review of the 1988 documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* Interview responses are bulleted and include one-sentence summaries without quoting sources.

[454] Ibid., 2.

Vincent Chin case, which my dissertation explores in detail.

Ethnic Studies professor Yen Lee Espiritu's book chapter extends the study of the Vincent Chin murder case by analyzing two primary interpretations of his murder—a racial killing and a barroom brawl—by examining the diverse points of view of the main actors in the case concerning the killers' motive.[455] Espiritu examines the discourses of attorneys, judges, Ronald Ebens, and Michael Nitz but foregrounds Asian Americans' statements in reaction to the crime. Espiritu provides a thoroughly researched account of the Asian American community's understanding of the crime as part of a nationwide trend of anti-Asian violence and attributes this perception to Asians' experiences with racism in the U.S. Espiritu's study is not a content analysis of news frames over time. Rather, the study incorporates only a few excerpts from local newspaper reports on the case. Moreover, Espiritu draws on news reports not for their own significance but as evidence for how Asian Americans wished to publicize the "miscarriage of justice" after the Michigan court sentence, according to Espiritu.[456]

One chapter in Asian Studies author Helen Zia's book-length study of Asian Americans in the U.S. briefly touches on media coverage of the Vincent Chin case. However, similar to Espiritu's study, news coverage of the case is relegated to the sidelines in Zia's work. Zia provides an account of her role as a journalist-turned-activist during the Vincent Chin case and her work as a journalist for American

[455] Yen Lee Espiritu, "Racial Killing or Barroom Brawl? Multiple Explanations of the Killing of Vincent Chin," in *Riots and Pogroms*, ed. Paul R. Brass (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 221-234.

[456] Ibid., 222.

Citizens for Justice, the pan-Asian organization formed on behalf of justice for Vincent Chin. Throughout her chapter, she intersperses local television reports covering the murder case as well as headlines and excerpts from five articles reporting on the case in *The Detroit Free Press* and *The Detroit News.* The chapter does not include media framing analysis of how coverage changed over time.[457]

The dissertation fills the gaps in scholarship by exploring key aspects of news coverage of the Vincent Chin case in local, regional, and national news publications. First, my research analyzes the specific frames journalists used to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood during the period of the murder case from 1982-1987. The dissertation then explores how these frames and their frequencies changed over time in the decades following the case. Furthermore, the present study investigates how journalists repeatedly characterized Chin as a news symbol of the persistent, widespread problem of anti-Asian violence in America in news coverage during President Trump's and President Biden's administrations. Lastly, the dissertation examines how and to what extent the specific frames used in news stories covering Chin's murder and his victimization later reappeared in coverage of specific cases of violence against Asians that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. The following chapter will discuss the theory that contextualizes my analysis of news framing of the Chin murder case.

[457] Zia, *Asian American Dreams*., 55-81.

Chapter 3: Mass Communications Theory

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 addresses specific mass communication theories, which I outline below, and explains how they inform this study. Specifically, the chapter defines and examines the usefulness of framing theory and worthy victim theory in explaining how journalists characterize violent crimes against Asians in the United States and the victims of such crimes. First, the chapter explains framing theory's effectiveness in guiding the creation of eight specific categories of news frames characterizing the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's death (a random crime or a hate crime) and his victimhood (a blameworthy victim or a victim of racial injustice) during specific time periods. Furthermore, the chapter clarifies how framing theory, when combined with a quantitative content analysis of news frames, sheds light on similar patterns between framing of the Chin case and framing of specific cases of violent crime against Asian Americans during Covid-19 in the U.S. Framing theory also uncovers how dominant frames in news stories change as news narratives shift. In addition, this chapter will explore the importance of worthy victim theory to understanding why journalists characterize some racial minority group victims as targets of racial injustice while depicting others as victims of non-racial crimes. Worthy victim theory explains why racial minorities who are framed as hate crime victims are frequently framed as worthy of racial justice.

3.2 Framing Theory

The basic underlying premise of framing theory, first introduced by Erving Goffman as frame analysis,[458] states that news media "focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning," according to a website exploring mass communication theory.[459] Sociologist William A. Gamson offers a similar definition of framing as "a central, organizing principle or idea" by which journalists "make sense of relevant events, suggesting to audiences what is at issue."[460] On the most basic level, framing theory suggests that the way a news story presents a person, issue, idea, or event to an audience, known as the frame, influences how media audiences process that information. In other words, "frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure" the meaning of a news story, as explained by the mass communication theory web site.[461]

Different scholars have examined the way framing theory provides an understanding of how journalists create a specific interpretation, or meaning, of a person, event, or issue from a communicated text, such as a news report. Communications scholar Robert Entman explains that journalists create meaning by "selecting some aspects of a [news story] and making them more salient" so as to

[458] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986).

[459] "Framing Theory," Mass Communication Theory: From Theory to Practical Application, accessed on October 7, 2022.

[460] William A. Gamson, and Kathrn E. Lasch, "The Political Culture of Social Welfare Policy," in *Evaluating the Welfare State: Social and Political Perspectives.* Ed. Spiro E. Shimon & Ephraim Yutchtman-Yaar (San Diego: San Diego Academic Press, 1983), 16.

[461] "Framing Theory," Mass Communication Theory.

highlight a particular problem, identify its source, evaluate its perceived causes and effects, and offer potential solutions.[462] Sometimes, journalists will create a specific interpretation by "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable" using word repetition or by placing words and phrases in headlines using bold print or large font, Entman explains.[463] Journalists may also incorporate quotes from particular sources early on and extensively throughout a news story if the source agrees with the journalists' position on an issue.[464] Additionally, journalists may use selective description by omitting sources or quoting particular sources sparsely if the person holds a contrary viewpoint to that of the journalist. "Omissions [in a news story] may be as critical as the inclusions" when creating a particular news frame, Entman claims.[465]

This dissertation uses framing theory to accomplish three objectives. First, the present study applies framing theory to gain a fuller understanding of how journalists created specific frames to characterize violent crimes against Asians in the U.S. and the Asian victims of such crimes. More specifically, the study uses framing theory to assess the extent to which news media, during specific time periods, characterized violent crimes against Asians as racially motivated crimes rather than as mere random crimes that had no basis in racism. For example, a front-page news story with an

[462] Robert M. Entman, "Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1993): 52.

[463] Ibid.

[464] Ibid.

[465] Ibid., 54.

opening sentence reading: "An Asian mother of three was slain in an act of racial hatred" demonstrates that the journalist is framing the violence as a racially motivated crime and that the journalist is framing the Asian victim as a hate crime victim.

Second, the dissertation applies framing theory to gain a fuller understanding of how one news frame can replace another news frame and become the dominant frame when the underlying news narrative changes. As discussed in the dissertation's review of scholarship in Chapter 2, journalistic narratives act as plot lines that journalists use to tell contemporary stories. News narratives demonstrate how journalists see, understand, and make sense of the world using these plot lines.[466] Plot lines in narratives consist of a beginning, middle, and end, a story arc (conflict, suspense, resolution), and characters such as a villain, a victim, and a hero who faces obstacles and eventually overcomes them.[467] Some examples of news narratives include *crime and punishment, captivity and rescue,* and *hard work and reward.*

News narratives are strongly linked to news frames because the narrative a journalist chooses based on his interpretation of an issue or event determines the frames he uses.[468] How journalists select specific news narratives and choose frames to fit these narratives "relies in great part" on news subjects' "interaction with the media and how [journalists] report on this interaction," according to scholar Philip

[466] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (New York: Random House, 1957), *Attitudes Toward History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950).

[467] Philip Seargeant, "The Art of Political Storytelling: Why Stories Win Votes in Post-Truth Politics," (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 103-106.

[468] Ibid.

Seargeant.[469] For example, in news coverage of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, the mainstream media disagreed with Trump's narrative describing Latino immigrants as murderers and rapists. Journalists were quick to defend these immigrants by constructing a narrative characterizing Trump as a populist who uses racial hatred and division to curry favor with his base.[470]

Changes in news narratives can cause one news frame to replace another frame in coverage of violent crimes and crime victims.[471] Scholars James Ettema and Theodore Glasser examine *Washington Post* reporter Loretta Tofani's Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism investigating the gang rapes of Prince George's County Detention Center inmates in 1982. Initially, Tofani's editors at *The Post* were not in favor of the story idea because they believed media audiences would have difficulty viewing inmates convicted of armed robbery and murder as worthy of compassion and justice.[472] However, after new evidence surfaced that some assaulted inmates were juveniles who were jailed because of drunk driving or shoplifting and could not afford bond, she changed her news narrative from *villain targets victim* to *a miscarriage of justice by the system.*[473] Tofani changed the narrative by "properly defining" the rape victims by "dramatizing" their innocence, according to Ettema and

[469] Ibid., 111.

[470] Ibid.

[471] James Ettema and Theodore Glasser, "Narrative Form and Moral Force: The Realization of Innocence and Guilt through Investigative Journalism," *Journal of Communication* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 8-26.

[472] Ibid., 13.

[473] Ibid.,13-14.

Glasser.[474] Tofani interviewed "twelve carefully selected victims in brief case studies," these scholars explain.[475] She used two strategies meant to stir public outrage: "highlighting cruelly ironic details of the victim's experience, and privileging the victim's own account of that experience," according to these scholars.[476] As the news narrative changed, news framing of the inmates shifted from hardened criminals convicted of high crimes to juveniles charged with minor offenses who lacked protection in the detention center.[477] The newsworthiness of this narrative drew outrage from the public, prompting the public to demand reforms to the jail system.[478]

News frames that replace other news frames can become dominant frames when the frame is newsworthy and draws attention and a response from media audiences.[479] Dominant frames are usually introduced near the beginning of a news report and appear more often than other news frames in an article or in a series of news stories reporting on the same issue.[480] One example of news frames that frequently become dominant frames in news stories covering violent crimes are frames that characterize crimes as racially motivated or as representing broader,

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[474] Ibid., 14.

[475] Ibid.

[476] Ibid.

[477] Ibid., 14-15.

[478] Ibid., 13.

[479] Noam Tirosh, "Dominant News Frames, Society's Memory, and the African Asylum Seekers' Protest in Israel," *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 4 (April 2018): 405.

[480] Ibid.

national problems of racial hatred. Because racial hatred is a problem that the public wishes to solve, frames defining issues as racial issues are more likely to attract public attention and initiate a public response than frames defining an issue as non-racial. Similarly, news frames that portray persons as victims of injustice often become dominant frames because such victims are likely to garner sympathy from media audiences.[481]

Sometimes, journalists highlight a frame as the dominant representation of an issue by privileging specific news sources, especially sources who are experts on a given issue, whose viewpoints support the dominant frame.[482] For example, journalists may privilege the statements of prosecuting attorneys in a news story in which the dominant frame characterizes the perpetrator as guilty of committing a violent crime. Authoritative voices increase the newsworthiness and credibility of the frame.[483]

Understanding changes in news narratives and news frames is important to comprehending shifts in news framing of violent crimes targeting Asian Americans and framing of Asian Americans as victims of such crimes. For instance, journalists reporting on the beating death of an Asian American man by two White men in a bar may decide to use the narrative of *man slain in drunken brawl at strip club.* Journalists may choose this narrative based on interviews with local law enforcement investigating the murder who claim that there existed insufficient evidence for a hate

[481] Ibid.

[482] Matt Carlson, "Dueling, Dancing, or Dominating? Journalists and Their Sources," *Sociology Compass* 3, no.4 (2009): 526-542.

[483] Ibid.

crime. Using the *drunken brawl* narrative, journalists would likely frame the crime as a random local crime in a violent city and frame the Asian American victim as blameworthy because he chose to drink excessively .and challenge the two men to fight. As consequence, journalists and their audiences would likely place little importance on the crime or the victim.

However, as noted in the research for this dissertation, journalists do not make decisions about news framing in a vacuum. Framing decisions are affected not only by the events themselves (ie. who is arrested for a violent crime, witness testimony, federal civil rights cases, judicial verdicts) but by competing voices. For example, if Asian American advocacy group leaders begin organizing press conferences to draw attention to the role of racism motivating the violence, journalists would be more likely to change the news narrative to a hate crime narrative and frame the Asian American as a victim of racial injustice. Moreover, by privileging the voices of Asian American community leaders and activists as news sources, journalists could position the hate crime frame as the dominant frame in news coverage of the crime. Media audiences would then be more likely to place substantial importance on the crime and the victim.

Third, when used with a content analysis of news frames, framing theory can help uncover similar patterns that may exist between framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood from 1982-1987 and framing of pandemic-related violence against Asians and the Asian victims from 2020-2022. For example, similar to news framing of the Chin case, news articles covering the Atlanta Spa shootings in March 2021 might privilege the statements of Asian American advocacy group

leaders to frame the murders as racially motivated crimes and frame the victims as hate crime victims. Similar framing patterns in coverage of the Chin case and the Atlanta shootings could serve as some evidence that the Chin case helped draw journalists' attention to anti-Asian racism as a persistent, widespread problem in the U.S., especially if news stories covering the Atlanta shootings mention the Chin murder case.

In order to examine how journalists characterized the criminal motive for violent crimes against Asian Americans, the dissertation uses framing theory to create categories of news frames. These frames derive from my analysis of the frames journalists used in their coverage of the crime committed against Vincent Chin. The frames, described in greater detail in the Methods section in Chapter 5, are as follows: No Racism, Sources Allege Racism, and Journalists Assert Racism. These are three of a total of eight frames, described in detail below, used in this study.

News articles that use the No Racism frame may quote a source, such as a defense attorney or a witness to the crime, who directly denies that racism was a motive in the killing. Additionally, a journalist may assert that a case was rigged to make a racial motive seem probable or that witnesses to the crime were coached to falsely claim they heard the perpetrator use racial slurs.

News stories that use the Sources Allege Racism frame quote at least one source who *alleges* that the perpetrator had a racial motive for the violent crime. These sources may encompass prosecuting attorneys, Asian American advocacy group members, a jury, an official document, or a government source, such as a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Justice, who claim the case is a civil rights

case. The article can claim that the perpetrator had multiple motives as long as one of the motives is racism.

Lastly, news articles that use the Journalists Assert Racism frame include at least one assertion from the writer of the news story of an *actual* racial motivation for the violent crime. In such news articles, the journalist directly and explicitly asserts that racism was a motive in the crime as if it were an indisputable fact. In news text, the journalist might assert, without attribution, that the killer was partly or entirely motivated by racism.

I use these framing categories in a content analysis of news frames. Content analysis is discussed in-depth in Chapter 5. Using content analysis, I identify the specific frames journalists used and their frequencies in news coverage of the Vincent Chin case and in coverage of later cases of violence against Asian Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic. This analysis helps uncover any shifts in framing of violent crime from ordinary crimes to hate crimes.

3.3 Justifying the Usefulness of Worthy Victim Theory

Before defining worthy victim theory and discussing its usefulness to the dissertation, it is first necessary to explain why I chose this theory over other useful mass communication theories. Doing so will contextualize the use of worthy victim theory as a central element in the dissertation.

The social context surrounding how Americans understand and respond to the idea of anti-Asian racism has evolved significantly over time—not only from the period of Vincent Chin's murder to the present but also from the mid-1800s when Asians first began immigrating to the U.S. (I discuss the history of Asian immigration

in detail in Chapter 4). As social context changes, news framing of specific issues, such as racism, changes. Hence, framing is not completely within the realm of a journalist's choice. Rather, framing reflects the broader social forces and concepts at work in a society.[484]

Two mass communication theories, Cascading Activation Theory and Sphere Theory, help explain how broader social forces and concepts, such as government public relations and changes in social mores over time, play an important role in shifts in news framing of particular issues. Cascading Activation theory assumes that U.S. political communication high-level power centers, such as the White House and Congress, set key frames that are difficult for less-dominant groups, including activist groups and news outlets, to challenge effectively. As a result, they must either accept the government's frame for a person, issue, or event or propose a counter frame.[485] As scholar Robert Entman explains, the Cascading Activation model explores how government frames "activate and spread from the top level of a stratified system (the White House) to the network of non-administration elites, and on down to news organizations, their texts, and the public."[486] Various interpretations of these frames "feedback from lower to higher levels."[487]

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[484] Robert Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame after 9/11," *Political Communication* 20, no. 4 (2003): 415-432. David C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1986.

[485] Entman, "Cascading Activation," 415-432.

[486] Ibid., 415.

[487] Ibid.

Entman applies Cascading Activation theory to an analysis of news framing of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. He finds that then-President George W. Bush's initial frame characterized the attack as a War on Terror. Two elite journalists, Seymour Hersh and Thomas Friedman, tried unsuccessfully to shift the focus from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia. Yet, in order for frame challenges brought by news organizations to successfully shift the government's frame, "elite discord is a necessary condition," according to Entman.[488] In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, there were no effective counter-narratives from high-level government bodies to challenge the War on Terror frame, which "overwhelmingly dominated the news."[489]

A significant drawback to Cascading Activation theory when studying news framing of violent crime victims is that the theory studies frames that originate at the top, usually with a government entity. Determining whether a news frame of an Asian victim originates with the government or with a news outlet would likely prove challenging. For instance, did framing of Vincent Chin as a victim of racial hatred originate with the U.S. Department of Justice's discovery of new evidence supporting a hate crime? A more likely possibility is that journalists created this frame after interviewing Asian advocacy group leaders who pushed the hate crime narrative. Being unable to discern a frame's origin limits the usefulness of this theory.

[488] Ibid.

[489] Ibid.

Sphere theory assumes that news framing follows shifts from consensus to debate among society's elites and the general public.[490] The sphere of consensus is reserved for topics on which there is widespread agreement, such as *murder is bad*. Journalists treat such topics as conventional wisdom.[491] The sphere of legitimate controversy concerns issues and ideas over where there is debate among the country's elite powerholders or citizens. Journalists are emboldened to investigate such issues and present opposing viewpoints. Lastly, the sphere of deviance applies to those radical, unacceptable, or dangerous issues that journalists are expected to either ignore or ridicule because they fall outside the bounds of legitimate debate and are held in disregard or contempt by the public.[492] One example might be: *All taxes on Americans should be abolished.* According to Hallin, the rules of "objective journalism" only apply in the central sphere, that of legitimate controversy. Where society holds that an issue or event falls into the sphere of consensus or the sphere of deviance, journalists are not held to the same standards of objectivity.

Applying Sphere theory to the dissertation, one could assume that journalists framed Vincent Chin as a less worthy victim when the public widely viewed Asians as "perpetual foreigners" that did not belong in America (sphere of consensus), as was the case even through the 1970s and 1980s. One could also assume that journalists took a neutral stance regarding Chin's victimization by relying on sources to speculate about a racial motive for his murder when public opinion began shifting

[490] Hallin, *The Uncensored War*.

[491] Ibid.

[492] Ibid.

under the influence of advocacy group protests (the sphere of legitimate controversy). Lastly, one could assume that as new cases of violence against Asians surged during the Covid-19 outbreak and public pushback questioned journalists who failed to recognize the race hatred behind the violent attacks against Asian Americans, many journalists today ignore the unacceptable idea that racism against Asians does not exist (sphere of deviance).

"Sphere" theory may prove challenging to an analysis of racialized violence coverage. To illustrate, shifts in news framing can influence public opinion just as shifts in public opinion can influence news framing. Differentiating cause from effect can be difficult. The same can be said for elite opinion. News framing might influence conflicts among elites and vice versa. Hence, tracing how a subject moved from the deviance sphere to the sphere of legitimate controversy would likely be difficult. However, Sphere Theory can highlight why there was little balance or objectivity for journalists in covering crimes against Asian people at certain points in American history.

Having used Sphere Theory and Cascading Activation Theory to lay the groundwork for discerning how social forces and concepts play a role in changes in news framing over time, I now apply the concept of the "worthy victim" to explain changes in framing. I chose worthy victim theory because it allows me to use the idea of worthy victimhood as an important vector for documenting changes in framing of racial minority victims of criminalized violence over time. When combined with a content analysis of news frames, discussed in Chapter 5, worthy victim theory

becomes a useful tool for grasping how journalists paid attention to Asian victims of violent crime across time.

3.4 Worthy Victim Theory

In news stories covering violent crimes, journalists often frame crime victims as either worthy or less worthy of compassion and justice. Worthy victim theory helps explain some of the factors that play a role in news framing of violent crime victims as either worthy victims or less worthy victims. Not all violent crime victims receive equal attention from mainstream news journalists.[493] For reasons discussed in this section, some victims may receive less media attention on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or reckless decision making, among other factors.[494] More often, scholar Chris Greer claims, "media resources are allocated to the representation of those victims who can be portrayed as ideal victims," or worthy victims.[495]

Scholar Nils Christie explains that, by definition, ideal, or worthy victims, form a category of "individuals who – when hit by violent crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim."[496] This group includes those persons who are considered "vulnerable, defenseless, innocent, and worthy of sympathy and compassion," according to Greer.[497] For example, elderly women,

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[493] Chris Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," in *Victims, Crime, and Society,* edited by P. Davies, P. Francis, and C. Greer. (London: Sage, 2007), 22.

[494] Ibid., 22-24.

[495] Ibid., 22.

[496] Nils Christie, "The Ideal Victim," in *Revisiting the Ideal Victim: Development in Critical Victimology,* ed. Marian Duggan (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2018), 12.

[497] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22.

young children, and expectant mothers "are typical ideal victims" because society tends to view them as persons in need of protection whereas "young men, the homeless, those with drug problems, and others existing on the margins of society" are very likely to be considered less worthy of compassion because society tends to view them as less respectable or less innocent than women and children, according to Greer.[498]

When journalists consider whether to frame a violent crime victim as either worthy or less worthy of compassion and justice, Greer explains, they make their decisions based on a "hierarchy of victimization" in news media framing.[499] Journalists place ideal victims who are deserving of compassion at the top of the hierarchy and place "less deserving" victims at the bottom, as Greer explains.[500] The hierarchy of victimization is important to the present study because where Asian American victims fall within this hierarchy, discussed below, shapes the importance that journalists place on such victims and, hence, the type of public response these victims receive.

The dissertation uses worthy victim theory to accomplish two goals. The first goal the dissertation seeks to accomplish using this theory is to gain a fuller understanding of how journalists frame Asian American victims of violent crime as either worthy or less worthy of compassion and justice. Analyzing how journalists framed Asian American victims in news stories during and in the decades following

[498] Ibid.

[499] Ibid.

[500] Ibid., 22-23.

the Vincent Chin murder case sheds light on how framing of Chin's victimization changed over time from a less worthy victim to a worthy victim and whether any similar patterns exist between news framing of Chin's victimization and news framing of Asian American victims of violence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

When deciding whether to frame victims of violent crime, including Asian American victims, as either worthy or less worthy of compassion and justice, journalists "consider persons through the lens of individual characteristics that make some persons "more 'deserving' or 'worthy' of the victim status than others," scholars Jessica Bouchard, Jennifer S. Wong, and Kelsey Gushue claim.[501] Journalists consider two characteristics when deciding how to frame a victim as either worthy or less worthy of compassion and justice.

The first characteristic a journalist considers when deciding how to frame a victim is an individual's conduct, including his behavior and his decision making.[502] Journalists will frame a victim who makes reckless decisions in an unsafe location as less worthy of compassion and justice.[503] For example, scholars Danielle C. Slakoff and Pauline K. Brennen claim that if an individual makes a reckless decision, such as fighting in a bar or a back alley, journalists are likely to "blame the victim" for the consequences of his actions and frame him as less worthy of compassion.[504] The

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[501] Jessica Bouchard, Jennifer S. Wong, and Kelsey Gushue, "The Differential Portrayal of Sympathetic Homicide Victims in Media," *International Review of Victimology* 26, no.3 (2020), 316.

[502] Danielle C. Slakoff, and Pauline K. Brennen. "The Differential Representation of Latina and Black Female Victims in Front-Page News Stories: A Qualitative Document Analysis." *Feminist Criminology* (December 2017): 11-12.

[503] Ibid.

[504] Ibid., 14.

arguably "unsafe location" of the crime "diminishes the 'shock value' or unexpectedness and, therefore, sympathy [for the victim] a story may elicit," Slakoff and Brennen explain.[505] For example, a news story framing Vincent Chin as less worthy of sympathy might emphasize that his slaying was the result of his decision to visit a strip club, drink too much, and provoke a violent brawl with two men by allegedly throwing the first punch. Furthermore, the news story would likely spotlight Chin's negative attributes, such as his short temper, while failing to mention his positive attributes, including his intelligence, work ethic, and success as a computer engineer.

Conversely, violent crimes that occur in arguably safe environments, such as a person's home, "point to the crime's unexpectedness," which evokes sympathy for the victim, according to Slakoff and Brennen.[506] For instance, if a person decides to walk home from work and is fatally stabbed by a stranger just as she enters her apartment, journalists are likely to characterize her decision to walk home as respectable and frame her as worthy of sympathy. Victims who are worthy of sympathy are frequently described in news reports in "glowing ways, using potent adjectives and imagery," such as "devout," "imaginative," or as having a heart to help others, according to scholar Kristin Gilchrist.[507]

The second characteristic journalists consider when deciding whether to frame

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[505] Ibid., 12.

[506] Ibid.

[507] Kristen Gilchrist, " 'Newsworthy' Victims? Exploring Differences in Canadian Local Press Coverage of Missing/Murdered Aboriginal and White Women," *Feminist Media Studies* 10, no. 4 (2010): 381.

a victim as deserving or less deserving of compassion and justice is an individual's race and ethnicity.[508] The "devalued racial status" placed on non-White victims of violent crime due to negative racial stereotypes makes race a "crucial factor" when characterizing racial minorities as less deserving of sympathy because non-White victims appear less newsworthy, according to scholars Kristen Gilchrist and Anna Gekoski, Jacqueline M. Gray, and Joanna R. Adler.[509] Scholar Yasmin Jiwani defines newsworthiness as "what makes a story worth telling" for journalists.[510] Decisions about who or what is newsworthy "are filtered through a predominantly Western, White, middle-class lens," according to Gilchrist.[511] A lack of news appeal due to negative racial stereotypes reduces compassion for minority group victims and produces news frames that "highlight the negative traits" of such victims, according to Slakoff and Brennen.[512] These victims receive scant media attention and tend to "pass virtually unnoticed in the wider social world," according to Greer.[513]

For example, Asian victims of violent crime in the U.S. during the decade prior to Vincent Chin's murder seldom generated significant media attention due to

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[508] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 21.

[509] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 377; Anna Gekoski, Jacqueline M. Gray, and Joanna R. Adler, "What Makes a Homicide Newsworthy?" *British Criminology Journal* 52 (2012): 1229.

[510] Yasmin Jiwani, *Discourses of Denial: Mediations on Race, Gender, and Violence* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

[511] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

[512] Slakoff and Brennen, "The Differential Representation," 15.

[513] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22.

negative racial stereotypes that led journalists to frame them as less deserving.[514] Stereotypes frequently associated with Asians during this period, such as the perpetual foreigner stereotype, lacked newsworthiness for journalists.[515] Hence, some news stories blamed Asians for the violence directed against them by framing them as foreigners who should not be in America. Additionally, the model minority stereotype, the idea that Asians in the U.S. did not face racial discrimination because they had assimilated and achieved academic and financial success, very likely prevented journalists from paying attention to Asians as victims of racism.[516]

To illustrate, some news reports in the late 1970s at the close of the Vietnam War tended to emphasize Southeast Asian refugees' status in the U.S. as perpetual foreigners and economic competitors and framed them as less worthy victims of violence.[517] Many Vietnamese refugees fleeing Communism had resettled in the U.S. and started their own businesses as shrimp boat fishermen. Some local Whites feared that the Vietnamese were beginning to take over the fishing industry. A news story in *The New York Times* on August 8, 1979,[518] reporting on the fire bombings of

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[514] Hien Duc Do, *The Vietnamese Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999); Harvey C. Dong, "The Origins and Trajectory of Asian American Political Activism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1968-1978," PhD diss., (University of California, Berkeley, 2002).

[515] Jennifer Ng, Yoon Pak, and Xavier Hernandez, "Beyond the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority Stereotype: A Critical Examination of How Asian Americans are Framed," in *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, ed. Min Zhou and Anthony Christian Ocampo (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 578.

[516] Ibid.

[517] Do, *The Vietnamese Americans.*

[518] Molly Ivins, "Killing Sharpens Texas Feud on Vietnamese Fishing," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1979. This article claims that the motive for the violence "has always been economic," a "case of misunderstanding," and "a clash of economic interests." It represents how some journalists framed the attacks.

Vietnamese fishing boats in Seadrift, Texas quoted a local White resident of Seadrift who described the Vietnamese fishermen as "vicious" foreigners who allegedly stole the best fishing spots and whom the U.S. government should stop "bringing in" to America, as Ivins reports.[519] One paragraph of *The Times* report acknowledged that some Vietnamese were "frightened" by the violent events and sympathized with the Asian victims.[520] However, the majority of the news article seemed to blame the violence in Seadrift on the Vietnamese refugees, framing the fire bombings as the result of increasing economic tensions in coastal cities where White fishermen were already having to compete for fish: "The Texas shrimpers, crabbers, and oystermen believe that their bays were overcrowded before the Vietnamese arrived," according to *The Times* report.[521]

Negative racial stereotypes that lead to victim blaming, such as stereotypes of the perpetual foreigner and economic overachiever, place Asians near the bottom of the hierarchy of victimization and can "render [Asian] . . . experiences with violence invisible," according to scholar Kristen Gilchrist.[522] Such stereotypes can also diminish the seriousness of the victimization, "signaling to the public" and to journalists that crimes against Asian Americans "do not matter," Gilchrist asserts.[523]

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[519] Ibid.

[520] Ibid.

[521] Ibid.

[522] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 376.

[523] Ibid.

Hence, for journalists, Asian victims appear less attractive and less worthy of media attention.

The second goal the dissertation seeks to accomplish using worthy victim theory is to understand the correlation between framing Asian Americans as hate crime victims *and* as worthy victims of violent crime in the same news story. In order to understand this correlation, one must understand how the news appeal of a racial motive assists in "transforming a violent local incident of apparently limited newsworthiness into an issue of public importance," scholars Eugene McLaughlin and Karim Murji explain.[524] Journalists consider hate crime victims to be newsworthy because racial hatred is "culturally proximate," or "meaningful" to media audiences, "resonating" with audiences' concerns about the world and with audiences' interest in posing solutions to racial problems, according to Gilchrist.[525] When deciding whether to frame violent crime victims as either worthy or less worthy of compassion and justice, journalists place greater importance on such victims following the discovery of a racial motive for the violent crime.[526]

For example, scholars McLaughlin and Murji analyze how the discovery of a racial motive in the murder case involving Stephen Lawrence, an eighteen-year-old African American man from London, increased his news value as a minority group victim and shifted news framing of his victimization from a less worthy victim

[524] Eugene McLaughlin, and Karim Murij, "Ways of Seeing: The News Media and Racist Violence," in *Understanding Social Problems: Issues in Social Policy,* ed. Margaret May, Robert Page, and Edward Brunsdon (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 270.

[525] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

[526] McLaughlin and Murij, "Ways of Seeing," 270-274.

defined by negative racial stereotypes to a hate crime victim and a worthy victim.[527] Lawrence was fatally stabbed by five White youths in Eltham, South London on the night of April 22, 1993, while waiting for a bus home. After initial charges against Lawrence's alleged killers were dropped in July 1993 due to a lack of evidence, Lawrence's family launched a private prosecution in September 1994 to pursue hate crime charges. The prosecution ultimately failed after the perpetrators were acquitted in April 1996 due to a lack of evidence for a racial motive.[528]

The absence of a racial motive for Stephen Lawrence's murder limited the newsworthiness and cultural resonance of the crime for journalists. Without evidence of a racial motive, "there appeared to be nothing that made this event particularly meaningful for the media," McLaughlin and Murji explain.[529] Local newspapers and regional television reported the murder the following day. National news outlets also reported the story. However, the crime did not make front-page headlines.[530] Local and national newspapers drew on negative racial stereotypes to frame Lawrence as less deserving of compassion. For example, journalists falsely depicted Lawrence as a gang member and carried stories falsely associating him with muggings and "hit-and-run street crime," McLaughlin and Murji explain.[531]

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[527] Ibid., 263-277.

[528] Ibid., 270-274.

[529] Ibid., 270.

[530] Ibid.

[531] Ibid., 264.

News framing of Lawrence and other members of London's Black community using negative racial stereotypes was the product of London's long history of denying the problem of anti-Black violence.[532] In London, "the extent and seriousness of racially motivated attacks on Black communities had been systematically played down or given limited coverage" in the 1980s and 1990s due to "the inadequate, or simply racist, non-response of the [London] police," according to McLaughlin and Murji.[533] This inadequate response produced police investigations that failed to "recognize the racist motivation for some attacks," these scholars claim.[534] Hence, some London newspapers, especially right-wing papers, "viewed incidents of racial harassment as random in nature" and "rejected the classification of incidents as racially motivated" unless direct evidence existed of "organized involvement" by racist groups, according to McLaughlin and Murji.[535]

After the Lawrence family launched a campaign for justice in 1996, a second and more thorough police investigation was launched. This investigation uncovered witnesses who had heard the White perpetrators utter racial slurs just before stabbing Lawrence. A new murder trial began, and on February 13, 1997, a judge ruled that Lawrence was the victim of an "unlawful killing" in a "completely unprovoked racist attack by five White youths," according to McLaughlin and Murji.[536]

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[532] Ibid., 268.

[533] Ibid.

[534] Ibid.

[535] Ibid., 269.

[536] Ibid., 271.

Stephen Lawrence's new status as a hate crime victim increased the newsworthiness of his victimization for journalists by making his victimhood more culturally meaningful to his hometown of Eltham and to the Southeast London community. For example, following the hate crime verdict, pro-Black advocacy group members in Eltham and the surrounding area staged protests to alert journalists to the need for increased news coverage of the racism motivating Lawrence's death.[537] London news outlets gradually began to acknowledge Lawrence's victimization as a product of anti-Black racism in the city. To illustrate, between February 14, 1997, the day following the judge's hate crime verdict, and February 24, 1999, London's conservative tabloid newspaper, *The Daily Mail,* published approximately 530 news stories discussing Lawrence's murder and the broader issue of anti-Black violence.[538]

Because hate crimes are newsworthy and serve to "intensify [public] interest in race and racism and their connection with crime and victimization," journalists are likely to frame hate crime victims using positive characteristics for the purpose of highlighting the victim's newfound "attractiveness" to the public, according to Greer.[539] Positive characteristics reinforce the victim's "elevated status" and increase the public attention the victim receives, according to McLaughlin and Murji.[540] Greer claims that by becoming newsworthy, hate crime victims "earn" their status as worthy

[537] Ibid.

[538] Ibid., 272.

[539] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 24, 26, 28.

[540] McLaughlin and Murij, "Ways of Seeing," 270.

victims and move up the hierarchy of victimization.[541]

For example, some local and national journalists who framed Stephen Lawrence as a hate crime victim also framed him as deserving of justice and compassion by characterizing him as a "hardworking, A-level student" who "did not have a criminal record," McLaughlin and Murji explain.[542] Additionally, some journalists emphasized that the location in which Lawrence was slain was "not on the mean streets of the inner city but in law-abiding suburbia," according to McLaughlin and Murji.[543] McLaughlin and Murji stress that the shift in news framing of Lawrence from a less worthy victim to a hate crime victim and a worthy victim helped make the murder case "one of the defining cases of the 1990s" that resulted in mainstream press recognition of anti-Black racism in London.[544]

News framing of racial minorities as both hate crime victims and worthy victims is a common practice among present-day news journalists covering major news events involving violent crimes against Asian Americans. For example, Pak Ho, a 75-year-old Asian American man from Oakland, California, was punched in the face and knocked to the pavement during a morning walk by Teauntie Bailey, a 26-year-old African American man. Although Bailey was not charged with a hate crime, local and national journalists immediately framed Ho's murder as part of a national problem of anti-Asian violence. For example, ABC7 News, a local station in

[541] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22-23.

[542] McLaughlin and Murij, "Ways of Seeing," 273.

[543] Ibid.

[544] Ibid., 270.

Oakland, reported on the crime as "part of the recent uptick in violence against Asian Americans."[545] Such violence was beginning to form "an allyship" between Black and Asian communities in California in the fight against anti-Asian hate.[546] The same news story framed Ho as a worthy victim. ABC7 News quoted one of Ho's friends who claimed she would always remember Ho for his "kindness" and "thoughtfulness."[547] Additionally, several national news reports simultaneously framed Ho as a hate crime victim and a worthy victim. A CBS News report called Ho an "innocent victim" of a series of "vicious hate crimes against Asian-Americans who`ve been attacked, harassed, blamed, and scapegoated."[548] The same news report characterized Ho as someone who was always "full of hope."[549]

In order to analyze how journalists characterized Asian American victims of violent crime, the dissertation draws on my analysis of the frames journalists used in news coverage of Vincent Chin as a victim to create categories of news frames. Journalists characterized Chin using the following five frames out of a total of eight frames for the study: Good Person, Physically Vulnerable, Chin as Symbol, Bad Conduct, and Reckless Conduct.

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[545] Dion Lim, "75-Year-Old Asian Man Warned about Increase in Attacks Days before Murder," ABC7News.com, March 12, 2021, accessed on October 25, 2022.

[546] Ibid.

[547] Ibid.

[548] Norah O`Donnell and Weijia Jiang, "Biden Condemns Hate Crimes Against Asian Americans," CBS New Transcripts, March 12, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[549] Ibid.

News articles that use the Good Person, Physically Vulnerable, and Symbol of Racism frames depict the Asian victim as deserving of sympathy and justice. News articles using the Good Person frame might describe the victim as friendly, intelligent, hardworking, striving for self-betterment by attending night school or working two jobs at once, and displaying traditionally praise-worthy family values, including marriage, children, family loyalty, and support for aging parents. News stories using the Physically Vulnerable frame might characterize the victim as physically weak, defenseless, unarmed, and helpless to his assailants.[550] Journalists are more likely to frame children, adolescents, the elderly, the infirm, and victims who are caught off guard or outnumbered by their attackers as fitting this frame.[551] Even tough, physically fit victims can fit this frame if they are reduced to helplessness.

Some news reports use the Symbol of Racism frame to depict the Asian victim as worthy of compassion and justice. News stories using this frame characterize the victim as a symbol of the preyed-upon racial group as a whole.[552] Reporters or their sources might state directly that the Asian victim had become a symbol, icon, or martyr to the cause of preventing anti-Asian violence twenty, thirty, or forty years after his death. Articles reporting on the milestone anniversaries of the

[550] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22-23.

[551] Ibid.

[552] Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs,* 8, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 262-286. Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Resurrecting Emmett Till: The Catalyst of the Modern Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 179-188.

victim's death and commemorations of these milestones almost invariably include this frame.

Journalists use the Bad Conduct and Reckless Conduct frames to describe the Asian victim as less deserving of compassion and justice. News reports using the Bad Conduct frame might describe the victim as blameworthy for his victimization because he engaged in "deviant" behavior, according to scholars Slakoff and Brennen.[553] Examples of deviant behavior include stripping, hiring prostitutes, or frequenting strip clubs.[554] Journalists using the Reckless Behavior frame might characterize the Asian victim as engaging in excessive drinking, using inflammatory language with strangers, provoking fights, and other such conduct. In so doing, the journalist does not depict the victim as worth avenging because he willingly engages in careless behavior.[555]

I use these framing categories in a content analysis of news frames in which I identify the specific frames journalists used and their frequencies in news coverage of the Vincent Chin case and in coverage of later cases of violence against Asian Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic. This analysis helps uncover any shifts in framing of Asian American victims of violent crime from worthy victims to less worthy victims.

In sum, worthy victim theory and framing theory help uncover specific news frames used in coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case and in reporting on more

[553] Slakoff and Brennen, "The Differential Representation," 11.

[554] Ibid.

[555] Ibid., 14.

recent murder cases involving Asian American victims. These theories, in combination with a quantitative content analysis of frames, help scholars understand how frames used in coverage of the Chin case develop, change, and sometimes reappear in contemporary cases of violence targeting Asians. In so doing, these theories help shed light on how the Chin case can be considered a critical turning point in the importance journalists placed on violence against Asians Americans as a widespread racial issue. This knowledge, in turn, informs scholarship regarding the evolution in journalistic attention to Asian Americans as a racial group over time.

Chapter 4: Historical U.S. News Coverage & Asians in America

4.1 Introduction

The social context surrounding how Americans understand and respond to the notion of anti-Asian racism evolved significantly throughout U.S. history from the onset of Asian immigration in America in the late 1840s to the period of Vincent Chin's murder in the 1980s, to the surge in anti-Asian violence in the 2020s. As discussed in Chapter 3, changes in social context can play some role in shifts in news framing of significant issues, such as racism. Hence, the manner in which journalists framed criminalized violence against Asians over time was not entirely within the realm of journalists' decision making. Rather, to some extent, framing of such violence reflected broader social forces and attitudes.[556]

In order to grasp the slow but steady change in news framing of violence against Asians that began during the Vincent Chin murder case, it is necessary to understand the shifts in social attitudes toward Asians in the U.S. that occurred throughout history. These shifts are reflected in key historic events. Some events include the White labor movements against Chinese immigrant workers in the 1800s, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, and the bombing of Vietnamese fishing boats in the 1970s. The historical background explores how journalists vilified and stereotyped Asians in America yet ignored them as victims of

[556] Robert Entman, "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame after 9/11," *Political Communication* 20, no. 4 (2003): 415-432. David C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1986.

racism. In so doing, this background informs scholars' understanding of how journalists translated national anti-Asian sentiment—and anti-Asian violence—into news. This understanding, in turn, lays the groundwork for comprehending initial news framing of the violence against Chin and shifts in framing of his murder from 1982-1987.

Lastly, the chapter analyzes key events in the more recent past, including Asian American advocacy group protests and press conferences that played a role in drawing journalists' attention to the racism motivating violence against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic. In their news stories reporting on new cases of criminalized violence targeting Asians, journalists quoted advocacy group leaders and revived Chin's story to draw parallels between the anti-Asian racism motivating Chin's murder and the racial hatred against Asian Americans during Covid-19. Hence, an analysis of key moments throughout history illustrates how social forces played an important part in the slow evolution in news framing of violence against Asians nationwide.

4.2 Asian Immigrants and the Mainstream Press, 1840s-1980s

In the nineteenth century, stereotypes of Chinese proliferated in U.S. newspapers, especially in the Western States, as tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants arrived to work in mining and on construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. Whites began to view the new arrivals as an economic threat and as a danger to Americans' health and safety.[557] Newspapers spewed derogatory stereotypes as they called

[557] Sucheng Chan, "Chinese Livelihood in Rural California: The Impact of Economic Change, 1860-1880," UC Press E-Books Collection, 1982-2004, University of California Press, accessed on June 22,

repeatedly for laws restricting Chinese immigration. In one such editorial, in August 1854, *The Daily Alta California,* the leading daily newspaper in San Francisco, stereotyped the Chinese as "diseased filth" and portrayed Chinatown residences as "dens" where "sickly Chinese" were "piled together like pigs in a pen," Asian Studies scholar Nyan Shan finds.[558] Other West Coast newspapers stereotyped Chinese immigrants as "cruel murderers" and "uncivilized assimilators" in urging Congress to pass a Chinese Exclusion Act, claims scholar San Hea Kil.[559] Kil finds that on April 23, 1882, *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Chinese laborers have a "latent love of blood . . . . The Chinaman does shed blood . . . . He does brawl, and always with a savage desire to kill."[560] Only a handful of California journalists denounced the hate mongering and published articles "defending and humanizing" Chinese laborers, as scholar Philip Chin explains.[561] For instance, journalist Ambrose Bierce, writing in

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2022. According to Chan, newspapers in California, especially in San Francisco, which was the main port of entry for Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century, used stereotypes to characterize Chinese immigrants as unfair job competition and as diseased foreigners who spread leprosy, smallpox, hookworm, and other diseases. The population of Chinese immigrants in California according to the 1860 census was 35,000, "almost one-tenth of the state's population. Chinese immigration continued at a steady rate during the 1860s and 1870s. All told, 322,000 Chinese people entered the United States between 1850 and 1882, when the Chinese Exclusion law was passed," Chan claims.

[558] Nayan Shan, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 21, cited from *the Daily Alta California,* August 15 and 22, 1854.

[559] San Hea Kil, "Fearing Yellow, Imagining White: Media Analysis of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882," *Social Identities* 18, no. 6 (November 2012): 667. Kil analyzes journalism support for the Chinese Exclusion Act in *The San Francisco Chronicle* between January and December 1882. The Act was passed on May 6, 1882 and was the first immigration law in U.S. history to exclude persons based on their race and ethnicity. In addition to the stereotypes listed above, Kil finds that newspapers called Chinese immigrants "coolie slaves," "celestial invaders," and "overwhelming deluge." (667).

[560] Ibid., 670.

[561] Philip Chin, "Humanizing the Other: Roughing It- Mark Twain and the Chinese in 1872," Chinese American Heroes, last modified September 29, 2015. Chin finds that Clemens' sympathy for the

The San Francisco Examiner, declared that Chinese laborers seemed "frugal, temperate, industrious, and have a high average honesty."[562]

Midwest and East Coast journalists weighed in as well. Asian immigration scholar Stuart Creighton Miller finds that on October 7, 1869, *The New York Herald* drew on stereotypes of the Chinese as "immoral": "[N]otwithstanding its [Chinese immigration's] demonstrable material advantages . . . . his [the Chinese immigrant's] apparent incapacity for moral improvement . . . makes it still an open question whether immigration should be encouraged," according to *The Herald.*[563] Similarly, scholar Mary Cronin finds that on September 18, 1870, *The New York Tribune* praised Chinese laborers for "mastering the shoemaking trade" yet stated that their non-Christian, alien culture made the Chinese "too great a threat to allow into the U.S."[564]

When Japanese immigrants began arriving on the West Coast in the early

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Chinese was rooted in his observation of a Chinese laundryman randomly stoned to death as he walked down the street.

[562] Sara Browning, "An Unlikely Ally: Ambrose Bierce, the Press, and America's Most Hated Minority" (unpublished manuscript, October 4, 2021), typescript. Cited from "Prattle," *San Francisco Examiner,* by Ambrose Bierce, 15 July 1888, MSS # 5992-a, Box 11, Papers of Ambrose Bierce, 1842-1914, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Archives, Charlottesville, Virginia. The study explores Ambrose Bierce's framing of Chinese immigrants in *The San Francisco Illustrated Wasp, The Argonaut,* and *The San Francisco Newsletter* from 1868-1886 and argues that Bierce's understanding of journalism as a moral weapon compelled him to defend Chinese persons.

[563] Stuart Creighton Miller, "An East Coast Perspective to Chinese Exclusion, 1852-1882," *The Historian* 33, no. 2 (1971): 197. Miller examines nuances in journalism framing of Chinese immigrants in 15 newspapers. He finds that in the 1850s and 1860s, mainstream newspapers balanced an appreciation for the Chinese work ethic with an awareness of racial differences. By the 1880s, fears of job displacement led some East Coast journalists to identify the Chinese worker as a *foreign enemy.*

[564] Mary M. Cronin, "When the Chinese Came to Massachusetts: Representations of Race, Labor, Religion, and Citizenship in the 1870s Press," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 79, 97, cited from *The New York Tribune* September 18, 1870, No Headline. Cronin's analysis of 15 East Coast newspapers centers on framing of Chinese strikebreakers in 1870. Like Miller, she uncovers the influence of White labor competition on framing of the Chinese.

twentieth century, American journalists drew on stereotypes to ostracize them as well. For example, communications scholar Bradley Hamm finds that on May 5, 1924, *The San Francisco Chronicle* complained that arrivals from Japan "settle in colonies from which our own people move away because the social atmosphere is destroyed . . . . If such aliens are allowed to enter, they will . . . produce social and economic conditions which are unjust to ourselves."[565] The December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor significantly intensified U.S. hostility to Japanese immigrants and citizens. For example, journalism scholar Thomas H. Heuterman finds that on the day following the Japanese air raid, which crippled America's Pacific fleet, *The Los Angeles Times* warned that California had become a "zone of danger" because it was the state with the largest population of Japanese immigrants.[566] Furthermore, *The Times* declared: "Treachery and double-dealing are major Japanese weapons."[567] Heuterman finds that a few weeks later, *The Times* called for internment of Japanese in January 1942: "The rigors of war . . . demand their immediate removal from the most acute danger spots."[568]

Stereotypes of Asians in the United States as unfair competitors and foreign

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[565] Bradley J. Hamm, "Redefining Racism: Newspaper Justification for the 1924 Exclusion of Japanese Immigrants," *American Journalism* 16, no. 3 (1999). Hamm analyzes framing of Japanese immigrants in 60 editorials across seven daily newspapers nationwide from April-May 1924. cited from "President for Exclusion," May 5, 1924, *The San Francisco Chronicle.*

[566] Thomas H. Heuterman, "The Japanese Americans," in *U.S. News Coverage of Racial Minorities: A Sourcebook,* ed. Beverley Ann Deepe Keever, Carolyn Martindale, and Mary Ann Weston (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 225. The population of Japanese immigrants in California during the 1940s was approximately 93,717 and increasing, especially in Los Angeles county, information from "A History of Japanese Americans in California: Patterns of Settlement and Occupational Characteristics." *History.* Accessed on June 21, 2022.

[567] Heuterman, "The Japanese Americans," 225.

[568] Ibid.

threats caused Chinese and Japanese in America to become vulnerable to violent crime during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, during the nineteenth century, some Chinese immigrants who lacked the financial resources to return to China attempted to settle in the western states, such as South Dakota and Wyoming.[569] White settlers banned together to loot and burn Chinese immigrants' homes and force them onto trains headed for the U.S.-Canada border. Newspapers either degraded Asian victims of such violence or ignored them. Scholar Beth Lew-Williams finds that on February 13, 1885, *The Stockton Mail* debased Chinese victims of looting and arson in Eureka, California as an "obnoxious alien element."[570]

The U.S. press villainized or paid little attention to Japanese victims of violent crime in the early 1900s. For example, on February 20, 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt, aware of Japan's powerful naval presence, signed the Gentleman's Agreement with Japan. Roosevelt believed that the Agreement, which discontinued Japanese immigration to California, would curb anti-Japanese violence in the state by appeasing nativists.[571] Yet, the violence continued. In 1920, *The Los Angeles Times*

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[569] Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018, 113.

[570] Ibid., 113-136. Quote cited from *The Stockton Mail,* February 13, 1885. During the 1880s, Chinese homes and businesses were either damaged or destroyed in Nevada, Colorado, South Dakota, and other states or territories. Some of the worst cases of violence and arson occurred in Denver, Los Angeles, Rock Springs (Wyoming), Tacoma (Wisconsin), and Seattle where Chinese were expelled from the cities. Lew-Williams explains that by failing to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 due to a lack of federal government funds and manpower, White settlers believed that the federal government had also failed to protect Americans from the foreign "threat." Hence, White settler vigilantes took matters into their own hands.

[571] Heuterman, "The Japanese Americans," 217. President Theodore Roosevelt, not wishing to offend Japan, reached a "gentlemen's agreement" with representatives of the Empire of Japan. Under the deal, the U.S. government agreed to accept the presence of Japanese immigrants already in America; permit immigrants' wives, children, and parents to enter the country; and ban discrimination against Japanese-

justified anti-Japanese attacks, reporting that Japanese assimilation in the U.S. is "unthinkable," "morally indefensible," and "biologically impossible," Heuterman finds.[572]

Forty years later, when the U.S. government interned Japanese immigrants and Japanese-American citizens following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, many news outlets, far from casting them as victims of injustice, played down their plight or defended their imprisonment.[573] For example, in 1942, U.S. Army troops arrived in Wapato, Washington, a center for the area's approximately 1,000 Japanese Americans, to process Japanese for evacuation to U.S. prison camps. On June 10 of that year, *The Wapato Independent* focused solely on how the presence of U.S. Army troops in Wapato "was short-lived but pleasant" and "said nothing about the Japanese Americans," Heuterman finds. [574] Other newspapers, such as *The San Francisco Chronicle,* used stereotypes to defend Japanese relocation from California to the Midwest. On January 29, 1942, *The Chronicle* characterized Japanese in the U.S. as "invaders" who should be removed to "a point deep in the [nation's] interior" and "not a nice part of the interior either," according to Heuterman.[575] Additionally,

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American children in California schools. In return, Tokyo agreed to stop issuing passports to Japanese immigrants wishing to come to the U.S.

[572] Ibid., 219.

[573] Ibid., 228.

[574] Ibid., cited from *The Wapato Independent,* June 10, 1942, 4. According to Heuterman's analysis of news coverage of the Japanese internment, the departure of the U.S. Army troops from Wapato to the internment camps "generated more editorial expression of regret than the evacuation of a population that for forty years had helped sustain the local economy" (228).

[575] Ibid., 225., Henry McLemore, No Headline, *The San Francisco Chronicle,* January 29, 1942. Heuterman finds that *The New Republic, The San Diego Union,* and *The San Francisco Chronicle* supported the mass relocation of Japanese persons. Overall, "more than 88 percent of the editorials in 27 newspapers in Washington, Oregon, and California supported evacuation and internment" (228).

Heuterman finds, Colonel Frank Knox, President Roosevelt's Secretary of the Navy and former publisher of *The Chicago Daily News,* denounced Japanese Americans as "a yellow peril" in an op-ed to the *Daily News* and called for "the imprisonment of all Japanese Americans," according to the news report.[576]

In the decades following World War II from the mid-1940s to the 1970s, stereotypes of Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans gradually shifted as U.S. society began to perceive China as a communist threat and Japan as a faithful ally.[577] With the onset of the Cold War in 1947, the People's Republic of China became America's preponderant enemy. America's military policy toward China became one of "containing the expansion of Chinese influence throughout Asia and the Third World," according to scholar Robert G. Lee.[578] Congress' passage of the Emergency Detention Act in 1950 meant the U.S. Attorney General had the authority to intern Chinese Americans in concentration camps just as the U.S. government had interned Japanese Americans in detention camps during the Second World War. Additionally, the U.S. government enforced new caps on immigration from Asia under the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act (1952) and carried out random FBI raids in America's Chinatowns to root out communist "spies."[579] These actions

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[576] Ibid., 226. Date and title of article not given. Heuterman claims that "Colonel Knox had been the general manager of the Hearst press while it was conducting its crusades against the "yellow peril."

[577] Robert G. Lee, *Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 152.

[578] Ibid., 152.

[579] Ibid., 153.

were supposed to limit the Chinese communist "threat" on domestic soil.[580]

National newspaper reports popularized the stereotype of the Chinese communist "threat." For example, on July 3, 1949, *The New York Times* ran an article headlined: "Red Scare Seen in Orient." [581] The news story quoted a missionary bishop to China who spent five weeks touring "the Orient." "A peaceful and Christian world can never be achieved if a force like communism takes over peaceful nations," the bishop told *The Times*.[582] The bishop then suggested that the United Nations should "make efforts to prevent a catastrophe" by taking the necessary steps to prevent the rise of communism in America and other countries.[583]

During the decades of the Vietnam War, the stereotype of the Chinese "threat" converged with the stereotype of the "model minority."[584] According to Lee, during the Vietnam War, "the model minority had two faces."[585] The stereotype presented Asian Americans as "silent and disciplined" while simultaneously manufacturing the Asian American threat in the U.S., "a new yellow peril," Lee explains.[586] For example, on February 18, 1979, *The Washington Post* reported that President Carter expressed concerns over the "potentially explosive repercussions" China's

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[580] Ibid.

[581] No Author, "Red Scare Seen in Orient," *The New York Times*, July 3, 1949.

[582] Ibid.

[583] Ibid.

[584] Lee, *Asian Americans in Popular Culture,* 190.

[585] Ibid.

[586] Ibid.

"dangerous" actions during the war would have for the "triangular Soviet-American-Chinese balance."[587]

As America's mainstream journalists cast a wary eye toward Chinese Americans, attitudes toward Japanese Americans in the U.S. were also shifting. U.S. citizens who had stereotyped Japanese Americans as "foreign threats" during WWII began to view them as allies during the Cold War, firmly aligned with the U.S. against communism. Hence, mainstream media newspapers framed Japanese Americans favorably, focusing on their positive characteristics. For example, on January 9, 1966, *The New York Times* lauded Japanese Americans as a racial group that "has risen above prejudiced criticism" barely two decades after Americans interned them in prison camps during World War II.[588] *The Times* also framed Japanese Americans as good citizens: "By any criterion of good citizenship that we choose, the Japanese Americans are better than any other group in our society, including native-bon Whites," *The Times* reported.[589] Additionally, the news story claimed Japanese Americans had determination and unbridled persistence, explaining that any obstacle they faced in whatever profession they chose "resulted only in enhancing their determination to succeed."[590]

[587] Jim Hoagland, "Chinese Troops Pour into Vietnam," *The Washington Post,* February 18, 1979.

[588] William Petterson, "Success Story, Japanese American Style," *The New York Times,* January 9, 1966.

[589] Ibid.

[590] Ibid.

4.3 Asian American Identity and "Presumed Homogeneity"[591]

For the purpose of fully understanding anti-Asian racism in the historic U.S. and journalists' response, it becomes pertinent at this point to address one aspect of Asian American identity that played some role in aggravating anti-Asian racism in America. Throughout American history, the "presumed homogeneity" of all Asian ethnic groups stirred up racial animosity and, in some situations, violence toward both Asian immigrants and Asians as U.S. citizens, according to scholar Harry H.L. Kitano.[592] Many Americans assumed the homogeneity of Asian ethnic groups at the physical level (ie. "all Asians look alike") and at the cultural level ("all Asians speak the same language and practice the same religion"). Hence, "looking alike has been equated with thinking and acting alike so that Koreans are mistaken for Japanese, who in turn are taken for Chinese" and so on, as Kitano explains.[593]

The false notion of a homogenous "Asian American" identity has ignited racial tensions at key moments in both recent and not-so-recent history. To illustrate, during the Second World War, some Asian ethnic groups who recognized that many Americans could not distinguish Japanese Americans from other Asian Americans wore buttons reading: "We hate them, too," Kitano says.[594] The difficulty for some Americans in distinguishing among the diverse cultures and physical appearances of

[591] Harry H. L. Kitano, "Asian-Americans: The Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, and Southeast Asians," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 454, (1981): 126.

[592] Ibid.

[593] Ibid.

[594] Ibid.

Asian Americans continues to incite violence against Asians in the U.S. today. As discussed later in this chapter, during the Covid-19 pandemic, President Trump's rhetoric characterizing Covid-19 as "the China virus" and "kung flu" played a role in stirring animosity, not only toward Chinese Americans, but against Asians of all ethnic backgrounds. Such animosity led to a surge in anti-Asian violence during the pandemic.

In actuality, the label "Asian American" encompasses over twenty nationalities with diverse cultures.[595] When inherent racism causes some Americans to converge all Asian ethnic groups under a single heading, cultural diversities are reduced to negative stereotypes of Asians as "foreigners" and "threats" to Americans and the American way of life. While such stereotypes as the "perpetual foreigner" and "economic threat" can precipitate racial violence, they can also cause journalists to either downplay or ignore racism in their coverage of specific cases of violence against Asians in the U.S., as the following section demonstrates.

4.4 Asian Americans in the Mainstream Press, 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s and 1970s, many U.S. journalists downplayed the idea of Southeast Asians in America as victims of racialized violence. News media scholars Chris Greer, Danielle C. Slakoff, Pauline K. Brennan, and Kristen Gilchrist apply worthy victim theory to news coverage of violent crime victims.[596] As discussed in Chapter

[595] Ibid., 127.

[596] Chris Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," in *Victims, Crime, and Society.* ed. P. Davies, P. Francis, and C. Greer. (London: Sage, 2007), 22-24. Danielle C. Slakoff and Pauline K. Brennen, "The Differential Representation of Latina and Black Female Victims in Front-Page News Stories: A Qualitative Document Analysis," *Feminist Criminology* (December 2017): 1-29. Kristen Gilchrist, "

3, this theory helps explain how news media reporters frame victims of violent crime as either worthy or less worthy of sympathy and justice based on the victim's race and perceived newsworthiness.[597] For example, racial stereotypes associating African American victims with gang membership and street crime and Asian American victims with perpetual foreignness shape some journalists' framing of such victims as less worthy of compassion and justice. Therefore, some journalists downplay the role of racism in violent attacks against these racial minority group victims.[598] Conversely, journalists frame White female victims of violent crime as worthy of sympathy and justice because of stereotypes associating such victims with lawfulness and innocence.[599]

'Newsworthy' Victims? Exploring Differences in Canadian Local Press Coverage of Missing/Murdered Aboriginal and White Women." *Feminist Media Studies* 10, no. 4 (2010): 372-390.

[597] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 21-24 and 26. In his study of newsworthiness, crime, and criminal victimization, Greer describes how a violent crime victim's racial and ethnic demographics as well as the newsworthiness of the case of violence shape whether journalists perceive a victim of violent crime as either worthy or unworthy of sympathy and compassion. Greer explains how newsworthiness is "shaped by news values – those criteria that determine which events come within the horizon of media visibility, and to what extent, and which do not. News values are those criteria that influence, often implicitly, the selection, production, and prioritization of events as news." News values may include racial violence, drama, or action, among others (26). Other factors Greer mentions that influence journalists' framing of victims includes race, gender, and age.

[598] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22-23; Greer explains that "black youth have been demonized in media discourses as the 'criminal other'. Whether as pimps, rioters, muggers, Rastafarian drug dealers, gang members, or Yardies, the association between race and crime has been forcefully established and remains resonant today. This association has more recently extended to Asian youth with media interest in "potential Asian criminality" (36). Slakoff and Brennan, "The Differential Representation of Latina and Black Female Victims," 1. Slakoff and Brennan examine front-page crime stories from four different U.S. newspapers. They find that "stories about White female victims received more repeated coverage and were more likely to contain sympathetic narratives than stories about Latina/ Black female victims. In contrast, Latina/Black female victims were more likely to be portrayed as risk-takers and "bad" women, and their victimization was normalized through descriptions of their unsafe environments."

[599] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims," 381. Gilchrist examines news coverage of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and compares this with coverage of missing or murdered White women. According to Gilchrist, White females covered in news media "were discussed in glowing ways, using potent adjectives and imagery," including "devout," "so beautiful," "imaginative," "promising," and possessing an "indomitable spirit" (381). By comparison, "the Aboriginal women received three and a

Journalists are more likely to frame racial minorities who are victims of violence as worthy of sympathy and justice when law enforcement or other news media sources draw journalists' attention to a racial motive for the violence.[600] For example, Greer explores how "evidence of institutional racism in the police (mis)handling of the murder case" of a London-born Black teenager named Stephen Lawrence increased the newsworthiness of Lawrence as a victim.[601] On April 22, 1993, Lawrence, who was eighteen years old, was brutally stabbed by six White youths late at night while he waited at a deserted bus stop in Eltham, a district of southeast London. Police initially told reporters that race was not a factor in the stabbing death. However, a public inquiry in 1998 with the goal of investigating the Metropolitan Police Service's (MPS) handling of the case uncovered how stereotypes of young Black men as criminals initially prevented London police from investigating the role of anti-Black racism in the murder. The discovery that the crime was racially motivated "intensified [media] interest in race" as a factor motivating violent crime targeting all Black British people in the southeast London area, according to scholars Eugene McLaughlin and Karim Murji.[602] Following the discovery of a racial motive, journalists began framing Lawrence as a victim who was worthy of sympathy and

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half times less coverage; their articles were shorter and less likely to appear on the front page. Depictions of the Aboriginal women were also more detached in tone and scant in detail in contrast to the more intimate portraits of the White women" (373).

[600] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 26-27, esp. 28. See also Eugene McLaughlin and Karim Murij. "Ways of Seeing: The News Media and Racist Violence," in *Understanding Social Problems: Issues in Social Policy.* ed. Margaret May, Robert Page, and Edward Brunsdon. Malden: Blackwell, 2001. 263-277.

[601] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 28.

[602] McLaughlin and Murij. "Ways of Seeing," 274.

justice.[603]

In the 1960s and 1970s, journalists viewed Asian victims of violence in America as less worthy of sympathy and justice, stereotyping them as unfair job competitors and troublemakers.[604] Consequently, some journalists covering cases of violence against Asians downplayed the role of racism.[605] For example, in the late 1970s, some journalists covering the fire bombings of Vietnamese fishing boats in Texas coastal cities blamed the Vietnamese victims for "stirring up trouble" by "stealing" the best fishing locations from local White fisherman, as scholar Hien Duc Do explains.[606] Do cites a report from *The New York Times* on August 8, 1979 describing "an ugly and long-simmering feud" between Vietnamese refugees and White fishermen in Seadrift, Texas.[607] Do finds that *The Times* downplayed racism by

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[603] Ibid.

[604] Al Santoli, "To Bear Any Burden: The Vietnam War and Its Aftermath in the Words of Americans and Southeast Asians." (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986). Saltori draws on the perspectives and experiences of American and Southeast Asian Vietnam War veterans, Southeast Asian refugees, and officials during and after Vietnam. The book includes refugees' experiences in the U.S. facing racial discrimination. Jeremy Hein, *Ethnic Origins: The Adaptation of Cambodian and Hmong Refugees in Four American Cities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 85. Hein's study examines violence against Southeast Asian refugees in the 1970s and 1980s in the all-White towns of Eau Claire and Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Chicago, Illinois; and Rochester, Minnesota due to stereotypes of the perpetual foreigner and unfair job competitor.

[605] Hien Duc Do, *The Vietnamese Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999); Harvey C. Dong, "The Origins and Trajectory of Asian American Political Activism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1968-1978," PhD diss., (University of California, Berkeley, 2002). Do and Dong examine how journalists ignored the broader problem of racism in cases involving anti-Asian violence. These studies explore journalism framing of Asian victims of violence in the U.S. in the 1970s and emphasize how prevailing stereotypes of Southeast Asians as foreigners and economic competitors made them vulnerable to violent attacks.

[606] Do, *The Vietnamese Americans,* 16. Some journalists played down racism in coverage of the firebombing of Vietnamese fishing boats and reported that the attacks were the result of "intense economic competition" with local White fishermen—not racial animosity (16).

[607] Ibid., 16., Do cites an article by Molly Ivins, "Killing Sharpens Texas Feud on Vietnamese Fishing," *The New York Times,* August 8, 1979, p.16. According to the article, Vietnamese refugees

reporting that since the arrival of refugees in Seadrift in 1976, "the friction has always been economic."[608] To illustrate, *The Times* interviewed the wife of a White fisherman in Seadrift. She explains that during a routine day on the job with her husband, Billy Joe Aplin, five boats carrying Vietnamese fishermen suddenly "circled around us, ramming and bumping us" in a successful attempt to steal Aplin's prime fishing location.[609] *The Times* described the altercation, which ended with the shooting death of Aplin,[610] as a "clash of economic interests," according to Do.[611]

As this dissertation examines in its review of scholarship in Chapter 2, diverse factors may account for the way journalists perceived Asians in the U.S. as victims who were less worthy of sympathy and compassion in the decades leading up to Vincent Chin's slaying. Newsroom routines, journalists' preoccupation with daily "spot news," and personal, often sensational details can distract journalists from recognizing and examining the underlying causes of broad social problems, such as

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had begun arriving in the small town of Seadrift in 1976. The Texas shrimpers, crabbers, and oystermen "believe that their bays were overcrowded before the Vietnamese arrived."

[608] Ivins, "Killing Sharpens Texas Feud."

[609] Ibid.

[610] Ibid. According to *The Times*, after five Vietnamese fishing boats took turns ramming into Aplin's boat, "two suspects were arrested," but Aplin was "still plenty mad about the incident." A few days later, "Billy Joe Aplin watched Sau and Chinh Van Nguyen and three friends start to launch their boat. . . . Several sources said that Mr. Aplin recognized some Vietnamese as those who were involved in the previous incident and accosted Sau Van Nguyen. A fight ensued. Mr. Aplin, shot several times with a .38-caliber pistol, died at 9:15 in a hospital emergency room. Chinh Van Nguyen was arrested that night, charged as an accomplice. Sau Van Nguyen turned himself in Monday and has been charged with murder." *The Times* report states the bare facts of the shooting without emphasizing that Billy Aplin started the fight.

[611] Ibid. Here, *The Times* report appears to side with the White firebombers.

racism.[612] Hence, journalists can become sidetracked from perceiving "race and racism and their connection with crime and victimization," Greer explains.[613]

Another likely factor shaping the underrepresentation of Asian Americans as victims of racism is the model minority stereotype. Scholars Bok-Lim C. Kim, George T. Endo, Connie Kubo Della-Piana, and Bob H. Suzuki, as well as other scholars examining news coverage of Asians, argue that by the 1970s, many journalists appear to have accepted the myth that Asians in the United States had become a model minority.[614] This myth is linked to the following stereotypes: Asians in America are hardworking, perseverant, talented, mathematically inclined, increasingly well educated, and well assimilated.[615]

As discussed in greater detail in the dissertation's review of scholarship, the extent to which the model minority stereotype has and continues to shape news framing of violence against Asians and Asian victims of such violence has been the topic of much scholarly debate. According to scholar Bok-Lim C. Kim, the model minority stereotype put blinders on journalists and likely played a role in coverage that downplayed or even overlooked anti-Asian violence in the United States.[616]

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[612] Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[613] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 28.

[614] Bok-Lim C. Kim, "Asian Americans: No Model Minority," *Social Work* 18, no. 3 (May 1973): 44-53; George T. Endo and Connie Kubo Della-Piana, "Japanese Americans, Pluralism, and the Model Minority Myth," *Theory into Practice* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 45-51; Bob H. Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the 'Model Minority': Outdoing Whites? Or Media Hype?" *Change* 21, no. 6 (1989): 12-19, quoted in Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the Model Minority," 14.

[615] Qin Zhang, "Asian Americans Beyond the Model Minority Stereotype: The Nerdy and the Left Out," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 1, no. 3 (2010): 24.

[616] Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the 'Model Minority.'"

Asian studies scholar Connie Hanzhang Jin agrees with Kim. She finds that the model minority myth "flattens the diverse experiences of Asian Americans [in academics and economics] into a singular, narrow narrative" of Asians' successful assimilation.[617] Circulated by the news media, this narrative can cause individuals to overlook disparities between Asian ethnic groups in education and income and paint "a misleading picture" regarding the Asian community that overlooks anti-Asian violence, according to Hanzhang Jin.[618]

In addition to the model minority stereotype, Asian isolation in the 1970s and 1980s may have shaped the way journalists chose to frame Asians as victims of violence. Prior to Vincent Chin's murder, "the Asian American community had been . . . unable to deal with local media," according to the Asian American Journalists' Association (AAJA) web site.[619] Asian studies author Helen Zia claims that Asian Americans with small populations in Midwestern cities, such as Detroit,[620] formed "disconnected, informal networks" that led to the absence of a "heightened racial consciousness" between White Americans and Asians as well as scarce interactions between the two groups.[621] Hence, Asian American victims of violence were hesitant

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617 Connie Hanzhang Jin, "6 Charts that Dismantle the Trope of Asian Americans as a Model Minority," NPR, last modified May 25, 2021.

618 Ibid.

619 "A Timeline of the Chin Case," Asian American Journalists Association, last modified May 22, 2013, accessed September 30, 2021, http://oldsite.aaja.org/vc-timeline/AAJA is an organization that advocates for members of the Asian American Pacific Islander community for greater representation in U.S. mainstream media newsrooms and greater inclusion in media, according to its web site.

620 In 1980, Detroit had approximately 34,612 Asians. Cited from Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States, Bureau of the Census Library, U.S. Department of Commerce, January 1988.

621 Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), 79. One chapter in Zia's study discusses jury selection for the second civil rights

to reach out to mainstream journalists.

4.5 The Slow Evolution in News Framing of Violence against Asian Americans, 1987-2017

In the decades following the Vincent Chin case, news framing of violent crime against Asian Americans across the country slowly and steadily evolved in three key ways. First, some reporters began looking closely for a racial motive when covering cases of violent crime against Asian Americans. These journalists did not use an official frame that ignored or played down racism as a possible criminal motive. Second, journalists began reporting on specific cases of violence targeting Asians in the U.S. as symptoms of the serious and persistent national issue of anti-Asian racism. Lastly, journalists began paying attention to pan-Asian advocacy groups who called out and condemned the racism motivating particular cases of violence against Asians. Important to note is that although some journalists sought out Asian American advocacy groups' perspectives regarding violence against Asians, in some cases, the press still faced harsh criticism for downplaying the role of racism in its coverage of such violence.

Drawing Attention to Anti-Asian Violence in the Decades Following the Vincent Chin Case

National news outlets' frequent and consistent references to the Vincent Chin case in news stories covering violence against Asians in the U.S. illustrate how journalists

trial connected to the Vincent Chin case. Zia claims that during this period (late 1980s) Asians were "near invisible" in Cincinnati. To illustrate, she explains that when jurors were asked about their contact with Asians, out of 180 Cincinnati citizens in the jury pool, "only 19 had ever had 'casual contact'" with Asians in the city.

used the case to draw attention to anti-Asian violence decades following Chin's murder. The Associated Press, *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* and National Public Radio (NPR) mentioned Vincent Chin's name a total of 24, 73, 28, and 46 times, respectively, between the end of the last civil suit related to the Chin case on June 1, 1987, and Donald Trump's swearing into office on January 20, 2017.

In the decades following Vincent Chin's murder, some national news coverage referencing the Chin murder case drew attention to anti-Asian violence by discussing how the pan-Asian organization surrounding the Chin case taught Asian American communities to unite against anti-Asian hatred. For example, on November 27, 2000, The Associated Press reported that the pan-Asian activist group American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), a direct outgrowth of the Chin murder case, was successful in bringing diverse Asian ethnic groups together in support of justice for Vincent Chin, despite "sharp [cultural] differences" among these groups.[622] According to the news report, by strengthening the bonds within the Asian American community following Chin's death, ACJ protests "taught Asian crime victims that it pays to stick together" in the face of racial adversity.[623] As one example, The Associated Press

[622] Richard Benke, "Author Casts Wary Eye on History of Asian American Aspirations," *The Associated Press,* November 27, 2000, Nexis Uni Database. See also William M. Welch, "Rights Panel Cites Japan-Bashing as a Cause of Bias," *The Associated Press,* February 28, 1992, Nexis Uni Database. The Associated Press compares the racially motivated murder of Vincent Chin to the stabbing death of Japanese businessman Yasuo Kato in Camarillo, California on February 23, 1992. The man was stabbed "after being threatened by a White man who blamed Japan for the loss of his job." Part of the news report is devoted to a summary of a 1992 Civil Rights Commission report claiming that anti-Asian violence is a "serious national problem" that warrants "increased sensitivity by the media." The Commission report was released during a period of increased animosity toward Japan and Japanese Americans facing attack from politicians and business leaders who blamed Japan for U.S. economic woes. The news report claims that the Civil Rights Commission "offered 44 recommendations as remedies to anti-Asian hate, including greater federal effort to prevent hate crimes and better efforts by police agencies to hire Asian-Americans."

[623] Ibid.

report described how Korean Americans during the 1992 Los Angeles riots organized protests against the looting and burning of Korean businesses by Black residents of L.A. Black Americans in the city resented Koreans' financial success at a time when Blacks were struggling under L.A.'s unstable economy.[624] The news report quoted a Korean American business owner in L.A., Jae Yul Kim, who explained that Korean Americans in the city had grown closer because of the protests: "Before the riots, I never talk to my customers. Now, we make jokes, we like each other. I learn to change. I have to," Kim told The Associated Press.[625]

In the early 2000s, some national news coverage referencing the Vincent Chin case drew attention to violent hate crimes against Asian Americans by commemorating the milestone anniversaries of Chin's slaying. On June 23, 2002, The Associated Press memorialized the 20th anniversary of Chin's murder with a news report on the gathering of civil rights activists at a Detroit conference titled a "Rededication to Justice."[626] According to the news report, in addition to honoring Vincent Chin's memory in the presence of Chin's family and friends, "the conference also honored activists for raising awareness about injustices motivated by hate and discrimination" toward Asian Americans since Chin's death.[627] Similarly, *The New*

[624] Ibid., The L.A. riots lasted for three days from April 29-May 1, 1992 and centered around the beating of Rodney King, an African American victim of police brutality. On March 3, 1991, LAPD officers beat and arrested him after a high-speed chase for driving while intoxicated. After the four police officers involved in the beating were acquitted, race riots encompassing violence against Korean American storeowners engulfed the city. Koreatown was destroyed with several buildings looted and set on fire.

[625] Ibid.

[626] Geralda Miller, "Civil Rights Activists Remember Asian American Killed in Detroit Twenty Years Ago," June 23, 2002, Associated Press, Nexis Uni Database.

[627] Ibid.

York Times commemorated the 20th anniversary of Vincent Chin's killing on June 18, 2002, and reported that the Chin case harbors an important lesson that Asian Americans should remember: stereotypes of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners can result in *"*acts of prejudice and intimidation . . . from vandalism to murder."[628] *The Times* article explained that just as pan-Asian organization arose following Chin's murder, more recent acts of violence against Asians are once again "emboldening . . . Asian American advocates" to speak out against anti-Asian hate.[629]

After Vincent Chin's Death: The Slow Shift in News Framing of Violent Crimes against Asians

In the late 1980s, news framing of particular cases of violent crime targeting Asian Americans began a slow but steady shift. Some journalists started using an official frame that acknowledged anti-Asian racism as a possible criminal motive in violent crime cases. These journalists began considering the views of Asian American advocacy group members and other sources who alleged a racial motive for violence targeting Asian groups when making judgements about framing Asians as victims worthy of justice.

One example is journalism framing of the Jim Ming Hai-Loo murder case. On July 29, 1989, Loo, a Chinese immigrant, was murdered outside a bar in Raleigh, North Carolina. As Loo and his Vietnamese friends played pool, two White brothers,

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[628] Lynette Clemetson, "A Slaying in 1982 Maintains Its Grip on Asian Americans," *The New York Times*, June 18, 2022, Nexis Uni Database.

[629] Ibid.

Lloyd Piche, 29, and Robert Piche, 35, who mistook Loo as Vietnamese, began "blaming them for American deaths in Vietnam," according to a Report on Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans that discussed the case in detail.[630] Witnesses claimed that Lloyd Piche had said to Loo: "I don't like you because you're Vietnamese. Our brothers went over to Vietnam, and they never came back," as stated in the civil rights report.[631] After the bar's manager asked Robert and Lloyd to leave, the two men waited outside. When Loo and his friends exited the bar, a fight ensued, and Robert Piche hit Loo over the head with a gun, knocking him unconscious. Loo died in the hospital from brain damage on July 31, 1989, according to the civil rights report.[632]

Journalists' reliance on police statements to frame Loo's murder as racially motivated illustrates the slow but persistent shift in news framing of violence against Asians in the U.S. For example, on August 1, 1989, *The Chapel Hill Newspaper* reported that Loo's murder was "what police described as a racially motivated attack at a pool hall."[633] In response to the crime, on March 29, 1990, local court Judge Howard E. Manning, Jr. sentenced Robert Piche to 37 years in prison for second-degree murder. This sentence was far less than the lifetime sentence North Carolina

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[630] *Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s: A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights.* University of Illinois: Champaign, Illinois, 1992, 26-28.

[631] Ibid.

[632] Ibid., 26-27. Loo fell onto the ground and hit his eye on a fragment of a broken beer bottle, which caused a bone fragment to pierce his brain.

[633] "Chinese Man's Slaying in Raleigh Called a Racially Motivated Attack," *The Chapel Hill Newspaper,* August 1, 1989, Newspapers.com.

law permits for such a crime.[634] Having punched one of Loo's Vietnamese friends during the altercation, Lloyd Piche was sentenced to six months in prison for disorderly conduct.[635] In the months following the sentencing, Asian American advocacy group leaders in Raleigh held rallies and press conferences to "press the U.S. Department of Justice to bring federal civil rights charges against Lloyd Piche" for calling Loo and his friends gooks, according to the civil rights report.[636]

Additionally, some local journalists began paying attention to Asian advocacy group leaders' statements that framed Loo as a victim who was worthy of racial justice. For example, on July 15, 1991, *The Raleigh News and Observer* cited a press release sent out by Asian American activist leaders in Raleigh. The press release stated that Lloyd Piche had "conspired" to "injure, oppress, threaten, and intimidate" Loo because of his race, according to the news report.[637] Lloyd was convicted of violating Loo's civil rights on July 15, 1991, and later sentenced to four years in prison on October 15th of that year.[638]

However, national news outlets paid little attention to the Loo murder case. According to the civil rights report on the case: "Loo's killing . . . was hardly covered

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[634] *Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s*, 27. Robert Piche was given the possibility of parole in just 4 1/2 years.

[635] Ibid.

[636] Ibid., 26.

[637] "Man on Trial over His Role in Loo Death," *Raleigh News and Observer*, July 15, 1991, Newspapers.com.

[638] *Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s*, 28. Lloyd Piche was convicted on eight counts of violating Loo's civil rights.

by the national media and raised no national sense of outrage."[639] The dearth of national coverage could possibly be attributed to the fact that Asian American community leaders in Raleigh lacked the resources to connect with national news journalists.[640] A statement from the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) does not refute this argument. According to AAJA, Asian American communities, who were largely isolated from White communities in major U.S. cities, "had been . . . mute and unable to deal with media" during the initial years following the Vincent Chin case.[641]

Contrary to news reports covering the Loo murder case, some journalists did not initially use an anti-Asian racism frame when reporting on the McCreesh Playground murder that took place in August 1991. This is because journalists did not initially explore the possibility that anti-Asian racism played a role in the incident. However, after Asian American activists became involved in the case, journalists began to pay increasing attention to the potential role of racial hatred by incorporating activists' statements condemning such racism into their news reports.

At McCreesh Park in a suburban neighborhood in Southwest Philadelphia on the night of August 4, 1991, 18-year-old David Reilly was stabbed to death in an altercation between a group of his White male friends and a group of six Vietnamese

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[639] Ibid., 28.

[640] *Civil Rights Issues Facing Asian Americans in the 1990s*, 27. A Nexis Uni Database search reveals only two news reports written by the Associated Press on September 8, 1991 and January 25, 1992 and one report published in *The New York Times* on September 12, 1991. All three reports only briefly mention Loo's murder in 2-3 sentences each within the context of an increase in hate crimes against Asians.

[641] "A Timeline of the Chin Case," Asian American Journalists Association.

refugees in their late teens. Reilly and his friends spotted the group of refugees in the park, who had been quietly visiting amongst themselves.[642] Witnesses for the defense later testified that two of Reilly's friends walked over to the refugees. The witnesses claimed that one of Reilly's friends "threatened to harm them if they did not vacate" the park, according to scholar Scott Kurashige's analysis of the event.[643]

A fight ensued after one of the Asian youth left the park and quickly returned carrying kitchen knives and a meat cleaver. Reilly was stabbed once in the back and once in the chest. Reilly's friends later told police who were stationed near the park and had broken up the fight that Reilly was attempting to act as a peacemaker but "was caught in the crossfire" when he was slain, according to Kurashige.[644] He died in the hospital the night of the murder. The prosecution charged all six of the refugees involved in the fight with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder. On June 29, 1992, three of the six Vietnamese refugees were found guilty of third-degree murder, and all six refugees were found guilty of criminal conspiracy to commit murder. Sentences ranged from one-to-ten years to twelve-to-thirty years imprisonment.[645]

In the initial months following the murder, some local journalists downplayed anti-Asian racism as a possible criminal motive for the altercation in three ways.

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[642] Scott Kurashige, "Pan-ethnicity and Community Organizing: Asian American United's Campaign against Anti-Asian Violence," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 3, no. 2 (June 2000): 168.

[643] Ibid.

[644] Ibid.

[645] Scott Kurashige, "Beyond Random Acts of Hatred: Analyzing Urban Patterns of Anti-Asian Violence," *Amerasia Journal*, 26, no. 1 (2000): 225.

First, journalists framed Reilly's murder as the result of Asian gang activity.[646] However, investigations by defense attorneys confirmed that there were no organized gangs of Asians in Southwest Philadelphia. Defense attorneys also uncovered that "it was some of the White youth and not the Asians who belonged to a gang known as the White Power Boys, Kurashige claims.[647] The White Power Boys, a White supremacist group that was active in some parts of Philadelphia and other major Northeastern cities, harassed, intimidated, and discriminated against Southeast Asians moving into White neighborhoods. However, rather than focusing their news reports on the White Power Boys, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* characterized Riley's death as an "Asian gang slaying" in a "White-Asian feud," in an article published on August 4, 1991.[648] Similarly, on October 25, 1991, *The Inquirer* reported that on the night of the murder, police "photographed the group of Vietnamese teens" as part of local law enforcement's ongoing efforts to "collect intelligence" on "Asian gang activity" in Philadelphia.[649]

The second way some local journalists downplayed anti-Asian racism as a possible criminal motive was by blaming the Vietnamese youth for starting the fight instead of acknowledging that two of Reilly's friends had instigated the altercation. For example, on August 4, 1991, *The Raleigh News and Observer* quoted

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[646] Kurashige, "Pan-ethnicity and Community Organizing," 179.

[647] Ibid., 169.

[648] Scott Kurashige, "Spree of Anti-Asian Violence Has Long Roots — Including Terror in 1990s Philly," Truthout, accessed on June 14, 2022. Kurashige does not provide the title of the news report.

[649] Jennifer Lin, "Police Photo Sweeps Anger Asians," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* October 25, 1991, Newspapers.com Database.

Philadelphia police who claimed that "three young Asians had approached the White youths" and started the fight by name calling.[650] This idea was later proven untrue by defense attorneys during the June 1992 trial. Defense attorneys subpoenaed two White bystanders who were near the park the night of the murder. The witnesses testified that they had seen two White teens approach the group of Vietnamese youth.[651]

Third, some news reports downplayed anti-Asian by "demoniz[ing] Asians" as enemies and perpetual foreigners, according to Kurashige.[652] On August 10, 1991, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* interviewed one of the White teenagers involved in the fight. During his interview, he associated the refugee youth with the Vietnam War: "They go to war with us . . . and then they try to move into America. We were here first. We're Americans," he told *The Inquirer*.[653]

National news media largely ignored the McCreesh Playground murder in the initial months following the crime. The few journalists who did cover the murder downplayed the possibility of anti-Asian racism as a potential motive for the fight. For example, on September 3, 1991, a *New York Times* report referred to the murder as "a clash between Whites and Asians" but framed the clash as an economic issue.[654]

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[650] "Teen Hacked to Death in Philadelphia," August 4, 1991, *The Raleigh News and Observer*, Newspapers.com Database.

[651] Kurashige, "Pan-ethnicity and Community Organizing," 169.

[652] Ibid., 168.

[653] Kurashige, "Spree of Anti-Asian Violence Has Long Roots."

[654] Michel Marriott, "Slaying Divides Neighborhood on Racial Lines," *The New York Times*, September 3, 1991.

The Times claimed that "the loss of industrial jobs" and the city's growing Asian population that "rose to 43,522 last year from 17,764 in 1980" led to the altercation.[655]

Some local journalists covering David Reilly's used the anti-Asian racism frame by paying attention to statements made by Asian American activists concerning anti-Asian racism in the Reilly murder case and incorporating these statements into their news coverage. While activists addressed the role of anti-Asian racism in initiating the fight at the park, their main focus was drawing attention to the role that such racism played during the trial of the Vietnamese youth.

Asian Americans United (AAU), a pan-Asian advocacy group in Philadelphia, became involved in the case during the months leading up to the murder trial, which began on June 6, 1992.[656] AAU leaders argued that prosecutors' charge of first-degree murder for all six Vietnamese refugees involved in the fight was racially motivated because not all of the refugees could have stabbed Reilly. This is because the coroner's report indicated that Reilly was stabbed once in the back and once in the chest. The coroner's report led defense attorneys to conclude that only one or two people could have had stabbed Reilly. AAU activists claimed that the refugees who did not stab Reilly were falsely charged with first-degree murder due to the racial

[655] Ibid.

[656] Kurashige, "Pan-ethnicity and Community Organizing," 188. Asian Americans United was a pan-Asian advocacy group created in 1985 in Philadelphia to combat anti-Asian violence. According to Kurashige, "Asian Americans United was not the only Asian American organization involved in the McCreesh Park incident. The Asian American Youth Association and its president, Hoang Tran, also mediated between Whites and Southeast Asians in Southwest Philadelphia." For more information on AAU, visit the organization's web site: https://aaunited.org/#.

profiling of Asians in Southwest Philadelphia as criminals and troublemakers.[657] According to scholar Robert Thayer, racial profiling in 1990s Philadelphia was "part of a social context where the growing population of Asian Americans . . . was met with hostility on a citywide level" that seeped into the justice system and "led to wrongful convictions of Asians."[658] The challenge for AAU activists was that none of the six refugees charged with first-degree murder had confessed to murdering Reilly.[659] Hence, activists could not argue with certainty as to which of the six refugees involved in the fight they believed were falsely charged with murder on racial grounds and which were guilty of stabbing Reilly.

AAU members centered their argument concerning the racial profiling of Vietnamese youth around two factors.[660] First, at rallies and press conferences, AAU highlighted the fact that lead prosecutor Joseph Casey told the court that " 'regardless of who actually plunged the knives into David Reilly's body, all, *all* are guilty' " of murder and conspiracy to commit murder because of the " 'anti-White racial tensions' " in Philadelphia, as Kurashige explains, quoting the prosecutor.[661] According to Kurashige, AAU highlighted "the prosecutor's emphasis on the theme of 'us versus

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[657] Ibid. 169-170.

[658] Robert Thayer, "Who Killed Heng Lim?" M.A. Thesis, 1990, 14, 53-58, in Kurashige, "Beyond Random Acts of Hatred," 229. Thayer cites statistics from the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations that reveal that Asian Americans were the victims of 25-30 percent of all reported interracial attacks in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The population of the Hmong community in Philadelphia declined from over 3,000 in the early 1980s to around 450 by 1991 after, as one researcher describes, 'a series of violent racial attacks and pervasive crime in their neighborhoods led most of them to pack up and leave the city by 1984.'" (229)

[659] Kurashige, "Pan-ethnicity and Community Organizing," 169.

[660] Ibid.

[661] Ibid., 169, 179.

them' " by using the phrase "We Americans" when addressing the jury and the phrase "the foreigners on trial" when speaking about the Vietnamese defendants.[662]

AAU's second piece of evidence of racial profiling involved the arrest of Ty Truong. On the night of the slaying, Ty Truong, a twenty-four-year-old Vietnamese resident of Southwest Philadelphia, was wrongfully charged with Reilly's murder because he was Vietnamese. Following his arrest, Truong told police that he had been at the movies at the time of the altercation in the park. Police initially ignored Truong's alibi and held him in jail for fifty-five days based on a statement from one of Reilly's friends. Reilly's friend had seen Truong drive by the park just minutes after police broke up the fight and had informed police that Truong was " 'one of the motherfucking gooks' " who killed Reilly, as Kurashige explains.[663] Although police eventually investigated Truong's alibi and released him from jail, AAU drew attention to his *prolonged detention* in jail as "a product of the racial profiling endured by Asian youth throughout the area," Kurashige says.[664] These experiences with police were not confined to Vietnamese teenagers in Philadelphia but had been "shared by African American and Puerto Rican youth," according to Kurashige.[665]

Some local journalists covering the trial of the Vietnamese youth used the anti-Asian racism frame by incorporating Asian activists' statements concerning racial hatred in the Reilly murder case into their news reports. For example, on June

[662] Ibid.

[663] Ibid., 168.

[664] Ibid.

[665] Ibid.

5, 1992, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* covered an AAU rally held in front of the District Attorney's office. The news report claimed that AAU protesters "painted Reilly's slaying as a response to what they described as a long pattern of harassment and violence against Asians [in Philadelphia] . . . a pattern of abuse activists say prosecutors and police have ignored."[666] The news report also quoted AAU activist John Fong who described how every day in Philadelphia "Asians get attacked with rocks and sticks" and "get beaten" because of their race.[667] Similarly, on June 6, 1992, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the trial was "being watched closely" by AAU. *The Inquirer* reported that the activist group claimed that prosecutors "have treated anti-Asian violence [in the Reilly case] indifferently" by "harshly handling Asians" and "falsely charging" some of the defendants with murder.[668]

None of the secondary sources that I consulted commented on national news coverage of the Reilly murder trial, and a Nexis Uni database search uncovered only one 140-word news report in *The New York Times* from July 1, 1992, that covered the trial. This news report paid attention to anti-Asian racism by emphasizing that prosecutors ignored such racism in the murder case. According to *The Times,* AAU leaders claimed that prosecutors' attempt to convict all the refugees of first-degree murder despite the fact that some refugees did not stab Reilly was "unfair" on "racial

[666] Craig R. McCoy, "Protesters Denounce Asians' Prosecution in Philadelphia Slaying," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 5, 1992, Newspapers.com Database.

[667] Ibid.

[668] Linda Lloyd, "Racism Blamed as Vietnamese Go on Trial in Reilly Killing," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 6, 1992, Newspapers.com Database.

grounds."[669]

In the early 1990s, local and national news coverage of the Latasha Harlins murder case and the Los Angeles riots, discussed in detail below, did not always acknowledge the potential role of anti-Asian animus. While a few news stories used the anti-Asian racism frame by spotlighting how such racism motivated the violent crime targeting Asian Americans, other news stories either ignored or downplayed the role of race.

Asian American studies author Helen Zia analyzes the L.A. riots and the Latasha Harlins murder case. According to Zia, on March 3, 1991, four White police officers arrested Rodney King, an African American, for speeding in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. During the arrest, the officers struck King over fifty times with nightsticks, breaking his right ankle and fracturing a facial bone, after King initially resisted police orders. The officers were charged with use of excessive force and assault with a deadly weapon.[670]

While the four officers awaited trial, another very significant case of violence surfaced in Los Angeles nearly two weeks later. On March 15, 1991, Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old African American youth, was murdered by 49-year-old Korean storeowner Soon Ja Du. According to Zia's account of the case, Harlins walked into Soon Ja Du's store to buy a $1.79 bottle of orange juice. As Harlins approached the cash register, Soon Ja Du saw the orange juice in Harlins' backpack and assumed she

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[669] "Vietnamese Convicted in Slaying of a White," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1992, Nexis Uni Database.

[670] Zia, *Asian American Dreams*, 182-183.

was stealing despite the fact that Harlins carried cash in her hand. Store security camera footage shows that Soon Ja Du grabbed the backpack. Harlins threw the orange juice on the counter and slapped Du, knocking her down. As Harlins turned to leave the store, Du grabbed a .38-caliber handgun hidden beneath the counter and shot Harlins in the back of the head, killing her instantly, as store security camera footage shows. In the days following the killing, an African American activist group known as the Brotherhood Crusade organized pickets and boycotts of Korean-owned businesses and murdered some Korean storeowners.[671]

However, justice evaded L.A.'s African American community. On October 12, 1991, Soon Ja Du was convicted of voluntary manslaughter and faced a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison. But on November 15th of that year, Judge Joyce Karlin reduced the sentence to 5 years' probation and 500 hours of community service. The judge noted that Soon Ja Du "was inexperienced with guns" and "would otherwise not have shot Harlins," according to Zia's account of the event.[672] The judge's sentence infuriated L.A.'s African American community.

Black-Korean animosity intensified on April 29, 1992, when a mostly White grand jury acquitted the four White police officers who beat Rodney King on all charges. From April 29-May 4, 1992, riots fueled by Black-White racial tensions engulfed Los Angeles. Blacks who remained angry over Latasha Harlin's murder and who resented Korean businessowners that thrived in poor, mostly Black

[671] Ibid., 180.

[672] Ibid.

neighborhoods looted and burned Korean-owned marketplaces in L.A.[673]

Scholars and Asian American studies authors agree that Korean American isolation in 1990s Los Angeles hindered their ability to draw attention to the anti-Asian racism motivating the looting of Korean-owned businesses due to Latasha Harlins' murder.[674] Korean Americans, viewed as foreigners, were isolated from White American journalists. Hence, they lacked the connections to draw some local mainstream reporters' attention to the anti-Asian racism motivating violent crime against Koreans in the city.[675] Moreover, in the early 1990s, "there were no national pan-Asian advocacy groups that pushed for policy changes to improve the lives of Korean Americans" and draw national news journalists' attention to the racial injustice targeting Koreans in Los Angeles, as scholar Angela E. Oh notes.[676] Michael M. Thornton, a professor of sociology and race studies,[677] agrees, claiming that Korean Americans in 1990s L.A. faced "longstanding neglect … isolation, and alienation" from African Americans and, especially, from White Americans in L.A.[678] Such isolation, Thornton claims, led to White "majority presses . . . misunderstanding interethnic conflict" by overlooking anti-Asian discrimination.[679] In considering this

[673] Ibid., 174.

[674] Ibid., 180-184.

[675] Ibid.

[676] Angela E. Oh, "An Issue of Time and Place: The Truth behind Korean-Americans' Connection to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots," *Asian American Policy Review* 19 (2009/2010): 39-48.

[677] Michael M. Thornton, "Meaningful Dialogue? The Los Angeles Sentinel's Depiction of Black and Asian American Relations, 1993-2000," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 8 (November 2011): 1275-1298.

[678] Ibid., 1282.

[679] Ibid., 1277.

case in the context of Asian American news coverage, I reviewed approximately one hundred news articles covering the case.

Due to Korean American isolation from the White mainstream press in L.A., some news reports in *The Los Angeles Times* did not pay attention to the potential role of anti-Asian racism in coverage of Latasha Harlins' murder. Instead, they characterized African Americans—not Korean American shopkeepers—in L.A. as victims of racism. These news stories did not report on the Brotherhood Crusade boycotts fueled by anti-Asian racism that targeted Korean marketplaces. Instead, such news stories focused on how stereotypes of Blacks as criminals led to tense interactions between Korean storeowners and their African American customers.[680] According to Asian Studies author Helen Zia, several news reports in *The L.A. Times* focusing on Black-Korean interactions in Korean marketplaces quoted African Americans who had unpleasant encounters with Korean storeowners. Zia, who interviewed some of the storeowners when writing her book, *Asian American Dreams*, claimed that some Korean business people harbored suspicions that all Blacks were thieves due to the presence of Black gangs in L.A.[681] For example, on March 20, 1991, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter interviewed an African American man who was a customer in Soon Ja Du's store. The man claimed: "I came up to the counter to pay for a bottle of wine, and she [Du] says to me: 'Oh, you didn't steal

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[680] Zia, *Asian American Dreams*, 176.

[681] Ibid., 177.

anything today.' I stopped going in there," according to *The Times* report.[682] The news report stated that "all [African Americans] interviewed had similar complaints" about Korean storeowners in L.A.[683]

Only a few local news reports in *The Los Angeles Times* covering the Harlins murder case paid attention to anti-Asian racism. These reports portrayed both African Americans and Korean Americans as victims of racial prejudice. For example, on April 8, 1991, *The Times* published a report claiming that "behind the discord" between African Americans and Korean Americans lies "a common struggle" to overcome "the prejudice" facing minority groups in L.A.[684] *The Times* report framed Du as "both victim and victimizer," a storeowner guilty of shooting Harlins but also an immigrant struggling to cope with the "stress" of a "startlingly racially diverse" American culture.[685] Similarly, the report characterized Harlins as an "innocent victim" trying to cope with "the troubles that disrupt life" for African Americans who were frequently stereotyped as criminals.[686] The report quoted Halford Farchild, a social psychologist at Cal State Los Angeles, who claimed that he "felt so bad" for both African Americans and Korean Americans because "both are victims" of the race prejudices inflicting minorities.[687]

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[682] Andrea Ford and John H. Lee, "Racial Tensions Blamed in Girl's Death," *The Los Angeles Times,* March 20, 1991, Newspapers.com Database.

[683] Ibid.

[684] Jesse Katz and John H. Lee, "Conflict Brings Tragic End to Similar Dreams of Life," *The Los Angeles Times,* April 8, 1991, Newspapers.com.

[685] Ibid.

[686] Ibid.

[687] Ibid.

A few national news reports covering Harlins' murder used the anti-Asian racism frame by spotlighting acts of such racism targeting Korean American storeowners in L.A. However, other national news stories did not mention anti-Asian hatred as a motive for robbing and burning Korean-owned businesses. For example, on August 19, 1991, in a news report headlined "Another Korean Store Firebombed," The Associated Press focused on the pattern of robberies, arson, and boycotts inflicted by African Americans against Korean-owned businesses following Harlins' slaying. The report quoted Bishop E. Lynn Brown who "condemn[ed] fire bombings on any race, any culture, or any ethnic group."[688] However, a different Associated Press report published on October 9, 1991, focused solely on jury deliberations during Soon Ja Du's trial without mentioning the fire bombings or anti-Asian racism.[689]

Similarly, some *New York Times* reports covered the attacks against Korean-owned stores without shedding light on anti-Asian racism. For example, on March 22, 1991, *The Times* reported that Harlins' murder "has strained relations between Blacks and Koreans" in L.A. but stopped short of reporting on the violence targeting Korean-owned stores or spotlighting Koreans as victims of racial injustic.[690] Similarly, on November 17, 1991, *The Times* covered Soon Ja Du's sentence of 5 years' probation and community service without mentioning the looting and burning of Korean-owned

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[688] Yumi Wilson, "Another Korean-Owned Store Firebombed," The Associated Press, August 19, 1991, Nexis Uni Database.

[689] Linda Deutsch, "Deliberations Resume in Racially Charged Case," *The New York Times,* October 9, 1991, Nexis Uni Database.

[690] No Author, "Merchant Charged in Girl's Fatal Shooting," *The New York Times,* March 22, 1991, Nexis Uni Database.

businesses or the problem of anti-Asian racism in the city. [691]

Similar to its coverage of Latasha Harlins' murder, *The Los Angeles Times* did not always pay attention to anti-Asian racism in coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. News stories framed the violence against Korean American storeowners—not as the product of anti-Asian racism—but as the result of African Americans' resentment of Korean economic success in poor Black neighborhoods.[692] For example, on May 1, 1992, the *LA. Times* quoted an African American looter and arsonist. According to the news report, the looter "voiced the outrage of many Black residents toward [Korean] immigrant merchants: 'These businesses we burned down don't care about us,' he said. 'They [Korean storeowners] just charge high prices and take our money. Now, we are taking some [money] back."[693] While the news story did mention that some Black residents in L.A. "raised their fists at police cars and cried 'No justice! No peace!' in protest of Rodney King's beating" by four White police officers, the news report downplayed the riot's Black-White racial tensions in favor of economic ones.[694] For example, the news story concluded that it was Korean storeowners—not police officers—who "received the brunt of a rage that some residents and community experts say stems from [African Americans'] painful

[691] "Grocer Given Probation in Shooting of Girl," *The New York Times,* November 17, 1991, Nexis Uni Database.

[692] Zia, *Asian American Dreams,* and King Kok Cheung, "(Mis)interpretations and (In)justice: The 1992 Los Angeles "Riots" and "Black-Korean Conflict," *Personal and Political* 30, n0. 3 (Fall 2005): 3-40.

[693] No Author. "FEAR: Self-Inflicted Wounds Terrorize South Los Angeles," *The Los Angeles Times,* May 1, 1992.

[694] Ibid.

economic isolation."[695]

Other news stories in *The Los Angeles Times* used the anti-Asian racism frame in news coverage of the 1992 riots by framing Koreans as innocent victims of racial discrimination. According to scholar Lai Wah Chen's analysis of *Los Angeles Times* coverage,[696] on May 1, 1992, *The Times* ran a front-page story that framed Korean shopkeepers as worthy of justice and sympathy, noting that Koreans "cried in grief" after finding "their small retail businesses in embers." [697] The news report voiced the perspectives of several Korean Americans, including a Korean storeowner who expressed anger over what she termed the "racist violence" by African American arsonists who firebombed her business: "We didn't do anything wrong. We worked like slaves here. . . . Is this justice? What is it? What did we do to them [African Americans]? Nothing."[698]

Various interpretations exist as to the extent to which national news outlets paid attention to anti-Asian racism in news coverage of the 1992 L.A. riots. Some analyses find that national media outlets ignored Korean American perspectives. For example, Asian Studies author and former activist Helen Zia spoke with Korean Americans during the aftermath of the 1992 riots. She claims that "few [national news] reporters ventured to Koreatown or bothered to interview Korean Americans

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[695] Ibid.

[696] Lai Wah Chen, "The 1992 Los Angeles Riots: A Comparison of Media Coverage between The Los Angeles Times, The Orange County Register, and The Los Angeles Sentinel, Master's Thesis, (University of Oregon, 2021), 34.

[697] Greg Braxton and Jim Newton, "Looting and Fires Ravage L.A.: 25 Dead, 572 Injured; 1,000 Blazes Reported," *The Los Angeles Times,* May 1, 1992.

[698] Ibid.

about the riots."[699] Zia notes that "Ted Koppel of ABC News dedicated two weeks of *Nightline*'s programs to onsite coverage in Los Angeles" but only spoke with African American gang members in the city."[700] Zia's analysis did not mention any of the coverage of the L.A. riots in national newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.*

Similarly, Jane L. Twomey, a professor of race and ethnic studies, analyzed coverage of the LA. riots in *The New York Times.* She claims that *The Times* predominantly framed the racial conflict in terms of a fight between African Americans and Caucasians.[701] For example, Twomey explains that *Times* reports merely "chronicled events from the Rodney King beating to the jury's decision" to acquit the four White police officers charged with using excessive force against King.[702] Other *Times* reports focused on the aftermath of the verdict and framed the riots as a result of "police brutality" and "Black-White racism," according to Twomey.[703] Still other news stories published in *The Times* framed the looting and burning of Korean American businesses in terms of African Americans' frustration over the increased economic competition that Korean-owned businesses created. For example, on May 3, 1992, *The Times* ran a front-page story contrasting what it termed the "economically vibrant enclave" of Koreatown with L.A.'s poor Black community,

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[699] Zia, *Asian American Dreams,* 183.

[700] Ibid.

[701] Jane L. Twomey, "Constructing the Riot: An Ideological Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots in Five Newspapers," Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998.

[702] Ibid., 198-199.

[703] Ibid.

which, the report claimed, "struggles with poverty and crime."[704] In the report, *The Times* quoted a Korean merchant who claimed: "I think the Black people are jealous of Koreans. They're lazy. We are working hard. They're not making money; we are making money.'"[705] According to Twomey, *The Times* reported that Korean merchants had become "a lightning rod for the [financial] discontent of some Black residents."[706]

Scholar Claire Jean Kim takes a different approach in her analysis of mainstream media framing of Black-Korean race relations. Kim examines race relations between Korean store owners and Blacks during New York City's Red Apple Boycott,[707] which began on January 18, 1990, and lasted nearly four months. The boycott occurred approximately two weeks after residents elected David Dinkins the city's first African American mayor.

Kim argues that, rather than downplaying or ignoring the anti-Asian racism targeting Korean storeowners as some journalists covering Black-Korean conflict in

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[704] Ibid., 219., cited from S. Mydans, "A Target of Rioters, Koreatown is Bitter, Armed and Determined," *The New York Times,* May 3, 1992.

[705] Ibid., 219-220., cited from S. Mydans, "A Target of Rioters, Koreatown is Bitter, Armed and Determined," *The New York Times,* May 3, 1992.

[706] Ibid., 220., cited from S. Mydans, "A Target of Rioters, Koreatown is Bitter, Armed and Determined," *The New York Times,* May 3, 1992.

[707] The Red Apple Boycott, named after a Korean American-owned produce shop in Brooklyn called The Family Red Apple, surrounded the alleged assault of a Haitian American woman, Giselaine Fetissainte, by a Korean American shopkeeper. The woman claimed she was struck by three of the shop's employees over a dispute involving limes, plantains, and peppers. The shopkeeper said that the woman had refused to pay for the items and that she had not been attacked but merely restrained from leaving the store with the items. A local Black activist, Robert (Sonny) Carson, and George Edward Tait, a community activist and educator, led the boycott. The incident led to public criticism of New York City's Mayor David Dinkins for failing to end the protest.

Los Angeles had done, mainstream media journalists in New York City "used colorblind talk to champion the Korean merchants [as victims of racial injustice], deflect charges of [anti-Black] racism…and condemn the [Black] boycotters as criminals, demagogues, and 'reverse' racists."[708] In so doing, journalists undercut the boycott of Korean-owned stores and pressured Mayor Dinkins, who had campaigned on racial unity, to condemn the boycott.[709]

One of the key tenets of Kim's argument is that mainstream media—both news articles and editorials—developed an official news narrative about the Red Apple Boycott that drew attention to the anti-Asian racism motivating it. This narrative "held that the Black underclass was scapegoating the Korean model minority in a manner that violated the norms of colorblindness," as Kim explains.[710] Kim argues that this official narrative "re-racialized" Koreans as the "good minority," Blacks as the "bad minority," and Whites as the "neutral, disinterested observers" or "colorblind enforcers," whose role was promoting "fairness and justice."[711] By framing Whites as the neutral party, mainstream media allowed Whites to think of the boycotters as the lawbreakers.[712]

For example, Kim explains that *The New York Times* characterized the Red Apple Boycott as a "morality play" between "good" Korean store owners and "bad"

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[708] Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 189.

[709] Ibid.

[710] Ibid., 192.

[711] Ibid.

[712] Ibid., 193.

African American boycotters who inflicted racial injustice on the Korean storeowners.[713] One *New York Times* article published May 13, 1990, and headlined "Black Demonstrators March in 2 Brooklyn Communities" juxtaposed excerpts from Mayor Dinkin's speech expressing the need for racial harmony in New York City with descriptions of Black protesters noisily calling for additional boycotts. Another *Times* news story published May 29, 1990, and headlined "Racial Unity and Dissent in Brooklyn," covered a march in support of racial harmony led by opponents of the boycotts. The subhead read: "While Marchers Stress Love, Boycotts of Two Stores Continue."[714] The story contrasted the racial "bitterness" of a small group of Black boycotters with descriptions of marchers "pleading for racial harmony," according to Kim.[715]

Both print and television news stories relied heavily on the use of the model minority stereotype to characterize Korean shop owners as "good" minorities while relying on the Black underclass trope to characterize boycotters as "bad" minorities inflicting racial injustice on Korean storeowners. For example, a story in *New York Newsday* published June 29, 1990, and headlined: "Singled Out for Their 'Success': Asians Battle Soaring Violence as 'Model' Immigrant Group," characterized the boycott as an example of anti-Asian violence.[716] Additionally, an episode of CBS's *48 Hours* titled "Simmer in the City" that aired July 12, 1990, "depicted the bad

[713] Ibid., 194.

[714] Ibid.

[715] Ibid.

[716] Ibid., 195.

minority persecuting the good minority," according to Kim.[717] The episode juxtaposed video clips of Korean immigrant storeowner Bong Jae Jang getting out of bed at 5 a.m. in his small apartment and describing his long work hours with a clip of Black protesters "shouting slogans, gesturing, leaning against the police barricades, looking angry and threatening," as Kim explains. According to Kim, a White reporter questioned Jang about why he believed the boycotts were happening. Jang "shook his head, looked down, and responded, 'I don't know, I don't know,'" Kim explains.[718] The official news narrative that categorized Korean storeowners as "good" and Black boycotters as "bad" governed mainstream media coverage for the duration of the boycott, drawing attention to anti-Asian racism.

In the early twentieth century and especially following September 11, 2001, journalists frequently paid attention to anti-Asian racism in news reports covering cases of violence targeting Asians in the U.S. News reports during this period illustrate the trend in news coverage toward acknowledging the legitimacy of racial hatred as a motive for violence against Asians in the U.S. During this period, hate crimes targeting Asian Americans increased.[719] Scholar Nadia Kim cites a 2002 report from the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium that claims that "anti-Asian hate crimes have increased sharply" across the U.S., and "the crimes

[717] Ibid.

[718] Ibid.

[719] Nadia Kim, "Asian Americans' Experiences of Race and Racism," in *Handbook of Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations*, ed. Hernan Vera and Joe R. Feagan (New York: Springer, 2007), 140.

reported displayed a high level of violence."[720] For example, "29 percent of the reported bias-motivated incidents . . . were an assault or battery crime," according to the 2002 report.[721] The report does not cite reasons for the increase in such crime. Kim explains that despite the increase in crimes targeting Asians, law enforcement remained hesitant to label such crimes as racially motivated assaults because of police officers' "inability to see racism" targeting Asians.[722] Kim speculates that stereotypes of Asian Americans as the model minority prevented police from recognizing crimes against Asians in the U.S. as racially motivated.[723] The model minority stereotype promotes the idea that Asians successfully assimilated into U.S. society and did not face racial discrimination; instead, Asians thrived academically and economically.[724] According to Kim, because mainstream media relied heavily on law enforcement as sources in crime news reporting, journalists "rarely reported" violence and other crimes against Asians as hate crimes—unless the case involved a racist statement from the perpetrator.[725]

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[720] National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, *Remembering: A Ten-Year Retrospective*, (Washington, D.C.: National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 2002), cited in Kim, "Asian Americans' Experiences of Race and Racism," 140.

[721] National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, *Remembering: A Ten-Year Retrospective*, (Washington, D.C.: National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 2002), cited in Kim, "Asian Americans' Experiences of Race and Racism," 140-141.

[722] National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, *Remembering: A Ten-Year Retrospective*, (Washington, D.C.: National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 2002), cited in Kim, "Asian Americans' Experiences of Race and Racism," 141-142.

[723] Ibid.

[724] Nicholas Daniel Hartlep, *The Model Minority Stereotype: Demystifying Asian American Success* (Charlotte, NC : Information Age Publishing, Inc.), 2021.

[725] National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, *Remembering: A Ten-Year Retrospective*, cited in Kim, "Asian Americans' Experiences of Race and Racism," 141-142.

In the first decades following Vincent Chin's slaying, journalists began paying increasing attention to anti-Asian racism amidst strong pressure from Asian American advocacy groups and Asian American community leaders. Populist political rhetoric and the Covid-19 pandemic would soon help journalists understand the full force of anti-Asian hatred.

4.6 News Coverage of Vincent Chin under the Trump and Biden Administrations

National news outlets' frequent and consistent references to the Vincent Chin case during President Donald J. Trump's and Joseph Biden's administrations illustrate the importance of the case in drawing attention to the racism motivating violence against Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. Between the time of Donald Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2017, and the end of the first year of President Joe Biden's administration on December 31, 2021, *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* The Associated Press, and National Public Radio (NPR) mentioned Vincent Chin's name a total of 28, 31, 15, and 56 times in news stories and in sidebars. During Trump's and Biden's presidencies, an increasing number of national news articles renewed attention to Chin's murder as representative of racial injustice against Asians and the ongoing problem of anti-Asian violence and discrimination in America.

News Coverage of Vincent Chin during the Trump Administration, Pre-Pandemic

During President Trump's administration and prior to the first reported cases of the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S., some national news stories mentioning Vincent Chin drew attention to anti-Asian racism by examining the history of "Buy American"

campaigns in the U.S. and how they discouraged consumers from purchasing products from Asia. For example, on January 30, 2017, *The Washington Post* reported that President Trump's "Buy American" campaign "follows a long history of similar campaigns steeped in racism" against Asian Americans.[726] To illustrate, *The Post* report discussed newspaper owner William Randolph Hearst's "Buy American" campaign that was launched during the Great Depression to "keep American money in America," according to *The Post* report.[727] *The Post* claimed that the campaign "was racist toward Japan and Japanese Americans." *The Post* supported its claim by citing a report in one of the Hearst newspapers headlined: " 'Buy American' Campaign Blocks Order for Jap Flower Bulbs." *The Post* compared Hearsts' "Buy American" campaign with the "Buy American" campaign of the 1970s and 1980s that encouraged Americans not to purchase automobiles made in Japan and led to the racial scapegoating of Vincent Chin. *The Post* discussed how Chin's killers mistook him for a Japanese American during the mass layoffs of American auto industry workers as U.S. employers moved production to Japan.[728]

Similarly, broadcast radio stations, such as National Public Radio (NPR), drew attention to anti-Asian racism during Trump's presidency using the Vincent Chin case. For example, on February 23, 2017, NPR mentioned Vincent Chin in a news report discussing how racism potentially motivated American workers' unions

[726] "Our History Shows There's a Dark Side to 'Buy American," *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2017, Nexis Uni Database.

[727] Ibid.

[728] Ibid.

to launch pro-America initiatives modeled on President Trump's "Buy-American" campaign.[729] According to the NPR report, "President Trump and his criticism of . . . companies that move manufacturing overseas" may be one reason United Auto Workers (UAW) launched a "Buy American" advertising campaign to persuade U.S. consumers to purchase cars manufactured in America rather than in Japan.[730] As part of the news report, NPR interviewed Dana Frank, a professor of U.S. history at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Frank told NPR that "there's a short distance between these kinds of campaigns and racism" because such campaigns portray American-made products as superior to foreign-made goods.[731] Frank spoke concerning the slaying of Vincent Chin who was murdered during the "Buy American" campaign of the late 1970s and 1980s. According to NPR, at a press conference in Detroit, UAW President Dennis Williams "urged consumers to buy union-made vehicles first, then . . . to buy cars made at nonunion factories in the U.S. before buying any imports."[732]

Additionally, national news stories mentioning Vincent Chin during President Trump's administration called attention to anti-Asian racism by examining how the collective Asian American identity can lead to racial violence. In such instances, violence can arise when White perpetrators misidentify Asians as members of an Asian ethnic group currently being targeted in the U.S. For example, in a news report

[729] Produced by David Greene, "Auto Workers' Union to Launch 'Buy American' Campaign," February 23, 2017, NPR, 3:00.
[730] Ibid.

[731] Ibid.

[732] Ibid.

on August 17, 2017, *The New York Times* explained that Vincent Chin's killers wrongly believed he was Japanese American.[733] Hence, they scapegoated Chin for the unemployment of hundreds of American autoworkers in the 1980s due to the increase in Japanese car sales in the U.S. *The Times* claimed: "If Chin, the son of Chinese immigrants, could be killed because of Japanese auto imports, the concept of an 'Asian-American' identity had consequences."[734] Furthermore, in this particular news report, *The Times* quoted Christine Choy, a Korean American filmmaker. Choy told *The Times* that the nationwide protests among Asians in America that arose following Vincent Chin's death encompassed "a lot of people who said they can't stand by anymore" and allow Asians to be scapegoated by those who believe "all Asians look alike."[735]

In a news report on August 2, 2018, *The Washington Post* drew attention to anti-Asian racism by highlighting both the drawbacks and the benefits of the collective Asian American identity within the context of the Vincent Chin case.[736] First, *The Post* report examined the drawbacks of the collective Asian American identity, explaining how Chin's killers murdered him because they wrongly assumed he was Japanese American. According to sociologist Dina Okamoto, the scapegoating of Asians is one reason why Asians frequently "reject the [broader Asian American]

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[733] Jay Kaspian Kang, "Not Without My Brothers," *The New York Times,* August 13, 2017, Nexis Uni Database.

[734] Ibid.

[735] Ibid.

[736] Sonia Rao, "Variations in the Scope of Identity," *The Washington Post,* August 2, 2018, Nexis Uni Database.

label because they view it as homogenizing, and they don't believe it really captures who they are," Okamoto told *The Post.*[737] Second, *The Post* report claimed that the Chin case also illustrates the benefits of the Asian American label. For example, Okamoto told *The Post* that during the pan-Asian protests following Chin's murder, the term Asian American took on the new meaning of "banding together to combat widespread racial injustice."[738]

News Coverage of Vincent Chin during America's Struggle with Covid-19

During the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S., some national news reports mentioning Vincent Chin called attention to the racist violence directed at Asian Americans by quoting Asian activists who blamed racist political rhetoric for such violence. For example, on May 11, 2020, *The New York Times* reported concerning a PBS documentary that "covers an expansive arc" of discrimination, including violent crime, targeting Asians in the U.S. from the 1850s until the Covid-19 pandemic.[739] *The Times* report quoted Korean American actor and activist Daniel Dae Kim, one of the documentary's producers. Kim, who includes an examination of the Chin case as part of his documentary, told *The Times* that the case is one of many stories of "discrimination, marginalization, and violence" against Asians and that new cases of violence targeting Asians are continually arising as the pandemic continues.[740]

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[737] Ibid.

[738] Ibid.

[739] Brandon Yu, "Telling Asian American Stories," *The New York Times,* May 11, 2020, Nexis Uni Database.

[740] Ibid.

Kim told *The Times* that the rhetoric of U.S. political leadership has been to blame for anti-Asian discrimination at various periods in American history. For example, during the period of Chin's death and the increase in Japanese car imports to the U.S., Kim explained to *The Times,* U.S. House Representative John Dingell (D-Mich.) complained that American jobs were being lost to what Dingell termed the "little yellow men" in Japan.[741] "It [racist rhetoric] seems to be part of the daily playbook for some of our leaders. . . . It's heartbreaking, and it's tragic," Kim told *The Times*.[742] As an activist, Kim stated that he hopes to use the documentary to bring America's history of anti-Asian discrimination, including violence, "out to the general population" so that people will "finally understand" this history and how it can be applied to pandemic-related violence, *The Times* reported.[743]

Some news reports in *The Washington Post* mentioning the Vincent Chin case drew attention to anti-Asian violence by quoting Asian American activists who compared the violence against Chin to the violence against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, on April 2, 2020, *The Post* quoted Helen Zia, a leading activist and spokesperson for the Justice for Vincent Chin campaign in the 1980s.[744] Zia told *The Post* that the violent crime Asians currently face during the pandemic resembles "the harassment and violence Asian Americans faced in the wake of the collapse of the U.S. manufacturing sector in the 1980s," the period during which Chin

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[741] Ibid.

[742] Ibid.

[743] Ibid.

[744] "Targeting Asians and Asian Americans Will Make It Harder to Stop Covid-19," *The Washington Post,* April 2, 2020, Nexis Uni Database.

was slain.[745] She recalled that during the time of Chin's death when White Americans fumed over Japanese economic competition in the auto industry, all Asians became targets of racism. Zia stated: "I never knew when someone might curse me with racist epithets or threaten to get violent," according to *The Post*.[746] Zia told *The Post* that violent crime against Asians "did nothing to save the U.S. auto industry [from imported Japanese cars] then. And it won't . . . slow the spread of Covid-19 now."[747] She blamed pandemic-related violence against Asians on President Trump's "deliberate decision to use anti-Chinese language to describe the disease," according to *The Post.*[748] Chin's murder and the violence during the pandemic demonstrate that "Americans can do better" and political "leaders need to step up," Zia told the newspaper.[749]

Noteworthy is that international news coverage of the U.S.-Japan trade wars in the 1980s and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 played an important role in shaping attitudes toward Asian Americans during these decades. Just as an increase in Japanese car imports into the U.S. led Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz to target Vincent Chin because they mistook him for a Japanese American, tensions surrounding the pandemic's origin in China played a role in increasing anti-Asian hate toward members of diverse Asian ethnic groups in the U.S. According to scholar

[745] Ibid.

[746] Ibid.

[747] Ibid.

[748] Ibid.

[749] Ibid.

Duncan Hewitt, "international media coverage of China inevitably plays a vital role in shaping perceptions of that nation around the world," leading to challenges for foreign journalists to portray the country in positive—yet accurate—ways.[750] According to Hewitt, China's citizens have pushed back against international news coverage of their nation due to their perception of such coverage as "fundamentally biased" against China.[751] This bias, China's citizens have claimed, influences the manner in which Western populations, particularly journalists, perceive China and Americans of Asian descent.[752] Hewitt finds that, consequently, "media organizations from around the world have, over recent decades, devoted ever greater resources to improving news coverage of China by reporting 'the China story.'"[753] While international news coverage shapes attitudes toward Asian Americans, perceptions of other racial minority groups, such as African Americans and Latino Americans, remain much less affected by such coverage.[754]

News reports also focused attention on anti-Asian racism during Covid-19 by interviewing Asian activist leaders who referred to the Vincent Chin case as a turning point in bringing awareness to such violence. For example, on April 5, 2020, The Associated Press quoted Asian American activist Helen Zia who told the news outlet that Chin's murder was "a watershed moment" during which Asian Americans "had

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[750] Duncan Hewitt, "International Media Coverage of China and Chinese Journalists," Rutgers Institute Fellowship Paper, University of Oxford, 2011, accessed May 14, 2021.

[751] Ibid.

[752] Ibid.

[753] Ibid.

[754] Ibid.

to organize to change [the violence] we saw going on around us."[755] Zia claimed that at the time of Chin's murder, violent crime had become so intense against Asian Americans in Chin's hometown of Detroit that many Asians were afraid to leave their homes: "I knew I had to watch out and be careful who I was around, how they [non-Asians] looked at me . . . . I think we're in that stage now [during Covid-19] . . . The level of anger [during Chin's death] . . . it's already here today," Zia told The Associated Press.[756] With violence against Asian Americans during Covid-19 escalating, Zia worried that the pandemic "could be another seminal moment" in the fight against anti-Asian racism, Zia told *The Post*. [757]

In a similar news report mentioning Vincent Chin, National Public Radio (NPR) drew attention to anti-Asian violence during Covid-19 by speaking with Asian activists who described Chin's murder as a landmark event in Asians' continued struggle against anti-Asian discrimination.[758] On May 28, 2020, NPR spoke with Renee Tajima-Pena, a Japanese American filmmaker and activist. She told NPR that Chin's murder helped spotlight racism, including violence, against Asians in the U.S. during a period when the model minority stereotype had been "embedded in the American psyche and imagination" for decades.[759] Chin's slaying "really stands out

[755] Terry Tang, "Asian Americans Use Social Media to Mobilize against Attacks," The Associated Press, April 5, 2020, Nexis Uni Database.

[756] Ibid.

[757] Ibid.

[758] Produced by Ailsa Chang, "PBS Series Documents the History of Asian Americans over 150 Years," May 28, 2020, NPR, 6:00.

[759] Ibid.

as being a turning point when a lot of people realized, yeah, we [Asian Americans] *do* face discrimination and racism," Tajima-Pena told NPR.[760] The NPR report traced the history of violent crime against Asians in America, including the internment of Japanese Americans in U.S. prison camps during World War II and the murder of Southeast Asians in the U.S. whom Americans suspected of being terrorists following September 11, 2001. Tajima-Pena told NPR that such violence is "embedded in American society" because of the "roots of racism in the country."[761] Amidst these cases of violence, Chin's death stands out as the moment when Asian Americans were empowered to "come together to fight for justice," Tajima-Pena told NPR.[762]

News Coverage of Vincent Chin during the Biden Administration

During the first year of President Joe Biden's administration, some national news reporters interviewed Asian American activists who used the Vincent Chin case to motivate Asian American youth to take a stand against pandemic-related violence. For example, in a broadcast news report on March 27, 2021, NPR interviewed Korean American author and activist Paula Yoo regarding her young adult novel examining the Chin murder and its aftermath titled *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement.* Yoo told NPR that she believes the book helped to "inspire a younger generation [of Asian Americans] to get involved as activists, as writers, as lawyers going into

[760] Ibid.

[761] Ibid.

[762] Ibid.

politics" and to draw attention to Asian American "stories," "history," "contributions," and "racism."[763] According to the NPR report, Yoo explained that Chin is "not just a symbol" whose name "has resurfaced recently" due to the violence caused from the pandemic.[764] Rather, his death also had "a tangible effect," instigating Asian civil rights protections and inspiring a fresh wave of "grassroots advocacy organization" among Asian American youth that has continued through the pandemic, Yoo told NPR.[765]

In a different broadcast news report that focused heavily on the Vincent Chin case and aired on April 7, 2021, NPR interviewed Asian American activists who drew parallels between the anti-Asian racism that led to Chin's slaying and the racial violence against Asian Americans during Covid-19. NPR spoke with Asian American author and former activist Helen Zia who helped start the activist organization titled American Citizens for Justice (ACJ) a few months following Chin's murder.[766] Zia told NPR that she saw similarities between the violence against Chin and attacks against Asian Americans during the pandemic. Zia explained that in the 1980s, the decade during which Chin was murdered, members of all Asian ethnic groups were scapegoated for the decline of the U.S. auto industry due to the increase in Japanese auto imports into the U.S. Today, Asians of different ethnic backgrounds are

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[763] Produced by Karen Grigsby Bates, "How Vincent Chin's Death Gave Others a Voice," March 27, 2021, NPR, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2021/03/27/981718272/how-vincent-chins-death-gave-others-a-voice.

[764] Ibid.

[765] Ibid.

[766] Produced by Beenish Ahmed, "Atlanta Killings Echo Murder of Vincent Chin in 1982 during A Period of Anti-Asian Sentiment," April 7, 2021, NPR.

scapegoated for the pandemic.[767] She claimed that during the early 1980s, "anybody who looked Japanese, we felt like . . . we had a target on our heads. . . . To think of how we are today, going through a remarkably similar period [of violence]. . . . its chilling."[768] NPR also spoke with James Shimoura, a Japanese American attorney who claimed: "I think [awareness of anti-Asian racism] is the one critical thing that came out of the [Chin] case . . . People were like, 'He's Asian.' And it could have been me that night [who was killed]. And, for that reason, [the Chin case] has raised the consciousness of millions of Asian Americans in this country today" in terms of being aware of how other Americans view them during the pandemic, Shimoura told NPR.[769]

On March 20, 2021, *The New York Times* drew attention to anti-Asian racism in a discussion of the Vincent Chin case by quoting Asian American executives, small business owners, and activists regarding their personal experiences with anti-Asian violence during the pandemic. These experiences demonstrate that fear united Asian Americans "across their class divides," according to *The Times* report.[770] In this particular news report, *The Times* cited data from The Pew Research Center demonstrating that in 2016 Asian Americans' "incomes ranged from about $12,000 . . . to roughly $133,500," according to Pew.[771] The income discrepancy is due, in part,

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[767] Ibid.

[768] Ibid.

[769] Ibid.

[770] Brian X. Chen, "There is No Rung on the Ladder That Protects You from Hate," *The New York Times*, March 20, 2021, Nexis Uni Database.

[771] Ibid.

to a wave of Asian immigrants to the U.S. in the 1960s who were "relatively low-skilled workers" followed by "a new wave of higher-skilled [Asian] immigrants" in the 1990s, according to *The Times.*[772] Violence against Asians during the pandemic facilitated a newfound solidarity among Asian Americans of varying social classes just as Chin's death "helped Asian communities across different ethnic groups come together," *The Times* reported.[773]

The same *New York Times* report claimed that Asian Americans who remembered the widespread pan-Asian organization that occurred during the Vincent Chin case recognized the importance of standing together during the pandemic despite their diverse economic backgrounds. For example, *The Times* quoted Anna Mok, a Chinese American executive in San Francisco. Mok claimed that her "physical vulnerability" due to the scapegoating of Asian Americans during the pandemic made her realize that "no matter how much money one makes, no matter how successful one is, [racial violence] is the reality of being an Asian in the U.S."[774] *The Times* also spoke with Jo-Ann Yoo, the executive director of the Asian American Federation, a nonprofit activist organization. According to *The Times*, Yoo claimed that "the year of increasing attacks [against Asians] . . . will . . . bridge the class divide by creating a dialogue among people of Asian descent" rooted in the knowledge that "any Asian could be targeted" with racism.[775]

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[772] Ibid.

[773] Ibid.

[774] Ibid.

[775] Ibid.

On March 28, 2021, *The Washington Post* focused heavily on the Vincent Chin case in a news report concerning how Asian Americans faced greater challenges than African Americans in their efforts to draw media and public attention to the seriousness of racism, including violence, targeting their respective groups. To illustrate, the news story described Chin as "a Chinese American brutally beaten to death . . . by two White autoworkers."[776] *The Post* then compared Chin's slaying to that of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Floyd was a 46-year-old African American man who suffocated to death after Derek Chauvin, a 44-year-old White police officer, knelt on his neck for over nine minutes during Floyd's arrest. Floyd was arrested for allegedly using counterfeit money to pay for groceries. The news report explained that despite Asian Americans' and African Americans' similar experiences with racist violence, anti-Black racism has historically received the lion's share of attention from mainstream media due to anti-Asian stereotypes.[777]

This particular *Washington Post* report used the Vincent Chin case to explain how the model minority stereotype—the idea that Asians are well assimilated in U.S. society—could account for the historic lack of attention to anti-Asian racism when compared to anti-Black racism in America. For example, *The Post* reported how the model minority stereotype may have caused Asian Americans' experiences with racial violence, including Chin's slaying, to be "footnoted or compartmentalized, recounted, and analyzed as a subplot in the much bigger narrative" of the "Black-

[776] Michael Eric Dyson, "Why Don't We Treat Asian American History More like African American History," *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2021, Proquest Historical Newspapers Database.

[777] Ibid.

White binary" system of U.S. racism.[778] By contrast, anti-Black racism was always "integral to our understanding of the American Founding" and "at the center of the American story," *The Post* reported.[779] The story of Asian Americans' struggles for racial acceptance in the U.S. is "in many ways like the African American story" in terms of the persistence of racial stereotypes and the historic perception of both racial groups as less "civilized" and less "pure" than Caucasian Americans, according to *The Post*.[780] Moreover, both Asian Americans and African Americans have organized politically in an effort to overcome racial oppression. Hence, *The Post* concludes, "Vincent Chin ought to be as well-known and as righteously mourned as George Floyd."[781]

An Associated Press report on March 17, 2021, examining the range of attacks against Asian Americans following the first cases of Covid-19 in the U.S. discussed the possibility of racism motivating such attacks within the context of the Vincent Chin case. For example, the news report acknowledged the possibility of a racial motive behind the shooting of six Asian women at three spas in Atlanta, Georgia on the afternoon of March 16, 2021.[782] According to the news report, while police suggested that the attack was motivated by the perpetrator's sex addiction and his desire to eliminate what he saw as "a source of temptation," many Asian Americans

[778] Ibid.

[779] Ibid.

[780] Ibid.

[781] Ibid.

[782] Christine Fernando and Terry Tang, "EXPLAINER: Why Georgia Attack Spurs Fears in Asian Americans," The Associated Press, March 17, 2021, Nexis Uni Database.

"raised concerns that the shootings were the latest in a string of hate crimes against Asian Americans."[783] The news report quoted U.S. House Representative Judy Chu of California, a lawmaker who condemned the shootings as racially motivated. "Please stand up, condemn this violence, and help us #StopAsianHate," Chu wrote on Twitter.[784]

The Associated Press report claimed that the violent attacks directed at Asians during the pandemic are reminiscent of the violence directed at Vincent Chin: "The rash of attacks . . . has renewed attention" to the Chin case and to anti-Asian hatred among politicians who drafted legislation to support organizations including Stop AAPI Hate and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, according to The Associated Press.[785]

News Coverage of Vincent Chin during the 40th Anniversary of his Murder

Journalists covering the 40th anniversary commemorations of Vincent Chin's slaying frequently used the case to draw attention to more recent cases of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. and to the broader problem of violence targeting Asian Americans. For example, on June 16, 2022, The Associated Press covered the 40th anniversary of Chin's murder. The news story quoted a defense attorney for Asian American civil rights who claimed that pan-Asian activism helped make Chin's death a "seminal moment" by bringing national media attention to the broader issue of anti-Asian

[783] Ibid.

[784] Ibid.

[785] Ibid.

violence.[786] Similarly, a *Washington Post* story explained how some Asian Americans today are continuously struggling against anti-Asian violence in the wake of the 40th anniversary of Vincent Chin's murder.[787] On June 26, 2022, *The Post* quoted a South Asian college student who attended a Unity March in Washington, D.C.[788] The student said the rally "was a way to bring attention to the fact that hate crimes against Asian Americans are not just random acts of violence but patterns that need to be broken."[789] Broadcast outlets reported on the 40th anniversary of Chin's slaying by spotlighting the importance of the Chin case to understanding current-day anti-Asian hatred. For example, on June 17, 2022, National Public Radio (NPR)[790] interviewed author Helen Zia who emphasized that the Chin case is a "landmark" case and "not only for Asian Americans."[791] Zia explained that because Asians and non-Asians in the U.S. "are part of the American democracy . . . . what happened [to Chin] might

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[786] Corey Williams, "Detroit Honors Vincent Chin, Asian American Killed in 1982," The Associated Press, June 16, 2022, accessed on July 1, 2022. The article discusses Chin's slaying within the context of recent cases of violence during the pandemic, among them the deaths of Vicha Ratanapakdee and Yao Pan Ma. The Associated Press honored the 20th, 30th, and 40th anniversaries of Chin's murder but did not commemorate the 25th anniversary.

[787] *The Washington Post* did not commemorate the 20th, 25th, or 30th anniversaries of Vincent Chin's murder.

[788] Gaya Gupta, "Asian American Groups Rally for Racial and Social Equality," *The Washington Post,* June 25, 2022, accessed on July 1, 2022. The Unity March rally was held along D.C.'s National Mall and was organized "to bring attention to a slate of issues affecting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, including the increased number of hate crimes, reproductive rights for underprivileged women, and the lack of Asian American representation in both media and government."

[789] Ibid.

[790] National Public Radio (NPR) commemorated the 20th, 25th, 30th, and 40th anniversaries of Vincent Chin's slaying.

[791] Ari Shapiro, "Why Vincent Chin Matters Today, 40 Years after His Death," National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.: NPR, June 17, 2022.

have started with Asian Americans, but it has an impact on *all* Americans."[792] Other NPR broadcasts also recognized Vincent Chin's significance.[793]

4.7 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated how the Vincent Chin case can be construed as having played an important role in shifting news framing of violence against Asians in the U.S., gradually turning journalists' attention toward the racial animus underlying such violence. The process whereby anti-Asian racism gained legitimacy and significance within the pages of the mainstream press was slow yet persistent. The roots of anti-Asian animosity ran deep in America for decades from the arrival of the first Asian immigrants in the 1800s, causing many journalists to vilify these newcomers in their coverage. Moreover, stereotypes of Asians as model minorities and economic competitors in the mid-1900s dissuaded journalists from condemning instances of violence targeting Asians as motivated by anything other than job competition or random acts of foolishness (barroom brawls). However, pro-Asian protests and press conferences organized by pan-Asian American advocacy groups following Chin's

[792] Ibid.

[793] See Wynne Davis, "Vincent Chin was Killed 40 Years Ago. Here's Why His Case Continues to Resonate," National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.: NPR, June 19, 2022. The broadcast discusses the Vincent Chin case in light of the exponential increase in anti-Asian violence since the Covid-19 pandemic and places a particular focus on the power of narrative in transforming Asian Americans into targets of racism. David Han, commissioner of the Michigan Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission, spoke at the Vincent Chin 40th Remembrance and Rededication event in Detroit. In an interview with NPR's Wynne Davis, he said: "In leadership roles of any kind, whether it's the presidency or leaders in companies, leaders in our communities or even leaders in our churches, the positions and the narratives that different folks speak, based on self-interest as well as fear, certainly impacts the Asian community in America," Han said. Doualy Xaykaothao, "Vincent Chin," National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.: NPR, June 22, 2002. In an interview with NPR's Doualy Xaykaothao, Roland Hwang, an attorney in the Vincent Chin case, claimed: "Chin's case is even more important today because crimes against Asians grow each year. . . . There's probably 4-500 cases of anti-Asian violence arising nationwide" in 2002.

slaying in 1982 both energized and awakened journalists to the reality of anti-Asian hatred and its widespread dominion across the states. As instances of violence targeting diverse Asian ethnic groups became increasingly visible in the decades following the Chin case, more journalists either cited sources alleging racism as a criminal motive or called out racism directly in their news reports. By the time of the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S., many news stories revived and retold Chin's story to spotlight the anti-Asian hatred motivating the attacks.

While Chapter 4 has investigated the broader social forces and attitudes that played some part in the slow evolution in news framing of violence against Asians in the U.S., Chapter 5 explores the methods the dissertation uses to measure shifts in news framing of such violence over time. Specifically, I explain how I used a quantitative content analysis to uncover the specific types of news frames journalists used in coverage of the Vincent Chin case, their frequencies, and the trends or patterns in framing of the Chin case that re-emerged in coverage of more recent cases of criminalized violence against Asian Americans during the pandemic.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The dissertation accomplishes two primary objectives using the methods I discuss in this chapter. First, the study uses a quantitative content analysis of news media frames to examine evidence of how framing of the violent crime against Vincent Chin and framing of Chin as a victim of such violence changed during the case and in the decades following Chin's murder. Second, using a quantitative content analysis of news frames, the dissertation locates similar patterns and trends in framing between the Vincent Chin case and the shootings of six Asian women in three spas in Georgia during the Covid-19 pandemic. Changes in news framing of the Chin case as well as similar patterns between framing of the case and the Georgia shootings serve as some evidence of how journalists gradually started paying attention to anti-Asian racism and the persistent, widespread problem of anti-Asian violence in America. Before describing the methods used in this study, I list the key questions the dissertation addresses and the sources used for data collection for this project.

5.2 Operationalizing the Research Question

My research questions strive to explain how a crime that began as a small news story became a monumental case with lasting influence. It also aims to explain how Vincent Chin, whom journalists initially framed as a victim of a barroom brawl that Chin initiated, became a victim worthy of sympathy, a martyr whose death started a national movement against racial injustice targeting Asians in America. I explore how news media framed and reframed the case until it became a rallying cry for Asian

American advocates and, decades after Chin's murder, a news media symbol of racial injustice against Asian Americans today. In addressing this query, I have identified the following specific questions:

1. How did the amount of Vincent Chin murder case reportage change over time? During what periods was the coverage most extensive once the case had worked its way through the courts?
2. What frames did news media employ to characterize Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood?
3. Did the framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood change from June 1982 to December 2022? If so, at what points in time did framing change?
4. Did any distinctive patterns or trends in news framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood emerge among the separate news outlets under analysis from June 1982 to December 2022?
5. Did correlations exist between key events during the Vincent Chin murder case and increases or decreases in the specific types of frames used?
6. Does the coverage indicate that key events that took place following the murder played a role in shifting news media framing of the case?
7. Is there any evidence in the coverage to indicate that the discovery of additional information about the case, for example, evidence of a racial motive or the decisions of judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and police played a role in shifting news media framing of the case as journalists reported the story in greater depth?

In addition to measuring the frames, this content analysis in this dissertation also allows me to address the broader issue of narratives about Asian Americans as identified in the previous chapters, specifically:

1. What news narratives did journalists employ in news stories reporting on the Vincent Chin murder case from June 19, 1982, to December 31, 2022? For instance, was the "model minority" narrative (Asians assimilate well into U.S. society, work hard, and rise to the top) evident in any news reporting on the Chin case? Was a "victim of racial injustice" narrative (Asians in the U.S. are targets of racial harassment, discrimination, and violence based on race and ethnicity) evident in any of the coverage? What other news narratives were evident in the coverage?
2. Was there a *predominant* narrative within reporting on the Vincent Chin case? If so, did a predominate narrative change over time?
3. Did less dominant narratives change over time? If so, at what points in time did the narratives change?
4. Do any similarities in news framing exist between the Vincent Chin murder case and more recent cases of violence against Asians in the U.S. that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic?
5. Do any themes emerge in news framing of cases of anti-Asian violence that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic? If so, what are these themes? Is there some evidence to suggest that particular themes played a role in shaping news coverage of the violent crimes and/or the Asian victims?

5.3 Data Collection

The dissertation uses data collected from news stories covering the June 19, 1982, Vincent Chin murder case and the March 16, 2021, Georgia murder case in local, regional, and national print news outlets. The study gathers data during the period of the Chin case from the date of his slaying on June 19, 1982, to the end of news coverage of the last federal civil rights trial related to the case on June 1, 1987. The dissertation also gathers data in the subsequent decades of the case until December 31, 2022. I sampled news coverage of the Chin murder case and the Georgia murder case from the following seven print news outlets: *The Associated Press; The Atlanta Journal-Constitution; The Cincinnati Enquirer; The Detroit Free Press; The Lansing State Journal; The New York Times;* and *The Washington Post.*

I chose these news outlets for several reasons. First, *The Detroit Free Press,* a local daily newspaper, was published in Vincent Chin's hometown of Detroit, Michigan, only six miles from Highland Park, the city where Chin's murder took place. Hence, the newspaper was a key source of local coverage of Chin's slaying and the state and federal trials that followed. Second, *The Lansing State Journal,* a local daily newspaper published in a city in close proximity to Highland Park, contained in-depth coverage of key events of the Chin case. Third, *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* a local daily newspaper, was the premier paper reporting on the second federal civil rights trial related to the Chin case that took place in Cincinnati from April 22, 1987, to May 1, 1987. *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution* was the primary source of news coverage for two of the murder cases involving Asian victims during the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S. I selected *The Associated Press, The New York Times,* and *The*

Washington Post because of their high circulations, frequent, in-depth news coverage of the Chin case, and their distinguished reputation for top-tier news reporting. They represent prestigious national news organizations with a long tradition of news reporting on prominent issues.

I collected data from the digitized archives of the following online news databases: Proquest Recent Newspapers, Nexis Uni Database, and Newspapers.com. I located *The Washington Post* within Proquest Recent Newspapers, an online database that provides PDFs of full-text news reports from U.S. newspapers dating from the early 2000s until the present. I located content from *The Associated Press, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* and *The New York Times* using the Nexis Uni database, formerly LexisNexis Academic. Nexis Uni is an online database featuring news items from newspapers and broadcast television outlets dating from the 1970s. Newspapers.com, the "largest online newspaper archive" encompassing more than 867 million pages of historical newspapers from over 24,000 newspapers across the U.S. and overseas, provided content from *The Cincinnati Enquirer, The Detroit Free Press,* and *The Lansing State Journal.*[794] The following section draws on the data sources listed above and describes the quantitative content analysis employed in this dissertation to uncover the depth and frequency of press attention to the Vincent Chin murder case over time.

This study does not draw on broadcast media sources because of the difficulty and cost of accessing video clips of the Vincent Chin case. Additionally, this study

[794] "About Newspapers.com," Newspapers.com, accessed June 13, 2023.

does not perform a content analysis of social media mentions of the Chin case and the Georgia murder case in 2021 because I am focusing solely on newspaper frames. However, the power of social media to challenge, shift, and create diverse frames is important to acknowledge.

5.4 Understanding Content Analysis

The dissertation uses a quantitative content analysis of news frames in articles covering the Vincent Chin murder case and the Georgia murder case for the purpose of analyzing how shifts in news framing of these cases occurred. Content analysis is a type of textual analysis. A text is anything from which researchers can interpret meaning, including newspapers, "film, television programs, magazines, advertisements, graffiti, and so on," according to scholar Alan McGee.[795] By allowing for the interpretation of specific texts, content analysis helps scholars understand how individuals, including journalists, "make sense of the world" within "particular contexts" and "at particular times," McKee explains.[796] Hence, content analysis is important to a study analyzing changes in news media frames over time.

Content analysis involves several steps.[797] First, scholars decide the unit of analysis they want to study. When applied to journalism, the unit of analysis might be the text of the news article or the news frame.[798]

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[795] Alan McKee, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 1.

[796] Ibid.

[797] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 275-288.

[798] Ibid., 280-82, 288.

Second, scholars develop a coding scheme. Developing a coding scheme involves the creation of specific coding categories and their descriptions for the purpose of organizing the content under analysis, such as categories of particular types of news frames.[799] Scholars can develop coding categories in two ways. First, a specific theory or theories can guide the creation of particular categories. Second, scholars can use a preliminary study of the data to create categories by analyzing a small portion of the data sample (ie. one hundred news articles) and taking notes regarding specific categories of news frames that emerge from the sample.[800] Scholars should describe each content category in a way that helps answer the study's research questions.[801]

When describing specific categories of content, such as news frames, the individual description for each type of frame should remain distinct or "mutually exclusive" from the individual descriptions of the other types of frames to avoid overlap, according to scholar Alan Bryman.[802] Overlapping descriptions among content categories can hinder the study's replicability.

The third step in using content analysis involves quantifying the number of times content falls under specific coding categories across a particular time period. For example, a scholar might quantify the frequency with which news reporters use specific types of news frames in coverage of a specific event over time.[803]

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[799] Ibid., 283-285.

[800] Ibid.

[801] Ibid.

[802] Ibid., 288.

[803] Ibid., 291.

Content analysis is useful to the present study for two reasons. First, quantifying news frames across framing categories allows scholars to examine how the type and frequency of specific frames change during particular time periods. Second, a quantitative content analysis uncovers potential correlations between changes in the type and frequency of news frames and key events across time.

It is important to note that content analysis has important limitations. First, while content analysis is useful for answering questions pertaining to *how* content changes across time, content analysis does not reveal *why* content changes over time. "We can speculate, but our suggested answers can usually only be speculations," according to Bryman.[804] Questions as to why content changes can be addressed in future research.[805] Second, content analysis relies on scholars' subjective interpretations of the data when developing coding categories. As Bryman explains, content categories "always entail some interpretation on the part of coders."[806] Consequently, when striving to create a content analysis that is easily replicable, scholars should remain cognizant of the diverse ways other scholars might interpret the coding descriptions for specific categories of frames.

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[804] Ibid.

[805] Ibid.

[806] Ibid.

5.5 Content Analysis and Framing Theory

Framing theory, discussed in detail in Chapter 4, is useful for understanding the importance of conducting a quantitative content analysis of news media frames. This theory helps scholars understand how journalists choose particular frames at particular times as "a way of putting together pieces of information … to create an understanding" of an event or a widespread problem taking place in society, such as racial violence, according to scholars William A. Gamson and Kathryn E. Lasch.[807] Journalists use a variety of words, phrases, headlines, story lines, photos, layouts, and graphics to frame the news.[808] Using content analysis to examine the types of news frames reporters incorporate into their coverage is, therefore, important to uncovering how journalists make sense of a particular problem across time and which aspects of that problem they deem newsworthy at different periods.

Scholars have used quantitative content analysis to examine news media framing of race and racial violence. Fridkin, Wintersieck, Courey, and Thompson examined news framing of police violence involving a White law enforcement officer and an African American woman that took place in Arizona on May 20, 2014.[809] Officer Stewart Ferrin, an Arizona State University (ASU) campus police officer, arrested Ersula Ore, an African American ASU professor, for jaywalking near

[807] William A. Gamson and Kathryn E. Lasch, "The Political Culture of Social Welfare Policy," in *Evaluating the Welfare State: Social and Political Perspectives,* ed. S.E. Spiro & E. Yutchtman-Yaar (San Diego: San Diego Academic Press, 1983), 16.

[808] Ibid., 16-17.

[809] Kim Fridkin, Amanda Wintersieck, Jillian Courey, and Joshua Thompson, "Race and Police Brutality: The Importance of Media Framing," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 3394.

campus at approximately 8 p.m.[810] A police dashboard camera recording, which was released to the media on June 28, 2014, reveals how Ore's arrest quickly escalated into a physical confrontation during which she was handcuffed and thrown onto the pavement after kicking the officer.[811] A passerby called 9-1-1 to report that the officer was behaving violently toward Ore.[812] Ore was charged with "aggravated assault on a police officer . . . refusal to provide a name when detained, and obstructing a public thoroughfare," according to Fridkin et al.[813] She was booked and sent to jail where she remained for eight hours.[814] She later accepted a plea deal on August 1, 2014.[815] Ferrin was charged with assault and put on leave for eight months following a police investigation into the incident. In February 2015, Ferrin resigned from his position with the ASU Campus Police Department.[816] The incident "represented one of several incidents in recent years involving a violent interaction between police officers and African American citizens," Fridkin et al. explain.[817]

Using content analysis, Fridkin et al. examined news media frames in 53 news

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[810] Ibid., 3394-3395.

[811] Emma Lacey-Bordeaux, "Arizona Professor's Jaywalking Arrest Quickly Gets Out of Hand," CNN, June 30, 2014. See also Fridkin et al., "Race and Police Brutality," 3400.

[812] Ibid.

[813] Fridkin et al., "Race and Police Brutality," 3395.

[814] Ibid.

[815] Lacey-Bordeaux, "Arizona Professor's Jaywalking Arrest Quickly Gets Out of Hand." See also Fridkin et al., "Race and Police Brutality," 3400.

[816] Ray Stern, "The Battle Isn't Over between Arizona Professor and ASU Cop Who Arrested Her in 2014," *Phoenix New Times,* January 30, 2018, accessed August 10, 2023.

[817] Fridkin et al., "Race and Police Brutality," 3394, 3395.

reports covering the violence over a four month period from May 20, 2014-August 29, 2014.[818] These scholars used the results of the content analysis to uncover how diverse news frames shaped public perception of the violence, the police officer, and the university professor.[819] For the purposes of this dissertation, which does not analyze how journalists shape public opinion, I focus solely on Fridkin et al.'s use of content analysis of news frames.

The content analysis involved several steps. First, Fridkin et al. read through the news articles to locate the diverse frames reporters used to describe the event. Second, the authors developed a coding scheme to describe each of the news frames located after reading through the articles. The content analysis located the following three frames: "the police brutality frame; the law-and-order frame; and the race frame," according to Fridkin et al.[820]

Third, the authors created the following descriptions for each of the three news frames. The law and order frame characterized the ASU professor as responsible for the violence and emphasized the necessity of police intervention.[821] Journalists manufactured this frame based on descriptions of the altercation in police

[818] Ibid., 3399. The study collected news stories covering the incident in Access World News (NewsBank), LexisNexis Academic, now NexisUni, and Google News. The 53 news articles were collected from "newspapers, blogs and feeds, Internet news sites, television news, wire services, and radio" (3399). Specific newspapers and television outlets are not mentioned except for Fox 12 Oregon, a local news station, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* and *The Times (London)* (3400).

[819] Ibid.

[820] Ibid., 3394.

[821] Ibid., 3395.

reports.[822] For example, based on reports from local law enforcement, this frame drew attention to the dangerous construction zone near the place where Ore jaywalked and characterized her as "argumentative" and as "refusing to show her identification" during the arrest, according to Fridkin et al.'s summary of the police reports.[823] One police report described Ore as "kicking" the police officer in his "left shin," according to these scholars.[824]

Conversely, the police brutality frame highlighted the police officer's use of unnecessary force when arresting Ore and blamed Ferrin for the violence.[825] Journalists created this frame based on documents made available to the media by the prosecuting attorney.[826] For example, according to attorney documents, the police officer said to Ore: "Put your hands behind your back right now; I'm going to slam you on this car." The police officer "aggressively swung Dr. Ore in a circle by her arm and then tackled her to the asphalt in a 'head-lock' position," according to Fridkin et al.'s summary of the attorney documents.[827]

Finally, the race frame spotlighted the race of the police officer and the professor. This frame emphasized the significance of race in interactions between law enforcement officials and citizens.[828]

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[822] Ibid.

[823] Ibid.

[824] Ibid.

[825] Ibid., 3399.

[826] Ibid., 3395.

[827] Ibid.

[828] Ibid., 3399.

The scholars included a brief summary of the overall findings of the content analysis.[829] First, reporters used the police brutality frame in 46 percent of total news stories reporting on the incident.[830] Thirty-five percent of news stories using this frame included some variation of the following sentence: "The professor was 'pushed and slammed to the ground by a police officer," Fridkin et al. explain.[831] Additionally, 35 percent of all news stories using this frame included some variation of the following sentence: "In the ensuing struggle, the professor's skirt was hiked up, leaving her exposed and vulnerable," according to Fridkin et al.[832]

Second, reporters used the race frame in one-third of news stories.[833] The race frame focused on the race of the police officer and the university professor as well as whether Ferrin violated Ore's civil rights during the arrest. For example, findings indicate that 5 percent of news stories using the race frame included a sentence reading: "The FBI is currently investigating [Ores's] arrest for civil rights violations," according to Fridkin et al.[834]

Lastly, 21 percent of news reports used the law and order frame.[835] These news stories frequently created a negative portrayal of Ore and a favorable view of

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[829] Fridkin et al., "Race and Police Brutality," 3401. The study does not include detail regarding which specific frames reporters used during specific time periods and in in specific news outlets.

[830] Ibid.

[831] Ibid., 3402.

[832] Ibid., 3401, 3402.

[833] Ibid., 3401.

[834] Ibid., 3402.

[835] Ibid., 3401.

Ferrin, explaining that Ferrin was doing his best to protect Ore from potential harm due to a dangerous construction zone.[836] For example, 32 percent of the news stories using this frame included the phrase: "in a dangerous construction zone," and 54 percent of news stories using this frame mentioned that Ore resisted arrest," Fridkin et al. explain.[837]

In a similar study, Fryberg et al. used a content analysis of news frames to examine how newspapers' locations (local verses national) and political ideologies (conservative verses liberal) helped shape framing of Arizona SB 1070.[838] SB 1070 is an anti-immigration bill signed into law by Republican Governor Jan Brewer on April 23, 2010.[839] The bill increased the authority of state and local law enforcement to impede undocumented immigration by authorizing immigration officers to "question a person's citizenship based on 'reasonable suspicion that a person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States,'" according to Fryberg et al.'s summary of the bill.[840] The bill was meant to discourage undocumented immigration by emphasizing the threat of being "arrested, fined, detained, and deported," which increased concerns regarding racial profiling of U.S. citizens, Fryberg et al. explain.[841]

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[836] Ibid.

[837] Ibid.

[838] Stephanie A. Fryberg, Rebecca Covarrubias, Hazel Rose Markus, and Erin D. Carter, Giselle A. Laiduc, and Ana J. Salido, "How the Media Frames the Immigration Debate," *Analysis of Social Issues and Public Policy* 00, no. 0 (2011): 1.

[839] Ibid.

[840] Ibid., 2.

[841] Ibid.

The study collected news stories published during the period the Arizona governor signed the bill into law. The scholars examined three weeks of newspaper articles from one week prior to the signing of the immigration bill until two weeks after the signing of the bill from April 17, 2010-May 7, 2010. A database search resulted in a total of 337 news articles from local and national newspapers, including *The Arizona Republic, The Arizona Daily Star, The New Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times,* and *The Washington Times.*[842]

The study's coding process included several steps. The first step involved developing a coding scheme. To develop the coding scheme, the authors first read through the news stories and "identified the most prevalent themes" in news reports either supporting or opposing the bill, explains Fryberg et al.[843] Based on their reading of the news stories, the authors created the following five framing categories supporting the bill: Economic Threats; Threat to Public; Federal Laws are Inadequate; Need to Protect Welfare; and Need to Protect Jobs. The authors also created the following five framing categories opposing the bill: Racism; Cost to Ethnic Minorities and Legal Immigrants; Immigration Bill is Unconstitutional; Need to Uphold Democratic Values; Immigrant Nation.[844]

The second step in the coding process involved describing each of the coding categories on a separate coding sheet. On the coding sheet, the authors listed the

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[842] Ibid., 5.

[843] Ibid.

[844] Ibid., 6.

names of the framing categories in one column and each category's description in a second column.[845]

Lastly, the authors coded the sample of news stories. When coding the articles, "coders could assign more than one [frame] to any given article," Fryberg et al. explains.[846] On the coding sheet beneath each coding category, coders recorded a "1" if a specific frame was present in a news article and a "0" if the frame was not present in the article.[847]

The content analysis produced the following results. First, regarding the types and frequencies of specific frames used in news coverage of the immigration bill, most of the news frames used in articles supporting the immigration bill included "Federal Laws are Inadequate (27.3%); Threat to Public (27.6%); Need to Protect Welfare (13.5%); Economic Threats (11.1%); and Need to Protect Jobs (5.6%)," according to Fryberg et al.[848] The analysis also finds that news frames used in articles opposing the bill included "Racism (55.1%); Costs to Ethnic Minorities and Legal Immigrants (22%); Bill is Unconstitutional (19.9%); Need to Uphold Democratic Values (18.5%); and We are an Immigrant Nation (7%)," according to these scholars.[849]

Second, the study compared frames among local and national newspapers.

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[845] Ibid.

[846] Ibid.

[847] Ibid., 7.

[848] Ibid.

[849] Ibid.

Among those frames used in news articles supporting the bill, only the Need to Protect Welfare frame appeared equally in Arizona and national newspapers.[850] Frames including Federal Laws are Inadequate, Economic Threats, Threat to Public, and Need to Protect Jobs appeared to a greater extent in national newspapers than in Arizona newspapers.[851] Among those frames in news articles opposing the immigration bill, frames including Bill is Unconstitutional, Need to Uphold Democratic Values, and We Are an Immigrant Nation were equally common in both national and Arizona newspapers.[852]

Lastly, the study examined differences in framing between conservative and liberal newspapers. According to Fryberg et al., "conservative newspapers were more likely than liberal newspapers to frame support for the bill in terms of threats (Threats to Public Safety and Need to Protect Our Welfare)."[853] Additionally, "conservative newspapers were also more likely to frame support for the bill in terms of Economic Threats and the Need to Protect Jobs," Fryberg explains.[854] In terms of news articles opposing the bill, findings indicate that conservative and liberal newspapers used similar frames.[855]

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[850] Ibid.

[851] Ibid.

[852] Ibid.

[853] Ibid., 9.

[854] Ibid.

[855] Ibid.

5.6 Content Analysis and News Framing of the Vincent Chin Case

I chose a quantitative content analysis of media frames to examine news reports covering the Vincent Chin case for several reasons. First, the study used content analysis to reveal the specific types of frames journalists chose to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood from the time of his slaying on June 19, 1982 through December 31, 2022.

Second, the study used content analysis to reveal the frequency with which journalists used specific frames to characterize Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood across time. The dissertation was able to use this method to locate any correlations between key events and increases or decreases in the frequency of specific frames. For example, the dissertation used content analysis to reveal whether there was an increase in frames used to characterize Chin as a sympathetic victim of a racially motivated crime in June 1984 when a jury found Chin's killer guilty of violating Chin's civil rights.

Lastly, the dissertation used content analysis to help uncover any similar patterns or trends between news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case and the Georgia murder case involving the shooting of six Asian victims that occurred during President Trump's administration and the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S. (The Georgia murder case is discussed in detail later in this chapter.) The analysis traced whether the frames journalists employed during the first five years of news reporting on the Chin case persisted in coverage of the Georgia murder case on March 16, 2021. Furthermore, the study traced whether some frames became more prominent and others less so in news coverage of such cases of violence. Similarities in framing

between the Chin case and the Georgia case could serve as some evidence that the Chin case became a dominant case shaping how journalists paid attention to such violence.

For the content analysis of Vincent Chin murder case coverage, I analyzed news reports covering a span of forty years from the time of Chin's slaying on June 19, 1982, until December 31, 2022, the last full year of news coverage of the case at the time of this writing. I examined the following three time periods:

- the period between Vincent Chin's murder on June 19, 1982, and June 1, 1987, one month after the third and final federal civil rights trial ended;
- the thirty years following that period from June 2, 1987, to January 19, 2017, the day before Donald Trump was inaugurated into office as U.S. president;
- the period from the date of Donald Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2017, to December 31, 2022, approximately two years after Joe Biden took office as president.

The following steps explain how I used a quantitative content analysis to examine news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case. First, I collected the data from five local, regional, and national print news outlets: *The Associated Press, The Cincinnati Enquirer; The Detroit Free Press; The Lansing State Journal;* and *The New York Times.* I included in my sample all news articles that contained the name "Vincent Chin" or "Chin" at least once within the text of the news article. My total sample yielded 478 news stories covering the Chin case.

Second, I "cleaned" the data by weeding out any duplicate articles. The final sample was 382 news stories broken down as follows: *The Associated Press* (n= 89);

The Cincinnati Enquirer (n= 18); *The Detroit Free Press* (n= 156); *The Lansing State Journal* (n= 63); and *The New York Times* (n = 56).

Coding Scheme Development

Third, I developed a coding scheme to describe the news frames journalists used in coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood. To develop the coding scheme, I read through approximately one hundred news articles from the data sample and located the frames reporters used in coverage of the case from 1982 to the present. After developing a list of 14 framing categories to describe the specific frames located, I omitted categories if they did not focus centrally on framing of Chin's murder or his victimhood. For example, I dropped categories focusing on framing of Chin's mother, Lily Chin, as a bereaved victim. The final coding scheme included the list of eight framing categories below and their descriptions.

News Framing of Vincent Chin's Victimhood

Worthy Victim Frames

Worthy victim frames in news accounts cast the victims as deserving of sympathy and justice.[856] I located two types of worthy victim frames journalists used to characterize Vincent Chin.

Good Person Frame. According to scholar Kristen Gilchrist, the good person frame

[856] Chris Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," in *Victims, Crime, and Society*, ed. P. Davies, P. Francis, and C. Greer. London: Sage, 2007, 22, 23. Kristen Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims: Exploring Differences in Canadian Local Press Coverage of Missing/Murdered Aboriginal and White Women," *Feminist Media Studies*, 10, no. 4 (2010): 375-376.

casts the victim as "worth saving or avenging" based on his/her characteristics and personal traits.[857] Journalists characterize the victim "in glowing ways, using potent adjectives and imagery," she claims.[858] Examples of these characteristics include the following: "devout," "imaginative," "promising," "cherished," "vibrant," and "strong," according to Gilchrist.[859] News stories that fit this frame might describe the victim as friendly, intelligent, hardworking, striving for self-betterment by attending night school or working two jobs at once, and displaying traditionally praise-worthy family values, including marriage, children, family loyalty, and support for aging parents. Any references to Chin having a fiancée or celebrating his bachelor party fit this frame. Any references to Chin starting a family, searching for a home to buy for his family, falling in love, looking forward to his wedding day, working a second job, receiving two pay raises, or having potential fit this frame. The following phrases also fit this frame: *taking care of his mother, Chin's fiancé, engaged to be married, celebrating his upcoming wedding, working two jobs, providing for his family, desiring to have children, well-liked by everyone, immigrant in search of the American Dream,* and similar phrases.

Physically Vulnerable Frame. Journalists sometimes frame worthy victims as innocent victims.[860] Innocent victims are characterized as physically weak,

[857] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims," 376, cited from Marian Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* (Sage, Newbury Park, 1997), 375.

[858] Ibid., 381.

[859] Ibid.

[860] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22-23.

defenseless, unarmed, vulnerable, and helpless to their assailants.[861] Journalists are more likely to frame children, adolescents, the elderly, the infirm, and victims who are caught off guard or outnumbered by their attackers as fitting this frame.[862] Even tough, physically fit victims can fit the frame if they are reduced to helplessness. This frame might use the following words and phrases describing Vincent Chin or the attack: (the victim): *unarmed, outnumbered, helpless, hiding, arms pinned, held in a bear hug, on the ground being beaten, bludgeoned to death, struck repeatedly in the head,* (the attack): *baseball bat beating, fatal beating, unprovoked attack, assault, two against one, two men confronted him, chased him, swinging at Chin, standing over him,* and similar phrases.

Less Worthy Victim Frames

Scholars have examined whether and under what circumstances news media cast African American victims as less worthy of sympathy than Caucasian victims.[863] This research informs the present study. Less worthy victim news frames frequently result from stereotypes and reinforce them.[864] Such news framing often makes specific victims of crimes seem less deserving of sympathy and justice than other victims whose racial or social class backgrounds are more acceptable to journalist and

[861] Ibid.

[862] Ibid.

[863] Eugene McLaughlin and Karim Murij, "Ways of Seeing: The News Media and Racist Violence," in *Understanding Social Problems: Issues in Social Policy,* ed. Margaret May, Robert Page, and Edward Brunsdon (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 263-277. Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz, "Race and the Misrepresentation of Victimization on Local Television News," *Communication Research* 27, no. 5 (October 2000): 547-573.

[864] Eugene McLaughlin and Karim Murij, "Ways of Seeing," 264-267.

audience.[865]

In the Vincent Chin case, information surfaced that journalists might have used to cast him as less worthy of sympathy and justice than, for example, a young White elementary school teacher. For instance, Chin was a heavy drinker who frequented strip clubs and responded to insults by provoking fights. Less worthy victim framing categories will help to address the following questions: How extensively were these traits, widely viewed as negative, mentioned in the Chin murder coverage? Did the number of mentions of "less worthy" traits diminish over time?

I identified two types of less worthy victim frames journalists used to characterize Vincent Chin for this project.

Bad Conduct Frame. According to scholars Danielle C. Slakoff and Pauline K. Brennen, some journalists frame victims as less worthy of sympathy and justice when they engage in what many regard as bad conduct or "deviant" behavior.[866] Examples of deviant behavior include "sex work," such as prostitution or stripping, hiring prostitutes, frequenting strip clubs, or frequenting other establishments that offer sexual favors, according to these scholars.[867] News articles using words and phrases including *topless bar, strip club, stripper, exotic dancer, nude dancer, adult entertainment, alleged prostitution, stuffing money in a dancer's g-string, purchasing*

[865] Ibid.

[866] Danielle C. Slakoff and Pauline K. Brennen, "The Differential Representation of Latina and Black Female Victims in Front-Page News Stories: A Qualitative Document Analysis," *Feminist Criminology* (December 2017): 11.

[867] Ibid.

sex, paying for sexual experiences, selling sex, sex work, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, participating in the sex trade, consensual sex is bought and sold, women wearing tight-fitting clothing and striking seductive poses, performing illicit sexual activity, and similar phrases fit this frame. News articles using the words and phrases *bar, lounge, club,* or *Fancy Pants* that *do not* use the words and phrases *topless, strip club, stripper, exotic dancer, nude dancer,* or *adult entertainment* do not fit this frame.

Reckless Conduct Frame. When a journalist frames a victim as engaging in reckless behavior, the victim appears blameworthy and less worthy of sympathy and justice than a non-risk-taking victim.[868] According to scholars Slakoff and Brennen, examples of reckless behavior include "drinking to excess" or "using drugs."[869] News articles with references to victims engaging in excessive drinking, using inflammatory language, provoking fights, and similar conduct fit this frame. Any reference to a quarrel, a fight, a scuffle, an argument, a confrontation, or a disagreement that happened at a bar fits this frame. Coders should look for the following words and phrases: *throwing the first punch; starting the confrontation; arguing with two men in a bar; scuffling with two strangers; pushing a man in a bar; exchanging insults with two men at a bar; exchanging blows; shouting obscenities; throwing a chair; striking him in the head; having an altercation in a bar; a fight that occurred at a bar, a disagreement that escalated into violence;* and similar phrases.

[868] Ibid., 14.

[869] Ibid., 11, 14.

References to any statements the victim said that are commonly used to escalate or provoke a fight also fit this frame, including: *Why don't you learn how to fight?, What are you, chicken?,* and similar statements.

News Framing of the Criminal Motive

By ascribing motive, a journalist can make sense, or appear to make sense, of a crime. The motive—or alleged motive—can become the frame for news reports on that crime. A news frame is "a central, organizing principle or idea" by which journalists "make sense of relevant events, suggesting to audiences what is at issue," according to scholars William Gamson and Kathryn E. Lasch.[870] Hence, the Chin story evolves from a fuzzy tale of boozy rage into a clearer story with anti-Asian hatred at its center once journalists themselves allege—or heavily quote sources who allege—a racist motive for his murder.

The three frames listed below describe the motivation for Vincent Chin's murder. News stories that mention race explicitly or directly—not indirectly using inference or implication—fit this frame. The following are examples of direct, explicit references to racism:

- A news article reading: "The judge's lenient probation sentence for Vincent Chin's killers demonstrates that a person has a license to kill provided the victim is Chinese."

[870] William A. Gamson, and Kathryn E. Lasch, "The Political Culture of Social Welfare Policy," in *Evaluating the Welfare State: Social and Political Perspectives,* ed. Spiro E. Shimon & Ephraim Yutchtman-Yaar (San Diego: San Diego Academic Press, 1983), 16.

- Any news article lumping all Asian ethnic groups together is a direct reference to racism. For example, an article reading: “The prosecutor believed Ronald Ebens had hard feelings toward all Asians.”
- Additionally, the words “race,” “racism,” “lynching,” “bigotry,” “prejudice,” “civil rights,” “discrimination,” or any reference to racial injustice shown toward Asian Americans demonstrates a direct reference to racism. Hence, a news article reading: "A federal grand jury acquitted Ronald Ebens of violating Chin's civil rights" mentions racism directly. However, an article reading: "A federal grand jury acquitted Ebens on the charges" is an indirect reference to racism because there is no direct mention of Ebens violating Chin’s civil rights.

Sources Allege Racism Frame. According to scholar Robert Entman, journalists can “make a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable” by incorporating quotes from sources extensively throughout a news story if the source agrees with the journalists’ position.[871] Journalists using this frame quote or paraphrase *at least one* source claiming *explicitly and directly* that the alleged perpetrator had a racist motive for the murder. Sources can claim the alleged perpetrator had multiple motives as long as one motive is racism.

Examples of news articles that use this frame might report that a source or sources, such as a person, a jury, an Asian American advocacy group or its leaders, the F.B.I.,

[871] Robert M. Entman, “Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1993), 53.

or an official document, stated that the alleged assailant hated Asians or had negative feelings toward Asians, spouted racist slurs, or violated a victim's civil rights. Any news article stating that the F.B.I. is investigating a possible civil rights violation or that Asian American groups or group leaders are calling for an investigation into whether Chin's civil rights were violated fits this frame. Any news article stating that a federal grand jury indicted Ronald Ebens on civil rights charges or that a jury concluded that Ebens beat Chin because of his ancestry fits this frame. Any news article in which a source references Japanese cars, Japanese automakers, associates Japan with the decline of the U.S. auto industry, or references Americans losing their jobs due to Japanese auto imports fits this frame because such references help explain racist motives. Any news article in which a source claims that Asians in the U.S. are falling victim to prevailing attitudes toward the Japanese also fits this frame. Any news article stating that a jury found Ebens guilty of violating Chin's civil rights or that a jury convicted Ebens of violating Chin's civil rights in the first civil rights trial fits this frame. Lastly, any news article referencing the case as a civil rights case or referring to the two federal trials as civil rights trials fits this frame because such references indicate that sources or newsmakers are accusing Ebens of racism.

The following do not fit the Sources Allege Racism frame because the link to racism is indirect or unclear:

- A source claimed that Ronald Ebens told Vincent Chin to stop disrespecting the pole dancer.

- A source claimed that Ronald Ebens offered to pay a pedestrian $20 to help him find the Chinese guy. (It is unclear whether race serves as a descriptor for locating Chin or as a motive for killing him.)
- A source claimed that Ronald Ebens worked at a Chrysler plant.

Journalists Assert Racism Frame. Sometimes, journalists will create a specific interpretation of an event by placing particular words and phrases in news text and by repeating these words and phrases throughout the text.[872] In news text, reporters might assert, without attribution, that racism is the motive for a murder *as if it were an indisputable fact.* News articles in which the journalist claims, without attribution, that Vincent Chin's killer was partly or entirely motivated by racism or that the murder was the result of anti-Asian hatred or discrimination against Asians fit this frame. News stories that fit this frame might include the following statements from journalists: *The defendant's racist statements about the man he allegedly killed justify the civil rights indictment. During a barroom fight that preceded the fatal beatings, the defendant shouted racist slurs. The killer was motivated by racism toward Asians. Although Asian Americans have endured a long history of violence, the discrimination they face is frequently overlooked.*

No Racism Frame. This frame figures heavily in Vincent Chin's story. Whether Chin's murder was racially motivated is at the heart of four years of civil rights prosecution against Chin's chief assailant, Ronald Ebens, whose lawyers denied a racist motivation for the attack. Several types of news content fit this frame.

[872] Ibid.

— Direct denials. An alleged assailant, the assailant's lawyer, or a law enforcement official or investigator denies the attack was racially motivated and claims it was the result of a "barroom brawl." An assailant denies that he used racist slurs in reference to Vincent Chin or that he himself is racist. A journalist states, without attribution, that no evidence of a racial motive has come to light.

— Descriptions of a federal court case or its outcome. Defense attorneys claim there is insufficient evidence for a racial motive in the first federal civil rights trial because an Asian American civil rights group allegedly rigged the case to make a racial motive seem indisputable by coaching or influencing witnesses. News stories describing the first federal civil rights trial using the words and phrases *rigged, coached, influenced witnesses, tapes of witnesses being influenced, advised witnesses on what to say and not say, instructed witnesses to remember their lines when questioned on the stand, collaboration among witnesses, frame-up case,* and similar words and phrases fit this frame. A news story reading that a jury has acquitted Ebens or found Ebens innocent on charges of violating Chin's civil rights also fits this frame.

— Observations of others. The news article quotes sources claiming there was no racial motive for Vincent Chin's murder. The article quotes witnesses to the crime as claiming they did not recall the perpetrator making any racist remarks. The article quotes a source who knew the subject well and claimed he had never seemed like a racist.

The following statements do not fit the No Racism frame because the link to racism is indirect or unclear:

--Ronald Ebens said he did not recall making any disparaging remarks about Chin.

--The defense attorney claimed that Vincent Chin's death is better explained by men drinking too much.

News Framing of Vincent Chin as a Symbol of Anti-Asian Violence

Scholarship has analyzed how journalists characterize certain violent crime victims as symbols. Reporters depict these victims as representing a trend of violence against the racial, ethnic, religious, or ideological group to which that victim belongs. Scholars Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence define a news symbol as a person who "lives on beyond" his original story as journalists re-introduce him into subsequent news stories months, years, and even decades later.[873] These subsequent news reports often cover events similar, yet unrelated to, the original story.[874] By re-introducing news symbols into subsequent news stories, journalists use symbols "to recount stories" about broader social problems, such as anti-Black racism in America, Bennett and Lawrence claim.[875]

Chin as Symbol. Far from allowing the Vincent Chin murder case to be forgotten, journalists frequently reintroduced it in news reports regarding violence against Asians in the U.S. Some of these news reports were published decades following Chin's murder during the Covid-19 pandemic in America. In news reports using the

[873] W. Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 20, 24.

[874] Ibid., 24.

[875] Ibid., 25.

Chin as Symbol frame, reporters or their sources may state directly that Chin had become a symbol, icon, or martyr to the cause of preventing anti-Asian violence twenty, thirty, or even forty years after his death. Articles reporting on the milestone anniversaries of his death and commemorations of these milestones almost invariably include the Chin as Symbol frame.

Inter-coder Reliability Test

The fourth step in the content analysis involved conducting an inter-coder reliability test to evaluate the coding scheme. Another academic volunteered to assist with the coding test. I trained him to understand how I defined each of the eight framing categories. In order to test how well a second coder could understand the definitions for each category, I selected a small sample of twenty-four news articles from the original data sample (N= 382). I selected articles from *The Detroit Free Press* (9 articles), *The New York Times* (6 articles), and *The Associated Press* (9 articles).

Next, the two coders independently coded the sample of twenty-four news articles using the coding scheme. (Appendix B provides the step-by-step procedure used to code news frames in each article.) For three framing categories, including Good Person, Bad Conduct, Journalists Assert Racism, and Chin as Symbol, both coders had complete agreement. For two framing categories, including Reckless Conduct and Sources Allege Racism, the two coders disagreed 4.17 percent of the time and agreed 95.8 percent of the time on each category. Both coders had the highest percentage of disagreement at 12.5 percent when coding news articles that framed the Asian American victim as Physically Vulnerable. However, in discussions, the second coder agreed with the first coder's interpretation of the

framing category. Should other academics use the Physically Vulnerable frame in replication of this study, a more detailed description of this frame might be necessary to help guarantee a higher percentage of agreement between coders. Overall, the two coders disagreed 2.6 percent of the time and agreed 97.4 percent of the time on all frames. After coding the 24 articles, both coders met briefly and discussed the reasons for the disagreements. By the end of the meeting, the second coder fully understood the reasons for the discrepancies, and both coders agreed that more training regarding the coding of the Physically Vulnerable frame would have been helpful.

Coding Procedure

The final step of the content analysis of Vincent Chin news coverage involved coding the news frames in the entire sample of news articles (N=382). To simplify the process of coding news frames in each article, I only coded frames within the text of the article. I did not code frames in the article headlines or photo captions. The unit of analysis was the paragraph of the news article as I coded news frames on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. Step-by-step instructions for coding the news frames are listed in Appendix B.

Once I coded the frames in all the news articles, I recorded the count for each frame in an Excel spreadsheet along with the headlines for each news article, each article's publication date, and the news outlet that published each article. I paid special attention to specific points in time when framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimization shifted. For example, during the five-year period of the Chin case from 1982-1987, I searched for correlations between shifts in framing and key

events of the case, such as judges' decisions and press conferences held by Asian American advocacy groups.

5.7 Content Analysis of News Framing of the Georgia Murders

I conducted a separate quantitative content analysis of news coverage of the shooting deaths of six Asian victims in Cherokee and Fulton Counties in Georgia in the spring of 2021. This content analysis compared how and to what extent news framing of the murder case resembled framing of the historic Vincent Chin murder case that occurred approximately 40 years earlier. Similarities in news framing between the Chin case and the Georgia case serve as some evidence of the extent to which present-day journalists pay attention to anti-Asian racism in news coverage of violent crimes against Asian Americans.

The Georgia murder case involved the shooting deaths of six Asian women, one Caucasian woman, and one Caucasian man at three Georgia spas by 21-year-old Robert Aaron Long on the evening of March 16, 2021. A ninth victim, a Hispanic gentleman, was shot in the head but survived. Long, who is Caucasian, was apprehended and taken into police custody where he informed law enforcement that he committed the crimes due to his sex addiction and his desire to eliminate sexual temptation. Such temptation conflicted with his evangelical beliefs. Long also told police he habitually satisfied his sex addiction by visiting Asian massage parlors where sexual favors were allegedly bought and sold. He had previously sought

treatment for his addiction in a mental health clinic for evangelicals. Long denied a racial motive for the shootings.[876]

I chose the Georgia case for two reasons. First, news coverage of the case harbors important similarities and differences with coverage of the Vincent Chin case. These similarities and differences helped illuminate the extent to which present-day news reporters pay attention to anti-Asian racism in coverage of violent crime against Asian Americans.

News coverage of the Georgia murder case shares several similarities with coverage of Vincent Chin's murder. First, the Georgia murders drew immense coverage locally and nationally. Secondly, quite a few journalists initially quoted local police investigators as claiming that the murders were not hate crimes and that the six Asian victims were not victims of racial injustice. Some of these journalists emphasized that two of the Asian victims were White and one victim was Hispanic while other journalists stressed that the killer's alleged sex addiction—not racism—likely drove him to target women. Also similar to the Chin case, Asian American activists and other critics immediately objected to such news coverage, arguing that

[876] Specific details of the Georgia murder case are as follows. Robert Aaron Long shot and killed four people, two of whom were Asian women, and two of whom were Caucasian, at Young's Asian Massage parlor in Georgia's Cherokee County. A fifth person, a Hispanic man, was shot between the eyes but survived. Long then drove 30 miles South to Atlanta, Georgia in Fulton County where he shot and killed three women at Gold Spa and one woman at Aromatherapy Spa. All of Long's Atlanta victims were of Asian descent. After a brief highway pursuit, police apprehended Long as he headed south in his SUV and placed him in the custody of Cherokee County law enforcement. Long told police he was on his way to Florida to commit similar crimes against establishments that promote prostitution. After pleading guilty to four counts of murder, aggravated assault, domestic terrorism, and possession of a weapon in a Cherokee County court, Long was sentenced to four consecutive life sentences in prison without the possibility of parole plus an additional 35 years in prison. The plea deal spared Long a death sentence. The sentencing took place on July 27, 2021. However, Long pleaded not guilty to the same charges in a Fulton County court. In August 2023, Long appeared in Fulton County court a second time to discuss prosecutors' desire to admit as evidence Long's guilty plea to killing four people in Cherokee County. Under Georgia's new hate crime law, the prosecution is seeking the death penalty. The Atlanta case is ongoing as of the time of this writing.

the murders were indeed hate crimes because six of the victims were Asian. Following local protests by Asian American advocacy group leaders who claimed the string of shootings had ignited fears of racial hatred, some reporters framed the case as an anti-Asian attack that was part of a national trend of racial violence against Asian Americans. A few of these reporters compared the Atlanta shootings to Vincent Chin's murder, keeping the narrative of racial injustice intact.

However, unlike news coverage of the Vincent Chin case, some news articles covering the Georgia murders continued promoting the narrative of the mentally troubled sex addict whose desperate attempt to alleviate temptation led to the shootings. Some of these news articles contained opposing frames that acknowledged Asian American community members' concerns yet questioned whether Long's motive was ultimately racism.

The second reason I chose this case was because the shootings took place during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S. and President Donald Trump's administration. This time period is important for uncovering how and to what extent journalists paid attention to anti-Asian violence in the wake of President Trump's labeling of the Covid-19 virus as "the China virus."

I chose a quantitative content analysis to examine news frames in coverage of the Georgia murder case for three reasons. First, the dissertation used content analysis to reveal the specific types of frames journalists chose to characterize the motive for the Georgia murders and to characterize the six Asian victims.

Second, content analysis uncovered the frequency with which journalists used specific frames to characterize the criminal motive and the six Asian murder victims

across time. The study located correlations between key moments in the Georgia murder case and increases or decreases in reporters' use of specific frames. For example, content analysis revealed whether there was an increase in news frames characterizing the Asian victims as worthy of racial justice following Asian American advocacy groups' protests of the racial hatred motivating the killings.

Lastly, the dissertation used content analysis to uncover any similar patterns or trends between news framing of the Georgia murder case and the Vincent Chin case. The analysis traced whether journalists recycled the frames they used to characterize the motive for Chin's murder and his victimhood in coverage of the Georgia murders and the six Asian murder victims. Similar trends and patterns in framing between these two cases offer some evidence of increased news media attention to anti-Asian racism.

The time period analyzed for the content analysis of news frames of the Georgia spa shootings encompassed a span of approximately two years. I analyzed the period from March 16, 2021, the day of the shootings, to December 31, 2022, the last full year of news coverage of the Georgia murder case at the time of this writing.

The content analysis involved three steps. First, I collected the data. I collected data from the set of five news outlets I used for the content analysis of the Vincent Chin murder case: *The Associated Press*, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Lansing State Journal*, and *The New York Times.* For this particular analysis, I also included *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.* I chose this newspaper because it is the only major daily newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia, the city where four of the shootings took place. I also added *The Washington Post* because the

reputable daily newspaper has a large national audience and contains a high amount of news coverage of the Georgia murder case. Within each of these news outlets, I used the search term "Robert Aaron Long" because the search returned the highest number of news articles within each outlet. Searches using the term "Atlanta" resulted in dozens of news articles that did not cover the shootings in Atlanta, Georgia.

Second, I "cleaned" the data by weeding out any duplicate articles. I began with a sample of 317 news stories. After omitting the duplicates, the final sample was 218 news stories broken down as follows: *The Atlanta Constitution* (n = 63); *The Associated Press* (n= 38); *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (n= 9); *The Detroit Free Press* (n=4); *The Lansing State Journal* (n=4); *The New York Times* (n=40); and *The Washington Post* (n=60).

The final step of the content analysis involved coding the news frames in the entire sample of news articles covering the Georgia murder case. To simplify the process of coding news frames in each article, I only coded frames within the text of the article. I did not code frames in the article headlines or photo captions. The unit of analysis was the paragraph of the news article because I coded news frames on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. I used the same step-by-step instructions for coding as I used for the content analysis of the Vincent Chin murder case in Appendix B.

Once I coded the frames in all the news articles, I recorded the count for each frame in every news article in an Excel spreadsheet along with the headlines for each news article, each article's publication date, and the news outlet that published each article. I paid special attention to when framing of the motive for the shootings and

framing of the Asian victims shifted and searched for correlations between shifts in framing and key events of the Georgia case, such as Asian American advocacy group protests.

5.8 Conclusion

Content analysis proved a very useful method for this project. Overall, using a content analysis to examine shifts in framing patterns within news coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case and explore comparable trends between framing of the Chin case and the Georgia murder case will help shed light on how and to what extent U.S. journalists acknowledged, addressed, and, eventually, condemned anti-Asian racism. Furthermore, analyzing how journalists framed Asians in the U.S. as victims of violent crimes will help uncover how and under what circumstances reporters paid attention to these victims as either deserving or less deserving of racial justice. Examining crime framing and victim framing in news coverage of violence targeting Asians in America is important in a society where public perception of Asians as a racial and ethnic group was gradually evolving. Moreover, comparing news framing of cases of violence against Asians in America that occurred in the 1980s with more recent cases of such violence will assist in uncovering some evidence of how journalists gradually started paying attention to anti-Asian racism as a persistent, widespread social issue in America.

Chapter 6: Results for The Vincent Chin Murder Case

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six analyzes the results of the content analysis of Vincent Chin murder case news coverage from 1982-2022 within the aggregate of local and national news outlets chosen for this study.[877] The chapter examines the extent to which journalists used the eight news frames characterizing Chin's murder, victimhood, and status as a news symbol to support particular news narratives. I also examine how key events during the case played a role in shaping shifts in framing.

Overall, findings convey that news framing of the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's murder supported the narrative of racial injustice. The Sources Allege Racism frame dominated overwhelmingly in news coverage, trending steadily upward in visibility across time. The Journalists Assert Racism frame was barely visible in coverage during the initial years following Chin's death; yet, as predicted, the frame's appearance in news stories trended upward dramatically in the decades following the murder case. Despite this upward trend, the fact that journalists consistently relied more heavily on source attribution than their own assertions to condemn the anti-Asian racism motivating Chin's slaying was shocking, especially given the surge in anti-Asian violence during the pandemic. The No Racism frame showed a consistent downward trend in visibility across time and, surprisingly, never dominated in the early months of news coverage of the case.

News framing of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime also supported the

[877] The five news outlets are as follows: *The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer*.

racial injustice narrative. The Physically Vulnerable frame remained prominent in characterizations of Chin's victimhood across time. However, the Good Person, Reckless Conduct, and Bad Conduct frames consistently accounted for a much smaller percentage of total frames in news coverage of Chin. These results signal an intense journalistic interest in the legitimacy of anti-Asian racism as opposed to the worthiness of Asian victims of violent crime.

Lastly, journalists paid attention to Vincent Chin as a news symbol of anti-Asian racism in America to a far lesser extent than predicted. Most surprising was the frame's low visibility in news stories published during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6.2 Vincent Chin News Coverage, 1982-2022

Two of the primary research questions this dissertation seeks to answer are as follows: First, which specific news frames did journalists use to characterize Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood? Second, how did journalists use these frames to support particular news narratives in coverage of Chin? As discussed in the review of scholarship in Chapter 2, scholars Patterson and Monroe define narratives as "the stories people tell" to draw attention to broad problems in society.[878] In this chapter, I examine the results of the content analysis of Vincent Chin news coverage, including the specific frames journalists used in coverage of the murder case over time. I then offer some evidence of how key events of the case appear to have played a role in important shifts in framing and examine the extent to which shifts in overarching news narratives are related to shifts in framing of the case. (Shifts in framing at

[878] Patterson and Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," 315.

specific times during the Chin case is discussed later in this chapter.)

I began my analysis by examining the specific types of news frames journalists used and their frequencies in coverage of the murder case to characterize the motive for Chin's murder and to characterize Chin as a victim of violent crime. First, I started with the broadest overview of the framing and examined news frames in the aggregate of all five news outlets from June 19, 1982, the date of Chin's slaying, to December 31, 2022, the date marking the end of the last full year of news coverage during the research.

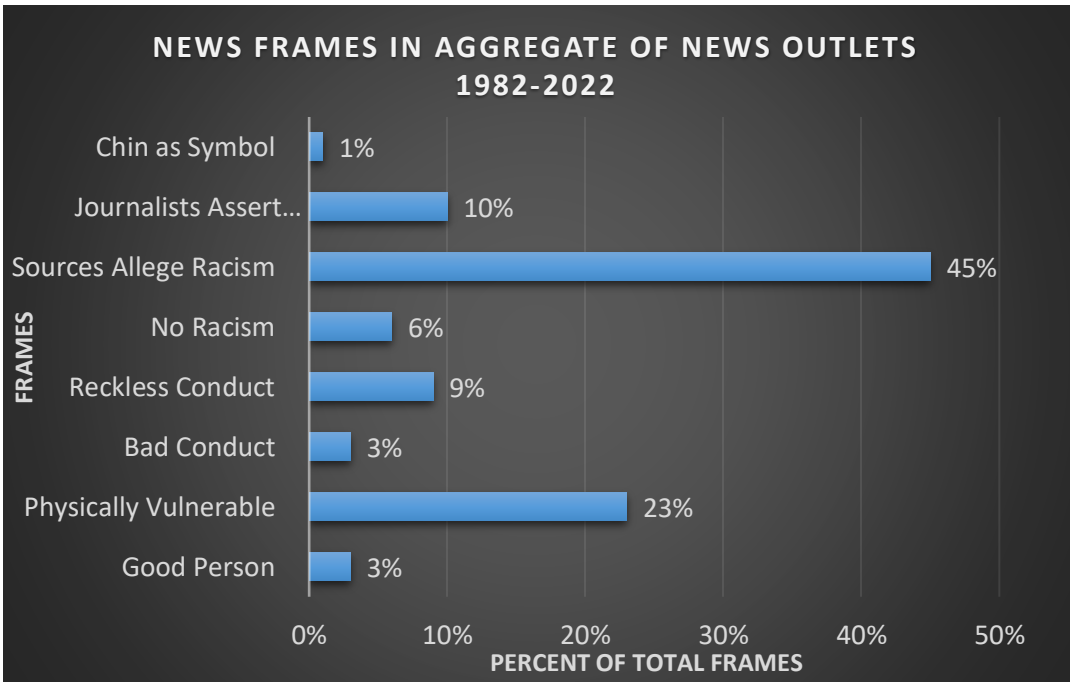


Figure 1. News Frames in Aggregate of Publications, 1982-2022 (Figure by author)

Section 6.2 refers to the results presented in Figure 1. When characterizing the motive for Vincent Chin's murder, journalists overwhelming relied on the Sources Allege Racism frame more than any other frame from 1982-2022. The Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for 45 percent (1,457 frames) of total news frames in

the aggregate of news outlets from 1982-2022 (N= 3,269 total frames in all news outlets). Journalists who used this frame quoted or paraphrased at least one source claiming explicitly and directly that the alleged perpetrator had a racist motive for the murder.

The fact that the Sources Allege Racism frame accounts for a large percentage of total news frames from 1982-2022 demonstrates how journalists typically rely on their sources rather than their own direct assertions to support a particular news narrative. In order to support the narrative of Vincent Chin as a target of racial injustice, journalists covering the Chin murder case used the Sources Allege Racism frame when quoting Chin's friends and family, prosecuting attorneys in the case, and Asian American activists protesting in support of racial justice for Chin.

Both national and local news outlets used the Sources Allege Racism frame. For example, on May 9, 1983, *The Associated Press* quoted Stewart Kwoh, an Asian American attorney protesting the racial injustice behind Vincent Chin's death during a rally organized by the Asian American activist group American Citizens for Justice (ACJ). Kwoh compared the racism motivating Chin's slaying to the racial discrimination against Chinese laborers who were prevented from immigrating to the U.S. in the late nineteenth century by an act of Congress. "I came from California where they had the first Chinese exclusion movement in the 1880s, so we feel outraged 100 years later [because of Chin's death]," according to *the Press*.[879] In the decades following the Chin case, journalists quoted Asian American Studies

[879] James Reindl, "500 Join Rally to Protest Asian American Killing," *The Associated Press,* May 9, 1983, NexisUni Database.

professors, Washington politicians, and activists to draw attention to the anti-Asian hatred motivating Chin's death. On June 19, 2021, during the 40th anniversary commemoration of Vincent Chin's slaying in Detroit, Michigan, *The Detroit Free Press* quoted an Asian American activist who compared the racism motivating Chin's brutal murder to the hatred motivating attacks against Asian Americans during Covid-19: "The heightened level of rhetoric of 'China is responsible for this virus' . . . is part of the larger kind of trend of pitting China and the United States against each other."[880] Overall results for the Sources Allege Racism frame suggest that the news narrative of racial injustice dominated from 1982-2022 because journalists relied heavily on sources to support the idea that anti-Asian hatred motivated Chin's murder.

By contrast, in the aggregate of news outlets, the Journalist Asserts Racism frame accounted for just 10 percent (332 frames) of total news frames from 1982-2022 (N= 3,269 total frames in all news outlets). Hence, journalists relied much less on their own direct assertions of racial injustice than on sources to support the racial injustice narrative from 1982-2022. For example, in news articles using the Journalists Assert Racism frame, reporters directly asserted, without using attribution, that racism was the motive for Chin's murder as if it was an indisputable fact. For example, on March 18, 2021, in a news story discussing the murders of six Asian women at three in Atlanta, *The Associated Press* reported on the rising hatred toward Asian Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic. The report noted that Asians in the

[880] Niraj Warikoo, "Forum on Saturday to Remember Chin's Legacy," *The Detroit Free Press,* June 19, 2021, Newspapers.com.

U.S. have "been targeted before, from the immigration ban imposed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 through the herding of Japanese Americans into concentration camps during World War II to the murder of Vincent Chin by Detroit autoworkers."[881]

On one level, the dominance of the Sources Allege Racism frame over the Journalists Assert Racism frame is not surprising. Responsible news reporters habitually rely on credible sources in their coverage of race-related topics more than their own direct assertions. Daniel Hallin's Sphere Theory helps explain why some journalists, in addition to relying on sources, directly asserted that anti-Asian prejudice led to Chin's slaying from 1982-2022.[882] Hallin's theory assumes that journalists separate news events into one of three categories or spheres. The theory posits that news framing follows shifts from consensus (such as nineteenth-century prejudice against immigrants) to debate among society's elites and the general public (such as debates regarding whether the U.S. should welcome immigrants). The sphere of consensus is reserved for topics on which there is widespread agreement. Journalists treat such topics as conventional wisdom. The sphere of elite contestation, or legitimate controversy, concerns those issues over which the country's elite powerholders debate, such as policy issues. Journalists are emboldened to report on and investigate such conflicts. Lastly, the sphere of deviance applies to those allegedly radical, unacceptable, or dangerous issues that journalists are expected to

[881] Untitled, *The Associated Press*, March 18, 2021, NexisUni.

[882] Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1989.

either ignore or ridicule because they fall outside the bounds of legitimate elite debate and are held in disregard or contempt by the public.[883]

In light of the assumptions of Hallin's Sphere Theory, one could argue that Asian American advocacy group protests against anti-Asian racism, political statements condemning anti-Asian hatred, and the uptick in violence targeting Asians in the U.S. during the Covid-19 pandemic succeeded, to some degree, in moving the issue of anti-Asian racism from the sphere of contestation to the sphere of consensus between 1982 and 2022.

This would help explain why some journalists believed they could directly assert that Vincent Chin's murder was the result of anti-Asian racism without relying on sources. For example, as discussed in the review of scholarship in Chapter 2, during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, journalists largely framed violence against Asians as "ordinary crimes" when the public viewed Asians as a "model minority" who did not face racism (sphere of consensus). In the 1990s and the early 2000s, new cases of violence against Asians arose, and public opinion began shifting under the influence of Asian advocacy group protests. At this time, journalists began taking a more neutral stance regarding such violence and used sources to speculate about a racial motive (the sphere of legitimate controversy). As discussed later in this section, during the Covid-19 pandemic, as violence against Asians surged and public pushback "punished" journalists who failed to recognize the race hatred behind violence against Asians, many journalists ignored the now unacceptable idea that racism against Asians does not exist (sphere of deviance) and embraced the idea that

[883] Ibid., 117-118, 131-136, 162-163, 197-198.

violence against Asians is racially motivated, unless hard evidence indicated otherwise.

When journalists made direct assertions that anti-Asian racism motivated Vincent Chin's murder, they used the racial injustice narrative in their coverage of the case. Although it is clear from the content analysis of the data that journalists relied to a far greater extent on sources to allege a racial motive for Chin's slaying, both the Journalists Assert Racism frame and the Sources Allege Racism frame helped keep the racial injustice narrative intact from 1982-2022. When and to what extent journalists themselves asserted a racial motive (as opposed to giving voice to sources who alleged a racial motive for Chin's death) is examined more closely later in this chapter.

Claims that racial hatred did not motivate Vincent Chin's murder were present to a much smaller degree. Journalists framed Chin's murder as motivated by factors other than racism in only a small percentage of total news frames from 1982-2022. The No Racism frame accounted for just 6 percent (197 frames) of total news frames in the aggregate of news outlets during this period (N= 3,269 total frames in all news outlets). Journalists using the No Racism frame quoted sources who denied that Chin's murder was related to his race or that Chin's killers used racial slurs. Journalists using this frame also directly asserted, without using attribution, that there was no evidence of a racial motive. For example, on May 2, 1987, in a report covering Ronald Ebens' acquittal on charges of violating Chin's civil rights, *The New York Times* quoted defense attorney Frank Eamons who called the civil rights trial a "rigged" case: " 'We said all along this case was a frame-up. This was never a civil

rights case, and he [Ebens] got a fair trial,' " according to *The Times.* This news report represents a typical example of how journalists use a counter-frame to maintain the objectivity of news stories, especially those stories covering the court proceedings surrounding a murder case. While the finding for the No Racism frame yielded a lower percentage of total frames than expected over the forty-year time span, an analysis of variations in the frequency of this frame during each time period, discussed later in this section, provides a more in-depth understanding regarding when journalists used this frame. Overall, the small percentage of No Racism frames indicates that the news narrative of Vincent Chin's slaying as an ordinary crime unrelated to race appeared less frequently than the narrative of racial injustice.

According to the results presented in Figure 1, when characterizing Vincent Chin as a victim worthy of compassion and justice in the aggregate of news outlets from 1982-2022, the Physically Vulnerable frame dominated, accounting for 23 percent (744 frames) of total news frames during the forty-year period (N= 3,269 total frames in all news outlets). Journalists who used the Physically Vulnerable frame characterized Chin as helpless when confronted by his assailants.

The fact that the Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for a large percentage of total news frames over time is not surprising given the assumptions of worthy victim theory. Worthy victim theory (Mclaughlin and Murji, 2001; Gilchrist, 2010; Greer, 2007) assumes a correlation between framing racial minority group victims as hate crime victims *and* as victims who are worthy of justice in the same news story. The news appeal of a racial motive assists in "transforming a violent local incident of apparently limited newsworthiness into an issue of public importance," scholars

Eugene McLaughlin and Karim Murji explain.[884] Hate crime victims are newsworthy because racial hatred is "culturally proximate," or meaningful, to media audiences, "resonating" with audiences' abhorrence for racism and their interest in posing solutions to racial problems, according to scholar Kristen Gilchrist.[885] Hence, when deciding whether to frame racial minorities who are violent crime victims as either worthy or less worthy of justice, journalists pay greater attention to victims of race hatred.[886]

For example, on November 3, 1983, *The Detroit Free Press* framed Vincent Chin as both a worthy victim *and* a victim of racial injustice. *The Press* quoted Helen Zia, then president-elect of the Asian American advocacy group American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), following the indictment of Chin's killers on charges of violating Chin's civil rights. ACJ had campaigned on the notion that Chin's killers had "conspired to injure, oppress, threaten, and harass [Chin]" because of his race, according to *the Press.* Zia expressed satisfaction with the indictment: "We feel that this is sort of the first step in possibly seeing justice," she told *the Press*.[887]

The Good Person frame accounted for merely 3 percent (103 frames) of total news frames during the forty-year period (N=3,269 total frames in all news outlets). Journalists who used the Good Person frame characterized Vincent Chin as friendly, intelligent, hardworking, striving for self-betterment by working two jobs, and

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[884] McLaughlin, and Murij, "Ways of Seeing," 270.

[885] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

[886] McLaughlin and Murij, "Ways of Seeing," 270-274.

[887] Joe Swickard and John Castine, "U.S. Indicts Two Given Probation in Chin Death," *The Detroit Free Press,* November 3, 1983, Newspapers.com.

displaying traditionally praise-worthy family values, including marriage, children, family loyalty, and support for his elderly mother, Lily Chin. For example, on April 14, 1983, *The Detroit Free Press* reported that Chin's killers had been accused of "beating Vincent Chin, 27, to death with a baseball bat" outside a bar "where he had gone with friends to celebrate his upcoming wedding."[888] I expected that this frame would account for a larger percentage of total news frames given the assumptions of worthy victim theory discussed earlier. Despite the small percentage of frames characterizing Chin as a Good Person, the overall dominance of the Physically Vulnerable frame from 1982-2022 helped ensure the racial injustice narrative remained intact.

When characterizing Vincent Chin as less worthy of compassion and justice, journalists framed him as engaging in reckless conduct to a greater degree than engaging in bad conduct. The Reckless Conduct frame accounted for 9 percent (302 frames) of total news frames in the aggregate of news outlets from 1982-2022 while the Bad Conduct frame accounted for 3 percent (99 frames) of total news frames during this period (N=3,269 total frames in all news outlets). Journalists using the Reckless Conduct frame characterized Chin as blameworthy for his own victimhood because he drank excessively, used inflammatory language, and provoked fights. On June 14, 1984, *The Associated Press* quoted defense attorneys for Chin's killers who described his death as having resulted from "a confrontation" that Chin initiated due

[888] Joe Swickard, "Manslaughter Out in Plea Bargaining," *The Detroit Free Press,* April 14, 1983, Newspapers.com.

to "drunken anger."[889] Similarly, journalists using the Bad Conduct frame focused on Chin's habit of frequenting strip clubs. In a news story published on June 6, 1984 describing jury selection for the first federal civil rights trial, *The New York Times* reported that Federal District Judge Anna Diggs-Taylor questioned potential jurors regarding their thoughts on whether they found "nude dancing" offensive, a nod at Chin's weekend habit of watching strippers perform onstage at the Fancy Pants Tavern.[890]

The fact that framing of Vincent Chin as a less worthy victim composed only a small quantity of frames in the aggregate of news outlets from 1982-2022 was not surprising. Less than a year after Vincent Chin's slaying, Asian Americans began protesting what they alleged was the racial injustice behind his murder, organizing press conferences, protest marches, and rallies to send the message that Chin was an innocent victim wrongly slain because of his race. (In the same manner, Asian American activists' campaigns also played a part in the high percentage of Sources Allege Racism frames journalists used as they quoted activists during press conferences, protest marches, and speeches who insisted that Chin's killing was racially motivated.) Hence, in keeping with the assumptions of worthy victim theory, journalists paid greater attention to Chin as a victim of racial injustice and relied less on news frames that focused on his poor behavior and reckless conduct. News frames

[889] David Fox, "Federal Trial Begins for Man Given Probation in Beating Death," *The Associated Press,* June 14, 1984, NexisUni Database.

[890] "Jury Selection Begins in Beating Death of Chinese-American," *The New York Times,* June 6, 1984, NexisUni Database.

characterizing Chin as a worthy victim supported the racial injustice narrative over the forty-year timeframe.

Lastly, when characterizing Vincent Chin as a symbol of racist violence against Asians in the U.S., the Chin as Symbol frame accounted for just 1 percent (35 frames) of total news frames in the aggregate of news outlets from 1982-2022 (N=3,269 total frames in all news outlets). When using this frame, reporters or their sources stated directly that Chin had become a symbol, icon, inspirational meme, or martyr to the cause of preventing anti-Asian violence twenty, thirty, or even forty years after his death.

The fact that the Chin as Symbol frame accounted for such a small percentage of total news frames from 1982-2022 is not unexpected. According to scholars Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence, a news symbol, by definition, "lives on beyond" his original story, and journalists often do not re-introduce him into subsequent news stories as a symbol or martyr until years or even decades following the original event.[891] For instance, as I will discuss later in this chapter, journalists did not begin to frame Vincent Chin as a martyr for the cause of racial injustice against Asians in America until new cases of violence against Asian Americans began surging nearly forty years following his death during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, on January 28, 2021, *The Associated Press* revived Chin's story in a news report covering the uptick in violence against Asian Americans in major cities. *The Press* called the Chin murder case a "seminal moment" in Asian Americans' fight against

[891] W. Lance Bennett and Regina G. Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 20, 24.

racial violence because the case led to the first national pan-Asian organization movement that derived from Michigan Circuit Court Judge Charles' Kaufman's lenient probation sentence for Chin's killers.[892]

6.3 Vincent Chin Murder Case News Coverage, 1982-1987

While analysis of the types and frequencies of news frames in the aggregate of news outlets from 1982-2022 clearly revealed that the Sources Allege Racism frame dominated across the entire data sample, a closer analysis of the three distinct time periods under study uncovered the preponderance of specific frames at various points in time. First, I examined the overall framing results during the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-1987. Doing so uncovered the news narratives journalists used in coverage of the case itself and the specific frames chosen to support these narratives over the five-year period. Second, I conducted a close and careful analysis of news framing during each distinct year of the Chin case from 1982-1987. Doing so allowed me to search for evidence to support potential correlations between key events of the Chin case and shifts in news framing at specific points in time during the case.

Section 6.3 refers to the results in Figure 2 on the following page. Overall, when characterizing the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's slaying from 1982-1987, journalists framed the murder as racially motivated to a far greater extent than they framed the murder as an ordinary violent crime. The Sources Allege Racism frame dominated overwhelmingly from 1982-1987. This frame accounted for 40 percent (749 frames) of total news frames coded during this time period (N=1,874 total

[892] Terry Tang, "Corky Lee, Known for Photographing Asian America, Dies at 73," *The Associated Press*, January 28, 2021, NexisUni Database.

frames used in all news outlets) and was used more than any other frame during the five-year period of the Chin case.

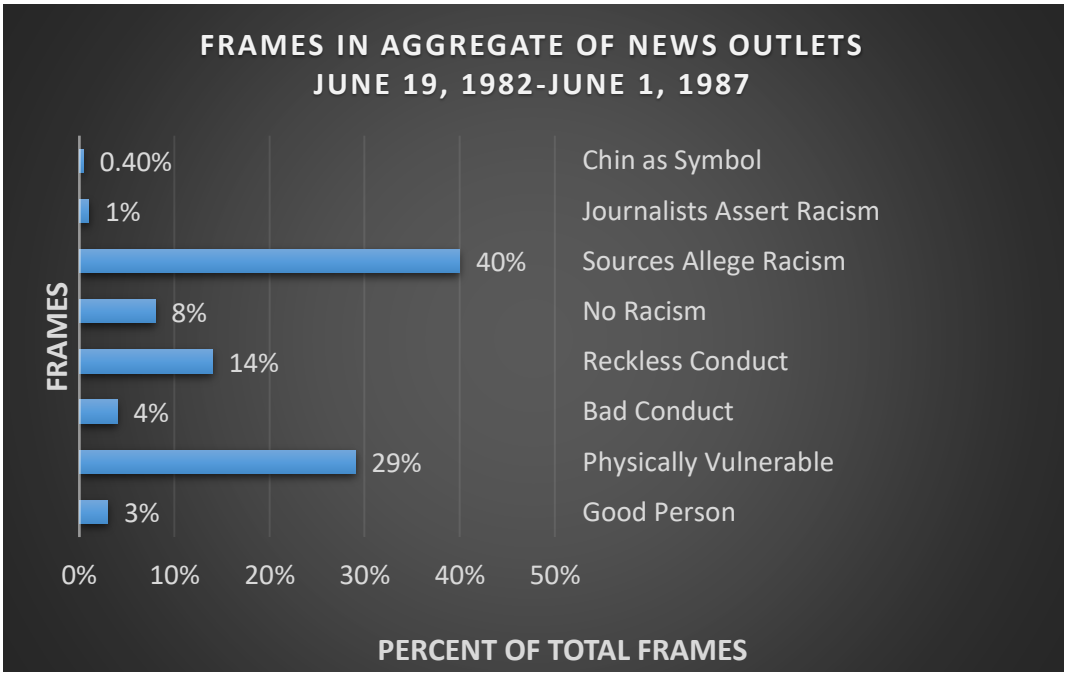


Figure 2. News Frames in Aggregate of Publications, 1982-1987 (Figure by author)

Conversely, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for only 1 percent (20 frames) of total news frames from 1982-1987 (N=1,874 total frames used in all news outlets). This result is not surprising. As discussed in the review of scholarship in Chapter 2, the model minority myth potentially influenced how journalists in the 1980s framed violent crimes against Asians. By the 1980s, many journalists appeared to have accepted the myth that, through hard work and perseverance, Asians in America achieved success academically and economically[893] and became well-

[893] Kim, "Asian Americans: No Model Minority," 44-53; Endo and Della-Piana, "Japanese Americans, Pluralism, and the Model Minority Myth," 45-51; Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the 'Model Minority,' " 12-19, quoted in Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the Model Minority," 14.

integrated and well-accepted into America's mainstream society and culture as U.S. citizens.[894]

The fact that journalists relied heavily on sources in the 1980s to allege that racism was a factor in Vincent Chin's slaying while only a few reporters directly asserted that anti-Asian racism was a motive highlights an important question surrounding the Journalists Assert Racism frame that this study considers: Did American society's perception of Asian Americans change over time as the growing number of cases of violence targeting Asians in the U.S. caused some people to question the model minority stereotype? Or, did the evolution of journalism practices over time empower journalists to take ownership of anti-Asian racism in America as an indisputable fact?

I speculate that both possibilities are true. Based on Hallin's Sphere Theory, one could argue that as the idea that anti-Asian racism did *not* exist in America moved from the zone of consensus to the zone of deviance, by the twentieth century, journalists felt more comfortable speaking out against such racism directly. Scholar Thomas Patterson recognized that broadcast news reporters have come to place less weight on source attribution using "soundbites" and more weight on journalists' own assertions to avoid turning important news events into mere debates between sources.[895] Since Patterson's study was published in 2013, news practices have

[894] Zhang, "Asian Americans Beyond the Model Minority Stereotype," 24.

[895] Thomas Patterson, *Informing the News: The Need for Knowledge-based Journalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2013). Patterson argues that broadcast news places too great an emphasis on sources. He claims that the journalists are those who "help us understand the world of public affairs beyond our direct experience." Placing too much emphasis on soundbites in broadcast news relegates the role of the reporter to the background. In so doing, broadcast news becomes less informative and, instead, resembles an echo chamber where viewers are only exposed to sources who share the viewers' opinions.

evolved to allow reporters to incorporate more of their own direct analysis into their news reports. Hence, one could argue that reporters covering violent crimes targeting Asian Americans, for example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, felt at ease incorporating their own claims regarding anti-Asian racism as a motive for such crimes into their news coverage. (I examine content analysis results for news framing of violence against Asian Americans during Covid-19 later in this chapter.)

The No Racism frame accounted for only 8 percent (158 frames) of total news frames from 1982-1987 (N=1,874 total frames used in all news outlets). This result is much lower than expected given the prevailing stereotypes of Asian Americans in the 1980s as "model minorities."

Overall results for the Sources Allege Racism, Journalists Assert Racism, and No Racism frames from 1982-1987 are important for three reasons. First, the dominance of the Sources Allege Racism frame suggests that the news narrative of racial injustice against Vincent Chin remained largely intact from 1982-1987. Second, results suggest that while some journalists directly acknowledged the presence of anti-Asian racism in the U.S., most journalists during the 1980s did not report on such racism as an indisputable fact. Hence, while the Chin case gradually drew journalists' attention to the idea of anti-Asian racism in a society accustomed to viewing Asian Americans as model minorities, most reporters continued to rely on sources to support the narrative of racial injustice. Only a few journalists spoke out against anti-Asian hatred directly during the case. Finally, results for the No Racism frame indicate that, while, overall, the frame did not dominate from 1982-1987, it never disappeared.

When framing Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime, overall results indicate that, during the period of the murder case, reporters characterized Chin as a victim who was worthy of racial justice to a far greater extent than they characterized him as someone who was less worthy of racial justice. Journalists used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any other news frame describing Chin's victimhood. As shown in Figure 2, the Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for 29 percent (546 frames) of total news frames from 1982-1987 (N=1,874 total frames used in all news outlets).

However, the Good Person frame accounted for just 3 percent (63 frames) of total news frames from 1982-1987. I expected a higher percentage of frames to focus on Vincent Chin's admirable, or "good," qualities during the duration of the case. As discussed earlier in this section, worthy victim theory assumes a correlation between framing racial minority group victims as hate crime victims and as worthy victims of violent crime. This is because the importance for society of fighting against racism causes hate crime victims to appear more newsworthy for journalists.[896] Hence, the result for the Good Person frame was surprising.

Journalists characterized Vincent Chin as a less worthy victim of violent crime to a lesser extent than they characterized him as a worthy victim of violent crime. The Reckless Conduct frame accounted for 14 percent (261 frames) of total news frames in the aggregate of news outlets from 1982-1987 (N=1,874 total frames used in all news outlets). The Bad Conduct frame composed only 4 percent (69

[896] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

frames) of total news frames during the period of the Chin case (N=1,874 total frames used in all news outlets).

Overall results for framing of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime are important. The fact that journalists used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any other frame to characterize Chin's victimhood reveals that, from 1982-1987, journalists paid attention to Chin as a victim of violence who was worthy of racial justice to a greater extent than they paid attention to him as a less worthy victim who did not deserve justice. Hence, the narrative of racial injustice against Vincent Chin dominated from 1982-1987.

Lastly, the Chin as Symbol frame accounted for only a small portion of total frames from 1982-1987. Less than 1 percent (8 frames) of total news frames during the duration of the Vincent Chin case characterized Chin as a symbol, icon, or martyr to the cause of preventing anti-Asian violence in the U.S. (N=1,874 total frames used in all news outlets). This result is not surprising. News symbols take shape over long periods of time as journalists revive events, such as the Chin case, that occurred years or even decades in the past "to recount stories" about broader social problems, such as anti-Asian racism, as Bennett and Lawrence claim.[897]

6.4 Vincent Chin Coverage: Shifts in Framing during Distinct Years of the Case, 1983-1987

When analyzing content analysis results for each separate year of the Vincent Chin murder case, I did not analyze 1982 separately because there was almost no news

[897] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 20, 24.

coverage of the Chin case during that year. Examining each separate year of the case helped answer the following research questions: First, at which specific points in time did framing of Chin's murder and his victimhood change? Second, did correlations exist between key events during the Chin case and increases or decreases in the specific types of frames journalists used? Third, was there any evidence in the coverage to indicate that key events played a role in shifting news media framing of the case at specific points in time?

Important to note is that the sample sizes of news articles varied from year to year. I controlled for the variation in the volume of news articles across the five-year period by dividing the total quantity of a specific frame in a given year by the total number of news frames in that year. The sample sizes of news articles for each of the five years of the Chin case are as follows: 1983= 91 articles; 1984= 75 articles; 1985= 4 articles; 1986= 11 articles; 1987= 51 articles (N=232 total news articles). This section refers to Figures 3-7 located in Appendix C.

When examining the predominance of specific frames used to characterize the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's murder, the Sources Allege Racism frame dominated in nearly every year of the case from 1982-1987. However, the frequency with which journalists used this frame varied from year to year. Such variations are important because they help reveal the extent to which journalists relied on sources to support a narrative of racial injustice during specific years of the case.

Results uncovered correlations between key events during the Vincent Chin case and increases and decreases in the Sources Allege Racism frame from 1983-1987. As the results in Figure 3, Appendix C indicate, the Sources Allege Racism

frame accounted for 41 percent (235 frames) of total news frames in that year (N= 572 total frames in all news outlets). Evidence suggests that key events related to the case in 1983 played a role in the large percentage of the Sources Allege Racism frame used in coverage of the case during this year. For example, on April 22, 1983, Laura Chan, Executive Director of the Organization of Chinese Americans in Washington, D.C., convinced the Department of Justice (DOJ) to begin a preliminary investigation into whether Chin's killers had violated his civil rights.[898] American Citizens for Justice (ACJ) leaders organized a massive Detroit rally on May 9, 1983 in support of bringing a civil rights case against Chin's killers.

Local and national journalists covering the Detroit rally relied heavily on sources who claimed Vincent Chin's murder was racially motivated. For example, on May 9, 1983, *The Detroit Free Press* quoted Vincent Chin's mother, Lily Chin, who spoke at the rally. During her speech, she questioned how Judge Charles Kaufman could give a probation sentence to two White men responsible for murdering her son because of his race: "My son is beaten like an animal, and the killer is not in jail . . . . This is freedom and democracy? Why isn't every person equal?" according to *The Press*.[899] On the same day, *The Associated Press* (AP) quoted Detroit attorney James Shimoura who attended the rally and condemned the racism he alleged as motivating

[898] Laura Chan based her request on the uncovering of new evidence. ACJ Press Secretary Helen Zia and Detroit attorney Liza Chan helped investigators uncover evidence of racial slurs directed at Chin by his assailant, Ronald Ebens, at the Fancy Pants Tavern the night of the murder.

[899] John Castine, "A Bat, A Gavel, A Question of Justice," *The Detroit Press,* May 9, 1983, Newspapers.com.

Chin's murder: "Asian people who live here [in the U.S.] are citizens like anybody else" and should feel safe, he said, according to AP.[900]

Similarly, evidence suggests that the grand jury indictment of Vincent Chin's killers in 1983 played a role in the large percentage of the Sources Allege Racism frame used in coverage of the case during this year. On November 2, 1983, following a grand jury inquiry into the violation of Chin's civil rights that began two months earlier, the jury indicted Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz on two charges: interfering with Chin's civil rights and conspiring to interfere.[901] Local and national news outlets covering the event quoted multiple sources who praised the indictment as a giant step toward obtaining racial justice for Vincent Chin. For example, on November 3, 1983, *The Lansing State Journal* quoted Chin's mother, Lily Chin, who stated that the indictment makes her "feel there's hope still for justice in this land."[902] Lily claimed that if her son's killers were ever acquitted, "it would show American law is unjust and discriminates against the Asian race."[903] On the same day, *The Detroit Free Press* quoted Helen Zia, then president-elect of American Citizens for Justice, as claiming that the indictment was a "first step" in obtaining racial justice for Chin. "…[N]ot only was a murder committed, but it was a serious violation of Vincent Chin's civil rights," Zia told *The Free Press.*[904]

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[900] James Reindl, "500 Join Rally to Protest Asian American Killing," *The Associated Press,* May 9, 1983, NexisUni.

[901] Paula Yoo, *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry,* 317.

[902] "Indictment Inspires Mother," *Detroit Free Press,* November 3, 1983, Newspapers.com.

[903] Ibid.

[904] Joe Swickard and John Castine, "U.S. Indicts 2 Given Probation in Chin Death," *The Detroit Free Press,* November 9, 1983, Newspapers.com.

National news outlets covered the indictment as well. News articles relied heavily on sources and documents alleging a racial motive for Chin's murder. For example, on November 3, 1983, *The New York Times* included a statement from the indictment claiming that "Ronald Ebens, 43, and his stepson, Michael Nitz, 23, taunted Mr. Chin in the Fancy Pants Lounge in nearby Highland Park last June 19, calling him a 'chink' and a 'nip' along with 'numerous obscenities,' " according to the news report.[905] Such news reports demonstrate how the racial injustice narrative remained intact in 1983 as journalists covering key events relied heavily on sources who attributed Chin's slaying to anti-Asian racism.

As the results in Figure 4, Appendix C indicate, journalists' use of the Sources Allege Racism frame decreased slightly in 1984 from the previous year, accounting for 35 percent (248 frames) of total news frames in 1984 (N= 703 total frames in all news outlets). Evidence suggests that the first federal civil rights trial of Vincent Chin's assailants in June 1984 played a role in the relatively large percentage of the Sources Allege Racism frame journalists used in this year. The trial, which was open to the press, attracted extensive local and national news media attention. During this year, a total of 42 news articles, most of which relied heavily on sources claiming that Vincent Chin's murder was racially motivated, covered the civil rights trial. This number represents over half, or 56 percent, of total news articles covering the Chin case in 1984 (75 articles) within all five news outlets examined for this year. To illustrate, on June 27, 1984, *The New York Times* quoted S. Theodore Merritt, the

[905] John Holusha, "2 Fined in Detroit Slaying Are Indicted by Federal Jury," *The New York Times*, NexisUni, Newspapers.com.

prosecuting attorney in the first civil rights trial, during closing arguments. According to *The Times,* Merritt described Chin's murder as "a lynching with a bat instead of a rope."[906] Similarly, on June 26, 1984, *The Associated Press* quoted Merritt during final arguments as claiming: "From the moment that bat was removed from the car, the hunt was on to catch a 'Chink,'" according to the news report.[907]

In 1985, journalists' use of the Sources Allege Racism frame increased substantially. As the results in Figure 5, Appendix C indicate, this frame accounted for 60 percent (24 frames) of total news frames in that year (N= 40 total frames). Because no key events of the Vincent Chin case took place in 1985, this result is difficult to explain.[908]

The following year in 1986, a significant change in news framing of Vincent Chin's murder took place. This shift in news framing is important because it indicates a broader shift from a racial injustice narrative to a narrative characterizing Chin's murder as unrelated to anti-Asian hatred. As the findings in Figure 6, Appendix C indicate, journalists' use of the Sources Allege Racism frame dropped dramatically from 60 percent (24 frames) of total frames in 1985 (N= 40 frames) to only 4 percent

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[906] "Jury Debates the Guilt of 2 in Detroit Slaying," *The New York Times,* June 27, 1984, NexisUni Database.

[907] Jim Irwin, No Headline, *The Associated Press,* June 26, 1984, NexisUni Database.

[908] Journalists published only 4 news articles in 1985. One of these articles was a *New York Times* news story headlined *"*Violent Incidents against Asian Americans Seen as Part of Racist Pattern." This article alone accounted for 19 of the 40 Sources Allege Racism frames. The importance of this article is worth noting because it is one of the first national news stories to discuss the Vincent Chin murder case within the context of a broader problem of racism. Within this article, journalists directly asserted that the Chin case represented a broader issue of anti-Asian hatred in the U.S. Fox Butterfield, *"*Violent Incidents against Asian Americans Seen as Part of Racist Pattern" *The New York Times,* August 31, 1985, NexisUni Database.

(4 news frames) of total frames in 1986 (N=109 total frames in all news outlets). Conversely, the No Racism frame accounted for nearly half, or 48 percent (52 news frames), of total frames in 1986 (N=109 total frames), a significant increase from a mere 5 percent (2 frames) of total news frames in 1985 (N= 40 frames).

Evidence suggests that a key decision by the Sixth Circuit Appeals Court of Cincinnati in 1986 played a role in shifting news framing of the Vincent Chin case from a racially motivated crime to a crime not motivated by anti-Asian hatred. On September 11, 1986, the Sixth Circuit Appeals Court of Cincinnati overturned the jury's verdict at the end of the first civil rights trial concluding that Ronald Ebens was guilty of violating Chin's civil rights. The Appeals Court's decision also overturned Ebens' 25-year prison sentence. In September 1986, 10 news articles, relying heavily on sources who claimed that Chin's murder was not racially motivated, covered the Court's decision. This number represents 91 percent of total news articles covering the Chin case in 1986 (11 articles) within all five news outlets examined during this year.

Most news articles quoted Ronald Ebens who defended himself against accusations of anti-Asian racism while other news stories quoted defense attorneys who expressed satisfaction with the Appeals Court's decision. For example, on September 12, 1986, *The Detroit Free Press* quoted Frank Eaman, Ebens' lawyer, who expressed relief at the Court's decision to overturn Eben's prison sentence and insisted that Ebens was not a racist: "We felt Ron Ebens was convicted [in 1984] only because the trial wasn't fair," Eaman told *The Press,* alluding to the witness coaching by American Citizens for Justice attorney Liza Chan during the first civil rights trial

in June 1984.[909] Similarly, on September 17, 1986, *The Detroit Free Press* quoted Ronald Ebens who insisted that anti-Asian racism did not motivate him to slay Chin: "I've never been a racist," Ebens told *The Free Press,* "and with God as my witness, that's the truth."[910]

In 1987, a second significant change in news framing occurred. News framing, once again, relied heavily on the Sources Allege Racism frame to support the racial injustice narrative. Figure 7, Appendix C shows that the Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for close to half, or 44 percent (192 frames), of total news frames in 1987 (N=437 total frames in all news outlets), a dramatic increase from just 4 percent (4 frames) of total frames in 1986 (N=109 total frames). In stark contrast, the No Racism frame accounted for only 14 percent (63 frames) of total frames in 1987 (N= 437 total frames), a significant decrease from 48 percent (52 frames) of total frames in the previous year.

Evidence suggests that the second federal civil rights trial that occurred in late April and early May 1987 played a role in shifting news framing of the Vincent Chin case from an ordinary violent crime to a racially motivated crime. Nearly all news

[909] Bill McGraw, "Verdict Voided in Chin Killing," *The Detroit Free Press,* September 12, 1986, Newspapers.com. Defense attorneys for Ronald Ebens accused Liza Chan, an attorney for the pan-Asian American advocacy group American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), of tape recording herself improperly coaching three of Vincent Chin's friends before they testified for the prosecution on Chin's behalf in the first civil rights trial. On tape, Chan could be heard telling Chin's three friends that they must testify that they heard Ronald Ebens utter a racial slur at Vincent Chin at the Fancy Pants Tavern the night of the murder. Chan recorded herself saying to Chin's friends: "Let's all remember our lines, okay?" During the Appeals Court hearing, defense attorneys argued that during the first federal civil rights trial, presiding Judge Anna Diggs-Taylor did not allow the media or court room spectators to hear these tapes. Only the jury was given headsets to listen to the tapes. Therefore, defense attorneys argued, the verdict in the trial should be overturned because the judge's decision prejudiced journalists and the public against Ebens.

[910] Bill McGraw, "I'm No Racist," *The Detroit Free Press,* September 17, 1986, Newspapers.com.

stories reporting on the trial and its outcome quoted sources alleging that Chin's death was motivated by anti-Asian hatred. A total of 43 news articles covered the trial in 1987. This number represents 84 percent of total news articles covering the Chin case (N= 51 total articles) within all five news outlets examined during this year. For example, on May 2, 1987, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* quoted Detroit attorney and American Citizens for Justice spokesperson James Shimoura shortly after the jury acquitted Ronald Ebens on all charges of violating Chin's civil rights. Shimoura said that he would "never accept" the jury's verdict: "As far as I'm concerned, it was a racial killing. Every American of Asian descent has shed a tear as a result of this case," he told *The Enquirer*.[911] Similarly, on the same day, *The Detroit Free Press* quoted Shimoura who highlighted the broader issue facing Asian Americans: "There's still an ongoing problem with racism against Asians" that the jury refuses to acknowledge, he told *The Free Press.*[912]

National news outlets also picked up the story. On May 6, 1987, *The New York Times* reported on the verdict, suggesting that Chin's murder could be representative of a broader problem of anti-Asian racism in the U.S. The newspaper quoted Ron Wakabayashi, director of the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL), an Asian advocacy group based in San Francisco. Wakabayashi insisted that the jury's decision to acquit Ronald Ebens on all civil rights charges "will only

[911] Denise Stinson, "Civil Rights Not Violated in '82 Beating, Jury Decides," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 2, 1987, Newspapers.com.

[912] Jacquelynn Boyle, "Jury Clears Ebens in Chin Case," *The Detroit Free Press*, May 2, 1987, Newspapers.com.

encourage the most backward element in this country . . . . It suggests a relaxing of law enforcement for this kind of racial violence," according to *The Times*.[913]

The variations in journalists' use of the Sources Allege Racism and No Racism frames in news coverage of key events during specific years of the Vincent Chin case are important. The manner in which journalists used these frames to cover specific events—relying heavily on sources alleging racism in coverage of the two federal civil rights trials but relying extensively on the No Racism frame in coverage of the Appeals Court decision—reveals that the racial injustice narrative could be challenged. The racial injustice narrative was indeed fragile in the 1980s, and by no means had journalists firmly accepted anti-Asian racism in the U.S. as "fact" during this decade.

Hence, from 1983-1987, reporters rarely used the Journalists Assert Racism frame to support a narrative of racial injustice. During each year of the Vincent Chin case, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for less than 10 percent of total frames in a given year. Instead, journalists relied on the opinions and viewpoints of their sources to "guide" the news narrative and, hence, the frames journalists chose.

When examining the preponderance of specific frames used to characterize Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime during distinct years of the murder case, journalists used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any other frame describing Chin's victimhood in nearly every year of the murder case from 1983-1987. Results uncovered correlations between key events of the Chin case and

[913] Isabel Wilkerson, "For Asian Americans, Acquittal in Rights Case Arouses Outrage and Fear," *The New York Times*, May 6, 1987, Newspapers.com.

increases and decreases in the frequency of the Physically Vulnerable frame during a given year of the case. Findings indicate that during specific years of the case when key events centered on whether Chin's assailants violated his civil rights, journalists relied more heavily on the Physically Vulnerable frame to characterize Chin as a victim who was worthy of racial justice. Conversely, when key events of the case cast doubt on whether Chin's murder was racially motivated, the percentage of the Physically Vulnerable frame in a given year decreased.

As shown in Figure 3, Appendix C, in 1983, the year American Citizens for Justice organized a massive rally in Detroit in support of bringing a federal civil rights case against Vincent Chin's killers, the Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for 34 percent (195 frames) of total news frames in that year (N= 572 total frames in all news outlets). Local and national news outlets covering the rally framed Chin as helpless to his assailant and worthy of racial justice. For example, on May 9, 1983, *The Associated Press* quoted Liza Chan, a Detroit attorney and ACJ member who led the cause for a prison sentence for Chin's assailants. Chan told The Associated Press that a stiffer sentence than probation was warranted because of the "brutal" manner in which Chin was assaulted because of his race.[914]

Similarly, during the first federal civil rights trial in 1984, the Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for 30 percent (209 frames) of total frames covering Vincent Chin in that year (N= 703 total frames in all news outlets) as Figure 4, Appendix C illustrates. Over half (56 percent) of total news articles covering the Chin

[914] James Reindl, "500 Join Rally to Protest Asian American Killing," *The Associated Press*, May 9, 1983, NexisUni Database.

case in 1984 (N= 75 total news articles) reported on the civil rights trial. Most of these articles characterized Chin as "physically weak, defenseless, unarmed, vulnerable, and helpless to his assailants," qualities scholar Chris Greer claims reporters use when framing violent crime victims as persons who are worthy of justice.[915] For example, on June 17, 1984, *The Lansing State Journal* quoted Harold Fitzgerald, a witness for the prosecution, as he described the altercation between Chin and Ronald Ebens. On the witness stand, Fitzgerald told prosecutors that "he [Ebens] was hitting him [Chin] rather severely . . . . He gave him a couple of good licks around the skull as he was staggering," according to the *The Journal.*[916] The newspaper also quoted another witness who told prosecutors on the stand that he had overheard Ebens and Nitz discussing how they wanted to "catch Chin and blast his head open."[917]

National news outlets covering the first federal civil rights trial also framed Vincent Chin as vulnerable to his attackers. On June 13, 1984, *The Associated Press* quoted prosecuting attorney Thomas Merritt during opening arguments of the trial. Merritt described Chin's "fatal beating" as "a story of racism turned violent," and said that "the defendants possessed a racial intent in baiting, hunting, and finally beating Vincent Chin."[918]

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[915] Greer, "News Media, Victims, and Crime," 22-23.

[916] "Witness Breaks Bat," *Lansing State Journal,* June 17, 1984, Newspapers.com.

[917] Ibid.

[918] David Fox, No Headline, *The Associated Press,* June 13, 1984, NexisUni Database.

The results for the Physically Vulnerable frame are important. First, the results support worthy victim theory. The theory assumes that when racial minority group victims of violent crime are victims of racism, the desire to end racism resonates with the public and causes it to view the victim more favorably.[919] Under these circumstances, the victim becomes newsworthy, and journalists are more likely to frame him as worthy of justice.[920] Hence, the results demonstrate how journalists used the Physically Vulnerable frame to support a news narrative of Vincent Chin as a victim of racial injustice.

In 1986, a major shift in news framing of Vincent Chin as a violent crime victim occurred. News framing shifted from characterizing Chin as a victim of racism who was worthy of justice to a victim of an ordinary crime who was less worthy of justice. As Figure 6, Appendix C, illustrates, in September 1986, when the Appeals Court overturned Ronald Ebens' prison sentence for violating Vincent Chin's civil rights, the percentage of the Physically Vulnerable frame decreased sharply. This frame accounted for only 7 percent (8 frames) of total news frames in 1986 (N= 109 total frames in all news outlets). In contrast, the percentage of frames used to characterize Chin as less worthy of justice increased. For example, the Reckless Conduct frame accounted for 9 percent (10 frames) of total news frames in 1986 (N= 109 total frames in all news outlets), an increase from only 3 percent (1 frame) of total frames in 1985 (N= 40 total frames in all news outlets), as shown in Figure 5, Appendix C. Similarly, the Bad Conduct frame accounted for 10 percent (11 frames)

[919] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

[920] McLaughlin and Murij, "Ways of Seeing," 270-274.

of total frames in 1986 (N= 109 total frames in all news outlets), a notable increase from 0 percent of total news frames in 1985 (N= 40 total frames in all news outlets).

Evidence suggests that the Appeals Court's decision played a role in the small percentage of the Physically Vulnerable frame journalists used to characterize Vincent Chin as a victim in 1986. Ninety-one percent (10 news articles) of total news articles covering the Chin case in 1986 (N= 11 total articles) reported on the Appeals Court decision. Local and national news outlets covering the Court's decision focused on Chin's bad conduct and reckless behavior, including his habit of frequenting strip clubs, his quick temper, and his tendency to provoke fights with strangers. For example, on September 20, 1986, *The Lansing State Journal* described Chin as having initiated an "argument" with Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz in "a nude dancing club."[921] Similarly, an article published in *The Detroit Free Press* on September 12, 1986, characterized Chin's slaying as the result of a "fight" that Chin started "in a Highland Park go-go club."[922] The shift in framing is important because it demonstrates a broader shift from a narrative of a violent crime that resulted from the racial injustice targeting Asians in the U.S. to a narrative of a barroom brawl that Chin initiated and that ended in tragedy.

In 1987, a second major shift in news framing of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime occurred. During this year, framing shifted from characterizing Chin as a victim of an ordinary crime who was less worthy of justice to a victim of racial

[921] Frederick Standish, "Retrial Ordered in 1982 Vincent Chin Killing," *The Lansing State Journal,* September 20, 1986, Newspapers.com.

[922] Bill McGraw, "Verdict Voided in Chin Killing," *The Detroit Free Press,* September 12, 1986, Newspapers.com.

hatred who deserved retribution. In 1987, when the Department of Justice decided to retry the Chin murder case and the civil rights issue moved to the forefront once again, the percentage of the Physically Vulnerable frame increased significantly. As shown in Figure 7, Appendix C, the frame accounted for 26 percent (113 frames) of total news frames in 1987 (N= 437 total frames in all news outlets), surging from only 7 percent (8 frames) of total frames in 1986 (N= 109 total frames in all news outlets). In contrast, the Bad Conduct frame accounted for only 3 percent (12 frames) of total news frames in 1987 (N= 437 total frames in all news outlets), a significant drop from 10 percent (11 frames) of total frames in 1986 (N= 109 total frames in all news outlets). The Reckless Conduct frame showed little change, accounting for 10 percent (42 frames) of total news frames in 1987 (N= 437 total frames in all news outlets) compared with 9 percent (10 frames) of total news frames in 1986 (N= 109 total frames in all news outlets).

Evidence suggests that the second federal civil rights trial in 1987 played a role in the large percentage of the Physically Vulnerable frame journalists used to characterize Vincent Chin as a victim in 1987. Eighty-four percent (43 news articles) of total news articles covering the Chin case in 1987 (N= 51 total articles) reported on the second trial. Nearly all of these news stories described Chin as the vulnerable victim of a brutal attack. For example, on May 2, 1987, the day following the Cincinnati jury's acquittal of Ronald Ebens on all charges of violating Chin's civil rights, a reporter with *The Lansing State Journal* referred to Chin's murder as a "baseball bat slaying" and a "beating death."[923] On May 7, 1987, a staff columnist for

[923] "Detroit Man Innocent in Rights Case," *The Lansing State Journal*, May 2, 1987, Newspapers.com.

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported that Ronald Ebens "beat a Chinese American's brains out" with "a regulation weight baseball bat" after he "sneaked up behind him" in a McDonalds parking lot.[924]

Similarly, national news coverage framed Vincent Chin using the Physically Vulnerable frame. On April 21, 1987, the day before the second civil rights trial began, The Associated Press published a report that described Chin's murder as the "fatal beating of a Chinese American with a baseball bat" and emphasized how the attack against Chin had been premeditated.[925]

Surprisingly, journalists rarely used the Good Person frame from 1983-1987. This frame accounted for only 7 percent or less of total news frames in a given year during every year of the Vincent Chin case with one exception. As Figure 6, Appendix C shows, in 1986, the year the Appeals Court overturned the verdict from the first federal civil rights trial finding Ronald Ebens guilty of slaying Chin because of his race, the Good Person frame accounted for 15 percent (16 frames) of total news frames in that year (N= 109 total frames in all news outlets). This result is inconsistent with worthy victim theory's assumption that journalists frame violent crime victims who are racial minorities as blameworthy for their fate when racism is not the motive for a criminal offense. For this reason, this result cannot be explained.

Lastly, framing of Vincent Chin as a symbol of a broader problem of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. accounted for less than 1 percent of total news frames in a

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[924] Tony Lang, "An Uglier Form of Racism," *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* May 7, 1987, Newspapers.com.

[925] "Jury Seated for Autoworker's Retrial," *The Associated Press,* April 21, 1987, Newspapers.com.

given year for each year of the murder case from 1983-1987. This is not surprising because journalists often do not re-introduce persons as news symbols into subsequent news stories until years or even decades following the original event.[926]

Overall, content analysis results analyzing shifts in news framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood during distinct years of the murder case from 1983-1987 highlight two important points regarding news coverage of the case. First, the results demonstrate the weakness of the racial injustice narrative at key points in time during the case. While journalists relied heavily on sources who attributed Chin's murder to anti-Asian hatred during the first federal civil rights trial in 1984, as soon as the Appeals Court overturned Ronald Ebens' conviction two years later, journalists downplayed anti-Asian racism as a possible criminal motive. Instead, reporters framed Chin as a victim of an "ordinary" violent crime, highlighting his reckless behavior toward his assailants and blameworthiness for his fate.

Secondly, content analysis results demonstrate the need for further research regarding the reasons why journalists made specific framing decisions at particular points in time during the Vincent Chin case. For example, the fact that journalists framed Chin as a victim of racial injustice during the second federal civil rights trial in 1987—despite the jury's acquittal of Ronald Ebens on all civil rights charges at the conclusion of this trial—raises the question of why reporters emphasized a racial injustice narrative instead of continuing to frame the crime as unrelated to racism as they did in 1986. Did journalists suspect that anti-Asian racism was, in fact, the

[926] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 20, 24.

motive and felt comfortable relying on sources to push a narrative of racial injustice? Were journalists, who were accustomed to viewing Asian Americans as model minorities who did not face racism, now beginning to question this stereotype?

This dissertation cannot pinpoint the specific reasons for shifts in framing using content analysis. Oral history interviews with journalists and meticulous archival research are necessary to answer the aforementioned questions. However, content analysis does uncover the important shifts in coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case. The documentation of these important shifts is critical to demonstrating the liability of frames around Chin's murder.

6.5 Comparing News Frames across the Three Eras

Next, I compared news framing of Vincent Chin during the murder case from June 19, 1982-June 1, 1987 to news framing of Chin during the second and third time periods under analysis: June 2, 1987-January 19, 2017 and January 20, 2017-December 31, 2022. I compared how often journalists used specific types of news frames from one era to the next and how the frequency of particular frames changed across time. Doing so helped to answer the following research questions. First, was there a *predominant* narrative used in news reporting on the Vincent Chin case across the three eras under study? If so, did the predominate narrative change over time? Second, was there a *less dominant*, or underlying, narrative used in reporting on the Chin case?

It is important to note is that the sample size of news articles differed across the three eras. I controlled for the variation in the volume of news articles across the three eras by dividing the total quantity of a specific frame in a given era by the total

number of news frames in that era. The sample sizes for the three eras are as follows: June 19, 1982-June 1, 1987: N= 232 news articles; June 2, 1987-January 19, 2017: N= 115 news articles; January 20, 2017-December 31, 2022: N= 35 news articles.

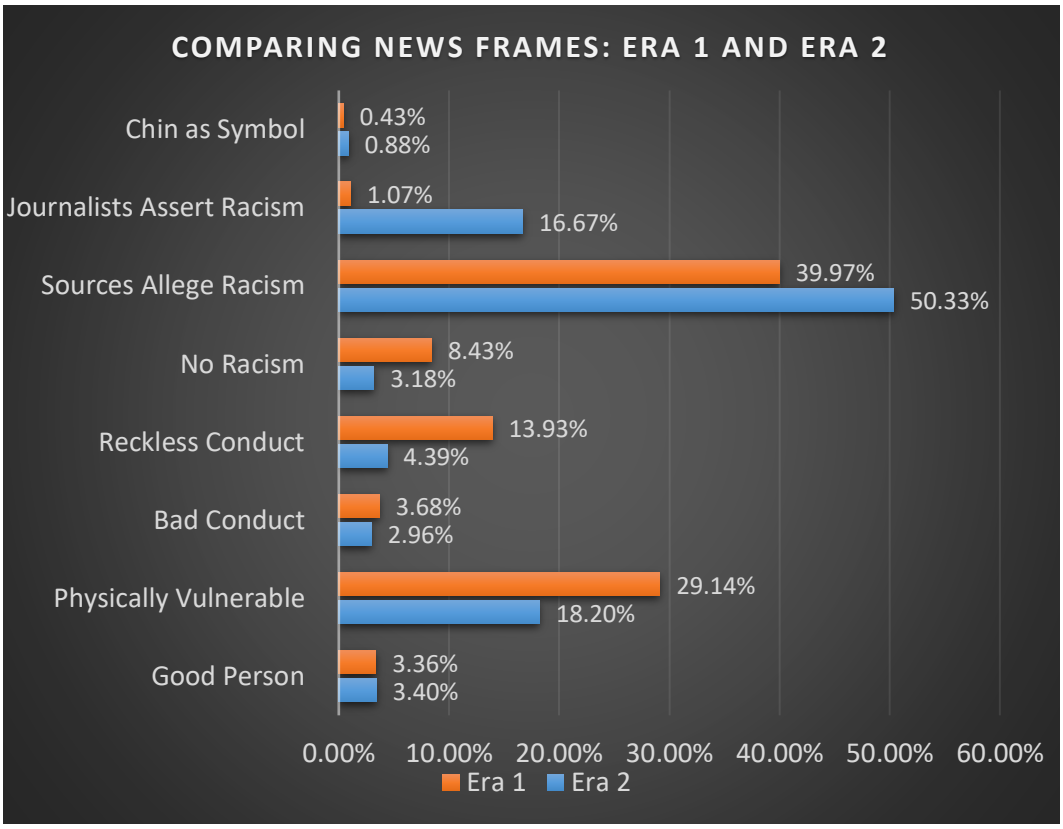


Figure 8. A Comparison of News Frames, Eras 1 and 2 (Figure by author)

Eras 1 and 2

Section 6.5 refers to Figure 8 above, Figure 9, and Table 2. When comparing news framing of the violent crime against Vincent Chin between the first and second eras, findings indicate a considerable shift in the way journalists covered the criminal motive. While the Sources Allege Racism frame remained the dominant frame in news coverage of the Chin murder case from 1987-2017, the Journalists Assert Racism frame appeared to a much greater extent during the second era as compared with the first era. As Figure 8 indicates, journalists' use of the Sources Allege Racism

frame showed a marked increase, accounting for 50 percent (459 frames) of total news frames in coverage of the Chin case from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets) compared with 40 percent (749 frames) of total news frames from 1982-1987 (N= 1,874 total frames in all news outlets). Reporters' use of the Journalists Assert Racism frame also showed a pronounced increase, accounting for approximately 17 percent (152 frames) of total news frames from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total news frames in all news outlets) compared with only 1 percent (20 frames) of total frames from 1982-1987 (N=1,874 total frames in all news outlets).

Not surprisingly, as journalists relied increasingly on their own assertions as well as sources to frame Vincent Chin's murder as a racially motivated crime, news reporters' use of the No Racism frame decreased. The No Racism frame accounted for only 3 percent (29 frames) of total frames in coverage of the Chin case from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total news frames in all news outlets) compared with 8 percent (158 frames) of total frames from 1982-1987 (N=1,874 total frames in all news outlets).

The results for news framing of the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's murder from 1987-2017 are important for two reasons. First, the increase in the Journalists Assert Racism frame hearkens to one of the central questions this dissertation considers: Did the conventions in news coverage of Asian Americans change over time? In the 1980s, the model minority stereotype likely played a role in news coverage that downplayed or ignored anti-Asian violence in the United States.[927] Yet, by the 1990s, as cases of violence against Asian Americans increased,

[927] Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the 'Model Minority.'"

society gradually awakened to the idea that Asian Americans indeed face racism. The gradual fading of this stereotype may have played a role in boosting the frequency with which journalists directly asserted that Chin's murder was the result of anti-Asian hatred.

Secondly, the findings are important because they indicate that the narrative of racial injustice against Vincent Chin continued to predominate from 1987-2017. As more journalists spoke out against the violent crime targeting Chin as a racially motivated offense, frames that characterized such violence as unrelated to race appeared to a lesser extent in news reports. Table 2 below compares changes in framing across the three eras.

News Frame	**Era One**	**Era Two**	**Era Three**
Sources Allege Racism	Strong, Dominates overall	Develops consistently, Dominates overall	Remains strong, Dominates overall
Journalist Assert Racism	Very weak	Weak, Increases dramatically	Fairly strong, Increases dramatically
No Racism	Very weak	Very weak Decreases dramatically	Very weak Decreases slightly
Physically Vulnerable	Fairly Strong, Dominates in victim framing	Weak, Continues dominating in victim framing, Decreases slightly	Very weak, Continues dominating in victim framing, Decreases dramatically
Good Person	Very weak	Very weak, Remains steady	Very weak, Decreases slightly
Bad Conduct	Very weak	Very weak, Decreases slightly	Very weak, Decreases slightly

Reckless Conduct	Weak	Very weak, Decreases dramatically	Very weak, Decreases slightly
Chin as Symbol	Very weak less than	Very weak, Remains steady	Very weak, Increases slightly

Very Strong: *Frame accounts for 60-100 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Strong:*** *Frame accounts for 40-59 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Fairly Strong****: Frame accounts for 25-39 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Weak****: Frame accounts for 10-24 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Very Weak:*** *Frame accounts for 0-9 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022.*

Table 2. Tracking Frames in All News Outlets by Era (Table by author)

When comparing news framing of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime between the first and second eras, results indicate another important shift in framing. During the second era, journalists paid significantly less attention to the details surrounding Chin's behavior as a victim than during the first era. For example, although the Physically Vulnerable frame continued to dominate in the second era, journalists' use of the frame in news coverage of Chin decreased significantly. As Figure 8 indicates, the Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for only 18 percent (166 frames) of total frames in news coverage of Chin during the second era (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets) compared with 29 percent (546 frames) of total frames during the first era (N= 1,874 total frames in al news outlets).

News frames characterizing Vincent Chin as displaying bad behavior and reckless conduct in the hours leading up to his murder also decreased. Journalists' use of the Reckless Conduct frame dropped remarkably, accounting for only 4 percent (27 frames) of total news frames covering the Chin case during the second era (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets) compared to 14 percent (261 frames) of total

frames during the first era (N=1,874 total frames in all news outlets). The Bad Conduct frame showed a smaller decrease, accounting for 3 percent (27 frames) of total frames from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets) compared to 4 percent (69 frames) of total frames from 1982-1987 (N=1,874 total frames in all news outlets).

The Good Person frame showed a slight uptick in visibility in news stories. However, this increase was nearly imperceptible. The frame accounted for 3.40 percent (31 frames) of total news frames in coverage of Vincent Chin during in the second era (N= 912 compared with 3.36 percent (63 frames) of total frames in the first era.

Framing of Vincent Chin as a symbol of a broader problem of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. showed little change from the first era to the second era. The Chin as Symbol frame accounted for 0.9 percent (8 frames) of total frames in news coverage of Chin during the second era (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets) compared to 0.4 percent of total frames during the first era (N= 1,874 total frames in all news outlets).

Results comparing news framing of Vincent Chin during the first and second eras are important. Findings indicate that the narrative of racial injustice predominated over both periods. In framing this narrative, during the second era, journalists paid significantly less attention to the details surrounding Chin's victimhood and incorporated more direct assertions that racism motivated Chin's slaying.

Part of the shift in journalists' attention from the victim to the crime may have been related to the amount of time that elapsed since the end of the Vincent Chin murder case in May 1987. As more cases of violence against Asians in the U.S. arose in the 1990s and during the twenty-first century, Chin gradually transformed from a news story rooted in facts and details surrounding his victimhood to a news figure who represented a broader problem of anti-Asian violence in America. Hence, the shift in press attention signals a growing journalistic interest in Asian Americans' place in U.S. society as a group that faced racial discrimination.

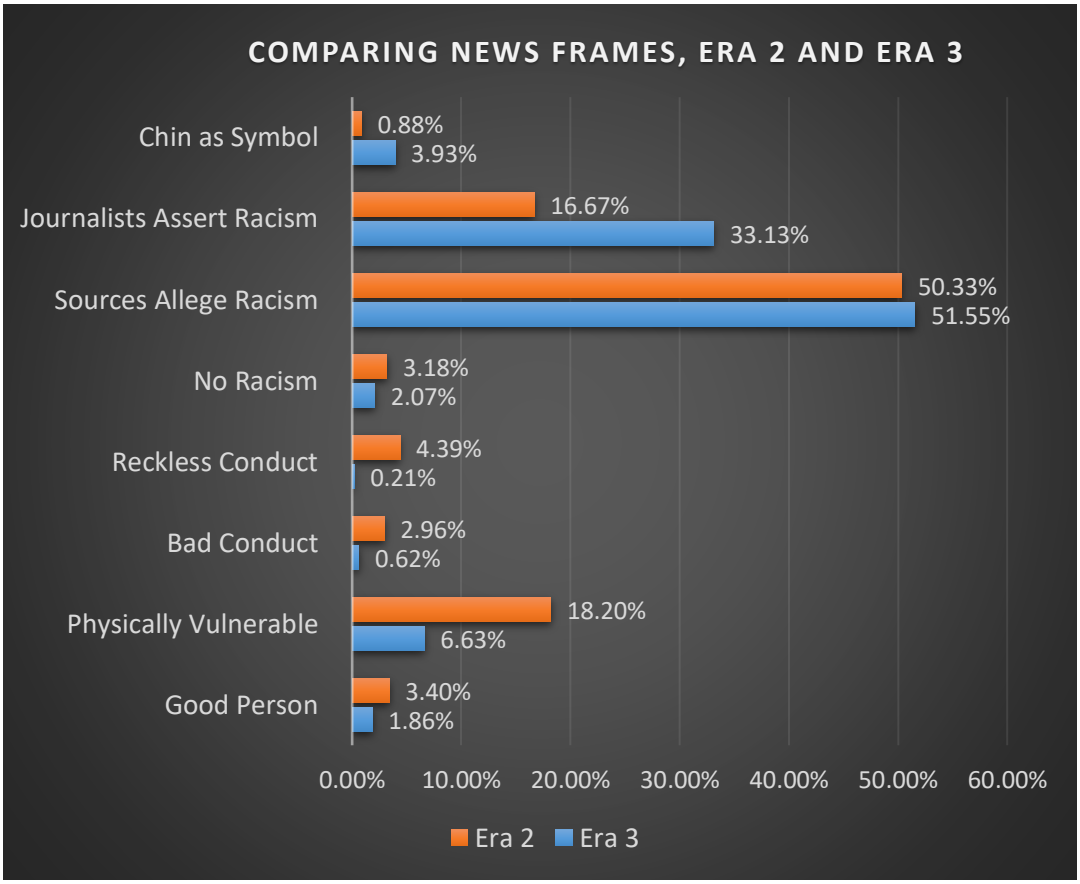


Figure 9. A Comparison of News Frames, Eras 2 and 3 (Figure by author)

Eras 2 and 3

When comparing news framing of the violent crime against Vincent Chin between the second and third eras, findings indicate that the Sources Allege Racism frame continued to dominate in news coverage of Chin's murder during the third era. As the findings in Figure 9 above indicate, from 2017-2022, the period of Donald Trump's administration and the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S., the Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for 52 percent (249 frames) of total news frames used in coverage of Chin during this period (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets). This is a slight increase from 50 percent (459 frames) of total frames from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets). The continued dominance of the Sources Allege Racism frame was surprising given the upswing in violent attacks against Asians in the U.S. during Covid-19 and the prevalence of advocacy group protests against anti-Asian racism that likely drew journalists' attention.

Despite the dominance of the Sources Allege Racism frame from 2017-2022, this era continued a significant upward trend in journalists' assertions that anti-Asian racism was the motive for Vincent Chin's murder. As shown in Figure 9, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 33 percent (160 frames) of total frames in coverage of Chin from 2017-2022 (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets). This was a sharp increase from 17 percent (152 frames) of total frames in coverage of Chin from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets). Especially noteworthy was that across the three eras, reporters' use of the Journalists Assert Racism frame showed a striking increase of 32 percentage points, surging from just 1 percent (20 frames) of total frames in coverage of Chin from 1983-1987 (N= 1,874

total frames in all news outlets) to 33 percent (160 frames) of total frames from 2017-2022 (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets).

Most news articles published from 2017-2022 that used the Journalists Assert Racism and the Sources Allege Racism frames to revive Vincent Chin's story mentioned his slaying within the context of the anniversary commemorations of his death and the uptick in new cases of anti-Asian violence during the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S. Importantly, some of these news stories mentioned Chin within the context of a broader, more serious problem of anti-Asian hatred in America. For example, on June 25, 2021, *The Detroit Free Press* published a news story commemorating the 39th anniversary of Chin's slaying. The reporter asserted that the commemoration, organized by Asian American advocates in Detroit, "comes at a time of concern about a spike in anti-Asian violence over the past year, some of it tied to rhetoric about the origins of Covid-19 and China."[928] Similarly, a year earlier, on March 30, 2020, a *New York Times* reporter attributed the surge in anti-Asian violence during Covid-19 as the result of President Trump "tying the virus to China."[929] *The Times* reporter placed the upswing in anti-Asian violence during the pandemic within the context of the "decades of exclusion, racism, and discrimination" Asians in the U.S. faced that encompassed "some of the darkest chapters of American history."[930]

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[928] Niraj Warikoo, "Detroit Group Calls for Black and Asian Unity," *The Detroit Free Press,* June 25, 2021, Newspapers.com.

[929] Matt Stevens, "For Asian Americans, Taunts are Painful Echo of 'Outsider' Status," *The New York Times,* March 30, 2020, NexisUni Database.

[930] Ibid.

Not surprisingly, as reporters' use of the Journalists Assert Racism frame increased from 2017-2022, journalists' use of the No Racism frame decreased. The No Racism frame accounted for just 2 percent (10 frames) of total frames during the third era (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets), a slight decrease from 3 percent (29 frames) of total news frames during the second era (N=912 total frames in all news outlets).

News coverage reviving the story of Vincent Chin's murder from 2017-2022 continued a significant downward trend in the use of frames characterizing Chin as a victim of violent crime. For example, similar to the second era, in the third era, journalists continued to use the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any other frame to describe Chin's victimhood. However, as shown in Figure 9, the Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for only 7 percent (32 frames) of total frames in news reports reviving Chin's story from 2017-2022 (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets), plunging from 18 percent (166 frames) of total frames from 1987-2017 (N=912 total frames in all news outlets).

Similarly, journalists' use of the Good Person, Bad Conduct, and Reckless Conduct frames decreased in news coverage reviving Vincent Chin's story during the third era. The Good Person frame accounted for only 2 percent (9 frames) of total news frames in coverage of Chin from 2017-2022 (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets), a slight decrease from 3 percent (31 frames) of total frames from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets). Both the Bad Conduct and Reckless Conduct frames accounted for less than 1 percent of total news frames during the third era. The Bad Conduct frame accounted for a mere 0.6 percent (3 frames) of total

news frames from 2017-2022 (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets), a decrease from 3 percent (27 frames) of total frames from 1987-2017 (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets). The Reckless Conduct frame composed only 0.2 percent (1 frame) of total frames in the third era (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets), a decrease from 4 percent (40 frames) of total frames in the second era (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets).

These results are not unexpected. At a time when President Trump linked the Covid-19 virus to China and new cases of violence against Asians in the U.S. surged, Asian American advocacy group leaders held press conferences spotlighting anti-Asian racism as the root cause of such violence. Hence, journalists who attended these press conferences may have been more likely to focus on the motive for targeting Asian victims in the U.S. rather than on the victims themselves.

Lastly, from 2017-2022, news framing of Vincent Chin as a symbol of a serious, widespread problem of anti-Asian violence in America rose only slightly from the second era. The Chin as Symbol frame accounted for only 4 percent (19 frames) of total frames used in coverage of Chin during the third era (N= 483 total frames in all news outlets), increasing from 0.9 percent (8 frames) of total frames during the second era (N= 912 total frames in all news outlets).

Content analysis results for news framing of Vincent Chin across the three eras are important. First, the fact that news reporters continued to use the Sources Allege Racism frame more than any other frame in news coverage characterizing the motive for Vincent Chin's death is important. The persistent dominance of this frame demonstrates that while journalism practices evolved to include a greater emphasis on

journalists' viewpoints,[931] sources continued to serve as the primary avenue for emphasizing a particular news narrative.

Second, the fact that reporters' use of the Journalists Assert Racism frame markedly increased from one era to the next indicates that journalists were paying greater attention than ever before to Asian Americans as targets of racial hatred. One might speculate that reporters' use of the Journalists Assert Racism frame in news coverage of Chin peaked during the third era because of the spike in violence against Asians during the Covid-19 pandemic that drew journalists' attention to racism. The precise reasons for the pronounced increase in journalists' assertions regarding anti-Asian violence warrants further research.

Third, results are important because they demonstrate that the news narrative of racial injustice against Vincent Chin remained predominant across the three eras. However, the preponderance of this narrative does not preclude the visibility of the No Racism frame. The No Racism frame never completely disappeared in any of the three eras examined. Even news reports reviving the story of Chin's murder in coverage of the surge in new cases of violence against Asians in the U.S. during Covid-19 used the No Racism frame when recounting the events surrounding Chin's death. One possibility for this result could be journalists' obligation to act as trustworthy stewards of information for the public by presenting all sides of an issue.

Lastly, content analysis results for news framing of Vincent Chin across time underscore journalists' elevated focus on the motive for slaying Chin. The fact that, over time, news frames characterizing Chin's personality traits and behavior as a

[931] Patterson, *Informing the News*, 22.

victim accounted for less and less of total news frames in a given era demonstrates a shift in press attention toward the racial discrimination afflicting Asians in the U.S. Importantly, this shift in attention indicates how Chin evolved from a news story about a barroom brawl that ended in tragedy to a news figure representative of a broader, more serious problem of violent crime against Asians in America. Over time, Chin's murder became associated with an awareness and a sensitivity toward Asian Americans' place in U.S. society as a group that faced racial discrimination.

Chapter 7: Results for The Vincent Chin Murder Case by Publication

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis of Vincent Chin murder case news coverage from 1982-2022 within the five separate news outlets under study.[932] I analyzed results for the eight news frames journalists used to characterize the criminal motive for Chin's murder, his victimhood, and his status as a news symbol of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. The analysis uncovered intriguing trends and changes in news framing across time. First, in each news outlet, findings indicate a steady trend toward a reliance on sources to frame the criminal motive as anti-Asian racism. The Sources Allege Racism frame dominated in every news outlet from 1982-2022. The No Racism frame showed a consistent downward trend in visibility in each outlet across time.

The Journalists Assert Racism frame exhibited striking variation. In each news outlet, the frame's visibility remained extremely low during the period of the murder case but trended dramatically upward in the subsequent decades. Overall, the frame's visibility was lower than expected, especially in national coverage. This result defied expectations that progressive newspapers with a national reach would trumpet anti-Asian racism more frequently than local newspapers.

Additionally, findings indicate that news reporters paid less attention to the

[932] The news outlets this chapter examines are as follows: *The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer.*

details surrounding Vincent Chin's victimhood across time. Although the Physically Vulnerable frame remained prominent in each of the five news outlets, the frame displayed a gradual downward trend in visibility in news reports over time. Similarly, in each news outlet, frames characterizing Chin as engaging in reckless conduct and bad conduct displayed downward trends in visibility. Results for the Good Person frame were inconsistent in both local and national news outlets.

Lastly, as expected, in each news outlet, results reveal that journalists paid the greatest attention to Vincent Chin as a symbol of anti-Asian violence during Covid-19. However, overall visibility for this frame was much lower than expected during the pandemic.

7.2 Analyzing Framing of Vincent Chin by Publication: 1982-2022

The remainder of Chapter 7 discusses content analysis results from a comparison of news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-2022 in the following five news outlets: *The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer.* Analyzing news framing of Chin in each separate news outlet helped to answer the following research questions. First, which frames, if any, *predominated* within each of the five news outlets over the forty-year period? Second, do any trends in the frequency of news frames emerge across the five news outlets from 1982-2022? If so, how well do these trends conform to my hypotheses? Section 7.2 will refer to Figures 10, 11, and 12 and to Table 3 and Table 4 located in Appendix D.

The sample size of news articles in each of the five news outlets was different. I controlled for the variation in the volume of news articles in each of the five news outlets by dividing the total quantity of a specific frame in a given news outlet by the total number of news frames in that outlet. For each news outlet, the sample sizes of news articles are listed in Table 3 in Appendix D.

Table 4 in Appendix D displays the results for news frames in each of the five publications from 1982-2022. When comparing news framing of Vincent Chin in each news outlet from 1982-2022, results indicate a sweeping trend toward using sources to allege that the motive for Chin's murder was anti-Asian racism. As Figure 10 indicates, in coverage of the Chin case, the Sources Allege Racism frame dominated across all five news outlets under analysis, accounting for between 41 percent and 50 percent of total frames in a given news outlet. *The New York Times* used the Sources Allege Racism frame more than any of the other four news outlets in news reports covering the Chin murder case from 1982-2022. This frame accounted for 50 percent (298 frames) of total frames in *The Times* over the forty-year period (N= 596 total frames in *The New York Times*). Conversely, *The Lansing State Journal* used the Sources Allege Racism frame less than any of the other four news outlets in press reports covering Chin's murder. The Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for 41 percent (149 frames) of total frames in *The State Journal* from 1982-2022 (N= 361 total frames in *The Lansing State Journal*).

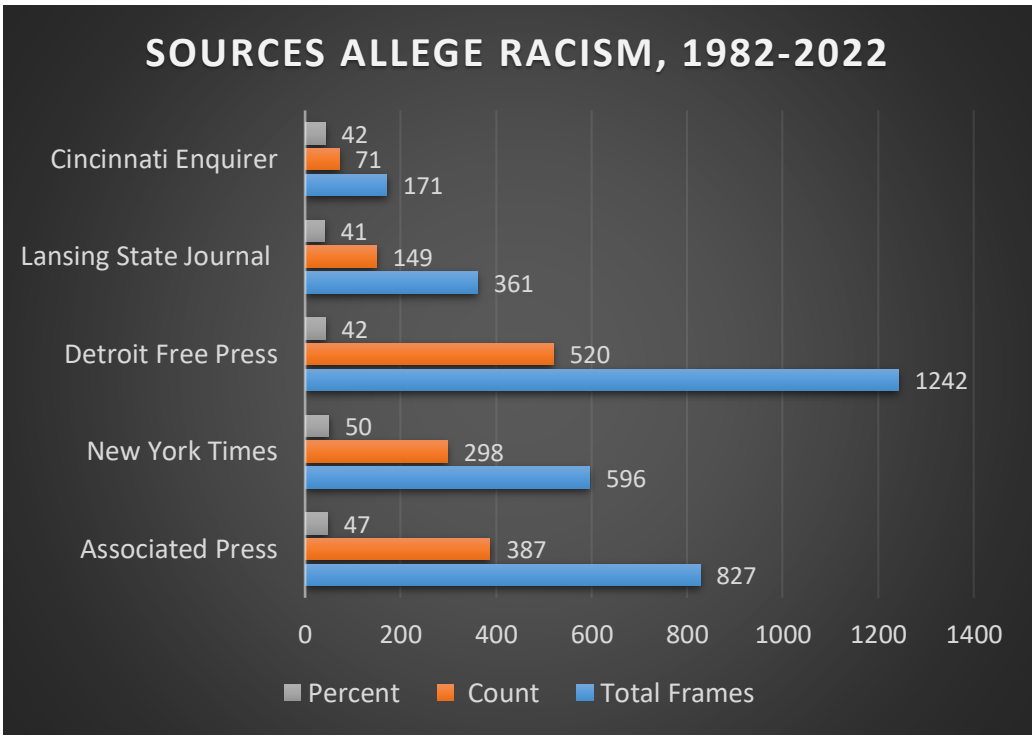


Figure 10. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Sources Allege Racism (Figure by author)

When compared with the Sources Allege Racism frame, the Journalists Assert Racism frame was less visible in each of the five news outlets in news reports covering the Vincent Chin case. As Figure 11shows, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 6 percent to 20 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1982-2022. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* used the Journalists Assert Racism frame more than any other news outlet. The frame accounted for 20 percent (34 frames) of total news frames in *The Enquirer* from 1982-2022 (N= 171 total frames in *The Enquirer*). I found it interesting that the Journalists Assert racism frame was most prominent in a local newspaper rather than a national newspaper, such as *The New York Times.* Because *The Times* is a leading national news organization, I hypothesized that news reporters for this newspaper would take a bold stand in

calling out and condemning violence against Asians in the U.S. as a legitimate and serious issue.[933]

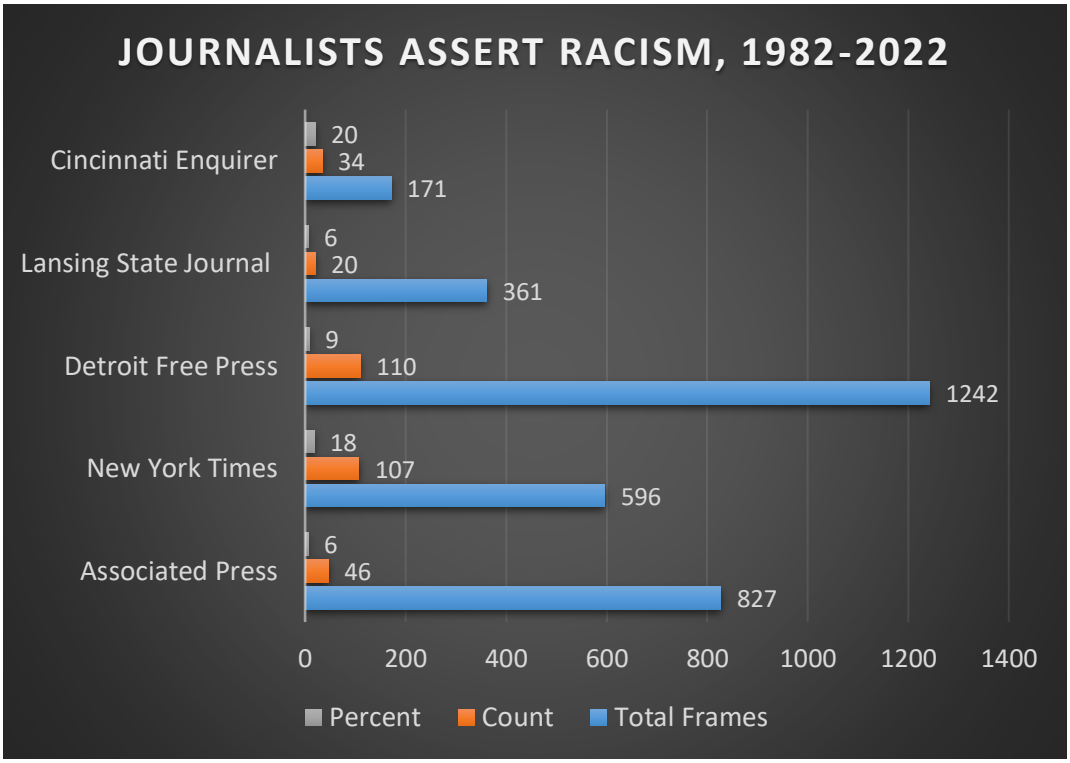


Figure 11. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Journalists Assert Racism (Figure by author)

Hence, across the five news outlets, results indicate a trend toward characterizing Vincent Chin's murder as a racial crime. As Figure 12 illustrates, the No Racism frame accounted for less than 10 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1982-2022. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* used the No Racism frame more than any other news outlet. The frame accounted for 9 percent (15 frames) of total news frames in this outlet from 1982-2022 (N= 171 total frames in *The*

[933] The Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 6 percent (46 frames) of total news frames in *The Associated Press* from 1982-2022 (N= 827 total frames). This frame accounted for 6 percent (20 frames) of total news frames in *The Lansing State Journal* from 1982-2022 (N= 361 total frames).

Enquirer). This is surprising given that journalists working for *The Enquirer* asserted that Chin's murder was a racially motivated crime more frequently than reporters for any other newspaper examined for this analysis.

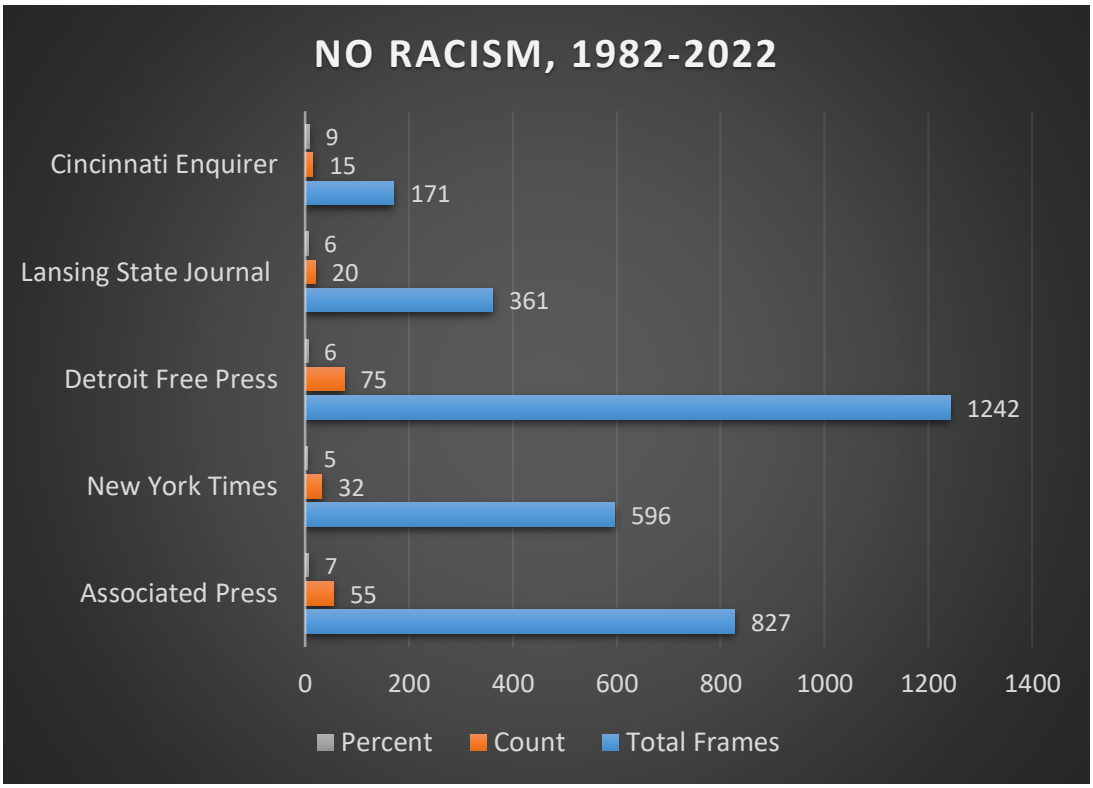


Figure 12. Shifts in Frames by Publication, No Racism (Figure by author)

Content analysis results for news framing of the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's murder are not unexpected. In news reports covering violent crimes involving racial minority group victims, it is not uncommon for journalists to rely heavily on credible sources to allege that such a crime was motivated by racial hatred. Furthermore, although some journalists directly asserted that anti-Asian prejudice led to Chin's slaying, the acceptance of anti-Asian racism as a stark reality in American society was gradual due to prevailing stereotypes of Asians as model minorities who

did not face racism. Such stereotypes could have played some role in the extent to which journalists asserted that Chin's murder was racially motivated.

When characterizing Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime in each of the five news outlets from 1982-2022, findings indicate a trend toward framing Chin as physically vulnerable to his attackers. Results for victim framing within each news publication are shown in Figures 13 through 17, located in Appendix C. Across all five news outlets, the Physically Vulnerable frame dominated over all other news frames characterizing Chin's victimhood. As Figure 13 indicates, *The Lansing State Journal* used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any of the other four news outlets in press reports covering the Chin murder case. This frame accounted for 29 percent (105 frames) of total news frames covering the Chin case in *The State Journal* from 1982-2022 (N= 361 total frames in *The State Journal*). *The New York Times* used the Physically Vulnerable frame less than any of the other four news outlets. This frame accounted for 14 percent (83 frames) of total news frames in *The Times* during this period (N= 596 total frames in *The New York Times*).

When compared with the Physically Vulnerable frame in news coverage of Vincent Chin, the Reckless Conduct frame, Bad Conduct frame, and Good Person frame each accounted for a much smaller percentage of total news frames in each of the five news outlets. For example, as shown in Figure 14, the Reckless Conduct frame accounted for 10 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet from 1982-2022 while the Good Person frame accounted for only 5 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet (See Figure 15). The Bad Conduct frame accounted for only 4 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet (See Figure 16).

Lastly, journalists paid very little attention to Vincent Chin as a symbol of the broader problem of anti-Asian violence in America. When examining news framing of Chin in each news outlet from 1982-2022, the Chin as Symbol frame accounted for 2 percent or less of total news frames in a given news outlet during this period (See Figure 17).

Overall, content analysis results for news framing of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood in the five news outlets under analysis from 1982-2022 indicate substantial journalistic focus on the role that race played in the violence against Chin and less focus on victim framing of Chin. While it is intriguing that national newspapers, especially *The New York Times,* did not "lead the charge" when it came to drawing attention to anti-Asian racism in coverage of Chin's murder, the fact that journalists were increasingly spotlighting such racism is noteworthy. This intent focus could signal a mounting awareness among news reporters of the significance of Chin's story as representative of a broader problem of racial discrimination targeting Asians in America.

7.3 Analyzing Framing of Vincent Chin by Publication: Three Eras of Chin Case Coverage

This section explores content analysis results from a comparison of news framing of the Vincent Chin case in the five news outlets discussed above during the following three eras: June 19, 1982-June 1, 1987; June 2, 1987-January 19, 2017; and January 20, 2017-December 31, 2022. This analysis helped answer the following research questions. First, during each era, which frames, if any, *predominated* within each of

the five news outlets? Second, do any trends in the frequency of news frames emerge across the five news outlets in a given era?

Important to note is that for each of the five news outlets, the sample size of news articles differed across the three eras. I controlled for the variation in the sample size by dividing the total quantity of a specific frame in a given news outlet during a specific era by the total number of news frames in that outlet during that era. For each news outlet, the sample sizes of news articles for each era are listed in Table 5 in Appendix D.

Era One

A close analysis of the three distinct periods under study uncovered the preponderance of specific frames at various points in time. I examined news framing results in each news outlet during the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-1987. Doing so uncovered trends in news framing journalists used in coverage of the murder case. Table 6 in Appendix D shows results for the frequencies of each of the eight news frames in each publication during era one.

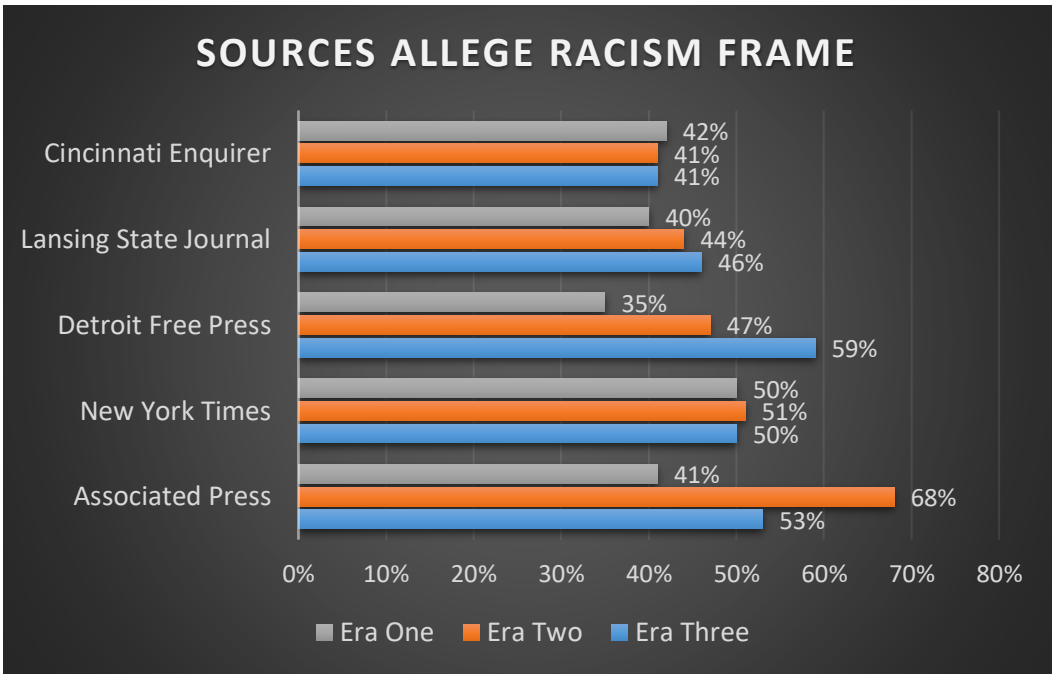


Figure 18. Frames by Publication, Sources Allege Racism (Figure by author)

When comparing news framing of the violent crime against Vincent Chin in each of the five news outlets during the period of the murder case from 1982-1987, results indicate a trend toward journalists quoting sources who alleged that Chin's assailants murdered him because he was Chinese American. As the results displayed in Figure 18 above indicate, in coverage of the Chin case, the Sources Allege Racism frame dominated in all five news outlets under analysis, accounting for between 35 percent and 50 percent of total frames in a given news outlet during the first era. *The New York Times* used the Sources Allege Racism frame more than any of the other four news outlets in news reports covering the Chin murder case during the first era. This frame accounted for 50 percent (124 frames) of total frames in *The Times* from 1982-1987 (N= 249 total frames in *The New York Times*).

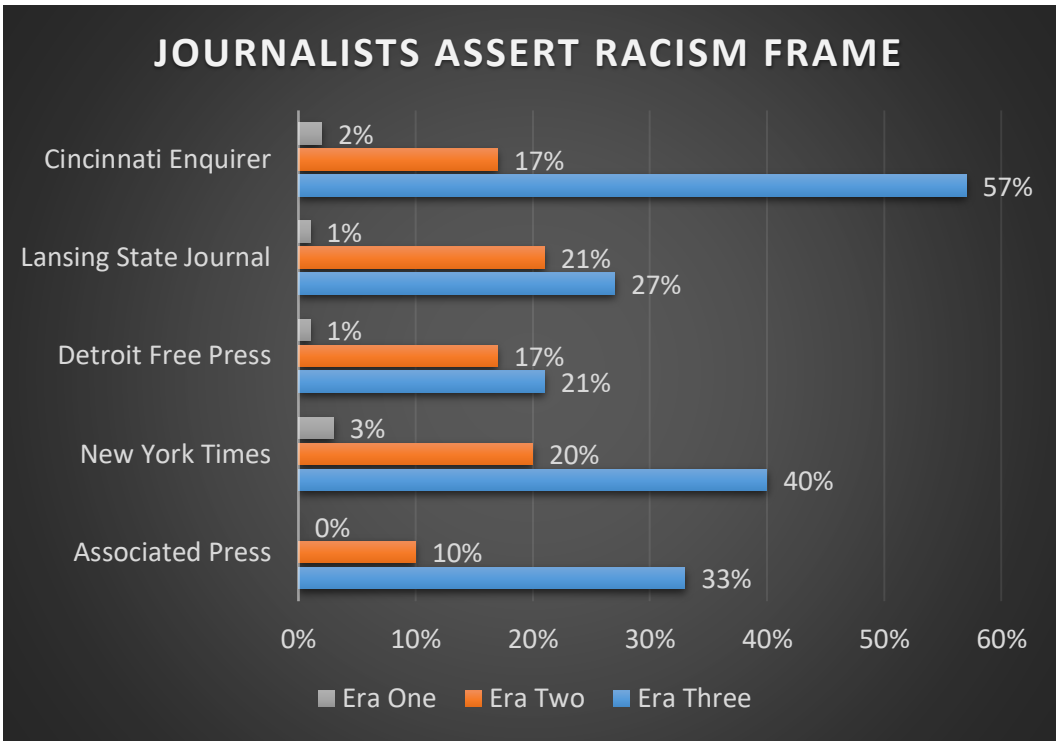


Figure 19. Frames by Publication, Journalists Assert Racism (Figure by author)

In each of the five news outlets from 1982-1987, results indicate a trend away from news reporters directly asserting that anti-Asian racism motivated Vincent Chin's killing. As the findings in Figure 19 above indicate, in news stories covering the Chin case, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for only 3 percent or less of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1982-1987. *The New York Times* used the Journalists Assert Racism frame more than any of the other four news outlets in news reports covering the Chin murder case during the first era. This frame accounted for only 3 percent (8 frames) of total frames in *The Times* from 1982-1987 (N= 249 total frames in *The Times*). In the other four news outlets, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 2 percent or less of total news frames in a given outlet during the first era.

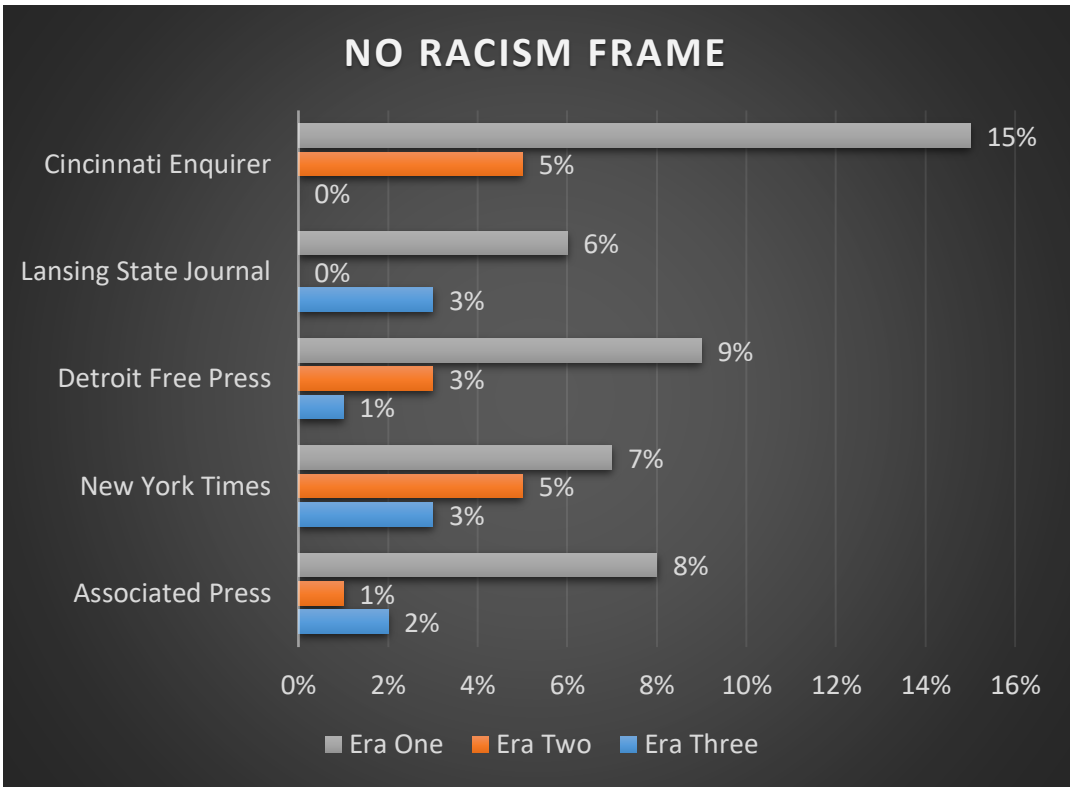


Figure 20. Frames by Publication, No Racism (Figure by author)

Lastly, across the five news outlets, journalists' use of the No Racism frame in news coverage of Vincent Chin varied considerably during the first era but accounted for less than 16 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet as shown above in Figure 20. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* used the No Racism frame more than any of the other four news outlets in coverage of the Chin case. This frame accounted for 15 percent (13 frames) of total frames in *The Enquirer* from 1982-1987 (N= 86 total frames in *The Enquirer*). *The Lansing State Journal* used the No Racism frame less than any of the other four news outlets in coverage of the Chin case. This frame accounted for 6 percent (18 frames) of total frames in *The State Journal* from 1982-1987 (N= 298 total frames in *The State Journal*).

Content analysis results for journalists' use of the No Racism frame are unexpected. I hypothesized that journalists would use the No Racism frame frequently during the period of the Vincent Chin case from 1982-1987. During the 1980s, U.S. society predominantly stereotyped Asian Americans as model minorities who faced little racial discrimination because they had purportedly assimilated into mainstream American culture by achieving economic and academic success.[934] Hence, I expected journalists to use the No Racism frame more often in news coverage of the Chin case during the decade when the model minority stereotype was prevalent. A close, careful analysis of framing during distinct years of the Chin case from 1983-1987 in each of the five news outlets, discussed in the next section, helped draw correlations between specific years when the No Racism frame was less visible in news reports and key events of the Chin case.

Conversely, results for the Sources Allege Racism frame and the Journalists Assert Racism frame are not surprising. Because most Americans viewed Asians in the U.S. during the 1980s as a minority group that did not face racial hatred, I predicted that journalists would be less likely to directly assert that racism was a factor in Chin's slaying and more likely to rely on sources to allege that racism was a factor in Chin's murder.

[934] Kim, "Asian Americans: No Model Minority," 44-53; Endo and Della-Piana, "Japanese Americans, Pluralism, and the Model Minority Myth," 45-51; Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the 'Model Minority,' " 12-19, quoted in Suzuki, "Asian Americans as the Model Minority," 14; Zhang, "Asian Americans Beyond the Model Minority Stereotype," 24.

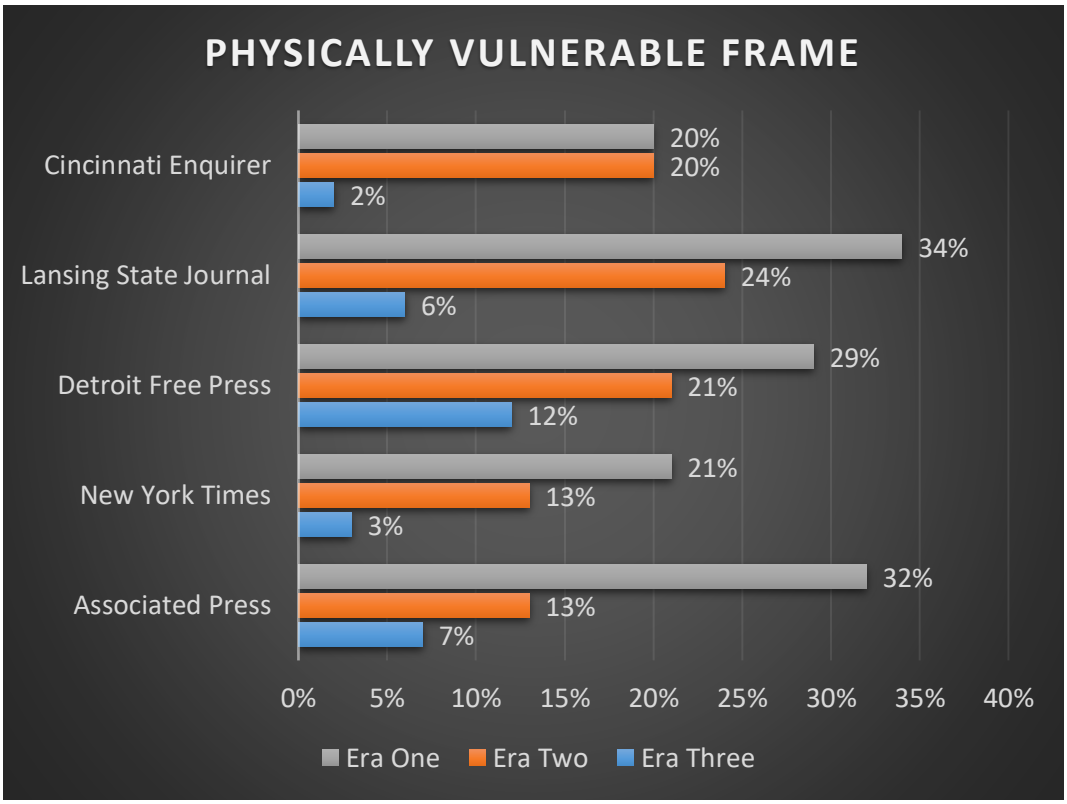


Figure 21. Frames by Publication, Physically Vulnerable (Figure by author)

When characterizing Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime in each of the five news outlets from 1982-1987, findings indicate a trend toward framing Chin as physically vulnerable to his attackers. In news coverage of the Chin case in all five news outlets, the Physically Vulnerable frame dominated over all other news frames characterizing Chin's victimhood during the first era. As the results displayed in Figure 21 above indicate, this frame accounted for between 20 percent and 34 percent of total frames in a given news outlet during this period. *The Lansing State Journal* used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any of the other four news outlets in press reports characterizing Chin's victimhood. The frame accounted for 34 percent (101 frames) of total news frames covering the case in *The State Journal* from 1982-1987 (N= 298 total frames in *The State Journal*). Conversely, *The Cincinnati*

Enquirer used the Physically Vulnerable frame less than any of the other four news outlets. The frame accounted for 20 percent (17 frames) of total news frames in *The Enquirer* during the first era (N= 86 total frames in *The Enquirer*).

The dominance of the Physically Vulnerable frame in news coverage of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime during the first era was expected. According to the assumptions of worthy victim theory, when society alleges that a minority group crime victim was the target of racial violence, journalists are more likely to frame the victim as worthy of sympathy and justice by characterizing him as helpless and vulnerable to his assailants.[935]

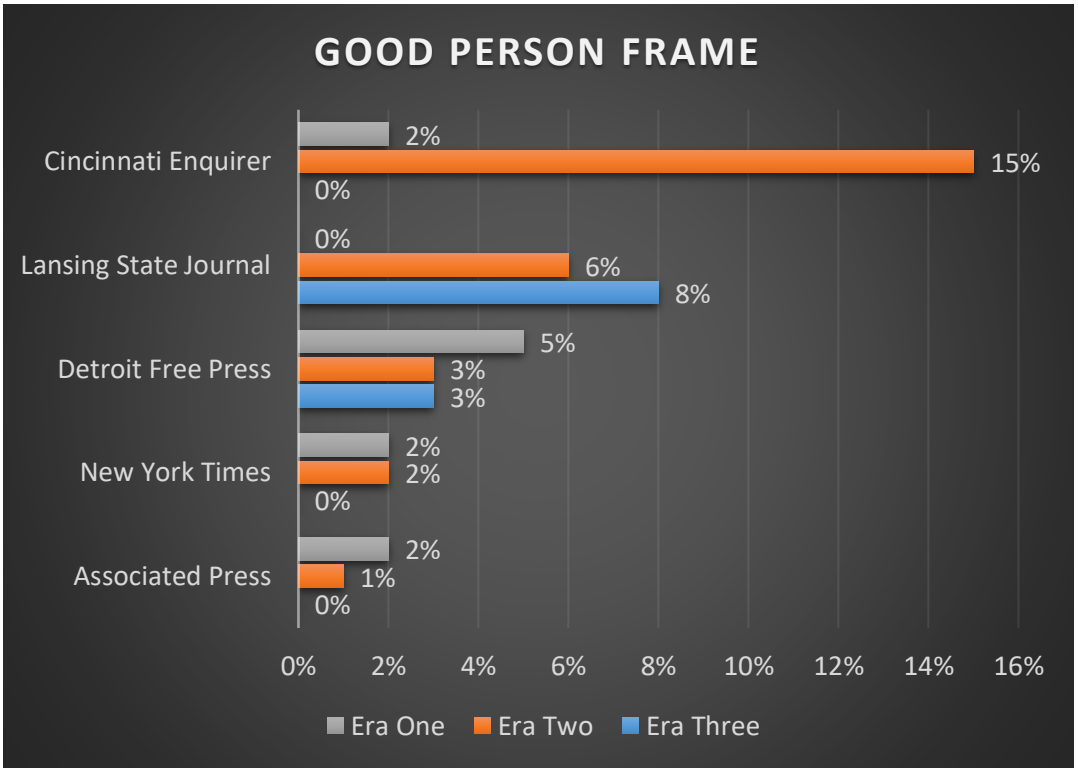


Figure 22. Frames by Publication, Good Person (Figure by author)

[935] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

Conversely, results for the Good Person frame were unexpected. When society alleges that racial minority group victims are the targets of racism, journalists depict such victims of violence as good persons—persons who are "devout," "imaginative," "promising," "cherished," "vibrant," and "strong,"—according to the assumptions of worthy victim theory.[936] However, as the results displayed in Figure 22 indicate, from 1982-1987, the Good Person frame accounted for only 5 percent or less of total frames in each of the five news outlets. *The Detroit Free Press* used the Good Person frame more than any of the other four news outlets in press reports characterizing Chin's victimhood. The frame accounted for a mere 5 percent (32 frames) of total news frames covering the case in *The Free Press* from 1982-1987 (N= 637 total frames in *The Free Press*). *The Lansing State Journal* never used this frame in news coverage of Chin during the first era. Because a content analysis of news frames can only demonstrate *how* journalists portray news figures, further research is necessary to uncover *why* reporters for the five news organizations did not use the Good Person frame more frequently during the first era.

[936] Ibid., 381.

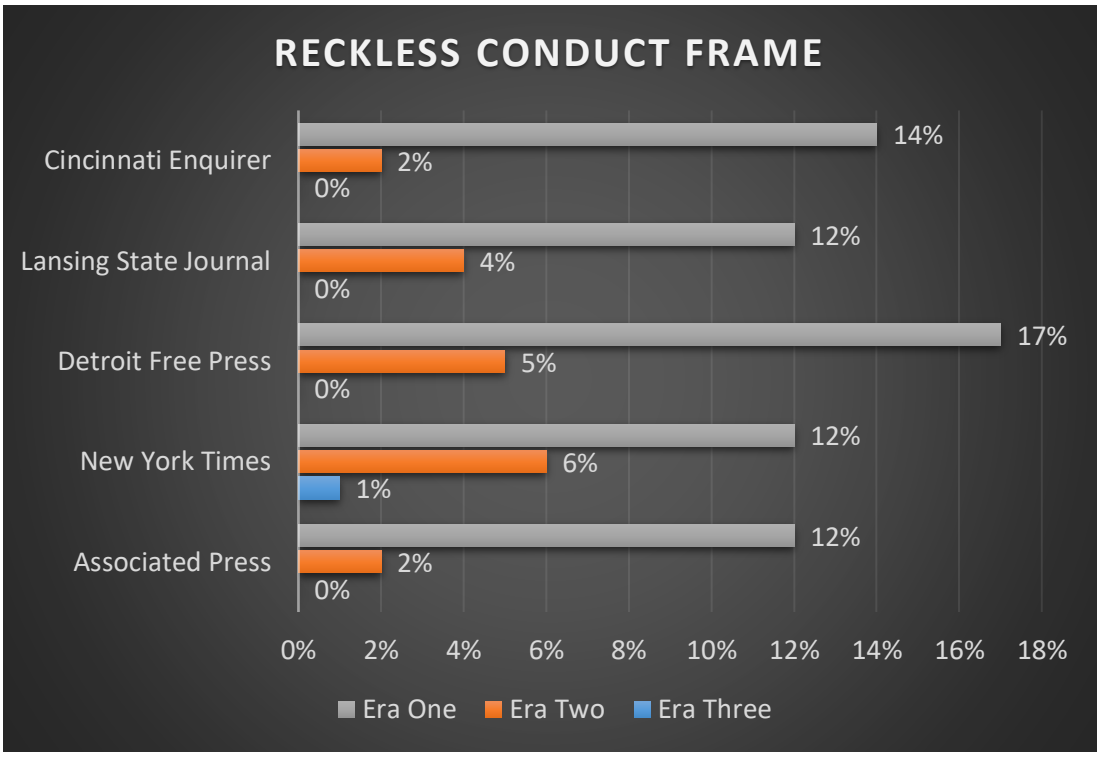


Figure 23. Frames by Publication, Reckless Conduct (Figure by author)

Findings indicate a trend away from framing Vincent Chin as a victim who was less worthy of racial justice. Frames characterizing Chin as less worthy of justice and compassion appeared to a moderate degree in coverage of the murder case during the first era. As shown in Figure 23, the Reckless Conduct frame accounted for less than 20 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1982-1987. *The Detroit Free Press* used this frame more than any other news organization during this period. The frame accounted for 17 percent (209 frames) of total news frames in *The Free Press* during the first era (N= 637 total news frames in *The Free Press*). Within the other four news organizations, the Reckless Conduct frame accounted for between 12 percent and 14 percent of total frames in a given news outlet during this period.

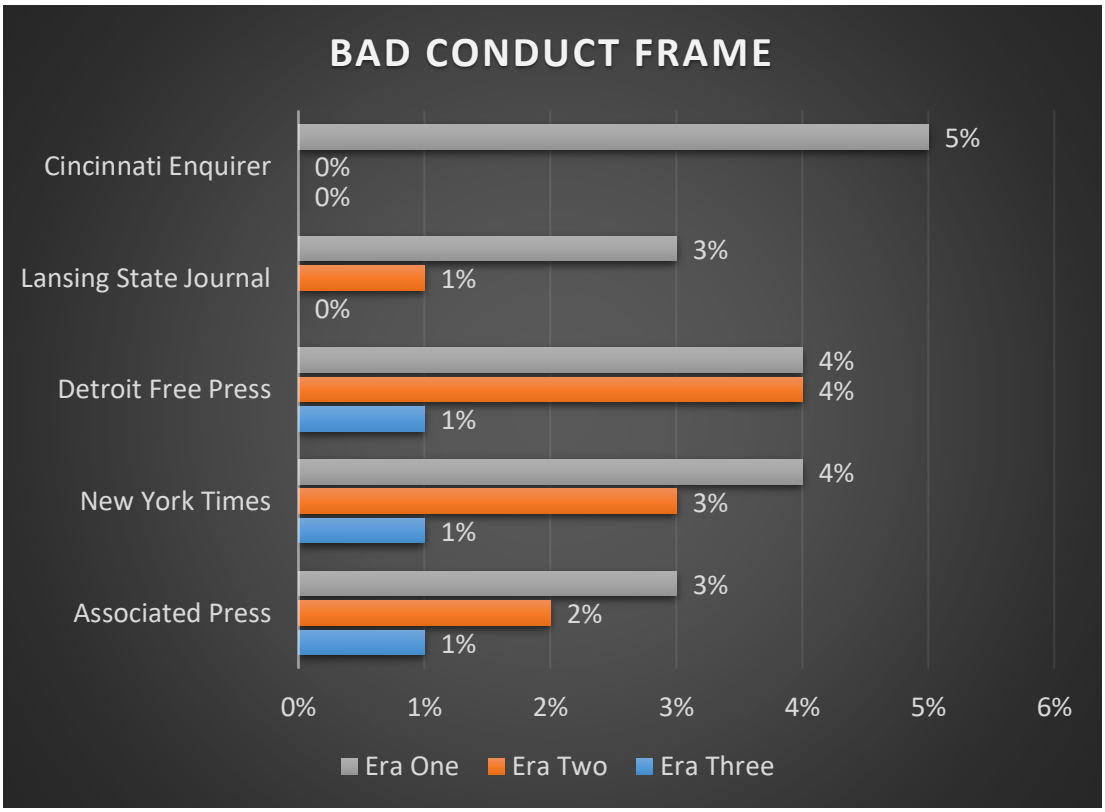


Figure 24. Frames by Publication, Bad Conduct (Figure by author)

The Bad Conduct frame appeared even less frequently than the Reckless Conduct frame in news coverage of the Vincent Chin case during this era. As the findings displayed in Figure 24 show, the Bad Conduct frame accounted for only 5 percent or less of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1982-1987. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* used the frame most frequently. Yet, the frame accounted for only 5 percent (4 frames) of total news frames in this newspaper during this period (N= 86 total news frames in *The Enquirer*). *The Associated Press* and *The Lansing State Journal* used this frame least frequently during the first era. The Bad Conduct frame accounted for just 3 percent (19 frames) of total news frames in *The Associated Press* from 1982-1987 (N= 604 total frames in *The Associated Press*) and 3 percent

(10 frames) of total news frames in *The Lansing State Journal* during this period (N= 298 total frames in *The State Journal*).

I hypothesized that journalists would emphasize Vincent Chin's poor conduct and reckless behavior to a greater extent than the results demonstrated. I based this prediction on the fact that most Americans viewed Asians in the U.S. during the 1980s as successfully assimilated minorities who did not face racism. Hence, in the initial years following Chin's slaying, I expected that more journalists would frame him as less worthy of justice and characterize the incident as a barroom brawl for which Chin was to blame. Further research, including oral history interviews with journalists covering the Chin murder case, is necessary to uncover why news framing trended away from characterizing Chin as a less worthy victim during this decade.

Lastly, in each of the five news outlets, journalists paid very little attention to Vincent Chin as a symbol or martyr. As shown in Figure 25, when examining news framing of Chin in each news outlet from 1982-1987, the Chin as Symbol frame accounted for only 1 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet during this period. This result was not surprising given that journalists often do not re-introduce a news figure into subsequent news stories as a symbol or martyr until years or even decades following his death.[937]

[937] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 20, 24.

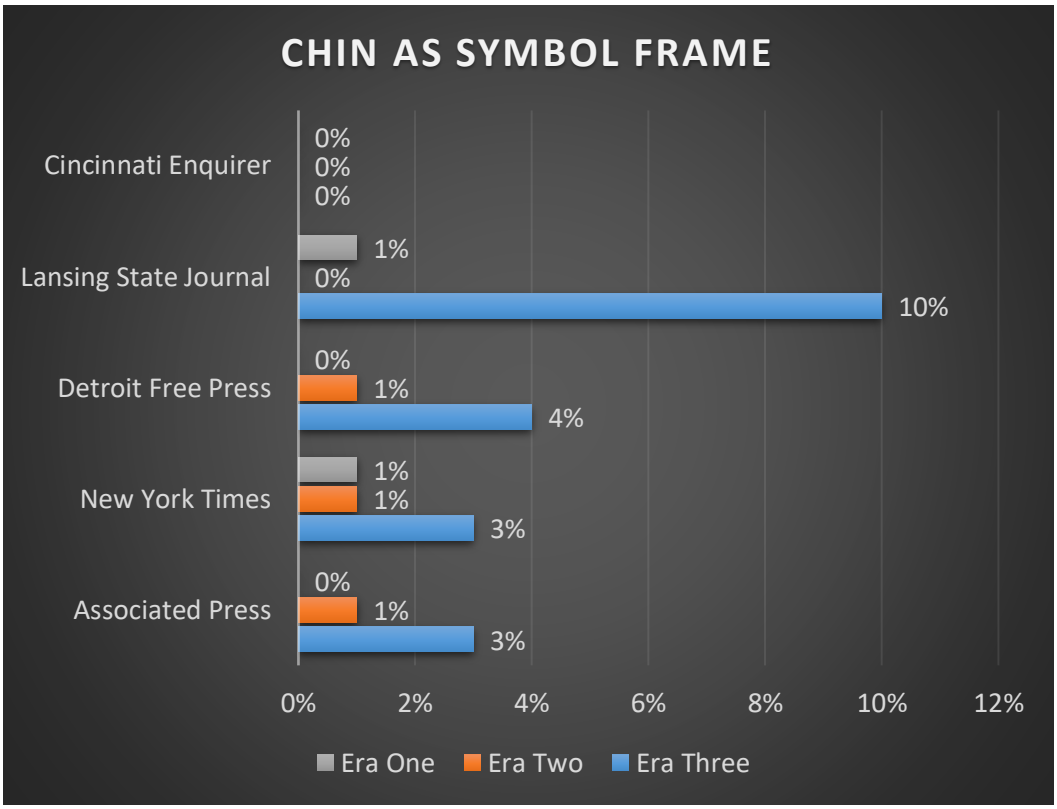


Figure 25. Frames by Publication, Chin as Symbol (Figure by author)

Overall, news coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-1987 across the five news outlets demonstrated a trend toward framing Chin's murder as racially motivated by using sources to allege that his slaying occurred because of his Asian ancestry. Conversely, news coverage of the case demonstrated a trend away from focusing on the details surrounding Chin's victimhood, including his bad conduct and reckless behavior leading up to the crime. In each news outlet, framing of Chin's victimhood played a moderate to small role in coverage of the case. These results suggest increased journalistic attention to Asians' place in U.S. society as targets of racial violence rather than as fully assimilated ethnic minorities.

Eras One and Two

Next, within each separate news outlet, I compared news framing of Vincent Chin during the first period under analysis from June 19, 1982-June 1, 1987 to framing of Chin during the second period under analysis from June 2, 1987-January 19, 2017. Doing so helped answer the following research questions. First, in each of the five news outlets, did the *predominant* frames used to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood change from era one to era two? Second, did any trends in the frequencies of particular news frames used to characterize Chin's murder and his victimhood emerge across the five news outlets in era two? If so, did these trends differ compared with the trends that emerged in era one?

As previously noted in this chapter, the sample size of news articles for each of the five news outlets differed across the three eras. For each news outlet, the sample sizes of news articles for each era are listed in Table 5 in Appendix D.

Table 7 in Appendix D shows results for the frequencies of each of the eight news frames in each publication during era two. When comparing news framing of the criminal motive for Vincent Chin's murder between the first and second eras, results indicate a strong trend toward quoting sources alleging that racism motivated Chin's slaying. As shown in Figure 18, findings indicate that the Sources Allege Racism frame dominated in each news outlet during the second era. The frame accounted for 41 percent to 68 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017. Whereas *The New York Times* used the Sources Allege Racism frame more than any of the other four news outlets in coverage of the Chin case

during the first era,[938] during the second era, the Sources Allege Racism frame dominated within *The Associated Press.* The frame accounted for 68 percent (93 frames) of total frames in *The Associated Press* from 1987-2017 (N= 136 total frames in *The Associated Press*), increasing dramatically from 41 percent (248 frames) of total frames in this news outlet from 1982-1987 (N= 604 total frames in *The Associated Press*).

Results for the Sources Allege Racism frame are not surprising. In the decades following the Vincent Chin case, as racial violence targeting Asians in the U.S. gradually increased, I predicted that journalists would continue to use sources to allege that racism was a factor in Chin's slaying.

Due to the rising number of cases of racial crimes involving Asian victims in America from 1987-2017, I hypothesized that more journalists would directly assert that the violence against Vincent Chin was a racially motivated crime. I based my hypothesis on Daniel Hallin's Sphere Theory, explained in detail in Chapter 2. The theory assumes that news framing of particular topics or ideas follows shifts from debate to consensus among society's elites and the general public.[939] Applying Hallin's theory to this study, I expected that as the idea of anti-Asian racism gradually moved from the sphere of debate to the sphere of consensus as cases of anti-Asian

[938] The Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for 50 percent (124 frames) of total news frames in *The New York Times* from 1982-1987 (N= 249 total frames).

[939] Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1989.

violence in the U.S. increased, more journalists would be emboldened to report that Chin was killed because of his race.[940]

As expected, results in Figure 19 demonstrate a substantial trend toward increased visibility of the Journalists Assert Racism frame in news coverage of Vincent Chin's murder. During the second era, news reporters directly asserted that anti-Asian racism motivated Chin's slaying to a far greater extent than during the first era. Findings indicate that the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 10 percent to 21 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017 compared with only 0 percent to 3 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1982-1987. To illustrate, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 20 percent (38 frames) of total news frames in *The New York Times* from 1987-2017 (N= 194 total frames) compared with only 3 percent (8 frames) of total frames in this newspaper from 1982-1987 (N= 249 total frames in *The New York Times*). Similarly, the frame accounted for 10 percent (14 frames) of total news frames in *The Associated Press* from 1987-2017 (N=136 total frames in *The Associated Press*) but never appeared in this news outlet from 1982-1987.

Whereas the Journalists Assert Racism frame was most prominent in *The New York Times* during the first era, the frame was most visible within *The Lansing State Journal* during the second era. The frame accounted for 21 percent (15 frames) of total frames in *The State Journal* during the second era (N= 72 total frames in *The State Journal*), increasing dramatically from only 1 percent (3 frames) of total frames in this newspaper during the first era (N= 298 total frames in *The State Journal*). This

[940] Ibid.

finding was unexpected because I predicted that, across both eras, journalists would assert anti-Asian racism more frequently in a progressive, national newspaper such as *The Times.*[941]

Lastly, the low visibility of the No Racism frame from 1987-2017 demonstrates a trend toward framing the violence against Vincent Chin as a racial crime. Findings shown in Figure 20 indicate that the No Racism frame accounted for 5 percent or less of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017. This is a significant decrease from the first era when the frame accounted for 6 percent to 15 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1982-1987. During the first era, the No Racism frame dominated in *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* accounting for 15 percent (13 frames) of total news frames used in coverage of the Chin case from 1982-1987 (N= 86 total frames in *The Enquirer*). During the second era, the frame continued to dominate in *The Enquirer* but accounted for only 5 percent (2 frames) of total news frames in this newspaper from 1987-2017 (N= 41 total frames in *The Enquirer*).

Results pertaining to the No Racism frame are not surprising. I hypothesized that in news coverage of Vincent Chin's murder journalists would use this frame less frequently in the decades following Chin's death because of the upswing in cases of racial violence targeting Asian victims in the U.S. Hence, results suggest that journalists began to pay increasing attention to Chin as a target of racism rather than as a victim of a random, ordinary crime.

[941] During the first era, the Journalists Assert Racism frame dominated in *The New York Times*, accounting for 3 percent (8 frames) of total frames in *The Times* from 1982-1987 (N= 249 total frames).

When comparing news framing of Vincent Chin as a victim who was worthy of racial justice across the first and second eras, results demonstrate a trend away from framing him as a physically vulnerable victim. As during the first era, during the second era, the Physically Vulnerable frame dominated over all other frames used to characterize Chin as a victim of violent crime. However, during the second era, the frame's visibility decreased in nearly every news outlet. As the results displayed in Figure 21indicate, the Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for only 13 percent (18 frames) of total news frames in *The Associated Press* from 1987-2017 (N= 136 total frames in *The Associated Press*) compared with 32 percent (192 frames) of total frames in the same news outlet during the previous era (N= 604 total frames in *The Associated Press*). These results indicate a gradual shift away from journalists' focus on the details surrounding Chin's victimhood. One could speculate that news reporters' increased focus on the racial motive for Chin's killing might have played a role in this shift.

During both the first and second eras, the Physically Vulnerable frame was prominent within *The Lansing State Journal.* The frame accounted for 24 percent (17 frames) of total frames in this local newspaper from 1987-2017 (N= 72 total frames in *The State Journal*), decreasing from 34 percent (101 frames) of total frames in *The Journal* from 1982-1987 (N= 298 total frames in *The State Journal*).

The decreased visibility of the Physically Vulnerable frame in news coverage of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime was surprising because it contradicts the assumptions of worthy victim theory. According to this theory, when society alleges that a violent crime victim was the target of racial violence, the victim's

newsworthiness increases because racism, and the desire to fight against it, resonate with the media audience. Hence, according to the theory, journalists are more likely to frame the minority group victim as worthy of justice by characterizing him as helpless to his assailants.[942]

Results for the Good Person frame in news coverage of the Vincent Chin case were mixed with no clear trend emerging from 1987-2017. I hypothesized that as more journalists paid attention to Chin as a target of racial injustice, news reporters' focus on Chin's positive characteristics would increase, according to the assumptions of worthy victim theory.[943] However, not all of my findings support my prediction. For example, results indicate that the Good Person frame's visibility *decreased* in both local and national news outlets, including *The Associated Press, The New York Times,* and *The Detroit Free Press.* The Good Person frame accounted for 3 percent or less of total frames within each of these news outlets from 1987-2017, as shown in Figure 22.

Other findings did support my hypothesis. The Good Person frame's visibility increased in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* and *The Lansing State Journal* from the first era to the second era. To illustrate, the Good Person frame accounted for 15 percent (6 frames) of total news frames within *The Cincinnati Enquirer* from 1987-2017 (N= 41 total frames in *The Enquirer*), an increase from only 2 percent (2 frames) of total frames in this newspaper from 1982-1987 (N= 86 total frames in *The Enquirer*). Similarly, the frame accounted for 6 percent (4 frames) of total frames in *The Lansing*

[942] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374.

[943] Ibid., 374-376.

State Journal from 1987-2017 (N= 72 total frames in *The State Journal*) but was never used in this newspaper from 1982-1987.

I was surprised that national news outlets, particularly *The New York Times,* did not spotlight Vincent Chin's positive characteristics more frequently. Because *The Times* is a national, progressive-leaning newspaper, I expected reporters to emphasize Chin's selflessness, congeniality, strong work ethic, and other good qualities to a greater extent, causing him to appear more sympathetic to readers.

During the second era, news framing of Vincent Chin trended away from characterizing him as *less* worthy of racial justice. For example, as shown in Figure 23, the visibility of the Reckless Conduct frame decreased significantly in each of the five news outlets during the second era. The frame accounted for 6 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017 compared with 17 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet from 1982-1987.

To illustrate, the Reckless Conduct frame accounted for only 2 percent (3 frames) of total news frames in *The Associated Press* from 1987-2017 (N= 136 total frames in *The Associated Press*) compared with 12 percent (75 frames) of total frames in this news outlet from 1982-1987 (N= 604 total frames in *The Associated Press*). Similarly, in local newspapers, the Reckless Conduct frame accounted for only 2 percent (1 frame) of total frames in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* from 1987-2017 (N= 41 total frames in *The Enquirer*) compared with 14 percent (12 frames) of total frames in this newspaper from 1982-1987 (N= 86 total frames in *The Enquirer*). During the second era, the Reckless Conduct frame was prominent in *The New York Times* despite the fact that the frame accounted for only 6 percent (11 frames) of total

frames in this newspaper during this period (N=194 total frames in *The Times*), a sharp decrease from 12 percent (30 frames) of total frames in *The Times* during the first era (N= 249 total frames in *The Times*).

Additionally, in each of the five news outlets, the visibility of the Bad Conduct frame continued to decrease across time. Results in Figure 24 show that the Bad Conduct frame accounted for 4 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017 compared with 5 percent or less of total frames from 1982-1987.

Results for the Reckless Conduct and Bad Conduct frames align with my predictions. I based my predictions on worthy victim theory that assumes that news reporters will pay less attention to violent crime victims' undesirable traits, such as poor conduct, when reporters believe the victim was a target of racial hatred.[944]

Lastly, the Chin as Symbol frame maintained its trend of very low visibility during the second era. This result was unexpected given that journalists will often re-introduce a news figure into subsequent news stories as a symbol or martyr years or decades following his death.[945] Similar to news reporters' use of the Chin as Symbol frame during the first era, the frame accounted for only 1 percent or less of total frames in each of the five news outlets during the second era and was never prominent in any single news outlet, as shown in Figure 25.

Overall, in each news outlet, journalists covering the Vincent Chin murder case from 1987-2017 continued to rely on sources to frame his death as a racial crime.

[944] Ibid.

[945] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 20, 24.

At the same time, news reporters directly asserted that anti-Asian racism motivated his murder to a far greater extent than during the first era. As journalists increasingly turned their attention to anti-Asian racism and Asians' evolving position in U.S. society from model minorities to targets of race hatred, news reporters' focus on the storyline surrounding Chin's victimhood (ie. how Chin behaved in the hours leading up to his death, his vulnerability to his assailants, etc.) gradually became less visible in news coverage.

Eras Two and Three

The final step of my content analysis of news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case was to compare framing within each news outlet between era two (June 2, 1987-January 19, 2017) and era three (January 20, 2017-December 31, 2022). Doing so helped answer the following research questions. First, in each of the five news outlets, did the dominant frames used to characterize the criminal motive for Chin's murder and his victimhood change from the second to the third eras? Second, did any new trends in the frequency of particular news frames used to characterize the criminal motive and Chin's victimhood emerge across the five news outlets during era three? If so, did these new trends differ compared with the trends that emerged in era two? Lastly, is there some evidence in the news coverage to suggest that President Trump's rhetoric regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and its origin in China played a role in any shifts in news framing of the criminal motive for Chin's murder between the second and third eras?

The sample size of news articles for each of the five news outlets differed across the three eras. As previously noted in this chapter, for each news outlet, the sample size of news articles for each era are listed in Table 5 in Appendix D.

Table 8 in Appendix D shows results for the frequencies of each of the eight news frames in each publication during era three. As during the second era, during President Trump's administration and the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S., results indicate a strong journalistic focus on anti-Asian racism as the motive for Vincent Chin's slaying from 2017-2022. Findings demonstrate a robust trend toward high visibility of the Sources Allege Racism frame. The frame dominated in nearly every news organization, accounting for 41 percent to 59 percent of total frames in a given news outlet from 2017-2022 (See Figure 18). Results for *The Detroit Free Press* were particularly striking. The Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for 59 percent (80 frames) of total news frames in the local newspaper from 2017-2022 (N= 136 total frames) compared with 47 percent (219 frames in *The Free Press*) of total frames in *The Detroit Free Press* from 1987-2017 (N= 469 total frames in *The Free Press*).

Some evidence suggests that President Trump's rhetoric describing the Covid-19 pandemic as "the China virus" and "kung flu" during his reelection campaign rallies played a role in the dominance of the Sources Allege Racism frame from 2017-2022. For example, on March 30, 2020, *The New York Times* briefly discussed Vincent Chin's slaying within the context of the surge in anti-Asian violence during Covid-19. The news story quoted U.S. House Representative Judy Chu, a Democrat from California, who told *The Times* that President Trump's anti-Asian rhetoric labeling Covid-19 "the China virus" stemmed from "certain political motives" and

that The White House and her Republican colleagues are "not taking into account the effect of their actions on . . . Asian Americans."[946]

From 2017-2022, a total of 11 news articles in *The New York Times* quoted Washington politicians, Asian American activists, and other sources condemning President Trump's rhetoric regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and its origin in China. This number represents 85 percent of total news articles reviving the story of Vincent Chin's murder in this newspaper from 2017-2022 (N=13 total news articles).

As Asian American activists held press conferences condemning the rising tide of violent crime targeting Asians in the U.S. during the pandemic, some news reporters covering the violence drew attention to the Vincent Chin case to condemn anti-Asian racism. Accordingly, I hypothesized that the trend toward increased visibility of the Journalists Assert Racism frame that began from 1987-2017 would continue in news reports reviving the tragedy of Chin's murder from 2017-2022.

Results confirm my hypothesis. Findings demonstrate that during President Trump's administration and the Covid-19 pandemic, journalists became emboldened to assert—more than during any other period under analysis—that Vincent Chin was killed because of his Chinese ancestry. In national and local news reports discussing Chin's murder, findings indicate that the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 21 percent to 57 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 2017-2022 compared with only 10 percent to 21 percent of total news frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017 (See Figure 19). For example, the Journalists Assert

[946] Matt Stevens, "For Asian Americans, Taunts are Painful Echo of Outsiders' Status," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2020, NexisUni Database.

Racism frame accounted for 40 percent (61 frames) of total news frames in *The New York Times* from 2017-2022 (N= 153 total frames in *The Times*) compared with 20 percent (38 frames) of total frames in the same newspaper from 1987-2017 (N=194 total frames in *The Times*). Similarly, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for over half, or 57 percent (18 frames), of total news frames in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* from 2017-2022 (N=44 total frames in *The Enquirer*) compared with only 17 percent (7 frames) of total frames in the same newspaper from 1987-2017 (N= 41 total frames in *The Enquirer*).

News framing in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* represents the first time that the Journalists Assert Racism frame dominated over all other news frames in Vincent Chin murder case coverage. This is an important milestone in news coverage of Chin's murder because it signals that news reporters were acknowledging more than ever before that anti-Asian violence is a legitimate problem in the U.S. The fact that this frame accounted for nearly 60 percent of total frames in a *local* newspaper is surprising. I expected that a progressive, national newspaper such as *The New York Times* would assert anti-Asian racism most frequently.

There exists some evidence to suggest that President Trump's rhetoric regarding the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic in China may have played a role in the dominance of the Journalists Assert Racism frame in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* and in the frame's high visibility in the other news outlets under analysis. For example, on April 26, 2020, in a news report covering one of Trump's reelection campaign rallies in Ohio, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* called out Trump for "dangerously stoking the fires

of bigotry and ethnic intimidation during a crisis," according to the news report.[947] *The Enquirer* stated that Trump "eagerly fueled anti-Asian sentiment by calling it [the Covid-19 virus] 'the Chinese virus' even as the FBI warned the country that hate crimes against Asian Americans were likely to 'surge' because of stereotypes about the virus."[948] A second article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* examined the widespread problem of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. by reviving the story of Chin's murder and claiming that simply "minimizing attacks" against Asians in the U.S. without acknowledging racism is akin to downplaying "the murder of Vincent Chin . . . as manslaughter rather than a hate crime," according to the news article.[949] The report condemned anti-Asian racism and blamed President Trump for "stoking fear [of Asians] through the Covid-19 crisis."[950] From 2017-2022, every news article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* that used the Journalists Assert Racism frame when retelling the story of Vincent Chin's death also tied President Trump's anti-China rhetoric regarding the origin of Covid-19 to the rise in anti-Asian violence.

Similarly, on March 20, 2021, *The New York Times* discussed Vincent Chin's slaying in a news report covering the surge of violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. A reporter for *The Times* claimed that President Trump's description of Covid-19 as the "kung flu" pandemic was an example of the type of "xenophobic

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[947] Gabe Davis, "Ohio Must Strengthen Hate Crime Protections," *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* April 26, 2020, Newspapers.com.

[948] Ibid.

[949] Simon Tam, "Anti-Asian Violence is Nothing but Hate," *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* April 26, 2020, Newspapers.com.

[950] Ibid.

language" fueled by Trump "that added hate crimes to a deadly disease" and served as a reminder of the racist violence targeting Chin.[951] From 2017-2022, a total of 10 news articles in *The New York Times* used the Journalists Assert Racism frame to condemn President Trump's rhetoric regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and its origin in China. This number represents 77 percent of total news articles reviving the story of Chin's murder in this newspaper from 2017-2022 (N= 13 total news articles).

The fact that the Journalists Assert Racism frame dominated in only one news outlet is surprising. President Trump's comments regarding the origin of the Covid-19 virus and the ensuing animosity toward Asians in the U.S. played a role in bringing anti-Asian racism to journalists' attention from 2017-2022. Hence, I predicted that this frame would dominate in a majority of the news outlets under study. Further research is necessary to uncover potential reasons why some news organizations continued to rely on sources alleging anti-Asian racism in coverage of the Vincent Chin case more frequently than their own direct assertions.

Lastly, as predicted, the trend toward low visibility of the No Racism frame to characterize the violence against Vincent Chin continued across the second and third eras. Findings indicate that the No Racism frame accounted for only 3 percent or less of total news frames in a given news outlet from 2017-2022, decreasing slightly from 5 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017 (See Figure 20). To illustrate, the visibility of the No Racism frame dropped from 3 percent (14 frames) of total frames in *The Detroit Free Press* from 1987-2017 (N=469 total

[951] Brian X. Chen, "There is No Rung on the Ladder that Protects You from Hate," *The New York Times,* March 20, 2021, NexisUni Database.

frames) to 1 percent (1 frame) of total frames in the same local newspaper from 2017-2022 (N= 136 total frames). The No Racism frame was also barely visible in national news outlets. The frame accounted for just 2 percent (4 frames) of total news frames in *The Associated Press* from 2017-2022.

From 2017-2022, coverage of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime trended away from framing him as physically vulnerable to his assailants. The visibility of the Physically Vulnerable frame diminished significantly in every news outlet, accounting for 12 percent or less of total frames in coverage mentioning the Chin case from 2017-2022 compared with 24 percent or less of total frames from 1987-2017 (See Figure 21). In national news coverage, the frame accounted for only 3 percent (5 frames) of total frames in *The New York Times* from 2017-2022 (N= 153 total frames in *The Times*), a notable decrease from 13 percent (26 frames) of total frames in the same news outlet from 1987-2017 (N= 194 total frames in *The Times*). The frame also showed a striking drop in visibility in local coverage mentioning Chin's slaying. The Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for only 2 percent (1 frame) of total frames in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* during the third era (N=44 total frames in *The Enquirer*) compared with 20 percent (8 frames) of total frames in this newspaper during the second era (N=41 total frames in *The Enquirer*).

The visibility of the Good Person frame in press coverage reviving Vincent Chin's story followed a similar download trend from 2017-2022. The frame never appeared in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* from 2017-2022 but accounted for 15 percent (6 frames) of total frames in this newspaper during from 1987-2017 (N=41 total frames

in *The Enquirer*) (See Figure 22). The only news outlet in which the frame's visibility increased from the second to the third era was *The Lansing State Journal.*[952]

The reduced visibility of frames characterizing Vincent Chin as a worthy victim of violent crime was unexpected given the assumptions of worthy victim theory.[953] I speculate that as the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the U.S. and violent crimes against Asian Americans skyrocketed, Asian activists' protests and press conferences turned news reporters' attention toward anti-Asian racism as a serious national issue. Hence, the smaller details regarding Chin's positive personality traits and his helplessness to his killers faded into the background.

In news reporting on Vincent Chin as a *less* worthy victim, coverage trended away from using the Bad Conduct frame and the Reckless Conduct frame from 2017-2022. The visibility of both frames diminished significantly in every news outlet during the third era. To illustrate, from 2017-2022, the Reckless Conduct frame appeared only in *The New York Times* (See Figure 23). The frame accounted for only 1 percent (1 frame) of total news frames in coverage of Chin within *The Times* from 2017-2022 (N=153 total frames in *The Times*). The Reckless Conduct frame was slightly more visible in *The New York Times* during the second era but still composed only 6 percent (11 frames) or less of total frames during this period (N= 194 total frames in *The Times)*.

[952] *In The Lansing State Journal*, the Good Person frame accounted for 8 percent (5 frames) of total frames used in coverage mentioning the Vincent Chin case during the third era (N= 63 total frames), a slight increase from 6 percent (4 frames) of total frames during the second era (N= 72 total frames).

[953] Gilchrist, "'Newsworthy' Victims?" 374. Worthy victim theory assumes that journalists are more likely to frame a racial minority group victim as worthy of justice (physically vulnerable, good person) when society alleges that a violent crime victim was attacked because of racial hatred.

Similarly, from 2017-2022, the Bad Conduct frame was barely visible in any of the five news outlets under study. The frame encompassed only 1 percent or less of total news frames used in coverage mentioning Vincent Chin during this period (See Figure 24). This finding represents a slight decrease from 1987-2017 when the Bad Conduct frame accounted for 4 percent or less of total frames.

Results for news framing of Vincent Chin as a victim who was less worthy of justice conformed to my expectations. Because worthy victim theory assumes that news reporters frame minority group victims of violent crime favorably when society believes that racism was the criminal motive, I predicted that very few articles would spotlight Chin's shortcomings.

Lastly, the downward trend in visibility of the Chin as Symbol frame shifted significantly from the second to the third eras. During the Trump administration and the pandemic, journalists showed increased attention to Vincent Chin as a symbol of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. in every news outlet examined, although the frame's overall visibility remained low. To illustrate the rise in visibility of this frame, the Chin as Symbol frame accounted for 10 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet from 2017-2022 compared with only 1 percent or less of total frames in a given news outlet from 1987-2017 (See Figure 25). The most significant increase in visibility of the frame occurred in *The Lansing State Journal.* The frame accounted for 10 percent (6 frames) of total frames in *The State Journal* during the third era (N=63 total frames in *The State Journal*) but was never visible in this newspaper during the previous era.

The increase in visibility for the Chin as Symbol frame confirms my hypothesis. Journalists frequently re-introduce news figures as symbols or martyrs representing a widespread problem in the decades following the original news event.[954] Moreover, the spike in violent crimes targeting Asians in America during the pandemic and President Trump's rhetoric linking Covid-19 to China spotlighted anti-Asian hatred in an unprecedented way, drawing significant press attention. The intensity of racial animus toward Asians in the U.S. during this period likely played an important role in prompting news reporters to reflect on previous violent crimes involving Asian victims, such as Chin's murder, as racial crimes and to frame the Asian victims as symbols of a broader social issue.

Despite the heightened visibility of the Chin as Symbol frame during the third era, I was surprised that overall visibility remained low. Such low visibility leads me to question how journalists today define a news symbol and whether this definition has evolved over time. Further research, including interviews with journalists reporting on anti-Asian violence during the Covid-19 pandemic, is necessary to uncover why and to what extent reporters viewed Vincent Chin as a symbol of anti-Asian violence in the U.S.

Overall, the content analysis of news reports covering the Vincent Chin murder case from 2017-2020 produced both foreseeable and unforeseeable results. Not surprisingly, journalists relied heavily on sources to frame the criminal motive for Chin's murder as anti-Asian racism. What *was* surprising was that more journalists did not assert that Chin was murdered because of his Chinese heritage.

[954] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 20, 24.

More shocking was that progressive national news organizations, such as *The New York Times,* never "led the charge" in condemning anti-Asian violence; instead, journalists with smaller, local newspapers called out racism most frequently.

Why did only a small number of news reports use the Journalists Assert Racism frame during an era that witnessed a nationwide surge in violence targeting Asians in the U.S.? One possible explanation is that in some cases of violent crime involving Asian victims, such as the Atlanta, Georgia spa shootings that killed six Asian women on March 16, 2021, some evidence suggested non-racial motives for the murders, including mental illness. Such evidence may have played a role in swaying some journalists from directly asserting that Asian victims are targets of racism. The Atlanta, Georgia murder case is examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Results for The Georgia Murder Case

8.1 Content Analysis Results

Chapter 8 analyzes the results of the content analysis of news frames used in coverage of the March 2021 Georgia murders of six Asian victims from March 16, 2021 to December 31, 2022.[955] First, the chapter examines the specific frames journalists used to characterize the criminal motive and the Asian victims. The eight news frames are explained in detail in Chapter 5 and are as follows: No Racism; Sources Allege Racism; Journalists Assert Racism; Physically Vulnerable; Good Person; Bad Conduct; Reckless Conduct; and Chin as Symbol. I compare trends in framing between the Georgia case and the Vincent Chin case. Second, the chapter analyzes framing results within separate news publications.[956] Lastly, it explores how specific themes embedded within particular news frames characterized the Asian victims in the Georgia case.

Results uncover both similarities and differences in framing trends between the Georgia case and the Vincent Chin case. As expected, the Sources Allege Racism frame dominated overwhelmingly in coverage of both cases. Conversely, the Journalists Assert Racism frame became more prominent over time in coverage of the Chin case yet remained steady in coverage of the Georgia murders. The fact that the

[955] The details of the Georgia murder case are explained in the discussion of the study's methods in Chapter 5.

[956] The seven news publications covering the Georgia murder case that are examined in this study include the following: *The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Atlanta-Journal Constitution, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal,* and *The Cincinnati Enquirer.*

Journalists Assert Racism frame never dominated in coverage of the Georgia shootings was surprising given how Asian American advocacy group leaders consistently condemned the rise in anti-Asian violence during the Covid-19 pandemic. Similar to framing of Chin's murder, the No Racism frame never completely disappeared in Georgia murder case coverage.

Victim framing was strikingly similar between the two cases. Findings indicate that the Physically Vulnerable frame was prominent in coverage of both cases. Conversely, the Good Person, Bad Conduct, and Reckless Conduct frames accounted for a smaller percentage of total frames in news coverage of both cases. Overall, content analysis results demonstrate that in coverage of both Vincent Chin and the Georgia murders journalists placed greater importance on the question surrounding the legitimacy of anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive while paying less attention to Asians as individual victims of violent crime.

Lastly, results uncover particular themes embedded within specific news frames. While the Bad Conduct frame characterized the Asian victims as "sex workers," the Good Person frame undercut this theme by portraying the victims as "doting mothers."

8.2 Georgia Murder Case News Coverage: 2021-2022

This section compares content analysis results for news framing of the Georgia murder case most directly with framing of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-1987. While this six-year period represents only a small slice of news coverage of Chin's murder, it readily illustrates the evolution of framing of the violence against

Chin as well as framing of his victimhood in the immediate aftermath of his murder. This research also considers the evolution of framing over time by comparing these two cases.

For my analysis of the 2021 Georgia murder case, I began with the broadest overview, examining frames in all seven local and national news outlets explored for this analysis from March 16, 2021, the date the Georgia murders occurred, to December 31, 2022. The content analysis of the Georgia murders examined the following news outlets: *The Associated Press*; *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution; The Cincinnati Enquirer; The Detroit Free Press*; *The Lansing State Journal*; *The New York Times;* and *The Washington Post.*

This section answers the following research question: What similarities exist between news framing of the historic Vincent Chin murder case and framing of the murders of six Asian women in Georgia during the Covid-19 pandemic? Using this contemporary case of violence against Asians, the dissertation analyzes whether the resonance of particular frames that both arose and developed in Chin's coverage are present in coverage of other murders involving Asian victims.

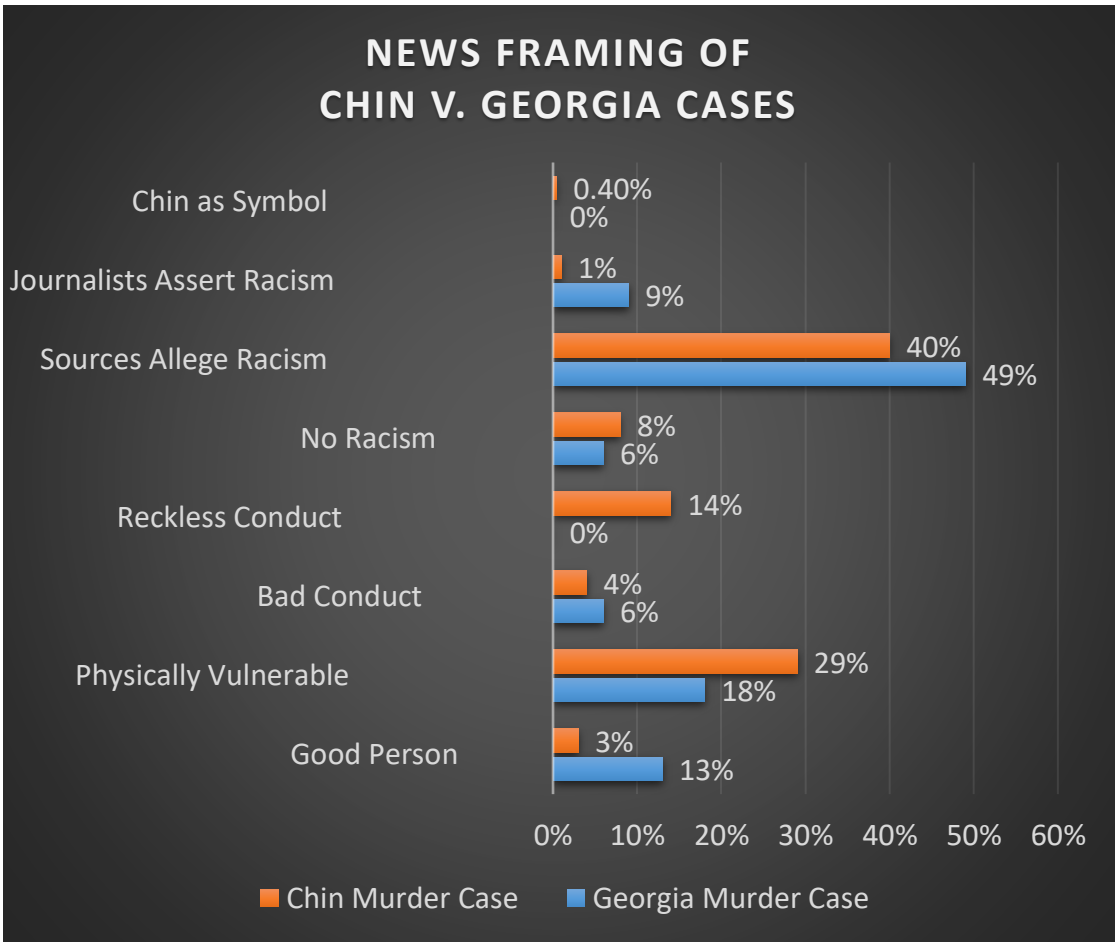


Figure 26. A Comparison of Framing of Chin and Georgia Cases (Figure by author)

The Sources Allege Racism frame dominated in news coverage of the criminal motive for the Georgia murders and Vincent Chin's murder. As shown in Figure 26 above, the Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for nearly half, or 49 percent (1,161 frames), of total frames used in coverage of the Georgia shootings from 2021-2022 (N= 2,372 total frames in Georgia murder coverage) and accounted for 40 percent (749 frames) of total frames used in coverage of Vincent Chin's murder from 2021-2022 (N= 1,874 total frames in Chin murder coverage). Similar to coverage of the Chin case, journalists covering the Georgia shootings interviewed Asian American advocacy group leaders, Asian community members, and

Washington politicians to frame the shootings as racially motivated. Hence, journalists' strong reliance on source attribution to discuss anti-Asian hatred as a potential criminal motive in the Georgia case could be considered a legacy of news reporting on the tragedy of Vincent Chin.

Findings indicate that the Journalists Assert Racism frame remained steadily visible across time in coverage of the Georgia murders (see Figure 26). Nevertheless, the frame accounted for only 9 percent (203 frames) of total frames reporting on the case from 2021-2022 (N= 2,372 total frames reporting on the Georgia case). This result was unexpected given the frequent press conferences and protests from Asian American advocacy groups condemning the rise of anti-Asian racism during this period. One possible explanation for the low visibility of the Journalists Assert Racism frame is that some local authorities questioned whether the crime was racially motivated. For example, on March 23, 2021, Cherokee County Sheriff Jay Baker denied that direct evidence of a racial motive existed. He told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that the perpetrator, Robert Aaron Long, had "a really bad day" and "this is what he did."[957] Several local and national news stories quoted the sheriff despite pushback from Asian American community leaders calling the tragedy a hate crime.

Despite the Journalists Assert Racism frame's low visibility in news coverage, its persistence across time is important because it reveals that some journalists routinely paid attention to anti-Asian racism as a legitimate factor motivating the Georgia murders. For example, on March 17, 2021, the day following the shootings,

[957] "Fundraising," *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution,* March 23, 2021, NexisUni Database.

The Associated Press published a news story discussing the motive for the Georgia murders within the context of the history of anti-Asian racism in the U.S. "Racism against Asian Americans has long been an ugly thread of U.S. history," a reporter for *The Associated Press* stated, referencing the Japanese Internment camps during World War II and the death of Vincent Chin.[958]

One particularly interesting finding was how journalists frequently asserted that anti-Asian racism was the motive for the Georgia killings *in the presence of source allegations to support such assertions.* (This pattern was also present in Vincent Chin case news framing.) Nearly half, or 43 percent (94 news articles), of total news articles covering the Georgia murder case from 2021-2022 (N = 221 total articles covering the case) used the Journalists Assert Racism frame and the Sources Allege Racism frame in the same news story. For example, on March 18, 2021, a reporter for *The Associated Press* claimed that "a White gunman was charged with killing eight people, most of them Asian women, at three Atlanta-area spas."[959] The shootings, the reporter said, came at a time when "Asian Americans were already worn down by other . . . pandemic-fueled racist attacks."[960] The reporter followed up his statement with a quote from Margaret Huang, president and CEO of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate groups: "This man [Robert Aaron Long] identified targets owned by Asians" and "was very clearly going after a targeted

[958] Christine Fernando and Terry Tang, "EXPLAINER: Why Georgia Attack Spurs Fears in Asian Americans," *The Associated Press*, March 17, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[959] Terry Tang, "Asian Americans Grieve, Organize in Wake of Atlanta Attacks," *The Associated Press*, March 18, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[960] Ibid.

group of people," Huang said.[961] These results demonstrate the importance the press placed on using public statements to bolster journalists' own assertions.

Compared to coverage of the Georgia murders, the Journalists Assert Racism frame became increasingly visible over time in coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-1987. Daniel Hallin's sphere theory, discussed in detail in Chapter 6, assumes that journalists separate news events into one of three spheres: the sphere of deviance, the sphere of legitimate controversy, and the sphere of consensus.[962] Using this theory as a lens for analysis, one could posit that advocacy group press conferences and protests condemning anti-Asian violence during the Chin case very likely played some role in moving the issue of anti-Asian racism from the sphere of deviance to the sphere of legitimate controversy from 1982-1987. Hence, as U.S. society began to debate the authenticity of anti-Asian racism, more journalists began condemning it as a criminal motive for violence.

As predicted, the visibility of the No Racism frame remained low in news coverage of the Georgia murders. As the results displayed in Figure 26 indicate, the frame accounted for only 6 percent (141 frames) of total news frames in coverage of the case from 2021-2022 (N= 2,372 total news frames in coverage of the Georgia case). Yet, the frame never disappeared in news reports, despite efforts from Asian American activists, politicians, and local community members to characterize the shootings as a hate crime.

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[961] Ibid.

[962] Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1989.

One possible reason for the persistent presence of the No Racism frame in news coverage of the Georgia shootings is that journalists are trained to acknowledge the counter-frame. In other words, because local police informed the press in the initial days following the shootings that a racial motive was uncertain due to the perpetrator's alleged sex addiction, journalists had an obligation to explore motives unrelated to the victims' race. Hence, when to frame violent crimes involving Asian victims as hate crimes remained somewhat controversial for some news reporters when direct evidence of a racial motive was lacking. For example, on March 19, 2021, *The New York Times* reported how "the Atlanta shootings and other recent attacks have exposed difficult questions" involving the ability to prove a racial motive. "Did the assaults just happen to involve Asian victims?" *The Times* asks, "or did the attackers purposely single out Asians in an unspoken way that can never be presented as evidence in court?"[963] This news article illustrates some of the questions journalists routinely asked when deciding how to frame a criminal motive in a case where hard evidence of anti-Asian racism was absent. At the same time, the news article illuminates the evolution of coverage involving Asian victims since Vincent Chin's murder because some journalists automatically assumed that anti-Asian racism could be a potential motive for the Georgia shootings.

Similarly, the visibility of the No Racism frame remained low in coverage of Vincent Chin's slaying and never disappeared. As shown in Figure 26, the No Racism frame accounted for 8 percent (158 frames) of total news frames covering the Chin

[963] Nicole Hong and Jonah E. Bromwich, "Asian Americans Ask: Why Not Call It Hate?" *The New York Times,* March 19, 2021. NexisUni Database.

case from 1982-1987 (N= 1,874 total frames in coverage of the Chin case). As discussed in Chapter 6, news reporters frequently questioned the legitimacy of a racial motive for Chin's slaying, even after the pan-Asian American advocacy group, American Citizens for Justice, uncovered Ronald Ebens' statement blaming Asians for the loss of American jobs in the auto industry.

Content analysis results pertaining to news coverage of the Asian victims indicate that journalists paid significant attention to the Georgia murder victims as persons who were worthy of racial justice because there had been recent calls for city leaders to increase safety measures for Asian spa employees in the workplace. Results show that the Physically Vulnerable frame remained prominent over all other frames used to characterize the six Asian victims. As shown in Figure 26, the frame accounted for 18 percent (428 frames) of total frames used in coverage of the Georgia murders from 2021-2022 (N= 2,372 total frames in Georgia murder case coverage). Journalists using the Physically Vulnerable frame emphasized the victims' apprehension and helplessness as they ran for cover while the perpetrator fired multiple shots from his 9mm handgun. For example, on March 19, 2021, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported how some members of the city's Asian American community were petitioning the local government for greater safety measures, such as security personnel, for Asian spas. The newspaper quoted Michelle Kang, vice president of external affairs for the Korean-American Chamber of Commerce, who

claimed that Asian Americans in Georgia "deserve a right to safety from crime or violence at work and home."[964]

Additionally, journalists used the Good Person frame to characterize the Georgia victims as worthy of racial justice. Findings indicate that the Good Person frame was the third most prominent frame in news coverage of the Georgia shootings. The frame accounted for 13 percent (300 frames) of total frames used in coverage of the Georgia murders from 2021-2022 (N= 2,372 total frames in Georgia murder case coverage). (See Figure 26). Most news stories using this frame depicted the victims as hard-working immigrants and devoted mothers, highlighting their work ethic and devotion to their children. (The "doting mother" theme is explored in greater depth in the final section of this chapter.) For example, on March 21, 2021, *The Washington Post* described the six Asian victims as having "followed a well-worn, difficult path" to achieving success after arriving in America.[965] The news article portrayed them as "low-wage" immigrants "in search of a better life."[966]

Findings demonstrate that news framing of the Georgia spa victims as worthy of racial justice bore both similarities and differences to framing of Vincent Chin as a worthy victim. The Physically Vulnerable frame was the second most prominent frame in coverage of both murder cases. As discussed in Chapter 6, multiple news articles characterized Chin as helpless, describing his attackers as pursuing him and

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[964] "Asian American Leaders, Lawmakers: 'We Deserve a Right to Safety,'" *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* March 19, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[965] Ariana Eunjung Cha, Derek Hawkins, Tim Craig, and Mery Kornfield, "Victims' Lives Show Immigrant Struggles," *The Washington Post,* March 21, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[966] Ibid.

pinning him down before bludgeoning his head with a baseball bat. However, the Good Person frame was much less visible in news reports covering Chin than in news reports covering the Georgia victims. As shown in Figure 26, the Good Person frame accounted for only 3 percent (63 frames) of total news frames used in Chin case coverage from 1982-1987 (N= 1874 total frames in Chin case coverage).

One might speculate that the much higher visibility of the Good Person frame in coverage of the Georgia victims resulted from journalists' desire to divert attention from the stigma of Asian spa employees as "sex workers" by characterizing them as good people and devoted mothers. (I discuss how the news themes of the "Asian sex worker" and the "doting mother" played some role in characterizing the Georgia shooting victims in the final section of this chapter.)

Results indicate that news framing of the Georgia spa victims as *less* worthy of racial justice bore similarities and differences to framing of Vincent Chin as a less worthy victim. The visibility of the Bad Conduct frame was relatively low in coverage of both murder cases. As the results displayed in Figure 26 indicate, the frame accounted for only 6 percent (136 frames) of total frames used in coverage of the Georgia victims from 2021-2022 (N= 2,372 total frames in Georgia victim coverage) and only 4 percent (69 frames) of total frames in coverage of Chin's victimhood from 1982-1987 (N= 1,874 total frames in coverage of Chin's victimhood).

Journalists frequently frame violent crime victims as exhibiting "bad conduct" or "deviant conduct" when these victims engage in "sex work," according to scholars

Slakoff and Brennen.[967] For the purpose of this study, sex work includes prostitution, stripping, frequenting strip clubs, or allegedly offering sexual favors in a bar, strip club, or spa. For example, on March 20, 2021, *The Washington Post* used the Bad Conduct frame when it reported that the spas in Fulton County that Robert Aaron Long had targeted "had long been identified online and by police as places where sex work and possible sexual exploitation regularly occurred."[968] According to *The Post,* "the suspected gunman, Robert Aaron Long, allegedly told law enforcement that he was a regular customer at two of the massage spas he attacked . . . . signaling that he set out with the intention of attacking Asian women whom he perceived to be selling sex."[969] (The "Asian sex worker" theme embedded within the Bad Conduct frame is discussed in the final section of this chapter.) Similarly, as discussed in Chapter 6, news articles covering the Chin case that used the Bad Conduct frame reported that he routinely visited strip clubs on the weekends.

Unlike visibility of the Bad Conduct frame, the visibility of the Reckless Conduct frame varied considerably between the two murder cases. The Reckless Conduct frame never appeared in coverage of the Georgia murders from 2021-2022. (See Figure 26). This result could be explained by the high visibility of the Physically Vulnerable frame in coverage of this case. For example, several news articles reporting on the deaths of the six Asian women discussed video footage of the shootings that showed the victims hiding helplessly under chairs. Hence, none of the

[967] Slakoff and Brennen, "The Differential Representation," 11.

[968] Jessica Contrera, Tracy Jan, and Douglas MacMillan, "Killings Start Discussions on Sex Work, Exploitation," *The Washington Post,* March 20, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[969] Ibid.

victims behaved recklessly. Conversely, the Reckless Conduct frame was the third most prominent news frame used in coverage of Chin's murder from 1982-1987. The Reckless Conduct frame accounted for 14 percent (261 frames) of total news frames used in Chin case coverage from 1982-1987 (N= 1874 total frames in Chin case coverage). (See Figure 26). This result is likely due to journalists' focus on the details surrounding Chin's slaying in the initial years following his death. The result also emphasizes that frames parallel actions and events. Despite the potential criticism of the nature of spa work, unlike Vincent Chin, the six Asian women victims were not frequenting a strip club or initiating an altercation at the time of their deaths. These victims were merely doing their jobs.

Lastly, the visibility of the Chin as Symbol frame in news coverage of the Georgia murders was almost non-existent. The frame accounted for less than 1 percent (3 frames) of total news frames covering the Georgia case from 2021-2022 (N= 2,372 total frames covering the Georgia case). (See Figure 26). Given the growing press attention to anti-Asian racism and its history in America, I expected journalists to frame Chin as a symbol of the broader problem of such racism. As discussed in Chapter 6, a news symbol, by definition, "lives on beyond" his original story, according to scholars Bennett and Lawrence.[970] Journalists re-introduce him into subsequent news stories as a symbol or martyr in the years following the original event.[971] While several news stories covering the Georgia case did revive the tragedy of Vincent Chin's murder to remind media audiences of America's past experiences

[970] Bennett and Lawrence, "News Icons and the Mainstreaming of Social Change," 20, 24.

[971] Ibid.

with violence targeting Asian Americans, journalists covering the Georgia case almost never used the words "symbol," "martyr," or "representation" in their characterizations of Chin.

The findings are intriguing. If journalists are not paying attention to Vincent Chin as a symbol of the widespread problem of anti-Asian violence in America, then perhaps the real legacy of his death is the acceptance among journalists of the legitimacy of anti-Asian racism as a motive for violence against Asians in the U.S. The Chin case sparked a conversation regarding news coverage of such violence that continues today.

Overall, comparisons of news coverage between the historic Vincent Chin case and the Georgia murder case reveal similar trends in framing of the violent crime. In news coverage of both cases, journalists overwhelmingly relied on sources to draw attention to the reality of anti-Asian racism when reporting on the criminal motive but relied less on their own assertions that the murders were hate crimes. These findings, coupled with the persistent presence of the No Racism frame in coverage of both cases, are important. While anti-Asian hatred captured press attention, both during the Chin case and the Georgia murder case, when and to what extent violent crimes against Asians *should be* framed as racial crimes remains an ongoing debate for some journalists. This is especially the case when news sources raise other possible criminal motives for the violence, such as a perpetrator's poor mental health. The following section of this chapter analyzes results for news framing of the Georgia murder case by publication.

8.3 Analyzing Framing of The Georgia Murder Case by Publication

Section 8.3 discusses content analysis results from a comparison of news framing of the Georgia spa shootings in the following seven news outlets from March 16, 2021-December 31, 2022: *The Associated Press, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Cincinnati Enquirer, The Detroit Free Press, The Lansing State Journal, The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post.* Analyzing news framing of the Georgia shootings in each separate news outlet helped to answer the following research questions. First, which frames, if any, were *prominent* across time? Second, do any trends in the frequency of news frames emerge across the seven news outlets from 2021-2022? This section will refer to Figures 27-34 and to Tables 9 and 10 in Appendix D.

The sample size of news articles in each of the seven news outlets was different. I controlled for the variation in the volume of news articles in each news outlet by dividing the total quantity of a specific frame in a given news outlet by the total number of news frames in that outlet. The seven news outlets and their sample sizes are listed in Table 9 in Appendix D.

When comparing news framing of the Georgia murders in each news outlet from 2021-2022, results indicate a robust trend toward quoting sources who alleged a racial motive for the shootings. The Sources Allege Racism frame dominated in nearly every news outlet under analysis, accounting for between 31 percent and 60 percent of total frames in a given news publication (See Figure 27). *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* used the Sources Allege Racism frame more than any of the other six publications. The frame accounted for 60 percent (311 frames) of total

frames used in news coverage of the spa shootings in this newspaper from 2021-2022 (N= 519 total frames in coverage of the spa shootings in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*). I expected that *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* would rely on sources to a greater extent than other news outlets because this newspaper is published in the city where the shootings took place. Consequently, journalists had access to a broad array of sources, including prosecuting attorneys, Asian American activists, and local community members, who alleged that the perpetrator targeted the Asian victims because of their race. The Sources Allege Racism frame did not dominate in *The Detroit Free Press* but still maintained fairly strong visibility. The frame accounted for 31 percent (4 frames) of total news frames in *The Free Press* in coverage of this case from 2021-2022 (N= 13 total frames in *Free Press* coverage of Georgia case).

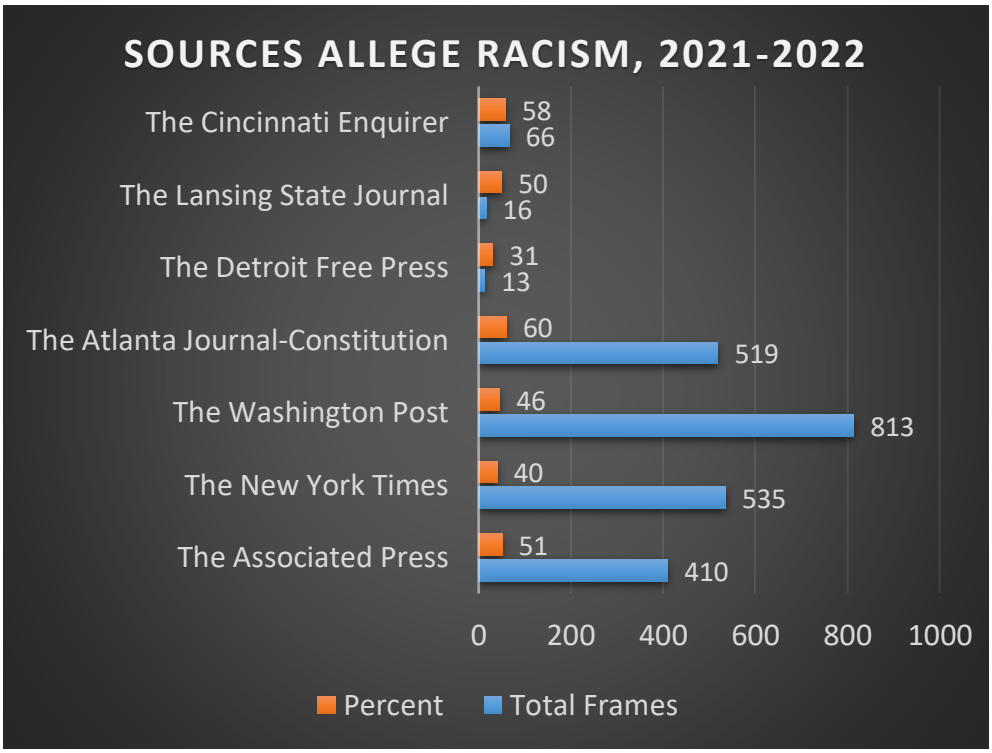


Figure 27. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Sources Allege Racism (Figure by author)

The Journalists Assert Racism frame was much less visible than the Sources Allege Racism frame within the seven news publications. The Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for 6 percent to 15 percent of total frames in a given news outlet from 2021-2022. (See Figure 28 below). For example, while the Sources Allege Racism frame composed 58 percent (38 frames) of total news frames in Georgia murder case coverage in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* from 2021-2022 (N= 66 total frames in *The Enquirer*'s coverage of the Georgia case), the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for a mere 6 percent (4 frames) of total frames in the same newspaper during this period. Similarly, the Sources Allege Racism frame accounted for 40 percent (215 frames) of total news frames in coverage of the shootings in *The New York Times* from 2021-2022 (N= 535 total frames in *The Times'* coverage of the Georgia case). However, the Journalists Assert Racism frame accounted for only 10 percent (55 frames) of total frames in *The Times* during the same period.

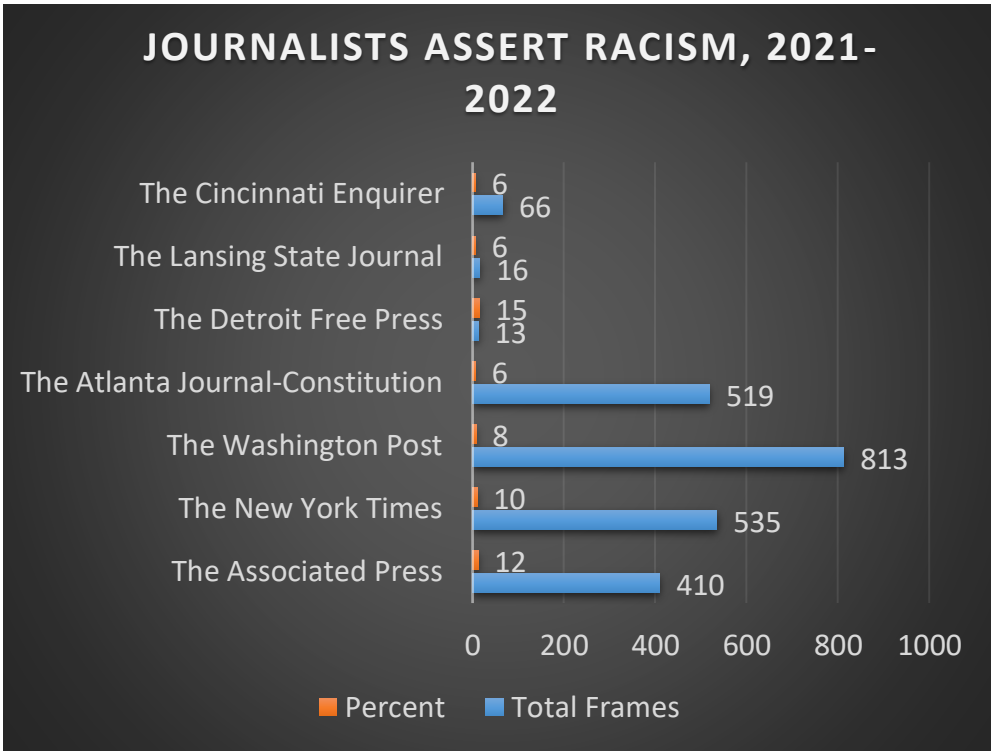


Figure 28. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Journalists Assert Racism (Figure by author)

There was particularly weak visibility of the Journalists Assert Racism frame in *The New York Times*. Because *The Times* is a leading national and progressive-leaning newspaper, I hypothesized that news reporters for this publication would take a bold stand in calling out and condemning anti-Asian violence in the U.S. as a legitimate and widespread problem. Possible explanations for framing results pertaining to *The New York Times* require further research, including interviews with *New York Times* journalists who covered this case.

The Journalists Assert Racism frame made the strongest appearance in *The Detroit Free Press.* The frame was prominent in this newspaper, accounting for 15 percent (2 frames) of total frames used in the news organization's coverage of the Georgia murders from 2021-2022 (N= 13 total frames in *Detroit Free Press* coverage of the Georgia case).

While results indicate a trend toward weak visibility of the Journalists Assert Racism frame, the persistence of this frame in each of the seven news publications is encouraging, suggesting that journalists' understanding of racism as a factor in news coverage of violence against Asians was becoming more mainstream. The frame's appearance in every news outlet demonstrates that both local and national journalists were paying attention to anti-Asian racism instead of downplaying or ignoring its existence.

Few journalists described the Georgia spa murders as unrelated to the victims' race. The visibility of the No Racism frame was very weak in each news publication. (See Figure 29). These results indicate a trend away from framing the crime as a mere

random shooting. The No Racism frame accounted for only 4 percent to 13 percent of total news frames covering the Georgia murder case in a given news outlet from 2021-2022. The visibility of the No Racism frame in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* was staggeringly low. The frame accounted for only 4 percent of total frames used in coverage of the Georgia murders in each of these news publications.[972] Conversely, the No Racism frame was prominent in *The Lansing State Journal*, yet only accounted for 13 percent (2 frames) of total news frames in this publication from 2021-2022 (N= 16 total frames in *The State Journal* coverage of the Georgia case).

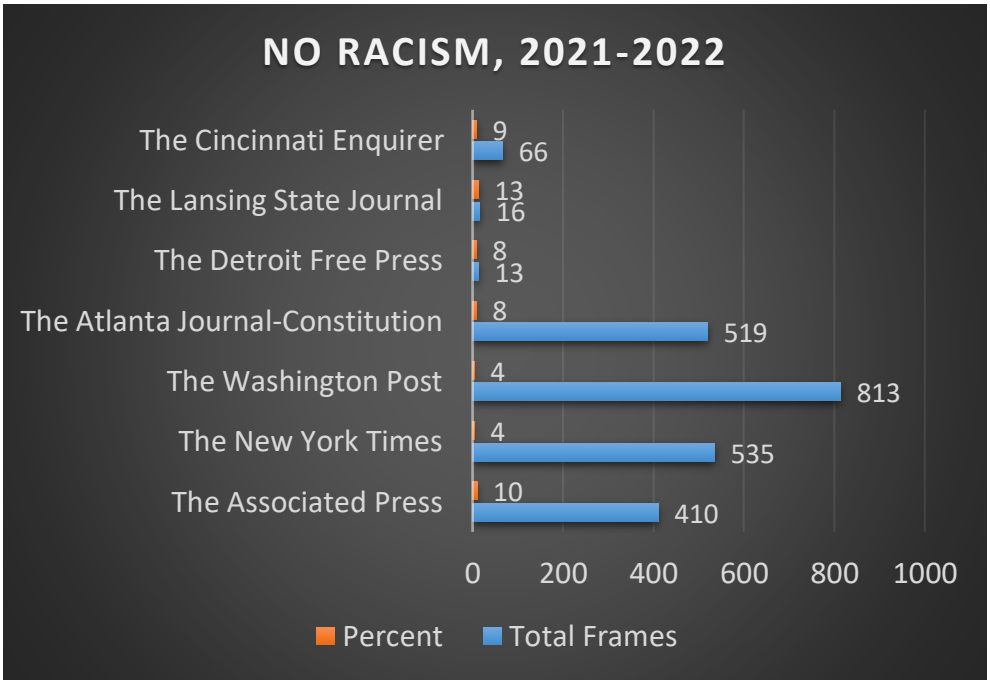


Figure 29. Shifts in Frames by Publication, No Racism (Figure by author)

[972] The No Racism frame accounted for 4 percent (23 frames) of total news frames covering the Georgia shootings in *The New York Times* from 2021-2022 (N= 535 total frames) and 4 percent (29 frames) of total frames covering the shootings in *The Washington Post* during the same period (N= 813 total frames).

The No Racism frame accounted for 10 percent (39 frames) of total news frames in *Associated Press* coverage of the Georgia case from 2021-2022 (N= 410 total frames in *Associated Press* case coverage). It is noteworthy that nearly half, or 45 percent (17 news articles), of total news articles in *The Associated Press* that covered the Georgia murders (N= 38 total AP news articles covering the murders) used both the Journalists Assert Racism frame and the No Racism frame in the same news story. This finding indicates that some news stories that quoted sources claiming that evidence did not support a racial motive also included statements from journalists who asserted that racism was the reason for the killings.

For example, on March 17, 2021, *The Associated Press* reported that the perpetrator, Robert Aaron Long, "told police that [the] attack was not racially motivated. He claimed to have a 'sex addiction,' and authorities said he apparently lashed out at what he saw as sources of temptation."[973] Later, in the same news story, the reporter asserted that since the Covid-19 pandemic, "thousands of incidents of abuse have been reported to an anti-hate group that tracks incidents against Asian Americans."[974] The reporter also noted that "The American Psychiatric Association does not recognize sex addiction in its main reference guide for mental disorders."[975] Hence, this particular news reporter seemed to question law enforcements' explanation for the violence and draw readers' attention to the rising hate crimes

[973] Kate Brumback and Angie Wang, "Man Charged with Killing 8 People at Georgia Massage Parlors," *The Associated Press,* March 17, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[974] Ibid.

[975] Ibid.

against Asians in the U.S.

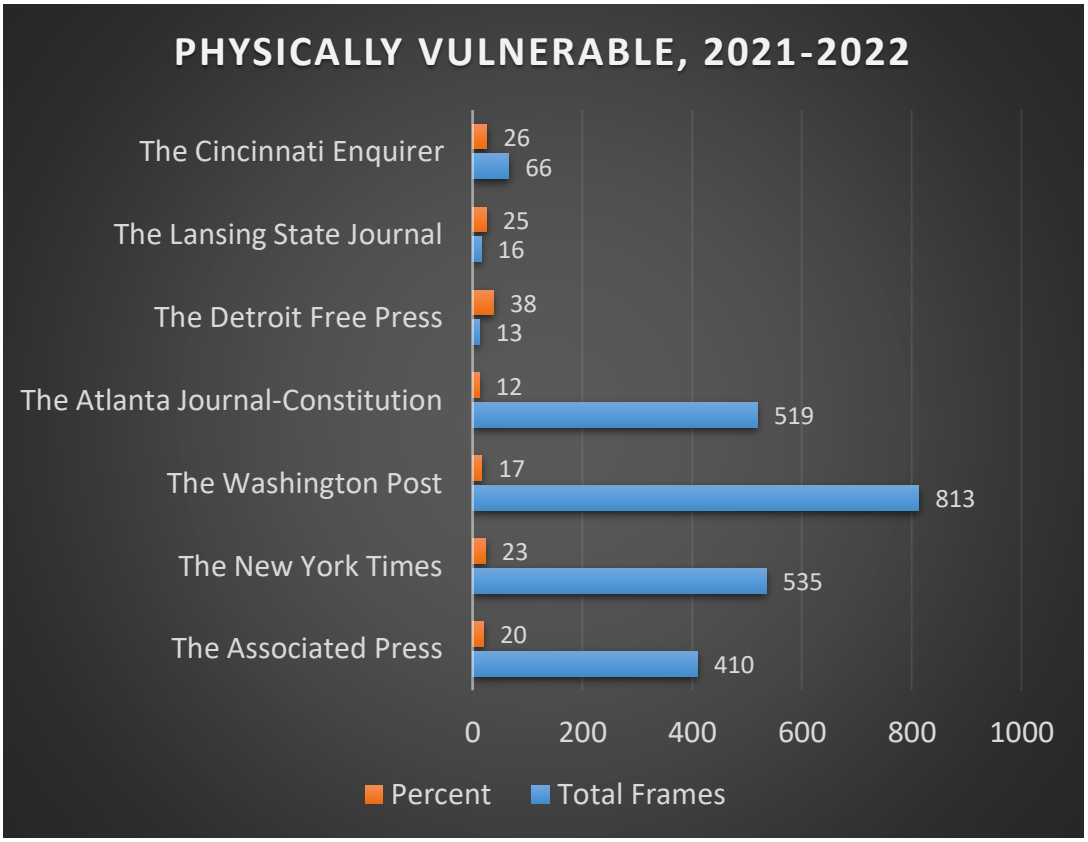


Figure 30. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Physically Vulnerable (Figure by author)

When comparing news framing of the six Asian victims in each news outlet from 2021-2022, results indicate a strong trend toward framing the victims as worthy of racial justice. In each news outlet, with the exception of *The Washington Post,*[976] the Physically Vulnerable frame was the most prominent news frame used to characterize the Asian victims. The frame accounted for 12 percent to 38 percent of total news frames in a given news publication from 2021-2022 (See Figure 30). *The Detroit Free Press* used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any of the other

[976] The Physically Vulnerable frame accounted for 17 percent (136 frames) of total news frames in coverage of the Georgia murders in *The Washington Post* from 2021-2022 (N= 813 total frames). The Good Person frame, discussed below, dominated in *The Washington Post.*

six news publications. The frame accounted for 38 percent (5 frames) of total frames used in news coverage of the Georgia shooting victims in this newspaper from 2021-2022 (N= 13 total frames in *Free Press* coverage of the murders). Unexpectedly, the visibility of the Physically Vulnerable frame was weakest in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* accounting for only 12 percent (60 frames) of total news frames used in coverage of the Asian victims in this newspaper from 2021-2022 (N= 519 total frames in *Journal-Constitution* coverage of the Georgia case). I hypothesized that the Physically Vulnerable frame would dominate in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* due to the fact that the crime took place in Atlanta, Georgia. Hence, local journalists had easy access to interviews with the victims' family and friends who frequently characterized their loved ones as having little recourse to protect themselves during the shooting.

The Good Person frame was the second most prominent frame used to characterize the Asian shooting victims within each news publication, with the exception of *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. The frame accounted for 2 percent to 19 percent of total news frames covering the Asian shooting victims in a given news publication from 2021-2022 (See Figure 31). The Good Person frame was prominent in *The Washington Post,* accounting for 19 percent (153 frames) of total frames used in news coverage of the Georgia shooting victims in this newspaper from 2021-2022 (N= 813 total frames in *Washington Post* coverage of the Georgia case). Unexpectedly, the Good Person frame accounted for only 11 percent (55 frames) of total frames used in coverage of the Asian victims in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* during this period (N=519 total frames in *Journal-Constitution* case

coverage). I predicted that a local newspaper published in the city in which the shootings occurred would frame the victims more favorably than news publications outside of Georgia, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.[977] A separate study that includes interviews with the local and national journalists covering the Georgia murder case could shed light on the reasons journalists chose particular frames.

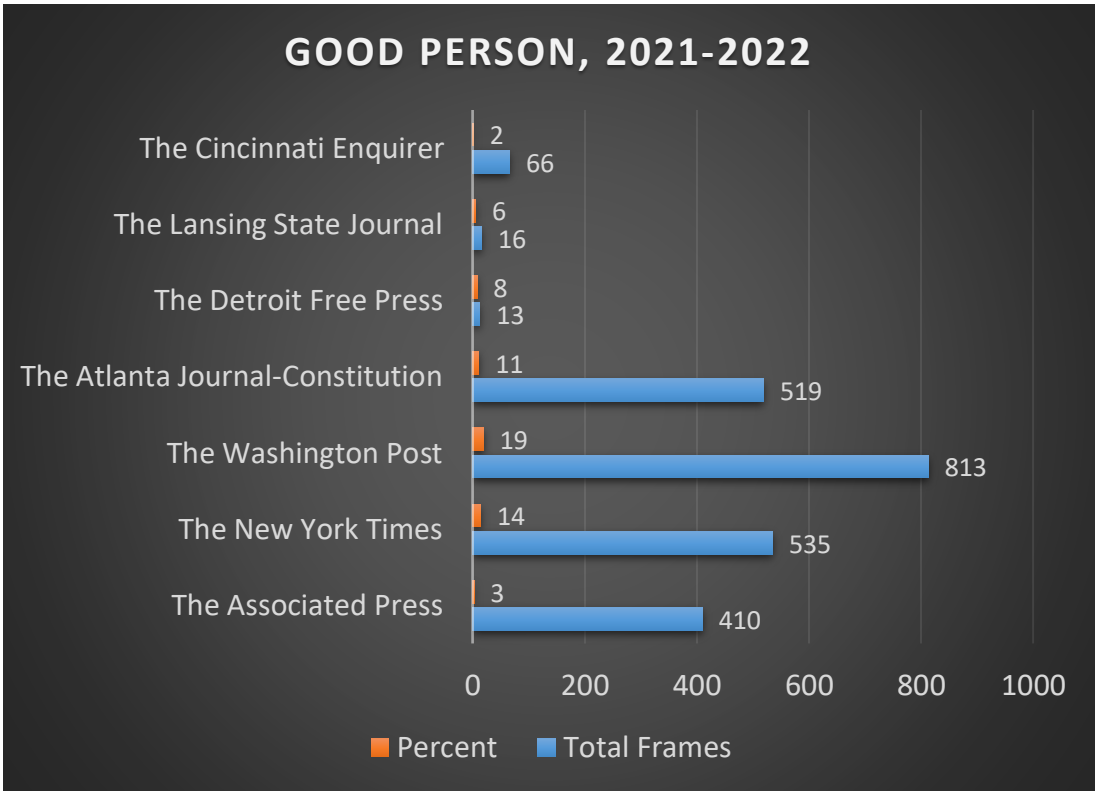


Figure 31. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Good Person (Figure by author)

Results for news framing of the Georgia spa victims demonstrate a trend away from framing the victims as *less* worthy of racial justice. The Bad Conduct frame, which emphasized the stereotype of the "Asian sex worker" due to the victims'

[977] The Good Person frame accounted for 14 percent (76 frames) of total news frames used in coverage of the Georgia shooting victims in *The New York Times* from 2021-2022 (N= 535 total frames).

employment at spas,[978] accounted for 8 percent or less of total frames used in coverage of the Georgia case in a given news outlet from 2021-2022. (See Figure 32).

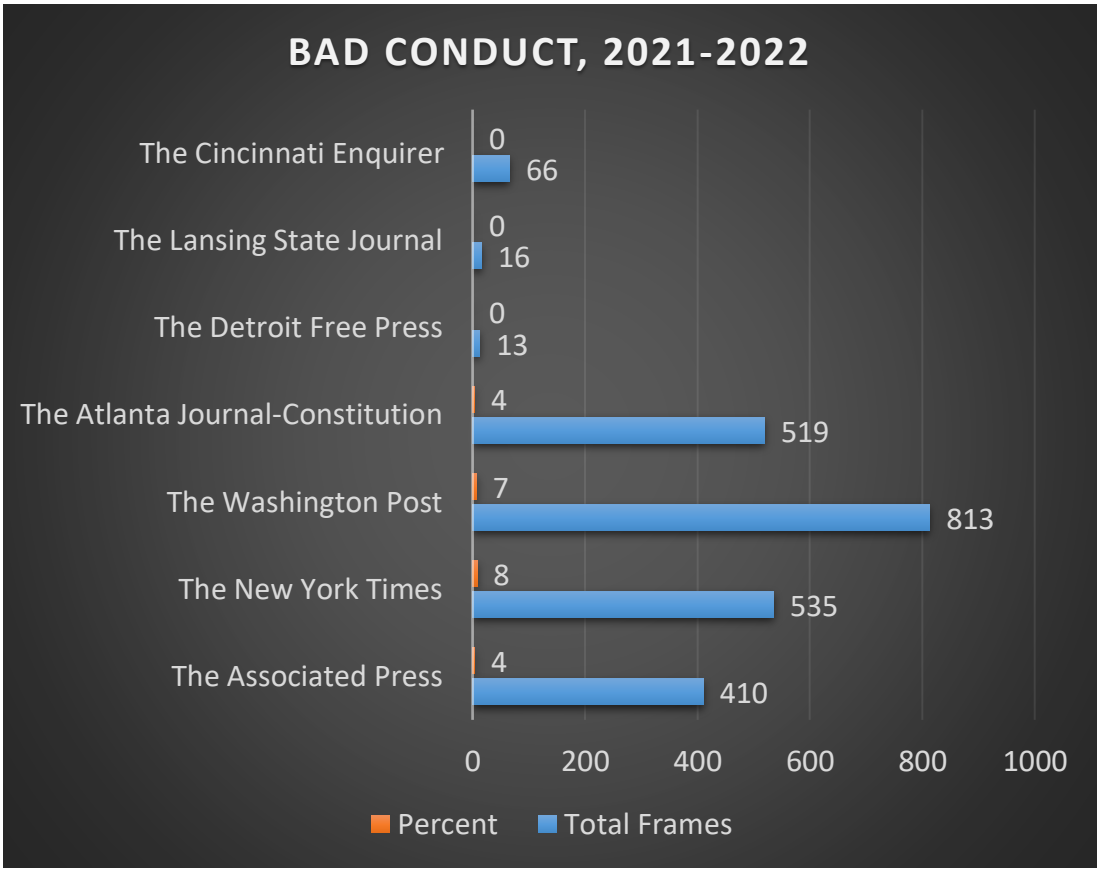


Figure 32. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Bad Conduct (Figure by author)

Results indicate a distinction in the frequency with which journalists used the Bad Conduct frame in local and national news publications. Within local news publications, the frame's visibility was either very weak or nonexistent. For example, the frame never appeared in *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Lansing State Journal*, or *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. Furthermore, the frame accounted for only 4 percent (22 frames) of total frames covering the case in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* from 2021-2022 (N= 519 total frames in *Journal-Constitution* case coverage.). These

[978] The "Asian sex worker" theme will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

results were not surprising given the fairly strong visibility of the Physically Vulnerable frame and the Good Person frame in these three publications. These frames characterized the Asian women victims as helpless and emphasized their positive characteristics as hard-working immigrants from China who were devoted to their families.

Within national news publications, visibility of the Bad Conduct frame was slightly higher. The Bad Conduct frame was most prominent in *The New York Times*, accounting for 8 percent (44 frames) of total frames covering the murder case in this newspaper from 2021-2022 (N= 535 total frames in *The Times* case coverage). It was surprising that a national, progressive-leaning newspaper such as *The Times* would use the Bad Conduct frame to emphasize the "Asian sex worker" stereotype more than any of the other six news publications. This result highlights the fact that news organizations that are politically progressive on some issues are not necessarily progressive on others. Specific reasons for this result are beyond the scope of this study and present opportunities for further research, including interviews with *Times* news reporters who covered the Georgia murder case.

Similarly, the Reckless Conduct frame never appeared in any of the seven news publications in coverage of the Georgia murders from 2021-2022. This result was expected due to news reporters' emphasis on the physical vulnerability of the six Asian victims in the moments leading up to their deaths. None of the Asian victims behaved recklessly by, for example, trying to wrest the gun from the perpetrator after he began firing. (See Figure 33).

Lastly, in news articles reporting on the Georgia murder case that revived the story of Vincent Chin's slaying, the Chin as Symbol frame accounted for less than 1 percent of total news frames covering the shootings in each of the seven news publications from 2021-2022. (See Figure 34). This result ran counter to expectations in this research. Given the growing press attention to anti-Asian racism during the Covid-19 pandemic, I expected journalists to frame Chin as a symbol of the broader problem of anti-Asian hatred. Yet, Chin's story has largely disappeared from this coverage. Hence, the extremely low visibility of the Chin as Symbol frame could indicate that the real legacy of Chin's death is not his status as a symbol or martyr but, rather, the conversations among journalists regarding how to cover violence against Asians in the U.S., discussions that the Chin case initiated. These debates continue as new cases of violent crime against Asians in America arise.

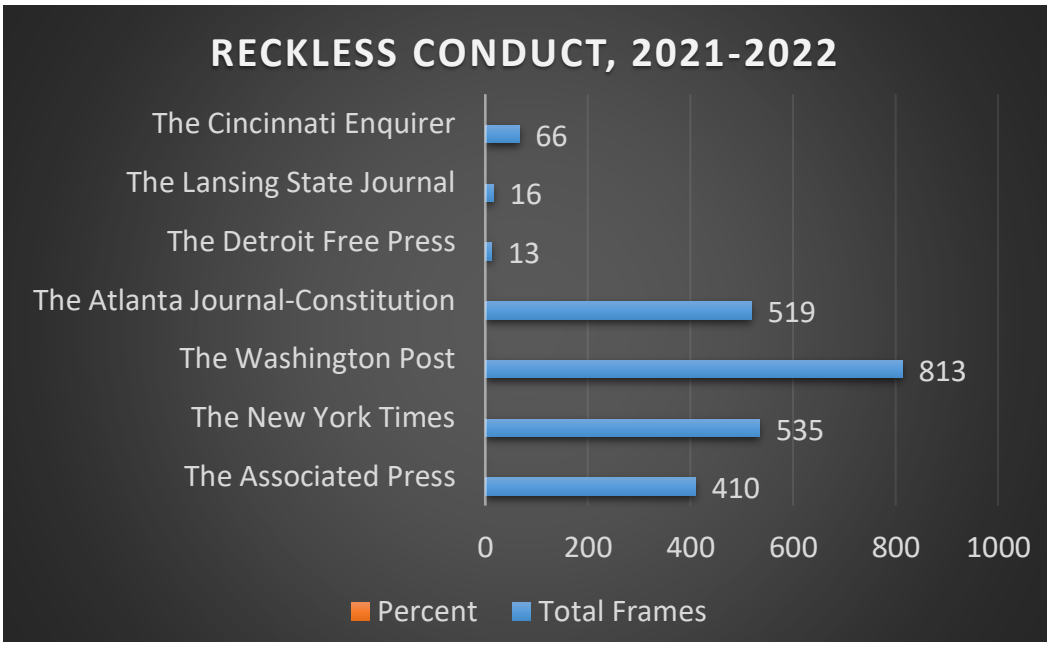


Figure 33. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Reckless Conduct (Figure by author)

Overall, an analysis of individual news outlets covering the Georgia murder case revealed the following patterns. Although the visibility of the No Racism frame remained very weak, albeit consistent, in every news publication, the persistence of journalists' assertions that race was a factor in the crime is powerful because it demonstrates the evolution in press attention to anti-Asian racism in news framing from Vincent Chin's murder to the present. To illustrate, in the decades prior to the Vincent Chin case, news reporters either downplayed or ignored anti-Asian hatred when covering violent crime cases involving Asian victims in America. During the Chin case, journalists primarily leaned on news sources to allege the possibility of a racial motive for Chin's death. In Georgia murder case coverage, not only did some journalists condemn anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive for the shootings, but, in some news stories, they directly asserted a racial motive.

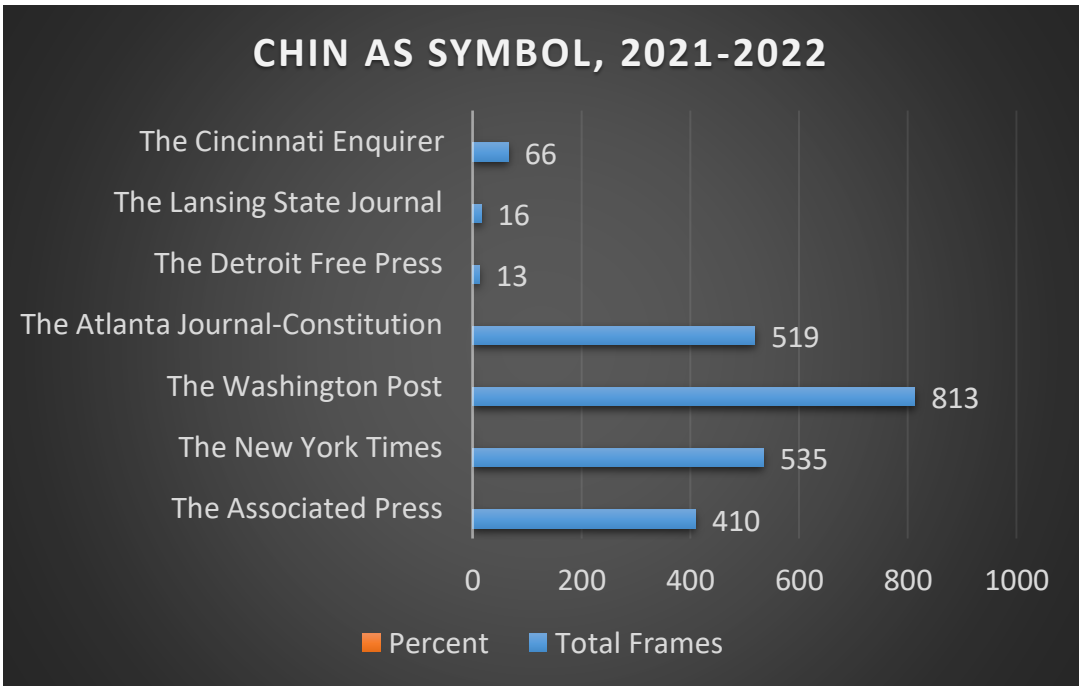


Figure 34. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Chin as Symbol (Figure by author)

In each news publication, coverage of the Asian victims as either worthy or less worthy of racial justice remained a "subplot" in the broader story of press framing of violence against Asians in the U.S. Reporters for both local and national news outlets covering the Georgia shootings primarily characterized the Asian victims as racial scapegoats, emphasizing their helplessness to the perpetrator. Yet, news frames characterizing the victims as alleged sex workers persisted alongside more favorable descriptions of the victims as good persons worthy of racial justice. The final section of this chapter examines specific themes embedded in news frames and how these themes help characterize the Asian spa shooting victims.

8.4 Themes of Georgia Murder Case News Coverage

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the results of a content analysis of news frames used in Georgia murder case coverage. Upon analyzing specific news frames, I discovered some intriguing themes that persisted within each news publication and across the timespan of the murder case from 2021-2022. This section explores the themes of the "Asian sex worker" and the "doting mother" to answer the following research question: How do these themes, embedded within specific news frames, help shape characterizations of the Asian female victims as either worthy or less worthy of racial justice?

First, I address the theme of the "Asian sex worker" that is embedded within the Bad Conduct frame. As discussed in Chapter 3, journalists used the Bad Conduct frame to characterize victims of violent crime when the victims engaged in what many regard as "deviant conduct," or "sex work," according to scholars Danielle C.

Slakoff and Pauline K. Brennen.[979] The dissertation defines sex work as prostitution, stripping, or as profiting from sexual transactions in strip clubs or spas.

The stereotype of the Asian sex worker debuted in the U.S. at the intersection of history, legislation, and popular culture. It first emerged in the nineteenth century after the U.S. Congress passed the Page Law (1875), which prohibited the importation of unfree laborers and immigrant women to America for immoral purposes.[980] The law was primarily enforced against women from China and was legislated "amidst the spread of anti-Chinese fervor" in America as part of congressional efforts to gradually legalize the prohibition of all Asian immigration.[981] According to scholar Celine Parrenas Shimizu who studies the representation of Asian and Asian American women, the stereotype of the "hypersexual Asian woman" took firm hold in America at the turn of the twentieth century as Asian women appeared in cultural productions, such as Madame Butterfly (1904).[982] The "hypersexual Asian" stereotype in cultural productions caused society to perceive Asian and Asian American women as "representations of desire for sexual pleasure and sex work," including work involving exchanges of payment for sex, according to Shimizu.[983] These cultural productions "were occurring at a time of Asian encounters

[979] Slakoff and Brennen, "The Differential Representation of Latina and Black Female Victims in Front-Page News Stories," 11.

[980] "The Page Act of 1875," Immigration History.

[981] Ibid.

[982] Celine Parrenas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham: NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 17.

[983] Ibid.

with the West and Western invasions of Asia and portrayed Asian women as sexually excessive," Shimizu claims.[984]

Findings indicate that within news articles covering the Georgia murder case, the "Asian sex worker" stereotype emerged as a theme in news reports using the Bad Conduct frame to characterize the Asian victims as less worthy of racial justice. Some of these news reports questioned whether any of the victims of the Georgia spa shootings accepted payment for sex or engaged in lewd behavior with customers. For example, on March 18, 2021, *The New York Times* reported that in 2020, an anti-trafficking organization, Street Grace, used a customer review web site called RubMaps "to identify 165 illicit massage businesses in Georgia, more than three quarters of which were in the greater Atlanta area."[985] Data gathered from RubMaps, which is used by regular customers at diverse Asian spas, indicated that "the illicit massage industry in Georgia has more than 1,000 customers a day and an estimated annual gross revenue of more than $42 million," *The Times* reported.[986] This information was obtained from a list of customer reviews on RubMaps describing the sexual services employees at specific Georgia spas provided to them and the price employees charged for each service, according to *The Times*. *The Times* report explained that two of the spas Robert Aaron Long targeted in Atlanta, Aromatherapy Spa and Gold Spa, "have dozens of [customer] comments on RubMaps" detailing

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[984] Rachel Ramirez, "The History of Fetishizing Asian Women," Vox, March 19, 2021, accessed on February 20, 2024, https://www.vox.com/22338807/asian-fetish-racism-atlanta-shooting.

[985] Frances Robles, "The Killings Targeted an Industry with a History of Concerns about Sex Trafficking," *The New York Times,* March 18, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[986] Ibid.

specific sexual services Asian employees offered to customers.[987]

Similarly, on March 21, 2022, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* used the Bad Conduct frame 21 times to characterize the Asian female victims as potential sex workers. The local newspaper described Long as a regular customer at Gold Spa and Aromatherapy Spa and reported how advertisements for both spas "featured women — particularly Asian women — in suggestive poses."[988] According to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* several customer reviews on the RubMaps web site claimed that payments in exchange for "full-on sex" between employees and customers had occurred at both Gold Spa and Aromatherapy Spa in 2020.[989] The site maintained anonymity for all employees.[990] Additionally, the news report quoted Dawn Hawkins, executive director of the National Center on Sexual Exploitation. Hawkins seemed to imply that if the Asian victims had, indeed, engaged in sex work, they were blameworthy for their deaths. Hawkins claimed in a written statement: "Violent crime is far more likely when commercial sex is involved — including brothels fronted as spas and massage businesses."[991]

Additionally, the "Asian sex worker" theme appeared in news stories in which Long described the Asian spa workers as sources of sexual temptation. For example, on March 19, 2021, *The Washington Post* used the Bad Conduct frame 22 times. *The*

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[987] Ibid.

[988] Johnny Edwards and Alan Judd, "State Has Failed to Reign in Industry that Often Exploits Asian Women," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 21, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[989] Ibid.

[990] Ibid.

[991] Ibid.

Post reported that although police had not uncovered hard evidence that any of the Asian shooting victims were, in fact, sex workers, Long informed police that he viewed the spa employees he targeted as "temptations" he needed to "eliminate."[992] This statement implied that Long "set out with the intention of attacking Asian women whom he perceived to be selling sex," according to *The Post*.[993]

Interestingly, in a separate news story published on March 18, 2021, *The Washington Post* pushed back against the "Asian sex worker" theme by quoting sources who characterized the association of Asians with hypersexuality as a harmful stereotype. For example, *The Post* quoted a CBS This Morning interview with Asian American activist and author Helen Zia. Zia questioned the legitimacy of Long's explanation of a sex addiction that motivated his crime, stating: "Hyper-sexualization of Asian American women is part of the racism towards Asian Americans. . . . To say that sexual addiction is an excuse or a reason to go on a mass killing rampage is ridiculous."[994]

Similarly, *The Associated Press* also seemed to question the accuracy of Long's statements describing the Asian female victims as objects of sexual desire. On March 18, 2021, *The Associated Press* quoted Long as informing police that the Asian women were "temptations for him that he wanted to eliminate."[995] *The*

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[992] Jessica Contrera, Tracy Jan, and Douglas MacMillan, "Atlanta Spa Killings Lead to Questions about Sex Work and Exploitation," *The Washington Post,* March 19, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[993] Ibid.

[994] Olivier Knox, "The Daily 202: Trump Gets Tied to Two Forces Targeting America: Russia, Domestic Extremism," *The Washington Post,* March 18, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[995] Lindsay Whitehurst and Michelle L. Price, "Stigmas on Race, Gender, and Sex Overlap in Atlanta Slayings," *The Associated Press,* March 18, 2021, NexisUni Database.

Associated Press then quoted New York City activist Esther Kao who called the idea that all Asian spa workers are sex workers a dangerous "assumption," claiming: "The majority of massage parlors are licensed businesses that provide professional, non-sexual massages."[996] Moreover, *The Associated Press* downplayed Long's assertions of a sex addiction, stating that such explanations carried little weight with some professionals. To illustrate, the news outlet quoted David Ley, a clinical psychologist, who claimed that sex addiction "is not a condition recognized by the American Psychiatric Association" and, in the past, has been "used as an attempt to avoid taking responsibility for abuse and assault," according to the news report.[997]

The fact that some journalists quoted Long as characterizing the Asian employees as sexual temptresses is significant. Journalists who used the Bad Conduct frame drew attention to the Asian employees—not as victims of racial injustice—but as objects of sexual desire who could be perceived as blameworthy for their fate. News stories that used the Bad Conduct frame frequently to emphasize Long's defense of his actions reduced a violent hate crime to a mere sex addiction.

Conversely, journalists who relied on sources to question the legitimacy and propriety of Long's description of the Asian spa employees as temptresses is significant. News reporters' reliance on sources, especially Asian American community members, to push back against the "sex worker" stereotype indicates that some journalists are no longer readily accepting long-held stereotypes concerning Asians as reality. Instead, they are having conversations about the accuracy of such

[996] Ibid.

[997] Ibid.

representations.

Within some news stories, journalists countered the "Asian sex worker" theme embedded in the Bad Conduct frame with the theme of the "doting mother" embedded within the Good Person frame. As discussed in the dissertation's Methods in Chapter 3, journalists used the Good Person frame to characterize victims of violent crime as "worth saving or avenging" based on a person's favorable characteristics, including her intelligence, work ethic, selflessness, and so on, according to scholar Kristen Gilchrist.[998] In addition to these characteristics, journalists who used the Good Person frame characterized the victims as displaying traditionally praise-worthy family values, including marriage and support for children and loved ones.[999]

Scholars Rachel E. Stough and Elizabeth A. Bennett define the "doting mother," or "ideal mother," as one who "mothers selflessly, intensively, and exclusively."[1000] These scholars trace the sociopolitical origin of the "ideal mother" to the rise of industrialization in mid-eighteenth-century America.[1001] Industrialization shifted work outside the home and required family members who were accustomed to helping their relatives rear their children to, instead, take on new responsibilities

[998] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims," 376, cited from Marian Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame* (Newbury Park: Sage Publishing, 1997), 375.

[999] Ibid.

[1000] Rachel E. Stough and Elizabeth A. Bennett, "Supermom's Support Group: Exploring and Resisting Normative Motherhood," in *Normative Motherhood: Regulations, Representations, and Reclamations,* ed. Andrea O'Reilly (Ontario: Demeter Press, 2023), 231.

[1001] Ibid., 231.

removed from domestic duties.[1002] This social shift created a role in which mothers became "idolized for their service" in the home and viewed as "domestic guardians" of the wellbeing of their children, Stough and Bennett explain.[1003] Part of this new ideology demanded an intense focus from women on self-sacrifice.[1004] Generically speaking, some scholars have construed the new demands placed on women to mother intensively as a source of suffering for many mothers, increasing stress and fatigue and decreasing women's "sense of wellbeing," according to Stough and Bennett.[1005]

However, scholar Min Jiao explores how women in China view the notion of the "doting mother" as a source of female empowerment as opposed to suffering. In her examination of the intersection of gender and race in mothering, Jiao cites scholar Adrienne Rich who differentiates between motherhood as an institution and mothering as an experience.[1006] While the institution of motherhood "aims at ensuring that . . . all women shall remain under male control," creating unwanted stress for mothers expected to run a household, the experience of mothering centers on women's "powers of reproduction" and strong relationship with their children,

[1002] Ibid., 232-233.

[1003] Ibid., 233.

[1004] Ibid.

[1005] Ibid., 231.

[1006] Min Jiao, "Mothering and Motherhood: Experience, Ideology, and Agency," *Comparative Literature Studies* 56, no. 3 (2019): 541.

according to Rich.[1007] While the experience of mothering demands hard work and sacrifice, the child's prosperity and the maternal bond are a source of joy and comfort.

Jiao draws on Rich's explanation of mothering as an experience to explore author Yan Mo's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips,* which idealizes the notion of "the doting mother." Traditionally, big breasts and wide hips are Chinese cultural symbols of "female procreation and maternal power" that Mo uses to glorify mothering and maternal sacrifice, according to Jiao.[1008] Jiao explains that Mo understands maternal sacrifice as "endurance," "love," and "resourcefulness."[1009] Hence, the mother in Mo's novel is caring, giving, hardworking, and "cherishes" her children's success, Jiao explains.[1010] For Mo, these universal maternal virtues empower women and portray them as good persons.[1011]

The universal maternal virtues of hard work, love, endurance, and sacrifice embodied by the "doting mother" surface frequently in news coverage of the Asian female victims in the Georgia murder case. Findings indicate that within some news articles covering the case, journalists emphasized the maternal virtues of "the doting mother" to push back against the stereotype of "the Asian sex worker." Some of these news articles examined the socioeconomic hardships that led a few of the Asian

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[1007] Jiao, "Mothering and Motherhood," cited in Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 13.

[1008] Ibid., 543.

[1009] Ibid., 544.

[1010] Ibid.

[1011] Ibid.

victims to become employed by the Georgia spas as a means of providing for their children. For example, on March 24, 2021, *The New York Times* reported concerning the income disparities among Asian ethnic groups in America and how the "affluence of some Asian Americans" instigated a false narrative that "hid the trials of their own blue-collar communities."[1012] The article described some of the Asian victims as working-class immigrants. Suncha Kim, an immigrant from South Korea who was killed during the spa shootings, had worked "odd jobs" to "pick up extra cash" before accepting employment at Gold Spa to support her two young children, according to *The Times* report.[1013] A second shooting victim, Soon Chung Park, had arrived in the U.S. as "a widow with five children," *The Times* stated.[1014] According to the news report, Park worked 12-hour shifts at Gold Spa to support her family.[1015]

Additionally, *The New York Times* used the "doting mother" theme to humanize the victims. By drawing attention to the Asian victims' employment at the spas as a means of financial survival, *The Times* undercut the victims' status as alleged sex objects. To illustrate, the same *Times* news report mentioned above told the story of 51-year-old Hyun Jung Grant, a victim who was a single mother who worked long hours "to help pay her children's college tuition," according to *The Times.*[1016] The news story described Ms. Grant favorably as a former teacher in South

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[1012] Corina Knoll, Michael Forsythe, Frances Robles, and Linda Qiu, "Two Immigrant Paths: One Led to Wealth, the Other Ended in Death in Atlanta," *The New York Times,* March 24, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[1013] Ibid.

[1014] Ibid.

[1015] Ibid.

[1016] Ibid.

Korea before she arrived in America where she lived in a "modest rental townhouse, one step closer to becoming the homeowner that Ms. Grant had envisioned," *The Times* reported.[1017]

This particular news story drew attention to Hyun Jung Grant's shame over having to work at a spa due to the negative stigma associated with such employment. The article quoted Grant's son, Randy Park, who told *The Times* that his mother "preferred to tell people she had a job at a makeup counter."[1018] Grant frequently told her son that "she hoped to one day do something else," something that would allow her to "pursue much of her passions," Park told *The Times.*[1019] *The New York Times* story used the Good Person frame 13 times to characterize the Asian victims as "doting mothers" but used the Bad Conduct frame only two times.

Other news publications also used the "doting mother" theme to highlight maternal virtues including resourcefulness and family loyalty to humanize the Asian spa shooting victims. On March 20, 2021, *The Washington Post* interviewed several of the victims' loved ones who said they will be remembered "most of all" for "their devotion to family."[1020] *The Post* described one victim as a "former elementary school teacher" and another as "a former dancer" in China.[1021] Yet, after arriving in

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[1017] Ibid.

[1018] Ibid.

[1019] Ibid.

[1020] Ariana Eunjung Cha, Derek Hawkins, Tim Craig, and Mer Kornfield, "Atlanta Spa Shooting Victims Highlight Struggles for Asian and Asian American Immigrant Women in Low-wage Jobs," *The Washington Post,* March 21, 2021, NexisUni Database.

[1021] Ibid.

America as single mothers, their limited ability to speak English made securing a job to support their families challenging. *The Post* emphasized the "precarious financial situation" of the victims.[1022] To illustrate, for Suncha Kim, life meant "self-sacrifice and taking care of others" often by "piecing together two to three jobs at a time to survive," according to *The Post.*[1023] "She always put her children first. Every conversation started with her asking, 'Are you okay?' And the children would say, 'Yes, we are good,' and she would respond: 'If you are good and happy, I am happy,' " a relative of Kim's told *The Post.*[1024] This particular *Washington Post* article used the Good Person frame 33 times to frame the Asian shooting victims as "doting mothers" but never used the Bad Conduct frame.

Additionally, local news coverage focused attention on the Asian victims as "doting mothers" rather than as "sex workers," emphasizing maternal virtues of hard work and self-sacrifice to humanize the victims. On March 20, 2021, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* interviewed the son of Yong Yue, Robert Peterson. Peterson told *The Journal-Constitution* that Yue was a licensed spa therapist who had been laid off during the pandemic. He described her as a "a kind and deeply caring woman" who, when she wasn't working long hours, "could be found taking someone flowers, food, gifts, or that little extra cash they needed to make rent," Peterson told the newspaper.[1025]

[1022] Ibid.

[1023] Ibid.

[1024] Ibid.

[1025] Shaddi Abusaid, "Families Struggle with Tragedy," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* March 20, 2021, NexisUni Database.

In humanizing the Asian victims, this particular news story characterized the Asian women as deserving of justice. “My mother didn’t do anything wrong,” Peterson told *The Journal-Constitution*. “And she deserves the recognition that she is a human, she’s a community person like everyone else. . . . None of those people deserved what happened to them,” Peterson told the local newspaper.[1026] This particular news story used the Good Person frame 10 times but never used the Bad Conduct frame to describe the victims.

Journalists’ decision to draw on the “doting mother” theme to highlight the working-class struggles and sacrifices some of the Asian spa shooting victims endured to support their children is important. Emphasizing the poor socio-economic conditions of the Asian victims added another layer of contextualization that drew attention to the victims as members of a marginalized racial community who were attempting to find their footing in a new country. This context helped frame the victims as sympathetic and as worthy of racial justice. While arguably the context replaces one stereotype (the hyper-sexual Asian woman) with another (the good Asian mother), it is, at the least, an attempt to uncover the victims’ humanity using a positive valuation of their lives.

8.5 Conclusion

Content analysis results of the Georgia murder case revealed the following key points. As in coverage of the Vincent Chin murder case, the Sources Allege Racism

[1026] Ibid.

frame dominated over time in news reports discussing the criminal motive for the Georgia shootings. Additionally, whereas news reporters covering the Chin case slowly acknowledged racism as a criminal motive over time, journalists reporting on the Georgia case were quick to assert that racism had motivated the shootings. Even so, journalists continued to rely on sources to buttress their assertions of racism in the Georgia case. This was especially the case in news stories quoting local law enforcement who highlighted a lack of hard evidence of anti-Asian hatred motivating the Georgia shootings.

While Vincent Chin largely disappeared from news coverage of the Georgia shootings, his legacy survives. Questions surrounding news framing of Chin and his slaying during the period of his murder case from 1982-1987 helped spark current-day newsroom conversations regarding how and to what extent reporters should highlight anti-Asian racism as a motive when covering specific cases of violent crime involving Asian victims.

The themes of the "Asian sex worker" and "doting mother" in news framing of the Georgia spa shootings added an interesting layer of contextualization to the content analysis. These themes reveal the complexities in covering a crime that falls at the junction of race, gender, and sexuality and the challenge for journalists of isolating the role of race from these other factors. While news reporters initially focused on the Asian victims as alleged "sex workers" due to historic stereotypes of Asian women as sex objects and prostitutes, results indicate that some journalists gradually began pushing back against such stereotypes. These news reporters sought to humanize the Asian victims by spotlighting the socioeconomic reasons they took

positions as spa workers, foremost among these reasons, to provide for their children. By exploring the reasons for the Asian women's choice of employment and humanizing the female victims, news coverage of the Georgia case offered a deeper layer of context that was noticeably lacking from coverage of Vincent Chin. The final chapter of the dissertation expounds upon these and other conclusions from the content analysis of news frames of the two murder cases. The chapter includes a thorough, qualitative reflection of the coverage of four Asian murder victims in the U.S. during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

Chapter 9 presents an overview of the findings of the content analyses of news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-2022 and the March 2021 Georgia murder of six Asian victims from March 16, 2021-December 31, 2022. Additionally, the chapter discusses the significance of the Chin case to framing of four murder cases that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S. Whereas journalists overwhelmingly relied on sources to allege that racism motivated Chin's slaying, over time, news reporters played a more sizeable role in directly asserting the reality of anti-Asian racism and its legitimacy as a criminal motive for Chin's death.

Trends in framing of the Vincent Chin case resurfaced in framing of the Georgia spa shootings as journalists, once again, relied predominantly on sources to condemn anti-Asian racism as the motive for the murders. Yet, whereas the Journalists Assert Racism frame became more prominent over time in coverage of the Chin case, the frame's visibility remained steady across time in coverage of the Georgia shootings. Unexpectedly, the Journalists Assert Racism frame never dominated in coverage of the Georgia case, and the No Racism frame, while used sparingly, never disappeared. Regarding framing of the Asian victims, in both murder cases, journalists predominantly framed them as physically vulnerable and worthy of racial justice. In the Atlanta murders, the theme of the "doting Asian mother" played some role in humanizing the Asian victims as good persons, countering the negative stereotype of the "Asian sex worker." A qualitative reflection on news framing of

four murder cases involving Asian victims of pandemic-era violence in the U.S. demonstrates how contemporary journalists placed anti-Asian racism front and center in news stories. News reporters' routine attention to such racism in news coverage of violence against Asians is a legacy of the Chin murder case. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the contribution of my study to journalism scholarship.

9.2 The Vincent Chin Murder Case

Overall results for the content analysis of news framing of the Vincent Chin murder case from 1982-2022 indicate that framing of the criminal motive for his murder supported the racial injustice narrative. The Sources Allege Racism frame predominated in coverage of the case, demonstrating a steady upward trend in visibility from 1982-2022. The visibility of the Journalists' Assert Racism frame in news stories also increased, trending strongly upward across time. Yet, unexpectedly, the Journalists Assert Racism frame never dominated in news coverage of Chin's murder—not even in news articles retelling Chin's story during the surge in pandemic-era violence against Asians and the protests denouncing anti-Asian racism. While the No Racism frame exhibited a consistent downward trend in visibility across time, it never disappeared.

News framing of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime also supported the racial injustice narrative. While journalists used the Physically Vulnerable frame more than any other frame to represent Chin as deserving of racial justice from 1982-2022, the Good Person, Reckless Conduct, and Bad Conduct frames played a much smaller role in portrayals of Chin. Overall, journalists paid greater attention to the criminal motive for Chin's murder than to Chin's personal attributes and conduct in

the moments leading up to the crime.

Content analysis results analyzing news framing by publication uncovered intriguing trends in portrayals of Vincent Chin's murder and his victimhood from 1982-2022. Regarding news framing of Chin's murder, in each news outlet, journalists trended toward relying on sources to allege a racial motive for Chin's slaying. Additionally, the visibility of the Journalists Assert Racism frame trended upward but remained lower than expected. Results contradicted expectations that progressive, national newspapers, such as *The New York Times,* would sound the alarm over anti-Asian racism more frequently than local newspapers. Instead, *Times* news reporters rarely asserted anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive. This result highlights the fact that news organizations that are politically progressive on some issues are not necessarily progressive on others. All news publications portrayed Chin as a victim who was worthy of justice, emphasizing his physical vulnerability to his attackers over his positive traits and reckless behavior in the moments leading up to the crime. Lastly, overall visibility for the Chin as Symbol frame was far lower than predicted. This finding indicates that the legacy of the Chin case was not that he became a news symbol of the widespread problem of anti-Asian violence in the U.S. but that his slaying helped introduce anti-Asian racism as a news frame in coverage of violence against Asians in the U.S., placing racism front and center in coverage of anti-Asian violence.

Hence, results indicate that, over time, the Vincent Chin case played a role in instigating journalists' awareness and curiosity concerning Asian Americans' evolving place in U.S. society as a racial group. By the end of 2022, journalists were

paying special attention to Asian Americans—not as model minorities—but as targets of racial hatred.

9.3 The Georgia Spa Shootings

A content analysis of news framing of more contemporary cases of violent crime against Asian Americans, including the 2021 shooting of six Asian women at three spas in Georgia's Fulton and Cherokee Counties, reveals the extent to which journalists applied the lessons from framing of the Vincent Chin murder case to framing of other, more recent murder cases. As discussed in the historical background in Chapter 3, covering the Chin murder case taught news reporters the following lessons. First, journalists learned to consider the potential for a racial motive in cases of violent crime against Asian Americans. Second, news reporters learned to be cognizant of the fact that violence against Asians is a persistent, widespread problem in the United States. Lastly, journalists learned to pay attention to pan-Asian advocacy group protests who played a role in steering journalists' attention toward anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive in Chin's death.

While results for news framing of the Georgia murder case reveal some similarities with framing of the Vincent Chin case, findings also indicate important variation between the two cases. In framing of both cases, journalists predominantly relied on sources to assert that the murders were racially motivated. Yet, the extent to which journalists themselves condemned the murders as racist varied between the two cases. News reporters covering the Chin case rarely asserted that anti-Asian hatred motivated his slaying in the initial months following his murder but increasingly

made such assertions in the years and decades following his death. Conversely, some journalists reporting on the Georgia case were quick to highlight the role of anti-Asian racism in the shootings in the days following the crime. Sometimes, journalists covering the Georgia shootings used the No Racism frame and the Journalists Assert Racism frame in the same news story. In such news stories, reporters quoted local police who claimed no evidence of a motive existed for the shootings. Later, in the same news story, journalists asserted that the murders were part of a broader problem of anti-Asian violence during the pandemic. Journalists crafted news stories using both frames during the Chin case much less frequently.[1027]

In coverage of the Georgia spa shootings, journalists' decision to use both the No Racism frame and the Journalists Assert Racism frame in the same news story reveals key points regarding the nature of journalism. For example, journalism mirrors current events; hence, journalists are obligated to report their sources' claims, including claims from local police denying evidence of a racial motive. However, in addition to reporting their sources' claims, journalists are also obligated to report on cases of violent crime in a manner that fits the crime narrative. Quoting sources who claim that Robert Aaron Long murdered six Asian women because he viewed them as sexual temptresses doesn't fit the crime narrative. Media audiences usually prefer more concrete explanations for homicide, such as racism. In a society where anti-Asian racism is now culturally resonant, news audiences readily accept such hatred as legitimate—and newsworthy—rational for violent crime targeting Asian ethnic

[1027] Only 3 percent of total news articles covering the Vincent Chin case from 1982-2022 used both the Journalists Assert Racism frame and the No Racism frame. Twenty-four percent of total news stories covering the Georgia murder case from 2021-2022 used both frames.

groups.

The nature of journalism also helps explain why news reporters used the No Racism frame in coverage of the Georgia case despite the ongoing protests against anti-Asian racism during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S. The manner in which the case unfolded was chaotic. The shootings of six Asian women, a Caucasian woman, and a Caucasian man at three different spas happened in quick succession, each incident separated by less than an hour. Local journalists were likely under pressure to fill a news hole and meet their deadlines. Consequently, and similar to Vincent Chin case coverage, news reporters quickly threaded into their stories initial reactions from city police who claimed that no evidence of anti-Asian hatred as a criminal motive existed. In the initial hours following the crime, reporters likely had little time to debate how—or whether—racism was a factor in the shootings.

Additionally, newsroom dynamics likely played a role in reporter's use of the No Racism frame, helping to determine which aspects of the case were covered as well as those that were not. For example, while a 2022 study of television stations in the top twenty designated market areas (DMAs) by the Asian American Journalist Association (AAJA) revealed that Phoenix, Denver, Miami, and Cleveland had newsroom staffs in which Asian Americans proportionately represented the AAPI population in their communities,[1028] newsrooms that lack Asian American representation would be much less likely to highlight racism as a criminal motive in

[1028] Daniella Ignacio, "AAJA Broadcast Snapshot Finds Underrepresentation of AAPIs in Local TV News in Top 20 Media Markets," Asian American Journalists Association, May 4, 2022, https://www.aaja.org/2022/05/04/aaja-broadcast-snapshot-finds-underrepresentation-of-aapis-in-local-tv-news-in-top-20-media-markets/.

coverage of the Georgia spa shootings. These circumstances very likely played some role in news reporters' use of the No Racism frame in coverage of the crime.

Striking similarities in news framing of the Asian victims existed between the Vincent Chin case and the Georgia murder case. The Physically Vulnerable frame was prominent over all other frames used to characterize the Asian victims in coverage of both cases. The Good Person, Bad Conduct, and Reckless Conduct frames were much less visible in news coverage. The low visibility of these frames in coverage of both Vincent Chin and the Georgia victims suggests that journalists placed greater importance on Asian Americans' place in society as racial scapegoats while paying less attention to Asians as individual victims of violent crime.

The expansion of the content analysis of eight news frames to include an exploration of particular themes embedded within specific frames offered a more extensive understanding of how journalists characterized the six Asian shooting victims. The themes of the "Asian sex worker" (Bad Conduct frame) and "doting Asian mother" (Good Person frame) reveal the journalistic challenge of covering crimes that fall at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. While historic stereotypes of Asian women as prostitutes initially drove news framing of the shooting victims, some journalists challenged these stereotypes by framing the victims as hardworking, blue-collar parents struggling to provide for their children. Humanizing the victims in this way unearthed nuances in news coverage of the Asian victims that were noticeably lacking in coverage of Vincent Chin as a victim of violent crime.

9.4 Four Cases of Anti-Asian Violence: A Brief Overview of News Framing

To further explore how the Vincent Chin case played a role in news framing of more contemporary cases of violence against Asians in the U.S., Section 9.4 examines four additional murder cases involving violence targeting Asian Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic. The murders took place between January 1, 2021, and February 28, 2022. I provide a qualitative overview of these cases because, unlike news coverage of the Georgia murder case, far less local and national coverage of each of these four cases existed. I chose these cases because they illustrate the following two points concerning contemporary journalism framing of violence toward Asians in the U.S. First, some journalists do not initially assert that anti-Asian racism motivated a violent crime in the absence of direct evidence to support a racial motive. When evidence is absent, journalists rely to a greater extent on sources to allege racism as a criminal motive. Furthermore, in particular cases where evidence of a racial motive is lacking, news reporters may use other frames, such as a mental health frame, which may ultimately dominate in coverage of that particular case.

Second, the four murder cases illustrate that an incident of anti-Asian violence must meet specific criteria in order for news reporters to frame the Asian victim as a symbol of a broader problem of anti-Asian violence. One criterion, discussed above, is explicit evidence of a racial motive, such as a racist statement from the perpetrator, as seen in the Vincent Chin case. In other words, not every Asian victim of violent crime will have his or her story revived and retold in news coverage of more recent cases of anti-Asian violence, as was the case with Vincent Chin.

In each of the following four cases of violent crime against Asians, journalists framed each case as motivated by anti-Asian racism. In so doing, news reporters either relied on sources to allege that racism was a criminal motive, or journalists directly asserted that racism initiated the crime. How journalists chose to frame anti-Asian racism in each case provides intriguing reference points for reflection about the legacy of the Vincent Chin case. Although present-day journalists frequently assert that racism is the criminal motive in coverage of violent crimes against Asians in America, the Journalists Assert Racism frame does not always dominate in news coverage of such crimes, and, sometimes, it is never used. Nonetheless, as news framing of the four cases suggests, the Chin case played a role in creating the anti-Asian racism frame journalists use in coverage of violent crimes against Asians today. I explore each of the four murder cases and their coverage below.

— *The attack against Chinese immigrant Yo Pan Ma, 61, on April 23, 2021*

While collecting bottles and cans on a street corner of East Harlem in New York City at around 8:30 p.m., Ma was suddenly struck from behind, knocked down, and repeatedly kicked in the head by Jarrod Powell, 51, a homeless ex-convict. Ma suffered a traumatic brain injury, fell into a coma, and died in the hospital eight months later on December 31, 2021. Powell pleaded guilty and acknowledged he had assaulted Ma because Ma was Asian. After viewing a videotape of the incident, a New York district attorney charged Powell with second-degree murder and a hate crime. Powell was sentenced to 22 years in prison. Ma's death sparked national unrest amid a rise of hate crimes against Asians in New York City.

The New York Times, The Associated Press, and *The Washington Post* covered the attack as part of a wave of anti-Asian hate crimes sweeping across New York and the nation. Journalists themselves condemned the attack as racially motivated in headlines and in news text. News reporters also quoted sources, including district attorneys and Asian American advocacy group leaders, who condemned the violence. Several journalists framed Ma sympathetically as a victim who was worthy of racial justice. News reporters emphasized Ma's strong work ethic as a chef and his devotion to his wife who worked as a home care attendant. Both lost their jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic. Karlin Chan, a community activist in New York City, spoke sympathetically of Ma as a victim of violent crime. Chan told *The Associated Press* in a news report published on January 8, 2022, that Ma and his wife were "recent immigrants" who "really didn't have any savings" and who "collected returnable bottles and cans to generate extra money for food."[1029]

— The murder of a Chinese American woman, Michelle Go, 40, on January 15, 2022

Go was pushed under a train at the Times Square subway station by Martial Simon, 61, an unemployed, mentally troubled homeless man and a Haitian immigrant. The police charged Simon with second-degree murder but did not charge him with a hate crime, stating that they could find no evidence of racial animus. Instead, police told reporters that Go was a victim of a subway crime wave that cut across races and

[1029] Susan Haigh, "Chinese Immigrant Attacked in New York City Dies Months Later," *The Associated Press*, January 8, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/crime-new-york-new-york-city-homicide-hate-crimes-f159287b034a312e060a613aa5644ba7.

ethnicities. (A homeless assailant pushed a Caucasian woman into the path of a subway train shortly after Go was murdered.)

Several news articles in *The New York Times, The Associated Press,* and *The Washington Post* covered Michelle Go's murder using competing news frames. For example, several news reporters led with evidence of Simon's mental instability without mentioning a racial motive. However, later, in the same news story, reporters compared Go's murder to the murder of Yao Pan Ma, describing Ma's murder as a proven case of racial hatred. In news reports that used competing frames, reporters rarely asserted directly that Go's murder was the result of anti-Asian hatred, instead, relying on sources to frame Go's slaying as racially motivated. In such news stories, journalists emphasized Go's admirable characteristics, including her kindness, intelligence, devotion to family and friends, and her volunteer work counseling homeless families regarding how to succeed in job interviews. These news stories framed Go as a woman who deserved racial justice.

Other news articles in the same three news outlets never mentioned a racial motive for the crime. Such news stories buried the hate crime frame, emphasizing, instead, that Simon had allegedly exhibited symptoms of schizophrenia for years and was a victim of a broken system. For example, a 3,000-word report published in *The New York Times* on February 5, 2022 discussed Simon's long history of mental illness and never once mentioned race. Instead, the report framed Go as yet another victim of subway crime caused by "deinstitutionalization" and a rise in homelessness in the

city.[1030]

While this dissertation analyzes data from newspapers, it is important to acknowledge some of the assumptions other types of media, particularly social media, made when reporting on violent crimes targeting Asians in the U.S. during the Covid-19 pandemic. When framing violence against Asians during the pandemic, including Michelle Go's murder, some social media journalists and bloggers rushed to frame the violence as race related. [1031] Journalists framed violence against Asians as racial violence even when no hard evidence of racism, such as a racist statement from the perpetrator, existed, as was the case in Go's slaying. The result of the overemphasis on race framing, scholar Janelle Wong notes, was "heightened fears among Asian Americans, such that many are afraid to venture out in public" and "are buying guns for self-protection."[1032]

In actuality, anti-Asian hate incidents during the pandemic "increased but from a relatively low baseline," Wong finds.[1033] For example, while official police statistics show an increase in anti-Asian hate crimes, "in New York City—which is characterized by the most dramatic year-over-year increases . . . anti-Asian hate crimes accounted for only 11% of all reported hate crimes in 2020. That's less than

[1030] Andy Newman, Nate Schweber and Chelsia Rose Marcius, "Decades Adrift in a Broken System, then Charged in a Death on the Tracks," *The New York Times,* February 5, 2022, NexisUni Database.

[1031] Janelle Wong, "What the Media Gets Wrong about Anti-Asian Hate," Medium, Accessed May 13, 2024, https://stopasianhate.medium.com/what-the-media-gets-wrong-about-anti-asian-hate-369656a98684.

[1032] Ibid.

[1033] Ibid.

the 14% that Asian Americans make up of the population," according to Wong.[1034] Future research could apply quantitative content analysis to a study of news frames used in social media coverage of violence against Asian Americans during the pandemic.

—The murder of a Chinese American woman, Christina Yuna Lee, 35, on February 13, 2022

At approximately 4:20 a.m., Lee was stalked up six flights of stairs, followed into her Chinatown apartment unit in New York City, and stabbed more than forty times in the neck and torso. Neighbors called the police after hearing Lee's cries for help. Police found her naked from the waist up and lying on her bathroom floor. A Manhattan district attorney indicted 25-year-old Assamad Nash on charges of murder, burglary, and sexually motivated felony. The district attorney did not charge the killer—an unemployed, homeless, and mentally troubled man—with a hate crime.

Similar to coverage of Michelle Go's murder, some news stories in *The New York Times, The Associated Press,* and *The Washington Post* used competing frames to discuss Christina Yuna Lee's slaying. For example, some news articles led with quotes from the district attorney who stated that Lee's murder was not inspired by racial hatred. These news articles focused on the killer's mental instability, in particular, the fact that Nash was found unfit for trial following a psychiatric examination. Yet, later in the same article, journalists compared Lee's stabbing with the racial murders of Michelle Go and Yao Pan Ma. For example, on February 13,

[1034] Ibid.

2022, *The New York Times* described Lee as one of many victims "injured or killed in a string of random attacks in New York City, many of them committed by people who had severe mental illness."[1035] News reporters presented these victims using a mental health frame, never mentioning race as a criminal motive. Yet, the same news article compared Lee's slaying with the murder of Yao Pan Ma, characterizing him as the victim of a hate crime. Some such news stories framed Lee as helpless to her attacker, emphasizing how Nash pursued Lee into her apartment and muffled her screams as he stabbed her. Several of these news reports focused on Lee's positive characteristics, including her kindness and her closeness to family and friends.

— The murder of 84-year-old Thai American Vicha Ratanapakdee on January 28, 2021

During Ratanapakdee's early morning walk along the streets of his neighborhood in San Francisco, a 19-year-old African American man, Antoine Watson, violently shoved Ratanapakdee to the ground. He hit his head on the pavement and was hospitalized. Two days later, he died of a brain hemorrhage. A video camera captured the assault from across the street. After viewing the tape, the district attorney charged Watson with murder but claimed the video showed no evidence of a racial motive. Asian Americans in the Bay Area, led by Ratanapakdee's family, immediately organized protests, vigils, and rallies in support of justice for Ratanapakdee and stopping anti-Asian hate.

[1035] Precious Fondren and Ashley Southal, "Woman Followed and Fatally Stabbed in Her Chinatown Apartment," *The New York Times*, February 13, 2022, NexisUni Database.

In news coverage of this case, several national and regional news stories in *The New York Times, The Associated Press, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times,* and CNN as well as several local news stories in *The San Francisco Chronicle* and *The San Francisco Examiner* directly asserted that Ratanapakdee's murder was one of many anti-Asian attacks in a rising tide of violence targeting San Francisco's Asian American community. For example, a CNN news report that aired on February 16, 2021, described the murder as a hate crime, framing it within the context of "a clear pattern of targeted hate" that emerged in major U.S. cities during the pandemic[1036] The news report quoted sources who characterized Ratanapakdee as the victim of "a deadly assault" that was "horrific and senseless," a victim who deserved racial justice.[1037]

While anti-Asian violence remains a serious, widespread problem in America, anti-Black violence is even more endemic to the U.S. In a study comparing anti-Asian discrimination in the U.S. to discrimination against other racial minorities, scholar Janelle Wong cites official police data revealing that "in 2019, Black people continued to be the most targeted racial group. In that year, 58% of reported hate crimes were motivated by anti-Black bias, 14% by anti-Hispanic bias, and 4% by anti-Asian bias."[1038] Wong then cites historical data from a study by Zhang et al. in 2021. Zhang and his colleagues find that from 1992-2014, Black Americans were the

[1036] Kyung Lah and Jason Kravarik, "Family of Thai Immigrant, 84, Says Fatal Attack was 'Driven by Hate," CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/16/us/san-francisco-vicha-ratanapakdee-asian-american-attacks/index.html.

[1037] Ibid.

[1038] Wong, "What the Media Gets Wrong about Anti-Asian Hate."

targets of 5,463 violent hate crimes while Asian Americans were the target of 329 such crimes.[1039]

9.5 Continuing Chin's Legacy: The Vincent Chin Institute

The increased attention the Vincent Chin murder case received in the wake of anti-Asian sentiment during the Covid-19 pandemic led to the creation of the Vincent Chin Institute (VCI) in 2023. The VCI was founded to keep Chin's legacy alive by advancing the nationwide fight against anti-Asian racism by "building a multiracial, multicultural coalition united for equal justice and human dignity, which stand as a landmark of American history," according to the VCI web site.[1040] Furthermore, the organization "brings together the movement's leaders to create intergenerational resources for the support, education, and advancement of the future of the movement."[1041] For the purpose of educating individuals concerning the murder case surrounding Chin's death and how it continues to shape Asian Americans' place in U.S. society decades later, the VCI published a 64-page Vincent Chin Legacy Guide. While the guide includes instructional tools and offers historical context concerning Chin and the movement that sprung from his murder, it does not offer the careful analysis of the murder case and its news media coverage that my dissertation provides. Indeed, the legacy guide highlights the need for a thorough examination of

[1039] Yang Zhang, Lening Zhang, and Francis Benton, "Hate Crimes against Asian Americans," *American Journal of Criminal Justice,* 47 (2022): 441-461, cited in Wong, "What the Media Gets Wrong about Anti-Asian Hate."

[1040] "The Vincent Chin Legacy Guide: Asian Americans and Civil Rights," Vincent Chin Institute, accessed April 22, 2024, https://www.vincentchin.org/legacy-guide.

[1041] Ibid.

the Chin case and its significant role in turning journalists' attention to a serious national issue.

9.6 Contribution to Scholarship

The dissertation makes a scholarly contribution to journalism theory, methods, and history and also adds to academics' understanding of how news reporters pay attention to anti-Asian racism in current-day news coverage of cases of violent crime involving Asian American victims. First, the study demonstrates how the broad paradigm of framing theory can be adapted specifically to understand the evolution of news framing of anti-Asian racism across time. Using a content analysis of news framing of the Vincent Chin case, I was able to operationalize framing theory and demonstrate its power in two ways: first, in identifying eight specific framing categories journalists used in coverage of Chin's murder and his victimhood and second, in using these categories to identify and compare shifts in news framing of Chin's murder and his victimhood over time and across diverse local and national news publications. (An inter-coder reliability test ensured that the eight categories were both valid and reliable.) I then used the eight framing categories to uncover threads of historic Chin case framing in news reports covering more contemporary cases of violence against Asian Americans. Hence, combining framing theory with the content analysis method illustrates how journalism scholars can use frames in a flexible and adaptable way.

In addition to framing theory, the study draws on worthy victim theory to provide scholars with a fuller understanding of how journalists made decisions regarding whether to frame Vincent Chin as a victim who was either worthy or less

worthy of racial justice. Worthy victim theory shed light on how journalists made these framing decisions in coverage of the historic Chin murder case as well as in coverage of Asian American victims in more contemporary cases of violence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Second, the dissertation's historical background contributes to an understanding of how journalists drew on the context of their time to slowly change how they paid attention to and framed Asians as a racial group in news coverage of violent crime. For instance, fears that Asians would steal American jobs and forever alter the culture and society of the country played a preeminent role in violence against Asians beginning in the mid-1800s. Journalists stereotyped Asians as "hoards," "monsters," "diseased filth," and "economic overachievers" in an effort to paint them as a foreign enemy and legalize the expulsion of Asians from the U.S. In the initial months following Vincent Chin's murder during a time when U.S. society "othered" Asians as "perpetual foreigners" or stereotyped them as fully-assimilated "model minorities," news reporters framed his slaying as the story of a barroom brawl and cast a hot-tempered Chin as responsible for his fate. Yet, as the first Asian American advocacy groups began organizing press conferences and protests to shed new light on a serious, widespread hatred toward Asians in the U.S., journalists transformed Chin's story into a tragedy of racial violence ignited in large part by the Japanese-America "trade wars" of the 1980s. As violence against Asians in the U.S. became more commonplace in the decades following Chin's death, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, journalists leaned on the Chin case to draw connections in

their news stories between the anti-Asian hatred of America's historical past and present.

Finally, the dissertation contributes to academics' understanding of current-day journalism framing of violence against Asian Americans. While Vincent Chin's story largely disappeared from news coverage of more contemporary cases of violent crime targeting Asians in the U.S., his legacy survives in the way journalists today approach framing of such violence. America's journalistic toolkit now includes an anti-Asian racism frame shaped by the advocacy group protests and court cases that arose during the Chin case.

Yet, important questions remain. While the dissertation illuminates *how* news framing of violence against Asians in the U.S. shifted over time, a content analysis cannot explain *why* journalists changed the way they framed such violence. Did shifts in news framing of Vincent Chin from 1982-1987 help spark newsroom conversations regarding when and to what extent reporters should spotlight anti-Asian racism as a criminal motive? Additionally, how much news coverage of anti-Asian racism is generated from news sources alleging such hatred, and how much of this coverage springs from journalists' personal convictions that such prejudice does, indeed, exist? These questions fall beyond the scope of this dissertation and require interviews with journalists who covered the contemporary cases of violent crime involving Asian victims examined in this study.

The facts this dissertation does uncover are that Vincent Chin's murder became associated with an awareness and a sensitivity toward Asian Americans' place in U.S. society as a group that faced racial discrimination. Over time, as

journalists grew less accustomed to the idea of Asian Americans as model minorities and more informed regarding the marginalization of and discrimination against Asian ethnic groups in the U.S., journalism as a profession evolved to become a tool to advocate for racial justice.

Appendix A: Major Events of the Vincent Chin Case

Table 1. Major Events of the Vincent Chin Murder Case

Date	Major Case Event
June 19, 1982	Vincent Chin is bludgeoned to death with a baseball bat by Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz outside a strip club in Highland Park, not far from Detroit Michigan.
June 23, 1982	Vincent Chin dies in a coma.
June 25, 1982	Judge Kalem Varian charges Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz with second-degree murder during an arraignment hearing. The press does not attend the arraignment.
June 29, 1982	Vincent Chin's funeral is held one day after Vincent Chin was to be married to his fiancé, Vikki Wong.
October 5, 1982	During a preliminary hearing with Judge Thomas Bayles, prosecutor William Cahalan and defense attorneys Bruce Saperstein and Edward Khoury strike a deal to plea bargain from second-degree murder charges to manslaughter. Judge Bayles later states that he believed Chin's killers should have been charged with first-degree murder; however, he allowed the deal to move forward. The press does not attend the hearing.

February 8, 1983	Ronald Ebens pleads guilty to reduced charges of manslaughter. Michael Nitz pleads no contest.
March 16, 1983	Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Charles Kaufman sentences Ebens and Nitz to three years of probation and a $3,000 fine for Chin's death plus court costs. The sentence does not include jail time.
March 28, 1983	The Asian advocacy group, Association for Chinese Americans, formerly requests that Judge Charles Kaufman reconsider his lenient sentence of three years of probation for Vincent Chin's killers.
March 31, 1983	American Citizens for Justice (ACJ) is founded in Detroit, Michigan in reaction to the fatal beating of Vincent Chin. The group's founding mission is to obtain racial justice for Chin. The mission later evolves to become obtaining racial justice for Asian Americans targeted by racial discrimination, especially violent crime.
April 29, 1983	During a hearing in Detroit, Michigan, Judge Kaufman hears oral arguments from American Citizens for Justice attorneys James Shimoura, Roland Hwang, and Liza Chan regarding revising his lenient sentence of three years of probation for Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz to include jailtime.

	The press and approximately 100 Asian American protesters are present at the hearing.
May 9, 1983	A massive rally is held in Detroit, Michigan and in major cities across the U.S. to protest the probation sentences for Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz.
June 29, 1983	Vincent Chin's mother, Lily Chin, and American Citizens for Justice representatives meet with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) in the nation's capital to convince the DOJ to open a civil rights investigation into Chin's slaying.
	ACJ is successful in convincing the DOJ to open the investigation.
July 1983	The DOJ orders the FBI to investigate whether Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz violated Vincent Chin's civil rights.
August 4, 1983	The DOJ makes an official announcement that a federal grand jury in Detroit, Michigan will hear evidence regarding whether Vincent Chin's slaying was racially motivated.
September 1, 1983	The federal grand jury begins its inquiry into whether Vincent Chin's civil rights were violated.
November 2, 1983	The federal grand jury indicts Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz on charges of interfering

	with Vincent Chin's right to enjoy a public place of accommodation on account of his race and conspiring to violate Chin's civil rights.
June 5, 1984	The first federal civil rights trial begins with jury selection at the Eastern District Michigan Court of Detroit. Judge Anna Diggs-Taylor presides over the trial. The press is present at the trial.
June 28, 1984	The federal grand jury finds Ronald Ebens guilty of interfering with Vincent Chin's civil rights but finds Ebens innocent of conspiring to violate Chin's civil rights. Michael Nitz is cleared of both charges.
September 18, 1984	U.S. District Judge Anna Diggs Taylor sentences Ronald Ebens to 25 years in federal prison. Ebens appeals and is released on $20,000 bond.
September 11, 1986	The Sixth Circuit Appeals Court of Cincinnati overturns Ebens' conviction. The Court's decision surrounds American Citizens for Justice attorney Liza Chan's improper coaching of three prosecution witnesses during the trial. Chan tape recorded herself coaching the witnesses, who were with Chin the night of the murder, to claim that they heard Ronald Ebens direct a racial slur at Chin at the

	Fancy Pants bar. The Court rules that Judge Anna Diggs Taylor erred by failing to admit the tapes into evidence, preventing defense attorneys from using the tapes to discredit the three witnesses. The Court also rules that the prosecution erred by making misleading statements to the jury asserting that Ebens was prejudiced toward Asians. No hard evidence of anti-Asian prejudice was ever introduced during the trial.
September 19, 1986	The DOJ announces it will retry the case against Ronald Ebens.
February 23, 1987	The DOJ orders a change of venue for the second federal civil rights trial from Detroit, Michigan to Cincinnati. Defense attorneys requested the change of venue, arguing that extensive media publicity during the first civil rights trial in Detroit served to prejudice the jury against Ronald Ebens.
April 22, 1987	The second federal civil rights trial begins in Cincinnati presided over by Judge Anna Diggs-Taylor. The press is present at the trial. The tape recordings are admitted as evidence. However, neither the media nor the public are allowed to hear them.
May 1, 1987	A Cincinnati jury acquits Ronald Ebens on all charges.
July 1987	Ronald Ebens is ordered to pay $1.5 million to

the estate of Vincent Chin on condition of his employment.

Ebens remains unemployed and never pays any

of the settlement. He later relocates to Nevada.

Events of the case as summarized from Paul Yoo, *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry*, pp. 315-318

Appendix B: Coding Instructions

This dissertation deals with press coverage of violence against Asians in the United States, focusing on the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982. Coders will play an important part in the research, helping to trace news frames that shaped themes of the reporting on this topic.

A preliminary reading of Chin murder news texts under study revealed that reporters repeatedly employed several news frames. Coders will count examples of those frames, analyzing news articles paragraph by paragraph.

Coders should familiarize themselves with these news frames before they begin the coding process. Coders should closely read the following descriptions of the news frames under study.

Quantifying News Frames: How to Code Each Paragraph of an Article

On the Excel spreadsheet, coders will record the news article's publication date and headline, the news organization that published the article, and the article's online database. Coders will also write their initials and the date they coded each article. Coders will have a hard copy of each news article, make notations in longhand, and then transfer their tallies to the Excel coding sheet, as explained below. Once coders have transferred their tallies to Excel, they must file the hard copies by news organization and by date.

The procedure for coding each paragraph of a news article is as follows:

First, coders must familiarize themselves with the news frames under study, as defined above. They will look for these frames in each paragraph of a news article and will code using the following frame abbreviations.

GP- Chin was a good person.

V – Chin was a vulnerable victim.

BC – Chin was engaged in bad conduct.

RC – Chin was engaged in reckless conduct.

S – Chin was framed as a symbol.

SR – The paragraph cites sources who say that the motive for Chin's murder was racial hatred.

JR – The journalist or the author of the article directly states that the motive for the murder was racial hatred.

NR – The paragraph includes claims that there was no racial motive for Chin's murder or includes no references to racism as the motive.

Second, coders will read the news article to be coded and number the paragraphs, starting with paragraph one.

Third, coders will determine which, if any, of the frames they are looking for appear within each paragraph of the news article, counting on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. For this study, a paragraph is one or more sentences set off by a double space between lines of text and/or an indentation. Some paragraphs may include none of the frames. Others may include only one. Other paragraphs may contain more than one.

Whether a particular frame, for example, frame “GP,” appears in a paragraph once or more than once, coders will count frame “GP” only one time for that paragraph. If more than one distinct frame, for example, frames “GP,” “V,” and “SR,” appears in a paragraph, coders will count each of these frames only once per paragraph. In other words, if frame “GP” appears twice in the paragraph, frame “V” appears three times,” and frame “SR” appears one time, the notation in the margin for that paragraph, in pen, will be:

GP - 1

V - 1

SR -1

Fourth, once coders have coded every paragraph of the article, they will tally the total number of times an abbreviation for a specific news frame appears in the margins of the article. Coders will then record that number under the appropriate framing category on the Excel coding sheet. For example, if coders wrote the abbreviation for frame “GP” six times in the margins of a news article, they will record the number “6” under the category labeled “Good Person Frame” on the Excel sheet. If a specific news frame(s) does not appear in a paragraph, coders will record “0” under the category for the appropriate frame(s). Importantly, coders should record any comments or concerns they have regarding the coding of a specific paragraph in the “Comments” column of the Excel sheet. Those comments can include anything from

problems in distinguishing coding categories to specific quotations from the news text that would help flesh out the Chin news narrative.

Next, the dissertation author will tally the total number of times each news frame appears on a quarterly and yearly basis for each news outlet under study and for the collective number of times the frame appears in all of the news outlets combined between 1982 and 2022.

Appendix C: Charts of News Frames

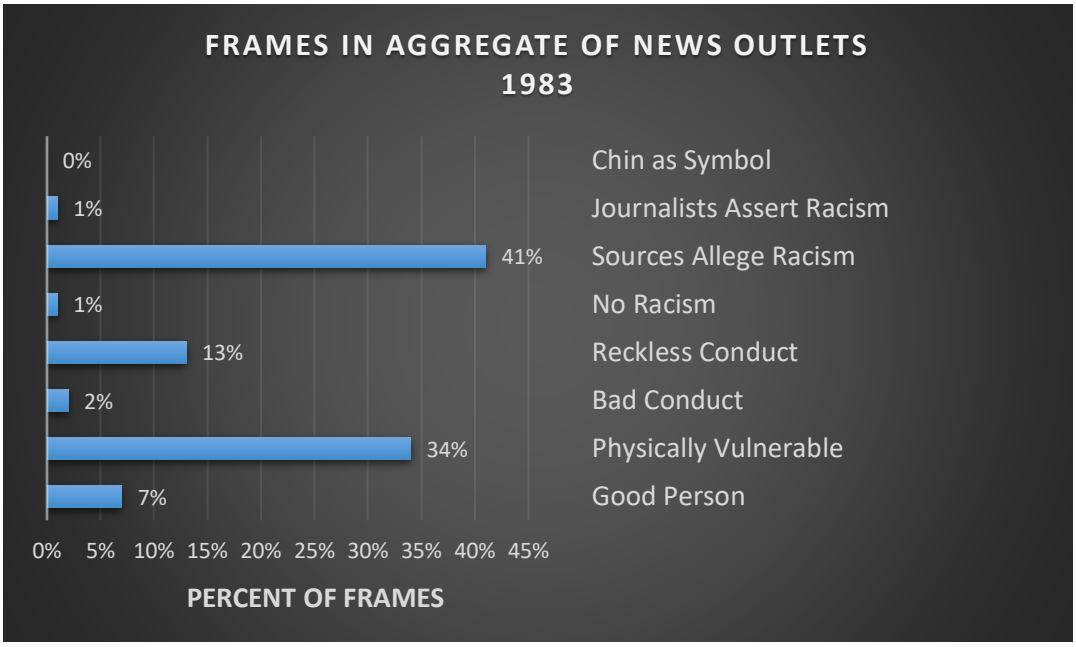


Figure 3. News Frames in Aggregate of Publications, 1983 (Figure by author)

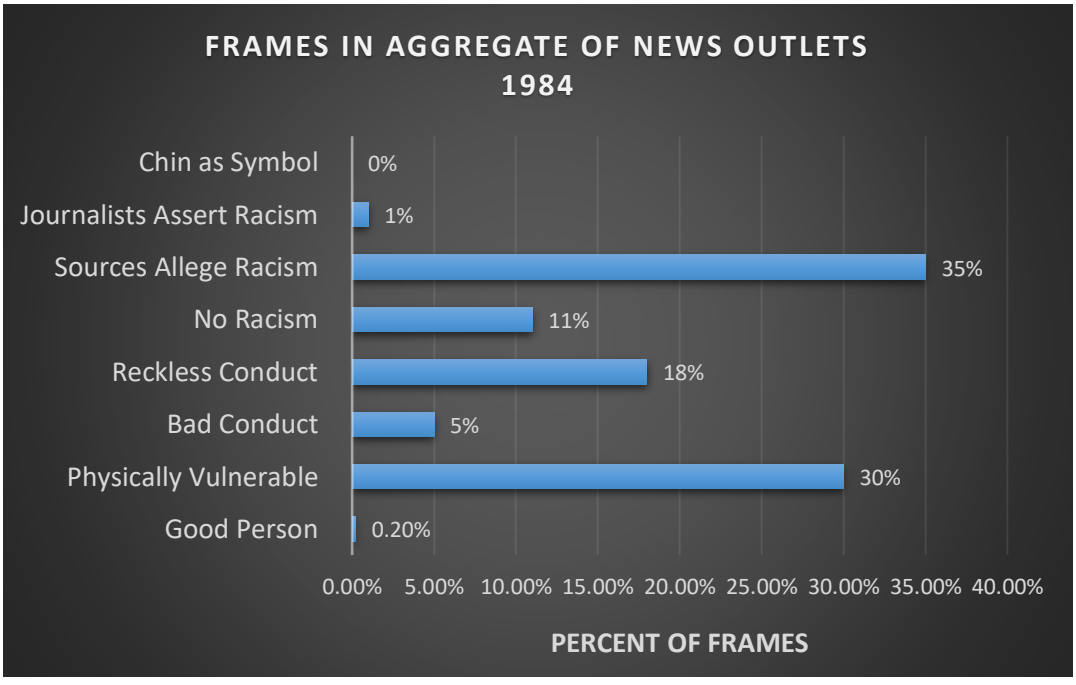


Figure 4. News Frames in Aggregate of Publications, 1984 (Figure by author)

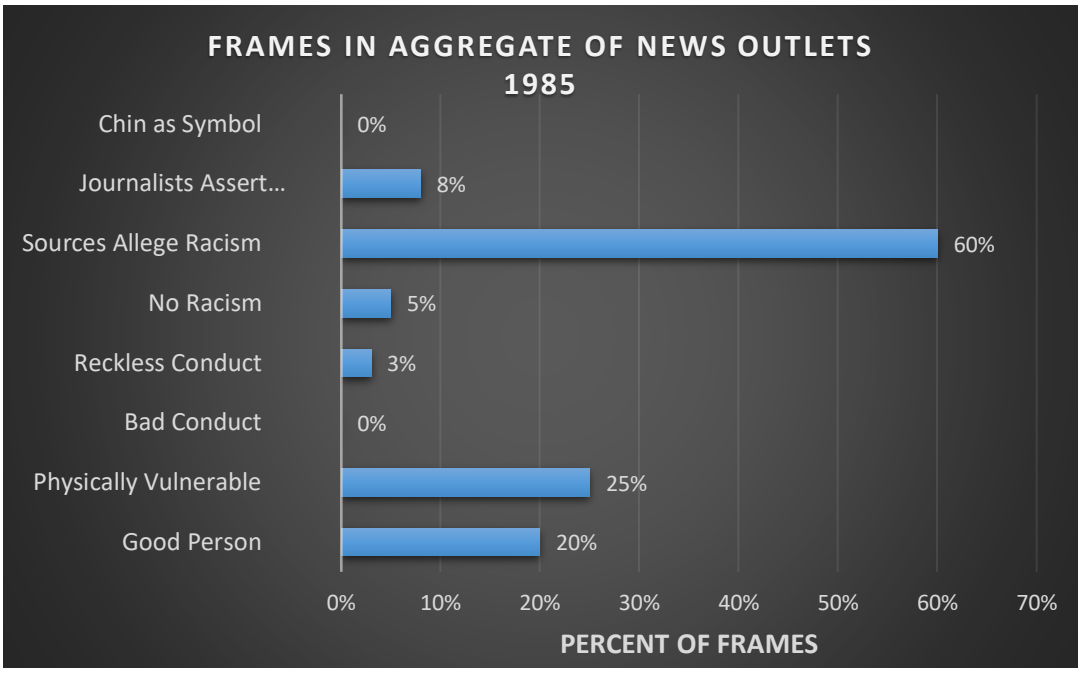


Figure 5. News Frames in Aggregate of Publications, 1985 (Figure by author)

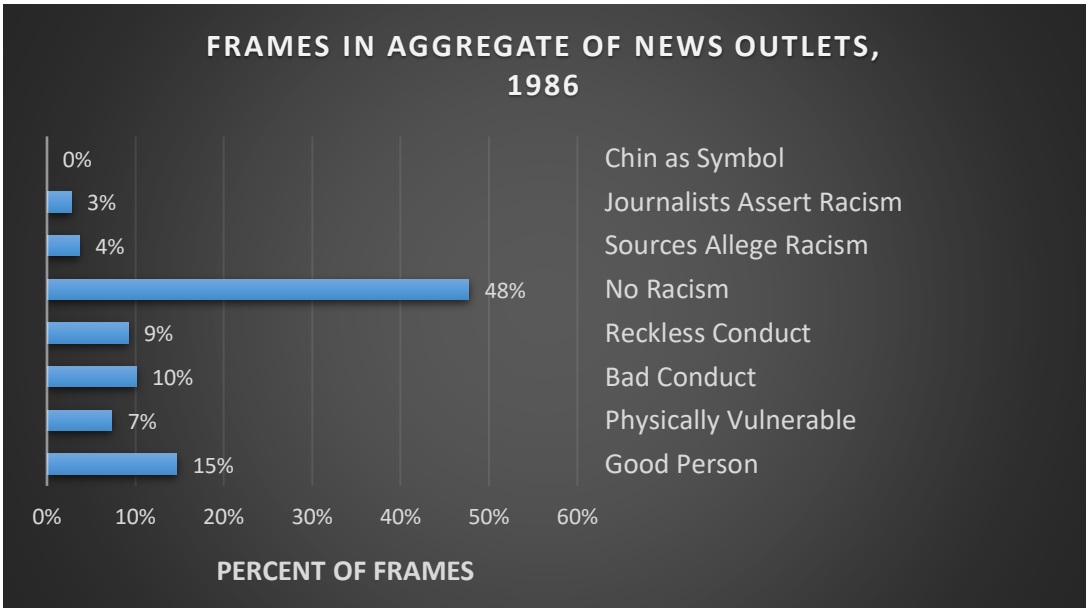


Figure 6. News Frames in Aggregate of Publications, 1986 (Figure by author)

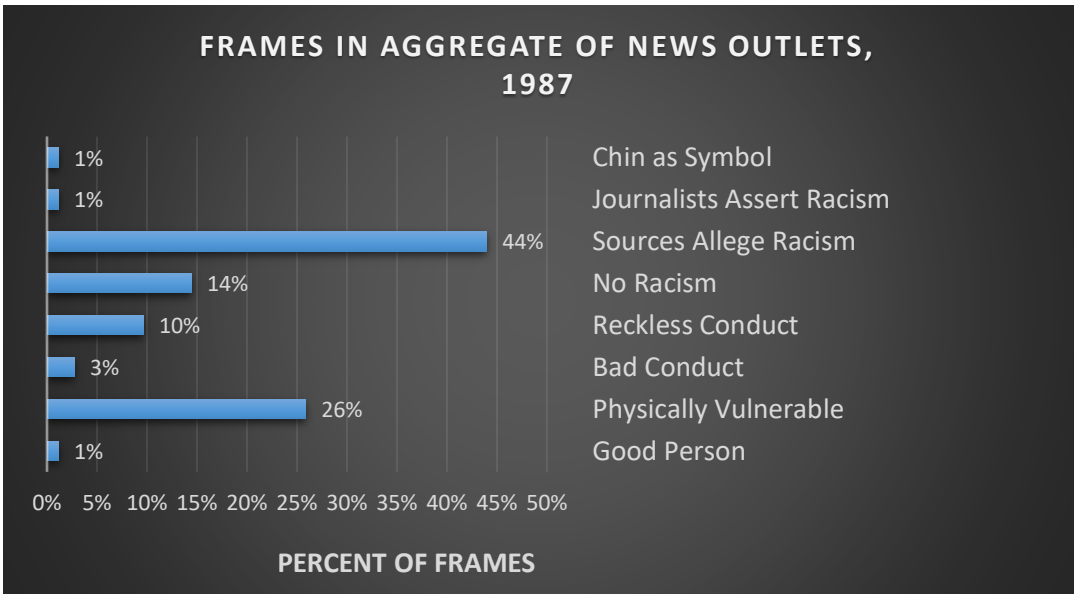


Figure 7. News Frames in Aggregate of Publications, 1987 (Figure by author)

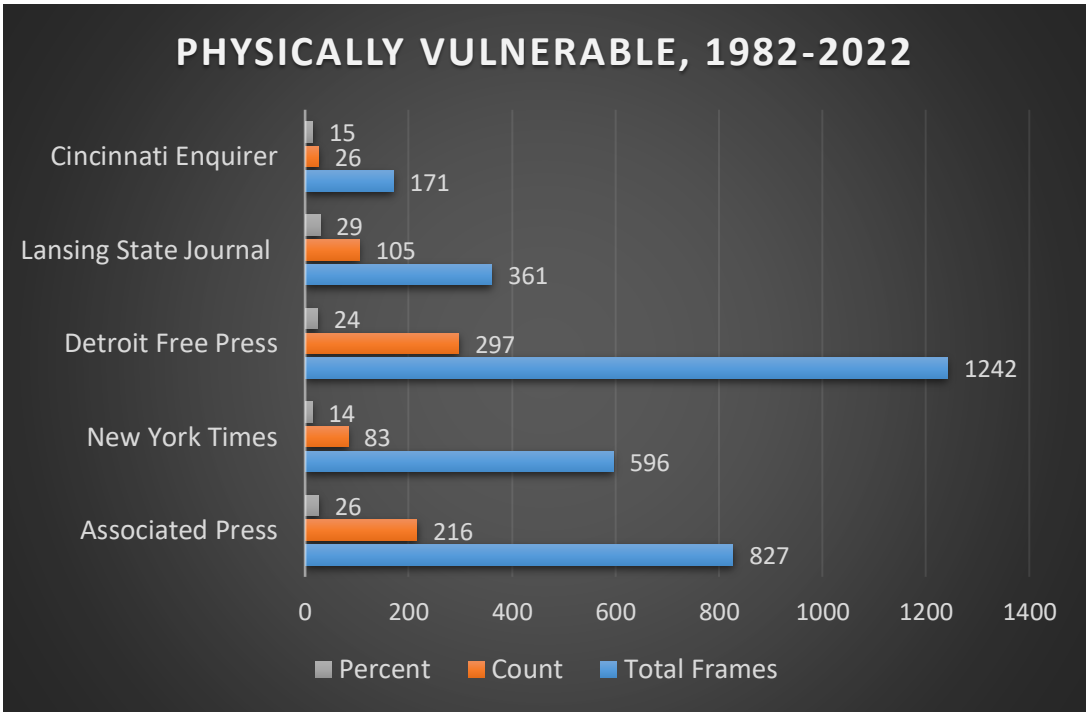


Figure 13. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Vulnerable (Figure by author)

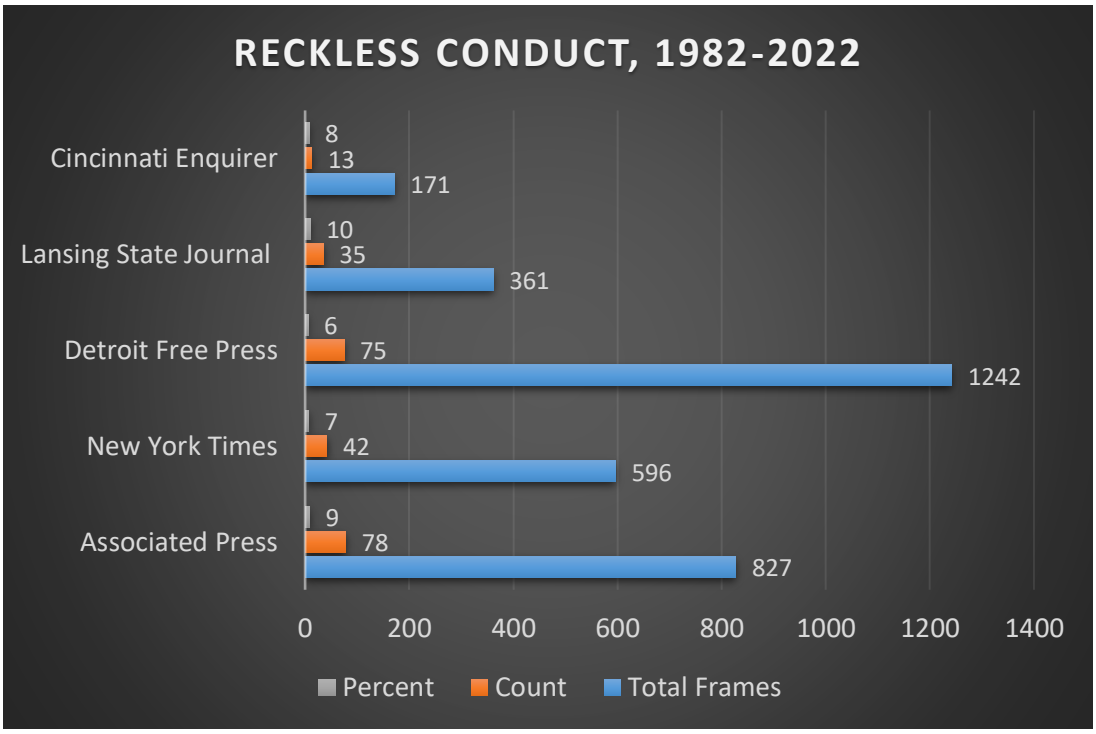


Figure 14. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Reckless Conduct (Figure by author)

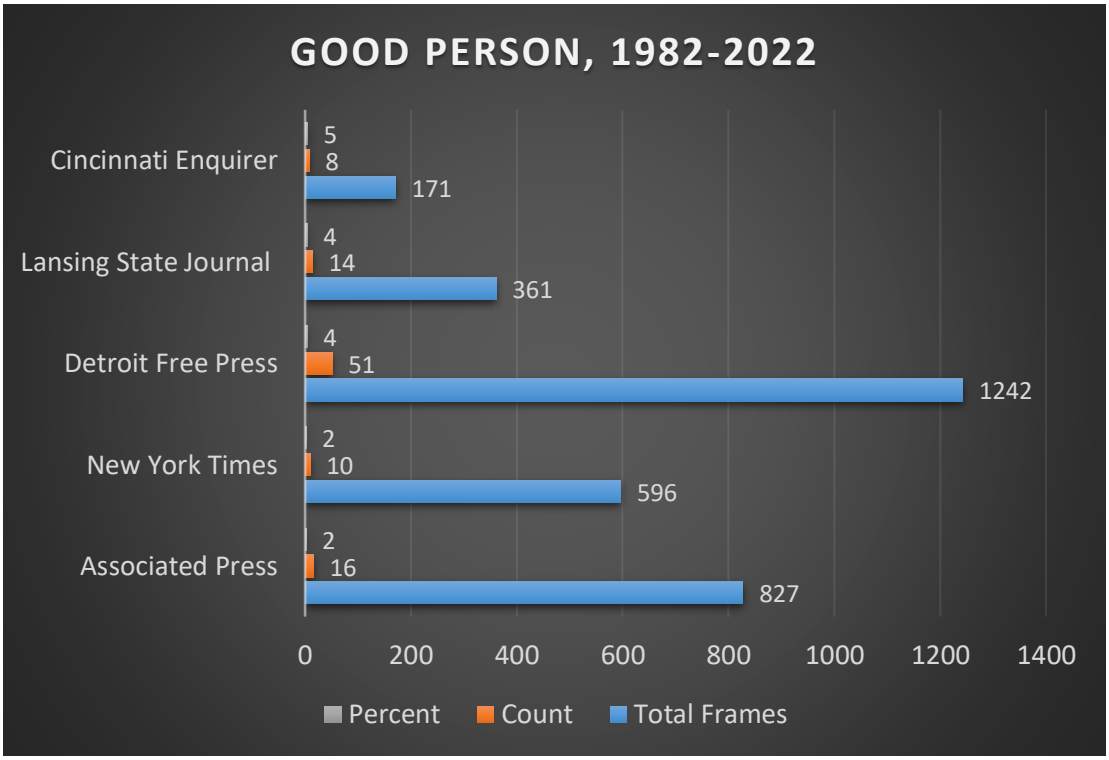


Figure 15. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Good Person (Figure by author)

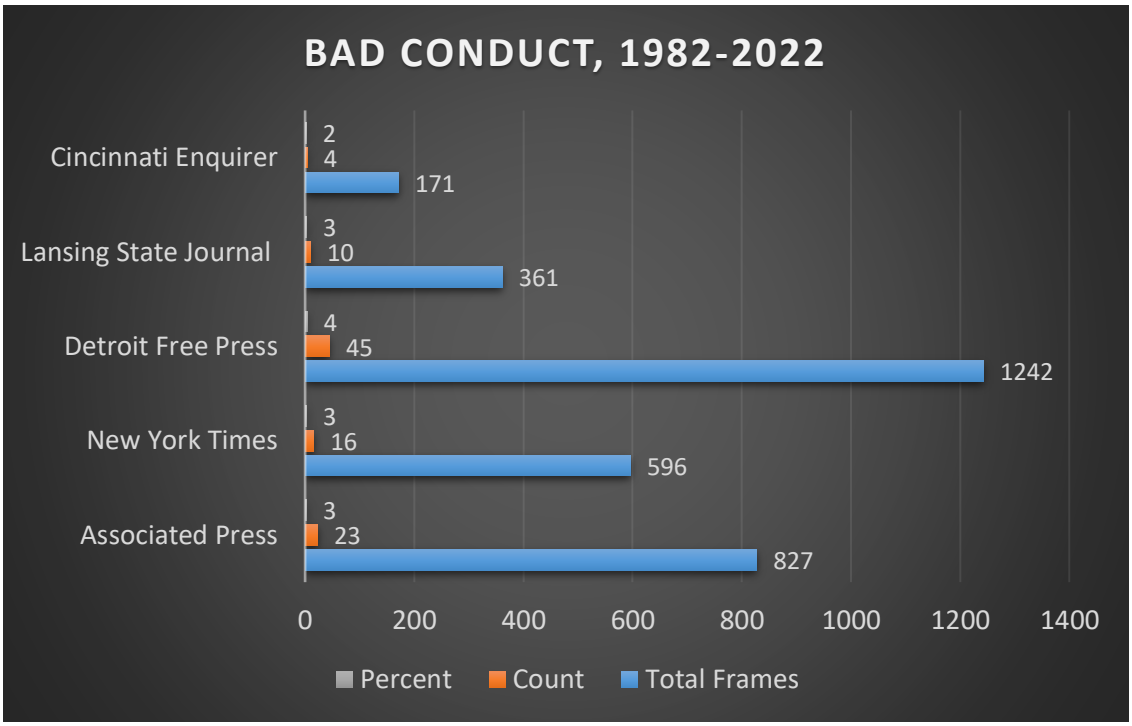


Figure 16. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Bad Conduct (Figure by author)

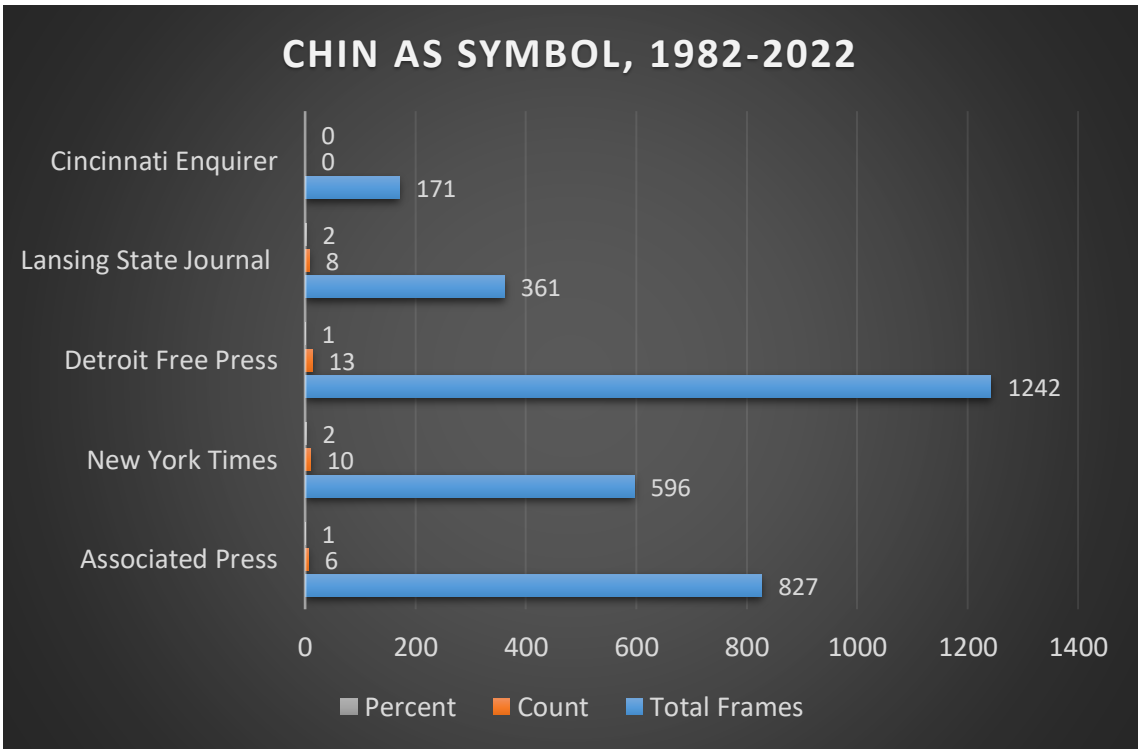


Figure 17. Shifts in Frames by Publication, Chin as Symbol (Figure by author)

Appendix D: Tables

Publication	Total News Articles
Associated Press	90
New York Times	54
Detroit Free Press	157
Lansing State Journal	53
Cincinnati Enquirer	18

Table 3. News Article Sample Sizes by Publication, 1982-2022 (Table by author)

News Frames	Associated Press	New York Times	Detroit Free Press	Lansing State Journal	Cincinnati Enquirer
Sources Allege Racism	Strong	Strong **Dominates**	Strong	Strong **Used Least**	Strong
Journalists Assert Racism	Very weak **Used Least**	Weak	Very weak	Very weak **Used Least**	Weak **Prominent**
No Racism	Very weak	Very weak **Used Least**	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak **Prominent**
Physically Vulnerable	Fairly Strong	Weak **Used Least**	Weak	Fairly strong **Prominent**	Weak
Good Person	Very weak **Used Least**	Very weak **Used Least**	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak **Prominent**
Reckless Conduct	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak **Used Least**	Weak **Prominent**	Very weak
Bad Conduct	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak **Prominent**	Very weak	Very weak **Used Least**
Chin as Symbol	Very weak	Very weak **Prominent**	Very weak	Very weak **Prominent**	**Never Used**

Very Strong: *Frame accounts for 60-100 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Strong:*** *Frame accounts for 40-59 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Fairly Strong****: Frame accounts for 25-39 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Weak****: Frame accounts for 10-24 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022;* ***Very Weak:*** *Frame accounts for 0-9 percent of total news frames used from 1982-2022.*

Table 4. Tracking Frames by Publication, 1982-2022 (Table by author)

Publication	Era One	Era Two	Era Three	Total Articles
Associated Press	65	18	7	90
New York Times	19	23	12	54
Detroit Free Press	87	61	9	157
Lansing State Journal	50	10	3	63
Cincinnati Enquirer	11	3	4	18

Table 5. News Article Sample Sizes by Publication, 3 Eras (Table by author)

News Frames	Associated Press	New York Times	Detroit Free Press	Lansing State Journal	Cincinnati Enquirer
Sources Allege Racism	Strong	Strong **Dominates**	Fairly strong **Used Least**	Strong	Strong
Journalists Assert Racism	**Never Used**	Very weak **Prominent**	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak
No Racism	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak **Used Least**	Weak **Prominent**
Physically Vulnerable	Fairly strong	Weak	Fairly strong	Fairly strong **Prominent**	Weak **Used Least**
Good Person	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak **Prominent**	**Never Used**	Very weak
Reckless Conduct	Weak	Weak **Used Least**	Weak **Prominent**	Weak	Weak
Bad Conduct	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak	Very weak **Used Least**	Very weak **Prominent**
Chin as Symbol	**Never Used**	Very weak **Prominent**	**Never Used**	Very weak **Prominent**	**Never Used**

Very Strong: *Frame accounts for 60-100 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Strong:*** *Frame accounts for 40-59 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Fairly Strong****: Frame accounts for 25-39 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Weak****: Frame accounts for 10-24 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Very Weak:*** *Frame accounts for 0-9 percent of total news frames used in a given era*

Table 6. Tracking Frames by Publication, 1982-1987 (Table by author)

News Frames	Associated Press	New York Times	Detroit Free Press	Lansing State Journal	Cincinnati Enquirer
Sources Allege Racism	Strong, Increases over time **Dominates**	Strong, Increases slightly over time	Strong, Increases over time	Strong, Increases slightly over time	Strong, Decreases slightly over time **Used Least**
Journalists Assert Racism	Weak, Increases over time **Used Least**	Weak, Increases over time	Weak, Increases over time	Weak, Increases over time **Prominent**	Weak, Increases over time
No Racism	Very weak, Decreases over time	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time **Prominent**	Very weak, Decreases over time	**Never Used**	Very weak, Decreases over time **Prominent**
Physically Vulnerable	Weak, Decreases over time **Used Least**	Weak, Decreases over time **Used Least**	Weak, Decreases	Weak, Decreases over time **Prominent**	Weak, Remains steady over time
Good Person	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time **Used Least**	Very weak, Remains steady over time	Very weak, Decreases slightly	Very weak, Increases over time	Weak, Increases dramatically over time **Prominent**
Reckless Conduct	Very weak, Decreases dramatically over time **Used Least**	Very weak, Decreases over time **Prominent**	Very weak, Decreases dramatically	Very weak, Decreases dramatically over time	Very weak, Decreases dramatically over time **Used Least**

Bad Conduct	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	Very weak, Remains steady over time **Prominent**	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	**Never Used**
Chin as Symbol	Very weak, Increases slightly over time	Very weak, Remains steady over time	Very weak, Increases slightly over time	**Never Used**	**Never Used**

Very Strong: *Frame accounts for 60-100 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Strong:*** *Frame accounts for 40-59 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Fairly Strong****: Frame accounts for 25-39 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Weak****: Frame accounts for 10-24 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Very Weak:*** *Frame accounts for 0-9 percent of total news frames used in a given era*

Table 7. Tracking Frames by Publication, 1987-2017 (Table by author)

News Frames	Associated Press	New York Times	Detroit Free Press	Lansing State Journal	Cincinnati Enquirer
Sources Allege Racism	Strong, Decreases over time	Strong, Decreases slightly over time	Strong, Increases dramatically over time **Dominates**	Strong, Increases slightly over time	Strong, Remains steady over time **Used Least**
Journalists Assert Racism	Fairly strong, Decreases over time	Strong, Increases dramatically over time	Weak, Increases slightly over time **Used Least**	Fairly strong, Increases over time	Strong, Increases dramatically over time **Prominent**
No Racism	Very weak, Increases slightly over time	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time **Prominent**	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	Very weak, Increases slightly over time **Prominent**	**Never Used**
Physically Vulnerable	Very weak, Decreases over time	Very weak, Decreases dramatically over time	Weak, Decreases dramatically over time **Prominent**	Very weak, Decreases dramatically over time	Very weak, Decreases dramatically over time **Used Least**
Good Person	**Never Used**	**Never Used**	Very weak, remains steady over time	Very weak, Increases slightly over time **Prominent**	**Never Used**
Reckless Conduct	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	Very weak, Decreases over time **Prominent**	**Never Used**	Very weak, Decreases over time	**Never Used**

Bad Conduct	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	Very weak, Decreases slightly over time	Decreases slightly over time **Never Used**	Remains steady over time **Never Used**
Chin as Symbol	Very weak, Increases slightly over time	Very weak, Increases slightly over time	Very weak, Increases over time	Weak, Increases dramatically over time **Prominent**	**Never Used**

Very Strong: *Frame accounts for 60-100 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Strong:*** *Frame accounts for 40-59 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Fairly Strong****: Frame accounts for 25-39 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Weak****: Frame accounts for 10-24 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Very Weak:*** *Frame accounts for 0-9 percent of total news frames used in a given era*

Table 8. Tracking Frames by Publication, 2017-2022 (Table by author)

Publication	**Total Articles**
Associated Press	410
New York Times	535
Washington Post	813
Atlanta Constitution	519
Detroit Free Press	13
Lansing State Journal	16
Cincinnati Enquirer	66

Table 9. News Article Sample Sizes by Publication, Georgia Case (Table by author)

News Frames	AP	NYTs	WP	DFP	LSJ	CE	AJC
Sources Allege Racism	Strong **Dominant**	Strong	Strong	Fairly Strong	Strong	Strong	Very Strong
Journalists Assert Racism	Weak	Weak	Very Weak	Strong **Prominent**	Weak	Very Weak	Very Weak
No Racism	Weak	Very Weak	Very Weak	Very Weak	Weak **Prominent**	Very Weak	Very Weak
Physically Vulnerable	Weak	Weak	Weak	Fairly Strong **Prominent**	Fairly Strong	Fairly Strong	Weak
Good Person	Very Weak	Weak	Weak **Prominent**	Very Weak	Very Weak	Very Weak	Weak
Reckless Conduct	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used
Bad Conduct	Very Weak	Very Weak **Prominent**	Very Weak	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Very Weak
Chin as Symbol	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used	Never Used

Very Strong: *Frame accounts for 60-100 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Strong:*** *Frame accounts for 40-59 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Fairly Strong****: Frame accounts for 25-39 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Weak****: Frame accounts for 10-24 percent of total news frames used in a given era;* ***Very Weak:*** *Frame accounts for 0-9 percent of total news frames used in a given era*

Table 10. Tracking Frames by Publication, Georgia Case (Table by author)

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