

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE TRAGIC TALE OF TRAYVON MARTIN: AN ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIVE
ANECDOTES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

BRIANA PATRICE ADAMS
SPRING 2016

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for baccalaureate degrees
in Communication Arts and Sciences and Spanish
with honors in Communication Arts and Sciences

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Kirt Wilson
Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences
Thesis Supervisor

Lori Bedell
Senior Lecturer of Communication Arts and Sciences
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

For my honors thesis, I will be analyzing the 2013 State of Florida v. Zimmerman case in order to gain a better understanding of the communication patterns surrounding this racially charged case and how coverage differed across various media. In order to execute this project, I will divide my thesis chapters by media type: print media (newspapers/news articles), television media, the National Public Radio and social media. Using a critical approach through Kenneth Burke's concept of the representative anecdote, I hope to uncover the narratives used to describe Trayvon Martin and to elucidate the way the media framed the case for their listeners. How did these narratives overlap? How did they differ? How did the narratives told in black press relate to mainstream coverage? How did the media make sense of the incident and what are the implications of these narratives from a rhetorical standpoint? Using this background, I will offer my interpretation of the case as it unfolded over time, taking into consideration the coverage presented by the media and the representative anecdote theory by Burke. By exploring these research questions, I hope to provide an in depth media analysis of one of the most controversial cases of this decade.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Media Coverage	3
A Chronology of Events: The Night of February 26 th , 2012.....	5
Methodology	6
Dramatism and the Trial.....	8
Chapter Preview	11
Chapter 2 Trayvon and the Print Media.....	13
Trayvon The Pot Head	14
Trayvon the Criminal	17
Trayvon’s Hoodie	18
Trayvon and Post Racial America.....	22
Trayvon the Victim	25
Conclusion: Implications of Print Media Anecdotes	26
Chapter 3 Trayvon and the Television/Podcast Media	29
HLN News	30
“My son was not a thug”	31
“Trayvon was our hero”	33
“I would have called the police”	35
National Public Radio	36
“Trayvon was a typical teen”	37
“What if shooter was black?”	39
“The black press play a unique role”	42
Conclusion: Implications of Television/Podcast Anecdotes	44
Chapter 4 Trayvon and Social Media	46
Million Hoodies Movement for Justice.....	49
Social Media Blackout	51
#BlackLivesMatter	53
Conclusion: Implications of Social Media Anecdotes	55
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	61

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge my Creator for blessing me with the passion, ability and perseverance to finish this project.

To my parents, Cyril Brandtford and Patricia Adams, thank you to both of you for everything you have taught and given to me. Your unconditional love and sacrifices have brought me to this point and I truly hope that I have made you proud.

To Kyle Seaton, thank you for being my rock. I am grateful for your dedicated support and for sending me numerous links and articles on all things Trayvon Martin related. I truly appreciate everything you have done for me.

To Indira Turney, my big sis, thank you for being my support system and someone that I can look up to and learn from. You rock.

To Mr. Earl Merritt, thank you for believing in me five years ago and for making my Penn State experience the fulfilling one that it was. I would not be here without your mentorship and encouragement.

To Kirt, my thesis adviser and Lori, my honors adviser, thank you for pushing and encouraging me to reach my full potential. I am so humbled to call you both my advisers and mentors. I am forever grateful for your support and guidance.

To Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon's story has resonated with me so much that I have dedicated the culmination of my academic career to investigating the narratives and depictions of him in the media. Our perception of others matters---and so do black lives. May he rest in peace.

Chapter 1

Introduction

One may argue that no other criminal prosecution in recent memory has grabbed, wrestled, and held the attention of the nation like the prosecution of George Zimmerman in 2013 for the murder of Trayvon Martin. Countless media entities ranging from traditional to new social media forms buzzed with comments from Americans of all races, who debated, protested and expressed their thoughts feeding to and from its polarized, sensationalized nature. It's reach and controversy elicited emotional responses from celebrities and President Obama. Across the nation, marches took place, and it even rekindled civil rights activism in the form of the Million Hoodies Movement for Justice.

The main characters in this narrative were 17-year-old Trayvon Benjamin Martin, an African American male from Miami Gardens, Florida and George Zimmerman, a white Hispanic male and neighborhood watch volunteer from Sanford, Florida. At the center of the legal case was not whether or not a shooting had transpired or whether Zimmerman had killed Trayvon. Instead, the heart of the controversy focused on two issues. First, what was Zimmerman's intent when he fired the shot that killed Trayvon? Second, was Trayvon responsible for his own death, because he had either attacked or threatened Zimmerman? In other words, was Zimmerman "standing his ground" and acting from a position of self-defense? Or was the death of Trayvon motivated by fear based on racial stereotypes and misjudgment? The media coverage that followed the shooting of Trayvon was intensive and relentless. Many television channels such as HLN featured daily coverage of the trial and presented highlights and commentary of the trial

every evening. Towards the close of the trial, on July 13, 2013, the jury found Zimmerman not guilty on all charges and acquitted him of the charge of second-degree murder.

Holistically, media coverage of all forms sensationalized the case over three main points: race, violence, and the fairness of the justice system. Numerous scholars have conducted research concerning the relationship between the media and its influence on the court of public opinion. It follows, then, that the trial of George Zimmerman serves as an example of two dynamics simultaneously: the ability of the media to influence the court of public opinion and the interplay between race and the justice system. This two-fold dynamic makes it worthy of further analysis. This paper will analyze specific highlights of media coverage for their rhetorical significance using Kenneth Burke's Dramatist theory.

Beside its rhetorical significance, the trial of George Zimmerman was significant for its historical and cultural implications. Racial violence has been a constant presence in American history, with notable cases such as the murder of Emmett Till, the assassination of civil rights leaders such as Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, and, in recent years, the advent of the shooting of unarmed black teenage men. Given America's long standing history with racism and mistreatment against African Americans, the trial of George Zimmerman resonated greatly with the African American population and their complicated history with law enforcement, as well as the perceptions of African American male teenagers. The media is charged with publicizing major events and helping the public to make sense of events both complex and sensitive in nature. The death of Trayvon Martin and trial of George Zimmerman provided an opportunity for rhetorical critics to examine what arguments and communication strategies were utilized in creating discourse surrounding the violence of unarmed teenagers. More importantly, it allowed a closer examination into the anecdotes, narratives and arguments

regarding black teenagers and how such depictions could be considered problematic given the context of America's historically racist society.

Media Coverage

America's response to Trayvon's death and the trial that ensued was nothing short of monumental. It was clear that Americans on both sides of the issue were watching this case carefully for its cultural implications. Coverage of the trial by three of the most respected newspapers in the country, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*, was substantial and pronounced and often provided a sense of the enormous impact the trial was having on the nation. The *Chicago Tribune* described the scene outside the courthouse on the first day of jury selection as "mostly still and quiet" and offered the thoughts of members of the public who were present that day. Jim Hopps, a 66-year old man of Deltona asserted, "It's a case that is going to be in the history books...I just want to see justice done the correct way" (Hernández). As reported in the *New York Times*, one protest in Atlanta held following the trial's verdict featured numerous civil rights figures including Martin Luther King III who summarized the atmosphere of the protestors, "This is a tone-setting time that at least sets up a framework for dialogue that has not existed in a long time. People are not as frustrated about the verdict. It's about consistent, systemic kinds of things that don't get reported and happen every day in courtrooms across America" (Joseph and Somalya).

The nation's response was nothing short of monumental. It was the verdict heard 'round the country. The *Los Angeles Times* noted a sit-in demonstration that took place in Florida in the office of Gov. Rick Scott, just a few days after the verdict was announced. This momentum

spread to cities such as Baltimore, Minneapolis, Houston and Atlanta, which hosted peaceful rallies to protest Zimmerman's acquittal. However, a few protests grew violent. In Los Angeles, the police arrested 14 people for failing to disperse and protestors began stomping cars and breaking windows. (Pearce 2013). It was clear that some citizens of America felt the need to respond to this verdict, whether those methods were peaceful or violent.

One of the most significant moments of media coverage was a speech given by President Obama that was dedicated solely to addressing the death, trial and impact of Trayvon Martin. The President believed it was necessary to expand on his thoughts after observing the national turmoil unfold following the not guilty verdict of Zimmerman. As reported in the *NY Times*, President Obama began by offering his personal condolences to the family of Trayvon Martin, commenting on the dignity and grace with which they had handled the loss of their son and the trial. He was also careful not to offer his personal thoughts on the legal issues surrounding the case stating, "I'll let all the legal analysts and talking heads address those issues... The juries were properly instructed that in a case such as this reasonable doubt was relevant, and they rendered a verdict. And once the jury has spoken, that's how our system works" (Federal News Service). Instead, the President sought to provide more context as well as explore the responses of the African American community. He said,

You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this

issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away (Federal News Service).

Considering these remarks from President Obama, it was evident that this trial captured the nation's attention while conjuring up racial tensions and exposing that reality that maybe America was not a post racial society as many claimed.

A Chronology of Events: The Night of February 26th, 2012

The evening of February 26, 2012 George Zimmerman was on his way to Target to do some grocery shopping. On his route, he observed a young male approximately, 5'11 to 6'2 tall, that was walking through the rain and looking into homes in the neighborhood. This was a point of concern for Zimmerman, because there had been an outbreak of crimes and break-ins in his area. He recently had formed a Neighborhood Watch Program with a few other concerned neighbors and was given a nonemergency number to call if he ever felt or noticed anything suspicious. This night in particular, Zimmerman felt this young male was threatening enough for him to call the nonemergency number for further instruction (Cashill 4). After a brief exchange with an officer from the Sanford Police Department, Zimmerman was instructed to inform the officer if the young male "did anything else" to which Zimmerman responded, "Okay. These a**holes. They always get away" (Cashill 5).

The young male, who we now know to be Trayvon Martin, headed south on a dog walk that was positioned between the backs of buildings. The town house where he was staying was only a few hundred feet down that dog walk. Meanwhile, Zimmerman remained on the phone with the dispatcher, who suddenly heard wind sounds in the background. The dispatcher asked,

“Are you following him?” Zimmerman responded, “Yeah” and once again the dispatcher stated, “Okay we don’t need you to do that” (Cashill 6). The call, which lasted only about four minutes, is one of the most straightforward and undisputed events that would occur in this episode. A neighbor called 911 at 7:16 p.m., five minutes after Zimmerman said he saw Trayvon. The recording of this 911 call revealed a male voice calling for help and approximately one minute after the call was made, a shot was fired, and the screams for help stopped. Officers arrived on the scene at 7:17 p.m. and Trayvon was pronounced dead at 7:30 p.m. His body was found just a few yards away from the house where he was staying (“Murder”). Zimmerman’s account of the night’s events ended when an officer handcuffed and disarmed him. Thereafter they placed Zimmerman in the back of their vehicle.

Methodology

When the news regarding the shooting of Trayvon Martin broke, the media wasted no time in covering many of the major moments from the shooting. Beginning on June 10th, 2013, a year and four months after the shooting, there was wall-to-wall coverage of the trial, from opening statements to the examination of witnesses, and leading up to the much anticipated closing arguments and verdict. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the media portrayed the legal proceedings against Mr. Zimmerman. Significant to this coverage was the fact that although the media discussed Zimmerman and his acts that evening, they spent just as much time, and at times even more, characterizing Trayvon Martin. This project seeks to understand how the media coverage of the Zimmerman’s trial became, also, a trial of Trayvon Martin

Specifically, I executed a qualitative textual analysis in order to analyze the depictions of Trayvon Martin in various media forms including newspapers, television media, the National Public Radio and social media. I ran a database search of the Lexis Nexis and Ethnic NewsWatch archives in order to find any newspaper article from 2012-2014 that discussed Trayvon Martin. The primary search words were “Trayvon Martin.” All articles were then collected and organized into categories based on the narratives and representations they presented. I also conducted searches for live television and National Public Radio broadcasts and blogs searching for themes in communication patterns that created what Kennedy Burke would call a “representative anecdote.”

Kenneth Burke, an important twentieth century literary theorist, introduced dramatism or dramaturgy in the early 1950’s as an approach to understand the uses of symbols in the social world. Dramatism serves as a method to understand the human world as a symbolic world of dramatic “action” where language is strategic and intended as a specific response for certain situations. Theorists have observed dramatism at work in numerous disciplines, including sociology, literary criticism, rhetoric, political science and interpersonal communication.

One basic tenet of the theory contends that humans create symbols, respond to symbols and understand various contexts through symbols. Symbols provide an alternative experience, a “symbolic knowledge” that allows human beings to both create conflict and division as well as unity and peace. Burke would certainly have agreed with Shakespeare when he suggested that “all the world is a stage,” and all the men and women merely players. Burke viewed the relationship between life and theater to be more literal than metaphorical. Human beings play various roles on live stages as they attempt to impact others. These dramas demonstrate the choices that individuals, groups, and organizations make when conducting their daily lives.

Furthermore, dramatism acknowledges that human beings make intentional choices to act through symbols because they are motivated to do so. Symbols provide insight for discovering such motivations (German 321-322).

The Dramatistic Pentad is a key model used by theorists to analyze symbols in communication. The pentad consists of five elements: the act, or what was or will be done; scene, or the context of the act that answers the questions of where and when the act occurred; agent, or who performed the act; agency, or the way the act was performed; and purpose, or the goal of the act. Essentially, the pentad answers the what, where, who, how, and why of human communication and symbols (German 321-322). Just as the fingers on a hand, these elements work individually as well as collectively, and are often considered in pairs of terms or ratios. For example, when communication focuses on what occurred and who performed the action, a ratio of agent/act becomes most prevalent. Furthermore, application of these ratios and the central terms that are emphasized help to identify the ideology or worldview with which the communicator constructs the message. For example, if the scene/setting is the central term for the action, dramatist theory urges that the drama is being dominated by the material situation, or the ideology, materialism (German 321-322).

Dramatism and the Trial

This thesis serves to analyze the media portrayal of Trayvon Martin and the choices of anecdotes that were presented through their coverage. The anecdotes regarding Zimmerman were not within the scope of this thesis except to the degree that Zimmerman's behavior is explained as an outcome of what Trayvon Martin did or did not do. I argue that the media's extensive

coverage of Trayvon Martin is significant in part because he was not on trial. Focusing on the victim of violence is not an uncommon part of how the media covers a trial, but in this instance the media did more than simply discuss who Martin was. The media, in a variety of different ways, created representative anecdotes that implied a moral judgment about Trayvon Martin. This, in turn, became the primary mechanism for deciding whether or not Zimmerman should be punished for Martin's death. Within this thesis, I present how the coverage of Trayvon in print, electronic and social media reveal an inherent bias towards young black teenagers and the law. I contend that as a society, we need to examine how young black men are portrayed in the media and society and their right or lack thereof, to stand their ground.

When examining the media's representation of Trayvon it is important to first recognize the symbols in the communication the media service to the public. In fact, the analysis of these symbols is essential when criticizing the messages and ideologies presented by the media. Major news channels like CNN and NBC covered the trial from jury selection and pre-trial logistics, to day by day trial events and then the responses of the public to the verdict. I argue that within this coverage were distinct and significant patterns in the content of the coverage and the manner it was presented. Bearing this in mind, I ask, what was the motivation for presenting such different narratives? Moreover, what is the worldview that shapes the narratives of the drama by these powerful entities?

Through observing the data, I have discovered great controversy and exploration surrounding one of the main agents of the drama, Trayvon Martin. The explicit legal purpose of the 2013 trial held in Sanford, Florida was to uncover whether George Zimmerman was innocent or guilty. What I conclude, however, is that the media approached the trial as an opportunity to investigate, discuss, and even draw conclusions about who Trayvon Martin was and whether he

was the “guilty party” on the night of February 26th, 2012. That is, was Trayvon simply a young teenager walking home from the convenience store? Or was he a potential criminal on the brink of causing trouble in an unfamiliar neighborhood? What I demonstrate in this thesis is that by examining Trayvon Martin’s character and behavior, the media constructed an image of who George Zimmerman was on the night in question. Was he acting simply acting as a responsible neighborhood watch volunteer or was he an irrational racist? The media attempted to depict the character of Trayvon Martin in an effort to explore Zimmerman’s “motive” for shooting the unarmed teenager. This is an important point, because in Kenneth Burke’s theory of the pentad in symbolic action, “motive” is not an internal or psychological construct. Burke argued that motives are determined by the configuration of language. Or, put differently, human beings understand motive not through direct access to a person’s mind but through a pentadic description of the action, setting, and purposes that describe an experience. So when the media asked, “What was Zimmerman’s goal or purpose?” that fateful night, what they are really doing, according to Burke, is providing an explanation, a “motive” for the symbolic action that the media, itself, has constructed through its coverage. Was the killing of Trayvon committed out of malice or poor judgment? Was Zimmerman acting within his rights of the “Stand Your Ground” law because Trayvon posed a serious threat? From the perspective of Burkean theory, the answers to these questions are found not in the “facts” of that night, but in how symbols describe and explain what happened that night. The “truth” is not a function of unmediated reality, but constructed through the representative anecdote that the media, itself, creates in its portrayal of those facts.

Indeed, as I will argue below, the key elements of Burke’s pentad that must be understood in the media coverage of the Zimmerman trial are: Agent (who did the action),

Purpose (why the action was performed), and Act (what was performed). The two other elements of Burke's pentad, scene and agency, were not emphasized by the media because there seemed to be widespread agreement about what the scene and the agency (a gun) of the event involved. The real questions and the disagreements that emerged in the media coverage all revolved around who was the key person in the event, why that key person acted as he did and, consequently, what the act actually was—an act of self-defense or an act of cold-blooded murder. In order to unpack the motive for that night, as motive was constructed by these media sources, a closer analysis of the coverage is required.

Chapter Preview

In Chapter 2, I explore the anecdotes present in the print media to bring resolution to the question: how did the media realize George Zimmerman's motive in the murder of Trayvon Martin? Or in other words, how did they create discourse surrounding Zimmerman's perception of Trayvon and the conflict that ensued that night? A distinction between the mainstream and black press newspapers revealed contrasting representations of Trayvon Martin as an 'agent' which toggled with the legitimacy of his innocence. A closer analysis of the media coverage revealed that Zimmerman's motive was ultimately connected to Trayvon's true purpose and unpacking Trayvon's purpose became a central focus of the coverage.

Chapter 3 accounts for the differences between the print, television, and podcast media followed by an analysis of specific excerpts by HLN television network and the National Public Radio. The multidimensional aspect of these mediums presented a unique opportunity to revisit these narratives and their ability to present multiple, contrasting views to their audiences. An

analysis of the anecdotes detailed how the media coverage may have been skewed and also exposed an underlying theme of suspicion of institutions directed towards young, unarmed black men.

In Chapter 4, I investigate the transformation of social media from a connecting tool into collaborative spaces of political mobilization and activism. I highlight three visible representations of this phenomenon at work: the Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, the social media blackout and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. At the core of these models, Trayvon is once again the focal point of the framing, but in a less negative context. Ultimately, I argue that the strategic use of social media was a significant part of sharing Trayvon's story effectively, with the purpose of mobilizing political action.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the anecdotes found in the print, electronic, and social media in an effort to consider what consequences and implications these narratives may have in the context of American society. I also consider why the focus on Trayvon Martin as an agent could be problematic considering George Zimmerman was the one on trial. Finally, I question the media's code of ethics on reporting on cases like these and how this case may have set a precedent for cases to come.

Chapter 2

Trayvon and the Print Media

The role of mass mediated messages in shaping our knowledge and understanding of major events is certainly evident in the coverage of the Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman conflict. As the trial rapidly unfolded, attorneys on both sides struggled to develop their respective cases, yet a large question remained: Who was Trayvon Martin? Members of the general public as well as the jury did not have the opportunity to know him personally; consequently, they were left to synthesize the narratives and depictions portrayed by the media. However, in this attempt to recreate Trayvon, the attorneys and the media dug up cell phone records, pictures and came to various conclusions about what kind of person Trayvon Martin was when he crossed paths with George Zimmerman on the night of February 26th, 2012.

This thesis analyzes the discourse surrounding the perception of Trayvon Martin in various media forms, beginning with the print media. Using the Dramatistic Pentad as a tool in the analysis, scholars and critics are able to identify and locate symbolic patterns and essential values surrounding a particular discourse. As mentioned in the introduction, in the media's attempt to identify Zimmerman's goal or purpose, they used their access to narrative threads to work at providing a motive for Zimmerman shooting Trayvon. One result of this was the focus on Trayvon as the 'agent' in the pentad despite Zimmerman being the one on trial. Furthermore, the media became interested in Trayvon's 'purpose' as the 'agent' in the scenario to legitimize or scrutinize Zimmerman's 'act' of shooting him. Was Trayvon acting as a criminal to create mischief in the neighborhood? Or was he walking home to his family? We see that with these

possibilities, Zimmerman may have been acting out of self defense and good intention, or out of racist beliefs and misjudgment of Trayvon's outer appearance. Embedded in the media's representation of Trayvon, are consistent themes and stories that allow the critic to go beyond the descriptive nature of an event and uncover how Trayvon's purpose may have been linked to Zimmerman's goal.

The anecdotes found in both mainstream and black press newspapers, reveal certain language and terms surrounding the agent, Trayvon Martin, which toggle with and question the legitimacy of his innocence. The following representative anecdotes were found in mainstream newspapers across the United States that were published between the incident and throughout the trial.

Trayvon The Pot Head

Central themes in the depictions of Trayvon Martin include numerous references to his past association with marijuana use. An article written in the *Herald-Sun* provides the following, "Trayvon Martin was not an angel and he took pictures flipping the bird, used marijuana and was suspended from school at the time of his shooting. He was a young boy who needed guidance" (Pitts 7). This description was typically referenced by the media as a tactic used by the defense team of George Zimmerman. Zimmerman's defense team wanted to get their portrayal of Trayvon as a troubled teen into the press, and they sought every opportunity to do so. Their reasoning isn't difficult to imagine. If Trayvon had a suspicious past and was capable of being the aggressor the night he was shot and killed, then their client, Zimmerman, was acting in self-defense. But the defense lawyers were not solely responsible for talking about Trayvon Martin as

a “pot-head.” Leading up to the trial, the media went on an investigative hunt, digging up cell phone records, photos and even tweets of Trayvon Martin while he was alive. In numerous articles, the mainstream print media not only focused on Martin as the important “agent” of the conflict but as a particular kind of “agent.”

The narrative of the “drug user” portrayed Trayvon Martin as an “agent” who was known for participating in illegal activity. This, in turn, made it more likely that his “purpose” was to create mischief in the neighborhood the night he was killed. Also, the intentional use of the term “angel” in the anecdote, “Trayvon Martin was not an angel and he took pictures flipping the bird, used marijuana and was suspended from school at the time of his shooting...” (Pitts 7) provides another criticism of Trayvon’s character. To indicate that Trayvon was not an angel tended to suggest that his death, if not legitimate, was at least understandable or somewhat palatable. Does the fact that Trayvon was a teenager who smoked, was suspended, and posed with his middle finger up justify his life being taken away?

One important consequence of the representative anecdote which I’ve described so far is that it shapes how we view George Zimmerman. If Trayvon Martin is the “agent” who, because of his past drug use and illegal activity (purpose) is probably out to cause mischief (act), then Zimmerman becomes part of the “scene.” Saying Zimmerman is part of the scene does not mean that he isn’t a person. Instead, it means that he isn’t the agent in this representative anecdote; he is just part of the context, part of scene who is acted upon by the behavior of a criminal (the real agent). In Kenneth Burke’s theory, human beings can become “scenes” provided they are not identified as the agent of a particular action. That, I argue, is what happened in some of the print media portrayals. Most certainly, that is precisely how the Zimmerman defense team wanted the media to portray their client. If Zimmerman was just part of the scene in an event where Martin

was the true actor, then Zimmerman could not be held responsible for Martin's death. George Zimmerman was just a responsible member of the community who tried to defend himself and his neighborhood from the "obvious" threat (act) that Martin (agent) sought to perform.

Furthermore, the *Herald-Sun* was participating in establishing a "motive" that explains what happened the night of Martin's death. In this instance, though, that "motive" plays directly into the hand of the Zimmerman defense team. Within this media frame, Trayvon was portrayed as a drug dealer and his social media pictures and suspension from school were constructed as their own special 'acts' prior to the night in question. The highlight on these actions turned Trayvon, the agent, into a drug dealer, because stereotypically, drug dealers have poor school records, have hardcore outer appearances and most obviously, consume marijuana. Therefore, the 'acts' of Trayvon flipping the bird in his photos and being suspended from school demonstrated Trayvon's true 'purpose,' making it more likely that he was indeed a mischievous, drug dealing character when Zimmerman approached him. Therefore we see, through this frame how the media portrayed 'act,' 'agent,' and 'purpose' that Trayvon was a drug dealer who was up to no good on the night in question.

In an online article found in HLN News, where they reported on the strategy of Zimmerman's defense team, the following claim was made: "Trayvon Martin used drugs and his judgment may have been impaired the night of the shooting and may have affected his decision-making" (HLN Staff 1). The imagery of Trayvon Martin, a young African American male using drugs is a common stereotype reinforced by the media and various depictions shown in films and music videos alike. African American men are often perceived as thugs and, consequently, are treated with suspicion and caution. Such depictions rely on the assumption that some members of the public fear the harm and danger these "thugs" could potentially cause and utilize it for their

own ends. In this case, George Zimmerman's defense team was certainly aware of the inherent biases that many persons hold regarding African American young men, and felt that linking Trayvon's drug use to the night in question, would cast doubt that George Zimmerman pursued Trayvon without cause.

However, this type of discourse also highlights the role of the justice system in presenting evidence. Was it ethical or even relevant for Zimmerman's defense team to introduce Trayvon's marijuana use into the trial? Wasn't George Zimmerman the agent whose motives and purpose were in question? During the trial on Monday, July 8th, 2013, Judge Debra Nelson ruled that Zimmerman's attorneys would be able to present evidence about how Trayvon Martin may have been high on marijuana the night he was shot. Moreover, the strategies exhibited by Zimmerman's defense portrayed Trayvon in an extremely negative light in an effort to advocate for Zimmerman's innocence and as justification for Trayvon's death. The representations and characterizations of Trayvon went far beyond marijuana usage to include suggestions of violent and criminal behavior.

Trayvon the Criminal

The New York Times, among other newspapers, extensively covered the trial and highlighted the legal strategies of both the prosecution and defense teams. In the exploration of this coverage, the George Zimmerman defense team would present that Trayvon was not only a young man who used drugs, but had a violent and criminal edge to him, giving George Zimmerman no choice but to end Trayvon's life. Consider the following portrayal offered by the Zimmerman defense team as reported in *The New York Times*: "Trayvon Martin armed himself

with the concrete sidewalk and used it to smash George Zimmerman's head" (Alvarez 11). It is particularly interesting to note the use of "armed" in this claim seeing as though Trayvon Martin was not armed with any weapons the night he was killed. In fact, the only items he was holding were a pack of Skittles candy and a can of Arizona Tea. Nevertheless, the defense team was challenged with creating a narrative that stripped Trayvon of this "unarmed" depiction and instead showed him as someone capable of inflicting violence and harm to George Zimmerman.

There was a similar depiction found in an online NBC Miami article portraying Trayvon as a violent, ruthless person who would clearly have been the aggressor in the conflict: "Trayvon Martin punched him in the face and knocked him to the ground, then climbed on top of him and slammed his head into the sidewalk several times" (Burnside and Hamacher). Coupled with the allegations of "being high" the night of the conflict, Trayvon was also portrayed as a violent teenager who was capable of inflicting the harm that George Zimmerman claimed as having occurred that evening. The night Trayvon was shot, Zimmerman was taken into police custody with several bruises and scrapes that would indicate he had been in a physical altercation. In an attempt to excuse George Zimmerman of racial profiling and justify his claim of self-defense, certain narratives and themes rose to capture who Trayvon might have been the night of the shooting. According to some media coverage, Trayvon was a drug-using, violent, criminal, teen that was not simply walking home that evening, but posed a threat to the community.

Trayvon's Hoodie

A hoodie is a long-sleeved sweatshirt with a hood that can be pulled tightly around the face with a drawstring. The garment was extremely popular and adopted by track runners and

football players in the 1960's and '70's as workout gear. Throughout the following decades, the hoodie became increasingly popular in sports culture and expanded to universities and other settings. However, urban culture also adopted the hoodie as a representative garment. It was often worn by graffiti artists and other young people who sought anonymity with the hooded garment while committing crimes. When the Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman incident came to light, the hoodie went from simply a fashion trend to a political statement (Horton 705-706).

The night of February 26th, 2012, Trayvon Martin was walking in the rain carrying some candy and a can of Arizona Tea. Trayvon was also wearing a hoodie the night he was killed. The narratives that surrounded his fashion choice led to an even larger question regarding the stereotype “thug” and how a hoodie reinforces that stereotype. The *Philadelphia Daily News* paper recalled a statement by Geraldo Rivera, reporter and talk show host who claimed: “Trayvon Martin is partially responsible for his own death because he chose to wear a hoodie the night of the shooting” (Hill 2) What role did the clothing Trayvon wore have in his death? This claim opened up a realm of possibilities regarding the justification of Zimmerman’s self defense claim. The essential theme in this narrative is that Trayvon was wearing a hoodie, and was therefore a thug, criminal, or someone who was up to no good and thus posed a threat to the community. Through the media and perception of gang culture, the “hoodie” has come to represent an obvious symbol of poor judgment and criminal behavior. Geraldo Rivera’s comment revealed an even larger discourse surrounding race relations in the United States and how African American men in particular, are perceived as an “other” even by the clothes they choose to wear. This anecdote in particular certainly reflected the discussion of how African Americans are stereotyped, profiled and what narratives are automatically “assumed” by people

of other races. Rivera's comment helped to draw out how a hoodie is perceived and in doing so, placed the blame of Trayvon's death on Trayvon himself, for choosing to wear an article of clothing embedded in negative associations. This comment was also significant because it demonstrated the importance of the media in this process. As a talk show host, Rivera used his position to voice his own opinions of who Trayvon was.

Within this discussion lies great rhetorical significance as critics examine how society has turned the "hoodie" from an article of outerwear style clothing to an ideological construct of criminality and unfair profiling. In the framing of this article, Trayvon was made a criminal and the hoodie acted as its own special 'agency.' Wearing the hoodie turned Trayvon, as the agent, into a criminal, because the hoodie became the means by which criminal activity could occur, shielding the criminal from the eyes of anyone who might see and identify the criminal. Additionally, the 'agency' of wearing the hoodie revealed, according to Rivera, Trayvon's true 'purpose.' By wearing the hoodie, Trayvon wanted to remain anonymous and discreet. He wanted to be able to roam the neighborhood and possibly even break into a few homes without anyone knowing who he was. Thus we see how the media portrayed 'act,' 'agent' and 'purpose' that Trayvon was a criminal who was up to no good.

Not every member of the print media saw the hoodie as the agency of criminality, however. Among members of the black press, the hoodie was identified as an element of black culture, but it was dissociated from the criminal dimensions that we see in the mainstream media. The *Chicago Defender*, for example, revealed that Trayvon's hoodie contained such great cultural significance that it may even be displayed in the soon to be built African American History Museum: "The hoodie of Trayvon Martin now represents an image of an urban street kid that either embraces or engages in street thug life" (News One). It is significant to note that the

Chicago Defender was founded for primarily black readers and spoke out against injustices against blacks in the Jim Crow era. It is no coincidence that the *Chicago Defender* decided to report on a story of Trayvon's hoodie being inducted in the newly constructed African American History Museum. In this paper's framing, Trayvon's hoodie becomes the 'agency' that symbolizes the stigmatization and profiling (act) of young black men in America (scene) As mentioned in the introduction, the media can act as its own agent or can serve as a conduit of others. In contrast to mainstream media organizations, who typically portrayed Trayvon as a criminal through the voices of the defense team, the black press chose to depict him as the victim of society and the system.

It is evident that the discussions surrounding Trayvon's hoodie invoked numerous opinions on both sides of the debate. Some believed that Trayvon's appearance justified Zimmerman's quest to stereotype and pursue him, regardless of his race. Others believed that regardless of what he was wearing, Trayvon ultimately would have been a target for Zimmerman because of his race. It is certainly difficult for the public to come to terms with the unjust killing of a teenager and some even argue that introducing the overall significance and implications of the hoodie was a way to avoid talking about race. Was the hoodie itself the problem? Had Trayvon been wearing a vest, would Zimmerman still have profiled him and assumed he was a threat?

While mainstream newspapers have shed light on certain perceptions and assumptions about Trayvon, there was certainly a central focus on the relationship between African American men, negative stereotypes and innocence. The mainstream media, acting on behalf of the Zimmerman defense team was adamant to elicit such narratives in an effort to prove Zimmerman's innocence and construct images of Trayvon that would justify the shooting.

However, just as these narratives rose to the surface, other narratives were being created in other spaces. On the other side of the debate, numerous black newspapers were buzzing around the country trying to make sense of yet another tragedy and loss of life in the community.

Trayvon and Post Racial America

An article published by the *Philadelphia Tribune*, one of the oldest African American newspapers in the United States, portrayed Trayvon Martin as a catalyst that reignited racial issues in a society where race relations were deemed positive and even progressive:

Trayvon Martin has created a national racial conversation in much the same manner as the saga of Till. Martin has captured the ambiguous meanings of race in America at a time when both the President and the lowest segments of society are black. Trayvon Martin is today's race case (Washington).

A common theme found in all of the aforementioned narratives was Trayvon's role in drawing attention to the injustice against African Americans and for stimulating conversations about race in America. Trayvon, in many other narratives, was depicted as a thug who did drugs and was suspended from school. However, in the black press, he was represented as someone who died unjustly because of his skin color and attire. In these narratives when Trayvon is the victim, he is not the agent in the scene. Instead, Zimmerman becomes the agent, the individual who murdered Trayvon. Emmett Till, at 14 years old, allegedly wolf-whistled at Carolyn Bryant, the twenty one year old wife of a white storeowner in Mississippi. He was later beat, shot to death and thrown into the river by Ron Bryant, Carolyn's husband and his brother in law, J.W. Milam. Till's mother decided to have an open-casket funeral to demonstrate the severity of her

son's injuries. The high-profile trial was swarmed with reporters and photographers and ended with an acquittal of both men in September of 1955 (Crandall 1464-1465). The aftermath of this tragedy exposed the experiences of all African Americans and provided a platform for organized resistance against racial oppression and violence.

Many modern day civil rights activists feel that Trayvon Martin's death captured the attention of the nation in a similar way that Emmett Till's death did. How were these two incidents similar? Both agents were young, African American men who were killed while visiting a city other than where they were from. Furthermore, they were both killed for allegedly posing a threat to someone. In the eyes of many black Americans, the lives of both young men were taken senselessly. Within these narratives, the communication patterns suggest that there was an inherent innocence about these young men, even Trayvon, who was often assumed to be a thug and criminal on the opposing side of the argument. Amidst these narratives and comparisons, critics often question and provoke conversations surrounding how Trayvon represents the current racial climate and how his legacy as a civil rights martyr has been realized. The traditionally black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, presented the following interpretation: "Trayvon Martin has become this generation's Till and though his life was snatched away from him, his legacy has also been immortalized" (News One).

Although Trayvon Martin and Emmett Till's situations were not completely parallel, it is clear that Trayvon's death resonated with the African American community and forced various communities to reexamine race relations in America. Trayvon Martin's death, many years removed from Till's bears uncomfortable similarities that resonated deeply with the African American community and forced a reexamination of race relations in the U.S. In many ways

Trayvon's death shattered the perception of the post-racial society that many claim to currently exist with the election of President of Barack Obama, the nation's first black President.

What exactly did Trayvon's death reveal about the current racial climate in America? In a feature published in the Chicago Defender, Eric Holder, then Attorney General of the United States claimed: "Trayvon Martin caused [me] to have a discussion with [my] son about how to interact with the police" (News One 2). The "discussion" that Attorney General Holder was referring to is a common tradition that occurs in numerous African American households. Due to the long-standing history of police brutality within the African American community, parents often feel compelled to talk with their children about how to interact with the police. Police brutality remains a controversial issue, particularly for African American families because other issues such as racial prejudices, negative stereotypes and fear are all brought to the surface. Such fears and distrust are not unfounded.

Following the Reconstruction era after the Civil War, America found itself lodged in the period of Jim Crow segregation, which was designed to alienate African Americans in almost every public sphere. African Americans were almost never hired as police officers and most of the interactions they had with the police were unpleasant. Violent acts by police officers also ignited many revolts that occurred in the 1960s. Despite civil rights reforms, the 1990's witnessed a great deal of public police brutality, including the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, California. The statistics are overwhelming. In 1999, Amnesty International, a human rights organization, released its annual report that members of racial or ethnic minorities comprise an overwhelming number of victims of police brutality, unjustified shootings, and deaths in custody. The annual report also suggested that evidence of brutality and discriminatory treatment by police officers was "widely documented" in court cases, newspaper accounts,

studies, and individual testimonies (Lewis 644-646). As a result, many African American mothers and fathers habitually discuss do's and don'ts of interacting with the police so as not to incite violence or a possible arrest. As Attorney General Holder mentioned, the death of Trayvon served as a catalyst for him sit down and talk with his son about how to interact with the police. Ironically, in Trayvon's case, George Zimmerman was not a police officer, but a neighborhood watch volunteer with an avid passion for law enforcement. Nevertheless, Trayvon's untimely death encapsulated the nightmare of many African American parents who fear losing their children to police brutality. More to the point, the incident illustrates that perhaps the violence that black communities experience is not limited to official police officers but is related to any individual who claims to have the right to protect the law by watching the black community.

Trayvon the Victim

Another major theme that emerged in the black press's coverage of the event was that Trayvon Martin was not the aggressor the night he was killed. Instead, he was a victim of racial profiling. The *New York Amsterdam News* wrote that "Trayvon Martin carried nothing more deadly than a bag of candy and a can of iced tea" (Hicks). In the previous narratives depicted in mainstream newspapers, Trayvon was portrayed as a criminal, violent, drug using, thug who was scoping out the neighborhood and aggressively attacked George Zimmerman the night he was killed. However, opposing narratives from the black press contested this notion and looked at the items he was carrying the night of the shooting. Could a teenager carrying a bag of candy and a can of iced tea have been that threatening to George Zimmerman? An article found in the *Chicago Defender* suggests: "Black Americans see Trayvon Martin as an example of bias

towards blacks” (Burdeau). Though it is hard to ascertain Zimmerman’s intent on the night in question, these narratives provoke a discourse concerning the frequency and regularity of racial profiling of African Americans by law enforcement, or in Zimmerman’s case, an affiliate of law enforcement. Racial profiling entails the practice of using a person’s race or ethnicity to determine whether or not they might be violating the law. Persons who engage in racial profiling rely heavily on stereotypes or assumptions in order to come to certain conclusions about a particular individual or group (“Crime” 131).

Members of the black community viewed Zimmerman as the agent, the aggressor, because he categorized or judged Trayvon based on his appearance that evening, identifying him as a potential criminal, something that parents saw enough in their own histories to warn their children against. Trayvon’s death incited an even larger public response based on the fact that Zimmerman profiled him despite his being unarmed and merely walking home from the grocery store with snacks and a drink. Did Zimmerman have reason to fear Trayvon Martin that night? Or were his actions a result of inaccurate racial profiling and impulse?

Conclusion: Implications of Print Media Anecdotes

This chapter serves to examine the anecdotes found in print media in order to identify the dominant values, concerns and ideologies that exist within society. How are communication patterns actually applied to our shared meaning and understanding of the world around us? Kenneth Burke in his 1950, *A Rhetoric of Motives* suggested that identification is a process exercised by human beings. As human beings, we are inherently separate beings based on social class and other factors. Burke also assumes that in order to overcome our division, we look for

ways in which our interests, attitudes, values, experiences, or perceptions are shared with others. We then voluntarily identify with those others, defining ourselves as “both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (“Kenneth Burke” 142).

However, identification cannot be separated from division. As human beings we attempt to make sense of the world by defining who we are and who we are not. We label, define and position actors in an effort to interpret the world around us. As a result, the labeling of individuals inherently creates meaning and generates power structures and hierarchies that have consequences for the actors that operate within these roles. This thesis serves not only to identify the narratives and anecdotes found in the media, but also to identify patterns and the meaning of the discourse surrounding Trayvon Martin. The mainstream media presented extensive coverage based on the anecdotes used by George Zimmerman’s defense team. In these narratives, Trayvon was portrayed as a violent, drug using, troubled teen that may have had criminal intent the night he was walking the night of February 26th, 2012.

The killing of a young teenager is a challenging event for many Americans, as it should be. As a society, we do not condone the senseless killing of young people. Though a shared value, the media took an opportunity to help the public make sense of this tragedy. Among several print newspapers of the mainstream media, the main strategy was to show Trayvon in a light that legitimized George Zimmerman’s actions that evening, which included his surveillance of Trayvon, his following of Trayvon and, eventually, his death. Many of these newspapers tended to focus on who Trayvon was rather than focus on who Zimmerman was. Although in some media forms, Zimmerman was made to be an agent and portrayed negatively, when the media created anecdotes with Trayvon as the agent, they engaged and fueled racial stereotypes. These portrayals of Trayvon cast him into the criminal and problematic stereotypes that are often

used against black men. The labels that were placed on Trayvon had consequences for not only him, but for many African Americans. The narratives presented in the mainstream media reinforced many stereotypes that are projected against African Americans, men in particular. This portrayal provoked a national debate about the perceptions of African Americans that became quite controversial.

On the other side of the debate are the narratives that emerged from the black press newspapers. These depictions of Trayvon portrayed him as a victim of racial profiling and a tangible representation of the reality for many African American men. Though this racial debate united many African Americans who still struggle to attain racial equality, it also divided them from other communities who fail to understand the struggle and tragedies of the African American experience.

Regardless of whether the narratives were found in mainstream or black press newspapers, it is apparent that Trayvon Martin's death captured the attention of a nation that currently has an African American President and which many often claim to be past racism and discrimination. The conflicting portrayals of Trayvon revealed an even greater underlying tension; how do other communities view African Americans and how do these perceptions then shape the African American experience?

Chapter 3

Trayvon and the Television/Podcast Media

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the anecdotes found in mainstream and black newspapers across the country. This chapter serves to differentiate television and podcast media from newspaper/print media. Here I will examine the anecdotes presented by television channels such as HeadLine News (HLN) and radio broadcast stations such as the National Public Radio. Many communication theorists argue that when considering the medium as a channel of communication, one must focus not solely on the content of the media but the nature and structure of the media and how these elements influence overall thinking and behavior.

Media theorists in this field are typically concerned with the complexity of the medium, what senses (visual, aural, etc.) are elicited in the medium, how these messages are constructed and the social and the psychological influences the medium projects unto its audience. Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis are often most credited with Medium theory. McLuhan, in particular, argued that the human senses were vital to the process of communication and how the media extended to appeal to the senses. He also suggested that each medium has its own character, including strengths and weaknesses and what worked well with one medium may not work well for another (Ellis 646).

One key difference between print media and television is the most apparent distinction between orality and the written word. Primarily, one component of television media is its oral nature, which is the most organic and natural medium of communication. It is the first stage of human development at the individual and cultural level because speech comes naturally and is

learned early in the maturation of being human. History tells us that group oral traditions and rituals served as a primary mechanism of creating and storing knowledge. On the other hand, print, or the written word is fixed to a particular confined space. It is certainly more permanent, because once something is written down, it is more likely to endure and harder to be erased. The written word developed rules and structure in order to communicate ideas across time, and, often, different cultures and communities. It is, therefore, often treated as objective (Ellis 646). The written communicator is more associated with rationality and deliberate reasoning. In fact, the printing press served as a catalyst in spreading the written word and also fostered scientific inquiry and rejection of religious and traditional authority. Messages on television, however, are designed to embody a general domain of information and experiences to appeal to mass audiences. Contemporary electronic media emphasizes immediacy, brevity, speed, and the privilege of having visual impact (Ellis 647).

HLN News

For the purpose of this chapter, I conducted a search of television clips that focused solely on depictions of Trayvon Martin. HLN network was by far the channel with the most footage and largest number of segments regarding Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman. These segments discussed who they were and often featured legal experts to provide commentary and conversation about the trial. This chapter will highlight the anecdotes found in HLN newscasts, demonstrate how they relate to the former narratives, and offer an analysis of what these narratives mean overall.

Television remains a major source of news, shaper of viewpoints and a significant influence of public opinion. Headline News, also known as HLN and formerly known as CNN2, was founded in 1980 as an extension of weather news coverage. It has since expanded to include more opinion shows and pop culture news. In comparison to other cable news networks like Fox News and MSNBC that tend to suggest a certain political affiliation, CNN and HLN by extension, enlist political contributors from both sides to preserve a somewhat nonpartisan network identity (K'tepi 449).

“My son was not a thug”

In June of 2013, Vinnie Politan, an anchor of HLN, conducted an interview with Tracy Martin, Trayvon's father. The purpose of the interview was to shed light on Tracy's perception of George Zimmerman, the pain of losing his son and his thoughts on the impending trial. In this three-minute clip, Vinnie asked Tracy what he thought was the biggest lie told about his son Trayvon. Tracy's response indicated that the media's portrayal of his son as a thug was the biggest misrepresentation thus far. He also stated that he was certain that Zimmerman profiled his son. As Tracy spoke, HLN showed various pictures of Trayvon looking quite young, posing with family members and images of his parents grieving. HLN also included an interview of Zimmerman apologizing to the family claiming that he was unsure of how old Trayvon was or if he was armed with a weapon on the night in question. Tracy Martin strongly disagreed with this line of defense by Zimmerman and felt that the trial itself and the media were heavily “victim bashing” his son. In this narrative, Tracy Martin identifies the electronic media (particularly

television) as the ‘agent’ that heavily scrutinized his deceased son (act) to push an agenda to support Zimmerman’s claim (purpose).

The next clip featured Robert Zimmerman, brother of George Zimmerman, stating that he was “viciously blind sided by a nose breaking attack by an experienced fighter who relentlessly attacked him” (HLN After Dark). As the clip played, the screen was covered with images of Trayvon holding up his middle finger, showing his teeth with grills and blowing smoke out of his mouth. Following these images, Tracy Martin said the following regarding the media’s depiction of his son: “I’m sure at the time when he [Trayvon] took those pictures, he wasn’t thinking, I’m going to get killed and these are going to be the pictures in every magazine. So just public opinion of him being a thug is one of the biggest hypocritical lies.” (HLN After Dark) The clip ended with the audio of Tracy Martin pledging to not let his son die in vain in hopes that justice would be served while showing a smiling picture of Trayvon on the screen.

The juxtaposition of these very different portrayals of Trayvon on the same network is significant. Unlike print media, television clips contain several dimensions that are worthy of further analysis. In addition to observing the interview between Tracy Martin and Vinnie Politan, one must also scrutinize the additional clips that are woven into the segment. I have identified three anecdotes in this particular clip. The first anecdote comes from Tracy Martin, Trayvon’s father, who believed that Trayvon had been victimized not only by Zimmerman but also by the media who had portrayed him as a criminal and thug. When prompted by Vinnie Politan, he admitted that the biggest representation of his son was that he was a thug. Tracy Martin, having raised his son and seen him in a different light, knew better. He felt the media took advantage of his son in order to advance and justify Zimmerman’s decision to take his son’s life. This certainly echoes with anecdotes found in the previous chapter that were part of the black press.

However, given the fact that in this instance the medium was television, there was more content for the viewers to take into consideration. Furthermore, the fact that it was on HLN gave the narrative of Trayvon as a victim more legitimacy.

In addition to the interview, HLN also provided a clip of George Zimmerman's brother, Robert Zimmerman. In this clip, Robert alluded to the criminal frame we saw in the print press by referring to Trayvon as an experienced fighter who relentlessly attacked his brother. HLN not only played this clip, but also accompanied the aural descriptions with images of Trayvon that reinforced this negative, hardcore, "thug" persona. The third and final anecdote was from Tracy Martin, who revealed that Trayvon was a people's person and did not deserve to die. This anecdote most similarly relates to the glorification and martyr-like representation of Trayvon as someone who died unjustly, like Emmett Till. The media are able to indirectly influence the discourse and opinions of their audience by framing various events and stories. Through their coverage of Trayvon, HLN presented specific anecdotes that they felt the audience could internalize when considering who Trayvon Martin really was.

"Trayvon was our hero"

On June 24th, 2013, HLN Evening Express aired a 90-minute clip entitled "Who was Trayvon Martin?" According to the station, the purpose of the segment was to give viewers an idea of who the victim was as the trial approached. The clip began with a visual of "Trayvon's family tree" where the host, Ryan Smith gave basic facts about Trayvon's life. He objectively reported that Trayvon was born on February 5th, 1995 and at the time of his death, was a junior at Krop High School and lived with his mom in Miami, Florida. His parents, Sybrina Fulton and

Tracy Martin were divorced in 1999. Sybrina was a Program Coordinator for a housing community and Tracy was a truck driver for a living. Trayvon had two siblings, Demetrius Martin and Jahvaris Fulton, who reportedly was his best friend. Trayvon Martin's last days in Sanford were spent visiting his dad and his dad's girlfriend. He was on a 10-day suspension from school from having a baggie of marijuana in his backpack. He had only been in Sanford for a week.

The main anecdote presented in this clip portrayed who Trayvon was to his family: "Trayvon was our hero. At the age of 9, Trayvon pulled his father from a burning kitchen, saving his life. He loved sports and horseback riding. At only 17, he had a bright future ahead of him with dreams of attending college and becoming an aviation mechanic." (HLN Evening Express) This particular anecdote comes from the family of Trayvon Martin and portrays him as a normal 17-year-old boy who loved his family and his hobbies. The print as well as television media did not heavily cover this narrative of Trayvon as a family hero, but that doesn't make it any less significant. This portrayal of Trayvon directly contrasts with the "professional fighter" and "thug" depictions that were frequently used in media coverage. It is significant that HLN chose to dedicate a segment to presenting who Trayvon was according to his biographical information as well as who he was according to his family. This portrayal acknowledged that Trayvon was in Sanford because of a suspension from school, but at his core, the profile portrayed Trayvon as a genuinely caring individual who loved his family. In this anecdote, Trayvon Martin, the 'agent' was a normal high school student, who was visiting his father (act) in Sanford, Florida (scene) to give himself something to do during his suspension (purpose).

“I would have called the police”

HLN personality Dr. Drew hosted a two-minute segment with special guests in order to discuss if the Zimmerman trial was really about race. His special guests included attorney Mark Eiglarsh, editor Michael Skolnik, author Crystal Wright, and author Shahrazad Ali. The panelists, diverse in both ethnicity and occupation, expressed their personal views on the incident in question and had varying responses regarding the racial implications of the case. Mark Eiglarsh felt that Trayvon and George Zimmerman’s exchange alluded to the judgment and fear that exists in society, especially regarding the perception of African American young men. His comment was followed by Michael Skolnik, who directly addressed these perceptions by adding that the conversation on this matter should not be about the hoodie that Trayvon wore but should be more concerned with what both men had in their hands. Skolnik felt that blaming the hoodie was not the heart of the matter and served as a distraction from the larger issues, which involved gun violence and racial profiling. The facts of the night in question, according to Skolnik, were that Zimmerman was armed and Trayvon was not. In fact, Trayvon’s only possessions were his cell phone, a bag of Skittles and a can of Arizona Iced Tea at the time when Zimmerman assumed that he was armed. Following Skolnik’s comment, Crystal Wright added that Zimmerman had a right to be suspicious of Trayvon. “If I saw a man wearing a hoodie at night that looked like he didn’t belong in the community, I would have called 911 too”(Dr. Drew On Call).

This statement included a very important phrase, “like he didn’t belong.” What does it mean to not belong in a community? Was it Trayvon’s race? Was it his hoodie? Was it his manner? Much of what the media tried to address was, I argue, precisely this question of “belonging.” If the agent, Trayvon, “belonged” in the scene that was the immediate community

then Zimmerman's behavior was extremely problematic. But if the agent, Trayvon, did not belong in the scene then his purpose must have been suspect and his very presence was a kind of violation. That is, Trayvon's "not" belonging became a problem that made Zimmerman's behavior excusable. Her comment raised some dissension among the other panelists, who felt that though her views could still be considered profiling, calling 911 is still less aggressive than pursuing the individual yourself.

I believe that HLN showed this clip to represent the wide range of opinions that the average American may have had regarding the racial undertones of the trial. The anecdotes and opinions presented by the panelists uncovered that many Americans do have an engrained sense of distrust and fear of "the other" which in this case, was realized as Trayvon wearing a hoodie, walking through a predominantly wealthy neighborhood. However, these anecdotes also revealed attitudes and perceptions about what constitutes one's ability to "belong" and the fact that though Trayvon carried nothing but candy and a drink, George Zimmerman viewed him as a threat and dangerous.

National Public Radio

National Public Radio, Inc. (hereafter NPR) is a noncommercial over-the-air and satellite and web-delivered radio system. NPR creates and delivers multimedia news, information and music programming. It also represents public radio interests before the U.S. Congress and the Federal Communications Commission. It was created by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a government-sponsored corporation that seeks to provide the United States with noncommercial radio programming of an educational nature. NPR's mission was to serve as a

leader in national newsgathering and production as well as provide a link between national and local noncommercial radio stations. With the turn of the 21st century, one of NPR's major goals became attracting a more racially and culturally diverse audience through programming and staff diversity (Troshynski-Thomas, Meyer and MacLaury 313).

When considering the anecdotes in the media, NPR is a media source worthy of its own distinct analysis. For the purpose of identifying the anecdotes found in electronic media, I conducted a search using the keywords "Trayvon Martin" between 2012-2013. Unlike television, the National Public Radio does not have added impact on audiences of visual effects and images; however, it does maintain its sense of orality and print features through its audio and written reports. Moreover, as a news medium, NPR is often thought to lean toward a more "liberal" perspective. Its news reports are extensive, often reflecting a viewpoint that is less commercial than what one finds on television.

"Trayvon was a typical teen"

The National Public Radio published a report on March 23, 2012 entitled, "Trayvon Martin was 'typical teen,' George Zimmerman is hard to categorize". The article began with an image of a memorial dedicated to Trayvon located outside the neighborhood community in Sanford where he was shot and killed. It goes on to quote the Miami Herald which claimed that, "Trayvon Martin was a typical teenager who would end up in a casket, buried in a white suit with a powder blue vest" (Memcott). The article continues to recount other stories that reveal more about the two figures at the center of the tragedy that resulted in the death of Trayvon

Martin on February 26th, 2012. The representations of Trayvon were compiled in a list and were directly followed by those of George Zimmerman:

Trayvon was 6-foot-3, 140 pounds, a former Optimist League football player with a narrow frame and a voracious appetite. He wanted to fly or fix planes, struggled in chemistry, loved sports video games and went on to New York for the first time two summers ago, seeing the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty and a Broadway musical, *The Addams Family*. ...

[He] had nonviolent behavioral issues in school, and on the day he was killed, he had been suspended for 10 days from Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School in North Miami-Dad. ‘He was not suspended for something dealing with violence or anything like that. It wasn’t a crime he committed, but he was in an unauthorized area (on school property),’ (his father) said, declining to offer more details. ... “When he was a child, Trayvon saved his father’s life. “That was my main man. That was my hero. He saved my life, actually pulled me out of a house fire. He was 9 years old at the time. A 9-year-old kid saved his dad’s life. And I wasn’t there to save his life,” (his father Tracy) Martin said in an MSNBC interview that aired Thursday (Memmott).

These depictions of Trayvon were certainly more positive compared to other portrayals of him as a thug and professional fighter. In the anecdotes listed above, Trayvon is described as a normal teen, with normal height and weight, who had ambitions, hobbies, a dislike for Chemistry and was beginning to travel and experience the world. Instead of portraying Trayvon as “other,” aggressive, or violent, NPR included narratives that alluded to Trayvon being a regular teenager

who had normal struggles in school and also saved his father's life. Although suspensions and using drugs are certainly not positive qualities, according to this report, it is fair to assume that "typical" teenagers sometimes get in trouble. Many of the things Trayvon did can be considered part of the life experiences of many teenagers. This narrative presented Trayvon, the agent, as a typical teenager, who traveled and desired to fly or fix planes (act) in order to live a fulfilled life (purpose).

NPR also reported that Martin was unarmed at the time when George Zimmerman shot him. Given this fact, Martin's family and supporters believed the case was one of racial profiling because Zimmerman's assumptions that Trayvon was suspicious were based on his inherent biases against black people. The main issue that this article toggles with is: Who was Trayvon Martin? Was he a typical teenager as the anecdotes above suggest? Or was he a suspicious threat to the Sanford community? By including these anecdotes about Trayvon not having "nonviolent behavioral issues", saving his father's life, and his love for sports video games, you no longer picture an aggressive thug, but a typical teenager who would end up in a casket.

"What if shooter was black?"

Another NPR report was published on March 20, 2012 that featured an image of a makeshift memorial for Trayvon Martin outside of the community where he was killed in Sanford, Florida. The report began by boldly asserting, "a huge part of the Trayvon Martin story is of course about race. The killing of the unarmed, black teenager has led to conversations about biases against black men. In a lot of ways, it fits the stories that we've heard so many times before: a black man was profiled by a white man and the authorities won't step in and provide

justice for a black victim” (Peralta and Memmott). The anecdote presented above depicts Trayvon as a victim of both racial profiling and the justice system. As mentioned in a previous chapter, this particular anecdote is not foreign to the black press and minority communities who are aware of the inherent biases that exist against black men. NPR chose to focus even more on this narrative by examining these biases by speaking with Joshua Correll, a University of Chicago psychology professor who specializes in bias against black men. Correll’s research indicates that his participants are universally more likely to fire at black men whether the shooter is young, old, male, female or even black.

According to Kenneth Burke, narratives and representative anecdotes do more than just “tell stories.” In fact, the discourses surrounding these anecdotes reveal what society truly fears and values at its core. It follows then that this study investigates, what has this narrative revealed about society’s inner fears and values? Professor Correll has a working hypothesis that states that in American culture, black is often associated with danger and crime and physical aggression. He argues that it’s this association that leads us to see black people as a greater threat and to pull the trigger. We see these stereotypes everywhere—from news coverage, to movies to music. Correll has been testing this hypothesis since 2002, mostly looking at police bias and other members of the community. In order to conduct his test, he gives his participant two buttons with the option to shoot or not to shoot. He then presents pictures of black men and white men. Some of the men in the pictures are holding guns, others are holding harmless things like wallets and cellphones. After conducting his experiment, Correll found that regardless of race or age of the shooter, the participant is more likely to fire at an unarmed black man and less likely to shoot an armed white man (Peralta and Memmott).

The NPR report also included a 7-minute audio clip from a Tell Me More news segment that featured an interview with Michael Skolnik, co-president of the cultural website Global Grind who also participated on the HLN panel mentioned previously in this chapter. Skolnik, a white man, wrote to others of his race that he would never look suspicious because of the color of his skin. He revealed in the clip that an African American kid such as Trayvon could be singled out for looking suspicious, but he also argued that, “Even if I have a black hoodie, a pair of jeans and white sneakers on...in fact, that is what I wore yesterday...I still will never look suspicious.” Skolnik reflected that the fact that we as a country look as young black men suspiciously is wrong. This report places a special focus on the ‘agent’ who performs the ‘act’ which in this case is wearing a hoodie. This application of the pentad offers a critique of why the ‘purpose’ changes so drastically when the ‘agent’ turns from black to white. As Skolnik points out, if a white man, the ‘agent’ performs the same ‘act’ of wearing a hoodie with jeans and sneakers as a black man ‘agent’ the purpose is perceived differently. For the white agent, the ‘purpose’ of wearing that specific attire would not reveal any suspicious intent but simply a fashion choice. However, a black agent would be interpreted as suspicious and a ‘purpose’ of creating mischief.

When asked by NPR’s Michel Martin for final comments, Skolnik said, “The last thing that I would say to you Michel, is that Trayvon Martin had a bag of Skittles and a can of iced tea. George Zimmerman had a nine millimeter automatic weapon.” Within this 7-minute clip, Skolnik underscores that America has inherent biases towards young black men and in order to expose these biases, we need to ask ourselves, why do we profile young black men in this country? What is it about them [these young black men] that scare us so much?

This NPR report works rhetorically to support the professor's hypothesis that in American society, black is associated with danger, crime and aggression. Trayvon's tragic death was a prime example of a young black man being profiled due to inherent negative biases and, as a result, losing his life. Strategically though, NPR chose to support this idea by explaining the research of psychology professor Joshua Correll, whose experiment confirmed that unarmed black men are more likely to be shot. Correll suggested that regardless if the shooter is young, old, male, female or even black, unarmed black men are still more likely to be targeted. This research, coupled with an audio interview of Michael Skolnik of Global Grind, suggested that African Americans are indeed perceived as more suspicious. The title of the report, "Trayvon Martin Shooting: What if shooter was black?" makes an important point. America has to address the inherent association with black men and danger because the fact is that young, black unarmed men are more likely to be killed than any other group.

"The black press play a unique role"

As we have seen so far, NPR departed from other forms of coverage with its emphasis on Trayvon as a family hero as well as examining inherent racial biases. A final way in which the NPR coverage of this event was different is that it turned attention directly on the media itself. NPR published a report on April 20th, 2012 entitled, "Examining Coverage of the Trayvon Martin Case" where media critic Eric Deggans explained how media outlets emphasized different aspects of the Trayvon Martin "story" to grab the attention of particular audiences. It is no question that media coverage of the case was intense and this report sought to discuss how each news organization targeted a specific audience.

This report is a form of meta-communication or communication regarding communication. Academics refer to meta-communication when people send messages about other messages to refine the meaning of communication. A characteristic feature of meta-communication is that it frames or contextualizes the original message in an effort to unravel or modify the underlying meaning of a phenomenon. It is a fundamental and central concept in communication that helps to debunk the subtle messages embedded in complex human communication (Andersen 651-652).

Lynn Neary and Steven Inskeep, hosts of Morning Edition, engaged in a form of meta-journalism by discussing the patterns and strategies that other news media organizations used in communicating the story of Trayvon Martin with TV and media critic Eric Deggans. Deggans began his interview by first explaining how a local story snowballed into a nationwide tragedy. According to Deggans, Trayvon's story began more or less as a local story of someone who had been killed in a fight. When the family of the victim was not satisfied with police action, they contacted an attorney and a public relations representative who then approached companies like CBS This Morning. The desire was clearly to give the story more attention than it had received to that point. As they began to do more press conferences, it was only a matter of time before newspapers like the *Orlando Sentinel* and the *Miami Herald* picked up the story.

The report also included a brief quote from George Curry, syndicated columnist, who recognized the role of the black media in pushing Trayvon's story forward. Curry argued that the black press plays a unique role because it knows and recognizes the value of these kinds of stories in the African American community. Deggans added that Trayvon's story was bigger than just one incident in Sanford, Florida. It represented and revealed the suspicion that some institutions in society, such as the justice system, don't work for people of color the way they

work for white people. A central concern of this story is that the police and prosecutors failed to do a thorough job with this case. Black reporters working for both mainstream news organizations and black press focused on this issue early and stayed on top of this issue and fought to bring it to the light (“Examining Coverage of the Trayvon Martin Case”).

Moreover, Deggans alluded to the strategies that news organizations such as MSNBC, Fox News and CNN used to galvanize their respective audiences. Since MSNBC is focused on a more liberal message and ideology and because it is the most watched cable channel for African-Americans, their messages and portrayals of Trayvon were less critical of his character and more critical of George Zimmerman and the justice system. Fox News on the other hand, is more concerned with not rushing to judgment and justifying the shooter, George Zimmerman’s position in the conflict. Fox News’ audience consists primarily of white, middle-aged conservative males and their messages are catered toward such an audience. Other outlets with no known affiliation, such as CNN and HLN are focused more on being neutral and are very invested in locating the heroes and villains and then telling the story repeatedly. Trayvon Martin’s case was unique in that there was no clear hero or victim. The case is murky and more complicated, which was demonstrated in their coverage.

Conclusion: Implications of Television/Podcast Anecdotes

Similar to those found in print media, the anecdotes found in television/podcast media reveal underlying values, concerns and ideologies that exist in our society. In fact, these communication patterns dictate our shared meaning and understanding of the world around us. As a news source, electronic media have advantages by having an oral component and the ability

to include other video clips, which present more opportunities for the viewer to engage with the content. The media also have the power to frame various narratives to galvanize various audiences. It is apparent that for the electronic media, Trayvon's story did not feature a clear hero and villain and this made the coverage more difficult for news stations like HLN and CNN. However, in discovering who Trayvon Martin was, the television media incorporated representations of Trayvon as a family person, as a hero and as a teenager with dreams and ambitions. In order to keep the coverage balanced, they also included anecdotes of him being suspicious, making Zimmerman's decision to call 911 justified. As Kenneth Burke suggested, we label and define actors in an effort to interpret the world around us. These labels and perceptions of others in turn create meaning and develop hierarchies that have consequences for the actors within these roles. Also in this chapter, I demonstrated how NPR focused on media coverage itself, exposing a very sharp contrast appeared between the black press, which viewed Trayvon's story for its value and inherent, and the mainstream white media. The black press, according to NPR, acknowledged the suspicion of institutions by people of color and the innate suspicion and fear that is directed towards young, unarmed black men. While this coverage did not exonerate Trayvon Martin from guilt or explicitly assign guilt to Zimmerman, it did acknowledge that racial bias existed and was often an unconscious part of police work.

Chapter 4

Trayvon and Social Media

Social media is the term used to describe networks and communities of people who create and share content online, typically on closed web sites rather than on the World Wide Web as a whole. Social media is a relatively recent phenomenon and its popularity rapidly increased in the early 2010s. Social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter have become a ubiquitous part of American life. Users and advocates of social media have outlined numerous benefits of social media participation including: increased social contact, the ability to form or maintain relationships across distances and the sharing of information to make daily life better (Ciment 868). As evidenced by the shooting of Trayvon Martin, social media also can lead to political protests and mass mobilization towards change.

Beyond its power to impact and improve communication, social media have a powerful and far-reaching effect on society as a whole. Social media sites such as Facebook serve as a collaborative space where persons can acquire information and organize in an efficient way. Social media sites also have served society by bringing stories ignored by traditional media to public attention. As mentioned in the print media chapter, the black press played an important role in shedding light on the shooting of Trayvon. Social media played a similar role, perhaps even more forcefully (Ciment 868). After being disseminated through various social media sites, Trayvon's killing transitioned from a local incident to a national dilemma.

Following Martin's death in the February of 2012, Trayvon Martin's family posted a petition to Change.org that called for the Florida's District State Attorney, Angela Corey, to prosecute George Zimmerman for the shooting and killing of Trayvon. Celebrities such as Janelle Monae and MC Hammer used their Twitter accounts to urge people to sign the petition

by including a link to the petition on various tweets. Overall, the petition gained 2,278,988 signatures and on April 11th of that year the Florida State Attorney announced that he be bringing charges of second degree murder against George Zimmerman. With the click of a button, Trayvon's story was shared across the nation through various posts, tweets and blog sites.

Social media distributes information in an entirely different way when compared to more traditional forms of media. One of the most significant differences involves its structure and presumptions about what is and is not appropriate to express in any single or group of messages. Print and electronic media are governed by ethical codes of conduct that limit the extent to which writers and reporters can make claims. These codes are taught in journalism schools across the country. Furthermore, the companies that own traditional print and television media are often wary that they might be sued for inaccurate or, perhaps, unethical statements; consequently, the companies police what is said in the media for which they are ultimately response. Of course, these ethical codes and corporate concerns do not result in unbiased or always accurate reporting. As this thesis has demonstrated, traditional media organizations circumvent these guidelines through media framing or by selecting and prioritizing various segments, stories, testimony, and editorial commentary.

In contrast, however, social media distributes information not on behalf of an organization but frequently on behalf of individuals. Instead the users of a media technology, be it Facebook or Twitter, shape the discourse by what they choose to post or share. Unlike the print and television organizations, social media is not governed by an agreed upon code of ethics. Indeed, while Facebook and Twitter may decide to "ban" a particularly offensive user, both of these social media permit a wide array of messages that are inaccurate, hateful, and inflammatory. The ideal of "free speech" is, in other words, part of the culture of social media

and personal opinion, regardless of its content, constitutes the majority of what is said through these channels.

The individualized and often unregulated nature of social media presents a unique and somewhat complicated set of issues for two specific reasons. First, social media have increasingly become a form of “citizenship journalism.” That is, audiences frequently look to Facebook and Twitter for “news” about particular events. Furthermore, users of Facebook and Twitter will post statements and links that purport to be “facts” about current events even though the posts and reposts may or may not be true. What constitutes fact versus fiction or reasoned argument from biased personal opinion is often unclear to the audiences that turn to social media. Second, in recent times, Facebook and Twitter have transformed themselves into sites of political mobilization and activism. Within these spaces, protestors have been able to announce their views and complaints to the world, especially when these events may be ignored by the press and mainstream media. One of the clearest examples of social networking as an activist tool was demonstrated by the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 and 2012. In January of 2011, thousands of Egyptians gathered to protest autocratic rule by President Mubarak. This protest was created and organized on Facebook and was disseminated through Twitter (Voss 1023-1024). It was evident that social media proved itself to be not only a space where people can connect and bond with one another, but also a vehicle and catalyst for activism and social protests. The consequence of these two developments—social media as a form of political organizing and social media as a form of journalism—have increased the importance of social media for the distribution of information, but, at the same time, it has divided the public and experts as to what the proper role of social media should be.

Deciding the proper role of social media is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the shift toward social media as an avenue for discussing important political and social issues demands that I attend to its coverage of the “Trayvon phenomenon” and, especially, how social media was used to galvanize interest in the trial of George Zimmerman. Toward that end, this chapter will highlight three visible representations of this phenomenon at work: Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, the social media blackout, and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. At the heart of these movements, Trayvon, the ‘agent’ and his “wrongful” shooting which became the ‘act,’ represented him as a martyr and revealed his ‘purpose’ to galvanize and motivate people to protest the policing of black bodies.

Million Hoodies Movement for Justice

The Million Hoodies Movement for Justice was founded in the wake of the murder of Trayvon as a direct response to the media’s failure to adequately report on the events leading to Trayvon’s death. Million Hoodies successfully helped to generate global support for the arrest of George Zimmerman by assisting in gathering signatures for the petition on Change.org. In 2012, Million Hoodies created a new tool to help track and document incidents of police conduct and institutional discrimination and has since collected over 2,000 incidents of misconduct in New York City alone. In 2014, Million Hoodies partnered with ColorOfChange.org in a successful grassroots campaign to stop Oklahoma from criminalizing Black youth from wearing hoodies in public spaces (“About”).

This organization is a prime example of how social media works to galvanize activism and protests. Using the Internet as a tool, Chief organizer Daniel Maree successfully created a

blog post, YouTube video and a Facebook event to organize a campaign and rally that took place in multiple cities. the message across the world. The Million Hoodie March movement turned into an official non-profit organization dedicated to social causes such as The Million Hoodies Movement for Justice. The Million Hoodies Movement for Justice is largely an unstructured network of volunteer supporters who share information and organize offline protest activity collaboratively through social media. This section of the chapter will identify how the organization was constructed through the emphasis on particular anecdotes and how these portrayals were instrumental in the development of these organizations.

The first anecdote presented Trayvon's hoodie at the center of the conflict. The Million Hoodies portrayed Trayvon, the agent, used his hoodie (agency) to go about his life. This narrative depicted the hoodie solely as an expression of his own style and person identity as a hip urban youth (act). The Million Hoodies diagnosed the problem as racism. This portrayal also pointed towards George Zimmerman, the other 'agent' and his 'act' which was profiling and ultimately shooting Trayvon which revealed Zimmerman's 'purpose' as a "racist" individual. Million Hoodies then relied on these narratives to connect people's individuals value systems about fairness to the larger issues of social injustice inherent in Trayvon Martin's shooting and law enforcement's initial failure to arrest Zimmerman.

The second representative anecdote, which was prognostic in nature, proposes a solution to the problem, which included themes of solidarity among people and gun reform. In this case, Zimmerman, the agent, shot Trayvon (act) due to a generally more liberal attitude of gun usage in the state of Florida and other states (scene). Million Hoodies provided a solution to combating this racist 'act' by linking Trayvon's death to other examples of African Americans who have faced injustice and racism because of people with racial biases within the justice system and

certain gun laws. This strategy evoked themes of unity and solidarity among many Americans, especially African Americans who can relate to these injustices and provided a tangible solution, advocating for gun reform to prevent future incidents like Trayvon.

Finally, Million Hoodies provided a call to action by focusing on participation in protest initiatives both online and offline. In addition to identifying the problem and the solution, Million Hoodies also amplified their social media presence by providing extensive information about protests, marches and major breaking news surrounding the Trayvon campaign using blogs, and Facebook pages. The social media group felt that mainstream print and television media were neglecting certain narratives and representing Trayvon in a way that needed to be challenged. It gave way for thousands of other social media users to express their frustrations and sentiments regarding Trayvon's death and the Zimmerman trial in a new way. Overall, the Million Hoodies Justice Movement provided an opportunity to examine how social media networks rose to the occasion of message framing during the Trayvon Martin trial. Million Hoodies seized the power of narratives to identify the problem of racism, offer solutions to combat inherent racial biases in the justice system, as well as engage and motivate supporters to support Trayvon's family and the cause.

Social Media Blackout

As evidenced by Million Hoodies, social media help to frame media messaging and create protests and activist organizations. Another phenomenon witnessed in the Trayvon Martin coverage was the execution of the social media 'blackout' as the jury began considering the case. In other words, people took their frustrations to social media, blacking out their profile pictures

and spreading the word about a day of absence from social media. Some individuals replaced their profile photos on Facebook with a black square or outlines depicting Trayvon in a hoodie to voice their frustrations. Hundreds of thousands of people utilized hashtags such as #Blackout4Trayvon, #JusticeforTrayvon and other hashtags on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to share opinions and organize rallies and protests.

Facebook users shared images of Martin Luther King, Jr. wearing a hoodie, the images coupled to demonstrate what the blackout meant to them. Once again we see the emergence of the hoodie as an ‘agency’ by which the black community identifies (act) their place in society (scene). It was extremely symbolic for social media users to recreate images of Martin Luther King, Jr. with the hoodie. When Dr. King, who is revered by many as a martyr for civil rights, is portrayed with a hoodie it sends the message that Dr. King and Trayvon Martin share important similarities. It may even imply that both men were killed largely because of the color of their skin. This depiction of Trayvon as a civil rights figure directly contradicts the negative portrayals of him as a criminal and was a central theme found on social media as well as in the black press.

The social media “blackout” was not, however, without critics. Indeed, the expression sparked a debate over its effectiveness and purpose. Many argued that changing a graphic on a social media page won’t actually sway the outcome of Zimmerman’s verdict or address the racial divide. Those on the other side of the debate argued that swaying the outcome of the verdict wasn’t the goal of gestures such as the social media blackout. Instead, the purpose is to gather positive energy and demonstrate solidarity with Trayvon’s family and other frustrated individuals. Though the efficacy of the social media blackout can be debated, it is evident that it provided another opportunity for social media users to express themselves using iconic representations of Trayvon.

#BlackLivesMatter

#Black Lives Matter is another organization like the Million Hoodies for Justice Movement that was formed on social media as a response to Trayvon's death. This social media group first began as a hashtag and later developed into an organization with structure and resource. It also provides an exemplary model of how social media acted as an alternative outlet when compared to the print and television media. #BlackLivesMatter was created by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza in 2012 after Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted for his crime. Alicia Garza described feeling "incredibly vulnerable, incredibly exposed and incredibly enraged" when learning of George Zimmerman's not guilty verdict. She expressed that the verdict basically said: black people are not safe in America (Day). When Garza logged on to Facebook that day, she wrote what she calls an "impassioned online message" and a "love note to black people." The post ended with: "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." Many of Garza's friends began sharing their thoughts and used a hashtag: #blacklivesmatter. It was then that Alicia Garza and her close friend Patrisse Cullors, brainstormed how they could organize a campaign, or a call to action to ensure that, "we are creating a world where black lives actually do matter" (Day).

The social media group felt that in the media coverage of the Zimmerman trial, it was actually dead 17-year old Trayvon who was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder. Social media users then became the 'agents' that used the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter (act) in order to respond to anti-Black racism and express their feelings regarding the Zimmerman trial and Trayvon's death (purpose). Using three simple words, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter claims to be a tactic to (re) build the Black liberation movement. The hashtag itself, #BlackLivesMatter reflects an attempt to broaden the conversation around state violence and ways in which Black

people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state (“About Black Lives Matter”).

One of the unique characteristics of #BlackLivesMatter (hereafter BLM) is that unlike the social media blackout, it focused on taking the hashtag off of social media and made it a political project to facilitate the connections necessary to encourage social action and engagement.

According to Patrisse Marie Cullors, BLM co-founder, social media was instrumental in growing and developing the organization. She noted that, “because of social media we reach people in the smallest corners of America...There is a network and a hashtag to gather around. It is powerful to be in alignment with our own people” (Sidner and Simon). Cullors also added that BLM is “much more than each individual death of an African-American man or woman, it is about what it means to be black in America.” I believe that here lies another important representation of Trayvon through the lens of BLM. The death of Trayvon was the ‘agency’ that provided a lens into the realities of black people in America ‘scene’. According to BLM, the ‘act’ of Trayvon’s death was due to the ‘agency’ and symbolism of his hoodie, which unites many African Americans across the country.

Similar to the strategic nature of the Million Hoodies Movement for Justice, BLM saw Trayvon’s death as an opportunity to organize and pull people together through their use of Twitter and Facebook. The Black Lives Matter organization recognized the value of social media in developing a political agenda and mobilizing for action beyond petitioning for justice through various mediums. More importantly, these groups seized the opportunity to use social media as an outlet to present narratives that were often left out of mainstream print and television media. The result was a movement unlike most of the freedom campaigns that preceded them.

Black Lives Matter has shown that a hashtag on Twitter can link the disparate fates of unarmed black men shot down by police in a way that transcends geographical limits and time

zones. A Facebook post can be shared with the intent to organize a protest in a matter of minutes. Other websites such as Tumblr, Instagram and Vine allow photos and videos from protests and marches can be distributed instantly. Black Lives Matter has created a new sense of emergency in America, which was inspired by Trayvon's death. Until 2012, deaths like Trayvon were viewed as problem witnessed in local communities but hidden from the national public sphere. Black Lives Matter has brought these conversations to the frontlines and has successfully created a movement to address racial inequality in the United States.

Conclusion: Implications of Social Media Anecdotes

Like the print and electronic media, social media websites were filled with commentary and buzz surrounding Trayvon's death and the Zimmerman trial. In this chapter, I focused on how social media facilitated movements through platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to mobilize and strategize towards political action. The Million Hoodies Movement for Justice and the #BlackLivesMatter movement immediately saw the power of social media to connect with others, disperse information and organize protests and other strategies. The depictions of Trayvon on these sites portrayed him as a martyr and as someone who was marked by the hoodie, which symbolized the 'agency' through which main stream society criminalized (act) and labeled him, ultimately leading to his death. This narrative was felt by many African Americans who related to this concept of profiling and stigmatization and were led to engage on social media through "blacking out" their profile pictures or mobilizing with these organizers. This chapter showed the transformation of social media from a connecting and relationship building tool to a vehicle for framing messages and mobilizing political action.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to accomplish three main tasks: 1) uncover the narratives used to describe the event that led to Trayvon's death and portrayals of Trayvon during George Zimmerman's trial; 2) examine how these narratives overlapped and how they differed; and 3) assess the consequences and implications of these narratives as explicated through Kenneth Burke's pentadic analysis and the theory of representative anecdotes as expressions of "motivation." These tasks were pursued with the goal of providing an in-depth media analysis of one of the most controversial cases of this decade. Considering the crucial role the media play in presenting major events and helping the public make sense of such events, an analysis of the symbols and ideologies presented by the media was important. What I conclude, however, is that the media approached the trial as an opportunity to investigate, discuss, and even draw conclusions about who Trayvon Martin was in order to uncover who George Zimmerman was and what his motive was on the night of February 26th, 2012.

As conveyed in the first critical chapter, the narratives that appeared in the mainstream print media focused heavily on Trayvon as an 'agent' and attempted to connect the 'acts' of his behavior on social media and in school to demonstrate what his 'purpose' may have been when Zimmerman encountered Trayvon on the night of February 26th, 2012. Another narrative shed light on the opinion of commentator Geraldo Rivera, who placed great significance on Trayvon's choice of clothing that night he was killed. Rivera argued that Trayvon was in part responsible for his death, because he chose to wear a hoodie that night. In this particular framing, Trayvon

was made a criminal and the hoodie was portrayed as its own special ‘act.’ The act of wearing a hoodie that night made Trayvon, the ‘agent’ appear as though he were a criminal, because it is likely that criminals would wear hoodies to hide their identity. According to Rivera, the ‘act’ of wearing the hoodie revealed Trayvon’s true ‘purpose’ that night; he wanted to be able to roam the neighborhood and possibly break into a few homes while remaining discreet.

Conversely, narratives also arose from black press media sources that portrayed Trayvon and the other elements of the scenario in a different light. Black newspapers such as the Chicago Defender depicted Trayvon’s hoodie as the ‘agent’ that symbolized the stigmatization and profiling of young black men, which became its ‘purpose.’ I conclude that the black press were not concerned with the agenda of Zimmerman’s defense team, but instead seized an opportunity to create discourse surrounding the stereotyping and perceptions of African Americans. Given the fact that the black press’s primary readership is the African American community, it is not surprising that they explored the racial implications of the conflict.

In the second critical chapter, I analyzed how the electronic media reveal underlying values, concerns, and ideologies. There I argued that the oral dimension of television media and their ability to include additional clips presents more opportunities for the viewer to engage with the content. Television organizations like HLN and CNN struggled to identify Trayvon as an ‘agent’ and whether or not he was a victim or a criminal. This emphasis on Trayvon as an ‘agent’ in the television coverage was essential to ascertaining if Trayvon belonged to the neighborhood, or ‘scene’ where he was killed. If he did in fact belong to the scene, this would have made Zimmerman’s ‘act’ of shooting problematic.

Additionally, in this chapter, I examined how the National Public Radio, a publically supported media organization, not only focused on the Zimmerman case, but also on the media

coverage itself. For example, National Public Radio described the black press as an ‘agent’ whose ‘act’ was forcing Trayvon’s story in the mainstream media in order to portray the suspicion of institutions by people of color and innate suspicion directed towards young, unarmed black men, its true purpose. While NPR did not directly exonerate Trayvon from guilt or assign guilt to Zimmerman, this emphasis on the role and intent of the black press acknowledged the racial bias that often goes unreported in police work.

The final chapter highlighted the rise of social media as a tool of strategy and mobilization towards political action. Organizations such as the Million Hoodies Movement and the #BlackLivesMatter also constructed Trayvon as an ‘agent’ and as a martyr through which society criminalized him, ultimately leading to his death or, at the very least, the exoneration of George Zimmerman. We also see a reemergence of the hoodie, which represented the ‘agency’ by which Trayvon achieved his martyr status. Trayvon’s hoodie illustrated the narrative shared by African Americans who could relate to this concept of profiling and stigmatization due to outward appearance. Of course, this framing of the hoodie was completely inverted to the anecdote that appeared about the hoodie in the print media.

After sixteen hours of deliberations over two days, on July 13th, 2013, the jury found George Zimmerman not guilty on all counts. While this thesis by no means expects to scrutinize the verdict of this case, it does consider the coverage of one of the most controversial cases of this decade. The impact of this case was felt throughout the country and arguably the world. Still, pertinent questions remain. Did the coverage of Trayvon’s tragic tale set a precedent for cases to come? Will the media continue to place a particular emphasis on the black victims of violence as they did with Trayvon, even if the violence in question led to death? I argue that though the verdict and judicial system have their power and impact on society, so do the media and the

narratives they construct. We as participants and viewers, must continue to remain vigilant of the narratives being portrayed and their inherent implications.

Through a close analysis of these narratives, I argue that the mainstream print media's focus on Trayvon Martin is problematic when considering that Zimmerman was the only person on trial. In fact, their coverage implied that it was as much a trial of Trayvon as much as it was Zimmerman. This reveals an inherent bias towards young black men and the law. In other words, based on stereotypes and representations of black males in the media, it is easier to link Trayvon to criminal activity than it would be to link Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, to killing him out of malice. If in fact, Zimmerman had shot Trayvon because he was a racist, overzealous law aficionado, this would have exposed larger questions about the true racial climate in America. Arguably, the media constructed these narratives questioning Trayvon's purpose in order to preserve this "post racial" status that many believed was achieved through the election of a black President.

Regardless of their intentions, the media placed a deceased teenager on trial, and it begs the question of the media's sensitivity towards these unique cases. Although Zimmerman's character was called into question in various narratives the media constructed about him, he was able to defend himself and respond to whether or not these portrayals were at all valid. Trayvon, on the other hand, had his whole life examined, ranging from school behavior reports to alleged marijuana use, to the photos he posted on his social media sites. When covering a situation such as this, I recommend the media, both electronic and print, evaluate their methods in reporting on the deceased. It is simply impossible to assess who Trayvon was as a person and moreover, what was going through his mind on the night of February 26th, 2012. Though the media speculated extensively on the clothing he wore and his alleged marijuana use, in the final analysis, these are

indeed just speculations and not fact. In my opinion, there was another way to go about covering the case. Journalists could have handled this case by reporting on the night in question through police reports and objectively covering the trial, being careful not to speculate on any of the individuals' character. Unfortunately, in many of the cases involving victims like Trayvon such as Jordan Davis and Mike Brown, we see that the media has continued this pattern of placing the victims on trial in light of their death. We must ask ourselves: where do the accused individuals come into play?

The media's portrayals of George Zimmerman were not within the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to mention that Zimmerman was linked with images of law enforcement although he was simply a volunteer neighborhood watchman. In my opinion, the fact that Zimmerman was not conducting official police business when he shot Trayvon has larger implications worthy of discussion. When discussing his purpose behind shooting Trayvon, Zimmerman claimed he was acting out of self defense and referenced the Stand Your Ground laws that justify taking action if one feels their life is in danger. In the portrayal of the night Trayvon was killed, Zimmerman was often portrayed as the victim, although he was armed and had his vehicle nearby. Did Trayvon have the right to stand his ground that night? Did Zimmerman have the right to "police" Trayvon although he was not an official officer? Regardless of where one stands on who was "wrong" that fateful night, I argue if Zimmerman had the right to stand his ground, so did Trayvon. As a society, we need to examine the perception of young black men and why just about anyone, from police officers to neighborhood watch volunteers have the right to shoot first and ask questions later. In my opinion, this fact alone shatters this perfect depiction of America and furthermore, indicates that America has not achieved the post racial status that many claim to exist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. "About." *Million Hoodies Movement for Justice*. Alliance for Global Justice, 2012. Web. 22 Mar. 2016.
2. "AboutBlack Lives Matter." *Black Lives Matter RSS2*. Black Lives Matter, 2012. Web. 24 Feb. 2016.
3. Alvarez, Lizette. "Clash of Styles in Court Opens Trial in Young Man's Death." *The New York Times* [New York City] 25 June 2013, sec. A: 11. Print.
4. Andersen, Peter A. "Metacommunication." *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Ed. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2009. 650-654. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 28 Feb. 2016.
5. Burdeau, Cain. "Obama: 'If I Had a Son, He'd Look like Trayvon'" *Chicago Defender* 6 Apr. 2012: n. pag. Print.
6. Burke, Kenneth. "A grammar of motives." Berkeley: University of California Press. 1969. (Original work published 1950)
7. Burnside, Jeff, and Brian Hamacher. "Trayvon Martin School Suspensions Revealed." *NBC 6 South Florida*. NBCUniversal Media, 27 Mar. 2012. Web. 05 Mar. 2016.
8. Ciment, James. "Social Media." *Culture Wars in America: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices*. Ed. Roger Chapman and James Ciment. 2nd ed. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2014. 867-870. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 20 Mar. 2016.
9. Crandall, Emma. "Till, Emmett Louis 1941–1955." *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*. Ed.

- Fedwa Malti-Douglas. Vol. 4. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 1464-1465.
Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 1 Feb. 2016
10. "Crime." *Race and Ethnicity in America*. Stephen Meyer. 2014 ed. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2015. 125-146. Information Plus Reference Series. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 3 Feb. 2016
11. Day, Elizabeth. "#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 19 July 2015. Web. 25 Feb. 2016.
12. Dr. Drew on Call. "Is Zimmerman trial about race?" Online video clip. HLNTV, 20, June 2013. Web. 5 Feb. 2016
13. Ehrlich, Brenna. "Trayvon Martin: How Social Media Became the Biggest Problem." *Mtv News*. Viacom International, 15 July 2013. Web. 5 Mar. 2016.
14. Ellis, Donald. "Medium Theory." *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Ed. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2009. 644-649. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 9 Feb. 2016.
15. "Examining Coverage of the Trayvon Martin Case." Audio blog post. *National Public Radio*. N.p., 20 Apr. 2012. Web. 18 Mar. 2016.
16. Federal News Service. "Transcript: Obama Speaks of Verdict Through the Prism of African-American Experience." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 July 2013. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.
17. German, Kathleen M. "Dramatism and Dramatistic Pentad." *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Ed. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss. Vol. 1. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2009. 320-322. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 31 Oct. 2015.

18. Hernández, Arelis R. "Small Crowd Shows up for Day 1 of Jury Selection."
Chicagotribune.com. Orlando Sentinel, 10 June 2013. Web. 21 Jan. 2016.
19. Hicks, Jonathan P. "The Trayvon Martin Case: A Tale of Two Families." *New York Amsterdam News* 27 June 2012: n. pag. Print.
20. Hill, Marc Lamont. "Of Trayvon Martin and the Denial of Truths." *The Philadelphia Daily News* 5 Apr. 2012: 2. Print.
21. HLN After Dark. "Trayvon Martin's father: My son was not a thug." Online video clip. HLNTV, 20 June 2013. Web. 2 Feb. 2016
22. HLN Evening Express. "Who was Trayvon Martin?" Online video clip. HLNTV, 24 June 2013. Web. 2 Feb. 2016
23. HLN Staff 1. "Should Jury Hear of Trayvon Martin's Marijuana Use? | HLNtv.com."
HLNtv.com. Cable News Network, 27 May 2013. Web. 05 Mar. 2016.
24. HLN Staff 2. "What's next for 'Million Hoodies' Movement? | HLNtv.com." *HLNtv.com*.
Cable News Network, 17 July 2013. Web. 04 Mar. 2016.
25. Horton, Ron. "Hoodies." *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*. Ed. Thomas Riggs.
2nd ed. Vol. 2. Detroit: St. James Press, 2013. 705-706. Gale Virtual Reference
Library. Web. 3 Feb. 2016
26. Joseph, Channing, and Ravi Somaiya. "Demonstrations Across the Country
Commemorate Trayvon Martin." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 20 July
2013. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.
27. Kte'pi, Bill. "Television News." *Green Culture: An A-to-Z Guide*. Ed. Kevin Wehr and

- Paul Robbins. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2011. 447-449. The SAGE Reference Series on Green Society: Toward a Sustainable Future. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 13 Feb. 2016.
28. Lewis, Thomas. "Police Brutality." *Encyclopedia of African American Society*. Ed. Gerald D. Jaynes. Vol. 2. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2005. 644-646. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 3 Feb. 2016
29. Memmott, Mark. "Trayvon Martin Was 'Typical Teen,' George Zimmerman Is Hard to Categorize." Audio blog post. *National Public Radio*. N.p., 23 Mar. 2012. Web. 4 Mar. 2015.
30. "Murder." *American Law Yearbook 2012: A Guide to the Year's Major Legal Cases and Developments*. Detroit: Gale, 2013. 159-164. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 23 Mar. 2016.
31. News One. "Never Forget: Trayvon's Hoodie May Be Displayed in African American History Museum." *The Chicago Defender* 1 Aug. 2013: n. pag. Print.
32. News One. "Holder to NAACP: Trayvon's death made me sit down with my son." *The Chicago Defender* 17 July 2013: n. pag. Print.
33. Pearce, Matt. "Peace, and More Chaos, at Trayvon Martin Rallies across the U.S." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, 16 July 2013. Web. 21 Feb. 2016.
34. Peralta, Eyder, and Mark Memmott. "Trayvon Martin Shooting: What If Shooter Was Black?" Audio blog post. *National Public Radio*. N.p., 20 Mar. 2012. Web. 8 Mar. 2016.
35. Pitts, Leonard. "Martin or Zimmerman? Who Fits the Description of Real Thug?" *The Herald-Sun* [Durham] 26 Nov. 2013: 7. Print.

36. Sidner, Sara, and Mallory Simon. "The Rise of Black Lives Matter." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 28 Dec. 2015. Web. 25 Feb. 2016.
37. Troshynski-Thomas, Karen, Steve Meyer, and Judson MacLaury. "National Public Radio, Inc." *International Directory of Company Histories*. Ed. Derek Jacques and Paula Kepos. Vol. 132. Detroit: St. James Press, 2012. 308-313. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 25 Feb. 2016.
38. Voss, Tanya M. "Social Networking." *Global Social Issues: An Encyclopedia*. Ed. Christopher G. Bates and James Ciment. Armonk, NY: Sharpe Reference, 2013. 1020-1027. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 22 Mar. 2016.
39. Washington, Jesse. "Trayvon Martin Case Reignites Racial Issues." *The Philadelphia Tribune* 18 June 2013: n. pag. Print.

ACADEMIC VITA

Academic Vita of Briana Adams

briana.adams94@gmail.com

Education: The Pennsylvania State University

Major(s) and Minor(s): Communication Arts and Sciences and Spanish

Honors: Communication Arts and Sciences

Thesis Title: The Tragic Tale of Trayvon Martin: An Analysis of Representative Anecdotes and their Implications

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Kirt Wilson

Work Experience:

June 2015-August 2015

Talent Intern

Served as a talent intern and assisted in the launch of company wide surveys for engagement and retention and created a recruitment app that was used in the corporate hiring process as of September 2015

International Capital and Management Company, St. Thomas USVI

Supervisor: Shemura Nicholson

April 2015-May 2016

Public Relations Intern

Created social media content, managed social media postings, and assisted the Schreyer Honors College Admissions Staff with campaigns and drafting email content

Schreyer Honors College, State College PA

Supervisors: Wade Bennett and Mitch Kirsch

Grants Received: Merrill Lynch Scholarship, Kenneth Frazier Liberal Arts Scholarship, Academic Excellence Scholarship, Bunton-Waller Fellowship Award

Awards: Birkle Student Engagement Award, Fannie Lou Hamer & W.E.B. Du Bois Award, CAS Community Service Leadership Award, Scholar Involvement Award, Jackson Lethbridge Tolerance Award, Richard B. Gregg Award for Scholarly Excellence in Communication Arts and Sciences

Significant Distinction: *Communication Arts and Sciences Department Marshal, Spring 2016 Commencement*

Professional Memberships: Lambda Pi Eta Communications Honor Society

Language Proficiency: Proficient in Spanish