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Visual Communication Quarterly
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hvcq20

Building boundaries: A case study of the use of news photographs and cultural narratives in the coverage of local crime and in the creation of urban space

Robert E. Gutsche Jr. [a]
[a] School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Iowa

Available online: 07 Sep 2011

To cite this article: Robert E. Gutsche Jr. (2011): Building boundaries: A case study of the use of news photographs and cultural narratives in the coverage of local crime and in the creation of urban space, Visual Communication Quarterly, 18:3, 140-154

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2011.599275

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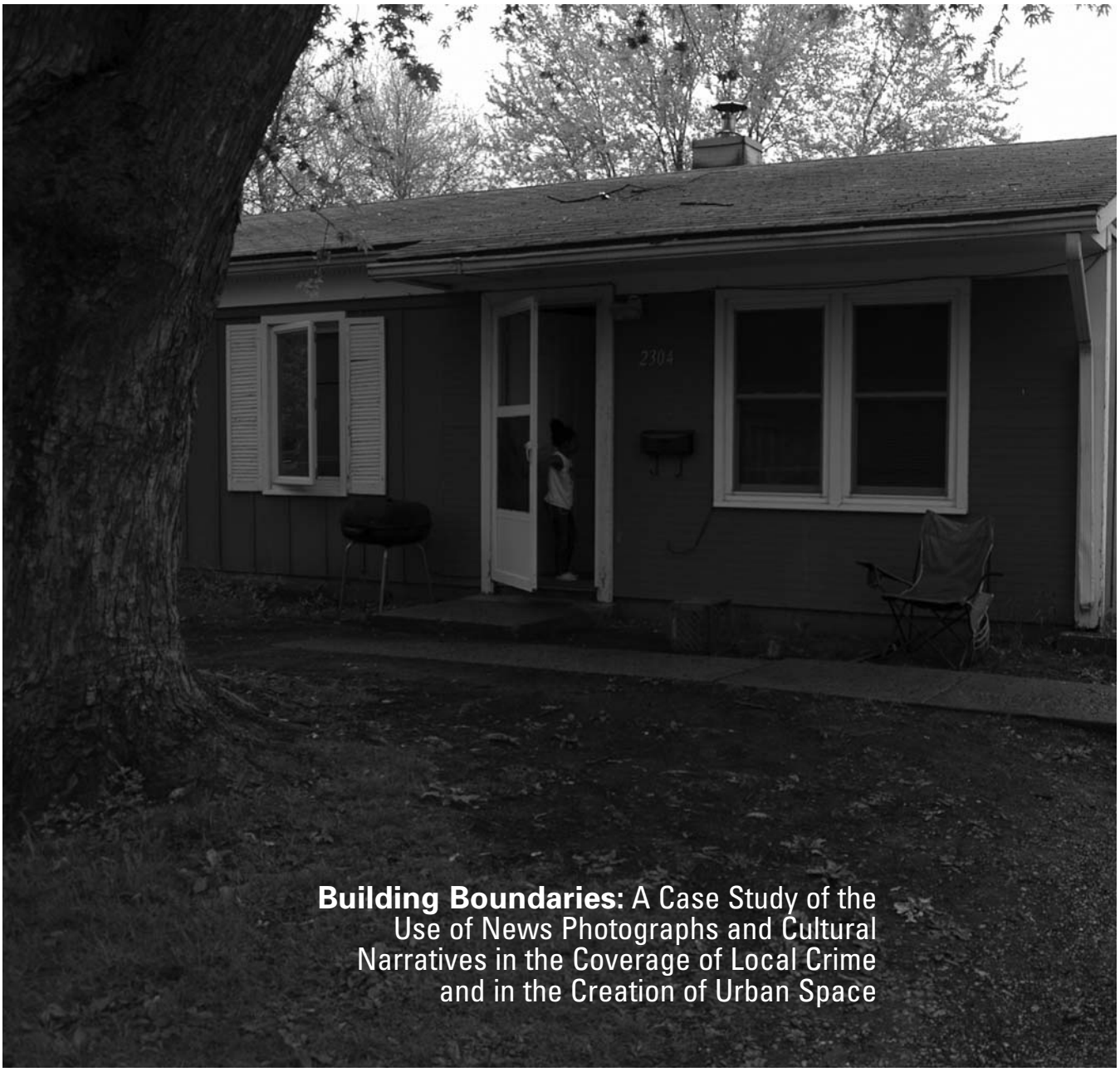

Building Boundaries: A Case Study of the Use of News Photographs and Cultural Narratives in the Coverage of Local Crime and in the Creation of Urban Space

This case study of two Iowa cities argues that news images hold cultural representations that can easily be defined within dominant society and the news institution itself. News narratives, the telling of a common story to help readers and journalists alike understand a current news event, have traditionally been identified within the words of news texts. This paper furthers the understanding of news narratives by looking through the lens of an event framed by news images.

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Figure 1. This newspaper photograph depicts the "Southeast Side" of the community in this study as desolate, criminal, and highly minority. Such local myths intersected with more culturally resonant news narratives in the summer of 2009 in coverage of "crime waves" of two Iowa cities. Courtesy of* The Daily Iowan*. Used with permission.

A media-created "crime wave" started with a street melee of nearly 60 people on Mother's Day 2009 in an area of Iowa City, Iowa, that local news media demarcated as the "Southeast Side." The news event started a telling of violent African Americans living in a separate world within the same—mostly Anglo—city. The overarching story line, rooted in cultural understandings and meanings that span society when discussing crime and minorities, was replicated during the same summer in the "Southeast Side" of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a city about 30 minutes north of Iowa City (Figure 1). That "crime wave," which included several police officers being assaulted by residents and a number of shootings and other violence, told the same stories of poor, young, Black men committing crimes in a battle over gang turf.

This project began after observing an increasing amount of news coverage of violence within the pages of Iowa City's newspaper, *The Iowa City Press Citizen*, in 2009. Most curious was the consistent reference to the "Southeast Side," an area that was very rarely—if ever—defined by graphics, maps, or other locators in both TV and newspaper coverage of the violence and a proposed youth curfew to curb the crime. It became this project's goal to explore these news stories and photographs to better understand the symbols, language, presentation, and rhetoric of the materials—especially the images—in the news texts.

Through analysis of photographs between March 2009 and January 2010 in three newspapers' coverage of the "southeast sides," this paper argues that when it came to local news coverage of the "southeast side" media capitalized on the perceived history of the space: crime-ridden, populated predominantly by minorities, and dangerous, feeding off of the resonance that crime is Black, urban, and contained to the "bad side of town." News photographs in this case study became an important element in defining this space based on characteristics of what was culturally resonant.

This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how news narratives—the telling of a story within recognizable cultural themes to create and sell news as both a cultural artifact (Ettema, 2005; Schudson, 1989, 2003) and as a targeted consumer product (McChesney, 2004)—are constructed by adding the photographic element. This paper argues that news photographs are not just "snapshots" or frames of reality (Entman, 1993, 2007; Gitlin, 1980). They are cultural representations that can easily be defined within dominant society

and the news institution itself and used to create a culturally resonant news narrative (Carlson, 2007).

Iowa City's crime wave is the primary case study for this project. News images from three newspapers—the local *Iowa City Press Citizen*, the regional (Cedar Rapids) *Gazette*, and the university student paper, *The Daily Iowan*—are used for the analysis. Coverage of the Cedar Rapids crime wave acts as a complementary case study of how the sort of narratives rooted in the images of the Iowa City crime wave discussed in this paper resonate in different communities. Implications from this research contributes to an understanding of how news media practices and the cultural and social forces that shape those practices are constructed and used in local news that demarcates geographic space.

First, this paper explores the background of the media-constructed 2009 crime waves and the southeast sides of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids. Next, a conceptual framework is formed through literature on cultural narratives in the news and the study of representations of crime in images. Finally, the paper categorizes photographs in terms of the main cultural themes newsworkers deployed in accounts of the crime wave on these southeast sides and relates these findings to the larger body of knowledge surrounding images and their cultural meanings and influence.

Iowa City's Summer Crime Wave

Community fears about a crime wave in Iowa City grew initially from "riots" in the streets of the city's southeast side on and immediately following Mother's Day 2009. At least eight teenagers were "arrested for their alleged participation in" violence involving up to 60 people that Mother's Day. Another "riot" occurred a few days later, as well. This time, 30 people were said to have been involved. Speculations about the origins of the disturbances were written in editorials, columns, news stories, and letters to the editor in local newspapers. Many columns and news stories carried comments about the local violence and its connection to an influx of African Americans from Chicago, as well as a preponderance of low-income, Section 8 housing recipients living on the southeast side (Wiser, 2008).

Stories published in the papers about residents who lived on the southeast side—even stories about everyday life—provided details, including their experiences with crime and chemical dependency, and discussing their low socioeconomic status (see as an example Daniel, 2009). As Iowa City repopulated for the beginning of the fall semester at the University of Iowa, many of the college students returned from summer vacation uninformed about the recent bouts of violence in the city.

The four neighborhoods on the city's southeastern side have had a mixed history of crime and housing issues that stretch back to the late 1950s when a four-lane highway cut this section off from the rest of Iowa City (Spence, Lawson, & Visser, 2010). In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, new housing developments were built to increase the density of the area, mostly with low-income apartments and duplexes. In 2010, 20% of Iowa City's Section 8 housing voucher holders were concentrated in the southeast side. In general, the southeastern portion of the city is home to several blocks of high concentrations of minorities, whereas the majority of neighborhoods with high concentrations of Anglos are elsewhere in the city. Still, the southeast side is not home to the largest clusters of low-income or minority residents, both of which are spread fairly equally throughout the city (Spence et al., 2010).

Crime was also not limited to the southeast side in 2009. Violence also increased in the city's downtown bar district, mostly in incidents and behaviors related to underage drinking, disorderly conduct, and drinking ordinance violations, and mainly among college students. Crime throughout the city in the spring of that year was already up more than 30% from the year before (Hermiston, 2009). However, between 2008 and 2009, reported crime was down about 19% in one southeast side neighborhood and nearly 13% in another (Hermiston, 2010).

The Summer Crime Wave in Cedar Rapids

Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has a similar history and geographic makeup as Iowa City. While the Iowa River cuts through the center of Iowa City, the Cedar River splits Cedar Rapids in half, from which its neighborhoods are formed. The city has had a blue-collar background, home to Quaker Oats and a handful of other factories. Its neighborhoods have seen an increase in diversity over the past decades, and these new residents have settled all throughout the city.

During the summer of 2009, much of the media attention in Cedar Rapids—covered almost exclusively by *The* (Cedar Rapids) *Gazette*—focused on the March 30, 2009, attack on a city police officer as he disrupted an attempted robbery. Later in the summer, two other officers were beaten by residents. Crowds from across the community spoke

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out against the violence, calling for a new police substation and increased patrols to squelch the violence stemming, mainly, from the southeast side. Compared with the first six months of 2008, assaults and thefts had both dropped by about 15%, and robberies and thefts were down about 35% (Belz, 2009b). Iowa City's southeast side is more of a metaphor for a deviant space, whereas street names in Cedar Rapids bear the directions that demarcate the various geographic locations of its neighborhoods.

Yet news stories about the crimes in Cedar Rapids still focused on the southeast side and its people as highly criminal, minority, and pathological. For example, at the beginning of the crime wave in March 2009, police arrested 148 people within a three-week period; 53% of them were African American (Belz, 2009a). Further, through text and images, news media coverage of the 2009 crime wave turned to narratives of low-income, Section 8 housing on the southeast side, the continued interstate migration of Chicago residents to those housing opportunities, and the need to license property managers in order to better manage who might rent these apartments.

In each of these themes, news media was important in creating the community's awareness and understanding of the southeast side. Included with the news texts, news photographs illustrated newsworkers' ideas about the people and space of the southeast side in 2009.

Conceptual Framework

News narratives help retell today's news through the lens of the past (Barnett, 2006; Ettema, 2005). Newsworkers rely on narratives as story lines to relate current-day coverage of news events to audiences. Through text, language, writing style, the selection of "facts," and the use of sources, they craft stories that are recognizable. More important, the values that resonate in the news narrative are crucial for the news to be interpreted and the narrative to be recognized (Berkowitz, 2011).

Narratives become familiar through the use of myth and stereotypes (Lule, 2001). Stories that have cultural meaning, display symbolic resonance, and are ripe in the audience's memory (Bird & Dardenne, 1988) tend to remove the contemporary news event from its own context and meaning specific to today (Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). Without culturally familiar values and narratives, or stories that are familiar to us, news would seem "wrong," incomplete, or distant (Berkowitz, 2011).

News texts and their meanings have frequently been understood through the use of media frames (Gitlin, 1980; Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2003) in which media use social and cultural symbols and messages to "frame" or construct recognizable messages to connect a news event to the audience. However, it is the narrative, not the frame, which must be maintained and imbues the cultural positions and values (Berkowitz, 2011), used to create the story line, the authenticity, and the resonance, making news authoritative, legitimate, and accessible to the audience (Schudson, 2003).

Cultural narratives surrounding race, culture, and crime converge to produce stereotypical—and often negative—depictions of African Americans and other minorities (Dates & Barlow, 1990). Stories that are told in print and photographs about crime tend to rely on the fears of society and the social constructions of race, space, and the news media as a whole (Fishman, 1978; Sacco, 2005; Schudson, 2003). Cultural and social construction of news enables the media to present disproportionate images and news stories with Anglos as victims and African Americans as perpetrators (Romer, Jamieson, & de Coteau, 1998). Negative stereotypical depictions in news coverage can lead to negative societal effects, such as public policy that may be harmful to specific populations (Maltz, Gordon, & Friedman, 2000).

The use of cultural stereotypes in covering crime is accelerated by news constraints, such as market forces, newsroom culture, and time restraints (Berkowitz, 1997). Crime news then becomes its own cultural phenomenon. Crime waves emerge within the news media first as themes, perhaps as multiple stories about the same events that are continually produced, and then are further pursued as news outlets compete to be sure they cover the same themes and events, in order to remain a legitimate social and cultural institution (Fishman, 1978). For crime waves to occur as media constructions, journalists must connect crime news events to characteristics of a larger crime theme. Such themes are easy to find in the coverage of race and crime. For instance, mob violence (Wilson, Gutiérrez, & Chao, 2003)—such as in the case of how the Iowa City crime wave began—has been depicted in the past as a representation of the primitive nature of minorities, a cultural narrative that is often reproduced within coverage of marginalized populations who

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have been viewed as especially criminal (Ericson, Baranek, & Chan, 1987).

News is a social construction, revolving around the everyday actions, perceptions, and understandings of individuals and social groups (Schudson, 1989, 2003). Therefore, newspaper coverage of a news event or issue must, to some degree, be a representation of social and cultural norms of a community within the written word, news judgments, and selected texts created within news coverage that adequately resonate with a community. Photographs, then, are essential to newspaper coverage (Garcia, 1987; Huxford, 2001; Keegan, 2008; Stone, 1997). News images hold meaning with temporal symbols (using time lines of photographs, color, and image size to tell stories), metaphorical symbols (creating associations between ideas, ideologies, people, and places through image placement or spatial composition), and synthetic symbols (employing artificial imagery or illustrations to distort the image and the reality) (Huxford, 2001). Newswork culture, the newsgathering process, and the creation of photographs—from the preparation of the photo shoot through the editing and to the publication—maintain or alter the images' meanings (Bock, 2008; Silcock, 2007). What appears is the ultimate product, the image, that tells stories through "modes of seeing" (Jenkins, 2007) and the documentary nature of the image, and constructs a "visual agenda" (Miller & Roberts, 2010) through storytelling surrounding a news event or issue.

In turn, news photographs contribute to the newsworkers' cultural narrative—the story lines, history, context, and stereotypes—through "cognitive structures" created by a viewer's own understandings, ideals, and readings of the image (Fujioka, 1999; Newbury, 1999). News photographs are a mixture of snapshots of time and reality and representations of a decisive moment that has been purposefully captured. Most research on race and visual media representations has been in the television medium, especially TV news (Dixon; 2007; Entman & Rojecki, 2000), but newspaper news photographs are highly read and often are a reader's first, or only, impression of the story (Garcia, 1987; Stone, 1997). Readers rely on news photographs for short-term and long-term impressions of an issue (Zillmann, Gibson, & Sargent, 1999) that draw readers further into the environment and to the people, places, and issues being discussed within the image and the news text (Zillmann, Knobloch, & Yu, 2001, p. 302). Television depictions of crime, especially involving African Americans, have traditionally provided the images for visual communication research specific to news coverage and its influence on community (Domke, Perlmutter, & Spratt, 2002; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Fürsich, 2002). However, cultural narratives have not been viewed through the lens of the photojournalist.

The complexities of how media construct narratives surrounding race and crime waves led to the following research question: "In what ways do the photographs associated with reports on 'crime waves' in Iowa City and Cedar Rapids in 2009 represent the spaces, places, and people of the neighborhoods under discussion?"

Method

I began this project after observing an increase of newspaper coverage about violence in the "southeast sides" of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids in 2009. I became interested in the consistent reference to the "Southeast Side," an area that was very rarely—if ever—defined by graphics, maps, or other forms of location in TV and newspaper coverage in either city. To further understand this phenomenon of how the news media demarcated this space and its people, I approached the news stories and their photographs as texts to better understand the images' symbols, language, presentation, and rhetoric (Hall, 1973). Through this critical analysis (Johnson, 1987) I was in search of embedded codes within the collection of images about the southeast sides that signify a dominant discourse (Tonkiss, 1998) surrounding cultural narratives about race, space, and people.

Photographs from *The Daily Iowan, The Iowa City Press Citizen*, and *The* (Cedar Rapids) *Gazette* were selected for this study because they are the major papers covering Iowa City and Cedar Rapids. During this time period, all three newspapers covered the crime in Iowa City; however, *The Gazette* was the only newspaper of the three to cover crime in the Cedar Rapids area. The time period for this study, spanning from March 1, 2009, to December 31, 2009, was selected based on the events that started the crime waves in both cities.

All of the photographs included in stories about the southeast sides within the news sections of the three newspapers were read. A total of 69 images were read, a census of the images related to stories about the southeast sides. Images that presented environment, space, and action were of most interest; therefore, despite their potential value, head shots of criminal suspects, public figures, and others were excluded. On the rare occasion a photo illustration was present, it was

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also analyzed as to what it appeared to represent. Captions were used to help orient and interpret the photographs. Both *The Gazette* and *The Press Citizen* supplied digital versions of the photographs that were initially viewed on microfilm. The news stories accompanying the images were also read. Images from The Daily Iowan were viewed in color via PDFs of the newspaper.

News stories and feature photographs included a number of topics, including crime, education, neighborhood events, and profiles about people or places. My readings of images began as I read each issue of the newspapers in the time period, selecting the images that related to the southeast sides. Images were first categorized by the kinds of stories they were related to, such as crime and safety, daily life, and school. Next, images were categorized based on whether they primarily contained people or whether they contained space, on whether the image represented people, environment, or ideas (for example, an illustration of a police badge, for the purpose of this study, represented the idea of crime and power).

Multiple readings of the images over the course of several weeks followed a qualitative approach not only to understand the potentially overt messages that emerged but to explore the deeper meanings within the artifacts (Pauly, 1991): the social and cultural forces represented in the creation and production of these images. To help with my analysis, I reflected upon my own experience as a journalist, my exposure to a year's worth of news accounts and histories of the two cities involved in this study, and the dozens of hours I spent on the southeast side of Iowa City over the previous year and in conversations with local newsworkers and city residents about the news coverage of the southeast sides.

From there, I explored the use of language in photograph cut lines, the size and placement of the photographs, and the overall tone of the photographs to identify themes that represented the major narratives—the kinds of stories that they told—about the space or people. My readings of the images were also enhanced by an understanding of the involvement of the researcher within the interpretation of the evidence at the center of study (Pauly, 1991). My use of an interpretive approach of these images is in the attempt to understand the culture or the "patterns of meaning embodied in symbolic forms" (Thompson, 1990, p. 132) within the images of the southeast sides. While it is not enough just to name the themes and list the meanings of particular images, this study attempts to provide insight as to what the "texts" of the images as collective narratives say about the way we make meanings from within our communities. This study suggests that there are "features" of these images "that, when taken together, tell a larger tale than the manifest story" (Reese, 2007, p. 152).

Specifically, I was interested in the following characteristics of the images as they were placed within the themes to see the degree to which consistent themes—narratives—emerged:

1. In what ways were people of the southeast sides portrayed? Including images of people within news photographs is an important tool as a way to connect the readers to those involved in the news. Representations of the people within the space demarcated as the southeast side, then, become a crucial element of the stories we tell about news events, places, and spaces. My interest was to what degree the people—or in the story of the southeast side, the characters—were portrayed through images of their everyday lives.

2. In what ways were the spaces of the southeast sides shown? The environment of the southeast sides, through the composition of the images, the items shown, and the lighting of the spaces, created the setting for the stories told about the neighborhoods.

3. What recognizable narratives were found within the images? The images of the characters and the settings contributed to images that told stories about the southeast sides and their people. As discussed, news stories about complicated social issues often are based upon common myths and narratives. For this study, it was crucial to identify, which, if any, stories told through the images were overtly—or covertly—recognizable.

Analysis

The narrative categories identified in this study are built, in part, from Lule's (2001) seven archetypes that he identifies through which media tell stories and resonate narratives surrounding social myths: the victim, the scapegoat, the hero, the good mother, the trickster, the other world, and the flood. Mixtures of news, myth, and culturally resonant stories that have been shown to reappear across generations and in both news and entertainment provide a foundation upon which to further explore the appearances of myths and narratives in our news. Therefore, turning to such grounding in an analysis provides parameters and

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perspective in how to recognize and categorize narratives.

Residents as Deviant and Criminal

In both southeast sides in the summer of 2009, crime was viewed as a serious public issue. It may not be surprising, then, to see images of law enforcement as sources and subjects of images in the coverage of crime (Ericson et al., 1987). Therefore, one of the three main themes within the photographs of this crime coverage included police officers, police cars, yellow police tape, and images of officers and residents. Many of the news photographs during the summer of 2009 revealed crime as gritty, and the images often represented those people involved as either saviors (the police) or deviants (the residents), regardless of whether residents were believed to be involved in the crime itself.

A July 27, 2009, image in *The Daily Iowan* is an example of crime and deviance overtly represented: a police officer, blurred in the foreground, revealing the action of the event as he walks away from an apartment building. Two uniformed officers, in focus, stand at the building. Police tape strings across the image. The photographer shoots this photo from yards away, neither part of the scene nor involved in it. He is instead an observer of action that is separate from him—and the viewer. In the center of the color photograph, what appears to be blood and garbage "litter the pavement at a crime scene," the caption describes. And, with officers standing around the mess in this image, there is no question that they are in charge of the scene and the environment. No subjects who are identified as residents from this area of Iowa City are in the shot. Police dominate and "secure" the space, a scene of a shooting.

The messages within many of the images that included people of Iowa City's southeast side were subtler. Take for example, a *Press Citizen* image in which two police officers are "questioning residents" about a death on the southeast side. The image, placed at the side of a front cover banner headline, "Police Investigate Suspicious Death" on October 9, 2009, shows two apparently Anglo police officers in full uniform, surrounding two apparently African American teenagers outside of an apartment building. One of the teens, a woman, looks to one of the officers who is speaking. The whites of her eyes pop from her face in fear or concern. The officer's arms are crossed, his face stern (Figure 2).

The image of the apparently African American male shows only his backside, his weight shifted to his left leg, his head titled, reducing his height against that of the officer. It is clear that the officer is in charge and as though he believes the teens suspect. The male teen's jacket is also telling: an apparent sports logo with the word *Devil*. Three arrows protrude through the D, a subtle sign of an editorial and photographic choice to use this image despite any possible representation of embedded stereotypes.

In a third example, this one from *The Gazette*, two or three apparently African American patrons are "checked" by security outside of a bar in Iowa City's southeast side. Such an image is common at dance clubs and bars: security using a wand to check for weapons or checking identification cards as people enter. However, this July 24, 2009, image, as part of a story headlined "Tough Crowd" about added security measures at a troubled southeast side bar, is cast in darkness from harsh, bright building lights and streetlights, creating a deviant and dangerous feel. Not only are these patrons photographed while being searched, the image represents the people of the southeast side and its environment as devious and dangerous.

Throughout all three newspapers, the criminal elements of the southeast sides were evident in the news photographs. Such representations were not limited to the environment, the police, and the characters one might expect in crime news. However, that a good number of images used in this study represented the theme that the southeast sides of the cities *did not* appear in relationship to a specific crime—people entering bars, neighbors walking past an area business, and the rare image of residents out in the street—is the strongest evidence of the power of the cultural narrative. The images, as a whole, tell a story that the highly minority sections of a community correlate with residents who are deviant and criminal.

The "Southeast Side" as Segregated and Desolate

The people of the southeast sides of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids were represented as predominantly criminal, segregated from the rest of the geography and society within the larger communities. The space was represented as desolate. Segregation in American cities is a common truth and a common narrative (Wilson, 1997, 2009; Wilson & Taub, 2007). Racial tensions have grown throughout neighborhoods across the United States, leading to physical segregation, educational gaps between races and ethnicities, and other

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Figure 2. Courtesy of the* Iowa City Press Citizen. *Used with permission. Original in color.

inequalities. News photographs from the southeast sides match some of these physical and ideological barriers.

An August 26, 2009, photograph of Iowa City's southeast side in *The Daily Iowan* maintains an earlier theme of the devious nature of the southeast side. Two Anglo police officers are in the background, standing by a police car at night in an apartment complex's parking lot. The car's headlights shine at the camera lens. In the foreground, a random shopping cart—one of two visible in the image—reflects the camera's flash. A low shutter speed blurs the image. In the background is an empty field, covered in the blackness of night. No other people are shown. The shopping carts, one overturned, are among other large items strewn throughout the lot (Figure 3).

The photograph accompanies a cover story on the proposed Iowa City nightly curfew debate, a local governmental policy, though not specific to this apartment building, shopping carts, or the southeast side. The image, however, represents this space as barren, separate from the rest of the city, and—with the police presence—complete with an element of danger. Indeed, in photographs about Iowa City's southeast side that did not involve crime, such as stories about redevelopment or the opening of a new bridge, for example, desolate landscapes and empty fields and railroad tracks continued the impression that the southeast side is abandoned.

The southeast side of Cedar Rapids is likewise portrayed. A March 1, 2009, *Gazette* photograph on the cover of the paper's local section is one of four large images of Cedar Rapids police officers entering a home to check for a methamphetamine lab and searching the south side for known criminals. The main photograph shows a house that police officers will enter. It is night, and the porch light presents a harsh contrast to the dark around them. Officers are silhouetted against dim light coming from the house's windows as they attempt to enter the structure.

Silhouetting police officers, or using the contrast of bright lights with the darkness of the surrounding environment, is a common theme in presenting the southeast sides as mysterious, dangerous, and hidden. Few images show life within the

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Figure 3. Courtesy of* The Daily Iowan. *Used with permission. Original in color.

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neighborhoods. Unlike other areas of the cities depicted in news photographs, where children are swinging in parks, people clean their yards, and residents are profiled for their community contributions, news photographs showed a dark and detail-less space in the southeast side.

Another example: In a *Press Citizen* story on May 2, 2009, about an increase of crime in Iowa City, a small, grayscale image inside the paper shows two police officers returning to their squad car after stopping a pickup truck on the southeast side at night. The police car's headlights reflect off of the truck and the ground. Both officers appear to be walking back to the safety of their car from a dark abyss. It is a small image on the story's jump, but it is a subtle reminder that the space in the city's southeast side is populated by police. It is consistently night, dark. And other than the sole pickup truck, the southeast side is empty.

Such consistent and subtle visuals—images of figures in shadows, empty railroad tracks, bright lights casting a blinding spread to create a mystic scene—are consistent devices in all three newspapers that suggest the southeast sides are desolate, almost deserted, mysterious, and foreign. In addition, images that focus on the African Americans in the southeast sides, rarely depicting that any others live there, support the power of cultural narratives used in crime news and news reports about race.

Residents in Need of Help and Reform

In the coverage of the 2009 crime waves, it was quite rare for residents of the southeast sides of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids to be photographed clearly. When residents were clearly represented they were depicted as helpless or in need of help to avoid participating in crimes within their space. Photographs emphasized the youth of the southeast sides in schools, on the streets, or with adult mentors, parents, or police officers.

In more subtle ways, young residents were depicted as having committed crimes—or potentially partaking in future ones. Such photographs of people in the southeast sides were taken in courtrooms, with police officers, in relationship to community and neighborhood centers and their programs. Residents were commonly shown conducting community service to redeem themselves and their neighborhoods, those of the "other world" (Lule, 2001) within the cities. The residents are shown as "strangers," as primitive and ripe to be socialized into the norms of more advanced peoples in the rest of the city (Lutz & Collins, 1993).

The Spot, a neighborhood youth center on Iowa City's southeast side, was a common space reporters and photographers turned to during the crime wave. Often with headlines like *The Daily Iowan's* "Center Works to Aid Youth," on September 22, 2009, news stories depicted the neighborhood center as an avenue for rehabilitating and "saving" youth from the streets. Photographs shared in this narrative as much as the news text did. In a photograph from the same date in *The Daily Iowan*, two young African American teens are shown inside the Spot, apparently after school.

In focus and in the background, one of the male teens is on a cell phone, a baseball cap backward on his head. The other male teen is looking off into the distance, deeper into the room or out a window. In the foreground and blurred, an Anglo woman, perhaps in her 50s and a Spot supervisor, brushes her forehead with her hand in a sign of frustration. The setting suggests that the youth, there for activities to "help have a positive effect on their lives" because "many kids don't have much positive influences in their lives," as the photo caption says, appear to be spatially distant from the supervisor—and the effects that will help them contribute to their community. The woman seems at her wit's end with these children. They are most surely lost.

The theme of helplessness and residents in need of reform is supported with images such as the one just described: teens in trouble, Black, and potential early offenders who need those from outside the southeast side (read: Anglo) to save them. An April 1, 2009, photograph of a 17-year-old inside a Cedar Rapids courtroom, charged with assault on a police officer, shows a dejected African American youth, another example of this theme. While it would have been usual for images of the boy to be captured in a mug shot/head shot, this photograph provides a confusing message beyond simply identifying the suspect.

However, this photograph shows the youth in focus and in the foreground (Figure 4). Over his right shoulder is the animated face of an unidentified Anglo man. His eyes are wide, his mouth poised to speak. He looks alarmed, angry. The photograph, which easily could have been cropped to focus on the youth, holds a deeper, purposeful meaning. Historically, photo-editing literature for newsworkers would suggest one choose what remains and what does not in a photo to direct the viewer to what is "of most importance" (Edom, 1976, p. 84). A strong composition of a news photograph should focus on a person, an item, or an object without a

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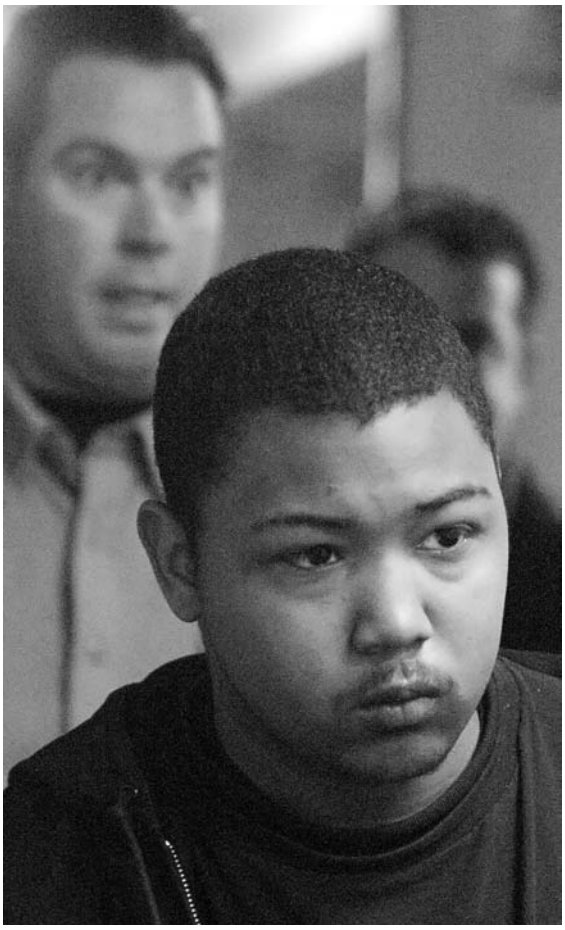

Figure 4. Courtesy of* The (Cedar Rapids) Gazette. *Used with permission.

cluttered environment so that the viewer can clearly determine what is of most relevance. Published photographs should represent the choices of a photographer and a photo editor, perhaps cropping images to allow the storytelling of photographs to be represented clearly. Yet there are cultural meanings to images encoded during the normative processes and choices photographers and editors use in the creation of a news item (Hall, 1980; Huxford, 2001, 2007; Lutz & Collins, 1993).

The use of a subject's eyes and the photographer as an observer looking upon the deviant and helpless southeast sides also appears in an October 30, 2009, *Gazette* photograph of an eight-year-old southeast side resident in Cedar Rapids. An image proper for Halloween, it shows the youth carrying home on his right shoulder a large, carved pumpkin. It is from a community event to benefit the underserved. The boy, slightly hunched, carries the pumpkin, its eyes carved in inward angled triangles, giving the face its own devious nature.

The grayscale image, placed inside the paper, reproduces the boy in a dark light and the pumpkin almost as white (Figure 5). This image alone may not reveal more than an excited youth taking a pumpkin home to his family, but the text surrounding the image does not allow the viewer to escape the dangers of Jamar's neighborhood:

> Jamar Thurman, 8, of Cedar Rapids, carries a jack o' lantern to his home during the annual Halloween pumpkin carving event Thursday at the Wellington Heights Community House in southeast Cedar Rapids. The event is sponsored by the Wellington Heights Neighborhood Association, the Sixth Judicial District Department of Correctional Services and Horizons. Nearly 300 pumpkins, donated by Anamosa State Penitentiary, were available to be carved and given away to children in the neighborhood.

Indeed, the meaning of the photo, then, may be deeper: The image of a boy, carrying a "face" with the eyes lording over him, resembles the image of an unsettled, unnamed Caucasian man

Figure 5. Courtesy of* The (Cedar Rapids) Gazette. *Used with permission.

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peering from behind an African American youth as described earlier, clarifying a consistent narrative in discussing the neighborhoods within this crime wave: the devious nature of the highly minority and segregated areas of our communities require the social control of constant and increased observation.

Combined throughout all three newspapers we see repeated instances of representing the southeast side residents as being in need of help and reform, providing further evidence of the power of cultural narratives regarding race, crime, and urban identities. Most interesting, these repeated narratives seem to hold such strong resonance that they easily appear in three diverse newspapers—one run by college students and one of the three in a separate city, all discussing issues regarding their own southeast sides.

Conclusion

News coverage of the "crime waves" of 2009 in both Cedar Rapids and Iowa City surrounded several narratives based upon racial stereotypes. This paper argues that the resonant narratives, rooted within familiar cultural beliefs and ideologies spread through the media, dominated the coverage of complex social issues within the southeast sides. The use of these narratives constructed crime waves and spatial characteristics reliant on negative narratives and stereotypes about places and people, not upon reality.

Had the events that contributed to the "crime waves" been looked at within the context and history of the communities, neighborhoods, and the cities as a whole, instead of as a wave of related—or unrelated—events, perhaps a crime wave would never had been created. News coverage that evaluated the social, cultural, and economic pressures which contributed to the violence, including the local political and policing policies, may have produced more relevant and realistic representations of issues and events.

Second, these cultural narratives may have easily been used in the coverage because of the lack of focus on other stories within the everyday lives of the southeast side. Stories that revealed the liveliness, potential, and everyday activities of other neighborhoods throughout the two cities would place the southeast sides within the regular coverage area of the cities. While neighborhoods other than the southeast sides were covered because of their businesses, unique residents, school activities, and neighborhood associations, the bulk of coverage regarding the southeast sides relied upon narratives of crime and minorities. Had reporters and photographers included the southeast sides in news throughout the course of the year, not just on the criminal activity, the southeast side and its people may have been better understood as a part of the city, not separate from it.

In sum, this paper argues that while research of cultural narratives in the news is not new, there are ample opportunities for future research to explore the use and appearance of news narratives within local news coverage, not just larger, national news stories and news trends. In addition, this case study provides evidence that news photographs are an important element in defining the southeast sides based on characteristics of what was culturally familiar, and therefore suggests that more research on news narratives include visual representations, as well as the written word. Such investigations can unearth more perspective into a newsworkers' ability to tell stories and mask complex cultural and social issues behind what we believe we know about people and places.

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The author would like to thank the following reviewers for their comments and suggestions and colleagues for their support: Judy Polumbaum, Frank Durham, Jack Lule, Dan Berkowitz, Kelly Giese, and Etse Sikanku. In addition, the author thanks the newspapers mentioned in this study for their cooperation.

Robert E. Gutsche Jr. is a PhD candidate in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa. Correspondence should be addressed to robert-gutsche@uiowa.edu.

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