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2 Renewing the Lease

How News Characterizations of Baltimore Realigned White Reign of US Cities

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About two weeks after Freddie Gray died in police custody and droves of residents – many black—took to Baltimore streets to protest anti-black policing and official violence, police in Charlotte, NC, decided, in the words of one *Charlotte Observer* news story, to “engage in dialogue on officer-involved deaths” (Wootson, 2015). Citing the deaths of black men at the hands of non-black police officers in Baltimore, New York, Ferguson—and locally in the slaying of a black youth in Charlotte in September 2013 and in February 2015 in North Charleston, SC, when police killed what the newspaper described as a mentally ill black woman—the newspaper promoted “talk” about the violence during “community conversations” led by Charlotte police. At the same time, the newspaper editorially attacked Baltimore “rioters” for “inexcusable, but also unsurprising” responses to Gray’s death, with one editorial labeling residents as “the drivers behind Baltimore’s pain” (*Charlotte Observer*, 2015).

Outside of the paper’s editorial pages, news coverage of local police outreach efforts to maintain calm on Charlotte’s streets highlighted the perilous and virtuous job of police but journalists sidestepped the systemic forces that might just make public actions in Baltimore a form of resistance against power structures rather than simply serve as signs of social strife (Jeffries, 2015). Indeed, in describing local police efforts to open “dialogue” about “when and why police pull their guns,” one news article described the police department’s “chief weapon: a simulator that allows people to see what it’s like for officers in a use-of-force situation” (Wootson, 2015). In fact, much of the *Charlotte Observer*’s local coverage of Gray’s death and related public unrest over the police department’s tactics that are thought to have killed him focused on a highly routine element of journalistic work, the “localizing” of news (Kaniss, 1991; Lindell and Karlsson, 2016). Days after Gray’s death and at the beginning of unrest in Baltimore on April 29, 2015, for instance, the *Charlotte Observer* explained that some 85 local police officers would begin wearing “lipstick-sized cameras” to record police interactions in the wake of “highly publicized shootings that have focused attention on police” (Off, 2015). Yet, in listing the shootings and

where they took place—"in Missouri, New York, South Carolina and Maryland"—the newspaper held off until the bottom of the story to discuss its own local ties:

Locally, the deaths of two African-Americans at the hands of CMPD officers have provoked controversy.

Jonathan Ferrell, 24, a former Florida A&M football player who moved to Charlotte to be with his fiancée, was shot and killed in September 2013. Ferrell had wrecked his car, approached a house to ask for help and was mistaken for a burglar.

Janisha Fonville was shot in February after officers were called to a domestic dispute. Police said Fonville, 20, lunged at the officer with a knife, although a witness disputes that claim.

Randall Kerrick, the officer who shot Ferrell, was charged with voluntary manslaughter. Mecklenburg County District Attorney Andrew Murray ruled that Officer Anthony Holzhauser was justified when he shot Fonville.

Other local news coverage by the *Observer* that discussed Gray's death or unrest in Baltimore focused on the virtuous practices and purposes of local police, including comparing the horror in Baltimore to a calm and uncontested public-police relationship in Charlotte—despite the city's recent history. A May 2, 2015 news article headlined "CMPD has rules for safe transport of prisoners," for example, reads as a promotional aid for police relations, stating, "As in Baltimore, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police have rules in place that aim to prevent deaths like Freddie Gray's" (Gordon, 2015). The article expands upon local police standards on transporting "persons in custody": "According to their policies, Charlotte-Mecklenburg officers approach these situations with care.... As such, the rules seem designed with the security of prisoners and officers in mind." In turn, and as this chapter argues, Charlotte's daily newspaper and newspapers across the US that were home to their own "Freddie Gray cases"—i.e., nationalized instances of racialized police violence that led to the death of a black man¹—used news about Gray's death as an opportunity to distract attention away from local racial strife (King and Stapleton, 2013).

Our analysis of newspaper coverage from nine US cities about the Baltimore unrest examines the role of "localization" of place and people to demarcate and characterize geography and its social conditions in a way that explained the need for local police violence and virtue in a quest not only to "maintain calm" on city streets but to maintain ideological control over the role of police and local undesirables (Derickson, 2016; Yancy and Jones, 2013). We argue that racialized news coverage

of Baltimore in newspapers whose own geographies were home to high-profile deaths of black men by official and pseudo-police officers prior to the Gray protests realigned (and renewed) structures of white control in these spaces.

Myths of Place and News Scene-setting of White Supremacy

The press have a longstanding role in the creation of dominant ideology in the US, specifically when it comes to explanations of people and spaces of urban environments (English, 2011; Hirsch, 2002). Moreover, the press function alongside corporate, governmental, and police institutions in advancing explanations of everyday life that benefit white populations—particularly in terms of social conditions within urban geographies, thus creating notions of both “inner-cities” and of nations (Bhabha, 1990; Gutsche and Rafikova, forthcoming; Said, 1979). Lule (2001), for instance, analyzes the role of cultural myth in news constructions of “The Other World,” a space of racialized disorder placed within a Westernized (read US white) environment. The “othering” of space leads to dominant news discourse of judgment and measurement of validity in the narratives of meanings that come from within those spaces.

Ideological examinations of place-making has been extended in recent years and appears among an interdisciplinary set of research about how domestic media discuss urban areas of the United States. This work contributes to delineation between geographic interpretations of space and place (Lefebvre, 1991; Lipsitz, 2011; Massey, 2010). Here we understand space as a geographic location with a particular social function and meaning, such as a baseball park or a school classroom. Place, however, holds deeper cultural meaning; this is where the baseball park becomes a geography of building nationhood as “America’s pastime,” and where the classroom is represented as a space for building community and breaking stereotypes through education. Certainly, dominant meanings of spaces and places, however, can be contested (Soja, 2010): baseball parks are meaningless to some while classrooms are oppressive to others. It is within the role of news myth—the journalistic storytelling of culturally resonant tales of similar situations to espouse meaning to a current issue or event—that some of the deepest meanings of dominant society are embedded, from issues of gender and race to those of nationhood (Schudson, 2005).

Myth not only operates at a larger semiotic level of interpretation and meaning-making, but functions as a means by which to set local news agendas that, in turn, can also influence local socio-political policies, debates, and outcomes (Macek, 2006; McCombs and Funk, 2011). Even mediated local events can be shifted into larger, national spotlights of discussion. For example, the fatal shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon

Martin in 2012 by a white-Hispanic neighborhood watchman outside of Orlando, Florida, has been cataloged in recent media memory as a moment that forced public recognition of police violence against blacks (Gutsche and Rafikova, 2016). Contributing to discourse on the plight of black youth at the hands of police through visual rhetoric—similar to the open-casket photography of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black youth who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for flirting with a white woman (Berger, 2011)—images of Martin in a hooded sweatshirt held spatial components of meaning related to the explanations for the violence. The local and national public discourses that presented the cases of Till and Martin as expressing Southern racism and violent sentiments thereby released Northern communities of responsibility for less-publicized acts of hate under white-issued guarantees of property and of home (Kurtz, 2013; Pulido, 2015).

Popular and press discourse that began to connect dominant ideologies of the US to black-white hatred halted around the time of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, turning to specific issues of Islamophobia (Carr, 2016). Only recently have public and press platforms provided an opportunity to rekindle discourse related to anti-black racism as a form of domestic terrorism; this in itself is a war of terror with direct geopolitical extensions (Muhammad, 2010; Thompson, 2016). “Spatial turns” in recent work on news, digital media, and geography have reappeared scholarly discourse (Adams and Jansson, 2012; Couldry and McCarthy, 2004; Falkheimer and Jansson, 2006; Hess and Waller, 2014; Reese, 2016). However, much of this work ignores racial and class delineations of both ideological and physical spaces captured in a mediatized world (Grimm, 2015), tending to normalize a white space of sorts in which elite mechanisms of media coverage and racialized language in the form of metaphor and explanation serve as social maps of resistance to black identity of self and space (Hodges, 2015; McLemore, 2015; Yancy and Jones, 2013). It is the combination of critical race theory, human geography, and journalism studies that provides a dynamic intersection of meaning related to the role of media control (Monmonier, 1996), although much of this work operates within mainstream explanations that whitewashes intersections of news, race, and space as a form of cultural and social control (Giroux, 2015).

Media Acts of Surveillance, Control, and Policing

Journalists operate within an interpretive community that measures and maintains a paradigm of approved journalistic practice (Berkowitz and TerKeurst, 1999; Carlson, 2006). In “boundary work” research, however, the word “community” retains a sense of spatial connection when the boundaries being examined operate within “hyper-local” environments or even in digital spheres (Campbell, LeDuff, Jenkins and Brown, 2012; Robinson, 2014). In other words, mediation of issues and events can rarely escape a geographic start to where an event or issue begins.

Even in an age when journalistic “objectivity” has been replaced with “fairness and balance,” journalists function amid professional standards of observation, a “waiting and watching” of their spatial environments (Gutsche, 2015a). Surveillance of populations, “communities,” and geographies is core to journalism’s role and function (Shoemaker, 1996; Shoemaker and Cohen, 2006), yet surveillance is meaningless if absent of the cultural explanations for what one may see, particularly in terms of surveillance related to race and space.

Debate about colorblindness in a supposed post-racial society—one said to be influenced less and less by issues and identities of race—and the role of journalism in it (Alemán, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Feldman, 2016; Hodges, 2015) continues to be at the center of public storytelling about policing, policies of security, and notions of physical meanings of space (Macek, 2006). Police myth, as a set of narratives that revolves around the altruistic naturalized authority of police (Manning, 1997), also operates as a press function via myths of journalists as heroes, as agitators, and as citizens engaged in “policing” of the powerful and of the poor (Ehrlich and Saltzman, 2015). These narratives of power combine in a merged interpretive community of press-police in ways that establish and maintain messages of public and policing policies (Gutsche, 2015). Often rooted in racialized interpretations of and for social structures, the work of journalists operates within boundaries of implementing oppression that are rarely challenged by journalistic boundary research (Duggans, 2012; Klaehn, 2005).

In terms of spatial connections amid these boundaries of social structures (Burgess, 1985; Yanich, 2005), spaces of belonging and of banishment and the complexities of media systems that stretch beyond physical borders to related ideological ones remain tied to fundamental and socially conservative positions of thought and action that render communication as a central element of divides that the press purports to challenge (Beckett and Herbert, 2009; Graeff, Stempeck and Zuckerman, 2014). To address interactions of place and race in how Gray’s death and Baltimore protests appeared in local news across the US, we ask the following questions: First, how did journalists outside of Baltimore who had covered their own, local events of police violence cover Baltimore protests and police actions? Second, in what ways does this coverage identify a fluidity of racialized norms in press coverage of urban (read, black) and police activity? Third, what explains the role of locality and place-making in press explanations of what happens “here” through coverage of what is happening “there?”

Exploring Press Characterizations of Place and People

Our analysis of news place-making in this case relies on press characterizations of geography, populations, and social conditions that appeared in 152 articles from nine city newspapers across the United States at the time of unrest in Baltimore (see Figure 2.1).

Victim and Age	Date and Location	Newspaper Item Counts	Description of Case
Trayvon Martin 17	February 26, 2012 Sanford, Florida	<i>Orlando Sentinel</i> Staff News Articles: 5 Local News Columns: 0 Editorials: 0 Local Op-eds: 0 Wire Stories: 15 Total: 20	A black male was shot and killed by a neighborhood watchman in a suburb of Orlando, Florida. George Zimmerman, a white Hispanic, was acquitted of wrongdoing in Martin's death. Public controversy about the role of race in this case remains.
Eric Garner 43	July 17, 2013 Staten Island, New York	<i>The New York Times</i> Staff News Articles: 11 Local News Columns: 0 Newspaper Editorials: 1 Local Op-eds: 1 Wire Stories: 0 Total: 13	A black male was wrestled to the ground and killed by two non-black police officers who allege he was illegally selling cigarettes. Garner died from complications after being placed in a "chokehold." Video captures Garner's pleas and led to the #ICan'tBreathe Twitter handle.
Jonathan Ferrell 24	September 14, 2013 Charlotte, North Carolina	<i>Charlotte Observer</i> Staff News Articles: 8 Local News Columns: 0 Newspaper Editorials: 2 Local Op-eds: 1 Wire Stories: 0 Total: 11	A black male was shot and killed by a white police officer after Ferrell sought help at a house near where he was involved in a car crash. The officer shot Ferrell 10 times as Ferrell allegedly ran toward him.
Michael Brown 18	August 9, 2014 Ferguson, Missouri	<i>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i> Staff News Articles: 2 Local News Columns: 1 Newspaper Editorials: 1 Local Op-eds: 0 Wire Stories: 23 Total: 27	A black male was shot and killed by a white police officer near St. Louis after the officer stopped Brown who was suspected of stealing from a store. Brown ran, stopped, turned, and was killed. Autopsies indicate Brown may have held his arms up, leading to the mantra, "Hands up, don't shoot."
Tamir Rice 12	November 22, 2014 Cleveland, Ohio	<i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i> Staff News Articles: 13 Local News Columns: 4 Newspaper Editorials: 3 Local Op-eds: 1 Wire Stories: 5 Total: 26	A black male was shot and killed by a white police officer while sitting outside his house with an air gun. As officers arrived, Rice reached to his waist, possibly to give the gun to officers. Officers opened fire as the squad car was stopping. Rice died the next day.
Tony Terrell Robinson, Jr. 19	March 6, 2015 Madison, Wisconsin	<i>Wisconsin State Journal</i> Staff News Articles: 2 Local News Columns: 0 Newspaper Editorials: 0 Local Op-eds: 1 Wire Stories: 2 Total: 5	A black male was shot and killed by a white police officer responding to a 911 call about a disturbance. While police and Robinson's friends say Robinson was on drugs and was violent, witnesses suggest the officer could have used non-lethal means to subdue.
Eric Courtney Harris 44	April 2, 2015 Tulsa, Oklahoma	<i>Tulsa World</i> Staff News Articles: 4 Local News Columns: 5 Newspaper Editorials: 2 Local Op-eds: 0 Wire Stories: 8 Total: 19	A black male was shot and killed by a white volunteer reserve deputy officer (also a corporate CEO and contributor to the sheriff's department) who reportedly mistook his firearm for a Taser and shot Harris in the back. Video captures Harris telling officers he can't breathe. An officer responds, "Fuck your breath."
Walter Scott 50	April 4, 2015 Charleston, South Carolina	<i>Charleston Post and Courier</i> Staff News Articles: 11 Local News Columns: 1 Newspaper Editorials: 2 Local Op-eds: 0 Wire Stories: 7 Total: 21	A black male was shot and killed by a white police officer after being stopped for a broken brake light. Scott ran. Video shows the officer shooting Scott in the back and handcuffing him as he appears lifeless. No officers were seen performing CPR.
Freddie Gray 25	April 12, 2015 Baltimore, Maryland	<i>The Washington Post</i> Staff News Articles: 7 Local News Columns: 2 Newspaper Editorials: 1 Local Op-eds: 0 Wire Stories: 0 Total: 10	A black male died in police custody at the hands of white police officers. (We selected <i>The Washington Post</i> for this data, because we are interested in how places outside of Baltimore covered this case. <i>The Post</i> is one of the closest newspapers that covered the story as a local and national one.) Gray died April 19.
		Total Items: 152	

Figure 2.1 Cases and Articles Selected for Study.

Each of these newspapers had covered police brutality and racialized violence within their own cities that had garnered local and national press attention in the last few years, beginning with the February 26, 2012 murder of a black teen, Trayvon Martin, by a white Hispanic neighborhood watchman in Sanford, FL. We searched online news databases and newspaper archives for "Gray" and/or "Baltimore" in each of

these newspapers for one month starting April 18, 2015 when protests related to Freddie Gray's death began in Baltimore. We selected news articles, editorials, and wire material from the Associated Press and other services and read these texts repeatedly (Berkowitz and Eko, 2007), making notes and discussing content and story forms, paying particular attention to how news explanations of Baltimore's unrest localized the event to the respective outlet's geography and to coverage of previous local events of racialized policing (El-Burki, Porpora, and Reynolds, 2016; Gutsche and Salkin, 2015).² Through our readings, we identified three major themes of how local news descriptions of sources/characters, environmental settings, conflict, dialogue/quotes, and explanations—key elements of journalistic storytelling (Parisi, 1998; Schudson, 2005)—functioned to ascribe meanings of spaces from “there” to “here” in coverage of another space (Gutsche, 2014).

News of Racialized Narratives, Narratives of Racialized News

By and large, local coverage of Baltimore protests in newspapers whose cities had their own instances of nationalized police violence against black men focused on information updates about Baltimore's unrest and the potential causes for violence that were rooted in national narratives of racialized disorder. The *Tulsa World*, for instance, ran a wire story from *The Washington Post*'s Eugene Robinson that focused on the role of parenting; it blamed disorder in the streets on disorder in the home, claiming that “[m]any of the rioters who set Baltimore on fire on Monday evening” were “teenagers” who, under the guidance of Baltimore city officials, needed parents to “get their kids out of the streets and stem the wave of chaos” (*Tulsa World*, 2015). Additionally, articles that ran in national newspapers, including *The New York Times*, repeated language from local officials that cast the violence as the fault of “thugs” and “criminals” (Stolberg, 2015a). This language used by national newspapers and wire stories that appeared in local newspapers, such as in the *Orlando Sentinel*. One Tribune wire service story that ran in the *Sentinel*, for instance, outright racialized news stories of figures (“teenagers”) involved in Gray's case by using terms such “thugs” in reference to protesters. It thereby placed the protestors in a context of racial tension (e.g. Mozingo and Phelps, 2015), as the term “thugs” frequently appears in news to associate urban blacks with crime (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Gutsche, 2015; Macek, 2006).

Discussing the political maneuvering of State Attorney Marilyn Mosby in charging Baltimore police officers with Gray's death, an Associated Press wire story that also appeared in the *Orlando Sentinel* discussed how Mosby had ousted “an established white opponent last year, accusing him of being too cozy with police officers and too out of

touch with the citizens of Baltimore” (Nuckols and Meyers, 2015). The story added that Mosby and “her husband, a Baltimore city councilman, are black and live just blocks from the poverty-stricken community where riots broke out Monday following Gray’s funeral.” At the same time, newspaper articles overtly described Baltimore as a warzone. *The New York Times* described armored vehicles lining “this battered city’s main thoroughfares” while “thousands of law enforcement officers and National Guard troops worked to maintain order” (Stolberg, 2015b) although the same article acknowledged only “scattered reports of unrest after a day of largely peaceful protests.”

Amid reporting that moved back and forth between official police reports and editorial rhetoric about the challenges of living in urban (read, black) America, newspapers ran articles that presented Baltimore as a warzone where residents were always on the brink of violence, such as in local reporting of Cleveland’s *Plain Dealer* (Ewinger, 2015). Meanwhile, major official players, such as the officials who activated the National Guard, were presented as calm, prepared, heroic, and virtuous peace-makers, such as in a wire story that appeared in the *Post and Courier* (Milloy, 2015). With the dryness of foreign war correspondence a *Washington Post* news article reported: “The troops were in Baltimore before midnight” (Hermann, Harris and Halsey, 2015).

Interjected into the fray of official reports and distant voices of violence, local newspapers coupled national wire stories of Baltimore with reporting about how the protests threaten their own “peaceful” communities. And it is in this local coverage of city meetings, art installations, and school news that the Baltimore case became more about local racial order than about Baltimore itself. A *Cleveland Plain Dealer* local news story about a county commission discussion of public funding for arts and development, for instance, highlighted a speaker from the audience who, having referred to himself as “a black man in Cuyahoga County,” spoke about racial inequality in local contracting work (Litt, 2015). The paper characterized the man as being concerned with what the newspaper called “this week’s civil unrest in Baltimore.” More specifically, the *Plain Dealer* quoted the man as saying that local inequality will make for “the next Baltimore—Cleveland and Cuyahoga County.” The article made no mention of the 2014 police killing of Tamir Rice, nor any other local and racialized violence similar to what was occurring in Baltimore.

In May 2015 the *Wisconsin State Journal* published a local news article about police opposition to artwork placed in a library depicting “a black boy pointing a toy gun at three riot police officers who have their weapons aimed at the child” (Ehlke, 2015); the artwork was presented as becoming controversial “as demonstrations endure nationwide to protest the killings of black suspects by white police officers.” The *State Journal* mentioned that the debate emerged because of Gray’s death. As such, a police shooting in Madison, WI in May 2015 was presented as

an afterthought: “In March, a white police officer shot and killed an unarmed black man in Madison, sparking demonstrations.” Articles appearing in newspapers from local reporters and wire services that either relayed information from afar or related the coverage from “there” to issues, people, and places of “here” generally cast Baltimore as a dangerous urban environment – even without the protests—and full of morally corrupt youth and black agitators (i.e. Milloy, 2015; Robinson, 2015).

News coverage and opinion columnists alike contributed to overarching narratives of urban, black culture that, when aligned with stories of reaction to Baltimore in local spaces, created a widespread construction of place that justified and legitimized violence to calm unrest. In describing protests in Baltimore as leading to “devastation” in “blighted neighborhoods on both sides of town,” for instance, a *New York Times* news article referred to the violence “part of a heavy blow for Baltimore,” itself characterized as “a long-suffering city that has in recent years shown encouraging signs of a comeback” (Shane, 2015). Indeed, the national paper quoted a Baltimore resident who discussed systemic conditions that influence her neighborhood: “This is the land that time forgot,” the resident said. She continued, referring to residents and officials, “They want to act like the CVS is the Taj Mahal. They have dilapidated buildings everywhere. They have never invested in the people. In fact, it’s divested. They take every red cent they can from poor black people and put it into the Inner Harbor.”

Press legitimization of normalized disorder and oppression in Baltimore neighborhoods emerged in national news analyses that were republished locally, preparing a palette of racialized explanations for protests and of justifications for state-issued violence in Baltimore and at home that would curb the immediate conflict. These narratives of racialized disorder painted a picture of ideological meaning for local audiences across the country that were judged in terms of “civilized” responses to injustice—such as in the case of a *Washington Post* column that appeared in the *Tulsa World*, asking in its fatalistic headline, “Will anything change in Baltimore?” (Dvorak, 2015b).

These were balanced against questions posed locally, such as by one news *Tulsa World* column: “Through the emotional toll, how has Tulsa escaped the destruction other cities are experiencing?” (Graham, 2015). The newspaper provided this answer: “a quick admission by the Sheriff’s Office that the death was an accident, the tenor set by the victim’s family, nonviolent attitudes of demonstration organizers, the arrest and charge of Bates and the decades-long work in reconciliation led by several organizations and faith leaders.” And amid claims from community organizers, city officials, and residents that efforts to bring people “together” have kept the peace, the story ends with one local pastor’s tempered comments about the relationship between racially diverse North Tulsa and the larger city: “North Tulsa has been the stepchild of this

community,” the pastor told the newspaper. “There is a level of frustration that comes with that and hostility among people. But the voices of reason have been able to prevail so far.”

Localizing National Justifications of “Virtuous” Violence

Through a combination of hometown and national voices in reporting and opinion pieces, local newspapers presented Baltimore as home to racialized disorder. This was exemplified in claims of poor parenting and out-of-control youth that were included in an op-ed from the *Wisconsin State Journal* (Henck, 2015), in a local news column in Cleveland’s *Plain Dealer* (Morris, 2015), and in an editorial in Charleston’s *Post and Courier* (McArdle, 2015). A *Washington Post* column republished in the *Tulsa World*, for instance, mentioned a “blighted, joyless place of boarded up buildings in one of Baltimore’s poorest areas” (Dvorak, 2015a) and told stories of reckless and untamed youth through the journalist’s first-person tale from Baltimore: “I wanted to ask the protesting kids what they were feeling. I got my answer when one of them knocked into me and took my phone and as I chased after him, others knocked me to the ground. Some of them had rocks and bricks in their hands.”

But journalists also identified counter-narratives to dominant press explanations of black responsibility in the creation of social unrest, including arguments about systemic economic and political policies that oppress black communities, such as in a *Tulsa World* news column (Jones, 2015), in a republished wire story (*Tulsa World*, 2015a), and in a *Washington Post* news article (Schwartzman, 2015). An *Orlando Sentinel* news story, for instance, featured local civic leaders who described finding justice through religion and faith groups (Kunerth, 2015), while news articles in *The New York Times* provided perspectives from personal stories about racial discrimination by police (Stolberg, 2015b; 2015c). A *Washington Post* news article described the role of perceptions of race, power, and policing in Baltimore neighborhoods (Parker, 2015).

Yet, local newspapers maintained that dominant narratives of black “culture” and “violence” were influencers that not only led to social unrest in Baltimore but that could bleed out into streets across the country. The *World*, for example, reported on controversy in a Tulsa high school: a student used a “racial slur” in a private tweet about the “Baltimore riots” (McCracken, 2015). While the tweet was not republished in the newspaper, the student’s apology was. The student also was quoted saying, “I am proud of my country and disappointed in the people in it.” In another case of local controversy related to the Baltimore unrest—a sign that the faraway disorder can (and does) make its way “home”—the *Plain Dealer* ran a story about how Cleveland teachers allayed their

students' concerns about a pending verdict in the prosecution of a Cleveland police officer charged in 2012 with shooting and killing two black homeless people (Ewinger, 2015). The *Plain Dealer* quoted a letter from school leaders who urged teachers to "talk with your students about how they might be feeling, how they think students *should or could respond*, why they think students in Baltimore responded the way they did, what students might be able to do in a positive way to make their voices heard." (Ewinger, 2015, emphasis added).

The reporter added parenthetically that a school district communications officer said "the letter is 'just to keep the staff mindful of what we see in *other cities*'" (emphasis added). In other words, the article served as a press release of officials wanting to maintain local control because of unrest elsewhere. Indeed, the online version of the article included a photograph of firefighters observing a "blaze" in Baltimore; the caption mentioned rioters who "plunged part of Baltimore into chaos, torching a pharmacy, setting police cars ablaze and throwing bricks at officers."

By ignoring narratives of political and economic oppression as underlying causes for anti-black policing and social conditions in Baltimore—and by slighting the power of protest as personal and collective agency to create change—local newspapers rationalized "virtuous" violence from "virtuous" police (der Derian, 2009). This diverted attention away from concerns of white power structures, and to the need for increased control. *Cleveland Plain Dealer* news columnist Phillip Morris (2015a), for instance, used his assessment of the "motherly" instinct shown by Toya Graham, a Baltimore mother who slapped and pulled her son out of the protests on live television, to argue for control. In a column headlined, "What a mother bear can teach about maternal skills, respect and survival," Morris equated Graham's actions to an "angry mother bear" who had charged at tourists in Yellowstone National Park. Morris added, "We need more two-legged mother bears" to model good parenting in homes of black families. "It is often said that the pen is mightier than the sword. Now the camera is potentially more powerful than both. But each of these tools fails in comparison to the power of a committed mother bear ushering her children across the bridge of life."

Longstanding connections between animalistic or savage behavior and black folk (Ewen and Ewen, 2008) recur in local newspapers' overarching presentations of unapproved behaviors of blacks in Baltimore and elsewhere, such as in an editorial in the *Plain Dealer*, titled, "Poor communication and pointless rioting" (*Plain Dealer*, 2015). All nine newspapers reflected on how such a "lack of values" is not just national in nature, but local. A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* editorial, for example, found local lessons in the challenge of finding "rays of hope" in recovery from unrest in Baltimore: "This is our challenge, and it is what Baltimore, and the nation, can learn from Ferguson" (*Post-Dispatch*, 2015).

Applying “Police Myth” to Explain White Crime “There” and “Here”

By setting a stage of disorder and fear that could (and did) spread into communities outside of Baltimore, newspapers compared their communities to Baltimore, presented as a singular place that was under racialized duress and so required a mythically virtuous police force and action (violence) to create calm. A *Plain Dealer* editorial, for instance, characterized the violence in Baltimore as an unwarranted revolt against institutional order: “Demonstrators—and we use that term loosely—have looted and burned buildings, and fought with police, injuring at least 20, in a senseless spree of criminal behavior” (*Plain Dealer*, 2015). In an example of boosting the authority of physical force in creating calm, a *New York Times* news story about the lifting of the curfew and sending home the National Guard stated that in Baltimore the “deployment of thousands of soldiers and the curfew ... had been central to the *peace strategy*” of the mayor and governor (Blinder, Fausset, and Stewart, 2015, emphasis added). In fact, local newspapers consistently published that “peace” was central to policing in both Baltimore and at home; moreover, “peace,” while never defined, was directly affiliated with policing.

An editorial published in Charleston, South Carolina justified military style policing in Baltimore by comparing the events there to other spaces in the nation: “Recall though that in Ferguson, MO., the authorities were faulted at first for staging a ‘militaristic’ show of force at protests over a white policeman’s killing of black 18-year-old Michael Brown. Then they were blamed for not exerting enough control to quell riots” (*Post and Courier*, 2015). Such writing confused the situation by critiquing state-issued violence while also praising it, ultimately justifying police actions. For instance, the Charleston newspaper ran a syndicated column from Bloomberg View that argued that even within a world of “the white power structure,” violence can change little. “Oppression does not usually lead to rioting, and when rioting does happen, oppression is not always its target. Sports fans riot—sometimes after a win, sometimes after a loss. Economically oppressed blacks have rioted against the white power structure; so have whites against their city’s black population.” (McArdle, 2015).

The above-mentioned two articles appeared alongside news of a recent “crime spree” by teenagers in downtown Charleston, which city officials described as having, in the words of one news story, “absolutely no connection to the local shooting of Walter Scott or the violence in Baltimore” (Boughton, 2015b). Still, the police chief was quoted as saying that the local violence “was an aberration and certainly something that was unusual and we hope never happens again in the city.” A few days prior to the local violence, that *Post and Courier* news article reported that the

shooting of Scott “may have been what sparked a Monday night town hall event in North Charleston,” but “the violence in Baltimore is what turned the discussion into a comparison of two embattled communities” (Boughton, 2015a).

In a story datelined Milwaukee published in Madison’s *Wisconsin State Journal*, an Associated Press reporter referenced local unrest related to the police killing of a man in 2014, to highlight a “march [that] came as Baltimore recovers from rioting and looting” amid “protests and rallies in Milwaukee over the last year [that] have been largely peaceful” (Antlfinger, 2015). A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* news article reported that business districts were slowly mending after “riots” related to protests in nearby Ferguson (Gallagher, 2015). And while the *Post-Dispatch* listed local initiatives showcasing how the region is “beginning to change,” journalists there—as at other local newspapers—challenged the degree to which their city’s strife resembled that of Baltimore. “That is not to say that Ferguson (or, more broadly St. Louis) is Baltimore,” one editorial claimed (*Post-Dispatch*, 2015). Neither the victims nor the “cases and circumstances” were the same, the newspaper asserted; and the “respective histories of the two cities are significantly different.”

In Cleveland, a headline for a news story about a verdict expected in late April or early May 2015 on a police-involved shooting from 2012 quoted Cleveland’s mayor saying officials are “ready for ‘a variety of contingencies’” (Naymik, 2015). The reporter also praised local officials for their ability to control protest: “Jackson’s administration and the police department have successfully managed protests in response to the November police shooting death of 12-year-old Tamir Rice by clearing the way for demonstrators and letting them talk to the police chief and other officials.”

In the *Plain Dealer* some news stories at the time focused on providing the public “pointers on handling protestors” (Pelzer, 2015), while other news stories reported the frustration of Rice’s mother, who cried, “How long do I have to wait for justice?” (Shaffer and Heisig, 2015). Elsewhere, a Tulsa news columnist related the protests in Baltimore and Ferguson to how “Tulsa has survived the type of anger leading communities to ashes” (Graham, 2015) that resulted from both an April 2, 2015 “accidental” shooting of a black man by a white volunteer sheriff’s deputy, and a 1921 “race riot” that destroyed much of one Tulsa neighborhood following violence against a black youth (Hirsch, 2002; Marshall, 2015). Comparing the racialized violence of the April 2 event and the 1921 riot, the columnist suggested that local protests related to the April 2, 2015 shooting appeared as a “racially, economically and generationally mixed crowd” that gathered “to protest for change.” “No blows have been exchanged, no glass broken, no property damaged, no fires set and no looting,” the columnist insisted, and indicated that Tulsa had become civilized in its protesting, including when “[t]hree years ago, Tulsa had

a soul-searching moment when two men gunned down five black men, killing three, because of their race. Tulsa didn't explode. The city held firm with an even hand."

Newspapers that described "civilized" local protesting of police-involved shootings—if residents protested at all—used local scenes of "calm" as a way to further the contrast to the radical actions of Baltimore residents. Typical of such local racialized violence was an *Orlando Sentinel* news article that, during the Baltimore protests, mentioned a man who stood in front of an Orlando courthouse to "show support for Baltimore residents" (Lotan and Comas, 2015). Like other press coverage in local newspapers at the time, characterizations of protestors whitewashed descriptions of local institutionalized racism that contributed to local killings at the hands of police or pseudo police, such as in the case of Trayvon Martin near Orlando and a volunteer reserve officer in Tulsa. Three days after the story of the Baltimore supporter appeared, the *Sentinel* reported that Orlando police officers would begin to wear body cameras; the paper explicitly called this a solution to ease "tension between police and the public [that] escalated nationally, erupting into protests and violence, including in Ferguson, Mo., and ... Baltimore" (Weiner, 2015). Apparently, except for a passing mention that four area police officers had been charged with the use of excessive force locally, the Orlando area—like the other geographies home to their own instances of local racialized policing—escaped having to respond to its striking similarities to Baltimore.

Conclusion

News place-making did ideological work in shaping coverage of Freddie Gray's death and subsequent protests in Baltimore that appeared in local news across the US. Narratives and explanations of racialized policing and subsequent protests in Baltimore that appeared in news of local conflict exemplified the fluidity of national, racialized narratives of naturalized police authority to control urban spaces. Furthermore, words like "thugs" and characterizations of poor parenting—rather than narratives of oppression and racialized violence by police—appeared in wire stories that provided both information and ideological explanations about unrest in Baltimore as well as in local news reporting about local conflict. Such use of national press explanations in local coverage and coverage created independently by local journalists reveals the power of widespread and dominant ideological explanations used in the journalistic community to express ideas such as "police myth"—that which presents police as a natural and virtuous authority to institute social control (Manning, 1997)—and of other myths related to urban conditions and cultures.

Indeed, a correlation between press and police narratives of police violence (e.g. Araiza, Sturm, Istek, and Bock, 2016) created journalistic boundaries for authorized, official explanations of social order via force.

Here force against a portion of the citizenry is viewed as justified and necessary. More specifically, this chapter shows the role of the press in borrowing from and applying a version of “police myth” as a form of news myth used to complicate the geographic nature of the Baltimore story in ways that made the story appear as a local issue absent of larger, systemic issues. Our second conceptual contribution concerns the power of news place-making as a process by which journalists characterize geography in order to justify interpretations of urban disorder and decline that lead to efforts on behalf of order. We thereby extend the notion that journalistic constructions of place construct dominant explanations of social conditions in everyday news and that these provide opportunities for local white control of urban black space. And while journalists localize news as a way to relate information from afar to audiences at home, the role of local news storytelling, including of news from far way, then, becomes a territory for characterizing people and places from “here” and “there” within an arena of control and subjugation.

The processes of connecting what happens “there” to “here” warrants further examination as an ideological indoctrination not to local community needs, but as a means to maintain national power. These explanations of everyday life borrowed from far away provide a sense of community belonging beyond local boundaries. In this case, newspapers in cities with their own national, racialized instances of police violence against black men, with the assistance of wire services and digital access to tweets, public statements, and television broadcasts of voices close to the proximity of the news event, covered Baltimore protests not only as a news story deserving attention but as a means to justify local police actions and to prod public examinations locally of race, place, and policing.

Notes

- 1 We recognize and sympathize with the police-involved killings of black women, which have also gained national press attention, and we recognize that many more have not been publicized (see Embrick, 2015; Gross and Hicks, 2015). For our current purpose, however, we focus on specific cases that have been tied together in coverage of police violence against black men (see Figure 2.1).
- 2 To be clear, while the role of the Associated Press and other wire services is to provide coverage of spaces spanning wide geographies, the material is selected for publication by local journalists and often undergoes editing to reflect local values and information (Kaniss, 1991).

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