Framing Peace as Violence

TV news depict the LAPD attack on immigrant rights marchers

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My thanks to Mary, Dolores Inés, Samy, Patricia, Christy & everyone else!

Vox California 2009
Cultural Meanings of Linguistic Diversity
The 1960s inner city ‘riots’ were big news

1967 Kerner Commission studied mass media news coverage
These “disturbances”

“violent expressions of community outrage” at unrepentant White racism toward African Americans and other communities of color
The 1967 Commission asked

"What effect do mass media news have on the riots?"
3 Kerner Commission findings

#1 News media failed to give a balanced, factual account with instances of sensationalism, inaccuracy and distortion
#2 Portrayal of violence

Media news failed to accurately portray the scale and character of the violence
#3 Fail to explain the causes and consequences of civil disorders
That was then...

This is now.
How well have news media reported on immigrants 40 years later?
2007 march for Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles MacArthur Park

attacked by the LAPD
New test for news media
My research team:

Layza López (UCLA 2008),
Edgar Munguía & Omar Torres
(UCLA 2010),
Martín Vallejo (UCLA 2011)
Three analyses of 51 news stories

1. Narrative frame comparison
2. Visual codes:
   • to frame news &
   • to judge interviewees
3. CDA of spoken reports
350 LAPD attack 7000 marchers for Immigrant Rights
2 conflicting narratives circulate about events

- LAPD’s narrative
- News Media narrative
First, the LAPD's narrative

After a 6 month investigation in association with 300 lawsuits
Police Misconduct narrative

For 24 minutes, police used 36" batons and fired guns loaded with hard rubber bullets to forcibly break up a lawful assembly of people.
When the police forcibly cleared MacArthur Park

- LAPD violated the marchers' 1st Amendment rights.
- The LAPD accepted responsibility for injuries to 300 people due to "more than 100 batons strikes"
The LAPD noted:

"The law allows force to prevent violence---as a precursor to an arrest.

“Officers fired at least 150 rounds of less-lethal impact munitions as they cleared the park.

OJO: “no arrests...occurred as a result of any force used in MacArthur Park"
News Media narrative

51 TV news stories
3 networks: CNN, Fox, MSNBC
5 local television stations
Finding #1: Unanimity

No difference between networks and local news reporting
1st study

Comparative Framing
TV news frame: “May Day Melee”

“Riot Suppression” frame

stock villains, victims and heroes:
Demonstration = face-off between two violent groups
Marchers =

the violent (hence criminal) agitators
Police = lawful government agents disciplining agitators
Victims = News Media Personnel

*not* families with kids in strollers, innocent marchers or hapless street vendors
Why blame the victims?

Riot Suppression narrative: the marchers started the violence
For example: on the Order to Disperse
FOX-News Fox News Live

15 hours after attack
“Police ordered the stragglers to disperse first by helicopter and siren, then loud speaker and bull horn. That’s when protesters began throwing bottles and rocks at police knocking one officer off his motorcycle.”

—Fox’s William La Jeunesse
the official LAPD report:

- “No complete dispersal order was given in either English or Spanish” (9)
- A valid dispersal order was never given.
- This failure likely resulted in a large number of people who had no idea that they were being ordered to disperse” (50)
CNN Newsroom
Correspondent Ted Rowlands
17 hours after attack
FOX News Special Report
with Brit Hume
22 hours after attack
FOX News Report
with Shepard Smith

23 hours after attack
Example 2: on the Reasons for the Dispersal Order
me that this incident actually sparked hours earlier when a man was arrested for shoplifting. Later members of his group or gang about 50 to a 100 came to the illegal immigrants' rally here demonstrating and...
LAPD did NOT corroborate the elements of Fox correspondent’s claims
me that this incident actually sparked hours earlier when a man was arrested for shoplifting. Later members of his group or gang about 50 to a 100 came to the illegal immigrants' rally here demonstrating.
News media used Riot Suppression frame even when errors were egregious.

Always at expense of marchers as perpetrators.
2nd study

Visual coding

• of subjectivity, authority, right to speak
• of framing
Who gets full subjectivity & authority?

- All journalists & 1 interviewee, Rick Oltman (opposed to liberalizing immigration policy)

- No marchers:
  - (1) Xiomara Corpeno (2) Megali & and 3 unnamed others
Visual coding of subjectivity & authority

- Gaze (eye-line & facial expression)
- Camera focal length (mid-close up or close-up)
- Camera angle (high-angle vs ground horizontal shot)
Visual coding of storyline framing
Before vs. After

**BEFORE:** repetitive images of peaceful marchers in white t-shirts waving US flags

**AFTER:** reoccurring images of the LAPD in full riot gear moving toward the demonstrators
3rd study

Critical discourse analysis of constituent metaphors
Spoken metaphors about social agents in news event

Metaphors for the DEMONSTATION, POLICE, MARCHERS

small # for STUDENTS, MEDIA, IMMIGRANTS
How frequent did media describe them as violent?

Police 75% of time

&

Demonstrators 72% of time
DEMONSTRATORS?

72% VIOLENT or CRIMINAL
9% HUMAN or PEACEFUL
News media spoken metaphors:

Peaceful Marchers characterized as violent
At the scene, on May 1st

Belligerent protesters started this?
Belligerent protesters start melee (ABC7: 60 seconds)

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Peaceful protest turned violent

- “Select” group of protesters
- LAPD report: “5 to 10 anarchists”
- As ACCURATE as it gets
A day later, May 2nd

Who does the local new cited as injured?
Only injured police and media (CBS2: 33 seconds)

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.
No reporting of marcher injuries
No reporting on demonstrator injuries (CBS2: 38 secs)
24 hours after attack

- 18 injured officers
- 246 injured marchers, including broken bones (not reported)
  - “more than 100 batons strikes”
  - 146 “less-than-lethal impact munitions” shot
26 hours later, FOX News:

- Disclaims video police violence
- Sensationalizes: “Parade of the parasites and criminals”
  - “25,000 pedophiles take streets”
Fox appalling claim (FoxNews: 3-4 minutes)

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.
And now, How does a newsroom reinforce its own framing of an event?
QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.
LAPD releases report that exonerates marchers and takes full responsibility

September 2008
News media never retract their reporting of the events. The nation more likely will associate immigrant-rights marchers with violence.
Our conclusion

2007 local and network news about marches liable to ALL
1967 Kerner Report criticisms
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>failed to give a balanced, factual account</td>
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<td>#2</td>
<td>Attributed the violence to the marchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>failed to explain the causes of LAPD attack on peaceful marchers</td>
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Query for discussion

How to respond to the news media’s lack of accountability?
Thank you!

Otto Santa Ana, UCLA

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