

THE WATTS RIOTS:
A CONTEMPORARY STUDY OF THE NEWS COVERAGE OF RIOTS

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ABSTRACT

The Watts riots happened in Los Angeles, California, in 1965. It was six days of looting and burning, 34 deaths, thousands of arrests, and \$40,000,000 in damages. This research questioned how the black California press framed and covered the Watts riots, specifically looking into the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer's* use of sources, terms used when describing the riots.

After reading more than a hundred articles, I found that the *Sentinel* interviewed and quoted mostly community leaders and witnesses when covering the Watts riots, and the *Observer* used unidentified sources or official sources while reporting on the riots.

The language used by authors and sources when referring to the Watts riots in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer* changed in each edition of the newspaper. Editions sent to the printers closer to the end of the Watts riots were more likely to discuss the cause of the riots, where later editions in the timeframe I researched were more likely to discuss how to go about fixing the causes of Watts riots.

Both newspapers made an attempt to stay neutral in most of their reporting of the Watts riots, but writers from both papers framed the riots more negatively than positively. Some articles had indiscernible frames as those articles contained either straight facts or did not have a set frame.

Chapter 1: Introduction

A young man and his older brother were pulled over on a hot, late, summer day, but they did not understand why. The young black man, Marquette Frye, got out of his car to talk to Lee Minikus, a white California Highway Patrol trooper. The two discussed that Frye had been pulled over for speeding. Minikus also asked Frye whether he had been drinking and where he and his brother were headed.¹ It should have been a routine stop and could have ended there, but it did not. This traffic stop was the beginning of what was called the “long hot summers” of 1965.² What followed were six days of destruction in the 46.5 square mile neighborhood of Watts in southern Los Angeles. Thirty-four people died, 1,032 people were injured, 3,952 people were arrested (60% of those were convicted of crimes like burglary, vandalism, looting, and destruction of property), and 1,000 buildings were damaged, resulting in \$40,000,000 in indemnification.³

At the time, local and state officials were surprised by the uprising. Throughout the evolution of Los Angeles, the city was seen as a safe haven for minorities, drawing hundreds of thousands of black individuals during what is dubbed the Second Great Migration in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴ So when the black community residing in Watts spoke of excessive police brutality and took to the streets, looting and burning local white businesses, both Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty and Police Chief William H. Parker were highly criticized for not bringing in the National Guard sooner than two days after the riots began and for saying they did not understand why the riots started in the first place.⁵

Watts was not the first black community to rise up in the streets to speak out against police brutality and discrimination, and it definitely was not the last. An eerily similar riot happened in August 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, after Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed 18-year-old Michael Brown, who was running away from Wilson. The unrest that ensued lasted for 17 days. Locals and visitors alike took to the streets and looted, burned, and fought. Riots broke out again after the St. Louis grand jury acquitted Wilson in the murder of Brown.⁶ Racial violence obviously still occurs today, and it is not dissimilar from past riots.

Previous research and studies show that 1965 newspapers blamed many different catalysts for the start of the riots in the southern Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts. Theories explored spanned many different directions. Some blamed the drug users, thieves, illegal drivers, and the poor living in the area at the time, while others said the intense summer heat was driving aggression and violence. The dissolution of the black family dynamic, youthful “antics,” and, the southern “newcomers” were also part of some theories for the cause of the Watts riots.⁷

Scholars have taken different angles in examining both newspapers and interviews of those in the Watts Curfew Zone and greater Los Angeles County, and all have come up with mixed reasons why the riots began. Most of these reasons relate to race, including police-resident hostility, discrimination, difficulty in acquiring jobs, and the ignorance of the local white officials.⁸ Most of those researchers look solely at mainstream media or compare mainstream media and minority media.⁹ Only in texts regarding the history and evolution of the black press can minority media be closely analyzed and, even then, there are few mentions of the Watts riots.¹⁰ There is a hole in the

story, regarding the black press' perspective on the Watts riots, specifically black California newspapers. While studying the black press in comparison to mainstream media has provided some insight into black newspapers' perspectives on racial tensions turning violent, there is merit to studying black newspapers only in comparison to each other.

With racially charged events constantly being covered by contemporary news outlets, it is important to look into the history of riots in order to recognize patterns and how to use that understanding to cover present and future events. How different newspapers framed and placed the blame for the start of the Watts riots gives contemporary news managers a historical perspective on differences in news values and judgments, allowing them the opportunity to apply those perspectives to contemporary racially charged events. In order to do so, I looked at two California black newspapers and analyzed what sources journalists turned to when covering the story and how the writers framed the Watts riots.

The purpose of this textual analysis is to determine how the black California press covered the Watts riots. This is important because events stemming from racial violence still occur today and examining how the black press framed events of racial violence can help journalists determine how to cover similar events today. By looking at the past, contemporary journalists can learn from the mistakes and successes of others in an attempt to avoid those mistakes in the present.

In Chapter 2, I will delve into the history surrounding the Watts riots. I will examine and define why I chose to use the term riots, and the difference between a riot and a rebellion. I will step back into the 1700s and explain how the city of Los Angeles

came to be, and from there, how Watts became the black community that it was in 1965. I will examine the police and community relationship in Watts up until 1965 in an attempt to give the reader the ability to put his or her self in the social climate of rioters at the time. I will discuss the actual events of the Watts riots between August 11 and August 17, 1965, the damage, destruction, arrests, and deaths. I will then look at the past research conducted on the Watts riots, including Sears and McConahay and the McCone report commissioned by then-California Governor Edmund G. Brown. From there, I will take yet another step back in time and examine the history of the black press starting in the early 1700s with slave autobiographies and ending in the mid 1960s with the slow decay of newspapers. Then I will discuss framing theory and how it is relevant to the research I conducted, as well as look at two riots and how they were covered in the news. I will end Chapter 2 by presenting my research questions for the reader to ponder.

Chapter 3 will discuss my chosen research method, textual analysis and how I went about reading and analyzing the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer*. This section will also give the reader some contextual information both about the cities of Los Angeles and Sacramento and the two newspapers previously mentioned.

Chapter 4 consists of the results from my research, which I will not spoil by including them in my introduction. Readers will learn what sources the *Sentinel* and *Observer* used and how often, what the framing of the content analyzed was, and the terms used by both the writers of the articles and the sources included in them.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss my findings and how they tie into the bigger picture of the news coverage of riots.

The paper will end with my conclusion, in which I revisit some previously mentioned themes and leave the reader something to think about later on.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Overview

This is the full story of the Watts riots in California in 1965. Previous researchers and historians have told only part of the story. Some historians focus solely on what happened during the six days of destruction and violence in the southern Los Angeles neighborhood, and others take the context back a little further by describing the growing police racism and discrimination in a city that was believed to be a safe haven for minority families. Researchers have analyzed and speculated why the riots may have happened with surveys, interviews, and textual analyses of the newspaper coverage of the riots during and months after the violence. Taken separately, readers acquire different pictures of what actually happened to bring about \$40,000,000 worth of damages to the 46.5 square mile black community. Only by going back in time and following the story to its start can historians and researchers ever fully understand how such destruction happened, seemingly overnight. To those paying attention and living in the community, the Watts riots were not a surprise.

Terminology. Race riots have meant and encompassed many different things throughout history. Before the early and mid-1900s, riots involved violence by whites against blacks and the black community.¹¹ In the mid-1960s, race riots changed dramatically. They then almost always started in black neighborhoods and involved mostly black participants. The riots of the mid-1960s represented black anger against the lack of real job opportunities, “lack of meaningful political power in local government, police brutality against blacks, and a sense of frustration that the new civil rights movement had not led to substantial changes in their lives.”¹² These new types of riots

were referred to as “rebellions” because they typically involved some type of unifying cause, such as the civil rights movement, which will be discussed in more detail in a later section. Rebellions were usually aimed at white-owned businesses in black communities, spontaneous, and often sparked by a specific incident – like the arrest of a black individual, the shooting of a black individual by police, or an altercation between a white and black individual.¹³ It often took a lot of force to end these types of riots, usually including bringing in the National Guard to help force them to an end.¹⁴ Rebellions also sometimes involved fires, looting, and the destruction of buildings.

Based on my previous research, I will refer to the looting, burning, and violence in Watts as “riots.” This decision is based primarily on the terminology used in the newspapers and official documents I analyzed for this research. The *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the *Sacramento Observer*, some past research on the Watts riots, and the McCone report most often referred to the violence in Watts as “riots.” It is important to note that not all of my research referred to what happened in Watts as “riots.” For example, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* by Gerald Horne referred to the events as an “uprising,” and some of the articles in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* also referred to the events as an “uprising” or “rebellion.” The words “uprising” and “riots” were also used interchangeably in some past research. But the word “riot” was used most often by official sources, local community leaders, and Watts residents when discussing the incident in Watts.

The Watts riots occurred on the cusp of when researchers and historians switch from calling racial violence “riots” and “rebellions.” Therefore, while some may argue the events in Watts should be called rebellions, I will base my terminology on what most

of the newspapers, research, and documents I analyzed and refer to what happened in Watts as riots.

History of Los Angeles and Watts

At the very beginning, there were migrants. Eleven families with young children moved to what is now known as Los Angeles for the promise of land and a new beginning in the late 1700s.¹⁵ By 1781, there were 94 settlers in the area, a significant amount of whom were mixed race – Spanish, Native American, and black.¹⁶ The community grew slowly over the next decade and mostly kept to itself, until in the early 1800s, there were a series of “booms” that brought large amounts of migrants to the city.¹⁷

The first significant boom happened in the early-to-mid-1800s, right after the gold rush in northern California.¹⁸ People thirsty for gold meandered down to Los Angeles during their rush to get rich quick and stuck around once they got a feel for the mild temperatures and land ripe for the taking. In the 1880s, the Southern Pacific railroad company and its competitor Santa Fe Industries built tracks connecting southern California to the rest of the country, but they struggled to sell tickets because of the high prices.¹⁹ In order to increase revenue and sell more tickets, both railroad companies lowered ticket fares to Los Angeles, which lead curious Americans living in the Midwest and the eastern part of the country to purchase tickets and see what the “Paradise in the West” had to offer them. The second passengers got off the train, boosters would meet them and show them the extensive farmable land, promote the mild temperature, and, eventually, sell to those who could afford it a part of Los Angeles.²⁰ The Southern Pacific Company was known to sell Los Angeles land to people in Ireland before they even

stepped foot in the country.²¹ With the construction of the railroads came further diversity to Los Angeles – Southern Pacific and Santa Fe hired Mexicans to complete the work because of the cheap labor – and with more land being farmed, local farmers hired Japanese workers to help out, also because of the low cost of labor.²² While Mexican and Japanese workers were being hired for jobs, blacks began to further populate the city as slaves and indentured servants as the families they worked for began buying land and moving to the city.

The next boom was in the 1890s, when settlers found oil deposits in southern California, and just like the gold rush, people hoping to get rich quick flocked to Los Angeles for their taste of wealth.²³ The oil rush brought the oil industry to Los Angeles; the city became the center of oil equipment and services, providing manufacturing and service jobs to those living in the area. Freed black individuals began slowly trickling into the city for jobs in the oil and manufacturing industries and were even given the opportunity to be employed as firemen and policemen – jobs that typically were not given to blacks at the time.²⁴ With cheap housing and the ability to purchase and rent land with money from local jobs, the black community began to grow in downtown Los Angeles.²⁵ In 1910, 36 percent of black families owned their homes in the city – a percentage that was higher than most North and Midwest cities.²⁶

Growing infrastructure and highways brought even more migrants to Los Angeles in the 1920s – building the well-known and affluent neighborhoods that surround the city, as well as black communities, such as Watts – or as it was known then “Mud Town” – after being pushed out of downtown in favor of businesses.²⁷ Watts began as a sparse neighborhood of a couple of houses with unpaved roads and extremely cheap housing,

but as thousands of black migrants came to Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s for jobs and the advertised racially friendly city, Watts began to grow.²⁸ Between 1940 and 1946, the neighborhood of Watts nearly doubled in size.²⁹ With this influx of black families, came racial tension from the surrounding white community who were being gradually pushed out to the suburbs of Los Angeles.³⁰ The black population in Los Angeles jumped from almost 75,000 in 1940 to more than 650,000 in 1970.³¹

Brewing Racial Tensions

Conditions for blacks were, admittedly, much better in Los Angeles than they were in any other American city.³² California law outlawed legal segregation in the late 1800s and blacks could vote and own property, but discrimination was obvious in the quality of housing and jobs available.³³ Although black individuals could own and rent suitable homes for an affordable price, they were not welcome in white communities and were often “visited” by white neighbors, who sometimes went as far as to burn houses down.³⁴ After 1910, blacks who aspired to be homeowners tended to purchase property off of Central Avenue in Watts, which was becoming a mostly black community.³⁵ While California and Los Angeles laws did not allow legal segregation, they still allowed business owners to choose whom to serve and hire, leading to most black workers being stuck with jobs whites did not want to do – such as manufacturing, janitorial responsibilities, strenuous physical labor, and household work.³⁶

As the black community grew through the 1930s and 1940s, so did racial tensions with white neighbors, local officials, and the Los Angeles Police Department.³⁷ White business, property, and land owners could not legally segregate in Los Angeles, but that did not stop them from voicing their opinions in other ways. People angry with the “black

situation” in the city would write letters to newspapers and paste posters throughout the city asking for support against the rising “black problem.”³⁸ Local officials would not go out of their way to help the black community with the surrounding white neighborhoods and even left infrastructure in Watts to decay; they also did nothing about the growing racism in the Los Angeles Police Department.³⁹

The Los Angeles Police Department was known to many in Los Angeles as being extremely racist to the point of brutality against all minorities who lived in the city.⁴⁰ For example, law enforcement was known to sit on the streets in Watts, waiting for blacks to walk down the street, and frisk them unnecessarily and without cause.⁴¹ When Watts residents took their concerns of discrimination to Los Angeles officials, the police force would not be investigated, and in instances where the brutality could not be ignored, authorities would give law enforcement a warning, but there would be no further disciplinary action taken.⁴² Chief William H. Parker did not help the situation when he was elected as police chief in 1950. He ran the department like a military command, treating southern Los Angeles – in particular Watts – “as if it were an alien community during wartime.”⁴³ Although black individuals could legally be on the police force and in local government, by the Watts riots in 1965, there were only three black city councilmen on the board, few black law enforcement officers on the Los Angeles and California forces, and only a handful of blacks in California’s government.⁴⁴ These factors led to the undertones of racism in Los Angeles and Watts and had a large part to play in the cause of the Watts riots.

Even though Los Angeles was more hospitable to blacks than other cities in the United States throughout its development, there were still many disparities that separated

the black community – other than racial discrimination, local official neglect, and police brutality. In 1965, the year of the riots, 79 percent of the southern Los Angeles population was black, 30.9 percent of them lived in poverty, and black families reported median earnings of \$4,497 in 1959 during the 1960 census.⁴⁵ The Department of Commerce lists the national median earnings to be at \$6,900 for 1965.⁴⁶ Ten-point-nine percent of black men and 12.8 percent of black women were unemployed, in comparison to the national unemployment rate of 4.5 percent.⁴⁷ Of the black youths not already included in the census as being unemployed, only 42 percent of the young men and 19 percent of the young women were enrolled in school⁴⁸. The McCone Report, a report commissioned by then-California Governor Edmund G. Brown, states about 66 percent of students who went to school in the Curfew Zone did not graduate.⁴⁹ The McCone Report lists many of these disparities as part of what contributed to the start of the Watts riots.⁵⁰

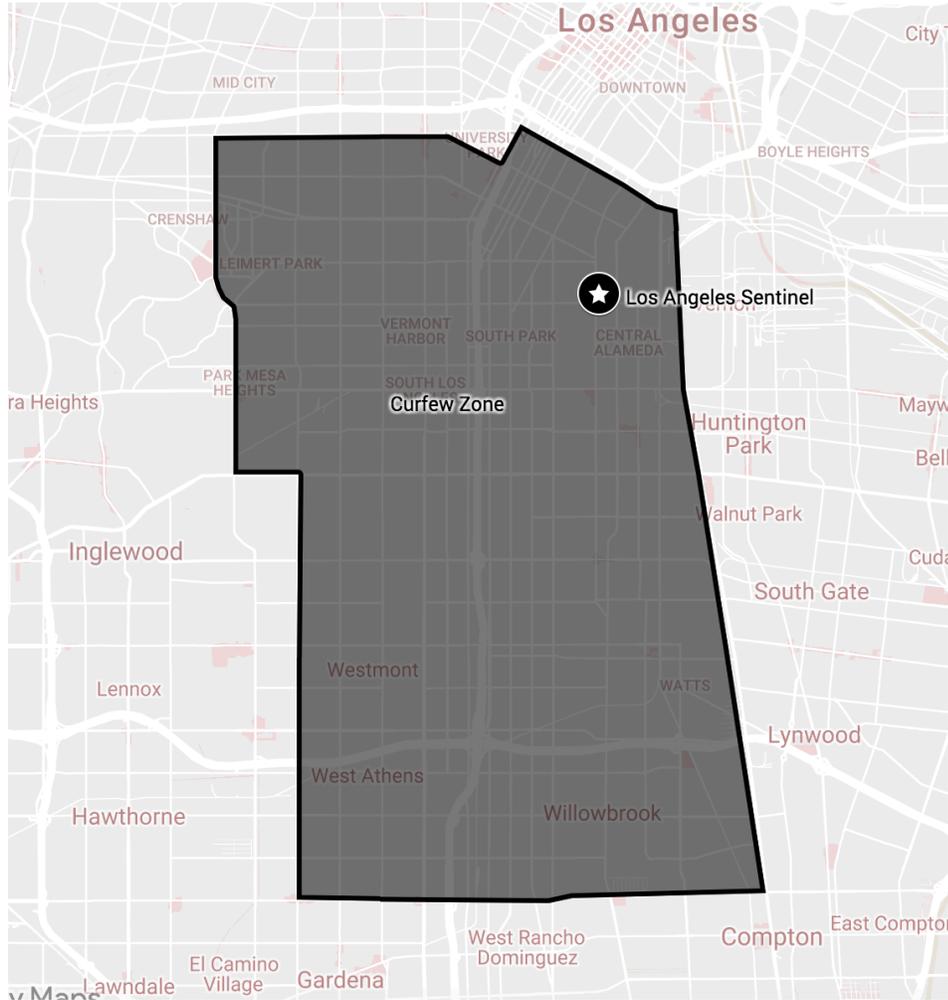
The Watts Riots

The Watts riots started on August 11, 1965 and continued until August 17, 1965.⁵¹ There have been many retellings of what is seen as the catalyst that started the riots. What is known as fact is that there was an altercation of some sort between a young black man named Marquette Frye and a white California law enforcement officer named Lee Minikus. Below is one retelling of many retellings, based on multiple sources since the incident.

Marquette Frye and his brother were pulled over by Lee Minikus, a white California Highway Patrol trooper. Minikus asked Frye to step out of his car for a sobriety test. Minikus asked Frye if he had been drinking because he had received a report that Frye was driving erratically.⁵² While the two talked outside of Frye's vehicle,

a crowd gathered, including Frye's mother, who began asking Minikus why her son was pulled over.⁵³ The Highway Patrol trooper called for backup as the gathered crowd began to get more agitated.⁵⁴ The backup officers attempted to calm the crowd and widen the gap between the troopers, Frye, his mother, and brother.⁵⁵ Minikus arrested Frye and managed to get him in a police vehicle to be taken back to the station, when Frye's mother and brother got involved in an attempt to get him out. They were both arrested and put into police vehicles as well. While the three members of the Frye family were being arrested, a black woman, who was thought to be pregnant because of the barber's frock she was wearing, got involved in the fray and was pushed by a law enforcement officer, leading to outrage among the surrounding rioters and causing the spark that started the riots.⁵⁶

For the following six days, there was destruction, looting, and burning of businesses in the 46.5 square miles (one and a half times the size of Manhattan), which would be dubbed the "Curfew Zone" (for a map of the Curfew Zone, see Map 1) on August 13, as local officials put a curfew on the area. Thirty-four people died, 1,032 people were injured, 3,952 people were arrested (60% of those ended with convictions), and 1,000 buildings were damaged, resulting in \$40,000,000 in damages.⁵⁷ While many who lived in Los Angeles came from other parts of the United States, the McCone report commissioned by Governor Brown states only about two percent of the local black community were involved in the riots.⁵⁸ Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty and California Police Chief William Parker were both highly criticized by Watts locals and black leadership for not bringing in the National Guard sooner than two days after the riots began and for saying they did not understand why the riots started in the first place.⁵⁹



Map 2 Los Angeles Riots "Curfew Zone" (Map courtesy of Google.)

Past Research on Watts Riots

Past research and studies show that 1965 newspapers (both mainstream press and black press) blamed many different catalysts for the start of the riots in the southern Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts. Theories explored ranged from blaming the criminals (drug users, thieves, illegal drivers, etc.) and poor living in the area at the time, the intense summer heat, the dissolution of the black family dynamic, youthful “antics,” and the southern “newcomers.”⁶⁰ While scholars have taken different angles in examining

both newspapers and interviews of residents of the Watts Curfew Zone and the greater Los Angeles County, all have come up with mixed reasons why the riots began. Most of these reasons are related to race, including police-resident hostility, discrimination, difficulty in acquiring jobs, and the ignorance of the local white officials.⁶¹

Sears and McConahay delve further into the causality question by surveying those who lived in the Curfew Zone, as well as analyzing racial references in Los Angeles area newspapers at the time.⁶² The two scholars conclude from their research that the protests started because of the social and psychological environments of Watts. Another major work of research used by scholars involving the Watts riots was the Los Angeles Riots Study completed immediately after the riots in 1965.⁶³ This study involved organizations such as the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, and the University of California Los Angeles, as well as hundreds of assistants, researchers, and interviewers.⁶⁴ The study consisted of interviews of 2,070 people during the five-month period after the riots. Those interviewed were black, white, and Mexican-American Curfew Zone residents, black individuals who were arrested during the riots (many of whom lived in the Curfew Zone), greater Los Angeles residents, social service workers, and merchants whose businesses sustained damage during the riots.⁶⁵ The interviews were scheduled to be two hours long each and asked various questions about the riots, including attitudes toward the riots, participation in the riots, social and political attitudes in general, and other relevant background information.⁶⁶ It is important to note that the interviewers lived in the area to ease any tensions with those interviewed. The findings and results from the Los Angeles Riots Study are used in a multitude of

scholarly research and will be the backbone of the cultural and social environment referred to in this paper.

The McCone Report commissioned by the then-Governor Edmund G. Brown also looked into the cause of the riots, as well as made multiple suggestions for things the government and Watts community could do to solve the social ills of the area and prevent another riot. The report held 64 meetings, during which the group of eight men interviewed administrators, law enforcement officers, others in state, county, and city government, business owners, residents of the area, people who “exercise leadership among these residents,” Mexican-Americans, social workers, and “others concerned with minority problems.”⁶⁷ The report counted three major contributors to the start of the Watts riots: unemployment, lack of education and poor schools, and the police and community relationship.

The McCone Report also made suggestions to help the government and community move forward after the Watts riots and avoid another similar situation. The following are excerpts from the report.

“Because the idleness brings a harvest of distressing problems, employment for those in the Negro community who are unemployed and able to work is a first priority.... We recommend that our robust community take immediate steps to relieve the lack of job opportunity for Negroes by cooperative programs for employment and training, participated in by the Negro community, by governmental agencies, by employers and by organized labor.”⁶⁸

“In education, we recommend a new and costly approach to educating the Negro child who has been deprived of the early training that customarily starts at infancy and who because of early deficiencies advances through school on a basis of age rather than scholastic attainment. What is clearly needed and what we recommend is an emergency program designed to raise the level of scholastic attainment of those who would otherwise fall behind. This requires pre-school education, intensive instruction in small classes, remedial courses and other special treatment.”⁶⁹

“We recommend that law enforcement agencies place greater emphasis on their responsibilities for crime prevention as an essential element of the law enforcement task, and that they institute improved means for handling citizen complaints and community relationships.”⁷⁰

History of the Black Press

Research on the news coverage of the Watts riots is expansive. Studies have been done on the racism found in mainstream newspapers when covering the riots, comparing the mainstream press to the black press in terms of framing, source selection, and placement of blame for the start of the riots, and using textual analysis to determine framing in mainstream media.⁷¹ All of these studies have been done time and again, but there is a gap in the knowledge of the black press. While researchers have looked at the black press, it is most often in reference or comparison to mainstream media and is almost never analyzed on its own. For this study, it is important to understand the evolution of the black press from its beginnings to the Watts riots in 1965.

Before there was the black press, blacks expressed themselves in many different ways in the 1700s: poetry, slave autobiographies, preacher sermons, hymns, and folk songs.⁷² Black community issues were rarely published in white newspapers, save for news regarding slave rebellions or crimes and advertisements of whites looking for runaway slaves.⁷³ As the fight for freedom continued and blacks pushed for more methods of self-expression and a forum for discussion of black issues, white newspapers continued to attack blacks and cast them only as criminals.

The final push for the creation of the first black newspaper was when Mordecai M. Noah, the editor of the *New York Enquirer*, bashed blacks in his daily newspaper for “their lack of integrity and courage, questioned the chastity of black women, supported slavery, and rallied against setting slaves free.”⁷⁴ In response to Noah’s scathing

commentary, John Russwurm and Samuel Cornis created and began publishing the first ever black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal* on March 16, 1827 in New York.⁷⁵ The *Journal's* content directly combatted anything negative white newspapers published about blacks at the time, as well as pushed for an end to slavery. The *Journal's* editors had difficulty publishing and finding advertisers because of the lack of black-owned businesses and few white-owned businesses that would be willing to advertise with a black newspaper. Most of the advertisements the *Journal* published included personal ads for help wanted, marriage, and finding employment, but those few advertisements were not enough to financially support the paper, and it eventually went out of business but not before spearheading a trend others would continue.⁷⁶ Other newspapers followed and replaced the *Freedom's Journal*, but none were as popular as Frederick Douglass's *North Star*, which was created and published by blacks on December 3, 1847.⁷⁷ Douglass's paper was created to show America that black editors could write, edit, and publish a paper just as good, if not better, than white editors could.⁷⁸

Many of the first black newspapers sought to create a sense of racial pride and inspiration to better the black community.⁷⁹ Because blacks did not have access to formal education, one of the main goals of the early black press was to educate its readers, as education could be a way to show the white community that blacks were not "intellectually inferior to whites," and as one editor of a black newspaper said, "live down the already shallow excuses for ... oppression."⁸⁰ The other goal of the black press was to put an end to slavery in the United States and across the world.

Black leaders and white abolitionists were split on how to go about attaining freedom for slaves.⁸¹ Some thought slaves should rise up against the slave owners, while

others thought violence was not necessary. The black press was split on the topic of violence as well, some utilizing a militant and aggressive form of writing to spur slaves and freemen alike to fight for freedom. Militancy in black newspapers grew more popular after the Fugitive Slave Law was enacted in 1850 – which allowed slave owners to seize runaway slaves without giving them a trial – and the Dred Scott decision in 1859 that stated that “Congress had no power to prevent slavery in [United States] territories.”⁸² Black leaders who sought violence got what they wanted when the North fought the South in the Civil War between 1861-1865.

President Abraham Lincoln declared slaves free in 1862. With this came many more black newspapers in the coming years. These black editors typically set their sights on educating their communities about integrating into society and creating a black national identity.⁸³ As freed slaves began moving into society and attempting to create a life for themselves by purchasing property and getting jobs, newspapers provided guidance to help them become a part of pre-established communities as smoothly as possible. Black newspapers became less militant after the Civil War and began focusing on topics of interest to the readers.⁸⁴ Some papers focused on continuing to educate readers about farming, business practices, and household management; others discussed the arts, such as literature, science, art, and drama; and other papers got more political once black men received the right to vote in 1870.⁸⁵

Violence against blacks attempting to become part of American society became extremely prevalent at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* verdict on May 18, 1896 stated that blacks were “separate, but equal.”⁸⁶ There was more lynching and violence against black people at that time than

there had been in the history of the United States.⁸⁷ Black newspaper editors were not exempt from the violence, and often, editors who were outspoken on race issues (lynching, discrimination, segregation, etc.) would have violence aimed at them.⁸⁸ Most feared for their lives, but that fear pushed some of them to report more militantly and aggressively than before. Ida B. Wells was one newspaper editor whose life was threatened on multiple occasions. Her passion was putting a stop to lynching, and she reported on the topic vigorously, even after her newspaper offices were broken into and ransacked.⁸⁹

At the beginning of the 1900s, black leaders like Booker T. Washington, William Monroe Trotter, and W.E.B. DuBois began discussing whether blacks should “agitate” for equality or accept segregation and begin separate, black communities, instead of attempting to integrate with white communities.⁹⁰ Washington was extremely outspoken on the opinion that blacks should not agitate to attain equality and purchased black newspapers with the help of the white sponsors who supported him.⁹¹

More black newspapers were published at this time than any other; there were more than 2,000 black newspapers published, some condemning discrimination and segregation, and others, Washington’s papers included, preaching peace between the races.⁹² One of those new newspapers was the *Chicago Defender*, which began publishing in 1905.⁹³ It was the first black newspaper of its kind, adopting yellow journalism in an attempt to attract readership and report on race more sensationally, using gross exaggeration and extreme descriptions to get points across. Robert Abbott, the *Defender*’s editor, is cited with helping spur the Great Migration north during World War I.

The black press's gears shifted during the Great Migration and World War I between 1915-1928. With able white men off to war, there were jobs ripe for the taking in the North, and Abbott knew that. He published articles encouraging southern blacks to move north, and so they did. Thousands of black individuals and families moved north and west during World War I to occupy jobs left by white men off fighting in the war to make a better living for themselves. People also moved north because droughts and heavy rainfall wiped out crops in 1915 and 1916, there were higher wages in the North, there was still rampant discrimination and black mistreatment in the South, and northern laws were more hospitable to blacks and their civil rights.⁹⁴ While Abbott was helping promote the North, other black newspapers were utilizing militant reporting to discuss and condemn the mistreatment and segregation of black soldiers during the war, helping blacks get acquainted with new laws and societal rules in the North, posting updates on family members in the war or migrating across the United States, and continuing to condemn violence and racism against blacks in the United States.⁹⁵ The *Chicago Defender* was considered one of the most militant papers at the time, openly condemning the racism and discrimination of black soldiers off at war.⁹⁶

The black newspaper editors' fight against discrimination and violence against blacks continued through the Great Depression between 1929-1939 and then bridged to World War II in 1939-1945. During World War II, the black press began receiving criticism from the government about its coverage of the war and battle for better treatment of black soldiers fighting in the war. The Federal Bureau of Investigation began looking into black newspapers for reportedly publishing propaganda for Japan and Russia; these investigations deteriorated the relationship between the government and the

black press.⁹⁷ Despite the negative relationship with the government, the black press continued to gain subscriptions because it was the only available way blacks could read about their own community and have updates about family members and friends off at war. Although the relationship with the government continued to be rocky, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt offered the black press a seat in the White House press corps in 1944 for the first time in history.

After World War II, easily accessible television began to take its toll on newspapers across the United States, and black newspapers suffered.⁹⁸ Circulation numbers plummeted, and many papers had to either decrease the frequency of publishing or stop publishing entirely. The decrease in circulation made most black newspaper editors become more conservative to attract and retain as much advertising revenue as possible, all but putting an end to militant coverage in the black press.⁹⁹

It is difficult to pin down the start of the civil rights movement between 1959-1976. Some historians and researchers say it started with *Brown v. Board of Education*, but others say it began with the Greensboro student sit-in in 1960.¹⁰⁰ The civil rights movement was both good and bad for black newspapers; they went from the highest circulation yet during World War II to practically going extinct in the mid-1960s.¹⁰¹ Although the exact cause of the decline is unknown, historians say the downfall started in the 1950s, when black newspapers were accused of aligning with communists during the Cold War; another cause could be the lack of objectivity and sensationalistic reporting in some popular publications or the extreme militant-style reporting when the United States was at its most vulnerable.¹⁰²

Most black newspapers died by 1963.¹⁰³ There were only 2 dailies and 131 weeklies, semiweeklies, and biweeklies left in the United States.¹⁰⁴ During this time, mainstream media began covering black interests and black community issues, making staple black newspapers redundant.¹⁰⁵ Mainstream press also started hiring black reporters to increase diversity in newsrooms and make covering diverse communities easier; this made it difficult for black newspapers to retain good reporters on staff because they were being recruited to white newspapers and offered a higher salary than the black newspapers could afford.¹⁰⁶ Because of these difficulties, the black press became even more conservative to maintain what few subscriptions and advertisers it had left.¹⁰⁷

Some black leaders, like Malcolm X, were not happy with the conservative state the black press was in and continued militant reporting in his paper *Muhammad Speaks*.¹⁰⁸ Other black newspapers continued condemning racism and discrimination in the United States, but the heyday of black militant reporting was all but over.¹⁰⁹ It was during this time period that the Watts riots occurred.

Framing Theory

I used framing theory as the basis for understanding why riots are covered by journalists in the manner in which they are. All journalists use frames, although they may not know it. It is understood that, while the job of a journalist is to present his or her audience with all sides of the story, certain sides may receive more coverage, time, or column space than others. Gitlin explains that media frames are defined as “patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion,” where journalists use framing to present certain events to their audiences.¹¹⁰ Frames give

journalists a tool to process large amounts of information quickly by organizing topic into categories and relaying that information to audiences.¹¹¹ Another classic scholar of framing states that journalists use the theory to make pieces of their work more noteworthy to their audiences.¹¹² Entman breaks this process into two parts, choosing certain aspects of the event and making those aspects more visible in the journalist's work.

As previously mentioned, these forms of framing theory are not always outrightly known, understood, or utilized by journalists.¹¹³ Sometimes journalists choose to cover or focus on one aspect of an event that they deem interesting, and thereby, they choose only a certain part of the event to cover and make it more available and visible to his or her audience.¹¹⁴ In part, because of journalists' general ignorance of unconscious framing, most news coverage is framed or biased in some way.¹¹⁵ With more knowledge and understanding of frames in news coverage, journalists could attempt to avoid frames and biases in their reporting. Understanding the way journalists use frames, whether accidental or on purpose, is an essential aspect of understanding the news coverage of riots.

Journalists decide what to cover based on a handful of factors: news worthiness, timeliness, relevance, and availability.¹¹⁶ These factors provide a base for framing at the start of story selection, because if something is old or does not affect a wide range of the news organization's audience, the story is almost always cut in preference for something that does both those things. These factors are also taught to almost all journalists at the beginning of their careers, either in school or as part of their training at a news organization. If a story is interesting and will draw eyes to the newspaper, magazine, or

television, it is not only the focus of at least one reporter's time, but it will most definitely be included in the newscast or newspaper for the day. While journalists focus on the above listed factors when choosing a daily story, source availability is also a very large aspect of which stories get covered.

Sources are people journalists interview and quote in their stories to give them more relevance, background, and information. Without what is termed a "good source," a reporter's story will most likely be dropped from the newscast or changed, therefore, making sources one of the most important aspects of story selection and coverage.¹¹⁷ Sources are chosen based on their past willingness to be interviewed for stories, their knowledge on at least one aspect of the story, their credibility, and whether or not they are available for an interview when the reporter needs it.¹¹⁸ Journalists typically turn to official sources because of quick turnaround and deadlines. Official sources differ for all communities, but typically, they include local, state, or federal government officials, community leaders (such as religious leaders and organization heads), and law enforcement. Official sources are typically more willing to talk to reporters and are extremely knowledgeable on the topic of discussion, which makes an official source a "good source," based on the previous definition.

Sources journalists are more likely to turn to depend on the community that news outlet is located in. For example, in 1965 Los Angeles and Sacramento, California, black newspaper writers were more likely to turn to community leaders. Based on the research detailed extensively in a later section, those community leaders most typically were the black city councilmen and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, spokesmen or organizational leaders. These and similar sources were used

extensively throughout the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer* in the fall of 1965. Most articles sourced some sort of black or local community leader, relied on personal observations, or took to the streets for man-on-the-street interviews.

Previous personal research on this topic noted that mainstream news media (*Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*) typically used official sources, such as police officers, city or state leaders, or government officials. Personal experience working in a contemporary commercial news media outlet also gives me perspective to say most mainstream media tend to use official sources when reporting on national stories. Since I began working at Newsy in January, I have read hundreds of national, mainstream media articles and, rarely, do they quote local or man-on-the-street sources. Granted, access to official statements and press releases is obviously made easier with the access to high-speed internet, but my previous research on the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* proved the same fact: Mainstream media tends to rely on officials when sourcing articles. This is not always the case, as there is always an outlying situation, but in most cases, I have found this to be true. The sources used in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* during the Watts riots in 1965 will be discussed in further detail in a later section of this paper.

In this paper, I use three very simple frames: positive, neutral, and negative. When completing my research, I found that the articles, writers, or sources did not fit nicely in previously made framing boxes. What I did find was that each article had a certain tone of voice, connotation, and language used when discussing the Watts riots. These things would contribute to the overall interpretation of the article. Writers or sources sometimes were complimentary of the riots – in that they said the riots would

lead to the rebuilding of the Watts community – or they used language and terms that denounced the riots, and some articles stated facts only and avoided framing all together, therefore, leading to a categorization of neutral. While these are extremely simple frames, I found them to be very useful when analyzing the articles in the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer*. It is important to note that in some cases, the framing of the article was undiscernible because the article included mostly factual information (lists of names or of information) or the article did not provide a set opinion on the Watts riots. It is also important to note that the definitions and understandings of framing as described above are based off of research of mainstream media. Although this is a study regarding the black press, I believe that because the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* at this point in time were attempting to remain conservative in order to retain advertisers and compete with mainstream press, it is possible to take the concept of framing and apply it to these specific two papers. This may not have been the case if the papers I was analyzing adhered more to the militant or advocating reporting style.

Riots and News Coverage

The start of research on news coverage of protests came from Gitlin, who made the argument that the only time such events are covered in the news are when they meet the journalistic norms of story selection (newsworthy, timely, relevant, and available). He also argued that because journalists tend to utilize mostly officials as main sources, the coverage of racially charged events is typically skewed, lacking all sides of the story.¹¹⁹ This is called sensationalism, which is when journalists frame a story to seem much more interesting than it may be by providing only certain facts and sources.

Sensationalism became a part of journalism in the late 1800s, when newspaper publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst began competing for high circulation numbers using yellow journalism. Yellow journalism is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “Journalism that is based upon sensationalism and crude exaggeration.”¹²⁰ The same dictionary defines sensationalism as “the presentation of stories in a way that is intended to provoke public interest or excitement, at the expense of accuracy.”¹²¹

Sensationalism is a common theme when journalists cover events of racial tension, especially riots. Riots have been happening for decades and have evolved with time and geographical location. There have been dozens of riots throughout history. In the early days, riots involved violence by whites against blacks, most of the time in an attempt to suppress blacks and black communities.¹²² In the early 1900s, something changed in the black community and riots were typically ignited in black neighborhoods and involved mostly black participants. Most of the time, these riots were a way for blacks to express anger at their situations in society: low paying jobs, poor housing and education opportunities, and poor treatment by the government and surrounding communities.¹²³ Historians refer to these types of riots as “rebellions,” and rebellions typically involve some sort of organization and a unifying cause (e.g. civil rights), although this is not always the case.¹²⁴ Violence in riots and rebellions in the 1960s and beyond was typically aimed at white-owned businesses, as was the case in the Watts riots.¹²⁵

One example of a riot occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1921. The incident started on May 31 of that year when a newspaper article reported that a black man had assaulted

a white woman. The white community gathered outside the courthouse after his arrest, and rumors spread of a possible lynching.¹²⁶ A group of armed black individuals went to the courthouse in an attempt to protect the black man from being lynched, and violence ensued between the black and white groups. The violence spread to the local black community, where the two groups continued to fight, loot, and burn. Thirty-six people died, and 35 city blocks were essentially decimated, resulting in \$1.8 million in property lost.¹²⁷

As mentioned previously, sensationalism was extremely prevalent in the black press, sometimes taken to high levels of militancy and advocacy. Not only is this theme present in the news coverage of the Watts riots, but Messer and Bell also noticed it during the coverage of the Tulsa riots.¹²⁸ The definition of framing used within the scholars' work is that it "involves actors within social movements who 'assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists.'"¹²⁹ The researchers focused on how local newspapers framed the riots in terms of what themes were presented and how those themes contributed to the blame of the riots. Messer and Bell found that newspapers used sensationalistic terms to describe the destruction and interviewed local officials (government, city council members, law enforcement, etc.), who blamed mostly the militant blacks — who went to the courthouse to protect the arrested black man — and the poor conditions they lived in.¹³⁰ Another main theme the researchers found was the vindication of the whites involved in the fray.¹³¹ The case study ends with the conclusion that newspapers use frames when

covering riots to place blame and figure out what caused the riots, depending on who is being interviewed and quoted in the article.¹³²

Another example of a riot was the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The riots were sparked after the trial of Rodney King in 1991, “where four police officers brutally beat King after a speed chase,” and the shooting of a young black girl that same year.¹³³ A jury acquitted all four officers on April 29, 1992, and that day began the six days of unrest by mostly blacks that left 52 dead, 2,239 injured, and \$1 billion in property damage.¹³⁴ Like the Watts riots in 1965, most of the violence, looting, and burning was aimed at non-black businesses, which meant, Korean-American businesses at the time.

Oh and Hudson examined the framing in the *Los Angeles Times*' coverage of the Los Angeles riots. The researchers specifically looked at mainstream media frames and minority frames in newspaper coverage. These included, but were not limited to, "damages/disruption," "causes/explanation," "public safety," "police reaction," "legal issues," the names of the victims, "strife," and "blacks" as victims.¹³⁵ Oh and Hudson found the newspaper was more likely to mention damages/disruption, legal issues, police reaction, the names of the victims, strife, and blacks as victims than all other themes and frames. The researchers explained that newspapers “look for news events or spectacle[s] that help signify an issue, so as to make the conveyance of preferred meaning easier.”¹³⁶ This means that newspapers will use framing to tie an event or spectacle to a bigger issue in order to make the issue seem more important, which can lead to misinterpretation and misrepresentation in the coverage of the issue and event.

It is important to note that neither of these two studies specifically looked at the black press when analyzing the framing of the Tulsa and Los Angeles riots. They

examined mainstream press, which historically has (at least minutely) different ways of reporting. The differences I have noticed in past research is that mainstream press tends to interview government officials when writing a story, whereas the black press has more of a tendency to talk with community leaders and people on the street. Mainstream press also does this, but not to the same extent as the black press. That is most likely because the black press has been seen as a voice for the community since its onset. The 1960s is a difficult time to pin down one single way the black press was operating, as there were few papers left, and those that were left tended to remain as conservative as necessary to retain advertisers.¹³⁷ Some black newspapers were still militant at this time, but I did not analyze those for this paper, as they were not available or located near Los Angeles. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer* tended to report conservatively and were seen as an advocate for the middle-class at the time.

Research Question

After reading more than 20 books, multiple scholarly articles, and previous research done on the Watts riots, I wondered how local authorities did not see the riots coming. If it truly was as prevalent in the community as historians and previous researchers have stated time and time again, is it possible for officials and authorities to be so blind to a brewing problem of racial violence in the southern Los Angeles neighborhood? Although I may never know the answer to that question, I can find the answers to other questions that have popped up in my research of the history of the black press, the growth and evolution of Los Angeles, and the coverage of race in the media.

Previous scholars have compared the news coverage of the Watts riots and other racially motivated violence between predominantly black and mainstream white

newspapers. The conclusion is mostly what I would expect. The black newspapers took to the streets more often and typically looked at the deeper set meaning of the violence inside the black community, while mainstream white newspapers attempted to diagnose and solve the problem via talking and quoting local white officials. As always, there are some outlying situations, which are mentioned in multiple scholars discussed in further detail previously. But no scholar has looked at comparing black newspapers to each other. Historians take the time to look at the development of the black press and mention each's individual style, but none have looked at the black newspaper coverage of the Watts riots in depth.

So how did the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer* frame the Watts riots? How did the two newspapers account for the cause of the Watts riots?

Based on past research I have done on the Watts riots and historical texts on numerous topics related to this thesis, I thought the *Los Angeles Sentinel* would use both officials and locals in its coverage of the riots. It was known as not being as volatile as other black newspapers had been during and, especially, before the riots, and attempted to stick to mainstream journalistic norms as much as possible. I also thought the newspaper would not try to attribute the riots to anything and will, instead, take a deep dive into the history of police violence and brutality in the area when explaining what brought about the racial violence. I thought the *Sacramento Observer* would take the same ideals as the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and attempt to be as objective as possible, excluding opinion pieces. While the *Observer* started publishing just a few years before the riots, there is a chance the articles published in it could be a mix of opinion pieces and Associated Negro Press wire pieces. That would mean that the *Sacramento Observer* would mostly have official

sources and outside opinions in its articles and would most likely attempt to place blame on external factors. Although there was no telling exactly what the *Sacramento Observer* did until I got my hands on the microfilm.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In my research, I used textual analysis as defined by Fürsich, “A combination of meticulous reading and contextualized interpretation of text [that] will be able to explain the specific ideological moment.”¹³⁸ There are two main theories of how textual analysis should be completed: a deep dive into the context of culture, production, and audience reaction to the text or a surface level look at the words on the page with only the reader’s interpretation of its meaning.¹³⁹ Fürsich’s definition combines the two theories in a way that the research provides attainable context, while also mostly into consideration and analyzing the text itself.

I completed a surface level textual analysis, in which I looked for overall themes and frames while reading the articles. I recorded these themes during my second reading of the articles and analyzed them alongside the sources the writers turned to, the terms and language used by the writers and sources when discussing the Watts riots, and the frames presented throughout the article.

One reason why I employed this method is because many of the journalists and audiences who read the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer* were unattainable — in that they were either not alive anymore, their names were not listed on bylines, they live too far away for me to actively seek them out, or their contact information is out of date. By meticulously reading and interpreting the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* and educating myself on the context of the time the newspapers were written, I was able to draw conclusions about how the black press covered the Watts riots.

Primary Evidence

The key primary sources used throughout this paper are two newspapers published between August-October 1965, specifically published between August 11 — the first day of the rioting — and October 14, as discussions of the Watts riots continued throughout much of the months of August, September, and October in the black California press. This paper will examine the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer* both black-owned and operated, weekly newspapers.

Los Angeles Sentinel. Leon H. Washington was an “advertising salesman for the California Eagle” when he left to start his own newspaper.¹⁴⁰ He got so many subscriptions that he turned his little newspaper into the *Los Angeles Sentinel* on March 15, 1933.¹⁴¹ Washington’s “Don’t Spend Where You Can’t Work” campaign in 1934 spurred a movement in Los Angeles where blacks were encouraged to not spend money at white-owned businesses that refused to hire them.¹⁴² The early days of the *Sentinel* were described as “fearless, independent and free.”¹⁴³ In 1965, Los Angeles had a population of 2,479,015 people.¹⁴⁴ Refer to Table 1 for further population breakdown. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* was published weekly on Thursdays, was a Democratic newspaper, and had a circulation of 30,735 in 1965. Refer to Table 2 for further circulation breakdown.

Sacramento Observer. Dr. William Hanford Lee, a “former successful real estate broker and businessman,” began publishing the *Sacramento Observer* in 1962.¹⁴⁵ The *Observer* was the first ever black newspaper in Sacramento, California.¹⁴⁶ The weekly paper started out being produced on a kitchen table with little more than 600 subscriptions but has grown significantly in recent years, receiving more than 50,000

subscriptions.¹⁴⁷ Sacramento had a population of 191,667 in 1965.¹⁴⁸ The *Sacramento Observer* was published weekly on Thursdays, was an Independent newspaper, and had a circulation of 4,940 that same year.

I chose the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer* because they were two of three black newspapers left in California in 1965. The third paper was *The Oakland Post* and copies of the paper in 1965 are extremely difficult to find and get access to without living and being a student in California, neither of which I am. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* was available to me through an online historical African American press database, through which, I was able to download full editions of the newspaper. The *Sacramento Observer* was only available from one California library, which generously gave me permission to borrow it through Inter-Library Loans.

I decided to use black California newspapers when analyzing the coverage of the Watts riots because the black press in California had easier access to sources and information than papers in other parts of the country did. The *Sentinel* offices at the time were located amongst the rioting, and reporters could (and did) walk through the Curfew Zone to get information. The *Observer* was located close enough to Los Angeles to send a reporter and receive official information regarding the riots.

Table 1 California City Population

	Los Angeles	Sacramento
Population	2,479,015	191,667

Table 2 California Black Press Information

	<i>Los Angeles Sentinel</i>	<i>Sacramento Observer</i>
Published	Weekly	Weekly
Day of Week	Thursday	Thursday
Political Affiliation	Democratic	Independent
Circulation	30,735	4,940

Research Design

This historical textual analysis was completed by meticulously analyzing articles from the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer*, as mentioned previously. The first read of the articles was for general information and content of the article itself. During and after this first read, I input information about the article title, author, placement in the newspaper, sources, overarching themes, terms used and other notes. From there, I read through the article again and provided myself with a transcript of the text of the article to make keyword searching easier and create a running document for easily accessible information.

The third time I read the article, I looked for the frame of the content (positive, negative, or neutral)¹⁴⁹, who the reporters quoted or paraphrased in the article (names of sources, locals, officials, other reactions, etc.), and what words reporters utilized to describe either the cause of the Watts riots and surrounding context (local officials, political climate, residents of Watts, etc.). After creating a list of all of the words used by the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer*, I compiled a shorter list of words

used more often by tallying how many times each word was used in each article and then totaling the number of times each word was used for each newspaper between August 11 and October 14. This was done through a spreadsheet, which listed the headline of each article, the author (if available), the date the article was published, whether it was positive, neutral, or negative, who the sources were in each article, and a tally of how many times certain words were used to describe the riots and surrounding context.

Based on research by Sears and McConahay, I expected these words to include police brutality, racial discrimination, ignorant local officials, Watts resident's social positions, and the late summer heat.¹⁵⁰ Although no scholar has used this method in exactly the way I do, Sears and McConahay came somewhat close in both their book *The Politics of Violence* and their article in the *Journal of Social Issues* "Racial Socialization, Comparison Levels, and the Watts Riot" published in 1970, 11 years prior to the book.¹⁵¹ They analyzed the content of newspaper articles and conducted interviews, and while I did not have the availability to interview people who lived in the Curfew Zone, I did have access to the newspapers. Although there were many explanations in 1965 for why and how the Watts riots began, I initially looked for mentions of

- unemployment
- lack of education
- criminals in the area
- poor/low-income
- racial discrimination
- emotional cause
- broken homes

- police brutality
- newspaper mistreatment
- summer heat
- young age “antics”
- ignorant officials
- high black expectations for moving to Los Angeles
- poor housing
- migrants/black Muslims or outside agitators.

Chapter 4: Results

The *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* articles written and published between August 11 and October 14, 1965, were had more differences than originally anticipated. As mentioned previously, I looked at three main components while analyzing the text in the two newspapers: the sources quoted or relied upon for information in each article, the frame, and the terms used when referring to the riots.

It is important to note that some editions of both newspapers are missing from my research. While saving online files of full *Los Angeles Sentinel* editions from an online database, the database was missing the September 30, 1965, and the October 7, 1965, files. Therefore, I did not have access to them. Furthermore, neither newspaper editions on August 12, 1965 had any information or articles regarding the Watts riots, most likely because the riots had started the night before, and the newspapers either did not know about it or did not have enough information to print anything on it. My research is also missing the *Sacramento Observer* September 23, 1965, edition because that edition did not contain any information or articles regarding the Watts riots.

Sources

Of the 115 articles read and analyzed in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 74 of them contained sources or information that stemmed from local community leaders or man-on-the-street interviews. The other 41 articles relied on the author's own observations or another, unmentioned information source. Refer to Table 3 for further breakdown of sources in the *Sentinel*.

The *Sacramento Observer*'s journalists seemed to mostly rely on unidentified sources or information in a portion of the 25 articles read and analyzed for this paper. Of those articles, ten did not identify the source of information, two used community leaders, and most interestingly, the remaining articles used officials as sources. Refer to Table 4 for further breakdown of sources in the *Observer*.

Table 3 List of Sources Mentioned in Los Angeles Sentinel

Source Names	Times Mentioned
author's own observations	21
rioters	1
Rev. H. H. Brookins	2
Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally	4
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.	2
not mentioned	3
Long Beach Lieutenant	1
LAPD	6
white business owners	1 (multiple in one article)
Mrs. Griffin	1
unidentified source	20
Councilman Billy G. Mills	7
Louis Green	1
Ralph Reece (spokesman for the Watts rioters)	2
Sociologists	1
Phillip E. Watson (LA Assessor)	1
Councilman Gilbert Lindsay	1
Assemblyman Charles J. Conrad	1
Paul M. Posner (LA County Democratic Chairman)	1
Dr. K. H. Sutherland (county health officer)	1
Aunt Theby	1

man-on-the-street	3 (multiple in one article)
LA Chamber of Commerce	1
Councilman Thomas Bradley	2
Religious Leaders	5 (multiple in one article)
NAACP	8
Frank Miller (president of the United Veterans Club)	1
Los Angeles Urban League	1
James Farmer (national director of CORE)	1
Leroy Collins (Fla. Gov)	1
Lewis Green (chairman of the United Neighborhood Organizations of Watts)	1
Pat Brown (Gov. of Calif.)	4
Local attorney	1
Victor M. Carter (president of Republic Corporation)	1
Normal O. Houston (president of Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Co.)	1
John A. Gronouski (Postmaster General)	1
Odis. T. Ireland (chairman of the Watts Labor Community Action Committee)	1
UCRC Spokesman	1
John M. Pratt, counsel for the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches and Vice President of the LCDC	1
Rev. Dr. Gayrand S. Wilmore Jr. (United Presbyterian civil rights leader)	1
Horace Cayton Kerkley (Sociology professor and specialist on urban problems)	1
John Shabazz (Muslim minister)	1
Assemblyman Willie Brown (from San Francisco)	1
Jack Conway (federal administrator for the Office of Economic Opportunity)	1

Samuel Yorty (LA Mayor)	1
Arthur Morgan (area manager of the Californian State Employment Service)	1
Ralph Merola president of AFL-CIO Local 685	1
Charles Ingram (city planner/architect)	1
Robert Goe (executive assistant to Mayor Yorty)	1
C. E. Cameron (of the State Dept. of Alcohol Beverage Control)	1
Judge Loren Miller	2
Marquette and Ronald Frye	1
Community Labor Committee spokesman	1
William H. Parker (LA Police Chief)	1
J. A. Cinquemani (executive secretary)	1
Rep. Augustus F. "Gus" Hawking	1
Lt. Gen. Roderick L. Hill	1
Lynn Compton (deputy district attorney of LA)	1
George Slaff (president of the American Civil Liberties Union for Southern California)	1

Table 4 List of Sources Mentioned in Sacramento Observer

Source Names	Times Mentioned
religious leaders	1 (multiple in one article)
unidentified source	10
Hale Champion Director of Finance	1
US Senator Thomas H Kuchel	1
unofficial coroner's report	1
Councilman Billy G. Mills	1
Roy Wilkins	1
NAACP	2
Assembly Speaker Jesse M. Unruh	1
own observations	1
Dr. James M. Nabrit Jr. (president of Howard University)	1
Jack Greenberg (direct counsel of the legal Defense Fund)	1
Leroy Clark (Legal Fund Assistant Counsel)	1

Framing

I also analyzed and recorded the frame of the articles. As previously described, I placed each article in one of three categories: positive, neutral, or negative. I defined those terms in this way: Positive – the writer or sources used complimentary language, terms, or phrasing when referring to the Watts riots; this usually entailed the writer or source saying the riots would lead to the rebuilding of the community, which was a positive outcome of the riots.¹⁵² Neutral – the writer or sources described mostly factual information without much room for bias, opinion, or framing; some articles I analyzed that had a neutral frame were lists of names, information regarding meetings, or factual updates on the situation in the Watts community. Negative – the author or sources used

language that condemned or denounced the riots; these articles sometimes used terms such as “holocaust” or “massacre” when discussing the riots.

The literary theme of sensationalism contributed greatly to the negative frame when present in articles, either by the writer him or herself or the sources.

Sensationalistic articles were more likely to use extremely descriptive terms – which were borderline exaggerative in some instances – when discussing the violence and destruction of the riots. When articles used this sensationalistic language, more often than not, the article’s frame was interpreted as negative because of the use of the negative terminology. Each of these observations is my objective opinion. Each of the articles’ frames could be interpreted differently by others. There were also numerous articles where the frame could not be identified. This typically happened when the article included a list of names (e.g. names of the dead or arrested), if the article was marginally related to the Watts riots but did not give an opinion or directly comment on the riots, or if the article presented multiple differing opinions.

In the majority of the 140 articles read and analyzed, most of the author and source framing was neutral. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* had the closest count with 46 articles’ frames listed at neutral and 44 at negative. The *Sentinel* did have 3 positive articles, in which, sources or authors referred to the Watts riots as a good thing for the community, most often commenting on how the community could now rebuild and be better than it was before. It is important to note that two of the articles in the *Sentinel* were listed as more than one frame because the articles included interview perspectives from multiple sources. Those articles were listed as both “positive/negative” and

“neutral/negative” and were tallied in both applicable places. See Table 5 for a comprehensive view of the frames of the *Sentinel*.

The *Sacramento Observer* was surprisingly neutral when discussing the Watts riots. Of the 25 articles analyzed, 11 of them had neutral frames and six of them were negative. There were no positive articles regarding the Watts riots, and the remaining six articles were either lists of names (dead or arrested) or did not comment on the riots. For a look at the *Observer* numbers, see Table 6.

Table 5 Los Angeles Sentinel Frames

Positive	Neutral	Negative	N/A
3	46	44	23

Table 6 Sacramento Observer Frames

Positive	Neutral	Negative	N/A
0	11	6	6

Terms Used

The final component I looked at while analyzing the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* was the terms used by authors and sources when referring to the Watts riots. In this case, those references changed in each edition of the newspaper. Editions sent to the printers closer to the end of the Watts riots were more likely to discuss the cause of the riots, where later editions in the timeframe I researched were more likely to discuss how to go about fixing the causes of Watts riots. The terms I looked for mentions of were:

- unemployment

- uneducated or bad schools
- criminals
- poor
- racial discrimination
- high emotions or emotional
- poor housing
- police brutality or bad police and community relations
- summer heat
- young antics
- government (local, state, or federal)
- an overfull area.

In the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, there were so many mentions of removing or blaming Los Angeles Police Chief William H. Parker or Los Angeles Mayor Samuel Yorty that I added their names to the list for that newspaper. The two local officials' resignations were not called for in the *Sacramento Observer* thus, their names were not added to the *Observer's* list of terms. In the *Observer*, the authors or sources specifically mentioned the poor Watts community and police relationship, in addition to police brutality, so I independently distinguished the two terms from each other when looking at that newspaper. The *Sentinel* made no outright mention of the poor community and police relationship and typically lumped it in with police brutality, so I left it that way in my research, as well.

Both newspapers mentioned unemployment the most as either the leading cause of the Watts riots or one of the most important things to fix in order to keep another riot

from happening. The Los Angeles Police Department was mentioned second most in both newspapers, whether with the phrase police brutality or poor police and community relationship was used. But that is where the similarities in terms ends for the *Sentinel* and *Observer*.

The *Los Angeles Sentinel* stated all of the above-mentioned terms (except for poor police and community relationship) at least once. Following the top two causes or things to fix in Watts (unemployment and police brutality), the *Sentinel*'s writers and sources also mentioned poor housing, racial discrimination, the poor in the community, and uneducated or bad schools. All of those terms were mentioned both in the early editions of the newspaper and the later editions, as both were mentioned as causes and things necessary to fix in the community. See Chart 1 for a breakdown of all the terms mentioned in the *Sentinel*.

The *Sacramento Observer* used fewer terms than the *Sentinel*, but those that were mentioned by authors and sources were stated (mostly) more than once. The *Observer*'s writers and sources mentioned the poor in the area, poor housing, criminals, and uneducated or bad schools while commenting on the Watts riots but did not discuss the government's potential role in the riots or racial discrimination, two things highly discussed in the *Sentinel*. See Chart 2 for a breakdown of all the terms mentioned or not mentioned in the *Observer*.

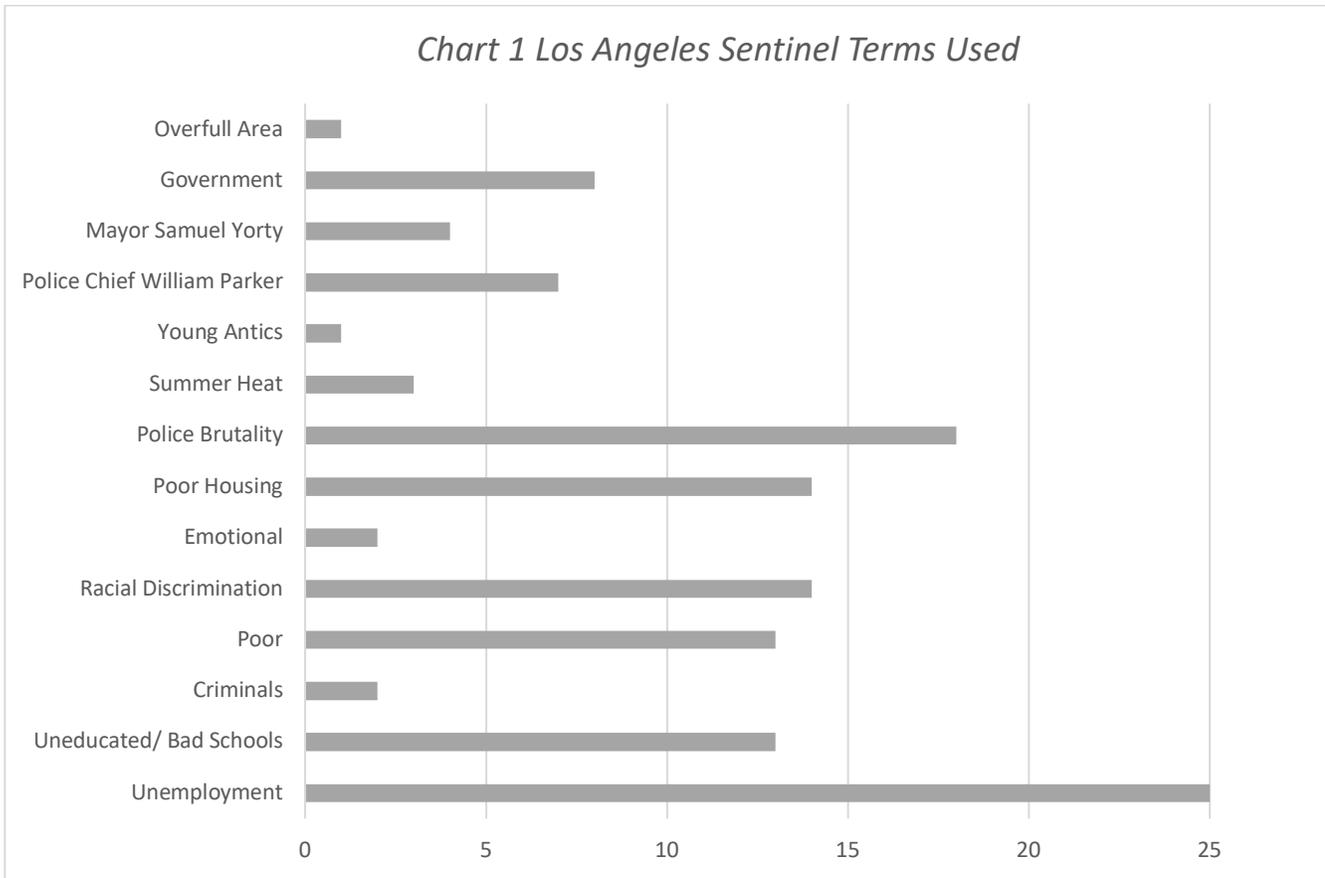


Chart 1 Los Angeles Sentinel Terms Used

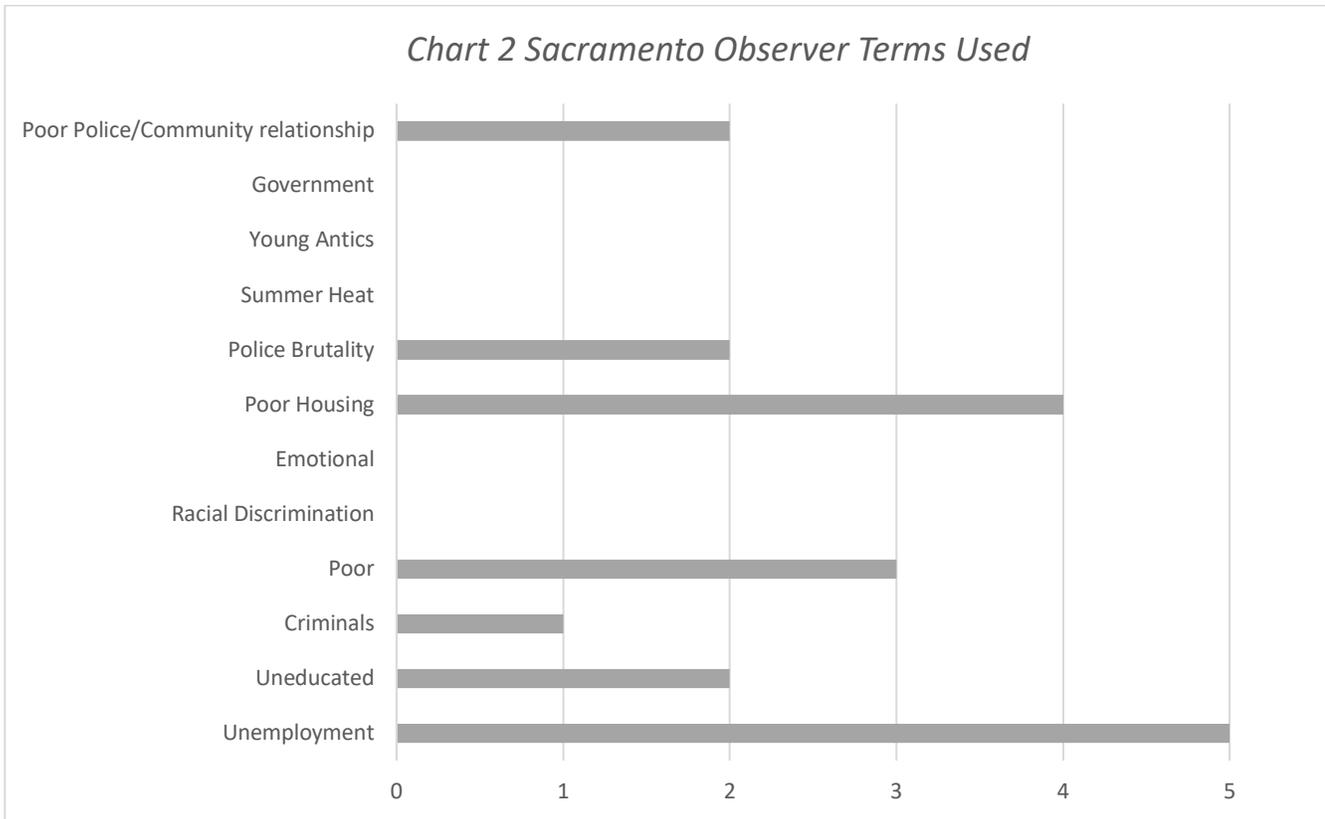


Chart 2 Sacramento Observer Terms Used

Chapter 5: Discussion

Framing of the Watts riots was different for every single article I read. There was no one generalization or understanding I came to after reading the 140 articles. The framing of the articles depended on the author's own observations and opinions and those of the sources used. Based on the research listed above, I found correlations between official sources and blaming Watts itself for the start of the riots. Official sources as previously described tended to be local, state, or federal government officials. In this case, I also included certain governmental organizations and the Los Angeles Police Department. More often than not, when writers quoted or used information from these official sources, they blamed the poor, uneducated people in Watts for the riots and the poor community they lived in. There were many mentions of the poor, criminals, uneducated, unemployed, and poor housing in both the *Sentinel* and *Observer* when official sources were used. There were also many times other sources, like community leaders (religious leaders, NAACP, or city councilmen), blamed the low-income rate, bad schools and education opportunities, and the poor Watts neighborhood for the start of the riots.

Some of the language used in these articles lead to a negative frame of not only the Watts riots, but also of the community of Watts itself. That is because the articles with this negative language and framing were often sensationalistic and used terminology like "uprising," "holocaust," or "revolt" when discussing the riots.¹⁵³ The writers and sources sometimes referred to the people who lived in Watts as "rioters," "criminals," or "poor," casting a negative connotation for readers on those who participated in the riots and/or lived in Watts. The destruction of the Curfew Zone was also heavily described in

negative, sensationalistic terms, with sources or writers often recalling or referring to the damage, destruction, burning, looting, or war zone that was Watts during the six days of rioting.

With the knowledge of the poor relationship between the Watts community and the Los Angeles Police Department and local government, it is not very surprising that the official sources blamed the start of the Watts riots on the internal social ills of the community. The government had a history of not going out of its way to help improve Watts' infrastructure and did little about the growing racism in the Los Angeles Police Department.¹⁵⁴ The LAPD was known to many in Los Angeles as being extremely racist to the point of brutality and had only gotten worse after Police Chief William H. Parker took office in 1950.¹⁵⁵

On the flip side, many Watts residents interviewed, almost entirely by the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, cited the poor police and community relationship, police brutality, or government for the start of the riots. There were articles published that said the riots were not a surprise for those who lived in the community.¹⁵⁶ Those articles said police would walk through Watts looking to arrest or pull people over, and the government had the opportunity to put some money into the community through the War on Poverty Program but had decided to hold off on doling the money out. Watts residents also highly criticized Los Angeles Police Chief William H. Parker and Mayor Samuel Yorty for their mishandling of the situation and taking far too long to call the National Guard to put an end to the looting and burning. Watts community members also blamed the LAPD for not stopping the rioters from looting, with one article describing how law enforcement guarded the ruins of Watts instead of actively trying to stop the destruction.¹⁵⁷

Articles in which the residents placed the blame for the start of the riots on the Los Angeles Police Department or the local government sometimes led to a negative connotation of the LAPD and local government, which was sometimes interpreted as a negative frame throughout the whole article. It is important to note that articles that used man-on-the-street interviews or Watts residents were no less unsupportive of the riots, also using descriptive language when referring to the destruction, looting, or burning of their community, but while they discussed how Watts was burned, they also placed blame on the Los Angeles Police Department, Chief Parker, and Mayor Yorty for not doing more to end the riots before they got worse, using extremely descriptive and negative words, in some cases, while discussing the police brutality and perceived government neglect.¹⁵⁸

Another theme I noticed while completing this textual analysis was that articles in both the *Sentinel* and *Observer* took a different approach toward the end of the timeframe I analyzed. I found that the articles in both newspapers were more similar in late September and early October than they had been in August and early September. I believe this is so because the two newspapers started to use similar sources toward the middle and end of the timeframe I examined. The *Los Angeles Sentinel* stopped interviewing Watts and Los Angeles residents as much in middle and late September and October and began relying more on community leaders and official sources for information and input. These articles, writers, and sources focused on how to (1) prevent another riot from happening, (2) rebuild Watts post-riot, and (3) get back to normal post-riot.

In both newspapers, official sources, local community leaders, and Watts residents focused on what was next for Los Angeles. Articles in both the *Sentinel* and *Observer* mentioned lowering the unemployment rate, building better schools and locally run businesses, and allocating some money from the War on Poverty Program to the Watts community.¹⁵⁹ The language used in these articles pushed what happened in Watts forward and focused on what the government and community was going to do to rebuild the community and prevent another riot from happening. Writers typically used their own observations and opinions and official sources, local community leaders, and some Watts residents while writing these articles. Most sources seemed to agree that something had to be done to change the Watts community, but they could not agree on what.

Local community leaders and residents called for the resignation of Police Chief Parker and Mayor Yorty to help expedite the recovery and make changes to the many social ills that may have contributed to the cause of the riots. The language used was: police and community relationship, police brutality, poor in the community, poor housing, bad schools and education, low-income rate, and high unemployment. Local community leaders and residents' suggestions to fix those issues included: create a community relations committee to help determine and facilitate community grievances with the local police force and government, increase locally-owned businesses, increase the number of jobs available to blacks in the area, build better schools, offer programs and classes to school dropouts or otherwise uneducated, and appropriate funds to help rebuild adequate housing. Surprisingly, throughout all the articles, no reporter from the black press included the opinion of Mayor Yorty or Police Chief Parker when it came to moving forward after the riots. This may have been because of the lack of community

trust in Yorty and Parker at the time, as Watts residents and local community leaders blamed the two government officials for contributing to the start of the riots. It may also have been because writers were trying to show the community that it would be rebuilt and quoting the mayor or police chief most likely would not have been seen as a good thing by the *Sentinel* and *Observer's* readers.

It is difficult to pin down only one thing the black press blamed as the cause of the Watts riots. Official sources, as described above, typically placed blame on the internal social ills of the Watts community, mentioning poor, poor housing, unemployment, bad schools and uneducated, or criminals as the reasons for the riots. Local community leaders took a wider stance and blamed the social ills of the community, but also placed some of the blame on the shoulders of the government and officials for letting the community get to where it was, thereby leading to the bubbling up of resentment and anger in the community and leading to the riots. Watts residents mostly blamed the government and law enforcement for the start of the riots, but also said the social ills of the Watts community contributed to the start of it all.

Unexpected to me, I found that the black press turned mostly to local community leaders than any other sources when reporting about the Watts riots. As I was reading the newspaper editions, I did notice writers quoting other official sources or community residents, but not usually when reporting on the riots. Community leaders, such as the NAACP, local business owners, and city councilmen had a lot of opinions and suggestions when it came to the cause of the riots and how to go about moving forward after the riots in the southern Los Angeles neighborhood. There is no way to know for sure why this was the case, but I believe that the black press turned to the local

community leaders more than other sources for a number of reasons. They were most likely easily accessible, willing to talk, and knowledgeable on the topic of the riots. All of those fit the suggestions of a good source described previously in this paper.

I think reporters did not go to official sources as much as expected because they were less available and much less willing to talk. As previously described, Mayor Yorty and Police Chief Parker were coming under fire for their handling of the riots and most likely did not want to discuss it with reporters. I also found that the black press did not rely on Watts residents as much as previously expected when it came to report on the riots. I had previously thought that writers would turn to locals for most of their reporting but did not find that to be true. Most of the man-on-the-street and resident interviews were used at the beginning of the timeframe I researched and dropped off pretty significantly toward early and middle of September. Their interviews typically described the destruction and looting during the riots and tried to explain the cause. Rarely did the resident sources try to come up with ways to move forward after the riots. This was most surprising for me.

The *Sacramento Observer* relied on official sources when reporting on the riots more often than previously expected. I expected some before beginning my research but was surprised with how many official sources the *Observer* could interview, especially considering the newspaper was only a few years old at the time of the riots. The *Observer*, as previously mentioned, also did not use a single wire article or opinion column when reporting on the riots. Most of the articles, as shown in Table 6, had neutral frames and did not outrightly condemn or support the riots. The *Observer's* distance from Los Angeles most likely played a major part in the sources the newspaper had

access to. Unlike the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, which was mere blocks from the heart of the Curfew Zone, the *Observer* did not have the opportunity to walk out the newspaper office's front doors and talk to witnesses. This most likely explains some of the newspaper's reliance on official sources.

At this time in history, the black press was on a significant decline, as most papers had died by 1963, leaving only 133 papers in the United States.¹⁶⁰ Most black newspapers were attempting to remain somewhat conservative in order to retain advertisers and compete with mainstream press.¹⁶¹ That most likely contributed to why the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* interviewed so many officials and local community leaders, in order to receive similar information as the mainstream press and stay competitive. While the black press of 1965 attempted to remain somewhat conservative, it was still seen as a voice for the community.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

There has been little prior research comparing two black newspapers. This poses a problem for those who wish to learn more about how the black press covered certain issues, and I believe there is merit in understanding how newspapers of all types cover extremely important events, such as riots. As previously mentioned, there are mass amounts of research on riots, the black press, Los Angeles, and the news coverage of events of racial violence, but there is no research that takes all of these factors into consideration while comparing two black newspapers. Messer and Bell and Oh and Hudson both examined the mainstream press's coverage of riots – the 1921 Tulsa riot and the 1992 Los Angeles riots – but neither scholarly work took into consideration how the black press covered the events.¹⁶²

Other research comparing the black press' and mainstream media's news coverage is wide spreading. Just searching the University of Missouri online database for the search term “comparing black press and mainstream media” provides more than half a million possible results. For example, Mastin, Campo, and Frazer analyzed four mainstream and four black newspapers covered the issue of “reparations being awarded to descendants of U.S. slaves.”¹⁶³ Moody-Hall compared the mainstream press and black press' coverage and framing of racial profiling before and after September 11, 2001.¹⁶⁴ Those were just two examples of thousands of studies comparing the black press and mainstream press' news coverage. While research comparing mainstream and black press is interesting in many aspects, there is little research comparing solely black newspapers' news coverage to each other.

This is one reason why I compared the news coverage of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer*. There is a gap in the knowledge, and I believe it is an important part of understanding history that has been sorely lacking. While studying past research of the news coverage of riots, there was little to no information on how the black press covered such events. As previously mentioned, I did find very useful and helpful information from both Messer and Bell and Oh and Hudson, but they did not look at the black press.¹⁶⁵ What little information on news coverage I did find on the black press most often included a comparison to the mainstream press.

Studying the news coverage of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* only contributes slightly to an area of study that could use much more research. This research is important because riots continue to occur, and no matter whether they are called “rebellions,” “uprisings,” or “riots” the occurrence of riots means there are still disparities in contemporary society that need to be addressed. Not only can looking back at riots in the history of the United States help give historical perspective to contemporary riots, but it can also help society understand why riots occur and how past governments and communities have reacted to similar incidents. It is also important for everyone to be educated on such issues so as not to repeat them. Unfortunately, riots very similar to the Watts riots and other riots previously mentioned in this research still occur today and have for decades.

While it is not a guarantee, knowledge of past riots and how the black press covered them can help everyone, and especially contemporary journalists, understand better ways to tell the story and get information out to the public. As previously mentioned, the black press in 1965 was on a decline and many papers attempted to stay

somewhat conservative and had adopted very similar practices in coverage as mainstream press. Although, the black press's purpose at this time was still seen as a voice for the community and as an advocate for the black middle class. Although most of the remaining black newspapers were not as militant as they had been in prior years, they were still a way for people to read about things that were happening in the black community. In both the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer*, there were still many community pages involving local religion, advertisements for local stores, news regarding local, state, and national sports teams, and listings for local properties for sale or rent. They were both still community papers in 1965. The papers also included opinion columns where writers and residents could discuss local, state, and national goings-on and how those issues affected the community.

Historically, writers for the black press would turn to the community and let local residents tell their stories.¹⁶⁶ I found this in multiple articles, especially in the *Sentinel*, where a source's information and story would fill up the entire article, with the writer providing slight context and background. One example in the August 19, 1965, edition of the *Los Angeles Sentinel* included an article titled "'I Guess They Were Hungry' Burned Businessmen Bitter," which included multiple quotes from a handful of business owners in Watts.¹⁶⁷ The writer, Bill Lane, provided the reader with detailed information, regarding exactly what Watts looked like at that moment.

"Los Angeles looks like a bombed-out European city during World War II. Shattered glass is everywhere. Crumbled brick and mortar litters sidewalks and spills grotesquely into alleys. Steel beams stand twisted and bent like hairpins, and disjointed water pipes spew water over burned timbers and merchandise that has turned to charcoal."¹⁶⁸

But after setting the scene, Lane included many interviews from multiple businessmen who went to tell the story of what they had heard or seen happen and what their plans were for the future.

Articles like this occurred in almost every single issue of the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, whether they were about the Watts riots or other community issues. Similar articles appeared in the *Sacramento Observer*, although those articles rarely discussed the Watts riots. These two newspapers let the local residents and sources tell their story of the riots, and that is what contemporary journalists should aspire to do.

Objectivity is a practice taught to journalists in every career field. Journalists, either while in school or while training at a news agency, are told to be fair and objective while reporting. They are told to provide all sides of the story and give equal time or space to those sides. Objectivity is almost impossible to truly attain. As previously mentioned, framing and biases exist whether or not journalists and sources are aware.¹⁶⁹ Every single person has an opinion, and while a journalist can provide quotes from multiple sides of the story (e.g. Republicans and Democrats), rarely do those sides actually cancel each other out and provide an objective story, based solely on facts. In this scenario, not only are both sides providing their opinions, but journalists are handing those set opinions to news consumers to choose from, instead of allowing them to decide what they think on their own. While the job of a journalist is to tell news consumers what is going on in their community and throughout the world, frames and biases do not allow journalists do that job objectively.

The black press was not known for its use of objectivity, in fact, it was known for exactly the opposite. Black newspapers were popular for their very opinionated coverage

of issues in the black community and society. The very first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, made it a point to directly combat any negative coverage of the black community and individuals found in white newspapers.¹⁷⁰ The black press continued to fight and advocate for freedom, equality, and racial pride throughout its evolution.¹⁷¹ Although in 1965, newspapers typically tried to remain somewhat conservative and mostly did away with its militant and sensationalistic forms of reporting, as previously mentioned, the black press still held onto its practice of allowing sources – whether overly emotional or not – to tell their perspective of the story and facts in some articles.

In cases like the Watts riots, it is almost impossible to find a source who is not emotional, especially if the incident took place in that person's community. Local residents, law enforcement, government officials, and local community leaders were all emotional because of what happened to their community. It would be difficult, if not impossible, during a high-emotion situation like a riot to find a reliable, knowledgeable source who was not emotional in some way. This was something the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Sacramento Observer* took advantage of. The two papers allowed sources – whether or not they were emotional – tell the story and facts based what they saw and knew. In one article published on September 9, 1965, in the *Sentinel*, Marquette Frye, the young, black man whose arrest had sparked the start of the Watts riots, gave his own opinion of what happened the day he was pulled over by law enforcement officer Lee Minikus.¹⁷² The two-page spread included almost entirely quotes from Frye and his brother Ronald, who was there at the time of the incident. This was just one example out of many similar articles found in both newspapers that allowed the sources tell the story and facts from their perspective.

I believe this is the best and most-effective way for contemporary journalists to report on riots. Instead of searching to balance out multiple sides of the story or attempting to take all of the information, digest it, and then present it to the audience with a journalist's own take on the incident, journalists in every career field should allow the sources to present the story in the way that person saw and understood it. In this manner, the journalist avoids inserting his or her own personal frames or biases into the content and allowing the story to be told by those who had personal experience with it. It is important to note that this practice would not stop the article from being framed by the opinions and biases of the source, but this way, the journalist is not unintentionally connecting information he or she got from a source to something unrelated.

With riots still being prevalent today, I feel like this method of reporting could significantly help reporters prevent their own personal opinions and biases from framing a story. It could also give news consumers a better idea of what being in that community would feel like at that moment. For example, had mainstream reporters interviewed students and residents in Columbia, Missouri, during the peaceful Concerned Student 1950 protest in the fall of 2015, news consumers across the United States might not have thought the campus was an unsafe place. But mainstream media did not do that. Instead, multiple large national news outlets came to Columbia with a picture of what was happening already in their heads, reported based on that picture and failed to let people who experienced or were a part of the peaceful protest tell their story in their perspective without that information being connected other unrelated events on campus. This led to family members of students being concerned for their well-being. I feel that if the mainstream media, and in some cases the local media, as well, had let students and

residents in Columbia tell the story the way they knew, experienced, and understood it, news consumers across the country could have better made up their own minds on what was happening at the school, instead of what the national media was telling people happened.

This was just one of many cases in recent years where contemporary reporters could have learned a lesson from the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and the *Sacramento Observer*'s reporting during the 1965 Watts riots. If contemporary journalists would take the time to learn how the black press covered riots, as well as many other stories, they could take those lessons to better their own reporting and decrease unintentional framing.

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152. __, "The People Speak the Irony of it All," (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 19, 1965,) A10.
153. __, "The Task Ahead,"(*Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 26, 1965,) A6.; __, "Collins' Proposal Rejected," (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 26, 1965,) A1, A8. Note: These are just a couple of articles that used the phrases "uprising," "holocaust," or "revolt."
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NOTE: This is just one article of many that expressed views that the riots had been coming.

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158. __, "The People Speak The Irony Of It All," (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 19, 1965,) A10.; Bill Lane, "I Guess They Were Hungry" Burned Businessmen Bitter," (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 19, 1965,) A1, A11.

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