The Central Park Five and Their Media Coverage: From Circus to Silence

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THE CENTRAL PARK FIVE AND THEIR MEDIA COVERAGE

FROM CIRCUS TO SILENCE

MASTER'S THESIS – NORTH AMERICAN STUDIES

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Abstract

In 1989, a rape of a white woman in Central Park became one of the most publicized cases in American history. This thesis focuses on the Central Park Five and how the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* described and presented the boys in the media storm. In what way did the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* frame the Central Park Five around the trial, meaning before, during, and after the exoneration in 2002 and the settlement with the city of New York in 2014? Previous research concerning this case study has primarily focused on details of the case and other aspects. This research uses framing theory and the White Racial Frame to show patterns of racial frames in the two newspapers. The research shows that while the racial narratives were prevalent around the trial, they became less visible after decades had passed. This thesis demonstrates that how the boys were depicted was highly influenced by their time. With the years going by, the frame changed as well. In the end, the men were viewed positively instead of demonized.

Introduction[1]

> You all tried to dehumanize us as human beings," Mr. Richardson said, his voice cracking as he fought back tears, and supporters rubbed his shoulders. "But we're still here, we're strong," he continued. "Nobody gave us a chance, except the people who believed in us. People called us animals – wolf pack."[2]

On April 19, 1989, Trisha Meili, a white woman, jogged through Central Park and was raped and left for dead in the bushes. Five boys were indicted for this crime, four African Americans and one Latino. The boys were very young – Korey Wise, 16; Antron McCray, 15; Kevin Richardson, 15; Yusef Salaam, 15; and Raymond Santana, 14. The media picked up the story almost immediately.[3] It became one of the most publicized cases in American history. The media followed the five boys closely, and their reporting reached all corners of the nation through national papers, local papers, and television.

In 2002, it became clear that the five boys were not guilty of the crime when Matias Reyes stepped forward and confessed that he alone attacked Meili in Central Park. DNA evidence of Reyes confirmed that he was at the scene of the crime.[4] The Central Park Five immediately sought exoneration. The New York Supreme Court vacated the convictions on December 19, 2002.[5] The five men filed a suit for $250 million, "arguing the city should pay

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[1] Photos on Front Page: Maya Simon, "Korey Wise," StMU Research Scholars, last modified November 29, 2020, https://stmuscholars.org/korey-wise/; William Glaberson, "After the Arguments: Jogger Jury Weighs a Jumble of Details," *New York Times*, August 10, 1990; "Five Men Exonerated in Central Park Jogger Case Agree to Settle Civil Rights Lawsuit for $42m," News.com.au, last modified June 21, 2014, https://www.news.com.au/world/five-men-exonerated-in-central-park-jogger-case-agree-to-settle-civil-rights-lawsuit-for-42m/news-story/8fdfa0b53dad78643bbd2efca81b0a1b.

[2] Kate Taylor and Nate Schweber, "After Settlement in Jogger Case, Plaintiffs Thank Supporters," *New York Times*, June 28, 2014.

[3] Sarah Burns, *The Central Park Five: The Untold Story Behind One of New York City's Most Infamous Crimes* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2011), 39.

[4] Natalie Byfield, *Savage Portrayals: Race, Media and the Central Park Jogger Story* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 154.

[5] Greg Stratton, "Transforming the Central Park Jogger into the Central Park Five: Shifting Narratives of Innocence and Changing Media Discourse in the Attack on the Central Park Jogger, 1989–2014," *Crime, Media, Culture* 11, no. 3 (2015): 286.

for their false arrest and malicious prosecution."[6] After years of going forwards and backward, they received a settlement of $40.7 billion.[7]

At the time of the trials, America looked different than it does now. The 1980s and 1990s were decades where America nationwide and inner cities, in particular, had to deal with many changes. For example, the disappearance of blue-collar jobs, the proclaiming of the War on Drugs, and the "crack epidemic" had a significant impact on public discourse.[8] These roaring times were the background of the media coverage concerning the Central Park five. When the historical context is considered, the media's approach clicks into place. Race, gender, and class were right on the surface in many public debates without people wanting to emphasize those themes. The fact that the victim was white and affluent, and the boys were black and Latino, from Harlem, and youths, plays a significant role in how the media chose to present this case.

When the story broke, it confirmed the mass hysteria that was present all over the nation. White Americans feared for their lives and were afraid of "gangs" and "thugs" in cities that ran amok. Those words were coded language and stamped black Americans as criminals.[9] They were deemed dangerous and hopeless. Especially black youths were seen as lost causes. There was a collective animosity toward youths.[10] The city shrugged its shoulders at black-on-black crime. That is why the 28 other cases of rape in the same week as the Central Park jogger involving a black woman passed unnoticed.[11] All in all, the perfect environment for the media to offer the story of the Central Park jogger case in the way they did.

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[6] "Article 1 -- No Title," *Washington Post*, March 15, 2003; Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 186.
[7] Jim Dwyer, "In Botched Case Of Park Jogger, An Altered Life," *New York Times*, June 27, 2014.
[8] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 436; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 5, 49.
[9] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 456.
[10] Perry L. Moriearty and William Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America," *Journal of Gender, Race & Justice* 15, no. 2 (2012): 307.
[11] Sam Roberts, "When Crimes Become Symbols," *New York Times*, May 7, 1989; Ellis Cose, "Rape in the News: Mainly About Whites," *New York Times*, May 7, 1989; Howard Kurtz, "Attack in N.Y. Park Reopens Racial Wounds: Some Urge 'Fair Shake' for Suspects; Other Call Sympathy Misguided," *Washington Post*, May 3, 1989; Don Terry, "A Week of Rapes: The Jogger and 28 Not in the News," *New York Times*, May 29, 1989.

This thesis focuses on the Central Park Five and how the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* described and presented the boys in the media storm. The main question is: In what way did the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* frame the Central Park Five around the trial, meaning before, during, and after the exoneration in 2002 and the settlement with the city of New York in 2014? It is essential that, apart from the articles about the trial, the happenings of 2002 and 2014 are also researched. This case offers a unique view on the development of media discourse from the time of the trial to the settlement twenty-five years later.

The newspapers that will get a closer look are *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Multiple search terms were used to find the newspaper articles. One of these is "Central Park Jogger." This term was quickly coined by the newspapers and used in many articles.[12] The terms "Central Park," "rape," and the names of the boys are used as well in combination with date ranges to get as many results as possible. By close reading the articles and considering their historical context, the frame the media constructed unravels.

These two newspapers were chosen because the primary sources were readily available from when the attack happened to the settlement in 2014. The two newspapers are selected because they both identify as liberal newspapers, and they are both national newspapers. The papers being both liberal and national newspapers, provide an equal footing. The search for articles produced 344 clippings that have been read. The articles that showed specific frames were highlighted. With this in-depth research, this thesis points out that these two liberal newspapers move within a particular frame.

Many academics have written articles and books about the topic at hand in this thesis: race, crime, and the role that the media plays in the United States. What they agree on is the notion that the media plays a central role in how blacks are perceived and how racial stereotypes

[12] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 39.

are preserved and confirmed.[13] Most people receive their knowledge about recent events from the news. For example, a study by Lori Dorfman and Vincent Schiraldi revealed that 76 percent of the public acquires their opinions about crime through that medium by reading and watching news stories.[14] In a way, an "indirect positive relationship" exists between crime and media coverage.[15] Because the media shows a great deal of crime, the perception that crime is rampant forms in the public mind.

In the 1990s, the media's mantra was "if it bleeds, it leads." Crime coverage increased immensely, from fifth to first place as the most covered topic.[16] Scholars Vanessa Garcia and Samantha Arkerson write that:

> First, the media tell us that crime is a major problem in our society.…Second, the media tell us that crime is violent and serious. It is rare to see a news story, television show, or movie about nonviolent crime.…The third piece of information that the media provide is that crime is an urban problem.…Fourth, crime is presented as a black male, or at least a non-white, activity. News stories still reinforce the symbolic assailant and superpredator belief which entails a young black male who is very violent and cannot be stopped unless arrested and incarcerated.[17]

They emphasize that the media focuses on crime with urgency. In their opinion, the public must be on the lookout for crime. Scholar Greg Stratton points out that the media chooses shocking crimes to alter "public perceptions, beliefs, or behavior toward any aspect of the relationship to

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[13] Ashley Doane, "Shades of Colorblindness: Rethinking Racial Ideology in the United States," in *The Colorblind Screen : Television in Post-Racial America* (New York, USA: New York University Press, 2020), 27; Elizabeth Teebagy, "White Privilege and Racial Narratives: The Role of Race in Media Storytelling of Sexual Assaults by College Athletes," *The Journal of Gender, Race, and Justice* 21, no. 2 (2018): 486; S. Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader*, ed. G. Dines and J.M. Humez (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011), 82; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 99.

[14] Lori Dorfman and Vincent Schiraldi, *Off Balance: Youth, Race & Crime in the News: Building Blocks for Youth* (Washington DC: Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2001), 4.

[15] Venessa Garcia and Samantha G. Arkerson, *Crime, Media, and Reality: Examining Mixed Messages About Crime and Justice in Popular Media* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 186.

[16] Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 287.

[17] Garcia and Arkerson, *Crime, Media, and Reality*, 178.

the rest of society."[18] Thus, the media works selectively to ensure that the public perceives certain crimes.

In addition, they connect the crime coverage to the black male, who is presented as violent and dangerous.[19] This frame aligns with what others have written about the topic. Professor of Media and Public Affairs Robert Entman states that his data supports that male blacks "appear consistently threatening, demanding and undeserving of accommodation by the government" on local news stations.[20] Not only are they depicted as dangerous and vicious, but they are also overrepresented in news media regarding crime. Several studies indicate that the proportion shown in the media of crime committed by blacks and other people of color is not reflective of reality.[21] The news presents a distorted depiction of a higher frequency of black male perpetrators than in reality. Here selectivity negatively impacts young black men, especially when it comes to crimes perpetrated by a young black man against a white victim. Most of the time, news coverage shows that scenario. However, white perpetrators are six times more likely to kill a white victim.[22]

The concept of the myth of the criminalblackman, coined by Professor of Law Katheryn Russell-Brown, connects seamlessly to the overrepresentation of black men in the news. Because black men are shown predominantly as perpetrators when it comes to crime subjects, the conclusion that black men are responsible for committing crimes more than whites becomes

[18] Stratton, "Transforming the Central Park Jogger into the Central Park Five," 283.
[19] Teebagy, "White Privilege and Racial Narratives," 490, 491; Garcia and Arkerson, *Crime, Media, and Reality*, 179.
[20] Robert M. Entman, "Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism and Cultural Change," *Journalism Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 1, 1992): 359.
[21] Dorfman and Schiraldi, *Off Balance*, 7; Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz, "Overrepresentation and Underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as Lawbreakers on Television News," *Journal of Communication* 50, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 151; Felix Kumah-Abiwu, "Media Gatekeeping and Portrayal of Black Men in America," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 28, no. 1 (2020): 73; Teebagy, "White Privilege and Racial Narratives," 486, 487; Mary Beth Oliver, "African American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous': Implications of Media Portrayals of Crime on the 'Criminalization' of African American Men," *Journal of African American Studies* 7, no. 2 (2003): 15; Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 304.
[22] Dorfman and Schiraldi, *Off Balance*, 17.

the truth.[23] Thus, the person feared by most becomes the young black man. This picture is in stark contrast to how whites are perceived. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva states that "stories of ''bad'' behavior by black and Latino youths are presented as ''normal,'' whereas stories depicting ''bad'' behavior by white youths are not."[24] Historian Ibram X. Kendi used the example of the story portrayal of Hurricane Katrina to show the difference. He writes that "the Associated Press dispatched a photograph of White people carrying "bread and soda from a local grocery store," and another photograph of a Black man who "loot[ed] a grocery store.""[25] Another study shows that even if a white man and a black man are accused of a similar crime, the white man is framed more sympathetic.[26] The portrayal of a black man as a criminal in the media has consequences when they need to stand before a jury. When a suspect is of color, juries become harsher towards that person. Though, when the suspects appear to be more stereotypically white, people are more lenient.[27] Thus, the media's portrayal of young black men is harmful.

The language used by the media has changed over time. Blatant racial language is no longer used in the news because this results in condemnation from the public. However, the language changed from overt to covert. An example is the reporting of the "crack epidemic." In the 1980s, crack cocaine was introduced onto the American drug market. Although no news outlet used blatant racial slurs in their coverage, it becomes clear that the news reports point at one particular group. Academic Carol Anderson shows that:

[23] Katheryn Russell-Brown, *The Color of Crime: Racial Hoaxes, White Crime, Media Messages, Police Violence and Other Race-Based Harms* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 47.
[24] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 99.
[25] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 441.
[26] Teebagy, "White Privilege and Racial Narratives," 487.
[27] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 107; Oliver, "African American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous,'" 7.

> Between 1986 and 1987, 76 percent of the articles in the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* dealing with crack referenced African Americans either directly or through code words – *urban, inner city*, etc.[28]

When people got asked in a survey in 1995 to close their eyes and picture a drug user, ninety-five percent said they saw a black drug user.[29] This is one of the many examples showing that media coverage influences the public. The coverage of the entrance of crack cocaine in the United States is further discussed in Chapter 1.

Placed into the academic field discussed is the book *The Central Park Five: The Untold Story Behind One of New York City's Most Infamous Crime*, where Sarah Burns writes in depth about the Central Park Jogger case. She sees the media and police as crucial players in the story's framing. Burns writes that:

> The media coverage of the crime exposed a racism, rarely acknowledged or examined, rife in American society, and the language used to describe the supposed perpetrators was filled with imagery of savage, wild animals, the same racist language that had been used to justify lynchings earlier in the century.[30]

Here she connects the language used by media in this case to the history of media coverage. While Burns focuses on multiple aspects of the case, sociologist Nathalie P. Byfield addresses the case from another perspective. In her book *Savage Portrayals: Race, Media, and the Central Park Jogger* story, she centralizes the development of contemporary media. At the time of the trial, Byfield was a reporter, so the book is autoethnography combined with content analysis. She argues that the development "was a type of historically situated racial project because it helped to consolidate the category of people we classify as "white.""[31] The consolidation of

[28] Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 131.
[29] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 106.
[30] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, ix.
[31] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 6.

whiteness creates "otherness" for people who do not fit that white category. Her argument fits in with the reasoning of this thesis.

This thesis wants to add to the academic discussion on race, crime, and the role of the media by using framing theory and the White Racial Frame (WRF) of scholar Joe Feagin in the research of this particular case. The White Racial Frame is a relatively new concept that lends itself to in-depth research. The frame is used to show patterns in newspaper articles. This frame provides a new perspective and adds to the research already done concerning this case study.

To explain the frame in which the media moves, it is first necessary to establish what framing and framing theory is. Framing theory is established in sociology and further developed in communication studies. Sociologist Erving Goffman's work on frame analysis proposes that with shared frames, people try to make sense of their environment and navigate through life.[32] It is a way for humans to organize their experiences. Because people absorb much information throughout the day, they need to have a system where they can sort through large amounts of information.[33] This is where frames come into play.

Sociologists William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani were, after Goffman, the ones to provide us with a theoretical framework concerning framing in the media. According to them, "media discourse can be conceived of as a set of interpretive packages that give meaning to an issue. At its core is a central organizing idea, or frame, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue."[34] Here, they write about the term 'frame,' which becomes a way for media to make sense of an event or system and to organize for their audience. In this regard, the media creates meaning and formulates information for the public.

Entman expands this idea further. In his view,

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[32] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 10.
[33] Kimberly Lane et al., "The Framing of Race: Trayvon Martin and the Black Lives Matter Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 51, no. 8 (2020): 792.
[34] W.A. Gamson and A. Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *The American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (1989): 3.

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.[35]

The use of frames by the media thus provides a way for them to put events and systems in these four boxes: to define a problem, diagnose a cause, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.[36] According to Entman, a sentence could tick multiple boxes or none.

Not only do they contain these four functions, but frames also have four locations in the communication process. These are the communicators, the text, the receiver, and the culture.[37] The communicator, the text, and the culture are the most valuable for our purposes. Firstly, the communicator is, in our case, the media. They let themselves be guided by frames that underscore their belief systems. In that way, they decide what to say by making conscious or unconscious framing judgments.[38] Secondly, the text contains the frames used by the communicator. These texts are loaded with keywords and stereotyped images.[39] Lastly, culture is defined as "the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping."[40] Hence, a culture combines different frames that fit the logic of a certain group.

Professor of Journalism Maxwell E. McCombs adds to the debate with his definition of framing as "the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributions for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed."[41] He focuses on how the media choose topics to present to the public in a certain way. This agenda-setting is a crucial part of

[35] R.M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communications* 43, no. 4 (1993): 52.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 53.
[41] Maxwell E. McCombs, "New Frontiers in Agenda Setting: Agendas of Attributes and Frames," *Mass Communication Review* 24 (1997): 9.

his definition of framing. However, scholar Damion Waymer writes that this definition lacks an emotional connotation of key terms used by the media.[42] By addressing how the media presents their news, he forms a fuller interpretation of framing. An audience can respond differently to two different titles of the same article. The use of words influences the audience, making it a powerful discursive tool.

The most important aspect of framing valuable to this research is how the media form their news to have a specific effect on another group, the public, and situations. Because the media use certain kinds of official sources and employ journalists with specific goals, it presents elite social discourses as the common sense of society.[43] More than one frame may be used in the discourse at hand, for example, in a criminal court case like the Central Park Jogger case. While the media use different frames in this case, a dominant frame always prevails above the other frames. This dominant frame presents "the preferred reading of an issue, event or character."[44] Through research, these dominant frames become apparent and give a better understanding of how the institution of media uses these frames to shape specific ideas and support particular groups.[45]

The dominant frame of interest in the case of the Central Park Five is the White Racial Frame (WRF). Feagin developed this frame as a component of the idea of systemic racism. Systemic racism refers to "whites' historical and systemic oppression of non-European groups that manifests in the structures and operations of racist societies like the United States."[46] While racism deals with "strongly held negative and falsehood views, beliefs, and attitudes by one

[42] Damion Waymer, "Walking in Fear: An Autoethnographic Account of Media Framing of Inner-City Crime," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 171.
[43] Ibid., 172.
[44] Lauren R. Tucker, "The Framing of Calvin Klein: A Frame Analysis of Media Discourse about the August 1995 Calvin Klein Jeans Advertising Campaign," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 1998): 144.
[45] Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 172.
[46] Sean Elias and Joe R. Feagin, "Systemic Racism and the White Racial Frame," in *Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Racisms* (London: Routledge, 2020), 16.

racial group regarding another racial group,"[47] systemic racism pertains to the foundational nature of white oppression. This foundation of white oppression is grounded in "long European and European American histories of slavery, genocide, and colonialism."[48] Focusing on systemic racism explains that the American societal foundation is racially structured. It also highlights how whites have gained their economic and political power while simultaneously fostering inequalities along racial lines.[49]

Within the body of systemic racism, the White Racial Frame is the main component. Before further elaboration on the White Racial Frame, it is necessary to have a clear vision of what race is. The birth of race can be traced back to the period of the Enlightenment. Here is where the contemporary racial ideology was born.[50] Writers like David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Hegel were the philosophers that introduced the idea of whites' racial superiority. Here race sprouted as a socially constructed identity. This identity is "shaped and maintained by social, political, and economic systems of power that result in racial hierarchies with advantages for members of dominant groups and cumulative disadvantages for others."[51] For example, slavery was legitimized with the notion that Africans, and later African Americans, were inferior to white Americans.[52] This racist framing was key in rationalizing the oppression of Africans and other people of color during the centuries of imperialism of the West.[53] The belief of this racist framing was carried into the Jim Crow-era.[54] Many whites have claimed that

[47] Kumah-Abiwu, "Media Gatekeeping and Portrayal of Black Men in America," 68.
[48] Elias and Feagin, "Systemic Racism and the White Racial Frame," 21.
[49] Ibid., 16.
[50] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1997), 5.
[51] Lane et al., "The Framing of Race," 793.
[52] Calvin John Smiley and David Fakunle, "From 'Brute' to 'Thug:' The Demonization and Criminalization of Unarmed Black Male Victims in America," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 26, no. 3–4 (2016): 352.
[53] Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 119.
[54] Ibid.

the United States became colorblind after this period.[55] However, race in the United States still plays a significant role in the inequalities that exist today.[56]

As mentioned earlier, the White Racial Frame is a component of systemic racism developed by Feagin. He states that the WRF is "an overarching white worldview that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narrative, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate."[57] A distinct aspect of the WRF is the inclusion of a positive view of whites and whiteness while simultaneously demonstrating a negative view of racial others.[58] The main argument of the frame is that racial structures are entwined with everyday behaviors, practices, beliefs, and feelings.[59] In a way, he humanizes whites with this perspective. By emphasizing the structures of society and its institutionalized racism, he centers on the socialization of whites instead of the discourse that implies whites are intrinsically immoral.[60]

Feagin developed the frame because he found that in social sciences and other mainstream academic and popular analyses, racism contained limited terms such as prejudice, bias, and stereotyping. Feagin mentions that these concepts "although certainly useful, are far from sufficient to assess and explain the foundational and systemic racism of the United States."[61] The WRF enables scholars to go beyond the concepts of bias or stereotyping. It allows us to form a broader look at covert and overt racism. American society and other systemically racist societies use this framing throughout their institutions and cultures, which legitimizes and

[55] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 1.
[56] Ibid., 2.
[57] Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 3.
[58] Elias and Feagin, "Systemic Racism and the White Racial Frame," 16.
[59] Glenn Bracey II et al., "The White Racial Frame: A Roundtable Discussion," in *Systemic Racism: Making Liberty, Justice, and Democracy Real*, by Ruth Thompson-Miller and Kimberley Ducey (New York: Springer, 2017), 45.
[60] Ibid., 44.
[61] Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 3.

justifies the many aspects of systemic racism.[62] Researching this frame from a different point of view gives us a better understanding of the dominant societal view.

The White Racial Frame is beneficial for "developing a more exact comprehension of contemporary patterns of white racial oppression."[63] This moves the debate from limited concepts such as racial inequality as a social problem to a broader look at how the racialized society developed and is institutionalized. Feagin states that "the problem is considered to be an abnormality in an otherwise healthy system."[64] He deters from that with the WRF, stating that structures are racialized in the United States.[65] Feagin steps away from the Eurocentric context of social scientists. Most social scientists work from a notion of Western modernity.[66] Talcott Parsons argues that U.S. racism will likely become non-existent with the upcoming industrialization and modernization.[67] The idea that a "civilized Western society" would exist without abandoning its history of imperialistic subordination of peoples of color is implausible.[68] That is why it is critical to use the White Racial Frame to be able to look beyond Eurocentric beliefs.

Other scholars build further on the White Racial Frame and agree that Feagin's concept of systemic racism and the right frame is needed in the academic debate. Sociologist Noël Cazanave writes that the WRF gives an objective and materialist dimension and covers the subjective and cognitive aspects.[69] Cazanave argues that this subjective and cognitive aspect of the frame includes feelings, language, thoughts, and other symbols.[70] With this clarification,

[62] Elias and Feagin, "Systemic Racism and the White Racial Frame," 16.
[63] Ibid., 22.
[64] Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 5.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Talcott Parsons, "Full Citizenship for the Negro American? A Sociological Problem," in *The Negro American*, by Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), 740ff.
[68] Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 7.
[69] Noël A. Cazanave, "Joe R. Feagin: The Social Science Voice of Systemic Racism Theory," in *Systemic Racism: Making Liberty, Justice, and Democracy Real*, by Ruth Thompson-Miller and Kimberley Ducey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 33.
[70] Ibid., 34.

Cazanave states that "the white racial frame can be viewed as an enlarged and more elaborate conceptualization of what earlier scholars have identified as the cognitive glue that bonds systems of oppression together – dominant ideologies."[71] Thus, Cazanave agrees with Feagin that the WRF enriches the scholarly discourse around racism and provides a more practical and developed framework.

Another sociologist that adds to the meaning of the White Racial Frame is Kathleen J. Fitzgerald by stating that the WRF is a worldview that affects both white and black people in their thinking patterns and societal racism.[72] For example, when a white woman sees a black man walking toward her and chooses to cross the street, she is operating out of the frame because of her past exposure to racial stereotypes of black men as dangerous leads to her reaction. Fitzgerald writes that such situations show the racial beliefs of people pervasive in our society that inhibit people from questioning their racialized thought process from which discriminatory actions arise.[73] Hence, she expands the WRF to include people's inaction regarding racialized behavior.

This research highlights three anti-black sub-frames within the WRF: the dehumanizing, animal-like sub-frame, the criminal black man sub-frame, and the hypersexual gendered-racist sub-frame. The previous enumeration is not an extensive list of the sub-frames within the White Racial Frame. However, for this research, these three are the most relevant sub-frames. In every chapter, these sub-frames form the bones of the analysis, with the White Racial Frame as the overarching concept.

The dehumanizing, animal-like sub-frame is full of stereotypes that link black Americans to the old view of being compared to apes, monkeys, and other animals. That view

[71] Ibid.
[72] Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, *Recognizing Race and Ethnicity: Power, Privilege, and Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 318.
[73] Ibid.

originated from figures like Thomas Jefferson during the Enlightenment.[74] The sub-frame falls into the concept of dehumanization. In the context of race, "dehumanization occurs as a mechanism of psychological distancing that can justify lack of empathy or even violence, both symbolic and physical towards members of a group."[75] Recent research studies found that many white minds strongly associate ape images with black images.[76] These associations are used in the media through animalistic imagery when writing about black Americans and criminality.

The criminal black man sub-frame is connected to the view that black Americans are connected to all sorts of criminal behavior. The media play an essential part in portraying black Americans as criminals. Analytical studies conclude that black Americans are portrayed as dangerous and guilty and are over-represented in the news.[77] The media constantly reinforces the criminality image. Here the animal-like sub-frame and the criminal black man sub-frame work in cohort with each other. Using animalistic imagery when speaking of criminality concerning black Americans, they legitimate discrimination and discriminatory policing.[78] A consequence of this framing is that black Americans are considered threats to society and are seen as others and un-American.[79]

The hypersexual gendered-racist sub-frame overlaps with the criminal black man sub-frame in the way that the dangerousness of black men is underscored. Black men interviewed in research are wary of being perceived as "menacing, and their tone of voice could be considered aggressive in conversations."[80] This aggressiveness is seen as an immediate threat to white women's supposed purity. This perceived threat is rooted in the idea that black men

[74] Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 102.
[75] Ioana G. Panaitiu, "Apes and Anticitizens: Simianization and U.S. National Identity Discourse," *Social Identities* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 111.
[76] Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 103.
[77] Oliver, "African American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous,'" 14.
[78] Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 104.
[79] Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 308; Derrick R Brooms and Armon R Perry, "It's Simply Because We're Black Men," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 24, no. 2 (2016): 178.
[80] Derrick R Brooms and Armon R Perry, "It's Simply Because We're Black Men," 175.

are brutes that cannot help themselves and must attack white women. Around the time lynching became the way to punish black men, often the accusation was that they raped a white woman.[81] The notion that black men are beasts with hypersexual needs also connects to the dehumanizing animal-like sub-frame. All three sub-frames are in one way connected and have in common that anti-blackness is at the center.

The White Racial Frame is a reasonably new frame that has not been applied enough, especially to historical events. The WRF is rooted in social sciences and communication studies. Therefore, using the WRF is innovative in qualitative historical research and contributes to the academic field by opening new ways to implement a multidisciplinary approach. The WRF is rooted in a long racial history, which provides an opportunity to apply this to a contemporary case study. The three sub-frames contribute to having a clear structure in the research.

This thesis consists of three chapters in which the main question is answered. These are divided in the portrayal around the trial, during the exoneration in 2002, and when the city of New York settled with the Central Park Five in 2014. Each chapter begins with a short sketch of the historical context of the time. The decades from the 1980s until the mid-2010s are central to this research. Through those decades, the circumstances in New York are considered. For example, the city's decline in the 70s and 80s played an essential role in the media landscape. Each chapter uses articles from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* to show patterns. The first chapter argues that both newspapers use language around the trial rooted in the White Racial Frame. The three sub-frames all have a significant presence in these newspaper articles. The second chapter argues that during the exoneration in 2002, the media still moved from a place in which the White Racial Frame was dominant, albeit toned down.

[81] Smiley and Fakunle, "From 'Brute' to "thug," 353.

Lastly, the third chapter argues that the White Racial Frame finally subsided to the background after twelve years of knowledge of their innocence.

Chapter 1 – Putting The Trial and Its Media Coverage in Historical Perspective

New York City in the 1980s was completely different from what we are used to now. Deterioration was affluent.[82] Crack found its way to the streets in 1985.[83] The unemployment rates in inner-city neighborhoods skyrocketed.[84] Violent crime went hand in hand with joblessness.[85] This trend of deterioration of cities was seen all over America in the decades from the 1960s. In that kind of decaying city, Trisha Meili was attacked. With that picture of a crumbling city came many racial theories and stereotypes.

These attitudes formed the opinions of the New Yorkers about the "Central Park Jogger" case. At the time, the media played a prominent role in getting those opinions to the public. It included the fear people experienced in a city paralyzed by crime.[86] The complicated racial history of the United States and its influence on people and the media came to the surface in the reporting of the case. Racist language, such as articles filled with imagery of animals and savages, was affluent in the articles describing the attack and the court case.[87] Articles in favor of the boys were almost non-existent. The public was ready to take the narrative given to them at face value. The story conformed to the assumptions and fears of Americans. The media was there to accommodate and confirm the narrative over and over, making no room for innocent until proven guilty.

This chapter deals with how racial attitudes and stereotypes existing at the time of the trial find their way into the stories written by the media of the Central Park Five. It is necessary to construct a base from a national point of view to an urban perspective from the 1960s until

[82] Heather Ann Thompson, "Rethinking the Politics of White Flight in the Postwar City: Detroit, 1945-1980," *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 2 (1999): 164.
[83] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning,* 436.
[84] Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 240.
[85] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 8.
[86] Ibid., 8–10, 14; Lynnell Hancock, "Wolf Pack: The Press and the Central Park Jogger," *Columbia Journalism Review* 41, no. 5 (2003): 39.
[87] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 67.

the 1990s. First, this chapter discusses national attitudes towards black Americans. The 1960s provided advancement for black Americans by signing multiple acts for their equality. However, the administrations of Nixon and Reagan changed their policies in a way that had a significant impact on black Americans in a negative way. These affected the racial attitudes of whites and blacks alike throughout the country. These are essential in how the media handled the case of the "Central Park Jogger." Next, New York City and other urban areas are discussed. The trends that develop in these areas are relevant to the case study. After that, a description of the attack on Trisha Meili follows. The articles of two newspapers, the *New York* Times and the *Washington* Post, are analyzed with the White Racial Frame and the context of the time in mind. Eventually, the articles will provide evidence of how reporters at the time used racialized language and how they used the White Racial Frame in different ways.

Development of National Attitudes and Policies of Black Americans, the 1960s-1980s

The Civil Rights Movement was well underway in the 1960s. It had changed the outset of racism with the defeat of the Jim Crow laws in 1954 when the Supreme Court decided in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional and inherently unequal.[88] This meant that schools needed to be integrated and other public spaces needed to desegregate. With desegregation did not come immediate acceptance. Especially in the South, white people had problems dismantling Jim Crow.[89] The Ku Klux Klan again became a powerful terrorist organization wreaking havoc on black people. States made efforts to legislate more rules to confine black Americans instead of following the decision of the Supreme Court.[90] For example, in his 1964 presidential campaign, Barry Goldwater laid the foundation

[88] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 36; Anderson, *White Rage*, 78.
[89] Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 57.
[90] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 37.

for the "tough on crime" rhetoric, using the fears of black crime to support his claims.[91] The people's reaction indicated that they were unwilling to give up their racist ideas and fought back against the progress black people wanted.

Regardless of this opposition, the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum in the late 1950s and reached its high point at the beginning of the 1960s. The signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson was a direct result of the Civil Rights Movement.[92] Immediately, the difference was noticeable. Black Americans registered to vote in huge numbers. Kids were able to go to stores and amusement parks. Interracial marriage climbed because miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional a couple of years later.[93]

Thus, the social and political progress of black Americans was evident. On the surface, the advancement of blacks was on the rise. Overt racism declined after the adoption of the two critical Acts. However, historian Michelle Alexander writes, "any candid observer of American racial history must acknowledge that racism is highly adaptable. The rules and reasons the political system employs to enforce status relations of any kind, including racial hierarchy, evolve and change as they are challenged."[94] Legal Scholar Reva Siegel has labeled this as "preservation through transformation," which means that the regimes in place want to stay there. Therefore, they change their rhetoric and rules in order to maintain their place.[95] With the progress made by the Civil Rights movement came the moment when harsher legislation propositions in Congress and law and order rhetoric started to appear more frequently.

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[91] Ibid., 41; "Goldwater Acceptance Speech: Get Tough on Crime" (San Francisco, July 16, 1964), https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4559695/user-clip-goldwater-acceptance-speech-tough-crime.
[92] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 38; Kenneth T. Andrews and Sarah Gaby, "Local Protest and Federal Policy: The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement on the 1964 Civil Rights Act," *Sociological Forum* 30, no. 1 (2015): 516.
[93] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 38; Marlon C. Robinson, "Black and White Biracial Marriage in the United States," *The Family Journal* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 278.
[94] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 21.
[95] Jessica L. Roberts, "To Have and to Uphold: The Common Language of Status-Preserving Countermovements," *National Black Law Journal*, Spring 2009, 124.

An explicitly racist agenda was no longer accepted in Congress; segregationists instead threw themselves at the emerging crime issue that they connected implicitly to race. They packaged it as "cracking down on crime."[96] This new focus on law and order would readjust the political parties and their constituents in the United States.[97] Many black Americans lost their interest in the political system. The main reason was the unravelment of the 1960s gains and the poverty that spread in the 1970s.[98] The realignment along party lines influenced thoughts on race, poverty, and the social order. Conservatives argued that culture, particularly black culture, was the leading cause of poverty. By contrast, liberals pointed out structural factors and were convinced that social reforms and civil rights legislation would prevent criminal behavior.[99]

Thoughts on race, crime, poverty, and social order were engrained in the presidential campaign of Richard Nixon in 1968, although it was covert. His campaign handlers introduced the 'Southern Strategy,' which tried to attract white working-class Americans by dubbing the Democrats as the party of African Americans without explicitly saying so.[100] The law and order rhetoric made crime and blackness intertwine in a new way. Without openly opposing civil rights legislation, Nixon went for a strategy to "weaken the enforcement of civil rights laws."[101] He appointed four Supreme Court justices who would roll back important court decisions, reducing the gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

Later, Ronald Reagan's campaign followed the same path as Nixon's. It mastered the "excision of the language of race from conservative public discourse," which contained language that exploited racial hostility and resentment while never explicitly stating the link to

[96] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 43.
[97] Ibid., 44.
[98] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 431.
[99] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 45.
[100] Anderson, *White Rage*, 104.
[101] Ibid., 105.

race.[102] The campaign talked about "welfare queens" who were lazy, inner cities that were dubbed dangerous and littered by criminal predators, and poor and ignorant people.[103] This language allowed people to connect laziness, immorality, and danger to black people without saying it was about black people. On the contrary, Reagan professed a color-blind society where "nothing is done to, or for, anyone because of race."[104] Bonilla-Silva states that "color-blind racism became the dominant racial ideology as the mechanisms and practices for keeping blacks and other racial minorities at the bottom of the well changed."[105] The policies that Reagan would later implement during his presidency exemplify the change in mechanisms and practices that negatively impacted black Americans.

When Reagan earned the seat in the White House, the country was in a deep economic recession. Reagan used this recession to justify cutting social programs for middle- and low-income families while simultaneously cutting the taxes for the rich and expanding the military budget.[106] His administration also cut back on federal jobs, which notably had consequences for black Americans, considering blacks were employed more often in the public sector due to less discrimination in hiring and compensation compared to the private sector. At the same time, the enforcement of civil rights laws was weakened by his administration.[107] For example, he made the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ineffective with management that did not believe in group discrimination.[108] The processing of complaints was slowed with Clarence Thomas as the head of the organization.

Reagan's administration managed to wipe out much of the progress that had been made against poverty in one year. Black families suffered from Reagan's policies. Their median

[102] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 48.
[103] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 433, 434.
[104] Anderson, *White Rage*, 118.
[105] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 17.
[106] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 432.
[107] Anderson, *White Rage*, 122.
[108] Ibid., 123.

income declined by 5.2 percent, and the population of poor people increased by 2.2 million.[109] Reagan's policies, for example, slashed training and labor services budget by 70 percent and the black unemployment rate increased. The gap between white and black unemployment became wider than before. The disparity had narrowed in the 1960s and 1970s. However, in the early 1980s, the black unemployment rate was 15.5 percent. The black youths had an even higher unemployment rate; a staggering 45.7 percent were unemployed.[110] These disparities gave way to new racial ideas to justify them. These racial ideas connect back to the rhetoric used in Reagan's campaign. The narrative of black Americans being lazy, dangerous, and immoral was connected to their poverty and unemployment. It was seen as proof of these stereotypes. Although Reagan's policies were not actively linked to the black unemployment rates, many Americans bought into the racialized narrative of that time.

In 1982, Reagan announced his War on Drugs, ushering in a decade of new ways in which black Americans disproportionally were stigmatized and arrested. He viewed drugs as a problem flooding the nation. However, there was no drug problem or crisis. The use of marijuana was declining, hallucinogens and heroin use had subsided, and first-time cocaine use was dropping.[111] When he declared war, drugs were not considered the nation's most critical problem. Less than 2 percent of Americans thought drugs had to have the main focus.[112] This did not stop Reagan from declaring a full-on war. Alexander states that:

> The drug war from the outset had little to do with public concern about drugs and much to do with public concern about race. By waging a war on drug users and dealers, Reagan made good on his promise to crack down on the racially defined "others" – the undeserving.[113]

[109] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 433.
[110] Anderson, *White Rage*, 121.
[111] Ibid., 124.
[112] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 49.
[113] Ibid.

With his War on Drugs, Reagan had created the perfect problem where he used his coded language that influenced the whole nation and their perspective on black Americans. The language was so coded that even criminologists hardly feared that the War on Drugs would disproportionally hurt black Americans. Kendi states that "many criminologists were publishing fairytales for studies that found that racial discrimination no longer existed in the criminal justice system."[114] The opposite proved to be true.

The Reagan administration used the media to its advantage to justify the War on Drugs. Robert Stutman, the special agent in charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) New York City office, was assigned to draw attention to the emergence of crack in October 1985.[115] In 1986, thousands of articles flooded the news with racial connotations, describing the "predators" that preyed upon addicted "crackheads" and "crack whores," who fell pregnant and were giving birth to "crack babies."[116] Crack babies were linked to inner-city crime, for example, gang violence and prostitution. The framing of these babies became a tool to justify a more aggressive war on drugs. The idea that someone was selfish enough to sacrifice the health of their future baby for a quick high fueled the need for punishment.[117] Inner-city neighborhoods and the emergence of crack cocaine were sensationalized. The communities in the neighborhoods were easy targets, having collapsed under the devastating blows of deindustrialization and the emerging unemployment rates that followed. The introduction of this rhetoric in the media caused a portrayal of black Americans as human predators and crack addicts in the public discourse.

The media held on to this narrative far into the late 1980s, using words such as "epidemic," "instantly addictive," and "plague" as descriptors for the situation, emphasizing

[114] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 435.
[115] Ibid., 436.
[116] Ibid.; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 5, 49.
[117] Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 290.

the dangerousness of it all. These claims have since been proven false.[118] Black Americans were implicated for stimulating crack use and arrested and convicted more often. However, white Americans consumed and sold illegal drugs at comparable rates.[119] These statistics were not represented in the media and were unknown to the public. Kendi writes that "White Americans were more likely to fear those distant Black mugshots behind their television screens than their neighborhoods' White drunk drivers, who were killing them at a greater rate."[120] Media influenced the minds of the people watching and reading their shows and articles, which resulted in persistent racist ideas and fear for black Americans.

When vice president George H.W. Bush ran for president in 1988, he used this racist line of thought in his campaign to defeat the Democratic nominee, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis. Bush had been behind in the polls when the National Security Political Action Committee (NSPAC) launched a television advertisement about a black rapist and murderer of whites, Willie Horton.[121] The Democratic candidate was presented as soft on crime. Bush would be the one who was the answer to obtain and maintain law and order. While Bush mentioned this story during his campaign trail, the ad was the medium in which the story came alive. The spot contains a narrator telling the viewer that Horton received multiple furlough passes from prison on weekends. The last one did not end well, as Horton "fled, kidnapping a young couple, stabbing the man and repeatedly raping his girlfriend."[122] They chose to depict an image of Horton in the most menacing way possible by repeating the words "raping" and "kidnapping." Later, Bush distanced himself from the ad; however, the damage had been done. The message had been broadcast for over a month, instilling fear in the public discourse.[123] The ad had

[118] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 52.
[119] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 438.
[120] Ibid., 440.
[121] Ibid., 442; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 54; Colleen E. Mills, "Framing Ferguson: Fox News and the Construction of US Racism," *Race & Class* 58, no. 4 (2017): 51.
[122] Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley, "Playing the Race Card in the Post–Willie Horton EraThe Impact of Racialized Code Words on Support for Punitive Crime Policy," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 100.
[123] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 14.

brought associations to life, such as dangerous, black, violent, rapist, and murderer, without ever outright mentioning race or racist ideas. The implications were far more subtle.

The implicitness of the Horton ad is what made the spot as effective as it was and what was indicative of how race played a role in society then. Political scientist Tali Mendelberg argues that "the racial message was communicated most effectively when no one noticed its racial meaning."[124] White Americans believe in a "norm of racial equality," which makes them reject overt racism and blatant racist ideas, not implicit racial messages. When the implicitness is uncovered, many Americans distance themselves from the message. Nonetheless, the message had already been out there and consumed by the public without questioning the racial appeals. Only after civil rights activist Jesse Jackson opened the public's eyes to the implicit racial appeals Bush's rates began to lower.[125] Despite the lowering rates after the uncovering, Bush still won the election. The discussion on race was too late to have an impact on the outcome.

Development of Urban Attitudes and Policies of Black Americans, the 1960s-1980s

The decades' national policies and political elections impacted cities and their policies in fighting crime and maintaining law and order. Federal policymakers interfered with urban areas, first under Johnson and Nixon in the War on Crime and later under Reagan in the War on Drugs. They wanted to eliminate civil disorder and manage the changing urban landscape.[126] In his War on Poverty, Johnson also started by inserting law and order into his rhetoric. He declared that the answer to urban unrest was preserving of law and order.[127] He saw the realization of civil rights and disorder prevention as a package deal. In order to achieve this

[124] Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 21.
[125] Ibid., 20.
[126] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 136.
[127] Ibid., 56.

goal, police departments were expanded, especially in large urban areas with a high concentration of black Americans.[128] This was the answer of policymakers to riots and rebellion of blacks.

Subsequently, the suburbanization process was on its way in the 1960s and went well into the 1970s, which caused a massive and racially selective exodus from city centers. Social scientist Robert J. Sampson writes that the "suburbanization of the United States following World War II may be the single most consequential effect of crime in American Society."[129] He gives New York as an example. The city endured a steep urban decline. Sampson sees suburbanization as an alternative explanation for that decline. In the 1970s, 800,000 residents left New York City, which caused the homicide rate to go from 14.15 per 100,000 in 1970 to 25.62 in 1980.[130] Cities all over the country saw similar trends of people moving out of the city. For example, in Detroit, between 1970 and 1980, 310,000 white residents fled to the suburbs, leaving behind their houses.[131] This phenomenon was called white flight, white Americans leaving the cities in droves for the suburbs.

In the North, cities went from small black communities in 1940, which generally represented 4 percent of a city's population, to larger black communities, quadrupling to 16 percent in 1970. The white residents of Northern cities went from 50 percent to 29 percent, which resulted in many neighborhoods where 75 percent of the residents were black.[132] There were different reasons for white residents to move away from the city, such as rising incomes, the falling cost of credit after World War II, and new highway construction. It was also a reaction to blacks migrating to the cities.[133] Scholar Leah Platt Boustan researched this

[128] Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*, 66.
[129] R. J. Sampson, "The Contribution of Homicide to the Decline of American Cities.," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 62, no. 5 (June 1986): 563.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Thompson, "Rethinking the Politics of White Flight in the Postwar City," 163.
[132] Leah Platt Boustan, *Competition in the Promised Land: Black Migrants in Northern Cities and Labor Markets* (Princeton: University Press, 2016), 93, 94.
[133] Ibid., 94.

correlation and found that in cities with the most significant increase in the black population, the white population experienced the greatest decrease.[134] Additionally, black Americans were blocked from moving to the suburbs by the white population already living in these neighborhoods.[135] That is how inner-city neighborhoods evolved in largely being populated by black residents.

Another important reason white residents fled the inner-city communities was the deindustrialization significantly impacting inner-city jobs. Many people worked in factories and at other industrial companies right in the heart of the city. In the 1950s and 1960s, blue-collar factory jobs were abundant, and people without much education could find employment close to home.[136] However, in the 1970s, companies decided to look for cheaper locations elsewhere, such as Singapore, Ireland, or nonmetropolitan America, which led to a considerable part of the inner-city population being without a job. The city's economy underwent a transformation that burdened the remaining population with economic and social deficits, targeting the people who could not carry that burden.[137] Globalization and deindustrialization significantly impacted black inner-city communities because, at the time, most black Americans lacked a college degree. Furthermore, they had attended racially segregated and underfunded schools, lacking basic resources.[138] The consequence black Americans faced was isolation in the inner cities and joblessness.

In 1973, the nation experienced an economic recession that hit every Northern industrial city. A prime example of this experience was Detroit. Because of the loss of its white population, the loss of the tax base that belonged to that population, deindustrialization, recession, and lack of political support, the city plummeted into deterioration.[139] Many other

[134] Ibid., 110.
[135] Ibid., 107.
[136] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 50.
[137] Anderson, *Streetwise*, 240.
[138] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 50.
[139] Thompson, "Rethinking the Politics of White Flight in the Postwar City," 164.

cities followed. Cities grew poorer and could not invest in public services. To balance their budget, cities needed to cut into these services, such as public schools and welfare services.[140] This left a mark on inner-city communities that heavily relied on those services.

At the same time, the federal government pulled out from the fight against poverty during the Nixon administration and started to pump money into prison construction. Policymakers, scholars, and law enforcement officials justified the investment in prisons by exemplifying crime rates.[141] However, historian Elizabeth Hinton writes that "incarceration rates, in reality, had little relationships to actual crime rates. Instead, incarceration rates correlated directly to the number of black residents and the extent of socioeconomic inequality within a given state."[142] She gives Colorado and Hawaii as examples, which had high crime rates, but a meager incarceration rate and a low percentage of black and Latino residents. Other states with a higher concentration of black and Latino residents had a higher incarceration rate, although they did not necessarily have higher crime rates. Incarceration of black Americans grew in record time, and by the end of the 1970s, conditions in low-income urban areas developed for the worse. The result of the deterioration of the inner-city was the development of greater white antipathy. They stamped this problem as a "them"- not an "us"- problem, which created greater social malaise and a society with greater distance.

In the 1980s, the occurrences in the decades before caused crime rates to soar in cities around the United States. For example, New York City experienced such a staggering decline that it had reached its low point. All around the city, muggings were regular events. Buildings were abandoned or burned, the subway was dangerous, especially for women, and, on average, thirty-six people died at someone else's hands every week.[143] Inner-city neighborhoods felt the burden of unemployment; the only jobs appearing at the time were manufacturing jobs in

[140] Anderson, *Streetwise*, 240.
[141] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 175.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 8–10.

suburban areas.[144] Black Americans were stuck in their neighborhoods and were unable to reach these jobs, leaving them trapped in a jobless perspective. The decline in opportunities for manufacturing jobs led residents of the poorest neighborhoods towards criminal activity to pay the bills.

The emergence of crack cocaine during the 1980s laid waste to inner cities all over the United States. In New York City, the drugs showed up in 1984. In the poorest neighborhoods, such as Harlem, the South Bronx, and Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick in Brooklyn, dealers took over to sell crack to anyone who wanted it.[145] Housing projects dotted these neighborhoods' landscapes, consisting of tall, grey buildings on massive plots. Before neighborhoods had the opportunity to have a sense of community and many businesses in the so-called "stoop culture," in which people met each other on the streets, the projects kept families separate and playgrounds abandoned. This abandonment opened up an opportunity for drug dealers who could hide in all the hallways and vestibules of the buildings.[146] Instead of creating urban renewal, the projects set in motion an urban deterioration.

In addition to the concerns about the emergence of crack, another concern swept the nation: juvenile crime. Not only did the crime rates connect to higher crime in adults, but juvenile crime by black youths was also feared. They were seen as future criminals and were handled in that manner. A sort of moral panic emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, where the threat of youths was exaggeratedly spelled out. Professors Elizabeth Scott and Laurence Steinberg write that a "collective hostility" arose towards adolescents.[147] Policymakers focused profusely on urban centers and developed a more punitive approach, molding juvenile justice legislation to make it possible to hunt for future criminals.[148] Hinton states that "black youth were more

[144] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 51.
[145] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 11.
[146] Ibid., 13.
[147] Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 307.
[148] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 247.

likely to be labeled "delinquent" based on the way in which policymakers, law enforcement officials, and criminal justice authorities evaluated their morality and character."[149] In line with that notion is the outcome of a study that suggests that "black boys as young as 10 years old were significantly less likely to be viewed as children than were their white peers."[150] Young black boys were perceived as (future) delinquents even though they had no earlier contact with the police.

The legislators' policies caused black youth to be incarcerated disproportionally more than white youth. Hinton writes that "black youth under the age of eighteen accounted for more than half of all arrests for murder, rape, robbery, and violent crime, while white youths were more than half of those arrested for burglary, larceny, and auto theft."[151] Race became a component of the policies, reinforced by the statistics showing black youth were incarcerated more. The same was seen in the overall population of incarcerated people. The United States was (and still is) the number one country regarding the imprisonment of ethnic minorities.[152] Criminality was linked to race and ethnicity in the minds of Americans; something policymakers were already doing for a couple of decades.

Overall, the decades and developments discussed significantly influenced the racial outlook of all Americans. For decades, the federal government had introduced policies that played into a certain kind of view. The media played a prominent role in molding this view. Especially during the "crack epidemic," the press formed a narrative around inner-city neighborhoods. The public formed their opinion about these neighborhoods based on what they consumed in the paper. The same happened with the "Central Park Jogger Case."

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[149] Ibid., 219, 220.
[150] Jamie D Hawley and Staycie L Flint, "It Looks Like a Demon," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 24, no. 2 (2016): 209.
[151] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 223, 224.
[152] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 6.

The Media Coverage of the Central Park Jogger Case

Amid all the inner-city chaos and policy changes, Trisha Meili was attacked in Central Park on April 19, 1989. Central Park had deteriorated, just like the city around it. The financial crisis caused the dwindling of resources to afford the upkeep.[153] And in this run-down park, Meili went out for a jog and took her usual route. She was struck from behind, about halfway between the East and West drives, and never saw her attacker coming. She was dragged off the road into the woods, forty feet away from the road. There she tried to escape but fell and got stricken again. She was raped, beaten, and tied up with her drenched shirt as a strap binding her hands. Her attacker left her behind in a critical condition.[154] The fact that she survived the attack was a circumstance that the newspapers would highly emphasize in the articles still to come after the attack.

During the attack on Trisha Meili, a lot was happening in the park, among which was a large group of black teenagers entering the park from the northeast side. Most teenagers came from Harlem, a Manhattan neighborhood with a large black and Latino population.[155] Among those teenagers were the five boys named Korey Wise, Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, and Raymond Santana. These five boys, four black and one Latino, got picked up by the police amongst other youths that were in the park that night for disturbances.[156] The media was in front of the Central Park Precinct the next day to catch a glimpse of the accused boys. Thus, one of the most publicized cases began.

The print media quickly got wind of the case; the first articles appeared in the newspaper on April 21, 1989. The *New York Times* started with the headline "Youths Rape and Beat

[153] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 19, 20.
[154] Ibid., 26.
[155] Jonathan Gill, *Harlem: The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America* (New York: Open Road & Grove/Atlantic, 2011), 395.
[156] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 27, 31, 33, 37.

Central Park Jogger."[157] The article's title indicated that the youths who got arrested were the perpetrators. Journalist Craig Wolff did not use the word allegedly or another type of indication that the youths could be innocent. The *Washington Post* started its first article with "Teen-Agers Held in Rape."[158] The emphasis was that the boys were charged with rape and must be convicted first. The *New York Times had a different approach and* skipped that in their title. This approach resulted in a frame of the boys as guilty from the first article published in the *New York Times.*

In a matter of days, New Yorkers got interviewed by journalist Michael T. Kaufman, and they expressed their worries that "the case was bringing racial tension and hostility to the surface."[159] Their opinions differed but had a couple of racial undertones. For example, "Stanley Starsiak, a 40-year old rare-coin dealer who is white and lives in the Clinton section of Manhattan, went on to volunteer that black families bear some blame for what he described as a lack of responsibility among black youths."[160] An East Side resident, Ken Harlin, felt his stereotypes widen when he said, "the idea of the type of people I have to fear changed. At first, I thought they were kids high on drugs." However, they turned out to be average city kids. He said, "if they were street kids you could blame it on poverty."[161] The idea of dangerous street kids was affluent in the article among black and white residents of the city. Although they often emphasized that they were not trying to be racial or prejudiced, the things that were expressed and written down by journalists said otherwise.

Apart from the general findings discussed above, the three sub-frames of the White Racial Frame were present in the articles. The dehumanizing animal-like sub-frame presented itself in multiple ways. That included a new word introduced in the American lexicon, a word that would be connected to the case forever. The term 'wilding' found its way into the

[157] Craig Wolff, "Youths Rape and Beat Central Park Jogger," *New York Times,* April 21, 1989.
[158] "Teen-Agers Held in Rape," *Washington Post,* April 22, 1989.
[159] Michael T. Kaufman, "New Yorkers Wrestle With a Crime," *New York Times,* April 28, 1989.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

newspapers when New York Chief of Detectives Robert Colangelo mentioned that "they said they wanted to go 'wilding.' We never heard that word before, but it means they wanted to raise hell."[162] Soon after that, the term wilding appeared in many other articles and began to take hold of the public.[163] The definition of wilding the newspapers presented was "a large group of kids from the projects, running around in bands, jumping people, throwing them to the ground and robbing them."[164] When teenagers went wilding, they supposedly "had been transformed into something else."[165] The language used, had a dehumanizing factor that painted the boys as transforming into something other than human. The dehumanization is linked to a long history dating back to the early days of the first encounters between Europeans and Africans. The animalistic view that the Europeans adopted was pervasive. They routinely referred to "the blacks they encountered as brutish, bestial, or beastly."[166] By emphasizing the term wilding in their news reporting, the group was presented as evil boys looting the park.[167] Later, a detective introduced the term in the trials, inserting the word into the public record.[168] This painted the boys officially as part of 'savage attacks' by evil teenagers.

Connected to the use of the term wilding and the dehumanizing animal-like sub-frame was depicting the boys as part of a 'wolf pack.' Some black residents caught on early. For example, Mr. Brath said, "it's the same old story. The press is trying to make our youth out to be some kind of animals, some vicious 'wolf pack.'"[169] In addition to using wolf pack in their messaging, the words 'savage' or 'savagely' are used to describe the attack on the jogger. She

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[162] "Teen-Agers Held in Rape."
[163] Ronald Sullivan, "Youth's Recounting of Jogger Rape Is Read to Jury," *New York Times*, July 18, 1990; "Suspects Joke About Rape Assault in Central Park," *Washington Post*, April 24, 1989; "4 in N.Y. Rape Case Are Denied Bail," *Washington Post*, April 29, 1989; Howard Kurtz, "Brutalized Jogger Out of Hospital: Prosecutors Unsure If She Will Testify," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1989; Ronald Sullivan, "Videotapes Are Core of Central Park Jogger Case," *New York Times*, June 11, 1990.
[164] David E. Pitt, "More Crimes Tied to Gang In Park Rape," *New York Times*, April 24, 1989, sec. Metropolitan News.
[165] Michael T. Kaufman, "Park Suspects: Children of Discipline," *New York Times*, April 26, 1989.
[166] N. Jeremi Duru, "The Central Park Five, the Scottsboro Boys, and the Myth of the Bestial Black Man," *Cardozo Law Review* 25, no. 4 (2004 2003): 1321.
[167] George F. Will, "They Went 'Wilding,'" *Washington Post*, April 30, 1989.
[168] Ronald Sullivan, "Lawyer's Question in Jogger Trial Appear to Hurt Client," *New York Times*, July 25, 1990.
[169] Michel Marriott, "Harlem Residents Fear Backlash From Park Rape," *New York Times*, April 24, 1989.

is "savagely beaten."[170] They went "rampaging through the park."[171] Some articles asked how these "well-adjusted youngsters turn into a savage wolf pack."[172] Others were more blatant and skipped the question when talking about the boys. For example, Mary McGrory wrote that "some of the savages lived at Schomburg Plaza, a comfortable high rise building" and that "case-hardened New Yorkers have come apart at the spectacle of a best-and-brightest savaged by a bunch of kids with nothing better to do."[173] The wording of the articles found its way to the public and instilled fear. Women began to fear "'wolf packs' on the rampage."[174] Officials used the same language when talking about kids from minority neighborhoods such as Harlem. Peter Reinharz, chief prosecutor of the Family Court Division of the city's Law Department at the time, talked about "these types of kids" with "their predatory nature" that "carry out wolf-pack behavior."[175]

The words found their way into the trial as well. When testifying in the two trials, a woman attacked on a bicycle described the sounds the youths made as "animal noises, sort of grunting."[176] She associated the youths she encountered with animals and mentioned it in both trials. Numerous research about animalistic language in the description of a crime suggests that such wording results in the dehumanization of the perpetrator and ends in harsher sentencing.[177] Therefore, this kind of language impacts the people described in newspaper articles and public opinion. Reinharz, the prosecutor, also stated that "kids like this, given what I would call their

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[170] Haynes Johnson, "No Pat Answers in N.Y. Assault," *Washington Post*, April 28, 1989; Howard Kurtz, "'Wilding' Attack Left Jogger Battered and Dying, Court Is Told," *Washington Post*, June 26, 1990.
[171] Ronald Sullivan, "Crucial Ruling Due In Park Rape Case," *New York Times*, February 18, 1990; Will, "They Went 'Wilding'"; Kurtz, "Attack in N.Y. Park Reopens Racial Wounds: Some Urge 'Fair Shake' for Suspects; Other Call Sympathy Misguided"; Howard Kurtz, "Prosecutor Hopes to Avoid Plea Bargains in Central Park Rape Case," *Washington Post*, May 6, 1989.
[172] "The Jogger and the Wolf Pack," *New York Times*, April 26, 1989.
[173] Mary McGrory, "Horror in the Park," *Washington Post*, April 30, 1989.
[174] Amy E. Schwartz, "'Motiveless Malignity," *Washington Post*, May 16, 1989.
[175] David E. Pitt, "Gang Attack: Unusual for Its Viciousness: Experts Say Park Rampage Was Unusual Only in Its Ferocity," *New York Times*, April 25, 1989, sec. Metropolitan News.
[176] Ronald Sullivan, "4 Testify on Terror on Night of Jogger's Rape," *New York Times*, June 28, 1990; Ronald Sullivan, "Judge Rejects Lawyer's Plea In Jogger Trial," *New York Times*, October 27, 1990; Ronald Sullivan, "Keeping Emotions Under Control at Jogger Trial," *New York Times*, July 2, 1990.
[177] Eduardo A. Vasquez et al., "The Animal in You: Animalistic Descriptions of a Violent Crime Increase Punishment of Perpetrator," *Aggressive Behavior* 40, no. 4 (August 2014): 341.

predatory nature, are people who, given the chance, would do something like this again."[178] The belief that these kids would repeat this offense aligns with what they found in the research. They are described as animals and they are viewed as "a greater risk of future violence."[179] Which henceforth culminates in more severe sentences. The boys, in this case, did serve many years in prison.

Another animal-like element that was factored in was the supposedly unremorseful attitude the boys portrayed. In hindsight, their manner made sense, as they were innocent of the crime. However, the newspapers emphasized their lack of remorse multiple times. The police mentioned several times to the media that the boys joked about the whole situation and that "one called it 'fun.'"[180] Even psychologists got interviewed to underscore the lack of bad conscience, and these psychologists dubbed their behavior as something that set the event apart.[181] In the courtroom, the description of the boys did not change much. The boys became expressionless and impassive, even when the jogger appeared in the courtroom.[182] Korey Wise got the short end of the stick when a journalist described him as seeming "to be dozing" when Meili got cross-examined.[183] The emphasis on the supposed lack of remorse fits the dehumanizing animal-like sub-frame because predators who hunt their prey do not feel guilt or shame for attacking it. The language that presented the boys in such a matter was more subtle yet led to the same conclusion in the newspapers. The boys had to be savages with no remorse for committing such a crime.

The dehumanizing animal-like sub-frame and the hypersexual gendered sub-frame are connected in that they show the same language. The difference is that the hypersexual gendered

[178] Pitt, "Gang Attack."
[179] Vasquez et al., "The Animal in You," 342.
[180] "Suspects Joke About Rape Assault in Central Park."
[181] Pitt, "Gang Attack."
[182] Howard Kurtz, "Brutalized N.Y. Jogger Testifies: Woman Describes Permanent Effects of Attack She Can't Remember," *Washington Post*, July 17, 1990; Michael Specter, "3 Defendants in Jogger Trial Portrayed as Victims of Police: Teenagers Were Pressured to Confess, Lawyers Argue," *Washington Post*, August 8, 1990.
[183] Ronald Sullivan, "Lawyer Tries Grilling Jogger On Park Rape," *New York Times*, November 3, 1990.

sub-frame focuses more on the interplay between genders; here, the black man and the white woman. When the Jim Crow era began, a shift occurred in the perception of the black man. They went from compliant servants to brute monsters and savages. The media portrayals shifted with that perception. In these portrayals, the science of Jefferson and other Enlightenment-era theorists and biologists, based on faulty biological and anthropological components, got used to arguing that "blacks were naturally more prone to violence and other aggressive behaviors."[184] This violent and aggressive behavior was directed toward white women. Black brutes needed to be stopped to keep white womanhood pure. Hence, lynching became the justified vigilante justice to keep the black brutes at bay.[185]

Fast forward a couple of hundred years, and the media portrayals of the five boys somewhat resembled the times of the Jim Crow era. First and foremost, the innocence and tenacity of the white woman are highlighted in many articles. She was "a young woman of rare promise," "self-evident, intelligent, and assured," and "brilliant, probably one of the top four or five students of the decade."[186] In contrast, the boys were depicted as "arrogant" and "cocky."[187] The emphasis on the negative when the boys are described fits the picture of the menacing group the boys belong to and, on the opposite of them, the innocent woman that was attacked. By emphasizing her impeccability, the boys' characters are designated as lesser.

The news stories concerning this trial align with what Stacy Mallicoat and Connie Ireland call the "symbolic assailant," which is the minority male who lurks in the shadows awaiting the innocent victim.[188] The symbolic assailant is the offender society sees that way as a whole. The narrative provided by the newspapers contained the historical practice of the

[184] Smiley and Fakunle, "From 'Brute' to "thug," 353.
[185] Teebagy, "White Privilege and Racial Narratives," 484.
[186] Paula Span and Howard Kurtz, "Aftermath of an Assault: New Yorkers Shocked by Vicious Attack," *Washington Post*, April 27, 1989; M.A. Farber, "'Smart, Driven' Woman Overcomes Reluctance," *New York Times*, July 17, 1990; Celestine Bohlen, "Hard-Working Banker Ran to Relax, Thinking Little of Park's Dangers," *New York Times,* April 28, 1989.
[187] Kaufman, "Park Suspects: Children of Discipline."
[188] Garcia and Arkerson, *Crime, Media, and Reality*, 68.

"unsuspecting white woman who did everything right to live a good life (i.e., innocent victim)" that was attacked by perpetrators of color who were "violent, predatory, and stalking" her.[189] Meili fitted the characteristics of a "good woman." She had an admirable job at Salomon Brothers as an investment banker and a lovely apartment. She was not a party animal, and she had a steady relationship. The public accepted her innocence.

The public also noticed the amount of media attention this case received. Meili's progress to recovery was closely followed in separate articles.[190] The elements of race and gender were expressed in multiple articles. They mentioned that "her status as a successful investment banker insured significant coverage even if her assailants had been white," and that the case drew wide coverage because the woman "was a highly successful, well-educated and privileged member of the city's professional elite."[191] The amount of coverage said a lot about the media and the larger society. Many people in the black community stated that had the victim been non-white or poor, there would not have been the same amount of attention.[192] There was proof of this as well. At that time, only one article in the *Washington Post* mentioned that 28 other women were raped the same week as the Central Park jogger. The article at hand was not an article about that topic; the subject was the opinion of *Amsterdam News*, a black-owned newspaper. Wilbert A. Tatum, chairman of the paper, said:

> A black woman in Fort Tyron Park was almost beheaded after she was raped. But she was a prostitute, so who cares? Another black woman was raped and thrown from the roof. It

[189] Ibid., 69.
[190] Lawrence K. Altman, "Medical Advance Brighten Jogger's Prognosis," *New York Times,* May 21, 1989; "Park Victim Is Making Big Gains, Doctors Say," *New York Times*, June 16, 1989; Sara Rimer, "Central Park Victim Learns Fundamental of a New Life," *New York Times*, August 12, 1989; Ronald Sullivan, "Doctors Give Jogger Chance of Full Recovery," *New York Times*, November 3, 1989; Ronald Sullivan, "Jogger in Rape In Central Park Leaves Hospital," *New York Times,* November 15, 1989.
[191] Cose, "Rape in the News: Mainly About Whites"; Michael Specter, "N.Y. Jogger's Assailants Given Maximum Sentences," *Washington Post,* September 12, 1990.
[192] Roberts, "When Crimes Become Symbols"; Tom Wicker, "Making Things Worse," *New York Times,* May 2, 1989.

> was a two-day story. But the jogger was the American Dream of what America never was and never will be: blonde, blue-eyed and perfect.[193]

Here he pointed out that Meili was considered the "perfect victim," which is in line with what Mallicoat and Ireland stated concerning the symbolic assailant and the innocent victim.

Another opinion in the black community was from Mr. Butts, the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. He said, "the first thing you do in the United States of America when a white woman is raped is round up a bunch of black youths, and I think that's what happened here."[194] Some people compared the five boys to the Scottsboro boys, nine black teenagers accused of rape by two white women in Alabama in 1931.[195] In that case, one woman recanted her testimony, and new trials were ordered, but the men were not released. In the end, they spend a combined 104 years in prison.[196] The comparison was made by black-oriented newspapers and the black community. The voices of skeptics were, however, far and few between.

At the Central Park Five trial, a white woman testified that, when she was in the park and encountered the group of youths, she "feared they would knock out Jerry and rape me."[197] Thus, she invoked the picture of black men being unable to control their criminal and sexual urges towards her, a white woman. This image found its way to the public of the U.S. through the 1915's film *Birth of a Nation*. It influenced the public perception immensely.[198] In this film, the Ku Klux Klan is depicted as honorable and heroic, while the black men were savages who tried to attack white women. Blackness immediately became associated with criminality. The

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[193] Michael Specter, "Black-Owned Newspaper Has Its Own View of N.Y.: The Amsterdam Asserts Jogger Wasn't Raped," *Washington Post*, August 21, 1990.
[194] William Glaberson, "In Jogger Case, Once Viewed Starkly, Some Skeptics Side With Defendants," *New York Times*, August 8, 1990.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Duru, "The Central Park Five, the Scottsboro Boys, and the Myth of the Bestial Black Man," 1337.
[197] Sullivan, "Judge Rejects Lawyer's Plea In Jogger Trial."
[198] Melvyn Stokes, *D.W. Griffith's the Birth of a Nation: A History of the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

savage brutes thus transformed into the thugs that got to be used as scapegoats for many problems.[199] That is how the image of the criminal black man took hold and where the criminal black man sub-frame predominates.

What immediately stood out was how the group of young black and Latino people was described in the articles. The focus was immediately pointed to the fact that the group consisted of around 30 young people, and the term gang was widely introduced. Some journalists took precautions and dubbed it a loosely organized pack, as described by the police.[200] In the *Washington Post*, such discretion was not used when, in an article describing the youths, the following was written: "The youths, charged as adults and facing up to nine years if convicted, were part of a gang of 32 teen-agers…"[201] Not long after, the *New York Times* followed suit when they talked about a "24-year old man, [who] was attacked and robbed by a gang of 20 youths."[202] From then on, the term gang was almost always used in articles about the case.[203]

Dubbing the group of youngsters as a gang connected them simultaneously to criminal group behavior. Scholar D. Marvin Jones writes that "the threat of the gang was synonymous in subtext with the threat of the black male."[204] By aligning the boys with gang culture, they are associated with criminal behavior. The media saw it as an explanation for their behavior, "the gang gave them their evil identity."[205] The youths were kids from the same neighborhood

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[199] Smiley and Fakunle, "From 'Brute' to "thug," 353, 354.
[200] Craig Wolff, "Attacks Were Planned, Two Park Victims Say," *New York Times*, April 22, 1989; James C. McKinley Jr., "2 More Youths Held in Attacks In Central Park," *New York Times*, April 23, 1989.
[201] "Teen-Agers Held in Rape."
[202] David E. Pitt, "2 Youths Indicted in Beating And Rape in Central Park," *New York Times*, April 27, 1989.
[203] Sam Roberts, "Park Rampage and Mayor Race: Fear and Politics," *New York Times*, May 1, 1989; David E. Pitt, "Jogger's Attackers Terrorized at Least 9 in 2 Hours: Attackers Went on 2-Hour Rampage," *New York Times*, April 22, 1989; Pitt, "More Crimes Tied to Gang In Park Rape"; "N.Y. Park Assault Victim Out of Coma," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1989; Lisa W. Foderaro, "Angered by Attack, Trump Urges Return of the Death Penalty," *New York Times*, May 1, 1989; Wicker, "Making Things Worse"; Ronald Sullivan, "Park Victim, Out of Coma, Says 'Hello,'" *New York Times*, May 4, 1989; Elizabeth Holtzman, "Rape - The Silence Is Criminal," *New York Times*, May 5, 1989; "Park Rape Victim's Fever Breaks," *New York Times*, May 6, 1989; "Fourth Victim Located In Park Gang Attacks," *New York Times*, May 24, 1989; Ronald Sullivan, "Statements Are Allowed In Jogger Case," *New York Times*, February 24, 1990; Ronald Sullivan, "2 Tell of Gang Terror Before Rape of Jogger," *New York Times*, June 27, 1990.
[204] D. Marvin Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion: The Myth of the Black Male* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 53.
[205] McGrory, "Horror in the Park."

looking for something to do to pass the time. There was no organized gang that planned their activities for that evening. Nevertheless, the media ignored this fact and emphasized the gang aspect.

The group of kids came from approximately the same neighborhood, Harlem. The media also emphasized this fact and often connected it to criminality. They tried to explain the behavior of the boys and, for example, asked anthropologists and sociologists who studied East Harlem to find an answer. These scholars said that "the street culture could have fostered a rampage that otherwise appears senseless," and they stated that the "power balance shifted from adults to teen-agers because of the drug trade."[206] They never discussed the probability of innocence. Their guilt needed to be explained, and the fact that they lived in Harlem was marked as one explanation. One article gave the neighborhood a chance to respond. Many residents were "enraged about the way they feel the press had portrayed the accused teenagers and their neighborhood" and said that "this is not a community that should be branded with the images of poverty, fear, and despair."[207] Their voices and opinions were a minority in the media's sound about the boys and the neighborhood.

As with many inner-city neighborhoods throughout the U.S., Harlem built a bad reputation. Harlem was not immune to the spreading of crack cocaine in the 1980s, just as it was unprepared for all the other urban changes. Although the neighborhood might be associated with the "drug world," the boys did not join that world.[208] Nonetheless, the connection was made instantly, and it was the first question on everyone's mind: were the boys immersed in the drug trade?[209] When the answer was no, the boys did not fit the picture the public already made of them. They did not fit the picture of a criminal black man. They kept pointing out that

[206] Gina Kolata, "Grim Seeds of Park Rampage Found in East Harlem Streets," *New York Times*, May 2, 1989.
[207] Susan Chira, "Rape Suspects' Neighbors Feel Accused," *New York Times*, May 1, 1989.
[208] Kolata, "Grim Seeds of Park Rampage Found in East Harlem Streets."
[209] Span and Kurtz, "Aftermath of an Assault: New Yorkers Shocked by Vicious Attack"; Will, "They Went 'Wilding.'"

"four lived in a building with a doorman, and one went to parochial school" and that "teachers called them good students; friends called them good friends."[210] The fact that they did not come from low-income families kept the media busy for quite a while.

The media searched for other explanations for how the boys fit the picture. Some tossed in the idea of boredom by saying, "the incident is an outgrowth of the boredom and frustration of ghetto life."[211] Again pointing out that the boys were from Harlem. For others, their questionable futures were the cause.[212] Some dubbed them "life's losers" that were part of a gang that needed to prove themselves, framing the white woman as a "winner."[213] Not many counter-messages got published. Journalist Meg Greenfield saw through the façade by writing that "our reflexive habit of projecting the crimes and defaults of the few onto the many, of universalizing and even, in some cases, romanticizing the worst elements of the ghetto pathology is self-indulgent, cruel, and yes, racist."[214] She pointed out the framing of the media of the boys as racist. She was one of the few who spoke out about how the media and public reacted to the crime and the suspects.

In addition to trying to fit the boys in a particular picture, the newspapers emphasized another trope of the criminal black man. The boys got framed as violent, angry, and aggressive. They are framed as inherently having anger issues and "taking it out on whatever is available."[215] In other words, they needed to take their anger, which was inherently a part of them, out on the jogger. In media, black men are often visualized as perpetual violent criminals who cannot control their urge to use violence.[216] Their background is not considered and is

[210] Kaufman, "Park Suspects: Children of Discipline"; Johnson, "No Pat Answers in N.Y. Assault"; Will, "They Went 'Wilding.'"
[211] Robin Marantz Henig, "The 'Wilding' of Central Park: Complex Motivations Underlie Violent Group Actions," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1989.
[212] Michael Specter and Laurie Goodstein, "Three Guilty Of Raping N.Y. Jogger," *Washington Post*, August 19, 1990.
[213] McGrory, "Horror in the Park."
[214] Meg Greenfield, "Other Victims in the Park," *Washington Post*, May 8, 1989.
[215] Henig, "The 'Wilding' of Central Park: Complex Motivations Underlie Violent Group Actions."
[216] Gina Castle Bell and Tina M. Harris, "Exploring Representations of Black Masculinity and Emasculation on NBC's Parenthood," *Journal of International & Intercultural Communication* 10, no. 2 (May 2017): 148.

generalized as dangerous. That is what both newspapers presented in their reporting of the case. A keen example of this is the description they gave of Yusef Salaam. He was a very tall boy, yet, he was a teenager. When looking at the newspaper's portrayal, the reader encountered another picture of him. They emphasized his height, for instance: "At 6 feet 4 inches, he towered over the jurors, who had to crane their heads up to see him take the oath."[217] Or they described him reciting an "angry rap poem" where the teenager "defiantly" stood in front of the judge at his sentencing hearing.[218]

Khorey Wise also received a similar characterization from the media. When describing him giving his testimony, he was "alternately holding his head in his hands and then looking up with undisguised anger."[219] When he got questioned by the prosecutor, he "exploded in rage on the witness stand yesterday and jumped down after repudiating his written and videotaped confession" and "repeatedly sneered at the prosecutor."[220] The prosecutor's remarks about his behavior were emphasized in the newspaper, stating that the jury saw him as "hostile, assertive, refusing to look at evidence."[221] In contrast, the detectives and prosecutors were described differently. They wrote about a police detective on the witness stand: "The silver-haired detective, wearing a gray suit, gray shirt, and gray shoes, carried the measured assuredness of 28 years on the force."[222] Another detective, Mr. Hartigan, received praise for his composure.[223] Here the white police officers are met with compliments and praise about how they compose themselves in court. They are the heroes in the story. Such language is not used in the portrayal of the five boys.

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[217] William Glaberson, "Testimony Shows Both Sides of Defense Lawyer's Gamble," *New York Times*, August 2, 1990.
[218] Specter, "N.Y. Jogger's Assailants Given Maximum Sentences."
[219] Ronald Sullivan, "Jogger Suspect Says Police Insisted He Touch Her Blood," *New York Times*, November 18, 1989.
[220] Ronald Sullivan, "Defendant in Jogger Trial Bolts From Stand in Rage," *New York Times*, November 27, 1990.
[221] Ronald Sullivan, "Prosecutor Recalls Violence in Park," *New York Times*, November 30, 1990.
[222] Ronald Sullivan, "Scientific Link Is Still Missing In Jogger Trial," *New York Times*, July 20, 1990.
[223] Ronald Sullivan, "Detective Asked About Handling of Jogger Case," *New York Times*, July 21, 1990.

Lastly, another tendency of the media became apparent, which was the focus on the fact that they were youths and juvenile crime was rising. The public's fear of minority youths seeped onto the pages; the Central Park attack had become the symbol of that fear.[224] They classified them as "young predators."[225] The boys usually would have been tried in Family Court. However, the Juvenile Offender Act of 1978 lowered the responsibility for crimes to thirteen for murder and fourteen for violent crimes, making it possible to try them as adults.[226] As discussed earlier in the chapter, black children were more likely to be seen and tried as adults. Besides being portrayed as predatory youths, the young boys were also portrayed as adults. The articles speak of "three men" accused of the attack.[227] And when they were convicted, they were also characterized as "three young men."[228] Especially Khorey Wise had long been specified as an adult in media coverage.[229] The idea of the time that youths, who committed adult crimes, were an epidemic was evident in the reports around the case.

The three sub-frames of the White Racial Frame are seen in the reporting surrounding the case. The historical context explained in the first part of the chapter illustrates much of the underlying messages the media put out in their articles. The content of the press accounts was determined by the period in which they were written. In the next chapter, it becomes apparent that with time passing by, the language somewhat changes. However, as it shows, not that much will shift. It will become clear that the press did not take responsibility for their language around the trial.

[224] Kurtz, "Attack in N.Y. Park Reopens Racial Wounds: Some Urge 'Fair Shake' for Suspects; Other Call Sympathy Misguided."
[225] Rita Kramer, "New York's Juvenile-Thug Mill," *New York Times*, July 10, 1989.
[226] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 97, 98.
[227] Jeremy Gerard, "New Cable Network Plans To Cover Jogger Trial Live," *New York Times*, May 24, 1990.
[228] Ronald Sullivan, "3 Youths Guilty of Rape And Assault of Jogger," *New York Times*, August 19, 1990.
[229] William Glaberson, "Juror Says Wise's 'Remorse' Helped," *New York Times*, December 12, 1990.

Chapter 2 – The Exoneration of the Central Park Five and its Historical Context

After the media frenzy surrounding the case of the Central Park jogger died down, it took multiple years before the boys entered the press accounts again. In the meantime, Khorey Wise, Anton McCray, Raymond Santana, Kevin Richardson, and Yusef Salaam sat in prison, waiting for their freedom. After five years, some became eligible for parole, except for Khorey. His maximum sentence was fifteen years instead of ten because he was sixteen at the time of the trial and crime. Thus, he was sentenced as an adult. He had to wait another five years for a parole chance. The other boys did have a chance for parole but never got out earlier. For a parole application to be granted, guilt needed to be admitted. All four boys refused to admit their guilt.[230] Eventually, they were released in 1995, 1996, and 1997. For the rape of the Central Park jogger, they had served between six and eight years in confinement.[231]

Serving more than thirteen years in prison in 2002, Khorey Wise was eligible for a conditional release.[232] Before that, Matias Reyes had confessed to him in 2001. After that, he confessed to a correctional officer. He said that he had raped the jogger and that he acted on his own. His claims proved accurate, and it was knowledge he alone could have known.[233] Further DNA testing, absent as a form of verification in 1989, revealed that the semen collected at the scene belonged to Reyes. He was already in prison for a murder and three rapes.[234] When the District Attorney's office re-examined the evidence, it became apparent that the confessions of the five defendants were inconsistent with the evidence known. The confessions also did not match one another. The New York Supreme Court vacated the convictions on December 19, 2002, following the recommendations from District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau.[235]

[230] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 184, 185.
[231] Ibid., 185.
[232] Ibid., 189.
[233] Saul M. Kassin and Gisli H. Gudjonsson, "The Psychology of Confessions: A Review of the Literature and Issues," *Psychological Science* 5, no. 2 (2004): 34.
[234] Hancock, "Wolf Pack," 39.
[235] Stratton, "Transforming the Central Park Jogger into the Central Park Five," 286.

However, the decision was too late to spare any of the boys from their punishment. Wise was the last to be released. His release already happened four months before the decision of New York Supreme Court Justice Charles Tejada.[236]

Quickly, the media got wind of the quietly reopened investigation into the Central Park jogger case. The narratives of 1989 presented themselves in the newspapers again. The articles revived the same discussions about race, class, and gender. They especially emphasized that New York City was not the same as in 1989. The question this chapter handles is how the articles in 2002 reflected the racial attitudes and stereotypes existing at the time of the exoneration. To thoroughly investigate, this chapter dives into the relevant historical developments of the 1990s. Both on a national and urban level, they provide a contextual basis to examine further the newspaper articles published around the time of the re-examination of the case and the eventual vacating of the convictions. After illustrating the developments in the relevant years, the newspaper articles are analyzed, showing the White Racial Frame in the press coverage.

Developments of National Attitudes and Policies of Black Americans, the 1990s and Beginning of the 2000s

During and after the presidency of George H.W. Bush, the "New Democrat" took form in Bill Clinton. The New Democrats abandoned their New Deal liberalism and replaced it with an "understanding of the world as technocratic, meritocratic, and therapeutic."[237] Not all the actions of Clinton were in sync with that understanding. Especially concerning his rhetoric about crime. The Democrats took over the language of Republicans as "being tough-on-crime."

[236] Duru, "The Central Park Five, the Scottsboro Boys, and the Myth of the Bestial Black Man," 1317.
[237] Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 694.

In his 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton promised to be even tougher on crime than the most formidable Republican.[238] He delivered on that promise in multiple aspects of his policies.

In 1994, Clinton, being in office for two years as President, signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act that furthered the War on Drugs, which was set in motion by Nixon and Reagan. In this crime bill, mandatory sentencing was lengthened, and a 100:1 ratio was implemented between the possession of crack and cocaine.[239] Possession of crack was thus met with harsher sentencing than cocaine. This impacted black Americans who mainly dealt with crack cocaine compared to white powder cocaine, primarily used by whites.[240]

Apart from lengthening the mandatory sentencing, the bill also included a mandated life sentence for three-time offenders. Alexander writes that "the Justice Policy Institute observed that the Clinton Administration's 'tough on crime' policies resulted in the largest increases in federal and state prison inmates of any president in American history."[241] More and more people were incarcerated with no outlook on ever getting out. The thought of prison having a rehabilitative outcome was abandoned.[242] Research provides evidence that disadvantaged blacks and other minority groups in the United States suffered under crime-control policies for their economic, social, and political advancement.[243] The disproportionate incarceration of blacks and other minority groups resulted in diminished civil rights.

Another significant component of the Violent Crime Act of 1994 was the investment of 9.9 billion dollars to construct new prisons.[244] The process of mass incarceration started long

[238] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 56.
[239] Lepore, *These Truths*, 699.
[240] Walter Enders, Paul Pecorino, and Anne-Charlotte Souto, "Racial Disparity in U.S. Imprisonment Across States and Over Time," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 35, no. 2 (2018): 367.
[241] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 56.
[242] Frank R. Baumgartner et al., "Throwing Away the Key: The Unintended Consequences of 'Tough-on-Crime' Laws," *Perspectives on Politics* 19, no. 4 (2021): 1236.
[243] Marie Gottschalk, "Hiding in Plain Sight: American Politics and the Carceral State," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008): 244.
[244] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621 (2009): 223.

before this crime bill, yet, it grew immensely after the act's implementation.[245] Instead of investing in, for example, education and public housing, Clinton invested in prisons. Angela Davis notes that "criminalization as a means of controlling populations served both to produce greater profit and to conceal the very socio-economic conditions they were exploiting."[246] She points to the disadvantaged of the nation's population. No additional funds needed to be given to other causes to solve poverty and joblessness if poor and marginalized people got locked in prison. A 1997 survey of state and federal prisoners showed that "African Americans and Hispanics have higher incarceration rates than whites, and together the two groups account for about two-thirds of the state prison population."[247] These numbers show that blacks and other minority groups were subjected to the criminal justice system on a much more regular basis than whites were. The War on Drugs ensured that black prison admissions were twenty-six times higher in 2000 than in 1983. For whites, this was eight times higher.[248]

At the same time of the rise as mass incarceration, a notion concerning racism took over public discourse. Colorblindness became the top ideology regarding racism. Sociologist Ashley Doane writes that:

> The point of colorblindness is how we see color/race: in a "colorblind" world, race is often (but not always) defined as a characteristic of *individuals* in a world where racism is no longer a major factor and race plays no meaningful role in the distribution of resources.[249]

This point aligns with the argument of Michelle Alexander, who states that "in the era of colorblindness, it is no longer permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt."[250] This race-neutral approach of institutions

[245] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 56.
[246] Angela Y. Davis, "Deepening the Debate over Mass Incarceration," *Socialism and Democracy* 28, no. 3 (2014): 16.
[247] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration," 228.
[248] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 98.
[249] Doane, "Shades of Colorblindness," 17.
[250] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 2.

built a structure where black Americans were oppressed without them being able to address the issue. Lawsuits that used racism as their approach got rejected by the Supreme Court, which made it almost impossible to fight criminal injustice based on race.

Because of colorblindness and the so-called end of racism that swept the country, the racial disparity in incarceration rates was interpreted with the idea that especially black Americans were more prone to criminality. So-called "racial realists," said that "if racial inequality persists, it is the problem of the people who fail to take responsibility for their own lives."[251] By stamping it as an individual problem and not placing it in a structural and systemic frame, the history of hundreds of years of oppression of minority groups was washed away. Unfortunately, the denial of the existence of structural racism made it possible for many policies, which hurt black Americans and other minority groups disproportionally, to exist.

While the incarceration rates increased, the actual nationwide crime rates went down. Especially in urban areas, crime decreased across the whole nation.[252] Multiple scholars have researched this phenomenon. They give a multitude of reasons, where they point to the importance of national-level conditions. Criminologist Eric P. Baumer and Law professor Kevin T. Wolff compared every scholar's reasoning to the data available. They concluded that the "enhanced economic perceptions and rising imprisonment" were most significant.[253] Interestingly, the wave of mass incarceration accounted for some crime drops. However, as scholar William Spelman has made clear in his research, Americans' imprisonment only amounted to one-fourth of the crime drop.[254] He writes that this makes sense because "if imprisonment were an incredibly inefficient means of reducing crime – and there are strong

[251] Rose M. Brewer and Nancy A. Heitzeg, "The Racialization of Crime and Punishment: Criminal Justice, Color-Blind Racism, and the Political Economy of the Prison Industrial Complex," *The American Behavioral Scientist (Beverly Hills)* 51, no. 5 (2008): 629.
[252] Eric P. Baumer and Kevin T. Wolff, "Evaluating Contemporary Crime Drop(s) in America, New York City, and Many Other Places," *Justice Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2014): 18.
[253] Ibid., 33.
[254] William Spelman, "The Limited Importance of Prison Expansion," in *The Crime Drop in America*, by Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 123.

arguments that it is exactly that – it could hardly have helped but have a substantial effect on the crime rate, given the enormous scale of the difference."[255] Thus, because incarceration was employed on such a large scale, it had to have some influence on the crime drop. It was bound to have some influence if a nation decided to lock up more people than ever before.

The actual crime drop did nothing to soothe the moral panic concerning juvenile crime. It continued to worsen in the 1990s. The Central Park jogger case spurred scholars and the public to be aware of the youths who terrorized the nation. The scholar who attracted the most publicity was John J. DiIulio Jr., a political scientist. In his magazine article *The Coming of the Super-Predators*, DiIulio warned in 1995 that a flood of "super-predators" who "have absolutely no respect for human life and no sense of the future" would overflow the cities, especially the black inner-city neighborhoods where the "trouble would be the greatest."[256] With the birth rate in mind then, he predicted that when 500,000 boys between the ages of 14 and 17 would be born, 30,000 would be murderers, muggers, or rapists.[257]

His message was very influential and got picked up by the media, other scholars, and policymakers. The public also listened and internalized the ideas of young predators. A 2001 report published by the Frameworks Institute revealed that when asked about their opinion on teens, almost 75% of respondents gave unfavorable descriptions.[258] They also overwhelmingly said that young people under 30 did not share their moral and ethical values. Policymakers noticed this public opinion and jumped onto the bandwagon to propose more punitive measures for youths. They put their reliance on incarceration to control young people. Between 1992 and 1997, policymakers of forty-four states used the rhetoric of the super-predator to implement new laws or expand existing laws to allow juveniles to be tried as adults in court.[259]

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[255] Ibid., 124.
[256] John J. DiIulio, "THE COMING OF THE SUPER -- PREDATORS," *Washington Examiner*, last modified November 27, 1995, https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/the-coming-of-the-super-predators.
[257] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 177.
[258] Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 298.
[259] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 180.

Youths of color experienced the harshest impact from these policies. For example, statistics collected in 2000 showed that "82% of youth charged in adult court in eighteen of the largest jurisdictions in the country were youth of color and that African-American (43%) and Latino (37%) youth were more likely than white youth (26%) to receive a sentence of incarceration."[260] Two-thirds of regression studies focused on these racial disparities concluded that decision-making has a "race-effect."[261] This indicates that the overrepresentation of minority groups in juvenile crime ensued from race bias.

In 2000, DiIulio recanted his prediction of a flood of super-predators, and other scholars had stamped his conclusions as overstated.[262] However, this was too late; the research was already implemented by politicians who needed these frames to build their arguments for a more punitive criminal justice system that included juveniles. In 1994, the Safe Schools Act allowed school officials to use federal money for school security, which resulted in more police officers and surveillance equipment in schools.[263] The No Child Behind Act of 2001, introduced by President George W. Bush, put educational failure and crime on the same level.[264] These Acts created the school-to-prison pipeline, which absorbed many young, minority children.

Alongside juvenile crime being a problem for black Americans, so was the labor market a problematic space for them. The colorblind society caused whites to be less predisposed to consider that blacks and other minorities faced structural barriers in their careers.[265] Here, the belief that individuals had themselves to blame was pervasive. However, while the country experienced an economic boom, the employment rates of young, less-educated black men were

[260] Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 301, 302.
[261] Ibid., 302.
[262] Baumgartner et al., "Throwing Away the Key," 1237.
[263] Joseph M. Mckenna and Joycelyn M. Pollock, "Law Enforcement Officers in Schools: An Analysis of Ethical Issues," *Criminal Justice Ethics* 33, no. 3 (2014): 165.
[264] Gottschalk, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 247.
[265] Lawrence D. Bobo and Camille Z. Charles, "Race in the American Mind: From the Moynihan Report to the Obama Candidacy," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 621, no. 1 (2009): 247.

still declining.[266] Multiple reasons included persistent discrimination, the disappearance of blue-collar jobs, weak schooling, and the decline of real wages, which were set in motion before the 1990s. Two new developments that influenced the downward spiral of black men in the labor market were mass incarceration and the enforcement of payments in child support.[267] Incarcerated men become ex-offenders, and employers were (and still are) hesitant to employ them. This difficulty in finding a job will be explored further in chapter 3. Moreover, the enforcement of child support was heavily taxed on non-custodial parents, which are primarily men. This taxation pushed them into more casual work and caused them to be excluded from the regular labor force.[268] Thus, black men found themselves blocked from the strong economy of the 1990s.

Nationwide, blacks faced structural barriers to block their advancement in life. Mass incarceration, in combination with the culture of colorblindness, had a massive impact on black Americans. At the expense of their youths, new juvenile crime laws were implemented, affecting a whole new generation of people. These developments all seeped into the labor market, making it challenging to create upward mobility. Thus, while the 1990s was experienced by many as a booming decade full of opportunities, many black Americans saw these moments passing by without them being able to participate.

Development of Urban Attitudes and Policies of Black Americans, the 1990s

The nationwide trends were noticeable at the urban level, and New York City underwent a massive transformation in all sorts of different aspects in the 1990s. The economic boom of

[266] Cynthia G. Colen, Arline T. Geronimus, and Maureen G. Phipps, "Getting a Piece of the Pie? The Economic Boom of the 1990s and Declining Teen Birth Rates in the United States," *Social Science & Medicine (1982)*, Social Science & Medicine, 63, no. 6 (2006): 1533.
[267] H. J. Holzer, P. Offner, and E. Sorensen, "What Explains the Continuing Decline in Labor Force Activity among Young Black Men?," *Labor History* 46, no. 1 (2005): 38.
[268] Ibid.

the 90s impacted the city, and the use of crack cocaine decreased.[269] The new generation saw the devastating effect of the drugs and poured new initiatives and strategies into inner-city neighborhoods. Mayors of New York City and neighborhood communities generated diverse initiatives to combat crime in the city. Sometimes this resulted in helpful approaches; other times, they caused other problems for the residents of the inner cities.

The city's transformation was greatly influenced by the economic growth the nation was experiencing, although not the whole region benefited on the same level. That is not to say that inner-city neighborhoods did not experience any advancement. Researchers Ingrid Gould Ellen and Katherine M. O'Regan state that "the number of high-poverty neighborhoods declined, and the number of low-income neighborhoods experiencing a gain in average income greatly exceeded those experiencing a decline."[270] However, this increase did not match other neighborhoods. Poor neighborhoods received less help than other areas from local, state, and federal agencies in their effort to combat poverty. More unemployment and underemployment developed in these regions.[271] This did not stop residents from trying to improve their neighborhoods, despite the lack of interest from the city government.

One of the points where residents themselves tried to improve their situation was combatting crime. On a local level, they developed policing and other policies that generally took a less punitive approach.[272] They tackled the problem in that sense because they could put the illegal drug market and criminal violence in a social context. The context is how high unemployment, racial discrimination, inadequate housing, failing schools, and a lacking of health care caused the situation in the urban neighborhoods.[273] The younger generation shared

[269] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 182.
[270] Ingrid Gould Ellen and Katherine M. O'Regan, "How Low Income Neighborhoods Change: Entry, Exit, and Enhancement," *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, Regional Science and Urban Economics, 41, no. 2 (2011): 89.
[271] R. Curtis, "The Improbable Transformation of Inner-City Neighborhoods: Crime, Violence, Drugs, and Youth in the 1990s," *The Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology* 88, no. 4 (1998): 1274.
[272] Gottschalk, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 250.
[273] Curtis, "The Improbable Transformation of Inner-City Neighborhoods," 1276.

the belief that their neighborhoods needed policies that invigorated the community and changed for the better. The police wanted to cooperate with the communities and implemented "community policing." The aim was to regain trust between the police and the residents by creating more respectful interactions. As a result, the communities could assist the police in their investigations and felt more secure.[274] Although it helped to tighten the bonds between police and residents, it was not the all-encompassing solution to heal the wounds.

When it came to crime, the city developed some policies so that the residents were supported. In 1994, Mayor Dinkins started with the initiative to put more than 5,000 additional officers on the street, making a total of 31,000 cops available at the New York Police Department (NYPD).[275] There had never been that many officers before. The NYPD applied the so-called "broken windows" theory, which consists of the conviction that "if a broken window is left unfixed, it will appear that no one cares, and more windows will be broken."[276] This fell under Order-Maintenance Policing (OMP). When Rudy Giuliani was elected as mayor of New York City, he introduced, in coalition with the NYPD, the "quality of life" campaign, which was, for them, the answer to reducing crime. It contained OMP, which included turnstile jumping, vagrancy, prostitution, littering, loitering, public urination, excessive noise, public drunkenness, minor drug use, graffiti, and other breaches of public order.[277] The same year, police arrested 21 percent more people resulting in people being reluctant to hang out in public spaces.[278]

Crime rates did begin to go down in the second half of the 1990s, but the correlation between the "quality of life"-policy and the actual crime reduction has been contested. Baumer

[274] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 183, 184.
[275] Ibid., 182.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Richard Rosenfield, Robert Fornango, and Andres F. Rengifo, "The Impact of Order-Maintenance Policing on New York City Homicide and Robbery Rates: 1988-2001," *Criminology* 45, no. 2 (2007): 356; Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 182.
[278] Curtis, "The Improbable Transformation of Inner-City Neighborhoods," 1275.

and Wolff write that "the increasing shift to order-maintenance policing and reductions in crack cocaine markets had, at most, a relatively small impact on overall trends in New York City."[279] Rather than OMP, global and national shifts plus mass incarceration caused the crime drop. OMP had little impact on, for example, murders, which went from 2,245 accounts in 1990 to 1,177 murders in 1995.[280] The decrease in crime rates did impact every neighborhood in New York City. However, putting all the emphasis on order-maintenance policing would be short-sighted. The police did like to use the policy and its presumed positive effect to legitimize their mass surveillance of disorderly people, which existed mainly of young minority males.[281]

The new way of policing widened the rift between police and inner-city neighborhoods as even more police officers flocked to the inner cities. The community policing mentioned earlier was insufficient to fill the trust gap. They instead looked after themselves and their neighborhood. The especially hard-hit regions of the city by the terrible economy, the drug war, and violence started to organize themselves through PTAs, tenants associations, community organizations, after-school programs, and sports leagues, policing and working to improve their education system on a local level.[282] Against all odds, some neighborhoods got back on their feet, albeit unstable.

The stabilization was undercut by new urban planning. Local housing authorities demolished many projects where predominantly black, and minority families lived.[283] Again, black families had to adapt to policies that disproportionally affected them. Gentrification pushed them out of their neighborhoods. In Harlem, many public housing projects were demolished, and poorer families had to leave.[284] The new legislation President Clinton put in

[279] Baumer and Wolff, "Evaluating Contemporary Crime Drop(s) in America, New York City, and Many Other Places," 31.
[280] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 183.
[281] Rosenfield, Fornango, and Rengifo, "The Impact of Order-Maintenance Policing on New York City Homicide and Robbery Rates," 357.
[282] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 182.
[283] Edward Goetz, "Gentrification in Black and White: The Racial Impact of Public Housing Demolition in American Cities," *Urban Studies* 48, no. 8 (2011): 1600.
[284] Ibid., 1583.

place concerning public housing made the Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) implement guidelines that significantly impacted public housing agencies. They were forced to evict drug dealers and other criminals, and tenants needed to show their criminal records.[285] Their "One Strike Guide" made clear that housing agencies needed to use their authority for stringent screening. It made it hard for ex-offenders to apply for public housing and find a home.

The Media Coverage of the Exoneration of the Central Park Five

The newspaper articles about the boys underscored that New York had transformed into something different in 2002. In the meantime, the boys had turned into men. The men were back in the news because of the reinvestigation of the New York City Justice Department and the exoneration. The articles especially routed back to the New York City of the 80s, describing it as a place where "racial tensions" were high and a "descent into lawlessness" was present.[286] As described, the city used to be rampant with crime and "soaked in the blood of crime victims," where "rapists, muggers and other violent criminals seemed to roam the city at will" and where "someone was murdered every four or five hours."[287] People were convinced that the public's reaction would be different if the same crime had happened in 2002 as in 1989. For example, former *News* editor Rosen believed that "there would be more skepticism about police procedures" and that we knew more "about DNA evidence, about false confessions, about juvenile issues."[288] Eventually, that would never be known. It is possible to analyze how the newspapers reacted to the reopened investigation and the eventual exoneration of the five men.

[285] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 145.
[286] Michael Powell, "A Vicious Symbol Upended," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2002; Robert D. McFadden and Susan Saulny, "13 Years Later, Official Reversal in Jogger Attack," *New York Times*, December 6, 2002; Robert D. McFadden, "Boys' Guilt Likely In Rape of Jogger, Police Panel Says," *New York Times*, January 28, 2003; Sam Roberts, "An Old Case in a Different New York," *New York Times*, October 20, 2002.
[287] Bob Herbert, "That Terrible Time," *New York Times*, December 9, 2002.
[288] Hancock, "Wolf Pack," 41.

Before the White Racial Frame and its sub-frames come into play, a discussion about a more broad point, which is what the media chose to report in 1989 versus in 2002, needs to be had. In 2002, many articles about false confessions appeared where the question of how an innocent man could confess to something they did not do found center stage.[289] Journalists Saul Kassin and Susan Saulny both wrote a title with false confessions in its content.[290] What is striking is the absence of this question around the time of the trial. In newspaper articles, no one ever doubted that the confessions were truthful except for the defendants' attorneys. Thus, the focus on false confessions and how they come into existence is a noteworthy difference from the articles about the initial trial.

Then the follow-up question is whether the White Racial Frame and the three sub-frames also had disappeared or decreased in writing surrounding the case in 2002. Three sub-frames are consecutively analyzed, beginning with the dehumanizing, animal-like sub-frame. The term "wilding" was connected to this sub-frame in the former chapter. The word reappeared at the time of the reinvestigation. Christine Haughney wrote that “the reopening of the gang rape case – known as “wilding”- recalls a bleak chapter in New York’s history.”[291] Other journalists emphasized the fact that authorities were the ones who introduced the word.[292] The burden of using the word was connected to the police, not the media. Next to wilding, the word “rampage” also found its way back into the contents of the articles.[293] They emphasized that these kids

[289] “Inconsistencies In Teenagers’ Words,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2002.
[290] Saul Kassin, “False Confessions and the Jogger Case,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2002; Susan Saulny, “Why Confess to What You Didn’t Do?,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2002.
[291] Christine Haughney, “Central Park Rape Case Convictions in Question,” *Washington Post*, September 6, 2002.
[292] Samuel Maull, “5 Cleared in N.Y. Jogger Case,” *Washington Post*, December 20, 2002; Robert F. Worth, “A Word That Seared a City’s Imagination,” *New York Times*, December 6, 2002.
[293] Jim Dwyer and Susan Saulny, “Youths’ Denials in 89’ Rape Case Cost Them Parole Chances,” *New York Times*, October 16, 2002; McFadden and Saulny, “13 Years Later, Official Reversal in Jogger Attack”; Haughney, “Central Park Rape Case Convictions in Question”; Joyce Purnick, “A Confession That Clarifies Nothing,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2002; Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn, “New Light on Jogger’s Rape Calls Evidence Into Question,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2002.

were not "on a nature walk."[294] The image of the feral black youth and the portrayal of an animalistic attack entered the lexicon of the newspaper once again.

Another striking trend concerning this sub-frame is the continued use of the term "wolf pack." A question asked by journalist Sam Roberts from the *New York Times* went as follows: "Could a wolf pack of wilding teenagers be rounded up near the scene of the crime and be pressured into confessing? Probably, although advances in DNA testing make some mistakes less likely."[295] His answer was in favor of the men. However, the continued use of the wolf pack instilled the image in the reader's mind. Others used it only as a descriptor of the group of youths which caused the term to be inextricably linked to the case in 1989.[296] The step to connect Matias Reyes' actions to the "pack of youths" became smaller. Authorities sold the media that picture by suggesting that Reyes "either joined or followed the pack that night as teenagers roamed through the northern reaches of the park."[297] That depiction was not quite contested in the newspapers.

The next sub-frame, the hypersexual gendered-racist sub-frame, was not that present anymore in the articles. The sub-frame was present in another way. Journalists acknowledged that the accusation of a black man raping a white woman was embedded in the nation's history.[298] Bob Herbert wrote about the stereotypes that persisted around the time of the rape and its media presence. He writes, "the jogger was white, female, attractive and blameless. The accused were black, male, predatory and obligingly sullen."[299] There was acknowledgment in some articles about the stereotypes that fit the hypersexual, gendered-racist sub-frame, which

[294] Roberts, "An Old Case in a Different New York."
[295] Ibid.
[296] Kevin Flynn and Jim Dwyer, "Reconsidering Other Verdicts In Jogger Case," *New York Times,* December 2, 2002; McFadden and Saulny, "13 Years Later, Official Reversal in Jogger Attack."
[297] Jim Dwyer, "Some Officials Shaken by New Central Park Jogger Inquiry," *New York Times,* September 28, 2002.
[298] Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn, "2 Prominent Lawyers to Review Police Inquiry Into Central Park Jogger Case," *New York Times,* November 2, 2002.
[299] Herbert, "That Terrible Time."

differentiated staunchly from the accounts given at the time.[300] During the trial and before, the men were not given the benefit of the doubt. This disbelief of their innocence connects to the racialized treatment of criminal suspects. Legal scholar Elizabeth Teebagy states that:

> Black men who are accused and convicted of rape are far more likely to receive the harshest punishment… Conversely, White men who are accused of rape are often treated more leniently and given more of the benefit of the doubt, as women accusing White men of rape face a tough evidentiary burden, while rape accusations by White women against Black men can result in conviction without the barest evidence of sexual contact.[301]

The recognition of this treatment and the naming of it transformed the discourse somewhat.

What also changed concerning the criminal black man sub-frame was using the term "gang." Journalists often described it as a "mob of teenagers" or a "group of youths" when they omitted the term "wolf pack."[302] The terminology had changed over time. The loose gang was only once introduced.[303] The association with gangs had but disappeared. What did not change was the wariness of the notion that the men could be innocent. From the moment Reyes stepped forward to confess his crimes, the first articles that appeared questioned his reliability immediately or wrote that Reyes must have had connections to the convicted boys.[304] The assumption that the men were connected to the case persisted even after Reyes confessed. This belief was not based on physical evidence because their DNA was nowhere to be found. Stratton writes that "the doubt surrounding false confessions, the potential of a fallible justice system, and other 'ambiguities' in Reyes' version of events allowed for the existing public narrative to

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[300] Michael Powell, "Reversals Sought in Central Park Jogger Case," *Washington Post*, December 6, 2002; Marc Santora, "Black Police Officers' Group Seeks New Jogger Case Inquiry," *New York Times,* September 9, 2002.
[301] Teebagy, "White Privilege and Racial Narratives," 491.
[302] Jim Dwyer, "Convict Says Jogger Attack Was His 2nd," *New York Times*, October 3, 2002; William K. Rashbaum, "Lawyer Seeks Exoneration of 5 Convicted In Jogger Case," *New York Times,* October 13, 2002; Dwyer, "Some Officials Shaken by New Central Park Jogger Inquiry."
[303] Dwyer and Flynn, "New Light on Jogger's Rape Calls Evidence Into Question."
[304] Robert D. McFadden and Susan Saulny, "DNA in Central Park Jogger Case Spurs Call for New Review," *New York Times,* September 6, 2002; Tina Kelley, "On Tape, Convict Insists That Only He Raped Jogger," *New York Times*, September 21, 2002; Dwyer, "Convict Says Jogger Attack Was His 2nd"; "N.Y. Rape Suspect's Credibility Questioned," *Washington Post*, December 3, 2002.

remain, albeit threatened."[305] The media played a considerable part in maintaining the stereotype of blacks as criminals, where blacks are disproportionately over-represented in images concerning crime.[306] The belief of their guilt persisted even when new evidence came to the surface.

Also evident was the trust the media had in the police. A question like "if detectives imposed a fabricated story, why would they risk being contradicted by the victim? There was no guarantee that if she awoke from a coma, she would have no memory of her attack" was not unheard of in the media discourse.[307] The newspapers cast the same doubts about Reyes' account as the police. For example, detective Sheehan was among the ones that discredited Reyes' story that he acted alone and called him a "manipulator of stories."[308] The police stuck with the story that the five men had to be involved somehow.[309] Multiple articles were printed that published the report of the panel. It investigated the handlings of the police, which stated that there was no misconduct on the part of the police.[310] While there were voices in the newspapers that addressed the actions of the police as misconduct, these voices were not as strong as the police panel itself. The nature of reporting had always been to trust the police. Also, to write down what was told by the police. However, the fact that critical voices were present, albeit in a low capacity, indicated a slight change in tone.

Another facet that changed was how the two newspapers approached the theme of race. The media's story about the trial denied the assumption that the case had anything to do with race. Claims such as "responsibly, jurors in the jogger case concentrated on the facts rather than

[305] Stratton, "Transforming the Central Park Jogger into the Central Park Five," 290.
[306] Oliver, "African American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous,'" 15.
[307] Purnick, "A Confession That Clarifies Nothing."
[308] Kevin Flynn, "Suspect in Rape Absorbed Pain And Inflicted It," *New York Times,* December 7, 2002.
[309] William K. Rashbaum, "Police Will Review Jogger-Case Reversal," *New York Times,* December 7, 2002.
[310] McFadden, "Boys' Guilt Likely In Rape of Jogger, Police Panel Says"; Jim Dwyer, "New Slant on Jogger Case Lacks Official Certainty," *New York Times*, January 28, 2003; Marc Santora, "Prosecutor Rejects Theory of Boys' Attack on Jogger," *New York Times*, January 31, 2003; Jim Dwyer, "One Trail, Two Conclusions," *New York Times,* February 2, 2003.

racial claims, "[311] "this was not a case of black, white and Hispanic, but rather one of right and wrong and of what happened in Central Park,"[312] and "this was a case about brutality, not race"[313] emphasized the supposed non-racial case and focused on the "facts." When looking at the newspapers' attitudes towards race around the reinvestigation, this portrayal changes considerably. A myriad of articles highlighted that the case was "racially charged."[314] By acknowledging that the case entailed race, the media recognized the underlying currents. What the media did lack was addressing their role in framing the story in 1989 and downplaying the racial factor in the case. Nowhere in the articles was their contribution to the story, let alone the taking of some accountability. Primarily, the newspapers were pointing at one another.

To say that racism or discriminatory language was absent in 2002 is misleading. The three sub-frames of the White Racial Frame were present in some way. One of the most striking tendencies was the focus on how New York City was different from the city in 1989. Herbert writes, "most New Yorkers in that period – for reasons that spanned a continuum from out and out racism to a deeply felt desire to see criminals brought to justice for a terrible crime – wanted them to be guilty."[315] Times had changed for journalists, and some of that transformation seeped into the newspapers. Still, many of the tropes that belong to the sub-frames found their way back. Terms like "wilding" and "wolf-pack" were back in use, and although some sub-frames were not as present in the articles as in 1989, the White Racial Frame did linger in the pages.

[311] "Conscientious Jurors and Racial Tension," *New York Times,* August 20, 1990.
[312] Ronald Sullivan, "2 Teen-Agers Are Convicted in Park Jogger Trial," *New York Times,* December 12, 1990.
[313] "Brutality and Judgment," *Washington Post,* August 21, 1990.
[314] Susan Saulny, "Convictions and Charges Voided In '89 Central Park Jogger Attack," *New York Times,* December 20, 2002; Powell, "Reversals Sought in Central Park Jogger Case"; Robert D. McFadden, "History Is Shadow On Present In Jogger Case," *New York Times*, September 7, 2002; Susan Saulny, "3 Seek to Overturn Verdicts in '89 Rape of Park Jogger," *New York Times,* September 5, 2002; Roberts, "An Old Case in a Different New York."
[315] Herbert, "That Terrible Time."

Chapter 3 – The Settlement of the Central Park Five and its Historical Context

On December 8, 2003, Antron McCray, Raymond Santana, and Kevin Richardson sued New York City, the district attorney's office, the NYPD, and the many individuals that worked on the case for damages caused by their wrongful incarceration.[316] Amongst those individuals were prosecutors Elizabeth Lederer and Linda Fairstein. After a while, Korey Wise and Yusef Salaam followed suit in bringing legal charges against them. They filed a suit for $250 million, "arguing the city should pay for their false arrest and malicious prosecution."[317] The lawsuit argued that their civil rights were violated, including the Fourth, Fifth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Amendments rights, and that the city and its agents deprived them of their constitutional rights by prosecuting them based on racial animus.[318]

The filing of the lawsuit was swiftly accomplished. However, the settling of the case took eleven years. Under the leadership of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the case had been delayed. In 2007, the city tried to get the case dismissed. The court kept many of the arguments intact and granted no dismissal.[319] When Bill de Blasio became the mayor of New York City in 2014, settling the case was encouraged by him.[320] On June 26, 2014, the city comptroller approved a payment of $40.7 million to the five wrongfully accused men.[321] After an eleven-year battle, the men finally got recognition from the city.

Over eleven years, only 27 articles in the *New York Times* and six articles in the *Washington Post* contained information about the Central Park Five and their impending case against the city of New York. Compared to the hundreds of articles released around the case in 1989, that is a meager amount of stories. Although the amount of articles is small, this chapter

316 "3 Convicted in Jogger Attack to Sue City," *New York Times*, December 8, 2003.
317 "Article 1 -- No Title"; Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 186.
318 Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 211.
319 Ibid., 212.
320 Gail Sullivan, "Report: New York City to Settle with 'Central Park Five' for $40 Million. Black and Hispanic Youths Were Wrongly Imprisoned For Jogger Rape," *Washington Post*, June 19, 2014.
321 Dwyer, "In Botched Case Of Park Jogger, An Altered Life."

analyzes them with the White Racial Frame in mind. How did the media frame the men concerning the lawsuit and settlement? This chapter first discusses the relevant historical developments from the end of the 2000s and the beginning of the 2010s. The national and local levels are examined, which contributes to setting the stage for the analysis of the articles. After illustrating the relevant developments, the articles are explored in combination with the White Racial Frame.

Developments of National Attitudes and Policies of Black Americans, the End of the 2000s and Beginning of the 2010s

By the 2000s, it became clear that the War on Drugs had failed to do what it set out to accomplish. Not only scholars came to this conclusion, but also people directly involved saw the general failure of the War on Drugs. For example, the head of the Office of National Drug Policy said that "after 40 years, the United States' war on drugs has cost $1 trillion and hundreds of thousands of lives, and for what? Drug use is rampant and violence even more brutal and widespread."[322] The goal to reduce drug use and the spreading of drugs was not reached, and drug overdoses increased while drug cartels grew.[323] Despite these failings, the budget for the war steadily increased during the 2000s. The national budget went from $11 billion in 2003 to $12 billion in 2006, and state and local governments spent over 30 billion to wage a war they knew was ineffective.[324]

While the budget grew in the 2000s, voices for reforming drug laws did emerge. In the decade, the rhetoric concerning drug laws changed a little from very punitive to a somewhat

[322] Gregory Fulkerson and Fida Mohammad, "The Failure of the War on Drugs: A Comparative Perspective," *Drugs and Anti-Narcotics Policies* 3, no. 2 (2011): 56.
[323] Christopher J. Coyne and Abigail Hall, "Four Decades and Counting: The Continued Failure of the War on Drugs," *Cato Institute Policy Analysis*, no. 811 (April 12, 2017): 1; Fulkerson and Mohammad, "The Failure of the War on Drugs: A Comparative Perspective," 56.
[324] Lisa D. Moore and Amy Elkavich, "Who's Using and Who's Doing Time: Incarceration, the War on Drugs, and Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 98, no. 1 (September 2008): 178.

lesser punishing stance. However, it was not until the administration of President Barack Obama attempted to reform the approach to the drug war that elements changed. An annual report, the National Drug Control Strategy, stated that more money would go to prevention and treatment instead of law enforcement.[325] Professionals and scholars of the criminal justice system had called for a revolution rather than reform. For example, legal scholar and attorney Meagan K. Nettles writes that "rehabilitation, mental health treatment, drug treatment, probation, and community service are preferred over incarceration."[326] Doctors in the field, such as doctor Lisa D. Moore, also pointed out the need for policymakers and public health practitioners to "treat this as a public health problem, one that deserves prevention and treatment rather than punishment."[327] Although these calls became louder than earlier, the number of inmates did not decrease.

Mass incarceration was not stopped at the turn of the decade. In 2007, one in every 31 adults, more than 7 million Americans, was locked up in the prison system.[328] For black youths, the numbers were even grimmer. In 2009, 31.3 percent of the juveniles arrested were black, whereas 27.8 percent of the adults arrested were black.[329] Compared to white youth, they were twice more likely to be arrested.[330] The War on Drugs created a society where many people stayed behind bars, and hardship in families of color and urban communities was produced daily.

Meanwhile, the government spent $81 billion on incarceration costs.[331] This was the budget every year. Many of the gains of black American citizenship, hard-won by the Civil Rights Movement, were erased by mass incarceration. Wage, education, employment, and other

[325] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 190.
[326] Meagan K. Nettles, "The Sobering Failure of America's War on Drugs: Free the P.O.W.s Comments," *California Western Law Review* 55, no. 1 (2018-2019): 312.
[327] Moore and Elkavich, "Who's Using and Who's Doing Time," 179.
[328] Moriearty and Carson, "Cognitive Warfare and Young Black Males in America Symposium," 292; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 60.
[329] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 184.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Nettles, "The Sobering Failure of America's War on Drugs," 276.

socioeconomic aspects were negatively affected, especially amongst uneducated, poor black men.[332] What also emerged was data on wrongfully convicted black Americans. A study involving 343 men discovered that "false confessions of rape and sexual assault are more likely to involve juveniles."[333] The researchers also found that rapes that are wrongfully convicted are more likely to be interracial, while most rapes are intra-racial—a statistic where the Central Park Five fit right in.

Even though incarceration rates were still going up, sounds for reform appeared. Because of the worldwide economic crisis from 2007 to 2009, policymakers needed to reduce costs. The global financial crisis became an incentive for state and local governments to decrease the number of prisoners to reduce costs.[334] In 2011, one-fourth of the states, thirteen to be exact, closed or were planning to close a prison.[335] The support for the tough-on-crime movement waivered. Because of the crime drop, public support for reentry programs, and media stories about the consequences of mass incarceration, there was a growing belief that the drug war had failed and the system had gotten out of control.[336] President Obama reacted to this changing view by introducing the 2010 Fair Sentencing Act. The law reduced the disparity between the legal penalties for the abusage of powder cocaine and crack cocaine. With the new act, the disparity came to 18 to 1.[337] So, while the act reduced the disparity, it did not erase the inequality of the legal system.

While other voices were sounding the alarm for reform, the repercussions of being caught up in the criminal system continued. After incarceration for a drug-related felony, people were out on the streets without much support to rebuild their lives and, at the same time, marked

[332] Gottschalk, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 244.
[333] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 187.
[334] Todd R. Clear and Natasha A. Frost, *The Punishment Imperative: The Rise and Failure of Mass Incarceration in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 6.
[335] Ibid., 7.
[336] Fulkerson and Mohammad, "The Failure of the War on Drugs: A Comparative Perspective," 56; Clear and Frost, *The Punishment Imperative*, 6.
[337] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 190.

as dangerous felons who inevitably will repeat their crimes. Finding a job became troublesome because many employers were, and still are, highly unlikely to hire convicted felons.[338] If convicted felons do not succeed in finding a job, it could mean more prison time. Forty jurisdictions "required parolees to maintain gainful employment."[339] Many ex-inmates had to cope with this predicament.

Next to employment, other aspects of their lives where they experienced difficulty were the rights to welfare benefits, the right to serve on a jury, public housing, financial aid to attend college, and having large debts. Because of legal barriers, many convicted felons had been barred from applying to welfare and public housing, making it very hard to find a place to live.[340] Due to past drug convictions, roughly 50,000 to 60,000 students yearly did not get financial aid.[341] Thus, they had to take out other loans if they needed further education, which piled on the debt they had already acquired because of the criminal justice system. In some states, newly released prisoners need to pay for their drug testing and treatment and pay multiple institutions, such as courts, probation departments, and child-support enforcement offices.[342] Their debt to society was not paid just by their prison sentence; the payment continued in freedom.

One of the most significant impacts of incarceration for a drug-related offense was systematic voter disenfranchisement. Sociologists estimated that "16 million Americans were disenfranchised owing to felony convictions in the mid-2000s."[343] Both short- and long-term restrictions for voting impacted whole segments of the black population. In some states,

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[338] Moore and Elkavich, "Who's Using and Who's Doing Time," 178; Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration," 230; Coyne and Hall, "Four Decades and Counting: The Continued Failure of the War on Drugs," 2, 12; Gottschalk, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 245.
[339] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 148.
[340] Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration," 230.
[341] Coyne and Hall, "Four Decades and Counting: The Continued Failure of the War on Drugs," 2; Moore and Elkavich, "Who's Using and Who's Doing Time," 178.
[342] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 154, 155.
[343] Becky Pettit, *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012), 80.

convicted felons lost their right to vote for the rest of their lives.[344] To restore the right to vote, every state made its own rules and regulations. Alexander writes that

> "typically the restoration process is a bureaucratic maze that requires the payment of fines or court costs. The process is so cumbersome, confusing, and onerous that many ex-offenders who are theoretically eligible to vote never manage to get their voting rights back."[345]

Voter disenfranchisement caused less than half of young black men to vote for Barack Obama.[346] Mass incarceration highly changed the landscape of voters.

Although many minority voters were disenfranchised, Barack Obama got elected in 2008. After his election, many declared society post-racial, primarily white Americans.[347] Doctor of Philosophy Roopali Mukherjee states that "Obama's victory offered his largely liberal supporters the self-congratulatory assurance that their faith in colorblind denials of racial privilege and stigma were key to his ascendance."[348] Colorblindness found its way into the highest office, which opened the road for the minimization and denial of the effects of systemic racism on ethnic and racial minorities. The theme of "no more excuses" took hold of the public discourse, where Obama's victory was seen as the ultimate example that there was "no white man trying to keep you down."[349] This image did not only persist in conservative corners; it also appeared in the discourse among many middle-class black Americans.[350] They had bought into the belief that systemic racism did not affect them or did not exist. This mindset was quite problematic because ample examples existed to prove otherwise. Furthermore, the denial of

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[344] Moore and Elkavich, "Who's Using and Who's Doing Time," 178.
[345] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 158, 159.
[346] Pettit, *Invisible Men*, 82.
[347] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Austin Ashe, "The End of Racism?: Colorblind Racism and Popular Media," in *The Colorblind Screen: Television in Post-Racial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 57.
[348] Roopali Mukherjee, "Rhyme and Reason: 'Post-Race' and the Politics of Colorblind Racism," in *The Colorblind Screen: Television in Post-Racial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 43.
[349] Ibid., 48.
[350] Wornie L. Reed and Bertin M. Louis, "'No More Excuses': Problematic Responses to Barack Obama's Election," *Journal of African American Studies* 13, no. 2 (2009): 98.

systemic racism laid the blame for underachieving on black youth.[351] The suggestion that their negative mindset was the problem, instead of a structure that limited them in many aspects of life, enforced the racial stereotypes of black youth.

That racism did not disappear with the election of Obama was showcased in the opinions people had and projected about the president. Compared to former president George W. Bush, Obama's death threats increased 400 percent in his first year.[352] Comparisons to apes and the usage of derogatory terms in connection to the president were recurrent themes.[353] In the supposed post-racial society, the fact that Obama was black was pointed out by many. Mukherjee writes that "Obama's post-racial significance demanded declarative and self-conscious acts of seeing and recognizing his blackness."[354] The paradox of the claim that people did not see race when, at the same time, that was all they saw when they looked at Obama indicated that a post-racial society did not exist.

That white Americans contradicted themselves regarding race showed itself in their attitudes and feelings toward other black Americans they thought were supposedly getting more aid in their lives. They saw affirmative action as a form of "reverse discrimination," which, in their eyes, violated post-racial societal norms.[355] Research showed that white Americans obtained the notion that racism against whites had become more pervasive than racism against minorities.[356] Whites dubbed themselves as the new victims without considering the statistics concerning the outcomes for minorities. These outcomes were drastically more negative for minorities than for whites.[357] The belief that Obama did more to improve the economic situation for black Americans than other groups, even though the research did not hold up that view, left

[351] Ibid., 107.
[352] Anderson, *White Rage*, 156.
[353] Ibid., 157, 158.
[354] Mukherjee, "Rhyme and Reason," 45.
[355] Doane, "Shades of Colorblindness," 29.
[356] Michael I. Norton and Samuel R. Sommers, "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 3 (2011): 215; Doane, "Shades of Colorblindness," 29.
[357] Norton and Sommers, "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing," 215.

white Americans feeling aggravated.[358] The increase in racial equality threatened their dominant societal position.[359] Thus, the view of a post-racial society might have been pervasive; the acts and thoughts of the population did not correspond to that notion.

Developments of Urban Attitudes and Policies of Black Americans, the End of the 2000s and Beginning of the 2010s

The gentrification discussed in Chapter 2 continued to grow in the years following the 1990s. At the beginning of the 2000s, many white and middle-class black Americans moved into neighborhoods that were first seen as predominantly black.[360] Yet, these groups were not the only ones that opted for homeownership. Many other minority groups were able to obtain a house through subprime lending.[361] A subprime loan was a high-cost loan. Eventually, when home values started to plummet, people had loaned more than their house was worth.[362] Because the property values decreased by nearly 30 percent, it resulted in many foreclosures, hitting the black community hard because housing was the larger share of their wealth.[363] The economic recession, which started in 2007, affected the nation. Inner-city communities especially experienced the repercussions of the country's economic downfall, with unemployment and foreclosures increasing.

The Great Recession greatly impacted the high racial wealth inequality in the United States. During the recession, black and Latinx households lost 48 and 44 percent of their wealth.

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[358] Brian D. McKenzie, "Political Perceptions in the Obama Era: Diverse Opinions of the Great Recession and Its Aftermath among Whites, Latinos, and Blacks," *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 824.
[359] Norton and Sommers, "Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing," 215.
[360] Derek Hyra and Jacob S. Rugh, "The US Great Recession: Exploring Its Association with Black Neighborhood Rise, Decline and Recovery," *Urban Geography* 37, no. 5 (July 3, 2016): 19.
[361] Ibid., 8.
[362] Ibid., 13.
[363] Christian Weller and Angela Hanks, "The Widening Racial Wealth Gap in the United States after the Great Recession," *Forum for Social Economics* 47 (April 3, 2018): 238; Hyra and Rugh, "The US Great Recession," 1.

The loss was much higher than white households, which lost 26 percent.[364] When looking at household income, the recession reduced by 11 percent in black households, whereas the reduction for white Americans was 5 percent.[365] Unemployment increased as well; black Americans experienced an increase from 8 percent to 16 percent, which toppled the white and Latino levels of unemployment.[366] All in all, the recession widened the racial wealth gap even more.

Simultaneously, the recession had an impact on housing in the inner cities. However, for the Harlem neighborhood, this did not result in foreclosures but gentrification. Research showed that more white Americans moved to the neighborhood. Between 2010 and 2012, black American home loan borrowers declined from 28 to 23 percent, while white home loan borrowers increased from 53 to 60 percent.[367] Hence, incoming white Americans changed the neighborhood, making it less available for black Americans to settle in formerly predominant black neighborhoods. With white people moving in, the association of value increases made the neighborhood less affordable for black Americans.[368] Low-income households were left behind.[369] The Great Recession made the differences between classes painfully visible.

In the policy field, the stop-and-frisk program of the NYPD endured scrutiny from scholars and judges. The police used this approach to stop people on the street and frisk them for concealed drugs. Under the government of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the stop-and-frisk program soared.[370] In 2011, it peaked at over 685,000 stops.[371] The year after that, the number

[364] Fenaba R. Addo and William A. Darity, "Disparate Recoveries: Wealth, Race, and the Working Class after the Great Recession," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 695, no. 1 (2021): 175; Weller and Hanks, "The Widening Racial Wealth Gap in the United States after the Great Recession," 241.
[365] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 499.
[366] McKenzie, "Political Perceptions in the Obama Era," 825.
[367] Hyra and Rugh, "The US Great Recession," 18.
[368] Ibid., 19.
[369] Doane, "Shades of Colorblindness," 30.
[370] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals*, 196.
[371] Michael D. White and Henry F. Fradella, *Stop and Frisk The Use and Abuse of a Controversial Policing Tactic* (Bielefeld: New York University Press, 2016), 3.

of stops decreased to 532,911.[372] The most impacted groups were blacks and Hispanics, caused by "the highly localized nature of the policy, and discriminatory enforcement."[373] The research showed that these groups were disproportionally picked out to undergo the stop-and-frisk approach of the police.[374] The fact that many researchers had paid interest to the subject and multiple lawsuits resulted in unfavorable verdicts changed the approach to the program somewhat. Especially *Floyd v. City of New York,* where Judge Shira Scheindlin of the federal district court in Manhattan decided that the stop-and-frisk program of the NYPD was unconstitutional, was a critical case that shifted public opinion.[375] The police had to consider this and needed to decrease the number of people stopped on the streets. This change in public opinion for blacks and other minorities came pretty late. However, it gave the police an incentive to change their method.

The Media Coverage of the Lawsuit and Settlement of the Central Park Five

What immediately stood out was the media attention given to the lawsuit and settlement in the papers. Compared to the articles surrounding the trial and exoneration, the men had little room to tell their story after acquittal. The *Washington Post* only printed six articles in eleven years about the process, while the *New York Times* published 27 articles. In the articles, some common themes were discussed. The fear of the New York City of 1989 appeared several times, which painted a picture of a "dangerous New York, polarized New York, a place where a young white woman running in the park could be attacked by a gang of black kids."[376] Still years later, this was emphasized by many journalists.[377]

[372] Byfield, *Savage Portrayals,* 196.
[373] Sharad Goel, Justin M. Rao, and Ravi Shroff, "Precinct Or Prejudice? Understanding Racial Disparities in New York City's Stop-and-Frisk Policy," *The Annals of Applied Statistics* 10, no. 1 (2016): 367.
[374] White and Fradella, *Stop and Frisk The Use and Abuse of a Controversial Policing Tactic,* 4.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Michael Newman, "The Afterlife," *New York Times,* May 4, 2003.
[377] Brent Staples, "When Mass Hysteria Convicted 5 Teenagers," *New York Times,* October 28, 2012; Manohla Dargis, "Still Seeking Lessons From a Notorious Case," *New York Times,* November 22, 2012; Jim Dwyer,

Apart from New York City being a scary place, the city's recurring criticism of their handling of the settlement was present. However, it was the first time the opinions of the men concerned were printed. Their Councilman Charles Barron and two of the men criticized the city for not wanting to settle.[378] Another article showed that even other city officials saw the reluctance of the city to settle as undesirable.[379] In the writing about the case, this was the first time criticism of the city of New York got more attention than the voices of the officials belonging to that institution. Documentary maker Ken Burns aired the opinion that the settlement would benefit all New Yorkers.[380] The decision of Mayor Bill DeBlasio to appoint a new council was viewed positively.[381] All in all, the media flipped their narrative in favor of the five exonerated men concerning settling the case.

In retrospect, the media began to see that, at the time, the case was surrounded by mass hysteria. Journalist Brent Staples put it accurately when he stated that "mass hysteria always makes perfect sense when we are trapped in it."[382] That realization seemed to seep into the pages of the newspapers. Journalist Jim Dwyer was the first and only one to admit that he had been complacent in his silence. He writes that "much of the news media failed to note the vast inconsistencies in the case. Among the skeptics, people like me had mumbled, rather than shouted, our doubts."[383] Another journalist highlighted the new developments concerning false confessions and DNA evidence. She recognized "how black and brown men and boys are disproportionately funneled into the prison system."[384] A remark like that was not found in the previously printed articles, especially not in 1989. What these comments showed was a

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"From 'Central Park Five' Case, a Lesson in Assigning Blame," *New York Times*, May 3, 2013; "A Settlement in the Jogger Case," *New York Times*, June 21, 2014.

[378] John Eligon, "City Vows to Fight Lawsuits In Central Park Jogger Case," *New York Times*, April 20, 2011.

[379] Russ Buettner, "Critics Tell City to Pay Those Wrongly Convicted in Park Jogger Case," *New York Times*, February 28, 2013.

[380] Alyssa Rosenberg, "Ken Burns' Case for a Settlement With the Central Park Five," *Washington Post*, April 14, 2014.

[381] Benjamin Weiser, "More Talks Expected in Rape Lawsuit," *New York Times*, April 16, 2014.

[382] Staples, "When Mass Hysteria Convicted 5 Teenagers."

[383] Dwyer, "From 'Central Park Five' Case, a Lesson in Assigning Blame."

[384] Sarah Weinman, "There's Much More to Linda Fairstein's Story," *Washington Post*, June 14, 2019.

changing outlook on the case. It shifted from disbelief to believing in the innocence of the five men.

This change in perspective was also seen when looking at the three sub-frames of the White Racial Frame. What changed concerning the dehumanizing animal-like sub-frame was how the articles tackled the animalistic connotations of the case. Instead of leaning into and using animalistic language, journalists recognized that the animal-like characterization took place around the case. The terms "wilding" and " wolf pack" emphasized how the boys were depicted.[385] However, the term "wilding" associated with the Central Park Jogger case was put forth in another case in April 2010. New York City's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, spurred the term when he described a shooting in Times Square.[386] Newspapers picked it up and printed articles where he talked about "gang members" that caused the commotion. Although not many newspapers specified the race of the group of thirty people, it was implied that their skin was not white.[387] Through coded language, the articles spoke of blackness without spouting overtly racist epithets.[388] The changing way the media approached the Central Park Five case did not cause the media to apply the same approach to newer cases.

In addition to the awareness of the depiction of the boys, the men got a small amount of room to tell the media themselves how they experienced the negative attention. Antron McCray said, "demonstrators, you know people just shouting, you know, 'Rapist!' 'You animal!' 'You don't deserve to be alive.' It just felt like the whole world hated us."[389] McCray felt the weight of the public's anger coming down on him in various forms. Kevin Richardson gave a heartfelt speech after the settlement was finalized and said, "nobody gave us a chance, except the people

[385] Staples, "When Mass Hysteria Convicted 5 Teenagers"; Russ Buettner, "City Subpoenas Film Outtakes as It Defends Suit by Men Cleared in '89 Rape," *New York Times*, October 3, 2012; Sullivan, "Report: New York City to Settle with 'Central Park Five' for $40 Million"; Benjamin Weiser, "5 Exonerated In Jogger Rape Agree to Settle," *New York Times,* June 20, 2014.
[386] Burns, *The Central Park Five,* 211.
[387] Ibid., 212.
[388] Smiley and Fakunle, "From 'Brute' to "thug," 354.
[389] Jim Dwyer, "Cleared in the Rape of a Central Park Jogger, but Still Calculating the Cost," *New York Times,* November 21, 2012.

who believed in us. People called us animals – wolf pack."[390] The dehumanizing language greatly impacted Richardson and the rest of the men. These were the first articles where the men responded, and it became clear that the wording of the early articles had left their mark.

The hypersexual gendered-racist sub-frame was not present in the articles anymore. The only remarkable change connected to gendered news was that the media mentioned Trisha Meili's name for the first time.[391] She even spoke about what kind of emotions Matias Reyes triggered inside her. She said, "Reyes became real to me in a way the five had not."[392] The *Washington Post* published an article about her and her new book, *Victory Lap*. The racial tensions generated by the case were briefly mentioned in the article.[393] Mainly, the article was focused on Meili and her accomplishments. With the upcoming belief that the men were not vicious attackers, the usage of this sub-frame had died down.

Lastly, the criminal black man sub-frame was almost abandoned because the years after the exoneration, the public opinion about the five men had shifted. When articles mentioned the boys after the exoneration, they were children again. Lines such as "we see baby-faced 14-year-old Raymond Santana mumbling out a confession" and "Mr. McCray was last seen in public two decades ago as a skinny 16-year-old, practically drowning in a suit that he wore to the Manhattan courthouse" were featured.[394] Their humanity was acknowledged by using that language. Just as the mentioning of the families of four suspects sending flowers to Trisha Meili did.[395] The newspaper did not mention this fact in its earlier reporting.

What also shifted in tone was the attitude towards the police, the prosecutors, and police conduct. Around the time of the exoneration, newspapers took many remarks of the police and

[390] Taylor and Schweber, "After Settlement in Jogger Case, Plaintiffs Thank Supporters."
[391] "Jogger Victim Was 'Stunned' By Confession," *New York Times,* March 29, 2003.
[392] Ibid.
[393] Paula Span, "Victory Lap: 14 Years After Being Savagely Attacked, the Central Park Jogger Shares Her Story," *Washington Post,* April 14, 2003.
[394] Staples, "When Mass Hysteria Convicted 5 Teenagers"; Dwyer, "Cleared in the Rape of a Central Park Jogger, but Still Calculating the Cost."
[395] Newman, "The Afterlife."

prosecutors at face value. Nevertheless, the voices about the police changed in the newspapers after the exoneration. Especially the false confessions and the coercion that made those confessions happen got the spotlight. Criminal law specialist James Cohen said, "there is a real fair argument that the police bullied these people to confess because some of what they said is inconsistent, clearly, with the evidence."[396] The fact that the cameras had been turned off for most of the interrogation was also pointed out.[397] Many blamed the police for misconduct and letting another dangerous person run free. Namely, the police had let Matias Reyes slip away from their radar two days before the attack on the jogger.[398] The police and prosecutors received criticism from all sides. However, they continued to insist that they had acted without "malice and wrongdoing."[399] Linda Fairstein, the former prosecutor in charge of the sex crime unit, expressed that she thought "the five teenagers were properly charged."[400] Despite these voices being present, they became sparser, and the voices in support of the men became louder than the negative ones. Along these lines, the criminal black man sub-frame had diminished, as had the other two.

The years after the exoneration had considerably changed the language used in the newspapers. The wording had shifted from an overall present White Racial Frame to a subsided and almost gone one. Other system actors got criticism, especially the police and prosecutors bore the brunt. The transformation in this story's framing had already begun to form around the exoneration of the men. This shift carried on in the years that followed and eventually resulted in a new tone that supported the five unrightfully convicted men.

[396] Susan Saulny, "3 of 5 in Jogger Case Sue City, Charging a Wide Conspiracy," *New York Times,* December 9, 2003.
[397] Jim Dwyer, "Confessions, Manipulation And Injustice," *New York Times,* April 2, 2011.
[398] Dwyer, "In Botched Case Of Park Jogger, An Altered Life."
[399] Buettner, "Critics Tell City to Pay Those Wrongly Convicted in Park Jogger Case."
[400] Jim Dwyer, "Suit in Jogger Case May Be Settled, but Questions Aren't," *New York Times,* June 25, 2014.

Conclusion

> They were convicted on hysteria. It's hard to believe that a case with this lack of physical evidence was winnable. And if it had been a regular Jane Doe case, it would have been unwinnable.[401]

After the settlement was finalized, the five men tried to regain their lives. Four of them had left New York City; only Korey Wise stayed.[402] To pick up one's life after twenty-five years of being in the public eye must have been challenging. The articles written about the case will stay on record forever. This research shows that the frame the *New York Times* and the *Washington* Post provided for their readers changed over time. The coverage shifted from mass hysteria to an almost silence in the reporting. This shift was influenced by historical developments that changed their wording. The media's framework was always tied to the public discourse.

In the 1980s, the United States had endured policies from Republican presidents that negatively affected the black population. Despite overt racism declining, covert racism was rising.[403] Crime and blackness became synonyms in political rhetoric. The colorblind society was introduced. At the same time, Reagan wiped out the progress against poverty made by the War on Poverty. He let go of the policies that tried to erase poverty and introduced a new war: the War on Drugs. Drugs were the country's number one enemy in his eyes, and the public discourse became poisonous toward people caught up in the rise of crack cocaine. The media became flooded with images of "crack babies" and "predators," putting a specific group in a particular light.[404] This picture resulted in a deeply planted seed of fear toward black Americans.

On an urban level, this fear was extended to particular neighborhoods. The neighborhoods that were implicated were predominantly black communities. Multiple

[401] Jones, *Race, Sex, and Suspicion*, 53.
[402] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 185–87.
[403] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 49.
[404] Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 436; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 5, 49.

processes influenced the public discourse. First, suburbanization caused white flight in inner cities. In cities with the most significant increase in the black population, the white population decreased the most.[405] Coincidently, deindustrialization impacted inner cities immensely. While poverty programs were cut, unemployment swept the inner-city communities. Many residents were pulled toward criminality to pay the bills. The introduction of crack cocaine crushed any stability in inner-city neighborhoods nationwide. Add to that the fear of juvenile crime and the chaos in the United States was complete.

This chaos was noticeable in the newspapers. Especially the chaos in New York City was palpable. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* lost themselves in turmoil. The three sub-frames of the White Racial Frame were present in multiple ways. Animalistic comparisons were not abnormal, and dehumanization took place in various articles. The white woman was the epitome of innocence, while the five boys were part of a wolf pack that savagely attacked her. The boys were framed as violent and aggressive. The media attention was immense. It magnified the racial tensions that were at the surface of society. The articles made society's fear of black men and youths evident.

Fast forward thirteen years and the Central Park Five were back in the newspapers. This time there was another perpetrator on the podium. With the confession of Matias Reyes and DNA evidence, the newspapers revived many of the sentiments of the 1989 case. Again, the newspapers were influenced by the historical developments of the 1990s. The New Democrats incorporated the same tough-on-crime rhetoric in their political campaigns as the Republicans. Mass incarceration took flight under the leadership of Bill Clinton. Implementing the Violent Crime Act of 1994 penalized crack cocaine more severely, lengthened mandatory sentencing, and constructed new prisons.[406] The incarceration rates soared, racial disparities were ignored,

[405] Boustan, *Competition in the Promised Land*, 110.
[406] Enders, Pecorino, and Souto, "Racial Disparity in U.S. Imprisonment Across States and Over Time," 367; Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration," 223.

and society was further declared colorblind. Structural racism was denied, and, at the same time, the policies introduced by the Clinton administration furthered that same structural racism.

Local communities tried to develop policies with a less punitive approach to combat the structure that impacted the black population. In contrast, Mayor Dinkins introduced more than 5,000 officers on top of the 26,000 already roaming the city.[407] Crime rates did drop in the 1990s. However, this was not due to the new way of policing. The new way of policing did cause a further rift between the police and black communities. The tensions between the police and the low-income neighborhoods did not lessen with the crime drop.

All these developments translated into the articles about the exoneration of the Central Park Five. The emphasis was on the changing times and place, with New York City in the leading part. They highlighted that the newspapers and the public would have reacted differently if such an instance had occurred in 2002. The tone of the newspapers had changed somewhat. The media did not ignore the racial undertones the case had brought up. They even acknowledged the historical background of the accusation of a black man raping a white woman.[408] Looking back at the reporting, they acknowledged that the case had produced a media craze. This craze was tied to the chaos of the city and the nation at the time. What the newspapers failed to do, was take accountability for their role in that chaos. Newspapers reported on what other newspapers had published without acknowledging their part in the story. Thus, their tone changed in identifying the racial stereotypes, but their role was elusive.

Their attitude toward the five men had changed, albeit not entirely. In their reporting, they trusted the police and their statements. They gave ample space to the police and the report they published. The media provided room for dismissing Matias Reyes as the sole perpetrator. When the police called him into question as a reliable source, the media unquestioningly

[407] Burns, *The Central Park Five*, 182.
[408] Powell, "Reversals Sought in Central Park Jogger Case"; Santora, "Black Police Officers' Group Seeks New Jogger Case Inquiry."

reproduced these statements. In line with those tendencies were the observations that Reyes must have known the five boys.[409] The belief of innocence was not granted to the Central Park Five after DNA evidence proved Reyes to be the perpetrator. Many articles left the story open-ended. Often articles were closed with the statement that the truth about what happened that evening will never be known. This tendency revealed that the public was not ready to believe in the five men's innocence in 2002.

After years of struggling, the Central Park Five received a settlement of $40.7 million.[410] It took the city eleven years to settle with the men, who filed a suit in 2003. In those eleven years, the newspapers paid scant attention to the suit. A total of 33 articles were published. In those articles, the changing times were noticeable. The attitude towards the War on Drugs had shifted from much support to dubbing it a failure. Obama's administration attempted to reform elements of the War on Drugs. Although it became clear that the war had caused mass incarceration, the number of incarcerated people still increased. Only the Great Recession motivated state and local governments to try decreasing prisoners to reduce costs.[411]

Incarceration impacted people even after they obtained their freedom. To be labeled as a felon marked a person for life. The job market was impossible to navigate because employers were not hiring felons.[412] Other rights were also infringed and were difficult to gain back. Many were unable to vote for the first black president, Barack Obama. After his election, the ideology of the colorblind society experienced a boost by declaring the nation post-racial.[413] The denial of systemic racism was further expanded, and the notion that there were no excuses anymore took hold in the public discourse. At the same time, white Americans coined reverse

[409] McFadden and Saulny, "DNA in Central Park Jogger Case Spurs Call for New Review"; Kelley, "On Tape, Convict Insists That Only He Raped Jogger"; Dwyer, "Convict Says Jogger Attack Was His 2nd"; "N.Y. Rape Suspect's Credibility Questioned."
[410] Dwyer, "In Botched Case Of Park Jogger, An Altered Life."
[411] Clear and Frost, *The Punishment Imperative*, 6.
[412] Moore and Elkavich, "Who's Using and Who's Doing Time," 178; Bruce Western and Christopher Wildeman, "The Black Family and Mass Incarceration," 230; Coyne and Hall, "Four Decades and Counting: The Continued Failure of the War on Drugs," 2, 12; Gottschalk, "Hiding in Plain Sight," 245.
[413] Bonilla-Silva and Ashe, "The End of Racism?," 57.

discrimination as their number one problem.[414] In their eyes, affirmative action conflicted with the notion of a colorblind, post-racial society. The hundreds of years of systemic racism and disadvantages experienced by the black population were forgotten from that point of view.

Cities underwent their transformation in the 2000s. New York City was unrecognizable compared to the NYC of 1989. Gentrification took hold of the inner-city neighborhoods, and Harlem gentrified instead of crumbling underneath the weight of the recession. White Americans found the neighborhood and heightened the prices. Low-income households suffered because of the raised expenses. Once again, black communities paid the price for gentrification. Moreover, the Great Recession caused black households to struggle. The housing market was hit hardest. Because black families' wealth was primarily invested in houses, they suffered greatly from the recession. What did improve New York neighborhoods for black families was the fact that the stop-and-frisk program of the NYPD was declared unconstitutional.[415] After that decision, the police were forced to rethink their program and adjust their approach.

In the years that followed the exoneration, the media lost interest in the story of the five men. The *Washington Post* published six articles in those eleven years, a stark difference from how the case got picked up in 1989. Understandably, the settlement would not generate as many articles as around the case. The mass hysteria had died, and the five men were innocent and exonerated. However, it is telling that interest had died down in such an extensive way. Unlike the previous articles, these shifted further toward believing in the five men. The process set in motion around the time of the exoneration carried on in the eleven years it took for the settlement to finalize. Instead of unquestionably reproducing what the police and the city said about the case, the newspapers criticized the institutions for how they handled the case. Additionally, they were aware of how the boys were framed during the case and only used the

[414] Doane, "Shades of Colorblindness," 29.
[415] White and Fradella, *Stop and Frisk The Use and Abuse of a Controversial Policing Tactic*, 4.

terms like wilding and wolf pack to explain how they were depicted. For the first time, the Central Park Five got room to express their emotions about how the media treated them. Enabling them to speak considerably shifted how they framed the narrative.

The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* changed their attitudes toward the five men. Their attitudes evolved alongside the changing perspectives of the public, the cities, and the nation. The White Racial Frame showed the racialized language used by the media at the beginning of the reporting. The racialized language decreased through the years. The three sub-frames helped paint a picture of how the media adopted historically rooted ideas about black men and black communities. A frame is made with the historical context and framework influencing each other; one does not exist without the other. This thesis demonstrated that how the boys were depicted was highly influenced by the time they lived in. With the years going by, the frame changed as well. Eventually, the times changed positively for the men.

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