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Disciplining Black activism: post-racial rhetoric, public memory and decorum in news media framing of the Black Lives Matter movement

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ABSTRACT

The Black Lives Matter movement was created from a hashtag used on Twitter in 2013 in the United States when George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida, United States. Advocacy and non-violent protests by Black Lives Matter groups have been framed in news media reporting as riots and the group has been called 'racist' and 'anti-law enforcement'. This paper will unpack three rhetorical strategies that the news media uses to discuss BLM. I argue that the effect of these rhetorical strategies is the delegitimization of the very real problems concerning racial profiling and racial killings that the Black Lives Matter group protests. I will examine Black Lives Matter's own goals and how these are ignored or questioned by the news media in that the group is framed in a delegitimizing manner. This paper uses Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's concept of racial grammar in conjunction with a Foucauldian emphasis on governmentality to examine these instances of racist rhetoric in re-presentations of Black Lives Matter movement in US news media.

KEYWORDS

Black Lives Matter; post-race; racial grammar; governmentality; news media; rhetoric

Introduction

Black Lives Matter (BLM) was born from a hashtag on Twitter in 2013 when George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida, United States. The movement reignited into what it is today after the killing of African-American man Michael Brown in 2014 by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Protests by the BLM group have been framed as riots; and the group has been called racist and anti-law enforcement, which has led to the counter movements and advocacy Blue Lives Matter and 'All Lives Matter'. This paper seeks to unpack the racist rhetoric that has been used to delegitimize the very real problems that the BLM group seeks to find solutions for. It will examine the BLM group's own goals and how these are ignored and delegitimized in the news media.

This article first explains the BLM movement's beginnings and goals. Understanding what the BLM movement stands for helps contextualize how they are undermined in the news media (both liberal and conservative leaning). The following sections set out the theoretical and methodological framework for the close textual analysis of select news

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articles. Using Bonilla-Silva's theory of racial grammar and Foucault's theory of govern-mentality this article analyzes news articles from *Fox News, CNN,* and the *New York Times* to illuminate how racial grammar, through three different rhetorical strategies, is used to delegitimize the BLM movement and position their activists and protestors as 'bad' Black citizens, compared to the 'good' Black citizens who took part in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s–60s under Dr Martin Luther King Jr. I have selected these three news producers because while all news sources make claims to their objectivity, they are commonly viewed as exemplifying the following ideologies, conservative, centre, and liberal. As such, and without claiming to agree with these ideological framings, it nevertheless is useful to sample news items from what are held to be ideologically divergent sources in order to show how widespread and implicit the racial rhetoric surrounding BLM can be. The articles analyzed are from 2014 to 20 January 2017 as this time period is when a number of high profile Black deaths[1] occurred and were discussed in the context of the BLM movement under the so-called 'post-racial' pre-sidency of Barack Obama.

'Not a moment, but a movement' – Black Lives Matter

The BLM movement's beginnings are titled on the official website as HerStory, a term used to specify and position the history of BLM as one that came from a group of three women. Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi wanted to draw atten-tion to the social, economic, and political inequalities faced by African-Americans, as well as state a commitment to 'acknowledge, respect, and celebrate differences and commonalities' (Black Lives Matter 2017). The movement began after the acquittal of white neighbourhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman of the murder of unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin. Garza posted a love note to Black people on her Facebook and then Cullors, her friend, reposted it with the hashtag #black-livesmatter. The two women then reached out to another activist they knew, Tometi, and together they created Twitter and Tumblr accounts to encourage Black people to share why #blacklivesmatter (Day, 2015). Those early tweets expressed one reason that these three women started this movement: because they felt that Black libera-tion movements in the US had left out women, queer, and transgender people, and instead only created space and leadership for Black, cis-gendered, able-bodied, heterosexual men (Black Lives Matter 2017).[2]

The BLM movement focuses on inclusiveness and addressing inequality. It is con-cerned that Black people in America are more likely to be living in poverty, to be incarcerated, and to be used in state-sponsored Darwinian experiments if they are differently abled (Black Lives Matter 2017). The BLM tagline, 'This is not a moment, but a movement', underpins the philosophy that their group is not just concerned with high profile black deaths at the hands of white police officers, but the fixed, underlying, historical circumstances and structures that have led to this moment, and the different ways that the state enacts violence on Black Americans (Black Lives Matter 2017). While this article is only discussing the racial rhetoric that surrounds this group, it is important to mention the intersectional oppressions that the movement is attempting to draw attention to and in turn hopes to alleviate.

Racial grammar and governmentality

The news media examples that are studied in this article will be analyzed through Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's discourse of racial grammar. Bonilla-Silva describes racial grammar as the distillation of racial ideology, and as grammar constructs the rules of language, racial grammar constructs the rules, as such, of talking about race either directly or indirectly (2012). Whiteness a priori is an example of racial grammar, where whiteness is the assumed and un-named normative speaking position, whereas for Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Indigenous peoples they have to be 'named' and explicated by their race and ethnicity in everyday language. As a result, racial grammar normalizes white supremacy in society (Bonilla-Silva 2012). In this article, I will name white persons as I name Black persons to draw attention to this inequality. In Bonilla-Silva's paper 'The Invisible Weight of Whiteness', he discusses different areas of contemporary American society where whiteness becomes universal and Black people and other minorities are instantly 'Othered' or just simply ignored. Racial grammar can be further developed by incorporating Dana-Ain Davis' notion of racial indexing. Davis discusses racial indexing as the way in which code words are used that are implicitly, rather than explicitly, racially disparaging (2007). Davis' explains that it is important to note, 'the meanings of the words and phrases are understood to be racializing *by the racialised subject* and may or may not be recognized as such by the speaker' (2007, 352; emphasis in original). By discussing the way in which people use particular words that create a semiotically indexical relationship to a Black individual, people can discuss race in a discriminatory fashion without being explicitly racist, in the same way the news media uses the codified words like 'thug' to insinuate a Black person without mentioning race. In general, the racial grammar in the US context sets up Black and other minorities as less valued or less important as white people, and by using indexical code words, speakers can discriminate on the basis of race without actually mentioning race.

Racial grammar works discursively to create knowledge of particular groups of people at particular historical moments (Hall 1997). Racial grammar, like any discourse, is not carved in stone and, at times, changes the way in which race is talked about and how people are racialized. Under current neoliberal imposts, cultural values associated with individualism have generated a discourse of post-race where individuals not collective groups are made salient (Davis 2007). The idealized (but not realized) post-racial US society meant that talking directly about race was seen as racist, even if it was to point out inequalities between races (Esposito 2009). The rise of neoliberalism has also placed more emphasis on individual responsibility for how a person's life is structured by choice as opposed to structural conditions (such as racism) shaping what choices are afforded to individuals (Goldberg 2015). A post-racial discourse is paradoxical in that it requires the existence of race in order to diminish its significance and locate it in the past. It is not the rejection of race per say but rather a repudiation of its legitimacy as an explanatory framework for understanding contemporary social reality. Post-racial discourse directs attention away from structural systems of racism and instead places the blame on individuals themselves for their lack of success (Bonilla-Silva 1997). This post-racial, neoliberal ideology permeates the news media content that I analyze. I argue that three different rhetorical strategies: the deployment of public memory, utilizing rules of decorum, and the reproduction of a post-racial discourse are used to delegitimize the BLM movement.

Foucault's notion of governmentality is useful for understanding how the discourses of post-racial and neoliberal ideologies are internalized into governing mentalities in news and public discourse. Nikolas Rose (1996) states that governmentality,

> seeks to degovermentalise the State and to de-statise practices of government, to detach the substantive authority of expertise from the apparatuses of political rule, relocating experts within a market governed by the rationalities of competition, accountability and consumer demand… through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualisation and self-fulfilment (147)

What Rose is articulating here is the role of governing mentalities in disciplining individuals to view their success or failure as tied to their own personal choice, which works to delegate governance to individuals in line with the de-statising practices of neoliberalism. This normalization of post-racial discourse and neoliberalism happens through governmentality, or the governance of self, whereby subjects modify, change, or alter their behaviour to reach the state's required standard of normalcy. Governmentality is not state directed but is instead circulated through different social and cultural institutions and texts that express certain levels of expertise that make their statements or claims appear 'true'. These institutions, such as schools, medical establishments, and news media hold a level of respect and acknowledged power in our society and therefore the things we are taught in school, or are told about our bodies by doctors, we tend to believe without much questioning.

The transition to neoliberal modes of responsibility intensify governmentality. Media texts are a form of governmental technology that help to shape citizens' behaviours to govern themselves (Ouellette and Hay 2008). Television programming in particular can do this. Ouellette and Hay (2008) discuss the use of reality television as a governmental technique for creating 'good' citizens. I will argue that news programming also uses 'expertise' and other techniques of news programming discourse to position BLM in relation to 'good' and 'bad' black citizens.

Because news media are traditionally viewed as objective and the key source of factual and truthful information in society, the knowledge they circulate is awarded a considerable degree of authority. As Mickler (1998) argues,

> The news media are concerned with the inspection of the operation and state of societal governance. News is a *governmental function within an "administered society"* and news and campaign media… are integral to the *governmental problematising of population*. (45; emphasis in original)

As a technology of governance, news media have the authority to create knowledge about certain groups, where they may problematize particular groups and position other groups as socially desirable. Mickler's (1998) article is concerned with the way in which news media re-presents Indigenous Australians. He discusses the way in which news media has the power to visualize deviance, which can lead to different stereotypes about specific groups. This is what the US news media attempts with its framing of the BLM movement, the emphasizes on the 'deviant' members of the movement uses racial grammar, such as the word 'thug' and the phrase 'race-hustler', as a means to delegitimize the movement as a whole.

Disciplining black activists: rhetoric strategies to delegitimize BLM

News media, as previously stated, exercises a governmentalizing power and is one of the sites where racial grammar and racial indexing is prevalent and easily identifiable. This is not to say that the news media has the intent of being racist, but the dominance of particular types of phrasings used to describe Black and white individuals or groups *are* racist and should have attention drawn to them. There are three strategies that the news media uses to delegitimize the BLM movement: the deployment of public memory, utilizing rules of decorum, and the maintenance of post-racial discourse. The following sub-sections will unpack these three rhetorical strategies and the way that the news media uses them.

Deployment of public memory

One of the biggest critiques of BLM in the news media is that they do not emulate the supposedly non-violent protest style of the 1960s civil rights movement (Hooker 2016). This is a rhetorical strategy I am calling a *deployment of public memory*. By constantly comparing the BLM to Martin Luther King Jr.'s Civil Rights movement, the news media can delegitimize the actions by BLM because they do not emulate Dr King's 'peaceful protests'. On a broadcast of *The O'Reilly Factor*, that aired 11 July 2016, white man Bill O'Reilly, Fox News' most profitable star,[3] conservative political pundit and author, states that Martin Luther King would not support BLM.[4] O'Reilly's reasoning for this is that Dr King was a pacifist and did not condone violence, whereas in O'Reilly's opinion (which is treated as fact) the BLM movement does condone violence and chooses to use violent rhetoric to encourage it ('O'Reilly: Martin Luther King Would Not Support Black Lives Matter Movement' 2016). Historically speaking, the non-violent civil rights protests have been romanticized as the only form of protest that led to social change. Meanwhile, the other civil rights groups of the time, such as the Black Panthers, have been delegitimized as 'thuggish' and a 'distraction' to Dr King's advocacy (Hooker 2016).[5] This deployment of public memory, where the Civil Rights movement is framed as being worthy of remembrance according to socially acceptable discourse on non-violent advocacy, such as a selective remembrance of King's speeches and the March on Washington, is a useful rhetorical strategy used by *Fox News* ('Black Lives Matter Activists Aim To "Reclaim" MLK As Radical' 2017) to delegitimize BLM protests which do not mimic these non-violent protests.

It is important to note that the Civil Rights Movement was often met with violence. While the Civil Rights activists purposefully enacted polite and decorous behaviour as much as possible at civil protests, such as sit-ins, freedom rides and boycotts, Dr King, along with other activists, were often beaten by police or white citizens at their non-violent protests. Civil Rights organizers of the time[6] asked demonstrators to use non-violent protest styles to draw attention to the inequalities of the social system. By demonstrating peaceably in the face of abuse (physical and verbal) by white individuals the demonstrators made their oppressors act inappropriately (Cmiel 1994). While the Civil Rights activists made a point of using non-violent protest styles, the State itself held a monopoly on force and could enact violence on the Civil Rights activists whenever and wherever they chose, without fear of retribution. Hooker (2016) argues that the historical narrative of the Civil Rights movement has been romanticized to ignore the violence of white supremacism and perpetuate a discourse that only some forms of protest are

socially acceptable. Now that it is legitimate to publicly remember and accept Dr King's historical advocacy, much of the racist and racial structures he was fighting against become obscured in the contemporary context. Dr King's choice to use non-violent modes of protest was not necessarily because he was a pacifist, but because he knew that he and the other members of the Civil Rights Movement would face violence. By meeting violence with non-violence, they were able to draw attention to white supremacy, using the violence against them as proof (as it was broadcast in the nightly news) of the unfair and unequal system.

In January 2017 *Fox News* published an article that attempts to deploy public memory through invoking the romantic narrative of Dr King as a peaceful protester "Black Lives Matter Activists Aim To 'Reclaim' MLK As Radical" 2017). The article argues that BLM activists see King as an agitator and draw many parallels between the Civil Rights Movement under his leadership and their own movement today. While this article may seem impartial, the use of the word 'reclaim' in quotation marks in the title works discursively to suggest that Dr King was not radical and implies his anti-racist advocacy was socially acceptable. The first sentence of this article states,

> The civil rights hero Martin Luther King Jr. famously pursued equality through peaceful protest, but many 21st century activists have said they want to "reclaim" him under a different image: as a forceful "radical." ("Black Lives Matter Activists Aim To 'Reclaim' MLK As Radical" 2017)

The news copy frames Dr King as a peaceful protester. By pairing words like 'hero' and 'famously', the article works to romanticize Dr King's work by downplaying how politically dangerous his ideas were to white society and also invalidate claims by the BLM activists that he was a radical. The use of the word 'but' works grammatically to introduce a new phrase that contradicts with the first. By crafting the sentence in this way and placing the activists' image of Dr King as a radical second, it suggests their claims are contradictory to the 'common sense' view of the man. The use of the words 'forceful' and 'radical' can be understood here as racial grammar, which have negative connotations in this news context, especially in relation to protest movements. What this *Fox News* article ignores is that Dr King famously said in an interview on *CBS* that, 'riot is the language of the unheard' (1966). This was his way of explaining to the [white] mainstream news audience why some Black people choose to riot. For Dr King, 'rioting' occurs because oppressed groups do not have other avenues to air their grievances and defend their lives.

Fox News chooses to disregard the more radical aspects of Dr King's speeches in favour of the more decorous and hopeful sounding sentences. For instance, when the media and public remember Dr King's 'I have a Dream' speech (Washington Monument, 1963), the lines that are often quoted are the hopeful ones about the dreams for his children and the nation. For example, the line, 'I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but the content of their character' (King 1963) is one of the most well-known lines in the speech. Earlier parts of the speech where King states that if whites think that Black people will now be content to go back to 'business as usual' and that there may be 'whirlwinds of revolt that will shake the foundations of our nation' are often ignored (King 1963). He does not threaten violence but calls for continued pressure in breaking down the structures of racism. This deployment of public memory by *Fox News* not only justifies the state violence that is enacted upon the BLM activists, but also imposes a

norm of decorum that disciplines and tames Dr King's rhetoric for the purpose of delegitimizing BLM protest as being too radical *compared to* Fox's re-telling of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. This imposition of decorum on the BLM protests is another rhetorical strategy that is used by the news media to delegitimize the BLM movement.

Decorum

Decorum is another rhetorical strategy that the news media uses to delegitimize the BLM protestors. Decorum reiterates cultural norms of stranger sociability. Decorum also restricts access to public spaces to certain individuals who do not perform or conform to these social codes that govern public spaces (Deem 2002). Those who do not conform to these normative forces of decorum are seen as 'unfit for citizenship and public participation' (Deem 2002, 45). This can be seen in the news media's April 2015 reporting on Freddie Gray's murder while in police custody. Following his death, protests ensued around the city of Baltimore. These protests began peacefully, as first reported by the *New York Times* and *CNN*, but then a small proportion of the protestors turned into violent rioters – looting, hurling bricks and other objects at police and police vehicles (Babcock 2015; Yan and Ford 2015). Despite the articles' acknowledgement of peaceful protest, most of the content and the photographs that are included with the articles visualize, in the Mayor of Baltimore's words, young black 'thugs' (Yan and Ford 2015). The focal point of the story changed, as in earlier reports on Freddie Gray's death both *CNN* and *New York Times* described the peaceful protest and the unlawful death of Gray (McLaughlin 2015; Stolberg and Nixon 2015). The focus then changed to a narrative of Black youths attacking police officers, rioting and 'destroying the city' (Yan and Ford 2015).

The *New York Times*' headline 'Scenes of Chaos in Baltimore as Thousands Protest Freddie Gray's Death', conflates the chaos occurring in Baltimore with the protesters. Headlines like this work discursively to frame the 'thousands' of protestors as the people creating the chaos, rather than conveying the reports that it was a small minority who were looting and destroying property.[7] The *New York Times*, being a well-established news institution, has an authority that gives the words that they publish a governmentalizing effect. What the *New York Times* writes creates knowledge about certain groups – in this case, the BLM protestors in Baltimore – and emphasizes deviant behaviour in order to demonstrate an example of 'bad' citizenship (Mickler 1998). The images that the *New York Times* used in this particular article also helped to visualize 'deviance'. For instance, the photograph at the top of the article is one of young Black men atop a car. The photo is taken from a low angle looking up at the men, which makes them look dominant and menacing in the image. Another photo in the slideshow that accompanies the article is one where a Black man is about to throw a chair into a shop front while a white man can be seen pulling a white woman away in fear. By placing the images of the deviant behaviour prominently at the top of the article, while photos of the more peaceful aspects of the protest are near the bottom of the article, the *New York Times* is positioning BLM protestors as 'bad' citizens. 'Bad' citizens are given news salience which works to make invisible the non-violent protests, as they do not gain as much media coverage. There are more news articles written about the violent protests, than the non-violent.

The *CNN* article offers up much of the same rhetoric that BLM protestors are 'bad' citizens. *CNN* headlines their article, 'Baltimore riots: Looting, fires engulf city after Freddie Gray's funeral', by using the word 'riot' and mentioning Freddie Gray by

name, again conflating those protesting his death (which had been occurring for several days at the point of the article going online) and the rioting, conducted by a small group of the protestors. The *CNN* headline's language is arguably more dramatic than the *New York Times*. The phrase 'fires engulf city' creates the image of the entire city of Baltimore on fire, when there was only one major building fire that was reported and then several cars set alight around the city. *CNN*'s article compares Baltimore to a 'war-zone', likely to conjure devastating images for the reader. Comparing a protest, and the property damage and violence that occurred after them, to a war-zone is one way to emphasize the negative behaviour of some of the protestors and use that minority to stand in for all the protestors. The photos at the top of the page of the *CNN* article show a group of young black men on a vandalized police car, whereas, at the bottom of the article, is another set of images, showing the peaceful protests that occurred before violence erupted. By locating these images at the bottom of the article, *CNN* hides the 'good' protesters of the BLM movement, and instead concentrates on the violent minority, the 'bad' citizens. These two articles use their headlines and chosen cover photos to contribute to the discourse that BLM is a group of violent and disobedient Black youths or to use the shorthand term 'thugs', as the Baltimore mayor (and President Obama) did when discussing the Baltimore riots.

This focus on the 'bad' protesters who are not following the 'rules' of social respectability helps to delegitimize the BLM protesters. Rules of decorum are often used to silence those groups that are trying to draw attention to inequalities (Lozano-Reich and Cloud 2009). Historically, rules of decorum and civility have been stated to be essential to a democracy – Lozano-Reich and Cloud (2009) argue that protesters 'inherently do not operate within the realm of decorum' (224). When the news media constructs stories about protesters they often make implicit comparisons to civil standards of decorum, that the protesters are breaking, much like in the *New York Times* and *CNN* articles about the Baltimore protests. While *Fox News* uses the deployment of public memory to critique movements like BLM, they ignore and forget that while the 1960s Civil Rights activists used decorous modes of protests, they were in fact breaking the law in many instances by doing so (Cmiel 1994). While the BLM movement is often not breaking laws, as protest is legal, the disruption to standards of civility and politeness are what the news media paints as deviant.

Reproduction of post-racial discourse

The positing of racism by the BLM movement as a structural issue sustaining inequality has received some backlash, primarily from those on the conservative side of American news media and politics. These individuals have termed members of the BLM movement 'race hustlers', in a move to maintain a post-racial discourse. A 'race hustler' is a person who blames 'white privilege, an unfair society and a terrible country' (The O'Reilly Factor 2014) for the problems that face black people in America. The act of naming racism as a system of inequality ruptures post-racial discourse. Calling the BLM activists 'race hustlers' is an attempt to reassert post-racial discourse through arguing that protestors are using race as an excuse for their own individual misfortune. Within a post-racial discourse, the act of calling out racism is construed as racist (Esposito 2009). Conservative media journalists, such as Bill O'Reilly (before he was cancelled) and Sean Hannitty of *Fox*

News, use the term 'race hustler' as a call to focus on what really matters, self-responsibility (The O'Reilly Factor 2014). 'Race hustler' is a loaded term. The appropriation of the word hustler in African American hip-hop and rap music by artists, such as 50 Cent, Cassidy, Ice T, Lil Wayne, and Beyoncé creates a connotation between the term hustler and poor black neighbourhoods, the consumption and dealing of drugs and prostitution. These activities are usually seen as deviant as they do not support 'productive' ways of belonging to society, so the term hustler generally has negative connotations (although ironically a hustler exemplifies the values of neoliberal entrepreneurialism). A 'race hustler' describes a person who is trying to advance black opportunity and status through the naming of racist events, situations or commentary. When *Fox News* names BLM activists as race hustlers, it implies that resources, such as economic opportunity and physical well-being are equally distributed among the population. It positions white people as the objects of racial and economic injury, akin to being robbed of what is 'rightfully' theirs.

Race hustling in this sense can be compared to Dr King's metaphor of 'cashing a cheque'. In his 'I Have a Dream' speech he spoke of the 'promissory note' that the US Declaration of Independence gave to all Americans, the guarantee to the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. For Black Americans, King argued, when they cashed in this 'cheque' they were told they had insufficient funds. America had defaulted on this promise. King frames the right and promise of liberty as something that all Americans are entitled to. The *Fox News* pundits by contrast, imply that the right to liberty is something that belongs to white Americans and that Black Americans are only 'allowed' to receive this right if they act in a civil and decorous way, as defined by the white majority. The implication is that groups like BLM are trying to gain rights (that they are entitled to) through force, which makes their claims for rights seem illegitimate. O'Reilly denies the existence of white privilege which would explain the inequalities, instead he uses statistics on unemployment rates, median household incomes and family units to compare Blacks, whites and Asians (The O'Reilly Factor 2014). O'Reilly uses these statistics that show that Asian Americans have the lowest unemployment rates, highest median incomes and low rates of single-parent homes, as an example of how race does not create structural inequalities. O'Reilly goes on to state that Black children must learn 'civil behaviour' to be able to act 'correctly' in public and goes on to say if they do not learn this civil behaviour they will be 'poor… angry… looking to blame someone else' (2014). This privileging of civility is positioned against the way in which BLM activists act during their protests. 'Race hustler' is used almost exclusively to delegitimize Black activists who are voicing their concerns on state violence enacted against them or their support for groups like BLM. So, for right-wing commentators, 'race hustler' is a specific rhetorical tool that they wield to reproduce the post-racial discourse.

'Race hustler' could also be used to describe these right-wing news commentators as they hustle or sell their whiteness to reproduce this discourse. By naming BLM activists as race hustlers, O'Reilly and Hannitty are utilizing their race, their whiteness, in a hostile way. Using their whiteness to push back against the advancement of Black people denies BLM's claims of structural racism. A hustler holds power against the person they are trying to hustle. Colloquially, if you are 'hustled' it means a person/hustler has taken something from you (usually money) and you don't realize it until after the fact. White governmental experts have the power of their race to hustle Blacks (and other minorities) out of their civil rights, money, and property. These white 'experts' in the news media hustle race for the purposes of

reproducing a post-racial discourse. They deny race as a system of oppression and take away the opportunity to discuss the material effects of racism. The post-racial discourse assumes that racism is over, which means that those identifying structural racial inequalities are blaming a system for 'their problems' instead of taking personal responsibility. The *Fox News* pundits are selling their whiteness and using carefully selected Black members of society who conform to their notions of civility to state that those who proclaim race is a structural issue are just victimizing themselves. By drawing attention to racial inequalities as a structural issue, BLM activists are fracturing the post-racial discourse that obscures these issues. Fox News, in reaction to this discursive break invoke 'race' by labelling BLM 'race' hustlers to rhetorically suggest that race has no significant explanatory purchase on social reality other than as a ruse. However, in order to do this, they must know better (to see through the ruse) so they are also positioning themselves as race experts even as they invoke post-racialism.

Conclusion

The binary of 'good' and 'bad' Black citizenship promoted in the news media examples analyzed in this paper, aligns 'good' Black citizens with neoliberal values of individualism and personal responsibility. 'Bad' Black citizens by contrast, draw attention to structural racism that discriminates against them. There are parallels between this binary and the one between the BLM movement and the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr King. Even though the goals of each movement were similar (finding solutions for social, political, and economic inequalities between races), the violence that has erupted during BLM marches and protests has led to some in the news media using rhetorical strategies that position the movement as violent and anti-police. This article has examined the deployment of public memory, utilization of the rules of decorum, and the reproduction of a post-racial discourse through rhetorical strategies that structures anti-BLM discourse in US-based news media. Anti-racist struggles draw attention to and confront the historical structure of racism, sexism and State violence. This confrontation of negative societal aspects means that anti-racist movements like BLM have to be discursively and rhetorically delegitimized by those in power. The BLM group seeks to end the inequalities that confront Black people in their everyday lives, empower and create spaces in leadership for Black women, as well as queer and transgender Blacks, who are often omitted from the story of Black Civil Rights. However, *Fox News, CNN,* and *New York Times'* re-presentation of the BLM movement in a negative light means that the news media can ignore and delegitimize the movement's goals. While *Fox News* may seem extreme in its racial rhetoric, it should not be viewed as an outlier to an otherwise racially equitable mode of reporting, but rather, as existing on a continuum of racial grammar that makes it difficult for peaceful protesting to gain news salience in mainstream media outlets, such as *CNN* and *New York Times*.

Notes

1. Michael Brown, shot by white police officer Darren Wilson in Missouri – Eric Garner choked to death by white police officer Daniel Pantaleo in New York – 12 year old Tamir Rice shot by white police officer Timothy Loehmann in Ohio – Freddie Gray killed by white police officers in Maryland – Walter Scott, shot by white police officer Michael Slager in South Carolina – Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Cynthia Hurd, Sharonda Coleman-

      Singleton, Myra Thompson, Ethel Lance, Rev. Daniel Simmons, DePayne Middleton-Doctor and Susie Jackson murdered by white supremacist Dylann Roof in South Carolina .

2. Many Black feminist scholars have already written on the issues that BLM draws attention to. See: *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins (2000); *Are Prisons Obsolete?* by Angela Y. Davis (2011); *Habeas Viscus* by Alexander G. Weheliye (2014).

3. Until he was fired for sexual misconduct in April 2017.

4. Several articles have been written that contradict O'Reilly's claim and state that they think Dr King would have supported the BLM activists. See Richard Lischer's article in *The Washington Post* (2018) and Megan Garber for *The Atlantic* (2015).

5. The Black Panther Party was known for trying to draw attention to police brutality in Oakland, California. They also ran a variety of community programmes, most notably Free Breakfast for Children programmes. The group was under FBI investigation in an attempt to undermine group leadership. The Black Panther Party was often re-presented in the media in a negative light, compared to Dr King's Civil Rights movement.

6. Organizations, such as Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

7. Other studies in the area of social movements have found this to be a commonly used media framing technique to delegitimize protest. Work such as *The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control* by Bowers, Ochs, Jenson and Schulz (2009) looks in depth at the media framing of social movements including the 1960s Civil Rights movement. Todd Gitlin's 2003 book *The Whole World is Watching* is another that looks at social movements and how the media frames them.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Chloe Banks recently submitted her MA thesis in Communication Studies at the University of Otago. Her thesis is concerned with investigating white television audiences of post-racial television shows and mapping this television consumption to how they frame current events and racial discourse surrounding the BLM movement. She currently works as a tutor at University of Otago.

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