



Center for Population Dynamics

School of Social and Family Dynamics
Arizona State University

Tempe, Arizona, 85287-3701, USA www.asu.edu/cepod

CePoD Working Paper # 09-117

Media Representations of Racial and Ethnic Population Change in Atlanta, Georgia: 1990-2000

Eileen Diaz McConnell

2009

**Media Representations of Racial and Ethnic Population Change
in Atlanta, Georgia: 1990-2000**

Eileen Diaz McConnell
Department of Transborder Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies
Arizona State University
Lattie F. Coor Hall, Room 6635
Mail Code 3502
Tempe, AZ 85287-3502
480.727.7073
480.965.7165 fax
eemcconn@asu.edu

DATE: March 31, 2009. Paper in progress, to be submitted to *Latino Studies* for publication in Special Issue: "Latino/as and the Media."

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the American Seminar, University of Kansas Hall Center for the Humanities, November 2008 and at the Latino/as and the Media conference and workshop, John Jay College, CUNY, New York City, NY, February 2009. The author appreciates the insightful feedback of participants at the American Seminar and the Latino/as and the Media Conference, especially Kimberly Ebert, Adriana Katzew, G. Cristina Mora, and Dina Okamoto.

Media Representations of Racial and Ethnic Population Change in Atlanta, Georgia: 1990-2000

The U.S. population has experienced substantial racial and ethnic change in recent years, becoming far more diverse in 2000 than in previous decades. Groups such as Latinos and Asians experienced strong population growth and became more geographically dispersed within the country during the 1990s. Most Americans were likely to learn about these demographic shifts from mainstream media coverage of Census 2000 results. This study considers how journalists in Atlanta, Georgia, a non-traditional destination for Latinos and Asians, conveyed a simultaneous and large influx of Latinos, Asians, African Americans and Whites to the area. Analyses of seventy *Atlanta Journal Constitution* articles published between 2000 and 2003 reveal that reporters were unlikely to provide balanced coverage about local racial/ethnic change. Instead, journalists provided far more statistical information about Latinos and Asians than either Whites or African Americans. Overall, the study reveals how, even when reporting “hard” statistics, news outlets participate in discourses that help sustain and disguise the racialized hierarchy in the United States.

Keywords: Race, Ethnicity, Demographics, Population growth, Newspapers

INTRODUCTION

Since 1980, the United States has experienced strong population growth of non-White groups, particularly Latinos and Asians (Hobbs and Stoops 2002).ⁱ Consequently, by 2000, the country had become far more racially and ethnically diverse than in previous decades. Another important demographic trend is the geographic diffusion of where such groups reside. For instance, although native and foreign-born Latinos continue to be concentrated in cities like Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, and New York City; others have moved to “new” places, including rural locations and metropolitan areas that traditionally have not had a substantial Latino presence (Kandel and Cromartie 2004; Suro and Tafoya 2004). Like Latinos, U.S. and foreign-born Asians have traditionally been geographically concentrated, but are rapidly becoming more widely dispersed across the country (Min 2006; Xie and Goyette 2004). Indeed, by 2005, 27.5 percent of recently arriving Asian immigrants were selecting “new destination” states compared to 24.2 percent selecting California (Massey and Capoferro 2008).ⁱⁱ

Despite a burgeoning scholarly literature about the recent growth and changing settlement patterns of Latinos and Asians, most Americans were likely to learn about these shifts from mainstream media coverage. The current project investigates how newspaper reporters in one non-traditional destination, Atlanta, represented local racial and ethnic demographic changes documented in the 2000 census of the U.S. population. The study examines seventy articles published in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC)*, the most widely-circulated newspaper in the Southeast, over a four-year period. Of particular interest are journalistic practices regarding the usage and context of census figures about racial and ethnic groups; that is, how journalists use and frame demographic statistics about the four largest groups in Atlanta: African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Whites.ⁱⁱⁱ

Statistics generally are framed as an impartial and scientific form of categorizing and measuring individuals into units (Porter 1986), yielding “hard” numbers that are widely considered to represent an objective reality that is free from bias. However, journalists, policy makers, and others have many choices about *how* and *when* to use statistics about any issue or group. This study focuses on whether reporters provided parallel and balanced statistical information about all four racial and ethnic groups or concentrated on the dynamics of some groups and not others. Identifying how reporters use statistics about racial/ethnic groups provides important insights about contemporary representations of race and ethnicity in the United States.

A large body of research connects media coverage and public opinion and/or behavior (e.g., Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Preiss et al. 2007; Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Media representations of statistics vis-à-vis racial and ethnic groups may influence the public’s perception of demographic changes occurring in the country, which can have profound implications for interpersonal and structural racial and ethnic relations. Indeed, how members of the media present the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the United States could have significant attitudinal and behavior implications. For instance, news coverage that provides uncontextualized references to the rapid increase of non-White populations could help create a widespread perception of racial and ethnic threat. In turn, perceived threats could encourage some policy makers, communities, and organizations to pursue policies that impede the targeted groups’ social, economic, and political mobility. Such actions can have a chilling impact on native and foreign born members of groups such as Asians and Latinos, who tend to be homogenized in the U.S. (Oboler 1997; Kim 2007; Pew Hispanic Center 2007). Moreover, such representations ignore the important historical contributions of Latinos and Asians to the U.S. economy and society (e.g., García 1996; Kwong 2002).

This project makes two contributions to existing scholarship about race, ethnicity, and the mainstream media. First, the study links a recent demographic trend—increasing racial/ethnic diversity in a Southern city—with media portrayals of this pattern. Scholars have devoted significant attention to analyzing media coverage of population dynamics such as unauthorized Mexican migration and related legislation in California (e.g., Santa Ana 2002; Ono and Sloop 2002). The movement of Latinos to “new areas”; however, has received far less consideration. Past research on media representations of Asians have identified common stereotypes associated with Asian men and women (Mansfield-Richardson 2000; Hamamoto 1994; Shah 2003). To date, no published study has examined newspaper coverage of the simultaneous geographic dispersion of Latinos and Asians across the country and the ensuing diversification in cities like Atlanta. The investigation of media representations of multiple Non-White racial/ethnic groups undertaken here also is unusual; few studies compare media coverage of minority groups to each other (e.g., Shah and Thornton 1994; Shah and Thornton 2004).

Second, the present focus on media representations of statistics about racial and ethnic change in the U.S. connects the media and demography literatures. As described in the next section of the paper, scholars have identified the generally negative media representations of non-White groups in the U.S. and elsewhere; however, they have not explored how mainstream news outlets frame statistical information about race and ethnicity.^{iv} Others have examined the use and misuse of statistics in newspaper reporting, but none has focused on media coverage of statistics about racial/ethnic minorities. Conversely, demographers and other quantitative social scientists use “official” state-collected statistics about racial and ethnic groups, but rarely consider how such demographic information is socially constructed, much less how they are communicated to the larger public or how their use might shape public opinion and policies.^v

From 1990 to 2000, the Atlanta metropolitan area had the largest population increase of any Southern city; in 2000, Atlanta was the most populated city in the region (Census Bureau). African Americans have a long and rich history in Atlanta and the South (Dorsey 2004). In recent years, a considerable number of African Americans moved to Atlanta from other parts of the country. In fact, the city gained the largest number of African Americans of any U.S. metropolitan area during the 1990s (Frey 2003). Moreover, Atlanta is now considered an “emerging gateway” for immigrants, with rapid growing foreign-born populations from Mexico, India, China, and elsewhere from 1980 to 2000 (Singer 2004). As a result of these trends, Latino, Asian *and* African American populations increased by 300 percent or more in some Atlanta-area counties between 1990 and 2000. Over the same decade, Atlanta also gained the second largest number of Whites in the country (Frey 2003); a percent increase of 17 percent.^{vi} The substantial growth of all four racial/ethnic groups within a fairly short period of time points to Atlanta as an important site to study media representations of contemporary racial and ethnic change.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Analyses of the news media have considered such topics as discourses of power and inequality (Van Dijk 1988; Fairclough 1995; Gumperz 1983) and framing practices (Entman 2004; Entman and Rojecki 2000). This literature reveals how members of the media participate in the construction of knowledge in society, such as developing particular interpretations through the selection, emphasis, and juxtaposition of material (Entman 2004). Through these practices, media members participate in producing discourses that are not simply reflecting an objective reality. Rather, such discourses help create “what knowledge is considered useful, relevant and

‘true’. . . and what sorts of persons or ‘subjects’ embody which characteristics” (Hall 1997/2003: 6).

Theoretical work about race and ethnicity is relevant to the current study. Scholars of racial formation and critical race theory emphasize the centrality of race as *the* organizing principle in society (e.g., Banton 1998; Omi and Winant 1994; Fanon 1968). Racial formation theory contends that definitions of racial/ethnic categories and the selection of particular individuals to identify with those categories are established, changed, and destroyed via societal level “racial projects,” which explicitly link social structures and cultural representations (Omi and Winant 1994). These historically-situated projects, which include media discourses, simultaneously interpret, represent, and explain racial dynamics and how resources are (and should be) distributed by race (Omi and Winant 1994: 56).

Extensive empirical scholarship shows that media representations of non-White groups tend to be negative. For instance, Latinos, particularly Mexican migrants, are consistently depicted with dehumanizing language that characterizes this group as foreign others, threats, economic units, as having educational deficiencies, and as lower-class peons (Chavez 2001; Ono and Sloop 2002; Santa Ana 2002; Gutiérrez 2008; Flores 2003; Padín 2005; Rodríguez 1999). Media dissemination of these negative images has helped to create a generalized “Latino Threat Narrative” in contemporary American society (Chavez 2008: 3).

Coverage of other racial/ethnic minority groups also tends to be negative (Entman and Rojecki 2000; Dixon and Linz 2000; Hamamoto 1994; Wilson, Gutiérrez, and Chao 2003). For example, native-born Asians have been portrayed as racially inassimilable foreigners for decades (Lowe 1996; Ngai 2005; Shah 1999; Tuan 1998).^{vii} Non-White groups are not portrayed

identically. For instance, analyses of media advertising suggest that Latinos and Asians are presented as more “exotic” compared to African Americans, who are recognized as an integral part of “U.S. national identity and black/white racial imagery” (Dávila 2001: 225). Moreover, U.S. reporters emphasize the individual or cultural deficiencies and “lifestyles” of racial and ethnic minorities as both the cause and the solution to racial/ethnic conflict (Shah and Thornton 2004). They also ignore the effects of societal-level inequalities and minimize the involvement of Whites in such conflicts (Shah and Thornton 2004). In sum, this research complements the racial formation perspective, particularly through documenting how the mainstream media highlights the perceived shortcomings of non-Whites, reinforces the invisibility of White privilege, and supports the status quo.

To date, two studies have examined media coverage of U.S. Latino population growth.^{viii} In one, Rodriguez (2007) examined mainstream newspaper coverage of a Census Bureau report showing that Latinos had become the largest U.S. minority in 2001; she found that the predominant frame of is one of competition between Latinos and African Americans to be the largest minority group. In the second study, McConnell (2008) reveals that journalists depict Latinos and recent Latino population growth using the dramatic language of combustion, natural disasters, and the foreign “other”. Moreover, reporters frame Latino population growth as jeopardizing the resources and structural positions of both Whites and Blacks (McConnell 2008).

Research focusing on journalistic usage of statistics reveals that some reporters have difficulty with mathematics and quantitative data (e.g., Paulos 1996; Maier 2002; Berger 2000, 2001). Common errors include the misinterpretation of numbers and incorrect usage of mathematical terminology (Maier 2002). Inaccurate reporting of statistics also can take the form of providing numbers without sufficient context or appropriate benchmarks and confusing

correlation and causation (Paulos 1996). Texts written for journalists emphasize that statistics should be used with care (Meyer 2002), as using figures like percentage increase when the population base is small can lead to “hype” that distorts the reality of a phenomenon (Cohn and Cope 2001: 97).

Analyses of media coverage of “hard” science reveal additional problems. For example, reporters’ focus on compelling narratives and dramatic storylines can lead to misrepresentations of scientific issues such as chronic health hazards (Bomlitz and Brezis 2008) and the risks associated with fatal motor vehicle accidents (Connor and Wesolowski 2004). At times, journalists omit important data about the methodological features of scientific investigations and make errors of inference (e.g., Molitor 1993). Using numbers inappropriately can lead to erroneous reporting. For instance, journalists discussing trends that appear to be worsening over time are more likely to present frequency data than rate data (Berger 2001). However, using frequency data can exaggerate and dramatize situations that may or may not be deteriorating over time, as they do not account for simultaneous changes in the population on which the frequency is based (Berger 2001). Even when reporters provide appropriate quantitative information, the presentation of statistics can be less appealing to readers than a few dramatic but unrepresentative exemplars (Gibson and Zillmann 1994; Paulos 1996).

Taken together, previous empirical and theoretical scholarship is useful for developing specific expectations about how the *AJC* covered racial and ethnic change in Atlanta. Consistent with analyses of media coverage of statistics and “hard” science generally, I expect that reporters used quantitative information from the Census Bureau in a selective and incomplete manner, in order to emphasize the demographic trends that they considered to be particularly dramatic and compelling. The racial formation perspective and past empirical research offer insight about

which racial and ethnic trends reporters were likely to consider especially newsworthy: the growth of non-White groups. I expect that the increase of Whites in Atlanta was minimized, consistent with the minimization of White hegemony in other contexts (Shah and Thornton 2004; Shah and Nah 2004).

In addition, I expect that reporters provided different amounts of coverage about the growth of Latinos, Asians, and African Americans relative to each other. Previous research suggests that Latino population growth, and perhaps that of Asians, may be represented differently than the growth of the African American population. As noted earlier, Latinos and Asians are commonly portrayed as being on the fringes of American society; their historical contributions to the U.S. are not as well-known as African Americans. There are also significant differences with respect to each group's experience and demographic presence in Atlanta. African Americans have a rich history in Atlanta and the South and have represented the largest non-White group in the area for many years. In 2000, only a small proportion of Blacks in Atlanta, 5.1 percent, were foreign born (Census Bureau). In contrast, the majority of Latinos and Asians in Atlanta were immigrants, 77.6 and 87.2 percent, respectively and to be recent arrivals in the United States (Census Bureau).^{ix} For these reasons, journalists were likely to regard the growth of Latinos and Asians as more notable than African Americans, and focus more on the changes in the former groups than the latter. Finally, Latin American immigrants comprised 51.7 percent of all immigrants in 2000 (Census Bureau); estimates suggest that they comprise the majority of immigrants lacking legal status in the United States (Passel 2006). In the current economic and political context, reporters may have been especially attuned to changes in the local Latino population over other non-White groups.

METHODOLOGY

The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* is the largest daily newspaper in the Southeast (Perry 2004) and its Sunday newspaper has the highest circulation in the region (Editor & Publisher 2000). The U.S. Census Bureau began releasing Census 2000 data about the racial and Hispanic origin characteristics of the population in 2001 (Grieco and Cassidy 2001).^x The current study includes *AJC* articles published between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2003 to capture the media attention devoted to Census 2000 and results about racial/ethnic population change.^{xi}

Twenty counties comprise the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area, all with different growth rates of Latinos, Asians, Blacks, and Whites between 1990 and 2000. The study focuses on media coverage of one Atlanta-area county, Gwinnett, for two reasons. First, Gwinnett County had the largest Latino, Asian, and total immigrant populations in 2000 of any Georgia county (Census Bureau).^{xii} Second, it had the most equivalent percent growth of Latinos, Asians, and African Americans of all Atlanta-area counties during the 1990s: a 657% increase of Latinos, 319% growth of Asians, and 330% growth of African Americans (Census Bureau).^{xiii} Therefore, media coverage of Gwinnett County's simultaneous increase of multiple non-White groups should be more balanced than other counties where the growth rates were less equivalent.

The LexisNexis Academic database was employed to locate *AJC* articles that referred to relevant census results for Gwinnett County. The earliest available census data about racial and ethnic groups, and hence the most widely-reported in the media, referred to broad categories such as "Black or African American," "Asian," and "Hispanic" (e.g., Grieco and Cassidy 2001). I used these terms in the keyword search to find articles. Seventy articles included the keywords "Census" and "Hispanic" (or "Latino") and "Asian" and "African American" (or "Black") and

“Gwinnett” within the main text of the article and were analyzed in the study.^{xiv} I examined each article for the presence of statistical information and for *which* groups were statistics supplied. I categorized articles as including statistics if they provided specific figures such as a group’s absolute size in a particular year or percent growth between 1990 and 2000. When appropriate, illustrative examples are provided to suggest how reporters contextualized the statistics within articles.

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

Table 1 presents two types of information. First, each *AJC* article was examined for whether reporters used at least one statistic about one or more of the four race/ethnic groups. The figures shown in the first column of the table are based on all seventy articles in the study; the second column is limited to the fifty-five articles that included specific statistics about one or more groups.^{xv} Second, each article was examined to determine whether statistics were supplied for only one racial/ethnic group, several groups, or all four groups. Each row indicates whether an article provided statistics about a race/ethnic group, either in isolation or along with other groups. For instance, the “African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Whites” row indicates the percent of articles that included specific demographic information about all four groups within the same article. Similarly, the “Latinos only” row refers to articles that mentioned other racial/ethnic groups but only included specific statistic information about Latinos.

Table 1 About Here

Table 1 shows that journalists described racial and ethnic change in Gwinnett County in three primary ways: providing statistics about Asians and Latinos only, all four race/ethnic groups, or only Latinos. The most common pattern is that articles were most likely to provide

specific statistics of only one or two groups. Indeed, the “Asians and Latinos” row of Table 1 indicates that in 24.3 percent of articles, reporters provided demographic information about Latinos and Asians with no parallel information about Whites and Blacks.

In the second most common pattern, representing 21.4 percent of all articles, journalists supplied one or more statistics about African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Whites. A careful examination of these articles suggests that although statistics about all four groups were provided, there were often distinct differences in *how much* information was supplied about each group. For example, a team of journalists contributed to a lengthy article that provided the most detailed reporting on Census 2000 results about racial/ethnic change in Atlanta and thirteen metropolitan-area counties, including Gwinnett ("Burgeoning population affects counties differently" 2001). Five of the fourteen geographic areas, including Gwinnett County, were described using the same number and types of statistics about each group.

However, disparate information was provided about each group for nine of the fourteen areas. A good example is Cobb County, Georgia, an Atlanta-area county whose population increased by more than a third between 1990 and 2000. African Americans, Latinos, Whites, and Asians accounted for approximately 44 percent, 24 percent, 20 percent, and 7 percent of the county's growth over the decade, respectively (Census Bureau). Journalists described these changes in detail:

Whites, who comprised 94.6 percent of the population in 1980, now claim 72.4 percent. The Black population saw an increase of 159 percent during the last decade, rising to 114,223 in 2000, about 19 percent of Cobb's population. Another boom was recorded in the Asian population, which rose 139 percent in the 1990's. The most eye-popping trend toward diversity is reflected in the Hispanic population. A 400 percent increase was recorded since the 1990 census. During that count, the number of Hispanics was recorded as 9,403. That rose to 46,964 last year ("Burgeoning population affects counties differently" 2001).

In this passage, the reporter focused on the “sexy” story of a declining proportion of Whites in the past two decades and a rapidly increasing non-White population. The growth of African Americans and Latinos was accentuated through the use of multiple statistics compared to Whites and Asians.^{xvi} Dramatic language accompanied the statistics: terms such as “boom” and “eye-popping” described the growth of Asians and Latinos, more neutral language referred to African Americans (“saw an increase”), and *no* descriptive imagery was used for the proportional decline of Whites. Such articles suggest that even when statistics about all four groups were provided, the coverage of racial/ethnic change within the article were not balanced.

In addition, although multiple groups were mentioned in each article, when statistics were presented about only one group, it was most frequently about Latinos. Indeed, one-fifth of all articles provide statistics about the size or growth of the Latino population, even though references to other groups appear in the text unaccompanied by statistics. For example, one article noted that an “incredible number of Latinos and Asians” have settled in Gwinnett County, but only specific figures about Latinos warranted mention:

Gwinnett’s population, with a whopping 657 percent increase in Hispanics in the past decade, now claims the greatest number of Latinos in the Atlanta region. More are coming, too, furthering Gwinnett’s explosive growth (Chapman 2001).

Clearly, the more than six-fold increase of Latinos in Gwinnett County *is* newsworthy, especially compared to the smaller growth rates of other race/ethnic groups. Yet, in much of the news coverage, reporters did not provide parallel information that would put this growth in perspective. As noted earlier, this provided an incomplete portrait of the changes occurring in Gwinnett County: *all* groups experienced substantial increases since 1990. Journalists’ selective

use of statistics meant that readers were not given cues to contextualize the “whopping” population growth of Latinos.

Moreover, the emphasis on the growth of a few races and ethnicities and vague but ominous statements such as “more are coming too” were often linked with Gwinnett’s population boom and the subsequent problems associated with this growth. For instance, in an article about Gwinnett County’s controversial decision to take part in the metro Atlanta bus service after years of declining to participate, all four groups were mentioned, but only the size of the Latino population was identified:

One of the fastest-growing counties in the state, it has seen a dramatic demographic change. The county population soared from 352,910 residents in 1990 to 588,488 in 2000, according to the census. Many of those newcomers moved from cities or countries where public transit was a part of life. Fifty-five thousand of those newcomers were Latinos. Asians also moved to Gwinnett in record numbers, buying houses, filling apartments and starting businesses. White people and black people continued coming, as well (Quinn 2001).

Here again, by providing figures about Latinos while ignoring similar information about other groups, reporters did not accurately convey how Latino population growth fit within broader patterns of change occurring in Gwinnett County. In fact, 1990 and 2000 census data demonstrated that the absolute size growth of Latinos in Gwinnett County (55,667) was actually *smaller* than the absolute increase of Whites (78,616) or Blacks (58,866) (Census Bureau). However, this point was never made in reporting about racial/ethnic change in Gwinnett.

The same lack of context occurred when journalists used statistics only about Asians, as occurred in 7.1 percent of articles. Like Latinos, Asians also had a smaller numeric increase over the decade (32,065) than either Blacks or Whites. Statistics about all three non-White groups, African Americans, Asians, and Latinos, were provided far less often, appearing in only 5.7

percent of articles. Table 1 reveals still another striking result: journalists *never* provided demographic statistics of Whites and/or African-Americans alone.

The next table identifies which groups received the most media coverage in terms of how frequently journalists used statistics about each race/ethnicity, whether in an article providing only quantitative information about that group or with others. For example, the row for “Asians” in Table 2 notes articles where demographics were noted for all four groups, only Asians and Latinos, or only Asians. The results clearly demonstrate the extent to which media coverage about all four racial/ethnic groups in Gwinnett County was skewed, revealing the concerted repetition of statistics about Latinos and Asians compared with Whites and Blacks. For example, 71.4 percent of all articles recounted statistics about Latinos and 58.5 percent referred to Asian demographics (column 1, Table 2). In contrast, specific quantitative information about Whites and Blacks was provided in only 21.4 percent and 27.1 percent of articles, respectively. The second column shows that, of articles that explicitly provided statistics about any group, statistics about Whites were provided three and a half times less often than those about Latinos and nearly three times less often than those about Asians (27.3 percent, 90.9 percent, and 74.5 percent, respectively). Journalists were somewhat more likely to cite the demographics of African Americans than Whites, yet statistics about Blacks still appeared less than half as often as those referring to Latinos and Asians.

Table 2 About Here

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analyses support the above-mentioned expectations about how journalists cover statistics about racial and ethnic change. Although reporters may appear to be relaying statistics

in an objective manner, they were selective in how they used quantitative information. Journalists clearly emphasized some aspects of racial and ethnic demographic change over others. Approximately one-fifth of articles provided one or more statistics about all four racial and ethnic groups. This suggests that nearly 80 percent of the time, the simultaneous growth of all four groups was *not* considered to be newsworthy or relevant to readers. Moreover, as expected, non-White population dynamics, especially the size and growth Latinos and Asians, were particularly prominent in the media coverage. Reporters *never* reported statistics about just Whites and/or African Americans in articles, and they were far less likely to include specific statistics about both groups compared with Latinos or Asians.

Some might argue that the extensive focus on Latino population size and increase is warranted; after all, the group increased by more than 600 percent in Gwinnett County in one decade. Yet, if the percent growth of a local population were the primary determinant of media attention, Asians and African Americans would have received comparable coverage: they increased by 319 and 330 percent, respectively, in Gwinnett over the decade. Further, if other features of the population dynamics motivated coverage, such as the absolute size of each group's increase, then reporters would have devoted more attention to the changes in the White and African American populations than to either Latinos or Asians. These are not the patterns uncovered in this study.

Instead, the selective and uncontextualized usage of statistics in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution's* meant that the newspaper's audience was unlikely to understand how all four populations were growing in the area. According to reporters, the real story was about the "whopping" growth of two non-White groups, Latinos and to a lesser extent, Asians. Journalists' repetition of statistics about both groups meant that readers were likely to be well-versed about

how those groups were changing compared with Whites and Blacks. Moreover, reporters not only provided unbalanced information about shifts in the local population, but as the cited passages suggest, their use of colorful language combined with specific figures powerfully conveyed to the audience *which* changes were most important and dramatic.

The *AJC*'s coverage of racial and ethnic change in Atlanta aligned with the patterns uncovered by media and race scholars. Indeed, even when using ostensibly objective information like statistics, reporters, regardless of intent, participate in "racial projects" that help sustain and disguise a racialized hierarchy in America and the nearly-invisible hegemony of Whites. However, this study also hints that the growth of local African Americans in Atlanta is treated differently than Latinos and Asians. The historical and political context of the area, the centuries-long presence of African Americans in the South, coupled with national and local concerns about non-White immigrants may explain why changes in the Black population received much less coverage than similar dynamics among Latinos and Asians. In-depth research comparing media representations of all three groups in a variety of domains would provide more insights about the symbolic position of Latinos and Asians in media representations vis-à-vis African Americans. Such work would also contribute to emerging scholarship about the position of Latinos and Asians within the traditional U.S. divide between Blacks and Whites (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2004; Lee and Bean 2004).

Native-born Whites routinely underestimate the size of the White population and dramatically overestimate the size of Latinos and other minority group populations (Ortman and Kluegel 2005; Nadeau, Niemi, and Levine 1993). A recent study finds that when it comes to estimating the size of racial and ethnic groups in the United States, the *perceived* sizes of racial and ethnic populations in one's local area is a much stronger predictor than actual census figures

about each group's size in the local community (Wong 2007). The extensive focus on non-White growth and change in the *AJC*, particularly regarding Latinos and Asians, and Whites' own personal experiences with non-White newcomers might lead to inaccurate estimates about the racial/ethnic composition of both the local area and the country as a whole.

Moreover, unbalanced news coverage of racial and ethnic demographic change may influence public opinion about the threats and challenges posed by non-Whites, particularly the recent, rapid increases of "new" groups such as Latinos and Asians. Misperceptions about the size and growth of non-White groups *are* associated with attitudes. For example, U.S.-born Whites who believe that Latinos comprise more than 33 percent of the U.S. population and think that Latinos will continue to increase significantly in the near future are more likely to favor restricting Latin American migration (Ortman and Kluegel 2005). Moreover, the combination of racialized discourses and uneven news coverage may be indirectly linked with specific policy responses that inhibit the full incorporation of some groups in the United States. Indeed, policy makers and community leaders in Gwinnett County have taken action affecting local Latinos. In 2006, county officials outlawed mobile street-corner taco stands (Jonsson 2006) and the Gwinnett County Public Library's Board of Trustees eliminated funding for Spanish-language library materials (Jarvie 2006).^{xvii} Additional studies are needed to document similarities and differences in media coverage of racial/ethnic population change across U.S. contexts and to examine the connections between media representations of racial and ethnic population dynamics, attitudes, and policies.

DATE: March 31, 2009

WORD COUNT: 7,324

Table 1: References to Statistics about Racial/Ethnic groups in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*,

Jan. 1, 2000 – December 31, 2003

	Percent of all articles in study* (count in parentheses)	Percent of articles including demographic statistics**
African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Whites	21.4 (15)	27.3
African Americans, Asians, Latinos	5.7 (4)	7.3
Asians and Latinos	24.3 (17)	30.9
African Americans and Whites	0.0 (0)	0.0
Latinos only	20.0 (14)	25.5
Asians only	7.1 (5)	9.1
African Americans only	0.0 (0)	0.0
Whites only	0.0 (0)	0.0

Note: *N=70. **N=55. Percentages do not add up to 100.0 percent across rows or columns.

Table 2: References to Statistics about Racial/Ethnic groups, alone or in combination, in the
Atlanta Journal Constitution, Jan. 1, 2000 – December 31, 2003

	Percent of all articles in study* (count in parentheses)	Percent of articles including demographic statistics**
Articles that refer to group alone or in addition to other groups:		
Asians	58.5 (41)	74.5
Latinos	71.4 (50)	90.9
African Americans	27.1(19)	34.5
Whites	21.4 (15)	27.3

Note: *N=70. **N=55. Percentages do not add up to 100.0 percent across rows or columns.

References

- "Burgeoning population affects counties differently". 2001. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. March 23, 4H.
- Banton, Michael. 1998. *Racial Theories*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bardales, Aida. 2006. Gwinnett County Library Reinstates Spanish-language Budget. *Críticas Magazine: An English Speaker's Guide to the Latest Spanish-Language Titles* July 15, 2006.
- Berger, Charles R. 2000. Quantitative Depictions of Threatening Phenomena in News Reports. The Scary World of Frequency Data. *Human Communication Research* 26:27-52.
- . 2001. Making It Worse Than It Is: Quantitative Depictions of Threatening Trends in the News. *Journal of Communication* 51 (4):655-677.
- Bomlitz, L. J., and M. Brezis. 2008. Misrepresentation of Health risks by Mass Media. *Journal of Public Health Medicine* 30 (2):202-204.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2004. From bi-racial to tri-racial: Towards a New System of Racial Stratification in the USA. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27 (6):931-950.
- Census Bureau, U.S., Census 2000, Summary File 3; generated using American FactFinder; <http://factfinder.census.gov>; (2007).
- Chapman, Dan. 2001. Gwinnett No. 1? Steady Growth May Put County in Top Spot by 2008. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. March 24, 1B.
- Chavez, Leo. 2008. *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Chavez, Leo. 2001. *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cohn, Victor, and Lewis Cope. 2001. *News & Numbers: A Guide to Reporting Statistical Claims and Controversies in Health and Other Fields, 2nd edition*: Blackwell.
- Connor, Susan M., and Kathryn L. Wesolowski. 2004. Newspaper Framing of Fatal Motor Vehicle Crashes in Four Midwestern Cities in the United States, 1999-2000. *Injury Prevention* 10 (3):149-153.
- Dávila, Arlene. 2001. *Latinos Inc.: Marketing and the Making of a People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dixon, Travis L., and Daniel Linz. 2000. Race and the Misrepresentation of Victimization on Local Television News. *Communication Research* 27 (5):547-573.
- Dorsey, Allison. 2004. *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- Editor & Publisher. 2000. In *Editor & Publisher Year Book 2000: The Encyclopedia of the Newspaper Industry*. New York.
- Ellis, Mark, and Richard Wright. 1998. The Balkanization Metaphor in the Analysis of U.S. Immigration. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (4):686-699.
- Entman, Robert M., 2004. *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Entman, Robert M., and Andrew Rojecki. 2000. *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Fanon, Franz. 1968. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York City: Grove Press.
- Flores, Lisa A. 2003. Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (4):362-387.

- Fowler, Roger. 1991. *Language in the News: Discourse and the Ideology in the Press*. London: Routledge.
- Freedman, Paul, and Ken Goldstein. 1999. Measuring Media Exposure and the Effects of Negative Campaign Ads. *American Journal of Political Science* 43 (4):1189-1208.
- Frey, William H. 2003. *Race and Space in Urban America: Perspectives from Census 2000*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.
- García, Juan R. 1996. *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Gibson, Rhonda, and Dolf Zillmann. 1994. Exaggerated versus Representative Exemplification in News Reports. *Communication Research* 21 (603-624).
- Grieco, Elizabeth M., and Rachel C. Cassidy. 2001. Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin, 2000, edited by U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration: US Census Bureau.
- Gumperz, J.J. 1983. *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gutiérrez, Elena R. 2008. *Fertile Matters: The Politics of Mexican-Origin Women's Reproduction*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Hall, Stuart. 1997/2003. The Work of Representation. In *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices* edited by S. Hall. London: Sage.
- Hamamoto, D. 1994. *Monitored Peril: Asian-Americans and the Politics of Television Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hobbs, Frank, and Nicole Stoops. 2002. Demographic Trends in the 20th Century: Census 2000 Special Reports edited by U. S. Census Bureau: U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Iyengar, Shanto, and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jarvie, Jenny. 2006. Border Issues Cause More Than Whispers at Libraries. *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, A 17.
- Jonsson, Patrik. 2006. The influx of immigrants has some cities and towns restricting taco stands and Spanish speakers. *Christian Science Monitor*, July 16, 2006.
- Kandel, William, and John Cromartie. 2004. New Patterns of Hispanic Settlement in Rural America In *Rural Development and Research Report 99*. Washington, DC: Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Kim, Nadia. 2007. Asian Americans' Experiences of "Race" and Racism. In *Handbooks of the Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations* edited by H. Vera and J. R. Feagin: Springer.
- Kwong, Peter. 2002. Forbidden Workers and the U.S. Labor Movement: Fuzhounese in New York City. *Critical Asian Studies* 34 (1):69-88.
- Lee, Jennifer, and Frank D. Bean. 2004. America's changing color lines: Immigration, race/ethnicity, and multiracial identification. *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:221-242.
- Lowe, Lisa. 1996. *Immigrant Acts: on Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Maier, Scott R. 2002. Numbers in the News: A Mathematics Audit of a Daily Newspaper. *Journalism Studies* 3 (4):507-519.
- Mansfield-Richardson, Virginia. 2000. *Asian Americans and the Mass Media: A Content Analysis of Twenty United States Newspapers and a Survey of Asian American Journalists*. Edited by F. Ng, Garland New York: Taylor & Francis.

- Massey, Douglas S., and Chiara Capoferro. 2008. The Geographic Diversification of American Immigration. In *New Faces in New Places: The Changing Geography of American Immigration*, edited by D. S. Massey. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- McConnell, Eileen Diaz. 2008. Too Much 'Information'? Media Representations of Latina/o Population Growth, 1990-2000. In *Latina/o Images for the 21st Century: Interethnic Relations and the Politics of Representations in the United States*. Bielefeld, GE.
- Meyer, Philip. 2002. *Precision Journalism: A Reporter's Introduction to Social Science Methods, 4th ed.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Min, Pyong Gap. 2006. Settlement Patterns and Diversity. In *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues*, edited by P. G. Min. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Molitor, Fred. 1993. Accuracy in Science News Reporting by Newspapers: The Case of Aspirin for the Prevention of Heart Attacks. *Health Communication* 5 (3):209-224.
- Nadeau, Richard, Richard G. Niemi, and Jeffrey Levine. 1993. Innumeracy about Minority Populations. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 57:332-347.
- Ngai, Mae M. 2005. *Impossible subjects: Illegal aliens and the making of modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Oboler, Suzanne. 1997. The Roots of Hispanic Homogenization. In *Challenging Fronteras: Structuring Latina and Latino Lives in the U.S.*, edited by M. Romero, P. Hondagneu-Sotelo and V. Ortiz. New York: Routledge.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. 1994. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd. ed. New York: Routledge.
- Ono, Kent A., and John M. Sloop. 2002. *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ortman, Jennifer, and James Kluegel. 2005. Public Opinion and the "Hispanic Challenge". In *American Sociological Association*. Philadelphia, PA.
- Osajima, Keith 2000. Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s. In *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, edited by M. Zhou and J. Gatewood. New York City: New York University Press.
- Padín, José Antonio. 2005. The Normative Mulattoes: The Press, Latinos, and the Racial Climate on the Moving Immigration Frontier. *Sociological Perspectives* 48 (1):49-75.
- Passel, Jeffrey S. 2006. The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S.: Estimates Based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Paulos, John Allen. 1996. *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper*. New York: Doubleday.
- Perry, Chuck. 2004. Atlanta Journal-Constitution. In *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, edited by J. C. Inscoe. Athens: Georgia Humanities Council.
- Pew Hispanic Center. 2007. 2007 National Survey of Latinos: As Illegal Immigration Issue Heats Up, Hispanics Feel a Chill. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Porter, M. Theodore. 1986. *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Preiss, Raymond W. , Barbara Mae Gayle, Nancy Burrell, Mike Allen, and Jennings Bryant. 2007. *Mass Media Effects Research: Advances Through Meta-analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Quinn, Christopher. 2001. Gwinnett County ready to take bus system to the road. *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. November 4, 1F.

- Rodríguez, América. 1999. *Making Latino News: Race, Language, Class*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rodríguez, Iliia. 2007. Telling Stories of Latino Population Growth in the United States. *Journalism* 8 (5):573-590.
- Santa Ana, Otto. 2002. *Brown Tide Rising: Metaphors of Latinos in Contemporary American Public Discourse*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Shah, Hemant. 1999. Race, nation, and citizenship: Asian Indians and the idea of whiteness in the U. S. press, 1906-1923. *The Howard Journal of Communications* 10:249-267.
- . 2003. 'Asian culture' and Asian American identities in the television and film industries of the United States. *Simile: Studies In Media & Information Literacy Education* 3 (3).
- Shah, Hemant, and Seungahn Nah. 2004. Long Ago and Far Away: How US Newspapers Construct Racial Oppression. *Journalism* 5 (3):259–278.
- Shah, Hemant, and Michael C. Thornton. 1994. Racial Ideology in U.S. Mainstream News Magazine Coverage of Black-Latino Interaction, 1980-1992. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 11:141-161.
- Shah, Hemant, and Michael C. Thornton. 2004. *Newspaper Coverage of Inter-Ethnic Conflict: Competing Visions of America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Singer, Audrey. 2004. Rise of the New Immigrant Gateways. In *The Living Cities Census Series*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Suro, Roberto, and Sonya Tafoya. 2004. Dispersal and Concentration: Patterns of Latino Residential Settlement. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Tuan, Mia. 1998. *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites? The Asian Ethnic Experience Today*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 1988. *News As Discourse*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Weill, Susan, and Laura Castañeda. 2004. 'Empathetic Rejectionism' and Inter-ethnic Agenda Setting: Coverage of Latinos by the Black Press in the American South. *Journalism Studies* 5 (4):537-550.
- Wilson, Clint C. , Félix Gutiérrez, and Lena M. Chao. 2003. *Racism, Sexism, and the Media: The Rise of Class Communication in Multicultural America*. Third ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wong, Cara J. 2007. "Little" and "Big" Pictures in our Heads: Race, Local Context, and Innumeracy about Racial Groups in the United States. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71 (3):392-412.
- Xie, Yu , and Kimberly A. Goyette. 2004. *Asian Americans: A Demographic Portrait*. Washington DC: Russell Sage Foundation and the Population Reference Bureau.

ⁱ The terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably to refer to men and women of Hispanic origin, regardless of race. Whites, Asians, and African-Americans are those who are not Hispanic.

ⁱⁱ Many are not technically “new” destinations, as Mexican and/or Chinese migrants worked in agriculture, railroads, or heavy manufacturing in such areas in earlier decades (Kwong 2002; García 1996).

ⁱⁱⁱ Another race group, American Indian or Alaskan Natives, comprised a tiny fraction of Atlanta’s population in 2000 and were absent from local news reporting of racial/ethnic demographic change.

^{iv} Dávila (2001) notes that Latino demographics are used to identify U.S. Latinos as a specialized advertising market.

^v Exceptions include Ellis and Wright (1998) and Gutiérrez (2008).

^{vi} The smaller percent change of Whites is due to the group’s large population base in 1990.

^{vii} Popular press images that stereotypically depict Asians as a successful model minority can encourage a perceived threat of competition and anti-Asian attitudes (Osajima 2000; Tuan 1998).

^{viii} Weill and Castañeda (2004) analyzed the response of Black newspaper editors to Latino population growth. Padín (2005) examined representations of Latinos as social assets or liabilities in a Portland, Oregon newspaper, not specifically representations of local Latino population increases. To date, no published work has investigated media coverage about recent Asian population dynamics.

^{ix} In 2000, approximately 29.2 percent of Latinos, 19.1 percent of Asians, 2.3 percent of African Americans, and 1.5 percent of Whites in Atlanta resided in a foreign country or were at sea in 1995 (Census Bureau). U.S. island areas and Puerto Rico are not considered foreign countries.

^x The Census Bureau offers specialized services for journalists, including briefings about census data, available at <http://www.census.gov/pubinfo/www/news/index.html>.

^{xi} Nearly all *AJC* articles using Census 2000 data to discuss racial and ethnic change, more than 600, were published during this period.

^{xii} By 2000, Gwinnett County was 72.7 percent non-Hispanic White, 13.3 percent Black, 10.9 percent Latino, and 7.2 percent Asian.

^{xiii} Gwinnett County's Non-Hispanic White population increased by 24.9 percent during the 1990s; Whites increased nationwide by 3.2 percent.

^{xiv} Multiple keyword searches were conducted to locate articles that included terms like African American but not Black and vice versa. Articles did not have to refer to Whites or Caucasians; the analyses examine how often journalists did or did not refer to this group. Editorials and letters to the editor were excluded; newspaper staff and the reading public do not consider them to be unbiased journalistic reporting (Fowler 1991). Articles that referred to Census 2000 results solely as supplementary material in an appendix also were excluded.

^{xv} The other fifteen articles included the keywords but did not report specific statistical information about any race/ethnic group.

^{xvi} The figure for African-Americans includes those identifying as Hispanic; the number of non-Hispanic Blacks is actually 112,924.

^{xvii} Nationwide negative response led to a reinstatement of the library's Spanish-language budget (Bardales 2006).