


Spring 5-25-2017

# The World Watches: How Media Coverage of American Police Violence Influences The Perspectives of South Louisiana's Community Members

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Running Head: HOW MEDIA COVERAGE OF POLICE VIOLENCE IMPACTS  
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**THE WORLD WATCHES: HOW MEDIA COVERAGE OF AMERICAN  
POLICE VIOLENCE INFLUENCES THE PERSPECTIVES OF SOUTH  
LOUISIANA'S INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

**Jahi Mackey**

PIM 75

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
Master of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management at the SIT Graduate  
Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

HOW MEDIA COVERAGE OF POLICE VIOLENCE IMPACTS INTERNATIONAL  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS

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### **Acknowledgements**

When I started my SIT journey in fall 2015 at the age of 20, I had no idea what struggles and triumphs were in store for me. My time at the SIT Graduate Institute would not have been possible if it were not for the efforts and encouragement of so many people. I would like to thank the following people for their support during the on-campus phase: my mother and grandmother, close friends from my pre-SIT years, all my classmates from the PIM 75/MAT 45 cohort and instructors.

I returned home to south Louisiana for my practicum phase. During this time, the region was under an international lens for the first time since Hurricane Katrina in 2005 due to the death of Alton Sterling by Baton Rouge city police and widespread flooding that devastated the region in August of 2016. I would like to thank the activists, artists, community leaders and community members who helped me navigate the turbulent summer and subsequent months as well as those in Baton Rouge and New Orleans who helped me conduct research by participating in the study or helping to locate participants. I take no efforts or contributions for granted, regardless of size.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

**BBC-** The British Broadcasting Service uses the abbreviation BBC.

**Generation X** - (Coupland, 1991)- Generation X is defined as the age demographic of individuals who were born from the early/mid-1960s to the late 1970s/early 1980s.

**LGBT-** LGBT is an abbreviation used to describe the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

**Millennial** (Strauss and Howe, 2000)—Millennial is a term used to define the age demographic of individuals who were born from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s or early 2000s.

**Parish**— The U.S state of Louisiana is divided into 64 parishes, similar to counties in other parts of the United States.

**SIT-** The School of International Training Graduate Institute commonly uses the abbreviation SIT.

**South Louisiana-** The South Louisiana region is commonly used to describe the communities of and surrounding Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Lake Charles and New Orleans. While there is no exact geographic boundary for south Louisiana, Louisianians common refer to any communities from the Interstate 10 and 12 corridor to the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico as south Louisiana.



## ABSTRACT

Police violence towards African Americans in the United States have gained greater international attention in this decade due to social media and increased media coverage. Alton Sterling's death in Baton Rouge in the summer of 2016 resulted in local pushes for criminal and racial justice reform. However, international community members were largely absent from both community dialogue and action. Keeping this in mind, my research question is as follows: To what extent does media coverage of American police violence impact the perspectives of south Louisiana's international community members with regards to African Americans and American society. Through qualitative research methodology, this study will illustrate the extent to which media coverage of police violence shaped international community members' perspectives.

The six-week research study lasted from January to March 2017, with Baton Rouge and New Orleans the two main locations. Twenty-three respondents contributed through either semi-structured interviews or surveys. Respondents were asked about domestic and media coverage of American police violence, its influence on their perspectives regarding African Americans and American society, and the impact that the Alton Sterling incident had on their perspectives. This study reveals factors such as social identity and interpretation of media shape their perspectives more than media coverage alone.

**Keywords/concepts:** immigrant studies, international students, racism, social justice, community engagement, African Americans, American society, American politics, intersectionality, criminal justice

## INTRODUCTION

After spending nearly a year in Vermont to complete the on-campus phase of my academic program at SIT, I returned home to Louisiana in June of 2016 to start my practicum experience. My return to Louisiana was uneventful for about a week and a half, but that was the calm before the storm. On July 5th, 2016, Baton Rouge city police officers shot and killed an African American man named Alton Sterling after a tense exchange outside of a Yemeni-American owned convenience store. After a video surfaced of his murder, the incident generated local and nationwide protests. The day after Sterling's murder, the police-involved murder of Philandro Castile by local police in Falcon Heights, Minnesota further amplified these protests. To African Americans across the country, these deaths were a reminder of the harsh disparities that Black men and women face in their encounters with police. For Baton Rouge residents, Mr. Sterling's death was a reminder of the deep geographic and racially based disparities that existed in the city of Baton Rouge.

South Louisiana's summer only became more tumultuous from there. Two weeks after the murder of Alton Sterling, a lone gunman shot and killed two Baton Rouge city police officers and one East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff officer on a busy thoroughfare in the city. The following month, the Baton Rouge metropolitan area and surrounding communities in the south Louisiana region were affected by devastating and rare widespread flooding. The flooding displaced hundreds of thousands of residents, ruined homes and disrupted the livelihoods of thousands in the region. Unfortunately, the flooding received minimal national and international coverage because it took place during the final week of the 2016 Olympics in Rio De Janeiro and in the midst of other contentious political scandals related to the 2016 presidential campaign.

The natural disaster and violence of the summer in south Louisiana hugely impacted the community and its institutions. East Baton Rouge Parish public schools and universities in Baton Rouge worked to reconcile the impact that the flooding and police-related violence had on their institutional communities. Improving police and community relationships were included as a major topic for the mayoral and city council political races in the city and parish in addition to reducing crime, poverty and traffic congestion. Meanwhile, activists and community leaders worked to educate community members on issues regarding racism and other institutional inequities. However, as the summer progressed, I observed that the voices of international community members were minimal, if not completely absent.

Perhaps the absence of international community members was inevitable. Baton Rouge's urban culture results in the exclusion of regional and international diversity, and the racial and economic segregation of the city of Baton Rouge creates a binary between black and white Americans. Most immigrant and non-Black communities of color self-segregate or operate in majority white circles. Furthermore, discussions on racial injustice in Baton Rouge have not evolved beyond the Civil Rights-era or a Black/White American binary. They ignore the impact of racism and white supremacy on Asian Americans, Latino or Arab American residents in the city and region. Overall, international community members seem to be invisible to local leaders.

At the same time, I've often wondered if this absence is coerced by the same people who work with international community members as well. As an undergraduate student attending school in New Orleans, I observed that international student advisors and administrators made insignificant efforts to promote a complex understanding of American culture and society to international students. Furthermore, they lacked intersectionality when addressing the

experiences of the international students that they worked with. The heavy emphasis on nationality and the inability to discuss other social identities such as race, class and gender resulted in missed opportunities for true intercultural understandings between international students and Americans of color. In many cases, discussions on social justice based issues were generally nonexistent, and superficial at best.

One of those issues is police violence. It is far from being a new issue and it received both significant domestic and international coverage while I attended college in New Orleans. While not all police violence incidents are covered in the same volume as they are in the United States, many of them are covered by international media outlets. Regardless of their political leanings and reputations in their home countries, international news outlets have covered these situations much differently than American ones. In addition to news coverage, viral videos and depictions of African Americans being victims of police violence have flooded social media networks. Since obtaining my Bachelor's degree in 2015, police violence has continued to receive more worldwide coverage, and to my surprise, the Alton Sterling incident also received significant international coverage.

Recognizing that American police violence receives significant coverage domestically and internationally, I am perplexed by the marginal amount of international voices in south Louisiana's community dialogues concerning race and police-civilian relationships. Therefore, the purpose of my research project is to investigate to what extent does international and domestic media coverage and narratives of American police violence impact international community members' perspectives of African Americans. My research will also explore how the media coverage further impacts their collective perspectives on American culture and society.

Research will highlight the Alton Sterling incident recognizing that it took place in the city of Baton Rouge and reverberated across the entire south Louisiana region. I am also seeking to understand how other factors—life experiences, background and social identities—shape their understandings and interpretations of these media narratives as well.

The overall goal of my research is to investigate the reasons behind the marginal amount of international perspectives in south Louisiana’s dialogue concerning racial injustice and if there are possibilities for integrating more complex, multicultural perspectives in local and national racial justice movements. International community members, ranging from international students, immigrants or first-generation immigrants have contributed so much to south Louisiana’s contemporary development and culture. The exclusion of them by community and political leaders results in a lack of true multiculturalism in the south Louisiana community. Therefore, their voices are extremely important in rebuilding community, and it is important that they are receiving well-rounded and complex perspectives on the social injustices plaguing the United States.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study seeks to understand to what extent does domestic and international media coverage of American police violence involving African Americans in the United States influence international community members’ perceptions of American society and African American people. Therefore, the literature explores media’s ability to shape a person’s worldview, the factors that influence the construction of media narratives, and how factors such as social identity and environment influence one’s interpretation of media images and narratives presented to them.

Selected literature delves into the construction of media narratives. Hallin (2005) states that the region of the world and media outlet's country of origin will impact the quality of media narratives. In Europe, the extreme diversity in political ideology in the press results in a plethora of diversity in perspectives and coverage of issues taking place internationally and domestically. European media outlets tend to exist on a spectrum from far left to far right. Hallin (2005) points out that though American press is also partisan, it has undergone several centuries of changes .

American press started off as very partisan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but became less so due to cultural shifts taking place in the United States. Because of these cultural shifts, a new journalistic culture was created. Partisan press has since reemerged in the United States in the contemporary era (Hallin, 2005). Hallin (2005) also articulates that in certain European countries, the state has an important role in shaping the press. State subsidies in some European countries enforce some pluralism and neutrality in the press (Hallin, 2005). On the other hand, American media is commercial, operating independent from the government and with its own agenda.

Iyengar et al (2010) adds to Hallin's perspectives, but also asserts that ideology concerning the purpose of media is the reason why American and European media outlets have such different coverage. In Scandinavian countries, for instance, media is considered to be a public service. In the United States, however, media is very much shaped by the free market. It seemingly has an entertainment based focus which transitions the ways in which information is communicated to the public. This effects both the topics covered as well as the timing of news programs.

In Scandinavian countries, news media programs air at multiple time slots throughout the day in Scandinavia. On the other hand, American news programs air in the early mornings. The primetime evening hours are reserved for entertainment programs (Iyengar et al, 2010). Iyengar et al further asserts that ideologies concerning the purpose of media in different countries will also influence what citizens are informed about. Citizens who live in countries with market-based media will be ill-informed about “hard news” than those who live in countries that are less market based (Iyengar et al, 2010). In other words, citizens of countries with market-oriented media outlets will be less knowledgeable on international issues and more knowledgeable on domestic issues. Iyengar et al’s conclusions came from a quantitative survey of various North American and European countries. The results of this survey concluded that of the countries included in the survey, there was an overall greater focus on domestic news than international news, but United States provided the least amount of international news coverage.

Baum and Zhukov diverge from the Hallin and Iyengar by asserting that media narratives concerning a specific event or conflict depend on the political context of a country that a news outlet is based (Baum and Zhukov, 2014). Citing coverage of the Libyan Civil War as an example, they state that countries considered to be non-democratic covered the conflict with a pro-Ghaddafi regime bias. On the other, countries considered to be democratic covered the Libyan Civil War with a pro-rebel bias. Therefore, news media in non-democratic countries did not report on the protests and nonviolent actions by regime opponents, instead overemphasizing violent actions committed by rebels and ignoring any negative actions by the government. The inverse was true for media outlets based in democratic states (Baum and Zhukov, 2014).

Selected literature spoke about the ways in which media outlets cover minority populations. In the United States, media outlets do not cover ethnic minorities in a complex and

multifaceted way. This affects how they are perceived by others internationally and domestically. In her study, Ramasubramanian (2011) discusses how television images of Asian Americans, specifically the 'model minority' stereotype of them, influence the attitudes that white Americans have towards them. The study is quantitative, and she concludes that "although model minority stereotypes do not seem to fit the traditional blatant derisive stereotype framework, they could significantly increase subtle, symbolic racism in indirect ways" (Ramasubramanian, 2011).

For Latinos who live in the United States, Mastro, Behm-Morwaitz and Kopacz (2008) state that their media representation is highly problematic. Despite representing a growing demographic and the second largest minority group in the United States, their representation in media is extremely marginal. When Latinos are portrayed in media, they are usually cast in stereotypical roles. Their portrayal influences how they are treated in everyday life, as Mastro, Behm-Morwaitz and Kopacz also assert that due to the stereotypical casting of Latino people on television, "these images may provoke a broader array of discriminatory responses than previously recognized" (Mastro, Behm-Morwaitz and Kopacz, 2008). Furthermore, they state that white Americans get a large majority of their information from mass media (Mastro, Behm-Morwaitz and Kopacz, 2008). Using the social identity theory and the aversive racism theory, Mastro, Behm-Morwaitz and Kopacz state that white people who may support racial equality and consider themselves unprejudiced may still have discomfort towards people of color due to their exposure to these media narratives of ethnic minorities.

Not only are ethnic minorities misrepresented, but they are also criminalized in media. In their research, Maneri and Ter Wal (2005) assert that the media is like a mirror reflecting society. Therefore, if there is a lot of prejudice towards immigrants and ethnic minorities in the society in



which media outlets are based, then that prejudice will be reflected in mass media. They also state that because most journalists are white, the ways in which ethnic minorities and immigrants are covered will not be entirely accurate. At the same time, Maneri and Ter Wal (2005) state that this problem has manifested in various ways over time. In the past, issues concerning Black crime were over reported while the harassment of Black families by police were often underreported, but nowadays, this coverage has improved. Nevertheless, Maneri and Ter Wal stop short at saying this problem is completely resolved. They state that the media provides minimal space for minority opinions, often portraying them as “speechless actors involved in negative acts” (Maneri and Ter Wal, 2005).

The misrepresentation and criminalization of ethnic minorities is not something that is unique to the United States; ethnic minorities are misrepresented and criminalized in other countries as well. In a policy brief for the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Fluckiger (2006) discusses how the construction of media narratives concerning immigrants across the world contribute to xenophobia, islamophobia and ethnocentrism (Fluckiger, 2006). She states that when issues concerning ethnic minorities and immigrants are covered, their perspectives are often excluded. Reporters opt for the perspectives of authorities and officials who are presented as more credible and reliable than the immigrants themselves (Flückiger, 2006).

The way in which ethnic minorities are depicted in their home country may also influence the perspectives of others abroad. In the country of China, Tan et Al (2009) discuss the impact that American and Chinese media images of African Americans have on Chinese citizens. They conduct research regarding the stereotypes of African Americans by Chinese high school students based on both their home country’s media as well as abroad. Through this study, they

discover that Chinese stereotypes of African Americans are not as negative as those towards white Americans. However, Chinese respondents remarked that the American media portrayed African Americans negatively.

Regardless of how media narratives and images are created, or whose stories they tell, the literature states that they do have a significant impact on shaping public belief. Happer and Philo (2013) assert that while what is presented in media is not absorbed uncritically, media outlets can set their own agendas and refocus the public's interest on certain topics. They also have the ability to limit the amount of arguments and perspectives presented (Happer and Philo, 2013). Happer and Philo use the practices of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) regarding their coverage of the global financial crisis of 2008 as their main example. Happer and Philo assert that because the BBC has its own definition of democracy, the amount of political perspectives that they allow to engage in debate on any sociopolitical issues are very limited. Therefore, only the three main parties in British government are allowed to express their views on air. In addition, Happer and Philo (2013) state that people who possess a lot of financial capital are more likely to have access to the media than other entities. Happer and Philo also cite a study conducted in 2011 by the Glasgow Media Coverage organization regarding media coverage on the state of disability benefits in the United Kingdom. Happer and Philo state that one of the main conclusions of this study was that media coverage and claims of knowledge regarding certain fraud cases shaped perspectives, but disabled people were not satisfied with how they were depicted in media. Furthermore, disabled people felt that their direct experiences contradicted and rejected the messages presented by media (Happer and Philo, 2013).

The literature also considers the fact that it is up to the individual to interpret the media images that they receive. Their interpretation, however, may be influenced by factors such as the environment they are in and their social identity. Evans et al (1998) discuss how the perceptions of Australian students regarding discrimination and racism towards African Americans in the United States differed depending on the identities of the respondents. The results of their study reveal that non-white and indigenous Australians were more likely to perceive African Americans experiencing racism. Their study also asserts that environment is important to consider when understanding how individuals interpret media narratives. Evans et al observed a lack of cultural diversity in the social environments of white Australian respondents, suggesting that there should be greater attention given to issues concerning diversity and multiculturalism.

Some of the literature presented also focuses on the role that media plays in the assimilation and acculturation of immigrants into their host country, specifically in the United States. Dalisay (2012) discusses how the use of media affects the acculturation of immigrants in the United States. In a survey conducted by Princeton University, they highlight that there were connections made between uses of English language media before immigrating to the US and English proficiency. Those who used English language media before immigrating and after immigrating to the United States were more likely to have high proficiency in English than those who did not (Dalisay, 2012). As a result of this, they were more likely to have a lot of American political knowledge. Dalisay also asserts that immigrants who are active in political decision making are those who can acquire knowledge regarding the politics of their host country, shaped by their use of media which grants them proficiency in English. Dalisay also cites studies that draw connections to media use and acquisition of American cultural values. They observe that as immigrants become more acculturated to their host society, their use of native media is not as

frequent (Dalisay, 2012). However, one key finding from Dalisay's study is that immigrants may also use media sources in their home country to learn about American culture and society as well.

The studies and reports collected provided an understanding of how media shapes the worldview and perspectives of an individual, regardless of their location in the world. Available studies also provided insight on the construction and shaping of media narratives across the world. However, I observed that many of these studies were quantitative in nature. The quantitative analysis compromised the quality of the findings and hindered the ability to obtain better understandings of how the respondents truly feel about what they are being asked. As I looked at the literature, I wondered how differently the findings would have been if the interviews were done with a qualitative methodology.

In addition to the highly quantitative nature of the studies, there was little discussion regarding the role of social identity and environment in how individuals interpret and understand media narratives. Regarding Evans et al's (1998) study, the data presented a case for an influence, but the quantitative nature of the study diminished a further discussion on these findings. However, Mastro, Behm-Moraitz (2008) did provide a sufficient discussion on the role of social identity in understanding and interpreting media narratives. I wonder how differently the studies would be if the researchers accounted for an individual's socioeconomic status, age, gender or ethnicity, as well as their background. Some of the studies discussed nationality and others were conducted in an international context, yet nothing considered the homogeneity or heterogeneity of a person's environment and how this may influence one's interpretation of the media.

While the most recent research study was conducted in 2014, a large majority of the literature presented is not recent. Moreover, none of the literature focuses on the topic of police violence. Therefore, research is needed to provide greater complexity and understanding of the ways media images and narratives can influence not only a person's worldview, but the ways in which they interpret these images. Further research is also needed that focuses on an immigrant and transplant's knowledge and perspectives on the issues taking place in the south Louisiana community. This region, despite its on-going demographic changes, has often been overlooked and downplayed in the last few years in regard to understanding the immigrant experience. More importantly, it is necessary to understand how and if this information can be used to build communities that are truly multicultural, especially in my hometown. Issues concerning systemic racism and police violence in the United States have been publicized in the media both domestically and internationally, yet the lack of sufficient engagement of international community members has hindered opportunities for true inclusive and multicultural dialogue in the south Louisiana region.

## **RESEARCH/PI DESIGN/METHODOLOGY**

### **Site of Research**

I based my research within the south Louisiana region. South Louisiana contains the two largest metropolitan areas in the state of Louisiana. New Orleans is the largest city in the state. It is also the 49<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States with 389,617 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The second largest city is Baton Rouge, the state's capital, which has a population of 229,493 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2015).

The state is divided into parishes, much like the counties in other states in the United States. New Orleans is the largest city in the state of Louisiana, but it is not located in the most populated parish; East Baton Rouge Parish is the largest parish by population in the state of Louisiana with 445, 227 (United States Census Bureau, 2015) residents. In regards to demographics, New Orleans and Baton Rouge are both majority Black cities (United States Census Bureau, 2015), though New Orleans' Black population is declining.

Despite being only an hour apart from each other, these cities have very different identities. Baton Rouge is the center of state government and the main sectors of its economy are state government offices, health care, the petroleum industry and education. New Orleans is known to most Louisiana residents as the economic and cultural center of the state. The main sectors of its economy are domestic and international tourism, art and culture, and international trade due to being a major port city on the Mississippi River. In regard to the south Louisiana region as a whole, most communities outside of the two major cities are rural or suburban. Oil refineries and other industrial businesses are predominant in the region, specifically along the Mississippi River.

In the last ten years, Baton Rouge and New Orleans have struggled with many social issues. Both cities are highly racially segregated cities, still impacted by Jim Crow-era urban planning policies such as redlining and racial segregation. Socioeconomic inequality has also become a major issue in the last few decades for both cities. Currently, New Orleans is continuing to address issues concerning its ongoing recovery from Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The city is also trying to slow down or prevent the gentrification of its neighborhoods, increase the amount of affordable housing, and reduce crime. Another significant issue for New Orleans

is the rising sea level due to climate change; New Orleans is below sea level and the disappearing wetlands on the coast of Louisiana leave it vulnerable to hurricanes.

Baton Rouge's issues are similar to New Orleans, but there are many divergences. The city is seeking to address issues with traffic and public transit. Environmental issues are also an ongoing concern for the city due to the presence of industry in the northern part of the city. Like New Orleans, Baton Rouge is a very racially segregated city, but the city's segregation exists as a north/south divide. The city's northern, predominantly African American side, is much less economically developed than the southern, predominantly white side. Many communities in North Baton Rouge have the highest poverty in the state of Louisiana, and urban blight has been a major issue for several decades. North Baton Rouge has also had many issues regarding poor air quality and dumping. South Baton Rouge is the inverse; a large majority of businesses, economic development and wealth are concentrated on the southern side of the city.

The Greater Baton Rouge area as a whole is recovering from the 2016 flooding, which devastated both the city and its suburbs. Because the flooding was due to an unusual accumulation of rain, there was no flooding in the Greater New Orleans area. Those hardest hit by the flooding were residents living in rural and suburban communities closest to rivers and residents living in Baton Rouge's impoverished neighborhoods. Though the floods impacted people of various socioeconomic classes, recovery efforts have been mixed.

I chose to base my study in this region because they are both in close proximity to one another. I also had a personal connection to both communities. I grew up in Baton Rouge and lived in New Orleans for several years prior to attending SIT. Most importantly, the Alton Sterling incident took place in Baton Rouge, receiving a lot of coverage nationally and

internationally. New Orleans has also struggled with police violence incidents, although most have not received the same amount of widespread coverage that the Alton Sterling incident did. Additionally, I wanted to see whether the difference in location would have an impact on shaping the perspectives of respondents.

### **Population of Study**

For my research study, I focused on south Louisiana residents who had an international background. My parameters for an international background were as follows: international students who attended a university in either the Baton Rouge or New Orleans metropolitan area, immigrants to the United States who lived in the Baton Rouge or New Orleans metropolitan area, residents whose parents were immigrants from another country or individuals whose upbringing took place in two or more countries, one of which included the United States. Participants in the study had to have grown up in either Baton Rouge or New Orleans, or lived in either city before and/or during the summer of 2016. All respondents in the study were above the age of 18.

My goal was to obtain a total of 24 participants, 12 of them from the Baton Rouge metropolitan area and 12 from the New Orleans metropolitan area. The final number of participants ended up being 23 participants. In order to recruit participants, I used Facebook, email, word of mouth and phone. In Baton Rouge, a majority of my recruiting was done via word of mouth and through the help of Facebook friends. The same applied to New Orleans, but because New Orleans has a much larger and accessible population of residents with an international background, I also contacted cultural organizations and immigrant organizations in addition to those I personally knew who worked or had interpersonal relationships with international students and immigrants.



### **Positionality**

My social identity played an important role in my research. As an African American, the issue of police violence deeply disturbs me, especially keeping in mind that it has contributed to the polarization of communities that are not impacted by this issue. I also conducted this research as a native to Baton Rouge and a former resident of New Orleans. Growing up in Baton Rouge, specifically in North Baton Rouge, I was extremely aware of the social inequalities and disparities affecting the city. Furthermore, my identity as a Baton Rouge native and native to the south Louisiana region gave me an understanding of the demographics and environment of my research that someone not from the region would not necessarily have.

### **Research Method and Data Collection**

For my research study, I chose to use the qualitative research method. While doing my literature review, I observed that a large majority of the studies used the quantitative research method. In my opinion, this diminished the ability to capture rich narratives and diverse perspectives from respondents. Therefore, I felt that it was necessary to use the qualitative method so that I could capture the diversity in perspectives and narratives related to my research question. Because the research project was qualitative, and all of the questions were open-ended, the length and content of the interviews depended upon the participants' personal knowledge, as well as personal comfort and linguistic fluency in answering the questions provided. Research began on the last week of January 2017, concluding on the first week of March 2017.

I provided two methods of collecting research to participants: an online survey format and an interview that could be done by phone, Skype or in person. Interviews were semi-structured and consisted of 10 open-ended questions. Both the survey and interview had the same

questions. Questions asked participants about their country of origin, some important aspects of their social identity, the sources of media used to get the news and learn about the world, and how media coverage of police brutality incidents in the United States, especially the one that took place in Baton Rouge, influenced their perspectives of African Americans and American society. They also asked whether or not the Alton Sterling incident impacted their interaction with African Americans in their local community and their desire to get involved in dialogue and social action concerning racial justice. While conducting interviews, I often asked follow up questions so that participants could elaborate and clarify their responses. At times, participants would answer multiple questions in one response, so I had to amend some of the questions I asked.

Due to the difficulty in scheduling interviews and securing respondents, I offered to travel where the participants were to conduct interviews. Therefore, I found myself speaking to participants in parks, cafes, offices, stores, classrooms, libraries and in restaurants. My consent letter stated that the interviews would take from 30 to 45 minutes, but none of my interviews ended up confined to that range of time. My shortest interview was 15 minutes long and my longest interview was 90 minutes long.

### **Limitations to Research**

One of the main limitations to my research was the fact that English was the main language used to conduct interviews and disseminate surveys. Therefore, the quality and detail of responses depended upon a respondent's fluency in English. Respondents whose first language was English or who were fairly fluent in English were able to do the interviews with ease, but those who were not very fluent in English often had a lot of difficulty doing the interviews. Some

participants opted for the survey because they felt more comfortable writing in English than speaking, whereas some participants felt more comfortable with the interviews because they were more comfortable speaking in English. My questions were very long, so I often had to restate and rephrase questions so that respondents could best understand what I was asking them. In addition to these difficulties, I had to avoid asking leading questions in an attempt to compensate for a respondent's difficulty in speaking English. As a result of the linguistic diversity and varying proficiencies in English, the detail and length of responses often varied greatly for the surveys as well.

Ironically, another limitation to the research was the research design itself. To ensure the respondent's comfort in participating in the study as well as consider their language proficiency, I offered the choice between a survey and an interview. However, the quality of the responses in the surveys were spurious. Though I could not follow up on any of the responses in my surveys, some respondents answered the questions in the survey with detail that was comparable to the interviews. Others gave very short and vague responses, making it extremely difficult to analyze survey data if the responses were extremely vague or too short. For example, a few of my respondents responded to each survey question in short, ambiguous phrases that did not clearly answer any of the questions asked.

The geographic environment was also a limitation to the research. Because I lived in Baton Rouge, an hour and a half away from New Orleans, most of my New Orleans' responses were collected through surveys. I did drive down to New Orleans on a weekday to conduct some interviews, but I was unable to visit the region more than once. I began my research during the start of the academic semester for most New Orleans area universities as well as during the

beginning of the Mardi Gras festival season. As a south Louisiana native and former New Orleans resident, I was aware that it would have been nearly impossible to conduct research due to immense local and tourist traffic and parade schedules that may have restricted my travel. The most difficult place to conduct research was in Baton Rouge, where there few opportunities or outlets for me to access those with an international background.

### **Analyzing Data**

The qualitative interviews gave me opportunities to obtain diverse perspectives and experiences both related and unrelated to my research question. I learned about the respondents' perspectives on media, race relations in the United States, the different issues they observed taking place in the United States and their relationship with African Americans living in south Louisiana. I was also able to learn about how respondents related to their own social identity. Therefore, the analysis focused on my observations and reactions to the perspectives presented to me in both the interviews and surveys.

All participants allowed me to record the interviews so that I could transcribe them. I transcribed the audio from the interviews by myself. All interviews were transcribed English, but in some cases, I noted if another language was spoken during the interview as well. This would happen if an interview respondent was interrupted during the course of the interview or being interviewed with someone else at the same time. Upon the conclusion of my transcribing, I began to code and analyze my research responses. Interviews were thoroughly read for themes and key quotes were highlighted so that I could categorize the responses. I also coded responses to observe trends in the data.

During analysis, I separated participants in various categories. Categories separated respondents by the type of international background that they had, how they understood their social identity, the types of media sources they used to obtain domestic and international news, their awareness of local and national social issues, their understandings and perspectives on police violence involving African Americans as well as their desired engagement in social justice movements and conversations on racism and social injustice.

### **PRESENTATION OF DATA**

The presentation of data reflects the perspectives of international community members living in the Baton Rouge and New Orleans metropolitan areas. The data is based on a collection of twenty four interviews and surveys by these respondents, deriving from my observations of conversations that I have had with the referenced in both of these cities. Following the presentation of data is an analysis of the data, which is derived from participant responses.

#### **Summary of Participants**

In regards to demographics, there was a diverse cross section of respondents. National diversity included countries from Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and South America. Participants came from or had international backgrounds in countries such as France, Haiti, Jamaica, Jordan, Romania, Palestine, Turkey and Venezuela. In addition to diversity in nationality, there was a wide range of diversity in age. Participants came from three generations: 75 % from the Millennial generation (ages 18-36) and 20 % from Generation X (ages 37-52) and 5 % from the Baby Boomer generation (ages 52-60). Diversity also extended to other components of social identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and regional identity if applicable. In terms of academic or professional backgrounds, many

participants were international students who were enrolled in universities located in the Baton Rouge or New Orleans area, artists, educators and activists.

### Description of Nationality

To ensure clarity of the nationality that each respondent identified with, I asked all participants to describe their nationality (see Chart 1). In the research study, 100 % participants had an international background, meaning that they had a connection to another country by way of birth or through their parents. Forty eight percent of respondents in the research study considered themselves non-native-born citizens to the United States, meaning that they were born in the another country and immigrated to the United States for either school or to start a new life in the country. Twenty six percent of respondents reported being first generation immigrants, meaning that their parents were immigrants to the United States. Twenty six percent of respondents described their upbringing as having took place in both their parents' home country and in the United States, though the time spent in either country varied.

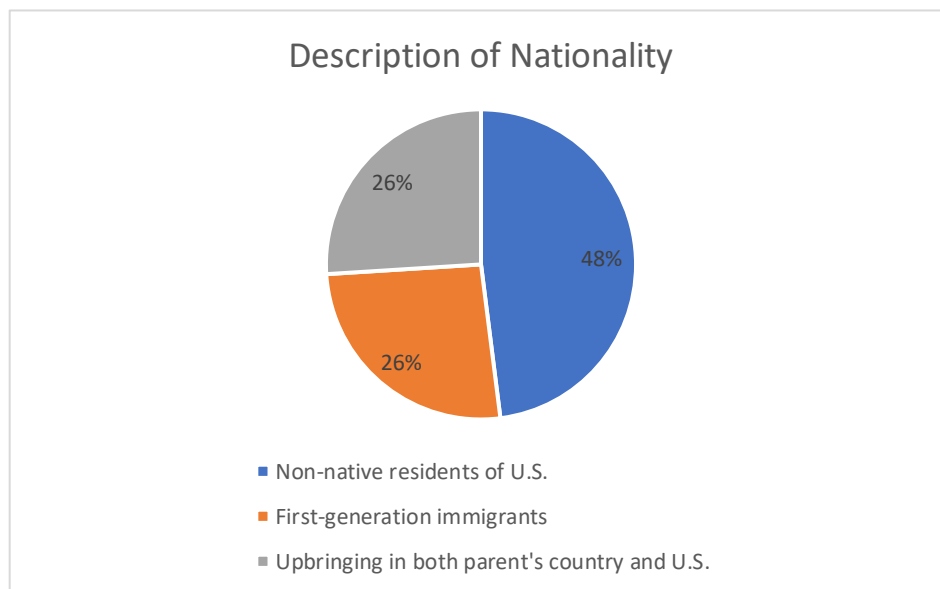


Chart 1: Description of respondent's nationality.

### Other Important Aspects of Social Identity

Participants were asked to describe the other aspects of their social identity (see Chart 2). When responding to this question, forty eight percent of respondents stated that their nationality or ethnicity was the only component of their social identity. A majority of respondents—52 percent— however, were more specific and listed multiple components of their social identity. Some participants said that their gender, sexual orientation, religion, race and/or regional identity was an important aspect of their social identity. The difference in providing a survey versus an interview did not affect the response to this question.

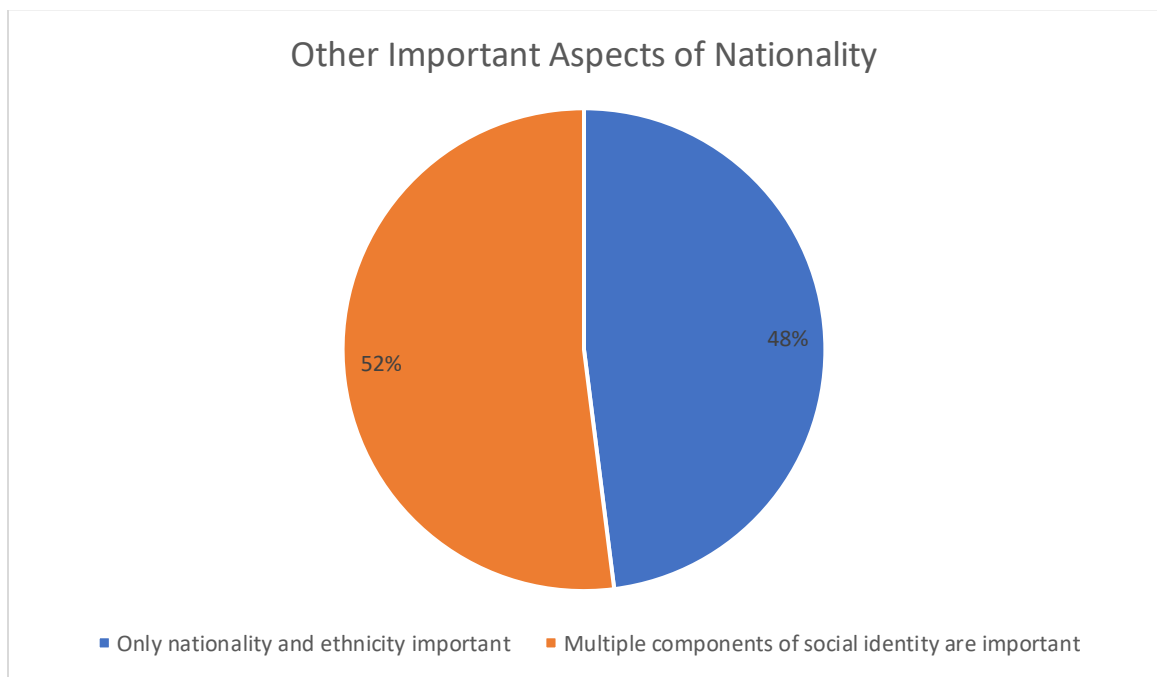


Chart 2: Other Aspects of Nationality

### Sources For Receiving American News

Research respondents were asked to list the sources through which they receive news about the United States (see chart 3). Around 48 percent of research respondents stated that they received news about the United States from a combination of Internet, social media or television.

39 percent of respondents received their news from only internet and social media networks.

Four percent of respondents received their news from only television and internet and nine percent of respondents stated that they received their news from social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter exclusively.

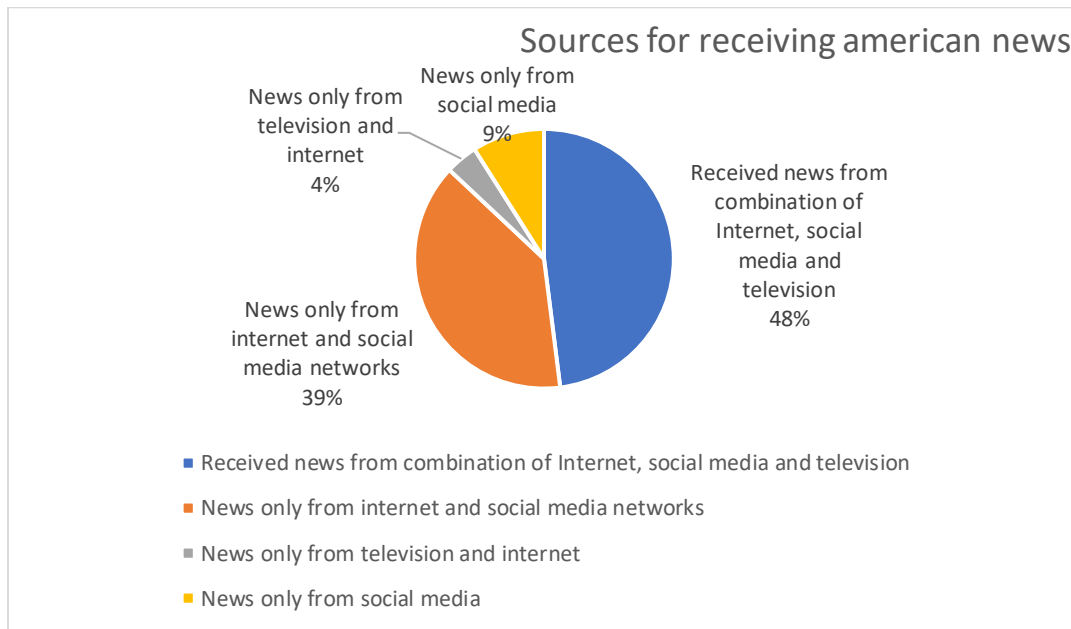


Chart 3: Sources For Receiving American News

With regards to the country of origin for these sources (see chart 4), 21 percent of respondents received their news from exclusively domestic news sources such as CNN and NPR. 17 percent of respondents received their news from mostly domestic news sources with some that were international. 21 percent of respondents reported that they received their news from a balance of domestic and international news sources such as the BBC, Le Monde and sources from the respondents' country of origin. 13 percent of respondents stated their news came from mostly international news sources with very few from the United States. For 30 percent of respondents, the nationality of these news sources could not be determined.



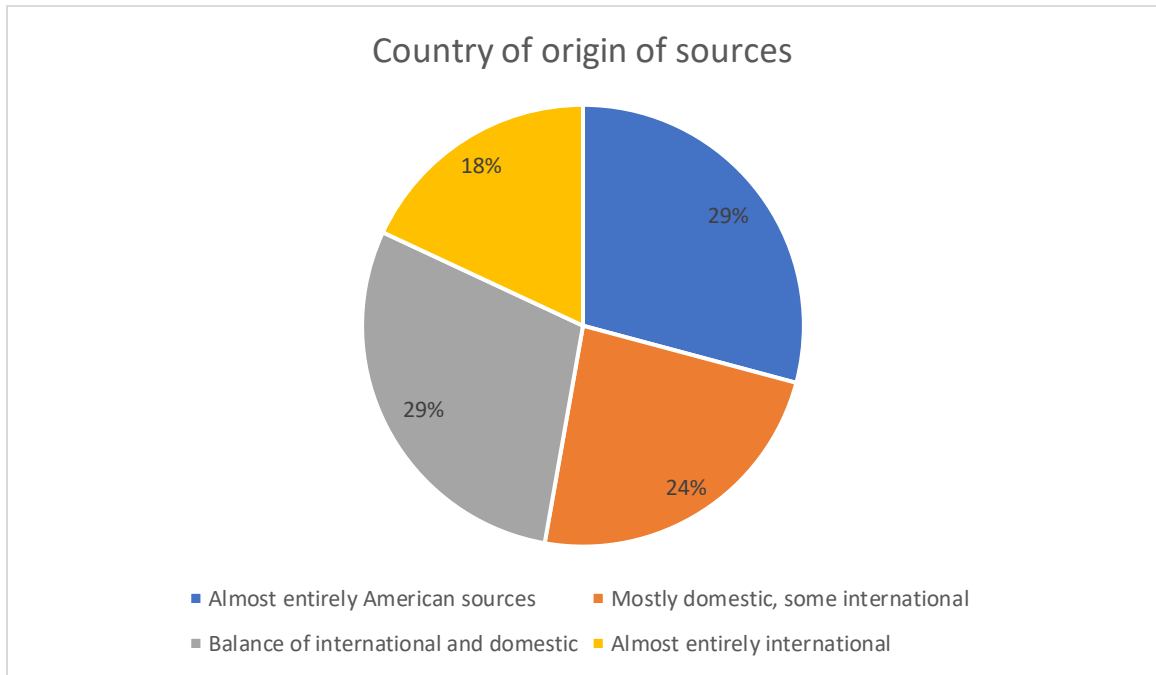


Chart 4: Country Of Origin Of Sources

### Sources To Learn South Louisiana

### About The United States and

Participants were asked to list the sources through which they learned about the United States and Louisiana, in addition to the media sources that they used (see Chart 5). 39 percent of respondents stated they learned about Louisiana and the United States through a combination of non-news media sources such as movies, music, television, social media, magazines and by word of mouth. 21 percent of respondents relied on mostly people and literature more than non-news media to learn about the United States and Louisiana. 34 percent of respondents were the inverse, relying on mostly non-media news sources more than people.

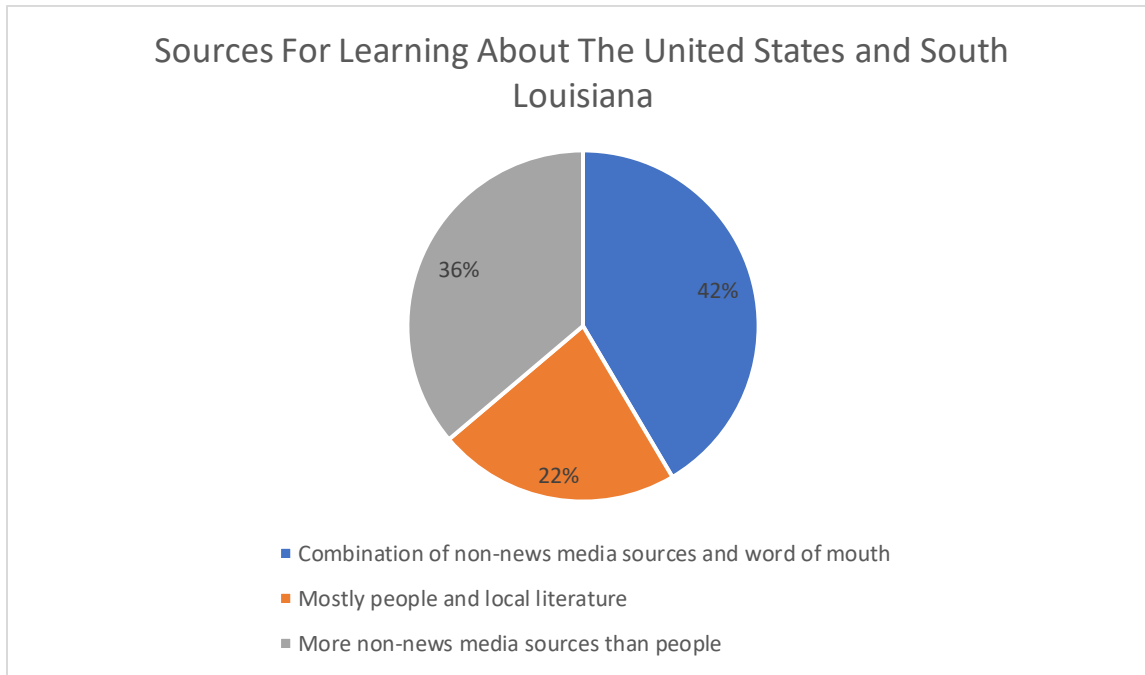


Chart 5: Sources For Learning About The United States and South Louisiana

### **Awareness of Local and National Social Issues**

Participants were asked to comment on their awareness of social issues in the United States and/or in either the Baton Rouge or New Orleans area (see Chart 6). One hundred percent of respondents in both the survey and interview were highly aware of social issues taking place in the United States and in Louisiana. In regard to both Baton Rouge and New Orleans, some of the social issues mentioned by respondents were related to criminal justice, women, the LGBT community, poverty, crime and the environment. 78 percent of respondents mentioned issues that were both connected to and disconnected from the actions of the Trump administration. Research was collected during the first 40 days of the Donald Trump’s presidency. 17 percent of respondents mentioned issues that were only connected to the Trump administration and nine percent of respondents mentioned issues that were not connected to his administration.

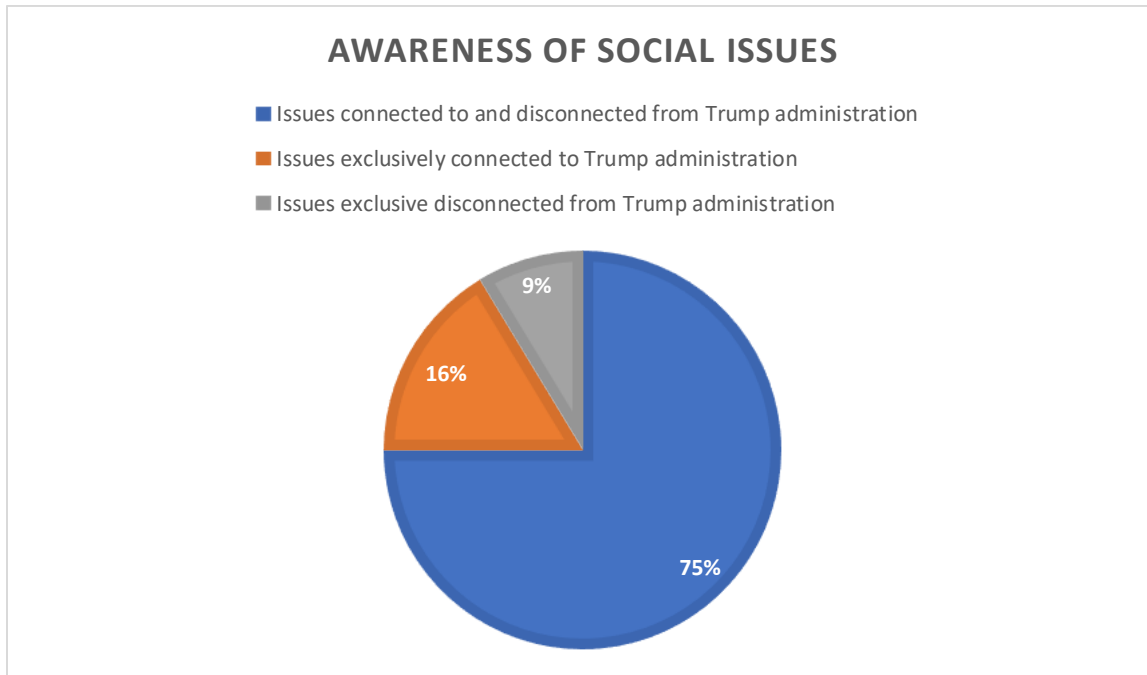


Chart 6: Awareness of Social Issues

### **Frequency Of Media Coverage Of American Police Violence In Country of Origin**

When asked about the frequency of the respondent’s home country’s media coverage of American police brutality incidents, I received a wide range of responses in both the survey and the interview (see Chart 7). Of the 23 respondents who participated in my research study, 52 percent of respondents reported that their country of origin covered American police violence towards African Americans in the media, but the degree to which news media outlets covered American police violence depended upon country of origin. Respondents who came from North American, South American and Western European countries were more likely to report that their countries covered police brutality incidents taking place in the United States than respondents from Eastern European, Middle Eastern and South Asian countries. Another important thing to note is that respondents who noted that incidents of police violence towards citizens took place

in their country of origin were also more likely to state that their country’s media networks also covered these incidents frequently.

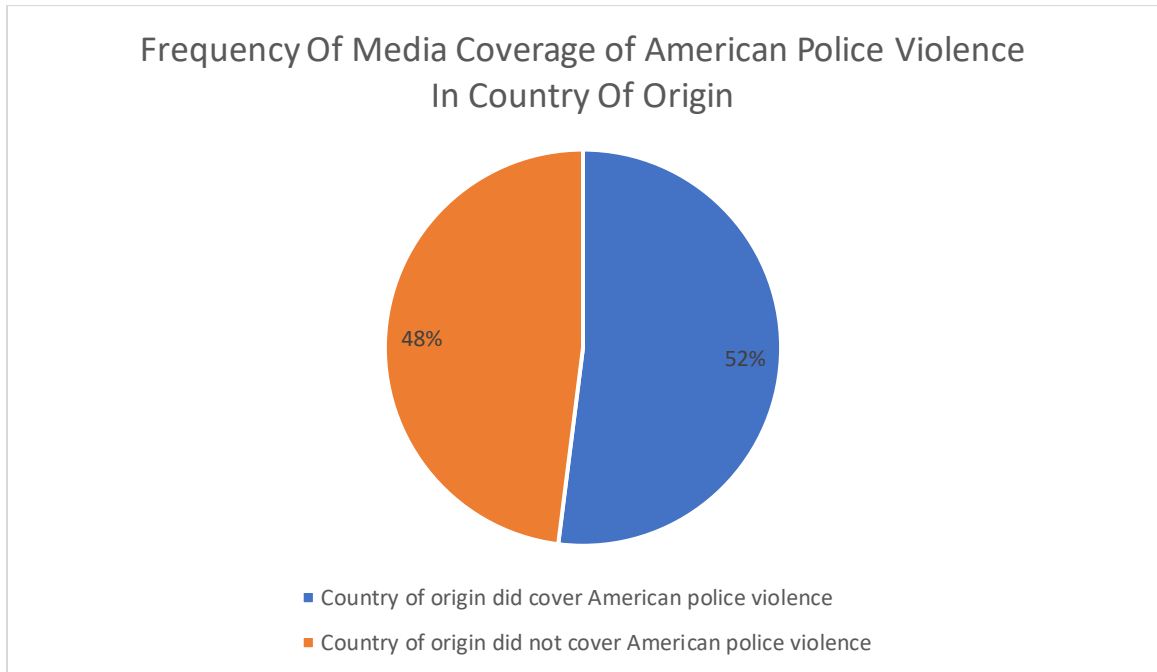


Chart 7: Frequency of Media Coverage of American Police Violence in Country of Origin

### **Impact of Media Coverage On Perceptions of African Americans**

Respondents were asked to describe the impact that media narratives and coverage of American police violence incidents had on their perceptions of African American people (see Chart 8). Most respondents—around 65 percent of them—stated that both domestic and international media coverage did have an impact on their perceptions of African Americans. 35 percent of respondents expressed that media coverage of American police violence had little to no impact on their perspectives.

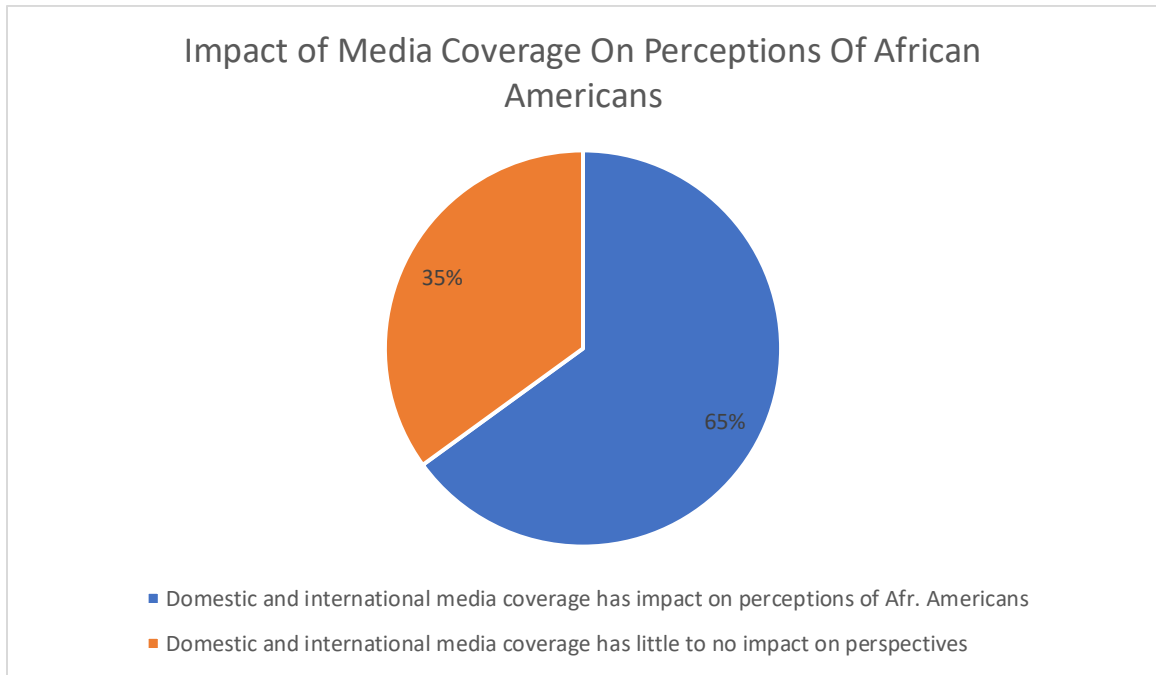


Chart 8: Impact of Media Coverage on Perceptions of African Americans

Most respondents in this study expressed that exposure to media images of American police violence towards African American people did not necessarily change their perspectives. In other words, if respondents were already aware of the issue of police violence, then media coverage either reinforced their sympathy or apathy towards African American people. However, an overwhelming majority of participants in the research study sympathized with African American victims. The difference between the survey and the interview format did determine the clarity and detail of the responses.

### **Impact of Media Coverage On American Society**

Participants were asked to describe the impact that media coverage of police brutality incidents in the United States had on their perceptions of American society (see Chart 9). 26 percent of respondents expressed that media coverage did not change their perceptions of American society. 35 percent of respondents stated that media coverage either reinforced

negative perceptions of American society or made them think more negatively about American society. The response to this question was unclear for thirty nine percent of responses recorded, even more so when recording data collected by the survey.

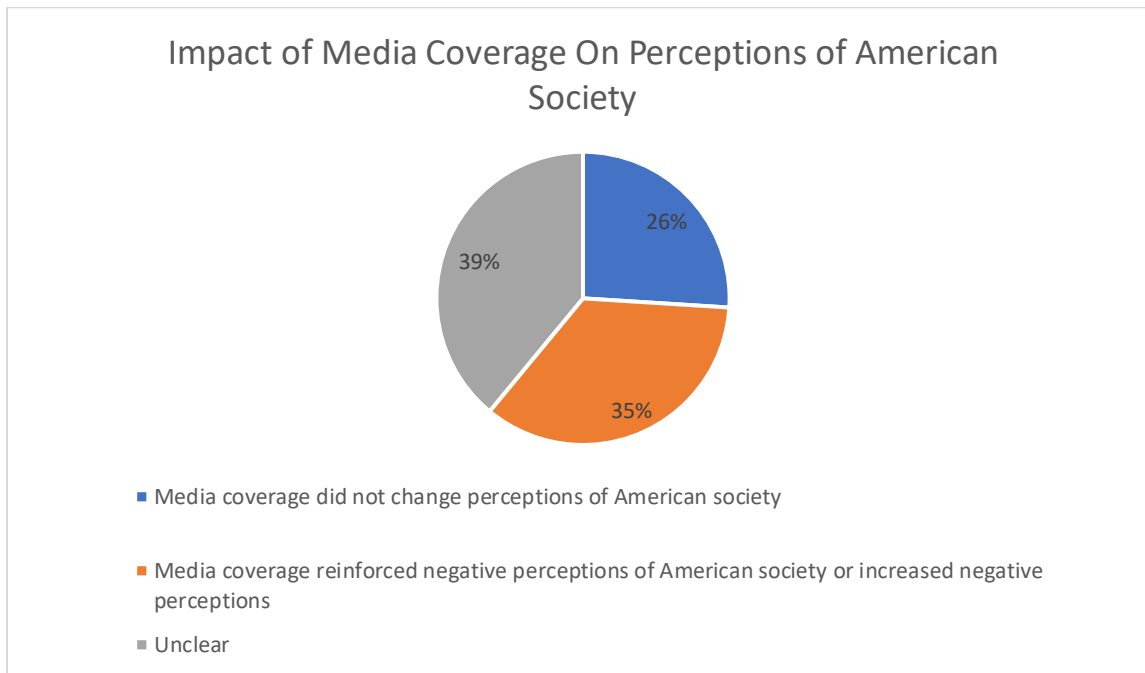


Chart 9: Impact of Media Coverage on Perceptions of American Society

### **Impact of Alton Sterling Incident on Local Interactions With African Americans**

Keeping in mind that a police brutality incident did take place in south Louisiana, specifically in one of the cities that my research was based in, I asked participants to describe whether Alton Sterling’s death impacted their interactions with African Americans in their local community. Though police coverage of American police violence in general did not change their perspectives, the Alton Sterling incident did. 47 percent of respondents expressed that the incident made them feel more sympathetic towards African Americans living in the community. However, some in the research study expressed still not completely understanding the African

American experience. At the same time, the number of people who remained apathetic towards African Americans in their community remained extremely small.

### **Impact of Alton Sterling Incident On Desire To Get Involved In Social Action and Dialogue**

Respondents were asked to express whether the Alton Sterling incident impacted their desire to get involved in dialogue on racism or social injustice if they were not already involved or motivated to do so (see Chart 10). For 74 percent of respondents, the incident either increased their desire to get involved in social action and/or dialogue or affirmed their desire if they were already engaged. 17 percent of respondents expressed that they remained indifferent and four percent expressed that the incident affirmed their lack of desire to get involved in any dialogue or action.

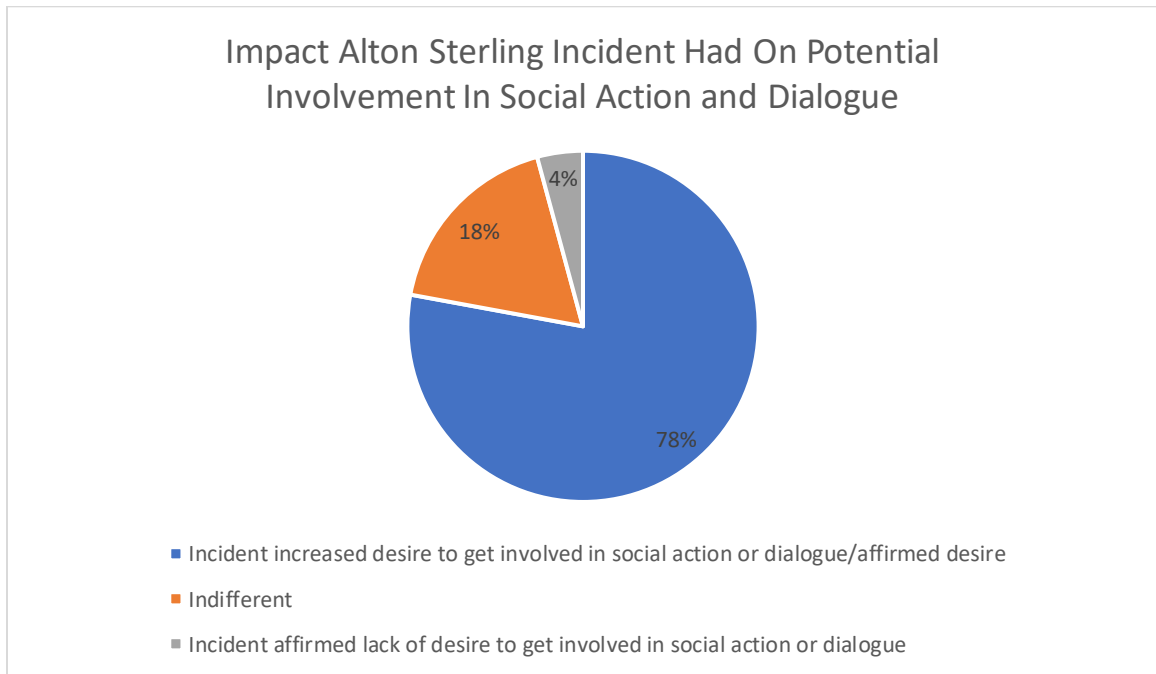


Chart 10: Impact Alton Sterling Incident Had On Potential Involvement In Social Action and Dialogue

While most respondents stated that the incident impacted their desire to get involved in dialogue on racism or action regarding social injustice, the degree to which they desired to get

involved greatly varied. Some respondents had no interest in getting involved in social action such as protests, citing disinterest or concerns for their immigration status as a barrier to social action. However, these respondents still felt as if it was important to be engaged, and preferred dialogue instead. Other respondent did wish to get involved in social action, but those that did were respondents who through the interview or survey expressed that they were already involved in social justice work.

### **Importance of Outsiders Educating Themselves on American Social Issues**

Participants were asked whether they considered it important for those living outside of the United States to educate themselves on social issues in the United States, especially those that concern minority communities (see Chart 11). A large majority of respondents—around 82 percent—felt that it was very important that people living outside of the United States educate themselves on social issues taking place. Some respondents commented that this was especially important if respondents were from a minority group in their country or origin or would be a member of a minority group once arriving to the United States.

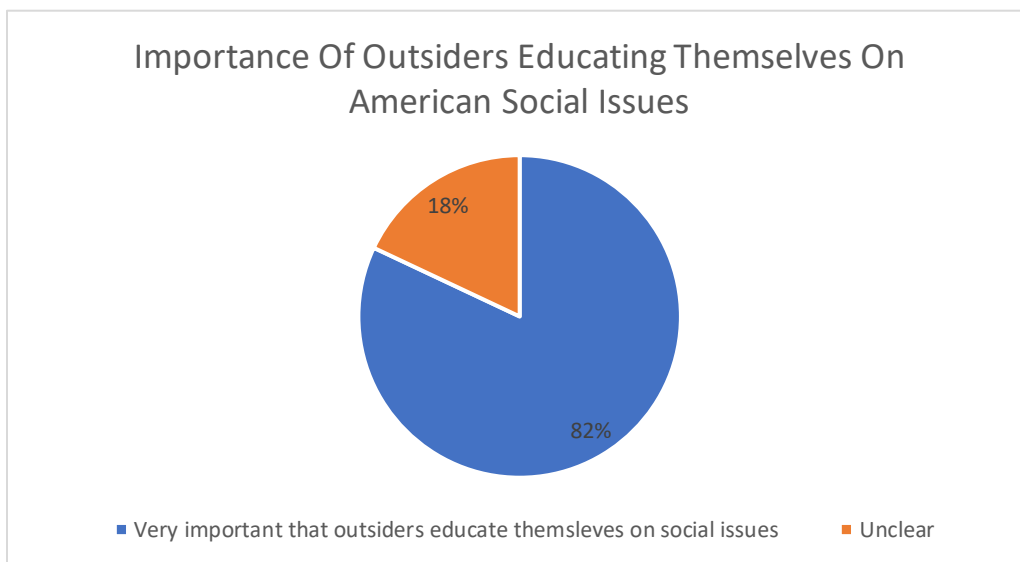


Chart 11: Importance of Outsiders Educating Themselves on American Social Issues



## DATA ANALYSIS

### Theme 1: Analyzing Media

Through the interviews and surveys of my research study, I received a lot of information with regards to perspectives on not only police violence, but on the way that media sources covered the topic. My research revealed that exposure to media coverage of police violence alone did not necessarily affect respondents' perspectives. There was great diversity in the ways in which respondents interpreted and understood news media and coverage of police violence. For some respondents, their home country's media coverage on Americans in the United States was not as detailed as it is in the United States. For others, specifically those who were first-generation immigrants, the media coverage that they received the most was American media coverage. However, they were just as critical of the way in which police violence was covered.

When news media covered police violence towards African Americans, some respondents felt as if the media outlets did not share the full story. In their opinion, the role of any news network was to tell a balanced story that accounted for both the police officers and African American community members impacted. They perceived certain networks inserting their own agenda into their coverage of American police violence:

“They give a one sided story. They want to say that--they're basically painting a story of like--there's two sides to it. It's either the police is too bad and they are going crazy, beserk, killing everyone or the people are the bad ones. They don't try to give some kind of balance and present what is happening. So if the picture is that the police are bad, then that's the only picture they are going to try and paint. A lot of times that's what it seems at least. And if the people are bad, then that's the picture they are going to try and paint. They are going to run with it and embellish it. They're going to be like 'Blue Lives Matter.' Twist it completely when half the time, that's not what is actually happening.”

Some respondents felt as if the news media had a different role. Both American and international news networks and entities in general were to be responsible and accurate in their coverage of historically marginalized communities. For respondents who shared this view, they felt as if media coverage reinforced systems of oppression when covering police violence towards African Americans. As a result, they were selective in the news media that they exposed themselves to.

“Now definitely, that goes back to the source. There is obviously something that exists here, it’s media manipulation. Through the sources I was getting them from, I felt that they were quite honest. But in high school, I was exposed to sources that would sort of criminalize the victim. This was of course to help a certain community maintain an innocent status.”

While many respondents were critical of media coverage on the topic of American police violence, there were many who were critical of the media. I found that for some respondents, the news media industry was inherently problematic. For them, news networks could not be trusted to deliver an accurate and well-rounded report of the events that were taking place in the local and global community. Those respondents who were critical of news media coverage tended to be individuals who came from marginalized backgrounds regarding race, ethnicity or nationality, or those who were aware of issues concerning racism and systemic inequalities.

“I’ve never trusted media. I’ve never trusted news outlets because there are so many ways of looking at the same story. I think that with my education and my access to education, I’ve learned that, I could spin my own story if I wanted to. Stats could be manipulated up or down to make anything sell if you wanted to.”

Overall, I found that respondents who were critical of news media coverage were also critical of the issue of police violence and systems of oppression connected to it. They felt as if the issues connected to media coverage were also further reaching than what they saw on

television or read online. Because of this, they relied more upon social media and community perspectives, especially in the aftermath of the Alton Sterling incident.

## **Theme 2: Understanding of Social Identity**

Social identity presented itself as one of the most important—if not the most important—theme of my research. At times, this theme overshadowed the impact that the media coverage of police violence had on respondents. One of the most obvious observations that I made from my research was that the respondent's social identity affected the ways in which they perceived the issues of police violence towards African Americans, African Americans themselves and American society. International students of African, Asian, Middle Eastern and Latino descent and immigrants who came from historically marginalized backgrounds in their home countries were more likely to sympathize with African Americans when seeking to understand the issue of police violence. The same applied to first-generation immigrants who were from minority backgrounds as well.

Another piece of this theme was not only related to demography, but also to one's understanding of social identity. The conversations I had with respondents through interviews in addition to recorded survey responses revealed to me that some of them had a complex understanding of their collective social identity. They also revealed that other respondents still did not understand the impact that their social identity had on their world view and how others received them. For instance, some respondents would identify certain components of their social identity that were important to them when asked about their social identity at the beginning of the interview, but throughout the course of the interview, respondents would express that other social identities like religion influenced their worldview and perspectives on social issues.

One major social identity that influenced interpretation of media coverage of police violence as well as perceptions of African Americans and American society was religious identity. I observed that respondents who mentioned being very religious Christians tended to view media coverage of police violence through an uncritical lens, and be less sympathetic towards African Americans who were impacted by this issue. In terms of their perspectives on American society, they were also less critical of it. For respondents who mentioned belonging to religions such as Islam and Judaism, or those who did not mention religion, the opposite effect was present. These respondents were more critical of police officers when observing media coverage of police violence and more sympathetic towards African Americans. They were also more critical of American society overall.

I found that participants who could speak with great understanding about their social identity were more likely to have a complex understanding of police violence and its impact on African Americans. Respondents who were introspective about their social identity were also able to understand and speak in great detail about social injustices taking place in the United States. One of my respondent's perspectives below reflect an example of a respondent who expressed having a very complex and introspective understanding of their social identity:

“ My Caribbean identity is important. My affiliation with African American identity. I wouldn't really say that I'm African American because of the lifestyle that I've had and how I was raised because I didn't have a lot of the opportunities and the access that my African American friends had. And I was really looking at the African American experience through a lens. And even though I was involved in it, and participated to defend it, it was still through this lens that I was looking through.”

I also found that respondents who were introspective as it related to their collective social identity and were self-aware of how others received them were better able to understand the

impact of police violence on African American people than those who did not. Respondents who also understood that their social identity was shaped by how they saw the world and how others saw them were also able to see police violence towards African Americans as a systemic issue as opposed to a circumstantial occurrence.

The number of social identities that a person mentioned did not necessarily mean that a respondent demonstrated an understanding of their social identity either. For example, one of the research respondents only mentioned that their ethnicity was an important component of their social identity besides nationality. However, they spoke about how their ethnicity impacted the way that they interpreted media coverage of various social issues. They also spoke about how their ethnicity influenced their experience with oppression and marginalization in their own lives.

### **Theme 3: Growing Up**

During this research study, I had a chance to learn a lot about the environments of my respondents' upbringing. Many respondents in the research study expressed that this had some influence on their perspectives as it related to their perspectives on police violence and African Americans.

I observed that the demography of the respondent's home environment of was an important factor. During the interview process, some of the respondents who were first-generation immigrants expressed that the environment of their upbringing was very diverse in terms of demographics. There were people of various races, social classes and ethnicities that they had a chance to interact with and learn from. For other first-generation immigrants, the

demography of their environments was homogenous. One respondent was very intuitive in understanding the impact that the diversity of their upbringing had on shaping their perspectives.

“It wasn’t a very homogenous on any level of the spectrum. Um... So I don’t know if it was our economic situation. I don’t know if it was my dad’s language barrier. I don’t know what put us in the neighborhoods that I grew up in all the time. but when my dad, before he got in trouble, got some money together and we moved to a nicer neighborhood in Florida. And it was like definitely different. Like the diversity was gone and I had one friend that was not white when moved into that neighborhood.”

I found that research study respondents who were first-generation immigrants and were introspective with regards to growing up in diverse environments tended to be very critical of media coverage of police violence towards African Americans. Having been exposed to African American people and their community, they tended to be more aware of some of the issues that African Americans faced. They were also critical of American society and culture as well, specifically with regards to how American news media networks presented issues in American society to the local and global community. On the other hand, some first-generation immigrant respondents described the demography of the environment of their upbringing but didn’t say whether this had an impact on their perspectives or not.

Some first-generation immigrant participants in the study commented that their upbringing influenced how they selected and interpreted media as well. Due to having a connection to another country, some first-generation respondents described having to bridge the gap between two distinct cultural contexts. As a result, they saw the United States through an outsider lens, being more critical of American society and culture. One respondent commented that their upbringing influenced the media that they chose to expose themselves to. Their upbringing also influenced how they related to American culture:

“American culture relies so much on subliminal messages and group-thinking that they can hide the truth right in front of you and you wouldn’t even know it. We don’t teach ourselves to ask questions. We don’t encourage inquisitive of thinking. Our whole educational system and the back mapping of what’s needed in the workforce is dismantling what you learn in school.”

Diverse upbringing influenced first-generation respondents’ ability to have sympathy for African Americans and other minority groups in the United States. Therefore, if they were exposed to media images and narratives that contradicted their worldview or their perspectives on American society, they did feel as if it truly reflected the struggles of people of color in the United States.

With regards to international students and immigrants, the environments of their upbringing tended to be more homogenous and less diverse. Therefore, their understandings of American culture and society as well as their understandings of African American people tended to be influenced by the news and entertainment media that they consumed. Having not been exposed to diverse images or components of the African American community, much of their understandings of police violence and other social issues depended upon outside knowledge.

#### **Theme 4: Identifying System of Oppression**

Most participants did not think that African Americans were at fault for police violence. However, not everyone connected police violence to systems of oppression such as racism. Therefore, when viewing domestic and international coverage of police violence, some saw police violence as an example of systemic racism while other saw it as an unfortunate circumstance that may have been the result of human error.

Whether they were first-generation immigrants or not, if respondents were in environments where they reported either not being treated equally or observing inequities taking

place, then they were likely to see systems of oppression. For one of the research respondents, they were in an environment where systemic oppression was consistently a topic of conversation. Therefore, they could connect police violence towards African Americans to systemic racism and oppression:

“Nationally, there is clearly a lot of division, whether it be in our education system with the charter schools and the segregation within the school system. There are so many problems that you’re like where to start. There’s a whole prison industrial complex, what food sources are reliable. It just seems as if the system itself, which is mainly a capitalist system—I’m not going to say it’s not working, but there needs to be some adjustments because having everybody focus on building wealth is not helping people. It’s not working for everybody.”

Though some respondents who were either international students or immigrants to the United States were able to identify systems of oppression in the United States, some remarked that they couldn’t say the same of those back at home. They remarked that many could not see police violence as a systemic issue because they did not have the background history to understand the issues that African Americans faced in their own communities. I observed from the conversations I had with respondents that this may have been due to the fact that in certain countries, issues impacting people of color and other minority groups in the United States are underreported as international issues. In addition to this, respondents stated that news media, domestically or internationally, does not provide context.

At the same time, there were many respondents who did not see police violence towards African Americans as connected to systemic oppression, even going as far as to say that African Americans were partly responsible for the ways in the were treated by police officers. Through some of the conversations, I observed that some respondents internalized negative images and pathologies of African American people. In other words, when the Alton Sterling incident took



place, some respondents felt that Sterling's death was more connected to personal choice in interaction than it was to systemic oppression:

“For me, I think when you put yourself in situations-- do I believe there are injustices or situations in which he may have been racially profiled, I think he has.... I think you're being racially profiled to begin with because you put yourself in situations or in places that are questionable to begin with, and you do things that make you even more suspicious. So that's where I stood with it.”

There were some respondents who felt that police violence was an issue that was connected to the systemic oppression of African Americans, but they did not see the system of power and privilege that impacted the relationships between African Americans and white Americans in the United States. Even if they remarked that police violence was a systemic issue, race relations in the United States was seen through their own cultural lens of understanding race, commenting that race relations in the United States are not the same in their home country. In other words, because they were coming from a cultural environment dissimilar to the United States, they saw American race relations as two communities engaged in mutual conflict. This was very common for international students and immigrants who were not born and raised in the United States.

“Well... I mean, it is divided. It is definitely divided. And I mean, it actually shocked me since I wasn't born here and when I came here, I didn't realize while living in a foreign country, how separated this country is. And it really shocked me to see this division. Even before Trump's inauguration, I could feel the discrimination from both sides, not only white people discriminating against Black people, but vice versa. Black people discrimination against white people. »

Nevertheless, those who understood and spoke about systemic oppression felt that it was necessary that the people in their home country also expand their understandings of American society.

“I... would like people in other countries like Chile, like my family, to not idolize the United States as much as they do. First and foremost, educating themselves on how the economic structure here is really important because they idolize the economic access, which isn't even real in this country... And I think that when they understand that, they'll understand the marginalization of so many different communities and automatically have the solidarity that's necessary to become better educated and aware of those struggles. A lot of times people are hesitant to listen to that struggle because they are so hesitant to believe that or not believe that in its entirety. So... while they might know and see that there is police brutality against marginalized people, they might also like the Cubans who came to Florida, overlook the poorer parts of their own society, or in this case, the outside society, because they have access to something else, and most of the time, it's monetary access.”

## DISCUSSION

### Conclusions

My research study revealed that media coverage of American police violence incidents domestically and abroad alone did not influence respondent's perspectives. The results revealed that interpretation of these media narratives was more important than exposure alone. This exposure was influenced by the respondent's social identity and their environment—which is similar to what would perhaps influence the perspectives of Americans who do not possess an international background.

Recognizing that the same factors that influenced the perspectives of respondents would influence those without an international background, it is troubling that international community members have been excluded from the conversation. Despite their general exclusion from social

justice movements and community building initiatives, the perspectives of international community members are very valuable to improving the community. In connection to criminal justice and police reform, international community members also have very valuable contributions to criminal justice and police reform conversations. Respondents in my research study expressed viewpoints that ranged from great empathy for African American community members to indifference, though the latter was very rare in my research study. The diversity in perspectives are no different than that of Americans who are considered to be native born citizens or possessing no immediate international background.

Unfortunately, intercultural miscommunication between Baton Rouge and New Orleans city leaders and international community members has resulted in their perspectives—and even presence—being overlooked. Even social justice activists have left them out of these conversations for social change altogether. Nevertheless, my research study also revealed that this exclusion may also be multilateral; not every immigrant or international student wants to engage in social change or dialogue concerning strained police relations between people of color and police officers. At the same time, this can apply to those considered to be native-born citizens of the United States. Therefore, overlooking immigrants or international students is still problematic.

Another conclusion from my research is that dialogue on race relations and police/community relations have been both an underused and overused tool in south Louisiana. In south Louisiana, dialogue can encourage education on the topic of race and other forms of social injustice taking place in the community. However, dialogue with the intent to educate and raise awareness on social issues has been relatively underused with exception to a few

organizations such as Dialogue On Race Louisiana. I saw that dialogue was often used to control the narrative and silence progressive conversations on police reform and racism. Dialogue events were often broadcasted on local news networks, diluting the ability of participants to have their concerns heard. In addition to this, there were more time for police officers to speak than for community members, specifically African Americans.

Through my research, I learned that dialogue was a means through which respondents expanded their understandings of police violence and other issues concerning the African American community. It also proved to them that they could make a change in the community that they were calling home, whether it be temporarily or permanently.

### **Practical Applications**

Social identity and understanding of social identity was a vital factor in influencing the way in which the respondent understood and interpreted media narratives. In regard to future research, those who study immigrant or international perspectives on any American issue would greatly enrich their study by accounting for an individual's collective social identity, which includes their socioeconomic status, age, gender or ethnicity, as well as their educational or professional background. Another variable that should be included for future research is environment, which also can influence how one see's the world or interacts with those different from them.

In terms of college environments, those working in the field of international student advising or those working with international students should work to incorporate more socially conscious perspectives into their field. Though international students are aware of the social injustices that occur in the United States, student advisors and administrators have not done the

best job in addressing issues concerning social identity. Overall, there is a great absence of these conversations, which may be a result of international student advisors not understanding their own social identity, or not being intersectional in the ways in which they address the needs of international students of various social identities. This is intriguing considering that international students, regardless of their age, are having conversations about American issues with both their domestic and international classmates. Some international students in the research study even expressed that their international classmates were also scared of being impacted by issues such as police violence.

Not only does there need to be more understandings of social identity in the United States by international student advisors, there needs to be more diversity in the fields of international student advising, especially at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Having student advisors from diverse backgrounds can provide international students with a wide range of perspectives concerning the American experience so that they can have a well-rounded view of American society. In addition to greater diversity among international student advisors, American students of color need to have a stronger voice in helping international students integrate into American universities or in planning internationalization efforts. Examples of this could include working to provide mentor programs for international students and increasing outreach to students of color to participate in these programs. Another way in which international student departments could work to increase the engagement between international students and students of color is through dialogue on social issues impacting communities of color in the United States.

Organizations who work to help immigrants integrate into American society must also make sure that there is greater demographic diversity regarding those who help immigrants

integrate into American communities. It is important for immigrants to be able to see the complexities of American society, and be encouraged to integrate, rather than assimilate, into American society. Some respondents expressed that those who helped them improve their English competency, for instance, expressed views and perspectives that were adversarial to African Americans and African American social justice movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition to this, some respondents felt as if they were not truly aware of inequalities taking place in the United States until they arrived to south Louisiana for school or to work.

Finally, social justice activists and community leaders must focus on diversifying their engagement of community members, especially those working in the Baton Rouge and New Orleans metropolitan areas. In response to Alton Sterling's death, activists in the Baton Rouge community tended to focus on direct action and protest. Public dialogue was left up to city government and police officials who in my opinion were not genuine in their approach to the issue. Dialogue is an important tool that activists and community leaders can implement so that immigrants and international students can deepen or expand their understandings of social issues such as police brutality and systemic oppression towards peoples of color in the United States. However, this will also require community leaders to improve their intercultural competence with regards to working with international community members.

Most importantly, activists in south Louisiana should work to form stronger coalitions with Asian American, Latino, Arab American, immigrant and religious minority communities. Many respondents who had international backgrounds and were people of color expressed desires to expand their understandings of issues plaguing the African American community

locally and nationally. As we work to reconcile the rifts between community members and police officers, it is important to know that complex problems require complex solutions. Most importantly, we should all remember that the community belongs to everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from.

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### **Appendix 1: Interview/Survey Questionnaire For Respondents**

1. What is your nationality? What are important aspects of your social identity?
2. What are the sources through which you receive most of your news about the United States?
3. What are some other sources through which you learn/have learned about the United States and the city you live in?
4. What are some of the social issues taking place nationally and locally that you are aware of?
5. How would you describe the frequency of coverage of police violence towards African Americans in your country of origin?
6. How would you describe the impact that these media narratives have on your perceptions of African Americans? How would you describe the impact that these media narratives have on your views off American society?
7. Did the Alton Sterling incident impac the ways in which you interacted with African Americans in your local community? if so, to what extent?
8. Did the incident impact your desire to get involved in dialogue or social action concerning social justice? Why or why not?
9. How important is it that people not from the United States educate themselves on the social issue taking place in the United States, specifically those concerning minority groups?
10. Are there any other thoughts that you would like to express that have not been expressed during this interview?