

**A TALE OF TWO CHAMPIONS:  
LSU AND SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY COMPETE  
FOR COVERAGE IN LOUISIANA NEWSPAPERS**

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

In

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by  
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B.A., University of New Orleans, 1999  
May 2005

*For Ava*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of three-and-a-half years of hard work. It would not have been possible without the help of several very important people.

First, I'd like to thank my committee members, Dr. Lori Boyer and Dr. Ralph Izard. Thank you both for lending me your expertise and advice, as well as testing the fruits of my labor in the fire of constructive criticism. A special thank you to Dr. Izard for giving me the opportunity to be a master, that on paper I probably didn't deserve.

Many, many, many thanks to my chair, Dr. Renita Coleman. Thank you for chairing yet another graduate research project. Your excitement about my topic and your constant encouragement throughout the whole process made writing this thesis less of the monster I dreaded. Thank you for working hard for me as if my project was yours, and for making yourself available at work, home and even over sushi. You were exactly what I needed in a chair, and I will always be grateful.

A huge thank you to my coders, Ben and Siobhan. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the work you did for me while juggling the demands of your own lives. Ben, thanks for coding the lion's share of the sample. Siobhan, you are a woman of integrity. It would have been so easy to back out, yet you worked for me across state lines. I consider both of you my friends.

I would also like to thank my parents for always being in my corner. And last but not least, my wife, my best friend and the mother of my child, Terri, who left me alone when I needed to work, cracked the whip when I didn't feel like working, and never doubted I would reach my goal. I love you.

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## ABSTRACT

This study's purpose was to discover if two Louisiana newspapers gave Louisiana State University's football team more favorable coverage than that of the team from Southern University, a historically black university. A content analysis of articles published in *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge) and the *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans) from the 1995 and 1998 seasons, when Southern University's team accomplished greater success than LSU's team, and the 2003 season, where both teams won national championship titles revealed that while LSU's team did not receive more prominent coverage and praise than Southern University's team, racial stereotypes appeared throughout the 667 articles analyzed.

Although each team has a predominant number of black players, characteristics stereotypical of white players (intelligence, hard work) were used in describing LSU's football team, which represents a predominantly white university. Characteristics stereotypical of black players (athletic ability) were used in describing Southern's football team, which represents a historically black university. Although, there was not significantly more black stereotypes used to describe Southern than LSU, LSU players were framed significantly more often as intelligent and hard working than Southern players. These findings are consistent with modern racism theory.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

When the Fighting Tigers of Louisiana State University football defeated the No. 1 Bowl Championship Series-ranked Sooners of Oklahoma University in the 2004 Nokia Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, they vaulted to the front page of newspaper sports sections around the country. This was no more true than in the Louisiana press. *The Advocate*, LSU's hometown newspaper, hailed the 13-1 season as "the winningest season in school history," and other Louisiana newspapers echoed the same.

Another champion was born in Louisiana that year as well. Baton Rouge's other college football team, the Southern University Jaguars, finished their season 12-1, and also were crowned national champions—the black college national champion. Southern University is a historically black university with an enrollment of about 10,000 students, compared to LSU's 30,000-plus enrollment. While LSU competes at the Division 1-A level, the Jaguars compete at the lower Division 1-AA level. The two universities' success had journalists dubbing Baton Rouge "Tittletown," and, like LSU, Southern appeared in Louisiana sports pages.

Despite the press that both football programs received in 2003, many locals believe LSU is more favored by the press than Southern. No group makes this claim more than African-Americans, believing the cause to be racial at its core. This is significant because academic studies have shown that although the media no longer engage in traditional, old-fashioned racism that is very obvious, overt racism still exists within the media (Rainville & McCormick, 1979; McConahay, Hardee and Batts, 1981; Entman, 1990).

Regardless of whether racism is the reason for an assumed disparity in news coverage between the two football teams, one could argue that LSU football possesses more news value than Southern. LSU is a Division 1-A football program. This means that its opponents are more competitive than the teams Southern faces. Division 1-A teams appear in nationwide television broadcasts far more than Division 1-AA teams. Therefore, they have more exposure and thus a larger fan base. LSU is the state's flagship university. Unlike Southern University, it bears the state's name. LSU in many ways represents the entire state more than any other state university, while Southern, a predominately black institution, represents only a fragment of the community. In Louisiana, African Americans make up only 32 percent of the population, a comparable demographic to LSU's 30,000 students to Southern's 10,000 students.

Clearly, from a national perspective LSU is more newsworthy than Southern University. Surely, LSU would receive more coverage than Southern in the national media. Audiences in other parts of the country are more familiar with LSU, considering most of LSU's football games are broadcast nationwide. LSU also is the 2003 College Football National Champion. The only nationwide coverage Southern football receives is once a year when NBC broadcasts the "Bayou Classic." While Southern's lack of national prominence compared to LSU is a seemingly good justification for more favored news coverage, could that lack of prominence be promulgated by the media's lack of coverage? The same argument has been made in regard to women's sports. Gender bias studies have recorded the prejudice in reporting of women's athletic events (Salwen and Wood, 1995; Knight and Giuliano, 2001; Eastman and Billings, 2000 and 2001), thus attracting nominal audiences. Likewise, if Southern football has a smaller fan base, one

could argue it is the result of a lack of media coverage. And does this represent another form of modern racism?

This study will determine, first, if there is a disparity in the amount of coverage of LSU and Southern by looking at two Louisiana newspapers: *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge) and *The Times-Picayune* (New Orleans). In addition, this study will explore how stories about Southern, a historically black university, are framed compared to stories about LSU, a predominantly white university. This will determine if the newspapers depict the two racially opposed schools according to modern racism theory. Although, both LSU and Southern have a predominant number of African-American players on their teams, the study will not look at the players as individuals as much as how the two teams that represent racially opposed institutions are depicted. For example, references to one team's win/loss record to make conclusions about its level of talent and/or popularity with fans would be considered neutral; however, if one program is referred to as the "state favorite," while the other program is referred to as the "minority favorite," this would be considered racially biased.

This is an important study because it contributes to the current body of knowledge on media bias and framing of race. Many studies have been done to determine how the media have reinforced stereotypes and framed stories based on race; however, not many have been done in the arena of sports reporting. If media bias is ever to be fully exposed and exterminated, it must be addressed in all news areas in which it exists.

This study is important to journalism as it is practiced and taught. In this country, racial issues run deep throughout its society's history. The media have the power to

either keep alive beliefs that have divided racial groups for centuries, or be a catalyst for change in how people perceive one another and institutions unique to certain ethnicities.

Also, while public perception may be that LSU receives more media coverage than Southern, no definitive proof exists to confirm this belief. Therefore, this study will address this issue.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Theory**

This study will employ three theories: modern racism, schema theory, and framing. These three theories are important because they explain how the media influence their audience, as well as how audiences process the information the media give them. Just as media representatives may bring their own set of prejudices and beliefs to their reporting, the audience receives these messages and filters them through their own set of prejudices and beliefs.

#### Stereotypes and Modern Racism Theory

Walter Lippmann introduced the concept of stereotyping in his 1922 book “Public Opinion.” He argues that since people have limited exposure to places, people and cultures, they are therefore dependent on different kinds of media for this information: “Each of us lives and works on a small part of the earth’s surface, moves in a small circle, and of these acquaintances knows only a few intimately. Of any public event that has wide effects we see at best only a phase and an aspect” (Lippmann, 1922, p. 53). People see people and events in much the same way schema theory explains how people deal with complexity—they draw from what they know to either affirm or dismiss what they see. “For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see,” Lippmann said (1922, p.54).

Stereotyping is often referred to as overgeneralization, or the “failure to see distinctions between members of a category or class” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 97). Some of the products of overgeneralization are racial and gender bias. Davis and Harris

define a stereotype as “a generalization about a category of people that is negative and/or misleading” and “used to predict and explain the behavior” of a group of people (Eastman & Billings, 2001, p. 184). African Americans have been the victims of negative racial stereotypes in the media. However, the traditional racial stereotypes, which depicted African Americans as lazy, intellectually inferior to whites, and naturally athletic, have transformed from the overt to the covert. Traditional racist sentiment has been replaced with what researchers have dubbed “modern racism” (Sears and McConahay, 1973; McConahay, Hardee, and Batts, 1981). Robert Entman is best known for his study of modern racism in the media (1990). Modern racism’s three components—anti-black effect, resistance to black political demands, and the belief among whites that racism is dead—may convey “a sense that that modern racist sentiments...are at least acceptable if not majority views among the white citizenry” (Entman, 1990, p. 335).

While modern racism theory explains how racist beliefs manifest themselves in more covert ways, schema theory shows how media messages may influence and/or reinforce the modern racism beliefs of those who receive the messages.

### Schema Theory

Scholars have defined a schema as “a cognitive structure consisting of organized knowledge about situations and individuals that has been abstracted from prior experiences. It is used for processing new information and retrieving stored information” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 82). According to schema theory, people decide whether the information they are receiving is worthwhile by comparing it to information and beliefs they already have stored. Scholars argue if audiences decide the new information

is worthwhile, they integrate it—or at least the conclusions they drew from the information—into their existing thought schemas. If audiences decide the information is not worthwhile, they either will discredit the information and/or its source or replace their previous schema in favor of the new information (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 65).

Since people tend to store the conclusions they draw from the information rather than the evidence itself, the information may acquire slants that make it more or less accurate.

Stored schemas may in turn become the definition or perception by which people comprehend different events and different people, forming overgeneralizations.

It is inevitable that people will form schemas about race, and in contemporary society, those beliefs are likely to be the more insidious type of modern racism than the more overt ones of traditional racism. Besides acquiring these modern racism schemas through everyday interactions, people may also acquire them from the mass media.

Framing theory explains how media messages can be written to either emphasize or ignore these modern racism themes.

### Framing

Media framing is the term used to describe how the media organize information in producing the news. Some scholars have defined a frame in this context as “a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 277).

Framing goes a step beyond bias in news coverage because people may be able to detect if a story is biased toward one ideology, or group of people over another, but they may not as easily detect news being packaged and presented from a specific angle

(Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 278). Not only do producers of the news frame stories, but framing also is practiced by those from whom they get the news. Those controlling the news event (i.e. public relations, press releases, etc.) usually define these frames and then the news media pass it on to the public.

Research has shown that media framing can have an effect on the way audiences interpret an issue. The media suggest who is responsible for problems within society and who can help remedy the problem (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p.279). By focusing on discrete events out of context, the study showed that television news led audiences to assign blame for social problems to individuals rather than society as a whole. This is significant when considering Entman's arguments on modern racism. If the media give whites the impression that African Americans are threatening, overly demanding, and undeserving, whites may assign blame for social problems to this specific group of people, as in the case of affirmative action and poverty.

Framing can show the manifestations of modern racism clearer than a bias study in which things are simply coded positive, negative or neutral. For example, mentioning an athlete's intelligence and natural physical ability is positive. However, when those characteristics are combined with race, and white athletes are associated more with intelligence and black athletes more with physical abilities, then that is modern racism.

These three theories will play a significant role in this research. They will help to substantiate that LSU football truly possesses more news value than Southern University football for the reasons discussed, or if the media have contributed to Southern's lack of prominence in the media by its lack of coverage and/or the way it has framed stories about their program.

## **Background**

In 1995, Southern University finished the season as the black college national champion, as well as the champions of the Southwestern Athletic Conference. LSU finished that season with a 7-4 record. The Tigers failed to win their conference championship, but beat Michigan State in the Independence Bowl in Shreveport, La. In 1998, Southern University did not win the black college national championship, but did achieve the title of SWAC champions for the second straight year. That same season, LSU started the season 3-0, but finished a dismal 4-7. In 2003, both schools' football teams won their conference championships and national championship titles.

These three years were chosen for comparison of coverage of LSU and Southern because they represent two seasons in which Southern had outstanding records of wins, including bowl games and championships, but LSU did not fare as well (1995 and 1998), and one season in which both schools achieved parity (2003). If media portrayals were based on team performance only, then amount and favorability of coverage should be comparable in 2003, but Southern should have received more and better coverage than LSU in 1995 and 1998. If the media instead portrayed LSU more often and more favorably than Southern in the years when LSU's record was worse than Southern's, then this may be evidence of modern racism.

## **Empirical Evidence**

Surveys have shown an increase in whites' acceptance of minorities and blacks in particular (Dovidio, 1993). A 1990 survey showed only 4 percent of whites thought blacks in general were lazy, opposed to 75 percent who felt that way according to a 1933 survey. More than 90 percent of whites surveyed in 1991 said they would vote for a

well-qualified, black, presidential candidate in contrast to 1958 when most whites said they would not vote that way. Despite the fact that percentages of whites, though few, still hold overtly bigoted attitudes toward blacks, studies have shown even the vast majority of whites who “probably believe they are not prejudiced may nonetheless exhibit a modern, subtle form of bias” (Dovidio, 1993, p. 52).

McConahay, Hardee and Batts (1981) conducted three experiments, using questionnaires with Likert-type opinion statements, to test a theory of modern racism that whites, though cognizant of old-fashioned racial beliefs as racism, do not recognize new, subtle beliefs that reveal anti-black feelings still exist. In the first two experiments, 20 and 34 white, male students at Duke University respectively were asked to rate their agreement with opinion statements about old-fashioned racial beliefs and modern racism beliefs. Some of the participants were administered the questionnaire by a black proctor and the others by a white proctor. In both experiments, participants agreed with old-fashioned racial beliefs less when the proctor was black than when the proctor was white. However, their level of agreement did not vary for modern racism beliefs; thus the findings were consistent with modern racism theory. Since the modern racism beliefs may not have appeared racially offensive compared to the old-fashioned beliefs, the researchers conducted a third experiment. In this experiment, a series of questionnaires were administered, one of which contained only modern racism beliefs. The results showed the “modern racism scale had a lower perceived racism mean than the old-fashioned racism scale” (McConahay, Hardee and Batts, 1981, p. 576). Although some participants argued during debriefing that the modern racism items did not measure racism or prejudice, the researchers based these items on previous research.

Assuming people form stereotypes by associating a group of people with a set of descriptive characteristics, Gaertner and McLaughlin (1983) tested several white, male college students using three lexical decision tests. In the first and second experiments, the participants' were shown several word pairs and asked to signal if the pair was made of two meaningful words or not. Nonsense syllables, such as kupod and zumap, were sometimes paired with real words. The words whites and blacks also were used in word pairs with positive and negative descriptive characteristics, such as lazy and smart. In the second experiment, the word blacks was replaced with the word Negroes since Negroes was the more popular term at that time. The researchers noted the participants' reaction time to each pair. Their logic was the participants' reaction time would be faster when the words were highly associated (e.g. nurse/doctor) than when they were not (apple/chair). The results in each experiment showed participants' reaction times were significantly faster when the words blacks or Negroes were paired with negative characteristics than with positive characteristics. The opposite was true in regard to whites (Gaertner and McLaughlin, 1983, pp. 26-27). However, there was no significant difference in reaction times between whites and blacks paired with negative characteristics. The third experiment used a Likert format, and produced the same results as the first two experiments. Gaertner and McLaughlin reasoned that whites may not see blacks as more lazy than whites, but rather they may see whites as more ambitious than blacks; thus "racial stereotypes have not faded, but rather, have become more subtle, perhaps more complex, and less overtly negative" (p. 30).

Dovidio explained three normal psychological processes that produce modern racism, or aversive racism in whites: 1) social categorization – drawing the line between

other groups and their group; 2) the basic need for power for ourselves and our group – often accomplished by keeping other groups down; and 3) sociocultural influences – reflecting the values of society. Since aversive racists hold to egalitarian values, they would not discriminate in ways obvious to themselves or others. However, their negative attitudes manifest in ways that can be rationalized or justified based on something other than race. “Aversive racists may discriminate, but in a way that insulates them from having to believe that their behavior was racially motivated” (Dovidio, 1993, p. 53). Researchers have found evidence of this ambivalence in regard to affirmative action.

Despite studies which showed 75 percent of whites surveyed agreed that affirmative action agendas that help blacks should be supported, in another survey 80 percent of whites surveyed opposed giving preferential treatment to blacks over whites, saying it infringed on their personal freedom (Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner and Drout, 1994, p. 72). Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner and Drout tested whites’ resistance to affirmative action when the policy was framed to only show its benefit to blacks in contrast to when the policy was framed to show its benefit to other groups, such as elderly and disabled persons. Using the factorial survey approach, they asked 337 white college students from two universities to rate 12 statements on 7-point bipolar scales according to three dimensions: agree-disagree, fair-unfair and effective-ineffective. Although, white Americans who hold egalitarian values should have shown equal resistance to affirmative action for the three, targeted groups, the results showed a greater resistance to policies that benefited blacks than policies for the elderly and the disabled. The researchers suggested the participants felt elderly and disabled people were more deserving of preferential treatment because they earned it, or that they were

“disadvantaged due to factors outside their control” (Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner and Drout, 1993, p. 81).

Studies have shown how race can negatively impact journalists’ judgment in portraying the news. One researcher tested journalists’ ethical reasoning in decision making (Coleman, 2000), using the assumption that if they held negative ideas about certain racial groups, it would affect their news judgment “despite their best efforts to avoid prejudicial thinking” (Coleman, 2000, p.295). Two groups of journalism students were given the task of deciding whether to run a photograph. One group was given the four stories with photographs of white and black people to accompany each story. The other group was given the same four stories in text form without any indications of the subjects’ race. This group never saw pictures, but was able to read identical descriptions of the pictures, omitting the race of the people in the pictures. The stories covered four social issues: drugs, prostitution, elder abuse and homelessness. Using the Journalists’ Ethical Reasoning Instrument (JERI), the results showed the 53 of 108 participants who saw the photographs used significantly lower levels of ethical reasoning when photographs showed blacks than whites (Coleman, 2000, p. 303).

While sociological and psychological research of modern racism studied its implications on society as a whole, other studies applied the concepts of modern racism to a subset of society – the media.

A study of images of blacks in local television news discovered that 76 percent of all local television stories about blacks fell into the categories of crime and politics (Entman, 1990). Crime reports involving African Americans often entailed footage of accused criminals being led around in handcuffs, while whites were less often presented

this way. The news also presented black political action almost exclusively as special-interest politics, while white political action was presented as public-interest politics. Based on this, Entman argued “the news media may be helping to encourage and legitimize modern racism by inadvertently reinforcing impressions of blacks as threatening, overly demanding, and undeserving” (1990, p. 333). Even when authoritative African American spokespersons appeared in news broadcasts, they seemed to follow middle-class, white patterns of communication, “symbolically showing that they were on the same side as whites” (1990, p. 341). He argued that this might have contributed to whites’ impression that racism is dead and external forces no longer hold African Americans back. Although the old model of overt racism, which labeled African Americans as lazy, no longer exists, modern racism implies that racism is dead. Therefore, white audiences can interpret this to mean if African Americans do not succeed, they must not be working hard enough. Thus, how a group of people is presented, or framed, in the news can negatively affect public opinion about them.

Researchers have found blacks lack visibility and voice in the media, especially in regard to national news issues or stories about non-black issues. One study performed content analysis of 26 different television news broadcasts from 12 cities during the years 1987 and 1989 through 1998 (Poindexter, Smith and Heider, 2003). The 596 news stories were coded for the race and ethnicity of the anchors, reporters, news sources and perpetrators of crimes, as well as the racial focus of each story. The findings showed almost 9 out of 10 white reporters’ stories had a white focus” (Poindexter, Smith and Heider, 2003, p. 531). Whites made up 73% of the reporters. African American reporters made up only 16%. The findings further showed whites appeared as news

sources more than 75% of the time, and “there were fewer opportunities for African Americans to be a source for the news when a story contained only one source” (Poindexter, Smith and Heider, 2003, p. 533). This was true whether the source was an expert, a company spokesperson or a private citizen.

Many studies have been conducted to determine racial bias in the media. However, the scope of these studies regarding sports media is not as vast. These studies catalog the racist tendencies of sports reporters from the decades of overt racism to the more current years of covert racism.

A content analysis of newspaper cartoons from 1908 to 1938 investigated racial stereotypes in the media, which featured the first and second African-American boxing champions, Jack Johnson and Joe Louis (Wiggins, 1988). During the three-decade period, Wiggins found both African-American fighters were depicted as Sambo, a character made to criticize African Americans and entertain racist audiences. Jackson and Johnson appeared in these cartoons not as they really looked but instead with “small ape-like heads, big eyes, a wide mouth with large red lips, nappy hair, and big feet” and their complexion was “the blackest possible black” (Wiggins, 1988, p. 243). Wiggins discussed one cartoon that was published in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. In the cartoon, Uncle Sam points to a picture of Johnson “asking patriotically ‘Who’ll wash that off?’” referring to his dark complexion (Wiggins, 1988, p. 245). Conversely, their white opponents were drawn with “symmetrical features,” appearing “strong,” “handsome,” and like a “champion” (Wiggins, 1988, p. 244). Even cartoons that reflected the champs’ dominance over their opponents mocked Johnson and Louis’s race. One cartoon depicted Johnson with a Sambo face eating a watermelon. The seeds in the watermelon spelled

out the name of his defeated opponent. Although Johnson's era had passed, cartoonists started drawing Louis favorably after his first-round knockout of German fighter Max Schmeling on the eve of WWII in 1938. Other black fighters continued to be drawn unfavorably, but Louis became the "Brown Bomber, a true American champion" (Wiggins, 1988, p. 253).

One study of several National Football League broadcasts showed professional football announcers' speech painted a "positive reputation for white players," while doing exactly the opposite for black players. Their research proved white players received "more play-related praise" than their African-American counterparts (Rainville & McCormick, 1979, p. 179). On the other hand, African-Americans received "more references to past nonprofessional achievement," such as how bad grades kept them off the field during their college years (Rainville and McCormick, 1979, p. 177).

Announcers tended to sympathize more with the shortcomings of white players on the field, while African-American players were often negatively compared to other players. The researchers proposed the psychological mechanism that the football announcers, who were all white, came into each game with the belief that whites were superior to blacks to explain how unconscious reputation building occurred. Therefore, the announcer would "perceive and verbalize in a way that supports his belief" (Rainville and McCormick, 1979, p. 179).

This same conclusion was reached in a replication of Rainville and McCormick's study (Rada, 1996). It found that football announcers had little time to pick and choose words as the game unfolded "at a machine-gun pace." Announcers were then forced to

“dredge up comments that reflect subconscious beliefs, images, attitudes, and values” (Rada, 1996, p. 232).

Racist tendencies in sports announcers were found not only in football but basketball as well. A study of stereotyping in college basketball announcing found that announcers did not pay more attention to white players than blacks (Billings & Eastman, 2001). However, it did find that game commentary was “heavily imbued with the conventional racial stereotypes, disadvantaging minority athletes.” They concluded “traditional prejudices about Black players” (e.g. that blacks are athletically gifted but inferior to whites intellectually), and “concomitant flattering of White players persists” (Billings and Eastman, 2001, p.198).

Another study examined the commercials televised during the 1988 NCAA basketball playoffs (Wonsek, 1992). Although the players were predominately African American, African Americans appeared in only 19.27 percent of the commercials aired during the series (Wonsek, 1992, p. 455). African Americans appeared in only two of forty-five commercials by Chevrolet, the NCAA playoff’s major, single sponsor (Wonsek, 1992, p. 456). Of all the products advertised during the playoffs, African Americans were featured predominately in commercials for athletic apparel.

Like football and basketball, the third of the top three U.S. sports, baseball, also has been scrutinized for racial bias. A study determined St. Louis Cardinals’ Mark McGwire, a white man, received more prominent media coverage during his historical record-setting 62-homerun season than Chicago Cubs’ Sammy Sosa, a dark-skinned Dominican, who also hit 62 homeruns in the same season (McCarthy, 1999). Examining five newspapers from around the country, the prediction was that McGwire would not

only have more coverage than Sosa, but that McGwire news items would be longer, appear on more newspaper section fronts and above the fold more times, and appear in more headlines and captions.

The study supported all five hypotheses with McGwire news items outnumbering Sosa news items by two-and-a-half times in nearly every category (McCarthy, 1999, p. 72). However, it stated the disparity was not because of racism but rather nationalism. Since, Cincinnati Reds star Ken Griffey Jr., an African American, received comparable media coverage to McGwire when he was McGwire's initial challenger in the homerun race during the early part of the season, this ruled out racism (McCarthy, 1999, p.67). "Since baseball is considered the 'American Game,' it follows, based on previous media performance, that the bulk of the media coverage went to an American player" (McCarthy, 1999, p.72).

When considering the news value in respect to LSU and Southern University's football teams, the results of these past studies raise this question: If LSU had a mediocre season while Southern achieved greater success, would the disparity shift in Southern's favor, or would LSU still be the media's choice in coverage? If the disparity remained in LSU's favor, what are the reasons for the disparity? Would the disparity be the product of LSU's national and local prominence versus Southern's, or does the measuring stick of newsworthiness consider race? The way the news stories are framed will allow us to see if race does indeed play a role, not just prominence and school size.

### **Hypotheses**

From these research questions, the following hypotheses can be formed:

H1: LSU will have more news items published about its football team than Southern overall.

In the Mark McGwire/ Sammy Sosa study (McCarthy, 1999), McGwire received more coverage than Sosa because he was the hometown hero—the American in America versus Sosa, a Dominican. Therefore, it can be assumed LSU would receive more coverage in Louisiana newspapers than Southern because LSU is the more popular football team of the two in Louisiana.

H2: LSU will have more news items published about its football team than Southern in each individual season analyzed in this study, although Southern achieved greater success than LSU in the 1995 and 1998 seasons.

Rainville and McCormick's study (1979) showed that even when black players outperformed white players, football announcers' comments showed sympathy in the form of making excuses for white players, rather than praise for the achievements of the black players. This shows if one is favored, he will always be favored. Therefore, LSU should remain the favorite, even when having less success than Southern.

H3: LSU will have more prominently placed news items (front page of the newspaper, section fronts, etc.) than Southern.

McGwire received two-and-half times more prominent coverage than Sosa because he was the hometown hero. LSU, the state hero, should receive comparable coverage.

H4: News items about LSU's football team will be longer than items about Southern.

The study of Sosa and McGwire (McCarthy, 1999) found disparity in amount of stories, length, and prominence.

H5: LSU's team will be framed more as intelligence/mental skill - hard work/ effort positive, while Southern's team will be framed more as physical/ athletic ability.

Based on the literature, sports announcers have attributed natural athletic ability more often to black players, and intellectual play/ hard work more often to white players (Rainville & McCormick, 1979; Rada, 1996; Billings & Eastman, 2000). Although, both teams have predominantly more black players, LSU players, regardless of their race, should receive the more favorable comments because they represent a predominately white university.

H6: LSU will be framed more positively than Southern.

Based on the literature, sports announcers and journalists built positive reputations for white players and negative reputations for black players in the past (Rainville & McCormick, 1979; Wiggins, 1998; Rada, 1996). Therefore, it can be assumed LSU will be depicted as champions, or the crowd favorite, or favored to beat its opponent more, while Southern will be framed less positively.

### **Research Question**

Will LSU players and coaches be quoted significantly more than Southern players and coaches?

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

To assess whether LSU football was featured more positively in Louisiana newspapers' sports pages than Southern University football, this study conducted a content analysis. Content, as defined by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) is "the complete quantitative and qualitative range of verbal and visual information distributed by the mass media" (p.4). Quantitative refers to the amount of coverage of a particular issue. Qualitative refers to the perspective the issue is approached or portrayed by the media. While two newspapers may give an issue the same amount of coverage, they may emphasize different angles.

Riffe defines quantitative content analysis as "the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, in order to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption" (Riffe, 1998, p. 20). A content analysis usually involves "drawing representative samples of content, training coders to use the category rules developed to measure or reflect differences in content" (Riffe, 1998, p.2). Two research goals of this method are (1) to describe the communication and (2) to draw inferences about its meaning, or draw conclusions based on what was observed. Using trained coders, this study accomplished both goals for content analysis research.

This study analyzed two Louisiana newspapers: *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge) and the *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans). It examined the coverage each paper gave LSU and

Southern University's football teams during their 1995, 1998 and 2003 seasons. In 2003, there was parity between the two teams. Each completed the season with only one loss and a national championship title. However, in 1995 and 1998, Southern achieved greater success than LSU on the field. This superior performance should translate into more favorably framed media coverage for Southern if there was no bias among sportswriters for one team over the other. However, if bias existed, then a variable other than a winning university team would be needed in the equation to add up to prominent coverage—a white university's team.

*The Advocate* has been the leading newspaper of Louisiana's capital city Baton Rouge for more than one hundred years. It has a daily circulation of approximately 93,000 and 124,000 on Sundays. This newspaper is significant to this study because it is the primary newspaper of Baton Rouge, the city in which both schools are located. *The Advocate* would likely have more coverage than the other Louisiana newspaper used in this study.

The *Times-Picayune* is the leading newspaper of Louisiana's largest and most populous city, New Orleans. The newspaper was founded in 1837 and won two Pulitzer Prizes in 1997. It has a large daily circulation of 766,262, being sold even in Baton Rouge (80 miles away). Its Sunday circulation is 794,640.

The time frame for this content analysis spanned the coverage the Tigers and Jaguars received the day after the first game of each season to the day after their final game. LSU and Southern began the 1995 season on September 2, and played their last games on December 29 with wins in the Independence Bowl and Heritage Bowl

respectively. Therefore, the 1995 season coverage spanned from September 3 to December 30.

In 1998 and 2003, the two teams began and ended their seasons on different days. Southern began the 1998 season on September 5, and played its last game on December 26. LSU did not begin the 1998 season until September 12, nearly a week after Southern. Its last game was on November 27, a month before Southern's season ended. LSU and Southern's first games of the 2003 season was August 30. However, Southern's final game was on December 15, 2003, while LSU's last game occurred on January 4, 2004. In regard to the 1998 and 2003 seasons, the time span began with the start date of the team that started the earliest, and ended with the end date of the team that finished the latest. Therefore, coverage from 1998 spanned from September 6 to December 27. The 2003 season coverage spanned from August 31 to January 5.

A census of all stories published in the two newspapers during this time period was analyzed. However, this census did not include briefs or columns (i.e. commentary). Briefs were not included because they tended to either list only game statistics or report on supplementary matters that did not pertain to the games (e.g. injury reports, fan participation, etc.). Columns were not included because they were not objective reports. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

### **Operational Definitions**

Prominence was defined as article length, placement and whether a photo or graphic accompanied the article. Article length was determined by counting paragraphs.

Placement depended on whether the article appeared on the front page, a section front or

the inside of the newspapers (McCarthy, 1999), in descending order of importance. If a photo or graphic accompanied the article, it was considered to have more prominence.

Intelligence/mental skill was defined as any reference by paragraph to an LSU or Southern player's cognitive ability as it pertains to playing the game (Billings and Eastman, 2001; Rada, 1996). For example, "Player X outsmarted the defense on that play."

Physical/ athletic ability was defined as any reference by paragraph to an LSU or Southern player's athletic talent coming from natural ability rather than from intense training and/or coaching (Billings and Eastman, 2001; Rada, 1996). For example, "Not many teams can compete with Player X's raw athletic talent."

Hard work/ effort positive: Any reference by paragraph to an LSU or Southern player being a hard worker, or having a good work ethic (Billings and Eastman, 2001; Rainville and McCormick, 1979). For example, "No matter what the score says, they play hard for the whole 60 minutes."

Hard work/ effort negative: Any reference by paragraph to an LSU or Southern player not working hard or being lazy (Billings and Eastman, 2001; Rainville and McCormick, 1979). For example, "Player X has failed to meet his coach's expectations on the field."

Game-related positive: Any positive reference by paragraph to LSU or Southern as it pertains to what happened on the field from either the players' perspective or the coaching perspective. For example, "Team A's defense dominated the line of scrimmage for 60 minutes."

Game-related negative: Any negative reference by paragraph to LSU or Southern as it pertains to what happened on the field from either the players' perspective or the coaching perspective (Rainville and McCormick, 1979). For example, "Player X's fumbling gave the game away."

Neutral: If the paragraph simply gave information about either team (e.g. statistics) without emphasis that would classify it in one of the previous frames. For example, "Player X rushed for 250 yards on 15 carries" as opposed to "Player X manhandled the opposing team's defensive line, rushing for 250 yards on 15 carries."

Opponent: If a paragraph only gave information about the teams LSU and Southern faced. If the paragraph spoke about the LSU or Southern and their opponent, then the paragraph was coded in regard to the information about given about LSU or Southern only.

Other: The coders used this option only when he/she encountered a reference that did not fit in any of the stated frame categories but is pertinent to the results of this study. For example, any reference to race being a hindrance or an advantage on the field would automatically be considered a pertinent reference.

Sourcing: Coders noted whether each paragraph was attributed to LSU and Southern players and coaches, as well as Opposing teams' players and coaches. If the paragraph had no attribution, it was attributed to the reporter who wrote the article. If the paragraph was attributed to someone who did not fit into one of these categories, it was noted as "Other."

### **Coder Training and Intercoder Reliability**

Two independent coders were trained and coded 10% of the articles. One coder was a male doctoral student, and the other was a female recent college graduate at the master's level. The female coder was African American, and the male coder was African. Reliabilities for interval variables were calculated using Pearson's correlation and ranged from 1.0 to .77. All were significant at  $p < .001$ . Individual reliabilities were: length in paragraphs  $r = 1.0$ ; intelligence/ mental skill  $r = .77$ ; physical/ athletic ability  $r = .94$ ; hard work/ effort positive  $r = .96$ ; hard work/ effort negative  $r = .84$ ; game-related positive  $r = .91$ ; game-related negative  $r = .96$ ; neutral  $r = .89$ ; opponent  $r = .99$ ; other  $r = .84$ . Agreement for nominal variables using Holsti's Formula was: date, 1.0; season, 1.0; headline, 1.0; newspaper, 1.0; team, 1.0; placement, .88; photo/ graphic, .94.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This study included 667 articles about LSU and Southern University football in the two newspapers and three seasons analyzed with *The Advocate* accounting for 63% of the articles to the *Times-Picayune's* 37%. The percentage of articles written each season was almost the same: 32% in the 1995 season, 31% in the 1998 season and 37% in the 2003 season. The most prevalent frames were the game-related positive and neutral frames. On average, the game-related positive frame appeared in at least 5 paragraphs in each article. The neutral frame appeared the most on average—in at least 10 paragraphs per article.

This study examined a census of all stories published in three years of the two newspapers. While significance tests are not appropriate for a census, they are computed here because three years of coverage may be construed as a sample of all the years that the newspapers report on the two teams; the years examined here were chosen to allow for the best possible circumstances for the newspapers to afford Southern, the black team, equal or better coverage than LSU, the white team. If differences are found in these three years—when the black team was outperforming the white team and, therefore, should have received more or equal amounts of coverage and been framed more or equally positively—then it seems unlikely that equality of coverage may be expected in other, more typical years.

The first hypothesis, which stated LSU would have more news items published about its football team than Southern overall, was supported ( $t = 73.5$ ,  $df = 666$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

LSU received 61% of the stories to Southern’s 39% over all three years combined. See Table 1.

**Table 1:** Individual and combined coverage.

	<b>The Advocate</b>	<b>Times-Picayune</b>	<b>Combined</b>
<b>LSU</b>	231 (55%)	177 (71%)	408 (61%)
<b>Southern</b>	188 (45%)	71 (29%)	259 (39%)
<b>Total</b>	419 (100%)	248 (100%)	667 (100%)

The biggest disparity in coverage was found in the *Times-Picayune*. LSU received 71% of the New Orleans paper’s articles, while Southern made up only 29% ( $t = 44.72$ ,  $df = 247$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The disparity in coverage in regard to *The Advocate* was more modest but the difference was still significant ( $t = 59.55$ ,  $df = 418$ ,  $p < .001$ ); LSU made up 55% of its articles and Southern made up 45%.

The second hypothesis, that LSU would have more news items published about its football team than Southern in each individual season, despite Southern’s greater success than LSU in 1995 and 1998, was supported. More stories appeared about LSU than Southern in every season. In 1995, Southern made up 34% of the articles ( $t = 41.19$ ,  $df = 212$ ,  $p < .001$ ); LSU accounted for 66%. In 1998, LSU accounted for 60% of the articles; Southern for 40% ( $t = 41.18$ ,  $df = 208$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In 2003, the gap was closest with LSU articles making up 58% to Southern’s 42% ( $t = 44.95$ ,  $df = 244$ ,  $p < .001$ ). See Tables 2 – 4.

**Table 2:** Individual and combined coverage for the 1995 season.

<b>1995</b>			
	<b>The Advocate</b>	<b>Times-Picayune</b>	<b>Combined</b>
<b>LSU</b>	78 (56%)	62 (75%)	140 (66%)
<b>Southern</b>	62 (44%)	21 (25%)	73 (34%)
<b>Total</b>	140 (100%)	83 (100%)	213 (100%)

**Table 3:** Individual and combined coverage for the 1998 season.

<b>1998</b>			
	<b>The Advocate</b>	<b>Times-Picayune</b>	<b>Combined</b>
<b>LSU</b>	67 (54%)	59 (69%)	126 (60%)
<b>Southern</b>	57 (46%)	26 (31%)	83 (40%)
<b>Total</b>	124 (100%)	85 (100%)	209 (100%)

**Table 4:** Individual and combined coverage for the 2003 season.

<b>2003</b>			
	<b>The Advocate</b>	<b>Times-Picayune</b>	<b>Combined</b>
<b>LSU</b>	86 (52%)	56 (70%)	142 (58%)
<b>Southern</b>	79 (48%)	24 (30%)	103 (42%)
<b>Total</b>	165 (100%)	80 (100%)	254 (100%)

The third hypothesis, which stated LSU would have more prominently placed news items than Southern, was partially supported. When both papers were combined, no significant difference was found in placement of the different teams' stories ( $X^2 = .27$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .60$ ); 33% of LSU's stories were on the front of the newspaper or sports section; 22% of Southern's stories were in the same place. However, in the Times-Picayune alone, the hypothesis was supported ( $X^2 = 15.71$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Only 20% of Southern's articles appeared on fronts, versus 47% of LSU's. See Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5:** Prominent placement overall.

	<b>LSU</b>	<b>Southern</b>
<b>Front page/ Section front</b>	220 (54%)	145 (56%)
<b>Inside</b>	188 (46%)	114 (44%)
<b>Total</b>	408 (100%)	259 (100%)

**Table 6:** Prominent placement in the Times-Picayune.

	<b>LSU</b>	<b>Southern</b>
<b>Front page/ Section front</b>	83 (47%)	14 (20%)
<b>Inside</b>	94 (53%)	57 (80%)
<b>Total</b>	177 (100%)	71 (100%)

The fourth hypothesis, which stated news items about LSU would be longer than Southern news items, was not supported ( $F = 29.87$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $666$ ,  $p = .47$ ). No statistically significant difference was found between the average lengths of articles about the two teams. The mean number of paragraphs for LSU articles was 21.88 ( $sd = 8.16$ ). The mean number of paragraphs for Southern articles was 22.32 ( $sd = 6.44$ ). Neither was there a significant difference between length of stories appearing in either paper analyzed separately.

The fifth hypothesis, which stated LSU's team would be framed more as intelligence/ mental skill and hard work/ effort positive while Southern's team would be framed more as physical/ athletic ability, was partially supported. The number of references to each type of frame was counted in the stories and then the intellectual/mental skills frame and the hard work/ effort positive frames were combined into one index for an interval level measure. A statistically significant difference resulted between the teams on references to intelligence/hard work ( $F = 11.49$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $666$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with LSU receiving an average of .855 ( $sd = 1.24$ ) references to that frame per story and Southern receiving only .56 ( $sd = .81$ ) references to intelligence/hard work. See Table 7.

**Table 7:** Intelligence - hard work/ effort positive index

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>sd</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>LSU</b>	.855	1.24	408
<b>Southern</b>	.56	.81	259
<b>Total</b>			667

However, there was no significant difference between the two teams on references to physical ability ( $F = .24$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $666$ ,  $p = .62$ ; LSU  $M = .37$ ,  $sd = .98$ ; Southern  $M = .42$ ,  $sd = 1.2$ ). See Table 8.

**Table 8:** Physical/ athletic ability - hard work/ effort negative index

	Mean	sd	N
LSU	.37	.98	408
Southern	.42	1.2	259
<b>Total</b>			667

The sixth hypothesis regarding which team would be framed more positively was tested by combining the intelligence/ mental skill, hard work/ effort-positive, and game-related/positive frames into an interval level “positive frames” index. A significant difference resulted, but it was in the opposite direction than was predicted, with Southern receiving significantly more positive framing than LSU. The mean for LSU was 6.22 ( $sd = 4.86$ ). In contrast, the mean for Southern was 7.42 ( $sd = 4.72$ ), ( $F = 9.84$ ,  $df = 1$ , 667,  $p < .01$ ). To explore the negative frames, the physical ability, hard-work/negative, and game-related/negative frames were combined into one interval level index, and there was again a significant difference in the opposite direction than was predicted. LSU received significantly more negative frames ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $sd = 4.32$ ) than Southern ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $df = 2.85$ ) ( $F = 14.09$ ,  $df = 1$ , 666,  $p < .001$ ).

The research question found LSU players and coaches were quoted significantly more than Southern players and coaches. The mean score for LSU players was 2.34 ( $sd = 3.33$ ) in contrast to Southern players’ mean score of 1.54 ( $sd = 2.86$ ), ( $t = 4.03$ ,  $df = 668$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mean score for LSU coaches was 2.14 ( $sd = 3.4$ ) in contrast to Southern coaches’ mean score of 1.17 ( $sd = .09$ ), ( $t = 5.38$ ,  $df = 668$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to determine if Southern football has been treated less favorably in Louisiana newspapers than LSU football. This was determined by considering the articles' prominence, the quantity of articles, and how each team was framed – either positively or negatively. Since the racial makeup of the two universities is potentially the reason for disparity in coverage, the articles also were analyzed for the use of racial stereotypes. Although a significant difference in coverage was found, it could not be determined that race was indeed the cause. A correlational study such as this cannot determine the reason for the difference, only that something systematic occurred because these differences did not come about by chance. The study's results indicate that although sportswriters for the two newspapers did not favor LSU significantly more than Southern in prominence and praise, they did knowingly or unknowingly employ modern racism themes.

LSU's team was portrayed more often as intelligent and hard-working than Southern's team. Intelligence and hard work are stereotypical of white athletes (Eastman and Billings, 2001). Although both teams have black and white players, LSU represents a predominately white university, and Southern represents a historically black university. Therefore, the players may not have been the victims of stereotyping based on their individual race, but rather their school identity, which are racially disparate. This is indicative of what one researcher referred to as “the emergence of black authority,” a component of modern racism (Entman, 1990).

When blacks began to appear on television in authoritative roles, such as doctors, lawyers, anchorpersons and law enforcement officials, on screen their words and behavior “were not linked in any way to their racial identities, and indeed denied black identity” as it was portrayed on the news (i.e. criminal, impoverished, etc.) (Entman, 1990, p. 341). These black authorities were more palatable for white audiences. They were not really viewed as “black” as whites had identified black in their schemas, or as the researcher stated, black authorities were almost viewed as being “on the same side as whites” (Entman, 1990, p. 341). In the same way, the reporters may have removed black LSU football players from their racial identity and classed them as representatives of the predominately white university. Southern, on the other hand is defined as a historically black university, and its team could not escape its racial identity.

It is somewhat surprising that these racial stereotypes still exist in the press. Even with the advent of diversity awareness and racial consciousness in newsrooms around the country in recent years (Yeoman, 1999), racial overgeneralizations used in the media for decades are still practiced. While this study does not assert that all sportswriters at *The Advocate* and the *Times-Picayune* hold traditionally negative attitudes toward blacks, it is clear that they convey attitudes, which reflect modern racism themes in their content. McConahay, Hardee and Batts (1981) conducted a study that measured the existence of modern racist sentiment (e.g., blacks are getting more money and/or attention than they deserve) and old-fashioned racist sentiment (e.g., favorable opinions about miscegenation laws and the innate intelligence of black people). The study’s findings suggest while old-fashioned racism has declined, modern racism has not. Whites recognized old-fashioned

racist sentiment as racism, but not the modern racist sentiments (McConahay, Hardee and Batts, p. 570, 578).

It may be unreasonable to expect newspaper reporters to keep a tally of how many stories they write about one team to ensure that they are writing just as many about another team. Reporters cover news, and the news is not found evenly distributed among all possible sources. In an *American Journalism Review* article about perceived media bias during the 2000 presidential election (Wizda, 2001), an *Orange County Register* ombudsman said seemingly uneven reporting of one candidate over another from one day to the next eventually evened out over a month's time (Wizda, 2001, p. 37). This was confirmed by a scholarly meta-analysis of bias studies (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). The candidates' supporters claimed the newspaper was biased at different periods for different reasons. He went on to explain "...readers won't necessarily define 'fair reporting' the same way" (Wizda, 2001, p. 37). The LSU Tigers represent a larger school with a larger population of alumni and a larger fan base. They compete on the highest level of NCAA competitive play for football, and they did win the BCS College Football National Championship, which meant beating the best of the best across the nation. Therefore, it is reasonable to give them higher prominence in coverage than Southern. It is never reasonable, however, to use stereotypical frames.

If reporters increased their coverage of Southern football, the team still may never be as recognized or as popular as LSU. Yet, if reporters continue biased reporting in regard to Southern, they can hinder their popularity. Scholars have credited lack of prominent coverage and small fan bases to similar biases, such as gender bias (Eastman

and Billings, 2000 and 2001). Sports are divided along gender lines, and like African-Americans, women have been the victims of bias.

Studies have found that media producers presented women's athletic competitions, from the NCAA women's basketball championship to the Olympics, in "less exciting fashion" than their male counterparts (Eastman and Billings, 2001). Women's sports received less coverage and prominence than men's sports by television, print and electronic media, even when the contests were at their newsworthiness peak (Eastman and Billings, 2000). Scholars suggest this bias contributed to smaller audiences for women's athletic competitions.

Similarly, this study's results show that LSU football received more coverage than Southern in *The Advocate* and the *Times-Picayune*. LSU news items outnumbered Southern news items by one and one-half times overall. The same was true for the 1995 and 1998 seasons, even though Southern was crowned the black college football national champion and conference champion respectively in those seasons while LSU finished those seasons 7-4-1 and 4-7 respectively. While media representatives might argue that LSU possesses more news value than Southern because of its fan base and higher level of competition, those same representatives' bias and use of stereotypes may be limiting the size of Southern's fan base, at the same time reinforcing racial stereotypes. With less coverage, people who read the sports pages have less opportunity to become familiar with the team's players and coaches, and therefore become fans. Yet, even if the disparity in coverage cannot be attributed to race but rather other news considerations, the presence of stereotypes in the coverage undeniably is based on race. If what the readership is

reading is imbued with racial stereotypes, then the reporters will either reinforce negative schemas about blacks in their readers or introduce them.

Considering the broad empirical evidence of negative attitudes of whites toward blacks (Entman, 1990; Entman and Rojecki, 2000; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997; McConahay, Hardee and Batts, 1981; Fazio and Dunton, 1997; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson and Howard, 1997; Oliver, 1999; Oliver and Fonash, 2002), one cannot reasonably exclude the sportswriters for *The Advocate* and the *Times-Picayune*, which are mostly white, from this population. The presence of stereotypes in the coverage of LSU and Southern University football is evidence of negative attitudes toward blacks.

Researchers have used framing and schema theory to explain how journalists and their audiences process overwhelming amounts of information. For journalists, framing allows them to “quickly identify and classify information” so they can then “package” that information for their readers (Scheufele, 1999, p. 106). Schema theory explains how readers of the news organize information in their minds by grouping related information into categories. New information is either accepted or discredited based on whether it fits into the reader’s pre-existing schemas. Journalists also possess schemas, which can easily influence how they frame the news and “thus systematically affect how recipients of the news come to understand these events” (Scheufele, 1999, p.107).

If the readers share the journalists’ schemas, the readers likely will accept the information as true, and the journalists will have reinforced the stereotype. Journalists can also impress negative attitudes of blacks in readers who do not possess negative schemas already, but whose limited interaction with African Americans includes reading the sports pages. As Entman and Rojecki (2000) pointed out, “Racial isolation heightens

the importance of the messages Whites receive about Blacks from the mass media” (p. 2). For these readers, Lippmann’s (1922) ideas about the pictures in our heads will have been drawn with the ink of stereotypical reasoning, thus keeping modern racism alive and leaving it up to the next generation of journalists to try to undo.

Another interesting finding was LSU players and coaches were quoted or attributed twice as many times as Southern players and coaches. This may stem from the same realm of thought that researchers referred to as racial exclusion (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). A study of random evening television news broadcasts on ABC, NBC and CBS in 1997 revealed that whites had 548 total soundbites compared to blacks’ 63 soundbites (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 65). In stories ranging from sports and entertainment to economics and electoral politics, soundbites from whites outnumbered soundbites from blacks 3 to 1 at the least, and 99 to 1 at the most. Entman and Rojecki determined these patterns “would reinforce an image of Blacks as a distinct group whose identity, knowledge and interests are both narrower and systematically different from Whites” (p. 64). One can only speculate as to why the reporter sought only information from half as many Southern players and coaches as at LSU. At best, the *Times-Picayune* and *Advocate* reporters, who covered Southern games, were not as adept at interviewing as the reporters who covered LSU. This is not likely. However, if junior, less-experienced reporters were assigned to cover Southern University football while veteran reporters covered LSU that would raise even more questions about the fairness of coverage between the two teams. The worst case scenario is, just as in those television news stories, which hardly used Blacks’ soundbites as its sources for technical expertise

(Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 64), the reporters may have felt quotes from Southern players and coaches added little to their own assessment of the game.

One unexpected result of the study was Southern's football team was framed more positively (i.e. Southern received more praise and was portrayed more as a winner) than LSU's football team. Past studies of professional football announcers' speech during broadcasts showed white players were cast in a more positive light than their black counterparts (Rainville & McCormick, 1979). The research revealed announcers praised white players more, depicted them as the aggressors and gave them more positive special focus. In contrast, the announcers negatively compared black players to other players, made negative references to their past achievements and depicted them as the recipients of aggression. Announcers also tended to grant more sympathy to white players than black players when they failed to execute on the field. Based on this, LSU was expected to receive more positive treatment despite the fact it had less success than Southern in the three seasons analyzed in this study. At the end of the 1995 season, while the 11-1 Southern Jaguars were being crowned with the black college national championship title, LSU was celebrating its first winning season in seven years with a regular season record of 6-4-1 and adding another win in the Poulan Weedeater Independence Bowl in Shreveport, Louisiana – a game one Louisiana sports columnist described as a “postseason crumb” for the hungry (Finney, 1995). In 1998, Southern finished the season with a more modest 9-3 record and a SWAC conference championship. LSU, on the other hand, went back to its losing ways, finishing the season 4-7.

Contrary to expectation, the findings suggest the old adage “Everyone loves a winner” better describes how the two teams were framed in these seasons. This is

consistent with research of media bias in political campaigns (Waldman & Devitt, 1998). Researchers found a strategy or frontrunner bias, in which the media had a tendency to give more favorable coverage to the frontrunner than to the losing candidate. In 1995 and 1998, Southern won more often than LSU, which may have made it easier for sportswriters to portray them more favorably. In 2003, the teams had similar success thus were equally framed.

Also contrary to expectation, there was not a significant difference in prominence between LSU and Southern news items overall. The difference in front page and section front articles versus those that appeared on inside pages between the two teams was moderate. This could be attributed to what has been referred to in journalism schools and textbooks as the criteria for newsworthiness (Itule & Anderson, 2000), not race. In determining what is news, journalists everywhere are taught to consider certain elements, such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, prominence and human interest. Prominence, whether the news is about someone noteworthy (or some team), is only one consideration of several in deciding which news items are placed on the section front or the inside pages. Therefore, whether the articles were about LSU or Southern likely was not as much a consideration as whether the news was timely, possessed conflict, or was considered relevant to local readers. Both teams likely received a fairly equal number of timely, section front articles, such as game reports following a game day, and general news stories, which typically filled inside pages.

The average length of LSU and Southern articles was similar overall as well. Even when prominence was determined by whether a photo or graphic accompanied the article, there was not a significant difference between either team. This may have more

to do with the newspapers' design and standards than on making a concerted effort at balanced reporting between the two teams. Newspaper editors routinely push to have some kind of art accompany articles to make their paper's design more attractive and draw readers' attention to its news stories. The similarities in article length between LSU and Southern could be attributed to newsroom standards, such as having a minimum number of sources for each story or a minimum length of each article.

The biggest surprise of this study was how biased the reporting between the two teams was in the *Times-Picayune*. A closer look revealed that the coverage between the two teams was more comparable in *The Advocate* newspaper; 55% of the articles were about LSU and 45% were about Southern. The real disparity came from the *Times-Picayune*, which published two-and-a-third times more LSU articles than it did about Southern, 71% and 29% respectively. Southern articles also appeared on the inside pages of the *Times-Picayune* far more often than LSU articles, 80% to 53% respectively.

If LSU's campus was located in New Orleans and Southern alone was situated in Baton Rouge, one could understand why the coverage between the two teams would be so lop-sided in LSU's favor. However, LSU's campus is as far away from the *Times-Picayune* newsroom as Southern's campus. Even the fact that the LSU Medical School is located in New Orleans is not justification enough for such slanted coverage, for Southern University also has a sister school in New Orleans – Southern University at New Orleans, or SUNO. Considering the evidence found in this study of racial bias through the use of stereotyping and the radical difference in coverage of the two teams, one can construe that modern racism exists in the New Orleans newspaper.

Another possible explanation for the disparity in coverage between the two teams is space that would otherwise have gone to Southern University in the *Times-Picayune* went to New Orleans' college football team the Tulane University Green Wave. When deciding which team out of three would get more prominent coverage, Tulane would rank first since it's the home team. The next likely consideration would be to choose the two Division I-A teams—Tulane and LSU, leaving Southern in last place for prominent placement.

However, further evidence of bias shows when the *Times-Picayune* news staff published its choices for Top 10 Sports Stories of 1995 in its December 31 edition, it did not include the Southern Jaguars' 11-1 season and black college football national championship title. Most of the stories that made the list of top choices directly related to New Orleans. It did, however, list LSU's first winning season in seven years as a Top 10 story, ranking it No. 2. Southern was overlooked despite the fact it plays two of its regular season games in New Orleans every year – against Jackson State University and the nationally televised Bayou Classic against Grambling State University. One story that did make the cut was a story about that season's Sugar Bowl game, which takes place every year in New Orleans. The *Times-Picayune* news staff picked this story although the game had not been played yet, and it featured two out-of-state teams—Virginia Tech and the University of Texas.

Neither did the news staff mention Southern's 2003 black college football national championship title in its Top 10 stories list for that year. LSU's Bowl Championship Series title-game berth, however, was the No. 1 choice. This is telling for two reasons: first, because each team had similar success, completing their respective

seasons with only one loss, and second, because by the date this list was published, Southern already had completed its season, which resulted in a championship title. LSU had not yet played its final game and was not crowned the national college football champion technically until the following year. LSU teams were featured two more times on the 2003 Top 10 list; the women's basketball team, who made it to the Final Four, and the Tigers baseball team, who made it to the College World Series. Neither team won national titles. LSU's football team and Southern's football team was not mentioned in the *Times-Picayune's* Top 10 Stories list of 1998.

As damning as these facts are, the *Times-Picayune* is not alone. *The Advocate* news staff also did not rank Southern's 1995 or its 2003 black college football national championship titles in its Top 10 Stories list in either year. In 1995, *The Advocate* news staff ranked LSU's first winning season in seven years as the fifth biggest story of that year. In 2003, it ranked LSU's BCS title game berth as the fourth biggest story of the year, following the arrest of now convicted serial killer Derrick Todd Lee, the election of Louisiana's first female governor and the end of the local parish school system's 47-year-old desegregation case.

*The Advocate* created one Top 10 list from all its stories instead of creating several Top 10 list by category, such as a Sports Stories Top 10, as the *Times-Picayune* did. Therefore, the odds of any specific story making the list were smaller in regard to *The Advocate*. Nevertheless, a third of the news staff's 1995 list was not local stories. The news staff chose stories that affected New Orleans and Bogalusa rather than the story about the Southern Jaguars' accomplishments that season. The news staff was more localized in its choices in 2003, but it again overlooked the Jaguars. A story about

Picadilly Cafeterias Inc. filing for bankruptcy was picked before Southern's 12-1 national championship season.

Like the *Times-Picayune*, neither team was mentioned in the Top 10 Stories of 1998. Dissimilar to the *Times-Picayune*, *The Advocate* also had a Top 10 stories list in which its readers decided which stories were the biggest in 1998 and 2003. This list was published the same day as the Top 10 list produced by *The Advocate* news staff. There was no Top 10 Stories list for readers in 1995. Unsurprisingly, *The Advocate's* readers reflected the overall opinion of the news staff, not mentioning either team in the 1998 list and not listing Southern's 2003 black college football national championship in the 2003 list. *Advocate* readers did rank LSU's BCS title game berth as the third biggest story of that year. Not only did the reader's reflect the opinion of the staff, but their top six choices were identical to the news staff's choices with the exception of ranking LSU's success story third on the reader's list and fourth on the staff's list. Only the last four stories on each list were completely different. In this case, it can be concluded that six times out of ten, *The Advocate's* readership placed importance on stories the newspaper framed that way. In a study to determine how news frames and schemas affected an audience's issue interpretations and attitudes, Shen (2004) found that when "the news frames were consistent with their issue schemas, audiences generated more frame-related thoughts and displayed stronger frame-consistent attitudes than when frames were inconsistent with individual schemas" (p. 411). Considering the similarities between the two 2003 Top 10 lists, the readers' schemas only disagreed four times out of ten. The number of agreements between the news staff and the readership could be extended to

seven times out of eleven. They agreed on what would be included six times and on what would be excluded at least once – Southern’s 12-1 national championship season.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

Researchers have noted that unless bias is “willful,” “influential,” “threatening to widely held conventions” and “sustained rather than an isolated incident,” it is not worthy of discussion (Williams, 1975, p. 192; D’Alessio and Allen, 2000, p. 133). Considering the evidence of stereotypes found in three seasons of coverage of LSU and Southern University football teams in two of Louisiana’s premiere newspapers, spanning nearly 10 years, the issue of racial bias in sports coverage qualifies.

Gone are the days when African Americans were overtly mocked in the media, described as inferior in intellect and gifted only in physical prowess, but covert racist ideas still are manifest in many journalists’ words. The disparity in the amount of coverage between the two teams can be attributed to many things that have nothing to do with race: competition level, popularity with the readership, news value, etc. Even in this regard, things may be getting better. From 1995 to 1998 to 2003 the gap between the amounts of coverage LSU and Southern received grew increasingly smaller. This may be a sign of change for the better and the advent of more fair coverage in Louisiana newspapers. However, the results indicate the *Times-Picayune* has much further to go to meet this journalistic standard.

Nevertheless, there still is no denying the presence of stereotypes seemingly based on race in both newspapers. This must change if the media are ever to be truly fair and objective. Only 30 years ago in the world of college and professional football, people believed blacks were not cut out to play the mental, leadership roles of quarterback and head coach. Although one could count them on one hand, a few broke through those

barriers, such as former NFL quarterbacks Warren Moon and Randall Cunningham as well as former Oakland Raiders head coach Art Shell. Today, there are a few more black quarterbacks in the NFL, and black college quarterbacks are seemingly too numerous to count. Today, there are several black NFL and college head coaches, but black coaches at predominately white universities are a rarity. Case in point, in 2004, Mississippi State Sylvester Croom, became the first black head coach in the 72-year history of the Southeastern Conference. All of this is a byproduct of traditional and modern racism in society and the media.

The media are simply too powerful an influence to allow stereotyping of racial groups to continue. For example, in the broadcast industry, media executives have unabashedly used their influence to muscle politicians into meeting the goals of their agendas (Layton, 2004). When Sen. Bob Dole ran for president in 1996, Congress was considering a National Association of Broadcasters bill that would give television stations a large expanse of the digital spectrum for free. Dole was against it, feeling that TV stations should pay for it. While campaigning in Iowa, Dole received a letter from NAB board member Nick Evans, who headed 11 television stations in several states, including Iowa. In the letter, Evans threatened to broadcast negative messages about how Dole was attempting to destroy free television and encourage his 700 employees to back another presidential candidate. Dole backed off, and the bill passed. If media executives can accomplish this, they can accomplish just as much if not more in the arena of public opinion. This is no less true in print journalism. Based on circulation data, *The Advocate* and the *Times-Picayune* combined reach nearly 900,000 Louisianaans every day and nearly 1 million on Sundays. This does not take into account the unknown number of

people who access the newspapers via newsstands and the Internet. Unless these journalists make an effort to recognize, control and change their negative schemas about blacks, they will continue to keep alive beliefs that have separated whites and blacks for centuries.

### **Future Studies**

This study's findings have not exhausted the scope of possible research in regard to stereotyping in sports coverage. This study was limited to only three seasons within an eight-year period in two Louisiana newspapers. It would be interesting to see how the two newspapers used in this study fared across a wider time frame. As D'Alessio and Allen (2000) pointed out in their meta-analysis of media bias in election coverage, larger sample sizes "are less susceptible to confounding by simple sampling error" (p. 139). A larger sample size would gauge bias in the two newspapers analyzed in this study more accurately. Future research also could include the columns written about each team to discover how individual sportswriters frame these teams and what the evidence reveals about that reporter's individual schemas. In addition, more Louisiana newspapers could be included in the analysis. The topic could be expanded outside one state.

Interviews with sportswriters also would give a better understanding of their reasons for disparity in coverage. With different newspapers come different approaches as to how the news is selected and presented. Bias could be as much a product of newsroom policy as much as the individual prejudices of the reporter. Readership studies like Shen's (2004) that show how media frames affect audience interpretations of an issue and reinforce audience schemas also would be beneficial to understanding the impact of bias.

How these two teams were portrayed in broadcast news, including television and radio, also would add to the current body of knowledge on this issue. Another interesting study might include comparing coverage of LSU to coverage of another NCAA Division I-A program in Louisiana, such as Tulane University in New Orleans. Coverage of Southern could also be compared to one of its Division I-AA opponents, such as in-state rival Grambling State University. The results of these studies, which would compare two predominantly white universities to one another and two HBCUs to one another, could then be compared to this study's results, thus widening the perspective of what role race plays in Louisiana sports coverage.

### **Beyond This Study**

As newsrooms become more diverse, the hope is that news coverage will reflect that diversity. However, it would be naïve to place the hopes of fairer coverage that is more sensitive to race squarely on the shoulders of this added minority. Whites will always hold the majority in the media population and thus have the greater impact on how the news is portrayed. Hopefully, continued research, discussion and acknowledgement of modern racism in the media will alter long-held beliefs and allow journalists to accurately report the events and people in the news.

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**APPENDIX I**  
**CODING BOOK**

Coder - The coder should write down his/her name or initials.

Date - Write the date the article was published—month and day.

Year – Check the year the story appeared.

Headline - Write the headline (also sub-headlines if any) of the article.

- A. Note which newspaper the article appeared in by checking the box next to the corresponding newspaper.
- B. Check the box to note which school the article is MAINLY about, or if the article is about both teams equally. If the article is predominately about LSU, that is, half or more of the story is about LSU, then check the “LSU” box. If the article is mostly about Southern, then check the “Southern” box. Only check the “Both” box if both teams are mentioned a comparable percentage of the time. If both teams are mentioned in an article, but the article is predominately about one team, check the predominant team’s box.
- C. Note whether the article appeared on a section front, inside a section, or on the front page of the newspaper. For example, an article appearing on a section front will read 1B or D1, while an inside article will read 12A or B2. The number is most significant in determining whether the article appeared inside or on a section front. The only time the letter is significant is when it appears on the front page of the newspaper. If this is the case, it will read either as 1A or A1.
- D. Count how many paragraphs are in the article.

E. Circle “yes” if a picture or graphic accompanied the article. Circle “no” if the article stood alone. Do not code the caption to the picture.

### **Frames**

This section requires the coder to determine if words, phrases, whole sentences, or whole paragraphs in the article fit into one of the frame categories listed on the coding sheet. Using tally marks, in the space next to each frame category, the coder should note which frames appear in each article and how many times that frame appears throughout the article. Below is a description of each frame with examples. Note: all references should be noted whether it is the reporter’s comments or a direct quote from a source.

**Intelligence/mental skill:** Any reference to an LSU or Southern player’s cognitive ability, especially as it pertains to playing the game. For example, “Player X has an incredible understanding of the game” or “He outsmarted the defense on that play.”

**Physicality/ athletic ability:** Any reference to an LSU or Southern player’s athletic talent coming from natural ability rather than from intense training and/or coaching, or displaying a real physical presence. For example, “the big running barreled through the defense on his way to the endzone” or “Not many teams can compete with X University’s raw athletic talent.”

**Hard work/ effort positive:** Any reference to an LSU or Southern player being a hard worker, or having a good work ethic. For example, “Being smaller than other lineman,

he had to work really hard to succeed” or “No matter what the score says, they play hard for the whole 60 minutes.”

**Hard work/ effort negative:** Any reference to an LSU or Southern player not working hard, being lazy, or putting out a poor effort. For example, “Player X has failed to meet his coach’s expectations on the field” or “Team X got behind early and just gave up.”

**Game-related positive:** This frame is different from the hard work positive, intelligence/ mental skill, and physicality/ athletic ability frames because it refers to more general comments about an LSU or Southern player or coach that paint a positive picture, especially as it pertains to what happened on the field. For example, “Abram Booty began last season as a freshman trying to earn playing time at LSU. He begins this season as the Tigers’ most dependable wide receiver.”

**Game-related negative:** This frame differs from hard work negative because it refers to comments that are general, and not specific to the level of effort put out by a player or team. “An LSU team that once was ranked as high as No. 6 in the nation ended its season Friday with its seventh loss in the final eight games” is an example of Game-related negative, while “They will have to play better to have any chance to win” is an example of hard-work negative.

**Neutral:** Refers to a statement or paragraph that states a fact without conveying a positive or negative image of an LSU or Southern player or coach. For example, “The

Tigers face Auburn next week, an improved Rice team the following week and South Carolina and Florida before finally getting to SEC weakling Kentucky.”

**Opponent:** This refers to a paragraph that speaks about either LSU or Southern’s opponent and nothing about LSU or Southern. The coder should be careful to take the paragraph in context, and be sure which team, is the subject of discussion. If the paragraph talks about what an opponent did to LSU or Southern then it does not fit here. For example, “A&M dominated the first half, yet the Aggies only led 12-0 at the intermission” should be coded as “Opponent,” but “McElroy (an Aggie) did most of the damage to LSU” is “Game-related negative” for LSU.

**Other:** The coder should only use this option when he/she encounters a reference that does not fit in any of the stated frame categories but is pertinent to the results of this study. For example, any reference to race being a hindrance or an advantage on the field would automatically be considered a negative reference. Use as a last result.

**Sources:** Code the sources used through out the article, using tally marks next to the appropriate source. If the statement cannot be attributed to a specific person, it should be coded as “Journalist.” If the source does not fit in either category, code it as “Other.” There the total number of tally marks in the “Sources” section should add up to the

number of paragraphs in the article, just as the total tally marks in the “Frames” section should total the number of paragraphs.

**APPENDIX II**  
**CODING SHEET**

Case: \_\_\_\_\_

Coder: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Year:  1995  1998  2003

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

A. The Advocate                       The Times-Picayune                       The Times

B. LSU                       Southern                       Both

C. Front page                       Inside                       Section front

D. Number of paragraphs: \_\_\_\_\_

E. Photo/Graphic: Yes                      No

**Frames**

Intelligence/ mental skill \_\_\_\_\_

Physicality/ athletic ability \_\_\_\_\_

Hard work/ effort positive \_\_\_\_\_

Hard work/ effort negative \_\_\_\_\_

Game-related positive \_\_\_\_\_

Game-related negative \_\_\_\_\_

Neutral \_\_\_\_\_

Opponent \_\_\_\_\_

Other (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources**

LSU player \_\_\_\_\_

LSU coach \_\_\_\_\_

SU player \_\_\_\_\_

SU coach \_\_\_\_\_

Opp. Player \_\_\_\_\_

Opp. Coach \_\_\_\_\_

Journalist \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

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