THE US/THEM BINARY: AN ANALYSIS OF LOCAL MEDIA’S FRAMING OF LOCAL TERRORISTS

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2007

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ABSTRACT

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The media is a vital player in the terrorist cycle since the communication of information can have tremendous influence on reactions to terrorist events. Typically, when doing research on terrorism and the media, researchers draw samples from large, national media organizations and recently, the focus has been on the media's presentation of 9/11 and other large, very publicized terrorist events. In contrast, since 9/11, scholars have not paid as much attention to smaller terrorism cases, especially concerning how they were represented in their respective local media outlets. It is important to explore the many communicative paths of terrorism discourse, not just the most prominent. The present study addresses this neglected area of research by analyzing coverage of terrorism in the local context. The ethnocentric distinction between the “us” and “them” binary of terrorism is examined by studying how two local news sources present incidents of terrorist-related activities where the accused is somehow identified with the local community. My hypothesis is that when the accused is located close to home, assumptions about terrorism -- the identity of terrorists, the reasons given for terrorism -- are blurred. This research found that being from the community does affect the coverage of the events and the treatment of the accused. However, the coverage and treatment is dependant on the social distance of the accused from the elite. The variables of religion, citizenship, class, and ethnicity influence the attribution of community membership, the use of the terrorist label, and the ways the media contextualizes and explores the reasons for the terrorist event.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this thesis was a challenging, yet very rewarding experience. I have learned greatly from the assignment and credit for the lessons should be given to those who have helped me. I would like to thank Dr. McQuarie for assisting me in forming the thesis committee. I am also grateful for the seemingly unending patience and wealth of suggestions of Dr. Mirchandani as she read my many, many drafts. Thanks also go to Dr. Gajjala, Dr. Oates, and Dr. Dickinson for their valuable contributions. I additionally want to thank my family- my husband for his support, encouragement, and inspiring interest in the cases analyzed and my son for his patience and consideration.
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INTRODUCTION

A great deal of research has been done on how the news media reports terrorist events. However, while there have been many studies on how terrorism has been covered in large, dominant newspapers and on television networks, there have been few analyses performed on smaller local news sources. Likewise, many have studied reports of 9/11 and other large terrorist events, but coverage of smaller scale terrorist events have been explored far less. The current study attempts to address these neglected areas by examining how local press report terrorist-related activities, that are less publicized than larger events such as 9/11 and the Oklahoma City Bombing. More specifically, this research explores the manner in which two local news sources present incidents of terrorist-related activites in which the accused is identified with the local area.

American media covers terrorism in a way that ignores what “we” do and focuses on the behavior of “them” (Cooper 1991; Dunn, Moore, & Nosek 2005; Edley 2003; Kellner 2005; Mittleman 2005; Zinn 2002). The news commonly defines the violent actions of others as terrorist while legitimizing or ignoring the destructive behavior of Americans. This dichotomy is particularly important in respect to terrorism because our collective definitions of terrorism are not clear (Martin & Draznin 1991; Norris, Kern, & Just 2003; Rusciano 2003). The national press also rarely contextualizes terrorist events and consequently communicates an oversimplified version of the occasions to their audience. By not situating the event within a historical and global context, the media does not serve the informational needs of the public. Framing terrorism in this ethnocentric manner perpetuates an us/them binary of terrorism by never reporting the full complexity of the phenomenon.
In this study, the news stories of events involving members of the local community are analyzed to determine how the local media portrays the accused when the lines between “us” and “them” are blurred. The effect of community membership is explored by asking questions such as: When an accused terrorist is identified with a specific American community, does the hometown element affect the framing of the stories? Do local newspapers cover smaller-scale terrorist events similarly to the national press? If so, how do they negotiate the process of othering when the terrorist is homegrown? Are the accused still labeled “them,” or do they become “us”? Is the community member considered a terrorist? How is the occurrence rationalized within the community?

One common method of creating the distinction between us and them is to emphasize differing characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and religion. Therefore, this study also examines how the media handles the ethnicity and religion of the suspected terrorists. Research has shown that terrorism is regularly connected to Islam and as a result, Muslims and Arabs have been severely othered. Stereotypes and fear of terrorists have led to drastic changes in governmental practices, such as civil liberty restriction and increased support of racial profiling (Adelman 2004; Altheide 2006; Cainkar 2004; Edley 2003; Leone & Anrig 2003; Norris, Kern, & Just 2003). Moreover, by defining terrorists as foreign and extreme, the idea of homegrown terrorists may seem strange and inconceivable. The proposed study addresses how the factors of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and religion may influence the process of othering in the coverage of terrorist events and intersect in the framing of the stories.
CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

This analysis contributes to multiple bodies of literature. The most obvious contribution of this study will be to research on the media and terrorism. It importantly adds to the scarce research on how smaller news sources present local terrorist events and builds upon what is known about the terrorist labeling process. Additionally, this study contributes to the study of news coverage of minorities and the role news plays in perpetuating racism. Although there is already a substantial body of knowledge on this topic, the findings are primarily based on coverage of and treatment of African Americans. In contrast, this analysis concentrated on news depictions of Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims.

Finally, and arguably most importantly, the research serves as an effort to a greater understanding of a key phase in the terrorist cycle. Without more attention given to how terrorism is communicated to the American public, terrorism will continue to be conceptualized in a heavily ethnocentric context, leading to further insecurity and suffering for all.

Terrorism in the News

In order to analyze how the current project’s cases are reported, it is important to recognize how other terrorist events have been covered. Chomsky (2002) described the rhetoric of the current War on Terrorism as strikingly similar to the first war on terrorism, which began over twenty years ago. The focus of U. S. foreign policy regarding what Reagan described as the “evil scourge of terrorism” was the Islamic world and Central America (Chomsky 2002: 70). In the media of the 1980s, “publicists referred to terrorism as the cancer of the modern world, growing inexorably until it poisoned and engulfed the
society on which it fed” (Laqueur 1986: 87). During the same time, Ahmad (1986) characterized terrorism discourse as having three characteristics: suspension of reason, suppression of inquiry into causation, and unqualified support for violent and retaliatory response. Moreover, he described the environment of the 1980’s as “extremely inhospitable to reasoned discussion of terrorism, its forms, and the compulsions, which produce them. In the U.S., discourse on the subject is dominated by the preferences of the governments of the United States and Israel” (3).

An illustration of that era’s restricted, ethnocentric discussion, as described by Shaheen (1985), can be found in his review of nightly newscasts performed by TV Guide in 1981. He found that out of 38 reports on raids on Palestinian targets in Lebanon, eleven reports showed Israeli victims, but only three showed footage of the carnage caused by Israelis. To further this point, Shaheen quoted former President Carter,

We hear the Israeli position in our country quite consistently, and we rarely hear the countervailing arguments. Any time you present to the public, as accurately as possible, the policy of Syria, or the Palestinians in particular, it’s almost inevitable you’re going to be accused of being anti-Israel (170).

Additionally, Taogott & Brader (2003) pointed to the ethnocentrism of terrorism coverage in the news. They found that the victimized government reported events and details from their perspective and labeled perpetrators according to their interests.

Also in accordance with earlier coverage, stories pertaining to 9/11 published in Newsweek and Time between September 11 and October 15, 2001 were found to echo national-identity affirming messages of government and military officials (Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeaux, & Garland 2004). Not surprisingly, considering the normal operations of news media, journalists relied heavily on official government sources and
tended to emphasize voices that were consonant with the dominant perspective, possibly in fear of the backlash present at the time. Consequently, discourse emphasized mythic American values while demonizing the “enemy.” The authors of the study pointed out that this nationalistic discourse not only buttressed the War on Terror, but it also helped gain public support for policies that sacrificed civil liberties in the name of security, such as in the USA PATRIOT Act.

In Cooper’s (1991) words, despite “journalistic crusades against ethnocentrism and racism,” reports usually offer only one perspective, which is that terrorism is enacted by “the other” (13). It seems that ethnocentrism and episodic reporting is a chronic problem of reports on terrorism (Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003). For this reason, ethnocentrism is an element of concern in this study. The hometown context adds a valuable dimension to the study of ethnocentrism in terrorism reporting by locating the accused so close to home.

Possibly the element of terrorism coverage most worthy of research is the lack of adequate, comprehensive contextualization and thus the amount of contextual information, such as the historical background, environmental conditions, proceeding actions of the parties involved, reasons for the event, and possible related events, will also be a key element measured in the current study.

An unfortunate aspect of news production is the overuse of episodic reporting, which does not offer contextualization, in contrast to thematic reporting. Thematic news goes “beyond the immediate human drama to explore the origins of problems and the larger social economic, or political contexts in which the immediate news story has developed” (Bennett 2005:46). On the other hand, episodic news puts the audience “into
the middle of an already developed situation and puts the focus on the people who are in trouble or in conflict” (Bennett 2005:46). Episodic reporting does not contextualize events which results in fragmented, confusing information (Ben-Shaul 2006; Bennett 2005). The disconnected aspect of episodic reporting makes it difficult for audience members to fully understand and integrate the new information with their prior experiences and knowledge (Graber 2006). Without situating the event in the larger political and social context, consumers are much more likely “to attribute responsibility for social problems to individuals not systematic attributions, such as … cultural deprivation, educational and job inequalities, drug addiction, or discrimination” (Johnson-Cartee 2005: 164). Sadly, the vast majority of news is reported in an episodic fashion, further serving the needs of the elite by diverting the public’s attention away from the big picture and instead focusing on individual, fragmented events.

In accordance with episodic reporting, interviews of journalists outlining the key television news elements of terrorist events conducted by Martin and Draznin (1991) pointed to a lack of contextualization. While context was far from priority, the involvement of Americans, the quantity of hostages and/or bodies, symbolic attacks, what additional events also need to be reported, and if there is access to video footage played major roles. The journalists also stated that due to constraints on time in televised news, usually only print media had opportunities to contextualize terrorist events (Martin & Draznin 1991). Although, as discussed later, unfortunately print media does not provide adequate context either.

Taugott & Brader (2003) cited research illustrating the process through which terrorist events were conveyed to the public in mainstream media. First, details of the
event were supplied for approximately two days. Then the news focused on governmental reports about responses. Finally, the larger picture with background information and explanations *may* have been given. “In general, the coverage of motives, goals, or explanations gets short drift” (Taugott & Brader 2003:184).

Gallimore (1991) assessed the guidelines media institutions use when reporting on terrorist events. He discovered that although news organizations do claim to subscribe to principles of objectivity when covering terrorism, actual reports do not correspond with the guidelines. Overall, he felt as if the media did not report terrorism responsibly. According to Gallimore, coverage lacked substance by neglecting to address the causes of and broad issues surrounding terrorism.

Research performed by Altheide and Grimes (2005) considered how news coverage of 9/11 played a part in creating the appearance of a tight connection between terrorism and Saddam Hussein. Through their theoretical proposition that the existing system of policy and analysis is institutionalized “War Programming,” Altheide and Grimes asserted that network television news coverage gave little perspective on or context of the terrorist event and journalists did not ask officials fundamental critical questions due to the risk of appearing antipatriotic.

Another body of research done by Altheide (2004) used extensive ethnographic content analysis to outline how the always-malleable concept of terrorism has been stretched to include fear, consumption, and war. Altheide also reiterated the often-discussed lack of causal inquiry. He found that the idea that the events of September 11th were the result of the enemy’s hatred of freedom and democracy was widely promoted
and questioned little. And the few who did engage in thought and discussion about the complexity of the situation were quickly criticized (Snow 2003).

For example, despite the extensive media attention the 9/11 attacks received on television and in print, very little attention was given to causal explanations of the terrorist event. In a review of the literature on news coverage of terrorism, Taugott & Brader (2003) discovered that less than 6 percent of newspaper coverage offered explicit explanations, less than 3 percent of televised network news gave explanations, and nearly 75 percent of news coverage totally neglected to discuss causes. Five weeks after 9/11 less than six explanations were receiving limited press time and the number decreased to zero by January 2002. The glaring lack of exploration of causes could be the result of elites pressuring news organizations to discuss only official information. In fact, commentators who attempted to sincerely explore reasons for 9/11 were quickly censured (Taugott & Brader 2003). The list of the condemned is long and includes politicians, correspondents, comedians, columnists, and musicians.

Of the reasons for terrorism that the American press did mention, the most common explanation was “inadequacy of airport security, immigration checks, and intelligence gathering” (Taugott & Brader 2003:188). Other causes were the terrorists’ hatred for the United States, differences in culture and religion, and the mental instability and irrationality of terrorists (Taugott & Brader 2003; Gerbner 1991). In contrast, Polikanov (2006) reported very different explanations from Russian public opinion polls.

Public and expert perceptions … do not coincide with the concepts Washington is forcing on the world community. Russian citizens are inclined to share the European viewpoint emphasizing the socioeconomic roots of terrorism, growing global inequality, and intensified competition in the world arena. Most experts and survey respondents believe that the main causes of terrorism are “the new world order based on energy
resources, natural resources, and markets,” “politicians inability to cope with human development tasks,” and “the U.S. redivision of the world in its favor.” Few believe that terrorism is a “war between Christian and Muslim civilizations” (50).

Clearly, deep examination of terrorism does not receive adequate press time or attention from the American public (Leone & Anrig 2003). To understand the motives of terrorists, “the internal conditions in those countries that seem to be producing the largest numbers of potential anti-American terrorists” and the “economic and foreign policies of the US-particularly in terms of our unique global role and our long-term involvement in the Middle East” need to be considered (Leone & Anrig 2003:5).

At a United Nations general assembly in October of 2006, the underlying dynamics of terrorism were discussed. Notions of associating terrorism with any religions, ethnicities, or nationalities were dismissed by many representatives. Instead, poverty, lack of sustainable development, disrespect for religion and culture, long-standing conflict, illiteracy, unemployment, and discrimination were cited as the multifaceted roots of terrorism. Additionally, in the report “Uniting Against Terrorism,” the United Nations urged States to encourage ideologies of free thought as alternatives to militancy and extremism to decrease terrorism. The report also claimed that unresolved violent conflicts, lack of civil rights, human rights abuse, religious and ethnic discrimination, political exclusion, and socioeconomic marginalization create environments that can be exploited for terrorist causes.

Ross (1993) conceptualized a causal model of terrorism. He divided the most prominent roots into structural, psychological, and rational choice categories and compiled a detailed list of the structural causes, which included a high level of modernization, presence of political unrest, counterterrorist organization failure,
availability of weapons and explosives, and grievances, such as poverty, exploitation, and discrimination. Crenshaw (1981) distinguished between conditions that allow opportunities for terrorism, motivating reasons for terrorism, situational factors that directly precede terrorist outbreaks, and individual motivations. She outlined the direct causes of terrorism as the existence of concrete grievances and lack of opportunities for political participation. Overall, Crenshaw (1981) theorized

Terrorism per se is not usually a reflection of mass discontent or deep cleavages in society. More often it represents the disaffection of a fragment of the elite, who take it upon themselves to act on the behalf of a majority unaware of its plight, unwilling to take action to remedy grievances, or unable to express dissent (396).

Overall, the press neglects to address the complex conditions leading to terrorism and by not doing so the press is drastically failing to serve the informational needs of the public. For this reason, the current study pays close attention to the discussion of the reasons for the terrorist activity. The extent of exploration of causes and the particular explanations discussed are given great attention.

News Frames

An additional element of this study is the concept of news frames. How the media framed the cases in question and gave meaning to the events are some of the concerns of this research. Fully exploring news coverage of terrorism is of great importance because the media’s framing of terrorist events potentially shapes the public’s perception of terrorism and national security, which can in turn influence levels of support for changes in public and foreign policy. Thus, the use of news frames should be discussed.

News frames organize social phenomena in a variety of ways (Hertog & McLeod 2001). The outlines of a frame are drawn with the goals and values of the creator in mind, privileging certain information, and defining the rest as peripheral or unrelated (Hertog
& McLeod 2001). The limits of the news frame categorize what is “in” the frame and what is “out” (Hertog & McLeod 2001). Through actively choosing what is to be contained within a news frame, the journalist declares what is relevant to the discussion by including some aspects of issues and events while excluding others. These distinctions also apply to relevancy and availability; when an element lies outside the frame, it is irrelevant and unreported (Reese 2001). In addition, actors are assigned roles such as problem-solver or source of problem and relationships between concepts and actions are created. Additionally, values are given to the relationships - some relationships are favored and legitimate while others are presented as inappropriate or impossible. Well-known narratives and myths within the culture are also used to ensure familiarity. Furthermore, journalists support the chosen frame by citing testimony, reports, public records, accounts from witnesses, and other sources that support their definition of the story (Johnson-Cartee 2005).

The interpretive structure of news frames help perform several functions (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003). Using frames that the public understands, journalists can effectively and simply inform the public of complicated political decisions and issues. By drawing from pools of recognizable storylines, reporters can quickly communicate the news of the day. In turn, the public relies on frames to make sense of the new information given to them by the media. Also, news reporters are routinely required to quickly assemble incoming facts and information into news stories (Johnson-Cartee 2005). They do this by fitting the information into news frames and using prepackaged materials from corporations and wire services (Pozner 2003). This standardization ensures a steady flow of product and infuses it with some sense of comfortable familiarity for consumers.
Although framing the news can be a helpful tool for communicating complex ideas to the masses, it also unfortunately leads to superficial coverage and oversimplification, which can have serious consequences. Instead of presenting new information about events, information is either blended into old frames or not reported at all (Bennett 2005). And unfortunately, as Bennett (2005) so insightfully understood it, “when new information is translated into old formulas, there is no challenge for people to replace their prejudices with new insights” (244).

In the current study, the framing of the news stories are considered in relation to the conventional framing of terrorism. Of interest is how the variables of ethnicity, religion, citizenship, class, and the local context may have influenced the framing choices made by journalists.

Defining Terrorism

There has been a great deal of debate about how to define terrorism. According to the United Nations (Rupérez 2006),

In certain political scenarios, some states deem terrorism only to be that which affects them, while others that are suffering from the same violent methods … are only referring to various struggles for self-determination, or against tyranny…From this standpoint, there is bad and not so bad terrorism, explained by different yardsticks.

Furthermore, when Martin & Draznin (1991) asked journalists to define terrorism, many different responses were given. This shows how the people from whom most of the public receives vital information about terrorism unfortunately lack consensus on general definitions.

Defining terrorism is extremely difficult partly because the understandings found in literature are either incomplete or too inclusive (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003). Also
making terrorism difficult to define is the fact that terrorism is a method, not a nation, ideology, or a person (Rusciano 2003). Not unlike pornography, terrorism is a very subjective concept and people usually “know it when they see it” (Martin & Draznin 1991). Cross-cultural consensus on definition is even more convoluted, especially if terrorism includes unintentional civilian casualties resulting from military campaigns (Rusciano 2003).

Further complicating the matter, the designation of “terrorist” has been interchanged with “radical activists,” “armed rebel,” “repressive regimes,” “liberation movements,” “dictatorships,” and “urban guerillas” (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003:6). In a similar manner, George W. Bush redefined the perpetrators of 9/11 from “those folks” to “evil ones” and their actions from “terrorist attack” to “act of war” (Altheide 2006). Similarly, “the enemy-terrorism, Iraq, bin Laden, Hussein-becomes one threatening category, something to be defeated and destroyed, so that the public response will be one of reaction to fear and threat rather than creatively and independently thinking for oneself” (Snow 2003:82). Clearly, these elements and individuals should not be subjected to overgeneralizations.

In the absence of a clear definition of terrorism, it is the media rather than terrorists who ultimately shape our understanding of and reaction to terrorism (Cooper 1991). For instance, although the executors of 9/11 planned and chose to hijack aircraft and use them as “missiles of death,” the American media and government ultimately assigned a definition to the event (Altheide 2006: 89). Propaganda created meaning by connecting the event to ideals of patriotism, fear of “those who hate freedom,” and
justification for brash, revengeful, and deadly retaliatory acts (Altheide 2006; Snow 2003).

Additionally, as a result of genuine confusion, lack of reason, and their own political socialization, some Western experts, and especially the media, have had great difficulty accepting the basic differences among various forms of violence. “Terrorists,” “commandos,” “partisans,” “urban guerrillas,” “gunmen,” “freedom fighters,” “insurgents” and half a dozen other terms were often used interchangeably to describe pre-9/11 events (Laqueur 1986: 90). Post 9/11, Chomsky (2002) described the still existent perplexity of terms as being rooted in the official U.S. definition of terrorism, which is found in U.S. code, military manuals, etc. He quoted the definition as “the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature…through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear” (79). This definition comes ironically very close to actual U.S. government policy, only instead of calling it terrorism it is referred to as low-intensity conflict or counter terror (Chomsky 2002). Additionally, Ahmad (2001) has commented extensively on how the media has defined terrorism. He has considered the problem a result of lack of “commitment to analysis, comprehension, and adherence to some norms of consistency” (13). Consequently, terrorism has been and is simply defined as what they do to us (and U.S. allies), and, as a result, the hero of yesterday can be the terrorist of today and the terrorist of here can be the hero of there.

Accordingly, Kellner (2005) considers the word terrorism “one of the most loaded and contested terms in contemporary political vocabulary” (25). On an international level, the word is highly disputed and what gets labeled terrorism is very dependent on
who is doing the labeling (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003; Rusciano 2003). Thus there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism (Dunn, Moore, & Nosek 2005). Normally, actions described as terrorist are the actions of others- “other countries, other political, religious, and ethnic groups; other belief systems than one’s own” (Cooper 1991:10; Dunn, Moore, & Nosek 2005; El-Saadawi 2001 & 2003; Mittleman 2005; Zinn 2002). Terrorist has come to describe groups and individuals that the United States and our allies are fighting with (Kellner 2005). This biased use of the terrorist label is a focus of this study. I seek to expand on past research by exploring how this ethnocentric labeling process plays out when a member of the community performs the terrorist actions. When outsiders define a community member as a terrorist, how do the local community and press respond and understand the situation? Is the accused part of us or do they become them?

Race and Ethnicity in the News

Since the dominant “us” of the news media usually racially consists of Whites, “them” normally refers to a group of a different race or ethnicity. Furthermore, racial and ethnic differences often serve as identifying markers and play important roles in intergroup prejudice and the process of othering. Therefore, ethnicity is a vital aspect of this study. Thus, since it is important to realize how the press frames the activities of minorities, I will briefly review what is known about the relationship between news and minority groups and the role the media plays in perpetuating racism. Considering the portrayed relationship between the Middle East, Islam, and terrorism, I pay particular attention to news representations of Arabs and Muslims.
Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk (1988) described institutional texts, such as news stories, as manifestations of the power and dominance of the in-group and expressions of common racist attitudes held by Whites. They are a means for producing racial consensus, if not oppression and control of minorities. “Discourse is not just a symptom or a signal of the problem of racism. It essentially reproduces and helps produce the racist cognitions and actions among the white majority” (18). Racist acts and beliefs are rationalized through descriptions of reasons, motivations, and goals, which are connected to opinions and attitudes, in the interests of in-group members (Glaser 2005). Additionally, discourse of the dominant group fosters solidarity while communicating the norms and values of the in-group. It also defines threatening groups and legitimizes discriminatory action against them and categorizes “in-group members as innocent victims of ‘them’” (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988: 18). The effectiveness of discriminatory discourses depends on their ability to normalize dominance and/or discrimination to populations. When dominant group members share discriminatory beliefs and attitudes, racism becomes structural, not individual. In other words, “discourse becomes crucial in the complex process of the formation or confirmation of relevant social cognitions against minorities” (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988:19).

Specifically related to the news, the biases in reporting stories involving minorities have effects beyond the maintenance of everyday racism among the masses. News coverage has the ability to influence government legislation that can have real implications for minority groups, such as in cutting funding to social programs, increasing the amount of police in minority communities, and increasing post 9/11
security measures (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988). However, despite the ubiquity and power of the media, it should not be assumed that audiences automatically appropriate its racist messages. Some people may appropriate the messages and others may reject them, while others may not even recognize them (Law 2002). Nevertheless, coverage of minorities in the press can shape the beliefs others hold about people of different ethnicities by creating an interpretive and evaluative structure for ethnic affairs, especially for the dominant group (Bobo 1997; Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988). Furthermore, the way in which people are categorized in the news is significant because “referring to racial groups can easily give the impression that races are real” (Law 2002:103). Additionally, van Dijk (1987) has found that for people who do not interact frequently with ethnically different others, everyday conversation about minorities among dominant members is predominantly based on media information. And since the media strongly influences what White people believe they know about other ethnicities and race relations, “it is important to assess its contents, structures, and strategies or (re)production” (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988: 222).

However, according to Smitherman-Donaldson and van Dijk (1988), respectable press does not produce blatant racist discourse as they did in the past. In fact, research on racial attitudes speaks of an end to traditional Jim Crow type racism (Bobo & Kluegel 1993). Today, America sustains a more “subtle, covert, and possibly more insidious brand of racism” (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988:13). Subtle racism manifests in the forms of social and public policies and practices, which are supported by political elites. This prejudice goes by many names, including modern racism, symbolic racism, racial resentment, and subtle prejudice, each with theoretical differences. However, each
describes a racist movement away from “biological inferiority to new, more subtle forms” (Krysan 2000: 144). Theorists of this “new” racism try to explain the complex paradox of White Americans valuing equality while not supporting racial policies, such as affirmative action, and not acknowledging the structural causes of inequality (Bobo & Kluegel 1993; Kluegel 1990; Krysan 2000; Sears, Van Laar, Carillo, & Kosterman 1997).

Bobo (1997) has argued that many Whites do not support racial policies, such as affirmative action, due to group self-interest. His concept of laissez-faire racism is rooted in Blumer’s (1958) ideas about the sense of group position. Blumer believed that people are taught through a collective process to believe in a hierarchy of racial groups.

It operates chiefly through the public media in which individuals who are accepted as the spokesmen of a racial group characterize publicly another racial group. To characterize another racial group is, by opposition, to define one’s own group. This is equivalent to placing the two groups in relation to each other, or defining their positions vis-à-vis each other. It is this sense of social position emerging from this collective process of characterization which provides the basis of race prejudice (Blumer 1958: 4).

The group positions portrayed in the media result in unequal entitlement to resources and status (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith 1997). Superior groups try to maintain the privileges of their position and prejudice stems from perceived threats from other groups. To support this prejudice, stereotypes are produced and maintained and the structural and historical causes of inequality are denied (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith 1997).

As noted, this racist ideology is commonly communicated via the mass media. Through ubiquitous media, which elites control, oppression of minorities is enacted and legitimized (Law 2002; Paek & Shah 2003; Potter & Kappeler 1998; Shah & Thornton 2004; Whillock & Slayden 1995). Media producers often adhere to professional values, which support instead of challenge constructed racial hierarchies (Law 2002: Whillock &
Slayden 1995). In particular, news plays a strong role in maintaining racism through its representation of racialized groups (Law 2002). If minorities are mentioned, they are normally presented in a negative way, neglecting positive aspects of minority communities (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988). Out-groups are subjected to daily news coverage associating them with violence, danger, and crime and often the ethnic backgrounds of perpetrators are revealed through mug shots, video, or photographs (Law 2002; Lipschutz & Hilt 2003; Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988).

Furthermore, it is very common for news stories to present minorities as problem causing, such as in producing illegal immigration, unemployment, drug use, crime, welfare, and bilingual education without drawing attention to the real issues of a community, such as homelessness, lack of educational opportunities and poor or no healthcare (Keeble 2003; Law 2002; Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988; Whillock & Slayden 1995).

Additionally, if the news does give attention to racism, its tendency is to highlight extreme groups or events by non-elites, such as the Ku Klux Klan.

Moreover, White-centric reporting of news may help construct the concept of race and reinforce stereotypes of minorities that are supportive of the ideology of the elite (Law 2002; Lipschutz & Hilt 2003; Dixon & Maddox 2005). The exaggerated coverage of crime by local televised news may engrave racial stereotypical images of criminals into viewers’ minds and the display of ethnicity may cause dominant group members to form racial explanations for crime rather than broad social reasons (Lipschutz & Hilt 2003). In so doing, minority groups may be defined as a social problem and the actual roots of issues are often neglected (Law 2002). For example, stereotypical caricatures of African Americans are easily found in U.S. news (Lipschutz & Hilt 2003; Smitherman-Donaldson
& van Dijk 1988; Dixon & Maddox 2005). In Law’s (2002) review of studies of race and news, he found that African American men were commonly portrayed as sexually excessive, violent, and/or rap stars, while African American women were frequently presented as drug abusing, welfare mothers. Also, studies revealed that Asian Americans were presented as “‘inscrutable, manipulative’ invaders of US business and Native Americans as ‘Indian drunks’” (Law 2002: 108).

Similarly, Shaheen (1984, 1985, & 2001) has discovered an overabundance of stereotypical representations of Arabs in many media forms and has produced extensive documentation of the profusion and longevity of Arab and Muslim stereotypes in American media. For example, Shaheen found that Islam is frequently associated with male supremacy, holy war, and acts of terror, depicting Arab Muslims as hostile alien intruders, and as lecherous, oily sheikhs intent on using nuclear weapons (Shaheen 2001). Additionally, reports on Muslims often contained footage of prayer in mosques which are edited so that the video quickly cuts to scenes of bombings or shootings, further linking Islam to violence in the minds of an audience (Shaheen 2001). Muslim men were stereotypically presented as violent and Muslim women were stereotypically presented as submissive (Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003). Similarly, Donaldson and van Dijk (1988) referred to the images of “the Moslem guest worker who slaughters sheep on the balcony” and “the invariably Arabic terrorist from the Middle East” which pervade European media (21). Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2003) have also recognized how the media has a tendency to use the terms Arab and Muslim interchangeably, although not all Arabs are Muslim and many Muslims are not Arab.
In his book *Covering Islam*, Said (1979) argued that the Western media’s coverage and interpretation of Islam is extremely influential and the success “of this coverage can be attributed to the political influence of those people and institutions producing it rather than necessarily to truth or accuracy” (169). Said (1979) also coined the term Orientalism, “a way of coming to terms with the orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (1). He explored how Europeans have developed and used an exteriority, or representation of the Orient, not “natural depictions of the Orient” (21). Nonetheless, Westerners believe this representation to be objective. By standardizing cultures of the Orient, these representations have developed into stereotypes. The technology of the postmodern world, such as ubiquitous media, has accelerated and solidified this process. Said explained how that this is particularly true for the way the Near East is conceived.

It hardly needs saying that because the Middle East is now so identified with Great Power politics, oil economies, and the simple-minded dichotomy of freedom-loving, democratic Israel and evil, totalitarian, and terrorist Arabs, the chances of anything like a clear view of what one talks about in talking about the Near East are depressingly small (27).

He identified modern stereotypes of Arabs created by Orientalism as the anti-Zionist, the oil supplier, and the bloodthirsty, oversexed, irrational perpetrator of jihad, which lead to substantial misunderstandings (Said 1997:28). In further oversimplification and cultural hostility, Islam is used as “a handle for grasping a vast region of the world and proclaiming it an entirely coherent phenomenon”(299). Thus, the word Islam is used to identify all at once a society, a culture, and a religion without any regard for the diversity exhibited among Muslims. According to Said (1997) the West carelessly relies on these
generalizations and “clichés about how Muslims behave are bandied about with a nonchalance no one would risk in talking about blacks or Jews” (301).

In reference to news coverage of events involving Arabs, Shaheen (2001) claimed

News reports selectively and relentlessly focus on a minority of a minority of Arabs, the radical fringe. The seemingly indelible Arab-as-villain image wrongly conveys the message that the vast majority of the 265 million peace-loving Arabs are ‘bad guys’ (28).

According to Said (2003), before 9/11, Arabs were generally depicted as backward, fundamentalist, unpredictable, and dangerous, but post September 11th, Arabs have been othered even more. The actors of 9/11 were divided into our heroes and their terrorists, exacerbating differences and suppressing similarities. Furthermore, few people who are in the profession of reporting on the Arab world are even genuinely knowledgeable of the culture (Said 1997). For example, in 1992, out of 774 U.S. news foreign correspondents surveyed, only ten claimed to be capable of conducting an interview in Arabic (Hess & Kalb 2003).

Similarly, reports show that Islam has also been victim to ethnocentric news production. The results of a survey conducted in the fall of 2001 showed that 68% of Muslims in the United States believed that Islam was not portrayed fairly in the news (Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003). Furthermore, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia has charged British media with portraying Muslims in negative stereotypical ways and representing “asylum seekers as ‘terrorists’ and ‘the enemy within’ following the September atrocities in the US” (Keeble 2006:41). Believing that the New York Post carries an anti-Arab and anti-Muslim perspective, Arab merchants in Brooklyn tried to boycott the paper in 2002 (Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003). Additionally,
in spring of 2004, the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia faulted the media for supporting anti-Muslim attitudes (Keeble 2003).

Lorber (2002) described the media’s superficial depiction as a “conventionalizing idealization of American women and men, a propagandistic demonization of Muslim men, and a sentimentalization of Muslim women” (379). Furthermore, journalists frequently use the term “Islamic terrorist,” but the label “Christian terrorist” is not used, which influences the development of the perception that all Muslims are terrorists (Shaheen 1985). Not surprisingly, portrayals of Arabs and Muslims as radical outsiders have been linked to intolerance, xenophobia, and prejudice in consumers of news (Cho, de Zuniga, Shah, & McLeod 2006).

Due to the unfair treatment given to minority groups and the common use of race and ethnicity to dichotomize groups, it is central to explore the treatment of the accused in terms of their differing ethnicities. Therefore, in addition to studying terrorism and who is defined as terrorist, itself an index of a medium’s bias and ethnocentrism, the current study gives special attention to elements of racism and ethnocentrism related to concepts of terrorism in the news stories analyzed. As a result, the study adds to the substantial amount of literature on the relationship between news and race. However, as previous work concentrates on news coverage of African Americans, this study handles reports on Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims, which have been studied to a lesser degree. Specifically, I choose to study one case in which the accused is of the dominant White race and another case in which the accused are of Arab origin. Particular consideration is given to any stereotypes of Muslims, Arabs, and terrorists used in depicting the local events. For example, uses of the constructed connections between and
derogatory representations of Islam, Arabs, and terrorism reported by past studies is identified and explored. In addition, the effect of ethnicity in relation to community membership is studied.
CHAPTER II: METHOD

Bennett (2005) described the news as an “important link in a chain of poor reasoning about social problems” (46). Accordingly, news media is important to analyze because understanding the content can help predict its impact and serves to help understand the people and processes that create the media product. This is particularly vital in such dangerous situations as terrorism. As discussed above, with inadequate discussion and understanding of the situation, developing an informed, effective response to recent terrorist events is practically impossible (Leone & Anrig 2003). Consequently, in pursuit of a full understanding of the American media’s construction of terrorism and how to deal with terrorism effectively and safely, it is vital to explore the many communicative paths of terrorism discourse, not just the most prominent. Therefore, since the majority of findings on news reports of terrorism results from the analysis of large, leading newspapers, such as *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*, the coverage of the activities analyzed in this study is from newspapers addressing the respective local communities of the accused.

The coverage of two cases of alleged terrorist-related activities in their respective local newspapers are studied.

- The first case involves a European American from San Anselmo in Marin County, California-

  On November 25, 2001, John Walker Lindh was captured by the Afghan Northern Alliance forces in a flooded fortress in Afghanistan and taken into U.S. custody with about 80 Taliban fighters. Upon questioning, it was discovered that Lindh was an American from Marin County, California near San Francisco. He confessed not only
to fighting with the Taliban, but also belonging to al Qaeda. His parents, Frank Lindh and Marilyn Walker, were notified of his condition by authorities and an “American Taliban” media spree began.

- The second case involves three men in Toledo, Ohio; two are Arab Americans from Jordan and one is Lebanese—

On February 21, 2006, an indictment charged Mohammad Zaki Amawi, Marwan Othman El-Hindi, and Wassim I. Mazloum with terrorist activities, which included plotting attacks against U.S. and coalition troops in Iraq, voicing desires to kill George W. Bush, and planning to recruit people for their cause. Because two of the men were living in Toledo, Ohio at the time of the indictment and one had lived in Toledo within the last few years, the case was a cause for anxiety among Toledo residents and excitement among local Toledo press.

The two particular cases were chosen due to key similarities. Both cases occurred in the post 9/11 environment and in areas not normally associated with terrorism. Additionally, in each of the cases the accused did not clearly and directly produce obvious, destructive results, which adds an interesting dimension to assumptions of guilt and the use of the terrorist label. Due to this ambiguity, the journalists could have potentially defined the events in a myriad of ways and chosen from an extensive list of possible frames when constructing their stories. This wide range of possible framing choices accentuates the decisions made by the journalists while covering the cases.

The two cases contain a distinct difference: the accused are of different ethnicities. John Walker Lindh is White and the Toledoans are members of the Arab
community. In addition, there are class differences, Lindh is from a privileged background and the Toledo men are financially disadvantaged. Additionally, the case associated with members of an Arab community is from an area with a high concentration of Arabs and Arab Americans. Thus, within the area, relationships of “us” versus “them” and boundaries of in-groups and out-groups may be less defined, further expanding the pool of potential news frames.

To analyze the John Walker Lindh case, I use a popular regional paper of the community of the accused, the San Francisco Chronicle. As the largest newspaper in Northern California and the second largest on the West Coast (Hearst Communications), the San Francisco Chronicle serves San Francisco, the Silicon Valley, the eastern Bay Area and Napa Valley (Hearst Corp.). BurrellesLuce (2006) ranked the newspaper 14th of U.S. daily newspapers according to circulation of 512,129 daily readers and 451,504 Sunday readers.

Lindh’s home county contains about 246,960 residents, with about 77 percent of the population being non-Hispanic White (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). African Americans make up just over 3 percent, Asians are about 5 percent, and Hispanics count for about 12 percent of the population. Approximately 16 percent of the residents are foreign born and a language other than English is spoken in about 20 percent of homes in the county. Over half the population holds a Bachelor’s degree or higher and the median household income is just over $66,000.

About 20 miles south of San Anselmo, Lindh’s small hometown in Marin County, lies San Francisco, which is bit more diverse. Of the 739,426 people living in San Francisco, it is estimated that few than 50 percent are White, 7.8 percent are African
American, 30 percent are Asian, and 14 percent are Hispanic. However, in contrast to popular perceptions of who is considered White, the Census Bureau (2000) defines White as “having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.” Therefore, the above percentages may seem inflated to the common observer. Over 45 percent of households speak a foreign language in the home and about 36 percent of residents are foreign born. The median income is $55,221 and approximately 45 percent of residents hold Bachelor’s degrees or higher.

I use the dominant newspaper of Northwest Ohio, The Blade, to analyze the coverage of the case involving Mohammad Zaki Amawi, Marwan Othman El-Hindi, and Wassim I. Mazloum. Fourteen counties in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan are covered by The Blade and the newspaper touts a readership of 257,600 daily and 367,300 on Sundays (About the Blade; Block Communications). However, according to Burrell Luce (2006), The Toledo paper reaches only 129,291 daily and 167,686 on Sunday, ranking it 83rd in circulation.

The city of Toledo is populated by about 300,000 people. Approximately 70 percent of Toledo residents are White, 23.5 percent are African American, and 5 percent are of Hispanic or Latino origin (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). About three percent of the population is foreign born and 7.3 percent of households speak a language other than English in the home. Less than a quarter of the Toledo population hold Bachelor’s degrees or anything higher and the median household income in 1999 was $32,546.

It is important to note a significant characteristic of the Northwest Ohio/Southeast Michigan region. About 50 miles northeast of Toledo, Ohio lies Dearborn, Michigan. With approximately 30 percent of the population of Dearborn being Arab, the city has by
far the largest proportion of Arabs among places of comparable size (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). Although *The Blade* does not serve the Dearborn community, it is possible that this attribute may have influenced the coverage of the Toledo case.

Having such a large concentration of Arabs in the area may have increased the amount of inclusion extended to the accused. Or, similar to how large numbers of African Americans in a region have been shown to increase perceived group threat among Whites (Fossett & Kiecolt 1989; Giles & Evans 1986; Quillian 1996), the Arab population of Dearborn may have a similar effect on Whites in *The Blade’s* community. On the other hand, according to contact theory, the sizeable Arab population of Dearborn may provide opportunities for interethnic contact that could increase harmony between the groups (Dixon 2006). Friendships among the ethnic groups can disturb stereotypes and reduce prejudice. In this way, the relatively high proportion of Arabs in the area may increase the inclusion and hospitality granted to the accused Toledoans.

My analysis includes both the texts of the news pieces from the newspapers’ online archives and the microfiche images of the news stories. The two samples include every piece, published from the day the stories broke to a month later, that either was directly about the case or mentioned the case in some way and included news articles, cartoons, letters to the editor, and opinion columns. Due to the rate at which the initial coverage of the events began to lose prominence in the newspapers and the large amount of coverage of the cases, I chose to limit the time frame to one month. Journalists’ crucial framing choices are made when a story breaks and considering the lasting impact of first impressions, it is reasonable to assume audience members may be most influenced by early news coverage. Accordingly, the analysis will focus on the first stories of the cases.
The total number of texts of this analysis is 39 from The Blade and 53 from the San Francisco Chronicle. The Blade sample consists of 29 news stories, 1 cartoon, and 9 opinion pieces, which include letters to the editor and columns. The sample from the San Francisco Chronicle contains 23 news stories, 2 cartoons, and 28 opinion pieces, which also include letters to the editor and columns. The data is supplemented by information obtained through personal correspondence with members of the Toledo Arab community.

I examine both the textual and visual aspects of the press coverage of the two cases. I begin by analyzing the news discourse for traces of what previous studies have reported and how the local context possibly influences these matters. Next, I code the texts according to the thematic categories guided by the questions to be answered and the findings of past research on terrorism coverage. I also study the headlines since they are often used to frame stories, attract readers, and offer a “snapshot of the reporter’s handling of the story” (Johnson-Cartee 2005: 165). The photographs used in the newspaper reports and other visual dimensions of the news reports are also considered. The images used by journalists are especially worthy of study because images are capable of conveying unverbalized meanings and those meanings may be particularly elusive (Messaris & Abraham 2001). Also the simple practice of selecting, eliminating, cropping, and editing photos have far reaching implications and ultimately results in what the public actually sees. Special attention is also given to the layouts of the news pieces, such as in the placement of the articles in relation to other related articles, the sizes of the articles, and the sections in which articles were placed. After being coded, examples of text, images, and relationships are identified for discussion based on how well they represent the central thematic message.
The themes I focus on in this study all contribute to and work together in the production and reproduction of stereotypes of terrorists and the process of othering. Specifically, the analysis explores how the accusations of terrorist type activities were presented by the news in a local context, especially in relation to the religions, nationalities, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status of the accused. Crucial to the us/them binary is the degree of inclusion given to the accused in the press. Accordingly, first I analyze how the men are defined in relation to their communities. Secondly, considering how past studies have found a lack of contextualization in news coverage of terrorism, the exploration of reasons for the terrorist behavior of the accused is also examined. I look at any constructed connections between Islam and terrorism as well as rationales for these connections. Thirdly, due to the lack of consensus concerning definitions of terrorism and the tendency to define terrorism in an ethnocentric manner, I look at how the men are labeled and related discussions of their guilt or innocence. Since discussion of the roots of terrorism is necessary to develop an appropriate response to terrorism, the bounds of the discourse are also of particular interest.
CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS

Group Membership

A major difference in the coverage of the John Walker Lindh of Marin County, California case and the case concerning the three men in Toledo, Ohio was how membership in the local community was negotiated in the two newspapers. While San Francisco Chronicle journalists and readers treated Lindh as a member of the dominant group, Mohammed Zaki Amawi, Wassim Mazloum, and Marwan El-Hindi were automatically othered in the Toledo Blade. Although, the Chronicle published many pieces clearly defending and blaming San Francisco and Marin counties for the behavior of one of their own, the Toledo trio was treated as if they were naturally not part of the mainstream Toledo population and should not be identified as such. Many of the reports on the Toledo men situated them in relation to the Muslim community and thus they were not discussed as members of the in-group. And while focus was put on the Muslim community through stories of praise and accusations, Toledo Muslims defensively distanced themselves from the men.

Journalists covering the Lindh case quoted many who were amazed and bewildered by the details of John Walker Lindh’s life. The difficulty they had experienced reconciling the figure of the prisoner with what is known of the California boy was expressed for days in the newspaper. The news stories accentuated the differences between the Caucasian American from a well-to-do family and a Taliban soldier. For example, the relationship was discussed as how “they couldn’t match up the televised image of the grubby, half-starved, wounded solider … with the shy, deeply spiritual boy who lived in the comfort of Marin county” (“Dad calls” Dec 4), “the wild –
haired Taliban warrior who spoke with an Arabic accent…seemed a universe away from
the boy who grew up in privileged Marin” (Fagan Dec 5), and “a grimy, light-skinned
man claiming to be an American…was among more than 80 Taliban fighters who
struggled out of a flooded basement” (“Prisoner claims” Dec 30). The reports
emphasized the disparity between the two characterizations to a point of seeming to
create two different people.

Due to Lindh’s class and ethnicity, he fit within the imagined bounds of the
community’s collective identity. In contrast to the Toledoans, Lindh was considered a
legitimate member of the community and received special treatment as a result of the
inclusion. As Paek, Yoon, and Shah (2005) have found, local newspapers convey local
identity to readers and thus the coverage of the cases communicates to readers who can
be considered legitimate members of the community. The newspaper clearly defined the
expectations of White Americans by defining what they are thought not to be and
highlighting reactions of shock and confusion. The message was that privileged White
boys from California should not be grubby, half-starved, and in Afghanistan. In other
words, from the standpoint of a media organization ran by the dominant group, we are
White Americans, we are not like them.

Conversely, a theme found in the coverage of the Toledo case was emphasis on
the men’s foreignness, not their ties to their Toledo homes (Hall Feb 22; Hughes Mar1;
Ray Mar 31). Despite the U.S. citizenship of Amawi and El-Hindi, journalists
emphasized the ethnicities and foreignness of the Toledo men. The reports made it very
clear that these men were not average Americans; they were nonwhite foreigners with
connections to the Middle East and should be treated accordingly. Additionally, The
Blade, when offering other examples of Ohio terrorist cases, unnecessarily mentioned the ethnic origins and citizenship statuses of the charged: “In 2003, Iyman Farris, naturalized U. S. citizen and Ohio truck Driver.... In 2004, Nuradin M. Abdi – A Somali national living in Columbus” (Provance Feb 23).

Intriguingly, Erika Ray of The Blade wrote a story (Feb 23) about how terrorists target technologically savvy foreign students when recruiting and linked this matter to the Toledo terrorism case even though two of the indicted were American and only one of the men was a college student at the time (Anonymous associate of accused, personal communication Feb 23, 2006; Shockman Feb 22). Additionally, the story, which included discussions with “terrorism experts” at local universities about recruiting foreign students and large tables illustrating declining numbers of foreign students at nearby universities, was printed just a day after the story broke (Ray Feb 23). Overall, the news story defined foreign students as potential threats and the decline as a good, safe trend for the region. This may have caused alarm in some Toledoans and made them unreasonably suspicious of foreign students.

Another story that may have contributed to the othering of the accused Toledoans appeared during the early days of the case. This story involved a possible purchase of a firm that manages U.S. port facilities by a company in the United Arab Emirates. The national media quickly related the potential deal with the War on Terror. Likewise, a Toledonian wrote into The Blade about the same issue.

President Bush said “I want those who are questioning it to step up and explain why all of a sudden a Middle Eastern company is held to a different standard than a Great British company.” I can give you two good reasons: the towers that used to be part of New York skyline. I don’t recall London wiping out buildings in the U.S or killing our citizens (Michalak Mar 1).
Notice the use of the author’s use of the term “Middle Eastern.” Regularly using the blanket term encourages the audience to summon the erroneous overgeneralizations the very diverse region is subjected to. Overgeneralizations such as this maintain a simplified perspective of the world that supports the dichotomization of others as “not us.” Further emphasizing the men as the “other” and enforcing broad generalizations about the Middle East, when seeming to refer to events in Jordan, reports of the Toledo trio’s activities sometimes just located the events in the Middle East, perpetuating generalizations of a diverse region (“A local” Feb 23).

Another piece that may have contributed to the distancing of the accused men from the Toledo community is one that drew a connection between the accused men and the U.S. port facilities business deal many perceived as suspect. Similarly, The Blade’s piece “Knowing friends from enemies” connected the business deal with the Toledoans accused of terrorism.

Distilled to its essence, the argument against the sale is that Dubai Ports World is an Arab firm, and it was Arabs who attacked us on 9/11 … The argument is comparable to the one President Roosevelt used to send Japanese Americans from the West accost to concentration camps. If we are now in the war against Islamo-fascists, we need to be able to distinguish our friends from our enemies. In this war, there are good Muslims and bad Muslims. The alleged Toledo conspirators, if guilty, are examples of the latter. The “Trainer” and the 1,715 Muslims currently serving in the U.S. Army are examples of the former. We wouldn’t lump “the trainer” in with the terrorists he risked his life to catch, and we shouldn’t lump the UAE in with Iran or Syria, or even with Egypt or Saudi Arabia (“Knowing Friends” Feb 25).

Although, it seems that the author is discouraging stereotyping Muslims and Arab nations, some statements, such as “in this war, there are good Muslims and bad Muslims,” (in contrast to “good people and bad people”) unfortunately defined the War
on Terror as a war with Islam and further emphasized the Toledo men’s “otherness.”

Accentuating the differences between the trio and the dominant Toledo population places
them outside of the community and does not grant them the privileges members of the
community may be extended.

While northern California seemed confused about what their John Walker Lindh
had become and how the community should treat him, *The Blade’s* conception of
community membership in relation to the Toledo case was more complicated. The Arab
and Arab American men were clearly not considered members of the dominant
community. They were immediately connected to the Muslim population and the Muslim
community was prompted to answer for the men’s actions. Right at the beginning of the
coverage, the Muslim community’s reactions were published along side the charges. In
response, the Muslim community generally disowned the accused men. Distancing
themselves, in “Stay involved, UT president advises Arab, Muslim students,”
representatives of the University of Toledo’s Arab Student Union and Muslim Student
Association were reported as explaining that the accused men were not affiliated with
their organizations and did not have contact with them (Feb 23). The three men were also
described as having no ties to a large local mosque and only having been seen
infrequently at a smaller local mosque (Yonke & Troy Feb 22). Furthermore, the
president of a mosque in west Toledo desperately voiced his loyalty to the U.S., trust in
the judicial process, and his disdain for terrorism,

> Hopefully, if they’re guilty, they will pay the price. And if they’re
innocent, they will not be punished. If I knew they were going to harm
this country, I’d be he first one to turn them in…I would not hesitate.
This is my country and the country of my children. We want all the
people of the United States to be living in peace and harmony (Yonke &
Troy Feb 22).
Many Muslims in the Toledo-area were frightened by events of the terrorism case, “fearing government oppression and backlashes from people who blindly link all Muslims with the handful of extremists” (Yonke Feb 25). Imam Aly Lela, hired recently to lead a Toledo mosque said, "The Muslim community in general is suffering from defamation and being the target of extra investigations. And statistics show that the misunderstanding and prejudice has increased” (Yonke Feb 25). It is no wonder the Muslim community distanced themselves from the accused.

Additionally, the newspaper reported that members of the Muslim community were praised for their help in drawing the attention of the authorities to the trio of men while individuals and leaders of different faiths gathered together for a banquet and respectfully discussed the situation (Provance Feb 23; Yonke Feb 24). The Blade also carried a cartoon showing a representative of the Muslim community wearing a medal with “For helping nab 3 terror suspects” written on it. Above the man was the label “Local Hero” (Kirk Feb 23).

Although, praise is undeniably better than discrimination and denigration, to praise a specific community singles out and homogenizes the group. Again it puts the spotlight on the Muslim community and thus connects terrorism to Islam. Furthermore, some statements in the media coverage took it a step further. Ted Wasky of the Cleveland FBI office said the following about Toledo area Muslims,

They [Toledo area Muslims] are the ones who deserve the most credit. The ability to prevent another terrorist attack cannot be won without the support this community gives (3 charged Feb 22).

Another example was,
“Local Muslims, who the government considers to be the collateral victims of these three individuals’ alleged crimes, assisted their investigation by telling authorities about Mr. Amawi’s ‘radical’ comments. …It’s very important that the community work with law enforcement to weed out the bad apples,” said Craig Morfrod, an assistant U.S. attorney in Cleveland (Boak Feb 23).

With these quotes above, Muslims are held responsible for other Muslims’ actions. They imply imminent criticism of Muslims if an act of terrorism does actually occur in the future. Singling out the Muslim community draws attention to the socially created connection between Islam and terrorism, neglects the real, dire conditions underlying terrorism, and does not require the majority to face, accept, and take responsibility for their share of the problem. Additionally, the focus firmly places the Toledo men outside the dominant community as “them.”

Overall, few people spoke up for the accused Toledoans in The Blade. Muslims who were questioned seemed to separate themselves from the accused and reiterated requests for no discrimination. Through the praise given by authorities and encouragement to report future incidents, they may have felt pressured to respond in a way favorable to the majority. This coincides with analyses performed by Domke, Garland, Billeaudeau, and Hutchinson (2003), which found African Americans were more averse to racial profiling prior to 9/11 than Arab Americans, post-9/11. The authors suggested the reason for the findings may be that African Americans have solidified their stance on racial profiling while Arab Americans feel pressured to respond in a way that would not further jeopardize the Arab community.

In contrast to the way Toledoans, dominant and minority, distinguished the three terrorist suspects as outsiders and generally did not protect them, Marin County residents seemed to accept any attacks on John Walker Lindh as attacks on themselves. For
instance, an article published in the *Chronicle* titled “Paper Tigers” (Dec 16) spoke of comments made by Shelby Steele in the *Wall Street Journal*. The author of the article was noticeably defensive.

Noting, unsympathetically, that Walker was named for John Lennon, he describes Marin as a place where “traditional American history, culture, and religion are without any special authority,” adding that the young man’s “seduction” was made possible by a “post-‘60s cultural liberalism…that gave his every step toward treason a feel of authenticity and authority.” Steele stops short, however, of suggesting we bomb Fairfax, after Kandahar (“Paper Tigers” Dec 16).

Another example of *Chronicle* journalists’ protective stance was the report “Everyone Has a Theory on the Man from Marin” (Fagan Dec 9). Reporter Kevin Fagan countered those who argued the American Taliban was the result of permissive parenting in “far-out, anything-goes Northern California.” He cited expert opinion on parenting and discredited the connection between “the moneyed comfort in Fairfax to mud holes with the Taliban.” The lengthy article contained many statements guarding the Bay Area from the rest of the nation’s arrows. The journalist also reminded his audience that the last case of an American “joining up with foreigners who we regarded as enemies” came out of Oregon, not “loopy California” (Fagan Dec 9).

Eventually, dissenting voices appeared in the newspaper. In “White, Middle-Class and Taliban” columnist Debra Saunders (Dec 11) drew attention to the preferential treatment the in-group member received from the local press.

If al Qaida trainee and Taliban fighter John Walker, 20, had been born Abdul Hamid—the Arab name he gave himself—somewhere in the Middle East, most Americans would dismiss that prisoner-of-war as just another woman-hating loser who deserves whatever misery POW status entails…Lucky for Walker, he’s white, middle-class and American. He’s: one of us (Saunders Dec 11).
And another San Francisco Chronicle piece “Dangerous Liaisons: How many Taliban soldiers lurk in U.S. ‘burbs?” written by Richard Rodriguez called Americans on their racial profiling tendencies.

String the bastard up! Lock him in a cell and throw away the key! Just get him out of our sight….before John Walker peered at us from under his mop of hair, we Americans had been comfortably arguing on talk radio about “racial profiling”. Whatever our opinion, we all thought we knew what danger looked like. Danger had a brown face (Rodriguez Dec 16).

But while the author continued to criticize the support for racial profiling following 9/11, he relied heavily on racial categories, further solidifying racial constructs. He commented on how decades ago, African Americans turned to Islam to “gain refuge from the humiliations imposed by the White West.” Summoning racial stereotypes, he asked if there is “a new generation of converts, not in inner-city black America, but in white American suburbs, like Littleton, Colo., or Marin County.” The article ended with the author’s account of a recent flight.

The other day, on an airplane, I caused a minor panic every time I got up and went to the toilet. I am brown, you see, and look sort of Arabic. So not a few of my fellow passengers watched my every step. But sitting beside me on the plane was a blond kid, 16 or 17, I’d guess. He said nothing. He ignored the movie; ignored the insufficient chicken offered by the flight attendant. He stared out the window…dreaming of what? (Rodriguez Dec 16).

As critique of the dominant ideology can be considered a crucial ingredient of a healthy society, the critical piece “Dangerous liaisons: How many Taliban soldiers lurk in U.S. ‘burbs?’” should be appreciated. However, while shedding light on the faults of racial profiling, the author unfortunately reinforces the constructed connection between terrorism, religion, and race. Instead of asking more pertinent questions about the global conditions underlying terrorism and why Lindh chose to fight against the U.S. or with the
Taliban, he just basically pointed the finger at another race and asked if there were going to be more terrorist white boys.

Conversely, the Toledo case did not receive as much attention possibly because the accused were of the expected ethnicity. Nevertheless, there was still a good deal of discussion emphasizing their ethnicities, citizenships, and religions, which further supported stereotypes. Additionally, the high concentration of Arabs in *The Blade* area may have influenced this reaction since large minority groups can increase perceived threat by the majority (Giles & Evans 1986). The high concentration of Arabs in Dearborn, if serving as an influential factor at all, did not seem to provide any sense of inclusion to the Toledo men. In contrast, the Arab community may have had the effect of enhancing the threat felt by the dominant group. This finding offers support for group threat theory while adding to the research that complicates and discounts contact theory (Dixon 2006).

Another factor that may have shaped the coverage of the two cases is the socioeconomic status of the accused and their families. Generally, journalists are of upper-middle class origin and expectedly tend to hold middle-class values and identities (Gitlin 1980). Thus, Lindh’s privileged background may have located him firmly within the reporters’ class and the wealthy San Francisco community overall. His advantaged status was repeatedly reported in the newspaper by mentioning his father’s profession as a lawyer and the first class attorney hired to defend Lindh.

In contrast, the Toledo men lacked the economic advantages of John Walker Lindh. A representing lawyer speaking about the men’s finances was quoted in *The Blade*. 
It is clear these are people of modest means. Not only are they not a threat to anybody, but they don’t have the money they need to represent themselves. They’re just hard-working folks (Yonke Feb 25).

*The Blade* also pointed out that the businesses they worked for were hurt by the negative publicity surrounding the case and that they were denied bail although they were not a flight risk due to lack of funds for air travel (Hughes Mar 1; Messina & Hall Feb 23). It is reasonable to believe the clear discrepancy in class status between Amawi, El-Hindi, and Mazloum and Lindh, in addition to the other key differing variables discussed, like ethnicity, may have influenced perceived community membership and thus be responsible for the differing treatments of the accused.

Use of Labels

Of the many differences in treatment was the unequal use of the terrorist label. Normally, actions labeled terrorism are the actions of others—“other countries, other political, religious, and ethnic groups; other belief systems than one’s own” (Cooper 1991:10; Dunn, Moore, & Nosek 2005). This held true for the cases analyzed. There was great effort to put Lindh in a positive, innocent light, while the supposed guilt of the Toledo men was stressed.

For the first couple days of the breaking John Walker Lindh story, front-page articles of the *San Francisco Chronicle* gave great allowance to the prisoner’s parents’ description of his character. Lindh was not only referred to as a “poor fellow,” but was also given many other loving labels that beg for compassion and understanding. For example, he was described as a “sweet shy kid,” “quiet and soft-spoken and humble,” “a bright school boy,” “a sweet, kind, intelligent kid,” and “a good boy” (“Dad calls” Dec 4; “Prisoner claims” Dec 3; “Taliban soldier” Dec 3). He was also repeatedly posed as a boy
far from the autonomy and maturity of adulthood. His desires were phrased as present
 desires, implying a position as a juvenile yet to reach his adult goals (“Dad calls” Dec 4).
The peaceful tendencies of Lindh’s childhood were mentioned while describing his
favorite toys as a boy (“Dad calls” Dec 4; “American’s Road” Dec 4). The height of this
juvenile representation was his father’s insistence that his son never asked for his
permission to join the Taliban (Fagan, Podger, & Epstein Dec 5).

John is a very sweet kid, devoted, religious, devoted to his religious
conversion…a good boy…I want to give him a hug, and maybe a little
kick in the butt for not asking my permission to go to Afghanistan (“Dad
calls” Dec 4).

Compassionate comments were sometimes accompanied by photos of Lindh at different
stages of his childhood and smiling with family members, with sentimental captions of
“sensitive boy ” “bonding,” and “at play” (Fagan, Podger, & Epstein Dec 5). The
newspaper plainly captured the family’s and friends’ obvious attempts to garner
sympathy from the public and depict him as innocent and loving.

Additionally, despite Lindh’s recorded confessions of being a Taliban soldier, a
variety of sources, including professors and columnists, denied his guilt and downplayed
the seriousness of the situation. Skeptics were quoted as saying “There’s no indication
he’s done anything wrong,” “I think he was there seeking spirituality and wasn’t a
terrorist… It was a youthful indiscretion,” and “They may wind up questioning this
young man Lindh and find out he thinks he’s Napoleon, or he’s vicious, or find out he’s
absolutely incoherent about what happened to him. Who knows? Nobody we’ve heard
from yet does” (“Dad calls” Dec 4, Fagan Dec 9). Due to the conditions and disoriented
state in which Lindh was first interviewed, some supporters asked for his confession to be
dismissed. In the paper’s Dec. 4th edition, it was reported that his father explained how
“his son had been interviewed right after being pulled out of a flooded dungeon …and that anything he said at that point should be taken with a grain of salt” (“Dad calls” Dec 4). The denials further the Marin man from the terrorist label by reducing his behavior to incoherence and immaturity relieving him of responsibility and stigma.

However, the paper did also draw some attention to how Lindh, a 20-year-old man who has engaged in adult activities, was strategically portrayed as a juvenile too immature to take responsibility for his actions. For instance, the Chronicle gave room for this opposing voice,

Funny, when Lindh was 16, he was grown-up enough to take the high school equivalency exam and graduate high school. He was grown up enough to travel the globe alone, as his parents bankrolled his journey for spiritual enlightenment. But now that there are consequences to his soldiering for murderous thugs, he’s a baby (Saunders Dec 11).

Importantly, although coverage of Lindh’s situation was included in section headed “WAR ON TERRORISM,” nowhere in the San Francisco Chronicle’s coverage was John Walker Lindh called a terrorist, despite his being found amongst Taliban soldiers in Afghanistan during the War on Terror. Instead, Lindh was critically described as “those who fight with those who are against us,” “plainly on the wrong side, and allegedly with an AK-47, defining him as …the enemy,” (“A spiritual” Dec 5) and to have “apparently committed treason and should face a military court-martial” (Epstein Dec 19).

Now, while John Walker Lindh admitted to supporting the destruction of September 11th, considered the U.S. Cole attacks justified, was found in an Afghan dungeon, had trained with bin Laden’s forces, and had fought for the Taliban, the three men of Toledo pleaded innocent. Nevertheless, The Blade’s depiction of the case painted
the trio with a very guilty brush. For example, on the first day of the story, the headline “3 charged in terror plot” boldly spanned the front page of the paper with mugshots and pictures of the men in handcuffs (Feb 22). Reports were heavily weighted with details taken straight from the indictment. The article that broke the newspaper’s coverage of the case read like a factual story of the men’s terrorist activities with short “according to the indictment,” and “officials say” type phrases sprinkled in between the lines and lines and lines of activities Americans have learned to dread. Also, previous crimes of the accused were listed, although they had little to do with the case. Moreover, assuming guilt, US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales was quoted as saying during a press conference about the case “I think America is safer today” (“3 charged” Feb 22). In short, there was little of the passionate witnessing to great character found in the coverage of Lindh’s case.

When *The Blade* did allow for words in defense of the trio of men, they were usually words from their lawyers, who were paid to defend their clients. However, on the day the story broke, journalists did make efforts to interview friends, coworkers, and family members of the accused. Their efforts resulted in three small pieces, one for each man. One story described the shock experienced by family, friends, and coworkers of Mazloum. His uncle described the allegations as “100 percent false” and said his nephew was a “good boy” (Hall Feb 22). Mazloum’s employee said “He’s been nothing but good to everybody since I have known him” and “found the allegations difficult to believe” (Hall Feb 22). Another piece defended Amawi and described him as a “very sensitive boy” and displayed a picture drawn by the accused (Shockman Feb 22). Evidently, reporters had more difficulty finding witnesses to El-Hindi’s character. So after an
extremely brief commentary on others’ beliefs in his innocence, the article stressed his marital history, which included several children, multiple marriages, and the age difference between him and his current wife (“Few clues” Feb 22).

An interesting element of The Blade coverage was how the media juxtaposed the accused men with U.S. military veterans. For example, the FBI’s Toledo informant was sensationalized somewhat in the manner of a hero. Local televised news thrillingly threw the words “THE TRAINER” (the name by which he was referred to as before his identity was revealed) up across the screen whenever they were about to present new information on the man. After identifying the man as Darren L. Griffin, it seemed reports distinguished him from the accused in an effort to dilute their striking similarities. The media, possibly recognizing that the trainer was skilled in the same violent matters the charged were accused of seeking, seemed to legitimize his skills by repeatedly citing his U.S. military background which included serving in the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and as a member of the Special Forces (Yonke Mar 2). Examples of these distinctions included “the Trainer who has a military background … documented conversations and training exercises with the men, including weapons and plans to smuggle guns into Iraq,” “a person with military background who contacted authorities about the terror plot,” and “a U.S. military combat veteran … from whom the plotters sought weapons training and bomb-making advice” (“3 charged” Feb 22; Hall Feb 25; “Knowing friends” Feb 25).

Not only did these sorts of statements recognize his history as a veteran of the Gulf War and for fighting for the “right” side, but they also identified the Trainer as member of the in-group, American, and unthreatening. Additionally, Blade religion editor David Yonke pointed out that Griffin is African-American, further separating the hero
from the Arab villains (Yonke Mar 25). This discourse communicates that it is acceptable to possess a history and skills of violence, as long as the possessor represents the interests of the United States.

In a similar manner, placed on the same page of the large layout of articles that introduced Blade readers to the case, a news piece reported the reactions to the indictment of mothers whose sons had been killed or injured in Iraq (Henry Feb 22). One mother was reported as saying about the death of her son,

I just don’t think too much about it. My son was in the Army. He was doing his job. He was killed in the line of duty. Now, he’s gone and my life’s gone. To be honest, I don’t even try to think about it anymore because all I do is cry (Henry Feb 22).

The discussion of the families’ reactions did not serve to provide any new information specifically about the case. What the article did do was contrast the accused with U.S. military members and potentially stir feelings of anger and nationalism in readers.

As the Trainer and the other veterans were discussed, they were portrayed as heroes of their country. Although the “heroes” and the “terrorists” use similar violent methods to reach their goals, the terrorist labeling process ethnocentrically situates “us” as the good guys and “them” as the bad guys.

The alleged activities of the Arab men were described as terrorist, but John Walker Lindh was called everything but terrorist. Although Lindh’s articles were placed under the “WAR ON TERRORISM” heading, various definitions of his actions were discussed. The heading could have been interpreted as just describing the measures through which he was found, meaning he was discovered by American forces engaged in the War on Terrorism. Another major difference was how the innocence and guilt of the suspects, which affects how the accused are labeled, were depicted. Lindh’s parents had
ample space to witness to their son’s character in the Chronicle. In contrast, The Blade relied heavily on the indictment of the Toledo men to describe the case, which left readers with piles of allegations. The use of photos was especially telling with the Toledoans in handcuffs and Lindh laughing with his family. This disparity was especially striking when considering the manner in which the men were found and how they pleaded -Lindh captured in an Afghan fort and giving a recorded confession and the Toledo men arrested on U.S. soil and pleading innocence.

**Exploration of Reasons**

Many explanations were given for Lindh’s behavior, but reasons for the Arab men’s behavior were not explored. The differing number of articles within the first month of the stories is evidence of this, especially in terms of letters to the editors from readers. Lindh had significantly more pieces than the Toledo men. Evidently, Chronicle readers and reporters felt a stronger need to discuss John Walker Lindh’s story. Being considered on of “us” seems to warrant a fuller understanding, while outsiders do not receive this privilege.

In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, friends and family struggled to reconcile the images of the starved and wounded man with the boy they remembered, and voiced other hypotheses of forced fighting, delusion, and naivety (“Dad calls” Dec 4; “American’s road” Dec 40). Lindh was described as easily influenced and brainwashed. As they positioned Lindh as not actual Taliban, but a victim of the Taliban, he was portrayed as vulnerable, impressionable, isolated, and young (“Taliban soldier” Dec 3). Furthermore, Lindh’s predicament was described as the result of having the good humanitarian parts “sucked” out of him by the Taliban (“Taliban solider” Dec 3). The situation was
discussed as if goodness and the Taliban cannot coexist. They were presented as exclusive and opposite; one characteristic had to leave to be replaced by the other.

While much of the national media was very critical and unsympathetic regarding the predicament of John Walker Lindh, mercy predominated the tone of the Bay Area newspaper’s early coverage of the “American Taliban.” For instance, The *San Francisco Chronicle* quoted President Bush from an interview with Barbara Walters on the show *20/20*.

We’re just trying to learn the facts about this poor fellow. Obviously, he has been misled. He was going to support a government that was one of the most repressive governments in the history of mankind ("Paper Tigers" Dec 16).

In contrast, the reasons behind the alleged violent plans of the Toledoans were not discussed. *The Blade* did not publish any stories exploring how they may have been forced or brainwashed. Unlike the Northern California response, the culture of Toledo was not blamed or applauded. Nor did anyone question the men’s maturity or the manner in which their parents raised them. However, a causal influence of Islam was repeatedly implied as if they were innately linked. News reports of the Toledo terrorism case repeatedly used the term “holy war,” and emphasized the religion of the men, further connecting violence to a religious cause ("3 charged” Feb 22; “A local dose” Feb 23; “Indictment” Feb 22; “Local reaction” Feb 22; Hughes Mar 1; Yonke Mar 2). On the first day of coverage, under a “3 charged in terror plot” headline and within the border of the dominant terror piece, articles titled “Toledo-area Muslims ask for justice, fear backlash” and “Men accused of trying to build bombs for ‘holy war’” were placed. The choice of words and spacing reproduces a link between Islam and terrorism.
Noticeably, a news report used the term “Islamist” to describe, it seems, a fundamental, hostile Muslim.

There are of course, Islamists in the UAE. But not, so far as we know, in the management of Dubai Ports World, whose security record is exemplary. There are, as we have seen, Islamists in Toledo, too. And there are Islamists in London... (“Knowing friends” Feb 25).

It is difficult to determine exactly what “Islamist” meant to the author because they did not define the word. Consequently, the author’s audience may have not known what is exactly meant by the term. With the word “Islamist” so closely resembling the word “Islam,” it is not difficult to imagine a reader who is unfamiliar with mainstream Islam or is victim to Islamaphobic propaganda misunderstanding the message. The term itself, without previous familiarity, does not communicate anything extreme or extraordinary about Muslims identified as an Islamists. The reader could easily interpret the term as meaning any Muslim in general and thus strengthen the negative stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. Therefore, the term “Islamist” seems to be potentially very destructive and needs to be used very carefully and responsibly, if at all.

Further linking Islam to violence, several stories in *The Blade* mentioned El-Hindi’s former employment as an imam for the Toledo Correctional Institution. Joshua Boak, a *Blade* staff writer reported in “Detainee served as imam at prison” that El-Hindi did significantly more than lead prayer services…the indictment alleges he studied how to build suicide bomb vests and ‘improvised explosive devices’ or IEDs, a popular weapon among insurgents inside Iraq (Feb 23).

The author also speculated,

An instructional video similar to what Mr. El-Hindi would have viewed is available at www.globathreat.com. It shows the assembly and detonation of a thin vest filled with enough firepower to kill or injure dozens of people standing near the bomber (Boak Feb 23).
Boak continued by discrediting the prison’s previous imam, Kamal Najib, who was unrelated to the case at hand, by describing his criminal background, further painting a negative picture of Islam. After the prison warden described imam Najib as “exceptional,” criminal charges and convictions of Najib were listed with a comment on how Najib’s crimes did not prevent him for serving as an imam (Boak Feb 23). The article questioned and discredited the character and morality of imams. This focus on El Hindi’s history as a Muslim religious leader appeared as a maneuver to discredit Islam and further link Islam to violence, especially considering the connection created between leading prayer services and violence.

Correspondingly, Islam was also blamed for John Walker Lindh’s behavior: the Chronicle sometimes tied the behavior of John Walker Lindh to his conversion to Islam. Journalists claimed “his life took a sharp turn … when he began his search for spiritual meaning at about 16” (“Dad calls” Dec 4), he professed “inspiration from reading ‘the autobiography of Malcolm X’” (“Dad calls” Dec 4), and “his odyssey to that battered fort evidently began four years ago when he joined a Mill Valley mosque and began exclusively wearing traditional Islamic robes” (Fagan Dec 9). Drawing attention to his conversion points to a change from a family influenced by Catholic, Native American, and Buddhist beliefs to a Muslim identity, an identity perceived as making him capable of such violent behavior.

Searching for the root of Lindh’s “anti-American” ideas, in the article “John Walker’s curious quests,” Lattin and Fagan (Dec 13) in an accusatory tone explore the mosques Lindh frequented as a teenager. During visits to two mosques, Masjid
Darussalam and the San Francisco Islamic Center, leaders and visitors of the mosques were interviewed. Some Muslims’ remarks were highly defensive.

“We don’t want to talk of war here, no talk of anything violent,” Mohammed said. “We only want to know Allah and to pray…whatever happened to push him to the Taliban, I guarantee it didn’t happen here…you will see it happened in Pakistan. It must have been so” (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13).

Yet, the journalists still asserted that “it might have been here, however, that Lindh first heard the fiery Islamic rhetoric that is preached at many mosques—especially before September 11” and quoted another Muslim who was offended by the “angry rhetoric about Zionism and America and injustice” he heard at Masjid Darussalam (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13). He went on to say “We should stop importing these imams (Muslim preachers) from the Middle East.” The journalists’ account of the visit to the first mosque was wrapped up with an accusatory description of the mosque’s bookshelves: “One book in stock this week, for instance, raves of ‘The Indomitable spirit of Jihad,’ while another alongside it preaches of ‘Islam and Universal Peace’” (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13).

The trip to the second mosque began with the statement “Walker’s sojourn to Pakistan may have been inspired by his visit to the second, smaller San Francisco mosque” (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13). The journalists reported the mosque is known for the presence of Tabligh Jamaat, an Islamic revival movement. While interviewing two people about Tabligh Jamaat, one asserted the group is peaceful, not political, and not a “recruiting group for militant movements” (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13). Despite the description of an innocuous Tabligh Jamaat, the reporters pressed on. They mentioned a Tabligh Jamaat convention Lindh attended and quoted another man claiming to be knowledgeable of the movement (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13). He said, “The Tabligh Jamaat
followers are sympathetic to the fundamentalist form of Islam practiced by the Taliban and by the Wahhabi sect that controls Saudi Arabia” (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13). The journalists’ extensive probing at mosques exemplifies the belief that Islam is to blame for Lindh’s terrorist behavior.

Frequently, to conceal the real political and economic forces that shape history and society, religion is held responsible for unpleasant occurrences (El Saadawi 1980). Therefore, instead of crediting the actions of governments and corporations, religion, particularly Islam, takes blame for objectionable situations. And, just as Shaheen (1985) noted how the media does not ever use the term “Christian terrorists,” the imam of the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo has expressed his aggravation over the way the media announces the religion of accused Muslims, but do not identify the religious orientations of non-Muslims when they are charged with a crime (F. Aboelzahab, personal communication Mar 16, 2006). Thus, with the spotlight on Islam, American capitalistic, imperialistic forces prevail un tarnished. Additionally, little effort is made by the media to show the diversity within Islam and as a result the public relies on overgeneralizitions when attempting to understand Islam (Said 1997).

In general, there was great disparity between the two cases regarding the exploration of causes, which may stem from differing positions in the us/them binary. Nevertheless, an element the two cases shared is the connection journalists made between terrorism and Islam. In the Bay Area some news stories overtly related Lindh’s experience in Afghanistan to Islam and one reporter even went on a hunt to track down the mosque supposedly guilty of changing their “sweet boy.” In Toledo, again the Muslim community was identified as playing a leading role in the case. The rationale for
this connection between Islam and terrorism was never offered; it was presented as common knowledge that was so natural it did not need explanation. However, it does need explanation. Although some Muslims do cite Islamic beliefs in support of violence, as Shaheen (2001) has explained, they are the minority. This difference is crucial considering “words associated with a stereotype can directly activate the relevant stereotype, influencing consequent judgments” (Dunn, Moore, & Nosek 2005:69). Said (1979) has also contested the use of Islam as “a handle for grasping a vast region of the world and proclaiming it an entirely coherent phenomenon” (299). Every religion can be interpreted in a myriad of ways and manipulated to suit various agendas, which even a superficial account of world history can confirm. Thus, it is objectionable and dangerous for the news media to oversimplify and generalize this relationship.
CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

This study supports previous research on stereotypes of Muslims, which found Islam frequently associated with holy war and acts of terror (Donaldson and van Dijk 1988; Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003; Shaheen 2001). Journalists today would never overtly state something like “Muslims are violent” or “terrorists are Muslim.” Now, more subtle symbolism is used to express this message, such as focusing on the Toledo Muslim community. The common footage on the news of bombings in between scenes of prayer in mosques effectively link Islam to violence in the minds of an audience. This is an example of the subtler, concealed form of prejudice and discrimination theorists of racism speak of. Connections made between Islam and terrorism were subtly made by The Blade and the Chronicle by scrutinizing the men’s Islamic ties. For example, Chronicle journalists investigated Lindh’s trail at Northern California mosques to discover what or who was responsible for influencing him and El-Hindi’s history as an imam at a Toledo prison was reported.

The violent Arab Muslim stereotype deployed in the news coverage agrees with prior research on how minorities are generally represented in the news. Minorities are commonly portrayed as the cause of problems while the real issues shaping the problems are neglected (Keeble 2003; Law 2002; Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988; Whillock & Slayden 1995). Through not addressing the issues surrounding terrorism and exploring reasons for the Toledoans’ behavior, the violent Arab Muslim stereotype was utilized and reproduced. Blade journalists implied that the Toledoans’ ethnicities were to blame for the terrorist behavior by not exploring potential motives and reasons. In contrast, Lindh, as a member of the majority, did not fit the stereotype and thus his case
was given special treatment. As a white man, Lindh’s reasons for his actions were not obvious to journalists or the readers of The Chronicle and explanations were discussed at length. However, the Arab and Arab-American men were not supplied this privilege; space was not given to the trio for the exploration of reasons. The grounds for this difference may be that Arab Muslims are perceived as violent Jihadists by nature (Shaheen 1984, 1985, & 2001; Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2003; Said 1997). Thus, the Toledo case did not need the extensive explanation of the Lindh case.

This study also confirms past studies of the terrorist label, which have found that terrorism is normally ethnocentrically defined as what they do to us. For example, reports of Dunn, Moore, & Nosek (2005), who, when examining American newspapers for linguistic differences in describing the invasion of Iraq in 2003, found that

Benign words were more likely to be used in reference to violent actions associated with the United States and its allies, whereas words implying destruction and devious intent were more likely to be used in reference to violent actions associated with Iraq and non-U.S. allies (69).

The difference in labels serves as evidence of the Toledoans being othered. The terrorist label was quickly attached to Amawi, El-Hindi, and Mazloum. But, despite Lindh’s support of and participation in al-Qaida and Taliban activities, Lindh was not called a terrorist. On which sides of the binary the two parties fell was determined, as discussed previously, by ethnicity, nationality, class, and religious background. Thus, as a white, upper-class male, Lindh was perceived as being too American and too close to the American elite to be identified as a terrorist. It is also worth noting that if Lindh had been brainwashed or influenced into being a soldier for the United States Army, he would have probably been called a hero.
The lack of contextualization and exploration of reasons in the coverage of the Toledo case is inline with previous findings on contextualization in terrorism coverage. As Altheide and Grimes (2005), Bennett (2005), Gallimore (1991), and Taugott and Brader (2003) have found, the media rarely participates in deep questioning of the issues surrounding terrorism and does not provide thematic coverage which presents the historical background of a terrorist event. Likewise, The Blade did not investigate possible reasons for the actions of the accused and did not discuss actions of U.S. that may have been related to the terrorist plot. However, the Chronicle’s management of the Lindh case did not conform to the usual patterns in terrorism coverage. Reporters and readers posed and discussed questions about John Walker Lindh at length. This break from conventional coverage may be due to Lindh not meeting the public’s expectations of terrorists and the community identifying him as one of their own.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Overall, the coverage of the two cases had intriguing similarities and differences. Now some of the dissimilarities may have been due to the culture and the demographics of the respective areas: Toledo is near a large concentration of Arabs. Also, the timing of the cases may have played a role. The John Walker Lindh story began being covered by the San Francisco Chronicle on December 3, 2001, approximately three months after the attack on the World Trade Center. In contrast, the Toledo terrorism case did not break until February of 2006, about five years later. Considering the closeness between September 11th and Lindh’s capture, the American people may still have been processing the attacks and not sure what the event meant for the United States. In other words, the country was still recovering from the attacks, which may have influenced the presentation of John Walker Lindh. Therefore, this different atmosphere may have influenced the treatment of the Toledo men. By the time the Toledo trio was arrested, the Bush Administration had reacted to 9/11 in definite retaliatory ways and the rhetoric of the War on Terror had solidified. Thus, there may have been a harsher reaction if John Walker Lindh had been captured in 2006. In contrast, it is possible that, due to the short span of time between the 9/11 attacks and the discovery of John Walker Lindh, the shock of 9/11 could have created a more ruthless environment than the relative calm of 2006. Overall, we do not know how the timing affected the treatment of the accused of either case. But, it is reasonable to attribute the differences to the ethnicity of the accused.

Therefore, a reason for the differing portrayal of the men and their cases may be racism. Media texts were described by Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk (1988) as manifestations of the power and dominance of the in-group and expressions of common
racist attitudes held by Whites. Hence, newspapers are a tool of maintaining dominance over minorities. They advance in-group solidarity, define threatening groups, and rationalize discriminatory action. In this way news discourse is “crucial in the complex process of the formation or confirmation of relevant social cognitions against minorities” (Smitherman-Donaldson & van Dijk 1988:19). The press reuses racist messages, however subtle, to construct a “common-sense whiteness” (Law 2002: 161).

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to believe the reason why the Bay Area Muslim community was not repeatedly singled out in the manner the Toledo Muslim community was is that Lindh is White and comes from a privileged White family and is identified with by the White majority. Additionally, The Blade never questioned the motive for the alleged plot of the Toledo trio. The reason has been so well constructed as being naturally Arab, it need not be mentioned. Thus, elements of racism were apparent in the coverage. Similar to how crime and poverty are presented as being caused by minorities, terrorism was portrayed as being caused by minorities and the roots of the problem were neglected. The structural and historical origins of the violence were denied, while myths and stereotypes formed to protect the interests of the dominant group. This finding adds to research of news representations of minorities that found minorities portrayed as the cause of problems while ignoring the real issues of communities (Law 2002; Lipschultz & Hilt 2003).

Furthermore, the ethnic deviance in the case of John Walker Lindh, a White American citizen, caused great cognitive dissonance and resulted in the Chronicle community scrambling to understand a situation that did not fit their expectations. Since past research has found that the news very rarely contextualizes terrorist events to the
extent of discussing potential reasons for the terrorist behavior, the exploration of possible causes of Lindh’s behavior by the media is exceptional. The common news frame of terrorism did not entirely work because the public could not depend on their prior experiences, which formed their expectations of terrorists. Thus, readers needed more explanation for John Walker Lindh’s behavior than terrorism normally receives and therefore engaged in more discussion about the event than terrorist media frames usually allow. This is similar to what Norris, Kern and Just (2003) have described as two-sided contexts where communications can become controversial as communities argue the meaning of events. In contrast, the Toledo case was given the typical framing treatment. Journalists immediately related the event to the Muslim community, provided little context, and offered no reasoned inquiry.

Nevertheless, in both cases the conventional structure of terrorism coverage still resulted in oversimplification. The bounds of discourse could not satisfy the in-depth discussion required to understand either situation. There was no decent inquiry of the reasons why the suspects, or anyone for that matter, would be critical of or engage in violence against the United States. Past research has shown that this extent of contextualization is rarely provided. The conventional terrorism news frame only communicates information that suits a common, dominant interpretation of the event; it rarely contextualizes the event leaving important information out and does not accurately reflect the complexity of reality (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003). Conventional news frames of terrorism give meaning to a convoluted global problem by supplying the public with “consistent, predictable, simple, and powerful narratives that are embedded in the social construction of reality” (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003: 5). The manner in which “key
concepts, stock phrases, and iconic images” are bundled and used and reused to present terrorism perpetuates a single way of interpreting terrorist events (10). Terrorism frames do help the public to interpret and assess the situation of the event or issue, but the public does this without realizing the complexity of the situation (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003). Consequently, traditionally framing terrorism leads to the public’s interpretations of the conflict being based on prior experience with little opportunity for new ideas and perspectives. Obviously, adequate context through the offering of balanced history and deep questioning of U.S. foreign policy is outside the limits of acceptable terrorism discourse in America.

This rigid framework is evident in the coverage from the San Francisco Chronicle. After reporting how Lindh believed the attack on the U.S. Cole was justified, no one asked why he believed this. Following Lindh’s confession of supporting 9/11, no one questioned why he supported it. Neither did reporters ask why Lindh dreamed of returning to Yemen or Pakistan with a medical degree to help poor people, instead of staying in the United States. No journalists questioned the parents about how a “bright school boy” who passed “the high school equivalency exam at age 16,” could be brainwashed or easily influenced. An article tellingly titled “John Walker’s curious quest: Still a mystery how the young Marin County convert to Islam made the transition from spiritual scholar to Taliban Soldier” spoke of Lindh as a 14-year–old posing online as an African American and getting into philosophical debates about racism in which he typed “our blackness does not make white people hate us, it is THEIR racism that causes the hate” (Lattin & Fagan Dec 13). In the article, this act, which demonstrated Lindh’s remarkable perceptiveness, sensitivity, and concern at such a young age, neglected to
indicate that John Walker Lindh may have been an exceptional young man who might have possessed an ability to understand the effects of U.S. action abroad and independently decide to train with al Qaida.

Evidently, this direction of thought is out of the realm of reasonable discussion in American newspapers. Questioning the acts of the United States is too threatening to American power and thus could damage its imperialist efforts. It is safer and convenient to blame terrorist behavior on a religion, ethnicity, hatred of our freedom, or just plain evilness. The strategic lack of exploration keeps the focus on characteristics of social groups and off of the complex conditions surrounding terrorism, which perpetuates the polemic concept of “us” versus “them”. The ethnocentrism in the coverage of the terrorism cases supports the research of others who have found that when it comes to terrorism, what we do is ignored and the focus is put on the behavior of others (Cooper 1991; Dunn, Moore, & Nosek 2005; Edley 2003; Kellner 2005; Mittleman 2005; Zinn 2002). In other words, who gets labeled as terrorist depends on who is doing the labeling because the labeling occurs in accordance with the victimized government’s interest (Norris, Kern, & Just 2003; Rusciano 2003; Taugott & Brader 2003).

This lack of self-reflection acts as a disservice to the newspapers’ audience because it does not provide necessary information to the public. In order for Americans to begin to understand terrorist events, the media needs to examine the United States’ role in the global arena and its involvement in the Middle East. Inadequate contextualization, lack of exploration of reasons, and reliance on stereotypes undoubtedly impedes progression toward peace. With little discussion and understanding of the situation, finding a decent solution to terrorism is impossible (Leone & Anrig 2003).
Evidently, the media is a vital player in the terrorist cycle since the communication of information can have tremendous influence on understanding and reaction. Therefore, it is important to understand this stage of the process as fully as possible. With the current study, I hope to add to the understanding of this issue by illuminating a neglected aspect of terrorism. The analysis of the San Francisco’s Chronicle and Toledo’s Blade coverage of their respective cases found that being from the community does affect the treatment of the accused. However, the treatment is dependant on the social distance of the accused from the elite.

This study only begins to shed some light on how terrorism is presented by media in the local context. Much more analysis is needed to understand how accused community members are labeled, treated, and discussed within the community. Future research in this area would benefit from the analysis of cases where the accused share more characteristics in order to isolate certain variables, such as ethnicity or class. Furthermore, analyzing cases that occurred within a shorter time span would help to eliminate the effect of differing emotional and rhetorical climates in reference to national security. Also, it would be valuable to compare and contrast national coverage of a case to the local coverage to see the effect of the local context more clearly.
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APPENDIX

San Francisco Chronicle


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