

Criminal justice paper assignment

Law



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William Gill Criminal Law This paper is regarding the issue of race in the media, as it relates to referencing various ethnic backgrounds throughout coverage of criminal stories. I am currently a student, studying Criminal Justice, which calls for many outside of the classroom encounters with the law, regarding research, reading, and simply keeping up with current events. The Washington Post, to me is my main source of information regarding local crime trends.

Throughout my research, I have noticed a potential issue regarding the referencing of races, that could lead to future animosity (if there isn't any already), and that could add to future misconceptions of specific race categories, that more than likely would be generalized to entire populations. There has been recently been a huge realization that many Americans associate specific races with specific crimes. Looking back to date, two major events have shocked many Americans, based on the actual race of apprehended suspects. The D. C. sniper incident and the Virginia Tech shootings are both incidents that really brought to light the issue of race and crime. In the case of the sniper, many assumed that from past situations mixed with stereotypes, that the snipers were white. In the case of the Virginia Tech shootings, no specific race was mentioned in the questioning of who committed such a heinous act, probably from the lesson learned in the sniper situation. Once the police verified who committed the acts, once again, there was shock, brought around the race of the sniper. No one suspected the killer to be Asian in the case of the Virginia Tech shootings.

Ironically enough, in reading various articles throughout the semester, I have found a change in the disclosure of race, and the referencing of race in crime

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articles. There was not one article that specified the race of a suspect. In making that discovery, I also noticed that there was more of an emphasis put on the location of where a suspect lived, than on his or her actual race. Does this mean that based on recent attention on specific races, the media will not specify or focus on the race of suspect? Will society start to focus the negative labeling on certain locations now, or will they assume that citizens from a particular area are already of a certain race? These are all questions that probably can not be answered, based on the constant alterations of one's mind as it relates to perception. As a student, and regular reader of The Washington Post, I have come up with a set of guidelines that I feel should be taken into consideration, when describing the actual suspects, and offenders in all news articles that are published. The first guideline would be to only mention race when it matters; for example, when searching for a suspect.

The race of a suspect is extremely relevant in this situation, because citizens need to be able to have an idea of who to look out for in hopes of assisting with the capturing of that particular suspect. The second guideline is a reminder of roles. The media's job is not to solve crimes, but to get the facts, and to keep others informed. There has also been a history of conflict between the police and the media regarding the disclosure of strictly confidential information. It is imperative that this is followed, because many cases have been put at risk, and some even lost, due to media leaks.

In being mindful of your job in the media, it is also a good idea not to focus attention on a particular race if, and when a crime is committed. This guideline will have a major impact in the cut down of various racial

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stereotypes, and negativity geared toward one specific group after the commission of a crime. The last guideline that I have come up with is simply to allow pictures to speak for themselves. If there is a photo of a suspect, I do not believe there is a need to specifically mention race during the report of the incident.

I think this guideline would also assist in the negativity and misperception often gathered from media reports. In summing up my paper, I think that the mentioned guidelines be taken into consideration throughout different newspapers throughout the world, regarding the race of the individuals suspected of committing crimes, and those already captured. Although I recognize that events such as September 11, the D. C. Sniper attacks, and the Virginia Tech shootings all changed our perception of race, we should recognize that not one specific race is anymore or less capable of committing a crime than the other.

It is imperative that all races be represented accurately, with little to no bias as possible. Article References 1. Man Under Eye of Court Agency Held in Assault, Kidnap Attempt, Washington Post, March 5, 2008. Allison Klein. 2. Howard Student, Teen Arrested In Fatal Shooting, Washington Post, March 11, 2008. Martin Weil and Elissa Silverman. 3. Detective Is Shot In the Face While Serving a Warrant, Washington Post, February 16, 2008. Allison Klein. 4. 1 Man Arrested, Others Sought in 3 Slayings in Largo, Washington Post, February 6, 2008. Meg Smith.