

# **Futures at Stake: Why Louisiana Needs Better Policy to Protect Children's Identities in the News Media**

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Sarah Walker

Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA



## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine how the identification of youth names and photos in relation to criminal acts in the news media produces major negative effects, and to provide policy suggestions for Louisiana to address and prevent these ramifications. First, the paper will provide theoretical background into the current forms of color-blind racism, symbolic racism, and structural/institutional racism which dominate American society and allow seemingly non-racial mechanisms to criminalize and control Black Americans. These ideologies and larger institutional inequalities not only lead to Black children facing an increased risk of arrest and criminalization, but further allow for the mention of an arrest in a news article to inappropriately symbolize guilt regardless of the outcome. This understanding will help explain why the current law in Louisiana meant to protect youth from being exposed in the media, known as the Children's Code, actually contains loopholes which allow Louisiana news outlets to damage the identity of Black children in their articles, and disproportionately mention Black children in relation to particularly serious or heinous crimes. By using examples of reform initiatives from newsrooms around the country and evaluating a case study for a pair of articles written on a Louisiana youth, I propose a policy amendment to the Children's Code prohibiting the identification of youth and their criminal record under all circumstances, and further propose ways in which media outlets can take initiative to alter publication practices that currently serve to preserve and spread damaging, racialized messages.

## **Introduction**

This research paper examines how Louisiana media perpetuates the criminalization of Black youth and poses as a barrier to their advancement. In an era of colorblind racism, the media is used as a mechanism to perpetuate implicitly racist ideologies in American society about Black individuals. In Louisiana specifically, the Louisiana Children's Code Article 412 is intended to protect youth from the harmful effects of media representation. However, exceptions in this current policy allow online news sites to identify Black youth alongside particularly heinous crimes, distorting the perceptions of Black youth criminality in Louisiana and perpetuating the criminalization of Black youth. The child's identifying details will appear on a permanent, searchable news record, which stigmatizes their name in the community, impedes their successful transition into adulthood, affects their future opportunities, and denies their chance for redemption. It is a practice that is especially unforgiving for an age group that is still developing and should instead be given support for their mistakes. I will examine and provide policy/reform suggestions for the local media with relationship to these privacy laws. Namely, I

propose a policy amendment to the Children's Code which prohibits the identification of youth and their criminal record under all circumstances, and further propose ways in which media outlets can take initiative to alter publication practices that preserve and spread negative racialized messages.

## **Background**

A theoretical and historical understanding of race in America can help inform the discussion to follow in this paper. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in Jim Crow era America, Black Americans were trying to gain traction in a country that was controlled by racism. Many mechanisms and biases were used against them to block their ability to advance in society. The major defining developments of this time period were the ways in which White scholars, elites, and the public generated a narrative which associated race with criminality (Delgado and Stefanic 2007; Muhammad 2010). The process of writing crime into Black culture came as a product of structural racism, White Supremacy, and social domination (Cazenave 2018). The intention was to suppress and control a newly freed Black population by claiming they were

inherently inferior and criminal due to their race (Muhammad 2010). During this period, “growing concern about juvenile delinquency blended with... institutional racism” resulted in a disproportionate number of Black youth being sentenced or punished for “delinquency” crimes in comparison to White youth (Muhammad 2010: 230-231). Effectively, “Bias in the juvenile justice system was in part a testament to, and a consequence of, the discriminatory nature of Progressive era crime prevention. Black juvenile delinquency became one of the most effective demonstrations that structural inequality was the primary cause of crime among blacks” (Muhammad 2010: 231). The effects of this era built the foundation for contemporary racial politics in America that reflect the same racist discriminations and disparate targeting of Black youth for criminal acts.

Internalized, racial mindsets reflect the theory of symbolic racism as described by David Sears (1988). Symbolic racism refers to the political role of hegemonic attitudes resulting from predispositions acquired before full adulthood, and reflect the dominate norms of a given environment (Sears 1988: 54, 58). This ideology can be used to explain antiblack attitudes in modern society, despite America’s claim to being

post-racial (Sears 1988). Another theory, known as colorblind racism, is considered the new form of stereotyping carried out in the current era. Colorblind racism uses race-neutral terminology, institutional and nonracial mechanisms and practices, and “raceless” explanations in order to build a dominant mindset associated with a particular race (Bonilla-Silva 2015). Although aimed at being entirely objective, the process both reflects and is shaped by implicit racial biases and practices in America, and in its own way upholds enduring racist, discriminatory, and exclusionary ideology within American social structures (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Delgado and Stefanic 2007; Sears 1988). In sum, this institutional practice perpetuates implicitly racialized messages without naming race as the explicit cause for noticeable inequalities.

These theories combined help inform and explain the issues with contemporary racial politics that Black youth face on a daily basis. The process of socialization that predisposes racist stereotypes in American society contributes to biases which work to criminalize Black youth and effectively remove them from society before they reach adulthood. Among the many ways that Black youth are impacted by structural inequalities and institutional racism, the two that I will

present for reference and example are the school-to-prison pipeline and present-day media representations of Black youth.

The school-to-prison pipeline is a term that refers to the likelihood of school students, particularly from minority communities, to have more exposure with juvenile or adult detention, rather than universities or jobs, before they reach adulthood. The theories previously described help explain the mindsets of American decision-makers in their attempts to control and punish Black Americans/youth. Furthermore, in the 1990s, the American public grew increasingly afraid of Black juveniles as a direct effect of the Central Park Five media coverage. As a result, state governments deemed it necessary to deploy police officers, sometimes referred to as “school resource officers,” in schools, claiming that these measures would protect communities and prevent harm on society (Vitale 2018). Not only were the heinous stereotypes of Black boys completely unfounded in later decades, but the consequences of this movement have been detrimental for the development of already marginalized youth. Heavy policing in public schools and frequent contact with law enforcement in communities severely increases the probability for minority

students to be criminalized for common adolescent mistakes (Vitale 2018). In effect, “Black and Latino students were frequently arrested for minor acts of disobedience and disruption such as using cell phones, disrespecting teachers, and getting into loud arguments.” Along the same vein, “suspensions, which are a huge predictor of future arrest, are also highly racially disproportionate” (Vitale 2018: 62). In sum, it is evident that Black youth face barriers in their daily life which impede their successful transition to adulthood. They are criminalized at young ages for normal adolescent misbehavior, and this predicts their future interactions with the juvenile and adult legal systems.

The second cultural practice which impacts the perception of Black youth in America is their representation in the media. The media, and its distorted patterns of portrayal, have historically been major drivers of implicit racial biases against African Americans (Beckett 1997). The overall distorted presentation of black males in the media creates problematic understandings and attitudes among the American public due to the media’s ability to shape public attitudes (Beckett 1997; The Opportunity Agenda 2011). Publication practices disproportionately criminalize Black males by

exaggerating negative associations (particularly criminality, unemployment, and poverty), placing individualized blame, and underrepresenting important positive dimensions within the lives of Black males (The Opportunity Agenda 2011). Media portrayals are linked with lowered life chances for the Black population overall (Opportunity Agenda 2011). General antagonism toward black males, exaggerated views related to criminality and violence, lack of identification with or sympathy for black males, reduced attention to structural factors, and increased public support for punitive approaches to problems are some of the outcomes on public perceptions (The Opportunity Agenda 2011). In the sections to follow, as this paper looks more closely into the ways Black youth are mentioned in the media, it is clear to see that addressing these problems is especially important for youth in order to prevent their unfair criminalization before they have an opportunity to make adult decisions.

### **Discussion**

In the previous section, this paper presented the ways in which Black youth are criminalized in America. Beginning with the processes of socialization that predispose

racist stereotypes in American society, these biases are the foundation for practices which work to criminalize Black Americans and effectively remove them from society: the establishment of laws with racist ideology, the over-policing of minority communities, the racialized targeting of youth by law enforcement, and the misrepresentation of Black names and faces in the media.

It is crucial to remember that police officers have the authority to arrest individuals based on discretion and suspicion alone. However, by the principles of the American justice system, an arrest alone is not intended to mean someone is a criminal or has been committing an illegal act. If formal charges are never brought against the suspect, then the individual is meant to have maintained his/her innocence throughout the whole encounter. Conversely, if an individual is found guilty under the eyes of the law (which is based on White dominant narratives in the first place), then they are meant to return to society with a clean bill of innocence after they have served their punishment and repaid their debt to society. This is the theoretical framework of the American legal system. However, ideas of criminality are socially constructed based on White dominant narratives, and when put in practice, the social ramifications of an arrest

hold more weight than the final verdict (Cazenave 2018).

Unfortunately, the principles of the law do not apply in practice as they are established in theory. From the time a Black individual is arrested they are assumed to be criminal, regardless of the verdict that follows (Vitale 2017). The outlook is worse still if formal charges are brought against them, since they then become stigmatized in the eyes of the law and by society as being inherently criminal in nature, deviant from social norms, and irredeemable from their unlawful actions (Vitale 2017). Instead of being able to move past poor decisions and/or unfair police targeting, a criminal record will follow an individual for the rest of their life and make it difficult for them to obtain housing, employment, and educational opportunities in the future. From their first interaction with law enforcement, Black Americans are more likely to be placed in a criminal legal cycle that makes their chance of advancement much more difficult (Vitale 2017).

This reality is especially harmful for Black youth. During a time in their lives when they are still developing, learning right from wrong, and establishing their interests for the future, they are being targeted, criminalized, and presented with barriers to

advancement (NJN 2012). The juvenile legal system also does little to redeem and rehabilitate these children, but rather further criminalizes them and produces major negative effects on their future opportunities and outlooks in life (NJN 2012). Through all of these practices, it is clear to see how and why Black youth are highly susceptible to come into contact with the law at such young ages. Black youth indeed face numerous obstacles in their daily life, such as the school-to-prison-pipeline, racial biases held against them, and police targeting, which block their successful transition into adulthood. Another one of these obstacles, which will be the main current event that this paper is set to study, is the depiction of Black youth in the media. Specifically, I will focus on a current Louisiana law which is supposed to protect children's identities in the media, but in fact contains major flaws which allow local news sources to perpetuate and reinforce racist stereotypes, and further criminalize and slander Black children within the social sphere.

### **The Current Policy and its Problems**

In Louisiana, there is currently a law which governs publication practices in relation to criminal offenses committed by

minors. It is supposed to protect youth from being exposed in the media, however, loopholes that have been written into the law, and a general lack of enforcement in some cases, has allowed media outlets to continue to publish identifying details of a minor in relation to their legal arrangements, which only perpetuates the criminalization of Black youth in the media and creates barriers to their advancement in the future. Known as the Children's Code (Article 412), this law states that the criminal records and identity of a youth under the age of 18 are prohibited from being published, except in the case that the minor is being tried as an adult, being tried for a crime of violence, or is arrested on a second or subsequent felony charge (Justia 2018). Media sources are interested in the read appeal that an article can provide if it shares the specifics of a crime, so they will readily publish the identifying details of a minor when presented with the opportunities; the higher the traffic on an article, the more revenue the outlet can generate (Pauli 2017). This ideology again reflects the ability for race-neutral institutions/mechanisms to preserve implicitly racist narratives even if it is not their primary intention (Sears 1988). News outlets seem to be exploiting the identification of "heinous youth" in order to

boost the market for their articles, demonstrating the ability for the media to easily ostracize and villainize Black individuals/youth, and control their reputation in society (Bonilla-Silvia 2002; Delgado and Stefanic 2007). Already it is clear to see that the current policy (the Children's Code) is not only ineffective to prevent the news sources from damaging the identity of Black children in their articles, but it also ensures that Black children are mentioned in relation to particularly serious or heinous crimes.

The practice of publishing the photos and/or names of a child who is arrested, although legal under certain circumstances, has become a problem within the digital age of news reporting. Unlike printed newspapers, which go out of circulation after a few days or weeks, any information that is published online exists forever and can easily be found in an internet search many years after the incident was reported. Said differently, "With the advent of the Internet, what's online becomes people's main or only source of news... People's reputations are at stake, and often the arrest itself and not the outcome is what is known about them" (Wang 2017). While harmful under all circumstances, the ramifications of publishing an individual's name and photo in

relation to their crime is especially detrimental for youth, who are still developing and do not need an online record following them into adulthood.

In general, the implications of the current policy mean crime articles from local news sources inadvertently create a distorted image of Black criminality in the eyes of the community. Louisiana news and media outlets perpetuate the criminalization of Black youth in the news when they continue to publish mugshots and names of children arrested for crimes that fall outside the protection of the Children's Code (The Opportunity Agenda 2011). Black children are disproportionately arrested by law enforcement, so any media coverage of them will be misrepresented as predominately criminal in nature. Moreover, this practice feeds into memories of the 'Superpredator' buzz word that became a popular societal mindset in the 1990s. The Superpredator myth was theorized in 1995 by a Princeton Professor, John Dilulio, who "predicted that the number of juveniles in custody would increase three-fold in the coming years" and urged public officials to take action lest there be a "bloodbath" on account of these kids growing up to become adults in public society (Equal Justice Initiative 2014). As was mentioned before, these statements and

ideologies ignited panic in the public and villainized (Black) juveniles as ruthless criminals who were remorseless, irredeemable, and incapable of rehabilitation (Bogart 2020). It led nearly every state to pass harsh and excessive crime legislation in the 1990s which increased the number of circumstances under which juveniles could be tried and treated as adults in sentencing and punishment (Equal Justice Initiative 2014). Even worse, Dilulio later admitted that his initial statements about the 'Superpredator scare' were entirely unfounded (Bogart 2020). Predictions about the Superpredator surge, which was publicly revealed to be a myth in the first place, had lasting results on contemporary media coverage of youth in crime stories. Namely, increasingly negative and fearful views of Black teenagers emerged among the general public in response to "highly publicized heinous crimes committed by juvenile offenders," based upon "frightening imagery [that] was racially coded" (Equal Justice Initiative 2014). Ironically, the mindset of American society that Black youth criminality was on the rise occurred during a time when juvenile arrests for murder steadily declined to two thirds its initial rate at the start of the craze (Bogart 2020). This phenomenon reflects the power of elites to become the agenda setters about

public opinion, and the media's role in specifically spreading this image (Beckett 1997). Evidently, the media's coverage of Black youth crime is historically known for disseminating messages that uphold racist biases. It is for this reason, and knowing how crucial the media is for shaping public opinion, that evaluating the flaws of the Children's Code and offering policy suggestions is so important; it is an attempt to diminish the flow of implicitly racist publication practices.

In particular, the current policy permits online media sources to permanently identify a child alongside their criminal history, which affects their future outcomes and denies their chance for redemption. Publishing a child's criminal history affects their future outcomes and denies their chance for redemption, even if they are never prosecuted, are acquitted, or have served their sentence (Cramer 2020). In the words of the Juvenile Law Center: "Public access to records of juvenile arrests... can impede successful transitions to adulthood for many youth, especially when these records remain available long after the youth's involvement with the juvenile justice system has ended. These records can create obstacles for youth seeking employment, education, housing and other opportunities... it can stigmatize the

youth and erect barriers to community reintegration" (Juvenile Law Center 2014). Any time a child's name or photo is mentioned in the news, a traceable record and online history exists forever, and negatively impacts an individual's chance to obtain employment, housing, and educational opportunities in the future.

In other ways, the policy has been applied inappropriately by Louisiana law enforcement to avoid the consequences of their racist policing. In a recent example, the shooting of a 14-year-old boy by a Jefferson Parish Sheriff went unreported for months (Seville and Rappleye 2020). When asked about the incident, Joe Lopinto of the JPSO claimed that they did not release information of the shooting to the media because the "state's child privacy laws prevent his office from commenting on cases involving juveniles" (Seville and Rappleye 2020). This explanation is entirely faulty, as a police shooting can, and should, be reported without ever mentioning the child's name. Instead, law enforcement called on this 'privacy law' to protect themselves from charges of abuse. Originally intended to protect minors from media exposure, the Children's Code is being wrongly used by law enforcement to not hold themselves accountable.

Clearly the Children's Code, Louisiana's current model for keeping the information of minors private, is flawed in its ability to protect Black youth from being criminalized in the community and later blocked from future advancements. The purpose of this paper is to propose policies and/or policy reforms which will intervene to solve this very issue. Before presenting my suggestions, however, I will examine the ways in which online news sources are making similar efforts to change their publication practices and moderate the racist effects of media.

### **Related Reforms**

Elsewhere in America, numerous media sources have begun to recognize the harmful repercussions of their publishing practices and are taking initiative to alter their business policies involving crime reporting. In one example, the San Jose Mercury News, an online news outlet covering the San Francisco Bay area, has limited its publication practices to never publish the name of a minor being tried in juvenile court, even if the charge is for a violent offense (Funt 2015). This guideline is less straight forward if the child is being tried in adult court, but in those situations the editors will evaluate the case and use their discretion to decide if it is necessary to

publish the child's name and identifying details. Bert Robinson, managing editor at the San Jose Mercury News, spoke on his decision to narrow the category of acceptable circumstances to publish a child's name in relation to their arrest, stating: "If we had put their names on our website, then people googling [their names] 10 years from now would find that story. The biggest punishment that's going to come to them is going to be us naming them" (Flunt 2015).

A second type of racialized crime reporting reform comes in the form of removing mug shot galleries from online news sources. Typically, online news sources publish all of the names and mug shots made public by police and sheriff's offices without any mention of the individuals' charges, facts of their cases, or updates of verdicts (Blakinger 2020). Mugshot galleries are harmful because they publicly expose the names and faces of individuals under criminal pretenses before they have had their day in court (i.e., while they are still innocent under the eyes of the law) (Cramer 2020). The primary purpose of these galleries for news sources is to generate publicity and page views, but they are of limited news value and come at the expense of disproportionately impacting people of color by "feeding into negative stereotypes and undermining the

presumption of innocence” (Blakinger 2020). Knowing that Black and Latino people are targeted and more often arrested by law enforcement, then it follows that a majority of the people represented in the mug shot galleries are of minority status. When these images are presented online without context, they feed into negative stereotypes and “creates an illusory correlation for viewers that fosters racial bias and vastly overstates the propensity of Black and brown men to engage in criminal behavior” (Cramer 2020). These news sources from traditionally liberal states are presenting ways in which media portrayals that are racialized in nature can be reformed.

To analyze this issue locally, a few southern news outlets have followed the lead and have declared they will remove mug shot galleries from their website, including websites in Alabama, Houma, LA, and southern Mississippi. AL.com’s motivation was “To make our crime and justice coverage more meaningful for our digital readers” and create “a transparent process to help us reshape coverage of the criminal justice system in our state” (Scott 2020). HoumaToday made a similar statement: “Online information is permanent and can appear in a google search of anyone’s name; the image this paints of the individual is

counterproductive to their ability to move on from their past arrests, especially if the person has repaid their debt to society” (The Courier 2020). Finally, the Sun Herald, based in southern Mississippi, made their decision based on feedback from community members: “Business and community leaders tell me that all that crime coverage creates a false impression of what we are as South Mississippians. Every community has crime, they note, but why does ours get so much coverage?” (Kaplan 2018). The interesting thing to note among all three of these statements is that no mention of race is given. It seems that although news stations in other, more liberal areas of the country have racial motivations for altering their publication practices, these southern, more conservatively placed news outlets are motivated by the reputation and value of the community when deciding to remove mug shot galleries. Evidently, a wave of news reform, whether explicitly motivated by race or not, can prompt other media outlets to join the trend. This is especially important in the current era of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silvia 2015). Perhaps these news sources set the example for other businesses to follow, thus indicating that any reform is welcome even if it is not initially for the same reasons that one would expect.

The third type of reform to defamatory media mentions can be taken after the example of Cleveland.com. Cleveland.com established the Right to be Forgotten policy in 2018 (Owen 2018). Under the Right to be Forgotten, people who have committed non-violent crimes and have successfully expunged their records from court can have their crime story removed from the website (Owen 2018). The editors at Cleveland.com made this decision after discovering the number of people who contact them on a daily basis reporting that their publications have “blocked [individuals] from improving their lives by the prominence of stories about their mistakes in Google searches of their names. They don't get jobs, or their children find the content, or new friends see it and make judgments” (Quinn 2018). There are numerous requests daily to have this information removed from the website, so the editors took initiative to enact this practice, and also agreed to restrict their publication of mugshots to only the most notorious crimes and will cease publishing the names of most people accused of minor crimes.

The fourth and final type of change that news stations are making to their publication practices involves publishing stories which speak with compassion,

humanity, and cover both sides of the story. The New Haven Independent, an online Connecticut news site, is spearheading the media reform movement with a declaration from the founding of their publication that they will never “run photos of or name people who’ve been arrested — unless they’re public figures, the arrest is judged to be a public emergency, or the Independent is able to interview the accused person directly” (Wang 2017). Their standard presents the primary example that all newsrooms should follow, and this will be discussed in the following section of the paper. In the meantime, however, it is important to note the additional steps that the New Haven Independent takes to ensure fair reporting for all parties involved. If they find it necessary to publish a person’s personal information in relation to their crime, they are sure to include background into the person’s life and give their side of the story; in the words of the editor: “I feel strongly that if the press quotes police officers and experts about what [should] be done with/for people who get arrested and are in hard times, we should try to have those people’s side of the story included as well” (Wang 2017). Their efforts are meant to add humanity to an article which incriminates and slanders a person’s name in the community (Wang 2017).

In the discussion of media which further criminalizes Black individuals and youth, the examples above from news sources around the country provide four reforms to online journalism which are a step to improve the ethics of reporting and diminish racist publication practices. These changes include restricting guidelines about when it is acceptable to publish a person's name and photo, removing mugshot galleries, allowing updates and removals to be made on past articles, and publishing both sides of the crime story to balance the overtly negative depiction that comes from a crime coverage. While these current reforms are a useful step in the right direction, they do not do enough to fully remedy the problem of media for reinforcing the criminalization of Black Americans. For example, while most of these outlets agreed to limit or restrict their publications of individuals' names and photos, they do not do enough to fully ensure that this information will never reach the internet under all circumstances. Furthermore, some of the restrictions were based off of ideas that "minor" crimes do not deserve heavy coverage. Yet this only makes the "major" crimes more pronounced if these are the only forms of crime being covered in the media. In other words, it further amplifies

the disproportionate and vilifying effects of crime media.

Nevertheless, the examples presented in this section, while imperfect, still provide a foundation to follow to develop more improved policies and reforms which mitigate the negative effects of media portrayals of Black individuals. Buzz has started to develop around changing the standards of online journalism, which presents cautiously hopeful regards for the future. Not many of the outlets, however, have provided statements or insight into the publication practices concerning the privacy of minors. This issue still needs addressing. In the next section I will present a policy suggestion to implement in Louisiana with the intention of addressing the damaging and irreversible effects of identifying youth and their criminal record in the media, a practice which is still permissible under an array of circumstances allowed by the Louisiana Children's Code.

### **Policy Suggestions**

Given the evidence presented in the previous section, I make a suggestion about how to handle this problem. My ideas are two-fold: a policy recommendation, and a proposal. First, I suggest Louisiana amend

the current Children's Code to prohibit the publication of youth information under all circumstances. A child should never be named or have their photo identified with their criminal history or a crime they are suspected to have committed. Removing these exemptions from the Children's Code will ensure that all youth are protected and will increase the opportunity for children interaction with the juvenile legal system to have a fair outlook on the future. At least their names would not be "Googleable" to family, friends, employers, landlords, etc.

However, policy is slow to enact and usually does not work exactly as it is intended. There are many ways in which loopholes to the law can be found, and without enforcement, the policy holds little weight. This is why my second recommendation would be to request news outlets to specially adopt their own business practices which change the way Black youth are represented in the media. A state-wide policy would be more stable and consistent to ensure that these practices are being managed and standardized for all of the online news sites in the state. Proposing reforms to publication companies directly leaves the change entirely dependent on the discretion of the journalism business, and unless every news source took initiative, the names and photos of youth

would still be exposed by one news station or another. If, however, certain news stations which were presented with this information and felt inclined to take a stance, they could take the lead to set an example of ethical journalism in Louisiana. More sources are likely to follow suit. Further, including different perspectives on the youth crime stories from certain outlets who agree to change their publication practices could help to counteract the flood of negative articles published about the same incident.

Local and state news outlets should take into consideration the racially discriminatory and harmful effects of publishing a child's name and make it their best effort to never publish the identifying details of a minor under any circumstances. This is obviously an ambitious request that I anticipate will be met with pushback, but I have responses to the possible rejections. If the news outlet finds it important to identify the minor because they find it important to inform the public about any public safety concern they face, I respond that I do not believe a child's name, photo, or identifying details are necessary in order to achieve this purpose. Public attention can still be achieved without identifying the parties involved. Further, if the site is particularly interested in read-appeal and views generated on their

crime stories, consider publishing the “what” details of the crime without disclosing any “who” details of the crime (Quinn 2018). They can disclose non-identifying details of the crime or create pseudonyms for the actors involved (Quinn 2018). This practice has proven to satisfy the crime-hungry appetites of readers while keeping the identity of youth/individuals private (Pauli 2017).

In the case that they are unwilling to accept such drastic changes, I alternatively suggest the sites move forward with journalism practices based on the previous examples presented from current news outlets who have already spearheaded the movement to remove mug shot galleries from their websites and limit the incriminating information published. There are a few other tips that news sites could use and/or follow when considering how to modify their business standards to reduce the damaging effects of the media. For one, editors should ask themselves about the true value of the crime story they wish to publish. They should consider questions such as: Is there imminent public safety concern? Is the crime so serious that the community needs to know? Does it warrant frequent updates? Does it serve and inform the community? (Kaplan 2018). These will help inform their intentions and

repercussions of each article that involves a juvenile.

Furthermore, writers should find underreported areas of the news that would be more beneficial to highlight. Too much crime reporting is not beneficial for the community. It creates a false impression about the city and portrays the community in a negative light. And knowing that it spreads implicitly racist ideology, it could be useful to decrease the number of articles published which contribute to this ideology. If writers and editors at news sources need to find a new story to publish, they should consider focusing on leads which do not receive a lot of attention but present some informative benefit for the community. Additionally, they could further restrict the guidelines for what constitutes necessary publication of a child’s identity. So, when faced with a subjective interpretation about what and what not to publish, they should consider strictly narrowing the instances when it is warranted to publish a child’s identity.

Finally, as was mentioned in the given examples, online news sources should do their absolute best to give both sides of every crime story. Speaking with compassion and providing updates on the child’s case can add humanity to an article which incriminates and slanders their name in the community. It

can also add a more positive understanding of the youth in the midst of all the other articles which have published the child's personal information. The hope is for future Google searches of the individual to include stories which counteract the overtly criminalizing and unforgiving image that was painted of them elsewhere in the media. Especially in these instances, it is critical too that writers focus on exposing the systematic injustices that youth face in relation to their criminal allegations. Changing the narrative from placing individual blame on child offenders to recognizing the structural and societal injustices that puts children in these positions will be a progressive change to the status quo.

### **Conclusion**

This research paper has culminated to provide evidence that the representation of Black youth in Louisiana news sources is harmful and causes problems that are both created and exacerbated by contemporary color-blind and institutional racism. Exceptions in the Children's Code leave clear opportunities for Louisiana media to identify Black youth alongside particularly heinous crimes, which does not fare well for the child's future opportunities or for the perceptions of Black youth in general. The

two-fold policy amendment and media proposal are ways in which online news sources can be regulated in their ability to criminalize Black youth with their articles. Another area of study that could continue from this research paper would be examining problems and policy solutions for the mention of Black adults being identified for their crimes. In the meantime, moving forward, publishing articles which highlight the larger structural inequalities that children face, rather than assigning individualistic blame to their actions, can be another opportunity in the future for the broad scope of media to shift the narrative about Black juvenile crime. Given the media's profound effect on shaping public opinion, it is clearly an important area of study and requires tackling the implicitly racist messages that are spread through common publication practices. Ultimately, Black children, who are already targeted and face an increased risk of coming into contact with law enforcement, need to be supported in their ability to develop, not punished and criminalized multiple times over. I would hope adults and parents who are in a position to affect change, regardless of their race, would want the best for every child the same way they do their own children. Reforming the ways in which we regard and treat youth, increasing our

capacity for forgiveness and compassion, and supporting the success of children could have a profound impact on their future opportunities as adults and their ability to remove themselves from the criminal cycle.

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