

O Captain, My Captain! U.S Newspaper Framing of the Death of Captain America

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how U.S. newspapers framed the death of Captain America. Specifically, the presence of various frames and their classifications was determined via a content analysis of 139 newspaper articles. Additionally, this thesis explores relationships between frame substance and other frame classifications. Generic/recurring frames were more prevalent than issue-specific/recurring frames. Frames tended to be episodic more often than thematic. Frames were also most likely to be neutral in valence, though differences from this overall trend emerged in some individual frames. Frames tended to be ambiguous rather than substantive. No relationship emerged between frame substance and the classification of generic/issue-specific frames, nor did one emerge between frame substance and the episodic/thematic frame classification. However, frames possessing negative valence were more likely to be ambiguous than frames possessing positive valence. Implications for framing theory and the news coverage's treatment of Captain America's death as an indicator of post-9/11 American identity are also discussed. Limitations of this study and opportunities for future research are acknowledged

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## I. Rationale

Of all fictional characters, perhaps the one that most embodies American idealism and philosophy is Captain America. Created by writer Joe Simon and artist Jack Kirby, Captain America debuted in 1941 in *Captain America Comics #1* in the wake of World War II (Marvel, 2008). He was primarily involved in pro-Allied, anti-Nazi propaganda stories; the cover of his first appearance famously showed Captain America punching Hitler in the jaw. While his costume has subtly changed over the character's history, it consistently includes the colors of the American flag, as does his iconic shield. As World War II ended, Captain America waned in popularity until the cancellation of his comic book in 1954. In 1964, however, Stan Lee and Kirby reintroduced the character into Marvel Comics lore as the leader of what would become one of Marvel's flagship comic book titles, *The Avengers* (Wright, 2001).

Captain America would become one of Marvel's most recognizable characters (Wright, 2001). While the comics he stars in have had fluctuations in their sales figures since his reintroduction, he remains one of Marvel's most popular and iconic characters. He is the quintessential American superhero, as illustrated by Dittmer's (2005) statement: "His characterization as an explicitly American superhero establishes him as both a representative of the idealized American nation and as a defender of the American status quo" (p. 627).

When Captain America was shot and killed in his eponymous comic book series, news media devoted substantial coverage to his murder. While some media treated it as a self-contained story, other media took Captain America's death as an opportunity to reflect on the current state of the country. The purpose of this study is to explore how journalists and columnists framed this event.

As a theoretical perspective, framing has primarily examined questions about news media and its audiences and publics. Myriad studies examining frames in news media about specific issues exist—terrorism, welfare, and civil rights, among others. However, framing scholars have largely ignored coverage of entertainment media content by news media. Very few studies exist on news media reactions to and framing of fictional events and characters. This lack of research is surprising considering the widespread use of media for entertainment purposes. This study attempts to begin to address this gap in the literature by examining U.S. newspapers' framing of the death of Captain America. By examining this event, some aspects of post-9/11 American culture may be revealed.

This study also examines possible relationships between frame substance and other frame characteristics. Frame substance is a relatively new frame classification, first articulated by Williams and Kaid (2006). Research into this classification is in its beginning stages. While there are many avenues for research regarding frame substance, this thesis explores the extent frame substance is related to other frame classifications.

First, context is provided about Captain America and the events in the fictional universe surrounding his death. Literature examining the superhero's placement in popular culture and as a national symbol is addressed. Next, conceptual foundations of framing theory are articulated. After establishing framing as the theoretical background for this research, literature regarding political representation in entertainment media is discussed. The method for this study is articulated next, followed by results and discussion. Finally, limitations of this study and opportunities for future research are presented.

## II. Background on Captain America's Death

Recent events in Marvel's fictional universe led to the death of Captain America and may provide context for certain frames and issues present in the newspaper coverage. A team of heroes confronted a group of villains in a fictionalized version of Stamford, Connecticut. The resulting clash caused a massive loss of civilian life. This led to calls by the public to have superheroes register with the government. Congress passed a "Superhero Registration Act," requiring mandatory registration by anyone with superhuman abilities. Some superheroes accepted this and registered, valuing accountability and public safety that the law took into consideration. Other superheroes refused to register, saying the law violated their own civil liberties. Captain America led the anti-registration faction. As a result, those heroes became outlaws, and pro-registration heroes pursued and arrested the law-violating heroes. After a series of battles, Captain America's faction surrendered, and he was arrested (Millar & McNiven, 2007). Later, while Captain America was being transported to the site of his trial, he was shot and killed (Brubaker & Epting, 2007).

It is difficult to ignore the social commentary apparent in the storyline. Clearly, the age-old debate regarding security and freedom was at play in this graphic narrative. This debate is especially salient in the post-9/11 era, especially when the Patriot Act is taken into account. Comics and graphic novels have occasionally delved into social commentary and critique. Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1997) shows the experience of Jews in Nazi Germany through a narrative involving mice and cats. Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) follows an aging Batman in a world that is a satire of Reagan-era, Cold War politics. Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* (1995) is a veiled commentary about Thatcher-era United Kingdom and was adapted into a Hollywood film with veiled commentary about the Bush administration. An

issue of *Amazing Spider-Man* showed Spider-Man's and other heroes' and villains' reactions to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Straczynski & Romita, Jr, 2001). Relevant to this study, Mark Millar and Steve McNiven's *Civil War* (2007) called to mind the ageless debate over personal freedom and security.

Hoppenstand (2006) argues that superhero comics have always had some degree of social and political commentary contained within, citing the Green Lantern/Green Arrow comic book in the 1970s and Marvel's stable of Stan Lee-created heroes in the 1960s. Scholars have also examined social commentary in comic books when social commentary may not be obvious. McGrath (2007) examined how a Marvel Comics title starring a Latina superhero portrayed Latina stereotypes.

Captain America comic books have also delved into socially and politically significant stories. In a mid-1970s story arc that had obvious Watergate overtones, Captain America discovered and stopped a right-wing conspiracy to take over the United States. When he found that the perpetrator of the plan was the current president of the United States, Captain America briefly renounced his name and costume, going by the name Nomad instead (Wright, 2001). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Captain America's partner in crime-fighting was the Falcon, Marvel's first African-American superhero (Wright, 2001). Additionally, though not in the comic book story itself, readers in the "letters" section of the comic book in the late 1960s and early 1970s argued whether Captain America should be depicted as a participant in the Vietnam War (Wright, 2001). This suggests that Captain America functioned as a symbol of American identity in the Vietnam War era, at least to readers of his comic book.

Indeed, some academic scholarship has examined Captain America's symbolic significance to American culture. Edwardson (2003) states that nationalistic boundaries are

formed in part by the internalization of cultural mores through the consumption of popular culture. This creates a larger cultural identity, and it further establishes individual and collective selves within a larger geopolitical narrative (Edwardson, 2003). Sharp (2000) argues that ideological hegemony is created not only through political ideology, but also through popular culture, even the most mundane depictions of everyday life.

Captain America, as an element of popular culture and as a highly symbolic character, helps to create and to reflect the American cultural identity. In an analysis of a post-9/11 comic book storyline, Dittmer (2005) argues that Captain America helps to accomplish the establishment of cultural identity by connecting “the political projects of American nationalism, internal order, and foreign policy (all formulated at the national or global scale) with the scale of the individual, or the body” (p. 627). He is the literal embodiment of American ideals. He embodies hard work, a defensive approach to foreign policy (with his trademark shield), and the centrality of America to the eponymous superhero: all contribute to the formation of American identity among comic book readers (Dittmer, 2005). He possesses the ability to both “*embody* and to *narrate* America in ways that the bald eagle, flag, and other symbols cannot” (Dittmer, 2005, p. 630). Therefore, as a popular culture symbol, Captain America plays a vital role in creating an American cultural identity.

While an analysis of the comic book text would be informative, the focus of this thesis is to analyze how American newspapers framed their coverage of the death of Captain America and which real-world issues were invoked in the discussion of his murder. Analysis of this coverage helps to illuminate news media’s attitudes and reflections toward post-9/11 American culture and society. It also extends framing theory by examining entertainment-oriented news, rather than

politically-oriented news. Further, this thesis extends framing research by examining relationships between frame substance and other frame classifications.

### **III. Literature Review**

#### **III.a. Framing Theory**

Many definitions of framing exist in the framing literature, though the following two definitions are used to guide this study. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) describe a frame as “a central organizing idea...for making sense of relevant events” (p. 3). They also argue that both media and audience frames interact with each other to create meaning, though the focus of this thesis was to examine media frames. Entman (1993) states that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p.52). Entman (1993) also maintains that frames are located in the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the society’s culture.

Scheufele (1999) provided a typology of framing literature, organizing studies along media frames and audience frames, and he further organized them into studies that analyze the two frames as either independent or dependent variables. The analysis of frames in news media is important; evidence suggests that news frames are just as important as hard facts in a story, at least when media consumers mentally conceive a political issue (de Vreese, 2004).

#### **III.a.i. Frame Classifications**

The literature on framing has developed over the past two decades to identify four different classifications of frames. These classifications include: generic/recurring and issue-specific/emergent (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), episodic/thematic (Iyengar, 1991), valence (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003), and substance (Williams & Kaid, 2006). These four classifications are not mutually exclusive; for example, a single frame may be generic, episodic, possess a positive valence and be substantive in focus.

However, categories are exclusive within each classification. For example, a frame cannot be both episodic and thematic (Iyengar, 2001). Likewise, a frame cannot be both generic/recurring and issue-specific/emergent (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001), nor can it possess both positive and negative valence (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003), nor can it be both substantive and ambiguous (Williams & Kaid, 2006).

Generic or recurring frames are generalizable across a multitude of different events. Issue-specific or emergent frames pertain to frames present only in specific events or issues (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001). Episodic frames deal with a singular event, while thematic frames address an issue across a wider range of time. In other words, the episodic and thematic frame classification refers to the scope of the issue covered (Iyengar, 1991). Frame valence refers to the tone of a frame, whether positive, negative, or neutral (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). Frame substance refers to the contextual depth of a frame (Williams & Kaid, 2006). These frame classifications are described in detail below.

### **III.a.ii. Generic and Recurring Frames**

Generic and recurring frames are found across a number of media contexts. Analysis of generic frames, while not digging deeper into the nuances of the event, allows for greater generalizability and use across other events and framing studies (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five generic frames discussed in prior studies. These generic frames are Conflict, Human Interest, Economic Consequences, Morality, and Responsibility. The Conflict frame emphasizes tension between individuals, groups, and institutions. The Human Interest frame emphasizes an emotional angle, focusing on an individual or a group of individuals. The Economic Consequences frame emphasizes the

economic impact of an event, issue, or person, on another person, group, or institution. The Morality frame ties the topic under discussion to terms of religious or social moral tenets. The Responsibility frame assigns responsibility to a person, group, or institution in reference to the story topic.

Beyond Semetko and Valkenburg's five generic frames identified above, framing literature identifies other recurring frames. Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007), in their framing analysis of media coverage regarding the kidnapping of Romanian journalists, identify three recurring macro frames that may serve as a foundation on which generic frames are built: Metacommunication, Speculation, and Cynicism.

The Metacommunication frame comprises communication about communication; it explains how the media covers itself. Esser and D'Angelo (2003) examined television news metacommunication in the 2000 presidential election. Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007) found that the metacommunication frame emerged as a dominant frame in Romanian newspaper coverage of a high-profile kidnapping. In their content analysis of international news websites' immediate coverage of the Iraq War, Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, et al. (2005) found that U.S. websites were more likely to use the Metacommunication frame than other countries' websites. In other words, American media were more likely to portray themselves as actors and key players in the Iraq War than news websites based in other countries. Moldoff and Williams (2007) found that audience metacommunication frames in an advocacy group's blog were framed negatively, limiting the opportunity for meaningful discourse. Williams (2008) analyzed the presence of metacommunication frames in news media coverage of the second Iraq War.

The Cynicism frame refers to feelings of powerlessness, distrust, and sarcasm. Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007), in their analysis of Romanian news coverage of a high-

profile kidnapping, found that the cynicism frame emerged more prominently in audience discussion posts than in online news stories. Landreville (2006) analyzed editorials in international newspapers published immediately after former President Bush's 2004 re-election. The cynicism frame was more likely to be present in newspaper editorials originating from countries not involved in the Iraq War coalition than in countries supporting the Iraq War.

The Speculation frame includes stories that make predictions about a particular course of action, or develops a diagnosis (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007). In other words, the Speculation frame unifies the Prognosis and Diagnosis recurrent frames. Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, et al. (2005) found that U.S. news websites and international news websites did not significantly differ in the rate they each used the prognosis frame in the immediate onset of the second Iraq War. Likewise, they found that use of the diagnosis frame did not significantly differ between U.S. news websites and international news websites. Landreville (2006) analyzed prognostic and diagnostic frames in international newspaper editorials immediately following George W. Bush's 2004 re-election. Many editorials offered a growing American conservative movement as a reason for Bush's re-election. In addition, many editorials predicted either more war or more instances of terrorism. They also advised Bush to work more closely with the international community.

While Constantinescu and Tedesco did not refer to them as such, all three macro frames meet Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) criteria for generic frames. These macro frames are generalizable among a number of different political and cultural contexts.

Other recurring frames exist in framing literature as well. The Political Consequences frame highlights possible consequences for political actors in a political situation (Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, et al., 2005; Moldoff & Williams, 2007). The Game frame is

characterized by defining winning parties and losing parties (Moldoff & Williams, 2007). The Societal Impact/National Identity frame emphasizes the impact an event has on a society's sense of identification with a nation-state (Williams & Kaid, 2006).

This thesis examines the presence of generic and recurring frames in U.S. newspapers' coverage of the death of Captain America. Furthermore, this thesis explores the extent to which generic and recurring frames were substantive or ambiguous.

### **III.a.iii. Issue-Specific/Emergent Frames**

Issue-specific, or emergent, frames arise from the content of a particular media story. Unlike generic frames, issue-specific or emergent frames are not generalizable across multiple contexts. They only arise out of a specific context. In that sense, the study of issue-specific/emergent frames with the intent of extending and elaborating framing theory is limited. However, identifying emergent frames within a media sample concerning a specific issue can tease out nuances and provide a deeper understanding of historical and cultural context (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001). The identification of emergent frames may also lead to the discovery of new generic frames (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001).

Several studies have identified issue-specific and emergent frames in different contexts. Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, et al. (2005) found several of these frames in their analysis of European news coverage of the 2004 European Union elections. Matthes and Kohring (2008) found several frames that emerged in news stories about biotechnology.

This thesis examines the presence of issue-specific/emergent frames in U.S. newspapers' coverage of Captain America's death. Furthermore, this thesis also explores the extent to which issue-specific/emergent frames were substantive or ambiguous.

### **III.a.iv. Episodic and Thematic Framing**

Iyengar (1991) posited that frames can be either episodic or thematic. An episodic frame covers an issue at the level of the individual or event itself, often employing anecdotes or exemplars. A thematic frame covers an issue in a very broad context, linking past events to the story being covered. Breaking news is more likely to use an episodic frame (Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, et al., 2005).

Iyengar (1991) argued that television's heavy use of the episodic frame results in blame being placed on the individual for social problems, rather than the government. However, Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) content analysis of Dutch media refuted Iyengar's finding. According to that study, Iyengar's argument may be bound to American media and audience culture. Newspapers also tend to use the episodic frame rather than the thematic frame.

Studies regarding episodic and thematic framing and U.S. newspaper coverage have found a heavy use of the episodic frame in a number of news contexts. In a comparison of newspaper coverage of a 1967 Vietnam War protest and the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, Jha (2007) found that newspapers tended to use episodic frames over thematic frames overall, with no significant difference in the episodic frame's presence in the coverage between the two events. Mastin, Choi, Barboza, et al. (2007) found that episodic frames were more prevalent than thematic frames in newspaper coverage of elderly abuse. Dudo, Dahlstrom, and Brossard (2007) found similar results in their content analysis of U.S. newspaper coverage of avian flu. Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff (2008) found that episodic frames dominated newspaper coverage of intimate partner violence.

This thesis examines episodic and thematic frames in American newspapers' coverage of Captain America's death. It also examines possible relationships between the episodic/thematic frame classification and the substantive/ambiguous frame classification.

### **III.a.v. Frame Valence**

De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2003) stated that frames can be classified by their valence. In other words, frames inherently stress positive, negative, or both positive and negative aspects of a given issue or person. As a result, "news frames can be expected to influence public support for various policy measures" (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003, p. 362). Frames in a news story are also just as important as facts in a news story on a reader's evaluation of issues discussed in the news content (de Vreese, 2004).

A frame with positive valence may emphasize beneficial or high-worth aspects, solutions, or treatments. A frame with a negative valence may emphasize unfavorable or low-worth aspects, solutions, or treatments. A frame with a neutral valence presents statements of fact without assigning positive or negative value (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003).

Many other studies have explored frame valence in different contexts. Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, et al. (2004) analyzed the valence of European news frames in their coverage of the 2004 European Union elections. While news was generally framed positively or neutrally across the continent, some countries' news coverage, such as Austria's and Spain's, were more negative than other countries' news coverage. Williams and Kaid (2006) continued the analysis of the 2004 EU elections, focusing on frame valence of U.S. news media coverage of the elections. The expansion itself was generally framed positively. Some frames, including Societal Impact/National Identity and Political Consequences, were predominantly framed negatively. The Economic Consequences and Conflict frames were predominantly neutral in valence.

Williams (2007) analyzed how American media framed youth voter-mobilization efforts and turnout in the 2004 U.S. presidential elections. Framing of young voters and voter-mobilization efforts were generally positive. Framing of turnout among young voters was mixed, with stories nearly equally distributed among positive, neutral, and negative valence.

Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, et al. (2005) found that news websites based in countries officially supporting Iraq military action framed the onset of the Iraq War more positively than news websites based in countries not officially endorsing the war. Jha (2007) found no difference in frame valence of news coverage of a 1967 Vietnam War protest and the 1999 Seattle WTO protests. Schuck and de Vreese (2009) found that news framing of the 2005 Dutch EU Constitution referendum possessed positive valence. However, according to experimental and survey data, this positive framing mobilized those opposing the referendum to vote against it. Therefore, positive media framing of an issue does not always equate to more favorable public attitudes toward that issue. In fact, it may mobilize those with unfavorable attitudes toward the issue.

This thesis examines the valence of frames in U.S. newspapers' coverage of Captain America's death. Additionally, the thesis also examines possible relationships between frame valence and the frame substance classification.

### **III.a.vi. Frame Substance**

In their study of American media's coverage of the European parliamentary elections, Williams and Kaid (2006) posited that frames can be classified as either substantive or ambiguous. A substantive media frame "is detailed and informative, offering context and detailed information" (Williams & Kaid, 2006, p.302). An ambiguous media frame "is vague and indistinct, providing little to no context or clear information. Ambiguous frames are in

essence considered empty or lacking, if the story did not provide any details to help to inform the audience in some educative way” (Williams & Kaid, 2006, p.302). These classifications of substantive or ambiguous consider a frame's depth, as opposed to Iyengar’s (1991) classification of episodic and thematic frames, which considers the focus or scope of what is framed.

Exploration into frame substance is in its preliminary stage; few studies exist that delve into this research area. Williams and Kaid (2006) first introduced the idea of frame substance in their content analysis of American news coverage of the 2004 European Union elections. Expanding their analysis into global media coverage of the elections, Williams, Kaid, Landreville, et al. (2007) found that the two most substantial frames in their analysis (Voter Apathy and Voter Backlash) were negative in valence. Williams (2006) found that most candidate e-mails sent to potential voters in the 2004 U.S. presidential election were lacking in substance.

In an experiment investigating the effects of frame substance, Moldoff’s (2007) findings indicated that frame substance did not significantly affect levels of trust and cynicism among participants. However, results also indicated that substantively framed information with a positive valence may increase one’s political information efficacy. In addition, the level of frame substance in a news article predicted the amount of information retained by participants.

This thesis further develops research about the substantive/ambiguous frame classification. To achieve such, the strength of relationships is tested between frame substance and other frame classifications: generic/recurring and issue-specific/emergent, episodic and thematic, and frame valence.

### III.b. Entertainment Media and Political Representation

A number of studies have examined the intersection of politics and entertainment media. Most studies examined entertainment and political representation in television. However, film and political cartoons also have been objects of study.

Television has been the subject of the bulk of research dealing with the intersection of politics and entertainment. Holbert, Tschida, Dixon, et al. (2005) examined how the television drama *The West Wing* framed the office of the presidency, extending framing into examinations of entertainment media, not just news media. A qualitative analysis also examined the construction of the presidency in the television show (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 2002).

Political scientists and communication scholars have also put *The Daily Show*, a comedy television show that satirizes news programs, under academic scrutiny. Baym (2005) argues that the show transcends comedy and becomes a new form of critically-inclined, 21<sup>st</sup> century journalism. Baumgartner and Morris (2006) found that while *The Daily Show* tended to increase confidence in one's ability to understand politics, it also tended to increase cynicism toward news media and the electoral system and caused participants to rate George W. Bush and John Kerry more negatively. Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, et al. (2007) explored priming effects of *The Daily Show* and national television news programs on political gratifications associated with the two types of shows.

Other entertainment television programs have had their political content and effects examined. Mechling and Mechling (1995) analyzed how the Disney animated feature *Our Friend the Atom* helped communicate the promise of atomic energy in 1950s America by tying this scientific development to traditional American cultural indicators. Cantor (1999) explained how the long-running television comedy *The Simpsons* endorses local (as opposed to federal)

solutions to political problems and intelligently (and irreverently) deals with topical issues. Holbrook and Hill (2005), using priming and agenda-setting as theoretical foundations, found that among heavy viewers of crime dramas, the president's treatment of crime favored heavily into participants' evaluation of the president. Niven, Lichter, and Amundson (2003), in a content analysis of late night comedy programs, found that jokes about political figures centered on the president and presidential candidates and rarely mentioned policy, instead focusing on personal failings. People who view these programs are often consumers of other news media—one has to understand current events to understand their satire (Young & Tisinger, 2006).

Subsequently, Young (2004) found that partisanship and political knowledge moderate the effects of late-night caricatures of presidential candidates on people's evaluations of candidates' character traits. Pfau, Moy, and Szabo (2001) explored correlations between prime-time television viewing and perceptions of the federal government. While viewing some television genres did not have a significant relation with perceptions of the government, others did—most notably, watching prime-time science fiction television shows was negatively correlated with confidence in the federal government.

Holbert and colleagues have also published a series of studies examining effects caused by viewing the film *Fahrenheit 9/11*. One study explored the mediating effects of emotion on evaluations of a 2004 Bush/Kerry presidential debate (Holbert & Hansen, 2008). Another study examined how prompting different levels of elaboration (using the elaboration likelihood model as a theoretical base) affected one's emotional reaction to the film (Holbert, Hansen, Caplan, et al., 2007). A third study examined the effects of political ideology and viewing *Fahrenheit 9/11* on confidence in President Bush's policies (Holbert, Hansen, Mortensen, et al., 2006). Finally,

another study examined the priming of affective ambivalence resulting from the film in combination with other moderating variables (Holbert & Hansen, 2006).

While scholars have studied entertainment television and film extensively, comic books and graphic novels have rarely been examined with their political and social content in mind, though some studies exist. Dorfman and Mattelart (1991) strongly critiqued the pro-capitalist and supposed imperialist Disney comic books that were sent to South America in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Smith (2001) explored how the mythos of Wonder Woman reinforces the American melting pot metaphor, both in how immigrants obtain American identity and the loss of immigrants' native identity. Paul (2007) and Chute (2007) both analyzed comic book storylines dealing with the tragedy of 9/11. Kinsella (1999), in his analysis of Japanese manga comics, found that the comics primarily served to reinforce the Japanese political and cultural status-quo.

However, political cartoons have been the subject of much academic work. Most superhero comic books have negligible political content, but Captain America, by the very nature of his character, imposes political implications in any narrative he appears. He is an embodiment of America and American ideals (Dittmer, 2005). Thus, in a sense, *Captain America* comic books are political cartoons, justifying inclusion of literature on political cartoons in this thesis. Ideas expressed in political cartoons resonate in various ways with people, depending on a number of factors (Bormann, Koester, & Bennett, 1978). Moreover, Edwards and Winkler (1997) argue that satire and parody depicted in political cartoons can contribute to the construction of political and ideological realities.

Several analyses of political cartoons' content and effects exist in the literature, although most studies use qualitative research methods. Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne (2001)

conducted a fantasy theme analysis of political cartoons satirizing the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. Wheeler and Reid (1975) explored how participants judged caricatures of President Nixon pre- and post-Watergate. Dittmer (2005) analyzed a series of post-9/11 Captain America comics, finding that the superhero symbolically reinforced geopolitical boundaries and American ideals.

In exceptions to the above methodologies, Penner and Penner (1994) conducted a quantitative study that examined newspaper comic strips and political cartoons dealing with homelessness. They found 57% of comic strips and 30% of editorial cartoons belittled or neutralized the issue of homelessness. Another study analyzed editorial cartoons depicting the 1992 presidential campaign, finding that cartoons focused on personalities of the candidates more often than policy (Koetzle & Brunell, 1996).

Daily newspaper comic strips are capable of spearheading social campaigns and producing significant reaction from social and economic institutions. For example, Benoit and Hirson (2001) concluded that not only did the comic strip *Doonesbury* elicit a very strong reaction from the tobacco industry, but also its message was effective in its construction and its mobilization of readers.

As noted, many qualitative investigations of political representation in entertainment media exist, but few studies were found that used framing as a theoretical base. Thus, this thesis extends the reach of framing to news media coverage of entertainment media content. Additionally, the thesis explores the relationship between frame substance and other frame classifications within entertainment news stories.

#### IV. Research Questions

Based on the review of literature, the following research questions are asked:

RQ1: What frames are present in U.S. newspaper coverage of the death of Captain America?

RQ2: In U.S. newspaper coverage of Captain America's death, are the frames primarily:

2a: Generic and recurring or issue specific/emergent?

2b: Episodic or thematic?

2c: Positive, negative, or neutral in valence?

2d: Substantive or ambiguous?

RQ3: In U.S. newspaper coverage of Captain America's death, is there a relationship between frame substance and:

3a: The frame classification of generic/recurring or issue-specific/emergent?

3b: The frame classification of episodic/thematic?

3c: Frame valence?

RQ4: What issues/topics are presented in the U.S. newspaper coverage of Captain America's death?

## V. Research Methodology

### V.a. Sample

Newspaper articles from the United States were gathered for analysis. For purposes of this study, the unit of analysis was the newspaper article, while the unit of enumeration was the presence or absence of individual frames and frame classifications. Since the material analyzed was organized by numbered news articles, the unit of analysis was the newspaper article (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989; McCollough, 2006).

The Lexis Nexis online database was used to collect the sample. An exhaustive search of all articles in U.S. newspapers containing the words “Captain America” and either “killed,” “kill,” “killer,” “death,” “dead,” “died,” “demise,” “deceased,” “assassinated,” “assassin,” “murder,” “murdered,” or “murderer” in the database was conducted. In addition, only articles meeting the above criteria dated between February 15, 2007 and March 2, 2009 were included. The former date allowed for the possibility that the story may have been leaked prior to the comic’s official publication, as the issue of the comic in which Captain America died was released on March 7, 2007. Only articles specifically mentioning Captain America’s death were analyzed. Any article that met the above criteria but did not mention Captain America’s death was discarded from the sample. In addition, articles were examined individually to eliminate reprints of Associated Press wire stories.

Newspaper articles ( $N = 147$ ) were found using the above search criteria. Articles appeared in 71 newspapers across all geographic regions of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Newspapers ranged from those with large, national circulation (*USA Today*, *The New York Times*), to those in medium-sized markets (*The Virginian-Pilot* [VA], *The San Jose Mercury News*), to those in smaller markets (*The Lewiston Morning Tribune* [ID], *The Herald* [SC]).

Within the sample, eight additional articles were determined to be reprints of wire service articles. These articles were removed from the sample and not included in data analysis.

Therefore, the total sample is comprised of 139 newspaper articles. Ninety-two articles (66% of the sample) were published within the first five months of the sample period, with 64 of those articles (46% of the sample) occurring within the first month. Further, only 23 (16.5% of the sample) of the articles in the sample were published during the final year of dates included in the sample (March 1, 2008-March 2, 2009). This rapid decline in relevant articles' prevalence suggests that the date range used in the study was adequate to capture the bulk of relevant media discussion. See Table 1 for a distribution of the sample by month.

### **V.b. Coding Scheme**

The author trained a coder using a codebook developed by the researcher and randomly selected articles from the sample (see Appendix B). The coder was randomly assigned to code 15 articles, while the author coded the entire sample. Identifying information, such as the story title, was collected from each unit. A unique identification number was assigned to each article. Coders also recorded the newspaper in which the article appears. The date the article was published was also recorded.

The two coders examined the sample for the presence of a number of frames, both issue-specific and generic. The five generic frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) were analyzed in the sample. These frames include Conflict, Human Interest, Economic Consequences, Morality, and Responsibility. In addition, other recurring frames, such as the three generic frames identified by Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007)—Metacommunication, Speculation, and Cynicism—were analyzed. Other recurring frames that were coded include

Political Consequences (Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, et al., 2005), Game (Moldoff & Williams, 2007), and Societal Impact/National Identity (Williams & Kaid, 2006).

A tentative list of emergent frames was generated from a preliminary reading of the sample. These were: Decline of America, Comic Book Death as Cliché, and Comic Book Death as Publicity Stunt. The Decline of America frame laments an erosion of American values and culture, weakening reputation in the global community, or unpopular political decisions. The Comic Book Death as Cliché frame characterizes the story as a common, perhaps tired plot device of comic books. It may also note an inevitable resurrection of the character. The Comic Book Death as Publicity Stunt frame emphasizes the promotional or economic gain that Marvel Comics stood to benefit through its killing of a high-profile character.

Coders also were able to identify possible emergent frames in an open-ended section of the codesheet. If emergent frames were identified, then after conference between the coder and the author, a second round of coding would have been conducted to identify more instances of the emergent frame in the sample. This combination of deductive and inductive approaches addresses Matthes and Koehring's (2008) concern that a deductive approach limits framing analysis to pre-established frames. Other content analyses have identified emergent frames using this method (McCollough, 2006).

Any frames that were present within the article were further analyzed. Frames present were coded as either episodic or thematic in nature (Iyengar, 1991). Second, the valence—whether its tone was positive, negative, or neutral—of each present frame was recorded (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). Finally, whether the frame was substantive (rich in context) or ambiguous (lacking in context) was recorded (Williams & Kaid, 2006).

Finally, coders identified the presence or absence of a number of issues. These issues included: economy, social class marginalization, environment, foreign reputation of America, terrorism, Iraq war, Afghanistan war, and Patriot Act/discussion of civil rights and liberties. Coders also were able to identify issues that were not present on this list. Finally, coders determined the valence of the discussion of any issues present.

Intercoder reliability was not attained at an adequate level during the first attempt at establishing intercoder reliability. In this attempt, intercoder reliability was assessed at .73 using Holsti's (1969) formula. A second attempt at data collection using a different coder was initiated after some adjustments, which are described below.

Some aspects of the codesheet were modified for the second attempt at data collection. First, a number of other issues were identified in the first attempt at data collection that were not included in the original list of issues. These issues were assigned their own categories. These issues include: George W. Bush/Bush administration, comic books (any discussion of comic books, comic conventions, issues related to comics, but not including Captain America's death), and entertainment media in general (not including comic books). The valence of these issues was also recorded. The Iraq War and Afghanistan War issue categories were consolidated into a single War issue category. If this issue was present, coders were asked to identify which war was discussed. Another issue category, Captain America's death, was added. This category was added to discern the tone of the discussion of Captain America's death independent of the discussion of other issues. Additionally, the name of the issue-specific frame Comic Book Death as Cliché was changed to Comic Book Death as Temporary. Using the word "cliché" may exclude the possibility that a discussion of temporary comic book death will have a positive valence. For example, an article may discuss the temporary nature of death in comic books as a

proud tradition rather than a tired plot device. In addition, the name of the issue-specific frame Comic Book Death as Publicity Stunt was changed to “Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator” for the same reasons.

The online form used for data collection was also modified to include definitions of each frame and issue category within the codesheet. On the first version of the online form, operationalizations of frame and issue categories were not listed, though a separate paper codebook was provided. While a separate codebook was provided in the first round of coding, having the operationalization of each variable more readily accessible may have helped improve intercoder reliability.

A different coder was trained and 15 articles were randomly selected from the sample to assess intercoder reliability. The coder analyzed those 15 articles, while the author re-coded the entire sample. Intercoder reliability was assessed at .84 using Holsti’s (1969) formula. Consensus was reached on differing coding decisions through discussion.

## VI. Results

This study analyzed frames and frame classifications present in U.S. newspaper coverage of the death of Captain America. Research questions regarding the presence of frames, frame classifications, relationships between frame substance and other frame classifications, and the presence of various issues were proposed. The results of this study are presented below.

### VI.a. Frames Present

Research question 1 asked which frames were present in U.S. newspaper coverage of the death of Captain America. To answer this question, the frequency of all frames present in the sample was calculated. In the sample ( $n = 139$ ), 436 total frames were present. The two frames that occurred most frequently in the sample were macro frames as identified by Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007). Metacommunication was the most frequent frame present (20.18%,  $n = 88$ ), followed by the Speculation frame (14.68%,  $n = 64$ ). The issue-specific frame Comic Book Death as Temporary was the next most frequent frame (11.93%,  $n = 52$ ). The next four most frequent frames are generic frames: Societal Impact/National Identity (10.55%,  $n = 46$ ), Conflict (10.32%,  $n = 45$ ), Economic Consequences (9.40%,  $n = 41$ ), and Responsibility (5.50%,  $n = 24$ ). Cynicism, a macro/recurring frame, was the next most frequently occurring frame (5.05%,  $n = 22$ ). After Cynicism, the next two most frequently occurring frames were the issue-specific frames, Decline of America (4.36%,  $n = 19$ ) and Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator (3.44%,  $n = 15$ ). The generic frame Human Interest was next (2.75%,  $n = 12$ ). Finally, three generic frames occurred rarely in this sample: Morality (0.92%,  $n = 4$ ), Political Consequences (0.69%,  $n = 3$ ), and Game (0.23%,  $n = 1$ ) (Table 2). No frames emerged during the coding process.

## VI.b. Frame Classifications

Research question 2a asked if the frames present were primarily generic/recurring or issue-specific/emergent. To answer this question, frequency of the number of generic and issue-specific/emergent frames was calculated, and a chi square test was conducted in order to determine statistical significance of the difference between the two classifications. Generic frames appeared more often than issue-specific/emergent frames in the sample. Generic frames accounted for 80.28% of all frames ( $n = 350$ ), while issue-specific/emergent frames accounted for 19.72 % of all frames ( $n = 86$ ). The difference between the two frame classifications is statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 436) = 159.853, p < .001$  (Table 3).

Research question 2b asked if the frames present were primarily episodic or thematic. To answer this question, frequency of the number of episodic and thematic frames was calculated, and a chi square test was conducted in order to determine statistical significance of the disparity between episodic and thematic frames. Overall, the frames present in the sample are primarily episodic (79.82%,  $n = 348$ ) rather than thematic (20.18%,  $n = 88$ ). This result is a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 436) = 155.046, p < .001$  (Table 4).

For each individual frame, a chi square test was conducted to determine the significance of difference between episodic and thematic classifications within each frame. Most frames followed the overall trend, tending to be more episodic than thematic. However, there were two exceptions. The Cynicism frame was nearly evenly split between episodic ( $n = 12$ ) and thematic ( $n = 10$ ) frame classifications,  $\chi^2 (1, n = 22) = 0.182, p = .670$ . The Decline of America was the only frame that was thematic ( $n = 10$ ) more often than episodic ( $n = 9$ ), though not significantly so,  $\chi^2 (1, n = 19) = 0.053, p = .818$  (Table 4).

Research question 2c asked if the frames present were primarily positive, negative, or neutral in their valence. To answer this question, frequency of the number of positive, negative, and neutral frames was calculated, and a chi square test was conducted in order to determine statistical significance of the difference between the three levels of valence. Neutral frames were most prominent in the sample (50%,  $n = 218$ ), followed by negative frames (32.80%,  $n = 143$ ) and positive frames (17.20 %,  $n = 75$ ). These differences are statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2, N = 436) = 70.408, p < .001$ .

Among individual frames, most followed this overall trend, though some frames showed variations. The Decline of America possessed negative valence 17 of the 19 times it occurred, while the Cynicism frame possessed negative valence in all 22 of its occurrences. The Human Interest frame possessed positive valence ( $n = 11$ ) more than it was neutral ( $n = 1$ ), and did not possess negative valence in any occurrence. The Metacommunication frame, while it tended toward neutral valence ( $n = 41$ ), possessed positive valence ( $n = 27$ ) more often than it possessed negative valence ( $n = 20$ ). The Societal Impact/National Identity frame was rarely positive ( $n = 2$ ). Of its remaining occurrences, valence was nearly evenly split between neutral ( $n = 23$ ) and negative ( $n = 21$ ) (Table 5).

Research question 2d asked if the frames present were primarily ambiguous or substantive. To answer this question, frequency of the number of ambiguous and substantive frames was calculated, and a chi square test was conducted in order to determine statistical significance of the difference between the two levels of classification. Overall, ambiguous frames (64.45%,  $n = 281$ ) were more prevalent than substantive frames (35.55%,  $n = 155$ ). This is a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2(1, N = 436) = 36.413, p < .001$  (Table 6).

Each frame was also analyzed individually to ascertain if significant differences existed in substance within frames. Most frames followed the overall trend, though the Conflict frame was substantive ( $n = 23$ ) more often than it was ambiguous ( $n = 22$ ). The Economic Consequences frame was ambiguous ( $n = 23$ ) more often than it was substantive ( $n = 18$ ), though this difference is not significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 41) = 0.610, p = .435$ . The Decline of America and Societal Impact/National Identity frames were ambiguous to a larger degree than indicated by the overall trend. The Decline of America frame was ambiguous in 89.47% ( $n = 17$ ) of its occurrences, and the Societal Impact/National Identity frame was ambiguous in 86.96% ( $n = 40$ ) of its occurrences. The only frame that was substantive more often than ambiguous was the Human Interest frame. In its 12 occurrences, it was ambiguous three times and substantive nine times (Table 6).

### **VI.c. Relationships between Frame Substance and other Frame Classifications**

Research question 3a asked if there was a relationship between frame substance and the classification of issue-specific/emergent and generic frames in U.S. newspaper coverage of the death of Captain America. To answer this question, chi square tests were conducted. The first test analyzed frame substance and issue-specific/emergent frames collectively. Of issue-specific/emergent frames, 69.77% ( $n = 60$ ) were ambiguous, while 30.23% ( $n = 26$ ) were substantive. This disparity in distribution between these two categories is significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 86) = 13.442, p < .001$ . This indicates that when frames in this sample are issue-specific/emergent, they are more likely to be ambiguous than substantive (Table 7).

Next, a chi square test was conducted analyzing the difference in ambiguous and substantive classification in Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames, the recurring frames Societal Impact/National Identity, Game, and Political Consequences, and the macro-

recurring frames Speculation, Metacommunication, and Cynicism collectively. Of these generic/recurring frames, 63.14% ( $n = 221$ ) are ambiguous and 36.86% ( $n = 129$ ) are substantive. This difference is significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 341) = 24.183, p < .001$ . This suggests that when frames are generic/recurring, they are more likely to be ambiguous than substantive in this sample (Table 7).

A 2x2 frame substance by frame type chi square test was conducted to see if frame substance and the classification of generic/issue-specific frames are significantly different. This distribution is not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 436) = 1.322, p = .250$  (Table 7). Therefore, no statistically significant difference was discovered.

Research question 3b asked if there was a relationship between frame substance and the classification of episodic and thematic frames in U.S. newspaper coverage of the death of Captain America. To answer this question, chi square tests were conducted. The first test analyzed frame substance within episodic frames. Among episodic frames, 65.52% ( $n = 228$ ) were ambiguous, while 34.48% ( $n = 120$ ) were substantive. This difference is significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 348) = 33.517, p < .001$ . This suggests that when frames are episodic, they tend to be more ambiguous than substantive (Table 8).

Next, a chi square test was conducted to analyze frame substance within thematic frames. Among thematic frames, 60.23% ( $n = 53$ ) were ambiguous, while 39.77% ( $n = 35$ ) were substantive. This difference is marginally significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 88) = 3.682, p = .055$ . This suggests that thematic frames tend to be more ambiguous than substantive, though this relationship may not be as strong as the one between frame substance and episodic frames (Table 8).

Finally, a 2x2 frame substance by episodic/thematic frame classification chi square test was conducted to determine the statistical difference, if any, between frame substance and the episodic/thematic frame classification. This distribution is not statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 436) = 0.858, p = .354$  (Table 8). Therefore, no statistically significant difference was discovered.

Research question 3c asked if there was a relationship between frame substance and frame valence in U.S. newspaper coverage of the death of Captain America. To answer this question, chi square tests were conducted. Of frames possessing negative valence, 74.83% were ambiguous ( $n = 107$ ) and 25.17% ( $n = 36$ ) were substantive. This distribution is statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (2, n = 143) = 35.252, p < .001$ . Among neutral frames, 62.39% ( $n = 136$ ) were ambiguous and 37.61% ( $n = 82$ ) were substantive. This distribution is statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (2, n = 218) = 13.376, p < .001$ . Among positive frames, 50.67% ( $n = 38$ ) were ambiguous, while 49.33% ( $n = 37$ ) were substantive. This difference is not statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (2, n = 75) = .013, p = .909$ .

A 2x3 frame substance by frame valence chi square test was conducted to determine the relationship, if any, between frame substance and frame valence. This distribution is significant,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 436) = 13.343, p = .001$  (Table 9). This result and the above results suggest that frames that possess negative valence tend to be more ambiguous than frames that possess neutral or positive valence.

#### **VI.d. Issues/Topics Present**

Research question 4 asked which issues were present in U.S. newspaper coverage of the death of Captain America. To answer this question, a frequency of the presence of issues was

conducted. A chi square test was performed on the valence of individual issues to determine if the distribution of valence within those issues was significant.

Comic books ( $n = 74$ ) and entertainment media ( $n = 32$ ) were discussed most often in the sample. War ( $n = 22$ ), terrorism ( $n = 19$ ), Patriot Act/civil liberties and rights ( $n = 17$ ), and George W. Bush/Bush administration ( $n = 15$ ) were discussed the next most frequently. Environment ( $n = 3$ ), economy ( $n = 2$ ), social class marginalization ( $n = 2$ ), and foreign reputation of America ( $n = 1$ ) occurred rarely in the sample. Other issues identified during coding include drug abuse ( $n = 1$ ), the Obama inauguration ( $n = 1$ ), guns ( $n = 4$ ), political corruption ( $n = 2$ ), the United Nations ( $n = 1$ ), sports ( $n = 2$ ), steroids ( $n = 1$ ), NFL player-turned-soldier Pat Tillman's death ( $n = 2$ ), individual crime ( $n = 2$ ), and a soldier's death ( $n = 1$ ) (Table 10).

Overall, issues tended to be discussed neutrally ( $n = 196$ ) more often than positively ( $n = 60$ ) or negatively ( $n = 88$ ). This distribution is statistically significant,  $\chi^2(2, n = 344) = 89.953, p < .001$ . Discussion of Captain America's death itself followed the same trend, tending towards neutral discussion ( $n = 98$ ). When it was not neutral, the discussion possessed negative valence ( $n = 28$ ) more often than positive valence ( $n = 13$ ). The distribution between all three valence categories about Captain America's death is significant,  $\chi^2(2, n = 139) = 88.849, p < .001$  (Table 10).

Entertainment industry-related issues (comic books and entertainment media) tended to be more positive ( $n = 44$ ) and neutral ( $n = 46$ ) in discussion than negative ( $n = 16$ ),  $\chi^2(2, n = 106) = 15.925, p < .001$ . In contrast, all other issues in the sample were rarely discussed positively ( $n = 3$ ). Discussion of those issues tended to be more neutral ( $n = 52$ ) and negative ( $n = 44$ ) than positive,  $\chi^2(2, n = 99) = 41.879, p < .001$ . Individual issues followed the same trend

with the exception of George W. Bush/Bush administration, which was negative ( $n = 11$ ) more often than it was neutral ( $n = 4$ ) or positive ( $n = 0$ ) (Table 10).

### **VI.e. Summary**

In sum, generic/recurring frames were more prevalent in the sample than issue-specific/emergent frames. While some generic frames appeared frequently in the sample, other generic frames, such as Game, Political Consequences, and Morality, appeared rarely. Frames also tended to be more episodic than thematic, though the Decline of America and Cynicism frames were nearly evenly split between the two categorizations. While most of the frames predominantly tended toward neutral valence, some frames, such as the Decline of America and Cynicism frames, predominantly possessed negative valence. Some frames rarely possessed positive valence, being predominantly neutral or negative, such as the Societal Impact/National Identity frame. Frames also tended to be more ambiguous than substantive, though the Decline of America and Societal Impact/National Identity frames leaned very strongly toward being ambiguous. Other frames did not lean as strongly toward ambiguity, such as the Conflict and Economic Consequences frames, while the Human Interest frame was the only frame that tended to be substantive.

As for relationships between frame substance and other frame categories, results suggest that issue-specific frames are no more likely to be ambiguous or substantive than generic frames. Likewise, episodic frames are no more likely to be ambiguous or substantive than thematic frames. However, results also suggest a correlation between frame substance and frame valence, namely that frames possessing negative valence are more likely to be ambiguous than frames possessing positive valence.

Finally, while the discussion of issues was predominantly neutral, discussion of non-entertainment issues was rarely positive, trending toward neutral and negative valence.

## VII. Discussion

This thesis examined how U.S. newspapers framed the death of Captain America. In doing so, relationships between frame substance and other frame classifications were explored. This study also revealed, to some extent, aspects of post-9/11 American reality.

Many different frames were present in the sample, though some were more prevalent than others. Overall, frames tended to be episodic in nature, though two frames—Decline of America and Conflict—were nearly equally episodic and thematic. Frames also tended to be neutral in valence, though some frames are notable for their lack of positive valence. Additionally, frames tended to be ambiguous rather than substantive, though some individual frames were more likely to be substantive than others. No significant distribution was found between frame substance and the generic/issue-specific dichotomous frame classification, nor was there a significant distribution between frame substance and the episodic-thematic classification. Results suggest a significantly different distribution between frame substance and frame valence, namely that positive frames are more likely to be substantive than negative or neutral frames.

Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed below.

### VII.a Theoretical Implications: Framing Theory

This thesis supports prior research about the prevalence of generic frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In fact, most frames in the sample were generic in nature. Two common generic frames in political and economic news are the Conflict and Economic Consequences frames (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001). Their relative prevalence in this study as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> most frequent frames suggests that they may also be common in news coverage of entertainment media, though further study is needed to explore the applicability of generic news frames to entertainment news.

In addition, this study supports the macro frame classification proposed by Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007). Macro frames are generalizable across different news stories, and serve as a base on which generic frames are built. Macro frames accounted for 39.9% ( $n = 174$ ) of the 436 total frames. The two most frequently occurring frames, Metacommunication and Speculation, were macro frames. This study's findings give support to the macro frame concept.

When utilized, the Metacommunication frame commented on the quality of the comic book story itself and the nature of the comics industry. While most news stories praised the quality of the story, some were less than impressed. "The recently finished Marvel event 'Civil War,' the death of Captain America, and Marvel's 'Initiative' storyline continues a trend of writing at Marvel focusing on more flash than substance" (Kulesa, 2007, p. A27). Stories also commented on the prevalence of this fictional death in the news, sometimes analyzing the political discussion it generated:

The news of the Captain's death caused a media frenzy last week, with many drawing allusions to the current political atmosphere... "We're not surprised that we got coverage. We are surprised by the magnitude of the coverage," said Joe Quesada, editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics. (Mautner, 2007, p. G09)

The Speculation frame was mostly utilized to provide predictions of Captain America's return. "Just like in 1969, when the Captain died in *Captain America* No. 113, don't expect this dirt nap to last. Comic book characters don't stay dead long" (Jensen, 2007, para. 25). In other instances, it provided a base to the Decline of America frame, providing diagnoses as to why the country has seemingly peaked:

The Marvel Universe, despite its superpowers and dramatics, contains many parallels to our own. The fictional federal government – faced with the issue of how to deal with several thousand walking weapons of mass destruction – took the easy way out, ignoring the Constitution and enacting legislation that impinged civil liberties. Marvel created a thinly-veiled allegory for our own present situation and turned Captain America into a comic book martyr for democracy. (Sullivan, 2007, para. 12)

This thesis also supports prior research about frames possessing either an episodic or thematic nature (Iyengar, 1991). Most frames were episodic, covering the specific event, also supporting prior research findings on the prevalence of episodic over thematic frames in U.S. newspaper coverage (Carlyle, Slater, & Chakroff, 2008; Dudo, Dahlstrom, & Brossard, 2007; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Jha, 2007; Mastin, Choi, Barboza, et al., 2007). While political, health and social issues were the focus of the news stories covered in prior research, this study found that episodic frames were more prevalent than thematic frames in entertainment news coverage as well.

In addition, a new generic frame may have emerged – the Societal Impact/National Identity frame. Identified as an emergent frame by Williams and Kaid (2006) as the impact an event has on a society's sense of identification with a nation-state, this frame occurred frequently in the coverage of Captain America's death. This suggests that this frame may be generalizable to other contexts. This finding also supports prior research that the identification of issue-specific and emergent frames may lead to the identification of generic frames (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001).

However, even in identifying a potentially new generic frame, other generic frames occurred rarely in the sample. The Game, Morality, and Political Consequences frames were not

prevalent, accounting for a combined eight of the 436 total frames. This suggests that some generic frames may not be generalizable to all news contexts. Framing researchers should exercise caution when identifying a new generic frame. The frame should emerge in a number of different news contexts (i.e., political, health, science, etc.) before announcing the emergence of a generic frame. In addition, the rarity of some generic frames in this sample suggests that some generic frames may only be applicable to certain news contexts and not others. The Game frame, for example, may only apply in the political news realm.

This study supports prior research suggesting that frames possess an inherent valence (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). Overall, most frames possessed a neutral valence. Prior research suggests that the valence of frames in the coverage of a certain event may be context-dependent. Some studies find that news coverage is predominantly negative in tone (Lichter & Smith, 1996; Ketchum, 2004; Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005). However, other studies have found varying degrees of valence in news coverage (Williams, 2007; Williams & Kaid, 2006; Williams, Kaid, Landreville, et al., 2007). This might be explained by the context of this particular news event. Other studies examining frame valence tend to analyze political news. The newspaper coverage of Captain America's death included stories written in dedicated comic book and entertainment columns as well as in national news sections. Though this thesis did not attempt to answer this question, it may be that stories in "hard news" sections of a newspaper were more negative in valence than stories in "soft news" sections of a newspaper. This may be the reason why neutrally valenced frames dominated, and suggests that entertainment news may not be predominantly negative. While this study does not attempt to answer that question, future research may attempt to do so.

Perhaps the most valuable theoretical contribution of this thesis is the development of the frame substance concept (Williams & Kaid, 2006). Three relationships involving frame substance were explored: frame substance and the generic/issue-specific classification, frame substance and the episodic/thematic classification, and frame substance and frame valence. Two of the three relationships were non-existent, while a consistent relationship was revealed between frame substance and frame valence.

No consistent relationship was discovered between frame substance and the classification of generic/recurring and issue-specific/emergent frames. It is unclear why no relationship was found. Though not hypothesized, the researcher assumed that perhaps issue-specific/emergent frames might be more ambiguous than generic frames due to the frame's novelty. However, this was not the case. On the other hand, perhaps their novelty would cause issue-specific/emergent frames to be more substantive than generic frames. Since the frames would be new and unfamiliar, more detail would need to be communicated. Again, this was not the case, as there was no statistically significant difference between the classifications. Perhaps in other news contexts, a relationship may exist, but this study reveals no consistent relationship between frame substance and the classification of generic and issue-specific frames.

No consistent relationship was found between frame substance and the classification of episodic and thematic frames. Prior research on frame substance takes great care to define frame substance as a different concept than the episodic/thematic classification (Williams & Kaid, 2006; Williams, Kaid, Landreville, et al., 2007). While there could be overlap between the two classifications, they describe two different aspects of frames. Episodic and thematic frames refer to the scope of what is covered in a news story, while frame substance refers to the depth of what is covered in a story. The lack of an observed relationship between these two classifications

supports prior research that suggests frames have varying levels of depth and substance (Williams & Kaid, 2006; Williams, Kaid, Landreville, et al., 2007). Had a relationship been found – for example, if frames tended to be more ambiguous when they were episodic – then doubt would have been cast on the soundness of the frame substance concept. Since no such relationship was found, the frame substance concept gains more legitimacy. However, given the lack of research on this topic, more research needs to be conducted exploring frame substance.

While no consistent relationship was found regarding the prior two proposed relationships, a relationship was found between frame substance and frame valence. Substantive frames were less likely to possess negative valence than ambiguous frames. Negative frames were ambiguous 75% of the time; neutral frames were ambiguous 62% of the time, while positive frames were ambiguous 51% of the time. This result counters findings by Williams, Kaid, Landreville, et al. (2007) that suggest substantive frames may tend to be more negative. While that study did not attempt to find a relationship between frame substance and frame valence, the two frames that were most often substantive were negative in valence. This study, however, suggests the opposite.

This finding could be due to context. Williams, Kaid, Landreville, et al. (2007) examined framing of the 2004 European Union elections. Perhaps in a political news context, an opposite relationship between frame substance and frame valence exists than the one that is found here in an entertainment news context. Further, it could be possible that the relationship changes not only between different news contexts, but within news contexts as well. Just as some political issues may be covered more positively or negatively than other political issues, so too could entertainment issues. Further study examining the relationship between frame valence and frame substance is needed.

However, if the relationship between frame substance and frame valence found in the present study holds true for future studies, then this may serve as a good omen for the general media-consuming public. Moldoff's (2007) findings suggest that frame substance may have a positive relationship with information retention. As a frame is more substantive, more information is likely to be retained regarding a certain news story. Though this study found that negative frames were more likely to be ambiguous, positive frames were just as likely to be ambiguous as they were substantive. This finding, in tandem with Moldoff's (2007) findings, is comforting to a certain extent. Though it may seem most news is negative, the news media may provide more depth to positive coverage than negative coverage. If more people are likely to remember positive news than negative news, then perhaps we need not worry so much about news coverage's negativity. Of course, more research is needed to explore this possible relationship.

#### **VII.b. Practical Implications: Newspaper Reaction and Post-9/11 America**

This study helped extend framing theory into the realm of entertainment news. Specifically, it analyzed how U.S. newspapers framed the death of Captain America, a symbolic fictional character. While this study contributed to the development of framing theory, it also provided a glimpse of how some media are portraying post-9/11 life. Both the frames and the issues discussed in the sample help reveal some aspects of media's attitudes toward post-9/11 American society.

Two prevalent frames that appeared often and commented on the state of American life were the Decline of America and the Societal Impact/National Identity frames. When these frames occurred, they were rarely positive. The Decline of America frame was predictably negative most of the time, while the Societal Impact/National Identity frame was neutral in 23

occurrences and negative in 21 occurrences. Needless to say, Captain America's murder seemingly struck a chord with many journalists.

Many articles lamented the erosion of American values that Captain America's death symbolized to the articles' writers, though the definition of American values varied from journalist to journalist. Many journalists used Captain America's death to editorialize against an erosion of civil liberties and the Iraq war. Some newspapers saw Captain America's death as a sign of an eroding American culture. In an editorial in *The Press Enterprise*, the death of Captain America was interpreted as a blow to the country's efforts to fight the war on terror, and decries an American culture "where moral courage and patriotism are in too-short supply" (Socking evil, 2007, p. B08b).

Not only do newspaper journalists fear American values are eroding, but they also might be so far in disrepair that there is no hope for recovery. In *The Philadelphia Daily News*, comics writer Christos Gage, when asked why he thinks Captain America's assassination resonated so widely, stated, "I think there's a nostalgia for Cap's era, a wish that values such as his courage, self-sacrifice and instinctive desire to do the right thing are still with us. But his death represents a fear that they're gone and they're not coming back" (Maida, 2007, p.32). Indeed, columnist Leonard Pitts reflected this very fear. "By my count, this is the fourth time Captain America has died - though never this emphatically. Still, I'm sure he will eventually return. I am less sanguine about the nation whose name he bears" (2007, para. 14-15).

In the *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, columnist Tom Henderson placed the blame for America's decline on its people. He compares the American people today with the American people during World War II. According to Henderson, American society today is "reactionary, fearful, angry, ignorant, and violent;" very different from the progressive idealism of the 1940s

(2007, p. 6A). “We could not have asked for a better hero to defend us. You, however, could have asked for better people to defend” (Henderson, 2007, p. 6A).

Some articles posed the question of the United States’ relevance directly. An editorial from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* asked, “O Captain, our Captain - if you're gone, what about us? So many people, both here and abroad, are wondering: Is America somehow past it? On the down side? Subheroes in a comic book that's not even funny? Does the end of Captain America portend the waning of his namesake land?” (“RIP Captain America,” 2007, p. A12). The article offered no answer to this question.

Not only is the possibility of irrelevancy salient to these writers, the specter of uncertainty looms as well. In the *Portland Press Herald*, columnist John W. Porter wrote, “As I watch events in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere unfold, I wish I could reach into my cousin's great bin of comics and find the final chapter. Instead, like you, I must wait for the next installment, not at all sure that the ending will be a happy one” (2007, p. C4). Nearly a year later, in a reflection on entertainment media, columnist David Harsanyi of *The Denver Post* stated, “Some say popular culture is typically a reflection of our national psyche. If that’s true, we’re a nation completely unsure of itself” (2008, p. D-01).

Many articles also explicitly mention that Captain America’s death was a culmination of a storyline with allusions to real-world civil liberties issues. In addition to the above articles’ mention of the Iraq war, columnist Leonard Pitts noted that Marvel’s Civil War storyline has parallels to the Patriot Act, which he opposed. Captain America’s resistance to registration – which Pitts compared to opposition to the Patriot Act – ended in his assassination. He stated:

For 66 years, Captain America has been the conscience and moral center of the universe he inhabits, the good soldier, the decent American, the one who did the right thing. Now

he lies bleeding out on courthouse steps, having tried and failed to stop the federal government from betraying core American values. The symbol of freedom lies dying with handcuffs on. (2007, para. 11)

A look at the discussion of the issues present in the sample may point to why Captain America's death seems particularly troubling to these journalists. In all issues not pertaining to comic books or the entertainment industry, few are portrayed positively at all (Table 10). Neutrality and negativity dominate the discussion of these issues. However, when mentioned, the George W. Bush administration is not depicted kindly. In the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, columnist Tony Norman sees Captain America's death as a protest against the Bush administration's perceived erosion of civil liberties. He called Captain America's death a sign of a nation's "descent into disillusionment" and stated "there's no more potent protest against the nation's drift toward constitutional tyranny than [Captain America's] absence" (2007, p. A-2). Columnist Mike Thomas of *The Chicago Sun-Times* referred to the president's "ever-plummeting approval rating" (2007, p. 31).

The death of Captain America pushed journalists to reflect on the state of American affairs. Generally, their view is a bleak one. Many journalists portray the United States as a nation in crisis; it is either waning in its resolve in the war against dangerous terrorists, or the country is destroying freedom through its revocation of rights and freedoms from its people. Clearly, journalists and columnists interpreted Captain America's death in different ways. Captain America's death itself tended to be portrayed neutrally (Table 10). However, some newspaper journalists used Captain America's death as an opportunity to reflect on a perceived degradation of American culture and values, though most reflections were ambiguous in nature. As noted earlier, the Decline of America and Societal Impact/National Identity frames tended to

be ambiguous. Journalists seem sure that Captain America's death means something, but they are not sure exactly what it means.

It should be noted that not all stories reflected on the health of U.S. culture, politics, and society. Some articles just read the character's death as a literary device. In the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, an editorial stated:

Somewhere, I'm sure, someone is warming up a keyboard with an elegy for the old soldier, one that might draw a parallel between the "death" of this particular icon and the patriotic faith of our nation. To me, that seems a facile and glib analogy, one that does the artists charged with spinning these graphic myths a disservice. Captain America's death is just a feint into the void, a little literary experiment to shake things up. (Martin, 2007, para. 5)

Some articles explicitly rejected the notion that Captain America's death was a symbol of America's decline. For example, in college newspaper *The Daily Athenaeum*, Martina Fetzer admonished pundits and journalists who attempted to read Captain America's death as a political and social allegory: "Sometimes a story is just a story" (2007, para. 11).

While the Decline of America and Societal Impact/National Identity frames were prominent in the sample, it should also be noted that most of the stories did not attempt to draw a link between Captain America's death and the current state of America. Many articles focused on the comic book issue's high sales. Many articles also focused on the comic book story itself, commenting on its quality. Others also emphasized the tendency for comic book characters, especially popular ones, to return from the dead.

In any case, the fact that this entertainment event received any media coverage at all is noteworthy, disregarding the reaction this fictional character's death conjured. While it is a

possibility these ruminations occurred because of a slow news day, perhaps it is a testament to the power of symbols and the mythology of the character. As noted earlier, ideological hegemony and establishment within a geopolitical narrative are attained in part through the consumption of popular culture (Sharp, 2000; Edwardson, 2003). Captain America functions as a living embodiment of American values (Dittmer, 2005), and therefore assists in the construction of a people's national identity. Captain America's place in the American cultural lexicon may be the reason his death sparked so much speculation on the health of the country.

Are we really a nation in crisis? What are the consequences of the United States' current policies on the state of the country's health? Perhaps this question can only be answered after the brunt of the impacts of 9/11, the Patriot Act, and the Iraq War have long subsided. The only conclusion this study can provide concerning this question is that U.S. newspapers are warily unsure of the answer themselves. Like any good issue of a superhero comic book, the American people are left with a cliffhanger ending, awaiting the next chapter and wondering if the nation will make it out alive and intact.

### **VIII. Limitations**

One limitation of this study is its context. It was noted earlier that some frames rarely appeared in this analysis. This may have occurred because of the nature of the story. Perhaps different norms exist in journalistic practice when reporting political news than in reporting entertainment news. This could affect the types of frames that appear in entertainment news. Another related limitation becomes apparent when one realizes framing was developed by researchers examining “hard news.” Relationships among frame classifications may differ according to different news contexts. Some generic frames may not crossover from “hard news” to entertainment news contexts. Likewise, perhaps there are generic frames present in entertainment news that have limited generalizability to other news contexts, though none emerged in this particular study.

This study’s sample size was also relatively small when compared to other content analyses of news media. Only 139 articles were analyzed, though this amount represents the entirety of U.S. newspaper coverage within an approximately 25-month period (Table 1). In comparison, Constantinescu and Tedesco (2007) analyzed 255 news stories, Williams, Kaid, Landreville, et al. (2007) analyzed 611 stories, and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) analyzed 2,601 newspaper articles and 1,522 television news stories. While the sample size for this study allowed analysis of several variables, some frames did not occur frequently enough for statistical analysis to yield accurate results. For example, the Responsibility frame occurred 24 times. Its distribution of episodic/thematic classifications yielded significant results (Table 4). However, its distribution of valence and substance did not yield significant results (Tables 5 & 6). An increased sample size may reveal tendencies in frame variables that this study could not.

Intercoder reliability was also on the lower end of acceptability, though as Van Gorp (2007) suggests, frames are abstract variables that may cause difficulty in obtaining reliability in content analyses. Overall, Holsti's formula averaged .84. Individual variables' averages ranged from .53 to 1. One variable (dominant overall frame) had a very low reliability of .267. Due to its low reliability, this variable was not analyzed and was not included in the intercoder reliability calculation. Analysis of this variable may have further illuminated the findings in this study.

Another limitation of this study is its methodology. This content analysis utilized a primarily deductive method of identifying frames. Frames were identified in prior literature and were coded for in the sample. One limitation of the deductive method of framing content analyses is its reliance on pre-determined frames, leaving no room for emerging frames (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). This limitation was addressed through the addition of an inductive element in the codesheet. Coders were asked to identify possible emerging frames in an article, guided by the definitions of a frame offered by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Entman (1993). Though inductive methods of identifying frames may have methodological limitations of their own (see Matthes & Kohring, 2008), every effort was made in training to ensure that emergent frames could be identified. While three emergent frames were identified from an initial reading of the sample, none were identified during the coding process.

In addition, this thesis only examined how U.S. newspapers framed Captain America's death. Undoubtedly, television, blogs, and other forms of media covered this event as well.

Finally, there was a noted lack of research specifically examining framing in entertainment media and entertainment news. Thus, this thesis did not have the advantage of

many prior studies examining this area of framing. However, this study may provide a framework from which future studies examining framing and entertainment news can build.

## IX. Future Research

There are several avenues for future research regarding this topic. This study found a relationship between frame substance and frame valence. Frame valence may have effects on how news coverage is interpreted (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). In addition, both the Decline of America and Societal Impact/National Identity frames were predominantly negative and ambiguous. Moldoff's (2007) findings suggest that political information efficacy tends to decrease when exposed to negative, ambiguous election news. Interactive effects of frame valence and frame substance need to be explored further, with different dependent variables and under varying news contexts. Such contexts may include, but are not limited to, health communication, political communication, public relations initiatives, and entertainment news. In addition, findings from Grabe and Kamwahi (2006) suggest that the effects of frame valence may be modified through gender. Therefore, interaction effects of frame valence, frame substance, and gender could be explored.

As previously mentioned, content analysis of media frames in entertainment news and entertainment media are not prevalent in the literature. More content analyses exploring framing in entertainment media and entertainment news contexts should be conducted. There may be frames (and aspects of frames) unique to entertainment news that need to be explored. Specifically, the correlation between frame substance and other frame classifications could be explored in other news contexts. While substantive frames were less likely to be negative than ambiguous frames in this examination of entertainment-related news, this relationship may or may not hold true in political, health, or social news.

Future studies can also explore Captain America's death via other research methodologies. Rhetorical and textual analyses into both the comic book story and news media

reaction could provide a more substantial look at the possible connection between Captain America's death, a perceived decline of American ideals, and post-9/11 America. While this thesis was able to provide a glimpse of this connection, qualitative analyses may provide further insight.

In addition, future analyses of Captain America's death should include reactions in other media. This thesis narrowed its focus to news coverage contained in American newspapers. Future studies may examine the reaction to Captain America's death in television news, the Internet, and other media. News coverage of this event in international media may also prove informative.

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## XI. Appendixes

### XI.a. Codesheet

Article ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Story Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Story Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Issue-specific/Emergent Frames:

(1) Decline of America \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = present, 0 = absent)

*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = episodic, 2 = thematic)

*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive)

*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = substantive, 2 = ambiguous)

(2) Comic Book Death as Temporary \_\_\_\_\_

*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(3) Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator \_\_\_\_\_

*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(4) Other (please specify):

*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Please explain this frame in the space below:*

Generic/Recurring Frames:

(5) Conflict: \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = present, 0 = absent)

*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = episodic, 2 = thematic)

*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive)

*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = substantive, 2 = ambiguous)

(6) Human Interest: \_\_\_\_\_

*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(7) Economic Consequences: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(8) Morality: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(9) Responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Who or what is described as the primary responsible party?:*

(10) Metacommunication: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(11) Speculation: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Primarily prognostic (1) or diagnostic (2)?:* \_\_\_\_\_

(12) Cynicism: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Who or what is the primary target of cynicism?:*

(13) Political Consequences: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(14) Game: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

(15) Societal Impact/National Identity  
*Episodic or thematic:* \_\_\_\_\_  
*Valence:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Substantive or ambiguous:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Please provide any noteworthy quotes and examples of the frames present in this article:*

Dominant overall frame:

- (1) \_\_\_ Decline of America
- (2) \_\_\_ Comic book death as cliché
- (3) \_\_\_ Comic book death as publicity stunt
- (4) \_\_\_ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) \_\_\_ Conflict
- (6) \_\_\_ Human Interest
- (7) \_\_\_ Economic Consequences
- (8) \_\_\_ Morality
- (9) \_\_\_ Responsibility
- (10) \_\_\_ Metacommunication
- (11) \_\_\_ Speculation
- (12) \_\_\_ Cynicism
- (13) \_\_\_ Political Consequences
- (14) \_\_\_ Game
- (15) \_\_\_ Societal Impact/National Identity
- (16) \_\_\_ Cannot determine/No frame present

*Please provide any noteworthy quotes and examples of the dominant overall frame of this article:*

Issues Identified (select all that apply):

Economy: \_\_\_\_\_ (0 = absent, 1 = present)

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_ (1 = negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive)

Social Class Marginalization: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_

Environment: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_

Foreign Reputation of America: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_

Terrorism: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_

War: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_

-Which war is specified? \_\_\_\_\_

Patriot Act/Civil Rights and Liberties: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_

George W. Bush/Bush Administration: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_

Captain America's Death: \_\_\_\_\_

-If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Comic Books: \_\_\_\_\_  
 -If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Entertainment Media: \_\_\_\_\_  
 -If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 -If present, valence? \_\_\_\_\_  
 -Please briefly identify the issue discussed: \_\_\_\_\_

Specify the dominant issue mentioned in this article:

Economy \_\_\_\_\_  
 Social Class Marginalization \_\_\_\_\_  
 Environment: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Foreign Reputation of America: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Terrorism: \_\_\_\_\_  
 War: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Patriot Act/Civil Rights and Liberties \_\_\_\_\_  
 George W. Bush/Bush Administration \_\_\_\_\_  
 Captain America's Death \_\_\_\_\_  
 Comic Books \_\_\_\_\_  
 Entertainment Media \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall tone of article: \_\_Positive \_\_ Neutral \_\_Negative

## **XI.b. Codebook**

*For each frame, use the questions below as guides to ascertain whether a frame is present or not present.*

### (1) Decline of America

Does the story suggest that the United States' principle values (democracy, equality, etc.) are eroding?

Does the story suggest that the United States is in a period of social, economic, or political (domestic and/or international) decline?

### (2) Comic Book Death as Temporary

Does the story imply that Captain America will return in some way?

Does the story suggest that all comic book characters who die will return eventually?

### (3) Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator

Does the story connect Captain America's death to higher visibility and/or profitability for Marvel Entertainment?

Does the story suggest that comic books often use death as a means to sell magazines?

### (4) Other

*If you feel that a frame is present that is not explicated on the codesheet, please explain in detail the frame and provide a relevant example(s).*

### (5) Conflict

Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups/countries?

Does one party/individual/group/country reproach another?

Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem/issue?

### (6) Human Interest

Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?

Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?

Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?

Does this story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?

Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?

### (7) Economic Consequences

Is there a mention of any type of losses or gains now or in the future?

Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?

Is there a reference to any kind of consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

### (8) Morality

Does the story contain any moral message?

Does the story make reference to morality, God, or other religious tenets?  
 Does the story offer specific (social) prescriptions or solutions about how to behave/act?

(9) Responsibility

Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?  
 Does the story suggest that some level of government is responsible for the issue/problem?  
 Does the story suggest that an individual/group of people in society is responsible for the issue/problem?  
 Does the story suggest solution(s) to the issue/problem?  
 Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?  
*Also identify the primary responsible party in the space provided.*

(10) Metacommunication

Does the story include the reporter's own opinions?  
 Does the author of the story cite other media?  
 Does the story mention how the news media has handled the event?  
 Does the story mention/discuss the communication strategy of a particular individual or group of individuals?

(11) Speculation

Does the story make any speculation about what has happened or will happen?  
 Does the story mention any hypothetical assumptions about the event?  
 Does the story ask or imply any rhetorical questions or inferences?  
*Prognostic or Diagnostic:* Does the story attempt to predict the future (prognostic) or attempt to explain why something has happened (diagnostic)?

(12) Cynicism

Does the story reflect any attitudes of disdainful or jaded negativity, especially as a general distrust of others' integrity or motives?  
 Are there any feelings that ordinary people cannot influence what the powerful do?  
 Are there any statements implying that powerful individuals in a society do not care about the others?  
 Is there any indication of (bitter) irony or sarcasm toward certain individuals or issues?  
 Is there any perceived sense of surrender to "greater forces" or alienation (i.e., refusal to participate in any social or political actions like voting, protesting, etc.?)  
*Also please provide the primary target of the article's cynicism in the space provided.*

(13) Political Consequences

Are political careers implicated in regard to the event described in the story?  
 Are political motives implicated in regard to the event described in the story?  
 Are political costs and/or benefits implicated in regard to the event described in the story?

(14) Game

Is the story characterized by players participating in a game?

Are actors identified as winning or losing parties in the story?

(15) Societal Impact/National Identity

Does the story explore the impact of Captain America's death on the American people's sense of national identity?

Does the story reflect on the current state of America's culture, politics, or society?

*For each frame identified as present, you'll be asked to identify the frame's valence, its substance, and whether it is episodic or thematic in nature. Instructions to ascertain these characteristics are as follows:*

**Episodic/Thematic:** 1 = episodic, 2 = thematic. Does the story deal with the frame at the individual instance or event, or does it attempt to link together broader themes? Does the story discuss only a specific period of time, or does it attempt to cover a broader time period?

**Valence:** 1 = negative, 2 = neutral, 3 = positive. What tone does the discussion of the frame carry? A negative valence emphasizes unfavorable treatments, aspects, or solutions. A positive valence emphasizes favorable treatments, aspects, or solutions. A neutrally valenced frame presents facts without assigning a positive or negative value.

**Substance:** 1 = substantive, 2 = ambiguous. Does the story provide adequate context surrounding discussion of the particular frame, or is it vague and lacking in context surrounding discussion of the particular frame?

*You will then be asked to identify which issues are present in the article. Mark a '1' if present, '0' if not present. If an issue is present, please identify the valence of the discussion of that issue.*

**Economy:** Any mention and/or discussion of real-world global or domestic economic issues. Do not include mention and/or discussion of comic book sales.

**Social Class Marginalization:** Any mention and/or discussion of real-world disadvantaged, marginalized, and/or hardships faced by a defined social group (i.e., racial categories, income categories, gender, age, etc.)

**Environment:** Any mention and/or discussion of real-world environmental issues. This includes climate change/global warming.

**Foreign Reputation of America:** Any mention and/or discussion of the way other countries view the United States. This includes views about policy, culture, and society.

**Terrorism:** Any mention and/or discussion of real-world terrorism in general, Al Queda, Osama bin Laden, 9/11, the War on Terror.

**War:** Any mention and/or discussion of real-world armed conflict. Do not include the Marvel Civil War comics event. Do not include references to the war on terror.

**Patriot Act/Civil Rights and Liberties:** Any mention and/or discussion of the Patriot Act, or any mention or discussion of civil rights and liberties.

**George W. Bush and/or Bush Administration:** Any mention and/or discussion of President Bush, his administration as a whole, and/or members of his administration.

**Captain America's Death:** Any mention and/or discussion of Captain America's death.

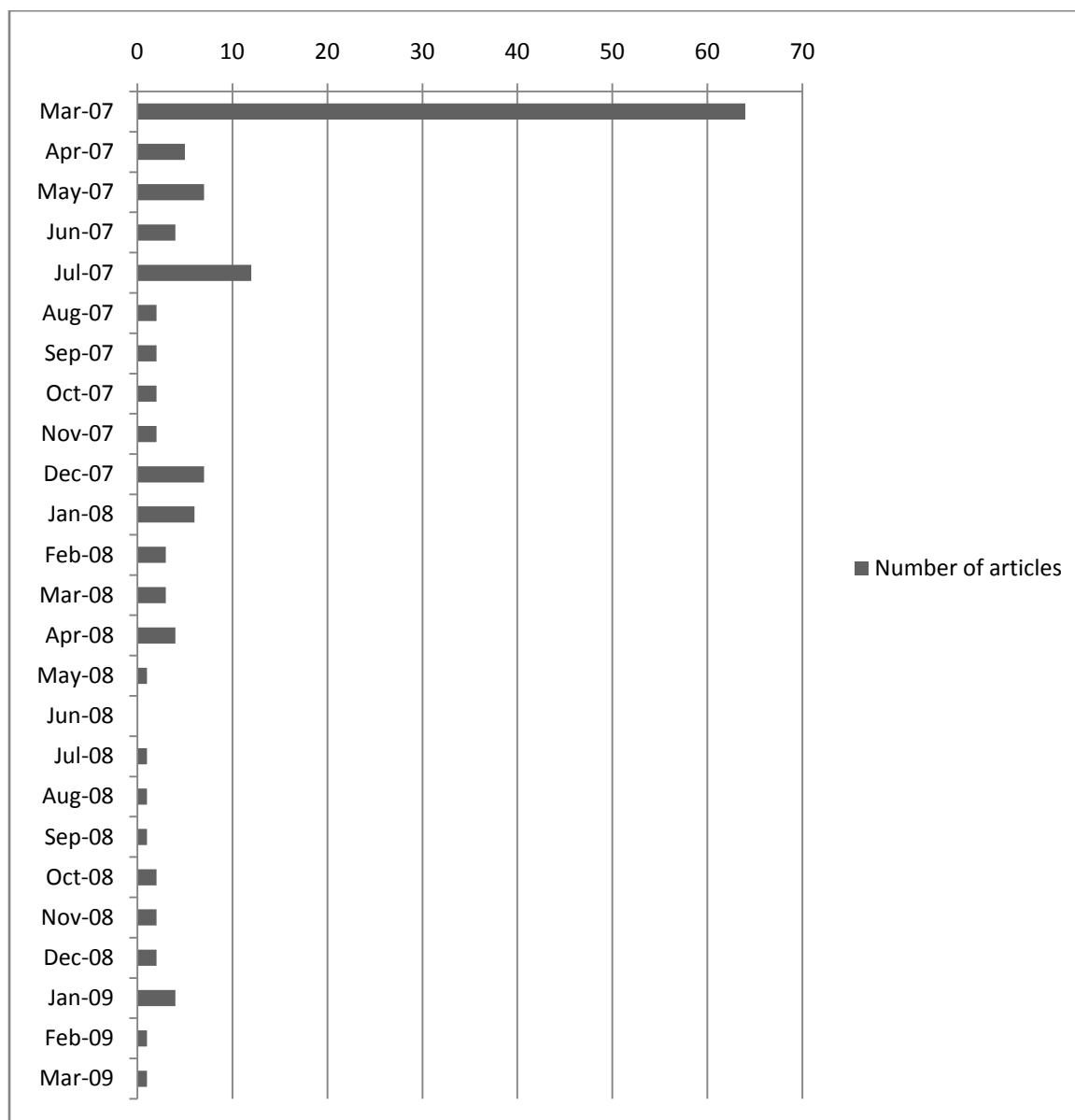
**Comic Books:** Any mention and/or discussion of comic books and comic-related topics. For example, reviews of books, previews of books, comic conventions, personalities, etc. Do not include discussion of Captain America's death.

**Entertainment Media:** Any mention and/or discussion of entertainment media other than comics.

*Then, identify the issue that is the dominant issue of focus in the article. Finally, identify the overall tone of the entire article.*

## XII. Tables

*Table 1. Frequency of Newspaper Article Distribution by Month*



*Total number of articles = 139*

Table 2. Frequency of frames

| Frame                                   | Times Present | Percentage |
|---|---------------|------------|
| Decline of America                      | 19            | 4.36%      |
| Comic Book Death as Temporary           | 52            | 11.93%     |
| Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator | 15            | 3.44%      |
| <i>Total Issue-Specific Frames</i>      | 86            | 19.72%     |
| Conflict                                | 45            | 10.32%     |
| Human Interest                          | 12            | 2.75%      |
| Economic Consequences                   | 41            | 9.4%       |
| Morality                                | 4             | 0.92%      |
| Responsibility                          | 24            | 5.50%      |
| Metacommunication                       | 88            | 20.18%     |
| Speculation                             | 64            | 14.68%     |
| Cynicism                                | 22            | 5.05%      |
| Political Consequences                  | 3             | 0.69%      |
| Game                                    | 1             | 0.23%      |
| Societal Impact/National Identity       | 46            | 10.55%     |
| <i>Total Generic Frames</i>             | 350           | 80.28%     |
| <i>Total</i>                            | 436           | 100%       |

Table 3. Issue-specific and generic frames

|             | Issue-Specific | Generic      | Total      | $\chi^2$ , DF=1 | <i>p</i> |
|-------------|----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------|
| # of frames | 86 (19.72%)    | 350 (80.28%) | 436 (100%) | 159.853         | <.001*   |

\*Indicates statistical significance

Table 4. Episodic and thematic frames.

| Frame                                   | Episodic   | Thematic  | Total      | $\chi^2$ ,<br>DF=1 | <i>p</i>          |
|---|------------|-----------|------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Decline of America                      | 9          | 10        | 19         | 0.053              | .818              |
| Comic Book Death as Temporary           | 40         | 12        | 52         | 15.077             | < .001*           |
| Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator | 13         | 2         | 15         | 8.067              | .005*             |
| Conflict                                | 38         | 7         | 45         | 21.356             | < .001*           |
| Human Interest                          | 11         | 1         | 12         | 8.333              | .004*             |
| Economic Consequences                   | 36         | 5         | 41         | 23.439             | < .001*           |
| Morality                                | 3          | 1         | 4          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Responsibility                          | 19         | 5         | 24         | 8.167              | .004*             |
| Metacommunication                       | 76         | 12        | 88         | 46.545             | < .001*           |
| Speculation                             | 56         | 8         | 64         | 36                 | < .001*           |
| Cynicism                                | 12         | 10        | 22         | .182               | .67               |
| Political Consequences                  | 2          | 1         | 3          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Game                                    | 1          | 0         | 1          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Societal Impact/National Identity       | 32         | 14        | 46         | 7.043              | .008*             |
| <i>Total*</i>                           | <i>348</i> | <i>88</i> | <i>436</i> | <i>155.046</i>     | <i>&lt; .001*</i> |

\*Indicates difference between episodic and thematic frames is significant at least at  $p < .01$

^Indicates average cell size is less than 5, so  $\chi^2$  would be suspect

Table 5. Frame valence

| Frame                                   | Positive  | Neutral    | Negative   | Total      | $\chi^2$ ,<br>DF=2 | <i>p</i>          |
|---|-----------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Decline of America                      | 0         | 2          | 17         | 19         | 27.263             | < .001*           |
| Comic Book Death as Temporary           | 4         | 39         | 9          | 52         | 41.346             | < .001*           |
| Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator | 2         | 6          | 7          | 15         | 2.8                | .247              |
| Conflict                                | 2         | 39         | 4          | 45         | 57.733             | < .001*           |
| Human Interest                          | 11        | 1          | 0          | 12         | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Economic Consequences                   | 15        | 17         | 9          | 41         | 2.537              | .281              |
| Morality                                | 0         | 2          | 2          | 4          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Responsibility                          | 7         | 7          | 10         | 24         | 0.75               | .687              |
| Metacommunication                       | 27        | 41         | 20         | 88         | 7.795              | .02*              |
| Speculation                             | 5         | 39         | 20         | 64         | 27.219             | < .001*           |
| Cynicism                                | 0         | 0          | 22         | 22         | 44                 | < .001*           |
| Political Consequences                  | 0         | 1          | 2          | 3          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Game                                    | 0         | 1          | 0          | 1          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Societal Impact/National Identity       | 2         | 23         | 21         | 46         | 17.522             | < .001*           |
| <i>Total</i>                            | <i>75</i> | <i>218</i> | <i>143</i> | <i>436</i> | <i>70.408</i>      | <i>&lt; .001*</i> |

\*Indicates statistical significance at least at  $p < .05$

^Indicates average cell size is less than 5, so  $\chi^2$  would be suspect

Table 6. Frame substance

| Frame                                   | Ambig.     | Substant.  | Total      | $\chi^2$ ,<br>DF=1 | <i>p</i>          |
|---|------------|------------|------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Decline of America                      | 17         | 2          | 19         | 11.842             | < .001*           |
| Comic Book Death as Temporary           | 33         | 19         | 52         | 3.769              | .052**            |
| Comic Book Death as Publicity Generator | 10         | 5          | 15         | 1.667              | .197              |
| Conflict                                | 22         | 23         | 45         | 0.022              | .882              |
| Human Interest                          | 3          | 9          | 12         | 3                  | .083              |
| Economic Consequences                   | 23         | 18         | 41         | 0.61               | .435              |
| Morality                                | 4          | 0          | 4          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Responsibility                          | 15         | 9          | 24         | 1.5                | .221              |
| Metacommunication                       | 51         | 37         | 88         | 2.227              | .136              |
| Speculation                             | 46         | 18         | 64         | 12.25              | < .001*           |
| Cynicism                                | 14         | 8          | 22         | 1.636              | .201              |
| Political Consequences                  | 2          | 1          | 3          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Game                                    | 1          | 0          | 1          | N/A^               | N/A^              |
| Societal Impact/National Identity       | 40         | 6          | 46         | 25.13              | < .001*           |
| <i>Total</i>                            | <i>281</i> | <i>155</i> | <i>436</i> | <i>36.413</i>      | <i>&lt; .001*</i> |

\*Indicates statistical significance at least at  $p < .001$

\*\*Indicates *p* value denotes marginal significance

^Indicates average cell size is less than 5, so  $\chi^2$  would be suspect

Table 7. Frame substance and issue-specific, generic frames.

| Type  | Ambig.       | Substant.    | Total      | $\chi^2$ , DF=1 | <i>p</i> |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------|
| Issue-Specific/Emergent                           | 60 (69.77%)  | 26 (30.23%)  | 86 (100%)  | 13.442          | < .001*  |
| Generic/Recurring                                 | 221 (63.14%) | 129 (36.86%) | 350 (100%) | 24.183          | < .001*  |
| <i>2x2 (type x substance) <math>\chi^2</math></i> |              |              |            | 1.322           | .250     |

\*Indicates statistical significance at least at  $p < .01$

Table 8. Frame substance and episodic/ thematic frames

| Type  | Ambig.       | Substant.    | Total      | $\chi^2$ , DF=1 | <i>p</i> |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|----------|
| Episodic  | 228 (65.52%) | 120 (34.48%) | 348 (100%) | 33.517          | < .001*  |
| Thematic  | 53 (60.23%)  | 35 (39.77%)  | 88 (100%)  | 3.682           | .055**   |
| <i>2x2 (type x substance) <math>\chi^2</math></i> |              |              |            | 0.858           | .354     |

\*Indicates statistical significance

\*\*Indicates that *p* is marginally significant

Table 9. Frame substance and frame valence

| Valence  | Ambig.       | Substant.   | Total      | $\chi^2$ , DF=1 | <i>p</i> |
|--|--------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|----------|
| Negative   | 107 (74.83%) | 36 (25.17%) | 143 (100%) | 35.252          | < .001*  |
| Neutral  | 136 (62.39%) | 82 (37.61%) | 218 (100%) | 13.376          | <.001*   |
| Positive   | 38 (50.67%)  | 37 (49.33%) | 75 (100%)  | 0.013           | .909     |
| <i>3x2 (valence x substance) <math>\chi^2</math>, DF = 2</i> |              |             |            | 13.343          | .001*    |

\*Indicates statistical significance

Table 10. Presence and valence of issues

| Issue                                  | Pos. | Neut. | Neg. | Total | $\chi^2$ DF=2 | <i>p</i> |
|--|------|-------|------|-------|---------------|----------|
| Economy                                | 0    | 1     | 1    | 2     | N/A^          | N/A^     |
| Social Class Marginalization           | 1    | 1     | 0    | 2     | N/A^          | N/A^     |
| Environment                            | 0    | 2     | 1    | 3     | N/A^          | N/A^     |
| Foreign Reputation of America          | 0    | 0     | 1    | 1     | N/A^          | N/A^     |
| Terrorism                              | 0    | 12    | 7    | 19    | 11.474        | .003*    |
| War                                    | 0    | 12    | 10   | 22    | 11.273        | .004*    |
| Patriot Act/Civil Rights and Liberties | 0    | 11    | 6    | 17    | 10.706        | .005*    |
| George W. Bush/Bush Administration     | 0    | 4     | 11   | 15    | 12.4          | .002*    |
| Other                                  | 2    | 9     | 7    | 18    | 4.333         | .115     |
| <i>Total</i>                           | 3    | 52    | 44   | 99    | 41.879        | <.001*   |
| Captain America's Death                | 13   | 98    | 28   | 139   | 88.849        | <.001*   |
| Comic Books                            | 36   | 26    | 12   | 74    | 11.784        | .003*    |
| Entertainment Media                    | 8    | 20    | 4    | 32    | 13            | .002*    |
| <i>Total</i>                           | 57   | 144   | 44   | 245   | 72.4          | <.001*   |
| <i>Overall Total</i>                   | 60   | 196   | 88   | 344   | 89.953        | <.001*   |

\*Indicates statistical significance at least at  $p < .01$

^Indicates average cell size is less than 5, so  $\chi^2$  would be suspect

### XIII. Note

1. The complete list of newspapers containing articles examined in this study are as follows:

*The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The Boston Herald, The Tulsa World, The Denver Post, USA Today, The Newark Star-Ledger, The New York Daily News, The Spokesman Review (Spokane, WA), The Indiana Daily Student, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, The Raleigh News and Observer, The Patriot News (Harrisburg, PA), The Deseret Morning News (Salt Lake City), The New York Times, The Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA), The Chicago Sun Times, The Philadelphia Daily News, The Greensboro News and Record, The Washington Post, The Houston Chronicle, The Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY), The Washington Times, The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock), The Bismarck Tribune (ND), The Columbus Dispatch (OH), The Herald News (Passaic County, NJ), The Berkshire Eagle (Pittsfield, MA), The Tampa Tribune, The Times Union (Albany, NY), The Arizona Daily Wildcat, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Business Wire, The Palm Beach Post (FL), The San Francisco Chronicle, The Dartmouth, United Press International, Newhouse News Service, The Associated Press, The Intelligence-Journal (Lancaster, PA), The Daily Utah Chronicle, The Daily Targum, The Roanoke Times, The Seattle Times, The Birmingham News, The Virginian-Pilot, The Contra Costa Times (CA), The Daily News of Los Angeles, The Chattanooga Times Free Press, The Sunday Oregonian, The Minneapolis Star Tribune, The Augusta Chronicle, The Jersey Journal, The Tacoma News Tribune, The Triangle, The Massachusetts Daily Collegian, The Herald (Rock Hill, SC), The Lewiston Morning Tribune (ID), The St. Paul Pioneer Press, The Daily Athenaeum, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Mobile Register, The Portland (ME) Press Herald, The San Jose Mercury News, The Boston Globe, The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, The Press Enterprise (Riverside, CA), The*

*Inland Valley Daily Bulletin* (Ontario, CA), *The Journal Record* (Oklahoma City), *The Lowell Sun* (MA), *The San Antonio Express-News*.