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RERPORTING POVERTY IN LOUISVILLE:
NEWS COVERAGE OF SLUM CLEARANCE, LA SALLE PLACE,
AND COLLEGE COURT, 1934-1938

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation *summa cum laude*

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ABSTRACT

This project examines poverty in news by analyzing reports on Louisville slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court public housing projects from November 1934 through February 1938 in the *Courier-Journal*, *Louisville Herald-Post*, and *Louisville Leader* newspapers. In contrast to current academic research, reports on issues related to poverty appeared regularly, portrayed the poor as deserving, and avoided intersecting poverty with issues of race or gender. However, in support of current academic research, coverage of poverty in Louisville neglected to discuss perpetual poverty and relied on elite sources for information. In the event of economic distress and federal intervention like the Great Depression, news reports may be more attentive and sympathetic toward the poor.

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Poverty is not just the problem of those who are poor. Understanding the sources and nature of poverty is in fact the basis for addressing some of the larger social problems of our day. (Iceland, 2003, p. 147)

According to research on how news media report on poverty, media contribute to class disparity. Over 40 million Americans live below the poverty line, yet discussion about poverty in mainstream news is sparse. Although the national poverty rate in the United States has declined since the Great Recession of the late 2000s, many impoverished citizens have descended into deeper poverty. In 2016, the portion of the U.S. poor population in severe poverty (i.e., persons with household incomes below half of their poverty threshold) reached its highest peak in 20 years (Bialik, 2017). In light of the fact that poverty remains deeply rooted, why do news media dedicate extensive coverage to political affairs, wars, and tragedy, but not to unrelenting poverty?

How media frame poverty influences public attitudes about poverty, class, and social inequality. In *Framing Class*, Kendall (2011) concludes, “In a mass mediated culture such as ours, the media do not simply mirror society, rather, they help to shape it and create cultural perceptions” (p. 210). By covering class issues and poverty selectively, media contribute to skewed beliefs about the poor. Grabe (2004) says, “[M]ass media content functionally caters to different segments of the population to promote social stratification and maintain the status quo” (p. 125). Rather than identifying longstanding inequality and exclusion, reports on poverty tend to focus on current issues such as overpopulation, famine, conflict, and economic turmoil (Lugo-Ocando, 2015). Politicized subjects mirror the interests of dominant social groups (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001) and the poor’s experiences are “easily distorted, erased, or naturalized” by media (Resende, Pardo, & Nielsen, 2017). When covering the poor, journalists generally produce negative, stereotypical, or sensational stories

(Awad, 2014) that intersect issues of class, race, and gender. News reports of poverty reflect how society understands socially and economically deprived groups.

Case Study

To determine just how entrenched media coverage of the poor is, this project examines how news media covered poverty generations ago during the Great Depression. Specifically, this project focuses on news reports about slum clearance in Louisville, Kentucky and the city's first two public housing projects: La Salle Place and College Court. As urban concentration increasingly characterized the American poor in the mid-1930s (Glasmeier, 2002), Roosevelt's New Deal provided more public aid for poor communities including government-funded public housing (Smith, 2008). Efforts to increase affordable housing coincided with policy makers' efforts to eradicate slums that had developed in cities across the nation. As urbanization progressed in the United States, slums also developed rapidly. Slums were overcrowded, dilapidated, and disease ridden neighborhoods that were a result of long term, concentrated poverty (Smith, 2008).

The city of Louisville engaged in slum clearance and public housing projects by developing La Salle Place and College Court. Authorized in 1935 for a total of \$1.9 million, La Salle Place would house 212 poor white families and College Court would house 125 poor black families:

The new buildings... will consist of three-story apartments and two-story row houses and will replace the present socially disqualified housing, which is in an advanced state of disrepair. Sanitary accommodations in the present are poor and the district is generally considered a slum.... (*Louisville Herald-Post*, 1934, p.1)

La Salle Place and College Court are fitting subjects for this case study because slum clearance and public housing projects directly affected poor people. Moreover, the racial

segregation of the two housing projects allows for an unambiguous comparison between reports of poverty and race. By analyzing news reports of slum clearance and the development of La Salle Place and College Court, this research tests the reporting of poverty in the news media, a subject essential to robust civil discourse.

The analysis of Louisville newspapers from November 1934 to February 1938 reveals that, in contrast to current findings, they published reports on issues related to poverty regularly, portrayed the poor as deserving, and avoided intersecting poverty with issues of race or gender. However, in support of current findings, coverage of poverty in Louisville neglected to discuss perpetual poverty and relied on elite sources for information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty Discussion in News Media

The academic literature concerning representations of the poor shows that American news media refrain from covering poverty. In mainstream news, economic inequality, social class, and poverty are mostly superficial or invisible (Bulloch, Wyche, & Williams, 2001). The Pew Research Center's Excellence in Journalism Project's (2013) study of fifty major news outlets from 2007-2012 found that only 0.2% of news coverage focused on poverty despite almost fifty million Americans living below the poverty line. Keeping class issues and poverty out of mainstream news contributes to stigmatization of the poor (Awad, 2014).

One explanation for the absence of poverty in news media is the myth that America is classless. According to Mantsios (2006), class identity is no longer a component of mainstream American culture. Furthermore, poverty is a sensitive topic that is often framed in a way that "obscures the class structure and denies any sense of exploitation" (Mantsios, 2006, p. 163). Froomkin (2013) says that despite the lack of news about the poor, persistent

poverty can be considered an “ultimate accountability story” because the outcome happens mainly by design (para. 7).

In *Poverty in America*, Iceland (2003) identifies several causes for concentrated poverty including “past governmental policies, racial and ethnic discrimination, residential segregation, economic changes and employment dislocations, the movement of prosperous residents to the suburbs, and finally, other, less definable social and cultural factors” (p. 57). Lister (2004) adds that poverty also involves symbolic injustice, an outcome of the way society handles poverty, including how media, public officials, and politicians frame poverty. Research shows that journalism about poverty seldom questions existing structures of power focusing instead on individual-level traits and disregarding political, institutional, or structural inequality (Iceland, 2003). Most literature concerning representations of poverty in news media refers to neoliberalism, the rise of individualism and the critique of the welfare state that became popular in the 1980s, an ideology that promoted free-market capitalism and opposed collectivism (Harkins & Lugo-Ocando, 2018). The ideology of the free market blamed individuals for their own misfortunes (Rose, 1996). Neoliberalism became the “main discursive regime for the news media for the years to follow” (Harkins & Lugo-Ocando, 2018, p. 55), and has influenced a pattern in traditional journalism of framing poverty as the result of individual failings. As a dominant perspective, neoliberalism influences how news media represent poverty (Redden, 2014).

Journalists avoid reporting on the social complexity of poverty and its causes. In *Blaming the Victim*, Lugo-Ocando (2015) shows that journalists report global poverty in terms of its manifestations rather than as a “by-product of inequality” and perpetual exclusion (p. 2). He adds that news media may cover poverty in the event of a tragedy (e.g., natural disaster or famine) or frame the issue within a political context (e.g., unemployment or poor housing conditions), but their coverage of the poor seldom includes structural analysis.

Kendall (2011) classifies news coverage of poverty as either thematic or episodic. Thematically, poverty is characterised in broad terms and the poor are often represented by faceless statistics. Episodically, the poor remain invisible except at holidays or times of tragedy (Kendall, 2011, p. 116). Kendall (2011) concludes that the majority of news media frame the poor as responsible to some degree for their own plight, which encourages the media audience to blame poverty on its victims.

Following the principle of objectivity makes journalists reluctant to address the causes of poverty. Developed as a pillar of journalism in the twentieth century, objectivity is the commitment to the separation of facts from values (Schudson, 1978). News companies strive to establish a reputation for objectivity in order to enhance their credibility and compete with other organizations, but journalistic objectivity has an adverse effect on understanding subjects of inequality such as the poor (Paim, 2017). In “Toward a Journalistic Aesthetic of Poverty?” Paim (2017) argues that traditional journalism cannot help solve social problems when its practitioners rigidly adhere to objectivity. Objective journalism is unable to discuss poverty as an outcome of institutional inequality without putting its perceived neutrality at risk. Instead, mainstream journalists use the third person and utilize logical or moral tones that separate the reporter from the subject (Resende, Pardo, & Nielsen, 2017). Paim (2017) says that objective reporting prevents audiences from empathizing with the subject.

Resende, Pardo, and Nielsen (2017) say that because journalists separate themselves from the subjects of poverty, “news risks freezing the experience of poverty into a second, more distanced level of recognition” (p. 16). Maintaining objectivity makes sense when reporting on governments, institutions, or public officials, but the authors say that it is necessary to question objectivity when journalists are covering subjects of hidden exclusion such as the poor (Resende, Pardo, & Nielsen, 2017). Lugo-Ocando (2015) describes how journalists default to “othering” when reporting on poverty; poverty appears in decontextual

narratives and in us-and-them dichotomies that impede the media audience from experiencing empathy (pp. 67-70). Carey (2017) adds that conventional journalism fosters silence and exclusion (p. 176).

News Sources on Poverty

Scholars also point out that journalists too often rely on official sources for gathering information. According to Grabe (2004), “In a society that places a high premium on equality and democracy, the demographic makeup of those who have their voices represented in the news is expected to be diverse,” yet only empowered elites serve as “society’s experts, analysts, and commentators” (p. 111). Individuals in dominant social positions (e.g., government officials, politicians, community leaders, and business executives) make up the majority of sources in mainstream news, and journalists rarely search out perspectives directly from the poor. Awad (2014) says that coverage of poverty from a dominant perspective is “negative, stereotypical, and sensationalist” and “disregards structure in favor of individualistic accounts of poverty” (p. 1068). In an effort to keep operating costs down, media companies employ fewer reporters who subsequently rely on dependable and low-cost sources for information (Kumar, 2004). The two most frequently cited sources in news reports are corporate public relations and state governments (Herman & Chomsky, 2002), and a significant percentage of news is based on press releases and public relations materials (Carey, 1997). Corporate think tanks also provide news media with a consistent supply of experts who often convey bias toward the wealthy class (Kumar, 2004). The limited scope of mainstream news sources ultimately deflects attention from structural causes of poverty.

Social elites and journalists have a complex relationship. In order to maintain access to elite social circles, journalists write about the wealthy and authoritative groups in their communities. Kendall (2011) concludes that news reports encourage readers to hold “elites

and their material possessions in greater awe” than the poor, “who are portrayed, at best, in need of our pity, and at worst, as doomed by their own shortcomings” (p. 4). Because they are closely connected to journalists, elites influence the information that audiences receive (Brown et al., 1987). In *Poor News*, Harkins and Lugo-Ocando (2018) conclude that the symbiotic relationship between political actors and news media is problematic because news coverage of poverty reflects the “frames, definitions, and narrow parameters” of discourse on poverty held among the elite (p. 71). Those with economic and political status use mechanisms including news media to sustain their power (Negrine, 1996). In *The News Untold*, Carey (2017) found that news media’s conservative approach to poverty is widely perceived as normal and that audiences often expect only certain voices to be heard in news reports.

Scholars understand that the conventions of journalism support elite social and political interests. Awad (2014) claims that even journalists who are inclined to challenge conventional coverage of poverty succumb to structural and organizational pressures. Kumar (2004) maintains that the economic demands of for-profit news media—primarily generating revenue via advertising—affect news content: “When attracting and retaining advertisers is one of the key economic imperatives, then the content of news media is shaped accordingly” (p. 18). In other words, the preferences of newspaper advertisers constrain journalists. Thussu (2004) explains that news media’s reliance on advertising results in constant pressure to deliver interesting coverage at a fast pace. These constraints on journalists often result in deficient news coverage of the poor. According to Thussu (2004):

In reporting stories about the dispossessed the journalists get little in return except perhaps some moral satisfaction and professional pride. In contrast, if they cover celebrities and economic and political elites, they rub shoulders with the rich and

famous and that proximity to power is what gives journalism much of its charm. (p. 55)

By relying on elite sources and meeting the needs of their economic stakeholders, commercial journalism hinders the poor. Froomkin (2013) notes that because neither advertisers nor readers are likely to demand more coverage of poverty, news editors will not assign more coverage of the poor. Journalists consider poverty stories “enterprise work” that requires extra time and commitment (para. 7), resources that are hard to justify given assumptions and generalizations regarding impoverished communities.

Stereotypes of the Poor

Coinciding with neoliberal ideology, poor individuals are stereotyped as either ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ (Harkins & Lugo-Ocando, 2018), and in mainstream news media, discourse surrounding the undeserving poor is dominant. In *The Undeserving Poor*, Katz (2013) explains:

The terms used to describe the undeserving poor—whether based on morality, culture, or biology—serve to isolate and stigmatize them. The undeserving poor, the culture of poverty, and the underclass are moral statuses identified by the source of dependence, the behavior with which it is associated, its transmission to children, and its crystallization into social patterns. (p. 2)

Historically, welfare recipients have been stigmatized as “bad people” who do not deserve assistance because they refuse to work (Blank-Libra, 2004, p. 26). In the 1980s, journalists and researchers described the undeserving poor as the “underclass” who were “morally inferior” to other impoverished citizens (Gans, 1996, p. 87). Kendall (2011) says that journalists sometime frame poverty as an outcome of failings in communities and the nation, but they mostly frame the poor as individually responsible for their plight. Historically,

American news media view children and the elderly poor most sympathetically because of their vulnerability (Gilens, 1996). In *The Mediation of Poverty*, Redden (2014) found that news coverage of the poor in Canada and the United Kingdom stereotypes the poor as “lazy, addicts, and fraudsters” (p. 48). Terms like “poverty-stricken, crime-ridden, violence-prone, welfare-dependent, drug-infested, gang-ruled, [and] predator-haunted” flourish in news reports about poor neighborhoods and encourage citizens to understand poor populations by these issues (Ettema & Peer, 2004, p. 283). Moreover, Hall et al. (1978) say that journalists often point to poverty as a cause of violence and crime, but they do not discuss the causes of poverty. With few exceptions, the poor in the neoliberal era are framed as undeserving.

Much of the literature connects misconceptions about the poor to racial stereotypes. In *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, Gilens (2013) says “The beliefs that blacks are lazy and that welfare recipients are undeserving are by far the strongest influences on white Americans’ welfare views.... The stereotype of blacks as lazy is doubly important because it influences the perception that welfare recipients are undeserving” (p. 80). Media images of the black, urban poor are overrepresented in poverty portrayals (Bulloch, Wyche, & Williams, 2001). Since the 1960s, the highest percentage of African Americans in poverty stories appears when news stories on poverty is most negative, whereas the lowest percentage of poor blacks are present when discourse is more sympathetic (Gilens, 2004). Poor black men have dominated images in news media as a violent and threatening underclass (Gans, 1995), and poor black women have been labeled lazy “welfare queens” who are purposely reliant on public assistance (Hancock, 2004). In a study of newsmagazine portrayals of the poor from 1993-1998, Clawson and Trice (2000) found that 49% of news images of the poor were African Americans, although only 27% of the poverty population was black. The authors also found that poor blacks were overly present and stereotyped in stories about welfare reform and childcare. In contrast, the authors found that poor whites were portrayed 33% of the time

despite making up 45% of the poverty population. Poor Asian Americans were not represented at all despite making up 4% of the population, and poor Hispanics were underrepresented by 5%. Overrepresentation of blacks in news coverage reflects negative attitudes towards African Americans. Clawson and Trice (2000) conclude that distorted images of the poor in the news perpetuate “negative beliefs about the poor, antipathy toward blacks, and a lack of support for welfare programs” (p. 63).

Poverty stereotypes in news media are also frequently gendered. Portrayals of the poor as passive, vulnerable, and reliant show how poverty is feminised and infantilised (Lugo-Ocando, 2015). Historically, women who receive public aid and charity have been scrutinized for their “financial and moral ‘worthiness’” (Kohler-Hausmann, 2007, p. 332). Blank-Libra (2004) describes the stereotypes of poor mothers: “promiscuous, young, single females, probably teenagers” who “have children to make themselves eligible for [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] or to get more AFDC” (p. 26). The depiction of “welfare queens” living the high life by defrauding welfare encourages contempt toward poor women (Clawson & Trice, 2000, p. 54). Ronald Reagan introduced the term “welfare queen” to public discourse on poverty in 1976, affecting welfare policies for decades to come. Popularizing the image of welfare queens in media “transmitted multiple messages with derogatory racial, gender, and class subtexts” (Kohler-Hausmann, 2007, p. 335). Coughlin (1989) concludes that images of welfare mothers in news media reinforce the myth that “they come from minority group backgrounds; they have suspect morals, prodigious fertility, and hopeless futures” (p. 86).

In sum, stereotypes in news media perpetuate negative conceptions toward the poor and stigmatize the poor as undeserving. Ultimately, classist, racist, and sexist assumptions made about the poor in news media neglect to contextualize the realities of poverty or attribute poverty to structural inequality (Bulloch, Wyche, & Williams 2000).

Depression Era News

Unlike contemporary news coverage of poverty that is based in the context of neoliberalism, journalism during the Great Depression accepted the welfare state and social collectivism. The economic Depression of the 1930s fostered cynicism about the systems of democracy and capitalism. Schudson (1978) says, “[T]he war, the depression, and the New Deal made political, economic, and social affairs so complicated that they forced journalism to emphasize ‘the meaning’ of the news and the context of events” (p. 148). Reporters’ unions formed in the 1930s to protect the professionalization of journalism and “put the mass media to work for the people, not the publishers and the socio-economic strata they represented” (Scott, 2009, p. 4). Many citizens were critical of mass media and its leverage in political affairs (Emery, Emery, & Roberts, 2000). As readers became more critical of editorial opinions, newspapers directed more attention to answering difficult questions as a result of cities facing deprivations in social welfare like poverty and lack of adequate housing (Kobre, 1969). Accordingly, subjectivity, specialization, and interpretative reporting appeared more frequently in newspapers, and scholars criticized objective journalism as an unattainable ideal (Schudson, 1978). According to Emery, Emery, and Roberts (2000), asking “why” became important in journalism in addition to summarizing “who did what” (p. 311). Still, as Welky (2010) points out, mainstream print media downplayed radical criticisms:

[Mainstream print culture] was a product of profit driven corporations that wanted to appeal to the largest possible audience within a target demographic. Mainstream sources used professional writers to shape messages that attracted readers. They played upon audiences’ fears, stroked their egos by justifying their lifestyle, and fed—or created—the myths governing their understanding of the world.... Mainstream print culture achieved relevance by creating an illustory national culture to which all

readers belonged, a national set of ideas and principles to which all Americans supposedly subscribed. (p. 3)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, politicians often spoke to journalists whose newspapers supported them. Likewise, most interviewing was “no more than puffery” for the politician being interviewed (Schudson, 1994, p. 576). Weaver and Wilhoit (1991) found that later approaches to journalism were even less analytical (e.g., “investigating claims, analyzing complex problems, discussing national policy, and developing intellectual interests”) compared to journalism in the early- and mid-twentieth century (p. 114).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research examines poverty in news during the Great Depression by analyzing reports about Louisville slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court public housing projects from November 1934 (when slum clearance was authorized) through February 1938 (when La Salle Place and College Court were dedicated) in the *Courier-Journal*, *Louisville Herald-Post*, and *Louisville Leader* newspapers. The *Courier-Journal* was a morning publication with the largest circulation in Louisville. Competitors of the *Courier-Journal* included the *Louisville Herald-Post* (an evening publication), *Louisville Leader* (weekly African American publication) and *Louisville Times*. The *Louisville Times* was the evening counterpart to the *Courier-Journal*, thus its content mainly replicated the *Courier-Journal*. Each article regarding slum clearance, La Salle Place, or College Court from November 1934 through February 1938 was examined according to the following questions:

1. *Location*: On what page(s) does the article appear?
2. *Subject*: What topic(s) does the article address?
3. *Illustration*: Do illustrations accompany the article? If so, what do they depict?

4. *Source*: What source(s) of information or perspective does the article identify?

5. *Cause*: Does the article discuss causes of poverty? If so, what are they?

6. *Description*: How are people living in poverty described?

The location of the article indicates the prominence of reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, or College Court relative to other news stories. The subject of the article reveals what reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court discuss. Illustrations (e.g., photographs and blueprint sketches) that accompany articles highlight particular dimensions of article subjects. Sources interviewed in articles reveal newspapers' consultation with elite and non-elite perspectives. Causes are identified in each article to analyze explanations for Louisville slum clearance, public housing projects, and poverty. Finally, descriptions of poor individuals included (and excluded) in articles on slum clearance, La Salle Place, or College Court are examined for stereotypes.

Unlike the *Louisville Herald-Post* that is available only on microfilm, the *Courier-Journal* and *Louisville Leader* are digitized and online tools allow users to search particular phrases throughout publications. In addition to articles on Louisville slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court, 150 other articles in which the term "poverty" appeared were examined in the *Courier-Journal* and *Louisville Leader* newspapers from November 1934 to February 1938.

Limitations

One difficulty of analyzing news reports during the 1930s is that the full variety of media is inaccessible. In addition to the *Courier-Journal*, *Louisville Herald-Post*, and *Louisville Leader*, newspapers published at the time included the *Louisville Defender* and *Louisville Times*. Like the *Louisville Leader*, the *Louisville Defender* is an African American publication. Unfortunately, there are no archives of the *Louisville Defender* prior to 1940 and

the *Louisville Leader* published only one article about La Salle Place and College Court. The *Louisville Herald-Post* ceased publication in 1936, so it covered only part of the events of slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court. Moreover, there are no archives of the *Louisville Herald-Post* from January 1935 through March 1935. Nonetheless, the *Courier-Journal*, *Louisville Herald-Post*, and *Louisville Leader* provided more than 100 articles for the purposes of this research.

This research examines news coverage of concentrated poverty in Louisville during the Great Depression. As with all case studies, the research findings that follow may not be generalizable. That is, news coverage of poverty in Louisville, Kentucky during the 1930s may differ from coverage of poverty during the 1930s in other locations. However, a case study that focuses on historical coverage of poverty within an urban U.S. location such as Louisville provides a significant point of comparison for other research that considers representations of poverty.

FINDINGS

As Table 1 shows, 121 news articles were found on Louisville slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court from November 1934 to February 1938—102 in the *Courier-Journal*, 18 in the *Louisville Herald-Post*, and one in the *Louisville Leader*. The number of news reports concerning the Louisville public housing projects demonstrates steady public attention toward the subject. Two-thirds (81 of 121) of articles regarding slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court were sporadically dispersed throughout the *Courier-Journal*, *Louisville Herald-Post*, and *Louisville Leader* newspapers—the median of articles being located on page seven. One-third (40 of 121) appeared on the front page. The *Courier-Journal* ran nearly one-fourth (25 of 102) of its articles on the front page, but the *Louisville Herald-Post* ran most (14 of 18) of its stories on the front page. Likewise, the *Louisville*

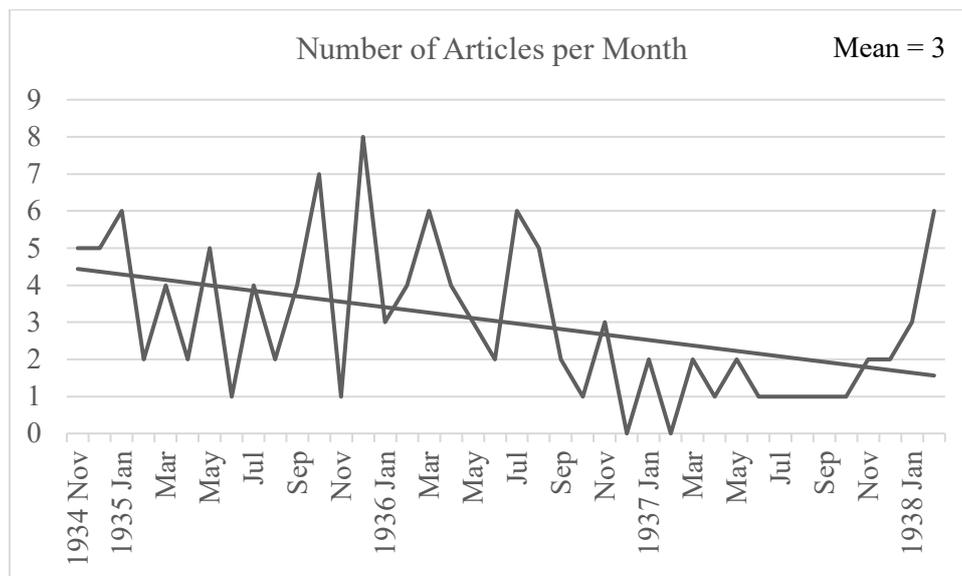
Leader published its single report on La Salle Place and College Court on the front page. The number of articles located on the front page of newspapers indicates the importance of slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court at the time.

Table 1: Location of Articles

Location	<i>Courier-Journal</i>	<i>Louisville Herald-Post</i>	<i>Louisville Leader</i>	Total	%
Front Page	25	14	1	40	33.1%
Other	77	4	-	81	66.9%
Total	102	18	1	121	100%

Figure A illustrates the consistent stream of coverage on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court. From November 1934 to February 1938, the *Courier Journal*, *Louisville Herald-Post*, and *Louisville Leader* published an average of three articles per month. Over time, as the trend line in Figure A indicates, coverage declines from the

Figure A



authorization of slum clearance to the dedication of La Salle Place and College Court as various issues covered in early articles were resolved and construction progressed. Events

that competed for coverage with slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court included the “Great Flood” of the Ohio River that dominated Louisville coverage in the early months of 1937.

News stories about the Louisville public housing projects focused on one of six primary subjects: economy, funding, housing need, legality, progress, and slums. Reports about the economy concerned business opportunity and employment. For example, a *Courier-Journal* article titled “Projects to Employ 1,200, Club is Told” said that “men will be employed on the two federal low-cost housing projects here when construction is begun” (1936, Mar. 6, p. 19). Reports about funding detailed federal grants and taxes for the projects, such as an article in the *Louisville Herald-Post* titled “Housing Project to Receive Coin: US to Provide \$1,800,00 for Clearance Here” (1935, May 28, p. 1). Reports about housing need supported developments in affordable housing; a source in the *Louisville Herald-Post* said, “[E]ach project shall include a group of family dwellings... to be offered at low rental... to stimulate the local real estate situation” (1935, Sep. 14, p. 1). Reports about legality concerned the constitutionality of federal intervention and zoning. For instance, the *Courier-Journal* article “U.S. Plans Appeal in Slum Clearance Case” said “Judge Dawson had held that the National Government lacked the authority for condemning the property involved for the purposes intended.... The decision of the Public Works Administration to proceed with the project was believed to have resulted from the favorable status of the preliminary work on the program here” (1935, Jan. 6, p. 1). Reports about progress provided updates on construction, rental pricing, tenant application, and dedication. Finally, reports about slums described insufficient housing and were accompanied by illustrations of such areas.

Table 2 shows that most articles on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court were reports about progress. Although progress in slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court was initially slowed due to legal challenges to federal intervention, almost half

of articles highlighted project progress (58 of 121). Accordingly, the *Louisville Leader's* single publication detailed the dedication ceremony for College Court. Like the number of news reports regarding slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court, the number of articles centered around progress of the projects indicates a constant level of public interest in improving city housing. Many stories discussed technical details about the projects, including specifics about funding (21 of 121) and legality (31 of 121). Few articles about the public

Table 2: Subject of Articles

Subject	<i>Courier-Journal</i>	<i>Louisville Herald-Post</i>	<i>Louisville Leader</i>	Total	%
Economy	5	-	-	5	4.1%
Funding	17	4	-	21	17.4%
Housing Need	3	1	-	4	3.3%
Legality	28	3	-	31	25.6%
Progress	47	10	1	58	47.9%
Slums	2	-	-	2	1.7%
Total	102	18	1	121	100%

housing projects focused on shortage of available housing (4 of 121) or slum conditions (2 of 121). Likewise, few articles emphasized potential economic benefits (5 of 121) of slum clearance and construction of public housing such as opportunities for real estate and employment.

Table 3 shows that 18 illustrations accompanied news stories pertaining to slum clearance, La Salle Place, or College Court. Similar to preceding findings, the majority of illustrations (10 of 18) were photographs of construction that demonstrated project progression. One-third of the illustrations (6 of 18) were photographs of government officials involved with the projects. Interestingly, two photographs in the *Courier-Journal* displayed

slum conditions in Louisville (see Figure B). One description read, “Blight and slum conditions are costing the city thousands of dollars yearly and are perpetuating miserable

Table 3: Illustrations Attached to Articles

Illustration	<i>Courier-Journal</i>	<i>Louisville Herald-Post</i>	<i>Louisville Leader</i>	Total	%
Construction	8	2	-	10	55.6%
Government Official	3	3	-	6	33.3%
Slums	2	-	-	2	11.1%
Total	13	5	-	18	100%

living conditions for hundreds of families, according to surveys of actual living conditions” (1938, Jan. 30, p. 54), acknowledging the severity of the poor’s living conditions.

Figure B (*Courier-Journal*, 1938, Jan. 30, p. 54)

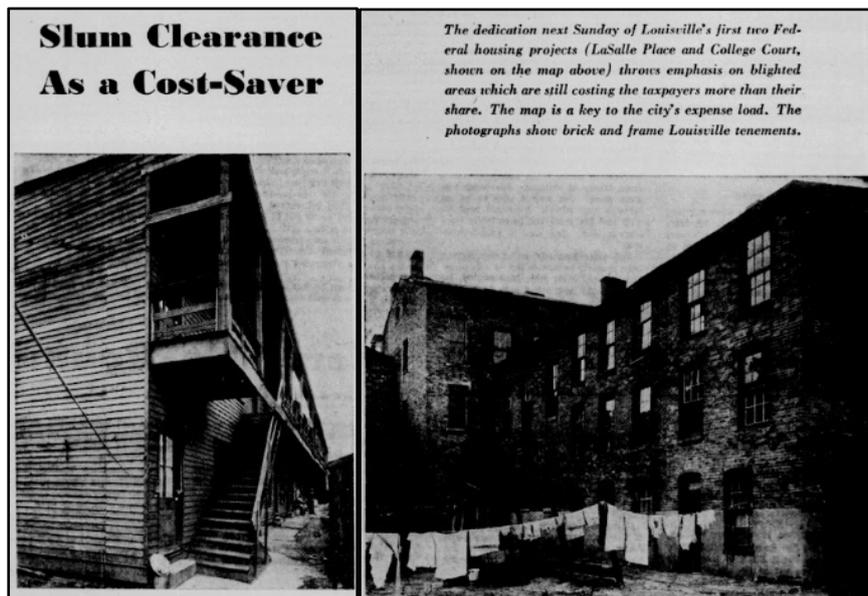


Table 4 shows that most people interviewed in regard to slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court (82 of 82) were in elite social positions. Nearly two-thirds of elite sources were government officials (54 of 82), primarily white men from local government, the city municipal housing commission, and the Public Works Administration. Other elite

sources included business executives (12 of 82), attorneys (8 of 82), judges (4 of 82), local property owners (2 of 82), and national news agencies (2 of 82). Just two sources from the

Table 4: Sources Interviewed in Articles

Source	<i>Courier-Journal</i>	<i>Louisville Herald-Post</i>	<i>Louisville Leader</i>	Total	%
Elite	73	9		82	97.6%
Non-elite	2	-	-	2	2.4%
Total	75	9	-	84	100%

Courier-Journal were people in non-elite positions. One person interviewed was a black man who expressed his appreciation for College Court, and another was a poor white man who expressed concern about the La Salle Place tenant waiting list.

Table 5 reveals that six news stories contextualized the need for Louisville slum clearance and public housing. The *Courier-Journal* concentrated on manifestations of poverty such as lack of adequate housing (2 of 6) and unemployment (3 of 6) when reasoning

Table 5: Causes of Poverty Explained in Articles

Cause	<i>Courier-Journal</i>	<i>Louisville Herald-Post</i>	<i>Louisville Leader</i>	Total	%
Housing Need	2	-	-	2	33.3%
Unemployment	3	-	-	3	50.0%
Structural Failing	-	1	-	1	16.7%
Total	5	1	-	6	100%

clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court. For example, one source said,

It has been estimated that [federal] projects will provide housing accommodations for approximately 160,000 persons and employment for many thousands of men. One of the declared policies of Congress in enacting the National Industrial Recovery Act

was to reduce and relieve unemployment quickly. (*Courier-Journal*, 1935, Feb. 10, p. 10).

However, one article from the *Louisville Herald-Post* blamed structural failings within the city:

City organization presents the salient example of the lack of coordination.... Our present cities then are not only disorganized but anachronistic. The city pattern and the form shelter have evolved from and are still based upon the log cabin and the cow path.... In same way, to save their existence, our cities must reclaim these decaying interior areas.... In every case their present use, cheap housing in unfit dwellings, must change. (1936, Jan. 1, p. 25)

Finally, Table 6 shows that nearly half of news reports portrayed the poor as deserving (34 of 69). One source from the *Courier-Journal* said, “Government may undertake those projects which benefit the health, the moral, and the general welfare of the people” (1935, July 16, p. 2), indicating that the poor deserve improved living conditions.

Table 6: Descriptions of the Poor in Articles

Description	<i>Courier-Journal</i>	<i>Louisville Herald-Post</i>	<i>Louisville Leader</i>	Total	%
Deserving	29	5	-	34	49.3%
Undeserving	5	1	-	6	8.7%
Race	22	7	-	29	42.0%
Total	56	13	-	69	100%

One source from the *Louisville Herald-Post* said, “[S]ome other means must be found of providing decent, adequate shelter for millions of people” (1936, Jan. 1, p. 25). Although the poor were mainly portrayed as deserving, a few descriptions of the poor focused on their desperation and neglected to provide context. For instance, the *Courier-Journal* published a

story concerning a prospective tenant who wanted to live in La Salle Place: “[W]hen the project was still more or less in the air... she pleaded with pathos for a modest little flat in which she and her husband could find peace at a low price” (1937, Aug. 18, p. 2). Ultimately, narratives about the poor and their experiences lacked explanation and potential solutions. Some commentary portrayed the poor as undeserving (6 of 69), mainly by critics of federal intervention who considered slum clearance and public housing costly and wasteful.

Similarly, the mayor of Louisville commented on the severity of slum conditions:

Miller pointed out the menace of slums to the public health, safety, and welfare of the citizens, declaring that “they breed disease which not only affects the inhabitants of the area, but spreads to other sections,” and that in each slum section, “juvenile delinquency, crime, and immorality flourish... [slums] are an economic liability and constitute a financial drain on the municipality. (*Courier-Journal*, 1936, Apr. 23, p. 12)

Mayor Miller supported slum clearance and public housing projects, yet his rhetoric conveyed disdain for the poor. Additionally, about one-half of descriptions regarding the poor specified their race (29 of 69) in order to differentiate La Salle Place tenants (white) from College Court tenants (black). Interestingly, there was no other racial identification in news reports about the poor. Also, reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court made no gender identifications about the poor.

DISCUSSION

Coverage of issues related to poverty in Louisville seems more prevalent from November 1934 to February 1938 than coverage of poverty in mainstream news today. For more than three years, local newspapers covered slum clearance and construction of La Salle Place and College Court public housing projects almost weekly (121 articles in 169 weeks)

and placed one in three reports on the front page. Unlike commercial news today, which seldom reports on poverty and class, newspapers in Louisville during the Great Depression covered issues concerning poverty routinely.

Although Louisville newspapers covered issues related to poverty, they mainly focused on slum clearance and public housing projects rather than the subject of poverty as such. In total, 695 articles contained the term “poverty” in the *Courier-Journal* from November 1934 to February 1938. Searching 150 articles (more than twenty percent) in which the term appeared revealed that only one column repeatedly concerned poverty. “Along the King’s Highway” by Linda Hope Carew was a weekly column that described the struggles of poor families and advocated for providing charity to the poor. In one editorial, Carew said:

[I]f the poor are to live, it is going to cost them more to live. What can they do? What would you do, my friends, if you suddenly found yourselves facing the blank wall of poverty? ...I urge you to help them save on the heavy clothing, the warm bedding and the whole shoes they must have if they are not to fall ill, that they may have something with which to buy fuel. (*Courier-Journal*, 1934, Nov. 18, p. 42)

“Along the King’s Highway” encouraged newsreaders to empathize with the poor and to provide them with assistance, yet because it was an opinion piece, the column was purposely isolated from headline news and placed in the editorial section. Other news articles that mentioned “poverty” were not focused on poverty as were reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court.

Although the *Louisville Leader* contained only one article about slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court, one editorial did concern poverty and race. In “Race Prejudice Blocks Old Age Pension,” R.A. Adams says:

Southern Democracy, which controls the administration, would oppose [an old-age pension bill] because three-fourths of such money would go to colored people of the South. So, according to this information, needy white people of the nation are to be denied this consideration and the help so necessary, in order to prevent benefits from reaching Negroes in the Southland.... [P]rejudice is unreasoning, as well as blind, therefore it will not hear this argument, and so the southern oligarchy will increase its poverty when it might increase its wealth. (*Louisville Leader*, 1935, Jan. 19, p. 3)

Adams criticized the federal government for blocking financial support to white and black citizens who are in need because of long-standing racial prejudices. Moreover, the content of the editorial demonstrates an intersection between poverty and race. The writer emphasized how the government manifested poverty in America by making their decisions based on racial motivations. This editorial is a rare example of journalism that analyzes institutional causes for poverty in America. Unfortunately, the reach of the *Louisville Leader* was limited mainly to black readers.

News articles about Louisville slum clearance and public housing projects mainly concerned federal funding, regulation, constitutionality, and construction details. By focusing on technical details of the projects such as taxation and legal disputes and how they affected the city in general, the issues were less about poverty and more about broad improvements in infrastructure. According to Lugo-Ocando (2015), news media often report poverty issues within a sensational or political frame rather than in an analytical or structural context. Reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court emphasized each stage of progress—highlighting sites, housing layouts and amenities, and tenant requirements and rental prices. News reports did not address the subject of poverty per se, but they increased awareness for the projects and detailed amenities included in affordable housing. Like

coverage of poverty today, news reports neglected to contextualize slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court and explain their relationship to poverty in Louisville.

Although the *Courier-Journal* published photographs of a slum in Louisville, the accompanying article did not provide historical context for its existence. Occasional news reports that provided background for the housing projects pointed to a shortage of housing and a lack of employment opportunities rather than to institutional deficiencies or inequality. The frequency of articles on Louisville slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court was a response to the Depression and Roosevelt's New Deal. Reporting on poverty was a response to a growing number of slums and the need for adequate housing in Louisville. When reports connected Louisville slum clearance and public housing projects with widespread economic deprivation, the public may have accepted slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court as practical efforts to ease suffering caused by the Great Depression instead of blaming institutional shortcomings. Importantly, a source in the *Louisville Herald-Post* blamed structural failings within local government, but the criticism mainly concerned the government's lack of initiative to improve city infrastructure and housing rather than perpetual poverty.

Newswriters strived for an objective stance when reporting on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court. By the early twentieth century, objective journalism was an expectation in American news. Newswriters who attributed poverty to systemic shortcomings risked receiving negative responses from other professionals for interpreting, rather than simply reporting, verifiable facts. Although the Depression fostered cynicism toward the economy and its governance, Louisville newswriters overlooked structural analysis of poverty in their reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court. Pressured to produce numerous stories, journalists had little time or resources available to analyze potential causes for events such as slum clearance and public housing projects. Consequently,

news reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court perpetuated decontextual narratives and the normalization of poverty.

With the rare exception, white males in elite social positions were sources in reports about slum clearance, La Salle Place, or College Court. Like today, journalism on poverty in Louisville during the Great Depression relied on dominant perspectives for information. Although opinions on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court were mainly positive, they were political and did not discuss systemic inequality. For example, a member of the Public Works Administration encouraged slum clearance and public housing construction:

[T]he recent economic collapse has emphasized the crisis of unemployment; the cessation of activity in the building industry has brought a shortage of housing too acute to ignore longer; and intensity of social evils in the blighted areas has now reached a point which forces the local taxpayers in many of our cities to pour thousands of dollars into sections returning hundreds in taxes. (*Louisville Herald-Post*, 1936, Jan. 1, p. 25)

Most accounts of the Louisville projects were motivated by politics and emphasized economic manifestations of concentrated poverty. However, unlike accounts today that are motivated by neoliberal ideology, sources did not necessarily favor individualist accounts of poverty. While focusing on the politics of slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court, elite sources agreed that the projects would improve citizens' overall welfare. Elite sources readily provided dependable information to journalists; gathering information from diverse points of view was more challenging. Yet, by relying on information from sources in power, journalists enabled elites to control coverage of slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court and thus influence beliefs about local poverty.

Of the 84 sources who commented on Louisville slum clearance and public housing projects, only two were people in non-elite positions. Once La Salle Place and College Court were dedicated and ready for occupancy, one black citizen expressed his gratitude for College Court and said the government's work "gives to hundreds of our citizens the first decent housing they have ever known" (*Courier-Journal*, 1938, Feb. 7, p.1). A white man, hoping to move to La Salle Place, expressed disappointment about his position on the tenant waiting list and requested that he be given the status of "Tenant No. 1" (*Courier-Journal*, 1937, Aug. 18, p. 2). This single account was an outlier, a rare non-elite source in reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court. Like news reports today, poor voices were virtually absent from Louisville newspapers during the 1930s.

In contrast to current findings, coverage of slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court primarily portrayed the poor as deserving improved living conditions. How news articles described concentrated poverty ultimately supported the city's efforts in slum clearance and construction of public housing. Slums were described as crowded, disease-ridden, and unacceptable means for shelter. The *Louisville Herald-Post* emphasized the amenities included in La Salle Place and College Court:

[The housing units] will be thoroughly modern, with mechanical refrigeration, central heating, tile baths, build-in kitchen equipment and group laundry fittings.... The houses themselves will be surrounded by lawns, shrubs, trees and hedges, an effort being made in the landscaping to provide small country homes for families in a congested city area. (1935, Dec. 30, p. 1)

On several occasions, newswriters detailed the benefits that tenants of La Salle Place and College Court had to look forward to. Yet, according to Glasmeier (2002), "Public sentiment toward the poor changed little during the Depression years, and in some instances probably worsened as the general population experienced their own economic insecurity" (p. 163).

Additionally, terms used to describe the deserving poor often avoided context. For instance, the *Courier-Journal* described a prospective tenant who “pleaded” for a home in La Salle Place. The article failed to explain the person’s concerns and ignored potential solutions that could alleviate the person’s desperation. A few descriptions portrayed the poor as undeserving, although such instances were far less prevalent than news reports on poverty today. Reports on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court that depicted the poor as undeserving described slums as costly to taxpayers and centers of crime and immorality. Associating negative characteristics with poverty in news reports contributes to the common belief that the poor fail to live up to American ideals (Clawson & Trice, 2000). Associating slums with costliness and deviance in the Depression paralleled the widespread conception that the poor are inferior in the neoliberal era.

Nearly one in four news articles on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court segregated descriptions of the poor by their race, differentiating La Salle Place tenants (white) from College Court tenants (black). Contrary to contemporary reports, 1930s news about poverty in Louisville did not overrepresent poor African American citizens compared to poor white citizens. Aside from their segregation, descriptions of the white poor and the black poor were homogenous in the *Courier-Journal*, the *Louisville Herald-Post*, and the *Louisville Leader* in coverage of slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court. Similar to discourse about the undeserving poor, antipathy toward the African American poor is exacerbated by neoliberal stereotypes and opposition to welfare, although this perspective was less prominent prior to the 1960s (Gilens, 2004). Interestingly, articles on slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court also did not differentiate the poor by their gender. With a single exception, prospective public housing tenants were not identified as male or female. Modern representations feminize the poor by portraying them as passive,

vulnerable, and reliant; however, local news representations of the poor in 1930s Louisville did not perpetuate gender stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

News in Louisville during the mid-1930s covered issues about poverty more than mainstream news outlets do today. Louisville journalists portrayed the poor as deserving and did not associate poverty with race or gender. However, news about slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court focused on the construction of Louisville's public housing projects rather than their residents. Like recent reports, Louisville newspapers neglected to discuss perpetual poverty, lacked in-depth analyses, and relied on elite sources for information. Ultimately, journalists in Louisville during the 1930s distanced poverty and class inequality from news by reporting only on political initiatives related to slum clearance, La Salle Place, and College Court.

Studying journalism on local poverty during the Great Depression contributes to how scholars understand news coverage about the poor today. According to current research, media outlets seldom report on poverty and perpetuate stereotypes about the undeserving poor. Had slum clearance and construction of public housing in Louisville occurred after the Great Depression, coverage of the poor may have more closely aligned with current research about poverty in news. Nonetheless, both the findings in this project and findings in current research support that mainstream news media fail to discuss the deep roots of poverty. To increase discourse surrounding poverty and enhance the quality of news concerning social issues, news editors should encourage journalists to engage in their communities and practice civic reporting. In addition to traditional reporting, editors may dedicate columns to analyzing inequities in their communities and offering solutions for social problems.

Most research explores the connection between news reports on American poverty and neoliberal theory. However, late research neglects to analyze reports on poverty from diverse historical contexts prior to mainstream neoliberal and individualist ideologies. When examining the relationships between journalism and poverty, scholars should be careful when considering their findings in reference to neoliberalism. This case study demonstrates that in the event of economic distress and federal intervention like the Great Depression, news reports may be more attentive and sympathetic toward the poor. Future research is necessary in order to analyze poverty from different contexts and explore their relationship to beliefs about poverty today.

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