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Abstract

This article examines the political discourse surrounding NCLB, educational reform, and how that discourse shaped perceptions of public education during the Bush Administration. Examining mass media campaigns in the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine*, the article demonstrates how the media has visually and textually framed and reinforced NCLB and market reforms as the only solution to address the failures of public education by attacking teachers' unions and individual teachers. Visual and textual data were collected, cataloged, and analyzed employing frame analysis in concert with critical discourse and visual analysis. Analysis revealed that media framing presented an overwhelmingly negative image of teachers' unions as opposed to NCLB and other school reform efforts. Even in the rare instances where unions were presented positively, the debate resonated with general public perception so that even when individuals or the general public are critical of NCLB and educational reform efforts, they support overall premises about "saving" public education.

Keywords

No Child Left Behind Act, politics of education, mass media, school reform

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Introduction

In October 2004, Senators Frank Lautenberg and Edward Kennedy contacted the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) to determine if the Bush Administration violated federal law when it used of US\$700,000 in taxpayer money to research how the mainstream media was presenting President Bush and NCLB. The Bush Administration hired Ketchum, Inc., “a public relations and marketing agency which specializes in corporate and product positioning” (www.ketchum.com) to study how NCLB was being discussed in the media (positive or negative) and to rank “reporters according to the content of their articles” (Lautenberg & Kennedy, 2004, <http://lautenberg.senate.gov/newsroom/record.cfm?id=254277>, “Taxfunder Media,” para. 1). Almost a year later (September 2005), the GAO determined that the use of taxpayer money was a violation of federal law, noting that conducting “a media analysis similar to the one conducted by the Department is within its authority” (Gamboa, 2005, p. 2). However, the Department of Education misused funds when it used them “to evaluate the Republican Party’s (or any other political party’s) commitment to education” (Gamboa, 2005, p. 2).

The issue at hand was not the study itself but the way in which the findings were used. The Bush Administration used the information from this study to craft media video news releases (VNRs) for distribution to major media outlets. The VNRs including a “reporter,” a family, a story line about schools, and the benefits of NCLB nowhere stated the federal government produced them (see also Pear, 2005, October 1). The GAO determined,

The failure of an agency to identify itself as the source of a prepackaged news story misleads the viewing public by encouraging the viewing audience to believe that the broadcasting news organization developed the information. The prepackaged news stories are purposefully designed to be indistinguishable from the news segments broadcast to the public. When the television viewing public does not know that the stories they watched on television news programs about the government were in fact prepared by the government, the stories are, in this sense, no longer purely factual—the essential fact of attribution is missing. (Gamboa, 2005, p. 5)

This example poses some important questions for those of us who work in education and are concerned about perceptions of school reform, public schools, teachers, and students. What, if anything, are we to believe reported in the mainstream media today if we cannot trust the source of that

information? How does the mainstream media frame public education, and in particular, NCLB, school reform, and teachers? How do these frames resonate with already existing public perceptions? This article takes up these questions to illustrate the media's role in framing NCLB, school reform, and teachers through the use of visual and textual discourses that rely on already existing beliefs about the state of public education in the United States. The article begins with an extensive review of the available literature pertaining to media analyses. Then, I will discuss the methodology used to collect, narrow, and analyze the data. The images and discourses employed by two major media outlets, the *New York Times* (NYT) and *Time Magazine* (TM), will be discussed in terms of how they framed the issues surrounding NCLB, school reform, and teachers' unions. The task here was not to uncover what the messages were in as much as it was to uncover how the messages were conveyed. Finally, I will offer some conclusions for reflection and further research.

Mediating the Message: The Role of the Popular Media and the Public

What the public is often exposed to is based on the interests of those who have the power to control the message and its interpretation (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Garret & Bell, 1998; Wallace, 1997). If one considers that all media stories elicit socially constructed meanings between text and reader/viewer, then understanding how that process comes about is crucial for educators and the public alike. Anderson (2007) noted,

Educators and the general public need to better understand not only the extent to which the "reality" of educational reform and policy decisions is constructed with the help of the media but also the sophisticated and subtle mechanisms that make it possible. (p. 106)

Without such an understanding, there is little momentum to broaden the critique beyond those who are under the microscope (in this case, public education, teachers, and unions) and through what lens they are viewed.

For years, conservatives have engaged in a scathing critique of the United States media for what they perceive to be a liberal bias (Alterman, 2003; Eveland & Shah, 2003). Liberals have responded that the media is in fact not liberal but under the thumb of conservative pundits (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Lakoff, 2002, 2004, 2006). The purpose of this article here is not to engage with this particular debate. There are excellent examples of research and commentary regarding the politicization of the media and how the media

shapes public perception (see for instance Anderson, 2007; Gerstl-Pepin, 2002, 2007; Glassner, 1999; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Kellner, 1995; McChesney, 2004, 2007; Opfer, 2007; Snow, 1983; Wallace, 1997). Rather, the goal is to explore how the media frames the debate surrounding one particular piece of education policy, No Child Left Behind, teachers, and teachers' unions.

Given the longstanding ambivalent relationship that the polity has with its public schools, investigating the political discourse surrounding NCLB is an important area of research, particularly for those who wish to frame the debate in terms other than those currently in use (see for instance, Hursh, 2008). Debates over the purposes of public schools have served as a backdrop for many of the reform efforts throughout the history of U.S. public education (Abowitz, 2003; Kliebard, 2002; Tyack & Tobin, 1994; Tyack, 1986, 2003). Furthermore, the pressure for public schools to perform for political and economic reasons has had an impact on schools, students, teachers, and teacher preparation (see for instance, Apple, 1993, 2001; Graff, 1992; Hursh, 2007, 2008; Marshall & Tucker, 1992; Tucker, 2007; Walsh, 2001; Wallace, 1993). From the news that the Soviet Union won the space race and the initial approval of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to its latest reauthorization as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), society has viewed public education as both a vehicle and obstacle to effecting change (Cremin, 1990; Cross, 2004; Reese, 2005; Shaker & Heilman, 2004). And, the mainstream media plays a role in how people view the state of the nation or, in this case, the state of public education (Chomsky, 1997; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Lippman, 1922/1997; Moses, 2007; Wallace, 1997).

At the beginning of each semester, I poll my undergraduate teacher education students to explore their beliefs about teaching, learning, and public schools. They express a number of beliefs that are firmly rooted in the American psyche: parents don't care, the schools are failing students, teachers are lazy, teachers don't care, teachers are the "least smart," progressive education is too soft, "we" need to go back to basics, money to fund schools isn't important, understanding education theory isn't important but practical experience is, and so on. Quite literally, there is a "crisis" in education (e.g., Berliner & Biddle, 1995). When I prod further to explore the origins of these beliefs, many students comment that they just know it, it was their personal experience, their parents told them, they have read/heard about it in/on the news/television/paper/Internet, and most recently it must be true because "we have NCLB."

Shaker & Heilman (2004) referred to some of the items on the list above as "the new common sense of education" and noted important specifics:

Standardized tests are the sine qua non of assessing school quality; our public schools are failed and cynical institutions; teachers are self-interested unionists; education faculty are woolly apologists for the status quo; explanations of school problems—including the impact of poverty on children are only “excuses”; there is no correlation between school quality and school funding; the punitive imposition of high stakes tests and centralized standards will “shape up” malingering students and teachers; research in education should exclusively follow certain quantitative models; voucher advocates are the true sponsors of minority advancement, etc. (p. 1456)

The course in which I poll students fulfills a requirement they complete *before* applying to the teacher education program at the university. When asked to describe NCLB, they can offer few specifics other than it was designed to fix the schools. Even though they have not been formally introduced to public education as part of their professional preparation, they have already formed perceptions about its state. Their list is eerily similar to Shaker & Heilman’s, and may reflect the public’s perception and support for different policy decisions related to public education. Although the above anecdote cannot and should not serve as a statement of truth about college students’ beliefs about the public schools, it does serve as an inspiration for the broader research project on which this article is based.

Differing perceptions/differing frames of explanation

The discussion above reflects deeply held ideas, beliefs, and values that Americans express and hold about the purposes and functions of the public schools. Many of these deep-held beliefs, values, ideas, and systems of meaning, also known as frames, serve to organize people’s understandings about the world around them (Goffman, 1974; Lakoff, 2002, 2004, 2006). Lakoff noted, “Framing is about getting language that fits your worldview. It is not just language. The ideas are primary—and the language carries those ideas, evokes those ideas” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 4). Quite literally, the “ideas come first . . . Ideas come in the forms of frames. When the frames are there, the words come readily” (Lakoff, 2002, p. 23). For this reason, connecting how the mainstream media frames NCLB, teachers, and teachers’ unions to the public’s perception of education becomes crucial if education policy makers are going to enter into the debate in ways that are accessible and meaningful to the public.

It is also important to consider the connections between the media and those who have the power to shape public opinion. Lippman (1922/1997)

wrote extensively on how the elite harness venues like mass media to shape public perception. Herman & Chomsky (1988), building on the notion of the “manufacture of consent” (e.g., the media serves to entertain, inform, and manipulate viewers based on the interests of the powerful and the elite, so that viewers’ beliefs and values are shaped by the media), noted that media outlets, after all, are not nonprofit organizations that exist simply to serve the public good. Media outlets are businesses. Because they are subject to owner control, the market, and profit margins, media outlets do more than report the news; they are in the business of *producing* news (McChesney, 2007). As evidenced by the GAO report and later news reports about the Department of Education (ED) and its role in paying Armstrong Williams, a prominent African American commentator to tout NCLB, what the public is exposed to is shaped by very explicit goals (Anderson, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Pear, 2005, October 1). The choice of visual imagery (e.g., photos, graphics, advertising, etc.), whether the article itself is a cover story, located on the front page, or above-the-fold, is not random (McChesney, 2004). Decisions are made to sell papers, and more important, to win supporters of different ideological and political positions.

Unions and teachers in the public eye: Imaging teachers in the literature

Given the ascendancy of the media as a cultural form, it should be no surprise that media images and portrayals of education policy, teachers, and teaching are of interest and concern to researchers in fields like communication studies, media studies, advertisement, and education. Turning the lens back on the media reveals how it shapes and is shaped by public perception (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; McChesney, 2004). Some work has focused on teachers and teaching in popular film (Ayers, 1996; Bulman, 2002; Burbach & Figgins, 1993; Giroux, 1994; Reyes & Rios, 2003; Trier, 2001), children’s texts (Sandefur & Moore, 2004), cartoons (Warburton & Saunders, 1996), television (Banks & Esposito, 2002; Gray, 2005; Tillman & Trier, 2007), and radio (Petrilli, 2008). Others have mined preservice teachers’ images of the profession (Bolotin & Burnaford, 1994; Mitchell & Weber, 1995) and have drawn broader connections to the images found in the media and popular culture (Farber, Provenzo, & Holm, 1994). Still others have focused specifically on how educational policy is represented in the media (Thomas, 2004, 2006; Wallace, 1993). The literature suggests that people’s interactions with visual images and text, regardless of medium, contribute to the socially constructed discourses about teachers, teaching, and public education.

In educational research, the question of engaging in a study of the media itself has been one of controversy. Rotherman (2008) noted that although the public gathers much of its knowledge about education policy and research from the media, journalists in fact have little experience in knowing how to judge the validity of the policies and research about which they report. In addition, media outlets often fail to critically engage with the sources of their information so that partisan research groups like “think tanks” (e.g., the Fordham Institute, the Brookings Institution, the Education Policy Institute, etc.) are considered as credible as research guided by blind peer-review and professional research standards (Haas, 2007; Shaker & Heilman, 2004). It thus becomes even more crucial to engage critically with the media’s framing of NCLB because how the legislation (and those people and issues connected to it) is presented in print and in visual imagery may shape how people interpret its purpose and efficacy.

Visual images, particularly those in the print media, and their associated text seem to be less utilized as a data source for exploring the complex social constructions about teachers and their work. Fischman (2001) commented that excluding visual images as a valid source of research data is a blind spot in educational research. In addition, he noted that failure to include such images might prevent educational researchers from engaging with the current complexity of popular culture as it relates to schools and public education. Given today’s visually mediated world, it is crucial to engage with and challenge the media images (and their accompanying texts) that shape and support what the public believes to be accurate about teachers and public education.

Method

Methodologically, I draw from multiple theoretical paradigms, including communication theory, critical media studies, frame and discourse analysis, and visual analysis, to ground this inquiry. By crossing disciplinary boundaries, I illustrate the power of framing and discourse as people cognitively organize their world and make sense of images, language and their meaning in context (Benford & Snow, 2000; Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 1999). Framing is a contested process in which people make sense of the information to which they are exposed (Coburn, 2006). Its exploration enables researchers to better understand the beliefs, values, and ideas that shape the lens through which people view information that may or may not resonate with their beliefs (Altheide, 1996). The process of framing, therefore, is deeply personal while still socially and culturally shaped. Altheide (2002) noted,

The capacity to define the situation for self and others is a key dimension of social power. One reason to study mass media documents is to understand the nature and process by which a key defining aspect of our effective environment operates and attempts to gauge the consequences. The media are essential in social life. (p. 33)

Frames not only tell us how things will be discussed; they also shape what will be excluded from the discussion (Altheide, 1996, 2002). In other words, those who have the power to effectively control the framing process can shape the discourse surrounding an issue and how people might come to understand it. Those same individuals also have the power to determine what is excluded from the conversation. Altheide's work on the construction of fear focused on just this reality (2002). In tracking discourse, that is, identifying and analyzing how and when language was used in the reports of major media outlets, Altheide illustrated that the mainstream media utilizes frames based on long-standing beliefs within the polity that create and reproduce fear of the unknown, the misunderstood and, most important, the other.

Visual imagery also relies on framing of a sort. In particular, it relies on semiotics, that is, the signs and meanings ascribed to objects (see, for instance, Danesi, 2007; Sebeok, 2001). When photojournalists frame a shot, they look for images that capture the emotions and imagination and elicit a response from the viewer. Thus visual analysis was also an important methodology on which to rely for this project. Methodologically, visual analysis enables the researcher to draw generalized conclusions from the analysis of visual content such as objects, color, placement, role and setting (Bell, 2001). In this respect, it was a particularly powerful way to capture the complex messages and relationships between visual imagery and accompanying text.

The analysis presented in this article is guided by two research questions:

Research Question 1: What images and discourses are utilized in the media connected to NCLB?

Research Question 2: How do the images and discourses surrounding teachers, teaching, and teachers' unions *resonate* with the public and motivate them to further support NCLB (e.g., Coburn, 2006; Lakoff, 2004, 2006)?

In exploring these research questions, my goal was to reconstitute the data in ways that help one to understand how the media rhetorically constructed and defined the relevant issues surrounding NCLB, particularly those related

to teachers. This is particularly important given how NLCB is supposed to reinvision the educational experiences of children and adolescents and rescue them from the perceived failures of the U.S. public education system.

Data

This study explicates a particular data set that was part of a larger study that examined the political discourse surrounding NCLB. Since January 2001, I have collected press releases, speech transcripts, and other documents available from the United States Department of Education (ED) to uncover the political discourse surrounding NCLB as outlined in legislation and policy (for instance, No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). In addition to documents made available through the ED, I have gathered artifacts from Weblogs, mainstream media outlets like *Time*, and *Newsweek*, and regional newspapers in 10 large urban media centers (i.e., New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Antonio, San Diego, Dallas, San Jose, and the Washington, D.C., metro area) in the form of lead articles/cover stories, letters to the editor, editorial articles, photos, and other visual representations.

The data analyzed and discussed in this article focus specifically on visual and textual media from the *New York Times* (NYT; <http://www.nytimes.com>) and *Time Magazine* (TM; <http://time.com>) archives from January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2008. Because the articles were identified by conducting Web searches in the online archives, there was an inherent risk that the data collected may be incomplete because resources are added and deleted from sites as they are routinely updated (Wouters, Hellsten, & Leyersdorff, 2004). Thus searching each site required double-checking each artifact, and confirming the date of publication and modification, when necessary. In spite of the challenge of relying on Internet archives for visual and textual data, the decision to do so enabled me to more efficiently organize the data because I could then rely on the search engine I employed (Mozillas Firefox 5.0 for Macintosh) to identify the location of the keyword *teachers' unions* within the articles their archive databases identified.

Data Set

Initially, the NYT archive identified 249 articles falling within the January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2008 date range. I further refined the search results by *section name* (Education, $n = 140$, Front Page, $n = 28$, and Magazine, $n = 6$). Each article was individually checked for duplication across section (for

instance, when the article appeared under both the Education and the Front Page), noted for presence or absence of visual imagery, and specific use of the term *teachers' unions*. The data set was then further narrowed by eliminating blog posts (because they only appeared online), international stories, stories about state or federal budgets, or when the search term was part of a long list within the article, and was not specifically connected to the larger topic of the article. This resulted in a final data set of 43 articles, 26 with visual images.

Articles from *Time* were identified the same way. An initial data set of 36 articles published from January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2008 was identified. Thirteen articles were excluded, leaving a final data set of 23 articles, 17 of which had visual images associated with them.

Data Analysis

To reconstitute the data in meaningful ways, I have engaged in a sustained content and discourse analysis with these data (Bell, 2001; Berger, 2005; Fairclough, 2003; Krippendorff, 2004), starting with the information available from the ED to identify key terms, ideas, and themes to examine how the political discourse has framed NCLB and school reform. This analysis has yielded a complex understanding of the interplay between language, discourse, and the framing of teachers and public education (Goldstein and Beutel, 2008, 2009). In addition, I employed visual and textual analysis informed by cultural studies to extend my inquiry into how the popular media constructs issues related to NCLB, school reform, teachers, and public education (Bell, 2001; Hall, 1982; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). The purpose was to uncover the institutional, structural, cultural, and social ways in which the discourse and visual images construct meanings surrounding NCLB and school reform to connect media messages to the official discourse employed by the U.S. Department of Education.

Initial coding of the textual data, including title/headline, captions of visual images, and body text involved identifying if the articles referred to teachers and teachers' unions positively, negatively, neutrally, or from a mixed perspective (see Table 1). To accomplish this task, it was necessary to examine each article for its context, that is, it was necessary to uncover how the term *teachers' unions* was discussed in relation to the main topic of a given article. Topics covered a range of subjects, including state and federal legislation, gubernatorial and presidential elections, specific leaders at the state and national levels (e.g., New York Governor George Pataki, Secretary of Education Rod Paige, etc.), tenure, school reform efforts like NCLB, merit

Table 1. Review of Keywords Teachers Unions

Outlet	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Mixed	Total(%)*
<i>The New York Times</i>	3 (7.0%)	12 (30%)	17 (39.4%)	11 (25.6%)	43 (102%)
<i>Time Magazine</i>	0 (0%)	3 (13%)	19 (82.6%)	1 (4.3%)	23 (99.9%)
Total (%)	3 (4.5%)	15 (22.7%)	36 (54.4%)	12 (18.2%)	66 (99.8%)

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100.

pay, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and standardized testing. Articles were coded *neutral* when there were no positive or negative comments made in relation to the article's context, *positive* when there were positive comments, and *negative* when the comments presented the unions in a negative manner. Of particular difficulty to identify, were articles in which a mixed reaction to teachers' unions was presented. At this point, context became a crucial component of the data analysis because it embedded teachers' union within a much more complex set of issues.

Within the total data set of 66 articles, a review of the keywords teachers' unions was referred to neutrally 22.7 % of the time, positively 4.5% of the time, negatively 54.4 % of the time, and 18.2 % of the articles presented a mixed view of unions. The *Time* data set presented teachers' unions more negatively than did the NYT (82.6 % vs. 54.4% respectively). Associated terms across both media outlets included *powerful*, *obstructionist*, *special-interest*, *against reform*, *self-centered and selfish*, and *status quo*. Perhaps the most negative term employed against teachers' unions was used by George Will when commenting on the National Education Association's Web content regarding 9/11: *a national menace* (as reported by Rothstein, 9/4/2002). Within context, the use of such terms in relation to *teachers' unions* appeared most often in articles and visual images that most frequently addressed issues related to school reform and NCLB.

At the same time, the NYT data set presented a much more mixed view of teachers' unions (18.2% vs. 4.3%). In this case, it was not simply that the teachers' unions were all *good* or all *bad*; rather their evaluation (within the article) was contingent on their reported actions as a collective or as individual teachers. In other words, the national teachers' unions, individual local unions, and individual teachers were presented positively when and if they showed willingness to consider and accept popular school reform initiatives. At the same time, however, these cases were exceptions to the rule regarding the common sense belief of the role teachers' play and how public education

reform ought to occur (Hess, 2004; Kumashiro, 2008; Shaker & Heilman, 2004). As I will discuss in the coming section, these differences are important, especially when taken in consideration with the visual and discourse analysis conducted on each article in the data set.

Discussion: Capturing the Imagination of the Polity

Historically, the use of images on magazine covers and front pages of newspapers has served to entice people to buy and has functioned as a means of knowledge production by tapping into people's emotions and commonsense collective beliefs about and images of the present, past, and future. Take, for instance, the iconic image of the *Little Red Schoolhouse* or the one-room schoolhouse in the historical narrative of the United States. In 1921 a progressive school named the Little Red School House was founded (<http://www.lrei.org/whoware/index.html>). Begun as a progressive school, it persists today in spite of the pressures of NCLB. Other schools and a national curriculum share the same name. In reality, the one-roomed schoolhouse is a rarity today. What makes it so iconic is that the vision endures in spite of so many changes in society (transportation, population explosions, reform efforts, etc.—see Tyack, 1986; Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

Tyack (1986) noted,

Traveling across the United States one can find school buildings that exemplify diverse legacies from the turning points in our educational history. In a country landscape, the one-room school, with its steeple-like bell tower, remains the symbol of the common-school movements of the nineteenth century, reflecting its chiefly rural character, its affinity with the family farm, its unbecoming nature, and its Protestant-republican ideology of creating the nation in the hearts and minds of individual citizens. Like a church with its Bible, the rural schools with its McGuffey Readers was to be a small incubator of virtue. (p. 4)

The image of the little red schoolhouse or the one-room schoolhouse exists to this day because it harkens back to what people think of as being a simpler, less violent, more stable time. The images are so embedded in U.S. popular culture that one can find Clip Art associated with many computer word processing programs capturing its iconic essence. Finally, the ED under the Bush Administration employed this imagery, including the words *No Child Left Behind*, as part of the façade surrounding its entrance.

Teachers and Teachers' Unions

In the case of framing public education, there are similar images available in the *NYT* and *TM*. Some of these images leap from the page and into larger than life icons because they communicate on multiple levels in multiple ways (Mitchell & Weber, 1995). While attending the 2008 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in New York City, a colleague pointed out a 70-foot billboard that was located across the street. This billboard was a replica of a *NYT* full-page ad that was part of a recently launched campaign drawing attention to incompetent teachers and the unions that supposedly protect them. My students have brought to my attention ads like this one that featured a picture of an apple with a bite taken and a worm sticking out. The text above the apple read, "Vote for the WORST *unionized* TEACHERS (who can't be fired)" (font size, etc., approximated). While looking at the billboard, my colleague and I watched two women stop to read the text. As they walked away, one of them laughed and said "How funny is that! There really are so many bad teachers." Another person walking by said, "You can read that because of a teacher."

The irony that such a billboard was positioned outside an educational conference should not be overlooked nor should the use of the iconic apple often associated with teachers. The fact that there was a worm sticking out of a spot where a person had taken a bite was a powerful example of visual imagery designed to elicit disgust. After all, who wants to eat a piece of fruit—something wholesome and good—only to discover that it is spoilt and worm ridden? What makes this billboard and the *NYT* ad important to this discussion is that the women I mentioned completely missed or overlooked the word "unionized" because it was in a handwritten sans serif font that was not only harder to read and dissemble but also the font size was much smaller and finer than the rest of the text. If one were to glance, one might mistakenly read *vote for the worst teachers*. When exploring the ad's background, one learns it was supported by the Center For Union Facts (www.TeachersUnion-Exposed.com). On further exploration, the reader learns the architects of the site are not necessarily against teachers; but they are against unions, union corruption, and union abuse. However, this message is blatantly absent from the ad. By asking people to vote for the worst teachers; the ad shifts the focus from the unions to teachers themselves, thus blaming individual teachers for the collective failure of the public sphere to adequately support schooling and education. No mention is made of the conditions in which teachers work, the supplies they need, the challenges they and their students face, and so on, particularly for those who work in urban communities. Whereas the cryptic

focus of the original ad was an attack on unions, the resultant focus was on individual teachers. By silencing the union(s) as a legitimate voice and advocate for teachers, teachers are once again left to fend for themselves as individuals without any safety net, and they are ultimately found at fault.

The U.S. Labor Movement has long been viewed in complex ways. On the one hand, its history of fighting for workers' rights in terms of a living wage, safe work conditions, and the right to organize is well known to some. In addition, unions also were sites of educational and intellectual development among the working class (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). This is not necessarily the image of unions, teachers' unions in particular, the media has focused on, historically or within the articles analyzed. A second ad by The Center for Union Facts framed teachers' unions as bullies in schools, which reflects much of the discourse revealed in data analysis. The photo depicted a young, blue-eyed, White boy with light brown hair. He was hanging from a coat hook by the back of his coat, a brick wall framing his body. The lighting was overexposed through the use of a flashbulb, the overall effect lending the image a sense of dramatic immediacy and urgency. The child's expression appeared sad and one is left wondering who will help him. The image draws on many-an-adults' memories of the kid who was always bullied: hung up on hooks, shoved in lockers, lunch money or homework stolen. Instead of the bully being the bigger kid, however, the bully was the teachers' union. The text above the photo read, "The Biggest Bully in Schools?" Below, it read, "Teacher Unions." The subtext read, "Teacher unions bully principals into keeping bad teachers, scare politicians who support school reform, and block efforts to pay great teachers higher pay. It's time to stand up to the bully."

What is particularly interesting is how these two ads frame teachers' unions as unfettered interest groups who have more control over personnel actions than do school administrators and Boards of Education. Unions protect teachers' rights to due process regarding items and personnel actions outlined in the negotiated contract. Unions provide lawyers to teachers when necessary and advocate for safe working conditions. They also advocate for appropriate professional development. What they can't do, however, is stop a district from de-tenuring and firing a teacher, *provided* the school's administration and Board of Education have done their due-diligence to document infractions and don't pass on an incompetent or dangerous teacher with a letter of recommendation simply to eliminate a problem. This side of the story is rarely discussed alongside the power of the unions and the public is left with only one part of the picture: that the union is solely at fault.

Indeed, groups like the Education Policy Institute <http://www.educational-policy.org> and others have framed teachers' unions as the primary obstacle to reforming education. Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, blamed the unions for the problems in public education in February of 2007 at an invited talk at a conference on technology and education (www.sfgate.com). Rod Paige's new book, *The War Against Hope*, is subtitled *How Teachers' Unions Hurt Children, Hinder Teachers, and Endanger Public Education* (2006). To present teachers' unions as bullies (and against hope) not only ignores the long-standing struggles for access, equity, and justice in which the unions have participated but it also frames them as an obstacle to justice. In doing so, the media frames school reform (and justice) as a process that must occur outside the realm of teachers and unions. The media suggests that they cannot be trusted to do what is just and right. Teachers and their unions must be told what to do because if left to their own devices, they will cut a swath of destruction through students, because they are lazy, incompetent, abusive, and above all, a threat to the American public.

The coverage of former Secretary of Education Roderick Paige's claim that the National Education Association (NEA) was a terrorist group is a case in point. The day after Secretary Paige called the NEA "a terrorist organization," he issued an apology for the language he employed but not for the spirit of the attack:

It was an inappropriate choice of words to describe the obstructionist scare tactics the NEA's Washington lobbyists have employed against *No Child Left Behind's* historic educational reforms. I also said, as I have repeatedly, that our nation's teachers, who have dedicated their lives to service in the classroom, are the real soldiers of democracy, whereas the NEA's high-priced Washington lobbyists have made no secret that they will fight against bringing real, rock-solid improvements in the way we educate all our children regardless of skin color, accent or where they live. But, as one who grew up on the receiving end of insensitive remarks, I should have chosen my words better. (Secretary Paige Issues apology for the comment about the NEA, February 23, 2004)

Both the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) condemned Secretary Paige's comments and several individual teachers expressed a range of emotions from disappointment to outrage. Paige, a spokesperson for the Bush Administration discursively situated the nation's largest teachers' association, during a national "war on terror," as an enemy

engaging in the worst type of political violence and intimidation: that against innocent children.

The NYT carried no front-page coverage. The Opinion section hosted five commentaries: two editorials, one op-ed, and two letters to the editor. While all five commentaries were scathing of Paige's remark, the fact that they were located in the Opinion section framed their content as clearly partisan, and thus analysis of their content was excluded from this study. In contrast, the Education section hosted nine articles that referred to Secretary Paige's comment. The first was an article reporting on the initial discursive act (Pear, 2004, February 24). In the first article, Robert Pear, *New York Times* reporter, noted that Paige said the NEA "was like 'a terrorist organization' because of the way it was resisting many provisions of a school improvement law pushed through Congress by President Bush in 2001" (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D00E6DC143CF937A15751C0A9629C8B63>). In further reporting of Paige's apology, Pear noted that Paige stood by the intent of his words, noted that he (Paige) still had great respect for *individual* teachers (not teachers as a collective), but that he had merely made a "poor choice of words." The remainder of the articles addressed calls for removing Secretary Paige from his position. All of these articles focused on the unions, individual teachers, some politicians, and their reactions to the statement, not its implications for teachers, their work, or public perception of teachers and teacher's unions. There was no mention of knowledge of or reaction to Paige's comments from the wider public. On one hand, it's politics as usual; it is a classical rhetorical device to "demonize" what one perceives to be a threat. In the NYT articles that portrayed unions negatively, unions were consistently presented as too powerful, against school reform (and hence, against children), and as part of the status quo. In this case, Secretary Paige saw the NEA as a threat to implementing NCLB and therefore a threat to the Bush Administration's perception of how to achieve justice for all U.S. children (through school reform measures such as testing, accountability, and choice). On the other hand, to call the teachers' unions in general "bullies," let alone the nation's largest teachers' association a "terrorist organization," politically detracts from the work in which unions and teachers engage, especially given the public's concern about teachers and teaching on the national level (Bostrom, 2003). To only report the reactions of those who were victims of the attack, serves to further minimize the initial attack (the terrorist comment) and marginalizes the object of that attack (the NEA and teachers' unions in a broader sense and teachers in general) because doing so framed the issue as a localized, individual concern, not one of larger social, political, and economic concerns.

Teachers and NCLB

Still other media images play on assumptions about teachers. Mitchell and Weber (1995) noted that there are several images concerning teachers that permeate U.S. society. One of the most enduring, according to Mitchell and Weber (1995), is that of the prim and proper, White teacher. Both *TM* and the *NYT* utilized this image in their discussion of NCLB and school reform. Take, for instance, the February 5, 2008 cover of *TM* of a young White female teacher with long brown hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt and grey slacks (<http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,1101080225,00.html>, p. 1, para. 9). She was sitting in a student's desk with an open math book and other books were visible underneath. Her hands were folded gracefully on the desk and her expression was nondescript. She was portrayed as a student seemingly waiting for instruction. The phrases "How to make better teachers" and "Who would be the education President?" flanked her on either side. The cover story, however, included a photo of a young White male in white shirt, tie, and khakis (<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1713174,00.html>, p. 2, para. 11). His arms were crossed, and he was flanked by blurred shapes of students. The angle of the shot was taken below eye level, conveying a sense of authority as did his central location within the picture. The students had no discernable features, making them anonymous. The caption read, "Ben Van Dyk fled public school to teach at parochial Servite High. Pay isn't great, but there's more support and freedom to teach creatively."

These and other visual images employed by both *TM* and the *NYT* present the image of teachers as predominately young, White, and seemingly conservative in dress, if not in politics. Visually, these two images play on a number of assumptions about teachers and teaching. On one hand, both publications present "better teachers" as being young and fresh. New teachers are presumably better than current teachers who are more experienced, older, resistant to NCLB, and probably part of the union. In this regard, NCLB and its focus on the Highly Qualified Teacher frames youth as something that is desirable because new teachers have not yet been jaded by those who might oppose the requirements of NCLB (see Cochran-Smith & Lyttle, 2006; Weiner, 2005).

The text of the *TM* article, however, did not concern the age, skills, knowledge, or dispositions of talented teachers, nor was it about what challenges teachers face in the classroom. Instead, it focused on school reform efforts like merit pay and how it might enlarge the pool of potential teachers, reward teachers, and motivate teachers in general. Analysis of the data and this particular *TM* article reveals that recruiting new teachers and learning to teach should be independent of larger social issues. If one is motivated to teach, has the

appropriate bachelor's degree and the desire to be successful (evidenced through raising test scores, etc.), and is willing to work hard and not give up, one can become the type of teacher that the nation, under the guise of NCLB, needs and wants. Better teachers don't need better preparation, more mentoring, a more stable school environment, better leadership, or more resources. They simply need more pay to improve. Connecting the preparation of better teachers to issues of pay and the market reflects a wider public belief that if one is willing to work hard and is better at something, one will be better paid because one is *worth* more (see also Tough, 2006, November 26). It also reflects larger common sense beliefs about teachers and school reform (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Those who do not perform as well, should get paid less, or even fired, especially if their students don't achieve adequate yearly progress.

My point here is not that teachers don't deserve better pay, better working conditions, and more respect. The point is that the media frames issues related to justice as a matter of economic justice, as if pay, competition, and the market (e.g., merit pay, vouchers, and school choice) will level the playing field for students (and teachers) and prepare them for the competitive workplace in a privatized world by incentivizing public education as a competitive workplace for teachers (McCluskey, 2007; Giroux, 2008; Hursh, 2008; Saltman, 2007, see also Nagourney, 2002, June 28). Problematic in this view, of course, is the notion that all school districts, students, and communities are the same and therefore need and get the same.

In fact, those who are critical of NCLB and popular school reform efforts are excluded from the discussion simply because they challenge the new conventional wisdom (Shaker & Heilman, 2004; van Dijk, 1998), and therefore obstruct the path to change (and presumably, success). In a speech to the Greater Houston Partnership, Secretary Paige reflected this sentiment.

Now I know . . . they [teachers' unions, those opposed to NCLB] will fight it anyway they can. If those who fear change defeat national reform, then division, exclusion, racism, and callousness win. This is a debate with profound consequences. If we lose this debate, millions of children will be harmed by being excluded, ignored, disrespected, and under-educated, and then sent out into a world for which they are educationally unprepared and uncompetitive. Who among us would wish that on any child? (2003, December 15; <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2003/12/12152003.html?exp=4>, para. 47)

In other words, Paige is claiming those who challenge NCLB do so not based on sound arguments, research, or extensive experience in education.

Rather, they challenge NCLB because deep down they don't believe all children in the United States are equal, they don't believe all children deserve justice, and they aren't willing to do the work. Those who support NCLB, in Paige's view, are proreform and proequality, and are willing to challenge anything and everything that stands in the way of their image of a reenvisioned public education.

This image of teachers' unions and teachers was consistently revealed in the analysis of data. A case in point is the recent discussion of Michelle Rhee, the new Chancellor of Washington, D.C., Public Schools. Michelle Rhee rocketed to national recognition when she took the reigns of the beleaguered D.C. schools. *TM* included Rhee in three articles in November 2008, including one in which she commented that she was afraid of the direction of public education under democratic control because of the democrats ties with teachers' unions (Ripley, 2008a, November 26). Rhee also was referenced in its "A Brief History of Tenure" in which she commented, "Students cannot wait for accountable teachers while adults argue," in response to teachers' unions and those who are supportive of tenure (Stephey, 2008, November 17).

In its November 26, 2008 cover story, *Time Magazine* contributor, Amanda Ripley, commented,

Rhee could do something no one has done before: she could prove that low-income urban kids can catch up with kids in the suburbs. The radicalism of this idea cannot be overstated. Now, without proof that cities can revolutionize their worst schools, there is always a fine excuse. Superintendents, parents and teachers in urban school districts lament systemic problems they cannot control: poverty, hunger, violence and negligent parents. They bicker over small improvements such as class size and curriculum, like diplomats touring a refugee camp and talking about the need for nicer curtains. To the extent they intervene at all, politicians respond by either throwing more money at the problem (if they're on the left) or making it easier for some parents to send their kids to private schools (if they're on the right).

Meanwhile, millions of students left behind in confused classrooms spend another day learning nothing. (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1862444,00.html>)

In this context, Rhee was a bold reformer, reflective of the type of educational leader aligned with the Bush Administration's discourse regarding public education reform. Those who stand in the way of reform "lament"

about the real day-to-day challenges that teachers, schools, students, families, and communities face and not because they are intimately aware of the realities of urban communities and schools. Instead, they are “diplomats” who conduct fact-finding missions and “bicker” over surface-level quick fixes to make it appear as if the situation has improved. In addition, politicians, when they do address the state of public education, do little to challenge the deep structures of schooling that impede change. They either throw money at the problem (with no evidence that the funding is effecting change) or give parents a market-based out.

Ripley also discussed Rhee’s personality and style, and her interactions with students and adults, noting that education has become too emotionally focused:

“The thing that kills me about education is that it’s so touchy-feely,” she tells me one afternoon in her office. Then she raises her chin and does what I come to recognize as her standard imitation of people she doesn’t respect. Sometimes she uses this voice to imitate teachers; other times, politicians or parents. Never students. “People say, ‘Well, you know, test scores don’t take into account creativity and the love of learning,’” she says with a drippy, grating voice, lowering her eyelids halfway. Then she snaps back to herself. “I’m like, ‘You know what? I don’t give a crap.’ Don’t get me wrong. Creativity is good and whatever. But if the children don’t know how to read, I don’t care how creative you are. You’re not doing your job.” (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1862444-2,00.html>)

Rhee’s discourse mirrored that of NCLB and the Bush Administration, and is representative of how the *NYT* and *TM* negatively framed teachers’ unions and others were antireform, especially in regard to taking a tough stance on student learning. Like the political discourse surrounding NCLB, high expectations, standards, and accountability, nothing should stand in the way of student learning and achievement (Hursh, 2005, 2007). The discourse reveals a disdain for any *adult* who stands in the way of student achievement, whether it is learning how to read, whether it is because of refusing to be tough in regard to teaching and learning because one believes that outside issues affect student learning, one who believes in the importance of creativity in the classroom (and hence, critical of standardized testing, accountability, and school reform in general), or because one is an administrator who wants to avoid conflict.

The photo of Rhee on the November 26, 2008 *TM* cover reflected this nonsense attitude. Standing in a classroom in front of a chalkboard and three

student desks, Rhee was dressed in a black pants suit, tightly gripping an old broom with both hands. The position of the broom is of particular note. It appeared as if Rhee had just finished sweeping the floor, perhaps metaphorically (and literally) cleaning house. The broom, from its bristle base to where the handle ended underneath her chin draws the viewer's gaze upwards to her face and visually divided the photo in half. Rhee stood with her chin straight, lips turned down, shoulders squared, her gaze focused looking *down* on the viewer. The camera flash both illuminated and spotlighted her upper body. To her right was the title, *How to Fix America's Schools*, to her left, the phrase, "Michelle Rhee is the head of Washington, D.C., schools. Her battle against bad teachers has earned her admirers and enemies—and could transform public education."

Inside, the photo of Rhee depicted her sitting in the center desk of the three student desks from the cover. Here, again, she was dressed in her black suit jacket, her chin raised and she gazed down at the viewer. Her lips were downturned and hands were clasped in front of her on the desk. The background behind her is dark, except for the backlighting that surrounds her. To the right of the photo is the phrase "Rhee tackles classroom challenge" (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1862444,00.html>).

Both photos reflected and reinforced the Rhee's discourse throughout Ripley's article. Rhee appeared serious, ready to sweep up and out the trash (in this case, bad teachers or teachers who refuse to take their jobs more seriously). She will broker no deals with anyone—politicians, unions, administrators, parents, or teachers—who stand in the way of all children achieving academically. "We're in Washington, D.C., in the nation's capital," she said later. "And yet the children of this city receive an education that every single citizen in this country should be embarrassed by", (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1862444,00.html>) p. 2, para. 2). With this in mind, the article noted that Rhee shut 21 schools and fired 100 workers, 270 teachers, and 36 principals, and had plans to tie teacher pay and continued employment to test score data and classroom evaluation.

The discourse here not only reflects the message the Bush Administration has conveyed regarding NCLB's ability to ameliorate the dire situation of U.S public education but it also reflects long-standing beliefs regarding the need to radically overhaul the public schools to ensure the nation's ability to compete on a global stage (Giroux, 2008). Rhee's dismissive attitude of those who don't agree with her "no-nonsense approach" to teaching and learning parallels the Bush Administration's view on the need to accept standards, accountability, and "doing what works" as outlined by the *What Works Clearinghouse* under its administration (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>). The point is

it is no longer about how to best educate students in the public schools; it is simply a matter of *doing* it, with no excuses (Hess, 2004).

The media's discussion of NCLB does little to challenge this representation of those who critique NCLB because it still frames NCLB's policies, practices, and supporters as advocates for achieving justice (ultimately in the form of economic access) for public education students, particularly for those who have been least served in the past (Hursh, 2008; Lipman, 2003). Even when the media presents a critique of aspects of or actions surrounding the legislation (for instance, budget cuts, issues related to state standards, etc.), it fails to address larger issues and concerns in which the public might be interested. Take for instance, the October 13, 2004 *NYT* article about the 2004 US Commission of Civil Rights report on the Bush Administration. According to author Michael Janofsky (2004), President Bush

neither exhibited leadership on pressing civil rights issues nor taken actions that matched his words.

The draft, prepared by the commission staff, accuses Mr. Bush of civil rights failures in education, voting, gay and lesbian issues, affirmative action, housing, environmental justice, racial profiling and hate crimes and concludes by saying, Failing to build on common ground, the Bush administration missed opportunities to build consensus on key civil rights issues and has instead adopted policies that divide Americans. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/13/politics/campaign/13rights.html>)

Instead of continuing to report the findings of the Commission and providing details of the report, the article instead focused on the timing of the report's release (right before the 2004 Presidential elections) and that a number of Republican voting members on the commission were disturbed by that timing. Janofsky reported that "Republicans were clearly concerned that politics were trumping fairness. Mr. Kirsanow [the Commissioner] said that the draft 'evinces a bias and political slant unacceptable from an allegedly nonpartisan agency.'" Thus the article's focus was more about the individual political concerns of members of the Commission and the timing of the report draft (which was well-known given the process) rather than the content of the report. Instead of digging into the deeper and more complex issues at stake in regard to issues of equity, social justice, and civil rights, the *NYT*, here and in other places, simply presented opposing viewpoints (about the timing of the report) rather than addressing the content of the report (and whether

President Bush's record merited the critique—see, for instance, Gerstl-Pepin, 2002).

The above article illustrates how the reporting of President Bush's record on civil rights, particularly in relation to education, is not nearly as important as the partisan politics surrounding its release. Instead of focusing on the content of the report, the concerns of individual Republicans were deemed more newsworthy and valuable than the polity's right to information prior to an election. Instead, President Bush's civil right record was framed in terms of the idea that "it's politics as usual" and not something over which to be concerned. The public's attention was deflected to what the *NYT*, Republicans, and the Bush Administration consider a "real issue": the timing of the report. Those who are critical have no real claim to critique. They simply want to engage in partisan rivalry, particularly about who is for and against reform.

Conclusions: Imaging the struggle over U.S. education reform

The discussion here is by no means an exhaustive one. It is a first foray into interrogating how the media contributes to the framing of NCLB and school reform and their supporters and rivals within the wider community. It is interesting to note that although many people in the United States are suspicious of the main stream media, they still engage in its consumption and repeat what it reports. In this respect, the media wields a great deal of power in regard to how it frames different issues, particularly those related to NCLB and teachers (Anderson, 2007). In his discussion of television and the media, Bourdieu (1996) noted,

The political dangers inherent in the ordinary use of television have to do with the fact that images have peculiar capacity to produce what critics call a *reality effect* [italics original]. They show things and make people believe in what they show. This power to show is also a power to mobilize. It can give a life to ideas or images, but also to groups. The news, the incidents and accidents of everyday life, can be loaded with political or ethnic significance liable to unleash strong, often negative feelings, such as racism, chauvinism, the fear-hatred of the foreigner or, xenophobia. The simple report, the very fact of reporting, of *putting on record* as a reporter, always implies a social construction of reality that can mobilize (or demobilize) individuals or groups. (p. 21)

When the media continues to simply “present” the story or report the facts, it fails to take responsibility for its complicity in people’s interpretation of those news reports, especially when it employs positive, neutral, or negative language in regard to a key part of the article. In the case of this study, the fact that teachers’ unions was presented negatively in more than half of the articles analyzed is important to remember. People bring assumptions and beliefs based on their everyday life experiences to every text with which they engage and the media is no different. If they already believe that teachers’ unions are a problem, the articles reinforce those beliefs and then also connect them to other broader issues. Thus analysis of the NYT and TM articles that constitute the data set for this study reveals that the mass media may not tell people what to explicitly think about teachers’ unions. However, by negatively portraying teachers’ unions, and by extension teachers, and framing them as anti-NCLB, antischool reform, and antichild, the media might shape *how* the public thinks about them.

Paolo Freire’s work on critical literacy made this point decades ago (1970, 1998; see also Freire and Macedo, 1987; Macedo, 2006), and this work has since been extended to critical media literacy. Text and images are not neutral, and how text and media are controlled shapes the message itself. Indeed, “reading [in text or the media] does not consist of merely decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Language and reality are dynamically interconnected” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 29). People don’t necessarily view issues in the media and take at face value what is reported. How they interpret what they view is deeply affected by their worldview. When media outlets fail to problematize the issues they present, people are less likely to look beyond what reinforces their beliefs. Viewers read the word through the lenses of their worlds.

The point is that the media, in the images it produces (whether in the form of advertisements, journalist photos, or other visual images), in what it reports, where and how, frames issues related to public education in ways that do little to challenge people’s current beliefs. It simply “reports the news” as uncontested *and* uncontested. Thus the mass media fails to provide the public alternate frames that might also be useful in understanding and resolving issues related to educational reform and those involved with it. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) noted,

One realm of media discourse is uncontested. It is the realm where the social constructions rarely appear as such to the reader and may be largely unconscious on the part of the writer as well. They appear as

transparent descriptions of reality, not as interpretations, and are apparently devoid of political content. Journalists feel no need to get different points of view for balance when they deal with images in this realm. (p. 120)

In the case of how the media framed NCLB, the connection is not necessarily a direct one. Indeed, as this discussion illustrated, media representations of public education, NCLB, unions, and teachers frame the discussion more in terms of what and who impedes school reform, equality, and justice for all public school students, regardless of the validity of the concern or critique raised.

The irony here, of course, is that the mainstream media is playing the role that the Bush Administration and its supporters wanted it to, whether it intended to or not, because it failed to present multiple sides of the story (even when specific media outlets claim balance in reporting). However, it moves from irony to concern when one considers that the message itself is suspect and that the federal government's treatment of education is more intertwined with the media than in the past. Lewis (2004) noted,

Education coverage at the federal level used to be somewhat benign. Education was viewed as an important issue- but not nearly as critical as, say, national security or the affairs of the Department of State. It was a low priority. The way ED has shaped its media policies, however, has shoved education up a notch or two in status and importance. (p. 160)

It should be no surprise that the Bush Administration took such an interest in the positive disposition in the media regarding NCLB. Not only was education supposedly the "cornerstone" of the Bush Administration (Bush, 2001) but also by focusing on education the mainstream media helped to divert the public's attention from other pressing issues. By claiming literacy to be the most fundamental of civil rights, the Bush Administration, and by proxy the media, has framed the debate surrounding NCLB as one in which those who are critical of NCLB are just like those who blocked the school-house doors in Little Rock, AK. Critics of NCLB and the Department of Education are not just racist bigots; they denounce the foundations of individual freedom, and by extension, equality, justice, and the opportunity to engage in the marketplace. That those critics are teachers' unions, teachers, and others who have already been excluded from the policy discussion is reinforced through those media images that elicit deep feelings and frames among the viewing public.

Thus the mass media will continue to play a role, in some fashion or another, in people's beliefs about public education, and by extension education policy (Wallace, 1993, 1997). President Obama campaigned on promises to reform NCLB, fully fund NCLB and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (DEA), invest in early childhood education, and continue to prepare, hire, retain, and reward the best teachers (www.barackobama.com/issues/education/), and revealed his education plan (Education Week, 2009). On December 15, 2008, *NYT* reporter Sam Dillon wrote about President Obama's choice of Arne Duncan to be the nation's Secretary of Education (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/16/us/politics/16educ.html>). Dillon referred to Duncan as "a compromise choice" between two rival camps,

one group espousing a get-tough policy based on pushing teachers and administrators harder to raise achievement, and another arguing that schools alone could not close the racial achievement gap and urging new investments in school-based health clinics and other social programs to help poor students learn. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/16/us/politics/16educ.html>)

On one hand, Dillon referred to Obama's perspective that the two camps reflected "old education debates" and the choice of Duncan was one that might enable both camps to work together toward a common end. However, ten days earlier, Op-Ed columnist David Brooks referred to the former group as "reformers," those educators "who support merit pay for good teachers, charter schools and tough accountability standards," and the latter, including teachers' unions and members of schools of education, as the "establishment" (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/05/opinion/05brooks.html>). Although Brooks did not go so far as to label teachers' unions, and by extension teachers, "anti-reform," the article did imply which group, in his opinion, had the best interests of children and the American public at heart, and it certainly wasn't teachers, their unions, or those in schools of education. Brooks commented, "Everyone has reservations about that law, but it is the glaring spotlight that reveals and pierces the complacency at mediocre schools. If accountability standards are watered down, as the establishment wants, then real reform will fade."

While the Dillon article about Duncan was front page news and the earlier Brooks article was located in the Opinion section, the two pieces are eerily similar in how they frame supporters and critics of NCLB in terms of whether they are for or against the reforms mandated by the Department of Education. Framing who supports NCLB and education reform (business leaders, innovative

educational service groups, and certain chief operators of school districts) and presenting them as a foil to the “establishment” resonates with the public because it builds on general beliefs about teachers, teaching, and unions. Even so, this resonance is tenuous, as many members of the public also acknowledge the incredible work that many teachers do in less-than-optimal conditions.

The reality is that media outlets have long been doing more than simply “reporting the facts” in the forms of news headlines, and readers and viewers are not always made privy to what is carefully vetted reporting and what is a paid advertisement. The GAO report about the Bush Administration’s *video news releases* discussed earlier is a case-in-point. Media outlets like the *NYT* and *TM* thus play a pivotal role in what information the public has access to, and from what perspective that information is given. Those who engage in larger educational and policy debates need to pay serious attention to how the mainstream media frames the debates over NCLB, teachers, and public education, to counter and transform the message when necessary, and to hold the media *accountable* for how it frames the debate in support of one view or another.

One way to do this is for educational researchers to examine more closely how the mass media frames issues surrounding school reform, teachers, teachers’ unions, and student learning and to then enter *into* the debate, both in their classrooms and beyond, and challenge the idea that those debates are “tired” (Obama, quoted in Dillon, 2008, December 15; <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/16/us/politics/16educ.html>). It is not enough for educational researchers, particularly those concerned with school reform, teaching, and students (regardless of where they fall in the debate), to continue conducting research, simply reporting that research to grant-givers, at conferences, or in peer-review academic journals. They can expand their audience to more effectively include more members of the public and introduce multiple and alternative frames for how members of the public view school reform (as more nuanced), teachers (teachers on the whole are dedicated to students and their learning), and teachers’ unions (although they advocate for and protect their members working rights, they can also serve as important allies in professional development and teacher retention), among other issues. Furthermore, teacher-researchers can work to present these differing frames as part of the debate resolving educational issues rather than just exceptions to the common sense ideas presented to (and perhaps held by) consumers of the mass media. If the majority of voices in the media reflect one side of the story, the public’s scope is limited in its understanding of the issues of concern. Furthermore, if those voices reinforce existing beliefs about schools and those who work and learn within their walls, then the public may be less likely to ask the tough questions about NCLB and public education in

general. Educators and policy writers must demand that the media, too, is held accountable in regard to making it transparent who is speaking and for what purpose. In addition, educational researchers need to make clear their research findings by disseminating them in forums beyond scholarly journals and monographs. It is not enough to engage in critique within academic circles. Educational researchers can provide the counter examples and engage with the public and the popular media to reframe the debate. To do that, they must also employ the media as strategically as those who have controlled the political discourse to this point.

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Bio

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