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Author: Matthew Ulrich

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# Sports Illustrated's Coverage of Race and Ethnicity in Major League Baseball A Longitudinal Analysis

Matthew Ulrich

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### I. Introduction

On April 9, 2013, Bud Selig, the commissioner of Major League Baseball, announced that he was creating a diversity committee to study a demographic decline in the number of black players in the baseball's highest professional level (Kepner 2013). This committee, led by a diverse group of baseball's front-office executives, has been be given the task to study to study this demographic decline. The goal of this committee is to determine how to add to the MLB's current programs, which include the Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities, or RBI, program and Urban Youth Academies, in an attempt to revitalize the black presence in the game.

According to the 2013, 2014, and 2015 MLB Racial and Gender Report Card studies, conducted by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, the MLB has received top grades in overall diversity and an A+ each year for player diversity (MLB Racial and Gender Report Card 2013, 2014, 2015). The problem, however, lies in the demographic trend. Of all the major professional sports leagues in the United States, Major League Baseball has experienced the strongest change over the last several decades in terms of racial makeup. Once a predominantly white and black league, the MLB came to be dominated by white and Hispanic athletes over the last few decades, as the representation of black players has faded.

Particularly after Selig's diversity committee announcement, scholars have extensively studied baseball demographics, examining economic and social factors that may be driving changes in Major League Baseball's demographic composition. These explanatory factors include region, income, price inflation of baseball equipment, access to ballparks by race/ethnicity (particularly in inner cities), sports stars during childhood (particularly Michael Jordan's role in attracting black youth in basketball), MLB stars by team and city, college scholarships by sport, and free agency differences in professional sports leagues (Swartz 2014a, 2014b, 2014c.).

Many empirical studies have tried to describe the typical childhood background of professional baseball players but it is important to gain a different perspective, one on how the sport is framed. The sports media determines how players are covered in the present day and how both parents and children view the sport. Children grow up playing the sports of their idols, be it the sport of a professional athlete depicted in a magazine or the favorite sport of their parents. The way baseball is presented by the sports media undoubtedly affects the future generation of professional players. Therefore, trends in such presentation should be examined longitudinally, as they will determine the demographic makeup of future players. Moreover, an examination of sports media coverage is also important for our understanding of broader processes of race representation in the media.

This study focuses exclusively on print media in the sports media industry. It attempts to examine the sports media's numeric representation of race/ethnicity in professional baseball by studying *Sports Illustrated. Sports Illustrated* is the best representation of the sports print media as a whole, as it is the largest sports magazine in the United States (Coddington 2014) with a circulation of 3.1 million as recently as 2013 (Lulofs 2013). Research on sports media coverage has studied *Sports Illustrated*'s coverage of race/ethnicity in baseball before (Eagleman 2009, 2011; Condor & Anderson 1984). Eagleman's studies, in particular, focused solely on coverage of professional baseball players, as this study does. Prior research, however, has not examined how media coverage changed over a longer period of time and how these changes are related to shifts in the racial/ethnic composition of baseball players.

Three frameworks that this study uses to understand numeric representation in sports media coverage are race-based discrimination, affirmative action, and color-blind portraval. Race-based discrimination is the process whereby minority players are less represented (or covered in a different, stereotyped way) because of their racial/ethnic identity. Race-based discrimination has traditionally been a significant problem in sports media coverage. Race-based discrimination can be conscious or subconscious, but a problem regardless of intent. Affirmative action, on the other hand, serves as a potential solution for problems that earlier differential sports media coverage as well as other institutional discrimination processes might have created for minority athletes. Affirmative action can be described as a promotion of the progress of disadvantaged persons. For baseball media coverage, affirmative action would involve presenting minority players, particularly black players, more and in a more positive light, hence aiming to boost their representation in professional baseball. The role of sports media in this regard would be to promote minorities in their articles or stories. Finally, color-blind portrayal refers to the act of covering sporting events without an explicit attention paid to the race/ethnicity of players which presumably results in proportional representation of athletes, but does not make an effort to effect social change.

This study is significant in helping us understand our society's view on race/ethnicity because the media's perceptions and stories often influence society's views as a whole (McCombs & Shaw 1972). Through a national cultural interest in sports, we come to see underlying societal themes. In some cases, these themes actually overshadow the sport itself, such as the 1968 Olympics black power salute by track and field athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos. In terms of baseball, Jackie Robinson's participation in Major League Baseball and the progress that it represented overshadowed the game itself. The perspective of the media on race/ethnicity in sport, although distant enough from the sport itself not as to overshadow sporting events, is important in its implications of how race/ethnicity is portrayed in the media to the American public.

#### **II. Literature Review**

This study relies heavily on agenda-setting theory and also takes ideas from framing theory. Agenda setting is defined as the media's ability to influence the public's agenda on topics (McCombs et al. 2002). McCombs and Shaw's original study of the 1968 presidential election demonstrated the correlation between the media and public's interpretation of the most important election issues (McCombs & Shaw 1972). Agenda-setting has been directly applied to sports media as of 2005, when McCombs described sports media, which consists of news, television, and radio outlets, as a defining aspect of professional sports (McCombs 2005). A widely used framework, agenda-setting theory makes a claim and provides evidence that the media has a strong influence on the public's perception. Accordingly, it is important to study media output in order to understand how the public views a topic. In order to understand how the public views a topic. In order to understand how the public views a topic. In order to understand how the public views a topic. In order to understand how the public views a topic. In order to understand how the public views race/ethnicity in baseball, this study quantifies how the media covers race/ethnicity in the MLB. In terms of conclusions, this study is able to make recommendations for the media based on the notion that the media has a strong impact on the public, and that the media must influence the public in a progressive manner.

Often attached to agenda-setting theory is framing theory, which dictates that the media can perceive a social phenomenon, interpret how its audience will understand that social phenomenon, and frame stories accordingly (Goffman 1974). This theory is important to use in tandem with agenda-setting theory, because it serves as a foundation for the media being able to actively influence its readers. Although this study does not observe how the media sets frames, it works under the premise that when a higher quantity of articles are devoted to baseball players of a certain race, the media can actively shape how the public views the racial composition of the sport. In this way, a sports media outlet featuring fewer black players in a time of declining black presence in the game may further hasten this decline, while a sports media outlet featuring more black players will be able to help redirect the trend with affirmative action taken to promote black players in articles. In the same vein, a sports media outlet featuring players while color blind to race is likely to project a proportional portrayal of race in the sport but is unlikely to help redirect the trend of declining black presence in Major League Baseball.

Furthermore, it is important to view sports media as an institution, one that provides services to its readers and viewers. With this institutional view, this study explores the idea of institutional racism and its effects on the media's portrayal of athletes. Jeanette Owuso used Carmichael and Hamilton's 1967 definition of institutional racism, as "Collective failure of an institution to provide appropriate and professional services to people because of their color, race, culture, or ethnicity. Systematic racism appears neutral; however, the policies and practices systematically and habitually disadvantage an ethnic, racial or gender group" (Owuso 2009: 6-7). Observing the sports media industry demographically, it is important to note that the majority of sports journalists are white males (Sabo et al. 1996; Associated Press Sports Editors Racial and Gender Report Card 2012), and it is likely that they would favor other white males (Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers 2004). While this is not an explicit accusation of favoritism, the sports media industry's racial makeup makes evaluation of bias important. Although this study does not study how the media frames athletes, it can evaluate how much each race/ethnicity is covered and how this coverage affects Sports Illustrated readers' perceptions of baseball.

Scholars have both studied and scrutinized sports media's coverage of race/ethnicity, particularly in the past fifteen years, with studies often branching off in many directions. The clearest difference methodologically is that some studies analyze qualitatively *how* race/ethnicity is portrayed verbally or visually by sports media outlets while others quantify *how much* each race/ethnicity is covered. Subject-based differences include the sport, nationality, and gender of those being studied, and outlet-based differences include print media, television, and Internet. Although this study deals exclusively with male baseball players, print media, and *how much* each race/ethnicity is covered, it is important to take other perspectives on sports media's coverage of race/ethnicity into account in order to provide context and background. Most of the focus, though, will be on literature that relates more directly to this study.

With the assumptions of agenda-setting and framing, and the assumption of sports media as an institution, this study evaluates past findings based on three frameworks: race-based discrimination, affirmative action, and color-blind portrayal. Race discrimination in sports media has been heavily studied, but affirmative action and color-blind portrayal have not been specifically connected to the sports media. As a result, review of affirmative action and colorblind portrayal will be both literature-based and speculative.

#### **Race-based Discrimination**

In an early study to quantify racial representation in terms of *Sports Illustrated* coverage, Condor and Anderson discovered that there was a sharp increase in *Sports Illustrated* feature articles covering African-American athletes during the period of 1974 to 1981. They found that there was an equal number of feature articles covering black and white athletes (Condor & Anderson 1984). It is important to note that Condor and Anderson did not cover baseball players exclusively, and other popular leagues such as the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) tend to be made up of predominantly black players. For comparison, 49% of NFL players were black in 1982 (Oriard 2007) and the earliest metric of race in the NBA identified 75% of players as black in 1990 (NBA Racial and Gender Report Card 2013). Condor and Anderson concluded that black athletes were underrepresented in comparison to white athletes despite the equal quantity of feature articles (Condor & Anderson1984).

"Do the Best MLB Athletes Receive Coverage Regardless of Race and Nationality? A Content Analysis of Sport Magazines" (Eagleman 2009) by Andrea Eagleman serves as a foundation for this study's methodological framework. Eagleman's 2009 article used an eightyear sample of *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN The Magazine* issues to determine if the best Major League Baseball players were covered equally or if they were covered differently based on race. Distinguishing between the best MLB players and average MLB players is important in order to evaluate the media's coverage of race/ethnicity based on performance or human interest stories. If the best players of a certain race/ethnicity are disproportionally covered compared to the average players of the same race/ethnicity, it leads to questions as to why the sports media is covering race/ethnicity in that manner.

Eagleman's 2009 study found that the best white athletes were underrepresented in overall magazine coverage and white athletes not on her best player list were overrepresented. Conversely, that the best minority athletes were overrepresented in magazine coverage and minority athletes not on her best player list were underrepresented (Eagleman 2009: 106). Eagleman justified her results by speculating that journalists are more likely to focus on white players who are not on her best player list because "it is possible that writers have a greater knowledge of the personal issues these athletes deal with" (Eagleman 2009:106). Eagleman speculated that the (prominently white) sports journalists are more likely to cover white athletes based on personal stories and black athletes based on performance. With this argument, Eagleman asserted a likelihood of race-based discrimination against minorities by the sports media.

Although Eagleman found that *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN The Magazine* both cover race/ethnicity unfairly, she discovered that *Sports Illustrated* did a better job than *ESPN The Magazine* in covering race in terms of numeric representation in the magazines (2009: 107). This discovery is important to take into account given this study's exclusive focus on *Sports Illustrated* coverage.

Studies of American telecasts covering the 2000, and 2004 Summer Olympics are also important to consider when discussing a trend of racial coverage by the media. Observations of the 2000 Olympic coverage found that there was a strong favoritism towards white athletes, with over 1200 more mentions of white athletes by commentators than of black athletes (Billings & Eastman 2002: 367). A trend of favoritism formed at the 2004 Olympics, with mentions of white athletes increasing from 55% to 66.8% of all athlete mentions (Billings & Angelini 2007).

#### **Affirmative Action**

Affirmative action has proven to have a significant place in professional sports over recent years. The most famous example of affirmative action in American sports is the NFL's Rooney Rule, which mandates that each every NFL team must interview at least one minority candidate during a search for a new head coach (Collins 2007: 871). The Rooney Rule has been criticized due to the fact that teams will often interview a minority candidate to meet the requirement, even though they already had another head coach in mind. However, the Rooney

Rule has seen significant success in terms of African-American head coach hiring, which is important due to the large black presence in professional football (Madden & Ruther 2010)

In baseball, the aforementioned examples of the MLB Diversity Committee, MLB's Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) Program, and Urban Youth Academies all serve as proof that affirmative action has a place in professional baseball.

Applying affirmative action to the sports media in the setting of *Sports Illustrated* coverage of race/ethnicity, the sports media would have a predetermined agenda regarding more coverage of minorities. In baseball, the minority-based agenda would likely focus exclusively on black players, as a result of the well-noted demographic shift in professional baseball (Kepner 2013). There have been no specifically documented programs linking affirmative action and sports media, so the results can only be predicted based on other sports-related affirmative action.

#### **Color-blind Portrayal**

Color-blind racism, which derives from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's 2003 book, *Racism Without Racists*, refers to a distinctive type of racism that mainstream American society does not view as outward racism, but is instead justifies with seemly "logical" explanations (Primm, DuBois, and Regoli 2007: 229). Bonilla-Silva defines color-blind racism as a dominant racial ideology in the United States, meaning that it is widespread throughout much of the country.

In support of color-blind racism in the media, Cranmer et al. found that in terms of National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Football Heisman Trophy finalists, black athletes were significantly more likely than white ones to be described with physical characteristics. They also found that white athletes more likely than black athletes to be described with mental characteristics (Cranmer et al. 2014: 183). This is an example of colorblind racism in that majority of sports journalists are white males (Sabo et al. 1996; Associated Press Sports Editors Racial and Gender Report Card 2012) and these journalists are likely to have a subconscious scope of race and ethnicity, applying this scope to their commentary.

A 1996 study by Sabo et al. analyzed a variety of international sporting events, and argued that the content of announcer's commentary did not indicate negative biases towards minorities. Sabo et al. "did not find solid evidence that commentators contracted a negative representation around Black athletes. In fact, Black athletes were least likely to receive negative comments" (Sabo et al. 1996: 13). They also reported that commentators seemed to place Hispanic athletes in an intentionally favorable light, and avoided negative evaluations of Hispanic players (Sabo et al. 1996:15). Sabo et al.'s findings negate the idea of color-blind racism in the setting of international sporting events and provide an argument for color-blind portrayal of athletes, with no specific affirmative action agenda.

In a study on college basketball commentary, Billings and Eastman found that traditional racial prejudices "seem to be the language of sport, at least in college basketball, and few sportscasters make an effort to break out of the patterns of speech used by their predecessors" (Billings & Eastman 2001: 198). However, they also observed that announcers exhibit no extreme favoritism towards any particular race/ethnicity by announcers, and that hiring minority announcers could change racial prejudices in the languages of sport (Billings & Eastman 2001: 198).

Based on past research, color-blind media representation when covering race in sports can lead to color-blind racism. Some studies have shown, however, that a color-blind approach leads to no bias or even a bias towards traditionally disadvantaged groups.

#### **III. Research Questions**

This study's comprehensive research question is, "How does the quantitative representation of white, black, and Hispanic race/ethnicity in *Sports Illustrated* change over time, and how are these changes related to the changing demographics in baseball?" For the purposes of results, the individual research questions are as follows:

- 1. Are MLB players of different race/ethnicity over- or underrepresented (in relation to their prevalence among all MLB players)?
- 2. Are the "best MLB players," of different race/ethnicity, over- or underrepresented (in relation to their prevalence among the "best players" in the MLB)?
- 3. How do these levels of representation (both for all players and the "best players" change over time (2000-2014)?

#### **IV. Methodology**

This study used a quantitative content analysis methodology to analyze articles in *Sports Illustrated*. I coded all *Sports Illustrated* issues that were released from April 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup> (the MLB's regular season) from 2000 through 2014. The monthly time frame, from April 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>, is set both to replicate Andrea Eagleman's 2009 results and also to give each player "a fair chance of being featured in a magazine regardless of his performance in the previous season, or whether or not his team advanced to the postseason" (Eagleman 2009: 94).

Only articles listed in the *Sports Illustrated* table of contents, with a single MLB player featured, were coded. In order to limit confusion regarding coding of multiple players, as well as for consistency with prior research, articles were not coded if they featured multiple players or if they featured a coach.

For each article that fit these criteria, I recorded date, title of article, author's name, athlete's name, athlete's race/ethnicity, athlete's on-field position, athlete's team, all-star status, and best player status. The most important variables in relation to this study's research question were date, which was transformed into year, athlete's race/ethnicity, all-star status, and best player status. For a few athletes, it was not possibly to clearly identify race/ethnicity, and some athletes identify as biracial; those cases were excluded from the data presented in this study. The codebook for this study can be found in Appendix A and includes descriptions of all variables used.

This study operationalized racial and ethnic categories on the basis of the definition provided by Cooper et al. (Cooper et al. 2012: 198). Cooper et al. provided the following definition, which is in turn based on the U.S. Census, "black is commonly used to refer to African Americans and Latino/Hispanic is used to refer to black Latinos and anyone else having Latino roots" (Cooper et al. 2012: 198). For simplicity, this study refers to the aforementioned Latino/Hispanic category as Hispanic.

This study diverged from Eagleman's 2009 study in that it used different measures of "best player." Eagleman describes her best athletes list, compiled from MLB's website, as including "the top five athletes in each of the nine main hitting categories, and the top five athletes in each of the nine main pitching categories for each year from 2000 through 2007" (2009: 95). Eagleman's criteria for inclusion into her "best players" list, however, are somewhat problematic, as Major League Baseball's website notes only four main hitting categories and four main pitching categories (MLB.com 2015). Consequently, it is not clear how the nine hitting and pitching categories were devised. To provide a more thorough examination of the

"best player" issue, this study used two different measures of "best player": All-stars and a revised "best players" list.

The first measure, all-star game selection, defines players as top MLB athletes through their selection to the MLB All-Star Game. Approximately seventy players are selected as allstars annually, and although the all-star designation is less selective than inclusion in Eagleman's "best player" list, it is still a valid measure of the makeup of the best players in Major League Baseball. Regarding selectiveness, this study found 68% of featured players were all-stars, while Eagleman found 50% of players were "best players" (2009, 2011). Data for all-star game rosters in Major League Baseball were obtained on the www.baseball-reference.com website.

The second measure of best player status in Major League Baseball is this study's "best players" list. The "best players" list first includes the top five vote-getting position players for the American League Most Valuable Player (MVP) Award and the National League Most Valuable Player Award. Additionally, this study includes the top five vote-getting pitchers for the American League Cy Young Award and the National League Cy Young Award on the "best players" list. The Most Valuable Player Award is given to the most outstanding player in each of the American and National Leagues, regardless of position (Baseball Writers' Association of America 2015). The Cy Young Award is given to the best pitcher in each of the American and National Leagues. The Baseball Writers' Association of America votes for these awards (Baseball Writers' Association of America 2015) and they are considered to be the most prestigious regular season individual awards in Major League Baseball. Compared to pitchers and the Cy Young Award, position players do not have an equally prestigious award exclusive to them, and while position players often garner the vast majority of the Most Valuable Player Award votes, pitchers occasionally receive a place as a top five MVP vote-getter. For the

purposes of this study, the "best players" list will only include the top five position players in the MVP voting and will disregard all pitchers in MVP voting to make the Most Valuable Player Award the position player equivalent of the Cy Young Award.

For interpreting the data, this study defines the total numbers of featured players in *Sports Illustrated* in a given year, obtained through coding all issues during the baseball season that year, as observed values for that year. These observed values are then compared to expected values, calculated on the basis of actual demographic composition of baseball players in MLB overall or in a respective best player category; these numbers have no association with *Sports Illustrated* coverage. This study's results focus heavily on observed to expected ratios, which are derived as a ratio of observed and expected values. An observed to expected ratio represents whether *Sports Illustrated* covered a particular race/ethnicity more or less than was expected. An observed to expected ratio greater than one signifies an overrepresentation of a race/ethnicity compared expectations based on player demographics. Likewise, an observed to expected ratio less than one signifies an underrepresentation of a race/ethnicity compared to expected ratio

Data on Major League Baseball's overall demographics were obtained through the Society for American Baseball Research (Armour and Levitt, 2012).Racial/ethnic composition for all-stars and players "best players" list were determined using information from www.baseball-reference.com, from the *Sports Illustrated* articles themselves, and additional Internet-based reports on athletes' racial/ethnic self-identifications.

The author served as the only coder for this study and therefore was, unfortunately, unable to obtain a traditional measure of intercoder reliability. As a substitute measure of reliability, I compared this study's overall observed values to Andrea Eagleman's overall observed values during the length of Eagleman's study (2000-2007). The overall observed values were remarkably similar, with each racial/ethnic category's percent of coverage being no more than 3% different between the two studies. This similarity shows strong reliability between the two studies and allows for comparison between the two studies' results.

In terms of data analysis, this study relies on bivariate analyses and nonparametric regression. Bivariate analysis is a simple form of quantitative analysis involving two variables. Nonparametric regression does not assign the two variables as dependent and independent, but instead assesses their relationship, in this case over time. With nonparametric regression, lowess plots serve as the primary visual evidence for results. Lowess plots are a linear comparison of variables over time and use weights on data points that favor data points nearest to the point being estimated.

#### V. Results

First, examining the overall levels of coverage over the entire time period (2000-2014), this study found that while white players were underrepresented, black and Hispanic players were overrepresented in relation to their overall demographics in Major League Baseball. This conclusion is derived from observed and expected distributions of players (Figure 1). Figure 1 shows observed percentage of coverage by race, expected percentage of coverage by race, and an observed to expected ratio by race.

#### Figure 1 about here

Black and Hispanic players' average observed to expected ratios were 1.85 and 1.23 respectively (Table 1), greater than one during the entire fifteen-year sample. These ratios indicate that more black and Hispanic players were featured in *Sports Illustrated* articles than

would be expected solely on the basis of player demographics. The observed to expected ratio for white players was less than one for the entire fifteen-year period, indicating that white players were underrepresented in *Sports Illustrated* compared to their demographic representation in Major League Baseball. The average observed to expected ratio for white players was 0.73 for the fifteen-year period (Table 1)

#### Table 1 about here

To examine the level of coverage for the "best" MLB players over the entire time period (2000-2014), this study used both all-stars and players on the "best players" list as two measures of "best players." They are covered separately in this study's results.

This study found that Hispanic all-stars were fairly represented in *Sports Illustrated* articles, with average observed to expected ratio of 0.98 over the fifteen-year period (Table 2). White all-stars were only slightly underrepresented, with a 0.92 average "Observed to Expected" ratio over the same period (Table 2). Black all-stars, however, were overrepresented with a 1.38 average observed to expected ratio (Table 2). When interpreting results for all-stars, it is important to be cautious with regards to the smaller frequencies of observed and expected values, particularly given the use of nonparametric regression in this study. For black all-stars, the observed and expected frequencies were only 20 and 14, respectively (Table 2).

#### Table 2 about here

Hispanic and white players on the "best players" list were fairly represented in *Sports Illustrated* articles, with average observed to expected ratios of 0.99 and 0.95, respectively (Table 3). Black players on the "best players" list were proportionally overrepresented, with a 1.20 average observed to expected ratio (Table 3). When interpreting results for athletes on the "best players" list, it is important to be cautious with regards to the smaller frequencies of observed and expected values, particularly given the use of nonparametric regression in this study. For black players on the "best players" list, the observed and expected frequencies were only 10 and 7, respectively (Table 2).

In terms of comparing all-star and "best players" list, this study found that the "best" black players were overrepresented on both lists, but more so for all-stars (1.38 vs. 1.20 observed to expected ratios). The "best" Hispanic players were proportionally covered, both all-stars and players on the "best players" list. The "best" white players were slightly underrepresented in both measures, but more so for all-stars (0.92 vs. 0.95 observed to expected ratios).

#### Table 3 about here

Examining observed to expected ratios by race/ethnicity for overall levels of coverage in *Sports Illustrated*, the most obvious trend over time concerns black players. Between 2000 and 2007, there is a large increase in the observed to expected ratio for coverage of black players, demonstrating that black players were becoming increasingly overrepresented in *Sports Illustrated* feature articles (Figure 1, Observed to Expected Ratio). However, from 2008 to 2014, there has been a consistent decrease of the black observed to expected ratio and, by 2014, the coverage of black players featured in the magazine (13%) is almost proportional to their representation in Major League Baseball (8%). Regarding white and Hispanic players, there is no impactful trend for either race/ethnicity. The coverage of white players dips slightly from the years 2000-2004, but then returns to a more proportional level of representation from 2004-2015 (Figure 1, Observed to Expected Ratio). For Hispanic players, the observed to expected ratio appears to be is quite cyclical over time, with no positive or negative trend (Figure 1, Observed to Expected Ratio). In regards to the cause of this cyclical pattern, it is possible that the small

*annual* frequencies of observed and expected values result in an unstable pattern of Hispanic coverage when observed year to year.

In terms of trends for all-star representation in *Sports Illustrated*, white all-stars show a U-shaped trend for observed to expected ratio, with ratios greater than one in the earliest and later years and ratios lower than one in middle years (Figure 2, Observed to Expected Ratio). The ratio was 1.25 in 2000, averaged 0.82 from 2001 to 2011, and averaged 1.30 from 2012 to 2014 (Table 2). Black all-stars showed a sharp upward trend in coverage during the years 2000-2003 and then began a strong decline (Figure 2, Observed to Expected Ratio). Hispanic all-stars show no trend and were very close to accurately represented throughout the fifteen-year period (Figure 2, Observed to Expected Ratio). Trends concerning all-star players should be treated with caution because of low frequency of observed and expected values for individual years, particularly from 2005 to 2014.

#### *Figure 2 about here*

For players on the "best players" list, the black players' observed to expected ratio has a cubic trend—an increase during the years 2000 to 2003, a decline from 2004 to 2010, and another increase from 2011 to 2014 (Figure 3, Observed to Expected Ratio). Hispanic coverage once again lacks a substantial trend over time but has the lowest observed to expected ratio in the earliest and latest years in the fifteen-year period. (Figure 3, Observed to Expected Ratio). White players on the "best players" list have a cyclical trend over time for observed to expected ratio (Figure 3, Observed to Expected Ratio). Trends concerning players on the "best players" list should be treated with caution because of low frequency of observed and expected values for individual years, particularly from 2005 to 2014.

#### Figure 3 about here

In terms of comparing all-star and "best players" list over time, this study discovered similar trends for both measures of "best" players. The only major difference was that for black players on the "best players" list, there was a sharp increase in the observed to expected ratio from 2011 to 2014. The consensus for white and Hispanic players for both measures of "best" players is that there are no significant trends, and the observed to expected ratio remains similar over time. These trends should be treated with caution because of low frequency of observed and expected values for individual years, particularly from 2005 to 2014.

For additional evidence and alternate perspective of results, refer to the subsequent table and figures.

Table 4 about here Figure 4 about here Figure 5 about here

#### **VI. Discussion and Conclusions**

This study found that over the time period between 2000 and 2014, the "best" white players were underrepresented, but less so than white players overall. On the other hand, the "best" black players were overrepresented, but less than black players overall. The "best" Hispanic players were proportionally represented, as opposed to Hispanic players being overrepresented overall.

As a result of the different categorizations of players, the only direct comparison that can be made is between this study's "best player" findings and Eagleman's best player findings. Eagleman categorized players as on her best players list or not on her best players list, while this study categorized players as "best players" (there are two measures), but did not exclude "best players" from the overall count of players. Additionally, comparisons between the studies can only be made between the years 2000 and 2007 due to the time period constraints of Eagleman's study.

To compare "best player" findings from 2000 to 2007 Eagleman found that the "best" white players were underrepresented and minorities were overrepresented, opposing this study's findings. This study discovered the same general results from 2000 to 2007 as from 2000 to 2014, observing the "best" white players to be less underrepresented and more proportionally covered than white players overall. For black and Hispanic players, which were both overrepresented overall, black players were less overrepresented and Hispanic players were no longer overrepresented.

This study's conclusions differ from those of Eagleman because Eagleman did not take into account the true racial demographics of a best players list. Eagleman found that 50% of featured players were represented on her best players list and she then assumed 50% of players of each race/ethnicity were to be featured on her best players list. This method is only correct if her best players list had the same racial composition as overall MLB players' population, but that is not the case and should lead to incorrect expected values. For instance, when examining this study's "best players" list, only 50% of total "best players" are white, while 62% of all players are white. As a result, it is important to reexamine findings about the media's coverage of the best players in Major League Baseball. Eagleman's conclusion that sports journalists from 2000 to 2007 were more likely to feature black players for performance and white players for human interest stories cannot be assumed as true without further research.

This study found that black players as a whole were increasingly overrepresented from 2000 to 2007 and this overrepresentation decreased over the period of 2008 to 2014, becoming

close to proportional towards the end of this period. This trend can be explained by the increasing attention to race-based discrimination in media coverage during the 1990's and early 2000's. The sports media may have either intentionally or unintentionally overcompensated in its coverage of minority athletes, particularly black athletes, to make up for prior race-based discrimination. If this were done intentionally, this would be an example of affirmative action. Once scrutiny became less common, from 2008 to 2014, sports journalists returned to more color-blind portrayal of race.

For all-stars and players on the "best players" list, the trend over time for black players was very similar to that of black players overall, with a sharp increase followed by a strong decrease. The increasing pressure to counter race-based discrimination in sports media coverage during the 1990's and early 2000's can once again explain these "best player" trends.

Conclusions regarding longitudinal trends for *Sports Illustrated's* coverage of race in baseball leads to the debate between color-blind representation and affirmative action. In the case of covering professional baseball, should the media adopt an approach that features athletes regardless of race or should the media promote certain athletes based on race? With the unfortunate decline of the once large black presence in the game, it is important to have some level of affirmative action in the game, covering black players at a greater-than-proportional frequency. Although the coverage of race by *Sports Illustrated* was more proportional in the later period (2008-2014), the overrepresentation of black players from 2000 to 2007 is beneficial for the game of baseball. In 2012, it was reported that a surprising 22.6% of MLB Entry Draft first-round picks were African American, much higher than the 8.8% figure in the major leagues that year (Rosenthal 2014). Athletes drafted in the 2012 MLB Draft were typically born between the years of 1990 and 1993, so they would have grown up with this heightened coverage of black

MLB players in the early to mid-2000's. Although this is not generalizable evidence, it is important to note the possible positive effects of affirmative action on the black presence in the game.

A criticism of agenda-setting theory, particularly in relevance to a longitudinal study, is that although agenda-setting has proved to be a causal theory, temporal order of causality is often hard to establish (Scheufele 2000). In application to this study, does the media depict race in baseball as a reaction to the current state of the sport or as a view of baseball for the future? Although there is no conclusive answer to the aforementioned question, this study theorizes that no matter the reason for racial representation in *Sports Illustrated*, the representation will have an effect on the current and future perception of Major League Baseball.

Given the time constraints of an undergraduate thesis, this study is unable to extend the time period sampled. Extending the period to the beginning of *Sports Illustrated* in 1954 would provide a much more thorough basis to analyze the effects of coverage trends. It would be interesting to see how race/ethnicity has been covered qualitatively in *Sports Illustrated*, either through descriptive language like in Sabo's 1996 study or by studying the focus of articles in terms of whether a story is performance related or human interest related. Finally, further research on nationality-based discrimination in the sports media's coverage of baseball would serve as a good addition to this study.

This study serves as a strong foundation for research on sports media coverage amidst notable demographic changes in sports. Its methodology and results are important to anyone looking to understand how the media influences and responds to demographic trends. Additionally, if someone is trying to look at print media covering sports, *Sports Illustrated* is an industry standard and this study illustrates how a longitudinal content analysis can be performed

on Sports Illustrated.

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## Appendix A. Codebook for Sports Illustrated articles

**Unit of Analysis:** Feature story articles that appear in the table of contents. These stories must contain one Major League Baseball player. Stories about multiple players, coaches, or team personnel are not coded

**Sampling Size:** *Sports Illustrated* issues released during the Major League Baseball regular season, April 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30<sup>th</sup>

Magazine Date: Indicate the date of publication, using the convention mm/dd/yy

Title of the Article: String variable, used for reference

Author's Name: String variable, used for reference

Athlete's Name: String variable, used for reference

Athlete's Race/Ethnicity: If unsure, read article and see if the athlete himself or the author identifies race/ethnicity

- identifies race/ethn
- 1. White
- 2. Black
- 3. Hispanic
- 4. Asian
- 5. Biracial or undeterminable, excluded from results

Athlete's On-Field Position: Position the athlete played the most during the season. Will be able to analyze outfielders by summing their positions

- 1. Pitcher
- 2. Catcher
- 3. First Base
- 4. Second Base
- 5. Third Base
- 6. Shortstop
- 7. Left Field
- 8. Center Field
- 9. Right Field
- 10. Designated Hitter (American League only)

Athlete's MLB Team at the Time of Publication: Will use 31 dummy variables to measure this—31 because of the 2005 relocation of the Montreal Expos to Washington, becoming the Washington Nationals.

- 0. Not on team at time of publication
- 1. On team at time of publication

**All-Star Status:** Measures whether the athlete was an all star that season. This should be the most longitudinally suited and effective way of measuring the top players. There are 64-68 all stars per season (rules have changed) of 750+ (25 players on a roster at a time) players 0. Not an all-star

1. All-star

**"Best Players" List Status:** Measures whether the athlete was on the "best players" list that season. In order to qualify for the list, a player must:

a) be one of the top five vote-getting position players for the American League Most Valuable Player (MVP) Award or the National League Most Valuable Player Awardb) be one of the top five vote-getting pitchers for the American League Cy Young Award or the National League Cy Young Award

0. Not on the "best players" list

1. On the "best players" list



Figure 1. Sports Illustrated Coverage 2000-2014, by Race/Ethnicity



Figure 2. Sports Illustrated Coverage of All-Stars 2000-2014, by Race/Ethnicity



Figure 3. Sports Illustrated Coverage of Players on Best Players List 2000-2014 by Race/Ethnicity, by Year



Figure 4. Sports Illustrated Coverage 2000-2014, Observed to Expected Ratios by Category and Race/Ethnicity



Figure 5. Percent of players featured in SI articles that are MLB All-Stars and percent that are on the "Best Players List"

			Frequencies				0	bserved to Expected	
			(Percentages)					Ratios	
	White		Black		Hispanic		White	Black	Hispanic
Year	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected			
2000	13 (57%)	14 (61%)	5 (22%)	3 (13%)	5 (22%)	6 (25%)	0.92	1.70	0.88
2001	7 (44%)	10 (61%)	1 (6%)	2 (12%)	7 (44%)	4 (26%)	0.72	0.52	1.68
2002	6 (33%)	11 (61%)	4 (22%)	2 (11%)	6 (33%)	5 (27%)	0.55	2.06	1.26
2003	3 (25%)	7 (61%)	3 (25%)	1 (10%)	5 (42%)	3 (27%)	0.41	2.40	1.55
2004	5 (45%)	7 (60%)	2 (18%)	1 (10%)	4 (36%)	3 (28%)	0.75	1.80	1.31
2005	2 (20%)	6 (61%)	2 (20%)	1 (9%)	5 (50%)	3 (28%)	0.33	2.20	1.80
2006	5 (38%)	8 (61%)	3 (23%)	1 (9%)	5 (38%)	4 (28%)	0.63	2.56	1.38
2007	7 (54%)	8 (63%)	5 (38%)	1 (9%)	1 (8%)	3 (26%)	0.85	4.52	0.29
2008	6 (67%)	6 (62%)	1 (11%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	2 (27%)	1.07	1.36	0.00
2009	5 (42%)	7 (62%)	2 (17%)	1 (7%)	5 (42%)	3 (29%)	0.67	2.35	1.46
2010	8 (50%)	10 (63%)	1 (6%)	1 (8%)	7 (44%)	4 (27%)	0.79	0.80	1.61
2011	2 (25%)	5 (64%)	1 (13%)	1 (8%)	4 (50%)	2 (27%)	0.39	1.58	1.86
2012	5 (83%)	4 (64%)	1 (17%)	0 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (27%)	1.30	2.31	0.00
2013	4 (44%)	6 (61%)	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	5 (56%)	3 (28%)	0.73	0.00	1.97
2014	4 (50%)	5 (61%)	1 (13%)	1 (8%)	3 (38%)	2 (28%)	0.82	1.52	1.32
Total	82 (45%)	113 (62%)	32 (17%)	18 (9%)	62 (33%)	49 (27%)	0.73	1.85	1.23

 Table 1. Sports Illustrated Coverage 2000-2014 by Race

Note: Observed values are based on author's coding and reflect the number of players, by race/ethnicity, that were featured individually in a Sports Illustrated article in a given year

Expected values are based on the total number of observed players in Sports Illustrated articles by year, the number of MLB players, and race/ethnicity demographic statistics, obtained from the Society of American Baseball Research for 2000-2012 and the MLB Race and Gender Report Card for 2013 & 2014 Race/ethnicity was determined by a combination of baseball-reference.com and articles noting a player's racial/ethnic self-identification Observed values rounded for presentation, but unrounded numbers used for calculation of observed percentages

	•		Frequencies (Percentages)	•			0	bserved to Expected Ratios	
	White		Black		Hispanic		White	Black	Hispanic
Year	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected			
2000	12 (63%)	10 (52%)	3 (16%)	3 (16%)	4 (21%)	6 (29%)	1.21	0.99	0.73
2001	7 (50%)	8 (59%)	1 (7%)	2 (11%)	5 (36%)	4 (25%)	0.85	0.64	1.41
2002	5 (36%)	7 (47%)	3 (21%)	1 (9%)	5 (36%)	5 (38%)	0.76	2.29	0.95
2003	2 (29%)	3 (46%)	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	2 (29%)	2 (34%)	0.61	2.03	0.85
2004	3 (38%)	3 (40%)	2 (25%)	1 (13%)	3 (38%)	3 (41%)	0.94	1.89	0.91
2005	1 (14%)	3 (46%)	1 (14%)	1 (9%)	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	0.31	1.60	1.32
2006	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	1 (10%)	1 (7%)	4 (40%)	4 (40%)	1.00	1.40	1.00
2007	3 (43%)	3 (41%)	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	3 (38%)	1.05	3.14	0.38
2008	5 (83%)	3 (58%)	0 (0%)	0 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (33%)	1.43	0.00	0.00
2009	3 (60%)	3 (54%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	2 (40%)	1 (26%)	1.11	0.00	1.52
2010	2 (29%)	3 (49%)	1 (14%)	1 (15%)	4 (57%)	2 (32%)	0.59	0.98	1.80
2011	1 (25%)	2 (48%)	1 (25%)	0 (12%)	2 (50%)	1 (35%)	0.53	2.05	1.41
2012	3 (75%)	2 (56%)	1 (25%)	0 (11%)	0 (0%)	1 (27%)	1.34	2.28	0.00
2013	3 (60%)	3 (58%)	0 (0%)	0 (8%)	2 (40%)	2 (31%)	1.03	0.00	1.28
2014	4 (50%)	4 (51%)	1 (13%)	1 (9%)	3 (38%)	3 (33%)	0.99	1.45	1.13
Total	59 (47%)	63 (50%)	20 (16%)	14 (11%)	41 (33%)	42 (34%)	0.92	1.38	0.98

Table 2. Sports Illustrated Coverage of MLB All-Stars 2000-2014 by Race

Note: Observed values are based on author's coding and reflect the number of MLB all-stars, by race/ethnicity, that were featured individually in a Sports Illustrated article in a given year

Expected values are based on the total number of observed all-stars in Sports Illustrated articles by year, the number of MLB all-stars, and race/ethnicity demographic statistics of all-star rosters obtained from baseball-reference.com

Race/ethnicity was determined by a combination of baseball-reference.com and articles noting a player's racial/ethnic self-identification

Observed values rounded for presentation, but unrounded numbers used for calculation of observed percentages

	Frequencies (Percentages)						Observed to Expected Ratios				
	White		Black		Hispanic		White	Black	Hispanic		
Year	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected					
2000	7 (88%)	6 (70%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	1 (13%)	2 (20%)	1.25	0.00	0.63		
2001	3 (50%)	4 (60%)	0 (0%)	0 (5%)	2 (33%)	2 (30%)	0.83	0.00	1.11		
2002	2 (29%)	4 (55%)	2 (29%)	1 (10%)	3 (43%)	2 (35%)	0.52	2.86	1.22		
2003	1 (33%)	1 (42%)	0 (0%)	0 (16%)	2 (67%)	1 (42%)	0.79	0.00	1.58		
2004	3 (43%)	3 (40%)	1 (14%)	1 (10%)	3 (43%)	4 (50%)	1.07	1.43	0.86		
2005	0 (0%)	1 (35%)	1 (33%)	0 (10%)	2 (67%)	2 (55%)	0.00	3.33	1.21		
2006	1 (25%)	2 (40%)	1 (25%)	1 (15%)	2 (50%)	1 (35%)	0.63	1.67	1.43		
2007	1 (25%)	2 (45%)	2 (50%)	1 (20%)	1 (25%)	1 (35%)	0.56	2.50	0.71		
2008	1 (100%)	1 (55%)	0 (0%)	0 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (30%)	1.82	0.00	0.00		
2009	2 (50%)	2 (45%)	1 (25%)	1 (15%)	1 (25%)	1 (30%)	1.11	1.67	0.83		
2010	2 (40%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	0.80	0.00	1.50		
2011	1 (50%)	1 (55%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	1 (50%)	0 (20%)	0.91	0.00	2.50		
2012	3 (75%)	2 (50%)	1 (25%)	0 (10%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	1.50	2.50	0.00		
2013	2 (100%)	1 (60%)	0 (0%)	0 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	1.67	0.00	0.00		
2014	2 (40%)	3 (55%)	1 (20%)	1 (10%)	2 (40%)	2 (30%)	0.73	2.00	1.33		
Total	31 (50%)	33 (50%)	10 (15%)	7 (12%)	23 (34%)	23 (34%)	0.95	1.20	0.99		

Table 3. Sports Illustrated Coverage of Players on Best Players List 2000-2014 by Race

Note: The "Best Player List" includes the five highest vote-getters annually for the Most Valuable Player and Cy Young awards, obtained from Baseball-Reference.com

Author only considered position players for Most Valuable Player award, as Cy Young award is specific to pitchers and there is no comparable award that is specific to position players

Observed values are based on author's coding and reflect the number of players on the "Best Player List", by race/ethnicity, that were featured individually in a Sports Illustrated article in a given year

Expected values are based on the total number of observed players on "best players" list in Sports Illustrated articles by year, the number of players in the MLB on the "best players list," and race/ethnicity demographic statistics of players on the "best players list"

Race/ethnicity was determined by a combination of baseball-reference.com and articles noting a player's racial/ethnic self-identification

Observed values rounded for presentation, but unrounded numbers used for calculation of observed percentages

		Featured in SI	Articles	ML	MLB All-Stars (% of Featured)			Best Player List (% of Featured)		
Year	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	
2000	13	5	5	12 (92%)	3 (60%)	4 (80%)	7 (54%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	
2001	7	1	7	7 (100%)	1 (100%)	5 (71%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	2 (29%)	
2002	6	4	6	5 (83%)	3 (75%)	5 (83%)	2 (33%)	2 (50%)	3 (50%)	
2003	3	3	5	2 (67%)	2 (67%)	2 (40%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	
2004	5	2	4	3 (60%)	2 (100%)	3 (75%)	3 (60%)	1 (50%)	3 (75%)	
2005	2	2	5	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	4 (80%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	2 (40%)	
2006	5	3	5	5 (100%)	1 (33%)	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	1 (33%)	2 (40%)	
2007	7	5	1	3 (43%)	3 (60%)	1 (100%)	1 (14%)	2 (40%)	1 (100%)	
2008	6	1	0	5 (83%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
2009	5	2	5	3 (60%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	1 (50%)	1 (20%)	
2010	8	1	7	2 (25%)	1 (100%)	4 (57%)	2 (25%)	0 (0%)	3 (43%)	
2011	2	1	4	1 (50%)	1 (100%)	2 (50%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	1 (25%)	
2012	5	1	0	3 (60%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	3 (60%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	
2013	4	0	5	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
2014	4	1	3	4 (100%)	1 (100%)	3 (100%)	2 (50%)	1 (100%)	2 (67%)	
Total	82	32	62	59 (72%)	20 (63%)	41 (66%)	31 (38%)	10 (31%)	23 (37%)	

Table 4.Percent of players featured in SI articles that are MLB All-Stars and percent that are on the "Best Player List"

Note: Players featured in SI articles are based on author's coding and reflect the number of players, by race/ethnicity, that were featured individually in a Sports Illustrated article in a given year All-Star frequencies are based on author's coding and reflect the number of MLB all-stars, by race/ethnicity, that were featured individually in a Sports Illustrated article in a given year Best Player List frequencies are based on author's coding and reflect the number of players on the "Best Player List", by race/ethnicity, that were featured individually in a Sports Illustrated article in a given year Percentages in parentheses reflect All-Star and Best Player frequencies as a percentage of the total players featured in SI articles, by year