# Picturing Identity:

## A Visual Rhetorical Analysis of the Reaction to Ferguson through #Iftheygunnedmedown

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## Abstract

This research rhetorically analyzes pictures presented on Twitter and Instagram using the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown. Using photographs, young men and women point out how the media may use bias to frame young black people as criminals. By using the hashtag, young people were able to reclaim their identity from the media, criticizing media bias in the process. Social Media has created a new platform to control identity. The dichotomy between pictures in #iftheygunnedmedown offer a rhetorically significant example of how social media can combat media bias and be used to redefine identity. By analyzing the use of this hashtag using framing, social identity, identity control, and other theories, the rhetorical significance of the pictures are demonstrated.

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> "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." -Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Race, identity, and media all came to a head on August 9, 2014, when the events in Ferguson, Missouri became the center of controversy and national attention. It started when a white male police officer, Darren Wilson, shot and killed an 18-year-old, black, unarmed man in his neighborhood. Reports state that Brown had robbed a convenience store earlier, which led to Wilson chasing Brown, eventually leading to Brown being shot multiple times. Brown was unarmed and according to some witnesses, had raised his hands to show he did not have a weapon. The whole incident led to a long and controversial discourse on police weapon use, race issues, and police monitoring. Soon after the incident, riots broke out throughout the community, with attacks on citizens and police alike. The event had around the clock coverage from CNN, Fox News, and many other news stations. Race issues drove much of the narrative in the news, while sub-issues were keeping the story alive elsewhere (Brown, 2014; Chatelain, 2014).

Protests became more prevalent as time went on, which led to a dramatic increase in police officers assigned to the area, and more resources from which they could draw. Many protesters were coming away with injuries from rubber bullets, pepper spray and tear gas. A SWAT team arrested Journalists from *The Huffington Post* and *The Washington Post*. Ryan

Reilly, one of the journalists arrested, said, "They essentially acted as a military force...The worst part was he slammed my head against the glass purposefully on the way out of McDonald's and then sarcastically apologized for it." (Alman, 2014, par. 4). The increased tension and militarization of the police created a chaotic environment that seemingly had no solution. Race riots and protests became the center of the dilemma, pointedly directing all of those involved, including media viewers, to create a divide between the police and the community (especially the black community) that has so commonly followed such events. Instead of seeing each group as people who are invested in the well-being of the town of Ferguson, the two groups were caught in a hostile environment of mutual enmity.

Race issues have been a consistent issue in Ferguson, with strong divides existing before Michael Brown was shot. Dr. Clarence Lang (2014) says Ferguson is approximately 70% African American and no stranger to racial profiling:

> Data collected by the State of Missouri since 2000 shows that African Americans have consistently been targets of racial profiling by law enforcement officers. In 2013, black Missourians were 66 percent more likely to be stopped by police, though they were not more likely than whites to be in possession of contraband. In fact, white Missourians were more likely to be found with contraband (34 percent) than were their black counterparts (22 percent). In Ferguson, police stop black people at a higher rate than they do whites, with black drivers twice as likely to be searched. In 2013, African Americans constituted 92 percent of searches and 80 percent of traffic stops in Ferguson (par. 1).

This type of environment had created a short fuse on a bomb that was ready to explode, and the Michael Brown incident lit that fuse. It sparked new waves of activism amongst black youth. One activist, Naisha Soto, said, “There's a lot of power in the streets. We are frustrated and angry

at the fact that one of our young people was killed. I understand the riots. Angry people react by doing whatever they can to take the hurt away. How can we respect the law if the law is attacking us like that?" (Boswell, 2014, par. 22). Many people of all races began to protest the treatment of African Americans in Ferguson. They fought to replenish the value of young black people in society. They chanted, "Black lives matter!" and used Brown as their rallying point. The use of his identity, both in the way the media used it, as well as the protestors, became a point of interest for all involved.

Brown was about to start his first year of college. The photograph of him in his high school graduation cap and gown made the rounds in social media. One writer lamented: "He will not have a first day ever again. And for the children of Ferguson, who have yet to have their first day, they may remember the smell of death, the odor of tear gas, the stench of an American tragedy" (Chatelain, 2014, par. 4). Another photograph of Brown holding up a hand sign that is similar to those of the Bloods, became an alternate picture paired with his name through news media outlets on television (Scott, 2014).

The dichotomy of the pictures created an even greater purpose for the protesters. They were now fighting not only the seeming bias of the police department, but of televised media. Protesters used social media in their retaliation, using the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown as a way to defend against stereotypes and negative framing strategies. Criminal defense lawyer CJ Lawrence was the person who created the hashtag. He said he was frustrated by what he saw as an attempt to shift blame away from the police, and onto Brown. He Tweeted images of himself depicting the paradoxical nature of the media's approach to black men. He said the hashtag acted as a rhetorical question, asking which picture the audience thought the media would use if they had died in a shooting, "but in reality it's something we ask ourselves every day as African Americans" (Judah, 2014, par. 7).


#iftheygunnedmedown caught on and became viral, with over 100,000 uses in the first 24 hours (Judah, 2014, par. 9). It became most popular with black youth, especially young black males

who used the hashtag along with some variation of the question, “which photo do you think the media would use?” Forty percent of African-Americans ages 18 to 29 use Twitter, compared to 28 percent of white youth of the same age (Vega, 2014). Their participation had a great impact on the protest, but also created a national impact wherein black youth from all over the nation could join in and make their voice heard.

As this hashtag spread across the nation, non-black people began to use the hashtag, trying to become part of the movement. Many tweeted that it was for blacks only, and that its purpose was to create discourse surrounding black youth. Some call activism on social media “slacktivism,” or as famous TV writer and director Shonda Rhimes said, “It’s a hashtag. It’s you, sitting on your butt, typing into your computer and then going back to binge-watching your favorite show” (Yandoli, 2014, par. 3). Others stood up for the hashtag, "I knew it had potential to take off as a major social statement, from Black Twitter to American journalism outlets" (Judah, 2014). Whatever the outcome, the portrayal of black Americans in the media has been brought into the spotlight on a large scale.

Those who participated in this hashtag became part of a bigger movement. Their protest gave them ownership of their own visual portrayal. They were taking charge of their own identity by opposing the frame the media had chosen and created their own framework in a way they were able to choose. Not only did the tweets shed light on how televised media may perpetuate stereotypes, it portrayed the positive aspects of black lives, beyond the stereotype. This reclamation of identity through social media changes the relationship of observers and the media. Most people did not have the time or resources to communicate their criticisms of the media to large audiences, yet social media has given power back to the masses and the individual, the power to construct their own narrative under their own terms.

The media is necessary in the information age, not only to keep the public informed, but also to make accountable those in power. The value in critiquing the media has the same effect, to keep those in power through the media accountable. The media may act as a watchdog over the government but there must be a balance by overseeing the watchdog. Accountability becomes convoluted in the time of social media, where purveyors of information can be anonymous or have no ties to objectivity or even truth. Social media can be seen as a branch of media, in the same way television news or radio is connected to the overall means of communication. The largest difference is that social media is perpetuated by those who have no journalistic training. There exists a grey area in the way news travels so quickly, wherein objectivity and opinion overlap and become more difficult to separate.

Images also play an integral role in the way messages are communicated in the digital age. People in the United States spend large amounts of time watching television, films, looking at apps, social media, not to mention all the other physical images bombarding them outside of the digital world: billboards, cereal boxes, newspapers, magazines, etc. The rhetorical significance of images has been noted across multiple disciplines. Helmers and Hill (2004) assert there is "a growing recognition of the ubiquity of images and of their importance in the dissemination and reception of information, ideas, and opinions—processes that lie at the heart of all rhetorical practices, social movements, and cultural institutions" (p. 19). Social media has only increased this ubiquity and compounded the messages sent through the medium.

Visual rhetorical analyses for images on Twitter, a platform that thrives on sharing short 140 character tweets, are rare. They often seek to disseminate meaning from older, iconic photographs, or advertisements, yet have not generally used social media as a source for research. The photographs shared by everyday people have a great impact on those consuming

them on social media platforms. By beginning in Twitter, the research may expand with some of the same concepts onto sites like Facebook and Instagram, where photo sharing is more common. Twitter is unique in its use in multiple protest movements (Hands, 2011; Dahlgren, 2009; Russell, 2011; Svensson, 2012), calling together multiple numbers of people to unite in one way or another.

The contrasting of photographs has further rhetorical significance. Those "Tweeting" their photos convey the complexity of their lives in two chosen photos. They know people's lives are not oversimplified character bifurcations, yet the photos gain significance from the way the media's choice of a singular photo can define audience's perception of identity. In cases like Brown's shooting, the media may frame the audience's perception toward his being culpable or a victim. The existence of media bias toward framing blacks in the media has been proven through multiple studies (Iyengar, 1991; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007). By understanding the significance of these photographs within this hashtag movement, we must visually, rhetorically analyze these texts. The dichotomy between pictures in #iftheygunnedmedown offer a rhetorically significant example of how social media can combat media bias and be used as a public forum for negotiating identity.

## Literature Review

The events of Ferguson allow for a complex and multi-faceted approach to the many issues at play. To explore the media's relationship with identity and visual representation, previous research on Framing Theory and Identity Control Theory will build the groundwork from a theoretical perspective. Scholarship on social media, visual rhetoric, and media bias and race establish a better foundation for examining and analyzing the hashtag and the media.

### *Framing Theory*

Erving Goffman (1974) began the discussion on Framing Theory with his book *Frame Analysis*. He said, "Social frameworks…provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being" (p. 22). The way a situation is framed will have a profound effect upon perception. Behavioral research provides evidence that people are sensitive to contextual cues, which affect decisions, judgments, opinions, and alter decision outcomes (Iyengar, 1991). Other research suggests that trait inferences from simple texts are automatic, and such inferences are made sub-consciously (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Framing a subject socially can have multiple consequences for the subject and the audience.

Within the media, framing is even more apparent. Reporters that cover the same event may find that they are using the same angles: "borrowed frames help [reporters] process a glut of facts—on deadline" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 98). If a reporter sees that such frames elicit a desired response, that frame becomes even more ubiquitous in its use, until saturation (Entman, 2007; Goffman, 1974). The way media frames problems draws people's attention to certain ideas while ignoring others, holding power because it changes the way "we make sense of the world" (Kendall, 2005, p. 5). Frames change perceptions of situations, telling the audience what is relevant to understanding, and altering if they view something positively or negatively (Druckman, 2001).

The frames used by those reporting news can have an effect upon audiences, further turning their viewpoint toward or away from that of the author. Davis and Kent (2013) state, "framing theory and research directly challenge the notion that news stories can and should be objective. Social constructionism asserts that there is no objective social reality that can be described using traditional reporting practices. The social world is constructed and this

construction is constantly being negotiated" (p. 73). If objectivity cannot be achieved, then bias must exist in some form or another. Understanding the message frame can also help with which methods or measures could be used, such as observing frames in texts and contexts, observing the mind of the person who constructed the frame, or observing those on the receiving end of the frame (D'angelo, 2012).

From a theoretical perspective, framing theory criticizes the effects media has on one end "while taming with more observational precision the media hegemony view on the other" (Reese, 2007, p. 149). Framing theory brings the responsibility of the media into focus helping those who create it to see what impact their decisions can have on individuals and groups. They are opinion-makers and watchdogs, but they also shape the identity and perception of others through their choice of representation within the media.

From a critic's standpoint, framing theory allows for the assessment of issues presented by and in the media. News framing is of particular interest to critics, "given its relevance to the agenda setting function of the news and the particular salience attributed to the issue of representing "reality" (Shugart, 2011, p. 637). This representation of reality allows the media to decide what is, and is not, important when it comes to the issues. Furthermore, it creates a window in which media outlets can shape the identities of groups or individuals merely by the consistent portrayal of one viewpoint, regardless of its veracity. As a theory and a critical lens, framing theory applies in multiple ways to the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson.

*Social Identity Theory & Social Media*

Social Identity Theory is derived from the psychological principle that people gain a sense of self-worth and belongingness from their membership in groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It also states that interactionism, not individualism, is what helps a person psychologically create

a social identity (Turner & Oaks, 1986). Positive esteem is sought from the social comparisons they make (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, the self-regulation of perception, behaviors, and conduct are determined by group membership and participation (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

People attribute value and emotional significance to a group through their interactions with it, creating an idea of what it means to be integrated with large numbers of people. Tajfel (1982) expounds on this theory more when he says: "In conditions in which social interactions are determined to a large extent by the individuals' reciprocal group memberships, positive social identity can be achieved, in a vast majority of cases, only through appropriate intergroup social comparisons" (p. 24). Those associated with #iftheygunnedmedown are identifying with the black community and especially black youth. The use of the hashtag asks participants to relate and compare their experience with that of Brown.

In this article, those people participating will be a part of many differing and overlapping groups, such as a member of the Twitter community, and more exclusively part of a "hashtagged" conversation. They may also be part of their geographically close community with whom they are participating via Twitter, or an expansive digital community of friends and viewers with whom the sender has never met.

People may categorize themselves, and change their own perceptions or those within the group by creating boundaries of acceptable or adapted communication. McKinley, Mastro, and Warber's (2014) research shows:

> In group bias may in turn lead to more favorable judgments of in group members, and, in the case of…other minority groups, improved self-concepts… educators must also encourage ethnic minorities…to create their own media that presents counter

> stereotypical representations of these ethnic groups and further promotes a positive self-concept among other viewers (p. 15).

Twitter is changing the way social groups are being made, sustained, and interacted with and provides new ways to manage identity (Li & Bernoff, 2011). Users are prone to disclose their beliefs and find others to validate their disclosure (Seung-A, 2013). This social management of in-group communication facilitates group identity through a public space, one that can be accessed by outsiders. This is especially relevant as it pertains to race, especially among minorities and their favorable outlook toward representation in a public sphere (Phinney, 1992).

Twitter, although used largely for social and group communication, has also found a fitting purpose as a medium for activism (Hands, 2011). The platform has been used as a place of political participation and therefore a form of expression for political agency (Dahlgren, 2009). This new political arena can be both formal and informal (Dahlgren, 2009), but gives power to citizens that normally do not wield political power. The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 showed the potential for this technology to be reworked by citizens to undermine policy, but also for its practical purposes of rallying people together (Russell, 2011). Svensson (2012) has shown how this new form of activism relates to identity and power:

> Practices of updating illustrate types of power relations that reveal themselves in the continuous preoccupation of expressing and negotiating ourselves and our positions, as well as interpreting others through the production, maintenance and sustenance of network visibility (p. 17).

Power over identity becomes the real issue of this protest. Technology offers a new balance to power, taking from the media and giving it to normal citizens, who before had difficulty in producing mass messages.

Herrara (2012) has named the younger people who are so closely tied to digital social networks as the wired generation, and that being so close can make connection instantaneous. Twitter has been especially efficient at bringing large numbers of people together through its succinct and simple model. People may take collective action by individually participating but maintaining their commitment through group identification (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Castells (2007) posits that power relationships must be focalized, and there must be a function, which works as that switch for groups. Hashtags may act as a catalyst for change, mobilizing masses toward a specific goal.

Hashtags like #ItStopsToday, #ICantBreath, and #Justice4All have created groups which affected President Obama's decision in changing policy regarding police work (Brewster, 2014). These more recent hashtags have shown how much of an impact social media can make. By researching who uses a certain hashtag, the creation of a socialized group identity through participation is better understood (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

The factors contributing to virality are many, but Berger and Milkman's (2012) research suggests that emotional arousal, value exchange, self-presentation, and the desire to influence or entertain others are the leading cause of social transmission. There is no established objective measurement for when a message gains the identifier "viral" but rather it becomes a social moniker when that message is transmitted quickly and often by individuals.

Many of the black youth on Twitter are referred to through a digital, cultural identifier: "Black Twitter" (Williams, & Domoszlai, 2013). Brittney Gault, a 28-year-old black student, said "they are really a media response team….Everybody is tapped into Black Twitter" (Vega, 2014, par. 8). It is a complex community with many aspects. It has become the subject of research, and continues to grow. Meredith Clark, a professor at the University of North Texas,

breaks Black Twitter into three levels of connection: first a personal community, or a physical connection outside of Twitter; second are thematic notes where people collectively gather digitally around certain topics or subject matters; and third:

> Where we see a lot of conversation about these networks and how they're linked, is when those personal communities and the thematic notes kind of intersect around a specific topic. And generally you see that, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, #AskRKelly, those sort of things. That's where you see the meta-network at work (Ramsay, 2015, par. 8).

This convergence of thematic notes and personal community in hashtags portrays their purpose as an identifier, group maker, and medium for political discourse. Twitter has been appropriated and adapted for communal and rhetorical functions beyond what others have done with the medium since its inception.

Although social media helps a group to grow and gain unity, conventional media sources still act as a catalyst in creating identity socially. The media can create contrast by presenting people outside of a group with information both about those within and outside of the group. This contrast then presents those who wish to identify with the group an opportunity for comparison. Mckinley, Mastro, and Warber (2014) offer an explanation for how these comparisons work:

> The relationship between media exposure and intergroup outcomes is further played out when it comes to the media's role in creating commonly held norms and conventions. In order for intergroup comparisons to operate, the comparative dimension must be recognized by both in-group and out-group members. In other words, the point of comparison is not merely the group itself, (e.g., gender, race, etc.) it is the relevant dimension in the immediate context (p. 3).

So, if those in the #iftheygunnedmedown group wish to compare their experience with how it was sometimes portrayed in the media, they must do it in a way that is not only understandable to themselves, but to others as well. The nature of the hashtag requests that people keep in mind the perspective of the media, while at the same time visually showing other aspects of their life for comparison. The context of the discourse changes with time, but still remains relevant as long as audiences keep the conversation surrounding Ferguson alive. If people do not understand the context, they miss the relevance of the discourse, and the importance of intergroup identity.

*Media Bias and Race*

The focus on certain narratives within media, establishing African Americans as the perpetrator is detrimental. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) place the racial element in what they call the "crime script," as the dominating force in influencing white people's attitudes that blacks commit crime, even when a black person is not mentioned in a report. Other research focuses on the idea that white attitudes have become overtly favorable to non-whites, but is subversively unfavorable and impractical in instituting policy that would favor blacks (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). The use of interracial conflict has also been used to vie for ratings, and is sometimes a superior concern over that of shaping proper attitudes toward race (Dixon & Williams, 2015).

Although framing is applied to all subjects in the media, it can be especially negative toward black males. Billy Hawkins (1998) discusses the negative framing of black people, using the covers of Newsweek and Time magazines as an example. The representation of O.J. Simpson during his trial was especially poignant, showing a darkened mugshot that symbolized a broader bias within these covers, which "strategically work[s] to keep black men, and blacks in general, in stereotypical and disadvantaged positions" (p. 49). These negative displays illustrate

a larger problem in framing with race, where it portrays a story as showing people's darker sides, but does so more often when it comes to black representation.

The media can contribute to social learning by teaching what other races "are like" through their representation. Even when people are given personal experiences with diverse populations, they are still left with stereotyping judgments, which are attributed mostly to media representation (Kellstedt, 2003). Goffman (1974) posits that negativity in framing, although at times subconscious, is made with intentional effort. In cases of an incident like Michael Brown's, there may be effort made by the media to place responsibility on him, versus his shooter (Gandy & Li, 2005). Negative frames may cause audiences to desire for Brown's guilt, so their perception may match the belief system with which they have been conditioned. The social pressures of framing can lead to conformity to a broader, negative perception, especially in relation to race (Entman, 1992).

Mediated images of race shape racial understanding and misunderstanding, and the media should be more socially responsible in this endeavor (Entman, & Rojecki, 2000). Audiences tend to exaggerate motives of individuals and discount the more important contextual factors, jumping to conclusions quickly (Iyengar, 1991). In one study, over 75% of all local news covering black people had to do with crime or politics (Entman, 1990). When messages are framed in an accusatory manner, it can "lead to increases in the perceived culpability of the target of the news coverage" (Seate, Harwood, & Blecha, 2010, p. 351). Because of stereotypes in news coverage, audiences show a hostile prejudice toward African Americans, and were harsher in their judgments toward the suspect (Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007). Therefore, analyzing how black people are framed by the media is of continual concern until these issues subside.

## Method

Rhetorically analyzing texts is one of the oldest methods of study. Originating in Greek courts, it found its roots in old politics and persuasion. In Aristotelian terms, rhetoric is defined as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Roskelly, 2008, p. 8). With such a broad definition, rhetorical processes allow for flexibility in evaluation, no matter the form of discourse. Rhetorical studies are finding the capacity for persuasion, the power of it, and its meaning that makes it worth studying. As Bizzell and Herzberg (1990) review:

> *Rhetoric* is synonymous with meaning, for meaning is in use and context, not words themselves. Knowledge and belief are products of persuasion, which seeks to make the arguable seem to be natural, to turn positions into premises – and it is rhetoric's responsibility to reveal these ideological operations (pp. 14-15).

The "ideological operations" are implicitly felt, but rarely understood. Rhetorical meaning arises from analyzing texts, which utilize these operations. Whether it is in words, visualization, or sound, rhetorical meaning may be found and critically dissected.

The study of rhetoric has changed as researchers refine and branch off into sub-categorical regions of the discipline. Because there are so many variations on the subject, rhetoric cannot be contained within one discipline. Medhurst (2001) explains:

> We have recovered the truth that the study of rhetoric is inherently interdisciplinary. We cannot study rhetoric and public affairs without knowing something— preferably a great deal—about those public affairs that we seek to critique from a rhetorical point of view. Not only are rhetorical dimensions linked to the not-so-obviously rhetorical, but there are

> many instances in which certain rhetorical dimensions do not even manifest themselves save through study of the ostensibly nonrhetorical (p. 499).

The interpretation of rhetoric therefore becomes an encapsulating experience, bringing in multiple viewpoints. People are not so cut and dry to have their experiences explained entirely in objective terms, they are free agents, ready to make multiple decisions in similar moments and contexts. The purpose may not be in *predicting* how people will act, but *understanding* how they have acted.

According to Brockriede (1974), there are different categories of rhetorical analysis: Evaluative, descriptive and classification, and explanation. Evaluative can be seen as not effective because it is providing an opinion without much reason behind the opinion. Descriptive and classification analyses will allow a more focused look at texts, but can force the rhetoric to fit the categories within classifications instead of the other way around. Furthermore, the description of the rhetoric only offers insight into what the rhetoric is doing, and does not allow the audience to come to their own conclusion about the text when it is done. An explanatory analysis allows the critic to discover different categories from the text, allowing the audience to see the reasons for results and asks them to come to their own conclusion of whether the critic was right in his/her analysis.

Medhurst (2001) also points out that as we analyze rhetoric, we create it ourselves. Those participating in the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown were acting as amateur rhetoricians, evaluating the media's use of photography as biased, and creating a protest rhetoric in the process. Although they did not knowingly employ Framing Theory in their process, they established a clear view of how two separate photos of a person may instill different types of reactions from an audience. They also noticed that by contrasting their own pictures, it created a

persuasive argument implicit in the pictures themselves when accompanied by the hashtag, criticizing the media for their consistent choice of negative photos over positive ones. Their own identity was seized by the discourse of the media. Before social media, they did not have an adequate mode for response, but with the help of Twitter, they were able to reclaim the narrative of their own identity, as many of the examples came from their own lived experience. By understanding their experience and the changing tide of visual rhetoric, the way young black people negotiate identity and interact with the media may also be better understood.

In a 1970 conference of Communication scholars, a definition of visual rhetoric was established. In its simple form, any artifact or product that formulates, sustains, or modifies perceptions, attitudes or behaviors was considered to be viable as a form of rhetoric (Foss, 2005). Sonja Foss (2004) states, "visual artifacts constitute a major part of the rhetorical environment, and to ignore them to focus only on verbal discourse means we understand only a miniscule portion of the symbols that affect us daily" (p. 303). By focusing on images, we have to consider the context in which they are shown, which may change meaning associated with the image (Grancea, 2014). As it pertains to race, images can reinforce stereotypes. They lend power to framing strategies through repeated tropes, and can be harmful when lacking context (Cobb, 2011).

The invention of printing, and exactly replicating a visual message began the importance of analyzing visual messages as mass media (Ivins, 1953). Today, digital replication can happen instantly, and millions of people may see copies of the same picture within seconds of it being taken. This mass production and distribution has changed much of the way Americans consume messages, and the way they think about them. Ivins (1953) postulates that as the ability to disseminate photographs increases, they become like vocabulary words added to the dictionary

of communication. Social Media offers the largest collection of this visual connection the world has ever known.

Since #iftheygunnedmedown deals with social media platforms such as Twitter, which use photographs accompanied by text, the artifacts analyzed are not only the words used, but the pictures associated with the hashtag. The rhetorical significance is mainly found within the photographs, as they portray the purpose of why the hashtag was created in the first place and offer a unique medium associated with this hashtag. Analyzing what features are given in one photograph versus its contrasting counterpart help show the underlying message to the movement. Furthermore each photograph displays certain components of an identity the person chooses to share. Both detail different aspects about their lives, but with different meaning when used by the media. Through a dual approach, the pictures act as an enthymematic structure, allowing the audience to fill in what choice they think the media would make, but also come to their own conclusion as to a person's identity, since it cannot be accurately reflected by a single photograph.

Photographs are one of many artifacts within visual rhetoric that are worthy of studying. Although rhetoric itself is interdisciplinary, visual rhetoric continues that expansive reach, covering areas such as architecture, advertising, film, history, photojournalism, and many more. Visuals may substitute or transcend the use of words. There are no ways to fully represent an individual merely through a description, nor can the emotion be fully felt through words in the same way as a nonverbal explanation. An image may display complex and infinite messages through semiotic and emotional responses from the audience. News photographs are especially prone to being used as a symbolic referent, wherein they may be altered or focused with accompanying words or editing to fit a certain narrative (Bock, 2008). Photographs in news then

may become “cultural representations that can easily be defined within dominant society” (Gutsche, 2011, p. 141-142).

Messaris (1997) outlines three essential ways that images persuade: iconicity, indexicality, and syntactic indeterminacy. Iconicity stands as one of the more relevant aspects in this study, as those who participate in the hashtag employ some form of a functioning icon in their pictures. Icons may be images that can stand for an idea or a concept. Lucaites and Hariman (2001) define iconic photographs as:

> Photographic images produced in print, electronic, or digital media that are (1) recognized by everyone within a public culture, (2) understood to be representations of historically significant events, (3) objects of strong emotional identification or response, and (4) regularly reproduced or copied across a range of media, genres, and topics (p. 37).

This research will use this definition in determining the iconicity of a subject within the photographs used in the hashtag. The iconicity plays a role in establishing common ideologies, increasing understanding to the purpose of the image, and influencing identity.

Indexicality refers to a photograph’s ability to document that something actually happened. Images may be duplicitous or biased, but unaltered photos show that some action took place. They may also indicate something beyond the photograph, like a footprint or smoke that signified something that went before (Lester, 2014). This quality brings different challenges as the internet is full of altered or “Photoshopped” photographs, but they still function as a representation of the self, since those who Tweeted the photographs chose them as identifiers.

Syntactic indeterminacy presupposes that pictures cannot make full logical connections in and of themselves. In this way, the hashtag and accompanying tweet are most useful. The connection between the pictures is easily seen through the words and the connection to the hashtag. Messaris conveys why this connection is important when analyzing an image:

> Any mode of communication can be described in terms of either semantic or syntactic properties. A semantically oriented description focuses on how the elements of a particular mode (images, words, musical tones, or whatever) are related to their meanings. A syntactically oriented description is concerned with the interrelationships among the elements themselves as they combine to form larger meaningful units. Each mode of communication has its own characteristic combination of semantic and syntactic features (Messaris, 1997, p. viii).

The *combination* of photographs is one of the most important persuasive functions of these images. Alone they may be weaker rhetorically than when they are combined, giving them their syntactic description and larger meaning. Also, the photographs meaning is determined semantically by the accompanying Tweet, registering the description through the words used.

The photographs used in the Tweets can also serve another function beyond what Messaris has dictated. They may also function as epideictic arguments toward humanizing those in the photographs. Aristotle, commenting on the praise aspect of epideictic oratory, said:

> [Mention of] attendant things contributes to persuasion, for example, good birth and education; for it is probable that good children are born from good parents and that a person who is well brought up has a certain character. Thus, too, we "encomi-ize" those who have accomplished something. The deeds are signs of the person's habitual

> character, since we would praise even one who had not accomplished anything if we believed him to be of the sort who could (Kennedy, 1991, p. 81).

The economization of a person's deeds works as a lens for understanding the value of a photograph and how it defines a person's life visually. Display of conduct helps an audience to decide if a person will continue that behavior in the future.

Aristotle continues: "we judge future things by predicting them from past ones; and enthymemes are best in judicial speeches, for what has happened in some unclear way is best given a cause and demonstration [by enthymematic argument]" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 82-83). He then states that the blame functions work as opposites to those of praise. In other words, if any person or group is seen as transgressing or violating social principles then blame is made. The dual pictures can take on both blame and praise arguments for different audiences, so each photograph will be studied within that context.

Lester Olson (1983) explains the "visualization of the praiseworthy or the blameworthy allows for the union of aesthetics and society, since a people's aesthetic artifacts can both reflect and reform social action." (p. 24). The active nature of this hashtag as a protest and civil rights movement allow it to perform this type of reformation. The sophisticated use of visual artifacts within the hashtag community portrays the advanced rhetorical functions of social media. Gallagher and Zagacki (2005) state "images…may disclose particular aspects of human beings as they confront the world in the here and-now" (p. 182). The photographs shown below act as artifacts of lived experiences, captured in a still image to challenge framing devices used in media, and markers of their own perception of identity.

For the purposes of this thesis, those people who tweeted using the hashtag shall be called a "sender." The photograph used to showcase the identity of the sender with an affirming

message will be called the “positive” photograph, while those in the light of stereotyping and creating bias will be called the “negative” photograph. Many of the words associated with the pictures went along the lines of: “#iftheygunnedmedown which picture would the media use?” Any auxiliary information that may have been used multiple times beyond that will be taken into consideration (e.g. “#iftheygunnedmedown which photo would they use? Just me doin my thing), but those artifacts analyzed in this study are mainly in the photographs representing the senders. Those using the hashtag without a picture associated are not included in this research.

This analysis will combine multiple approaches referenced here, tailoring an approach to flesh out the meaning from the Tweets. By studying multiple senders, common themes will arise and overall messages will begin to take form. Those artifacts chosen will be based on their representation of themes that exist within the larger thread. They will also be chosen based on their popularity, as in being retweeted multiple times or “favorited” by multiple people. They will be broken down as representatives of their themes, but also individually as photographs. The hashtag will have a different meaning to each sender, yet the overall rhetorical message may arise from finding the center of its virility, the part of its usage that resonated with each sender enough to partake in the ubiquity. This pervasiveness is why it is worth rhetorically analyzing and exploring.

A visual rhetorical analysis can assist in understanding the ambiguous nature of photographs. There may be multiple messages being sent from a single photograph, but it is the job of researchers to interpret, with evidence to back it up, and then explain findings. I am limited in this capacity, as I am a white male who lives in a mostly white town, so I cannot fully understand what a black person tweeting a pair of pictures with this hashtag may have intended. I have lived in black communities in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh for parts of my life,

allowing me some access into the experience, but I am far from an expert and even further from a participant. I offer this limitation for insight into my own approach. Nevertheless, approaching these Tweets as artifacts, I may offer my interpretations along with my educated perspective as I attempt to glean the rhetorical nature of the photographs.

Therefore, each of the photographic pairings will be analyzed from screenshots as they appear in the Tweet, working as an enthymematic argument. Smith (2007) identifies key characteristics of visual enthymemes: they involve probable premises and conclusions that allow for multiple interpretations by audiences, they accommodate ethical and emotional dimensions of argument, and they depend on agreement between messenger and audience. Each photo also has an epideictic function, with the positive showing praise and the negative portraying blame (Kennedy, 1991). The photographs will be considered one after the other, and then how they work together. This analysis will be explanatory, interpreting the iconicity found within each photograph, along with cultural representations, and what the photos offer as a way of negotiating identity (Brockriede, 1974; Gutsche, 2011; Messaris, 1997). The semiotic significance of each icon will be analyzed, along with the presented and suggested elements of each photo, where it "engenders an understanding of the primary communicative elements of an image and, consequently, of the meanings an image is likely to have for audiences" (Foss, 2004, p. 307). The framing employed within each artifact is seen as alternative identity narratives selected by the sender, both acting as different meaning-making visualizations of lived experiences. The audiences being taken into account are Black Twitter, those within the hashtag community, and those media to whom the Tweets are directed as protest. The analysis will then uncover the rhetorical function of each Tweet, and ultimately demonstrate the means of how the

senders mediated their own identity. This analysis will be followed by discussion of the overarching message behind the Tweets as a collective whole.

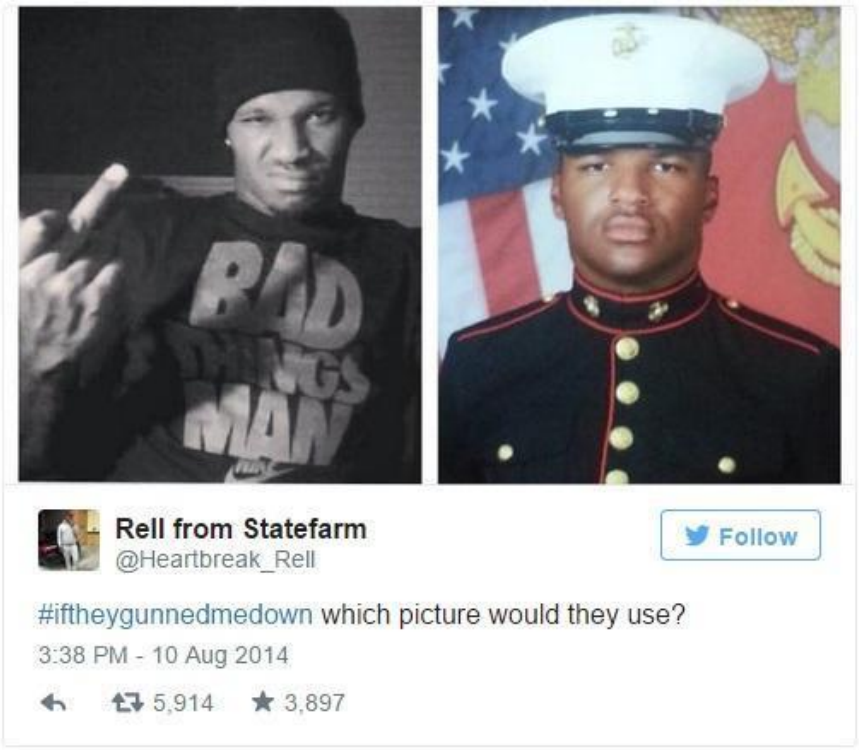
## Analysis

In this analysis, I argue the pictures used in the hashtag act as an enthymematic argument against media bias, that housed within the pictures are a re-appropriated representation of self-identity. Each picture acted as a symbolic "letter to the editor" where those on Twitter voiced their concern and criticism of the media's handling of the Michael Brown case. The pictures simultaneously show what pictures the media may use in a biased way toward African American youth, and another picture, which represents a more positive aspect of their life. The dichotomy of the pictures contrasts the negative versus the positive. Each portrayal sets up the Tweet as an individual presenting his/her own character, and as a member of a community wishing to reclaim the way their collective identity is framed. The idea may not be to necessarily setup identity as a binary, but to show two points of a spectrum of lived experience.

Although each of these characteristics may be a symbol of identity, they are also used to portray self-attributed stereotyping from a chosen picture. The negative photographs in each of these were as carefully chosen as the positive artifacts. Each photograph indicates an aspect of something that actually happened, but the narratives formed from the picture may take on new context when framed by the media as the defining portrayal of identity. As Burke (1969) describes the concept of synecdoche, he says: "either the whole can represent the part or the part can represent the whole (For 'represent' here we could substitute 'be identified with')" (p. 508). Each member participating in the hashtag acts as a synecdoche, with Michael Brown acting as the prototype within the media. The photographs are far more nuanced than even the senders may realize, tapping into the social consciousness of perceived stereotypes, both positive and

negative. As the media continue to choose more negative photographs to portray black youth, they perpetuate racism through framing choices. The arguments presented fight this negative assumption with positive photographs that frame the individuals in a narrative in such a manner as to persuade viewers toward benevolence rather than malevolence until proven guilty. The choices by the sender, whether consciously or subconsciously, to both present identifying pictures and critique the media, demonstrate the rhetorical value of these images.

Figure 1:




Larrell Christian (Fig. 1), said in an interview about his Tweet: "it seems like when the police gun someone down they always use a thuggish picture" (Rhoades, 2014, par. 7). The negative picture is edited with a black and white filter, contrasting the darkness and accentuating his middle finger, face, and the words on his shirt. The iconicity of his middle finger couples with the words "bad things man" on his shirt to label him as worthy of blame. A beanie can be

tied to gang related activity and the sneer helps to add to the idea of mal-intent. In contrast, the positive photo has several instances of iconicity, creating an argument for praise. The color, in contrast to the black and white photo, helps to showcase the icons of the American flag and the Marine Corp. logo and uniform. His demeanor is obedient and dignified, indexicality in the form of someone who is disciplined in the ways of the Marines. The use of military uniforms and affiliation with armed forces was a common trend in the hashtag community. By doing so, the affiliation acts as a display of good deeds past and future, one attributed to hard work by the individual and not obtained by luck or chance. The syntactic indeterminacy inherent in each of these photos is the hashtag coupling them together. Christian's completion of the hashtag's question isn't necessary to those consuming the photos, but common nonetheless in providing clarification of meaning.

Figure 2:

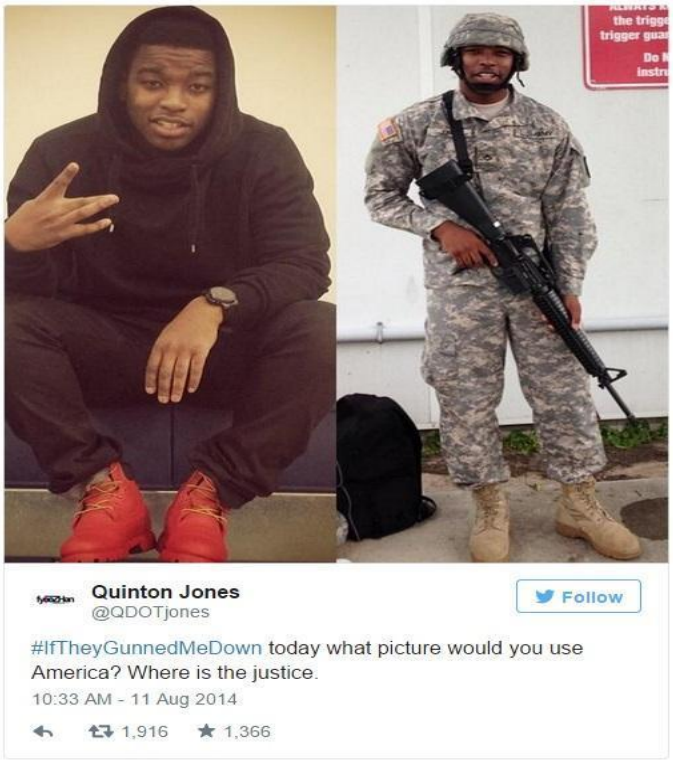
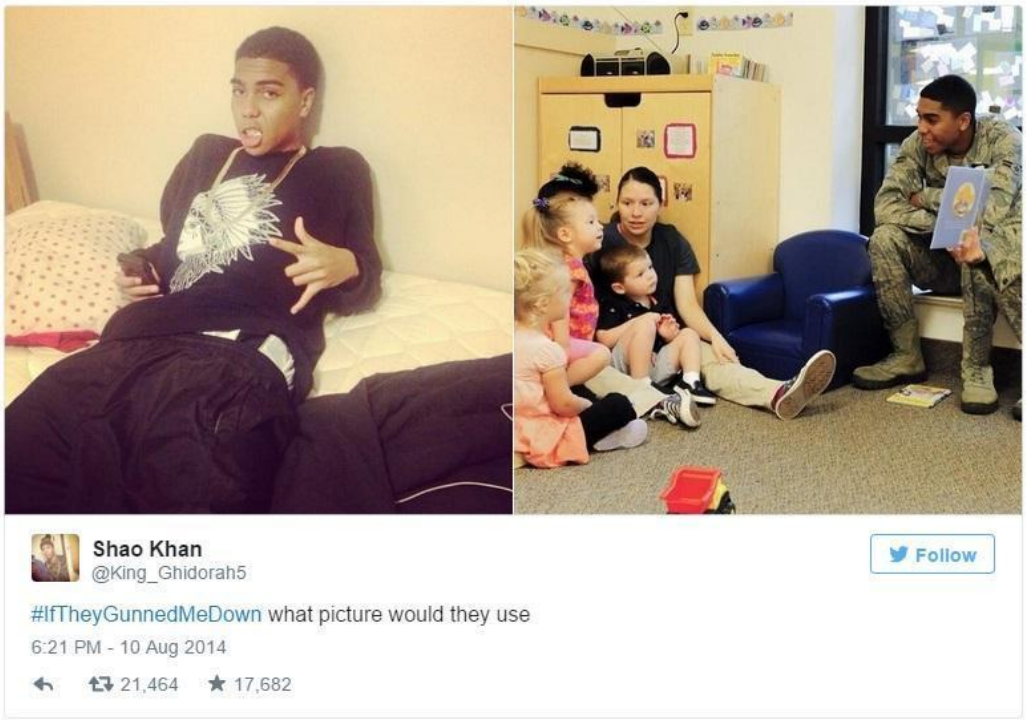


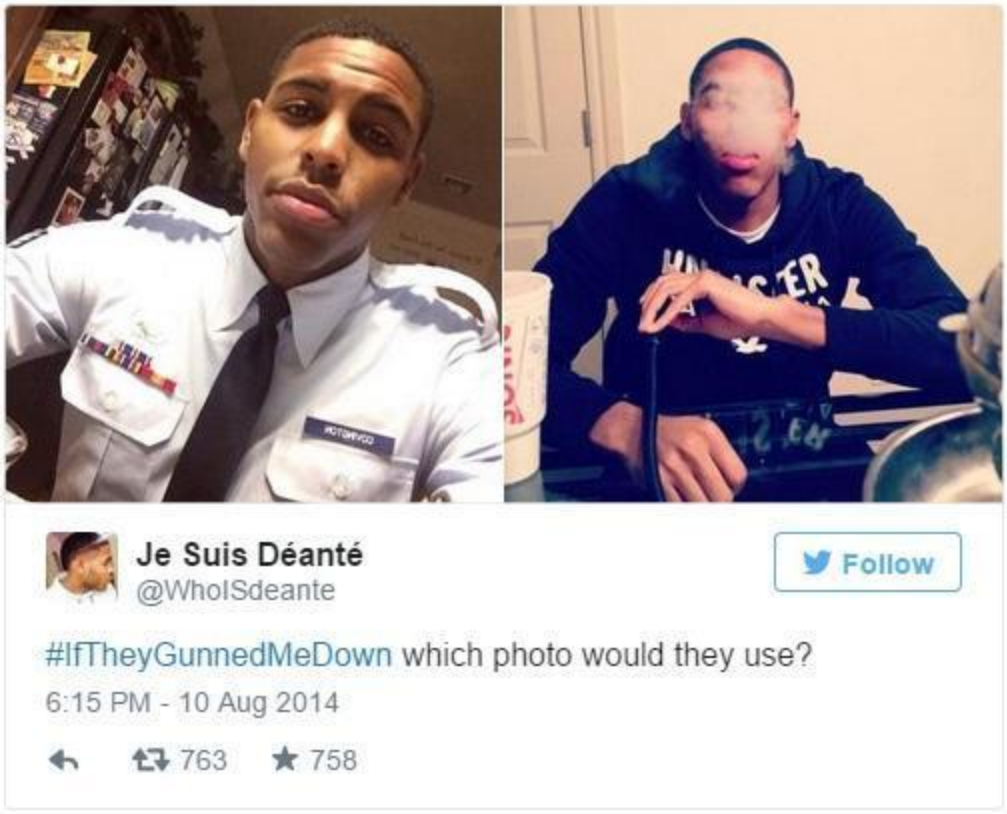
Fig. 2 offers another contrast of gang related icons to military service. The negative photo utilizes a focus on the icon of a Westside gang sign along with a hood and sweat pants. His sneer and aloofness attribute blame through laziness and impolite or unfriendly behavior. The positive utilizes the full army uniform along with an army weapon. This type of gun shows a propagation of defense within war, not on American streets. His facial features are kinder and more acceptable. The sign in the background indicates a training facility of some kind, adding to the indexicality of his diligence in his profession and duty. He includes "America" in the syntactic indeterminacy as the source of his question; turning the argument to the people he serves. Furthermore, his secondary statement in the Tweet, "Where is the justice." portrays his value system, focusing instead on declaring the idea instead of asking the question. The statement is used in accusatory way toward the country he serves.

Figure 3:



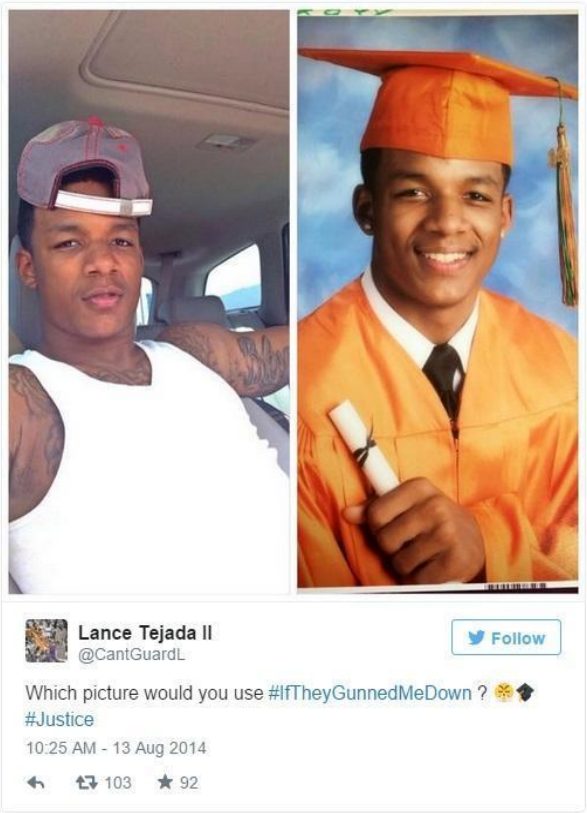
Shao Khan's positive photo uses the Army uniform motif, but it also utilizes several other praiseworthy components. The indexicality of him reading to children of another race while another person from the Army holds the book makes the case for a service oriented, charitable, and good-hearted person. The act is praiseworthy as it acknowledges that he values education and uses his position in the armed forces for more than violence. He's also smiling and being friendly. The quality of the photograph is superior and shows brighter colors along with sharper detail. In contrast, the negative photo is slightly blurred with bad lighting. There are different examples of iconicity, where he uses a perceived gang sign and is dressed in black shirt and black pants together. The absence of color in his apparel makes his character seem more easily designated into contrasting and monochromatic attributes, finding polar points to focus on instead of what is in between. The sneer is apathetic and slightly abrasive, with his phone in hand and sitting on a bed he characterizes lethargy. Inactive versus active is the theme here, with the negative photo attributing negligence in contrast to responsible volunteering.

Figure 4:



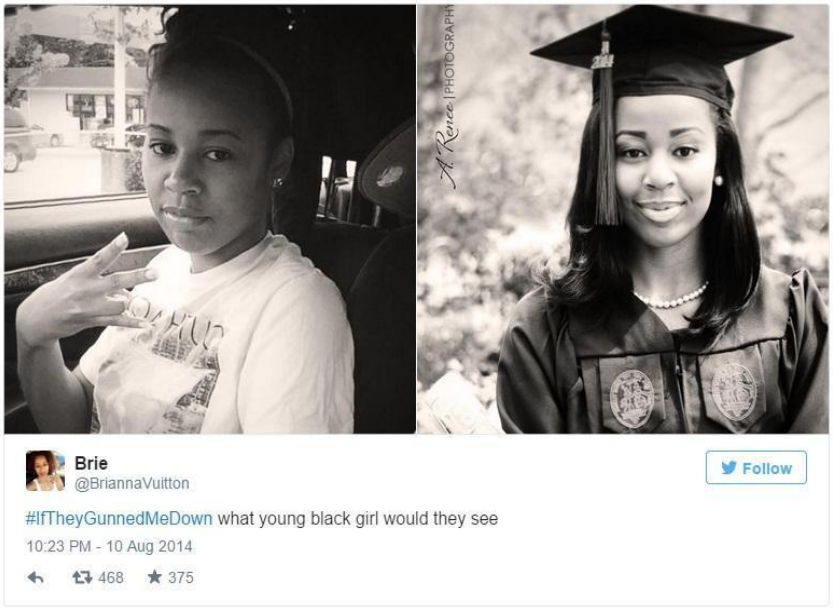

This person chose to utilize a selfie in a Navy uniform as a positive photograph. Even though he is at home, his tie is tied, his shirt is wrinkle free, and his image is clean cut and professional. The iconicity of the Navy colored badges performs the double purpose of indexicality for achievement within his service. The negative photograph takes on iconic blame-worthy attributes by obscuring his entire face in a cloud of smoke. The facial features cannot send a message because of his hookah use. Although obviously not a plausible choice for a media photograph because of the opacity of the smoke, the photograph makes it a point of showing how identity may be lost through the negative frame. Smoke is iconic as a symbol of addiction and sometimes poverty. The negative photo is also hazier than the positive photo, contrasting the quality of the picture both figuratively and literally.

Figure 5:




Lance Tejada II uses another common praiseworthy theme of the positive photo from graduation, either from college or high school. This photograph mirrors more closely the photograph depicting Michael Brown at graduation and provides the indexicality of gaining a diploma through learning. The iconicity of the school colors and the robes altogether depict accomplishment, education, and someone who adds to society. His smile is more appealing and kind, while the background shows a staple in American culture for graduation pictures, bringing him into a more normative state. The photo itself is a photograph of a printed photograph, with writing at the top, adding more social value to the picture. The negative photograph displays the icons of tattoos and a tank top, colloquially referred to as a "wife beater." His hat, in contrast to the more dignified graduation cap, is backwards and sitting loosely on his head, displaying apathy and an ignoble youthfulness.

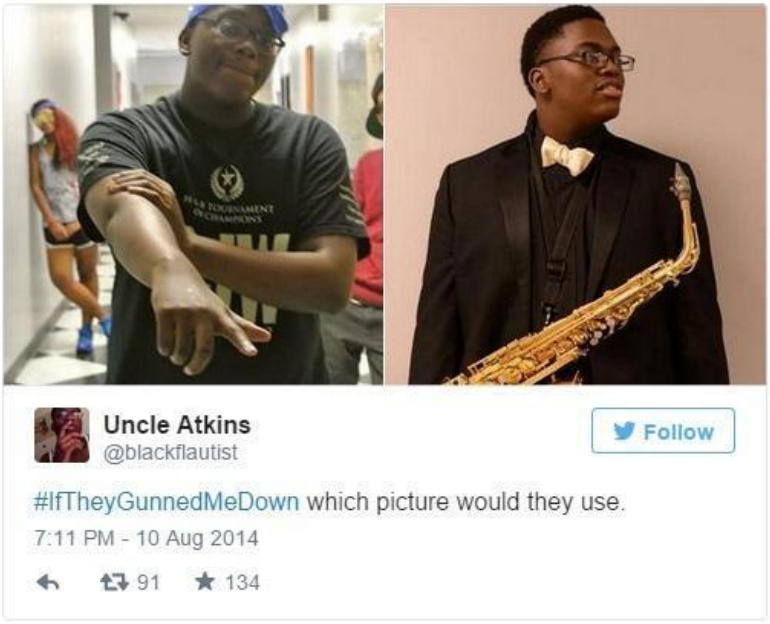
Figure 6:




Although predominantly male oriented, many female users also tweeted images of themselves to get the message across. Displaying a similar format for her pictures, Brie used a graduation photo, shot by a professional photographer and in black and white. The cap and gown are iconic in many ways of displaying accomplishment and education, just as in figure 5. Fusing education with identity places black lives in the context of a cultured society, further removing it from the frame of criminality. Her negative photo has her flashing an Eastside gang sign and a hostile glare, also in black and white. The black and white filter shows more clearly the darkness of the negative photo, and how much lighter the positive photo is. Light plays a more crucial role in the dichotomy of the photos, contrasting what each one represents. The lack of color in both photos also takes away from skin color and focuses on other nonverbal features, which can be purposeful, forcing the audience to focus on other attributes. The syntactic indeterminacy of this Tweet veers away from the usual description, instead saying "what young

black girl would they see." She places responsibility on the viewer for perceiving her identity, rather than the person who chooses the photograph in the first place.

Figure 7:




This last sender represents the myriad of random positive images, which make up the remainder of the images in the hashtag. It follows the basic theme overall, where education and military were the most pervasive, most of the other senders use the blameworthy iconicity of an ambiguous gang related gesture or hand signal for their negative photograph, while the positive photo uses a picture of the sender in more dignified dress and appearance. In this case, the sender uses the saxophone along with a tuxedo to indicate talent as well as decorum. Holding the instrument with his outfit presents indexicality to this praiseworthy behavior, making the instrument more than only a prop. The negative photo utilizes harsher lighting, with non-appealing facial and arm gestures (seemingly mimicking a handgun) as a sense of unfavorable perception. The framework of the argument works best by establishing divisive points of

identity and allowing the audience to decide which photo the media may use if the sender were "gunned down" by police.

Black youths wanted to represent more than one aspect of their life, and fight stereotyping with positive images, which provide more affirming messages of black lifestyle. They needed consideration of their own lived experience, and representation of their lives the way they see it. The positive representations in their social media accounts show a shared experience that may have been overlooked by the media in their choice of picture. There is a larger context surrounding race where images may ostracize people through the media, "othering" them in the process. This othering becomes problematic because it leaves the media as the dominant discursive frame of blacks as criminals, leaving their perspective unchallenged and causing audiences to justify their own racism (Pötzsch, 2011). The reality of this perspective becomes obvious when looking at the American prison system where the majority of those incarcerated are black, despite being a minority in the country (Jewkes, 2014; Stabile, 2006). By seeking an analysis of the reaction of those in Ferguson, a better understanding of that persuasive process and its effect on audiences as well as the authors can bring awareness. The positive picture accompanied by the negative works as a *dissoi logoi*, displacing stereotypes and functioning as a humanizing mechanism with visual persuasion.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) state that cultural artifacts maintain their power by adapting through time, taking on new meaning through new modes and levels. Although the pictures function as a rhetorical device, Twitter then becomes a repository for such artifacts allowing them to take on new meaning through time. As they are reproduced or retweeted they gain new meaning through recontextualization. This also adds to the rhetorical value of the artifact through repetition. Woodyard (2003) states: "Communicators conventionally use

repetition of a single idea or image to move from one level of intensity to another until saturation is experienced. The clarity of a point is enhanced each time an idea or image is presented or restated" (p. 141). With a continuation of black and racial issues, the point of saturation is being reached, but as a negative stereotype through framing. A medium like Twitter allows for opposing perspectives with alternative frameworks of dissent. The act of re-Tweeting, sharing, and "favoriting" positive images allow for the saturation of messages created and sustained by the audience who claims the identity themselves. The community becomes involved by the creation and repetition of identifying messages.

Michael Brown has become a type of "individuated aggregate" wherein a single person may be thought to represent an entire community (Lucaites, 1997). His community includes African Americans in the immediate vicinity of Ferguson, Missouri, but because of his massive exposure, it may also include many of those black people across America. In an even more uniting way, he became the reason and the icon for the community participating in the hashtag. The two pictures of him in a graduation cap and gown and him on his doorstep with a perceived gang sign were no longer social media avatars. Their aesthetic appeal did little as representations before the incident, but now they are symbols of the complex life of African Americans. Each person who posted his or her own picture wished to transcend that same threshold for the photograph, bringing them from a picture added to Facebook, or a random picture on a phone, to one that performs a persuasive act. The collection of artifacts takes on the issue of race as a mass identity, giving power to rhetoric through aggregated photographs of a community's lived experience (Hale, 1998). As Lucaites and Hariman (2001) state, "the individual is the locus of value, but the collective is the locus of power" (p. 40). As pictures continued to collate through

the hashtag, the conversation progressed into the multi-faceted experiences of black youth, and connected their identity to the rest of humanity.

Twitter offered a way to bring about a change in digital communities and how they communicate ingroup and outgroup messages. The Black Twitter community has a chance for reclamation of the lost expression of visual African rhetoric and identity, versus oral, musical, or written representation (Bates, Lawrence, & Cervenka, 2008). The combination of photographs, written words, and display can combine to portray a sense of community, culture, and self-identity (Prelli, 2006). Visual artifacts can express the humanity, or the imperfections of day-to-day life. The rhythm and movement from day-to-day practices can be captured in moments of time and space through a photograph, defining identity within a framework of context and representation. This is not unique to the black community, where everyone may have some compromising photo they do not wish the public to see. Yet, the way the media used photos of black people in the past is what makes the focus more poignant. Examples such as Jack Thornell's image of James Meredith lying on the road in fear and anger created a discordant conversation on the evolution of black power in 1966, or collections of photography, such as *Without Sanctuary* help to reshape public memory regarding lynchings in American history (Thornton, 2013; Ohl & Potter, 2013). Photographs can act as a definitive narrative. These photographs collect a moment as a representation of the person's life. Although the experience extends beyond the photograph, the act of sharing it as the representative story for who a person is comes from the media framing.

By adding the hashtag to their Tweet, the owners of the photographs chose to participate in the conversation. They use the symbolic power of the collective to make a bigger point, but also add their own argument to the discourse. By "favoriting" or retweeting a pair of

photographs, they also add to the discourse, showing support or investment in the outcome of the argument being made. Validation to identity and group inclusion performs the function of sustaining and building the discourse. Each of these levels builds on the next to get such discourse noticed by the very media they seek to criticize.

## Conclusion

Identity is built through experience and expression, all of which is publicly discussed and controlled when the media attempts to define it for a group. Although discussed and represented in many mediums, black identity is a truly complex and rich concept, not to be defined by outsiders, but by those who adhere to it. Wilson (1999) has defined racial identity as being rooted in its social construction, and discursive interaction leads to the most accurate interpretation of how black identity is formed. Other scholars argue racial identity is constructed as groups collectively navigate the racial hierarchy in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ayres, 2003). Identity may be chosen but also inherited, with external influences attempting to define what it is. Much of the black experience has been tied to image and attempting to reclaim an accurate portrayal of a group:

> A claim to authenticity in a postmodern world would seem to be tied inextricably to one's ability to master the image—not only those depictions to be gleaned from media representations, but also those of the self as a social representation, as a carefully constructed image of one's ''real'' essence (Chidester, Campbell, & Bell, 2006, p. 299).

Attempting to formulate what is or is not authentically black is a personal or in-group matter, not something to be dictated by a scholar or television reporter. Identity is not about the stereotypes and the good or the bad, but rather the people who claim that identity and what group they identify with through participation (Means Coleman, 2006). The participants drive identity

therefore external sources may be unreliable in labeling or defining what identity means. Still, media play a large part in defining what black identity means to non-black audiences, where framing methods and media bias help shape stereotypes.

Media bias will continue to exist in all contexts, but especially as it pertains to race. Newspapers and television can be especially influential in defining collective identities and continuing racism (Madroane, 2012). The way journalists cover a story may narrow the focus too much, distracting from larger issues at hand. Objectivity is difficult in journalism, especially where narratives evolving in the public sphere become so defining. Neutrality in a story may be near impossible, but with subjectivity can come a sense of avoiding discrimination and bias. Using better news judgment allows for a nuanced story which captures the humanity of a narrative without diminishing the relevance of an identity group. Although bias in media is a largely disputed issue, it is one that continues to frame political and social issues in much of the media today (Goldberg, 2014; Dixon & Williams, 2015; Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Racism and identity are at the heart of the incident in Ferguson, and those issues were strongly swayed by the media's coverage over the following days.

With the pervasiveness of image making comes an increase of documentation of people's lives. Each person has the capacity for culpability and many of us seek to have events of our past forgotten, yet posts on social media and other places allow for negative depictions of people whether or not they wanted an image to be shared. This proof of adverse circumstances creates an environment where unfavorable portions of identity are shared with unintended audiences. Using such an image as a key symbolic representation creates bias within audiences and is unfair to presumed innocent. Every journalist has an ethical duty to consider whether a photograph best

represents a person's identity, and not choose the unfortunate photograph where a past event in their life vilifies them.

Mainstream media hinders out-group views of black identity by under-representation and providing a narrow view of black experience. Entman and Rojecki (2001) are leading authors on the subject of media and race, they conclude from one of their studies on evening news that "at the most general level the color pattern of the news conveys a sense that America is essentially a society of White people with minorities-the very word rings pejoratively-as adjunct members who mainly cause trouble or need help" (p. 63). An anchor may have significant framing effects on a news story merely by their phrasing of the lead-in remarks (Iyengar, 1991). As previously cited, a vast amount of literature points to image choice as having significant framing effects on a story, especially in relation to race (Entman, 1990, 1992; D'Angelo, 2002; Dixon & Williams, 2015). Media may present information that is skewed or omit information about an issue in order to change attitudes and opinions, whether intentional or not (Entman, 1993). When it comes to race, these frames have real world consequences of social and economic gains and losses (Ash & Schmierbach, 2013). Media can also greatly influence the distribution of power in society through news slant and bias (Entman, 2007).

This visual rhetorical analysis sought to show how the dichotomy between pictures in #iftheygunnedmedown offer a rhetorically significant example of how social media can contend against media bias and be used as a public forum for negotiating identity. The ties to a digital representation are becoming more difficult to disentangle, where photographic avatars on sites like Twitter and Facebook make up as much a part of a people's identity as the choices they make in the real world. Visual choices are deliberate, and utilizing this power, the senders created messages about themselves and the circumstances in which they live. Unknown

individuals can comment and persuade on large social issues through social media, and this example shows how a larger dialogue was created through a simple hashtag on Twitter. Examples such as #icantbreathe and #alivewhileblack show how the medium will continue to host larger issues and bring together collective identities within a persuasive discourse. These hashtags are wielded by the Black Twitter community, showing a digital power that can truly affect change for the future (McDonald, 2014). This community is paving a new path for commentary on social and race issues through social media.

Another hashtag #blacklivesmatter shows a statement that should not have to exist in the modern world, but one that has rallied thousands and gained continuous momentum. The promotion of black identity and the way this discourse continues to spread shows the persistence of hashtag activism and the growth of digital culture. As technology and communicative culture change, audiences should question whether or not dominant media, which relies on "traditional news norms, provides an adequate view of the change in a dynamic society...an advocate press seems better able than the traditional mainstream press to give voice to those who challenge an entrenched status quo" (Spratt, Bullock, Baldasty, Clark, Halavais, McCluskey, & Schrenk, 2007, p. 187). Audiences turn the tables with social media, creating personal press on issues through social media while controlling their own identity along the way. This personal response and in-group effort was made apparent through the reaction to Ferguson and the protests that followed. DeRay Mckesson, a leading organizer and protester on Twitter said:

> Ferguson exists in a tradition of protest. But what is different about Ferguson, or what is important about Ferguson, is that the movement began with regular people. There was no Martin, there was no Malcolm, there was no NAACP, it wasn't the Urban League. People came together who didn't necessarily know each other, but knew what they were

> experiencing was wrong. And that is what started this. What makes that really important, unlike previous struggle, is that—who is the spokesperson? The people. The people, in a very democratic way, became the voice of the struggle (In Berlatsky, 2015, par. 8).

Black voices represented themselves in equal output through several outlets, social media being key among them.

Through social media, all users may become reporters and send messages of what to think and what to think about. Inherently built into social media is an expectation for bias, but both sides can be equally represented. This type of reporting then becomes a new form of framing and priming on issues, with the largest difference from traditional media being the absence of a *defining* story. By hearing all stories within a discourse, audiences may inductively reach their own conclusions. This new form of citizen journalism is enhanced with the pairing of the smartphone, where every person has a recording device, which can broadcast to a mass audience. The act of people posting their own pictures takes back framing methods from the media and creates a new situation under their control, where individuals and communities represent themselves. Stories may be unfolded in real time with hundreds of perspectives and all of them containing different angles. Relatively high quality photographs and video are at the fingertips of most Americans and are able to capture a moment as it is happening. There exists in that portrayal a personal account of what happened, and audiences know to only view that account as one among many, as their Twitter accounts allow them to scroll through multiple different videos or photographs of the same incident.

The incident in Ferguson led to an increase in police cameras and more understanding of citizen's use of video and photography during events where police are involved (Hermann, 2014). The accounts of what happened with Michael Brown are varied and plentiful, but few

images were able to capture what actually happened. This left the media an open field of how to frame him, as a villain or a victim. Images have the power of creating defining profiles of their subjects, narrowing a complex identity into one piece of visual rhetoric. The example of Brown in his graduation outfit or on his doorstep with a perceived gang sign show two sides of a story that lack context or much insight. Yet, framing him as malignant became the choice structure of the narrative, and continues to be a problem in many cases involving black youth. Social media allows for frames to be used by all parties, and circumvents defining narratives by providing multiple perspectives.

#iftheygunnedmedown was unique as it used photographs as the integral part of its rhetoric. Photographs and other visual artifacts should not be overlooked for their rhetorical value, and future research may delve more deeply into how such artifacts affect the discourse of social media. Other researchers may focus more intently on Instagram or Facebook and the way they employ the relationships between text, visuals, and hashtags. Others still may focus on the way hashtags of this nature evolve over time and grow into new platforms. A content analysis may reveal themes or messages unnoticed in this research.

It is my hope as visual rhetorical analyses of social media become more pervasive in communication studies, and its influence on today's rhetorical landscape is more fully realized, that more scholars and students will see the importance of conducting this type of research. The world is continually moving toward a more diverse and complicated visual vocabulary, and it is the responsibility of each of us to expand our view of what rhetoric is and how it can be analyzed. Traditional methods maintain their merit, but the extension of including visual rhetorical analysis as a viable and credible approach commensurate to other forms is imperative

for the future of the discipline. The visual gives great insight into the social construction of identity and power. According to Andreas Ventsel (2014):

> From the perspective of power relations, the general goal of visual rhetoric would here be to make a distinction, in the analysis of any visual representations (in this case, a photograph), between different logics of signification used for the production and reproduction of differing social relations in pictorial images. In addition, it would lay a foundation for interpreting these means of signification as practices that create identity, and for creating a typology of the means of signification (p. 179).

As media outlets continue to rely more and more on visual elements, they further shape the hegemony of the masses, especially in framing identity. When audiences consume visual rhetoric they create connections to ideas that are difficult to loosen once the attachment has been made (Stafford, 2001). The power of such potent connections brings responsibility to those who distribute visuals to vast audiences.

Although visual discourse has existed for many years, its importance to rhetoric is more significant than ever. At one time audiences could trust a photograph to provide evidence of something as it existed in reality, but now images are altered as numerously as they are distributed. Audiences have become more adept at noticing those alterations, but still they consume all images as a form of influence, even knowing of their alteration (Seo, Dillard, & Shen, 2013; Spurgin, 2003). Photographs like the ones of Michael Brown become more significant for their reminder that he once existed in reality and now he does not, but this hashtag has shown the representative choice made by the media is what matters. Examples like Senator Millard Tyding's doctored photo with Earl Browder lost him his seat in the Senate for supposed Communist dealings, or O.J. Simpson's famed altered photograph on *Time* magazine

demonstrate how audiences are deceived or outraged by a representative photo (Tagg, 1988; Carmody, 1994). Visual artifacts participate in persuasive discourse significantly, as Rogoff (2000) states: "in today's world meanings circulate visually, in addition to orally and textually'' (p. 29).

The ways in which the media presented Michael Brown created a unique rhetorical situation in the social media response. Black audiences created a new discourse of what authentic identity means to them and how to define themselves personally through visual representation. The hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown creates a new form of collective identity, allowing audiences to participate with their own Tweets and photographs, along with retweets and "favoriting." Their visual enthymematic response allowed for a more multi-faceted and expansive discourse to emerge about the issues surrounding Ferguson.

The enthymeme in the photographs and in rhetoric logically assumes the premises are understood by their audiences. Yet, the suggestion of uniformity in perspective can undermine the reason for argument in the first place because rhetoric is inherently based on the differences in perspective. Each consumer of rhetoric comes from a different philosophical viewpoint, and those viewing visual images are no different. These differences provide the necessity of more approaches to the subject and create a nuanced and diverse comprehension of rhetoric as a whole. The function of enthymeme then allows for no single "right way" of approaching a piece of rhetoric, but the divergence in the conclusions becomes the function and purpose of the analysis. This makes the critical lens in approaching the subject more important; specifying the origin of that particular scholar's perspective. As more researchers contribute, the discourse within visual rhetoric will evolve and the results become more significant.

Visual artifacts in social media make up the ubiquitous landscape of people's communicative lives. Their existence requires fundamental questions as to how people navigate their identity and social issues in this new landscape. As platforms like Twitter and Facebook integrate themselves into society, they will continue to shape the way we think about politics and media in more persistent ways than traditional sources ever could. Individuals are bombarded by visual rhetoric every day without a greater knowledge of how to critically think about or interact with the artifacts they see each day. Greater visual literacy among scholars and the general populace is necessary if we wish to understand this growing phenomenon. Images will continue their pervasive nature and society will progress in brandishing them throughout digital culture. With this progress, audiences should demand more of their media, allowing power to be shared and the ownership of identities to be given back. Individuals may then define their identities on their own terms and in their own way.

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