

# Framing Peace as Violence

TV news depict the LAPD attack  
on immigrant rights marchers

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My thanks to  
Mary, Dolores Inés,  
Samy, Patricia, Christy  
& everyone else!

*Vox California 2009*  
Cultural Meanings of  
Linguistic Diversity





The 1960s inner city 'riots' were  
big news

1967 Kerner Commission studied  
mass media news coverage



These “disturbances”

“violent expressions of  
community outrage” at  
unrepentant White racism toward  
African Americans and other  
communities of color





The 1967 Commission asked

*"What effect do mass  
media news have  
on the riots?"*

## 3 Kerner Commission findings

#1 News media failed to give a balanced, factual account with instances of sensationalism, inaccuracy and distortion





## #2 Portrayal of violence

Media news failed to accurately portray the scale and character of the violence



#3 Fail to explain

the causes and  
consequences of civil  
disorders





That was then...

This is now.

*How well have news  
media reported on  
immigrants 40 years  
later?*





2007 march for  
Immigrant Rights in  
Los Angeles MacArthur  
Park

**attacked by the LAPD**



New test for news  
media





My research team:

Layza López (UCLA 2008),

Edgar Munguía & Omar Torres

(UCLA 2010),

Martín Vallejo (UCLA 2011)



# Three analyses of 51 news stories

1. Narrative frame comparison
2. Visual codes:
  - to frame news &
  - to judge interviewees
3. CDA of spoken reports





350 LAPD attack 7000  
marchers for Immigrant  
Rights

2 conflicting  
narratives circulate  
about events

- LAPD's narrative
- News Media narrative





First, the LAPD's  
narrative

After a 6 month investigation in  
association with 300 lawsuits

# Police Misconduct narrative

For 24 minutes, police used  
36" batons and fired guns  
loaded with hard rubber  
bullets to forcibly break up  
a lawful assembly of  
people





When the police forcibly  
cleared MacArthur Park

- LAPD violated the marchers' 1st Amendment rights.
- The LAPD accepted responsibility for injuries to 300 people due to "more than 100 batons strikes"



The *LAPD* noted:

"The law allows force to prevent violence---as a precursor to an arrest.

"Officers fired at least 150 rounds of less-lethal impact munitions as they cleared the park.

OJO: "no arrests...occurred as a result of any force used in MacArthur Park"





# News Media narrative

51 TV news stories

3 networks: CNN, Fox, MSNBC

5 local television stations



# Finding #1: Unanimity

No difference between  
networks and local news  
reporting



1st study

# Comparative Framing



TV news frame: **“May Day  
Melee”**

**“Riot Suppression” frame**

**stock villains, victims and  
heroes:**





Demonstration =

face-off between two  
violent groups



Marchers =

the violent (hence  
criminal) agitators





Police =

lawful government agents  
disciplining agitators



Victims =  
News Media Personnel

*not* families with kids in strollers,  
innocent marchers  
or hapless street vendors





Why blame the victims?

Riot Suppression narrative:  
the marchers started the violence

**For example: on the Order to  
Disperse**







FOX-News Fox News Live

15 hours after attack

“Police ordered the stragglers to disperse first by helicopter and siren, then loud speaker and bull horn. That’s when protesters began throwing bottles and rocks at police knocking one officer off his motorcycle.”

—Fox’s William La Jeunesse





## the official LAPD report:

- “No complete dispersal order was given in either English or Spanish” (9)
- A valid dispersal order was never given.
- This failure likely resulted in a large number of people who had no idea that they were being ordered to disperse” (50)



CNN Newsroom  
Correspondent Ted  
Rowlands  
**17 hours after attack**





FOX News Special  
Report  
with Brit Hume  
**22 hours after attack**



FOX News Report  
with Shepard Smith

23 hours after attack

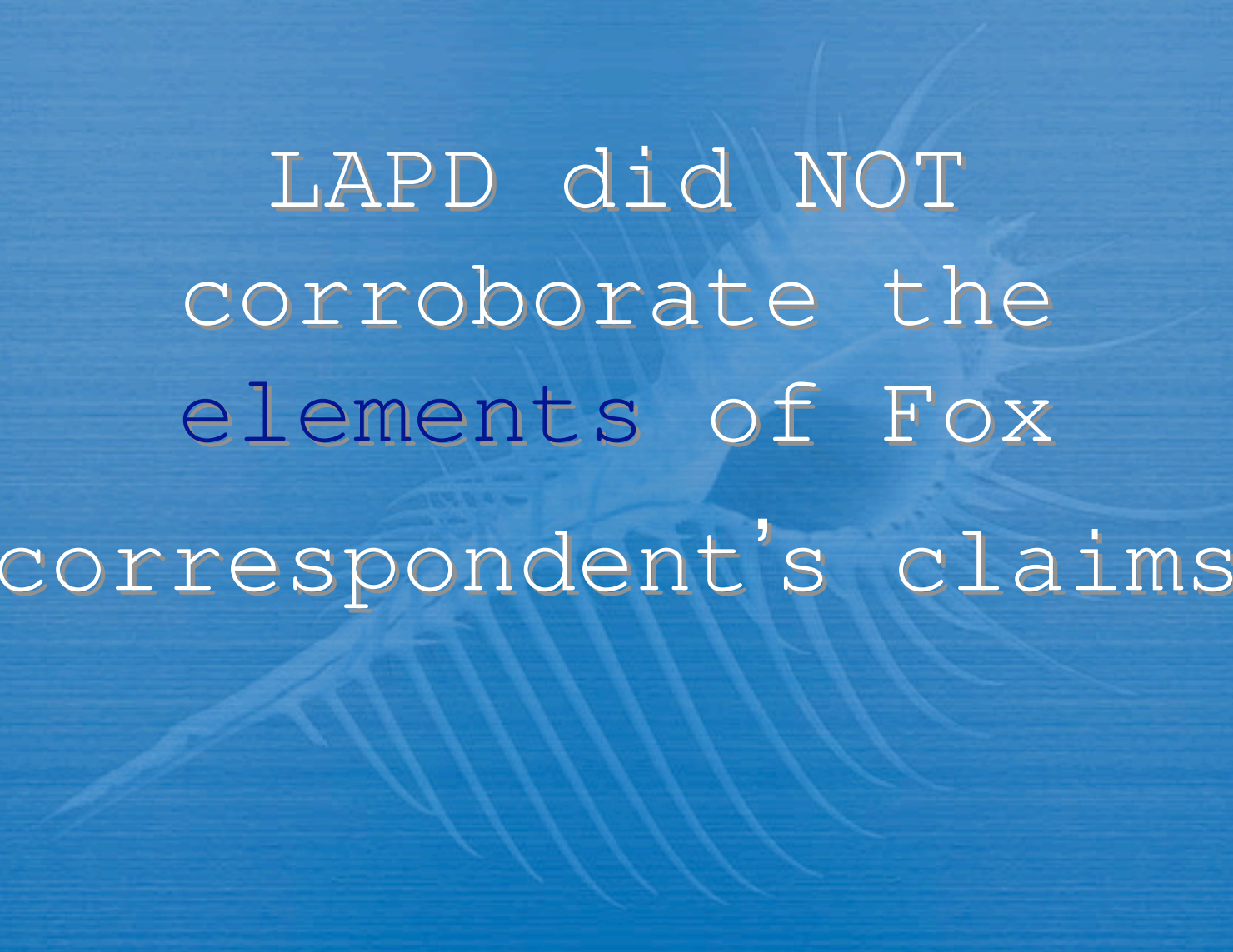




**Example 2: on the Reasons for  
the Dispersal Order**

me that this incident  
actually sparked hours  
earlier when a man was  
arrested for  
shoplifting. Later  
members of his group or  
gang about 50 to a 100  
came to the illegal  
immigrants' rally here





LAPD did NOT  
corroborate the  
elements of Fox  
correspondent's claims

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News media used Riot  
Suppression frame even when  
errors were egregious.

Always at expense of  
marchers as perpetrators.



2nd study

# Visual coding

- of subjectivity, authority, right to speak
  - of framing



■ ■ ■ Who gets full  
subjectivity &  
authority?

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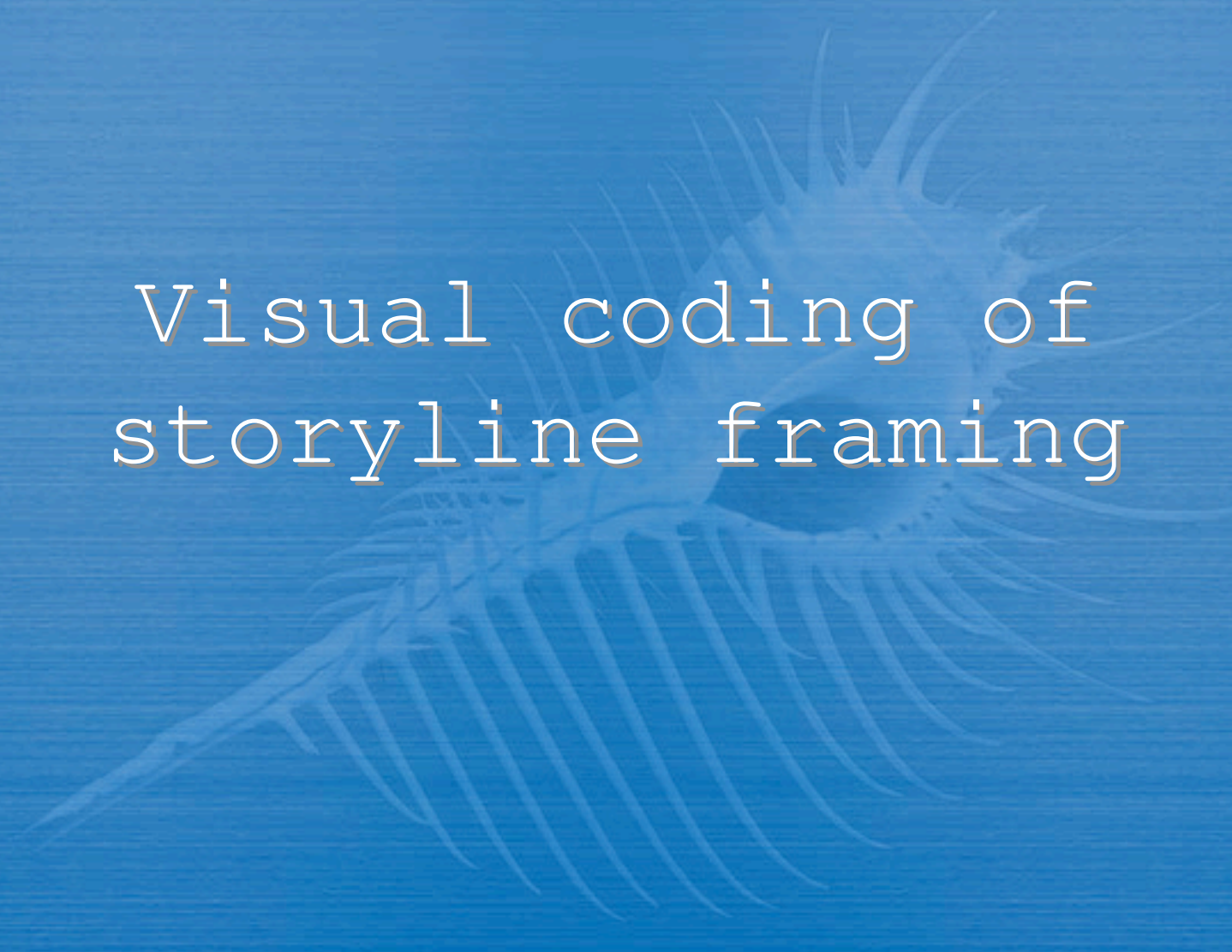
- All journalists & 1 interviewee,  
Rick Oltman (opposed to  
liberalizing immigration policy)
- No marchers:
  - (1) Xiomara Corpeno (2) Megali  
& and 3 unnamed others



# Visual coding of subjectivity & authority

- Gaze (eye-line & facial expression)
- Camera focal length (mid-close up or close-up)
- Camera angle (high-angle vs ground horizontal shot)





Visual coding of  
storyline framing



# Before vs. After attack

- **BEFORE:** repetitive images of peaceful marchers in white t-shirts waving US flags
- **AFTER:** reoccurring images of the LAPD in full riot gear moving toward the demonstrators





3rd study

Critical discourse analysis  
of constituent metaphors



# Spoken metaphors about social agents in news event

Metaphors for  
the DEMONSTATION,  
POLICE,  
MARCHERS

small # for STUDENTS, MEDIA, IMMIGRANTS





How frequent did media  
describe them as  
violent?

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Police 75% of time

&

Demonstrators 72% of time




# DEMONSTRATORS?

72% VIOLENT or CRIMINAL

9% HUMAN or PEACEFUL





News media spoken  
metaphors:

Peaceful Marchers  
characterized as violent



At the scene, on May  
1st

Belligerent protesters started this?





# Belligerent protesters start melee (ABC7: 60 seconds)

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.



# Peaceful protest turned violent

- “Select” group of protesters
- LAPD report: “5 to 10 anarchists”
- As ACCURATE as it gets





A day later, May 2nd

Who does the local news  
cite as injured?



# Only injured police and media (CBS2: 33 seconds)

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.





No reporting of marcher injuries



# No reporting on demonstrator injuries (CBS2: 38 secs)

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.





## 24 hours after attack

- 18 injured officers
- 246 injured marchers, including broken bones (not reported)
- “more than 100 batons strikes”
- 146 “less-than-lethal impact munitions” shot



26 hours later, FOX

News:

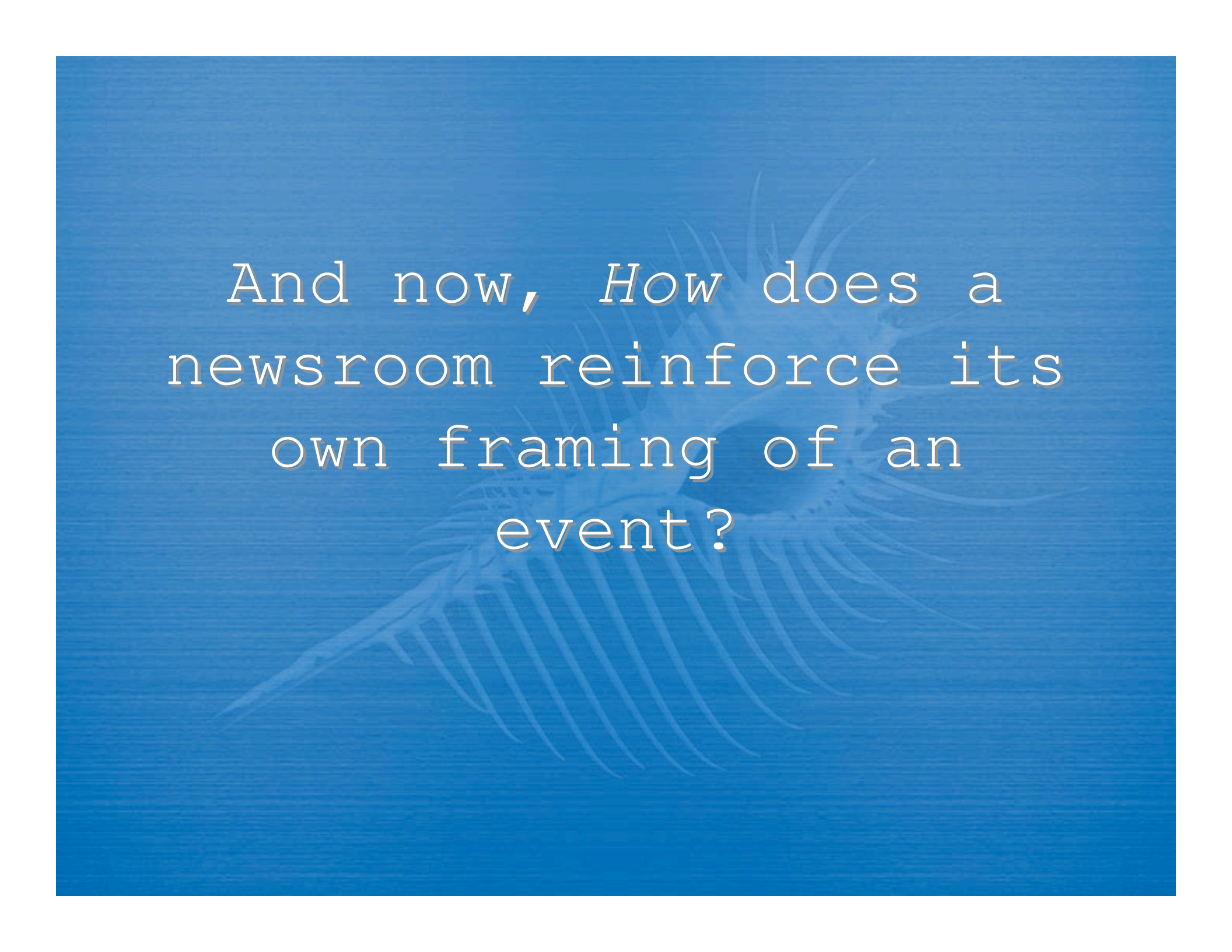
- Disclaims video police violence
- Sensationalizes: “Parade of the parasites and criminals”
  - “25,000 pedophiles take streets”





# Fox appalling claim (FoxNews: 3-4 minutes)

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.



And now, *How* does a  
newsroom reinforce its  
own framing of an  
event?





(17 seconds)

QuickTime™ and a  
decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

The background of the slide is a solid blue color. In the center, there is a faint, light blue watermark of the LAPD star logo, which is a five-pointed star with a central circle and radiating lines.

LAPD releases report  
that exonerates  
marchers and takes  
full responsibility

September 2008



A faded, light blue image of the Statue of Liberty is centered in the background of the slide. The statue is shown from the waist up, holding the torch and tablet. The background is a solid, medium blue color.

News media never  
retract their  
reporting of the  
events

The nation more likely will  
associate immigrant-rights  
marchers with violence



# Our conclusion

2007 local and network news about  
marches liable to ALL

1967 Kerner Report criticisms





## In 2007 California TV news

#1 failed to give a balanced, factual account

#2 Attributed the violence to the marchers

#3 failed to explain the causes of LAPD attack on peaceful marchers



# Query for discussion

How to respond to the  
news media's lack of  
accountability?





Thank you!

Otto Santa Ana, UCLA

**Framing Peace as Violence**