Maryann Erigha
Published online on: 17 Apr 2019

How to cite :- Maryann Erigha. 17 Apr 2019, Race scandals as racial projects from: The routledge companion to media and scandal Routledge
Accessed on: 26 Sep 2023
Ideas about race, racial ideologies, and racism are enmeshed in media scandals. What unfolds are race scandals—scandals that (1) involve disclosures of individual or institutional racism, (2) reveal moral or legal transgressions that violate accepted societal norms, and (3) receive widespread media and public attention. Race scandals remain a prominent fixture in United States (U.S.) media. Herman Gray’s (1997) framework of “scandal” versus scandal brings attention to the different ways audiences construct and reify race scandals. Gray uses “scandal” in reference to questionable “race scandals” created by whites—either through fictional media representations or biased mediation in journalistic coverage of real events. He uses scandal in reference to actual scandals where racial inequality, disparities, and discrimination form central components of injustice within a high-profile media narrative.

Understanding a race scandal as a racial project—“an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (Omi and Winant 1994: 56)—helps to illustrate the role of scandals in either the maintenance or disruption of the current racial order. As racial projects, some scandals are progressive, as they reveal racism, while other scandals are regressive, as they perpetuate racism and reproduce structures of hegemony, domination, and oppression. Race scandals in the media oscillate between these two ends—“racism as scandal” and “racialized scandals”—in competing racial projects. The former exposes the everyday realities and horrors of racism, while the latter perpetuates ideologies that keep racism alive. Typically in the case of racialized scandals, white journalists and media producers manufacture a race scandal by making racial deviance the focal point of real or imagined characters and events. Racialized scandals operate to reinforce the racial status quo, as they normalize, for primarily white audiences, the presentation of blackness and black people as moral transgressors in need of restorative transformation. The majority of black audiences, who view racism as scandal, render the anti-blackness of a nation and its people as scandalous and denounce the persistent disconnections between a commitment to racial equality and repeated practices that violate the social norm. When racism is scandal, the moral transgressors are the state, the nation, the society, and the citizens that, time and again, disregard codes of morality. The specific cases in this chapter, though not exhaustive, build on previous work to reveal the contemporary persistence of race scandals. Moreover, the proliferation of digital technologies and the ubiquity of the internet and digital media in everyday life add a new dimension to race scandals that facilitates their effectiveness as racial projects.
**Race scandals as racial projects**

**Racism as scandal**

The very presence of racism should be scandalous in a society that purports to uphold ideals of racial equality and inclusivity; hence, the act of exposing institutional or individual racism involves divulging and publicizing statements that disavow commitment to racial equality. Racism as scandal, therefore, includes highly circulated media narratives that unfold stories about racism, discrimination, slurs, or other transgressions that violate the ideal moral order of a society ostensibly motivated to eliminate racist behavior. As racial projects, media coverage providing depth, scope, structure, characterization, visibility, and longevity to narratives about racism as scandal works to center controversies in order to bring disgrace upon individuals or institutions and, ultimately, to promote change.

**The scandalous state**

At the center of U.S. race scandals is the scandalous state: the institutional racism of the local, state, and federal governments that illustrates moral and legal transgressions that violate norms of racial equality and receive immense media and public attention. Of late, police departments and law enforcement have been the subject of race scandals in the media, as videos of their misconduct with citizens has circulated and outraged millions worldwide. The March 1991 videotaped beating of Rodney King, a Los Angeles motorist, and the subsequent trial and not guilty verdict of Los Angeles police department (LAPD) officers, gained heightened media attention as a race scandal (Gooding-Williams 1993; Hunt 1997). The video of the LAPD repeatedly kicking, hitting, and beating King with batons was widely circulated in news media to showcase the police brutality of white police officers against unarmed black citizens. The verdict that exonerated the LAPD from blame was equally viewed as a scandalous example of deeply entrenched racism afflicting the nation and its people.

In just the first decades of the twenty-first century, the names of countless black Americans have been etched in race scandals involving state-sanctioned violence or racially divisive court rulings—often linked to unnecessary, premature deaths of black citizens. In 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin posthumously became a household name after 26-year-old George Zimmerman killed him, during Martin’s walk home from a convenience store in Sanford, Florida. Media coverage of the Zimmerman killing evolved as a psychodrama scandal—one that involves an otherwise unknown person who violates moral or social norms (Lull and Hinerman 1997). The scandal continued when the Sanford police department did not immediately arrest Zimmerman after the killing but permitted him to return home—to some, signaling an institutional devaluation of black life and privileging of white life. Only after nationwide efforts and outrage was Zimmerman apprehended and charged. The scandal further developed as white media outlets slandered Martin’s character, the public debated about what truly happened during the encounter, and the court handed Zimmerman a not guilty verdict. The death of Martin and the trial of Zimmerman symbolized a new visibility in the cycle of anti-black violence, non-indictments, not guilty verdicts, and white impunity under the law—a cycle that claimed multiple victims such as Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Rekia Boyd, Laquan McDonald, Freddie Gray, Dontre Hamilton, Jamar Clark, Altron Sterling, Walter Scott, Ezell Ford, Ramarley Graham, Amadou Diallo, Akai Gurley, Jonathan Ferrell, Sandra Bland, Sean Bell, Korryn Gaines, Aiyana Jones, and hundreds of other victims (Freelon et al. 2016). Widespread anti-black brutality and injustice erect places as symbolic monikers of race scandals, such that the names of cities—Selma, Ferguson, and more—hold deeper meaning beyond their geography.
Flint, Michigan likewise gained national notoriety due to the Flint Water Crisis. In April 2013, the Michigan state treasurer Andy Dillon, a Democrat, authorized a switch in water source to the Flint River for the majority black Detroit suburb of Flint. A year later in April 2014, residents began receiving water from the contaminated river. The water contained dangerous levels of lead, fecal coliform bacteria, and other toxins. The media scandal unraveled after city, state, and national officials—such as the Republican governor of Michigan Rick Snyder and the state-appointed emergency manager Jerry Ambrose—continued to declare that Flint water was safe for residents, despite its visual discoloration and confirmatory tests that categorized it well above the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) threshold for hazardous wastes. Despite protests, lawsuits, and media outrage, it took nearly two years before the Michigan National Guard distributed clean bottled water to residents. Meanwhile, at least a dozen residents died from a Legionnaires outbreak, contracting pneumonia from bacteria between June 2014 and November 2015 during the time of the Flint Water Crisis. The incident resulted in several felony charges against government officials, a $100 million allocation for water infrastructure upgrades from the EPA, and a $97 million settlement for the state to replace water lines.

Institutions and individuals

The scandalous state fuels the persistence of racism in U.S. history and the present, casting a shadow that embraces like-minded individual and institutional actions. In their framework of scandals, Lull and Hinerman (1997) describe institutional scandals as organizations or companies committing moral breaches in authority or conduct, usually racism or discrimination, with regard to their treatment of a racial group. Such was the case in spring 1994, when black workers filed a class-action racial discrimination lawsuit against the Texaco oil company. Shortly thereafter, in November 1996, a secret tape recording of a high-level corporate meeting was made public. On this tape, white Texaco executives referred to black employees as “black jelly beans” who would not advance up the corporate ladder because “all the black jelly beans seemed to be glued to the bottom of the bag” and “porch monkeys” who sit outside the company as window dressing to make the company appear to be more diverse and accepting of high-ranking black employees (Feagin et al. 2001: 154). Ultimately, the company settled with 1,348 black workers for $176 million, and the Texaco case made visible the scandal of racism in corporate America.

More recently, the coffee chain Starbucks became entangled in a highly visible race scandal. In spring 2018, a white manager of a Philadelphia Starbucks called the police on two black men while they were waiting for a friend to arrive for a meeting. The police arrested the men on suspicion of trespassing, though the charges were later dropped, and the narrative manifested into a glaring example of everyday discrimination against blacks in America. The men settled with Starbucks for an undisclosed amount and with the city of Philadelphia for $1 each and a promise from the city to support a $200,000 initiative for young entrepreneurs in Philadelphia communities. In an attempt at image restoration, Starbucks closed thousands of stores nationwide for employees to undergo a four-hour session of racial bias training.

Beyond institutions, white individuals become the subject of race scandals when they utter racist remarks or engage in racist behavior that gains heightened media attention. In 2007, chef Paula Deen made headlines when she suggested that her brother hire all black waiters for his wedding, insinuating a slavery or plantation-themed wedding. In 2013, Deen admitted to using the N-word during a deposition for a workplace racial and sexual discrimination lawsuit. Following the revelation, Food Network did not renew her show’s contract. Other companies such as Home Depot and Walmart dissociated themselves from Deen or backed out of business deals with her. In addition, Rachel Dolezal made headlines in 2015 when the story broke that
she had been falsely posing as a black woman for years, during which time she became president of the local Spokane, Washington chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As the story gained traction in news and online media, many people were angered with her fabrication of a black racial identity, particularly upset by her deceit and insensitivity to the lived experiences of real black women.

Furthermore, sports commentary is a commonplace venue for media scandals about race, usually concerning white men who make racist on-air or otherwise audio-recorded statements and receive pressure to leave their positions following widespread knowledge of their remarks. In April 2007, radio personality Don Imus—host of his *Imus in the Morning* CBS Radio show, simulcast on MSNBC TV—called players on the Rutgers University women’s basketball team “nappy-headed hos” and was subsequently fired from CBS and MSNBC for the racist and sexist remark. However, by December 2007, in no small twist of irony, Imus received a multimillion dollar opportunity for a talk radio gig on WABC, the flagship for the *The Rush Limbaugh Show* (Bisbort 2008: 166). Earlier Limbaugh was subject to his own race scandal when he was forced to resign from ESPN following his racist commentary about Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb (Bisbort 2008: 195). Similarly, former Los Angeles (L.A.) Clippers basketball franchise owner Donald Sterling was forced to sell his NBA team in 2014 after a leaked audio recording of him became public, in which he urged a female friend to stop publicly associating and posing on Instagram with African Americans, including basketball legend Magic Johnson. Consequently, NBA commissioner Adam Silver ordered Sterling to break all affiliations with the L.A. Clippers, including selling the team, and handed Sterling a lifetime ban from the NBA. Acts of racism manifest into race scandals in the media when they garner widespread attention and become the subject of debate among audiences.

**Racialized scandals**

Beyond scandals where overt racism centers the incident, other scandals do not appear to be directly about race but are made to be about race: they become racialized in the media. In manufactured race scandals, white media executives and workers label instances of black opposition—real or imagined—to the dominant white racial order as “scandalous.” Hence, “blackness and difference continue to function as the markers of ‘scandalous’ threats to the moral and social boundaries” (Gray 1997: 89). As racial projects to preserve the racial status quo, such racialized depictions aim to channel white anxieties into becoming outraged by the idea of black deviance. The focus of racialized scandals, therefore, centers on the portrayal of black bodies out of control, on the downfall, and in transgression of moral standards (Gray 1997), creating a scandalous monster of blackness (usually the black man) from which whites should seek protection.

Racialized scandals further the ideology of white supremacism through the deployment of anti-black narratives, regularly and stereotypically attaching negative emotion and value to blackness, and by extension, framing black people as the default moral transgressors—imagery that in turn is used to justify the intense policing and scrutiny of black bodies (Alexander 2010; Gray 1997; Taylor 2016). Historically, racialized scandals have operated as racial projects intent upon provoking and justifying white violence against black people. The stereotype of criminality remains a recurring racialized trope in U.S. media to mobilize white sentiment around the notion of blackness being a threat to whiteness and, especially, to the “sanctity” of white womanhood (Dyer 1997). The racial projects of white media productions to construct and disseminate racialized scandals that stereotype black men as lecherous and violent have real world effects: inciting white violence and maligning the character of black people, families, and communities.
In politics, campaigns deploy racialized scandals against political candidates. During the 1988 presidential campaign, Republicans created infamous paid advertisements featuring William Robert Horton, whom commentators nicknamed “Willie” to demean his manhood and diminish his stature. Symbolizing a threat of black criminality, the ads: depicted a bearded Horton; affiliated his image with violent crimes of kidnapping, assault, rape, and murder; and suggested that Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis was loose on crime and would allow black criminals to roam the streets freely. As racialized scandals, the ads played upon Horton’s moral transgressions (though Horton insisted on his innocence in the case of any violent crime for which he was charged or convicted) (Feagin et al. 2001). Receiving considerable media exposure, the ads intentionally distorted and presented exaggerated and inaccurate information with the intent to construct a savage black monster, murderer, and rapist in the minds of white voters (Feagin et al. 2001; Jamieson 1992; Mendelberg 2001). In the end, the Horton ads were influential in demonizing the black image while simultaneously garnering white support to elect Republican George H. W. Bush as the 41st U.S. president.

Besides politicians, celebrities are also prime targets for race scandals in the media, as they are almost guaranteed to attract and retain viewership. Star scandals happen when celebrities receive intense media scrutiny for private or alleged acts that are made public and become the catalyst for disgrace (Lull and Hinerman 1997). Such scandals take advantage of media stardom and attach engrossing narratives to circulated and recognizable images of popular figures. By far, the most prominent example of the contemporary racialized star scandal is the case of Orenthal James (O. J.) Simpson. Simpson was arraigned and then tried in 1995 for the (1994) murder of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman. Public discourse about Simpson’s trial centered on racial ideology (Hunt 1999; McKay and Smith 1995). Like the above examples, media coverage played upon the most scandalous of racial stereotypes pervading U.S. media—the image of white female victimhood and black male criminality. The trial also made visible racially segregated sites of reception, and reaction to the not guilty verdict, while bringing to light predominant narratives about the fate of African Americans at the hands of a white “justice” system (Hunt 1999; McKay and Smith 1995).

In spite of the innumerable contributions of black people, blackness, and black popular culture to American culture and social life, blackness remains embodied in scandal in American ideology (Gray 1997). Indeed, racialized scandals are potent vehicles for racial projects spurring the persistence of racism, as they perform ritualized race baiting acts that kindle the flames of racial hatred and animus.

**Race scandals in a digital age**

Digital technologies have fundamentally transformed everyday communications; the internet, digital video, and social media, especially, have altered the landscape of race scandals. Digital technologies provide various methods for capturing and diffusing information—such as via online social networks, social media, blogs, online petitions, digital video, and email. The near ubiquity and the mass adoption of the internet, and in particular social media, as a means of communication has led to increased awareness of issues, dissemination of information, development of narrative, and speed of mobilization for race scandals. In addition, digital technologies allow a large, visible, and persistent challenge and assembly against scandals of racism at an international scale, without requiring participants to be physically present in the same locality. As Herman Gray (1997: 86) argues,
Race scandals as racial projects

Because Martin Luther King and the leaders of the civil rights movement framed the question of black equality and civil rights in moral and religious terms, they were able to effectively define and reveal as *scandalous* the inhuman and brutal treatment which blacks suffered at the hands of a racist social system.

In the same way that civil rights era activists defined racism as scandal, black Americans today use social media to mobilize race scandals as racial projects that interpret, explain, and articulate the racial dynamics involved in racist incidents and systems in order to generate media attention and combat affronts to their citizenship and belonging.

The LAPD beating of Rodney King marked a significant instance of using digital technologies to influence the mediation of race scandals (Hunt 1997). A progenitor of the “going viral” phenomenon, the resultant video demonstrated the power of individual citizens with handheld digital cameras to capture and disseminate incidents of social injustice for public audiences. Decades later when the fatal shootings of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement captured the minds, television screens, and social media feeds of global viewers, mobile smartphones became the dominant mode for people to capture scandals of racism. Meanwhile, the internet via social media platforms and YouTube became the primary venue for the dissemination of video footage. An upswing in citizen journalism, with non-journalists capturing digital or mobile video and audio recordings of race scandals, has catapulted social issues of racial injustice before global audiences in a relatively short time span (Freelon et al. 2016). The racial projects of mobilization against scandals of racism have taken on a new life in the digital era.

*Tweets, hashtags, and hackers*

Television star Roseanne Barr’s racist tweet about President Barack Obama’s senior advisor Valerie Jarrett, a prominent black woman in U.S. politics, developed into an online race scandal. In May 2018, Barr posted on her Twitter account that if the “muslim brotherhood & planet of the apes had a baby = vj.” Although Barr deleted and apologized for her tweet, ABC executives immediately canceled her sitcom, *Roseanne*—which had been recently resurrected after two decades—despite high ratings. The network’s entertainment president Channing Dungey said, “Roseanne’s Twitter statement is abhorrent, repugnant, and inconsistent with our values.” Adding to the media scandal, journalists criticized President Donald Trump for not condemning or calling out Barr’s remarks as racist but rather tweeting to change the subject and instead critique the network’s actions. Trump’s conduct reinforced the notion of a scandalous government that is mum on addressing race issues.

On Twitter, hashtags, which join comments under a single theme using the # symbol, provide a reference point for defining scandals and gathering supporters (Brock 2012; Conley 2014; Freelon et al. 2016). Specifically, hashtag activism, wherein Twitter users mobilize around hashtags, is one method of calling out race scandals, uniting multiple publics, and organizing sentiment online to counter racialized scandals, challenge racism, and assemble for social change. Mobilizing against racism as scandal, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag emerged to speak out against issues such as anti-black state-sanctioned violence or extrajudicial killings, with an offline movement to bolster the online activism (Taylor 2016). In another case, the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown hashtag brought attention to mainstream news outlets’ racist portrayals of black victims of police violence. Newspapers such as *The New York Times* displayed black victims of violence with mug shots and made references to victims’ past “deviant” behavior. In the case of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, mainstream news coverage referred to his parents’
criminal behavior. Meanwhile, white mass murderers received coverage complimenting their brilliance or crediting them with mental illness, and not personal deviance, in relation to their violent and murderous acts (Walsh 2005). Via hashtags, Twitter users called attention to and mocked the implicit racism, using the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown hashtag to illustrate biased news media depictions. Demonstrating their perceptions of W. E. B. Du Bois’s double consciousness by comprehending the dissimilar perspectives of how they view their identities versus how others view them through a white supremacist lens, black participants showed how news media would depict them as violent, gang-related, deviants (Gross 2017). Meanwhile, white participants unmasked the cultural production of whiteness as they showed how news media would depict them as well-put-together individuals in neatly dressed clothing. In this manner, social media are central technologies used to highlight or narrativize scandals as racial projects to effect positive change.

Another hashtag capturing a race scandal as a racial project is the #OscarsSoWhite controversy that plagued the Hollywood film industry. In 2015, #OscarsSoWhite became a trending hashtag following a lack of diversity: all 20 nominees for Best Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor, and Supporting Actress were white. Oscar nominations in 2016 followed the same all-white pattern in the acting categories (Yuen 2017). Some fans and celebrities boycotted the annual Academy Awards ceremony. In light of the controversy, Academy president Cheryl Boone Isaacs enacted changes aimed at increasing racial minority and female representation in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to extend voting power to underrepresented groups.

The proliferation of digital technologies in everyday life also provides space for online hackers to create race scandals if information revealed violates the moral and social norms of society and gains widespread attention. One Hollywood studio became embroiled in a scandal of racism when the December 2014 hack of Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE) disclosed thousands of emails and documents related to SPE executives, employees, and movies. Among other issues, this leak revealed racial disparities. The scandal caught wind in media reports, which focused on how Sony executives devalued black talent, for instance believing that Academy Award winning actor Denzel Washington could not headline a global box office hit movie and suggesting that if President Barack Obama was a film producer, he would produce only black cast films (Erigha 2019). Many reporters labeled the comments racist, and Sony executive Amy Pascal resigned, a move that signaled the scandal had achieved a height of moral degradation that could only be mitigated in the eyes of the public with her removal from her leadership role at the corporation.

Online organizations

Using racial projects to fight the racist status quo, marginalized groups employ digital technologies to: (1) push back against stereotypes and disparaging portrayals, (2) bring notice to race scandals, and (3) effect change in media representations. Through media activism, they assemble around harmful media and condemn images and statements that promote negative portrayals to deter scandalous images from materializing. As an example, the online activist organization ColorofChange.org runs media accountability campaigns and uses virtual petitions that have the capacity to gather volumes of signatories in a relatively brief time frame, in an attempt to foster awareness about scandals of racism and to quell racialized scandals or dissipate their narratives before they gain momentum. An online political organization with over 1 million members, ColorofChange.org was founded in 2005 by two social activists: software engineer James Rucker and environmental attorney (and now CNN political commentator) Van Jones. The two created the organization in response to a race scandal—the President George W. Bush-led federal government’s lack of action regarding Hurricane Katrina, the natural disaster that
Race scandals as racial projects

displaced thousands of predominately black victims in New Orleans, Louisiana (Gonzales and Torres 2011). The grassroots civil rights organization aimed to use media, in the form of national online campaigns, to raise awareness about political, social, and racial injustices ignored by white-owned media organizations—primarily concerning websites, newspapers, television, and film. Essentially, the internet age gave rise to new institutions with goals of using digital methods to address race scandals that for centuries have had debilitating effects on black communities.

ColorofChange.org members actively mobilize around race scandals with media accountability campaigns that call out racist remarks, emails, cartoons, or incidents and condemn individuals or groups. During George Zimmerman’s murder trial, one campaign urged members to monitor the news and report biased media attacks on gun violence victim Trayvon Martin. In doing so, the organization discouraged media professionals and organizations from running smears about Martin’s life that would sway public opinion by promoting racial stereotypes of black men and boys. Compared to “post-media” reactionary responses, proactive “pre-media” measures aim to prevent unjust media portrayals before they become widespread, full-blown, racialized scandals. Sometimes campaigns deliberately call for moral transgressors to lose their platforms and advertising revenue or abdicate positions of influence. Among those entities involved in bringing awareness to former L.A. Clippers owner Donald Sterling’s racist comments, ColorofChange.org used online petitions to discourage advertisers from sponsoring Sterling’s team and to urge NBA Commissioner Adam Silver to enforce the toughest possible penalty on Sterling, who was forced to sell the team and was banned from the NBA. Digital media provide individuals and groups with the platforms and tools to raise awareness via race scandals and to advocate for social transformation.

The future of race scandals

Furthering anti-black rhetoric characteristic of white supremacist doctrine, racialized scandals perpetuate ideologies that vilify blackness in mainstream media discourse, while scandals of racism illuminate the concerted ways that U.S. institutions and citizens hypocritically defy their own social norms of racial equality to express, enact, and enforce stark racial divisions and disparities. Meanwhile, black Americans who are depicted as “scandalous” or who are the perpetual victims of scandals of racism use digital media to call attention to and mobilize around scandals for social justice.

Given the multiple sources of information the internet provides and the 24-hour news cycles that structure media coverage, one consideration for the future is how race scandals will evolve under competition for popular attention. Perhaps many small “micro-scandals” that happen and are resolved quickly will dominate media coverage compared to the conventional norm of fewer major “macro-scandals” that sustained heightened media attention over long durations.

Another consideration is how persistent commercialism, the goal of maximizing profit, will continue to shape the presentation and prevalence of race scandals. Scandals sell newspapers, magazines, and advertisements; generate web traffic; and increase ratings and profits for media organizations. An estimated 93 million U.S. viewers tuned in to live television coverage of police cars chasing O. J. Simpson in his white Ford Bronco, while more than a thousand journalists traveled to Los Angeles from around the world to cover the murder trial. Television networks frequently capitalize on race scandals, since coverage gains viewership and increases advertising revenues. Ratings for the liberal news outlet CNN, for instance, increased around the airing of the O. J. Simpson trial. Over two decades later, spinoff books, television miniseries and docudramas, and tabloid publications continue to profit from the racialized media scandal following O. J. Simpson. Scandalous media commentary about race sustains ongoing audiences.
and helps some individuals and organizations to gain immense popularity. Rush Limbaugh’s race-baiting tactics help him derive a devoted following from politically conservative white audiences (Bisbort 2008: 168). In cable television, Fox News commentators are well-known race-baiters who make scandalous comments about race and racism with regularity (Deggans 2012); perhaps because of this racially polarizing strategy, they sustain the highest primetime ratings of all cable news networks. The economics of race scandals shows that so long as racism continues to be profitable, race scandals are likely to populate media coverage.

Moral transgressors, even, profit from race scandals. After killing unarmed black men, George Zimmerman and Darren Wilson received substantial sums of money from online donors. On his Fox News program, white conservative political commentator Sean Hannity advertised a website for viewers to send money in defense of George Zimmerman, raising nearly half a million dollars for the man who shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin. Similarly, Darren Wilson the police officer who shot to death 18-year-old Michael Brown raised more than $430,000 through donations on a Facebook page and more than $330,000 using GoFundMe, a website for crowdfunding. Because race scandals are profitable and serve racial ideologies of white supremacism that function to demean blackness and sustain racial inequality in the U.S., media scandals about race can be expected to appear as regular, everyday, recurring rituals.

The ideological vehicle of mainstream media provides a tool for dueling racial projects—working to either entrench or redress centuries-long acts of racial wrongdoing. Yet only racial projects that challenge and prevent blatant and covert racism aim to move society towards the progressive goal of racial inclusivity and away from racial oppression. Exposing acts of racism and upsetting the narratives of racialized scandals are fundamental steps in striving towards eradicating the systemic scourge of racism in U.S. culture.

References


Race scandals as racial projects


