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Watts, the 1965 Los Angeles Riots, and the Communicative Construction of the Fear Epicenter of Los Angeles

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215 mental maps collected in 1998 indicate that Watts is Los Angeles' epicenter of fear. Spatial cluster analysis provides evidence that this fear is most closely associated with the 1965 "Watts" riots. The role played by television in constructing spatial fear is proposed as a possible explanation for the persistence of this collective memory. Analysis of phone survey data and of a set of mental maps indicates that the greatest fear of Watts is found among respondents with stronger dependency relations with television.

Keywords: Social Fear; Mental Maps; Media Dependency; GIS; Spatial Effects

On Wednesday, August 11, 1965, Marquette Fry, a 22-year-old Black resident of the South-Central section of Los Angeles, had a few drinks—a vodka and orange juice mix known as "screwdrivers"—while visiting an acquaintance.[1] Toward the end of the day he decided to return back home, situated about two miles south of Watts and, at the time, a preponderantly Black area of Los Angeles. His driving was quite erratic. Lee Minikus, a California Highway Police patrolman stopped Fry just two blocks away from his home, at the corner of the 116th Street and Avalon Blvd. As back-up police cars arrived at the scene, Fry's neighbors and random pedestrians stopped by what seemed to be an emerging encounter. For a while Fry exchanged humorous one-liners with the police. The events took, however, a dramatic turn when Fry's mother, warned by the neighbors that her son was in trouble, arrived at the scene (McCone,

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1965). Embarrassed, Fry became uncooperative, resisting the officer's attempt to put him in the patrol car. Some on-lookers thought that the amount of force used by the police in restraining Fry was excessive. The crowd surrounded the police officers, whose number escalated as the tension increased. Soon, the issue was not Fry's drunk driving; it was the raw confrontation between a crowd of about 1000 Black residents of the area and the symbols of the White establishment of the city. People threw empty bottles, sticks, and stones at retreating police cars. Once police evacuated the area the pent-up fury unleashed. Cars driving down Avalon Boulevard—a main street in the neighborhood—were stoned. Encounters with police or even fire units invariably ended in violent confrontations. During the night between Wednesday, August 11 and Thursday, August 12 stores and official buildings were broken into, looted, and frequently burned. The scenario was repeated in the following three days, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, August 12–14, despite of the fact that thousands of National Guardsmen had been deployed to impose a curfew in a 50 square mile area south of the Los Angeles downtown and east of the international airport.

When the situation was finally brought under control five days later, there were 34 persons killed and 1032 reported injuries. The material losses were estimated at over $230 million dollars (2002), more than 600 buildings being damaged by burning and looting (McCone, 1965).

Thirty-three years later (1998) we conducted a complex study of six Los Angeles ethnically-marked neighborhoods. These included White, Latino, Asian, and African-American residents. One of the research goals was to uncover which Los Angeles residential areas are most feared and which are perceived as "most comfortable" (safe, secure, or desirable).

By asking a sub-sample of 215 (out of a total of 1491) respondents to color in a standard black and white street map of Los Angeles metropolitan area we learned that Watts was the most intensely feared Los Angeles neighborhood (see Figure 1), a number of concentric rings of fear surrounding it.[2] The epicenter of this most intensely feared area has an extremely precise location and it coincides with one of the zones most seriously affected by the 1965 riots: the so-called "Charcoal alley." On this street in 1965 almost all commercial buildings were burned, looted, or damaged (Cohen & Murphy, 1966). Our suspicion was that what we detected in the maps collected in 1998 was the indelible collective memory of the 1965 events. Alternative explanations that arose included the proposition that the negative public image of Watts is created by other, more objective or recent factors, such as crime incidence or the more recent 1992 riots, sparked by the Rodney King incident. But, if the "epicenter of fear" does, indeed, reflect the memory of 1965, how did these memories survive for such a long time? Specifically, what processes might explain how the fear image of Watts had consolidated and diffused? These are the central research questions addressed in this paper.

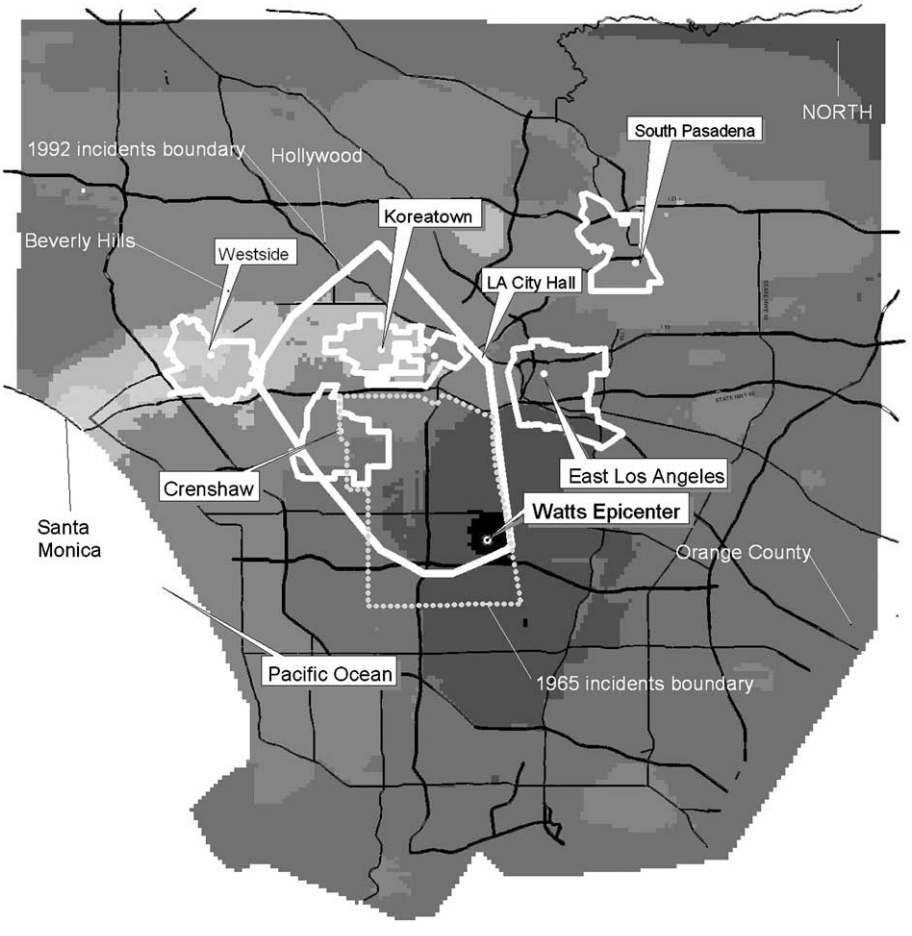

Figure 1 The composite map of fear for 215 Los Angeles respondents. The area most feared, depicted in the most intense dark shade covers the communities of Florence-Graham, Watts, Willowbrook, and Compton. Darker shading = feared areas; lighter shading = comfortable areas; solid black lines = main highways; dotted gray line = 1965 incidents area; solid thick white line = 1992 incident area; medium white lines = borders of study areas; white dots = landmarks and notable locations.

Media Negotiations of Spatial Fear: Los Angeles and Watts

The basic theoretical assumption supporting this paper, which we explored in previous work, is that fear or comfort feelings related to specific social spaces can be most profitably explained through people's communication practices (Matei, Ball-Rokeach, & Qiu, 2001; Matei, Ball-Rokeach, Wilson, Gibbs, & Gutierrez Hoyt, 2001). Mediated or direct communication channels play a central role in the construction of Los Angeles as a mental/social artifact (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Hunt, 1997; Loges, 1994).

Our work, which employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, builds on and extends research done on the construction of "otherness" in urban areas

(Ajaye, 1992; Entman, 1994; Hunt, 1997). Our major contribution is to demonstrate that racial stereotyping contributes to creating social fear of *specific urban social spaces*. In particular, in our previous work we showed that presence of a mix of African-American and Hispanic populations in a specific urban area induces a feeling of fear. Along the same lines, we found credible evidence that communication processes can enhance fear. More specifically, we found that individuals connected to the communication infrastructure via interpersonal and television channels were more likely to be fearful of racially coded areas of Los Angeles.

This research line, although productive, had some limitations. Most importantly, it was primarily focused on what in spatial statistics is called *global* processes. That is, the goal was to ascertain that there is a probabilistic association between fear and presence of black and brown minorities in Los Angeles county when looking at the collection of observations (spatial units) as a whole. By definition, this type of research ignores local concentrations in the variable of interest (in this case, fear). Its main goal is to explain how fear is spatially distributed across a large swath of territory, not to explain its local variations. Moreover, we did not attempt to elucidate the role discrete components of the communication infrastructure, such as television or newspapers, played in fostering fear.

The present paper addresses these issues directly. Our aims are to explain why fear is focalized on Watts and which of two central communication channels, television or newspapers, seems to be more important in fostering such fear.

We will start by theoretically justifying the importance of discerning between television and newspaper influences on fear. We will then discuss the role played by focalized fear on local social dynamics and will conclude with a number of research questions addressing the generative factors of focalized fear.

Mass Media and Spatial Fear: Theoretical Assumptions and Research Questions

Mass media portrayals of urban life are intensely connotative and inclined to use strong stories and dramatic effects. The attempt is to make the news interesting and thus commercially viable by *re-presenting* reality, imprinting it with sentiment and specific conventions. This bias is particularly present in the case of commercial television (Altheide, 2002; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Hunt, 1997).

The causes are multiple. Television stations prefer stories and images that emphasize fear and conflict on account of their higher "news value" (Altheide, 2002). Vivid imagery of violence takes precedence over other types of imagery in portraying social events, exploiting what psychologists call the stimulation effect of vividness on message processing (Brosius, 1993; Smith & Shaffer, 2000). In addition, television tends to "standardize" reality, using labels and "shorthand" definitions for actors, spaces, and situations. Television is more inclined than other media toward a standardized, even stereotypical language and imagery, due to its time constrained nature. Television broadcasts tend to concentrate information in small doses that need, at the same time, to be compatible with the visual imagery. This leads, in the end, to favoring vivid, standardized, and dramatic images and symbols (Iyengar,

1994), which can lead to stereotyping. Stereotyping includes social roles, ethnic imagery, and spatial designators and is particularly strong in times of crisis, especially those that involve violent social events (Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Young, 2003).

This reasoning is also congruent with cultivation theory, which proposes that television content promotes a "mean world syndrome," which instills in viewers a vision of fear and suspicion toward other social groups, races, or classes (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994; Shrum, 2002). As proposed by Gerbner et al. (1994), the profuse use of violence in television content, as a dramatic *primum movens* principle, has the secondary effect of cultivating in the mind of the audience an image of a dangerous and anomic world, which directly threatens the security of the viewer. Because "meanness in the world" is apparently pervasive and because the audience needs faces and names to pinpoint its origin and scope, stereotypes applied to groups and communities different from one's own will be reinforced.

These theoretical processes can be responsible for a stereotypical treatment of specific areas of Los Angeles as particularly "violent" and fearful, especially if, as in the case of Watts, they have the added historical construction as a rebellious and ethnically "dangerous" space.

Newspapers, on the other hand, can play a more complex role in depicting reality. Although equally driven by commercial motives, they rely, when telling stories, on narratives and argument in far greater measure than television. Thus, newspapers have at least the potential to encourage reflexive absorption of information. For example, Clarke and Fredin (1978) have shown that political information filtered through newspapers is more likely to lead to reasoned electoral decisions. Or, as Sheley and Ashkins (1981) have shown, newspapers are relatively less likely to distort the extent and gravity of violent crime in urban areas.

The way in which violence and crime play out in the public arena is influenced not only by what the media tells the people, but also by the violent events themselves. In Los Angeles, these include routine crime and more recent bouts of civil disorder. In this context, in order to clarify what produces the negative reaction toward Watts, it is first imperative to ask if its image is produced by mediated or immediate experiences. More specifically, how much could fear of Watts be a function of social experiences and processes specific to the South Central section of Los Angeles surrounding Watts? Although we have reason to believe that it is mass-mediated process that fostered and maintained Watts' fear image, we need to first rule out competing explanations for the spatial association between the fear epicenter detected in our maps and the 1965 events.

Specifically, we need to be sure that the fear focused on Watts is not produced by more recent events or phenomena, equally capable of inspiring fear. There are at least two likely candidates: an unusually high level of crime in that part of the city and more recent inter-racial conflicts, such as the 1992 urban uprising.

A two-step process can be used to rule out these alternative accounts. First, we need to determine statistically if Watts, and more specifically the area identified as being most feared in our maps (Figure 1), was one of the zones most affected by the 1965 events:

RQ1: Is the area most feared in 1998 the same as the area that experienced the most damage in the 1965 Watts riot?

Second, even if Watts corresponds with the zone of maximum fear identified in the affective maps, we need to rule out other factors, equally capable of eliciting fear. A likely candidate is the 1992 civil disturbance that covered most of South Central Los Angeles, including Watts. This more recent violent event, equal in size and intensity with the 1965 riots, is closer in time and thus easier for people to remember.

RQ2: Is the area most feared in 1998 the same as the area that experienced the most damage in the 1992 civil disturbances?

Both the 1965 and 1992 events were quite exceptional. They only lasted for a few days and, although violent, only directly affected a comparatively small number of Los Angeles residents. In contrast, daily occurrences, such as crime, would be more likely to be present in the public imagination and to affect a far larger number of people than the two riot incidents. Southern Los Angeles—and Watts in particular—have long been known as "crime-ridden" areas. Yet, in order for crime to justify fear, its actual level should be much higher than in areas perceived as being safe.

RQ3: Is crime in Watts sufficiently high to elicit a corresponding level of fear?

If after answering these questions we come to the conclusion that Watts is more closely associated with the 1965 events than with either the 1992 riot events or with everyday crime incidents, then we can proceed to explore the role of television, compared to newspaper communication, in shaping the socio-affective image of Watts. Of the two, the television channel is the focal one, newspapers being included in our analyses for comparison purposes.

Admittedly, identifying television as one of the main causes of fear of Watts is a strong and difficult point to make. The complicated and immensely difficult story of how Watts became and remained a stigmatized area is intricate and probably cannot be fully untangled in the absence of a content analysis of the last 40 years of television coverage in Los Angeles. We would also need to know how television stations of record identified, geographically and topographically, the area of the 1965 riots. A central research question should be: what role has the media played in using Watts as shorthand for the racial conundrum of the city? A connected question would be: how much of the reality on the ground (e.g., the ethnic composition and political options of Watts' residents) is reflected in the reputation of Watts?

Although part of our broader research agenda, these questions cannot be directly addressed with the data we presently have. In the absence of access to a full media content analysis, we can, however, look at the types and intensity of media connections of the people who created the affective maps of Los Angeles that we study here. We know, for example, how central or peripheral the medium is in their lives, a notion we operationalize as "media connectedness," a concept that follows Ball-Rokeach's (1998) media connectedness or dependency theory.

A basic premise of media system dependency (MSD) theory is that conditions of social change and social conflict that are experienced as ambiguity and threat increase the intensity of people's MSD relations. These conditions may be acute, as in the case of a natural disaster (Hirschburg, Dillman, & Ball-Rokeach, 1986), or they may be chronic (Ball-Rokeach, 1998; Loges, 1994). It is, in part, the presence of these conditions in contemporary urban spaces that prompted the present exploration of the communicative construction of fear and our larger inquiry into the communicative construction of community in Los Angeles (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). Another tenet of MSD theory is that media effects are most likely to occur when and where people have the strongest MSD relations. Put briefly, people with relatively intense MSD relations with television are more likely to exhibit focalized fear of Watts than people with relatively intense MSD relations with newspapers due the more vivid nature of the medium (Brosius, 1993), and the more "black and white," so to speak, nature of television mode of storytelling.

Hypothetically, we assume that when television is a central means of connecting to the world, its message, inflected by stereotyping and violence, can bleed into the spatial mental images people hold about specific social groups and about the spaces they occupy. The expectation is also informed by Shrum's (2002) who, in a development of cultivation theory, proposes that television cultivation effects are mediated by information processing mechanisms. When people build or retrieve social or spatial maps of their surroundings, they rarely engage in judgment construction through an extensive and deliberate search of memory. Rather, they retrieve only the information that is most accessible. This is, in most cases, information that was dramatized and standardized with an easily recognized label. Increased exposure to television storytelling depletes our mental images of complex constructs, replacing them with simplified, Manichean images. These images, simple and dramatic, are more accessible for retrieval and will be more present in our judgments because they will score higher in the mental "relevance indices" we use for organizing our knowledge about the world.

Under these circumstances, we expect that the role of television in labeling and locating race conflicts in Los Angeles will increase the likelihood that areas of racial conflict, such as Watts, will become the mental constructs easiest to retrieve when knowledge about the ethnic landscape of Los Angeles is requested. Since racial relationships in Los Angeles are always perceived as verging on violent conflict, this, in effect, translates into a sub-conscious fear bias toward Watts, the rationalized source of the conflict. If this explanatory mechanism is operative, then we should find that more intense television connectedness results in a darker (more fearful) image of the Southern part of Los Angeles and of Watts in particular.

How can we detect, in operational terms, the role of television in constructing the image of fear people have of Watts? If television is the most important fear inducing and preserving vehicle, then the mental maps drawn by Los Angelinos who are strongly connected to television will depict Watts in more fearful colors, when compared to the maps colored by the overall sample of map-makers.[3]

RQ4: Does the mental map created by television connectors depict the Watts area in a shade of fear that is significantly more intense (darker) than the shade in which Watts is depicted by the entire study sample?

A discussion of the communicative process of constructing and generating a fear epicenter in Los Angeles cannot be complete, however, in the absence of a comparison between media. The comparison term for the effect of television connectedness on fear of Watts is newspaper connectedness. As previously discussed, it is commonly accepted in mass communication research that although some newspapers can have a negative effect on the audience (Williams & Dickinson, 1993), the social effects of print media are generally positive. Local newspapers in particular foster a more elevated civic dialogue and deeper understanding of local issues, which bring about a more discriminating frame of reference for judging the problems of the communities covered by them (Atwood, Sohn, & Sohn, 1978; Janowitz, 1967; McLeod et al., 1996; Moy, McCluskey, McCoy, & Spratt, 2004; Stamm & Guest, 1991). We thus expect that television is more important, when compared to newspapers, in constructing a fear image of Watts:

RQ5: Does the mental map created by television connectors depict the Watts area in a shade of fear that is significantly more intense (darker) than the shade in which Watts is depicted in the newspaper connector maps?

Method

Data-sets and Variables

Data presented in this paper come from three sources: a Los Angeles phone survey and mapping exercise, historical data about the 1965 and 1992 incidents, and socio-demographic data related to crime and ethnic composition of Los Angeles obtained from the FBI, APB On-line, and the Census Bureau.

Los Angeles Survey and mental maps

First, we utilize maps of "fear and comfort" collected from 215 Los Angeles residents. The maps depict the mental images of the "feared" and "comfortable" areas of Los Angeles. These were obtained as part of a large scale survey of Los Angeles' ethnically marked neighborhoods, conducted over a period of two years (1998–1999). The telephone interview, about 45 minutes long, was administered to a total of 1491 respondents of 6 ethnically marked neighborhoods, located in the central urban area of Los Angeles (see Figure 1). The communities were selected to reflect the dominant populations of the city (White Anglo-Saxon, White European/Jewish origin, Latino, and Asian). From each community about 250 respondents were selected using a random-digit dialing procedure. Together, the specific populations selected represent 90% of the county population. We chose to study these populations using geographically focused, rather than county-wide samples in order to facilitate in-depth, *in situ* research. The samples are generally in tune with the general characteristics of these Los Angeles ethnic populations (Matei, Ball-Rokeach et al.,

2001). They display, however, slight biases due to the nature of the data collection used (phone survey), such as a higher percentage of female respondents (56%) and higher education level (40% are college graduates).

A major goal of the study was to discern the effects media connections have on civic well-being in Los Angeles urban neighborhoods. The survey questions included, along with those related to media connections and use, people's social connections in Los Angeles and in their local communities, work and cultural associations, or social-demographic characteristics. In addition, a sub-set of survey participants (i.e., those who scored above average on the variable "how often do you participate in discussions about your local community") were subsequently invited to be part of a number of follow-up research activities, which included a mapping exercise. The sub-sample was limited to 215 respondents due to collection cost and data-set electronic management reasons. Although a small fraction of the larger sample, the map-makers are similar to the rest of the respondents in terms of education, age, income, and social experience (Table 1). Thus, we believe that the respondents selected for our exercise reflect more general trends in the Los Angeles ethnic populations studied. Taking into account the fact the samples reflect the major ethnic populations, the maps obtained from them can also be considered a sub-set of the mental pictures generated by the Los Angeles population.

Mental maps were collected during focus groups or through mail surveys sent to eligible focus group participants. Once collected, the maps were digitized, stored, and analyzed as complex computer graphics—a process that raises separate technological issues, as described below.

During post-interview focus groups or at the respondents' domicile—in the latter case the maps being sent and returned by mail—the selected study participants were given black and white maps of Los Angeles and four crayons to color the maps. The

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Study Samples

Study samples	All samples ($N = 1491$)	Map-makers ($N = 215$)
Household income (median)	27,500	27,500
% ≤$35,000	51	54
% ≥$75,000	13	19
Level of education		
% ≤high school	38	35
% ≥college graduate	40	40
Median age	39	43
% female	57	61
Years in neighborhood		
% <3 years	30	22
% >10 years	42	50
Years in Los Angeles		
% <3 years	9	8
% >10 years	71	74
% first-generation immigrants	32	34
% own home	35	39

maps depicted the street grid, with the main highways prominently featured and labeled, and equal size labels for established, historically documented, local community names (e.g., South Pasadena, Hermosa Beach, Santa Monica, Hollywood, Watts, etc.). No identification on the map was provided for non-standard area locations, which might otherwise allude to racial coding, such as South Central. Respondents were instructed to use a different crayon for each of four possible feelings: red indicating feared areas, green for the areas they felt most comfortable and safe, orange for the areas perceived as being somewhat but not completely comfortable, and blue depicting neutral feelings toward an area or areas that the respondents did not know well enough to form an opinion. The colors were selected to reflect general cognitive conventions, such as those used for traffic lights. Red was selected for its common association with interdiction or danger, green with "free" or "accessible" areas, and orange for its in-between position. Blue was considered as a natural choice for a neutral color. No respondent raised issues related to understanding or using the color scheme.

After coloring, all individual maps were digitized using Geographic Information Systems methodologies facilitated by the ArcView computer program. The maps were electronically transformed into raster images. A raster image is a GIS technical concept for designating maps that are represented as a collection of small units, equal in size, and similar in shape. These are usually square pixels. A raster map is made of hundreds or even thousands of pixels, similar to a digital picture.

Once digitized, each map became a collection of over 80,000 pixels, and each color was converted into a numeric value as follows: -1 = red; 0 = blue; 1 = orange; 2 = green. By this, the coloring ramp became a fear scale and each map a mathematical matrix with more than 80,000 possible values. Since such maps take considerable amounts of storage space, the program cannot handle more than a few hundred such maps at a time. This limitation constrained the number of maps collected for this study to 215.

The maps, once converted into numeric arrays, were combined mathematically using what in GIS is called "map algebra," into a final map, whose pixels receive an average value based on the values of the maps that are morphed into it. This average value was obtained by adding the values of the pixels corresponding to that specific pixel location in the individual maps and then by dividing the sum by the number of maps involved. Each final map pixel value is then re-translated into colors, reflecting an average feeling of comfort or fear.

We used this procedure for creating several *average* maps, the most important being those for respondents who share a relatively high level of media/communication connectedness to television or newspapers. To ensure that these maps are mostly inflected by media connections and not by other personal characteristics, and in effect to control for socio-demographic characteristics, we selected a group of respondents as homogeneous, as possible. To this end, we selected the individuals with the desirable media profiles from a specific and shared socio-demographic background. This was defined by age and permanent residence at the time of the riots (1965); respondents had to be at least 12 years old and not residents of Los Angeles at the

time of the riots. We attempted in this way to ensure that map-makers had an equal, lifetime opportunity to have exposure to the Los Angeles Watts riots story and that this exposure was mainly mediated. Imposing these selection criteria, we retained 30 respondents over 45 years' old in 1998 with strong television connections and 32 respondents over 45 years of age in 1998 with strong newspaper connectedness.

The two groups contain a diversity of respondents, both male and female, and from most ethnic backgrounds included in the study. Although they present some differences, these are generally small and typical to the television- or newspaper-oriented consumer identified in the literature.[4]

Following the selection process, we created two focal *average* maps: one constructed from the 30 individual maps of television connectors, and one from the 32 maps of the newspaper connectors. Because 16 of the respondents in each group were part of both groups we also constructed maps and performed analyses, for check-up purposes, only for the respondents unique to each group.

Both map groups included residents from five of the six residential study areas, the exception being Pico-Union, where neither mainstream television nor newspapers were selected as one of the top two media for attaining any of the three goals. Pico-Union is the area with the highest number of first generation immigrants, the lowest literacy, and the lowest English-speaking proficiency. These factors account for their lack of connectedness to either mainstream and English-language television or newspapers. However, both map groups include individual mental maps produced by African-Americans: eight (26% of total) in the strongly television-connected group and six (25%) in the newspaper-connected group.

The measure of media connectedness used for determining who is a "strong television or newspaper connector" follows along the MSD assumption that there are three types of individual goals that play a part in constructing media dependency relations. These goals—understanding, orientation, and play—parallel classical categories of human motivation (McClelland, 1955) implicated in people's efforts to navigate their social environments (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, 1984). For present purposes, we asked survey respondents to think about "all the different ways of communicating and getting information—using television, radio, newspaper, books, magazines, the Internet, talking with other people, or any other way" to identify the top two ways that they (1) stay on top of their community (social understanding), (2) get information to make decisions about the products you buy (action orientation), and (3) relax or have fun (solitary or social play). When respondents choose television, newspapers, or radio, they are asked a follow-up question to assess whether they are referring to mainstream/general interest media or to ethnically targeted/non-English-language media. Only respondents who select mainstream television or newspapers as one of their top two media connections, for at least one of the three goals, are included in this analysis. The measures of television and newspaper connectedness are simply the summated scores of how often mainstream television or newspapers are selected. Television and newspapers connectedness thus ranges from 3 (the respective medium was selected for each of

the three goals) to 0 (not selected for any of the three goals). All respondents selected for analysis had a score of at least 1.

Historical data about the 1965 and 1992 incidents

The 1992 riot incidents data-set (illustrated as solid white circles in Figure 2) contains the addresses of 709 buildings damaged during the riots. The 1965 data-set similarly contains 798 locations of the buildings destroyed or looted during the week-long Watts riot period (see gray dots with black center in Figure 2). The 1965 data were manually re-mapped by the authors of this paper using the maps found in the McCone Commission report on the Watts riots (McCone, 1965). The 1992 maps were obtained from Ned Levine and Associates, hired by the Rebuild Los Angeles Foundation to perform a spatial analysis of the 1992 destructions (Larson & Finney, 1996).

Crime and socio-demographic data

Information about the geographic distribution of crime in Los Angeles was obtained from two sources. Each data-set has advantages and disadvantages. The first is provided by the FBI. Specifically, we used the FBI crime index measure for 125 police

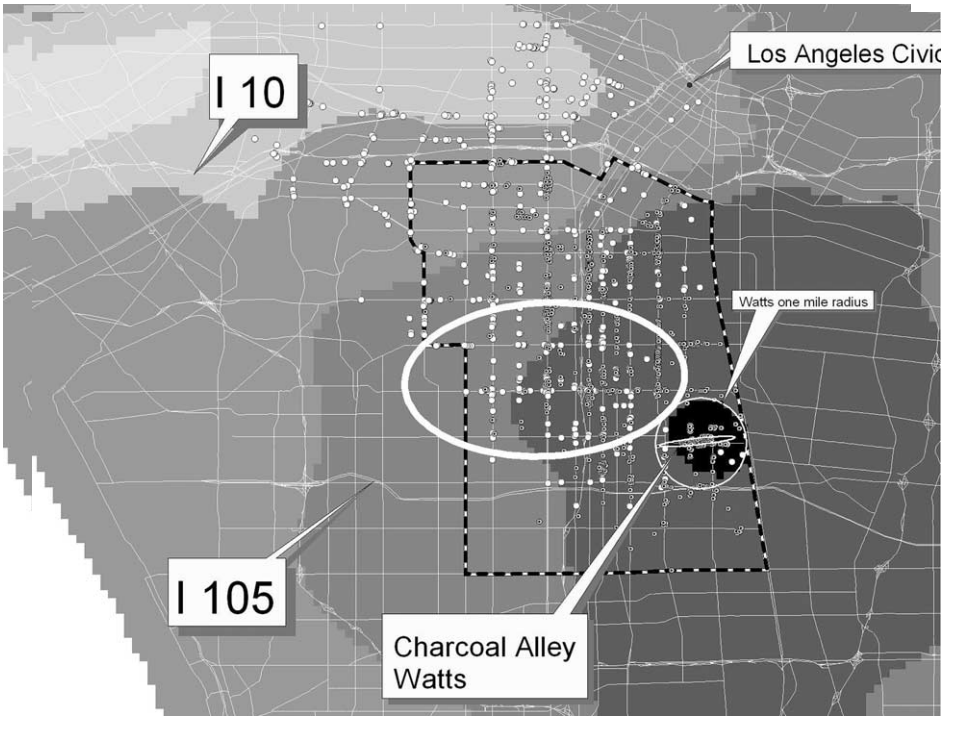

Figure 2 Hot spot analysis of 1965 and 1992 events relative to the Watts epicenter of fear. Thick white line (large ellipsoid) = 1992 second order cluster. Thin line (small ellipsoid) = 1965 second order cluster. Thin circle = 1 mile radius around Watts. White dots = 1992 incidents. Grey dots = 1965 incidents. Dotted line = 1965 curfew line. Intense black area, zone most feared in Los Angeles.

administrative districts in Los Angeles county (LAPD, 1999; LASD, 1997) in the years directly preceding our study (1997–1998). The FBI crime index counts "part 1" crimes—the eight "serious offenses" for which the FBI gathers national data, including homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, vehicle theft, and arson. The raw number of crimes was divided by population size and multiplied by 1000, to obtain crime incidence per 1000 residents. The advantage of this data-set is that it includes actual crime data. The disadvantage is that it is biased toward reported crimes and it usually exaggerates the level of criminality in areas with high daytime visitors (e.g., tourist areas).

The second data-set is based on Figlio's Crime Victimization Index, which represents the likelihood of violent crime victimization (homicide, rape, and robbery) compared to the national average in 1999 (Figlio, 1991a, 1991b; Figlio & Somerson, 1990). The data were obtained in 1999 through APBonline.com (currently not available). The CAP Index measures *risk of crime*, not actual crime occurrence. It is a predicted level of violent crime (rape, homicide, robbery) in a zip-code area and is generated by fitting crime values—provided by police and victims—through multiple regressions. The predictors are: basic demographics (age, marital status, gender, etc.); housing characteristics (housing occupancy and density); and population mobility (Figlio, 1991b).

These values are standardized into a 1–10 scale, 1 representing the lowest and 10 the highest level of victimization likelihood. According to Figlio (personal communication, September 6, 2000), preliminary studies in urban areas seem to confirm the predictive model, the correlation between real crime occurrence and predicted values producing multiple *R*-squares in the .7–.8 range. The advantage of this score is that it scales well with the geographic units of various size or population density, and type of residential setting. The disadvantage, typical to most predicted indices, is that its estimates partially rely on socio-demographic factors, which raises the issue of confounding factors.

Finally, we use a socio-demographic data-set describing at zip-code area of geography the ethnic and immigrant composition of Los Angeles (percentage of the population that is immigrant, Black, White, Hispanic, or Asian). These data, reflecting 1998 projections derived from the 1990 Census data, were obtained from the Census Bureau (http://www.census.gov).

Statistical Procedures

The data were analyzed using a number of spatial and traditional statistical techniques. In answering research questions 1 and 2 we used nearest neighbor cluster analysis to determine if the riot event locations present any hot spots, in other words, if they are concentrated spatially in a way that suggests a greater than chance occurrence (Levine, 1996, 2000). This procedure uses the x and y coordinates of each building destroyed in 1965 or 1992 as variables. The clusters are, similar to traditional cluster analysis, identified as groups of incidents that are close enough to rule out chance proximity. According to the authors of the Crimestat software used for

performing the analysis (Levine, 2000), a threshold distance is required for testing for the statistical significance of the clusters. This threshold distance is the lower limit of the confidence interval around a random expected distance (Levine, 2000, Help file). The value for this analysis was set to .05 (i.e., fewer than 5% of distances could be expected to be as small or smaller by chance). The clustering procedure, itself, is described as follows:

> Pairs of points that are closer together than the threshold distance are grouped together, whereas pairs of points that are greater than the threshold distance are ignored. The minimum number of points required for each cluster was set to the recommended default of 10 points. Clustering is hierarchical in that the first-order clusters are treated as separate points to be clustered into second-order clusters, and the second-order clusters are treated as separate points to be clustered into third-order clusters, and so on. Higher-order clusters will be identified only if the distance between their centers are closer than the new threshold distance. (Levine, 2000, Help file)

In our analysis, we produced both first-order and second-order clusters. The second-order clusters are of greater significance because they localize the hot spots, areas where not only individual incidents, but whole clusters of incidents, are so close to one another that this could not have occurred by chance alone.

To address research question number 3 we used the two types of crime incidence data described above. The level of the association between fear and crime was determined for the FBI index by calculating the Pearson *r* correlation value. Level of fear for each police district was obtained by averaging the value of the pixels falling in the fear map obtained by combining all 215 individual maps within the boundaries of each district, so that a single level of fear score, between 2 and -1, was assigned to each of the these districts. For the Crime Victimization Index we employed the same averaging technique, using zip-code areas as units of geography, to quantify fear/comfort at the local level.

To determine whether level of comfort/fear at the zip level of analysis is predicted by the Crime Victimization Index, we employ linear multiple regression, which allows controlling for ethnic composition. In this way we distinguish the unique effects of crime from the effects of ethnic composition on the spatial distributions of fear and comfort.

For research questions 4 and 5 the main task is to obtain a synthetic level of fear for the Watts district extracted from the maps generated by: (a) our entire sample, (b) from the maps generated by the sub-sample of strong television connectors, and (c) from the maps generated by the strong newspaper connectors. For this we used the same summation procedure described above, the unit of geography being a one mile radius circle around the intersection of 103rd Street and Wilmington Blvd. This is the mid-point of "Charcoal Alley," one of the streets most devastated by the Watts riots, and it corresponds with the Watts fear epicenter as identified by our entire sample fear/comfort map. A one mile radius was selected because Watts is a place (neighborhood) name, rather than an administrative district of Los Angeles and, thus, no official borders exist. One mile north and south of this intersection Watts

borders two Los Angeles county sub-divisions (Florence-Graham and Willowbrook). The circle we drew covers about 90% of what can be considered the Watts district of Los Angeles. The mean levels of fear of Watts obtained from the television and newspaper mapping groups were compared with the fear level exhibited by the entire sample. The significance of the differences between these maps was tested using paired-sample *t*-tests.

Results

The first two research questions ask if the epicenter of fear, detected in the entire sample (215-respondent map) best overlaps with the 1965 or the 1992 hot spots. To answer these questions we first had to determine on the basis of nearest neighbor cluster analysis the main 1965 and 1992 hot spots. Then, we determined which of these is spatially closer to the Watts fear epicenter. The 1965 events produced 18 first-order clusters, significant at $p < .05$, containing 366 (44%) of the 798 locations mapped. For the 1992 events we obtained 11 first-order clusters, containing 148 (20%) of the 702 locations mapped. In addition, we obtained one hot spot (second-order cluster) for each set of events. The location of the two second-order clusters (hot spots), as shown in Figure 2, demonstrates unequivocally that the epicenter of fear detected in the affective maps of Los Angeles residents precisely coincides with the hottest spot of the 1965, not the 1992 events.

The 1965 hot spot, although small in size, denotes a very precise location: Watts (Figure 2). It is very elongated, ellipsoidal in shape, following the path of destruction along the 103rd street coinciding with "Charcoal Alley," traversing from east to west, the darkest spot of fear on our map. The 1992 second order cluster is far larger and includes a number of first-order clusters situated West of the 110 Freeway, in what is more traditionally considered "South Central" Los Angeles. Its center is about 3.5 miles away from Watts and is in an area whose average level of fear is .03 (on the -1 to $+2$ scale), slightly above neutral. In contrast, the 1965 cluster covers an area whose average level of fear is $-.2$

The third research question asks if fear of Watts is the product of crime or of remembering the 1965 events. Table 2 presents the data for the top ten crime-ranked areas of Los Angeles county, divided by municipality, in further detail.

With 80 felonies per 1000 inhabitants in 1997, the Southwest district of Los Angeles City, which includes the Watts district, was the seventh highest Los Angeles area (of 125) in terms of crime. However, this level was comparable or just a little higher than the level of crime in more reputable areas of town, such as Santa Monica or West Hollywood, which in our respondents' imagination trigger a high level of comfort (Table 2).

This mismatch between crime and fear/comfort is confirmed by correlation analysis. We used the administrative units as cases, which excluded the two geographic units that had very low populations but high daytime visitor traffic and the highest level of crime (Universal Studios and the warehousing district City of Industry). For each of the remaining administrative units we calculated a synthetic

Table 2 Top Ten Administrative Units in Los Angeles County in Terms of Crime

Administrative area	FBI Crime Index	Population	Crime per 1000 persons
Industry*	1915	700	2735.7
W. Hollywood/Universal City*	833	1150	724.3
Central area	8137	40224	202.3
Commerce	1488	13050	114.0
Santa Fe Springs	1527	15000	101.8
Signal Hill	826	9133	90.4
Southeast area (includes Watts)	10245	127984	80.0
Southwest area	12874	164552	78.2
Santa Monica	6473	86955	74.4
Pacific area (Airport)	14531	201119	72.3

*Industry is a warehouse/industrial district, very sparsely populated and W. Hollywood unincorporated is the administrative label for Universal City, a theme park. The most frequent type of crimes committed here are theft or larceny. The areas are clearly outliers and were not included in the final correlation analysis.

measure of fear by averaging the values of the pixels confined within their boundaries. This value of fear was then correlated with crime per capita. We found the two variables to be statistically uncorrelated, $r(125) = .03$, $p = .71$.

The results of a multivariate analysis, using zip-code areas as cases, the Crime Victimization Index as the main predictor, ethnic/racial composition as controls, and crime/fear as the dependent variable, also fail to indicate a relationship between comfort and crime in the expected direction: more crime, more fear (Table 3). Rather, as we previously reported in our research (Matei, Ball-Rokeach, & Qiu, 2001), there is a slight positive relationship between the two, areas that are more prone to crime victimization being perceived as relatively comfortable ($B = 0.17$, $p < .05$). However, there is a clear association between fear and presence of Hispanic ($B = -1.02$, $p < .01$) and Black populations ($B = -0.30$, $p < .05$), both when they are concentrated in isolation, as well as when they are found in high mixed concentrations ($B = -0.26$, $p < .01$). The results also indicate a certain level of comfort in areas with non-native born residents and a certain level of fear of Asian inhabited areas (see Table 3).

Table 3 Socio-Demographic Variables Predicting Comfort at Zip-Code Level of Geography

	B	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Constant	−0.01	0.05	−0.16	.87
Crime Victimization Index	0.18	0.09	2.00	0.05
% Asian population	−0.24	0.08	−3.16	0.01
% White population	0.16	0.14	1.51	0.25
% Black population	−0.30	0.14	−2.14	0.05
% Hispanic population	−1.02	0.12	−8.47	0.00
Interaction % Hispanic and Black population	−0.26	0.07	−3.57	0.00
% foreign born	0.78	0.10	7.85	0.00
R-square = .50				

In conclusion, we have reason to believe that, in the terms specified here, fear is not explained by crime in Los Angeles county since there is no positive relationship between the two (more fear, more crime). Also, regarding Watts, crime, although a *general* reason for concern in Watts, cannot be singled out as the most important reason for fear of this specific area.

The last two questions address the role of connectedness to television or newspapers in coloring the mental maps of fear. We can get a visual image of the relationship between the media-inflected maps and the general map of fear by comparing the shades of gray in Figures 1 and 3, and 4. The first thing we notice is that the darker shades in and surrounding Watts are the most intense and extensive in the strong television connector map (Figure 3). The map created from the images found among strongly newspaper-connected respondents (Figure 4) is paler, especially in the area surrounding Watts, and is generally closer to the total sample map.

Are these visual differences statistically different? Are the mean levels of fear for the area confined within the one mile radius circle in the center of the map different when we compare the map created by television connectors to the total sample map or to the newspaper-inflected map?

Table 4 presents the mean level of fear for the one mile radius area surrounding Watts, extracted from the three maps. The values refer specifically and only to the

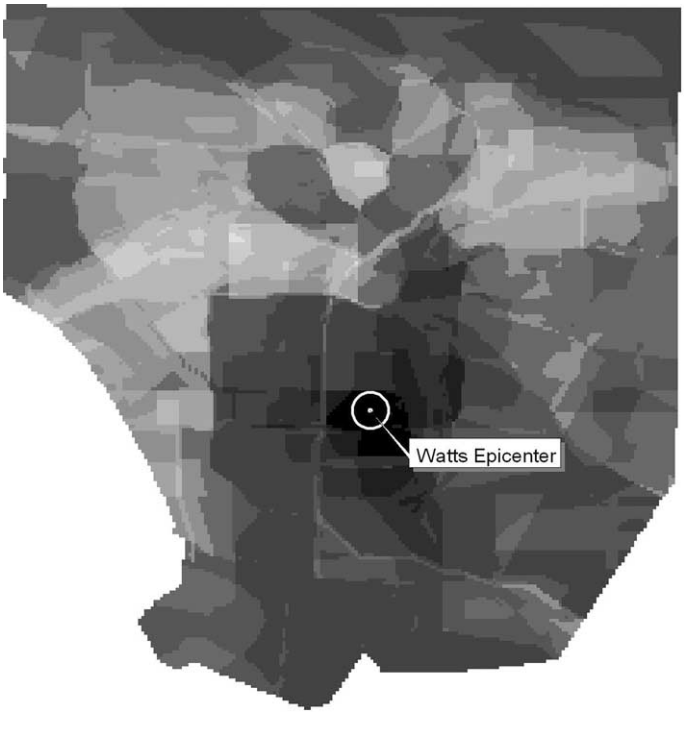

Figure 3 Mental map of LA residents over 45 years' old with stronger connectedness to TV. Darker shading depicts increasing fear.

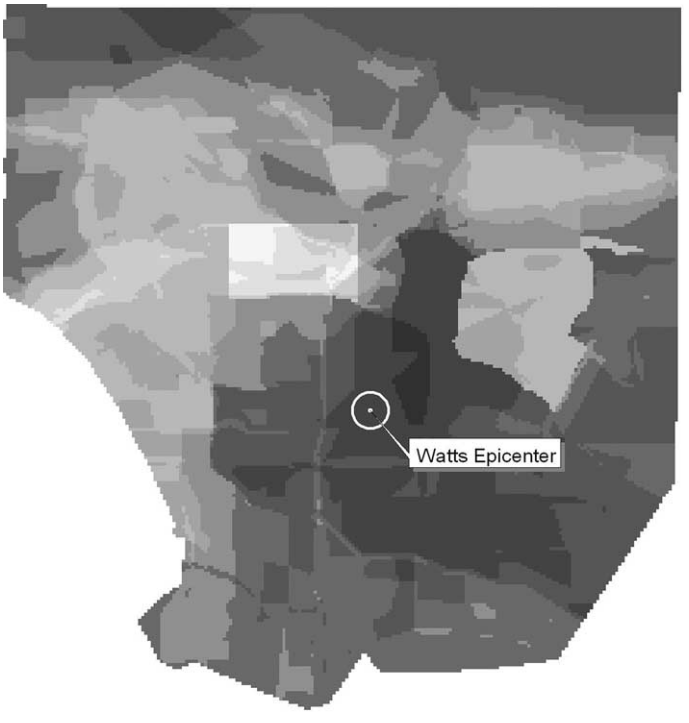

Figure 4 Mental map of LA residents over 45 years' old with stronger connectedness to newspapers. Darker shading depicts increasing fear.

level of fear in the one mile radius area surrounding "Charcoal Alley." In all three maps the values are negative (column 2). That is, in all three the target Watts area is feared. Importantly, the television-inflected map has the highest level of fear (highest negative value). In addition, the newspaper-inflected map presents a significantly *lower* level of fear of Watts than that found in the television-inflected map, but slightly above that found in the total sample map. Although still fearful of Watts, newspaper connectors fear it less than all our map-makers taken together. A *t*-test for paired samples[5] indicates that this value is significantly different from the other two (Table 5).

To remove the possible contaminating factor created by the fact that some strong newspaper connectors are also strong television connectors, we also created maps for respondents who presented connections to *either* television or newspapers,

Table 4 Values for Fear within One Mile Radius of Watts Center (103rd & Wilmington)

Map layer	Mean fear value	Standard deviation	*N* or pixels
All maps	−0.21	0.02	104
Television-inflected map	−0.43	0.002	104
Newspaper-inflected map	−0.19	0.02	104
Scale range −1 to 2			

Table 5 Significant Differences Between Fear Levels in Watts

Difference between fear of Watts in:	*t*	*p*
All maps vs. television-inflected map	79.45	0.00
All maps vs. newspaper-inflected map	−8.17	0.00
Newspaper-inflected map vs. television-inflected map	99.79	0.00

eliminating from both sub-samples the 16 respondents that were part of both groups. Upon comparing the fear values in the Watts area, for the maps thus created, we obtained the same pattern of significant differences between television- and newspaper-inflected maps. The average fear value of the uniquely television inflected map is −.55, compared to that for newspapers, −.30. The same *t*-test procedure indicated that the difference is significant at $p < .01$, the result being confirmed by non-parametric tests. However, this time the newspaper-inflected maps presented more fear of Watts than the overall map.

In conclusion, the answers to research questions 4 and 5 are affirmative: the strong television connector mental map expresses more fear of Watts than the total sample (RQ4) and the strong newspaper connector maps (RQ5).

Discussion

The main goal of this paper has been to explore the communication processes that could account for the social construction and remarkable persistence of intense fear of a geographic area (Watts) four decades after a "riot" episode. Our statistical analysis indicates that the fear epicenter of Los Angeles covers one of the zones most intensely affected by the 1965 riot events. One, but not the only, area affected by arson and looting in 1965, Watts was found to be in the middle of what 215 maps of fear and comfort identified as the fear vortex of Los Angeles. This indicates that the mid-1960s events still have a powerful resonance in people's minds.

The survival of this memory is assumed to have been fostered by mass media portrayals of Watts as the problematic zone of Los Angeles. Watts, just a couple square miles in size, and only one—although central—of many foci of an event that covered more than 50 square miles, was immortalized by the media searching for shorthand understanding of the 1965 events. It did this by encapsulating a kernel of truth—Watts was a very hot spot in 1965—into an emotional image of fear and rebelliousness. This process of construction of fear around Watts, while interesting in terms of what it tells us about the geographic location of the epicenter of the 1965 riots, is even more interesting in terms of what Watts has become since the mid-1960s. Although the 1965 "Charcoal Alley" was not entirely invented by the media, the media has contributed to making it the central piece of a story (Vinson, Bregman, Laird, Shoemaker, Martin, & Cozzi, 1965).

Our analysis confirms that fear of Watts is more intense in the maps of those with relatively strong connections to television. They have a darker picture of Watts than newspapers connectors or anyone else in our sample of map-makers, for that matter.

While the "mean world syndrome" (Gerbner et al., 1994) is still a debated television effect, our findings are consistent with the media message processing and cultivation theories presented in the literature review. The finding adds a new historical reconstruction feature to the cultivation argument, namely, the data suggest that stigmatizations of ethnically marked geographic spaces can endure over long periods of time (in this case almost four decades) via television connections that actively reinforce or re-construct initial stigmatization.

Present findings also supplement our earlier work employing socio-spatial analyses of affective fear/comfort maps that reported a general tendency to associate fear and comfort with the ethnic composition of residential areas (e.g., fear with Black and Hispanic). The paradox is that such association between fear and geo-ethnic formations can continue even when the ethnic background of an area has changed. For example, Watts continues to be feared even as the area has become a multi-ethnic neighborhood where the Black population is a minority.

Present findings also suggest that ethnically charged historical events mediated by television afford very specific localization of social fear. A methodological implication that follows is that affective maps produced by survey participants analyzed with GIS and socio-spatial statistical techniques can contribute new dimensions to inquiries into media and society issues, generally, and media effects questions, in particular.

In terms of limitations, our study suffers from a relatively small number of cases (46). This was dictated by the technically difficulties entailed in collecting and analyzing such type of data. Although we started with a reasonable pool of respondents (215), only 46 of them had the necessary media connections and social background required by our analyses. The low number of respondents raises the issue of representivity and generalizability. As we explain in the paper, these will be further explored in a number of follow up studies that utilize better and larger samples.

Finally, we note a puzzle for future research that concerns our findings with respect to the maps created by the respondents who are only newspaper connectors. These maps, although darker than those created by television connectors, seem to be more fearful of Watts when compared with the maps created by the entire sample. A possible explanation might be that when the number of maps used for calculating the level of fear for a specific area declines, as is this case ($N = 16$), the sampling error increases and the results start varying unpredictably. These findings encourage further research, with larger and better samples.

Overall, we have reported findings in an area of research quite new and in need of refinement and improved theoretical articulation. We are currently investigating other urban areas, outside of California, using the same methodology, one in the Midwest and one in Europe. Yet, until the results become available and are compared to those reported here, Los Angeles should be considered a particular, albeit notable case of media projection of historical-racial traumas onto mythical locations. Future research will have to determine if this expiatory strategy is unique or not to Southern California, especially in urban areas marked by ethnic conflict.

Another issue for future research should be a thorough investigation of media content dealing with spatially related fear. An important future research agenda item

should be a content analysis of television and newspaper stories that have contributed to building the geo-ethnic image of Watts between 1965 and 1998. Future research could identify spatially how the media has labeled and re-labeled various areas of Los Angeles in relationship with race conflicts in general, and with the "Watts issue" in particular.

In conclusion, we hope that our discussion about Watts and its mediated construction has practical applications. Identification of Watts as *the* fear area of Los Angeles has a series of immediate effects, one of the most important being economic and social avoidance of the area not only by the White residents of the city but also by Blacks and Hispanics living outside the Watts area. Perceptual "red-lining" affects the prospects of economic development in the area. The local media, and especially television, should review the way in which they cover the many ethnic and racial fault lines of the city and their spatial location to bridge rather than to widen the gap. A first step in this direction would be abandoning the "Watt riots" label for addressing the 1965 events. Both spatially and socially the 1965 events, although affecting Watts more than other areas of the city, have in fact covered a far larger geographic area and had far wider social and political ramifications. Second, local television stations should make a conscious and sustained effort to reveal the multi-ethnic transformation of Watts and its surroundings. This could help to re-signify the area from a space of conflict to a space of convergence. Third, a continuous effort to address frontally the racial and ethnic tensions of Los Angeles should avoid making spatial generalizations. Social and ethnic issues in modern metropolitan areas like Los Angeles are rarely the product of specific groups living in one specific neighborhood. Rather, they emerge at the intersection of various forces, many of which are not geographically grounded, or if they are, they are not strictly local (i.e., they belong to the entire metropolitan area). Although a beginning, we hope that our findings provide at least a starting point in this direction.

Notes

[1] The following narrative is based on Cohen & Murphy (1966) and on the McCone Report (1965).

[2] Watts is a very small section of Central Los Angeles. South-Central, considered to be the traditional "Black" area in Los Angeles, is far larger, spanning over more than 50 square miles.

[3] We use the whole map-maker sample as baseline to emphasize that we are interested in deviation from the "typical" mental image (as we capture it through our sampling procedure described in the methods section) of Los Angeles.

[4] For example, television compared to newspaper connected respondents are slightly older (average age 63 vs. 60), somewhat less affluent (62% make more than $35,000/year vs. 78%), less educated (40% are college educated vs. 53%), and more likely to be female (60% are female vs. 47%). In addition, 66% of the television- (compared with 75% of the newspaper-) dependent respondents also use interpersonal communication for satisfying basic social needs.

[5] The units (cases) that are paired are pixel locations. Within the one mile radius area are 104 pixel locations. For each location we compare the value for the pixel in the two maps (i.e.,

television- vs. newspaper-inflected maps). *T*-ratios are very large due to low variance. To ensure that the significance was not artificially boosted by the number of pixels or by low variance, two supplementary analyses were performed. First, we changed the map resolution, from 104 to 36 pixels. An analysis performed at this rougher level of resolution, produced similar results, although, as expected, at relatively lower *t*-values. Second, to check the robustness of our *t*-tests we repeated the pair-wise analyses by using non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon), which provided similar results in terms of significance and directionality.

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