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Social Fault Lines

How do we define them, question them and report through them?

Presented by

Romina Ruiz – National Enterprise Reporter

Earl Hopkins – Austin Culture Reporter

What are Social Fault Lines?

- Hypothetical **dividing lines** that split a group into relatively **homogeneous subgroups** based on the group members' **demographic alignment** along multiple attributes
 - Dora Lau and J. Murnighan, “Demographic Diversity and Faultlines: The Compositional Dynamics of Organizational Groups,” *The Academy of Management Review* 23 (April 1, 1998): 325–40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/259377>.
- The UN says that societies are "fracturing in ways that are becoming more and more tangible, with the growing divide between the privileged and the rest dramatically rearranging both macro structures and local life-worlds.
- These cleavages erode social cohesion, citizenship practices and trust in public institutions, leaving deep fault lines that manifest economically, politically, socially and spatially."
 - “Fault Lines and Front Lines: Shifting Power in an Unequal World | News & Views | UNRISD,” accessed January 21, 2022, <https://www.unrisd.org/overcominginequalities-hujo-carter>.

What does this mean in terms of journalism and storytelling?

- Anthropologically and sociologically speaking, these categorizations and groupings are socially constructed **BY PEOPLE** in order to keep track **OF PEOPLE**
- Fault lines are human and therefore **inherently flawed**
- Reporting means asking questions even about things that seem accurate or right because of some historical context or "**because it's always been that way**"

Some examples

- There are a lot of fault lines at play in **discrimination**, and often more than one in combination at any one time:
 - Race
 - Age or gender
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Class or socioeconomic status
 - Language and geographic location

Journalism has gotten it wrong (a lot)



Marauders From Inner City Prey on L.A.'s Suburbs

By RICHARD H. METZ and NEKE GOODMAN, Times Staff Writers

One by one and in small bands, young men desperate for money are marauding out of the heart of Los Angeles in a growing wave to prey upon the suburban middle and upper classes, sometimes with senseless savagery.

In the last 18 years, the ghettos and barrios of the city have increasingly become staging areas for robbers, burglars and thieves who ride the freeways like roving caravans to hit homes and businesses in such areas as Pasadena, Orange, Glendale, Palms Verdes, Long Beach, West Los Angeles and Beverly Hills.

A Times computer analysis shows that 43% of the felonies and upper-class suburbs in 1979 were ranging out of the inner city. An especially intense study of the chief target area—the western suburbs—suggests that this percentage is nearly twice as large as it was in 1969.

In the western suburbs, particularly the Culver City-West Los Angeles-Beverly Hills-Santa Monica area, marauders from the inner city in 1969 accounted for 26% of all convictions for predatory crime—robbery, burglary, theft, forgery, fraud or fencing. By 1979, that figure had reached 42%.

Six months ago, a team of Times reporters and researchers set out to investigate an emerging phenomenon in America: the permanent underclass. Last Sunday, the Times published the first of two special reports on their findings: a portrait of a third-generation Chicago welfare family, coupled with an analysis of how the underclass came into being and its implications for the future of America. Today's

inner-city criminals will prey more frequently on residents of the suburbs than they do on residents of the suburbs. But the computer analysis shows that the increase in marauding out of the inner city has been accompanied by a decrease in predatory crime within the ghettos and barrios.

In addition to West Los Angeles, Long Beach, Pasadena, Palms Verdes, Corona, Beverly Hills and Glendale, the sampling of upper- and middle-class suburbs in which marauding from the inner city increased overall includes Malibu, Santa Monica, South Pasadena, San Marino, Torrance, Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach,

including report comes from the inner city of Los Angeles. Thousands of people live there, most of them law-abiding and so concerned as their suburban counterparts about crime. In fact, they are often the victims of the most desperate of the underclass: those for whom predatory crime has become a way of life—the subject of today's report. (See related editorial, Part IV, Page 4.)

El Segundo, Anaheim, Sierra Madre, Topanga, La Cienega and northern San Gabriel.

The computer analysis, plus interviews with more than 30 marauders who operate from the inner city, show:

—An increasing desperation among the underclass to survive. The most desperate have discovered that robbing the affluent can be easy and lucrative. Ronald Trotter, 28, member of a ghetto family of 15 brothers and sisters called the Fygmores, infamous for its pioneer marauders, says: "You know, ain't nothing down here,

and the slugs is really poor. They ain't got no money. They's poor. Just . . . There's no way to make it . . . There ain't nothing for them to do but go out there and get the money."

—A lack of education, jobs and deterrence. Trotter dropped out of school. So did 98% of the predatory felons analyzed by The Times. Trotter is from a family of welfare for three generations, like all of the predators interviewed. He has no job. Seventy-five percent of all predators in the computer analysis are unemployed or have no job skills. Trotter is a repeat offender. Predators in the computer analysis will more than a dozen prior convictions and arrests get still sentences only a quarter of the time—and repeat their crimes.

The computer analysis and interviews show that most of the marauders preying out of the inner city are black between 25 and 34 years old and leave the ghetto to commit crimes because they have had it. South-central Los Angeles has been picked over. They have little fear of getting caught because chances of that happen

Please see MARAUDERS, Page 3

Los Angeles Times

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Sunday, July 12, 1981

4 / 566 pages / Copyright 1981, Los Angeles Times / Sunday 784

Kansas City Star Apologizes for Racism in Decades of Reporting

The newspaper said it had "disenfranchised, ignored and scorned" generations of Black people. The apology comes after one in September by The Los Angeles Times.

What role fault lines play in our news coverage

How the divide affects our coverage

Some of the issues that arise

- Mischaracterization of groups based on stereotypes and/or cultural troupes
- Lack of trust from said groups and subgroups
- Coverage that suffers from unchecked bias and wrongful assumptions

There is no such thing as a dominant narrative

- Characteristics of white supremacy culture and narratives
 - Objectivity
 - Perfectionism
 - Paternalism or "Only one right way"
 - Either/or thinking
- Ask questions
- Ask questions
- Then ask some more questions

Questions to ask

- How does our team (life experiences reflected by those who work for us) and the content itself (whose stories are reflected, and how) accurately reflect social fault lines?
 - How and **WHERE** are we working?
 - Do we have reporters in the communities we serve?
 - Are we broadening our sources and coverage?
 - What do our newsrooms look like?

Additional questions to ask

- Is our work truly accessible to all?
- How are we making a transition to a diverse work culture?
- Are we relying on dominant storylines and troupes to tell stories?

We can get the story right

- Example: USAT's coverage of the [2021 Atlanta spa shootings](#) from March 2021
- Some called her by her Chinese name Xiaojie, 谭小洁 or Jay for short.

NATION

Xiaojie Tan dreamed of traveling the world and celebrating her 50th birthday with her daughter. Then the Atlanta shooter ended her life.

Trevor Hughes, Romina Ruiz-Goriena, Cara Kelly and Sirena Clark USA TODAY

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In China, it is customary to put the family name before the given name. Tan's name in Chinese transliterated to Tan Xiao Jie, which means pure or honest. However, because Western countries use the surname last, her legal name in the United States is Xiaojie Tan.

How we can get it right

What steps to make and how to go about them

Ways to combat social fault lines in coverage

- Move from dominant stories
- Think about who else could be answering these questions
- Ask why certain stories are being told in a specific way
- Get rid of homogeneous storytelling
- Be more horizontal with your sources: ask them pronouns, explain the reporting process and their rights



Steps to consider

- Create a newsroom or company-wide checklist
- Go out your way to interview sources of varied backgrounds
- Develop more horizontal relationships with sources that increase transparency
- Develop an inventory to account for list of diverse sources
- Think about things that get you to the intersectionality bucket

Suggested IRE reading list

- White Supremacy Culture by Tema Okun
 - <https://www.dismantlingracism.org/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/whitesupcul13.pdf>
- And for a larger list of articles, books, podcasts and other media
 - bit.ly/ANTIRACISMRESOURCES

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Thank you.