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# NAFTA and the working class : a study in framing

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NAFTA AND THE WORKING CLASS: A STUDY IN FRAMING

A Thesis

Presented to

The School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Michael Juarez

August 2009

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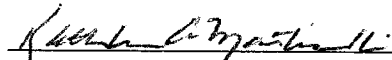
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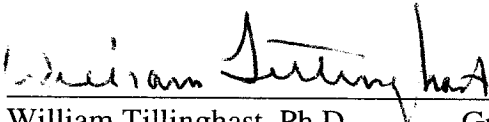
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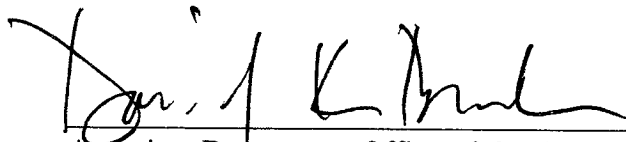
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## ABSTRACT

### NAFTA AND THE WORKING CLASS: A STUDY IN FRAMING

by Michael Juarez

The purpose of this study was to examine how newspaper editorials referenced the working class in the United States regarding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) using a content analysis through a specific media frames method. The study analyzed the *Dayton Daily News*, the *San Antonio Express-News*, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. Specific media frames evoking the working class were “working class,” “middle-class,” and “blue-collar.” Other frames analyzed for context either evoked a pro-NAFTA stance, such as “competition” and “globalization,” or an anti-NAFTA stance, such as “protectionism” and “demagogue.”

The study collected 426 editorials pooled from two distinct time frames: January 1993 through December 1994, and editorials from January 2004 through July 2008. In the first time frame, editorials were chosen when side agreements were negotiated for NAFTA that addressed labor and environmental concerns. In the second time frame, editorials showed how influential NAFTA was on editorial writings 10 years after the agreement was signed into law. Results from a chi-square analysis showed that nearly half (205) of all editorials made mention of the working class, and the protectionist frame in relation to NAFTA was used in 176 editorials.

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Finally, this research was inspired by my father, Jesus Juarez, a retired forklift driver for Pacific Coast Producers, and an enigmatic man who showed me the merits of work ethic and integrity.

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## 1. Introduction

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is fundamentally an economic pact between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, influencing the economic well-being of millions of their citizens. Initially shepherded by President George H. W. Bush's administration, it was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994. The main focus of the agreement revolved around the elimination of tariffs on goods such as motor vehicles, computers, textiles, investments, and agriculture, and the protection of intellectual-property rights. Tariffs would be gradually eliminated over several years, depending on the type of product, specifically, fabric, gold and silver compound, and herbicide tariffs. The agreement classified tariffs by letter code, and those classified as "A" were the initial product group to have tariffs removed after NAFTA became law. The last round of products would have tariffs removed in January 2008, and were mostly imports coming into the United States classified as category "C+" (Brank, 1994).

The agreement was written in intricate language and filled of over 1,000 pages. Consisting of 14 issues, sweeping in scope, NAFTA was unique in its approach: trade in goods, energy and basic petrochemicals, emergency action procedures regarding trade imports having a negligible effect on a particular country, government procurement, investment provisions, cross-border trade in services, telecommunications, financial services, competition policy (monopolies), intellectual property protection, and institutional frameworks and dispute settlement. It also contained two side provisions regarding environmental measures and labor.

NAFTA's member nations had political motives to create an international executive agreement. NAFTA is based on the principle aspects of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) of 1989, which allowed entry of United States markets into Canadian industry, with a tradeoff of a more free-market-based economy focusing on export markets, and cheaper domestic and imported inputs (Grinspun & Cameron, 1993). Canada entered into NAFTA to initiate improvements to CUFTA regarding rules of origin for products, government procurement, financial services, and ultimately to be the first nation to legally recognize NAFTA. This was due in large part to support from Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000).

Mexico's motives for joining the agreement stemmed from needing foreign investment to convert its economy into increased industrial productivity and higher real wages (Baer & Weintraub, 1994). Mexico intended to convert its economy into a more prosperous and financially secure nation via an outward-looking economic perspective, in contrast with its protectionist past.

Motives behind the United States entering NAFTA negotiations included gaining greater markets for its imports, and the linking of markets as a North American answer to the other two major trading blocs of the world: Europe and East Asia (Weintraub, 1994). U.S. influence dwarfed that of its neighboring countries, "not just economically, but also culturally, militarily, and politically" (Grinspun & Cameron, 1993, p 15). Country emissaries negotiated for market positions beneficial to their respective countries, often using national law to supersede corporate infringement in national industries. For example, the United States sought investment in Mexico's energy sector, with Mexico

only able to take its energy market “off the negotiation table” because under Mexican constitutional law this economic sector could not lawfully be handled by a foreign country (Grinspun & Cameron, 1993).

The agreement passed in the United States because of a congressional vote for “fast-track legislation,” an easy pathway for ratification of the agreement. As stated by Berry, “fast-track legislation” is presidential authority to push legislation through Congress during a 90 day period to be accepted or rejected in whole by both legislative bodies (Nader, 1993, p.159). When approved, with little resistance from lawmakers, the stage was set for negotiations between the three nations over market sectors. As Eden and Lot said, each nation lobbied for its own agenda: the United States wanting to expand its economic hegemony through Europe and Japan, Mexico to further instill its economic liberalization policies, and Canada to keep a hold onto its United States markets (Grinspun & Cameron, 1994).

Canada was the first nation to ratify NAFTA into law, with a Parliamentary vote of 112 to 94 (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000). The United States House of Representatives approved NAFTA by a vote of 234 to 200 on November 17, 1993, and the United States Senate passed it three days later by a vote of 60 to 38 (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000). Mexican legislation was anticlimactic on the bill because presidential authority dominated Mexico’s congressional body, and 60 of the 64 seats in the Senate were held by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Pro-free-trade President Carlos Salinas, seen as a liberal reformer by the Bush and Mulroney administrations, also negotiated Mexico’s entry into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) and was a supporter of the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000). Finally, as the agreement segued from the Bush administration into the impending Clinton presidency, United States negotiators were able to ratify NAFTA by satisfying President Clinton and Democrat constituencies when side issues addressing labor and environmental concerns were added to the agreement.

NAFTA has continually shown political relevance, specifically regarding the 2008 presidential primaries. While campaigning in states with noteworthy manufacturing employment such as Ohio and Indiana, and to satisfy constituents, Democratic Party candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama both advocated reworking NAFTA to include more economic protectionism. Many of those constituents were represented by trade unions, a major voting bloc in the Democratic Party.

Representing what are usually referred to as the “blue-collar” worker, trade unions have seen a loss of legislative clout due to the globalization of the American economy. Because NAFTA policy is so connected to the umbrella term “globalization,” how “blue-collar” workers are framed in the media deserves attention from an academic standpoint, to explore to what extent (if any) these workers were allowed to be represented on an issue so central to their financial security. During the United States-Canada negotiations involving NAFTA, Connecticut Senator Chris Dodd referred to the lack of input by domestic constituencies when he stated “a lot of these agreements are being negotiated without talking to people who have a deep interest in what is to be included in them” (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000, p.196).

This thesis is a content analysis on the framing of NAFTA via newspaper editorials and editorial columns. While not all-encompassing as representative of their respective readerships, these opinion pieces gave valuable perspective on NAFTA, such as the effects of manufacturing layoffs or depressed wages, and how often middle- and working-class concerns were addressed. Communications scholar Entman (1993) noted the perspective of media “framing” involving consideration of selection and salience for each story topic chosen. The interests of the working class regarding job stability, job retraining, wage stability, and employee morale are sought out in respect to the notion that business interests supersede worker perspectives within media forums (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001).

Newspapers selected for study are the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *San Antonio Express-News*, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, and the *Dayton Daily News*. These sources provide insight from both national and local news perspectives. The first two newspapers were chosen based on their plethora of editorials and news stories written on the topic, while the latter three specify how NAFTA has affected particular communities. The *Union-Tribune* and the *Express-News*, two newspapers chosen for local perspective, are published near the United States-Mexico border, while the *Daily News* is published from the Midwest, a manufacturing region now seeing increasing unemployment due to job offshoring and downturn in U.S. automakers’ financial fortunes (Zumbrun, 2008). Most media pieces on NAFTA are based on sweeping generalizations of the American economy. In contrast, and to enhance the study of classism within communication study, an account of media indifference toward the American worker

would do much in analyzing the scope of globalization regarding job losses and how American workers are referenced by media types.

Professor Judith Hellman noted that groups in opposition to NAFTA are distinct within the United States and Canada (Grinspun & Cameron, 1993). They include organized labor, with respect to offshoring of jobs to maquiladora plants, and human rights advocates and environmentalists, with respect to Mexico's laissez faire judicial policy toward environmental concerns. Also, the following public figures opposed NAFTA: Patrick Buchanan, Ralph Nader, Ross Perot, and Jerry Brown (Baer & Weintraub, 1994), and were the main media commentators in opposition to the agreement.

Groups in favor of NAFTA were represented mostly by business associations. Most prominent was the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), whose members represent 85% of the United States manufacturing economic sector. The Council of the Americas, which oversaw United States business interests in Mexico, was also an active lobby. The Business Roundtable, a collection of lobbyists, shepherded the pro-NAFTA public relations campaign. The concept of capitalist class theory, by Fairbrother (1997), explained a combination of capitalistic and governmental synergy for this agreement. Fairbrother's theory is that government and a dominant faction of business are able to counter opposition to their legislative issue via control over political opposition. An example is the marginalization of labor interests in the negotiation stages of NAFTA between governmental emissaries, and careful strategic media framing, such as picking successful businessman Lee Iacocca as a public relations figurehead for passing NAFTA.

Academics and economists tended to take pro-NAFTA stances, as the former were cited for having no particular “ax to grind” (Baer & Weintraub, 1994, p. 122) on the issue. Economists felt that whatever short-term job losses might occur due to its passage could be offset by severance packages to workers from the multinational companies and government retraining programs.

The literature review will elaborate on several aspects of NAFTA media framing. First, there is an analysis of NAFTA by academic researchers. Second, a summary of aspects of media framing and how it relates to classism, and finally, an analysis of perspectives on NAFTA in several mass publications, and the reasoning behind each author’s biases.



## 2. Literature Review

The literature review examines the different treatment of working class people, with disenfranchisement of worker rights serving as the basis of this framing study. Academic research on NAFTA tends to focus on the working class mainly in geographical perspective, such as the type of manufacturing work done in El Paso and New York. It also has looked into worker marginalization, in how worker rights have not been enforced in manufacturing employment. Writings on working-class frustration regarding NAFTA revolved around loss of employment opportunity due to NAFTA or union workers feeling a loss of clout within their work environment. Also, academic studies on classism present how media portray working-class groups and the effects of framing theory. Finally, the literature review interrogates published works on NAFTA, with analysis on the tone of each book regarding the agreement.

### *Academic Research on NAFTA*

An examination of studies on NAFTA in connection to working class concerns reveals that most of them looked at certain geographical areas that changed in the wake of NAFTA's implementation. As Kessler (2004) stated, proponents of NAFTA contended that job losses to Mexico would be countered by the creation of job growth in United States exports. In contrast, Kessler stated that opponents argued that jobs in certain sectors would see even greater job losses to Mexico and overshadow any job growth in domestic exports, particularly in apparel, electronics, and food processing. Several authors examined the effects on the apparel industry. Kessler (2004) found that in Los Angeles two-thirds of displaced textile workers were women. Spener and Capps

(2001) found that border towns such as El Paso had become accustomed to a Mexican-American workforce rather than one of undocumented workers trying to land jobs in the United States. Carty (2006) reported that the sports cap company New Era, in upstate New York, developed a laissez faire attitude in giving its workers a choice in belonging to a union. Carty (2006) also noted that New Era's corporate manager initiated hiring policies to allow undocumented workers to become a larger part of its workforce.

Another line of research analyzed the extent labor unions still had a voice in opposing NAFTA. Shoch (2000) studied the lack of clout unions had with the Democratic Party, shown in the quick ratification of NAFTA. It was signed into law by a proponent of free trade, then-President Bill Clinton, any democrat of this predisposition being termed "New Democrat." Shoch examined how the 1994 congressional majority win by Republicans helped unions to better influence Democrats to vote no on "fast track" laws in 1997 and 1998, slowing implementation of free trade deals by the United States government. Compa (1997) looked at a side accord of NAFTA, the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC). Unions bristled at how existing labor practices were to be kept in place by each sovereign nation, preferring a more harmonious set of labor laws to be upheld by all three countries (compa, 1997).

#### *Classist Framing Regarding Working Class Groups*

The framework used in analyzing NAFTA and its relevance with the working class was done in conjunction with the term "framing." Framing was defined by Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991) as being "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is

through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration” (p. 3). By this, they are describing the development of an issue with attributes that side with a particular perspective, then presenting it in a salient manner through any given medium.

Regarding working- and middle-class social class representation, the study of framing has been interpreted through unique perspectives. This thesis will utilize the term working- and middle-class interchangeably, as these groups are referenced the same in most editorial writings. Angles of interest in this thesis are how labor unions bristled, then acquiesced to the agreement, how people of low-economic status are interpreted via media frames, and the agreement’s continued relevance.

Framing generally represents information from a biased perspective, whether intentional or unintentional. However, this method is two-fold. Just as providers of content can skew information, audiences can misinterpret information as well.

Dalrymple and Scheufele (2007) asserted, “The user chooses *how* he or she receives information and *what* information he or she pays attention to or disregards” (p. 101). Even taking into account working class studies, the amount of current literature found on social class is limited. As Grindstaff (2005) has stated, media’s treatment of class is understudied, and when it has been acknowledged, it is not comprehensive and/or valuable in perspective.

The stereotyping of the working class stems from media indifference. Anastasio, Rose, and Chapman (1999) found that the media can be so insulated, that they can portray their version of the world as mainstream society. In their content analysis of social issues covered in newsmagazines, Covert and Wasburn (2007) found that poverty

received the least attention, while the environment and gender received the most. This supports the notion that journalistic insulation results in indifference toward the working class, in not looking at how issues affect different types of people. While advertisers may not consider this social group to be a desirable demographic, still working class concerns are rarely showcased as a social epidemic. Yang and Shanahan (2003) wrote about the persuasive and dominating power mass media have on a nation's culture. Media provide vivid reporting such as first-hand editorial accounts and photojournalism, paired up with such social issues as industrialization and literacy. This combination can propel such issues to mass social-consciousness. However providing the same impact for issues revolving around the working class do not carry the same urgency.

Communications scholar Shanto Iyengar (1987) gave concise reasoning in difference in analysis of the economically disadvantaged. He wrote that mass media can view subjects from either an "episodic" or "thematic" viewpoint. In his analysis, episodic viewpoints revolve around specific occurrences happening to particular people, whereas thematic viewpoints revolve around broad analysis of a subject in a sweeping manner, such as use of graphs or percentage figures. In analysis of the working class in media, an episodic perspective of a man who recently lost his job would show an interview about how he feels in that moment of time, while a thematic perspective would show a graph to illustrate the degree of poverty resulting from a loss of jobs within a community.

In one of three writings analyzed, Iyengar (1989) made succinct differentiation between seemingly disparate groups of the economically disadvantaged. He gave insight

to how researchers tended to get less sympathetic viewpoints from survey respondents when terminology included “people on welfare” as opposed to “poor people.” Iyengar differentiated between the “poor” and “unemployed” in that the former was seen in media as having more control over their employment fortunes, while those termed in the latter group were seen in a more sympathetic light because of not having choice in their economic situation.

Regarding classism, Iyengar (1996) explained how the media rely often on the portrayal of “financial failure due to personal failings” as a frame for low-income groups. Iyengar (1996) also gave insight to “The type of victim makes a difference” (p. 820), in the variation of certain types of poor people within media framing. For example, a manufacturing worker who is unable to find work after his job was transplanted to a foreign country can be referenced with a sympathetic portrayal. He is seen as having lost his job of many years, as opposed to being viewed as indifferent, or lazy in developing a new skill set to get a better job. Unsympathetic characterizations were noted by Kensicki (2004) as characterizations of people as “lazy, sexually irresponsible, and criminally deviant” (p. 54).

Several social theorists have given insight into media representations of the working poor and the subject of classism as a whole. Kendall (2005) asserted that the term “working class” is a generalization not easily defined. The working class that once made up the manufacturing sector of the United States has morphed into “white collar” work as bank clerks, retail sales workers, and other service providers. She pointed out that if these economic sectors were coupled together, demographic analysts should

classify as much as 62% of the United States labor force as being working class. As Woods, Kurtz-Costes, and Rowley (2005) stated, the physical traits so evident in discrimination against gender and minorities are not so obviously apparent when taking into account social class. Ehrenreich (2001) wrote about how the poor are able to afford clothing that resembles that worn of the financially stable, so as to not expose them as “charity cases” (p. 175).

Further analysis of social class within mass communication analysis delved into interesting aspects. The notion of the media displaying the reality that the working class can be marginalized oftentimes as uneducated and ill-informed is crucial to this thesis.

As Gilens (1996) stated:

Americans rely heavily on the mass media for information on the society in which they live, and the media shape America’s social perceptions and political attitudes in important ways. Media distortions of social conditions are therefore likely to result in public misperceptions that reinforce existing biases and stereotypes (p. 516).

Within the field of media studies, the American perspective is characterized as simplistic in its approach to media sociology. American reporting is based on what its audience finds newsworthy, with little working class coverage given because their concerns as a demographic are not what media business managers and advertisers hope to attract in viewers and readership. According to Reese and Ballinger, “This research, often termed ‘media sociology,’ has helped explain how news gets constructed – by individuals – within a social and occupational setting” (2001, p. 641). In contrast to this method, the European method of approaching media studies has stemmed from a more “ideological and institutional analysis” (Reese & Ballinger, 2001, p. 621).

European analysis of social class concentrates more on the institutional causes of a social problem, such as lack of education or being born into a financially poor household. In contrast, American narratives concentrate on sweeping generalizations, with the often-used perspective of how personal failings result in needing social welfare programs and how a supposed lack of character may result in someone having a low-economic status. This sensibility results in issues affecting the working class not being viewed with more urgency by the media. Working-class interests are not being able to draw sufficient attention, since they are not an attractive audience from an advertising standpoint. Kovach and Rosenthal have stated, “The advertising business also decided to use newspapers mainly to reach the upper classes” (2005, p. 165).

To elaborate on the quote by former presidential candidate Chris Dodd, nationally recognized political figures put out simplified rhetoric on issues regarding lower-economic social classes. This rarely brings salience to understanding how national issues affect average Americans. As Domke, McCoy, and Torres (1999) noted,

“Many issues that intersect in a significant way . . . such as welfare, immigration, crime, poverty, and affirmative action – have significant material components and, as a result, are often discussed in terms of economic resources, government services, and pragmatic policy goals” (p. 575).

Often- times thematic reasoning is used by a politician in skewing policy rhetoric in dealing with poverty based on how it affects American tax dollars and social resources. This may include such broad generalizations as how social welfare programs are financially burdensome for governments, without discussing specific institutional problems that affect working class citizens and leave them in financial crisis, such as lack of employment opportunity and educational prospects.

NAFTA is a national agreement negotiated by emissaries of national politicians, ratified mainly from political discourse. Then-President Bush had hoped to get it ratified when the Republican National Convention convened in 1992, to tout a unique agreement between three countries to showcase economic credentials (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000). In 1992, President Clinton gave a speech mentioning he would only lobby for NAFTA after labor union and environmental concerns were accounted for (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000). With such strong inclinations to take credit for this agreement by the heads of the United States two-party system, one could easily see Holbrook's (2002) hypothesis of campaigns not heightening voter interest on any given issue since they cannot widen the differences in candidate information. Regarding NAFTA, while voters might be given a barrage of information on an issue via radio, television, and print, they might not fully understand the reasons why different political figures support a piece of legislation. This is because politicians may not want to be transparent in mentioning legislative aspects that could hurt their reputation in future elections. Nevertheless, the pro- and anti-NAFTA groups had disparate political representation, as Simons (1996) said, "Liberal Democrat Dick Gephardt opposed NAFTA; Liberal Democrat Ted Kennedy supported it. Conservative Rush Limbaugh supported NAFTA; Pat Buchanan opposed it" (p. 278).

One-way information is the typical way that the working class is reached by the media, via television or print (Bucy, 2001). Media consider such an audience to be passive in being relayed information on any given issue, without worry of repercussions, such as television ratings losses or newspaper subscriptions cancelled (Bucy & Gregson, 2001). To be fair, many national polls during the ratification process of NAFTA showed



a negative, and in best-case scenarios, a mixed reading on the agreement from survey participants. For example, a September 1993 CNN-*USA Today* poll showed figures of 35% pro- and 41% anti-NAFTA (Bertraub, 1997), obviously showing audiences distrust of political rhetoric of expanding free trade.

The vast influence of the media on perceptual politics involves an intermingling of sensibilities that may or may not be noted by practitioners of information-gathering. Social change owes a debt to media reporting, which might be part of a movement and a vessel respectively, with respect to industrialization, racial- and gender-rights movements, and a large literate population as the result of this relationship (Yang & Shanahan, 2003). Public understanding of socio-political issues is developed through years of vivid media reporting from a myriad of perspectives, such as newspaper editorials and photojournalism (Kensicki, 2004). For NAFTA analysis, one could look at Iyengar's theory of episodic viewpoint (1987), in framing this issue on an individual level, asking if the transformation of the American economy out of manufacturing with such a domineering agreement would be warranted out of economic necessity. In contrast, Kensicki (2004) asserted that apathy could result in a public perception that such an event is just another public policy initiative handled by government or no one.

Communication scholars many times have noted a lack of media coverage on this topic. Media coverage that exists are mostly framed in how minority groups are stereotyped (Kensicki, 2004). Interestingly, Kendall (2005) described that the more conscious middle- and working-class groups became "disguised privileged-class interests" (p. 238). They may demand more accurate portrayals of their living concerns

and plights, as a sort of “silent majority” if their lifestyles are not financially sustainable. In regards to the working poor, treating them as “other, and lesser than oneself” (Lott, 2002, p. 102) was noted as classism. Lott said “through cognitive distancing and institutional and interpersonal discrimination, the nonpoor succeed in separating from the poor and in excluding, discounting, discrediting, and disabling them” (2002, p. 102). This notion highlighted the urgency of this thesis, and is its crux.

Agenda-setting involving the issue of NAFTA revolved around the positive impression given to the idea of free trade from media. Modern-day journalism addresses situations that are of greatest important to audiences (Splichal, 1999). Ricardo’s theory of comparative advantage – that a country should only focus its resources on that which it is best designed to create (Miller, 1996), is the usual media inclination for pro-free trade reporting. However, as MacArthur (2000) asked, what has a country devoid of natural resources and under an authoritarian government to offer in the comparative-advantage bargain? His answer is lowly paid labor, unhindered by labor laws that a transnational company need take heed with a government that does not consider its poor citizens.

Salil S. Pitroda made a sweeping statement in relation to economic trade that those who stand to suffer short-term losses stand in the way of long-term progress (Miller 1996). This viewpoint takes Iyengar’s thematic perspective (1987) in relation to NAFTA, in how the United States needed to discard manufacturing jobs to develop a more sophisticated work force revolving around product importation. Low-skilled workers who do not have immediate access to retraining programs are being dismissed due to their lack of influence with media gatekeepers.

### *Published Works/Media Perceptions on NAFTA*

Books on the topic of NAFTA are written explicitly from a pro- or anti-NAFTA stance. Bertraub (1997) wrote with a positive connotation toward NAFTA, from the perspective of a being a Mexican envoy working with Ivy League-educated Mexican negotiators on developing a trade pact with the United States. In contrast, books edited by Nader (1993) and written by MacArthur (2000) stressed the secrecy of the meetings between negotiators from media reporting, to the personal accounts of those who lost their job to offshoring and what it means to be in a job-displaced predicament.

One could scan the published works on the topic of NAFTA to see political perspectives from a variety of authors' political inclination. Bertraub's (1997) perspective was that of a negotiator working as a Mexican emissary when he wrote of the economic convergence of the United States and Mexico, and whether the removal of tariffs would be good for both. Bertraub believed that after the United States won the Cold War, its foreign policy lost a sense of direction, so via its multinational capitalistic companies, free trade initiatives were needed to spearhead greater United States hegemony in North America. Weintraub (1994) wrote from the perspective of an economist who worked in bringing economic awareness to United States foreign relations policy. He stressed the opportunity created in an economy revolving around intrafirm trade. Ganster and Lorey (2008) took the position that the losses that came from manufacturing and agriculture would be offset by growth in others, such as retail, tourism, and transportation.

Anti-NAFTA published material is plentiful, with most of its authors giving episodic counterpoints based on the United States manufacturing economy to contrast with the political good will given by media commentators on the economic synergy between the three involved nations. Stephen Diamond wrote that the term “free trade” is a label for business executives only (Grinspun & Cameron, 1993). Herman Daly gave five thematic reasons for corporate inclination for free trade:

1. Getting prices right.
2. Moving toward a more just distribution.
3. Fostering community.
4. Controlling the macroeconomy.
5. Keeping scale within ecological limits (p. 124).

He wrote the free trade perspective succinctly, in contrast to the anti-NAFTA writings in an essay collection by Ralph Nader (1993). To show that this agreement was for the business elite only, Cameron and Tomlin (2000) simply wrote that “NAFTA was for the bigwigs” (p. 3). The reference to United States workers as “losers” by Vernon Briggs (Miller, 1996, p. 94) is the overwhelming impression of an under-represented, unseen bloc that was ill-equipped to handle the “frontal attack” (Grinspun & Cameron, 2000, p. 14) that NAFTA posed.

Published works discussing the media’s take on NAFTA usually address pro or con positions in newspaper editorials or by national politicians during stump-speeches. The inspiration of this thesis came from literary authors who referenced newspaper editorials having an overly pro-NAFTA slant in the coverage of the agreement. Sal Pitroda said (Miller, 1996) that the press had been given a plethora of protectionist concerns and exaggerations of mass unemployment resulting from free trade agreements.

The press was seemingly not influenced by reports of lower “real wages” for working-class types, wages aligned with actual purchasing power without inflation factored in. An example of this is Robert Kreklewich’s assertion, in Grinspun & Cameron (1993), that the market for stable, high-wage manufacturing jobs would diminish with closings of automotive manufacturing plants in the United States.

The public relations campaign waged by the Business Roundtable with government support proved to be successful in garnering public and political support for NAFTA. In an interview conducted in the *Des Moines Register* in November 1993, a corporate communications officer from Harvard University said that NAFTA was the most publicized public policy issue ever (MacArthur, 2000). Members of this lobbying group were also responsible for pro-NAFTA op-ed editorials in newspapers in Oklahoma (MacArthur, 2000). When an anti-NAFTA prime minister of Canada, Jean Chretien, was voted into office, the White House released reports on health care to successfully sway the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* from placing this election on their front pages, as it might complicate the NAFTA ratification process by the addition of such a non-harmonious political figure to negotiations (MacArthur, 2000).

### *Summary*

The literature review examined NAFTA in relation to the working class via media references, and provided a basic understanding of the media concept of framing. In research of NAFTA in regard to working class types, the agreement itself was given a positive impression the majority of the time, with only passing reference to people whose jobs may be lost due to implementation of the trade agreement. People with low-skill

sets may have lost employment regardless of the outcome of the negotiations for NAFTA. However, with their livelihoods having so much at stake within these proceedings, it is important within the context of trade study to note the effects that such agreements may have on their economic well-being.

NAFTA is viewed as a successful trade agreement in several economic aspects. Exports from Mexico have tripled from 1993 through 2003, and many United States manufacturing companies have relocated to Mexico, with payroll budgets decreased in paying lower Mexican wages. NAFTA was shepherded by a “New Democrat” President and made law, with more praise from Republican lawmakers than Democrats. Published works on the topic discussed the obtrusive nature of tariff law and the potential for better business dealings with trade neighbors Canada and Mexico. With such acquiescence from political and media types, such externalities as job losses were only given passing reference or ignored altogether. Job adjustment programs for the working poor were paid little attention by authors. Those who outright opposed NAFTA were called demagogues and fringe-types, ignorant of complex financial situations, with the often-used crass metaphor by Ross Perot of local job dislocation being a “giant sucking sound” from Mexico. It is questionable whether working-class people had good representation in the media by such anti-NAFTA commentators as Perot and Buchanan. The intention of this study is to show whether the working class was represented in newspaper editorials. This thesis will use content analysis to address the following questions, to be answered in the thesis conclusion.

### *Research Questions*

1. How is the working class framed by newspapers covering NAFTA?
2. How often are working class groups referenced in newspaper editorials?
3. Does a newspaper's geographical location show a change in occurrence with media frames used?
4. How do frames of working class groups in local newspapers compare to the national newspapers?

### 3. Method

A content analysis was used to examine newspapers' editorial positions on NAFTA. The study measures the number of pro-NAFTA versus anti-NAFTA editorials, the number of times writers espoused their stances versus anonymous editorial boards, and the times certain words were used in multiple editorials, across the five newspapers. The five newspapers are the *San Antonio Express-News*, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the *Dayton Daily News*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. The first two were chosen due to their close proximity to the United States-Mexico border, the third due to being representative of the manufacturing-focused Midwest, while the last two were chosen for their national perspective on NAFTA. When the editorial was not given a byline its perspective was still taken into consideration. Also, the number of times the working class was referenced, or terminology representing working class interests were counted.

In this quantitative content analysis, newspapers were chosen as the medium of analysis on NAFTA. This is because of their more comprehensive reporting compared to television, radio, and the Internet. While newspapers are known as being objective in tone, Hoffman and Wallach (2007) have written, "If newspaper reporting is regarded more favorably than other media outlets, but in actuality there is a bias, readers could be influenced wrongly by newspaper reporting" (p. 617). It is not the actual news stories on NAFTA studied, but editorials, which are inherently biased in tone. The study used San Jose State's library networks Lexis/Nexus search engine to collect 426 editorials from the five newspapers. A longitudinal content analysis of these five newspapers will note how



local newspapers such as the *San Antonio Express-News*, compared/contrasted with national newspapers such as the *New York Times*, in reference to working class perspectives.

This study explicitly defines pro- and anti-NAFTA framing. The number of times the working class was referenced in each editorial is noted as a positive frame. The protectionist frame is noted as the negative working-class frame, in which the manufacturing sector acquiesced to free trade concepts and did not “protect” its employees from business growth. The pro-NAFTA frames use the term globalization, relating the expanding global economy to 21<sup>st</sup> century business of the economic-state overriding the nation-state; the anti-NAFTA frame uses the term demagogue, in the dismissal of anti-NAFTA commentators as such within editorials. The term competition will be analyzed, with reference to a pro-worker frame of the United States work force in comparison with foreign country work forces.

The area of scrutiny will be terminology used by the writers. MacArthur (2000) noted that those in the pro-NAFTA group (politicians, businessmen, economists) looked at the agreement from a sweeping, thematic standpoint, using the following terms to instill a positive impression of the agreement: “economic forces,” “technological innovation,” “globalization,” “economic integration,” “free trade,” “free markets,” and “comparative advantage” (p. 5). Anti-NAFTA rhetoric in newspaper editorials usually referenced labor union and environmental concerns. Quotes in those editorials that drew on the impression of short-term job losses to be the consequence of increased import

trade, and/or any that dwell on public apathy on the subject, representing working-class referencing.

Each editorial received a code with numerical values. Editorials which had an anti-NAFTA thesis were coded as one, editorials ambivalent toward the topic of NAFTA were coded as two, and pro-NAFTA editorials were coded as three. The media frames such as globalization, protectionist, demagogue, and competition, were counted for the number of times they were used in each editorial, as well the number of times the working class was referenced. The higher the number for referencing of the working class, the greater respect is shown toward working class concerns. To have no or a low number of working class referencing would show dismissiveness of working-class concerns on the editorialist's part.

The study termed the type of editorial as one of two writings: thematic, coded as one, or episodic, coded as two. The coding was based on Shanto Iyengar writings (1987), on whether the editorial revolved around a topic of general, abstract nature, usually conveyed with percentages and reports (thematic): or revolved around public issues of a tangible sort (episodic), such as a new airport being built by the United States-Mexico border, or the rights of Mexican truck drivers commuting through the United States after NAFTA's implementation. Analysis of terminology has been done using a statistical computer program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), to compute the findings of the references and percentages of editorials' partiality toward NAFTA.

The author for each editorial also serves as an analysis focal point. The intention is to note how often the pro- and anti-NAFTA editorials were either researched by a

newspapers' anonymous editorial board or written by an actual editorialist, such as George Will or David Broder. Analysis consists of how often each respective newspaper took a pro- or anti-NAFTA stance in its coverage of NAFTA, and whether it allowed an editorialist to convey perspective on the issue, or take upon its editorial board to convey approval or disapproval of NAFTA.

The 426 NAFTA editorials examined were from two distinct time frames. The study collected editorials from January 1993 through December 1994, when side agreement negotiations regarding environmental and labor concerns began through editorial analysis on the political symbolism over the passage of NAFTA a year after its implementation. Then editorials from January 2004 through December 2008 were collected to see what the editorials stated a decade after its passage, and coinciding with heavy analysis given to it during the 2008 Democratic primaries. There is expectation in difference in editorial tone toward the agreement between these two time periods.

The 426 editorials used were siphoned off from a larger number of a little more than 600, with these 426 chosen due to their main theme on NAFTA, instead of only slight reference in passing. An example of an editorial being too marginal to warrant being part of the study would be December 1993 editorials grading the legislative year for Bill Clinton in his first year as President with only minimal references to NAFTA. More editorials came from the national perspective newspapers (256) than local newspapers (170), for both time periods.

The Lexis/Nexus database provided a plethora of editorials on NAFTA for national newspaper analysis, averaging more than 50 editorials for each time frame. The

local perspective newspapers did not write as often on NAFTA however, the decision to pick three local newspapers instead of two brought a more even number of editorials to analyze between national and local newspapers, as provide the Midwest analysis via the *Dayton Daily News*. Generally, fewer than 10 editorials were written on NAFTA during the initial ratification process by localized newspapers, with the exception of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* which produced 88 editorials during 1993-1994, and approximately 20 editorials were written on NAFTA by the localized newspaper editorialists for the latter time period.

### *Hypotheses*

1. The frames in Time Period 1 will differ from the frames in Time Period 2.
2. The newspapers' frames in Time Period 1 will differ from each other.
3. The newspapers' frames in Time Period 2 will differ from each other.
4. Each newspaper's frames in Time Period 1 will differ from its frames in Time Period 2.

The study conducts data analysis with frequency testing using Chi-square analysis and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for differences between framing usage.

Tables featuring the independent variables, such as newspaper, tone, and date, will be compared with the dependent variables, such as number of times frames were used. The articles will be coded by the researcher, however, 10% of the articles will be coded by a research assistant to determine coder reliability.

#### 4. Findings

The purpose of this content analysis was to note the extent to which editorials referenced working class members regarding NAFTA. Frequency tables were used first as cumulative research to note the common media frames used in editorials. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test statistical relevance of the hypotheses.

Table 1 displays that roughly half, 205 editorials regarding NAFTA, made mention of working class plights. In contrast to the 221 editorials that ignored such details.

Table 1

*References to working class frame salient among editorials with working class frame  
(n=205)*

Variable	n	%
One Reference	86	42
Two References	46	22
Three References	21	10
Four References	18	8
Five References	9	4
Six References	6	3
Seven References	6	3
Eight References	3	1
Nine References	1	1
Ten References	3	2
Eleven References	2	1
Twelve References	1	1
Thirteen References	1	1
Sixteen References	1	1
Eighteen References	1	1

Analysis showed that geographic location made a difference with respect to working-class citation. Table 2 shows that in the manufacturing-heavy economic sector represented by the *Dayton Daily News*, only 14 editorials revolved around the topic of NAFTA, in comparison to two localized newspapers whose cities earned more business due to the passage of NAFTA, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* and the *San Antonio Express-News*, at 129 and 27 respectively. This shows the influence of United States-Mexico border relations. Table 2 also shows that the national newspapers the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* published 167 and 89 editorials on the topic of NAFTA, respectively, making it a national issue of importance.

Table 2

*Editorials published according to time span (n=426)*

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	<i>Dayton Daily News</i>	<i>San Antonio Express-News</i>	<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i>	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>
1993- 1994	4	1	88	50	118
2004- 2008	10	26	41	39	49

---

Editorial tone was more often thematic than episodic. Table 3 shows that thematic perspectives were used 82% of the time.

Table 3

*Type of media frame perspective in editorials analyzed (n=426)*

---

	Thematic	Episodic
Frequency	351	75
Percentage	82%	18%

---

In quantity of editorials written, shown in Table 4, only the *San Diego Union-Tribune* came close as a local newspaper (129) to match the high editorial output of the national newspapers.

Table 4

*Number of editorials published by five newspapers analyzed (n=426)*

---

	<i>Dayton Daily News</i>	<i>San Antonio Express-News</i>	<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i>	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>
Frequency	14	27	129	89	167
Percentage	3%	6%	30%	21%	39%

---



### *Testing of Hypotheses*

To test hypotheses one through four, the study performed one-way ANOVA testing. A significance level of .05 was used to note the significance of the findings.

Hypothesis 1 stated that the frames in time period one would differ from time period two. Analysis within table 5 determined that only within the globalization frame was there a statistical difference between the 1993-1994 time period and 2004-2008 (.051).

Table 5

*Analysis of variance (ANOVA) to measure significance of media frame findings*

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Variable	Mean Square (Between Groups) (Within Groups)		F Value	Significance
Editorial Type	.009	.146	.061	.804
Working-Class Frame	5.294	7.605	.696	.405
Protectionist Frame	.049	1.717	.028	.866
Demagogue Frame	.152	.183	.826	.374
Globalization Frame	10.616	2.732	3.886	.051 *
Competition Frame	2.686	1.025	2.620	.108
Editorial Tone	.284	.561	.506	.477
Total Frames Used	95.5	13.935	6.925	.009

---

\*p ≤ .05

For broad analysis, total frames added together resulted in there being more media frames used within the 1993-1994 time period (203) than during 2004-2008 (127) within Table 6, with statistical significance close at .09 in total frames used, referencing Table 5 again.

Table 6

*Descriptive figures for editorial variables by time span*

Variable	1993-1994 (n)	2004-2008 (n)	1993-1994 (mean)	2004-2008 (mean)
Editorial Type	261	165	1.17	1.18
Working-Class Frame	122	83	2.70	3.02
Protectionist Frame	111	65	1.97	1.94
Demagogue Frame	12	10	1.17	1
Globalization Frame	62	66	1.174	2.32
Competition Frame	72	50	1.46	1.76
Editorial Board/Editorialist	261	165	7.93	6.74
Tone	261	165	2.40	2.35
Total Frames Used	203	127	3.82	4.93
Editorials Published	261	165	4.06	3.55

Hypothesis 2 stated that newspapers' frames in Time Period 1 (1993-1994) would differ. Using chi-square analysis for Table 7, it was found that while 24% of editorials that used a frame used it once within each piece, this percentage dwindled to 19% for two frames for each piece, 14% for three frames per piece, then 11% for four or five frames used, until becoming 2% or less for more than eight frames used in any given article for this time period.

For the third hypothesis, the newspapers' frames used in Time Period 2 would differ from each other; the frame use ratio would be the same as Time Period 1. Table 7 shows 21% of articles referencing one frame per editorial. The percentage would dwindle down the more frames that were used. Again, when the number of times a frame was used became eight or more per editorial, the percentage became 2% or less for the amount of frames by editorial, thus making the hypothesis false.

Table 7

*Number of frames referenced in editorials used in total according to time span*

Variable	1993-1994	2004-2008
One Reference	49	26
Two References	39	22
Three References	28	19
Four References	22	12
Five References	21	11
Six References	12	8
Seven References	11	5
Eight References	4	3
Nine References	6	3
Ten References	4	3
Eleven References	2	2
Twelve References	0	2
Thirteen References	2	2
Fourteen References	1	3
Fifteen References	1	0
Seventeen References	0	1
Nineteen References	1	0

For the final hypothesis, it was expected that each newspaper's frames in Time Period 1 would differ from its frames in Time period 2. Of the specific media frames used, Table 6 shows only the protectionist frame being substantially different from Time Period 1 versus Time Period 2, with 111 occurrences in the former, and 65 in the latter time period.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in relation to working-class representation within the context of the agreement. Specifically, it looks at certain media frames to denote the extent that working-class people were or were not disenfranchised within the conversation of this issue, drawing on two time periods to consider changes in tone and writing style that may have occurred. This chapter elaborates on the research questions of the study to note the evocation of frames used regarding NAFTA and the working class.

The study found that the majority of articles on the topic of NAFTA came from the national newspapers the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* at 256 rather than local newspapers the *Express-News*, the *Union-Tribune*, and the *Daily News* with 170, according to Table 4. Within the context of the two time spans researched, 261 editorials came from the 1993-1994 time frame in contrast to 165 from the 2004-2008 time frame in Table 8. This was expected from introduction of the agreement to Congress being within the earlier time period and media attention given, such as the Ross Perot-Al Gore debate on the Larry King Live cable television show.

Table 8

*Editorial count by time spans analyzed (n=426)*

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	1993-1994	2004-2008
Frequency	261	165
Percentage	61%	39%

---

Table 9 shows overwhelmingly how 351 editorials used the thematic perspective regarding NAFTA compared to 75 using an episodic perspective.

Table 9

*Type of media frame perspective given in editorials analyzed (n=426)*

---

	Thematic	Episodic
Frequency	351	75
Percentage	82%	18%

---

For the referencing of working-class frame, Table 1 shows that the majority of editorials using this frame referenced the working class only once within each editorial, there being 86 editorials written with a lone reference to this group. Forty-six editorials made mention of the working class two times within each editorial. In 21 editorials, three references to working-class people were made within each piece. In total, 205 editorials mentioned the working class, with 221 not doing so at 48% and 52%, respectively.

The protectionist frame was used most by editorialists, as shown in Table 10, often conveying a negative counterpoint to the advantages of free trade as protectionism is the mirror opposite term for free trade, and was used 41% of the time in 176 editorials. The competition frame in Table 11 was used 29% of the time in 122 editorials. The globalization frame in Table 12 was used 30% of the time in 128 editorials. Lastly, the demagogue frame according to Table 13 was used 5% of the time in 22 editorials.



Table 10

*References to protectionist frame salient among editorials which included a protectionist frame (n=176)*

Variable	n	%
One Reference	91	52
Two References	37	21
Three References	27	15
Four References	13	7
Five References	4	2
Six References	2	1
Seven References	1	1
Eight References	1	1

Table 11

*References to competition frame salient among editorials which included a competition frame (n=122)*

Variable	n	%
One Reference	80	65
Two References	25	21
Three References	10	8
Four References	4	3
Five References	1	1
Six References	2	2

Table 12

*References to globalization frame salient among editorials which included a globalization frame (n=128)*

Variable	n	%
One Reference	68	53
Two References	28	22
Three References	15	11
Four References	8	6
Five References	5	4
Six References	1	1
Nine References	2	2
Eleven References	1	1

Table 13

*References to demagogue frame salient among editorials which included a demagogue frame (n=22)*

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Variable	n	%
One Reference	21	96
Three References	1	4

---

According to Table 14, newspapers had editorialists convey perspective on NAFTA the majority of the time. Only the *San Antonio Express-News* was more partial toward the editorial board over an actual editorialist, with 19 editorials using this method compared to 11 using a bylined editorialist method.

Table 14

*Number of bylines associated with either a newspaper's editorial board or an editorialist (n=426)*

Variable	n	%
<i>Dayton Daily News</i> Editorial Board	10	2
<i>Dayton Daily News</i> Editorialist	4	1
<i>San Antonio Express-News</i> Editorial Board	16	4
<i>San Antonio Express-News</i> Editorialist	11	3
<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i> Editorial Board	19	5
<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i> Editorialist	110	26
<i>New York Times</i> Editorial Board	29	7
<i>New York Times</i> Editorialist	60	14
<i>Washington Post</i> Editorial Board	36	8
<i>Washington Post</i> Editorialist	131	30

The tone of the editorials was shown in Table 15 to be overwhelmingly pro-NAFTA with 230 written in favor of the agreement. Ambivalent editorials toward NAFTA were counted at 127. Sixty-nine editorials were explicitly anti-NAFTA, that being 16% of all editorials analyzed.

Table 15

*Tone of editorials with respect to NAFTA*

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	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Ambivalent
Frequency	69	230	127
Percentage	16%	54%	30%

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Concordia University, Irvine, graduate Charity Nelson worked as a research assistant for the study and analyzed 10% of the 426 articles. Nelson concluded that the results matched the general findings of the thesis 80% of the time, maintaining a substantial reliability rating.

*Recommendations for Future Analysis*

The findings of this study increase understanding of a social group not given consideration in mass media and politically inclined matters. There are aspects in this topic that could be drawn out in other framing studies for more understanding of classism within media.

A qualitative study to create a theoretical perspective on classism within mass media would enhance communication study, using case studies on specific editorials' use

of media frames. More media frames could be introduced for greater understanding of classism within the newspaper medium, such as using “free trade” and “big business,” though using more frames in this study would have been excessive. Perspective on Mexican workers and how they are characterized within stories on trade would bring insight as to how they are represented within media and to what degree they may be disenfranchised or marginalized.

Analysis of working-class representation within news articles would be a complimentary addition to this thesis on news editorials. Analysis of headlines, source and quote selection, and photo captioning would all give greater understanding of NAFTA and this economically intertwined social group.

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