Book Review: Framed: Media and the Coverage of Race in Canadian Politics by Erin Tolley

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Roosevelt’s New Deal or the Red Summer of 1919. A review of the bibliography reveals that important scholarship on the Black press and crucial sources on African American history were not consulted. If the newspaper itself is the “first draft of history,” Michaeli’s book is the second. His primary sources are mostly articles in the Defender and other publications, as well as material from a recently released archive of the Abbott-Sengstacke family papers, an early biography of Abbott, and sources from other journalists. Thus, the reader is left to wonder how much Michaeli has verified or dug into the Defender’s accounts of people, events, and issues, or simply reproduced them.

The 1955 murder of Chicago teenager Emmett Till illustrates how this book fails to illuminate historical knowledge. Till was lynched in Mississippi by two avowed racists, and the widespread publicity about this atrocity was a catalyst for Black outrage and civil rights activism. As Michaeli recounts, the Defender jumped on the story, devoting considerable space to expressions of grief and outrage and covering the subsequent murder trial in Mississippi. When the Defender published photographs of the boy’s mangled body in his coffin, the newspaper made a powerful intervention into the national press’ refusal to address the horrors of lynching. This story is a staple of civil rights historiography and Michaeli offers little new information about the Defender’s role. The author also fails to consult the substantial body of literature—both scholarly and popular—on the Till case, including the memoir of his mother Mamie Till Bradley.

There are several other problems with this book—Women as members of the Black press or as subjects of the news are largely invisible, with the exception of Ida Wells-Barnett and Ethyl Payne. Because the author follows the Defender’s stories chronologically, each chapter jumps back and forth between numerous threads rather than following one with greater depth and detail. And the final chapters revert to the first person as Michaeli inserts himself into the newspaper’s history. Yet this is a worthwhile and readable book. It offers readers a vision of Black life in these United States through the pages of a brave and admirable journalistic institution.


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Erin Tolley’s, *Framed: Media and the Coverage of Race in Canadian Politics*, is competently written, comprehensively researched, persuasive, fact-laden, and characterized by a sound interpretation of data which supports its theme. Tolley is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto, where she teaches Canadian politics.

The book’s theme revolves around “race differentiation” in Canadian politics, especially how racialization is embedded and articulated in media coverage. To map out
racial differentiation in news, the book looks at the reportage of White and visible minority candidates so that patterns of media framing can be compared. Specifically, the volume explores the contextual nature of racialized media coverage by looking at a number of factors that include candidate gender, political party affiliation, and the diversity of the ridings in which politicians run. Similarly, it investigates candidates’ own views on media coverage and race in politics. It sheds light on the work that journalists do, the constraints that they face, and how they think about covering stories touching on diversity. Finally, *Framed* raises questions of the media’s role in shaping views about race, inclusion, and democratic politics.

Tolley outlines four strong justifications why *Framed* is useful. First, it’s the first Canadian study that documents visible minority and White candidates’ accounts of their electoral, communication, and image management strategies and assesses how a politician’s race affects self-presentation and media portrayals. Second, the book positions the media as a vital link in the citizen–politics relationship. The media is seen as having three roles in the relationship: as a connector (a primary source of information about politics), a shaper (determining which stories are covered and how), and a mirror (reflecting the events and issues of the day). Third, Tolley’s work contributes new empirical data while providing a basis for theorizing the relationships among race, the media, and politics. Fourth, by including the voices of journalists, the volume helps readers move beyond a “blame the media” frame to identify the multitude of factors that contribute to racialized coverage.

*Framed* is founded on framing theory where in the present context, political subjects are presented in media coverage through a racialized and gendered lenses, a practice is rarely applied to white male politicians. As such, and drawing on gendered mediation research, Tolley proposes a new framework for understanding the impact of race on political news coverage. She refers to the framework as “racial media,” which posits that politics are covered in ways that reflect dominant cultural norms, long-standing organizational practices, and the assumption of Whiteness as standard. Under the proposed framework, racialized media coverage is seen in two ways: as explicit racial content, and as something latent, visible in the ways race affects the coverage of other subjects. The data corpus for the study is collected using in-depth interviews and content analysis.

Chapter 1 focuses on “racial mediation,” which is based on the role of media in the selection, construction, production, and consumption of the news. Does race influence the media’s selection, interpretation, and shaping of stories? Chapter 2 answers this question through a systematic comparison of the news coverage of White and visible minority candidates in Canadian politics. Tolley found visible minority candidates’ coverage to be more negative, less prominent, more filtered, and more likely to include a photograph (a subtle way of cuing candidate race). Chapter 3 explores media’s coverage of visible minority women in Canada. In Chapter 4, Tolley examines candidate self-presentation and media portrayals. She argues that race is one factor in the relationship between self-presentation and media portrayal. Chapter 5 examines journalists and the framing of race, based on qualitative interviews with 13 Canadian journalists who narrated about news routines, news judgment, diversity in the media, and the coverage of race in politics.
In concluding, Tolley asks, “What have we learned from the book?” The answer is that race matters—and she notes that this is perhaps the single most important finding of her research. This is because media coverage is racially differentiated, and racialization is unevenly applied, in that it affects visible minorities more than any others. What this means is that racialized media framing sets visible minority candidates apart as different and foreign, portraying them as products of their sociodemographic backgrounds, as individuals who have less to contribute to the policy issues that matter to Canadians and who place a disproportionate focus on the interests of their “own” communities. Her findings here are parallel in important ways to those of Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki’s *The Black Image in the White Mind*. Her conclusion that “race matters” mirrors W. E. B. Du Bois’s most quoted phrase about racism—“the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,” as captured in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

*Framed* is a great contribution to the literature on race at the intersection of media and politics. Its major strength lies in the combination of comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data, an approach that taps into the merits of the two data collection methods, while compensating for their weaknesses. Also, an array of justifications that Tolley has highlighted about the book’s importance explains the relevance of the current topic in political communication. The book’s major weakness, as the author acknowledges, is the lack of data from Canadian voters, which would have made it possible to gauge the effects of exposure to race differentiation coverage.

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Christopher Ali’s book *Media Localism* investigates—and challenges—current approaches to regulation of local broadcast media in the United States. The book compares developments in the U.S. regulatory environment since the turn of the millennium with those of Canada and the United Kingdom, providing an interesting international dimension at a timely moment. While the plight of local newspapers has (deservedly) garnered plenty of attention, this book shines a needed light on the threats that local broadcasters are currently facing. The book arrives in the midst of an unprecedented wave of consolidation and mergers in the broadcast industry. Ali is an assistant professor of media studies at the University of Virginia.

One of the main problems the author identifies is the lack of precision in defining “local,” particularly as that term relates to the airwaves. The default understanding has generally been geographic localism, and that conceptualization has undergirded the historical development of the broadcasting system in the United States since the