with "senior Republican lawmakers" to try "to cover the costs of this disaster without undermining Mr. Bush's other priorities," such as "making his tax cuts permanent."

A few influential Republicans, however, are beginning to say that America should help the victims of the tsunami without beggar]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are some of the monumental human disasters currently taking place around the world that are not getting nearly as much attention in the United States as did the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In what ways was the tsunami more visible than these other disasters?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How did the presence of so many foreign tourists among those who died or were injured contribute to the massive attention that the tsunami received?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How did the tsunami enable the Bush Administration to gain visibility for the charitable pledge of $350 million made by the United States? Why is this kind of visibility virtually impossible to achieve when the United States supports relief efforts to stave off the many other monumental human disasters currently taking place around the world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Why is there typically lots of claim making attention given to disasters that produce massive suffering in a short period of time (such as the tsunami or an airplane crash) but much less attention given to disasters that produce the same or more suffering gradually, over a longer period of time (such as disease or malnutrition)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Americans earn and the expenses of maintaining a middle-class lifestyle that fail to point out that the problem is more acute for black men. (College-educated black men earn only as much as white men with high school diplomas.)

The most egregious omissions occur in the coverage of crime. Many more black men are casualties of crime than are perpetrators, but their victimization does not attract the media spotlight the way their crimes do. Thanks to profuse coverage of violent crime on local TV news programs, "night after night, black men rob, rape, loot, and pillage in the living room," Caryl Rivers, a journalism instructor at Boston University, has remarked. Scores of studies document that when it comes to victims of crime, however, the media pay disproportionately more attention to whites and women.

On occasion the degree of attention becomes so skewed that reporters start seeing patterns where none exist—the massively publicized "wave" of tourist murders in Florida in the early 1990s being a memorable example. By chance alone every decade or two there should be an unusually high number of tourists murdered in Florida, the statistician Arnold Barnett of MIT demonstrated in a journal article. The media uproar was an "overreaction to statistical noise," he wrote. The upturn that so caught reporters' fancy—ten tourists killed in a year—was labeled a crime wave because the media chose to label it as such. Objectively speaking, ten murders out of 4.1 million visitors did not even constitute a ripple, much less a wave, especially considering that at least 97 percent of all victims of crime in Florida are Floridians. Although the Miami area had the highest crime rate in the nation during this period, it was not tourists who had most cause for worry. One study showed that British, German, and Canadian tourists who flock to Florida each year to avoid winter weather were more than 70 times more likely to be victimized at home. The typical victim of crime in Florida, though largely invisible in the news, was young, local, and black or Hispanic.

So was the typical victim of drug violence in New York City in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when some reporters and social scientists avidly implied otherwise. "The killing of innocent bystanders, particularly in the cross fires of this nation's drug wars, has suddenly become a phenomenon that greatly troubles experts on crime," began a frontpage story in The New York Times. It is "the sense that it could happen to anybody, anywhere, like a plane crash" that makes these attacks so scary, the reporter quoted Peter Reuter from the RAND Corporation. According to The New York Daily News, "spillover crime from the drug wars even affected people in "silk-stocking areas." In fact, a New York magazine article revealed, thanks to a crack cocaine epidemic, "most neighborhoods in the city by now have been forced to deal with either crack or its foul by-products: if not crack houses and street dealers or users, then crackhead crimes such as purse snatchings, car break-ins, burglaries, knife-point robberies, muggings, and murders." TV newscasts, needless to say, breathlessly reported much the same, with pictures at eleven.

* * *

To suggest that all Americans have a realistic chance of being a victim of homicide is to heighten already elevated anxieties among people who face little risk. In spite of the impression given by stories like the one in Time titled "Danger in the Safety Zone: As Violence Spreads into Small Towns, Many Americans Barricade Themselves," which focused on random murders in several hamlets throughout the country, tens of millions of Americans live in places where there hasn't been a murder in years, and most of the rest of us live in towns and neighborhoods where murder is a rare occurrence.

Who does stand a realistic chance of being murdered? You guessed it: minority males. A black man is about eighteen times more likely to be murdered than is a white woman. All told, the murder rate for black men is double that of American soldiers in World War II. And for black men between the age of fifteen and thirty, violence is the single leading cause of death.

OF DOGS AND MEN

* * *

Police inattention is one of several factors that journalists accurately cite to account for why white crime victims receive more media attention than black victims. Journalists also cite complaints from African-American leaders about the press paying too much attention to problems and pathologies in black communities. But are crime victims the best candidates to overlook in the service of more positive coverage? A host of studies indicate that by downplaying the suffering of victims and their families the media do a disservice to minority neighborhoods where those victims live. Criminologists have documented that the amount of coverage a crime victim receives affects how much attention police devote to the case and the willingness of prosecutors to accept plea bargains. As a rule, the more coverage, the more likely that an assailant will be kept behind bars, unable to do further harm to the victim or community. In addition, when a neighborhood's crime victims are portrayed as victims—sympathetically and without blame, as humans rather than as statistics—people living in other parts of the
city are more inclined to support improved social services for the area, which in turn can reduce the crime rate.

Underreporting of black victims also has the effect of making white victims appear more ubiquitous than they are, thereby fueling whites’ fears of black criminals, something that benefits neither race. Helen Benedict, a professor of journalism at Columbia University, has documented that rapes of white women by black men—which constitute a tiny proportion of all rapes—receive considerable media attention. In a separate study of women’s concerns about crime Esther Madriz, a sociology professor at Hunter College, discovered that stories in the news media “reinforce a vision of society in which black men are foremost among women’s fears.”

Another explanation journalists and editors give for their relative neglect of black victims might be called the Journalism 101 defense. Those of us who took an introductory journalism course in college remember the coach pounding into our cerebrums the famous dictate attributed to John Bogart, city editor of the New York Sun in the 1880s: “When a dog bites a man that is not news, when a man bites a dog, that is news.” Everyone expects black crime victims, the argument goes, so their plight isn’t newsworthy. Here is how a writer for the Los Angeles Times, Scott Harris, characterized the thoughts that go through reporters’ and editors’ minds as they ponder how much attention, if any, to accord to a city’s latest homicide: “Another 15-year-old shot to death? How hum. Was he an innocent bystander? What part of town? Any white people involved?”

As heartless and bigoted as this reasoning may sound, actually there would be nothing objectionable about it if news organizations applied the man-bites-dog principle universally. Obviously they do not; otherwise, there would never be stories about crimes committed by black men, since no one considers black perpetrators novel or unexpected.

My friend David Shaw, media critic at the Los Angeles Times, offers a simpler explanation for the scant attention to black victims. To stay in business newspapers must cater to the interests of their subscribers, few of whom live in inner-city minority neighborhoods. The same market forces result in paltry coverage of foreign news in most American newspapers, Shaw suggests.

Now there’s a study someone should do: compare the amount of attention and empathy accorded by the U.S. press during the 1990s to black men shot down in American cities to, say, Bosnians killed in that country’s civil war. I wouldn’t be surprised if the Bosnians fared better. The tendency to slight black victims extends even to coverage of undeniable newsworthy crimes such as shootings of police by fellow officers. In 1996, after a white New York City police officer, Peter Del-Debbio, was convicted of shooting Desmond Robinson, a black plainclothes transit officer in the back, wounding his kidneys, liver, lungs, and heart, reporters and columnists evidenced great sympathy for Del-Debbio. They characterized him as having made an innocent mistake and suffering overwhelming remorse. The agony of Robinson and his family, by contrast, received more modest attention. Few reporters seriously questioned—and some overtly endorsed—the official spin from the district attorney, mayor, and defense attorneys that the shooting had nothing to do with race and was largely the victim’s fault—even though in testimony Del-Debbio recalled having reacted not to seeing just any man with a gun but “a male black with a gun.”

While some writers made note of the fact that black officers say their white colleagues are quick to fire at African Americans working undercover because they view them as suspects, no reporter, the best I can determine, investigated the issue. When Richard Goldstein, a media critic for the Village Voice, reviewed the coverage of the shooting he found that only the Daily News—not the Times or Post—made note of the fact that, since 1941, twenty black police officers in New York had been shot by white colleagues. During that time not a single white officer had been shot by a black cop. “Imagine,” wrote Goldstein, “the shock-horror if 20 female officers had been shot by male cops. But when it comes to race, the more obvious the pattern the more obscure it seems.”

**MAKERS OF THE NATION’S MOST HAZARDOUS MUSIC**

Fear mongers project onto black men precisely what slavery, poverty, educational deprivation, and discrimination have ensured that they do not have—great power and influence.

After two white boys opened fire on students and teachers at a schoolyard in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in 1998 politicians, teachers, and assorted self-designated experts suggested—with utter seriousness—that black rap musicians had inspired one of them to commit the crime. A fan of rappers such as the late Tupac Shakur, the thirteen-year-old emulated massacrified killings, described in some of their songs, we were told. Never mind that, according to a minister who knew him, the Jonesboro lad also loved religious music and sang for elderly residents at local nursing homes. By the late 1990s the ruinous
power of rap was so taken for granted, people could blame rappers for almost any violent or misogynistic act anywhere.

So dangerous were so-called gangsta rappers taken to be, they could be imprisoned for the lyrics on their albums. Free speech and the First Amendment be damned—when Shawn Thomas, a rapper known to his fans as C-Bo, released his sixth album in 1998 he was promptly arrested and put behind bars for violating the terms of his parole for an earlier conviction. The parole condition Thomas had violated required him not to make recordings that "promote the gang lifestyle or are antilaw enforcement."

Thomas's new album, "Til My Casket Drops," contained powerful protest lyrics against California governor Pete Wilson. "Look how he did Polly Klaas/Used her death and her family/So he can gain more votes and political fame/It's a shame that I'm one they say is a monster." The album also contained misogynistic and antipolice lyrics. Thomas refers to women as whores and bitches, and he recommends if the police "try to pull you over, shoot 'em in the face."

Lyrics like these have been the raw material for campaigns against rappers for more than a decade—campaigns that have resulted not only in the incarceration of individual rappers but also in commitments from leading entertainment conglomerates such as Time Warner and Disney as well as the state of Texas, not to invest in companies that produce gangsta albums. William Bennett and C. Delores Tucker, leaders of the antirap campaigns, have had no trouble finding antipolice and antiwomen lyrics to quote in support of their claim that "nothing less is at stake than civilization" if rappers are not rendered silent. So odious are the lyrics, that rarely do politicians or journalists stop to ask what qualifies Bennett to lead a moralistic crusade on behalf of America's minority youth. Not only has he opposed funding for the nation's leader in quality children's programming (the Public Broadcasting Corporation), he has urged that "illegitimate" babies be taken from their mothers and put in orphanages.

What was Delores Tucker, a longtime Democratic party activist, doing lending her name as coauthor to antirap articles that Bennett used to raise money for his right-wing advocacy group, Empower America? Tucker would have us believe, as she exclaimed in an interview in Ebony, that "as a direct result" of dirty rap lyrics, we have "little boys raping little girls." But more reliable critics have rather a different take. For years they have been trying to call attention to the satiric and self-caricaturing side of rap's salacious verses, what Nelson George, the music critic, calls "cartoon machismo."

Back in 1990, following the release of Nasty As They Wanna Be, an album by 2 Live Crew, and the band's prosecution in Florida on obscenity charges, Henry Louis Gates confided in an op-ed in the New York Times that when he first heard the album he "bust out laughing." Unlike Newsweek columnist George Will, who described the album as "extreme infantilism and menace . . . , slide into the sewer," Gates viewed 2 Live Crew as "acting out, to lively dance music, a parodic exaggeration of the age-old stereotypes of the oversexed black female and male." Gates noted that the album included some hilarious spoofs of blues songs, the black power movement, and familiar advertising slogans of the period ("Tastes great! LESS filling"). The rap group's lewd nursery rhymes were best understood, Gates argued, as continuing an age-old Western tradition of bawdy satire.

Not every informed and open-minded follower of rap has been as upbeat as Gates, of course. Some have strongly criticized him, in fact, for seeming to vindicate performers who refer to women as "cunts," "bitches," and "hos," or worse, who appear to justify their rape and murder, as did a track on the 2 Live Crew album that contained the boast, "Til . . . bust your pussy then break your backbone."

Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, a professor of law at UCLA, wrote in an essay that she was shocked rather than amused by Nasty As They Wanna Be. Black women should not have to tolerate misogyny, Crenshaw argued, whether or not the music is meant to be laughed at or has artistic value—both of which she granted about Nasty. But something else also concerned Crenshaw: the singing out of black male performers of vilification. Attacks on rap artists at one reflect and reinforce deep and enduring fears about the sexuality and physical strength of black men, she suggests. How else, Crenshaw asks, can one explain why 2 Live Crew were the first group in the history of the nation to be prosecuted on obscenity charges for a musical recording, and one of only a few ever tried for a live performance? Around this same time, she observes, Madonna acted out simulated group sex and the seduction of a priest on stage and in her music videos, and on Home Box Office programs the comic Andrew Dice Clay was making comments every bit as obscene and misogynistic as any rapper.

The hypocrisy of those who single out rap singers as especially sexist or violent was starkly—and comically—demonstrated in 1995, when presidential candidate Bob Dole denounced various rap albums and movies that he considered obscene and then recommended certain films as wholesome, "friendly to the family" fare. Included among the latter was Arnold Schwarzenegger's True Lies, in which every major female character is called a "bitch." While in real life Arnold may be a virtuous Republican, in the movie his wife strips, and he puts her through hell when he thinks she might be
cheating on him. In one gratuitous scene she is humiliated and tortured for twenty minutes of screen time. Schwarzenegger’s character also kills dozens of people in sequences more graphically violent than a rapper could describe with mere words.

Even within the confines of American popular music, rappers are far from the first violently sexist fictional heroes. Historians have pointed out that in country music there is a long tradition of men doing awful things to women. Johnny Cash, in an adaptation of the frontier ballad “Banks of the Ohio” declares, “I murdered the only woman I loved/Because she would not marry me.” In “Attitude Adjustment” Hank Williams Jr. gives a girlfriend “adjustment on the top of her head.” Bobby Bare, in “If That Ain’t Love,” tells a woman, “I called you a name and I gave you a whack/Spit in your eye and gave your wrist a twist/And if that ain’t love what is.”

Rock music too has had its share of men attacking women, and not only in heavy metal songs. In “Down By The River” amiable Neil Young sings of shooting his “baby.” And the song “Run For Your Life,” in which a woman is stalked and threatened with death if she is caught with another man, was a Beatles hit.

JUST A THUG

After Tupac Shakur was gunned down in Las Vegas in 1996 at the age of twenty-five much of the coverage suggested he had been a victim of his own raps—even a deserving victim. “Rap Performer Who Personified Violence, Dies,” read a headline in the New York Times. “What Goes ‘Round...? Superstar Rapper Tupac Shakur Is Gunned Down in an Ugly Scene Straight Out of His Lyrics,” the headline in Time declared. In their stories reporters recalled that Shakur’s lyrics, which had come under fire intermittently throughout his brief career by the likes of William Bennett, Deolores Tucker, and Bob Dole, had been directly implicated in two previous killings. In 1992 Vice President Dan Quayle cited an antipoliceman song by Shakur as a motivating force behind the shooting of a Texas state trooper. And in 1994 prosecutors in Milwaukee made the same claim after a police officer was murdered.

Why, when white men kill, doesn’t anyone do a J’accuse of Tennessee Ernie Ford or Johnny Cash, whose oddly violent classics are still played on country music station? In “Sixteen Tons” Ford croons, “If you see me comin/Better step aside/‘A lotta men didn’t/A lotta men died,” and in “Folsom Prison Blues” Cash croons, “I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die.” Yet no one has suggested, as journalists and politicians did about Shakur’s and 2 Live Crew’s lyrics, that these lines overpower all the others in Ford’s and Cash’s songbooks.

Any young rap fan who heard one of Shakur’s antipolice songs almost certainly also heard one or more of his antiviolence raps, in which he recounts the horrors of gangster life and calls for black men to stop killing. “And they say/it’s the white man I should fear/But it’s my own kind/Doin’ all the killin’ here,” Shakur laments on one of his songs.

Many of Shakur’s raps seemed designed to inspire responsibility rather than violence. One of his most popular, “Dear Mama,” was part thank-you letter to his mother for raising him on her own, and part explanation of bad choices he had made as an adolescent. “All along I was looking for a father—he was gone/I hung around with the thugs/And even though they sold drugs/They showed a young brother love,” Shakur rapped. In another of his hits, “Papa’s Song,” he recalled, all the more poignantly, having “had to play catch by myself/what a sorry sight.”

Shakur’s songs, taken collectively, reveal “a complex and sometimes contradictory figure,” as Jon Pareles, a music critic for the New York Times, wrote in an obituary. It was a key point missed by much of the media, which ran photos of the huge tattoo across Shakur’s belly—“THUG LIFE”—but failed to pass along what he said it stood for: “The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone.” And while many mentioned that he had attended the High School of Performing Arts in Baltimore, few acknowledged the lasting impact of that education. “It influences all my work. I really like stuff like ‘Les Miserables’ and ‘Gospel at Colonus’,” Shakur told a Los Angeles Times interviewer in 1995. He described himself as “the kind of guy who is moved by a song like Don McLean’s ‘Vincent,’” that one about Van Gogh. The lyric on that song is so touching. That’s how I want to make my songs feel.”

After Tupac Shakur’s death a writer in the Washington Post characterized him as “stupid” and “misguided” and accused him of having “committed the unpardonable sin of using his immense poetic talents to degrade and debase the very people who needed his positive words most—his fans.” To judge by their loving tributes to him in calls to radio stations, prayer vigils, and murals that appeared on walls in inner cities following his death, many of those fans apparently held a different view. Ernest Hardy of the L.A. Weekly, an alternative paper, was probably closer to the mark when he wrote of Shakur: “What made him important and forged a bond with so many of his young black (especially black male) fans was that he was a signifier trying to figure out what he signified. He knew he lived in a society that still didn’t view him as human, that projected its worst fears onto him; he had to decide whether to battle that or to embrace it.”
Readers of the music magazine *Vibe* had seen Shakur himself describe this conflict in an interview not long before his death. "What are you at war with?" the interviewer asked. "Different things at different times," Shakur replied. "My own heart sometimes. There's two niggas inside me. One wants to live in peace, and the other won't die unless he's free."

***

**QUESTIONS**

1. What are the various ways, seldom covered by the news media, in which black men are victimized in American society?

2. Why do the news media exaggerate the likelihood of black men committing violent crimes while underreporting cases of black victimization?

3. Why does Glassner argue that it is hypocritical for claimsmakers to single out rappers for their sexist and violent lyrics?

4. Separately consider each of the problems afflicting black men that you identified in your answer to Question 1: What might be the policy implications if the news media were to give greater coverage to these problems? In other words, what kinds of new initiatives might be undertaken in response to these problems if they received more media exposure?