

Racial Profiling

*Local TV News
Racial Representation for
Black History Month
February, 2001*

*A Grand Rapids
Institute for Information Democracy Report*

GRID



Data



WOOD TV 8



WZZM 13



WXMI 17

*Who's voices we
heard in news stories:*

Numbers & percentages

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| White | 330 - 82% | 253 - 86% | 196 - 84% |
| Black | 52 - 13% | 32 - 10% | 27 - 11% |
| Hispanic | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| Asian | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Native American | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Arab | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Multi-racial | 6 | 3 | 2 |

*Crimes by race
when race was identified*

| | | | |
|-------|----------|----------|---------|
| White | 14 - 64% | 9 - 45% | 4 - 36% |
| Black | 8 - 36% | 11 - 55% | 7 - 64% |

WXMI Fox 17
(10pm only)



| <i>Types of Voices</i> | White | Black | Hisp. | Asian | Arab | Native | Multi-racial |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|--------------|
| Government official | 17 | | 1 | | | | |
| Police | 13 | | | | | | |
| Business/economics | 25 | 1 | | | | | |
| Doctor/nurse/medical | 12 | | | | | | |
| Education | 11 | 4 | 1 | | | | |
| Lawyer | 4 | | | | | | |
| Parent | 17 | | | | | | |
| Resident/neighbor | 16 | 4 | | | | | |
| Religious | | 1 | | | | | |
| Citizen | 20 | 3 | | | | | |
| Family/Friend | 10 | 1 | | | | | |
| Fire Dept. | 4 | | | | | | |
| Worker/employee | 16 | 1 | 3 | | | | |
| Neighborhood Org. | | 4 | | | | | |
| Victim | 2 | | | | | | |
| Environmental | 3 | | | | | | |
| Entertainment/Artist | 10 | 5 | | | | | |
| Organizational rep. | 12 | 2 | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Volunteer | | | | | | | |
| Student | 6 | 1 | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Prisoner | | | | | | | |

WOOD TV8
(6pm & 11pm)



| <i>Types of Voices</i> | White | Black | Hisp. | Asian | Arab | Native | Multi-racial |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|--------------|
| Government official | 42 | 3 | | | | | 1 |
| Police | 17 | | | | | | 1 |
| Business/economics | 39 | 2 | | 2 | 1 | | 1 |
| Doctor/nurse/medical | 30 | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Education | 21 | 7 | 1 | | | | |
| Lawyer | 13 | | | | | | |
| Parent | 18 | 2 | | | | | |
| Resident/neighbor | 18 | 4 | | | | | |
| Religious | 6 | 4 | | | | | |
| Citizen | 31 | 4 | | | | | 1 |
| Family/Friend | 17 | 2 | | | | | |
| Fire Dept. | 10 | | | | | | |
| Worker/employee | 12 | 5 | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Neighborhood Org. | 1 | | | | | | |
| Victim | 1 | | | | | | |
| Environmental | 29 | | | | | | |
| Entertainment/Artist | 17 | 11 | | | | | |
| Organizational rep. | 2 | 4 | | | 1 | 1 | |
| Volunteer | 4 | | | | | | |
| Student | 9 | 4 | 3 | | | | 1 |
| Prisoner | | | | | | | |

WZZM 13
(6pm & 11pm)



| <i>Types of Voices</i> | White | Black | Hisp. | Asian | Arab | Native | Multi-racial |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|--------------|
| Government official | 20 | 3 | | | | | |
| Police | 8 | | | | | | |
| Business/economics | 41 | 3 | | 1 | 1 | | |
| Doctor/nurse/medical | 10 | 1 | | | | | |
| Education | 18 | 2 | | | | | |
| Lawyer | 5 | | | | | | |
| Parent | 15 | | | | | 1 | |
| Resident/neighbor | 31 | 2 | | | | | 1 |
| Religious | 4 | 2 | | | | | |
| Citizen | 26 | 4 | | | | | 1 |
| Family/Friend | 15 | 3 | | | | | |
| Fire Dept. | | | | | | | |
| Worker/employee | 8 | 2 | | | | | 1 |
| Neighborhood Org. | 1 | | | | | | |
| Victim | | | | | | | |
| Environmental | | | | | | | |
| Entertainment/Artist | 14 | | | | | | |
| Organizational rep. | 14 | 4 | | | 1 | | |
| Volunteer | 3 | | | | | | |
| Student | 19 | 5 | 1 | | | | |
| Prisoner | | 1 | | | | | |

Introduction

As has been presented with other studies, the intent of these reports is to present some analysis on issues that are significant in the West Michigan viewing area. We have been working closely with the Racial Justice Institute's Media Action Team to present recommendations to the media on ways to improve their coverage on race and racism in the community. We hope this report furthers the community's understanding of diversity and contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the need to heal the wounds of racism.

Malcolm X once said "*America is guilty of image making through the press to justify anything they have in mind to do.*" While we do not subscribe to conspiracy theories, it has become clear to us that after our third annual racial representation in local TV news study, there is a pattern to how racial issues are presented.

Many media researchers speak in terms of the cumulative effect certain images and messages will have on viewers. What does it do to public perception over a period of time if the dominant images and messages are from White people? What does it do to public perception if the overwhelming images of those who commit crimes are Black or Latino? Media researcher Dr. George Gerbner says that news which presents mostly a White perspective tends to re-enforce stereotypes for White viewers. For minority viewers, the cumulative effect of mostly White images and voices in the news can lead to low self-esteem, self-contempt and even acts of rage.

What we have observed in this year's study of racial representation on local TV news is the further promotion of predominantly White views and White voices. Just looking at the data on pages 6-9 demonstrates that minorities have limited representation and limited voices. This is particularly in areas of authority and expertise, such as government, business, health care, education and the environment.

In this report we will not dwell on the lack of minority representation, since that information was presented in our previous study *Racial Profiling*, which can be found online at http://www.grcmc.org/griid/r_methodology.shtml. What we choose to look at this year was racial representation during the month of February, Black History Month. All three stations (WOOD TV8, WZZM 13 & WXMI 17) surveyed in the study did do stories for Black History Month. Most of the stories focused on African Americans in the community, but some looked at diversity issues in general. This report will analyze three main areas; how Black History Month stories were presented, crime & racial representation *and* a comparative look at other stories that frequented the news during February.

In our month-long study we found a total of 39 stories that were related to Black History Month and racial diversity. Of the three stations WXMI 17 had the most stories (14), followed by WZZM 13 (13) and WOOD TV 8 (12). That WXMI 17 had the most is revealing since they only run one news show a night, compared to the 6 & 11pm from both Channel 8 & 13. Each of them ran at least one announcement for events and activities in the viewing area and all three stations did run stories that dealt with some aspect of racism.

All 3 stations covered either the Heritage Awards Ceremonies (13 & 17) or the Paul Collins Award Ceremony (8). All 3 stations covered the Summit on Racism at Hope College, but WXMI 17 did the longest and best job. Their coverage of the Summit included several interviews with participants/organizers and gave a snapshot of the increasing racial diversity in Ottawa County. Channel's 13 & 17 did pieces on the Multiracial Association of Professionals (MAP) meetings, while Channel 8 did a piece on a cultural performer from Cameroon. Channel 8 & 17 both did pieces on Kent County Commissioner Paul Mayhue's challenge of the Old Kent/Fifth Third Bank merger on grounds of poor performance with the minority community. Channel 8's piece was longer and had an interview with Comm. Mayhue, but neither of the stations looked into his challenge of the bank's discriminatory practices.

Both Channel 8 & 13 ran pieces that were in part self-promotional news stories, a trend that has been increasing over the past three years. Channel 8 did a piece on the Bethel Pentecostal Choir and part of the story was about using the choir for a station promotional piece over the holidays. Channel 13 ran a short story about an Asian cultural event at GVSU, which focused on their reporter Tatum Wan as a speaker. WZZM 13 also ran a story on how to do a genealogy study, featuring their reporter Kimberly Easton.

Only Channel 13 did a piece on Black History Month in the schools. They focused on a class at St. Andrews Catholic School, which was doing a session on Ghana. This could have led to a more interesting story about how many schools are promoting Black History Month in the curriculum and what effect it has had on the students and educators.

The bulk of the Black History Month stories were about individual achievements in the community. Channel 8 ran stories on Henry School principle Ruth Jones, local artist Paul Collins and a piece on a young bi-racial student who was confronted with being called a "nigger" by a fellow student. Channel 17 ran four profiles under the heading of "Unsung Heroes; LaDiedra Brown Gais, Wendel Smith, Loutisha Patterson and Mary Williams. Each of these stories certainly provided viewers with some positive achievements and efforts by African-Americans in the community. However, by focusing on individual achievements viewers could be left with the impression that racism is solved only by individual acts. There was no real discussion of institutional racism or why these people were motivated to do what they did as professionals or volunteers. In many ways the pieces ended up being "feel good" pieces that in no way put in context for viewers why African-American achievement should be celebrated in the first place.

The best stories done throughout the month that did take an investigative look at issues concerning the minority community were a piece on housing discrimination by channel 13 and a

look at AIDS in the Black community by channel 8. WZZM 13 gave us a 5-minute plus story on the work being done by the organization Fair Housing Center of Grand Rapids. The reporter gave us statistics, spoke with representatives from Fair Housing and with one Black woman's experience of trying to buy a home. The only short-coming here was the follow up story that featured a Black man working out in a gym. The piece was not well done and attempted to entertain us with comments that wove in weight-lifting themes/images with minority struggles against housing discrimination.

The channel 8 piece was over six minutes and did a good job of humanizing how AIDS impacts the Black community. The story focused on an HIV positive man and his role in trying to inform the Black community about this disease. The piece also showed a local woman who organized a recent forum for Black leaders and the issue of how the Black Church is dealing with the AIDS in their community. The piece even ended with some contact information in case viewers wanted to act. The only short-coming of the piece was that whenever data or statistics was reported it was done as a voice over by the reporter, not as something we heard from the Blacks in the news piece. This can leave the impression that the Blacks in the story were not well informed or that they were acting more out of emotion than reason. While these statistics were being run, black and white footage was run in slow motion, footage that was exclusively inner-city scenes, which could leave viewers with the impression that this is only a poor Black issue

Racializing Crime

A pattern in local news reporting that we have observed over the past 3 years that concerns us is the racial make-up of those accused/charged with crime. In relation to how often we hear minority voices in news stories and how many times they appear as those charged with a crime there is huge gap. All three stations have Blacks appearing as criminals 3-6 times more than when Blacks are represented in any given news stories. Not only is there a disproportionate amount of Blacks appearing as criminals, but the way they are often represented is different than with Whites charged with crimes.

One comparison from our February study was two high profile crime cases, both involving sexual assault. In one case you had a Black male accused of raping a White woman in East Grand Rapids and in the other case you had a White male accused of sexual assault of a teen at a Muskegon dance club. Notice I did not say that the White suspect committed statutory rape (even though he did), because the news stations only called it sexual assault.

The other areas where there was a difference in how these cases were presented was that often when the Black man's face appeared, it read Rape Suspect above his picture and with the White man it only read Suspect. Lastly, the pictures that were given to us of both suspects were significantly different. When the White suspect's picture appeared it had either a photo of him at the dance club with his arms around two girls smiling or a mug shot picture. In the mug shot picture he had a black eye, which could lead viewers to think he was a victim.

With the Black suspect we were given an artist sketch that looked somewhat menacing during the time the police were looking for him. Once he was apprehended we were given images of him in the courtroom through a TV monitor since his hearing was being broadcast from the jail into the courtroom. In these images he was always sitting with his arms crossed with a contemptuous look on his face. There were no sympathetic pictures of him at work or with friends. With these types of images it would be easy for viewers to have already convicted him in their minds.

Since this study was conducted it was reported that the Black male charged of rape was found not guilty after a DNA test was done. The *Grand Rapids Press* reported that he was seeking legal council because of his false arrest. We wonder if the local TV news might be included in the lawsuit for convicting him in their coverage?

Racism or Hockey?

The last issue we wanted to point out was that in comparison to other stories, racism or positive racial news stories paled in comparison to other "news." As was mentioned earlier there were a total of 39 stories that dealt with Black History Month or racial diversity. However, when looking at specific stories that dealt with a particular issue or individual there were never more than 4, the WXMI 17 4-part Unsung Hero Awards. Besides the channel 17 series most stories never appeared more than twice, such as the housing discrimination story or the AIDS in the Black community story.

In comparison there were a total of 15 stories (combined on the 3 stations) of a local hockey scandal. A coach told a player to allow a goal to be scored that would lose the game and give them a more desirable spot in a tournament. Channel 8 gave us 7 stories on the hockey scandal. What would have happened if the AIDS in the Black community had received 7 stories over the same period?

Another absurd comparison was a story that appeared on WZZM 13. The Charlevoix Club was canceling space that had been rented by numerous couples for wedding receptions. The 6 stories dealt with the frustration of couples and their families on having to scramble to find another location. What if 6 stories had been done about Black History Month education in local schools? Our recommendation would be that stories dealing with racism or racial diversity be given as much coverage, if not more, than stories that we feel are not hard news.

*We would love to hear your thoughts on this report. Contact GRIID at 459-4788x122
or e-mail to jsmith@grcmc.org or mail to GRIID at 711 Bridge St. NW,
Grand Rapids, MI 49504*

Resources

Books:

The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America, Robert Entman & Andrew Rojecki, 2000.
The Media in Black and White, edited by Everette Dennis & Edward Pease, 1997
The White Press and Black America, by Carolyn Martindale, 1986
Don't Believe the Hype: Fighting Cultural Misinformation About African-Americans, Farai Chideya, 1995
The TV Arab, by Jack Shaheen, 1984
Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema & the Colonization of the American Indians, by Ward Churchill, 1992
Media Matters: Race and Gender in US Politics, by John Fiske, 1996

Reports: on the GRIID web site at www.grcmc.org/griid/mediaracism

Racial Profiling: TV News and Racial Representation
Fall Colors: How Diverse is the 1999-2000 TV Season's Prime Time Lineup? (PDF Format)
A Different World: Native American Children's Perceptions of Race and Class in the Media (PDF Format)
A Near Whitewash: A Look at Local Late Night TV News Representation
Report of the President's Initiative on Race

Videos: available at GRIID for loan 459-4788x122

bell hooks: Cultural Criticism & Transformation (66 min.)
Edward Said: On Orientalism (1 hour)
Literary & Media Images of Native Americans (1 hour)
Representation & the Media w/Stuart Hall (1 hour)
Dragon Lady: Asian Women in Film (1 hour)
Facing Racism: Four different racism workshop perspectives (1 hour)
In Whose Honor?: Native American Mascot Logos (25 min.)

Organizational web links: on the GRIID web site at www.grcmc.org/griid/mediaracism

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting
News Watch
Asian American Journalist Association
National Association of Black Journalists
National Association of Hispanic Journalists
Native American Journalist Association
The Maynard Institute for Journalism Education
National Black Media Coalition
raceandmedia.com

Recommendations to the Media

We encourage the adoption of these recommendations to begin before The Racial Justice Summit of 2002 as adopted by the Media Action Team

1. Be an advocate for racial justice in the same way that you are already advocates for issues like quality public education, health care and consumer safety.
2. Profile the efforts of individuals and organizations that have a commitment to racial diversity and racial justice.
3. Provide coverage that is above population percentages. For example, even though the Native American community is less than one percent of the population, they deserve more than one percent of the news coverage. News organizations should give voice to - and inform the public about - communities rarely heard.
4. Utilize minority opinions for non-race specific issues. Minorities can speak to issues of the economy, education, the environment, gender and politics.
5. Invite a racially and economically diverse group of men and women to meet periodically with news directors and reporters to insure ongoing dialogue around racial representation in the media.
6. Profile minority cultural events year round, not just during calendar specific times like Black History Month or Hispanic Heritage Month.
7. Provide more investigative reporting into the racism that exists in West Michigan, both personal and institutional.
8. Be more selective about the national and international news used on local broadcasts. Much of this news - news not produced here - perpetuates negative racial stereotypes. For example, in this community you could rely on university departments that focus on International Studies.

Who to Contact

WOOD TV 8
120 College SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
456-8888
News Director: Jim Loy

WZZM 13
645 3 Mile Rd NW
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49544
785-1313
News Director: Sheryl Grant

WXMI 17
3117 Plaza Dr. NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525
364-8722
News Director: Tim Dye