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Stereotyping of Minorities by the News Media in Minnesota

**Minnesota Advisory Committee to the
United States Commission on Civil Rights**

May 1993

A report of the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. This report will be considered by the Commission and the Commission will make public its reaction. The findings and recommendations of this report should not be attributed to the Commission but only to the Minnesota Advisory Committee.

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Letter of Transmittal

Minnesota Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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The Minnesota Advisory Committee submits this report, *Stereotyping of Minorities by the News Media in Minnesota*, as part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on civil rights issues within the State. This report was adopted unanimously by the Advisory Committee on February 8, 1993.

The Advisory Committee held a factfinding meeting on July 30–31, 1992, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to obtain various perspectives and facts on news media stereotyping of minorities in Minnesota. Those invited to participate included elected officials, academic researchers, newspaper editors, television news directors, minority journalists, minority newspaper editors, and members of the different minority communities.

The Committee believes that there is a real problem of news media bias and stereotyping in the State and that its persistence tends to increase racial tensions. Moreover, the Committee also believes that a recurring negative portrayal of minorities in the news undermines the development of self-esteem among youths in the minority communities.

Although the report does not reflect an exhaustive analysis of the subject, the Committee hopes the Commission will find it of value in its monitoring of racial, ethnic, and religious tensions nationwide.

Respectfully,



Mary E. Ryland, *Chairperson*
Minnesota Advisory Committee

Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The present era of history is often dubbed the *information age*. It is a world with instantaneous communication and access to events around the globe. The media is a pervasive presence of news and entertainment. Its newspapers, periodicals, newsletters, radio, and television continuously communicate messages and images to the general populace. It is the primary source of information for the public about the Nation, the community, and its people. When information from the media stereotypes groups,¹ it not only impedes different racial and ethnic communities from understanding each other, but also serves to reinforce racist and discriminatory attitudes against minorities.

Negative depictions of minorities do occur in the media. Such media stereotyping can adversely affect both the minority communities and the majority community. The resulting harm for race relations includes: (1) a reinforcement of negative stereotypes that impedes equal opportunity for minorities, (2) an impression that minorities make more negative contributions to a community than positive contributions, (3) an alienation of the minority community from the majority community, (4) a deterioration of potential role models for minority youth, (5) an impediment to the development of self-esteem among minorities, and (6) polarization of the racial and ethnic communities.

Robert Entman, a professor of journalism at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, expressed this view regarding racial and ethnic stereotyping by the television industry:

While the roots of racism are varied and deep, there is a surprising source of messages that daily stimulate racial tensions: local television news. . . . Blacks generally look more threatening than whites in crime stories and they seem more demanding and self serving in political stories. . . . Many of the racial messages on local news are difficult to change, since they reflect a part . . . of urban reality. . . . It's not that blacks and whites are treated differently in every respect; many . . . measurements [are] in balance. But overall, local television presents viewers with an accumulation of negative imagery of African-Americans. By denying the historical context of high crime rates and political demands among blacks—the residue of long years of discrimination—television contributes to a racism that is more subtle than old-fashioned bigotry, but just as destructive,² especially in today's tense economic political climate.

The subject of media bias is not new to the United States Commission on Civil Rights. In August 1977 the Commission published *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. The report "focused on two issues regarding civil rights in broadcasting—the portrayal of minorities and women on network

¹ *The American Indian and the Media* (Minneapolis: National Conference of Christians and Jews, Inc., 1991), p. 79, has the following definition of racial stereotyping:

stereotyping.—trite, uninformed, often banal images or mocking characterizations implying that all members of a group or race are alike. Stereotypes replace observation and thought with bias and patterned response. The beliefs and lifestyles of millions of individuals . . . cannot responsibly be reduced to a few simple equations.

² Robert M. Entman, "How TV News Promotes Anti-Black Stereotyping," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 17, 1992, p. B-5.

television and their employment at television stations.”³ The report concluded:

Television’s portrayal of women and minorities and the potential impact of these portrayals are issues of critical importance to the American society. To the extent that viewers’ beliefs, attitudes, and behavior are affected by what they see on television, relations between the races and the sexes may be affected by television’s limited and often stereotyped portrayals of men and women, both white and nonwhite.

Specifically addressing the topic of television news, the Commission reported:

Very few stories in the network evening news treated topics related to minorities . . . and none focused on their achievements or accomplishments. Minorities . . . rarely appeared as newsmakers and furthermore rarely served as correspondents. . . . The presentation of blacks in the news has been a subject of concern ever since the Kerner Commission [1967] pointed out the media’s failure to present blacks on a routine basis as members of society. . . .

In an analysis of the news media’s coverage of blacks, William Rivers argued that blacks are portrayed primarily in terms of their “plight” and “The everyday world of the Negro and the continuing substance of Negro life in the United States seem to matter not at all.”⁵ A 1975 study of blacks in the news conducted by Churchill Roberts reported that blacks continue to appear in the news very infrequently. Those who do make the news appear primarily in civil rights-related stories.⁶

This report was followed in 1979 by another report on media stereotyping, *Window Dressing on the Set: an Update*. The Commission was interested in learning whether minorities and women made the news more frequently since its

1977 report and if there was more news about their accomplishments or their problems. The report found:

[F]ew stories in . . . the news broadcasts in five widely scattered dates in 1977 dealt with minorities and women, and both the absolute number and relative percentage of stories about them has decreased since [the] 1974–75 [Commission study]. . . . A total of 249 newsmakers appeared on the sampled broadcasts. Of these, 88.4 per cent were white males . . . minority males for 4.4 per cent and minority females for 0.4 per cent of the total.

Minnesota, similar to other communities in the country, is vulnerable to the divisiveness and problems concomitant with media stereotyping

Table 1.1
1990 Population of Minnesota and Minneapolis–St. Paul Metro Area

	State	Metro Area
Total	4,375,099	2,413,873
White	4,130,395	2,220,465
Black	94,944	89,666
Asian	77,886	65,056
Hispanic	53,884	37,256
Am. Indian	49,909	23,835
Other	21,965	14,851

Source: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1990 Census Profile, No. 2, (June 1991).

3 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television* (August 1977), p. ii (hereafter cited as *Window Dressing*).

4 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

5 William L. Rivers, “The Negro and The News: A Case Study,” in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communications*, rev. ed., eds. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971) p. 154.

6 *Window Dressing*, p. 54.

7 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: an Update* (January 1977), p. 24.

of minorities. The media and the general population are largely white. Yet a significant number of minority groups lives in Minnesota. Minorities are nearly 6 percent of the State's residents with a total population of approximately one-quarter million individuals.

The minority population in the State is growing. In the last 10 years the statewide minority population has increased by 75 percent while the white population has grown only 5 percent.⁸ Over 90 percent of the State's minority community lives in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. There, they are concentrated in the inner-city areas of the Twin Cities.

The media in Minnesota is large and diverse. There are 796 newspapers, periodicals, radio stations, and television outlets. In telecasting, 15 commercial and 5 public television stations cover the State. In addition, there are 24 cable systems. Six commercial stations, including all major networks, and two public stations are in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Also, 172 radio stations broadcast in the State, covering every area.

There are 580 newspapers and periodicals published in the State, and 28 of these newspapers are daily publications. Three newspapers have circulations exceeding 50,000: the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), and *News-Tribune* (Duluth). There are another 351 weekly newspapers, of which 300 are primarily news and information publications.⁹

The media comprises a very powerful institution. When stories with other races are presented, people watch or read in an attempt to get to know communities other than their own. This learning effort forms the basis for empathy and understanding. Gary Gilson, executive director of the Minnesota News Council, maintained that hands-on, factual reporting could generate initial improvements in understanding among the races:

⁸ 1990 Census of Population.

⁹ Julie Winklepleck, ed., *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* (Detroit: Gale Research International Limited, 1992), pp. 1037-38.

Table 1.2
Minnesota Media Statistics

Newspapers	
Daily 28	
Evening daily	(14)
Morning daily	(11)
All day daily	(1)
Daily w/ Sunday edition	(13)
Daily w/ weekend edition	(1)
Triweekly	13
Semiweekly	11
Weekly	351
Free or partly free	(58)
Shopper	(52)
Biweekly	3
Semimonthly	4
Monthly	4
Periodicals	
Weekly	7
Biweekly	3
Semimonthly	3
Monthly	68
Bimonthly	30
Quarterly	43
Variant	24
Total number of publications	580
Radio Stations	
AM Stations	88
FM Stations	84
TV Stations	
Total TV Stations	20
Cable Systems	
Total Cable Systems	24
Total number of broadcast listings	216

Source: *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media*, p. 1037-38.

The most valuable thing that news organizations can do is to go out and watch what happens all over town and report it, whether it is good or bad. And, as a byproduct of that, diversity will be reflected. And one of the things that white people will learn is that all white people are not the same, and all black people are not the same. . .¹⁰ If anything, at the very least, that will be progress.

The Minnesota Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights undertook to study negative stereotyping of minorities in the State by the news media. The Advisory Committee believed it should examine this issue because it addresses some of the root causes of racism, and its study would have a broad impact on the public at large in Minnesota and nationally. The Advisory Committee was also aware of the Commission's expressed objective to pursue this issue nationally.

On July 30 and 31, 1992, the Advisory Committee held a public factfinding meeting on stereotyping of minorities by the news media in

Minnesota. The meeting was preceded by several months of research. Elected officials, the editors of the three largest newspapers in the State, television news editors and anchors from the Minneapolis-St. Paul and Duluth areas, academic researchers, editors and publishers of Minnesota's major minority newspapers, minority reporters, and members of the minority communities testified at the factfinding meeting.¹¹

A series of speakers told the Advisory Committee that the images portrayed by the media have a profound impact. Unfortunately, there has been a long history of negative stereotyping of minorities. Today more than ever, the news industry is driven by financial interests. These market interests determine both stories and perspectives with the result that minorities are often stereotyped and treated as a homogeneous entity.

¹⁰ Testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, Minneapolis, MN, July 30-31, 1992, transcript, p. 231 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

¹¹ The agenda of the factfinding meeting is in the appendix to this report.

Chapter 2

The News Media and Minority Stereotyping: Its History, Role, and Impact

History of News Media Stereotyping

There was consensus from all quarters that historically the characterization of minorities in the media has been unfair and biased. Most of those testifying before the Advisory Committee believed that this bias was continuing. Yusef Mgeni, an award winning journalist with 20 years' experience and president of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Urban Coalition, coalesced this opinion and stressed that this was anything but a new issue:

The media is not constructively contributing to the past, present, or future of people of color in America. They are not even contributing to their own growth or that of white people because they misinform themselves about [minorities]. . . . And this image . . . results in a cumulative portrait of people of color [as] lazy, shiftless, stupid, inferior beings who are often dangerous and must be kept in their place. . . .

Two and a half decades [ago], the Kerner Commission [1967] reported the damaging effects . . . of stereotype portrayals of African Americans . . . in the broadcast media. Following that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded in a report entitled, *Window Dressing on the Set*, that stereotype portrayals of people of color . . . have been perpetuated by the networks in their pursuit of higher ratings and higher profits.²

Leola Johnson, assistant professor at the University of Minnesota in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, recapped the history

of American racial thought in the mass media. She contended that there have been two pervasive stereotypes. Prior to the Civil War, there was the compliant minority. Starting in the second half of the 19th century and continuing to today is the image of the dangerous, urban minority. Recently, a dichotomous stereotype has emerged: one, the compliant, achieving minority; the other the dangerous, urban minority.

The image of the compliant, sexless black man was most pervasive by itself before the Civil War. After blacks were freed, there emerged . . . the image of zip coon or of the urban black, the knife toting, straight razor carrying, dangerous black man. . . . Chinese immigration in this country [resulted in] Fu Manchu and those . . . young Chinese men carrying white women off. . . . [Recently] there has emerged a class difference in the way in which media stereotypes African Americans and Asians. . . . On the one hand you have the . . . model minority, . . . and then on the other hand you have Asian gangs and black gangs.

Mahmoud El Kati, lecturer in history at Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota, supported this opinion. He too believed that the stereotypes of blacks were polarized between compliant and violent. By engaging in this bimodal stereotype, the media has essentially voided the black person of any individual complexity.

We have this image of the black people in the 18th and 19th centuries primarily as a background for humor and hate thoughts in the literature. [This] does not

¹ Testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, Minneapolis, MN, July 30-31, 1992, transcript, p. 239 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

² Ibid., p. 240.

³ Ibid., pp. 66, 67, and 68.

allow for the complexity in the African experience. . . . One of the oldest institutions is . . . the black face minstrels, which lasted for over a hundred years. . . . Stereotypes commonplace in the 19th century . . . were the childlike, happy-go-lucky, watermelon eating, banjo picking, loyal, lovable, harmless, even sexless [black]. . . . And what is incredible to me is how do we get from Uncle Remus, and Sambo, and Coon, and Uncle Tom in the 19th century to this villainous, criminal threat to the republic character that we see today? . . . I contend that primarily Hollywood and popular press are responsible for the new stereotyping of black people. We jumped from Sambo to Stagger Lee.⁴

Mgeni gave further evidence of media complicity in negatively and untruthfully stereotyping blacks.

Talk about the power of stereotypes in the media. The Amos and Andy show actually spent 23 years on the radio before taking its sickness to television. It was created in 1929 by two white men, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll. Gosden and Correll claimed to have done an indepth research study of Negro life as the basis for starting the show, when in reality Gosden played with a black orphan adopted with the family; and that was the extent of his background. . . .

. . . The Amos and Andy show was brought to television in 1953, but this presented a significant problem because the two primary characters were Caucasians. . . . It took 2 years to find African Americans who could meet the stereotypical sick characteristic which Gosden and Correll were looking for. . . .

. . . The Amos and Andy show was essentially a continuation of minstrel shows performed decades earlier, and despite protest from the NAACP and numerous other organizations, CBS paid \$2 1/2 million to Gosden and Correll for 20 years for the television rights to the show . . . The show finally went off the air in 1966.⁵

Many stated this negative emphasis persists in today's news coverage. Sharon Sayles-Belton, president of the Minneapolis City Council, gave two recent examples:

We had a 17-year-old African American girl who was the subject of an 8-page story . . . about teenage pregnancy. . . . She agreed to be interviewed and photographed. She didn't realize people would see one African American [and] they would see all of us. So she didn't realize that when people saw her photographs, it would reinforce the stereotype that African Americans are the reason that we are having problems like teenage pregnancy.⁶

When the media continues to describe . . . north Minneapolis (an area of Minneapolis that is predominantly African American) in terms of crime and violence and all these other negative images, it has an impact on the viability and stability of a community.

The legacy of 200 years of media stereotyping has its effect in the news portrayal of minorities today. Much of it is the residue of a history of an untrue and biased caricature of minority groups. The result of this inaccurate, shallow profile is that the black community and other minority communities do not have a human face. They are "projected as amoebae, single cell animals, no complexity in their lives."⁸ Gilson added to this:

The only time I ever see a Chinese person on the television screen is when they drag that dragon through the street once a year on Chinese New Year's. How come we never visit with a Chinese family or the guys that run a business during the year? The other thing is on Martin Luther King's birthday. I don't know why [the media] doesn't go up to a white person and ask what they think. They only go to black people. So, they ghettoize the people they are talking to.

4 Ibid., pp. 50-51.

5 Ibid., pp. 235-38.

6 Ibid., pp. 38-39.

7 Ibid., p. 40.

8 Ibid., p. 54, Mahmoud El Kati.

9 Ibid., p. 229.

The Role of the Media in Race Relations

El Kati cited Richard Wright, the celebrated black author, in arguing that the basic struggle in this country in race relations is the dynamics between whites and blacks. Central to this conflict is the definition of reality.¹⁰ The media plays a significant role in defining reality and hence in the race relations climate of the country.

Along this theme, Gilson told of a documentary produced by a group known as News Reel in the early seventies on the issue of blockbusting in Philadelphia. He said the reporters interviewed a white man leaning on a mop in the middle of his kitchen watching white youths ready to attack blacks who came into the neighborhood. During the interview the white man told how he once had hated blacks, too, but then, during an alcoholic treatment program, a hateful relationship with a black man transformed into a friendship. Gilson concluded that these types of stories are newsworthy, and there is no reason why the mainstream media does not cover these types of stories.

Now, there is not a reason why that (story) could not be on regular commercial television news in some form or another. That is the way people live everyday. And if you hear a story about redlining or about real estate blockbusting, you may hear it from the point of view of the steps of the Capitol, where the government commission deals with that problem, but you don't hear about it from the point of view of the kids, the kitchen, the front steps where people live that issue everyday.¹¹

There are just great, important stories about how people live from day to day in terms of the economy, health care, jobs, stress, volunteerism, caring, and sharing of all types that really reflect the way people

live today and things that people are doing together. . . . It isn't as hard as some of them would make it out to be to do good news.¹²

Other presenters before the Advisory Committee also said that there were many interesting positive stories about minorities and race relations. They argued that these stories could be interesting and profitable. David Nimmer, a retired reporter and assistant professor of journalism at St. Thomas College, St. Paul, related:

There are reasons to celebrate the stuff of life . . . victories that go not being noticed by the mainstream press. . . . It used to be when I got in the business that reporters went out in the street and they told editors what was going on. . . . Editors now tell reporters, you go out here . . . What that does is miss the day to day struggles and the stuff of the community.¹³

Mgeni offered a recent example of the media's role in perpetuating negative stereotypes—coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles riots:

When we heard about the situation in Los Angeles, nobody said that 60 percent of the 1,200 people who were arrested were not African Americans. Nobody said that 20 percent of the businesses that burned down still had all the windows intact and the doors locked. . . . Nobody talked about the role of the Los Angeles Police Department in the escalation and the feeding frenzy of the rebellion that took place. And these are all relevant, important events that people need in order to develop a well-informed public opinion.¹⁴

Gilson was asked to define for the Committee a definition of news. He replied, "News is anything that is interesting and important."¹⁵ Flowing from that he argued further, "The media has

10 Ibid., p. 80.

11 Ibid., p. 222.

12 Ibid., p. 220.

13 Ibid., pp. 73-74 and 75.

14 Ibid., pp. 258-59.

15 Ibid., p. 224.

a responsibility to help us examine ourselves so we can get along better together.”¹⁶

Most of the speakers maintained that the media’s interests and, consequently, its role are driven by commercial concerns. Gilson said, “The commercial considerations, especially in this economy, have driven (the media) crazy, and they have gotten away often from their principles.”¹⁷

Nimmer argued that there is too big a tendency to market the news as though it were a product. This is detrimental to news coverage, because once news is viewed as a product, then its sole purpose is to provide a nice medium for advertisers and not to inform a community about itself.¹⁸ As a result of the commercialization of the news, he asserted that there exists a bias for sensationalism. This leads in turn to unintentional stereotyping.

Looking back upon my experiences, I did not detect any overt or obvious or planned or promoted institutional bias from the major news gathering organization in this town. . . . Still, there is a tendency to seize and sensationalize¹⁹ the negative of the black gangs, the Asian gangs. . . .

The news organizations were generally recognized for beginning to take efforts to hire and recruit minorities. However, this was still not eradicating a concern expressed by several witnesses: the failure to depict minorities as “experts” in areas other than race relations. Some also suggested that the few minority reporters in the area newsroom are expected to be the resident experts on all issues dealing with race relations. Nimmer told the Committee how personnel staffing influences the media’s position on a story.

As a matter of fact, there are more black and Asian, Hispanic people working in newsrooms than ever before. . . . They are in there slugging it out with people about how these images ought to be portrayed. . . .

. . . A couple of weeks ago, the *Pioneer Press* ran two huge pages of copy about gangs in the Twin Cities. . . . And I looked at those articles . . . and the first thing I noticed is that most of the sources were from the police department. Now the police have an interest in this and they have to be consulted. . . . But the police and people in the African American and Asian working-class community, poor community, often have very different points of view on how these kinds of things emerge. And at the very least, you have to consult²⁰ a good sample of people from those communities.

Sayles-Belton supported the idea of still more minorities in the newsrooms and as a means of altering the media’s character. In addition, she urged that more minorities be used as experts in issues other than race relations in order to break down stereotypes and open communication channels between the races.

I think the media needs to find better ways of recruiting persons of color to be part of their work force so that the news is both sensitive and is accurate. And I think they also need to do a considerable amount of work trying to understand who our experts are in the community . . . who are of color and are capable of talking about issues that are in the mainstream news. . . . [Minorities] are capable of talking about meteorology, of talking about solid waste collection, lime sludge, and just about every other issue that you can imagine. And I think that we have to ask them to assist us in breaking²¹ the stereotypes . . . that are held by the public at large.

16 Ibid., pp. 252–53.

17 Ibid., p. 223.

18 Ibid., p. 77.

19 Ibid., pp. 72 and 75.

20 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

21 Ibid., pp. 43–44.

Impact of the Media

Several presenters mentioned the media's enormous influence on the community. If this influence is negative, the impact upon racial harmony is equally negative. Mgeni gave a summary statement on the influence of the media.

If you control what goes in, you can control what comes out. . . . Our children spend more time in front of the television sets before they enter kindergarten than the adults will spend earning a 4-year college degree. In today's society, that is a tremendous influence. . . . When children look at television before they are 12 years old, they have seen 30,000 commercials.²²

Johnson supported the powerful impact that the media possesses in molding opinions.

When you are talking about the power to shift people's points of view, the media is powerful. An example of this is the media shift on the Soviet Union, not now, but between World War II and the McCarthy period. What a dramatic change in popular thinking about the Soviet Union went on. You can see that directly in terms of shift in media portrayals of the Soviet Union; positive during World War II, very nasty after World War II.²³

David Beaulieu, commissioner of human rights for the State of Minnesota, gave another example of the strong impact of media bias concerning American Indians. He related the results of a survey taken in 1970 of third, fourth, and fifth graders in the Bloomington public schools, a suburb of the Twin Cities.²⁴

The results of that survey were quite appalling. Young children in that suburb have an image of [the] American Indian which is really quite unreal, which really doesn't reflect the humanity of Indian people; and cer-

tainly doesn't reflect or bode well for the relationship of those children with Indian citizens as they grow up.

It is interesting how powerful our common images of minorities are. Michael Doris, [an American] Indian author, was in Africa in an area where there was . . . no electricity, no television, no newspapers; and he came upon a stand of a man selling items to tourists that happened to come through that area. The stand included stuffed monkeys with head dresses, bows and arrows and hatchets. The common image of American Indians of²⁵ this society exists in the middle of Africa. . . .

Several speakers addressed the positive influence the media had and could have on race relations in this country. Mgeni told the Committee:

The media was the major influence responsible for the success of the civil rights movement because it brought the tragedy and reality of history into millions of living rooms around this country. So, the media can play a positive role in²⁶ bringing about positive social change in our country.

Nimmer maintained that the local media had responsibly addressed a number of race relations issues.

The [media] has talked openly and meaningfully about the growing gap in incomes and opportunities between the rich and the poor. And they have addressed community and neighborhood issues involving minorities and people of color when those people have found a way to actively . . . come forward in some kind of protest to say we want to be heard. . . . The leaders of the news organizations have, in fact, agreed to hear them out and to do stories.²⁷

22 Transcript, pp. 248-49.

23 Ibid., p. 82.

24 David Beaulieu identified the study as *Suburban School Children and American Indians: A Survey of Impressions*, by Lori Hanson et al., Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1970.

25 Transcript, p. 7.

26 Ibid., p. 250.

27 Ibid., p. 73.

Beaulieu added that his agency's work had received fair and cooperative coverage from the media, with positive results for the community. He stated that the media had, at times, even undertaken to publicly examine its own fairness in reporting.

We see a rather growing and cooperative role with regard to the media in terms of issues of discrimination and how (our agency is) attempting to approach that. We think that we have a responsibility to report our results of our cases in the press, and we have a good response in terms of having the press cover cases that we resolve successfully.²⁸

I think at times the press reports on the issue (of its stereotyping), and I think that is very useful to do that. We need to do more of that (because) this particular issue is directly related to our ability to create an environment in the State which is healthy for human rights.²⁹

Josephier Brown, director of the St. Paul Human Rights department and representing Mayor Jim Scheibel, testified about the impact the media has in labeling issues. A recent media event occurred concerning the issue of hate crime, a concern to the community as a whole. The issue was identified in the press as a "black" issue.

St. Paul had a hate crime ordinance that went to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court said it was unconstitutional. On the day of the decision, Mayor Scheibel called the press conference and had members of the community testify about their concerns. . . . The following day the newspapers carried the story and along with it carried the picture of the president of the NAACP, the only black person that spoke. . . . That stereotyped hate crimes as a black issue. That is the kind of stereotypes that you see in the media.³⁰

28 Ibid., p. 9.

29 Ibid., p. 10.

30 Ibid., pp. 16-17.

Chapter 3

The Print Media

Three newspapers in Minnesota have daily circulations greater than 50,000: the *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), the *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul), and the *Duluth News-Tribune*. Senior editors from the three newspapers came and talked to the Advisory Committee about media bias, news stereotyping, newspaper policies, specific stories, and minority representation in the newsroom.

The pivotal concern of all three editors was freedom of the press. All three editors expressed their willingness to talk about their coverage and the manner in which any story or any group is covered or portrayed. What they were not willing to allow is government intervention in their right to independently publish the news. Robert Jodon, editor of the *Duluth News-Tribune*, summarized this concern:

The first amendment is very important to journalists. . . . We welcome your thoughts on the issue [of media bias]. . . . Our only objection would be were [the Committee] to issue a finding that we should do this and be specific. If you tell us we ought to listen to the people more in our community, we agree with you, and we support that goal. . . . But we would be very upset were [the Committee] to try and tell us in some kind . . . of directive on what we cover.¹

The Star Tribune

Tim McGuire, executive editor of the *Star Tribune*,² spoke about the newspaper's policies, the community it serves, allegations of news stereotyping of minorities, and attempts by the paper to cover the minority communities. He

noted that Minnesota is essentially a *white* State and that minorities were disproportionately underprivileged:

African Americans, Native Americans, and all people of color have had a very difficult time, not only getting noticed in this community but getting by. . . . The eighties were a grim decade for the State's minorities. . . . The overall poverty rate for black Minnesotans was 37 percent. It is four times that of whites. For Native Americans it was even worse. . . . This is not a friendly, kindly place to people of color. People of color have every right to be frustrated and upset and to feel that they have been not been dealt from the top of the deck.³

McGuire remarked that it was the *Star Tribune* 2 years ago that offered the first candid examination of such racial issues with a 12-day, 64-page series of articles, "Issues of Race." The series covered the impact of race in education, employment, housing, police relations, and even media coverage. The series finished second in the Pulitzer judging that year for the public service award.

According to McGuire the race series was a seminal moment for the *Star Tribune*.

We examined the community as no one had before, and we examined ourselves and decided that we had to change a lot of things, and we have. We have broadened the number of sources we use. There are more people of color on our source list. We are doing far more enterprise stories on people of color. We are doing more profiles of people of color. We do more photos of people of color just doing ordinary things

1 Testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, Minneapolis, MN, July 30-31, 1992, transcript, p. 123 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

2 The *Star Tribune* publishes daily and Sunday from 425 Portland Ave., Minneapolis, MN. It has a daily circulation of 413,237 and Sunday circulation of 673,773.

3 Transcript, p. 108.

Table 3.1
Star Tribune News Division Staffing

	Total	Minority	Black	Am. In.	Asian	Hispanic
Officials & Mgrs.	18	2	2	0	0	0
Professionals	221	17	10	1	1	5
Technicians	4	0	0	0	0	0
Clerical/Craft	41	6	5	0	0	1
Total	284	25	17	1	1	6

Source: *Star Tribune* EEO-1 Report, June 27, 1992.

rather than going out to the white suburbs or a white community. . . .

McGuire also gave examples of stories recently run by the *Star Tribune* exposing injustices against people of color. In 1991 there was a story, "Many Minority Shoppers Say They've Encountered Racism in State Stores," which reported on blacks being targeted for shoplifting. The story was picked up and featured by a local television station in its newscast. This year *Tribune* reporters "uncovered and reported a system of redlining by Paragon Cable Television, the cable television providers to . . . Minneapolis."⁵

The executive editor admitted that "there are certainly stories in which stereotypes occur."⁶ However, he emphasized that the paper wanted to change the perceptions that the stereotypes were intentional and that it was making a con-

certed effort to bring more diversity into its day-to-day coverage.

Some [have] suggested we intentionally perpetuate stereotypes. We want to change those perceptions; we are working on improving the communication. . . . This is very hard work. Culture change is very difficult. . . . We want all people of color to be reflected in our coverage, not just dramatic stories dealing with grave social issues. We think we have a long way to go . . . but making progress in this area is a top priority.

The *Star Tribune* does have a written policy regarding identifying the race of a person in its news articles. Race is noted only if it contributes to the reader's full understanding.

Use the racial identification only if the news event itself, the circumstances of the event, or the relationship of the event to the broader context of current affairs, indicates that the identification is relevant.⁸

⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 111-12.

⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 113-14.

⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

Table 3.2
Pioneer Press News Division

Professional Staff					
Total	Minority	Black	Hispanic	Asian	American Indian
175	21	6	4	10	1
ratio:	12%	3.4%	2.3%	5.7%	0.5%

Source: Mindi Keirnan, managing editor of *Pioneer Press*.

The Pioneer Press

Mindi Keirnan, managing editor of the *Pioneer Press*,⁹ spoke of the paper's goals, its accomplishments in covering the communities of color, its staffing, and its policies. She prefaced her remarks by stating that although she was willing to discuss the issue of media bias, the government has no role in dictating coverage or in making recommendations about coverage.

The goal of the *Pioneer Press* is to have its coverage reflect the community, which includes the local minority communities. Not only is this a philosophical goal of the paper, but also a sound business practice, as the minority communities are too large a customer base to ignore or to misrepresent. She explained:

Our goal at the paper is to do everything we can to mirror the coverage of our entire community, all demographic groups; rich, poor, black, white, native, Hispanic and all kinds of people; suburban and those who live in the city. Increasingly our coverage is directed outside the confines of government buildings . . . to the parts of the community that have been disenfranchised. . . .¹⁰

We make mistakes like all humans . . . [But] we believe that [our coverage focus] is not only the right thing to do . . . but . . . it is a good business decision. We need all people to buy the newspaper, this is a free market, we need as many customers as we can get.¹¹

Keirnan stated that the newspaper had recently taken a number of steps to increase and enhance its coverage of the local minority communities. These included the establishment of an editorial diversity committee, meeting with the community, expanding minority source lists, monitoring the portrayal of people of color in the paper's pictures, and a recent series of stories on the different ethnic groups in the metropolitan area.

We have a diversity committee within our own newsroom. Their charge is to examine issues relating to content as well as to hiring and promotion of members of our own staff. . . . We take personal phone calls . . . and go out into the [minority] community. . . . We meet with community groups who ask to meet with us. . . .

⁹ The *Pioneer Press* publishes daily and Sunday from 345 Cedar St., St. Paul, MN. It has a daily circulation of 201,860 and Sunday circulation of 267,781.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

¹¹ Transcript, p. 100.

. . . Every staffer is expected to contribute at least three names of minorities who are experts [in the field] they cover. . . . That information is made available on the computer to everybody on the staff so nobody has an excuse for why they cannot find people of color who are experts. . . . We did weekly stories for almost 9 months profiling different ethnic groups within the Twin Cities and then having people from¹² those groups write opposite editorial pages for us. . . .

For several years the paper has . . . specifically had a beat assignment of minority affairs. That person is responsible for covering issues that are of special interest to the minority community [such as] the Minnesota Human Rights Commission [and] bias stories.¹³

In addition, Kiernan claimed that some of the coverage of the minority communities by the *Pioneer Press* has generated hostile reactions from the white community.

Two Sundays after the Rodney King story broke, we (did) a demographic profile of blacks in Minnesota. The story was shocking . . . because it said that blacks in Minnesota are worse off than blacks on [the] average nationwide. We got phone calls from white people who told us that [the *Pioneer Press*] was going to start a riot.¹⁴

Our policy is not to use the race of someone unless it contributes specifically to the description of the suspect. . . . We get lots of calls any time there is a crime in the Twin Cities and someone is on the loose. . . . If the description is very sketchy whatever their race, people call . . . , it is white people calling to tell us that they know the suspects are black and that we are

doing a disservice to the community by not putting them on the alert for black people.¹⁵

I will tell you that we received more than 50 complaints when we published the book, *A Divided Nation*, by people, mostly white, a few of color, who made it very clear that . . . we were publishing information that only divided the country and that we were stirring up black people . . .¹⁶

Currently the news staff at the *Pioneer Press* is 12 percent minority. Keirnan claimed it was difficult to recruit minorities to the metro area, but that the paper was committed to minority hiring. As part of that commitment the paper has continued its sponsorship of minority fellowships and undertaken an aggressive recruitment effort to employ more minorities. She added:

We have doubled the number of professional minorities on the news staff in the last 2 years. This is a result of an active commitment by the paper to hire quality people of color.¹⁷

For 20 years the *Star Tribune* and the *Pioneer Press* have participated in the . . . Urban Journalism Workshop. . . . There are two people on the *Pioneer Press* staff right now who are people of color who came out of that program. . . . In addition, the *Pioneer Press* has had a program with the University of Minnesota where every quarter we have a student who is a person of color . . . spend a term in our classroom. . . . One of the people who came through that program [is now] a member of our staff.¹⁸

12 Ibid., pp. 98, 99, and 100.

13 Ibid., p. 92.

14 Ibid., p. 93

15 Ibid., pp. 95-96.

16 Ibid., p. 97.

17 Mindi Keirnan, telephone interview on Dec. 18, 1992.

18 Transcript, pp. 127-28, 129.

The Duluth News-Tribune

Robert Jodon, managing editor of the *Duluth News-Tribune*,¹⁹ expressed his paper's desire to cover the minority communities accurately and comprehensively. He believed that to do this it is essential to recruit people of color to the newspaper. But he also noted that his reality is that the community his paper serves is 96 percent white, and that limits the number of minority journalists who would be willing to work in the community.

I want to talk about recruiting. This is something that I have heard a lot of . . . negative feedback from [the audience]. I will tell you that in 4 years in Duluth I have been able to recruit only four minorities to that city. . . . At the present time we have one Native American supervisor on staff, an Asian photographer and [one] Hispanic copy editor. We are currently recruiting minorities to fill a vacancy on our reporting staff. . . . It has been offered to four individuals, all of whom have turned it down.²⁰

On the matter of unbiased news coverage, Jodon stated that there was an internal program at the newspaper to sensitize the writers and editors to the minority communities and issues of color. The program includes sensitivity training and regular meetings with members of the minority community.

He explained the paper's effort in this regard, adding that having more minority staff would be the most effective approach to eliminate minority stereotyping and bias:

About a year-and-a-half ago, the [*News-Tribune*] invited representatives from all of the [Indian bands] in northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin to come in and sit down over a 5-week period and talk to the news staff about American Indian, Native Ameri-

can issues. We have also conducted seminars on diversity for supervisors at the newspaper and for staff members at the newspaper. So we are making efforts to train individuals at our newspaper on the issue of diversity and deal with that issue. I don't think that anything would work better than to have more minorities on the staff, however, . . . And we are going about that aggressively.²¹

One of the paper's strategies to increase minority staff is the paper's intern program. Each summer the *News-Tribune* hires four interns. Two of the positions are designated specifically for "minority interns."²²

Jodon, like his counterparts from the *Star Tribune* and the *Pioneer Press*, was concerned that the factfinding meeting would result in recommendations for government interference on what is published by a newspaper. He felt that no government commission or body should dictate in any way the stories a newspaper decides to print.

The Rural Newspaper

Paul Sand, executive director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews for the Minnesota-Dakotas region, talked about the local, nonmetropolitan, rural newspapers and the religious press. He noted two things: (1) these newspapers are read and are very influential, and (2) they virtually ignore minorities.

When you go out in rural America, many people only subscribe to the weekly newspaper in that county. Do you know that of the 2,700 in my home town, [only] 5 people subscribe to the *Star Tribune*? Their major print news comes from the weekly newspapers . . .²³

My concern that I have dealing with rural Minnesota . . . and going around and talking to a lot of those editors . . . is that there is absolutely no minority cov-

19 The *Duluth News-Tribune* publishes daily and Sunday from 424 W. 1st St., Duluth, MN. It has a daily circulation of 60,431 and Sunday circulation of 84,073. Duluth is located on Lake Superior and is the second largest metropolitan area in the State with a population of 85,493.

20 Transcript, pp. 124-25.

21 Transcript, p. 132.

22 Ibid., p. 120.

23 Ibid., p. 245.

erage . . . We have migrant workers working out . . . in the sugar beet fields, and there is a great deal of racial tension going [on] out there [but] no reporting is going on. . . .

There are problems out there in rural America with the media. It is a small part, but let me tell you something, it has one tremendous impact on the attitude of people towards racism, prejudice, et cetera. That's maybe where we should start.²⁵

The City Pages

Monica Bauerlein, managing editor of *The City Pages*,²⁶ had a different view of the mainstream press coverage of minorities from that of the major newspapers. In her opinion, media coverage of minorities was frequently negative and did not convey to the public the major issues of concern within the minority communities.²⁷ For instance, "police misconduct is a large topic in the minority community, but it is not covered as extensively as it could be by the media."²⁸

She also stated that although the newspapers were attracting minority reporters to their staffs, they were not keeping them. This not only affected the papers' coverage of the minority com-

munity but also served to generally preclude minorities from moving into management positions.²⁹ She added that this continual turnover in the newsrooms was known in the minority communities, which furthered "the perception of media bias."³⁰

She said that all reporters kept "a golden rolodex of sources."³¹ Historically minorities have been excluded and ignored from this information circle.

She did not decry negative stories about minority communities. Doing "negative stories is okay as long as the media approaches all communities with the same critical eye."³² But, she added, the press needs to be careful even in stories that are patently neutral, such as a report on population and poverty, which tends to "portray minorities as a blight on the community."³³

Bauerlein added that the media does make positive contributions. "They do make the effort to be fair, to respond to the concerns of the minority community, and to be tolerant of diversity. But it doesn't seem as if the good intentions get them there."³⁴

24 Ibid., p. 243.

25 Ibid., p. 248.

26 *The City Pages* is an alternative news and arts weekly of the Twin Cities. It publishes from 401 N. 3rd St., Suite 550, Minneapolis, MN. It has a weekly circulation of 97,328.

27 Monica Bauerlein, interview in Minneapolis, MN, July 29, 1992 (hereafter cited as Bauerlein Interview).

28 Bauerlein Interview.

29 Bauerlein noted during the interview that the exclusion from management of minorities was not absolute, as there were minority managers in the media in the city.

30 Bauerlein Interview.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

In her opinion, the complaints of the minority community are for the most part valid concerns. The complaints are rooted in an accurate perception that the media reflects the rest of society. Moreover, a lot of the minority criticism is

directed at the television industry. By its nature, "television news is sensationalistic."³⁵ This in itself portrays those in the lower positions of society in a generally negative light.

³⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 4

Television News

There are 216 broadcasting companies in Minnesota: 172 radio stations, 20 television stations, and 24 cable systems.¹ Twelve of the stations are concentrated in the two largest

metropolitan areas, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Duluth. Five of the stations are public broadcast stations; none of these has traditional news broadcasts but they do offer news feature stories.

Table 4.1
Minnesota Television Stations

Station	Metro Area (population)	Network	News
KCCO-TV [7]	Alexandria(7,608)	CBS	yes
KSAX-TV [42]	Alexandria	ABC	yes
KWCM-TV [10]	Appleton (1,842)	PBS	no
KAAL-TV [6]	Austin (23,020)	ABC	yes
KSMQ-TV [15]	Austin	PBS	no
KBJR-TV [6]	Duluth	NBC/Fox	yes
KDLH-TV [3]	Duluth	CBS	yes
WDIO-TV [10]	Duluth	ABC	yes
WDSE-TV [8]	Duluth	PBS	no
WIRT-TV [10]	Hibbing (21,193)	{simulcasts WDIO}	
WXOW-TV [19]	La Crescent (3,674)	ABC	yes
KEYC-TV [12]	Mankato (28,651)	CBS	yes
KARE-TV [11]	Minneapolis (370,951)	NBC	yes
KITN-TV [29]	Minneapolis	Fox	yes
KMSP-TV [9]	Minneapolis	Ind.	yes
WCCO-TV [4]	Minneapolis	CBS	yes
KTIC-TV [10]	Rochester (57,885)	NBC	yes
KTCA-TV [2]	St. Paul (270,230)	PBS	no
KSTP-TV [5]	St. Paul	ABC	yes
KTCI-TV [17]	St. Paul	PBS	no
KTMA-TV [23]	St. Paul	Ind.	yes
KBRR-TV [10]	Thief River Falls (9,105)	{simulcasts KVRR}	

Source: *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media*.

¹ Julie Winklepleck, ed., *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1991) p. 1038.

Two stations, WIRT in Hibbing and KBRR in Thief River Falls, simulcast the broadcasts of two stations in larger neighboring markets.

A Survey of Television News and Minority Stereotyping in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area

In the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area there are five major commercial television stations. The five stations have daily news broadcasts in the morning, the evening, and at night. Minorities are on each news staff but are in management only at station KARE, channel 11.² The public television station in St. Paul has 34 officials and managers, 1 of whom is a minority.

Station KARE, the local NBC affiliate, surveyed the television news broadcasts for minority stereotyping in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. All news broadcasts of the four major television stations for the week December 29, 1991–January 4, 1992, were monitored. The total review encompassed 27 different newscasts and 14 hours of broadcast time.³

During that survey period, only one expert of “color” was interviewed by reporters on the news broadcasts. There was just one feature story of a minority—an African American girl getting her pilot’s license at the age of 15. Otherwise, “minorities were generally depicted in a negative light.”⁴ American Indians were shown in only two types of stories. One story concerned the group’s protest of sporting teams using Indian names, and the other story type was the promotion of sobriety during the New Year celebration.

There was only one prime time mention of Hispanics. That story was about the hijacking of a helicopter by Cubans seeking political asylum in the United States. With the exception of one story that used an Asian doctor as a medical

expert, all the stories on Asians concerned crimes and drugs.

Crime was the most prevalent story on the news with 44 stories. It also was a topic often associated with blacks. Blacks were interviewed 28 times during the week, and one-third of those interviews were related to crime. Virtually every other *black* interview was with a “sports” figure.⁵

Minority Staffing at Major Television Stations

Commission staff obtained the staffing levels of the 10 largest television stations in the State from the Federal Communications Commission. Minorities are 6.5 percent of the total full-time staffs at those stations and 6 percent of professionals and managers. The lowest staffing minority percentage in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area was 4.5 percent at WCCO; in the Duluth area, stations WDIO and simulcast station WIRT (Hibbing) had no minorities on their staffs.

The levels of minority managerial and professional staffing in the Twin Cities ranged from a high of 10.2 percent at station KMSP to a low of 1 percent at WCCO. In Duluth, station WDSE had the highest minority managerial and professional representation at 9 percent.

Minorities are 4.5 percent of the total population in Duluth, yet they comprise only 2.7 percent of the staffs at the four television stations. Three of the four stations in Duluth have minority employment levels proportionate to the minority population.

In the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, minority staffing levels at the largest six stations are slightly lower than their population ratio. Minorities are 9 percent of the metro area population and comprise 7.3 percent of the employment at the television stations.

2 1992 Annual Broadcast Station Reports, Federal Communications Commission.

3 KARE, “The Role of the Media,” Jan. 15, 1992.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

Table 4.2**Minority Staffing Levels at the Television Stations in Minneapolis-St. Paul and Duluth**

Station	Total Staff	Minority Staff	Percent	Mgrs. & Profess.	Minority Staff	Percent
Minneapolis:						
KTCA	177	14	7.9	124	11	8.9
KARE	173	15	8.6	81	7	8.6
KITN	41	2	4.8	19	1	5.2
KMSP	90	8	8.9	39	4	10.2
WCCO	201	9	4.5	96	1	1.0
KSTP	261	21	8.0	128	8	6.3
Duluth:						
WDSE	23	1	4.3	11	1	9.0
WDIO	52	0	0	52	0	0
KDLH	50	2	4.0	21	1	4.7
KBJR	61	2	3.3	28	2	7.1

Source: Federal Communications Commission, 1992 station staffing levels.

The staff levels in the table are totals and do not separate news staffs.

Perspectives of Media Journalists

Four individuals from the television media testified before the Advisory Committee about minority stereotyping. The group included a public affairs program director from public television, a news anchor from a Minneapolis CBS network affiliate, a news director of a Minneapolis-St. Paul independent station, and a news director of a television station in Duluth.⁶ The

news people stressed that they spoke for themselves and not on behalf of their news organizations. Their consensus opinion was:

- television news is driven by stories and market shares,
- if stereotyping does occur, it is unintentional; the highly competitive market of television news precludes networks from alienating any segment of viewers,

⁶ Those testifying included: Susan Robeson, public affairs director, KTCA public television (St. Paul), Don Shelby, news anchor, WCCO channel 4—CBS (Minneapolis), Penny Parrish, news director, KMSP channel 9—Independent (Minneapolis), Steve Goodspeed, news director, WDIO channel 10—ABC (Duluth).

- the prospect of having television news purposely trying to “train” the public instead of objectively inform lends itself to the dangers of government manipulation, and
- diversity among reporters and editors will alleviate a great deal of minority stereotyping.

Two minority news reporters briefed the Committee prior to the factfinding meeting on the issue of media stereotyping of minorities.⁷ Lou Harvin, news reporter for KSTP-TV, channel 4, told the Advisory Committee that “information, fairness, and ratings” are the rules for television news. He admitted that there are complaints on news coverage from minority communities but overall stations are afraid of alienating any viewers. “If calls protest the fairness of a story, that producer won’t last long.”⁸

Carolyn Brookter, also a news reporter at KSTP-TV, mentioned that reporters “do not have any control over lead stories, [they] just report. . . . Quick is the name of the game.” This sometimes leads to categorizing and labeling, which may explain the stereotyping that is seen. “The bottom line,” she said, “is that we need minority production people.”⁹

Don Shelby, news anchor with WCCO, articulated that a code of integrity permeates the news industry:

It is the profit motive that drives commercial television. . . . What goes on television will be that which is popular. . . . (However) within the news arm, which is driven by a need to make a profit and to be popular

and to have good ratings, there is a code of morality . . . (which) is to bring to an audience enough information so that the audience may develop an informed opinion.¹⁰ I do not know of any [other] profession in the world whose only function is to tell the truth. I get fairly tired of getting beat up. There are some right things to examine, to tear the media apart about. But that core of integrity [is there] . . . people who are driven to tell the truth, to find it and to [tell] it. . . .¹¹

Nobody in this business is [stereotyping] on purpose. If we find out we are [covering the minority community] poorly, we are not doing it on purpose. The second thing, though, . . . is that we do not even know what it is we are doing that is offensive. . . .¹²

If you tell [the television news media] that [its] job is to train the public, that is a fairly scary mandate because then you have put somebody in charge of deciding what the public should know.¹³

All . . . journalists operate under the code that the story that [they] are presenting must be fair, accurate, and balanced. Those are the three guidelines of any good journalist: fairness, accuracy, balance. . . . [And] may I tell you that there is no record by which to judge [this] except anecdotal memory that does not work for any type of scientific approach to this.¹⁴

Both Penny Parrish, news director at KMSP-TV channel 9, Minneapolis, and Steve Goodspeed, news director of WDIO-TV channel 10, Duluth, supported Shelby’s view that stories and events drive television news coverage. The television news operation is an instantaneous medium, quickly reacting and reporting on events that are just breaking stories.

7 Carolyn Brookter and Lou Harvin, African American reporters with KSTP-TV, channel 4, Minneapolis, briefed the Committee on Sept. 26, 1991.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, Minneapolis, MN, July 30–31, 1992, transcript, p. 151 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

11 Transcript, p. 157.

12 Ibid., p. 176.

13 Ibid., p. 153.

14 Ibid., pp. 174–75.

Parrish, however, added that current television news broadcasts may be giving viewers just the news without the necessary context of the story:

I think one of our greatest weaknesses is, if we do a story on a gang shooting in a black neighborhood, do we then the next day have to try and do a neighborhood picnic where they put the new swing set close by so that things are balanced? No, I don't think that is our job. But what our job is, is to take any story we have and put it in context. People are hungry for the whys and the wherefores around the news and television news. Partially because of its time [limitations, television news] programs tend to give the story and not give the context.¹⁵

Goodspeed remarked that television is simply an event phenomenon and does not see that changing:

Most blacks in large market television are on because they are criminal suspects or at least that is what the white majority audience is bombarded with on a daily basis. I do not see that changing dramatically in the short term or long term as long as the media follows events, as long as we follow the cops around and they choose to focus on crime areas in which there are large black populations.¹⁶

Should the media take it upon itself to go and do positive stories? Maybe that is what we have to do. But, traditionally we have been taught not to worry about the race and just follow the story. . . . I think [that] on a daily basis [the] grind of daily news events presents minorities too often in a negative light. . . .¹⁷

The news journalists felt that although there was still room for improvement, news reporting and its portrayal of minorities had improved in

recent years. In fact, the television news played a major part in promoting civil rights for minorities. Shelby said he was in the business because of its positive influence:

I am . . . in this business [because] I sat at home as a boy and watched [civil rights events] on television and I saw the networks go in there and change an entire nation because of its approach to the civil rights problems that existed in the south. And I said that is what I want to do. . . .¹⁸

I think largely the media, as it is represented by its entertainment arm, has not done a terribly bad job of trying to overcome some of the issues of stereotyping. I think it has probably done some of the most significant work in that area, if you can simply quantify the effect on the American psyche, changes in attitudes . . . how one thinks about women, blacks, Hispanics. . . . But I think . . . the news arm . . . experiment [in this attempt] has largely failed.¹⁹

Diversity in the newsrooms was universally offered as an action that would have an immediate impact on diminishing media bias. As Shelby said, "By the very presence of the person with color, the nature of the discussion [in the newsroom] changes."²⁰ Parrish agreed, saying that the newsrooms should be a mix of people with varied interests in the community.

Moreover, the two executives mentioned specific actions to increase minority representation on their staffs. Parrish said that minorities now constituted 15 percent of her staff and she makes a conscious effort to find people of color. Goodspeed said he too hoped to put minorities into news positions so that news productions will be "driven internally with minority input."²¹

15 Ibid., p. 170.

16 Ibid., p. 172.

17 Ibid., p. 178.

18 Ibid., pp. 175-76.

19 Ibid., p. 150.

20 Ibid., p. 165.

21 Ibid., p. 173.

Susan Robeson, public affairs director of KTCA-TV channel 2, a public broadcast station in St. Paul, had several different perspectives from the other news broadcasters on television's coverage of minorities. She agreed that minority representation in the medium is poor and stressed that this is particularly true at the decisionmaking positions. She further maintained that the media, as a *white* institution, decides the means of inclusion for minorities rather than letting minorities decide the process. As a corollary to this argument, she spoke about the reluctance of white management in public television to address difficult issues because of its fear of censorship from Congress and loss of support from the public.

I think that a lot of the issues [of media stereotyping] are very deeply rooted [in] institutional racism. . . . I think the basic issue of power and representation is really never adequately addressed. . . . I am African American and I am the first management person of color . . . at the station . . . and I am the only person of color if you exclude the janitorial staff. . . . I recently went to the annual PBS meeting in San Francisco and . . . I walked into a room of 1,200 people that represented program directors and general managers and station presidents from all across the country. And I was in a room of probably 1,190 white males. So that while there are many things that PBS does that are wonderful. . . . But if you look at it in terms of power and representation and do people of color speak for themselves, it all comes out . . . pretty much like where we were in 1967.²²

The media, . . . a white institution, decide[s] how, what, when, where, why, and how to become inclusive, and it is never quite effective. . . . Why not let the victim of [the] stereotyping define how to do that

[Minorities] have never been empowered and so nothing really has ever changed.²³

I think there is a lot of fear at PBS. . . . [T]he recent congressional debate on funding has created a climate of self-censorship. . . . There is a fear of voices like David Jones, who is a very outspoken person on these issues. . . . As a result, I have seen it even at my station, "No, let's not air that because there might be this kind of reaction and we don't want to go to the mat on that. We'll do it on something else." So there is a climate of fear that if we go too far and alienate the mainstream, we will be in trouble, and we won't be able to get our membership dollars.²⁴

After the factfinding meeting, Goodspeed reflected further on the testimony of others and the subject of news media bias.

I was struck by how much misunderstanding there seems to be about how we do our job. I think some people are looking for a conspiracy in the media where none exists. However, I firmly believe that minorities are not represented fairly and accurately in television news, and it is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.²⁵

David Jensch, news director for station KBJR, Duluth, was unable to attend the factfinding meeting. He did, however, talk about the factfinding meeting and news media bias with several television news directors and reporters who did attend. After those conversations he attended the national convention of Radio and Television News Directors in San Antonio, Texas.

Upon attending the recent fall convention of Radio and Television News Directors in San Antonio, I was made even more aware of how we in the media influence public impressions of minorities. We must strive

22 Ibid., pp. 140-41.

23 Ibid., pp. 142-43.

24 Ibid., pp. 144-45.

25 Steve Goodspeed to Mary Ryland, Chair, Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992, Midwestern Regional Office of the USCCR files.

in positive ways to include minorities in stories. Here in northern Minnesota we must steer stories to choose especially Native American people on all subjects. We do have Native Americans available in all professions

and walks of life to call upon. It is our duty to portray all minorities as normal, everyday people and not as being mindless or faceless with group mentality.²⁶

26 David Jensch to Peter Minarik, regional analyst, USCCR, Nov. 24, 1992, Midwestern Regional Office of the USCCR files.

Chapter 5

Perspectives of Minority Journalists

Journalists and editors from minority newspapers and news organizations all maintained that one of the reasons for their existence was that the major media did not accurately portray minority communities. They argued that there were major issues of vital interest to their communities that were not covered. Moreover, they stressed that when there was coverage of the minority community, it was inaccurate.

Two minority journalists had positive things to say about the mainstream press. Some mentioned that contacts were starting to develop between themselves and the mainstream media. One individual, Bob Metoxen, a Native American who is a managing news editor of MNN News Network, related that in his experience as a reporter, the media had done a good job of covering people of color.

Ruth Denny, editor of *The Circle*, the largest Native American newspaper in Minnesota, spoke at length on her frustrations with the media:

The newspapers are businesses. They are population driven. . . . Many of our stories are in the metro section in the back pages. It is not played up as an important story. But, for us, when our religious freedom rights are being destroyed . . . that is a very big story for us. . . . When our treaty rights are dumped everyday, that is a big story for us. But the *Pioneer Press* and the *Star Tribune* do not think it is a big story because we are such a small population. . . . [The major media] read[s] our paper, they get ideas for their story, they write their own version of it, put their

byline on it. . . . I am tired of the white middle-class people coming to our community and telling us what is important and who is important in our community.¹

. . . The main reason why *The Circle* started was because the *Pioneer Press* and the . . . *Star Tribune* refused to tell many of our stories. And when they tell our stories, they tell it wrong. They do not have the cultural perspective. They do not have the education and they do not have the view of our community.²

Laura Wittstock, founder of Migizi Communications, had a similar view:

Migizi really came about . . . when several journalists . . . decided that we needed to have regional presences in the media. . . . Our objective was simple and clear. . . . We wanted to report news and information concerning American Indians by American Indians.³

Al McFarlane is editor and publisher of *Insight News*, a Twin Cities newspaper that covers the African American community. He is also president of Media Interests, a coalition of minority newspapers in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. He told the Advisory Committee that the coalition of minority newspapers was formed to increase their influence in the community.

[The] attempt [was] to bring Asian, African, Hispanic, and Indian owned . . . and oriented media together to collaborate for strength, for business, and for expanding . . . informational opportunity . . . and informational impact.⁴

1 Testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, Minneapolis, MN, July 30–31, 1992, transcript, p. 209–12 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

2 Transcript, p. 208.

3 Ibid., pp. 282–83.

4 Ibid., p. 55.

Minority editors, reporters, and news writers also talked about stereotyping of minorities by the news media. The pervasive opinion from this group was that the mainstream media both ignores and stereotypes the minority communities. McFarlane stated: "There is a bias in the reporting and in the handling of information and stories about [the minority] community. . . . [The] white press relegates the consideration of people of color to the problem category. [Minorities] are presented as an appendage to business as usual."⁵

Gary Blair, reporter for the *Native American Press*, told the Committee: "Most of all the coverage is superficial. [The media] does not get down to the nitty gritty of what is really going on."⁶ Wittstock added: "[There is] a misrepresentation of the depiction of people of color in the press and on the media."⁷

Mel Reeves, reporter for the *Minneapolis Spokesman*, a newspaper covering the African American community in the Twin Cities, said: "The press here seems to take an adversarial role when it comes to people of color."⁸ He related that he had helped organize a rally to protest the Rodney King verdict. Between 5,000 and 6,000 people took to the street. During the march about 15 individuals broke away from the main group and looted one store. Referring to coverage of the event, Reeves said:

It was garbage. . . . I kept thinking, how could anybody have been at that march and lead off with this [looting] story. It was impossible. . . . I thought that was a perfect example of . . . stereotyping done in the media and that is they really do sometimes go out of their way to show . . . one perspective.

Nghi Huynh, editor and publisher of the *Asian American Press*, St. Paul, suggested that the media continues to stereotype Asians. He mentioned specific areas of persistent stereotyping: education, employment, and government involvement:

The mass media views . . . the Asian as very good in school. . . . [But] we have a lot of people who need help to improve their study at school. . . . The mass media [says] Asians are hard working. . . . Well, that is true in some ways, but . . . it is not always like that. . . . The mass media says the Asians are not prepared for . . . politics and government . . . [but Asians] are very active, like this year when more than 60 delegates from the Republican Party will be in Houston and more than 100 Asian delegates [will be] in New York. . . . In social standards, they say the Asian is very shy and not open. . . . The . . . stereotype is not true.

Ron Edwards, reporter for radio station KMOJ, Minneapolis, gave examples of what he considered media bias. He alleged that 2 years ago the media suppressed information in a police shooting of a black youth. He claimed that the black community has been the primary group involved in trying to obtain additional funding for a public defender program, but that this positive contribution of the black community has been ignored by the media in its coverage of the story.¹¹ Edwards further held that the media's ignoring of the Committee's public factfinding meeting on the topic of news media bias was itself a definitive indictment of their prejudice:

The fact of the matter is in my community no one knew about this happening other than listening to KMOJ. We have monitored the *Star Tribune*, *St. Paul*

5 Ibid., pp. 56 and 61.

6 Ibid., p. 184.

7 Ibid., p. 286.

8 Ibid., p. 201.

9 Ibid., p. 201.

10 Ibid., pp. 188-89.

11 Ibid., pp. 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, and 269.

Dispatch and every other major entity in this town. There has been no reporting of . . . this event.¹²

Moreover, Edwards believed that the media stereotyping of minorities was calculated and intentional:

Stereotyping of minorities . . . certainly does exist at every fundamental level of media within the State of Minnesota. It is insidious, it is calculated, it is with malice and with forethought.¹³

Other illustrations of alleged media bias were offered to the Advisory Committee. Blair said he went to the White Earth Reservation to cover a story on election fraud. He told how he "had lunch with the people who stole the ballot boxes out of the two polling places . . . to try to expose the election fraud."¹⁴ But the election fraud was not the story of interest to the major media: "All the media asked the same question, 'Is there going to be violence? Are we going to restrain anybody from voting?'"¹⁵

Blair related that when he has urged the media to cover social problems in the minority communities, he has been labeled as "abrasive." What is more frustrating to him, though, is that the issues of concern remain unaddressed by the mainstream press:

I have been accused of being negative, too assertive, too abrasive, any time [I] talk for people of color. I have seen time after time after time . . . in [minority] neighborhoods situations that are just outrageous . . . I have begged them [the media] to come out there. . . .¹⁶

Mario Duarte, editor and publisher of *LaPrensa*, a newspaper directed toward coverage of the Hispanic community in Minneapolis-St. Paul, said that the Hispanic community has been invisible to the media. There was a recent local broadcast on media stereotyping, "The Role of the Media."¹⁷ Several minorities were on the panel, but no Hispanics were involved. He added that he has never seen coverage of the State's large Hispanic migrant worker population or of any of the issues affecting them.

Included in the discussion on minority news organizations was the issue of economic control. Two concerns were expressed from the minority reporters and editors. One, it is difficult for any minority news organization to become independent and speak the truth because advertising support from the white community will evaporate. Second, the government provides both direct funding and advertising dollars to media organizations. Speakers alleged that neither of these sources of revenue was being equally apportioned to the minority press.

Wittstock inferred that these problems existed because white "people do not want people of color to be in charge of how news is produced, where it goes, who hears it, how it gets paid for, [and] what the topics are."¹⁸ Her main focus was that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting did not support minority news productions.

[T]he Corporation for Public Broadcasting does not, despite what it says, support productions by people of color about people of color. We have lots and lots of programming that has the handle of cultural diversity or being inclusive of people of color that . . . are not productions that are done by people of color . . . We

12 Ibid., p. 277.

13 Ibid., p. 262.

14 Ibid., p. 183.

15 Ibid., p. 184.

16 Ibid., p. 217.

17 See footnote 3, chap. 4.

18 Transcript, p. 284.

have testified before the United States Senate on appropriations. . . . Until . . . the dollars start to go toward communities of color so that we can produce our own programming and have it aired, there is not going to be a measurable change in the images that we see on the screen . . . hear on the radio and . . . see in the newspapers about our people.¹⁹

Edwards elaborated further on the issue of independence:

Ninety percent of the black media is commercial and for profit. It must be dependent upon dollars from the various institutions, entities, communities that they will have a tendency to criticize. And so . . . it is difficult to maintain independence. . . . When you are effective [you are] punished . . . the dollars [are] cut off.²⁰

The other aspect to equal government support of the minority press was advertising dollars. McFarlane told the Committee that the government directs its advertising dollars to the mainstream press. Such practices exclude these sources of revenue from news organizations that primarily serve minority communities.

There is a wealth of money, public money, that is intended to inform people that generally goes to the white press. . . . [T]he Veterans Administration, the Health Department, etc. . . . spend thousands and millions of dollars to inform people about problems. The history has been that the spending has been in a circle that has excluded the media that serves people of color.²¹

McFarlane suggested that a symbiotic relationship between the government and the media existed. Government helps the mainstream, white media to flourish and in turn the *white*

media explains the government to the people. The result is a "propagandizing of a European world view . . . in [an] effort to maintain white supremacy."²²

Blair told the Committee that he personally was beginning to make some positive inroads at the *Star Tribune*. There was a commitment to him that the paper would "come out and do something in the community and later . . . follow up [with] a story. . . . And they have. . . . [And] I have been assured that they are going to do more."²³

Duarte mentioned that several large media organizations were starting to work with him both in recruiting minority journalists and in advertising for recruitment purposes. He told the panel that he has started to "see a couple [of organizations], the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* and channel 2 [KTCA-TV] . . . for information and some business."²⁴

Metoxen completely supported the idea that the major media has accurately and fairly covered minority communities. He felt that he had been given every opportunity to pursue stories affecting the minority community, and that other reporters, with whom he worked, were diligent in their coverage of minority communities:

From my personal perspective in terms of my employers, in terms of the people that I have worked with through my years of broadcasting is . . . that I have worked with people who have afforded me a full range of endorsement and backing to pursue story ideas that benefit all. I have been fortunate in that I have worked with people who have given me credit for being a Native American on their staff. I have worked with people who have not talked or joked about racial minorities. . . .

19 Ibid., pp. 287-88.

20 Ibid., pp. 289-90.

21 Ibid., pp. 59-60.

22 Ibid., p. 57.

23 Ibid., pp. 185-86.

24 Ibid., p. 206.

I have worked with an outstanding staff of reporters . . . concerned with a wide range of issues in Minnesota, not just affecting the rural parts of that State, but issues of race and minority concerns and African American issues and American Indian issues concerning spear fishing and things of that sort and matters concerning the Southeast Asian population in our State as well [as] the Hispanics.²⁵

On a couple of occasions through the years I have worked closely with Laura [Wittstock] on issues. . . . Frequently we will contact people in the community for their perspective on matters pertaining to people of color.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 278–79.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 280.

Chapter 6

Perspectives of the Minority Community

African American Community

The historical portrayal of blacks by the media has been far from desirable. “Burly, negro, negroid, ruffian, African animal, colored cannibal, [have been] terms used in news stories and in the jokes and cartoons.”¹ Mgeni related:

The media fails to picture people of color realistically, depict our history, accurately report news and events of the interests in our lives and cultures, honestly acknowledge serious leadership from within communities of color. . . . In short, the media is not constructively contributing to the past, present, or future of people of color in America.²

Gleason Glover, former president of the Minneapolis Urban League, and Bill Davis, first vice president of the Minneapolis NAACP, asserted that the media’s portrayal of blacks had improved in recent years; however, the local press coverage of the African American community was generally stereotypic and negative. Each stressed that for a real improvement to occur, reporters and editors need to be more sensitive and know what is happening inside the black community.

Glover listed a series of examples illustrating the continuing negative portrayal of blacks by the local media:

To look at the TV coverage of drugs in Minneapolis, I would think that the greatest proponent of drug dealings in this city were African Americans. Just looking at footage on television. But the statistics point out . . . that whites tend to use drugs and have a higher use of drugs than African Americans.³

We talk about crime. You would not think that most of the homicides in this city are black on black crimes. You would think they are white and black crimes because of the way it is portrayed.⁴

. . . When the [newspapers] show snapshots of [black criminals] . . . the one they show is going to be the worst one they can find.⁵

. . . The *Star Tribune* [recently] wrote an article about this outstanding white educator . . . claiming he . . . had a good human rights, civil rights record. . . . Little did they know that the man had the worst record of any white person in hiring blacks. . . . But he was lauded in the newspapers as a person who was a leader in affirmative action. . . . Now the damage is that they do not do the kind of intensive investigative reporting for whites that they do on blacks.⁶

Davis gave other examples of what he considered unfair and biased reporting by the media of the African American community.

1 Testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, Minneapolis, MN, July 30–31, 1992, transcript, p. 233 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

2 Transcript, p. 238.

3 Ibid., p. 330.

4 Ibid., p. 330.

5 Ibid., p. 331.

6 Ibid., pp. 332–33.

Less than 48 hours ago . . . we had the dedication of the Roy Wilkins Chair, the first one in the country. And I . . . did not see any coverage in the local media of that positive event.

I had an associate . . . with a degree in journalism. . . . He began to look through the St. Paul [paper] and the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* to ascertain exactly how many positive stories were written about people of color. And he reported to me that . . . less than 1 percent of the stories were of a positive nature of African Americans over a 10-year period.

Both Glover and Davis believe there still is not “very much headway in terms of the positive images that need to be projected.”⁹ “The stereotyping still goes on.”¹⁰ Blacks still are not portrayed as being as intelligent as white people. Moreover, this problem will continue until the media begins “to hire people who are sensitive, knowledgeable, and informed about what is going on in [the black] community.”¹¹

American Indian Community

Seven Native Americans addressed the Committee. All believed that mainstream news coverage of the American Indian community in Minnesota was a combination of superficial stories and reporting done from a perspective of ignorance. The “beads and feathers” events and the sensational attracted attention, but issues of culture, economic development, and government were ignored.

Vernon Bellecourt, Peace Makers Center, Minneapolis, said that “the media, for the most part, will often cover what they feel to be glamorous stories or that catch the attention of their readers or their viewers.”¹² He added that the press did do a credible job in reporting the recent mascot story, but that “it was a very safe issue and was not too controversial.”¹³

Tom Beaver, counselor at the minority affairs office, University of Minnesota, related:

On a daily basis we are invisible to the news organizations. The only time that curtain of invisibility is raised is when they decide to give us what some Indian people are calling beads and feathers coverage. . . . What we are lacking . . . from the media is coverage . . . on the important issues facing Indian people today. We do not see any coverage of the destruction of our freedom to worship in our traditional ways and the destruction of our sacred sites here in Minnesota and other places . . . We do not get coverage about our government and our government leaders.¹⁴

Several speakers related recent media coverage that distorted the Indian culture. Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung¹⁵, chairman of the board, Peace Makers Center, Minneapolis, related the story of a vicious rape and murder of a young Indian woman 6 years ago:

When the media came out to report on the story, they went down to a place called Art's Bar. . . . They showed pictures of Indian women staggering out of bars late at night. What the media was kind of saying [was] if [those] women didn't have a drinking problem, . . . then they wouldn't be raped or murdered.¹⁶

7 Ibid., p. 326.

8 Ibid., p. 323.

9 Ibid., p. 321, Bill Davis.

10 Ibid., p. 334, Gleason Glover.

11 Ibid., p. 326, Bill Davis.

12 Ibid., p. 368.

13 Ibid., p. 364.

14 Ibid., p. 356.

15 Identified in the transcript as Clyde Bellecourt.

16 Transcript, pp. 376-77.

He added another incident typifying the media's not understanding the Indian context. "The fact is that after 500 years, we, the Indian people, continue to be the innocent victims of America's longest war" being waged in North, Central, and South America.¹⁷ This essential story is not covered; only a superficial event such as a demonstration by "Indians denounc[ing] Christopher Columbus" receives press notice.¹⁸ He mentioned a recent news broadcast depicting Indians as thieves:

WCCO news . . . reported that the people at Canterbury Downs were accusing the Indian people of stealing their clients. . . . I called the reporter [and] asked him what does this statement mean? Does this mean Indian people are a bunch of thieves?¹⁹ . . . They apologized [and] admitted their mistake.

Nee-Gon-Nway-Wee-Dung talked about the spear-fishing controversy in northern Wisconsin and early press coverage:

In Wisconsin, when we went out to the boat land, the media was reporting that Indian people were depleting the wildlife. You remember, . . . 800 or 900 people were standing, stoning Indian people out in the water. . . . They said Indian people were wrecking the tourist industry in Wisconsin. It took us 3 years in nonviolent efforts. . . . Over 400 people were arrested, only 2²⁰ were [Indians]. . . . The media never reported that.

Those testifying at the factfinding meeting gave three reasons for what they perceived to be poor and unfair coverage of the American Indian. First, white editors and reporters simply do not know American history. Second, the white press is ignorant of Indian culture and heritage. Third, very few American Indians work in newsrooms, writing and editing stories for the major media. Tom Beaver explained:

The problem is that [American Indians] need to be included in the history books. . . . Until that happens, we are going to be having the problem we are facing now. . . . Reporters come out of a poor educational background.²¹

. . . One of the major differences between Native Americans and other people of color is our unique relationship with the United States Government. We are a political entity. We are a sovereign nation and most non-Indian reporters are unable to consider Indian nations as sovereign nations, . . . are ignorant of treaties and what they were for and what they mean to Indian people and what they promise.²²

Bellecourt supported this:

I think the biggest problem which breeds racial intolerance is the fact that Americans in general have been shortchanged in the education system. They do not really know anything about the history of Africans. They do not know anything about the indigenous people of this land.²³

17 Ibid., p. 366.

18 Ibid., p. 367.

19 Ibid., pp. 375-76.

20 Ibid., p. 379. In 1989 the Wisconsin Advisory Committee to the USCCR issued a summary report, *Discrimination Against Chippewa Indians in Northern Wisconsin*, exposing the bigotry and treaty violations against the Chippewa Nation. That report served to focus media attention on the civil rights being denied Native Americans in northern Wisconsin, which in turn largely alleviated the protests and attacks on the Indians by the local community.

21 Ibid., p. 370.

22 Ibid., p. 357.

23 Ibid., p. 371.

Part of the reason for this “is a lack of Indian people in the media as reporters . . . and in the management areas as decision makers.”²⁴ Ruth Denny, editor and publisher of *The Circle*, mentioned this as the very reason for her paper’s existence:

The main reason why *The Circle* started was because the *Pioneer Press* and the media, *Star Tribune*, refused to tell many of our stories. And when they tell our stories, they tell it wrong. They do not have the cultural perspective. They do not have the education.²⁵ And they do not have the view of our community.

Asian and Hispanic Communities

Four individuals from the Hispanic and Asian communities talked to the Committee about their perceptions of media bias. Two messages were common to the speakers. First, their communities are diverse: ethnically, culturally, and socially. Second, there does not seem to be as much an overt bias in the coverage of their communities by the media as there is a general disregard.

Albert DeLeon, executive director of the State Council on Asian and Pacific Minnesotans, mentioned that in Minnesota there were distinct communities of Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, Laotians, Vietnamese, Tibetans, Cambodians, Hmong, Filipinos, and individuals from the Indian subcontinent. He said that “it is very important to identify the specific ethnic community”²⁶ when there is coverage by the media and not to assume that all Asians are part of one

homogeneous group. “The melting pot theory doesn’t exist anymore.”²⁷

Richard Koy, a Cambodian refugee living in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, said that he believed his community was invisible to the major media. In his opinion that is a way of receiving “unfair treatment by the media.”²⁸ This disregard by the media makes such groups “feel badly . . . and rejected from the community”²⁹ at large.

Edwardo Wolle, executive director of the State’s Council of Spanish Speaking Affairs, addressed both the invisibility of the Hispanic community to the major media and the diversity of the community. He remarked that 64 percent of the Hispanic population is of Mexican descent, 5 percent is Puerto Rican, 3 percent Cuban, and the other 28 percent is other groups. In the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area, the Hispanic community has basically been invisible.

When the reporting comes out from the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* and sometimes from the *Pioneer Press*, I find that two terms are interchangeable, minority and African American. Sometimes we are not included in the mix. . . . We are . . . not in there when it comes down to the discussion of “minority.”³⁰

Wolle also mentioned that outside the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area, the coverage of Hispanics was distorted and negative:

We have a large number of Hispanics throughout the State. We find that [in greater Minnesota] some of the issues that the media tends to distort are the issues of social services. . . . The portrayal of the Hispanic in greater Minnesota is not the best. It is looked at . . . [as

24 Ibid., p. 357, Tom Beaver.

25 Ibid., p. 208.

26 Ibid., p. 400.

27 Ibid., p. 401.

28 Ibid., p. 408.

29 Ibid., p. 408.

30 Ibid., p. 403.

if Hispanic] people are [just] coming in to take advantage of benefits.³¹

Juan Lopez, of Hennepin County personnel, stressed that the key to eliminating media bias and getting coverage for all segments of the population was a diverse staff of reporters and editors.

I think if the media wants to be successful, they need to diversify. I think that diversification will address some of the issues that have been raised by many of the speakers here. And they need to tailor their product to the community. . . . They need to have a product that is different than the old one-size-fits-all approach.³² And that is what we have been getting forever.

³¹ Ibid., p. 402.

³² Ibid., pp. 414-15.

Chapter 7

Findings of the Committee

1. The news media has tremendous influence on the attitudes of viewers and readers regarding race relations in this country. There is significant merit in allegations that the media presentation of news is biased when it comes to reporting on people or communities of color. Continuous biased presentations foment unrest and contribute to racial polarization. However, when the media has reported fairly on civil rights, equal opportunity, and race relations, it has effected real positive changes for the majority communities as well as for the minority communities.

2. The unfair portrayal of minorities in the electronic and print media has produced negative self-images of people of color, and it has bestowed upon white people an undeserved and destructive image of superiority.

3. Business interests drive today's news coverage and reporting. Media entities exist to make profits, and they must broadcast and print what a majority of people want to hear and see or else their enterprises will lose popularity and profits. Although those business objectives are not unlawful, they stand in juxtaposition to, and may impede fair, aggressive reporting on minority communities and issues related to race relations.

4. Although there has been some improvement in recent years by the metropolitan media in Minnesota in covering minority communities and in depicting people of color in a positive manner, minorities are still generally portrayed as a negative segment of Minnesota society. Continued negative stereo-

typing of minorities in media presentations could lead to the conclusion that the stereotyping is deliberate.

5. The Print Media

• There is diversity among the staffs of the two largest newspapers in Minnesota. Minorities are employed in professional positions at the two largest newspapers in the State at percentages equal to their population. In Minneapolis-St. Paul, minorities are 9.5 percent of the population; 40 of the 414 professionals at the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* (9.6 percent) are minorities. However, the Advisory Committee received no evidence that they are employed in positions that influence the editorial and publishing policies of the business.

• Editors from the three major newspapers in the State admit that negative stereotyping of minorities continues to occur. It includes (1) minorities depicted in a negative fashion, (2) minorities portrayed as a negative segment of the community, and (3) issues and perspectives of and about the minority communities not fairly and accurately represented.

• The major newspapers state that they are responsive to the community concerns regarding negative stereotyping of minorities. They also indicate that they have undertaken initiatives to countervail the tendency to negatively stereotype minorities.

• There are eight newspapers published by, for, and about the minority communities in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.¹ These newspapers exist to (1) cover stories in the minority communities that the major press does not cover, (2) show the diversity and heterogeneity within the minority community, and (3) ex-

¹ The newspapers are *Asian American Press*, *Insight News*, *La Prensa*, *Minneapolis Spokesman*, *Native American Press*, *St. Paul Recorder*, *The Circle*, and *Visiones*.

press opinions and report news on local and national issues from minority perspectives.

- Evidence at the factfinding meeting concerning the print media was limited to the metropolitan areas of Minneapolis-St. Paul and Duluth. Indications exist that there may be pockets in greater Minnesota with publications, reaching large audiences and influencing opinion, that are not as visible as those in these metropolitan areas and thus are not under the scrutiny of those observers who are concerned with this issue.

6. Television News

- **Minorities are employed at 9 of the 10 major television stations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and Duluth.** Station WDIO (Duluth) is the lone major station that has no minorities among its 52 employees. The aggregate minority staffing level of the major television stations, however, is less than the minority proportion of the general population.

- **Negative stereotyping of minorities by the television news media in Minnesota does occur.** This is acknowledged by station managers and supported by a survey of news broadcasts conducted by station KARE (Minneapolis).

- **Efforts have been made by several television stations to present positive stories about the local minority communities and positive contributions to society by minorities.** Nevertheless, television news is driven by the spectacular and the sensational. These notions lead to reporting that ignores the consideration of accuracy and fairness thereby imparting images of minorities that are negative, inaccurate, and false, e.g., drugs are an inner-city problem involving mostly minorities; welfare recipients are mostly minorities; teen-age pregnancies involve mostly minorities—all false and misleading.

Chapter 8

Recommendations for Action

Susan Robeson, public affairs director for public television station KTCA, St. Paul, prefaced her remarks before the Advisory Committee with a historical perspective of the problem of media stereotyping. She noted that the issue had received several major, in depth examinations over the past two decades. It was her hope that this study of the issue would be more than just one more report. As she told the Advisory Committee:

I brought with me a report by the United States Commission on Civil Rights from 1977, *Window Dressing on the Set, Women and Minorities in Television*, the Kerner Commission Report from 1967, and (a) . . . study released this year in 1992, *Big World Small Screen, Role of Television in American Society*. . . . And . . . they all come to the same . . . conclusion in terms of the issue of stereotyping of minorities in the media. . . . For 25 years we have . . . with great clarity identified the issues. But, somehow the institutions that read these reports [continue to] perpetuate themselves. . . . I think that maybe as a society and as a Commission . . . we need to figure out another model than [just] studying and issuing reports. . . .

The Advisory Committee concurs with this sentiment, and in the spirit of that statement, offers the following recommendations:

1. The press in this country does and should enjoy a higher level of unrestricted freedom to publish and broadcast than any other country in the world. With that freedom goes the obligation not to use that freedom to limit the freedom, liberty, or advancement opportunity of any racial, ethnic, or religious segment of the community. No differently from in-

dividual libel cases, group libel (whether intentional or not) is destructive of a free press.

2. Stereotypes and bias are the result of ignorance. The Congress and the State legislature should ensure the importance of mandatory curriculum revision in all public elementary and high schools. This will provide a complete and accurate account of the historical development of America, including the many contributions of all races. This education process will better prepare the next generation of journalists with the capacity and inclination to report the news without bias. This effort will, to an extent, also help the next generation of viewers be less susceptible to media bias.

3. Media bias is pervasive throughout this country. All advisory committees of the United States Commission on Civil Rights should consider examining this issue. This would provide a national focus on the prevalence of minority stereotyping.

4. Acknowledging that the news media is directed toward consumption by the white community, the government should encourage the establishment of and strengthen minority-owned news media outlets. This can be done by either executive orders or legislative appropriation, directing that a fair share of public monies spent on advertising by Federal, State, and local governments be placed with minority-owned media. Further, we recommend that minority-owned media collaborate to achieve this end.

¹ Testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, hearing, Minneapolis, MN, July 30-31, 1992, transcript, p. 138-39 (hereafter cited as Transcript).

5. Ultimately, prejudice and stereotyping in the news will be alleviated only when the mainstream media is truly diverse. To this end we commend the efforts of many news organizations in the State of Minnesota to recruit and hire people of color. We recommend, however, that all levels of government should:

be extra vigilant in enforcing equal employment opportunity laws at news organizations, and specifically, (as part of equal employment opportunity enforcement) be alert for gradual increases in barriers to employment, i.e., educational requirements and skills, that may illegally and unfairly deny minorities opportunities for employment.

6. The media affirmed its commitment to (1) expanding the diversity of their staffs, and (2) expanding channels of communication with minority communities. To attain these goals we recommend that media organizations:

- publicly announce on an annual basis its employment staffing levels and annual hiring activity.
- monitor the terminations of minorities at their news organizations to ensure that people of color are not caught in revolving door employment practices, as these preclude minorities from real empowerment in the news gathering and reporting process, and
- solicit regularly the views of a wide range of consumers from members of the minority community and others who have an interest in expressing their perceptions of news coverage to the editors and news directors.

7. Recognizing that the majority of the television stations and newspapers are owned and operated by whites, it is important for minorities outside the media to be active participants in the news reporting process. This should include:

- assisting the media in recruiting minority reporters and locating people of color who are expert in specialized areas,
- supplying positive newsworthy stories about their communities and citizens to the press, and
- making their reactions to news coverage, both positive and negative, known to the media.

8. We strongly urge the majority media to aid the development of minority community media, both print and electronic, by working cooperatively where at all possible. The minority and majority media can make valuable contributions to each other, serving as mutual sources of (1) news and other material for distribution, (2) experience and talent in the business aspect of the media, and (3) permanent and/or temporary personnel needs.

9. The Advisory Committee understands the significance of media bias and stereotyping to race relations in this country. It has made recommendations to government agencies, the media, and to the minority community. Its final recommendation is to itself. The Advisory Committee should review this topic again in the summer of 1995 and determine whether or not the recommendations have been implemented and whether such implementation has had a positive effect in decreasing the negative stereotyping and the misrepresentation of the minority communities by the media.

Appendix

AGENDA MINNESOTA ADVISORY COMMITTEE "News Media Stereotyping of Minorities"

Panel 1

9:30 a.m., July 30, 1992

Donald M. Fraser, Mayor, City of Minneapolis
Josephier Brown, Mayor's Office, City of St. Paul
Sharon Sayles-Belton, President, Minneapolis City Council
David Beaulieu, Commissioner, MN Department of Human Rights

Panel 2

10:30 a.m., July 30, 1992

Mahmoud El Kati, Macalester College
Al McFarlane, President, Insight News
David Nimmer, St. Thomas University
Loela Johnson, University of Minnesota

Panel 3

11:30 a.m., July 30, 1992

Mindi Keirnan, Managing Editor, St. Paul Pioneer Press
Tim J. McGuire, Executive Editor, Star Tribune
Robert Jodon, Managing Editor, Duluth News-Tribune

Panel 4

1:30 p.m., July 30, 1992

Susan Robeson, Public Affairs, KTCA
Don Shelby, News Anchor, WCCO
Penny Parrish, News Director, KMSP
Steve Goodspeed, News Director, WDIO

Panel 5

2:30 p.m., July 30, 1992

Bill Lawrence, Native American Press
Nghì Huynh, Asian American Press
Mario Duarte, LaPrensa
Mel Reeves, Minneapolis Spokesman
Ruth Denny, The Circle

Panel 6

3:40 p.m., July 30, 1992

Gary Gilson, Minnesota News Council

Yusef Mgeni, Urban Coalition

Paul Sand, National Conference of Christians and Jews

Panel 7

4:40 p.m., July 30, 1992

Ron Edwards, KMOJ Radio

Bob Metoxen, MNN News Network

Laura Wittstock, Migizi

Day Two

July 31, 1992

Panel 8

9:00 a.m., July 31, 1992

Bill Davis, Director, Minneapolis Community Action

Gleason Glover, Minneapolis Spokesman

Panel 9

10:00 a.m., July 31, 1992

Tom Beaver, University of Minnesota

Vernon Bellecourt, Peace Makers Center

Andy Marlow, KUOM Radio

Clyde Bellecourt, Peace Makers Center

Panel 10

11:00 a.m., July 31, 1992

Dr. Albert V. de Leon, Asian Pacific Council

Edwardo Wolle, Spanish Speaking Affairs Council

Richard Koy, Refugee and Immigrant Resource Center

Juan Lopez, Hennepin County Personnel

