

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

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**Minneapolis-St. Paul News Coverage  
of Minority Communities**

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**December 2003**

A report of the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. Statements and observations in this report should not be attributed to the Commission, but only to participants at the community forum or the Advisory Committee.

## **The United States Commission on Civil Rights**

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957, reconstituted in 1983, and reauthorized in 1994. It is directed to investigate complaints alleging that citizens are being deprived of their right to vote by reason of their race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or by reason of fraudulent practices; study and collect information relating to discrimination or a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice; appraise federal laws and policies with respect to discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice; serve as a national clearinghouse for information in respect to discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin; submit reports, findings, and recommendations to the President and Congress; and issue public service announcements to discourage discrimination or denial of equal protection of the laws.

## **The State Advisory Committees**

By law, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has established an advisory committee in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The committees are composed of state citizens who serve without compensation. The committees advise the Commission of civil rights issues in their states that are within the Commission's jurisdiction. More specifically, they are authorized to advise the Commission on matters of their state's concern in the preparation of Commission reports to the President and the Congress; receive reports, suggestions, and recommendations from individuals, public officials, and representatives of public and private organizations to committee inquiries; forward advice and recommendations to the Commission, as requested; and observe any open hearing or conference conducted by the Commission in their states.

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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, *Minneapolis-St. Paul News Coverage of Minority Communities*, as part of its responsibility to advise the Commission on civil rights issues within the state. The report was unanimously adopted by the Advisory Committee by a 16–0 vote.

This report contains information received by the Minnesota Advisory Committee at its fact-finding meeting held in Minneapolis on April 24 and 25, 2002. The Advisory Committee is indebted to the individuals who testified at the public meeting for their time and expertise and to the staff of the Midwestern Regional Office, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, for the preparation of this report.

The Advisory Committee understands the Commission is charged to study and collect information relating to denials of the equal protection of the law, and trusts the Commission and the public will find the material in this report informative.

Respectfully,

John Morrow, *Chairperson*  
Minnesota Advisory Committee

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

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## Executive Summary

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In this diverse nation, most Americans learn a great deal about people of different races, religions, and national origins through their exposure to media. The news media play a crucial role in educating Americans about the nation's diversity, and they have tremendous influence on the attitudes of viewers and readers regarding race relations. Likewise, with most Americans living in areas that, in reality, are segregated by race and income, it is often primarily through local news media that residents learn about the diversity of their cities and towns. News media, therefore, carry the huge burden of ensuring that all races, religions, and cultures are presented accurately. When news media stereotype groups of people, bias and racial polarization are perpetuated.

In 1993, the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published its report, *Stereotyping of Minorities by the News Media in Minnesota*. The report found at the time "significant merit in allegations that the [Minnesota] media presentation of news is biased when it comes to reporting on people or communities of color." The Committee recommended that a follow-up examination of the topic occur. Therefore, this report is an update of the 1993 report that discusses improvements or lack thereof in the news media of Minnesota's Twin Cities. The Committee also attempted to assess how well the news media are covering communities of color, and to foster dialogue between news media and local communities concerning how improvements can begin.

On April 24 and 25, 2002, the Minnesota Advisory Committee held a fact-finding meeting to elicit data, perspectives, and opinions about the Twin Cities news coverage of communities of color. The meeting was open to the public and included a session in which the public could provide testimony. In addition, all affected groups were invited to participate as panelists. Although most information presented in this report was derived from the fact-finding meeting, the report also includes information gathered by regional staff through interviews and secondary sources. The complete report follows this summary.

### Coverage of Communities of Color

The Minnesota Advisory Committee had difficulty coming to a strong conclusion regarding how well the local news media cover communities of color. From the evidence presented and testimony made at the fact-finding meeting, it appears that the overt stereotyping that was cited in the 1993 report has dissipated. Many journalists, news directors, and editors who testified at the meeting mentioned the conscious efforts they make when preparing stories to assess the ramifications on the communities being covered. This awareness of stereotyping as a serious issue is an important first step to improvement. Consciousness of the problem, however, may not be adequate to eliminate the more implicit stereotyping that some community representatives argue persists. In addition, many panelists believed that the local news media lacked ideological balance in their stories. The perspectives of communities of color were often not included in news stories. This lack of coverage was also found in a study cited that concluded coverage of Hispanic communities has improved qualitatively in recent years, but quantitatively, the coverage is still sparse.

The Minnesota Advisory Committee found that Minnesota Public Radio and Twin Cities Public Television are doing a better job of covering communities of color than commercial radio and television. Although even these stations can admittedly improve, the representatives from the public stations clearly have made it a priority to cover these communities. Brendan Henehan of Twin Cities Public Television explained one way his station improved coverage: “We made race front and center. We started comprehensively tracking and counting, something we do to this day. We do it unabashedly. We counted guests by gender, by racial makeup. We would have upfront conversations on a weekly basis at our staff meetings.” The Committee believes this commitment needs to continue and spread throughout the Twin Cities news media.

## **Diversity of Journalists, Editors, and Management**

One of the observations of the 1993 report regarded the underrepresentation of people of color working for Twin Cities news media stations and papers. Most glaringly, hardly any people of color held high-level positions, including editors, news directors, and other management positions. The report found “no evidence that [people of color] are employed in positions that influence the editorial and publishing policies of the business.”

In this current study, the Committee heard testimony of the importance of having a diverse workforce in news media production. For instance, Minnesota is an increasingly diverse state with its population of Hispanics and blacks increasing 166 percent and 80 percent, respectively, since 1990. Although within these communities themselves there is great diversity, most presenters at the meeting stated that members of minority groups provide deeper understanding of these communities. Another example occurred in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks when some news media outlets found themselves unprepared to cover the Arab and Muslim communities of the Twin Cities. This event highlighted the importance of having diverse staffs. Those news outlets that had employees who were members of these communities were better prepared to cover these groups. As Lynda McDonnell, now of the Urban Journalism Workshop, testified, “I can tell you from being at the Pioneer Press, having a talented, young, Arab American woman in our newsroom meant that the paper did a far better job of covering the impact of 9/11 and the reaction in the local Muslim community than we would have done otherwise.”

Compared with 1992, the diversity of the Twin Cities news staffs has improved. For example, the Minneapolis Star Tribune had a workforce that was composed of 6.8 percent people of color in 1992. By 2002, that figure had grown to 13.6 percent. Likewise, the diversity at the St. Paul Pioneer Press increased from 12 percent in 1992 to 18 percent in 2002. In addition, although exact data were not given, presenters at the fact-finding meeting testified that there appeared to be more people of color delivering the news on local television. However, there are still relatively few people of color holding positions where they influence the editorial and publishing decisions in local news media. There was no evidence presented that a person of color holds a position of high influence at any local television news station. As Clarence Hightower, president and CEO of the Minneapolis Urban League, stated, “I don’t see a black news publisher. I don’t see a black station manager. I don’t see [people of color] making progress in other areas of media, other than we’ve got some faces on TV.”

An issue discussed at the 2002 fact-finding meeting that was not mentioned at the 1992 meeting was retention of journalists of color. The problem was highlighted during the fact-finding meeting by the announcement that a prominent local African American news anchor was leaving the station to become a main anchor in a larger market. Furthermore, it was noted that for the first time in 23 years,

the American Society of Newspaper Editors reported that the number of minority reporters at daily newspapers in the United States fell in 2000. The reasons for the exodus of minority reporters included the lack of advancement opportunities and the inability of journalists of color to do new and interesting work. After hearing testimony on staffing demographics, recruitment efforts, and retention issues, the Minnesota Advisory Committee concluded that, despite increased recruitment efforts by the news media, it remains the responsibility of the news media to continue to diversify their journalist staffs, to begin diversifying their managerial staffs, and to provide an open working environment in which people of color and of diverse ideas can thrive.

## **Community and Alternative News Media**

Not surprisingly, the Twin Cities community and alternative newspapers are expanding as the diversity of the area increases. Many representatives from these papers testified at the fact-finding meeting. Most discussed the important service their papers provide given the lack of coverage and, according to some, the negative coverage that the mainstream media provide these communities. These representatives also discussed challenges they face operating small media outlets in an arena where larger corporate media outlets dominate.

The Minnesota Advisory Committee heard testimony from Al McFarlane, owner of Insight News, and others regarding the difficulty community papers have in securing corporate advertising, which provides the bulk of most newspapers' income. According to Mr. McFarlane, with the increasing diversity of the Twin Cities and the corresponding increasing circulation of community newspapers, it is difficult to understand why large advertisers avoid these opportunities. "There's basically a boycott of black, Asian, and Latino media, of ethnic media, by major financial institutions," he said. Despite the strong observation, Mr. McFarlane and the Committee recognized the need for greater organization between communities of color in order to let advertisers know that "there is somebody to answer to" if they ignore these communities.

Another issue expressed by community newspapers was their relationship with the mainstream press. The Committee observed obvious tensions between these different media outlets, where there appears to be more competitive than corroborative forces at work. A group of community newspapers is now organized in part to try to improve these relations. Ideally, community newspapers can be an outlet through which mainstream papers could recruit and develop reporters and managers, and mainstream papers can be a source of advertising contacts and other resources for the community papers. This ideal is nowhere near a reality in Twin Cities news media today.

## **Debate over Federal Deregulation**

Deregulation of the telecommunications industry is an issue of great importance to the communities of color in the Twin Cities, and for that matter, to all communities across the nation. In this report, the Minnesota Advisory Committee presents an introduction to the deregulation debate and provides perspectives from local news media experts. The only conclusion the Committee could make is that no conclusion can be made at this point. Studies need to be conducted on the national and local levels to understand fully how deregulation will affect communities of color. As of now, the Federal Communications Commission, or any other government agency, has not conducted the necessary research to conclude what the effects of deregulation would be on these communities.

## **Conclusion**

The complete report of the Minnesota Advisory Committee follows. At the end of the report, the Committee presents a number of findings and recommendations for the Twin Cities news media, government, and the local communities of color. Although some disagreement may occur regarding specific findings and recommendations, all Committee members and presenters at the fact-finding meeting, whether they were members of the mainstream news media, community press, or the local neighborhoods, agreed that coverage of communities of color could be improved. Turning this point of agreement into a priority to be addressed is now the challenge facing the Twin Cities.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

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Television is a dominant factor in American life. It transcends space, catapulting viewers across the Nation and around the world, introducing them to diverse peoples in various settings along the way. Television is preeminent as a communicator of ideas and as an entertainment form. Just as in a moment of triumph it showed the thrust into space fairly and objectively, it can achieve equivalent standards of presentation when grappling with cultural and racial diversity or when covering men and women. Because of the medium's capacity for fixing an image in the public mind, its responsibility for avoiding stereotypic and demeaning depictions becomes central to its role. The encompassing nature of the medium necessitates that diversity among decisionmakers, newsmakers, and newscasters become an integral aspect of television.<sup>1</sup>

This statement was the preface to the 1979 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report on the coverage of women and minorities on television. It stressed the important role television played in the lives of Americans. In a relatively short period, television had become a primary means for people to entertain and educate themselves. The Commission then was concerned with the lack of diversity in television programming, including news programs.

For many U.S. citizens, local television, radio, and print news media provide the primary source for learning about their communities, as well as the world. Although programming may also be entertaining, news media provide the vital service of educating their viewers, listeners, and readers about the events, debates, and communities of their locality. Since local news media may be the primary sources of learning for many adults, they play a vital part in policy debates regarding civil rights, the public's general knowledge about minority communities, and larger understandings of the world. As Michael Parenti writes, "Our notion of what a politician, a detective, a corporate executive, a farmer, an African, or a Mexican-American is like; what rural or inner-city life should be; our anticipations about romantic experience and sexual attractiveness, crime and foreign enemies, dictators and revolutionaries, bureaucrats and protestors, police and prostitutes, workers and Communists, are all heavily colored by our exposure to the [news] media."<sup>2</sup>

If we view news media in this capacity of educator, the task of the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in this report is to investigate how well Twin Cities news media are educating their viewers, listeners, and readers about the area's communities of color. In May 1993, this same body published a report titled *Stereotyping of Minorities by the News Media in Minnesota*. The report did not cite any intentional attempts by the news media in Minnesota to stereotype minorities. The Committee did find, however, that a number of factors contributed to negative portrayals of people of color, if they were portrayed at all. In February 2002, it voted unanimously to update this report.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update*, January 1979, p. v.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Parenti, *Make-Believe Media: The Politics of Entertainment* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 4.

The Committee reaffirms the high level of freedom the press in this country enjoys and in no manner wishes this report to question the level of this freedom. The report proposes to foster discussion and ideas about how the local news media can better cover and report on communities of color. Although some media may be more prepared or able to cover communities of color and debates may occur regarding how poorly or how well these communities are covered, no presenter at the fact-finding meeting suggested that the Twin Cities communities of color were represented as well as possible or that there was no room for improvement. It is in that spirit that the Minnesota Advisory Committee undertook this project, and it is in this spirit of working toward improvement that this report is released.

## Population

The state of Minnesota ranks 21st in population in the United States with 4,919,479 residents. As illustrated in Table 1, minorities compose approximately 10.6 percent of the state’s inhabitants with a total population of roughly 520,000 individuals. This population of minorities is more than twice the number it was in the 1990 census. Percentage-wise, Minnesota is becoming a much more diverse state than it was in the past. While the white population increased approximately 6.5 percent since 1990, the African American population increased about 80 percent, the Hispanic population increased a staggering 166 percent, the Asian American population increased 82 percent, and the Native American population increased 10 percent.

**TABLE 1**  
**Population and Racial Demographic Data of Minnesota, 2000 and 1990**

	2000		1990	
Total	4,919,479	100.0%	4,375,099	100.0%
White	4,400,282	89.4%	4,130,395	94.4%
Black or African American	171,731	3.5%	94,944	2.2%
Hispanic or Latino	143,382	2.9%	53,884	1.2%
American Indian	54,967	1.1%	49,909	1.1%
Asian	141,968	2.9%	77,886	1.8%
Other	65,810	1.3%	21,965	0.5%
Two or more races	82,742	1.7%	N/A	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census.

According to the 2000 census, the metropolitan area of Minneapolis-St. Paul contains over half of the state’s total population with 2,968,806 residents. The majority of these people live in the suburbs. However, sizable numbers of minorities are residents of the cities. As illustrated in Table 2, minorities make up more than a third of the population in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

**TABLE 2**  
**Population and Racial Demographic Data of the Twin Cities, 2000**

Total	669,769	100.0%
White	441,630	65.9%
Black or African American	102,455	15.3%
Hispanic or Latino	51,890	7.7%
American Indian	11,637	1.7%
Asian	58,943	8.8%
Other	26,819	4.0%
Two or more races	27,793	4.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census.

A closer look at the statistics reveals interesting trends. Growth in Minnesota's African American population can be partly attributed to an influx of new immigrants. The state is now home to the largest settlement of Somalis outside of Africa.<sup>3</sup> Most live within the Twin Cities, as do 90 percent of all African American Minnesotans. Two-thirds of the fastest-growing minority group, Latinos, are of Mexican origin. Minneapolis' Latino population tripled in the 1990s. The state's largest Asian ethnic group is the Hmong, a population that has increased almost 150 percent since 1990. St. Paul is the core of the Hmong community, with more than 24,000 Hmong residents. Unlike the state's population as a whole, the Native American community is primarily growing through natural increase—births exceeding deaths—and not through in-migration to Minnesota from other places. About 40 percent of Minnesota's Native American population live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.<sup>4</sup>

### **Previous Studies on the News Media and Civil Rights**

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has a history of studying the relationship between the news media and civil rights. The Commission first addressed the issue in 1977 with the release of its report *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. This report came to three major conclusions. First, it documented that the stereotyping of people of color and the underrepresentation of them, as well as women, were serious problems in prime-time television dramas. Second, the Commission concluded that people of color and women rarely are covered by or report the news. Third, white males overwhelmingly worked at the decision-making positions in local newsrooms.

Because of the seriousness of the problem, the Commission decided to undertake a follow-up report on the same issue two years later. In 1979, it released *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update*. Unfortunately, the results were not much better and, in some cases, the problems had become worse. The Commission found that most newscasters and an even larger portion of all newsmakers, or people covered, were white and male. In addition, white males were overrepresented in official and manager positions at news stations. Among its recommendations, the Commission urged the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to investigate the portrayal of minorities and women and the impact of these portrayals on viewers.

<sup>3</sup> Minnesota Public Radio, "Faces of Minnesota: Somalis," Apr. 4, 2001, <[http://news.mpr.org/features/200104/04\\_galballye\\_somalis-m](http://news.mpr.org/features/200104/04_galballye_somalis-m)>.

<sup>4</sup> The McKnight Foundation, "2000 Census—Increasing Diversity: Overview," *Hot Issues*, <[http://www.mcknight.org/hotissues/overview\\_censusd.asp](http://www.mcknight.org/hotissues/overview_censusd.asp)>.

In addition to the Commission, other government agencies and private research groups have studied the civil rights implications of news media. Commonly called the Kerner Report, the *1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* was the first official document of the federal government that recognized that racism was a problem in the United States. As it was specifically a report investigating the nation's ethnic tensions, not the news media, its most famous conclusion was that the United States was becoming two societies, "one black, one white—separate and unequal." However, it also criticized newspapers and television news for failing to report on African American life adequately or to employ more than a token number of minorities.

More recently, the Shorenstein Center at Harvard University released a report titled *The American Media and Race Relations in an Interdependent World*. In introducing the reason for the report, Robert Entman, the study's author, wrote, "Perhaps for the first time since the landmark Kerner Report of 1968, the impacts of the media on race relations have become matters of public controversy."<sup>5</sup> The report focused on news media coverage of the expanding nonwhite U.S. population, possible improvements news media could make given their prioritizing of profit, and whether race should be taken into account in journalism.

### **1993 Minnesota Advisory Committee Report**

In 1993, the Minnesota Advisory Committee released its report, *Stereotyping of Minorities by the News Media in Minnesota*. The report recognized that "images portrayed by the media have a profound impact," and by studying the images that promote stereotypes of minorities, it addressed "some of the root causes of racism." The update of that report is one objective of this investigation.

#### ***Findings of the 1993 Report***

The Minnesota Advisory Committee came to the following conclusions after the two-day fact-finding meeting held in 1992:

1. The news media have 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.
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.
4. Despite some improvements, minorities are still generally portrayed as a negative segment of Minnesota society.
5. The print media have diverse staffs but little diversity in management positions. The editors of the three major newspapers in the state admit that negative stereotyping of minorities continues. However, the editors said that the papers are responsive to community concerns.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Entman, *The American Media and Race Relations in an Interdependent World: A Report on the Shorenstein Center Conference on Race and the Press*, June 29, 2001, p. 2.

6. Television news has people of color on staff, but the minority staffing levels are less than the minority proportion of the general population. Negative stereotyping of minorities does occur, but several stations have tried to present positive stories about local minority communities.

### ***Recommendations of the 1993 Report***

The Minnesota Advisory Committee made the following recommendations in regard to its findings concerning Minnesota media and minorities:

1. The press does and should enjoy a high level of unrestricted freedom to publish and broadcast.
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.
3. All advisory committees of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights should consider examining this issue.
4. The government should encourage the establishment of and strengthen minority-owned news media outlets.
5. All levels of government should be extra vigilant in enforcing equal employment opportunity laws at news organizations and be alert to barriers to employment.
6. The media should affirm its commitment to expanding the diversity of their staffs and expanding channels of communications with minority communities.
7. Minorities outside the media should be active participants in the news reporting process.
8. Majority media should aid the development of minority community media by working cooperatively.

### **Scope and Methodology**

The scope of the study differs significantly from the earlier report. The Committee's 1993 report addressed the Minnesota news media broadly. To provide a more detailed and targeted report in light of limited resources, the Committee chose to focus this study on the news media of the Twin Cities region, specifically. In no way does this narrowing of focus imply that the news media coverage of communities of color in other areas of the state is less important or beyond the need for review.

The Minnesota Advisory Committee held a two-day fact-finding meeting in Minneapolis on April 24 and 25, 2002. All concerned parties brought to the attention of regional staff were invited to participate. Among the highly qualified and distinguished presenters were Mayor R.T. Rybak of Minneapolis, Commissioner Janeen Rosas of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights, local government officials, representatives from both major daily newspapers in the Twin Cities, presidents of community journalist associations, spokespeople for local community papers, independent media representa-

tives, reporters, and other interested parties.<sup>6</sup> Similar to the earlier report, most data used and quotations cited in this report were obtained during the fact-finding meeting.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the results of other local and national studies are cited and compared with testimony from the fact-finding meeting. Quantitative data received at the fact-finding and formulated by regional staff are presented when pertinent.

This report is limited by the fact that one major body participated only sparingly: television news stations. Regional staff invited representatives of the five local television news stations to the fact-finding meeting and attempted repeatedly to obtain information from them. Two stations—KSTP and WCCO—sent representatives to the fact-finding meeting, but only KSTP provided all data requested. This lack of participation by most television news stations is particularly troubling because from testimony and data available, diversity among television news directors appears to be one of the major problem areas of Twin Cities news media. Not having the television stations themselves fully discuss this issue makes addressing these matters more difficult.

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from panelists throughout this report were taken from a transcript of the Minnesota Advisory Committee's April 24–25, 2002, fact-finding meeting in Minneapolis, which is on file with the Midwestern Regional Office of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

## Chapter 2: Diversification of News Media Management and Workforce

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“There’s an expression around the newsroom. News is what happens to your editors.”<sup>1</sup>

The news that residents of the Twin Cities read, watch, and listen to reflects the background and experiences of the people who decide what is and what is not news. Therefore, participants at the fact-finding meeting stated that diversity is important in news media not because it achieves some politically correct outcome or an abstract ideal. It is important because it produces better, more democratic news coverage. If there is a diversity of people deciding what is news, the news will most likely be more representative of the diversity of the local area. As Lynda McDonnell, executive director of the Urban Journalism Workshop, stated, “One of the great values of having a more diverse workforce—whether it’s race, religion, where you live, if you’ve been in the military, or if you grew up on a farm—is that you simply have a breadth of perspective and experience to draw on that a lot of newsrooms don’t have right now. It tends to be kind of a tight little circle. And to do a really good, responsible job of covering the whole community, we can’t afford to have such a tight little circle.”

At the fact-finding meeting, discussions on what is news and who decides what is news turned to whether editorial and management staffs of local news media outlets, which are primarily if not exclusively white, can have the same sense for what is news as the communities of color they serve. Len Witt, former executive director of Minnesota Public Radio’s Civic Journalism Initiative and now the Robert D. Fowler Distinguished Chair of Communications at Kennesaw State University, shared a personal example that put the issue in perspective:

About a year and a half ago, I was shocked to read that the “liberal, progressive” Minnesota had the worst racial disparity of black males to white males in the country when it came to imprisonment. If you’re a black man in Minnesota, your chance of being sent to prison is 25 times greater than if you are white. We had a news editor retreat, and I mentioned these figures. The rest of the people couldn’t believe it and challenged the numbers and said I had to be wrong. “What were my sources?” “Prove it,” they said, because they were not buying it. Then the very next person at the retreat said he had read that by the year 2020, a third of the world’s population would suffer from clinical depression. Everyone quickly agreed that that was a story that had to be done. No one challenged the numbers. So, why? What was going on? The answer was as white, middle-class Americans, they all knew someone who had suffered from mental illness. So, when you mentioned mental illness, yes, they felt it was a story. It was in their guts. It is visceral. On the other hand, as white, middle-class Minnesotans, they didn’t know anyone in their cohort who was in prison. It never came up on their personal radar screen. Why? Well, Minnesota does not imprison more black males than the rest of the nation, but it does imprison far fewer whites. For every 100,000 black citizens in this state, 1,463 black men are in prison. For every 100,000 white citizens in this state, there are 63 white males in prison—

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 201.

1,463 to 63. So if you're black, this is a visceral issue. You feel it in your gut. If you are a white newsman or woman, you don't. So to do right by the people who are left out, including minorities and the poor everywhere, we have to find ways to get their voices heard.

Professor Witt's point is clear. Communities of color cannot expect to have the stories that are important to them covered if the editors and news directors do not deem those stories newsworthy. Professor Witt did not view this dynamic as the result of blatant or intentional discrimination on the part of the news media. On the contrary, most of the management personnel who gave testimony at the fact-finding meeting were rigorously trying to improve the coverage of nonwhite communities and attract people of color to work at their stations or paper. However, diversity in the editorial rooms and in management matters also. The results of the minority job searches and outreach efforts are crucial. It is important to see a person of color reporting the news, but it is also important to know that people of color are deciding on the news. Mark Anthony Rolo, executive director of the Native American Journalists Association, wrote about this matter:

Newsrooms feel pressed to heed calls for more diversity in personnel because they understand or at least are beginning to understand that in order to adequately report on communities of color they need people from those communities. Yet, if you poked your head into an editorial meeting of nearly every large daily newspaper in the country you might just understand a big part of the news shutout game. Most of the people sitting around those meeting tables are male and are white. The people who decide what gets into tomorrow's newspaper, on tonight's evening newscast are mostly male and are white. And while there may be a heavy dose of sympathy for the excluded, truth is, the majority of news content that will be decided on during those editorial meetings will reflect the worlds of those who will generate it, mostly male and white.<sup>2</sup>

## **Newspaper Newsroom Diversity**

Understanding that newsroom and management room diversity is important to overall news coverage, the Minnesota Advisory Committee attempted to track the improvement in diversity at Twin Cities news agencies since its first report. The two large, mainstream papers in the area showed improvement in the diversity of their employees. However, the diversity of the decisionmakers appears to still leave considerable room for improvement. As Howard Orenstein, senior policy advisor to St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly, stated:

I haven't done a thorough survey, but if you're just talking about the [editors of the] major media outlets, it doesn't look much different now than 10 years ago. As I just think in my mind of the people of color I know on the two editorial boards, it's basically the same as it was 10 years ago, although one person has changed from the Pioneer Press to the Star Tribune. So that was, in my view, a loss. But I don't think that that has significantly changed.

Despite stagnant diversification at the managerial level, the Twin Cities newspapers have had some success in diversifying their newsrooms. According to Dave Peters, senior editor of the Pioneer Press, the number of minorities employed at the paper has increased more than 25 percent since the

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Anthony Rolo, ed., *The American Indian and the Media*, second edition (the National Conference for Community and Justice, 2000), pp. 8–9.

1993 report. This increase is reflected by the percentage of nonwhites in the newsroom increasing to 18 percent from 12 percent 10 years ago, as shown in Table 3. In addition, compared with the lack of any senior editors of color in the early 1990s, there are two out of 10 today. Furthermore, 10 percent of team leaders are minority journalists. Improvement is evident. However, as Maria Douglas Reeve, one of the minority senior editors at the Pioneer Press, stated during the fact-finding meeting, “There are two of us [in management positions]. At a paper that size, it is just not enough.”

The Star Tribune also has seen improvement in its newsroom diversity since the last report. Minority employment throughout the paper has doubled in 10 years—6.8 percent to 13.6 percent. Scott Gillespie, assistant managing editor for local news at the Star Tribune, informed the Minnesota Advisory Committee that 14.9 percent of the reporting staff, 11.1 percent of the copy-editing staff, and 18.5 percent of the photo staff are now people of color. These staffing numbers led the Boston Globe to rank the Star Tribune sixth among major newspapers throughout the county in its ratio of minority employment to circulation demographic. The Star Tribune had 89 percent parity according to this ratio. However, only two of the 33 supervisors in the newsroom are minority and no senior managers are people of color. Star Tribune reporter Dushesne Drew may have summarized the state of newsroom diversity in the Twin Cities when he told the Committee, “I argue that we’re probably doing a little better than some others, which is really a sign of how poorly our industry is doing.”

**TABLE 3**  
**Minorities by Percentage of Twin Cities Newsroom Staffs,**  
**1992 and 2002**

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>2002</b>
Star Tribune	6.8%	13.6%
Pioneer Press	12.0%	18.0%

Source: American Society of Newspaper Editors, “2002 Minority Percentages by Newspaper,” Apr. 8, 2002, <<http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=3434>>.

## Television Newsroom Diversity

Testifying at the fact-finding meeting, Clarence Hightower of the Minneapolis Urban League stated, “It seems to me that we have at least made progress with television media, in terms of getting people of color on television, news anchor, those types of things. [However], I question what kind of progress we’re making in terms of having people of color represented in other areas of the media. I don’t see a black news publisher. I don’t see a black station manager. I don’t see black folks or people of color making progress in other areas of media, other than we’ve got some faces on TV.”

In researching television newsroom diversity, Commission regional staff struggled to find the quantitative figures to assess Mr. Hightower’s perception of the Twin Cities television media. It was difficult because the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) no longer publishes reports on minority and female employment trends in the broadcast and cable industries—in fact, although data had been entered up until January 31, 2001,<sup>3</sup> the last report, reflecting 1997 data, was published in 1998. In addition, local television stations were unable to provide the information directly to the Minnesota Advisory Committee, when requested.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Pulley, Federal Communications Commission, Media Bureau, interview, Mar. 10, 2003.

KSTP-TV news director Scott Libin was the only news director in the Twin Cities region to provide all information requested to the Committee.<sup>4</sup> Brendan Henehan, executive producer for content at Twin Cities Public Television, also presented thorough employee diversification information at the fact-finding meeting, but his station does not produce a local news program, so the station is not comparable. Another station, WCCO, sent a representative to the fact-finding meeting, but Dennis Douda, although very frank and helpful in his assessment of local television news, did not present employment diversity information at that time. Regional staff's later written request for the information was not answered. Two stations with local news programs are currently undergoing a duopoly acquisition: Fox-29 and KMSP. News Corporation now owns both stations and, according to human resources director Nicki Mills, the company's policies on diversity had not been defined as of March 2003.<sup>5</sup> KARE 11 news director Tom Lindner cancelled a scheduled interview with regional staff, was unavailable for the fact-finding meeting, and did not respond to a written request for information.

The difficulties in acquiring data on employee diversity may indicate further problems. More accurately, the "window dressing" finding that the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights made in its early reports on news media appears to still prevail, at least in the Twin Cities. According to Professor Sherrie Mazingo of the University of Minnesota School of Journalism, no news directors or managers currently at television stations in the Twin Cities are people of color.<sup>6</sup> Scott Libin of KSTP disappointingly reported that, despite strong recruitment efforts, his station has no "top level" management who are people of color. In addition, one person of color who was an assignment editor left the station shortly after the fact-finding meeting. However, the station has added another African American male reporter since then. The station now has four reporters of color, and one—Harris Faulkner—has been promoted into the station's main 6 and 10 p.m. anchor job. This fluctuation between taking steps forward and a step backward seems to be common in the industry.

Although it is difficult to assess the actual demographic information of the other television news staffs, estimates can be made based on the presence of on-air reporters and other unofficial sources. For example, KARE 11 appears to have no people of color among its main news team of Paul Magers, Diana Pierce, Ken Barlow, and Randy Saver. Fox 9 seems to have one person of color on its news team out of 15 reporters. Fox 29 has no people of color as part of its main news team at 10 p.m. Based on unofficial information from its Web site, WCCO has approximately six reporters of color on staff. WCCO news anchor Dennis Douda told the Minnesota Advisory Committee, "In the newsroom that I'm in now, we have just lost our one African American reporter to a large market. So, we have an Asian main anchor. My co-anchor, Amelia Santaniello, her mother is Japanese. We have just hired a reporter who's of Asian descent. Beyond that, though, I don't know that we reflect the community at large." Twin Cities Public Television, which provides a vital educational service to the area, has people of color working in 13 percent of its officer and manager positions.

## **Struggle for Diversity Beyond Race**

Some people in the local communities contend that news coverage of their communities may not improve substantively even if more people of color were employed as news reporters, editors, and directors. Murali Balaji, a reporter for the Pioneer Press and president of the Asian American Journalists

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<sup>4</sup> Scott Libin was replaced as news director of KSTP in early 2003. Cheryl Johnson, "KSTP's House-Cleaning Follows Nelson's Jump to 11," *Star Tribune*, Mar. 2, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Nicki Mills, interview, Mar. 7, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Sherrie Mazingo, interview, Apr. 29, 2003.

Association in Minnesota, stressed that to achieve true diversity, news agencies must diversify beyond color. There needs to be a diversification of ideas:

I must emphasize that with [diversity of staff] must come a diversity of ideas. You know, one of the common misconceptions, I believe, is that communities of color all have the same voice and all think alike. There is a misconception that there is one voice for the black community or one voice for the Asian American community, which is actually so diverse that, in many definitions, people of East Indian descent, like myself, don't even qualify as Asian Americans. Also, the Native American community and the Latino community do not have a monolithic ethnic composition. You can't have a monolithic philosophical composition. You have to bring in a diversity of ideas. Unfortunately, we in the news business tend to recycle approaches and perspectives. What we need is an influx of new ideas. It is a matter of going out and seeking those new ideas, and I don't think we do a good enough job of doing that.

Although racial and ethnic diversity in the newsroom is a major step in improving coverage of communities of color, it should not be seen as a panacea. The goal for local newspapers and news stations is to improve the coverage of communities of color, not merely to increase the number of faces of color in the newsrooms. In order to improve coverage, people with new ideas of what is news and how to do news are needed. This point was made clear by numerous presenters at the fact-finding meeting, foremost among them was Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak:

I don't believe having an African American face on the news will necessarily represent all that is going on in the community. I believe there's a grassroots component of all of this that is important. And so I don't think we can simply assume when we look around a newsroom and see that the faces are diverse that the experiences have to be diverse. That's a very different issue. What that means to me is that the challenge for media shouldn't necessarily be about saying what color the person's skin is or what ethnicity they are, as much as how well are they connected to and part of the diverse communities within the city. So, I don't think we can simply stop at asking what a person's surname is or what color their skin is.

Having people of color writing and presenting the news is a positive step in many regards. However, the people of color who have reached the position of working for a network news station or a large urban paper like the Star Tribune or Pioneer Press may not have any more contact with or knowledge of the local communities of color as white, male reporters. One of the reasons for this is that many of the reporters of color in the Twin Cities are not originally from the area. In the competitive industry of news media, reporters are constantly changing job locations looking for opportunities in the larger and more personally profitable regions of the country. Because reporters of color are in such high demand, there is great movement among this group. For example, Star Tribune reporter Dushesne Drew briefly described how he came to Minneapolis: "I moved here as an intern in the summer of 1993 while I was a graduate student at Northwestern University. I could have found Minnesota on a map before moving here, but I don't think I could have told you a whole lot more about the state. I think, like a lot of people of color in this business, we came from someplace else. We've adopted Minnesota as our home."

With many of the people of color who work in the local news media being from other parts of the country, it is unfair to expect them to have significant contact with the local communities. For one, the people of color who work in the news media are professional people who generally earn higher incomes than many of the people who live in the communities of color in the Twin Cities. As

Duschesne Drew stated, “You can’t expect [the reporters of color] to suspend their middle-class privileges to live in poorer communities.” This class difference may actually create underlying conflict between these reporters and the communities of color they often are expected to cover. People in the community may view these reporters who are not from the local area and who are of a professional class as out of touch with what is happening in the community.

Second, the reporters of color oftentimes do not want to be pigeonholed into covering “minority” issues exclusively. Although race issues may be important to them, they may be more interested in covering other news events. This desire is not always well received by community members, who often expect reporters of color to represent the communities’ many interests. Mark Anthony Rolo of the Native American Journalists Association, discussed the feelings of some community members:

That is a problem: assimilation. It seems that a lot of people of color who succeed in newsrooms, we call them sellouts because they often assimilate and, in order to advance, they play that game. They don’t want to be seen as representatives of their community. They don’t want to be seen as sources, who people can go to and say, “Hey, who can I talk to?” or “Tell me more about this issue.” They are reporters of color who just absolutely refuse to be labeled that way. So it’s a problem on our side as well.

## Chapter 3: Recruitment and Retention of People of Color in the News Media

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“In general, the television news industry’s record on placing minorities in managerial ranks is embarrassing.”<sup>1</sup>

Given the importance of having diverse newsrooms and management, the Minnesota Advisory Committee investigated the efforts Twin Cities news media have made to recruit and retain people of color. The Committee found that a difference between the fact-finding meeting held in 1992 and the current meeting involved the discussions around this issue of recruitment and retention of people of color in the news media. The subject was barely discussed in 1992 and, when mentioned, it was addressed as something that needed to be taken more seriously. Based on testimony given at the 2002 fact-finding meeting, local news media managements appear to be taking measures to address the issue. Yet, as reported in the previous chapter, recruiting and retaining people of color in the newsrooms have proved difficult, although some improvement has occurred. The Minnesota Advisory Committee emphasizes that it is the responsibility of the news media to recruit and retain people of color. The Committee also asserts that news media must make it their priority and take responsibility for having an open environment in which people of color will more likely be willing to work and willing to stay.

In the aftermath of the widely publicized Jayson Blair scandal at the New York Times, the Committee also wants to stress that there was absolutely no evidence presented at the fact-finding meeting or found during research to suggest that any journalists of color in the Twin Cities were given a “free pass.” In fact, it appears from the evidence that a problem with the local news media is the lack of employee development programs, where people of color could be groomed into new, elevated positions. Journalists who are hired at mainstream media must “hit the ground running.” Thus, many new employees are lateral hires who are not provided enough opportunity to advance.

### Positive Steps by Local Media to Recruit and Retain People of Color

The Committee heard about several recruitment efforts by the Twin Cities media sources. Both television and print media representatives discussed the programs their respective companies have installed to recruit people of color and make their newsrooms more diverse. Some of the local news media had internship or fellowship programs geared toward recruiting qualified young reporters to their station or paper. Many of these programs targeted young people of color in particular. Although the specifics of the individual programs may differ, all programs attempted to attract highly qualified people to report the news of the Twin Cities. The programs served as a way to introduce those from the area to the news media industry and to educate those outside the region about the Twin Cities. Although the programs differed, the spokespeople all concurred that more and greater efforts need to be made in order to have a more diversified news force.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Kirk, “D.C. Post Lures Vickie Burns from Channel 5,” *Chicago Tribune*, Business Section, Aug. 28, 2003, p. 3.

The following presenters at the fact-finding meeting discussed the programs at their respective station or paper that aim to increase and maintain diversity in newsrooms.

- **Scott Libin, News Director, KSTP.** [KSTP] is one of the very few companies in the [television news] industry to pay interns. We do so not because I insisted on it but because Stanley Hubbard, who owns the company, insisted on it. That, in itself, enables us to attract interns who honestly otherwise could not afford to do internships. We pay them for their time. They also get credit. We don't pay them a great deal. It's not much more than minimum wage, but we provide them the opportunity that interns everywhere get. But instead of working, as I did, for the privilege of paying my school to receive credit, they work and we also pay them for their time. And they tend to come to us principally through local universities. [In addition], the reporter trainee position didn't exist when Zoua Vang [a local Hmong reporter now with a station in Fresno, California] became available, and we had to do some creative accounting. I was still young enough to be in my honeymoon period as a news director and perhaps was able to get away with some things that might have been difficult under other circumstances.
- **Scott Gillespie, Assistant Managing Editor for Local News, Minneapolis Star Tribune.** We have a paid internship that I think is one of the best in the country. We hire 10 interns each year. They are all in newsroom crafts: reporters, writers, copy editors, photographers. We emphasize minority and female candidates. We recruit at all four major minority journalism conventions for the internship program and also elsewhere. We have hired several of our recent minority interns, and we are always keeping an eye on those folks. We stay in touch with them if they leave us to go to work for other newspapers. If they get out of college and go somewhere else, we try to stick with them, and we try to lure the most talented back to Minneapolis to the Star Tribune. We've had some success with that. We recently started a scholarship program with the University of Minnesota that's funded by the Star Tribune Foundation, and we provide \$5,000-a-year scholarships, renewable for three years. Last year was the first year of the program, and we awarded four scholarships to minority recipients. We plan to continue to have minority representation in that scholarship program. It's an important part of that program. The participation includes a paid Star Tribune internship, and students must study journalism at the University of Minnesota. They must maintain a 2.75 grade point average during the program to stay in it. We're in the process right now of choosing the students for the next round of that program. In addition, we have a companywide program called the Great Workplace program. As part of that, we have a diversity policy that goes beyond affirmative action to value diversity that's not limited to race, ethnicity, or gender, but broadly encompasses age, physical disability, sexual orientation, educational background, economic status, and also culture.
- **Lynda McDonnell, Executive Director, Urban Journalism Workshop.** The Star Tribune has something called Minnesota Youth News. I think they have one student from 15 or 16 school papers who work as essentially what we would call stringers. They write articles for the newspaper. They're paid a small amount, but they work very intensely with editors to develop their skills. We had a student, a young African American student, who was in our program last summer, who has been working with them. He's a kid who's very determined and needs a lot of help developing his writing. This program has allowed him to do that. He did several rewrites to get his first piece in the Star Tribune, and no one could have been prouder of that experience. That kind of very persistent hands-on help provides students the confi-

dence and the skills they need to really succeed at this profession and go to journalism school feeling that they can be successful. That's the kind of commitment that I think it takes.

- **Dave Peters, Senior Editor/City Edition, St. Paul Pioneer Press.** Probably most visible in the area of recruitment is the internship effort to attract young people into the profession. We now have a variety of internship programs, some in conjunction with Knight-Ridder, our parent company, and some that we have cooked up on our own. Typically we get about six or seven interns over the course of a year, usually three, four months at a time. Over the past several years, out of that six or seven, usually four or five are minority journalists, largely through several Knight-Ridder programs. These are people who are coming to us either right out of college or maybe with a year or two left, but are serious about journalism and going into the field. We've hired a few of these over the past four years—maybe four or five people we've hired up directly from that program. Others have gone on to jobs with the Washington Post, the Charlotte Observer, the Kansas City Star, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Raleigh News and Observer, Miami Herald, and some others. We try to make sure that every outside opening, every opportunity we have to hire, at least one of the final candidates—and that's three, four, five people, usually—at least one is a minority candidate. So we are constantly searching for quality people that can fill those spots. We actively attend the national conventions for minority journalists looking for candidates. As a result, we have a database of people that we identify as prospective candidates. Senior editors try to identify a couple of people in particular and track them personally: keeping tabs, watching their careers, looking for opportunities to bring them here when the time comes. In addition to the internships we offer, we've been involved for years, as has the Star Tribune, with the Urban Journalism Workshop.
- **Bill Buzenberg, Vice President of News, Minnesota Public Radio.** There is a very strong active outreach campaign going on and a recruitment effort [at MPR]. I believe that it is not enough to say, "We can't find people." That, to me, is never the right answer. The answer is we need to keep looking. There are people who want to work, who are good, and we want to bring them in, and we will be stronger when we do. I started a fellowship program when I got here, which has been successful. Many people have come in. And it's working. There are ways to bring in and increase the diversity of the staff.
- **Gary Gilson, Executive Director, Minnesota News Council.** The Minneapolis Foundation, Don Shelby [of WCCO-TV] told me, is going to put up money to identify kids of color in the fifth or sixth grade who have an aptitude and an interest in journalism, and they're going to provide resources for them to learn. And if they show this interest and show some progress, they're going to get scholarships to college, and they're going to have guaranteed jobs in the news media down the line. That's a new departure.

## Retention Problems

Although it may not seem that retaining people of color to work in the news industry would be problematic, it is a significant problem in the effort to build greater diversity in Minneapolis-St. Paul newsrooms and throughout the news media industry. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) reported that the number of minority reporters at daily newspapers in the United States fell from 11.85 percent to 11.64 percent in 2000, the first decline in the 23 years the survey has been

done.<sup>2</sup> According to Tim McGuire, former news editor for the Minneapolis Star Tribune and past president of ASNE, the two main reasons for the exodus of minorities from daily newspapers were the lack of advancement opportunities and the lack of opportunities to do new and interesting reporting.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Sherrie Mazingo concurs with these findings and stated that 30 percent of minority journalists are out of the field in five years because of these reasons primarily.<sup>4</sup>

Although ASNE cited the lack of advancement opportunities as a major reason for newspapers' inability to retain people of color, the availability of new jobs was also a problem cited by presenters at the fact-finding meeting. For example, during the week of the meeting, Dave Huddleston, an anchor for Channel 4, announced he was leaving the station for a main anchor position in Philadelphia, the nation's fourth largest market. Minneapolis is the nation's 13th largest market, so it is not uncommon for local talent to leave when opportunities in larger cities become available. In addition, larger cities may present more opportunities for journalists of color to hold main anchor positions. The exact reasons for Mr. Huddleston's departure, however, were not presented at the fact-finding meeting. Also during the course of the research for this report, a senior manager at the Star Tribune who is an African American woman left for a position in Atlanta. As Gary Hill of KSTP explained, "Frequently it is kind of a two steps forward and one step back process that I witness. Even in our own newsroom, we've done a pretty good job over the years of hiring people of color and a fairly lousy job of retaining them. In our industry, it's not uncommon for people with those skills to move on to better jobs, better paying jobs elsewhere in the country."

Despite these challenges, for some who spoke about retention at the fact-finding meeting, the problem focused around the issues cited in the ASNE study. Lynda McDonnell of the Urban Journalism Workshop at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul summarized the situation regarding the opportunities for nonwhite reporters and anchors to do interesting work:

I can tell you from being at the Pioneer Press, that having a talented, young Arab American woman in our newsroom meant that the paper did a far better job of covering the impact of 9/11 and the reaction in the local Muslim community than we would have done otherwise. But without training, promotional opportunities, and genuine effort to diversify the way we define and deliver the news, people like this young woman will get tired or angry or lonely and either leave the profession or move on. It gets tiresome to be the one voice who is arguing for a particular kind of story or who is expected to find out what is going on in a particular community.

If the newsroom remains a white, male culture, it is unlikely that new reporters of color will feel engaged and welcomed unless they accept that culture. Lorena Duarte, a reporter for La Prensa newspaper, evoked a generalized scenario regarding advancement that young journalists of color may face in the field: "You have to be white and/or conform to whatever the newspaper or TV station that you're working for, conform to their culture, their internal culture, to their priorities. Then at a certain point, someone else gets promoted instead of you, someone else who happens to be white gets the anchor job instead of you." Therefore, some presenters argued that to retain nonwhite employees, management and editors must strive to broaden the culture of their newsrooms. They must provide a more open environment in which diverse people with diverse perspectives can coexist in a productive manner.

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<sup>2</sup> American Society of Newspaper Editors, "2000 Minority Employment Results Tables," Apr. 12, 2000, <<http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?ID=1460>>. In 2001, the numbers rose again.

<sup>3</sup> Tim McGuire, interview, Dec. 4, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Sherrie Mazingo, interview, Dec. 4, 2001.

Although news media representatives openly acknowledged the difficulties in retention, no solutions to the problem were proposed.

## Recruitment Problems

Despite the positive steps taken to recruit people of color to local newsrooms, presenters at the fact-finding meeting frankly discussed major impediments to attracting reporters and managers of color to the Twin Cities. One of the major concerns was the relative lack of diversity of the region compared with other major cities. Reporter Dushesne Drew, who was raised in New York and went to journalism school in Chicago, discussed this issue:

Because [journalists of color] don't tend to have the roots that many of our white colleagues have, it makes life more difficult. I don't have an aunt who lives here. I don't have cousins who I grew up with who are here. All of my family is on the East Coast. It's hard. It's very hard. This is a very different community than the one I grew up in. It's not as diverse. It does not have the history of having lots of people of color. And that was a real adjustment for me, as it tends to be for other people. When I think about some of the other folks I work with who are from Florida or from Chicago or from L.A., those of us who are here have made a pretty good adjustment and like it here. There are obviously very good things about life here, but it's different. It's sort of a different sort of sales pitch that goes on. We were talking before about recognition. Some of that is about the size of the paper you're at. We're a good-size paper, so that helps. We get the pay that goes along with that, so it helps as well. But there is sort of that constant competition with other papers in our circle.

Because of this difficulty in attracting people of color who are from more diverse parts of the country, as well as the importance of having people with ties to the local communities of color, many panelists discussed the need to nurture young students in the Twin Cities to become journalists. As Howard Orenstein, senior policy advisor to St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly, discussed:

The schools are the one place in the Twin Cities where we're integrated. They don't do a very good job in housing and other areas, but we do in the schools. And we have many people of color succeeding in our schools, high achievement, and we ought to be making sure that they see journalism as a career that's enticing to them, so that we're feeding the pipeline at the starting end and not just relying on bringing folks in from other cities who are not members of our community when they move here. I don't want to mean we're not welcoming to them. If they want to bring in a senior management person who's a person of color, that's great. But it would be even better if the person grew up here.

The local news media has made initial efforts to develop homegrown talent to work in the news industry. The Urban Journalism Workshop is one of the clearest examples of this effort, but the program also reveals challenges at the local recruiting level as well. Located at St. Thomas University, the workshop coordinates “an industry-wide effort to attract and train more young minority students for careers in newspapers, television or online reporting, writing and production.”<sup>5</sup> These efforts are centered on a two-week summer residential program for 16 students who “work with journalism fac-

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<sup>5</sup> University of St. Thomas, Urban Journalism Workshop, “Training Tomorrow’s Journalist’s of Color: A Program for Twin Cities Minority High School Students.”

ulty and professionals, write articles for publication in daily newspapers and produce a 15-minute television news broadcast.”<sup>6</sup> The new director of the workshop, Lynda McDonnell, briefed the Committee on challenges the program faces in its effort to attract more local journalists of color:

When I go to schools, what I find is that often there are not very many young men of color in these journalism classes. There will be a lot of young women because they are attracted to writing, but there are not always a lot of young men. The same thing shows up in terms of applications for the summer program. We had 45 applications. They were terrific applications, but of those only 10 of them were from young men. Also, there are certain underrepresented groups like Native Americans, which may be a result of their community paper, *The Circle*, having an internship program. I got a lot of applications from young Asian American women. So, part of our challenge is to figure out how do we increase our reach into a variety of communities that we would like to attract and have them at least get a taste of journalism to see if this is something that would appeal to them.

Possibly the most positive sign occurred during the fact-finding meeting’s open session when Mary Vidas came before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to present information about Broadcast Media Education at North Community High School in Minneapolis. Ms. Vidas has been teaching grades 9 through 12 for the past 10 years at this school, which has a student population that is approximately 86 percent African American, 13 percent Asian American, and 1 percent Hispanic American. From her experience, Ms. Vidas was able to tell the Committee that “there is a swell of young people coming up in the ranks who are very much interested in continuing to pick up where others are now, reporting at the various newspapers, television and radio stations in town.” Her good news regarding the strong interest in journalism among her students was presented along with a challenge to the local news media. As Ms. Vidas said, “I am here as well to challenge the media that they need to do more outreach to our young people. They need to be walking through the door and assuring our young people that there is a place here in Minneapolis for them.”

Some news media outlets are beginning to answer the call to this challenge. Dushesne Drew described the work the *Star Tribune* is doing in this area:

We are in the schools. I started a program with a few other folks in our paper a couple months ago at North High, which is a place we’ve been trying to get into for a while. And as you may know, both Minneapolis and St. Paul schools now have shifted to schools within schools, and they’re encouraging their principals and other leaders in the buildings to reach out to folks in the community who have expertise to help draw and strengthen their programs. North has a communications program. They’ve had it for years. They didn’t previously have a whole lot of interest in working with us. But, they called, and I went, and now we’re there every couple of weeks. We might be there every week by next school year. There are a number of us who are interested in helping some of the folks who are from here who really are going to be here long term, or more likely to be here at least, come into our ranks. We’ve had a program at Johnson High in St. Paul, similar to the one at North, for about four years now. You know, it’s not going to yield on its own the kinds of numbers that we’d like to see, but it’s incremental. It’s a piece of the pie.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

This involvement has yielded measurable results. As Scott Gillespie told the Committee, “I’ve got a wonderful little aside from the Johnson High School journalism program. Susie Vang, a Hmong student who was Johnson’s valedictorian last year, is also a Star Tribune scholar at the University of Minnesota under the first year of the scholarship program. One of the reasons she got interested in journalism was because of the Johnson program. She became valedictorian, and she was selected in our first group of students to receive the \$5,000-a-year scholarship at the University of Minnesota. So we’re very happy about that and hope she’s just a start in that area.”

## Chapter 4: Twin Cities News Coverage of Communities of Color

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If the normal daily routine of Washington journalism includes telling the audience what the president, his subordinates and key players on Capitol Hill are planning, proposing, and debating, and if virtually all of them are white, an inadvertent by-product of newsmaking will be a dearth of non-whites demonstrating competence and making major positive contributions to the nation's business. For whites, longstanding cultural stereotypes and misunderstandings of non-whites readily fill in the blanks, reinforced by residential and social segregation that obstructs development of empathetic first-hand intimate relationships across group lines. The stereotypes and misapprehensions are anything but objective and accurate.<sup>1</sup>

The stress that news media management places on hiring and retaining people of color is not done as an end in itself. Unquestionably, the news managers and journalists who testified before the Minnesota Advisory Committee believed that having a diverse staff was important in and of itself. However, possibly more important, most of them saw diverse staffs as a means to improved coverage. This view is rooted in the belief that there is a fundamental difference between being born as a white person and as a nonwhite person in the United States. The difference in perspective that results is crucial to ending stereotypical coverage and improving the overall news production of a city or region. Professor Len Witt discussed this with the Committee:

The Pittsburgh Press did a poll and discovered that 80 percent of their white readers never had any contact with black people. My guess is similar numbers are true for Minnesotans. The bulk of what they know about black life is what they read in the newspapers, here on the news, or see on the TV. Now this is where it gets really crazy. In other words, for the majority of white Minnesotans, the only understanding they have of black and other ethnic cultures is what's provided in our newspapers, radios, or our televisions. Ironically, most of the media stories are produced by news people who look and act a lot like me, white and middle class. So white and middle-class reporters and editors are telling other white and middle-class Americans about the black experience in America or about the Hispanic experience or the Asian experience or the Somali experience or the Native American experience. Common sense says something needs to be fixed in this formula. It's mandatory that we, as journalists, get out into those communities and bring those communities into the very heart of the newsroom. However, this is not easy because a lot of reporters and editors don't think the citizens have much to say. I have seen it over and over.

As noted in the previous chapter, the Twin Cities news media have begun sincere efforts to diversify their workforce. In this chapter, the issue of coverage of communities of color is discussed. Given that the newsrooms of the Twin Cities are more diverse than they were in 1992, it is not surprising that many presenters at the fact-finding meeting observed that coverage has improved since the first

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Entman, *The American Media and Race Relations in an Interdependent World: A Report on the Shorenstein Center Conference on Race and the Press*, June 29, 2001, pp. 2–3.

Committee report. However, as Professor Witt observes, local news media must move beyond merely hiring more people of color and begin exploring ways of bringing “communities into the very heart of the newsroom.”

## **Concerns About Continued Stereotyping**

Although the diversification of newsrooms should have produced less stereotypical news reporting, some fact-finding meeting participants did not find substantial change. Forums and focus groups organized by the Inter-Race Institute to discuss local news media coverage of communities of color came up with some conclusions that question the extent to which Twin Cities news media coverage of minority citizens has improved. Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, president and CEO of Inter-Race, discussed the groups’ findings:

The focus groups included a wide range of people, diverse educators, European American media professionals, senior citizens, Somali residents, youth groups, media professionals of color. Our moderators heard the same complaints over and over again. The recurring theme was a need for change. And in particular, coverage is needed that shows all groups as part of the overall fabric of community life, as has already been pointed out. It is not enough to do positive stories on the African American community during Black History Month or Indian History Month. Rather, reporters should have a deep understanding and level of trust in the community so that positive stories are happening all year.

The conclusions of the focus groups in the Inter-Race study were enlightening. The Somali group concluded that the “local media tends to be too negative on nonwhite populations.” The representatives in the Somali group thus felt that these community members do not “trust those media organizations and feel devalued.” Perhaps surprisingly, the focus group consisting of college students “said that they generally felt the media did a poor job.” Within this group, Ms. Jenkins Nelsen stated that participants made comments “relating to the news media’s stereotyping, [lack of] sensitivity, and viewing whiteness as normative.”

Throughout the Minnesota Advisory Committee meeting, community representatives echoed the findings of this report. In fact, for some participants, coverage of communities of color still relies on the same old stereotypes. Francis Fairbanks, executive director of the Minneapolis American-Indian Center, gave her reflections of the Twin Cities news media coverage of her community:

One of the things that bothers me the most is any time there’s anything to do with American Indians, they always look for the bars and the Indians who are drunk. They never come to the Indian Center to see the people who are working there. They never go into the schools to see the Indian children who are going to school. So we’re displayed in the same stereotypic manner that we’ve always been displayed, as drunken Indians. I think it goes for both television and the papers. One of the things that bothers me the most about the media is that we don’t really hear newsworthy things that are positive. We look at the negative all the time. I think that’s really not a plus for people of color. You never see the accomplishments of Indian people. What you do see is the failures. Like when they talk about education, they talk about our dropout rate. And sometimes our families are blamed, but it’s the school system, I think, that should be covered. The curriculum has to change to teach our people that we do have

something to be proud of. So it's a wide range of things when we talk about concerns of civil rights and concerns of the stereotypical and discriminatory tactics.

Likewise, Lorena Duarte, a reporter for La Prensa Minnesota, has not observed noticeable improvement in the local news media's representation of the Hispanic community. She felt that her community was still represented largely as "border crossers" who were coming to this country "to take your jobs." For her, stereotyping has not been fully addressed within mainstream media. As Ms. Duarte stated, "There is just such an overwhelming amount of negative stereotyping, of misinformation, and many times just blatant disregard of our communities. It is very frustrating at times because you know what the truth is and you wish that more people heard it. But I think most people, especially white people, are conditioned not to."

Another community representative, Clarence Hightower of the Minneapolis Urban League, concurred with these opinions that the news media still relied on negative stereotypes. Reviewing some current happenings in the area regarding public people of color, Mr. Hightower pointed out contradictions between how whites and nonwhites are covered:

It seems to me that if a person of color does something wrong, it just never goes away. A white person can do something and it might show up for a day or two, but a person of color, it shows up for the next month, the next six months, the next year. If you look at [Minneapolis City Councilman] Brian Herron, Brian's face is attached to everything that can happen bad to the city council. And if that was a white person, I don't think that would be the case. The same with [former University of Minnesota men's basketball coach] Clem Haskins. Everything that can happen bad at the University of Minnesota, you see Clem Haskins' face attached to it. If Clem Haskins was a white coach, I don't believe that would be the case. In terms of how the city is segregated, I believe that if something happened bad in north Minneapolis, they make a point to say it was north Minneapolis. But if something happened bad in Edina, they don't say the northern part of Edina, they don't say the southern part of Shakopee. But if something happened in Minneapolis and in north Minneapolis, it seems to me like they make a point to paint this blighted, ugly, nasty picture about north Minneapolis.

Interestingly, criticism of news coverage of communities of color was not limited to community representatives. The Inter-Race study again discovered similar responses. As Vivian Jenkins Nelsen stated, "Our European media professionals had some interesting things to say. We asked every group to rate the media's fairness in reporting about various racial/ethnic and national groups on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing the best. Respondents in this group—I'll remind you again, they were the white professionals—gave the media a 3.0." At the Committee meeting, most media professionals were aware of the deficiencies in the coverage, but television and radio professionals in particular felt handcuffed by the nature of how news is produced. For example, television news does not allow enough time for thorough coverage. WCCO reporter Dennis Douda described a typical television news production:

It's frustrating. In a 30-minute newscast or even in an hourlong newscast, you don't get to explore in-depth stories not only for individual communities but for the community at large. I think it doesn't exist. This market is a rare animal in that I don't know of another market where everybody competes with long-form, 10 p.m. journalism. Ours is Dimension. There's Focus 5. There's 11 Extra. You know, everybody has a longer forum, investigative or mini-documentary style of journalism that exists in their late news, when warranted. But even then the long-form stories rarely go be-

yond five or six minutes. It could take you five or six minutes to deliver your grocery list. There's a challenge. But even getting two minutes for a story rather than a minute-thirty, which is just the facts, a minute-thirty—the average package now is supposed to be dictated to be about a minute-fifteen or a little longer so you can get X number of packages in a newscast. And the average package is five sentences: two sound bites and maybe a 10-second stand-up. Five sentences.

The five sentences Mr. Doua described do not allow for complex issues to be explored. In these cases, the fear of media professionals and community advocates is that viewers must then rely on stereotypes to fill in what the broadcast leaves out. For instance, Gary Hill of KMSP discussed a recent news event that he knows needed to be explored but was not:

The eighth-grade basic skills test results were just released here in the past few weeks. We just [showed] the statistics broken down by demographics. 86 percent of whites passed their eighth-grade basic reading skills test on the first try, 61 percent of Asians, 52 percent of Hispanics, 46 percent of blacks. Unfortunately, in our business, broadcasting, we have a set number of minutes and seconds to present a story. So what a viewer may take away from that story is no more than that lineup of players by demographic and a scorecard. Because the majority of people receive their information from television, I think we still have an enormous responsibility to try and put some context with the statistics and then help people understand how they might improve the situation in their community or in their home or in their school, whether it's education, medical coverage, access to mental health or the police chiefs here.

The nature of television news production, however, does not allow for context and complexities to be aired. To provide these aspects of the story, more time and resources would have to be allotted. The same issues to some degree affect radio, particularly commercial radio. Steve Murphy of WCCO Radio shared with the Committee similar concerns in his industry:

I'd be happy to try to explain why [public radio does a better job of covering communities of color than commercial radio] to a degree, but I certainly can't excuse the level to which it happens. We do need to work harder at this. There's clearly huge shortcomings. But to explain some of it, a lot of it has to do with long-form formatting in public radio, the lack of commercials, the length of stories, which can be three and four and five minutes or longer. Unfortunately it's still true that in commercial radio, we're chasing headlines. And regardless of who it is that's involved in that story, it's making headlines. The other part is resources. I was at a recent media workshop with Melanie Sommer, who handles the Minnesota Public Radio Web page, and she was talking about the combined workforces of the MPR Web page with their news staff. And she told us that they have a news staff at MPR of 52 people, which blew us away in commercial radio. So I would say the combination of resources, and more importantly, the long-form format of MPR's coverage. I really have to compliment them. They do a marvelous job of exploring issues, those personal stories, what's behind some of those tragic stories that we cover in headline form, they can do a marvelous job of. And I commend them for that. Again, that doesn't mean to say that we can't do some of that ourselves and do a better job.

Unfortunately, newspapers are not immune from stereotyping either. Although newspapers can usually provide the larger context and complexities of a story, some presenters felt that oftentimes newspapers slip into old habits of stereotyping communities or simply ignoring issues of importance

to them. The Inter-Race study found that many sectors of the Twin Cities called for “more news about communities that were not token, such as a black section, but integrated naturally in the newspaper.”<sup>2</sup> The focus groups felt that the inclusion of special sections does not change coverage because only the group being focused on reads them. Maria Douglas Reeve, weekend editor of the St. Paul Pioneer Press and president of the Twin Cities Black Journalists Association, gave her opinion on how well newspapers cover the local communities of color:

When I was thinking about this panel, one of the things I wrote down is festivals, festivals, festivals. If there’s a powwow, we’ll go do it. Cinco de Mayo is coming up. We’ll go do that. Hmong New Year, we’ll go do that. And in certain instances, if there is a story of general interest, you’ll try to get somebody, a person of color, to be a voice in that story. And if you’re really lucky, you can get a picture of them, and so that completes the package. But we don’t think about should we do a story “for this community” unless something is coming up, unless something is happening. But, I mean, that’s sort of the nature of newsrooms. Where you have more freedom with that is in feature sections where you decide. More often than not, I’ve been disappointed in how—and I’m paying attention to newspapers, because we compete with them—the story choice, selection, what are you writing about, what are you choosing to put there. I don’t think that there is enough thought about wouldn’t this be interesting to somebody in a different community.

## Signs of Improvement

Although everyone who testified before the Minnesota Advisory Committee saw inadequacies in the coverage of minority communities, signs of improvement since 1992 were evident. One of the first positive occurrences since the 1993 report was the decision by the Star Tribune not to use Native American nicknames in its reporting. The change actually occurred before the release of the report but after the fact-finding meeting, so it was not acknowledged by the Committee. Thus, for more than the past decade, the Star Tribune has not used Native American nicknames in reporting, even in sports reporting. For example, baseball games between Atlanta and Cleveland do not include the team nicknames “Braves” and “Indians.”<sup>3</sup>

A senior thesis done at the University of Minnesota School of Journalism also provides some hope to the direction news coverage in the Twin Cities is going. In her study of both major Twin Cities newspapers as well as the Rochester Post-Bulletin, Nicole Garrison found that between January 1997 and December 2001 these newspapers had improved their coverage of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Minnesota and no longer relied heavily on the negative stereotypes that had been used in the past. She concluded, “Today, coverage of these groups is mostly positive and focuses on Mexicans and Mexican Americans as professionals, business owners, educators, homeowners and good neighbors.”<sup>4</sup> Despite these improvements, her study also discovered that the same improvement

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<sup>2</sup> Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, president and CEO of the Inter-Race Institute, testimony before the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, fact-finding meeting, Minneapolis, MN, Apr. 24, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Tim McGuire, interview, Dec. 7, 2001. In 2001, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a statement calling for an end to the use of Native American images and team names by non-Native schools. See “U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Condemns the Use of Native American Images and Nicknames as Sports Symbols,” Apr. 16, 2001, <[www.usccr.gov/press/archives/2001/041601.htm](http://www.usccr.gov/press/archives/2001/041601.htm)>.

<sup>4</sup> Nicole Garrison, “Newspaper Coverage of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Minnesota: January 1, 1997–December 31, 2001,” p. 36.

seen in the newspaper coverage of these communities “cannot be said of the quantity of coverage.”<sup>5</sup> As Table 4 demonstrates, the two major daily papers of the Twin Cities never averaged even one article a week in the period researched. It appears that reporters are more educated about the negative stereotypes that plagued articles in the past, but they are unable or unwilling to write a significant number of articles about these communities. The reasons for this finding were not discussed in the study.

**TABLE 4**  
**Number of Articles Concerning Mexicans and Mexican Americans**

	Star Tribune	Pioneer Press
2001	49	28
2000	25	21
1999	33	17
1998	36	12
1997	20	21
Total	163	99

Source: Nicole Garrison, “Newspaper Coverage of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Minnesota: January 1, 1997–December 31, 2001.”

In the statements of news reporters at the fact-finding meeting, possible answers to the questions posed in the study of the Minnesota Mexican community are presented. Maria Douglas Reeve of the St. Paul Pioneer Press discussed the complexity of news coverage as well as improvements she has seen:

Are communities of color still portrayed negatively? I think in some instances yes, some instances no. At least speaking for my own paper, we have tried to do some things, and I don’t think we’ve been as proactive as possible. We have newsroom goals. At the beginning of every year, we set out what those goals are going to be. Diversity is always one of them. So in the morning, when we come in, we critique the paper. We talk about what have we had, what have we not had, and we get to say, “Were we diverse today or weren’t we?” More often than not, we’re not. But maybe somebody has a plan somewhere, but I’m not seeing that there is this sort of proactive approach to making sure that we can say every day that we were diverse. I think that, in cases of stories of crime and such, we always cringe. Sometimes, we see something that we’ve done and decide maybe we should not have done that. In the case of that Somali man who was shot, I was the editor that weekend, and the reporter we sent over did do a good job of finding out who he was. It was decided that we didn’t want to just say, “this crazy Somali man . . .” Rather, who was this guy? Did he have a family? We got pictures of the kids. I mean, this is a human being that this horrible thing happened to. Can’t we show this was a human being as opposed to taking Minneapolis cops and what they said, their word for it? So we try to do those sorts of things. Are there cases where we could do better? Absolutely.

Another sign of improvement is the consciousness of the issues that reporters at the fact-finding meeting expressed. This consciousness seems to be having a positive effect on some of the articles written. For example, Pioneer Press reporter Lisa Donovan discussed a story she wrote about an African Ameri-

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

can prostitute who was murdered. Although stories like this are usually covered as a typical crime story, Ms. Donovan took the time to find out more about this woman, and she was impressed with what she found. She described the process of crime writing to the Committee:

We constantly are making this value judgment on life, and I don't think that's right. So, I decided I was going to go in and get to know her and to find out who she was. When I emerged from that experience, I realized the commonalities that we all have—and I hope that that's what the readers took away. This was a woman who had some problems, but she was funny. She was beautiful. She had children. She had friends that she hung out with. She would go down the right path and then verge off into the wrong path. She was human.

## **Public Radio and Television**

The Minnesota Advisory Committee found that Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) and Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) seem to be doing a credible job of providing diverse programming, particularly when compared with commercial radio and television. Bill Buzenberg, vice president of news at MPR, and Brendan Henehan, executive producer for content at TPT, listed some of the many programs that addressed issues of concern to communities of color that aired on their stations. For example, Mr. Buzenberg testified that in the previous six months, MPR had done 174 stories dealing with race and ethnicity. Included in this list was a major series titled “The Changing Face of Minnesota” and “The Color of Justice in Minnesota,” as well as stories on Native Americans in the rural justice system, “driving while black” and racial profiling issues, the needs of the Somali community, the mental health needs of the Hmong community, and diversity profiles of Hispanic Americans.

Likewise, Mr. Henehan discussed numerous programs and series on TPT that addressed the needs of underserved viewers. Mr. Henehan spoke sadly about the cancellation of “News Night Minnesota,” a nightly news and issues program that made diversity a main priority. As Mr. Henehan described:

It was regular reporting from Indian reservations around the state. It was looking at our changing immigrant population, whether it was Serbians from Pelican Rapids or Hispanics in Worthington. It was looking at the plight of gay high school students in Minneapolis. It was racism on the campus of the U of M in Morris. It was a place where even if you weren't a person of color, it was front and center on a nightly basis. We set a goal of having fully one-quarter of the content of that program devoted to communities of color and underserved communities.

In addition, TPT has a program titled “Don't Believe the Hype,” which was entering its 10th season at the time of the fact-finding meeting. Its mission is to “create a program, created by and for youth of color, challenging notions of what it means to be a youth of color in America.” Furthermore, TPT was the first station in the United States to create a Hmong language program, provides a weekly program that concerns the Twin Cities Arab American communities, and has a news program targeting the African community.

The priority on profits that commercial stations operate under makes following the example of MPR and TPT difficult. However, prioritizing service to communities of color and striving to improve coverage can be replicated. Prioritizing profits and serving the communities of a locality should not necessarily present an either/or dilemma. It will take great effort. Mr. Buzenberg, in stating the goal of Minnesota Public Radio, may have provided a model for commercial radio and television:

We still believe in something called educating the public and understanding that our audience is diverse, and we're speaking to that diverse audience, and we cover that diverse audience. We also are not in the opinion business, as much as we are in the facts and providing information through gathering that information with reporters. I think that counteracts stereotypes. People need solid information, and that's the business that we're in. I also say that it's this kind of knowledge and familiarity and understanding that really is critical to our success as a nation. The diversity in this country, in this region is a strength. And we have taken that on board at public radio, and I believe in what we do and who our audience is, and we know that our audience is very diverse. So our purpose, really, in public radio is helping all of us understand who we are.

Although compared with commercial television and radio MPR and TPT are doing commendable programs, their spokespersons and the Minnesota Advisory Committee believe there is still room for improvement. As Mr. Buzenberg said, "I will repeat, we're not perfect, we haven't done everything that could be done, and we have more to do."

## **Experts and Spokespeople**

One of the concerns expressed throughout the meeting dealt with the news media's use of sources and experts to discuss certain issues. Community members believe that it would be a positive step for news media to interview people of color for technical and professional stories. For example, Soraya Amra, president of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee's Minnesota chapter, noted that there are many Arab and Muslim Americans in the Twin Cities area who are very educated and can speak knowledgably about stories regarding medical issues, financial markets, and other areas of interest to the general public. Having people of color speak only about issues of interest to other people of color does little to educate the general public about the diversity of these communities. Clarence Hightower of the Minneapolis Urban League was even more critical:

It seems to me that the intellectual capacity of people of color, as displayed in the news media, only goes as high as things that are bad. The news media will call you and talk to you about crime, talk to you about housing, talk to you about welfare, things that are negative. But [I guess to them] we're not smart enough to know anything else. [I suppose they assume] we don't have attorneys, we don't have dentists, and we don't have medical professionals. We just don't get those calls.

Murali Balaji, a reporter for the Pioneer Press, stated that his paper had begun the process of meeting more people from communities of color so that reporters could "expand their rolodexes." However, he concurred with Ms. Amra and Mr. Hightower that reporters tended to return to the familiar experts that they already know:

There's a general reluctance, I believe, and it doesn't have to be just white, male reporters. I think there's a general reluctance among all of our peers to expand our contact lists. If we are quoting a doctor on a medical story, why can't we find someone of Southeast Asian background who's a qualified, articulate expert on the subject we're writing about? I think by diversifying our source list, we'll be able to better integrate communities of color and, more importantly, treat every individual as a human being rather than typecasting groups.

Just as participants of the meeting called for journalists to diversify their sources when doing articles and segments on professional issues, they also called for diversifying their sources when doing pieces on communities of color. This issue was raised at the beginning of the meeting by Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak. He discussed how he had noticed the media's tendency to locate the community spokesperson and interview that person exclusively when covering communities of color. A fairly recent event in the sparsely covered Somali community reminded him of this tendency:

There was the shooting of a Somali man, which received an extraordinary amount of news coverage. At several times during that event, members of the media would say to me, "Well, who do you think of as a Somali spokesperson?" And I would step back from that and challenge them and say, "What do you mean, a Somali spokesperson?" Do we ask every gay person in Minneapolis to appoint a spokesperson to speak for their, quote, unquote, common experience? No, we do not, because their experience is very different. Do we ask every person of Asian descent to appoint a spokesperson when we talk to them about that? And with our Somali communities—and I use that in the plural—that's especially important right now. And I think in the task that you folks have, one of the points I hope you bring forward is the idea that this is not the responsibility of communities to come forward with the, quote, unquote, spokespeople who will be able to represent the common experience, as if there is one. It's the responsibility of the media, and I would add politicians, to understand the complexities of communities and not assume that there can be one or two spokespeople.

## **Civic Journalism**

I want to make the point that it's not enough to rely just on initiatives like this to try to bring more diversity into journalism schools and diversity into newsrooms. The majority [of journalists] really need to change the approach that we have to one of how we define news, how we deliver news. And I would refer back to my comment earlier about the way we cover government and politics, which tends to be very focused on the sort of narrow slice of the folks who are involved: the leaders.

In this statement, Lynda McDonnell of the Urban Journalism Workshop offered her opinion about the direction she believes the news media should take for true change to occur. This altering of news coverage from starting and ending with what leaders say to starting with people in the community and holding leaders responsible is part of the type of journalism called civic journalism. Professor Len Witt discussed civic journalism with the Advisory Committee:

Civic journalism is something that really only got a foot in the door in about 1993, so it's really new and it's kind of experimental. And I know how newsrooms react to it, but I just cannot understand why. Maybe the community, just like you set up a little community center for kids or—and this could happen on the Indian reservation, it could happen in the community, what if there was like a little community center, room, place, where journalists could actually set up offices. With computers today and laptops, they can move anywhere. And I don't see why you couldn't almost have little bureau offices, instead of like in downtown St. Paul, at MPR, or in downtown Minneapolis, in a building. Have a little place where various reporters can come, right in the middle of the communities, and expose the community every day, expose the Indian reservation every day, expose the urban population, maybe for Somali or

Indian or Asian. It just seems like it would make sense if the person showed up there every day, got to know people in the community.

In addition, civic journalism stresses intimate knowledge of communities prior to events that occur when news media “parachute” into communities without any previous understanding. Many community leaders stressed the need for news media to have some knowledge of the communities they cover. The knowledge of and relationship with communities are central to civic journalism. Soraya Amra of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee told the Committee, “I also recommend that the people who are reporting on issues specific to different minority communities, that they understand what is important in those communities or have some knowledge of that community. Oftentimes a reporter is sent out that doesn’t have any knowledge, so then when we see the skewed report or the biased report or whatever, it may not be intentional, it may be just because of ignorance. And so something that they can do to help themselves is educating themselves.”

Although very few news media around the nation practice civic journalism, the contact between journalists and communities that the practice espouses may be particularly lacking in the Twin Cities. Dennis Doua of WCCO gave the example of how a news station in another market interacted with communities:

I know that [WCCO news director] Maria Reitan came from a market, Louisville, Kentucky, a smaller market, but came here surprised that we didn’t have a reporter dedicated to covering communities. She identifies it in the broader sense. Generally that tends to mean communities where specific cultures are able to thrive. That would include minorities, but it wouldn’t have to exclude the majority either. But she had, in Louisville, three reporters who were assigned the responsibility of maintaining touch with the communities that may not garner coverage.

According to Professor Witt, media professionals are often reluctant to establish strong relations in communities, possibly out of a feeling that they have nothing to learn there. As he explained, “You know, [journalists feel that] we’re the professionals. We can’t be tarnished by what the everyday people are going to try and push us to do. They’re going to corrupt the news.” Another explanation Professor Witt offered deals with power: “There’s a lot of talk about how you can get communities involved and get communities talking and we want to hear from communities. But then there comes the next line where the community actually gets in power and wants to make changes, then you’re talking about, well, maybe we’re not so interested in talking with the communities. Because institutional change is really hard to come by.”

The business side of the news business makes civic journalism difficult also. As Lynda McDonnell told the Committee, cost consciousness limits the effort news sources can make in covering communities of color. As she said, “[Civic journalism is] the kind of reporting that is often very difficult to commit to when budgets are cut, when staffs are trimmed, and when profit expectations are raised. So, the kinds of things that are easy to do—to put greetings in the paper on every ethnic label, to put together source lists with a variety of people from ethnic backgrounds—are important. They’re valuable things to do. But it’s the deeper commitment to how we define the news, how we report the news, and how we deliver it that I think is really key.”

With the cost concerns and time constraints of the news industry in mind, some ideas regarding integrating communities and journalists in the spirit of civic journalism were broached. Soraya Amra discussed one idea. She told the Advisory Committee, “A positive way that the media can approach some of the concerns that we have is to invite the three [community leaders on the panel] here or

three others and meet with us and understand the issues that are affecting our communities. As a positive thing, members of my group will be meeting with the Star Tribune next week, but on the negative side, that was a meeting that was scheduled about six months ago that was cancelled.”

The Inter-Race study came to some basic starting points where the news media and community could begin to bridge the gap that appears to separate them. The focus groups in the study concluded that there are few opportunities outside of crises for groups to meet with the news media. Therefore, the community focus group recommended that there be social activities where representatives of the media and the general public get to know each other and allow them to come together during noncrisis times. It was also suggested that a conference be done to begin educating the community and the news media.

In addition, some presenters offered basic advice on how journalists can still learn about the communities they cover. Vivian Jenkins Nelsen offered a rather obvious solution:

I’m just surprised that people think they can write about our community and never read about it. So there’s such a lack of—I’m going to say it’s almost anti-intellectual behavior. It’s, like, come, look at the story, who’s talking, who’s doing this, you slap it together. There’s no background. You know, you can read a book from time to time. And I’m not just saying that because I’m an academic, but I’m saying that because I think it represents a lack of respect to communities of color that you’re not willing to even background yourself in that way. So I’m saying that I think the education needs to be deeper than just talking to each other. I think it has to be much more intentional than that.

## **Community Involvement**

According to Vivian Jenkins Nelsen:

Consumers of news must assume some responsibility. It is important that an unfair or biased story do more than make people mad. Letters to the editor, phone calls, meetings must follow. Readers must also accept that sometimes less-than-favorable coverage of their community is simply a reality. Rushing to defend those who are wrong and always pointing the finger on racism solves nothing. When a negative story is fair and balanced, readers should acknowledge that as well.

Throughout the meeting, presenters discussed the responsibility of reporters to make the proactive steps of learning about the local communities of color. However, as Ms. Jenkins Nelsen admonished, the community must not get discouraged and become apathetic. Community involvement is crucial to improving coverage. As frustrating as it is for communities to see themselves falsely represented or overlooked by the local news media, it is also disconcerting for reporters to write insightful articles on communities and receive no response. Lisa Donovan discussed the frustration reporters feel when they do a story that is important to communities of color and receive no feedback:

In a police department study, more African American men and more Hispanic men were being asked by police the question, “Do you mind if I search you? You don’t have to say yes, but could I search you?” Most of us probably would feel like, yes, we need to do that. So I wrote a story about that, and I did not receive a whole lot of reaction from the community about that. And so I think that that can often signal to

our bosses, to our editors, and to the people who are deciding what stories go where and where we should devote our time that maybe this isn't something our readership is interested in.

Likewise, Dushesne Drew discussed the importance of community feedback on stories. Without the positive feedback to show editors that people are reading these stories, it is unlikely editors will spend the capital on producing similar pieces. He told the Committee:

Jim Walsh, who at the time was a legal affairs reporter, and I spent a little over three months crunching numbers and filling out information and requests to do a pretty meaty package on the racial profiling issue. We made a huge investment as a paper in that topic. We made it because Jim saw a story and drove it. He had an editor at the time who didn't think that was the best use of his time. It was an internal struggle over getting that story done, and it burned some relationships, some personal relationships, in our newsroom. And the stories ran. I think people read them. I know we did get some feedback. But the realities for a lot of that stuff, there are many of us, black, white, green, who see things and push for them, and sometimes we end up losing. But oftentimes, when we win, it is a little disheartening if there seems to be no reaction at all.

Both the news media and the community need to work diligently if the problems of stereotyping and lack of coverage of communities of color are to be solved.

## Chapter 5: Perspectives of Community and Alternative News Media

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Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak is a strong supporter of community and alternative news media. A former reporter with the Star Tribune and founder of two monthly alternative papers, Mayor Rybak spoke at the fact-finding meeting about the role of these news sources in society:

I really think the issue is about understanding that plural voices means more than having one or two from one or two communities. The alternative voices we can add will not only increase our ability to understand different viewpoints, but I think also certainly begin to forward different voices. And that's terribly important. We're in a period of telescoping of media, one in which there are fewer and fewer media outlets on a global level. That should be a threat to all of us who consider having diverse opinions important. That should be an especially important topic for what folks here are doing today.

In 1992, the Minnesota Advisory Committee found that most community news media outlets began for just the reason the mayor said: to offer a different voice. Community news sources were often begun because their founders wanted to correct what they perceived as lack of coverage or inaccurate coverage of their constituencies by mainstream media. The Committee believes that these issues of representation are still important to the community media representatives. However, as some community media have expanded in the Twin Cities, divisions seem to have grown between them and mainstream media. The relationship between the two industries appears to be antagonistic to some degree. Interestingly, these difficulties were most clearly expressed by reporters of color at the mainstream news media outlets.

### History

As was found in the original report, community papers were most often founded because they filled a gap in coverage left by the mainstream media. Mark Anthony Rolo, executive director of the Native American Journalists Association, said, "Why [ethnic media] exists in the first place is because, for The Circle 20 years ago, the Native community was like, 'Hell, they're not reporting on us. They're not covering our community. Maybe we can try doing that.' Ethnic newspapers, for most of them, came about because the mainstream newspapers were not covering them. So my biggest frustration with the Star Tribune and Pioneer Press was always, 'why are you the official record and we are not?'" Murali Balaji, a reporter for the Pioneer Press and president of the Asian American Journalists Association in Minnesota, added, "When the ethnic presses were formed, obviously their mission was to cover communities that were underrepresented in print and on television. You didn't see faces of color on TV. You didn't see news about communities of color for communities of color in our newspapers. Obviously, they began with the purpose to be community oriented [and] to make sure that everyone was up to speed on what was going on and what issues are important."

In addition to lack of coverage, some ethnic papers were formed to combat negative portrayals of their community. Al McFarlane, owner of the African American publication Insight News, told the

Committee, “Historically, mainstream media have tended to work to marginalize our values, our presence, our existence, our claims, and our needs.” Lorena Duarte, a reporter for La Prensa Minnesota, also felt this history as she described why her father founded the bilingual paper:

My family came to Minnesota when there were very few new Latino immigrants. Many of them had been established for a while. My father saw a great need to demonstrate that Latinos did something other than rob cars and rape and murder little girls, which is what you saw on the major media outlets. That’s all you saw. And so the reason that La Prensa Minnesota was even conceived of is because he just saw a great need to demonstrate the positives in our community, what we do right, and truly articulate our needs. Because our needs are so much more complex than the little blurbs that are kind of thrown out here and there on some radio show or on some TV show for their 30-second spot or small community involvement piece or whatever. So, we needed to articulate our needs and demonstrate what we were doing to rectify those needs.

### **Community and Alternative Press Today**

Not surprisingly, the ethnic press has done well as they have become more established in communities and as the ethnic communities continue to swell in size. For example, La Prensa has grown from a small, eight-page weekly in 1991 to a considerably larger, three-section paper today.<sup>1</sup> Its circulation has increased accordingly. According to Lorena Duarte, “Our circulation has grown. We started off as a monthly newspaper. Now we’re weekly. We used to print 2,000 papers, now our circulation is 15,000 a week.” Other ethnic papers in the Twin Cities have flourished beyond circulation size. For example, the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder, one of Minneapolis’ African American community newspapers, has attracted two large corporate sponsors, UPS and AT&T.

As the communities of color grow and the ethnic press becomes larger, new problems have arisen. One of the most serious problems for ethnic papers is garnering corporate advertisements—the primary funding for newspapers. The example of the Spokesman-Recorder having two large corporate sponsors appears to be the exception more than the rule for most community newspapers. Al McFarlane, who also owns McFarlane Media Interests, discussed the issue in detail in the 1992 fact-finding meeting. For him, the argument he made then was still valid today:

We call Target, we call Cub, we call Rainbow, and we call Walgreens, every major company, all the banks. But there’s basically a boycott of black, Asian, and Latino media, of ethnic media, by major financial institutions. They are boycotting our community; they’re boycotting our businesses. And they do it because they feel they don’t have to [advertise with us]. There’s nobody to answer to because our communities, in their view, are not organized enough to place an expectation or demand. Therefore, we have to do that.

Beyond private business, Mr. McFarlane pointed out that federal and local governments spend a good deal of money on news media advertising. Unfortunately, government advertising in community papers is declining:

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Duarte, publisher, La Prensa de Minnesota, interview, Dec. 6, 2001.

Hennepin County and Ramsey County spend tons of money with legal notices. The Airport Commission used to spend a lot of money with all of our papers. They stopped doing it because they felt like it was not an appropriate expenditure of taxpayers' money to talk to businesses in our community, when there was a white-owned resource that does it. So business as usual is dealing with the white media, white companies, and we always again are marginalized and looked at as extraordinary or extra cost. And they would even tell us when we'd make sales calls, "Well, we'll put the real ad in the Star Tribune and put a little ad in your paper, telling people to go to the Star Tribune to read the information." And we said, "Why don't you put the real ad in our paper? It's cheaper. Run the big ad in our paper and buy a little ad in the Star Tribune. Tell them at the Star Tribune, if they want the information, go to the Spokesman-Recorder, to Insight, to La Prensa, the Insight News." Let's flip this thing upside down, and then we have a beginning of looking at what moves towards parity and equity.

In his presentation to the Minnesota Advisory Committee, Mayor Rybak also addressed the financial aspects of running an alternative or community news media outlet:

I believe that mainstream media can and should do a very good job of representing the diverse communities that we have. But I don't believe mainstream media can ever do as good a job of that as grassroots media that represents the community, that comes out of the community, and that has a perspective of the community. Because of that, I think part of the work should be about understanding how do we support those institutions. Any of the community papers that we deal with, especially during periods like now, are struggling. So we really need to look at that issue, of how to economically help those publications.

In addition to looking for change from advertisers, McFarlane put some of the responsibility on the communities themselves. In discussing his paper's relatively new advertising of Rainbow groceries, McFarlane spoke of the need for consumers to pressure advertisers to invest in community papers. As he said, "If our consumers are sufficiently aware, they have the power to call up the owner of Rainbow and say, 'We're glad to see your ad in Insight News; why aren't you advertising in the Spokesman-Recorder? Are you also advertising in La Prensa Minnesota or the Asian-American Press?' If our people begin to do that, they will respond." However, it is unclear whether the organization and coordination between communities exist for such actions to occur.

### **Growing Tensions Between Mainstream and Ethnic Media**

The Minnesota Advisory Committee recommended in the 1993 report that mainstream and minority news media outlets work "cooperatively where at all possible." The community press, besides being a very valuable news source in itself, can also help develop reporters for the larger news media. For example, Brandt Williams, a reporter for Minnesota Public Radio and former reporter for Insight News, discussed the advantages he has over other reporters because of his experience with a community newspaper: "For me, being a black reporter, coming from first working on a small community newspaper, I think that gave me an opportunity to make a lot of contacts within the community, which I think has been valuable in how I do things now at public radio."

Unfortunately, the Committee recommendation for cooperation does not appear to have been followed. In fact, the relation between Twin Cities mainstream news media and its community news

media appears quite contentious and this contentiousness may be increasing, ironically, as more people of color are employed in mainstream media. It is difficult to see how these tensions are improving coverage of communities of color.

According to Maria Douglas Reeve of the Pioneer Press, the differences between the two news sources are so striking that Brandt Williams' positive experiences will likely not be experienced by others:

As far as I'm concerned, I do not think there is a relationship with ethnic press and mainstream papers. We don't tend to hire from them. We don't tend to recruit from them. And to be perfectly frank, sometimes, if you read those stories, we don't write that way. There is a way that we approach what we do, and it is different from what happens at ethnic or community newspapers. It just is. Have we, in our organizations, tried to form relationships with people at ethnic presses? There's been effort.

Likewise, Murali Balaji articulated what he saw as clear differences in the two news sources' approach as journalists:

I do think there's somewhat of an adversarial relationship [between mainstream and community media]. We in the mainstream media sometimes trivialize what the smaller newspapers do. It's not newsworthy, or the alternative newspapers tend to take on more of an anti-establishment feel. It's perfectly okay to be critical; however, one thing that we don't do as [mainstream] journalists is just look to bring people down. So in that sense, the mainstream and the community and alternative newspapers have different philosophies and a different dynamic in terms of approaching the news. [So], there has been somewhat of an adversarial relationship between the ethnic presses and the mainstream media, especially when it comes to journalists of color who work at the mainstream organizations.

According to Mr. Balaji, journalists of color employed with mainstream news media feel squeezed by the pressure of being one of a few people of color in their newsrooms. They are pressured to be representatives of communities of color within the papers, and, ironically, the same communities that they are supposed to represent see them as outsiders. For Mr. Balaji, the latter feelings are most expressed when he recruits people of color to work at mainstream press:

We're holding the mantle of peace for our professional organizations, but one of the most difficult things for the Asian American Journalists Association nationally has been to recruit the ethnic press. There are so many ethnic newspapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul representing the Asian American community. We have made a concerted effort, in recent months only, however, to really be aggressive. I made it a point when I was elected president that we go out to the community and we start talking to people. Many ethnic newspaper journalists don't even know that our organizations exist to help. But in the past it was just like, "Oh, they're sellouts. They don't want to represent their community." I've got to say, unfortunately, that we do have a burden to bear. I cover city politics, but in the newsroom I all of a sudden became the expert on South Asian affairs. I am a Hindu, but after September 11 people were asking me questions about Islam. Unfortunately, there are so few [people of color] nationally at big newspapers or big media organizations in general that we do have to at times act as spokespeople for our communities. And it's just like a double pressure. Here are our peers in the mainstream media saying, "Oh, we need you guys to step up and

“speak out about these issues,” and then we have our peers in the ethnic media who say, “You guys are sellouts. Get lost.” So again, I can’t emphasize enough the fact that I think, over the years, it’s developed into an adversarial relationship, and it shouldn’t have to be that way.

Despite these apparent tensions, most panelists from community and alternative newspapers expressed a willingness to work with the larger, mainstream press. The possibility of improving overall news coverage as a result of a productive relationship is great. However, for the possibilities to be explored, yet alone reached, dialogue must first take place.

Dialogue has begun among the communities themselves. Disparate community papers have created a group called AHANA, which stands for African, Hispanic, Asian, Native American. As Al McFarlane, owner of Insight News, told the Committee, “it’s a public policy collaboration where we try to get our people talking to each other and talking to the world and using technology to do that.” This consortium holds great promise if it can continue to foster strong ties between communities and begin to interact with the mainstream press. Nghi Huynh, owner and publisher of the Asian-American Press, stressed this potential in his presentation at the fact-finding meeting:

My suggestion is that we have to create more dialogue between the mass media and the ethnic media. The more meetings we have and the more chances we have to work together, the more detail we can get into and the better we can help to do the job. Secondly, if they claim that not enough minorities are qualified for jobs [at the mainstream press], we can have a media-training center. We would like to recruit, and we would like to support [their efforts to diversify the newsrooms]. Also, the minority media organization, our consortium group, can provide assistance to mainstream media if they don’t understand aspects of the community. For example, if they don’t know how to market with the minority community, the McFarlane Interest Group, representing the minority consortium, can do the marketing. Or if they say, not enough people are qualified for the job or are meeting the requirements, we can have a committee to deal with the training. So, our group is trying to prepare so that we can fulfill their needs. However, we do not have enough resources to make it happen. They have to provide us some resources for us to do the job.

## Chapter 6: Federal Deregulation of the Telecommunications Industry

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According to some presenters at the fact-finding meeting, possibly the most crucial change since 1992 in the local news media has been the effects of years of federal deregulation. Although deregulation is a matter of national debate and importance, the Minnesota Advisory Committee could not do a thorough study of local news media without paying some attention to the matter. The purpose of this chapter is to present some of the opinions gathered at the fact-finding meeting. A more thorough discussion of the deregulation debate, including a review of research studies, is presented in Appendix A.

For many participants of the fact-finding meeting, federal deregulation is really about money and big business. Specifically, deregulation of the telecommunications industry pertains to relaxing ownership rules regarding such items as the number of stations a single television or radio owner can possess in a market and whether or not a single corporation can own a newspaper, or television and radio station in the same market. Historically, deregulation of the telecommunications industry has been done as a result of bipartisan efforts, with the most notable piece of legislation being passed in the 1996 Telecommunications Act (the Telecom Act).<sup>1</sup> Because the relaxation of rules can dramatically change who decides what is news and how news is delivered, the issue is of great importance to Twin Cities communities of color.

Although framing such a complex issue as a dichotomy between two sides is not thoroughly accurate, it is one way of accessing the issue and shall be done hesitantly. Deregulation is generally supported by those who believe the interests of the public are best served when news media owners compete in an economic market, and deregulation is generally opposed by those who believe the public interest is best served when government rules strictly limit the reach of owners of news media. It is fair to claim deregulation of television and radio is strongly supported by large media companies at least partly because most of these companies historically have benefited from such measures. On the other hand, groups whose primary concerns regard the ability of smaller, local news media to control the content of their product have opposed deregulation. Thus, the opponents of deregulation are as disparate as the National Rifle Association, Common Cause, and the American Federation of Radio and Television Artists.

### **'Bottom-Line' Journalism**

Bill Buzenberg of Minnesota Public Radio spoke for many of the presenters when he said:

I think that the economic pressures have completely predominated. If you can get a larger audience doing X, great, do X. Doesn't matter what it is. This was not always the case. I did a book of history of CBS news during the whole Cronkite era. It was fascinating as to how much they took it as their responsibility to provide information for a democracy, for citizens of democracy. They would say, "We get to make a lot of

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<sup>1</sup> Pub. Law No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996) (codified in scattered sections of 47 U.S.C.).

money, but we get to return that with information for society that society needs.” I think that whole attitude has changed drastically, and it’s now seen as however much money you can make is what counts. To serve the citizens of a democracy with information is not seen as a value. Unfortunately, I think sometimes our government has not put on the pressure and said this is an important part. So like many things in our society, that bottom-line-driven mentality kind of wipes out a public service mentality.

Deregulation has come to mean that local news services can (and must) focus more exclusively on profits than coverage of communities, and particularly communities of color because such coverage is less profitable. Yet, for stations to succeed, they must attract advertising dollars. To attract advertising dollars, stations must attract viewers. Therefore, local news stations have the fiscal responsibility to attract the most viewers they can. Unfortunately, providing news that attracts the most viewers does not necessarily mean providing the best quality news. To many presenters, this reality causes the news media not to cover complex cultural issues that are vital to broader understanding, because such pieces are not good for ratings. Minnesota Department of Human Rights Commissioner Janeen Rosas explained, “I think there is another factor related to the profit motive driving the media and the consequences of that, and that’s the entertainment factor. It seems to me that people tend to like stories that have simple morals, sort of like where there’s a clear good and there’s a clear distinction. Complexity isn’t very entertaining perhaps.” The fear of deregulation opponents is based on the assumption that large corporations will pay little attention to any contribution a news program makes beyond its profit margins. This assumption is a matter of debate.

However, the participants are not alone in these feelings. A poll by the Pew Research Center examined how perceptions of news media employees about their industry have been changing. The results appear to show that people in the industry have identified a change since the first round of deregulation took place in 1996. The poll found that “Bottom-line pressures have hit television and radio news especially hard. The number of local television people who see a negative fallout from financial strains has almost doubled since 1995, rising to 46 percent in this latest survey from 24 percent in 1995. Similarly, a 53 percent majority of those in national television news now say that bottom-line pressure is hurting the quality of news, up from 37 percent who said so in 1995.”<sup>2</sup>

Some presenters echoed these findings in their statement. For example, Bill Buzenberg stated that “too many of our colleagues use that [television and radio station] license and see it as a license to make money using the public’s airwaves, as opposed to taking on the responsibility that goes with that.” Brendan Henehan of Twin Cities Public Television offered this reflection of the effects of deregulation on serving public interests in commercial television:

I think that with many commercial broadcasters, public responsibility has been greatly diminished in the last few decades, and I think that’s greatly unfortunate. I think commercial television stations feel much less pressure to do any number of things in the public interest. As somebody who believes in the First Amendment, there are things that I think are attractive about deregulation. But at the same time, acting in the public good, in the public interest, is something that I think has been lost.

As seen in Table 5, with the exception of Hubbard Broadcasting, the owners of Twin Cities television stations are large multinational corporations. Some people fear that these owners will sacrifice the quality and quantity of local coverage of communities of color in order to boost profit margins.

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<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, “Striking the Balance, Audience Interests, Business Pressures and Journalists’ Values,” <<http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=317>>.

Janeen Rosas expressed her perspective of the business of journalism by saying, “I heard it said that advertisers are the customers of the media, not the readers, not the viewers, but rather the readers are the product that the media delivers to the advertisers. The stories are not the product. They’re the means of delivering the product.”

Some participants believed that journalism geared toward profit blurs the distinction between journalism and entertainment. A number of presenters at the fact-finding meeting seemed to agree with former FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson who wrote, “Profit pressures produce a dumbing down of journalism.”<sup>3</sup> Conversely, other presenters, acknowledging that station owners do place a priority on profits, believed that such a setup could benefit communities. They argue it is in the owners’ financial interest to adequately cover all communities. Al McFarlane, president of Insight News, did not directly address deregulation but reminded the Advisory Committee, “The buying power of people of color in Minnesota—and it’s primarily in the Twin Cities—is well in excess of \$6 billion a year.”

The opponents of deregulation were particularly concerned with the perceived elimination of local public affairs programs. Although no statistics were presented to prove that public affairs programming has declined as a result of deregulation, even representatives of the local television stations implied that it did occur. At the fact-finding meeting, KSTP news director Scott Libin briefly discussed a public affairs program at his station, which is one of the few remaining:

I would also be remiss if I didn’t mention that we do have one of those public affairs programs, one of those rare surviving ones. In fact, it’s relatively new, an hourlong program, year-round, called “At Issue” with Tom Hauser that airs Sunday mornings on both our stations. We do it for reasons of the highest journalistic principles. We do it because [owner] Stanley Hubbard said so. It doesn’t make any money. Yet, maybe some day it will. But he does it because he believes in it, and we’re happy to support that, obviously. If we were a publicly held company governed by a distant board of stockholders and directors, I doubt very much that we would be doing “At Issue,” and I doubt we would be paying interns. We can because we are locally owned and operated by the same family that put us on the air 54 years ago.

**TABLE 5**  
**Twin Cities Local Television Stations’ Owner Information**

<b>Station</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Owner’s Annual Revenue, 2001</b>	<b>Number of Stations Owned</b>
KARE	Gannett	\$6.3 billion	22
WCCO	Viacom	\$23.2 billion	39
KSTP	Hubbard Broadcasting	\$600 million	8
KMSP and WFTC	News Corporation (FOX)	\$16 billion	35

Sources: “Gannett Co., Inc. Reports Fourth-Quarter and Full-Year Results,” Feb. 7, 2002, <[www.gannett.com/street/4q01.htm](http://www.gannett.com/street/4q01.htm)>; “About Gannett: Company Profile,” <[www.gannett.com/map/gan007.htm](http://www.gannett.com/map/gan007.htm)>; “Viacom Reports Full Year and Fourth Quarter 2001 Results,” Feb. 13, 2002, <[www.viacom.com/pdf/qr01q4.pdf](http://www.viacom.com/pdf/qr01q4.pdf)>; “The Facts: Viacom Inc.,” <[www.viacom.com/thefacts.tin](http://www.viacom.com/thefacts.tin)>; Hoover’s Online, “Hubbard Broadcasting, Inc.,” <[www.hoovers.com/co/capsule/3/0,2163,58653,00.html](http://www.hoovers.com/co/capsule/3/0,2163,58653,00.html)>; “Corporate Profile,” <[www.newscorp.com/investor/index.html](http://www.newscorp.com/investor/index.html)>; “Fox Entertainment Group: Annual Report 2002,” <[www.newscorp.com/feg/fegreport2002/fox\\_annual2002.pdf](http://www.newscorp.com/feg/fegreport2002/fox_annual2002.pdf)>.

Other participants of the fact-finding meeting argued that news media’s concern with profit might end up aiding coverage of communities of color. In one way, allowing a single owner to control more

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Johnson, “Take This Media . . . Please!” *The Nation*, vol. 274, no. 1, Jan. 7/14, 2003, p. 36.

than one station in a given market may encourage more diverse programming. In order not to compete for similar audiences, an owner may develop stations catering to the needs of different communities of viewers.

Presenters argued that ignoring the concerns of growing communities would not make practical business sense. Gary Gilson, a critic of many deregulation measures, recognized the business implications of poor coverage of minority communities: "I think that the companies that own these outlets ought to be persuaded that their own economic future depends on the stability and growth of the neighborhoods in their community and the quality of relations between the races." Expanding on this observation, Howard Orenstein, senior policy advisor to St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly, stated that the large media organizations would have to diversify their programming to survive:

In St. Paul today, cultural minorities comprise 35 percent of our population. The mayor sees that as a very positive thing for the city of St. Paul, but also in terms of this debate, the buying power of people of color and minority communities is steadily increasing, and there's a growing intolerance of the negative depiction of minority communities. This intolerance, the mayor feels, will have a negative impact on the financial survival of the major media outlets if these communities rely on the major outlets less for information. So, if nothing else, we feel that there will be positive things happening as committees organize and achieve the power that their numbers give them.

Gary Hill, director of investigations and special reports at KSTP-TV, recognized the balancing act between today's ratings and tomorrow's viewers in which local news programs find themselves. He hopes that the major media conglomerates have the foresight not to alienate the growing minority communities:

Broadcast news is ever more competitive. We now have how many newscasts at 10 o'clock? I think there's four. And I think there's three at 9 o'clock, in prime time, on three different channels. So the market gets ever more fragmented. And to the extent that this might impact some of the decision making in the newsroom, you're always trying to reach the broadest audience. So in some cases you might not serve the minority communities as well as you could if you're selecting stories that reach out across everyone's interest. Having said that, I think, in the long run [trying to only reach the majority interests] is a self-defeating way of programming. You are not much better off if you don't service the fastest growing segment, which is minority populations. [If we do not,] we are going to be out of the race in the long run.

## **Radio and Internet**

Until the 1980s, one company could legally own no more than seven AM and seven FM stations. In 2001, one company, Clear Channel, owns more than 1,200. Profit at many stations is promoted by stripping staff to the bone; some of these places have barely any employees and no local programming. They are computerized corporate jukeboxes, reverse ATM machines. Their broadcast bay is filled with the canned and the bland, a puree prepared at a place far away. Now we have hundreds of radio stations creating a profit with virtually no on-air personnel and no newsroom, no Asso-

ciated Press wire, no birth announcements, no obits. And not least, no coverage of the police, the PTA or the Lions Club and no high school football scores.<sup>4</sup>

Possibly the media most affected by deregulation has been radio. A few large companies have bought local radio stations and operate them from afar. In fact, four corporations control the music and news delivered to over half the radio audience.<sup>5</sup> In the Twin Cities, one station controls over 12 percent of the market share, as shown in Table 6. The radio stations remaining with their own newsrooms are usually small. Steve Murphy, managing editor of WCCO Radio in Minneapolis, stated at the fact-finding meeting that his station has seven people on staff. Comparatively, Mr. Murphy stated that the local Minnesota Public Radio news station has a staff of 52.

Gary Gilson of the Minnesota News Council was concerned about the change in radio because he believed that communities of color depended on radio for their news more than other communities. He had a very critical view of the changes he has witnessed in radio:

The great overlooked resource is radio. Now radio news has vanished. WCCO Radio has a news department, but it's a shadow of its former self. KSTP Radio used to have a news department. It doesn't anymore. They get the television people to talk through a microphone from a different part of the building. It appears on the radio. But it's in the form usually of a conversation with a talk show host who's filled with opinions. So it's all distorted by the time it gets to the audience. Before deregulation happened, all radio stations used to have to broadcast news, farm news, religion news, all kinds of news. They don't anymore. It's very expensive, and as soon as they were deregulated and saw that they could get rid of it, they got rid of it because it cut into profits. But radio is important, especially in communities of color. And there's got to be a way to create opportunities for ownership and service. That's the great untapped resource now or ignored resource, radio.

Interestingly, minority ownership of radio stations has increased recently despite the rapid growth of the large corporate radio owners. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration study found that:

All minority groups have increased their radio ownership since 1998. In terms of absolute growth, the number of reported Hispanic American-owned stations increased the most with the addition of 57 stations, followed by an increase of 43 African American-owned stations, 18 Asian American-owned, and three Native American-owned. Excluding the effect of the improved search methodology, however, the number of African American-owned stations increased by 15 percent, Hispanic American-owned stations 19 percent, Asian American-owned stations by 300 percent, and Native American-owned by 25 percent. The large increase in Asian American-owned stations was mostly the result of purchases by one large owner.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Phil Donahue, "Take This Media . . . Please!" *The Nation*, vol. 274, no. 1, Jan. 7/14, 2003, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> NOW with Bill Moyers, "Transcript: Virtual Radio," Apr. 26, 2002, <[http://www.pbs.org/nov/printable/transcript\\_clearc\\_print.html](http://www.pbs.org/nov/printable/transcript_clearc_print.html)>.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Changes, Challenges, and Charting New Courses: Minority Commercial Broadcast Ownership in the United States*, December 2000, p. 36, <<http://search.ntia.doc.gov/pdf/mtdpreportv2.pdf>>.

However, the report concluded, “Consolidation still threatens the survival of most minority owners, who as primarily single-station operators find it difficult to compete against large group owners.”<sup>7</sup>

**TABLE 6**  
**Ownership Market Share of Radio Stations in the Twin Cities**

	<b>Stations</b>	<b>Share</b>
Clear Channel Communications, Inc.	7	12.28%
Walt Disney Co.	5	8.77%
Viacom Inc.	4	7.02%
Salem Communications Corp.	3	5.26%
1400, Inc.	2	3.51%
Radio Southern Minnesota, LLC	2	3.51%
Northwestern College	2	3.51%
Other/Independent	32	56.14%

Source: The Center for Public Integrity, “Well Connected: The Databases,” <<http://www.openairwaves.org/telecom/analysis/default.aspx>>.

The advent and growth of cable television and the Internet provided some of the impetus for deregulation measures. Cable television now provides hundreds of stations to subscribers who can afford the monthly premiums. The number of people of color who have cable service is not known, so it is difficult to understand thoroughly how cable television has affected them. However, the number of people of color with cable television service may not be as great as some think. Brendan Henehan stated, “Half of Minnesotans still don’t have cable. I think it’s easy to get caught up in America where we assume everyone has 500 channels. There are still a great number of Minnesotans that just have over-the-air service.” With the Internet, anyone with a computer and an Internet provider can receive news from around the world at anytime. However, it should not be assumed that the Internet is a viable news option for communities of color at this time. According to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s 2001 data, Minnesota ranks second in the nation in percentage of population with Internet access, but this second-place ranking equates to only 64 percent of the population.<sup>8</sup> Currently, the Internet may not be option for a significant percentage of people of color who still rely primarily on radio and over-the-air television for news. In 2000, the Commerce Department found that 23.5 percent of African American households had Internet usage, whereas the total number of households nationally that used the Internet was 41.5 percent.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> The Progressive Policy Institute, “The Digital Economy,” <[http://www.neweconomyindex.org/states/2002/04\\_digital\\_02\\_print.pdf](http://www.neweconomyindex.org/states/2002/04_digital_02_print.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, “Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide,” <<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn99/contents.html>>.

## Chapter 7: Findings and Recommendations

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In this report, the Minnesota Advisory Committee set out to accomplish three tasks: update its 1993 report on the same subject; determine how well the Twin Cities news media are educating their viewers, listeners, and readers about the area's communities of color; and foster continued discussion and ideas on how the local news media can better cover the diverse communities of the Twin Cities. In this chapter, the Committee presents its findings and recommendations.

### 1. General Findings and Recommendations

#### *Findings*

- 1.1 Twin Cities residents rely to a large extent on the local news media for their understanding of diverse communities. Residents often learn about other races, cultures, and religions through their exposure to local news media. Therefore, the news media play a vital educative role and must pursue this role in a nonstereotypical manner.
- 1.2 Many people testified and some evidence was presented to conclude that explicit racial stereotyping is not as problematic as it was in 1992. However, the coverage of communities of color continues to be compromised because the communities' perspectives are oftentimes not given equal consideration. In addition, less explicit stereotyping still occurs. Some evidence implies that although quality of coverage has improved, quantity of coverage is lacking.
- 1.3 Given that the 2000 census found a 127 percent increase in the number of people of color in the state compared with 1990, local news media risk making themselves irrelevant to a large segment of society if they do not take diversity seriously. Minnesota is a state with a large white majority, but it is swiftly becoming more and more diverse. News media that can reflect this diversity will likely be the most successful. Alienating minority communities may prove to be fiscally irresponsible in addition to being socially irresponsible.
- 1.4 Diversification of newsrooms and management is vital to improving coverage of communities of color. The burden of diversifying news media staffs, especially management and editorial staffs, falls on the news media outlets themselves. The Minnesota Advisory Committee notes that the local news media have made concerted efforts to recruit people of color, and it recognizes the difficulties inherent in recruiting diverse people to the Twin Cities. Although quantitative progress was presented regarding the diversification of newsrooms, the local news media have not adequately diversified their management staffs.
- 1.5 Retention of people of color in the news industry is a current problem that was not cited at the 1992 meeting. From testimony presented in 2002, many people of color do not remain in their positions because of a lack of opportunity for advancement and inability to do new and interesting stories.

- 1.6 Deregulation of the telecommunications industry affects all news outlets. Although the deregulation measures target television and radio, cross-ownership rules apply to local newspapers as well. Looking at the effects of radio deregulation in 1996, the Minnesota Advisory Committee sees a genuine concern that deregulation measures may decrease competition and encourage large, international media corporations to control local news. The effect of deregulation on communities of color, however, cannot be determined at this time.

### ***Recommendations***

- 1.1 News media management staffs must be diversified. People of color need to have input regarding what is news in the Twin Cities. In addition to improving the coverage of communities of color, diversifying management may also ease the difficulties local news media experience recruiting and retaining people of color.
- 1.2 Local news media should offer paid internship programs, as some already do, to provide opportunity to people who may not be able to work for free because of economic status. Such an effort may increase the diversity of students who enter the journalism field.
- 1.3 Local news media should begin to implement civic journalism ideas to alter the way news is done. There are cost-effective ways to bring the community into the newsroom. A simple first step would be for news media outlets to be sure reporters are educated about the diverse communities and cultures of the Twin Cities. Journalists who cover communities could work, at least some of the time, in the communities in order to establish a rapport. Incorporating common technology such as cell phones and laptop computers would make this economically feasible. Furthermore, the large mainstream press could host luncheons and other gatherings where community leaders are invited to meet and greet.
- 1.4 Local news media need to “diversify their rolodex.” When possible, they should present people of color as experts on issues beyond race such as medicine, politics, and legal issues. Likewise, news media should not interview the same representatives from a given community. There is more than one leader and perspective in every community.
- 1.5 Communities of color need to be more proactive in promoting fair and accurate local news coverage through letter writing campaigns to approve or disapprove of a given article or segment and initiate meetings with editorial boards. Furthermore, communities should work with the Minnesota News Council to review news segments that they feel are inaccurate or stereotypical.
- 1.6 Local news media and local journalism scholars should analyze the news that is presented to Twin Cities residents. More studies need to be conducted to decipher both the quality and quantity of news coverage of communities of color.
- 1.7 The Federal Communications Commission and/or the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights should thoroughly study the effects of deregulation measures on local communities and specifically communities of color. These studies should take place before any further deregulation measures are enacted.

## **2. Twin Cities Television and Radio News**

### ***Findings***

- 2.1 News departments at commercial television and radio stations are at a distinct disadvantage in covering communities of color accurately and comprehensively compared with newspapers, public television, and public radio. The shorter segments of commercial television and radio news broadcasts do not allow for thorough reporting of complex issues. Thus, traditional stereotypes held by the public may persist.
- 2.2 Despite efforts by the Committee and regional staff to obtain information from local television news stations about the topics of this study, KSTP was the only station to cooperate fully. A representative from WCCO participated in the fact-finding meeting. The inability of other news stations to send a representative to the fact-finding meeting may be interpreted as disregard for the concerns of the local communities of color.
- 2.3 The “window dressing” mentality of television news is still prevalent. Based on testimony at the fact-finding meeting, there are currently no people of color serving in high-level management positions at Twin Cities television news stations.
- 2.4 The Federal Communications Commission no longer publishes employment reports for the broadcast and cable industries, making it difficult to assess the diversification of the television news industry.
- 2.5 Compared with mainstream television and radio, Twin Cities Public Television and Minnesota Public Radio both relatively succeed in providing diverse programs, although the local public television no longer has a local news program. However, improvements still can be made in their coverage of communities of color.

### ***Recommendations***

- 2.1 Television news directors must pay closer attention to the interests and concerns of communities of color. When given the opportunity to interact and dialogue with community leaders and representatives, television station managers and news directors should participate. Through interaction and dialogue, television news media and communities of color can begin to understand each others’ concerns.
- 2.2 The number of people of color employed at local television news stations in decision-making positions has not grown since the early 1990s. Television news stations must take responsibility for this fact and diversify their management staff.
- 2.3 The Federal Communications Commission should once again publish employment information for the broadcast and cable industry, particularly now that the number of owners is decreasing.
- 2.4 Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) should consider bringing back its nightly local news program, “News Night Minnesota,” as it appeared to cover communities of color well. The Minnesota Advisory Committee suggests that if TPT would return the show to the air, it consider marketing it through advertisements in the various community and alternative press.

### **3. Twin Cities Newspapers**

#### ***Findings***

- 3.1 Twin Cities newspapers have increased the number of people of color who work in their newsrooms. Recruitment efforts have yielded positive results. Yet, despite increases in overall employment of people of color, little improvement has occurred in regard to people of color in high-level management positions at area newspapers.
- 3.2 Retaining people of color in positions is as serious a challenge for Twin Cities press as recruitment is. Although Twin Cities newspapers have launched successful efforts to recruit people of color, they have not begun similar efforts to retain them.
- 3.3 Although some preliminary evidence shows that coverage of communities of color has improved in quality if not quantity, some members of various communities of color still have a negative impression of how mainstream newspapers cover them.

#### ***Recommendations***

- 3.1 In addition to diversifying management, one of the most serious problems confronting newspapers regards retention of journalists of color. The Star Tribune and the Pioneer Press should consider seriously the two main reasons journalists of color do not remain in the journalism field, as cited by the American Society of Newspaper Editors: lack of opportunity for advancement and the inability to do new and interesting work. The Committee recommends both papers develop meaningful solutions to these problems, and it reiterates the previous recommendation to all news media that diversifying management may be an appropriate first step.
- 3.2 Newspaper editorial boards should consider the needs and concerns of communities of color and express those concerns in their editorials. Preferably, editorial boards would include members of communities of color and those who have contact with local communities of color.

### **4. Community and Alternative News Media**

#### ***Findings***

- 4.1 Overall, testimony from the fact-finding meeting implies that community and alternative news media have grown substantially in the past decade. Many newspapers have expanded circulations, and the number of minority-owned radio stations has increased. Their growth can be seen as both a reflection of the expanding communities of color in the Twin Cities as well as the disillusionment many in these communities feel about the mainstream news media. No evidence was presented to conclude that minority-owned television stations have increased in number in the Twin Cities.
- 4.2 Community and alternative press have formed a consortium to work for their common interests. In order to secure corporate advertisements, these groups must continue to work cooperatively.

- 4.3 There is little effort by the mainstream and community press to work together. The consortium of alternative news media expressed interest in working with mainstream media. However, representatives from the larger media companies did not express a desire to do so, although they did not deny any interest.

### ***Recommendations***

- 4.1 As it did in 1993, the Minnesota Advisory Committee recommends that government should recognize that the mainstream news media are directed primarily toward consumption by the white community because such programming yields the greatest viewership numbers and advertising dollars. Therefore, government should encourage the establishment and strengthening of minority-owned news media outlets. Government agencies could support community and alternative press through advertisements in particular.
- 4.2 Mainstream press and community press should begin dialogue on how they can work together to improve the overall coverage of communities in the Twin Cities.
- 4.3 Community and alternative newspapers should consider attracting advertisements from Twin Cities Public Television and Minnesota Public Radio, as their diverse programming may be of particular interest to readers of those papers.

## Appendix A

### Brief Background to the Deregulation Debate and Studies Regarding the Effects on Communities of Color

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#### Background

Deregulation is the largely bipartisan effort to clear some Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations of American electronic media beginning in the mid-1970s. By 1981, a further shift took place when new FCC Chairman Mark Fowler began a “fundamental and ideologically-driven reappraisal of regulations long held central to national broadcasting policy.”<sup>1</sup> Of course, there are arguments among proponents of deregulation about the extent to which rules should be abandoned, and opponents of the way the telecommunications industry has been deregulated disagree on what rule changes should be made in light of new technology. And as would be expected of any contentious issue, legal challenges have been made in regard to the deregulation (or lack thereof) of the telecommunications industry.<sup>2</sup> However, for the purpose of this appendix, the debate will be severely simplified into the basic opinions of the opponents and proponents of deregulation.

Since the late 1970s, specific deregulatory actions taken by the FCC or Congress include the following: extending the length of television licenses; expanding the number of radio and television stations a single company can own; abolishing guidelines for minimal amounts of nonentertainment programming, most notably the Prime Time Access Rule; eliminating the Fairness Doctrine of 1987, which attempted to ensure that all coverage of controversial issues by a broadcast station was balanced and fair; dropping guidelines for how much advertising could be carried; leaving the responsibility of technical standards increasingly to licensees; and deregulating television’s competition, in particular cable.<sup>3</sup> Many of these rule changes were the result of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (Telecom Act),<sup>4</sup> which had the intention of letting “anyone enter any communication business—to let any communication business compete in any market against any other.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the explicit rule changes, the Telecom Act, Section 202(h), required the FCC to reassess and modify its broadcast ownership rules every two years. Thus, in October of 2002, the commission initiated review of four ownership rules: the national television multiple ownership rule,<sup>6</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> C.H. Sterling, “Deregulation” (the Museum of Broadcast Communication, Jan. 23, 2003), <<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/D/htmlD/deregulation/deregulation.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> Relevant legal cases that are of interest to the topic of diversity of viewpoints and media ownership include *Metro Broadcasting v. F.C.C.*, 497 U.S. 547 (1990); *Adarand Constructors Inc. v. Pena*, 515 U.S. 200 (1995); *Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod v. F.C.C.*, 141 F.3d 344 (D.C. 1998); *Fox Television Stations Inc. v. F.C.C.*, 280 F.3d 1027 (D.C. 2002); and *Sinclair Broadcast Group Inc. v. F.C.C.*, 284 F.3d 148 (2002).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Pub. Law No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996) (codified in scattered sections of 47 U.S.C.).

<sup>5</sup> Federal Communications Commission, “Telecommunications Act of 1996,” <<http://www.fcc.gov/telecom.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> 47 C.F.R. § 73.3555(e) (2003).

local television ownership rule,<sup>7</sup> the radio-television cross-ownership rule,<sup>8</sup> and the dual network rule.<sup>9</sup> On June 2, 2003, the FCC released its Report and Order replacing its absolute prohibition and its restrictions on common ownership of radio and television outlets in the same market with Cross Media Limits. The FCC also revised the market definition and the way it counts stations for purposes of television ownership cap from a 35 percent national audience reach to a 45 percent reach limit. Finally, the FCC retained the dual network rule.<sup>10</sup> On September 3, 2003, however, the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit issued an order staying the effectiveness of these new media ownership rules. The court ordered that the prior ownership rules remain in effect pending resolution of these proceedings.<sup>11</sup>

Although most of the specific rules being reviewed were implemented later, much of the debate regarding deregulation of the telecommunications industry revolves around the Communications Act of 1934.<sup>12</sup> This act established basic principles regarding telecommunications in the United States. First, it instituted that the airways are public property. Second, commercial broadcasters are licensed to use the airways. Third, the main condition for use will be whether the broadcaster served “the public interest, convenience, and necessity.” Although the act has been updated through amendment many times, these basic principles are still central to the debate. Proponents of deregulation do not perceive television and radio licensees as “public trustees” of public property. As Chairperson Fowler said of television, it is just another appliance or “a toaster with pictures.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is not the licensees’ responsibility to provide a wide variety of services to many different viewing or listening groups, which is not to imply that licensees would not attempt to do so. From this point of view, broadcasting is a business operating in a marketplace and should therefore be free of government regulation for the most part. Current FCC Chairperson Michael Powell, also a proponent of deregulation measures, rhetorically tries to find more of a middle ground:

I believe in the market, because I think it’s the best way to get dialogue between consumers and producers. But I also believe that markets fail. And government has to intervene. I also think that corporate activity can harm individuals, and government ought to do something about that. I personally believe in ideological temperament. I’m fairly moderate. But I do believe in the market, as do, I think, most of our country’s leaders. And I believe that it is a valuable mechanism to consider when trying to find the best welfare for consumers.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, proponents of deregulation argue that the evolution of the way news can be obtained demands new rules. As Chairman Powell stated, “Almost every rule that’s being considered here pre-dates cable television, pre-dates direct broadcast satellite television, pre-dates the Internet . . . So, what’s really at stake here is to take account of those changes, and to follow Congress’ mandate to

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.* § 73.3555(b).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* § 73.3555(c).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* § 73.658(g).

<sup>10</sup> 68 Fed. Reg. 46,286 (2003).

<sup>11</sup> *Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC*, No. 03-3388 (3d Cir. Sept. 3, 2003) (per curiam).

<sup>12</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 151 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Conservative Forum.org, Statement of Mark Fowler, quoted Nov. 1, 1981, <<http://www.conservativeforum.org/authquot.asp?ID=775>>.

<sup>14</sup> NOW with Bill Moyers, “Transcript: Rick Karr Interviews FCC Chairman Michael Powell,” Apr. 4, 2003, <[http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript\\_powell.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_powell.html)>.

review the rules thoroughly, and produce a result that works.”<sup>15</sup> With so many new means for the public to acquire information, many argue that rules governing television stations are unnecessary.

Opponents of deregulation hold strong to the principles of the Communications Act of 1934, that the airwaves are public property and the media companies’ responsibility is to serve the public not “consumers.” Therefore, they argue that by erasing rules that require licensees to perform a public service, the licensees will purely seek profit at the expense of balanced public broadcasting.<sup>16</sup>

## **Deregulation and Civil Rights: What We Know**

The opponents of deregulation argue that relaxing the rules regarding ownership creates an oligopoly of media giants who decide what information we will receive.<sup>17</sup> These corporations also have vested interests in what news is reported and can limit journalistic freedom. The clearest case study for this claim can be seen by network coverage of deregulation itself. FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein has discussed how the media owners are largely in favor of deregulation efforts, and that position is reflected by major television networks’ general lack of coverage of the issue:

This is one of the most important things the FCC has ever undertaken. And yet, we see virtually nothing on any of the major media outlets about it, particularly on television, which is somewhat disturbing. It raises a real question as to whether or not there is independence between ownership and the journalists. There’s no better case study that I can think of than this issue in determining whether or not the journalists are able to cover the stories they want to. Clearly, the owners may have a concern about this going out. And that would be evidenced by the fact that we’ve seen virtually no national news coverage on this issue.<sup>18</sup>

Besides for the major television outlets largely ignoring the issue, the public can see a trend in the number of owners of television and radio stations since deregulation began in the 1970s. The FCC’s empirical study titled “A Comparison of Media Outlets and Owners for Ten Selected Markets (1960, 1980, 2000)” concluded, “The number of broadcast outlets increased dramatically from 1960 to 2000. The number of broadcast owners also increased significantly from 1960 to 1980 but, from 1980 to 2000, the count of owners was generally, relatively stagnant. This is mainly due to tremendous consolidation, especially in the radio industry, since passage of the 1996 Telecom Act.”<sup>19</sup> The oligopoly that opponents of deregulation claimed would occur seems to be happening based on the statistics. For example, in 1975 there were some 1,500 owners of full-power TV stations and daily newspapers. By 2000, that number had dropped to about 625.<sup>20</sup> In 1996, Westinghouse, the largest

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Sterling, “Deregulation.”

<sup>17</sup> NOW with Bill Moyers, “Transcript: Barry Diller Talks with Bill Moyers,” Apr. 25, 2003, <[http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript\\_diller.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_diller.html)>. An oligopoly is a market situation in which a few producers affect but do not control the market.

<sup>18</sup> NOW with Bill Moyers, “Transcript: Rick Karr Interviews FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein,” Apr. 4, 2003, <[http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript\\_adelstein.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_adelstein.html)>.

<sup>19</sup> Federal Communications Commission, “A Comparison of Media Outlets and Owners for Ten Selected Markets (1960, 1980, 2000),” Media Bureau Staff Research Paper, September 2002, <[http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/DOC-226838A2.doc](http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-226838A2.doc)>.

<sup>20</sup> NOW with Bill Moyers, “Transcript: Bill Moyers Journal,” Oct. 25, 2002, <[http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript\\_bmjfcc.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_bmjfcc.html)>.

radio owner at the time, owned 85 stations.<sup>21</sup> After the Telecommunications Act of 1996, there are now 1,700 fewer (34 percent decline in six years) owners of commercial radio, and one conglomerate, Clear Channel, owns more than 1,200 stations and controls 11 percent of the market. The second largest owner controls about 250 stations.<sup>22</sup> These numbers imply that deregulation has possibly decreased competition, at least in commercial radio.

An examination of minority-owned media is also revealing. According to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) study of 2000, the results of deregulation on minority ownership are mixed. Positive findings were listed in the executive summary of the report:

- In 2000, 187 minority broadcasters owned 449 full-power commercial radio and television stations, or 3.8 percent of the 11,865 such stations licensed in the United States. These figures represent an increase of 0.9 percentage points of the number reported in 1998. However, about half of this increase was the result of an improved methodology to identify minority owners.
- Minority owners have made some gains in the commercial radio industry, and some previous owners have been newly identified. In 2000, 175 minority broadcasters owned 426 stations, or about 4.0 percent of the nation's 10,577 commercial AM and FM radio stations. This compares with their ownership of 305 radio stations in 1998, which represented 2.9 percent of that year's industry total. Again, half of the increase came from identifying already existing owners.
- All minority groups have increased their radio ownership since 1998. In terms of absolute growth, the number of Hispanic American-owned stations increased the most with the addition of 57 stations, followed by an increase of 43 African American-owned, 18 Asian American-owned, and three Native American-owned. Excluding the effect of improved search methodology, however, the number of African American-owned stations increased by 15 percent, and Hispanic American-owned stations 19 percent, Asian American-owned stations by 300 percent, and Native American-owned by 25 percent. The considerable increase in Asian American-owned stations was largely the result of purchases by one large owner.
- African Americans' ownership of 211 radio stations in 2000 continues to lead that of other minorities and represents almost half of all minority-owned radio stations. Hispanic Americans owned 187 stations or 44 percent of all minority radio stations.<sup>23</sup>

The report also found some disturbing trends. These findings were included in the executive summary as the following:

- Minority owners' share of the commercial television market decreased in 2000. The 23 full-power commercial television stations owned by minorities in 2000 represented 1.9 percent of the country's 1,288 such licensed stations. This is the lowest level since the Minority Telecommunications Development Program began issuing reports in 1990. That year, minorities

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<sup>21</sup> Center for Digital Democracy, "Minorities and the Media: Little Ownership and Even Less Control," Dec. 16, 2002, <<http://www.democraticmedia.org/news/marketwatch/minoritymedia.htm>>.

<sup>22</sup> John Nichols, "The Online Beat: The Fight for the Future of Music," *The Nation*, Jan. 16, 2003, <<http://www.thenation.com/thebeat/index.mhtml?bid=1&pid=270>>.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, *Changes, Challenges, and Charting New Courses: Minority Commercial Broadcast Ownership in the United States*, December 2000, <<http://search.ntia.doc.gov/pdf/mtdpreportv2.pdf>>.

owned 29 full-power television stations, compared with as many as 38 during 1995 and 1996. Between 1998 and 2000, there was a loss of five Hispanic American-owned and four African American-owned stations, and a new identification of two Asian American-owned stations, for a net loss of seven stations.

- While the broadcast industry's strong performance in recent years has benefited some minority owners and may help explain the increase in the number, consolidation still threatens the survival of most minority owners, who as mostly single-station operators find it difficult to compete against large group owners.
- At a time when single-station owners are struggling to remain competitive, 61 percent of minority owners operate stand-alone stations. In 2000, 131 or 31 percent of minority-owned stations were part of a duopoly (two or more stations of the same type in the same market), compared with 36 percent of nonminority competitors. Seventeen minority-owned stations, or 4 percent, participated in a local marketing agreement, while 8 percent of nonminority competitors did so.
- As reported in past years, minority owners continue to own more AM than FM stations. In 2000, minorities owned 248 AM stations and 178 FM facilities. Declining AM listenership over the past 15 years and the technical limitations of these stations make them generally less profitable than FM stations.<sup>24</sup>

The quantitative research may have produced some mixed results in regard to the overall value of deregulation on minority ownership of media, but the qualitative research, in the form of personal opinions of minority owners, yielded a much more uniform response.

Overwhelmingly, minority broadcasters were convinced that the Telecommunications Act of 1996 hurt opportunities for minority broadcast ownership. Seventy-three broadcasters, about 63 percent of survey respondents stated that view, while only six or five percent of responding broadcasters expressed the opposite view. Almost 14 percent of minority owners who replied to the survey, or 16 respondents, were undecided about the Act's impact on minority ownership, while about an equal number (17) expressed no opinion on the matter. Narrative responses from owners reflected their concern about the adverse effects of consolidation on their businesses. One African American owner commented that "[c]ritical mass by major Wall Street financed ownerships have [created] major obstacles for [the] minority owner. [It] is very difficult to compete against big ownership with 7-8 stations in the same market." Another owner wrote "[t]he 1996 Act is a disaster for small and minority broadcasters and operates against the principle of diversity of media ownership." An Hispanic American broadcaster in Florida decried the deregulation prompted by the 1996 Act. He said "[u]nder present station pricing, expansion is impossible. [The] Telecommunications Act of 1996 eliminated the participation and expansion of small entrepreneurs." An exiting Native American woman radio owner bluntly summarized a common sentiment among some broadcasters: "If the FCC and the federal government would have let the previous ownership cap prevail, I cannot help but feel it would have been

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

beneficial to minority broadcasters. We were proving that we could be a formidable broadcaster—serving the needs of our license communities and making money.”<sup>25</sup>

Another study that investigates the effects of deregulation of the media industry was done by Project for Excellence in Journalism. Its report examined what the possible effects on news coverage will be if the FCC continues to change its rules regarding media ownership. Like the NTIA study, the Project for Excellence in Journalism report, titled “Does Ownership Matter in Local Television News: A Five-Year Study of Ownership and Quality,” produced some mixed results. It concluded that in contrast to the large conglomerates that were emerging since the Telecommunications Act of 1996, smaller station groups tended to produce higher quality newscasts; network-affiliated stations tended to produce higher quality newscasts than network-owned and -operated stations; stations in which the parent company also owns a newspaper in the same market, or cross-ownership stations, tended to produce higher quality newscasts; and local ownership, although offering some protection against newscasts being very poor, did not encourage superior quality.<sup>26</sup> Despite concluding that ownership type made little difference in the overall topics covered in news programs, the report concluded the “overall data strongly suggest regulatory changes that encourage heavy concentration of ownership in local television by a few large corporations will erode the quality of news Americans receive.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> Project for Excellence in Journalism, *Does Ownership Matter in Local Television News: A Five-Year Study of Ownership and Quality*, Feb. 17, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## **Appendix B**

### **Fact-Finding Meeting Agenda, Minnesota Advisory Committee**

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#### **AGENDA**

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

**Fact-Finding Meeting  
“Minneapolis-St. Paul News Media Coverage of Minority Communities”**

**Wednesday, April 24 – Thursday, April 25, 2002**

**Embassy Suites Hotel  
425 South 7th Street  
5th Floor – Universal Room  
Minneapolis, MN 55415**

*Wednesday, April 24, 2002*

**INTRODUCTION 9:00 a.m.**

- Alan W. Weinblatt, Chairperson, Minnesota Advisory Committee

**PANEL 1 9:30 a.m.**

- R.T. Rybak, Mayor, City of Minneapolis
- Howard Orenstein, Senior Policy Adviser to Mayor’s Office, City of St. Paul

**PANEL 2 10:00 a.m.**

- Fouzi Slisli, Media Director, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
- Soraya Amra, President, Minnesota Chapter of ADC
- Francis Fairbanks, Executive Director, Minneapolis American-Indian Center
- Clarence Hightower, President and CEO, Minneapolis Urban League

**PANEL 3 11:00 a.m.**

- Vivian Jenkins Nelsen, President and CEO, Inter-Race
- Gary Gilson, Executive Director, Minnesota News Council
- Len Witt, Media Consultant

**LUNCH 12:00 p.m.**

**PANEL 4 1:00 p.m.**

- Lynda McDonnell, Executive Director, Urban Journalism Workshop

**PANEL 5 2:00 p.m.**

- Dushesne Drew, Star-Tribune Reporter
- Lisa Donovan, Pioneer Press Reporter
- Brandt Williams, Minnesota Public Radio Reporter

**PANEL 6 3:00 p.m.**

- Scott Libin, News Director, KSTP-TV
- Gary Hill, Director of Investigations and Special Reports, KSTP-TV
- Dennis Douda, Anchor/Reporter, WCCO-TV

**PANEL 7 4:15 p.m.**

- Mark Anthony Rolo, Executive Director, Native American Journalists Association
- Murali Balaji, President, Asian American Journalists Association
- Maria Douglas Reeve, President, Twin Cities Black Journalists Association

**OPEN SESSION 5:15 p.m.**

- Mary C. Vidas, Director, Broadcast Media Education, North Community High School

**ADJOURNMENT 6:00 p.m.**

*Thursday, April 25, 2002*

**PANEL 8 9:00 a.m.**

- Janeen Rosas, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Human Rights
- Tyrone Terrill, Director, St. Paul Department of Human Rights

**PANEL 9 9:30 a.m.**

- Al McFarlane, President, Insight News
- Lorena Duarte, Staff Reporter, La Prensa
- Kwame McDonald, Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder
- Nghi Huynh, Owner and Publisher, Asian-American Press

**PANEL 10 10:30 a.m.**

- Bill Buzenberg, Vice President of News, Minnesota Public Radio
- Brendan Henehan, Executive Producer for Content, Twin Cities Public Television

**PANEL 11 11:30 a.m.**

- Dave Peters, Senior Editor/City Edition, St. Paul Pioneer Press
- Scott Gillespie, Assistant Managing Editor for Local News, Minneapolis Star Tribune

**OPEN SESSION 12:30 p.m.**

- Steve Murphy, Managing Editor, WCCO Radio

**ADJOURNMENT 1:30 p.m.**