

## 1

## Why is Diversity So Important?

Rachele Kanigel

*Journalism is sometimes described as a mirror that society holds up to itself. When the public looks in that mirror, it is important that it see faces that reflect the diversity of the community. But it must see more, much more. It must see that the stories we tell, the experiences we illuminate, the public policies we explore, the communities we describe – the entire body of the very work we do – reflect those same diverse realities.*

Raul Ramirez, print and broadcast journalist,  
news executive, educator  
September 5, 1946–November 15, 2013<sup>1</sup>

On a fall day in 2015, staff members of *The Seattle Times* gathered to talk about how the paper was covering the social unrest that was sweeping the country. It was the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, and there had been demonstrations in Seattle and at nearby universities, as well as cities and college campuses around the country, protesting racist incidents, the killings of unarmed Black and Latino men by police officers, and other issues related to race and ethnicity.

Tyrone Beason, a staff writer for the newspaper's magazine, *Pacific NW*, almost didn't attend the meeting. He had been to these sorts of gatherings before and had been frustrated by the big talk and lack of action, so he headed out to lunch. But soon after he left the building, something compelled him back. He returned to the office and found a large crowd of staffers in the "fish bowl," the glassed-in area in the middle of the newsroom where the staff often gathered for discussions. "It was packed," Beason recalled. "That was the first indication that something was different, that other people were feeling the way I was feeling."<sup>2</sup>

Beason, who is Black, was disappointed by how the paper had been covering the protests, which had sometimes led to traffic gridlock and freeway

closures. “A lot of our coverage reflected the frustration that the protesters had disrupted the daily rhythm of life and did not really explore the issues around the demonstrations,” Beason said. “At times, it seemed our framing of the demonstrations missed the larger point that something momentous was happening, that Black Lives Matter wasn’t a fleeting or merely inconvenient phenomenon.”

Beason stood in the back of the room, surveying the crowd, silently listening to the comments. And then he spoke up. “Part of what bothers me about our coverage here is that the room itself doesn’t reflect the community we live in.”

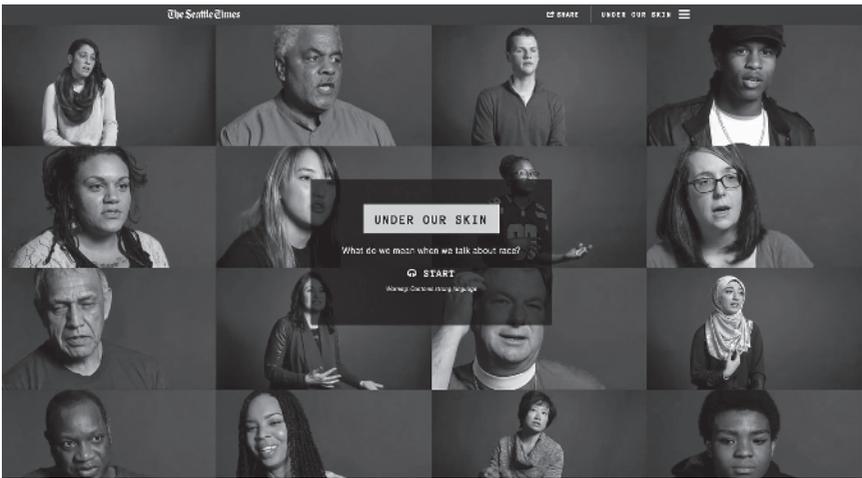
Like most mainstream newspapers in the United States, *The Seattle Times* was, and continues to be, a majority-White news organization. Beason was one of just a handful of African Americans on the staff. According to the American Society of News Editors’ annual newsroom census for that year, 9.5 percent of the staff was Asian American, 3.6 percent was Black, 7.1 percent was Hispanic and 0.6 percent was American Indian. With a total of 20.8 percent people of color, *The Seattle Times* actually had one of the more diverse newsrooms in the country. In 2015, just 12.8 percent of journalists in the newsrooms surveyed were members of racial or ethnic minorities. Many small to mid-size newspapers didn’t have a single person of color, according to the ASNE survey.<sup>3</sup>

Beason noted that the racial and ethnic make-up of the staff affected everything the paper did, from the headlines and stories it ran to how photos were shot, selected and placed, to the way the home page was assembled.

The discussion in the informal staff meeting that day sparked more conversations. And those dialogues – some in later fish bowl meetings, others between colleagues over coffee or in a quiet corner of the newsroom – led the staff to rethink the way it covered race. “It was a real galvanizing moment for us as a staff,” said Beason, who had started at *The Seattle Times* as an intern and spent most of his career there.

Staff members began to gather for biweekly meetings to talk about diversity issues and to brainstorm ideas for new ways to cover these issues. “These meetings became like a safe haven for talking about race,” Beason said. “We created this space in the newsroom where we could talk as freely as if we were knocking back cocktails.”

In the beginning of 2016, Beason and a team of 13 others from around the newsroom – videographers and reporters, editors and developers, designers and photographers – started working on an interactive multimedia project to explore issues of race and ethnicity. They invited 18 people from a mix of backgrounds and perspectives to *The Seattle Times* video studio and asked them to talk about hot-button words and phrases related to race and diversity: Person of Color, Politically Correct, Institutional Racism, Safe Space, White Privilege, Ally, All Lives Matter, Diversity, White Privilege, White Fragility, Racism. The reporters asked questions, but mostly they just listened while the



**Figure 1.1** “Under Our Skin”

A team from *The Seattle Times* spent nearly six months producing “Under Our Skin,” a video project in which 18 community members talked candidly about race.

sources talked. The community members’ responses were emotional, raw, edgy, honest. Sometimes their voices would rise in anger. Sometimes they would tear up, overcome by emotion.

The team spent months editing the 31 hours of interviews into a collection of powerful videos called “Under Our Skin” (Figure 1.1). The project was posted online on June 20, 2016 and the staff moderated a Reddit discussion<sup>4</sup> about it later that week. Readers were encouraged to add their own comments and hundreds did. Radio and TV news stations invited members of the “Under Our Skin” team to speak about the project and what they’d learned from it. The newspaper presented the videos at community events and schools.

Even more importantly, people in the community started using “Under Our Skin” as a jumping-off place for their own discussions about race. After watching the videos, the University of Washington Huskies football coach invited a White Episcopal bishop who had participated in the video project to speak to his players about race.<sup>5</sup> Schools, city government officials and churches began using the videos for diversity training, prompting more dialogue.

Beason said the project helped the staff communicate more candidly with each other and with the community they served.

“Since then, I’ve personally felt more comfortable talking about race, gender and other issues that I believe we should consider as we discuss what to cover and how to cover it,” Beason said in an email, nine months after “Under Our Skin” ran. “We have more work to do but I really believe we’ve broken the ice when it comes to discussing these sensitive topics.”

## Diversity and Journalism

The staff of *The Seattle Times* recognized that diversity is a vital component of reporting and that they needed to change the culture of the newsroom to improve their coverage of the community. By diving in and exploring the thorny issues around race, the staff was able to report more deeply and thoroughly on the divisions and tensions that were playing out in the streets of their city.

Unfortunately, their efforts are so notable in part because they are the exception rather than the rule. Journalism has a long history of ignoring and misrepresenting certain groups and while most news organizations are more inclusive in their coverage than they were years ago, huge gaps remain.

“The greatest issue in journalism today is that we continue to distort and inaccurately portray communities of color,” Dori Maynard, then executive director of the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, said in an interview shortly before her death in 2015. “Given that communities of color are growing at a rapid rate, we’re not reflecting a big swath of our population. And that cuts away at our ethics, our credibility and our accuracy.”<sup>6</sup>

To get a sense of this, think about your favorite news source – a newspaper, online, mobile news, television or radio outlet – and ask yourself: Do the staff and the coverage truly reflect the community they strive to serve? Whether you like Fox News or NPR, *The New York Times* or *Vice*, take a look at the sources interviewed and the issues the news organization covers. Does the news outlet routinely tap a diverse group of sources? Do the people interviewed reflect the people walking the streets of that community? And if they don’t, who or what is missing? How often do you see Latinos or Arab Americans interviewed on the news? When was the last time you saw an African American pictured in the business section or an Asian American featured in the entertainment section?

While some may see attention to diversity issues in journalism as “political correctness,” responsible journalists increasingly see such efforts as a way to truly serve their audiences – and even save the industry from irrelevance.

If this sounds like hyperbole, consider the demographics of the United States. In 2016, people in racial and ethnic minority groups made up 38 percent of the U.S. population, and the country is getting more diverse every year.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau has projected that by 2044 more than half of all adults in the United States will belong to a racial or ethnic group other than Caucasian.<sup>8</sup> In the second half of the 21st century, there will likely be no racial/ethnic majority in the country.

But diversity doesn't just refer to racial and ethnic minorities. People with disabilities, gay and transgender people, people from certain religious groups and those in other minority groups often complain that news coverage is biased, incomplete or inaccurate – or that they're left out of the media entirely. As Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel wrote in their book, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and The Public Should Expect*: "If we think of journalism as social cartography, the map should include news of all our communities, not just those with attractive demographics or strong appeal to advertisers. To do otherwise is to create maps with whole areas missing."<sup>9</sup>

Ray Suarez, a veteran broadcast journalist who worked for NPR, PBS and Al Jazeera America, as well as other news organizations, said the major news events of the past decade make having a diverse newsroom more vital than ever before. "It's hard to imagine covering recent events in the life of the country with mono-cultural newsrooms," he said in an email interview. "The shootings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, the rise of Black Lives Matter, the debates over legal residence and deportation, the torchlight parade in Charlottesville, the new nationalism of Donald Trump ... they all demand a look at local communities and the country as a whole from multiple perspectives. A groupthink-riddled newsroom is going to have a hard time explaining this stressed America to its readers, listeners, and viewers."<sup>10</sup>

The changing nature of news also makes diversity an imperative. Just consider:

**People rely on news media more than ever before.** While newspaper readership and broadcast news watching may be on the wane, people are constantly searching for news and information through digital sources.

**News today is accessible for much longer than it used to be.** Not that long ago, a print newspaper was the next day's birdcage liner and news broadcasts were heard just once and never repeated. But online archives, YouTube and podcasts mean that information – and misinformation – can be available indefinitely. A single journalist's mistake may be picked up and repeated for years. Now, more than ever, journalists need to choose their words carefully.

**In a high-pressure news environment, accuracy is even more vital.** The 24/7 news economy necessitates fast decisions and sometimes a rush to publish or broadcast. Without proper training, journalists working on tight deadlines can make serious errors of fact or judgment.

**Most of the vital issues of our day have a diversity component.** Politics, immigration, international affairs, health care, the economy, education – virtually all of the major issues journalists write about have diversity embedded in them. And diversity matters crop up even in "light" topics like sports and entertainment.

## The Five W's of Journalism From a Diverse Perspective

By Aly Colón

*Aly Colón first published this piece on the Poynter website in 2002. His advice for rethinking the five Ws of journalism from a diverse perspective still holds true.*

- WHO:** Who's missing from the story?  
**WHAT:** What's the context for the story?  
**WHERE:** Where can we go for more information?  
**WHEN:** When do we use racial or ethnic identification?  
**WHY:** Why are we including or excluding certain information?

### Making Connections: A Strategy for Connecting with Diverse Communities

#### *Online Sites, Publications, Broadcasts*

Search out online sites that focus on issues of diversity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disabilities and other diverse specialties. Read publications, watch television/cable TV, listen to radio owned by or oriented toward diverse groups.

#### *Specialists*

Contact diversity and/or race relations specialists. Check universities, institutes, diversity consulting firms, companies known for diversity efforts. Meet with diversity committees or diverse people in your own organization.

#### *Organizations*

Contact organizations that represent diverse groups, for example, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, African American Coalition, Asian American Association, The Deaf Center. Your own company may have its own versions of these groups as well.

#### *Leaders*

Ask everyone you meet who they respect as knowledgeable people in their communities. Seek out unofficial leaders.

#### *List*

Create a list of people you can turn to in diverse communities who represent different perspectives within their groups.

#### *Visits*

Visit online sites and communities different from your own. Eat at ethnic restaurants. Shop at ethnic stores. Meet the owners.

#### *Contact*

Remain in regular contact with people on your diversity list. Email them. Meet them for coffee, tea, breakfast or lunch in their communities.

*Aly Colón is the John S. and James L. Knight Professor of Media Ethics at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. He has a long background in news and journalism ethics, including positions as director of standards and practices at NBC News and as ethics group leader at the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Fla., where he taught and oversaw ethics training for young and mid-career journalists.*

[This piece was first published on Poynter.com and is reprinted with permission from the author.]

## Fault lines

Journalists don't intentionally ignore or misrepresent large swaths of the population, of course, but we all look at the world through a particular lens and whether we like it or not, we have blinders that keep us from seeing parts of a story. These blinders have kept people from understanding the power of systemic racism and the way slavery and other forms of oppression and injustice leave their mark not just on one generation but on many.

Robert C. Maynard, who in 1983 became the first African American to own a major metropolitan newspaper when he bought *The Oakland Tribune*, developed a concept to help explain the fissures in our society – and in media coverage. Influenced by the seismic faults that run through California – and literally shake it up from time to time – he believed that each person sees the world through the “fault lines” of race, class, gender, generation and geography and that these enduring forces shape lives, experiences and social tensions. They also shape the way journalists approach a story. By recognizing and rethinking these fault lines, he reasoned, journalists can report stories in a more nuanced, complete and balanced way.

For example, imagine two journalists are reporting a story about an old apartment building being torn down in a low-income neighborhood to make room for a luxury hotel. A reporter who comes from a well-to-do family might see the new building as a way to spruce up the neighborhood and bring jobs and new businesses to a previously run-down part of town. A reporter who comes from a working-class background may be more likely to focus on the families being displaced. Based on their personal life experiences, these two reporters may see different angles on the story, interview different sources, ask different questions and structure their stories differently.

Other factors can also shape the way you, as a journalist, might cover a story – political leanings, religious background, whether you're a parent, your experience with illness or disability. These life experiences can't help but influence the way journalists see the world – and the way they report on it.

So how do we rise above our own fault lines? The first step is to recognize them and the inherent biases we all bring to our work. The next is to reach

beyond the comfortable and the close at hand. As a journalist, it's easy to call "the usual suspects," the sources you've been tapping for months or years. You know the sources who will return your phone calls and come up with a catchy quote. But to go beyond your fault lines, you need to reach out to people who may not be so accessible and convenient.

"It takes a lot of work to make sure you go to people and places and environments that are not part of your normal fare," Aly Colón, a longtime journalist who is now the Knight Professor of Media Ethics at Washington and Lee University, said in an interview. "You have to force yourself to broaden your understanding, to go to different people to make sure you include those you may not even know about but should know about."<sup>11</sup>

By deepening their reporting and going beyond the usual suspects, journalists can add what Colón calls "muscle" to their stories. "Too often as journalists we settle for the skeleton of the story. What I try to encourage journalists to do is to think about those elements in the story that help the reader or viewer or listener to understand that story more completely. If the race or ethnicity or gender or orientation adds an element of understanding to the story itself – that without it you would not find the story as complete – that should be the guide."

To expand your source lists, tap different organizations than you normally would. When you're seeking comment on a health policy issue, for example, don't just call the American Medical Association; seek out sources from the National Medical Association, an organization representing African-American physicians, or the National Hispanic Medical Association. When interviewing business leaders, look for companies led by women or people of color, immigrants and people of different generations. Diverse perspectives are out there. Sometimes you just have to look a little harder to find them.

### Applying The Fault Lines

To help you understand how fault lines influence your own view of the world, take some time to think about the forces that shape who you are. The Maynard Institute for Journalism Education lays out the fault lines this way:

**Race/Ethnicity:** Black, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, mixed race, White.

**Gender:** Male, female, gay, lesbian, transgender (and you could add people who don't identify as male or female).

**Generation:** Youth (0–19), 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s+; baby boomer (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1976), Generation Y or Millennials (born 1977–2002).

While age can alter a point of view, that same point of view often is defined by generational experiences. For instance, Generation X didn't watch Richard Nixon resign as president. The baby boomers did not live through the Great Depression.

**Class:** Rich, upper middle class/wealthy, middle class, working class, poor.

**Geography:** Urban, suburban, rural; plus region.<sup>12</sup>

These fault lines often combine in unique ways. Intersectionality refers to overlapping or intersecting identities and the way different forms of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) interrelate. When considering fault lines, it's important to see how these different social identities shape you and the way you experience the world.

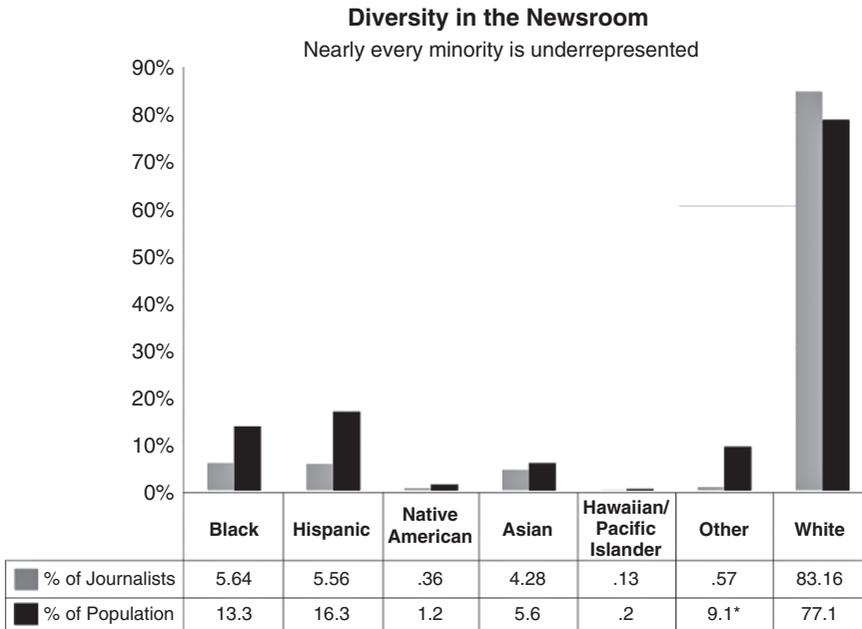
Once you've mapped your own fault lines, think about how they affect you. What biases and stereotypes do you harbor? (And don't say you don't have any; we all do.) What groups are you ignorant about? What assumptions do you have about different groups of people? Consider how institutions – the schools you went to, the communities you grew up in, the companies you worked for – and the values and sometimes oppressive practices in those institutions influenced how you see the world.

Next, think about how these fault lines could affect your work as a journalist or other media professional. Consider whom you interview or photograph. It's often easiest to talk to people who look like you, people who share your socioeconomic and religious background, who live in your part of town or who share your politics. Think about how to get different perspectives and venture into enclaves where you don't normally go, even to places where you feel downright uncomfortable. Be conscious in all the work you do to include people from across the fault lines.

## Where Are the Journalists of Color?

In 1978, the American Society of News Editors conducted its first annual newsroom employment census and reported that less than 4 percent of newsroom employees were members of ethnic or racial minority groups.<sup>13</sup> That year ASNE issued a challenge to the news industry: Achieve racial parity by 2000 or sooner. Over the next two decades, America's newsrooms did begin to diversify, inching up to 12 percent minority representation in 2002. But for more than a decade after that the percentage of minority journalists pretty much remained stagnant, hovering between 12 percent and 14 percent even as the American population became increasingly diverse.<sup>14</sup>

In 2016, the needle finally moved – a little; that year ASNE reported that 16.65 percent of journalists working in the newsrooms surveyed were people of color<sup>15</sup> (Figure 1.2). Adam Maksl, an assistant professor at Indiana University Southeast who had directed the survey for the previous four years, said year-over-year comparisons to 2015 results were difficult to make because fewer newsrooms responded to the survey in 2015. However, a comparison of 433 news organizations that participated in both the 2015 and 2016 surveys showed the minority workforce had, in fact, increased 5.6 percent. Maksl said the rise was mostly driven by large news organizations and online-only sites. The researchers found that at newspapers with daily circulations of 500,000 and above, nearly a quarter of the average workforce was made up of minorities. The average newsroom workforce at all 737 legacy and digital sites surveyed, however, was about only 11 percent people of



Sources: American Society of News Editors 2017 Diversity Survey; U.S. Census data 2015  
 \*The census counted 6.2 percent as “some other race” and 2.9 percent as “two or more races.”  
 Graphic by Eva Rodriguez

**Figure 1.2**  
 When comparing data from the 2016 newsroom diversity survey by the American Society of News Editors with U.S. Census data from the previous year it’s clear ethnic and racial minorities were underrepresented and White people were overrepresented in U.S. newsrooms. This is a continuing trend that has been documented by ASNE since 1978. (Graphic by Eva Rodriguez)

color. And the self-reported data came from less than half of the more than 1,700 news organizations ASNE counted that year.<sup>16</sup>

What changed? For one thing the survey results showed that some newsrooms that year added more journalists of color than White employees, Maksl said. Others lost both White and minority employees but lost more White journalists.

In 2017, the ASNE survey found that minority journalists comprised 16.6 percent of the workforce in U.S. newsrooms, a half-percentage-point decrease from 2016 but still several percentage points higher than had been recorded for the previous two decades.<sup>17</sup>

Large newspapers were found to be more likely to have diverse staffs. *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* had 19 percent minority representation, *The Washington Post* had 31 percent minority representation, the *Los Angeles Times* had 33 percent. At *The Miami Herald*, one of the most diverse newsrooms in the country, 42 percent of the journalists were people of color.<sup>18</sup>

While the trend lines were encouraging, it was still far from ASNE's decades-long goal of racial parity. Yes, nearly 17 percent of journalists were minorities, but they were covering a nation where more than twice that percentage were people of color.

"The numbers seem to be moving in the right direction, but the pace of diversity needs to quicken to catch up with the population," Pam Fine, then president of ASNE said in a news release about the 2016 survey. "We must ask ourselves how we can do a better job of inspiring people of color and women to go into the profession, hire them at good wages, and give them opportunities to influence coverage and advance through the ranks."<sup>19</sup>

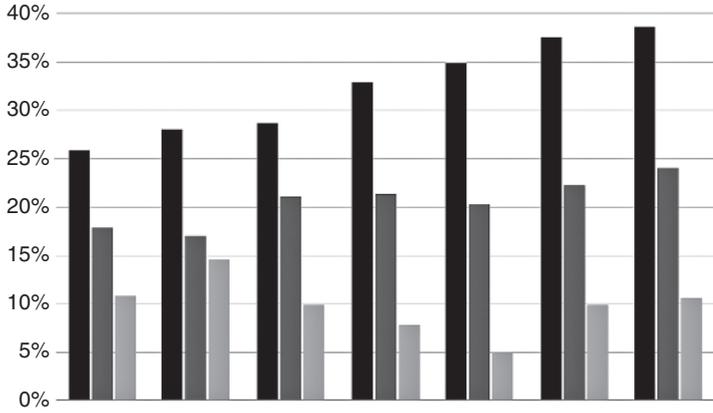
The 2017 ASNE survey also found record numbers of women and minorities in leadership roles, and yet they continued to be underrepresented. Of all newsroom leaders, 13.4 percent were minorities and 38.9 percent were women.

Representation of minorities in television news has been somewhat better. In 2016, all minority groups accounted for 22.4 percent of television journalists and 13 percent of radio journalists, according to figures from the Radio Television Digital News Association (Figure 1.3).<sup>20</sup>

Karen Magnuson, editor and vice president of news for the *Democrat and Chronicle* in Rochester, New York and co-chair of ASNE's Diversity Committee, explains some of the reasons why newsrooms are less diverse than editors would like. "I think the biggest obstacle is the financial challenges our industry is going through," she said in an interview. "Newsrooms are in the business of downsizing, not hiring. As newsrooms are shrinking, journalists of color, as well as White journalists, are losing their jobs or moving into other professions."<sup>21</sup>

Suarez, former host of Al Jazeera America's "Inside Story," the "PBS NewsHour" and NPR's "Talk of the Nation," said even news organizations that

**Minorities in Broadcast News**  
 Industry hasn't kept up with changing population



	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017
■ Minority US Population	25.9%	27.9%	28.6%	32.8%	34.9%	37.4%	38.0%*
■ Minorities in TV	17.8%	17.1%	21.0%	21.2%	20.2%	22.2%	24.4%
■ Minorities in radio	10.8%	14.7%	10.0%	7.9%	5.0%	9.8%	11.7%

Source: RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey

\*projected

**Figure 1.3**

In annual surveys by the Radio Television Digital News Association, racial and ethnic minorities working in radio and television news have consistently been underrepresented. (Graphic by Eva Rodriguez)

recognize the value of staff diversity can't always make it happen. "The basic thing to keep in mind is how hard it is to diversify a shrinking business. The idea that you would have a more representative staff given the way people are hired and fired and move on in real life is just a taller order than a lot of people realize. Even if you had the good will and commitment of the bosses – and you don't always – but even if you had it, it wouldn't be that easy. When a business is shrinking, when a lot of new hires aren't being made, the people in more senior positions stay where they are, they don't move up. So there's no room at the bottom for the new people."<sup>22</sup>

Because most editors and news directors don't do a lot of hiring, many have cut back on job fairs and minority journalism conferences where they're likely to meet and network with diverse candidates. Only a handful of the minority training and internship programs started in the 1980s and 1990s still exist.

And the fact remains that people tend to hire people who look like them. In several studies of hiring practices across many industries, researchers have

found that hiring managers are more likely to pass over African Americans and Latinos (or people with Black or Latino-sounding names).

Retention of journalists of color is also a problem in many newsrooms. Some report getting tired not just of overt racism but of microaggressions, subtle slights that still pervade newsrooms today.

In 2014 Rebecca Carroll wrote a column for the *The New Republic* with the provocative title “I’m a Black Journalist. I’m Quitting Because I’m Tired of Newsroom Racism.” In it, she detailed a string of incidents that happened during her time in newsrooms.

At the start of each new job, where I was almost invariably the only black editor on staff (unless it was a black publication – I have worked at a few), I would be heralded for my “voice” (and the implicit diversity it brought), until that voice became threatening or intimidating, or just too black. My ideas were “thoughtful” and “compassionate” until I argued, say, that having white journalists write the main features on a new black news venture sent the wrong message to the black online community. My editors disagreed.<sup>23</sup>

## How Does a Diverse Newsroom Affect Coverage?

Brenda Payton, who worked for many years as a reporter and columnist for *The Oakland Tribune*, says having people of diverse backgrounds in a newsroom can have both profound and subtle impacts on the stories that are told and the way the news is reported.

As an example, she notes the way many news organizations have focused on the petty criminal backgrounds of the victims of some police shootings, details that feed the image of Black men as criminals. “My idea is that if you have more diverse newsrooms you would have people saying, ‘I’m not sure that’s relevant’ or ‘Is that the best way to phrase it?’ If you have a newsroom that’s more diverse, then theoretically you’ll have people seeing things in different ways.”

Payton, who worked at *The Oakland Tribune* when Robert Maynard owned it, said, “I didn’t realize it at the time, but his vision was more than just wanting to have people who looked like me around the newsroom. He fundamentally understood that you cannot have good journalism if you’re not reflecting the community you’re trying to cover. No matter how culturally competent or well meaning you may be, it’s not going to work if you don’t have a varied perspective.”<sup>24</sup>

Dori Maynard, the director of the Maynard Institute named for her father, talked about the dangers of a homogeneous newsroom in an interview with NPR in 2005. “The conversation that goes on in the newsroom determines not only what stories get into the newspaper or onto your television or radio shows,

but also determines all the elements that go into those stories. If that conversation is not managed in a way that allows the diversity of opinion that may be in your newsroom to be reflected in your coverage, important elements of those stories are left out, so that they become not only less relevant to communities of color, but they also shortchange the white community, because they are not finding out what's going on in neighborhoods and communities other than their own."<sup>25</sup>

Having a diverse staff isn't the only step news organizations can, or should, take to improve their coverage but without one, it's nearly impossible to adequately cover a diverse community.

"My experience leading a newsroom showed me, time and time again, that staff diversity results in better and different coverage," Margaret Sullivan, then the public editor for *The New York Times*, wrote in a 2015 column for the paper. "Not in some kind of silly or obvious straight-line way, as in 'women write about things that interest women readers.' It's more this: When the group is truly diverse, the nefarious groupthink that makes a publication predictable and, at times, unintentionally biased, is much more likely to be diminished."<sup>26</sup>

## Getting Beyond The Usual Sources

All news outlets attempt to tell the human stories of the communities they cover and yet many miss the mark. Journalists tend to focus on institutions – government, courts, police, science, academia – that are dominated by men, White people and the well-to-do. A journalist who covers Silicon Valley, Congress or Wall Street could easily spend whole days never speaking to a woman or a person of color.

Even for reporters covering local beats and diverse communities it can be difficult to dig deep, particularly if they don't speak the language, understand the culture or have sources that trust them.

To combat these challenges journalists need to expand their contact lists and go into communities where they may not feel comfortable. That could mean hanging out in a "bad" neighborhood, visiting an Islamic cultural center or interviewing people in a part of town where some people don't speak English and where someone is needed to interpret.

"It depends on how much you're willing to put into it," says Suarez. "You'll earn dividends if you want to make the investment of both your personal time and the organization's time to get to know the civic leaders and the organizations, the pastors in the local churches, the police precinct captain. Then, when you're scrambling, when something unexpected happens, you'll be able to quickly put your finger on people who are not necessarily the people you want to talk to but they can point you to the people you want to talk to in almost any

circumstance. It's worth it to spend some of your own time down in there, in the neighborhood, at public events, eating in the places where there are to eat, shopping in the places there are to shop, just understanding the texture of daily life. You can't do that slow building of local knowledge when you're on deadline pressure so it becomes a vital thing to do when you're not on deadline pressure."

## Diversity Within Diverse Groups

As you become more aware of diversity and how it affects coverage, it's important to be cognizant of diversity within cultural and ethnic groups. Large demographic groups such as Asian Americans, for example, have many sub-groups. A recent Chinese immigrant, for example, may have a very different perspective than a person whose family immigrated from Japan in the 1930s or a refugee who fled Cambodia in the 1980s. Similarly, the LGBTQ community is not monolithic, and there are differences – and sometimes tensions – among gay and lesbian; bisexual; transgender; and non-binary people, those who don't identify as male or female.

Often you'll have to go out of your way to include diverse perspectives. It may take a little extra time to find same-sex parents for an education story or African-American executives for a business story, but you should consciously try by reaching out to a wide variety of sources and building trust. People may not talk to you at first, but if you continue to hang around, if you show that you're not just there for a quick quote but really want to get their perspective, people will begin to open up.

By including diverse sources, you will inevitably get different perspectives and voices and be able to offer a more nuanced and complete picture of the story.

## Discussion Questions/Activities

- 1 Read "I'm a Black Journalist. I'm Quitting Because I'm Tired of Newsroom Racism," by Rebecca Carroll, October 20, 2014. In the essay Carroll says, "at nearly every job I have ever had, I have encountered some sort of racial incident – either personally directed at me or witnessed by me as a third party." Have you witnessed or experienced racial incidents, either at work or at school? Discuss the incident with a group. How did you respond? Thinking back, how could you have responded?
- 2 View *The Seattle Times'* "Under Our Skin" project at <http://projects.seattletimes.com/2016/under-our-skin/#> How do the videos make you

feel? Which comments moved you the most? Which comments made you feel uncomfortable, defensive or angry? If you're part of a student or professional news organization brainstorm ideas for stories for your news outlet, taking inspiration from "Under Our Skin."

- 3 Map your fault lines, using the categories developed by Robert Maynard. Think about how your race, gender, class, geography and generation affect the way you see the world and how they affect the way you create and consume journalism. How do different parts of your identity overlap or conflict? How can you get beyond your own fault lines?
- 4 Do a social media experiment. Find a minority group you want to learn more about and start following organizations and leaders of that community on Twitter. Spend a week monitoring the group, continually adding new sources to your feed. At the end of the week, discuss what you learned. What issues were people talking about? What were some of the most shared tweets? How were the conversations on Twitter different from what you see in your own social circles?
- 5 As you can see from the employment statistics released by the ASNE and the RTDNA, television news staffs tend to be more diverse than print news outlets or radio stations. Why do you think that is? How can print and radio newsrooms catch up with TV in terms of diversity?

## Additional Readings

Frissell, Peregrine; Ibrahim, Ala'a; Raghavendran, Sheila; and Yang, Avery, "Missed deadline: The delayed promise of newsroom diversity," Asian American Journalists Association, July 27, 2017. <https://voices.aaja.org/index/2017/7/25/missed-deadlines>

Shepard, Alicia, "How Newsrooms Fail To Reflect America and Why It Matters," *BillMoyers.com*, Aug. 26, 2016. <https://billmoyers.com/story/newsrooms-fail-reflect-america-matters/>

Stewart, Alicia, "Why Newsroom Diversity Works," *NiemanReports*, June 10, 2015. <http://niemanreports.org/articles/why-newsroom-diversity-works/>

White, Gillian, "Where Are All the Minority Journalists?" *The Atlantic*, July 24, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/07/minorities-in-journalism/399461/>

## Multimedia

### **“A Manifesto on Diversity in Public Media”**

Read and listen to poet and radio host Al Letson of “State of the Re:Union” share his thoughts on the need for diversity in public media. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/06/01/410303423/poet-and-radio-al-letsons-manifesto-on-diversity-in-public-media>

### **Poynter NewsU Course: “Handling Race and Ethnicity”**

This \$29.95 course is free, thanks to the support of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. <http://www.newsu.org/courses/handling-race-and-ethnicity>

### **“Questions of Color”**

In 2017, the *Dallas Morning News* launched this video project in which community members discuss their experiences with race and diversity. <https://interactives.dallasnews.com/2017/questions-of-color/>

### **“Under Our Skin”**

In 2016, staff members from *The Seattle Times* interviewed 18 community members representing a mix of backgrounds and perspectives and invited them to discuss hot-button terms like institutional racism, microaggression, and white fragility. The newspaper produced a video project about the words we use to talk about race. <http://projects.seattletimes.com/2016/under-our-skin/#>

## Resources

### **American Society of News Editors Annual Newsroom Employment Surveys**

Each year since 1978, ASNE has conducted a newsroom employment survey (previously called newsroom employment census) that attempts to track the percentage of women and minorities in U.S. newsrooms. Over the years, the survey has changed to include digital-only news organizations. [https://www.asne.org/newsroom\\_diversitysurvey](https://www.asne.org/newsroom_diversitysurvey)

### **Colorlines**

This daily news site about race is published by Race Forward, a national organization that advances racial justice through research, media and practice. <http://www.colorlines.com/>

### **Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting**

Housed at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism in New York City, the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting is a news

trade organization dedicated to increasing and retaining reporters and editors of color in the field of investigative reporting. <http://idabwellssociety.org>

### **Journalism Diversity Project**

An answer to the “we can’t find qualified minorities,” this database of more than 100 digital journalists of color is available to hiring managers and conference planners committed to diversity. <http://diversifyjournalismwith.me/>

### **The Maynard Institute for Journalism Education**

Named for pioneering publisher and editor Robert C. Maynard, the Maynard Institute promotes diversity in the news media through improved coverage, hiring, business practices and training programs that equip journalists with leadership, multimedia skills and subject expertise for news organizations across platforms. The organization’s primary mission is “to ensure that all segments of our diverse society are fairly, accurately and credibly portrayed.” <http://www.mije.org/>

### **Media Diversity Forum**

Founded in 2002 as a project of the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University, Media Diversity Forum pulls together research, commentary, news and analysis related to diversity and media. <http://www.mediadiversityforum.lsu.edu/>

### **Media Diversity Institute**

The MDI works internationally to encourage and facilitate responsible media coverage of diversity. It aims to prevent the media from intentionally or unintentionally spreading prejudice, intolerance and hatred, which can lead to social tensions, disputes and violent conflict. MDI encourages instead, fair, accurate, inclusive and sensitive media coverage in order to promote understanding between different groups and cultures. <http://www.media-diversity.org/en/>

### **Radio Television Digital News Association Annual Surveys on Women and Minorities**

Each year RTDNA surveys broadcast newsrooms across the United States and monitors the number of women and minorities in the radio and television news workforce and in management positions. [https://www.rtdna.org/channel/women\\_minorities\\_survey](https://www.rtdna.org/channel/women_minorities_survey)

### **Society of Professional Journalists Diversity Resources**

SPJ provides an open forum for the discussion of diversity issues in journalism. The organization’s Diversity Committee aims to promote a broader voice in

newsrooms across the country and expand the depth and quality of news reports through better sourcing. The diversity page on the organization's website provides tips, teaching plans and other resources for journalists and journalism educators. <https://www.spj.org/diversity.asp>

## Notes

- 1 Raul Ramirez, "Final Words From Raul Ramirez: 'Journalism Has Always Been About the Power of Voices,'" written shortly before his death for the presentation of the Distinguished Service to Journalism Award by the Society of Professional Journalists, Northern California Chapter, in San Francisco, Nov. 19, 2013. <https://www.kqed.org/news/118783/final-words-from-raul-ramirez-journalism-has-always-been-about-the-power-of-voices>
- 2 Tyrone Beason, telephone interview by author, Jan. 15, 2017.
- 3 "Newsroom Employment Census," American Society of News Editors, July 28, 2015. <http://asne.org/content.asp?contentid=415>
- 4 "We Are Seattle Times Journalists Examining The Words We Use To Talk About Race In America. Ask Us Anything!" *Reddit*, June 23, 2016. [https://www.reddit.com/r/IAMA/comments/4pi7zm/we\\_are\\_seattle\\_times\\_journalists\\_examining\\_the/](https://www.reddit.com/r/IAMA/comments/4pi7zm/we_are_seattle_times_journalists_examining_the/)
- 5 Adam Jude, "UW Coach Chris Petersen, Inspired By 'Under Our Skin' Series, Encourages Dialogue On Race," *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 1, 2016. <https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/uw-husky-football/uw-coach-chris-petersen-inspired-by-under-our-skin-series-encourages-dialogue-on-race/>
- 6 Dori Maynard, telephone interview by author, July 23, 2014.
- 7 U.S. Census Quickfacts, July 1, 2016. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>
- 8 "New Census Bureau Report Analyzes U.S. Population Projections," U.S. Census Bureau, March 3, 2015. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-tps16.html>
- 9 Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, "The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect" (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 209.
- 10 Ray Suarez, email interview with author, Aug. 13, 2017.
- 11 Aly Colón, telephone interview by author, Jan. 9, 2017.
- 12 Maynard, Dori J. "Showcase: Fault Lines," Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. [http://www.localcommunities.org/servlet/lc\\_ProcServ/GID=00091000000967482594843765&PG=00112000000970358389680821](http://www.localcommunities.org/servlet/lc_ProcServ/GID=00091000000967482594843765&PG=00112000000970358389680821)
- 13 "The Future of Diversity in the News," American Society of News Editors, 2011–12, 12–13. [https://www.scribd.com/document/103525257/The-Future-of-Diversity-in-the-News#download&from\\_embed](https://www.scribd.com/document/103525257/The-Future-of-Diversity-in-the-News#download&from_embed)
- 14 "Newsroom Diversity Census," American Society of News Editors, 2002–2015. [https://www.asne.org/newsroom\\_diversitysurvey](https://www.asne.org/newsroom_diversitysurvey)
- 15 "Newsroom Diversity Survey," American Society of News Editors, 2016. <http://asne.org/content.asp?contentid=447>

- 16 Adam Maksł, telephone interview by author, Jan. 17, 2017.
- 17 “ASNE, Google News Lab release 2017 diversity survey results with interactive website,” American Society of News Editors, Oct. 10, 2017. <https://www.asne.org/diversity-survey-2017>
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 “ASNE releases 2016 Diversity Survey results,” American Society of News Editors, Sept. 9, 2016. [http://asne.org/blog\\_home.asp?Display=2153](http://asne.org/blog_home.asp?Display=2153)
- 20 RTDNA/Hofstra University Annual Survey, Radio Television Digital News Association, 2016. [https://www.rtdna.org/article/rtdna\\_research\\_women\\_and\\_minorities\\_in\\_newsrooms](https://www.rtdna.org/article/rtdna_research_women_and_minorities_in_newsrooms)
- 21 Karen Magnuson, telephone interview by author, July 28, 2016.
- 22 Ray Suarez, interview by author, San Francisco, Jan. 11, 2017.
- 23 Rebecca Carroll, “I’m a Black Journalist. I’m Quitting Because I’m Tired of Newsroom Racism,” *The New Republic*, Oct. 20, 2014. <https://newrepublic.com/article/119912/black-female-journalist-quits-media-decries-newsroom-racism>
- 24 Brenda Payton, telephone interview by author, July 22, 2016.
- 25 Margalit Fox, “Dori J. Maynard, Who Sought Diversity in Journalism, Dies at 56,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 26, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/26/business/dori-j-maynard-who-sought-diversity-in-journalism-dies-at-56.html>
- 26 Margaret Sullivan, “Newsroom Diversity: Why We Should Care,” *The New York Times*, June 17, 2015. <https://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/06/17/newsroom-diversity-why-we-should-care/>