MEDIA CULTURE & SOCIETY

American journalism and the politics of diversity

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What does it say about the American news media that one of the largest and fastest-growing journalistic professional voluntary associations is 'Unity: Journalists of Color'?[1] According to the journalists at Unity, it indicates the increasing awareness of racism in the news media and the determination of black, Latino, Asian-American and Native American journalists to do something about it. The Unity movement traces its roots to the Kerner Commission Report of 1968, which criticized news coverage of racial riots that year, arguing that the 'media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world'. 'This may be understandable', the Report continued, 'but it is not excusable in an institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of our society.' Unity is thus committed to two major goals: increasing the numbers of journalists of color to better reflect the actual composition of the American population and improving the 'representation' of people of color in the news.[2]

Asked to name the biggest 'overlooked' story of 1999, Unity president Jackie Greene, a manager at *USA Today*, replied that 'more should have been reported about people who were left out of the dot-com economic bounce. Little trickled down to the poorest among us.'[3] Likewise, Unity's official website has invoked 'the ethical obligation to cover low-income neighborhoods and disenfranchised people who fall outside the advertising demographic . . .'.[4]

But can diversity really be extended to include those 'outside the advertising demographic' when Unity has also underlined its 'commitment to the corporate bottom line . . . so that investment in diversity has a return . . .'?[5] If it is left to Unity's private sponsors listed in the 2004 annual conference program, a virtual who's who of the world's largest media corporations and advertisers including Gannett, Bloomberg, Toyota,

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General Motors, Coca-Cola Co. and Microsoft, the answer is far from certain. Thus the question becomes: can the 'diversity' ideal serve as the basis of genuine media reform, or is it more likely to provide 'progressive' political cover for an increasingly profit-obsessed media industry that has turned its back on serious and critical coverage of growing economic inequalities?

Diversity journalism

Today's Latino, Asian and Native American – as well as gender and sexual orientation – identity politics are largely the legacy of the black civil rights movement of the 1960s. The movement originally encompassed a complex array of organizations and political orientations, including protesters against neo-colonialism, defenders of alternative lifestyles, and upwardly mobile middle-class professionals. In the end, not surprisingly, it was the latter who predominated, with groups such as the Ford Foundation-funded Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) reducing the multi-faceted 'multicultural' movement to a simple demand for proportionate representation in universities, governments and corporations, government benefits for perceived past discrimination, and public recognition of new categories of persons brought into existence by the Census Bureau (O'Connor and Epstein, 1988; Skerry, 1993). With the exception of the National Association of Black Journalists, founded in 1975, the other constituent members of Unity began well after the struggle to define multiculturalism had been largely fought and settled as the recognition and defense of separate 'communities' of color. The Asian American Journalists Association was founded in 1981. The National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the Native American Journalists Association were both founded in 1984. In 1988, all of these groups came together to form Unity.

Unity has closely monitored the American Society of Newspaper Editors' efforts to employ a proportion of minority journalists equal to the overall proportion of minorities in the US population. Between 1978 and 2000, whereas the proportion of 'people of color' of the total American population increased from 19 percent to nearly 30 percent, the proportion of newspaper journalists of color also rose, but only from 4 percent to 12 percent. In television news, the numbers are somewhat higher, with 20 percent of its workforce made up of minorities. But in both print and television news, less than 10 percent of editorial management positions are held by minority journalists.[6] Employment of minority journalists varies widely by region of the country, but Unity's goal of proportionate employment is far from being achieved. The diversity journalism movement has also had only limited success in achieving its second major goal,

changing the amount and kind of stories about 'communities of color'. A 1997 study sponsored by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists found that only 112 out of 12,000 national television network news stories focused on 'Latinos' or 'Latino issues', and 64 percent of this coverage was about crime, affirmative action and immigration.[7]

Diversity journalism, however, has had greater success in changing the language of race reporting. Thus, even if Latinos have not yet attracted much attention in the news, the very existence and widespread, unthinking acceptance of the category 'Latino' is proof of Unity's ongoing success. Noting how public opinion poll results on race and ethnic issues vary sharply according to wording of questions (e.g. people tend to be against 'quotas' but for 'civil rights'), Unity's website has provided a helpful list of 'suggestions' on how to employ 'the words that frame the issues'. Instead of quotas, Unity suggests 'hiring outreach', 'goals' or 'adaptable timetables'; instead of 'illegal alien', 'undocumented immigrant' or 'new immigrant'. Many news media outlets have added such terms to their in-house style guides, while not necessarily adopting all of Unity's suggestions. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* 'Style and Usage Guide' comments, 'It is not important for us to be politically correct. It is important for us to communicate with our readers fairly and accurately.' Under the entry 'illegal immigrants', the *Times*'s 'Style and Usage Guide' notes:

> Use this term in referring to citizens of foreign countries who have come to the country with no passport. The nouns alien and illegal should not appear in headlines. The term undocumented immigrant is acceptable as a synonym for illegal immigrant under certain conditions, such as when a form of the word 'illegal' already appears in a sentence . . .[8]

And indeed, the term 'illegal alien', common in the 1970s, is virtually never used today.

A more fundamental shift in media discourse is evident in the relative frequency of the terms 'assimilation' and 'multiculturalism'. During the 1970s and even into the 1980s, one finds in immigration news stories favorable and relatively frequent references to assimilation as the accepted process of incorporating immigrants into the society. 'While the society has failed at racial assimilation, it has successfully integrated various ethnic groups – except for the Mexicans', notes a late 1970s *Los Angeles Times* story (Scheer, 1979). The story concludes that the 'persistence of the "illegal alien problem" is a testament to the continued failure to find that fusion of the two cultures'. In another *Los Angeles Times* article from the same period, a friendly Barrio policeman helps illegal immigrants with the 'difficulties of assimilating into a new culture' (Soble, 1979). However, by the early 1990s, assimilation belongs, not to the friendly policeman, but to the anti-immigration activist, as one *Los Angeles Times* story puts it:

'For FAIR (the anti-immigration Federation for American Immigration Reform) strategists, who are enthusiastic proponents of assimilation, diversity is a suspect notion' (McDonnell and Jacobs, 1993). As late as 1986, news stories in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post* mentioning the word 'assimilation' outnumbered those mentioning 'multiculturalism' 190 to 69, and 89 to 20, respectively. But in 1990, the balance shifted. By 1994, stories mentioning 'multiculturalism' outnumbered those mentioning 'assimilation' by 561 to 218 in the *Los Angeles Times*, and 264 to 116 in the *Post*.[9]

Diversity journalism's successes have been even more spectacular in the growing field of ethnic media. The Spanish-language network *Univisión* has more than 600 local television affiliates in the United States. In the highly competitive Los Angeles media market, *Univisión* affiliate KMEX-TV has the third most-watched nightly news program (Hudson, 2000). As America Rodriguez (1996: 62), a leading scholar of the network, notes:

> US Latino pan-ethnicity has dual origins, as an administrative convenience for the US government, specifically the Census Bureau, and as a commercial construction for advertisers seeking 'new' markets. By commissioning the first national Hispanic market research, *Univisión* . . . helped initiate the process of commercially defining Latin Americans and their descendants in the United States as a unitary market, a national audience.

'Mainstream' reporters at the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Orange County Register*, as well as at alternative newsweeklies such as the *LA Weekly*, say they regularly watch *Univisión* news and read Spanish-language dailies like *La Opinión* to help guide their coverage of Latino and immigrant issues.

Finally, the diversity journalism movement has succeeded in making courses on media and multiculturalism virtually mandatory in most university journalism and communication programs. Conferences and colloquiums on diversity and race have been held by most of the major journalistic professional and educational institutions. Examples include the national Committee for Concerned Journalists' forum on 'Diversity and the News' in February 1998, the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism's Workshop on Journalism, Race and Ethnicity in June 1999, and a March 2000 conference on 'Covering the Latino Community' sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), America's oldest professional organization of journalists, now has a Diversity Committee which recently issued a 'Rainbow Source Book' to help 'broaden the perspectives represented in the news media', meaning in SPJ's terms not an ideological broadening but simply providing names of experts from 'groups that are historically underrepresented in the media: women, gays and lesbians, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities' (*The Quill*, 1999).

Race and gender are 'crude proxies for ideas' argued one participant at the 'Diversity and the News' conference. But if that is so, why have numerous studies (e.g. Bogart, 1989; Rosenstiel et al., 1998; Underwood, 1995) shown an increasing ideological narrowing, de-politicization and trivialization of American news during the same period when employment of minorities and women has increased, even if not as much as one might hope (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996)?[10] And if racial and gender diversity translate into diversity of content, how can it be that the vice president of Gannett Corporation, publisher of *USA Today* and dozens of bland, mediocre newspapers, can truthfully brag that his company has 'one of the best records for diversity in the work force among the mass media industries' (cited in Glasser, 1992: 133)? The answer, of course, is that there is no necessary connection between physical and ideological diversity, and the gap between the two is widening as diversity journalism is increasingly allied to multicultural marketing and public relations.

Multicultural marketing

The American news media have always been highly commercial. But in recent decades, the sale of family-owned companies to media conglomerates trading shares on the stock market has intensified profit pressures (Hallin, 1996; Squires, 1993). Technological advances in the use of computer databases have provided one way to meet these increased profit expectations: instead of inefficient mass marketing, highly focused target marketing. Since the mid-1980s, Census data have been used to target according to race/ethnicity in addition to other 'life-style enclaves' linked to age, gender, income and previous buying habits (Wilson and Gutiérrez, 1985, 1995) The three major racial categories – Hispanic, Asian-Pacific Islander and Black – that guide the growing field of 'multicultural marketing' are constructs that owe their existence to the US federal government's OMB Statistical Directive 15 of 1973 (Hollinger, 1995; Lind, 1995).[11] Since the 1980s, the raw number of so-designated minorities has increased relative to the white population, but more importantly, thanks to the efforts of activists and media outlets like *Univisión*, the self-conscious identities of dozens of diverse national origin groups have coalesced around the three categories. In other words, if an African-American or black identity was well entrenched in American life from the long history of slavery, segregation and discrimination, a Latino identity bringing together Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans and El Salvadorans had to be 'forged', as did an Asian identity joining Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Vietnamese, Cambodians, etc.

Joseph Turow (1997: 194) argues that the advertising industry, via its target marketing strategy, 'affects not just the content of its own campaigns

but the very structure and content of the rest of the media system'. Chiefly, he maintains, target marketing favors the rise of 'segment-making' media, those outlets that speak to ever-smaller slices of America, over 'society-making' media, those outlets 'that have the potential to get all those segments to talk to each other' (Turow, 1997: 3). In a 1987 conference sponsored by the McKesson Corporation, Pacific News Service and the New California Alliance, a gathering reflective of the identity politics left's increasing cooperation with big business, California poll director Marvin Field told the audience of journalists, academics and activists that California was fragmenting into diverse 'segments' and that:

> . . . the mainstream media, individually and collectively, are reaching a smaller and smaller portion of the total. It's immutable: they can't overcome it. These growing segments together are becoming the majority. The only practical way they can be reached is selectively. And what we need is to make room politically, economically, and socially for a wider, diverse, specialized media.

What Field does not stress, of course, is the extent to which the media themselves are contributing to rather than simply reflecting this social fragmentation.

Indeed, Latino activists and Latino advertising agencies have often worked in tandem to promote Spanish-language media. The argument: Latinos are 'most receptive' to appeals in their own language (Guernica, 1982 cited in Wilson and Gutiérrez, 1985: 123–4). In fact, second- and third-generation Latinos are just as likely as other waves of immigrants to speak English as their first language (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996: 215–16). What is distinctive about the contemporary wave of immigration is its continuing relentless pace, which has meant that the first generation, whose first language is indeed Spanish, is being continually replenished. As one Los Angeles area Latino advertising director puts it:

> With 31 million residents of the US considered Hispanic, we are a critical mass that does not need acculturation the same way the Irish, Poles and Slavs did. No, this time it's different. Very different. With unprecedented numbers, we are already fully vested in the American dream. We have a language that will get us to work and home again, allow us to buy all of life's necessities and make a fair living [without ever] really having to take up the language of Chaucer, Blake or Updike. (Santiago, 1999)

If it is 'different this time', it is in part because Hispanic activists, elected officials and journalists, along with Spanish-language media, have a strong interest in keeping it that way.

There is evidence that target marketing has not only favored the rise of 'segment-making' media, as Turow suggests, but has transformed 'society-making' media such as daily newspapers. The national television networks each have their own executive 'head of diversity' and many major

newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Orange County Register*, have in-house diversity committees, made up of journalists of color on staff as well as news and business-side managers. Against the American tradition that there ought to be a 'wall' separating editorial and advertising departments, diversity journalism in practice often aggressively breaks down these distinctions. At the *Orange County Register*, reporters on the 'Asian Cultures' team, in addition to writing about the growing Vietnamese immigrant population, have become scouts to help business staff identify the best distribution points and potential advertisers, as well as goodwill ambassadors for the newspaper to the 'community' (Robertson, 2000: 18).

What matters to advertisers is 'class not mass'. Minority readers are desired only to the extent that they are affluent (Cranberg, 1997). As civil rights activist Jesse Jackson (1999) recently pointed out, of the $160 billion in total US consumer advertising spending, only $1.1 billion was targeted toward the African-American market, significantly less than their proportion of the population would warrant. Given African-Americans' and Hispanics' yearly earnings of $700 billion, 'multicultural marketing . . . is not just another "cause" ', Jackson argues, 'it is good business'. In the interests of public relations, corporate advertisers give Jackson a respectful hearing, but are hesitant to take significant action. This is not surprising. What is surprising is that Jackson and so many other former civil rights activists have put so much faith in the unadulterated workings of the market. What Jackson does not acknowledge is that if multicultural marketing is simply 'good business', then the 'cause' will be sharply limited by the needs and interests of major corporations.

Some ethnic identity activists argue that diversity journalism and multicultural marketing have not gone far enough and have settled for breadcrumbs instead of parity. But in fact the 'movement' has succeeded all too well, in that it *has* helped equate diversity with 'race' in the public mind and thus diverted attention from the increasing *lack* of ideological diversity in the American media. In this sense, the diversity movement has become less about racial justice than racial mysticism, that is, the promotion of the idea of homogeneous non-white racial 'communities' that in fact are sharply divided along class lines (Lind, 1995: 175). And thus, if the identity issues that the diversity movement raises are important for a segment of the non-white middle class, the 'racial mysticism' hypothesis suggests that this focus on diversity (defined purely in terms of 'representation' of semi-arbitrary 'racial' categories) helps draw attention away from other pressing issues, such as widening income inequality and increasing job precariousness for the working class. Not coincidentally, these are precisely the kind of class and economic problems that a globalizing, shareholder-profit-driven media system would prefer to ignore.[12]

Visible and invisible in the multicultural vision

'At stake today in local as well as global political struggles is the capacity to impose a way of seeing the world, of making people wear "glasses" that force them to see the world divided up in certain ways', Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 22) has argued. 'These divisions create groups that can be mobilized, and that mobilization makes it possible for them to convince everyone else that they exist, to exert pressure and obtain privileges. . ..' If diversity journalism and multicultural marketing have helped to make visible, and hence real, the 12.5 percent of Americans who claim Latino identities and the 3.7 percent who claim Asian and Pacific Islander identities, they have by the same process contributed to making invisible, and hence non-existent, the 12.9 percent of American workers who belong to labor unions and the 12.1 percent of Americans who live below the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2001, 2003; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004).

Previous content analyses have shown the virtual blackout of labor unions and left economic perspectives in the corporate-owned media (e.g. Tasini, 1990). My analysis of national media coverage of immigration – an issue that involves both labor and race/ethnicity aspects – shows that between 1974 and 1994 the labor angle declined while a focus on race/ethnicity increased sharply. An examination of the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the nightly news broadcasts of the dominant three national networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) finds that mentions of social and economic problems suffered by immigrants appeared in 36 percent of prominent immigration-related news stories in 1974 and only 25 percent in 1994. Likewise, the percentage of stories mentioning economic problems suffered by domestic workers (due to immigrants potentially competing for jobs or contributing to downward wage pressure) fell from 43 percent in 1974 to 8 percent in 1994. In contrast, the proportion of stories mentioning racism or discrimination against immigrants increased from 9 percent in 1974 to 22 percent in 1994.

Between the 1970s and 1990s, there was also a clear shift in the kinds of sources journalists relied on for their immigration articles. Of non-government sources, labor unions were the single largest (if still far from frequent) voice in 1974. By 1994, labor unions had all but disappeared (less than 1 percent of all sources cited), replaced by (highly professionalized) ethnic identity associations and assorted experts, many of them linked to diversity think-tanks. When sources are parsed according to their general ideological leaning, the shift in dominant viewpoints is even more striking: whereas in 1974, economic left (mostly trade unions) and cultural left (associations, think-tanks and politicians explicitly linked to ethnic identity organizations such as the congressional Hispanic Caucus) sources each made up 5 percent of all sources in immigration news stories, by

1994, economic left sources had fallen to less than 1 percent while cultural left sources had risen to 14 percent of all sources cited.[13]

In fact, during the 1970s and 1980s, struggles took place inside newsrooms to determine whether immigration would be covered as a labor or an ethnic issue. As Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) raids on immigrants increased during the early 1970s, the labor reporter at the *Los Angeles Times*, Harry Bernstein, wrote stories that emphasized the effects of illegal immigration on American jobs and wages. This aspect of the problem, Bernstein recalls, was 'self-evident: If you have a large pool of poor workers, that's bound to have a demeaning effect on worker wages'. Frank del Olmo, who joined the *Los Angeles Times* in the early 1970s and quickly became the newspaper's most prominent Latino reporter, began reporting regularly about the US–Mexico border and immigration issues. As del Olmo began paying greater attention to Chicano groups and thus emphasizing the ethnic-racial aspects of immigration (del Olmo, 1972), he came into increasing conflict inside the *Los Angeles Times* with Bernstein. Del Olmo viewed Bernstein as a 'knee-jerk' propagandist of the [union federation] 'AFL-CIO line' on immigration and recalls that Bernstein would corner him in the newsroom and 'make a fuss' about del Olmo's stories. But ultimately, del Olmo and his diversity journalist colleagues at other news organizations won the war. As the labor reporters hired at major news organizations during the 1960s and 1970s retired, they were usually not replaced. At best, or worst, labor reporting was subsumed within a new 'workplace' beat under the purview of the business desk (Tasini, 1990). By the mid-1990s, the labor beat at the *Los Angeles Times* had been dissolved, and labor perspectives were only occasionally covered by 'workplace' reporter Stuart Silverstein. Bernstein and other reporters at the *Los Angeles Times* confide that Silverstein 'wanted to do more stories on labor and immigration' but 'his editors won't let him'. *Los Angeles Times* immigration reporter Patrick McDonnell also confirmed the lack of a full-time labor reporter at the newspaper and that there had been 'some contention' over Silverstein's being assigned to the business desk.

The failure to see immigration as a labor story was sharply illustrated during the so-called 'Nannygate' scandals. When it was revealed that US Attorney General nominees Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood had hired illegal immigrants to care for their children. The *New York Times* and other national media defined 'Nannygate' as a woman's issue, that is, from the perspective of 'white, upper-middle-class women'. Under the guise of adopting a feminist perspective, the media effectively adopted the 'employer's' point of view, against those of either the immigrant workers themselves or those domestic workers denied jobs at decent wages by the widespread illegal hiring of cheap foreign labor. A Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) survey of the 142 articles on the Baird/Wood scandals during January through March 1993 found only two which were primarily

focused on immigrants' lives (Cabreros-Sud and Kathwari, 1993; see also Page, 1996: 77–105).

To be fair, there are exceptions. At the *Los Angeles Times*, Robert Scheer's 'Column Left' has frequently analyzed immigration and race issues from a labor or class perspective. For example, in one column, Scheer wrote about the Labor Department's lack of inspection staff to enforce labor wage and safety laws:

> What this means is that the only program with any real promise of cutting down the incessant demand for cheap immigrant labor barely exists. Jobs are the magnet that pull people to this country, and if employers continue to get away with violating our labor standards, then the migrants will keep coming, no matter how many propositions the voters pass. (1994: 5)

Los Angeles Times city editor Bill Boyarsky dismisses Scheer's analyses: 'Scheer thinks in terms of classic Marxist economics, he thinks economics is at the root of everything.' But except for Scheer, the *Los Angeles Times* coverage of immigration during the 1990s gave the impression that economics was at the root of nothing. It seems significant that whereas racial and cultural aspects of immigration could be raised in 'news' stories, naturalized as information, economic aspects had to be ghettoized on the opinion pages and clearly labeled as 'opinion', indeed a left and thus already discredited opinion in contemporary American political culture.

In short, if race and diversity admittedly have been under-covered or often written about in simplistic, stereotyped ways, economic and class inequality remain simply taboo. This goes not only for the commercial media, but also for such mildly alternative media as public television. Rubén Martínez, a journalist, author (see, e.g., Martínez, 1992), and former host of a public affairs program on the Los Angeles public television station KCET, recalls that he was part of the 'multicultural movement from the beginning, from the late 1980s through the '90s . . ..' Martínez says, 'It's not that I regret it . . . it was wonderful, in one sense, a lot of artists got a lot of exposure . . . but [it also] masked class issues.' He now criticizes the officially sanctioned multiculturalism that has become dominant at KCET and so many other media organizations as:

> . . . a safe approach to some very thorny and divisive issues, which ultimately are about class and they're not so much about culture . . .. Anybody want to talk about class? No, don't talk about that unless you're a marketer. But if you're talking about the redistribution of wealth, forget it.

Market pressures and journalistic competition certainly do not always produce a multicultural vision of the world. In recent years, there has even been a backlash, a so-called 'diversity fatigue' (Gitlin, 1995; Hoyt et al., 1999). Yet a soft multiculturalism continues to take up significant space and time in mainstream media that have a 'limited carrying capacity' for

social problems (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). Diversity politics contribute to the displacement and invisibility of more 'threatening' social problems (Edelman, 1988), those that call into question the equity and long-term sustainability of the laissez-faire global economic order. And diversity journalism's reification of artificially created racial categories undermines efforts to create more fluid cosmopolitan identities that transcend as well as tolerate differences and thus provide the basis for broad social solidarity.

Putting only a rosy face on cultural differences and glossing over the increasing economic insecurities faced by America's middle and working classes can have serious policy consequences. When the campaign for Proposition 187, a California ballot measure to deliver social services to illegal immigrants, arose in 1994, journalists at the *Los Angeles Times* were taken by surprise. But they agreed their first priority should be 'to air out this anger as much as possible', as one reporter put it. And so news coverage focused on the specific complaints, motives and strategies of the anti-immigration activists. But what the media failed to do was to seek the deeper causes, both for the surge of immigration and the backlash against it. Roberto Lovato, a former leader of southern California's Central American Resource Center, asks: why didn't the media 'talk about' what had set off the conflict in the first place?

> . . . the way Goodyear, Firestone, or you know, different manufacturing firms in southern California deracinated, abandoned, left deserted, the economic wasteland that is now southcentral Los Angeles . . . it's like having these thirsty people fighting among themselves for the little bit of wetness from this petty little plant, and the media comes and covers the people who are thirsting, fighting over a piece of wetness on a leaf, when the guy who stole the water source of the entire oasis took off without even being questioned.

Los Angeles Times immigration reporter Patrick McDonnell (viewed as relatively '*simpatico*' by immigrant advocacy organizations) admits that he would 'like to do some more' stories on immigration 'in the whole context of economic globalization'. But McDonnell concludes that 'newspapers maybe aren't as good with stories that are very, very high concept'. High concept, in other words, refers to stories in which agency is obscured and obscures itself from view, yet it is precisely here, in the realm of corporate decision-making and global economics, that the real story of immigration was to be found.

Global perspectives were also downplayed because of increasing market pressures on newspapers to emphasize 'local' news. In Orange County, the epicenter of the 1990s anti-immigration backlash, the *Los Angeles Times* competed intensively with the *Orange County Register* over who could provide more 'local' news. In 1992, the *Times* conducted a 'More Local News Sweepstakes' promotion in Orange County, in which participants were required to go over the newspaper's Orange County edition and circle with an orange crayon all the local news in the newspaper. The *Register*

responded proudly in its own counter-promotion, 'To circle all the local news in the *Register*, you'd need a whole box' (Stein, 1992).

If global perspectives were rare in newspapers, they were non-existent on local television news, where most Americans get their news. During a period when crime rates have actually gone down, local television news across America devotes more attention to crime news than any other topic, in some markets as much as 75 percent of all news coverage (Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000; Klite et al., 1997). More than any other type of news, violent crimes combine drama, emotion, fear and intense visuals to attract high audience shares and thus advertising dollars. Moreover, since violent crimes are more often committed by the poor, who are also disproportionately black and Latino, local television news indirectly reinforces racial stereotypes. In this kind of coverage, what is significantly missing are not the 'people of color' but the *white*s who are poor, who commit crimes (violent or otherwise), who lose their jobs, etc., in other words precisely the kind of news which could help dispel the almost automatic association many Americans make between non-whites and social problems. Gilens (1999) documents how US news media have tended to 'associate blacks with negative stories on poverty and whites with neutral or positive stories' (see also Calavita, 1996; Gans, 1995). Gilens argues that public misperceptions that poverty is a black problem (beliefs based on these media representations) have helped to create support for drastic reductions in government social services needed by both the white and non-white poor and working class.

Labor struggles, the global context on immigration and its complex domestic effects, social problems that affect the poor and middle-class across 'racial' lines – these kinds of comprehensive stories, largely missing from the US media, are unlikely to be taken up by journalists focused on the fragmenting (and to listen to Unity's own elected officials) even trivializing politics of identity. On a National Public Radio call-in show with Unity leaders, a caller from Minnesota asked, 'Isn't news news? . . . are there different facts for different races?' Kara Briggs, a reporter for the *Portland Oregonian* and president of the Native American Journalist Association, responded to the caller with a lesson in geography:

> You know, I would submit to you that you being from Minnesota and me being from Washington state, we might say very different things are news. I might talk about the crisis in salmon. You might talk about the crisis in walleye fish. We just have different perspectives. . .

When another caller brought attention to the 'narrow class basis of all current journalists, regardless of race, sex or national origin', Vanessa Williams, a *Washington Post* journalist and president of the National Association of Black Journalists, avoided the question entirely, instead turning to the need to:

> . . . look for non-traditional journalists of color. What about a person who's retired, maybe a homemaker who now – children are out of the house, looking for something to do, somebody who's committed to that community, who knows that community, who can be trained to be a journalist? A young person with a couple of years out of junior college . . ..[14]

In fact, there is a reason for such inept responses. American journalism's professional credo prohibits open advocacy. Hence the Unity journalists are placed in the difficult position of criticizing the media for lacking diversity, yet, in order not to seem ideological, forced to deny any substantive reason for such diversity. A long tradition of social science research (e.g. Gans, 1980; Schudson, 1995; Tumber, 1999) has shown that the news product is ultimately shaped far more by economic and organizational constraints than the personal characteristics – race, class, sexual orientation or even ideology – of individual journalists. To admit this would both undermine Unity's raison d'être and place the organization in the position of biting the hand of its corporate feeders. Yet only structural reforms of the media system are likely to produce diversity that is more than skin-deep.

Notes

1. Unity's 1999 national conference in Seattle, which attracted some 6000 minority journalists, was billed as the 'largest gathering of reporters and editors in the United States' and was visited by many of the major presidential candidates, including George W. Bush (Stocking, 1999).
2. From 'The Mission of UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc.', on website of Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc. (http://www.unityjournalists.org), viewed May 2001.
3. 'Meet the Prez; The New President for UNITY: Journalists of Color, Inc. Talks to News Watch about his Plans' (News Watch is a media monitoring organization associated with Unity; the interview transcript was found on the News Watch website, http://newswatch. sfsu.edu, viewed May 2001).
4. 'Journalism and Race', Press Kit, website of Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc., viewed May 2001.
5. 'Unity Update', by Paul DeMain, Unity President, from website of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (http://www.nahj.org), fall 1999.
6. Data from Census Report ('ASNE Census Finds Newsrooms Less Diverse') on website of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (http://www.asne.org), May 2001; and 'Journalism and Race', Radio-Television News Directors Association, Ball State University (1998) Annual Survey, on website of Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc., viewed May 2001.
7. Website of Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc., viewed May 2001.
8. Commenting on the *Times* policy, chief immigration reporter Patrick McDonnell described 'undocumented' as a euphemism: 'Every illegal immigrant has a document, they may not be legitimate documents, but everybody has a document. . .. So to call them undocumented is kind of preposterous.' From author interview with McDonnell, 13 March 1998. All quotations or information attributed

to journalists or activists in this article derive from in-person interviews conducted by the author in Los Angeles during March and April 1998.

9. Story mentions compiled from author's searches of the Lexis-Nexis database.

10. According to surveys conducted by Weaver and Wilhoit (1996), the percentage of women in the journalistic workforce increased from 20.3 percent in 1971 to 34.0 percent in 1992.

11. The fourth non-white category is Native Americans, less than 1 percent of the population and largely poor. Their poverty as much as their small numbers has made them irrelevant to multicultural marketing professionals, and in part for the same reason they have been the 'poor cousin' in Unity.

12. As Eric Alterman perceptively commented in *The Nation*: 'The editors of *The New York Times Magazine* . . . noticed [recently] that poor people had pretty much disappeared from the media's picture of American society but not, of course, from society itself' (Alterman, 2000: 12). The reason for this silence is not hard to see, Alterman noted, since 'thoughtful, engaging reporting on the poor is neither easy nor profitable and hence does not appeal to media conglomerates and their talk-show bookers . . .' (2000: 12).

13. 'Prominent' news stories are defined as those that start on page 1 or appear during the main evening news broadcasts. Percentages are derived from a broad news content analysis of three years – 1974, 1986 and 1994 – in which the number of news stories on immigration at these major US media outlets peaked. Story samples for each year are 42 (1974), 116 (1986) and 169 (1994). For those same years, the number of social actors cited in the news stories are the following: 288 (1974), 905 (1986) and 1332 (1994). My framing and social actor categorizations are similar in spirit to those employed in Gamson and Modigliani (1989), Hallin (1994), and Page (1996), but were adapted for the purposes of analyzing immigration news coverage in the French and American media (Benson, 2000, 2002). NYU graduate student Jane Mabe recorded issue frames for a random sample of 10 percent of all news stories; inter-coder reliability was 90 percent.

14. Transcript of 'Talk of the Nation', National Public Radio, 8 July 1999.

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