

Racial Profiling

Racial Representation on Local TV News
Fall 2002

*A Report from the Grand Rapids Institute
for Information Democracy*

www.griid.org

GRID



Summary of Findings

- ◆ WZZM 13 continues to produce *Healing the Racial Divide* segments.
- ◆ Minority voices in news stories continue to be at census levels or below.
- ◆ Minority voices/perspectives are rarely presented in non-race specific news stories.
- ◆ Crime coverage continues to reflect a disproportionately high number of Black and Latino suspects.
- ◆ WOOD TV 8 provided the most stories pertaining to institutional racism.
- ◆ All 3 stations recognized minority achievements in the community, but failed to provide minority voices in these news stories.
- ◆ The Arab and Muslim Community in West Michigan continues to be represented within the post 9-11 framework.
- ◆ Only WOOD TV 8 provided ongoing coverage of local efforts to ban Native mascot/logo use in schools, but has not named the "controversy" as racism.

Methodology

From September 3 through November 11, 2002, GRIID conducted a study of three local TV News stations: Monday through Friday only.

GRIID taped and logged information from the 5:30, 6 & 11pm newscasts of WOOD TV 8 & WZZM 13, and the 10pm newscast of WXMI's FOX 17.

GRIID looked at the number of stories, logged who spoke in each story according to race, social position or title that was given by each station. We also looked a crime coverage by race representation and conducted content analysis of stories that pertained to racism, both personal and institutional.

This is the 5th report that GRIID has conducted on racial representation since 1999. To view past reports go to www.griid.org/reports.

To contact GRIID call
459-4788x122
or e-mail
jsmith@grcmc.org

Introduction

This report marks the fifth consecutive year that GRIID has monitored racial representation on local TV news. We covered a 50-day period from September 3 - November 11, not including weekends.

This time period provided some interesting opportunities for representation and analysis. The Fall of 2002, consisted of local and state-wide elections, 9-11 observances, numerous community events related to diversity & racism, and the threat of war with Iraq. All of these aspects will be covered in this report.

In addition, this report continues to look at racial representation in news stories based on statistical data for each station that you can find on pages 11-13.

We continue to follow the recommendations that both GRIID and the Media Action Team of the Racial Justice Summit has endorsed since 2000. These recommendation provide a framework of analysis for our study.

GRIID acknowledges some good stories about race during the study period, but concludes that there is significant room for improvement for all three stations.

Recognition in Silence

All three stations reported on minority award ceremonies/minority recognition in the community. WZZM 13 reported on an Hispanic achievement award at Wealthy St. Theatre, WOOD TV 8 reported on a Minority Business Awards ceremony, and both 13 & 17 covered the annual NAACP awards celebration.

It is important that minority achievement is covered in local news, but a fundamental flaw in all of these stories is that viewers never heard any minority voices. How much would that have changed the significance of the story had viewers actually heard from one or more of the award recipients? These were all stories between 30-40 seconds, how difficult would it have been to add 10-15 seconds of comments? Whether intentional or not, the news stations in effect muted the minority community. This is significant on two levels. First, it communicates that minorities have nothing important to say. Secondly, it re-enforces the perception amongst White viewers that Black & Latino voices are heard only when they are complaining about racism.

Another example of minority muting was the coverage of the ribbon cutting at the new Franklin SW campus for the GR Public Schools. All three stations covered this event, an event with

great importance for the Latino community. Unfortunately, not one Latino spokesperson, parent or student was interviewed.

Recommendation #4

Utilize minority opinions for non-race specific issues. Minorities can speak to issues of the economy, education, the environment, gender and politics.

This lack of minority voices in non-race specific stories was re-enforced in the data for all three stations. Minority voices are limited in areas of business, health, lawyer/judges, education and government/elected officials. The only area of improvement statistically was minority voices in category of law enforcement. This was due primarily to the fact that the DC sniper case received extensive coverage locally and the main law enforcement spokesperson was Black.

See the National Association of Hispanic Journalist annual report on Latino representation on Network News at <http://www.nahj.org/pdf/br2003.pdf>

The Usual Suspects

For the 5th year in a row local TV news disproportionately shows minority faces as crime suspects. Minority voices continue to be a small percentage of all voices in local TV news coverage, but

when it comes to crime suspects the percentages go way up, especially for Blacks, Latinos and Arabs - see below.

Percentage of total news voices

	White	Black	Latino	Arab
	86%	10%	2%	.6%
	84%	11%	2%	.2%
	88%	9%	1.5%	1%

Percentage of crime suspects

	White	Black	Latino	Arab
	46%	36%	9%	7%
	49%	35%	5%	6%
	42%	27%	8%	19%

These percentages by the TV stations can have a negative impact on public perception about who is committing crime. A look at examples from both WZZM 13 and WOOD TV 8 can help us to see how problematic race representation and crime coverage can be.

In October channel 13 ran back to back crime stories that underscores both racial and class bias. The first story was about a Black father who was charged with neglect by bringing his infant to a crack house. In this story, his mug shot was put on the

screen, while the news reader spoke with a tone of disgust. The very next story was about a Martha Stewart executive who was being charged with economic fraud. The footage used here was of a man surrounded by lawyers/ supporters going to his car with reporters in pursuit. It was difficult to see his face and the news reader spoke in a very neutral tone. So why the difference? Was this intentional? The result is that viewers might see a bias, whether it was intentional or not.

WOOD TV 8 ran a length story in November about a shooting in a southeast area neighborhood in Grand Rapids. The initial story was about the shooting with concerns that the neighborhood, which has improved, might be stigmatized due to this recent shooting.

The video footage early on was exclusively of African American residents in the Highland/Prospect area, people standing in the streets and on their porches. Attempting to put a positive spin on the story, the TV 8 reporter then interviewed a staff person from the Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF). According to the staff person ICCF has been building new houses in that area for several years. This all seems good, except that the person they interviewed was White. Now it would be ridiculous to say that this ICCF staff had nothing useful to say about the development of a predominantly Black neighborhood, but it is equally so if news reporters can

not be sensitive to how both Black & White viewers might interpret this story. A great deal of discrimination is based upon perception.

Best Practices

WZZM 13 continued to run it's monthly segment of *Healing the Racial Divide*. We documented the September and October segments, one dealing with internalized racism and the other with teaching history from a multicultural perspective.



<http://www.wzzm13.com/news/healingtheracialdivide.asp>

The September segment focused on teaching history that included more than White perspectives and relied on two teachers - a Latina middle school teacher in the Wyoming district, and an African American professor at Hope College. Both interviews gave viewers good perspectives and gave clear examples of how to be more inclusive with history in the classroom. Where this story fell short was that it didn't investigate whether or not teachers are getting this training, or if the textbooks being used reflect a more multicultural perspective.

The October segment dealt with internalized racism that was a follow up story done on the initial WZZM 13 Special that aired summer of 2002.

A young Black male was asked to be adopted by a White family because he thought they could discipline better. The story focused most on the boy's comments and then an interview with a psychologist from Pine Rest. The psychologist's insights on internalized racism were quite general, with no real examples or references to studies or books that viewers could read that explored this matter in detail. The psychologist was also White.

Recommendation #1

Be an advocate for racial justice in the same way that you are already advocates for issues like quality public education, health care and consumer safety.

One of the best stories that we documented during our 50-day study was a segment by WOOD TV 8 that focused on health issues in the Black community. According to the story heart disease is high in the Black community, yet medical services are severely limited. A Black doctor who works for Spectrum Health is heading up a new African American Health Institute that will focus on the health needs of the Black community.

The story had a lengthy interview with this doctor and a Black patient, who was in recovering from heart problems. This was a great example of a story that incorporated race into a non-race specific theme - health.

Traditional Racism

Since the early 1990's the issue of Native American mascot/logo use by sports teams and schools has received some national media attention. Recently, because of organizing by the Native community, Marshall High School has become the focus of a battle over its use of a Native mascot.

WOOD TV 8 was the only station during our 50-day study period to report on this issue, running 3 stories. Both sides of this "controversy" were presented, but it's how they framed the story that was problematic.

Each story began with the reporter in the TV studio, standing in front of a large screen that read "Nickname Battle." In the initial story the TV 8 reporter referred to the citizens who wanted to keep the name "Redskins" as representing an "Old Tradition."

To begin with there is a general consensus in the Native community that

Go to this web link for more resources the Native Mascot/logo issue
<http://www.griid.org/mediaracism-mascot.shtml>



“Redskins” is a derogatory word, much like the term “niggers.” The logo used by Marshall school is typical of logos, in that it is a blatant stereotype of Native people - a red skinned, male face with a headdress.

Secondly, just because there is a sector of the community, for whatever reason, that wants to maintain a racist practice, it shouldn't be reported on it as an “Old Tradition.” It was an “Old Tradition” for White people to call Blacks “darkies,” “niggers,” and “burrheads,” but those are no longer acceptable. Reporters can present both sides of this issue and not condone one side, especially since this issue has a great deal to do with language.

There was one other story that had something to do with Native Americans, although it wasn't framed that way. WXMI 17 ran a story about a photo exhibit at the Holland museum with the works of Edward S. Curtis. Curtis is famous for his photos of Native Americans at the end of the 19th century, including photos of Geronimo and Sitting Bull.

The story focuses exclusively on comments from two representatives of the museum, both of which were White. Interestingly enough, during the story one of the museum reps made the comment that Curtis was accused of dressing up his subjects before taking their picture.

Unfortunately the FOX reporter did not find this comment worth pursuing. According to Goetzmann, “ethnographers were aware that Curtis had manipulated the subject matter by resorting to photographic trickery and posing Indians near modern tepees.” (*The West of the Imagination*)

Ward Churchill, in *Fantasies of the Master Race*, makes the point that photographers like Curtis dressed up the Natives “to make them look more traditional.” Since the US had virtually destroyed most traditional ways of living, the dominant culture had to romanticize the remaining Natives in nostalgic fashion in order to cope with their role in what Churchill calls a “genocidal campaign.”

The Limits of 9/11 Coverage

In some ways attention to the Arab and Muslim populations in the US has increased since 9/11. People might be more aware of the local Mosque or that most Arabs do not support terrorism. At the same time, much of the local coverage of the Arab and Muslim community has been limited to a 9/11 theme. It's as if Arabs and Muslims are irrelevant when it comes to anything other than terrorism.

All 3 stations produced 9/11 stories, some around the first anniversary of the terrorist attack in the US, while other

stories looked at responses to Homeland Security measures.

In the one-year anniversary coverage each station spoke with a local Imam (religious spokesperson for the Mosque) or local Arab business owners. They talked about how supportive people have been since 9/11 and that there have been numerous opportunities for more open dialogue. The anniversary coverage was fairly upbeat, but limited. The same Muslim representative was interviewed and just one Arab business owner. This could create a wrongful impression amongst viewers that Arabs and Muslims have nothing to worry about in West Michigan.

WOOD TV 8 was the only station to cover Arab or Muslim issues after the 9/11 observances during our 50-day study. They ran two longer stories in late October and early November, both having to do with terrorism on the domestic front.

The first story dealt with the new Homeland Security policy for non-US citizens entering the country. The policy was far sweeping in some ways, but does target people from specific countries that are mostly Arab. Qais Anani, a local Arab and member of the Arab American Association of West Michigan was asked his take on this new policy and he responded by saying it was “racial profiling.” The segment then showed Attorney General John Ashcroft

at the US/Canada border saying “this is not racial profiling.” The story concludes with the voice of Qais Anani expressing more concern about the policy over video footage of Muslims at prayer.

There are problems at many levels with this story. First, there should have been comments from more than one Arab. People from the other target countries could have been interviewed, immigration lawyers and local organization that work with new immigrants. This would have provided viewers with multiple voices and perspectives, especially for an issue that affects such a broad range of people.

Secondly, why is it that when we hear from Arabs or Muslims that we have to see images of Muslims at prayer? Is that the only thing that defines Muslims? The same is not the case when reporting on Christians, for various reasons. There is great diversity within the Christian community, meaning different practices and symbols exist. The same is true with Muslims, yet viewers are constantly presented with Muslims on their knees at prayer. This is but another form, albeit subtle, of how the news engages in its own form of profiling. (see Said, *Covering Islam*)

The other story that WOOD TV 8 ran in early November was also focused on Racial Profiling and Homeland Security. The story was set up by one of the

newsreaders talking about new terrorist threats. The story cut to a reporter who was talking about how before 9/11 there was about a 60% public opposition to racial profiling, but after 9/11 less than 40% of the American public was opposed.

Next the reporter spoke with 2 Black men, a senior citizen and a young man, both from Grand Rapids. The older man supported racial profiling, saying if it made us safer, then we should let law enforcement/security officers do it. The young Black man was emphatically opposed to it. The senior citizen response piece was about 30 seconds, the young man, less than 10 seconds.

Finally, the story cut to a forum held by the ACLU on Racial Profiling that featured author/researcher Prof. David Harris. Harris wrote the book *Profiles in Injustice: Why Racial Profiling Cannot Work*. The story only allowed viewers to hear an 8 second response by Prof. Harris, less airtime than the senior citizen. Harris is a national expert and researcher on the issue of racial profiling, both amongst law enforcement and with airport security since 9/11.

This story missed many points. First, they failed to mention that there were 4 local panelists that spoke after Prof. Harris, representing the law enforcement, legal, Arab and neighborhood organizing perspectives. Secondly, they didn't interview anyone from the audience that was in attendance. Interviewing anyone present

would have been more honest, since it gave respondents a context in which to work from. Asking people on the street isn't always good journalism, especially if people are unaware of the data or complexities surrounding an issue like racial profiling.

Who might we bomb?

Lastly, it is important to make a few observations about the coverage of a possible war with Iraq that was being debated during our 50-day study period. The data can be viewed by going to http://www.griid.org/pdfs/iraq_coverage.pdf GRIID website.

The possibility of going to war with another country is serious business, therefore news coverage should always be as objective and comprehensive as possible. We found that in the 50-day period that Iraqi voices were never heard outside of Saddam Hussein and and few Iraqi diplomats - Iraqi citizen voices were never heard.



Images we did see

More importantly, the video footage of Iraqis were exclusively of anti-American crowds or Iraqi soldiers, never of families, women or children, people who have been most impacted from the United Nations imposed Economic Sanctions.

One of the first rules of preparing people to go to war with another country is to demonize the opponent. To not hear Iraqi voices or positive images of Iraqi society will more than likely contribute to a lack of concern for Iraqi civilians who are the probable victims if the US decides to go to war.

images we didn't see



*an Iraqi girl
wounded from US bombing*
Source: <http://www.nomorevictims.org/>

Conclusion

Most of the recommendations that have been promoted and endorsed by various community groups throughout West Michigan, have not been applied by the TV news stations. See recommendations on page 14.

Recommendation #1 - only WZZM 13 has produced additional stories/segments dealing with race, albeit in a limited fashion.

Recommendation #2 - stories were produced about those recognized for their work against racism, but we rarely heard from these in individuals.

Recommendation #3 - the data suggests that all 3 stations fell short here.

Recommendation #4 - the data suggests that all 3 stations fell short here.

Recommendation #5 - Since last year's study only ch. 13 has met with a group.

Recommendation #6 - There was no coverage of cultural events during this study period.

Recommendation #7 - Both channel's 8 & 13 did run some stories that looked at institutional racism.

Recommendation #8 - The case of the DC sniper and Iraq coverage are both indications that improvements need to be made on this recommendation.

Recommendation #8

Be more selective about the national and international news used on local broadcasts. Much of this news - news not produced here - perpetuates negative racial stereotypes. University departments and spokesperson of organizations with an international focus could be used as resources.



Data from September 3 - November 11, 2002

	W	B	H	As	N	MR	Ar
Citizens/consumers	34	8	2				2
Neighbors/residents	10	1	2				
Business	39	2					1
Religious	3		1				1
Police	39	12					
Elected/gov't officials	98	7	1			1	1
Community reps	13	3					
Educator	8						
Sports/Entertainment	23	2	1				
Health	14			1			
Student	14	1					
School Administration	28	2					
Workers	6	1					
Victim	2						
Parent/family	40	3					
Lawyer/judge	5	1					
Fire department	10						
Researcher	9						
Political Candidates	14	1					
Military/veteran	1						
Volunteer	1						
Crime (perps/suspects)	31	20	6			3	14
Percentage	42%	27%	8%			4%	19%

Total Voices - 469

White - 411/88%

Black - 44/9%

Latino/a - 7/1.5%

Asian - 1/.25%

Native - 0

Multi-racial - 1/.25%

Arab - 5/1%



	W	B	H	As	N	MR	Ar
Citizens/Consumers	70	9	1	2	1	1	1
Neighbors/residents	28	7	2				
Business	50	3				1	
Religious	6	4					
Police	53	13	2				
Elected/gov't officials	118	5				1	
Community reps	27	3	2	1			2
Educator	18	1	1				2
Sports/Entertainment	22	1	1				
Health	54	3		4			2
Student	30	7		1			
School Administration	43	6					
Workers	23	3					
Victim	6						
Parent/family	69	11	6	1			
Lawyer/judge	26	2					
Fire department	16	1	2				
Researcher	8						
Political Candidates	131	5					
Military/veteran	10						
Volunteer	8						
Crime (perps/suspects)	56	44	11			2	9
Percentage	46%	36%	9%			2%	7%

Total Voices - 837
White - 716/86%
Black - 84/10%
Latino/a - 17/2%
Asian - 9/1%
Native - 1/.1%
Multi-racial - 3/.3%
Arab - 7/.6%



	W	B	H	As	N	MR	Ar
Citizens/Consumers	90	19	1			2	
Neighbors/residents	26	1	2				
Business	51			1		2	
Religious	13	3					1
Police	44	13	1			2	
Elected/gov't officials	86	3				1	
Community reps	12	2	2				
Educator	16	2	1			2	2
Sports/Entertainment	15						
Health	24			3			
Student	14	4		2			
School Administration	37	7					
Workers	24						
Victim	6						
Parent/family	64	18	5	4		2	
Lawyer/judge	15	2					
Fire department	7		2				
Researcher	20						
Political Candidates	50	5					
Military/vet	7	1					
Volunteer	2						
Crime (perps/suspects)	63	45	6			6	8
Percentage	49%	35%	5%			5%	6%

Total Voices - 741
White - 623/84%
Black - 80/11%
Latino/a - 14/2%
Asian - 10/1.3%
Native - 0
Multi-racial - 11/1.5%
Arab - 3/2%

Recommendations for the News Media

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

Contacting the Media

WOOD TV 8

120 College SE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
456-8888
News Director: Patti McGettigan
patti.mcgettigan@lintv.com

WZZM 13

645 3 Mile Rd NW
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49544
559-1315
News Director: Sheryl Grant
cgrant@wzzm.gannett.com

WXMI 17

3117 Plaza Dr. NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525
364-1717
News Director: Tim Dye
tdye@wxmi.com