NewsWatch

Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism at San Francisco State University Spring 1998

Adventures in Tribal Journalism

South Asians: The Hidden Minority

Censorship, Political Correctness or Gay Bashing?

Caught in a Cultural Crossfire

News

The **News Watch Project** is a news media monitoring and advocacy project of the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism at San Francisco State University Department of Journalism. The project's partners are Unity '99, which is comprised of four national journalism associations of color — Asian American Journalists Association, National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalists and Native American Journalists Association — and with the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association.

The project monitors news media coverage of communities of color — African American, Asian American, Latino and Native American — and of gays and lesbians, and advocates fair and accurate coverage of those communities. In addition to a quarterly journal, the project also offers a website with analysis of current coverage issues, a style guide with tips to improve coverage, links with our partner journalism associations, text of prior News Watch Project journals, and other related diversity publications issued through the university.

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The News Watch Project journal is free to members of our partner journalism associations, academic journalism departments and news media organizations. For all others, the cost is $3 per copy, including postage and handling, for U.S. addresses (for international addresses, add $2). Please send a check payable to the News Watch Project at the address below.

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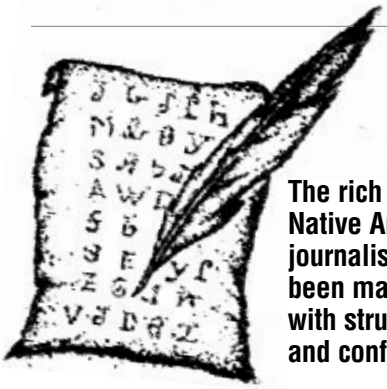
INSIDE



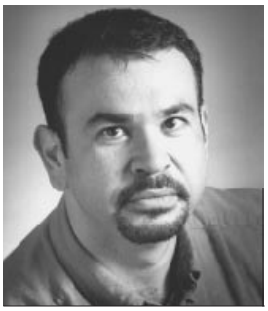
The rich history of Native American journalism has been marked with struggle and conflict.

¡Viva La Causa!

"*Pobre Clinton*," said Rosa the cashier at the Walgreens just around the corner from my apartment in the Mission District, a largely Latino section of San Francisco.

I was purchasing my weekly *Newsweek* with the Clinton Sex Scandal on the cover and on practically every page inside.

"That's the way men are," Rosa said in Spanish, visibly frustrated by the media coverage of the President's alleged — whatever — with Monica Lewinsky, and its legal and political consequences. "In Mexico, government officials have their mistresses. Who cares? It's those damn Republicans. They don't have anything better to do."



Fernando Quintero
Editor and News Watch Director

That was one perspective we rarely see in the mainstream American press; that of the recent immigrant. Just how do immigrants from Latin America or Asia view this whole sex scandal thing? Are the President's social and economic policies more relevant than his affairs with women? Are they more interested in foreign policy than in his private life? Are English-only, anti-immigration and anti-affirmative action ballot initiatives weighing more heavily on their minds?

I am reminded of a story I wrote for an Albuquerque newspaper on the 25th anniversary of John F. Kennedy's death. I interviewed local Hispanics who talked about the special place President Kennedy occupied in the hearts and minds of our people. One can still find those tacky Kennedy tapestries you buy at the local flea market hanging in the homes of Latinos throughout the country. And he was probably a bigger womanizer than Clinton could ever hope to be.

It was a story I am especially proud of because it was an enterprise assignment born out of my cultural sensibilities. That was the reason I got into journalism. But for that same newspaper, I also wrote a story I look back at with some regret.

I once did a two-month long investigative piece on a crack neighborhood that was located across the railroad tracks from downtown Albuquerque. The newspaper I worked for and I were criticized for choosing crack cocaine as the subject of the first major story about the city's only African American neighborhood. Up until then, very little had been written — good or bad — about black people in New Mexico.

In this issue, freelance journalist Starita Smith takes a look at the unique challenges black and Latino reporters face when covering each other's communities.

At a newspaper I worked for in northern California, I was once taken aside by a white heterosexual male editor who told me that my coverage of gays was too biased and sympathetic. Interesting, I thought, that I never received such criticism when I reported on Latino issues.

In our story by Chuck Colbert, a freelance writer and New England chapter president of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, internal charges of bias and political correctness by gay staff at the *Boston Globe* are examined.

We also look at the near Third World conditions for some Native American journalists who must practice their profession under tribal rule. After reading the experiences of Dan Agent, former editor of the *Cherokee Advocate*, I think many journalists working in mainstream media organizations will think twice about taking freedom of the press for granted.

And in an essay by Sreenath Sreenivasan, a journalism professor at Columbia University and a member of the Asian American Journalists Association and the South Asian Journalists Association, he points out the invisibility of belonging to an ethnic subgroup.

All too often, the American mainstream press paints the nation's ethnic communities with a broad, homogenous brush.

For many of you, we expect our journal to strike a familiar chord as well. And we expect to hear back from you. I like to think about News Watch Project as a grassroots movement of journalists, editors, journalism educators and media activists who support fair and accurate media coverage of communities of color — African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos and Native Americans — and of gays and lesbians. Our growing News Watch network is critical to our continued success.

As we enter the next century, we must strive harder for newsrooms and news content that accurately reflects the diversity of our nation. Take a look at our journals and plug into our web site. You'll soon learn that we still have a ways to go. We must challenge the system. And we must challenge ourselves.

More Than Just Entertainment

Dear News Watch:

I am writing to make some clarifications regarding the article, "Latino Publications: Filling a Mainstream Void" in the November 1997 issue of News Watch journal. (Specifically, the reference to my comments about *¡Exito!* Latino newspaper in Chicago targeting "readers more interested in entertainment and fashion trends than local politics.")

While *¡Exito!* often features entertainers and covers entertainment and culture prominently, it also covers the political arena quite extensively and also appeals to a broad and diverse Latino leadership.

¡Exito! consistently covers the key issues in the Latino community, such as education, local and international politics, economic development, health and housing. It also offers a diversity of opinions their editorial pages. *¡Exito!* plays an important role in the Latino community.

James J. Silva
Director of Communications
Latino Institute
Chicago, IL

Letters policy

We welcome letters to the editor via mail, E-mail, or fax. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and must include your name, address and daytime phone number.

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"All-American" Whites Only?

Dear News Watch:

Cameron Diaz

I thought the interview with actress/model Cameron Diaz in the Oct. 12, 1997 issue of *Parade* magazine included a subtle bit of institutional bias. In a reference to her "All-American" looks belying her Latino roots, the sentence implies, quite simply, that an "All-American beauty" cannot be from a "melting pot" background; that All-American means "creamy complexion" and "blue eyes." Period. The reference on the story jump, also to Diaz's "All American" looks, seems to imply that the "sophisticated designer wear" (often shown, incidentally, on the bodies of "exotic" ethnic models) is somehow not "All American." The assumptions in these two statements are staggering.

Mary Ellen Butler
Freelance writer
Concord, CA

"All-American" falls into a category of terms that are either outdated or inappropriate due to their Eurocentric or heterocentric nature, like the term, "red-blooded American male," which is usually used in the context of a heterosexual man's attraction to the opposite sex. What do gay men, who would certainly have an aesthetic appreciation for someone like Cameron Diaz, have running through their veins? Green blood? (F.Q.)

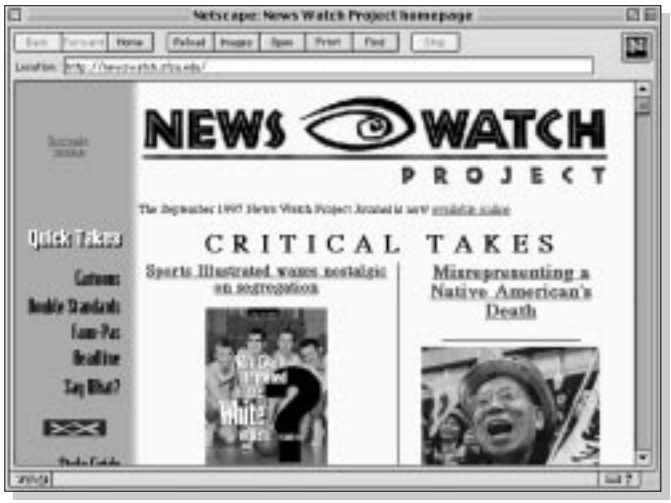
Web site insights

The News Watch Project web site aims to create a dialogue among journalists about how people of color and lesbians and gays are covered in the news. The site is a valuable resource for working journalists looking for guidance and insight about news coverage. In addition to news analysis, the site contains an archive of past publications from News Watch Project and the Center for the Integration and Improvement of Journalism, and links to other sites on-line that deal with bias and diversity.

The site has several departments that include a look at graphic images, headlines, a section that points out "Double Standards" in reporting, "Short Takes" for general analysis and criticism, and a style guide that can be downloaded in its entirety or searched for particular words on-line.

If you read or watch something that belongs in our web site -- good or bad -- send it in. Your contributions will make a big difference.

http://newswatch.sfsu.edu



Coming Out Mid-Life

On Dec. 4, 1997, ABC's newsmagazine 20/20 ran a segment about lesbians coming out in midlife. All of the women featured were in conflict about the decisions they each had made to leave their husbands and come out as lesbians. The interviews with the women made it sound like they all had a choice about what they had done. And because they were no longer in happy marriages, they were miserable victims. One woman said she was suicidal in her marriage to her husband, but that was glossed over. Instead, the report emphasized how happy the women were in their heterosexual nuclear families. This implies that identifying as a lesbian was a capricious, bad choice.

The report further implied that these women wrecked their families with their choice, showing scenes of children and husbands crying as the show faded to a commercial. The show did not present lesbian or gay-parented families that raise well adjusted children. Thus, the view of heterosexuality and traditional "family values" is portrayed as the happy ideal that these "homosexuals" gave up.

Questions asked by the interviewer evoked traditional beliefs about the nuclear family, and pushed conservative values onto the women. Questions such as, "Why not stay married for the family? For the kids? Families are good. Kids need a mom and dad there."

The interviewer failed to acknowledge alternative families that do not have a traditional mother and father.

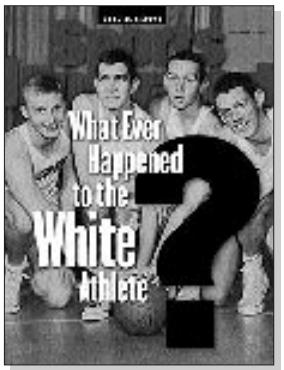
News Watch recognizes that many complicated emotions go into the coming out process, no matter the person's age. But too much emphasis in this story went to the negative. The story missed the complexity of emotions and completely avoided any sense of feeling liberated by their self-realization. News Watch asked 20/20 about the segment. We were told they looked for women in conflict because that made good television.

Focusing only on women in conflict gave a false and condescending impression. Perhaps the audience would have been better served by examining what factors make one woman feel such conflict about coming out in mid-life compared to one who feels great joy and well-being in a similar situation.

Theodora Consolacion is a staff researcher for News Watch Project and a master's degree candidate in research psychology at San Francisco State University.

What Ever Happened to the White Athlete?

What concerned me about the *Sports Illustrated* story was the nagging feeling that it was trying to prove a thesis that blacks do have some genetic superiority over whites that explains why they excel in sports.



Throughout the series, the magazine took pains to point out that the theory of biological athletic superiority of blacks had not been proven conclusively, but that it was still out there and that maybe it's not all hogwash. That kind of speculative writing helps further fuel stereotypes and covers up a greater point: There are still more options for white kids to probe when they're looking for an area in which to excel, and that the opportunities open to many black kids in this country continue to be limited to those sports that don't require a lot of financial resources.

Exploring the economics of sports, and who is able to take best advantage of costlier sports would have provided a greater public service.

Jackie Jones is an assistant city editor at ***The Washington Post*** *and a National Association of Black Journalists representative to the News Watch Advisory Council.*

It was interesting to read a story about race that presented white people, rather than people of color, as the "problem people." One could argue that the problem white athletes are having—not being able to compete with African Americans in some big-time sports—as trivial in the overall scheme of things.

The stories focused on "black" and "white" males only. What about Latino and Asian participation in these sports? What about women? In women's professional basketball, I'd bet the gap in black and white representation is smaller than in the NBA.

The *Sports Illustrated* issue left me thinking: What's new here? Why is this a story?

Although the series of articles were based on a survey *Sports Illustrated* conducted, I wondered what prompted the survey? This situation isn't new. With that said, I did find some of the survey results interesting and enlightening.

If someone asked me whether or not I would publish this story as it was reported, my answer would be "no" — not because I thought it was offensive, but because it didn't have much of a news hook. I would have published this story if it had included women and explored this issue in more than a black-and-white context.

Erna Smith is Chair of the Department of Journalism at San Francisco State University.

The *Sports Illustrated* cover story, "What Ever Happened to the White Athlete" (Dec. 8, 1997), which examined the proliferation of black athletes in professional sports, raised numerous issues and questions for News Watch reviewers:

It's interesting that *Sports Illustrated* chose to frame its exploration of racial differences in athletic ability with the question "Whatever happened to the white athlete?" If nothing else, *Sports Illustrated* reporter S.L. Price was clear on his mission. He spells it out for us: "We speak of the young men in team sports who ruled the American athletic scene for much of the century."

The cover query, coupled with the nostalgic cover photo of a '50s-era all-white men's basketball team might as well have been titled "Whatever Happened to Segregation?" In a series of articles, Price explores the state of scientific research about the physiological and athletic differences between blacks and whites. Since almost all of the science he refers to is inconclusive, the article says more about the state of mind of *Sports Illustrated* editors than it does about any serious social inquiry into racial differences. I'd say that the subtext to this article is the ongoing collective identity crisis of white men as systemic white racial preference is slowly dismantled.

"Whatever Happened to the White Athlete?" is the sort of magazine cover that may boost newsstand sales and reinforce the development of SI's mostly white male readership. But a more provocative question for the multi-cultured, multi-gendered readership of the 21st century might be: Can race determine our athletic ability? And here's a more hopeful answer: Science hasn't come up with beans — so let's not take the fun out of the game.

Robin Stevens is a National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association representative to the News Watch Advisory Council

Adventures in Tribal Nation Journalism

Under Fire at the Cherokee Advocate

By Dan Agent

The rich history of Native American journalism that began in 1828 with the publication of the *Cherokee Phoenix* in New Echota, Ga., has been marked with struggle and conflict.

In the 19th century, the Cherokee press was attacked and destroyed on more than one occasion, initially because of stories about the U.S. government's forced removal of the Cherokees to Indian territory, now Oklahoma.

Today, the Cherokee press is enduring another assault. This time from Principal Chief Joe Byrd of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, who has denied information about his revision of the Cherokee Constitution to more than 185,000 tribal members by controlling the content of the tribal nation's newspaper, the *Cherokee Advocate*.

Ironically, tribal members must now rely on non-Indian newspapers like the *Muskogee* (Oklahoma) *Daily Phoenix* for accurate coverage of their tribal government. That coverage, which has prompted charges of "negative publicity" from Byrd, reaches but a small fraction of tribal members.

From February 27, 1996, until July 30, 1997, I served as editor of the *Advocate* and was public affairs director for the Cherokee Nation. On July 29, 1977, I learned that five newspaper staff members and I would be dismissed from our jobs. The layoffs followed months of tension between my staff and Byrd, whose administration has been marked by allegations of financial misconduct, a federal investigation, and lawsuits. Many Cherokees were especially outraged over his attempted removal of the tribe's Judicial Appeals Tribunal, an act comparable to a U.S. President attempting to fire the U.S. Supreme Court.

The *Advocate* attempted to provide relatively balanced coverage of the crisis in spite of required copy reviews and edits by Byrd's executive staff. When I refused to make some of the suggested changes because I was committed to providing accurate information to the Cherokee people about their tribal government, I was let go.

Although the crisis brewing in Byrd's office became public on Feb. 25, 1997, when Cherokee Nation marshals served a search warrant on Byrd's administrative offices for financial records, the seeds of the crisis were planted earlier. For months, members of Byrd's administrative council had repeatedly and legally requested tribal financial documents from Byrd, but he refused.

After the search, Byrd fired the entire marshals office. Within months, the tribal prosecutor was also fired after she reviewed records obtained from Byrd's offices and filed charges against him for obstruction of justice and allegedly misappropriating nearly $88,000 in tribal funds.

The situation escalated in April 1997, when Byrd initiated an interpretation of the Cherokee Nation's constitution, changing the requirement to conduct business as a council from the required quorum of 10, or two-thirds of the 15-member council, to a simple majority of eight. Byrd's eight supporters on the council then voted to begin the impeachment of the Judicial Appeals Tribunal, and voted to ask the Bureau of Indian Affairs to take over the tribe's law enforcement.

"My removal as editor of the Advocate is only a small part of the disservice Byrd's administration has brought on the Cherokee people. More importantly, tribal members are being denied accurate information about their government."

– Dan Agent
Former editor of
the Cherokee Advocate

Later that night, 44 Cherokees, including former Chief Wilma Mankiller and some tribal employees, signed as plaintiffs in a lawsuit contending the meeting was illegal due to the lack of a quorum. The Cherokee Tribunal held for the plaintiffs. Nevertheless, Byrd has continued to defy the court, hiring his own police force and tribal judges.

Before my layoff, the *Advocate* provided front-page coverage of the Byrd ordeal with what I consider relative restraint, given the conduct of the Byrd administration.

A comparison between editions of the *Advocate* published under my direction and editions published since my removal provides vivid proof of the change in editorial policy and content at the *Advocate*.

The March-April 1997 issue led with the front page story, "Tribal Powers Pitted Against Each Other In Controversy," a 36-column inch summary of the crisis. The lead story on page one of the May-June issue, "Constitutional Crisis Continues, Issue Moves To Federal Court," was a 31-column inch summary. Both stories were reviewed by Byrd's executive staff, who changed copy that they considered negative toward Byrd.

The first two issues published after my layoff mention the crisis only in the inside pages. A 4-column inch story on page three of the July-August issue, "Chief Byrd Reports Compromise May Be Reached Soon Over Tribe's Controversy," was outdated, having been released prior to a June 20 takeover of the Cherokee Courthouse by Byrd's security force. There was nothing about the takeover or any other events that had occurred since the previous issue. Conversely, the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* and other area newspapers provided extensive coverage of those events.

Media queries followed my removal as editor of the *Advocate*, and after discussions with my former staff, I decided to limit my statements regarding the layoff until it was certain the staff would get all their benefits and entitlements. Soon thereafter, the lay-off of the staff was rescinded, and they have continued to produce the *Advocate* under Byrd's direction, excluding information about the crisis while the Byrd administration put its own spin on the situation.

In an interview with the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, Byrd spokeswoman Lisa Finley said the Byrd administration wanted the *Advocate* to focus more on positive news. "The layoffs have nothing to do with what's happening politically," she told another local publication. "This is strictly a reorganization of the department."

Her comments indicate a naiveté about public affairs and tribal newspapers that seemed to pervade the Byrd administration. In fact, Byrd told me before I took the job that he did not want the *Advocate* to be political. Although tribal newspapers are inherently political to some degree, due to funding from tribal councils and tribal chiefs, I felt reassured that the *Advocate* would cover all sides of all issues impacting on the tribe.

My removal as editor of the *Advocate* is only a small part of the disservice Byrd's administration has brought on the Cherokee people. More importantly, tribal members are being denied accurate information about their government.

According to council member Barbara Starr-Scott, in a statement Byrd made during a meeting with BIA officials to negotiate an end to the crisis, he said that Cherokees are not interested in the constitution as long as they get their commodities and services. Nothing about the meeting has appeared in the *Cherokee Advocate*. Under Byrd's administration, it never will.

Dan Agent is a former editor of the Cherokee Advocate *and former director of public affairs for the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. He is currently a public affairs specialist for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian and is editor of the Smithsonian Runner. He is also working on a manuscript about the Cherokee Nation constitutional crisis.*

A complete collection of essays by Dan Agent and other journalists who have written for tribal nation publications will be released at the national convention of the Native American Journalists Association conference in Phoenix, June 17-20.

Tips

- The basic tip for covering Native American nations, indigenous peoples, and people of color, is essential to good journalism: Do your research. Acquire a basic understanding of the culture and history of the nation to be covered, the sovereignty of Indian nations within the United States and the unique government-to-government relationships between the Indian nations, federal, state and local governments.
- Eliminate preconceived stereotypes derived from movies, television and print, including historical references from a strictly Anglo-American perspective. Develop an appreciation for history from a Native American perspective.
- For further assistance, contact the Native American Journalists Association, 1433 East Franklin Ave. #11 Minneapolis, MN 55404 or call (612) 874-8833.

South Asians: The Forgotten Minority

By Sreenath Sreenivasan

"*Mother Teresa lived in Asia?*" asked the incredulous voice on the other end of the telephone line. *"I thought she lived in India."*

That voice belonged to a news coordinator for a major metropolitan daily on the East Coast. Since she was not sure what kinds of stories on South Asia might run in her newspaper, she was looking for suggestions. When I mentioned the coverage of Mother Teresa's funeral, she reminded me how little most Americans know — dare I say care — about South Asia, starting with the fact that it is part of Asia.

I know where to put the blame: the overburdened shoulders of the media.

Complaining about the U.S. media's coverage of foreign regions is nothing new, and it is easy to find a paucity of stories about almost any area of the world. But the inadequate coverage of South Asia and its émigrés to the U.S. is particularly remiss. For the media, "Asia" too often means East Asia and Southeast Asia, while South Asia—with its nuclear ambitions, growing economic ties to the West and a billion-plus population, is relatively ignored.

"There's still a fundamental ignorance of what South Asia is, and who South Asians are," says Peter Bhatia, executive editor of the *Portland Oregonian*, whose father was born in India.

Let me state exactly what South Asia is: the countries of the Indian subcontinent. The biggest of these are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The others are Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives.

Media coverage of foreign countries, and their immigrants to the United States, is based largely upon American foreign policy and military involvement in those countries. Hence, coverage of Asia is focused on Japan, the Koreas, China, Vietnam, Cambodia — those countries where the United States has been a clear ally or foe, or where U.S. diplomacy has figured prominently.

By contrast, South Asia has existed on the periphery of American foreign policy.

Other factors that give East Asia more ink and air time include decades of close trade relations, and the proximity of the Pacific Rim, which makes it a more strategic partner than the Indian subcontinent.

A prime example of the narrow definition of Asia is the current "Asian economic crisis." In fact, the press has focused its attention almost exclusively on East and Southeast Asia, ignoring the economic situation west of Thailand.

That television is terrible when it comes to covering South Asia is no surprise. But the way the major networks have stayed clear of the region is egregious. It is obvious that if Mother Teresa had not died the same week as a certain British princess, we would still be waiting for the unprecedented sight of Brokaw, Jennings and Rather reporting live from India.

"I do try to put stories about South Asia in our world news roundups," says Indira Somani, a producer for WJLA-TV in Washington, "But this market is unusual." In previous jobs in three other markets—South Bend, IN, Springfield, IL, and Norfolk, VA, Somani says news directors were just not interested in the region.

And while the coverage of South Asia remains spotty at best, South Asian immigrants in the United States are nearly ignored altogether.

When asked about coverage of South Asians, several newspaper editors surveyed first responded with thoughts about India, instead of examples of how their papers portrayed South Asian immigrants in their own communities.

Since much of the impressions about South Asian immigrants come from Hollywood's portrayals of cab drivers, newsstand owners, convenience store operators and engineers, the media's failure to find other voices in the community perpetuates these stereotypes.

Two areas where coverage of South Asia has improved of late are the business press, which knows its audience is interested in emerging markets, and some radio news programs, which appear to have increased their reportage of the area. The very biggest U.S. newspapers have always maintained a presence in South Asia and have sent top correspondents to those posts, as have the newsmagazines. But those reporters spend their time scrambling from one cyclone to another, one riot to another—in such a wide, confusing and diverse region — that it is often difficult to get beyond the obvious stories.

One newspaper that tried to break the mold is *The Star-Ledger* in Newark, N.J. Because the circulation area it covers has a higher population of South Asians than

most other parts of the country, it embarked last year on a five-part series examining the state of India after 50 years of independence. Unlike most newspapers that rely on wire reports, *The Star-Ledger* sent a reporter and a photographer to India. The series also included New Jersey's connections to South Asia, like a story about high-tech workers in Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley, who had trained in New Jersey. The circulation department targeted Indian immigrant neighborhoods to increase circulation.

"Since we've done the series, we've been besieged by callers saying, it's the 50th anniversary of Israel," says Fran Dauth, a *Star-Ledger* managing editor. "But it's not the same as India, because we have stories in the paper every day about these other places."

The relative invisibility of South Asians in the U.S. media is rooted in American history. It was Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans who served as the spokespeople of the Asian-American movement during the civil rights period of the 1960s, defining the face and voice of the growing minority. The U.S. definition of Asia as limited to the East and Southeast was later widely accepted as university education programs were framed, and political and community projects were organized.

While Indians immigrated to the U.S. as early as the 19th century, the majority arrived after 1965 for educational and economic opportunities, admittedly for less painful reasons than those of Southeast Asian refugees. "South Asians aren't seen as having been victimized in the way other cultures have been," notes Bhatia.

Another reason why South Asians are the forgotten minority may be due to the way they have assimilated into mainstream America. Thanks to the legacy of colonial rule in the subcontinent, most immigrants arrive with at least a working knowledge of English and Western ways, making their transition easier.

But South Asian Americans are not completely exempt from blame for their current lack of visibility. Many still see themselves as belonging more to the motherland than to their American communities. South Asians that provide financial support to universities tend to earmark their funds for studies specifically about the subcontinent, rather than for Asian American studies. And, in South Asian communities throughout the country, naturalization and voter registration rates tend to be lower than for other Asian groups.

Although South Asians have been labeled Asians by the U.S. Census since 1979, they belong to a category, not a social group. Asian American Studies programs gloss over South Asia while Chinese Americans in California challenge whether South Asians ought to be eligible for minority business set-asides for Asian Americans. Even newsroom diversity consultants define Asian American hires as those from East Asia, rather than including South Asians in the mix.

The reason an association of South Asian journalists was formed is simple. Four years ago, too many of us felt like outsiders when mixing with members of the very active and very visible Asian American Journalists Association. While AAJA and the South Asian Journalists Association (SAJA) have come closer together over the past year, the fact remains there is still a notion that South Asians are somehow separate.

So why aren't South Asians present at the Asian American party? Because of something as simple as differences in physical appearance, suggests Rajini Srikanth, co-editor of the forthcoming compendium, " A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America" (Temple University Press, 1998).

"It's the one issue people are very reluctant to speak of," says Srikanth, an adjunct professor at Tufts University. But dealing with it, she says, "is fundamental to understanding what's happening in Asian America today."

Is there hope for the future? I believe there is. While we are not looking for a quantifiable increase in reporting about South Asia and South Asian Americans, we are looking for better, more accurate coverage.

As more and more South Asians reach positions of editorial decision-making, they will have opportunities to influence how stories are covered. Closer cooperation between AAJA and SAJA will help focus attention on common goals. And the constantly increasing population of South Asians will force the press to train its multicultural sights, at least occasionally, on this particular group of people of color.

Tips

- When writing about issues that affect Asian Americans, try to include a quote from a person of South Asian origin as well.
- Good starting points for getting an insight into South Asian communities are the professional associations, local merchants groups, political action committees, local houses of prayer and South Asia Studies departments at major universities.
- South Asia consists of seven countries, not just India, and the largest migration to the U.S. is from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. South Asians practice a wide array of religions including Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity.
- Contact the South Asian Journalists Association in New York to find experts or information about South Asia or South Asians in the United States. The website address: www.saja.org. E-mail: saja@columbia.edu, or call (212) 854-5979

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THE HARVARD CRIMSON/SARAH E. HENRICKSON

Harvard students protesting "National Coming of Homosexuality Day," a Christian counterpoint to National Coming Out Day, was the subject of a Boston Globe column that angered gay and lesbian staff at the newspaper.

Censorship, Political Correctness or Gay Bashing?

BY CHUCK COLBERT

In an op-ed piece by *Boston Globe* columnist Jeff Jacoby titled, "Where's the Tolerance Now?" that ran Oct. 23, 1997, he defended the free speech rights of Christian "ex-gays" who visited the Harvard Law School at the invitation of a conservative student group there to observe "National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day," a counter point to National Coming Out Day.

The ex-gay's presence at Harvard, along with its ricochet effect — parodies and dueling placards from both ex-gay supporters and gay Harvard students — generated a lively university-wide discussion about free speech.

News accounts characterized the debate as "civil." A *Globe* correspondent covering the event wrote that "the audience listened quietly."

A reporter for Harvard's student newspaper told the *Globe* that the debate was noisy but nobody interfered with anybody's right to speak.

Nonetheless, Jacoby, who did not attend the event, claimed "gay activists" thronged the entrance," giving an impression of unruliness, a description at odds with his own paper's news reports.

Additionally, Jacoby's column presented "the traditional Judeo-Christian view that homosexual behavior is sinful and unhealthy" and characterized "gay advocates, who so loudly champion tolerance and freedom of sexual choice," as "poisonously intolerant of people who make a choice different from theirs."

"Dare to suggest that homosexuality may not be something to celebrate," Jacoby wrote, "and instantly you are a Nazi, a hatemonger, a gas-chamber operator. Offer to share your teachings of Christianity or Judaism with students 'struggling with homosexuality' and you become as vile as a Ku Kluxer, as despicable as David Duke."

Before the Oct. 23 piece ran, Bob Hardman, a member of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, took the unusual step, along with NLGJA member Peter

Accardi, of trying to get the column killed.

Hardman and Accardi are Jacoby's copy editors.

Frequently, "Jacoby's writing draws on contempt for gays," said Hardman.

In 1994, when a column by Jacoby described gay pride marchers as unified by "carnal desire," 15 lesbian and gay staff members at the *Globe* signed a petition, addressed to the paper's editorial page editor, David Greenway. "Free speech is not a license for the *Globe* to purvey bigotry or hatred," they wrote.

According to Jack Thomas, the *Globe*'s ombudsman, Greenway told Jacoby it was appropriate to criticize gays for actions, but not merely for being gay.

"We reached an agreement back then," Hardman explained. "Jeff would keep a low profile on gay topics."

But Jacoby's column on Oct. 23 seemed to violate that agreement, spurring Hardman and Accardi into action. In a memo to Greenway, Hardman said: "Can you think of any other article we've printed that's based on a negative judgment about a group of people because of a characteristic that is either inborn or formed very early in childhood?"

In the end, Greenway referred the matter of Jacoby writing about gays to the ombudsman.

"I can assure you that on no topic — not race, not the death penalty, not multiculturalism, not welfare — are you made to endure as much fury as you have to endure if you say anything on this topic that is considered politically incorrect," Jacoby told Thomas.

Then, two weeks later, *Globe* columnist Jack Leo registered his point of view: "If there were a journalism review willing to look hard at the race/gender/orientation lobbies in the newsroom (there isn't), a fascinating analysis could be done here. What do we think about an activist gay editor who tries to kill the column, fails, and ends up pushing to get an ombudsman to intervene and make the column an issue?" he wrote in a column, "Phobic in the Wrong Places," published in *U.S. News & World Report* on Nov. 17, 1997.

"So the real issue being raised isn't accuracy or fairness," Leo wrote. "It's censorship."

Hardman disagrees.

"I'm a journalistic activist — against bigotry and for fairness, and not just for gays," Hardman said. "The principles of fairness and balance are not just about us. There are higher values at stake, ones about what is proper in journalism."

It is important to keep in mind that both Hardman and Accardi are out gay staffers, and that the *Globe* has a diverse workforce, including gay men and lesbians as part of the total mix of different ethnic and other groups. Hardman and Accardi's openness on the job enabled them to speak up in a very personal and credible way about what they considered to be anti-gay bias in the pages of their newspaper.

Indeed, one of the virtues of having a diverse workforce is that concerns such as the ones raised by Harman and Accardi can be raised internally. Keep in mind that we found out about the controversy within the editorial staff of the newspaper only because the ombudsman wrote about the matter in a public forum. Just imagine what goes on in the newsroom that we never hear about.

"Representation is not a matter of enforcing a code of political correctness or promoting identity/affinity group activism. Rather, the presence of ethnic and sexual minorities better ensures adherence to journalistic standards that are at the core of our profession: fairness, balance and accuracy."

– Chuck Colbert
New England chapter
president of NLGJA

When out lesbians and gays and people of color participate in setting editoral policy and news content, it adds more substance to their roles in diversifying the newsroom.

In this vein, representation is not a matter of enforcing a code of political correctness or promoting identity/affinity group activism. Rather, the presence of ethnic and sexual minorities better ensures adherence to journalistic standards that are at the core of our profession: fairness, balance and accuracy.

Representation of minority professionals also builds a system of checks and balances, guarding against ignorance, prejudice and bias. Including gays and lesbians as well as professionals from racial and ethnic groups in editorial, reporting, administrative and managerial positions helps to ensure, and in some cases, restore the credibility of the media in the public's eye.

But Jacoby, and, for that matter, any other journalist who continually heaps insult and contempt on lesbians and gay men should expect to hear criticism from the "orientation lobby," not only on the inside, but also from the outside. In that regard, NLGJA and the other minority journalism associations play an important role.

Meanwhile, on the topic of homosexuality, no one should confuse the minimal requirement of journalistic decency with political correctness. That goes for gays or anyone else prone to be being vilified or marginalized by the majority.

Chuck Colbert is a freelance syndicated columnist in Cambridge, Mass. He serves on the NLGJA board of directors and is president of the association's New England chapter.

Black vs Latino

Journalists Caught in a Cultural Crossfire

By Starita Smith

Dallas Morning News reporters Duchesne Paul Drew and Nora Lopez know what it's like to be comrades-in-arms. They share a professional bond that was forged during the past year when they got caught in the crossfire between black and Latino community leaders.

Drew, who is black, and Lopez, who is Mexican American, each faced accusationsthat their coverage of racial politics in the Dallas public school system was influenced by their own race. In Drew's case, the charges came from Latinos. For Lopez, it was African Americans who accused her of coverage that was biased against their community.

"It was truly an amazingly hard place to be in," recalled Lopez. "I was taken by surprise by this. Nothing in my background prepared me for this kind of animosity simply because of my skin color...It's really tough, and it's a different kind of stress added to the job aside from worrying about whether I'm getting the facts accurately. As a reporter, you have to listen to both sides and you have to be objective. You can't say anything about it."

Lopez and Drew learned the hard way that as Latinos pass up African Americans in numbers and influence in cities throughout the country, power struggles and tensions between the two groups are likely to erupt. Covering the Dallas schools, where African Americans and Latinos comprise nearly 90 percent of the student population, Lopez and Drew uncovered animosity and a lack of trust between the two groups.

The problem began with the announcement of Yvonne Gonzalez as the first Hispanic superintendent of Dallas public schools. Even before Gonzalez took her post, she was the target of attacks by blacks who were concerned about what would happen to their children and to black school administrators with a Latina at the helm of their school system. Latinos rushed to her defense.

Gonzalez later announced that she was "cleaning house," and either let go or demoted several black administrators. In the end, she was convicted of stealing money from the school district. She was scheduled to turn herself in to federal authorities on March 4 to begin a prison term.

Drew's reluctant involvement in the ethnic battle came during a school board meeting he was covering. An African American man walked up to him and said, "Hey brother man, I'm so glad to see you because these Mexicans have really been eating our asses."

The man made the presumption that because Drew was African American, his stories would favor the black community.

"There's not much I can do about that. I'm not worried about it," Drew said. "I know at some point I might get called on the carpet for not being black enough."

Lopez, whose telephone voice mail greeting at work is both in Spanish and English, found herself getting caught in the school district controversy after she discovered the following message from a prominent black community leader apparently unhappy with her reporting of the issues: "Are you just trying to set yourself up as a Hispanic reporter there?"

The implication was that Lopez was becoming the mouthpiece of the Latino community. When she looked for someone in the newsroom to talk to about what she was going through, she sought out other minority journalists.

"I don't know that my Anglo colleagues could really appreciate the position I was in," she said.

Although there have been flashpoints between African Americans and Latinos in several American cities, some veteran reporters have observed increased cooperation between the two groups. The challenge, they say, is not so much steering a straight course through ethnic hostilities, but getting out the good news that people of color are learning to work together and finding common ground.

Covering the tensions, as well as the harmony, between blacks and Latinos will continue to pose a professional challenge for reporters of both ethnic backgrounds for years to come as the United States moves towards becoming a nation without a single racial majority group by the mid-21st century.

Both African American and Latino reporters agreed they must rely on good old-fashioned reporting skills — checking information and presenting a balanced, accurate account of events — to get them through what can sometimes be a racial minefield.

Fortunately, not every Latino or black reporter must negotiate such treacherous waters. John Mitchell, a *Los Angeles Times* reporter since 1979, says he has seen little tension between blacks and Latinos. "I've covered stories where there were common interests. I tend to think that much of the reports of tensions are in some respects,

exaggerated," he said.

Because many blacks and Latinos in Los Angeles live in the same neighborhoods, they tend to work together on such issues as crime and safety, Mitchell said. Black politicians, who often run for office in areas with sizable Latino populations, end up courting Latino voters.

Mitchell, who is black, has written about a black adoption group that allowed a Latino adoption agency to operate under its auspices; then the Latino group encountered problems with its license. He also wrote about African Americans taking Spanish courses at night so they can communicate with their neighbors.

"In South L.A., there are more African Americans in Spanish classes than Latinos in English classes," he said.

In Chicago, there also seems to be more harmony than disharmony, say Latino *Chicago Tribune* reporters Teresa Puente and Mike Martinez. Mayors Richard M. Daley and the late Harold Washington made an effort to reach out to Latinos and all the other groups that comprise Chicago's multinational immigrant population, they said. The reporters added black and Latino organizations are trying to work together on some projects.

But a few racial disturbances remain. Clarence Page, the *Tribune's* black Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist, caused a stir at the National Council of La Raza convention last summer when he wrote that race relations, which he sees as a proxy for the class struggle between the haves and have-nots, are strictly a matter of black versus white. Latino farmworkers, according to his view, are represented by the black struggle. The column was published on the day the convention began.

Among those at the convention were Roberto Rodriguez and Patricia Gonzalez, who are among a tiny number of Latino syndicated columnists in the country. The pair disagrees with Page. Race relations are more complex than that, Rodriguez and Gonzalez wrote. There are issues of land and colonization of people who lived in the United States before the Europeans came in large numbers, they said.

Until recently, there weren't enough black or Latino columnists published on the nation's editorial pages to have a debate about anything. Today, these columnists are attracting readers from a variety of ethnic groups. Rodriguez said his web site has attracted a number of African American readers. He and Gonzalez have frequently written that commonalities between blacks and Latinos run far deeper than working together for the same political and neighborhood goals.

"I was taken by surprise by this. Nothing in my background prepared me for this kind of animosity simply because of my skin color...It's really tough, and it's a different kind of stress added to the job aside from worrying about whether I'm getting the facts accurately. As a reporter, you have to listen to both sides and you have to be objective. You can't say anything about it."

– Nora Lopez
Reporter
Dallas Morning News

"We are among few Mexican American — Chicano — journalists who claim their black roots," Rodriguez said, adding that he and his wife came across research done in Mexico in the 1940s that concluded there were more Africans in Mexico than Spaniards during the colonial period.

In the United States, black and Latino journalists are just beginning to figure out how to cover the swiftly changing racial picture of this country.

"America is moving into its first truly multicultural, multiracial century," said Page. "I would love to see it change so that I wouldn't have to write about race relations."

Starita Smith is a writer whose articles have appeared in Emerge, Black Issues in Higher Education, Texas Observer, *and* Moderna . *During her 17 years as a newspaper journalist, she was a reporter and editor at the* Austin American-Statesman, *the* Columbus Dispatch *and the* Gary Post-Tribune. *She lives in Austin, Texas.*