

SEPTEMBER 1997

NEWS WATCH



P R O J E C T

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- ◆ NATIVE AMERICANS LOST IN FLOOD DISASTER COVERAGE
- ◆ LATINO COMMUNITIES INVISIBLE IN THE NEWS AND THE CENSUS
- ◆ ASIAN AMERICANS TOO VISIBLE IN CAMPAIGN FINANCE COVERAGE
- ◆ ELLEN DEGENERES' COMING OUT RAISES GAY/LESBIAN NEWS PROFILE
- ◆ TYSON FIGHT BRINGS OUT ANTI-BLACK STEREOTYPES

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

For many years, I had been doing freelance writing and editing and also program consulting for Unity '94 and '99, the multiracial coalition of national journalism associations. Giving up flexible schedules, opportunities to work on exciting projects with different people, and having my cat Miles sitting on my lap as I worked on the computer would take something special.

That special something was the News Watch Project, which monitors news coverage of communities of color and of gays and lesbians.

In 1994, News Watch had produced a single report released at the historic Unity '94 convention. This new effort involves a different approach: quarterly magazines through which to address more complex issues in depth, and electronic information tools to provide more immediate feedback on current stories.

Setting up the project consumed many weeks as we encountered unanticipated problems: an underground cable fire rendered our phones useless for a week; roofing repairs interrupted our satellite TV news monitoring for two weeks; and various bugs delayed the set-up of the computer network. Yet, through it all, the News Watch staff persevered, with constant support from the San Francisco State University Journalism Department and the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism.

Now, with the staff all hired, phones working, website launched, and most advisory council members appointed, the News Watch Project presents the first issue of its magazine.

In this issue, you'll find a collection of articles designed to challenge and inform all of us as we work together to improve the quality of news coverage. You'll also find information on how to reach us. Let us know what you think about this issue and what stories we ought to consider for future journals. In the meantime, though, please read on. ☺



Diane Yen-Mei Wong
Editor and News Watch Project Director

WHO WE ARE

The **News Watch Project** is a news media monitoring and advocacy project. Based out of the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism at San Francisco State University's Journalism Department, it works closely with Unity '99, which is comprised of the four minority journalism associations — 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. Major funding for this project is provided by The Ford Foundation, with additional support from The Rockefeller Foundation.

WHAT WE DO

The **News Watch Project** monitors news media coverage of communities of color — African American, Asian Pacific American, Latino and Native American — and of gays and lesbians, and advocates for fair and accurate coverage of those communities. In addition to a quarterly journal, the project also offers a variety of electronic information services, including a website. The website includes comments about current coverage issues, a styleguide of tips to improve coverage, text of the prior News Watch report and other related diversity publications issued through the university.

HOW TO OBTAIN A COPY OF THE JOURNAL

The **News Watch Project** journal is available free to members of the five News Watch partners, journalism departments and news media organizations. For all others, the cost is \$3.00 per copy, including postage and handling, for U.S. addresses. (Add \$2.00 US for international subscriptions.) Please send a check payable to the **News Watch Project** to the address below. Thanks.

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We welcome your feedback and also your examples of good and bad print or broadcast coverage of communities of color or of gays and lesbians. Please send in examples with source and date information.

NEWS WATCH

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JOURNAL

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at San Francisco State University's Journalism Department

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JOURNALISM AND DIVERSITY

News Watch represents the culmination of years of thinking and doing something about diversity in journalism at San Francisco State University. It began in 1985, when Betty Medsger, an alumna of the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* and the *Washington Post*, was elected chair of the SFSU Journalism Department.

Within a year, the faculty decided that the best way to achieve diversity was to begin by looking at themselves, then all-white, and at their curriculum. A commitment was made to make special efforts to recruit people of color as part-time and full-time faculty; a seminar course on diversity issues in the news media became a required class for all majors; and in 1990, the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism opened with grants from The Freedom Forum and The John S. and James L. Knight Foundations.

The eight years since I left the *Wall Street Journal* to join the journalism faculty represents, in a way, the legacy of this commitment. Here at SF State, I'd like to think that we see diversity in journalism neither as an artificial exercise in social engineering nor as a "specialty" area. Rather I'd like to believe we see it as central to journalistic excellence and to the democratic ideals upon which America, in theory, is based and the First Amendment was penned to protect.

It is my hope through News Watch to spread the word that striving for newsrooms and news content that better reflect and address every strata of America has become central to the mission of journalism as it enters the 21st Century. I hope working journalists will find on the pages of this and subsequent News Watch publications not just critiques but examples of coverage that hit the mark and tips and advice on make theirs do the same.

So read on, and please let the News Watch staff know what you think. They know, as I do, that the coverage News Watch seeks to encourage requires, in some cases, no less than a fundamental shift in the way journalists look and see the world around them. This is no easy feat, but I can think of none in journalism today worth pursuing more. ☺



*Erna Smith
Chair of the Journalism Department,
San Francisco State University*



Out of the Deluge—

Disaster Coverage of the Native American Community

By Lucy Annis Ganje and Lynda Kenney

As rivers go, the murky Red River of the North is usually not impressive. In April 1997, however, a mighty Red River slowly crept out of its banks and forced more than 70,000 people to abandon their homes and businesses, and severely damaged the neighboring cities of Grand Forks, N.D., and East Grand Forks, Minn.

A remarkable series of climatic events led up to this disaster. Eight blizzards between December and April dropped nearly 100

inches of snow on the Red River Valley region. With spring warming, the river rose to an unexpected crest of more than 54 feet — 26 feet above flood stage — and remained at that level for five days. In addition to the worst natural disaster the residents had ever witnessed, a multistory downtown structure standing in six feet of river water caught fire. The blaze spread until it destroyed 11 buildings in historic downtown Grand Forks.

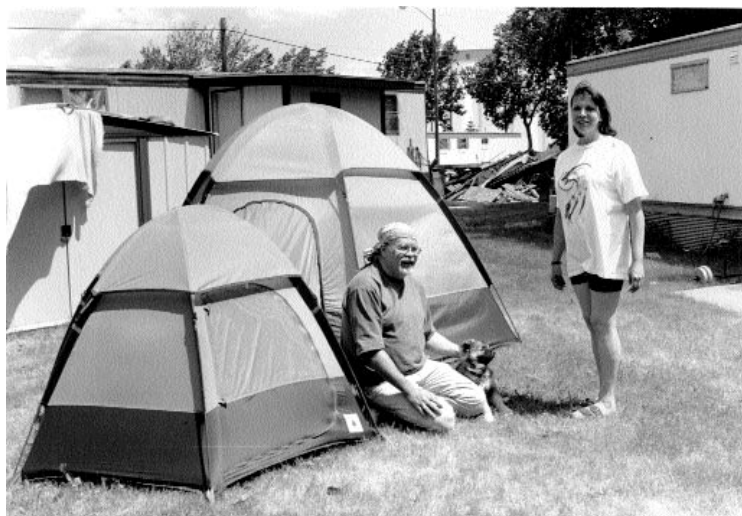
Thousands of residents sought refuge wherever they could. Some stayed in their cars; some in shelters or area motels; and still others with friends, relatives or strangers. Many scattered across the nation. Hundreds of area American Indian people returned to reservations where members of their extended families lived.

When the waters

finally receded, residents solemnly viewed the aftermath. Homes had been pushed off their foundations; schools and libraries destroyed; businesses totally wiped out. Everything was wet. Mud and debris filled the once-clean cities.

As flood waters rose and levees weakened, the staff at the *Grand Forks Herald* struggled to get the paper printed. They were forced to evacuate twice in 24 hours: once from their downtown site and once from their remote temporary newsroom at the University of North Dakota student union. The exhausted staff finally settled in a small high school 10 miles north of Grand Forks. Stories were sent to St. Paul, Minn., to be printed, and the paper was flown back for distribution. The disaster intensified when the staff learned that the fire had leveled its newly remodeled building, which housed the newsroom.

It was in this atmosphere that a core group of *Herald* staffers worked to produce the paper. Water had claimed many of their homes, and fire their place of business, but the paper did not miss a day of publication. The *Grand Forks Herald* became a reassuring symbol of the Red River Valley people — tough, resilient.



Mike Saunders (with puppy, Lokee) and Muriel Bedard “make do” by living in a tent while they renovate their flood damaged mobile home.

LYNDA KENNEY

LYNDA KENNEY

For 27 days the paper was distributed free and carried stories of the damaged homes, businesses and possessions of almost an entire community. Photographs of families returning to assess the damage filled the pages. The paper's editorial stance embraced and promoted the idea of a bigger and better "Greater Grand Forks." These were empowering and uplifting messages from a community-minded newspaper.

The "Great Flood" officially ended on May 19 with the Red River back in its banks. By this time the two cities' recovery process was well under way.

Newspapers play an essential role before, during and after a catastrophe. Responsible and timely coverage can save lives, establish contact between displaced families and friends, reduce property damage and increase public understanding of the event. The *Grand Forks Herald* became a vital link between the people and disaster services. It educated, warned, and informed a community that looked to it as their main (and sometimes only) source of information. It gave a human face to the disaster.

But what color was that face?

The community reflected in the pages of the *Herald* unfortunately represented only a portion of the northern plains towns it claims to serve.

The estimated combined population of Grand Forks, N.D., and East Grand Forks, Minn., is 58,477, according to the 1990 census. The minority population of the two cities is six percent. The 1,284 American Indian residents comprise the largest minority group, 2.2 percent of the population. Yet stories and images of Native people and their communities were hard to find.

The newspaper carried more than 1,000 flood-related stories written in April and May, the two months studied for this article. During this time only two stories addressed the impact of the flood on members of the Native American community. A feature story followed a family's return to the Turtle Mountain reservation, and a shorter story told of an American Indian prison inmate who sent all the money he had (\$10) for the flood relief effort.

The visual content was no better. In this same time period there were more than 500 photos of identified people documenting their struggle. Of these, only five were of American Indian people, and they all accom-

panied the evacuation feature story, "Return to Turtle Mountain."

Mexican Americans make up the second largest minority population in the area. Estimated figures are 2.1 percent of the combined communities, or 1,200 Latinos. This does not, however, include migrant farm laborers who were beginning to arrive to work the sugar beet fields.

In April only two of nearly 200 photos reflected the impact on this community. One was of a man sandbagging as part of a "Sentence to Service" project that allowed him to work off his court-ordered community service requirement. In May there was an improvement in the number of minority images published, but the content remained stereotypical. Just eight of more than 300 photographs included Latinos. Four of these images accompanied a feature story of a white pastor ministering to migrant workers and their families. Another story about migrant workers "lost in the shuffle," included two photos of Latino children playing at a farm labor camp.

Tony Lone Fight (Arikara/Hidatsa-Mandan), a graphic artist and member of the core group of *Herald* staffers who produced the paper throughout the flood, commented on what he believed was the staff's approach to diversity coverage. "Early on we talked about how to reach minority communities — how did the flood affect them, like the story on Native Americans going back to their reservation. We did that one story and that was it. I think if we could have come up with more angles, we would have done more. But honestly, diversity issues were the last things on our minds...all we thought about was the flood — nothing else."

Reflecting back on those hectic days, Lone Fight later said he was disturbed by the realization that coverage about the flood's impact on minority communities had been missing or relegated to the periphery. It was especially unsettling, he said, because "diversity issues are such a big part of my career and life."

Media representation issues also concerned Muriel Bedard (Hunkpapa Lakota) and Mike Saunders (Cherokee), Grand Forks residents who were evacuated and whose home sustained major flood damage.

"The lack of minority coverage is typical of the *Grand Forks Herald* and of this com-

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FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

I spoke Spanish to him and his mouth dropped open. Donning his cowboy hat and bolo tie, the Mexican American man had warmly welcomed me into the El Paso museum, where the reception for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists was going full force.

He saw my black skin and assumed I was African American. I told him I was from Puerto Rico. He smiled; I half smiled back. It happened once more. I had to explain myself again and was getting tired of it.

Sipping on my second rum and coke, I asked myself "What did I expect?" Just like many other people in the United States, he had probably never seen a black man speak Spanish. After all, I had just fallen into the same trap by assuming he was Mexican American. So I took the last swig, promptly erased all images of border life that had come to mind on the plane, and started over.

But starting over is not that easy for many of us who put out the news. The news media creates and perpetuates limited views of entire communities: Asian American, black, Latino, Native American, gay and lesbian, elderly, youth, the disabled, and the list goes on. And although we complain and focus most of our attention on the white-run and corporate-owned mainstream media, most of us people of color have a lot to learn, too.

With this News Watch Project, we want to help shatter these boxes we're all forced into. It's a crucial step to truly being a good journalist in our constantly-changing multicultural society. With this magazine and our website, get ready to be educated, have a dialogue and, hopefully, be stimulated into action.

Let's talk about why the poor on television tend to be black although most poor people in this country are not. Or about why the term illegal immigrants still conjures up images of the U.S. border with Mexico when most don't come in that way. Or about how a young gay man in a relationship with an older man does not inevitably become a serial killer.

Sound familiar? Unfortunately, there's a lot to talk about. And that's what we'll do. ☺



Iván Román

Publisher and Director of the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism



Is the Focus on Asian Americans Fair?

by Helen Zia

Few stories involving Asian Americans have generated as much prolonged heat as the campaign finance issue. Thousands of reports, broadcasts, columns and editorials have appeared since the story unfolded in September 1996. Observers, however, are specifically forewarned against looking too closely at the race angle.

In one of many admonitions against criticism of the racial aspects of the story's coverage, on July 10, 1997, the *Washington Post* editorial board wrote: "From the earliest days...the idea of 'Asian Bashing' has been floated in [Huang's] defense. This was then and still is a variant on what is otherwise often know [sic] as 'playing the race card'...shaming those who are pursuing Mr. Huang's alleged violations of the law suggesting that they are acting out of racial bias, not a desire to get to the bottom of scandal."

There is no question that aggressive journalistic scrutiny into political campaign fund-raising is in the public interest, and no Asian American groups are reported to have argued otherwise. Even the most worthy investigations are subject, however, to questions of fairness and accuracy. This article asks: Is the coverage accurate? Fair? Responsible?

In the 1996 presidential campaign, a new angle to an old story surfaced: the "Asian Connection," "Indogate," "Asiagate," "Lippogate," even "Chop Sueygate." Many of the subjects of the investigation are *Asian*

— like the Asia-based company Lippo Group and Asian national Mochtar Riady. Some, such as John Huang, are *Asian American*. Also Asian American are about 2.5 million legal permanent residents — immigrants from Asian countries who now reside legally and permanently in the U.S.

Reporting that fails to distinguish between Asian and Asian American plagues the coverage. Making the distinction correctly is not a minor detail — donations from Asian Americans are legal, while those from Asians and other foreign donors are illegal and subject to prosecution. For example, Michael Lewis writes in the *New York Times*, "This fear of Asians isn't all bad. If riding a few Asians out of Washington on a rail helps to generate public support for campaign

line, "Asian groups press for first-ever Asian cabinet official," is wrong in both references. In many stories, "Asian" and "Asian American" are used interchangeably, while others merely lump the two together as though they are the same, as in "Asian and Asian American money."

Blurring the two has led to confusion in the newsroom, and among policy makers and the public. Veteran national reporters have asked California State Treasurer Matt Fong, a Chinese American, whether his loyalty is divided between America and China — even though he is a 4th-generation American. When broadcasters like CNBC's Chris Matthews refer to "All these strange characters from Asia," it's no wonder that reporters fail to challenge Ross Perot when he says on

In the 1996 presidential campaign, a new angle to an old story surfaced: the "Asian Connection," "Indogate," "Asiagate," "Lippogate," even "Chop Sueygate."

finance reform, well then, hitch up the ponies, giddyap!" Yet the Democratic fund-raisers in question are all Asian American. The Asian donors are in Asia, not Washington.

Headlines — with their relentless need to shorten or sensationalize — are especially problematic. The Agence Presse France head-

national news, "Wouldn't you like to have someone out there named O'Reilly? So far we haven't found an American name" — as though Asian American surnames cannot be American.

Accuracy has also eluded descriptions of Asian culture. Many reporters have incorrect-

ly equated the Chinese term *guanxi* — the process of building long-term relationships — with corruption. When Mike Chinoy, CNN's Asia correspondent who has covered China for more than a decade, tried to correct his colleagues on their misuse of that term and other aspects of China, he was accused of "going native." Columnist William Safire decried *guanxi* for "importing an infection into the American political system" — as though the spoils system, Tammany Hall and campaign finance abuses are not American devices.

Uneven attention raises the question of fairness. In the first few months of the campaign finance story, the news net was cast widely. Though some news outlets like the *Wall Street Journal* focused primarily on transgressions by Democrats, the body of news initially examined a broad spectrum of campaign abuses. *Newsweek* ran photos of Lincoln Bedroom guests — with not a single Asian face among them, though their story emphasized the Asian influence. *Time* and others traced the money trail to the election strategy of Clinton consultant Dick Morris. The *New York Times* listed foreign companies with U.S. subsidiaries that made big soft money contributions to both GOP and Democrats; all but two were European, Canadian or Australian.

Among the top foreign soft money contributors was Australian-based News Corp., which owns several U.S. newspapers as well as the Fox news network. Media watchdog Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) pointed out the media's own glass house as it pursues influence peddling through soft money donations: combined, Disney/ABC, Time Warner/CNN, News Corp/Fox, General Electric/NBC, and Westinghouse/CBS made more than \$4 million in such contributions.

MSNBC's on-line magazine "Slate" delved into campaign finance practices. One article concluded that there was nothing new or different about "Asiagate," while others criticized the racial overtones of the investigations. Numerous news outlets reported briefly and sporadically on Cuban money; drug money; alleged money laundering by Thomas Kramer, a German national living in Florida; campaign violations of Dole fundraiser Simon Fireman, whose \$6 million fine far exceeded the total money from Asian American and suspected Asian sources; and the many White House coffees with banking,

tobacco and telecommunications interests.

These scandals, however, soon fell by the wayside. Instead, the five Congressional probes and the multitude of news investigations narrowed their sights on the "Asian connection." Though many reports showed that less than 2 percent of the \$200 million in soft

immigration category, his support was reported as proof of repayment for Asian American donations. Although Asian American groups — and individuals like John Huang — lobbied for the 4th preference, so did Microsoft's Bill Gates and the high tech industry — who arguably weigh in

TIPS:

1. When reporting on ethnic groups with which you are unfamiliar, improve your accuracy by learning the basic cultural landscape.
2. If most or all the subjects of a broad-based issue are of one ethnic or racial group, ask if the focus is justified and whether it is fair.
3. Consider the all-around impact of your story and ask if the approach is responsible.
4. If criticisms of racial sensitivity are raised, try to see the story from the other point of view.

money comes from Asian American sources, Asian and Asian American donations have received the vast bulk of media coverage.

Bounds of fairness are also stretched when politically involved Asian Americans become targets of investigation solely because their race. Election records of Gary Locke, the new governor of Washington, came under journalistic fire because he is Chinese American. The media question membership records of, and charitable donations to, Asian American non-profits. When the Democratic National Committee began interrogating donors with Asian-sounding surnames, most journalists — with the exception of the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Hartford Courant* — were hard pressed to offer a critical view since they were doing exactly the same thing.

Despite the investigative spotlight on Asian Americans, little coverage was devoted to other political developments in their community. During the last national elections, 19 major Asian American groups — many of the same ones being probed by reporters — undertook a massive voter registration drive that resulted in a record turnout for Asian Americans in 1996. These voters broke stereotypes by overwhelmingly supporting affirmative action and liberal candidates, but this went unreported.

Then there's the issue of influence-peddling. When Clinton eventually came out in favor of the 4th preference, a particular

more heavily than Asian Americans.

News managers cite their responsibility to ferreting out the truth from the murky financing scandal when they criticize accusations of "Asian bashing." Less obvious is any sense of responsibility regarding the use of racial slurs and stereotyping in their coverage of this issue.

Instead, many politicians and pundits seem to be in free-for-all mode when it comes to racially tinged comments made in the course of this and other Asia-related stories. Senate investigating committee member Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) joked with an amused Washington press corps that "Two Huangs don't make a right" and later in the hearings mocked, "No raise money, no get bonus." Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM) referred to "those little nuns and monks," while "Capital Gang" host Bob Novack complained of having to "take care of every single Chinaman in the world." While racial remarks about golfer Tiger Woods drew prominent treatment from many news outlets, slurs about Asian Americans pass by reporters and editors without comment.

What is the impact of coverage that contains such inaccuracies, unchallenged assumptions and racial slurs? Asian American political leaders reported that donations and community involvement for the 1996 presidential elections had suddenly dropped because people feared unwanted attention

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Reporting on Latino Communities:

Sifting through Generalizations and Government Distortions

by Patrisia Gonzales & Roberto Rodriguez

Commenting on President Clinton's call for the nation to have a dialogue on race, syndicated columnist Clarence Page recently posited that race relations in the United States is essentially a white/black affair. While recognizing the existence of Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, he wrote that, fundamentally, everyone is still either black or white, or is treated as an "honorary black" or an "honorary white." Thus he said, any discussion on race has to remain a discussion about black/white relations.

His paradigm makes perfect sense if one looks at the world through black and white lenses, yet it is ahistorical: the United States has never been a black and white society. If anything, that description merely speaks to a time before the advent of color television.

As columnists, we've written about this subject extensively, and so it baffles us to have the history of this country reduced to black and white. Our peoples' histories are of ancestral migrations — not immigration — that predate Columbus by thousands of years. Our histories are of genocide, colonization

and missionization — long before the white/black paradigm was imported here, post-Plymouth Rock. Our histories are not east to west, but rather, north to south to north; they include forced removals, land theft, lynchings and mass deportations...and Jim Crow. This perspective is rarely found in mainstream newspapers.

Reporting on Latinos is a difficult proposition, particularly when it involves racial matters. Members of the media would do well to learn different peoples' histories, rather than simply trying to force circles to fit into square pegs. The operative words in describing Latinos are "mixture," "misunderstood," and "invisible."

Sociologists talk about shared experiences as a criterion for what unites people, and perhaps this is the key to understanding Latinos. Most people referred to by that label share the experience of coming from countries that Spain colonized and that are today considered part of the "Third World."

Within these countries, there are descendants of masters and slaves, colonizers and colonized, landed elites and the dispossessed.



To think of all the people of Latin America as the same is akin to thinking all people of South Africa are one people. Interestingly, corporate America tends to group Latinos on the basis of their “Hispanic heritage,” as opposed to their independence from it. For corporate America, history is irrelevant when catering to their “Hispanic market.” This dynamic also permits government to place Europeans into the Hispanic category.

Separate from understanding how government manipulates identity, it has been said that when reporting about Latinos, it is better to speak about communities — such as Puerto Ricans, Argentineans, Mexican Americans — as opposed to a single community. But it is even more complex than that. Each nationality has its own mix of races, ethnicities, languages and cultures.

As with all peoples, Latinos are not monolithic. They are a grouping of diverse national, racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups that are conveniently lumped together by government and media. Adding to this diversity are some groups that have been here long before the thirteen colonies. This includes Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans and Hispanos.

Most Latinos in the United States are racially mixed or mestizos — an option not available in the Census. Within these groups, many of the people are indigenous, black, Asian and white. When people ponder why Latinos don’t think or vote as a bloc, they miss the obvious: like other diverse groups, Latinos are not a bloc.

While Latinos do indeed come from every part of the Americas, about three-fourths are of Mexican or Mexican American and Central American origin, and most of these are indigenous or indigenous-based mestizos. In other words, generally not white. The next largest groups are from the Caribbean, such as Puerto Ricans, Cubans and Dominicans — populations that are a mix of African, Spanish, and to a lesser extent, indigenous cultures. Those from South America — about 10 percent of all Latinos — are a mixture of Spanish-European, indigenous and black. Outside of the small minority who are white, or “pass” for white, most of these populations are subject to racial, cultural and linguistic discrimination.

Sociologists suggest that no more than 10 percent of U.S. Latinos could be consid-

ered “white.” Thus, in effect, one percent of the U.S. population (white Latinos) now determines how 99 percent of the population is identified. According to the bureau, everyone is either Hispanic or non-Hispanic. Besides being an awkward way to identify people — by what they’re not — it also has created unnecessary terms used by the media. In our work, we have encountered terms such as “Traditionally Non-Hispanic White Colleges and Universities.” Not only is it a mouthful, but it is also a bizarre way to identify most U.S. colleges, especially since there never has been even one “traditionally Hispanic” college in the United States.

The politically expedient act of government redefining these racial categories on paper sacrifices the right of people or peoples to self-identify. Additionally, as a result of bureaucratic decisions related to the year 2000 Census, government will increasingly misidentify this “brown” population as racially “white.” Because of these false projections by the government and media — including Latin American media — many Latinos are beginning to perceive of themselves as white, or try to pass for such in an attempt to avoid discrimination.

On public policy addressing racial matters, Latinos identified as white could conceivably be projected as benefactors of white privilege, as opposed to victims of it, and find themselves on the wrong side of the racial divide.

This may exacerbate the problem of Latinos being invisible to media and the gov-

Photo not available
for electronic distribution

ernment until the issue of immigration arises. As it is already, Latinos are rarely included in national stories, and when they are, most generalizations are negative.

Ironically, this misidentification is coming at a time when Latinos are being treated socially — as evidenced by the vicious anti-immigrant campaigns of the past few years — as anything but “white.” We have long referred to these campaigns as “Indian removal,” because they don’t actually target immigrants, but rather dark-skinned populations, specifically Mexicans and Central Americans.

Media must decide whether they will collaborate with government efforts to manipulate census data and impose a false identity upon 32 million people.

There is precedent for media refusing to follow government misidentification and government practices, in general. In the 1980s, Latino journalists throughout the country persuaded many major newspapers to drop the term “illegal alien” in favor of “undocumented immigrant.” A number of journalists at the *Los Angeles Times* decided that they would not accept the government-imposed term “Hispanics.” As a result of their efforts, the *L.A. Times* stylebook suggests using “Latinos” rather than “Hispanics.”

Officialdom — from government to corporate America — seem to prefer the term “Hispanic,” and because of the power of these institutions, the term is in widespread

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Ellen's Coming Out:

An Opportunity to Cover It Correctly

By Judy Gerber

The double coming out of comedian Ellen Degeneres and her sitcom character Ellen Morgan on ABC was easily the television event of the year. The advance publicity and dragged out rumors of is she/isn't she and will she/won't she built up the fanfare and hype across even mainstream America. Many have hailed Degeneres as courageous and her coming out as taking gay and lesbian acceptance in the society to a new level. Others argue that when a star comes out, it does little to change other people's lives. Besides, Degeneres is easy to accept: she's white, middle class, "the girl next door," as ABC anchor Diane Sawyer was so fond of saying during her interviews with Degeneres on the network's news magazines, "20/20" and "Prime Time Live." Did that comment reflect a change in attitude by the news media towards lesbians or was Sawyer doing her job — trying to protect ABC and Disney, ABC's parent company, from too much heat by emphasizing how Degeneres as a lesbian is practically "normal"? Did the whole thing get blown way out of proportion? And did the Ellen fanfare demonstrate that the media have changed their approach to coverage of

lesbians and gays?

It was no accident the coming out episode became so big. Networks have been using their news broadcasts for entertainment cross promotion for years, and the gay community facilitated the "Ellen" promotion. In the name of covering the news, local TV stations covered coming out parties sponsored by national lesbian/gay rights groups like Gay/Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and the Human Rights Campaign and countless local lesbian/gay organizations throughout the country. These parties gave news media their local angle on "Ellen." In many markets, all the local network affiliates covered the story, even though it meant promoting the competition's entertainment. Since those events were primarily gay and celebratory, stories were reported that way.

Most news media did not go seeking out an anti-gay position, although some mentioned opposition existed. Plenty of people inside and outside the newsroom worked to get fair coverage. GLAAD publicity associate Bill Horn attributes positive coverage to organizers making gay people willing to tell their stories available to reporters and making

sure newsrooms knew where parties were happening so that reporters could talk to real live gay people in their own towns.

Reporter Marshall McPeck, a member of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) electronic media coordinator, and formerly with CBS affiliate WTOL (Toledo), said that his station did not want to advertise programming from another network. Thus, WTOL limited its coverage to a couple of parties where people watched the episode. "Our main concern was promoting the enemy, but coverage from our newsroom was positive." In San Francisco, every station reported on parties. Only ABC's KGO-TV felt obligated to cover opposing views: it showed Jerry Falwell's demonstration.

Openly gay staff worked from the inside with their bosses to ensure news fairness. The Bergen (N.J.) Record had originally planned a focus group of straight parents to watch "Ellen" until two gay staff members convinced editors to broaden the group.

Pro-gay coverage was due, in part, to the fact that there's never been a national news story specifically about "coming out." Gay Pride and other gay-related issues get limited



coverage, but the national media have never stepped back to look at what it means to come out. Degeneres is the first to do anything specifically about one of the most significant steps in a lesbian or gay life.

In a social environment where some people vehemently oppose homosexuality and others just don't see why people make such a big deal about it, coming out evokes strong emotions. Many call the experience "liberating." Thus, when Degeneres described her own coming out as the "most freeing experience because people can't hurt me anymore," those already out could relate. By using extensive quotes about "her wish to lead a more honest and open life in public, her weariness at the effort it took her not to," *Time* magazine's cover story on Degeneres reflected the joy that lesbians and gays feel when they come out.

As fascinating as the overwhelmingly positive coverage was, it still missed some important opportunities.

First of all, the vast majority of lesbians and gays shown, talked to, and featured, are white and likely middle class — partly because that tends to be the group easiest for the media to find and partly because the gay movement itself has problems with diversity. The next time an opportunity like this one arises, gay organizations must take the responsibility to provide different faces — African American, Asian, Latino and Native American — to introduce reporters to a diverse community.

The only black gay view of Ellen was in the black gay press or in an article by Mandy Carter, National Field Director for the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum, in the summer issue of GLAAD Images. As she points out, there's still inadequate representations of African American gays and lesbians in the media: black men are usually presented as queens, black lesbians as butches in prison.

Venus Magazine editor Charlene Cothran was concerned that the white-only image of lesbians and gays on the show might prevent the black community from recognizing issues of black lesbians and gays. She sent news releases to numerous mainstream and black media outlets offering information and interviews. Atlanta radio station WALR accepted the offer, as did the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, in which she appeared as one of four local people featured the day of the show.

The Ellen story also left plenty of room for some important obvious sidebars that could have added depth and helped people deal with the issues in their real lives. Most media, however, skipped sidebars.

In tags to each part of the Degeneres interviews, Diane Sawyer mentioned a federal statistic that gay teens are two to three times more likely to try suicide than other teens but did not offer resources for help. Another sidebar could have discussed how 41 states have laws on the books banning homosexuality. Far from being harmless Victorian holdovers, these laws form the basis on which to take children away from lesbian mothers, justify employment discrimination and generally reflect what remains the dominant attitudes of the people who hold power in the United States.

Easy-to-find gay and lesbian resource lists — including those on-line — identify organizations in almost every part of the country. Newsrooms could have simply assembled a list of local support services. When even something as mundane as where to find the best berry picking every summer gets a sidebar about where to do the picking, news media ought to take the trouble to find out where resources on this topic can be found.

Those newsrooms that included sidebars missed ones that would have been useful. *Time Magazine* had a sidebar of quotes from the pundits on the question: "Is coming out going too far?" Most of the people quoted supported the show, but it also included homophobes like Randall Murphree, of the

American Family Association. Lesbians and gays expect to see those comments, but *Time* led the sidebar with Camille Paglia (a lesbian anti-feminist) validating homophobia among the fundamentalists.

Some newspapers less than happy with leaving a gay-positive spin on their coverage used reader polls to give opponents voice. Polls, however, are unscientific and more often than not, merely reflect which side is better organized. *The Tennessean* and the *Tampa Tribune* ran entire quotes, many of which spewed venom on the subject of gays and lesbians — hardly the sidebar that belonged in the news.

News coverage also failed to look into the episode's aftermath. For instance, how many young gays were taunted the next day when they walked into school after the episode? How many teachers had to avoid the subject entirely, or risked their jobs when they talked about the show?

Reflecting folk wisdom and a more cynical view of pro-lesbian coverage, Frank Rich in the *New York Times*, and John Gallagher in the *Advocate* both asserted that lesbians are more acceptable than gay men. Rich said, "Many straight Americans, especially men, find lesbians titillating even as they deplore or are threatened by male homosexuality..." Titillation is not acceptance; besides, who is more acceptable is irrelevant.

Lesbians have had to struggle for recognition of their particular concerns, even in the gay movement. Just because two or three famous show business lesbians have been

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TIPS:

1. Keep talking to lesbians and gays in the communities where you work.
2. Make the effort to find people of color in those communities, even though it tends to be a lot easier to find the white ones.
3. Don't assume all your readers or viewers are straight, disinterested parties. Instead, assume they could benefit from a listing of agencies that provide support and services for lesbians and gays.
4. Don't always seek out anti-gay comments in stories about lesbians and gays. There are still racists in this country, but the media doesn't feel compelled to always include their opinion in stories about African Americans. The same goes for lesbians and gays.
5. Include openly lesbian and gay staff in editorial discussions about coverage issues of their communities.





Sports Reporting Falls on Its Face: The Press and Tyson

By Erna Smith

It was as if the tabloid *Weekly World News* took mainstream American journalism hostage.

In reality, it was a modern-day sports soap opera starring Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfeld's mangled ear and columnists and commentators dueling for bragging rights on righteous indignation.

Tyson's biting of heavyweight champion Holyfeld's ears summoned age-old, menace-to-society stereotypes of black men. Numerous studies show black men most often make news for committing crimes,

playing sports or performing popular arts. The effect can reinforce stereotypes of subhuman character and superhuman physical prowess.

Because of his athletic skills, juvenile criminal past and propensity for violence toward women, culminating in his 1992 rape conviction, Tyson has become a pop culture icon for the apprehension many people feel about young, black men, either consciously or unconsciously.

With Tyson's aural attack on Holyfeld,

sports, crime and celebrity converged to create a major news story — and lucrative entertainment. Though able to convey the rawness of the event without resorting to animal metaphors, *New York Times* sports reporter Richard Sandomir found that the live, pay-per view broadcast of the fight produced “the type of singular, sanguinary show unlikely to be seen again.” In other words, sanctioned brutality run amok makes great television. The coverage also provided a field day for headline writers: “Biting the Dust,” “Tyson loser in bite of the century,” “The Mike Tyson He Knew Showed Humor, Not Bite,” “When It Needs Courage, Boxing is Toothless.”

None of this, of course, is just the news media's fault; they mirror attitudes of mainstream society. But if journalists learned any-

thing from the O.J. Simpson case, it should be that many black Americans view society quite differently than whites and detect a double standard in reporting on black public figures, especially male ones. Filter Tyson coverage through this prism, and it's not surprising that the journalistic avalanche of animal metaphors, vampire analogies and armchair psychiatric analyses of Tyson might strike some blacks as yet another example of white, mainstream media tearing down a high-profile black man.

Whether one blames Tyson, society, greed, his handlers or all of the above for the ugly public spectacle that he's become, fairness and accuracy in reporting requires journalists to be aware of, and to avoid, as much as possible, the use of words, phrases and metaphors that perpetuate racial stereotypes.

Generally speaking, the national press did a better job of avoiding stereotypes than regional newspapers. Thoughtful op-ed commentaries by columnists like Ellen Goodman of the *Boston Globe* and DeWayne Wickham of Gannett News Service contrasted with the well-meaning schmaltz and over-the-top hysteria of some sports columnists, who just couldn't seem to get enough of the adjectives "feral," "vicious," "sick," "despicable," and "prehistoric," phrases like "law of jungle" and "cave man mentality" and references to Count Dracula and fictional movie serial killer, Hannibal Lecter.

One Northern California sports columnist managed to squeeze almost every offensive cliché possible into the lead of his June 29 column: "Mike Tyson didn't want to be thought of as a primitive fighter. He read poetry and the classics to dispute the image that he was just some feral beast in padded gloves.

"...Then Tyson did something Saturday night that was so feral, so despicable, we can only conclude Count Dracula had taken control of his mind and body."

The difference between this column (and the many others like it) and the op-ed pieces following the Tyson debacle reflect, in part, deadline pressures, and also a difference in accepted professional standards for sport versus news reporting and punditry. Sports reporting remains, perhaps, the last bastion of unself-conscious moralizing and sentimentality in American journalism as well as public life.

Gone are the days of waxing poetic

about the heroic play of white superstars who were in life despicable characters. And the ascent of black athletes has made sports pages and newscasts the most likely and consistent source of black people in the news. In its rush to judgment, the Tyson coverage exposed the limitations of the still largely white fraternity of sports journalism.

The gap did not escape Goodman. In her July 3 column, she wrote: "...If I have it right, the outpouring of outrage, the shock on the part of sportswriters and fans, is not because the convicted rapist once assaulted a woman's body in a hotel room but because last Saturday night he assaulted Evander Holyfeld's aural organs in a boxing ring."

Goodman was neither the only op-ed nor sports columnist to refer to Tyson's 1992 conviction for raping Desiree Washington, a former Miss Black America beauty contestant. Her forceful commentary, however, presented a perspective not found often enough on the nation's sports pages — a woman's.

Wickham proved opinion writing need not succumb to name-calling and other lapses in journalistic fairness to be hard-hitting. In a good example of show-not-tell journalism, his July 2 column offered a detailed account of the former heavyweight champion's history of criminal behavior to support a call for Tyson's permanent banishment from professional boxing. "What Mike Tyson needs now is tough love. He needs to get out

of the boxing ring and onto shrink's coach....What he doesn't need is another chance to harm someone."

Columnists are paid to be opinionated, reporters to be skeptical. It is their job as journalists to be tough and critical of high-profile, black public figures, who like Tyson, invite and warrant intense journalistic scrutiny by breaking the law or otherwise misbehaving. This doesn't, however, give journalists license to use metaphors that perpetuate racial stereotypes or inject coverage with biases or spins that are socially, historically or culturally offensive.

The larger, underlying problem with the Tyson coverage wasn't the coverage itself. It's the absence of day-to-day coverage depicting African Americans in stories other than those about entertainment, crime and sports. This condition of relative invisibility inadvertently elevates people like Mike Tyson to symbols of their race no matter how they are portrayed in stories. ☹

Erna Smith is the chair of the journalism department at San Francisco State University and has taught courses on the history of journalism, editing, newswriting and diversity in the media. She previously worked as a copy editor for the San Francisco Examiner and The Wall Street Journal and has authored many reports and articles about journalism and diversity, including "The Color of News: Inside the L.A. Riots" and "What Color Is the News?"

TIPS:

To better address the issues raised by the Tyson coverage, journalists must:

1. Be aware. Metaphors, phrases and clichés that tend to perpetuate racial stereotypes are not just offensive, they're quite often inaccurate, and thus, bad journalism. To report with accuracy and comprehensiveness, journalists must become more aware of, and avoid the use of, stereotypes.
2. Be proactive. "Mainstreaming" African Americans into stories about everyday life instead of just in stories about entertainment, crime and sports will improve journalism.
3. Make diversity a company-wide commitment. The high representation of African Americans and Latinos in major professional sports heightens the need for greater sensitivity in sports reporting, yet most efforts to address employment and content issue center on news editorial department.

Start Spreading the News

Calling All Journalists and News Hounds:

The News Watch Project Website is up and running and needs your input. We want you to make use of the site as your on-line resource for bringing unbiased, fair coverage of people of color and lesbians/gays to the news.

Find answers to your writing questions in the News Watch Styleguide or take a look at what your colleagues have been doing with their news. We're applauding what's good, but we hope you'll all learn from the mistakes, too.

In order to keep the site current we need material from your area. Next time you see or hear a news report that grates on your nerves, don't just rant about it. Write a short critique and send it our way. If you don't have time to deal with it, send it to us anyway, and we'll write it up.

E-mail, fax or snail mail material to us and be sure to include the offending article or a transcript where possible. For TV or radio reports, an actual copy of the material would be best, but if you didn't hit the record button on time, we need details about what show it was, and where and when it aired. We're interested in broadcast and cable news, newspapers and magazines, and of course, those news websites.

So set a bookmark at

*<http://newswatch.sfsu.edu>
and get involved.*

Ellen Comes Out...

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more willing to risk coming out does not add up to more acceptance. Perhaps it seems to men that after a vacuum of coverage of anything concerning lesbians, a handful of public ones seems like a major change. Even now the prevailing lesbian stereotypes — ball-busting, bull dyke, castrating — are hardly those that promote acceptance. Instead, lesbians are usually perceived as threats to the male supremacist order because they don't need men.


And there was Degeneres adding her name to the list right on prime time television.

The superficial quality of Ellen coverage becomes clearer when looking at recent gay pride events. In much of the mainstream media, Ellen received much more attention

than this year's pride celebrations, which involve over a million gays in the United States alone. Most news reports about pride seem to follow a standard formula that the media have used for 25 years: show a couple of drag queens, dykes on bikes, some cute pictures of children and a couple of wide shots. Newsrooms seem unable or unwilling to understand why so many people come to the events year after year.

Coming out is an important, ongoing lifetime process because there are always new situations in which to come out. Lesbian/gay pride events remain an annual rite because it's a day of validation for being yourself despite the obstacles and it's a way to celebrate being out.

Many gays and lesbians were quite pleased with the coverage the community saw in the days of Degeneres'/Morgan's coming out. The industry demonstrated that it is capable of presenting positive coverage.

Getting to this point has taken a concerted effort by activist organizations and lesbians and gays inside their newsrooms, and that effort shows. The coverage also demonstrates, however, that reporters, producers, editors and the rest of a newsroom staff must work harder to go beyond the surface and delve into the multicultural richness and complexity of the lesbian/gay community. 

Judy Gerber is the assistant director of News Watch. She also works as a freelance television news and print writer. Gerber has been an openly lesbian journalist in both community radio and network news for 20 years. She was a founding member of Turnout, CNN's lesbian and gay journalist association.

[Editor's note: The next issue of the News Watch journal will include an article about the coverage of the Andrew Cunanan story.]

From the Newswatch Website

Apologizing for Slavery

A flurry of articles appeared between the end of June and August reporting on, and analyzing, U.S. Rep. Tony Hall's proposal in Congress that the U.S. government apologize for slavery. Most articles address whether an apology will really make a difference in black/white race relations. That may be an obvious question, but it misses the connection between apology and the logical consequences — a discussion of reparations (a historical demand of black people dating from the Civil War). Except for two notable exceptions in the *New York Times*, most other media missed this point.

Deborah Sontag questions the whole concept of political apologies in her column "Too Busy Apologizing to be Sorry" (*NY Times* 6/29/97) and characterizes apologies as both as "juvenile" and the latest trend in vote-getting. She backs up her point with a quote from a Columbia historian saying it would be "opening the door to all kinds of frivolous demands and unresolvable controversies." In this situation, those so-called "frivolous demands" include reparations.

The backhand reference to reparations is as far as Sontag goes. Rather than delve deeper, she ponders "Where does the line get drawn?...If Congress were to apologize to black Americans, should it not apologize to Native Americans?" The tone belittles the concept that treaties, which the U.S. broke, have long been points of contention between Native Americans and the U.S.

A more probing editorial by Brent Staples' (*NY Times*, 7/21/97) headlined "Forty Acres and a Mule: Slavery, Reparations, A Clinton 'Apology'," is quite concrete. He acknowledges that talk alone won't change history. The article demonstrates how clearly the media shortchanges the discussion by not validating the impact of slavery in practically every black family's history. He states that had reparations been made following the Civil War, it "would have created black capital and independence almost immediately." Staples argues that the history of unmet demands for reparations keeps the wounds of slavery alive.

Incidentally, the *Sunday San Francisco Chronicle & Examiner* (6/29/97) ran an eye-

opening article about Tony Hall, who sponsored the bill in the House. They describe him as a "liberal, white, born-again Christian," and that his call "parallels a flourishing movement of evangelical white Christians — many of them political conservatives." Good for the

Campaign Finance...

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generated by the various governmental and media investigations. Numerous supporters of Washington gubernatorial candidate Gary Locke canceled their participation in an L.A. fund-raiser last year because of the controversy.

Momentum to appoint an Asian American to the president's cabinet for the first time was derailed, and numerous lesser appointments were also scuttled as Asian Americans became persona non grata in Washington. Asian American foreign service officers and other State Department civil service employees report that they are now unable to obtain the higher security clearances needed to advance in their careers.

Even Asian American elected officials are shunning Asian American community events. At the annual banquet of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus Institute, previously attended by President Clinton and prominent Asian American politicians, only one of the seven Asian American members of Congress appeared this year — Rep. Robert Underwood of Guam. Non-profit groups like the Institute find themselves the subject of media and government probes.

Inaccurate and unbalanced coverage may also have contributed to a climate of racial misunderstanding. Individuals like Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Haw.) who speak out publicly against race baiting have become recipients of orchestrated hate messages. Groups that monitor hate crimes have observed a marked increase in anti-Asian incidents since the campaign finance probes began, even as the overall crime rate has fallen.

For example, in San Francisco, swastikas and other hate symbols have targeted Asian American businesses; in Syracuse, N.Y., Asian American college students were attacked at a

Chronicle/Examiner for running the article, but it raises many more questions than it answers, starting with what is the motivation for trying to issue an apology? Sincere anti-racism? Part of the conservative Christian movement's efforts to bring African Americans into their conservative social agenda? Why do most articles characterize opposition as coming from the left and the right, when political conservatives are promoting the apology? (J.G.) ☺

Denny's restaurant; a Chinese American man was shot to death in his own driveway by police in a middle-class California suburb. While such incidents are not directly linked to the campaign probes, news organizations have a responsibility to consider the impact of their coverage on community tensions.

At community forums, on Internet chat lines and at conferences and meetings, Asian Americans express fears that racially tinged political rhetoric and uninformed reporting will lead to a dangerous national climate. In these discussions, they trace their fears to the internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans in World War II, the targeting of Chinese Americans during the McCarthy Red Scare, and physical attacks against Asian Americans during the Japan-bashings of the 1980s. Unchecked political innuendo and media sensationalism characterized each of these periods.

Journalists must report the news accurately, fairly and responsibly. *The Washington Post* and other news organizations rightly uphold the validity of journalistic inquiry, but they are wrong to discount their critics as though race is merely a card being played. The issue is not whether journalists have an ulterior racial motive, as some editorial pages say they are accused of, but whether reporting can be accurate, fair and responsible when race is an element.

The continuing story of campaign finance reform offers journalists a challenge to cover an emerging American population that is distinct from its Asian roots. Meeting this challenge can only improve the quality of news coverage in all arenas. ☺

Helen Zia is a contributing editor to Ms. Magazine, where she was previously also the managing editor. A columnist on www.ChannelA.com, Zia lives in San Francisco and is at work on a book about the coming of age of Asian Americans.

From the Newswatch Website

Talking Up English First

On the education page, the *Los Angeles Times* (8/13/97) ran a feature about a Latina teacher leading the fight against bilingual education. Gloria Matta Tuchman is characterized as the Latina Ward Connerly, a reference to the black man leading anti-affirmative action efforts. The article reads like a public relations press release.

The four-column, six-and-a-half inch high photograph atop the article shows a smiling teacher holding up a sign with the campaign's phone number clearly legible. In fact it's in type at least twice the size of the newspaper copy.

News Watch recommends that a photo like that have the phone number on the poster obscured in some way or cropped off

to avoid the impression the editors of a paper are advertising for the campaign.

The article has one quote from a Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund spokeswoman commenting on how the English-Only education initiative is the third ballot assault in a row for Latinos. The rest of the article promotes Tuchman's position and relates her personal history. It talks about children being capable of learning in English but completely ignores the complexity of arguments that inspired bilingual education in the first place. Nowhere does it even mention the relationship of cultural identity to a child's ability to learn. The article also ignores questions about who is behind the English-only movement, only acknowledging the wealthy businessman for whom Tuchman is fronting on the English First ballot initiative. (J.G.)

Disaster Coverage...

Continued from page 3

community," said Saunders. "They don't give much consideration to Native people or any people of color. They don't want us here. They hope we go away. I've lived in Grand Forks since 1985 and have never felt like a part of this community." Saunders said his main source of news and information during the disaster was radio.

Radio allowed Saunders to construct his own images. "Its face is colorless."

"There's already a stereotypical perception of Native people in this community," said Bedard. "People think we are dirty, lazy alcoholics who live off the government. The media should make a greater effort to inform and educate the community about Native American people and show them in a way that does not stereotype us."

"Some of the things I'm hearing people talk about since the flood," said Saunders, "are price gouging, waiting in line for government assistance, how it feels to lose everything, to be dependent upon others, and to feel helpless. Well, Native people and other minority groups have experienced things like this for years. But now that it's happening to the white community, it's news."

A newspaper has many responsibilities to the communities it serves — to educate, inform and empower. It is no secret that mainstream media write and report from the standpoint of a "white man's world," regardless of a community's diverse population. Almost 30 years ago the Kerner Commission report warned US media of the effects of this narrow perspective; and more than 50 years have passed since the Hutchins Commission suggested procedures for responsible coverage of minority communities.

According to Mary Ann Weston in her recent book, *Native Americans in the News*, white, usually male, journalistic gatekeepers measure the importance of an event in terms of their own experiences. With their smaller population numbers and relative lack of political and economic influence in

the Red River Valley, American Indian people are marginalized by this practice.

"When you hear or realize that you or your property are not worth saving or protecting," said Saunders, "it's a horrible feeling. It is also something we have lived with our entire lives."

If the *Grand Forks Herald* is going to champion the revitalization of the community, it has a responsibility to uphold the dictum of its founder: "It will be the people's paper, run strictly in their interests, guarding jealously their rights and maintaining boldly their cause."

The question remains — whose interests, whose rights, whose community?

Lucy Annis Ganje, raised by journalist parents on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, is an associate professor at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks and the founding director of the Native Media Center. After two weeks of sandbagging efforts, Lucy, her partner Sharon and their family were evacuated.

Lynda Kenney is a lecturer and the assistant director of the Native Media Center at the University of North Dakota. After two weeks of sandbagging, she watched the river spill over dikes that were supposed to protect her home and community. A city official later told her the value of homes in her neighborhood do not warrant repair or replacement of the unstable 30-year-old levee system currently in place.

TIPS:

1. Don't wait for a disaster to establish a journalistic presence within minority communities; do it now to ensure that lines of communication already exist and will remain open.
2. Report on recovery efforts, including what often goes unreported, by investigating efforts within minority communities.
3. Critically evaluate the stories and images published.
4. Ask for input from members of the minority communities

The authors found the following articles especially useful when formulating their recommendations:

- Hernandez, Debra Gersh, "Covering Disasters: Report defines role of the media." *Editor & Publisher*, October 8, 1994.
- Bachman, S.L., "Disaster reporting in the Third World," *Quill*, January/February 1996.

From the Newswatch Website

Elvis and All of Us?

Entertainment news includes lots of stories about Elvis Presley the week of August 11. After all, it was the 20th anniversary of his death. Much of the coverage heralds the King's role as a cultural icon.

But Elvis did not have a huge impact on every community. Not all American youth growing up in the '50s and early '60s were star struck. Back when Elvis hit the music scene, few acknowledged the influence of black music on his work. Journalists who gloss over the fact that his audience was, and continues to be, primarily white perpetuate that mistake.

CNN reporter Bruce Morton put an Elvis essay together for the network. It mentions that Elvis "didn't invent rock and roll, but he helped, mingling in his music black rhythm

and blues, white country and western, gospel, everything." From that statement, he could have talked about what a big change that was because the music industry had been locking black R & B musicians out of the mainstream. And white parents were "driven crazy" partly because the music had so much black influence.

Instead, when he goes on to talk about the teenagers affected by Elvis, he's talking about white culture without acknowledging it — white parents driven crazy, white "kids, teenagers, a world, a culture of their own." The tone and the words, reinforced by scenes of all white people in the video, imply everyone was white.

CNN's website headlined the on-line ver-

sion of the story "How and why Elvis changed all of us." It just assumes a homogenous group of people in the audience being addressed.

News Watch has a few alternate suggestions. After acknowledging the fact Elvis incorporated black music, devote a paragraph or two to what that meant to white teens or black R & B musicians who couldn't get their records on the radio until then. And the headline? Here are a few alternate suggestions: "How and why Elvis changed pop music," "How and why Elvis changed white youth culture" or "The Elvis effect: Pop music would never be the same."

To see the original story on CNN's website: <http://www.cnn.com/SHOW-BIZ/9708/10/elvis.impact/>. (J.G.)

Latino Communities...

Continued from page 7

use. "Latino" appears to be used more as a form of rebellion or self-definition, particularly by those from immigrant communities.

In determining which label to use in a story, however, if the group in question is known, studies show it is better to use the name of the group or individual — e.g., Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, Mexican American, Peruvian — as opposed to a generic term. The terms "Latino" or "Hispanic" are generally and primarily terms of convenience for media, government and corporate America rather than terms people themselves use. Many people use multiple identifiers interchangeably — e.g., Chicana, Mexican, Mexican American, Latina and Hispana — and they do not have a problem with that. While Latinos or Hispanics may be of any race and are generally considered people of color, reporters should not assume the race or nationality of individuals.

Many in the profession simply and erroneously reduce complex issues regarding this population to the use "Latino" or "Hispanic." Perhaps this approach addresses what to call this diverse group of people, but it does not address matters of race. For many people, how they are iden-

tified is less important than being invited to the decision-making table. When speaking about the future of this nation, journalists must include Latino voices. Diverse, and even discordant, they are integral to expanding the racial dialogue and helping media understand how to tell that complex story. ☺

Patrisia Gonzales, the first Latina (Chicana-Kikapu) syndicated columnist in the country, is a current Kellogg National Leadership Program Fellow and is working on a book about the emerging human rights movement in Mexico. After attending the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, she worked as a reporter for The Philadelphia Enquirer, Tucson Citizen and Corpus Christi Caller.

Roberto Rodriguez, senior writer with Black Issues in Higher Education, is author of the recently released Justice: A Question of Race and On the Wrong Side of the Law, which chronicle his defense of the First Amendment and triumphs in two police brutality trials. He has won several state and national writing awards for fiction and has been writing opinion columns since 1984.

Based in Albuquerque, N.M., this husband and wife team is working on a book about racial and cultural mixture in the United States. A collection of their columns, Gonzales & Rodriguez: Uncut and Uncensored, was released Spring 1997.

TIPS:

1. Identify the group or individual by country of origin, if known, rather than using a generic term..

2. Ask interviewees how they prefer to be identified rather than making an assumption and imposing labels on them. Self-identification may be more complicated, especially if interviewees are multiracial.

3. Don't accept government or corporate misidentification.

NEWS WATCH PROJECT STAFF

DIANE YEN-MEI WONG, Project Director. Was program coordinator for Unity '94 and Unity '99, a coalition of the four national minority journalism associations and national executive director for the Asian American Journalists Association; currently a columnist for *Hawaii Herald* newspaper; author of *Break Down the Walls* (the evaluation of Unity '94) and coordinating editor of *Making Waves: Writings by and about Asian American Women*, also a playwright working on her second play, "First Time Hawaii"

JUDY GERBER, Assistant Director. Has over 20 years of experience as a print and broadcast journalist, most recently as a freelance writer for "CNN International" news program and an associate producer for "CNN World Report"; producer and host of "A Defiant Heart," a biweekly public affairs program for WRFG-FM, a local Atlanta community radio station; founding member of Turnout, a lesbian and gay organization at CNN; also writes for local television news.

ROBERT DEMALLAC, Information Technology Consultant. Provides computer, technical and information systems support and consultation for the project; serves as assistant computer network manager for the San Francisco State University Journalism department; previously worked at the university book store in the computer department; a senior in the university's Science/Humanities NEXA program.

IVÁN ROMÁN, Director. Directs and supervises the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism and its programs, including the News Watch Project: reported for English-language and Spanish-language daily newspapers in Rochester, New York; San Juan, Puerto Rico; and most recently, Miami, Florida; formerly a member of the board of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists; 1983 journalism graduate from Temple University.

The following part-time staff members conduct the bulk of the research for the News Watch Project. They identify, analyze and write about news, op-ed and other related items from newspaper, magazine, television, radio and on-line news sources. They are students at San Francisco State University.

MIKA BELLE, Researcher. Previously worked as a research and writing intern at the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, where he covered general news, elections, courts and arts and entertainment; was a freelance writer for *Vibe*, researching and reporting on arts and entertainment; a journalism major and former petty officer with the U.S. Navy.

THEODORA CONSOLACION, Researcher. Worked as a teacher association for a course on psychological statistics and as a graduate assistant for two other statistics classes; active with both the Asian American and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered communities; graduated from SFSU in psychology with emphasis on research and Asian American studies minor; a masters degree candidate in research psychology.

MICHAEL JOE, Researcher. Was assistant editor for the *Golden Gate* newspaper, covering student government; interned with the *San Francisco Examiner*; and reported for the *Potrero View* monthly newspaper; worked as assistant editor for the Bay Area Multicultural Media Academy, an intensive summer workshop for high school students; a senior in the journalism program.

RAMAL LAMAR, Researcher. Worked as an assistant in the university's Department of Special Education and as a research analyst in a Los Angeles law firm; was a contributing writer for the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, the largest black-owned newspaper on the West Coast; a computer science and applied mathematics major.

GABRIEL MARTINEZ, Researcher. Was director of the UC Berkeley Center for Racial Education, which organized events and programs for people of color communities on that campus; worked with the Korean American and African American Roundtable and Asian Immigrant Women Advocates; graduated from UC Berkeley in history, with an emphasis on 20th century US race relations and culture; a masters degree candidate in ethnic studies.



News Watch Advisors Back (l-r): Lori Edmo-Suppah, Nancy Baca, Cindy Hsu, Kara Briggs, Jackie Jones, Erna Smith, James Garcia, Sharon Stevens;

Front (l-r): Diane Yen-Mei Wong, Robin Stevens, Alan Acosta, Ken Yamada

SPECIAL THANKS

GARY BARKER
JOHN BURKS
SUMI IMAMOTO
DAVID OWYANG
DORIS OWYANG
MATTHEW OWYANG
STEVE OWYANG
IVÁN ROMÁN
ERNA SMITH

The Advisory Council serves as the liaison between News Watch and its five partners, and also with other news media groups and educational institutions. Council members work with their respective associations to facilitate information exchange and also provide support to the project. The News Watch Project and Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism are appointing four additional members.

Asian American Journalists Association

CINDY HSU Morning and noon anchor for WCBS-TV in New York; previously anchor/reporter in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Steubenville, Ohio; also president of the New York Chapter of AAJA, and former chapter vice-president and secretary; winner of Emmy Awards for Best Hard News Story and Coverage of Anticipated Breaking News.

KEN YAMADA Freelance writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area; formerly senior writer for *Computer Reseller News*; was vice president for media relations at Burson-Marsteller, and staff reporter for the San Francisco bureau of *The Wall Street Journal* and for *New York Newsday*; reporter/copy editor for *El Cerrito (Calif.) Journal* and an intern reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*.

National Association of Black Journalists

JACKIE JONES Assistant city editor at the *Washington Post*; previously held a variety of editing and supervisory positions at the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *The Philadelphia Daily News* and *New York Daily News*; vice president for NABJ and current co-chair of the group's Internship Committee and association's representative to the Accrediting Council for Journalism Education.

SHARON STEVENS Education reporter for NBC affiliate KSDK-TV since January 1993; previously a reporter for KTVI (St. Louis), reporter/anchor at NBC Radio in New York and reporter at WBBM-AM (Chicago) and WGBH-TV (Boston); vice NABJ president/broadcast; board member of Girls, Incorporated, the *St. Louis Journalism Review*, The Black Repertory Theater and local chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

National Association of Hispanic Journalists

NANCY BACA Assistant features editor at the *Albuquerque Journal*; was a reporter in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, covering a variety of beats, including retail business, county government and general assignment; also vice-president for print for NAHJ; holds a bachelors degree in journalism, communication and management from the University of New Mexico and is almost done with her work on a mass communication masters degree; a native of Venezuela.

JAMES GARCIA Editor and publisher of *Politico*, a new national monthly news magazine focusing on Latino politics; previously state desk reporter and columnist for the *Austin American-Statesman*, and Latin America correspondent for Cox Newspapers; also a freelance contributor to national magazines and to National Public Radio's "Latino USA"; working on a biography of US Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez; a graduate of the Univ. of Texas.

Native American Journalists Association

KARA BRIGGS City government reporter for *The Oregonian* in Portland, Oregon; was a reporter for *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, Wash.), and the *Wausau (Wisc.) Daily Herald*; current vice president for NAJA and organizer of the group's college newspaper training project, *The Native Voice*; a 1992 Howard Simmons Fellow and 1989 graduate of the Summer Program for Minority Journalists at the now-Maynard Institute for Journalism Education; a Yakama Indian.

LORI EDMO-SUPPAH Reporter for the *Idaho State Journal*; formerly publications manager for the UCLA American Indian Studies Center; was editor of the weekly *Sho-Ban News*; member of the NAJA board and secretary for its executive committee; journalism graduate from University of Montana; winner of the Wassaja Award from NAJA for coverage of controversial issues while at the *Sho-Ban News* and of several photography awards from the Idaho Press Club and NAJA; a Shoshone-Bannock.

National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association

ALAN ACOSTA Director, Stanford University News Service, in Northern California; previously served as deputy city editor and in a number of editing capacities at the *Los Angeles Times*; worked on two Pulitzer Prizewinning teams; also worked as editor at the *Orange County Register*, *Dallas Times Herald* and *Hartford Courant*; holds a masters degree in journalism from Columbia University.

ROBIN STEVENS Web producer at CNET: The Computer Network; was a freelance reporter for both magazines and newspapers covering politics and popular culture; former managing editor of *Out/Look*, a quarterly publication covering the lesbian and gay community; also former editorial coordinator at *Mother Jones Magazine*.

Academic

ERNA SMITH Journalism Department chair and professor; former copy editor at the *San Francisco Examiner* and *Oakland Tribune*; former foreign and national politics desk and banking and securities desk for the *Wall Street Journal*; also formerly with the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *Minneapolis Star*, *Houston Post* and *Waco Tribune-Herald*; 1992 research fellow at Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy.