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AMPLIFYING VOICES, PROTECTING LIVES: ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC RACISM IN MEDIA

Brian Daly, Dexter Brown, Julie Sobowale and Nadia Stewart
The Canadian Association of Black Journalists



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Executive summary

The voices of journalists of colour—within mainstream media and as citizen journalists—are needed more than ever. A government's willingness to protect journalists and their rights reflects how much it values democracy. Effective and enforced policies protecting the lives of racialized journalists, and resources to amplify their voices and stories, are needed the world over.

Public trust and citizen journalism

The individuals who recorded George Floyd's ill-fated encounter with Minneapolis police were engaging in citizen journalism. This form of reporting is generally defined as when "an ordinary person actively engages in recording, generating, and disseminating newsworthy events".[1] This allows citizens to "confront issues of social injustice and police accountability using technology such as smartphones."[2] A pair of city police officers in Halifax, Nova Scotia, were placed on administrative duty, and the province's Serious Incident Response Team was called in, after a Black teenager was injured during an arrest caught on cellphone video.[3] Five months later, in the same city, a cellphone video of a Black woman being roughed up by police officers at a Walmart led to charges being dropped against the victim.[4] South of the border, eyewitness video in the shootings of Jacob Blake, Oscar Grant and Eric Garner played pivotal roles in the subsequent investigations.

As the Black community's trust in law enforcement deteriorates in North America and around the world, eyewitnesses-turned-citizen-journalists see their recordings as the only way

[1] Ashley K. Farmer and Ivan Y. Sun, "Citizen Journalism and Police Legitimacy: Does Recording the Police Make a Difference?," *The Politics of Policing: Between Force and Legitimacy*, *Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance*, Vol. 21, 239-256, 2016, Emerald Group Publishing. *https://www.academia.edu/31878972/citizen_journalism_and_police_legitimacy_does_recording_the_police_make_a_difference*

[2] ibid.

[3] Aya Al-Hakim, "Investigation underway into Halifax police arrest of 15-year-old caught on video," Updated February 23, 2020, Global News. https://globalnews.ca/news/6583945/nova-scotia-police-watchdog-halifax-arrest-15-year-old/

[4] Michael MacDonald, "Charges dropped against woman who accused Halifax police of racial profiling, abuse", July 7, 2020, CTV News. https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/charges-dropped-against-woman-who-accused-halifax-police-of-racial-profiling-abuse-1.5013659

to challenge the status quo.[5] *Real STL News*, a citizen journalism outlet born out of the 2014 Ferguson uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, has no full-time employees and is staffed by volunteers but is relied upon by locals for breaking news, scoops and live streaming. In speaking to St. Louis Public Radio, Black citizen journalist and activist Tony Rice said a lack of trust is driving people to his reporting and the *Real STL News* platform. "[My followers] do not trust mainstream media. They think they have a certain bent or angle…And they rely on people like me. … For the most part, I have no one to account for."[6]

Establishment media should look to create partnerships with community journalists focused on training and expanding coverage. Researchers in Turkey found professional journalists who have either left or have been forced out of mainstream media outlets are establishing their own "'hybrid' alternative media platforms" where they work alongside citizen journalists in a new model of delivery.[7] Fellowship programs, such as those made available to Indigenous journalists through a partnership between the Canadian Journalism Foundation (CJF) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), provide opportunities for citizen journalists from racialized communities to access resources needed for personal and professional development. The recipients of the 2020 CJF-CBC Indigenous Journalism Fellowships, Sean Vanderklis and Karl Dockstader, are both community journalists who launched their own podcast to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities throughout southern Ontario. Expanding the program between CJF and CBC could include the public broadcaster exploring how they can better serve geographical news deserts through partnerships with community journalists who complete the fellowship program.

Protecting racialized journalists

When CNN reporter Omar Jimenez and his crew were arrested live on air while covering demonstrations in Minneapolis following the murder of George Floyd, police said it was because they were told to move and they did not. Fellow CNN reporter Josh Campbell was also reporting on the demonstrations that day but, when questioned by police, was told he could stay. "I identified myself ... they said, 'OK, you're permitted to be in the area,'" Campbell said. "I was treated much differently than (Jimenez) was."[8] Campbell is white. Jimenez is Black and Latino.

Covering U.S. President Donald Trump has made White House correspondents Yamiche Alcindor and April Ryan the targets of repeated attacks. Their relentless pursuit of answers from the "leader of the free world" has been an inspiration for Black female journalists the world over, even as the journalists are called names, ridiculed and even ignored.

We can only guess to what extent these Black journalists were targeted based on race. However, it is clear media companies need to ensure journalists' rights are upheld by government and law enforcement. In this case, U.S. journalists' First Amendment rights—their right to access public spaces, right to protect their sources, etc.—must be protected. Globally, credentialed journalists must be free to access spaces and ask questions, without fear of reprisal or arrest.

Bias vs. lived experience: Journalism's double standard

In his 2019 book *The Skin We're In*, Black journalist Desmond Cole paints a disturbing picture. Cole describes a situation at a May 2017 Toronto Police Services Board meeting where a debate around police officers in schools was on the agenda. Speaking up at the meeting brought on warnings of an arrest, despite the fact police appeared to be using tactics to limit the number of opposition voices in the room—something Cole and others were pointing out. Cole's ground-breaking 2015 *Toronto Life* article on carding—the police practice of stopping, questioning and documenting individuals (often

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[5] Farmer and Sun, 2016.

[6] Kayla Drake, "'People Like Me': Black Citizen Journalists Fill Trust Gap In St. Louis Media Landscape," July 24, 2020, St. Louis Public Radio. https://news.stlpublicradio.org/2020-07-25/people-like-me-black-citizen-journalists-fill-trust-gap-in-st-louis-media-landscape

[7] Yunus Erduran, Bora Ataman, and Baris Coban, *Citizen Journalism: A Dilemma for Professional Journalists*, November 2019, MEDAR. MEDAR-Report-2019-on-The-Perception-of-Citizen-Journalism-among-Professional-Journalists-in-Turkey.pdf

[8] Jason Hanna and Amir Verra, "CNN crew released from police custody after they were arrested live on air in Minneapolis", May 29, 2020, CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/29/us/minneapolis-cnn-crew-arrested/index.html

Black and Indigenous people) though no crime has been committed—shone a light on the conversation surrounding the policing of Black lives. It also raised the argument of objectivity, one often used to silence Black journalists when they attempt to use their platform to address the anti-Black racism they deal with on a regular basis. Cole writes: "The false premise of objectivity in journalism reinforces white supremacy. My activism is my writing, and in the fight for Black life, I am by necessity an actor and a critic at the same time."[9]

As Cole notes, the same standard is not enforced for white journalists:

> "Just before I was hired [as a *Toronto Star* columnist], Catherine Porter, a columnist at the *Star*, had written about an environmental demonstration she attended. In her column she misstated some facts about her demonstration. The *Star* acknowledged the inconsistencies but defended Porter from claims that she should not be demonstrating while working for the newspaper. The same public editor who later admonished me for 'becoming the news' wrote that 'Porter is right in her understanding that she has explicit permission—and encouragement—to take a public stand and act in line with her views on social justice issues. Certainly the editors who asked her to write about the climate change rally understood that she was participating in the protest as a means of introducing her daughter to the power of protest.'"[10]

This is not new. Black, Indigenous and journalists of colour are often labelled as biased in such cases. University of British Columbia professor Candis Callison says what they actually have is a type of expertise.[11] Therefore, objectivity is a convenience—a luxury, Black journalist Pacinthe Mattar says.[12] Until lived experiences are viewed as expertise, the voices of Black, Indigenous and journalists of colour will continue to be stifled under the guise of objectivity. As Cole notes, journalism is activism for those whose voices have been marginalized. Media outlets must ensure their codes of conduct and journalistic standards and guidelines cannot be weaponized or engaged as tools by management to silence Black, Indigenous and journalists of colour who speak publicly about their lived experiences. These policies typically exist to protect companies and must be re-examined through the lens of diversity and inclusion.

During a presentation at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism's Reporting Race Conference in 2016, William Gumede noted the need for South African media outlets to assess the extent to which institutional racism is present within their policies and practices. "Such audits must look at organisational policies, practices and informal cultures. There must be regular monitoring, and the impact of organisational policies, practices and customs should be measured. Managers should not retaliate against individuals pointing out racism in institutions."[13] Such audits should not be handled internally: third-party oversight is needed to engender trust. For Crown corporations/public broadcasters, license renewals should be tied to the implementation of key recommendations from these third-party audits.

Visible and invisible: The case for diversity data

It is worth considering whether Cole's experience at the *Toronto Star* would have been different had those in leadership been racially diverse. There are too few Black journalists in Canadian newsrooms and the absence of industry diversity data is troubling. A 2010 study found people of colour were significantly under-represented at all staffing levels in media outlets, including in management, where only 4.8% of board members and executives

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[9] Desmond Cole, *The Skin We're In: A Year of Black Resistance and Power*, 2020, Doubleday Canada.
[10] Ibid., pp. 76-77.
[11] CBC Radio, "Objectivity is 'the view from nowhere' and potentially harmful: expert," July 10, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/sunday/the-sunday-edition-for-july-12-2020-1.5639297/objectivity-is-the-view-from-nowhere-and-potentially-harmful-expert-1.5639304

[12] Pacinthe Mattar, "Objectivity is a Privilege Afforded to White Journalists," August 21, 2020, *The Walrus.* *https://thewalrus.ca/objectivity-is-a-privilege-afforded-to-white-journalists/*
[13] William Gumede, "The Media and Systemic Racism," October 24, 2016, Democracy Works Foundation. https://democracyworks.org.za/the-media-and-systemic-racism/

identified as people of colour.[14] Though outdated, this report contains the most recent available data in Canada. By comparison, American newsrooms have taken part in regular surveys since 1978.[15] Typically, journalists in Canada encounter resistance in response to calls for the release of such data.[16] The result: being a Black journalist in Canadian media is to be both visible and invisible at the same time.

This is not just a North American problem. In Germany, a study in 2009 found 84% of daily newspapers lacked representation from journalists with a migration background. Recent efforts[17] to gather data on newsroom diversity failed, with newsroom leaders in Germany providing responses similar to their Canadian counterparts: it is "not customary for us to ask employees about their ancestors or their origins" and they believe it would be "legally highly problematic to collect store and evaluate" diversity data.

Companies measure what matters to them. If diversity matters, it must be measured. Efforts are currently underway by the Canadian Association of Journalists and researchers at Ryerson University to produce a diversity survey for newsrooms. As a stakeholder in these conversations, the Canadian Association of Black Journalists is optimistic media companies will be more apt to participate than they have been in years past. While we believe media outlets should willingly provide more robust diversity data, government intervention might be required to compel media outlets to be more transparent.

How digital upstarts and citizen-funded/founded journalism can change the game

Non-profit news—citizen-funded or citizen-founded journalism—is on the rise in the United States, with newsrooms launching at a rate of more than one a month for almost 12 years, according to a 2019 report.[18] The News Leaders Association 2019 diversity survey found digital-only platforms—which includes multi-city digital media start-ups, legacy media, business publications and issue-specific sites—drove race and gender inclusion among newsrooms.[19] In Canada, the move to embrace the audience-funded model has been slower. A 2018 report concluded systemic barriers hinder people of colour from founding news start-ups—primarily because they are unable to access capital. Among the report's key conclusions: "If news outlets owned and operated by women and people of colour cannot access support to start and grow, the next generation of Canadian media will not represent Canadians in their full diversity".[20] Countries with healthy democracies support the journalism ecosystem. This includes allowing news start-ups to register more easily as charities and offering grants specifically for media start-ups founded by racialized journalists.

The argument surrounding the need for diversity data in journalism was amplified by the gathering and release of race-based COVID-19 data. In Toronto, Black Canadians were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.[21] Canadian media captured the headline, but sometimes missed the nuance surrounding what it means to be Black during a pandemic. This causally relates to the problem of

[14] Wendy Cukier, John Miller, Kristen Aspevig, and Dale Carl, "Diversity in Leadership and Media: A Multi-Perspective Analysis of the Greater Toronto Area, 2010," Proceedings for the 11th International Conference on Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations, South Africa, June 20-22, 2011. https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/diversity/academic/Diversity%20in%20Leadership%20and%20Media_2011.pdf

[15] News Leaders Association, "Newsroom Diversity Survey." https://members.newsleaders.org/newsroom_diversitysurvey

[16] Vicky Mochama, "Are Canada's Newspapers Too White? Most Refused to Say," March 2, 2016, Canadaland. https://www.canadalandshow.com/are-canadas-newspapers-too-white-most-refused-say/

[17] Hristio Boytchev, "Tracking ethnic newsroom diversity in Germany," undated, Neue deutsche Medienmacher. https://dataharvest.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hristio-Boytchev.pdf

[18] Institute for Nonprofit News, *INN Index 2019: The state of nonprofit news*, 2019. https://1l9nh32zekco14afdq2plfsw-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/INN.MainReport.FINAL_.2019.pdf

[19] News Leaders Association, "2019 Diversity Survey", September 10, 2019. https://www.newsleaders.org/2019-diversity-survey-results

[20] Lindsay Sample and Erin Millar, *The Rise of Audience-funded Journalism in Canada*, December 2018, The Discourse. https://www.thediscourse.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Report-The-rise-of-audience-funded-journalism-in-Canada.pdf

[21] Jessica Cheung, "Black people and other people of colour make up 83% of reported COVID-19 cases in Toronto," July 30, 2020, CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-covid-19-data-1.5669091

underrepresentation, which is at the core of Canadian media's white-centeredness. In this case, Black Canadians are left feeling irrelevant and overlooked simply because their voices—at the intersection of Blackness and post-secondary education in a post COVID-19 world[22] or Blackness and health[23]—are underrepresented or non-existent.

Too few journalists of colour in newsrooms throughout the Western world and too many policies policing their voices mean these stories often die at the hands of assignment editors out of touch with the lived experiences of racialized journalists. Recently, employees and former employees at Swedish Radio in Sweden expressed concern their work environment was one where the ideas of journalists of colour were being ignored, creating "conditions for racists" to work in their midst.[24]

Digital media start-ups create competition and provide an opportunity for diverse voices to enter an industry they might have otherwise been shut out of. Governments the world over should seek to remove barriers hindering their success, finding ways to incentivize investment and limit the power of larger players. For example, In India, the survival of journalism start-ups is threatened by the same challenges facing start-ups the world over: advertising revenue that is swallowed up by Facebook and Google and a system that favours legacy media.[25] In a 2017 report on the state of Canadian journalism, small digital news companies expressed their concern that new government policy measures often favour larger incumbent media organizations. The report argued that smaller media outlets are incapable of doing what the larger outlets can.[26] In some ways, this is true, but what remains a reality for many communities is that larger outlets have been known to ignore or poorly serve some audiences, as was noted in the aforementioned report on start-ups in India.

In recent years, an increase in the number of smaller digital players in Canada's journalism scene is having an impact on what establishment media defines as "news" and "relevant." An example is The Logic, a small, Toronto-based digital upstart. In the summer of 2018, the news outlet launched with 14 in-depth stories spread out over 3.5 months covering the Sidewalk Toronto project. The Logic's founder, David Skok, believes their reporting prompted *The Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* to reallocate resources to cover what The Logic was uncovering. "I am confident and convinced that our existence has actually made *The Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* better on this file," Skok said. [27] Small upstarts could have a disproportionate impact on the broader media ecosystem, as they tackle issues and policies mainstream outlets might not have the resources or will to explore.

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[22] The Conversation, "Addressing anti-Black racism in post-secondary institutions can transform Canada after the COVID-19 pandemic," July 19, 2020. https://theconversation.com/addressing-anti-black-racism-in-post-secondary-institutions-can-transform-canada-after-the-covid-19-pandemic-141366

[23] Ishani Nath, "The grim impact of COVID-19 on Black Canadians," September 8, 2020, healthing.ca. https://www.healthing.ca/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus/the-grim-impact-of-covid-19-on-black-people-in-canada

[24] Nord News, "Internal criticism of SR: 'We do not reflect Sweden,'" September 25, 2020. https://nord.news/2020/09/25/internal-criticism-of-sr-we-do-not-reflect-sweden/

[25] Arijit Sen and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Digital Journalism Start-Ups in India*, May 2016, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/Digital%20Journalism%20Start-ups%20in%20India_0.pdf

[26] Public Policy Forum, *The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy and Trust in the Digital Age*, January 2017. https://shatteredmirror.ca/wp-content/uploads/theShatteredMirror.pdf

[27] Lindsay Sample and Erin Millar, ibid.