

The Arc of the Moral Universe Does Not Bend by Itself

A diverse nation deserves a diverse press: this is a truth most Americans hold to be self-evident, according to a recent poll.¹ Yet newsrooms struggle to reflect the full splendor of American diversity. At this time of national fragmentation, journalists can foster healing through the pursuit of diversity.

To strive for greater representation aligns with journalism's moral imperative. According to the Society of Professional Journalists, for citizens to be "well informed in order to make decisions regarding their lives," journalists must report "in an accurate, comprehensive, timely and understandable manner."² Yet without diversity, comprehensiveness is impossible.

Lack of diversity in coverage renders negative repercussions. According to one media commentator, "A homogeneity of viewpoints tends to produce uncritical consensus, leading groups of otherwise intelligent people to collectively overlook or downplay evidence that might counter their preconceptions."³ To reflect the nation honestly, and draw from the full wealth of its perspectives, newsrooms must seek broader representation.

Diversity also brings substantial financial benefits. A McKinsey study found companies in the top quartile for managerial racial diversity to be 35% more likely to deliver above-par profitability.⁴ Such may stem from the inherent superiority of strategies forged from a broader set of viewpoints, but public perception may play a role as well. The success of diversity-focused branding campaigns

¹ "American Views 2020: Trust, Media and Democracy." *Knight Foundation*, 4 Aug. 2020, knightfoundation.org/reports/american-views-2020-trust-media-and-democracy/.

² "SPJ Missions." *Society of Professional Journalists*, n.d., www.spj.org/mission.asp.

³ Frank, Rebecca. "Why Diverse Newsrooms Matter." *News Media Alliance*, 26 Sep. 2018, www.newsmediaalliance.org/diverse-newsroom-study/.

⁴ Childers, Nicole A. "The moral argument for diversity in newsrooms is also a business argument — and you need both." *Nieman Lab*, 24 Nov. 2020, www.niemanlab.org/2020/11/the-moral-case-for-diversity-in-newsrooms-also-makes-good-business-sense/.

from Nike, Dove, and Google suggests that public commitments to diversity can reap financial rewards. Certainly media organizations have experienced the resource-depleting blowback from a lack of diversity: after one newspaper ran a controversial “Buildings Matter, Too” headline in the wake of George Floyd’s death, the resulting walkout of nearly 50 staffers posed a tremendous organizational setback.⁵

Greater representation begins with hiring. Despite representing 60 percent of the U.S. population, non-Hispanic whites constitute nearly 90 percent of newspaper leadership.⁶ Women constitute two-thirds of recent graduates from journalism and communications programs but only 42 percent of newsroom staff. Hiring more diverse staff and leadership will ensure reporting that better reflects the full scope of American life, in both topic and tone.

Newsroom leaders must also foster inclusion. Vox implemented surveys for staffers of color to regularly share their experiences. The effort has reaped significant rewards: since its 2014 founding, the company has doubled the percentage of minorities on staff.⁷

Those keen to ensure diversity would do well to foster young minds. NBCUniversal recently unveiled a million-dollar scholarship fund to support students from underrepresented populations pursuing pathways in journalism.⁸ For the fourth estate to thrive in perpetuity, such investments are critical.

⁵ Mateos, Evelyn. “To Solve Journalism’s Diversity Problem, Change Must Start at the Top.” *Editor and Publisher*, 9 Jul. 2020, www.editorandpublisher.com/stories/to-solve-journalisms-diversity-problem-change-must-start-at-the-top,166761.

⁶ Arana, Gabriel. “Decades of Failure.” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 5 Nov. 2018, www.cjr.org/special_report/race-ethnicity-newsrooms-data.php.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “NBCUniversal creates \$1M scholarship fund for underrepresented students.” *Columbia Journalism School*, 16 Feb. 2021, journalism.columbia.edu/nbcuniversal-scholarship-fund-underrepresented-students.

Those troubled by the nation’s present state of polarization and outrage may take heart in Dr. King’s view that “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”⁹ Yet the gravity that causes the arc to bend arises from the collective force of citizens’ daily decisions. For journalists to add to this gravity—and to fulfill imperatives both moral and financial—diversity must be a priority that is actively and sincerely pursued.

⁹ “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution.” *The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute*, 21 Jan. 2021, kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/publications/knock-midnight-inspiration-great-sermons-reverend-martin-luther-king-jr-10.

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