

# PORTRAYAL AND PERCEPTION

## TWO AUDITS OF NEWS MEDIA REPORTING ON AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS



A Report from The  
Heinz Endowments'  
African American  
Men and Boys  
Task Force

Pittsburgh,  
Pennsylvania

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# **PORTRAYAL AND PERCEPTION: AN OVERVIEW**

**TWO AUDITS OF NEWS  
MEDIA REPORTING  
ON AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MEN AND BOYS  
REVEAL COVERAGE  
THAT IS AT ODDS  
WITH HOW THEY AND  
THEIR COMMUNITIES  
VIEW THEM.**

When The Heinz Endowments decided two years ago to examine how Pittsburgh newspapers and local television newscasts cover African American males, it wasn't that the foundation expected to be surprised by the results. If a reminder were needed that black people are often ambivalent about how the news media covers African Americans, it came quickly when the Endowments' African American Men and Boys Task Force conducted a series of "community conversations" about the challenges black males face in the region. Local residents who attended the meetings cited example after example of what they viewed as unbalanced and even damaging reporting.

But it was the vehement expression of concerns during those discussions in 2009 that led the task force to include the power of storytelling in its strategy for finding ways to improve life outcomes for black men and boys. Endowments program staff had already identified critical issues to address, such as education, employment, identity and character development. As part of the response to local African American residents' comments about the media, the first communications project was to commission an evaluation of Pittsburgh media that could go beyond anecdotal observations in assessing the coverage.

Based on the alarming results from the first audit by Miami-based Meyer Communications LLC, it was decided that a deeper statistical analysis of some of the issues raised was needed to further solidify the original findings. The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, located in Washington, D.C., conducted another study using a different statistical approach. Each is included in this report and presents some findings that, while anticipated, yielded more than had been expected. The Meyer evaluation, for example, noted an overall dearth of stories about African American male youth. The Pew audit found a similar phenomenon in the coverage of African American women, and, in most of those accounts, the women were victims of crime or accidents.

4 Both analyses concluded that a disproportionate amount of Pittsburgh news coverage of African American men and boys focused on crime. The Meyer team reported that crime headed the list of all news topics related to the group, while the Pew study showed that, when considering television and newspaper stories together, crime coverage ranked second only to sports. To be sure, these were sobering confirmations about news stories involving African Americans in general and African American males in particular.

These results could have been discouraging to the Endowments and its community partners; instead, the findings have fueled efforts to encourage mainstream media to broaden their coverage of black men and boys and to support projects that put media in the hands of African American males, enabling them to tell their own stories and to challenge those told about them.

“We just aren’t portrayed well as people who are intelligent or thoughtful or interested in things like the environment or social causes,” said Pittsburgh psychologist Walter Howard Smith Jr. during an interview included in the Meyer study. “It’s not as if you never see images of us in those areas. It’s just that you don’t see them, I think, at the level at which we [have] interest in those realms... We are interested, and we are complex people.”

**THESE RESULTS COULD HAVE BEEN DISCOURAGING TO THE ENDOWMENTS AND ITS COMMUNITY PARTNERS; INSTEAD, THE RESULTS HAVE FUELED EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE MAINSTREAM MEDIA TO BROADEN THEIR COVERAGE OF BLACK MEN AND BOYS AND TO SUPPORT PROJECTS THAT PUT MEDIA IN THE HANDS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES, ENABLING THEM TO TELL THEIR OWN STORIES AND TO CHALLENGE THOSE TOLD ABOUT THEM.**

As part of its evaluation in 2010, the Meyer team developed a multifaceted process to examine Pittsburgh’s news media from several perspectives. The audit project included a three-month content analysis of the two mainstream daily newspapers, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review; the New Pittsburgh Courier, an African American weekly; and the evening newscasts of the local network affiliates, KDKA-TV (CBS), WTAE-TV (ABC) and WPXI-TV (NBC). Also part of the work was an online survey of 466 African Americans in the Pittsburgh region and a series of in-depth video interviews with a dozen media and black community leaders.

The content analysis found that the largest block of news stories linked to African American men and boys involved crime: 86 percent for television newscasts and 36 percent for the two daily newspapers. “Quality of life” topics, such as education, business/economy, environment, leadership or the arts, represented significantly smaller percentages of the coverage. Those results helped to explain the distrust of the media by survey participants, nearly all of whom expressed deep dissatisfaction with what they perceived to be the media’s negative focus on African Americans in connection to crime and indicated that they want a change.

“I, too, am interested in crime in the neighborhoods and on the streets of our community. However, balance those stories with some positive stories,” said one respondent. “Non-African Americans think that we are all like that. They have no other frame of reference.”

Although the Courier’s weekly circulation of about 11,000 is relatively small, including the Courier in the study gave the Meyer team

a basis of comparison with the two dailies to illustrate the kind of coverage of African American men and boys that is possible, and to point out the broad range of stories featuring this group. But the scan of all media in the Pittsburgh region, including online outlets, found that the Courier was bearing much of the responsibility for inclusive coverage of black males. One notable example was the fast-growing local blogosphere, which is predominantly white, with only a few blogs addressing African American issues.

Staff from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism evaluated the same newspapers and television outlets that were in the Meyer study, but did so for two months in 2011. The Pew examination was limited to only those media and focused on quantitative analysis without including a qualitative component. The Pew researchers' story-selection process and their statistical methodology offered an approach that differed from the Meyer group. Among the Pew results was the finding that, for local television stories involving African American men, the most frequent topics were sports (43 percent) and crime (30 percent), while for newspaper stories, crime led all news topics at 43 percent.

Despite the different procedures, the two studies' general findings were the same. "In either medium, however, African American males only rarely were present in stories that involved such topics as education, business, the economy, the environment and the arts," reported the Pew staff. "Of the nearly 5,000 stories studied in both print and broadcast, less than 4 percent featured an African American male engaged in a subject other than crime or sports."

Armed with such statistics, it would be tempting to trumpet the results and shake a finger disapprovingly at Pittsburgh mainstream media. But these findings join a body of similar research conducted in other communities and on a national level that demonstrates a pervasive problem across the nation. For the Endowments, these studies were the initial step on a long journey toward the goal of transforming this bleak landscape. The audits have provided powerful illumination of a way forward that has included creating forums for conversations with media executives; supporting efforts that enable African American men and youth to control their own narratives through film, radio and various online media; and developing opportunities for more of their voices to be heard.

We at the Endowments realize that this is a complex issue within a constantly evolving environment. But we believe that, for African American men and boys, there are too many stories that are not being told, too many avenues to fuller portrayals that are not being taken, and too many detrimental consequences from these limited depictions for the status quo to remain.

**PORTRAYAL  
AND PERCEPTION:  
AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MEN AND BOYS  
PITTSBURGH  
MEDIA AUDIT**

Meyer Communications LLC

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

Pittsburgh consistently ranks as the nation's most-livable city, praised for its affordability, its rich educational offerings and its small-business–friendly economic climate. From a bustling Downtown, a network of bridges carries residents out to well-defined, though racially segregated, neighborhoods and the Allegheny County suburbs beyond. New green businesses drive the Rust Belt renaissance, avid fans follow the City of Champions' professional sports teams, and Pittsburgh's cultural scene encompasses playwright August Wilson, artist Andy Warhol and a host of jazz greats. In Pittsburgh as elsewhere, the task of mirroring the community, with its myriad qualities, neighborhoods and activities each day — at the same time exposing its foibles — falls to the mainstream media.

Even as these traditional media outlets cope with seismic shifts in their own business models and changing audiences, they bear the ongoing responsibility for reporting the news and informing all citizens based on the enduring values of journalism — accuracy, fairness, transparency and integrity.

Like the city they cover, Pittsburgh's local media have their own distinctions, accomplishments and quirks. Still, the media mirror ought to reflect all of the community and its citizens, regardless of race, class or residence.

For one important group in Pittsburgh — its African American men and boys — the media mirror is more like a blind spot. Full inclusion of local black men and teens in the media’s reflection of the overall community remains an unmet and frustrating goal.

8 This report details a multifaceted media audit project commissioned by The Heinz Endowments’ African American Men and Boys Task Force. The project included a scan of the region’s media ecology; a content analysis of six news outlets over three months; a survey of 466 Pittsburgh-area African Americans; and a series of in-depth video interviews with a dozen media and African American community leaders. The report also examines how our society frames African American men and views the overall findings in the context of greater Pittsburgh, its African American citizens and their neighborhoods.

The audit project is driven by the task force’s mission to identify and increase educational, economic, social and leadership opportunities for African American men and boys in the Pittsburgh region and improve their life outcomes. The mission takes an asset-based approach in working with the African American community to address those outcomes.

The task force’s context statement notes that the condition of Pittsburgh’s African American men and boys is a consequence of historical and current injustices, including enslavement, structural racism and a narrow definition of black manhood. As one of the Endowments’ special initiatives, the Task Force has identified the media’s portrayals of African American men and boys as a leading contributor to the way the region views itself. Commissioning the audit is a step toward a deeper and more informed understanding of these issues.

For local media in Pittsburgh, as elsewhere, presenting a fair reflection of the lives of African American males certainly starts with the hard realities of urban life, among them the city’s historically segregated neighborhoods; high crime statistics involving African American men and teens; African American students on the short end of educational equity; and chronic unemployment continuing as a regional concern in the midst of the worst economic downturn in decades. And as New York Times columnist Bob Herbert wrote in August 2010, the nation’s African American boys and men face “a tragic crisis of enormous magnitude” involving severe deficits in education attainment, meaningful employment, familial responsibility and participation in violent crime. Addressing this crisis, he wrote, “is a job that will require a campaign on the scale of the Civil Rights Movement.”

The Endowments hired a national team of media, foundation, education and assessment professionals for the audit project. Each component of the team’s project on behalf of the task force surfaced clear examples of, and frustration with, a lack of inclusion of African American men and boys in local media coverage.

The team conducted a content analysis of media coverage from April 1 through June 30, 2010. The team, some with roots in Pittsburgh, focused on local news featuring African American men and boys and the places where they live with a goal of gauging how reflective the coverage is. The team tracked front-page news in two mainstream daily newspapers — the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review — as well as the New Pittsburgh Courier, an African American weekly. The teams also assessed evening newscasts by local network affiliates KDKA, WTAE and WPXI in the Pittsburgh market.

The team concentrated on eight different newsworthy topic areas of broad and general interest, such as jobs and the economy, education, crime, leadership, the environment and the arts. The analysis looked for coverage of 15 predominantly African American neighborhoods. In all, 47 specific search terms — neighborhoods, key organizations, news topics and words closely associated with them — were used in a first pass at reviewing coverage. A second cut drilled down to coverage specifically featuring African American men and boys individually or by race, naming them in a headline, in the body of the story or by showing their image.

The team found that 8.9 percent of the front-page news stories over the course of the three months specifically featured African American men and boys. And only 74 local evening broadcast television stories specifically featured African American men and boys in the same period. This includes instances in which coverage of events or topics throughout the region mentioned African American men and boys.

That only 8.9 percent of the front-page news stories feature African American men and boys — less than one in 10 — suggests that their interests and their neighborhoods are off the media's beaten track; their actions largely unseen, their views too rarely acknowledged. Only the New Pittsburgh Courier, by its mission to cover the African American community, fully included and featured African American men in its coverage.

Crime stories led all news topics linked to African American men and boys. In print, 36 percent (72 of 198) of all stories featuring the group focused on crime; on TV, 64 of 74 stories linked black men and boys with crime — 86 percent. And crime coverage featuring black men tended to get more prominent play in the news, with the stories more likely appearing atop the news page or at the beginning of the evening newscast.

**LIKE THE CITY THEY COVER,  
PITTSBURGH'S LOCAL MEDIA HAVE  
THEIR OWN DISTINCTIONS,  
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STILL, THE MEDIA MIRROR OUGHT  
TO REFLECT ALL OF THE COMMUNITY  
AND ITS CITIZENS, REGARDLESS OF  
RACE, CLASS OR RESIDENCE.**

A troubling finding from the content analysis is what little comprehensive coverage remains once crime is removed from consideration. Scant coverage exists featuring African American men and boys in the “quality of life” topics: education, business/economy, environment, leadership/community and the arts. And coverage of young African American men and boys ages 15–30 was all but nonexistent, with only 60 stories, or 2.7 percent, outside of the crime context in the three-month period.

10 Another component was a media ecology scan — a broad, contemporary look at all forms of local media. The scan describes an energetic media scene enlivened by a growing, predominantly white blogosphere, with a few notable exceptions of black participation. The scan concludes with one of the audit project’s most promising observations: Participation in the blogosphere is relatively easy and therefore inclusive of anyone, enabled by digital age technology, social media and cell phones.

The task force also commissioned an online survey. A surprising — and rewarding — 466 African Americans in the region took part.

The convenience survey found high dissatisfaction with the status quo; discomfort with and distrust of the media’s coverage and its perceived negative focus on African Americans in connection to crime; and near unanimity in the desire to see more stories including African American men and boys.

The audit’s video interviews allowed two media leaders — the Post-Gazette’s David Shribman and the Tribune-Review’s Sandra Tolliver — to share their perspectives on the responsibility and challenges of mirroring the whole community. The interviews also enabled notable African American leaders to voice their frustration with the mainstream media’s coverage of the day-in, day-out lives of black men outside of the context of crime. Comments from the dozen interviews are woven throughout the report. Despite repeated requests, local television executives declined to accept invitations to participate in the interviews.

This report’s analysis section bundles the audit project’s collective findings and views them in the context of previous research into deficit framing, stereotyping, and studies on race and media coverage.

The media audit project suggests that Pittsburgh’s mainstream media contribute to a consistent pattern of what a background paper from the national Dellums Commission calls “systematic omissions.”

**THE REPORT’S RECOMMENDATIONS ARE SIMPLE, SUGGESTING WAYS PITTSBURGH’S MEDIA, ITS AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND ITS FUNDERS CAN WORK TOGETHER TOWARD MORE INCLUSIVE COVERAGE.**

“Negative stereotyping is a core component of media images of young men of color,” the commission said, and “the media contribute to the denial component of racial sentiments mostly by what they usually omit.”

Combine what’s missing with what’s present in local media coverage and its association of African American men with crime, and you get confirming examples of the studies on negative frames of reference about black men and boys.

“I worry about the persistent presentation of ‘There was an awful shooting last night. It happened in the Hill District’ and then film of African American people, repeatedly, every day,” said Walter Howard Smith Jr., psychologist and executive director of Family Resources, a nonprofit committed to combating child abuse and providing treatment services to families in western Pennsylvania. Because of those images, people begin to associate African Americans with violence, he added.

The media are not alone in contributing to these dominant frames of reference: Hollywood, network and cable entertainment shows, advertising, sports programming, literature and music all play a role. And structural racism is a historic backdrop.

Long term, what should concern the local media most is the online survey’s finding of a pervasive sense of alienation among African American respondents that news coverage doesn’t matter. That finding is counterbalanced by a near-unanimous appetite among respondents for changing the status quo, and a strong preference for seeing more stories about African American men and boys themselves.

The report’s recommendations are simple, suggesting ways Pittsburgh’s media, its African American community, and its funders can work together toward more inclusive coverage.

The media audit is a starting point for a larger, long-term conversation in Pittsburgh on inclusion and fairness.

Eager to be heard, understood and included are the community’s African American men who know what they have to offer, said one of the dozen interview subjects.

“We just aren’t portrayed well as people who are intelligent or thoughtful or interested in things like the environment or social causes,” said Smith. “It’s not as if you never see images of us in those areas. It’s just that you don’t see them, I think, at the level at which we [have] interest in those realms.

“We are interested, and we are complex people.”

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# 2

## KEY FINDINGS

A Pittsburgh Post-Gazette photo on May 30, 2010, showed the cast of Richmond High School’s “Bye Bye Birdie” performing “Healthy, Normal American Boy.” The display photo was part of coverage of the 20th annual Gene Kelly Awards at the Benedum Center.<sup>1</sup> Ten days later, local media documented a dangerous and destructive car chase led by Sean Wright of Homewood, a crime suspect who had escaped earlier in the day from a local hospital. Before being subdued and taken into custody, Wright, 21, endangered dozens of lives, rammed three police cruisers with a Lincoln Navigator and injured three police officers during the lunch-time pursuit. A front-page Post-Gazette photo showed him in police custody, handcuffed and wearing a hospital gown. The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review played the story above the fold with this headline: “Menace to Society.”

The headline’s quote came from Pittsburgh’s African American Police Chief Nate Harper. “He appears to be and wants to be a menace to society. He’s someone that needs to be locked up for a very long time.”<sup>2</sup>

These two examples show the extremes of how Pittsburgh’s mainstream media present the lives of the region’s African American men and boys.

The first is mentioned for its rarity. The photo includes Antonio Paris, a young African American actor participating in a school-related, artistic activity. It is rare given the near absence in local mainstream media of articles or images

<sup>1</sup>Post-Gazette, May 30, 2010, page A9

<sup>2</sup>Tribune-Review, June 10, 2010, page A1

showing young African American males in normal, everyday activities — anything outside of the context of crime.

The second demonstrates the way local media more frequently associate African American men and boys with violent crime — an association documented in research nationally.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>“Crime in Black and White,” Dr. Franklin Gilliam and colleagues, UCLA School of Public Affairs

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Both surfaced in a multifaceted audit of Pittsburgh’s mainstream news media, a project that included a content analysis of local news coverage over three months, a survey of 466 African Americans in greater Pittsburgh, a scan of the local media scene, and in-depth interviews of local leaders and media executives.

A newspaper’s front page and local news fronts offer the editors’ best judgment of what’s important that day for its readers. Similarly, the evening newscast is the television version of the front page for viewers. If it’s local, and important, you’ll read it and view it there. So the front page and the evening news are natural starting points for assessing how Pittsburgh’s mainstream media cover and present local news of relevance to African American men and where they live.

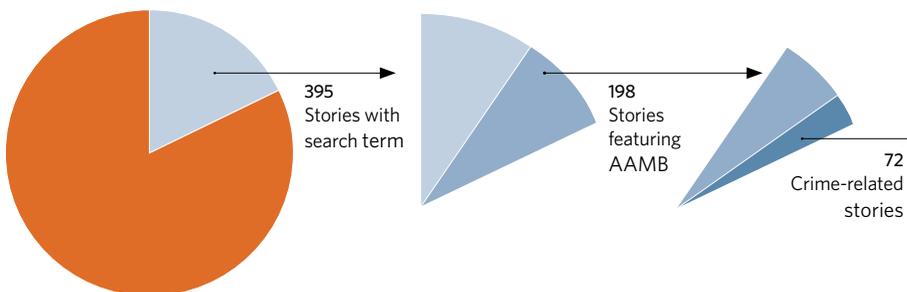
For the content analysis, the audit team reviewed 2,225 front-page news stories, photos and graphics in the Post-Gazette, the Tribune-Review and the African American–oriented New Pittsburgh Courier from April 1 through June 30, 2010. The team reviewed the front-page masthead and local news section fronts. The team used a set of 47 specific search terms focusing on local news, eight newsworthy topics of broad interest — and terms related to the topics — and 15 predominantly African American neighborhoods where the majority of Pittsburgh’s black people live. From the initial articles assembled using the search terms, the team identified articles or images that specifically featured African American men and boys in the headline or the body of the article, or in a photo. Using the same search terms, the team harvested and reviewed 74 stories featuring African American men and boys airing during multiple local evening newscasts on WPXI, KDKA and WTAE.<sup>4</sup> The key findings begin with the *content analysis*:

<sup>4</sup>Given the weight of front-page news, the team noted, but did not include, inside news pages and briefs, Feature and Business sections, or Sports sections (although local African American sports figures involved in news coverage were included). See Methodology.

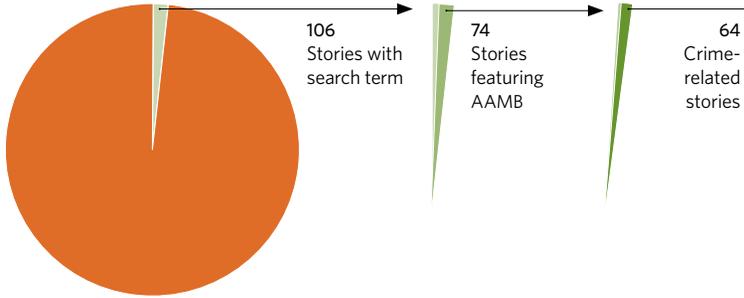
**KEY FINDING 1: LOW COVERAGE OVERALL OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS**

Of the 2,225 front-page news stories, 198 specifically featured African American men and boys. That’s 8.9 percent of all front-page articles; fewer than one in 10 articles.

Total Print Stories: 2,225



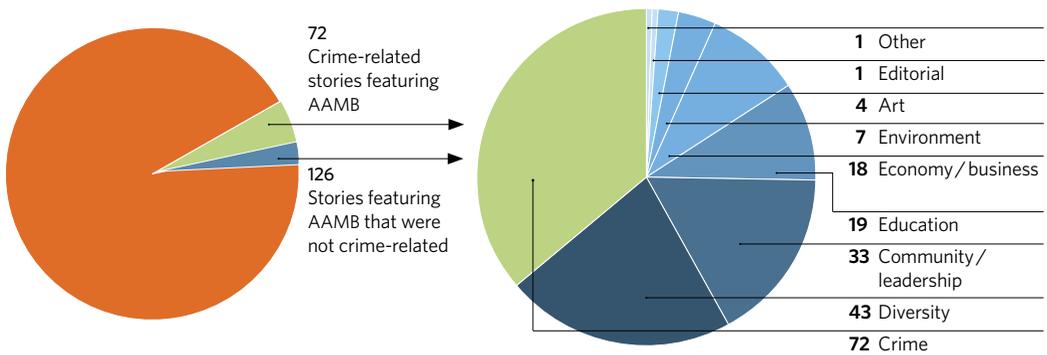
Using the same topical and neighborhood search terms, the team harvested only 74 evening news broadcast stories over the three months. Because of the way the online search technology is set up, the team was unable to arrive at a total number of stories that aired over the three months of evening broadcasts. Despite outreach to the local TV stations seeking cooperation, the team was unable to get even an informed estimate of the total universe of stories aired in the three-month audit period.



**KEY FINDING 2: WHAT COVERAGE THERE IS TENDS TO BE NEGATIVELY FOCUSED ON CRIME**

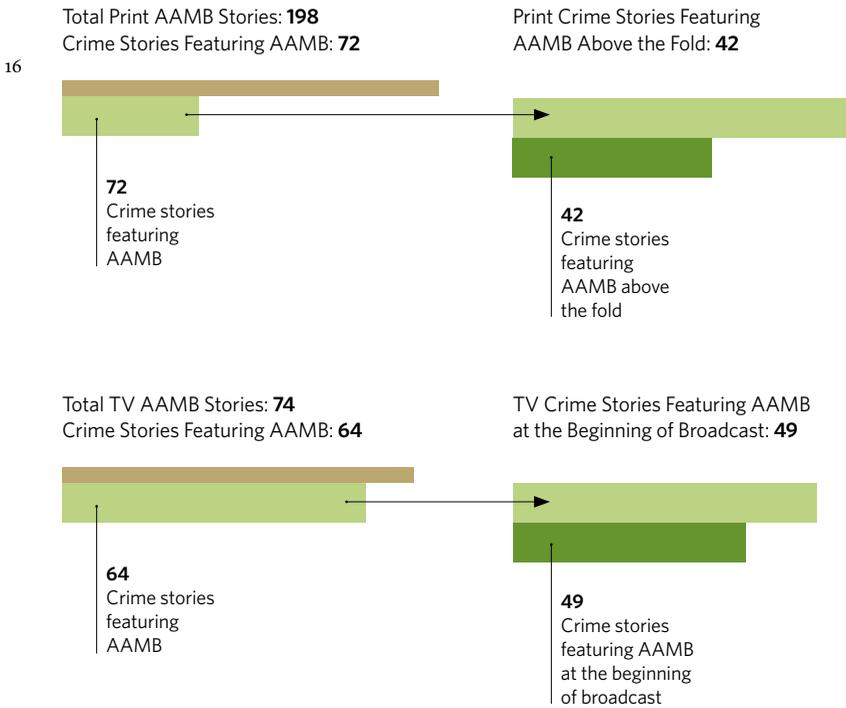
Coverage was broken down into the eight topical categories. Crime was the leading topic. In print, 36 percent of the articles featuring African American men and boys focused on crime. On television, 64 of 74 stories featuring African American men and boys — 86 percent — focused on crime.

Total Print Stories: **2,225**



**KEY FINDING 3: CRIME COVERAGE SPECIFICALLY FEATURING AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS GETS PROMINENT DISPLAY AND POSITIONING**

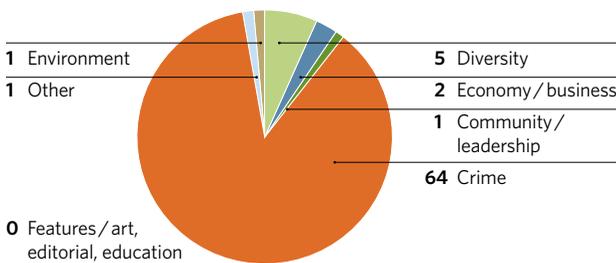
Of the 72 front-page print crime stories featuring African American men, 58 percent were published above the fold — at the top half of the front page. That’s nearly six in 10. On television, 77 percent of crime stories appeared at the beginning of the broadcast — more than three of every four.



**KEY FINDING 4: TAKE CRIME COVERAGE AWAY, AND LITTLE COVERAGE OF QUALITY OF LIFE TOPICS REMAINS FEATURING AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS**

Crime was one of eight broad topics included in the content analysis; the others included the arts, business/economy, diversity, community/leadership, education, editorial (local front-page columns) and the environment. For television, coverage of those seven other broad topics specifically featuring African American men and boys was particularly slight (only 10 of 74 on television compared with 126 of 198 in print).

Total TV Stories Featuring AAMB: **74**



**KEY FINDING 5: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IS FRUSTRATED WITH THE STATUS QUO, AND DESIRES A MORE BALANCED AND FAIR DEPICTION IN THE MEDIA OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS**

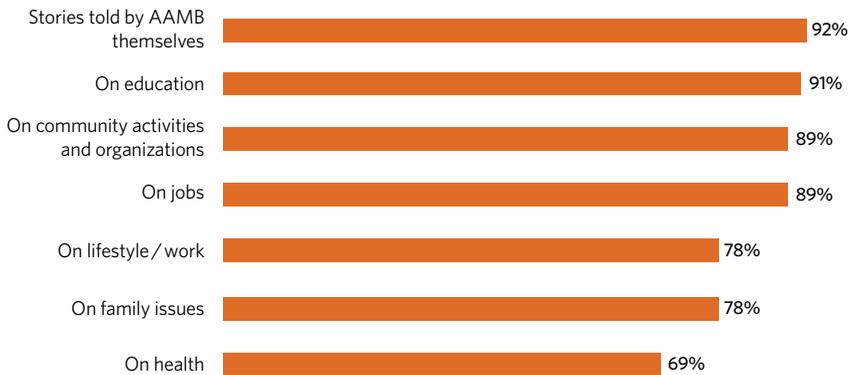
The audit’s online survey sought to understand how the portrayal in the news affects African Americans, and asked the 466 respondents their impressions of types of coverage generally, as well as of specific stories. Full highlights of the online survey appear later in the report.

When asked how African American men and boys are generally portrayed in the media overall:

- 99 percent of respondents said they believed that coverage leaned more heavily to topics that involve crime
- 96 percent said the coverage is negative
- 88 percent said stories in the Pittsburgh media are not personally relevant

Despite the pessimism apparent in those survey findings, participants were eager to see stories with more balance, and stories that highlight positive role models.

**Percentage of Survey Respondents who are Interested in Specific Topics that Would Change the Portrayal of African American Men and Boys in the Pittsburgh Media**



# 3

## ANALYSIS

<sup>18</sup> A multifaceted audit of media coverage of greater Pittsburgh's African American men and boys offers a limited, three-month view of a dynamic region and a complex community. Understanding what makes Pittsburgh tick, where its citizens live, how they relate, where they get their news and how their media outlets cover the region involves a broad set of issues. This is, after all, a metropolitan city of some 311,000 residents with an African American population one-quarter (or more) of the whole, and a county with 12 percent black population, of which 5.6 percent are male. Those residents mostly live in well-defined neighborhoods; in fact, 75 percent of the Pittsburgh region's African Americans live in Pittsburgh, Wilkensburg, Penn Hills and McKeesport.

Local media in Pittsburgh, as elsewhere, strive to provide news and information to the entire community. Journalists attempting to present a fair reflection of the lives of African American males certainly start with the hard realities of urban life: the city's historically segregated neighborhoods<sup>1</sup>; disproportionately high crime statistics involving African American men and teens<sup>2</sup>; African American students on the short end of educational equity; and unemployment continuing as a regional concern in the midst of the worst economic downturn in decades.

And as this report's scan of Pittsburgh's media ecology shows, the mainstream media themselves struggle amid a seismic digital-age shift imploding their business models and decimating their newsrooms — all against considerable competition for their viewers, readers and listeners.

<sup>1</sup>"Pittsburgh's Racial Demographics: Differences and Disparities," (The Bangs Report), University of Pittsburgh Center on Race and Social Problems, June 2007

<sup>2</sup>Bangs Report

The newspaper editors' and television producers' journalistic news judgment about the variety, volume and community context of daily events all factor into what is ultimately a subjective decision about what constitutes news. Shrinking news holes at newspapers and competition for limited air time on broadcast media also are critical factors.

That said, the four components of the media audit provide a collective body of information from which to draw conclusions.

### **CONCLUSION 1: PITTSBURGH'S MAINSTREAM MEDIA GET LOW MARKS ON INCLUSION**

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Three months' worth of front pages and broadcasts is a sizable body of work for media outlets, such that inclusion in daily coverage of African American men and boys living and working in Pittsburgh — along with all other demographic groups — ought to be apparent and consistent.

In addition, the black community is of sufficient size and importance, historically and currently, that their contributions and activities merit routine inclusion in the news. If only 8.9 percent of the front-page news stories (fewer than one in 10) and only 74 broadcast items feature African American men and boys and where they live, it strongly suggests their interests and their neighborhoods are off the media's radar screens.

"I think communities like Garfield need the sort of messaging that lets people know that it's on someone's radar screen," said Keith B. Key, a developer who returned to Pittsburgh to remake Garfield, his old neighborhood.

The print numbers from the content analysis include coverage from the African American-focused New Pittsburgh Courier. The Courier remains a reliable and inclusive outlet for African Americans, but its weekly frequency and its declining circulation mean the Courier alone can't carry the full responsibility for inclusive coverage.

The project's media ecology scan notes that the local blogosphere, while fast-growing and eclectic, remains predominantly white, with only a handful of blogs focusing on African American issues.

Add to that the scale of the "tragic crisis of enormous magnitude" confronting black men and boys nationwide, as noted in New York Times columnist Bob Herbert's opinion column in August 2010. Herbert noted that the situation involves severe deficits in education attainment, employment and familial responsibility, and undeniably high black male participation in violent crime and incarceration.

Given the scope of the problem, why local media do not provide more and deeper coverage of this looming national crisis, in depth and in context, is a fair question to ask.

Developer Key says local media lack an appreciation of — and fail to cover — African American residents he calls "the vanguard," longtime Pittsburghers who are their neighborhoods' social glue, the elders who transmit the community's values, the motivators of the young. "They're people who've been here all their lives," he said. "They choose to stay here . . . They have options."

**CONCLUSION 2: SYSTEMATIC OMISSIONS HELP SHAPE AND LIMIT THE LARGER VIEW**

With just 198 front-page stories on all topics and 74 TV stories featuring African American men and boys across three months (and 36 percent and 86 percent of them concerning crime, respectively), Pittsburgh's local media reflect an incomplete and imbalanced view of African American men and boys.

Take crime away, and the remainder suggests that, day in, day out, the lives of African American men and boys are largely unacknowledged, their interests unexplored, their perspectives unacknowledged by the mainstream media.

"There's not enough portrayal and focus on the many of us who are doing other things than those [crime-oriented] behaviors," said Walter Howard Smith Jr., a psychologist and executive director of Family Resources, a nonprofit committed to combating child abuse and providing treatment services to families in western Pennsylvania.

To an extent, local media executives note the need for a more complete perspective.

"People need to see a balance of what's out there," says Tribune-Review metro editor Sandra Tolliver. "I don't think, for example, at mainstream newspapers we do nearly enough with lifestyles, functions. If you read the newspapers in almost any city, you're not going to see a lot of black faces in the lifestyle section, the parties and such."

Post-Gazette Executive Editor David Shribman offers this perspective:

"I think people have catholic interests, lower case 'c,' universal interests. I'm wary of categorizing certain interests as being more specific to men or women, blacks and whites.

"When we do the page-one checks ... I have no idea what the color, the race or religion or creed or sexual orientation. I have no idea whether somebody in some story is black or white ...

"I would also say that stories of interest to African American boys and men surely are broader than crime, and I should have thought the economy, which is a huge factor in the lives of African American men and boys, [is important] as it is in every demographic group. ... I'd be hard-pressed to say that issues of this particular demographic group would begin and end with crime."

Within the African American community, there's a desire for a broader representation, as revealed in the open-ended responses to the online survey's questions:

"I, too, am interested in crime in the neighborhoods and on the streets of our community," said one survey respondent. "However, balance those stories with some positive stories."

The same survey respondent got to the heart of the problem — how the nation as a whole frames issues of race and identity, narrowing the definition of black manhood:

"Non-African Americans think that we are all like that. They have no other frame of reference."

The subject of frame of reference— deficit framing, negative framing, stereotyping— has generated a large body of academic and social research. One leading source is UCLA’s Center for Communications and Community, directed by Frank Gilliam. Over the years, the center’s work has focused on how “news coverage often perpetuates the stereotype that communities of color are hopeless, helpless neighborhoods.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>[www.c3.ucla.edu](http://www.c3.ucla.edu)

That’s at work in Pittsburgh media, observes Smith. “This media that can reduce people to simple images and labels and then have judgment attached to that not only impacts African American men and boys . . . but it also impacts the larger population of people who may run around with those images.”

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The media are not alone in contributing to these dominant frames of reference: Hollywood, network and cable entertainment shows, advertising, sports programming, literature and music all play a role. And structural racism is a historic backdrop.<sup>4</sup>

The national Dellums Commission, headed by former elected mayor and member of Congress Ron Dellums, has assembled a series of reports promoting public policy reform to improve the lives of young men of color. A commission background paper looking at the impact of media coverage on young African Americans cites a pattern of systemic omission in the media: “Negative stereotyping is a core component of media images of young men of color. . . . the media contribute to the denial component of racial sentiments mostly by *what they usually omit* [emphasis added].”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Young Men of Color in the Media Images and Impacts, Dellums Commission

<sup>5</sup>Dellums Commission

What’s in short supply in Pittsburgh is coverage that includes or features African Americans more frequently in stories about the economy, education, the environment, community leadership, nonprofits and the arts. The Post-Gazette’s Shribman agrees that those are indeed of broad interest to all.

“Well, those [eight topics] strike me as pretty universal topics and are colorblind and sex-neutral interests.”

Specifically, the content analysis found:

- Political coverage, especially of the Pittsburgh City Council, tended to foster the segregated-neighborhood narrative in the city. Coverage of the unsuccessful primary bid for governor by state Sen. Anthony Williams, who is black, rarely sought or included African American male opinions or perspective. Following Williams’ loss in the primary, political coverage rarely included the voices or perspectives of African Americans in the region.
- Religion/faith community coverage on the front pages is all but nonexistent, except for faith-involved marches for civil justice.
- Photographs can exclude as well as include. There were no African American men or boys appearing in a Tribune-Review Mother’s Day feature appreciating mothers; of 29 people pictured as part of Hipsters in the City, only one was African American. And the Tribune-Review published two photos of the Allegheny County Police Training Academy graduation. No African Americans appear to be among the 57 graduates.

- Few African Americans were included or seen on the front pages in the context of Pittsburgh's employment, entrepreneurial or corporate business climate. The region's unemployment rate was 8.6 percent in June 2010, compared with the U.S. rate of 9.5 percent. But unemployment rates for African Americans in the city are twice that of white unemployment.<sup>6</sup>
- Many education stories reflected negative trends and unhappy news: Pittsburgh Public Schools consolidations, budget cuts and disciplinary actions. Few articles looked at education from the classroom perspective, including individual African American teachers or students.

<sup>6</sup>Bangs Report

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Shribman identified another area of the news that should be of importance to African Americans but was not accounted for in the content analysis:

“Foreign policy ... if you look at the rate of African American men in the armed forces, [it] is a disproportionate percentage of blacks in the general population. So I would suggest ... stories about diplomacy, the war on terror, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq ...”

The online survey, in participants' responses to open-ended questions, turned up awareness of this omission/lack of inclusion in Pittsburgh.

“The story of 100 Black Men mentoring young black males only appeared in the black newspaper in Pittsburgh,” said one respondent.

Said another: “I was disappointed that the [consideration to build an all-male academy at Westinghouse High School] didn't get more media coverage on how that proposal would aid the community.”

The reasons for the omissions are not always obvious. The diminished capacity of the newsrooms may explain part of it, but video interviews and open-ended responses suggest that the omissions were occurring well before the media's business models imploded. A strong indicator of that declining capacity: During the three months of the Pittsburgh content analysis, the audit team saw very few examples of investigative or explanatory journalism — detailed, well-documented, multiple-day reporting — on any major topic.

The interviews and the content analysis don't point to a racist agenda within local media; rather, the culprit may be a lack of racial consciousness. One factor may be where and how the mainstream media deploy their remaining resources. After reading the newspapers for three months, the audit team members had seen little coverage about the Hill District and its historic importance [save its proximity to the Mellon Arena and the new CONSOL Energy Center], or what differentiates Garfield or Beltzhoover from other neighborhoods, or how Penn Hills, Wilkinsburg or McKeesport contribute to Allegheny County's quality of life. That sort of context comes from regular bylines and stories from reporters assigned to such neighborhoods.

The Courier's managing editor, Ulish Carter, repeatedly emphasized in a media ecology scan interview that he drives his reporters to develop deep contacts in the African American community, because that leads to stories that will produce a balanced news report. And he's referring to the full set of leaders of the

black community, “not just the activists and politicians, [who] don’t know you, they won’t give you that information,” he says. Combine that with the anonymous comment of one mainstream news executive who said it’s not surprising that there’s “suspicion [in the black community] when we show up, because we tend to show up when something bad has happened.”

UCLA’s Center for Communications and Community addresses the deficit framing/systemic omission problem by “building up the communications capacity of communities and by helping the news media improve their community connections and coverage.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>www.c3.ucla.edu

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### **CONCLUSION 3: THE FOCUS ON CRIME AND VIOLENCE — AND THE REASONS BEHIND IT**

Along with sins of omission are sins of commission in how the local news media contribute to associations of black men with crime and violence.

The content analysis found nearly four in 10 mainstream print stories, or 36 percent, associate African American men and boys with crime. On television, the percentage jumps to 86 percent.

Those crime stories tend to be played more prominently than others about African American men. They are more likely to appear in the top half of the news page (above the fold) and at the beginning of the broadcast.

These crime-focused statistics add heft to the negative stereotyping traits described in the Dellums Commission report, wherein a table shows that young blacks are more likely to be considered prone to violence (47 percent prone) as compared with Hispanics, Asians or whites.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Dellums Commission

But the hard realities of urban life point to why crime tops all topics. Local criminal justice statistics documented by the Bangs Report explain why journalists (and many readers) consider the topic to be newsworthy.

The majority of juveniles and adults arrested in Pittsburgh are African American, while the majority of juveniles and adults arrested in Allegheny County are white. African American arrest rates for juveniles and adults are two to four times white rates in the Pittsburgh area.

And the homicide rate is another harsh reality. More than half of Allegheny County’s 437 homicides — 244 — between 2006 and 2009 occurred in Pittsburgh. Eight of 10 victims died from gunfire.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Tribune-Review,  
July 20, 2010

The Courier reports local homicides through the filter of black-on-black crime with a monthly front-page campaign labeled “Under Attack/By Us!”

All this focus on crime feeds the fear factor in us all.

“It’s very disturbing to watch the over-focus on crime and violence and murder of African American males, in particular, but also of African Americans,” said Smith, the psychologist.

“I worry about the persistent presentation of ‘There was an awful shooting last night. It happened in the Hill District’ and then film of African American people, repeatedly, every day. [I worry about] those images and the association that people begin to make with violence and African Americans.

“...I think not only are white people susceptible to that, but so are African Americans.”

Tamanika Howze, project manager for the Kingsley-Lincoln Freedom School, says in her video interview that this crime-focused negativity does “a lot of damage. ... Certainly with TV and print, they demonize African American people and they demonize more African American males. You talk to just everyday average folk, and they will tell you that the only thing the media portrays about African American people is something negative.”

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“I think the media has a part in that thinking,” says Jasiri X, a local rapper, activist and political commentator. “Oftentimes, what gets major coverage is when violence happens in our community and not when people are doing programs at the Union Project, which is down the street, that are mentoring young people and producing talent shows.”

Is Pittsburgh’s competitive TV market part of the problem? Research provided by UCLA framing expert Frank Gilliam, the Dellums Commission and other reports has documented how crime coverage gets more attention because of the fear factor. TV news reporting’s propensity to lead with breaking news (fed by police scanners, mobile reporting units and helicopters, and readily available visuals) plays a role.<sup>10</sup>

Chris Moore, a talk show host for WQED-TV, KDKA Radio and WPXI-TV’s cable outlet, PCNC, explains that this, indeed, is part of what drives local television news:

“If it’s breaking news, they do a good job of covering it,” he said. “But it’s usually a fire or disaster. It would have to be a major disaster like a plane going down, unfortunately, at Greater Pitt, but usually it’s fires and who got shot and that kind of stuff.”

But Moore doesn’t consider that to be news.

“I think [news is] more what City Council is doing when it comes to the budget...what the mayor is doing when it comes to retirement and pension programs. How the city is going to face the tough economic and job situation is much more news to me than who got shot in Homewood or what person in Montour got killed in a traffic accident ... these people whose lives may have tragically ended, but ... it’s just not that much news to me that it should be leading a newscast.

“You know, ‘if it bleeds it leads.’ That’s what they run with.”

Given the audit’s focus on the African American community, the audit team to date has not compared how local media covers African American–featured crime news with coverage of other demographic groups.

<sup>10</sup>“Where You Live and What You Watch: The Impact of Racial Proximity and Local Television News on Attitudes about Race and Crime,” Gilliam et al.

#### CONCLUSION 4: WHY THE ABSENCE OF YOUNG FACES AND VOICES?

Perhaps the most puzzling trend is the near-absence of coverage of healthy, everyday activities of young men and boys ages 15 through 30. The content

analysis review of front-page news turned up only 60 of 2,225 stories (2.7 percent) addressing the interests of younger African Americans outside of crime.

Despite the considerable and ongoing efforts of this audit and the task force, and despite ample sources of data like the content analysis and the survey, there remains an incomplete picture of Pittsburgh's young black males.

The best perspective on the news and its relevance to the younger age group was revealed in the interview with four young African Americans.

On the media's omissions:

"They don't like to focus on the positive... how our school graduation rate is steadily increasing and how we're trying to work to get the test scores up," says interview subject James Mathis, 17, an Oliver High School senior.

"They don't show... positive African American men that have obtained degrees within business and marketing and that are moving in a positive direction," said Jahmiah Guillory, 19, an Oliver High School graduate who is now a sophomore at Penn State University, Greater Allegheny campus. "They don't show the barbers or they don't show the entrepreneurs."

On the impact to young African Americans:

"They only show the guys getting caught with drugs... And that affects our overall perception of different ways to become more economically fit as African American males," said Guillory.

There are many possible explanations for why young African Americans are off the radar screen. It may be part of the omission trend, it could indicate mainstream media's irrelevance to youth, or it could be a marketplace reality that the mainstream media aren't targeted to black youth.

Whatever the explanation, the gap begs to be closed.

"Go down to the Shadow Lounge... and you see young black people, and it's not just black people, you see [young people] intermingling," says Jasiri X. "Rarely is there any fighting or any violence."

Then he smiles. "But let somebody get shot outside the Shadow Lounge, that would be a top story: 'Hip-Hop Concert Goes Awry!'"

#### **CONCLUSION 5: THE STATUS QUO AND IRRELEVANCE**

Right behind the near-unanimous opinions in the survey that coverage leans too heavily toward crime and that coverage overall is too negative is a predominant sense of alienation: 88 percent (86 percent of black males) said the stories they do see in the media are not personally important.

"We typically tend to find out what's going on in our community from our peers," said Guillory.

"I personally don't like watching the news because the point of the news is to inform and forewarn, but it sometimes shocks and scares you," said Curtis Brown, 17, an Oliver High School senior.

"I don't like reading the paper, to be honest... There's a lot of negative stuff in there, and I'm not a negative person," said Lamar Blackwell, a 15-year-old junior at Perry Traditional Academy.

None of the four audit components, on their own, provide iron-clad proof. The content analysis to date doesn't compare coverage featuring African American males with all crime coverage in the region. Differences between television and print coverage and the audit team's use of search technology make it hard to draw apples-to-apples comparisons. The online survey is a convenience sample, and while its findings are helpful, it wasn't designed to be scientifically accurate within a few percentage points. The interviews add depth, but the logistics of taping and editing hour-long interviews limited the total number. And an ecology scan is meant to be a contemporary look at a scene that changes and evolves with each new day.

Taken together, though, the audit's components stitch together a look at a gap between what exists in coverage and what's desired. The survey found a community frustrated with the status quo and motivated to change it. Many are willing to take action to change the status quo by attending a meeting or a rally or volunteering.

And the ease of getting started in the blogosphere to provide news and information creates the potential for a vast expansion of news about African American men and boys. That said, African Americans need to grow their own ranks. Blogger Allegra Johnson said it's important to build up more of an African American chorus in the blogosphere "to give ourselves a voice."

This dynamic situation can be addressed with dialogue, cooperation, participation and commitment.

Pittsburgh's black community has demonstrated a willingness to take on the issues. Examples: The work of The Heinz Endowments African American Task Force; the Courier's front-page campaign on black-on-black homicide; and the laudable anti-violence nonprofit effort One Vision, One Life (even in the face of a RAND Corp. study that concluded that the organization "has had no impact.")<sup>11</sup> But as New York Times columnist Bob Herbert has suggested, addressing the black male crisis will require the same full-on effort backing the Civil Rights Movement. Is black leadership on this enough? Or will the policy solutions come out of Harrisburg, Washington or elsewhere?

But the focus comes back to the subject of this audit — the local media. For a media community seeking readers and viewers amid seismic shifts in their business models, this yawning gap — fed by low coverage, the dissatisfaction/frustration it engenders, and the near-unanimous expectations for improvement from a significant part of greater Pittsburgh — screams for a reassessment and shouts opportunity.

<sup>11</sup>Post-Gazette,  
June 3, 2010

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## **PITTSBURGH: AN ENERGETIC MEDIA SCENE**

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The greater Pittsburgh area is an energetic media market — newspapers, magazines, radio, television and a multitude of new-media digital channels — a situation that shouldn't be surprising for the home of such pioneering media outlets as KDKA radio and the New Pittsburgh Courier. And yet for African Americans, who comprise more than a quarter of the city's population and 12 percent of Allegheny County's, the media scene is far more limited than for white residents, who represent the majority population in the city and the region. The market's broad array of print, broadcast and online outlets includes relatively few that reflect Afrocentric interests or convey the diversity of the black population. To fully appreciate the extent to which African Americans are underserved, a review of the Pittsburgh media ecology is helpful.

Without question, Pittsburgh's KDKA is the progenitor of American commercial radio. The station has produced more than a dozen broadcasting "firsts," including the world's first broadcast by a licensed commercial station, the Harding–Cox presidential election returns on Nov. 2, 1920. Others include the first broadcast of a World Heavyweight Boxing Championship in July 1921 and establishment of the first radio newsroom in September of that year. Today, the news-and-talk-formatted station routinely ranks first or second in the market of more than 30 stations.

But as KDKA was making broadcasting history, the New Pittsburgh Courier (founded as the Pittsburgh Courier in 1907), one of the country's leading newspapers owned by and oriented toward African American readers, was building a national reputation as an activist thought leader on matters of race. At its peak in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, the newspaper published local and national editions with a circulation of 250,000. Its contributors included such figures as W.E.B. Du Bois, sociologist and founding editor of the NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*; and James Weldon Johnson and Zora Neale Hurston, renowned literary figures.

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Today, its weekly circulation is relatively small, under 11,000, reflecting economic and competitive issues faced by all newspapers, and some that may be unique to African American institutions. Nevertheless, says managing editor Ulish Carter, the Courier fills a critical space left by other area media. "Our sole purpose is to cover the black community, both the negative and the positive," he says, emphasizing the paper's deep contacts within the community, which enable it to provide what he describes as "a balanced approach."

### A BROAD MEDIA MARKET

Building on that historical platform, Pittsburgh has developed into the kind of market prized by advertisers, ranked 25th in the nation by Arbitron, the national radio rating service, and 23rd in the country by Nielsen, the national television rating service. The principal metro newspaper, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, reports a daily circulation of 181,058 and 286,766 on Sundays for the six-month period that ended Sept. 30, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC)<sup>1</sup>. The Post-Gazette's nearest competitor is the Tribune-Review, the aggressive suburban newspaper with a Pittsburgh edition that is owned by the nationally known supporter of politically conservative causes, Richard Mellon Scaife. The Tribune-Review has daily circulation of 179,695 and 201,615 on Sundays.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Post-Gazette, Oct. 26, 2010

<sup>2</sup>Tribune-Review, Oct. 26, 2010

Post-Gazette Managing Editor Susan Smith noted in July 2010 that 8.9 percent of the newsroom staff (18 people) is African American. In 2005 (the last year the Knight Foundation diversity report was conducted), the Post-Gazette reported its newsroom as 9.6 percent nonwhite (all people of color), serving a self-reported circulation area of 13.2 percent nonwhite, for a diversity index of 73 (parity = 100). For the same year, the Tribune-Review reported 6.8 percent nonwhite staff serving a circulation area of 6.7 percent nonwhite, for a diversity index of 102.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>"Newsroom Diversity Report 2005," Bill Dedman and Stephen K. Doig for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

There are also more than 40 suburban newspapers in the market, including many that also offer online access to their content, as well as more than a dozen specialty magazines. They include Pittsburgh Magazine, a lifestyle glossy; OUT, a publication for the gay and lesbian community; Squirrel Hill Magazine, which features information about the Squirrel Hill neighborhood; and Carnegie Magazine, published by the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh.

The Pittsburgh media market's richness is also enhanced by its television stations, notably public television station WQED-TV, producer of the award-winning nationally televised children's program, "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood,"

starring the late Fred Rogers. The station is known, too, for the nationally popular whimsical documentaries and specials produced by filmmaker Rick Sebak, such as “Sandwiches That You Will Like” and “Great Old Amusement Parks.” Until recently, WQED also aired the “Black Horizons” talk show, hosted by Chris Moore, which focused on issues of interest to the African American community. In November 2010, the station discontinued it as a stand-alone show and moved it into a rotation of nightly public affairs programs. The new multicultural program, “Horizons,” is hosted by Moore.

In addition to its public station, the Pittsburgh market also has commercial television stations affiliated with the legacy networks, WTAE-TV (ABC), KDKA-TV (CBS) and WPXI-TV (NBC), as well as the newer networks, WPGH-TV (Fox) and WPCW-TV (The CW), and programming provided via cable channels.

The November 2010 sweeps household ratings showed WPXI leading at 5 and 6 a.m., with KDKA grabbing the lead at noon and holding it at 4, 5, 6 and 11 p.m. Among 25- to 54-year-olds, the pattern was similar, except at 4 p.m., when WPXI reclaimed the lead for an hour with broadcasts of the “Judge Judy” program. In that hour, KDKA fell to third place behind WTAE’s broadcasts of “Oprah.”<sup>4</sup>

The three network affiliates show diversity in the makeup of their reporting and on-air staff. At KDKA, 20 percent of the reporting/on-air personnel (three men, three women) are African Americans. WTAE comes in at 16 percent (three men, one woman); WPXI at 14 percent (one man, three women).

When it comes to radio, the Pittsburgh market is distinguished more by its similarities to other major markets than by any differences. That is, with the exceptions of KDKA’s historical significance and WEAE-AM’s ESPN-driven all-sports format, Pittsburgh radio sounds very much like radio in any other big city, featuring music with news summaries on the hour (in some cases), or talk. Of particular note has been the precarious status of one of the market’s most distinctive stations, WDUQ. The public radio station, owned by Duquesne University, has been put up for sale. A 60-day option to hold the sale of the station that had been taken by The Heinz Endowments and three other foundations in mid-2010 has expired, and it remains on the market at the writing this report.\*

One significant way in which the radio market stands out among other big-city markets is by its lack of full-time black FM radio station. Although hip-hop, reggae, jazz and other forms associated with the black community can be heard on Pittsburgh radio, there is no FM station solely oriented to the African American community. Until 2009, the market was served by four such stations WAMO-FM (urban), WAMO-AM (R&B/talk) and WPGR-AM (gospel), all owned by Pittsburgh-based Sheridan Broadcasting Co., and WGBN-AM (gospel), owned by Pentecostal Temple Development Corp. The Sheridan stations were sold to St. Joseph Mission, a Catholic broadcaster, which changed the formats of the stations. Sheridan remains headquartered in Pittsburgh, where it also owns American Urban Radio Networks, a news service that is heard on stations around the country. The service can only be heard in Pittsburgh online.\*\*

<sup>4</sup>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, “Tuned In Journal,” Nov. 29, 2010

\*WDUQ was sold in January 2011 to Essential Public Radio, a joint venture of WYEP radio and The Public Media Co.

\*\*A new urban station, dubbed WAMO100, owned by Martz Communications Group, was launched in June 2011.

### NEW MEDIA ENRICH THE MARKET

As dynamic as Pittsburgh's traditional media scene might be, the new-media community (ironically, a term that already seems quaint) is fast growing, and it has become an important part of the region's media ecology.

30 One of the more engaging entries in this category is Pop City, an online city magazine founded in 2006. It serves up a menu of lifestyle and entertainment features aimed at an upscale audience. Although locally edited, it is owned by Detroit-based Image Media Group, which owns more than a dozen other East Coast and Midwest online publications, including several that are similar to Pop City, such as Baltimore's B more and Detroit's Model D.

Urban Media Today focuses, as its name suggests, on the concerns of city residents — or those who share their interests. Urban Media Today is African American owned and largely (though not exclusively) African American staffed. Much of its content — ranging from local news to lifestyle to sports — might fit easily into an alternative outlet like the Pittsburgh City Paper. Also, like the Huffington Post, much of the content on Urban Media Today is aggregated from other sources.

A big part of the new-media story in Pittsburgh, however, is social media, such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter, which are widely used in Pittsburgh — as they are globally. Indeed, Facebook announced in July 2010 that it had reached half a billion users worldwide. Blogs — ranging from complex, nationally known news sites like the Huffington Post to those of simple postings by individual diarists — are ubiquitous.

The emergence of blogs in the media landscape coincides with dramatic declines in newspaper readership and broadcast audiences that have led to the demise of numerous news outlets and retrenchment at many of those that remain. In fact, network evening news broadcasts have lost an average of a million viewers a year since 1980.<sup>5</sup> In Pittsburgh, these trends are as significant as in any other part of the country. The Post-Gazette, like so many other newspapers, is losing circulation. The recently released circulation numbers noted above represent a 1.7 percent decline in daily circulation and a 4.8 percent decline on Sundays, compared with the same period a year ago. The Post-Gazette fared marginally better than the national daily average in which daily newspapers lost 5 percent and only slighter better than the national 4.5 percent decline on Sundays for the same period. On the other hand, the Tribune-Review boasted a 6.8 percent daily increase and a 2.2 percent Sunday increase in the same period.

Of course it would be inaccurate to blame blogs for the current state of mainstream media, but it is also important to recognize the place they inhabit in the new-media environment, including Pittsburgh's. For example, the local political blog, 2 Political Junkies, has become important reading for those interested in Pittsburgh and state politics, and the sheer volume of local blogs is notable. Pittsburgh Bloggers, a local online directory, has more than 900 listings. One of the site's developers estimates that the actual number of Pittsburgh-area blogs is closer to 1,200–1,300.

<sup>5</sup>Pew Project for  
Excellence in Journalism

Pittsburgh is full of individuals, companies, nonprofits and organizations of every description embracing the Internet's possibilities. Businesses use it to establish identities or to burnish brands. Activists use blogs and social media to push agendas. Individuals like Elizabeth Perry, in her gentle, creative Woolgathering, use blogs to share ideas, while others, like the anonymous 30-something woman who authors "Diary of an Angry American: Disillusioned idealist needs a place to rant," use them to vent. Of particular note, is Secret Agent L, a blog by a Pittsburgh woman who uses her site to highlight random acts of kindness she and her followers have committed since November 2009. The gestures are often small, like leaving bubble bath for someone who's had a stressful experience or a bag of quarters at a coin-operated laundry for someone known to be in tough financial straits. Until July 2010, Secret Agent L was anonymous, but the blog became so popular that Laura Miller could no longer hide, and she revealed her identity at a public event in July.

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Curt Chandler, a senior lecturer in multimedia studies at the Pennsylvania State University and the former editor for online innovation at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, describes the blogging scene in Pittsburgh as "pretty active" and on "the higher end of the scale [among communities of similar size], because of the presence of so many universities," which tend to produce both large numbers of consumers and producers of online content.

In Pittsburgh, as in many other communities around the country, most newspapers have established some form of Web presence. Notable in the Pittsburgh market is the alternative weekly City Paper, which offers a much edgier, grittier approach to the arts, lifestyle, entertainment and politics than Pop City. It has a well-developed site that includes some Web-only features, such as the Slag Heap politics blog, and video, including the daily "Lynn Cullen Live" program, a talk show hosted by the well-known commentator. Another example is Pittsburgh Catholic, a 165-year-old newspaper providing general news, but also content of particular interest to Catholic readers in its online editions as well as in print.

Still, the independent bloggers capture the quirkiness and color that observers tend to associate with the Web. Some, like Secret Agent L, have become genuine celebrities. And many Pittsburghers are still mourning the 2009 loss of PittGirl, the until-then anonymous observer of life in the city, chronicled with pile-driver keystrokes. No one, especially politicians, was immune to her digital jabs. The writer, Virginia Montanez, was forced to reveal her identity — and give up her day job, too — when it appeared that others might disclose her name. Montanez now writes the That's Church blog and is developing a new following.

#### **DIVERSITY ONLINE**

Miller (Secret Agent L) and Montanez (That's Church) also represent another distinctive characteristic of the Pittsburgh blogging community: It is significantly female. Although there are no hard statistics on this point, informed observers have noted that the community appears to be "heavily female," which flies in the face of conventional wisdom about male dominance of the online world.

Representing another constituency is Out Online, which presents live programs, podcasts and other online content of interest to the gay and lesbian community in Pittsburgh.

A significant characteristic of the blogosphere in Pittsburgh is that it is overwhelmingly white. Allegra Battle Johnson is among the few notable African Americans online in the Pittsburgh area. Her blog is Reality Chicks, an entertainment site that pays special attention to women who appear on reality television programs. Johnson is also a contributor to American Urban Radio Networks. It's important, she says, for blacks to become engaged "to give ourselves a voice."

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One of the more truly local blogs produced by a Pittsburgh African American is Homewood Nation, developed by Elwin Green. The site is a successor to a blog called My Homewood, which he wrote for the Post-Gazette for four years. The blog is intensely local and contains information about the neighborhood, as well as Green's observations on a variety of topics. The site shares many of the characteristics of the form known as community journalism.

Another Pittsburgh African American who is active online is Mulango Akpo-Esambe. His site, Mangtoons, is less a blog than a display venue for his work as a cartoonist and animator, heavily oriented to tech subjects. He is reluctant to speculate about why there are so few African Americans involved online in Pittsburgh, but he notes that, while there are relatively few financial impediments, "it's not something you can just jump into. It takes time, and you have to be committed."

Philip Shropshire is a journalist whose Three Rivers Online site is home to various alternative news issues, including his own work and links to other sites that share his left-of-center political views. Shropshire doesn't speculate about why more black Pittsburghers aren't blogging. However, he says that as a journalist he was driven to go online because he could express his opinions freely. "I didn't have to think about what my white Republican owners thought," he says.

Another is Jasiri X, whose YouTube channel provides political commentary with hip-hop music. This commentator, associated with the Nation of Islam, makes rich use of irony to make his points, as in a recent YouTube post titled "What if the Tea Party was Black?"

At least two African American sites are commercially driven. Brotha Ash Productions and Soul Pitt offer online billboards for concerts, restaurants and fundraising events. In this respect, Urban Media Today, while not exclusively African American in its focus, stands out. It raises issues that resonate with an urban audience — from a locally generated story about public school standardized test results, to a CNN piece in the Faith section about how church attendance might affect marital prospects for black women. Pittsburgh Urban Media, which offers a multicultural approach to online local news, also includes many issues that are of specific interest to the African American community.

The use of social media underscores two important factors in considering online diversity: technology and cost. Today's mobile phones make it easy to

access social media without home computers and home broadband service. Cell phones make it easy to access popular social media like Twitter and Facebook. Additionally, the cost of cell phones and wireless broadband access, while not cheap, does not include the additional cost of a home computer and a broadband home connection to the Internet. In fact, the cell phone can be a bargain, providing voice communications, Internet access, photography, gaming, video, music — as well as the capacity to interact online via social media.

African Americans, along with Hispanics, are the heaviest users of mobile handheld Internet access. While 59 percent of all Americans connect to the Internet with cell phones and other handhelds, 64 percent of black Americans use the devices.<sup>6</sup> Overall, the Pew report on mobile access notes, 87 percent of African Americans own a cell phone, compared with 80 percent of whites. And while 66 percent of all Americans have broadband access at home, just 56 percent of African Americans have broadband at home.

Access to computers and broadband at home would likely increase Internet use beyond Facebook, Twitter, texting, email and simple searches. And, although broadband at home is growing faster among African Americans than for any other ethnic group, the 10-percentage-point gap between African Americans and all other groups is still significant.<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, the situation is mitigated in part by Pittsburgh's public libraries, which offer access to computers and free wireless for those with their own laptops at all branches, including the branches in the city's East Liberty, North Side, Hazelwood, Hill District and Homewood neighborhoods, which are predominantly African American.

### OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE

A key element in understanding the media ecology of Pittsburgh — and in appreciating the impact of the evolving nature of the region's media — is being aware of the networks that have developed and the opportunities for non-technophiles to engage. Contrary to the popular view of people who spend large quantities of time online — unkempt loners who shun actual human contact — Pittsburgh's social media users appear to be quite gregarious.

One of the women deeply engaged in the community is Melissa Sorg, an organizer of Pittsburgh's Pod Camp, an annual two-day free event attended by hundreds of people interested in learning more about being online. "We had 362 campers last year, and we expect at least that many this year," Sorg said in advance of the September 2010 event. Akpo-Esambe, the African American online cartoonist/ animator, has attended Pod Camp twice, where, as one of the few black participants, he says he made good contacts.

Less formal than Pod Camp is BlogFest, a periodic (typically quarterly) gathering of Pittsburgh area bloggers at Finnegan's Wake Irish pub, organized by Cynthia Closkey, whose blog is My Brilliant Mistakes. There have been around 20 BlogFest events. "Meet-ups are happening all over the place," she says, as communities of interest are developed among social media users.

<sup>6</sup>"Mobile access 2010,"  
Pew Internet &  
American Life Project

<sup>7</sup>"Mobile access 2010"

## CONCLUSION

Pittsburgh's media ecology is as active as that of any other metropolitan market in the United States, featuring quality newspapers and other print media, television stations with well-staffed and well-equipped breaking-news operations and a rapidly growing new-media culture. It is notable, too, for the historical significance of pioneering radio station KDKA and the black-owned New Pittsburgh Courier, whose roots are inextricably intertwined with the national progress of the African American community from the turn of the 20th century through the mid-century Civil Rights Movement.

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Yet there is a relative sameness in most of the commercial media, with the New Pittsburgh Courier standing out as a voice that reflects the interests and concerns of the African American community, and the City Paper staking out the alternative views associated with the progressive, more youthful constituencies of the market.

Thus, the new-media component of the ecology — the blogosphere and the more sophisticated applications of social media — offers the greatest potential for growth and diversity. To their credit, the major newspapers, particularly the Post-Gazette, have engaged this space by creating and disseminating content beyond that which is available in their print editions. The Post-Gazette has encouraged its reporters to work in the multimedia environment and set up a newsroom management structure to foster it. It has also experimented with varying degrees of success with partnerships with outside bloggers and with other commercial media.

Still, for the Post-Gazette and others, like the City Paper (which also offers Web-only content) this remains new territory. In this respect, Pittsburgh mirrors circumstances in other metropolitan markets. Whether these efforts by traditional media to engage in the digital realm will win out over blogs and other websites — and whether any of them will result in strong economic models — remains an open question.

In any event, Pittsburgh's media ecology appears to have many of the elements required for enhanced service to the black community, although it must overcome a critical weakness — the virtual absence of day-to-day coverage of news about the African American community. The burden is too large for the weekly New Pittsburgh Courier to shoulder alone, even with its frequently updated website.

The arrival of the Urban Media Today and Pittsburgh Urban Media websites is encouraging, but more entries are required. Homewood Nation also represents a significant piece as a blog that is narrowly focused on one neighborhood, and it may offer a model for others to follow.

The Pittsburgh media ecology is strong, but it can be stronger if existing news outlets take steps to address the diversity of the black community. Accomplishing this, however, will also require African Americans themselves to use new-media tools, along with investment by the business, philanthropic and education sectors to support their efforts.

# 5

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INTERVIEWS

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In the audit project's 12 videotaped interviews, media executives, young African American males and African American leaders from varied backgrounds with a variety of time in the community literally gave voice to the collective findings from the content analysis, the ecology scan and the survey. The African American interviewees included the legendary Pittsburgh football hero Franco Harris, now a businessman operating across the country [and Heinz Endowments director]; Keith B. Key, a wealthy real estate developer who has come back home to redevelop the Garfield housing project where he grew up; and Walter Howard Smith Jr., a psychologist and executive director of Family Resources.

Other than in crime stories, they said independently and repeatedly, African American men and boys generally do not see themselves in Pittsburgh's major newspapers or on the three city television stations broadcasting local news. The interviewees said they want more balance.

"The dominant portrayal of black men and women is just unbalanced," said Jasiri X, a local rapper, activist and political commentator who posts videos on YouTube. "And for so long, we've just been calling for balance. I mean, if somebody gets shot, its news. We're not saying don't cover that, don't cover the violence, but have a balance."

Report the crimes, they said, but also report more of the success stories and reflect more accurately the day-to-day lives of African American men and boys.

“We don’t hear about the African American males who are doctors and lawyers,” said Jahmiah Guillory, 19, an Oliver High School graduate who is now a sophomore at Penn State University, Greater Allegheny campus. Guillory is majoring in petroleum and natural gas engineering.

Editors of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette also were interviewed. They described their efforts to report and present news in a complex urban region. It’s a delicate balance against a backdrop of historically strong, even virulent attitudes still present in the region.

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“We’re very careful to avoid stereotyping,” said David Shribman, executive editor at the Post-Gazette. “We’re very careful to avoid inflammatory in any fashion. I think that there are some people . . . maybe a small group but a vocal number of people who call me up to say one demographic group or another is more inclined to behave one way or another in the streets of the community. And I must say that the number of telephone calls that I get in the course of a week that are horrifying and racist is probably the biggest surprise that I have had since being editor.”

The interviewees said the media must do better. The media need to give the city’s African American men and boys more honest, fuller coverage, going deeper to cover neighborhoods and shining a light on them.

“I think communities like Garfield need the sort of messaging that lets people know that it’s on someone’s radar screen,” said Key.

When coverage does occur, it tends to reinforce negative stereotypes and digs a deeper hole for a community trying to take responsibility for unacceptable behavior, said Key.

“I think when the media doesn’t find these positive attributes in places that are on the cusp, they tend to give way to a certain population of the community believing that they . . . can do things here that are seemingly permissible.

“To me, it just sends the wrong message that we’re not as concerned about life as everyone else would be — and we are.”

Those interviewed often cited the role television has in providing the visual associations.

“To be fair to those TV stations, I think they go with what they believe is going to get ratings. And dramatic pictures of fires, car accidents and all the rest — or shootings and yellow tape — are colorful and, unfortunately, draw a lot of interest. But they don’t bear the full responsibility,” said local television and radio talk show host Chris Moore.

“I don’t think that’s the TV stations’ fault. I think they’re pandering to the American interest,” he added. “You know, people used to read . . . [but] things have changed in America, and I think most Americans are lazy in terms of keeping themselves informed, and so they don’t read, and so it’s easy to pander to that.”

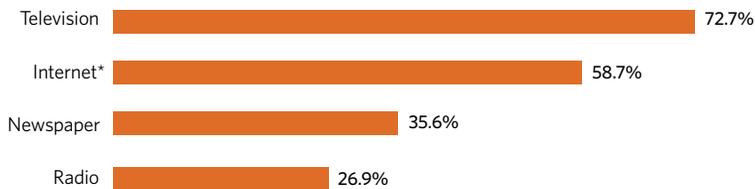
To varying degrees and in different ways, the interviewees also said that African American men and boys must take responsibility for reporting different stories about African Americans in this era of new media. Filmmaker Chris Ivey suggests that it’s time young African Americans do it themselves:

“It’s all about picking up the camera and doing it,” he said. “And that’s what people have to do, pick it up and just start trying it. And that’s one thing it’s hard for me to understand, it seems like . . . there’s a wall, people feel like they’re not allowed to try, they feel like there’s this barrier, they can’t do this. What can’t you do? Just try it. Just do it.”

# 6

## SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

Here's what 466 African Americans in Pittsburgh said about their local media in an online survey that included open-ended questions for fuller responses. Like most people, African Americans in Pittsburgh tend to get their local news and information from a variety of sources. Television tops the list of local news sources, followed by the Internet, which includes computer, cell phone or other mobile device. Just over a third indicated that they read a newspaper every day.



\*Includes computer, phone, mobile device, etc.  
Note: Respondents could choose more than one medium.

To understand how their portrayal in the news affects African Americans, the survey asked respondents their impressions of types of coverage generally, as well as of specific stories. When asked how African American men and boys are generally portrayed in the media overall, 99 percent of respondents indicated that they believe coverage leaned more heavily to topics that are about crime. Nearly as many, 96 percent, said the coverage is negative.

Respondents were presented with six stories and asked whether they followed the stories very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all. Some 94 percent followed the continuing story of Jordan Miles very or fairly closely.

Stories that portrayed African American men and boys in a negative light were deemed less fair than stories that were positive. Only 21 percent of respondents deemed the media’s coverage of the “menace to society” car chase led by motorist Sean Wright to be fair. On the other hand, more than 50 percent thought that the coverage of the Robert Morris black male leadership development institute expansion was fair.

Percentage of Survey Respondents Who Thought Media Coverage of Specific Events in the African American Community Were Reported Fairly

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CAPA student Jordan Miles is beaten by undercover police in January



Motorist Sean Wright injures three officers during a June car chase; police call him a “menace to society”



Pittsburgh Public Schools aim to close the achievement gap between black and white students



The Black Male Leadership Development Institute is expanded at Robert Morris University



State Senator Anthony Williams runs for governor in Democratic primary



Steeler Deshea Townsend and Dr. Zane Gates seek state funding for free medical clinics across Pa.



It is important to note that these stories were followed across all the media outlets in the audit.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



WPXI / Channel 11 / Channel 12 (cable or satellite) / NBC affiliate



WTAE / Channel 4 / Channel 8 (cable or satellite) / ABC affiliate



New Pittsburgh Courier



KDKA / Channel 2 / Channel 6 (cable of satellite) / CBS affiliate



Tribune-Review



Note: Only the six media outlets were presented in the question, and respondents could choose more than one.

## WHAT AFRICAN AMERICANS WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE ABOUT THEIR PORTRAYAL

With issues of fairness and coverage that leans highly toward the negative, how can the media respond to a community that has lost its trust of mainstream news sources? For one, African American media consumers want more stories that portray them positively; this they believe is a more accurate depiction of their community and life in Pittsburgh. In fact, two-thirds of the respondents rated the neighborhood where they live as good or very good. Yet the stories they see about their community are not depicting their neighborhoods accurately, or resonating with them personally. Eighty-six percent of male respondents said that the stories in the Pittsburgh media on African American men and boys are not important to them personally. Nearly half said they could not remember a story about their neighborhood that had caught their attention. When asked what types of stories they wanted to see more of, they emphasized those that highlighted positive role models and have more balance, and described a community that has many assets.

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More stories like...

*“Young males and how they achieve and how they battle to not become statistics. The role of fathers — how and why they do what they do. Healthy black family life and how to inspire, model and perpetuate it.”*

Most of the stories on African American men and boys that caught their attention at the local level were about crime, possibly reflecting the abundance of these stories. Most of the respondents felt discouraged by all the bad news. One man wrote:

*“A story about crime made me sad because of the lack of opportunities for black men. It also made me angry because I know many black men who are doing good work and their stories are seldom told.”*

A few men identified with stories that gave them hope, particularly around mentorship and educational attainment.

*“Stories of ‘organic’ leadership. Stories focus so much on institutional leadership, but often there are people who are mentoring and guiding that fall under the radar. Stories that more deeply explore the culture of not only what is happening with black males, but why these things are happening.”*

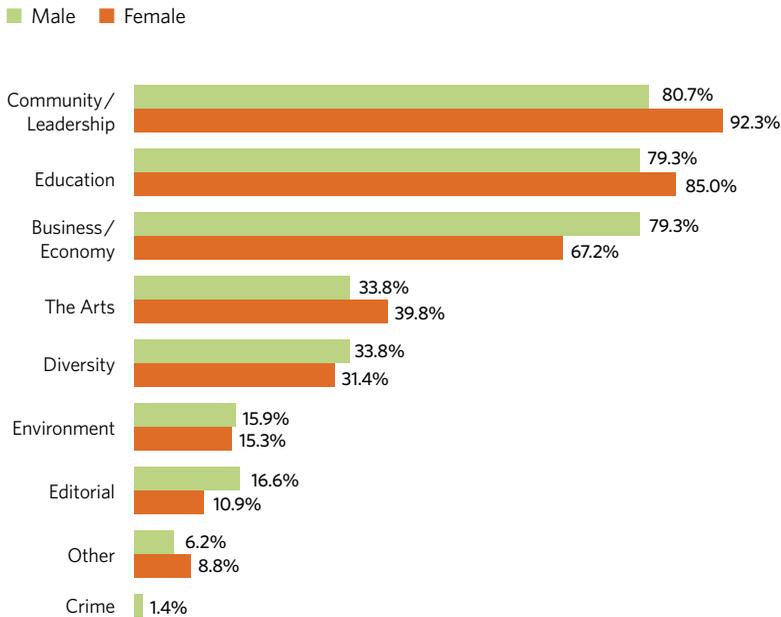
*“The story was about a black male development program at Robert Morris. I was pleased with what has been going on with working with this group of young men and how they are exposed to successful African American males.”*

*“Stories of black business owners and teachers [who] are giving back and are doing good in the community.”*

These personal sentiments came to light in the top three picks for stories on African American men and boys that respondents thought should receive more coverage by the local media. As the graph shows, they were Community/Leadership, Education and Business/Economy. Only 1.4 percent said they would like to see more stories on Crime. The chart below also shows differences between male and female responses.

Kinds of Coverage About African American Men and Boys That Survey Respondents Would Like to See More of in the Pittsburgh Media

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**ACTIONS TO ENCOURAGE A DIFFERENT PICTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS**

One way to create change is for African Americans to make their views known to the editorial boards and TV and radio stations. Although nearly three-fourths of respondents said that they wanted to contact the editorial board of a newspaper or call a station about a story, only a third had actually followed through. One deterrent for not taking action might be concern about the likelihood of getting an adequate response. Of those who had contacted an editorial board or a station, only half were satisfied with the response they received. The other half either did not receive a response, or felt that the response they got was inadequate. One person wrote:

*“It has been a while since I have written and called TV stations. Often I get so angry that I don’t write or call. It is ‘the same ole same ole.’ Collective organized voices get a better response.”*

# 7

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The media audit's content analysis, the survey responses and the interviews, all superimposed on the Pittsburgh media landscape, suggest that there's a big upside.

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### FOR LOCAL MEDIA

#### Recommit your efforts to mirror your community

fully by providing fair, inclusive and contextual coverage of all populations, including African American men and boys. Re-examine your beats and expand and widen your sources for expertise and commentary. Review your neighborhood coverage patterns and assess the breadth and depth of your sources to better understand why systematic omissions and imbalanced topical coverage may be contributing to negative stereotypes and unfair frames of reference in Pittsburgh.

#### Actively find and feature everyday examples involving African American men and boys.

Review your human and financial resources to determine and ensure that they're balanced; listen to and engage your own African American staffers in the process. Use the 2010 U.S. Census as the springboard for a deep dive into the lives of all Pittsburghers — including African American men and teens.

#### Partner with and engage your readers and viewers.

There's no shortage of interest, nor lack of interested parties, in changing the status quo of media coverage in the digital age; your legacy media readers and viewers are joined by a new generation of digitally literate partners. But you have trust issues with the African American community, and skepticism from younger readers and viewers who find you irrelevant. Find ways to increase your civic engagement with readers and viewers directly; develop channels of civic media and citizen journalism. There are willing partners among the many nonprofits, educational institutions and public venues in Pittsburgh for a constructive conversation. Offer and promote new forms of participation using social media, shared storytelling, crowd-sourcing, comment and feedback.

**Embrace and extend innovation.** Recognize the ubiquitous use of cell phones in the African American community and develop or tailor more content designed to be delivered in that format. Help to increase the size of the local blogosphere and add more African American voices in the process. Develop more outreach to potential African American journalists or citizen news participants through existing or new workshops or summer programs. These can be arranged in cooperation with the public schools and the public library system or in concert with the existing annual Internet training program known as Pod Camp. Of particular note is the summer program conducted by the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation for high school students. Other potential partner/sponsors are local niche media, foundations, higher education institutions and nonprofits. Special emphasis on new media would be especially beneficial.

#### FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

### Value information and be good news consumers.

News and information is a core community need, as important as education or services or infrastructure in the life of a vital community. Be aware of gaps in the information you need to vote, volunteer, participate or just lead active lives. Familiarize yourself with the reporters, columnists, commentators, editors, photographers, videographers and executives who work in local media. Actively use the channels available to you to engage with the media: Post-Gazette and Tribune-Review reporters and columnists include their email addresses; editorial pages publish letters to the editor; news sites like post-gazette.com invite your comments (and actively work to find and nurture such comments). Being a good news consumer means reading, watching and listening actively. Get news from a broad base of sources; don't fall into the "I get my news on NPR" or "I watch Fox News because it reflects my views" rut. You may not agree with Rush Limbaugh or Jon Stewart, but it's wise to know what they're saying.

**Be proactive.** If you'd like to see the media report more stories featuring African American men and boys in their own voices, help them out. Invite them to take a first, second or deeper look at events in your neighborhoods. Introduce local media representatives to the exemplars and experts, the influential people they may be seeking — or missing. Question the status quo; if you think coverage is unfair, incomplete or inaccurate, or promulgating stereotypes, call the media on it and point it out. Call when you see inaccuracy. Write when the story's incomplete. Insist on accuracy.

**Help grow the blogosphere.** The local blogosphere is overwhelmingly white and, with the exception of the New Pittsburgh Courier's offerings and a minuscule cluster of others, presents little local content that is specifically oriented to the African American community. Start-up financial costs are low, but personal time and personal energy costs are high. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, provide opportunities for African American men and boys to communicate online as well, but a significant commitment of time and energy is required to use these tools effectively as direct channels of communication.

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#### FOR FUNDERS AND THEIR NONPROFIT PARTNERS

The Dellums Commission offers a set of options for ameliorating the gaps and omissions in media coverage of African Americans. Several of these options are specifically aligned with the strengths of funders and their nonprofit partners.

**Employ subsidies for digital media as outlets for positive images.** The Endowments is already doing this with its "In the Spotlight" series, but this report clearly shows a need to add diverse voices to the predominantly white blogosphere. Plan these efforts to align with other projects under way (e.g., the Pittsburgh Foundation's new community news/ investigative journalism website).

**Conduct well-designed inter-group dialogues and educational programs.** The Endowments' African American Men and Boys Task Force has considered starting down this road; this project's report and edited video interviews will be useful tools for that outreach. Reach out to and partner with the media to help them extend their reach (and find new sources of information) in greater Pittsburgh. An educational avenue to explore (with Duquesne University or the University of Pittsburgh) is media literacy. Local funders might begin by researching centers of media literacy across the nation, such as New York's Stony Brook University. Investigate the movement in journalism schools to equip new graduates with entrepreneurial skills; developing a pilot program in Pittsburgh might help build a new generation of young media moguls.

**Heighten awareness and vigilance through systematic monitoring.** This audit is a good first step, and it establishes a baseline. Subsequent reviews of the media's coverage will help all parties identify progress, regression or status quo. But this audit still hasn't fully tapped one of the most important veins of information: young African American men themselves. Take another step by developing a survey specifically targeting their interests, and use it to develop a deeper understanding of how they'd like to be represented in local media coverage.

# 8

## METHODOLOGY

44 The Heinz Endowments asked the team from Meyer Communications LLC to audit local news media coverage of African American men and boys for three months — April, May and June 2010. The audit project had four main components, each with its own methodology. From the inception, all four components had a specific focus on the news, interests and opinions of Pittsburgh’s African American men and boys.

### THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

For the content analysis, team members and Endowments staff chose key words to identify coverage of local news on topics important to African American males and where they live. We searched the news using a list of 47 key words and phrases, including topics of interest (and words associated with them), specific predominantly African American neighborhoods, and leading organizations.

**The neighborhoods (15):** Homewood, Hill District, North Side, North View Heights, Beltzhoover, East Liberty, Garfield, Lincoln / Larimer, Lincoln / Lemington, Wilkinsburg, Duquesne, Penn Hills, St. Clair Village, Oak Hill and Allegheny Dwellings.

**The topics of interest (8):** Arts, Community / Leadership (including politics, nonprofit and religion), Crime, Diversity (including stand-alone photos and stories and photos of diverse populations), Economy / Business, Editorial, Education and Environment (including health). A category for Other captured coverage that did not fit elsewhere.

**Related key words (12):** African American / black male / young black male, low-income, at-risk, homicide / robbery / aggravated assault, murder, disadvantaged, troubled / disruptive, poverty, free and reduced lunch, overcoming odds, disparity, discrimination / prejudice.

**Organizations (12):** Pittsburgh Police, Allegheny County Jail, Schuman Center, NAACP, B-PEP, Urban League, Pittsburgh Public Schools, Peabody, Westinghouse, Oliver, Penn Hills School District, Wilkinsburg School District.

### PRINT

The team assessed coverage of two daily newspapers — the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review — and the New Pittsburgh Courier, a weekly serving the African American community.

The team subscribed to the newspapers’ print editions for the three-month period. With the rationale that significant coverage is that which appears on news fronts, the team logged and placed on a tabular grid the total number of articles on every front-page masthead and local section front (Local News and City & Region, including days when local coverage appeared inside). Items tracked included articles, sidebars, stand-alone photographs with cutline-only information, and exceptional front-page “teasers” that referred to longer stories or coverage elsewhere in the newspaper.

Each item was placed on a daily grid next to the news outlet’s name. The team summarized the context of the article, where the event happened, noted the inclusion of a photograph, and listed the print headline. In a first pass at assembling the news, the team

noted story placement (above or below the fold or where it appeared in the broadcast). The grids made it possible in a second cut to identify stories that specifically featured African American men and boys by name or by race, in the headline, in the body of the story, or in an image.

The team logged and noted significant stories and opinion columns appearing in other sections — Magazine, Living, Business, Forum, Insight, Page 2A local columns in the Post-Gazette and Sports — but did not include them in the front-page news count. Given the local focus, the team did not include stories or images of national figures, including President Barack Obama, Cabinet officials, Tiger Woods, or celebrities from arts and letters. The team did not include articles or images from the sports pages, although coverage of local sports figures and celebrity obituaries was included when it appeared on the news fronts.

The team noted significant coverage appearing inside local sections but did not include it in the front-page total. The team reviewed local inside briefs to judge if news including African American men and boys was more likely to appear there than on the front page. In the judgment of the audit team, it did not.

While the team actively used the news outlets' websites, the three-month audit was based on print editions.

## TELEVISION

Using the same search terms, the team also assessed local television coverage, and included Pittsburgh's three local network affiliates: KDKA (CBS, Channel 2 or 6), WTAE (ABC, Channel 4 or 8) and WPXI (NBC, Channel 11 or 12).

NewsPowerOnline.com conducted Boolean searches of evening newscasts by the three stations (as early as 4 p.m. through midnight) — the TV news equivalent of the front page. The initial sample netted news from other stations and broadcasts from other times of day; they were not included in the audit. The team

logged a news report once if it ran through successive broadcasts in the same evening; i.e., 5, 6 and 11.

The NewsPowerOnline search brought back only relevant items including the search terms, and did not include a total count of news stories appearing in the broadcasts over three months. Efforts to work with the stations to estimate the total story universe, based on the “news hole” of each broadcast, failed to produce an apples-to-apples number equivalent to the print starting point of 2,225 front-page stories. Two stations declined requests to participate in efforts to construct an exact or informed estimate of the news stories airing during the audit.

In the content analysis of both print and TV coverage, the team was sensitive to efforts to avoid profiling — a mention of race or other characteristics — unless the news outlet deemed it relevant.

## SURVEY

The media audit survey was administered online using a convenience sample, and was not intended from the outset to be a random-sample survey with a scientific level of confidence. The sample was selected in concert with the Endowments by choosing prominent organizations in Pittsburgh's African American community, such as churches, the NAACP and Urban League, and Endowments grantees serving the African American community, including youth organizations and schools. The purpose of the survey was to understand how African Americans in Pittsburgh see African American men and boys portrayed in the local media, and to garner ideas on potential changes, if any. From these organizations' email addresses, 130 individuals were contacted and asked to complete the survey, as well as to distribute it to others for completion. In all, 522 individuals started the survey, of which 56 were deemed ineligible, as they did not identify themselves as African American. Out of 466 respondents, 65 percent are female,

82 percent are ages 31 through 64, 65 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher, and more than 90 percent had lived in Pittsburgh for more than nine years. The majority of respondents reflect an older, better-educated and longer-term resident in relationship to the overall African American population in Pittsburgh over the age of 15. A convenience sample thus under-samples newer, younger, less-established participants.

The survey's convenience sample provides useful information from a group that is likely to be a key audience for legacy media on how they believe African Americans are represented in the Pittsburgh media. However, the views of individuals who are not members or acquaintances of the organizations that were contacted, or who do not have email addresses, are not fully represented.

### THE INTERVIEWS

The team's Jim Crutchfield, distinguished professor of journalism at Duquesne University and former publisher and president of the Akron Beacon Journal, conducted 12 video interviews with help from students and professors at Duquesne. Crutchfield interviewed individuals from greater Pittsburgh, including a panel of four young men in their late teens. Post-Gazette Executive Editor David Shribman and Tribune-Review Metro Editor Sandra Tolliver participated. Key African American leaders and executives were selected by the team in consultation with the Endowments' staff for their breadth of experience and depth of their perspective. They sat for interviews of up to one hour. Crutchfield selected the questions and conducted the interviews based on the topic and the flow of the conversation.

### THE ECOLOGY SCAN

A media ecology scan is a current look at the fullest range of local media serving Allegheny County, including print and electronic mainstream media, ethnic and topical media, digital and online news providers, and the blogosphere. Special effort was made to include and assess the past and current role of African American-focused media outlets.

### MEYER COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT TEAM

**Larry "Bud" Meyer** President, Meyer Communications LLC, project manager. Bud is former vice president of Communications and secretary for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and has 20 years of journalism and news executive experience at the Miami Herald and elsewhere. He will be an adjunct professor in strategic communications, University of Miami, in January. [<http://tinyurl.com/yzpqfey>]

**Julie Tarr** Tarr Planning and Evaluation and project director at the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, Philadelphia. Julie has worked successfully to expand programs and achieve policy reforms in services impacting underserved communities. She has special expertise in working with foundations and nonprofits to develop strategic plans and evaluations for numerous initiatives. She has more than 20 years of experience in philanthropy, applied research and evaluation, and nonprofit management. She was previously the Knight Foundation's program and evaluation director. [<http://tinyurl.com/yfnfre5>]

**James N. Crutchfield** Journalist, news executive, educator and foundation trustee. Jim grew up in Pittsburgh's Hill District. He is the former Akron Beacon Journal publisher, and reported and edited in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Akron and Long Beach. He is distinguished visiting professor in journalism and multimedia arts at Duquesne University, a former Duquesne trustee and current Knight Foundation trustee. [<http://tinyurl.com/yhp3gmg>]

**Charles Fancher** Lecturer at Howard University; president, Fancher Associates Inc; former vice president of Communications and Public Affairs at the Philadelphia Inquirer and Philadelphia Daily News; former vice president of Communications, Corporation for Public Broadcasting. [<http://tinyurl.com/yktk5pw>]

# 9

## GLOSSARY

**AAMB** An acronym that stands for African American men and boys.

**Above the fold** Newspaper stories with headlines and photos that appear above the mid-page crease.

**Arts** One of eight topic areas taken into account in the front-page and broadcast content analysis.

**Blog** A website (or Web log) in which items are posted on a regular basis and displayed with the newest at the top; an online journal that mixes candor, opinion and links to third-party information.

**Blogsphere** All blogs, or the blogging community.

**Business/Economy** A topic area in the front-page and broadcast content analysis.

**Citizen journalism** Private individuals doing essentially what professional reporters do — report information. That information can take many forms, from a podcast editorial to a report about a city council meeting on a blog. It can include text, pictures, audio and video.

**Civic media** An umbrella term describing media technologies that create a strong sense of engagement among residents through news and information. It is often used as a contrast to “citizen journalism” because it also encompasses mapping, wikis and databases.

**Coverage that “features” African American men and boys** A front-page item that specifically features or mentions African American men and boys individually or by race, in the headline or the body of the article, or in a photo.

**Community/Leadership** A topic area that includes front-page and broadcast coverage of politics, nonprofits and the faith community.

**Crime** A topic area that includes coverage of arrests, police, courts and violent crimes.

**Diversity** A topic area that includes stories or broadcasts describing or demonstrating the diversity of greater Pittsburgh’s population, including photos showing visual demonstrations of that diversity.

**Editorial** A topic area that includes front-page columns or opinion pieces.

**Education** A topic area that includes front-page or broadcast articles on education from pre-K through higher education.

**Environment** A topic area that includes front-page or broadcast articles on greater Pittsburgh’s air, water and environs, including stories on health.

**Fairness** The use of unbiased, disinterested or factual reporting. Fairness is considered a core value of journalism. When coverage is perceived by the public to be fair, then it will be regarded as credible.

**Legacy media** An umbrella term to describe the centralized media institutions that were dominant during the second half of the 20th century, including (but not limited to) television, radio, newspapers and magazines, all of which typically had a uni-directional distribution model. Sometimes “legacy media” is used interchangeably with “mainstream media.”

**Mainstream media** Or mass media. Usually applied to print publications, such as newspapers and magazines with the highest readership among the public, along with television and radio stations with the highest viewing and listener audience.

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**New media** A term that embraces all of the forms of electronic media — newer than TV and radio, that is — such as multimedia CD-ROMs, the Internet and video games.

**Search terms** An assemblage of 47 different terms — topic areas and words associated with them, and 15 predominantly African American neighborhoods—used to determine mainstream media local coverage of the region's black men and boys and where they live.

**Social media** A common term used to encompass the current Web trends, online tools and available platforms that allow users to share information, opinions and experiences with other users.

# **PORTRAYAL AND PERCEPTION: STUDY OF THE MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN PITTSBURGH**

Pew Research Center  
Project for Excellence in Journalism

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Staff from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism found in their study of Pittsburgh news media that one of the most frequent topics for stories involving African American males was sports, such as coverage of Allderdice High

School's boys basketball win over Chartiers Valley High in March shown above. The other was crime, such as reporting on the indictment in the same month of 29 gang members on drug and gun charges.

The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism conducted a content analysis of local media coverage in Pittsburgh from March 1 through April 30, 2011. The focus of the study was the quality and nature of coverage of African American males. Researchers tracked all stories aired during the 11 p.m. news broadcasts of the local Pittsburgh television networks KDKA, WTAE and WPXI, along with all the stories on the front page and the first page of the local sections of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. For comparative purposes, the same pages of the African American-oriented New Pittsburgh Courier were coded separately.

The analysis found that African American males were present to at least some degree in 16 percent of local television news stories, but almost all of that was implicit, through visual identification of people portrayed in stories, rather than through explicit references to race. Moreover, the range of subjects on local television involving African American males was very narrow. Almost three-quarters, or 73 percent, of the stories were about two subjects: sports at 43 percent of the stories and crime at 30 percent.

In newspapers, African American males were present in 4 percent of stories. That lower number is partly a reflection of two factors. The analysis of newspapers did not include the sports sections, though any sports-related stories on the front page or local sections were counted. In addition, this number reflects the less visual nature of newspapers compared with television, which limits the implicit visual identification of people portrayed in stories. Crime was by far the biggest

subject involving African American males in newspapers, accounting for 43 percent of all stories, but there are at least two other subjects that also reached double digits. Stories that talked explicitly about issues of race and gender made up 16 percent of the stories involving African Americans, and government accounted for 11 percent.

52 In either medium, however, African American males were present only rarely in stories that involved such topics as education, business, the economy, the environment and the arts. Of the nearly 5,000 stories studied in both print and broadcast, less than 4 percent featured an African American male engaged in a subject other than crime or sports.

### CONTENT ANALYSIS

For the content analysis, the team of researchers from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism studied 4,991 stories from March 1 through April 30, 2011. Within that sample were 1,232 newspaper stories from the front page and the first page of the local sections of the Post-Gazette, the Tribune-Review and the African American-oriented New Pittsburgh Courier. The sample also included the entire 11 p.m. newscasts appearing on WPXI, KDKA and WTAE. That resulted in 3,759 broadcasts. (Note: As the New Pittsburgh Courier is focused on serving an African American market, the 48 stories from the paper are not included in the overall numbers discussed below, unless otherwise noted.)

The researchers coded each story for both the topic being covered and whether specific demographic groups were represented as a significant presence.<sup>1</sup> Two different measures for race were used. One measured whether a story included race as a significant part of the story narrative. In other words, not only was an African American a figure in the story, but his or her race was overtly discussed as a component of the story as well. The other group of codes measured the visual presence of African American males. This would include stories where a subject (or subjects) of the story *appeared* to be African American, but their race was not part of the story.

It is impossible to tell with certainty an individual's background or race just by the visual depiction. Coders were told to use their best judgment as to whether a consumer of the news story would make a reasonable assumption that the subject was African American. While this concept is not precise, the level of agreement between coders was very high, signifying that this method of making judgments is valid and replicable.<sup>2</sup>

Among the major findings of the study:

- When African American males were a significant presence in stories, overwhelmingly that presence was implicit rather than explicit—a function of seeing a person in a photograph or video rather than a direct reference to his or her race. On television, 97 percent of the stories involving African American males were visual references without direct discussion of their ethnicity or racial identity. In print, where the number of photographs is limited, that number, 81 percent, was still substantial.

<sup>1</sup>For a person or group to be considered a significant presence in a story, that individual or group must be discussed in 25% or more of the time or space devoted to the entire story.

<sup>2</sup>Intercoder testing revealed that coders agreed on the visual references in 92% of the stories examined. See the methodology for more details.

- Sports and crime were by far the most common topic areas to include African American males. On local television, in which the sample included sports segments, more than four out of 10 stories (43 percent) that prominently featured African American men were sports-focused and another 30 percent were about crime. No other subject was higher than 4 percent.
- In newspapers, where the sample did not include the sports section, 43 percent of stories with an African American presence were crime related. After race and gender at 16 percent and government at 11 percent, no other topic in print was higher than 7 percent (education and lifestyle both).
- The African American male who received the most news coverage was President Barack Obama, who also was the top newsmaker. Following among those receiving significant coverage was Gov. Tom Corbett at No. 2, and the third most prominent figure was Pittsburgh athlete-turned-TV reality star Hines Ward, who declares himself biracial. The only other African Americans to be among the top 15 individuals receiving coverage were Teesa Williams, a female victim of a crime, and Myles Hutchinson, a man arrested and then cleared of charges related to a shooting of a police officer. In very few of these stories, however, was the subjects' race discussed.
- African American men received more than three times as much coverage as African American women (13 percent of all stories in the sample compared with 4 percent). While African American women were also closely associated with crime, especially on television, they were portrayed as victims or bystanders much more often than men.
- The African American-themed weekly newspaper, the New Pittsburgh Courier, had a different news agenda than the daily papers and offered different representations of African American men. Overall, 69 percent of the examined stories in the Courier related to African American males. These tended to be more focused on community organizations, charities and education. When crime was discussed, it was less focused on individual cases and more concerned with trends of efforts to deter crime in the future.

#### **RACE IS MORE "SEEN" THAN DISCUSSED**

Looking at print and broadcast stories together, less than 1 percent of the stories studied included African American males as a significant component of the story in a way in which their race was explicitly identified—a total of just 24 of the nearly 5,000 stories analyzed. While a small number, it is greater than any other racial and ethnic group. (Only four stories explicitly referred to Hispanic Americans, 11 to Asian Americans, and five to Muslim Americans. People described as immigrants were a significant presence in six stories.) If you add the number of stories that explicitly mention the race of an African American woman or African Americans as a group, the number of stories doubles to 48, though that is still less than 1 percent of all the stories examined.

(It is worth noting that the race of President Obama, the country's first African American to hold that office and the person who was a lead newsmaker more than anyone else, was not discussed in any of the stories included in this sample.)

The number of stories that displayed African American men as subjects, but did not discuss race, was much higher — slightly less than 13 percent of all stories examined here. And as might be expected, these images were much more likely to be attached to television stories than to appear in print photographs (just under 16 percent of all TV stories studied versus slightly less than 4 percent of print stories).

54 These stories, referred to as “visual references,” included images of African Americans, but did not discuss the race of the subjects. For example, a March 19 KDKA report on a rally against proposed cuts in public transportation featured pictures and quotes from a number of different people of many different races. At one point, a man named Sasha Craig, a Port Authority employee who happens to be African American, argued that voters had been lied to, by saying, “Mr. Onorato [Chief Executive of Allegheny County], you need to realize why you lost the gubernatorial race is because you sold us out with the drink tax . . . That drink tax money, you lied and told the public it was for mass transit; that money is not coming to mass transit.”

**African American Presence in Local Pittsburgh News Coverage: TV and Newspapers**

*Percentage of Stories (n = 4,943 stories)*

<b>Male African American Presence</b>	<b>12.7%</b>
Explicit Mention	0.5%
Visual Reference	12.2%
<b>Female African American Presence</b>	<b>4.0%</b>
Explicit Mention	0.2%
Visual Reference	3.8%
<b>African American Group (Explicit Mention only)</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
<b>Total African American Presence</b>	<b>14.7%</b>

Note: Some stories included the presence of multiple categories.

So, while African Americans were not absent from Pittsburgh news coverage, the subject of race itself was seldom mentioned.

However, in the few instances when it was, it was often in relation to a negative or controversial situation.

In the 24 stories that explicitly discussed the race of an African American man, more than half of them, 19 in all, focused on crime, missing persons, or a controversy involving race such as a March 12 Post-Gazette story headlined “Farrakhan Deflects Foes’ Charges of Anti-Semitism.” That article described the visit by Nation of Islam Minister Louis Farrakhan to Pittsburgh to participate in a town hall meeting titled “The Disappearing Black Community.” The invitation was condemned by a number of local Jewish leaders because of the minister’s past remarks.

Only five of the 24 stories could be considered positive — or at least not overtly negative or controversial. That small number included an April 26 story on WTAE that mentioned the induction of Willie Thrower, the first African American to play quarterback in the NFL, into the Hall of Fame in the Heinz History Center.

In some instances where race was a part of a controversial story, news outlets treaded softly.

On April 26, for example, two of the local TV networks discussed offensive letters found with racial slurs at West Allegheny High School.

WPXI featured a 90-second story in which reporter Gordon Loesch spoke with several members of the school community. “A black student found the letter and seven duplicates left on a classroom chair,” described Loesch. “It was turned in to the school principal the same day, April 15. The names of several black students were handwritten on it.” The story went on to mention the racial makeup of the school, where only 31 of the 1,000 students were black. The only two individuals interviewed on camera were white parents.

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KDKA covered the same story, but was less specific. “Police are looking into offensive letters filled with racial slurs and curse words that were left on the chairs of some local high school students,” stated anchor Ken Rice before showing a quote from an African American mother who described the letters as “hate mail.” However, the KDKA story did not state that the letters were aimed at African American students, only that they contained “racial slurs.”

The African American-themed *New Pittsburgh Courier*, in contrast, quoted the letters directly, leaving in the exact hateful language. Their April 27 story also included a quote from a male student who received one of the letters, and from his mother, who expressed frustration at the lack of response from the school.

### CRIME, SPORTS AND LITTLE ELSE

The association between African American males and crime reporting is strong. While crime fills a significant amount of news holes for local reporting, particularly on local television, African Americans are disproportionately present in these kinds of stories.

#### Top Topics in Pittsburgh News: Television and Newspapers

Percentage of Stories (*n* = 4,943 stories)

(*n* = 628 stories)

Overall		African American Male Presence	
Crime	20.7%	Sports	40.3%
Sports	15.5%	Crime	31.2%
Accidents	9.3%	Government	4.8%
Disasters	8.6%	Lifestyle	4.0%
Government	5.6%	Disasters	3.7%
Weather	5.1%	Other domestic affairs	3.5%
Other domestic affairs	4.6%	Accidents	2.7%
Transportation	3.5%	Education	2.4%
Foreign news	3.4%	Race/ gender issues	1.4%
Education	3.3%	Economy	1.1%

Overall in the sample studied, more than a fifth of the stories, or 21 percent, were about crime (24 percent of all TV stories and 11 percent of all newspaper stories).

Yet almost a third, 31 percent, of the stories that featured an African American male, whether or not race was explicitly mentioned, were focused on crime.

On television, 30 percent of the stories with an African American man or boy focused on crime. That was the only subject, outside of sports at 43 percent, in which African Americans were widely present. Government ranked third, but accounted for just 4 percent of all stories with African American males.

**Top Topics in Local Television News Coverage**

<i>Percentage of Stories (n = 3,759 stories)</i>		<i>(n = 584 stories)</i>	
<b>Overall</b>		<b>African American Male Presence</b>	
Crime	23.7%	Sports	43.0%
Sports	19.5%	Crime	30.3%
Accidents	11.8%	Government	4.3%
Disasters	9.8%	Disasters	3.9%
Weather	6.8%	Lifestyle	3.8%
Other domestic affairs	3.9%	Other domestic affairs	3.6%
Transportation	3.5%	Accidents	2.9%
Lifestyle	2.8%	Education	2.1%
Government	2.8%	Economy	1.2%
Foreign News	2.2%	Transportation	0.9%

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In the two daily newspapers studied, 43 percent of the stories with African American males were about crime. That was almost three times as many as the next largest topic, stories focusing on race and gender issues, at 16 percent.

**Top Topics in Daily Newspaper Coverage**

<i>Percentage of Stories (n = 1,184 stories)</i>		<i>(n = 44 stories)</i>	
<b>Overall</b>		<b>African American Male Presence</b>	
Government	14.6%	Crime	43.2%
Crime	11.2%	Race/gender issues	15.9%
Education	8.1%	Government	11.4%
Foreign news	6.9%	Education	6.8%
Environment	6.6%	Lifestyle	6.8%
Other domestic affairs	6.6%	Sports	4.5%
Elections/politics	4.6%	Misc. (such as obituaries)	4.5%
U.S. Foreign affairs	4.6%	Elections/politics	2.3%
Disasters	4.5%	Business	2.3%
Business	4.1%	Other domestic affairs	2.3%

More often than not, African American men were portrayed as suspects and criminals—often in short pieces read by the anchor and accompanied by a mug shot-type image.

One such story appeared on KDKA on April 26. “A suspect escapes police custody and hangs out in a barbershop,” stated anchor Darieth Chisolm while a still photograph of African American Jeffrey Turner Jr. hung on the screen for five seconds. Turner had been a suspect in a string of armed robberies and escaped police when they released his handcuffs to question him. According to the story, Turner ran into a shop, was hidden there by barber John Lewis, and was able to escape capture. Lewis, also an African American, was likewise featured in a still photograph during the story.

Other television crime stories went more in-depth, usually more than a minute in length. Many of these stories would show images of the African American males involved and rarely included any words from them, their family or legal representation.

An illustration of this kind of coverage can be found in the high-profile case of the shooting of a white police officer, James Kuzak, while he responded to a home invasion. Three African American men were arrested. However, the coverage of the first suspect, Myles Hutchinson, was somewhat representative of much of the crime coverage. On April 5, WTAE reported Hutchinson's arrest and showed two clips of him handcuffed and being led into a car by police. He was facing 24 charges for shooting Kuzak.

Six days later, however, the story changed significantly when Hutchinson was cleared of the charges and released from jail. The April 11 WTAE report on the case showed the same video of Hutchinson in handcuffs. Consequently, even after he was no longer a suspect, the image on the screen showed African American Hutchinson in police custody. This report did include a quote from his lawyer, who said that Hutchinson was glad the system had worked to vindicate him.

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### SPORTS COVERAGE ON TV

The only other subject area that compares with crime is sports, specifically on local television. One-fifth (20 percent) of all local television news stories studied here were devoted to sports, making it the number two subject.

As with crime, the percentage of sports stories that involved African American males was much higher. Fully 43 percent of the TV stories that prominently featured African American males were sports-focused.

Sports stories tend to focus on game scores and achievements more than the participants' ethnicity. In fact, in the sample, only two of the sports stories mentioned race explicitly. One was the April 26 WTAE story that mentioned the first African American quarterback to play in the NFL, Willie Thrower. The other was a March 16 story on WPXI in which Pittsburgh Steelers running back Rashard Mendenhall defended comments, made by another player, that playing in the NFL is like "modern-day slavery."

All the rest of the sports stories that featured African American men did not mention the race of the athletes. There were several previews, for example, of prominent men's basketball tournaments that included the University of Pittsburgh Panthers, a number of whose star players are African American.

Ahead of the Big East tournament, a March 8 WPXI package included expectations of two Pitt players, Brad Wannamaker and Nasir Robinson. On March 12, after Pitt received a No. 1 tournament seed, WPXI featured a question-and-answer session with Ashton Gibbs. Finally, after Pitt lost to Butler in a last-second upset on March 19, a WPXI package showed a devastated Nasir Robinson, who committed a last-second foul that contributed to the loss. "I blame myself," a distraught Robinson said. "I've been playing this game too long to make a dumb mistake like that."

In newspapers, unlike on TV, the connection between African American men and sports was not seen in this particular study. However, one of the main reasons could be that the sample did not include the sports sections of the papers.

**LITTLE TIME FOR ANYTHING ELSE**

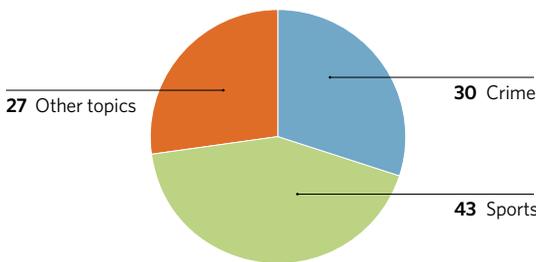
With the presence of African Americans in crime stories and sports, other important subject areas were rarely featured. Of all the stories that featured African American men, 5 percent dealt with local or national government. Just 2 percent focused on education and 1 percent on the economy.

On television, this breakdown is particularly dramatic. There, less than a third (27 percent) of the stories devoted to African American males were about subjects other than sports or crime.

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**Topics on Local TV with an African American Male Presence**

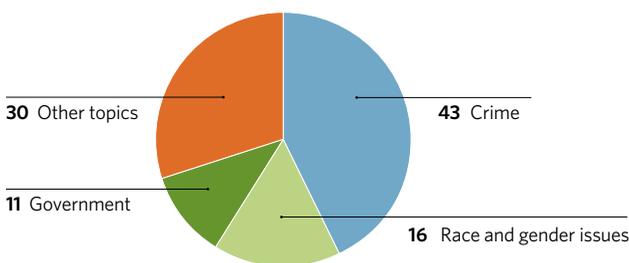
*Percentage of Stories (n = 584 stories)*



In newspapers, a larger proportion of stories, 57 percent, featuring African American men and boys were about non-crime subjects. However, that group of stories was divided up among a large number of different topics. Stories about race and gender issues, 16 percent, and government, 11 percent, combined to account for more than a quarter of the articles. As a result, a wide range of topics such as education, lifestyle, sports and business combined to make up the remaining 30 percent of the newspaper stories.

**Topics in Daily Newspapers with an African American Male Presence**

*Percent of Stories (n = 44 stories)*



This does not mean that stories on these subjects do not exist, just that they were not common.

On March 14, for example, KDKA offered an education story. “Dozens of African American students honored tonight, with support and scholarships. The Negro Educational Emergency Drive, known as NEED, held its 48th annual benefit dinner and awards program,” narrated KDKA anchor Ken Rice over pictures of the event. “NEED offers assistance and guidance to African American students who qualify for college but need financial help.”

Some stories would include African American subjects, while focusing on an issue that had nothing to do with race. On April 24, WTAE reported on an Easter egg hunt held at the Brown Chapel Church in North Side. The clip included quotes from an African American minister explaining the meaning of Easter while a young African American boy sat near the altar holding an egg.

### LEADING INDIVIDUALS

In addition to the subject of stories, analysts also looked at which individuals received the most news coverage, regardless of race. Of the top 15 individuals who were most often a lead newsmaker in newspaper and television stories combined, four of them were African American, although their race was rarely mentioned in the stories.<sup>3</sup>

A detailed look at these most covered people further illustrates the tenor of overall coverage.

The top newsmaker was President Obama, who was featured in 39 stories. As the most prominent figure in American politics and government, his inclusion is predictable. None of those stories discussed Obama's race.

<sup>3</sup>For a person to be considered a lead newsmaker in a story, that individual must be discussed in 50% or more of the time or space devoted to the entire story. Stories can have more than one lead newsmaker.

#### Top Lead Newsmakers

*Number of Stories (n = 4,943 stories)*

Barack Obama	39
Tom Corbett	32
Hines Ward	30
Sidney Crosby	29
Muammar Gaddafi	23
Jane Orié	23
Teesa Williams	16
Charlie Sheen	12
Cuddy Briskin	11
James Kuzak	11
Phylicia Barbieri	10
Scott Ashley	9
Matt Cooke	8
Myles Hutchinson	8
Alivia Kail	7

The third-largest newsmaker, however, is a much different situation. Fully 30 stories were focused on Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver-turned-dancer Hines Ward. Ward, who is biracial, was in the news because of his participation in the popular television program "Dancing with the Stars."

Ward was a noteworthy figure for several reasons. First, Ward is quite vocal about his biracial background, being half-African American and half-Korean. Second, 24 of the 30 stories that focused on Ward were on WTAE, Pittsburgh's ABC affiliate and the same channel that airs Dancing with the Stars. So, while Ward is the most visible African American outside of the president, it appears that his inclusion may have had as much to do with promoting the entertainment program on the same channel as with its core news value.

On March 27, several days before Ward made his debut on the dance show, WTAE ran a two-minute profile of Ward and his partner as they prepared their quickstep routine. “Lacing up his new shoes in the quiet corner of the dance studio, you get the feeling Hines Ward considers this his west coast locker room and offseason practice facility,” reported Mike Clark before showing images of Ward rehearsing.

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The seventh-largest newsmaker was in the news for a much less pleasant reason. Teesa Williams, a 17-year-old high school student, was the victim of a horrible crime. On March 22, Williams died after being pulled from the bedroom of her burning home. Days later, police reported that Williams had been shot prior to the fire and a 16-year-old male acquaintance was charged with murder. The sensational nature of the crime helped make Williams a significant newsmaker in 16 stories.

Myles Hutchinson, who tied for 13th-largest newsmaker, was another figure tied to a crime. Hutchinson, 21, was charged with attempted homicide and assault of Officer James Kuzak only to be released on his own recognizance several days later. Despite the clearing of Hutchinson in the case, the image of the African American being led to prison in handcuffs was widely shown — even in some of the reports of his exoneration.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN COMPARED WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN**

African American men were much more evident in the news than were African American women. In the entire sample of newspaper and television, 13 percent featured African American males, whether or not their race was mentioned explicitly, more than three times the amount featuring African American females (4 percent). The nature of the coverage, especially in newspapers, was different as well.

Because the number of stories that featured African American women (whether identifying them by race or not) in newspapers was small — only 21 — it is difficult to make significant conclusions based on the results. However, it is clear that African American women were not nearly as connected to crime in newspapers as were African American men. The largest topic was education at 19 percent, followed by government, stories about race and gender, and additional domestic affairs, all at 14 percent. Crime accounted for 10 percent.

**Top Topics: African American Male Presence Compared to African American Female Presence on Local Television**

<i>Percentage of Stories (n = 584 stories)</i>		<i>(n = 175 stories)</i>	
<b>African American Male</b>		<b>African American Female</b>	
Sports	43.0%	Crime	38.3%
Crime	30.3%	Accidents	11.4%
Government	4.3%	Education	8.0%
Disasters	3.9%	Domestic affairs	7.4%
Lifestyle	3.8%	Disasters	7.4%
Other domestic affairs	3.6%	Sports	4.6%
Accidents	2.9%	Government	3.4%
Education	2.1%	Economy	3.4%
Economy	1.2%	Transportation	3.4%
Transportation	0.9%	Race/gender issues	2.3%

On television, though, the association of African Americans with crime is actually stronger for women than for men. Fully 38 percent of the stories featuring women were on crime, compared to 30 percent for men. But most of the time women were portrayed as victims or bystanders rather than as suspects. The murder of Teesa Williams, for example, received extensive coverage.

Another example is the death of a 29-year-old mother of two caught in crossfire in a North Side brawl. On March 17, WTAE covered the vigil for her that was attended by about 50 people. Practically all the people seen at the vigil, and the only two people quoted about the violence in the community, were African American women.

“Nobody deserves this,” explained one woman. “How do you explain to somebody’s child that [their mother was] taken away in such a senseless crime?”

Similarly, during a March 13 WPXI story about the discovery of a man’s dead body in his house, the only interviews in the piece were of two African American female neighbors who had nothing to do with the crime, but who expressed concern about the safety of their community.

Even the second-largest subject area for women on TV, accidents and mishaps at 11 percent, often featured women as the victim of a misfortunate incident.

On April 19, for example, the roof of an apartment building began to collapse, forcing the evacuation of four families. On the KDKA report about the incident, the only tenant seen and heard from was an African American woman named Richelle Murtaza, who was glad that the authorities erred on the side of caution.

The topic that featured the most presence of men on television, sports, was not populated by women nearly as much. Only 5 percent of the television stories featuring African American women were about sports, compared to 43 percent for men. This can be tied to the increased coverage of men’s collegiate and professional sports like basketball and baseball, while women’s sports get much less attention.

#### **AN ALTERNATIVE — THE NEW PITTSBURGH COURIER**

The African American–oriented weekly, the New Pittsburgh Courier, offers a contrast to the more broadly aimed daily newspapers measured in this study. And while some similarities exist between the Courier and the other papers, including an emphasis on crime, the weekly offers a different general image of African American men.

First, African Americans were much more often the subject of coverage in the Courier than in the other outlets, not surprisingly. More than 95 percent of the stories in the weekly paper featured an African American, identified either by description in the story or by an associated picture, compared with only 5 percent of the stories in the two daily newspapers sampled, the Post-Gazette and the Tribune-Review. (The race of the subjects in the other Courier stories in the sample could not be determined.)

Even before considering the specific focus of reporting on African Americans, the subject breakdown for the Courier was different than for the two dailies studied. The biggest topics for the Post-Gazette and Tribune-Review combined were government, 15 percent; crime, 11 percent; education, 8 percent; and foreign news, 7 percent. For the Courier, various domestic affairs issues such as community organizations and charities were the top subject with 21 percent of the stories. That was followed by education, 17 percent, and crime, 15 percent.

62 The Courier devotes more space to crime than the daily papers (15 percent compared to 11 percent). However, both the tone of the crime coverage, and its place within the overall representation of African Americans, are very different. Rather than covering specific incidents, the weekly paper featured many articles about crime trends or community efforts to stop crime.

On March 2, the lead story in the Courier was headlined, “10 of 13 homicides Black lives.” The story noted that out of the 13 murder victims to that point in 2011, 10 were black and 9 were black men. The paper also took more of an editorial stance rather than an objective approach.

“And what’s worse is that if someone would have taken a second to think before reacting, most of the names [on the list] would not have appeared,” wrote staff writer Ashley N. Johnson. “Now not only are these lives gone, so are the lives of the ones who committed the crime and each party’s family.”

**Top Subjects in Pittsburgh Newspapers**

<i>Percentage of Stories (n = 48 stories)</i>		<i>(n = 1,184 stories)</i>	
<b>New Pittsburgh Courier</b>		<b>Daily Newspapers</b>	
Other domestic affairs	20.8%	Government	14.6%
Education	16.7%	Crime	11.2%
Crime	14.6%	Education	8.1%
Economy	8.3%	Foreign news	6.9%
Race/ gender issues	8.3%	Environment	6.6%
Misc. (such as obituaries)	8.3%	Domestic affairs	6.6%
Elections/ politics	6.3%	Elections/ politics	4.6%
Religion	4.2%	U.S. Foreign affairs	4.6%

A week later, the March 9 front page of the Courier spotlighted an anti-crime program called One Vision One Life that speaks directly to gang members in order to encourage them to stay away from violence.

Other subject areas are more comparable to the space devoted to crime. Education and domestic affairs stories on things such as charitable organizations received more attention in the Courier than crime.

The April 27 edition, for example, included a front-page story about Graduate Pittsburgh, a program aimed at promoting graduation among high school students. The group is working directly with two Pittsburgh schools, Westinghouse High and Peabody High, where more than half of the students have yet to meet graduation requirements.

That same edition featured another front-page story about a march on Good Friday that was part of the House of Manna’s Second Annual Prayer 4 Peace Rally. Roughly 200 residents braved the rain to join in the rally.

“I don’t care what religion you are or what color you are, what creed or what background you’re from,” the article quoted Rakeem Muhammed while he spoke to the crowd. “We are here because we owe these kids something — peace. Drugs, guns, violence. It has to stop.”

## METHODOLOGY

The sample for this study was made up of news coverage from Pittsburgh news outlets published from March 1 through April 30, 2011.

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### Outlets and Story Inclusion

For television, all stories airing as part of the 30-minute newscasts beginning at 11 p.m. were included. For newspapers, all stories on the front page and all stories on the first page of the local sections were included. The entirety of the articles was coded, even if the story continued onto another page. The outlets coded were as follows:

KDKA (Pittsburgh CBS affiliate)	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
WTAE (Pittsburgh ABC affiliate)	Pittsburgh Tribune-Review
WPXI (Pittsburgh NBC affiliate)	New Pittsburgh Courier

All seven days of the week of the daily newspapers, the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, were part of this study. The New Pittsburgh Courier is a weekly publication, and each edition was included.

For the television broadcasts, every evening that the station aired an 11 p.m. newscast was included in this study. There were some evenings when KDKA pre-empted or delayed their newscasts due to other programming such as sporting events. Those days were not included in the sample.<sup>4</sup>

Due to technical problems or the inability to access content remotely, some days were excluded from the sample.<sup>5</sup>

In total, analysts coded 151 television broadcasts and 124 newspaper editions. That resulted in a sample of 4,991 total stories (1,232 from newspapers and 3,759 from television).

### Capture Process

The primary method for capturing local Pittsburgh media was to use online tools. For all the television programs, analysts used the media monitoring service *Critical Mention*, which allows users to view local broadcasts from markets throughout the country.

Each of the newspapers was collected in different ways. Most of the papers were collected by printing out pages from Web services that offer exact replicas of the hard copy editions online.

For editions of the Post-Gazette up to March 23, hard copies of the paper were attained from the paper itself. For the rest of the period, copies of the paper were collected using the Web service Press Display. For the Tribune-Review, papers were acquired using the publication’s e-edition subscription service. And for the New Pittsburgh Courier, papers were obtained online through the publishing website Yudu.com.

<sup>4</sup>KDKA did not air its normal 11:00 pm newscast on March 12, 17, 24 and 25, and April 2 and 4.

<sup>5</sup>The following days are not included from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: March 1–4 and 6–7. The April 13 edition of the New Pittsburgh Courier was not available online. The following days from KDKA are not included in the sample: March 4, 10, 11 and 18, and April 1, 7, 8 and 22. The following days from WTAE are not in the sample: March 4, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 18, and April 1, 8 and 22. The following days from WPXI are not included in the sample: March 10, 11, 18 and 30, and April 1, 4, 6, 8 and 22.

Exact replicas of the newspaper hard copies were necessary in order to examine the pictures accompanying each article. While text of the stories could have been found through a number of other processes, these online services allowed analysts to examine the precise layouts, graphics and pictures that went with each story.

### Coding Variables

In addition to housekeeping variables, such as date, source and word count, each story was coded for the following variables:

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- **Topic** captures the general subject matter of the story.
  - **Presence of African American Explicit Mention** — refers to whether an African American is a significant part of the story (at least 25 percent) and their race is explicitly discussed in the story. If there was an explicit mention, a determination was made if it focused on a male, a female, a group or a combination of those.
  - **Presence of African American Visual Reference** — refers to whether an African American is a significant part of the story (at least 25 percent) and their race is *not* discussed in the story. It is impossible to tell with certainty an individual's race just by visual depiction, but coders were told to use their best judgment. If a consumer of the news story would make a reasonable assumption that the subject was an African American, coders were to select “yes” for this variable. If there was such a reference, a determination was made if it focused on a male, a female, or both genders.
  - **Lead Newsmaker** names a person who is the central focus of the story (at least 50 percent). Stories can have up to two lead newsmakers.

### CODING TEAM AND INTERCODER TESTING

A team of four researchers worked to complete the coding for this study. Intercoder testing was conducted for all the variables used. Each coder was given the same 75 selected stories to make up the intercoder sample. The percentage agreement for each variable was as follows:

Topic: 80 percent

African American Male — Explicit Mention: 98 percent

African American Male — Visual Reference: 91percent

African American Female — Explicit Mention: 97 percent

African American Female — Visual Reference: 94 percent

African Americans as a Group — Explicit Mention: 97 percent

The Lead Newsmaker variable is identical to the code used as part of the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism's weekly News Coverage Index. Regular intercoder testing for that project results in a rate of agreement of approximately 90 percent.

### PEW AUDIT TEAM

Staff members from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism who assisted in the production of this content analysis project were: researcher Steve Adams, researcher Monica Anderson, researcher Heather Brown, senior researcher Paul Hitlin, Deputy Director Amy Mitchell and Director Tom Rosenstiel.

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