



WOMEN OF COLOR IN U.S. NEWS LEADERSHIP 2023

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THE WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER WORKS TO MAKE WOMEN VISIBLE AND POWERFUL IN THE MEDIA

Founded in 2005 by Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem, the WMC is an inclusive and feminist organization that works to ensure women's realities are covered and women's voices are heard.

WMC works to make women visible and powerful in the media. We do so by promoting women as decision-makers and as subjects in media; training women to be effective in media; researching and exposing sexism and racism in media; and creating original online and on-air journalism decision-making.

Our media programs that address the problems of unequal representation and misrepresentation of women in media include interconnected strategies that:

- Recruit and place diverse women experts in the media — print, broadcast, radio, internet, social media, and media leadership — through WMC SheSource.
- Train diverse women leaders to be effective in media, and increase their thought leadership through WMC Progressive Women's Voices and other customized training.
- Investigate, report, create, and publish original media to expand diverse women's voices and representation through WMC Features, WMC IDAR/E, WMC Climate, WMC Women Under Siege, WMC FBomb, WMC Speech Project, and our syndicated radio program and podcast, WMC Live with Robin Morgan.
- Research, document, and produce reports that highlight the status of women in U.S. media, equip activists with evidence, and create benchmarks to hold media accountable for sexist and racist coverage.
- Advocate before government officials and agencies on policies affecting women's access to media and technology, ownership of media and technology, and safe and free speech in media and technology.



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Julie Burton, president & CEO,
Women's Media Center

Women of color in news leadership making impactful change

By President and CEO Julie Burton

The “Women of Color in U.S. News Leadership 2023” report spotlights 20 women of color top executives in media who are visible, powerful, and transformational.

These dynamic women in television, print, digital, and radio now occupy a seat at the table in an industry long dominated by White men. They lead at a time when the need to grow audiences, increase the bottom line, and keep pace with a rapidly changing digital world gains urgency. Perhaps paramount to the ability to do all of this is creating newsrooms that are inclusive, diverse, and representative. They are working to ensure that the voices, experiences, and stories of everyone, especially women and people of color, are included in media.

“Our job is to open the window as wide as we can,” says Andrea Parquet-Taylor, CBS News’ vice president of CW and independent stations news director.

Parquet-Taylor is one of the 20 women of color news leaders interviewed for this report, which includes profiles of Janelle Rodriguez, executive vice president of NBC News and head of its NBC News Now online streaming newscast; Karen Lincoln Michel, president and CEO of IndiJ Public Media and president of ICT (formerly Indian Country Today); Leona Allen Ford, DallasNews Corp.’s deputy publisher and chief talent and diversity officer; Swati Sharma, publisher, editor-in-chief of Vox; and Michel Martin, co-host of *Morning Edition*, NPR’s news magazine.

This special report builds on our 2018 report, “WMC’s The Status of Women of Color in the U.S. News Media,” which showed where women journalists of color are and are not in legacy print, radio, TV, and digital news. That report included profiles of 30 women journalists of color.

While the numbers of women of color in leadership roles in media have ticked up very slightly, let’s be clear: Their numbers are not close to where they should be. Women represent more than 51% of the U.S. population and people of color 40%. According to the U.S. Census, people of color will become the majority in this country by 2045.

The latest data from the News Leaders Association (NLA) shows that in 2019 roughly 9% of newsroom leaders were women of color: 3.04% Black, 2.6% Hispanic, 2.03% Asian, 0.24% Native American, 0.14% Middle Eastern or North African, and 0.44% multiracial.

The Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA)/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey found that a record-high 40.5% of local TV stations had news directors who were women and 17.5% had news directors who were people of color.

Hiring more women of color — in leadership roles — will result in real, impactful change. The lack of women in decision-making and prominent positions in media is the breeding ground for defamatory and sexist coverage and comments and results in media missing major stories — and missing viewership and readership.

As WMC co-founder Gloria Steinem said in our 2018 report: “Missing women of color in the newsrooms of this country is an injustice in itself, and an injustice to every American reader and viewer who is deprived of great stories and a full range of facts. Inclusiveness in the newsroom means inclusiveness in the news. Racism and sexism put blinders on everyone.”

Diversity and representation are cornerstones to American democracy and integral components to a fair and accurate media. It's imperative that newsrooms and news organizations are accountable and inclusive in the search for good talent. As noted in this report, Leona Allen Ford tells her team: "Don't send me a hiring pool that isn't diverse."

Adds Sara Kehaulani Goo, Axios' editor-in-chief: "It's my duty to not only give back but to model something different. It's my duty to create some different expectations, where diverse representation is the norm, not the exception. A truly inclusive newsroom is really important to ensuring the integrity of what we cover."

The women of color leaders included in this report are also using their decades of personal and professional experiences to share their abundant wisdom and create a much-needed pipeline.

"I say this to women and people of color when they're asking for advice, when they're worried about things like imposter syndrome or not connecting or not fitting in: 'Don't be in your head so much,'" said Catherine Kim, senior vice president of NBC News' editorial division. "'Just be bold. Say what you want to say. Be respectful, be transparent and professional — but don't hold back.'"

Karen Lincoln Michel is very conscious about how she leads. "When I got to run my own newsroom, on the first day, I told my staff, 'We're going to operate on some basic core values. One of them is that we'll have respect for each other, our individuality, and where we each come from.'"

The Women's Media Center is grateful to the women of color leaders who have contributed to this special report, our newest addition to our WMC Media Lab compilation of research and reports. We believe that research assembles evidence, equips activists with tools for social change, and creates benchmarks to measure the status and progress of diverse women in media. These reports raise awareness of the challenges created and perpetuated through unequal opportunities, inaccurate images, and unfair representations of women, especially women of color.

We invite readers of this report to explore more of our research and encourage the industry to open the window as wide as it can. And we promise to continue to build public pressure to make the changes they need to enact in order to create a truly representative media system — where all of us matter.

INTRODUCTION

Women news executives of color move up to make their mark

Today's unprecedented moment for women of color who've become key leaders in traditional and online media signals what many hope is a cultural shift in America's newsrooms.

Many of these women are rising to power amid new flashpoints in the nation's relentless reckonings over racial and gender equality — and, for some, amid hostilities they've faced in newsrooms. Often, these women are succeeding White men, who have historically held the industry's top jobs.

This transformation is reflected, for example, in a fast-tracked Latina editor heading newsroom development at the nation's No. 1 newspaper. In a Black Pulitzer Prize winner being deputy publisher of the largest newspaper in the nation's second most populous state. In a Native woman leading the oldest and largest news operation centering Indigenous communities in the United States and abroad.

This Women's Media Center's "Women of Color in U.S. News Leadership 2023" report spotlights 20 of these dynamic leaders and their strategies for creating more inclusive newsrooms and expanding definitions of what constitutes news — and, as a result, attracting new audiences whose trials and triumphs, concerns and curiosities increasingly are a part of the 24/7 news cycle.

As these women help chart a future for and boost the viability of American journalism, they are building a more diverse pipeline toward rank-and-file and C-suite positions alike. They are encouraging everyone — especially women — to bring their authentic selves, knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to the job.

Having women of color in these critical, decision-making, shot-caller positions does much to show others that "if you can see it, you can be it."

"I work with and have hired these young women of color who are super bright, just filled with passion about this business. I've seen their development from being really afraid to have their voices heard to taking on significant projects and knocking it out the park — because we've given them the space to do that without fear of failure," says [Andrea Parquet-Taylor](#), a Black woman who, in January 2022, was promoted to CBS News vice president of CW and independent stations news director.

"They're not judged by 'What have they done?' but by 'What can you bring to the table? And how can you help us?' That kind of support is different from what I got when I started. No question. That is why I'm doing this."

Diversity helps newsrooms' bottom line

In a nation increasingly comprised of persons of color — and where women and girls are slightly more than half of the population — race and gender diversity in the media and many other industries boosts the bottom line, a [fact confirmed by McKinsey & Co.](#), among others.

As for diversity in news media, as of 2022 a record-high 40.5% of local TV stations had news directors who were women and 17.5% had news directors who were people of color, according to the most recent survey by the [Radio Television Digital News Association \(RTDNA\)](#) and [Newhouse School at Syracuse University](#). Women accounted for 24.3% of news directors in radio, where the minority workforce was the highest it has been in the survey's 28-year history, rising 2 percentage points from the previous year's survey to 17.8%.

The authors of that yearly survey offered a weighty caveat, tied to projections that, by 2045, non-Hispanic White people will be less than 50% of the nation's population. "Of course, the big, long-term picture for minorities in local radio news shows an industry well behind an ever-increasing minority population in the U.S.," researchers wrote.

Similarly, of TV news they wrote, “In the big picture, though, there’s still a large gap between the minority population in the U.S. and the minority workforce in local TV news.”

The **News Leaders Association**, formerly the American Society of Newspaper Editors, launched its diversity report in 1978 to challenge newspapers to achieve racial parity in journalist staffing. In 2021, the organization scrapped what was to have been a revamped survey. Its **2019 diversity report, with 22.7% of its 1,883 legacy print and online-only newsrooms responding**, is NLA’s latest; that’s up from a historically low 17% response rate in the prior survey. (Responses have fallen sharply amid new industry layoffs in recent years.)

By that count, women accounted for 40.5% of newsroom leaders. Women were among the top three leaders at 77.3% of newsrooms and gender nonbinary people — being counted for the first time — were among the top three leaders at 2.3% of newsrooms. At least one minority journalist was among the top three editors at 26.4% of those newsrooms. Of all newsroom managers, 18.8% were people of color and roughly 9% were women of color. (Those roughly 9% women of color newsroom leaders broke down as follows: 3.04% Black, 2.6% Hispanic, 2.03% Asian, 0.24% Native American, 0.14% Middle Eastern or North African, and 0.44% multiracial.)

Amid such groundbreaking change as three women of color being promoted, between 2021 and 2023, to the top jobs at ABC News, MSNBC, and CBS News — respectively, **Kim Godwin** and **Rashida Jones**, who are Black, and **Ingrid Cipirián-Matthews**, who is Latina — there are no comprehensive data on the race and gender of news executives across all platforms.

Many laud the ascension of the women of color executives featured in this report, including Parquet-Taylor, of CBS; Latina **Charo Henríquez**, head of newsroom development and support at *The New York Times*; African American **Leona Allen Ford**, deputy publisher and chief talent and diversity officer, DallasNews Corp.; Native American **Karen Lincoln Michel**, president and CEO of IndiJ Media and president of ICT; Asian American **Catherine Kim**, senior vice president of editorial at NBC News; and South Asian American **Swati Sharma**, publisher, editor-in-chief of Vox.

Pushback against equity at work persists

Many women leaders have been promoted since 2020, as their news organizations covered #MeToo and Black Lives Matter as that movement amplified, among other issues, longstanding disparities in a wide array of workplaces, including the news media.

Certainly, much more must be done to transform newsroom culture. Already, some question how far-reaching and long-lasting these latest changes in newsroom leadership and rank-and-file diversity initiatives will be.

“The diversity efforts of the last three years have been largely cosmetic, performative, and perfunctory,” **S. Mitra Kalita**, a South Asian American news executive, wrote in a June 2023 *Time* magazine essay. “We have barely begun to change the systems contributing to inequity.”

After the pandemic lockdowns, a **major digital gaming conference** resumed but with absolutely no women, let alone women of color, on stage, wrote Kalita, who traded being senior vice president of CNN Digital to co-found Black- and Brown-focused **URL Media**. The racial reckoning that the 2020 Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd ignited didn’t prevent that erasure of women, says Kalita, who also runs **Epicerter NYC**, a hyperlocal news and information outlet.

Kalita recently told the Women’s Media Center, which profiled her in its **2018 inaugural special report** on women journalists of color, that there’s a cautionary lesson for newsrooms: “It’s not enough to put people of color in charge and not fully support them and their chances for success. What has happened as we face a tougher economic climate in 2023? Layoffs, budget tightening — and suddenly you no longer need the race reporter or Spanish-language community outreach? We cannot make diversity a fad or reaction anymore. It must be woven into every aspect of how newsrooms do business.”

Likewise, Richard Prince, a member of the **Metro Seven** — five Black men and two Black women journalists who in 1972 filed a historic federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint of racial discrimination against *The Washington Post* — asked what might be the ripple effects of the U.S. Supreme Court’s recent ruling against affirmative action in college admissions. (In 2022, the *Post* named **Monica Norton**, a Black woman, one of its three deputy managing editors; a Black man and a White man are the other deputies.)

“For Many Journalists, the Issue Is Personal” was a recent headline in **Journalisms**, a newsletter on news industry diversity and related topics that Prince founded and edits. Among the opinion essays he curated in the aftermath of the court’s ban was **one by Elvia Diaz**, a Latina who is editorial page editor at *The Arizona Republic*. “It’s cool,” she wrote, “to talk fairness and meritocracy, the idea that a person should get only what’s earned, when a system has been designed to serve and benefit a specific segment [of] the population. Everyone knows this is true — just take a quick look at colleges’ racial makeup through the years.”

Her most declarative statement in that piece, picked up and circulated internationally by *USA Today*, was this: “I wouldn’t be here without affirmative action.”

(It bears noting that in August 2023, several White former and current newsroom employees of Gannett filed a **federal lawsuit** against that media giant, alleging that they were unfairly passed over for jobs that went to journalists of color.)

Certainly, it has taken protracted effort for powerhouse newswomen of color to get to where they are, earning a seat at the proverbial table. The Women’s Media Center applauds these women as they do the complex but gratifying work of making the news media more representative, inclusive, fair, and viable.

TELEVISION

Building diverse teams from the global, national C-suites and management ranks

When **Catherine Kim** was a neophyte in the news business, two pioneering women journalists were the first to put extra effort into making sure she got off to a solid start.



Catherine Kim, senior vice president, NBC News, Editorial

"**Vicki Gordon** ... and **Susan Zirinsky**," says Kim, senior vice president of NBC News' editorial division. "They were legendary."

"Holly Hunter's character in *Broadcast News* was modeled after Susan," adds Kim, referring to Zirinsky, the former president at CBS News, where Gordon, before retiring, was executive story editor of the iconic news magazine *60 Minutes*.

"I've had the benefit of really strong female producers giving me a very early lift, mostly by recommending me for positions they knew were open," continues Kim, who also noted career-making moves on her behalf by **Ed Bradley**, the first Black person to co-anchor *60 Minutes* and the first Black person to be CBS' White House correspondent.

"He attached me to veteran *60 Minutes* producers right away," says Kim, formerly Bradley's executive producer. "I worked with some of the giants who were there at

that time. We traveled to the Middle East, to Africa. We did domestic coverage, looking at stories around incarceration. It was a rich experience that afforded me all the possible leeway to excel or fall on my face."

Kim and other decision-making TV newswomen of color agree that the varying levels of support they've received, especially in the early years, shape who they are professionally. The experience of receiving support also influences their notions of what it means to be team players themselves, duty-bound to build well-functioning, diverse newsroom teams.

Now, more than ever, good leaders are examining how well they manage a diversity of people who, beyond race and gender identity, also come with diversity of concerns about their work and personal lives.

"You're constantly learning and navigating," says **Andrea Parquet-Taylor**, CBS News' vice president of CW and its independent stations news director. "Our newsrooms now are comprised of people from multiple generations. You've got early-career folks, midcareer people, and people who are more advanced and nearing the end of their careers."



Andrea Parquet-Taylor, CBS News' vice president of CW and its independent stations news director

She continues: "They come to you with different issues, different concerns regarding what's important to them and the space they need to grow. Especially coming out of the pandemic, their priorities shifted.

You need to be listening, touching base with different folks throughout the organization. You prioritize, you set the model. You can say a million things, but if you're not the embodiment of what you say you believe, it's not authentic."

Modeling the type of leadership you wish you'd had

One day in mid-2023, CNN's **Michelle Genece Patterson** had just wrapped up a Zoom call with a woman applicant hoping to join a relatively small team of journalists behind *CNN Heroes*. Genece Patterson, a senior producer and roughly 17-year veteran of that high-profile show spotlighting people making positive change in their communities, was pondering how her personal background and worldview affect her leadership role at the global news organization.



Michelle Genece Patterson, senior producer, CNN

"A lot of us have been working together since *Heroes* came into existence 17 years ago. Along with the person who's our [executive producer], I have had a hand in hiring everybody for this unit."

It's a serious responsibility, one that she carries out largely in light of her own journey in the news industry. Genece Patterson says she has endured previous bosses who neither invited nor welcomed her viewpoints on what's newsworthy, a viewpoint heavily influenced by the reality that she is a Black, female urbanite born to immigrant parents from Haiti, the poorest nation in this hemisphere.

To Genece Patterson, her personal history, worldview, and everyday observations about ordinary things is a plus for journalism. And if a new hire is coming to the *Heroes* team — as this report was being published, it was comprised of eight women and three men — she'd prefer that the person have a certain sensibility.

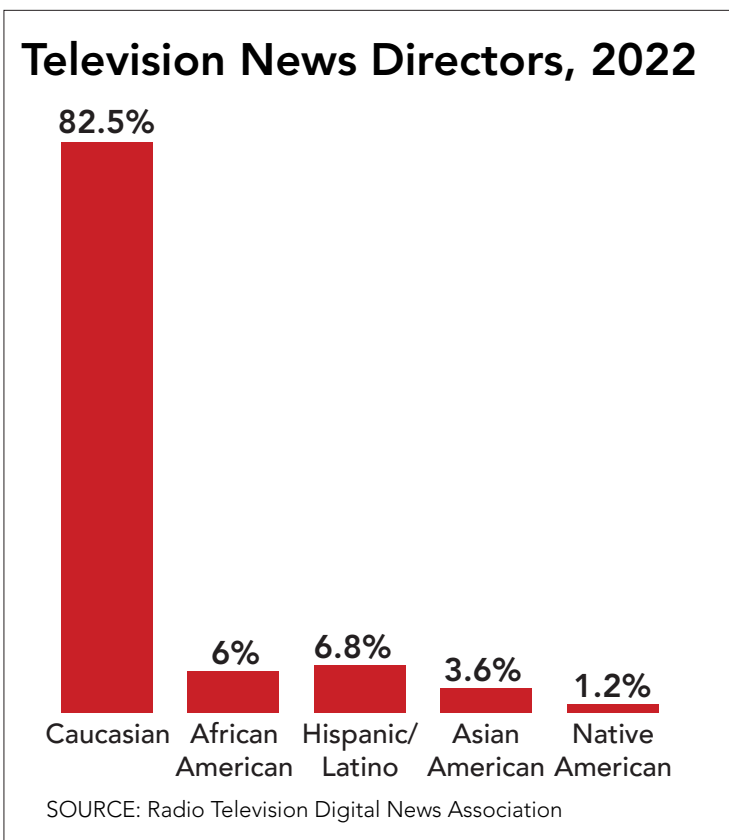
"There is one hero who had never had hair and makeup done before," Genece Patterson says.

"She was ready to flip out. She said, 'I can't do this.' And I'm like, 'You absolutely can do this.' And I know that if I'm there in that moment, where I hear that flutter, I can help her get to where she needs to be to be fully present for her work, herself, her organization, and her nation.

"I feel very good about being a conduit, helping people like her go from the not knowing — and from fear and impostor syndrome — to having this big moment on the global stage."

She wants new hires to have a similar sensitivity toward inclusivity and be able to show those who feel like outsiders that they've earned their place in the spotlight, Genece Patterson says.

Her work on *Heroes* has been ennobling, she added, and also sharpened her news skills. Her *Heroes* experience starkly contrasts with what she'd experienced in other newsrooms, and with what some in her far-flung network of Black women TV news producers are enduring right now. Some are dealing with burdensome clashes of race and gender that make it harder to simply do good journalism, Genece Patterson says.



Emma Carrasco, NBC News Group, corporate affairs senior vice president

The sheer tally of women journalists of color who are calling the shots is one measure of progress, yes, she says. But this number, in and of itself, is not a sign of full-on parity in the industry.

Nevertheless, some progress is being made overall. As of 2022, a record-high 40.5% of local TV stations had news directors who were women and 17.5% had news of directors who were people of color, according to the most recent survey by the [Radio Television Digital News Association \(RTDNA\)](#) and [Newhouse School at Syracuse University](#).

'Our job is to open the window...'

NBC News Group Corporate Affairs Senior Vice President [Emma Carrasco](#) is gratified that women comprise 50% of the division's leadership team.

“We crossed that threshold across the news group. We see the progress that people of color have made here. Systemic, long-term change does not happen overnight, but we’ve just kept at it,” says Carrasco, whose previous executive posts include overseeing audience development at NPR.

“When we see what’s happening in the world, we think that ensuring that we have diversity of gender and race and ethnicity and geography and economic standing and perspective is what’s going to make us competitive. It’s central to establishing trust” with news consumers.

That half of leaders at NBC News are female, and that this group includes people of color, is to be celebrated. But that success doesn’t reflect what is transpiring broadly in the news business. “I don’t know if I’d say that this is a breakthrough moment for women and women journalists of color. It’s been more a matter of chipping away over time at this,” says CBS’ Parquet-Taylor, who was promoted in January 2022 to her current job overseeing network-owned stations in Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Detroit, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Tampa.

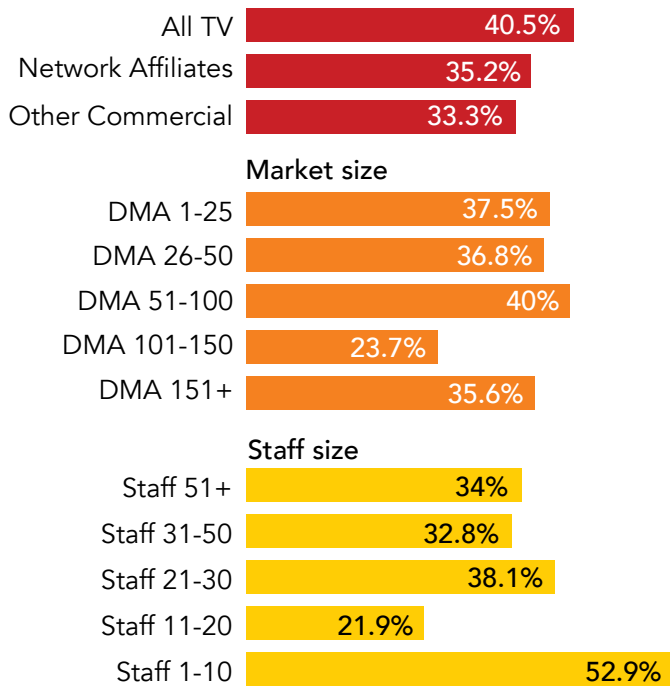
“Our job,” Parquet-Taylor adds, “is to open the window as wide as we can.”

Sometimes, that requires some force. In 2022, the Native American Journalists Association banned *The New York Times’* executive leaders from its annual conference and job fair, says Jourdan Bennett-Begaye, vice president of what is now the Indigenous Journalists Association and the first woman to be top editor of 40-year-old ICT, formerly known as Indian Country Today.



Jourdan Bennett-Begaye, editor, ICT

Women in Local TV News, 2022



Women News Directors

SOURCE: Radio Television Digital News Association

“We told them that, as an institution, they were not welcome,” Bennett-Begaye says, noting her organization’s concern that the *Times*, which had no Indigenous journalists on staff at the time, was stereotyping Native Americans in its coverage.

“We went to the table,” she continues, “and told them, ‘This is what we can do. We are interested in a partnership.’ So this is a good learning opportunity for both of us. We’re now having discussions about what that partnership will look like.”

Structural change is what she, as an IJA leader, is working for. It’s critical to set such a standard for other leaders, she says, showing them how to challenge powerful institutions.

“Fundamentally,” says NBC’s Kim, “I always wanted to treat and lead members of the team, and especially junior members of the team, in the ways I’d like to be led.”

Newsrooms can be intense and intimidating, Kim adds, dissuading some from speaking up. This reality convinced her, back in her mid-20s, to go into management: “It’s critical to lead in

a way that leverages the opportunity and lived experience of everyone in the room while we’re going after accuracy, authenticity, and the truth.

“I say this to women and people of color when they’re asking for advice, when they’re worried about things like impostor syndrome or not connecting or not fitting in: ‘Don’t be in your head so much. Just be bold. Say what you want to say. Be respectful, be transparent and professional — but don’t hold back.’”

TELEVISION PROFILE

Janelle Rodriguez

'How do you tell the story ... if you don't reflect this country?'

Early in her news career, **Janelle Rodriguez** set her sights on becoming an executive producer. After about 15 years at CNN, she was promoted to executive producer and eventually executive vice president for programming.

Now executive vice president of NBC News and head of its NBC News Now online streaming newscast, she has overseen a **55% surge** in the size of the latter's audience between 2020 and 2021.

Rodriguez started at NBC in 2015. Along her journey to her current position, the Latina and South Florida native has been nurtured and supported by her newsroom elders and her peers, she says.



Janelle Rodriguez, executive vice president of NBC News; head of its NBC News Now

Likewise, she's doing her part to fill NBC's jobs pipeline with a diversity of up-and-comers from far-flung parts of the nation — all in the interest of good journalism.

This is an abridged version of Rodriguez's conversation with the Women's Media Center.

WMC: What prompted your old bosses at CNN to say, as you recall, 'We'd like you to take on a bigger role?'

A tsunami happened in Southeast Asia during the Christmas-to-New Year holiday. All of my male bosses were out on vacation, and it was no surprise that the women were left to pick up those holidays.

I was in the role of a more junior person, leading the editorial meetings. Because it was such a huge story, the new CNN president, Joe Klein, started working a week earlier than he was scheduled. I was the senior producer, at the time, for Anderson Cooper, who we put on the story. It was a career-defining time for him. And [Klein] pegged me as a high achiever that he wanted to grow. They saw things in me that I didn't see in myself.

How old were you then?

In my early thirties.

How secure were you in your talents?

I felt very comfortable with my producing talents. But where I had a big learning curve was becoming a senior-level manager. As [rank-and-file] journalists, we're not trained to be managers, handling budgets or the interpersonal crises that happen.

To their credit, CNN sent me to an executive MBA program at UCLA. They invested in me, sending me to a number of different trainings and to a Time-Warner program for women in leadership.

Really healthy, strong organizations help close that leadership gap for people who may be great reporters but aren't already equipped to be senior managers.

What did the C-suite of NBC's newsroom look like when you joined that network?

CNN had been very male-dominated, although the number of women in leadership definitely began to increase while I was there.

Coming to NBC, I was quite surprised at how many women are in leadership. Sometimes I'm in senior-level meetings here with a room full of women, all women. Other times, it's a very mixed group of men and women. It's nice to work at a place that organically has that.

On the most basic level, what does that diversity among decision-makers do for the news cycle?

I'll give two separate examples: One of my colleagues was beating on my door, saying we had to do a special on anti-Asian violence during the pandemic. A lot of people have covered that story since. She — an Asian woman — was on it before it got picked up as a national story.

In a similar manner, a male colleague who's Jewish [jump-started] our coverage of anti-Semitic attacks happening across the country.

We need to connect the dots. Being of the community — whether it's the Black community, Latino, Asian, Jewish — gets us connected to stories.

Diversity is not even an optional thing. It's not just a good thing or the right thing to do. It has to be embedded.

As you scan the landscape, does this era mark a groundswell moment for women of color in newsroom leadership?

I'd hate to say it's a groundswell. Usually, it's a very zig-zagging road. Five steps forward, three steps back. A couple of steps forward, a couple of steps back. And that's true on multiple levels.

I think we're having some great moments, we're having some glimmers of progress. I want to see where we are 10 years from now.

Are you optimistic?

I am. And what gives me the greatest sense of optimism is younger folks. Generationally, they've never experienced the [all-White] '*Mad Men*' era of media, right? They're not going to put up with that.

Nonetheless, the road is usually very zig-zagging.

What are your big tips for those aspiring to be newsroom leaders?

The best tip I ever got, when I was very, very junior, was: 'Persevere.' See the long road ahead and hang in. You have to be confident.

If you're a good person, doing the right things, operating with integrity and treating people with respect, you'll have people cheering for you. When you make mistakes, you need strong people who believe in you. They'll help you overcome those days.

Which of your own mistakes stands out for you as both difficult and a pivotal lesson?

It probably wasn't the biggest one, but I think about this every couple of months because it's relevant: I was a very junior producer at CNN. They threw me in over my head into the control room, doing weekends, the 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. show, which is the most brutal. It means you're in the newsroom at 2 a.m. on a Sunday.

I hadn't mastered timing on my own and mistimed *Larry King Live*, which was syndicated globally, not just on TV but on radio stations, too. Those stations were in black, in silence, for two and a half minutes, which is a very long time. I just wanted to die.

I came out of there looking like I'd been shot, on the verge of tears and afraid I was going to get fired. The senior manager looks at me and, she was like, 'First of all, nobody knows who you are. You're not the center of the universe. Go home, get over yourself. Come back in here and do it again tomorrow.'

It was such a gift to me.

How are you opening a path for others, especially women and other people of color?

[NBCUniversal News Group President] [Cesar Conde](#), my boss, created the 50% Challenge Initiative [to create a staff that is half female and half of color], which is incredible.

As a part of that, I'm very hyper-focused on recruiting and the interview process, casting as wide a net as possible. Our hiring manager [Yvette Miley](#), who's senior vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion and a rock star in her own right, has set up these extraordinary partnerships with community colleges, state colleges across the country. I don't want all new hires coming out of Columbia and NYU. I want kids who went to community college or worked their way through state schools ... a kid from rural Texas who wants to be a journalist. It doesn't matter how well-intentioned or smart or aware of the world you are, we all have massive blind spots. And we all bring particular perspectives to the newsroom.

How do you tell the story of this country if you don't reflect this country?

TELEVISION PROFILE

Karen Lincoln Michel

'Working for [Indigenous media] is like coming home'

Before becoming president and CEO of IndiJ Public Media and president of ICT in January 2020, Karen Lincoln Michel refined her skills — and climbed the ladder — at a succession of news organizations.

She started as a reporter at the *La Crosse Tribune* in her home state of Wisconsin, alternately covering higher education, the environment, minority affairs, and the Ho-Chunk Nation, her own tribe.

Her management gigs in mainstream media included being publisher and executive editor of *Madison Magazine* in Wisconsin; executive editor of *The Daily Advertiser* in Lafayette, Louisiana; and assistant managing editor of the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, also in her home state.

Michel has served as president of UNITY: Journalists of Color; as president of the Native American Journalists Association, which recently became the Indigenous Journalists Association; and on the board of the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism.

She's grateful for the route she has taken and, most especially, her current stop at Arizona-based ICT, formerly known as Indian Country Today.

This is an abridged version of Michel's conversation with the Women's Media Center.

On what grounded her news reporting in mainstream newsrooms: The teachings and the values of my Ho-Chunk people. I was raised and brought up with those values.

I came to journalism because I saw the need for Native people to be involved in journalism. As I practiced mainstream journalism, I grappled internally with its values.

Native journalists provide that historical context. We know our communities. So we know the questions to ask, we know what's important. Our communities are very complex, given their ties to the federal government and federal policies. Those nuances, we understand.

And if you don't know the nuance, if you don't take time to find that out, then your coverage is inconsistent. It's inaccurate. It reduces the story to the stereotypes of Native people and communities.

On her leadership style: When I got to run my own newsroom, on the first day, I told my staff, 'We're going to operate on some basic core values. One of them is that we'll have respect for each other, our individuality, and where we each come from.'

It's important that we not talk to people any kind of way ... that we respect, for instance, different religious holidays and, for the Native community, different ceremonies and what they mean. We need to have policies in place — that are firmly supported and practiced — that allow for differences. There can't be a single way of doing things because that doesn't take staff diversity into account.

On how her path to the C-suite seems (but really isn't) accidental: I didn't have a plan to be on the business side, or even to be a leader. Opportunities came my way. And when they did, I wanted to do my best in that particular job. And at every level of opportunity, I always thought, 'This is going to be the pinnacle, this will be as far as I rise.'



Karen Lincoln Michel, president and CEO of IndiJ Public Media and president of ICT

Opportunity would just come along. That seemed to be a pattern throughout my career. And others encouraged me. Sometimes others see the talent in you first. They help to prepare you for the next step toward being a leader or taking more responsibility.

On what she loves about her current job: ICT and its parent company, IndiJ Public Media, are experiencing a lot of growth.

We're expanding from two bureaus to nine. We just opened a bureau in Montana in April 2023, and we have plans to open another bureau in the Northwest in the fall. We also have a newscast five days a week that goes out across PBS stations and public television stations in Australia. We are trying to make sure that as many people as possible see our content. There's a lot of excitement around that.

There's also the fact that we're trying to build a different kind of company, one that's built on Indigenous values. Our executive team and board members identified seven values that we are building our company on, and incorporating those values into the workplace.

All of the values resonate with me. But one value that I'd say most newsrooms don't have is humility. There are different interpretations of what humility is. For me, it is really knowing who you are as a person, your strengths and weaknesses; it's knowing that we're all equal.

Knowing that we're in this together creates a better atmosphere.

On how her career has come full circle: When I was going to public school, I often was the only Native person or I was one of very few. I tried but couldn't reconcile the values and priorities I was raised with with those of the larger society. They were at odds with each other. My worldview was different.

I got my degree in journalism, then started down a career path in newspapers, in mainstream media, where the values also were different. Internally, I was always grappling with that.

Working for ICT is like coming home.

PRINT

Restructuring newsroom systems by leading strategically and assertively

Tearing down, then rebuilding structures is what Charo Henríquez was doing even before she left her Puerto Rico hometown for the media capital of Manhattan where, in 2015, she became executive editor of *People en Español*.



Charo Henríquez, head of newsroom development and support, *The New York Times*

The next year, Henríquez landed at *The New York Times*, where, in 2020, she was promoted to become head of newsroom development and support, a nod to her work as a digital innovator.

“We didn’t have computers or internet connectivity at home,” says Henríquez of Puerto Rico, where, when she started her career in 1996, most people accessed the internet through less-expensive mobile devices.

“We were on Facebook, we were on social media constantly with our families, we were on WhatsApp doing, like, internal messaging and sharing information with our families,” adds Henríquez, who became a manager at age 26. “That was the cultural context of how we were using the internet and of how we were using technology in my community. That developed me as a digital journalist.”

Certainly, Henríquez says, she’s focused on how news and technology intersect. But that’s not all. She’s also intent on making her mark on newsroom culture; one manifestation of this interest is dialoguing in Spanish with other Spanish-speaking staffers as she circulates through *Times* offices — signaling a key part of herself to whoever is in earshot. Talking in her native language, in its own way, shows people of color in particular that their presence and perspectives should be on full display, that they should be eyeing a range of possibilities in news.

Her day-to-day duties regarding news and tech revolve largely around her own innovations. The training Henríquez developed for staffers includes intensive coaching in everything from writing to editing to audience development. “We’re not only elevating people’s skills, but also recognizing our great journalism by breaking down how we build this story, so that people can come in and collaborate and learn from each other,” she says.

That training includes a three-month-long “embed” program that transfers staffers to departments other than their own. “It’s about developing skills,” says Henríquez, who helped craft a call to action for diversity, equity, and inclusion that the *Times* released in 2021 — a document sparked by in-house concerns that the newspaper could be an inhospitable place for many to work and especially unfair for staffers of color.

Regarding the *Times* skills development effort, Henríquez notes: “And it’s an open application process, so we’re not cherry-picking who gets these opportunities. We’ve seen a direct impact, not only on the people who’ve done the embeds but also on the people who manage them.”

Bucking stereotypes is part of the job

Similarly, *USA Today*’s diversity efforts are designed to provide those aspiring to be a boss with the training they need. While she was *USA Today*’s vice president and executive editor of news and innovation, Asian American Kristen Go, who recently became top editor of CalMatters in her home state, says her excitement about steering those initiatives was motivated partly by how unprepared she was to take charge when she became a newsroom leader. That began when she was in her mid-20s and starting to supervise a group of reporters at *The Arizona Republic*.

“I thought I knew more than I actually did. I was impatient and didn’t understand some of the things I know now,” says Go, while applauding measures higher-ups at the *Republic* took back then to help her and other women of color advance as bosses.



Kristen Go, editor-in-chief, CalMatters

"I appreciate that even more," she adds, "especially when I work with younger folks trying to make that transition into management. I also had really good mentors who were honest about what I needed to work on."

Years later, at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, she was confident enough as a manager to make some necessary demands. "I did a lot of our recruiting," she says, of what transpired in 2014 after she started working in that Bay Area city, which is on track to become majority-minority. "The face of the newsroom dramatically changed. And it took a while to change that. It wasn't until I was managing editor that we saw that focus. I was very vocal about that.

"I told an editor, 'Don't bring another person who does not bring diversity to interview with me — until you show me more diversity in our ranks.' They were floored that I was that blunt."

Her bluntness derived, in part, Go contends, from stereotypes she'd faced down in her own past, including as a student reporter at her California high school.

Compared to her outspoken older sister, she was reticent. "'Asians don't rock the boat. Asians are quiet,'" she says, running down some stereotypes.

"My sister was always the chatty one," she adds. "I was the one who was always observing, taking in what was going on. As an introvert, the power of observation — especially when it comes to reporting — is really important. It's important even more so as a manager, being able to read the room as something is happening. That lets me take notes on how a person reacted and shows me the need to follow up with them. It's tapping into emotional intelligence."

It's a leadership style that helps level the proverbial playing field for women of color. "She's really had my back," *USA Today* national correspondent [Deborah Berry](#), who is Black, has said of Go, her former boss. Berry was a 2022–23 Harvard University Nieman Fellow who has reported throughout the American South and parts of West Africa for *USA Today*.

Women news leaders of color — who represent roughly 9% of traditional print newsroom managers, according to the [News Leaders Association's most recent data](#) — often take the lead in ensuring that journalists of color get to cover, among other critical news topics, stories centering people and communities of color and their concerns, those leaders say.

Making a mark by managing well

Women constitute 70% of senior executives at the Associated Press, says [Daisy Veerasingham](#), the first woman and person of color to head that 180-year-old global news wire.

Named as AP's president and CEO in August 2021, the trained lawyer had spent much of her earlier career as the only woman and/or person of color on a particular rung of the ladder at work. She has learned, she says, to embrace that singularity.



Daisy Veerasingham, president and CEO, Associated Press
(photo: Associated Press)

"There are two sides to being the only," says British-born Veerasingham, who is of Sri Lankan descent. "There are the negatives. Often, you feel like a spotlight is being shone on you all the time. You feel the pressure, the obstacles, the hurdles of that.

"But on the other side of it, I started to understand how being the only actually can be a change agent. I looked for allies — and sometimes some of your best allies are the people that are the most different from you — and I looked for the commonalities amongst other people that weren't necessarily always about gender or color."

She adds that although it's laudable that so many women in the news industry are snagging top jobs, women of color in news media still have a long way to go.

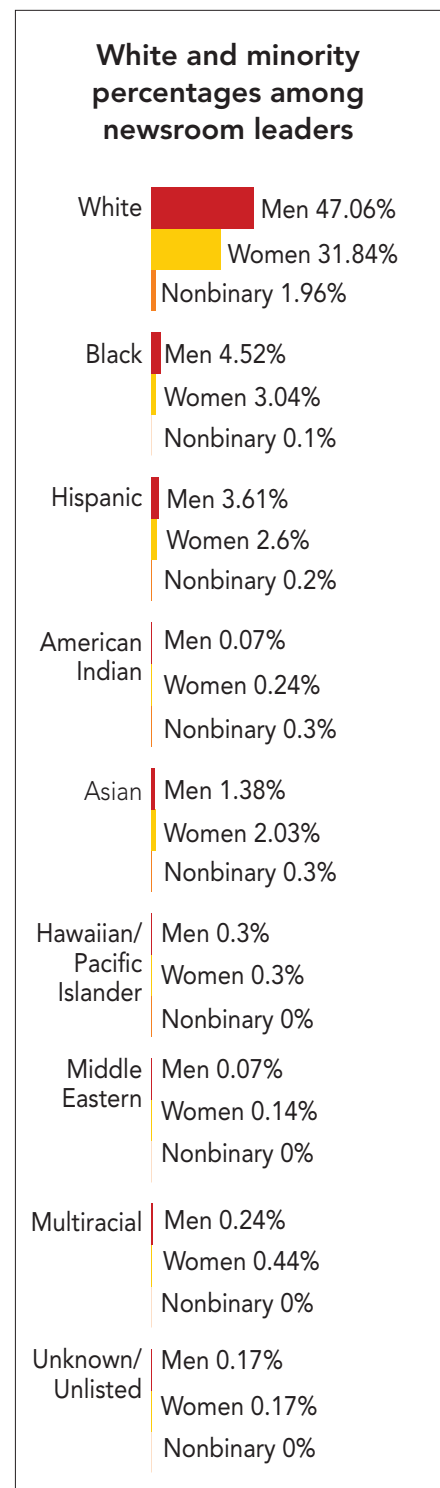
“Progress is being made, but I don’t think we’re at a breakthrough yet. The biggest challenge for women of color is to ensure that this pipeline of talent is continuing to be developed.”

Veerasingham is among women news leaders who say they didn’t set their sights on the corner office when they started out professionally. “It was just that I love that I could actually make a difference in terms of directions, strategy, taking people along with me. I have the ability to encourage, influence, mentor, drive, all of those things that I’ve found people responded to.”

“When you show people good management,” the *Times’* Henríquez says, “what’s working, when you’re coaching people who run teams and they start seeing the result, the output — the culture automatically becomes more collaborative.”

Collaborations that yield richer, truer journalism are intentional. They don’t arise by accident. But, Henríquez adds, many newsrooms are notorious for just winging it. For example, they often promote someone who’s been an extraordinary reporter, without training that person to be a good supervisor.

“Usually, we’ve managed the outcome, the story, instead of the people and the culture,” says Henríquez, who also is a member of the *Times’* culture and careers team. “But the objective of our team is creating a great culture where excellent journalism happens. We’re creating equitable processes and systems where people get opportunities. The whole environment around how the news happens and how it’s produced is as important as the output.”



SOURCE: News Leaders Association 2019 Diversity Survey

PRINT PROFILE

Leona Allen Ford

Now second-in-command at her hometown's big newspaper, Allen Ford follows other Black pioneers

Promoted in 2020 to be DallasNews Corp.'s **deputy publisher and chief talent and diversity officer**, Leona Allen Ford ascended to that spot after stints as a reporter, then editorial writer, then deputy managing editor for local news at what is the nation's 11th-largest daily newspaper, *The Dallas Morning News*, her company's flagship.

In 1994, she returned to that publication in her hometown from the *Akron Beacon Journal* in Ohio, where she was a lead reporter on 1994's **Pulitzer Prize-winning** series, "A Question of Color." Before Akron, she reported for the *Dallas Times Herald*, which shuttered in 1991.

Allen Ford, who is Black, dubs herself an "inclusion advocate, leadership developer ... and change leader across multiple print and digital platforms."

This is an abridged version of her conversation with the Women's Media Center.

Why did you choose the news business?

I got the bug in high school in Dallas, starting with the newspaper at Skyline High. At that majority-White charter school there weren't a lot of people who looked like me in our journalism classes.

Lola Johnson and **Clarise Tinsley**, who is still on the air, were among the few Black people, and certainly Black women, who were news broadcasters in Dallas at the time. I was planning to go into broadcast initially, but I also loved writing. And at Skyline, where I was living through the integration of Dallas schools, I was always trying to tell those stories of how Black students thrust into that environment were adjusting.

What made you want to work in the city where you were born and raised?

I was interested in really giving a voice to communities like the southern suburbs of Desoto, Lancaster, Cedar Hill — and in probing how its shift, its spike in Black residents happened. Those residents also were in search of better schools and the opportunities that any parent — Black, White, blue, green, or purple — wants. How can we tell those stories in robust and deep ways, with real analysis?

My focus has been on running the suburban team and the full metro team in ways that differentiate us, inclusively, showing the sense of place here as the community has continued to change. Now, Dallas County is 40% Latino.

I've worked to help our teams understand: 'You cannot cover these communities by sitting at your desk.'

How do you execute that kind of strong, expansive, contextual coverage?

Like a lot of newsrooms, we've struggled. We've not had enough journalists of color and not a lot at the executive level. You realize that reporters of color can't be the only ones doing these stories on communities of color.

So, for our editors, I organized a bus tour of South Dallas, where most residents are Black and, after that, Brown. We have to see for ourselves what the stories are. We have to show that those stories are not all about poverty and strife.

We've been meeting people from community groups, from church groups, gathering them in the same place to listen and to talk.



Leona Allen Ford, deputy publisher and chief talent and diversity officer, DallasNews Corp.

It's all of our jobs to cover this community authentically, building sources and knowing neighborhoods. Many drive to our office from their White middle-class neighborhoods. You will not know the Dallas-Fort Worth area doing that.

These sessions with community groups and so forth have been going on intermittently for decades. Are you surprised that diversity in coverage still requires all this extra effort?

I describe this as a journey. We will continue to be on it.

Now the competition isn't just media companies. We've lost staffers to architecture companies, dental offices. Everyone was realizing, 'I need writers, people who can analyze data.' Our skills are transferrable.

We are still in this tough, tough fight. One of the first things I did as a leader is push the idea of promoting from within, burnishing people's skills, creating a pipeline, returning to having a full-time recruiter, not just a point person in HR who doesn't really know what journalism is.

How far has that gone in shaping the demographics of the newsroom?

Our rank-and-file staffing is decent. But our leadership continues to be overwhelmingly White and male. Women make up 44% of leadership, which nevertheless is 69% White.

And we know that, in the decision-making about what and who gets covered, who's in leadership is key.

In 2020, I started a leadership development program. It's a tool for recruiting, retention, and growth. Seventy-two people have gone through that program, which provides one-on-one coaching from an outside expert. The program has a selection committee that makes sure that the pool of program applicants is diverse.

Another linchpin is we started a DEI council. We've someone from every team on it. The council came up with the idea that we'd have a year-round diversity recruiter.

We put in protocols around hiring. Don't send me a hiring pool that isn't diverse. We are repurposing our recruitment at job fairs and again attending conferences of the journalists of color organizations, after most companies had pulled back.

We work with Larry Graham, a former journalist who is the founder and executive director of the [Diversity Pledge Institute](#), an incubator of diverse talent.

As you make those strides, what remaining challenges are you mindful of?

We're making that transition to digital, while print is still paying the bills. That's a major challenge.

We're facing that challenge with [Katrice Hardy](#) as our executive editor. She's creating fantastic content and the most diverse newsroom leadership team — I think, in the country — of journalists who really understand how to put stories together and connect them to our audiences. She's a stellar journalist and a Black woman from Louisiana who understands how to cover the entire community.

I am grateful and proud to be in a place where we are not in a doomsday mindset. We're not a dying industry. We will be in a different form. But local journalism is more important now than ever. If we are not there, what will the public know about what's happening with their tax dollars? With the police department?

We're covering this community as inclusively as we can. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that our population's diversity is increasing. For DallasNews Corp. to grow, we've got to stay focused on that growth.

It's not just a social construct, it's a business imperative.

DIGITAL

Fellowships, training academies, deliberate intent drive digital news' diversity

Through recruitment and retention initiatives expressly for women and people of color, women of color leading online-only newsrooms say they are helping recover some of the diversity lost during a yearslong news industry downsizing.



Sara Kehaulani Goo, editor-in-chief, Axios

They do so with an acute awareness that most newsrooms have never mirrored the nation's racial and gender makeup, and never met their own diversity goals. Some of the reasons are still sadly apparent.

To prove the point, Sara Kehaulani Goo repeats what four journalists in Axios' inaugural class of diversity-focused newsroom fellows — two women and two men — echoed when they joined that news site in 2022: "I've been trying to cover these stories and my editor doesn't get. I've been covering race but my editor doesn't get it," says Goo, Axios' editor-in-chief.

"There's this lack of internal support," Goo adds.

Being able to provide that support is central to her job and part of what motivated her move into management: "When I entered [journalism], I had some really great mentors and allies. It's my duty to not only give that back but to model something different. It's my duty to create some different expectations, where diverse representation is the norm, not the exception. A truly inclusive newsroom is really important to ensuring the integrity of what we cover."

That's an ethos shared by HuffPost Editor-in-Chief Danielle Belton. In 2022, a year after she began helming that more than 18-year-old digital operation, it returned to profitability for the first time in several years. More diversity likely will further improve the bottom line, Belton says. (The World Economic Forum concluded the same in a [2021 report](#) on media diversity.) Among other moves, Belton has empowered those overseeing HuffPost's inclusion efforts to actually do their jobs — and refuses to accept "the same old excuses about how 'we couldn't find the right candidate.'"



Danielle Belton, editor-in-chief, HuffPost

"There were five Black [newsroom] employees when I got here," Belton adds. "Now, there are 15."

She rattles off the names of editors who are women and/or of color, crediting them with recent progress made. They include [Kate Palmer](#), one of two co-executive editors and part of HuffPost's seven-person [masthead](#), which includes two men. Belton also lists [Rajul Punjabi](#), the woman who directs HuffPost [Voices](#), launched in 2022 as a remake of what began, more narrowly, as Black Voices. Now, it covers issues across a spectrum of race and gender.

Across digital-only news sites, many of them nonprofit endeavors, women persistently have been running things. Women executives outnumbered men executives each year since 2016, according to the Institute for Nonprofit News. In 2022, women occupied 52.3% of the top three executive positions and 60.4% of other executive and manager positions at the 328 member newsrooms providing responses to INN's [Index 2023: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Nonprofit News Sector](#). That most recent INN survey also found that 51% of all staffers were female; and 36% were of color, 55% were White, and 9% chose not to disclose their race.



Yvette Cabrera, president, National Association of Hispanic Journalists

Says Center for Public Integrity senior reporter [Yvette Cabrera](#), noting recent years' layoffs and other leavings, disproportionately by journalists of color: "We've been talking about achieving newsroom parity. But we are so far from that. Right now, we're trying to get back to those numbers that were lost."

But National Association of Hispanic Journalists President Cabrera, who covers inequality, offered a caveat: “I’m also optimistic, mostly because of the work I’m seeing happen, especially in nonprofit journalism: groups in Detroit investigating longstanding abuses of working-class neighborhoods; a Bay Area nonprofit that’s looking at Latino immigrant communities, plus Indigenous communities from Latin America and Mexico with different needs and who speak [an ancient] dialect. For many of us, this kind of stepping up to meet the needs for local news is inspiring.”

Sex, race, place, experiences determine coverage

Making the 24/7 news cycle expansive and credible means women journalists and journalists of color, as their colleagues do, should let their news coverage be informed by race, ethnicity, place of origin, residence, sexual identity, and other aspects of their personhood, says **Amanda Zamora**, co-founder and publisher of **The 19th**.

“And we have to do that without doubting our ability or skills or value. It makes the journalism all the more powerful,” says Zamora, a board member of **Chicas Poderosas**, which tackles gender equity in newsrooms worldwide.

The staff at The 19th is 76% female, 11% nonbinary, and 65% of color. Launched in August 2020, its stated mission is to deliver service-oriented “free-to-consume and free-to-republish journalism,” mainly exploring issues relevant to those who are LGBTQ and/or women.

Such journalists seem more apt to investigate not only inequities of gender and race but also other divides, says Zamora, whose initial interest in a news career was fed by events in her Mexican father’s home country and in politics.

She cites how The Texas Tribune demographics reporter **Alexa Ura**, including in her 2023 coverage, has tracked the overwhelming whiteness and maleness of the Texas State Legislature. “She writes this same story every time a session starts again in Texas, a majority-minority state,” says Zamora, who previously worked with Ura at that 14-year-old Austin-based organization.



Amanda Zamora, co-founder and publisher, The 19th

Digital Leadership

Percentage of online newsrooms with a minority in a top-three leadership position

29.00%

Percentage of online newsrooms with a woman in a top-three leadership position

82.20%

SOURCE: News Leaders Association
*2019 Diversity Survey

It’s the first place, Zamora says, where she “didn’t get into trouble” for voicing strong opinions pinpointing, among other things, where news coverage and newsroom culture go awry. **Emily Ramshaw**, then the Tribune’s editor-in-chief, welcomed Zamora’s input and her approach to reporting the news.

“That was the first time I really felt empowered by my boss, empowered even to contradict her,” Zamora says, of Ramshaw, The 19th’s co-founder and member of *Forbes’* 2020 “40 Under 40” list. “She didn’t need to have the answers.

She really gave me a lot of confidence to have the answer and advocate for the answer, even if it meant disrupting what was already common practice.

“That was the beginning of me being the leader that I am — and that I am still becoming — today.”

DIGITAL PROFILE

SWATI SHARMA

Vox's 'outsider' editor-in-chief aims to make change on the inside

Before becoming editor-in-chief of Vox in March 2021, [Swati Sharma](#) spent more than three years at *The Atlantic*, ultimately as its managing editor, directing daily reporting and all of the news coverage teams: culture, education, family, health, global, ideas, politics, science, and technology. (Swati recently was also named publisher.)



Swati Sharma, publisher, editor-in-chief, Vox

Before joining *The Atlantic*, the South Asian American executive spent more than four years at *The Washington Post*, where, alternately, she was a breaking news assignment editor and foreign and national security digital editor. Earlier in her career, at *The Boston Globe*, she covered nightlife and hyperlocal news, and coordinated some of the Boston Marathon bombing coverage that helped the *Globe* win a Pulitzer Prize.

This is an abridged version of Sharma's conversation with the Women's Media Center.

Why did you choose journalism? Why have you stayed in the craft?

I've always believed that ignorance can cause a lot of societal harms. One way to combat that is through information. And a big part of journalism is trying to reach all sorts of people in all sorts of communities. That's been my driving force.

You became a story editor fairly early in your career and, from there, got on the management track. Was that on purpose? Strategic?

I've great mentors, people who supported me, helped train me, and gave me the chance to become a manager. I started managing people when I was about 30. Stepping into that role, back when I was at *The Washington Post*, was pretty deliberate. And being in management, over time, has become an even more deliberate thing for me.

Constantly, I'm trying to be better at this. Because the journalism is only as good as the culture of a newsroom. And management defines the culture.

What are the easy parts of your job? The challenges?

We're up against a lot, especially considering how the internet plays into all of this.

The way people get news is constantly changing. That presents a challenge, but also an opportunity. One of the skills that you really need as a journalist is being comfortable with constant change.

I came to Vox because it's been a game-changer. It's doing the kind of journalism I believe in. Through three different mediums of storytelling, we're doing news stories that have a certain approachability, that are easy to understand and offer clarity.

Plus, we don't have a paywall. This goes back to my personal mission: People really need and want information.

What's your assessment of Vox's gender and race diversity?

We've got a good amount of diversity, especially when it comes to women. In editorial, 59% of the staff is female and 40% is of color; in leadership at Vox, overall, 60% are female and 39% are of color.

Wherever I am, I always want to make the diversity balance better.

How do you do that?

By making diversity a mindset — something that is at the core of what we do — not an extra. We have to have people around us who reflect our society.

When we're recruiting, we have to think in terms of the big picture, of the skills that you really, really need journalists to have already and the skills that are teachable to newcomers to the craft. I think that opens up the pool a lot more.

One thing that I think about a lot is 'What happens if certain people aren't in the newsroom?'

I came to the industry as a kind of outsider. I went to community college. I'm the first journalist in my family. But I found my way and learned how things work. That's great. But it's actually not what I want for people. If you're not from this world, I want it to be easier for you to figure out your path, grow, figure out your next step. We must be about helping people — no matter their background — to thrive.

How does being a woman of color influence your walk, if you will, through the newsroom and the industry? Does your staff notice these aspects of you?

Because I do still see myself as that outsider, I really try to talk to people and connect with people and make sure that they know their path. My favorite cliché is 'Clarity is kindness.' The clearer you are with people and the clearer they are about what their path is, the better it is for the newsroom. That's as true for people who have room to grow as for someone who is shining professionally.

Also, I discuss how we shouldn't only think about race or talk to diverse sources when the story, for example, is about hate crimes against Asian Americans. We should always have diverse sources. That's a burden — no, an opportunity — that we all share. We need that awareness about race and gender no matter what the story is. The responsibility to find diverse sources shouldn't just be on people from diverse backgrounds.

What advice do you give women of color who aspire to management?

One, it's important to know your story and how that story drives your mission as a journalist. Why are you here?

Also, it's really important to always be you. Be you as you listen and talk to people. That's really good advice no matter what level you're on, but it's especially critical when you're a manager.

Also, I have my own personal board of directors, made of peers and mentors and others, including people who are not in the industry, who have known me since Day 1. It's those people who keep me honest. My success is their success.

RADIO

Diversity pays off at radio networks, international and domestic

Women direct five of the seven news divisions at **Voice of America**, a news network of the independent U.S. Agency for Global Media, broadcasting in 48 languages across 100 nations.

Born in Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Morocco, and Pakistan, each director's talent and experience earned them those jobs, says Yolanda Lopez, who, until fall 2023, was acting director of the 2,000-employee, Washington, D.C.-headquartered network that delivers news in 40 languages.



Yolanda Lopez, former acting director, Voice of America

The fact that five directors are female also results from creating a certain kind of work atmosphere. "There has been an effort, especially by Amanda," Lopez says, referring to roughly seven years' worth of diversity initiatives spearheaded by former investigative journalist and editor **Amanda Bennett**, CEO of the U.S. Agency for Global Media.

"Amanda wanted to make sure there is diversity, not only in our coverage but also in our leadership. Being a director of a division is one of our most coveted positions."

Continues Lopez, a native of Spain, who is White: "To make sure you hire the best, [sometimes] you have to rewind and see the process. How [fair] has it been? Have you opened up the job description enough that everyone feels represented and everyone feels comfortable applying?"

That's the sort of person-centered workplace that **NPR's Erika Aguilar**, a Latina, applauds.

"I think of myself more as a coach than anything," says Aguilar, named in October 2021 as executive producer of NPR's flagship *Morning Edition* and its even earlier 10-minute podcast, *Up First*.

"The coach," she says, "is going to tell you that you're awesome when you're awesome. They're also going to tell you when you've underperformed. Because what the coach really cares about is that you've at least tried to be your best self every day."

Indeed, who people are, where they come from and reside, how they navigate the world, and so forth factor into how fully they bring their best to newsgathering, adds Aguilar, an alum and mentor of NPR's **Next Gen Radio** project for young journalists of color. An array of differences and commonalities — including gender and race — are critical to developing news stories and the growing audiences those stories attract.

"I tell my team, 'I want you to fall in love with the audience. I want you to learn who they are, what they want, and what they need. We're making content for them, and if they're not interested in it — if it's not enough, if it's not necessary for their daily lives and it's not something that they want in their daily lives — then why are you making it?'"

Being given an opportunity, and granting the same

The **RTDNA/Newhouse School at Syracuse University Survey's most recent analysis of local stations** (global and national news networks aren't surveyed) found that the minority workforce in radio news was 17.8%, the highest it's been in the survey's 28-year history. That's up 2 percentage points from the previous year's survey. Minorities were 9.9% of radio news directors and 7.7% of general managers.

Among radio news directors, 24.3% were women, which was down 1 percentage point from the prior year and 3.5 percentage points from two years prior. Among radio general managers, 25.1% were women, a slight 0.7 percentage point increase over the previous year.



Erika Aguilar, executive producer, *Morning Edition*, NPR

Some of the women of color who lead in radio are General Manager **Erika Pulley-Hayes** and Executive Editor for Regional News **Teresa Frontado**, both of WAMU in Washington, D.C.; CEO **Tina Pamintuan**, of STLPR in St. Louis; and News Director **Jacquelynn Hatter** of WFSU in Tallahassee, Florida. NPR's Aguilar started out as a reporter at local public radio stations in Texas and California. Voice of America's Lopez began as a reporter with a Texas affiliate of Telemundo, the Comcast-owned Spanish-language network. Neither says they set out to become managers.

Managing, says Aguilar, chuckling, is "what happens, sometimes, when you're the oldest sibling. And I'm the oldest of five. I don't know if I learned to be a boss or be a leader, per se. It's just a lived experience."

Lopez's own biography — a native Spaniard, she built a career at Spanish-language networks Univision and Telemundo — factors into her approach to diversity. "I am White, but I come from another country. I'm an immigrant," says Lopez, describing herself as something of an outsider.

"My mission," she adds, "is for the underdog. The underdog is my hero."

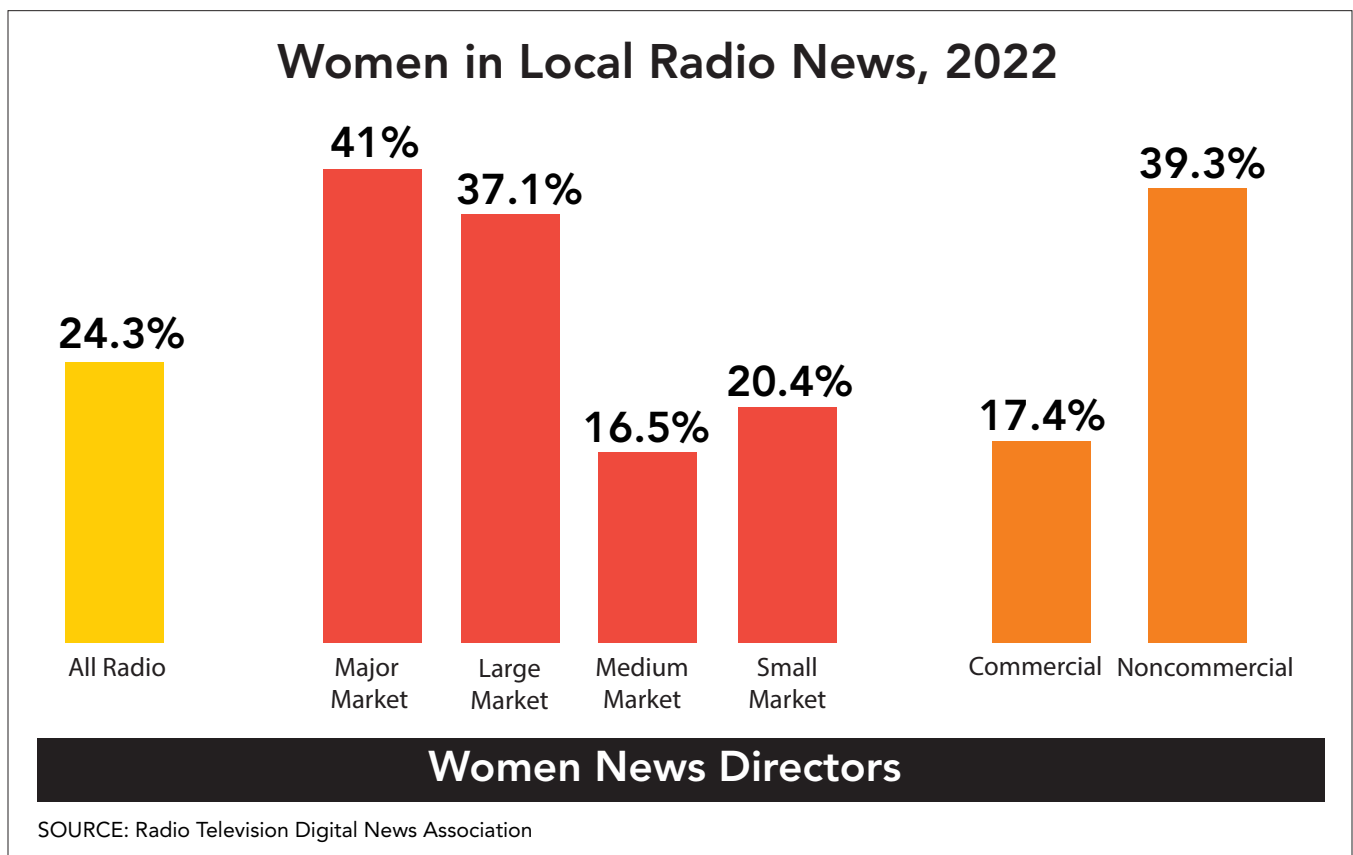
By that, she also means she's willing to advocate for those individuals and issues that are least likely to be prioritized by news managers with a less expansive view of what's newsworthy.

"We cater to such a global audience," she says. "We have to have people who are Vietnamese or Spanish or Creole ... Four White men [leading news operations] in South Central Asia won't work."

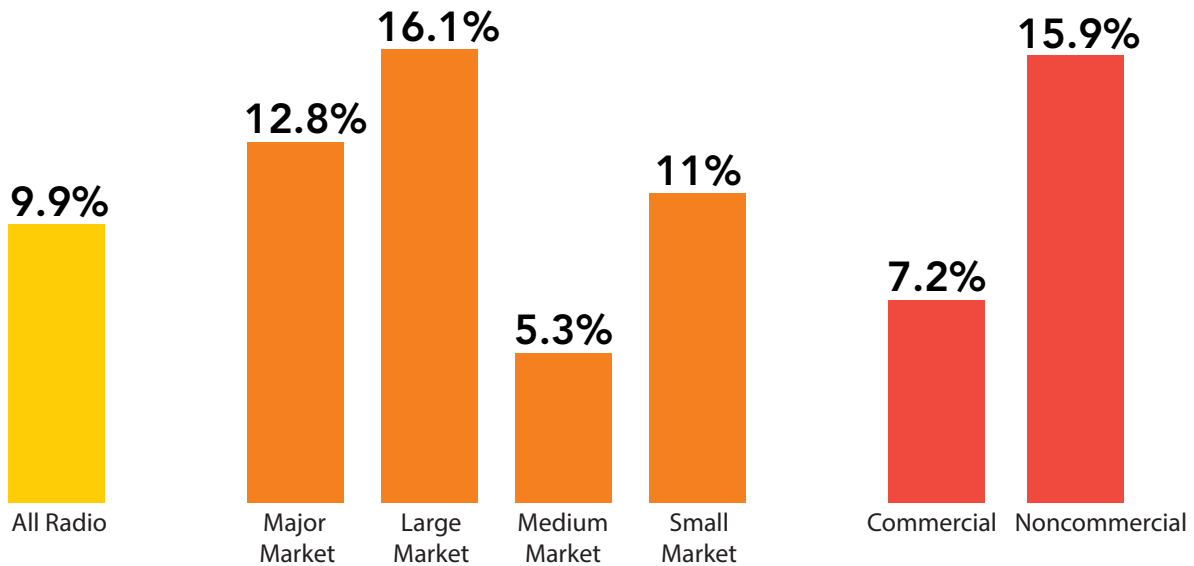
"I'm focusing on having women represented throughout our coverage and throughout the hiring process. If you take care of the process, then you will see that you have more diversity."

For her part, Lopez says, she does not necessarily "look good on paper" even though she, like many newswomen who lead, has her share of journalism awards. Likewise, when she is filling a job, she looks beyond the surface.

"Because I also am much more than what I look like on paper. With that attitude, I hire people ... Most of the time, I'm looking for the missing pieces. What is that we don't have that can bring value?"



Minorities in Local Radio News, 2022

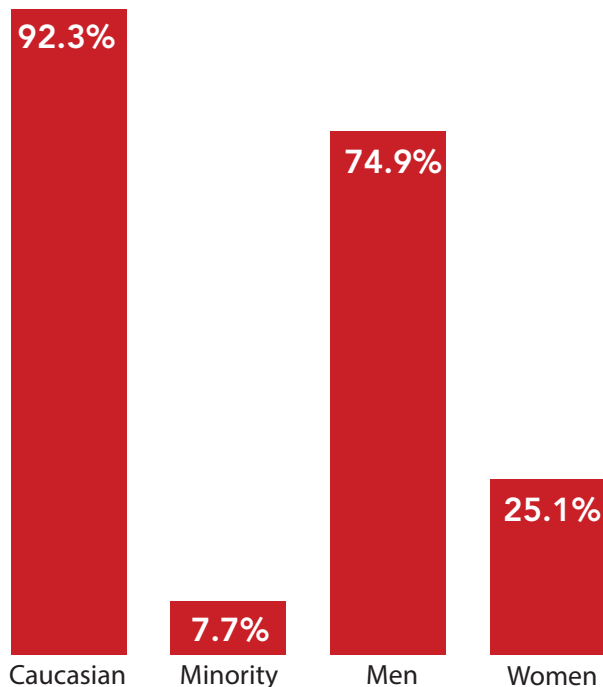


Minority News Directors

SOURCE: Radio Television Digital News Association

She continues, “I didn’t fit the profile. Still, people gave me the opportunity, knowing that I bring something different to the table. So I want to be able to see the outliers, the people who can be something different.”

Radio General Managers, 2022



SOURCE: Radio Television Digital News Association

Aguilar shares a similar sentiment, and offers herself as an example: “I bring a unique lived experience as somebody who has spent time in Texas and in California, two of the most populated states, but with starkly different politics, policies, processes. It might surprise people to hear this, but to see similarities between the two, especially right now, when we’ve had for a while a polarized society ... It’s not that I don’t see differences, I see a lot of common denominators.

“And my lived experience as a Latina is also a really great thing to bring to the show and to the team. Some young Latinas at NPR have said to me, ‘It’s so great to have you, even if you’re not my direct boss. It’s cool. Maybe I can do what you do someday.’”

RADIO PROFILE

MICHEL MARTIN

'Where can I add value? What aspect of the story is missing?'



Michel Martin, co-host, *Morning Edition*, NPR

In 1971, after New York City's WABC-TV fired Black journalist Melba Tolliver for sporting an Afro to President Nixon's daughter's wedding, an outraged fourth grader ordered her beautician to shear off her chemically straightened pigtails. It left that native New Yorker with an itty bitty natural of her own.

Ever since her schoolgirl's gesture of solidarity with Tolliver, journalist Michel Martin has worn an Afro nonstop — it's a preference and something of a declaration — including while working at *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and ABC News.

Martin moved from that TV network to National Public Radio 13 years ago, expressly to launch *Tell Me More*, which she developed and hosted until — against her objections — station bosses canceled it. Martin now co-hosts *Morning Edition*, NPR's news magazine.

This is an abridged version of Martin's conversation with the Women's Media Center.

On leading from the anchor's chair: As a host at NPR, you don't hire or fire people. But you're the brain trust of the show, the intellectual leadership of the show.

And you're a part of the emotional leadership of the show, helping people to bring out the best in themselves. One of the things I tell my staff is, 'If we're all having the same thoughts, we don't need to be here. What are you noticing in the world around you that is different from what I'm noticing?'

Diversity isn't just demographics. It is bringing the totality of people's knowledge, experience, and learning to the table. It makes for a richer experience for everyone. As a host, I try to stand up for that.

On telling your boss he made a wrong move: When they decided to cancel *Tell Me More*, its audience was soaring in number, and NPR caught flak from all across the country about the cancellation. I told them point-blank that I didn't like what they'd done. But this is not a democracy, right?

The seeds of what we planted with *Tell Me More* still are bearing fruit in other NPR shows that came afterward. *Life Kit*, for example, runs in segments and is news you can use. I'll argue that that type of service-oriented journalism, which some people used to look down on, is rooted in ethnic media. Especially at the turn of the last century, those media were answering questions of 'How do you live in this new world, how do you vote, how do you organize communities.' Why assume that everyone knows how to buy a car or house or manage debt when they've never done that before?

It would be great if more of us were media moguls, creating media empires and having access to those resources that let us do these stories on scale. Having said that, my attitude is that, when a door opens, you walk through it. I'm going to do what I can do in the time that I have. I'm going to tell the stories that I think need to be told in the way that I think they need to be told, with the people that I want to tell those stories.

I have always seen my role as 'Where can I add value? What voice is missing? What aspect of the story is missing?' And I'm also obviously thinking about parts of the audience that, perhaps, aren't top of mind for everybody. All of us should be doing that.

On being a mentor: Years ago, when I moderated a National Press Club panel, one of the lawyers on that panel said, 'Real mentoring takes place within the context of real work.'

I've made that my mantra. I have kids and a husband and, when my parents were alive, I had them to take care of. If I have any bandwidth beyond that, then I expand the circle. I understand that this causes some hurt feelings. I'll get emails from some nice young person in college, asking if I'll mentor them. And I'll often say, 'I want the best for you, but I don't know enough about what you're doing or what you're trying to do to be helpful to you.'

Plus, NPR has a formal mentoring program that I support. Even there, I'm very judicious; I do not take on a mentee every spring cohort or fall cohort. And the fall cohort is very intense, with us meeting with mentees every week, pushing and probing: 'What's been your rose? What's been your thorn? What do you need help with?'

If I'm in this relationship with you, I'm really in it. I want the experience to be meaningful to the person I'm actually working with, as opposed to some surface thing. I'm not going to shortchange it or be superficial about it.

On why the C-suite is important: Cheryl Deval is general manager of a public radio station in Louisiana. Kenya Young was named last year to the newly created position of senior vice president of WNYC Studios, which is part of New York Public Radio. Those are Black women.

Being on the business side of things used to be the furthest thing from my mind. Now it is on my mind, even if I don't think that's the direction that my career is going to take.

Yes, being a host is a position of leadership. But I'm hoping more people of color will understand and look at the decision, for example, to cancel *Tell Me More*. That was made in the C-suite, not the anchor chair. And I'm hoping that people will look at my advocacy and the argument I made for *Tell Me More* and for why that kind of programming matters.

I hope that people of color will think about the C-suite because that is where so many opportunities are created.

TOWARD PARITY: A WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER ROAD MAP

The Women's Media Center and several of the executives interviewed for this report offer a blueprint for news organizations striving to tell the fullest possible stories; to create news staffs reflecting our nation's racial, ethnic, and gender diversity; to increase the number of women of color in leadership positions; and to find leadership support.

"One of the first things I did as a leader is push the idea of promoting from within, burnishing people's skills, creating a pipeline, returning to having a full-time recruiter."

Leona Allen Ford, deputy publisher and chief talent and diversity officer, DallasNews Corp.

"I looked for allies — and sometimes some of your best allies are the people that are the most different from you — and I looked for the commonalities amongst other people that weren't necessarily always about gender or color."

Daisy Veerasingham, AP president and CEO

"When we're recruiting, we have to think in terms of the big picture, of the skills that you really, really need journalists to have already and the skills that are teachable to newcomers to the craft. I think that opens up the pool a lot more."

Swati Sharma, publisher, editor-in-chief, Vox

"And if you don't know the nuance, if you don't take time to find that out, then your coverage is inconsistent. It's inaccurate. It reduces the story to the stereotypes of Native people and communities."

Karen Lincoln Michel, president and CEO of IndiJ Public Media and president of ICT

For news CEOs and other executives

Set the standard. Let your midlevel and line managers and those who do the hiring know that diversity is not optional.

Conduct a personnel audit. What is the gender and ethnic makeup of your organization's rank-and-file employees, its decision-makers, and those in the pipeline for promotions? Set achievable goals for creating and maintaining a workplace that reflects the general population's diversity.

Encourage candid conversation about gender and racial parity. You do not have to be a woman or a person of color to speak out about why media content and context should be balanced and well-rounded, and how to achieve those ends.

Raise awareness. Educate your colleagues, bosses, neighbors, and friends about areas of newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, and online news where women and people of color and nonbinary people are acutely underrepresented and/or misrepresented and the impact of those realities on the corporate bottom line and on society.

Get serious about work-life balance for people of all genders. Flexible schedules and paid maternity, paternity, child care, and elder-care leave can boost worker productivity and devotion to their workplace. Employers need to provide workers with more options about how, when, and where to do their work throughout various life stages and amid various life demands.

For top, mid-level, and other front-line news managers

Staff with intention. Hire reporters, editors, producers, photographers, videographers, and other journalists who show proof of and capacity for reporting accurately and are mindful of gender, class, and ethnic diversity and how different groups, ideals, debates, and controversies intersect. Hire those who will cover a diversity of newsworthy topics and pursue a diversity of sources to flesh out those stories.

Mentor and encourage. In ways formal and informal, provide guidance, reassurance, and advice to young women of all races and classes who are considering journalism or are already in the field.

Diversify the source list. The Women’s Media Center’s [SheSource.org](https://www.womensmedia.org/she-source), the online brain trust of female experts on diverse topics, is explicitly designed to serve journalists, bookers, and producers who seek women experts as on-air guests and other sources of news and/or commentary. Encourage reporters to keep track of their source diversity and reward those who succeed in reaching pre-set targets of diversity.

Avoid biased or coded language and imagery. Just as good journalists examine their words for correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage, and style, so too — at all levels of the news delivery process — should they guard against biased language that could unfairly depict issues and people in the news. The Women’s Media Center website offers “[Unspinning the Spin: The Women’s Media Center Guide to Fair and Accurate Language](#),” a guide to fair and accurate language.

Clearly define sexism, racism, and ageism. Then make clear the federal, state, and local laws against discrimination and your organization’s system of ensuring it doesn’t creep into the workplace.

Monitor reader/viewer comments. Responses to news coverage that are posted on your site can shape perception/misperception of your news organization’s own philosophies and bent. Make sure reader/viewer feedback is neither needlessly inflammatory, provocative, malicious, racist, or sexist, nor a vehicle for spreading disinformation.

For concerned consumers of media

Demand accountability by:

Writing letters to the editor and station managers or taking other action — collectively, if necessary — to convey your concerns about coverage, newsroom staffing, etc. Press news executives for a speedy, reasonable, and reasoned response.

Knowing Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules on broadcast media ownership and joining the chorus of players who have been demanding that more efforts be made to increase the low number of TV and radio stations owned by women and people of color.

Letting your wallet do the talking. By all means, pay for some of the news you consume. It’s critical for those who advertise through news outlets, among others, to know where consumers are getting their information — and for journalists to earn a paycheck.



RESEARCH, REPORTS, PUBLICATIONS, AND CONTENT CHANNELS

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<https://womensmediacenter.com/news-features>

WMC Climate
<https://womensmediacenter.com/climate>

WMC IDAR/E
<https://womensmediacenter.com/idare>

WMC FBomb
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WMC Speech Project
<https://womensmediacenter.com/speech-project>

WMC Live with Robin Morgan
<https://womensmediacenter.com/wmclive>

WMC Women Under Siege
<https://womensmediacenter.com/women-undersiege>

WMC SheSource
<https://womensmediacenter.com/shesource>

Find all our reports here: <https://womensmediacenter.com/reports/category>

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Women's Media Center thanks our co-founders, Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem, for their vision and leadership. Our research on the representation of women in media is made possible through the generous support of The Ford Foundation, The Streisand Foundation, The Libra Foundation, Golden Mercer Charitable Giving Fund, The Pinpoint Foundation, and The Starry Night Fund. We are grateful to them for standing with us in our fight for equality, inclusion, and culture change.



This report's producers

Cristal Williams Chancellor is director of communications for the Women's Media Center, responsible for media communications, raising the visibility of the organization, and managing the production of many of WMC's reports. She was the editor of this report and WMC's previous report "The Status of Women of Color in the U.S. News Media 2018." Williams Chancellor is an award-winning journalist who spent the bulk of her career in newsroom and project management. Prior to coming to the Women's Media Center, she spent nearly 12 years at the American Society of News Editors. She was part of the team at the *Akron Beacon Journal* that won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize Gold Medal for Meritorious Public Service for a yearlong series focusing on race relations.



Katti Gray is a journalist who specializes in health/mental health and criminal justice news. Her bylines have appeared in a range of national and regional publications. She is the writer of this report. Katti's also a ghostwriter and editor, including for the Center for Sustainable Journalism's twin publications, *Youth Today* and *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*. As program director for the New York University Urban Journalism Workshop, she's helping to groom a next generation of journalists and journalism leaders. She has also been an adjunct professor at Hunter College and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Among other prizes, she shares a Pulitzer Prize with a team from *Newsday* in New York and has been a Pulitzer juror. In a nonadvocacy role, she creates custom content for philanthropy and some small nonprofits.



Diahann Hill has worked internationally in print, web, television, and film for 40 years, as an artist, graphic designer, art director, and stage and costume designer. She studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. In addition to her work with Xola promoting sustainable, locally controlled, and ecofriendly international tourism in India, Greenland, Mongolia, and elsewhere, Ms. Hill's career has found a primary focus in women's rights and civil rights in the United States. She has worked extensively with People for the American Way, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Economic Policy Institute, and Project Kid Smart. She is honored to be the designer for the Women's Media Center.



Barbara Findlen, the features editor for the Women's Media Center, copy edited this report. She's been working as a journalist for more than 30 years, including 13 years at *Ms.* magazine, where she ultimately served as executive editor. She is the editor of the anthology *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation* and coauthor, with Kristen Golden, of *Remarkable Women of the Twentieth Century: 100 Portraits of Achievement*.

Christin M. Smith, Ph.D., is a researcher-in-residence at the Trust Project, where she leads research projects that focus on news media transparency, trustworthiness, and user-centered design. She earned her doctoral degree in communication, culture, and media studies at Howard University. A published communication scholar and media expert on Afrofuturism, hip-hop culture, and religious studies, Dr. Smith's research interests include Afrofuturism, gender studies, hip-hop, feminism, popular culture, and religious studies. She was the fact-checker for this report.



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