

# In the Shadow of Kerner: Fifty Years Later, Newsroom Diversity and Equity Stall | Shorenstein Center

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The staffing of the American news media has never fully reflected the diversity of the nation. For most of the country's history, Latino and non-white journalists were not welcomed in white-run newsrooms and, through their own news outlets, produced content which shed light on issues the white press was ignoring. In the 1890s, journalist Ida B. Wells covered lynchings the mainstream news outlets would not. In the 1950s and 1960s, newspapers and television networks struggled to cover the Civil Rights era with only a rare few black journalists in their newsrooms. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, popularly known as the Kerner Commission, was convened by President Lyndon B. Johnson against the backdrop of cities burning in what were then called "race riots." Among the 1968 report's broader findings, key sections criticized news coverage of race and politics, pointing out the lack of diversity in America's newsrooms.

Half a century later, in a year filled with prominent Civil Rights era commemorations including the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., questions persist about newsroom staffing. The American Society of News Editors' stated goal in 1978 to steadily bring newsroom diversity numbers to parity with national averages has not materialized, despite the large demographic shift in America's racial and ethnic makeup. The ASNE's annual newsroom diversity survey shows that Latino and non-whites made up 12 percent of newspaper editorial staff in 2000, and by 2016, that had edged up to only 17 percent. The United States population is currently 38 percent Latino or non-white, more than double the percentage of newsroom representation. In 2016, women were 51 percent of the U.S. population, but made up only 38 percent of newspaper editorial staff. The Women's Media Center found that, "at 20 of the nation's top

news outlets [in 2017], men produced 62.3 percent of news reports analyzed while women produced 37.7 percent of news reports.”

[...]

This paper begins with a focus on the Kerner and Civil Rights era; progresses into research on the diversity of 2016 political news teams; and ends by exploring what might be done to create more diverse newsrooms. How have newsrooms changed, or failed to change? How prepared, willing and able are newsrooms to learn from their own behavior in a politically turbulent time? And what does this all mean for media equity, now and in the future?

Source: [In the Shadow of Kerner: Fifty Years Later, Newsroom Diversity and Equity Stall – Shorenstein Center](#)