

RECOMMENDATION

60



SET STANDARDS FOR REPORTING ON VISIBLE MINORITIES

Identify: A common practice in local reporting is to identify without any justification the race of criminals or crime victims if they happen to be visible minorities. In a notorious case of child abuse, the mother's place of birth was mentioned early in the story, identifying her as a visible minority, while the birth place of the father, a white man, was not mentioned at all.

Lurid: Sometimes photographs of the accused in minor criminal cases identify them as visible minorities when this is not done in the story. In addition, crime in minority communities is often reported in a lurid and impressionistic manner.

Reinforces: Racial overtones are also conveyed by the selection of photographs that accompany an article. For example, a leading Canadian newspaper ran an article on its front page about the plight of welfare recipients in the United States, using a photograph of a black woman. In the continuation of the article on an inside page, another photograph, that of a black man, was used. The words did not discuss the race of the welfare recipients, but the pictures conveyed the message that Black people are the predominant or sole consumers of American welfare dollars, when in fact, whites comprise 80 per cent of welfare cases. The visual message clearly reinforces the erroneous belief of many Canadians that visible minorities are on welfare more often than not.

Position: Racial overtones can also be conveyed by the positioning or layout of news items. For example, the same newspaper ran three brief news items about criminal acts and about imprisonment. Each item involved a Native or East Indian person. Each item in itself was unbiased, but they followed each other in one column, thus giving the impression that certain races can constantly be associated with crime and imprisonment. Here we have the feeding of another negative stereotype of visible minorities.

RECOMMENDATION:

Press councils should increase their capability to deal with racist reporting and set standards for reporting on visible minorities for the print media.