

DeWayne Wickham: Thank you, Senator. I needed the assistance of Eugene here. You know, Eugene is a multi-tasker in journalism today, he does both broadcast and print so he helped me there.

I caught just the tail end of the previous panel and so I may repeat some of the things that were said and, in fact, I prepared some remarks, which I will not read, but I will draw down from some of the points that I have printed here. I have a position at North Carolina A&T State University where I serve as the distinguished professor of journalism in a school of journalism and mass communications, which has an enrollment of in excess of 500 students, virtually none of whom want to be journalists.

It's kind of an interesting situation I find myself in. Most of them want to make, many of them want to make rap videos, short films, some of them see themselves as people who are going to leave the University, the Academy as they say and immediately begin their own record label. And they all amass there in this school of journalism and mass communications and it speaks to, I think, in many ways the frustration that many of us have about the state of the industry. And it brings me to this point.

In journalism, if you can find someone who's interested in journalism and you would teach them, in a journalism class, an introductory class, at some point you would begin to talk to them about what makes news. The decision making process. We like to do that. I don't know if Dr. Rosen is still here, but he would probably support me on that. I think that in one of his books there's a discussion of what makes news and we lay out all of these things. Names make news, conflict makes news and I do that, I talk about all that and then I say to them, but the most important factor in that determination is who gets to decide. And so as you begin to talk about failed coverage of issues of inequality and poverty and race, the question ought to arise, who gets to decide, who gets to decide about what it is we do in journalism.

And let me tell you a couple of things about that. Obviously the Kerner Commission in it's 1968 report thought that was an important issue and challenged the media to be more aggressive in hiring, promoting blacks, suggested that the media ought to do a better job in terms of how it covers issues of importance to people of color. And then following that there was this, this epiphany that the American Society of Newspaper Editors had, didn't happen by the way in 1968, it took a while.

They read the report, they digested it and somewhere around 1975, actually 1976, the American Society of Newspaper Editors decided to make diversity in the newsroom a significant issue and began to issue annual reports about how well it was doing, bringing blacks and other minorities in to newsrooms across this nation. It had a goal, it called it the year 2000 goal. And the year 2000 goal basically said, by the year 2000 our goal is to reach parity in terms of the percentage of minorities in the newsroom relative to the percentage of minorities in the general population. Each year, year after year after year, the annual report came out until as we approached the year 2000 and the realization struck that we're not even close. The year 2000 goal became a year 2025 goal and that's what we're working with today. Who gets to decide?

Now, if the problem were only that the industry is not being aggressive enough, maybe we could deal with that, but there's something else at work here. In 1993, the National Association of Black Journalists, an organization of which I'm a founding

member, did a survey of its members and asked questions about the attitudes of managers in the newsrooms in which they worked. These are broadcast and print journalists. And, the response was quite remarkable. Roughly a third of black broadcast and print journalists said they feared bringing up race issues in the newsrooms, issues of not only promotion and retention, but issues of coverage. They were fearful.

Now think about that. If the goal is to get more of us in these newsrooms and as we get there we are afraid to raise the issue of racial coverage then maybe the voice was wrong, maybe the negro race will not be saved by its talented tenth because the talented tenth are afraid to speak up. Sixty-nine percent of these journalists said there was a lack of commitment to diversity by their supervisors, which may give rise to that fear.

And so, we can talk about the unattractiveness of some of these stories to journalists, but the reality is that if minority journalists were thought to be those who would bring the stories to the papers, bring these stories to broadcast outlets, one we're not there in any significant numbers yet and two, many of us who are there fear raising these issues. They pigeon-holed us.

I can not tell you how many times I get letters from readers of my column who say, Can't you talk about anything other than black? And I send them a list of my columns, and I said well I talked about a lot things other that black. Today I'm talking about the President and his no-talk foreign policy. I won't get any letters about that because I'm not supposed to speak about those issues, but the point is, that it's very difficult for those of us who want to raise our voice to do so and many of us are afraid to take on these issues for fear that not only will the criticism come from without the newsroom, but it will come from within. And on that point I'll pass it on to Eugene.