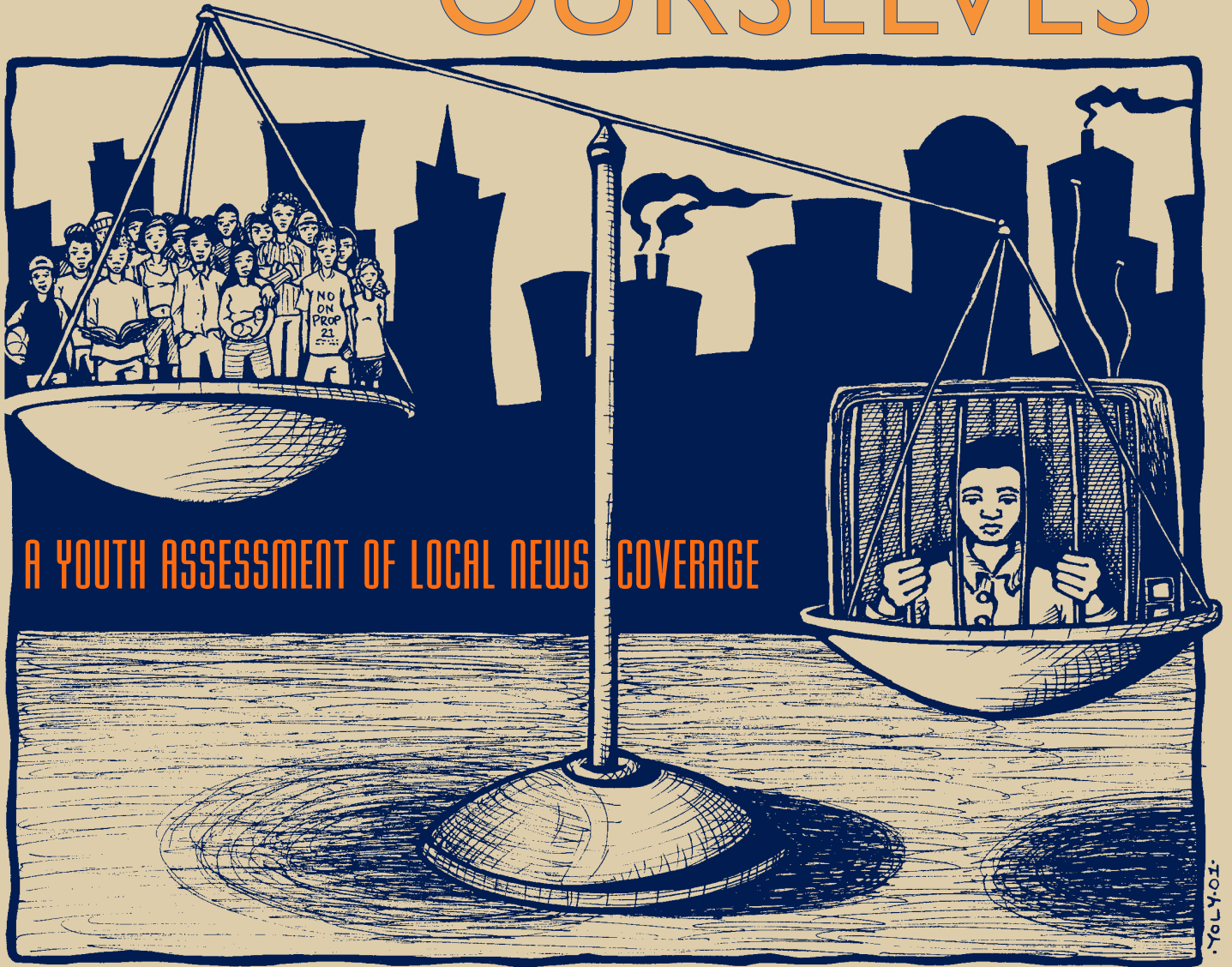


Speaking for OURSELVES



A YOUTH ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL NEWS COVERAGE

conducted by the **YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL** a project of We Interrupt This Message

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The Youth Media Council is a project of We Interrupt This Message, a national media training and strategy center. Launched in April 2001, the Youth Media Council is a youth organizing, leadership development, media capacity-building, and watchdog project dedicated to amplifying the public voice of marginalized youth and their communities.

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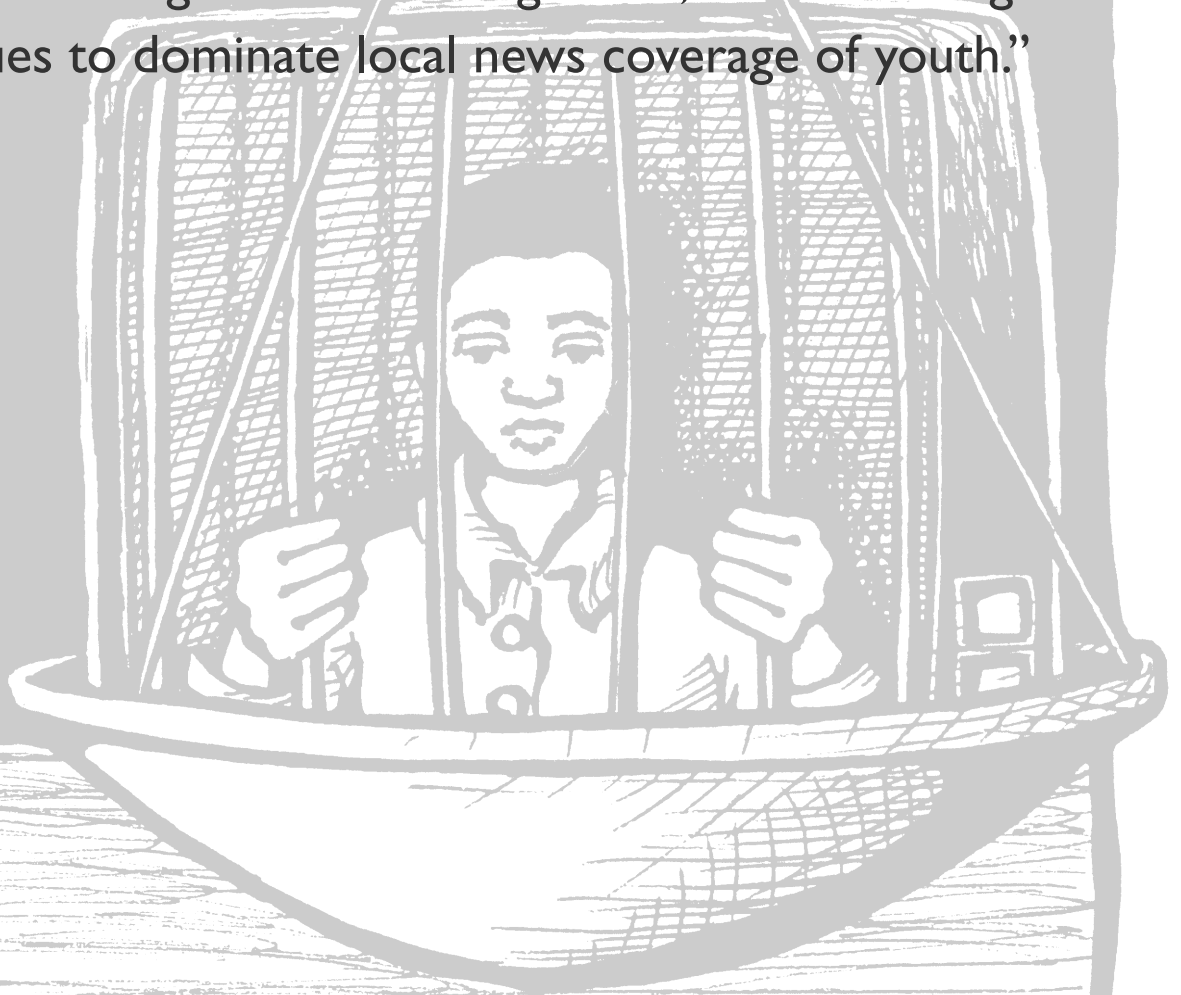
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“Despite the efforts of news stations like KTVU Channel 2 to reduce the hype surrounding stories about school shootings and crime in general, crime coverage continues to dominate local news coverage of youth.”



INTRODUCTION

by Andrew Vo, Aryeetey Welbeck, and Malkia Cyril

Although children make up one-fourth of the U.S. population, they account for only 10 percent of all news stories¹. The public depends on the news media to understand its children and the world. Seventy-six percent of the public say they form their opinions about social issues like crime from what they read and watch in the news². And despite a 33 percent decline in juvenile crime since 1993, two-thirds of the American public still believe crime is rising³.

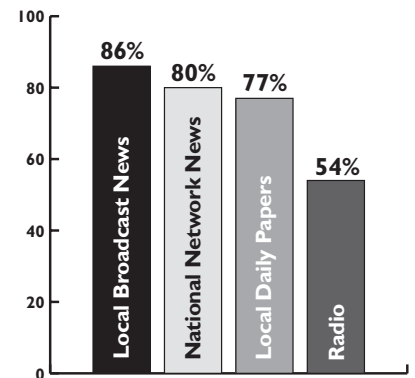
From 1990 to 1998, the national crime rate dropped by 20 percent, but news coverage of crime increased by 83 percent⁴. In a 1996 California poll, 60% of respondents reported believing that juveniles were responsible for most violent crime, although youth were actually only responsible for approximately 13 percent of violent crime that year⁵. Incarceration and policing, education, and poverty are social issues that shape the life expectancy and economic chances of thousands of Bay Area youth and our families, yet the coverage of these issues is often an unbalanced and inaccurate reflection of information, context, and policy about the problems and people at the center of public debate and policy. The disparity between coverage of youth and the real-life conditions of youth has led to the criminalization of an entire generation.

CRIMINALIZING YOUTH

The Census Bureau reported in the late 1990s that 80 percent of America's adults over age 40 are whites of European origin and 35 percent of children and youth under 18 are non-white or Latino, a proportion that has more than doubled since 1970⁶. In California, two-thirds of adults are white, while three-fifths of youth are of color. The demographics of the Bay Area reflect this pattern, leading to a phenomenon described by author Mike Males as “white hot fear” – a fear among white adults of racial transition that provides a backdrop for criminalizing news coverage of youth of all races.

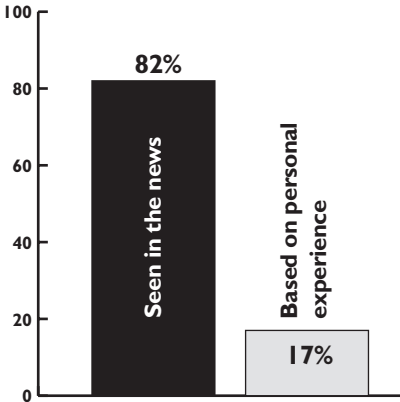
Despite the efforts of news stations like KTVU Channel 2 to reduce the hype surrounding stories about school shootings and crime in general,

CHART I: **WHERE ADULTS GET THEIR NEWS**



Source: Center for Media & Public Affairs, 1997

CHART 2: HOW DO ADULTS KNOW ABOUT CRIME AND CRIME TRENDS?



Source: ABC Poll, June 1999

crime coverage continues to dominate local news coverage of youth. From article titles such as “KIDS Without a Conscience” in *People* magazine, “Wild in the Streets” in *Newsweek*, and “Teenaged Wolf Packs” in *U.S. News & World Report*, to criminologists like James Q. Wilson who declared that population increases of teenagers and adolescents would cause “crime, addiction, and welfare dependency,” the 1990s were a period of mis-prediction and mis-perception about youth crime and juvenile justice⁷. Despite plummeting youth crime rates, the fear of youth crime led to public policy decisions that increased incarceration and made the juvenile justice system more punitive. As harsh state juvenile justice policies such as Proposition 21 passed in California in March 2000, the number of zero tolerance policies – a term borrowed from drug enforcement referring to increased use of school suspension and expulsion for both serious and minor student misbehavior – at the national level continued to rise. During the 1996-97 school year, 94 percent of U.S. public schools had zero tolerance policies for weapons and firearms, 87 percent for alcohol, 88 percent for drugs, and 79 percent for fighting or tobacco⁸. The use of suspensions had also increased dramatically, with African-American students suspended at a rate two to three times that of other students⁹. Despite the fact that student-reported crime and violence in schools is at the same level as it was in 1970, the rate of suspensions has doubled¹⁰. Simultaneously, economic safeguards like welfare were stripped away by the 1995 Welfare Reform Act. As opportunities for youth have decreased, increasing our vulnerability to the impact of punitive policy, our experiences and voices remain virtually invisible in news coverage.

ON THE HOME FRONT

In Oakland, the home base of KTVU Channel 2 and half of the Youth Media Council partner organizations, Mayor Jerry Brown has initiated numerous efforts to further militarize the lives of children and youth. In 2001, hundreds of youth, including many from Y.O.U. (the youth organizing group of PUEBLO), led a fight against the presence of the Oakland Police

Department in their schools, the sharing of records between public schools and police departments, and tracking of youth of color directly from underfunded public schools into overcrowded juvenile halls.

For several years, youth have been challenging the use of increased policing as a form of gentrification. In our neighborhoods we have seen dramatic shifts in the nature of policing, with increased aggression, monitoring, and arrests for “quality of life crimes,” like loitering, prostitution, shooting dice, cruising, and noise. In Oakland, these policies are being used as a way to force low-income residents like us to move out of our neighborhoods or go to jail. From the Let’s Get Free campaign to fight the brutality of the officers known as the Oakland Riders, to the Youth Force Coalition campaign to stop Alameda County from building the largest per capita juvenile hall in the nation, youth are demanding an end to the criminalization of our communities.

The distance between the experiences and conditions of youth and the news stories about us is a landscape of media bias in which myths become public opinion and lies become public policy. We can transform media bias into media justice by building strong relationships between news outlets and youth organizations, and increasing dialogue between journalists and youth community members. Basically, though these issues are real and our families want to participate in the public debate about them, we continue to live and die on the word of experts and reporters. It is therefore critical to our survival that journalists and communities work in partnership to report on public policy issues that frame the contours of our conditions and draw the boundaries that define our lives. The organizations of the Youth Media Council want to establish relationships with news outlets to ensure that news coverage fairly and accurately represents our communities, thoroughly explores our issues, and brings our voices to the center of policy debates about youth.

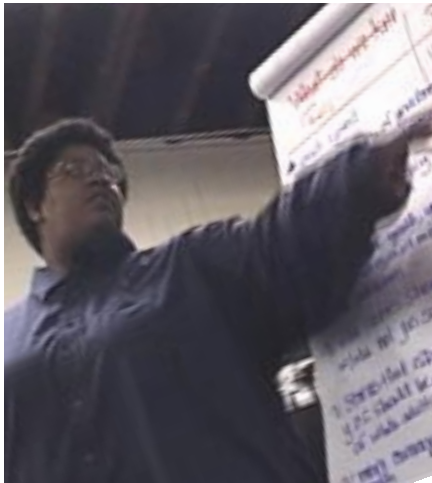
We hope this report will be used by community, youth, and policy organizations to build relationships between journalists and begin a dialogue about news coverage, its impact on policy and ultimately, on our conditions and quality of life.

“The distance between the experiences and conditions of youth and the news stories about us is a landscape of media bias in which myths become public opinion and lies become public policy. We can transform media bias into media justice by building strong relationships between news outlets and youth organizations...”



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS

DISPROPORTIONATE FOCUS ON CRIME



KTVU Coverage of Youth Focused Disproportionately on Crime

As the rate of juvenile crime and victimization goes down, news coverage of youth and crime on a national level continues to expand. Youth coverage on KTVU Channel 2 followed that trend. Of 257 KTVU News stories about youth, 162 stories focused on youth and crime. In coverage of education, more than one-third of all stories focused on crime and violence.

In the Period From March 1 to June 15, KTVU Reported 55 Stories About Pets or Animals and Only 12 Stories About Youth and Poverty

Stories about pets and animals appeared more than four times as often as stories about youth poverty.

For Each KTVU Story About Youth and Poverty, There Were 11 Such Stories About Youth and Crime

KTVU coverage of the conditions of poverty in which thousands of Bay Area youth live was almost non-existent, especially when compared to KTVU coverage of youth and crime, which overwhelmed the coverage we analyzed.

MISSING VOICES

Youth Voices of All Races Were Missing from KTVU Coverage, While the Voices of White Adults Were Amplified

Youth were quoted in only 30 percent of the stories about them. Of the total number of quotes found in coverage, 70 percent (499 quotes) came from white adults, while only 29 percent (209) came from youth of any race.

In Stories About Youth, Law Enforcement and Politicians Were Quoted More Often Than Any Other Sources

Police, prosecutors, and politicians were quoted in approximately half (49.8 percent) of the stories about youth. Yet, public defenders for youth were not quoted in any of the stories reviewed.

RACIAL BIAS IS A TREND

KTVU Coverage Lacked Racial Justice and Racial Bias Context, and Voices of Youth of Color are Missing

Only seven stories identified racism as a root cause of any problem. Additionally, while 60 percent of California's youth population is non-white or Latino, youth of color were quoted only 44 percent of the time.

MYTH OF RISING YOUTH CRIME

Only One Story Mentioned the Declining Rate of Juvenile Crime, and Only Two Stories Mentioned That School Shootings Are Rare

KTVU coverage of youth largely excluded statistics that reflect the real rate of crime and violence instead of the myth of rising youth violence that often informs public opinion about youth.

LACK OF CONTEXT

More Than Half of KTVU News Stories About Youth Failed to Examine Solutions or Causes for the Issues and Problems Presented in Coverage

In 53 percent of KTVU stories no solutions were offered, and in 66 percent of stories no root causes were explored.

When Solutions to Problems Were Offered, More Than 83 Percent Focused on Punishment, Increased Policing, or Incarceration

The number one issue discussed in KTVU news coverage of youth was crime, and when solutions were identified, the primary solution was incarceration. Only one story questioned whether incarceration actually reduces crime, leaving alternatives to incarceration unexamined.



We believe that it's
time for media outlets
to start telling the
whole truth about our
lives, our families, and
our communities.

WHO WE ARE

by Tharey Sen and David Kahn

We are the youth organizations and individuals of the Youth Media Council, a youth organizing, leadership development, media capacity-building, and watchdog project of We Interrupt This Message. We work with eight Bay Area youth organizations to develop their media capacity and organize for media accountability and improved coverage of youth.

Children and youth are a neglected yet central component of political life in the United States and have for generations played a unique role in building social movements. Since 1950, the number of children under the age of 18 has increased about half again in size. In 1999, children made up 26 percent of the national population. White, non-Hispanic children make up about 65 percent of the total youth population, and the remaining 35 percent of youth are from communities of color¹¹.

The Youth Media Council has brought together eight grassroots youth organizations to build media capacity, strengthen strategic media coordination, develop youth as media activists and leaders, and improve news coverage of youth. Our project-partners work on issues ranging from police accountability and alternatives to incarceration to gentrification, reproductive freedom and environmental justice.

The Campaign & Research Team, the component of the Youth Media Council that conducted the research for this study, is comprised of 15 working-class youth of color from Oakland, CA. We hope to promote media accountability by building strong relationships with news outlets and journalists. We believe that it's time for media outlets to start telling the whole truth about our lives, our families, and our communities.

METHODOLOGY

Policy debates affecting youth occur in news coverage, and most stories about youth focus on youth and crime. Both as a consequence and a cause, adults believe youth crime is increasing even as it decreases dramatically. Numerous studies have asked and answered the question, “What is responsible for this misconception?” To answer this question for ourselves, the Youth Media Council embarked on an examination of stories about youth on KTVU Channel 2’s “The 10 O’clock News,” voted the leading newscast in the country by a Columbia University nationwide study.

We selected three and a half months of KTVU news coverage of youth (from March 1 to June 15). Earlier studies have documented the overwhelming focus on crime and the limited focus on education and poverty in news coverage of youth, and the central nature of these issues in the lives of youth. This led us to focus our study on coverage of youth and crime, education, and poverty. Prior to reviewing the data, we identified three basic questions we wanted to answer:

- Who is speaking in news coverage of youth?
- Is context given to issues of crime, poverty, and education in coverage of youth?
- What are the most covered issues in news coverage of youth?

Following a preliminary review of coverage, we identified some additional questions:

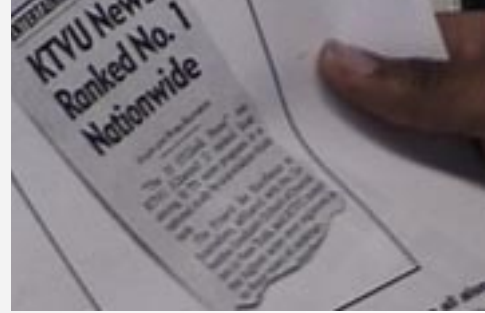
- Does discussion of public policy appear in stories about youth?
- Are loaded images and language used to describe youth in news coverage?

We watched 108 broadcasts of KTVU’s “The 10 O’clock News” and selected all the news stories from that period that quoted youth, mentioned youth, or were about youth. Due to our strong interest in criminal justice, and to ensure that we included all those who might be engaged in the juvenile justice system, we defined youth as 25 years and younger after research revealed that juvenile halls house many young people beyond the age of 18. We also learned that youth policy impacts adults under the age of 25



WHY WE CHOSE KTVU

We chose to examine KTVU Channel 2 because the Columbia School of Journalism has recognized KTVU as the leading news outlet in the Bay Area. KTVU has the most extensive viewership of any outlet in the Bay Area, consistently high ratings, and journalists who appeared to be responsive to building partnerships with youth members of the SF Bay Area community. We believed increasing accountability and improving coverage of youth at KTVU would set a standard leading to improvements in coverage at other local news stations. We also wanted to demonstrate that even outlets with a great record in general need to work with community members to make improvements in their coverage of youth. We chose to expand on earlier We Interrupt studies of print news and examine television coverage of youth because both Frank Gilliam, Ph.D. (University of California) and Martin Gilens (Yale University), as well as noted media effects researchers and authors, identify television as a primary shaper of public opinion and a foremost source of public affairs information.



because the trend in longer jail sentences for youth has resulted in sentencing for many teenagers under 18 that keeps them in custody far beyond their 21st birthday.

After an initial review of KTVU's coverage of youth, we came up with a series of questions. These questions focused on sources and demographics, context and policy, language and images – areas we felt reflected the components of a complete news story. We chose to focus on three primary political issues in coverage, crime, education, and poverty, because we identified them as conditions with a high degree of impact on youth, as well as the focus of many youth-led organizing campaigns.

We found a total of 257 stories about youth, which we used in our analysis to develop findings and make recommendations, as well as 55 stories about pets/animals. We chose to identify stories about pets/animals based on a finding from a 1998 We Interrupt This Message study of welfare and welfare reform coverage, which found more stories about pets than stories about poverty. We sought to make a similar comparison. We examined all aspects of news coverage except for the weather.

We hope these results will be used by youth, community, or policy advocacy organizations working on youth issues, as well as by journalists interested in building partnerships with youth for increased media accountability and better coverage of youth.

ANALYSIS OF NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE OF YOUTH

by Malkia Cyril, YMC Project Director, and Malachi Larrabee-Garza, C-Beyond YMC Representative

NEWS MEDIA & PUBLIC OPINION

Despite dramatic decreases in juvenile crime, it continues to be the primary focus of news coverage of youth. Eighty-five percent of all the communities in the United States recorded no juvenile homicides in 1995, and 93.4 percent recorded one or no juvenile arrests for murder during that same year¹². Between 1993 and 1997, the total number of reported school crimes dropped by 29 percent¹³, yet a 1996 CBS/*New York Times* poll taken prior to any of the highly publicized school shootings showed that 84 percent of respondents believed that juvenile crime was on the rise, despite specific evidence to the contrary.

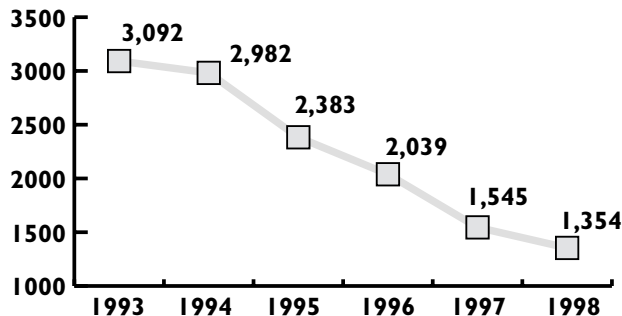


CHART 3: **DECLINING RATE OF YOUTH HOMICIDE ARRESTS, 1993-1998**

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

In fact, although the National Crime Victimization Survey reported that youth crime was at its lowest rate ever in the survey's 25-year history¹⁴, in a 1998 Los Angeles poll, 80 percent of respondents said the media's coverage of violent crime had increased their personal fear of becoming a victim¹⁵. Moreover, when youth appear in the news, they usually appear in stories related to violence or crime¹⁶.

This trend is particularly problematic because, according to media effects research and our own experience of media monitoring and policy advocacy, exposure to coverage that disproportionately relates youth and

“Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that coverage of youth is most often tied to violence and crime, and that the news media report crime, especially violent youth crime, out of proportion to its actual occurrence.”



crime increases public support for the most punitive policies *in all youth public policy areas, including education and economic policy*¹⁷.

Though crime, education, and poverty are the subjects of much public discussion, youth organizations and advocates find it increasingly difficult to get the nation's policymakers to act on behalf of children, especially teenagers and adolescents of color, or even to participate in the public discussion of their lives. News media often replace personal experience concerning issues such as youth poverty, crime, and public education for much of the voting public, therefore making the role of media as a shaper of public debate and therefore public policy a central feature of political life and one that should not be neglected by journalists, news directors, or policy advocates and youth organizers.

NEWS MEDIA & JUVENILE JUSTICE

This study examined all KTVU coverage of youth over a 3.5-month period and found that crime committed against or by youth received the most coverage. A 1997 study of 56 cities identified a similar finding for news coverage in general: crime was the most prominently featured subject in local television news. In some cities, crime accounted for more than 75 percent of local news coverage¹⁸. This is particularly true in news coverage of youth. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that coverage of youth is most often tied to violence and crime, and that the news media report crime, especially violent youth crime, out of proportion to its actual occurrence¹⁹. A national study of news coverage of youth revealed that there is more adult fear specifically of crime committed by youth of color, despite the fact that 86 percent of all crime is committed by adults²⁰. A study of California news coverage revealed that nearly 7 in 10 news stories about violence involved youth and more than half of television news stories concerning children or youth involved violence, though only 2 percent of young people were either victims of violence or violent offenders in that year²¹.

Further analysis of news coverage of youth demonstrates that despite less than a one in two-million chance of being killed in one of America's public schools in 1999, 71 percent of respondents to an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll believed that a school shooting was likely in their community²². Adults are afraid, and although that fear is based on myths and stereotypes, it becomes a justification for devastating policy solutions like Proposition 21 in California,

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political life...”

“...News coverage of youth gives the public a picture that leads to economic policy that increases poverty, educational policy that decreases equality, and a criminal justice system that calls for harsher penalties and increased punishment...”

which allows minors to be tried as adults at the discretion of a prosecutor for a vast array of crimes. Since 1992, 45 states have passed or amended laws that loosen the criteria for charging a child as an adult. Fifteen states, including California, allow prosecutors – not judges – to decide if a child should be tried in adult court, even for nonviolent offenses such as auto theft and perjury. In most states, children as young as 14 can be tried as adults; in Vermont and Kansas, 10-year-olds can²³.

The relationship between juvenile crime and poverty is rarely explored in news coverage of youth. Poverty is a central issue shaping the lives and experiences of a vast number of youth, yet a 2001 study conducted by Children Now, a national child policy organization, found that politics and economics accounted for only 3 percent of youth coverage nationally. Though poverty continues to disproportionately impact all youth under the age of 18, in 1998, 36 percent of Black children and 34 percent of Latino children lived in poverty²⁴.

Instead, youth coverage focuses on crime. Despite overwhelming evidence of the declining rate of juvenile crime, between 1980 and 2000, per capita spending on prisons increased nationally by 189 percent while per capita spending on education increased by only 32 percent²⁵. There has been a 204% increase in tax dollars for prisons versus a 1 percent increase in tax dollars for education²⁶. California ranks sixth among the states in the number of people incarcerated, 18th in prison spending, but 45th in spending on education²⁷. At midyear 2000, the nation’s prisons and jails incarcerated almost two million people; with a total of 7,616 youth housed in adult jails. According to a 1996 report by Community Research Associates, California had the highest number of juveniles in custody in public facilities in the nation²⁸. Youth of color comprise 53.4 percent of the total youth population statewide, but 59 percent of all juveniles arrested, 64 percent of juveniles held in secure detention, and 70 percent of juveniles placed in secure corrections²⁹.

Repeatedly, studies have shown that news coverage of youth gives the public a picture of race, poverty, education, and crime that leads to increased spending on punishment as a policy solution for youth, economic policy that increases poverty, educational policy that decreases equality, and a criminal justice system that calls for harsher penalties and increased punishment for youth. A clearer picture of youth is necessary to create effective public policy that not only responds to the real needs of youth and successfully improves their conditions, but also shifts the balance of power between news media and youth, giving youth and their communities a real public voice.

FINDINGS

KTVU “10 O’CLOCK NEWS” COVERAGE OF YOUTH: SUCCESSES

No Pattern of Loaded Language

In television news coverage, information is delivered audio-visually, making language and images an easy conductor of media bias. In corporate media, it is often challenging for journalists to find pictures and create scripts that do not inflame the stereotypes and biases of the public or deliver inaccurate representations of race, gender, and age. In our examination of 257 KTVU stories about youth, we found no pattern of loaded language. Of 257 stories about youth, the term “gang” was used to refer to youth only 15 times in five stories! The term “crackdown,” which has frequently been used to describe public policy trends, was used in KTVU news coverage of youth in only two out of 257 stories, and the term “drug dealer” was used to describe youth in only four stories.

No Gates, No Bars, No Problem

We also found no significant pattern of loaded images in KTVU news coverage of youth. Gates, bars, jail cells, handcuffs, weapons, drugs or paraphernalia, and courtrooms are images that criminalize youth when they appear disproportionately in news coverage. Only 23 out of 257 KTVU stories contained pictures of gates or bars, and only 28 KTVU stories about youth contained pictures of courtrooms or weapons. Additionally, only 21 stories contained images of handcuffs or youth in handcuffs, and only 12 stories contained images of drugs or paraphernalia. This did not increase significantly in the stories about youth and crime, where slightly more than 15 percent of 162 KTVU news stories contained pictures of courtrooms or weapons, and images of youth in handcuffs only appeared 28 times in 162 stories on youth and crime.

Overall, KTVU was successful in portraying youth without many of the criminalizing pictures and words that so often accompany news coverage of youth.

CHART 4: SUMMARY OF KTVU NEWS COVERAGE

108	Broadcasts Watched
257	Stories About Youth
55	Stories About Pets/Animals
162	Youth Stories About Crime
53	Youth Stories About Education
12	Youth Stories About Poverty
30	Youth Stories About Other Issues

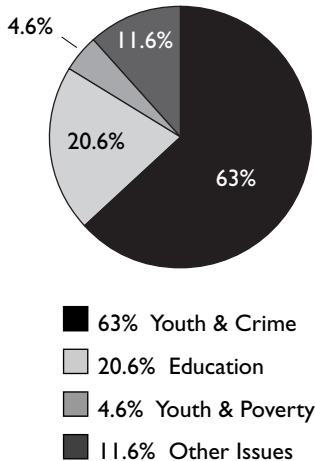
KTVU “THE 10 O’CLOCK NEWS” COVERAGE OF YOUTH: CHALLENGES

I. COVERAGE OF YOUTH POLICY ISSUES

CRIME

Coverage of Youth Disproportionately Focused on Crime

CHART 5: KTVU PROPORTION OF COVERAGE ON YOUTH POLICY ISSUES



Of the 257 KTVU stories about youth we examined, youth researchers found that 63 percent (162 stories) portrayed youth as either victims (134 stories) or perpetrators (43 stories) of crime. Despite the fact that by 1998, the rate of violent juvenile crime had dropped to the lowest level in 25 years³⁰, more than half the coverage of youth we examined was about crime.

In reality, the number of children hurt by violent crime has reduced significantly since 1995, and youth accounted for only 17 percent of all criminal arrests in 1999, a decrease of 8 percent since 1998³¹. In coverage of youth victims, the focus was frequently on youth as victims of kidnapping or sexual assault by strangers, masking the reality that of those who harm children and youth, 80 percent are parents, guardians, or other adults known to the child³².

For Each KTVU Story About Youth and Poverty, There Were 11 Such Stories About Youth and Crime

Youth researchers found that despite the fact that youth poverty continues to rise and rates of youth crime and victimization continue to fall, incidents of crime received more attention than conditions of youth poverty in KTVU news coverage of youth.

Youth Victims of Adults Are Underrepresented in KTVU News Coverage

Youth victims of other youth (158) and youth victims of adults (156) appear equal in coverage, while in reality, 16 children die at the hands of their parents and guardians every day in the United States while juvenile arrests for homicide by youth are at their lowest level since 1964 when the FBI began keeping this statistic³³. In 1998, more than 75 percent of youth homicide victims between the

ages of 12 and 17 years old were killed by adults, and the finding was 90 percent for youth homicide victims under 12 years old³⁴.

News coverage should provide accurate statistics and information to the public about who really harms children and raise questions about the policy implications. Reporting the crisis of violence against youth, not as a problem caused by youth but as a problem of adult and institutional abuse and neglect, can challenge the myth of rising youth violence and offer new and more appropriate policy solutions.

EDUCATION

Of 257 KTVU News Stories About Youth, 94 Were About Education, and More Than One-Third of Education Stories (36) Focused on School Crime or Violence

The fact that a youth is more likely to be struck by lightning than killed at school³⁵ was never mentioned in any of the KTVU stories about school crime or violence.

This trend in KTVU coverage of youth parallels a national trend. In a recent study of six local television news markets across the country, education received only 9 percent of news coverage³⁶. Studies have consistently shown that school crime, including serious violent crime, is on the decline, yet school crime and violence continue to be strong themes in education stories. Though education was covered in KTVU stories about youth, it was most frequently framed by crime and violence.

Additionally, we found through our review of coverage that **themes such as educational inequality were rarely covered**, while 90 percent of the nation's children attend public schools, three-quarters of those schools need repairs, renovations, and modernization, and the richest school districts spend on average 56 percent more per student than the poorest³⁷.

POVERTY

In the Period from March 1 to June 15, KTVU Reported 55 Stories About Pets or Animals and Only 12 Stories About Youth and Poverty

Stories about pets and animals appeared more than four times as often as stories about youth poverty.

Fewer Than 5 Percent of News Stories (12) About Youth Mentioned Poverty

In 1998, 29 percent of children in the United States lived just above the poverty level³⁸, but neither youth poverty nor the impact on youth of economic policy has ever emerged as a focus of news coverage.

While the United States became 49 percent richer over the past ten years, the number of poor children rose by 17 percent³⁹. As thousands of youth become significantly poorer as a result of welfare reform, and as the unemployment rate for teens skyrockets to more than four times the adult rate⁴⁰, child poverty remains one of news media's most under-covered issues.

II. MISSING VOICES: WHO SPEAKS FOR YOUTH ON KTVU?

The Voices of Youth Were Missing from KTVU News Coverage of Youth

Of the 257 KTVU stories examined by youth researchers, youth were quoted in only 30 percent of the stories. Yet police, prosecutors, and politicians were quoted in approximately half (49.8 percent) of the stories examined.

The voices of youth should be central to any debate about public policy issues that affect us. When young people are denied an opportunity to talk about the impact of public policy on our lives in news coverage, we are effectively shut out of public policy debates that define our very existence. The messages that youth offenders deserve harsher penalties, school shootings demonstrate a need to get tough on kids, and the juvenile justice system can't rehabilitate today's violent youth must be balanced by the voices of youth and youth advocates. Balanced coverage of youth would include the perspectives of those directly affected by the issues and problems, and those fighting for policy change on behalf of youth and their families.

Youth Voices Were Missing from Most KTVU Stories About Education

In KTVU stories about youth and education (94, including those education stories about school crime and violence), youth voices were absent from the coverage more than half the time (58.5 percent).

Education is essentially a youth issue, as youth are most directly impacted by educational policy. When youth are marginalized to the corners of the public debate on education, the interests of corporations and politicians define the terms of debate. This has led to the implementation of narrowly focused public policy that hurts young people, like the privatization of public schools, the end of race-based data collection, the rise in zero tolerance policies, and an overall frame on public education that blames students and parents for failing public schools instead of looking deeper at issues of racial equity and economic justice as the root causes for a crumbling infrastructure in our public schools.

Stories About Youth and Crime Almost Never Quoted Youth, Especially Youth Portrayed as Perpetrators

Of 162 KTVU stories about youth and crime, only one in five stories (19 percent) quoted youth, while more than half (53.5 percent) quoted police, prosecutors, and politicians. Of 43 stories that portrayed youth as perpetrators, only eight quoted youth perpetrators.

It is crucial in coverage of youth and crime, whether about youth as victims or as perpetrators, that the voices of youth are heard. Youth speaking for themselves in coverage of youth and crime helps to humanize frequently demonized youth, and brings context and balance to such stories. In stories about incidents of crime, the voices of youth help the public to understand the causes of youth crime and give a more broad conception as to the impact of violence on youth.

The Voices of Youth Advocates Were Almost Completely Missing from News Stories About Youth

In almost 70 percent of the KTVU coverage examined, youth researchers found no advocates for youth quoted; public defenders were never quoted in any of the stories.

During Youth Media Council visits with news outlets, news professionals repeatedly articulated the assumption that youth do not hold press conferences or have spokespeople and experts. In the Bay Area, there are hundreds of youth organizations representing the interests of young people. Besides the young people themselves, youth organizers, advocates, and public defenders are key spokespeople for youth. When these advocates and youth-friendly policy options are underrepresented in news stories about youth, the scope of debate on youth policy is narrowed and opportunities for humanizing coverage of youth are obscured.

“When young people are denied an opportunity to talk about the impact of public policy on our lives in news coverage, we are effectively shut out of public policy debates that define our very existence.”

Coverage of youth and crime largely shapes the public policy debate and is a primary vehicle for the criminalization of youth. News stories about crime can help shape how adults view crime on a local and national level and establish the terms for the public debate of juvenile justice. Public defenders must play a significant role in coverage of youth and crime, because they are more than legal advocates for youth. Public defenders represent a unique perspective on youth policy issues that must be counted for truly balanced coverage of youth.

The Voices of White Adults Were Amplified, While Youth Voices of All Races Were Marginalized in KTVU Coverage of Youth

Of the almost 800 quotes found in coverage, 70 percent came from white adults, while only 29 percent came from youth of any race; 181 stories quoted white adults, while 77 stories quoted youth. White youth were quoted more than twice as many times as youth of all other races. Youth of all races, and especially youth of color, need an opportunity to speak for ourselves, to tell our stories, and frame solutions based on our own experiences.

III. THE MYTH OF RISING YOUTH CRIME AND VIOLENCE

17 Percent of All Crime Stories, and 31 Percent of All Education Stories Were About School Crime

Focusing education stories on crime insinuates that crime is, in fact, a central trend concerning schools and students. A look at crime rates tells a different story. School-associated violent deaths have dropped 72 percent since 1992, and there is a less than one in two-million chance that a youth will be killed at school⁴¹. While we must applaud the effort of KTVU to de-sensationalize stories about school crime, we also recognized that school violence and crime was still reported disproportionately to its actual occurrence.

Only One of 257 Stories Mentioned the Declining Rate of Juvenile Crime, and Only Two of 257 KTVU Stories Mentioned the Fact That School Shootings Are Rare

Youth murders declined by 68 percent between 1993 and 1999, and are now at their lowest rate since 1966⁴². In fact, juvenile crime has declined 36 percent since 1994 and is at an all-time low for the past 25 years. If youth crime is such a critical issue to the news media, deserving greater focus than any other youth policy area, it seems equally critical to accurately portray the rate at which youth crime is actually occurring.

IV. LACK OF CONTEXT & POLICY IN KTVU NEWS COVERAGE OF YOUTH

INVISIBLE CAUSES

Of All KTVU Stories About Youth Examined, We Found That 66 Percent Offered No Root Causes

Where root causes were mentioned (87 stories), we found that negative youth behavior represented more than 70 percent of the causes offered. In most KTVU stories about youth that addressed the causes of problems and issues, we found that stories focused primarily on the negative behavior of an individual youth and the specifics of a particular incident. Youth stories about crime, accidents, health, education, and poverty rarely related the incident to a broader context of policy or social conditions.

This was especially pronounced in coverage of youth and crime, where more than 83 percent of root causes identified were negative youth behavior. Root causes offer necessary depth to reporting. News stories must ask, “But how did it get that way?” and answer through an exploration of context and conditions. Stories about education need historical context. Issues of school funding and inequality in resource allocation must be examined, and questions about tracking, poor teacher training, overcrowding, racial profiling, and segregation must be raised for an informed public that can fully participate in policy decisions that affect the lives of youth.

Family breakdown, “minority youth culture,” and teenaged genetics have all provided criminalizing myths about the root causes of youth crime. However, the

CHART 6: MENTION OF ROOT CAUSES IN KTVU COVERAGE OF YOUTH

1.6%	Poverty
1.6%	Lack of Access to Services
2.7%	Racism
1.9%	Policy
23.7%	Negative Youth Behavior
66.1%	No Root Cause Mentioned

CHART 7: MENTION OF SOLUTIONS IN KTVU COVERAGE OF YOUTH

- 30.4% Incarceration/Increased Punishment/Policing
- 3.1% Increase Access to Services
- 7.4% Change Policy
- 52.9% No Solutions Mentioned

FBI, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, as well as author Mike Males, the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, and the Justice Policy Institute have all determined through research that poverty, not age or race, drives violent crime rates and trends. The vast majority of families who moved off the welfare rolls between August 1996 and June 2000 moved into low-wage work or unemployment. And although the welfare caseload in California has dropped 53 percent⁴³, youth researchers were unable to find any stories that examined the role of welfare reform in contributing to youth poverty.

Comprehensive coverage would look closely at the relationship between social conditions like poverty and crime rather than focusing only on the incident without its broader context.

UNEXAMINED SOLUTIONS

More Than Half of KTVU News Stories About Youth Never Mentioned Any Solution to the Issues and Problems Raised in Coverage (53 Percent)

Solutions were invisible in the majority of coverage. Increased access to services and alternatives to incarceration were mentioned only 3 percent of the time. “Often, I think the public recognizes that there is a problem and can define the scope of that problem, but has a very difficult time identifying solutions to the problems. That’s where good reporting comes in. Good reporting will identify solutions, and when journalists don’t, it’s up to us as community groups to be able to define and frame our own solutions,” says Dawn Phillips, executive director of PUEBLO.

THE PRIMARY SOLUTION OFFERED WAS “LOCK ‘EM UP”

When Solutions Were Offered (118), More Than 75 Percent Appeared in Crime Coverage, and 83 Percent Focused on Punishment, Increased Policing, or Incarceration

Increased incarceration, aggressive policing, and harsher penalties for youth are quickly becoming the primary youth policy solution discussed in news coverage. Youth need solutions that provide an alternative to incarceration.

Only One Story Questioned Whether Incarceration Actually Reduces Crime

California leads the nation in youth incarceration. Yet, in stories about youth crime, reporters rarely ask the question, “Does incarceration make us safer?” While punishment-oriented solutions are discussed disproportionately in news coverage of youth, critical examinations of the effectiveness of these policies continue to be absent. Meanwhile, the lives of thousands of youth are being systematically destroyed, as services for youth are cut and the primary policy expenditure on youth is jail.

PUBLIC POLICIES WERE RARELY MENTIONED IN KTVU COVERAGE OF YOUTH

In 91 Percent of KTVU News Stories About Youth, Public Policies and Their Impact on Youth Were Invisible

Through policies, we as a community come together to solve social problems. When stories do not examine the effectiveness of public policies, the public can only view youth crime and failing public schools as solely individual problems and the result of negative behavior on the part of youth. Incidents of crime attributed to negative youth behavior frame the public policy debate.

When News Stories Mentioned Policies (21), Crime Policies Were Mentioned Most Often (18)

Youth researchers found policy solutions that increase incarceration, make penalties for youth harsher, and decrease services to incarcerated youth were mentioned most often.

V. RACIAL BIAS IS A TREND IN NEWS REPORTING

Voices of Youth of Color Are Missing From KTVU News Coverage of Youth

We found that 56 percent of youth quoted were white, while only 16 percent of youth quoted were Black, 14 percent were Asian, and 10 percent were Latino. Native American youth were never quoted, and Arab and Muslim youth represented only 1.85 percent of youth quoted.

White Youth Were Over-Represented as Victims of Crime in KTVU News Coverage of Youth

Of 243 reports of youth victims, where race could be identified, 141 victims were white and only 102 were youth of color, although youth of color are three times more likely to face victimization by crime or violence.

KTVU Coverage of Youth Lacked Racial Justice and Racial Bias Context

Only seven stories identified racism as a root cause of any problem presented. The disappearance of racism as a cause of poverty, incarceration, and general inequity is a disturbing phenomenon. It is supported by policy decisions that deny institutions the ability to recognize the ongoing impact of discrimination as a factor in employment or education, and bar many institutions from collecting and maintaining records about race and gender. These policies and initiatives make organizing for racial justice extraordinarily challenging. Comprehensive news coverage would examine race and racial bias as an indicator of economic, educational, and social health and well-being, as well as examining racial justice as a solution.



RECOMMENDATIONS

TO JOURNALISTS FOR IMPROVED COVERAGE OF YOUTH

BASED ON OUR FINDINGS, THE YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Balance stories about youth and crime with stories about youth poverty, education, and youth organizing.** Episodic stories about individual incidents of crime reported out of proportion to their actual occurrence only inflame irrational fears, support stereotypes, and magnify myths. Balancing stories about incidents of crime involving youth with stories about the real conditions in which youth live and the steps young people are taking to improve those conditions is an important step toward de-criminalizing youth in news coverage.
- 2. Link racial bias to inequity in stories about crime, education, and poverty.** We found that stories identified racism less than 3 percent of the time as a root cause of any problem, despite a long history of research on the enduring impact of racism on economic, political, and social inequality. The Youth Media Council suggests that KTVU examine the role of race and racism in the emergence of social problems like crime and poverty, and link racial bias to inequity in stories about youth.
- 3. Let youth speak for themselves in stories about youth.** In our study of KTVU's coverage of youth, we found that the voices of white adults were amplified in stories about us, while the voices of youth, especially youth of color, were marginalized. The Youth Media Council suggests that journalists should build relationships with youth organizations and balance the voices of police, prosecutors, and politicians with the voices of youth. Most youth organizations engaged in organizing or advocacy do have spokespeople, do hold press conferences, and are available for interviews. The voices of young people, especially those most impacted by crime, education, and economic policy, are critical to a full public debate on these issues.

- 4. Balance news coverage of youth by quoting youth advocates and public defenders.** For every issue, adult experts and advocates are given air-time in news reports. However, in news coverage of youth, the voices of advocates and public defenders were almost completely absent. The Youth Media Council suggests that balanced reporting would include the voices of youth advocates and public defenders, especially in episodic stories about youth crime.
- 5. Highlight root causes and trends.** In the KTVU coverage we examined, we found that root causes went unreported. Causes that were identified focused primarily on the negative behavior of the youth. The Youth Media Council suggests that KTVU coverage of youth would be more accurate if it focused on proven root causes of crime and violence, such as previous experience with abuse, poverty, and child sexual assault. Additionally, examining the root causes of a crumbling education system, an overly punitive juvenile justice system, and an over-burdened and often neglectful child welfare system would expand the debate on these issues and reveal alternative solutions.
- 6. Examine solutions other than increased punishment and incarceration.** Most of the coverage we examined did not present solutions. The Youth Media Council believes that this lack of solutions limits the public understanding of crime, education, and poverty, as well as denying the public an opportunity to think critically about the policy solutions currently being offered. We suggest that KTVU ask critical questions about all policy solutions, and explore the policy solutions that youth and community groups offer for social problems.
- 7. Balance the portrayal of white youth and youth of color.** We found that information about the experiences, families, school, and religious life were offered much more often for white youth perpetrators than for youth of color perpetrators. We believe that the amount of information offered about a young person beyond the criminal incident gives the public a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of crime as well as injecting a broader range of solutions into the debate. By offering additional information in coverage of youth of color perpetrators, KTVU could limit the criminalization of youth of color in news coverage and in policy.
- 8. Challenge the myth of rising youth crime and violence.** Only one story in 257 mentioned that school shootings occur rarely, and only one story mentioned the declining rate of juvenile crime. Thorough coverage would mention all relevant

statistics. The Youth Media Council recommends that KTVU make it policy in all coverage of juvenile crime or violence to provide accurate information and statistics about the rate of youth crime and violence.

- 9. Link social problems to public policy.** Public policy is a key component of democratic political participation. It is one way the public engages in challenging and fixing social problems. When incidents that illustrate the conditions of our lives are reported without an exploration of their relationship to public policy, we have less opportunity for political participation. Thorough reporting would place incidents within the context of public policy and social conditions.



CRT MESSAGES TO THE MEDIA

“**W**hen I turn on the television now all I see is our people being

criminalized, and made to suffer more than they already were. Isn't it bad enough that we live in poverty and do what we have to survive the mean streets of this country? All I ask is that the news media show what's really going on. Show how we really live, what we have to do in order to stay alive. Shed some light on the root causes of why crime exists, instead of blaming kids for social problems adults created. Let more of our voices be heard and represented. Put our experts up there on the screen laying out the real, complete facts. Show us as the future, and don't focus so heavily on our mistakes. When we come together to protest and demonstrate for a cause, don't just merely quote our angers and frustrations. Come and talk to us, have meetings with us, show up at our press conferences.

Report on the real deal. Most youth are not violent, thugs, or out of control, but we don't want to be pacified either. We should be congratulated for organizing for justice.” – **Tharey Sen**



“**Y**outh of color are not your enemies.

I'd like to think we could be your allies in trying to get better and more in-depth coverage of youth and youth issues. We hope that you hear our stories, respect our words and report the facts. This is the time for change. KTVU is a leading news outlet in the Bay Area and the nation, and they should be leading in representation of Black, Latino, Asian, Native American and Arab youth as well. This is the time for revolution. When I watch the news I feel obligated to tell you that your coverage of youth must improve, to ask that you see us as a constituency, and add context and balance to your coverage of youth of color. If I sit back and do nothing then me and people like me will fall victim to stereotypes, and I just can't let it go down like that.” – **Aryeetey Welbeck**

JUSTICE MOVES:

WHAT KTVU SHOULD DO

1. Attend a Town Hall meeting of youth, youth organizers, and parents to discuss our findings.
2. Produce a segment on the Youth Media Council, this report and our findings on “The 10 O’clock News,” “Family 2 Family,” or “Bay Area People.”
3. Engage in two roundtable discussions during the next year with youth policy advocates, youth, and their families about ways to improve coverage of youth.
4. Work with the Youth Media Council to sponsor a Youth Editorial Board that would suggest stories, review KTVU coverage to help ensure accuracy, balance, and thoroughness in reporting of youth, and provide a link to youth advocacy, grassroots, and policy organizations.
5. Work with youth organizations to establish methods to carry out the recommendations presented in this report.



The Youth Media Council intends to develop lasting relationships to improve media accountability in journalism. We recognize that building relationships between news outlets and youth creates opportunities to improve coverage and strengthen media accountability.

CONCLUSION

Although the tragedy of September 11th and the ensuing war did not occur during the period of this study, we would be remiss to ignore the potential impact of news coverage on youth as it is framed by a global war against terrorism, especially because the words terrorism and terrorist have not been clearly defined. In the domestic arena, it has not been the Timothy McVeighs of the nation that have been systematically portrayed as an enemy to be feared, hated, and caged. The images of terrorists have not been of anti-abortion clinic bombers who threaten and sometimes take the lives of those seeking to ensure a woman's right to choose. Instead, the images and language used to describe and depict dangerous enemies of "our way of life" have often been poor or working-class, teenagers, U.S. immigrants, and citizens of color. "They" have been us.

The coverage of the U.S. War on Terrorism is not the first time a community has been dehumanized in the news media, depicted as an enemy to be contained, or had stories reported about them that excluded their voices, or had the impact of policies and institutions wiped clean from the versions of truth offered by news media. Teenagers and youth, particularly youth of color, have faced similar challenges in news coverage.

For decades, marginalized communities have been attempting to participate in the public debate about them in news coverage. The struggle for public opinion is essentially the struggle for the hearts and minds of those who would, if given the opportunity, vote for alternatives to incarceration, join organizing campaigns to challenge corporate control of poor communities, and fight for racial and economic justice.

Media accountability is a challenging issue, yet achieving that would impact public policy in tremendous ways. Exerting pressure on news outlets and building relationships with journalists is, however, not the only way to improve coverage of youth. Organizations working for human rights for youth must also allocate time and resources to build skills in pitching stories, writing press releases, and developing media messages that identify and frame problems, talk about what's at stake, and point to solutions.

While it is difficult to imagine expending the limited resources of youth, community, and policy organizations to build strong relationships with media outlets and hold them accountable for their reporting, it is also central to winning in the public policy arena.

As Youth Making a Change and the Center for Young Women's Development struggle to achieve alternatives to incarceration in San Francisco County, YUCA chal-

lenges gentrification in East Palo Alto, and C-Beyond works to refocus the attention and resources of Concord and Pittsburgh on education instead of incarceration, we see that the local trends that incarcerate youth for longer periods of time, punish youth more severely for non-violent offenses, and convict youth – without the right to vote as adults – with the right to serve adult time, are also problems that amplify the need for media coverage to highlight this inequality and offer context and depth to the complex issues that shape our lives as young people.

As journalists, youth advocates, and community members struggle to keep up with the rigorous demands of a deregulated corporate media, the core standards of accuracy, balance, thoroughness, and objectivity become even more crucial to the building of real justice.



THIS IS FOR US

by The Campaign & Research Team

This is for the anonymous children whose voices are silenced, whose truth is hidden in unasked questions and invisible answers.

This is to stop bias propaganda that controls our thought, and brainwashes us into believing the capitalist and imperialist lies.

This is for every young person of color that has been stereotyped just because of the way they live.

This is for the anonymous people who aren't being heard. We have stories to tell and things to say but why isn't anyone listening?

This is for the generations that been brainwashed by the media and been made into mindless zombies. This is for the oppressed that is struggling to win social revolution.

I do this to give vision to the ones after us.

This is for the lives being distorted.

This is for the poor and working classes who struggle to raise their children.

This is for all the youth of color on lock-down because of America's so-called "freedom."

This is because without truth we'll never have justice.

ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

YOUTH MEDIA COUNCIL PROJECT PARTNERS

C-Beyond exists to develop youth leaders who realize their individual and collective power to organize and create unity for the good of all people. We educate youth of color, low-income youth, young women, disabled youth, and lgbtq youth in Concord and Bay Point/Pittsburg, California. We believe that oppression affects everyone, we dedicate ourselves to fighting it in all forms, and we continue to struggle with respect and in unity for the liberation of all people. [phone: 925.676.6556]

Center for Young Women's Development is one of the nation's first institutions run for and by young women from the streets. As a community-based, peer-run, nonprofit organization in San Francisco, our mission is to promote self-sufficiency, community safety, and youth advocacy by providing employment, leadership and training to young women and girls (ages 14-18) who have lived on the streets, and/or are involved in the juvenile justice and foster care systems. [phone: 415.345.0260]

HOPE for Girls, a project of APIRH (Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health), is a group of young Asian women in Oakland committed to youth organizing in issues effecting women, Asians and other people of color, low-income people, and youth. The HOPE project strives to educate the community about reproductive freedom and environmental justice.

Let's Get Free, formerly known as Third Eye Movement 510, is organizing Bay Area high-school youth against police brutality, and is currently leading a campaign to stop Alameda County from building the largest per capita juvenile hall in the country. A project of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, LGF is a primary partner in the Youth Media Council. [phone: 510.451.5466 x 311]

Youth Force Coalition is a coalition of youth organizations fighting against the oppressive attacks on our communities, including inaccessible and irrelevant education, gentrification, the criminalization of our communities, lack of living wage jobs, police brutality, toxic neighborhoods, and inadequate healthcare. YFC builds youth leadership and strategic unity among diverse constituencies, creates collective strategy,

mobilizes young people, and wages campaigns to build a movement for social change and a just world. [phone: 510.451.5466 x 3]

Youth of Oakland United is a youth component of People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO), a community-based membership organization that fights for social, economic, and racial justice in Oakland. [phone: 510.452.2010]

Youth Making a Change is the youth organizing component of Coleman Advocates for Youth. YMAC is currently working on juvenile justice issues and promoting alternatives to incarceration of youth. [phone: 415.239.0161]

Youth United for Community Action assists youth to critically assess their surroundings, consider alternatives, and secure some control by directing their energies and resources both to make better decisions in their lives and to create positive community change. Led and run by young people of color, YUCA seeks to provide a vehicle for youth to empower themselves and develop productive life skills through community organizing. [phone: 650.322.9165]

WE INTERRUPT THIS MESSAGE

We Interrupt This Message is a non-profit media training and strategy center with offices in San Francisco and New York. Founded on the conviction that marginalized communities should have the power to speak for themselves through the media and should be empowered to challenge the media stereotypes and distortions that misrepresent them, Interrupt defends human and civil rights by partnering with grassroots and public interest organizations to challenge racist, anti-poor, and anti-youth stereotypes promoted through the news. Interrupt's work is centered on building the capacity of advocates and activists to claim their voice in the media and change the terms of debate over the issues facing their communities.

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