

Do We Need Affirmative Action for Conservative Journalists?

✘ There's a new study out about diversity in America's newsrooms. And the bean counters aren't happy.

According to the American Society of News Editors there has been a steady decline in the number of minority journalists in the newsroom. About 37 percent of the U.S. population is non-white but in the newsroom minorities represent only 12.37 percent of the staff – and that's down from 13.73 percent in 2006.

As you can see the American Society of News Editors is good with numbers. But there's one kind of diversity they don't track and don't care anything about: Ideological diversity.

I've spent a good part of my life in the newsroom and I can tell you what, by now, you already know: most journalists in most newsrooms are liberal. Even the ones who describe themselves as moderates are really liberal. And their ideology affects their journalism.

Decades ago when the people who run newsrooms noticed that their staffs were overwhelmingly white and male they started making changes. No matter how fair and professional a journalist might be, a white reporter doesn't see things the way a black journalist might. A male editor doesn't see things the way a female editor does. A white reporter, especially one who doesn't speak Spanish, can't cover the barrio quite the same way that a Latino journalist can.

So diversity made sense. But what we wound up with was white liberals and black liberals and Latino liberals and male liberals and female liberals in the newsroom. And since minority groups tend to be more liberal than the general population, the more diversity that was introduced into the

newsroom, the more liberal the newsroom became. But there was precious little diversity of opinion. And that matters too.

Journalists who cover hard news should keep their opinions to themselves. But *perspective* matters. And cultural and political ideology influences journalistic perspective – how the journalist covers the news – at least as much as race and ethnicity and gender do.

A conservative journalist who is pro-life might bring some desperately needed diversity to a newsroom where just about everybody is pro-choice. A conservative journalist probably would care more about the IRS scandal than would a liberal journalist. Liberal journalists pretty much took their cues from President Obama and then Secretary of State Clinton and buried the story of how the disaster in Benghazi could have happened. Conservative journalists would push harder for the truth to come out. And if there were more conservatives in America's newsrooms the coverage of President Obama's two runs for the White House might have looked more like real news and less like coronations.

So what to do? How about an affirmative action program for the smallest minority in America's newsroom: conservative journalists.

If I were running things I'd tell all my reporters and editors to check their opinions at the door. But I'd want them to bring their perspectives to work. I'd want a newsroom where liberals and conservatives talk to each other – and influence each other's thinking. I'd want a newsroom that reflects a wide range of values in America. I would make sure every journalist under my command understood that there's a country between Manhattan and Malibu and that the people who live there have values too, even though they don't comprise the so-called cultural elite.

That, I think, would make for more honest journalism; better

journalism than what we have today.