

The Most Racist Part of the Zimmerman Trial Was the Media

How many young African-American men were killed in Chicago, Los Angeles or New York during the Zimmerman trial? It's difficult to find out because most news organizations apparently aren't interested. But the numbers are startling. Crystal Wright reports from the U.K.:

"During the July 4th holiday weekend, including the Wednesday leading up to it, 62 people were wounded by gun violence in Chicago and 12 others killed. The holiday shooting spree raised Chicago's homicide tally to 200 for the year. Last year about 500 people were killed, and most of those killing and being killed in Chicago are black. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, 'blacks make up about 33% of the city's population, they accounted for nearly 78% of the homicide victims through the first six months of 2012.'"

We don't see that on cable news or in the major websites because picking a single story that activists inject racism into is far more sensational. In this case, the Martin/Zimmerman situation is tragic, but the wave of black-on-black violence happening in our streets should sound serious alarms.

But today, journalism isn't about the search for truth; it's about the search for TV viewers, page views and advertising sales. Online blogs reward writers on the basis of page views, and TV news profits from high ratings. Generally, both are under incredible pressure to produce stories under the tightest of deadlines and—most important—get those stories noticed. The common thinking at some major blogs is that you have as little as one second to grab someone's attention with your headline. Television isn't much different with the escalating battle between Fox, MSNBC, CNN and their network

competitors. It's the reason cable news organizations carried the trial live for days on end.

After all, if that's the basis of your salary and continued employment, how strong is the temptation to focus on the sensational?

Sure, journalism has always been driven by advertising, but in the days of traditional, legacy media, they could afford some level of ethical standards and had budgets that would allow reporters time to dig for the complete story. But as the digital revolution continues to reshape the industry, the business of journalism has become a race for eyeballs, not integrity.

Under that pressure, reporters have become more and more dependent on unverifiable sources. In one media study by Cision and George Washington University, 89 percent of reporters admitted to using blogs as their research for stories. Katie Couric has admitted getting story ideas from her Twitter followers. And in this search for speed, it's simply easier to repackage a press release and pass it off as news. A 2010 study by Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence stated, "We found official press releases often appear word for word in first accounts of events, though often as not noted as such."

It's not just that opinion has taken over the news—so have press releases.

Are there good reporters out there? Of course. But the pressure to hit financial targets is greater than the pressure to report accurately. That's why we need to understand the news business for what it's becoming—a con. You're not getting real reporting; you're getting what will generate page views, ad sales or audience numbers. That doesn't mean we shouldn't follow reporting, but we should be more and more aware that the story we're getting is suspect.

Sadly, the tragic story of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman is just another confirmation of author Will Bonner's observation: "It is not news that sells papers, but papers that sell news."

Phil Cooke is a media consultant focused mainly on the Christian market as well as a vocal critic of contemporary American and American-influenced Christian culture. [*Click here to visit his website.*](#)