

A WHITEPAPER CREATED BY:

---



# FINDING OUR PIPELINE

**CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF BIPOC JOURNALISTS**

**PREPARED BY**

NIKETA REED

Executive Director | Arkansas Soul Media

**RESEARCH**

SARA BISHOP

Principal | Orchid Communications

**DIVERSITY SURVEY**

ANTOINETTE GRAJEDA

Editor | Arkansas Soul Media



---

**MARCH 2022**



# NAVIGATING THIS PAPER

THE TITLES AND PAGE NUMBERS BELOW ARE LINKED >>

**DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE | PG 3**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | PG 4**

**ESTABLISHING A BASELINE | PG 5**

**START RECRUITING EARLY EARLY | PG 7**

**PATHS ARE DEFINED IN J-SCHOOL | PG 9**

**THE LATE BLOOMER PATH | PG 11**

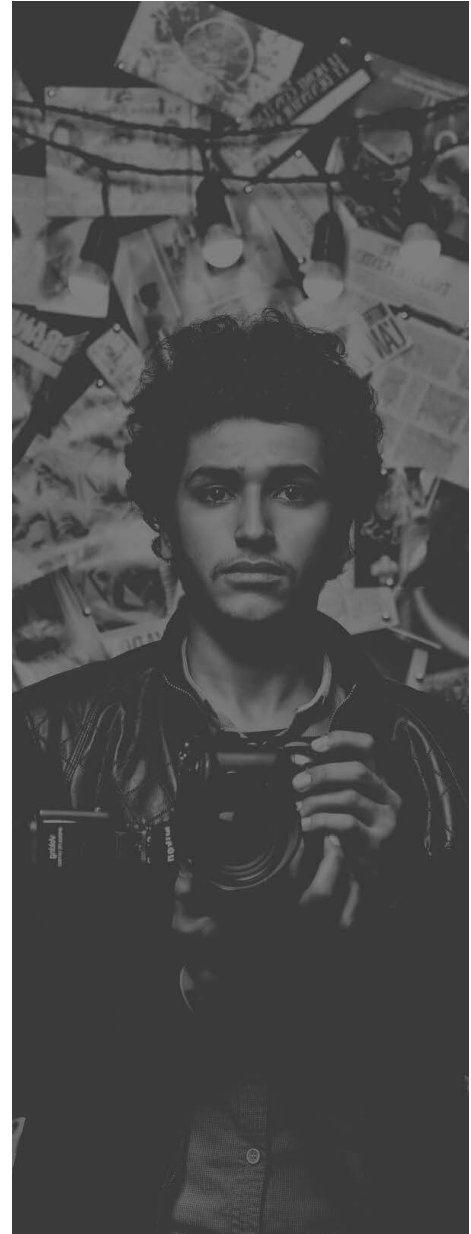
**PAY ATTENTION TO RETENTION | PG 14**

**THE LEADERSHIP TRAJECTORY | PG 15**

**CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK | PG 16**

**APPENDIX | PG 17**

**MEET THE TEAM | PG 18**



# DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Nothing in this white paper is *new*. A bunch of very smart people who care about diversity in media from different parts of the country have already studied, researched, analyzed and reported on just what the heck is happening with diversity in newsrooms and on a larger scale – media.

Don't believe me? Take a look:

*News organizations are increasing diversity efforts, a Medill survey finds*

*For More Diverse Newsrooms, It's Time to Rebuild the Journalism Pipeline*

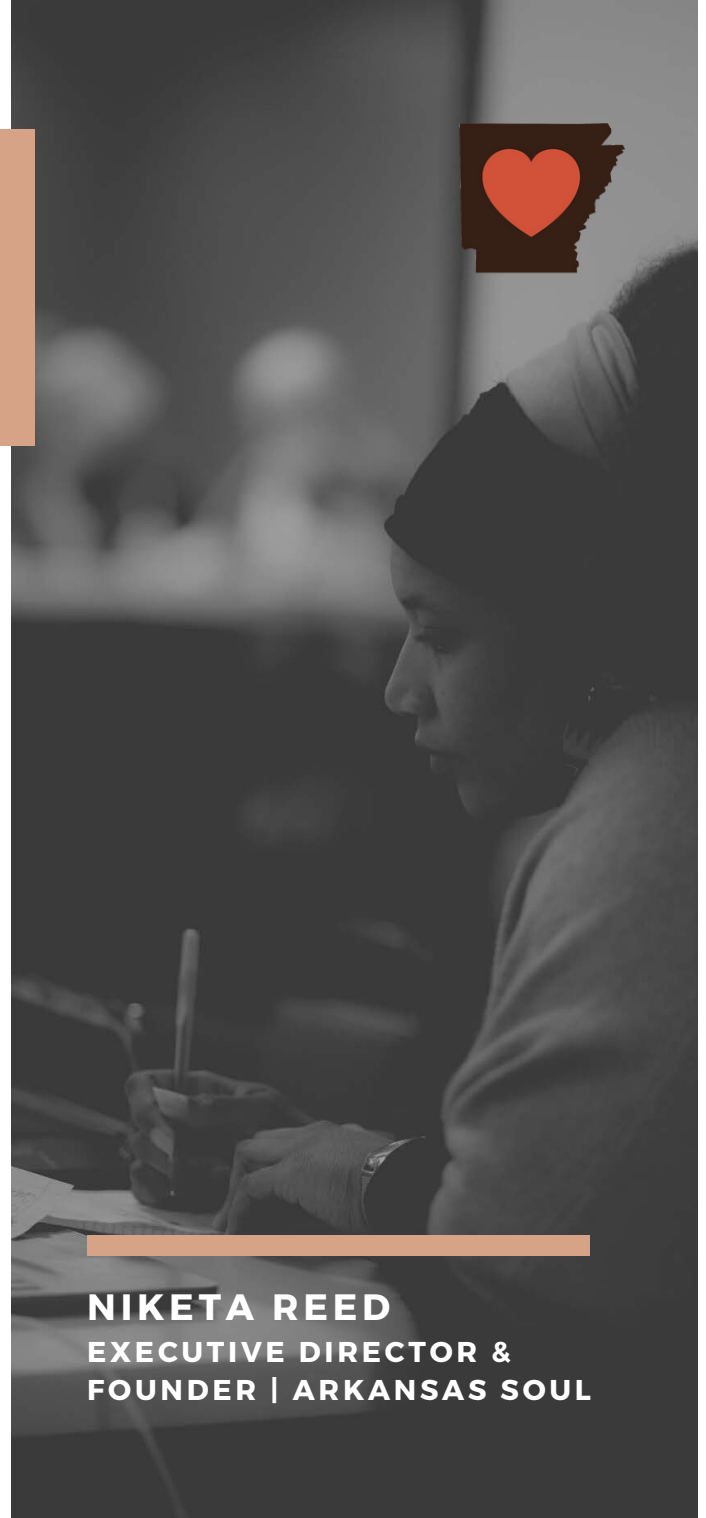
*Creating your own recruitment pipeline*

As one of the few Black journalism professors at the ACEJMC-accredited School of Journalism and Strategic Media at the University of Arkansas, I see the challenges on a daily basis.

What we did learn in searching for the Arkansas journalism pipeline is many news organizations and journalism institutions are *trying*. But is that enough to create real, lasting change? Time will tell.

In the meantime, what Arkansas Soul Media staff sees concerning journalism in our communities is a strong mistrust of mainstream media organizations in Arkansas, several news deserts across the state and an alarming lack of diversity at the "top," namely among editors, managers and directors.

This impacts coverage, perceptions, narratives and frankly loyalty to the profession. There is much work to do.



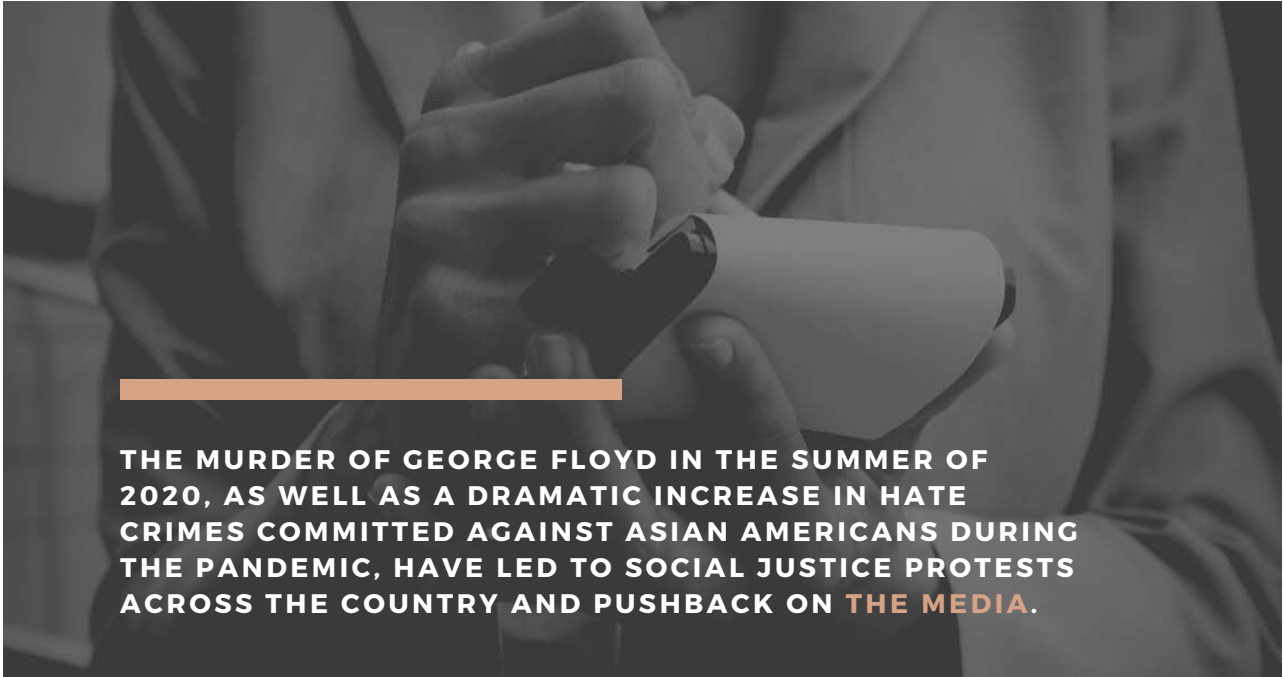
**NIKETA REED**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR &  
FOUNDER | ARKANSAS SOUL

And the research confirms what BIPOC media professionals have known all along: **No one is coming to save us.**

This comes with the silver lining that today's news organizations already know what to do. The real question is are they willing to invest the time, effort and money to do it?



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A grayscale photograph of a person wearing a white lab coat, holding a rolled-up document. The image is dark and serves as a background for the text.

**THE MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD IN THE SUMMER OF 2020, AS WELL AS A DRAMATIC INCREASE IN HATE CRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST ASIAN AMERICANS DURING THE PANDEMIC, HAVE LED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE PROTESTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND PUSHBACK ON **THE MEDIA.****

As media organizations cover these racial reckonings, it is imperative there are BIPOC journalists in newsrooms to help report on these topics and share the stories of impacted communities in an authentic way.

Currently, American newsroom employees are less diverse than U.S. workers overall. In 2019, the News Leaders Association's ASNE Newsroom Diversity Survey found 78% of full-time newsroom employees are white, with Blacks and Hispanics making roughly 7% each.

To combat the argument that a lack of diversity in newsrooms is due to a lack of qualified journalists of color, Arkansas Soul Media is implementing strategies to build a pipeline for BIPOC journalists to obtain professional employment where they can amplify the voices and stories of Black and brown people.

That pipeline begins in middle and high school when we introduce aspiring reporters to the basics of journalism through our hands-on learning/publishing experiences that build into their undergraduate studies. The initiative continues as we mentor, train and offer real-world experiences to rising journalists of color.

Arkansas Soul Media wants to be a model for other organizations to implement similar strategies in their communities – not just in Arkansas, but throughout the country.

***With the strategies listed in this whitepaper, it is our greatest hope that we can tackle this issue together: Publisher to publisher, editor to editor, writer to writer, colleague to colleague.***



# ESTABLISHING A BASELINE

In order to develop strategies for building a pipeline for BIPOC journalists, we must first establish a baseline.

In February of 2022, we emailed a survey to 91 Arkansas news organizations to ascertain the current diversity of their newsrooms. Only 9 entities responded – 5 print publications, 2 television stations and 2 digital organizations. The 10 percent response rate is what we expected based on reports of challenges faced by organizations conducting diversity surveys on a national scale.

---

In October 2021, the Associated Press reported efforts to track diversity in journalism were lagging. The AP story examined the difficulties faced by the News Leaders Association, a journalism trade group, to gather information about employment practices from newsrooms. NLA extended the deadline for survey responses for two months after “expressing disappointment about how few are willing to reveal the diversity of their staffs.”

The organization hoped for participation from 5,900 U.S. newsrooms, but instead received fewer than 250 responses. NLA formed after the 2019 merger of the Associated Press Media Editors and the American Society of News Editors.



ASNE launched a newsroom diversity survey in 1978, and when the most recent audit was released in 2018, officials announced a historic low among newsrooms participating in the annual survey. The response rate was around 17 percent during the study’s 40th anniversary.

In 1978, ASNE challenged the news industry to achieve racial parity by 2000, but current data show there is still work to be done. The Pew Research Center released a report in 2018 that found newsroom employees are less diverse than U.S. workers overall. After analyzing American Community Survey data from 2012 to 2016, Pew reported 77 percent of newsroom employees are non-Hispanic whites. Among U.S. workers in all occupations and industries combined, 65 percent are non-Hispanic whites.



# ARKANSAS BY THE NUMBERS

---

## Our survey revealed similar findings:

A total of 94 employees with a journalism or communications degree work at the 9 organizations that completed the survey.

Respondents reported a total of **74 white employees (79 percent) and 20 BIPOC employees (21 percent)**. **Of the 17 degreed employees in leadership positions, only 4 were BIPOC employees.** Only two organizations reported having a BIPOC employee with a journalism or communications degree in a leadership position.

The 9 organizations reported a total of **17 Black or African American employees (7 women, 10 men), 16 Hispanic or Latino/a/x employees (6 women, 10 men) and 2 Asian American and Pacific Islander employees (2 men)**. There was also one biracial woman who identified as Black and Asian. There were no Indigenous employees.

Television stations reported a more diverse workforce than their counterparts, but that could be a result of having larger staffs and therefore more opportunity to hire more people of color.

Four of the organizations reported having no BIPOC employees including one Spanish-language print publication.



# START RECRUITING EARLY EARLY

BECAUSE SENIOR YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL IS WAY TOO LATE



**Most journalists have an origin story, and it tends to start when they were young.**

An THV11-KTHV anchor and recent UAPB graduate told us about how seeing a Black male anchor on his tv screen for the first time when he was starting middle school fueled a lifelong dream to man the newsdesk.

Another Arkansas-based reporter remembers thumbing through her Sister 2 Sister magazines and rifling through stacks of Jet and Ebony in the family living room -- all while wondering who wrote the articles and how could she do the same?

Even yours truly, Ms. Arkansas Soul Media Executive Director, got her first taste of publishing when a 6th grade English teacher highlighted her poetry in class and sent it off to later be published in the local newspaper. She then was encouraged to take leadership roles with her school newspaper and yearbook staff from middle school to undergrad.

This isn't to say the profession doesn't have its share of late bloomers. But if we're going to compete with other industries for students and top talent recruitment, we can't ignore opportunities for early exposure (and light encouragement) to the media profession.



Here are a few ways we can engage with young future journalists in middle and high school:

- *Spot, highlight and encourage* strong writers in the classroom
- Expose students to all media - not just broadcast and newspapers.
- Encourage students to participate and compete in media programs like those offered from the Arkansas Scholastic Press Association (ASPA).
- Invest in journalism summer camps and other hands-on experiences in media
- Create job shadow opportunities.

## WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM STEM PROGRAMS:

- They recognize talent and certain aptitudes early on - encouraging the student and engaging parents on how to nurture their gifts.
- The STEM industry invests big time in nurturing these talents and protecting the pipeline (think orgs. like Black Girls Code, summer camps and college prep).
- They adapt their recruitment strategies and learning programs to the times (Robolox for learning how to code, etc.)

## EARLY DEI TRAINING

### ENGAGING BIPOC AND WHITE STUDENTS IN MEDIA

While we're on the topic of early recruitment, middle and high school journalism programs are ideal starting places to introduce concepts such as diversity in media, networking and the core principles of media literacy.

Given the current political climate in Arkansas, we understand how this may present challenges for some K-12 teachers and administrators. However, early DEI and media literacy training is essential to protecting the journalism pipeline -- and not just for BIPOC students.





# PATHS ARE DEFINED IN J-SCHOOL

For most journalists of color, the first stop on the route to the newsroom (and subsequently respect from white peers in the news industry) is journalism school (J-school).

J-school is a real "make or break moment" on the path to the newsroom, and predominately white, state institutions are struggling across the board to recruit, retain and graduate journalism students into an already shaky job market.

At historically Black Colleges and Universities such as Philander Smith and UAPB, lack of adequate funding is a major challenge for their media departments, which affects their faculty pool, networking abilities, access to state-of-the-art equipment and technology, and their overall recruitment efforts.

Incoming students of color with a true passion for journalism persevere but it's a bumpy road ahead for them, no matter the J-school they choose.

**Black journalism majors at the University of Arkansas School of Journalism and Strategic Media, interviewed for internal climate surveys at the School between 2018 and 2022, reported the following:**

- *Didn't feel like they belonged*
- *Felt their presence was questioned more in campus spaces than their white peers while reporting*
- *Little to no scholarship funds*
- *Struggled financially and felt lack of participation in low-paying student media jobs cost them rapport with faculty and peers*





## CLEARING THE PATHWAY

**First the bad news:** We're losing journalism majors in favor of political science, education and various STEM degree programs. Black and brown students feel they have to "hedge their bets" on a secure career in journalism. The programs listed above speak to their passions to support or contribute to their communities in some way. *Journalism doesn't feel as noble.*

University data also shows that some even take on second majors and a host of minors while studying journalism to have a backup plan in case they fail in the industry.

**Now some kinda good news:** The ones who persevere are tough cookies who love the news industry too much to give it up. But they need some help! Where the journalism pipeline finds many of them after graduation is in "journalism/newsroom adjacent" careers where they've transferred their hard-earned journalism skills into marketing, public relations and communications. *Journalism loses again.*

**Here's where editors, directors, publishers, journalism grant makers and agencies can make the difference:**

- *Earmark budget dollars expressly for BIPOC recruitment plans, paid internship programs and minority scholarships.*
- *Form smart partnerships with J-schools, training institutions, and minority professional orgs (NABJ, NAHJ, etc.).*
- *Make new friends --Reach out to HBCUs and minority-serving institutions **before** you have job openings and other needs or asks for these communities.*
- *Don't just invest in Northwest Arkansas-based students. Remember, most of the Black population in the state resides in Central Arkansas.*



# THE LATE BLOOMER PATH

SEE NEBA'S PIPELINE FROM GRADUATE SCHOOL



**NEBA EVANS**  
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER  
ARKANSAS PBS

**In the fall of 2018, the University of Arkansas School of Journalism and Strategic Media launched a new graduate recruitment program called Emerging Voices.**

It was an all-expenses paid visitation program that gave potential graduate students of color outside of Northwest Arkansas a chance to meet the faculty, ask questions about the degree programs and for many, visit Northwest Arkansas and the university campus for the very first time. If they liked what they saw, the School paid for their GRE test and the application fee was waived.

Out of the eight selected to participate in the first program, four students proceeded to apply to the graduate school and two were accepted: Neba Evans of UAPB and Whitney King of Arkansas State University.



Both of them received graduate assistantships, which covered their tuition and provided a small monthly stipend to live on, and both entered the documentary film program but at different times.

Neba enrolled first and got the full benefit of having Black professor mentors and ample opportunities to build her portfolio. Her enthusiasm and work ethic made her a rising star in the School. It came as no surprise when she declared she wanted to be a PRODUCER after graduating.

Before long, one of the many job opening promos coming through the J-school office seemed specially made for Neba - it was a producer position with Arkansas PBS.

And since there was an existing partnership with the two organizations, Neba's professors were able to easily craft her reference letters, her reel was ready and she secured the job in her last semester at the School.

The Georgia native now calls Arkansas home and plans to build an Arkansas Soul sponsored paid internship program, piloting at UAPB, to give students at her alma mater a sample of her own pipeline into the media industry.

Whitney King went on to become an instructor at the School.

**NEBA WAS ABLE TO LEVERAGE HER NEW NETWORK, SUPPORT SYSTEM AND SKILLS TO SECURE THE MEDIA JOB SHE WANTED IN ARKANSAS.**

**FUN FACT: NEBA'S THESIS FILM, A SONG FOR THE BLUFF, WAS FUNDED THROUGH AN ARKANSAS SOUL GRANT.**



## USING GRADUATE PROGRAMS AS A NEW PATHWAY

Undergraduate programs at J-schools aren't the only pathway to media and news organizations. A new pathway is emerging for career transitioners, and it can be a safer route into the media industry for BIPOC professionals in particular.

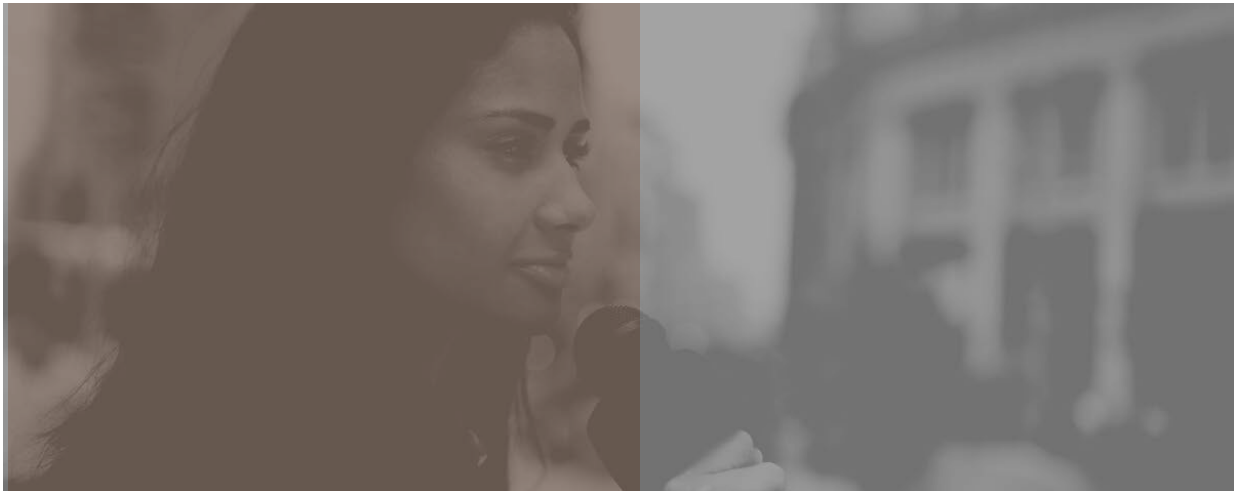
**Here are a few strategies and tips to consider in recruiting from graduate programs:**

- Graduate students tend to be more focused, have more drive and have the added bonus of work experience under their belts.
- Much like business schools, J-schools should consider forming work/tuition partnerships with organizations and corporations. *With advanced degrees, BIPOC professionals have a clearer shot at leadership positions and ladder programs can help with retention.*
- Graduate degree programs offer clear value to BIPOC media professionals and with teaching or graduate assistantships in place, they can avoid student loans. Another benefit of an advanced media degree is teaching becomes a build-in backup plan.
- Most with graduate degrees establish an area of expertise upon completion. Consider training up graduate students from other fields with writing or other media experience.
- Plus, it's generally easier to recruit graduate students - both for the classroom and the newsroom.



# PAY ATTENTION TO RETENTION

**CHECK IN BEFORE THEY CHECK OUT...**



Journalism plays an integral role in any functioning democracy. For decades now, the lack of diverse representation in journalism -- particularly in Arkansas -- has been a pervasive issue.

From long-standing barriers that have hindered educational opportunities for BIPOC journalists, to broader forms of systemic oppression -- it is clear that the Arkansas Journalism pipeline has more than a few challenges.

At the heart of this issue lies a deep-seated racism which silences and marginalizes those whose stories are deemed less important or valuable by established gatekeepers if they don't appeal to predominately white, general audiences.

This is a practice that extends from J-school, often the first place we learn what is news worthy and what is deemed a "special interest" topic.

The impact that systemic oppression has had on journalism is far-reaching. It also hurts the journalism pipeline in the long run.

The Arkansas-based BIPOC Journalists we spoke with expressed the following could help:

- *Provide support through minority professional organizations like NABJ, NAHJ, AAJA and NAJA.*
- *Give access to mental health resources as an added benefit or free service for journalists*
- *While our perspectives are needed, remember not to place them in the DEI box indefinitely or hassle them for their diverse sources.*
- *Diversity training is everyone's responsibility, not just the people of color in the room.*



# THE LEADERSHIP TRAJECTORY



**Even when BIPOC journalists make it through the journalism pipeline (completing their education and settling into the industry), they often face additional challenges such as discrimination within newsrooms, slow career growth and unequal pay compared with white journalists.**

BIPOC journalists feel it's difficult to advance within the industry and even make meaningful contributions. All of these factors combined over time create a situation where there are significantly fewer BIPOC journalists than there should be.

Systemic oppression within certain news organizations has played a significant role in undermining BIPOC voices. This form of discrimination is often perpetuated through different methods such as limiting opportunities to secure editorial positions, offering lower salaries than their white counterparts and failing to promote these individuals into higher roles.

## DON'T FORGET THOSE NUMBERS!

**From our Arkansas newsroom survey:**

Of the 17 degreed employees in leadership positions, only 4 identified as BIPOC employees. Only two organizations reported having a BIPOC employee with a journalism or communications degree in a leadership position.



# CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK

It goes without saying that we have a diversity issue in media and not just in Arkansas -- but all is not lost.

And while it's important for us to recognize the of lack of BIPOC voices in Arkansas journalism, we believe in actively seeking solutions too.

Meaningful representation within media and news organizations is possible but it requires investment in infrastructural support and increased access to educational opportunities for underrepresented journalists. We must also collectively begin tackling attitudes of systemic oppression. Ultimately, having diverse voices in journalism is essential for democracy and society as a whole.

*This isn't an admonishment, argument or plea: it's an **offer for partnership** in making things better and more equitable for the next generation of journalists.*

## OUR METHODOLOGY

### THE NEWSROOM DIVERSITY SURVEY

In February of 2022, we emailed a survey to 91 Arkansas news organizations to ascertain the current diversity of their newsrooms. Only 9 entities responded — 5 print publications, 2 television stations and 2 digital organizations. The 10 percent response rate is what we expected based on reports of challenges faced by organizations conducting diversity surveys on a national scale.

### INTERVIEWS & JOURNALIST FEEDBACK KEPT ANONYMOUS

We interviewed several journalists of color, namely those working in Northwest and Central Arkansas. To protect their job security and guard against the potential for retaliation, we decided to keep our list of journalists anonymous.

Arkansas Soul Media also has access to the University of Arkansas Fulbright College enrollment numbers and the School of Journalism and Strategic Media's climate survey results. We also had a number of brave, young Black and brown journalists step up to share their experiences while studying at the School.





# APPENDIX

## NEWSROOM DIVERSITY SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1: What is the name of your news organization?

Q2: What type of news organization are you?

- Digital
- Print
- Television
- Radio
- Other

Q3: As of February 1, 2022, how many of your employees had a journalism/communications degree?

- BIPOC \_\_\_
- White \_\_\_

Q4: How many of your employees with journalism/communications degrees were in leadership positions (editor/news director/general manager/etc.)?

- BIPOC \_\_\_
- White \_\_\_

Q5: How many of your employees with journalism/communications degrees were reporters?

- BIPOC \_\_\_
- White \_\_\_

Q6: How many of your employees with journalism/communications degrees identified as Black or African American?

- Female \_\_\_
- Male \_\_\_
- Transgender Female \_\_\_

Transgender Male \_\_\_

Q7: How many of your employees with journalism/communications degrees identified as Indigenous?

- Female \_\_\_
- Male \_\_\_
- Transgender Female \_\_\_
- Transgender Male \_\_\_

Q8: How many of your employees with journalism/communications degrees identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x?

- Female \_\_\_
- Male \_\_\_
- Transgender Female \_\_\_
- Transgender Male \_\_\_

Q9: How many of your employees with journalism/communications degrees identified as Asian or Pacific Islander?

- Female \_\_\_
- Male \_\_\_
- Transgender Female \_\_\_
- Transgender Male \_\_\_

Q10: How many of your employees with journalism/communications degrees identified as biracial?

- Female \_\_\_
- Male \_\_\_
- Transgender Female \_\_\_
- Transgender Male \_\_\_

Q11: If an employee answered biracial, which races did they identify with?

Q12: How many of your BIPOC employees with journalism/communications degrees identified as LGBTQ+?



# MEET THE TEAM

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PAPER



NIKETA  
REED

Niketa Reed is the founder and Executive Director of Arkansas Soul Media. She specializes in digital content strategy and diversity in media as an Assistant Professor at the University of Arkansas School of Journalism and Strategic Media.



SARA  
BISHOP

Sara Bishop is founder of Orchid Communications and faculty member in the Department of Communication at the University of Arkansas. As a consultant, Sara helps clients elevate the stories, messages and characters needed to bring about positive and sustainable change.



ANTOINETTE  
GRAJEDA

Antoinette Grajeda is an Arkansas-based journalist and editor at Arkansas Soul Media. She has covered race, culture, politics, health, education and the arts for NPR affiliates as well as print and digital publications since 2007.



ARKANSAS SOUL MEDIA

READY TO  
GET TO  
WORK?

WE GOT YOUR BACK. E-MAIL US AT  
[EXPLORE@ARGOTSOUL.COM](mailto:EXPLORE@ARGOTSOUL.COM)