



# How Journalists Can Address Racial Bias in Housing Reporting

In a recent review of 325 news articles about housing, spanning a wide range of California's mediascape, the results of the investigation showed an **overrepresentation of racial identities when describing the conditions of the problems of housing and various correlations between particular identities and stereotypes about that group**. Additionally, stories that addressed the analysis of why the problems were happening were less likely to include any kinds of identities represented and stories about solutions (or positive visions for the future) only tended to have identities represented in stereotypical roles.

Right wing populism relies on a narrative of an other upon whom problems can be blamed (Wodak, 2020). Whether a result of racial bias or just a result of the demographic groups impacted by housing problems, this pattern of media portrayal may be contributing to growing right-wing populist ideologies.

Journalists play an important role in the shaping of public narratives and can play a critical role in shifting this pattern. The follow are recommendations for journalists writing about housing, homelessness, homeownership, and related issues, and may be useful for journalists covering other beats.

- **When you are telling a person's story, pay attention to not flatten their character into a stereotype of one of their identities.** Don't let these stereotypes become archetypal characters – instead pay attention to the complexities of their character. How can you represent them to be relatable to multiple audiences?
- **When possible, include an analysis about the why of housing problems when including demographic information.** For example, if citing a particular percentage of Black renters facing eviction, is it possible to also include information about how the rental market has changed through financialization (and private equity landlords) to explain why particular communities are being impacts?

Additionally, the study showed how the mythology of redlining continues to define much of the conversation around housing. Coded language represents (white) homeowners in the suburbs (etc) and (Black and people of color) tenants in poorly maintained apartments in disinvested inner-city neighborhoods. Articles that related housing to neighborhood were most likely to also talk about housing in terms of need, cost, and investment, while racial identities were often represented in stories about need and cost. **Journalists can consider how their reporting recreates narratives of neighborhoods defined by redlining, or how it disrupts this pattern to introduce other possibilities.**

For more information on this study and related resources, go to <http://www.narrativestrategy.org>.