

Perceived lack of credibility didn't stop African-Americans from following Ferguson news

By SHANE GRABER / Newsrooms in this country have known for nearly half a century that coverage of African-American communities needs fixing. In 1968, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission, argued that newsrooms should provide more inclusive reporting on racial issues in response to a summer of nationwide inner-city social disorder the summer before. Last year, the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson provided ample opportunity to see whether the news media had improved its newsgathering sensitivity. According to many observers, it came up short. In a dozen in-depth interviews I conducted for research at the University of Texas-Austin, African-American respondents said that Ferguson news coverage in the wake of the shooting once again did nothing to improve credibility or build better relationships with diverse communities. "In society, trust is not given at the drop of a hat," a 34-year-old a real estate developer in Chicago told the paper's author. "So how could media assume a single media performance during a single news event is strong enough to significantly affect trust? The Michael Brown story didn't affect the way I felt, feel, or will feel about the media."