

**27.01.22**

# **Media That *Moves***

Creating anti-racist representations  
of Gypsies and Travellers  
in the UK media

**FULL REPORT**

Leeds GATE Archive



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# Project background

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Media that Moves is a joint initiative by Leeds Gypsy & Traveller Exchange and London Gypsies and Travellers, in collaboration with PIRC. The project is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT).

## What is the Media that Moves project?

The project aims to gain a deep understanding of the systems that perpetuate negative stereotyping of Gypsies and Travellers, focusing on the role of the media. It aims to find out about the key influences on the media and the stories they produce, and how they arise. It also aims to identify different framing<sup>1</sup> of Gypsies and Travellers used by the media.

Together, we've learnt from existing research and **30 interviews** with people from Gypsy and Traveller organisations, journalists, editors, and academics. With this knowledge, over a series of workshops with community members and advocates, we've examined how patterns of thought and influence can be broken, and ways of bringing about a reframing of Gypsies and Travellers.

This resource is for people who want to understand what Gypsies and Travellers face in the UK media. We cover this in a broad, non-technical way, capturing central themes, rather than specifics on how particular media organisations operate. We hope this provides groundwork for advocacy groups who want to inform their media strategies, and for allies—both inside and outside the media—who can work towards anti-racist representation of Gypsies and Travellers.

## Why the project is needed

Media coverage, public comments and statements from those in positions of power all reveal deeply ingrained misconceptions about, and prejudice against, Gypsies and Travellers. These are extremely damaging. They influence interactions and policy, leading to further deprivation, alienation and poor mental health in the Gypsy and Traveller community. Our organisations have a painful understanding of the impact that media representation has on communities.

## About the partners

**London Gypsies and Travellers** and **Leeds GATE** (Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange) are dynamic, community led organisations based in the South and North of England. We have an established track record of successful advocacy, support, community development, policy and campaigns work with Gypsies and Travellers, and our teams are led by Gypsy and Traveller staff. We are engaged in an ongoing collaboration between our organisations around strategic and community-based approaches to communications work.

For over a decade **PIRC** has been supporting movements for social, economic and climate justice to map, develop and strengthen compelling narratives that transform culture and policy. We work collaboratively across the UK and Europe, embedded in social movements, using participatory tools and methodologies.





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# Media framing

*The news media, film and TV have an important role in shaping how the public think about Gypsies and Travellers.*

For most people, this is their only source of ‘information’, as they will never have knowingly met a Gypsy or Traveller, or learned about their communities, culture and histories at school. It is still socially acceptable to report on Gypsies and Travellers in a way that would not be tolerated if it was any other ethnic group. And, because media reporting is so poor, there is very little public understanding that these are protected ethnicities, with culturally significant ways of life, that have been part of our culture for centuries, and that most people in these communities now live in houses and pay tax.

## **What is the media reporting?**

### ***Many, many stories!***

One of the most striking things is the sheer number of articles about Gypsies and Travellers. When a researcher reviewed three years of coverage in 12 of the biggest online newspapers, he found a total of 365 news stories, features and opinion pieces. That’s a story in a big national newspaper every 3 days, not to mention the stories in other nationals, TV stations, or the many, many local media organisations. What’s more, the Daily Mail and the Daily Express produced more than half the stories, showing that there is something of a tabloid campaign to over-represent, as well as *mis*-represent, Gypsies and Travellers.<sup>2</sup>



## ***Campsites & crime***

Most news stories are about ‘unauthorised’ campsites and crime. Across all newspapers, opinion pieces written by Gypsies and Travellers are rare. There are more diverse articles in outlets like the Guardian and the Independent, where topics of racism and poverty are more likely to be covered, but this is far outweighed by tabloid stories of camps and crime. And, across all types of stories, what’s often missing are structural issues about access to land and services, and we rarely see articles celebrating pride in family, community and culture. Some journalists also spoke of how organisations like the BBC are afraid of being called too liberal if they are perceived to be sympathetic towards the experiences of Gypsies and Travellers.

*“It actually did cause some quite rigorous conversations in the newsroom, where it was felt very much that actually we can be too soft on Gypsies and Travellers.”* **Journalist**

## ***Media feed off each other***

While it’s tempting to ask the question ‘which media outlets are having the biggest impact?’, there is a lot of crossover between TV programmes, the news, and social media. For instance, one of the biggest Gypsy Traveller stories that got picked up in the news in the last few years was Jeremy Clarkson using the racist word “p\*key” on the TV show Top Gear. The media all feeds off each other: what happens in TV programmes can generate news, and the news media all ‘look over their shoulder at one another’, using each other as sources to set their own agenda.<sup>3</sup> So we have to look at media

as a connected web, as well as what individual outlets are producing. That said, it's still the case that a paper like the Daily Express will have a significant role to play, given the volume and reach of its stories.

## **Common problems**

Much reporting is distorted and exaggerated. There may be some factual basis behind a story, but there will often be inaccuracies. Here are some of the common ways that media undermines Gypsies and Travellers, whether intentional or not:



**Misspelling Gypsy and Traveller**, and not using capital letters



**Failing to engage** with anyone from the communities when researching the story



**Mis-representing**, e.g. taking comments out of context, using stock images of rubbish



**Over-representing on crime stories**, e.g. reporting more crime involving Gypsies and Travellers than other communities, focusing on the Traveller in a mixed group



**Biased image selection**, e.g. ignoring people, capturing shelters and waste, showing children alone, and pixelating faces (particularly of men) like photos of criminals

The association of Gypsies with rubbish follows a broader tendency for the media to link marginalised, racialised groups with waste products.<sup>4</sup> Refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants have also been framed as 'wasted humans', as if the people themselves are a litter problem.<sup>5</sup>

# Issues engaging with the media

For groups or individuals engaging with the media, there are **several obstacles:**



**Lack of control.** Without good newsroom culture and practice, aggressive interviewers can trap and trick people, editors can take words out of context, and trolls can shout on social media.



**Representation vs. protection.** People often experience a Catch-22 between wanting better representation and also wanting to be protected from harm. The very things that can help to humanise—like sharing personal stories and showing pictures of people and homes and families—can also expose people to abuse. As many of our advocate interview participants noted, those that do share their stories often face hostility and suffer burnout as a result.



**False balance.** The inception point of a story will usually be negative. Stories tend to come from concerned, angry members of the public, and/or local council press releases. Then, if a journalist finds someone in the community to comment, it will often be to give a story the stamp of credibility.<sup>6</sup> They can bury a quote at the end and say the article is balanced because they have spoken to both sides, but this is false balance if the headline, image and story is still negative.

If we respond to these problems by avoiding the media completely, or only engaging if we protect people's identities (e.g. by choosing to pixelate faces, or not including children), then we run the risk of making no dent whatsoever in the barrage of misrepresentation.





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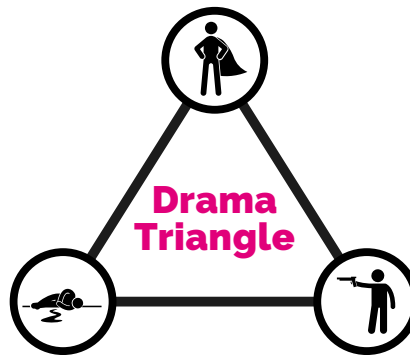
# Why the media misrepresents



# Why the media misrepresents Gypsies and Travellers

*There are many forces that influence a media outlet's decision of what stories to tell and how to tell them.*

Here are **three big ideas** that help explain this.



Moral Panic and the Drama Triangle can help us understand why Gypsies and Travellers are framed as villains and outsiders, and Churnalism explains why journalists produce such high volumes of low quality stories.



**Moral Panic happens when the media define something or someone as a threat to the values and interests of society.<sup>7</sup>** There will be some existing public prejudice, but this is exaggerated by the media, with the help of politicians and lawmakers, to create a sense of 'us versus them'. The media will blame 'them' when things go wrong, and defend 'us' (the status quo). Moral panics benefit news organisations because they increase the numbers of readers and viewers. They also benefit people in power, who can use moral panic to control the population and reinforce authority. Over the centuries we have seen this happen with any group defined as 'other' in society (e.g. witches, Muslims, gay people, migrants, and, of course, Gypsies and Travellers). The media know they can build on existing stereotypes to build a grand narrative that a group threatens 'our' children, 'our' homes, 'our' most cherished values. Below are some examples of tabloid front pages fuelling moral panic.

**DAILY Mirror** FERGIE IN HIS OWN WORDS

Becks' problem was falling in love with Victoria

ABDUCTION PANIC MOVES CLOSER

**SECOND BLONDE GIRL FOUND LIVING WITH GYPSIES**

Police seize child over kidnapper fear But family say: She's 100% ours

**THE Sun** REMEMBRANCE TRIBUTE

Strategy judge 'I was absolutely SCORE JOKING!'

A ROYAL TEAR FOR HEROES

SING ALONG, CHILDREN..

**The skirt on the drag queen goes swish swish swish**

TRANS CLASSES FOR KIDS AGE 2

Boris is backed on Naz

GET FIT FIX WITH WICKS!

**15p DAILY STAR** FREE WEEKLY NEWS DIGEST

Big Bruv bully row

**JIHADI JOHN: I'LL BEHEAD 20 MORE**

Cruel pledge by Brit executioner

Football txt storm

**Daily Mail** FREE GARDEN TOOL BAG AND SEEDS

**FREE DVD** GET YOUR LATEST SPECIAL BONUS DISC FREE TODAY

WATCH OUT THIS WEEKEND FOR DETAILS OF A SPECIAL PRESENTATION BOX

Drink, drugs, violence and under-age sex soaring as family life breaks down

**UK TEENS WORST BEHAVED IN EUROPE**

Couple break last TV taboo

**THE INDEPENDENT** THE ONLY OFFICIAL UCAS GUIDE TO UNIVERSITY PLACES

**DRUG NATION**

AN UNENDING FLOOD OF DRUGS IS DESTROYING THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN THE UK

**DAILY EXPRESS**

HOW COULD I NOT SAY YES! Rio to marry new love after heartache

MINISTER OF CONSCIENCE QUILTS IN GAMBLING PROTEST

Police chiefs in stark warning over children as young as nine fuelling knife crime epidemic

**'WILD WEST' BRITAIN OUT OF CONTROL**

Lowest of the low...refugees robbed of poppy cash

**THE BEST KNEE REPLACEMENT SURGEONS** Chosen by fellow doctors

GOOD DOCTORS GUIDE PULL OUT INSIDE

**Daily Mail**

New figures reveal violent crime up 80% in parts of Britain - Two elderly women's necks broken in vicious attacks - And one image of a machete thing sums up...

**CHILLING REALITY OF WILD WEST UK**

WILD WEST LONDON

**Daily Mail**

**THE GI DIET**

Forget Atkins, it's the diet everyone is talking about. 16-page Lifestyle special - with handling-sized food charts and GI Diet wheel to make meal choices easy

**ASYLUM: YOU'RE RIGHT TO WORRY**

After eight years in power, Blair admits that the public have real cause for concern on immigration

Why did Blair need a body double?

**DAILY Mirror**

PICTURE EXCLUSIVE

We won £152m Lotteary

IT'S VAL OVER FOR CELTS IN EUROPE

**PARENTS FEAR OVER VILE SELF HARM CRAZE**

Terrifying online game the Momo Challenge already linked to one death

**Daily Mail** JONATHAN CAIRNS

**WHAT A FARCE**

Faria threatens to kiss 'n' tell ++there's talk of a third (AND fourth!) man ++Sven speaks out ++and, oh no, Becks backs him!

Murdered boy's parents demand action over horrific cruises

**BAN THESE EVIL GAMES**

**DAILY STAR** 2 for 1 WRISTBAND

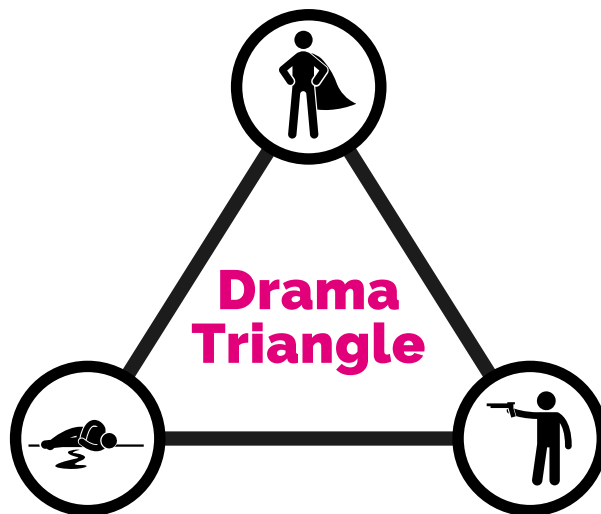
PLEASURE BEACH BLACKPOOL

FREE INSIDE! Britain's hot football and racing products

FOR EVERY READER

PLUS GET YOUR STAR FOR HALF PRICE TOMORROW - SAME SHOP

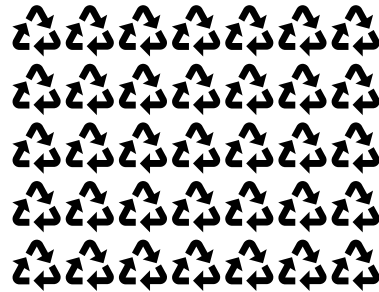
**PLAGUE OF MONSTER SPIDERS ATTACK MUM**



**In many news stories, and storytelling in general, there is a drama triangle—where you have a villain, and a victim and a hero.**<sup>8</sup> For most stories on Gypsies and Travellers, people in that community are the villain—criminal, immoral, violent, invading—and framed as the problem. The victim, in a typical news story, will be the settled community who is allegedly being threatened, forced out or made to feel unsafe, and the hero will be the authorities coming to the rescue of the settled community (for instance, the police, or local council). Sometimes Gypsies and Travellers are framed as victims—like stories about experiencing discrimination or being at greater risk of suicide—but these stories can be more about pity than justice. And, occasionally, Gypsies and Travellers are framed as heroes, like the story about the Traveller Christmas food bank challenge.<sup>9</sup> The villain-victim-hero is an established storytelling structure. But the problem with the Drama Triangle is that Gypsies and Travellers are rarely allowed to be normal people living their lives.



## Churnalism



**This idea pairs ‘journalism’ with ‘churn’, and was first used by the journalist Wazeen Zakir<sup>10</sup> to describe how most reporters rely on press releases and news agencies for stories, often copy / pasting material, rather than finding and researching original stories.** Newspapers have had a huge decline in revenue over the past 15 years, because of the move to online news, less paying readers and less advertising profit. Churnalism is a response to this. There is pressure on news organisations to produce stories while keeping costs down. One of the ways to do this is to reduce the time staff spent gathering original stories, doing research and checking sources. It results in lower quality reporting on everything, including Gypsy and Traveller stories, where journalists will often rely heavily on a press release from a local authority, without researching the story properly.



# What it's like in the newsroom

## ***Newsroom culture is still 'pale, male and stale'***

Journalism has a problem of representation, particularly in its senior staff. At the time of writing, every single top editor in the UK is white,<sup>11</sup> and most have been privately educated.<sup>12</sup> Our interview participants observed a trend that journalists who might be more progressive—characterised by some as tending to be younger, and/or more racially diverse tend also to be more junior and on less secure contracts.

The people in power aren't always leading the way on racial representation, as many senior editors still don't really understand that these are protected ethnic groups, and that stereotypes can amount to racism. It's common for media outlets to have big equality and diversity initiatives, but these don't usually explicitly extend to Gypsies and Travellers, and nor do they necessarily impact editorial decisions.

At the same time, it can be difficult for journalists to shift the culture of their newsroom. Many journalists—reporters, freelancers, even editors—are on insecure contracts. They work to close deadlines in a highly pressured environment. So unless they are protected (e.g. by their union), they face a real risk of losing their jobs if they stick their neck out.

*"I think one of the big problems is there's often a massive disconnect between the equality people, the heads of diversity in these big organisations, and the programme makers."* **Journalist**

**Style guides** often do not contain relevant information regarding these communities and, when they do, it is not always followed or enforced. So it may not be enough to have good practice written down somewhere.

*"On capital letters, I'm not sure whether it's in any style guide. I do remember a dispute in a local paper between sub editors and editors on whether to capitalise or not."* **Journalist**

**Training courses** about (or including) Gypsies and Travellers, when offered, will tend to be voluntary, perceived by many as difficult to fit in around work and, crucially, their success will depend on change being led from the top.

*"Yeah, I mean training's all very well and good and you know maybe you'll change one thing or another but a lot of people see that kind of training as an imposition in their work day. They resist it and so they they resist the kind of the conclusions that come with it."* **Journalist**

**Culture** can be changed from the bottom too, with journalists pushing for change. But this is easier with employment protection (e.g. union membership, secure contracts), which is weaker for staff on zero hour or short-term contracts.

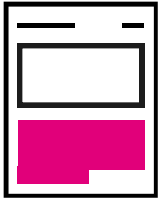
*"Depending on how well unionised the paper is, that also determines how much the staff can have an input."* **Journalist**

**“ I overheard one of the editors saying  
'oh just because we've had \*\*\*\*\* training  
doesn't mean we're going to stop writing  
about Travellers leaving litter and  
faeces everywhere.' ”**

**Journalist**

## Journalists, editors, owners

Media outlets differ in how power is distributed and how much autonomy lies with journalists, or different levels of editors. These descriptions offer a common pattern.



**Journalists** have limited control on the final story. Typically, they will pitch stories at daily meetings, but it is often senior staff that decide which ones are 'news'. Journalists will shortlist stories that are related to their geographical patch or subject area, that seem relevant to their audience, and that contain something new, shocking, surprising or funny. The quality of their writing may be compromised further, as there is often no time to do research beyond a press release.

*"I have to do 5 stories a day, [a total of] 1200 words."*

**Journalist**



**Editorial** control varies from outlet to outlet, but it's often the case that editors and sub-editors will decide the headlines and accompanying photos, as well as choosing the story. Many journalists say that their job is easier if they think like their editor.

*"It's sometimes tricky to know what shapes reporting, because the longer you work somewhere you know what the editor wants and it's often easier to give that to them."*

**Journalist**



**Ownership** is heavily concentrated in the UK. Three companies (News UK, Daily Mail Group and Reach) own 90% of the national titles.<sup>13</sup> And that comes down to just six billionaires who have an overwhelming influence, including Rupert Murdoch and Lord Rothermere.<sup>14</sup> Much like journalists internalise their editors, editors in turn internalise the owners. Or rather, they are picked by owners because they share the same instincts. As David Yelland, former editor of the Sun, admitted in an interview:<sup>15</sup> *“Most Murdoch editors wake up in the morning, switch on the radio, hear that something has happened and think: what would Rupert think about this? It’s like a mantra inside your head, it’s like a prism. You look at the world through Rupert’s eyes.”*

## ***The politics of the newsroom***

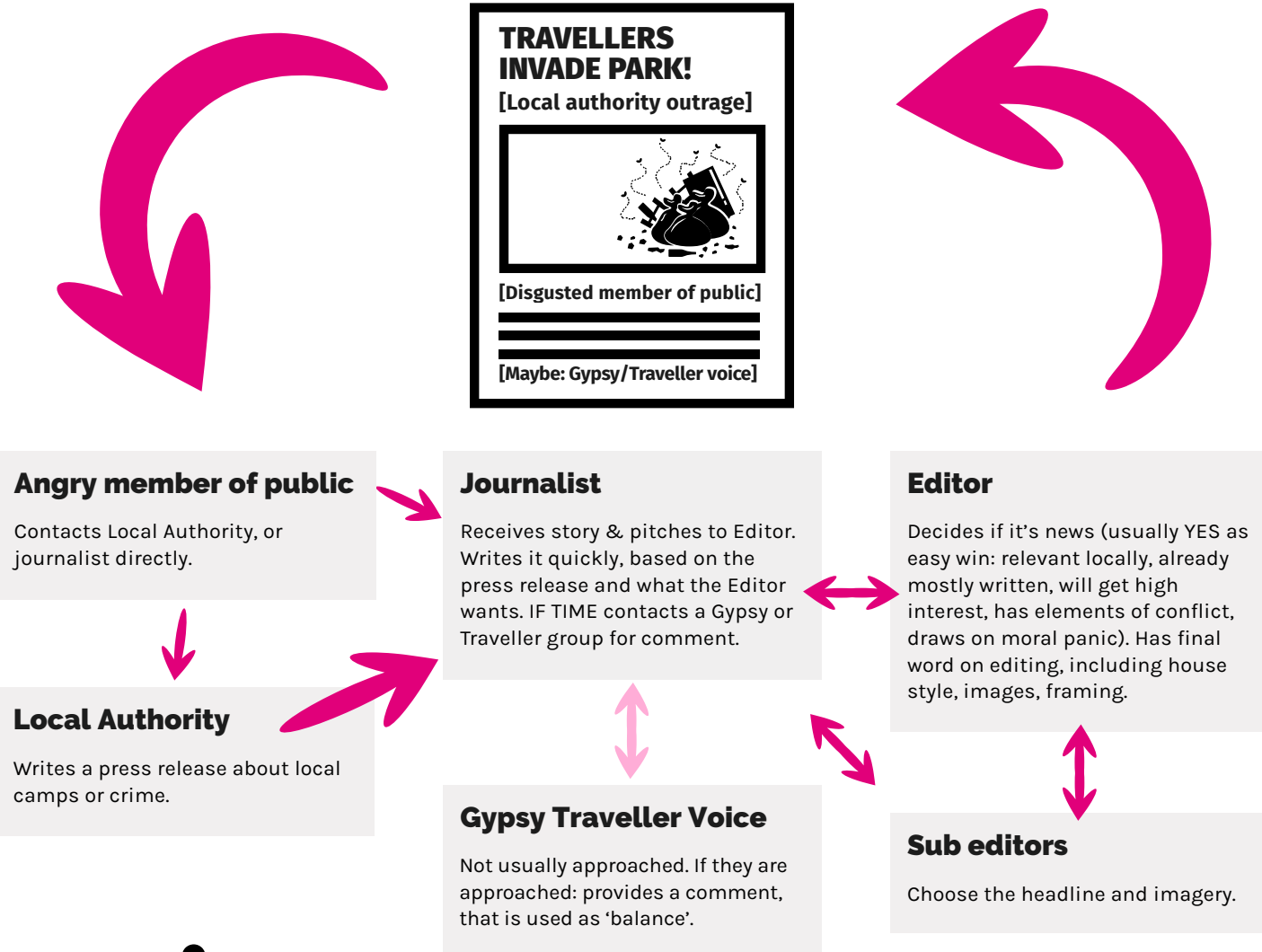
The politics and worldviews of the owners will help set the agenda of the newspaper, filtering through to the editors, shaping the choice and framing of the stories.<sup>16</sup> Most readers perceive news outlets to have a political affiliation<sup>17</sup> and this is a factor in where people choose to get their news.<sup>18</sup> The Daily Mail and The Daily Express—which, as we’ve seen, produce a significant share of the Gypsy and Traveller stories—are perceived to be two of the most right wing newspapers in the UK.<sup>19</sup> We can see this, for example, in some of the coverage from the Daily Mail on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which supports the Conservative government’s proposal and uses the banning of so-called illegal Traveller sites as the hook.<sup>20</sup> The politics of newspapers can also influence readers’ choice of which party to vote for—as researchers observed when The Sun supported the Labour party in 1997, and then changed back to the Conservatives in 2010, bringing a proportion of their readership with them.<sup>21</sup>



**“ I didn’t want to publish those photos [of litter] because I didn’t see it as relevant. But my editor basically forced me to.”**

**Journalist**

# The harmful story cycle



**Drama Triangle**

**Moral Panic**

**Churnalism**



#4

# Key influences on press culture

This map summarises some key influences on the newsroom identified by journalists and advocates. The size of each bubble indicates how powerful we think it is currently.



**Business &  
Advertising**



**Advocacy  
Groups**



**Social Media  
Sites**



**Training  
& Education**



**Regulation**



**Politicians &  
Celebrities**



**Readers &  
Public Opinion**

**Owners**

**Editors**

**Journalists**



Here, in more detail, we show the direction of influences and indicate (with the size of the arrows) how much power they seem to have currently.

**Advocacy Groups**

Although many Gypsy and Traveller groups do excellent media work, they can be distrustful and don't always understand media. Under-resourced groups, especially, tend to engage reactively, rather than pitching stories.

**Training & Education**

Baseline understanding of Gypsies and Travellers is low for journalists and wider public. No formal education about Gypsies and Travellers in schools, journalism colleges or in-house induction.

**Regulation**

Press are self regulated and membership is voluntary. Most are members of IPSO, which takes a long time to respond, doesn't have teeth and only considers discrimination against individuals. Unsuccessful claims embolden racism.

**Business & Advertising**

Main revenue for newspapers is advertising, selling on content, and circulation & membership. Journalists are pressured to create trending content. Bad Gypsy and Traveller stories about conflict, crime and scandal are considered easy wins.



**Social Media Sites**

Drive a third of traffic to news sites, and take a share of revenue. They use algorithms newspapers can't control and have very little accountability for misinformation spreading. Give newspapers feedback on readership.

**Readers & Public Opinion**

Media caters to prevailing stereotypes, but is also the main influence on public opinion. Newspapers monitor reader's online behaviour, readers give feedback through comments and complaints.

**Politicians & Celebs**

Affect what the newsroom decides to cover when they have significant influence on social media and/or personal relationships with journalists and news editors. Also often follow press and social media closely themselves, to monitor public opinion.

# Key influences on press culture

## 1. Business model and advertising

One print reader is worth around eight online readers in terms of revenue, but now far less people buy newspapers and instead get their news online.<sup>22</sup>

The main **revenue sources** for UK newspapers are:

- » **Advertising.**
- » **Syndication and licensed content.**  
(where a third party sells articles to be republished)
- » **Circulation and subscription.**

Only a few papers, like The Telegraph and The Times, have had success with a paywall. Most rely on advertising, and so they produce more of the 'click-bait' articles that people will open.

*"Journalists are doing more and more what we'd call 'trending content' than ever, which is really sad to see because it's massively in my opinion degraded the quality of the news output that we create, but it is also about keeping the newspaper afloat."* **Journalist**

## ***Gypsy and Traveller stories are often thought of as 'easy wins'***

*"Stuff about Gypsies sells in terms of the amount of clicks you get and the amount of advertising revenue you can get off the back of it."* **Journalist**

Tabloid journalists, particularly, follow the rule of the thumb that conflict and scandal sell, so produce Gypsy and Traveller stories in this vein. It may not be true that these stories always sell best, but it is believed.

*"Prejudice is a business model."* **Journalist**

## ***Social media drives the business model***

Social media sites are often where readers find news, where stories spread quickly, and where journalists go to get tip offs and understand their readers (through monitoring their engagement). They drive over a third of traffic to news sites, so outlets have to share their revenue with third party sites like Facebook, who use algorithms they can't control.

The copy that goes onto social media will tend to be more sensational than the original article.

*"Even for the Nationals, and when the headline is quite serious, the social media bit will be very casual and clickbaity."* **Journalist**

Comments offer a feedback loop to newspapers that they never used to have. But the volume of racism and hate below Gypsy and Traveller stories is likely sending a skewed picture of what public opinion is like.

Social media platforms do very little in the way of checks and balances, like moderating trolls or checking content. It was only recently that Facebook allowed users to control who comments—until then, news outlets were struggling, and failing, to moderate them.

*“Social media has a huge role to play in it and a complete vacuum of accountability or responsibility.”* **Advocate**

## 2. Readership & public opinion

Catering to the readership is key to the survival of most media. Everyone agrees that scandalous stories do well, but people have different experiences of the stories that portray Gypsies and Travellers in a more positive light.

Some local newspaper journalists go against the grain of their readers, writing balanced, nuanced Gypsy and Traveller stories, which are then met with poor engagement or complaints about bias. But they are able to run these stories because of the values of the outlet and editors. The moral case wins over the business case. Other journalists argue that well researched, positive stories actually do *better* than the standard stories of crime and camps, and they have the stats to prove the business case too.

## ***Analytics and stats***

The move to online means that it's even easier to get data about readers and reader habits, such as what people read, what they share, how long they stay on a website or webpage, and where they go next. This feedback informs the direction of content.

*"Metrics have always been carefully studied but they've never, ever been so carefully studied, as they are in the digital age."* **Journalist**

## ***Audience shares are changing***

Young, more diverse groups are leaving mainstream media, and heading to TikTok or YouTube for news, or Netflix and Amazon for entertainment. This is partly because digital natives have different habits, but possibly also because they are put off by the kind of content that a 'pale, male, stale' culture produces—content that doesn't represent them so well.

Dynamics like this can affect media coverage, because an outlet will cater to their current consumers, but might also have strategies to attract other demographics of consumer.

*"People who don't feel themselves represented by that particular demographic have left the mainstream media in droves."* **Journalist**

## ***Public opinion shapes media; media shapes public opinion***

Many journalists assume that there is a centuries-old ingrained prejudice against Gypsies and Travellers, and that they are simply reflecting what people already think. This may be true to some extent, but the media is where most people hear about Gypsies and Travellers.

*"So the vast majority of it comes from TV, film, and social media influencers, and then a very small amount of personal experience."*

### **Advocate**

And the media clearly exaggerate and even weaponise any stereotypes that already exist. Journalists will, consciously or not, repeat alarmist ideas, often without taking responsibility for the effect that has on their readers.

An example of that is the Channel 4 dispatches programme 'The Truth about Traveller Crime' which, even in its title, promotes the concept of 'Traveller Crime', as if these the words 'Traveller' and 'Crime' belong together, hammering home the idea that Travellers are criminals by nature.

*"Journalists are often very reluctant to accept the extent to which they shape public opinion."* **Journalist**

## ***National narratives are slow to change***

Narratives on migrants, LGBTQI+ people, Gypsies, don't change overnight. The movement for ethical journalism is relatively new, paying close attention to how groups of people are portrayed in the media. And, as noted by interviewees, changes in the media tend to go at the pace of wider social changes, such as mass movements on racism, or international conventions on human rights.

## **3. Regulation and complaints**

### ***Press regulation is voluntary***

There are two press regulators in the UK—the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), and the Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS). Both of them are voluntary, and only one of them, IMPRESS, fully meets the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry—an *independent* body that takes an *active role* in ensuring high press standards, using its powers to investigate a serious or systemic breach of regulations and *impose sanctions* like issuing fines and directing the placement of apologies and corrections.<sup>23</sup>

No traditional national papers have signed up to IMPRESS. The vast majority of titles, both national and local, and those with the highest readerships, have signed up for IPSO, which is paid for and controlled by the industry via the Regulatory Funding Company (RFC). Some broadsheets, like The Financial Times and The Guardian, have made their own complaints procedure. This means, at the moment, most of the press is 'self-regulated'.



IPSO's rules can only be amended at the discretion of the RFC, which is constituted entirely of newspaper executives. IPSO's standards are written by a sub-committee of the RFC called the 'Editors' Code' Committee, which is made up mostly of working newspaper editors. The intimate role of industry representatives in setting standards, deciding complaints procedures and securing funding (via the RFC) mean that IPSO is not an independent body. And, because it's in the interests of newspaper owners and editors to be able to say what they want without consequence, regulation is very weak.

*"There's such a strong resistance towards any sort of regulation, and it's clearly fallen short, it means it's really letting minority groups down in the UK."* **Advocate**

Some of the other **problems with IPSO** are:<sup>24</sup>

- ✗ **Time**—It takes a long time to respond, often months for complaints. That means that action often comes too late, after the damage has been done.
- ✗ **Teeth**—In its first five years, it did no investigations, and charged no fines. It also can't require newspapers to apologise, or to put corrections in a place of equal prominence.
- ✗ **Discrimination**—IPSO won't even consider complaints about coverage that targets *groups* of people, like Gypsies and Travellers, it deals only with abuse of individuals.

**“How would we feel about it if the Daily Mail were publishing 10 articles every month on illegal campsites? There’s no way you can use the editors code, you can’t apply IPSO’s code to that scenario. It just doesn’t work.”**

**Academic**

## ***When complaints aren't upheld, it emboldens racism***

When regulators investigate complaints and don't uphold them, then that also sends feedback to a newspaper or broadcaster that they have a green light to continue misrepresenting Gypsies and Travellers. When Ofcom (the UK's TV and radio regulator) finally responded to complaints about Channel 4's Dispatches programme 'The Truth About Traveller Crime', ruling (after a year) that it was fair to Travellers, this was perceived by many as a step backwards.

*"Whenever people go to challenge things that are definitely racist but that don't technically break the rules, it emboldens [the outlets] to do it."*

**Advocate**

## ***People don't tend to complain about Gypsy and Traveller coverage***

Journalists and editors take complaints seriously when they receive them directly from readers. But, while there are some groups who do actively complain about biased or racist Gypsy and Traveller stories, none of the journalists I spoke to were aware of their outlets receiving these kinds of complaints.

## **4. Training & education**

We are not taught about Gypsies and Travellers at school. And nor is it a subject that is included in journalism training courses, or in the in-house induction training that outlets might offer their staff. So most journalists

who write about Gypsies and Travellers will have a very low baseline understanding of the history, culture and current issues facing these communities, or how to sensitively report on them.

## 5. Advocacy groups

Some Gypsy and Traveller organisations are doing excellent work to improve media coverage, but this isn't always the case. There are several problems with how advocates have typically approached the media. One is to avoid it. And, as explored above, there is an understandable reluctance to get involved with the media when the outcomes are so often harmful.

*"Charities are rightfully afraid of being burned, and right that the narratives are often stacked against them."* **Advocate**

### ***"Difficult to reach"***

Perhaps due to this understandable caution engaging with the media, several journalists said that they had found it difficult to talk to people in the community when running stories. It's probably also the case, though, that many journalists don't try hard enough to find them.

*"So that's actually one of the main issues I had with covering Traveller topics, is that of course it's really difficult to convince people to talk to me for very good reason."* **Journalist**

## ***Only engaging reactively***

When advocacy groups only engage reactively to media requests, this will usually require them to respond to bad things happening, which inevitably means negative representation of Gypsies and Travellers. It's a difficult call to make, when such requests should be ignored to avoid 'rubber stamping' a negative story. It's also important to use the platform to get another perspective across.

## ***Not understanding media***

Some journalists within the Traveller movement spoke of how advocates wouldn't always distinguish media work from policy work. The way the journalists were being approached meant the advocates weren't getting the platform when they needed it.

*"[Gypsy Traveller organisations] didn't know how to present their work, they weren't giving comments. Like if a journalist rings up and says "I want a comment" they mean they want it now. Not after it's been run past the trustees and back down a week later for a statement. Then the story is over."* **Advocate**

## ***A breakdown of the relationship***

More broadly, journalists thought that the ultimate problem was a breakdown in the relationship between media and Gypsies and Travellers. Several reporters shared stories of how people in advocacy organisations would stop

engaging with them if they ran stories that contained anything unwanted. While, again, this might sometimes be a good call, it was perceived by some journalists as unreasonable, as they needed to show ‘both sides’.

*“What she wanted was for me to not mention any destruction or damage or antisocial behaviour or any negative Gypsy stuff at all, which was just never going to happen... You have to accept that we need to show some negative sides.”* **Journalist**

## 6. Politicians & Celebrities

Politics and media are interdependent, with influence running in both directions.<sup>25</sup> Politicians and political parties attempt to shape coverage but also adapt to the media agenda.<sup>26</sup> Both politicians and celebrity influencers affect what the newsroom decides to cover when they have significant influence on social media and/or personal relationships with journalists and news editors. They often follow the press and social media closely themselves, to monitor public opinion.





#5

**What can be done  
to change this?**



# Perspectives on how change happens

Speaking to journalists and advocates, we heard broadly **three perspectives** on how to encourage better media representation of Gypsies and Travellers:



**Support good practice:** e.g. pitch ‘positive’ stories, form better relationships between journalists and Gypsies and Travellers, support staff training and offer style guides.



**Punish bad practice:** e.g. make complaints, and campaign for changes to regulation.



**Wider cultural shifts:** e.g. organise around big moments, bring communities together, build stronger allies, and encourage more diversity in newsrooms and halls of power.

There is much to celebrate in progress that has already been made, and also more that can be done, with a clear strategy and more resources. While change won’t happen overnight, we hope these recommendations will take us in the right direction.

# Call to action for journalists

Journalists interested in improving coverage at their outlet can:

- ☐ **Try harder to contact Gypsies and Travellers**
- ☐ **Carry out an audit of their outlet's content**
- ☐ **Push for better stories**
- ☐ **Resist misrepresentation**
- ☐ **Keep an eye on the ads**
- ☐ **Moderate or turn off comments**
- ☐ **Check diversity initiatives include Gypsies and Travellers**
- ☐ **Whistleblow!**
- ☐ **Unionise!**

For journalists interested in improving coverage at their outlet, one of the most obvious steps is to **try harder to contact people** in the Gypsy and Traveller communities, rather than hiding behind the excuse that they are 'hidden' or 'secretive'.

**“The greatest sin that the media has with us is that they never bothered to pick up the phone to actually speak to the people who are affected by the story.”**

**Advocate**

When covering stories, journalists can pitch and **push for better stories**. Even within the pressures of the current media environment, working collaboratively with advocate organisations to identify compelling stories, including new information, statistics and real life case studies, that aim to avoid the flaws described earlier, would benefit the communities and be more accurate. The images, too, should be accurate and relevant. Inappropriate photos often reinforce unhelpful stereotypes (e.g. dirty children without guardians, dilapidated homes, waste). Where possible, journalists should reach for advocate resources to understand what it means to **resist covering stories that misrepresent**, exaggerate and distort—though, of course, their power to actually do that depends on how much it will risk them their job.

As a piece goes out, journalists should be aware that it may be accompanied by inappropriate advertising, based on keywords and algorithms, and **ask sub editors to keep an eye on the ads**. Similarly, any story on Gypsies and Travellers will tend to attract a high volume of comments online, on news sites and social media. If the outlet doesn't already do this, journalists can **request that comments are moderated**, or simply turned off.

Within their outlet, journalists can **check their Diversity and Inclusion initiatives**, and request that Gypsies and Travellers are appropriately included on the grounds of ethnicity. They can **request training sessions** from Gypsy Traveller organisations on what to be aware of when covering the subject, including style guides. Usually these trainings will need to be endorsed by head office, but pressure from reporters will help.



Journalists who want to go further in pushing for change can **whistleblow** within their organisations, or go public with an exposé of how the outlet campaigns against Gypsies and Travellers. One of the journalists I spoke to shared how a colleague had done a **mini audit of the paper's Traveller stories** and how balanced they were, looking at headlines, images and inflammatory words. They used this data to argue that the coverage was harmful, and also damaging their ability to build trust with Gypsies and Travellers and get good stories.

When this kind of work feels risky, journalists can **join a union**, and use the union to organise colleagues and also protect them if they want to take action.

*"Headlines like 'Traveller family pitches up on local community green' would be really common to see in my newsroom, and then people like me and my colleague started whistleblowing, saying we were not comfortable with this. I felt I was able to do that because of my position as a community reporter, and I argued that it was really damaging my ability to work with these groups if we keep doing this kind of thing. And [the editors] were really receptive to that actually, which is great and it's now rare to be doing that kind of headline."*

**Journalist**

# What campaigners & advocates can do



## ***1. Find & pitch 'good stories'***

### **Making the case for better, more accurate representation**

**Moral case.** There's a clear moral case for improving representation: Media coverage of Gypsies and Travellers directly fuels discrimination and hate crime. After My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding, for example, there was a spike in racist abuse and bullying.<sup>27</sup> When a group is discriminated against, they are more likely to avoid becoming part of the group that stereotypes them. This, coupled with relatively low rates of literacy in the Gypsy and Traveller communities, mean that people might not read what is written about them, and so have less power to challenge their representation.<sup>28</sup>

**Business case.** As above, there is some disagreement amongst journalists about whether more accurate, balanced stories do as well as sensationalist, harmful stories, in terms of reader engagement and advertising revenue. This is something that could be researched by advocates and journalists.

“*I mean, I’ve got the stats to back it up that my Traveller pieces that are really balanced really do well for the company, so it’s in the company’s interest to be appropriate.”*

**Journalist**

One interview participant raised another argument for both the moral and the business case: mainstream media outlets need to attract back the young, more racially diverse readers and viewers that are leaving them to get their news elsewhere—and this means being better on racism.

*“The younger generation of people between say 15 and 25, they just won't have bigotry. They will not have it. Concepts of equality, whether that's in terms of sexuality or gender identity or race, are so important to them.”*

**Journalist**

## **What a ‘good story’ looks like**

Better stories are humanising of Gypsies and Travellers. They cover personal stories, showing the reality and diversity of Gypsy Traveller life, and they also convey the structural aspects of discrimination and need for justice.

Better stories are written by Gypsies and Travellers, or include their voices, telling their story in the way they want to tell it. This means having more opinion pieces in newspapers, and people giving interviews.

Better stories avoid framing Gypsy and Traveller people as cardboard cut-outs—as the villain, victim or hero of the drama triangle.

Where possible we should try to avoid getting into the trap of ‘good Gypsy’ versus ‘bad Gypsy’. If all we’re doing is arguing whether Gypsies are good or bad then we are still at the level of ethnically stereotyping Gypsies. It’s also dehumanising to only portray people as good. If we insist that Gypsies and

Travellers are outstanding members of the community and contributors to society then we can set unrealistic expectations—that they have to be *exceptionally good* to be accepted. We need to go beyond this labelling to build a new grand narrative, that justice for Gypsies and Travellers protects what all of us hold dear—our freedoms, rights, safety and community.

In practice this might mean pitching and contributing to:

- » News stories about taking part in the community, showing solidarity with other groups, graduating from university, winning awards—but with relatable, everyday details of peoples' lives.
- » News stories about poverty, health, housing, and discrimination that expose structural injustices, but with Travellers as agents, rather than victims to be pitied.
- » News stories about unexpected events, like a local community coming out in support of a local Traveller site. As the saying goes: *Dog bites man: no story. Man bites dog: story.*
- » Feature stories about the history, culture and family life of Gypsies and Travellers.
- » Storylines in radio, TV and film that cover both the real issues facing people in these communities, and show people as complex and three dimensional.

## Example: Better news stories in UK press

### **‘The ignorance about us can be deadly’: Gypsy and Traveller women talk about the stigma they face**

For Gypsies and Travellers, dependent on family ties and already facing prejudice, the isolation of the Covid lockdowns has hit particularly hard



Gypsies and Travellers at the Appleby Horse Fair, which resumed this year after being canceled due to Covid in 2020 (Photo: Ian Forsyth/Getty)

#### News

7th April

### **Rally in solidarity with Gypsy and Roma communities in Oxford**







By Gergana Krasteva  
Health Reporter



Travellers at the Oxford Parkway station in December 2018

#### Most read

#### Commented

-  These schools have announced closures for pupils
-  Family heartbroken after 'misunderstood, kind, loyal' Willow found dead at service station
-  People wait hours to get a PCR test in city centre
-  Hour-by-hour weather forecast as storm hits



**Example: #weareallsomanythings,  
London Gypsies and Travellers**



This campaign, run by London Gypsies and Travellers, tries to challenge the stereotypes by showing people with their many identities, other than their ethnicity, living their normal lives.

## Where to pitch stories

The better the relationships with journalists, the easier it is to pitch stories. Local media is a good place to start, as the content of stories will often be relevant to the local area. But so-called 'soft media' opportunities are often overlooked (commentary, entertainment, arts and lifestyle), and can have a wide reach.

*"We often neglect the soft media, certainly on the left. The left can be a bit dismissive of Grazia, for instance, but I would always much rather place something in Grazia than I would in The Guardian. By a million miles."*

**Advocate**

### Example: Roma Press Center, Hungary



The Roma Press Center is a news agency in Hungary set up to reduce prejudice against Roma people. For many years it responded to biased stories, trying to balance them, but more recently it has become a proactive media organisation. It trains journalists from Roma backgrounds, gets reporters to sites quickly, and works towards alternative reporting of big stories, as well as pitching positive stories about Roma people.<sup>29</sup>

## Example: Travellers' Times, UK



The Travellers' Times has recently set up a traineeship programme to support Gypsies and Travellers to get placements in the media, which is part of a broader programme of work called 'TT Vision'.<sup>30</sup> The programme will invest in practical skills that will support community development, social mobility and place the tools for GRT representation firmly in the hands of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers themselves.



## ***2. Target & build relationships within media***

To build better relationships with journalists, advocacy groups need to try to understand the context they work in, and the pressures upon them, as well as providing them with good stories (see above).

*“Traveller organizations have to stop seeing journalists as inherently bad people.”* **Journalist**

It takes some time to establish who can be trusted, but a good place to start is with journalists who have already written better pieces on Gypsies and Travellers. Advocacy groups can also approach journalists with marginalised characteristics that seem more likely to understand the politics of representation. And the higher up the journalist, the better.

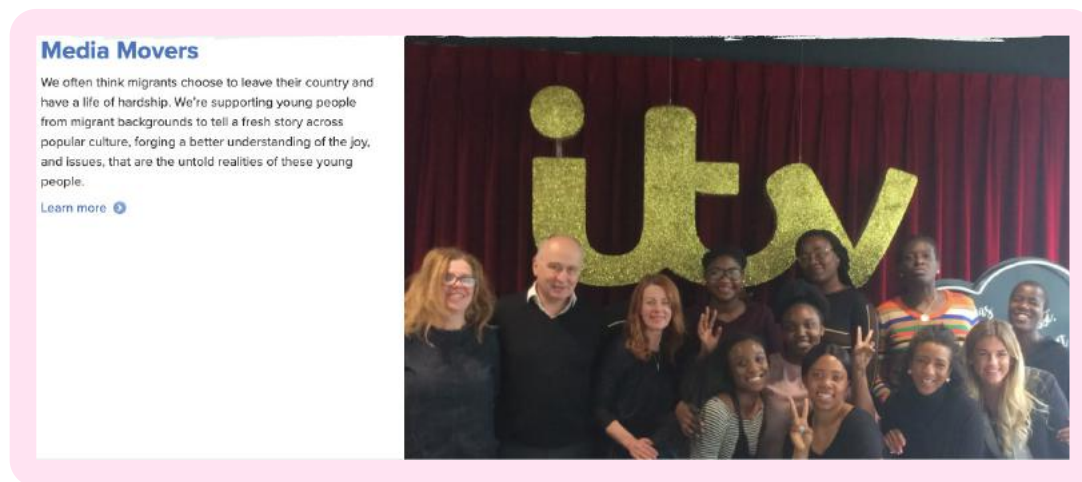
*“I think, definitely, get into the inboxes of as many high up editors as you can, and especially ones that you know are sensitive to these kinds of issues.”* **Journalist**

As above, one of our interviewees was able to show that the well researched more nuanced stories actually did better for the business. So for more

senior staff, a hook might be the business case, as well as the moral case. Advocacy groups can work with journalists to research the performance of ‘good’ stories and compare them with the ‘bad’.

While it might be counterintuitive, the more senior staff can actually be the easier to engage and invite to meetings because they work more on their terms, whereas reporters are stretched and would probably need permission from their boss.

### Example: OnRoad Media Movers



OnRoad is a UK organisation set up to improve the representation of minority groups in the media. As part of their work they facilitate ‘interactions’, where they bring together senior media professionals—journalists, celebrities, TV and radio producers—and people who have direct lived experience of the issues they report on. With this approach, they aim to encourage more balanced reporting and better storylines involving Trans people, and young people with migrant backgrounds.



### ***3. Offer training & resources for journalists***

#### **Offering training**

Advocates can try to address the fact that most journalists will have received no formal education about Gypsies and Travellers, by approaching the institutions that offer training:

- » **The National Council for the Training of Journalists.** This is the body that oversees the training and qualifications of journalists in the UK.
- » **Individual colleges.** There are many colleges and universities teaching journalism who could be approached on a one-to-one basis.
- » **The National Union of Journalists.** With 38,000 members, this is the largest union of journalists in the UK and they offer events and training courses for their members.
- » **In-house induction training.** Many media outlets have their own induction training for new staff.
- » **In-house bespoke training.** Many outlets will offer their staff workshops and training courses, for instance as part of Diversity and Inclusion initiatives.



By pitching this subject as an equality issue, helping to develop materials, and offering good speakers, many journalists thought there would be an appetite for training. The challenge, though, would be to make such courses mandatory, rather than voluntary, and to make sure the recommendations are acted upon.

*“You’ve got about 20 universities in this country who teach journalism and a lot of those lecturers genuinely would like to change things... I think you could go to every single one of those universities and ask for a chat, ask to meet, offer speakers.”* **Journalist**

## **Style guides and ‘do’s and don’ts’**

While ideally this is a subject that journalists should have a deeper understanding of, the stress of the job means that the longer the time commitment, the less likely people are to engage. So, as well as offering in-depth training, advocates can help those journalists who just want a quick reminder of dos and don’ts, with short, easily accessible documents covering advice on style (e.g. capitalising ‘G’ and ‘T’), facts (e.g. vast majority live in bricks and mortar housing), and framing (e.g. disproportionately cast as the criminal).

## **Media hub and press support**

Several journalists thought that a website with more centralised resources, combining the efforts of several Gypsy and Traveller organisations—style guides, data, case studies, photos, contacts—would be a useful one-stop place to go. And, similarly, more capacity for press officers who can do both the reactive work, responding to requests, and the proactive work of pitching stories. The function of press support like that would be to facilitate



a better relationship between the community and the media, rather than mediate it or speak on behalf of Gypsies and Travellers. The need for the public to hear about the real lives of Gypsies and Travellers, from communities directly, remains key. That's what journalists want, and it's also what is most likely to help humanise Gypsies and Travellers.

### **Example: Travellers' Times Press Pack**



#### **Travellers' Times press-pack**

Produced by and for journalists and editors

*The Travellers' Times is a platform that aims to challenge negative media representation of Gypsies Roma and Travellers, through producing media and running training. They created a press pack with 12 key points for journalists to remember when covering stories. This has been widely shared and is also available on the IPSO website as their only external resource on Gypsies and Travellers.*



#### ***4. Support Gypsies & Travellers to join & engage with media***

Many people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are now contributing to social media and alternative platforms, forming their own voices that challenge stereotypes and racism.<sup>31</sup>

However, engaging with traditional media can be daunting and often leads to burnout. Advocacy groups should be doing all they can to support and protect people from the community: offering role-play practice for aggressive interviews, peer-to-peer support, and media training. Before responding to requests from the media, advocates should do an assessment, weighing the risks of harm against the possible benefits of having a platform.

## Example: NEON Spokesperson Network



*NEON is a network of organisers across the UK that supports movement building, and better progressive messaging. Their Spokesperson Network is successfully boosting the number of progressive, diverse voices being booked by mainstream media. It provides media training, messaging help and PR support.*

But the more fundamental shift would be to increase the presence of Gypsies and Travellers actually inside the media—in the newsroom, and in cultural production roles like script writing. One Romany journalist spoke of how their colleagues just won't say and write the same things knowing that one of their team is a Romany Gypsy. Getting Gypsies and Travellers into these roles is a challenge, and will be helped by finding ways to support people to train as journalists, like prizes to go on courses, or placement schemes in industry. It's a slow but powerful way to bring about a cultural change in the media.

## Example: Friends, Families & Travellers



FFT is an organisation that campaigns to end racism and discrimination against Gypsies and Travellers and Roma. They have started a project to support more people from these communities to join production teams in creative roles, acting, writing, directing, designing. They do this by introducing people to production companies and sharing opportunities for jobs with their network.

“*We need more of us Gypsies and Travellers in there, working behind the scenes, being prepared to get our hands dirty in telling the stories of our communities and becoming storytellers. Because if we don't, then nothing will change.*”

**Advocate**



## ***5. Complain about comments, trolls & adverts***

Complaints are taken seriously by journalists and editors, and it's worth calling out poor reporting and hateful comments below the line. However, it's a huge undertaking to monitor coverage. To make an impact, there needs to be capacity to respond quickly and often, rather than just the odd person making a complaint.

A social media strategy for monitoring media coverage could look something like this:

- » Post a comment under the article to say why the story is inaccurate/wrong.
- » Tweet this.
- » Email the editor with a complaint.
- » Send this to the journalist on twitter and via email.
- » Put it up on your website that you have complained.

Similarly, we can watch for the adverts that go out alongside stories, and move quickly to request that the news outlet or social media platform take down anything inappropriate.



## Example: The Traveller Movement and Stop Funding Hate



The Traveller Movement have recently teamed up with Stop Funding Hate, to put an end to adverts that fuel hatred towards Gypsies and Travellers. Stop Funding Hate tactics have already helped bring about significant changes in the UK media. Since 2016 there's been a big drop in the number of anti-migrant front pages after dozens of advertisers walked away from the Daily Mail, Sun and Daily Express. The Daily Mail has revealed plans to “detoxify” and all three papers have new editors. These tactics work because the companies we shop with care what their customers think. Big advertisers know that aligning with hate and division damages their brand—and when consumers speak out, companies will respond.<sup>32</sup>

## Example: GTR Media Group

This GTR facebook page was set up to offer advice to people on what to do when they come across false or misleading reporting. There are several local groups liaising with

local press, trying to encourage more balance in the coverage. One such local group, called the Dorset Inter-Agency Concern for Travellers (DIACT), met with the editors of two local papers, the Bournemouth Echo and the Blackmore Vale Magazine, to explain how their reporting was offensive, which led to some improvements in the coverage.<sup>33</sup>

Papers often can't keep up with moderating their own comments. At one point the Guardian had 13 full time moderators to monitor their comments online, and they have much less capacity on this now.<sup>34</sup> One welcome development is the ability to shut down comments on Facebook, and close them on online articles. Some papers now do this for all their content on Gypsies and Travellers, but plenty let the trolls roll. Rather than trying to moderate this high volume of vitriol, advocacy groups should recommend that outlets simply turn off the comments.

### **Example: Yorkshire Evening Post 'Call it Out' Campaign**



The Yorkshire Evening Post 'Call it Out' campaign asks readers to report abusive behaviour on the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and Twitter—or, if appropriate, to the police. The goal is to counter the effect of online abuse on journalists, readers, and ethnic minorities in Leeds, including Gypsies Roma and Travellers.

“There was a story and it was getting the usual comments, but then there were people responding back saying ‘being a Gypsy and Traveller is a protected ethnicity’—kind of coming back at those trolls with arguments, which was good to see and I don’t think we’ve seen that before so hopefully that’s a good side of things changing a little bit.”

**Journalist**



## **6. Campaign on regulatory & legal grounds**

At the moment, in order to complain to regulatory bodies like IPSO and OFCOM, groups need to understand the details of how they work, and how to demonstrate that the codes have been breached. But advocates can go a step further and campaign for regulation to be changed so it can be more easily used to minimise harmful coverage of Gypsies and Travellers. This is a campaign that has plenty of common cause with the other groups who are routinely misrepresented and stereotyped in the British media, such as Muslims and Trans people.

*"As a sector I think we should be campaigning for systemic change within OFCOM, within IPSO and from the social media giants, but we'd need to do that across lots of other sectors as well. We couldn't do it by ourselves."* **Advocate**

One of the key changes that could be made to IPSO is to extend the guidelines on discrimination so they can apply to groups of people rather than just specific individuals. The justification for this is that discriminatory language about groups (Gypsies, gay men, autistic people), does harm individuals, as well as perpetuating racism and hate.

## Example: HackedOff Campaign



HackedOff is a campaign group that works on improving press regulation. They help people go through IPSO to make complaints, offer training for non profits, and advocate for a media that follows the recommendations of the Leveson enquiry. In service of this they call for:

- » All news outlets to sign up to IMPRESS (rather than IPSO).
- » Swift and effective enforcement of breaking the rules.
- » Newspapers to have to apologise, or publish corrections in equal prominence to the original article.

Another campaign target is the algorithms of social media platforms that decide who sees what, reward sensationalist stories and drive a third of traffic to news sites. Campaigns on social media and press regulation will find common cause in other misrepresented groups.



## ***7. Organise & build allies***

As above, there is plenty of common cause between Gypsies and Travellers and other groups in society that are misrepresented in the media. There would be power in coming together on broader media campaigns, with specific shared demands like changes to press regulation. In the wake of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement, there is greater opportunity to raise public understanding of Gypsies and Travellers as a misrepresented ethnic group, and to make sure that the large racial justice organisations in the UK are also doing their job properly and including this in their remit.

*"So, what we have to do as a community is really, as ever, and with a lot of anti-racist work, is hang on to the coattails and watch the pathfinding that's been done by Black and Asian communities".*

### **Advocate**

Sometimes what is needed is a big moment to coalesce around—a legal battle, a referendum, a change in the law—but Gypsy and Traveller groups can prepare for these moments with the slower, longer term job of organising and building relationships with powerful allies.

## Example: Drive2Survive



*The recent police, crime, sentencing and courts bill was widely protested under the broad banner of ‘Kill the Bill’. As part of this, Drive2Survive was an opportunity for Gypsy and Traveller groups to campaign against the way in which the proposals would greatly harm nomadic life in the UK, alongside their allies in other movements.*

One less obvious place to look for allies is **local councils**. Stories often come to the media through councils, with councillors speaking out against Gypsies and Travellers. Councils, like the media, have a representation problem. The people with power are more likely to be old, white men who don’t understand issues of representation.

Allies within councils can help pitch better stories to the media, and they can also push for better local government policies on Gypsies and Travellers. Advocacy groups can offer training to local councils that share important facts about Gypsy and Traveller life, structural injustices



relevant to the local area, and how sharing stories with the media can cause or mitigate harm.

*"I think one of the things to do is find people within councils who buck that trend... Say that this is a racial policy issue, and you want to make sure the councillor is doing the right thing."* **Journalist**

And, lastly, Advocacy groups can approach **celebrities** from Gypsy and Traveller communities, such as Tyson Fury, to see if they might use their platform to help.

# ***The battle of the narrative:*** ***What we're up against***



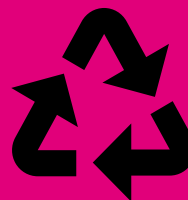
## **Drama Triangle**

Gypsies and Travellers are framed as villains.



## **Moral Panic**

Story signals a threat to society and settled people.



## **Churnalism**

Most of the text is copy pasted from press release.

# ***The battle of the narrative:*** ***What we're fighting for***



## **3D Characters**

Use soft media, including film and TV to portray Gypsies and Travellers as complex, real people living their lives, rather than villains, victims or heroes.



## **New Grand Narrative**

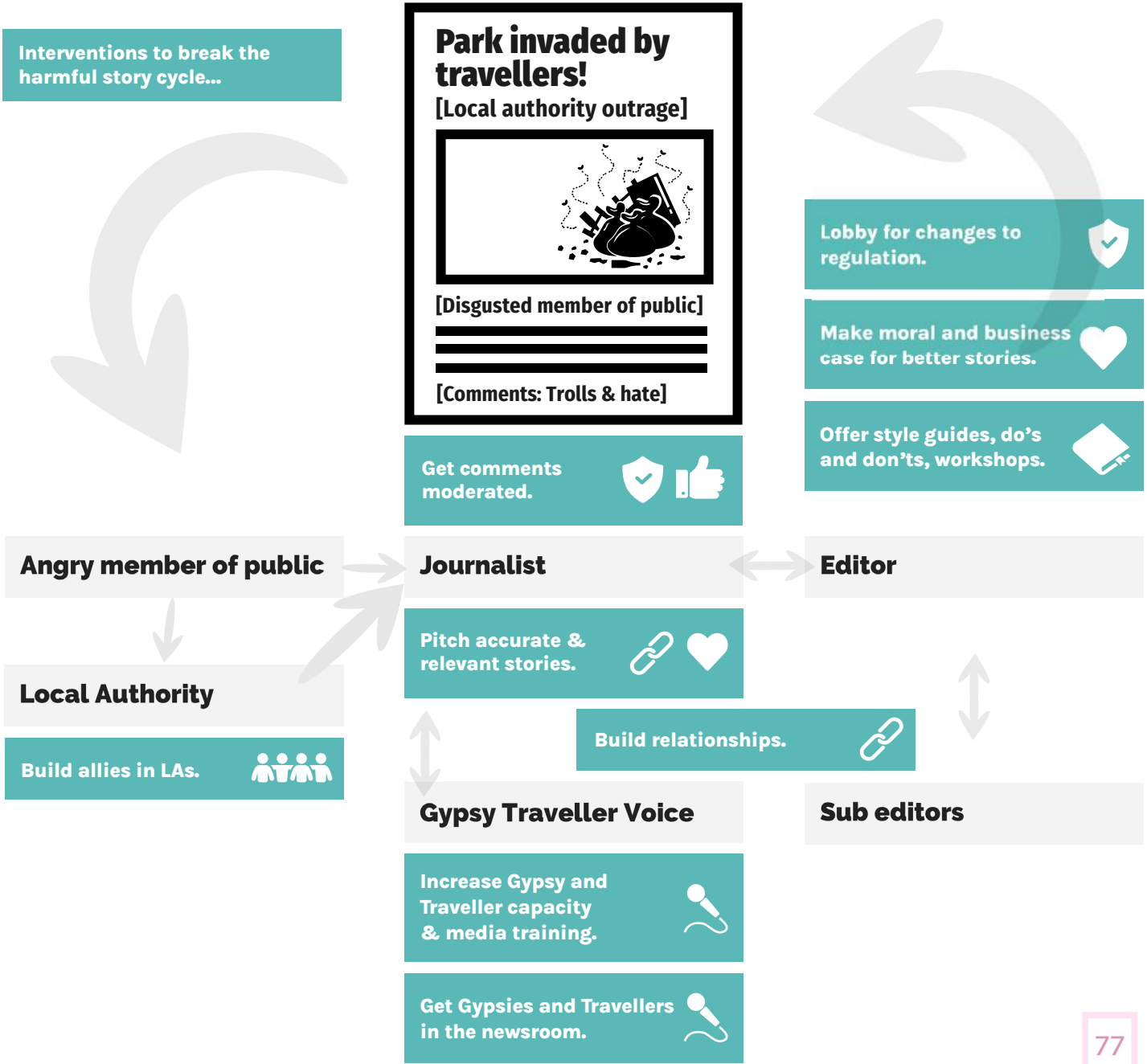
Talk about how justice for Gypsies and Travellers protects what everyone holds dear: freedoms, rights, safety, community.



## **Easy Good Stories**

Help journalists by offering resources: find & pitch stories, give Gypsies and Travellers voices, do well researched Opinion pieces.

# Breaking the cycle...





#6

# Learning from other movements



## CASE STUDY:

# Yes Equality Campaign, Ireland



It was illegal to be gay in Ireland until 1993.

But just over twenty years later, in 2015, the public voted to allow gay and lesbian couples to get married. This was after the Yes Equality campaign and was the first time anywhere in the world that equal marriage was won by popular vote rather than legislative change.



Before the referendum, certain media outlets and Catholic groups would frame gay people as a threat, whipping up moral panic about the welfare of children. In news stories, gay people were ‘vile’, or ‘murderer’, or ‘child abuser’. But this campaign helped win an astonishing 62% vote for marriage equality, and the media in Ireland has now shifted in step with legislative and social change.

## **What has changed?**

Since 2015, Irish TV programmes have contained more storylines involving gay and lesbian people. RTÉ, Ireland’s national TV and radio broadcaster, began to mainstream LGBTQI identities in its schedules, often showing people in normal Irish family settings, but also exploring more complex and diverse queer identities on shows like First Dates.<sup>35</sup> The Irish Eurovision entry in 2018, which featured a gay couple in its video and live performance, was largely covered in a positive way by the mainstream media.

Following the referendum, the government implemented a National LGBTQI strategy, with an action plan and commitments for improving policies for healthcare provision and community support. And the Prime Minister also issued a formal state apology to the thousands of people who were criminalized for their sexuality in Ireland until 1993.

## What can we learn?

The Yes Equality campaign had several strengths that led to its success:

- » **Local mobilisation.** They formed over 60 grassroots groups across Ireland to meet locally and run their own campaigns.
- » **Clear leadership.** They had centralised coordination with oversight of the Yes Equality strategy and messaging, making sure that sub coordinators signed a protocol document, agreeing how to use the name and brand.
- » **Huge social media presence.** They used Twitter and Facebook to recruit, campaign and keep people updated.
- » **Audience research.** They ran many polls and focus groups to understand the different audiences, barriers to support, and trusted messengers.
- » **Strong, positive frames.** They kept the messages upbeat and positive, sticking to their core values of inclusivity, love, generosity and fairness.
- » **Personal stories, different messengers.** Their playbook was to share stories of why people were voting yes, and they targeted messengers at different audiences groups.
- » **Avoiding arguments.** They had a strategy to avoid aggression and tearing people down in public, with a legal team who would fight it separately.

## CASE STUDY:

# Trans Liberation



*Photo credit: Angela Christofilou*

### **Who are trans people?**

We all have a gender. Most people are cisgender—this means that their gender matches what the doctor thought their gender was when they were born. Transgender people are people who's gender is different to the one the doctor thought they were when they were born.

The trans community is very diverse. Some trans people identify as trans men or trans women, while others may describe themselves as non-binary, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, agender, bigender or other identities.<sup>36</sup> Gender roles underpin some of the most powerful and deeply held beliefs about who we are and our roles in society. People who don't fit into boxes of what's considered "normal" face a lot of abuse, including:

- » Trans people having to prove their existence.
- » People acting like they need to be "fixed".
- » Domestic abuse and abuse from strangers.
- » Lack of access to important healthcare and mental health support.
- » Four in five trans people experienced hate crimes<sup>37</sup> in 2020 and from 2017-2019 the police recorded an 81% increase in hate crimes against trans people.<sup>38</sup>

## **Trans people in the media**

Over the past few years trans people have been mentioned lots more in the media, but unfortunately mostly in a negative way. There are very few trans journalists and editors in the mainstream media, and most of what's written about trans people is written by anti-trans campaigners and journalists who are against trans people.

- » In 2020 The Times and The Sunday Times wrote nearly 300 articles<sup>39</sup> about trans people, almost all of them from a hostile perspective.

- » In 2021, over 144 days, the same papers published 223 stories about trans ‘issues’.
- » The media doesn’t take responsibility to report on trans people in a way that isn’t discriminatory.

## **What has changed?**

Transgender people are fighting back against how they are being talked about in the mainstream media. Sometimes, this is by creating their own alternative media, like Them magazine,<sup>40</sup> or using social media to talk about their lives honestly when the mainstream media doesn’t. An example of this is by telling “mundane”, “everyday” stories like when trans man Freddy McConnell wrote a blog about “radical domesticity” in March 2020, talking about the day to day time he spent with his child.<sup>41</sup>

There have also been more supportive stories about trans people in the mainstream media. For example, Elliot Page coming out or US basketball player Dwayne Wade supporting his trans daughter. Cisgender journalists are also speaking up, like when Ash Sarkar wrote about her support for trans people.<sup>42</sup>

Trans people are making connections with other communities that are also being hurt. When the Sun newspaper interviewed Harry Potter writer JK Rowling’s abusive ex, trans people wrote a letter to The Sun<sup>43</sup> to say that they stood with JK Rowling and other women who experienced abuse. This is even after JK Rowling had written a blog against trans people’s rights just a few days before. The letter brought trans people from across the movement together and built strength.

Projects like All About Trans are making connections between the trans community and the media, and helps papers report better on trans people. And at PIRC we've created a short Trans Justice messaging guide for people talking to the media about trans issues.

## What can we learn?

- » **Coming together.** When trans people came together to sign the letter to the Sun, they built strength and power between themselves and also with cis people who have experienced abuse.
- » **Stick to your values.** Trans people could have ignored The Sun's treatment of JK Rowling because of how she treated them, instead they stuck to their values and fought against hurtful reporting.
- » **Create something new.** Mainstream media can be slow to change, but trans people are using social media and smaller self-run media to say what they want anyway.
- » **Focus on the day to day.** Mainstream media often tell stories that are far from the reality of our lives, by talking about simple things like going for a walk or raising children, we find things that connect us all.
- » **Unlikely allies.** When parents, teachers and basketball players show support for trans people, they are inviting others to do it too.

## CASE STUDY:

# Black Lives Matter



The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement began in the United States in 2013, in response to Black teenager Trayvon Martin being shot dead and the perpetrator getting an acquittal. The movement is against police violence towards Black people in America, and violence towards Black people in general. It has a huge global network and a large UK movement.

Media in the UK, the tabloids in particular, have routinely misrepresented Black people and perpetuated unhelpful and untrue beliefs like: 'Structural racism doesn't exist', 'white people face racism too', and 'Black men are



criminals'. When covering protests, the police have often been framed in the passive voice, with headlines like "Pepper spray caused a stampede" that don't name the police as an agent of violence. While this still continues today, we have over the past few years seen improvements in how the media covers racial justice protest and structural racism, and a drive within media outlets to be better on race and representation internally.

## **What has changed?**

Over the course of BLM protests, many outlets became more critical of the police, following the lead of Slate magazine who ran the headline "Police erupt in violence nationwide".

In the UK, following the death of George Floyd, racial justice organisations like Runnymede were overwhelmed with journalists asking for help with illustrating structural and institutional racism in a way that would make sense to their readers. It's a mark of progress that the words 'structural racism' began to be used widely across the political spectrum of papers, even if they were used negatively. A Telegraph article on how 'structural racism doesn't exist' was a success, because it was the first time in 20 years that the outlet had used that phrase. At some key moments, all media outlets got behind the idea that racial discrimination is real and needs to be addressed, like when football teams in the premier league started taking the knee.

And there was a huge response within the industry to be better, with Black, Asian and other racialised journalists speaking out, supported by public pressure. When Ian Murray, boss of the Society of Editors, denied Prince Harry's

claim that the UK tabloids were racist and bigoted, the outcry was such that he had to resign. The Independent created a new role of ‘Race Correspondent’ in Black woman Nadine White; on-screen diversity began to improve, and several outlets launched initiatives on anti-racism. But, even though media coverage and public consciousness has moved forward to some extent—there still hasn’t been a tangible change on substantive policies.

## What can we learn?

BLM has influenced public understanding and media coverage through:

- » **Long-term organising.** Racial justice activists have worked tirelessly for many years against police violence and in favour of racially just policies.
- » **Massive mobilisation.** After George Floyd, widespread anger and grief was channelled into the largest protests in US history, with an estimated 15-26 million people.
- » **Decentralised power.** BLM has always emphasised local organising over centralised control, giving autonomy to local and international movements.
- » **Strong messaging.** The central slogan ‘Black Lives Matter’ is clear and powerful, and the movement has focused on messages that explain racism, and call for unity—to band together and support one another.
- » **Progressive media.** As in the example of Slate magazine, above, progressive outlets have at times led the way, being bold on racial justice and encouraging more mainstream outlets to do the same.
- » **Whistleblowers.** Journalists of colour have spoken out about culture and conditions inside the industry, calling for change.



#7

# Acknowledgements & contributors

# Acknowledgements

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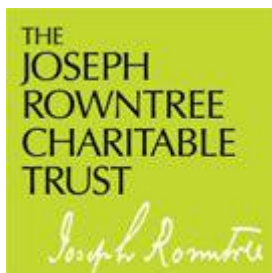
Designed by **Richard Hawkins**

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Hannah Vickers [The Bristol Cable](#)

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Nathan Sparkes [Hacked Off](#)

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Chris McDonagh [Travellers Against Racism](#)

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Anonymous [Reach PLC](#)





#8

# Endnotes & licensing

# Endnotes

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