

Karen Mitchell, Photojournalism

Year in School: Senior
Faculty Mentor: Dr. C. Zoe Smith, Journalism
Funding Source: McNair Scholars Program

Images of African Americans among winning newspaper entries in the Pictures of the Year archive

Since 1944 the University of Missouri has hosted an annual photojournalism competition designed to showcase the best work of photojournalists from the previous year. The contest has become a premier contest, drawing thousands of entries from across the globe, and has impacted the direction and progress of photojournalism over several decades. The archive is a digital warehouse of selected images from the competitions, containing nearly 35,000 images through the 2004 contest. The object of this study was to find out with what frequency and in what circumstances African Americans are portrayed in winning newspaper images in the archive. Each image or group of images was inspected to determine if any African Americans were in the photographs and separated into one of 10 categories of coverage. It was found that most of the photographs portray Blacks in a stereotypical light - usually as athletes, criminals or victims of racism, abuse or crime. Even during the height of the Civil Rights era there was little increase in winning photographs portraying African Americans. There are virtually no winning images in the first 13 years of the contest and more than half of the winners have been awarded in the last 18 contests.