

**MR. THOMPSON:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for giving me perhaps the last word of testimony.

I am Bankole Thompson, senior editor of the Michigan Chronicle newspaper, the state's largest leading African-American newspaper.

Throughout today's testimony I listened to the voices of injustice. They are voices of frustration, expressing injustice, frustration, inequity that has been going on throughout the city of Detroit. And perhaps, Mr. Chairman, as you go throughout the country, you will find out the days aren't much different but in the voices of rage that have been expressed here today compared to what you'll be hearing in other black cities across this country.

I come from a very significant institution called the media; and I listen to you as you talk about the media's role, what the media has not said, a perception that the media has created. Last year, Mr. Chairman, I wrote a book titled "Ignoring the Underprivileged. A Journalist's Indictment of Mainstream Media," which is recommended reading here at Wayne State University and Eastern Michigan University's School of Journalism. And what I talked about was -- I'm always -- I'm part of the media, but I am a critic of the media, and I like to advocate for greater media accountability.

I've made the assertion, Mr. Chairman, that the media is almost the God of our lives. But the fundamental question has always been how can this God be fair and objective in reporting the affairs of men. And so since I come from the media, I want to say that most of the time you hear the perception or you hear the question being raised "Is Detroit under siege by the news media or by extension, the mainstream media?" To critics, I can say yes and for very good reasons, Mr. Chairman. Throughout my own experience and coverage over my journalistic career being in Detroit, looking at some of the issues that affect this community whether we are Hispanic, African-Americans, or whites who live in this community, you clearly see there is a disparity in terms of how the news has been reported here in the city of Detroit versus what happens in Oakland County.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to give a clear-cut example that happened here in Detroit just in July of 2007, and this was an instance where three or four African-American males were arrested in the city of Taylor, accused of killing a white -- a Caucasian female or a white woman. The Taylor police, without having any evidentiary information, just pulled these four young males -- black males, who were driving in the neighborhood in the night, and a young white boy identified them as the culprits of the crime, and the police arrested this four young black males, forgetting that they're leaving the city of Taylor, two of them high school graduates about to go into college. One of them in fact was a basketball coach for the elementary school system in the city of Taylor, an exclusive white city. So they were arrested and right away under the prosecutorial mandate of an African-American prosecutor -- in fact, the first African-American prosecutor here in Wayne County called Kym Worthy.

The warrants for these young men, two of them, were signed; and they were being pushed to be charged for murder.

And so the parents of this young man called the general media, the news media, and they decided to come to the Michigan Chronicle newspaper -- of course, by virtual extension, Mr. Chairman, that we're a black newspaper, and so we should be concerned about issues affecting African-Americans. And so when they came to us, I had them in the conference room, and we had an extensive discussion. And I looked into the eyes of this black woman, and I called them, in fact, in subsequent columns whipping martyrs and vigilante justice.

I looked into their eyes, and they were crying, and they talked about how their kids were innocent and now they were about to be railroaded by the criminal justice system in Wayne County. I said to them, "Well, I will put my reputation on the line for you, given the fact that I will not discover any skeleton in the cupboard even as I am back on this investigation." They give me their word; and, of course, it was expected of me. That's what journalism should be about. That's what Joseph Pulitzer from the Pulitzer Prize is named after -- a fierce defender of the underclass. That's what he talked about what the news media should do. And so I'm back to this investigation and found out, Mr. Chairman, that there were no substantive evidence to even charge these two young men for murder. But the news media did not -- was not in the first place or generally interested in the case.

In fact, I made a couple of calls to some of my friends in the news media. And I said, "Hey, check this out. I'm investigating this story, and it will be out in next week's edition of the Michigan Chronicle. So why don't you do a story since you are in the electronic media and I'm in the print media.

Why don't you do a correspondent story so it comes out that same week, so we give it a big hit." There was nothing.

So I did the story and it came out, and interestingly enough, the community was aware of what was happening and it caught a flame, and then the news media came running. And so within three weeks we successfully were able to have the Wayne County prosecutor's office drop the charges because there was no evidence found. The gun powder residue test that was done came back negative. Clearly, that was the reason, according to the prosecutor, why they were released -- those two young men. But we know very well that gun powder tests come in negative is not always the reason to free young people who are arrested.

So within three weeks those young men were let go, and now they're in college in Ohio and Kentucky. That is clearly -- Mr. Chairman, that is a classic case. A classic example of what the news media ought to do. And I said that the news media can either liberate or imprison us.

Two weeks ago I wrote a column called -- titled "Pensive Letters From Prison " because since the Taylor case I've received lots of letters from brothers who are caught up in the justice system and basically expressing outrage of what has been done.

Some of them, even in admittance, talk about what has happened that they are looking for to come back. And I said to myself, if every media house could devote some coverage to what is happening behind the prison walls, local -- the local ABC channel here, Channel 7 recently did a story.

Bill Proctor, who is a reporter for Channel 7, did a story, an investigative piece of a young white male who was caught up in the justice system, accused of a murder that he did not commit. If not for Bill Proctor, he would still be languishing in jail. And he got him liberated. So the news media can do a lot.

So, Mr. Chairman, even as you go around the country, I recommend that there need to be more media accountability; that we the people, that people can hold the media accountable. You can write letters to the editors. You subscribe to our papers. You pay those cable bills to watch the networks. So, in essence, you can do something. And don't feel you don't have powers.

Thank you very much.