

Black Press Throughout History

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Abstract

This paper would be discussing and deconstructing the timeline of Black Press, the digest of how each publishing company in each of the three eras played a significant role within the Great Migration/Reconstruction Era, The Civil Rights Movement, and lastly we would be speaking about the current state of the African American journalism media today. For this paper, I would be determining if African American publishing companies are still a continuing flourishing within the community as we speak through each eras, and if not what could we do to promote that shine we once had before again.

Introduction

Journalism, at its foundation, provides citizens with the knowledge they need to be informed about community events and make societal changes. However, Black journalists and publications have often been silenced within American history, but they continued to report triumphs, goals, and obstacles, the Black press has fueled political action and raised spirits. Because of its clout, some Southern communities outlawed the sale of Black newspapers in an attempt to halt the Great Migration. The civil rights struggle was covered extensively, providing vital information and inspiration. Throughout these three eras, I would be bringing you through the journey of each important time during African American history, that has showcased how journalism played a great part in the many lives of African Americans and will be determined from what we've learned if these spoken words of triumph have disappeared as a whole or are the national power of print still there.

The Great Migration/Reconstruction

On March 17, 1827, the same year that slavery was abolished, one minister Peter Williams Jr, John Russman, Samuel Cornish, and a few other freedmen in the city of New York decided to

join forces to create a sense of hope for and to their African American community - and founded the first-ever African American newspaper company called the Freedom's Journal. When Freedom's journals were published to the public, they were released every Friday in 11 states across the country and a few outside of the country as well. The Freedom's Journal "provided international, national, and regional information [about] current events and contained editorials declaiming slavery, lynching, and other injustices. The Journal also published biographies of prominent African-Americans and listings of births, deaths, and marriages in the African-American New York community." (Freedom's Journal, the First U.S. African-American Owned Newspaper | Wisconsin Historical Society, 2015) Although regulations in some states "prohibited teaching slaves and free blacks," the creation of The Freedom's Journal revolutionized black lives, even if it meant receiving lashings or punishment by police if detected, black men and women boldly subscribed towards the newspaper and educated themselves to read (Williams, 2009).

Unfortunately, Freedom's Journal was only published two years after it first appeared. Despite its brief existence, Freedom's Journal achieved its purpose of uniting African-Americans and fostering literacy, unity, and integration. While glancing at other articles and journals that have been generated from the original, the influence of Freedom's Journal could be seen. Freeman's Journal and others like the Christian Reporter, The Philadelphia Tribune, and the North Star who made big breakthroughs in Black America which helped them progress greatly. "Black papers became the primary means of group expression and main community service outlet, reporting on job opportunities and retailers that didn't discriminate, and covering charity events in uplifting society pages with big pictures of smiling, dignified black people enjoying each other's company." (Quill, 2022)

The Civil Right Movement

Many historians believe that African American journalists put their lives on the line to support the Civil Rights Movement (Reeding 2016). They intended to promote the best methods and approaches for addressing the key problems the American multiracial society had been dealing with for generations, like inequality and segregation. Many of these journalists participated in heroic deeds to change the nation's history forever to be successful. During the Civil Rights Movement, different forces and events became key sources of motivation. To begin with, racial isolation was a result of boundaries that were created in America. This problem resulted in a slew of issues, including inequality and a scarcity of chances. The expanded usage and power of mass communication provided the second incentive. This turmoil within the United States has become a chance to raise awareness about the difficulties faced by various minority groups in the country (Knauer, 2014).

Journalists were also encouraged to promote the agenda and better the lives of many residents in the country as a result of the widespread civil rights movement. Journalists would communicate the people's demands and significant concerns impacting them by reporting the continuing civil rights turmoil. The value of defending each citizen's freedoms and rights would be appreciated by the larger society (Callero, 2017). Companies like Ebony, which was a news and photojournalism contributed by reporting on political events around the United States, activists protesting racial violence, and advocating for enhanced social mobility amongst African Americans in the diaspora - content regarding the Black Power movement was also published. Lerone Bennett Jr., the executive editor of Ebony, began writing a recurring piece called Black Power in 1965, which included an in-depth study about Stokely Carmichael in 1966 (James

West, 2016). Another publication was Jet magazine, which was publicly known in print that its stunning and graphic portrayal of Emmett Till's assassination. It grew in prominence as a result of its ongoing coverage of the nascent civil rights movement (Finkelman, 2009). The publication of Till's brutalized corpse on the cover of the issue inspired the black community to address racial violence, catalyzing the civil rights movement. The Johnson Publishing Company's campaign for economic, political, and social justice influenced its inclusion of progressive views (Patton, 2015).

The Future/Major Trends in Evolution

The NNPA now has approximately 200 black newspapers with a combined readership of over 15 million people (Muhammad, 2003) and no means are White-owned newspaper enterprises being degraded or undervalued, but America cannot continue to allow oneself and our community to be misled and educated on our people by someone who's never experienced the everyday challenges that minorities face in this society based on racism. As a result, rather than altering our methods and adjusting to White culture to feel like our views are finally being heard, Black businesses work to promote our people and should find support from one another. The most crucial approach to achieving this aim is to educate ourselves. With the growth of technology and the advent of the digital era, America and several other nations have also been able to advertise black companies, black news, and other items relevant to a person interested in minority life. Because where technology is currently, most people can access the Internet, which is only just a few clicks and shots away on their cellphones, computers, and other hand-held devices. This being the case, it would seem that everyone in black culture, as well as any other American culture, should be up to speed on current events. However, this is not the case.

Surprisingly, data reveal that just 28% of Black Americans read the newspaper. (Research Center, 2021) The disconcerting fact is that, in the era of Twitter, when individuals of all ages can instantaneously upload and share experiences, images, and videos, African-Americans and current-generation youngsters are unconcerned and satisfied with where our society sits. The young have a propensity to simply communicate to their followers rather than expressing thoughts and tales through mass media—and this is applicable when bringing up whatever type of social media outlet (i.e. Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook).

What We've Learned/Conclusion

_____Through these three eras, we've learned the importance of how significant African American newspaper publishing companies were to the community during their times. The Freedom Journal's was the gateway to many other publishing companies to provide resources such as seeking loved ones, housing, giving the source of learning the art of literacy, and also fighting for the change and development of a brighter and equal future amongst blacks and whites. The civil rights movement showcased the actual fight for justice and peace, with people risking the likelihood of their careers to showcase the horrors African Americans were enduring during the 50s-60s either that was by print, photography, or television to let the world know of the realism of what is to be an African American in the place they call "the land of the free" as brought up of Jet Magazine famous print of Emmitt Till laying unrecognizable in his casket. Based on the results that I've found, as stated even though there are over 200 magazines, there are still not many of us who are behind those seats and still able to continue to spread awareness and protest for the rights of our people. Not many African Americans are truly focused on the news or print, due to the high focus on receiving the news from social media platforms which could only misdirect the information given. We need to give shine back to African American

publications not only for the sake of this generation but to continue to educate those within the next few generations as well.

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