

CARTON 123

WRITINGS

"THE BLACK PRESS"

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The Black Press

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I Why does a black press exist?

1. Must be seen as a part of the tradition of self-expression among black people which can be traced far back in history. Examples are folk-songs and spirituals (which often were a method of communicating information that the masters tried to suppress) -- Speakers and orators, esp. among free blacks organized in the North, but also among black ministers in the South -- Poets: Phyllis Wheatley, 1770

Historically, there are three broad reasons for existence of black press:

1. To ~~protest against~~ expose and protest against racial oppression, and abuse harassment in all areas of black life.
Example: Freedom's Journal, first black paper in 1827, was founded as a response to racist attacks printed in white paper, New York Sun.
-- Black press continues to be a voice of protest. Housing, education, jobs, etc. ^{prisons, health}
2. Goes beyond protest to put forward the proposals and programs of different black organizations and black leaders. Press acts as an advocate of the cause of black liberation. ~~and~~ Credo of Freedom's Journal: "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentation in this which concerns us dearly... We intend to lay our case before the public with a view to arrest the progress of prejudice and to shield ourselves against its consequent evils."
-- Advocacy continues to be a function of the press, from those which support the NAACP to those which support the BPP.
3. To inform black people about events and activities in their communities. ~~that they do~~ Historically, white press tended not to report news from black community unless some "problem" developed -- crime, welfare, racial tensions, etc. "Regular" news went unreported. ^{pro stereotypes}
-- Black press also reports national and international news of special interest to blacks (e.g., activities of politicians, news from Africa) ^{Africa}
Also
A. ~~More recently~~, special interest black press has developed -- student, organizational (churches, fraternal groups),

Summary: protest, advocacy, news of interest to blacks

* → B.P. originated as part of blk freedom struggle (anti-slavery papers)

II History of black press -- some examples

(History of B.P. must be seen in context of black freedom struggle, of which the ~~is~~ press has been a part)

1. First black newspaper was Freedom's Journal, founded 1827 in NYC. Published by Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm. In 1828 changed name to Rights of All. Stopped publishing in 1830. Russwurm went off to Liberia where he taught school and published another paper.
2. Second paper was the Weekly Adocate. 1837. Later changed its name to the Colored American and became very influential in the struggle for abolition of slavery. Was edited by Samuel Cornish. Took a strong position on need for independent organizations of blacks to fight for abolition.

Also opposed colonization

White press didn't do this

W.P. sees blk community as a problem or ignores it

David Walker a contributor

*Papers not isolated, but
tied to blk movement*

1847

3. Frederick Douglass founded his own newspaper in ~~1837~~ (December), The North Star. Was partly result of tension between Douglass and white abolitionists (Garrison) over whether blacks should organize independently to fight for abolition. Martin R. Delaney was co-editor. In the first issue they answered white abolitionists: "It is evident we must be our own representatives and advocates, not exclusively, but peculiarly -- not distinct from, but in connection with our white friends. In the grand struggle for liberty and equality now waging, it is meet, right and essential that there should arise in our ranks authors and editors, as well as orators, ~~of~~ for it is in these capacities that the most permanent good can be rendered to our cause..."
- Paper had a great influence on the abolitionist movement.
 - Average circulation was 3,000. Was published weekly at a cost of \$80.00. Had ~~xxx~~ chronic financial problems, as is generally true of the black press.
 - In 1850 changed name to Frederick Douglass' Paper.

*Blk press
steered away
from colonization
idea*

4. In all before the Civil War there were some 24 periodicals published by blacks. aided ind. blk struggle. opposed colonization.

*crit
press*

* Since the Civil War hundred of black newspapers have been published. Some of the more important include:

1. The Elevator (San Francisco, 1865) Published and edited by William Powell and Phillip Bell. Paper's motto was : Equality before the Law. It survived until ~~the 1890s~~ 1898. It was published every Saturday and at one time had a circulation of 7,000. Was circulated not only in California, but also in Nevada, Oregon, ~~and Canada~~ New York City, Washington, D.C., Canada, Panama, China and Japan.
- First black paper in California was Mirror of the Times (S.F., 1855)
 - Survived for seven years.

*opposed
discrimination
against Chinese*

2. Chicago Defender, founded 1905 by Robert A. Abbott. This was first paper to introduce sensationalism and headlines into black press. Idea was to build a mass circulation. *red headlines, focus on crime*

*commercialism
munch*

3. By 1940 there were 200 black newspapers with a combined circulation of almost 2 million. Most were published in urban areas. In 1970 the four largest commercial black newspapers were:

Amsterdam News (NYC)	82,000
Philadelphia Tribune	75,000
Michigan Chronicle	73,000 (Detroit)
Baltimore Afro-American	65,000

Berkeley Post	40,000
Chicago Defender	37,000
LA Herald Dispatch	30,000
Sun-Reporter	8,000

So far we have been dealing with the commercial black press, i.e., newspapers published mainly ~~xx~~ for business reasons. But there is also a crusading or militant press which exists mainly to promote the black cause or to express the viewpoint of a particular organization. What have some of these been:

Black Press in California

The first black newspaper published in California was called the Mirror of the Times, and it began in 1855 in San Francisco. It was published for seven years, and then it merged with the Pacific Appeal,⁽¹⁸⁶²⁾ which was another black newspaper. Both of these papers campaigned for the abolition of slavery.

Probably the best known of the early black newspapers in California was a ~~paper~~ paper called The Elevator. It began publishing in April, 1865 in San Francisco. The Elevator was the organ of the executive committee of the ^{Black} ~~Colored~~ ^{Movement} Convention of California (a part of the Black Convention Movement?). It was published weekly. The paper declared in its first editorial that "our name is indicative of our object, we wish to elevate the oppressed of all nations and ~~skins~~ of every clime to the position of manhood and freedom.... We claim full equality before the law, we deserve nothing more, we will be satisfied with nothing less." The Elevator was quite successful. At one time it reached a circulation of 7,000. It circulated not only in California, but also in Nevada, Oregon, New York, Washington, D.C. and in foreign countries such as Canada, Panama, China and Japan. It survived until 1898. The Elevator not only campaigned for black freedom, but it also opposed ~~discrimination~~ discrimination against the Chinese people who were having a very difficult time in California.

1. The Guardian (Boston, 1901) Edited by William Monroe Trotter, who was one of the early black radicals who opposed the accommodation policy of Booker T. Washington. Trotter called for resistance and aggression instead of submission. Big feud between him and BTW, latter used his influence to try and undermine Guardian. Published weekly.
2. The Crisis, monthly magazine founded by W.E.B. DuBois in 1910 as organ of NAACP. DuBois took up the struggle initiated by Trotter. ~~Ter~~ Called for a militant movement led by "talented-Tenth" Also was founder of Pan-African movement. Crisis had circulation of 100,000 by 1919.
3. Negro World, organ of Marcus Garvey's UNIA. Promoted program of UNIA: ideas of Pan-Africanism (founding a black government in Africa), and black capitalism. Also engaged in feud with DuBois.
1917
4. Messenger, Founded around ~~1917~~ by Chandler Owen and black labor leader A. Phillip Randolph. Promoted labor unionism and socialism.
5. Muhammad Speaks, circulation about 400,000 ^{2 mil/162} Promotes Muslim program and also very good coverage nationally and internationally. May Chang
6. Black Panther Paper, about 100,000

Presently there are about 150 black newspapers (commercial)

III Problems of the Black press

1. Financial problems -- black newspapers ~~depend~~ get less advertising, must depend more on subscriptions. Will take whatever ads they can get; sometimes resulting in them calling for racial uplift while advertising products that are unhealthy and deny racial pride.
2. Politics -- ^a failure to follow thru consistently on their historic mission of protest and advocacy. Afraid to upset white power structure because they're afraid might lose advertising (give example of Atlanta Daily World). As black papers have become more commercial they've lost their mission; tend to speak mainly for the interests of the black middle class instead of the masses. ^a It is the organizational press and the non-business oriented black press that is carrying on the tradition. Sensationalizing (crime) and society emphasis-- one to get mass circulation, the other to appeal to the black elite. No sense of crusading.

Shouldn't write off black press. It is sensitive to criticism and organized press. Must see it as a potential ally, not enemy.

Growing split between commercial + political

BLK press more dependent on subscriptions + community support. Responds to crusading press. BLK press an ally not enemy - but is reluctant and may need a push