

Black Press: A catalyst for change

Written by Special to the NNPA from the Houston Defender
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Since the founding of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, the Black Press has played a significant role in the lives African-Americans. Following are examples of the impact of Black publications through the years.

1. Established a joint venture benefiting the community with a communication vehicle. *Freedom's Journal*

was the formation of a joint venture between the Black Press and the Black church, two of the strongest institutions in the community today. The objective was to cover our existence as a people, tell our own stories and establish a communication mechanism to inform and educate the Black community. No longer would others define us.

2. Created a campaign to end slavery by raising the consciousness of Blacks and whites.

The North Star, founded in 1847 by Frederick Douglass, established the Black Press as a tool of abolitionism, and was the most influential Black antislavery paper published. Its readership included presidents and members of Congress, who used the paper to keep abreast of the activities of the antislavery movement.

3. Campaigned and increased Black representation in government. After the Civil War ended in 1865, emancipation from slavery sparked a new wave of Black newspapers, which were finally able to circulate in former slave states. Blacks embraced their newspapers as a sign of freedom and a trusted source of information. The Black Press played a role building communities of free men and women in the North and South.

4. Worked tirelessly to stop Jim Crow laws and lynching. The end of Reconstruction in 1876 signaled the end of many protections extended to newly freed slaves. Thousands of Black men were murdered by white lynch mobs. Though the attacks were unreported by mainstream media, Black Press pioneers such as Ida B. Wells, editor of the Memphis Free Speech, traveled throughout the South to report on lynching. In retaliation, a white mob attacked her paper's office in 1892.

5. Contributed to the migration of Blacks from the South to the North. After establishing the *Chicago Defender* in 1905, publisher Robert S. Abbott helped spark the Black migration to the North by publishing the names of companies who were hiring workers, train schedules and advice on adjusting to urban life. When some Southern cities tried to ban the sale of the paper, Abbott secretly distributed it through Black Pullman porters working on trains.

6. Promoted the importance of Black organizations and collective work. Covering the formation of Black organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League and fraternities and sororities, the Black Press encouraged and supported the social and service agendas set by these groups.

7. Recorded the artistic contributions of African-Americans. The Black Press paid a role in the Harlem Renaissance (1918-1937), which is considered the most influential cultural and creative period in African-American history. Publications such as the Crisis, Opportunity, the Messenger and Negro World were crucial to the movement. The Chicago Defender published

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Gwendolyn Brooks' poetry and later hired Langston Hughes as a columnist.

8. Demanded the integration of the armed forces. In 1940, representatives of 21 Black newspapers formed the National Newspaper Publishers Association. In 1944, an NNPA committee called on President Franklin D. Roosevelt and demanded an end to segregation in the armed forces. Their demand helped "start the ball rolling," and in 1948, a Truman commission, drew up guidelines for ending segregation in the military.

9. Advocated equal rights for Blacks from sports and entertainment to lunch counters and housing. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Black newspapers helped lay the groundwork for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. As the movement developed, the Black press covered breaking events across the country, and sent reporters to write about their experiences of being discriminated against. They covered sit-ins, demonstrations, riots and speeches by leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

10. Fights for a fair share of opportunities and ensures a historical record. By covering the opportunities and challenges of the public and private sector, the Black Press raises concerns regarding government and corporate contracts, employment, leadership and philanthropy that benefit the Black community. Also, understanding we live in a global society, our children must be afforded the best education possible to compete in today's society. In addition, the Black Press provides documentation of our existence as a people.