

Carrying on its tradition of independence, the Black press established its own national organization in 1940 with the organization of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, which has consistently filled a leadership role in the struggle of Blacks.

The Black press in the North continued to grow, in strength and influence, and was slowed only by the impact of the Great Depression. This was a period -- from the early part of the century through World War I -- in which the Black press had learned some valuable lessons, not the least of which was the potential strength it had in its hands. It had seen its readership grow, it had trained its own journalists, it had been able to survive financially because of the support of Black people, and it had not surrendered to those who sought to silence it.

The importance of this is underscored by the fact that since Russwurm's first paper, there was always two separate and distinct presses in America for Blacks -- the white press and the Black press. But it was only in the Black press that Blacks could find any recognition of themselves as human beings. Like the rest of white America, the white press largely ignored them.

The onset of World War II brought the Black press to a new critical juncture in its history. The issue, reduced to its basic elements was that with racism so rampant at home, was the Black press justified in suggesting that Black men should lay their lives on the line to fight foreign dictators. The answer was provided in two parts. The war effort would be supported but at the same time the fight against segregation and discrimination, particularly where they existed in the armed forces and war-related industries, would be stepped up. The pages began to fill up with protests over the barring of Blacks from the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Air Force and private industry. The press began to report on how Blacks were being mistreated, while in uniform, by southern policemen. How, America, can you tolerate such things, the Black press asked.

Once again the protests fell on unfriendly ears, Virginius Dabney, the white editor of the **Richmond Times Dispatch** and regarded as a liberal, warned the Black press:

"The degree to which this (racial) injustice and discrimination is being emphasized by Negro editors and Negro leaders at this time, and the insistence with which they are demanding a complete and immediate revolution in race relations in America, has aroused no little concern among their white friends...they cannot view with other than apprehension the speed with which, Negro leadership, as exemplified in the Negro press, is pushing to a climax.

"...the current effort to effect a drastic revolution overnight can only result in violence and bitterness with the Negro suffering heavily in the end."

The response of the Black press was to ignore Dabney and others. Dr. V.V. Oak, at that

time a professor of sociology and an instructor of journalism at Wilberforce University, a Black institution, best summed up how most Black editors felt when he said:

"It is true that the Negro press is getting more and more militant in its demands for a real democracy at home, but this growing impatience of the press is quite natural as well as desirable...unless the American Negro is entirely unintelligent and unprogressive he is bound to demand his right to be a free American, especially when he is fighting abroad for the preservation of democracy."

The militant tone of the press irritated the government and there was talk within the Roosevelt Administration of the possibility of prosecuting some of the editors for impeding the war effort. However, the talk never got beyond the discussion stage and Black papers continued to point out the contradiction between what America publicly proclaimed as her war aims and the reality of her treatment of Blacks at home. The Double V campaign of the **Pittsburgh Courier** summed up the strategy of the Black press -- "V for Victory" over tyranny abroad and "V" for Victory over bigotry at home.

When the war ended, the Black press was stronger than ever. The combined circulations of the more than a hundred papers were well in excess of two million copies a week; the papers had built up enormous prestige among their readers on the strength of their war coverage both foreign and domestic; and increasingly more talented people were attracted to Black journalism.

In 1956 -- two years after the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools -- the Washington, D.C. **Afro-American** in a burst of inspiration printed a headline that in

retrospect prophesied the changes that were about to occur in America -- changes that would have enormous import for the Black press. Appearing over a story that told of a Supreme Court decision upholding the legality of several public accommodation laws that had been passed for the District of Columbia but which had been allowed to slip into disuse, the headline said simply -- "EAT ANYWHERE."

The decade that followed saw a permanent alteration in America's way of life. Discrimination and segregation lost their protection under the law and were no longer publicly acceptable -- but

Martin Luther King, Jr.

A man who taught us how to change the world.



When you're not getting a fair shake, you get discouraged. You don't like whoever is making your life miserable, and sometimes you might even react in a violent way. It seems only natural. But, a great man named Martin Luther King, Jr. never reacted violently. He saw deeper than most of us are capable. He saw that the powers of love and nonviolent resistance were the fastest ways to effect real change in this world. Some say he was too soft, too loving. But no one will deny that Dr. King got results. Martin Luther King, Jr.: One of the rare men in history with the incredible ability to turn a foe into a follower, using nothing but the truth.

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