

they did not disappear entirely. A higher level of integration between persons and within institutions was achieved -- although, the level of integration was hardly compatible with that of a truly open society, but as imperfect and as limited as this integration was it raised some questions as to whether Black institutions -- created out of segregation -- were any longer needed.

The white press, as a direct result of the civil rights movement and the changes it was producing, began to give more attention to Black affairs. No longer was the Black press the only medium telling the story of Black people. The white media, newspapers, radio, television and magazines had joined in reporting the Black experience. But with the end of its monopoly came a new challenge for the Black press. It had a new competitor. The white media which previously closed its doors to Black journalists now welcomed them. Soon the Black press began to lose many of its top people to other media. Higher salaries and professional recognition were the lure.

There were other factors that also began to operate against the Black press; the general decline in newspaper readership as more and more people turned to television; the dispersal of Black persons outside the central-city where the Black papers were available; the continued indifference of major advertisers to Black media (in 1974 Black media received less than one percent of the \$13.6 billion in advertising agency billings); and a decline, in some instances, of the quality and quantity of the reporting.

With the exception of a few Black magazines and several specialized publications -- like **Muhammad Speaks** (recently renamed **The Bilalian News**) -- the press has generally not experienced any growth over the past decade. In fact total circulation has declined from the peak reached after World War II.

The possibility that the decline will continue has to be faced and in so doing a basic question emerges. If the decline continues and the Black press begins to disappear, what meaning will this have for Black Americans specifically and the nation as a whole? What will we have lost if the one constant voice that has told our story over these many years is allowed to disappear?

The words of a young news editor of the **Kansas City Call**, a Black newspaper, provide a clue to the answers to those questions. The editor, Roy Wilkins, later to become executive director of the NAACP wrote in 1928:

"The Negro press was born of a need for voicing a protest against wrongs and proscriptions, first devoting itself to the task of making Negroes free men and citizens, and from that day to this fighting the battles necessary to securing for them the enjoyment of the rights of citizenship."

The battles about which the young editor wrote nearly a half century ago are not all won. The "colored only" signs have come down, Blacks are no longer lynched and jobs formerly closed to them have opened up. Racism is not the omnipresent opponent it used to be but it is still a formidable foe.

For this reason alone, Blacks continue to need a press that

speaks to their needs, their concerns, and is under their control. They need a press that will report their births, triumphs, failures, deaths and all the other events that shape and make up their lives. They need a press which is directly responsible to them and which serves their needs -- a press to which they have access and whose existence guarantees that their voice will

be heard.

The latter point is extremely important because even if the majority press wanted to expand its coverage of Black affairs -- which is doubtful -- there is a limit beyond which it logically cannot go. It is questionable whether its general readership -- which is predominantly white -- would tolerate such a policy. Currently, the general press is

evidencing a declining interest in Black affairs, an attitude induced no doubt by the absence of demonstrations, confrontations and other manifestations of conflict which were regarded as newsworthy by the media a few short years ago. Additionally, while there has been some improvement in the number of Blacks employed in the general media, the percentage is dis-



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