

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

February 24, 1977

The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Black Press is a landmark in the history of freedom of expression and in the life of the country it has enriched.

Americans can take the deepest satisfaction from the enduring contributions of the Black Press to advancing the ideals of social justice and equality of opportunity on which our nation was founded.

This important national milestone is an appropriate time for all of us to salute the Black Press of our country. In this spirit I want to express my deepest personal respect for the integrity and public service of the National Newspaper Publishers Association in its championship of one of our most precious freedoms as citizens of a democratic society.

*Jimmy Carter*

treasingly low and few in decision-making positions.

Finally, the press itself is shrinking as more and more newspapers and magazines merge or go out of business. Television with its instant coverage has become increasingly more important -- this despite its built-in faults of time constraints and its penchant for making news entertaining rather than substantive in its constant search for more viewers.

All these factors point up the need for a Black press, but the failure of many of these papers to increase their circulation at a time when population increases in their market areas continue to mount, indicate that something is wrong. It is not the purpose of this paper to make a definitive assessment of the situations, but at the very least there are several questions that should be considered.

- The first is whether Black people believe that they have become so assimilated into the mainstream culture that they no longer need their own, specialized press.

- The second is whether the Black press is adequately serving today's Black readers and whether they have reacted to this coverage or lack of it by withdrawing their support.

Neither of the two possibilities by themselves satisfactorily explains what caused the decline, but together they offer strong indications of what must be done in the future if the Black press is to remain a viable institution.

It is quite clear that its survival is in the hands of Black people. They alone can decide

whether to support Black publications or abandon them.

Of course the publications themselves have a responsibility to improve so that they are more attractive to their readers. They must begin to reflect their changing and complex concerns.

It is folly to believe that the same type of news presentation and selection of news stories that characterized the Black press of two decades ago is sufficient to attract and hold today's sophisticated reader. Black people have changed and so must the Black press if it is to survive.

It can never forget that it came into being as a very specialized press and that it exerted its greatest influence when it campaigned militantly and responsibly against the evils in our society.

There are lessons to be learned from that glorious past, for in creating a Black press, Black Americans added a needed and valuable dimension to the concept of a "free press" in America. It provided a forum in which unpopular ideas were aired unifying an oppressed minority and in the finest spirit of the First Amendment petitioning the government to redress those wrongs. The Black press has been a sentinel against injustice loudly and fearlessly decrying the evils of our society despite efforts to silence them.

To be sure, the Black press has served this nation well but its task is far from being over. Nor will it be until the conditions which gave it birth are no more. The words of John Russett written in 1827 still ring true:

"Too long have others spoken for us."

FIRST BLACK UMPIRE IN ORGANIZED BASEBALL WHEN HE STARTED IN THE SOUTHWEST INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE (1951).



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OF LOS ANGELES, ONCE UMPIRED SANDLOT GAMES FOR \$2 A GAME. ON DEC 13, 1953 HE BECAME THE FIRST BLACK UMPIRE IN A TRIPLE-A LEAGUE WHEN HE SIGNED WITH THE PACIFIC COAST LEAGUE. THE COLORFUL UMPIRE SPENT 15 YEARS IN THE MINOR LEAGUES BEFORE HE BECAME THE FIRST BLACK IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES--THE AMERICAN LEAGUE IN APRIL 1966. HE WORKED HIS FIRST WORLD SERIES IN 1970 AND THEN RETIRED AT THE AGE OF 56, ONE YEAR PAST THE AUTOMATIC RETIREMENT AGE. ONLY 5-FOOT 7-INCH HE HELD HIS OWN WITH THE BIGGEST....

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