



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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PATRICIA IRVIN
DAVID KIDD
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MONICA J. FOSTER
Seattle Office Coordinator

JULIE KEEFE
SUSAN FRIED
Photographers



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415 N. Killingsworth St.,
P.O. Box 5455, Portland, OR 97228.
Telephone (503) 285-5555.
E-mail: info@theskanner.com
World Wide Web site:
<http://www.theskanner.com>
Fax: (503) 285-2900

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Old Guard Marginalizes Ferguson

Remember these names: Ashley Yates, Johnetta Elzie, and Deray McKesson. They could get an invite to meet President Obama in the Whites House, but for some odd reason, there was confusion about whether the young Ferguson activists could speak at the #JusticeForAll march called primarily by Al Sharpton’s National Action Network on Dec. 13.

There should not have been confusion. If history is a guide, it likely had to do with the well-known fact that Sharpton is finicky – to put it mildly – about who speaks at events he’s connect- ed with.

In the case of the Ferguson activists, they kicked off a round of unprecedented global attention on the issue of police brutality. So, an invite from Sharpton should have been automatic. Why wouldn’t it be? The reason is obvious: Certain leaders will never ever exit the stage on their own volition. The idea that the next generation should “wait their turn” is perfectly laughable since every- one knows they will never be granted one.

Young activists did what some- one should have done a long time ago: They took the mic away from old leaders and started talking. Seems like I remember a story of Jesse Jackson asserting himself in SCLC. I read about John Lewis, the chairman of the Student Non- violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) being told to tone down his speech in order to speak at the 1963 March on Washington. We’ve been watching old heads giving press conferences, organiz- ing marches, and summits for years. It’s long past time for



**NNPA
COLUMNIST**

**Lauren
Victoria
Burke**

something new.
Keeping young people out of the spotlight is nothing new. I was there in 2013 when there was “no time” for Dream Defenders Execu- tive Director Phil Agnew to speak at the March on Washington 50- year commemoration. As Agnew walked to the podium, Sharpton arrived and started speaking.

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Funny how that happens. Were we really supposed to believe that a 10-hour program couldn’t spare Agnew two minutes?
At Mike Brown’s funeral, Sharpton ended the speeches with himself. And just think, we’re not talking strategy yet – just speak- ing. Not only have young leaders been marginalized, they have been deliberately blocked by old ones. Next year yet another “leadership summit” is planned by the old- heads.
This would all be fine if Black leaders were racking up policy

wins, but they aren’t.
When it comes to the issue of police brutality, certainly Sharpton is not the real issue or the true problem. Michael Stewart in 1983. Eleanor Bumpurs in 1984. Amadou Diallo in 1999. Patrick Dorismond in 2000. Sean Bell in 2006. Eric Garner in 2014. Sharp- ton has been championing the issue of police misconduct for more than three decades. What are his wins? If you’re the White House’s anointed “go to” man on Black issues, one would think an occasional victory would be easier to come by.
But think again.
Johnetta Elzie lives in a town where a cop became a millionaire

It’s about who decides strategy. It’s about who decides “what’s next.” It’s about power and what will be demanded from whom. Already we see that Ferguson leaders could care less about whether the White House is happy at the expense of focus on issues in the Black community. For four years Sharpton has deliberately avoided challenging the president on any issue. Has that worked? Could Martin Luther King have won policy victories without pres- suring Lyndon Johnson? How is it’s possible that Sharpton can walk in and out the door 61 times in six years and have nothing to show for it?
Meanwhile, Hispanic and gay leaders won ENDA and DACA and \$1.2 billion in the CROmnibus for immigration relief at the bor- der as Pell Grants and pensions are cut. All to the silence of civil rights leaders.
And what is the current back- drop? The economic situation is worse for African Americans. The unemployment rate being double has been accepted as “how it is.” The wealth gap between black and white is the largest in 25 years as Black “leaders” said nothing as President Obama agreed to make the Bush tax cuts permanent. The percentage of Blacks in poverty is 27 percent as community block grants were cut to the silence of leadership.
When the Obama administration cost HBCUs \$150 million, and 28,000 students at HBCUs had their education interrupted there was little pushback. What were Black leaders pushing for and against? What were they doing as these policies were being decided on?

Through The Media Lens: Covering Race

The second half of 2014 has been marked by the shoot- ing deaths of four African-American males by local law enforcement — Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; Eric Garner in New York, John Craw- ford and Tamir Rice in Ohio — that have attracted the attention of national media and the federal government, and shined a light on the issue of policing in minority communities.

It has also been marked by some exceptional journalism on the sub- ject, as well as some alarming narratives from journalistic choic- es that, while not necessarily intentional, serve to perpetuate stereotypes of Black men as dan- gerous criminals.

Race is present in the dynamics around these stories and those who are involved in producing these stories. Put another way: while a diverse group of journalists has been on the ground reporting this story, the same cannot be said about who makes decisions about what will be covered and how.
Some of the coverage goes into great detail about how the victims’ actions may have contributed to their own demise: John Crawford should not have tried to buy a toy rifle at Walmart, Mike Brown should not have (allegedly) stolen

GUEST COLUMNIST

Bob Butler

cigars from a convenience store, Eric Garner should not have (allegedly) been selling loose cig- arettes and Tamir Rice should not have been playing with a toy gun.
These cases are not the first, nor will they be the last, involving Black males and the police. It must be pointed out that Black males are not the only ones being shot. Dillon Taylor in Utah and Gil Collar in Alabama were White and

Two questions can help guide this process: Is this information relevant? And how will this affect the story?
A big part of how narrative is shaped in these stories starts with the photos of those involved. While availability of photos can be a challenge, especially in the early stages of a fast-moving story, efforts must be made to paint the fullest picture (pun intended) of the central figures. Images depict- ing black men solely as menacing, threatening or dangerous only fuel existing stereotypes.
Weighing whether to include

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also unarmed when police shot them. The difference is the media coverage of their cases does not imply that they deserved to die.
From the breaking news cover- age of these events to the analysis that followed, and will hopefully continue, it is important to recog- nize the negative patterns that can emerge in such stories, and to dis- cuss strategies for countering these patterns.

details about a black victim’s criminal background or drug use also contributes to the narrative. Here, balance is important. Is there an attempt to report the offi- cer’s history? Does the officer have a disciplinary history or a record of complaints regarding use of force? Is the victim’s back- ground relevant to the specific incident that ended his life? If so, explain this to readers, lest it be

interpreted as gratuitous or mali- cious.
In the case of Tamir Rice, why did the Northwest Ohio Media Group report on his parents’ crim- inal records? What did that have to do with Rice being shot by police?
Stories like Ferguson and the deaths of Crawford, Garner and Rice reaffirm the urgency of more diverse American newsrooms. Look no further than the member- ship of the National Association of Black Journalists to find many examples of responsible reporting.
NABJ was founded in 1975 in part, “to monitor and sensitize all media to racism.” Nearly 40 years later, NABJ still finds it necessari- ly to fulfill this role. It is our hope that those committed to a better approach to exploring issues of race and society will join us in examining how we can all improve.
Bob Butler is the President of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). NABJ is the largest organization for journa- lists of color in the nation, and provides career development as well as educational and other sup- port to its members worldwide. For additional information, please visit, <http://www.nabj.org>