

DIAGNOSIS NABJ: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF A POST-CIVIL RIGHTS  
ORGANIZATION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This critical study interrogates the history of the National Association of Black Journalists, the nation's oldest and largest advocacy organization for reporters of color. Founded in 1975, NABJ represents the quintessential post-Civil Rights organization, in that it was established following the end of the struggle for freedom rights. This piece argues that NABJ, like many other advocacy organizations, has succumbed to incorporation. Once a fierce critic of institutional racism inside and outside the newsroom, NABJ has slowly narrowed its advocacy focus to the issue of newsroom diversity. In doing so, NABJ, this piece argues, has rendered itself useless to the larger black public sphere, serving only the needs of middle-class African Americans seeking jobs within the mainstream press. Moreover, as the organization has aged, NABJ has taken an increasing amount of money from the very news organizations it seeks to critique.

Additionally, this study introduces a specific method of inquiry known as diagnostic journalism. Inspired in part by the television show, *House MD*, diagnostic journalism emphasizes historiography, participant observation and autoethnography in lieu of interviewing. This approach is taken, as a means of maintaining distance from the influence of various stakeholders within the early stages of research. Thus, diagnostic journalism, as this study argues, represents an ideal preliminary course of inquiry, as it allows the researcher to gather expertise on a topic prior to the critical interviewing stage.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 The Reggie Bryant Story**

On April 5, 2010, NABJ founder Reggie Bryant died following a long battle with cancer. One of the 44 original signatories of the organization's founding constitution, the long-time radio and television broadcaster known as "The Doctor" was a trailblazer for African Americans in television. From 1973 to 1978, Bryant co-produced and hosted *Black Perspectives on the News*, a show syndicated by PBS. More than 170 affiliates carried the program, which provided news and information on issues concerning the African American community. Following the end of the show's run, Bryant moved to radio, hosting shows on WURD and other Philadelphia-area stations until his death (Naedele 2010). Upon learning of his death, NABJ released a statement honoring Bryant's legacy. "Reggie was a true pioneer, especially with the "Black Perspective on The News" show. It was the equal of "Meet the Press" and many a day was superior thanks to Reggie's keen insight and sharp retort. Reggie lives on in all of us," said fellow founder and past NABJ president Les Payne (Williams 2010b).

What the press release played down, however, was that Bryant was not merely a journalist – at least in the professional sense of the word. Bryant, first and foremost, considered himself an activist on behalf of the African American community. Like many of the original founders of NABJ, Bryant's background was not in journalism. Bryant earned a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from Temple University. After graduating, Bryant took a job as a teacher. At night, he mentored gang members in Philadelphia. As he shifted his career toward filmmaking, his first documentaries dealt with issues facing teenage gang members. Bryant –

eventually – shifted toward radio and television broadcasting. But he never forgot why he became interested in journalism. "Reggie had a heart for his community. He used his broadcast career to serve the underserved. He was an unapologetic, unyielding and fierce advocate for his people. He never backed down," said Philadelphia Daily News columnist Elmer Smith following Bryant's death (Naedele 2010).

Yet during a session with fellow founders at the 2009 NABJ convention in Tampa, Bryant expressed his disappointment with the direction of the organization he helped create. The convention, a lavish, multimillion-dollar event featuring a job fair and corporate-sponsored sessions, did not reflect the NABJ he felt he helped create in 1975.

I have to take some exception to this [conference]. I have been engaged in evolution, revolution and confrontation. I have not heard that addressed here. I think that people are interested in becoming an employee for somebody. That's probably one of the reasons [there's been] an extraordinary difference from the way it was when we began this organization . . . The necessity for starting was not so much about jobs. [We wanted journalists] who could speak to larger communities, and say things that were important to them. Not about the train wrecks and potholes. But about the living conditions that were important to them. I have not heard that addressed. We didn't come together for NABJ to look for work. We came because this country, this bigoted, racist country, [needed] to change (Crittenden 2010b).

That would be Bryant's last appearance before NABJ. A year later, Bryant succumbed to his cancer. His message made during this meeting was the foundation for this study.

## **1.2 Chapter Overview**

This study will argue that the National Association of Black Journalists, a pioneering media advocacy organization founded in 1975 has succumbed to incorporation, and lost its

influence within the public sphere. Rooted in the legacy of the Freedom Rights Movement, the organization set forward in its initial constitution a comprehensive set of goals designed to challenge institutional racism within the mainstream. This piece will argue, however, that as the organization grew, and as newer generations of leaders took the helm, NABJ, funded heavily by the mainstream news organizations it was designed to critique, has become more invested in securing middle-class jobs for African Americans within newsrooms than fighting institutional racism within those newsrooms.

This analysis will consist of four main parts. The literature review will present the main theories that utilized in this study. The first section will make a connection between the notion of the public sphere set forward by Jurgen Habermas, and the notion of hegemony as set forward by Antonio Gramsci. This piece will argue that the development of the bourgeois public sphere set in place a middle-class hegemony that was specifically designed to quash public opinion, and specifically detrimental to individuals of color, notably African Americans. As a result, African Americans were forced to develop their own manners of challenging hegemony, notably through the black press. The second part will take an in-depth look at the black public sphere. This section will notably interrogate political and cultural fissures within the black community, discuss how middle-class African Americans have created their own hegemony within this sphere, and analyze why many black organizations dedicated to activism have fallen victim to cooptation, or as will be discussed in this piece, incorporation. The final section of literature review will specifically outline how the decline of the black press, which was once the preeminent institution of the black public sphere, has placed great pressure upon the mainstream press to offer representative coverage of the larger black community. Nevertheless, as first described by the Kerner Commission in 1968, and discussed in numerous studies ever since, the

mainstream press has never equipped itself to take on this challenge, leading to the persistence of racism with news coverage. It is within this context that NABJ was created in 1975.

The methodology used for this study will be discussed in the third chapter. This study has employed a method I have chosen to call diagnostic journalism. Influenced by scholarly and popular culture sources, diagnostic journalism relies upon in-depth historiography and observational research as opposed to interviewing. This is done as a means of gaining in-depth knowledge on a topic, which allows the researcher to garner a strong understanding of an issue, without the influence of various stakeholders. This, as I will argue, places the researcher in a superior position to conduct future research, making it an ideal tool for preliminary research.

The analysis of NABJ will begin with the fourth chapter. Specifically, this section will provide details about NABJ's founding, and outline the goals created by the founders during its constitutional meeting in December 1975. From there, this study will assess how the organization, over its history, has stayed true to four specific founding goals. Chapter 5 will analyze NABJ's relationship with members of the black press. Maintaining a relationship between black journalists working with the black press and black journalists working within the mainstream press was the first stated goal within NABJ's initial constitution. Chapter 6 will look at another founding goal by assessing NABJ's efforts to monitor the media for institutional racism. Chapter 7 will look at the organization's efforts to train students for careers in journalism. Chapter 8 will look at the organization's efforts to lobby the mainstream press for increased diversity within newsrooms. The last section of analysis, Chapter 9 will analyze how NABJ's financial situation has helped or harmed the organization in achieving these goals. The final chapter will provide not only concluding statements, but offer a vision for how NABJ, within the context of today's media environment.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Hegemony and the Public Sphere

*One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition (King 2003, 217-220).*

Unless one subscribes to a believe in a transmission model of communication, any message that enters the public domain has the risk of being interpreted in many different ways, despite the best intentions of the author. How these messages get processed often has to do with the lived experiences of the receivers. But in other cases, the message of an author, especially over time, may be reinterpreted, not because of the experiences of the author, but as a result of a concerted effort by the power elite to tailor and appropriate the message in a manner that benefits their interests. This chapter will discuss how this process impedes democratic discourse within the public sphere, and offer several theories on why this happens, all within the context of a democratic public sphere. To set up this discussion, this chapter will focus on the legacy of one of the nation's most revered – and arguably misinterpreted – political figures, Martin Luther King Jr.

When King's famed I Have a Dream speech enters the public sphere for discussion, the focus of analysis typically highlights a few lines toward the end of the speech. These lines,

which were improvised, paint a picture of a post-racial America in which people would be judged for their actions, not their skin color or religion. What rarely receives attention, however, is the first part of King's address, the part he specifically planned to deliver during the keynote speech of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. No dream was visualized within this portion. Instead, King spoke bluntly about the everyday lived experiences of African Americans in the United States. He said African Americans were tired of hearing that change was coming, and expected the Kennedy administration to use its might to end racial discrimination in hiring and housing. The government, when it came to civil rights, had offered African Americans a bounced check with insufficient funds. He and the hundreds of thousands in attendance on August 28, 1963 were there to make sure the next check would be cleared (King, 2003; Dyson, 2008).

What is also not mentioned during celebrations of King's legacy is his shift toward more radical progressive politics at the end of his life. By April of 1968, King had grown tired and disillusioned. After years of advocating for civil rights, he started to question the direction of the movement. Despite the supposed successes of integration, King began to acknowledge that such efforts disproportionately benefitted the black middle-class. The situation for working-class African Americans, however, had not improved, leading, in part, to the rash of urban riots that impacted major U.S. cities from 1965 to 1967. Still dedicated to nonviolence, King wanted to refocus the movement toward ending poverty. Thus, King decided to risk his political capital to address the issue of growing class inequality (in Honey, 2007).

Over the last several months of his life, King actively organized what would become the Poor People's Campaign. In public and in private, King began to turn his attention to how America's economic system denied civil rights for African Americans. For him, the new battle

for civil rights was directly related to “distributive justice.” And as part of his movement for such justice, King began to publically oppose the Vietnam War, which was draining resources from Lyndon Johnson’s anti-poverty efforts (Honey 2007; Dyson 2008).

As he pressed the issue, however, King found reticence among his progressive allies, including his own staff. These individuals, including long-time ally Bayard Rustin, believed that America would not tolerate an effort focused on economic justice. Concerned such an effort could be linked to communism, they felt this approach would potentially create a backlash against the larger movement, and potentially lead to political victories for right-wing candidates in the 1968 election. King however, did not back away from his new calling. “Something is wrong with capitalism today as it stands now in the United States . . . [w]e are not interested in being integrated in this value structure. Power must be relocated. A radical redistribution of power must take place,” (Honey 2007). This new dream, however, would never come to fruition. On April 4, 1968, King was killed by an assassin’s bullet (Honey 2007;Dyson 2008).

No other African American – including President Barack Obama – is so highly regarded within the United States as Martin Luther King Jr. No other person of color has been honored with a memorial in Washington D.C. And no other non-elected American citizen has been recognized with a holiday commemorating his life. Yet as time has passed since his death, the goals King sought to achieve during his final days have largely evaporated from his larger legacy. This was notably demonstrated during the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington, which took place in August of 2013.

In an article titled “Throngs Mark ‘I Have a Dream’ Anniversary, CNN reporter Mariano Castillo suggested that the march in 1963 was solely centered on racial equality. There was no mention that the purpose of the original march was related to employment issues (Castillo 2013).

A *Washington Post* article on the Saturday rally also failed to mention the other speakers or organizers of the original event, notably labor leader A. Phillip Randolph. Instead, the article's authors called King's "I Have a Dream Speech" a "standard of perfection" in civil rights rhetoric (Hasley, Morello, and Brown 2013).

Conservative commentators and news outfits chimed in with their own version of King's Dream. Bill O'Reilly of Fox News suggested that more African Americans could achieve the dream if they learned to speak proper English and conduct themselves responsibly (O'Reilly 2013). Black conservatives also attempted to appropriate King's dream. During a luncheon held the day of the official commemoration of the march, T.W. Shannon, speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives, told the audience that the key to achieving the dream rested with an embrace of conservative values. Adopting any other principles would proliferate the "contaminants of government dependence, class warfare, socialism and any other pollutant that would muzzle the ring of freedom," (Milbank 2013).

MSNBC, the supposedly progressive news outfit, was arguably the worst offender of overshadowing the original march. Not only did MSNBC ignore contributions made by other civil rights leaders, they trivialized King's own speech, rather than expand upon his overall progressive political philosophy. Throughout the week leading up to the official anniversary on August 28, the network – on its website and in its broadcasts – referred to the anniversary as "Dream Day." The network specifically created a website specifically focused on Dr. King, and encouraged people to tweet about their own "dreams" for America by tweeting through #DreamDay. The page featured tweets and video posts made by celebrities who went along with MSNBC's celebratory theme. Among the celebrities and political figures that were featured on the page were Sir Richard Branson, the Dalai Lama, celebrity chef Bobby Flay and Snoop Lion.

Another article noted that members of King's family were involved in a "Dream Day" traffic accident ("#DreamDay." 2013;Austin 2013).

Organizers of the anniversary events sponsored by traditional civil rights organizations also presented a problematic interpretation of the 1963 March. The Saturday event commemorating the march was called the National Action to Realize the Dream. To help commemorate the event, groups like the National Urban League of gave attendees t-shirts urging Americans to "redeem the dream" (Clark 2013). The keynote speaker of the event, Martin Luther King III, kept his comments specifically geared toward the "dream" portion of his father's speech. "The vision preached by my father a half-century ago was that his four little children would no longer live in a nation where they would judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." He did not, however, discuss his father's later work on economic equality (Miller 2013).

This was not the first time various elements of society rewrote the legacy of Dr. King to suit their own constituencies. For years, conservatives have been using the "content of their character" line to insist that King would oppose social programs today (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2003). The press also has a long history of providing trivial, token coverage of King, black history month and other ethnic events (Heider 2000).

This erasure of King's legacy is indicative of a longstanding issue within modern Western society. While activists like King are at times able to sway public opinion toward justice, Western societies are by-and-large shielded from contentious issues that may negatively impact the pro-business, pro-European interests within the public sphere. When such messages do enter this space, these same forces will often rewrite history, flipping the script on the legacy freedom fighters in a way that somehow benefits their own interests. The cooptation of King's

legacy is a representation of shifting hegemony. It is a representation of incorporation.

Moreover, it is a strong representation of how debate is conducted within the actually existing public sphere.

The concept of the public sphere has existed within academic debate for centuries. Over the past 50 years, arguably no scholar has offered a better framework of the public sphere than Jurgen Habermas. Many scholars have offered various sketches of the German intellectual's offerings. A rather simplistic explanation could be assessed as followed. For centuries in Western Europe, no true public sphere existed. Both the aristocracy and clergy claimed to know what was best for the masses, and acted on matters of importance to the "public" with little to no input from their citizens. But as time passed, and advancements in technology took place, more and more workers left subsistence farming in favor of salaried positions in carpentry, masonry, shipping and other service industries. These individuals began to settle within urban areas. Since they did not have to toil in the fields all day, these individuals had some degree of leisure time. In many cases, these workers opted to spend this time conversing with other workers inside of taverns or coffeeshops.

It was within these public spaces, Habermas argued, that members of this bourgeois class began to debate how aristocratic rule impacted their lives. By the 17th century, these select workers started to argue that a dramatic change was needed in how governance and debate operated within nation-states. As a result of these discussions, these workers gained the courage to rebel against the system, resulting in the famed revolutions in England, France and the Americas. Once in power, these individuals replaced the aristocratic system with a system devoted to encouraging public debate on issues of importance to mass populations. Thus, a new system developed, leading to the creation of a democratic public sphere within Western society.

The preeminent institution of this public sphere, Habermas argued, was the press (Habermas 1989).

Shortly after the release of the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in the United States, a litany of scholars lined up to critique Habermas' work (Calhoun 1993). While a public sphere did exist, it was never as democratic as Habermas suggested. Notable among the early critiques was that of Nancy Fraser. Her work noted that a large portion of the Western citizenry, notably women and people of color, were never given a voice within the new bourgeois public sphere, whether within the coffeehouses of the Americas, or within the halls of legislative buildings. These groups could not vote. They could not own land. Socially, they were expected to stay in their place, and not given a chance to interact on an equal level with bourgeois white men. Individuals of African descent in the Americas were not offered any rights that white society was obligated to honor. To effectively lobby for rights within mainstream society, these subaltern groups had to create their own counterpublics outside of the mainstream public sphere. Thus, given the marginalization of these groups, the notion of an ideal public sphere was always dubious, and may have never existed (Fraser 1992, 197-231). That may have been the point.

Some scholars may smirk at the suggestion that Jurgen Habermas' notion of the "bourgeois public sphere" has anything to do with Antonio Gramsci's theory of "hegemony." A solid argument can be made, however, that *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* serves as a description of how hegemony is developed and maintained by a power elite. Getting around Gramsci's notion of hegemony is no easy task. As scholar T.J. Jackson Lears attested, Gramsci never really presents a single definition for the concept. The definition Jackson Lears called the "closest" representation of the concept is mapped within a specific passage of

Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. In this passage, Gramsci said, "functions of social hegemony and political government," are the result of "spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population . . . caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys because of its position," (Jackson Lears 1985, 567-593). With this passage, was Gramsci suggesting that social hegemony requires mass populations to 'buy into their own oppression?' In a sense, that may be exactly what he is saying. But how does something like this happen?

Part of it stems from the establishment of a seemingly natural system of authority, one that is rarely questioned by the masses. Social theorist Max Weber argued that there are three parts to the establishment of an authority system within a society – charismatic leadership, traditional leadership and legal authority. Charismatic leadership, which is traditionally marked by religious leadership, draws people in through inspiration. The leadership convinces the masses that they are lacking something within their lives. Thus, the message of the charismatic leaders offers a pathway to some sort of personal nirvana. Once a group of people has been inspired, traditional leadership, the next step, takes place when the public formally grants the charismatic leaders the permission to set up rules regulating the behaviors of the specific group. Once these rules have been embraced through legislative action and years of acceptance from the masses, legal authority has been established. At this point, the authority of this regime becomes routinized and accepted as legitimate by the majority of the select society. As Weber states, the public rarely mounts significant challenges to authority, thus maintaining the legitimacy of the existing hegemony (Kalberg 2005).

A strong argument may be made that this model of authority led to the development of the United States. In protest of acts that largely impacted middle-class elites, a group of nationalists, led by charismatic figures like printer Benjamin Franklin, intellectual Thomas

Jefferson and war-hero George Washington, began to make the case that the British government was exploiting citizens through tariffs and other taxes. These sentiments were carried throughout the colonies via newspapers. Over time, these charismatic statements made within the press and within other public settings convinced enough middle-class men to revolt. These same men placed their trust in the leadership of the largely disorganized revolutionary movement, which led to the crafting of the Declaration of Independence by select “representatives” of the colonies in 1776. Following the war, after a failed attempt was made to create a central government, leaders from the states created the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Who exactly benefited from the revolution? While largely dismissed by historians and political scientists, Charles Beard’s *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* of the United States systematically suggested that the “founding fathers” of the nation created the legal authority of the new nation in a manner that protected their own financial and political interests. Even if one dismisses his thesis, there is no question that the constitution limited participation in the political process to white men, allowed for the continuation of the peculiar institution of slavery and forbid the collection of income taxes. The document also made it extremely difficult to change their initial vision through the legislative process (Beard 1913).

This does not mean challenges do not erupt. But as argued with the framework of Habermas, challenges to the status quo require collective action born through extensive debate over the issues. The problem is, citizens very often lack the knowledge required to engage in informed debate on many public matters. At least that is what Walter Lippmann believed.

In his text, *Public Opinion*, Lippmann, offering a critique of the modern nation-state and media of the 1920s, questioned the role the mass public could or should make on policy issues within modern society. The ideal public sphere requires members of the public to make a

concerted effort to keep themselves informed on major issues of relevance to their lives. They must read plenty of newspapers, listen to public radio and discuss important matters of the day with friends and co-workers. If this happens, these individuals have a better chance of making sound, informed decisions on questions of policy, and more importantly, on who will represent them in government (Jackson Lears 1985, 567-593).

Lippmann, however, questioned such an idealized view of the public sphere. Modern society is far too diverse, complex and challenging to expect the average citizen to develop informed decisions on major policy issues. People work long hours. They have families. They have specific biases based upon their religion, income or ethnicity. What little leisure time they have, they often prefer to spend it away from political issues. As a result, when people claim to have developed an informed opinion on an issue, they will likely be relying upon hearsay, half-truths and horrendously poor sources. That, combined with their own personal biases, leads most people to rely upon informational stereotypes, which, as Lippmann offered, are “partial and inadequate” representations of the world (Lippmann 1922).

Moreover, the idealized public sphere assumes that journalists will provide the public with well-informed accounts of daily events. Lippmann is also dismissive of this as a potential reality. Journalists, too, cannot develop the level of expertise on issues needed to create an informed public (Lippmann 1922) As a result, Lippmann, in a follow-up book to *Public Opinion*, placed a more succinct description on what he views as the public’s role in public debate. What truly exists is a *Phantom Public*, one that has no real influence, but nevertheless lends legitimacy to decision made by elites (Lippmann 1993).

But again, this is not to say that the public has no ability to influence public debate. There are many examples of when ideas stemming from played a major role in changing the

status quo. But as Gramsci notes in his work, the power elite of a strong functional social hegemony remains prepared to give concessions to marginalized populations. What they will not do, however, is grant anything that will completely disrupt or even significantly impact their overall control on society.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci contended that the key to maintaining hegemony requires the “dominant group [to be] coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups,” (Gramsci 2006, 85-91). Without such coordination of interests, the power elite faces potential revolution or other forms of social disorder. Thus, as time goes on, Gramsci notes that the dominant group will have to make concessions and sacrifices to ensure subordinate groups feel they have a stake within their society. As scholar Raymond Williams noted, “hegemony does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified,” (Williams 1977, 108-114). The modifications, however, will never go so far as to change the core economic and political structures upon which hegemony is built.

The lack of significant change within the overall power structure of the United States is why King sought more substantial changes in American hegemony during his final days. Integrating lunch counters and buses was progress. Making sure college-educated blacks had an opportunity to go to the top predominately-white schools was great. So was making sure black graduates could get jobs with white employers. But at the end of his life, a more radicalized King was not content with changes that failed to change the larger structures of institutionalized racism in America, notably as they pertained to issues of economic justice. Eating at a lunch counter is nice. It does nothing to ensure people can pay the bill.

King's more radical message, however, has largely been erased from the public imaginary. Instead, the public has remained fixated on the racial message of hope offered in the final section of King's March on Washington address. These words inspire people. But when taken as a whole, they do not call for a radical redistribution of power.

Engaging in such an erasure – eliminated the inconvenient messages from the legacy of popular radical leaders, is the artistry of shifting hegemony. It allows for concessions. It even allows for the former opposition leaders to be celebrated. But most importantly, it can, over time, recondition the opposition message in a manner that actually benefits the status quo. This is, to use a slang-term, the flipping of the script on dissent to serve the interests of the power elite.

Many scholars, notably those who embrace more decentralized notions of power, would argue that no population ever buys into a system that dominates them. Marginalized populations, always resist, and they always find ways to fight back against the domination of others. The enslaved resisted by refusing to work and breaking tools. The Zoot Suitors resisted against complying with a racist government by purposely wearing flamboyant clothing during a government sanctioned garment rationing (Kelley 1996). Children who refuse to obey in school are rejecting the idea that they should be good, loyal workers for oppressive multinational corporations (Willis 1988). People have the agency to make their own decisions. They are never mere cogs in a machine.

To a large extent, this is true. The elite of society can never completely end dissonance. Yet if one were to take the notion of hegemony as suggested here, such largely disorganized and marginalized “protests” at the edges of society rarely have a significant impact on transforming hegemonic systems of power. They take place. They may inspire some. But for the most part,

due to the lack of attention paid to such dissonance by the media, and the lack of concern paid to such dissonance by the powerful, these symbolic efforts largely exist in a vacuum outside the visibility of most within the larger public sphere. As scholar Stuart Hall argued, the power elite have no issue with such “carefully-regulated, segregated visibility,” (Hall 1996, 465-475). In the Ralph Ellison sense of the word, these opinions and actions, however meaningful to those engaged in them, will be rendered invisible to the bulk of society.

Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* featured an unnamed protagonist who had become disillusioned with society. After attending a historically black college and joining a multiracial movement for economic justice, the protagonist began to realize that his progressive ideas were being ignored in favor of trivial or symbolic efforts that did little to challenge institutional racism. Rather than continue to face frustration, the disillusioned protagonist moves underground. The reason? He felt that his political efforts would always remain insignificant in generating meaningful change on race relations in America. He felt *he* was invisible – but not in the physical sense. He was invisible because society has refused to acknowledge his voice. People simply refused to see him (Ellison 1952).

Invisibility of the marginalized voice helps explain how and why King’s larger message has been transformed by social hegemony over the past 50 years. In a society based largely upon economic hedonism and the ignorance of the poor, his final message of economic justice for all posed a direct threat to the established norms of bourgeois society – indeed, even more than the integration of lunch counters and hiring of well-trained, well-qualified African Americans to middle-class jobs. Nevertheless, his enduring legacy as a charismatic leader on civil rights has remained a significant moment within the collective history of the United States. Given the significance placed upon this moment, it would be impossible to simply dismiss King as a leader.

Instead, in an attempt to valorize him while rendering invisible the more radical elements of his vision, leaders within the mainstream public sphere from all political persuasions have opted to focus on his ambiguous dream as opposed to his very concrete vision for a just society. They have flipped the script of King's legacy to their advantage.

This model can also take place in other contexts within the larger public sphere. Indeed, within much smaller organizations, dissonant voices, for a variety of reasons, may become marginalized in favor of narrowly tailored messages favoring a specific set of goals. The next chapter will discuss how divisions within the larger African American community – the black public sphere – have played a role in the decline of the larger Civil Rights Movement.

## **2.2 The Black Public Sphere**

*Every time black people want to have a good time, ignorant-ass niggas fuck it up . . . I love black people, but I hate niggas, brother. Oh, I hate niggas!* Chris Rock (Truesdell 1996)

A common stereotype exists with regard to unity within the African American community. When everything hits the fan, all the black people will set aside their differences and work together for a common goal. Yet during intra-racial conversations among African Americans, sentiments often run counter to this popular assumption about the black community. Unity among African Americans is not a guarantee. In many cases, some groups of African Americans would rather deal with people who are not black as opposed to working within the community. These diametric sentiments may indeed speak to the double consciousness of blackness described by W.E.B. Dubois more than a century ago.

This chapter, however, will go further, arguing that the political back-and-forth seen within the African American community is actually a natural function of debate within the black

public sphere, an entity developed centuries ago as a result of the denial of black agency within the mainstream American public. Today, however, the health of the black public sphere has suffered during the post-civil rights era, as more and more African Americans see their interests more aligned with whites, as a result of both voluntary and involuntary circumstances.

Recent statistical data suggests African Americans demonstrate unity on certain issues. Many opinions have been rendered regarding the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin. African Americans overwhelmingly believed the jury made the wrong call. A Pew Research poll revealed that 86 percent of blacks felt the verdict was unjust, while a *Washington Post* poll set the level of African American disapproval at 91 percent. Additionally, more than 86 percent of African Americans believed that shooting was unjustified (Levenson 2013). These numbers were similar to another significant event – the reelection of Barack Obama. African American support of Obama in both 2008 and 2012 was more than 94 percent. In the 2012 election, for the first time in U.S. history, the overall percentage of blacks casting votes exceeded the percentage of whites. Had African American turnout had been so high, Obama would have lost the 2012 election to Mitt Romney (Kuhn 2008; Associated Press 2013).

This notion of unfettered black unity, however, has less evidence to support it. Numerous studies dating back to *Philadelphia Negro* have systematically documented the deep political fissures within the African American community (Dubois 1995; Lang 2009; Lacy 2007; Harris-Lacewell 20006; Baldwin 2007). Middle-class blacks distrust working-class blacks. Light-skinned blacks distrust darker-skinned blacks. The shouting and hollering of Pentecostal African Americans offends the demur, proper traditions of other black parishioners. And when the limitations of restrictive housing covenants were broken, many blacks did whatever they can

to get away from the blacks they did not like – although they really did not get very far away from them (Patillo 2007; Patillo 1999).

This is the legacy of the Black Public Sphere. On issues deemed important to all of its members, African Americans of different political and economic stripes have often worked together toward a common goal. On many other matters, members of the black community have exhibited anything but unity. Nevertheless, the black public sphere, for the most part, has operated as one dysfunctional family that has overcome and persevered in the face of racial oppression for decades. But over the past 40 years, things have slowly changed. Some family members see no further purpose for unity. They want a divorce.

A year before Obama's election, a Pew Foundation survey of African Americans detailed the emerging divisions within the black community. The survey suggested that a third African Americans feel that black community should no longer be seen as one 'race.' Rather, African Americans should be divided along lines of economic class and notions of values. The survey also suggested that more than half of all African Americans believed that poor blacks could hold themselves responsible for their lack of economic success. Racism was not to blame (*"Optimism about Black Progress Declines: Blacks See Growing Values Gap Between Poor and Middle Class."* 2007, 87).

Coined as enlightened racism by scholars Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, white beliefs on racial issues shifted during the rise of conservatism during the 1980s and 1990s. Intensified by the rhetoric of conservatives like George Will and Bill Bennett, and bolstered by the weekly imagery of Bill Cosby's very successful – and very fake –Huxtable clan, whites came to believe that racism was a thing of the past, and that the black working-class – or underclass, as some prefer to use – was simply too apathetic to raise their lot in life. In turn, these sentiments about

the black working class – which are largely rooted in the stereotype of the lazy, shiftless black coon (Bogle 1995) – were used justify the scaling back of social welfare programs (D'Souza 1995; McGowan 2001; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2003).

But by the end of the last century, an increasing number of African Americans, including perceived progressives like journalists Leonard Pitts, Cynthia Tucker, Juan Williams, and infamously, comedian Bill Cosby, began to publically offer the same conclusion, suggesting that personal responsibility, not institutional racism, was the primary reason the so-called underclass continued to struggle (Dyson 2005; Williams 2006; Cosby and Poussaint 2007). On one hand, this shift could speak to an increase in conservatism among African Americans. It could, however, mark the rejection of an inconvenience many successful African Americans have detested decades. They no longer wish to have their own personal fates linked with the fates of working-class African Americans.

No shortage of literature exists on the social construction of race, notably within the United States. A short summary of this evolution could read as followed. During the initial stages of American colonization, race as we know it today did not exist. In colonial Virginia, indentured servants from various regions of the world, including those of African descent, worked alongside whites and indigenous populations to build the early settlements. Blacks would eventually work out their contracts, purchase land and marry whomever they pleased, including European women. As the colonies became profitable agriculturally, additional cheap labor was needed to continue reaping profits. Following a model established by the Spanish, other Europeans in North America began to import involuntary human labor from Africa under a new system of servitude, lifetime chattel enslavement. These individuals would never have the

right to freedom, and their offspring, which would be declared the property of the “owner” of their parents, would also face a lifetime of labor (Roediger 2008; Asim 2007).

This notion of lifetime enslavement, however, flew in the face of the Enlightenment-era logic that brought democracy to Western Europe and North America. If all men were equal, how could one justify a system of lifetime servitude? As a way of relieving this contradiction, an effort was made to dehumanize individuals of African descent. Laws were passed banning interracial marriage, black suffrage and black ownership of land. Pseudoscientists began publishing materials purporting the inferiority of Africans. Africans were naturally more similar to apes and chimpanzees, thus not worthy of full rights as citizens. Given this condition, enslaved Africans were being done a favor by their white owners, and actually happy living in the servitude of their masters (Roediger 2008; Asim 2007).

Over time, this system began to eradicate ethnic divisions among most individuals of European decent within the United States. English, French, German and eventually Irish and Italian Americans all became ‘white,’ and enjoyed the privileges thereof. The value attached to ‘whiteness’ intensified hostility toward persons of color, as they became seen as a threat, notably following the abolition of slavery. Immigrants too would embrace the notion of black inferiority, helping to solidify racial hegemony in the United States, even following the abolition of enslavement. Stereotypes of black inferiority were proliferated through mediated forms of communications, while de jure and de facto forms of segregation helped keep blacks in their place within the spatial hierarchy of America. It is under this logic that the unique condition of blackness versus whiteness was created within the United States (Asim 2007; Roediger 2008; Harris 1995; Lipstiz 1998).

It was also under these conditions that the black public sphere was created. Blacks lived together, worked together and worshiped together. As a means of fighting such oppression, and as a means functioning within society, blacks created their own institutions, such as newspapers, organizations, universities and churches. African Americans, as noted, began to create their own systems that differentiated blacks, depending on community, along lines of skin tone, income, social status and whatever other distinctions particular communities sought to create. Thus, while African Americans were bonded culturally and politically, African Americans also began to create subcultures within their own communities (Dubois 1995; Dubois 1989; Drake and Cayton 1962; Frazier 1957; Wilson 1987; Omi and Winant 1994; Baldwin 2007; Black 2007; Lang 2009).

While this sketch helps trace the evolution of both whiteness and blackness within the United States, modern notions of who is and who is not African American has become muddled, as various scholars have attempted to dictate who may and may not be considered “authentically” black. The notion of a larger, more inclusive black public sphere, however, attempts to tie together individuals representing the totality of the black community. As defined by political scientist Michael Dawson, African Americans representing the black public sphere tend to believe that all share a “linked fate” with each other.

In his 1996 text, *Beyond the Mule*, Dawson directly challenged the perceived thesis of William Julius Wilson’s text, *The Declining Significance of Race*. Wilson’s book argued that, within the post-Civil Rights period, many African Americans achieved significant economic gains, which set them apart from what he called “the black underclass.” As a result, these new middle-class African Americans did not see themselves tied politically to the larger African American community (Wilson 1987). Dawson, in *Beyond the Mule*, countered this argument.

He contended that, due to the persistence experience of racism, African Americans continued to see their political, economic and social fates linked, regardless if income, education or other factors. In fact, Dawson suggested that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to feel linked to the larger black public sphere – even if such a connection is uncomfortable (Dawson, 1996).

Over time, both Wilson and Dawson’s arguments have shown merit. Nevertheless, the 2007 Pew study suggested middle-class African Americans in recent times have attempted to distance themselves culturally and socially from working-class African Americans. These African Americans are frustrated that racism continues to impede their upward mobility within mainstream society. But unlike the so-called underclass, these individuals feel they have played by the rules. They have worked hard in their careers. As such, these individuals believe they should not still be subject to the same unequal treatment as a result of their race. Yet, in terms of economic and social status, African Americans seeking middle-class backgrounds continue to struggle within mainstream America (Lacy 2007; Robinson 2010; Cose 1993). As one person interviewed for Ellis Cose’s *Rage of Privilege Class* lamented, “The bottom line is, you’re black. And that’s still a negative in society,” (Cose 1993). Since little they seem to do changes this perception, and since many feel as if they have no recourse to address institutional racism, many middle-class African Americans have sought to take out their rage against the black working-class (Truesdell 1996).

It is this framework that possibly explains the onslaught of criticism of working-class blacks by individuals like Bill Cosby, who gained fame among conservatives and African Americans for his infamous “pound cake” speech during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Brown V. Board (Dyson 2005). In his oft-quoted speech, Cosby told the audience that the lack

of education and morals within the black underclass was the sole reason this set of blacks had failed to reach the American Dream. Cosby did not stop there. In 2006, he co-authored a book, *Come On People*, with psychologist Alvin Poussaint. In it, the men made the argument that African Americans in the so-called underclass needed to work harder to become better fathers, better husbands and better members of society (Cosby and Poussaint 2007).

Cosby's opinions, of course, are not new, and were a major emphasis of Malcolm X's political teachings (Dyson 2005; Dawson 2001). But today, the backlash of the so-called black middle-class against the so-called black underclass has taken place under a new racial context. Despite their struggles, some African Americans, notably Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey, have reached the highest levels of influence and respect within the larger public sphere. Doors that were once denied to African Americans within the mainstream public sphere have been opened to them, in what may represent a rearticulating of racial hegemony in what some have called the "post-racial" era. The successes of a select few blacks may suggest that a new post-racial hegemony now allows for the inclusion of certain African Americans into public sphere, so long as they are well-spoken, well-educated and not strongly affiliated with any elements of the so-called black underclass or black radicalism. Those who do not embody such an image, however, are fair game for racial prejudice, because their actions, not the actions of others, have placed themselves in a lowly situation (Jhally and Lewis 1993; Omi and Winant 1994; Entman and Rojecki 2000).

Moreover, because many African Americans have embraced this new racialization, there has been a marginalization of such voices even within the black public sphere. While there has always been tension, the marginalization of black radicals has not been commonplace within the black public sphere. But now, in all areas of black public life, the moderates of the black public

sphere may be seeking to limit debate of “blackness” to those arguments that suite their own political and economic interests.

The black public sphere has a history that dates before the signing of the U.S. Constitution. Coordinated counterpublic action against racial hegemony is documented back to the 1770s, when churches in New York and Philadelphia began efforts to expose segregation within the white church and other areas of life (Brooks 2005, 31-66). While Nancy Fraser focused on the counterpublicity as it broadly impacted a variety of marginalized populations, later scholars, have given a more layered, nuanced description of the black public sphere that accounts for various activities among African Americans. In his essay, “A Black Counterpublic,” Dawson (1995) defined the black public sphere as “a set of institutions, communications networks, and practices which facilitate debate of causes and remedies to . . . political setbacks and economic devastation facing major segments of the Black community, and which facilitate the creation of oppositional formations and sites,” (p. 201). For Dawson, the epicenter of this sphere – which was created as a result of racial and economic stratification – are made up of the various activist organizations and publications that engage and agitate on behalf of blacks in public discourse.

Dawson’s most important works on the black public sphere, however, were not directly tied to Habermas. Aside from his important work of developing linked-fate theory in *Beyond the Mule*, his 2001 text, *Black Visions*, was arguably the most comprehensive scholarly attempt to track the various political ideologies within the black public sphere. Still privileging the idea of the political counterpublic, Dawson nonetheless mapped out the various ideological groups within the black public sphere – Black Conservatism, Radical Egalitarianism, Disillusioned Liberalism, Black Marxism, Black Feminism and Black Nationalism – within the text. Of the

two categories not generally used within most fields of study, Radical Egalitarianism takes a sunny view toward the prospects of integration, while Disillusioned Liberalism is marked by actors who believe that the challenges of racism are more pervasive and entrenched within the institutions of liberal society (Dawson 2001).

Another solid attempt to map political groupings was made by Dawson's protégé, Melissa Harris-Lacewell, (now Harris-Perry). In her book, *Bibles, Barbershops and BET*, Harris-Lacewell offered her own map of political ideologies within the black public sphere. She however simplified the list to Black Conservatism, Liberal Integrationism, Black Feminism and Black Nationalism. For Harris-Lacewell, Black Marxism is not addressed, due to what she sees as its relative insignificance in contemporary life. She also chose to combine the aforementioned "liberal" philosophies into one. Future research must continue to interrogate black political philosophies, as both lists may not fully embrace the more intricate divisions among more conservative and radical black political philosophies.

While scholars like Dawson focused on the counterpublic as a space of political discourse, a second generation of black public sphere scholars expanded the view of how subaltern public spheres operate. These scholars suggested that such spheres were not mere places of political discourse, but were also spaces where people within a particular subaltern sphere could engage in various forms of discourse related to issues within that community, including, but not limited to, politics and social action.

Directly challenging Dawson's work, scholar Catherine Squires argued for a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the black public sphere. Introducing the concept of "enclaves," Squires emphasized a spatial analysis of the black public sphere. Where African Americans speak, she argued, is just as important to understand as what they actually say.

Toward this, she introduced the concept of “enclave” spaces of discourse, or locations where African Americans can speak outside the surveillance of whites.

Borrowing from Robin Kelley’s notion of hidden transcript (1996), Harris-Lacewell also argued that intricacies of the black discourse public sphere can only be understood by observing how and where people speak, particularly, within spaces not directly associated with political activities. Noting that not all speech within the black public sphere should be constituted as political, she argued that black spaces of discourse allow African Americans to assert “uniqueness in cultural, artistic epistemological and spiritual frames,” as well as nurture “multiple facets of the African American intellect and spirit,” (Harris-Lacewell 2006). As part of her research, she focused on enclaves such as black barbershops, hair salons and other spaces predominately patronized by blacks.

What these studies do not account for, however, are spaces of black discourse existing within mainstream spaces. Such spaces like lunch tables in predominately white cafeterias are created by members of the black public sphere, as a means of creating a level of privacy within spaces not dominated by African Americans (Tatum 1997). Similar examples could include section of bars and nightclubs, areas of public parks and other “integrated “ spaces. Based on these studies, this work argues that there are three types of spaces of discourse within the black public sphere: Enclaves, spaces of counterpublicity and negotiated spaces.

Spaces of counterpublicity are primarily dedicated to challenging white racial hegemony. They also, however, represent places where other forms of political action take place. Included among spaces of black counterpublicity are the offices of the black press, black political and trade organizations and black studies departments. As noted earlier, enclaves are spaces where African Americans can discuss various topics outside the surveillance of whites. Enclaves,

however, do not have to be organized spaces. For instance, an inner-city street corner or back alley could serve as a public space for individuals involved in the underground economy and individuals who are homeless (Patillo 2007).

As noted earlier, enclaves are spaces where African Americans can discuss various topics free from the surveillance of mainstream actors. Conversations within enclave spaces do not necessarily focus on political issues. They focus on any issues pertaining to actors within the black public sphere. This could include anything from church issues, business transactions, fashion, sports or anything else of concern at the moment. Barbershops, churches and social functions like organizational picnics are typical enclave spaces. Like counterpublic spaces, enclaves do not have to be in specific organized spaces. For instance, an inner-city street corner or back alley could serve as a public space for individuals involved in the underground economy (Patillo 2007).

Finally, there are negotiated spaces of black publicity. In essence, there are spaces where African Americans are seen engaging in discourse, but not in a manner which is outside the surveillance of ‘others.’ In largely white schools, black students may choose a table to serve as a space for negotiated discourse. The same takes place within mixed crowd social spots, such as nightclubs or bars. Other places become negotiated spaces due to gentrification or encroachment by whites.

Churches and other religious buildings have an interesting position as spaces of discourse. At various times, a church could operate under any of these categories, depending on the situation. For instance, a single church, during the span of a weekend, could serve as space for counterpublic political action, a space for gossip among choir members and the site of a

cross-cultural revival. Throughout the Freedom Rights period, churches, more often than not, took on such varied responsibilities.

But in the view of Dawson, a political counterpublic has not functionally existed since the 1970s. In *Beyond the Mule*, he argued that class and political divisions within the black public sphere, combined with the larger right-wing Reagan Revolution, worked to cripple counterpublic activities within the black public sphere. As a result of this shift, actions of counterpublicity have been largely rendered useless (Dawson, 1996).

Dawson's argument was augmented that same year by a more comprehensive study. In the book, *We Have No Leaders*, Richard Smith argues that the manner in which civil rights organizations sought counterpublicity changed following the end of the Freedom Rights Movement. Beginning with the Niagara Movement of 1905, Smith claims that one of the biggest reasons counterpublic groups were effective prior to 1968 was that they by and large operated outside the mainstream public sphere. Whether the NAACP, SCLC or the Nation of Islam, decisions made with regard to ending racial discrimination were largely within black spaces of counterpublicity, which were largely outside the view and influence of mainstream benefactors. Moreover, because of the persistence of racial segregation, members of these groups had virtually no ties with whites, nor had much prospect of becoming actively involved within mainstream institutions or organizations.

This changed, however, with the end of the movement, due to what he calls "the incorporation" of such organizations by mainstream benefactors. Smith describes incorporation as the partial acceptance of a formally hostile or threatening population within an advocacy-related institution. This is often achieved through the acceptance of funds from mainstream benefactors, the interlocking of boards of directorate (Bettig and Hall 2012) and other measures

that give outside influences greater power within black organizations. In many cases, these benefactors represent the very groups black counterpublic organizations once critiqued. Accepting the assistance of such groups, in turn, works to significantly reduce the ability of an organization to agitate on behalf the citizens it supposedly represents. Thus, as a result of this incorporation, these groups, despite their continued visibility, have virtually no influence as agents of counterpublicity. “Blacks have lost the capacity to effectively press their demands on a system, and that the system has consequentially responded to their demands with symbolism, neglect and an ongoing pattern of cooptation,” (Smith, 1996, p. 21).

Two decisions made by two separate civil rights organizations in two cities serve as modern-day examples of incorporation. Only months after hosting its organization’s national convention, the Philadelphia Urban league made a highly controversial announcement. The local chapter of the organization dedicated to African American economic empowerment endorsed the effort of a Jewish developer seeking to build a casino in the heart of Chinatown. “As we conducted our research and talked with Urban Leagues in other cities, we realized that black people were going to gamble anyway. So why not have black people at the table making the decisions and addressing these concerns?” said Urban League head Pat Coulter at the press conference announcing the decision (Russ 2013).

Black people – especially working-class African Americans – do gamble. As demonstrated in studies, African Americans are two-and-a-half times more likely to engage in pathological gambling than whites. And given the economic situation of working-class African Americans, a bad night could spell economic ruin and subsequent stress for many black gamblers. In short, gambling is not a sufficient pathway for black economic empowerment. It is a proven way for blacks to enter economic failure – an issue that flies directly in the face of the

organization's century-old mission (Fong 2005, 34-42). Why would the Philadelphia Chapter of the Urban League support such an effort? Two of the individuals supporting the casino bid are either on or have direct ties to the Philadelphia Chapter's board of directors (Russ 2013).

Then came the case of Donald Sterling. In April of 2014, Sterling was banned for life for the NBA after the long-time Clippers owners made numerous racist statements against African Americans and Latinos during a taped private conversation with his mistress. This incident, however, was not the first time Sterling's racism was made known within the public sphere. In 2009, Sterling, who made much of his money in real estate, paid the largest housing discrimination fine in U.S. history after he was found guilty of refusing to rent his properties to blacks and Latinos. Despite this fact, at the time the Sterling tape was released, the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP was preparing to give Sterling his second lifetime achievement award for his work with individuals of color. It was found later that Sterling had given an undisclosed amount of money to the organization prior to each award. As a result of the controversy, the president of the chapter resigned (Branch 2014; Moore 2014; Whitlock 2014). Smith's study focused upon the incorporation of traditional Civil Rights organizations, like the NAACP and Urban League. He did not look at, however, the black press, or organizations that were founded during the post-Civil Rights Era. This would include the National Association of Black Journalists, which was founded in 1975.

### **2.3 African American Journalism: A Brief History**

It's a daily reminder of why many scholars question the legitimacy of American journalism. Good Day Philadelphia, the morning show for Fox's local affiliate, is the top morning show in the city of Brotherly Love. The broadcast features typical fare for a morning

program. It offers a rundown of local homicides and other carnage, banter on celebrity news and, if one is lucky, a story or two on public affairs. It also offers viewers routine updates on weather and traffic.

Not content with merely highlighting actual traffic news each morning, the station introduced a new member of the team, Kacie McConnell, to the broadcast in 2012. Typically, individuals who reach a position in such a large market have significant experience within the television or radio industry. An exception was made for McConnell. Only 22 at the time she was hired, she had graduated from Villanova's communications program only a year earlier. Why was she hired? As a *Philadelphia Daily News* reporter quipped, "early morning, rush-hour-traffic hassles have looked a lot better" to some Philadelphia residents since the former Miss Teen Pennsylvania and Fiat car model was hired (Darrow 2013).

By conventional standards, McConnell's hiring was a farce. She did not have the professional resume to qualify for such a job in such a large market. But as repeatedly demonstrated over the past several decades within the news industry, efforts to appeal to certain sectors of the marketplace have come to dominate many decisions, no matter how problematic they may seem. This episode is arguably one in a long line of decisions made by news networks to maximize profit shares (Underwood 1993; McChesney 2004; McChesney and Nichols 2012).

Such market-driven decisions have also played a role in how African Americans are covered by the mainstream news. Since such populations do not represent the ideal consumers for advertisers, newsrooms, many newsrooms have or will shift what few reporters away from daily news coverage of working-class communities of color in favor of increased coverage of suburban communities (Fink 1996; Underwood 1993; Smith and Reinhart 1997, 3.1-3.15). Thus

communities that have been historically marginalized by the press, under this logic, will likely become even more marginalized as the crisis continues to reduce the number newsroom staffers.

It is also under these circumstances that the National Association of Black Journalists must operate as an advocacy organization. This section will summarize the significance of the black press within the black public sphere, detail its demise, and provide the background for the establishment of the National Association of Black Journalists as a new agent of counterpublicity against racial hegemony within the news media. But first, a general discussion of the importance of journalism to overall public sphere will commence.

What is journalism? It is an issue that has been debated for well over a century, and more vigorously with the establishment of journalism and media studies programs in the United States. Depending on the scholar, it is seen as a public good, a business, a tool of social hegemony, a tool for social advocacy, a vehicle for public amusement, or a vehicle for the dissemination of politically biased information. What is more clear is that, when questioned, the public is not pleased with what they are given through the press, and people who consider themselves journalists are equally frustrated with their profession (Zelizer 2004).

That said, history suggests that journalism has and can continue to play a significant role in the development of democracy in America. Despite recent challenges, still believe in the power of journalism, and still seek careers in journalism, make calls proclaiming the “death of journalism” suspect at best. Journalism is still here. Nailing down what it is and what it will become represents the true challenge.

First, there is journalism as a method of inquiry. Journalism has a longstanding set of practices, notably interviewing, archival research and observation, which render it useful as a

research tool (Zelizer 2004). This aspect of journalism will receive greater attention in the next chapter.

Most discussions, however, focus on journalism as a public good, notably, within its role in the public sphere. While Habermas, as noted, suggested journalism was the preeminent institution of the public sphere, the roots of journalism theory well before the establishment of the United States. Early proponents of the usefulness of journalism included Thomas Jefferson and Alexis De Tocqueville. De Tocqueville, notably, was impressed with the number of newspapers within the United States, during his visit to the country in the 1830s. De Tocqueville also noted that the newspapers dealt with a variety of issues, and offered a variety of viewpoints (Nord 2007; Nerone 1994).

Over the past 100 years, two theories of journalism have dominated discussions of its role in society. One, which emphasizes the notion of a professionalized press, argues that, through proper training, journalists can produce news in a detached manner that nonetheless provides accurate accounts of public affairs, and that continues to hold the powerful accountable for their actions. The other, which emphasizes the notion of an activist press, suggests journalists must aggressively hold truth to power and work on behalf of various marginalized populations who have historically been ignored or exploited by the power elite. Both lines of thought share certain ideas. Most scholarship on both ends suggests that journalism should operate as the public's eye, or "the fourth estate" of political jurisprudence. Additionally, both theories suggest a healthy press will help facilitate debate on matters of public importance among citizens, and expose corruption and dishonesty among both political figures and other figures and institutions of influence. In this idealized role, the press serves as a check on various forms of institutional power, while simultaneously serving as a vehicle for the exchange of ideas (Bennett and Serrin

2005, 169-189; McChesney and Nichols 2012; Bettig and Hall 2012). Where they differ, however, is on how such efforts should be undertaken, notably with regard to content creation.

Opinions differ on how and when the press adopted the notion of professionalism. The first standard professional adaptation in news may have been the development of the inverted pyramid writing-style, which was devised during the Civil War as a means of saving money on telegrams. *The New York Times*, which adopted its “all the news that’s fit to print” mantra in response to the sensationalism of the yellow press in the 1890s, is seen a pioneering professionalized paper. The first journalism school was founded at Columbia University in 1906. The first widely known code of ethics was established by what would become the Society of Professional Journalists in the 1920s. The reason for these ‘innovations’ is also a matter of debate. Some critical scholars note that each of these innovations was tied to economic considerations, either with regard to the marketing of the newspaper to a mass audience, in the case of the *Times*, or the lobbying for higher wages among journalists, which was the reason for the initial development of ethics (Mindich 2000, Campbell 2004, 190-220; Schudson 1978).

By the dawn of World War II, many newspapers had adopted notions of professionalism in practice, notably, codes of ethics and notions of objectivity – however diluted the practice has become in reality (Mindich 2000). In response to press issues during the World War II era, a study by a group known as the Commission on the Freedom of the Press, through a harsh critique of how professionalism was actually operating within the industry, helped cement mainstream journalism theory.

The 1947 report from group, generically known as the Hutchins Commission, expressed concern that press companies were placing too much emphasis on profit, and not enough emphasis on producing propaganda-free news that helped people become better citizens. In what

became the main basis for “social responsibility theory,” the panel argued that the press should offer the public “a truthful, comprehensive” and meaningful account of news on a daily basis, one which offered a representative picture of all constituent groups within a society. The work of the Hutchins Commission, and social responsibility, became exceptionally popular among professionals and journalism academics in the decades following its 1947 release. Books featuring a detailed discussion Social Responsibility Theory included *Four Theories of the Press* (Nerone 1995; Peterson 1966, 33-49).

Several recent attempts at defining the role of professional journalists have been made into full-length books, most notably *The Elements of Journalism*(2001; 2009). This text offers a series of nine recommendations for how professional journalists should conduct themselves in a professional, responsible fashion, with the understanding that their first obligation as reporters is to “truth,” (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). Journalism ethics texts, including a popular one published by *Society of Professional Journalists*, also exist. This text, based upon the SPJ ethics code, teaches students that they must “seek truth and report it,” “minimize harm,” and “act independently” as professional journalists. These principles are necessary, journalism ethicists and some critics argue, if journalism is to operate in a manner that keeps the public sphere open to free, informed debate among all constituent groups within society.

The idea of professional journalism, however, has come under fire for the past several decades. Numerous studies have noted how professional newsrooms provide an overabundance of positive coverage about the power elite, and a miniscule amount of coverage of working-class populations. When such groups are covered, they are often directly or indirectly engaged in some form of societal disorder (Gans 1980; Tuchman 1978). Moreover, studies have also noted how the routinization of news practices maintain order and discipline within newsrooms, as

opposed to allowing for a robust interrogation of public affairs (Molotch and Lester 1974, 101-112). Such studies dovetail nicely with the work of Max Weber, who himself argued that the creation of routinized work places allows for the maintenance of the status quo within the modern workplace. Since work is routinized, and training standardized, individuals who fail to adhere to the rules can easily be replaced, without threatening the larger structure set in place. Workers, knowing such a system exists, are thus more likely to stay in line out of fear for losing their jobs (Kalberg 2005).

The latter point may indeed be the largest issue with professionalized forms of journalism. With very few exceptions, individuals who work within the mainstream professional press have little control over the overall direction of their news operation. While scholars sometimes tend to overdramatize the control ownership has over individual reporters – the CEO of a Gannett does not watch over every move of a police reporter in Utica, New York – the implementation of professional routines and codes of conduct often limits the overall ability of journalists to engage in critical journalism. Their first obligation, in theory, may be to truth, but their loyalties are likely to the individuals who may be counting on them to earn a paycheck (McChesney 1999; McChesney 2004; McChesney and Nichols 2012; Bennett and Serrin 2005, 169-189; Bennett and Livingston 2007).

The activist or advocacy tradition of contemporary journalism theory, however, largely rejects the objectivist nature of professional practice. Historically, the journalism promoted during the establishment of the United States Constitution was advocacy journalism. Newspapers typically promoted the political views of the ownership or sponsorship (Nerone 1994; Nord 2007). The golden age of advocacy journalism – at least in the narrow view of some celebrated journalism scholars (Bennett and Serrin 2005, 169-189) – took place during the first

two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, many social activists, often writing for smaller, independent newspapers, worked to expose various government and business-related corruptions. Of note was Upton Sinclair's work on the Chicago meatpacking industry, and Ida Tarbell's work on the oil industry. These efforts helped change laws regarding these businesses. Moreover, the era also helped convince many newspapers to take a more socially activist role in news coverage (Bennett and Serrin 2005, 169-189).

A strong case can be made that the most successful era of the activist press is more aptly found within the work of the black advocacy press. From the establishment of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, through the beginning of Reconstruction, to the beginning of the Freedom Rights Movement in the 1950s, the black almost single-handedly pushed the issue of civil rights into the mainstream.

Early American black advocacy newspapers, notably John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish's *Freedom's Journal*, set the stage for the nation's movement against chattel enslavement. It was not, however, merely an anti-slavery newspaper. The editors of *Freedom's Journal* sought to combat the rampant stereotyping of both free and enslaved black that was prevalent within the mainstream antebellum press. Additionally, *Freedom's Journal*, at least in its early years, actively argued for black citizenship rights within the United States. *Freedom's Journal* also served as a vessel for everyday life issues within the African American community, thus serving as a vessel of the larger black public sphere (Bacon, 2007).

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the black press had become a fixture within the black public sphere. On one hand, black conservative Booker T. Washington, with the benefit of white donors, began purchasing newspapers to promote his ideas of accommodation (Washburn 2006). Then there was the work of Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Following the death of her parents,

Wells-Barnett took herself and her siblings to Memphis, Tennessee, and took a part-time job as a reporter for a black newspaper. When the paper began to falter, Wells purchased a percentage of the operation and became its editor (Wells-Barnett 2002).

Lynching was not her first interest with regards to investigative reporting. Wells-Barnett published several articles detailing the horrid conditions black children faced inside of segregated schools. This effort, however, would soon become overshadowed by her lynching crusade, following an incident in 1892 involving three of her friends. In March of that year, a mob of whites stormed the property of a highly successful black shop owner and accused him of promoting violence. The mob proceeded to kill him and two other men. Horrified, Wells-Barnett wrote an editorial condemning the attacks. Aside from noting the hypocrisies of lynching, Wells-Barnett also made the bold claim – for 1892 – that many interracial liaisons between black men and white women were consensual (Wells-Barnett 2002). Moreover, she argued that blacks should migrate north to avoid Jim Crow segregation. White citizens of Memphis burned down Wells-Barnett's office in response to the piece (Wells-Barnett 2002).

After the destruction of her newspaper, Wells-Barnett moved to New York City, and later, Chicago. Away from the Jim Crow South, Wells-Barnett continued to speak out against lynchings – and the system of white supremacy that excused them – with a series pamphlets published over an eight-year span. The first efforts chronicled accounts of lynchings across the south. Another detailed the story of one man who fought back – leaving a bloody trail behind him – before he was lynched. With each effort, Wells-Barnett's words and rhetoric became more radically charged against white racism (Wells-Barnett 2002).

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the black press continued to engage in advocacy on behalf of African Americans, and thrived as an industry. By World War II, African

American newspapers were generating annual revenues of \$10 million. Two newspapers, the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier*, boasted circulations of well over 100,000 (Washburn 2006; Newkirk 2005, 81-91). The black press also continued to challenge racial hegemony, notably with the promotion of the Double V campaign during World War II, an effort to challenge Nazi racism in abroad and American racism within the United States.

Following the war, the mainstream press continued to ignore issues within the black community. The black advocacy press, however, wrote the first historical pages of the Freedom Rights Movement. While some view the *Brown v. Board* decision as the beginning of the movement, the heinous murder of Emmitt Till also led to heightened awareness of racial subordination in America (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006). While seen as a major national story today, the case was brought to light by the African American Press, chiefly *Jet* magazine, which, at the request of Emmitt Till's mother, ran a horrifying photo of Till's mangled body, which was on display during his open-casket funeral. It was also the black press that was the first to follow the Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by a 26-year-old Martin Luther King Jr., and the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Ark (Klibanoff and Roberts, 2007).

But by the early 1970s, the black press had significantly fallen in terms of reach and influence. For a host of reasons – chiefly financial – the black press began to bleed circulation throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The decline was most evident with the *Defender* and *Courier*. By 1972, each of these once great newspapers had paid circulations hovering under 30,000 (Newkirk, 2005). Some newspapers had completely folded. As of 2013, the *Defender* had cut its newsroom staff to only four employees ("State of the News Media 2013."). As the industry fell on hard times, journalists themselves began to leave the black press, seeking more lucrative opportunities within the white press. In short, by the 1970s, the black press as an agent of

counterpublicity had been greatly diminished. As a result, a greater emphasis, beginning in the 1960s, was placed on having the mainstream professional press engage in the same level of fair, comprehensive coverage of the African American community.

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, calls began for the need to specifically improve news coverage of racial minorities, notably African Americans. While not a major component of its study, the Commission on the Freedom of the Press acknowledged that the both the news media and entertainment media often stereotyped people of color, and that a better effort was needed to provide “a representative picture of constituent groups in the society” (Commission on Freedom of the Press 1966, 17-32). The research of journalists Gene Roberts and Herb Klibanoff offers more details into the mainstream press’s gradual embrace move toward covering the Freedom Rights Movement. In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal’s revolutionary piece on race relations, *An American Dilemma*, was released. More than 1,500 pages in length, Myrdal set forward the idea that most institutions within the United States denied African Americans basic rights. This included the press. Myrdal concluded that this process would not end until whites sought to end intuitional racism within the United States. While this report was largely ignored by most Americans, Roberts and Klibanoff argue that a small group of white journalists, open to racial progress and believing in the idea of social responsibility, were coming to embrace civil rights as the defining story the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006).

While slow to the story, more and more mainstream newspapers started assigning journalists to cover civil rights issues, notably after the election of John F. Kennedy. White journalists were there for King’s protests against Bull Connor in Birmingham, gave strong coverage to the murder of Medgar Evers, gave extensive coverage to Freedom Summer and were themselves victims of racial hostility during the Freedom Rides (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006).

But the enthusiasm many white journalists showed toward the civil rights movement was largely isolated to its less radical elements. The mainstream press had already demonstrated considerable contempt for the efforts of the National of Islam and Malcolm X (X and Haley 1964). Following the passage of Civil Rights Act in 1964, the mainstream press demonstrated considerably less enthusiasm for the more militant, more working-class oriented protests of the latter part of the movement. Even within their study, Roberts and Klibanoff, both of whom covered what they called “the race beat” expressed disdain for the movement’s militant turn, suggesting that the urban disruptions in Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities cost a great degree of goodwill among white journalists (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006).

This created, however, opportunities for African American reporters. When the movement changed from non-violent protest to “burn, baby burn,” many white reporters were no longer willing to involve themselves with the movement. As a result, many mainstream operations began hiring African Americans for the specific purpose of coverage the more radical Freedom Rights movement of the mid-to-late 1960s.

In 1965, only a few African Americans were working hired by mainstream news outlets. Among those of note are Carl Rowan of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, Ted Poston of the *New York Post*, Ben Holman of CBS, Tom Johnson of New York’s *Newsday*, and Austin Scott of the Associated Press. Others, like William Raspberry of the *Washington Post*, were given newsroom positions, but not as reporters. And in most cases, these individuals represented the only African Americans within their newsrooms – if not the entire newspaper or broadcast chain (Dawkins 1997; Terry 2007; Roberts and Klibanoff 2006).

More opportunities for black reporters opened up, however, in 1965. It was in this year that a race riot broke out on the Watts section of Los Angeles. Fearful of their safety, and

unfamiliar with the working-class black neighborhoods of the city, white journalists often refused to cover these events. As a result, news media covering the riot sent in blacks – freelancers, desk clerks and in some cases the first black person they could find – to relay the story. This was also the case in subsequent riots over the next few years, notably in Detroit and Newark, New Jersey. These riots offered a start for the careers of many journalists, including several founders of NABJ (Dawkins 1997; Dawkins 2003; Terry 2007). More importantly, these riots helped pave the way for arguably the single most important event in the newsroom diversity movement, the creation of the Kerner Commission.

Released on March 1, 1968 – just over a month before King was assassinated – the report attempted to explain why riots were erupting in urban areas. In response to this epidemic, President Lyndon Johnson commissioned a panel to investigate the causes of the riots on July 28, 1967. Johnson gave the commission three simple directives. They were to find out what caused the riots, what happened during the riots and how the nation could prevent further riots from taking place in the future. Johnson also wanted the effort to be as apolitical as possible.

Yet when the final Commission report was released to the public, the language and recommendations were anything but moderate. Invoking rhetorical arguments usually utilized by the radical elements of the black left, the Commission declared that the United States was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate, but unequal. The Commission also attributed the cause of the riots – which were essentially led by blacks inside of black communities – to conditions created by racist American policies and institutions (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968).

While the bulk of the report was dedicated to urban affairs issues, the commission offered a separate section on news coverage of the riots. The commission made several key points.

First, mainstream newspapers had allowed official sources like the police to dictate the tone of coverage. Second, in the lead up the riots, the mainstream press rarely bothered to cover news within working-class urban communities. Third, as a result of the nation's greater legacies of racism and social segregation, mainstream news operations, when they did cover such communities, had failed to demonstrate any ability to relate or empathize with working-class individuals of color. In short, throughout the riots, and indeed, throughout American history, the mainstream press presented a world "through with white men's eyes" and with a "white perspective," (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968).

Contemporary literature on the Commission's recommendations tends to focus on a specific concern relayed within the report – the lack of racial diversity within mainstream newsrooms (Newkirk 2000a; Mellinger 2013). The commission argued that the lack of diversity among reporting staffs harmed news coverage. As evidence, the Commission cited the work of the black press during the riots. Black newspapers, which had covered the impacted communities for years, provided a more balanced picture of the riots, more often interviewing black community members and other local representatives of the community. The mainstream press, on the other hand, limited much of its sourcing to white police officers, white politicians and other white official sources. As a means of addressing this issue, commission urged the mainstream press to actively recruit African American journalists. Not only should they seek out veteran reporters from the black press, the Commission suggested that the industry begin recruiting and training black reporters as early as high school (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968). This recommendation came with several assumptions not fully addressed in the report. First, this idea of diversity assumed that journalists of color would likely be assigned by the mainstream press to cover communities of color. Additionally, this

suggestion implied that journalists of color would better relate to communities of color, thereby providing superior coverage than whites.

Diversity in numbers, however, was only one issue of concern for the Kerner Commission. The commission also expressed concern about the lack of research on how the mainstream press represented black communities in news stories. It also expressed concern that journalism programs failed to provide skills training specifically related to coverage of racial and urban issues. As a result, the Commission felt a centralized organization – The Institute of Urban Communications – was needed to address the various issues impacting the news coverage of working-class black communities. The commission envisioned the institute as nonprofit research and education organization staffed by veteran journalists and journalism students. Once established, the Institute was to have six directives. Only one dealt with diversifying newsrooms.

First, through a yearlong fellowship program, the commission would train journalists interested in covering urban affairs and African American issues. Additionally, this educational arm, which would operate with the assistance of universities, would offer “mid-career” trainings to all veteran journalists, notably those within management. The recruitment of and training of minority journalists was the second goal. As a third goal, the commission also wanted the institute to develop a program that would improve the relationship between the press and police officers.

Media monitoring was at the core of the Kerner Commission’s fourth directive for the institute. The commission felt the institute needed to pressure the mainstream press by routinely documenting its failures. As the commission stated, “it would be healthy for reporters and editors . . . to know that others will be reviewing their work and will hold them publicly

accountable for lapses from accepted standards of good journalism,” (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968).

The commission also hoped this new institute would also produce news content. As its fifth objective, the commission sought the creation of an urban affairs wire service. Like the Associated Press, this service would provide high quality stories on issues of race and urban affairs for a few. It would also employ reporters trained by its institute. The commission recognized that news staffs lacked the resources to produce regular stories on issues of race (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968).

Finally, the commission sought to create an academic research wing within the institute. Noting that few studies had taken such an extensive look at riot coverage, they felt a group of dedicated researchers was needed to analyze the coverage of working-class African American communities. They also felt this group should approach research from a range of methodological perspectives (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968).

The commission’s vision, however, never came to fruition. Issues surrounding the Kerner Commission Report and issues of race were popular topics within *Editor and Publisher*, the industry’s trade magazine, and at the conferences of the American Society of Newspaper Editors and American Newspaper Publishers Association for several years following the report’s release (Mellinger 2013). Despite these discussions, the mainstream news industry made no significant efforts to deal with its poor coverage of African Americans, or hire more African American journalists. That is not to say, however, that the opinions of the Kerner Commission were not taken seriously. At the same time the Kerner Commission was calling for improvements in news coverage, many African American reporters were taking it upon

themselves to organize against racism within the news industry. These early efforts would pave the framework for the creation of the National Association of Black Journalists in 1975.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 What is Journalism?**

This chapter will summarize the methodological approach used for this study, an interdisciplinary effort that will be referred to as diagnostic journalism. An effort will also be made in this chapter to explain why this effort was used for this particular study of the National Association of Black Journalists. It will end with a preview of this study, one that focuses on the problems created by the lack of archived materials related to NABJ.

Over the past 30 years, numerous scholars have called for the expansion of “legitimate” methodologies, notably within the areas of media studies and cultural studies. In a field still dominated by works in the empirical tradition, cultural scholars have successfully lobbied for the acceptance of new forms of method, notably autoethnography, storytelling and performance studies (Solorzano and Yosso 2002, 23-44). Nevertheless, many scholars and grassroots activists who pushed for the expansion of method in the same vain question forms of methodology based upon more traditional means of information gathering. At the forefront of these critiques are efforts labeled as journalism. Mention journalism around cultural theorists at the bar during a conference, one or two peers may quickly share his or her opinions on why journalism is dying, is ineffective or illegitimate within the larger realm of media studies.

A major reason some question journalism has less to do with the specific methodological tools employed by journalists, and more to do with the failures of the mainstream, corporate-run media. No shortage of scholarship exists explaining how the mainstream media has failed to provide adequate coverage on a host of significant issues over the past 25 years (Bennett and Serrin 2005, 169-189; Dyson 2006; McChesney and Nichols 2012; McChesney 2004). These

failures, however, have more to do with various pressures placed upon newsrooms, pressures that in fairness have complicated the process of newsgathering. They should not, however, degrade the potential of journalism as a methodology tool for inquiry. This, of course, is the problem surrounding the definition of journalism.

Untangling the various forms and understandings of “journalism” represented the primary focus of Barbie Zelizer’s 2004 work, *Taking Journalism Seriously*. Journalism is not taken seriously, she argued, because the meaning of journalism is often determined by the perspective and lived experiences of each individual. As a result, the totality of what journalism has and can represent suffers under a present-minded fallacy that fails to consider the breadth and depth of journalism theoretically and methodologically (Zeilzer 2004).

As mentioned several different varieties of journalism have evolved over history. While each form of journalism emphasizes specific techniques, each of these forms of journalism utilizes methodologies routinely associated with history, sociology, anthropology and literary studies. To engage in journalism, a practitioner must know how to conduct a proper historical archival research. He or she must know how to conduct interviews. He or she must develop strong observational skills. Once they gather this information, the journalist must know how to interpret the data, through quantitative analysis or discourse analysis as a means of developing, at the very least, a coherent narrative based upon the gathered material. In short, journalism requires a variety of skills that render it a truly multidisciplinary mode of analysis (Zelizer 2004).

This is why the works of journalists are often featured in class syllabi of courses from a variety of disciplines. Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nicked and Dimed*, an analysis of how low-wage workers function within society, remains heralded as a solid effort of participant observation. As a means of discovering how people lived off of minimum wage jobs, she went undercover,

working several low-wage jobs in several different regions of the nation. Her work, which was based on these experiences, is a solid example of participant observation (Ehrenreich 2001). Moreover, numerous works by journalists are used as core texts in the areas of sociology, political science and history. One example is Gene Roberts and Herb Klibanoff's *The Race Beat*. A Pulitzer-Prize winning text, the serves as an example of historical research, and provides great details about the Freedom Rights Movement, details that can prove useful in African American studies, media studies and history courses (Roberts and Klibanoff 2006).

As scholar Barbie Zeilzer mentioned, more research is needed on what journalism actually is, notably, when discussed as a research tool (2004). Nevertheless, journalism has long operated as a multidisciplinary method, one that is capable of producing solid research within various fields of study. Journalism, thus, was the method employed in this study of the National Association of Black Journalists. The specific variety of journalism, however, is one this study seeks to introduce as a variant of the practice.

### **3.2 Diagnostic Journalism**

Diagnostic journalism is a preliminary form of information gathering. The notion of diagnostic journalism as presented here merges concepts from two separate sources. One is a famed work of urban ethnography, Mitchell Duneier's *Sidewalk*. The other is from a television program based upon Sherlock Holmes, Fox's award-winning series, *House MD*.

In his work, *Sidewalk*, a study of homeless African American men in New York City, Duneier postulates that his work represents a "diagnostic" ethnography. Based on the doctor-patient relationship, Duneier work "uses microlevel observations to diagnose social issues and pinpoint structural problems," (Hunter 2013). This required Duneier to spend a significant

amount of time with a variety of subjects, and required the use a variety of ethnographic methods. Using this approach, Duneier was able to find perspectives regarding the homeless that a less comprehensive study may have missed (Dunieier 1999). Nevertheless, Duneier was criticized for one aspect of his work. In reviews of his work, other scholars suggested he was allowing his personal connection to the men to skew his findings. Through his in-depth interviews, Duneier spent a great deal with his primary subjects. He spent so much time with them, and was so concerned about preserving their humanity, he presented a work that was engaged far too much in advocacy and moral reclamation, and too little true diagnostic work (Wacquant 2002, 1468-1532).

Diagnostic journalism is designed to avoid problems that may arise from personal contact with subjects. In this preliminary stage, researchers avoid, to the greatest degree possible, contact with key stakeholders. Instead, diagnostic journalism relies on archival research, participant observation and, when appropriate, personal narrative and autoethnography. The purpose of this avoidance is to gain as much expertise on a topic as possible *before* engaging in direct interviews with stakeholders. Only after a full diagnosis is made does the researcher begin to interview primary stakeholders. This, in theory, will allow the researcher to ask informed questions of primary stakeholders, based upon the perspective of the researcher, not potentially skewed perspectives of stakeholders with differentiating interests.

On its face, such a method seems antithetical to journalism research, or any research related to expanding voices within the public sphere. Most mainstream journalism work places the interview as the primary vehicle of inquiry. Journalism students are taught methods of interviewing, and within their work, encouraged, if not required, to include multiple voices from diverse perspectives within each story. Moreover, students invested in professional practice are

additionally swayed from including their own voice within the narrative, as is the case with autoethnography.

Interviewing, however, presents its own issues with regard to pursuing accurate information. From the perspective of oral history, interviews pose problems, because the memories of individual often fade or are reinterpreted over time. A more fundamental problem, however, exists with interviewing in journalism, one that relates back to the legitimate critiques of professional newsgathering. Any subject of an interview may freely mislead or lie about the facts related to a subject. Unless a researcher develops vast knowledge on the subject matter, the research has no means of challenging subjects on the veracity of their claims. In this sense, the interviewee is not invested in telling the truth. He or she is engaged in the dissemination of propaganda. Misinformation and propaganda, for instance, played a role in the nation's entrance to the Iraq War, the nation's failure to deal properly with Hurricane Katrina and its failure to foresee the factors leading to the 2008 economic recession. Had individuals engaged in more in-depth research, as opposed to relying upon expert testimony, these issues may have been averted.

The second source of inspiration for this this specific treatment of journalism originated from the hit television series *House MD*, which ran on the Fox television network from 2004 to 2012. A brilliant, yet misanthropic diagnostic expert, the eponymous protagonist, played by Hugh Laurie, aggressively diagnosed patient ailments through a specific process involving a number of methods and sources of information. His process relied upon diagnostic tests, patient histories and when appropriate, an analysis of a patient's living or work quarters. What House avoided doing, as part of his process, was developing a relationship with patients. While much of this was the result of his general disdain for people, the logic behind his avoidance of patient contact was based upon two factors. First, House did not want to develop personal attachments

with his patients. Doing so could compromise his willingness and ability to treat a patient, or impact his judgment when interrogating critical information related to the case. Additionally, House was wary of the reliability of personal interviews. Patients, he feared, would not provide full details about what may have led to their ailment, as a means to avoid embarrassment or judgment. Thus, rather than rely on such interviews, House preferred to first gather as much background on the specific case as possible, with as little contact with the patient as possible. This, in turn, allowed him to better assess information for its accuracy and relevance once patient interviews were required. His painstaking approach was designed to prevent lies and misinformation from blocking the best diagnosis (Jacoby 2009; Barnett 2010).

From a theoretical standpoint, such an approach, if applied to journalistic efforts, could deal directly with Walter Lippmann's conundrum of expertise. Through in-depth analysis of available archival materials, in-depth observational work and, when appropriate, personal reflection on the potential impact of the issue, a diagnostic researcher can develop expertise on a topic without the assistance of interviews. In many cases, through such work, he or she can develop knowledge of a situation at a level even greater than some potential stakeholders, notably, individuals who may be new to a situation, or individuals who are seen as experts due to a job or position title, but nevertheless lack of knowledge on a topic based on everyday lived experience (Tuchman, 1978).

There is also an intellectual benefit to diagnostic journalism. A diagnostic researcher has the opportunity to better memorize and interrogate and connect key pieces of information. Thus, when an interview is finally conducted, the researcher will have the ability to weave together seemingly disconnected bits of information, thus placing them in a position to have a more productive conversation with the interviewee, or stakeholder. Moreover, this intellectual process

may lead a researcher to ask questions, or take approaches to asking questions that researchers with less knowledge may not have known to ask, thus yielding data that may not have been gleaned without such an exhaustive effort. The diagnostic researcher may know the significance of an obscure number. They may know the significance of a specific meal or wonder about the significance of a particular piece of clothing worn during a specific event. Such knowledge will not likely generate without such an exhaustive effort at background research.

A diagnostic effort in reporting may also assist in another area. Journalists too often seek out stakeholders based upon the prestige their job title holds. In the words of Gaye Tuchman, they seek out the “big fish,” (Tuchman 1978). Nevertheless, in many cases, individuals who know the most about a particular subject, those individuals who will provide the most fruitful, comprehensive information, are often people who lack a brand-name title, but nonetheless have acquired in-depth knowledge through years of lived experience. Eugene Allen, the long-time White House worker made famous by Lee Daniels film, *The Butler*, was largely ignored as a potential source of information, despite his direct associations with more than eight American presidents. It was not until 2008 – two years before his death – that the public was made aware of his in-depth knowledge on presidential and White House affairs (Haygood 2008). A diagnostic approach to journalism may have brought his story to light earlier and, more importantly, led to the utilization Allen’s expertise on presidential affairs by other scholars and journalists

Flaws, of course, potentially exist with such a method. First, such a method heavily relies upon the idea that enough information can be gathered about an issue without engaging in significant contact with others. If an archive of documentation does not exist, and if no opportunities exist to observe phenomena, interviews may very well serve as the only means of

gathering information on a topic. This method also shifts the issue of bias from the subjects of the interviews to the researcher. Should a research have a specific agenda in producing a specific point of view on a topic, he or she can just easily skew data in a propagandistic manner. This of course, is an issue of any research project. Such an approach is also time consuming, and thus, likely not conducive for journalists seeking a quick turnaround in stories.

Additionally, by engaging in such a laborious preliminary method of inquiry prior to the interview stage, a researcher risks the loss of key information, notably from aging stakeholders, due to death or memory loss. Aside from Reggie Bryant's death, one of the most significant stakeholders in the history of NABJ, Chuck Stone, passed away during the course of this research. Nevertheless, in taking this approach, the hope is that, once interviews are conducted, the researcher will be able to engage more productive, more conversational interviews with stakeholders. Moreover, such an effort may help establish rapport with stakeholders. A researcher demonstrating vast background knowledge and personal investment into a project will likely show a stakeholder he or she is serious about the project, and that the stakeholder's time and energy are truly not being wasted or taken in vain.

This diagnostic work will assess NABJ's commitment to its founding goals over the course of its nearly 40-year history, largely through the use of primary source materials produced by the organization since its creation in 1975. This includes convention and career fair programs, annual reports and articles published within the official magazine of the organization, the *NABJ Journal*. It also includes NABJ press releases, NABJ research studies and other brochures and pamphlets. The piece will also include original news stories written about the organization, notably from *Journal-isms*, a diversity blog dedicated to journalism produced by the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. Additionally, this piece will use personal

observations made during four separate NABJ conferences in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011. While background interviews were used to assist in the research process, no interviews will be referenced in this study.

The primary goal of this study is to assess how NABJ, over its history, has stayed true to the goals of NABJ's founders, as formed within the organization's initial constitution. As noted in the work of Richard Smith, the leaders of African American organizations often reference the legacy of its founding or historic members, and suggest they are continuing to press forward in achieving their goals. This is used, Smith argued, to signify the continued relevance of such organizations. Yet, when an assessment is made of the current counterpublic offerings of such organizations, these efforts bare little resemblance to what the past leaders sought in terms of action. Since NABJ is both a relatively young, and was founded during the early days of the post-civil rights period, this organization lends itself well to such an analysis.

Moreover, NABJ is ripe for a study of its history and present activities. While many scholars and activist researchers have focused on issues related to the representation of African Americans in the news (Meyers 2004a, 95-118; Meyers 2004b, 194-216; Dixon and Linz 2000, 547-573; Cose 1997, 3-10; Reeves and Campbell 1997, 61-67) or historiographies of the African American press (Washburn 2006; Roberts and Klibanoff 2006), very little has been written about the experiences of African Americans journalists during the post-civil rights period.

Those that have been written specially about NABJ are more than a decade old. Invoking W.E.B. Dubois notion of "double-consciousness," Pamela Newkirk's *Within the Veil* highlights the struggles of several black journalists within mainstream newsrooms. A critical piece, Newkirk argues that the stress of having to perform as both an African American and a professional journalist has taken a significant psychological toll on many black reporters. Many

have chosen to leave the industry as opposed to continue dealing with racial microaggressions present within mainstream newsrooms (Newkirk 2000b).

Two other texts dealt directly with the history of the National Association of Black Journalists. Both written by Wayne Dawkins, a former NABJ board member, the self-published texts are a largely celebratory accounts of how the organization developed from its founding in 1975, through the end of 1999. Since this time, there have been no significant studies focused on contemporary African American journalists, or the nation's longest-running media advocacy organization.

### **3.3 Limitations of Study**

This study, however, will not go as in-depth into NABJ's history as hoped. It will primarily focus on the history of the organization from 1988 – The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kerner Commission report – through 2013. A significant reason this decision was made was due to the lack of an organized archive at NABJ's central office in Maryland.

In 1996, when NABJ first moved its archive to the University of Maryland in College Park, then president Art Fennell dreamed of creating an archive for the organization, with the assistance of the university's vast resources. "Recording and preserving our history through the NABJ Archives will give insight and perspective to the African American role in journalism. It's our obligation to leave a legacy for future journalists to follow," NABJ president Art Fennell said in 1996, after the move was announced (Staff Report 1996c, 6-7).

There was reason to believe, at the time, that NABJ had the resources to create such an archive. The National Association of Black Journalists had significantly increased its office space, moving from a 799 square-foot office in Reston, Virginia to a nearly 1900 square-foot

office on the Maryland campus. The move did not come without some controversy. Its space in Reston, provided by the Newspaper Advertising Association, was free. In discussing potential options for new offices, many NABJ members, themselves the graduates of historically black colleges and universities, did not understand why they would move to a headquarters on a predominately white institution. Some members were also concerned about the University of Maryland's record on hiring individuals of color (Staff Report 1996c, 6-7; Dawkins 2003; Dawkins 1997).

Fennell, nevertheless, said the move would benefit the organization for several reasons. First, the additional space, and partnership with the University of Maryland, would allow the organization to establish the NABJ Institute of Journalism. A major idea of Fennell's, the institute would provide professional development for members in the areas of technology, financial management and ethics. The institute, through its partnership with Maryland, would also provide short-courses at the new facility for journalism students. Equally important, the partnership and additional space would allow NABJ to create an archive celebrating its own history and the history of the black experience in journalism. The archive was to contain original documents of various NABJ materials, as well an archive about pioneering African American journalists. The president of the University of Maryland, William E. Kirwan, was also excited about its partnership with NABJ, and stating the move was a sign of the university's "dedication to diversity and multi-cultural education at all levels," (Staff Report 1996c, 6-7).

More than 15 years later, NABJ had maintained its partnership with University of Maryland. In 2011, when archival research for this project commenced, NABJ had just moved its office into a new, state-of-the-art building housing the university's journalism school. Adorned with multiple computer labs and several conference rooms, this move provided the

organization with even more space. Nevertheless, when lead to the “archive” by office staff, I discovered that Arthur Fennell’s dream of a collection celebrating the organization’s history had fallen rather short. Not only did NABJ not have an archive, it had developed no means of cataloging where most of its historical materials were located within its office.

The so-called archive room, which doubled as a storage facility for office supplies, was filled with stacks of largely uncategorized boxes and file cabinets. Tucked along side these boxes were a variety of broken computer monitors, videocassette recorders and other broken or obsolete office furniture. Many boxes, such as those stacked upon high shelves to the ceiling, were simply unsafe to assess. Most of the materials that were accessible required heavy physical labor, including climbing over and shifting around the boxes.

Once boxes with archival material were found, in many cases, there was no logic behind what was located within each box. Old compact discs of past convention panels were thrown in with copies of the *NABJ Journal*. Newsletters were thrown in with used pencils and pens. The organization had boxes of old videotapes from past conventions, but, due to the disorganization of the room, these could not be safely accessed. Even if these materials were accessible, the room had no means offered to visitors for playback. Nor was the room conducive for research. Only one table, and one viable chair were accessible within the room. Both were covered with other supplies.

Despite several visits to the archive – many of which were spent simply crudely cataloging materials – only a limited number of materials could be sufficiently researched. Among the materials not found were meeting minutes from early NABJ board session, early copies of the *NABJ Journal* and or any copies of the organization’s original constitution. Certainly, enough was located and assessed for the purpose of this preliminary study. But the

lack of an archive, combined with time and resource limitations, significantly narrowed the potential scope of this project. Moreover, the visits raised several questions regarding the state of NABJ. Why, after declaring a desire to create an archive 15 years earlier, had NABJ done next to nothing to create one? What type of assistance, beyond space, was the University of Maryland providing NABJ? With this brief forward analysis, and discussion of the archival research's limitations, the larger analysis into NABJ's commitment to its past leaders goals will commence with the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### ROOTS OF NABJ

This chapter will attempt to trace the roots of NABJ. Due to the lack of maintained evidence, little is known about the activities that led to the creation of the national organization. An oral history project, combined with a vigorous search of local chapter archives, is required to acquire such information. Nevertheless, through the use of newsletters from pre-NABJ chapters, and through tracing the biographies of specific NABJ founders, this chapter will argue that the Freedom Rights Movement heavily influenced many of NABJ's founders. In turn, many took into the founding meeting radical ideas about how a national organization for black journalists should operate.

Like the organization as a whole, little is known about how NABJ was developed. In his first book, *The NABJ Story*, Wayne Dawkins focused most of his attention on interviewing the actual founders of the organization. His narrative did go into some detail about the groups of journalists from specific regions had created their own organizations for black reporters prior to 1975. By the time NABJ was founded, several groups of journalists had organized in New York, the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Based on the newsletters of two of the organizations – one in New York and another in the San Francisco Bay Area – members of the early chapters seemed to be heavily influenced by the more radical portion of the Freedom Rights Movement of the late 1960s.

Black Perspective, New York's forerunner to NABJ, was founded in 1967. It was led by Thomas Johnson, the first African American reporter at *Newsday*, and was supported by businessman and civil rights leader Vernon Jordan. The stated goal of Black Perspective was to

inject black viewpoints into the media, as a means of forcing the mainstream media to become more multidimensional (Dawkins 1997).

The organization was also a defender of African American journalists within the mainstream press. This was demonstrated through a 1970 letter condemning the actions of three separate organizations. That year, Earl Caldwell, a pioneering African American journalist with the *New York Times*, refused to appear before a federal grand jury. He was subpoenaed by the U.S. Justice Department to provide details of his relationship with the Black Panther Party. Caldwell, who had covered many aspects of the Freedom Rights movement for the *New York Times* – notably, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. – had been assigned to cover the organization in the Bay Area. Arguing he was protected by the first amendment, he refused to testify before the grand jury. His decision was supported by the *Times*. The case had worked its way through the judicial system, and in June of 1970, was set for arguments before a federal court.

According to a letter composed by Black Perspective in June 1970, the Justice Department and two other organizations, the National Urban Coalition and The Capital Press Club of Washington D.C., had planned to hold a two-day convention addressing the Caldwell case. The groups, however, linked Black Perspective and two other pre-NABJ chapters to the event without permission. Remaining critical of the department's persecution of Caldwell, all three organizations refused to cooperate, and proposed to hold their own conference on the case in St. Louis, as opposed to participating in the event with the justice department. In the letter, the organization made it very clear that it had not approved the use of its name in the conference, nor had any intention of cooperating with the Justice Department (Dawkins, 1997).

Even more radical was the Black Journalists of the California Bay. Like the East Coast's Black Perspective, Black Journalists of the California Bay Area actively supported Earl Caldwell's stance against the Justice Department. This was demonstrated in the April 1970 edition of their monthly newsletter, *Ball and Chain*. The editors of the publication, however, were much more radical in their support of Caldwell. They also, in this newsletter, spoke more broadly on issues related to the larger black public sphere. As opposed to a First Amendment issue, *Ball and Chain* saw the government's petition against Caldwell as another example of police profiling against African American. Additionally, the publication noted that a loophole in an earlier lower court decision could potentially negatively impact African American reporters. The judge in the case noted that a court could compel a journalist to reveal his or her sources if the data obtained could represent a "compelling and overriding national interest." *Ball and Chain* expressed concern that, on other issues involving more militant civil rights groups, the government could use this argument to compel black journalists to reveal their sources. Since African American journalists primarily covered cases involving African American interests, such language could lead to continued harassment of black journalists interested in coverage black issues (*Ball and Chain Review*.1970).

In another article in the same edition, *Ball and Chain* editors questioned the prevailing logic that the mainstream press had a "liberal" agenda. The article, "Press Parades and Propaganda," suggested that the mainstream press, which was owned by whites, was more likely to support conservative causes and candidates. As examples, the article noted biases and discrepancies within stories published by the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Examiner*. The piece also argued that the press was hesitant to write about more progressive issues, due to

intimidation from conservatives like Spiro Agnew and then-California Gov. Ronald Reagan (*Ball and Chain Review*.1970).

A third article published in the newsletter directly deal with an issue of concern to the larger black community. This article discussed the negative influence the “black pimp” was having upon the larger African American community. Written by an individual named Rufus Byers, the article is not based upon any reporting. It does, however, provide more evidence of the organization’s radicalism. Throughout the piece, Byers heavily uses the term “whitey” in reference to white people.

#### **4.1 Founder Activism**

In December of 1975, after years of debate, a group of 44 individuals finally convened to create the National Association of Black Journalists. The founders had relatively diverse backgrounds. The group consisted of World War II veterans and individuals who had just graduated from college in the previous year. It consisted of individuals from broadcast operations, newspapers and magazines. In many cases the individuals who signed NABJ’s founding document had also been directly involved in or influenced by activist efforts during the Freedom Rights Movement.

The most recognizable founder – at least in terms of the Freedom Rights Movement – may have been Vernon Jarrett. Born in Tennessee, Jarrett was one of many African Americans to move north to Chicago during the Great Migration. Throughout the rest of his life, he would continue to have a significant impact upon his adopted city. Before arriving in Chicago, Jarrett, who served in the Navy during World War II, was involved in activist media, and created his own newspaper for civil rights on his naval base in Hawaii. Once he left the military and moved

North, Jarrett began his professional career in the black press, working first for the *Chicago Defender* in 1946, before moving to radio in 1948, where he co-hosted the very first daily show on black issues, *Negro Newsfront*. Jarrett remained in the black press exclusively for another 20 years, before taking a job with the *Chicago Tribune* as a columnist in 1969. He continued to work in black radio, however, hosting a show on a black-owned radio station throughout much of the rest of his life (Lamb 2004; Jarrett 2004).

As a columnist for the *Tribune*, and later, the *Sun-Times*, he did not shy away from issues of race. Jarrett is largely credited for helping elect Chicago's first and only African American mayor, Harold Washington, through his columns with the *Sun-Times*. His harsh words on race also gained him trouble among whites. During Harold Washington's eulogy, Jarrett took the occasion to lambast black politicians who may walk away from the mayor's reform platforms. He argued that doing so represented a type of "plantation politics" that played into the hands of the city's white elite. Even on his deathbed, Washington was committed to political action. In a conversation with Jesse Jackson, Jarrett relayed that his last request was an absentee ballot. He wanted to vote a young man running for U.S. Senator – Barack Obama. Jarrett's former daughter-in-law, Valerie Jarrett, remains one of the president's closest advisors (Lamb 2004; Jarrett 2004).

While not as well known in national circles, Chuck Stone's overall resume – in terms of both activism and journalism – was equally as impressive. Stone also served in World War II – as a Tuskegee Airman. After graduating from graduate school, Stone worked for nonprofit organizations in both Egypt and India during the 1950s. Upon returning home, Stone began his journalism career at the *New York Age*. From there, moved on to cover the White House for the *Washington Afro-American*, and rose to editor-in-chief of the *Chicago Defender*. But Stone's

strong views eventually got him fired, after he spoke out too strongly against machine-mayor Richard Daley. After leaving the *Defender*, Stone became a political consultant for Adam Clayton Powell, the pioneering New York congressman. Following Powell's defeat to Charles Rangel in 1971, Stone became an outspoken columnist for the Philadelphia *Daily News*, where he remained until his retirement. Later, he served as a professor at the University of North Carolina. Respectively, Stone and Jarrett would serve as NABJ's first two presidents (Weber 2014; Bates 2014).

These two leaders were not the only founders rooted in activism. At the time of NABJ's founding, Charles Cobb was a radio reporter for WHUR Radio, the official station of Howard University. By his own admission, Cobb "backed" into journalism. His first writing experience was not as a worker in the professional press. In 1962, Cobb joined the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee. As the field secretary for the Mississippi Delta region, Cobb helped draft the proposal that created the Mississippi Freedom School. After several years with SNCC, Cobb sought out enlightenment via a trip to Africa. During this time, Cobb served as a freelancer, working for the *Negro Digest*. Today, Cobb continues to write on issues of race and civil rights (Dawkins 1997; Cobb 2008).

Leon Dash also worked in Africa during the Freedom Rights era. It was not to serve as a journalist. Dash, who began his journalism career at the *Washington Post* in 1965, left the newspaper in 1968 to join the Peace Corps. While in Kenya, Dash served as a teacher. Following his work with the Peace Corps, Dash returned to the *Post*, and, in 1972, was one of seven black reporters to file a suit against the newspaper with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Washington. The suit claimed that the legendary newspaper was failing to promote African Americans to managerial positions. "The white males were being

mentored and brought along by editors. They were being steered to stories that editors knew would make the front page. Black reporters had to struggle,” Dash said of the suit (Newkirk 2000a). In 1974, the EEOC found that the *Washington Post* had discriminated against African Americans (Terry 2007). By 1975, Leon Dash was ready to make a move to create NABJ, stating he was “tired” of merely talking about creating an organization (National Association of Black Journalists 1990).

NABJ’s founders also included younger members influenced by the Freedom Rights Movement. This included one of its youngest founders, Sandra Dawson Long. Born in 1952, Long was too young to actively participate in the formative portion of the movement. It did, however, influence her decision to enter journalism. As a child growing up in Annapolis, Maryland, Long often lamented over the way African Americans were depicted in the news. In crime stories, for instance, the local newspaper would merely describe African Americans as “John Doe, a Negro.” She also noted that the newspaper overrepresented African Americans as criminals. Seeking to change this, Long sought out a journalism degree at the University of Maryland. But she did not write for the predominately white newspaper, the *Diamondback*. With others, she helped to found a new publication, *Black Explosion*. Additionally, Long was active in the black student union, and would often attend events featuring African American speakers. One of the youngest members of NABJ’s founding group, Long was a journalist at the *Wilmington News-Journal* at the time of the organization’s founding (Dawkins 1997).

Other founders were also directly involved within the activism within the black community through their jobs. Founder Carole Bartel worked for the Congress on Racial Equality’s magazine. Several other founders, including Alex Poinsett, Howard Lee, Pluria

Marshall, and the aforementioned Reggie Bryant also worked for the black press (Dawkins 1997).

## **4.2 The Founding**

By 1975, a great deal of interest had been generated in creating a national organization for African American journalists. By this time, official local organizations had been established in Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington and the Bay Area. But the first solid step toward the establishment of a national organization was made by a group of ten journalists several months before the founding meeting.

During a session led by Paul Brock, a former journalist who worked for the Democratic National Committee, the group decided to hold a meeting to discuss the creation of a national association during the annual National Black Institute for Elected officials, which was scheduled to be held in Washington D.C. from December 11 to December 13, 1975. This venue was chosen, due to the likelihood of solid attendance from African American reporters. It was centrally located on the East coast, and was an event that would likely be assigned to black reporters (Dawkins 1997).

Prior to the event, Brock, on behalf of a group called the “Interim Committee for a National Association of Black Journalists”, sent a standard letter to black journalists across the nation. The letter formally invited recipients to the “founding meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists,” which would be held on Saturday, Dec. 12 in the Sheraton Park Hotel in Washington D.C. Knowing that many journalists would not be able to fund their trip, the letter implored recipients to have their respective employers send them to cover the

conference. In addition, the letter noted that a “newsmaker” event would be held following the meeting, featuring authors James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni.

Another item within the letter proved to be especially important. The letter contained what Brock called a “12-point tentative agenda” for discussion during the meeting. As it would turn out, these points would come to represent the first draft of NABJ’s constitution.

The goals listed for discussion were as followed:

- Strengthen the ties between blacks in the white media and blacks in the black media.
- Sensitize the white media to institutional racism in its coverage
- Award scholarships to journalism programs that especially supported minorities.
- Expand the white media’s coverage and balanced reporting of the black community.
- Become an exemplary group of professionals that honors excellence and outstanding achievement among black journalists.
- Critique through a national newsletter examples of the media’s reportorial deficiencies as they affect blacks.
- Encourage journalism schools to appoint black professors through the work of a liaison committee.
- Work with high schools to identify journalists.
- Act as a clearinghouse for jobs.
- Expand opportunities for black journalists by assisting in recruiting activities.
- Work to upgrade black journalists by assisting in managerial and supervisory positions.
- Maintain a national office with a paid secretary for the clearinghouse (Brock, 1978).

The founding meeting was held on Saturday, December 12 in the Sheraton Park Hotel.

Little is known about the initial meeting. Wayne Dawkins compiled the only research conducted about the meeting for his first work on the organization. He did not use minutes from the meeting, and no such document may exist. Nevertheless, his account suggests there was a great deal of dissention over how and for whom NABJ would operate.

One issue not addressed in the announcement was who could be considered a “black journalist” by NABJ. By the time the meeting was held, the event drew the attention of individuals from various areas of the media landscape. While the advisory board consisted of individuals who worked within the press, individuals who attended the founding meeting of NABJ included people from public relations, music-format radio and advertising. With the influx of representatives from outside of journalism, the initial number of people who had attended the founding meeting was somewhere between 80 and 100. Led by individuals like Paul Delaney, an Ohio State graduate and *New York Times* reporter, the journalists in the room decided that full membership should be reserved to only to working journalists. As a result, disc jockeys and individuals who worked in public relations and advertising were dismissed from the meeting (Dawkins 1997).

This decision also impacted another group of potential members. In addition to media professionals outside the journalism industry, the group decided to ban journalism academics. The reason? Given the number of faculty members, notably at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, there was a concern that individuals within the academy would overrun the practitioners.

Conflicts of interest, however, were also apparent within the remaining group of working journalists. Dawkins identified two separate factions in his book. The first, led by Delaney, wanted NABJ to operate as a professional organization dedicated to the interests of individuals interested in journalism careers. He and others in this camp were concerned that activism would override what he felt was a more pressing issue, the professional development of African Americans seeking news careers. Another faction wanted the organization to mirror the activities of black organizations like The Links or Jack and Jill – elite, invitation-only

organizations largely limited to the black-middle class. Under this model, NABJ would have operated as an exclusive organization geared toward networking among select individuals and social functions.

Though not identified in his narrative, a review of Dawkins interview notes listed in the back of the text indicates a third group was also lobbying within the room. Led by Pluria Marshall and Richard Rambeau, this faction wanted the organization to take a more radical posturing. More than anything else, they felt NABJ should lobby for justice within the media, and use whatever means necessary to challenge institutional racism within majority-white newsrooms. This included filing challenges against racist television and radio stations through the Federal Communications Commission.

The greatest evidence of this faction, aside from Marshall's own discussion of the division, is that the final constitution had only one significant change from the proposed goals listed in Brock's invitation letter. Added to the section regarding the organization's battle against institutional racism was a line instructing the organization to file challenges through the FCC and EEOC (Dawkins 1997).

Another debate may also have developed during the meeting. This involved a possible suggestion that members of the black press may not have a place within the new organization. In an interview, Claudette Roy, a founder representing the *Detroit Free Press*, suggested such tension when discussion shifted to the role reporters for the black press should have within the organization. She cut herself off, however, without getting into too much detail. "There was debate that those in the black media – that the group should be very, very exclusive. Boy was that a heated discussion," (Dawkins 1997).

After hours of debate, the individuals within the meeting reached consensus. They had created rules for the governance of the organization. Moreover, the organization had agreed upon a set of goals for NABJ. Ultimately, these goals differed little from what was set forward by the planning committee. When the 44 founders signed the initial constitution, these were the following goals for the new organization:

- Strengthen the ties between blacks in the white media and blacks in the black media.
- Sensitize the white media to institutional racism in its coverage and employment practices by monitoring EEO and FCC regulations and working to seek compliance where necessary.
- Award scholarships to journalism programs that especially supported minorities.
- Expand the white media's coverage and balanced reporting of the black community.
- Become an exemplary group of professionals that honors excellence and outstanding achievement among black journalists.
- Critique through a national newsletter examples of the media's reportorial deficiencies as they affect blacks.
- Encourage journalism schools to appoint black professors through the work of a liaison committee.
- Work with high schools to identify journalists.
- Act as a clearinghouse for jobs.
- Expand opportunities for black journalists by assisting in recruiting activities.
- Work to upgrade black journalists by assisting in managerial and supervisory positions.
- Maintain a national office with a paid secretary for the clearinghouse (Dawkins 1997).

### **4.3 Initial Goals of NABJ**

While the founders set forward a total of 12 goals, this analysis located four specific issues these 12 goals sought to resolve. First, as indicated by the very first bullet point in the 1975 constitution, NABJ declared that it wanted to maintain a relationship among all black reporters, whether they were working in the black press or mainstream press. Second, the

founders sought to routinely monitor the mainstream press for racial biased coverage of African Americans, and take action against offenders accordingly. Third, the founders expressed a strong desire to support the education and training of young black journalists. Finally, NABJ's founders were clearly invested in making sure that young black journalists could find jobs, and that veteran black journalists were given opportunities for advancement within the industry. Thus, a final goal could be summarized as an investment in the recruitment and retention of African American journalists with the field of journalism. The next four chapters will assess how NABJ has fared in adhering to the vision set forward by the founders of the organization.

## Chapter 5

### NABJ AND THE BLACK PRESS

*“There was debate that those in the black media [there was a pause] – that the group should be very, very exclusive. Boy was that a heated discussion,”* NABJ Founder Charlotte Robinson, on discussion during founding meeting (Dawkins 1997).

This chapter will review the tenuous relationship held between the National Association of Black Journalists and the African American press. As the above statement suggests, tensions existed between NABJ and workers from the black press from the very day the organization was created. In reviewing this tension, this chapter will look at NABJ’s relationship with the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the organization representing the black press, NABJ’s relationship with its founders from the black press and the organization’s vigor in highlighting issues related to the black press during its annual conventions.

#### 5.1 Concerns from Day 1

Maintaining a relationship between and among African Americans who work in the black press and African Americans working in the mainstream press was the very first stated goal of the new organization, both in the planning phase and its first constitution. In doing so, they symbolically affirmed that journalists working in both the advocacy press and mainstream press would have the same stake in the National Association of Black Journalists. This move that was not necessarily required. For decades prior to the establishment of NABJ, most black newspapers operated with the assistance of National Newspaper Publishers Association. Founded in 1941 at the urging of the *Chicago Defender’s* John Sengstacke, the idea was to have black newspapers pool resources as a means of maintaining economic solvency and political relevancy (Washburn 2006). NNPA, of course, was not an organization for the reporters, as

much as it was an advocacy for issues involving the owners of the black press. Moreover, as individuals employed within the advocacy press, reporters for African American newspapers still had a stake in eradicating racism from the pages of mainstream newspapers, and in many cases, the pages of NNPA members.

As mentioned, many of NABJ's founding members worked for the black press. Of the 44 founders, ten were represented black-owned or black-oriented news operations. But by the time these individuals spoke with Dawkins for his first book few of them were active members of the organization, and in many cases had little do with NABJ following the founding meeting.

Founder Alex Poinsett represented Johnson Publications. An editor and writer with both *Ebony* and *Jet*, Poinsett spoke at length of how he started in journalism. Poinsett started at Johnson Publications in the library, and was eventually hired after a reporter accepted a bribe for writing a story about signer Clara Ward. That reporter was fired, and Poinsett was hired as a replacement. But when it came to discussing the founding meeting, he had very little to say. While he supported the organization in principle, he told Dawkins he “doubted that the organization could address [the] special needs of the black press.” He was only mentioned on one page between both books published by Dawkins (Dawkins 1997;Dawkins 2003).

Howard Lee was working with *Africa* magazine at the time of the meeting. Like Poinsett, he had a great deal to say about his work with his publication, which detailed interactions between Africans and African Americans. But with regard to NABJ, he stated he barely remembered the meeting or the organization as a whole. “I was cynical and suspicious,” he said about the founding meeting. Lee said he stopped being active within NABJ within two years. He is only mentioned once between both books (Dawkins 1997;Dawkins 2003).

Two founders were not aware of their founder status. David Gibson worked with the Mutual Black Network of Los Angeles in December of 1975 “I was a founder? That’s very interesting,” Gibson told Dawkins. “I was there. But I didn’t have a lot to do with the formulation,” (Dawkins 1997; Dawkins 2003). Carole Bartel, who wrote for *CORE Magazine*, was also unaware she was a founder. Now going by the name of Oona’o Hayes, she was not active following the meeting, and her whereabouts were unknown to NABJ until 2007 (Suggs 2007c).

Pluria Marshall was far more vocal about his experience with NABJ. It was not positive. A freelancer, Marshall specifically attended the meeting after learning of it from employees of Johnson Publications. Prior to his time with NABJ, he was a member of the National Black Media Coalition, group that filed lawsuits against problematic broadcasters. During the founding meeting, Marshall pushed for the organization to adopt its language requiring NABJ to file FCC complaints. In his comments to Dawkins, Marshall expressed nothing but disdain for the organization. “NABJ is appealing to black print members from white newspapers. It’s an organization of black journalists who work for the white press. They’ve become a contradiction to black folks in the black community,” (Dawkins 1997).

Marshall had several issues with the organization. The first two were related to membership. First, he was not pleased that NABJ restricted freelance journalists to associate membership. He expressed more dissatisfaction over an incident involving African American professors. At the 1976 convention, which was held the Texas Southern University, a historically black institution, the organization offended faculty members by informing the dean of school he could not join NABJ as a full member. Marshall also took exception to the fact that NABJ was not actively challenging FCC licenses. He also questioned NABJ’s ability to truly

increase diversity within the mainstream press. “They have this strange notion they can fight the people they can work for. They can get to the moon quicker,” (Dawkins 1997).

Richard Rambeau, who worked for Project BAIT in Detroit, expressed similar feelings about NABJ. He called the founding meeting a “primarily colored representation of the white press.” No longer in the journalism industry, he added that those who worked for the majority media couldn’t really reflect on what was going on in the black community because they were “paid by the majority,” (Dawkins 1997). Founders Charles Cobb, Vince Saunders and John White had nothing negative to say about NABJ. Nevertheless, none of them were active in the early days of NABJ. Like every other member of the black press noted thus far, they were each only mentioned on one page of narrative between the two NABJ historical accounts written by Wayne Dawkins (Dawkins 1997; Dawkins 2003).

The most active member of NABJ hailing directly from the black press was Reggie Bryant. Bryant participated in national events on occasion, but was more active in the Philadelphia chapter, which included fellow founders Chuck Stone and Acel Moore and, in the late 1970s and 1980s, an activist journalist by the name of Mumia Abu-Jamal. But after his *Black Perspectives* show featured a controversial segment some deemed anti-Semitic, he distanced himself from the organization, staying away until the 2009 convention. He too had become disillusioned with the activities of NABJ (Dawkins 1997; Crittenden 2010b).

## **5.2 Leadership Blackout**

Over the course of organization’s history, standing members of the black press have rarely served in any capacity on the executive board of NABJ. Since 1975, the National Association of Black Journalists has elected 20 presidents. None were members of the black

press at the time of their election. Only two held any ties to the black press during their tenure. Vernon Jarrett, the organization's second president, had a radio show and television show dedicated to black issues during his term. His primary employer, however, was the *Chicago Tribune*.

Bryan Monroe became the organization's first and only president employed by the black press in 2006. During most of his two-year tenure, Monroe served as vice president and editorial director for *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. He did not hold this position, however, when he was elected. At the time of his victory, Monroe served as vice president of news at Knight Ridder. He only moved to Johnson Publications after McClatchy absorbed the struggling chain.

Ironically, Monroe defeated a member of the black press in his election. Cheryl Smith, who held numerous positions at the *Dallas Weekly* before reaching the publisher's seat, was actually defeated three consecutive times for the presidency in 2003, 2005 and 2007. In 2009, another member of the black press lost. Mississippi anchorwoman Kathy Times defeated Angelo Henderson, a talk-show host for a Radio One-owned station in Detroit (Suggs 2007a).

Representatives of the black press have also infrequently served in other leadership positions with NABJ. By the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1995, not a single standing member of the black press had been elected to any of its six top executive board positions of president, vice-president of print, vice-president of broadcast, secretary, treasurer or parliamentarian. This changed in 1997, when Robin Stone of *Essence* was elected to the office of vice president for print (Dawkins 2003). After she served a single term, no member of the black press would serve again on the executive board for the next 12 years.

Long-time NABJ member Roland Martin was elected as secretary of the organization in 2009. He overwhelmingly defeated Sherlon Christie, a sports editor from Asbury Park, NJ.

Martin, however, held several different job titles at the time of his election (Prince 2009a). While he primarily served as a talk-show host on black radio, and was a contributor to News One, Martin also was a contributor with CNN. Like Stone, Martin only served one term on the executive board. No member of the black press has served on the board since. Denise Clay, an editor with the black-owned *Philadelphia Sun*, lost elections to serve as vice president of print in both 2011 and 2013 (Prince 2013a).

### **5.3 Convention Blackout**

As another means of assessing NABJ's connection to the black press, this work analyzed how often issues concerning the black press issues were featured during panels at NABJ's annual convention. It also looked at how many workers from the black press were featured on all panels during NABJ conferences. Due to the poor condition of the archive, convention programs were only found for a handful of books, dating back to 1988. Nevertheless, this effort showed evidence of black press marginalization.

In 1988, NABJ's convention, which was held in St. Louis, assessed the nation's progress on the Kerner Commission recommendations. The convention book did not list speakers for the conferences smaller panel sessions, but did include lists of speakers invited to talk at the larger plenary sessions. The first night of the convention featured a conversation with dancer and choreographer Katherine Dunham. The next day, the convention held four separate panels related to the Kerner Commission. Among the panelists were former Black Panther Bobby Seale, Congressman Kwesi Mfume, and several executives from major mainstream entities such as the National Association of Broadcasters, Hearst and the *Seattle Times*. Another plenary session the next day featured actor and actress Tim and Daphne Reid. None of these panels had

a member of the black press as a speaker or moderator. But since the smaller panels were not listed, it is possible some members of the black press were featured during those sessions (*13th Annual NABJ Convention Book* 1988).

“Stepping into Tomorrow” was the theme of the 1993 convention in Houston. The program book for this convention did list speakers from every panel, from the larger plenary sessions to the smaller concurrent sessions. No panels dealt directly with issues of concern to the African American press. Moreover, only one panel heavily featured members from a black-oriented operation. On the opening night of the event, writers from *Source* and *Vibe* magazines were featured in a panel dedicated to hip-hop. Another panel on money management featured an editor from *Black Enterprise* magazine. Another editor from *Essence* magazine was the moderator for a panel featuring black book authors. No representatives from any National Newspaper Association publication were featured on any panel.

Of all the sessions at the convention, one panel seemed suited for members of the black press. Titled “Minorities Managing Minorities”, the panel was dedicated to training new newsroom managers on issues related to directing other minority reporters. For whatever reason, the panel did not include anyone from the black press, where minorities have managed minorities for more than a century (Blount 1993).

In 1999, the National Association of Black Journalists participated in the second ever Unity convention. As will be discussed at length later, Unity is an umbrella organization that, until 2010, consisted of NABJ and three other organizations representing journalists of color, the National American Journalists Association, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the Asian American Journalists Association. At Unity conferences, all four organizations essentially hold their own conventions at the same time, with cross over in plenary and other

special sessions. At Unity 99, only panel was devoted to issues of concern to the black press. This panel, held at 2 p.m. on the final full day of the conference, discussed the relevance of the black press heading into to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Members of black press organizations were present on a few other panels. A panel on financial issues featured a representative from *Black Enterprise* magazine. But none of the plenary sessions – either for NABJ specifically or Unity – featured any representatives from the black press (Teng, Tynes, and Lao, 1999).

In 2000 NABJ held its convention in Phoenix, Arizona. For this convention, the organization's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference, NABJ offered tracks that allowed convention attendees to focus on panels dedicated to specific areas of interest. No track was dedicated to the black press. Nevertheless, the convention showcased members of the black press at a greater rate than in the past. On the first day of the conference, one panel looked at issues impacting black magazines following the shut down of *Emerge* magazine. Interestingly, no one from Johnson Publications, the flagship of black magazines, was on the panel. On Wednesday, a panel discussed job opportunities within the black press. Representatives included Ben Jealous, president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, and staffers with *The Final Call* and the *Atlanta Word Daily*. A third panel focused on the role the black press played advocating for African Americans. This featured Jealous, the editor of *The Final Call*, and representatives of several other black newspapers.

Members of black media organizations were heavily featured on other panels. These panelists, however, represented a new breed of black media makers largely divorced from the traditional black advocacy press. One panelist represented the *Haitian Times*. The others represented BET, *XXL* magazine, *O* magazine, *Essence*, *Savoy Magazine* and Blackplanet.com. While these operations are targeted toward black audiences, they are mainly focused on pop

culture or entertainment. Moreover, this would be the last convention where BET remained a black-owned entity before its sale to Viacom (*National Association of Black Journalists 25th Anniversary Convention and Job Fair Program Book 2000*).

Black press issues were once again absent during the 2001 convention in Orlando. Only one panel focused on black press issues. The topic was one that would be routinely recycled at convention after convention over the next decade. Featuring Ben Jealous and other executives with the NNPA, the panel discussed how the black press could survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The number of panelists from black media organizations also dropped significantly. Most of the panelists were not from the traditional black advocacy press (*National Association of Black Journalists 26th Annual Convention and Career Fair Program Book 2001*).

By the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary convention in 2005, organizers had eliminated the tracks. During this convention, held in Atlanta, a city with a rich black press legacy, not a single panel was dedicated to any issue concerning the black press. Additionally, no panelist from the black press in Atlanta addressed the conference. Other panelists from the black media mainly featured the usual suspects from previous conferences – BET, *Essence*, *Black Enterprise* and a representative from the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. One representative from an NNPA newspaper, however, was featured on multiple panels. The representation of this individual – the editor of the *Chicago Defender* – may have had as much to do with the person as opposed to than an attempt to engage the black press. The man featured on these panels was longtime NABJ member Roland Martin (Newman and Ng 2005).

Then came Indianapolis. The first convention under Bryan Monroe, now an executive with Johnson Publications, this convention devoted an entire “super workshop” to the black press. From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., attendees could meet with representatives of the black press,

chiefly, the *Indianapolis Recorder*, during what was called “Black Press Day.” This effort, however, had significant limitations. First, it was held on Wednesday, a day before the official kick-off of the convention. Second, it was not an open session. Pre-registration was required to attend the event. Nevertheless, it was a seeming start to a more collaborative relationship between NABJ and the black press (*National Association of Black Journalists 31st Annual Convention and Career Fair Program Book 2006*).

There was no such session during the 2007 convention in Las Vegas. Only one session, led by presidential candidate Cheryl Smith, focused on the black press. This session gave people an opportunity to inquire about career opportunities within the black press. The presence of black press representatives on other panels was again sparse, notably for members of NNPA newspapers. A representative from the *Atlanta Tribune* spoke on a panel discussing job opportunities at smaller newspapers. The other speakers on the panel represented the Gannett, McClatchy and Landmark newspaper chains (*National Association of Black Journalists 2007 Convention Program 2007*).

NABJ held its convention in Philadelphia in 2011. This gathering only featured two panels dedicated to the black press. One, titled “Virtually Free, The Black Press in The 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” was an optimistic look into how the black press could expand as a result of digital technology. A second panel looked at black media ownership issues. None of the panelists during this session, however, represented NNPA. Moreover, three out of four of the speakers actually represented mainstream corporations – Comcast, Huffington Post Media and NBC/Universal. In fact, not a single representative from NNPA spoke at the convention. Among the NNPA members shut out was the *Philadelphia Tribune*, one of the oldest black newspapers in the nation (*2011 NABJ Convention and Career Fair Program 2011*).

## Chapter 6

### NABJ AND MEDIA MONITORING

*“We set out to both increase black employment in the mainstream media and, just as importantly, to examine and analyze the institutionalized racism that plagued the reporting about black people in the mainstream media,”* – NABJ Founder, Chuck Stone, 2000

*“We can’t exist by simply persuading people to be nice. The media will remain at rest on the matter of fairness unless it is acted upon by an external force, such as the courts,”* – NABJ Founder, Les Payne, 2000(*NABJ Founders Legacy: In Pictures and Words*.2000)

This chapter will review NABJ’s efforts to monitor racism within the mainstream press. As previously noted, this represented one of the organization’s four main goals. Founders reaffirmed this goal during the celebration of NABJ’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2000. What the two above comments from two past NABJ presidents suggested was that, 25 years after the organization was founded, the need to monitor the press for racism within content remained important. This chapter, however, will demonstrate that, after 2000, NABJ’s efforts to monitor the media were at best inconsistent. First, this chapter will assess the rise and fall of the *NABJ Journal*, the organization’s official magazine. Edited for years by long-time NABJ member Richard Prince, the publication changed dramatically following his departure. This chapter will also assess the organization’s advocacy efforts on three significant cases that involved media stereotyping: Hurricane Katrina, The Don Imus radio scandal and the Trayvon Martin case.

#### **6.1 Legal Authority: Changes to NABJ’s Constitution**

Several objectives listed within NABJ’s initial constitution directly dealt with issues related to media monitoring. As noted, NABJ’s founders wanted the organization to “sensitize the white media to institutional racism in coverage and employment practices by monitoring

EEO and FCC regulations and working to seek compliance when necessary.” Additionally, the constitution mandated that NABJ “expand the white media’s coverage and balanced reporting of the black community,” and “critique, through a national newsletter, examples of the media’s reportorial deficiencies as they affects blacks,” (Dawkins 1997).

NABJ still has two goals related to monitoring in its current constitution. But the language as created by the founders on this matter has been significantly changed. The first goal declares that NABJ will “expand the media’s coverage of the black community and black experience.” The second states “NABJ will sensitize the majority-owned media to racism.” The mandate to file challenges with the FCC has been eliminated. Also gone is the mandate to monitor and analyze racism through a national newsletter. While this research was unable to pinpoint exactly when or why these changes were made, by rule, all changes to the constitution require a two-thirds majority vote from NABJ members ("National Association of Black Journalists Constitution." 2011).

## **6.2 The Early Journal**

As noted, NABJ was required to offer a regular newsletter that provided “examples of the media’s reportorial deficiencies as they affect[ed] blacks.” For the first four years of its existence, NABJ had no such publication. In 1981, NABJ finally released the first edition of what was then known as the *NABJ News* under the presidency of Bob Reid(Dawkins 1997). This first edition featured discussion of arguably the greatest scandal involving an African American journalist – Janet Cooke’s Pulitzer-Prize winning hoax. In 1980, Cooke won the prestigious prize for her intense story of an 8-year-old, third-generation heroin addict from Washington D.C. As Cooke began to receive praise for writing the story, people demanded that she reveal the

location of her source, so the young child could be helped. Eventually, Cooke was forced to reveal that the story was fabricated. She resigned from her position at the *Washington Post*, and she and the newspaper were forced to give back the award (Dawkins 1997).

### **6.3 Richard Prince and the Golden Era of the *NABJ Journal***

*NABJ News* eventually evolved into the *NABJ Journal*, a full-length newsletter that was published – by mandate – ten times per year. It featured news on a variety of topics. It monitored poor coverage of African Americans by the mainstream press. It covered issues of diversity in newsrooms. It also provided internal coverage of NABJ and featured news on issues of larger concern to the African American community. The *Journal* arguably reached its peak during the 1990s. Richard Prince edited *the NABJ Journal* during this period (Dawkins 1997; Dawkins 2003).

Since 2002, journalists who have wanted news on diverse issues within the media have been able to turn to the blog of Richard Prince. While not a founder of NABJ, Prince represents a significant pioneer among black journalists. Like many others, Prince caught his big break covering riots. While a student at New York University in 1967, Prince, a part-timer, was called in to cover the riots in Newark, New Jersey. After graduating, Prince moved onto the *Washington Post*, where he joined NABJ founder Leon Dash in protesting of the lack of diversity at the publication. Prince eventually settled in Rochester, New York, where he worked for the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* from 1979 to 1994, serving as a successful columnist. But what Prince is best known for today is his work with the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education (Prince 2005).

Founded in 1977 by another African American media pioneer, former *Oakland Tribune* owner and publisher Robert Maynard, the Maynard Institute provides a series of programs designed to increase diversity within the news industry. The institute also releases studies monitoring the media for racism. Since 2002, the institute is likely best known for Prince's blog. What is not widely known, however, is that this blog, *Journal-isms*, was not specifically created for the Maynard Institute. The column first appeared in the *NABJ Journal* in 1991 – hence the name. From 1991 to 1998, Prince served as the publication's co-editor. During this period, NABJ produced regular news that routinely critiqued racial issues within the mainstream press. This was especially true when the journal switched to a magazine format in 1996.

In announcing the change to a glossy book, Herbert Lowe, a sports reporter enlisted to oversee the change, stated that the move was made to turn the *Journal* into “the absolute best trade publication, bar none,” (Lowe 1996, 3). The change would come at a sacrifice. Instead of ten editions, the magazine would only be published six times per year. It would, however, be available on CD-ROM. Additionally, the association hoped to expand the visibility of the publication by offering of subscriptions. This effort also coincided with the organization's move to its new office, located on the campus of the University of Maryland (Lowe 1996, 3).

For this and the next several editions through 1998, Prince would serve as the publication's associate editor. The journal also staffed a number of accomplished journalists as contributing writers, including unofficial NABJ historian Wayne Dawkins and founder Les Payne. The new magazine, which averaged between 28-to-32 pages in length, provided several regular features. An editorial board, which included Payne and Dawkins, offered commentary on topics impacting African American journalists. The *Journal* also covered news from within the organization, both nationally and within its regional chapters. These editions also included

Prince's "Journal-isms" column, which, like his work today, offered news snippets related to issues of diversity within the media.

In its first commentary, published within the inaugural magazine edition, the editorial board chastised *USA Today* for dismissing Barbara Reynolds, a veteran columnist who was with the paper since 1983. When dismissed, Reynolds was the paper's only African American female columnist, and its only African American on its editorial board. In its critique of *USA Today* and Gannett, the board stated that the company had rolled back its efforts to hire African Americans since the departure of former chairman Al Neuharth in 1989. It also noted a committee to promote diversity at the newspaper had been disbanded. Mincing no words, the editorial board called the dismissal "shameful," and suggested that the company treated aspiring African American journalists with hostility. "[This] will make Gannett's recruiting efforts . . . seem disingenuous (NABJ Editorial Board 1996b, 4).

The editorial board ventured onto other topics in other editions. In the November/December edition of 1996, the board offered its opinions on the mainstream press's reluctance to investigate the CIA's connection to crack distribution. In its cover story for that month, the *Journal* offered a detailed analysis of the mainstream media's negative reaction to the "Dark Alliance" series, which was published by the San Jose *Mercury News*. The piece, written by white journalist Gary Webb, under the supervision of the paper's black editor, Jay Harris, argued that the CIA, in support of right-wing contras during the Nicaraguan civil war, helped the rebels smuggle drugs into the United States. The drugs were later sold by gangs in African American communities. Following the release of the series, members of the mainstream news community immediately chastised Webb and Harris. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*, notably, suggested the piece amounted to sloppy journalism. C-SPAN

allowed Oliver North, the former Reagan administration military leader who himself was accused of engaging in illicit activities with the contras, to comment on the piece. North called the piece the “greatest journalist hoax” since the Janet Cooke scandal.

The article on the media’s reaction to the story, which was written by Prince and NABJ founder Joel Dreyfuss, acknowledged the potential holes in Webb’s work. But the piece also addressed another issue that impacted how the mainstream press covered issues involving the African American community. The authors questioned why the press treated issues involving government corruption within the black community as conspiracy theories (Dreyfuss and Prince 1996, 20-23). Quoting white *Washington Post* ombudsman Geneva Overholser, Prince and Dreyfuss argued that duty of the press is to “protect people from government excess.” Dismissing such claims only enhanced African American distrust of the press (Dreyfuss and Prince 1996, 20-23).

The need to provide full coverage to so-called conspiracies was also echoed by the *NABJ Journal’s* editorial board. By ignoring the article, the board said newspapers like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were damaging their credibility with black consumers. The editorial further urged the mainstream press to follow-up on the claims. “This is about the actions of a government we all share; we should not allow this to be characterized as a black story,” (NABJ Editorial Board 1996a, 4).

A third editorial during this period took an international angle. Published in March 1997, this editorial argued that the mainstream press needed to pay more attention to issues in Africa. In highlighting the concern, the editorial noted several major issues that had taken place on the continent during the span of a few weeks. These issues included the continued ethnic conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi, the effort made by the U.S. state department to install

Ghana's Kofi Annan as U.N. Secretary General and President Nelson Mandela's efforts to overcome racial resentment in South Africa. Moreover, the piece argued that the American public should hear more about the everyday dreams and aspirations of Africans, as a means of dispelling myths about the continent (NABJ Editorial Board 1997, 4).

Other individuals were also allowed to have voice within the *NABJ Journal*, including ones that directly challenged the actions of NABJ. One vehicle for this was a section known as "NABJ and Me." Within this section, the editors allowed members to express opinions about the organization. Some of the pieces praised NABJ. In others, members offered harsh critiques of how NABJ handled specific issues related to black journalists. In a piece titled "Are You Listening," Carla Johnson Kimbrough, an editor at a small newspaper in Marietta, Ohio, argued that NABJ dismissed the needs of African Americans working at smaller newspapers. As a result, NABJ needed to develop programs that supported these journalists, individuals who are often at the beginning of their careers. She also argued that a board position should be reserved for a member working at a smaller newspaper (Kimbrough 1996, 32). In another piece, Vaughn Benjamin, who was a vice president with the Magazine Publishers of America, issued similar concerns about the organization's treatment of individuals who worked for magazines. Magazine workers, he said, were treated like "second-class citizens" at NABJ conventions (Benjamin 1997, 32).

The *NABJ Journal* during this period also printed excerpts of opinion pieces published by other news outlets. For the November 1996 issue, editors published excerpts from columns that addressed *Emerge* magazine's controversial cover of Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas. In this edition, *Emerge* called Thomas a "lawn-jockey for the far right." Accompanying this headline was a full-length cover picture depicting Thomas as a lawn jockey. *NABJ Journal*

published an excerpt of an editorial written by Armstrong Williams, a conservative black columnist. Williams accused *Emerge* of hypocrisy. Had a mainstream publication published such an offensive photo of a progressive African American, Williams argued the *Emerge* would have accused that the publication of racism. Another opinion published in the magazine argued the cover didn't go far enough. Patricia Stewart, who was a journalist-in-residence at Xavier University in New Orleans, said a more appropriate depiction would have shown Thomas in a white hood with a torch (Stewart 1996, 5).

In another set of excerpts, printed after its 1996 convention, the *Journal* offered opinions that were critical of the organization's annual gathering. *Washington Post* columnist Courtland Milloy suggested that black issues had become secondary fodder at NABJ. "In years past . . . there was talk of maintaining defense funds for embattled colleagues and filing racial discrimination lawsuits. Last week, nothing got started without corporate-sponsored croissants," Malloy said. "Many of use weren't doing anything, but we look[ed] so good, it didn't seem to matter," (Staff Report 1996a, 5). Another piece, published in the black *Washington Informer*, took offense that an award named after Ida B. Wells was given to a white man (Staff Report 1996a, 5).

Opinion pieces represented only a fraction of the offerings of the *NABJ Journal* during this period. Each edition featured numerous articles on a variety of issues. Among the articles published was an analysis of the sensational coverage of the Ennis Cosby homicide (Prince 1997a, 9; Mitchell 1996, 10), a piece discussing the impact a year-long strike against was having on black journalists in Detroit, an analysis of the media's poor coverage of black church burnings (Lawrence 1996, 16-18), a piece on the lack of diversity within the press pool covering the 1996 presidential election (Prince 1996a, 18-21), a piece on why a black magazine venture failed

(Sheppard 1996, 13) and a story on how technology was impacting the newsroom (Wynter 1996, 20-21). Additionally, the journal offered several on issues impacting the larger African American community. These stories included an article written by former NABJ president Thomas Morgan on the impact AIDS was having within the black community (Morgan 1997, 14-15), and several pieces on the Ebonics debate (Payne and Tucker 1997, 8; Payton 1997, 6; Stewart 1997, 5).

Then there was Prince's "Journal-isms" column. Spanning two pages in each edition, Prince provided a series of small stories on various issues related to race, diversity and the news. Pieces published during this period included an analysis of NABJ's lack of support for former Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists member Mumia Abu-Jamal, a piece on Bob Dole's black adviser, details of a sex-abuse scandal at Minneapolis *Star-Tribune*, and the effort made by a *Baltimore Sun* reporter to create a documentary on the African slave trade (Prince 1996d, 10-11; Prince 1996c, 10-11; Prince 1996b, 7; Prince 1997b, 12-13).

Editions during this period also featured plenty for rank-and-file NABJ members. Each edition highlighted notable stories from NABJ regional chapters. Additionally, the magazine featured an advice column written by M. L. Lake, a director of recruitment for the *Virginian-Pilot*. The *NABJ Journal* also featured an obituary selection celebrating the lives of recently passed NABJ members, and a listing of jobs (Lake 1997, 26; Lake 1996, 25).

Prince stepped away from his role as editor in 1998. Changes to the publication were almost immediate, as indicated by the fall 1998 edition. This edition did include a series of stories on the *Boston Globe*'s hypocrisy in its treatment of columnists Mike Barnicle and Patricia Smith. Both were caught plagiarizing. Barnicle, who is white, was suspended. Smith, who is black, was fired. This edition, however, did not include "Journal-isms" or any other related

column, lacked news from within NABJ and did not contain a board editorial (Walker 1998).

Two years later, due to economic issues, the *NABJ Journal* was temporarily suspended. When it returned, the *Journal* did not resemble the Prince-era model.

#### **6.4 The Dark Age: *NABJ Journal* 2002 to 2005**

The July 2002 edition was the first edited by Rick Sherrill, an Atlanta-based magazine publisher. Sherrill offered no editorial direction for the publication. In fact, he claimed that he was “surprised” he was even offered the position from then NABJ president, Condace Pressley. Since Sherrill was certain most members did not know who he was, he also included his resume in the column. At the end of the piece, he finally discussed what would be in the July 2002 edition. The entire publication, Sherrill said, would be dedicated to previewing the organization’s 2002 convention. “Next issue . . . let the games begin,” said Sherrill in his closing statement (Sherrill 2002a).

Highlighting the convention was not uncommon for the *NABJ Journal* during the Prince era. Editions prior to and following the conventions often contained information about the event. For instance, one edition featured a significant amount of commentary and analysis following a visit from Nation of Islam leader Lewis Farrakhan. In his remarks to the convention, Farrakhan referred to the organization’s members as “slave media-people,” (Staff Report 1996b, 6-8). The bulk of the edition, however, focused on a number of issues, including the 1996 presidential election.

Sherrill’s first edition as editor, however, was almost completely dedicated to the convention. The majority of pieces in the magazine focused on the convention itself, or the host city, Milwaukee. One piece detailed the history of the host city, and offered advice on what

convention attendees could do during their time in the city. Another, featuring a photo of actress Sheri Headley, was a preview of the convention's "Sprit in the Woods" event, a poetry contest that had debuted during the previous convention. The most in-depth story was a feature of NABJ's successful Student Multimedia Project, a program that will be detailed within the next chapter (Sherrill 2002a). The only other information offered in this edition that was not related to the convention represented holdovers from the Prince-era. One piece, which was written by Prince, reviewed several books related to the topic of race and news. The advice column of M.L. Lake was also featured (Sherrill 2002a).

The insularity of the July *Journal* was largely absent from Sherrill's second – and last – effort as editor. The cover story of this edition focused on the one-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, and the role African American Journalists played in covering the story. Written by Jackie Jones, the cover story offered five pages of reflection from black journalists who were on the front line of coverage throughout the horrific event. In addition to this piece, this edition also featured a 12-picture photo spread of the war in Afghanistan. This edition also paid homage to Leon Dash, Richard Prince and the five other members of the Metro 7 of *Washington Post*, who, as mentioned, protested the lack of diversity at the paper in 1972. An editorial critical of the organization also appeared. Written by associate board member Meta Mereday, the piece urged NABJ to embrace members who worked in public relations, or risk losing them – and their money. The edition was rounded out by Prince's book column and M.L. Lake's advice column. What the edition did not include were any pieces monitoring media activity for racism (Sherrill 2002b).

The next release of the *NABJ Journal* was in the winter of 2004. This edition specifically focused on an incident involving a college newspaper at Hampton University. University

officials confiscated copies of the newspaper's homecoming edition in retaliation of the staff's refusal to run an opinion piece written by the president of the university. Building around this scandal, the *Journal* published several stories focusing on the woeful state of journalism programs at historically black colleges and universities. These pieces detailed the fact that only seven programs were accredited, argued that the newspapers at many HBCUs had little independence from administrators, and noted – somewhat ironically – that the student newspapers at these institutions were published irregularly and infrequently. This edition also featured a piece on the increased number of black journalists working for mainstream publications in the south, and several “state of” columns written by NABJ board members. It did not, however, engage in any criticism of the mainstream press (Lee 2004b).

The opening column written by its the new editor, then treasurer and future president Greg Lee, acknowledged NABJ's own issues with irregular publication. Lee promised he would improve the quality of the *Journal*. “We will make this an all-around outstanding publication that is writer-friendly, well-designed and edited. I can assure you that all of this will happen in a year,” (Lee 2004a, 9). He never edited another edition of the *Journal*.

## **6.5 From Katrina to Imus**

Few events in recent memory have received the same level of criticism as the media's coverage of Hurricane Katrina. The episode was the subject to criticism within journalism trade magazines, within scholarly works, within alternative media magazines and within full-length books (Garfield 2007, 55-74; Yassin 2005, 9-12; Dyson 2006; Thevenot 2005; Bennett and Livingston 2007). Rather than focus on the efforts being made to save people – or the lack thereof – initial news reports focused upon supposed acts of dysfunction among the city's black

population. Individuals looking for food were framed as looters. Rescue helicopters left people stranded due to bogus reports of ‘gangbangers’ attempting to shoot them down. Also unfounded were stories of mass rapes, including the rape of babies in the Superdome. As these works concluded, the news focused more on false claims of black disorder than the truth (Gans 1980;Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001)

After a year of hiatus, the *NABJ Journal* returned in the winter of 2005. As could be expected, the cover story and most stories within this edition focused on news coverage of the disaster. *The Journal*, however, offered no significant criticism of the mainstream press in this edition. Instead, the *Journal* published a series of first-hand accounts written by members who covered the storm. In each, the focus was on what the reporters saw, and how they managed to cover the story in such deplorable conditions. Only one piece, titled “CWB: Coping While Black,” provided any assessment on the horrifically biased coverage of black residents of New Orleans. Yet the author, Lawrence Aaron, refused to blame any of the problems in coverage on institutional racism or stereotyping. Instead, he argued that deadline pressure led reporters to go with the “obvious images of fleeing, flooding, looting and chaos,” (Suggs 2005). The rest of the edition was light – although what it did cover was of significance. Two separate stories honored the lives of two black pioneers who died in 2005 – civil rights icon Rosa Parks, and *Ebony* and *Jet* founder John H. Johnson. Other pieces focused on news within NABJ, notably the 2005 convention. The new editor of the publication, Ernie Suggs, vowed that the *Journal* would not encounter the same issues with regard to publishing as it had in the past. “Coming this quarter, we are committed to publishing the *NABJ Journal*, come rain or shine,” (Suggs 2005).

The loss of two pioneering African Americans rounded out the focus of the next edition, published in the spring of 2006. The cover story focused on the life of Gordon Parks. Best

known for his work in film, the piece aptly noted that Parks was also a trailblazer for African Americans in photography. Another piece honored the life of the Coretta Scott King. This edition also featured something that had not appeared since the 1990s – news about activities from within NABJ.

In one of his *Journal-isms* postings with the Maynard Institute, Prince criticized new president Bryan Monroe for appointing Ernie Suggs editor of the publication. Suggs at the time was also serving on NABJ's executive board. This conflict of interest, Prince argued, could influence how the *Journal* covered activities from within the organization (Prince 2006a). Possibly as a result, this edition featured news about the organization, notably details surrounding the removal of its executive director, Tangie Newborn (Suggs 2006a). This piece also featured an opinion piece critical of NABJ. Linda Waller, an executive with the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, was concerned with the loss of a minority journalism program operated by Knight Ridder. Citing the Kerner Commission report, and the failed ASNE parity goal, she expressed concern that NABJ was not working hard enough to force the mainstream press to hire more African Americans (Suggs 2006a).

Then came the 2006 summer edition. As Sherrill did four years prior, Suggs opted to turn the summer edition into a preview of the NABJ convention. This time, Suggs decided to include profile pieces about NABJ's various award winners, notably columnist Cynthia Tucker of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. A full-length photo of Tucker graced the cover of the edition, which noted she had been named journalist of the year by NABJ. In addition to the cover piece on Tucker, other stories provided profiles of those who won the organization's other awards – emerging journalist of the year, student journalist of the year, lifetime achievement and educator of the year. Additional stories also highlighted the convention, notably a piece offering

tips for landing a job at an NABJ convention. The edition provided no stories monitoring media activity (Suggs 2006b). NABJ also failed to publish an edition of the *Journal* in the fall of 2006.

In 2007, however, another significant issue arose that gave the organization an opportunity to engage in direct media monitoring activity. On April 4, 2007, veteran radio host Don Imus, who was employed by both CBS and NBC, made offensive comments about members of the Rutgers Women's Basketball Team during his morning show. Drawing a comparison between the women on the Tennessee Volunteers squad, an interracial group featuring African Americans with perms, Imus referred to women on the Rutgers team, which featured women with cornrowed hair, as "nappy-headed hoes."

In the aftermath, numerous groups called for both CBS/Viacom, the corporation that operated his radio show, and NBC/Universal, the corporation that operated his MSNBC show, to immediately fire Imus. The National Association of Black Journalists, however, may have been the first to do so. "Has he lost his mind?" Monroe said in a press release. "Those comments were beyond offensive. Imus needs to be fired. Today," (Associated Press 2007). The next day, following an apology from Imus, NABJ continued to put the heat on his employers, this time, through a statement from NABJ treasurer Greg Lee, then a sports editor with the *Boston Globe*. "This kind of behavior must be punished. I hope the company and sponsors he has take some sort of action," (Associated Press 2007). On Wednesday, April 11, Monroe was one of the people invited to a meeting with Les Moonves, head of CBS, regarding the incident. Monroe reiterated his desire for Imus to be fired. A few hours later, Moonves cut ties with Imus (Steinberg and Carter 2007, 1).

While NABJ played a prominent public role in the Imus affair, they did not cover the incident with any depth within the *NABJ Journal*. The two editions of the *NABJ Journal*

published following the incident failed to dedicate a single story to the issue, and featured only one opinion piece on the matter not written by the executive board. Monroe did speak about the case, however, in two columns.

In the first, published in the spring edition of 2007 – an edition that went to press before his meeting with CBS – Monroe again called for Imus to be terminated. Monroe called for an increase in diversity among radio personalities (Suggs 2007b). The cover story for the spring edition focused on how job cuts were impacting black journalists, notably in Philadelphia, where several black staff members with the *Inquirer* had lost their jobs. Other stories featured a profile of Clarence Thomas, a profile piece on a black editor in Cincinnati and a story on multimedia reporting. This edition had no other stories monitoring news content in the media (Suggs 2007b).

In the summer edition of 2000, Monroe had less to say about the Imus affair. Monroe only devoted a portion of his piece to the incident. Instead, he chose to focus on an issue deemed more pressing – the election of NABJ's next president (Suggs 2007a). Highlighting the presidential fight between Cheryl Smith of the *Dallas Weekly* and Barbara Ciara, an anchorwoman from Virginia, this edition featured several stories focused on executive board races. This edition did feature one opinion piece, however, about the Imus scandal. A short, one-column piece written by a community affairs worker from Georgia, the piece focused more on issues of misogyny in hip-hop than the Imus affair itself (Suggs 2007a).

The summer edition was the last *NABJ Journal* officially published under Monroe's leadership. Ernie Suggs stayed on as editor, however – despite being reelected to his board. The winter 2007 edition, which featured NABJ award-winner Bernard Shaw on the cover, largely recapped the Las Vegas convention, with a specific emphasis on individuals elected to

the NABJ Hall of Fame. One piece did focus on the Jena Six story, an incident that surrounded the suspicious arrest of several black teens accused of beating a white teen. The piece, however, did not focus on the sensationalized news coverage of the incident. Instead, the author of this piece chastised black reporters for participating in Jena-related protests. Another story highlighted the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the integration of Central High School in Little Rock. No piece specifically engaged in monitoring of the mainstream press (Suggs 2007c).

### **6.6 For Us, About Us: *NABJ Journal* 2008 to Present**

Following the end of Monroe's presidency, the editorial direction of the *NABJ Journal* took a clear path away from monitoring issues. At a time when the organization could have assessed, at length, how the mainstream media covered various aspects of Barack Obama's candidacy or presidency, the *Journal* – and NABJ as a whole – dramatically veered away from any media monitoring activities. From the publication of its Spring 2008 edition, to the release of its Summer 2013 edition, NABJ published the *NABJ Journal* 11 times. During this period, the cover story, and thus bulk of stories within the publication, focused on NABJ's convention or NABJ's award recipients seven times. This move toward highlighting the organization in a positive light, as opposed to engaging in media criticism, was explained within the *NABJ Journal's* spring 2012 edition. Greg Lee, the former *NABJ Journal* editor and key Imus dissenter, was now the organization's president. In a column, he explained that "NABJ's publications have evolved from a monthly printed update on the news and notes from our association to the glossy quarterly *Journal*, a publication geared toward . . . a marketing showcase for NABJ."

In Spring 2008 edition, the *Journal* highlighted the stories of three women who had defeated cancer, notably, anchorwoman Rene Syler. Syler's story, which was the cover piece, was a personal account of how she used her religious faith to stay positive during her ordeal. The stories of two other women, including Hoda Kotb, were also featured in this edition. Other stories included a piece detailing a trip to Africa by NABJ board members, a profile of Radio One executive Cathy Hughes and a piece on digital journalism. There were no advocacy-related stories.

Advocacy on diversity issues was featured – in a sense – during the next edition. The *Journal* featured photo spread detailing the busy day its board members had visiting various media executives. The piece, however, provided no analysis or what was discussed during these meetings. It also did not include a story. The rest of the edition was dedicated to feature pieces about its awards winners, notably journalist of the year Leonard Pitts, and other stories about the 2008 Unity conference in Chicago (Suggs 2008). Neither the spring edition nor summer editions of 2008 made any mention of Barack Obama's historic presidential campaign.

No *NABJ Journal* was released for another year. The next time it was released, the focus was again on NABJ's awards and convention, which was to be held in Tampa (Suggs 2009). In fact, the next edition of the *NABJ Journal* that did not serve as either a convention preview or awards edition was not released until the winter of 2010.

"Bridging the Digital Divide" was the cover story for this edition, which was NABJ's first digital-only copy. In academic and media advocacy circles, the digital divide typically refers to the unequal level of access working-class and poorer communities have to digital technology ("Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age;" "State of the News Media 2013."). This story, however, had nothing to do within this classic notion of the

digital divide. Instead, the piece detailed the need for African American journalists to increase their knowledge of digital technology as a means of securing jobs. Other stories in this edition included a review of the previous conference in San Diego, and a preview the organization's annual Salute to Excellence banquet. No stories were dedicated to media monitoring (Childress 2010).

The next *Journal* that did not emphasize awards or the convention not released until the spring of 2012. Four years after his election, and six years after he burst onto the scene as a presidential candidate, an article about the nation's first African American president finally appeared in an edition of the *NABJ Journal*. One piece, which emphasized the findings of a Pew Center study, noted that Barack Obama was not receiving biased coverage in his favor. Another piece, written by Wayne Dawkins, discussed the potential challengers Obama may face from the Republicans in the 2012 presidential election. NABJ continued, however, to focus on favorable coverage of the organization. This edition previewed its 2012 convention in New Orleans, and highlighted its Hall of Fame nominees (Davis 2012).

In the winter of 2012, for the first time in more than five years, NABJ released two consecutive issues that did not directly focus on marketing. The cover story for this issue, "Does Diversity Still Matter," detailed the continued job losses by journalists of color. A second story also highlighted the issue. It reviewed how the industry was failing journalists of color, with a specific emphasis on the American Society of Newspaper Editors. The rest of the journal was devoted to internal issues, notably the forthcoming NABJ convention in Orlando (Davis 2013a). The next edition of the journal returned to what had been the norm over the past five years. It highlighted NABJ's award winners, notably, Roland Martin, its journalist of the year (Davis 2013b).

## **6.7 On the Sidelines: Sherrod, Trayvon and NABJ**

With the advancement of media technology, notably through press releases, NABJ still had an opportunity to engage in media monitoring activities. Nevertheless, from 2010 to 2013 – the period for which NABJ has created an archive of its press releases – NABJ’s advocacy efforts on issues related to institutional racism within the media was virtually nonexistent. Over this period, the organization only provided three press releases not related to organization news or advocacy on hiring. Moreover, on two of the biggest race-related stories of the past five years, NABJ largely stayed on the sidelines. Not only did NABJ not offer an opinion on the media’s treatment of Shirley Sherrod and Trayvon Martin within the *NABJ Journal*, it provided scant and often late commentary on these issues through its press releases.

NABJ released two statements related to monitoring in 2010. In August of that year, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a conservative talk-show host, earned negative press after using the word “nigger” 11 times in a conversation with a black caller to her show. The caller, who said her husband was white, expressed frustration that her partner would not say anything when his white friends would use the word. Schlessinger, who referred to the caller as “hypersensitive,” attempted to defend her husband’s friends, by saying that black comedians said “nigger, nigger, nigger” throughout their routines. When the caller expressed anger over Schlessinger’s use of the word, she noted that the United States had elected a “half-black” president, and warned the caller to stop trying to “NAACP” her. After the caller disconnected, Schlessinger continued her rant about so-called black hypersensitivity to racism (Holden 2010). Schlessinger was forced to apologize for her remarks, after the media monitoring site Media Matters posted her comments.

After two sponsors pulled their advertising from her show, Dr. Laura went on Larry King Live to announce she was retiring from broadcast radio(Oosting 2010).

NABJ, like other civil rights organizations, chimed in on matter. In a release, then president Kathy Times recalled a story of when a potential source called her a “nigger bitch” when she was on an assignment. Times also used the release to call for the creation of a panel discussing “talk show hate,” (Times 2010). NABJ, however, was severely late to the discussion. Schlessinger made her comments on August 10. She announced she was ending her show on August 17. NABJ’s press release came out on August 19 (Times 2010).

This is of note, because the organization had just offered a late response to another significant issue involving the conservative press the previous month. That case involved the firing of government worker Shirley Sherrod. On July 19, Sherrod, a director of rural development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was forced to resign after a video posted by conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart suggested she was not working hard to save the land of white farmers. After video was placed on Breitbart’s site, Fox News, and eventually several other media outlets picked it up as well. During this time, Sherrod was condemned a racist in the media. After an inquiry by the NAACP led to the discovery of Sherrod’s full comments, it was discovered the video was edited to place Sherrod in a negative light. The edited portion was a smaller segment of a story in which Sherrod relayed how she came to stop looking at farming issues in the context of race. Moreover, a white family that was mentioned in the video came out in defense of Sherrod, telling CNN she did everything she could to save their farm (Jencks et al. 2010).

As with the Dr. Laura incident, NABJ was late to comment on the matter. NABJ did not release any statement on how the media conducted itself during the Sherrod affair until ten days

after her firing. In that statement, Times said that it was clear several media companies “dropped the ball,” and that the media needed to do more to cover issues facing African American farmers. Moreover, the statement was self-serving for NABJ. That day, Sherrod was scheduled to speak about the incident during the NABJ convention in San Diego (Times 2010b).

In 2011, NABJ released only one statement on an issue related to media content. As his first act as president, Greg Lee chastised a media organization that, in an article, asked the question, “is there a problem with young black men?” The question was in response to a riot. The riot, however, did not take place in the United States. It took place in the United Kingdom, and the offending news organization was the BBC. Lee, nevertheless, noted that NABJ was an international organization, and that the BBC would continue to be monitored for racist content (Lee 2011). No other organizations were monitored via a press release the remainder of the year.

In 2012, the organization again released one statement related to a media issue. This one involved the Trayvon Martin case. Several issues existed regarding the mainstream media’s coverage of the tragic incident surrounding the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager by a self-appointed community watchman, George Zimmerman. One of the biggest rested with the slow pace with which the mainstream media responded to the suspicious shooting. Following the February 26, 2012 shooting of Martin, news coverage of the event was limited to the Orlando area. Only after Martin’s family hired an attorney – Benjamin Crump – was the story picked up by the national media. By March 15, as a result of Crump’s advocacy efforts, the story went national, and was covered by the *New York Times*, *Huffington Post* and other major news sources. Many civil rights organizations and leaders had also spoken out about the shooting, including the NAACP (Jencks et al. 2010; Jealous 2010).

Throughout this period, however, NABJ remained silent. It was not until March 24 – a

day after Florida Gov. Rick Scott appointed a special prosecutor to investigate the shooting – that NABJ finally offered any official release about the incident. The statement, however, did not offer an opinion from NABJ on any aspect of the case. Like the Sherrod release, it was self-serving. The press release announced that NABJ’ board members had conducted an “exclusive” interview with Daryl Parks, an attorney representing Martin’s family.

In the interview, Parks announced that Martin’s family was “hopeful” the state would file charges against Zimmerman. The “wide-ranging” interview, however largely rehashed already-known facts. What NABJ did not do in the release was offer any opinion on Zimmerman’s guilt or innocence, or any commentary on the media’s coverage of the incident (Turner 2012b).

For the next 15 months, NABJ remained silent about the case. NABJ would offer no more releases about the case. NABJ offered no coverage or analysis of the media frenzy in any of its three *NABJ Journal* editions published between March 2012 and August 2013. In fact, these publications only once mentioned Martin’s name. In its Summer 2013 edition, NABJ noted that the winner of its emerging journalist of the year award had covered the Trayvon Martin incident (Davis 2013b).

Following the announcement of the not guilty verdict, NABJ found itself in the middle of a Martin-related controversy. The location of its 2013 convention was Orlando. Given the result of the verdict, many organizations were calling for a boycott of all conventions in the state. In response, Greg Lee offered two reasons why NABJ would not cancel the event. First, such a cancellation would cripple the organization financially. Lee also argued that NABJ was instrumental in bringing cases like Martin’s into the public sphere. “If there was no National Association of Black Journalists, you wouldn’t have had the Trayvon Martin story out there,” (Anderson 2013; Prince 2014a).

## CHAPTER 7

### NABJ STUDENT PROGRAMS

This next chapter will review of NABJ's maintenance of the third goal of its founders, the training and development of student journalists seeking careers in the media. As a means of gaining a unique perspective into the programming, I took advantage of my status as a graduate student in 2010 to enroll in NABJ's annual Student Multimedia Project. This chapter, which will rely heavily upon autoethnography and other observations at NABJ conventions, will detail the history and current state of NABJ's efforts to produce emerging journalists.

#### **7.1 Student Multimedia Project: An Autoethnography**

I may be the oldest "NABJ baby" in the organization's history. In the spring of 2010, I decided to apply for the organization's Student Multimedia Project. Held during NABJ's annual conventions for the past 25 years, the project offers students the opportunity to cover the convention and develop skills within a specific area of journalism. In return, the students get free registration lodging for the duration of the conference.

By this time in my life, I certainly did not represent the typical person who would apply to such a project. I was 32, and had more than a few grey hairs in my goatee. I also had several years of journalism experience, and had even taught a course related to journalism at the University of Illinois. I also realized that participating in such a project would give me access to the organization I would never receive otherwise. As a journalist in the project, I would be able to cover and learn about different aspects of the organization I simply was unable to access discover during my previous ventures to its conferences in 2007 and 2009.

A practical aspect also factored into my decision to apply for the workshop. During my undergraduate education at Penn State University between 1998 and 2001, journalism was still

attached the to ‘silos’ of print journalism and broadcast journalism. With the exception of a single radio production course, all of my classes were geared toward writing. Moreover, when I left the field of journalism several years later, most newsrooms had not yet been converged. Print reporters were not required to take photos, let alone shoot videos. We also were not required to post stories to the web.

In April of that year, I received word. I had been was selected to participate in the multimedia portion of the student workshop. I was on my way to San Diego What I was not ready for, however, was just how intense the experience would be (Williams 2010a).

I and the other students arrived in San Diego the Tuesday before the convention. We were each bunked in our rooms at the Manchester Hyatt, an extravagant hotel overlooking the San Diego harbor, with another participant in the workshop. My roommate, a native of Philadelphia, was, like I, a sports enthusiast. That afternoon, we talked about our love of baseball, shared our thoughts on the Chicago Bears and debated whether Kobe Bryant or LeBron James was the better player. Despite the age difference, we had bonded immediately. That evening, the workshop’s educational staff, which featured many award-winning journalists, asked us to introduce ourselves. As the other students provided details about themselves, I realized I would be faced with a dilemma I have faced my entire life. Most of the other students were from urban areas. Not only was I older than all of them, I was from the metropolis of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. So, when it came time for my own introduction. I decided to claim exactly who I was. “My name is Letrell Crittenden. I’m probably the oldest person in this workshop’s history. And I’m from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.” The entire room burst into laughter. From that point forward, I was no longer a distance observer of a project. I felt like a

valued team member, one whom the mentors in the workshop – some of whom were younger than me – eagerly sought to train.

Over the next few days, I received more education on multimedia journalism than I had received during the previous ten years of my life. As part of the multimedia project, I served as a utility member of the student staff. Our staff assisted with the maintenance of the site, took photos and wrote stories. As such, our team, which consisted of four other students and two well-regarded multimedia educators, were often the last to leave the room each night, often past 10 p.m. This posed a significant dilemma in my attempts to observe the conference as a whole. The late nights, however, also allowed us to receive a degree of hands-on training from the mentoring staff that other students would not receive.

On the first, day, as a result of my rambunctious introduction and deep voice, I was encouraged by the mentorship team to try out for an on-air position. I was hesitant, at first, to take on the challenge. As noted, I was not trained to serve as on-air talent in college. Nevertheless, I decided to try. With a group of several other students, I traveled by van to a local television station in the city. Here, under the direction of a former NABJ president, myself and several other students were given pointers on how to deliver the news. Quickly, I learned of my deficiencies. I had the voice of a broadcaster. But I was not reading the piece smoothly. My pacing was too fast. I was not properly enunciating the words the proper syllables. In the course of a few minutes, I quickly discovered how much skill it required to become on-air talent. As a print reporter in upstate New York and Central Pennsylvania, I would often scoff at those individuals who arrived on the scene with camera crews. “All they do is talk,” I thought. “Anyone can do that.” Clearly, I was wrong.

Over the course of the next hour, as I waited for my audition, and observed how well-groomed the 20-year-olds going before me were, I gained an appreciation for just how competitive the SEED project selection process was. These were not kids off the streets. The students I was working with were polished. Next to me were individuals who would within a few years appear on major network broadcasts as anchors.

On the other side of the room were individuals who had made it in their profession. Individuals who knew what skills were required to reach the top of the broadcast game. Nevertheless, they believed it was their responsibility to give back. Even as it quickly became apparent that, in terms of broadcasting, I was not the next generation, the former NABJ president, a legend in broadcasting, continued to work with me help improve my own skills, however, incrementally it may be. “Just do your best,” I was told before entering the broadcast booth. Ninety seconds later, it was over. I had bombed. I received an education, however, I would never have received had I not tried for the position.

That turned out, however, to be one many struggles I experienced at the workshop. Earlier, NABJ took all of the SEED participants on a trip to the San Diego Zoo. As part of the trip, the multimedia team was asked to take photos of our journey. From the ground and from cable cars high above the zoo, I took hundreds of photos. The next day, myself and another member used a free, online editing program to create a voice and slide show of our trip. When it was posted, the director of the workshop, a woman at least two years younger than myself, gave us her thoughts. The pictures were weak.

Like any amateur, I was attempting to take the broadest possible photo. The best photos, she said, should be taken as close to the action as possible, showing as much intricate detail as possible. Rather than leave, she picked up her camera, and began taking photos around the

room, demonstrating how she would have approached the assignment. In my failure, I learned another valuable lesson on how to take solid photographs.

Then came the Friday of the conference. I was assigned to take photos of an extravagant NABJ party, which was held on the deck of an aircraft carrier. On my way to the event, however, a woman had fallen off the pier. Knowing that I had time to get to the event, I took a series of photos detailing the rescue of the woman. Remembering my lessons from the previous evening, I took out my camera, and, to the greatest degree possible, documented the efforts made by other citizens and police to pull her from the water. I was particularly proud of a tight shot I made, through a crack in the boardwalk. The shot, square on her face, showed both fear and relieve as, finally, she was reached by her rescuers. That night, I returned to the newsroom, excited about my story. I wrote a brief piece on the rescue, and attached my photos to the web application, an advanced version of Wordpress. When I finally made it back to my room that evening, I was excited. Through my quick wit, which harkened back to my days as a police reporter, and new camera skills, I had developed a positive story about a community rescue others may have ignored (Crittenden 2010a). Then I found out the bad news the next morning. I had not properly attached the photos to my story. But rather than be critical, the director of the multimedia project spent a full 30 minutes with me, detailing the various parts of the Wordpress platform.

I was much more successful, however, on another venture. In addition to Wordpress, the multimedia staff was shown how to use several other web-based storytelling applications, including a very basic slide show program known as Dipity. The multimedia mentors decided that, since this was the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference, a history of the organization was needed on the site. By this time, they had learned of my research, and assigned me to the task.

I had no idea what Dipity was, or how to use it. When I asked for help, however, I found out another issue. The mentors didn't know how to use it, either. New technologies were popping up all the time. Sometimes, the best way to learn them is through trial-and-error, I was told by the instructors. After about an hour of tinkering with the application, I figured out how to upload photos and other materials to it. Within two hours, my timeline was complete, and was placed on the front page of the site, where it remains to this day (Crittenden 2010c).

The term life-changing experience represents a cliché. My experience participating in the 2010 Student Multimedia Project, however, was at the very least, life altering, for a number of reasons. First, in terms of this project, my participation allowed me to acquire the social capital needed to get past organizational gatekeepers. This allowed me to review NABJ's archives, and engage in informal conversations with NABJ staff members about the organization. As noted in both anthropologic and sociological research, developing a rapport with gatekeepers is essential, as they have the potential to limit access to key sources of information (Basso 1996).

The participation in the project also had a less expected consequence, but one that was certainly related to another reason I participated in the project. Over the course of four days, I developed technical skills and a perspective on potential directions in journalism that I likely would not have developed otherwise. Additionally, these skills and perspectives have assisted me in my own career, as both a journalism educator and journalism scholar. Within the academy today, the field of communications is undergoing a cataclysmic shift in direction, as a result of advancements in technology, the decline of government support to universities and a shift within the academy that has deemphasized the humanities in favor of professional training. More and more universities, notably those without significant funding and significant research agendas, seek professors who can provide practical skills training in addition to their scholarly pursuits.

Thus, in many cases, the most universally competitive individuals will likely have to combine a solid degree of scholarship with a solid ability to engage in professional praxis.

As a result of this initial training, I was able to move my own professional praxis within the classroom toward a model that emphasized converged journalism and converged learning. During my first professional position, which I held while conducting research for this project, I taught several classes related to converged journalism, in addition to classes related to the theory of communications and media. As I entered the marketplace, I was informed repeatedly on interviews that my ability to engage in converged praxis made me a competitive candidate, despite my obvious lack of scholarly work to date. Additional research is required, but it is more likely that this emphasis on professional praxis will continue to influence how candidates for positions in communications are evaluated as they hit the market.

Finally, my experience with this project influenced my trajectory in scholarship. While the broadcast portions of the workshop relied upon expensive equipment, the overhead for the multimedia portion was relatively low. As noted, the website relied upon a low-cost Wordpress platform. While the actual photographic team used top technology for their work, the multimedia team low-cost point and shoot digital cameras for our own efforts. As I continued to work with the various platforms following the convention, I realized that many digital platforms are simple enough to allow even a novice to engage in basic media publishing. This experience led me to pursue another area of research. Given the continued failure of the mainstream media to cover working-class communities of color, I decided to explore whether or not citizens within such communities, if given the proper training, could cover their own communities as journalists.

At of the time of the project, I, with another professor at my former institution, had established a nonprofit known then as the Voice of Philadelphia. The idea was to provide news

about working-class communities within the city, using a consortium of paid staff members and interns. Following the workshop, I convinced my former colleague that a better approach would emphasize training citizens to produce their own media projects, using low-cost technologies made available to them. We could provide citizens skills training in basic newsgathering methods and show citizens how to self-publish and self-edit using free web applications. A few months later, we were given the opportunity to test our idea.

In January of 2011, Voice of Philadelphia entered collaboration with an alternative school and a local community access media project. The goal of the collaboration was to help students from the school, all GED-students who had previously left school without graduating, produce a documentary and website that reported on the dropout epidemic in Philadelphia's schools (Haywood 2011). In the collaboration, Voice of Philadelphia was tasked with providing the students journalism training, notably in the areas of research, writing and interviewing. The community media project, which provided free access to cameras and digital editing equipment, handled the technical support.

The process was not without its problems. We quickly realized that the majority of students lacked the interest and ability to write news articles. For this reason, the writing portion was scrapped. Nevertheless, after three months of regular meetings with the students, and routine journalism and video editing trainings, the students managed to produce a documentary. While this effort alone does not prove the feasibility of citizen journalism projects, the success of the effort demonstrates that, with proper education, citizens may be able develop the requisite skills to produce their own, high quality journalism.

My experience with NABJ, through its student projects, was indeed unique. But in terms of impact the project had on the trajectory of my career, my own experience parallels how the

project has helped many other aspiring journalists pursue their goals. NABJ through its student programming, has provided training to multiple cohorts of young black journalists.

## **7.2 NABJ Babies**

The term “NABJ baby” refers to any individual who was somehow supported by NABJ’s SEED program. In addition to the summer multimedia workshop, NABJ SEED also offers scholarships, internships and other training sessions to students. While the exact origin of the term is unknown, the organization has referred to individuals who have sprouted from its SEED programs as “NABJ Babies” since at least 2001, when Morgan used the term in an article (Rogers 2011). The founders never specifically sought a program for the development of student talent. But, as noted, training student journalists for careers in journalism was a goal of the founders. The founders aimed to “award scholarships to journalism programs that especially supported minorities,” and “work with high schools to identify journalists,” (Dawkins 1997).

Nevertheless, as with its mandate to create a newsletter, NABJ was slow to establish programs for students. Like the newsletter, the mandate was not adhered to until the presidency of Bob Reid. In 1981, the organization awarded its first \$1000 scholarship to a recent Florida A&M graduate by the name of Keith Thomas. Thomas used the money to fund his master’s education at Northwestern University. Within a year, NABJ added two additional scholarships. Named after Ida B. Wells, the awards provided up to \$10,000 of scholarships for two students (Dawkins 1997).

Throughout the 1990s, NABJ awarded multiple scholarships each year, due to the growth of its scholarship fund (National Association of Black Journalists 1998; National Association of Black Journalists 1999). The organization’s scholarship program continues to function to this

day. In 2013, NABJ offered a total of seven scholarships. Six of the scholarships offered awards of \$2,500. The final, dedicated to a photojournalist, was in the amount of \$1,500 (Foster, 2013).

NABJ also offers student members internship opportunities. NABJ offered its first internship to Rhonda Freeman-Baraka in 1983. Freeman-Baraka interned at the now defunct *Philadelphia National Leader* (Dawkins 1997). By 1989, NABJ was offering 18 internships to college juniors and sophomores at newspapers, television stations and radio stations across the nation (*National Association of Black Journalists 1988-1989 Annual Report*, 1989). Today, NABJ continues to offer internships – just not as many. In 2010, NABJ offered students the opportunity to intern with CBS News, NBC News and NPR (National Association of Black Journalists 2011). The number of total internships that year, however, was only five. In 2013, the organization gave out four internships. The only company participating in the program in 2013 was NBC (Foster 2013; Reed 2013).

The organization's student multimedia project represents a newer venture. Prior to 1989 NABJ had already established a student newspaper project, *The Monitor*. During NABJ conventions, students with *The Monitor* would write about various occurrences. In 1990, NABJ held its first full student project that included a broadcast component. Shelia Brooks, who was then serving as the organization's treasurer, developed the idea for the full project. Brooks was then a young anchorwoman who felt African American students lacked enough practical experience to be competitive in the job market, notably within broadcast journalism. She and others ran the first full student project – which included the publication of a daily newspaper and the broadcasting of a daily news show – during the 1990 convention in Los Angeles. Over the years, NABJ has added additional components to the project. Students may now apply and work in photography, graphic design, radio and multimedia. The project has also been very

successful in helping advance the careers of young black journalists. Among the students who worked on the very first student project in 1990 was an aspiring student from Texas A&M named Roland Martin(Rogers 2011).

Another program has also trained black student journalists for more than 20 years. Since 1992, NABJ has held short courses in media production for students. Similar to the summer project, the short courses provide students with an opportunity to receive hands-on training while producing an actual news product. Most of the short courses have been held at HBCUs, notably North Carolina A&T in Greensboro, NC, Howard University in Washington D.C. and Florida A&M in Tallahassee.

### **7.3 A Decline in Student Services**

As will be discussed in greater detail later, NABJ has experienced significant financial struggles over the past five years. This has resulted in a decline in the number of scholarships, internships and other awards offered by NABJ. Nevertheless, even with its reduced budget, NABJ continues to support students. Students, in turn, may see more value in NABJ than many professionals. While the number of professional journalists joining the association has declined, NABJ has actually enjoyed a steady level of student members over the past ten years(National Association of Black Journalists 2012).

## CHAPTER 8

### NABJ AND NEWSROOM DIVERSITY

*Either you've done your job and contributed to the solution by bringing in more journalists of color and increasing your total number of journalists of color through retention, or you're part of the problem. We cannot and must not let the economic changes in our nation and our industry impact the great need we have for achieving greater diversity in the newsrooms of our nation's newspapers. No, in fact we must make diversity a cornerstone of what must be done during these troubling times.* NABJ President Will Sutton, to members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 2001(Mellinger 2013).

No organization has worked harder or longer to diversify American newsrooms than the National Association of the Black Journalists. Over the course of its nearly 40 years history, one which predates the creation of the American Society of Newspaper Editors survey, NABJ has engaged in active criticism of the lack of diversity in mainstream newsrooms. Nevertheless, as the above quote laments, the percentage of African Americans and other racial minorities within mainstream newsrooms continues to lag far behind the goals set, and then reset, by ASNE with regard to diversity. This section will trace the history of NABJ's efforts to increase mainstream newsroom diversity, with a specific emphasis on the organization's work since 1999.

#### **8.1 Earning Legitimacy: NABJ, ASNE and The Early Diversity Movement**

The only published comprehensive study of the newsroom diversity movement to date is Gwennyth Mellinger's 2013 text, *Chasing Newsroom Diversity*. The back cover to Mellinger's book of American Society of Newspaper Editors refers to the association as the "leader in the newsroom integration movement." While it is unknown if Mellinger herself made this claim, this language likely stems from her text's lack of attention to NABJ. Mellinger, who problematically refers to ASNE's Goal 2000 effort as an "affirmative action project," does note that ASNE was a direct result of the larger Freedom Rights movement. What she fails to do in

her discussion of ASNE, however, is place its efforts in context with activities of NABJ, which was established more than two years before the Goal 2000 campaign was announced.

Formally established in April of 1978, ASNE's Goal 2000 "urged the industry to set a goal of minority employment by the year 2000 equivalent to the percent of minority persons within the national population," (Dawkins 1997). As Mellinger notes, the language was adopted by ASNE following a series of meetings held with various industry leaders, including a two-day summit at Northwestern University in September of 1977. Mellinger credits the idea for racial parity to Nancy Hicks Maynard, the daughter of *Oakland Tribune* publisher Robert Maynard. Hicks Maynard, in an interview, noted that she had made the recommendation for the parity idea in a letter sent to ASNE leaders (Mellinger 2013).

What Mellinger also fails to interrogate is the role the National Association of Black Journalists likely played in pressuring ASNE to adopt the standard. While not a founder, Jay Harris was an active member of NABJ in the late 1970s. He, for instance, lobbied for the placement of NABJ's headquarters at Florida A&M University in 1979. Harris, then at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern, was also tapped to conduct some of the research that lead to the creation of the Goal 2000 effort. In an interview with Wayne Dawkins, Harris noted that, at the September 1977 meeting, at least 20 NABJ members were present, including himself and Vernon Jarrett, then president of the organization. The meeting was also of note, because it was one of the first times NABJ leaders were asked to work on a project with leaders from the mainstream press. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Goal 2000 report, Jarrett was asked to serve on a board with the National Broadcast Editors Association to work on initial efforts related to the Goal 2000 campaign (Dawkins 1997). While the level of impact NABJ members had in pushing the Goal 2000 initiative is unknown, it is clear that NABJ, by 1977, was

actively involved in the promotion of newsroom diversity. Moreover, NABJ, by this period, was viewed as a legitimate advocacy organization on the issue of newsroom diversity. This fact is bolstered by another event that took place before the release of the ASNE announcement.

On February 16, 1977 16 NABJ members were invited to meet with President Jimmy Carter. For its 1976 convention, NABJ had asked both presidential candidates, President Gerald Ford and then Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter, to make an appearance. Both campaigns declined. Once elected, however, Carter offered to see members of both NABJ and the National Newspaper Publishers Association. Rather than see it as a courtesy call, the twelve board members who managed to make their way to Washington developed questions for the president the night before the meeting. Most of the questions were related to civil rights. For a half hour, members of NABJ fired a series of questions to Carter, leading to a series of inconsistent answers (Dawkins 1997).

While short in nature, this meeting, in addition to its work with ASNE action, gave the group greater legitimacy as an organization among white elites. Thus, the failure of Mellinger to acknowledge – even in passing – NABJ’s potential contribution to the newsroom diversity moment is a gaping hole within her research. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, the diversity movement cannot be discussed without acknowledging the many ways NABJ has attempted to address the lack of racial diversity within newsrooms. A significant part of its effort has been related to professional training for its members.

## **8.2 The NABJ Institute**

Based on an assessment of convention materials, NABJ has offered its members a wide range of panels and workshops dedicated to professional development since 1988. Moreover,

NABJ has effectively transitioned its workshop offerings as media technologies have changed. Professional development opportunities, however, have not been limited to the convention. For the past 20 years, the organization has offered regular training sessions for its professional members under what is known as the NABJ Media Institute.

Arthur Fennell introduced the idea for the NABJ Institute in 1995. Then president of the organization, Fennell, an anchor for NBC-10 in Philadelphia envisioned the institute as a cutting-edge “training and technology center where journalists and others can come learn hands-on Internet skills, computer-assisted reporting techniques and other basic management and training skills,” (National Association of Black Journalists 1996). As means of enhancing his vision of an institute, Fennell helped secure the move of NABJ’s central office to a building on the campus of the University of Maryland, College Park. Fennell believed the additional space and affiliation with a top research institution would enhance NABJ’s ability to implement the institute’s programming (Staff Report 1996c, 6-7). A year later, under the presidency of Vanessa Williams, the Institute was formally established. Williams saw the institute as critical in NABJ’s recruitment and retention efforts, arguing that it would “bury the lie that qualified black journalists could not be found,” (Dawkins 1997;Dawkins 2003).

In 1998, NABJ held three institutes. The first institute, funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation, was a two-day seminar for newsroom managers. It was held at the organization’s headquarters at the University of Maryland and attended by 70 people. Later that year, the organization held a conference dedicated to civic journalism, which at the time was s growing concept within the field. It was sponsored by the Pew Foundation for Civic Journalism and attended by 50 people (National Association of Black Journalists 1999). A third Institute was also held during that year. Co-sponsored by the *New York Times*, it too was dedicated to media

management (National Association of Black Journalists 1999).

The Institute continued its service into the next year, under the administration of its new president, Will Sutton. In 1999, with help from grants and sponsorships from the Pew Foundation, the *Detroit Free Press* and the Knight Foundation, NABJ held a series of two-day workshops on copy editing, business reporting, civic journalism and broadcasting. Additionally, to improve the quality of the workshops, NABJ sent the manager of the institutes to the famed Poynter Institute in Florida for training (National Association of Black Journalists 2000).

Over the next several years, NABJ executives continued to tout the health of the Media Institute. At least three workshops were held each year from 2001 to 2004, with nine held in 2002 alone. The topics of the workshops remained consistent. Media management, financial reporting, investigative reporting, copyediting and advanced news writing were among the key issues dealt with by the Institute over this period (*National Association of Black Journalists 26th Annual Convention and Career Fair Program Book*.2001; National Association of Black Journalists 2001a; National Association of Black Journalists 2005; "NABJ Media Institute Presents Better Watchdog Workshop. (" 2003; National Association of Black Journalists 2000).

By 2008, the Institute began to utilize the web for some of its trainings. From August 2008 to November 2008, NABJ offered four “webinars” geared toward managers. Additionally NABJ offered seven additional on-ground workshops. One was focused on media management. Another provided training and tips for freelancers. A third Institute, sponsored by the Freedom Forum for Diversity in Nashville, focused on multimedia skills. The Institute also sponsored a webinar on media management.

The other three sessions were geared toward journalists responsible for covering specific industries. The first, sponsored by Georgetown University, was an institute on political

reporting. A second, sponsored by Princeton University, was dedicated to education reporting. A third, sponsored by Morehouse College of Medicine, was dedicated to health reporters, as part of its new Healthy NABJ program (*2009 Annual Report*.2010).

For the 2010 and 2011 years, NABJ's programming took a dramatically different direction. The organization held six institutes. A total of four, as part of the organization's new Healthy NABJ initiative, were dedicated to health issues. The other two institutes were for public relations professionals and media entrepreneurs. While NABJ continued to offer trainings related to developing specific journalism skills, these offerings were only provided as webinars. In 2013, the organization held three institutes. Two were dedicated to health. A third was dedicated to energy reporting (Foster 2013; Reed 2013). As will be explained in the next chapter, financial concerns may have played a significant role in why NABJ changed the direction its Institute offerings.

### **8.3 Raising the numbers: Diversity-Related Activism**

As noted, NABJ has a very long history of engaging media corporations on the issue of diversity in hiring. Since 1999, when ASNE announced that it was pushing back the deadline for Goal 2000 to 2025, NABJ has engaged in intense criticism of the organization and its failure to meet its diversity goal. Additionally, NABJ has been a harsh critic of and other top media operations, notably NBC and CNN, over diversity issues.

In 1998, ASNE was forced to acknowledge it had no chance of reaching the parity goal by the year 2000. Newsroom diversity had increased significantly from 1978, when newsrooms diversity stood at only 3.5 percent. But by 1998, the number had risen to only 11.46. This was nowhere near parity given that the percentage of people in America who were not white had

reached 26 percent by that year. In response, ASNE announced in October of 1998 that it was pushing its parity goal back to 2025 (American Society of Newspaper Editors staff 1999). The decision was condemned by then-president, Vanessa Williams. During the Unity 99 convention, Williams urged members from all four Unity coalition members to pressure ASNE to keep its commitment to diversity (Dawkins 2003). Will Sutton, her predecessor, continued to keep the pressure on industry leaders over the issues of diversity.

In a June 2000 press release, NABJ announced that the Radio-Television News Directors Association adopted a statement that committed the organization to increasing the number of African Americans in management positions within the broadcast industry. A 1999 survey by RTNDA revealed that the percentage of minorities in management positions had actually declined by two percent since the previous year. In response, Sutton began a series of discussions with the organization, which resulted in the passing of the resolution at RTNDA's annual convention in July of 2000 (NABJ Supports Initiative to Increase Diversity of Managers in Electronic Newsrooms. 2000). News related to hiring of African Americans was less positive throughout the rest of the year. For the first time since ASNE began its survey in 1978, the percentage of minorities within newsrooms declined in the year 2000. This promoted Sutton to amp up the organization's criticism of ASNE.

In response to the decline, NABJ created a document, *Voices of Anger, Cries of Concern*. The document was not based on research. Instead, the organization collected a series of 24 statements from NABJ members on their frustrations with the industry's lack of commitment to diversity. In most cases, the statements did not provide specific examples of bias. They did, however, relay the message that black journalists were frustrated that more African Americans were not being hired by mainstream news organizations, and frustrated with racism within

newsrooms. For example, a statement by Louise Reed Ritchie, then head of the Black College News Association, suggested that black journalists were not advancing, because whites within the industry negatively stereotyped them. "I repeatedly have seen young minorities who have made stellar accomplishments . . . viewed by the industry as pushy and arrogant." NABJ president Will Sutton also contributed to the document, expressing the organization's distress over the lack of progress on diversity issues. "This trend cannot be tolerated," Sutton said (National Association of Black Journalists 2001b).

During ASNE's April, 2001 convention, Sutton addressed the issue directly. He released copies of the document during an address. Additionally, he offered a series of 12 recommendations for increasing diversity during his speech. Among the proposals was a rule requiring an African American to be interviewed for every open position, the creation of a long-term plan on diversity that included annual benchmarks and the creation of an ASNE mentorship program for young journalists of color.

Also in 2001, NABJ released a statement lamenting the resignation of Jay Harris, who, by 2001, had become the publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*. Harris resigned from his post in protest, after Knight Ridder ordered him to cut reporters from his newsroom staff. Sutton, in the NABJ release, invoked the issue of diversity. "There are too few African American publishers of daily newspapers, especially major daily newspapers, so to lose any of them is a problem," Sutton said (*NABJ Stunned by Resignation of Top African American Publisher*.2001).

NABJ's next president, Contrace Pressley, continued NABJ's criticism of ASNE and the mainstream press. ASNE's 2002 survey showed that the hiring of journalists of color remained stagnant. Newsrooms had added a net of four people of color from the previous census ("Table A - Minority Employment in Daily Newspapers." 2014). In a press release, Pressley said the

industry, despite repeated criticism from NABJ, was still not doing enough to increase diversity (Pressley 2002). Pressley also appeared on (Kincaid 2003) *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* in 2003. Appearing to discuss the Jayson Blair scandal, Pressley said the incident should not be seen as a reflection of African American journalists, and should not prevent employers from hiring African Americans (Kincaid 2003).

The next administration, led by *Newsday* court reporter Herb Lowe, had more direct skirmishes with specific media companies over diversity. Like his predecessors, Lowe offered press releases about the lack of diversity following the release of the annual ASNE report in 2004. Hiring overall had stagnated. The overall percentage of diversity in newsrooms was at 12.94 percent, an increase of barely one percent in four years. Additionally, the survey revealed that the number the number of African American supervisors actually declined from the previous year. As a result, NABJ urged ASNE to create a census that specifically looked at black news editors within mainstream newsrooms (Wheeler 2004).

NABJ was also involved with direct action against several newsrooms that same year. On November 18, *Washington Post* executive editor Leonard Downie held a meeting with staff members. The meeting was designed to deal with frustrations over Downie's decision to hire a white managing editor instead of a highly qualified African American candidate. Following the meeting, which was spearheaded by the Washington chapter president of NABJ, Downie distributed a memo detailing eight areas of concern for the newspaper. Diversity was not one of the eight bullet points. Moreover, Downie did not reverse his decision regarding the hire. He did, however, give the staff member considered for the managing editor position a promotion. Eugene Robinson, who was style editor for the *Post*, was named an associate editor and given his

own column. This move would help launch Robinson's career as a respected political commentator and author (Robinson 2010;Prince 2004e)

On December 2, staffers of color at *Newsday* met with its new editor, John Mancini. Staffers there were extremely frustrated with extremely poor work conditions and poor advancement opportunities. The situation was so stressful, many of its 50 black employees were considering taking buyouts offered by the Tribune Company. In response, Mancini said he was unaware of the level of hostility black newsrooms staffers felt at the paper. He suggested, however, that the issues were more a reflection of poor management, and that the racial issues became magnified as a result. He also rebuffed a request from Lowe to issue a statement on the newspaper's diversity issues. Mancini instead wanted Lowe and his other colleagues to remain patient as he settled into his new job, and made changes to the management structure (Prince 2004d).

The organization found itself at the middle of another controversy that year as a result of comments made by Brian Williams, who was recently named as Tom Brokaw's successor as anchor and managing editor for *NBC Nightly News*. In an interview for the November 2004 edition of *Hemispheres*, an in-flight magazine, Williams scoffed at a question about the lack of diversity in news organizations. "[W]e have bigger problems. There are no black members of the U.S. Senate. We should keep some perspective on this," (Prince 2004b). Given the obscure nature of the interview and publication, NABJ was not made aware of the comment until it appeared in the December 6 edition of *Journal-isms*. When they did find out, they made their displeasure with Williams strongly known. In a press release sent out on December 7, Barbara Ciara, then vice-president of broadcast, said the statement could "hurt the tenuous image of NBC

News, as well as those of other network news organizations, with regard to newsroom diversity,” (Prince 2004a).

In response to the fallout, NBC executives held a meeting with members of NABJ on December 11. Deemed a success by NABJ leadership, NBC committed itself to supporting future NABJ Media Institutes, and promised to engage in future discussion on issues of diversity. Moreover, NABJ had “got one of the Big Three [anchors] to recognize how central his role is in terms of shaping the debate on diversity,” said Sidmel Sumpter-Estes, a former president who attended the meeting. Sumpter-Estes also added that it was the most productive meeting the NABJ had ever held with an executive of a news organization Prince 2004c).

A few months later, not all was well with NABJ’s relationship with NBC. In May 2005, Bryan Monroe, then vice president of print, lamented that NBC had refused to release its company’s statistics on the hiring of minorities. This was of concern, since NBC News had lost several journalists of color over the past year, including Soledad O’Brien and Suzanne Malveaux. Monroe also announced that Williams had not spoken with NABJ since the December meeting (Redding 2005).

Following the Imus scandal of 2007, NABJ was again speaking with NBC News. As previously mentioned, Monroe, who took over as president in 2005, quickly called for the firing of the long-time host after he referred to members of the Rutgers women’s basketball team as “nappy-headed hoes” during a broadcast of his show, which, at the time, was simulcast in the mornings on MSNBC and CBS Radio (Steinberg and Carter 2007, 1; Associated Press 2007). Following a meeting with both CBS and NBC executives, Imus was fired. Additionally, used the incident to express concern about the lack of diversity in hiring (Suggs 2007b).

While NABJ continued to focus on diversity within newsrooms, a study by the advocacy group Media Matters painted a much broader perspective on the lack of overall diversity on cable network news. During the Imus scandal, the networks, according to the organization's *Locked Out* study, increased the number of African Americans they interviewed. But during the period immediately before the Imus made his comments, and a week after he was fired, the networks featured predominately white male guests on its primetime programs. Whites were featured 85.3 percent of the time on CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC during the duration of the study, which was a three-week period from April 2 to April 27. MSNBC was the worst in terms of diversity (Savillo 2007).

Monroe's predecessor, Barbara Ciara, also took an aggressive approach to advocating on diversity in newsrooms. These efforts came at a critical time. The downsizing of newsrooms was fully underway. As noted in the spring edition of the *NABJ Journal*, job cuts at newspapers were having a disproportionate impact on African American journalists, notably in diverse cities like Philadelphia (Suggs 2007b). With the industry facing considering cuts due to the recession, Ciara was concerned the next round would harm NABJ members even more significantly.

During its April 25, 2008 board meeting, Ciara announced that she or other members of NABJ's executive team had met with executives from CBS, ABC, NBC, Fox and the *New York Times* (Childress 2008d). The meetings were successful, for the most part, from the perspective of NABJ. David Westin, head of ABC News, said he was committed to increasing his outfit's diversity level from 12 percent to 25 percent in five years. Steve Capus, who took over NBC in 2005, said he would continue to support NABJ's training programs and serve as a sponsor for NABJ events. The *New York Times* offered sponsorship, and dedicated itself to producing a

program for NABJ's Media Institute. Roger Ailes of Fox News said he was open to sponsorship and training programs. CBS offered no commitments to NABJ (Childress 2008d).

In December, Ciara urged Gannett, the largest employer of journalists, to consider diversity when layoff selections were made. In her pitch, she appealed to the purchasing power of African Americans as a justification for keeping back staff members. "Publishers still need to serve the diverse communities which support their newspapers and magazines by purchasing these media products and shopping with their advertisers. Plain and simple: diversity in the newsroom is good for business," ("ASNE Study: Black Journalists Slashed from Newsrooms at an Alarming Rate." 2009). Also in 2008, NABJ added a component to its advocacy efforts. That year, it held its first Television Management News Census. Led by Bob Butler, NABJ's regional director for the West Coast, the census was an effort to expand upon the ASNE study, which focused on newsroom numbers at newspapers. Butler's first census revealed that only 16.6 percent of managers in television newsrooms were individuals of color, and that nearly a third of the 61 stations that participated in the survey had no people of color on staff (Prince 2008).

But 2008, ultimately, was not good for journalists of color. That year, according to the ASNE census, 13.5 percent of all newsrooms workers of color – or 400 in total – lost their jobs ("Table A - Minority Employment in Daily Newspapers." 2014). Moreover, the number of television newsroom managers dropped significantly, from 16.6 percent to just below 12 percent. This too drew a strong response from Ciara and Butler. "This is not about the economy costing black journalists their jobs . . . [T]here weren't many there to begin with,"(Prince 2009b).

Kathy Times took over as president in 2009. Like her predecessors, Times released numerous statements about the lack of diversity in newsrooms. "Study after study shows diversity has taken a hit and now it is just being completely abandoned by news organizations in

some of the most diverse cities in this country. Diversity is being ignored,” Times said in one 2011 release (Times 2011a). Times and her colleagues also visited media companies. In June, 2010 Bob Butler, now vice-president of broadcast, jointed Deidre Childress, vice-president of print, during a series of visits with executives in New York. A year later, Times met with representatives of ASNE in Orlando (Jones and Williams 2010;Childress 2011). Despite these efforts, journalists of color continued to lose jobs. In 2009, the newspaper newsrooms employed 6,300 journalists of color. By the end of 2011, newsrooms employed only 5,300 journalists of color ("Table A - Minority Employment in Daily Newspapers." 2014).

The job losses were also having an impact on NABJ’s membership. In July 2008, just before the 2008 Unity conference in Chicago, NABJ’s membership stood at 4,050 members. By the end the summer of 2011, membership had fallen to 2,900 (National Association of Black Journalists 2012). Realizing the impact of the losses, Times created a program to help members find jobs. Known as NABJ C.A.R.E.S., the online database allows out-of-work members to receive career advice and networking opportunities from NABJ staff (2009 Annual Report.2010).

Greg Lee would take over for Times in 2011. Under Lee, NABJ issued routine press releases condemning the dismissal of African American journalists. Among the losses noted by NABJ were the firing of *Chicago Tribune* diversity recruiter Sheila Solomon, the nonrenewal of veteran anchor Sue Simmons contract by WNBC in New York, the buyout of former NABJ Secretary Sarah Glover’s contract by the new Philadelphia Media Network, and the layoff of several NABJ members by Newhouse during its June 2012 series of cuts (Turner 2012c; Turner 2012e; Turner 2012d; Turner 2012a).

NABJ’s most public advocacy battle during Lee’s administration, however, was lodged against CNN. In February of 2012, after Roland Martin was suspended by CNN for issuing a

homophobic tweet, Lee used the incident to critique the lack of diversity at the news giant. He said CNN could use the moment to “present a diverse offering of voices in its programming,” (Lee 2012). NABJ stepped up its criticism in 2013, following the hiring of Jeff Zucker as the network’s leader. One of the first moves made by Zucker was to eliminate a morning show hosted by former NABJ journalist of the year, Soledad O’Brien. It was also widely expected – and later confirmed – that the organization would not renew the contract of Martin, who was named NABJ’s 2013 journalist of the year. NABJ was also concerned that none of the people brought on board by Zucker to help run CNN were African American. Lee met with Zucker to discuss the issue in February of 2013. In a press release, however, Lee refused to divulge what was said in the conference (Lee 2013a).

A column posted on the NABJ website written by Joel Dreyfuss, a founder of the organization, may have summarized the larger frustration many NABJ members were having with regard to the “diversity” movement. Written in response to the events at CNN, Dreyfuss, by then an ex-patriot in France, suggested the struggle with CNN, and continued losses of jobs on a whole, was a sign that the industry may have never truly cared about increasing newsroom diversity.

“I’ve always doubted that most of the owners of mass media have bought into it. They wanted a diversity of readers/viewers/consumers but they didn’t think that having a diversity of editors, anchors and reporters was necessary . . . even if it reduced the quality of coverage,” (Dreyfuss 2013).

## CHAPTER 9

### THE ECONOMICS OF NABJ

As the previous chapters noted, NABJ began struggling with several of its initiatives following the turn of the century. It has reduced its number of scholarships and internships, reduced its number of NABJ Media Institutes and struggled to regularly produce its *NABJ Journal*. The organization, as noted, has also failed to create an actual archive of its historical documents. A key reason for many of these struggles may stem from the organization's dire financial situation. This chapter will map the recent financial struggles of NABJ, through a 25-year review of its finances. As this chapter will note, its struggles not only hampered NABJ's ability to provide services, it arguably led to decisions that had a negative impact on its reputation within the larger public sphere. As a means of providing consistency in calculating the numbers, this study will focus on NABJ's total net assets at the end of each fiscal year. This is the one budget line that was consistent in each of NABJ's annual reports.

#### 9.1 A Convention-Funded Organization: 1988 to 1992

For the first decade of its existence, NABJ was largely an all-volunteer organization. It did not have a central office. It did not have a full-time executive director. Nevertheless, this lack of sophistication did not prevent the organization from functioning as a solvent advocacy organization, one that received most of its operating revenues from convention registrations and membership dues.

In 1988, NABJ earned just over \$686,000 in revenues. Of that total, \$464,795 came from registration revenues from its 1988 convention in St. Louis. This represented 68 percent of all the organization's profit for the year. The second highest total, \$87,000, came from membership

dues. This represented 13 percent of its profit for the year. Contributions to the organization from outside sources – most likely grants and sponsorships – marked the third highest revenue stream. In the 1988 budget, the organization reported \$41,910 under this line, which represented 6 percent of its revenue. For the year, after expenses, the organization had a net profit of \$135,865. This left the organization with a total net asset balance of just under \$588,000. Thus, in 1988, without the benefit of a large full-time staff, NABJ was nevertheless a solvent organization worth nearly \$600,000 in net assets (*National Association of Black Journalists 1988-1989 Annual Report*. 1989).

For 1989, the revenue breakdown was almost the same with regard to conventions and membership dues. The organization earned just under \$709,000 from its 1989 convention registrations, which represented 68 percent of the organization's revenue. Membership receipts were \$123,276. This represented 12 percent of NABJ's total revenue. Contributions to the organization from sponsorships, donors and grants dropped, as the organization reported only \$26,570 under this budget line. NABJ would leave the year with a profit of just under \$198,000, and net assets of just over \$764,000 (*National Association of Black Journalists 1990*).

How was the organization able to maintain its financial stability? The organization had a relatively low overhead, due to its small staff. The national office of NABJ had just opened in 1986, and was located at the Gannett headquarters in Reston, Virginia. Gannett allowed the organization to stay there at no cost (Dawkins 1997). In 1988 the organization spent just under \$230,000 on staffing and facilities. The next year, NABJ spent a combined \$237,000 on these budget lines (*National Association of Black Journalists 1988-1989 Annual Report*. 1989; *National Association of Black Journalists 1990*).

This did not mean, however, that NABJ was not spending money. Total expenses rose

from \$551,088 in 1988 to \$849,174 in 1989. The rise was not from staffing. Instead, the bulk of the increase stemmed from spending on the national convention and board expenses. NABJ spent more than \$230,000 at its 1989 convention than its 1988 affair. That may have been due, however, to a change in venue. The 1988 convention was in St. Louis. The 1989 convention was held in New York City. The rise in board expenses was even more dramatic. This budget line increased by nearly three-fold from \$24,118 in 1988 to \$66,904 in 1989 (National Association of Black Journalists 1990).

The years of 1991 and 1992 demonstrated the peril the organization faced at that time when convention revenues were low. It may have also served as a harbinger for the dangers related to the selection of a second-tier convention city. While the organization did not go into the red, its cash-on-hand was dangerously low at the end of each year. In 1991, NABJ spent \$375,000 on its national convention. While the event made money, the profit was significantly less than the yields from 1989 and 1990. The convention netted only \$484,296, which resulted in a profit of just over \$109,000. The situation was worse in 1992. Convention costs totaled \$331,830. But it also made less money, pulling in \$409,375, or a profit well below \$100,000. These results had a great impact on the organization's cash-on-hand at the end of each year. By the end of 1992, the organization's net assets stood at \$674,000, which was a modest drop-off from 1989. Based on these disappointing results, the treasurer of the organization, Jackie Green, suggested that NABJ needed to consider increasing convention fees and membership dues (National Association of Black Journalists 1993).

Neither Green nor any other NABJ leader hypothesized another possible reason for the actual loss in convention revenue for within NABJ's 1992-1993 annual report. The drop in revenues may have been related to the host city selected for each convention. The 1991

convention was held in Kansas City. The 1992 convention was held in Detroit. While these cities may appeal to some individuals, neither is considered a destination city.

As tourism researchers have argued, nonprofit association conferences represent a major risk/reward venture. For most organizations, the convention is the greatest generator of revenue. Nevertheless, because most host hotels require organizations to guarantee book specific quota of hotel nights, these events also pose significant financial risk, since the host hotel can penalize organizations that fail to meet booking quotas. Such an outcome is more likely to happen with nonprofit conventions as opposed to corporate conventions. Nonprofit association conventions are voluntary. Corporate conventions, in many cases, are not. While networking and camaraderie represent draws for conferences, the cost, convenience of location and amenities associated with a host city are other significant factors behind whether or not a member attends a convention. Thus, the selection of second-tier sites, places that are less appealing to members, could prove disastrous to an organization's finances (Toh, Peterson, and Foster 2007, 43-50; Cho 2008, 220-224).

Nevertheless, Jackie Green's 1992 report on NABJ's finances was not completely negative. The organization's investment portfolio, which represented six percent of all revenue, had increased. More importantly, NABJ did a better job of fundraising. In 1992, NABJ's revenue in the form of contributions from sponsorships, grants and donations had increased to just under \$230,000. This represented 20 percent of all revenues. Based on this, Greene concluded that NABJ was "not as dependent on annual convention support as it has been in the past," (National Association of Black Journalists 1993).

## **9.2 Rolling the Dice: 1997 to 2001**

By 1997, NABJ had undergone a number of changes. The organization now had a full-time staff, with a full-time executive director. It was preparing to relocate to a new facility at the University of Maryland. Moreover, the organization was very stable financially. The Clinton economy was good to many businesses and organizations, and NABJ was no different. Through a series of solid investments, increases in revenue from corporate and other contributions and the successful growth of its scholarship fund, the organization, held \$1.9 million in net assets by the end of the year (National Association of Black Journalists 1996; National Association of Black Journalists 1998).

In the past, revenue from investments was never a significant source of revenue. In 1988, investment income yielded \$28,605, which was seven percent of the organization's revenue. In 1992, investment income was even less, as the organization received \$27,692 from investments. But in 1997, investment revenues generated just over \$212,000. Investments had surpassed membership dues in significance, as dues only provided \$130,375 in revenue. The organization also enjoyed a solid year in terms of contributions from sponsors and other donors. Contribution revenue for the year yielded \$676,357 (National Association of Black Journalists 1998).

Another major change had taken place by this time. While convention registration revenues were still significant, the actual cost of the conventions had risen to a point where the registrations merely paid for the event. The 1997 NABJ's conference, which was held in Chicago, provided \$804,770 in revenue from registrations. However, expenses related to the convention totaled nearly \$950,000. Coupled with the stagnation in membership dues, this would have spelled disaster for the organization in past years. But due to its new, more diversified funding model, NABJ was no longer reliant upon its conventions or membership dues

for its solvency (National Association of Black Journalists 1998).

NABJ continued to do well in the market over the next two years. In 1998, the organization earned more than \$250,000 in revenue and interest from its investments. In 1999, investment revenue was just under \$300,000. Nevertheless, NABJ's massive spending on conventions continued, while its revenues generated from convention registrations and sponsorships began to stagnate. The 1998 convention was held in Washington D.C. The convention brought in \$871,000 in registration receipts. But the event was very expensive to produce. For the first time, the cost of a convention topped \$1 million (National Association of Black Journalists 1998).

In 1999, NABJ registrations almost broke even with the cost of the event, which was Unity 99 in Seattle. Founded in 1994, Unity: Journalists of Color was a collaboration of four minority journalist organizations; NABJ, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the Asian American Journalists Association and the Native American Journalists Association. The event in Seattle represented the second Unity conference held by the four organizations. NABJ's share of the cost the Unity 99 event was just over \$720,000. NABJ walked away with \$691,000 in revenue from registrations. Contributions to the organization made up the difference. But NABJ did not fair as well with its contribution line as they did the previous year. In 1998, the organization received just over \$614,000 in contributions. But the next year, this figure dropped to \$480,000 (National Association of Black Journalists 1999; National Association of Black Journalists 1998).

The drop in revenue from contributions hurt NABJ's bottom line. In 1998, the organization walked away with \$200,000 in cash and held net assets of \$2.1 million. But in large part due to the lack of contributions, NABJ actually ended 1999 year with a deficit of just

under \$50,000, while its assets dropped just below \$2.1 million. That, however, was just a preview of the financial uncertainty headed in NABJ's direction. The meager return also previewed the organization's forthcoming battle with other Unity members (National Association of Black Journalists 2000; National Association of Black Journalists 1999).

In 2000, the economy tanked, and with it, NABJ's financial stability. Like many investors, NABJ's investment portfolio was decimated. In this year alone, the organization lost more than \$461,000 in stock revenue. The losses, however, were made worse by its 2000 convention in Phoenix. As a result of the market, many members and exhibitors opted not to make the trip west. The final bill for the convention topped \$1.1 million. Convention revenue from registrations was only \$691,000. In a sign of the organization's future funding model, NABJ performed exceptionally well with sponsorships and other contributions, earning just over \$1 million. But when all expenses and revenues were totaled, the organization's net assets fell to \$1.8 million (National Association of Black Journalists 2000; National Association of Black Journalists 2001a).

The next year was just as bad for the organization. Stock portfolio losses totaled \$257,402. NABJ was forced to borrow money to pay its bills. Additionally, NABJ suspended publication of the *NABJ Journal*. Conference registrations for its 2001 event in Orlando brought in \$648,534, but the convention cost \$941,150 to produce. Contributions to NABJ also dropped, as the organization only brought in \$640,501 under this budget line. Membership dues brought in \$149,745. At the end of the year, the organization's net assets had fallen again, this time to \$1.5 million. Thus, over a two-year period, NABJ had lost more than \$500,000 in its net assets (National Association of Black Journalists 2001a; Barringer 2001b; Barringer 2001a).

The episode drew negative press for the organization, and fueled a near-revolt among

members against Will Sutton, the organization's president. A series of *New York Times* reports attributed the group's problems to other factors beyond the market. First, the report stated that many media organizations saw less reason to support the organization. It was not because they did not value diversity. Instead, many media corporations and foundations, including Knight Ridder, Dow Jones and the Poynter Institute began to offer their own programs and trainings related to diversity. They supported diversity internally. Thus, there was not as much 'need' to support NABJ. Additionally, the articles noted that NABJ's recent conventions in Orlando, Phoenix and Seattle were poorly attended. While expensive to produce, the Washington D.C. convention in 1998 drew more than 3,000 attendees, due to its central location along the East Coast corridor. Less than 2,100 people had registered for each of the next three conventions. As a result, NABJ was forced to pay penalties for failing to meet booking quotas at the convention hotels (Barringer 2001a; Barringer 2001b).

The problems led to dissent among membership. More than 100 members signed a letter prior to the 2001 convention expressing frustration about the future of the organization. The group, led by former presidents Thomas Morgan and Vanessa Williams, said an oversight committee was needed to check the organization's spending. Sutton initially balked at the idea of the committee. He noted the issues with the convention sites, and suggested that market conditions and the decisions made by past boards caused the crisis. Nevertheless, the board eventually approved the creation of an oversight committee during the Orlando convention. But that wasn't the only significant change made by the board.

NABJ also approved a measure that repealed a ban on accepting sponsorship money from companies selling alcoholic beverages. The decision, which was made at the end of the meeting, was met with some opposition. PBS anchor Gwen Ifill said accepting money from such

companies could impact the organization's ability to remain independent. "There are lots of fuzzy lines here. I want a mind-set that is better than 'green is green' for a media organization," (Barringer 2001b).

Supporters of the measure, however, said the change was needed to deal with reality. Fewer media companies were supporting the organization. To make up for the loss of funding, its new executive director Tangie Newborn felt NABJ needed to openly court money from non-media companies. Newborn, who was assigned to the position in 2000, also realized that accepting donations from certain companies could be seen as tokenism. She did not care. "They might look at it that way. Should we not take their dollars? It's green to me. And we need to look at that. I'm not saying we should take all. But you need to take a look at it." (Barringer 2001b)

To comply with Newborn's recommendations, NABJ had already relaxed other rules, including one that banned taking funding from the government. Additionally, as noted by the *New York Times*, the organization accepted contribution revenue from several sponsors not related to the media, including Aetna U.S. Healthcare, the South African Tourism Board and the company that produces the artificial sweetener Equal (Barringer 2001b).

### **9.3 (Un)Strategic Planning: 2006 to 2007**

By the beginning of 2006, it seemed as if NABJ was back on solid footing. NABJ's net assets were again above \$2 million. In its January 2006 treasurer's report, it was announced that NABJ had generated \$2,810,824 in revenues against \$2,686,378 in expenses (Glover 2006b). It would turn out later, however, that these positive estimations were wrong. After a review of statements by treasurer John Yearwood, the board determined that the organization actually lost \$200,000 in 2005. Many of the reasons related to the deficit, the treasurer noted, were related to

a mismanagement of funds and other poor financial practices. During an evening board meeting in March of 2006, the board forced Newborn out (Prince 2006b; Glover 2006a). Following a two-month search, Karen Wynn Freeman, the former co-executive director of the Association for Operations Management, was named the new executive director, and tasked with getting the organization's finances in order (Prince 2009a).

By the end of the year, the news had grown worse. In 2006, NABJ posted a record deficit of \$641,500, dropping its overall net assets to \$1.85 million. Once again, the convention was the organization's major cost. Held in Indianapolis, the career fair cost the organization \$1.8 million to produce. It didn't come close, however, to earning that back through registrations. Treasurer John Yearwood referred to the location of the convention, Indianapolis, as a "second-tier host location," as registrations to the convention only brought in \$836,000. Yearwood also noted that NABJ's contribution revenue from media companies was down. "What caused the deficit? Very simply, not enough funds were raised – the convention and other means – to cover normal operating expenses," said Yearwood in his January 2007 Treasurer's report (Prince 2007; Glover 2007a).

Given the continued struggles of the organization, Bryan Monroe, the president of NABJ and Sarah Glover, a Philadelphia-based photographer who served as the organization's secretary, led NABJ's efforts to create a new strategic plan that would guide the organization through 2012. The organization had contracted a group named Leading Edge Associates to produce a preliminary report for its new strategic plan. At its January 2007 board meeting, Larry Olmstead, a representative from the firm, provided details of the preliminary report. The findings were based on interviews of more than 230 people, including NABJ members and staff, journalism educators and others within the media industry. Additionally, the preliminary report utilized the

results of a 2006 membership survey. Like Yearwood's treasurer's report, the preliminary assessment from Leading Edge stated that the NABJ "had to get its financial house in order." Doing so, however, would require revising of the organization's priorities beyond mere economic issues (Glover 2007a).

First, the report stated the organization should not continue to expect the mainstream media to continue supporting NABJ conventions financially. The report stated that turnover among NABJ staff members in the central office was preventing the organization from developing continuity. Additionally, the report warned that if NABJ did not quickly begin offering programming related to "the new world of media," it would likely lose members due to a lack of interest. It bluntly stated that the organization needed to improve its website. Finally, the report said the organization needed to reevaluate what its role as an "advocacy" organization. Clearly, NABJ was an advocate on behalf of African American journalists. NABJ was divorced, however, from issues related to the larger black community – a concern that was repeatedly expressed by individuals surveyed for the study (Glover 2007a).

A few months later, at its April 22 board meeting, Glover and Monroe released the first draft of NABJ's 2007-2012 plan, which was dubbed "a bold five-year strategy that prepares NABJ members for the changing media landscape," (Glover 2007b). It called for the organization to increase professional training, improve the organization's customer service to members and notably, engage in more advocacy on issues related to media monitoring and the larger black community. The plan also sought to increase membership, engage the organization in larger discussions related to the future of journalism and help NABJ finally become a financially-sound nonprofit through the diversification of its revenue streams.

In April of 2007, the report was placed online for members to view. Olmstead, Glover

and Monroe presented the plan during a session at the 2007 convention in Las Vegas.

Additionally, Glover detailed the plan with the new board during an October meeting. At this meeting, the executive director, Karen Wynn Freeman, said her staff was already looking to implement some of the recommendations of the report (Childress 2007; *National Association of Black Journalists 2007 Convention Program*.2007; Glover 2007c).

Then there was silence about the plan. While some meeting minutes are missing from the organization's website, there are no signs the actual report was formally adopted by NABJ. In fact, the report was never mentioned again within future meeting minutes. No mention of the plan was made in any future press releases or any future *NABJ Journal* articles. The plan was never discussed in Richard Prince's *Journal-ism's* blog. Moreover, there was never any action on most of the proposals listed in the plan. While efforts were indeed made to diversify revenue streams, and efforts were made to challenge the mainstream press for its lack of diversity, efforts to improve its efforts on media monitoring were not taken.

Nevertheless, 2007, so it seemed, ended on a relatively positive note. NABJ's conference in Las Vegas seemed like a success. The lure of Sin City helped bring more than 3,100 attendees to the convention. Contributors heavily supported the event. But as the receipts came in, the outlook from the conference grew bleak. At its October 2007 meeting, Karen Wynn Freeman said the organization received a bill from Bally's – the host hotel – that was \$700,000 more than anticipated. She explained that the organization was charged for a number of items that were not in the budget, notably those related to equipment, food and security. She stated the convention would still make a profit of about \$100,000, however, through a combination of registrations and sponsorships (Childress 2007).

#### **9.4 DisUnity and Dysfunction: 2008 to 2014**

By the dawn of 2008, however, many key members began to question the legitimacy of its “success” in 2007, and began to urge NABJ take more drastic steps to maintain its financial stability. During a January board meeting, Greg Lee, the new treasurer of the organization, said he could not confirm how the organization did financially in 2007. One set of numbers suggested NABJ would end the year with a profit of \$87,000. He then noted, however, that the organization was still carrying more that \$200,000 in debt from 2006, and still owed Bally’s \$50,000 from its 2007 convention. He said the struggles were the result of the organization’s continued lack of oversight on finances (Childress 2008b).

This continued uncertainty frustrated former president Condace Pressley, who was serving as chair of the finance committee. She said at the meeting that she didn’t understand how a journalism organization could not accurately report its own financial situation. “We have a history of making the same mistakes over and over and over again,”(Childress 2008b). At this same meeting, Karen Wynn Freeman provided a slide show. In it, she suggested NABJ needed to work harder to ensure that more of its programming was paid for by a corporate sponsor or grant. “If [an event is] not sponsored, then no program,” (Freeman and Lee 2008).

In March 2008, Lee painted an even worse picture during his report to the board. While, at the time, he projected a net profit from convention registrations and contributions of \$471,000, Lee noted that the organization was still carrying debt of more than \$446,000. This included fees from office space, the disputed fees from Bally’s and a \$94,000 bill from American Express. He also noted that the organization was still borrowing against its reserve funds, gave out too much money in scholarship revenue. He also noted that, to pay monthly bills, the executive director was requesting to borrow even more money. Lee was not blaming the losses on market factors

or a lack of support from membership. He again suggested that NABJ's lack of budget oversight was costing the organization money (Lee 2008).

That same month, Pressley's finance committee weighed in on NABJ's financial situation. NABJ needed to significantly scale back its activities for the year. The organization was not paying enough attention to its increasing debt. Instead, it had established a bad habit of taking out more loans. Pressley also said that NABJ could not count on the 2008 Unity conference in Chicago as a fundraising vehicle (Pressley 2008).

Apprehension about NABJ's continued participation in Unity had existed, since Unity 99, when the organization did not fare well financially as compared to other convention years. By 2008, some members spoke very seriously about the need for NABJ to abandon Unity. A major sticking point was over the fact that, in creating the Unity coalition, the four organizations essentially created a fifth organization dedicated to diversity issues. While the board of directors of Unity was split evenly among the four member organizations, Unity also had some degree of independence from the four members. Unity had its own office in D.C. It also had its own executive director and staff. Since Unity was funded from revenues generated at Unity conventions – as well as through its own corporate sponsorships and grants – the organization was now seen by some as a competitor for dwindling contribution and convention dollars. In the summer edition of the *NABJ Journal*, Ray Metoyer, a former board member, summarized the growing opposition to Unity. “Unity is trying to be become an umbrella organization that oversees all the organizations . . . We never thought Unity would be actually competing with NABJ for funding and sponsorship dollars, at a time when corporate money has gotten so tight,” (Staff Report 2008, 5).

When the financial numbers began to matriculate from the 2008 Unity conference, groans

about Unity grew louder. While the organization did well at Unity financially, several issues regarding how the money was split irritated the board, led by president Barbara Ciara. A total of 2125 NABJ members attended the event. This represented 52 percent of all registrants. But due to preset numbers, NABJ had to share a larger portion of NABJ member-generated revenues with Unity and the three other member organizations. What NABJ seemed to take issue with most was revenue designated for Unity's central office. Unity took home nearly \$750,000 for the event. "Quite simply there was money left on the table for NABJ," Greg Lee said about the conference(Childress 2008a). When budget figures were finally made clear, NABJ's financial status had only grown worse in 2008. For that year, NABJ's net assets had fallen below \$1 million, to \$897,119. Overall, the organization had lost \$1 million in its net assets in three years (2009 Annual Report.2010).

In 2009, the organization's financial situation grew worse. NABJ's convention was scheduled for Tampa. As the convention drew closer in 2009, the organization grew increasingly concerned that the convention was headed toward disaster. The recession was continuing to hammer the news industry. Journalists of all races, genders and ages were losing their jobs (McChesney and Nichols 2012). As a result of the downturn, NABJ's membership roles dropped dramatically. In July of 2008, NABJ had 4,050 total members, and 2194 full members. A year later, NABJ had only 3,023 members, and just 1,654 full members. NABJ was faced with a horrific dilemma. With few companies hiring, few companies willing to sponsor the organization and a decline in membership, the convention, under normal conditions, would have faced difficulties. This situation was made worse, however, with the choice of another second-tier host city. But given NABJ's process of city selection, the current board, however, had no control to change it.

NABJ held a policy at that time of naming host cities five years prior to its conventions. In 2004, the board made not one, but two potentially problematic choices for its convention host. Shunning Chicago, New York, Miami and New Orleans as hosts, the NABJ board not only selected Tampa for its 2009 convention; they also chose San Diego for the 2010 convention (Glover 2004a). In reaching contracts for both conventions with the Hyatt hotel chain, NABJ promised a booking block of more than 5000 nights for each convention, with an obligation of 5,669 for Tampa. This obligation was actually higher than the one NABJ reached with Bally's for its 2007 event in Las Vegas (National Association of Black Journalists 2011).

By May of 2009, NABJ was already expecting the worst of the Tampa Convention. Only 500 people had registered for the event. Booth registrations and sponsorships were also low (Childress 2008b; Childress 2008d). When the numbers began coming in from the convention, NABJ's fears were confirmed. The event did exceed 1,500 registrations. But many of the attendees were students and associate members, not full members who pay a higher rate for registration. Those who did attend the conference were finding other ways to save money. Some opted to pay for a single day at the convention, as opposed to paying full price for the entire five-day event. The biggest, issue, however, was with the hotel block with the Hyatt. Many people opted to stay at nearby hotels, as opposed to the host hotel, to take advantage of cheaper room rates. Others decided to bunk together in rooms at the Hyatt. As a result, the organization came nowhere near filling the room allocation. NABJ only filled 3,328 nights within its 5,667 booking commitment. As a result of this, NABJ was forced to pay a \$150,000 booking penalty to the hotel. This, combined with other issues related to the recession, left NABJ than \$600,000 in the red for the year (Childress 2008a; Childress 2008c; National Association of Black Journalists 2012). After years of financial struggles and borrowing from

reserves, NABJ's total value in terms of net assets had fallen from \$1,849,181 in 2005 to \$284,341 at the end of 2009 – a loss of more than \$1.5 million, and a net asset total lower than what the organization held in 1989 (National Association of Black Journalists 2012; *National Association of Black Journalists 1988-1989 Annual Report*. 1989). As Tangie Newborn before her, Executive Director Karen Wynn Freeman became the scapegoat, and resigned from her post in December of 2009 (Freeman and Lee 2008; Prince 2009a).

As 2010 began, NABJ had reason to fear that its next convention in San Diego would bring more grief. The organization's performance in San Diego, however, was better than anticipated. First, NABJ helped itself by reducing its room commitment with Hyatt prior to the convention. The original contract required NABJ to book more than 5000 nights. The organization managed to lower that number to 2,850. Additionally, while the registration revenue was actually lower than what was gained in Tampa – \$378,500 in 2010 versus just under \$600,000 in 2009 – NABJ enjoyed a major spike in revenue generated from sponsorships. The organization nearly doubled its revenue, from \$730,000 in 2009 to more than \$1.4 million in 2010. NABJ also enjoyed an increase in revenue from memberships. NABJ earned \$240,000 in membership dues in 2009. In 2010, the number increased to \$316,000. Moreover, as noted previously, the organization began to emphasize profits with its Media Institute. In 2009, the Institute resulted in a significant loss of revenue. NABJ spent more than \$90,000 on the institutes, but only earned just over \$28,000. In 2010, the organization reduced its Media Institute expenses to just under \$50,000, but managed to make an \$8,000 profit from this budget line. The end result in 2010 was that the organization made a profit of \$450,000 for the year, and increased its net assets to just over \$722,000 (National Association of Black Journalists 2012; Lowery and Mullins 2010).

By the fall of 2010, the organization hired another executive director, Maurice Foster, a D.C.-based attorney who previously worked as deputy executive director with the National Bar Association. Moreover, the organization seemed poised great year in 2011 (Prince 2014d). For the first time in a nearly a decade, the convention was to be held in the Northeast, in Philadelphia (Prince 2014d). The year, however, created as much turmoil as it did stability. It was in 2011 that NABJ decided to leave Unity: Journalists of Color.

On NABJ's website, the organization has no posted board meeting minutes between January 2011 and August 2011. It is the longest such gap of any period on the site, which includes meeting minutes between 2004 and 2013. This gap is curious given that it is during this exact period NABJ's board made the decision to leave Unity, after months of negotiations.

The movement toward leaving Unity heated up in 2009, following the Tampa convention. In October 2009, Unity's president resigned. Barbara Ciara, the now-former NABJ president who had questioned the organization's relationship with Unity, decided to run for the right to serve the rest of the term. Running unopposed, she eventually was seated to the position (Prince 2010).

A year later, Ciara ran for a full term as Unity's president. She lost, however, to Joanna Hernandez, a member of NAHJ who had previously served as the organization's vice president. After the election, Ciara complained that the selection of Hernandez was an attempt to marginalize NABJ from Unity (Prince 2010). In her last action as president, Ciara submitted a series of proposals designed to change both the funding structure and voting structure of Unity in a manner that benefited NABJ both financially and politically (Times 2011b; "Timeline of NABJ and Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc Talks." 2011).

The proposal, which was based on revenues from the 2008 convention, recalculated the

revenue-sharing agreement in a manner that would have increased each member organization's share of Unity's revenues in 2012, the schedule date of its next convention. The shift, however, would have disproportionately benefitted NABJ. Based on the formula, NABJ would receive 45 percent of all convention revenues. Using 2008 numbers, this would have increased NABJ's take-home revenue from Unity by more than \$472,000. The increase for the other member organizations was substantially less. Based on this calculation, NAHJ, AAJA and NAJA, respectively, would have received about \$48,000, \$32,000 and \$5,000 in additional revenue from the 2008 convention. The loser under the new agreement was Unity itself. In 2008, Unity received \$750,000. Under this proposal, Unity would have only taken home only \$381,000 from the convention ("Timeline of NABJ and Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc Talks." 2011;Times 2011b)

NABJ's reasoning for changing the Unity funding structure was based on two arguments. First, Unity was never intended to be a fifth member organization. In such extreme economic times, resources could be better used by the member organizations. Additionally, president Kathy Times argued that Unity did a poor job of advocacy work, notably, with regard to newsroom diversity (Times 2011b;"Timeline of NABJ and Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc Talks." 2011).

In March, 2011, after a series of discussions – conversations not posted on NABJ's website – the Unity members ultimately voted to shoot down NABJ's proposal, and passed one that set in place a revenue sharing structure similar to the used in 2008. That measure was passed by a vote of 12-4. All of the no votes against came from NABJ. A month later, NABJ voted to leave Unity, and decided not participate in the Unity 2012 convention. "NABJ board members concluded that as a business model, Unity no longer is the most financially prudent for

NABJ and its membership,” an organization press release announced on April 11, 2011 (“Timeline of NABJ and Unity: Journalists of Color, Inc Talks.” 2011).

Board members discussed the logic behind the move further with Richard Prince. Quoted in a story on Prince’s blog, Charles Robinson, a regional director who was running for president, said NABJ would fare better conducting a stand-alone convention in 2012. “If there was an issue which put me over the top, it was a report from the Executive Director on projections from Philadelphia Convention revenues. Our projections (in a stand alone year) will far exceed what we will receive in the projections from the upcoming Unity Convention in 2012.” Robinson was one of 12 board members who approved the decision to leave Unity. Only one person voted against the move (Prince 2011b).

With the Unity issue behind them, the board and executive director Foster moved onto its 2011 convention in Philadelphia. At first glance, the event was a success. More than 2,400 people attended the convention, an increase of about 800 people from previous years. This led to an additional \$200,000 in registration revenues. Additionally, the convention drew 70 more exhibitors and recruiters to the convention floor. NABJ also increased sponsorship revenue to just over \$1.7 million, an increase of \$300,000 from the previous year (National Association of Black Journalists 2012).

But, as in previous years, the final year-end assessment of NABJ’s financial situation was not as positive as expected. Despite the profit made from the convention and other activities, NABJ’s total profit in net assets for the year was just \$3,300. Several factors played into this low number. First, the organization lost about \$8,000 in its portfolio investments. The biggest cost differentials stemmed from staffing costs and governance costs. In 2009, national office expenses were \$960,000. For 2010, NABJ cut staff expenses to \$770,000. But for 2011, the

expenses increased again, and for the first time, NABJ spent more than \$1 million on its D.C. office. Another significant increase in the budget was related to governance costs, or costs associated with board activities. In 2009, NABJ spent \$21,000 on governance. In 2010, that budget was significantly reduced, as governance charges were only \$2,000. But in 2011, the governance budget skyrocketed to \$64,000. In total, NABJ's expenses rose by 44 percent between 2010 and 2011 (National Association of Black Journalists 2012).

In 2012, NABJ was once again forced to deal with the fallout of its Unity decision. NABJ settled on New Orleans as the site for its 2012 convention. The change in venue was expected to lead to more revenue for the organization. It did not. The 2012 convention in New Orleans generated \$577,000 in registration revenue, which was a reduction of \$20,000 from the previous year. Moreover, it was nearly \$50,000 less than what NABJ had earned during the 2008 Unity convention in Chicago (*2009 Annual Report*.2010). Sponsorship and grant revenue was also down for the year. This may have been directly related to the split. Many companies, such as the *New York Times*, opted to attend the Unity convention in Las Vegas as opposed to NABJ's convention. They did not want to spend money to attend two conventions (Vega 2012).

The books on 2013 remain unclear. But at the convention in Orlando, Lee, the outgoing president, feuded in the press with Foster (Madden and Jamerson 2013). Moreover, the convention drew the organization negative attention. Aside from earning the ire of some groups for refusing to cancel the conference in response to the Trayvon Martin verdict (Prince 2014a), a drunken spat between two ESPN reporters also gained national attention. During the convention's annual Sports Task Force Party, Hugh Douglas, a former football-player-turned commentator, attacked fellow ESPN report Michael Smith. During the attack, he referred to Smith as a "house nigger." Douglas resigned from this position once the matter became national

news (Johnson 2013a).

Based on the continued turmoil, a group of members created a website called NABJ Board Watch. Members of the coalition included former presidents Sidmel Estes-Sumpter, Will Sutton, Condace Pressley, Barbara Ciara and Vanessa Williams and former interim director Drew Berry. "A group of us are very concerned about the constant cycle of surprises especially regarding NABJ finances," Berry said in an email to Richard Prince. "Motions passed at the business meeting typically go in a hole somewhere and are not acted on; there is little follow through," (Prince 2013c). In January of 2014, some of the members of NABJ Board Watch got their wish. After less than five years at the helm, Maurice Foster stepped down as executive director. The organization began its third national search for an executive director in less than ten years, and the second since the proposed 2007 strategic plan called for more continuity among central office staff (Prince 2014d).

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

*“We envisioned the organization as a powerful advocate for black journalists. NABJ would protect and defend our interests; it would critique coverage of our communities by the major news organizations and would press news organizations to hire more African Americans. But journalism went from being a calling that involved confronting the status quo to being a career . . . The NABJ Convention became a vast job fair where dozens of lovely little anchoresses – all cast, seemingly, from the same mold, with light skin, straightened hair, business suit and heels – lined up patiently to show their videos to NBC, ABC and CNN. The media companies became big sponsors of our events – and not surprisingly, that made it difficult for NABJ to criticize their coverage. Most of NABJ’s energies focused on the convention rather than on the issues we faced. In some ways, it seemed we had won our war,” – NABJ founder Joel Dreyfuss, 2011(Dreyfuss 2011).*

During a board luncheon in January of 2004, former NABJ president Art Fennell delivered stern criticism to current leadership. In the opinion of Fennell, the man who developed the idea for the organization’s Media Institute, NABJ did not possess the prominence it once had. Leadership needed to learn how to act more professionally. It needed to work together better as a team. NABJ needed to build new alliances with other organizations. Moreover, NABJ needed to learn to think differently. “It’s time to shake things up,” he told the board (Glover 2004b).

Ten years later, NABJ’s board, during its January 2014 meeting, spent time ridiculing the National Newspaper Publishers Association for accepting tickets for a trip to Africa, claiming such an act failed to live up to the standards of journalistic impartiality. Board members at that meeting also complained that Richard Prince, the man who once led the publication of its *NABJ Journal*, had “subordinated” one of the most important stories on race and news in recent memory. The big news Prince ignored? Earlier that month, ESPN had given a promotion to a black man, naming him head of news operations (Prince 2014e).

That same month, Prince, who has for 12 years has documented a variety of stories

related to race and news at least three-times-per-week on his *Journal-isms* blog, focused on several other issues not related to newsroom diversity. These stories included discussion of the firestorm created by a San Antonio anchor who uttered the words “Martin Luther Coon Day” on the air, an analysis of the racist language used to describe a football player on Twitter and other social media following the NFC Championship game and the release of a study on how the mainstream media highlights acts of individual racism at the expense of coverage of institutional racism (Prince 2014c; Prince 2014e; Prince 2014b). NABJ, however, had nothing to say about any of these issues. In fact, throughout the entire month, NABJ offered only a single press release. It was to announce that Maurice Foster, the organization’s third full-time executive director in eight years, had resigned from his post (Prince 2014d).

The main purpose of this study was to assess if NABJ had stayed true to the principles set forward by its founders in 1975. While NABJ has enjoyed great success with its student programming, and been a regular advocate for diversity in newsrooms, this study has shown that, at best, NABJ has strayed from the total vision as set forward by its founders. NABJ, the oldest and largest media advocacy organization in America, is in a state of turmoil. But this turmoil isn’t merely the result of poor financial decisions by board members or executive directors. It is not merely the result of the 2008 recession that decimated the journalism industry. The most significant problem with NABJ is arguably one of vision. Although, rhetorically, NABJ claims to serve as a strong advocacy organization for African American interests, and claims to honor the legacy of its founders, the actually-existing NABJ of today does not demonstrate a clear vision of who it serves or how it should engage itself within the public sphere.

Despite being the first goal list by its founders, NABJ has never attempted to maintain a serious connection between African Americans in the mainstream press, and African Americans

in the black press. In failing to achieve this goal, NABJ has dismissed a significant element of the black public sphere – the more working-class, radical element – from everyday discussions impacting the direction of NABJ. Black press workers have never been active on the board of NABJ. Black press issues have never been, with any regularity, discussed or highlighted at NABJ conferences, or within the *NABJ Journal*. Additionally, black press representatives have never been heavily featured as guest speakers on panels during NABJ's annual conventions. That this tension exists may not be shocking. From the very first meeting, members of the black press, including several founders, never believed that an organization heavily influenced by individuals seeking careers within the mainstream press could ever speak to their needs. Some also expressed a healthy skepticism that an organization of African Americans could ever truly impact change within the mainstream press, especially if the mainstream press employed the majority of its members.

A second goal as stipulated by the founders was related to media monitoring activities. More specifically, the founding document felt NABJ, through the creation of a national newsletter, needed to routinely document institutionalized racism within the mainstream press. This goal, too, has fallen to the wayside. But unlike its support of unity among all African American journalists, the failure of NABJ to maintain this goal may have much more to do with generational changes and political economic considerations. While slow to enacting this goal, NABJ, by the 1990s, was actively engaged in routine monitoring of potentially racially problematic happenings within the mainstream press, notably through its *NABJ Journal*. This publication provided routine coverage of incidents of institutional racism in the media, both in terms of content and within newsrooms. The *Journal* also engaged in discussions on issues beyond the newsroom, and allowed members to engage in criticism of NABJ's own activities.

But following the departure longtime editor and contributor of Richard Prince, the direction of the *NABJ Journal* changed significantly. When the modern *Journal* has been published – and it is published very infrequently and inconsistently – its pages have been more likely to praise the accomplishments of NABJ members as opposed to engaging in a critique of institutionally racist practices within the media. Moreover, its press releases, which too are sent out infrequently, are much more likely to highlight issues related to hiring practices as opposed to engaging in criticism of either content or organization racism within newsrooms.

Additionally, NABJ has never been heavily involved in issues related to the FCC, or other matters of media policy. The organization, for instance, has never offered a single release on the issue of net neutrality, an issue that could significantly limit the ability of working-class African Americans to both produce and access news ("Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age."). NABJ has failed to truly challenge institutional racism within the media, as urged by the Kerner Commission in 1968.

NABJ, however, has had some successes. Through its scholarship program, internship program and highly successful student multimedia project, NABJ has help launch the careers of many African American journalists seeking careers within journalism. Throughout its history, NABJ has been a fierce advocate for the hiring of African Americans and other racial minorities by mainstream media operations. NABJ was at the table when ASNE decided to pursue its racial parity goal. NABJ has also, through press releases, media appearances and private meetings, chastised the mainstream press for its failure to hire African Americans as reporters, and promote African Americans to management positions. In recent years, however, the effort to increase diversity in newsrooms has had limited success. African Americans have been heavily impacted by massive industry job cuts since 2006, and the goal of reaching racial parity seems to have

been lost. Moreover, these two efforts, while important, primarily benefit a small pool of African Americans – college-educated blacks seeking middle-class jobs.

### **10.1 NABJ and Incorporation**

Several factors have played a role in NABJ's struggles. Political economic factors may have impeded the organization's ability to function as a holistic advocacy organization. Numerous scholars of the political economy of the media have noted that news organizations cannot fully interrogate critical issues within the public sphere, as a result of their ownership and funding structure. Reliant almost exclusively on advertising dollars for profit, and heavily depending on powerful sources for daily news content, news organizations will often avoid overly confrontational news about specific stakeholders (Bagdikian 2004; McChesney 2004; Alterman 2003; Bettig and Hall 2012; McChesney and Nichols 2012). This same issue may have impacted NABJ's willingness to critique the mainstream industry with regard to institutional racism. As the organization has moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has taken on more and more money from not only media companies, but companies, like Rent-A-Center, with problematic relationships with the African American community. The above quote from Joel Dreyfuss, an NABJ founder who has remained active with the organization throughout its history, suggests that NABJ was indeed concerned about offending its funders within the mainstream media (Dreyfuss 2011).

The same quote, however, may offer another explanation for the organization's struggles. NABJ's founding document was created nearly 40 years ago, during the immediate aftermath of the Freedom Rights Movement. As noted, many of its founders and other early members were heavily influenced by the need to challenge institutional racism within the media. Those

concerns, however, may not represent the concerns of today's generation of NABJ members and leadership. The above comment from Dreyfuss – admittedly problematic in its depiction of African American women – speaks to a condition that was clearly present at the conferences observed for this study (Dreyfuss 2011). Founder Reggie Bryant also made this observation during his visit to an NABJ convention in 2009. Unlike the activist conventions of media advocacy groups like Free Press, today's NABJ conventions are geared toward a professional audience. People do not attend them to discuss issues related to the black condition. Today's NABJ convention attendees are looking for jobs, networking opportunities and, if available, the opportunity to learn new skills. What they do not seem concerned with, however, is using their time to engage in discussions about the black condition. This is the generation marked by a 2007 Pew study, one that suggested today's generation of middle-class African Americans believe their interests are more closely tied to whites – or in this case, the white press – than the larger African American community.

Combined, the organization's issues of political economy and middle-class apathy directly suggest that NABJ has fallen into a state of incorporation. As noted by Richard Smith, incorporated organizations continue to “work within the system” for change, but nevertheless lose the ability to influence the system, in part because they have been coopted by the very institutions they seek to critique, either through financial support, board infiltration or some other intrusion that limits the organization's ability to conduct activism. Incorporation does not destroy the organization. Since the organization, as a result of its longer legacy of activism, maintains some degree of social capital, the organization can still engage in activities that resemble counterpublic actions. But as Smith argues, these activities are “moribund and largely irrelevant,” leading said organization to operate “more as relic of the past than instrument of the

future,” (Smith 1996, 396). In its own unique way, NABJ may have become victimized by incorporation. Without a flow of revenues from media corporations NABJ was forced to cut its scholarship programs. It opted to change the editorial direction of the *NABJ Journal*. It was also forced to change the focus of its Media Institute, which was designed as professional development program for NABJ members, to a revenue-generating venture geared toward issues of significance to corporate sponsors.

NABJ may have also suffered from another form of cooptation, with regard to efforts to diversify newsrooms. Gwyneth Mellinger, in her discussion of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, suggested that as a result of whiteness, the newspaper industry in particular was never truly interested in increasing diversity within newsroom (Mellinger 2013). There is no reason to suggest her claim is false. What her work doesn't consider, however, is the idea that the Goals 2000 survey, and subsequent efforts by the mainstream media to engage in “in-house” advocacy of newsroom diversity, was designed to protect the mainstream industry from criticism by NABJ and the Unity coalition members. Many corporations, by the mid-1990s, had developed their own programs designed to increase diversity within newsrooms. Corporations that developed such programs include programs Down Jones, the Knight Foundation, The Poynter Institute, Gannett and the *New York Times*. Not only did such efforts help shelter the mainstream industry from criticism, they may have negated the need for these companies to support NABJ initiatives. Through their efforts, they are providing opportunities for journalists of color. Thus, there is less need, in theory, to support NABJ.

NABJ has also suffered from the cooptation of its mission by other media advocacy groups, a wound that was self-inflicted, due to its failure to actively critique institutional racism in the media. At the same time NABJ was increasing its reliance on corporate donations, and

decreasing its direct efforts to engage in media monitoring, a host of upstart media advocacy organizations stepped in to fill the void. These groups include the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, which rebooted Richard Prince's *Journal-isms* column, Robert McChesney's Free Press ("After Imus: What You can Do."), Malkia Cyril's Center For Media Justice (Cyril 2005, 97-104), The Center for Racial Justice Innovation's *Colorlines* magazine and other nonprofits (Apollon et al. 2014), notably the left-leaning organization Media Matters. These organizations additionally have taken revenues that could have been acquired by NABJ, had it maintained its media monitoring efforts. Moreover, representatives from these organizations are more likely to be interviewed on issues related to media policy and institutional racism. Additionally, its decision to leave Unity: Journalists of Color may have marginalized the organization even further within the media advocacy community. Rather than share resources, NABJ opted to leave an organization it helped to create, one that arguably represented the first major example of collaboration within the larger media advocacy movement. As Arthur Fennell warned the organization of in 2004, NABJ has become largely irrelevant within not only the mainstream public sphere, it has conceded its throne as the primary agent of media criticism within the black public sphere.

All of these forces have worked to stifle NABJ as an organization. Without an active research agenda, without an active monitoring agenda and without a solid connection to organizations that actually engage in monitoring, NABJ has not been able to present evidence proving that the lack of diversity in newsrooms leads to racist coverage. They have not been able to systematically demonstrate that the news still covers African Americans in a stereotypical light, nor have they systematically demonstrated that African American reporters are in fact mistreated within mainstream newsrooms. Instead, notably over the past 15 years, NABJ's

appeals for diversity, more often than not, have focused on the failure of the mainstream industry to meet the ASNE parity standard set in 1978. A goal was set. The industry failed. Thus the industry must work harder to honor its promise, the logic of this argument surmised.

This argument may have worked when there was absolutely no diversity in newsrooms. This argument may have found receptive ears when the industry was booming, as it was through much of the 1990s. That time, however, has passed. Without evidence demonstrating that the failure to diversify newsrooms is leading to poor coverage, NABJ cannot to force movement on diversity issues from today's news industry, notably within the context of a so-called post-racial society. When journalists of all creeds and colors, under an economy partly managed by an African American president, are also losing jobs within newsrooms, NABJ must bring more to the table than an argument that diversity is important "just because." It must present solid, routine evidence that racial hiring practices are indeed having a negative impact on news coverage and the morale of African Americans within newsrooms. To advocate on behalf of more newsroom diversity, they need the smoking gun presented by media monitoring research.

## **10.2 Future Research**

As noted, this preliminary study, one of diagnostic journalism, did not rely upon interviews. It has, however, developed a strong framework for the continued interrogation of the organization. Questions still remain on just how much influence corporations have had on NABJ's advocacy efforts. More could be known about relationship NABJ has held over the years with NNPA and other African American press organizations. Moreover, a more detailed analysis is needed of NABJ's history, notably the influence pre-NABJ media organizations had on the organization's development. Interviews would not only need to include founders. It would need to include past editors and contributors of the *NABJ Journal*, members of NNPA,

members of other Unity coalition members who have dealt closely with NABJ, and other members who, while not holding positions of power, have nonetheless proved influential in the development of the organization.

This study also projects to other areas within the activist media landscape. As noted, many media advocacy organizations have appeared over the past 20 years. No known researchers have looked into the impact these organizations have had within the public sphere. Additionally, the incorporation of NABJ may serve as a potential harbinger for what could happen to other advocacy organizations as they age. While such organizations take pride in not accepting corporate funding now, they could very well in the future suffer from the same issues of incorporation, as they are related to charitable organizations, wealthy progressive donors and others funding these organizations within a poor market economy.

Additional research could provide organizations like NABJ with a plan on surviving within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As noted within the Knight Foundation's Informing Communities study("Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age.") The explosion of digital technology, coupled with the disintegration of many elements of the traditional mainstream media, has opened a series of entrepreneurial opportunities for various media makers, including those interested in the creation of nonprofit media and media education. Additionally, this moment has created opportunities for media practitioners to better serve working-class citizens of color, by providing, through this technology, news and information that better represents their interests within the mainstream public sphere. Should NABJ choose to rebrand itself, and begin to embrace efforts directed at challenging institutional racism in all forms within the media, this moment could prove momentous for NABJ. It could allow the organization to rebrand itself, expand NABJ's public profile and acquire additional sources of

revenue for its coffers.

Changes, however, must be made if NABJ seeks to remain relevant as a civil rights organization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Should the organization chose to do so, NABJ must, through a new strategic plan, seek to utilize advancements in media technology and seek out partnerships with other media advocacy groups. If NABJ wishes to shake things up, and truly honor the legacy of Reggie Bryant and other founders who have passed, no better moment of evolution may ever exist than the present day.

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