MEDIA·2070

An Invitation to Dream Up Media Reparations

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AN INVITATION TO DREAM UP MEDIA REPARATIONS

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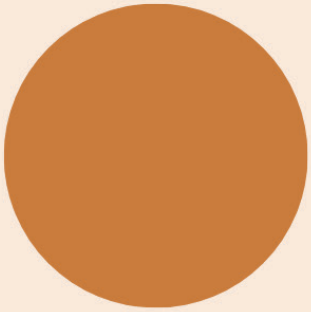
TRIGGER WARNING

There are numerous stories in this essay that explore the harms the news media have inflicted on the Black community. While these stories may be difficult or painful to read, they are not widely known, and they need to be.

ABOUT TEAM MEDIA 2070

This essay was co-created by a collective of Black staff at Free Press. The use of “our,” “we” and “us” throughout this essay reflects that.



To try to foretell the future
without studying history
is like trying to learn to read
without bothering to learn the alphabet.[1]

—Octavia Butler

A Snapshot of Anti-Black Harms

MEDIA AND RACE IN EACH CENTURY

1704

The Boston News-Letter, the nation's first continuously published newspaper, is the first paper involved in the slave trade: It runs a slave ad less than a month after its founding. The ad, from a local merchant, seeks a purchaser of "two Negro men" and a "Negro Woman & Child." The paper's publisher, John Campbell, acts as a broker.

1898

In **North Carolina,** the white-supremacist publisher and editor of Raleigh's **News & Observer,** Josephus Daniels, helps lead a coup that overthrows Wilmington's multiracial government — the only armed overthrow of a local government in the nation's history.

1917

After a white policeman attacks a Black woman in Houston, a riot that kills at least 15 people ensues. **A Black newspaper, The San Antonio Inquirer, publishes a letter from a Black woman who praises Black soldiers** involved in the riot.

The government arrests G.W. Bouldin, the paper's editor, and charges him with espionage — even though he was out of town when the letter was published. In 1919, he receives a two-year prison sentence and spends about a year incarcerated. Meanwhile, 13 Black soldiers who participated in the riot are hung, and 41 other soldiers are given life sentences.

1957

In Jackson, Mississippi, the White Citizens' Council produces a TV program — Citizens' Council Forum — to "thwart" the fight for integration. The program airs on WLBT-TV, an NBC affiliate, and receives free airtime since the station's general manager is a member of the Council. The program also receives funding from the Mississippi state government — which means that taxpayer dollars from Black residents help subsidize it.

1995

The Republican-controlled Congress passes legislation that **ends the FCC's minority tax-certificate program** — which since 1978 had helped increase broadcast-station ownership by people of color from less than 1 percent to 3 percent.

2017

A Color Of Change and Family Story study finds that **Black families represent 59 percent of stories about poverty** in news and opinion outlets like CNN and Fox News — even though they make up just 27 percent of poor families in the country.

Since the colonial era,

media outlets have used their platforms to inflict harm on Black people through weaponized narratives that promote Black inferiority and portray Black people as threats to society.

Special thanks to artist Micah Wilson
for the Media 2070 cover illustration.

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INTRODUCTION

We are living through historic times.

The racial-justice uprisings that have been happening across the country and throughout the world since the public execution of George Floyd in May 2020 are both inspiring and heartbreaking.[2]

This insurgency is happening at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed — once more for everyone who cares to see — many of the societal inequities that have ensured that Black lives don't matter.

Fueled by Black death and by those who refuse to accept it, the public uprisings have forced a reckoning in this country.[3] Powerful institutions, from governments to museums to universities to newsrooms, are being challenged to address their own anti-Black racism.[4] The institutions and systems people are protesting have all contributed to the prevention of Black freedom and liberation.

This essay documents how anti-Black racism has always been part of our media system's DNA. On the pages that follow, we explore the harms inflicted on Black bodies by our nation's white-dominant media companies. We also examine the harms inherent in government policies that consolidated media power with white owners and made anti-Black racism a central fixture of our media system since colonial times.

In this essay, we provide historical and contemporary examples of the active role white media institutions have played in promoting and perpetuating anti-Black hate and violence on their platforms. Since the colonial era, U.S. media organizations and institutions have protected a racial-caste system and in some cases allowed their platforms to be used as recruitment tools for white supremacists.[5] All of this has contributed to the death of Black people.

Media organizations were complicit in the slave trade and profited off of chattel slavery; a powerful newspaper publisher helped lead the deadly overthrow of a local government in Wilmington, North Carolina, where Black people held power; racist journalism has led to countless lynchings; southern broadcast stations have opposed integration; and, in the 21st century, powerful social-media and tech companies are allowing white supremacists to use their platforms to organize, fundraise, recruit and spread hate.[6]

We also tell the stories of how Black activists and journalists have challenged racist media institutions and policies — despite the violence they have faced for the radical act of speaking up in a country where Black people have yet to fully realize their ability to speak freely.

This essay is a living document.

The examples we provide are far from comprehensive — there's still so much we need to learn about how the white media have created and perpetuated the myth of Black inferiority. And there is still so much we need to learn about how the Black community has fought for a just media system and the health and well being of our communities. In particular there's much to uncover about the work of Black women and Black queer people, and Black transgender and gender-nonconforming activists and journalists — all of whose stories often go untold due to the forces of patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia.

While this essay makes the argument for media reparations for Black people, any group that has been harmed by our government or by corporations has the right to demand reparations to reconcile and repair the injuries caused to their communities. Colonialism, capitalism and imperialism have been destructive forces for people of color in the United States, starting with our nation's Indigenous communities.

We named this essay — and the larger project we're launching — Media 2070. And for the purpose of Media 2070, we define "Black" as the identity lived by people of the African diaspora.

Over the past century, there have been multiple commissions that have investigated the root causes of racial-justice uprisings — and examined the news media's role. The 2020 uprisings have resulted in Black journalists and other journalists of color publicly challenging racism within their own newsrooms.

This essay — and project — is an invitation to dream of the media we want to see 50 years from now. It is a call to reconcile and repair the harms that institutional and structural racism have caused.

We have to imagine this new world, specifically a new democracy, because there's nothing certain about a democracy in this country, now or in the future — especially when those in power feel threatened by our nation's demographic shifts and by growing resistance to the notions of power set by the colonizers of this land.

Tarso Luís Ramos, who studies white nationalism and authoritarianism, put it this way:

> **In the short human history of the modern nation state, it is hard to identify an example of when a democracy survived the transition in which the dominant racial, ethnic or religious group became a numerical minority. More typically, democracy is sacrificed in order to maintain the cultural, economic and political dominance of that class.[7]**

As people of color are expected to make up the majority of the U.S. population in a little more than two decades, our racist president is encouraging the rise and further normalization of white nationalism.[8] And as we look to our future, we must grapple with the question of whether it is possible to achieve a multiracial democracy in the United States when democracy has never been fully realized for Black people.

What we do know is that a sustainable, multiracial democracy will not happen without a struggle. And it will not happen until we address our nation's shameful, racist legacy and imagine that transformation is necessary and possible. But that transformation will not take place without reconciliation and repair.

And media reparations are central to achieving a fully realized, multiracial democracy since our nation's news media have historically weaponized narratives to further the political goals of protecting and preserving a white-racial hierarchy.

We recognize that there are many people who are the keepers of our stories — elders, activists, artists, technologists and more. It will take all of us to collect a more complete record that documents the history of harms our nation's media institutions and policies have inflicted. At their best, policies determine whether institutions operating within a media system (or industry) are accountable to the communities they serve. And like other systems that exist in our country — from education to criminal justice — the media system was not designed to help or uplift Black people.

What kind of media system does our community deserve once we reconcile and repair the harms caused by media companies and policies?

Before we can achieve the transformation we need, we have to dream of a world we deserve that does not yet exist.

That is why with the release of this paper, we seek to work in a Black-led coalition that is abundant with journalists, technologists, artists, activists, policymakers, media-makers, organizers and scholars, including those who have long fought for reparations. Together, we can advocate for media institutions to make reparations to the Black community and for regulators and lawmakers to make reparations for policies that have baked inequities into our media system. Together, we can win cultural, corporate, philanthropic and governmental media reparations.

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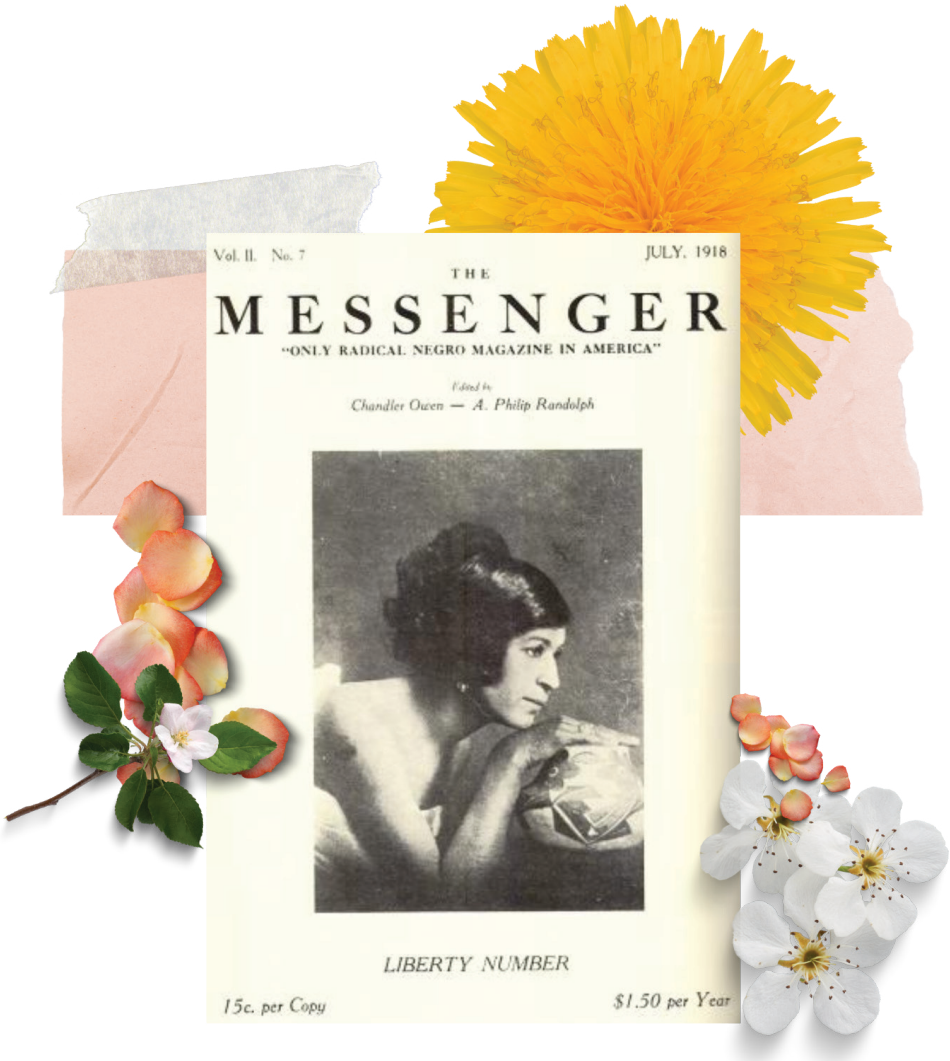
> **The people must know before they can act, and there is no educator to compare with the press.[9]**
> **—Ida B. Wells**



The Messenger

The Messenger was a political and literary magazine by and for Black people that was important to the flowering of the Harlem Renaissance and initially promoted a socialist political view. Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph co-founded The Messenger in New York City in 1917. Image: public domain; source: Wikipedia; accessed on Sept. 26, 2020; additional design: Team Media 2070

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7. "Is America Possible: Building a Multiracial Democracy in an Era of Division," plenary session, Facing Race 2018 conference, Nov. 10, 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=J7wxxKTq8ws&feature=emb_logo (Ramos' comments start at the 19-minute 30-second mark); bio of Tarso Luís Ramos, executive director of Political Research Associates, accessed on Aug. 17, 2020: https://www.politicalresearch.org/bio/tarso-luis-ramos

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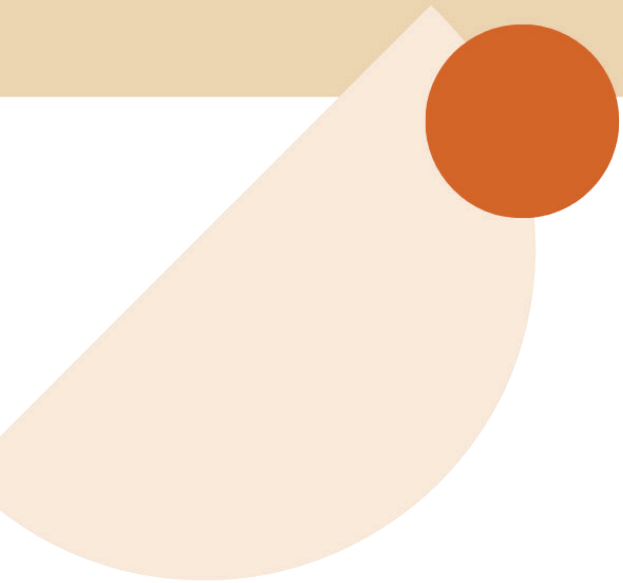
And to guide you as you engage with this essay,
we offer this incantation:



our souls are woven
in stories past to future:
may there be healing.

may this work exist as a sibling to everything else
necessary for full, holistic reparations.
may it exist as a relative of writing and movement at the intersections of media, rematriation, decolonization, and everything
else necessary to create a future full of holistic, grounded stories about those of us
who hold generational ancestral harm.

may there be no more
journalism written with
the blood of Black lives.

—alicia bell

"Chicago Beach" by Edzed Photography

I. A Day at the Beach

THE STORY OF EUGENE WILLIAMS

Eugene Williams was 17 years old in 1919 and worked at a local grocery store.[1]

His parents John and Luella had ventured from their birthplaces in South Carolina and Georgia to the big city of Chicago, with a young Eugene in tow. They likely rented a room when they arrived and were excited to start a new life with their little boy away from the Jim Crow South.[2]

And in 1919, during a typical hot Chicago summer, their teenage son and his friends decided to build a raft.[3]

Eugene's friend John Turner Harris said later that the raft was about 14 by 9 feet, "a tremendous thing."[4] One can only imagine the anticipation Eugene felt as he arrived at Lake Michigan near the 25th Street beach where Black people were allowed, with his friends and their great raft.[5]

Eugene was sailing his vessel when witnesses say he drifted into the unofficial whites-only waters near 29th Street. That's when a 24-year-old white man standing on the beach threw rocks at Eugene and his raft. The attack caused Eugene to drown.[6]

Police arrived at the scene and arrested a Black man rather than Eugene's attacker. A fight broke out, and the violence escalated into rioting across Chicago.[7]

Newspapers paid little attention to Eugene's life. Only the local Black-owned newspaper, *The Chicago Defender,* posted a photograph of him in the weeks following his murder.[8]

Eugene's father died just over a year and a half later, with his death certificate listing "aortic regurgitation" as the cause — some may regard his death as heartbreak. In 1923, the city awarded Eugene's mother $4,500 as compensation for the loss of her only child.[9]

A multiracial body called the Chicago Commission on Race Relations was formed to investigate the causes for the riots in the hopes of preventing them from happening again.[10]

In 1922, the commission issued a report that examined the factors that contributed to the riot, including the role of the press.[11]

It found that the city's white newspapers had falsely spread rumors that white people made up a majority of those who were killed and injured during the riot. In reality, Black people accounted for 23 of the 38 people who were killed and two-thirds of the more than 500 people who were injured.[12]

And the white press also sparked fear by falsely claiming that heavily armed Black residents were attacking white residents.[13] *The Chicago Daily News* quoted Alderman Joseph McDonough, who called on white residents to "defend ourselves if the city authorities won't protect us."[14]

McDonough also claimed that bombs were going off and that he saw "white men and women running through the streets dragging children by the hands and carrying babies in their arms. Frightened white men told me the police captains had just rushed through the district crying, 'For God's sake, arm; they are coming; we cannot hold them.'" [15]

But the commission found no evidence of "any bombs going off during the riot, nor of police captains warning the white people to arm, nor of any fear by whites of a Negro invasion."[16]

The commission studied both white and Black press coverage of the tragedy. It urged the Black press to be more accurate in its reporting on racial incidents, to abandon "sensational headlines and articles" and educate "Negro readers" on the "available means and opportunities of adjusting themselves and their fellows into more harmonious relations with their white neighbors and fellow citizens."[17]

Meanwhile, the commission found that Chicago's white press primarily depicted the city's Black residents through stories about crime:

> **Constant identification of Negroes with certain definite crimes could have no other effect than to stamp the entire Negro group in the public mind as generally criminal. This in turn contributes to the already existing belief that Negroes as a group are more likely to be criminal than others and thus they are arrested more readily than others.[18]**

The commission called for white newspapers to "apply the same standards of accuracy, fairness and sense of proportion with the avoidance of exaggeration in publishing news about Negroes as about whites" and to "exercise great caution in dealing with unverified reports of crime of Negroes against white women and should avoid the designation of trivial fights as race riots."[19]

It also recommended "capitalization of the word 'Negro' in racial designation and avoidance of the word 'nigger,' as contemptuous and needlessly provocative."[20]

Nearly half a century later, the racial uprisings that took place in the "long, hot summer" of 1967 in Detroit, Newark and more than 150 other cities across the country resulted in President Lyndon B. Johnson forming the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders — known as the Kerner Commission — to examine the root causes of the uprisings in an effort to prevent this from happening again.[21]

In 1968, the Kerner Commission released its report, which included a chapter focused on how white news outlets contributed to the country's racial division and unrest. It noted that "far too often, the press acts and talks about Negroes as if Negroes don't read the newspapers or watch television, give birth, marry, die, and go to PTA meetings."[22]

And now, a little more than 50 years after the historic Kerner Commission report, nationwide and international uprisings have erupted following the public execution of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man who was killed in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, by a white police officer who pressed his knee on Floyd's neck for more than 8 minutes — even after Floyd lost consciousness.[23]

The 2020 uprisings are again forcing our nation to reckon with systemic racism. Black Lives Matter activists are calling for the defunding of police departments, protesters are pulling down statues of Confederate soldiers, and many companies and organizations are feeling compelled to make performative public statements in support of Black lives. Black reporters are publicly calling on the white media outlets they work for to reckon with the harms they have caused to Black newsroom employees and the broader Black community due to systemic racism in their news operations.[24]

From weaponized racist narratives to media policies that prevent us from owning and controlling our own stories, the media system continues to harm Black people. It is beyond time that we reckon with how white media organizations have harmed our communities throughout U.S. history.

And as with any harm, the next discussion must focus on reconciliation and repair — also known as reparations. As Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones wrote earlier this year:

> **If black lives are to truly matter in America, this nation must move beyond slogans and symbolism. Citizens don't inherit just the glory of their nation, but its wrongs too. A truly great country does not ignore or excuse its sins. It confronts them and then works to make them right. If we are to be redeemed, if we are to live up to the magnificent ideals upon which we were founded, we must do what is just.**
>
> **It is time for this country to pay its debt. It is time for reparations.[25]**

"Slaves during slavery in the South. Photograph display on Gullah culture at Boone Hall Plantation."
By Flickr user denisbin; additional design by Team Media 2070

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EUGENE WILLIAMS

Source: Chicago Defender, Chicago Public Libary
Accessed on September 26, 2020

II. Media 2070

AN INVITATION TO DREAM

Pause.

Imagine it's 2070. There's a world where Black people have received reparations. It's been years since anyone's had to lobby for them.

What does the world look, feel and sound like?

What new kinds of joy are there that perhaps no one thought were possible? What new innovations have been created? What knowledge has emerged that never would have existed without reparations being made real?

This paper is an invitation into that dream. It is a recounting of harm, an attempt at defining a debt that is owed. This is a living document, a call awaiting a response, a question with many possible answers.

The question we want to ask here is this: How can the media better serve Black people once reparations are real? We know from the history of Black struggle that the basic human rights we have fought for and won have improved the lives of everyday people across all races who also have been harmed by predatory government policies and predatory capitalism.

As the issue of reparations has gained greater political attention in recent years, the government and institutions that benefited from the harms and exploitation of Black people must take part in a "process of making amends for a wrong" they have committed.[1] And one area they need to make amends for is the harm they've inflicted on Black communities.

Journalism and other forms of media create the narratives that shift culture. Culture is the forest floor where policy either dies or flourishes. For that reason, media reparations are crucial to repair the harm the government caused via policies that created structural racism in the media industry — policies that have benefited white-controlled media institutions that in turn have defended, reinforced and upheld our nation's white-racial hierarchy.

Any strategy to address journalism's future must reconcile and repair these harms. Individual news organizations must advocate for systemic change while taking an active role inside their communities and their own operations to offset the impacts of their history of anti-Black racism. And lawmakers and regulators must adopt policies that transform the media system so that Black ownership of media outlets is equitable and abundant.

But to do this, we have to begin by imagining. Imagine something new, even if it doesn't yet feel possible.

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III. Modern Calls for Reparations for Slavery

FROM LEGISLATION TO ACTIVISM

Over the past several years, the struggle for reparations has received renewed national attention.

The House Judiciary Committee held a hearing in June 2019 on legislation — sponsored by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D–Texas) — that calls for the creation of a commission to examine reparations for Black people to remedy the harms of slavery and historic discrimination.[1] Rep. Jackson Lee has continued the legislative struggle that Rep. John Conyers embarked on when he first introduced reparations legislation in 1989 and did so in every congressional session until he retired in 2017.[2]

Sen. Cory Booker, then a Democratic presidential candidate, introduced a Senate companion bill in 2019. And other former Democratic presidential candidates— as well as 2020 Democratic nominee Joe Biden — have expressed support for studying reparations.[3]

Cities across the country are also considering reparations. In Evanston, Illinois, the city council passed a resolution in 2019 to pay reparations to the city's Black population through a sales tax on cannabis. The city has created a reparations fund for the $10 million it plans to collect over the course of a decade; this money will pay Black residents who lived in the city from 1919 to 1969 — or their descendants — $25,000 to buy a house. The city's Black residents, according to Evanston Alderman Rue Simmons, made up more than 70 percent of local marijuana arrests despite making up less than 17 percent of the population.[4]

It's important to note, however, that the contemporary reparations movement is the continuation of a long struggle.

Nkechi Taifa is an attorney and longtime reparations activist. "I feel it critical that the populace understands that the demand for reparations in the U.S. for unpaid labor during the enslavement era and post-slavery discrimination is not novel or new," she wrote in a column recounting the long struggle for reparations. "Although there have been hills and valleys in national attention to the issue, there has been no substantial period of time when the call for redress was not passionately voiced."[5]

The "first formal record" for reparations, Taifa noted, took place in 1783 when Belinda Royall petitioned the Massachusetts General Assembly to request a pension from the estate of her former enslaver and ended up receiving 15 pounds and 12 shillings.[6]

In the late 1890s, the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, founded by Callie House and Rev. Isaiah Dickerson, called for "compensation for slavery from federal agencies."[7] At one point, the group had a membership that numbered in the hundreds of thousands.[8]

"Queen Mother" Audley Moore played a central role in leading and influencing the modern reparations movement. Born in 1898, Moore was the president of the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women when she "presented a petition against genocide and for self-determination, land, and reparations to the United Nations" in 1957 and 1959.[9] She remained "active in every major reparations movement until her death" in 1997.[10]

In 1987, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) was founded "for the purpose of broadening the base of support for the long-standing reparations movement."[11]

A year later, Congress passed legislation that compensated more than 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated in detention camps during World War II. They received a formal apology and $20,000 each.[12]

In 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates' landmark *Atlantic* essay — "The Case for Reparations" — brought renewed attention to the long struggle. It came during the onset of the Black Lives Matter movement, when the public was becoming more receptive to the idea.[13]

And new groups have also called for reparations, such as the National African American Reparations Commission, which was created in 2015, and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), which released a reparations toolkit in 2019 to educate the public on why reparations are "essential" for Black people.[14]

The M4BL toolkit defines reparations as an "act or process of making amends for a wrong"[15] and lists the many harms the Black community are owed reparations for, including Jim Crow, mass incarceration, redlining and educational inequities. The toolkit also cites the "myths of Black inferiority" created to "justify enslavement and its inherent violence and denial of human rights."[16]

This mythology, a foundation for anti-Black racism, didn't appear out of nowhere. The dominant white-controlled news media and institutions — through art, film and music — have played a central role in creating and perpetuating these myths.

While many media institutions claim objectivity, journalism is an institution that shapes perception and belief.

"The media system that exists in the United States is a white-led system," says Malkia Devich-Cyril, the founding director of MediaJustice. "It's not only dominated by white people, but by white-centered ideas and approaches, just in its basic structures, in the simple fact of its demographics."[17]

And as we show in the pages that follow, both owners and makers of media throughout U.S. history have used their powerful platforms to enshrine anti-Black racism into our culture — and have also participated directly in discrimination and abuse.

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Queen Mother Audley Moore (1898-1997)

Description: The Black Women Oral History Project interviewed 72 African American women between 1976 and 1981. With support from the Schlesinger Library, the project recorded a cross section of women who had made significant contributions to American society during the first half of the 20th century.

Photograph taken by Judith Sedwick
Source: Flickr user Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America
Additional design: Team Media 2070

Modern Calls for Reparations for Slavery

A TIMELINE OF BLACK RESISTANCE

FEB 1783

The "first formal record" for reparations takes place when Belinda Royall petitions the Massachusetts General Court to request a pension from her former enslaver's estate. Belinda receives 15 pounds and 12 shillings.

NOV 1898

The first annual convention of the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association is held in Nashville, Tennessee, from Nov. 28 to Dec. 1, 1898. The group reaches a membership of hundreds of thousands calling for "compensation for slavery from federal agencies."

1957 and 1959

"Queen Mother" Audley Moore, president of the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women, presents a petition to the United Nations against genocide and for self-determination, land, and reparations.

OCT 1966

The Black Panthers issue their 10-point program, in which they demand compensation for stolen wages and genocide: "the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities."

AUG 1988

Congress passes legislation that compensates more than 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry who were incarcerated in detention camps during World War II. They receive a formal apology and $20,000 each.

Image: Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs

JAN 1989

Rep. John Conyers (D–Michigan) introduces H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. This legislation calls for the creation of a commission to study and submit a formal report to Congress and the American people with its findings and recommendations on remedies and reparation proposals for African Americans. Conyers reintroduces the measure in every congressional session until his retirement in 2017.

JUNE 2019

The House Judiciary Committee holds a hearing on H.R. 40 — now sponsored by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D–Texas). Sen. Cory Booker (D–New Jersey), then a Democratic presidential candidate, had introduced a Senate companion bill earlier in the year.

JULY 2019

Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) releases a reparations toolkit in 2019 to educate the public: "We demand reparations for past and continuing harms. The government, responsible corporations and other institutions that have profited off of the harm they have inflicted on Black people — from colonialism to slavery through food and housing redlining, mass incarceration, and surveillance — must repair the harm done."

NOV 2019

The city council In Evanston, Illinois, passes a resolution to pay reparations to the city's Black population through a sales tax on cannabis. The city subsequently creates a reparations fund for the $10 million it plans to collect over the course of a decade.

Of note: The city's Black residents reportedly made up more than 70% of local marijuana arrests despite being less than 17% of the population.

IV. The Case for Media Reparations

ENVISIONING, CREATING AND PRACTICING A NEW MEDIA SYSTEM

The fight for a just media system — for media justice — is a critical racial-justice issue.

Like all other systems in the United States, the creation of the media system was never intended to include or serve Black people. And it certainly wasn't meant to help or support Black people in creating self-determined communities and futures. While some individual journalists and newsrooms such as Outlier Media (Detroit),[1] MLK50 (Memphis)[2] and Scalawag (the South)[3] have begun to create racially just, liberated futures — abundant with new systems and policies — we need structural change to truly move forward. And that means envisioning, creating and practicing a new media system.

The white-dominant press has used the power of racist narratives to subjugate, punish and control Black bodies and perpetuate white supremacy — both intentionally and unintentionally. Controlling narrative is about maintaining power. And that power has been wielded against Black and other Indigenous and colonized people to launch disinformation media campaigns from colonial times to the present.

"White-dominated media has been a part of the systemic oppression of Black people for as long as we've been here and as long as there has been a media system in place," said Sara Lomax-Reese, president and CEO of WURD Radio, one of the few Black-owned talk-radio stations in the country.[4]

Ensuring our media system is equitable for Black people is essential to dismantling the myth of Black inferiority — and subverting institutional and structural racism in our society. Discussions about "diversity" in the media tend to focus solely on issues of inclusion and representation, oftentimes in regards to hiring and coverage.

While diversity efforts inside newsrooms and media outlets are important, they alone are not enough to achieve a liberatory media future for Black people.

"I do think that what we have to recognize is that we can't mistake presence for power," said Color Of Change President Rashad Robinson. "Power is the ability to change the rules. Presence is not bad, but when we mistake presence for power, we can sometimes think something has happened that hasn't actually happened."[5]

So how can the fight for media reparations change the rules and create a media system that serves the Black community's news-and-information needs? We can start by considering these questions:

- What would it look like if we had a media system where Black people were able to create and control the distribution of our own stories and narratives?
- What would it look like if Black people had an abundance of Black-led news organizations serving our communities?
- What if our stories were covered by journalists who understand and are a part of our communities?
- What would it look like for Black people to create new narratives that humanize our communities rather than dehumanize us?
- What would it look like if media policies ensured that Black communities had equitable ownership and control of our own local and national media outlets and over our own online media platforms?
- What if our media system built autonomy and self-determination for resource-rich Black communities rather than extracting wealth for white media owners?

These are just some of the many questions to consider as we fight to ensure that the harms inflicted on Black people — and our struggle for a liberated narrative — aren't forgotten or lost to history.

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What if our media system built autonomy and self-determination for resource-rich Black communities rather than extracting wealth for white media owners?

V. How the Media Profited from and Participated in Slavery

THE ORIGINAL SIN

There is so much that we have to grapple with in understanding how our nation's white-controlled media system has harmed Black people. And it's important that we start from the beginning.

Since colonial times, our nation's media companies have used their platforms to surveil, criminalize, dehumanize and control Black bodies. Many of our nation's first newspapers laid the foundation for anti-Black racism in our country and in our media system.

Early newspaper printers (who often were also the publishers) took part in human trafficking by participating in and profiting from the slave trade with the publication of thousands of slave ads. Profits from the enterprise of slavery helped keep the earliest newspapers afloat.[1]

As Smith College Visiting Assistant Professor Jordan E. Taylor explains in a 2020 essay, profits from slave ads spread ideas that increased support for a revolution:

> **The slave trade stimulated revolutionary politics by providing a valuable revenue stream for newspaper printing. The texts, information, and ideas that catalyzed American Revolutionary — and then national — politics did not spread on their own. Their circulation depended on the ongoing profitability of the printing business. Although slave notices comprised just a portion of a printer's income, eighteenth-century newspapers operated at such fine margins that some might have needed this advertising revenue to survive.[2]**

Taylor's essay focuses on the active role many newspapers played in human trafficking: "Advertisers used printers as brokers and the print shop as a public space for transactions."[3] Thousands of ads that sold slaves contained the phrase "enquire of the printer."[4] This meant that the printer acted as the broker between the buyer and the seller. And it meant that newspapers were active participants in the slave trade and the enslavement of Black people. As Taylor notes:

> **Eighteenth-century Americans, as well as some subsequent historians, have celebrated the printing press as a vehicle of liberation and freedom. But northern or southern, American newspaper printers were deeply embedded in the political economy of slavery. Without newspaper printers, slavery still would have thrived in North America. Yet 'enquire of the printer' slave advertisements improved the profitability and flexibility of the slave trade while integrating it into the readers' daily lives. Printers' business calculations included the trafficking of thousands of enslaved humans and the destruction of many families.[5]**

The Boston News-Letter, our nation's first continuously published newspaper, was also the first paper involved in the slave trade: It ran a slave ad less than a month after its founding in 1704. The ad, from a local merchant, sought a purchaser of "two Negro men" and a "Negro Woman & Child."[6] The paper's publisher, John Campbell, acted as a broker.[7]

During his 18 years as publisher, Campbell published at least 66 slave ads with "enquire of the printer" in the notice. These ads accounted for the sale of as many as 100 enslaved people. And many of the slave ads involved the selling of Indigenous people.[8]

A 2002 journal article stated that the *Boston Gazette*, founded in 1719, published more than 1,100 slave-for-sale ads for the purchase of an estimated 2,000 people.[9]

Meanwhile, Benjamin Franklin purchased the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729 and was the "first printer outside of Boston to broker slave sales regularly."[10] Even though he spoke out against slavery later in his life, Franklin owned slaves.[11]

As Taylor notes, "during the thirty-seven years that Franklin published the *Gazette,* it printed at least 277 advertisements" — 113 with the phrase "enquire of the printer" — "offering at least 308 people for sale."[12] Taylor also notes that "the text of a few advertisements" suggests that printers like Franklin may have "handled slave sales personally."[13]

It's estimated that the more than 200,000 runaway-slave ads that newspapers published represented just a small percentage of the actual number of enslaved Black people who attempted to escape.[14] These ads included a great deal of information — or data, to use today's terminology — about runaway slaves, such as their height, weight and age, the languages they spoke, and whether they could read or write. Many ads contained descriptions of physical marks that slaveowners had inflicted on the bodies of those they enslaved.[15]

Edward E. Baptist, a Cornell University history professor, told *The Washington Post* in 2017 that runaway-slave ads were "the tweets of the master class" that served to "alert the surveillance system that was the entire body of white people in the South to help this individual recover this human property."[16]

And the nation's so-called founding fathers were among the slave owners to activate this surveillance system.

George Washington placed a runaway-slave ad in the *Maryland Gazette* in 1761 calling for the capture of four men he enslaved, including two men he bought from an "African ship" two years earlier.[17] Washington also placed a runaway-slave ad in *The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser* in 1796, while he was still president. He offered a reward for the capture of Ona (Oney) Judge, who was his wife Martha's maid in Philadelphia's President's House, a precursor to the White House. Judge was never captured.[18]

Thomas Jefferson placed a runaway-slave ad in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1769 and offered a reward for a Black man he enslaved:[19]

Before he became president, Andrew Jackson published an 1804 runaway-slave ad in the *Tennessee Gazette* that offered "ten dollars extra, for every hundred lashes any person will give him, to the amount of three hundred."[20]

Many prominent newspaper chains such as Advance Publications, Gannett and Tribune Publishing — as well as companies like Knight Ridder and Media General that were absorbed into larger corporations over the past two decades — bought newspapers that had once published slave ads.[21]

In 2000, *The Hartford Courant*, a Tribune Publishing property founded in 1764 that is the country's oldest continuously published newspaper, apologized for running slave ads.[22] It did so in an article that confronted the paper's racist history.

"Unfortunately, the practice of advertising for slaves was commonplace in newspapers prior to abolition," said *Courant* spokesman Ken DeLisa in 2000. "We are not proud of that part of our history and apologize for any involvement by our predecessors at *The Courant* in the terrible practice of buying and selling human beings that took place in previous centuries."

The Courant also acknowledged that the "views of early editors were undeniably racist." The paper pointed as an example to

its former owner, Thomas Day, who bought the paper in 1855. Day once wrote in an editorial that "we believe the Caucasian variety of the human species superior to the Negro variety; and we would breed the best stock."[23]

The Courant's apology for its slave ads and its acknowledgement of its previous owners' white-supremacist views shows that it's never too late for a news organization to reconcile with its past — and correct the record for the harms they caused to Black people for generations.

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VI. The Power of Acknowledging and Apologizing

TOWARD REALIZING THE DEBT

Since the colonial era, media outlets have used their platforms to inflict harm on Black bodies through weaponizing narratives that promote Black inferiority and portray Black people as threats to society.

Early colonial newspapers, such as the *Boston News-Letter*, depicted Black people as criminals.

In calling for more white indentured servants, the paper claimed in 1706 that the local Black population was "much addicted to Stealing, Lying and Purloining." And in its coverage of New York's 1712 slave revolt, the paper wrote that Black people were arrested because they "knew of the Late Conspiracy to Murder the Christians." The arrests resulted in the execution of many of the uprising's leaders.[1]

These types of narratives are still a primary feature of coverage of Black communities.

But perpetrators of systemic violence rarely acknowledge and admit to their harms. In recent decades, however, a few news outlets have apologized for their papers' advocacy of violence against Black people or for their harmful coverage of civil-rights issues.

These apologies make it clear that many news outlets worked in tandem with white-controlled institutions and power structures to maintain white supremacy in their communities. But these publications are far from the only news outlets that need to reconcile and make amends for racist — and at times illegal — conduct.

Perhaps the most shameful example of a powerful white publisher using his outlet to advocate violence against the Black community was Josephus Daniels. The publisher and editor of Raleigh's *News & Observer* — at the time the state's most influential paper — Daniels played a leading role in the only armed overthrow of a local government in our nation's history, which took place two days after the 1898 elections in Wilmington, North Carolina.[2]

As David Zucchino wrote in *Wilmington's Lie*, his book about the coup, at the time Black people made up a majority of the city's population.[3] Zucchino describes the conditions that bred white rage and resentment. After an

economic recession during the 1890s left white farmers in ruin, they "turned against the bankers and railroad men who dominated the state's white supremacist Democratic Party."[4]

Black and white Republicans and the Populist Party formed a political alliance that won statewide control of the North Carolina legislature in 1894.[5]

The Fusion government restored the right to elect county officials by popular vote — a right that Democrats had stripped during Reconstruction to prevent Black people from attaining political power in the state's 16 Black-majority eastern counties. The Black community demanded political power and were appointed to political posts and won state office.[6]

By 1897, a Fusion government formed in Wilmington. The mayor and police chief were Fusionist and the alliance controlled the city government.[7]

Black residents held public office and positions such as "aldermen, magistrates, deputy sheriffs, police officers and registers of deeds"[8] — and Daniels and Democratic Party leaders were determined to destroy Black political power. Daniels helped orchestrate the Democrats' campaign to end the "Negro domination" in the state with the overthrow of Wilmington's government and all of the city's Black leaders following the election.[9]

Daniels met the chairman of the state Democratic Party, Furnifold Simmons, a former U.S. House member, months before the election. Zucchino notes that following the meeting, "Daniels concluded that the Democratic campaign ... would require three types of men — men who could speak, the men who could write and the men who could ride."[10]

Zucchino added that the men who could speak were effective public orators. The men who could write were people like Josephus Daniels and other editors who supported the Democratic Party. And the men who could ride were the Democratic Party's white militia, known as Red Shirts.[11]

Daniels, who called the *News & Observer* the "militant voice of white supremacy," used his publication to incite white residents in the city and the state at large. He ran articles as part of a disinformation campaign that spread lies about alleged Black corruption and lawlessness.[12]

"Josephus Daniels orchestrated probably the most effective and impressive disinformation campaign up until that time," Zucchino told NPR. "It was two-pronged. It focused on telling white voters that black public officials were incompetent and corrupt and utterly incapable of governing and utterly incapable of having the intelligence to vote and, at the same time, being sexually insatiable and on the prowl for white women. They even used a term for it — it was the black beast rapist."[13]

One of Daniels' targets was Alexander Manly, a Black journalist and publisher of Wilmington's *Daily Record*, which declared on its front-age banner that it was "The Only Negro Daily in the World."[14] Manly used his paper to speak out against white supremacy in the city and denounced the lynching of Black men who were murdered for having consensual relationships with white women.[15] He wrote:

> **Every Negro lynched is called a 'big, burly black brute,' when in fact many of those who have thus been dealt with had white men for their fathers, and were not only 'black' and 'burly' but were sufficiently attractive for white girls of culture and refinement to fall in love with them as is very well known to all... Let virtue be something more than an excuse for them to intimidate and torture a helpless people. Tell your men that it is no worse for a black man to be intimate with a white woman than for a white man to be intimate with a colored woman. You set yourself down as a lot of carping hypocrites in that you cry aloud for the virtue of your women while you seek to destroy the morality of ours.[16]**

Prior to the election, reporters from several northern papers, including *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Washington Evening Star* and *The Washington Post*, traveled to Wilmington to cover the "race war in the Carolinas."[17]

Zucchino notes that leaders of the white-supremacy movement met the reporters at the train station and handed "out cigars and whiskey and arrange[d] for their lodging" and "took them around the city and filled them with stories of how blacks were stockpiling weapons in black churches and were planning to rise up and riot and take over the city."[18]

The northern newspapers "repeated the talking points of the white supremacists almost word for word" and "even swallowed the white supremacy narrative" that Blacks "weren't intelligent enough to vote and certainly were not intelligent or capable enough to hold office and had to be removed."[19]

The terror campaign intimidated Black men from voting while persuading thousands of white men to vote for Democrats. As a result, Democrats captured the majority of the state legislative seats during the November 1898 election. And as Zucchino notes, "White supremacists had stuffed ballot boxes with Democratic votes and destroyed Republican ballots."[20]

Two days after the election, white militias killed more than 60 Black Wilmington residents (the true figure is unknown) and forced white and Black leaders out of the city. More than 2,000 Black residents fled the city.[21] Coup leaders forced the mayor, the police chief and eight aldermen, including three Black members, to resign. One of the coup's leaders, Alfred Moore Waddell — a former Confederate lieutenant colonel, newspaper publisher and editor, and congressman — was installed as mayor, as were eight white-supremacist aldermen.[22]

The militia also burned down the *Daily Record*'s office but not before Manly fled the city.[23] In the years that followed, Manly would remain fearful for his life. North Carolina newspapers kept track of him. And in January 1899, he made his only known public acknowledgement of the coup and the events leading up to it. As Zucchino notes, "Manly refused to speak to anyone — not his wife, his son, or his friends — about details of his time in Wilmington in 1898."[24]

Following the coup, Daniels published a front-page cartoon that showed Simmons, the state Democratic chairman, winning a checkers game "over a diminutive black figure." The caption read: "The Game Is Over. The White Men Win."[25]

Following the coup, Simmons went on to serve as a U.S. senator for 30 years.[26]

Despite Daniels' role in spreading disinformation that led to the murder of Black Wilmington residents, he was welcomed in the highest levels of our federal government in subsequent years.

Daniels became the secretary of the Navy under President Woodrow Wilson in 1913 and unsuccessfully advocated for the government to take over control of the radio industry following World War I.[27] Daniels was concerned about foreign control of the U.S. radio industry and believed the federal government should control radio or that it should be a monopoly. President Woodrow Wilson's administration shared these concerns. This led to the creation of a radio trust made up of corporations to control the industry and prevent foreign control of U.S. airwaves. And it gave the Navy a seat on the board of directors of the Radio Corporation of America — RCA.[28]

General Electric's Owen Young served as RCA's board chairman. The companies that initially made up the major stakeholders of RCA included AT&T, General Electric, United Fruit Company and Westinghouse. And in 1926, RCA created the National Broadcasting Company — NBC Blue and Red networks — which helped ensure the dominance of powerful companies in the broadcasting industry.[29]

The passage of the 1934 Communications Act and the creation of the Federal Communications Commission led to agency policies that ensured white corporate control of the commercial broadcast industry — an approach that exists to this day.[30]

Given that our media system reflects our society's racial-caste system, it's not surprising that it took more than a century for the state of North Carolina to reckon with the history of the murderous 1898 Wilmington coup and the role of the *News & Observer.*

In 2000, the North Carolina legislature passed a bill to form a commission to investigate the coup. In 2006, the commission released its report and found that "members of the Democratic white elite in Wilmington and New Hanover County, achieved their political goals through violence and intimidation" and that "involved in the conspiracy were men prominent in the Democratic Party, former Confederate officers, former officeholders, and newspaper editors locally and statewide rallied by Josephus Daniels of the Raleigh *News & Observer*."[31]

The commission also called for reparations: "acknowledging that the democratic process failed in Wilmington [and resulted in] persistent, unfavorable treatment especially to the African American community, government leadership at all levels will pursue actions that repair the wrong."
The commission made a number of recommendations

to repair the economic, educational and political harms inflicted on the city's Black community. The recommendations included a call for "judicial redress to compensate heirs of victims." The commission also called for newspapers to acknowledge their role in the deadly coup and to "study the effects of 1898 and impact of Jim Crow on the state's black press and to endow scholarships at the state's public universities."[32]

Following the report's release, the *News & Observer* apologized for its role in the coup and acknowledged that "this newspaper was a leader in that propaganda effort under editor and publisher Josephus Daniels."[33]

But the racial terrorism that Daniels ushered in by publishing hate and disinformation was common among Southern newspapers. In her critically acclaimed and bestselling book *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Isabel Wilkerson addressed the deadly role that newspapers played in promoting violence against Black people. She wrote:

> **Newspapers were giving black violence top billing, the most breathless outrage reserved for any rumor of black male indiscretion toward a white woman, all but guaranteeing a lynching. Sheriff's deputies mysteriously found themselves unable to prevent the abduction of a black suspect from a jailhouse cell. Newspapers alerted readers to the time and place of an upcoming lynching.[34]**

In Waco, Texas, the *Tribune-Herald* apologized in 2006 for its coverage of the 1916 lynching of 17-year-old Jesse Washington. It stated: "We regret the role that journalists of that era may have played in either inciting passions or failing to deplore the mob violence. We are descendants of a journalism community that failed to urge calm or call on citizens to respect the legitimate justice system."[35]

The *Tallahassee Democrat* apologized that same year for taking "the side of the segregationists" in columns and editorials that opposed the 1956 bus boycott by the city's Black community. "We not only did not lend a hand, we openly opposed integration, siding firmly with the segregationists. It is inconceivable that a newspaper, an institution that exists freely only because of the Bill of Rights, could be so wrong on civil rights. But we were."[36]

Earlier, in 2004, Kentucky's *Lexington Herald-Leader* published a front-page "clarification" that stated: "It has come to the editor's attention that the *Herald-Leader* neglected to cover the civil rights movement. We regret the omission."

The paper published a report and previously unpublished photographs as part of its "clarification." And it admitted that the paper had refused to cover the local civil-rights struggle because it wanted to "play down the movement" — noting that the outlet's "stance was not unusual among newspapers across the South."[37]

The *Montgomery Advertiser* apologized in 2018 for its "proliferation of a false narrative regarding the treatment of African-Americans," which it noted "propagated a worldview rooted in racism and the sickening myth of racial superiority." The paper stated that "the *Advertiser* was careless in how it covered mob violence and the terror foisted upon African-Americans from Reconstruction through the 1950s. We dehumanized human beings. Too often we characterized lynching victims as guilty before proven so and often assumed they committed the crime."[38]

In 2018, Susan Goldberg, editor-in-chief of *National Geographic*, addressed the magazine's racist history in a special issue on race. The publication asked John Edwin Mason, a University of Virginia professor who specializes in photography and African history, to examine the magazine's coverage.

"Until the 1970s *National Geographic* all but ignored people of color who lived in the United States, rarely acknowledging them beyond laborers or domestic workers," Goldberg wrote. "Meanwhile it pictured 'natives' elsewhere as exotics, famously and frequently unclothed, happy hunters, noble savages — every type of cliché."[39]

Mason told NPR that "[*National Geographic*'s] photography, like the articles, didn't simply emphasize difference, but made difference ... very exotic, very strange, and put the difference into a hierarchy." He added: "And that hierarchy was very clear: that the West, and especially the English-speaking world, was at the top of the hierarchy. And black and brown people were somewhere underneath."

The Orlando Sentinel apologized in January 2019 for the role its racist coverage played in wrongfully accusing one Black teenager and three Black men — known as the Groveland Four — of raping a white woman in 1949.

Two of the Groveland Four were murdered. A mob shot Ernest Thomas hundreds of times, and a sheriff shot Samuel Shepherd and claimed he had tried to escape. Charles Greenlee and Walter Irvin each spent more than a decade in jail. Both have since died. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis posthumously pardoned the four men in January 2019.[40]

The paper's editorial stated: "We're sorry for *The Orlando Sentinel*'s role in this injustice. We're sorry that the newspaper at the time did between little and nothing to seek the truth. We're sorry that our coverage of the event and its aftermath lent credibility to the cover-up and the official, racist narrative."[41]

But the paper also asserted that the "Groveland Four coverage then would not happen today" since "reporters and editors at the *Sentinel* are expected to question official versions of events, not to blindly accept them."[42]

The *Sentinel*'s apology is an important step in making amends. But the editors seem too certain that the same thing won't happen again. Such a claim by any newspaper should leave readers questioning whether that publication has truly learned from its history.

The history of media participation in racial terrorism is terrifying and broad — and it happened not so long ago. This list of incidents (and the many others we don't have space to discuss here) should motivate all communities to take action to deeply examine the histories of their news outlets.

The killing of George Floyd has resulted in a nationwide uprising against systemic racism in our country — and it's led to an uprising of Black journalists and other journalists of color in newsrooms including *The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Black journalists are challenging newsroom executives for failing to hire Black journalists, failing to respect the ones on staff and failing to cover Black communities.[43]

The uprisings have also taken aim at statues of Confederate soldiers, conquistadors, slaveholders and white supremacists that have served as symbols of racial terror and white supremacy.[44] And several statues that have been toppled or removed include those of racist editors who used their publications to incite violence against Black residents and leaders.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, the descendants of Josephus Daniels removed his statue while North Carolina State University stripped his name from a campus building.[45] Meanwhile, in Nashville, Tennessee, protesters brought down the statue of Edward Carmack that stood in front of the state capitol.[46]

During the late 1800s, Carmack served as the editor of the *Memphis Commercial*. He went on to represent the state as a member of the House of Representatives and the Senate.[47]

In 1892, he took aim at pioneering journalist Ida B. Wells, who co-owned the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*. His attack came after she wrote — following the lynching of three Black men in Memphis — that Black men were often lynched for consensual relationships with white women.[48]

"Nobody in this section of the community believes that old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women," Wells wrote. "If Southern men are not careful, a conclusion might be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women."[49]

The Memphis Commercial responded with a threat:

> **The fact that a black scoundrel is allowed to live and utter such loathsome and repulsive calumnies is a volume of evidence as to the wonderful patience of Southern whites. But we have had enough of it. There are some things that the Southern white man will not tolerate, and the obscene intimations of the foregoing have brought the writer to the outermost limit of public patience. We hope we have said enough.[50]**

Following the publication of Wells' editorial, a white mob destroyed the *Free Speech and Headlight* office.[51] But despite Carmack's racist history, Tennessee plans to replace his statue.[52]

Edward Ward Carmack statue outside the Nashville capitol building in Tennessee

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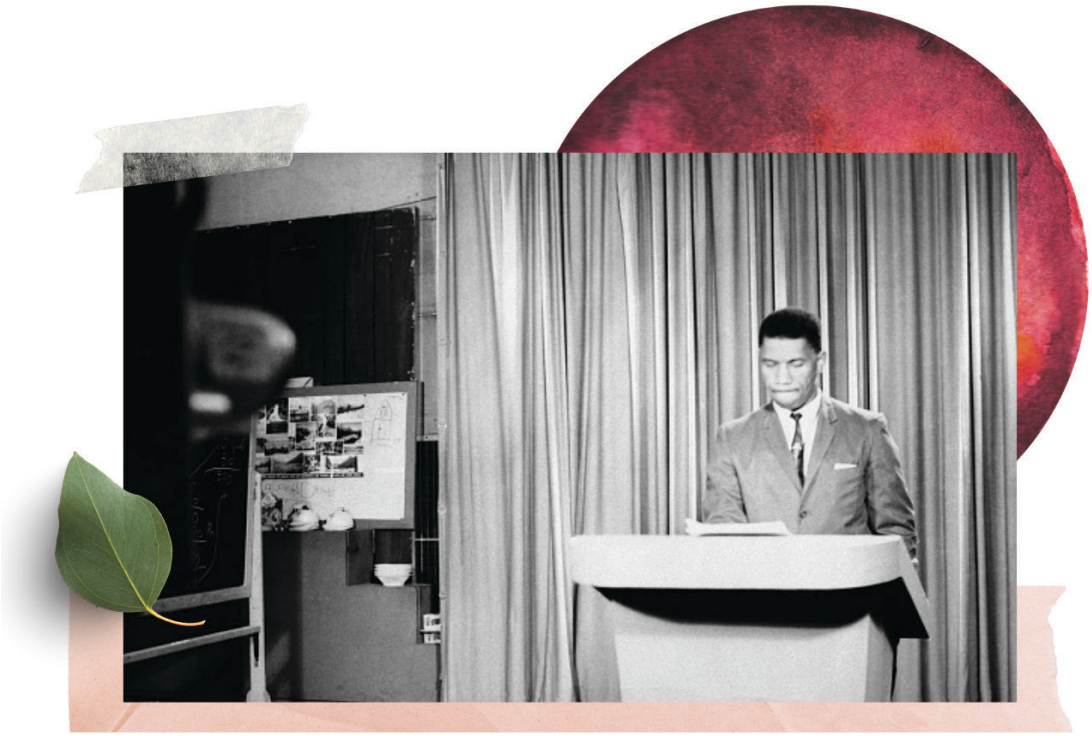

Medgar Evers

Medgar Evers delivered a 17-minute speech on WLBT on May 20, 1963.

Media Apologies & Acknowledgements of Anti-Black Harm

JUL 2004

Kentucky's Lexington Herald-Leader admits that it refused to cover the local civil-rights struggle because it wanted to "play down the movement" — noting that the outlet's "stance was not unusual among newspapers across the South."

MAY 2006

The **Tallahassee Democrat** apologizes for taking "the side of the segregationists" in columns and editorials that opposed the 1956 bus boycott by the city's Black community.

We not only did not lend a hand, we openly opposed integration, siding firmly with the segregationists. It is inconceivable that a newspaper, an institution that exists freely only because of the Bill of Rights, could be so wrong on civil rights. But we were.

MAY 2006

In **Waco, Texas,** the **Tribune-Herald** apologizes for its coverage of the 1916 lynching of 17-year-old Jesse Washington, stating:

We regret the role that journalists of that era may have played in either inciting passions or failing to deplore the mob violence. We are descendants of a journalism community that failed to urge calm or call on citizens to respect the legitimate justice system.

MAY 2006

A commission convened by the **North Carolina** legislature to study the 1898 Wilmington race riot issues a report finding that "members of the Democratic white elite in Wilmington and New Hanover County achieved their political goals through violence and intimidation" and that "involved in the conspiracy were men prominent in the Democratic Party, former Confederate officers, former officeholders, and newspaper editors locally and statewide." The commission also calls for reparations.

Following the report's release, the **News & Observer** apologizes for its role in the coup and acknowledges that "this newspaper was a leader in that propaganda effort under editor and publisher Josephus Daniels."

MAR 2018

Susan Goldberg, editor of **National Geographic**, addresses the magazine's racist history in a special issue on race:

Until the 1970s National Geographic all but ignored people of color who lived in the United States, rarely acknowledging them beyond laborers or domestic workers. Meanwhile it pictured 'natives' elsewhere as exotics, famously and frequently unclothed, happy hunters, noble savages — every type of cliché.

APR 2018

The Montgomery Advertiser apologizes in 2018 for its "proliferation of a false narrative regarding the treatment of African-Americans," which it notes "propagated a worldview rooted in racism and the sickening myth of racial superiority." The paper states that "the Advertiser was careless in how it covered mob violence and the terror foisted upon African-Americans from Reconstruction through the 1950s."

We dehumanized human beings. Too often we characterized lynching victims as guilty before proven so and often assumed they committed the crime.

JAN 2019

The **Orlando Sentinel** apologizes for the role its racist coverage played in wrongfully accusing one Black teenager and three Black men — known as the Groveland Four — of raping a white woman in 1949.

We're sorry for The Orlando Sentinel's role in this injustice. We're sorry that the newspaper at the time did between little and nothing to seek the truth. We're sorry that our coverage of the event and its aftermath lent credibility to the cover-up and the official, racist narrative.

JUN 2020

On June 23, the Black Caucus of the **L.A. Times** Guild sends Times' owner Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong an open letter demanding the paper address its lack of Black journalists and staff. Soon-Shiong responds with plans for changes at the organization and an acknowledgement:

I apologize to you today for not advancing anti-racist priorities as substantively and rapidly as we had dreamed.

JUN 2020

Amid the global uprising for Black lives in 2020, with thousands taking to the streets with banners and chants of "Black Lives Matter," the **Philadelphia Inquirer** publishes a front-page headline: "Buildings Matter, Too."

Days later, 44 of the newspaper's journalists of color release an open letter and stage a virtual walk-out. The following day, executive leaders respond:

The Philadelphia Inquirer published a headline in Tuesday's edition that was deeply offensive. We should not have printed it. We're sorry, and regret that we did. We also know that an apology on its own is not sufficient.

Following the uprising, 20-year veteran Stan Wischnowski resigns his post as the paper's top editor. In September 2020, Wischnowski is named executive editor of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)

Photo taken by Mary Garrity
Google Art Project restoration
Additional design by Team Media 2070
Source: Wikimedia Commons; accessed on Sept. 20, 2020

In May 2020, journalist and human-rights activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett was posthumously awarded a Pulitzer Prize...

> An early muckraker, she attracted the ire of those who benefited from the unjust systems she exposed. Wells's campaign against lynching, for which she won recognition, brought unprecedented scrutiny to American mob violence. She published numerous investigative newspaper reports, editorials and pamphlets denouncing lynching as a form of racial terrorism.

Sara L. Silkey, "Ida B. Wells Won the Pulitzer. Here's Why That Matters,"
The Washington Post, May 7, 2020:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/05/07/ida-b-wells-won-pulitzer-heres-why-that-matters/

VII. Government Moves to Suppress Black Journalism

ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE THE MEDIA OF RESISTANCE

Black newspapers in Memphis and Wilmington had to be silenced when they threatened the white political-power structure. Attacks on the Black press continued during World War I — but this time it was the federal government cracking down on Black publishers for political dissent.[1] Congress passed the Espionage Act in 1917 and the Sedition Act in 1918. Both criminalized free speech and attacked the press for criticizing the government's war efforts.[2] The government used these powers to threaten Black publications, such as *The Crisis*, for condemning racism and other injustices.[3]

In 1917, after a white policeman attacked a Black woman in Houston, a riot that killed at least 15 people ensued. A Black newspaper, *The San Antonio Inquirer,* published a letter from a Black woman who praised Black soldiers involved in the riot. "We would rather see you shot by the highest tribunal of the United States Army because you dared to protect a Negro woman from the insult of a Southern brute in the form of a policeman, than to have you forced to go to Europe to fight for a liberty you can not enjoy," wrote C.L. Threadgill-Dennis, a Black Austin woman.[4]

The government arrested G.W. Bouldin, the paper's editor, and charged him with espionage — even though he was out of town when the letter was published.[5] In 1919, he received a two-year prison sentence and spent about a year incarcerated.[6] Meanwhile, 13 Black soldiers who participated in the riot were hung, and 41 other soldiers were given life sentences.[7]

This environment put pressure on the Black press to stand down to avoid facing sedition charges.[8]

But the socialist publication *The Messenger*, which Chandler Owen and legendary civil-rights and labor leader A. Philip Randolph co-founded in 1917, did not. It called on the Black community to oppose the war. "No intelligent Negro is willing to lay down his life for the United States as it now exists," the paper wrote. "Intelligent Negroes have now reached the point where their support of the country is conditional."[9]The paper faced government retribution due to its editorial position. A biography of Randolph notes that "for such statements, the *Messenger*'s editorial office was visited in the dead of night by agents of the Justice Department. Several mornings, the editors arrived to find their files had been ransacked, furniture broken and back issues of their magazine confiscated."[10]

A Justice Department official arrested Randolph and Owen at a Cleveland antiwar event — where the two were speaking — after purchasing a copy of *The Messenger* that was being sold to audience members. The agent arrested both men, who were charged with violating the Espionage Act. They spent two days in jail.

A judge threw out the case because he "couldn't believe we were old enough, or, being black, smart enough, to write that red-hot stuff in *The Messenger*," Randolph recalled.[11] But the outlet lost its second-class mailing privileges, which had subsidized the cost of mailing the paper to subscribers.[12]

After the war, Black publications returned to criticizing the government and racism in our society. Troubled by this development, a young J. Edgar Hoover, who had joined the Justice Department in 1917 and became a special assistant to U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer in 1919, recommended that "something should be done to the editors of these publications as they are beyond doubt exciting the negro elements of this country to riot and to the committing of outrages."[13]

The Justice Department investigated the Black press and authored a 1919 report — *Radicalism and Sedition Among Negroes as Reflected in Their Publications* — that unsuccessfully attempted to convince Congress to pass peacetime sedition laws.[14]

"At this time there can no longer be any question of a well-concerted movement among a certain class of negro leaders of thought and action to constitute themselves a determined and persistent source of a radical opposition

to the Government, and to the established rule of law and order," the report stated.[15]

A number of issues drew the Justice Department's ire, including "the ill-governed reaction toward race rioting," "the threat of retaliatory measures in connection with lynching" and the "more openly expressed demand for social equality."[16] The report continued:

> **Underlying these more salient viewpoints is the increasingly emphasized feeling of a race consciousness, in many of these publications always antagonistic to the white race, and openly, defiantly assertive of its own equality and even superiority. When it is borne in mind that this boast finds its most frequent expression in the pages of those journals whose editors are men of education, in at least one instance men holding degrees conferred by Harvard University, it may be seen that the boast is not to be dismissed lightly as the ignorant vaporing of untrained minds.[17]**

The paper that troubled the Justice Department the most was Randolph's *Messenger*, which it called the "most dangerous of all negro publications. It is representative of the most educated thought among the negroes." The paper also concerned the Justice Department because it advocated for "sex equality."[18]

Hoover became the FBI director in 1924 and served in this position until he died in 1972. Throughout his time at the Justice Department, Black civil-rights activism — and the Black press — remained in his crosshairs.[19]

During World War II, Hoover tried to convince U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle to bring sedition charges against the Black press after the *Pittsburgh Courier* launched the "Double V campaign" that called for victory in the war effort abroad and victory over racism at home. The government was concerned the Black outlets were undermining the Black community's support for the war. Biddle declined to press charges.[20]

But while Hoover's FBI sought to criminalize the civil- and human-rights activism of Black publishers, federal government agencies worked with radio networks run by CBS and NBC to increase Black support for the government's war effort by producing programs that portrayed Black people positively.[21]

Public-affairs programs during this time rarely addressed issues of race. But NBC's *America's Town Meeting on the Air* and CBS' *People's Platform* aired programming that discussed race relations in the country. NBC aired an eight-part series — *Freedom's People* — that dramatized the contributions of Black people in such areas as the arts, education, the military, science and sports. The series featured prominent Black figures such as A. Philip Randolph and Olympic medalist Jesse Owens, and was produced by the Federal Radio Education Committee in the U.S. Office of Education.[22]

Once the war ended, so did the government's and industry's efforts to produce such groundbreaking programs. But these historical examples demonstrate that our federal government has long been fully aware of the power of narrative and media to influence public opinion about the Black community. And it has often exploited this power to further its political goals of harming Black groups and leaders.

• • •

1. Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, Northwestern University Press, 2006, pp. 107–109
2. "Prelude to the Red Square: The Espionage and Sedition Acts," WGBH, accessed on Aug. 20, 2020: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldman-prelude-red-scare-espionage-and-sedition-acts/; Danna Bell, "Viewing Loyalty and Sedition During World War I through Multiple Perspectives," Library of Congress, May 11, 2017: https://blogs.loc.gov/teachers/2017/05/viewing-loyalty-and-sedition-during-world-war-i-through-multiple-perspectives/
3. Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, Northwestern University Press, 2006, p. 108
4. Ibid, pp. 101–102
5. Ibid
6. Ibid; DeNeen L. Brown, "Vandals Damage Historical Marker Commemorating 1917 Uprising by Black Soldiers," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 8, 2017: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/08/24/i-am-not-guilty-the-mass-hanging-of-13-black-soldiers-after-the-bloody-1917-houston-riots/; Theodore Kornweibel,

Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts to Compel Black Loyalty During World War I, Indiana University Press, 2002, pp. 170–174. There's still much to learn about Bouldin's arrest. Kornweibel writes that after the article (letter) was published,, Bouldin (who was very likely unaware of its publication), Threadgill-Dennis and contributing editor William L. Hegwood were all arrested. The three were later acquitted at trial. Kornweibel notes that what happened at the trial "cannot be established." But the government continued to pursue Bouldin, and a federal grand jury indicted him again. Kornweibel has details on his second trial. Bouldin spent about a year in county and federal prison.

7. Patrick S. Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*, Northwestern University Press, 2006, pp. 106–108; DeNeen L. Brown, "Vandals Damage Historical Marker Commemorating 1917 Uprising by Black Soldiers," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 8, 2017: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/08/24/i-am-not-guilty-the-mass-hanging-of-13-black-soldiers-after-the-bloody-1917-houston-riots/
8. Ibid Patrick S. Washburn, p. 118; Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*, University of California Press, 1972, 1973, 1986, pp. 104–107
9. Ibid Jervis Anderson, p. 104
10. Ibid Jervis Anderson, p. 105
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21. William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio*, Temple University Press, 1999, pp. 68–74
22. Ibid

VIII. Black People Fight to Tell Our Stories in the Jim Crow Era

DEFIANCE IN THE FACE OF WHITE MEDIA CONTROL

Black people have advocated for centuries to tell our own stories so we can speak for ourselves.

The nation's first Black newspaper — *Freedom's Journal* — was founded in New York City in 1827. The paper's inaugural issue stated: "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. ... From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented."[1]

The North Star — the first of several papers that Frederick Douglass published — proclaimed in its inaugural issue in 1847 that it would fight to abolish slavery and advocate for the rights of full Black citizenship in the North. The paper wrote "to the cause of our long oppressed and plundered fellow countrymen" that it would "fearlessly assert your fights, faithfully proclaim your wrongs" and fight against "every effort to injure or degrade you and your cause."[2]

Ida B. Wells was a trailblazing journalist who used data to document and investigate lynching in a pamphlet called *Southern Horrors* as well as in the booklet *The Red Record*. Her fearless journalism finally received the recognition it deserved when she was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer Prize in 2020 for "outstanding and courageous reporting on the horrific and vicious violence against African Americans during the era of lynching."[3]

The emergence of broadcasting during the 20th century ushered in a powerful medium that would transform our media industry — first with radio, and then with television.

Like so many powerful white-owned and -controlled newspapers, the broadcast industry spread the myth of Black inferiority to protect a white-racial hierarchy. And it did so with the aid of government policies.

The government began to regulate commercial radio in 1927, and nearly all of the nation's commercial radio licenses — and later TV licenses — went to white men and white-controlled companies. Nearly two decades would pass before Jesse Blayton became the nation's first Black radio-station owner.[4]

But the government did award a radio license in 1927 to the Independent Publishing Company, which published a newspaper called *The Fellowship Forum* that was an organ of the Ku Klux Klan. The station served Northern Virginia and the Washington, D.C., area, before being sold to CBS in early 1932. Today, that station — WTOP 103.5 FM — is an all-news station that still serves the D.C. area.[5]

This is why Black people have embraced new methods of telling our story whenever new technologies have emerged. Each new technology has offered us a chance to own and control the telling of our own stories and challenge damaging narratives.

The *Pittsburgh Courier* sponsored a 1927 radio program — *The Pittsburgh Courier Hour*— that aired on WGBS in New York City. It was the first radio program devoted to "Negro journalism." The Harlem Broadcasting Company, founded in 1929, leased time on WRNY in New York City and aired the program — *A Raise to Culture*. But the company, the "first independent African American venture of its kind," was unsuccessful in its effort to acquire a radio station.[6]

In Chicago, the "dean of African American disc jockeys," Jack Cooper, leased time in 1929 on a lower-power radio station — WSBC — to air *The All-Negro Hour*, the "first successful weekly radio show featuring African Americans." Cooper partnered with the *Chicago Defender* — and later with the *Pittsburgh Courier* — to produce the first Black newscast in the Midwest. And in 1946, he created the first roundtable program for the Black community.[7]

In 1949, Jesse Blayton became the first Black owner of a radio station when he bought WERD-AM in Atlanta. In 1950, he hired the head of the NAACP's state chapter to produce news digests about the Black community for the station. As it happened, the headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) were located on the ground floor of the building that housed WERD. As the story goes, whenever SCLC's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wanted to make an on-air announcement, he would bang the ceiling with a broomstick and a microphone was lowered out of the window so he could speak.[8]

Many broadcast stations in other southern cities used their airwaves to broadly defend segregation following the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.[9] Powerful white leaders and citizens were determined to protect the South's white-racial hierarchy.

In Mississippi, influential white residents created the White Citizen's Council, a hate group formed to prevent integration in their communities. The number of White Citizens' Councils quickly spread throughout the South.[10] The organization sought to "thwart integration by using the legitimated institutions of traditional party politics, law, and journalism," writes media-studies scholar Steven D. Classen.[11]

In 1957, the Council produced a TV program — *Citizens' Council Forum* — to help achieve this goal. And later that year, the Council provided audio of its program for radio stations to air for free.[12] Stephanie R. Rolph, author of a 2018 book on the White Citizens' Council, writes that the group created the program to "counterattack ... a multimedia onslaught from the NAACP." She noted that "Council leaders feared that on radio and television, and in movie theaters, the acclimation to integration was slowly wearing down the commitment to segregation."[13]

The TV program aired on WLBT-TV, an NBC affiliate in Jackson, Mississippi, and received free airtime since the station's general manager was a member of the local Citizens' Council.[14] The program consisted of interviews like a typical public-affairs show and received funding from the Mississippi state government — which meant that taxpayer dollars from Black residents helped subsidize it.[15]

"The program worked to bring high-status defenders of Mississippi's 'state rights' before the camera and microphone," Classen writes. "Clearly, the show's agenda was not only focused on the distribution of white supremacist information but also on the provision of credibility and respectability to such arguments."[16]

And to build that credibility, the Council moved its program to Washington, D.C., to attract powerful congressional members to the show so it could broaden its audience and build support for its cause, including "northern sympathy for the southern position." Rep. John Bell Williams (D–Mississippi) and Sen. James Eastland (D–Mississippi) helped the Council secure use of the congressional studios to record its program.[17] Guests included such lawmakers as Sen. Barry Goldwater (R–Arizona) and devout racist Sen. Strom Thurmond (R–South Carolina), who was a Democrat until 1964 and appeared on the show 36 times, the most of any guest.[18]

It's not clear exactly how many stations actually carried the program. The Council claimed at various points that the program aired on 80 TV and radio stations, 550 TV and radio stations and more than 1,000 radio stations. The *Jackson Daily News* reported in 1961 that out of 308 stations the Council claimed carried the program, only seven in five states — Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Virginia — claimed that they carried it regularly.[19]

The history of racist policymaking has ensured that racist owners have held many of the nation's scarce broadcast licenses. As a result, Black people have had to pressure their local white-owned broadcast stations to integrate news coverage and staffing. Furthermore, Black people have had to pressure the federal government to adopt public-interest policies and enforce them to serve the information needs of the Black community.

As writer Kay Mills outlines in her book *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case that Transformed Television*, Medgar Evers, the iconic civil-rights leader and the first field director of the NAACP in Mississippi, sought to challenge racism in the broadcast industry in his state.

In 1955, the NAACP's Washington office protested to the FCC that Jackson's WLBT-TV interrupted a national program on its station that featured an interview with the NAACP's Thurgood Marshall. The station was owned by the Lamar Life Insurance Company. And WLBT General Manager Fred Beard — a member of Jackson's Citizens' Council — admitted that he had interrupted the program.[20]

Beard responded to the FCC's inquiry by writing that he did not permit either the NAACP or the White Citizens' Council on the air so the station did not have to provide equal time.[21] "I was only one of the many Southern television stations that complained to the National Broadcasting Company about certain programs promoting

social equality and intermarriage of whites and Negroes," wrote Beard. "As it has been our policy not to permit local or network propaganda on either side to be broadcast or telecast."[22]

He also acknowledged that he was a member of the "Citizens' Council Association" and described it as a group that was formed to "keep racial elements in the state from taking hold and causing acts of violence."[23] He added that the group's membership was "made up of the most outstanding business men in the state," and that it was "to the advantage of every one that such an organization exists."[24]

Journalist Hodding Carter III once called Beard "little more than ... an unofficial mouthpiece for the total resistance line of the Citizens' Council," noting that nearly all Jackson television stations were "geared to a far right-wing, rigid segregationist approach."[25]

Evers continued to repeatedly request equal time to respond to WLBT's racist programming, including in 1957 when the station aired the views of segregationists who opposed the integration of Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas.[26]

So when Mayor Allen C. Thompson appeared on local Jackson stations in 1963 to oppose civil-rights leaders' efforts to integrate the city's public institutions, Evers requested equal time to respond. This time, WLBT relented.[27]

Few people had heard Evers' voice, or the voice of any Black person on the air denouncing segregation. His presence on the local airwaves would make him a bigger threat to segregationists, and left his wife, Myrlie Evers, nervous about her husband's safety.

"Thousands of Mississippi Whites who had never seen a picture of him would now be seeing Medgar on television," Myrlie Evers recalled. "They would have time to become familiar with his appearance. When it was over, he would be recognized everywhere: at a stop light in the city, on a lonely road in the Delta, in the light from the fuel pump at a gas station."[28]

Despite the danger, Medgar Evers persisted and was finally permitted to appear on WLBT, where he delivered a heroic 17-minute speech denouncing segregation and appealing to whites in Jackson who supported integration:

Tonight the Negro plantation worker in the Delta knows from his radio and television what happened today all over the world. He knows what Black people are doing and he knows what white people are doing. He can see on the 6:00 o'clock news screen the picture of a 3:00 o'clock bite by a police dog ... He knows about the new free nations in Africa and knows that a Congo native can be a locomotive engineer, but in Jackson he cannot even drive a garbage truck ...

He sees a city over 150,000, of which 40% is Negro, in which there is not a single Negro policeman or policewoman, school crossing guard, fireman, clerk, stenographer, or supervisor employed in any city department or the Mayor's office in other than menial capacities ...

What then does the Negro want?

He wants to get rid of racial segregation in Mississippi life ... The Negro citizen wants to register and vote without special handicaps imposed on him alone ... The Negro Mississippian wants more jobs above the menial level in stores where he spends his money.

He believes that new industries that have come to Mississippi should employ him above the laboring category. He wants the public schools and colleges desegregated so that his children can receive the best education that Mississippi has to offer.

The Negro has been here in America since 1619, a total of 344 years. He is not going anywhere else; this country is his home ... Let me appeal to the consciences of many silent, responsible citizens of the white community who know that a victory for democracy in Jackson will be a victory for democracy everywhere.[29]

Less than a month later, Evers was assassinated in his driveway.[30]

RACE VIOLENCE BREAKS OUT IN MISSISSIPPI

AMBUSH EVERS-TYPE KILLING, RACE

By LARRY STILL

Fear of a new wave of violence was sweeping across Mississippi and the deep South in the wake of the sensational trial of fertilizer salesman Byron De La Beckwith for the murder of Negro NAACP leader Medgar Evers.

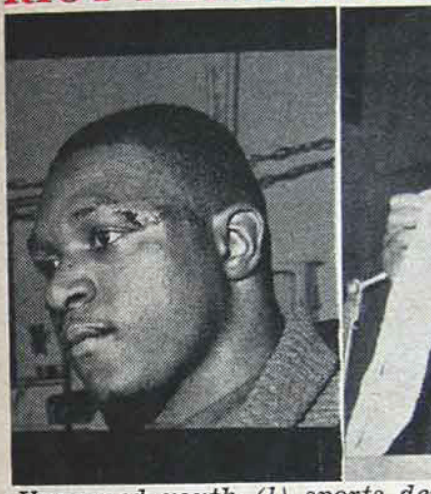
As the trial ended in the Hinds County Circuit Court in Jackson, another ambush assassination of Negro farmer Lewis Allen was revealed and new incidents were being reported daily, including the shooting of three students at Jackson State College. The college melee was touched off when a white motorist struck a Negro coed while speeding through the campus.

The all-white Beckwith jury failed to reach a verdict after Beckwith startled the court by taking the stand to admit he once wrote the National Rifle Assn. that "for the next 15 years we here in Mississippi are going to have to do a lot of shooting to protect our wives and children from bad niggers."

Mrs. Myrlie Evers, the murder victim's widow, expressed surprise at the jury's action. State NAACP Director Charles Evers, the victim's brother, insisted on making

Unidentified Mississippian kneels at bare grave of Lewis Allen, civil rights worker who was ambushed recently.

RIOT FLARE IN MI

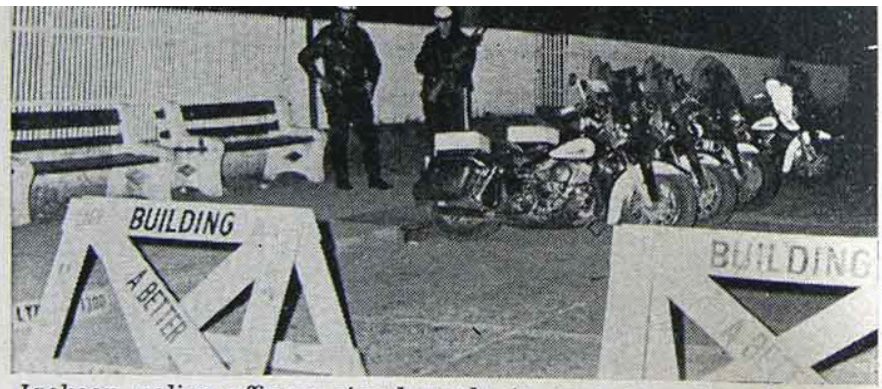


Unnamed youth (l) sports de while NAACPer Evers shows

"no comment" on the mistr

Mrs. Evers was the first w bor, Houston Wells, were th witnesses called by District early dramatic moments wh Evers took the stand and wa She looked straight at the Medgar Evers." The widow testifying.

Both Waller and defense Mrs. Evers by her name an teous. However, the victim gar Evers or Evers and the Beckwith." The only time was when tall, stately, whit once ordered a recess and will you take Mr. Evers out defendant and as the puzz court door, Judge Hendrick and added "I mean Mr. Be



Jackson police officers stand ready to go into action following outbreak of protesting Jackson College students.

Angry Jackson College student where one s

SSISSIPPI TOWNS

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accused slayer was called "Mr.
the victim was called "mister"
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accidentally said "Mr. Sheriff,
now." He was referring to the
led Beckwith reached the rear
suddenly realized his mistake
eckwith." Judge Hendrick kept

Mrs. Beckwith Expressed Bitterness Over Trial Verdict

order in the court, however, and appeared to be strictly impartial.

At the beginning of the trial, Beckwith swaggered in and out of court during recesses and often waved to white persons he recognized in the integrated audience or press gallery. As the jury remained out however, the defendant began to look haggard and tired and went back through the door to the jail cell without waving goodbye. After the mistrial verdict, Beckwith was taken back to the Hinds County Jail and Waller said he will oppose any bond because that's the law.

Mrs. Beckwith expressed bitterness at the outcome of the trial and said, "I expected my husband to go home with me tonight."

The arrogant defendant admitted to the court that he once wrote a letter saying, "When I die I will be buried in a white cemetery. If I go to heaven, I will be in the section for white people and if I go to Hades, I will raise hell until they move me to the white section . . ." As the courtroom spectators laughed at the letter, the defendant snapped: "Mr. Waller, you're supposed to take seriously what is intended to be serious and laugh at the humorous part."

Beckwith also confessed that he had once written: "I

Jackson police officers stand ready to go into action following outbreak of protesting Jackson College students.

ts take to the streets during protest tudent was shot.

Medgar Evers Murder Trial –
Jet Magazine,
Feb. 20, 1964

Image by Flickr user Vieilles Annonces

But the struggle against WBLT continued. In 1964, the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ (UCC) — led by the Rev. Everett C. Parker — filed a license challenge with the FCC against WLBT. Mississippi NAACP President Aaron Henry and Jackson's Rev. R.L.T. Smith joined in the license challenge, which argued that the station had failed to serve the city's Black community or fairly cover controversial issues regarding race relations.[31]

Parker had been inspired to hold Southern broadcast stations accountable following a meeting he took part in with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. During the meeting, Parker asked what he could do to help the civil-rights struggle. Dr. King replied, "Can you do something about the TV stations in the south?"[32]

But the FCC denied the petition, stating that the public did not have legal standing to contest a license unless it had an economic stake in the outcome or had an issue with electrical interference from a broadcaster.[33] But in 1966, a federal court ruled in favor of the UCC and local Jackson activists, saying for the first time that citizens did have legal standing to challenge licenses.[34]

The historic ruling would lead to a federal court revoking WLBT's license in 1969 — marking the first time that a court revoked the license of a U.S. broadcaster. And after years of litigation, a majority Black-owned company "received the license in 1979 and took over ownership of the station in 1980." The group's chairman was the NAACP's Aaron Henry.[35]

The heroism of local Black leaders and the UCC in successfully challenging the license of a powerful white-owned broadcast station is not a well-known part of our nation's history. But it gave everyday people the power — and legal right — to hold their local broadcasters accountable. It also paved the way for the integration of local broadcast stations — as well as the birth of the modern media-justice movement and the rise of public-interest organizations that advocate for democratizing media and technology.

And throughout the 1960s, the civil-rights struggle and the racial-justice uprisings also forced the federal government to take action to address the ways in which the news media had harmed the Black community.

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Milestones of Black Resistance Media

1827

The nation's first Black newspaper — **Freedom's Journal** — is founded in New York City.

1847

The North Star — the first of several papers that Frederick Douglass published — proclaims in its inaugural issue that it will fight to abolish slavery and advocate for the rights of full Black citizenship in the North.

1888

The Memphis Free Speech is founded by Rev. Taylor Nightingale on the grounds of Nightingale's church, the First (Beale Street) Baptist Church. Local teacher and activist Ida B. Wells later becomes a staff journalist and 1/3 owner.

1927

The Pittsburgh Courier sponsors a radio program — *The Pittsburgh Courier Hour*— that airs on WGBS in New York City. It becomes the first radio program devoted to "Negro journalism."

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Milestones of Black Resistance Media

1929

The Harlem Broadcasting Corporation is founded, leasing time on WRNY in New York City and airing the program *A Raise to Culture*.

1929

In Chicago, the "dean of African American disc jockeys," Jack Cooper, leases time on WSBC to air **The All-Negro Hour,** the "first successful weekly radio show featuring African Americans." Cooper partners with the *Chicago Defender* and later with the *Pittsburgh Courier* to produce the first Black newscast in the Midwest.

1949

Jesse Blayton becomes the first Black owner of a radio station with his purchase of **WERD-AM** in Atlanta.

1966

Local Black leaders and the United Church of Christ win a historic legal victory in their fight against racist station **WLBT**. The court ruling gives citizens legal standing to challenge broadcast licenses. The decision leads to a federal court revoking WLBT's license; later, a majority-Black owned company takes over ownership of the station.

IX.
MEDIA ARE THE INSTRUMENTS OF A WHITE POWER STRUCTURE

Racial uprisings took place across the country in 1967 in more than 150 cities, including Detroit and Newark. They forced the federal government to publicly acknowledge systemic racism in our society — issues that Black people had fought to address for over 300 years.[1]

President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders — also known as the Kerner Commission — to investigate the root causes of the racial uprisings. In 1968, the Kerner Commission released its report, which examined such factors as policing and unemployment.[2] It stated that: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal."[3]

The report also included a chapter on the news media. It found the media had "contributed to the black-white schism in this country" and that it failed to "report adequately on the causes and consequences of civil disorders and the underlying problems of race relations."[4]

It noted that the white press "repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifference of white America."[5]

The commission also found the Black community believed the media were "instruments of the white power structure" — and that "these white interests guide the entire white community, from the journalists' friends and neighbors to city officials, police officers, and department store owners. Publishers and editors, if not white reporters, they feel, support and defend these interests with enthusiasm and dedication."[6]

The report recommended the creation of an Institute of Urban Communications to recruit and train Black journalists and other reporters to improve their coverage of the "urban scene". The report also advocated for the creation of a news service to cover "urban affairs" and to assess the media's coverage of race, including racial-justice uprisings. The commission also called for further research into the media's impact on race.[7]

"Along with the country as a whole, the press has too long basked in a white world, looking out of it, if at all, with white men's eyes and a white perspective," the commission wrote. "That is no longer good enough. The painful process of readjustment that is required of the American news media must begin now."[8]

The report — along with the civil-rights movement and license challenges that followed the WLBT decision — pressured the broadcast industry to integrate its newsrooms. The political dynamics of the times forced newspapers to do the same.[9]

The political pressure to increase the numbers of Black journalists resulted in the founding of the Association of Black Journalists in Philadelphia in 1973, which in turn led to the creation of the National Association of Black Journalists in 1975.[10] And over the ensuing four decades, thousands of Black journalists were hired to work at local and national media outlets.[11]

The Kerner Commission report didn't just influence the adoption of newsroom policies to boost the presence of people of color. It also influenced federal policies and programs that began to address the harms caused by institutional and structural racism in the media industry.[12]

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X. The Struggle to Integrate Media

GOVERNMENT INTERVENES TO DISRUPT A HISTORY OF WHITE CONTROL

Resistance met efforts to integrate the nation's newsrooms. Few Black journalists had worked in white media outlets when the Kerner Commission issued its report. The report noted that:

> **The journalistic profession has been shockingly backward in seeking out, hiring, training, and promoting Negroes. Fewer than 5 percent of the people employed by the news business in editorial jobs in the United States today are Negroes. Fewer than 1 percent of editors and supervisors are Negroes, and most of them work for Negro-owned organizations ...**
>
> **The [com]plaint is, 'we can't find qualified Negroes.' But this rings hollow from an industry where, only yesterday, jobs were scarce and promotion unthinkable for a man whose skin was black. Even today, there are virtually no Negroes in positions of editorial or executive responsibility and there is only one Negro newsman with a nationally syndicated column.[1]**

It wasn't until 1950 that a Black woman was hired to write full time for a mainstream white-owned newspaper: that was Marvel Cooke, who joined *The Daily Compass* in New York. That year she published an updated series called "The Bronx Slave Market," which detailed the unjust treatment of the city's Black domestic workers. She coauthored an earlier version of the series in 1935 with civil-rights leader Ella Baker for *Crisis Magazine*.[2]

Meanwhile, in 1961 Dorothy Butler Gilliam became the first Black woman to work as a reporter at *The Washington Post*, where she faced difficult challenges. In a 2019 interview, she said that issues of race were never discussed at the *Post* unless an editor made a negative remark about Black people. She also noted that she could have a conversation with a colleague in the newsroom only to only have that same coworker ignore her if they crossed paths on the street.[3]

But Butler Gilliam had a long career at the *Post*. She also served as the president of the National Association of Black Journalists and as a founding board member of the Maynard Institute, which continues to fight systemic racism in newsrooms today.[4]

• • •

In 1964, the passage of the Civil Rights Act resulted in the creation of a Department of Justice agency called the Community Relations Service (CRS), which often worked behind the scenes to alleviate racial tensions. During its early years, two of the areas the CRS focused on were integrating newsrooms and addressing the news media's role in inflaming racial tensions in the United States.[5]

Former CRS Associate Director Bertram Levine, author of a book on the agency's history, notes that the CRS sought to "improve the depth and quality of reporting" about communities of color and to encourage newsrooms to hire more journalists of color.[6]

"The nation's leading opinion molders were asked to consider how their failure to depict the Negro people as normal human beings reinforced the myth of white superiority, and how the persistence of that myth made peaceful acceptance of new legal standards more difficult," Levine writes.[7]

In 1965, CRS Director LeRoy Collins, a past president of the National Association of Broadcasters, addressed a gathering of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. There he criticized U.S. leaders — including the media — for failing to support the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision.[8] He noted that "little or no national effort was made to lead the American people to understand why racial discrimination is unjust and unconstitutional."[9]

Meanwhile, CRS Deputy Director Calvin Kytle, a former journalist and publicist, criticized newspapers at an annual United Press International conference in 1965 for publishing news about civil rights on the same page as their daily crime roundups and for failing to seek the viewpoints of civil-rights leaders.[10]

When newsrooms were slow to integrate, the CRS pushed the news industry and media executives behind the scenes to meet with communities of color. The agency hired Ben Holman, the first Black journalist to work at the *Chicago Daily News* and the first Black on-air reporter for Chicago's WBBM-TV, to lead this effort.[11] Holman became the director of the agency in 1969.[12]

In 1968, the CRS helped organize a Negro and Spanish Speaking Radio Conference in New York City. The CRS also played a role in the production of such programs as the CBS documentary *Of Black America* and National Educational Television's *Black Journal*. Though CRS specialists didn't take "full credit for initiating these productions" or "record them as a specific output, they did influence the decisions made by the stations directly and significantly."[13]

> **In its 1969 report, the CRS observed: "Few American institutions have so completely excluded minority group members from influence and control as have the news media. This failure is reflected by general insensitivity and indifference and is verified by ownership, management, and employment statistics."[14]**

The report noted that "no general audience newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station ... is owned or managed by minority group persons." At that time, Black people owned fewer than a dozen radio stations, and whites owned "almost all Spanish-language radio and TV stations."[15]

By 1970, the CRS' goals focused on increasing "minority employment, ownership, and influence" in the media industry and on developing "techniques to identify and eliminate institutional racism, particularly as it adversely [a]ffects delivery of media services to minorities."[16]

The CRS provided support for a 1967 national conference involving media executives, civil-rights groups and Black and Latinx publications that took place in New York City. By 1970, the CRS had helped initiate more than 20 such media gatherings in cities nationwide.[17] This included "A Black Perspective on the Media" conference that the CRS co-sponsored with the National Urban Coalition. Media representatives discussed coverage of the Black community and ways to promote employment opportunities.[18]

These gatherings gave civil-rights groups the chance to learn from experts on topics including ways to challenge a broadcast license and strategies to integrate newsrooms. In 1970, the CRS provided technical assistance to a coalition — led by the president of Atlanta's NAACP chapter — that negotiated agreements with more than 20 Atlanta broadcast stations to integrate their workforces. The CRS noted the agreements resulted in the hiring of more than 140 Black technicians and professionals, as well as the appointment of a Black vice president of a Georgia radio chain.[19]

During the early 1970s, as a result of the WLBT case, civil-rights and community groups filed more than 340 license challenges across the country. Groups like Black Efforts for Soul in Television (BEST) organized workshops to teach groups how to file a license challenge and groups like the Citizens Communication Center provided legal representation.[20]

These efforts forced many stations to sign agreements with local groups to integrate their newsrooms and news coverage.[21] BEST also played a critical role in pressuring Congress and the president to appoint the first Black FCC

commissioner. The group's co-founder, William Wright, accused a Senate subcommittee of being racist for failing to consider the appointment of a Black FCC commissioner. BEST's advocacy pushed Congress and President Richard Nixon to appoint Benjamin Hooks in 1972.[22] Hooks left the agency in 1977 to become the executive director of the NAACP.[23]

But in 1973, Commissioner Hooks helped arrange the first meeting between the FCC and about 40 leaders of color, the majority of whom were Black. They discussed such issues as "extreme racism and sexism" in TV programming, news reporting, the agency's enforcement of its Equal Employment Opportunity rules and the "cavalier handling of petitions and complaints submitted" by organizations of color. [24]

Wright is quoted in the book *Reluctant Regulators* as saying he hoped the commission would understand as a result of the meeting "'something of the depth of frustration, the despair with the performance of the broadcast media, which afflicts the peoples of color.'"[25]

There is still much to learn about the role the CRS played behind the scenes to help integrate our nation's newsrooms. And there is so much to learn about the work of civil-rights activists who were determined to hold their local broadcasters accountable for failing to serve their communities.

This work has received little attention in U.S. media history. But as Levine noted, the CRS' efforts to mediate tensions with the news media ended in 1973, when the "program suffered a sudden demise with the termination of the agency's preventive work by the Nixon administration.".[26]

The Justice Department wasn't the only agency to respond to the findings of the Kerner Commission. In 1969, the FCC adopted the EEO rules that made it illegal for broadcast stations to discriminate in employment against any person "on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin" and "to ensure equal opportunity in every aspect of station employment."[27]

Efforts to democratize our media system also resulted in the FCC adopting a policy to increase broadcast ownership by people of color. In 1978, the agency created the minority tax-certificate program, which allowed broadcasters to receive a tax break if they sold their stations to people of color.[28] However, a federal court twice struck down the FCC's EEO rules in response to successful legal challenges brought by the broadcast industry in 1998 and 2001.[29] And in 1995, the Republican-controlled Congress passed legislation that ended the minority tax-certificate program, which had increased broadcast ownership by people of color from less than 1 percent to 3 percent.[30]

In the following years, both Congress and the FCC made it even more difficult for people of color to own broadcast stations. Congress passed the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which deregulated the broadcast industry and resulted in massive media consolidation. The legislation increased the number of TV stations a company could own as long as the combined stations did not exceed 35 percent of the national audience.[31]

In 2003, the FCC attempted to weaken its rules and raise the cap to 45 percent; in a compromise, Congress raised the cap to 39 percent.[32] The agency has also allowed giant TV conglomerates like Sinclair Broadcast Group — which owns and operates nearly 200 stations — to exceed its ownership limits through sham agreements, giving the company control over stations it doesn't technically own.[33]

This rampant deregulation also affected the radio industry: The 1996 Telecommunications Act also removed the radio-ownership cap, which had prevented a company from owning more than 40 stations nationwide. Clear Channel (now iHeartMedia) went from owning 40 stations to more than 1,200.[34] The consolidation of the broadcast industry reduced the number of broadcast owners of color, who could not economically compete with the big conglomerates.[35]

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XI. How Public Policy Has Entrenched Anti-Blackness in the Media

A MATTER OF INJUSTICE

More than half a century since the release of the Kerner report, the "painful process of readjustment" that the commission called for has yet to be fully realized.

Black journalists remain underrepresented in our nation's newsrooms, making up just 5.6 percent of all newsroom staffers working at daily publications and online sites in 2017 and 4.6 percent of newsroom leaders that same year, according to the American Society of News Editors' annual study, which was first conducted in 1978.[1] And the number of Black journalists working at local newspapers has likely declined in 2020 due to the number of reporters who have been laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic.[2]

But the American Society of News Editors — now known as the News Leaders Association — has been unable to produce a reliable study since 2017 because not enough news organizations have chosen to participate. In June, the group announced it was revamping the diversity survey.[3]

While a 2019 broadcast-industry study found that Black employees made up 12 percent of the TV-newsroom workforce, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions, making up just 5.5 percent of TV news directors and just 2.3 percent of general managers.[4]

The lack of Black journalists and newsroom leaders explains why so much news coverage still insidiously promotes the myth of Black inferiority and works to uphold a white-racial hierarchy. Media outlets such as CNN and Fox News, for example, underrepresent the percentage of poor white families in their coverage but "exaggerate the proportion of families receiving welfare who are Black while also wrongly attributing the use of (and need for) government programs to laziness, dependency or dysfunction," according to a 2017 Color Of Change and Family Story study.[5]

The study found that Black families represented 59 percent of coverage in "news and opinion media" about poverty even though they made up just 27 percent of poor families. However, white families represented just 17 percent of the poor in news coverage even though they made up 66 percent of all poor families.[6]

In addition, local news still stereotypes the Black community. A 2020 Heinz Endowments study found that 72.4 percent of local Pittsburgh television and newspaper stories that featured Black people over a two-month period in 2019 focused on crime and sports. A similar Heinz study conducted nearly a decade ago found that 71.5 percent of local-news stories about Black men and boys focused on crime and sports.[7] The president of the Heinz Endowments called the lack of progress "disheartening and intolerable."[8]

At the same time, federal policies have paved the way for massive consolidation over the past four decades and have further entrenched our media system's racial inequities.

Runaway media consolidation, coupled with an economic crisis in the newspaper industry, have resulted in the layoffs of thousands of journalists. Our nation "lost nearly 326,000 newspaper industry jobs between 1990–2019 — a staggering 71-percent decline." And the number of newspaper-reporting jobs declined 55 percent from 37,480 in 2005 to 16,800 in 2019.[9] In addition, the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an economic crisis that has forced a number of newspapers to further reduce their already depleted newsrooms.[10]

Sara Lomax-Reese, president and CEO of Philadelphia's WURD Radio — one of the few Black-owned talk-radio stations in the country — spoke to the BBC in June about the impact of consolidation. "There used to be this really powerful legacy of Black talk radio," she said. "There were absolutely way more African American talk radio stations, African American-owned stations in previous years. And when the 1996 Telecommunications Act was passed, black-owned radio stations were gobbled up and kind of

rolled into these massive, publicly traded companies. And so, that character of independently owned and city-by-city, individual voice and character was eliminated."[11]

These factors — made worse by the lack of generational wealth in the Black community due to historic economic injustice and discrimination — have made it harder to increase Black ownership.[12]

And these forces have made it difficult for existing Black owners to compete against larger conglomerates. According to recent data, Black people own and control less than 1 percent of our nation's full-power TV stations — just 12 stations in our entire country.[13] This is a troubling figure considering that it took until 1973 for the FCC to approve a broadcast license for the first Black-owned TV station on the U.S. mainland: WGPR-TV in Detroit.[14]

So while media companies have boasted over the past half century about their support for "diversity," racial disparities and inequities have persisted both inside our nation's newsrooms and in the boardrooms that control them.

Meanwhile, media conglomerates such as AT&T, Comcast, Disney and Fox Corporation are now dominant players on multiple media platforms. Each of these companies owns some or all of the following: local-TV stations, cable networks, news networks, cable-news networks, cable systems, broadband networks and movie studios.

The slow pace of progress when it comes to serving the Black community's news-and-information needs demonstrates how diversity efforts will never be enough to achieve the kind of equity Black people need in our media system.

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XII. White Media Power and the Trump Feeding Frenzy

FUELING THE RISE OF A TYRANT

Racism's been good for business for too many big media companies for far too long. This is why media reparations are critical.

Large media companies have little incentive to advance or achieve racial equity in their operations since it would force them to dismantle the white-racial hierarchy that exists in their own newsrooms. And they have little interest in doing that. The same goes for lawmakers and regulators whose policies have allowed this hierarchy to exist in our media system. Reparations are needed to reconcile and repair the history of harm and to materially reshape the ongoing imbalance of power.

In 2016, CBS Chairman and CEO Les Moonves openly rooted for Trump's racist presidential campaign while speaking at a Morgan Stanley Technology, Media and Telecom conference in San Francisco — in remarks that drew laughter from the audience.

"Who would have thought that this circus would come to town?" said Moonves, who departed CBS after being accused of sexual misconduct.

"But, you know, it may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS. That's all I've got to say. So, what can I say? It's — you know, the money's rolling in, and this is ... This is — this is something. I've never seen anything like this. And, you know, this is going to be a very good year for us. But — sorry, it's a terrible thing to say, but bring it on, Donald. Go ahead. Keep going."[1]

In that statement, Moonves pulled back the veil to reveal that many media conglomerates practice a predatory form of capitalism that harms Black people and other people of color. While this has been standard practice for a long time, the Trump presidency has made it clear that profit-driven journalism has a long history of failing to serve everyday people, especially in the Black community. Big media companies are profiting from Trump's racism while paying little-to-no attention to the impact of Trump's policies on the lives of Black people and other marginalized groups.

Media executives too often care more about maximizing profits than producing quality journalism. This has come at the expense of the Black community and other communities of color. Race is often covered as a spectacle, filled with dog-whistle language that perpetuates the myth of Black inferiority. And this has harmed so many journalists of color who work tirelessly to fulfill their journalistic missions.

While Moonves is no longer in power, many of the people who fueled Trump's rise are still firmly in charge.

President Trump is a media creation. One of the people most responsible for his rise is CNN President Jeff Zucker.

Zucker was the president of NBC Entertainment when he greenlit Trump's reality-TV show *The Apprentice*.[2] In 2011, Color Of Change launched a campaign against *Celebrity Apprentice* after Trump made the racist accusation that President Obama was not born in the United States.[3] But the group found little support for its effort.

"To a person, across the movement, at organizations that we regularly work with now, people were like, 'He's a clown, just ignore him,'" said Color Of Change's Rashad Robinson in a 2017 interview. "Allowing Donald Trump to be seen as a smart, capable businessman who each week showed up on TV to make decisions, while he was saying these other things, was not something that we should have let stand. Now that he's president, it is interesting to [think of] this moment, [when] we could have all gone in, to really put him away."[4]

Zucker was the president of CNN during the 2016 campaign when the racist Trump candidacy propelled the network to earn nearly $1 billion in profits. As president, Trump remains a primary focus of the network's coverage, which features pundits frequently debating his racist remarks — but little on how his policies hurt people of color.[5]

"We've seen that, anytime you break away from the Trump story and cover other events in this era, the audience goes away," Zucker told *Vanity Fair* in 2018. "So we know that, right now, Donald Trump dominates."[6]

Zucker also told *The New York Times Magazine* in 2017 that "the idea that politics is sport is undeniable, and we understood that and approached it that way." [7] Given Zucker's analogy, it's easy to see why cable networks like CNN and MSNBC cover race as a sporting event. Pundits spend hours debating Trump's latest racist statement. Conflict is good for ratings, cheap to produce and makes for easy segments to program. It attracts a bigger audience by inflaming viewers. But viewers learn little about the lives of the people that Trump's horrific policies target.

Meanwhile, inflaming racial divisions has been a central political and business strategy for Fox News in appealing to white viewers who fear our nation's changing demographics. Fox News' on-air personalities, including Tucker Carlson and Laura Ingraham, have spread white-supremacist ideology by promoting the dangerous narrative that immigrants of color are invading our country and replacing white people.[8]

And during the Trump presidency, Fox News has become the administration's political-propaganda arm, where racist ideas and policies that Fox News advocates are repeated and acted on by the Trump White House and vice-versa.[9]

This is playing out right now as the 2020 election nears. Trump is using thinly veiled racist dog whistles for his supporters, including white militia groups, to signal his support of violence against racial-justice activists. And Fox News is providing Trump with political cover.

In August, police in Kenosha, Wisconsin, shot Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old Black man, seven times in the back, leaving him partially paralyzed. Days later, 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse, who is white, shot three people — killing two — who were protesting the police shooting. Rittenhouse, who was charged with murder, had traveled from Illinois, where a militia had called for people with guns to "defend" Kenosha.[10]

Carlson came to the defense of the shooter and said "Kenosha has devolved into anarchy because the authorities in charge of the city abandoned it ... So are we really surprised that looting and arson accelerated to murder? How shocked are we that 17-year-olds with rifles decided they had to maintain order when no one else would?"[11]

Days later, Trump also defended Rittenhouse, suggesting he might have been killed if he had not acted first.[12]

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38%

Increase in CNN viewership in 2015, the year Trump descended an escalator to announce his candidacy

—State of the News Media, Pew Research Center, June 15, 2016: https://tinyurl.com/yyuyf9a6

20%

Increase in profits at CNN and Fox News in 2015

—State of the News Media, Pew Research Center, June 15, 2016: https://tinyurl.com/yyuyf9a6

54

Criminal cases of violence, threats and alleged assaults where Trump was directly invoked

—ABC News, May 30, 2020: https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/blame-abc-news-finds-17-cases-invoking-trump

200,000+

COVID-19 deaths in the United States

—Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control, covid.cdc.gov, accessed on Sept. 23, 2020

XIII. Media Racism from the Newsroom to the Boardroom

HOW THE CYCLE CONTINUES

The ways in which these big media companies are harming Black people extends beyond their news operations. For so long, these companies have profited from Black suffering by denying Black people their civil and human rights.

Big media and telecom companies like AT&T, Comcast and Verizon are part of this history. Until recently, these companies were members of the American Legislative Exchange Council, a right-wing organization made up of some of our nation's most powerful corporations. The group's mission is to lobby state lawmakers to pass legislation that it crafts to further its members' business and, at times, political goals.[1]

Through the years, ALEC has crafted legislation for state lawmakers on such issues as voter suppression, greenhouse-gas emissions and repealing Obamacare. The group has also pushed stand-your-ground laws, which make it legal for people to respond to perceived threats with deadly force.[2]

Too often, the public is unaware of ALEC's role in the passage of state legislation until the harm is done. After George Zimmerman shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, in 2012, ALEC's role in the passage of the state's stand-your-ground law received greater attention.[3]

But in 2018, it became difficult for many companies to remain in ALEC after David Horowitz — who the Southern Poverty Law Center has called a leader in the anti-Muslim movement — gave a speech at the group's annual conference.[4] The Intercept reported that Horowitz denounced "marriage equality and suggested that the Constitution's three-fifths compromise was not about Black people."[5] He also reportedly said that K–12 curricula were "turned over to racist organizations like Black Lives Matter and terrorist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood."[6]

AT&T, Comcast and Verizon all left ALEC after a coalition of civil-rights, labor, environmental and government-reform organizations called on the group's "largest corporate backers" to denounce Horowitz's speech and leave the organization.[7]

Verizon told The Intercept that "our company has no tolerance for racist, white supremacist or sexist comment[s] or ideals."[8]

As ALEC members, the big broadband companies pursued such predatory corporate policies as preventing state legislatures from passing their own Net Neutrality bills and banning municipalities from building their own high-speed broadband networks.[9] Their success on the latter front has contributed to the digital divide, which disproportionately impacts Black people across all income levels.[10]

While these companies are no longer members of ALEC, they are still hurting Black people with policies they've pressured our federal government to adopt.

For nearly a decade, Black racial-justice leaders and Black-led groups like Color Of Change and MediaJustice have fought for strong Net Neutrality rules to ensure that Black people could tell our own stories without the risk of being silenced by big cable and telecom gatekeepers. MediaJustice and Free Press (led by its staffers of color) also co-founded the Voices for Internet Freedom coalition to ensure the interests of communities of color are heard in the fight to protect an open internet. Coalition members

include 18 Million Rising, Color Of Change and the National Hispanic Media Coalition.[11]

> **"Because of network neutrality rules, activists can turn to the Internet to bypass the discrimination of mainstream cable, broadcast and print outlets as we organize for change," wrote Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors in 2014. "It is because of net neutrality rules that the Internet is the only communication channel left where Black voices can speak and be heard, produce and consume, on our own terms."[12]**

In 2015, the Obama FCC passed strong regulations that ensured the agency had the legal authority to enforce its own rules. But in 2017, the big cable companies worked with the Trump FCC to repeal those protections.[13] A subsequent exposé revealed that the industry employed dirty tricks to try to convince policymakers that there was widespread support for gutting the Net Neutrality rules.[14]

A 2019 BuzzFeed investigation found that prior to the FCC's 2017 vote, a cable-industry trade group — Broadband for America — hired two shady digital-services firms that filed millions of fraudulent anti-Net Neutrality comments with the agency on behalf of members like AT&T and Comcast.[15]

This is one of countless examples showing that the corporations controlling our nation's media and internet will stop at nothing to pad their profits — including engaging in willful misinformation that harms Black people and other historically marginalized communities.

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WAKE UP CALL
NET NEUTRALITY IS A RACIAL JUSTICE ISSUE
Stop the corporate takeover of our
SAVE INTERNET
#STOPTHEF
INTERNET a PRIVATE TOLL ROAD
Communicate FREELY ONLINE = EQU
FUNDAMENTAL CIVIL
Choose

Net Neutrality activists rally outside the FCC in 2017

Photos by Maria Merkulova

XIV. 2020: A Global Reckoning on Race

DEMANDING AN END TO ANTI-BLACK STATE VIOLENCE

The spring and summer of 2020 have given us a glimpse of that future. The racial uprisings taking place across the country in the wake of the execution of George Floyd are heartbreaking, tragic and inspiring. They have been sparked by Black death and suffering — and by those who refuse to accept them.

But the global embrace of Black Lives Matter has drawn the ire of President Trump, U.S. Attorney General William Barr and many Republicans in power.[1] Why? Because this response threatens our nation's white-racial hierarchy.

It was never the goal of a settler-colonial nation to become a multiracial democracy. And as we have discussed throughout this essay, our nation's dominant white media system has played a central role in preventing any kind of progress on this front.

This lack of progress has been brought into sharp relief in 2020, as the current racial uprisings might make up the largest movement our nation has ever experienced.[2]

The uprisings have brought greater attention to the death of 26-year-old Breonna Taylor. Louisville police shot and killed Taylor in March 2020 after they broke into her apartment in the middle of the night, claiming they were searching for drugs. None were found. Taylor, an emergency-room technician, was shot at least five times and did not receive medical attention for 20 minutes.[3] One of the three officers involved has been fired.

While Taylor's family called for criminal charges to be brought against all three officers,[4] a grand jury chose to charge just one of the detectives with "wanton endangerment" for the bullets fired into adjacent apartments.[5]

In other words, no one has been criminally charged or held accountable for the murder of Breonna Taylor.

The uprisings have also brought greater attention to the death of 23-year-old Elijah McClain in Aurora, Colorado.

In August 2019, the police detained McClain as he was walking home from a store in the evening, after receiving a call that he looked "looked sketchy." The police tackled McClain and placed him in a carotid (strangle) hold. McClain vomited several times and told the police "I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to do that, I can't breathe correctly." He lost consciousness and was given a powerful sedative from paramedics. En route to the hospital, McClain went into cardiac arrest. He died several days later.[6]

The murder of Floyd lit a fuse around the world against police brutality. And all of this has happened against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, which has laid bare the destructive impacts of racist oppression and policies.

And at the time of Floyd's death, Black people were nearly three times more likely to die of COVID-19 than white people.[7] There are many reasons for this, including a lack of health-care coverage or access to quality care, and a lack of sick leave at jobs that are low-paying but public-facing.[8]

The pandemic has also had grave economic consequences: Black businesses were far less likely to receive a small-business loan as part of the COVID-19 stimulus package. This contributed to a 41-percent decline in Black-owned businesses between February and April of this year.[9] And by May, when the uprisings started, Black unemployment had risen to 16.8 percent — 17.6 percent for Latinx workers — while the white unemployment rate had fallen from 14.9 percent in April to 12.4 percent. But the white unemployment figure is likely overstated because it includes white Latinx people.[10]

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how government policies at all levels have failed to ensure that our communities receive the resources we need to erase structural disparities and the harms that they cause. Instead, city, state and federal governments have invested an enormous amount of taxpayer money into policing Black people. This is why the Movement for Black Lives has called for defunding the police and shifting to a "massive investment in a shared vision of community safety that actually works."[11]

The 2020 uprisings have also seen thousands of white people hit the streets and call for an end to systemic racism. Perhaps greater numbers of white people, from all economic backgrounds, are realizing that the racist policies our lawmakers adopt to benefit big industries also render them disposable.[12]

But we are living through, at this moment, a call for a reckoning.

Black voices throughout our society are challenging systems of oppression on a scale we have not witnessed in half a century. This includes Black journalists who are calling for fundamental change at major white news organizations they work for. Despite the presence of many gifted and accomplished Black journalists in our nation's newsrooms, power disparities remain.

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George Floyd Memorial, South Minneapolis
May 31, 2020
Photo by Flickr user Chad Davis

2020

Black Lives (Breonna Taylor) Matter(s) Protest, Brooklyn, NY
June 12, 2020
Photo by Flickr user Informed Images

Black Lives Matter Protest
Washington, D.C.
June 6, 2020
Photo by Flickr user Geoff Livingston

uprisings

Black Lives Matter Protest
London
June 7, 2020
Photo by Flickr user Livvy Adjei

XV. Upending White Supremacy in Newsrooms

JOURNALISTS OF COLOR LEAD THE WAY

Black journalists at *The New York Times* took to Twitter on June 3 to denounce an editorial by Sen. Tom Cotton (R–Arkansas) the paper had published that day. Cotton's Op-Ed, "Send in the Troops," advocated for military force to put down the nationwide uprisings and trample people's constitutional right to protest — a fascist stance that directly endangered Black lives.[1]

Times staffers tweeted a screenshot of the column's headline with the message "Running this puts Black @NYTimes staff in danger."[2]

More than 1,000 *Times* staffers signed a letter denouncing the column's misinformation and the paper's decision to publish the piece.[3]

The paper's editorial-page editor, James Bennet, initially defended the decision, stating on Twitter that "Times Opinion owes it to our readers to show them counter-arguments, particularly those made by people in a position to set policy."

He added "[We] understand that many readers find Senator Cotton's argument painful, even dangerous. We believe that is one reason it requires public scrutiny and debate."[4]

But during a staff meeting, it emerged that the editorial page had solicited Cotton's Op-Ed and that Bennet had not read it before it was published. Soon after the meeting, he resigned.[5]

On June 5, the *Times* placed an editorial note on the online version of the column that read "we have concluded that the essay fell short of our standards and should not have been published."[6]

Meanwhile, journalists of color at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* revolted after the paper ran a June 2 headline that read "Buildings Matter, Too" for a story about buildings damaged during the demonstrations. The paper faced an immediate internal backlash against this co-opting of the term "Black Lives Matter."

The next day, journalists of color at the *Inquirer* published an open letter to the editor that spoke of the anger and frustrations they'd experienced at the paper:

> *We're tired of hasty apologies and silent corrections when someone screws up. We're tired of workshops and worksheets and diversity panels. We're tired of working for months and years to gain the trust of our communities — communities that have long had good reason to not trust our profession — only to see that trust eroded in an instant by careless, unempathetic decisions.*


Jazmine Hughes @jazzedloon · Jun 3, 2020
Replying to @jazzedloon
Running this put Black @nytimes staff in danger.
Opinion
Tom Cotton: Send In the Troops
Jazmine Hughes
@jazzedloon
To be clear, this story endangers *all* black people, NYT staffers and not. But for this, this is a labor issue. This is our livelihood. This is embarrassing.
8:05 PM · Jun 3, 2020
3.2K
366 people are Tweeting
marc tracy
@marcatracy
NEW: Times spokeswoman sends mea culpa
We've examined the piece and the process leading up to its publication. This review made clear that a rushed editorial process led to the publication of an Op-Ed that did not meet our standards. As a result, we're planning to examine both short term and long term changes, to include expanding our fact checking operation and reducing the number of Op-Eds we publish.
6:14 PM · Jun 4, 2020
6.6K
3.2K people are Tweeting about this

It's no coincidence that communities hurt by systemic racism only see journalists in their neighborhoods when people are shot or buildings burn down. It takes commitment to correct and improve that relationship. It is an insult to our work, our communities, and our neighbors to see that trust destroyed — and makes us that much more likely to face threats and aggression. The carelessness of our leadership makes it harder to do our jobs, and at worst puts our lives at risk.

We're tired of shouldering the burden of dragging this 200-year-old institution kicking and screaming into a more equitable age. We're tired of being told of the progress the company has made and being served platitudes about 'diversity and inclusion' when we raise our concerns. We're tired of seeing our words and photos twisted to fit a narrative that does not reflect our reality. We're tired of being told to show both sides of issues there are no two sides of.

Things need to change.[7]

That same day, the paper issued a public apology for the headline:

The Philadelphia Inquirer published a headline in Tuesday's edition that was deeply offensive. We should not have printed it. We're sorry, and regret that we did. We also know that an apology on its own is not sufficient.

The headline accompanied a story on the future of Philadelphia's buildings and civic infrastructure in the aftermath of this week's protests. The headline offensively riffed on the Black Lives Matter movement, and suggested an equivalence between the loss of buildings and the lives of black Americans.

That is unacceptable. ...

Finally, we apologize to Inquirer journalists, particularly those of color, who expressed sadness, anger, and embarrassment in a two-hour newsroom-wide meeting Wednesday. An enormous amount of pressure sits on the shoulders of black and brown Inquirer journalists, and mistakes like this, made by the publication they work for, are profoundly demoralizing. We hear you and will continue to listen as we work to improve.[8]

The following day, dozens of journalists of color called in sick in protest. And two days later, the *Inquirer*'s top editor, Stan Wischnowski, resigned.[9] In addition, more than 40 community leaders and social-justice groups — including the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, the Asian American Journalists Association Philadelphia, and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (Philadelphia chapter) — have called on the paper to "nurture deep relationships with the community and develop a community-first, anti-racist newsroom philosophy."[10]

On the West Coast, Black and Latinx journalists are challenging *The Los Angeles Times* management and ownership to address its lack of newsroom diversity, the coverage of communities of color and the treatment of journalists of color.

A June 24 article about the conflict revealed that out of more than 500 journalists who work at the paper, 61 percent are white even though white people make up just 26 percent of Los Angeles County. This stands in contrast to Latinx reporters, who make up just 13 percent of newsroom staff but almost half of the county population. And the paper employs just 26 Black journalists, which accounts for just 5 percent of the newsroom staff.[11]

The story described how "internal critics" view the changes that have taken place at the paper over the years. They believe the outlet has "reinforced an internal hierarchy that put people of color at a disadvantage" and created a "tiered newsroom, where veteran editors and reporters, who are largely white, have relied on a secondary class of primarily younger, less-experienced Latino, Asian and Black reporters who are paid significantly less than older counterparts."[12]

Current and former Black *Los Angeles Times* journalists used the hashtag #BlackatLAT on Twitter to call out the paper's mistreatment. The L.A. Times Guild's Black Caucus also wrote a letter to the paper's owner, Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong, and noted that "the nation's reckoning over race has put a much-needed spotlight on inequities at *The Times*." Citing the 1992 riots in Los Angeles that followed the acquittal of police officers who had beaten Rodney King, they declared:

We are in a crisis and it is not new. Those of us who have been here since the tumult of 1992 say history is repeating itself. We don't have enough Black journalists — or, more broadly, journalists of color — to cover our overwhelmingly diverse city, state and nation with appropriate insight and sensitivity. And most of us who do work here are often ignored, marginalized, under-valued and left to drift along career paths that leave little opportunity for advancement. Meanwhile, we're hearing the same empty promises and seeing the same foot-dragging from management."[13]

Among its demands, the Black Caucus urged the paper to issue a public apology — "not just for the Black journalists on staff, but for the communities that *The Times* has maligned over the years with tone-deaf coverage that has often inflamed racial tensions."[14]

Additional demands included hiring 18 more Black journalists over three years to reach parity with the county's Black population, rectifying pay disparities, and improving coverage to capture the "nuance and complexity" of communities of color — "in particular ... the Black community," which the company admitted was an "untapped base of potential subscribers." The "framing and selection" of stories, the letter noted, were often "designed mostly with a white audience in mind at the expense of communities of color."[15]

In an email to the staff in early June, *Times* Executive Editor Norman Pearlstine wrote that as "protesters are pushing America to examine how systemic racism has shaped our institutions, we would be remiss in not examining our own institution as well."[16] He also acknowledged the paper's history of harm:

The Los Angeles Times has a long, well-documented history of fueling the racism and cruelty that accompanied our city's becoming a metropolis. This publication fomented the hysteria that led to Japanese American incarceration, the Zoot Suit Riots, redlining and racial covenants, and it turned a blind eye to generations of police abuses against minority communities. At its worst, our coverage didn't simply ignore people of color — it actively dehumanized them. More recently, we can be faulted for focusing on a white subscriber base even as the city became majority non-white. Our paper's history of addressing the concerns of people of color in the newsroom has been equally checkered. Our failures have caused pain for staff past and present.[17]

The Los Angeles Times is hardly alone when it comes to ignoring the Black community and other communities of color — and in catering to white readers who are regarded as a more desirable demographic for advertisers to target.[18]

This is an issue that deserves greater attention since it shows the history of discriminatory business practices of many news outlets that have refused to deliver their papers to poor communities and communities of color.[19] In 1996, *The Washington Post*'s Geneva Overholser wrote that many newspapers had "essentially adopted red-lining: They simply cease to serve areas of little interest to advertisers."[20] It should come as no surprise that this kind of prejudice would also extend to how Black journalists are treated within their newsrooms and questioned about their ability to objectively cover their own communities.

In 2020, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*'s managing editor told two Black journalists — reporter Alexis Johnson and Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Michael Santiago — that they could no longer cover the local uprisings due to tweets each had posted.

Johnson posted a sarcastic tweet on May 31 that included a picture of a parking lot filled with trash. It read: "Horrifying scenes and aftermath from selfish LOOTERS who don't care about this city!!!!! .... oh wait sorry. No, these are pictures from a Kenny Chesney concert tailgate. Whoops."[21]

Following this tweet, the managing editor told Johnson she couldn't cover the uprisings. The paper also pulled Santiago from covering the protests after he tweeted his support of Johnson. Since then, he has taken a buyout and left the paper.[22]

A lawsuit Johnson filed accused the *Post-Gazette* of violating her civil rights and noted that reporters at the paper "who spoke out publicly against discrimination and hate after the 2018 shootings at the Tree of Life synagogue — which did not involve actions by police directed at African Americans — were not removed from covering that story."[23]

In 2018, a gunman shot and killed 11 Jewish worshippers.[24]

Unlike other newspapers whose editors apologized, responded or resigned, the *Post-Gazette* dug in. Executive Editor Keith Burris appeared on Laura Ingraham's Fox News program to defend the paper against the so-called "Twitter mob."[25] He also claimed in a column that he was simply upholding journalism ethics.[26]

Burris hardly has any credibility on this front: In 2018, when he was the editorial-page editor, he wrote a column defending Trump's racist comments after the president questioned why the United States should allow immigrants from "shithole countries" like El Salvador and Haiti to enter the country. Burris argued that "calling someone a racist is the new McCarthyism."[27]

Black journalists have long been accused of bias and the inability to "objectively" cover their own communities. White news-media companies have sought to protect a white-racial hierarchy by demanding objectivity that by default centers whiteness.

"Since American journalism's pivot many decades ago from an openly partisan press to a model of professed objectivity, the mainstream has allowed what it considers objective truth to be decided almost exclusively by white reporters and their mostly white bosses," wrote Wesley Lowery, a Black journalist who won a Pulitzer Prize at *The Washington Post* in 2016 for his investigative reporting on police killings.

Lowery continued:

> **[T]hose selective truths have been calibrated to avoid offending the sensibilities of white readers. On opinion pages, the contours of acceptable public debate have largely been determined through the gaze of white editors.**
>
> **The views and inclinations of whiteness are accepted as the objective neutral. When black and brown reporters and editors challenge those conventions, it's not uncommon for them to be pushed out, reprimanded or robbed of new opportunities."[28]**

Lowery left the *Post* after repeated run-ins with Executive Editor Marty Baron that placed his job in jeopardy over his comments on Twitter on such issues as journalism and race.[29] He is now a CBS News correspondent.

The view that whiteness is the default objective neutral — or normal — has also been the unwritten but understood focus of noncommercial public broadcasters. It's why major public-broadcasting stations are also facing their own newsroom reckonings.[30]

Julie Drizin, executive director of *Current* — a nonprofit news outlet covering public media — wrote in late June:

> **We hold these truths to be self-evident: Public media has a whiteness problem. You know this. Everybody knows it, especially people of color. The vast majority of our stations and organizations fail to adequately reflect their communities or the country. We lack representation of people of color in our leadership, staffing, newsrooms, voices on air, sources, coverage and — no surprise here — audiences.[31]**

New York's WNYC — the most listened-to public-radio station in the country — is one of the outlets that's struggling to reflect the communities they serve. The *New York Times* reported in July that more than 145 staffers at WNYC signed an open letter to the station's top management and board of trustees calling for a more diverse staff and for the immediate hiring of two Black reporters and two Black producers. The letter came in response to WNYC's decision to hire Audrey Cooper — a white woman and the former editor-in-chief of *The San Francisco Chronicle* — as its new editor-in-chief.[32]

Last year, *The New York Times* reported that WNYC's staffers had urged the station's leadership to hire a person of color who understood the city and had public-radio experience. But instead, the station hired Cooper — who lacked public-radio experience and did not meet the staff request that the station hire someone who understood the city (Cooper grew up in Kansas and worked and lived in California).[33]

In 2017, WNYC let go three hosts following accusations of sexual harassment and discrimination. This included John Hockenberry, host of *The Takeaway*.

During his WNYC tenure, several employees and a guest on his show said that Hockenberry had sexually harassed them. He also bullied and made sexist and racist remarks to Black women who were his colleagues, such as Rebecca

Carroll, and former co-hosts such as Farai Chideya and Adaora Udoji — both of whom left the show due to his behavior.[34] The contract of Celeste Headlee, a multiracial woman, was not renewed after she filed a formal grievance against Hockenberry for his abusive conduct. The following year, Laura Walker — who has been criticized for failing to address the harms taking place at the station — announced she was departing as the chief executive and president of New York Public Radio, which owns WNYC.

"What really did put a dagger through my heart was when I went to Laura," said Chideya. "I went straight to the top. I said this is what happened and she said it was horrifying, but with a certain — I'm just going to be blunt here — theatrical finality that sort of implied that this is not to be discussed again."[35]

Meanwhile on WNYC's *The Takeaway*, now hosted by Tanzina Vega, the show's executive producer, Lee Hill, discussed the challenges he had faced as the first Black person in the newsroom at Colorado Public Radio. There, he was the only person assigned "any sort of diversity work" and was once asked by a colleague if they could grab a beer so that person could "try to understand what it is like to be Black in America."[36]

Hill was also told that he sounded "weird" on the air even though he had on-air experience at NPR prior to arriving in Colorado.[37]

"I am in an executive role now and I love this job," said Hill. "But I have to say that it was one of my motivations for getting off the air. I felt really damaged by that experience."[38]

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XVI. Are Newsrooms Ready to Make Things Right?

REPAIRING HARM AND REDISTRIBUTING POWER

As Black journalists and other journalists of color are heroically speaking up, many white media institutions are showing just how unprepared or unwilling they have been to deal with a country that is becoming Blacker and Browner every day.

In June, the Associated Press announced a change to its influential stylebook, noting that it will start capitalizing "Black" when used "in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense." This change is intended, the AP said, to "[convey] an essential and shared sense of history, identity and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and within Africa."[7]

Many Black journalists had long advocated for this change.[8] And since the uprisings began, hundreds of newspapers and media outlets have announced their own plans to make the same style change. In the same announcement, AP also said it will capitalize the "I" in Indigenous "in reference to original inhabitants of a place."[9]

One of the outlets that will start capitalizing Black and Indigenous is *The Washington Post*,[10] which also announced that it will hire more than a dozen new positions that include journalists and editors.

"This is a historic moment in American history and in race relations," said *Post* Executive Editor Marty Baron. "It requires us to re-examine our coverage and concentrate resources on the issues of race, ethnicity and identity that clearly deserve heightened attention. With this expansion, we will be more inclusive in our journalism, providing broader and deeper reporting that today's social reckoning demands."[11]

In a memo to its staff, *The New York Times* promised to address issues of race within its newsroom.

"We have heard from many black colleagues, and other people of color around the company, that they do not feel sufficiently part of decision making, feel fully valued in our culture, or see a clear path for advancement," the memo read.[12]

It also stated that the paper will address such concerns as how to more fully represent people of color in leadership, how to "hold leaders and managers across the company accountable for progress" and how to ensure that coverage serves a more diverse audience.[13] The memo also noted that the "entire top of the company — executive committee members, masthead editors, desk heads and department heads — will participate in training on racial equity and inclusion."[14]

In a letter to the paper's Black caucus and newsroom staff, *Los Angeles Times* owner Dr. Patrick Soon-Shiong apologized "for not advancing anti-racist priorities as substantively and rapidly as we had dreamed" and made a pledge that "we will do everything in our power to end racism" at the paper. [15]

He wrote that "a prejudiced set of structures and attitudes for too long plagued cultures of journalism. Recognizing the injustice of racial prejudice is the first step toward reconciliation and change. At the Los Angeles Times, we acknowledge a need for change."[16]

He also stated: "We appreciate on a deeply personal level the pain of explicit and unconscious racism; of structural and interpersonal violence that is the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and modern institutions designed to disenfranchise," Dr. Soon-Shiong wrote in recounting the racism that he and his wife faced as teenagers in apartheid South Africa.[17]

Dr. Soon-Shiong said the *Times* will hire more Black journalists over the next 36 months, ensure pay equity and address "unconscious bias" in its news coverage. As part of these efforts, the editorial board will publish a story documenting the paper's history of racist coverage. [18]

What's frustrating is that it has taken Black death and suffering for these news organizations to commit to the kind of changes that should have happened many yesterdays ago. It has, after all, been more than 50 years since the Kerner Commission released its historic report.

Since then, Black, Latinx, Asian American and Indigenous journalists have created their own associations and have held annual conventions and conferences over the past half century that many executives from these powerful white-controlled media institutions have attended. These conversations about the need to integrate our nation's newsrooms and produce journalism that serves the Black community's information needs have been going on for decades. But racial disparities in presence and power remain.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting's Janine Jackson calls out these persistent inequities:

> **The Kerner report didn't call for 'diversity.' It called for US journalism to de-center its white male view. Media 'report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world.' Coverage 'reflects the biases, the paternalism, the indifference of white America.' And, the report said, this isn't just lamentable; it is 'not excusable in an institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of our society.'**
>
> **For Kerner, the meaningful representation of Black people in editorial roles was not a sop, or a nice thing to do, but a core value. Inclusion was crucial as a means toward an end — which was media that would 'meet the Negro's legitimate expectations in journalism.'"[19]**

As Jackson notes, the newsroom uprisings are another reminder that the industry has never fully committed to enacting the kinds of changes the Kerner Commission and Black journalists have called for — and that "the demand is not for *more* 'diversity,' but for *less* white supremacy."[20]

What's clear is that big media companies remain committed to upholding and protecting their own white-racial hierarchies. This is reflected in the poor treatment of Black journalists in newsrooms and in how Black communities are altogether excluded from newsgathering processes.

In a *New York Times* column, journalist Soledad O'Brien writes about the current newsroom uprisings and the racism that journalists of color face. She said that when she joined CNN as an anchor in 2003, it was "a great opportunity to work with journalists at a network known for its saturation coverage of news events."

But she was troubled to see that news reports rarely included people of color "unless they were about crime or tragedy or poverty." O'Brien, who has since left the network, saw that "deeper reporting on our community was often limited to Black and Hispanic history months — a 'special report' that often felt more marginalizing than special."[21]

O'Brien lays out why so many journalists of color have felt compelled to speak out:

> **To be clear, this is not just about how reporters of color are treated when they talk about race in the newsroom. The thin ranks of people of color in American newsrooms have often meant us-and-them reporting, where everyone from architecture critics to real estate writers, from entertainment reporters to sports anchors, talk about the world as if the people listening or reading their work are exclusively white.**
>
> **There are simply not enough of us in the newsroom to object effectively — not in TV, print or online, certainly not in management. So our only option is to mimic the protester's strategy: Talk directly to the public and just talk loud.[22]**

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Journalists of Color Unite in Solidarity

1975

The **National Association of Black Journalists** is founded to support African American journalists, students and media professionals. The organization's stated purpose is to provide quality programs and services to — and advocate on behalf of — Black journalists.

Source: "History/Mission," National Association of Black Journalists, accessed on Sept. 27, 2020: https://www.nabj.org/page/History

1981

The **Asian American Journalists Association** is founded in 1981 by several Los Angeles-based Asian American journalists, including Tritia Toyota and Bill Sing, to boost the participation of Asian Americans in the news media.

Source: "About," Asian American Journalists Association, accessed on Sept. 27, 2020: https://www.aaja.org/about

1983

The **Native American Journalists Association** (originally the Native American Press Association) is founded to advocate for more positive representation of Indigenous people in the media.

Source: "History," Native American Journalists Association, accessed on Sept. 27, 2020: https://najanewsroom.com/mission-and-history/

1984

The **National Association of Hispanic Journalists** is founded with a mission "to create a national voice and unified vision for all Hispanic journalists."

Source: "About," National Association of Hispanic Journalists, accessed on Sept. 27, 2020: https://nahj.org/about/

XVII. THE STRUGGLES OF BLACK MEDIA RESISTANCE

The activism of Black journalists and civil-rights groups has played a critical role in challenging white news outlets' racism and policies that have promoted media consolidation at the expense of the Black community.

Consolidated media power has curtailed Black people's ability to create and control the distribution of our own narratives. Instead, our stories are too often told by other people who get it wrong — which has caused us great harm.

Due to structural racism in the media, Black people have had to organize campaigns to pressure media outlets to stop promoting racism and other forms of hate on their platforms. One of the first examples of Black media activism — during the early days of commercial radio — took place in 1931. The *Pittsburgh Courier* launched a campaign that called on the Federal Radio Commission — a precursor to the FCC — to kick the racist *Amos 'n Andy* program off the air.[1]

It was perhaps the first such campaign in our nation's history that called on regulators to take action against a racist media program.

Half of the nation's radio-listening audience tuned into the nightly minstrel show. President Herbert Hoover invited the white actors, who played the title characters, to perform at the White House. The *Courier* collected more than 700,000 signatures on its petition. But in 1932, the FRC refused to take action.[2]

The *Courier*'s effort to engage and organize its readers to hold media companies accountable in many ways was a precursor to the online organizing taking place in the 21st century by advocacy groups like Color Of Change and Presente.org. Both organizations have used their online platforms to hold powerful media figures accountable.

Presente.org's campaign against the racist and anti-immigrant comments of CNN host Lou Dobbs led to his abrupt departure.[3] And Color Of Change launched a campaign that called on advertisers to boycott Glenn Beck's Fox News show in 2009 after he called Obama a racist who had "a deep-seated hatred for white people."[4] The campaign played a critical role in Beck's departure from the network.

The group also organized an advertisers' boycott against Fox News' Bill O'Reilly in 2015 after he falsely claimed that he had been attacked while covering the 1992 Los Angeles uprising that followed the Rodney King verdict. When sexual-harassment allegations surfaced against O'Reilly in 2017, Color Of Change was well positioned to pressure companies to stop advertising on the program. Other advocacy groups, including CREDO and Ultraviolet,

joined forces with Color Of Change. Ultraviolet sent a letter to 21st Century Fox CEO James Murdoch signed by more than 500 survivors of sexual assault calling for O'Reilly's firing. The pressure from all of these organizations led to his firing.[5]

Efforts like these are crucial: The dehumanization of Black people in the media has long fueled violence against Black community and those who fight for racial justice. This violence has also directly impacted members of the Black press, who have played an indispensable and dissident role in keeping the Black community informed about the ongoing struggle for civil and human rights.

"The critical role of the black press in the civil rights movement has not received the attention it deserves," writes Dorothy Butler Gilliam, who worked at a Black newspaper — Memphis' Tri-State Defender — after graduating from college in 1957. "Black journalists put themselves on the front lines of these stories before and during the civil rights movement, doing the work and putting their bodies in danger so the sacrifices of activists would not go unnoticed."[6]

One of those journalists was L. Alex Wilson, the editor of the *Tri-State Defender*, who traveled to Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 along with other Black journalists to cover the integration of Central High School by nine Black students.[7] A white mob savagely beat Wilson — hitting him in the head with a brick — in an attack that television cameras captured.[8] In 1959, Wilson developed a "nervous alignment," and a year later, he died of Parkinson's disease. He was just 51 years old. His wife and friends believed he developed Parkinson's as a result of the injuries he suffered in Little Rock.[9]

Today, Black journalists are using their platforms to disrupt racist and stereotypical media narratives that harm the Black community. And Black activists are using the internet to challenge these narratives and to advocate for the health and well being of their communities in the struggle for media justice.

• • •

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XVIII. Black Activists Confront Online Gatekeepers

TECH IS NOT NEUTRAL

Malkia Devich-Cyril helped "coin the term 'media justice'" in 2002 and was the visionary lead founder and former executive director of the Center for Media Justice. The group, now known as MediaJustice, has had an enormous impact on ensuring that the voices of diverse communities — fighting for racial, economic, and gender justice — are heard in the struggle for media access, control and power. MediaJustice also leads a network of more than "100 social justice, media, and arts organizations" that advocates "for communication rights, access, and fair representation."[1]

And because of groups like MediaJustice, activists today are fighting across the country to ensure the internet remains a platform for Black organizing, storytelling and liberation rather than oppression.

These efforts have taken many forms. Activists are calling for affordable internet access for the Black community and for the restoration of Net Neutrality rules. They're challenging online government and corporate surveillance of the Black community. And they're fighting the amplification of online white-supremacist hate that harms the free-speech rights of Black people — and disinformation campaigns aimed at suppressing the Black vote.[2]

Like every other media platform that has been created in our country, the internet has spawned an overflow of racist narratives that powerful gatekeepers have amplified.

Big tech companies like Amazon, Facebook, Google and Twitter have risen to dominance in this century while profiting off of racism and other forms of hate — and white supremacists use these platforms to organize, fundraise, recruit and spread their racist ideology.[3]

By amplifying hateful content, tech corporations provoke their users to ensure they stay engaged. This gives these companies more data about ways to keep users glued to their platforms — furthering the companies' predatory business goals.[4]

There is nothing neutral about online platforms. Their harms are baked into their algorithmic designs and protect a white-racial hierarchy. This algorithmic bias has resulted in the spread of racist hate speech even as the posts of Black users speaking out against racism are more likely to be removed.[5]

Meanwhile, social-media giants like Facebook are among the most powerful companies in the world. And they have consolidated control over the social-media space — giving them enormous power in determining how Black voices are heard online. As media and tech activist Brandi Collins-Dexter testified during a congressional hearing earlier this year:

> **While the Internet has provided a means for decentralized media voices to breathe digital oxygen into emerging mobilization efforts, it has also given rise to new tech oligarchies and distortions of political thought. Today, social media companies have consolidated online media and are now in control of how Black and other marginalized voices are represented online. Disinformers using media manipulation tactics see social media platforms as an integral part of their plan to destabilize the work of organizers.[6]**

Collins-Dexter added that the "disappearance of community-owned media, tech, and communications infrastructure ha[s] further compromised the ability to engage in safe and secure Black organizing."[7]

In recent years, racial-justice groups and activists have pressured social-media companies like Facebook to address algorithmic bias and remove hate speech, white-supremacist content and disinformation campaigns, such as voter-suppression efforts.[8] In 2018, Free Press, the Center for American Progress and the Southern Poverty Law Center launched the Change the Terms campaign to crack down on hate. The coalition includes Color Of Change, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, MediaJustice, Muslim Advocates and the National Hispanic Media Coalition.[9]

But companies like Facebook, one of the most powerful companies in the world, have resisted removing such content — even though the company knows its own algorithms are recommending white-supremacist content to users.[10]

The *Wall Street Journal* reported in May that in 2018, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and senior executives ignored an internal report from the company's researchers who found the site's algorithms "exploit the human brain's attraction to divisiveness." The report noted that if the algorithms were "left unchecked," there would continue to be divisive content designed to draw users' attention and increase their "time on the platform."[11]

The paper also reported that a 2016 internal Facebook report found that "64% of all extremist group joins are due to our recommendation tools" and that "our recommendation systems grow the problem."[12]

This helps explain why Facebook rarely removes controversial and false posts by President Trump, including those that violate its terms of service.

Facebook leaders decided to leave up a video that Trump posted on his Facebook page in 2015 — during the presidential race — where he called for a ban on all Muslims entering the country.[13] Meanwhile, a 2016 internal Facebook report found that dozens of Facebook pages had spread misinformation about the election — but the company had refused to remove most of these posts out of the fear of angering Republican politicians.[14]

And now in 2020, Trump is continuing to spread lies and disinformation about mail-in voting, falsely stating that it will result in a "RIGGED" election due to alleged voting fraud.[15]

But when Trump used social media to incite violence against demonstrators in Minneapolis during the George Floyd uprisings last May, the pressure on Facebook and Twitter to remove these posts intensified.[16]

Trump called the demonstrators "THUGS" and said he told Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz "that the Military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts."[17]

Twitter responded to the president's racist tweet by hiding his post — a first — and explaining why it violated the company's policies against the glorification of violence.[18] But Facebook refused to take action.

In fact, a *Washington Post* story revealed that Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg told Trump that his post put the company in a tough position. Trump then posted a new comment to explain that his previous threat to deploy the military was a warning. This gave Facebook the political cover it needed. Zuckerberg explained that Trump's post would remain up since it served as "a warning" and asserted that "people need to know if the government is planning to deploy force."[19]

Vanita Gupta of the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights, Sherrilyn Ifill of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and Rashad Robinson of Color Of Change spoke with Zuckerberg about Trump's post. They were "disappointed and stunned by Mark's incomprehensible explanations":

> **He did not demonstrate understanding of historic or modern-day voter suppression and he refuses to acknowledge how Facebook is facilitating Trump's call for violence against protesters. Mark is setting a very dangerous precedent for other voices who would say similar harmful things on Facebook.[20]**

In late June, Facebook announced that it would now remove posts — including ones from politicians — that incite violence or attempt to suppress voting rights. It also said that it would label posts, including political ads, that

violate the company's hate-speech policies.[21] But as always with Facebook, there are loopholes — especially for Trump. His previous posts threatening violence and delegitimizing mail-in voting remain up.[22]

This episode demonstrates how big tech companies — like other big media organizations before them — have worked to appease the powerful in pursuit of their own political and economic goals. These companies are part of our nation's white-power structure and protect a white-racial hierarchy. The design of their algorithms has resulted in weaponized narratives that dehumanize Black, Latinx, Indigenous and Asian American people, the Black LGBTQIA+ community and other marginalized groups and identities.

In recent years, as criticisms against Facebook grew, the company hired a Republican opposition research firm to smear its vocal critics. The *New York Times* found that the firm targeted billionaire philanthropist George Soros and falsely claimed that he was the person behind the anti-Facebook movement. The firm also urged reporters to examine the financial ties of groups funded by the Soros family or his foundation. One of these groups was Color Of Change.[23]

In a blistering statement, Color Of Change's Rashad Robinson denounced Facebook for endangering the lives of the organization's employees:[24]

> **I want you to know that your public relations campaign, built on dangerous narratives and steadily pushed to right-wing and mainstream media outlets, has threatened the safety of my team and countless others affiliated with the organization. Over the last year, we have seen a dramatic uptick in attacks to our platform and death threats, against which we have had to fortify ourselves. It is hard to fully explain the terror that comes from walking down the street by myself at night and being approached by a white man wearing camouflage, spouting details about me and our organization while yelling racist rhetoric. That is concerning enough, but what keeps me up at night are the untold risks to the people who do this work alongside me.[25]**

Even after Facebook's smear campaign came to light, racial-justice and civil-rights groups continued to engage with Facebook despite their rightful mistrust of the company.

In July 2020, Facebook released a final version of its independent civil-rights audit, a project it initiated in 2018 at the request of civil-rights groups and members of Congress.[26] Lead auditor Laura Murphy, a longtime civil-rights and civil-liberties leader and former ACLU legislative director, wrote that "Facebook's approach to civil rights remains too reactive and piecemeal" and noted that civil-rights groups have grown "disheartened, frustrated and angry after years of engagement."[27]

The auditors were also troubled after Facebook announced in September 2019 that it would exempt politicians from its third-party fact-checking program and after Zuckerberg gave a speech the following month at Georgetown University to amplify his prioritization of a definition of free expression as a governing principle of the platform."[28]

In Murphy's view, Zuckerberg's speech revealed a "selective view of free expression" and showed that Facebook wasn't willing to enforce its own policies when it came to politicians' posts. She wrote:

> **Elevating free expression is a good thing, but it should apply to everyone. When it means that powerful politicians do not have to abide by the same rules that everyone else does, a hierarchy of speech is created that privileges certain voices over less powerful voices. The prioritization of free expression over all other values, such as equality and non-discrimination, is deeply troubling to the Auditors.**

Murphy noted that Facebook has been far too reluctant to adopt strong rules to limit disinformation and voter suppression."[29] Facebook's failure to take down Trump posts that seek to suppress the vote and threaten violence against Black Lives Matter demonstrators troubled the auditors and the broader civil-rights community.

"These decisions exposed a major hole in Facebook's understanding and application of civil rights," Murphy wrote. "While these decisions were made ultimately at the highest level, we believe civil rights expertise was not sought and applied to the degree it should have been and the resulting decisions were devastating. Our fear

was (and continues to be) that these decisions establish terrible precedent for others to emulate."[30]

MediaJustice Executive Director Steven Renderos believes that history will judge Zuckerberg harshly due to the decisions he's made.

"In the long through line of history, I think there have been moments in which there are these kinds of forks in the road of the right thing to do and the wrong thing to do," Renderos told *Mother Jones*. "This will be one of those moments where you look back and you say Mark Zuckerberg was on the wrong side of history here, just like we look back and we say Bull Connor as that sheriff out in Birmingham was wrong."[31]

Like Facebook, Twitter has long failed to crack down on hate and protect marginalized communities. But in recent months, activists' efforts to hold Twitter accountable have pushed the company to take action.

In 2019, the Change the Terms coalition — which has denounced the company for allowing hate speech and harassment to thrive on its platform — launched a #StopRacistTwitter campaign calling on Twitter to ban white supremacists. The coalition scored a victory in July 2020 when Twitter announced it was banning former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke from its platform for violating the company's policies on hateful conduct.[32]

Despite this move forward, "the company still has a long way to go to rid racism and bigotry from its network," said Free Press Co-CEO Jessica J. González, who co-founded Change the Terms.[33]

Meanwhile, Duke's social-media pages and posts still remain up on Facebook, which has failed to take its own auditors' recommendations to prohibit content featuring white-nationalist or separatist ideology.[34]

"The world's largest tech companies have become propagators of deadly information, while they simultaneously profit from it," wrote UCLA Professor Safiya Noble. "They have long treated the world as their private research lab while off-loading risk onto the public and refusing to be held accountable for their business practices."[35]

"We are at another pivotal moment of reckoning about the immorality of our systems," Noble continued, "and it's a good time to reimagine regulation, restoration and reparation from Big Tech too."[36]

> *As internet platforms provide more opportunities for people around the world to connect, they have also provided a forum for certain groups to spread hate, fear, and abusive behavior. The deadly neo-Nazi march in Charlottesville, Virginia, was organized with the use of Facebook, PayPal, and Discord. The violent Proud Boys group vets new applicants through Facebook, and have seen an uptick in applications since summer 2018.*
>
> *Some technology companies have made steps in the right direction to reduce hateful activities online, but more work needs to be done.*
>
> *—ChangeTheTerms.org*

malkia devich-cyril

MEDIAJUSTICE

rashad robinson

COLOR OF CHANGE

monica roberts

TRANSGRIOT

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Who are the Black media heroes in your community?

Who has kept the community connected and informed, in traditional and non-traditional ways?

XIX.
MEDIA REPARATIONS ARE NECESSARY TO OUR NATION'S FUTURE

In recent years, we have seen major essays by Black journalists and writers that have broken through the public consciousness during a moment when Black activism is pushing our society and government to address systemic racism. Despite the power inequities in our nation's newsrooms and in the United States at large, Black journalists are still producing amazing work to tell the story of who we are and how racism impacts us.

The *New York Times*' 1619 Project, published in August 2019 and named after the year the first enslaved Africans arrived in the English colony of Virginia, is one of the latest examples of why we need Black journalistic brilliance in newsrooms. The groundbreaking project, conceived by *The New York Times Magazine*'s Nikole Hannah-Jones, a Black woman, "aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative." The project earned Hannah-Jones a Pulitzer for commentary in 2020.[1]

But there are still so many barriers to overcome, and so many voices that still need to be heard.

Black trans journalist and activist Monica Roberts founded the blog TransGriot in 2006 to address the void of online resources and information for Black trans people.[2]

In 2018, activist and writer Raquel Willis became the first Black trans woman to be named the executive editor of *Out Magazine*, one of the leading LGBTQIA+ publications in the country.[3] Willis, who recently left the magazine, published the Trans Obituaries Project in 2019 to highlight "the epidemic of violence against trans women of color." The project includes "a community-sourced 13-point framework to end the epidemic."[4]

Black journalists are continuing to break new ground — nearly 200 years after the first Black newspaper was founded — while reckoning with racism in the news media.

But the question remains: Can newsrooms reconcile and repair the harms they have caused? And can we count on the same profit-driven, white-owned corporate media institutions to fully integrate their newsrooms and allow Black journalistic brilliance to rise half a century after failing to heed the Kerner Commission's recommendations to do so?

You can't blame anyone who would answer "no" to these questions since white supremacy is very adaptive. When confronted by demands for change, those who benefit from and practice white supremacy often seek to release the pressure valve by making some concessions while keeping the white power structure intact. Media owners and newsroom leaders often play the long game and institute only incremental changes to buy time ... only to reverse the gains Black people have struggled to obtain. Power makes and plays by a different set of rules.

We have to fight to change the rules so our civil and human rights are fully realized. We have to advocate for new laws and regulations that will put an end to structural racism in the news industry instead of relying on performative corporate solutions or race-neutral laws that fail to confront our racial-caste system. Only then will we be able to control the telling of our own stories that need to be told and the sharing of our own dreams for our communities that need to be heard.

But this is difficult to achieve when Black owners didn't receive their first radio and TV station licenses until both mediums were firmly established.[5] And when our nation's lawmakers and regulators have paved the way for massive media consolidation — ensuring that Black people, due to a lack of wealth, own few radio, TV or cable channels or networks. And when the funding structures in noncommercial media have ensured its dominant institutions are white run and serve primarily white audiences.[6]

We have a de-facto media-apartheid system where the vast majority of radio, TV, cable and broadband networks are white-owned and -controlled companies. To realize a true multiracial democracy we will need to dismantle this system. As WURD Radio's Sara Lomax-Reese told the Institute for Nonprofit News:

> **Black media ... it really is an endangered species. If there is not a wholesale investment in reviving and supporting and providing resources to Black media — and I am not talking about Black-oriented media, I am talking about Black-owned media — it will go away. It is going away ... we're going backwards. We're absolutely going backwards. And if there aren't things done from a policy level, at the FCC level, at the national, state and local level, if there's not stuff done from a corporate level, from a philanthropic level, these entities will go out of business.[7]**

And while numerous white-owned media outlets and white reporters have exposed racial injustices in our society, too few have used their powerful platforms to advocate for Black economic, political and social equity.

This is an issue that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed in his final book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Dr. King argued that white people and white-controlled institutions, including the news media, have never fully supported racial equity. In fact, King wrote, they had more in common with white segregationists:

> *With Selma and the Voting Rights Act one phase of development in the civil rights revolution came to an end. A new phase opened, but few observers realized it or were prepared for its implications. For the vast majority of white Americans, the past decade — the first phase — had been a struggle to treat the Negro with a degree of decency, not of equality.*
>
> *White America was ready to demand that the Negro should be spared the lash of brutality and coarse degradation, but it had never been truly committed to helping him out of poverty, exploitation or all forms of discrimination.*
>
> *The outraged white citizen had been sincere when he snatched the whips from the Southern sheriffs and forbade them more cruelties. But when this was to a degree accomplished, the emotions that had momentarily inflamed him melted away. White Americans left the Negro on the ground and in devastating numbers walked off with the aggressor. It appeared that the white segregationist and the ordinary white citizen had more in common with one another than either had with the Negro.*
>
> *When Negroes looked for a second phase, the realization of equality, they found that many of their white allies had quietly disappeared. The Negroes of America had taken the President, the press and the pulpit at their word when they spoke in broad terms of freedom and justice. But the absence of brutality and unregenerate evil is not the presence of justice. To stay murder is not the same thing as to ordain brotherhood.*
>
> *The word was broken, and the free-running expectations of the Negro crashed into the stone walls of white resistance. The result was havoc. Negroes felt cheated, especially in the North, while many whites felt that the Negroes had gained so much it was virtually impudent and greedy to ask for more so soon.*[8]

The racial reckoning happening now within the news industry comes at a time when local newspapers across the nation are in financial crisis. This crisis is particularly concerning for the Black press, where the financial struggle has been acute for a long time.[9] But the struggle of big white-owned daily newspapers, which the pandemic has exacerbated, has led to increased advocacy from journalists, journalism organizations, media companies and elected officials for a federal intervention.[10]

There have been plenty of discussions within the journalism field about the profession's future and the need for new economic models to save and sustain local news. But too few Black journalists and members of the broader Black community have been a part of shaping these discussions. There's reason to fear that potential new models won't address institutional and structural racism — and will replicate existing inequities and continue to harm Black people.

We need a new media model that dismantles the white-racial hierarchy and the myth of Black inferiority. A federal intervention is needed to undo policies that have played a pivotal role in creating these inequities. It must examine the history of racism in our media industry, including the role of federal policies and oversight. And as calls grow for federal funding to support local journalism, we should not simply prop up a commercial media system that is more accountable to its shareholders than to the people it is supposed to serve.

Instead, federal policies must be used to ensure Black journalists and media-makers are equitably funded and supported. Policies must facilitate Black media ownership and allow Black owners to thrive. We have to ensure that federal funding to support journalism goes toward reconciling and repairing the harm caused by policies that have created and sustained an unjust and racist media system.

It is a debt that is long overdue.

As the issue of reparations gains more political attention, it's critical that our government and institutions take part in a process of making amends for wrongs they have committed — as well as all the ways in which they've benefited from the harm and exploitation of the Black community. Media reparations are essential to ensuring our government repairs the harms it caused by adopting policies that have materially, physically and spiritually subjugated Black people in the United States. Reparations are also necessary to address a broad history of structural racism in the media industry — an industry that has defended our nation's white-racial hierarchy.

Reconciling and repairing the harms that the media have caused the Black community is central to deciphering the future of the field. This means that individual news organizations must partake in systematic change and repair while also actively offsetting the impacts of a history of anti-Black racism inside their own newsrooms and communities. And to ensure equitable Black media ownership, the federal government must dismantle policies that created a racist and segregated media-ownership system.

As the Movement for Black Lives policy toolkit on reparations states, realizing justice requires a "systematic accounting, acknowledgement, and repair of past and ongoing harms, monetary compensation to individuals and institutions led by and accountable to Black communities, and an end to present day policies and practices that perpetuate harms rooted in a history of anti-Black racism, along with a guarantee that they will not be repeated."[11]

Black journalistic brilliance has never fully received its due in the white mainstream-journalism world. Yet Black journalists, media-justice advocates and community organizers provide a vision of what a liberated media system for Black people might look like. This liberated media system includes reparations.

The idea of media reparations is not new. Past and current reparation efforts have included calling for payments to fund Black-owned and -controlled media outlets.

And as we mentioned in Chapter VII, the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission report, released in 2006, called for newspapers to acknowledge their role in the deadly coup and to "study the effects of 1898 and impact of Jim Crow on the state's black press and to endow scholarships at the state's public universities."[12]

When civil-rights leader James Forman presented the "Black Manifesto" in 1969 at the National Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit, he called for white churches and synagogues to pay $500 million in reparations that would fund several initiatives, including:

- The "establishment of four major publishing and printing industries in the United States to be funded with ten million dollars each." These publishing houses were to be located in Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles and New York.

- "No less" than $10 million for the "establishment of a training center for the teaching of skills in community organization, photography, movie making, television making and repair, radio building and repair and all other skills needed in communication."

- The "establishment of four of the most advanced scientific and futuristic audio-visual networks to be located in Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland and Washington, D.C. These TV networks would provide an alternative to the racist propaganda that fills the current television networks" and each would receive $10 million.[13]

Meanwhile, in 2015 the National African American Reparations Commission released its 10-point preliminary reparations plan, which calls for:[14]

- "An annual federal set-aside of advertising dollars to support Black-owned newspapers and magazines and radio and television stations. These funds would be administered by the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters (NABOB) under the guidance of the Reparations Trust Authority."

- "Funding for a national nonprofit, noncommercial newspaper, radio and television network dedicated exclusively to culture/education, economics/business and civic-engagement programming for the benefit of Black America."[15]

The Movement for Black Lives policy platform calls for "full access to technology — including Net Neutrality and universal access to the internet without discrimination — and full representation for all."[16] It also calls for "universal, affordable, and community-controlled access to the Internet, for all Black people and oppressed communities at large."[17]

Modern-day crises have brought into sharp relief the urgent need for a serious and renewed discussion of media reparations. Uprisings following police and vigilante murders of unarmed Black people have laid bare a system of injustice that has long refused to listen and failed to respond.

And while the Kerner Commission report informed our government that the media were critical sources of disinformation and oppressive narratives that fed the conditions for unrest, the 2020 media uprisings show that there is still a lack of accountability or a commitment to fundamental change.

As long as harm goes unrepaired, we will continue to see uprisings and revolution for Black liberation. Black voices will be heard, one way or another.

Black media-makers are doing incredible things with little to no resources despite the fact that their ancestors' labor was stolen to build systems of oppression that include the dominant media system. We need media reparations to right this wrong — and to restore the fruits of that stolen labor to where they belong.

It's time to end the myth of Black inferiority.

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XX. Making Media Reparations Real

PAVING THE ROAD TO COLLECTIVE HEALING

The history and ideas discussed here, we hope, further lay the foundation to create and realize media reparations. But we have to work to make them real. Make no mistake: The work required is possible. In fact, it's already begun, which means that there is transformation toward reparative and restorative media that we can see in our lifetimes.

Media reparations are oriented toward a world we've never lived in before, a world where the media-and-journalism landscape promises opportunity for all people when Black liberation and freedom are realized. Media reparations could create a future of journalism — and media more broadly — that journalists, media-makers and all other community members alike can fight to sustain and support. Media reparations can create a future of journalism abundant with economic equity.

We are releasing this essay in conjunction with the launch of our Media 2070 project. We will work in coalition with Black journalists, media-makers, artists, activists, technologists, organizations, scholars and anyone who is a keeper of our story to demand media reparations.

One of our initial goals is to continue to uncover or rediscover stories of the harm caused by the news media that are often a forgotten part of our history. We are also seeking collaboration with people sharing stories of how other forms of media — film,[1] music, theatre[2] and the spectrum of visual arts — have perpetuated anti-Black racism and upheld the myth of Black inferiority.

We need to set the record straight so we can reconcile these histories and help inform the policies that are needed to dismantle institutional and structural racism. We also want to work in coalition to adopt a reparations platform that will advocate for media companies and policymakers to reconcile and repair the harms they have caused.

We dream of a world where reparations are made real, where Black people live and fully exercise their fundamental human rights that are actually enshrined and protected by law. For this world to be born and to exist, we must dismantle the myth of Black inferiority and the role media companies and our racist media system have played in its execution.

To create this world, the work toward media reparations must be grounded in curiosity and imagination of a new future, exploring and answering questions like:

- What could media reparations for Black people look like?

- Where do media reparations live within the greater struggle toward reparations?

- How does the fight for media reparations and broad-based reparations in the United States exist in solidarity with global struggles for reparations and decolonization?

- How do we ensure that Black people have control over the creation and distribution of our own narratives and stories? What opportunities are there for this to exist across various mediums of journalism, social media, technology and creative practice?

- What infrastructure do we need to ensure that media reparations are made real and sustainable?

- How do we create social-media algorithms and platforms that are emancipatory for Black people rather than predatory?

- What would a new economy look like that fosters Black-community ownership of media outlets, platforms and networks that are noncommercial and accountable to serving our communities' news-and-information needs?

- What role do media organizations play in ensuring reconciliation, repair and restoration for the community harms they've created or given voice to?

- How can Black and Indigenous people, across ethnicities and tribal affiliations, work together to ensure that media reparations function hand in hand with decolonization efforts and other movements toward repatriation and the honoring of treaties with Indigenous people?

Each time there has been a civil-rights win for Black people, countless other groups of people have also been uplifted. How can media reparations for Black people ensure better media institutions that everyone deserves? These are some of the questions that we have to wrestle with to dismantle the myth of Black inferiority. ‘‘

That myth — the great lie of our nation's founding — continues to fuel broad support for policies that prevent people on this land from realizing a multiracial democracy. This mythology creates barriers for necessary Black brilliance and innovation to be a full part of our future. And it raises the question of whether America is even possible at all.

So, we'll need to wrestle with these questions, but we'll also need to gather people and organizations that are committed to creating a future where all people thrive because Black people are thriving. In gathering, we'll need to build relationships and figure out strategy for making media reparations real, creating new media structures and building the future we know is possible.

Alone, no one person or organization has the power, insight, creativity or path for achieving what is possible. In coalition, however, all of that is present. So, consider who you can share this essay with. Share it with them. Bring your family, friends and community into visioning what's possible for the media landscape in 2070. Together, we have everything we need.

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EPILOGUE

THE CITY OF ANGELS LOOKS INWARD

As we were preparing to release this essay, *The Los Angeles Times* published an editorial in which leaders apologize for the paper's long history of racism.[1]

The editorial states: "On behalf of this institution, we apologize for *The Times*' history of racism. We owe it to our readers to do better, and we vow to do so."

It is critical for media institutions locally and nationally, like *The Los Angeles Times,* to reconcile the harms they have caused through racist news coverage, for editorial positions that have supported white supremacy, for the racism Black journalists and other journalists of color have faced in newsrooms, and for the impact of narratives weaponized to uphold policies that dehumanize Black people and other communities of color in protecting a white-racial hierarchy.

It is also critical to address the structural racism that has resulted in government policies that have allowed big white owned-and-controlled media — and now tech companies — to be the dominant players in our media industry, creating a de-facto media-apartheid system.

The Los Angeles Times apology serves as another reminder why we are launching Media 2070. It is crucial that we repair the harm of anti-Black racism in our media institutions and policies in the struggle to achieve a multiracial democracy.

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Los Angeles Times

Tower project exposes gaps in L.A.'s oversight

Egypt military crackdown on Islamists kills hundreds

Government rifts widen as ElBaradei resigns in protest

TROOPS TO GET LEAVE FOR GAY UNIONS

A natural question

A father's long, wrenching quest

Los Angeles Times newspaper

Image by Flickr user neeravbhatt

ABOUT TEAM MEDIA 2070

This project is the result of more than a year of gathering, built on the foundation of Juan González and Joseph Torres' book *News for All the People* and Alicia Bell's work infusing newsrooms with the spirit of community organizing via Free Press' #NewsVoices project.

Joseph Torres

Joseph advocates in Washington to ensure that our nation's media policies serve the public interest and builds coalitions to broaden the movement's base. Joseph writes frequently on media and internet issues and is the coauthor of the New York Times bestseller *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media.* He is the 2015 recipient of the Everett C. Parker Award, which recognizes an individual whose work embodies the principles and values of the public interest. Before joining Free Press, Joseph worked as deputy director of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. Born and raised in New York City, Joseph is Puerto Rican.

Alicia Bell

A child of ancestors from Mississippi and the Carolinas, Alicia works at the intersections of afrofuturist imagination, journalism, land, food and all the spaces in between. With Free Press, they organize communities around information equity and power sharing in an effort to transform the future of journalism to one that's more community rooted. Alicia learned community building and changemaking through electoral organizing in North Carolina; parent, student and youth organizing in New York; and housing, health and police-accountability organizing in Oakland. Outside of work, Alicia finds joy in raising their three niblings, laughing with their family, throwing down with their gardening collective, Angelou House, and spending time with big bodies of nature.

Collette Watson

Collette is a native of Gullah country, South Carolina, who has worked with Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) and now Free Press to channel the power of creative and cultural arts for Black liberation. Collette's practice is informed by over a decade as an award-winning indie soul musician and communications strategist. She is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and graduate of Howard University, and her favorite pastimes are nature walks with the hubster, red rice-eating and dancing it out to a fonky beat.

Tauhid Chappell

Tauhid is a project manager for Free Press' News Voices project, focusing on the program's Philadelphia initiative to reimagine how the city's local newsrooms approach their coverage of crime, violence and the criminal justice and carceral systems. An eight-year veteran of the media industry, he most recently worked as a social-media editor at *The Washington Post* before joining *The Philadelphia Inquirer* as an engagement editor. Tauhid is also an executive board member of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists (PABJ), the first and oldest association of Black journalists in the country and founding chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists.

Diamond Hardiman

Diamond works as a manager for Free Press' News Voices: Colorado project in collaboration with community members to envision a transformative local news. She aims to participate in the creation of a world where freedom is noncontingent — but rather, an inevitable necessity. In service of this vision she has worked as a tenants' rights advocate and bail abolitionist in St. Louis and as an advocate for people sentenced to execution by the state in Jackson, Mississippi. Diamond earned a B.A. in African American studies and political science from Saint Louis University. In her free time, she enjoys pondering womanist and liberation theology, listening to Megan Thee Stallion and admiring beauty wherever it appears.

Christina Pierce

Raised in the Midwest by two Carolinians, Christina coordinates all things operations, specifically IT, database management and special projects. Before joining Free Press, Christina served as an AmeriCorps member with City Year at a high school in D.C. Christina supports logistics in several aspects of her life, including local Black-owned restaurant events and church. Outside of work, Christina can be found long-distance running, imagining new apps and learning the ukulele.

DEFINITIONS

TERMS USED IN MEDIA 2070

Black

For the purpose of Media 2070, we define "Black" as the identity lived by people of the African diaspora. Communications strategist Omolayo Nkem Ojo writes, "Historically, the African diaspora has been those of African descent, whose ancestors were bought and kidnapped from the African continent and transported all around the world to build up colonial empires."

The present-day African diaspora in the United States includes African migrants, Afro Caribbeans and Afro Latinx people as well as Black Americans. Ojo astutely points out, "While we might relish the nuances of these distinctions, it should be noted that police — and others — don't discriminate based on nationality."

When U.S. media have perpetuated the myth of Black inferiority, denied Black people opportunities and participated in or misrepresented violence against Black people, the perpetrators haven't parsed nationality before committing these acts — and the harms have been well distributed. That's why we define Black as any person with sub-Saharan African parentage or lineage.

Reparations

The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) defines reparations as: "A process of repairing, healing and restoring a people injured because of their group identity and in violation of their fundamental human rights by governments, corporations, institutions and families.

"Those groups that have been injured have the right to obtain from the government, corporation, institution or family responsible for the injuries that which is needed to repair and heal themselves. In addition to being a demand for justice, it is a principle of international human rights law."

The United Nations outlines five conditions that must be met for full reparations: cessation, assurances and guarantees of non-repetition; restitution and repatriation; compensation, satisfaction and rehabilitation.

Media

We use this term to refer to the overall profession and the many formats that are available in U.S. society. The term includes not just white-owned corporations but also local and independent media outlets, bloggers, artists, influencers and news sources that exist to serve Black people and other marginalized communities.

Media System

We primarily use this term in reference to corporate-owned print, radio, television and online outlets that provide the majority of mass communication and information to the U.S. public. This white-controlled system is defined by policies and narrative practices that uphold a white-racial hierarchy — even amid efforts to diversify newsrooms and on-screen representation. This system also encompasses government policies that ensure white-owned media companies maintain ownership and control of the media infrastructure.

MEDIA·2070

AN INVITATION TO DREAM UP MEDIA REPARATIONS

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2020