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Unrecognized and Underwritten:  
The History of the Black Press  

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Introduction

- The first black newspaper, The Freedom’s Journal, was published March 1827 and was intended to not only define blacks but also to fill a gap within the black community and provide an outlet to express African-American views and advocate for their causes.
- Formerly, mainstream papers would not publish obituaries, or any type of news relating to African-Americans.

Today’s Black Press

- Although there are black journalists who are prominent in mainstream media outlets, newsrooms across the nation lack diversity and inclusion.
- Among news organizations, people of color are underrepresented and news staff do not mirror the makeup of the general population.
- According to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Newsroom Employment Diversity Survey, while people of color comprise about 40 percent of the U.S. population, journalists of color made up only 16.55 percent of newsrooms’ employees in 2017.
- Few black journalists receive Pulitzer Prizes and even fewer are in positions of power in newsrooms. According to the Columbia Journalism Review, only four African-Americans have won the Pulitzer Prize since 1917.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the black press and learn about a subsection of media that is rarely covered in academic curriculum.

Analysis

- Journalism suffers when there is a lack of diversity. Various mainstream news outlets have hired reporters for black coverage, but some are not covered or portrayed with the perspective they require.
- Mainstream media have been unsuccessful in adequately examining and reporting on racial problems in the United States and have failed to meet the black community’s expectations of journalistic coverage. For almost two centuries, the black press has acted to fill that void.
- Issues facing the black community are still those of the Civil Rights Movement. Blacks are still dealing with disproportionate incarceration rates, police shootings of defenseless black men, biased incarceration sentencing, and voter suppression.
- It is crucial to have a specific outlet for blacks because of the lack of opportunities in the mainstream media.

Conclusion

- The history of blacks in journalism reflects the history of race in America. It gradually and grudgingly yielded opportunities to people of color.
- Since the creation of the Freedom’s Journal, blacks have continued to use the media to fight for equality and human dignity.
- In 2017, blacks have more opportunities because of those publishers whose goal was to elevate and educate blacks.
- Currently, blacks have improved the second-class citizen status in some respects, but clear inequalities still persist.
- The black press has been fighting for centuries and should continue to exist and fight until there is total equality in society and the mainstream media.