



**COMMENTS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK JOURNALISTS ON
THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM**

Federal Trade Commission

Office of the Commissioner

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Washington, DC 20580

The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) submits these comments ahead of the public conference on the state of journalism, held by the United States Federal Trade Commission entitled “From Town Crier to Bloggers: How Will Journalism Survive the Internet Age?” As the nation’s largest and oldest minority journalist’s organization, we are pleased the Federal Trade Commission has the foresight to invite and recognize journalists of color to this conversation.

In order to remain viable in this struggling economy, all industries (including telecommunications and media) must recognize the needs of its consumers. For journalism in the United States, it is an ever diversified citizenry that should and must be represented in every facet of traditional and emerging media.

The news organizations that appear before the FTC will address the importance of diversity, but few will deliver the important numbers to show they reflect a diverse nation. Ahead of the 2010 U.S. Census showing a rising minority population, these media groups will

flatly praise the work of their respective diversity councils, but show little to no diversity in any aspect of news, including management and ownership.

It is the charge of the National Association of Black Journalists that diversity in itself is good business and presents itself as a successful and viable business model in a new America. As the platform by which journalism moves toward the digital and social networks, this industry must learn that while diversity may appear to be calling attention to what makes us different, it also shows what unites us - thus attracting greater viewers, clickers, and readers.

Newspapers, forged by the efforts of early journalists such as journalist and civil rights advocate Ida B. Wells and renowned publisher Benjamin Franklin are the oldest form of media in our country, with the first, entitled *Publick Occurrences*, published in 1690 in Boston.

At the turn of the century, newspapers were challenged by the birth of radio. In 1949, the cover of *Look* magazine featured a smiling picture of baseball great Joe DiMaggio, but just to the left of his head a headline declared "Radio is Doomed" at the advent of television. By the second half of the 20th Century, the free airwaves that brought radio and television had weathered the new challenge of cable television.

Today in 2009, that same challenge and, in some cases, the same death knell, is tolling at newspapers, television and radio stations across the country that cover black communities and that are owned and operated by minorities. As jobs have been reduced across our nation, black, Hispanic and Asian reporters are among the "last hired, first fired."

Here are some of our losses:

The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) reported in April that newsrooms suffered the biggest loss of jobs in about three decades. The percentage of minority journalists declined by .11 percentage points from a year ago. Daily newsrooms, in fact, shrank by 5,900 journalists in the past year, of them, 854 were journalists of color.

The depth of knowledge and experience that is being lost in bringing the message of the black community to the public is immeasurable. Where would we be if our top journalists only had knowledge of the last two presidential administrations and missed the institutional context of the years of Presidents Clinton and President Reagan? Our voice is the voice of people of all ages.

The National Association of Black Journalists stands ready to work with the Federal Trade Commission on the solutions to these issues and we start by thanking you for giving us a long-sought and hard-fought seat at these historic panel discussions.

The current state of the news industry is largely the result of a decision made 13 years ago, the Telecommunications Act of 1996. It has been an abysmal act, a failure in terms of boosting “the scarcity of viewpoints” available in the nation’s media. We know that success and control of the message is tied to ownership, and we are now no better off than we were when this change was approved. Minority ownership is too fractional to be considered a player in the big picture.

This single act is the crux of where we find ourselves today:

People of color own just three percent of all TV stations and eight percent of all radio stations in the country. Incredibly, the number of African American television station owners

declined by 60 percent from 2006 to 2007. There is a direct nexus between minority ownership and employment. Minority-owned stations are more likely to hire people of color as well as to air a nightly newscast.

Broadcast stations once provided its viewers/listeners with news and information. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 allowed companies to own more radio stations and removed the news and information requirement. News departments, including those that employed black journalists, were reduced or eliminated altogether. For example, Clear Channel owns 1200 radio stations, but less than 10% are listed as providing news and information. At least 50 of the stations provide a format for urban audiences, however the only news they provide is "on demand" from the internet.

To improve minority ownership, it is critical for the administration to require the Federal Communications Commission to conduct a regular and accurate census on minority and female broadcast ownership. To date, the FCC has never conducted an accurate study on minority and female ownership because it has poorly managed the data it collects from license holders.

Since the late 1990s, the make-up of journalists of color working at local TV stations has remained stagnant as a result of a federal court striking down the FCC's Equal Employment Opportunity regulations. The FCC adopted the EEO rules in the late 1960s to ban discrimination in the broadcast industry and require broadcasters to recruit people of color for job openings. The rules were adopted following the release of the landmark 1968 Kerner Commission Report that found the news media contributed to the racial divisions that were tearing apart our country.

During the late 1960s, people of color at local broadcast stations were virtually non-existent. The adoption of the EEO rules resulted in a steady increase in the presence of people of color at local stations. Since the court struck down the original EEO rules, however, the FCC has implemented new watered-down rules that fail to hold license holders accountable. The representation of journalists of color has remained stagnant ever since.

Our nation's newspapers continue to grapple with the burden of financial instability. This weight has forced many good papers to stop training young black journalists and to pressure our veteran journalists to leave the field. For newspapers to survive, they must continue to restore the trust of the public and find outside funding sources to sustain a variety of viewpoints.

It is imperative on the part of journalists of color to help the public understand the many threads that tie us all together. We will always work to separate facts from opinion and truth beyond shades of gray. We will continue to work to ensure our news media is diverse in the future. If we fail to take corrective action, we will revert to a time like 1954 where people of color were not seen or heard in media.

Emphatically, we believe people of color not only exist in the future of journalism but are essentially among the innovators and content creators of the future. We must occupy the mediums in ways heretofore that have not been thought of or created. Despite the adversity of current media, the entrepreneurial spirit is very much alive.

We have seen *The Washington Post* create The Root.com, and NBC News created Griot.com and others have or are planning to launch minority websites to capitalize on the growing market of specialized media. We also know that ethnic media is viable. Our long history tells us in a vacuum, ethnic media will fill the void in publications, radio, television, and digital

media. Our history is replete with those who took their own money and launched media that is the envy of the rest of the world.

As these new ventures are launched, they not only serve minority markets but much wider markets. These are unique niches, which should be cultivated to compete with traditional media conglomerates.

We believe the FCC's recent decision on net neutrality is the appropriate action to ensure viable access to information for all communities. We also believe the creation of an entrepreneurial bank to fund current and new media companies will keep us in-step as the world changes.

Several initiatives to garner federal funding for newspapers have us concerned. We have listened and only once has our Congress included a person of color in these deliberations. If funding is to be made available those funds must also be available to black Newspapers who are suffering in unimaginable ways. Their so-called audiences don't rival the large newspapers but their readers use them as guides and voices when they are discounted by major newspapers.

NABJ believes you want to hear the whole story and not that of "we'll get to it later." Somewhere there is a child whose vision is shaped by the stories we tell, the tales we remember and the new tales yet to be told. We urge you to be bold and consider our story. We continue to be modern-day story tellers who have had to struggle to be heard, sometimes in hostile environments.

We look forward to working with you in creating a new media landscape that embraces a new America. We ask that you do not allow diversity to be a mere word, but by the actions of your distinguished commission, give it meaning for newsrooms offering democratic access to the underserved.

Respectfully submitted,

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