

The New Black Press: An Examination of Black News Podcasts and Networks
in the Context of Black Media History and the Evolving Media Ecosystem

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: The New Black Press: An Examination of Black News Podcasts and Networks in the Context of Black Media History and the Evolving Media Ecosystem

This dissertation critically examines Black news podcasts through the lens of Black media history, political economy, and platformization, highlighting their socio-economic role and the emergence of Black creators in the digital media ecosystem. It explores the historical progression of Black news organizations from the Black Press to Black news podcasting, and the current economic practices of Black news podcasts, emphasizing its socio-political relevance, cultural impact, and funding strategies. By utilizing innovative models like crowdfunding, these platforms prioritize community engagement over profitability, challenging conventional media paradigms and advocating for media diversity and cultural autonomy. This dissertation poses questions on the impact of ownership and digital platforms on narrative control, funding and sustainability of Black podcasts, and their role in political discourse and representation. This inquiry contributes to understanding Black podcasts' economic viability and social impact, enriching discussions on media's political economy and Black media's future in cultural production and representation.

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DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to my Father, Carmon Cornelius Quick; Godmother, Agnes Althea Rogers Reece; Uncle, Michael Broussard; family friends, Scott Wardell; Dorothy Steel; Anna Ellis; and B.A.H.; and my Krio, Geechee, and Black Seminole ancestors.

May you all rest in heavenly power and peace. Thank you.

Your love, lessons, and presence will always remain.

I am infinitely grateful to you all.

Tenki Tenki.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	9
Significance of Study	14
Theoretical Framework: A Political Economic Perspective of Autonomy and Cultural Production in Black News Podcasting	15
Historical and Regulatory Frameworks.....	17
Economic Dynamics and Innovations in Black News Podcasting.....	18
Platformization and Cultural Production.....	19
Auditory Culture, Sonic Citizenship, and Audience Empowerment.....	22
Statement of Problem	26
Research Questions	27
Methodology.....	27
Summary.....	31
Organization of the Dissertation.....	33
CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL RACIAL	
INEQUALITIES & THE BLACK PRESS	
The Black Press	35
The Black Press	39
Freedom’s Journal	41
Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s Transatlantic Partnerships	45
“The Red Record” and “Southern Horrors”	46
Wells’ Anti-Lynching Law Campaign Support and Funding	51
Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro World.....	55
The Chicago Defender and the Black Community.....	61
CHAPTER II: BLACK RADIO - THE BIRTHPLACE	
OF A BROADCAST COMMUNITY	
Black-Controlled Media	71
Black-Appeal Media.....	73
KDKA (AM): The Beginning of Broadcast Radio.....	76
Atlanta’s WERD (860 AM): Black-Owned and Operated Radio	80
WHOD: A Milestone in Black Appeal Radio and Its Enduring Legacy.....	84
WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee: Black-Appeal Media Expansion.....	86

Black Radio Networks.....	87
CHAPTER III: LEGAL AND REGULATORY LANDSCAPE	91
Federal Cases That Have Impacted Minority Media Ownership	94
Declining Trends in Minority Media Ownership	96
Fostering Digital Equity: The FCC’s Strategic Initiatives	101
The FCC Tax Certificate Program	105
House Resolution 549 (2019-2020).....	109
MEDIA Diversity Act of (2020-2021).....	112
CHAPTER IV: DAILY BLACK NEWS PODCASTS AND BLACK PODCAST NETWORKS	116
Podcasting, Platforms & Cultural Production	121
Black Podcasting	124
Daily News Podcasts	134
Black Online Spaces.....	141
Black News Podcasts and Black Online Spaces.....	143
CHAPTER V: IHEARTRADIO & YOUTUBE	145
iHeartMedia/iHeartRadio	146
Content	147
Funding.....	148
YouTube.....	153
CHAPTER VI: BIN 640: BLACK INFORMATION NETWORK.....	160
Programming	161
Funding.....	163
The 100,000 Jobs Audience Member Initiative	166
CHAPTER VII: ROLAND S. MARTIN’S #BLACKSTARNETWORK & #ROLANDMARTINUNFILTERED.....	171
Funding.....	176
Programming	177
The Unfiltered Uncle.....	178
The Role of Hashtags in #RolandMartinUnflitered	181
Attention to Activism: The Danyé Jones News Segment	184
CHAPTER VIII: NAVIGATING THE MEDIA DYNAMICS OF CORPORATE CONGLOMERATES	188

Roland Martin, Byron Allen, BNC, and theGrio v. GM	188
BNC Programming	192
The Interplay of Fox Entertainment, Fox News, and Fox Soul.....	195
Fox Soul Programming.....	197
Legal Battles	197
The Fox Soul Super Bowl Debacle	198
The Persistent Pre-Show No-Show	200
CHAPTER IX: DISCUSSION	203
Recommendations for Black News Podcasters	218
Embrace Financial Innovation.....	218
Leverage Technology and Digital Platforms.....	220
Foster Community Engagement	220
Develop Strategic Partnerships.....	221
Advocacy and Policy Engagement	221
Emphasize Content Diversity and Quality	222
Research and Continuous Learning.....	222
Limitations and Future Research.....	223
APPENDIX	227
Photos of Roland Martin’s #BlackStarNetwork Studio	227
REFERENCES CITED	237

INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the 21st century was marked by an unprecedented shift in the media industry, largely catalyzed by the advent of podcasting. This digital medium, which allows for the dissemination of spoken word content in an easily accessible format, has permeated the societal fabric, securing its place as a significant facet of the broader media ecosystem. Podcasting also marked a new chapter in the evolution of Black media. Podcasting's flexibility and accessibility have allowed Black content creators to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, offering a platform for diverse voices and stories that challenge dominant narratives.

Sullivan (2019) observes that following the acquisition of the HowStuffWorks podcast network by iHeartRadio for a whopping \$55 million on September 15, 2018, there was a bold stride by the iHeartRadio app into the podcasting domain. Capitalizing on its longstanding connections with the broadcast radio industry, the app leveraged the acquisition of this major podcast network, which provided iHeartRadio with exclusive rights to feature these podcasts, hence paving the way for more premium content on its mobile application (Jarvey, 2018; Sullivan, 2019). Sullivan (2019) posits that platforms serve as intermediary infrastructures, facilitating interactions between diverse types of users that span customers, suppliers, producers, service providers, and advertisers through media distribution companies.

A case in point is the Web 2.0 platform, YouTube, which, due to its open-source decentralized backend, has a highly accessible model and market approach (p. 2). Sullivan (2019) theorizes that there are three primary functions at the core of media-related platform services: storage, discovery, and consumption (p. 4). YouTube

encapsulates all three of these functions as it “presents content for users to discover or search through its interface, serves as a data repository for the files to be delivered to the user (whether via download or streaming), and offers embedded playing software to allow users to consume media” (Sullivan, 2019, p. 4).

Expanding on this conceptual framework, Adler Berg’s (2022) research provides a nuanced account of the transition experienced by independent podcasters as they navigate the shift to a commercial podcast platform operating on a paid subscription model. Through an in-depth qualitative analysis involving four Danish podcasters, Adler Berg explains the compelling motivations that lead these creators to affiliate with such platforms, including the pursuit of commercial opportunities, the quest for greater creative autonomy, and the enhancement of their content’s discoverability.

These findings resonate with and exemplify Sullivan’s (2019) triad of media platform service functions. Notwithstanding these incentives, there remains an underlying tension, as the podcasters grapple with the concern of possibly diminishing listener numbers, a critical consideration in the balance of creativity and commerce within the podcasting domain (Adler Berg, 2022). Conferring with the results of Adler Berg (2022), Linares de Palomar and Neira Borrajo (2017) found the same theme in their research on the podcast, *Serial*. Linares de Palomar and Neira Borrajo (2017) discuss the difficulties faced by podcasts in developing a sustainable business model, pointing to issues such as the dominance of a few aggregators (e.g., Apple or Ivoox) that control distribution and the absence of integration with search engines like Google for audio content, which impedes searchability. They also address the industry’s lack of standardized metrics and regulatory consensus, noting that relying solely on download statistics does not offer a

true measure of listener engagement (Linares de Palomar & Neira Borrajo, 2017; Prata, et al., 2021).

Podcasts offer similar opportunities for spotlighting social injustices and fostering community discourse, but they also deviate by utilizing digital technology to reach global audiences instantaneously and interactively. Black news podcasting, as explored in this dissertation, both extends and deviates from the traditions of the Black Press by leveraging technological and economic innovations. Historically, the shift from print to broadcast media allowed Black media producers to overcome geographical limitations and engage with a wider audience through the power of voice. This transition, however, was often hampered by the significant costs associated with running a broadcast station, such as funding for equipment and operational expenses. While newspapers were relatively accessible for ownership, radio required substantial capital for technology and licensing, often excluding Black and Latinx communities from ownership.

Similarly, podcasting opens new pathways for reaching audiences globally through digital platforms, significantly lowering the barriers to entry compared to traditional broadcast media. The economic barrier is also significantly reduced in podcasting, democratizing content production and distribution. This shift enhances accessibility and engagement, allowing for real-time feedback and broader participation in discussions that were traditionally more localized or limited.

Black podcasting generally refers to podcasts that are created by Black individuals or primarily feature Black hosts and cater to a Black audience. Leveraging the medium's inherent flexibility and reach, Black podcasters have crafted a vibrant array of platforms, allowing them. Black podcasting is a rapidly growing and evolving field of

study, with numerous scholars and researchers exploring the cultural, political, and social dimensions of this phenomenon. One of the earliest academic works in this area is Llinares et al. (2018). They provide an overview of the history, structure, and uses of podcasting as a new form of media. They argue that podcasting has transformed the ways in which people consume and produce audio content, allowing for greater diversity and accessibility of voices and topics.

However, they also note that podcasting is still largely dominated by white, male, and affluent creators, which limits the potential for more diverse and inclusive content. In the interest to counteract white heterogeneous podcast ownership models and narratives, Florini (2015), examines the role of Black podcasters in creating alternative media communities. Florini (2015) argues that Black podcasters have created a “Chitlin’ Circuit” of podcasts, which provide a platform for Black voices, perspectives, and experiences. She also discusses the challenges and opportunities of Black podcasting, including the need to address issues of representation, monetization, and audience engagement.

Sullivan’s (2019) research forms a significant backdrop for interpreting the historical role of digital platforms in podcasting, regarding their effects on the evolving structure, content, and governance within the podcast industry. This research is instrumental in tracing the progression of the podcast industry, from a decentralized and open ecosystem to an increasingly consolidated space, where a select few platforms command most of the listener traffic. It is within this context of consolidation that podcast producers grapple with the complexities of monetization and audience maximization, attempting to strike a balance between artistic expression and commercial

viability. Sullivan (2019) underscore McChesney (2015) and Marable (2015), such that, their shared critique of media consolidation impacting the lack of diversity and pluralism in media, due to the dedication of profit found on these platforms, over the perceived activist nature of Black news (Sperber, 2021). The same can be said in earlier Black print news media, as will be discussed in this dissertation.

Sullivan's (2019) work serves as a robust foundation for investigating these issues within the specific milieu of Black news podcasts, whether they are hosted on social media, streaming platforms, independent websites, Over-the-Top (OTT) channels, or dedicated podcast network applications. The increasing relevance of digital platforms in the podcasting industry inevitably shapes the ways in which Black news podcasts are produced, distributed, and consumed. Sullivan's research offers valuable insights into this changing dynamic, presenting a nuanced understanding of how platform consolidation, monetization strategies, and audience maximization efforts impact the content and operational practices of Black news podcasts. More importantly, Sullivan's (2019) work allows for a deeper analysis of how these shifts within the broader podcast industry affect the representation and inclusivity of Black voices in the digital media space.

Wrather's (2019) assertion that media research and media histories offer an indispensable navigational tool for understanding contemporary media phenomena guides the approach for this study. The historical trajectories of legacy Black news media entities, their owners, and their operations will be meticulously analyzed and compared with current Black news podcasts and networks. Such a comparative lens enables a nuanced understanding of the evolution of Black news media, from traditional formats to digital platforms, and the implications of this shift for representation, inclusivity, and

accessibility within the media industry.

By using political economy to understand the political, economic, and historical backdrop and ongoing transformations in the broader podcast industry, this study hopes to shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Black news podcasts and networks. Moreover, the comparative approach allows for a deeper understanding of how these digital entities relate to, diverge from, and ultimately evolve beyond their legacy counterparts in the quest for representation, monetization, and audience engagement.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in the intersection of two previously divergent streams of a niche area of academic research: the cultural-political resonance and the economic underpinnings of Black news podcasts. This study embarks on a timely exploration of Black news podcasts and their burgeoning networks. These platforms have emerged as a distinctive journalistic force, meticulously tuned to echo, and represent the narratives of their listeners. While existing literature has delved into the cultural and societal dimensions of Black podcasts, there remains an underexplored territory in understanding the economic models and business strategies that underpin these platforms. This includes the mechanisms of advertising, sponsorship, revenue generation, and overall financial health. The oversight is notable given the critical role these podcasts play in countering the historical exclusion and marginalization of Black voices within the media landscape. These podcasts are not merely platforms for storytelling; they are potent instruments for redefining news through a Black lens, offering accessible, inclusive, and resonant spaces for Black American audiences.

Theoretical Framework: A Political Economic Perspective of Autonomy and Cultural Production in Black News Podcasting

According to Napoli (2014b; 2011), the political economy of media encompasses the production, distribution, and consumption of media content, all of which are areas where Black podcasts have made significant inroads. By leveraging the relatively low barriers to entry in podcasting, Black content creators have been able to produce and distribute content that directly addresses the concerns and experiences of Black audiences (Florini, 2015). Sharon (2023) analyzes podcasting, urging for a comprehensive research agenda that situates podcast studies within larger sociocultural and economic contexts. This call for a more granular examination of podcasting as a medium aligns with the objectives of this study, offering a methodological lens through which to explore Black news podcasting within the larger media landscape and the policies that impact them.

Critical political economy (CPE) provides a robust framework for understanding the complex interplay between media, politics, and economics. As detailed by Hardy (2014), this perspective emphasizes the significance of examining how media ownership, corporate interests, and governmental policies shape media content and influence public perception. CPE posits that media organizations are not neutral entities; rather, they are embedded within broader economic and political systems that drive their operations and editorial decisions. This means that media coverage can be biased and unfair, particularly when it serves the interests of powerful stakeholders. Given that media is a primary source through which the public forms opinions about the world, ensuring accurate and fair representation of societal events is critical for a healthy democracy (Hardy, 2014).

Hardy (2014) underscores that CPE investigates how media ownership and the political and economic structures of media organizations affect the production and dissemination of news. This includes analyzing how economic pressures, such as the need for advertising revenue, and political influences, such as regulatory frameworks, shape media content. Additionally, CPE explores how these factors contribute to the construction of meaning in mass media, influencing public discourse and societal understanding. Furthermore, CPE connects the circulation of symbolic and material resources that enable the public to comprehend, interact, and respond to various events. This includes the distribution of information and the infrastructure that supports media production and consumption. By examining these dynamics, CPE provides insights into how media systems operate, the power relations they embody, and their impact on public consciousness (Hardy, 2014).

Hardy (2014) also highlights the importance of understanding the internal processes within media organizations, such as newsroom practices and editorial policies, which are shaped by external political and economic pressures. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper understanding of the media's role in society and the ways in which media power is exercised and contested. CPE offers a critical lens through which to examine the media's role in shaping public opinion and societal norms. By focusing on the political and economic contexts of media production, CPE reveals the power structures and interests that influence media content, highlighting the need for greater transparency and accountability in media practices to ensure a more equitable and informed public sphere (Hardy, 2014).

Historical and Regulatory Frameworks

The historical underpinnings of Black news podcasts are deeply rooted in a legacy of racial inequalities in media representation and ownership. As McChesney (2017) explains, the concentrated media ownership tendencies of mainstream media have often encouraged “citizen journalists” to create new news sites to divert audiences from commercial journalism conglomerates. Black news podcasts can serve, as highlighted by Napoli (2015b), as mirroring this by producing content that speaks directly to their audiences’ experiences. The work of Matsaganis and Katz (2014) further supports this theme by emphasizing ethnic media producers, or in the case of this dissertation, Black news podcasts, can serve as counter-hegemonic platforms that challenge established media hegemonies and prioritize the cultural production of the Black community. Black news podcasts may be able to flourish with fewer corporate and governmental constraints, allowing for a diversification of voices within the media space (McChesney, 2015).

Napoli (2015a; 2015b) purports that the political economy of research in US media policymaking reveals the intricate interplay between media ownership and policy decisions. Black news podcasts operate within and often push back against these legal landscapes, advocating for regulations that promote media plurality (Napoli, 2019). Policies and regulations can either foster diversity or reinforce the status quo in ownership within the media industry.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 is a stark example of regulatory decisions exacerbating media consolidation, thus impacting minority ownership and diversity in content. Political economy scholarship also firmly asserts that media ownership shapes

the distribution of power within society (McChesney, 2013).

Ownership of these podcasts extends beyond the mere control of media assets; it encapsulates the stewardship of cultural narratives and the shaping of public consciousness. Therefore, ownership is crucial in determining the representation and cultural production within media. The emergence of Black-owned news podcasts has created a new space for diverse narratives, as Berry's (2017) concept of "podcasting while Black", Florini's (2020) concept of "podcasting Blackness", and Florini's earlier (2015) work on the podcast "Chitlin' Circuit" suggest. The cultural production within these podcasts is often a form of resistance against the backdrop of a media plutocracy that has traditionally misrepresented race in news (Dixon, 2017).

Economic Dynamics and Innovations in Black News Podcasting

Aubrey and Boling (2024) redefine economic podcasting by bringing to the fore Black and Brown voices in business journalism. While not economically focused, Black news podcasts with innovative funding models are also on the rise. Black news podcasts often employ innovative funding strategies, such as crowdfunding, to maintain operational autonomy and content integrity, allowing them to focus on community engagement and social impact over traditional profit metrics (Rei-Anderson, 2022). Stiegler's (2010) perspectives are instrumental in dissecting the economic models that Black news podcasts employ, from crowdfunding to alternative monetization strategies, which often diverge from the traditional advertising and sponsorship paradigms.

A thorough understanding of these economic and business aspects not only carries academic weight but also practical implications. The economic sustainability of Black news podcasts hinges on navigating market dynamics within a framework often

dominated by larger entities. The rise of independent funding models, such as crowdfunding and micro-patronage, reflects a shift towards economic models that empower creators and communities rather than corporate advertisers (O'Donnell, 2022). This theme underscores the political economy's focus on the intersection of economics and media structures (Garnham, 2018).

Based on this research, the monetization strategies of Black news podcasts also reflect a departure from traditional media models. Instead of relying solely on advertising revenue, which could potentially compromise editorial independence, many Black podcasters have turned to crowdfunding and subscription-based models. This approach not only ensures financial sustainability but also strengthens the bond between content creators and their audience, fostering a sense of ownership and community.

Platformization and Cultural Production

Rush (2020) expressed, the concept of the “culture industry” was critically developed by Adorno and Horkheimer and revisited in “Dialectic of Enlightenment”, which is a highly relevant framework to apply to the analysis of Black news podcasts. This concept highlights how mass-produced cultural goods can serve as instruments of social control by reinforcing dominant ideologies. Black news podcasts challenge this paradigm by creating their own cultural industry that seeks to dismantle hegemonic narratives and provide a platform for alternative voices and perspectives. Fox, et al. (2020) work introduce the concept of podcasts as discursive cultural guides, highlighting the educational and community-building potential of Black podcasting over the past decade. Jenkins and Myers (2022) study that articulates how Black voices in podcasting contribute to a digital public sphere, fostering spaces for civic engagement and cultural

affirmation.

To better understand the interplay between platformization and the commodification of culture within the realm of Black news podcast production, this study builds upon the theoretical foundations established by Nieborg and Poell (2018). Their seminal work provides a critical examination of the seismic shifts that have occurred within the political economy of cultural industries, particularly under the growing influence of platformization. The transformation of these industries, fueled by the increasing dominance of digital platforms, has profound implications for cultural production and distribution, a phenomenon that is inextricably linked with the operations and outcomes of Black news podcasts.

Nieborg and Poell's (2018) analyses of "the platformization of cultural production" underscore the power dynamics at play within platform ecosystems, highlighting how they shape the conditions of cultural production and distribution. In the same vein, they shine a light on how these platforms, through their policies and algorithms, can influence cultural plurality, potentially shaping the diversity and representation within cultural outputs. Furthermore, their discourse on accessibility emphasizes the significant role that platforms play in dictating who can produce, distribute, and consume cultural content.

The insights gleaned from Nieborg and Poell's (2018) work will serve as pivotal guideposts for this study, particularly in analyzing the dynamics of Black news podcast networks operating on platforms such as YouTube and iHeartRadio. It is within these digital arenas where the interplay between platform politics, cultural plurality, and accessibility becomes most salient. Understanding these dynamics not only unveils the

behind-the-scenes operations of Black news podcast production but also adds a critical layer to the broader discourse on the impacts of platformization on cultural production.

Dhiman (2023) confronts the challenges and opportunities facing news media in the changing media environment of digital media platforms, providing critical insights into the barriers of success in the podcasting industry, including income inequalities, the digital divide, polarization and echo chambers, addiction and overuse, privacy and security, and misinformation and fake news. These concerns are paramount in understanding the operational dynamics of Black news podcasts and their ability to navigate a digital ecosystem fraught with both potential and pitfalls.

There are also other factors that can interact with the audience and content within the digital media ecosystem, specifically on YouTube. As Napoli (2021; 2014b) notes, algorithms play a substantial role in what content is recommended to users on digital platforms. However, the biases in these algorithms can lead to the amplification of certain voices over others, often reflecting the biases of their predominantly white and male developers.

As found by Ibrahim, et al. (2023), YouTube's algorithm recommends left-leaning news, when artificial intelligence (A.I.) bots were implemented to experimentally engage as new users on the platform, going through a recommendation process based on news, falling into the far left to far right categories. Therefore, Black news podcasts may be able to navigate this landscape, by building strong community followings that can influence algorithmic recommendations through consistent engagement and sharing, thereby organically expanding their reach, as most inherently lean left due to their dedication to liberal ideologies that resonate with Black democratic perspectives.

Regarding digital activism, Florini (2019) goes beyond hashtags to delineate the racial politics at play within these networks, emphasizing the need for critical engagement with digital platforms that are increasingly central to Black cultural production.

Auditory Culture, Sonic Citizenship, and Audience Empowerment

Incorporating McHugh's (2022) analysis of the storytelling power of podcasting, the theoretical framework of this study is expanded to appreciate the auditory dimensions of Black news podcasts. McHugh (2022) posits that the medium's unique affordance for storytelling through sound adds depth to the narrative capacities of podcasts, transforming them into potent vehicles for cultural expression and identity formation. This acoustic element enriches the political economy of media framework by acknowledging that the production and dissemination of sound are as economically and politically charged as visual and textual media.

These new media ventures act as repositories of cultural memory and as platforms for historical redress (Zhao & Chakravartty, 2007). Bratcher (2021) aligns with the assertions of scholars such as Berry (2017) and Jenkins & Myers (2022), who have noted the pivotal role of Black podcasting in creating alternative spaces for representation and public discourse. It reinforces the idea that Black-owned news podcasts are not merely filling a void left by mainstream media but are actively redefining the contours of the public sphere and cultural production through their unique perspectives and storytelling approaches. Royston's (2023) examination of podcasts and new orality within the African mediascape further enriches this discourse, illustrating how Black podcasts utilize the spoken word to forge community ties, reaffirm cultural identities, and foster a new orality that resonates across the African diaspora. By bridging the gap between traditional

African oral practices and modern digital spaces, these podcasts contribute significantly to the “Black Public Sphere,” as suggested by Jenkins & Myers (2022), amplifying the Black voice, and catalyzing socio-political engagement within the digital era.

The emergent voices from Black-owned podcasts do more than fill gaps in representation; they construct “intimate publics,” a concept where the private and public spheres intersect to foster a sense of community and shared identity through aural experiences (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019; Sim, 2016). Sim’s (2016) research provides a profound understanding of how Black news podcasts employ sound to create intimate connections with their audience, thereby facilitating a form of intimacy that is both personal and collective. This intimacy through sound allows for the formation of a community that is connected not by physical proximity but by shared experiences and collective understanding, thus forging a Black public sphere that is both tangible and transcendent.

Sim (2016) further reinforces the concepts articulated by Berry (2015), Florini (2015, 2020), and Jenkins and Myers (2022), illustrating how the auditory experience of podcasting characterized by its immediacy and personal touch creates a unique space for engagement. It is in this sonic sphere where Black podcasters articulate issues of race, identity, and politics, crafting narratives that resonate with the listener on a deeply personal level while simultaneously contributing to the public discourse on Blackness in media. The concept of sonic citizenship relates to daily Black news podcasts by emphasizing the role of sound and audio media in shaping communal and individual identities within the public sphere.

The interaction between these platforms and their users represents a new form of audience dynamics, where community engagement and participation are central (Jenkins, 2019). This shift is in line with the political economy's examination of how technological changes disrupt existing media power structures (Carpentier, 2017). Black news podcasts thrive on audience engagement, fostering interactive communities that contribute to content and direction. This participatory culture challenges the top-down approach of traditional media, aligning with the political economy of media's emphasis on audience agency and collaborative content creation (Jenkins, 2019). An examination of external show programs, calls to action, and initiatives, specifically chosen to connect with listeners, were chosen to help deepen the understanding of the connection between platforms, podcasts, and the audience.

Black news podcasts often engage in societal advocacy, leveraging their platforms to highlight political issues pertinent to the Black community. Through this advocacy, they exert political influence and contribute to public discourse, embodying a form of media activism (Ramasubramanian et al., 2020). This indicates the interest of political economy in examining the ways in which media operations can both shape and mirror the distribution of power within society (Freedman, 2019). Incorporating Sperber's (2021) findings into the discussion on Black news podcasts being used as a tool for cultural expression and societal influence, suggests that the economic strategies employed by Black podcasters are in themselves acts of representation, serving as a counterbalance to the commodification trends within the broader media industry. These podcasts become more than just platforms for storytelling; they are agents of economic and cultural reclamation within the public sphere, reflecting a community's agency in defining its

own narratives and means of sustenance (Lindgren, 2016).

Building on the works of scholars like Mansell (2004), who discusses power structures in new media, and Prat and Strömberg's (2013) insights on the political economy of mass media, I argue Black news podcasts and their networks have carved out essential spaces within the media ecosystem, that were previously routed by the Black Press, offering a necessary perspective on news, culture, and society from the vantage point of Black Americans. Black news podcasts are not merely alternative news sources but are a response to and critique of a news media industry that has long been influenced by the political economy of media, creating its own cultural industry (Fox et al., 2020; Vrikki & Malik, 2019). Black news podcasts, through their creation and circulation, critique the traditional news media industry's long-standing influence and offer an autonomous platform for underrepresented narratives.

This study also includes an industry analysis rooted in the insights of prominent researchers. This study will draw from Rime, et al. (2022) redefinition of podcasting and their tension framework for innovation, providing valuable insights into the contemporary landscape of the podcast industry and future opportunities for technological advancement and transformation in production practices. The research underpinnings of Rime, et al. (2022) will inform an understanding of platform politics, cultural plurality, accessibility, and their implications for the development and sustainability of Black news podcast networks.

Statement of Problem

Despite the significant growth of Black news podcasts, there is an evident lack of in-depth research into their economic and business dimensions, especially concerning their news program channels on platforms like YouTube and iHeartRadio. This relationship is critical within the political economy of cultural production, which affects various facets of media creation, distribution, and consumption. Understanding how these podcasts are positioned within digital cultural economies and their methods of space negotiation in the digital media ecosystem is crucial.

There also remains a substantial gap in scholarly knowledge regarding the economic frameworks and political impacts of Black news podcasts within the digital media ecosystem, including historical ties to legacy Black media organizations. These podcasts serve as vital platforms for underrepresented voices, yet their economic sustainability, ownership models, and effects on public discourse are poorly understood.

Additionally, the challenges related to cultural commodification, the sustainability of independent media, and the influence of corporate ownership on content authenticity and representation are significantly underexplored. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the political economy of Black news podcasts, focusing on how they manage the intricacies of media production, ownership, and distribution in the contemporary digital ecosystem.

Research Questions

RQ¹: How do ownership structures and digital platform dynamics influence the content and narrative control of Black news podcasts?

RQ²: What legal structures and economic models underpin the funding and monetization of Black news podcasts, and how do these influence their sustainability and independence?

RQ³: In what ways do Black news podcasts impact the political discourse within Black communities?

Methodology

Investigating an emergent culture of Black news podcast media that distinctively deviates from conventional audio and broadcast news media presents a distinctive opportunity to unravel the intersecting webs of media industry trends, programming initiatives, and their continuous evolution. This understanding is of pivotal importance when seeking to strategically direct the future progression and advancement of Black news media as a comprehensive entity. Consequently, a pivotal component of this research approach entails the adoption of historical analysis to offer contextual insights, drawing from the richness of the past to inform an understanding of the future trajectory of the podcast industry.

I will highlight milestones in Black media history, such as the establishment of the first Black-owned newspaper, the role of Black media in civil rights movements, and their transition to digital media, through a document analysis. These documents were accessed via scholastic databases and online archives of older text. This context is crucial for understanding the legacy that Black news podcasts inherit and the continuities and discontinuities in Black media's objectives and challenges.

In doing so, this research will illuminate the path traversed by the industry, thus offering a historical backdrop against which its current state and future possibilities can be scrutinized. The historical analysis also considers the social and cultural impact of Black media, including its role in community building, cultural preservation, and social activism. This involves exploring how Black podcasts continue the tradition of Black media as a space for critical discourse, cultural expression, and political engagement, and how they adapt these functions to the digital age.

The primary sources for the historical analysis will include newspapers, magazines, legal documents, and other historical texts and advertisements. Secondary sources will involve scholarly articles that detail the history and influence of Black print news, radio, and podcast media. Some biographical texts on prominent figures in the Black Press will shed light on personal and professional challenges within the industry. Additionally, additional government and legal documentation will be reviewed to understand regulatory impacts on Black media operations.

To understand how ownership structures combined with digital platform dynamics influence the content, reach, and narrative control of Black news podcasts, this study employs a qualitative content analysis of Black news podcasts from platforms like YouTube and iHeartRadio. Purposive sampling was used to include various podcast sizes, reach, and thematic foci that pertained to the purpose of this study. Purposive sampling was the most suitable method for this study as it allows for the inclusion of Black news podcasts that have made significant contributions to discussions about Black communities or have been notably impacted by platform dynamics. This method ensures that the selected sample is not just random but directly pertinent to the topics of

ownership, content control, and their influence on narrative reach and structure. The selection criteria included audience size, engagement rates, platform presence, and duration of existence.

The podcasts chosen also showcased diverse economic models and political narratives. An analysis of how changes in media regulation and the economic landscape have impacted Black media is also included, as a detailed examination of significant legislative acts, such as the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and their implications for media ownership diversity. Additional considerations about the funding challenges and opportunities that have arisen with digital media, including new models like crowdfunding and sponsorship, which have become vital for sustaining Black podcasts, will be discussed.

To identify what legal structures and economic models underpin the funding and monetization of Black news podcasts, a legal and economic analysis will be conducted. I will review legal documents, FCC regulatory policies, failed bills, and key case law impacting media ownership and operations. I will examine how these legal frameworks shape the ownership structures of Black news podcasts, focusing on any barriers or facilitators they present to media operations. The economic analysis will consist of data gathering of the podcast funding sources, revenue models, and monetization policies, via annual reports, industry reports, and market data to contextualize the financial stability of the Black news podcasts and platforms within the current economic environment. Nielsen, Edison Research, Reuters, Podtrac, and Pew Research Center, covering specialized reports on podcasting, will be implemented to provide a macroeconomic view of the digital ecosystem.

Finally, to assess the ways in which Black news podcasts impact the political discourse within Black communities, and how do they contribute to shaping the broader media representation, I will analyze the discourse and audience engagement strategies employed by the podcasters and platforms. I will assess the content of Black news podcasts and how they frame certain political discourse the targets the audience to engage in a political discourse or action. A representative sample of podcast episodes and segments that have prominently featured political themes will be used in this study. I will analyze the rhetoric, themes, and narrative structures used and will focus on identifying instances where these elements influence political discourse and community engagement.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative content analysis of podcasts, thematic analysis of interview transcripts, and quantitative industry data. This triangulation of data sources and methods will ensure a robust understanding of the political economy of Black news podcasts, identifying key themes, trends, and disparities in the production, distribution, and consumption of Black news content online. By employing this type of methodology, the research aims to contribute to the discourse on the political economy of Black podcasting, offering insights into the economic models, regulatory challenges, and political narratives that shape the production and dissemination of Black news content in the digital age.

Case Studies

Adding to the document analysis in this study, case studies are also implemented. The historical Black print newspaper case studies included in this study are Ida B. Wells and her travels for her publications on lynching; the experiences of Marcus Garvey in the United States; and the familial ownership model of the *Chicago Defender*. In the realm of

Black news podcasting, Roland S. Martin's, #BlackStarNetwork, and his daily digital news show on YouTube, iHeartRadio, and his own #BlackStarNetwork app, #RolandMartinUnfiltered is included in this study. iHeartRadio's Black Information Network, including the Black news radio program, Atlanta's BIN 640, found on traditional AM/FM broadcast radio stations in Atlanta, and the globally on the iHeartRadio app is also included in this study.

This study will document and compare the financial challenges and ownership structures of the YouTube Black News Channel (BNC)/TheGrio and Fox Soul, illustrating how a major media organization like Fox, and Black moguls like Byron Allen, alike, can experience divergent outcomes in Black news podcasting. These case studies will move past simply considering ownership, and instead, delve deeper into the specifics of production processes, the format of shows, the choice of content, and the personalities involved. The goal of this study is to explore these diverse elements, providing deeper insight into the operational workings and strategic decisions that underpin these Black news podcasts and their networks.

Summary

In summary, this study constructs a multi-dimensional exploration of Black news podcasts through the prisms of political economy and cultural theory, dissecting their ascendancy, economic strategies, and their challenge to traditional media paradigms. Napoli's (2019; 2015a; 2014a; 2014b; 2011) works illustrate the podcasts' rise within the political economy of media, highlighting how low entry barriers empower Black creators to address their audience's specific needs directly. Fuchs (2015) offers a critical view on the audience as a commodity within the digital space, revealing the intricate

consumption-production dynamics of Black podcasts. The political economy of media framework will be used as a robust analytical tool, dissecting the complex interplay of media ownership, economic forces, and ideological impacts on information dissemination.

Nieborg and Poell's (2018) contribution is pivotal in understanding the ramifications of platformization on the cultural production of media. Mansell (2004) and Prat and Strömberg (2013) contribute to this framework by exploring new media power structures and mass media's political economy, providing context for Black podcasts' innovative funding and community-focused approaches. Adorno and Horkheimer's "culture industry" theory, revisited by Rush (2020), becomes especially relevant, examining how Black podcasts challenge mass-produced cultural goods that reinforce dominant ideologies. Sharon (2023) emphasizes the need for comprehensive podcast research within broader sociocultural and economic contexts. Dhiman (2023) and Stiegler (2010) discuss the barriers and successes in podcasting, while Fox et al. (2020) discuss racial politics and podcasts as cultural guides, while Ramasubramanian et al. (2020) and Jenkins and Myers (2022) examine Black political voices' contribution to the digital public discourse, which can be seen as a form of media activism. McHugh (2022) highlights the storytelling power unique to podcasts.

The collective works of Aubrey & Boling (2022), Sperber (2021), Freedman (2019), McChesney (2015), and Marable (2015) are also crucial for a nuanced understanding of Black news podcasts within the political economy. Their research critiques media consolidation, advances the digital labor discussion, and examines the interrelation of race, media, and economic agency, and how the digital environment can

reflect the current structure of power. These studies enhance the exploration of Black news podcasts as they challenge traditional media through community-focused economic strategies and assertive counter-narrative control in the digital ecosystem (Boling, 2021; McChesney, 2015), much like the counter-storytelling tenet of Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

This study positions Black news podcasts as potent agents of cultural production, economic innovation, and socio-political discourse, showcasing their potential within the media ecosystem. These podcasts stand as correctives to mainstream media's marginalization of Black voices, carving out spaces for narratives long excluded and establishing platforms for underrepresented narratives and historical issues (Zhao & Chakravartty, 2007). The study aims to delve into the platforms that house these Black news podcasts, like YouTube and iHeartRadio, to investigate how Black podcasts use these to expand reach and impact.

Organization of the Dissertation

This scholarly examination unfolds in the following chapters. The first chapter is a review of the emergence and roots of Black news media, encompassing an analysis of the Black Press of the 19th century. The next chapter continues the history of Black radio and its creation of a broadcast community transcending the original regional subscription parameters of the Black Press, while also discussing the ownership structures found in Black radio and their implications. Within these chapters, I scrutinize a myriad of nuances inherent in many trailblazing Black media organizations and writers, addressing the complexities that impact their efficacy as mass media bodies representing Black voices and viewpoints within America. Chapter 3 reveals the legal landscape that houses

traditional media systems and impacts the future of Black news organizations. In chapter 4, I start to unravel the complexities of Black podcasts and Black news podcasts networks, through the lens of platformization and cultural production.

A further investigation of Black online spaces and daily news podcasts are also included. Chapter 5 is an overview of digital platforms, YouTube and iHeartRadio, and their funding, content policies, and platform operations. Chapter 6 covers a case study of iHeartRadio's BIN 640, followed by a case study of Roland Martin's daily news show, #BlackStarNetwork in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 provides a contextual analysis of how these Black news podcasts interact and operate with advertisers and corporate conglomerates Fox and GM, and how in turn, these relationships impact their ability to control their narratives, funding, and programs.

This dissertation encompasses an examination of the commercial alliances and distribution channels tied to Black news media podcasting, in addition to a meticulous analysis of their internal podcast production and audience engagement strategies used for funding. These strategies reflect the quintessentially communal ethos prevalent within Black media and its audience. Furthermore, this analysis also responds to relevant studies concerning the cultural production and industrial aspects of Black news media within a socio-economic context traditionally steeped in racial bias and capitalist ideologies.

CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL RACIAL INEQUALITIES & THE BLACK PRESS

During the lamentable period of slavery in the United States, spanning from the burgeoning stages of colonial settlement until the denouement of the American Civil War in 1865, the abhorrent practice of advertising enslaved individuals permeated newspapers of the era (Desrochers, 2002; Johnson, 1981; Smith, 2019). Prominent newspapers of that era shamelessly disseminated advertisements espousing the sale of enslaved individuals, thrusting them into the marketplace as mere commodities to be bartered and exchanged. The inaugural slave advertisement appeared in *The Boston News-Letter*, now *The Boston Gazette* (Desrochers, 2002; González & Torres, 2012). On June 5, 1704, this historic ruin served as a testament to an era in which the institution of slavery inhumanely prospered. Orchestrated by the proprietor, John Coleman, the advertisement sought to facilitate the sale of “two Negro men,” accompanied by a “Negro Woman & Child” (Desrochers, 2002; Greene, 1944). As posited by González and Torres (2012), the conundrum persists wherein, even within the bustling metropolis of Boston with a population of 10,000, *The Boston News-Letter* grappled to secure 300 subscribers at the pinnacle of its popularity (p. 21). Moreover, they expound the disconcerting revelation that Native Americans, too, were unjustly stigmatized as criminals within the pages of another Bostonian colonial periodical known as *Publick Occurrences*.

This deleterious pattern parallels the treatment observed in *The Boston News-Letter*, wherein narratives surrounding the sale and re-capture of enslaved people, slave uprisings, and other forms of criminality were similarly expounded (González & Torres, 2012). In an unyielding procession that unfolded between 1704 and 1720, the corridors

of *The Boston News-Letter* published the trading of more than 500 enslaved individuals, their lives and destinies reduced to chattel within these solemn columns (Desrochers, 2002). Notably prevalent in the periodicals of that era were the infamous “runaway slave” ads, which manifested as notices meticulously crafted by slaveholders ardently pursuing the apprehension and repatriation of those enslaved individuals who had successfully fled their captors (Bly, 2021; Costa, 2001; Hodges & Brown, 2019). These harrowing advertisements featured comprehensive descriptions of the absconded slaves, meticulously enumerating their physical attributes, aptitudes, attitudinal dispositions, and distinctive markings (Bly, 2021). Their insidious intent was to facilitate the sale or recapture and re-subjugation of those who had courageously ventured to escape the fetters of bondage.

One must recognize the deeply egregious and dehumanizing nature of these advertisements, integral to the sinister operations of the slavery system fueled by capitalism. Their widespread dissemination helped entrench the reprehensible commodification and objectification of individuals, serving as corrupt tools in sustaining the shameful practice of transatlantic chattel slavery in America. These advertisements remain as stark reminders of the horrific atrocities and deep-seated systemic oppression faced by both enslaved and free Americans during this dark era. These ads also underscore how our nation’s earliest newspapers served as a catalyst to facilitate and perpetuate the injustices of slavery. Human suffering and bondage were explicitly commercialized for economic profit, with the press playing a pivotal role in this dehumanization. This grim legacy of slavery within a capitalist framework highlights a deep moral failure that resonates through history, particularly within Black media,

illustrating the severe consequences of a society where economic interests surpass fundamental human rights and dignity.

Enslaved Black people in America encountered their own subjugated existence through the prism of slave sale advertisements, acutely aware of the profound influence of community economics that brought them together in the markets facilitated by these very advertisements, predominantly disseminated in white areas (Zackodnik, 2015). Zackodnik (2005) further asserts that these newspapers, such as *The Boston News-Letter*, derived a substantial portion of their financial sustenance from these very slave advertisements, thereby completing a hauntingly circular capitalist trajectory that inexorably linked the funding of slave owners to the repugnant media institutions that perpetuated their dominion.

The dispassionate listings of people as property, with price tags affixed to their existence, reveal a chilling commodification at the heart of a burgeoning economic system. The press, in its facilitation and dissemination of such advertisements, played a pivotal role in the normalization and perpetuation of this abhorrent practice. By turning a blind eye to the moral atrocities in favor of economic expediency, these publications became complicit in the machinery of bondage. These remnants of a painful history serve as sobering testaments to the depths of inhumanity that can be reached when the pursuit of profit overrides the sanctity of human life, embedding systemic oppression into the very fabric of society. They force Americans to confront the uncomfortable reality that the foundations of economic growth in America were, in part, laid upon the forced labor and suffering of countless souls whose basic human rights were stripped away under the auspices of commerce and industry.

The haunting legacy of slavery, woven into the fabric of capitalist enterprise, represents a profound ethical lapse that reverberates through the annals of history. It casts a long shadow, particularly over the realm of Black media, spotlighting the grave repercussions of a societal structure that permits financial motives to usurp fundamental human rights and dignity. The egregious moral failings of a past where economic gain was ruthlessly prioritized over human dignity laid the groundwork for a redemptive counter-narrative in media. It was from these depths of exploitation that the Black press emerged, not merely as a media alternative but as a necessary beacon of truth and advocacy, seeking to reclaim the narrative and affirm the humanity of a community long misrepresented and silenced by mainstream channels.

The inception of “race papers” not only provided a pivotal platform for marginalized voices but also represented a distinct entrepreneurial endeavor within the media industry. These publications, conceived as business ventures by and for racial and ethnic minorities, were instrumental in articulating the concerns and aspirations of communities often sidelined in mainstream discourse. With a clear commercial strategy, they catered to a readership hungry for representation and discourse that resonated with their collective experience. Through these ventures, “race papers” “stood at the intersection of commerce and advocacy, demonstrating that media could simultaneously operate as a profitable business while serving the profound need for empowerment and solidarity within these communities. They set the stage for the evolution of Black media, establishing businesses rooted in truth-telling and the pursuit of justice, thereby creating a dedicated voice for African Americans and other minorities in the ongoing narrative of

systemic exclusion and misrepresentation.

The Black Press

In the 20th century, the Black press navigated the complex waters of a dual identity as both periodicals and colloquially designated “race papers.” This nomenclature emerged from their unequivocal commitment to news of paramount significance to the African American community, meticulously curated by their editorial teams (Suggs, 1983). Simultaneously, between 1824 and the 1850s, a panoply of other “race papers” came into existence. These included Hispanic (*El Dorado*), white Cuban (*La Verdad*), Afro-Cuban (*El Mulato*), and Native American (*Cherokee Phoenix*) publications, all rooted in New York. Each paper was united in its fundamental purpose: to articulate a fervent call for political and moral freedom in the unyielding struggle for human rights.

However, it is worth noting that these publications were not without their contradictions. For instance, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, despite its mission, also disseminated articles laden with racially prejudiced views towards “African Americans” in office (Baker, 1982; Carletta, 2006; Clayton, 1979; González & Torres, 2012; Guallar & Abadal, 2010). This duality underscores the complexities inherent in the media industry, even within outlets ostensibly committed to the advancement of marginalized communities. The earliest “race papers” were intended primarily for readers from racial and ethnic minority communities. These publications served as a platform to voice the concerns, interests, and perspectives of groups that were often marginalized or misrepresented in the mainstream press. They aimed to empower these communities by providing news, commentary, and information relevant to their experiences and struggles, fostering a sense of solidarity and identity. This catalyzed the inception of Black media

business, with “race papers” as the foundation of truth and advocacy, providing a dedicated voice for African Americans and other minorities in the face of systemic exclusion and misrepresentation.

The inherent complexities within the media industry are starkly illuminated by the duality of outlets that, while ostensibly championing the cause of marginalized communities, sometimes harbored their own biases. As with Black news podcasts, the earliest “race papers” emerged as a vital counter-narrative, aimed squarely at an audience of racial and ethnic minorities who found themselves sidelined in the dominant discourse. These publications became bastions of empowerment, offering a resonant space where the concerns, interests, and viewpoints of these communities could be expressed and affirmed. Through news, commentary, and information steeped in the lived experiences and struggles of these groups, “race papers” not only fostered a profound sense of solidarity and identity but also laid the groundwork for Black media to emerge as a formidable force of truth and advocacy. They were a clarion call to African Americans and other minorities, providing an unwavering voice to challenge systemic exclusion and shape a narrative of representation.

The inaugural Black newspaper in the United States, *Freedom’s Journal*, in conjunction with the indomitable journalistic endeavors of Ida B. Wells, an African American woman who fearlessly navigated the tumultuous waters of the publishing world, and the *Chicago Defender*, the longest-running Black-owned pioneer newspaper founded by progeny of the enslaved, collectively represent an inimitable triad in the archives of Black media. These influential publications, rich with substance and historical significance, have served as the bedrock of Black media evolution, and their echoes can

be discerned in contemporary Black podcasts.

Freedom's Journal, a seminal publication, paved the way for Black voices in the media industry. Wells, with her unremitting focus on white mob violence, lynching, boycotting, and trans-Atlantic advocacy building, brought issues of racial justice to the forefront through her groundbreaking works such as “The Red Record” and “Southern Horrors”. This was contemporaneous with the ascent of the *Chicago Defender*, a quintessential exemplar of Black-owned newspapers. The *Defender* perpetuated the tradition of illuminating the issues pertinent to the African American community, concurrently extending support and resources to these very same constituencies.

This dual role underscored the newspaper’s commitment not only to the dissemination of information but also to the tangible betterment of the communities it served. A thorough analysis of these organizations, encompassing their establishment, economic foundations, and financing methods, offers critical understanding into the Black media sector. This examination sheds light on the challenges, determination, and success that define the narrative of these significant outlets and their enduring impact.

Freedom's Journal

The inception of the Black Press transpired on March 16, 1827, in New York City, with the seminal debut of *The Freedom's Journal* an epochal milestone that specifically catered to the work of independent Black media journalists and editors within the United States, a significant 38 years before the abolition of slavery (Bourne, 2006; González & Torres, 2012). The *Freedom's Journal's* founding members were Samuel E. Cornish, a venerable Black Presbyterian minister, and John B. Russwurm, an illustrious figure counted among the earliest college-educated in the nation, who came from a

Jamaican and White heritage (Hines, 2016).

In the home of M. Boston Crummel (Fortenberry, 1974), another prominent Bostonian of African descent, they all gathered with friends late in the year prior, to devise a plan for their preeminent Black-owned publication (González & Torres, 2012). *The Freedom's Journal*, one of the first “race papers” in the U.S., was circulated in 11 states, the District of Columbia, Haiti, Europe, and Canada (Britannica, 2020). Adorned upon the pages of this succinct, single-page, four-panel newspaper, released every Friday from 1827 to 1829, resonated a resolute inscription that encapsulated their aspirations:

“We wish to plead our own cause, too often have others spoken for us...

From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented” (Barrow Jr, 1977; González & Torres, 2012; Svlich-Felker, 2011).

This quotation encapsulates an earnest yearning for self-delineation and sovereignty, most notably within the domain of mass communication and media. The phrase “We wish to plead our own cause” intimates a potent resolve to express personal sentiments, ideologies, or grievances, unencumbered by the obfuscation or distortion that can arise through the intervention of others. The subsequent clause, “too often have others spoken for us,” insinuates a historical precedent of external entities like the White population voicing opinions on behalf of Blacks, in an inaccurate and inequitable manner. This could allude to a situation wherein Black American voices have been marginalized or misconstrued, frequently culminating in misapprehension or bias.

The allusion to enduring “from the press and the pulpit” denotes that such misrepresentations have manifested within secular (press) and religious (pulpit) contexts. This infers a pervasive and systemic issue of being “incorrectly represented” across diverse sectors of society. In its entirety, this declaration appears to resonate as a call for self-agency and authentic portrayal, specifically for cohorts that have been historically marginalized or misrepresented by mainstream media and institutions. It underscores the paramountcy of Black Americans’ conveying their own experiences, viewpoints, and realities.

Although the declaration ostensibly suggests that the genesis of the Black Press was a counter-reaction to the inherently prejudiced white mainstream media, notable for their slave advertisements and lack of Black contributions, and religious institutions that rationalized slavery, it is crucial to recognize the inherent human instinct for survival as a potent driving force. This instinct galvanized Black Americans to utilize print media as a tool to preserve their ancestral heritage and aspirations for future generations. Exposure to print media, even within the oppressive framework of enslavement, unmasked the potent dynamism of mediated communication. This force transcended the restrictions inflicted upon individual Black American voices, which were often confined to the narrow audience of their Southern owners or Northern neighbors.

These voices, through the medium of print, found a way to echo beyond these geographical and societal constraints, asserting their presence and resilience in the face of adversity. The use of democratic media as a vehicle to magnify their voices, transcending the constraints enforced by an undemocratic society, transpired as a crucial survival strategy for the African American population. This was more than a mere reactive

measure to the pervasive dominance of the white mainstream media.

The foundational cadre of Black journalists, frequently emancipated individuals, were catapulted into an elite echelon, emerging as potent voices echoing the aspirations of the broader Black community (Carroll, 2017). Their ascended status underscored a profound comprehension - that triumph in the realm of the Black Press was intricately tied to the attainment of an elevated stratum within the layered hierarchy of the American class structure (Hutton, 1993; Marcus & Levine, 2001). This pattern was manifestly evident in the instance of *The Freedom's Journal*, as highlighted by its cultivated and distinguished African American proprietors.

This was further corroborated by the publication's chosen moniker, which bore testament to the elevated status and intellectual prowess of its owners. The name subtly but powerfully encapsulated the aspirations of an emancipated and educated Black elite, further underscoring the publication's commitment to representing and uplifting the African American community. The name symbolically encapsulates the emancipatory aspiration and democratic ethos that formed the underpinning of this pioneering publication.

Concerning the financial underpinnings of *The Freedom's Journal*, Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm, the pioneering visionaries behind its inception, depended upon the monetary support of African American individuals and entities staunchly committed to the import of an autonomous Black media. The roster of their financial benefactors was an illustrious one. It included Thomas Jennings, a distinguished African American dentist who presided over the group of stockholders; David Walker, founder of the incendiary abolitionist pamphlet, "David Walker's Appeal", who also acted as the

newspaper's agent in Boston; Stephen Smith, a prosperous African American lumber exporter from Pennsylvania who generously contributed to the Underground Railroad; and abolitionists rallied by Thomas Hale, a member of the white abolitionist collective known as "The New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been, or May be Liberated" (González & Torres, 2012; Landy, 2014; Polgar, 2011; Rury, 1985).

These unwavering supporters wielded a significant influence in maintaining the operational continuity of the newspaper, thereby ensuring the preservation of its editorial independence and integrity. Their contributions attest to the potent role of communal support in the success of such a pivotal institution within the African American media environment. Remarkably, their journalistic and methodical echoes can still be discerned in some of the pragmatic tendencies of contemporary Black news podcast networks and daily news shows featured in this paper.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett's Transatlantic Partnerships

In the 1830s, significant advancements in printing technology provided Black journalists and editors with the opportunity to own their own media organizations and printing presses. Previously, they had been deprived of support from the established white media, which consistently disregarded their stories and perspectives (Bourne, 2006; Carroll, 2017; Washburn, 2006). Ida B. Wells, a distinguished African American journalist, activist, and suffragist, emerged as a prominent figure who leveraged her ownership of Black print media to powerfully amplify the voices and experiences of Black Americans, shedding light on their indescribable suffering while demanding societal and political transformation (Darling, 2018; McMurry, 2000; Schechter, 1993;

Wells, 2014; Wells, 2020; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b).

Through her unwavering commitment to justice and intrepid journalism, she harnessed the capacity of Black print media ownership to empower the Black community, expose the scourge of racial violence, and fervently advocate for the rights and dignity of African Americans (Darling, 2018; Seay-Howard, 2023; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Zackodnik, 2005). Her resolute endeavors made an indelible impact on the discourse surrounding racial justice, playing an instrumental role in advancing the cause of civil rights in the United States, even going beyond American borders to seek social change (McClish, 2020; Seay-Howard, 2023; Wells, 2020; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b; Zackodnik, 2005).

One of the first notable endeavors by Ida B. Wells was the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*, a newspaper she co-owned and edited in the late 1880s (Adejumobi, 2009; Hardin & Hinton, 2001; Tucker, 1971; Wells, 2014; Wells, 2021a; Wells, 2020). It was within the pages of this publication that Wells began her courageous campaign against the horrors of lynching, bringing attention to the injustices faced by African Americans and demanding social change (Caddoo, 2017; Hardin & Hinton, 2001; Wells, 2014; Wells, 2021a; Wells, 2021b; Wells, 2020).

“The Red Record” and “Southern Horrors”

Noteworthy among her contributions are her seminal works titled, “The Red Record” and “Southern Horrors,” which served as illuminating exposés shedding light on the pervasive issue of racial violence and lynching in the United States (Bazzi et al., 2022; Darling, 2018; Ginzburg, 1996). Published in 1895, “The Red Record” stands as a seminal publication by Wells, meticulously chronicling countless instances of lynching

and the systematic perpetration of racial violence against African Americans (Darling, 2018; Seay-Howard, 2023; Wells, 2014; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b).

“The Red Record” poignantly underscored the harrowing atrocities inflicted upon Black individuals, laying bare the deep-seated roots of systemic racism and injustice that ran rampant throughout the South (Darling, 2018; Pinar, 2001; Seay-Howard, 2023; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b; Zackodnik, 2015). Wells masterfully documented cases, unearthing the horrifying specifics of lynching incidents in an endeavor to raise public consciousness, eliciting both outrage and empathy from readers spanning beyond the confines of the Black community (Seay-Howard, 2023; Wells, 2014; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b).

Preceding “The Red Record,” Wells composed “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases” in 1892 as a timely response to the lynching of three Black men in Shelby County, Tennessee, right outside of Memphis, on March 9th of the same year (Wells, 2014; Wells, 2020; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b). Wells was compelled to write this after her friends (Thomas Moss, owner; Will Stewart and Calvin McDowell, store employees) were lynched by a white mob for creating and working in their Black-owned and operated grocery store in their Black neighborhood called, “The People’s Grocery”, serving as competition to the White grocery store, owned by white grocer, William Barrett, that Blacks were forced to use in the area (Squires, 2015; Wells, 2014; Wells, 2020; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b). In this earlier pamphlet, Wells fearlessly confronted prevailing stereotypes and narratives employed to justify lynching (Markovitz, 2004; Schechter, 1993). She fearlessly unveiled the falsehoods underlying accusations, exposed the pervasive influence of racial prejudices, and laid

bare the active roles of white mobs in perpetuating violence against Black individuals (Darling, 2018; Seay-Howard, 2023; Wells, 2020; Wells-Barnett, 2021a; Wells-Barnett, 2021b).

Ida B. Wells employed her poignant prose to dismantle fallacies, shed light on injustices, and issue a resounding call to halt the abhorrent practice of lynching (Adejumobi, 2009; Curry, 2012; Dalal & Zavialova, 2001; Davidson, 2007; Pinar, 2001; Wells, 2021a). Her journalistic efforts in the *Memphis Free Speech* paper also sparked bus boycotts and mass exodus of Black Americans following the lynching of the owners of “The People’s Grocery” (Wells, 2021; Curry, 2012; Adejumobi, 2009; Davidson, 2007; Dalal & Zavialova, 2001; Pinar, 2001). This powerful response by the community mirrored the later Black American protest movement known as “The Great Migration” in the 1920s, which saw large numbers of Black Americans fleeing racial discrimination and white domestic terrorism in the South to seek better opportunities and treatment in the North.

Wells’ seminal works not only garnered international attention to the pressing issue of lynching but also galvanized widespread support for the anti-lynching movement and the broader struggle for civil rights (Bazzi et al., 2022; Darling, 2018; Schechter, 1993; Silkey, 2015; Zackodnik, 2015). The 1920s witnessed a confluence of factors that propelled the circulation of Black newspapers: the influx of Black migration to the North, coupled with rising literacy rates within the Black community, contributed to a surge in readership, transforming these newspapers into invaluable channels for the dissemination of Black narratives and experiences (Kaestle et al., 1991). According to Barlow’s (1995) study on Black radio during the 1920s, also known as the Jazz Age for Black musicians,

“local radio stations in New York City and Chicago were the most hospitable to African American performers in the 1920s” (p. 327). Barlow (1995) also stated Chicago was a leader in blues radio performances, and Black religious programs.

As such, the 1920s was the most expansive era for Black broadcast radio ownership as it was before commercial radio networks, during one the most popular eras for Black music on the newly established radio airwaves, although, they were often limited to exposure on mainstream radio networks compared to White dance performers like Paul Whiteman—the self-proclaimed “King of Jazz” (Barlow, 1995). The first Black dance band was broadcast in Chicago on KYW, which was owned by Westinghouse Electric Corporation, the owner of KDKA in Pittsburgh, the oldest surviving licensed commercial radio station on the U.S, now known as CBS (Barlow, 1995; Ruby et al., 2009). Apart from Black jazz artists such as, Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson being featured in mainstream radio, this appropriation and commercialization of Black culture by white entertainers led to a compromised authenticity of original Black deeply-culturally rooted art forms while also heavily influencing popular trends (Barlow, 1995).

As the United States was catapulted into the throes of World War II, following the assault on Pearl Harbor, the African American community domestically grappled with the pervasive challenges of segregation, discrimination, escalating racial tensions, and racially motivated civil disturbances (Ford et al., 2019). The historical phenomenon of “The Great Migration” continued well throughout the 1940s-1960s (Baran et al., 2023; Calderon et al., 2019; Collins, 2021; McGreevy, 2019) and found artistic expression in the renowned art series, “The Migration”, by Black American painter Jacob Lawrence, created during World War II in the 1940s (Collins & Davis, 2021). Lawrence, a

Southern-born artist who moved to Harlem, New York - considered the “Mecca of the New Negro” (Putnam, 2013) during the Harlem Renaissance - depicted the spirit of the migration that took place roughly twenty years following Ida B. Wells’ initiatives. His reflections were based on his personal experiences of relocating and living in Harlem (Laney, 2007).

After the offices of the *Memphis Free Speech* were destroyed due to backlash from her incisive editorial on lynching, “The People’s Grocery” in her paper, the *Memphis Free Speech*, Wells relocated to New York City, where she continued her journalistic crusade by resurrecting the *Free Speech* newspaper (Hardin & Hinton, 2001; Tucker, 1971; Wells-Barnett, 2021a). Wells details her need to flee from Memphis to New York after releasing her editorial about the lynching of her friends:

“Since my business has been destroyed and I am an exile from home because of that editorial, the issue has been forced, and as the writer of it I feel that the race and the public generally should have a statement of the facts as they exist. They will serve at the same time as a defense for the Afro-Americans Samplings who suffer themselves to be betrayed by white Delilahs.” (Wells, 2021a, pp. 7-8).

Wells’ poignant language revealed a deep religious connection inherent in the Black American experience, particularly in relation to their white oppressors. This spiritual resonance echoed sentiments expressed by other influential Black activists, journalists, and publishers, such as Frederick Douglass, who employed a radical Christian perspective grounded in Libertarian theology to denounce the institution of slavery, often interlacing biblical verses from Psalms into his public addresses on abolition (Carson, 1992). Through the revived *Free Speech* publication, Wells continued to be a resolute voice advocating for civil rights, challenging systemic racism, and illuminating the harsh

realities endured by African Americans (Giddings, 2006; Hardin & Hinton, 2001; Wells, 2020; Wells-Barnett, 2021b).

In addition to her newspapers, Wells made a significant impact through her pamphlet titled “The Reason Why: The Colored American Is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition.” This influential publication confronted the exclusion of African Americans from the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, exposing the systemic racism perpetuated by the organizers (Harris & Werner, 2021; Portwood, 2000; Rudwick & Meier, 1965; Wells-Barnett & Rydell, 1999).

Wells’ Anti-Lynching Law Campaign Support and Funding

Undeterred from her friend’s lynching, the destruction of her printing press office, and the constant barrage of violent racist threats and targeting from domestic White nationalists of her time, Wells resolved to take her anti-lynching campaign to the international stage, believing that the condemnation of foreign audiences, particularly in countries with moral and political influence like the UK, spurred greater reform efforts at home. Thus, in 1893 and again in 1894, she embarked on her transatlantic anti-lynching speaking tours. Wells engaged in extensive speaking tours across the United States and Great Britain, and Europe, where she garnered support and financial contributions from individuals sympathetic to her cause for Black American human rights (Barnard, 1993; Caddoo, 2017; Karcher, 2005; Nichols, 2009; Zackodnik, 2015).

Wealthy philanthropists, reformers, and members of the Black community played an extensive role in funding her anti-lynching law campaigns (Barnard, 1993; Karcher, 2005; McMurry, 2000; Nichols, 2009; Zackodnik, 2005). One of her significant backers was the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), an influential organization

dedicated to promoting the rights and welfare of African American women (Shaw, 1991; Tepedino, 1977; Peebles-Wilkins & Francis, 1990). Wells worked closely with NACW leaders, including Mary Church Terrell and Frances E.W. Harper, who provided financial assistance and rallied international support for her anti-lynching law campaigns (Gooding, 2022; McMurry, 2000; Peebles-Wilkins & Francis, 1990;).

Upon her arrival in the UK, Wells collaborated with anti-racist Quaker Catherine Impey, Impey's business partner and main funding source, Isabella Fyvie Mayo, and other members of the same ladies' societal organization, Society of Friends, to commence Wells' inaugural transatlantic anti-lynching lecture series, at Impey's home located in Street (Jordan, 2003; Locke, 2017; Paisana, 2016; Silkey, 2015). Wells' then began her campaign for justice in Aberdeen, Scotland, at Mayo's home. Wells gave speeches about the prevailing lynching laws in Memphis, Tennessee and discussed the separate car laws that were in place to keep Blacks segregated from Whites in train cars as well in the United States (Jordan, 2003; Paisana, 2016; Zackodnik, 2005).

Wells often started her speeches addressing the illusion of the Emancipation Proclamation and the failure of Reconstruction, as many still Whites held racist attitudes and behaviors that prevented Blacks from flourishing post-slavery in the U.S. in socially and economically deprived conditions (Jordan, 2003; Paisana, 2016). From the UK, Wells traveled to Scotland to continue her plight to end lynching (Bressey, 2014).

In 1893, the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* featured an advertisement of Ida B. Wells' visit to Aberdeen, Scotland. The advertisement, dated April 24th, was headlined "Lynch Law in the United States," reflecting her reason for travel and advocacy. Wells' lectures, including her influential talk in Edinburgh, were met with acclaim across

various publications (Bressey, 2014; Jordan, 2003; Wells, 2020). Wells, alongside her colleague Mayo, embarked on an extensive itinerary that included Huntly, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, bringing to light the plight of African Americans in the United States. Upon returning to the UK, Wells, with the assistance of Impey, addressed the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Birmingham, concluding her European advocacy campaign. Despite the campaign's success in raising awareness, internal discord between Impey and Mayo necessitated an early termination of the tour. Nevertheless, Wells' efforts over the three months profoundly resonated within British and Scottish social consciousness (Jordan, 2003; Wells, 2020; Wells-Barnett & Royster, 1997).

In the pivotal year of 1894, as the United States was poised for the grandeur of the Chicago World's Fair, Ida B. Wells received a cordial summons to the United Kingdom. This invitation came courtesy of Celestine Edwards, the esteemed editor of *Fraternity*, and the Society For the Recognition of the Brotherhood of Man (SRBM), by then the premier British institution championing the anti-lynching cause (Bressey, 2014; Jordan, 2003; Wells, 2020). Wells was extended the honor of lecturing before an assembly predominantly composed of white attendees, shepherded by the zealous Baptist minister Charles Aked. In a supportive gesture, Frederick Douglass furnished a commendatory letter for Wells, bolstering her engagement at Liverpool's Pembroke Chapel (Wells, 2020). Aked's invitation was a testament to his avant-garde stance and the burgeoning global esteem for Wells' crusade against lynching (Wells, 2020).

Despite a withdrawal of financial support from Mayo, Wells elected to remain in the UK to honor her speaking engagements. Her resolve was underpinned by the SRBM

and contributions from other benefactors within Bristol's community organizations (Jordan, 2003; Wells, 2020; Zackodnik, 2005). Aked, a respected pastor and vociferous advocate for reform, proved an indefatigable ally in the struggle against racial and gender inequity (Wells, 2020). Throughout their collaborative efforts for human rights and ecclesiastical solidarity, Wells forged an enduring friendship with Aked and his spouse. This connection was so profound that Wells later named her firstborn son in honor of the pastor, a gesture reflecting her profound respect and esteem (Jordan, 2003; Smith, 2019; Wells, 2020). In Chicago, the *Daily Inter Ocean*, a local white-majority newspaper also supported her anti-lynching law efforts by denouncing lynching, remaining the only publication to do so in the country at that time (Karcher, 2005; Nichols, 2009). Wells additionally received support from prominent African American newspapers, such as Frederick Douglass's *The North Star* and T. Thomas Fortune's *New York Age* (Curry, 2012; McMurry, 2000; Schechter, 2001; Wells, 2014; Zackodnik, 2005). These newspapers provided a platform for Wells to publish her articles and expose the horrors of lynching, amplifying her voice and reaching a wider audience. It is important to note that despite facing significant opposition and threats to her safety, Ida B. Wells was largely self-funded and relied on her own resilience and determination to advocate against lynching law (Barnard, 1993; Caddoo, 2017; Wells, 2020).

Wells' fearless activism and the support she received from various quarters were instrumental in raising awareness, mobilizing public opinion, and working towards ending the heinous practice of lynching in the South. These newspapers and writings by Wells exemplify her commitment to journalistic integrity, stopping anti-Black racism and violence through law reform and transatlantic network efforts to garner support for

societal justice in the US. Her dedication to Black American human rights also encompassed the right to pursue economic growth as Blacks in the US. Through her eloquent prose and meticulous investigations, she fearlessly challenged the status quo, providing a voice for the marginalized and demanding accountability from those in power.

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro World

In the island nation of Jamaica, Marcus Garvey found the inspiration to journey to the United States, specifically to Harlem, New York. This journey took place during the era of the Great Migration in 1916, and it was in this new setting that Garvey established the newspaper, *The Negro World*. This journalistic endeavor complemented his previously founded Jamaican Pan-Africanist organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), (Abdisa & Daba, 2022; Davies, 2022; Woodson, 2023). Garvey was originally invited by Booker T. Washington, to speak at Tuskegee University, however, Washington passed away from unknown causes shortly before Garvey's arrival. Garvey intended to model an industrial school after Tuskegee University and promote Pan-Africanism, especially with other West Indians throughout the country, before returning to Jamaica.

Garvey's Pan-Africanist organization was the most extensive global movement led by Black individuals in world history, boasting over a thousand divisions spread across forty-three countries and amassing a following of more than a million people around the world (Vinson, 2012). The newspaper's weekly editions reached audiences across the U.S., the Caribbean, Central America, and parts of Africa, reinforcing the global interconnectedness of the Black diaspora (Amoh, 2022; Cheek, 2022). Marcus

Garvey's *Negro World* marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of Black news media in the U.S. and beyond. Through this publication, Garvey demonstrated the immense power of the press as a catalyst for social change, a platform for marginalized voices, and a vehicle for fostering a global sense of Black identity.

The impact of Garvey's work remains indelibly etched in the industry of Black news media, underlining his enduring influence as a champion of Black empowerment. Garvey's newspaper offered a potent platform for disseminating Garvey's Pan-African philosophy, an ideology for emancipation (Mathewson, 2008), becoming a vehicle for the Black community's intellectual, political, and cultural expression (Amoh, 2022; Cheek, 2022; Martin, 1986; Moses, 1988). The main objective of Pan-Africanism can loosely be defined as Black Americans and Black Caribbeans building a progressive nation-state in Africa to represent the whole Black population (Araki, 2007). In America and abroad, Garvey recruited a team of talented writers, editors, and intellectuals, making the *Negro World* an intellectually rigorous publication that addressed a diverse range of topics, including contemporary politics, history, literature, and arts (Dennis, 2022; Woodson, 2023). Taylor (1992, 2000) also addresses the venerable impact of Marcus Garvey's wife, Amy Jacques Garvey, and Black community feminist doctrine within the Pan-Africanist movement.

Despite the shared goal of advancing the African American/Black community, the relationships between Garvey and other leading Black male journalists of the era were marred by tension and conflict (Haywood, 2018; Jagmohan, 2020; Philp, 2017; Pusey, 2019). One prominent instance of this discord was the dispute between Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois, who published a critical examination of Garvey's initiatives in his own

publication, 'The Crisis'. DuBois scrutinized Garvey's attempts to unify the diasporic Black population through the establishment of the Black Star Line, a Black-owned shipping enterprise. This venture operated a fleet of ships that traversed the Atlantic, connecting the U.S. and Africa (Carter, 2002; Pusey, 2019; Robinson, 2019).

Interestingly, even in the early days of his governmental career, J. Edgar Hoover, once the leader of the FBI, was a staffer in the Department of Justice, who expressed concern over the potential ramifications of the "radical elements" in Garvey's rhetoric and actions. This sentiment is encapsulated in a letter penned by Hoover in 1919 (Pusey, 2019; Robinson, 2019). Housed within the archival records of the Department of State (RG 59), one can discern a multiplicity of narratives detailing the actions and activities of Marcus Garvey and his wife (Pusey, 2019; Robinson, 2019).

Government workers meticulously recorded Garvey's activities, providing a comprehensive chronicle of his movements and initiatives. In certain instances, these government agents exceeded the bounds of simple observation, leveraging their influence to dissuade other countries from granting Garvey entry (Patton Jr, 2015; Pusey, 2019; Tolbert, 1987). Preceding the inception of the contemporary Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Investigation (BOI) functioned as a division of the Department of Justice. Within the BOI, the General Intelligence Division operated, an entity later known informally as the "anti-racial division" (Patton Jr, 2015). Under the guidance of the future FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover, this division dedicated significant resources to monitoring Garvey's actions, their aim being the disassembly of his burgeoning organization (Patton Jr, 2015; Pusey, 2019). J. Edgar Hoover was later found to use racially motivated surveillance tactics to illegally disarm and minimize the power

of Black leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Fred Hampton, and Malcolm X, funneled through his FBI program, Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), running from 1956-1971 (Giurlando, 2021; Goforth, 2019; Harrison, 1997; Patel, 2021).

Garvey found himself in legal disputes with the United States on multiple occasions, with a total of five notable cases. However, it was the case titled “United States of America v. Marcus Garvey, Elie Garcia, Orlando M. Thompson and George Tobias” that effectively severed the influence Garvey’s organization had been intertwining throughout the United States promoting the Black Star Line (Carter, 2002; Patton Jr, 2015; Pusey, 2019). In the aftermath of this litigation, his stay in the US met an untimely demise when Garvey was later found guilty of mail fraud, incarcerated, and exiled to Jamaica in 1923 (Jagmohan, 2020; Patton Jr, 2015; Philp, 2017; Pusey, 2019). Garvey’s deportation meant the commencement of the (UNIA) and the *Negro World’s* decline. Membership rates declined precipitously, and the once potent influence of the organization significantly diminished in many Black communities within the United States.

In contrast, Cheek (2022) eloquently outlines the profound influence that Marcus Garvey’s Pan-Africanist ideology had on Black Americans’ perceptions and political orientations, particularly in Harlem, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Cheek’s (2022) study reveals how this impact materialized during the second Italo-Ethiopian War from 1935 to 1941, where Garvey’s perspectives, disseminated through the *Negro World*, resulted in a widespread shift towards pro-Ethiopian activism. Cheek’s (2022) examination shines a spotlight on the shifting geopolitical sympathies of Black America during the 20th century. In this period, Ethiopia emerged as a beacon of African sovereignty in the face

of European aggression, overshadowing Liberia, and Haiti. Both Liberia and Haiti, once esteemed symbols of Black self-governance, found their reputations tarnished by dysfunction and brutalities linked to American political and economic interference. Specifically, Cheek (2022) notes the impact of the well-publicized atrocities committed by the U.S. Marines during their occupation of Haiti on shaping Black public opinion. This awareness created a foundation for subsequent anti-fascist activism among Black Americans.

Importantly, Cheek (2022) elucidates the multidimensional nature of the activism that surfaced during the Ethiopian War. Rather than being limited to a specific social stratum, ethnicity, or political group, the drive to protect Ethiopian independence brought about widespread political mobilization across various segments of Black America. This reflects the broad appeal of the Pan-Africanist movement, suggesting its power in rallying diverse constituents towards common causes. Cheek (2022) presents an analysis of Black American political sentiment and action during the 20th century, demonstrating the profound and far-reaching influence of Garvey's Pan-Africanist crusade in shaping Black activism. Cheek (2022) underscores the importance of transnational perspectives in understanding the histories of Black political mobilization and the complex interplay between domestic and international influences in Black news media and Black American history, alike.

Araki's research in (2021) and (2007) provides a detailed account of how Marcus Garvey's mission, particularly his Pan-Africanist views and his blueprint for Black economic advancement and international cooperation, resonated with Japanese communities in Japan and various U.S. cities such as California, Los Angeles, San

Francisco, and Seattle during the 1920s. Garvey saw Japan as a potential model for a Black nation-state, admiring its status as a non-White nation that maintained political autonomy (Araki, 2007). His influence also extended to Pan-Asian political groups like the Black Dragon Society (Kokuryū-kai), led by Ryōhei Uchida. This group frequently discussed the lynching of Black Americans and the global dominance of white powers in their English publication, the *Asian Review* (Araki, 2007). The editors even defended the rights and humane treatment of Black people in their responses to “Letters to the Editor,” positioning themselves as allies to Black people in their framing and discussion of racial issues. In contrast, the interaction between Black readers and Black writers was also quite popular in The Chicago Defender’s Letters to the Editor, one of the most popular Black owned newspapers in the U.S. (Thornton, 2006).

Marcus Garvey’s *The Negro World* and the global reach of his Pan-Africanist movement exemplify the transformative power of media in unifying and mobilizing the African diaspora. Garvey used *The Negro World* to disseminate his views, rally support, and connect diasporic African and Asian communities, leveraging the power of print media to cross geographical and political boundaries. This historical precedent finds its modern parallel in the realm of Black news podcasting, which has expanded the scope of Black media’s influence far beyond the limitations of print and geography. Today, Black news podcasts have inherited this mantle, harnessing digital technologies to reach global audiences instantaneously. They serve not only as platforms for news dissemination but also as forums for cultural exchange and political mobilization, much like Garvey’s movement.

This global reach is amplified by the decentralized nature of podcasting, allowing content creators to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and connect directly with audiences worldwide. Consequently, Black news podcasts contribute to a shared global Black narrative, fostering solidarity and activism across continents. They continue the legacy of using media as a tool for social change, echoing Garvey's utilization of the press to empower and unify Black identities globally. In the digital age, the voices and stories that resonate within Black news podcasts also carry the potential for unprecedented impact, influencing public opinion and policy on an international scale. The global network of listeners and creators forms a digital Pan-Africanist community, reminiscent of Garvey's extensive movement, now empowered by the accessibility and reach of modern media technology.

The Chicago Defender and the Black Community

At the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Robert Sengstacke Abbott found inspiration in the presence of two influential figures: Frederick Douglass, the renowned abolitionist and orator, and Ida B. Wells, the formidable journalist, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), (Collins & Sturdevant, 2008; Giddings, 2001), and prominent advocate against lynching (Michaeli, 2016; Perkins et al., 2019). As briefly discussed previously, pastor Charles Aked also attended this World Fair, which changed his uninformed opinion of lynching (Jordan, 2003), as Ida B. Wells presented her lecture, "The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition", against the exclusion of Blacks at the World Fair to the fair's attendees. The 1893 Chicago World's Fair deeply helped shape the trajectory of Black news media and human rights for years to come. Wells also recruited the NAACP

to work at implementing their anti-lynching campaign into law from 1909 forward (Collins & Sturdevant, 2008).

The *Chicago Defender*, one of the most prolific and unapologetically Black-owned and operated newspapers, managed first by Abbott then by John H. Sengstacke, was initiated by Abbott, the son of Gullah Geechee parents, who were former slaves from St. Simon's, Georgia (Perkins et al., 2019; Stovall, 1990). The inaugural issue of the *Chicago Defender* made its debut on May 5, 1905 (DeSantis, 1997; Rice, 2012; Webb, 2023). Originally published in a compact handbill format measuring 16 by 20 inches, the newspaper featured a concise yet impactful four-page layout, with each page neatly organized into six columns (Bitner, 1985; Whitmore). The *Chicago Defender* played a pivotal role in influencing Black Americans to embark on "The Great Migration" of the 1920s, utilizing push-pull economic dynamics, also considered economic determinism (Bitner, 1985; DeSantis, 1998; Ross & McKerns, 2004; Uhlenberg, 1973).

Conversely, as the realities of life in the North failed to match the dreams of Black Americans escaping the South and the post-Reconstruction period's challenges, also known as the "American Dream Myth" purported by DeSantis (1998). However, the *Chicago Defender* later criticized "The Great Migration" for its failure to provide security for the growth of Black America, as many initially thought (DeSantis, 1998; Ross & McKerns, 2004). Serving as a revolutionary and transformative institution for African Americans during the Progressive Era as well, the *Chicago Defender* provided a potent platform for the Black community, shaping the trajectory of civil rights and social justice in the United States.

The publication provided news and various forms of economic, social, and cultural opportunities for its subscribers and readers to feel a sense of community and advancement in their lives (DeSantis, 1998; Grossman, 1985; Stovall, 1990). The newspaper actively encouraged and facilitated the migration, providing information on job opportunities, housing, and community resources in the North (DeSantis, 1998; Grossman, 1985; Stovall, 1990). Beyond its role as a news outlet, the *Chicago Defender* fostered a sense of community and cultural pride (Graham-Jackson, 2023; Henderson, 1999; Mislán, 2009; Semmes, 2011), even inspiring literary arts in young Black children (Gray, 2017). It celebrated the achievements and contributions of African Americans in various fields, from the arts (Dolan, 2007; Marshall & Connor, 2019) and literature (Dolan, 2003; Marshall & Connor, 2019), even featuring the writings of Langston Hughes (Doreski, 1998; Kim, 2007) to sports (Aiello, 2007; Carroll, 2007; Lanctot, 2011) and politics (Doreski, 1998; Hughes, 1995; Mullen, 1999; Stovall, 1990).

Robert S. Abbott embarked on his journalistic venture with the humblest of beginnings, with only a quarter for the purchase of notepads and pencils to establish the *Chicago Defender* (Grossman, 1985; Kornweibel Jr, 1994). The newspaper's initial circulation was a modest batch of 300 copies, facilitated by a local press owner who consented to print them for \$13.75 an investment that sowed the seeds of an influential publication (Johnson, 2017; Jones, 1986; Perkins et al., 2019). The *Defender* was priced at 25 cents for adults and offered at the reduced rate of 10 cents for children aged 12 and under, an equitable pricing strategy that considered the financial constraints of its readers (Semmes, 2011).

There wasn't a smooth financial journey in its infancy. Nevertheless, Abbott's unwavering commitment and entrepreneurial spirit bore fruit as the *Chicago Defender* gradually amassed an impressive readership. By the year 1920, the paper boasted a paid subscription base exceeding 230,000, a testament to its burgeoning influence. The apex of the *Defender's* circulation coincided with World War I, surging to a quarter of a million readers, reflecting its status as a preeminent voice within the African American community during a tumultuous period in history (DeSantis, 1997; Perkins et al., 2019). The primary financial support for the *Chicago Defender* stemmed from its circulation revenue generated through newspaper sales and subscriptions from the Black community, and other individuals and organizations who recognized the importance of an independent Black newspaper in the Black community (DeSantis, 1998; Dolan, 2007; Kornweibel Jr, 1994; Semmes, 2011; Stovall, 1990).

As the *Chicago Defender's* readership grew, so too did its financial foundations, bolstered by a diversifying array of advertisements that paralleled its increasing circulation (DeSantis, 1997; DeSantis, 1998; Dolan, 2007). Between 1947 and 1975, the newspaper astutely incorporated tobacco advertising into its revenue streams, a move documented by Jones and Perry Jr. (2022). The *Defender*, with national distribution, garnered acclaim for its steadfast and unflinching promotion of civil rights, the pursuit of equality, and the advancement of African American interests, ultimately achieving a significant weekly circulation of 1,000 copies (Black, 2013; Whitmore).

The *Chicago Defender* was a call for African American empowerment, an unrelenting challenge to racial injustices, and a reflection of the collective aspirations and adversities of the African American community (DeSantis, 1997; DeSantis, 1998;

Grossman, 1985; Perkins et al., 2019). While championing economic self-sufficiency within Chicago's African American neighborhoods, the Defender garnered scrutiny from governmental bodies concerned about its potential to incite economic radicalism (DeSantis, 1997; Harvell-DeGolier, 2019). Nonetheless, the newspaper's pivotal role in articulating the African American viewpoint, steering public debate, inspiring civic action, and driving social transformation remained unchallenged (Cooper, 1999; Kornweibel Jr, 1994).

During the harrowing years of the Great Depression, Abbott faced daunting financial challenges, a struggle that persisted for over a decade (Rice, 2012). He succumbed to a series of health issues, including Bright's disease and tuberculosis, in 1940 (Feldman et al., 1994; Thornton, 2014; Wintz & Finkelman, 2004). Even as the Defender's circulation declined to around 70,000, Abbott's personal commitment to the newspaper's mission never wavered. He infused an impressive \$261,000 from his own wealth into the publication, a testament to his dedication to its continuance (Cavanagh & Steel, 2019). Yet, in the aftermath of the Depression, the Pittsburgh Courier eclipsed the Chicago Defender in popularity, emerging as the preeminent African American newspaper in terms of circulation throughout the 1930s (Greenwald & Anderson, 1996). It was not until 1965 that the Pittsburgh Courier was acquired by John Sengstacke, who, in 1967, rebranded it as the New Pittsburgh Courier (Webb, 2023). After Abbot's death, under the stewardship Abbott's nephew, John H. Sengstacke, the *Chicago Defender* transcended its role as a newspaper to a collection of newspapers owned by the family, becoming a catalyst for social change, a pillar of the Black community, and a symbol of resilience and empowerment (DeSantis, 1997; Marshall & Connor, 2019; Rice, 2012;

Thornton, 2014). Abbot's and Sengstacke's familial leadership were characterized by a profound commitment to the advancement of African Americans and their families, including a platform to showcase Black women who wrote about the suffrage movement in the *Chicago Defender*, which was a rare occurrence in that period (Alexanian, 2022; Webb, 2023). They not only transformed the *Chicago Defender* into a powerhouse publication but also extended his influence beyond the newspaper industry. John Sengstacke also played a key role in the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), an organization that united publishers across the country and advocated for their interests (Amatullah, 2021; Coates, 2022; Feldman et al., 1994; Mangun & Perry Jr, 2020; Perry Jr, 2002).

In January of 2003, a transformative shift in proprietorship unfolded, precipitating the transfer of control over the *Chicago Defender* and its associated publications: the *Michigan Chronicle*, the *New Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Tri-State Defender* from the family-owned entity, Sengstacke Enterprises Inc., to Real Times Inc (Chicago Defender, n.d.). This transition was orchestrated by Thom Picou, the Chairman and CEO of Real Times Inc., and Robert (Bobby) Sengstacke, the sole surviving offspring of John H. Sengstacke and the patriarch of the beneficiaries of the Sengstacke Trust, following a protracted negotiation period spanning five years (Chicago Defender, n.d.; Mathewson, 2008). Chet Gougis, holding the presidential role at the investment banking firm Duff & Phelps, LLC, was entrusted with the responsibility of orchestrating the process of sales management in 2000, as reported in the *Michigan Chronicle* in 2000.

Identified as a Sengstacke family-driven enterprise, the transaction enabled the trust beneficiaries, along with other Sengstacke family shareholders, to assent to the

company's sale. Key contributors to this transaction included Sam Logan, the former publisher of the *Michigan Chronicle*, as well as a cadre of investors from Detroit, colloquially known as the "Detroit Group," which comprised O'Neil Swanson, Bill Pickard, Ron Hall, and Gordon Follmer (Chicago Defender, n.d.). Another noteworthy stakeholder was David M. Milliner, a local investor from Chicago who held the position of publisher of the *Chicago Defender* from 2003 to 2004 (Chicago Defender, n.d.).

Kurt Cherry and James Carr were instrumental in the *Chicago Defender's* operations, contributing significantly to its success (Chicago Defender, n.d.). In 2009, there was a notable expansion when Real Times Media acquired Who's Who Publishing Company, renowned for its profiles of distinguished Black Americans who have made notable strides in business and community leadership (Chicago Defender, n.d.). This acquisition enriched the portfolio of Real Times Media, complementing its array of entities which includes RTM Digital Studios (Chicago Defender, n.d.). By July 2019, the *Chicago Defender's* print circulation stood at 16,000 copies, a modest figure juxtaposed against its formidable digital presence, which commanded the attention of nearly 500,000 unique visitors each month, underscoring its continued relevance and growing influence in the digital age (Chicago Defender, n.d.).

The *Chicago Defender's* relentless coverage of racial injustice, its role in promoting the Great Migration, and its unwavering commitment to civil rights have left an indelible mark on American history. Remarkably, during World War II, the *Defender* solidified its position as a powerful and influential voice within the Black community, resonating far and wide with its insightful commentary and tireless advocacy for the rights and aspirations of African Americans (Perkins et al., 2019). It is important to

acknowledge that the *Chicago Defender* also faced criticism for perpetuating Black elitism from its editors, sensationalist front-page stories displaying racial violence, and white beauty standards through its advertising practices, aspects explored by Webb (2023). The *Chicago Defender* ended its print services in 2019, yet in 2023, it still operates online (Davey & Eligon, 2019; Webb, 2023).

CHAPTER II: BLACK RADIO - THE BIRTHPLACE OF A BROADCAST COMMUNITY

In tracing the historical evolution of the Black Press, the emergence of broadcast media, spanning from the 1920s to the 2000s, serves as a crucial inflection point. From the start of the Great Migration to the advent of the broadcast media and later the Internet, this period heralded a significant shift in the way African American communities engaged with media, marking a transition from the analog world of the printing press to the more dynamic spheres of radio and television broadcasting (Marks, 1983, 1985). During this time, broadcast media crystallized as a potent successor to the print-centric Black Press, embracing the task of disseminating pertinent news, information, and entertainment to the African American community (Marks, 1983, 1985).

My dissection will encompass an evaluation of their internal operational structures, business alliances and collaborations, charismatic on-air personalities, and prevailing ownership frameworks. I will define Black radio in greater detail, specifically paying attention to the type of program and ownership models and shine a spotlight on quintessential Black radio stations that may have had a substantial influence on the Black news podcasts and networks at the center of our investigation. My objective is to disentangle the complex webs of association that bind their realms together, thereby creating a robust narrative that underscores the profound significance and sway these media modalities hold within the discourse on African-American representation.

The birth and evolution of Black radio in the United States stands as an indelible testament to the resilience and creativity of African American communities. The story of its inception is a chronicle marked by entrepreneurial spirit, cultural preservation, and

political mobilization. The origins of Black radio can be traced back to the late 1920s, shortly after the birth of commercial radio (Barlow, 1999; Randle, 1977; Spaulding, 1981). During these early years, mainstream radio remained largely inaccessible to Black voices, due to pervasive racial segregation and discriminatory practices. Yet, despite these systemic barriers, several pioneering individuals and institutions endeavored to create a space for African Americans within the airwaves (Barlow, 1999; Randle, 1977; Spaulding, 1981).

As Black radio stations began to emerge across the country, they quickly became cultural lifelines for African American communities, offering not only music but also valuable information and commentary on issues pertinent to these communities (Barlow, 1999). This was particularly true during the Civil Rights era when Black radio stations played an instrumental role in disseminating information about the movement, mobilizing support, and providing a platform for leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., (Tyson, 2020; White, 2017). Moreover, these stations made significant contributions to the world of music by promoting African American artists and genres, such as jazz, blues, and R&B, which were often marginalized or ignored by mainstream stations (Barlow, 1999; Petrucci, 2012; Tyson, 2020; White, 2017).

Figures like Jack “The Rapper” Gibson, Al Benson, and Dewey Hughes, among others, championed the music of Black artists, ultimately playing a pivotal role in the popularization of these genres (Barlow, 1999; O’Grady, 2020; Petrucci, 2012). The rise of Black radio also precipitated the advent of Black disc jockeys, who became influential figures within their communities. These radio personalities, known for their distinctive style and flair, became cultural ambassadors, shaping musical tastes and providing crucial

commentary on societal issues (Barlow, 1999; Petrucci, 2012). They further amplified the significance of Black radio, making it an integral part of the African American cultural experience. The evolution of Black radio is a narrative of resistance, resilience, and innovation. It underscores the imperative of media representation, the power of entrepreneurial spirit, and the profound impact of cultural self-expression. From its early roots in the 1920s to its blossoming in the 1960s and beyond, Black radio has proven to be an enduring platform, a voice for the voiceless, and a testament to the dynamic, vibrant heart of the African American community (Barlow, 1999; Petrucci, 2012; Tyson, 2020; White, 2017).

Black-Controlled Media

Within the expansive field of Black media studies, one finds a subfield devoted to “Black-controlled” and “Black-owned”. These terms refer to media entities that rest under the authoritative domain of Black owners and decision-makers. This governance extends across the spectrum of media operations, encompassing facets such as content creation, business model formulation, staffing policies, and other critical operational elements. It is important to note that these terms, though often used interchangeably by scholars and content creators, suggest different nuances upon deeper examination. The term “Black-controlled”, coined by Blackwell (1973), carries connotations of power and authority within Black media governance. It signifies the presence of Black decision-makers in positions of control, influencing and directing the strategic direction and daily operations of the media organization. This control allows for agency in the creation and dissemination of content, the formulation of business strategies, and the determination of staffing and policy decisions. It is a concept that stretches beyond mere ownership to

encompass broader aspects of managerial control, strategic direction, and decision-making authority within the media entity (Blackwell, 1973).

On the other hand, “Black-owned” fundamentally denotes ownership by a Black individual or entity, which does not necessarily translate into authoritative control over operational aspects. This term, at its core, pertains to the legal ownership of the media company. It may not necessarily encompass the control of its production processes, on-air personalities, managerial practices, or governance (Blevins, 2018). Terry (2022) contends that there is no relationship between ownership and content diversity, applicable to the broadcast stations and programs, and decisions of governance related to supporting a Black agenda, simply based on Black ownership,

Arguing that the evidence of a relationship between ownership and content diversity is inconclusive has even led to comments such as these: “[t]here is no evidence that such variables have any significant impact on beliefs of minority or female licensees as manifested in their station’s programming,” and “[t]he rationale that minority ownership of broadcast stations will result in a greater diversity of programming has not been supported convincingly by the data.” In one example, a Black owner who had used tax certificates to purchase 28 stations over twenty months, denied providing a “Black” viewpoint on his stations. (p. 220).

Hence, ownership does not always imply control, making it essential to distinguish between these two constructs. Throughout this study, both constructs will be considered, applying each as appropriate in line with the definitions. It is essential to understand the implications of these terms, their contexts, and their complexities. “Black-controlled” and “Black-owned” media, while seemingly similar, offer different insights into the operation and governance of Black news media entities. Distinguishing between these two concepts, therefore, allows for a more nuanced analysis of Black news media’s role and functioning in the broader media industry.

Black-Appeal Media

Black appeal, also referred to as Black-oriented, and Black-targeted radio, emerged in the United States during the mid-20th century, reflecting the demographic shifts precipitated by the Great Migration and the growing influence of African American culture (Barlow, 1999; Carroll, 2017; Newman, 1986; Siegelman & Waldfogel, 2001). This burgeoning medium facilitated the increased representation of Black voices and narratives, thereby exerting a profound influence on the American radio industry and beyond. Black appeal radio can trace its roots back to the period following World War I, during the Great Migration when millions of African Americans relocated from the rural South to urban centers in the North, West, and Midwest. This massive demographic shift led to a growing demand for media that reflected and resonated with the experiences, tastes, and concerns of the African American community (Barlow, 1999; Carroll, 2017; Newman, 1986; Siegelman & Waldfogel, 2001). The advent of Black appeal radio was initially characterized by mainstream, white-owned radio stations designating blocks of airtime to content oriented toward Black audiences, often featuring Black announcers. This was partly a commercial strategy, seeking to tap into a largely underserved market (Barlow, 1999; Carroll, 2017; Stiegler, 2008).

The next section navigates through “Black-appeal media,” a term assigned to media outlets that may not necessarily be under Black ownership or solely concentrate on Black content, yet strategically position themselves to draw in and engage Black demographics amidst their more expansive audience (Barlow, 1999; Newman, 1986). The inclusion of content that particularly resonates with Black audiences be it Black music, news, culture, or influential personalities is a deliberate tactic employed by these

outlets. Of note is the occasional interchangeable use of “Black-targeted” (Appiah, 2003), “Black-oriented”, and “Black-appeal” media, Black appeal and Black-oriented media are often associated with the scholarship used in this dissertation. The selection of scholarship employed in this section will depend on the decision of the scholar reviewed in this study, regardless of whether it aligns with traditional definitions of Black-oriented and Black-appeal media.

The rise of Black-appeal media has been an important development in media representation over the last century. In her book “Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century”, Carroll (2017) traces the history of Black-oriented media from the 19th century to the present day. She argues that Black media outlets have played a crucial role in shaping public discourse on issues of race and social justice. This has been particularly important in a media industry that has traditionally excluded the voices and perspectives of marginalized communities.

Black-appeal radio outlets are distinguished by their proclivity for generating content that reflects the interests, anxieties, and lived experiences of the Black community. Yet, it is essential to underscore that the orientation of the content towards Black experiences and issues does not invariably imply Black ownership or control. The thematic scope of such media primarily spans cultural, political, social, and economic narratives that are of relevance to the Black community. Within the realm of Black-oriented media, outlets like EBONY and Essence magazines are encountered (Barlow, 1999; Bramlett-Solomon & Wilson, 1989; Brown, 2010; Carroll, 2017; Omonuwa, 2001). As found by black-oriented media scholar, Walsh (1997),

“Encouraged by journals such as Black Enterprise, which published advice on “How to Buy a Radio Station,” a growing number of African-American businessmen and women viewed the industry as a viable and lucrative avenue for investment.” (p. 287)

Black magazines like EBONY, Jet, and Black Enterprise, also worked to establish economic stability through targeted content that met the needs of their readers and the advancement of Black people in America as a whole, which should not go unnoticed. It was a great feat to balance the two. Regardless of their respective ownership histories, these publications serve as emblematic instances of Black-oriented media due to their steadfast dedication to crafting content that resonates with and caters to Black readers. Venturing further, the fine distinctions between these forms of media continue to unravel, illuminating the various ways in which they contribute to the broader discourse of Black representation in media.

The advent of broadcasting technology brought forth new forms of engagement, enabling an intimate connection with the African American populace in ways that were. The programming on these platforms was meticulously curated, reflecting the tastes, interests, and lived experiences of the African American community. From the music played on the radio to the stories told on television, each aspect was thoughtfully designed to captivate and connect with the targeted audience. Musical selections, for instance, often reflected popular genres within the Black community, such as jazz, blues, R&B, and later, hip-hop. This cultural alignment served to foster a sense of shared experience and communal identity among African American listeners and viewers, simultaneously establishing these platforms as essential components of the broader Black

cultural industry.

Throughout this historical progression, the Black-owned or Black-appeal media outlets bore a sense of responsibility and purpose. They operated not merely as commercial entities but as conduits for community-building and cultural expression within the African American populace. In essence, they embodied an inherent strive to serve as a mirror to their community, reflecting its unique experiences, aspirations, and realities. This transformative era in the history of Black Press underscored the profound potential of broadcast media as an instrument of cultural affirmation, community engagement, and social change.

KDKA (AM): The Beginning of Broadcast Radio

Initiated in 1920, the first commercial radio station in the U.S., KDKA (AM) in Pittsburgh, marked the beginning of this technological revolution (Ruby et al., 2009). It's worth noting, however, that on Christmas Eve in 1906, Professor Reginald Fessenden, using his alternator-transmitter, transmitted his voice and Christmas music from the Brant Rock station in Brant Rock, Massachusetts (Fessenden, 1908; MacLennan, 2020; Patil & Patil, 2021). Ships at sea equipped with radio receivers primarily wireless telegraph outfits were astounded to hear a man's voice and music instead of the customary Morse code clicks (Belrose, 2002; Brodsky, 2008; Dosso & Dettmer, 2013; Plotkin, 2020). This broadcast demonstrated the feasibility of "wireless telephony," or what is now known as radio broadcasting (Fessenden, 1908; Garland, 2023; Patil & Patil, 2021). By developing the technology and demonstrating the practicality of transmitting speech and music

wirelessly, he laid the foundation for the future development of radio broadcasting (MacLennan, 2020; Schmidt, 2021).

Professor Fessenden left a legacy as a dedicated innovator who expanded the horizons of communication technology (Garland, 2023; Han, 2021; Patil & Patil, 2021; Pinkerton, 2019). KDKA emerged as a vital force shaping broadcasting regulations, instrumental in the creation of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) – the federal entity responsible for governing interstate and international communications in the United States. KDKA’s establishment coincided with a transformative era in American history (Adams, 1978; Garland, 2023; Patil & Patil, 2021). Post-World War I, the United States had revoked its prohibition on civilian radio usage as the Great Migration was fundamentally altering the demographic composition of Black America (Crawford-Franklin & Robinson, 2013). During the war, radio technology was viewed as a strategic asset, controlled by the government (Garland, 2023; Han, 2021; Patil & Patil, 2021; Ruby, 2016; Ruby, et al., 2009).

Once the conflict had concluded, Westinghouse engineer Frank Conrad, a passionate advocate for radio, commenced music broadcasts from his personal home-based radio station. These broadcasts elicited considerable public intrigue, prompting Westinghouse to construct a formal radio station. Thus, KDKA was born, acquiring its license from the Department of Commerce on October 27, 1920 (Spencer, 2005). KDKA’s inauguration was a historic event – it broadcast live the results of the Harding-Cox presidential election on November 2, 1920 (Madarasz, 2020; Stiegler, 2008). This

marked the debut of live election broadcasts, underlining the transformative power of radio as a conduit for instantaneous news dissemination.

In the ensuing years, KDKA was at the forefront of propagating radio as a prime source of entertainment and information. The station inaugurated regular music broadcasts and developed a range of programs encompassing sports, weather forecasts, and educational segments (Garland, 2023; Han, 2021; Madarasz, 2020; Stiegler, 2008). In doing so, KDKA revolutionized domestic entertainment and forged a template for future radio broadcasting. The success story of KDKA incited a surge in the radio industry. The Roaring Twenties, often heralded as the “Golden Age of Radio,” witnessed a proliferation of new radio stations (Landesberg, 2006). By 1922, a mere two years after KDKA’s inaugural broadcast, the United States was home to over 500 radio stations (Pavlik, 2017). This exponential growth was facilitated by technological breakthroughs, such as Lee De Forest’s Audion Tube, but it was KDKA that unveiled the practical and commercial possibilities of these technologies. The rapid expansion of radio stations led to a turbulent contest for frequencies, often causing mutual interference (Hijiya, 1992).

The Radio Act of 1912 had bestowed the Department of Commerce with the authority to license radio stations, but it lacked the provision to regulate frequencies or power levels. The result was the notorious “chaos of the airwaves,” marked by stations overlapping each other’s signals in their scramble for listeners (Phipps, 2001; Rudel, 2008). Recognizing the need for regulatory oversight in the increasingly congested radio environment, the U.S. government, prodded by broadcasters like Westinghouse, passed the Radio Act of 1927 (Pavlik, 2017; Phipps, 2001; Rudel, 2008). This act established the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) and introduced regulatory measures to mitigate

interference, ensuring the radio spectrum was used in a manner that served the “public interest, convenience, or necessity.” (Krasnow & Goodman, 1997; Sophos, 1990).

The Communications Act of 1934 subsequently expanded the FRC into the FCC, widening its jurisdiction to include not just radio but also telephone and telegraph services (Levin & Hines, 2003; Usher, 2006). Today, the FCC continues to oversee the U.S. airwaves, regulating a plethora of mediums including radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable communications. KDKA continued to evolve in tandem with these regulatory transformations, adapting its programming to changing regulations and audience preferences, thereby retaining its significant place in American broadcasting. Even as the focus shifted towards television and, more recently, digital media, KDKA demonstrated the enduring resilience and versatility of radio as a medium of mass communication. The rise of KDKA and the formation of the FCC are intertwined narratives in the annals of American broadcasting. Their roles have profoundly influenced the trajectory of American mass media and continue to shape its current and future trajectories.

Simultaneously, the technology and format established by KDKA, and other pioneering stations laid the groundwork for future stations, including Black-oriented radio. However, systemic racism and economic disparities of the early 20th century delayed the emergence of Black-oriented radio stations. It wasn't until the late 1940s, nearly three decades post the establishment of KDKA, that stations catering predominantly to Black audiences began to materialize (Spaulding, 1981). Furthermore, KDKA, among other early radio stations, offered platforms to Black artists, particularly in the genres of jazz and blues (Magee, 2005). These artists intermittently featured on

mainstream radio broadcasts, subtly contesting racial barriers, and projecting the vibrancy of Black culture and talent. Their presence on mainstream radio laid the groundwork for the black music explosion that pervaded Black radio and exert a significant influence on the broader American music scene. As such, while KDKA was not a Black radio station, its role in pioneering commercial radio broadcasting facilitated the emergence of Black radio, thereby enabling a more diverse and inclusive broadcasting industry.

Atlanta's WERD (860 AM): Black-Owned and Operated Radio

In the 1920s, Atlanta's media landscape displayed a copious number of contributions. One key advocate for Black radio music and its associated, Black-oriented programs, was the well-regarded newspaper, the Atlanta Constitution. This paper, having later merged with the Atlanta Journal to become the Atlanta Journal Constitution, remains the primary daily newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia. With its commitment to highlighting the African American community, the Atlanta Constitution broadcasted events from the respected Black academic institution, Morehouse College. Moreover, it introduced listeners to the captivating sounds of the renowned jazz vocalist, Bessie Smith, via Atlanta's first radio station, WSB, which continues its broadcasts today, albeit under commercial management (Barlow, 1995).

In 1949, WERD Radio, the first Black-owned and operated radio station in American broadcasting history, holds a significant place not only as a milestone in economic ownership but also as a pioneer of Black-owned radio, delivering content that deeply resonated with the African American community. This section seeks to trace the historical journey of WERD Radio, highlighting its key milestones, influential Black radio personalities, and its role in shaping Black-owned radio. Founded by Jesse B.

Blayton Sr., a distinguished entrepreneur, accountant, and educator, WERD Radio was established in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1949 (Davis, 2018; White, 2017). This marked a pivotal moment in the development of Black radio. Blayton Sr. made history as the first African American to own and operate a radio station (Barlow, 1999). He purchased WERD for \$50,000, resorting to using a White businessman as a proxy due to the previous owner's refusal to sell or lease to a Black individual (White, 2017). However, the station was only permitted to operate from sunrise to sunset, a restriction commonly imposed on Blacks in the South, particularly in business operations or travel (Amer, 2016; Bazzi et al., 2022).

The station's call letters "WERD" were reportedly derived from the term "word," symbolizing the power of spoken words and communication in catalyzing social change (Davis, 2018; White, 2017). Joseph Deighton Gibson Jr. Under Blayton's leadership, WERD Radio catered to a predominantly African American audience, with programming that encompassed music, news, and discussions relevant to the Black community. This commitment to serving and representing the African American community marked a distinct departure from mainstream stations and laid the groundwork for the rise of Black radio (Barlow, 1999; Sterling, 2004). WERD's studios were notably located in the same building as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which amplified its role during the Civil Rights Movement. WERD often aired live updates from the SCLC, making it an instrumental channel for disseminating

information about civil rights activities and serving as a rallying point for the Black community in Atlanta and beyond (White, 2017).

WERD Radio was home to several influential Black radio personalities who contributed to its success and legacy. These included “Jockey” Jack Gibson, one of the earliest Black disc jockeys in American radio, and Zilla Mays, who became the station’s program director and was one of the few women in a leadership position in radio at the time (George, 2002). Through their on-air personas and programming choices, they helped to define the sound and substance of Black appeal radio, contributing to WERD’s influence and popularity. The rise of WERD Radio represented a significant shift in the American radio industry. For the first time, a radio station was explicitly owned, operated, and oriented towards the African American community. This positioned WERD to cater to a demographic segment that had often been overlooked or marginalized by mainstream media outlets. However, in 1968, WERD was sold to a White businessman, which was not supported by many Black leaders in Atlanta and abroad (Amer, 2016; Davis, 2018; White, 2017).

WERD played a pivotal role in shaping the cultural and political identity of the Black community in Atlanta and beyond by reaching out to its audience. More than just a source of entertainment, the station served as a platform for dialogue and activism, reflecting and amplifying its listeners’ concerns, aspirations, and achievements. WERD Radio stands as a symbol of the intersection of Black entrepreneurship, cultural expression, and social activism. Its legacy, which continues to echo today, illustrates the powerful role of media in serving specific communities and contributing to broader social change. The station’s success highlights the lasting relevance and impact of Black appeal

radio, which continues to evolve and adapt in today's media landscape (Amer, 2016; Davis, 2018; White, 2017).

In the 1980s and 90s, the historic WERD building was transformed into a hair salon for the local Black communities, having previously been one of two locations for the Black beauty pioneer, Madame CJ Walker. In 2004, the building was purchased by Ricci de Forest, also a hairdresser, who later achieved non-profit status by creating a makeshift museum to honor Madame CJ Walker and WERD (Amer, 2016). As of 2016, situated a mere two blocks from the esteemed King Center in downtown Atlanta, Forest organized open mic events for local musicians within the confines of WERD. This allowed music to resonate within the walls of the station, echoing the sounds of past DJs and maintaining the musical legacy of the space (Amer, 2016) once again.

In the same period, Andrew "Skip" Carter, a radio engineer, and the founder of Carter Broadcast Group based in Kansas City, penned a critique of the pervasive racist practices within the industry. His critique, which was published in *Broadcasting Magazine*, caught the attention of Alf Landon, a former Republican presidential candidate who had not been successful in his bid (Hogan, 2022). Landon, moved by Carter's critique, helped that enabled Carter to establish KPRS-AM in 1950. This marked a significant step in challenging the industry's status quo and advancing diversity in media ownership (Selman-Earnest, 1985).

It is worthy to also note that according to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), KPRS 103.3 FM (Kansas City's Peoples Radio Station) in Missouri, owned by the Carter Broadcast Group, is the oldest continually African American family-owned radio station in the United States (Hogan, 2022). Miraculously, Andrew "Skip"

Carter, born in Savannah, Georgia in 1919, and the station's first DJ, managed to retain ownership of KPRS for over 70 years, with the help of his wife Mildred (Johnson, 2006).

WHOD: A Milestone in Black Appeal Radio and Its Enduring Legacy

The first known, Black-oriented program was aired by WHOD in Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1929, the same state where the first commercial broadcast radio station began. WHOD was among the first radio stations in the United States to introduce a Black-oriented program, paving the way for the emergence of Black appeal radio (Barlow, 1999; Smith, 2020). This section explores the history, milestones, key figures, audience, and enduring legacy of WHOD within the context of the radio industry.

WHOD emerged during a period characterized by the rapid proliferation of radio as a popular medium of entertainment and information (Barlow, 1999; Landesberg, 2006; Smith, 2020). This growth coincided with the Great Migration, which led to a significant increase in the urban African American population and subsequently, a demand for media content that resonated with this community's experiences and tastes (Crawford-Franklin & Robinson, 2013).

While WHOD was not exclusively a Black-oriented radio station, it distinguished itself through its introduction of a radio program specifically targeting the Black community. This move, deemed a strategic response to changing demographics, marked a significant milestone in American broadcasting history. It was on WHOD that Mary Dee, the first known Black female radio announcer, started her broadcasting career (Brewer, 2007; Dupree-Wilson, 2022; Newman, 2000; Smith, 2020). While information about all the figures involved with WHOD's early operations remains limited, Mary Dee stands out for her pioneering role. As the host of her eponymous program, "Moving Round," she

played a significant part in shaping the station's appeal to the African American community (Brewer, 2007; Dupree-Wilson, 2022; Newman, 2000; Smith, 2020).

WHOD's audience was largely composed of the African American communities residing in Homestead and nearby areas (Barlow, 1999). This demographic gravitated towards the station not only because of its Black-oriented program but also due to the inclusive ethos the station embodied. WHOD's introduction of a Black-oriented program had profound implications for the development of Black appeal radio. It demonstrated the viability of such programming and catalyzed further efforts to cater to the African American audience, both within the radio industry and the wider realm of mass media (Dupree-Wilson, 2022; Glasco, 2015).

WHOD contributed to the foundation upon which Black-owned radio stations like WERD and WGPR emerged in later decades. It can be argued that WHOD's initial step towards inclusive programming set a precedent that made the radio industry more open to the concept of demographic-oriented broadcasting. Mary Dee's broadcasting career at WHOD challenged racial and gender barriers in the radio industry, highlighting the potential of radio as a platform for the empowerment and representation of marginalized groups. Her legacy continues to inspire generations of Black female broadcasters (Barlow, 1999; Dupree-Wilson, 2022; Newman, 2000; Smith, 2020).

The history of WHOD serves as an enlightening case study in the evolution of Black appeal radio. As a trailblazer in Black-oriented programming, WHOD played a pivotal role in diversifying the American airwaves and amplifying African American voices. It stands as a testament to the resilience and influence of African Americans in shaping the mass media industry, despite the systemic barriers they faced. The story of

WHOD reminds us of the profound importance of representation and inclusivity within our media – principles that continue to resonate in the contemporary broadcasting industry.

WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee: Black-Appeal Media Expansion

A significant milestone in this journey was WDIA in Memphis, Tennessee.

Launched in 1947, WDIA was the first radio station to predominantly target the Black community, and this wasn't one of the first times it was done so. As Terry (2022) states,

“Black audiences were pursued by White owners in areas where the audience size was significant or the programming held appeal across racial categories. In one example, the rapid success of WDIA-Memphis when it went on 1947 led to 108 Black formatted stations by 1977, only a fraction of which were owned by minorities.” (p. 220).

WDIA's programming included content by, for, and about Black individuals, marking a significant shift in the radio industry (Newman, 2003). This was made possible by stations like KDKA, who demonstrated the commercial and societal potential of radio broadcasting (George, 2002). This represented a momentous breakthrough, for prior to this, Black voices were conspicuously sparse in the radio soundscape. WDIA not only illuminated a platform for Black music encompassing the blues, gospel, and rhythm & blues but it also facilitated insightful discussions on socio-political issues resonating within the Black community (Newman, 2003).

The epoch of the 1950s witnessed a burgeoning increase in the number of Black-oriented stations. Often serving as essential pillars within their communities, these stations disseminated news, entertainment, and information on social services, predominantly targeting urban areas with substantial Black demographics (Hogan, 2022).

This era also coincided with the zenith of “race records”, which were musical recordings by Black artists primarily intended for a Black audience. Radio emerged as an instrumental vehicle for promoting these records (Russell, 2023). As of 2023, the station can still be heard as 1070 WDIA on iHeartRadio (iHeart, 2023).

Black Radio Networks

Black radio networks in the United States have historically served as both mirrors and megaphones. They reflect the intricate fabric of African American experiences and amplify voices that have often been suppressed. These networks, born out of necessity and nurtured through resilience, have left an indelible mark on the annals of American media. By critically examining the scholarly works, the nuances, struggles, victories, and undying spirit of these pioneering networks can be revealed. As seen with radio programs and Black-owned radio stations, the common theme of Black radio ownership, even from the nexus of broadcast radio, was empowerment in the face of systemic racism, discrimination, and marginalization. Delving deep into the scholarly works on Black-owned radio networks reveal layers of historical influence still impactful today in Black-oriented and Black-owned news podcast networks.

Johnson Jr. (1993) provides a robust account of the birth and growth of Black radio networks. The pioneering spirit of the National Negro Network (NNN) in the 1950s set the stage for future networks. However, Vang (2008) notes the challenges faced by NNN, which, despite its groundbreaking work, found itself unsustainable after just three years. This volatility in the Black media landscape persisted even today. Such fluctuations in the Black media market remain typical in present-day, with numerous Black-owned media enterprises grappling with the intricacies of ownership and fiscal

challenges. Mutual Black Network (MBN), founded in 1972, faced financial hurdles leading to its merger with the Sheridan Broadcasting Corporation, eventually integrating into (SBN). This pattern of formation, struggle, and consolidation is emblematic of the broader challenges faced by Black businesses in a racially segmented market, though the FCC addressed their minority-ownership race-conscious policies in a variety of ways, which are explained in more detail in next chapter. By the early 1990s, the merger of SBN and National Black Network (NBN) birthed the American Urban Radio Network (AURN), symbolizing unity and collective strength in the face of adversity (Vang, 2008). As a 24/7 Gospel music network, AURN reaches approximately 25+ million weekly listeners, via offices in New York, Pittsburgh, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles. AURN holds “the number one Black-owned Nielsen rated national radio network and the only Black-owned broadcaster with a bureau in the White House press room”, according to their website (AURN, 2023).

Walsh (1997) paints a vivid picture of the transformative power of Black-oriented radio during the civil rights era. The FCC’s evolving policies, combined with the formidable presence of entities like the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation, created a climate for change. Celebrities, notably James Brown, used their influence to rally communities and amplify the civil rights message. Radio stations in New York, Chicago, and Atlanta, became more than just entertainment outlets; they morphed into platforms of activism. SBN played a role that transcended broadcasting. Their initiatives, combined with the impactful work of NBN and MBN were instrumental in not only reporting the civil rights movement but actively participating in it.

Newman's (2003) research titled "The Forgotten Fifteen Million" sheds light on the dual role Black radio played. While it catered to the 'Negro Market,' it also fostered radicalism, challenging societal norms, and advocating for change. These networks became symbolic "communities in the air," reinforcing cultural solidarity and shared Black experiences. Burroughs (2001) provides an intriguing narrative on NY 1190 WLIB-AM's transition to the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation.

This shift was not merely administrative; it was emblematic of a broader movement in Black-oriented media, focusing on tailored content that resonated deeply with African American listeners. As Vang (2008) notes, these networks emerged out of necessity. Mainstream media's consistent glaring oversight of Black experiences and narratives necessitated the birth of platforms that offered representation and voice. These networks, over the decades, metamorphosed into powerful institutions that went beyond entertainment – they became the soul and voice of a community seeking validation, representation, and justice.

The historical trajectory of Black radio networks in the United States underscores a legacy of reflection and amplification of the African American experience. These networks, catalyzed by necessity and fortified by tenacity, have been pivotal in shaping the media narrative. Scholarly examination reveals their nuanced evolution, struggles, and triumphs, highlighting a persistent theme of empowerment amid systemic challenges. The National Negro Network's pioneering efforts, despite short-lived success, set a precedent for subsequent Black radio ventures that have navigated similar trials. Entities like the American Urban Radio Network, born from the consolidation of struggling networks, exemplify the resilience of Black media enterprises.

Concluding, Black-oriented radio emerged as a significant force for social transformation. Figures of stature, such as James Brown, harnessed this medium to further the cause of activism. Entities like the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation redefined radio broadcasting, converting it into a platform for cultural cohesion and social advocacy. These “communities in the air” provided an alternative narrative to the mainstream media, which often overlooked the stories and voices of the Black community. In essence, Black radio has functioned not merely as a source of entertainment but as a medium for empowerment, education, and unity among Black American audiences. The sustained impact of these networks underscores the ongoing necessity for media that authentically represents and caters to the interests of the Black community. As these networks adapt and progress, they continue to be pivotal in advocating for equality, representation, and justice within the American media landscape.

CHAPTER III: LEGAL AND REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

The quest for Black media ownership is a pivotal struggle for representation, equity, and voice in the American media ecosystem. Historically marginalized in mainstream media narratives, Black media ownership embodies the promise of autonomy and the potential for diverse and authentic storytelling. This chapter examines the intricate legal and regulatory terrain that Black media entities navigate, scrutinizing how these structures have historically impacted ownership and, in turn, the representation of Black voices. It delves into the persistent challenges and breakthroughs that shape the contemporary political economy of Black news podcasting, underscoring why ownership is not just about economic control, but a fundamental step towards redressing long-standing inequities and enabling a more democratic media environment.

In the today's society, access to broadband services is more than just a luxury it's an essential tool for news, entertainment, education, work, and communal social interaction. Yet, despite its significance, disparities in broadband access and ownership persists, often reflecting the broader digital discrimination or societal inequalities found since radio's inception with Black radio stations and network representation and ownership, detailed in the previous chapter. Recognizing this persistent inequality, on October 24, 2023, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced a pivotal decision to address these disparities in the form of a vote to make broadcast airwave ownership more equitable (FCC, 2023). The FCC's announcement came in the form of Proposal DOC-397941A1. This proposal was not just a response to societal demands but was a direct outcome of the IIJA's requirements.

The IIJA (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) enacted into law by Congress and President Joe Biden in 2021, obligates the FCC to implement necessary regulatory adjustments to ensure every American can access quality broadband services without facing discrimination (WH.gov). Spearheaded by FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel, the rules were introduced during the 41st Annual Everett C. Parker Ethics in Telecommunications Lecture. Scheduled for vote on November 15, these rules aim to foster a balanced approach to broadband access. This initiative seeks to eliminate biases based on income, race, ethnicity, religion, color, and national origin, in line with the mandates set by the IIJA (FCC, 2023). The FCC states they will consider the technical and economic challenges inherent to achieving universal access, while addressing business policies and practices that might obstruct this goal without valid reasons. The upcoming FCC rules target not just intentional biases but also the unintentional disparities in broadband access across communities. “Digital discrimination of access” is proposed to be defined as policies that unfairly affect consumers based on attributes like race or income, barring genuine technical or economic reasons (FCC, 2023). The FCC will individually assess claims of genuine business challenges that might lead to unequal broadband access.

While the intent behind the 2021 IIJA requirements and upcoming FCC rules’ vote is commendable, its implementation may face challenges. Broadband providers may need to reassess their infrastructure investments, pricing models, and service areas. They might also need to confront implicit biases in their current operational strategies. Furthermore, ensuring compliance will require the FCC to develop robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Yet, the implications of successful implementation are

profound. By ensuring equitable access to broadband services, marginalized communities can experience improved opportunities for education, and even further, economic advancement with broadband radio station or network ownership opportunities with their newly acquired access standards. It can also foster a sense of inclusion, bridging the digital divide that has long separated various segments of the American population.

In conclusion, the relationship between the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Black-owned media entities in the United States is characterized by a complex interweaving of regulatory frameworks, market forces, and entrenched socio-economic imbalances. This intricate association forms a narrative that is far from linear, comprising a diverse array of determinants that influence the current trajectory of Black media proprietorship. As the FCC bears the responsibility for overseeing all forms of interstate and international communications, including radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable, the FCC's regulatory decisions and initiatives significantly influence the Black and minority media domain, critically affecting the vistas and impediments that Black media proprietors encounter. The scope of the FCC's influence is extensive, ranging from the issuance of broadcasting licenses and the allocation of the electromagnetic spectrum to the enforcement of media ownership regulations and the promotion of diversity in media representation. Each of these aspects plays a significant role in shaping the structural environment within which Black-owned media operate, and collectively, they constitute the regulatory ecosystem that can either foster or hinder the growth and sustainability of these vital voices in American media.

Federal Cases That Have Impacted Minority Media Ownership

The media landscape in the United States, while diverse in content, has often been criticized for its lack of diversity in ownership. Black media minority ownership has faced numerous challenges, both systemic and structural. Federal policies, legislative decisions, and judicial rulings have played significant roles in shaping the contours of minority media ownership. A few of the court cases that illustrate the complex interplay between efforts to promote Black media minority ownership and the challenges these efforts face: *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña* (1995), *Metro Broadcasting, Inc. v. FCC* (1990), *Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC* (2011), and *Minority Television Project, Inc. v. FCC* (2018).

Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña (1995) serves as a pivotal moment in the discourse surrounding affirmative action and its implications reverberated throughout sectors aiming to promote racial diversity and inclusion, including minority media ownership. In this case, the Supreme Court held that all racial classifications imposed by the federal government must be analyzed under strict scrutiny, the most stringent form of judicial review (Devins, 1995; McCrudden, 1996; Minnich, 1995). The Court's decision meant that policies promoting racial diversity, including those related to media ownership, had to show a compelling government interest, and be narrowly tailored to achieve that interest. This standard made it more challenging for the government to justify race-based policies, even if they were meant to redress historical racial inequities (McCrudden, 1996; Wong, 1996). The ruling indirectly impacted Black media ownership by heightening the legal standards for race-conscious policies aiming to bolster minority participation in the media industry.

In contrast, *Metro Broadcasting, Inc. v. FCC* (1990) directly addressed the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) minority preference policies. The FCC had implemented policies giving minority-owned broadcasters special consideration when seeking licenses. The Supreme Court, in this case, upheld the FCC's policies, stating that they served the compelling interest of promoting diversity in broadcasting (Devins, 1990; Starks, 1991). This decision was a significant victory for proponents of Black media minority ownership, emphasizing the importance of racial diversity (Hammond IV, 1991).

However, the landscape shifted again with *Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC* (2011), the FCC's 2002 rule mandating divestment to minority-owned entities was invalidated, emphasizing the legal complexities surrounding race-conscious policies (Terry, 2022; Terry et al., 2020). *The Minority Television Project, Inc. v. FCC* (2018) showcased another dimension, where a rule vital for minority-owned stations was challenged (Honig, 2018; Terry, 2022). In this case, a group of non-profit organizations contested the FCC's decision to remove a rule requiring broadcast stations to have a physical presence in the communities they served (FCC, 2018). The rule, while not exclusively about racial diversity, was crucial for minority-owned stations, which often have deep ties to their local communities (Honig, 2018). The elimination of this rule risked eroding the local character of these stations, potentially disadvantaging minority-owned media entities that serve specific community needs (Honig, 2018; Terry, 2022; Terry & Carlson, 2021).

Black media minority ownership in the U.S. is inextricably linked to broader socio-political dynamics and judicial decisions. While some rulings, like *Metro Broadcasting*, have affirmed the importance of racial diversity in media ownership, others, like *Adarand Constructors*, have imposed stricter barriers to race-based policies. The fluctuating judicial landscape underscores the need for a multi-faceted approach to promoting Black media minority ownership, one that not only relies on race-based policies but also addresses systemic barriers affecting local communities and champions the intrinsic value of diverse media voices in our country.

Declining Trends in Minority Media Ownership

The radio industry, an influential player in the narrative of American culture, has undergone seismic shifts in its regulatory landscape. Klaess (2022) provides an in-depth analysis into this transformation, offering unique insights into the intricate relationship between radio regulation and Black broadcast media ownership. In 1979, with the tantalizing promise of the FCC's plan to substantially deregulate the radio industry, the broadcast world found itself at the precipice of change. The intent was clear: to lean on competitive market forces as the new arbiters of public interest, rather than a restrictive regulatory apparatus (Klaess, 2022). By 1987, the FCC had significantly loosened its grip on commercial radio regulations. This wave of deregulation, championed by both broadcasters and politicians alike, was driven by a shared belief in the inherent efficiencies of the market and the potential for greater profitability and growth (Klaess, 2022).

The journey of radio regulation began earnestly with the Radio Act of 1927. This act laid the groundwork for how the spectrum, a public trust, managed with licenses, granted based on a station's ability to serve the public interest. As radio evolved, with its dual role as an entertainment and information medium, the 1934 Communications Act expanded and refined these regulations, establishing the FCC to monitor the industry (Klaess, 2022). This act focused on promoting competition, preventing monopolies, and ensuring broadcasters served the interests of the public.

One of the central tensions in radio regulation has been the balancing act between commercial interests and the public's right to information and diverse content. While early regulations, like the "5-7-7 rule" (p. 23), sought to prevent excessive commercialization by limiting ownership, subsequent decades saw these protections diluted. The 1980s marked a period of radical change, with ownership rules relaxed and the definition of local service becoming more ambiguous. This created an environment ripe for commercial exploitation, potentially at the expense of diverse content and voices. Despite the vagueness surrounding the "public interest" clause, its core tenet remained consistent: stations were obligated to serve their local communities (Klaess, 2022, p. 19).

This could manifest in various ways, from local news broadcasts to community interviews. However, the enforcement of this commitment was inconsistent, with larger markets, like New York, facing unique challenges in defining and delivering local service. By the mid-1970s, policymakers began to view the market as the ideal mechanism to serve the public interest. This marked a significant departure from earlier beliefs, where public interest was seen as something to be protected from unfettered commercial forces. This shift, as Klaess (2022) notes, transformed the very fabric of the

radio industry, with profound implications for Black broadcast media ownership.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996, heralded as a legislative advancement designed to foster media cross-ownership and promote a diverse, competitive market, ironically engendered an environment conducive to consolidation, particularly detrimental to the plurality of voices in the broadcast radio and television sectors. Harris and Kraft (1997) critically argue that the Act's implementation, steered by the FCC and state regulations, paradoxically established stringent barriers that contravened its foundational objectives of spurring competition, innovation, and investment. This policy, instead of catalyzing diversity, inadvertently granted large media conglomerates carte blanche to acquire multiple stations, which led to a pronounced increase in conservative voices dominating the airwaves, eclipsing the once vibrant spectrum of ideological diversity.

Economides (1999) posits that the Act's aftermath witnessed a dearth of new competitive players in local exchange markets, a stagnancy that, perhaps unintentionally, stemmed from the Act's provisions. The ensuing landscape, marked by a flurry of mergers and acquisitions, starkly narrowed rather than broadened the competitive arena. This shift has been particularly harsh for Black media ownership, which has seen its potential for growth and endurance stifled by the newly erected oligopoly, or a media plutocracy. The consolidation trend, which disproportionately amplified conservative perspectives, has significantly constrained the industry's competitive landscape, raising serious questions about the Act's efficacy in cultivating a telecommunications ecosystem rich in diversity and reflective of America's multifaceted populace.

Between 1998 and 2007, the landscape of minority-owned television stations underwent a significant shift, with nearly 40% of these entities transitioning to ownership outside of the Black community (Blevins & Brown, 2010; Blevins & Martinez, 2010). This trend underscores a departure from the diversity goals ostensibly championed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), with the agency's inclination towards market-centric policies over governmental oversight of media and the press. Such a shift has resulted in a disproportionate disadvantage for Black Americans within the media ownership arena. The ramifications of the Telecommunications Act (TCA) were acutely felt within the realm of radio broadcasting, where radio ownership consolidation critically undermined Black radio a medium that had traditionally served as a vibrant instrument of cultural expression and a platform for disseminating Black culture (Terry, 2022).

The post-TCA period also saw conservative talk radio gain a dominant foothold in the mainstream AM/FM broadcast spectrum. These stations, often characterized by their homogeneous political slant, accounted for an overwhelming 90% of the weekly news/talk programming among the top five radio proprietors following the enactment of the TCA (Blevins, 2019). This phenomenon has raised concerns about the narrowing of ideological diversity on the airwaves and the marginalization of minority voices in a medium once celebrated for its perspectives.

Miller (2004) reported that the Telecom Act of 1996 led to the loss of twenty-seven minority-owned stations within a year, affecting women and racial and ethnic minority business owners. Terry (2022) argued that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has not adequately supported the acquisition of minority media owners, a problem that has persisted for over two decades. In 2021, the U.S. Supreme

Court decision on the 2018 *FCC v. Prometheus Radio Project* court case directed the FCC to revive its discontinued Quadrennial Review Process by 2022, as stipulated in the Telecommunication Act of 1996 (Sandoval, 2022; Tama, 2022; Terry, 2022). In late 2023, iHeartMedia also addressed the FCC, stating that it must “do no harm to AM radio” as the FCC completes their belated 2018 and 2022 quadrennial reviews (Jacobson, 2023). Terry (2022) further noted that this mandate from the Supreme Court for the FCC to maintain records has created a tense atmosphere among media workers and the public, who are anticipating changes in minority-owned broadcasting from the FCC.

“Given the requirements of Section 202(h) [of the Telecommunications Act of 1996], this task is no small order, and with a regulated industry and citizen petitioner groups each ready to pounce on the agency’s next decision, the pressure to develop a viable administrative record is quite high” (Terry, 2022, p. 256).

The radio industry’s regulation has evolved significantly, impacting the ownership and representation of Black broadcast media. Initially, radio regulation was intended to manage the public airwaves responsibly, with the Radio Act of 1927 and the Communications Act of 1934 setting guidelines for competition and public service. However, a shift began in the late 20th century, particularly noted around 1979, when the FCC moved towards deregulation, aiming to rely more on market forces than strict regulatory frameworks (Klaess, 2022).

By the 1980s, the deregulation accelerated with policies that loosened ownership rules and reduced oversight, which some believed could lead to more efficient and

profitable media operations. This period saw a substantial relaxation in constraints that had previously aimed to ensure diverse and local content, paving the way for increased commercialization and consolidation (Klaess, 2022). The effects of these regulatory changes were profound, particularly after the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which further encouraged media cross-ownership and consolidation. Despite intentions to foster competition and diversity, the act led to a reduction in minority-owned media outlets. This consolidation has been particularly damaging to Black media ownership, which has struggled to maintain a foothold in the competitive landscape dominated by larger media conglomerates (Economides, 1999; Harris and Kraft, 1997).

The subsequent years saw a drastic reduction in the number of minority-owned stations, with significant implications for the diversity of voices and perspectives in the media. The regulatory environment favored large corporations over smaller, independent operators, often sidelining minority voices in the mainstream media narrative (Blevins & Brown, 2010; Blevins & Martinez, 2010). The ongoing challenges faced by Black and other minority media owners highlight the critical need for policies that not only address market dynamics but also actively promote diversity and inclusivity in media ownership and content. This calls for a reassessment of the impacts of past regulations and a concerted effort to ensure that the media landscape reflects the diversity of American society.

Fostering Digital Equity: The FCC's Strategic Initiatives

Consequently, in a strategic move in June 2021, Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced the renewal and renaming of the Advisory Committee on Diversity and Digital Empowerment

(ACDDE) to the Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC). This rebranding signified a redoubled commitment by the FCC to play a pivotal role in advancing equity within the technology sector, with a particular emphasis on the digital communications services industry. As seen on the FCC’s website, the CEDC’s mission is multifaceted: it aims to expand access to high-speed Internet and to enable diverse small enterprises to penetrate the media market. The Council stated it planned to create a dynamic forum for the exchange of ideas and the formulation of strategies, with a focus on critical aspects such as improving access to capital, fostering mentorship programs, and enhancing diversity among media proprietors (FCC, 2021).

Through these initiatives, the CEDC stated they would like to address systemic challenges and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable digital communications landscape. The inaugural Media Ownership Diversity Symposium, held in February 2023, hosted by the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC), touched upon the importance of keeping diversity statistics and records. These records are crucial for informing FCC policy decisions aimed at boosting the number of minority-owned businesses. In his address at the Symposium, FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks underscored this point by stating:

“Just weeks ago, the FCC released its Sixth Report on “Ownership of Broadcast Stations”. We require all TV and radio broadcasters to submit detailed ownership information every two years. This report shares the most recent tranche of information, reflecting broadcast ownership as of October 1, 2021. We’ve released this data on a biennial basis for over a decade, so this report provides both a snapshot of minority and female ownership in the broadcast industry at the end of 2021, and changes to that ownership over time.” (Starks, 2023).

Starks articulated a clear recognition of the crucial role that data plays within both the media industry and the sphere of policy-making, a point that stands in contrast to Terry's (2022) critique of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) approach, which highlights a lack of data-driven support for its minority ownership policies. Starks expressed a steadfast commitment to upholding the decisions of Congress and engaging in the necessary dialogues to refine policy based on a thorough analysis of the FCC's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) requirements. Such analysis is predicated on the comprehensive gathering and disclosure of workforce data within the broadcasting sector. The availability of this data is essential for fostering informed discussions and crafting well-rounded strategies that are conducive to achieving greater equity for Black media owners and content creators in the broadcasting industry.

“The value of this data is clear. It is one thing to assume; it is another thing entirely to see the numbers spelled out and broken down. Knowing those numbers benefits policymakers, industry players, and advocates – including you all here today. That's why I've long pushed for us to resume our collection and release of broadcast workforce data as well – as Congress intended us to do under our EEO requirements. Not just owners shape the content, perspective, and decisions of our media – so do employees. I remain committed to making this data available as well, to further inform these important conversations” (Starks, 2023).

The data presented in the “Sixth Report on Ownership of Broadcast Stations” regarding minority media ownership does not come as a surprise. Numerous scholars, including Terry (2022), Terry and Carlson (2021), and Yoo and Keung (2022), have noted the lack of substantial progress in enhancing minority ownership in the media sector over the long term. Despite efforts to shift the balance, the momentum for change has been slow. What remains particularly concerning are the statistics related to “majority ownership” in the context of “full power commercial TV stations” and “commercial FM radio stations”.

The figures in these categories underscore the persistent disparities in media ownership.

In the context of full power commercial TV stations in 2021, women held majority ownership of a mere 5%, a decline from 6% in 2019. Concerning racial categorization, the data demonstrated a slight increase in majority ownership by Black individuals, rising from 1% in 2019 to 3% in 2021. Asian individuals saw a modest increase in majority ownership, constituting 1% in 2021, compared to negligible representation in preceding years. Conversely, white individuals, though continuing to have significant majority ownership at 64%, showed a reduction from 67% in 2019. Notably, the racial categories of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native displayed no instance of majority ownership. Upon considering ethnic demographics, Hispanic/Latino individuals comprised 4% of majority owners, a figure consistent with 2019 (FCC, 2023).

Shifting focus to commercial FM radio stations, the ownership landscape exhibited analogous trends. Women's majority ownership constituted 9% in 2021, an increment from 7% in 2019. Black individuals' majority ownership was stagnant at 2% between 2019 and 2021. For Asian individuals, there was a minor upswing to 1% in 2021 from zero in preceding years. Majority ownership by white individuals, while still predominant at 72% in 2021, marked a decrement from 77% in 2019. Majority ownership among Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native groups was non-existent. In terms of ethnicity, Hispanic/Latino individuals' majority ownership remained steady at 5%, identical to 2019's figure (FCC, 2023).

The comprehensive data analysis found in "Sixth Report on Ownership of Broadcast Stations" underscores a marked deficiency in progress concerning minority

broadcast ownership. The figures, albeit displaying minor fluctuations, primarily underscore a persistent narrative of underrepresentation and disparity, falling short of reflecting the diverse demographic makeup of the United States. Thus, this empirical report underscores the necessity of robust strategies to foster diversity in broadcast ownership.

The FCC Tax Certificate Program

According Honig (2020), the systematic ostracization of individuals of color from owning broadcast licenses would be profoundly counter to the principles of competition. This unfortunate reality was the norm from 1932 to 1978, and in certain aspects, it persists in the present day. The Telecommunications Act, in its course of liberalizing the media market, effectively rendered the FCC's previous policies, promoting minority ownership, null and void. Among these initiatives was the FCC's minority tax certificate program. The program, operational from 1978 to 1995, offered tax incentives to companies that transferred their stations to minority owners. Despite being successful in bolstering minority ownership during its existence, the program was prematurely discontinued over concerns about its potential misuse, coincidentally just before the Telecommunications Act was enacted.

The ending of the minority tax certificate program represented a significant inflection point in the trajectory towards greater media diversity and representation. The minority tax certificate program had been a key incentive, enabling an incremental but steady increase in minority-owned media entities. The program's discontinuation was both a symbolic and practical blow, signaling a shift in policy orientation while

simultaneously stripping minority media owners of a vital financial incentive that helped level the playing field in a capital-intensive industry.

The consolidation of media ownership has led to less diversity in content, limiting the representation of minority voices in the public discourse. This, in turn, has raised serious questions about the role of the FCC and the effectiveness of its mandate to promote diversity, localism, and competition in the media industry (Terry, 2022). The combined effect of these two events precipitated a stark decline in Black and minority media ownership. The larger consolidated entities, fortified by their substantial financial capabilities and expansive networks, held sway in the industry, making it extremely difficult for minority-owned entities to compete effectively. As a result, the media landscape saw a drastic reduction in the diversity of voices and perspectives, with Black and minority media outlets being significantly underrepresented. Therefore, the simultaneous occurrence of the minority tax certificate program's termination and the enforcement of the Telecommunications Act can be viewed as a twofold policy failure. While both events were not directly targeted at minority media owners, they interacted to disproportionately affect this group, thwarting their progress in the media industry. This sequence of events highlights the complex dynamics of media ownership and regulation, and the critical role of policy in shaping the diversity and inclusivity of the media industry.

Economic barriers also played a significant role in diminishing the effectiveness of the FCC's diversity policies. The media industry, particularly broadcasting, requires substantial capital investment, often proving a high entry barrier for small, minority-owned enterprises. While the FCC initiatives aimed to facilitate access to capital, these

measures proved insufficient in the face of the industry's financial demands. The continued consolidation of media ownership further skewed the market dynamics, making it harder for minority-owned enterprises to compete. Thus, while the FCC has made strides to promote diversity in media ownership post-Telecom Act of 1996, the impact of these efforts has been curtailed due to persistent legal and economic challenges. This underlines the complex reality of media ownership and the need for comprehensive, robust policies that can navigate these obstacles to foster a diverse and inclusive media environment.

The Telecom Act was critiqued for its omission of provisions aimed at fostering diversity in media ownership, which inadvertently led to a shrinkage of minority ownership opportunities, regulatory constraints on content, and limited consumer choices in broadcast media (Rhinesmith et al., 2022). In response to the growing recognition of these shortcomings, in 2013, the FCC initiated measures to ameliorate the situation for minorities and women in media ownership, notably through the work of its Diversity Committee. This committee was established to spotlight and address the economic disparities and discriminatory barriers within the system. The Howard Media Group, affiliated with Howard University, proposed to the FCC that employing ethnographic research methods could yield insights into the unique requirements of minority and women audiences by directly engaging with the cultural contexts and content consumption patterns of these groups.

This approach underscores the importance of understanding media consumption through the lens of the audience's own cultural and social experiences. Mignon Clyburn stands out in this narrative as the sole Black woman to have served as an FCC

Commissioner to date. During her tenure from 2009 to 2018, Clyburn was a consistent presence on the FCC Diversity Committee, where she was known for her advocacy and efforts to improve representation and fairness in media ownership (Blevins & Brown, 2010). Her contributions to the committee's work highlight the critical need for diverse leadership in regulatory bodies to ensure that a broad spectrum of voices is considered in policy-making processes.

Societal prejudices, lack of access to quality education and training, and a dearth of networking opportunities for Black individuals in the media industry are other systemic barriers that must be addressed. The Telecom Act of 1996 and the termination of the FCC's minority tax certificate program were pivotal moments that impacted Black ownership in the media industry. Yet, the FCC has since attempted to rectify these consequences through initiatives like the CEDC, FCC Commissioner Geoffrey Starks' leadership, and their commitment to using minority ownership data in policy decision-making, at the 2023 Media Ownership Diversity Symposium. Despite these efforts, the road to a diverse and inclusive media landscape has been burdened with legal and economic hurdles.

Given the intertwined nature of these challenges, it becomes evident that resolving the scarcity of Black-owned media organizations necessitates a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach. Regulatory policies need to be augmented with initiatives designed to address the systemic barriers that obstruct the growth and sustainability of Black-owned media enterprises. Measures could include improved access to funding, the provision of training opportunities, establishing EEO as a regulatory standard, fostering of mentorship programs, and creation of platforms that celebrate and uplift Black voices

in media. Through such an all-encompassing approach, there's hope that the landscape of media ownership could one day reflect a rich diversity, not niche heterogeneity, reflection of society.

House Resolution 549 (2019-2020)

A more outright media reform plan could have helped shape the future of Black media in the US (Blevins, 2019), though it did not complete Senate approval, as of December 2020, a motion to reconsider was agreed upon without objection. Resolution 549 hoped to gain equity for Black media organizations, led by sponsor and Florida congresswoman, Val Demings. Citing the 50th Anniversary of the Kerner Commission findings of 1968, which found structural racism incited riots in over 100 cities between 1967-1968, the H.R.549 argues for less racial bias from the mainstream media and more equity for Black-owned media organizations in the U.S. The Kerner Commission basically found that the U.S. was splitting into “two societies: one Black, one white – separate and unequal” (Turner, 2023).

The Kerner Commission itself was established in response to race riots in the late 1960's, in the U.S., and aimed to understand and provide solutions to these societal rifts. The Kerner Report, their historical text about their research on this topic, critiques the media's role, noting that “the journalistic profession has been shockingly backward in seeking out, hiring, training, and promoting Negroes” (Kerner Report, 1968, p. 211). It underscores the necessity for media to employ more African Americans and to present a more balanced picture of their lives to challenge prevailing stereotypes (Hill, 1970). On the inadequacies of the media's representation of the Black American community causing the race riots of 1967-68, the report found, “At the heart of the explosion is the profound

frustration over the continued exclusion of some Negroes from the benefits of American society. The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world" (Kerner Report, 1968, p.364). This quote reflects the Commission's critical view of the media's role in perpetuating a racially divided society by not adequately or fairly covering African American perspectives or issues. The report also critiques the media's role, noting that "the journalistic profession has been shockingly backward in seeking out, hiring, training, and promoting Negroes" (Kerner Report, 1968, p. 366). It underscores the necessity for media to employ more African Americans and to present a more balanced picture of their lives to challenge prevailing stereotypes.

The Kerner Commission's findings about the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Black Americans in media have direct parallels with today's context of Black news podcasts. These podcasts have emerged partly as a response to the continued issues of representation and ownership in mainstream media. By creating platforms that are owned and operated by Black Americans, these podcasts help to ensure that the community's narratives and perspectives are presented authentically. They serve as modern counteractions to the media dynamics critiqued by the Kerner Commission, offering new forms of media ownership and representation that aim to rectify historical injustices in media portrayal and ownership, which is echoed in this Deming's-led bill.

Since its origins, epitomized by the pioneering publication *Freedom's Journal*, Black-owned media has often been sidelined within the broader mainstream media narrative, seldom receiving equitable partnership or coverage opportunities. This marginalization is a consequence of longstanding socio-economic exclusion. In response, legislative measures like H.R.549 represent a formal acknowledgment by the House of

Representatives of the imperative to cultivate media diversity and a commitment to dismantling the barriers that impede it. The bill acknowledges the troubling trend of diminishing small, independent, and diverse media outlets, as well as the inadequate representation of diverse groups in media ownership and governance.

The bill acknowledges a concerning decline in small, independent, and diverse media outlets, alongside a lack of proportional representation of diverse populations in media ownership and leadership roles. Such a trend is identified as counterproductive to the overarching goals of encouraging community engagement and promoting civic literacy and engagement elements that are fundamental to vigorous voter turnout, active participation in civic organizations, and a well-informed public on local political and societal matters (congress.gov). By addressing these issues, the legislation aims to strengthen media diversity, a supposed pillar of American democracy, reinforcing the belief that a varied media landscape is crucial for the success of our democratic processes.

The ongoing relevance of these issues underscores the importance of initiatives like H.R.549, which aim to support and sustain diverse media voices, including through modern platforms like Black news podcasts. These podcasts continue to address the gaps left by mainstream media, offering content that reflects the authentic experiences and perspectives of Black communities, thus continuing the legacy of media reform and representation efforts initiated by earlier movements and highlighted by significant inquiries like the Kerner Commission.

MEDIA Diversity Act of (2020-2021)

The H.R. 5567 (116th): MEDIA Diversity Act of 2020 represents a bipartisan effort within the U.S. House of Representatives to address systemic barriers in the communications industry. Introduced by Representative Billy Long, a Republican from Missouri, and co-sponsored by Democrat Marc Veasey, the bill targets the challenges that socially disadvantaged Americans encounter when attempting to position themselves in the communications marketplace. The MEDIA acronym encapsulates the bill's focus on "Measuring the Economics Driving Investments and Access," highlighting an intent to and understand the economic factors that influence investment and access. By identifying and aiming to dismantle these barriers, the legislation seeks to promote inclusivity and ensure that the marketplace reflects the diversity of American society (congress.gov).

The core proposition of the MEDIA Diversity Act was to mandate the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to examine and evaluate these barriers, integrating this examination into its regular biennial communications marketplace report. By adopting a data-driven approach, the act intended to spotlight these often-invisible barriers, thereby opening the way for more equitable and inclusive representation in the media industry (congress.gov). However, despite its well-intentioned objectives, the MEDIA Diversity Act of 2020 passed the House but did not pass the Senate. This setback was repeated in the following year with the MEDIA Diversity Act of 2021, reflecting the continuing challenges faced in the pursuit of equity and representation within the communications industry. The persistence of these challenges underscores the complex interplay of legislative and institutional hurdles that continue to perpetuate the underrepresentation of minority-owned media entities. The journey to a more inclusive

and equitable media industry, while arduous, remains an urgent and critical objective to ensure the diverse voices and experiences within our society are adequately represented and heard.

In summary, the challenges and evolution of Black media ownership in the U.S. is deeply influenced by federal policies, judicial rulings, and the FCC's regulatory frameworks. Notably, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, judicial decisions such as *Adarand Constructors v. Peña*, and the cessation of the FCC's Tax Certificate Program all contributed to the consolidation of media and the marginalization of Black voices. The FCC's initiatives, such as the Tax Certificate Program and the Diversity Committee, sought to support minority ownership, but were hampered by legal and economic barriers. These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies, involving funding, training, mentorship, and EEO standards, to enhance the representation of Black voices in media.

Recent legislative efforts, like H.R. 549 and the MEDIA Diversity Act, reflect ongoing endeavors to promote inclusivity in the communications industry, though challenges persist. Within the context of political economy, Black news podcasting emerges as a digital frontier offering opportunities for increased representation, ownership, and control over Black narratives. Podcasting's lower barriers to entry and potential for community-driven funding and content creation stand in contrast to the legacy of media consolidation, offering a new avenue for amplifying Black voices in the public discourse and media economy.

The findings from this chapter further emphasize that Black news podcasts are not only reacting to but actively negotiating with the existing media structures as defined by Napoli (2014b; 2011) in terms of production, distribution, and consumption. This negotiation is situated within the historical context of media ownership and regulation as examined by McChesney (2015) and Marable (2015), where racial inequities in media have led to alternative forms of media production, like Black news podcasts, which have emerged as counter-hegemonic forces.

The scrutinized actions of the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) and the consequences of pivotal court decisions (Devins, 1995; Honig, 2018; McCrudden, 1996; Wong, 1996), have historically influenced the landscape within which these podcasts operate. These podcasts serve as a platform for both cultural expression and economic empowerment, as highlighted by Aubrey and Boling (2022), by resisting dominant economic models and creating new ones. The significance of Black-owned media in the form of podcasts is further amplified by the theoretical underpinnings provided by scholars like Florini (2019) and Fox et al. (2020), who explore the role of digital platforms in enabling new forms of cultural production and community-building.

The totality of the economic and legal challenges highlighted in this chapter exemplify the kind of systemic barriers that the political economy of media seeks to analyze. Black news podcasts operate within this framework, as they navigate regulatory hurdles and leverage digital platforms for distribution, thereby embodying the critical interplay between economic models, ownership, and cultural production within the media ecosystem. They also embody Fuchs' (2015) assertion on the role of digital labor and audience commodification, utilizing innovative funding models to retain editorial

independence and foster a connection with their community (Napoli, 2015a; Rush, 2020). Thus, the legal and regulatory findings from this chapter provide empirical grounding for the theoretical assertions regarding ownership, diversity, and the democratization of media spaces. This dynamic interaction highlights the transformative potential of Black news podcasts, as they challenge entrenched economic paradigms and regulatory frameworks to create a more inclusive and equitable media ecosystem.

CHAPTER IV: DAILY BLACK NEWS PODCASTS AND BLACK PODCAST NETWORKS

Edison Research reports over 90 million worldwide people listen or watch podcasts online (Edison Research, 2019). Podcasting originated in the early 2000s, a period characterized by significant technological developments (McDaniel, 2022). The rise of the internet and the increasing ubiquity of personal computers laid the groundwork for a democratization of content creation, making it possible for anyone with a computer to produce and distribute their content, unlike the barriers of entry faced with traditional broadcast media. Portable digital media players, especially Apple's iPod, made it possible for audiences to consume this content anywhere, anytime (Kobus, 2022; Story, 2022). Podcasting, therefore, emerged as a unique amalgamation of these broader digital trends.

The term "podcast" itself is a hybrid term coined by journalist Ben Hammersley in a 2004 article for *The Guardian* (Berry, 2016; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). It combines "iPod," referring to Apple's then revolutionary portable media player, and "broadcast," indicative of the medium's essence of disseminating information widely (Kobus, 2022; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Story, 2022). Some other pod-pioneers believe "pod" stood for "personal on demand" or "personal option digital", popularized by Doc Searls, senior editor of *Linux Journal* in 2004 (Lum, 2006). As defined by Balanuta's (2021) study on an inclusive definition of podcasting, a podcast, "may be more granularly defined as an on-demand listening experience, mediated through audio or video platforms, which involves heterogeneous formats and generous thematic designs that can be authored by producers of multiple backgrounds" (p. 38-39).

Balanuta's (2021) definition of a podcast encapsulates the novelty of podcasting, being a new form of broadcast suited for the digital age, created by diverse identities, unrestricted by traditional gatekeepers such as broadcasters and publishers (Jenkins, 2022; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The low barriers to entry meant that anyone with a computer, a microphone, and an internet connection could create and distribute their podcasts. The content of these early podcasts varied widely, from technology discussions and music to niche hobbies and personal feelings. This diversity contributed to the podcasting ecosystem, turning it into a melting pot of ideas and perspectives (Berry, 2006; Heeremans, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

Rime and colleagues (2022) articulated a dynamic and multifaceted conception of podcasts, characterizing the medium as a "chameleon" due to its adaptive and versatile nature. They define a podcast as an episodic series of spoken audio content, readily available for download or streaming over the internet, accessible at any convenience, and producible by virtually anyone. This broad definition captures the essence of podcasts as a democratized form of media that transcends traditional broadcasting constraints. Rime and colleagues (2022) introduce a conceptual framework comprising six dichotomous tensions that represent the medium's diverse attributes. These pairs of opposing forces are in a state of constant flux, yet they inherently seek a balance, allowing for a dynamic equilibrium that underpins the medium's evolution (Rime, et al., 2022, pp. 1261-62). They argue that this fluidity is not a facet to be restrained but rather an attribute that should be fostered to catalyze innovation within the podcasting realm. By doing so, the core qualities that make podcasting unique and accessible are preserved, even as the medium continues to evolve and expand its reach and capabilities.

The definition of a podcast by Rime et al., (2022), when integrated with the insights from Bonini (2022), who views YouTube videos as a form of podcasting (p.2) and underscores the significance of power dynamics integral to the commodification of culture, offers a comprehensive perspective. Bonini's (2022) definition conceives podcasting as "a dynamic network of human and non-human entities that continuously reconfigure themselves in response to shifting power dynamics and the algorithmic constraints of their chosen platforms" (p. 16). In the context of this research, a podcast is conceptualized as a medium that is both adaptable and forward-looking, embracing both audio and visual narratives, often serialized into episodes. This medium is circulated through the Internet, crafted for cultural consumption, and made readily accessible to audiences regardless of location or time constraints.

The creation and evolution of podcasts are driven by a dynamic production of content creators, audience members, technological frameworks, and the broader cultural landscape. This collective is characterized by its responsiveness to ongoing shifts in cultural power dynamics and the algorithmic intricacies inherent to the platforms hosting the podcasts. Consequently, a podcast is perceived not only as a vessel for its content but as a living entity continuously sculpted by the intricate and algorithm-influenced environment it inhabits, as well as the ever-evolving societal and cultural forces that shape its existence externally.

Podcasting is unique because it predates social media and cloud services, relying on a decentralized system known as RSS ("Really Simple Syndication"). The inclusion of RSS in Apple's iTunes Music Store in 2005 and the company's dominance in digital audio sales significantly influenced early perceptions of podcasting (Sullivan, 2019).

From its amateur beginnings, podcasting entered a ‘second age’ around 2012 (Bonini, 2015), as popular podcasts began to self-finance through venture capital and crowdfunding. The investigative journalism podcast “Serial” became a turning point, attracting significant attention from advertisers and content producers, and signaling podcasting’s mainstream potential (Berry, 2015). This evolution is further propelled by events like the Podcast Movement in 2016, which aim to formalize the medium, drawing it closer to traditional media markets (Berry, 2022; 2015; Jorgensen, 2021; Palomar & Borrajo, 2017; Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

In the democratization of media production, podcasting emerges as a distinctly accessible medium. Unlike traditional broadcast radio, which requires significant capital investment for infrastructure and licensing fees, podcasting’s low production costs have effectively lowered the barrier to entry. With just a basic recording setup and internet access, any individual can produce and distribute their content, ushering in a new era of media democracy. This shift has empowered voices across the spectrum, ensuring that podcasting is not just the realm of professionals but of anyone with a message to share.

Yet, much like broadcast radio (Brekke, 2020), the podcast landscape has been assessed as a reflection of racially constructed socio-political and economic strata much like that found in the US, where “sonic” whiteness (Brekke, 2020; Vaillant, 2002) encompasses the top of the strata (McHugh, 2022; Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019) compared to also popular culturally-diverse podcast production teams who refrain from representing a whitewashed voice within their content (Chávez, 2020). However, as podcasting started to gain traction, it quickly caught the attention of commercial entities (Berry, 2006; Sullivan, 2019; Sullivan, 2019). The medium’s ability to engage audiences

in an intimate, on-demand manner made it a potent platform for businesses and advertisers.

This shift from grassroots to commercial marked a new phase in the history of podcasting, a phase that would see it grow into a billion-dollar industry (Berry, 2016; Sellas & Bonet, 2023). The podcasting industry further evolved in the 2010s, marked by increased professionalization and commercialization (Fox, et al., 2020). Entering the 2020s, the podcasting industry continues to grow and innovate. With the rise of global platforms like Spotify and iHeartRadio investing heavily in podcasting, and the emerging trend of exclusive content and podcast networks, the medium experiences unprecedented dynamism and expansion (Caramancion, 2022; Heeremans, 2018; Sellas & Bonet, 2023; Sullivan, 2019). The advent of video podcasts or “vodcasts”, often found on YouTube, and the increasing use of AI in podcast creation and recommendation algorithms point to a future where podcasting could become even more personalized and diversified (Parson et al., 2009).

Podcast networks are collectives of podcasts that are produced, distributed, or monetized by a centralized team. The concept mirrors that of traditional broadcast networks but is adapted for the digital age. The growth of podcast networks is inextricably linked to the proliferation of the Internet and advancements in mobile technology (Heeremans, 2018). Early on, networks were formed to aggregate content, streamline distribution, and create communities around specific genres or interests. This collective approach allowed for shared resources among creators, including marketing efforts and audience cross-promotion, which individual podcasters often found challenging to manage alone (Heeremans, 2018). Gatekeeping mechanisms, the pursuit of

niche audiences, the exchange of social capital, and enhancing discoverability are among the driving factors for these networks (Heeremans, 2018). This suggests that while there is an undeniable commercial logic, the ethos of disruption, inherent to podcasting, continues to play a pivotal role.

Podcasting, Platforms & Cultural Production

As per Rime and colleagues (2022), a successful podcast capitalizes on the heterogeneity of its format and the universality of its content to design a unique audience experience. These factors are associated with the tensions they term “independent and mainstream production” and “unique and universal content” that drive podcast innovation. The tension of “independent and mainstream production” embodies the democratization of podcast production (p. 1248). The tension of “unique and universal content” connects the popularity of a podcast to the creator’s ability to offer a unique experience underpinned by universally relevant content, drawing from genres found in traditional media forms such as newspapers, magazines, and television. However, unlike these traditional media forms, podcasting allows for greater creative freedom and is not tied to scheduled programming times, setting it apart from media forms like radio broadcasts. News media was traditionally platform independent but the growing digital landscape for news production has made it more dependent on online publishing (Nieborg and Poell, 2021).

The contemporary digital landscape is characterized by the emergence of a new phenomenon termed platformization. It’s a term that reflects the increasing influence of digital platforms, such as social media and streaming services, on cultural production (Helmond, 2015). This section delves into the concept of platformization, with a

particular focus on its role in the creation of ‘contingent cultural commodities’. In the context of digital culture, a ‘platform’ refers to a digital service or application that hosts user-generated content or facilitates a wide range of activities. Platformization is described as “the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of media industries and production practices” (Nieborg & Poell, 2021, p. 85).

This refers to the way in which these digital platforms are becoming integral to cultural production, encompassing the creation, distribution, and consumption of cultural content. The term “contingent cultural commodities” encapsulates the unique attributes of cultural goods produced within this context. These commodities are contingent in the sense that their production, distribution, and consumption are deeply intertwined with, and often dependent on, the dynamics of digital platforms. In the age of platformization, cultural production is heavily influenced by algorithms, user behavior, and the strategic objectives of platform companies (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Cultural production is then dependent upon these platforms, like Google, as in the case with YouTube, creating an environment of platform dependence, creating a digital ecosystem that creators are then intrinsically apart. This relationship impacts media making of all forms within digital media platforms (Nieborg and Poell, 2021).

For instance, after the content is produced on the platform, a creator may be promoted or demoted in a platform’s recommendation algorithm based on trending social media topics or popular content areas (Nieborg and Poell, 2021), or the user engagement their work generates (Silva & Kenney, 2019). With algorithms and platform companies wielding significant influence over which content gets visibility, there’s a risk that only

content conforming to certain popular standards or corporate strategies will succeed, based on their profitability from their optimized content. This dynamic could potentially sideline niche, innovative, or challenging cultural forms. This prompts questions about who holds power in the cultural economy, how that power is exercised, and how it might be democratized. The platformization of cultural production represents a significant shift in how culture is produced and consumed. It brings about the emergence of contingent cultural commodities whose value and visibility are tied to the unclear logic of algorithms and platform companies. While this shift has enabled new modes of creativity and engagement, it also requires critical scrutiny to ensure the vibrancy and diversity of the Black cultural industry.

Algorithms, including those used by YouTube, shape content visibility and influence audience reach. The concept of algorithmic targeting is widely discussed in scholarly literature. Napoli (2021; 2014a; 2014b) describes how digital platforms utilize algorithms to parse extensive user data and tailor content to specific audience segments. This contrasts with traditional media, where the approach to programming was to cast a wide net to capture a general audience. Algorithms in new media environments enhance user engagement by personalizing content, a strategy that Napoli (2021; 2014a, 2014b) argues is becoming increasingly sophisticated with advancements in data analytics. This targeted approach is beneficial for content producers, as Napoli (2011) suggests, allowing for the delivery of content to niche audiences, which is especially pertinent for minority voices seeking visibility within the digital media ecosystem.

This granular approach to audience targeting is emblematic of the concept of “contingent cultural commodities” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) within the platformized

culture. The content's production and consumption are contingent not only on the audience's preferences but also on the whims of algorithmic determinations. These algorithms, governed by the strategic objectives of digital platform companies, steer the visibility of content, with potential repercussions for the cultural economy. This is particularly salient in the Black cultural industry, where the risk of content conforming to popular standards for visibility may sideline innovative or nonconformist cultural expressions.

If YouTube algorithms tend to favor left-leaning news, as found by Ibrahim, et. al. (2023), Black news podcasts on YouTube, like #RolandMartinUnfiltered and Black News Channel, now the Grio, representing podcasts with similar ideological stances, might benefit through increased visibility and recommendation to interested audiences. This can help to grow their listener base and enhance community engagement. However, if a Black news podcast does not align with the left-leaning content within their show or segment, that the algorithm favors, or if it covers non-partisan or conservative viewpoints, it may face challenges in discoverability. This could hinder the podcast's ability to reach potential audiences and limit the diversity of perspectives within the algorithmically curated content ecosystem. Ultimately, the success of Black news podcasts in such an environment depend on their ability to engage listeners, encourage sharing, and possibly leverage platform-independent promotion strategies to counteract any algorithmic biases.

Black Podcasting

In the Black Podcast Listener Report of 2021, conducted by Edison Research, it was found that Black podcast listeners are more college-educated, with part-time and

full-time employment than the U.S. Black population, with the majority of them listening to shows at home, preferring a YouTube video format over sole audio podcasts, that are less than three hours, and have listened consistently between one to three years (Edison Research, 2019). “U.S. National News” was the third most listened to podcast category for Black listeners, following “History”, and “Religion and Spirituality”. Consistent with the Black Press, Black news podcasting extends their traditions by providing a modern platform for amplifying Black voices and issues, much like historical Black newspapers that focused on advocacy, representation, and community-specific news.

In Black podcasting, the sonic space is a potent vehicle for conveying emotion, nuance, and cultural identity. It serves as an alternative form of visibility and representation, often more accessible than traditional media, and fosters a democratic participation in the cultural discourse. This medium’s accessibility democratizes content creation, enabling a diverse chorus of Black voices to narrate their multifaceted identities and stories. Thus, the Black sonic space is not just a medium of entertainment but a resonant chamber for the community’s pulse, where listening is an act of engaging with and affirming the manifold narratives of Black life. It is where the oral traditions of the past find their contemporary echo, shaping a public sphere that is as vibrant as it is vital.

Jenkins (2022) and Jenkins and Myers (2022) investigated the link between Black oral tradition and Black podcasting within the framework of alternative media. Jenkins (2022) delves into the practices by which Black podcasters not only engage with but also enrich oral traditions, reinforcing that from which they’ve come. Both highlight the imperative to contextualize Black podcasting within its historical and cultural lineage, acknowledging the medium as an extension and modern embodiment of oral storytelling

and communal dialogue that have been cornerstones of the Black experience. They argue for a greater recognition of the roles that representation and accessibility play in this emergent domain. These works suggest that Black podcasting is not only a contemporary medium for entertainment and information but also a critical space for the representation of Black voices, the preservation and evolution of Black storytelling, and the democratization of media access, serving as a potent instrument for cultural continuity and social empowerment.

Jenkins and Myers (2022) present a thematic analysis of Black podcasting, blending it with historic Black media. The first theme, community-building, is central to the ethos of Black podcasting. Jenkins and Myers (2022) illustrate the ways in which podcasters leverage their platforms to not only gather and galvanize their audience but also to distribute resources and underscore the significance of communal cohesion, particularly as a mechanism of self-care. The interaction fostered between hosts and listeners, often facilitated by digital feedback channels such as email and social media, continues the legacy of unity and solidarity historically established by traditional Black media, much like newspapers.

The second theme, resistance, is evident as Black podcasts actively subvert prevailing narratives about Black individuals by amplifying a spectrum of Black experiences and perspectives. Through this act of showcasing a plurality of voices, Black podcasting confronts stereotypes and challenges monolithic representations, asserting the multifaceted nature of Black identity and experience. This engagement in resistance through podcasting echoes the defiant spirit of traditional Black media, which has long served as a counterpoint to mainstream depictions, offering an alternative narrative that

affirms the richness and complexity of Black life.

This theme of resistance is also echoed in Chávez's (2020) examination of Latinx podcasts on NPR. Chávez's (2020) posits that NPR's *Alt.Latino*, a podcast centered on Latinx issues, functions as a platform for Latinx perspectives and tackles significant societal concerns. Chávez (2020) proposes that the podcast's categorization as a music program empowers it to undertake counteractive tasks that are unfeasible within NPR's mainstream news programming. However, Chavez also asserts that NPR's concentration on an elite audience hinders *Alt.Latino*'s objective of connecting with marginalized listeners. Lopez's (2020) provides a broader context for understanding the role of podcasting in the larger media industry, and the ways in which race intersects with media production, consumption, and representation. Lopez (2020) argues that media play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of race and ethnicity, and that podcasting provides a means of challenging dominant narratives and creating new forms of cultural and political critique.

The third theme identified by the Jenkins and Meyers (2022) is "voice", referring to the myriads of narratives, viewpoints, and expressions that coalesce within the Black public sphere. Black podcasts are praised for broadening this sphere by introducing a wider array of contributors, thus making it more reflective of the global diversity within Black communities. Florini's (2015) work echoes the arguments made by Jenkins and Myers (2022), particularly in recognizing podcasting's accessibility and its ability to circumvent traditional media gatekeepers.

This perspective validates the assertion that Black podcasting significantly enhances the Black public sphere by allowing for a proliferation of voices and by

facilitating direct engagement with audiences, thereby fostering a digitally-mediated communal space. Conversely, Thakur (2020) presents a counterpoint to this narrative by suggesting that the digital realm, while democratizing, may also dilute a collective voice by introducing a cacophony of disparate narratives. This abundance of voices could potentially fragment the community's focus and impede the formations of unified agendas. Thakur's (2020) argument raises important considerations about the balance between diversity and coherence within the Black public sphere.

Both perspectives contribute valuable insights to the conversation on Black media's role in society. Florini's (2015) position underscores the empowering potential of podcasting as a medium of self-representation and autonomy for Black creators. In contrast, Thakur (2020) prompts reflection on the implications of a highly saturated digital media landscape for the strategic cohesion and impact of Black media. Together, these analyses present a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and challenges that Black podcasting presents in the ongoing endeavor to shape media representation at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality.

Fox et. al. (2020) contribute significantly to the understanding of Black podcasting, particularly in its role as a cultural compass and a contributory element to the Black public sphere, much like Thakur (2020). Their research underscores the medium's function in disseminating Black cultural knowledge, thus enabling podcasts to serve as a contemporary archive and conduit for the lived experiences of Black individuals. Furthermore, they acknowledge podcasts as instrumental in fostering community bonds and providing a forum for social commentary and critique. The intricate dynamics of representation and access are central themes in Barner's (2021) dissertation, which delves

into the performative aspects of marginalization within Black podcasts. Barner (2021) examined how these digital platforms not only exposed the nuances of marginalization but also actively worked to undermine it by offering alternative narratives that defy mainstream conceptions. This process of contestation and subversion through podcasting emerges as a powerful means of community engagement and social examination.

This research collectively illuminates the complexity of Black podcasting as a medium that simultaneously represents and challenges the status quo. While they celebrate the medium's capacity for representation and community fortification, they also acknowledge the intricacies involved in maneuvering through the politics of representation and the intricacies of audience interaction. Black podcasts, as posited by these scholars, are not merely tools of expression but are active participants in the cultural discourse, shaping and reshaping the contours of the Black public sphere.

Similarly, Bratcher's (2021) dissertation examines the power dynamics and economic structures of Black podcasting, focusing on the role of public opinion and the monetization of podcasting as a field. She argues that Black podcasters are engaging in a form of "power to the podcasts," challenging dominant media narratives and creating new spaces for community building and social change. However, she also notes the challenges of navigating the neoliberal economy of podcasting, and the need to address issues of exploitation and representation. Florini's (2019) work, *Beyond Hashtags: Racial Politics and Black Digital Networks*, delves into the function of Black digital networks, encompassing podcasting, in contesting prevailing narratives and carving out fresh arenas for cultural and political defiance. Florini (2020; 2019; 2014) posits that Black digital

networks offer a pathway to bypass conventional power hierarchies and foster novel forms of communal action and societal transformation.

Gender studies is also explored using Black feminist perspectives in the Christian (2022) study, which delves into the ways in which Black feminist knowledge production and activism are facilitated through podcasts. Her dissertation analyzes the content, structure, and reception of several Black feminist podcasts, highlighting their potential for challenging dominant narratives and creating community-building spaces for Black women. Christian (2022) also emphasizes the importance of centering Black women's voices and experiences in podcasting, and the need to address issues of accessibility and representation in this field. Similarly, Smith (2022) reflects on her experience as a Black doctoral student using podcasting as a methodology for her research. She argues that podcasting allows for a more collaborative and participatory approach to research, as well as a means of disseminating findings to broader audiences. However, she also notes the challenges of navigating the technical and practical aspects of podcasting, as well as the need to address issues of power dynamics and representation.

While each work approaches the topic from a slightly different perspective, they all share a common concern with understanding the cultural, political, and social dimensions of this phenomenon. They highlight the ways in which Black podcasters, and representing a large majority of alternative podcasts that resist dominant narratives like Black podcasters, Latinx podcasters, are creating alternative media, challenging dominant narratives, and creating new spaces for community-building and social critique. However, they also note the challenges of navigating issues of representation,

monetization, and access in this field, and the need to address these issues to fully realize the potential of Black podcasting as a form of cultural and political resistance.

Despite the modernization of media through podcasting and the monopolized privatization of media ownership, a veil of Black liberation and integrated acceptance within media institutions remains believed within our larger collective habitus (Venkatesh, 1998; Venkatesh, 2017). I argue that the mainstream news media, a highly influential institutional habitus within our society, has often ignored the cultural habitus of the true authentic lives and personas of Black Americans, thereby benefiting from the dehumanization of Black Americans in the US mainstream media, and silencing these authentic identities (Venkatesh, 1998; Venkatesh, 2017). Therefore, the emergence and proliferation of Black media and other alternative media narratives can be interpreted as a response to the skepticism that Black individuals and other people of color may harbor towards the U.S. mainstream media's portrayal of democracy, especially concerning the coverage of local and national issues and policies (Vercellotti & Brewer, 2006). These alternative narratives are more than mere reactions; they represent a deep and considered critique of the American democratic ethos as presented by mainstream outlets.

The discourse advanced by these media stories and programs often serves as a form of investigative cultural critique, unveiling the underlying truths obscured by the dominant media narrative. This portrayal creates a "false consciousness" among viewers, a concept suggesting that the realities of racial disparities and systemic inequalities are masked by the ostensibly neutral and democratic façade of mainstream media (Entman & Rojecki, 2010; Hill, 2009; Titley, 2019). So, in essence, these alternative media platforms endeavor to illuminate the ways in which democracy, as portrayed in mainstream media,

may be compromised by underlying racial prejudices. By doing so, they challenge the prevailing narratives and offer a more nuanced and authentic representation of the experiences and perspectives of Black communities and other marginalized groups.

The advent of media networks and news shows dedicated to highlighting and amplifying Black voices and experiences has led to a cultural shift in media representation. These platforms offer a critical counter-narrative to the traditionally Eurocentric mainstream media, providing much-needed visibility to Black stories, perspectives, and experiences. However, this trend also raises important questions about the commodification of Black cultural identities - the process through which aspects of Black culture are appropriated, repackaged, and sold for profit (Austin, 2004; Cashmore, 1997; Quick, 2011; Walker, 2000). By promoting self-representation, these platforms can help to challenge systemic racism and white supremacy, fostering a more inclusive and equitable media industry (Cashmore, 1997).

The commodification of Black culture can be seen as a form of cultural recognition and validation (Cashmore, 1997; Stevens, 2021). It can also foster economic empowerment, as profits from these ventures can be reinvested into Black communities, creating a sustainable ecosystem of Black-owned media enterprises (Austin, 2004; Walker, 2000). Furthermore, these platforms can help promote Black artists, intellectuals, and influencers, providing them with opportunities to gain visibility and profit from their work (Cashmore, 1997). However, the commodification of Black culture also carries potential negative implications. When culture is transformed into a commodity, it can become diluted, decontextualized, or oversimplified. In the pursuit of broader appeal, the richness and complexity of Black culture can be reduced to stereotypical or sensational

elements that sell, leading to a form of cultural exploitation (Radin & Sunder, 2004). This can lead to the erasure of the rich diversity within the Black community, reinforcing rather than challenging harmful stereotypes (Austin, 2004; Cashmore, 1997; Cherid, 2021; Quick, 2011).

The advent of Black news shows and media networks and their subsequent commercialization entail a dual impact. Positively, such platforms can amplify Black narratives, disrupt the hegemony of mainstream media representations, and stimulate economic growth within Black communities. These platforms can serve as powerful tools for advocacy and provide a space for the celebration and preservation of Black culture. Conversely, there is a tangible risk of cultural commodification, where the intrinsic value of Black culture is jeopardized by its reduction to a mere marketable commodity. This can lead to cultural appropriation, where elements of Black culture are co-opted without proper acknowledgment or benefit to the community, and to reductive portrayals that fail to capture the depth and diversity of Black experiences. To navigate these challenges effectively, it is essential for such media outlets to consciously strive for a balance that favors genuine representation and cultural integrity over the lure of commercial success. This balance is not only a matter of ethical media practice but also a critical aspect of the broader conversations about racial justice and equity in media representation.

The complexity of the commodification of Black culture demands a nuanced approach and continuous dialogue. By examining case studies of Black news podcasts hosted on platforms like iHeartMedia and YouTube, further insight can be gained into how these platforms engage with these multifaceted issues. The analysis of such case studies will contribute to a deeper understanding of how Black media can navigate the

intersection of empowerment, representation, and commercialization in a manner that honors the cultural richness it seeks to represent.

Daily News Podcasts

In 2020, Reuters Institute, in association with Google, published a Digital Media Project about daily news podcasts and the new habits forming during the time of COVID-19, and found that they were the fastest growing in the newest platform-dominated environment. Daily news podcasts were defined as either a native and daily podcast focusing on news and current affairs, or a daily radio show repackaged as a podcast (Reuters, 2019). Martínez-Graña, Elías, & Soengas-Pérez (2023) cite Martínez-Costa Pérez and Gárate (2019) definition the concept of daily news podcasts as,

“The daily news podcast as a type of regular podcast created for on-demand multiplatform distribution by a prestigious news brand, whose purpose is to outline and explain topical daily news in a brief format, lasting between 3 to 25 min. Having emerged as a way of giving a roundup of the previous day’s news in light of the deluge of news sources and channels, they aim to offer useful content that stands out and complements other media services, making use of the production resources of the entire group” (p. 320).

The daily news podcasts in this study extend this definition with independent Black news organizations and larger media organizations both presenting daily news podcasts, directly pertaining to Black American life, instead of the sole “prestigious news brand”. As we’ll find with Roland Martin Unfiltered, the length of time and depth of content also extend to over an hour daily news program.

The landscape of news podcasting witnessed a remarkable proliferation in 2019, as delineated in the report, evidencing a 32% surge in the global count of news podcasts from January to October, with an addition of approximately 12,000 podcasts. This

expansion underscores the emergence of daily news podcasts as a distinctive and influential genre within the digital media sphere. The Digital Media Project report further dissects this category into three sub-genres, each characterized by their temporal structure and content depth.

Micro-bulletins, the most succinct format, are designed for a brief update, typically ranging from 1 to 5 minutes, offering a concise synthesis of the most pressing news. News round-ups extend the narrative to a more comprehensive 6 to 15 minutes, providing a broader overview of current events. Lastly, deep-dives allocate 20 minutes or more to explore topics with rigorous depth, granting the audience an immersive experience into the subject matter. This tripartite classification not only reflects the diverse consumption preferences of the audience but also highlights the adaptive strategies of content creators in tailoring news dissemination to various temporal windows (Reuters, 2019).

In the transition to digital media, traditional print journalists are increasingly adopting the deep-dive podcast format, serving as the most popular with consumers in the US. This approach allows for a rich narrative storytelling technique, providing comprehensive analysis and a nuanced exploration of topics that resonate with listeners seeking depth and context. The immersive nature of deep dives caters to an audience's desire for intricate storytelling, affording journalists the creative space to delve into complex subject matter over extended periods. According to the report, "private data from publishers show that listeners come back several times a week and listen to the majority of each show – completion rates tend to be between 60% and 90%" (p. 5). This format capitalizes on the digital platform's capacity for lengthy, uninterrupted content,

thus accommodating detailed expositions that were previously constrained by print media's physical limitations. Deep dive news podcasts can also be expensive, much more than their podcast counterparts, typically with a team of 15 to 30 people on their news team (Reuters, 2019).

Conversely, broadcasters with roots in radio are gravitating towards micro-bulletin podcasting. These concise segments translate well to the digital realm, offering quick, digestible updates that complement the fast-paced lifestyle of modern audiences. By converting their established radio programs into bite-sized podcasts, broadcasters maintain continuity with their traditional format while extending their reach to a digital audience. Targeted at a young, diverse demographic, these strategies bridge the gap between legacy broadcasting and contemporary media consumption habits, engaging an audience segment that traditional linear channels often fail to penetrate (Reuters, 2019).

Further detailed in the report, news podcasts represent a significant and influential niche within the digital media ecosystem. Although they constitute a modest 6% of the total podcast offerings in the Apple directory, with approximately 50,000 dedicated to news, their impact is disproportionate to their numbers. News podcasts command a substantial 21% share of the top 250 spots in Apple's episode charts, which reflects actual listener consumption rather than just new subscriptions. This notable presence suggests that news podcasts reflects a robust engagement from listeners, indicative of news podcasts' substantial leverage and influence within the digital media ecosystem. Their impact is substantial, outstripping their numerical presence and showcasing the heightened demand for current affairs in audio form (Reuters, 2019).

The broader podcast market is experiencing rapid growth, with more than 200,000 new podcasts being added annually, a trend that, while slightly slowing, is still significant. This expansion is not only due to amateur podcasters but is also propelled by the increasing number of high-quality, professionally produced content. Media entities from broadcasters to digital publishers and those transitioning from print are making substantial investments in podcasting. The news category, in particular, has seen around 12,000 new podcasts emerge in the last year alone, a 32% increase that highlights the escalating demand for news-oriented audio content. This surge in news podcasts suggests a vibrant future for the format, offering diverse and deep-reaching implications for how audiences consume news in an increasingly digital world (Reuters, 2019).

Advertising and sponsorship emerge as the primary revenue streams for daily news podcasts, even for outlets like the New York Times, which also utilizes a subscription model for other content. Podcast advertising is usually sold on a CPM (cost per thousand listens) basis, with rates often surpassing those for web and video due to the perceived brand safety of podcast content, the difficulty of ad skipping, and the relatively low ad density, which preserves a listener-friendly experience. Advertisers are particularly attracted to podcasts because of their engaged and youthful audience demographics, who are increasingly elusive in other online domains. The success of monetization through advertising is exemplified by The Economist's The Intelligence, which reportedly began turning a profit within its first six months owing to high demand for sponsorship that covered its substantial staffing costs (Reuters, 2019).

Despite the lucrative nature of this model, the use of host-read advertisements in news podcasts has raised concerns about trust and the potential impact on editorial

integrity. As a result, sponsorships, where a single brand is featured exclusively over a period, are gaining popularity. Additionally, the use of generic spot advertisements is on the rise, though there is caution about this potentially diluting the premium and intimate appeal of news podcasts. To navigate these issues, some publishers opt for a neutral delivery of ads, employing distinct voices separate from the content creators, with no background music, to maintain a clear demarcation between content and advertising. This practice is part of the effort to safeguard the listener experience and the podcast's editorial value while securing the financial benefits of advertising (Reuters, 2019).

Emerging trends in podcast monetization show some publishers experimenting with exclusive content for subscribers as a way to add value to their offerings. For instance, Denmark's Politiken runs a hybrid model for its daily podcast, making it freely available twice a week while reserving mid-week episodes for subscribers. This strategy arises partly from a lack of traditional advertising interest in smaller markets. Other publishers, such as Zetland, a Danish slow news outlet with a membership of around 13,000, are pivoting towards subscriber-based models, transforming their operations to prioritize audio journalism. Their approach includes making all news stories available in audio format and providing a daily news podcast, which has become an integral part of the subscriber package. Engagement levels are high, with substantial portions of the audience tuning in regularly, and the audio format proving especially popular among young professionals with limited time. These developments suggest that smaller markets or publishers may adopt business models distinct from larger counterparts, with a greater focus on subscription-based audio content to drive engagement and reduce member turnover, instead of relying solely on advertising revenue (Reuters, 2019).

While research specifically dedicated to Black daily news podcasts has yet to be fully developed, the investigative efforts of Carvajal et al. (2022) provide valuable insights into the burgeoning field within the context of Spanish-speaking media. Their analysis penetrates the strategic core of the Spanish-language news podcasting sector, shedding light on the innovative business models that are emerging in tandem with this digital auditory phenomenon. The maturation of daily news podcasts has revealed a potent avenue for media establishments to bolster their strategic influence and to diversify their economic prospects. In a landscape increasingly dominated by digital platforms, these podcasts offer a dynamic medium through which media outlets may consolidate their brand positioning while simultaneously exploring novel fiscal avenues (Carvajal et al., 2022).

Carvajal et al. (2022) study also delineates the existence of two distinct editorial models within this arena. The first is characterized by its depth and nuance, providing listeners with comprehensive analyses that delve into the complexities of current events. This model offers a narrative richness and a level of detail that resonates with an audience seeking a thorough understanding of the news. In contrast, the second model adopts a succinct, bulletin-style approach, reminiscent of traditional radio news round-ups (Carvajal et al., 2022). This format is tailored to the rhythm of contemporary life, catering to listeners who demand quick, accessible updates on the latest happenings. By offering both in-depth reporting and concise summaries, daily news podcasts can meet a wide spectrum of listener preferences and time constraints (Carvajal et al., 2022).

Asier and Luis Miguel (2022) mirrored these findings, with their analysis of daily news podcasts in Spain. “The Daily” from The New York Times exemplifies how a

traditional newspaper successfully ventured into the podcasting arena, revolutionizing news delivery through audio formats. This podcast, achieving global acclaim with four million daily listeners and over three billion downloads, highlights the significant potential of news podcasts to rejuvenate traditional media. The investigation of daily news podcasts in Spain, exploring programs like “Quién dice qué”, “AM”, “El Mundo al día”, and “Un tema al día”, underscores the emergence of two distinct models in podcasting. The first model closely mirrors traditional radio with bulletins and reports, while the second adopts a more innovative approach similar to that of “The Daily”. This latter model emphasizes depth, narrative dissemination, and a conversational tone, which collectively aim to redefine audio news narratives and harness the digital distribution capabilities of newspapers.

Applying these insights to the context of Black news podcasting in the U.S., it is evident that such platforms have a unique opportunity to reshape news delivery within the Black community. Black news podcasts may also benefit from the innovative model to offer in-depth discussions, personalized narratives, and community-centric topics that traditional media often overlooks. By doing so, these podcasts not only engage with their audience on a deeper level but also foster a sense of community and identity.

Additionally, leveraging the conversational tone and narrative flexibility of podcasts could allow Black news platforms to address complex social issues in a more accessible and relatable manner. This strategic use of podcasting could significantly enhance the visibility and impact of Black voices in the media landscape, providing a robust alternative to conventional news sources while catering to the unique needs and preferences of the Black audience in the U.S.

Black Online Spaces

In the histories of media and cultural studies, the concept of “Black Online Spaces” (BOS) has emerged as a focal point, articulating the ways in which Black communities navigate, construct, and engage within digital realms (Brock, 2012; 2009). This burgeoning scholarship has documented the idiosyncratic dynamics of Black online communities, emphasizing their historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts (Florini, 2014). The emergence of digital spaces has revolutionized the modes of community formation, interaction, and activism, particularly for historically marginalized groups. Black digital spaces, because of this digital revolution, have become critical sites for the articulation of Black identity, culture, and politics (Brock, 2012; Florini, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020; Ng, 2022; Nummi et al., 2019; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022; Zulli, 2020). These spaces offer unprecedented opportunities for community building, narrative formation, and social critique that challenge the physical and metaphorical boundaries of traditional Black communal spaces (Brock, 2012; Evans, 2020; Hardy, 2022).

At the heart of Black digital spaces is the quest for a “home” online a place where Black individuals and communities can express themselves authentically, engage in cultural practices, and mobilize for social and political causes. This notion of home is predicated on the idea of an inclusive space that is carved out within, yet apart from, the dominant digital culture, offering respite and recognition for Black identities often sidelined in mainstream discourse (Hardy, 2022). The early 2000s marked the pioneering era of Black digital spaces. Online forums and message boards like Okayplayer provided the initial scaffolding for what evolved into a more extensive network of digital platforms, including social media, which now facilitate diverse expressions of Blackness.

These early digital platforms were not merely spaces for conversation but served as incubators for a burgeoning Black digital culture that intertwined music, politics, and community engagement (Hardy, 2022). By leveraging the connective power of the internet, these spaces have transcended geographic limitations, allowing for the formation of a global Black consciousness and community (Evans, 2020).

As these spaces have matured, they have become instrumental in shaping the discourse around Black issues, providing platforms for storytelling, debate, and advocacy (Aziz & Beydoun, 2020; Byrne, 2008; Noreiga, 2022; Pettijohn, 2022; Robinson, 2017; Squires, 2002; Williams Fayne, 2023). The impact of Black digital spaces extends beyond individual expression, contributing to the cultural and political mobilization that challenges systemic inequalities and advocates for social justice (Brock, 2009; Davis, 2018; Ng, 2022; Steele & Hardy, 2023). They have become arenas where Black voices can be amplified, where Black culture can be celebrated, and where the complexities of Black identity can be explored in depth (Maragh, 2018). Yet, the development of Black digital spaces is not without its challenges. Issues of accessibility, representation, and the replication of offline hierarchies in online environments remain areas of concern (Brock, 2009, 2012; Davis, 2020; Steele & Hardy, 2023; Williams, 2017).

As digital technology continues to evolve, so too will the nature of these spaces and the interactions within them. The critical examination of Black digital spaces, therefore, is an ongoing project one that requires continual reflection and adaptation as new platforms emerge and new voices join the digital chorus (Evans, 2020; Hardy, 2022; Maragh, 2018). As podcasting proliferates as a pivotal media platform, it is essential to situate Black news podcasts and their networks within this broader milieu of BOS. The

next section intertwines these two domains, shedding light on the intersectionality, implications, and trajectories that emerge.

Black News Podcasts and Black Online Spaces

To comprehend the essence of Black news podcasts, it is crucial to recognize the historical continuities they embody. Historically, Black communities have harnessed media, ranging from print to radio, to voice their narratives, challenge mainstream discourses, and foster community cohesion (Squires, 2007). In the digital epoch, BOS, epitomized by platforms like Black Twitter, have manifested as contemporary incarnations of these historical media practices (Clark, 2015). Black news podcasts and their networks can be construed as an extension of this lineage. They amalgamate the oral traditions inherent to Black cultures with the democratizing potential of digital platforms (Miró-Llinares et al., 2018). BOS research underscores the significance of spatial autonomy, where Black communities carve out digital territories to articulate their perspectives, often as counter-narratives to mainstream media (Brock, 2012). Black news podcasts resonate deeply with this ethos. By establishing independent networks and platforms, podcasts transcend the gatekeeping constraints of traditional media, offering nuanced, community-centric narratives that often challenge hegemonic discourses (Berry, 2016).

The commodification of BOS has been a salient theme in digital studies, with platforms often capitalizing on the cultural capital generated by Black users without equitable remuneration (Noble, 2018). Black news podcasts, while echoing these dynamics, also present a divergence. With the ascent of monetization strategies tailored to podcasting, from sponsorships to premium content, Black news podcast networks are

strategically positioned to harness their cultural capital, ensuring that economic dividends flow back into the community (Griffith et al., 2022). As Black news podcasts burgeon, they grapple with an array of challenges and opportunities. The perennial tension between authenticity and commercialization, inherent to BOS (Brock, 2012), is palpable in podcasting realms. The quest for monetization can sometimes clash with the imperative to retain the authentic voice and ethos (Berry, 2016).

Nevertheless, the horizon is full of opportunities. Collaborative ecosystems, where Black news podcasts forge synergies with other digital entities in BOS, can amplify reach and impact. Moreover, by harnessing emerging technologies, from AI-driven content curation to immersive audio experiences, Black news podcasts can continually reinvent their engagement paradigms (Llinares et al., 2018). The relationship between Black news podcasts and Black oral storytelling (BOS) signifies that these podcasts serve as a continuation and evolution of a longstanding tradition in Black cultural expression. By placing podcasts in the context of BOS, researchers and media creators are better equipped to appreciate and contribute to the ongoing narrative of Black digital expression in ways that are attuned to its historical significance and current social impact.

CHAPTER V: IHEARTRADIO & YOUTUBE

In structuring the case studies that form the core of this political economic research on Black news podcasts, the approach was methodical and purposeful. The case studies were chosen based on a set of criteria that ensured they exemplified the diverse spectrum of Black news podcasting. These criteria included the size and reach of the podcasts, the variety in content and focus areas, and the distinctive ways each engages with its audience. A content analysis of the news programs was conducted to understand the narratives, themes, and discourse within the podcasts, coupled with an engagement analysis of their audience-targeted initiatives, programs, and events.

These case studies were selected because they offer a cross-section of the Black news podcasting phenomenon, from grassroots initiatives to more commercially successful ventures, all featured on free to access and view platforms, iHeartRadio for audio-only programs, and YouTube for video-based news podcast programs. This diversity allows for a comprehensive understanding of the field, ensuring the study captures a full picture of the current state and potential trajectories of Black news podcasting in multiple global digital spaces.

iHeartRadio and YouTube are significant platforms for the case studies in a political economic analysis of Black news podcasting due to their expansive reach and monetization frameworks, which affect how Black narratives are disseminated globally.

iHeartRadio, with its traditional ties to radio broadcasting and recent foray into digital podcasting, offers insights into the evolution of Black auditory media within institutional and corporate structures. YouTube's global platform enables an unprecedented scale of content sharing and audience building, influencing the global

reach and engagement of Black news podcasts. These platforms illustrate different facets of the political economy, from corporate media structures to algorithm-driven visibility, shaping the access and influence of Black news narratives worldwide. Utilizing iHeartRadio and YouTube analytics is crucial for this research as it offers direct access to empirical data on how audiences are interacting with their platformed podcasts. This data, encompassing listenership, viewership, and engagement rates, as well as demographics and advertising patterns, is instrumental in painting a detailed picture of the audience reach and impact of these podcasts. Analyzing this data allows for an evidence-based understanding of the success and challenges faced by these media forms, providing insights into how effectively they engage with global audiences and how they navigate the political economy of the digital media landscape.

iHeartMedia/iHeartRadio

In July 2008, Bain Capital, and Thomas H. Lee Partners, two private equity firms, acquired Clear Channel Communications for \$17.9 billion (Reuters, 2008), which later became iHeartMedia, now owners of over 850 broadcast stations. The buyout valued at \$24 billion was executed at the peak of the leveraged buyout boom. However, the timing could not have been worse, as the financial crisis hit the same year, leading to a sharp decrease in advertising revenues - a primary source of iHeartMedia's income (Hooke, 2021). The central issue between Bain Capital, Thomas H. Lee Partners, and iHeartMedia revolves around the large amount of debt the company accumulated due to this leveraged buyout. In the years following the acquisition, and iHeartMedia found itself under increasing financial pressure.

The company's earnings were not sufficient to manage the debt from the buyout, which, along with the drop in advertising revenues, left iHeartMedia in a precarious financial position. In 2018, this led iHeartMedia to file for bankruptcy, citing a debt of over \$20 billion (Hals, 2018). The bankruptcy plan included a debt-to-equity swap, which significantly reduced the company's debt while giving creditors equity stakes (Christman, 2017). After a year-long process, iHeartMedia successfully emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2019, reducing its debt from \$16.1 billion to \$5.75 billion, and the company went public again, after separating from Clear Channel Outdoor, now two separate companies (Jacobson, 2019). However, the process led to tension and lawsuits with creditors, some of whom argued they had not received equitable treatment under the bankruptcy plan. Bain Capital and Thomas H. Lee Partners retained a 10% stake in the restructured company but lost a significant part of their original investment, though they broke even (Biswas & Steele, 2018; Carey, 2018).

Content

iHeartRadio's podcast content spans a diverse array of topics and genres, including music, news, talk shows, true crime, comedy, and more. The programming is featured on traditional broadcast radio stations and online via their platform and app. Some of the most popular shows under iHeartMedia include "Stuff You Should Know," "The Ron Burgundy Podcast," and "Atlanta Monster" (Jacobson, 2019). The move to include podcasting has helped iHeartMedia reach a younger, digitally savvy demographic that traditionally consumes less broadcast radio but is committed to audio content overall (iHeartMedia, 2019). According to Edison Research's 2022 The Infinite Dial Report, the iHeartRadio app and its podcast content cater to these listeners, mostly 18-34, allowing

them to access audio content on-demand, a feature that fits seamlessly into their mobile and flexible lifestyles (Edison Research, 2022). An analysis of 482 U.S. radio stations shows a significant lag in the adoption of podcasting by commercial radio, especially at the local level, where nearly two-thirds of stations do not offer any podcasts, and fewer than 20% offer multiple podcasts. Therefore, podcasts are predominantly found in larger markets or produced by major radio companies, reflecting a trend of decreasing investment in local radio, influenced by conventional revenue-centric strategies (Crider, 2022). Despite the rise of streaming and podcasts, traditional AM/FM radio continues to be a popular choice among Black listeners (Ho, 2020). Nielsen's 2021 African American Consumer Report stated traditional radio reaches 92% of Black Americans each week, and Black listeners account for over 21 million minutes of radio listenership a week (Nielsen, 2021).

Funding

Over half of iHeartMedia's stock is owned by institutional investors, with Pacific Investment Management Company LLC being the largest shareholder at 17%, followed by the next two largest shareholders with 12% and 7.5%. The top 8 shareholders together hold about 51% of the company. CEO Robert Pittman personally owns 0.7% of the shares. While hedge funds have a minor stake, insiders own US\$4.9m worth of stock in this US\$330m company, and the general public holds a 20% stake, giving them a notable yet not controlling influence on the company's direction (Yahoo! Finance, 2023).

iHeartMedia's funding strategy for its podcasting venture demonstrates the company's ability to adapt and innovate in an ever-changing digital media terrain, including their investment in Stuff Media for podcast publishing, and Jelli, for Smart

Audio data and analytics (Jacobson, 2019). The funding model seems designed to leverage a variety of revenue streams. Traditional advertising continues to play a pivotal role in iHeartMedia's revenue model, even though the advertising market has seen an overall decline since the pandemic (Huang et al., 2021). As seen in their fourth quarter results in December 2022, iHeartMedia's consolidated revenue increased \$63.9 million or 6%, compared to December 2021. Digital and political advertising revenue fluctuated due to the decrease in the overall advertising market but recovered due to 2022 being a midterm election year. Political advertising helped boost their multiplatform, audio & media services advertising, while the demand for digital advertising helped drive their podcast revenue to an increase \$11.5 million (iHeart, 2023).

iHeartMedia launched the iHeartPodcast AdSuite, a comprehensive advertising mix for podcasts, revealed at Podfront LA 2020. The AdSuite includes several products: AdSuite Insights provides a concise analysis of podcast analytics; iHeartPodcast Boost amplifies podcasts across iHeartMedia's radio stations; DSAI+LAI offers dynamic ad insertion targeting specific audiences; iHeartPodcast TakeOver ensures a brand's ad is the first one heard across all iHeartPodcasts; Podfluencers partners podcast talent with brands for integrated promotion; and Storytellers creates personalized ad content like custom episodes. With advertising as the main revenue for news podcasts, iHeartMedia seems to be working to enhance the experience for both listeners and advertisers, targeting quality content and high engagement, particularly among the youth. The company's innovative approach reflects a sophisticated understanding of the digital media ecosystem's potential, aiming to shape the future of podcast monetization (iHeart, 2020).

According to Conal Byrne, CEO of iHeartMedia’s digital audio group, including the podcasting, most of their “house ads” (95%), are marketed through Facebook to reach a specific niche that would be interested in their podcast show content, as podcasting is also a niche-interest market as advertising (Patel, 2023). According to Byrne was interviewed about his radio and podcasting strategies, stating:

“Conal and iHeart Digital earned that success by doing some unconventional things. Whereas other big podcasting players like Spotify and Apple have tried to boost revenue through subscriptions or platform exclusivity, Conal shunned those approaches and said he’s going for big audience reach, made possible in part by his ability to run ads and even shows on iHeart’s huge network of traditional radio stations.”

Brands and businesses sponsor individual podcast episodes or entire shows, reaching a highly engaged audience. Some of their most current in-podcast promotion partnerships are 23andMe, Blue Apron, Gillette, Lumosity, Stamps.com, SquareSpace, Indeed, and ZipRecruiter (iHeartMedia, 2023). The advantage of podcast advertising lies in its unobtrusive nature. As a native part of the content, it is less likely to be skipped by listeners and can be tailored to suit the theme or tone of the podcast, enhancing its effectiveness.

Byrne was also the general manager of the *Stuff You Should Know* podcast (Patel, 2023), interestingly, which is also one of the most popular podcasts and relatively podcast/advertiser relationships among iHeart podcast promotions overall (iHeartMedia, 2023). Support for the *Stuff You Should Know* podcast includes 23andMe; Blinds.com; Blue Apron; Casper; ForHims; Light Stream; Lumosity; MeUndies; Naadam; Quip; RxBar; SimpliSafe; SquareSpace; Stamps.com; and ZipRecruiter (iHeart, 2023). iHeartMedia’s vast podcast network allows advertisers to target their ads based on the

podcast's demographic, ensuring the message reaches an audience more likely to respond positively to the advertiser's product or service. Beyond conventional advertising, iHeartMedia has tapped into the potential of live events as an additional revenue stream. This strategy involves hosting events related to popular podcasts, such as live recordings, interviews, or meet-and-greets with podcast hosts and guests.

One of the largest events is their iHeartRadio Music Festival, occurring annually, for thirteen years. Fans are typically willing to pay for tickets to see their favorite artists played on the iHeartRadio apps and radio stations, providing a direct source of income to iHeartMedia. Moreover, live events can also attract sponsorship and partnership opportunities, thus enhancing revenue potential. Some of the 2023 iHeartRadio Music Festival sponsors were Hyundai, Capital One, M&M's, T-Mobile, MGM Resorts, and Audible. Capital One offered cardholders access passes, VIP packages, and private soundcheck performances (iHeart, 2023).

Subscription services, specifically iHeartRadio Plus and iHeartRadio All Access, represent another crucial component of iHeartMedia's podcasting funding model. For a monthly fee, these services provide subscribers with benefits such as ad-free listening, unlimited skips, instant replay of songs from the radio, and offline access to podcasts and music (iHeartMedia, 2023). This model is appealing to listeners who are willing to pay for a premium experience, and it offers iHeartMedia a consistent and predictable revenue stream. Lastly, iHeartMedia's podcasting division also benefits from syndicating its content to other providers, optimally shaped by their partnership with Liberated Syndication (Libsyn) Podcasting (iHeart, 2016). Through syndication, iHeartMedia allows other platforms to rebroadcast its podcast content, typically in return for a fee.

This enables iHeartMedia to maximize the reach and profitability of its content while also capitalizing on the distribution networks and audiences of these external platforms.

By leveraging both traditional and novel revenue streams, iHeartMedia is well-positioned to sustain and grow its podcasting operations, even as the media industry continues to evolve. iHeartMedia has grappled with transforming its business model, technology infrastructure, and content strategy to compete with native digital platforms. Martínez-Costa, Amoedo-Casais, & Moreno-Moreno (2022) found that the integration of podcasts by digital native media brands in Spain treat podcasts as integral to their journalistic products and services, seeing them as a vehicle to explore the informative and expressive capabilities of the format. The most popular types of podcasts among these brands are those that address current affairs through conversational formats, which include both audio and video. These podcasts are often serialized and original productions that are tailored for the media outlet's website and distributed across various platforms, indicating a strategic approach to harnessing podcasts to expand their journalistic influence in the digital ecosystem. iHeart's strategy is akin to these findings, driving them to a great competitive position.

Furthermore, the company had to navigate a complex bankruptcy process in 2018 due to a substantial debt burden, a legacy of its aggressive acquisition strategy under the previous moniker Clear Channel Communications. iHeartMedia's journey through the podcasting revolution is one marked by strategic evolution, commendable successes, and significant challenges. Its transformation from a traditional radio broadcaster to a major player in the podcasting arena illuminates the broader shifts within the media environment driven by technological innovation and changing audience preferences.

Looking forward, iHeartMedia's ability to adapt, innovate, and cater to its listeners will continue to define its role in the podcasting industry and beyond.

iHeartRadio's established audio media infrastructure and its move into digital podcasting provide an opportunity to study traditional media's adaptation to new digital forms. YouTube's global platform represents the democratization of content creation and dissemination, allowing Black podcasters to bypass traditional gatekeepers and connect directly with a global audience. Together, these case studies exemplify the diverse modalities through which Black podcasting continues the legacy of the Black press while innovating within and expanding upon the digital sphere, thus advancing my argument about the evolution of Black media in a contemporary context.

YouTube

An Alphabet/Google subsidiary, YouTube, is a video-streaming and sharing platform founded in 2005, with over 2 billion monthly users and over 120 million daily visitors (Leskin, 2020). YouTube was created by three PayPal employees - Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim at a dinner party (Dickey, 2013). Their vision was to make a platform that would simplify video sharing online, though it started as a video dating platform. Between 2005 and 2006, YouTube had their first one million views from a Nike ad and a completed a digital partnership with NBC to show their fall TV show lineup. In November 2006, Google, recognizing YouTube's potential, acquired YouTube for \$1.65 billion in stock (Associated Press, 2006). YouTube has significantly expanded since 2015, and podcasts represent one of the latest frontiers it has ventured into as it unintentionally became the most-used podcast platforms (Shapiro, 2022). Initially, podcasters utilized YouTube as an additional distribution channel, repurposing audio

content into video format. However, the platform's vast user base, superior discoverability, and monetization options have increasingly attracted podcasters, transforming YouTube into a premier podcasting platform.

In 2020, YouTube dedicated a part of their platform directly to podcasts (YouTube, 2020). They even developed their own app dedicated to podcasting, available to download on Android devices, last updated in 2023, with mixed user reviews. YouTube's business partners and deals reflect its intent to bolster its podcasting content. The podcast exclusive page features some of the top podcasts on their site, ranging from niche podcasts focused on Los Angeles culture to Black media powerhouse podcasts like "Drink Champs" from Revolt and "Million Dollaz Worth of Game" from the Barstool Sports podcast network (YouTube, 2023).

YouTube's algorithm tailors these ads to each viewer's interests and browsing habits, making them more effective, including a new artificial intelligence (A.I.) ad aggregator service, called "Spotlight Moments" that can target content by cultural themes for advertisers to select from content playlists to promote their products and services (Perez, 2023). In addition, YouTube offers a subscription service, YouTube Premium, that removes ads and provides other perks for a monthly fee, part of which goes to content creators based on viewer engagement metrics. According to Yahoo, in late 2023, YouTube took stricter precautions for users who implemented ad-blockers into their search engines, hoping to help reduce users who are restricting their ability to earn in their current funding model (Moon, 2023).

Known as being the most popular free video platform in the world, according to Reuters' 2023 Digital News Report, YouTube is the leading majority of social media

news sources compared to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok (p. 13). YouTube's extensive user base, diverse news content, and robust monetization options present significant opportunities and some limitations for certain creators. YouTube is being used as a learning tool during the pandemic amongst other things. As podcasting continues to grow in popularity, YouTube is poised to remain a significant player in this burgeoning media industry.

According to the Reuters' Digital News Report 2023, in the "social_sources" variable, YouTube is the leading majority of social media news sources compared to Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok (p. 13). More specifically, YouTube personalities led in attention in YouTube news compared to mainstream news outlets/mainstream journalists; smaller or alternative news sources; politicians/political activists; personalities (incl. celebrities and influencers); ordinary people (p. 13). In the "social_subjects" variable, participants rated the proportion of content they pay most attention to in various social networks they use for news (p. 14). YouTube news was ranked at 45% in national politics; and business and economic news was used by 39% of participants while 36% used it for climate news.

Notably, 32 % of participants used YouTube to watch news about the War in Ukraine. Thirty five percent equally watched YouTube for news about health and for fun news that makes them laugh, while only 24% used YouTube for social justice news (p.14). Shifts towards people using YouTube as a news source is less noticed, however, the demand for more video-led news is considerably obvious even with the inclusion of TikTok with YouTube overall (p. 13). In a combined sample of the US, UK, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Australia, Brazil, and Ireland,

YouTube ranked second in overall most accessed social network for a news source in the last week from 2014-2023 (p. 13).

YouTube also partners with Reuters and other mainstream news outlets to provide customized news content for their viewers on their YouTube News channel, however, they have no plans to institute a YouTube news business. Therefore, as news steadily evolves into a more social experience, YouTube is an essential content distribution catalyst for news content creation, dissemination, and access. There is an interesting relationship between traditional media such as broadcast radio and television, and new media, such as YouTube (Kelley, 2010; Newman et al., 2021).

A Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted in late 2020 found that around a quarter (26%) of Americans use YouTube for their news source, following Facebook, which a third of Americans primarily use to consume their news. Around three quarters of U.S. adults (73%) use YouTube, with 90% of 18-24 year old state using it (Perrin, 2019). YouTube viewers place high regard on politics, as seen with cable news and radio talk programs. (Pew Research Center, 2011). Twenty-one percent of all top news stories were about the U.S. government or politics, “often accompanied by emphatic personal analysis or evaluations” (p. 3). However, only 9% of YouTube’s top stories remained at the top the following week, compared to 50% of the top five stories from the mainstream press. So, YouTube allows for a grander access to different news media outlets, however, the longevity and consistency of news stories still seem to be most successful with traditional media, like newspapers and online news.

According to Pew Research Center (2020), YouTube: News and Politics channels typically fall under five categories: YouTube channels; news organization channels;

public figure channels; personality-driven channels; and independent channels. News organization channels are linked to external news organizations, such as CNN or YouTube. YouTube channels are hosted by a recurring personality who did not have a public persona until the creation of the show and/or channel, even if they currently have some public presence. YouTube channels also often operate as independent channels as well, as they are not clearly affiliated with an external news organization. Personality-driven channels have a recurring host who becomes the central focus of the program.

As such, these news channels can be affiliated with an external news organization, partnered with another organization, or independent. Public figure channels are personality-driven as they typically feature hosts who were previously famous before the start of the news channels. Public figure channels are typically affiliated with an external news organization. The news and politics channels used in this study will be a mixture of all the above mentioned. Seven-in-ten of the most popular independent news channels have a personality-oriented structure, whereas 22% of popular YouTube news channels connect with a news organization. The individuals who rule most of these autonomous channels tend to be YouTube personalities (i.e., those who rose to prominence through their YouTube presence) rather than those who had prior public-figure status (13 %) (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Around 25% of all U.S. adults use YouTube for their news as an “important way to stay informed” (Pew Research Center, 2020). Almost split evenly, adult Americans watch independent (42%) and mainstream news organizations (49%) almost equally, and 23% also visit and return to both types of news channels on occasion. On YouTube, the top news stories between 2009-2010 overlapped with traditional media eight out of 49

weeks studied by Pew Research Center (2011). Independent news channels and mainstream news channels are both thriving on YouTube, which also illuminates that American adults no longer feel constrained to only watch the news programs from traditional media outlets and are beginning to get more comfortable with independent news outlets.

The most popular news stories on YouTube are either international news or political news, including most often, a politician's faux pas. Known and used primarily as a visual media platform, YouTube's news sharing popularity is more dependent on the video's aesthetics and interest level of the news topic rather than the overall newsworthiness of the main news topic in the video. Therefore, the news video thumbnail visuals may be seen as more important a viewer sharing news videos rather than the titles and topics alone. The visual representation of the story greatly influences a citizen's decision to share the video. Though sharing is a high indicator of citizen participation, YouTube is also the least social of its new media cohort. Citizen participation is not derived from comments under news videos but rather through selection of the video alone, and sometimes through the sharing of that video with others; clicks on YouTube matter more than comments.

YouTube, initially a simple video-sharing platform, has transformed into a pivotal player in the digital media landscape. Its journey from a modest startup by three PayPal employees to a Google-owned powerhouse reflects its significant growth and adaptability. With over 2 billion monthly users, YouTube has transcended its original purpose, now serving as a primary source of entertainment, podcasting, and news. The platform's expansion into podcasting has been particularly noteworthy, capitalizing on its

vast user base and advanced features to become a preferred choice for podcasters. Furthermore, YouTube's role in news dissemination has grown, surpassing other social media platforms in user preference for news content. It has become a key destination for a wide range of news, from national politics and global events to more niche and independent narratives. This shift towards YouTube for news consumption, coupled with its diverse range of content and user engagement, underlines its significant impact and evolving role in the contemporary media ecosystem.

CHAPTER VI: BIN 640: BLACK INFORMATION NETWORK

For a deeper analysis of iHeartRadio Black news podcasting programs, in the following sections, this study will analyze the Black Information Network (BIN), an audio-only podcasting network on the iHeartMedia/iHeartRadio platform, which also broadcasts daily on traditional urban radio stations nationwide.

The narrative of Atlanta's WGST, now BIN, is marked by historical incidents of contestation and strategic shifts reflective of the intricate balance of media power, economic interests, and regulatory oversight. Notably, the FCC's decision in the 1940's to return the station's operation to Georgia Tech, rather than to Southern Broadcasting or Atlanta attorneys Lucas and Jenkins, was indicative of the regulator's preference for non-commercial trusteeship. This preference was underscored by the FCC's historical opposition to media consolidation. The ruling not only affected the commercial broadcasters involved, either financially or through operational cessation, but also reinforced Georgia Tech's capacity for educational enhancement through radio (Smith, 2001).

The storied history of Atlanta's 640 AM radio, known today as BIN, reflects a dynamic evolution in broadcasting. Initially renowned for launching rock 'n roll in the 1950s and later diversifying its format to capture a broader audience, the station made significant shifts through the decades. From Easy Listening in the 1960s to Top 40 and live sports in the 1970s, and increasing its broadcast strength in the 1980s, WGST was a pivotal media player. By the 1990s, it featured notable personalities like Sean Hannity and broadcasted Atlanta Braves games. The 2000s saw a rebranding to Hispanic sports talk before transitioning to the Black Information Network (BIN) in 2020, aiming to

provide news with a Black perspective as part of iHeartMedia’s initiative (Ho, 2020; iHeart, 2020).

In June 2020, iHeartMedia innovatively transformed Atlanta’s 640/WGST-AM, a station experiencing dwindling ratings, into the pioneering Black Information Network (Atlanta’s BIN 640 AM), (Ho, 2020; iHeart, 2020; RadioInsight, 2020). This marked a significant shift in the station’s focus, delivering 24/7 national and local news from a Black perspective. Operating as a standalone business, owned by iHeartMedia through its subsidiary iHM Licenses, LLC, the launch of BIN was uniquely heralded across several culturally diverse cities including Atlanta, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis, New Orleans, and San Francisco (Ho, 2020; iHeart, 2020). This was done by broadcasting impactful speeches such as Malcolm X’s “The Ballot or the Bullet” and Michelle Obama’s “Our Side of the Story is about to Be Told” for a full day, setting the stage for the introduction of BIN’s new programming the following day (AllAccess, 2020; Ho, 2020; iHeart, 2020). BIN’s program started as a 1-minute continuous bulletin format every hour, akin to Carvajal et al. (2022) second editorial model and Reuters Institute’s finding of bulletin-style news programs as the preferred type of news format with radio broadcasting organizations.

Programming

The Black Information Network (BIN) houses BIN and is encapsulated by its compelling slogan “Because Truth Matters,” alongside Freedom’s Journal’s historic motto, “We wish to plead our own cause,” both resonate profoundly with the principles of Black media empowerment. These expressions, originating from different historical periods, converge in their shared dedication to elevating and accurately representing

Black voices and perspectives, particularly in a media environment that has frequently marginalized or misconstrued these communities. BIN's array of podcast network programs exemplify this commitment. The lineup includes a variety of news programs such as "BIN's Black Information News Daily" and #RolandMartinUnfiltered, which offer critical and timely insights into current affairs. Delving into activism and political discourse, podcasts like "The Breakdown with Shaun King," "Waiting on Reparations," and "Pod Save the People" provide in-depth analysis and commentary on the issues central to the Black community (BIN, 2022).

For sports enthusiasts, programs like "All The Smoke with Matt Barnes and Stephen Jackson" bring the perspectives of Black athletes to the forefront. In the realm of music, "Questlove Supreme" showcases conversations with Grammy-Award-winning hip-hop artists, adding a rich cultural dimension to the network. "One Hundred: The Ed Gordon Podcast", hosted by historical BET interviewer who stayed with the BET intermittingly for four decades, offers a broad spectrum of interviews with influential Black figures from various fields, including artists, journalists, pastors, and politicians. BIN also engages listeners in critical race conversations through cultural programs such as "Dear Culture," "Code Switch" by NPR, and "Civic Cipher," the latter addressing issues relevant to both Black and Brown communities. The network further delves into historical narratives with programs like "In Black America" and "Black History Year," shedding light on pivotal moments in Black history (iHeart, 2023).

A notable highlight in BIN's programming was the in-depth investigative crime podcast series aired from May to August 2021, which meticulously unraveled the circumstances surrounding the 2018 death of Ferguson activist Danyé Jones, who was

found hanged from a tree, though the police deemed it a suicide, and his mother deemed it a lynching (Sen, 2020). This series exemplifies BIN's dedication to uncovering and reporting on critical issues that impact the Black community, much like Ida B. Wells. Furthermore, BIN maintains a website featuring the latest news reports and commentary from Black journalists like Vanessa Tyler, Mike Stevens, Teri McCready, Ramses Ja, and numerous other podcast creators and speakers, enriching its offerings and reinforcing its role as a pivotal voice in Black media, while also being featured in the iHeartRadio app. Through this diverse range of programming and channels, BIN continues to uphold its mission of providing truthful, impactful, and representative media content that resonates with and empowers the Black community (iHeart, 2023).

Funding

Financial support for BIN comes from their "National Founding Partners": Bank of America, GEICO, Verizon, CVS Health, USA, Lowe's, McDonald's, Sony, Verizon, and 23andMe, with the goal of engaging and supporting the Black community (Ho, 2020; iHeart, 2020). Some sponsored podcast shows and content, for example, "GEICO's Generational Story Time", feature interviews from Black Americans from various generations to compare the Black experience (iHeart, 2023). Topics central to the podcast program were Black family accounts of America's problematic and traumatic racial climate and how their activism empowered change in their community. Other topics were related to the connection to Black culture and hair, and mental health stigmas in the Black community and how to find help (iHeart, 2023). Furthermore, the partnership is manifested through press releases highlighting the latest endeavors of corporations like

McDonald's and donations with Verizon, showcasing their initiatives and contributions to the network and the community at large (iHeart, 2023; Verizon, 2020).

In 2020, BIN is distributed nationally through the iHeartRadio app, which includes 14 other broadcast radio stations across markets in Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, Charlotte, San Francisco, Nashville, and others, many of which are on FM (Ho, 2020; iHeart, 2020). BIN announced its strategic expansion into all 32 affiliate markets starting January 2022. This expansion was set to enhance local news coverage, addressing vital issues affecting the Black communities it serves. Since its inception in June 2020, BIN has become accessible through the iHeartRadio app across the U.S., and is also distributed nationally through the iHeartRadio app, available across more than 250 platforms and 2,000 devices. The expansion aims to not only extend its reach but also bolster local engagement and reporting (iHeart, 2021).

This initiative also heralds new job opportunities in the journalism sector, including roles for news anchors, reporters, a Managing Editor, and a Podcast Managing Editor, reflecting BIN's commitment to deepening its news coverage and operational capacity. The network's growth is underscored by the promotion of key personnel: Tanita Myers advances to Vice President of News Operations, Chris Thompson to Vice President of Network Operations, and Lauren Crawford to Senior Director of Digital and Social Strategy. These leadership adjustments are poised to drive BIN's future growth and effectiveness in serving the Black community. BIN's operation, supported by iHeartMedia's vast resources, underscores a significant evolution in media addressing the needs and perspectives of the Black community. This aligns with BIN's mission to offer an informative perspective that aids in societal accountability and comprehension.

BIN broadcasts on FM stations such as New York’s Power 105.1, the platform for “The Breakfast Club with Charlamagne the God and DJ Envy,” previously featuring Angela Yee, replaced by social media content creator and comedian, Jess Hilarious in 2024. This program, while influential, has faced its own controversies, including no longer connecting to Black listeners, outside of their name staple, coupled with allegations of potentially exploiting fans by using “affinity fraud”. According to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, when a “fraudster” wants members of a targeted group to trust them, they use their perceived connection to the members, even from a racial minority group perspective, as a form of credibility so that the victims invest in a fake investment opportunity and are scammed out of money due to their identification with the person committing fraud, generally ran as Ponzi schemes (SEC, 2023).

“The Breakfast Club with Charlamagne the God and DJ Envy,” a notable radio program, became entangled in a complex legal saga involving DJ Envy and iHeartMedia. Both are connected to a multimillion-dollar real estate fraud scheme orchestrated by Cesar Pina, who was featured on the show as DJ Envy’s business associate and seminar partner (Louallen, 2023). According to local U.S. Attorney Philip R. Sellinger, as stated in the complaint, Pina capitalized on his celebrity status to attract and subsequently exploit followers for fraudulent real estate ventures. These ventures were promoted using the celebrity of “Individual-1,” a well-known disc jockey and radio personality, believed to be DJ Envy, thus potentially influencing the program’s listeners, mostly Black and Latinx and/or fans of hip-hop, and participants in their real estate and financial literacy seminars. Additionally, “The Breakfast Club with Charlamagne the God and DJ Envy” is a foundational program of Charlamagne the God’s “Black Effect Network”, another

collection of Black-appeal podcasts situated on iHeartRadio, centered on Black entertainment and lifestyle, which adds layers to the implications of these legal developments (iHeart, 2023).

Racial issues have also surfaced within iHeartMedia, as exemplified by the firing of the President from iHeartMedia Atlanta. This action followed the release of a video showing Drew Lauter, the executive in question, using racial slurs (Ho, 2022). In response to the controversy, iHeart released a statement: “Allegations of this nature go against our company values and our policies, and we take them very seriously.” (James, 2022). This wasn’t the first time it occurred, and iHeartMedia’s delayed response to this incident (over a year), as critiqued by some, contrasts with their stated commitment to supporting the Black community, raising questions about the company’s adherence to its values and policies (James, 2022).

The 100,000 Jobs Audience Member Initiative

In a notable collaboration aimed at fostering Black economic empowerment, CareerBuilder partnered with BIN: Black Information Network to launch the “100,000 Careers” initiative (BIN, 2022; CareerBuilder, 2022). This pioneering platform seeks to bridge the gap between Black American job seekers and employers who value a diverse and skilled workforce. This initiative emerges against the backdrop of persistent income and unemployment disparities within the Black community, representing a strategic effort to address these systemic challenges. The “100,000 Careers” initiative was reportedly designed to be a comprehensive resource for Black Americans seeking career advancement or new job opportunities. Stating they recognized the importance of gainful employment in wealth-building within the Black community, the platform provided an

array of tools to facilitate career growth. These include job listings, user-friendly resume building tools, and custom content aimed at helping Black job seekers identify their transferrable skills and explore new career paths (BIN, 2022; CareerBuilder, 2022).

Kristin Kelley, CareerBuilder’s Chief Marketing Officer, underscores the alignment of this partnership with CareerBuilder’s broader mission of facilitating personal success. According to the CareerBuilder press release about the announcement, Kelley stated,

“This strategic partnership directly aligns with our mission of building personal success for all and will guide Black Information Network listeners to a host of tools that connect them to roles that best suit their skills leading to more meaningful careers. This partnership and the 100,000 Careers platform are both vital in bringing a valuable resource and job search experience to the Black community, and employers can now access a larger group of diverse candidates and talented workers” (CareerBuilder, 2022).

Tony Coles, the Division president for iHeartMedia Multiplatform Group and President for BIN, reiterated Kelley’s remarks,

“The initiative is not only a conduit for job opportunities but also a means of connecting individuals with roles that resonate with their skills and aspirations, thereby fostering more meaningful careers. That’s why we are thrilled that our partners at CareerBuilder have joined us in this effort to help 100,000 listeners not only find work, but to help them leverage their transferrable skills to build careers” (CareerBuilder, 2022).

A distinctive feature of the “100,000 Careers” platform is its extensive outreach. It leverages BIN’s extensive network across various media formats, including broadcast,

podcast, digital, and social platforms. By providing a direct pathway to employment and career development, “100,000 Careers” stands as a possible response to these challenges. As part of the initiative, CareerBuilder has introduced free career coaching services, a significant value-add for job seekers. These coaching sessions, spanning 45 minutes, offer personalized guidance and mentoring, helping individuals to navigate the employment landscape, understand their skillsets, and make informed career transitions. The access to over 5,000 career coaches through this initiative is a testament to its commitment to providing comprehensive support for job seekers (BIN, 2022; CareerBuilder, 2022).

CareerBuilder’s free career coaching service, exclusive to BIN listeners, aligns with the platform’s goal of empowering Black Americans. It offered customized advice and feedback, helping individuals to define their career paths and overcome professional hurdles. The use of AI technology and an initial questionnaire to match job seekers with suitable coaches exemplifies the initiative’s innovative approach (BIN, 2022; CareerBuilder, 2022). However, details of the impact in the lives of Black professionals have yet to be seen. A thorough review of post-survey results of the program would be useful to truly understand how these programs truly help Black Americans.

BIN represents a transformative approach to broadcasting, focusing on delivering news and content from a Black perspective. BIN’s diverse range of programming, including news, sports, music, and cultural shows, is designed to amplify Black voices and address issues pertinent to Black and Latinx communities. However, the network has faced controversies, such as the alleged involvement of “The Breakfast Club” in a real estate fraud and internal challenges like the mishandling of racial issues with executives.

An integral part of BIN's mission was the "100,000 Careers" initiative, a collaboration with CareerBuilder, aimed at tackling employment disparities in the Black community through resources like job listings and free career coaching. While BIN continues to make strides in representing and supporting the Black community, the full impact and effectiveness of its initiatives and programming are areas for ongoing evaluation and scrutiny.

This initiative represents a progressive integration of audience engagement in the realm of Black news podcasting. This program, aimed at addressing systemic unemployment and underemployment in the Black community, is emblematic of a politically economic strategy that resonates deeply with the ethos of Black media activism, as illustrated by McChesney (2015) in discussions of the political economy of media and the structures that underpin content dissemination. Simultaneously, this initiative echoes Marable's (2015) analysis of economic structures affecting African American lives, signaling a movement towards economic self-sufficiency and empowerment through proactive job matching and career building.

The strategic use of podcasts to further this economic empowerment initiative demonstrates an evolved understanding of media's role, moving from mere content delivery to active participation in economic development within the Black community. By combining media outreach with actionable career support, the "100,000 Careers" initiative exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to audience engagement that transcends traditional broadcasting, tapping into the potential of digital platforms to effect real-world change and address longstanding economic disparities.

However, the effectiveness of initiatives like this in fostering Black economic empowerment can be scrutinized for potentially being performative rather than transformative. Despite the well-intentioned design, such programs risk being performative if they fail to produce measurable outcomes in job placement or if they are not backed by a long-term commitment to addressing structural inequalities faced by the Black community. The risk of performative action is heightened if the initiatives are used primarily for public relations without embedding substantial changes or lacking in follow-through regarding the support and advancement of the careers of Black professionals. It's crucial to assess the longitudinal impact of these initiatives to determine whether they mark a substantive change or are merely symbolic gestures.

The performative risk in initiatives like “100,000 Careers” aligns with Sperber’s (2021) critique of left entrepreneurship, which suggests that actions by organizations may sometimes be more about self-promotion and maintaining an image rather than instigating real change. In the context of left entrepreneurship, such efforts could be seen as aligning with market strategies that prioritize the branding of activism rather than its efficacy. Similarly, if initiatives for Black economic empowerment become performative, they could be criticized for serving more as a marketing tool for the involved organizations rather than driving genuine, long-term empowerment for the community.

CHAPTER VII: ROLAND S. MARTIN'S #BLACKSTARNETWORK & #ROLANDMARTINUNFILTERED

The digital Black news show #RolandMartinUnfiltered, accessible on YouTube and the Black Information Network via iHeartRadio, will be examined next. Roland Martin extends his digital footprint through an Over-The-Top (OTT) channel that archives his various news shows and hosts his daily news program. Roland S. Martin's career encapsulates the significance of representation and ownership in Black podcasting and media. Martin was born into a family with Haitian-Louisianian roots in Houston, Texas, with parents and grandmother who owned their own catering and cake business, respectively. Martin's early life set the foundation for a career dedicated to highlighting the African American narrative. His formative years were shaped by his experiences at Jack Yates High School in Houston, a magnet school with a focus on media production. This early education laid the groundwork for his dedication to media and communication.

Continuing his journey, Martin attended Texas A&M University, where he graduated in 1991 (Gallian, 2008). His time at Texas A&M was instrumental in furthering his resolve to advocate for the African American community through media. To further specialize his expertise, Martin pursued a Master's degree in Christian Communications at Louisiana Baptist University (Martin, n.d.). This advanced degree was not merely an academic achievement but also a strategic enhancement of his skills in storytelling and media presentation, geared toward a profound engagement with community-centric narratives. With a robust educational foundation and a clear focus on media that highlights the African American experience, Martin was well-prepared to embark on a professional journey in media. His academic background and practical

experiences were tailored to create a media presence that would responsibly and effectively spotlight the African American experience.

Martin's early journalistic ventures began with his pivotal role as the executive editor of the *Chicago Defender*, a key connection in this analysis that also seems to influence the trajectory of his own media aspirations (Gallian, 2008). His transition to broadcasting on Chicago's WVON-AM, further solidifying his presence in Black media (Gallian, 2008). He became a senior analyst in 2008, for the Tom Joyner Morning Show, simultaneously, Martin's tenure with CNN from 2007 to 2013 saw him not only as a contributor but also as a visible representative of Black perspectives on mainstream media (Martin, n.d.). His appearances ranged from "The Situation Room" to "Anderson Cooper's AC360", underscoring the breadth of his contributions (Martin, n.d.).

Perhaps one of the most significant milestones in Martin's career was pioneering TV One's first Sunday News show, "Washington Watch with Roland Martin", produced by Comcast in 2009 (Martin, n.d.). This endeavor, running for a commendable four years, provided a platform for in-depth discussions centered on the Black community's concerns, achievements, and aspirations. However, like all media personalities navigating the complex interplay of ratings, representation, and content, Martin faced challenges. His subsequent venture, "News One Now" at TV One, the notable Black-owned cable channel, was eventually canceled in 2017 due to budget cuts at the network, reflecting the intricate balance of content creation and external funding security (Kenneally, 2017). Martin's contributions extend beyond broadcasting, with his literary works offering deep insights into the Black American experience. His books address critical issues from the perspective of Black men in America to the sociopolitical ramifications of a diversifying

nation. Martin's career, marked by achievements and controversies alike, reflects the complex landscape of Black media representation. His journey underscores the need for diverse voices in media and the challenges inherent in maintaining authenticity and ethical standards in the public domain.

In the fall of 2018, Martin's live daily news show was launched via his website, Facebook Live, Periscope, IGTV, Freevee, and YouTube, where viewers are also encouraged to live tweet, via Twitter (now X) during the two-hour streamed news broadcast, hence the hashtags in his news show name. According to YouTube, as of 2024, Martin's channel heralds over one million subscribers, with over 22,000 uploads of full-length deep dive news programs, clips, debates, rallies, and other political-centric content that is tailored to the Black community. According to Social Blade, which figures can be seen as fluctuating based on the real numbers, Martin has an estimated \$2.800 to \$45,000 estimated monthly earnings, and almost \$33,000 to \$541,000 annual earnings.

In this contemporary media landscape, reflecting the legacy of Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line, almost exactly 100 years later, Martin's #TheBlackStarNetwork is in its quest for empowerment and representation of the African American community. In 2021, his news network, #TheBlackStarNetwork, a free app and OTT channel with five hours of original content daily, was launched, under Roland Martin's company Nu Vision Media, Inc., started in 2010, where he serves as CEO. #TheBlackStarNetwork's content is also streamed live 24/7 via Amazon Fire TV. Parallels exist between Martin's and Garvey's pioneering ventures. Martin's initiative resonates with Garvey's vision, and both endeavors have sought to uplift and provide a voice to the Black community through different means and eras. As covered previously, Marcus Garvey, a seminal figure in

Black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, founded the Black Star Line in 1919, a shipping line aimed to facilitate the economic empowerment of African Americans and strengthen connections with the African diaspora. Fast forward to the 21st century, and echoes of Garvey's vision are present in Roland Martin's Black Star Network. Launched by Martin, a veteran journalist and media personality, this digital network aims to provide an "unfiltered" and authentic representation of the African American experience.

Like Garvey's initiative, Martin's network represents a step towards self-reliance and empowerment in the realm of media, offering a platform where Black voices and stories are amplified without the dilution often encountered in mainstream media outlets. The core philosophy binding Garvey's Black Star Line and Martin's Black Star Network is the pursuit of African American autonomy and representation. Both leaders recognized the importance of creating platforms owned by and for the Black community. They understood that true empowerment comes from having control over how their stories are told and their interests are represented. While Garvey focused on economic independence and physical mobility, Martin zeroes in on media representation and information dissemination.

Roland Martin's studio stands as a ceremonial tribute to the rich legacy of Black economic autonomy, with the prominent display of the #BlackOwnedMediaMatters hashtag serving as a profound declaration of his dedication to the cause. Outside of the studio office, on the historical 16th street of Washington, D.C., with "Black Lives Matters" painted in yellow, on the two-block long pedestrian walkway, in the Black Lives Matter Plaza, below the studio, a poetic additional element tying into Martin's mission. The studio space itself is a canvas of cultural reverence; within its confines, the

Pan-African flag drapes in the emblematic hues of red, black, and green, a silent yet powerful salute to the vision of Marcus Garvey. This space is an intricate tapestry of personal and collective histories.

Martin, with deliberate intentionality, adorns himself in attire that speaks to his formative years, garments representing his alma mater and the brotherhood of Alpha Phi Alpha, interwoven with pieces that embody the rich tapestry of African heritage. Beyond the fabric, the very walls of the studio whisper tales of resilience and faith, with biblical scriptures ensconced within, radiating wisdom and fortitude. An ode to #BlackVotersMatter is also featured on its interiors. Furthermore, the studio is graced by the artistic presence of Ida B. Wells, whose depicted visage is more than decoration; it is an ever-present inspiration, a reminder of the profound impact of Black journalism. He also includes a dedicated #BlackOwnedMediaMatters art wall that houses a collage of the rich heritage of Black journalism, adorned with front pages from seminal publications like Jet, Ebony, Essence, Emerge, the Pittsburgh Courier, Freedom's Journal, WERD Radio, Harry Belafonte, Negro Digest, Savoy, and the Crisis, the esteemed journal of the NAACP.

Martin's environment is not merely a place of work; it is a curated homage to the lineage of Black journalistic excellence, an environment where each element is infused with symbolism and significance, echoing the past while inspiring the present. These historical snapshots are accompanied by logos of pioneering Black media institutions, including WGPR, Detroit's trailblazing Black-owned TV station, and TV One, where Martin helmed a daily news program. This curated ensemble of Black media artifacts not only decorates the space but also encapsulates the profound legacy and ongoing relevance

of Black media in shaping narratives and fostering community discourse (Battaglio, 2022). Please see the Appendix for photos of the studio descriptions.

Funding

Martin credits his success and ability to stay functional as a company not to advertisers but to his #BringTheFunkFanClub, or his supporters who frequently and loyally send donations via mail or apps like Venmo and Cash App. According to Martin, he used \$400,000 of his own money to start his news show, essentially the cost to create a television studio, including technology, staff, and travel needs like tour buses, homes to rent for interviews, and flights for news coverage (Battaglio, 2022). Martin identifies audience donations, including those sent through mail, as the primary funding source for his program. He often opens and reads the accompanying letters live during the broadcast, emphasizing their importance over advertising revenue.

In his pursuit to foster a transparent relationship with his audience, Martin frequently showcases the evolution of his studio environment, attributing the progress to the steadfast support of his viewership. This display of gratitude is manifested through the scrolling credits of supporters' names at the conclusion of each installment of his daily news program. Moreover, Martin extends an invitation into the inner workings of his studio through guided tours, a gesture designed to provide tangible evidence of his operation's growth and the vital role played by patronage during his program.

These live tours often spotlight collaborations with Black-owned enterprises that have been instrumental in the studio's aesthetic and functional design, underscoring Martin's commitment to community upliftment through economic solidarity. Martin's candidness extends to financial disclosures, where he openly communicates the fiscal

exigencies of his studio operations. He divulges that the monthly operational costs amount to \$195,000, which, when annualized, necessitates an expenditure of approximately \$2.4 million for the year-round sustainability of his journalistic endeavors. Embedded within his programming, there are symbiotic partnership with sponsors that connect with helping or supporting the Black community, such as Google Grow, J. Hood and Associates, and Lemond Kitchen, the last two being business ventures connected to the Martin family. These sponsorships have embedded ads into his news content. Martin's approach exemplifies a new paradigm in media transparency and audience engagement, setting a precedent for the role of community funding in sustaining independent media platforms.

Programming

The Black Star Network offers a rich variety of programs that explore a wide range of topics pertinent to modern Black American life. Roland Martin frequently streams live news programming on his YouTube channel. This includes simultaneous coverage of political debates, conference talks, public addresses, election results, protests, and HBCU events, all with a focus on showcasing regional Black communities and bringing their stories to the forefront of the news.

Martin's news show airs daily and reruns on his live throughout the day, much like the 24-hour news cycle on CNN. At the forefront is the “#RolandMartinUnfiltered: Daily Digital Show (#RMU),” the daily news broadcast originating from Washington, DC. In his self-owned DC studio, with Black staff and crew, set designers, and artists, #RMU covers a wide range of topics, including politics, culture, education, social justice, and finance, featuring discussions with experts from various fields such as academia and

public policy. Another notable program is “#TheBlackTable with Dr. Greg Carr,” an esteemed professor in Afro-American Studies at Howard University. “#GetWealthy with Deborah Owens” provides financial insights and advice, as a critically-acclaimed author with over 20 years of experience as a Vice President at Fidelity Investments. Owens, described as “America’s Wealth Coach”, shares knowledge often not disclosed by banks or financial advisors, aiming to empower viewers with practical wealth-building strategies.

As of May 2024, Martin stands as the only Black-owned daily news show online. However, his programming took significant cuts in May 2024 as well. Martin ended two of his four additional programs outside of his daily news show, “#TheFrequency with Dee Barnes” and “#TheCulture with Farajii Muhammad”. Farajii Muhammad offered a weekly program of community-centric issues, especially those affecting women. However, he left #BlackStarNetwork to become a producer for the Tavis Smiley show. Dee Barnes, a writer, journalist, and Hip Hop artist, hosted an interview-centric show. No reasons behind the ending of this program were revealed. Martin’s news show stands as the most impactful, lucrative, and longest-lasting program on his network. With only two programs outside of his news program, Martin will need to pivot his business strategy to determine how to add additional programs that can match the success of his daily news show.

The Unfiltered Uncle

“Unfiltered” is not merely a moniker but a philosophy for Roland Martin, encapsulated in the very title of his digital news program, #RolandMartinUnfiltered. This choice embodies his deliberate pivot from the rigid protocols of mainstream media to

establish a platform that embraces unbridled expression, where language flows unfettered, and radical thoughts stand uncloaked. Martin’s discourse resonates with the intimate cadence of a family patriarch at a reunion imparting wisdom, not from a podium, but from a place of shared experience and kinship. His audience, in turn, is enfolded into this familial circle, where dialogue is personal, potent, and profoundly real. In the theme song of his program, Roland Martin is affectionately christened “Uncle Ro-Ro,” a sobriquet lent vibrancy by the dulcet tones of En Vogue, the illustrious Black female ensemble that reigned supreme in the 90s and early 2000s. This familial epithet extends to the young minds featured as interns or guests on his show, underscoring the deep-seated kinship that permeates his communication style.

Though his language may occasionally bristle with the sharpness of profanity, it remains a testament to his authenticity as a voice within the Black American community a candid reflection of lived experience and cultural veracity. “Uncle Ro-Ro” graced the digital airwaves with a poignant address in the #RMU segment released on December 31, 2019. The segment, aptly titled, “Young Voters, Uncle Ro-Ro Is Sick Of Y’all BS! Cut The BS About I Need Somebody To Excite Me In 2020,” was a candid five-minute entreaty to young Black voters. In this direct discourse, Martin challenged the emotional approach to electoral decision-making, urging a more rational assessment of presidential candidates.

The title of the segment itself mirrors Martin’s characteristic frankness, using the acronym “BS” as a softened stand-in for the more abrasive term it represents, signaling his straightforward and unapologetic style. The exhortation “Cut the Bullshit!” when uttered with the gravitas of an elder within the Black community, is not merely a

colloquialism but a powerful rhetorical device. It is employed not to berate but to jolt the younger generation from a state of passivity, especially when their actions or lack thereof might compromise their own welfare and that of their community. This linguistic choice, often articulated in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), is deeply interwoven with cultural nuances and signifies a desperate urgency, an imploration to heed the wisdom of lived experience.

Roland Martin's deliberate use of such language in his broadcasts is both a stylistic and strategic choice. It reflects a broader tradition of oral storytelling and frank conversation endemic to African American culture. His approach, though sometimes met with ambivalence in more conservative circles, finds resonance with those who see in it the echo of community dialogues, of spirited exchanges at family tables, and the impassioned sermons heard in Black churches, without the profanity. This direct style, while occasionally viewed as contentious in mainstream media due to its fervor and volume, has a different valence among those it seeks to move to action. For Martin's audience, the intensity of his delivery is not a sign of incivility but a measure of his commitment a reflection of the stakes involved in civil engagement and the pursuit of social justice. It captures a collective sentiment, a shared understanding that the time for soft words has passed and that the moment calls for a language that can cut through apathy and resonate with the imperative of the present.

Roland Martin fervently approaches the subject of voting with the earnestness of a family patriarch deeply concerned with the welfare of the younger generation. In his broadcast, affectionately termed the "Uncle Ro-Ro" segment, he addresses the dispassionate attitudes of some young voters, challenging their lack of engagement in the

electoral process. Martin articulates that such disengagement is counterproductive, not only to the individuals but also to the broader African American community, as it undermines their collective interests and negates the hard-fought gains for representation and equality,

“This is real simple, young Black voters, your ass gotta vote...to the young voters, cut the bullshit about I need somebody who’s gonna excite me. Let me excite yo’ ass in another way: If Donald Trump gets four more years, he likely will end up appointing half of all Federal judges in America and they are gonna be there for the next fifty years... If you are young, and you are waiting for somebody to tickle your fancy and ignite your soul, your ass is crazy. You are nuts! You better understand, there is power in that ballot. So, you need to be organizing your classmates and your cousins, and if you need to sit they ass down and play this video to educate them, fine!”

In his “Uncle Ro-Ro” segment, Roland Martin candidly embraces the use of profanity to underscore the urgency of his message to young, indifferent voters. This approach, reminiscent of an elder’s frank concern, is not meant to berate but to awaken and educate. He expresses, “But if you one of dem people, and you know somebody in your family, who are sayin’, man, I ain’t gonna vote, cuss they ass out, then educate them. That’s all I’m sayin’, maybe you don’t wanna cuss ‘em out, I would!” This impassioned plea serves as both a call to action and a means to impart crucial knowledge, reflecting Martin’s sincere investment in the well-being and political efficacy of his community.

The Role of Hashtags in #RolandMartinUnflitered

In the digital era, hashtags have become a powerful tool for activism and engagement, transcending their original purpose as mere metadata tags on social media platforms (Florini, 2019). The strategic use of hashtags in Roland Martin’s shows, particularly on the Black Star Network, exemplifies this evolution. Martin’s approach to

digital activism through hashtags parallels and contrasts with scholarly research on hashtag politics, especially as discussed in Sarah Florini's work, "Beyond Hashtags: Racial Politics and Black Digital Networks" (2019). Martin's use of hashtags in his programming aligns with and diverges from the broader themes of digital activism and racial politics as outlined by Florini (2019).

Roland Martin, through his various shows on the #BlackStarNetwork, leverages hashtags not merely as a tool for categorization but as a means of fostering community engagement and political discourse. Shows like "#RolandMartinUnfiltered" and "#TheBlackTable" with Dr. Greg Carr, employ hashtags in their titles, signaling their themes and content while inviting audience interaction and sharing. These hashtags serve as rallying points for viewers, enabling them to contribute to and amplify discussions on social justice, politics, and cultural issues relevant to the Black community. As discussed previously, Florini's (2019) work delves deep into the concept of digital networks and the role of hashtags in creating and sustaining Black digital spaces. Florini (2019) argues that hashtags do more than just create trending topics; they foster digital communities and networks that can lead to real-world social and political change. In line with Florini's (2019) findings, Martin's use of hashtags can be seen as a form of digital activism. By curating specific hashtags for his shows, Martin not only categorizes content but also cultivates a digital space for Black voices and perspectives.

However, where Martin's approach might diverge from Florini's (2019) analysis is in the direct integration of hashtags into the identity of his programs. While Florini (2019) emphasizes the organic growth of hashtag movements in response to social issues (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter), Martin's hashtags are pre-designed as part of a show's

branding. This suggests a more top-down approach to digital activism, where the audience is invited to participate within a predefined narrative framework. The purpose then, can be challenged, in a case for authenticity as if the hashtags aren't addressing a real movement or starting one, then they are merely a branding tool that could be used as a symbol of activism, unused in social action tactics.

Conversely, the impact of Martin's use of hashtags can be observed in the way they enable audience engagement and create a sense of community. Viewers of his shows are meant to use these hashtags to share content, engage in discussions, and connect with like-minded individuals. This aligns with Florini's (2019) observations about how digital networks serve as spaces for community building and activism. The hashtags associated with Martin's shows become symbols of collective identity and shared purpose, echoing Florini's (2019) insights about the role of digital networks in shaping racial politics. While Martin employs a more structured approach to hashtag integration, the underlying principles of community building, engagement, and activism resonate with Florini's (2019) findings about the power of Black digital networks. As digital platforms continue to evolve, the intersection of media programming, hashtag usage, and digital activism remains a critical area for further understanding, particularly in the context of racial politics and community empowerment.

Elon Musk, in a late 2023 statement, expressed a view that hashtags are "a relic of the past," indicating a potential shift away from their use on his social media platform. He suggests that simple keywords or phrases are sufficient for content discovery and engagement, despite a poll showing that many users disagreed with the removal of hashtags (Jain, 2023). Time will only tell if those objections will cease the ending of

hashtags in the future, which would have further implications for Martin and his program, #RolandMartinUnfiltered and Florini (2019).

Attention to Activism: The Danyé Jones News Segment

In 2018, Martin presented a deeply moving and socially significant segment titled, “Ferguson Activist Melissa McKinnies Speaks Out About Her Son, Danyé Jones’ Suspicious Death”. This segment poignantly delves into the tragic story of Danyé Jones, a young Black American and the progeny of Ferguson activists, who met his untimely demise, on October 17 under mysterious circumstances. His mother, Melissa McKinnies, narrates the harrowing events with heartfelt candor, connecting remotely via a cell phone from her vehicle. She vehemently disputes the initial police hypothesis of suicide, grounding her stance in an intimate understanding of her son’s principles and a vehement aversion to suicide, which she articulates was shared by Danyé (YouTube, 2018).

In her emotional recounting, McKinnies vividly describes the day she discovered her son, a moment that paints a visceral picture of shock and despair. She uncovered him lifeless, hanging from a tree in their own yard, a sight that left her reeling in horror and disbelief. Her narrative is laced with skepticism and a deep-seated distrust towards the official police investigation, pointing out glaring inconsistencies such as the military-style knots used in the hanging, a skill her son had never acquired. This heart-wrenching narrative tells a story of a mother’s relentless pursuit of truth, her unwavering determination for justice, and her staunch refusal to accept the purported cause of her son’s passing (YouTube, 2018). This news segment also echoes back to Wells’ mission to end lynching of Black Americans, a type of punishment often used by racist Whites to control the Black community through fear.

This individual tragedy is set against the broader, ominous backdrop of lynching, and Ferguson, a community that has witnessed the unexplained deaths of other Black American activists, exacerbating a climate of fear and suspicion. McKinnies' impassioned call for her son's case to be investigated with the same diligence and thoroughness as would be afforded to any other citizen, starkly highlights the racial and social disparities often perceived in law enforcement and judicial proceedings. The segment culminates with a fervent call to action, a rallying cry for the community to keep the memory of Danyé Jones alive and to tirelessly seek justice in his name, without real definitive action but more in a way to honor him. This narrative not only exposes the raw anguish of a grieving family but also resonates with broader themes of racial injustice and the ongoing struggles faced by African American communities in the United States (YouTube, 2018).

Furthermore, Roland Martin's adept use of digital activism is prominently showcased through his strategic inclusion of distinct hashtags in the segment's description: "#BlackStarNetwork", "#RolandMartinUnfiltered", and "#BringTheFunk", the latter being a nod to his dedicated fan club. Martin's fan club, #BringTheFunk, is more than just a fan club, it's also a direct funding model where fans and subscribers to his content can join his e-mailing list and donate to receive "special perks, incentives, gifts, and exclusives" (Martin, 2023). As detailed on his website,

"For those who want a more personalized experience and for those who want to support #RolandMartinUnfiltered, NuVision Media, Inc. has also launched the #BringTheFunk Club...now is the perfect time to sign up for the Roland Martin Mailing List, become a #BringTheFunk Club Charter Member or become a corporate sponsor of this unique and informative program."

These hashtags are not mere labels, but powerful funding tools for the program, and traditionally, tools for mobilizing online communities and amplifying the segment's reach. Interestingly, while the hashtag #DanyéJones gained considerable traction on Twitter, highlighting the case's resonance within the digital sphere (Sen, 2020), it was notably absent from the segment itself, a missed opportunity to possibly create a surge in traction and reach for awareness of Jones' case.

The description box under the news segment video on YouTube also intriguingly references a marijuana stock opportunity, hinting at a potential sponsorship angle for the segment. The marijuana stock investment ad was also featured at the end of the "Uncle Ro-Ro" news segment explained above, where he is directly selling the opportunity to the camera immediately following the news segment, which could be seen as problematic, as it does not match the tone of a video dedicated to young voters as a familial guide just shown. However, the sponsorship aspect remains within the realm of conjecture and is not definitively established. This potential sponsorship connection, if validated, echoes the challenges previously faced by Martin's alma mater, the *Chicago Defender*. The historic publication encountered its own quandaries in securing appropriate sponsorship and advertising, often aligning with tobacco and liquor companies to cater to its readership, as discussed earlier. This illustrates the delicate balance between maintaining editorial integrity and the potential influence of advertising, particularly through the host-read advertisement model, detailed by Reuters (2019).

Roland Martin's use of his platform for activism, as demonstrated in the segment discussing Danyé Jones' case, highlights a strong commitment to advocating for social

justice and providing a voice for underrepresented communities. This type of content naturally garners significant audience engagement and trust because of its authenticity and the personal nature of the narrative shared by Jones' mother. However, the integration of advertisements, such as the mentioned marijuana stock opportunity, juxtaposed with the serious content of the segment, presents potential challenges to maintaining audience trust. This advertising approach could be perceived as undermining the gravity of the content, especially when the promotional material is in stark contrast with the theme of the segment. It raises questions about the appropriateness of certain advertisements within emotionally charged or serious content, which is a critical concern in the context of host-read ads where the host's credibility is closely tied to the content they present.

Furthermore, the host-read model, while effective in generating revenue, must be navigated carefully to avoid conflicts of interest that could compromise the perceived impartiality and integrity of the host and the platform. In Martin's case, his direct appeal for funding through #BringTheFunk, while a transparent method of soliciting support, also adds layers of complexity to audience perceptions of independence and objectivity. The challenge lies in balancing commercial interests with a commitment to journalistic standards and audience trust, particularly when addressing sensitive or critical societal issues. This scenario underscores the broader implications of advertising strategies in Black news podcasts and the importance of clear ethical guidelines to preserve trust and integrity in news media.

CHAPTER VIII: NAVIGATING THE MEDIA DYNAMICS OF CORPORATE CONGLOMERATES

Roland Martin, Byron Allen, BNC, and theGrio v. GM

The dynamics surrounding the funding and viability of Black-owned media, particularly in the news sector, are complex and multifaceted. This complexity is exemplified by the economic entanglement of Roland Martin, the GM ad funding open letters, Byron Allen, and the recent bankruptcy and acquisition of the Black News Channel (BNC). The 2021 ad funding incident involving General Motors (GM) and its interactions with Black-owned media executives is a notable example of corporate responsibility, governance, and issues of racial inclusion and diversity, particularly in the sphere of advertising and media representation.

In early 2021, GM faced significant public criticism from a collective of Black-owned media CEOs. This group, led by notable media figures like Byron Allen and Roland Martin, took a provocative approach by publishing full-page advertisements in major newspapers, accusing GM and its CEO, Mary Barra, of perpetuating systemic racism by inadequately allocating advertising funds to Black-owned media outlets and my not meeting with them after many requests (Adams, 2021; Hall, 2021; Magee, 2021; Major, 2021). The central contention was that GM's advertising practices did not reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion, despite public statements to the contrary.

In response to this escalating situation, GM initially scheduled a meeting with these media executives, presumably to discuss and potentially rectify their concerns. However, following the publication of a second critical advertisement by the group, GM opted to postpone this meeting. The decision to delay was interpreted by some as a

reluctance on GM's part to engage directly with the criticisms leveled against it (Hall, 2021; Major, 2021). Consequently, GM revised its approach. Rather than conducting a single, potentially contentious meeting, the company announced plans for a series of smaller discussions with various Black media executives. This strategy could be seen as an attempt to diffuse tension and engage in more nuanced dialogues with a broader range of stakeholders in the Black media community (Hall, 2021). Simultaneously, GM publicly committed to increasing its advertising spend with Black-owned media companies. GM pledged a 400% increase in such spending by 2023, a move likely aimed at substantiating its claims of striving to be "the most inclusive company in the world" (Eisenstein, 2021; Magee, 2021).

The increased commitment to advertising spending by major corporations can be interpreted as a strategic countermeasure to criticisms of systemic racism, reflecting a broader corporate move towards racial equity. However, an enduring challenge is the difficulty Black-owned news media encounter in securing sufficient advertising revenue. This challenge is exacerbated by advertisers' preference for "brand safe" entertainment over news content, which aligns with industry trends that disadvantage minority-owned media outlets in attracting substantial advertising dollars (Battaglio, 2022).

The historical context of these contemporary challenges is reminiscent of observations from The 1968 Kerner Commission Report. The report noted that media coverage of Black American life, especially in economically disadvantaged areas, tended to attract fewer viewers than other content. This trend suggested a systemic issue with the marketability of Black stories within the mainstream news landscape, pointing to a broader lack of accountability among traditional news organizations and advertisers.

The Kerner Report addressed this issue directly, urging the media to deepen and enhance their coverage of racial issues:

“In short, the news media must find ways of exploring the problems of the Negro and the ghetto more deeply and more meaningfully. To editors who say, ‘we have run thousands of inches on the ghetto which nobody reads’ and to television executives who bemoan scores of under watched documentaries, we say: find more ways of telling this story for it is a story you, as journalists, must tell — honestly, realistically, and imaginatively. It is the responsibility of the news media to tell the story of race relations in America, and with notable exceptions, the media have not yet turned to the task with the wisdom, sensitivity, and expertise it demands” (p. 211).

This call to action underscores the vital role that media plays in shaping public perceptions and the critical need for a more responsible and inclusive approach to reporting on race relations in America. The report also discusses the potential impact of Black news reporters speaking directly to the Black American audience, employed by larger media organizations, or partnering with Black news organizations/reporters directly. Black news podcasting is answering that direct call to action, by delivering Black news to Black America from Black America. The persistent relevance of the Kerner Commission’s findings highlights the ongoing challenges faced by Black news outlets in navigating a media landscape still marked by systemic racial biases from over 55 years ago.

To add even more context to same issues from the Kerner Commission to today, is the bankruptcy and later distribution deal of the Black News Channel (BNC), now owned by Byron Allen, and embedded within his platform, theGrio. On August 4, 2022, during an #RMU news segment, Martin highlighted the essential need for Black-news media following the acquisition of the BNC by Allen Media Group for \$11 million, on behalf of billionaire and Jacksonville Jaguars owner, Shad Khan, approved by the U.S.

Bankruptcy Court in Tallahassee, Florida on August 1, 2022 (Favela, 2022; Medina, 2022). This comes after three rounds of layoffs occurring in December 2021 and January 2022 within BNC's news operations (Medina, 2022). Martin often incorporates Black media focused news segments that cover the advertising plights these companies face, which is a revolutionary approach to not only commenting on the news, but commenting on the state of Black news, and in turn, Black media and why it matters. This event is significant as it reflects the ongoing consolidation in media and the challenges faced by Black-owned news outlets. The transition of BNC's assets to TheGrio, one of the #1 Black news sites online, owned by Entertainment Studios, LLC, signifies a shift from a dedicated 24-hour news channel to a format that might not prioritize broadcast news in the same way.

BNC was launched on February 10, 2020, in 33 million homes (Neela-Stock, 2021), the culmination of a vision shared by former congressman and athlete, J.C. Watts and media entrepreneur Bob Brillante (Dobson, 2020). Before being sold to Khan, BNC was formally LightTV, a faith-based network with Fox stations, *Touched by an Angel* actress, Roma Downey, and MGM's Mark Burnett, and NBC as its backing (Fleming Jr et al., 2014). BNC's objective was to craft a news outlet that would provide a nuanced portrayal of the African American experience, one often marginalized in mainstream media narratives. Despite its promising start, BNC encountered substantial financial hurdles.

The fledgling network faced difficulties in securing distribution carriage contracts with major cable providers, which limited its audience reach and advertising revenue, however, they did eventually secure deals with Charter Communications in 2020 (Farrell,

2020) and Cox Communications in 2021 (BNC, 2021). These challenges were compounded by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, ultimately leading BNC to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in March 2022, failing to make payroll (Medina, 2022). The network's downfall, primarily due to its reliance on ad revenue without subscription fees, underscores the precarious financial model many Black-owned media entities operate under. Martin pointed out that despite Black Americans being significant consumers of live TV, Black-owned media like the BNC and #BlackStarNetwork receive a disproportionately small share of the \$322 billion spent yearly on advertising, getting only 0.5 to 1% of this amount (Favela, 2022).

BNC Programming

During its tenure, the Black News Channel (BNC) boasted a robust lineup, delivering eighteen hours of original programming each weekday. This content reached audiences through a network of traditional and digital platforms, including DirecTV, Comcast/Xfinity, and a suite of OTT services due to strategic agreements with Roku, Pluto, Tubi, Samsung TV Plus, and Amazon Fire TV. In a post-BNC era, personalities such as Dr. Marc Lamont Hill and Ebony K. Williams transitioned to theGrio, bringing their distinct brand of journalism to different programs under the same banner on theGrio's YouTube channel. There is also a "theGrio Black Podcast Network" channel on YouTube, with more of a Black culture and entertainment content focus, devoid of hard news shows. Despite this transition to Allen and additional programs and networks added on those new networks, there appears to be a noticeable dearth of recent video postings or consistent news content promotion on theGrio's main digital outlets as of October 2023. Concurrently, the subscriber count on theGrio's YouTube channel reflects a modest

figure, standing at 85,000. “theGrio Black Podcast Network” is in its infancy with an average of 6,000 subscribers.

BNC/theGrio not only represents the economic and power dynamics inherent in the operations of Black news platforms but also underscores the socio-political potential, or lack thereof, of these media entities to effect change within the broader media ecosystem. By drawing from Napoli’s (2014b; 2011) framework on the political economy of media, the production, distribution, and consumption of content by Black news entities like BNC/theGrio are deeply influenced by the larger societal and economic contexts. Unfortunately, being completely dependent on one funding source, proved to be the unraveling of their organization, allowing for an additional Black owner to purchase their content, without providing a foundation for the newscasters on their new platform, theGrio.

The transformation of BNC’s assets to theGrio, a leading Black news site, reflects the ongoing consolidation in media and the challenges faced by Black-owned news outlets. Mansell (2004) and Prat and Strömberg (2013) help contextualize BNC/theGrio within the continuum of media evolution influenced by ownership, economic interests, and the dissemination of information. These entities, while critiquing the traditional news media industry’s influence, offer a platform for underrepresented narratives, actively reshaping the cultural industry. The struggles and subsequent bankruptcy of BNC, contrasted with the commitment of GM to increase spending on Black-owned media, highlight the systemic disparities in advertising revenue allocation.

This reflects the broader industry trend where news content, especially from minority-owned sources, struggles to attract advertising dollars. Here, the theoretical

contributions of scholars like Rush (2020) become relevant, illustrating how Black news entities, through their own cultural industry, seek to dismantle hegemonic narratives and provide a platform for alternative perspectives. Once penetration into the market is facilitated by advertising dollars being allocated to more Black-centered media, the opportunity to begin the dismantling hegemony may be possible.

As of 2024, theGrio's YouTube channel features no new content from commentators, Eboni K. Williams, and Marc Lamont Hill. There is only their coverage of old news topics in the form of one to five minute clipped news segments. Marc Lamont Hill has since put more effort into his own YouTube channel, where he holds interviews over Zoom calls about key events, especially in his specialty of expertise, the conflict between Israel and Palestine, a timely topic. Eboni K. Williams hosts a podcast with a co-host covering news and entertainment. Their old news segment uploads on BNC dwindled to once or twice every one to three months over the past six months. The only show receiving updates is their entertainment sub-channel or playlist.

This shows a dramatic shift in production, coming from BNC to theGrio, which shows no matter the owner, Black or other, the content may still suffer, further threatening the success of the news show podcast, podcast network, and news commentators. According to news reports, on May 2, 2024, Byron Allen's, Allen Media Group (AMG), confirmed layoffs were imminent to gain more growth (Goldsmith, 2024). This could be yet another reaction to Black media businesses not being able to maintain operations without outside funding happening consistently, through investors or advertising. Allen Media Group is starting to suffer the same fate of BNC, starting with budget cuts and shows ending with the same newscast.

The struggles and subsequent bankruptcy of BNC and the new issues of AMG's layoffs, contrasted with the commitment of GM to increase spending on Black-owned media, highlight the systemic disparities in advertising revenue allocation. This reflects the broader industry trend where news content, especially from minority-owned sources, struggles to attract advertising dollars. Here, the theoretical contributions of scholars like Rush (2020) becomes relevant, illustrating how Black news entities, through their own cultural industry, seek to dismantle hegemonic narratives and provide a platform for alternative perspectives.

The case of BNC/theGrio underlines the need for Black-owned media to not only fill representational gaps but to actively redefine the cultural industry by fostering a media landscape that is inclusive and diverse. By critically examining the operational structures of Black news entities and their impact on discourse and community empowerment, insight is gained about how these platforms act as agents of change within the contemporary media ecology. BNC/theGrio demonstrates that while these entities have made significant strides in carving out essential spaces within the media ecosystem, their sustainability is contingent upon navigating economic challenges, securing equitable advertising revenue, and innovatively engaging with technology and community. This accentuates the importance of rigorous examination and ongoing dialogue concerning the operational structures, funding mechanisms, audience engagement, and the role of digital technology in shaping the contemporary landscape of Black media.

The Interplay of Fox Entertainment, Fox News, and Fox Soul

Lastly, this dissertation will briefly discuss FoxSoul and Fox's program strategy and targeting of urban audiences. The intricate interplay of corporate relationships,

business tactics, and brand identities that bind Fox Entertainment, Fox News, and Fox Soul is symbolic of the complexities inherent in today's media ecosystem. These entities, under the umbrella of the Fox Corporation, interlock in an unbalanced of influence and strategy, each reflecting diverse facets of media ownership, representation, cultural dialogue, and audience engagement. Fox Entertainment, Fox News, and Fox Soul are all part of the Fox Corporation, a mass media company formed because of the 2019 acquisition of 21st Century Fox by The Walt Disney Company (Schwartz, 2019). Fox Soul is a digital network that is part of the Fox Television Stations group, itself a component of the Fox Broadcasting Company, which operates as a subsidiary under the broader Fox Corporation umbrella, owned by the Murdoch family (Battaglio, 2022).

Similarly, Fox News, a subsidiary under the same corporate structure, is known for its conservative-leaning news and opinion programming. In 2020, amid the pandemic and widespread protests against police brutality, sparked by the killing of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement saw a significant surge in support. A study employing critical discourse analysis examined the portrayal of BLM on CNN and Fox News through 400 news show transcripts from May to October 2020 and found CNN portrayed BLM more positively, while Fox News often associated the movement with extremism. Both networks presented episodic, popularity, and growth narratives, but Fox News additionally framed BLM as riotous and hypocritical, contrasting CNN's change and conflict frames (Repo, 2022).

Supporting the reception of these findings, Fox News has faced criticism and allegations of promoting racist narratives and misinformation, which has led to a complex relationship with its sister network, Fox Soul. Fox Soul, launched in 2021, is a live and

interactive streaming channel aimed at African American viewers, specifically in faith, pop culture, politics, and personal guidance (Fox Soul, 2021). Their YouTube channel features original programming related to topics such as lifestyle, health, relationships, and personal development. The creation of Fox Soul can be seen as an attempt by Fox Corporation to diversify its audience and content offerings to reach Black viewers.

Fox Soul Programming

Fox Soul's programming engage with both the local and the broader national Black-centric conversations. Its lineup includes the incisive "McMillan & Morrow," where co-hosts Dr. Sean McMillan and Rich Morrow discuss public figures' decisions. "The Nightcap" invites viewers to a space complete with a full-service bar, a rotating ensemble of bartenders, and a signature pink couch that sets the stage for deep-diving dialogues (Fox Soul, 2023). Among Fox Soul's offerings, "Cocktails with Queens" stands out, though ending in 2023, it was a panel of Black women personalities, including actresses Claudia Jordan, Lisa Raye McCoy, Vivica A. Fox, and the singer Syleena Johnson. The ethos of 'sip-and-serve the tea' pervades the program, as each host infuses the conversation with their unique insights, delivering a dynamic exchange that is both relatable and enlightening (Fox Soul, 2023).

Legal Battles

In 2023, Fox Corporation found itself embroiled in a significant legal turmoil, culminating in a \$787.5 million judgment rendered against it in favor of Dominion Voting Systems. This judgment was a consequence of the dissemination of unfounded claims regarding electoral fraud (Peltz & Riccardi, 2023). Concurrently, the organization

faced allegations of internal racial discrimination as voiced by its employees, a matter that garnered attention in 2017 (Associated Press, 2017). Amidst these tumultuous circumstances, an intriguing development or rather, the lack thereof has been observed concerning Fox Soul's *Black Report*. It was their premier broadcast news program airing Friday evenings, starting in 2021, however, no news has been broadcasted since early 2023, with no information as to why the news show ended.

This raises pertinent questions about the impact of corporate governance on the mission and operational efficacy of a minority-focused news network under the support of a larger conglomerate. However, as of now, there is an absence of definitive investigative reports that explicitly connect these governance challenges to the observed hiatus in content updates. Additionally, Rupert Murdoch's resignation from his chairman positions at Fox Corporation and News Corp. in the fall of 2023 (Fadel & Folkenflik, 2023) adds another layer of complexity to the corporate narrative, potentially signaling a shift in organizational leadership and strategy at a time of considerable internal and external challenges.

The Fox Soul Super Bowl Debacle

Before moving into the details of the Super Bowl interview that never was, it's important to frame this novel event through the lens of Black media and cultural commodification, as it's deeply related. In 1992, the show, "In Living Color" markedly transformed Super Bowl halftime shows with its groundbreaking counter-programming strategy, drawing an audience of 20 million viewers away from The Super Bowl XXVI halftime show airing on CBS simultaneously (Chisolm, 2024; Rossen, 2024). This milestone was catalyzed by the show's unique blend of humor and cultural commentary,

compared to less culturally resonant performances like ice skating and marching bands during the Super Bowl (Chisolm, 2024; Rossen, 2024). Hosted by Keenan Ivory Wayans, the show was a family-run sketch-comedy venture that brought the talents of him and his siblings, known as the Wayans Brothers (Damon, Shawn also known as DJ SW-1 on the show, Marlon, and Dwayne), and sister Kim, into the spotlight as actors and DJ. “In Living Color” was produced by Keenan and his Ivory Way Production company, in association with Fox Television Center in Hollywood, CA. It premiered on April 15, 1990, on Fox (Smith, 2023).

Some argue that “In Living Color’s” success against the NFL, and their Super Bowl event, captured significant viewership and set a precedent for featuring Black artists in subsequent Super Bowl performances (Rossen, 2024). This shift compelled the NFL to overhaul its approach to halftime shows, starting with Michael Jackson in 1993, which marked the onset of modern, celebrity-driven performances at the Super Bowl designed to retain viewer attention and enhance the integration of popular culture (Goodman-Hughey, 2020). “In Living Color” not only showcased a talented predominately Black-ensemble cast led by the Wayans family but also marked a significant cultural moment for Black and diverse comedic expressions on mainstream television. As the only Black sketch comedy show of its time, “In Living Color” provided a stark contrast to predominantly white shows like “Saturday Night Live” (Goodman-Hughey, 2020).

This strategic shift has continued to influence the inclusion of renowned Black artists in Super Bowl performances, such as Prince, Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Usher, emphasizing the show’s lasting impact on how such events are staged to maintain

audience interest and integrate popular culture. This programming shift also highlights an ongoing issue with the commodification of Black American culture within the entertainment industry. Notably, performers at the Super Bowl, such as Usher in 2024 and in Beyoncé in 2016 (Fisher & Ford, 2024; Greenberg, 2016), are not compensated beyond the exposure they receive, which can boost their music sales and brand deals, a practice that stems from the wider industry trend of leveraging Black cultural productions without direct financial benefit to the performers. Usher, in the latest Super Bowl, serendipitously enough, featured marching bands and skating, albeit the Atlanta cultural experience of “Battle of the Bands” shows and roller-skating on Cascade in his performance, mirroring the less appealing Super Bowl performances that came before the “In Living Color” effect.

“In Living Color” was known for its diverse cast and its organic content, doused with satirical humor, typically from the lens of Black American life, that often addressed issues of race and culture. Moreover, the show’s approach to humor and representation, sparked discussions about media stereotypes. Although it was criticized for not challenging those stereotypes within the program and doing more to reinforce existing attitudes rather than challenge or change them (Cooks & Orbe, 1993), “In Living Color” is also credited with providing a platform for Black artists and comedic voices that challenged mainstream narratives.

The Persistent Pre-Show No-Show

During the 2022 Super Bowl LVIII, Fox Soul’s entertainment commentators, not their news show commentators, were scheduled to air an exclusive interview with Democratic president Joe Biden, a tradition started in 2004 by the then Republican

president, George W. Bush. During the pre-show, Biden was set to directly address Black viewers about that mattered to Black Americans (Klein et al., 2023), choosing Fox Soul three days before the Super Bowl (Bronston et al., 2023). Actress Vivica A. Fox, who is known for hosting “Cocktails with Queens” and “Fox Soul’s Screening Room” on Fox Soul, along with Mike Hill, a contributor at Fox Soul and sportscaster for FOX Sports 1 (FS1), would conduct the interview, usually pre-taped the Friday before the Super Bowl.

However, the interview was unexpectedly canceled. While the White House stated Fox retracted the invitation, Fox claims there was a miscommunication (Bronston et al., 2023). In 2024, Biden again opted out of a Super Bowl interview with CBS (Alafritz, 2024), even after attending the CBS Super Bowl interview in the past, which puts into question his reasoning for not again doing so in 2024. Nevertheless, Biden’s lack of participation further threatens the legacy of its annual tradition to connect to Black communities and their political foci of issues, as originally publicized.

The abrupt cancellation of President Biden’s scheduled interview with Fox Soul during Super Bowl LVIII in 2022 can be situated within the broader discourse of governance, media representation, and diversity. While the Biden administration has publicly committed to diversity and equity, the breakdown in communication with Fox Soul raises questions about the efficacy of these commitments when interfacing with media entities that have contentious histories with diversity. Furthermore, the incident resonates with a broader pattern of selective engagement by political figures with media outlets, which can have implications for public trust.

President Biden’s non-engagement with Fox News, reflect a strategic approach to media relations that weighs the perceived benefits against potential challenges in public

discourse. In this context, the absence of the interview on Fox Soul can be interpreted as a missed opportunity not only for direct engagement with Black American citizens but also for demonstrating the administration's governance principles in action. It underscores the necessity for transparent and inclusive communication strategies that bridge the gap between government entities and diverse media platforms, ultimately fostering a more representative public sphere. The interplay between Fox Entertainment, Fox News, and Fox Soul illustrates a complex relationship shaped by corporate strategies and market dynamics that continue to cross-influence each other, all deriving from the representation of Black culture and identities across different media platforms without proper connection or compensation.

CHAPTER IX: DISCUSSION

In the ever-evolving landscape of Black news media, the historical lens offers a profound understanding of its development and influence. The legacy of *Freedom's Journal* marks the genesis of Black journalism, where emancipated individuals rose to articulate the ambitions of a community striving for representation through ownership. These pioneers established a foundation of resistance and economic empowerment that echo through generations. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, unshaken by personal tragedy and threats, carried her anti-lynching crusade beyond American shores, seeking international solidarity for reform. Her relentless advocacy through speaking tours and seminal publications like *The Red Record* and *Southern Horrors* served as a catalyst, mobilizing support and awareness for the fight against the atrocity of lynching.

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association illuminated the impact of Garvey's Pan-Africanist ideology and his vision for economic advancement. Garvey's influence was not confined to Black America; it extended to Japanese communities and political groups, fostering a global identity and shared cause. The *Chicago Defender* emerged as a transformative force, guiding the Great Migration, and later critiquing its outcomes. *The Defender*, under the leadership of Robert Sengstacke Abbott and John H. Sengstacke, transcended its role as a newspaper to become a beacon of social change, advocating for civil rights and social justice within Black communities.

The financial backbone of the *Chicago Defender* was its circulation revenue, but it also faced challenges in funding during the Great Depression. Despite these struggles, *The Defender* remained a stalwart of the Black community and a symbol of perseverance.

As the *Chicago Defender*'s readership expanded, so too did its advertising base, which included controversial revenue sources like tobacco ads. Yet, the publication did not escape scrutiny, facing criticism for perpetuating elitism and other societal norms that countered the interests of its community.

In the realm of radio, early stations like KDKA and WHOD provided a platform for Black artists, subtly challenging racial barriers and fostering a burgeoning market for Black-oriented programming. This trend continued with the emergence of radio stations like WGES and WVON in Chicago (Mills, 2017), which became crucial outlets for Black American expression and empowerment. Stations like WERD in Atlanta, owned and operated by Jesse B. Blayton Sr., broke new ground as the first Black-owned radio station, becoming an influential voice during the Civil Rights Movement. Over time, these stations have weathered adversity, continuing to resonate with music and discourse that honor their legacies. Black radio networks exhibited the power of consolidation, or the need for constant merging, due to monetary constraints, a common theme for all Black news businesses.

The notion of "Black-controlled media" underscores the significance of having Black individuals at the helm, making strategic decisions, and shaping the narratives. In contrast, "Black-appeal media" refers to content that targets Black audiences, often as part of a broader strategy by mainstream outlets. The discussions around media diversity and ownership, exemplified by initiatives like the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the Minority Tax Credit Program, emphasize the ongoing challenges and the need for empirical support in policymaking to ensure the vitality and representation of minority voices in the media.

The advancement of digital technology and the media industry has significantly contributed to the democratization of news, facilitating the rise of personalized news content that caters directly to diverse communities. Black news podcasts are a notable manifestation of this trend, having established a crucial nexus between the unique lived experiences of Black Americans and the media they consume. With the establishment of Black news podcasts on platforms like iHeartMedia and YouTube, there is a dynamic shift from traditional media outlets, which have historically struggled to adequately represent Black perspectives and interests. This study sought to explore the origins, evolution, and impact of Black news podcasts, focusing on their role in community-building, promoting social justice, and revolutionizing news consumption.

The relationship between the media ecosystem and the Black community in America has been shaped by a long history of misrepresentation and underrepresentation. This disconnect necessitated alternative media sources that authentically reflect and engage with the Black American experience. Historically, as articulated by Davis (1990), the Black press played a significant role in fostering a sense of community among Black readers. Today, Black news podcasts have taken up this mantle, providing a digital space for Black voices to be heard and facilitating robust engagement among Black audiences. However, maintaining funding, workers, and additional shows on daily Black news podcasts and their networks, are still detrimental issues that threaten their survival within the digital media ecosystem.

Despite the remarkable growth in popularity of Black news podcasts, there remain significant barriers to their widespread acceptance and recognition in mainstream media, as evidenced by Ott-Fulmore's (2020) study. However, the resilience of these platforms

mirrors the history of Black radio, which as Bess (2017) notes, played a significant role in promoting Black voices and fostering a sense of community. Community was also exhibited through KJLH-FM in Los Angeles, Stevie Wonder's radio station, serving as a counter-voice in the community, during the 1992 race riots uprising (Johnson, 2004). Black news podcasts have taken this legacy into the digital age, broadening the scope of shared experiences and narratives within the Black community. Podcasting represents a significant advancement in the tradition of the Black Press and Black radio, respectively, preserving its core mission while adapting to the digital age's demands. Traditional Black media has historically been a pillar of advocacy, giving voice to African American narratives and serving as a watchdog for community rights and representation.

In the same vein, Black news podcasting has become a digital reincarnation of this advocacy, offering nuanced discussions on issues affecting the community. Furthermore, the tradition of focusing on community-specific news and interests has found a new medium in podcasting. By tapping into the power of niche targeting, Black podcasters direct content towards particular segments within the Black community, thus echoing the local engagement that the Black Press has long been known for. The independent spirit that fueled the emergence of traditional Black media, seeking to provide media spaces uninfluenced by the dominant narratives, continues robustly in the realm of podcasting.

YouTube and iHeart enables creators to retain editorial independence, broadcasting their truths without traditional media gatekeeping, though censorship and copyright claims are a rising issue. The potential for global reach is unparalleled; podcasts can transcend the geographic limitations of print circulation, fostering a

worldwide Black community dialogue, much like Garvey's mission. Additionally, the interactivity and engagement afforded by digital platforms enhance the dynamism of the medium, providing real-time conversations between creators and audiences that print could never accommodate, as found between the audience chat, commenters, and show presenters in #RolandMartinUnfiltered.

Economically, podcasting presents an altered landscape from traditional Black media businesses. Innovative funding models like crowdfunding and sponsorships provide financial backing while strengthening community ties, contrasting with the print ad and subscription model of traditional newspapers. The reduced costs for production and distribution align with the digital consumption trends of modern audiences, who prefer the autonomy of consuming content on their terms. However, the lack of advertising opportunities being fulfilled even after commitments are made publicly, as seen with GM, Roland Martin, and BNC/The Grio, leaves a gaping hole in the hopes of opportunity, as promises aren't being honored.

The same broken promises were found politically, with Biden's failed commitment to providing a Super Bowl interview with Fox Soul and CBS, which was initially tailored to speaking to the needs of Black Americans. When will Black America be seen as "brand safe" and politically central enough for dedicated support for consistent periods of time from advertisers and politicians alike? It takes these Black media organizations to hold these companies and politicians accountable, like the communal letter to GM. However, as seen with the "10,000 Careers" initiative by iHeartRadio, and FCC diversity figures, the results have left to be seen.

Research has indicated that audiences' cultural and community values play a pivotal role in how advertisements are perceived (Mastro & Stern, 2003). Thus, understanding how Black audiences respond to podcast advertisements is paramount. This could ensure that ad content resonates deeply, aligning with the cultural ethos of the audience. Implementing a tracking program from the FCC for ad dollars, with a minimum requirement would be a great start, however, the involvement the FCC has now is still slowly growing after decades.

Moreover, the political economy of grants and funding, if navigated effectively, can provide substantial financial support. A curated and sponsored database of Federal grants, FCC programs, and additional fellowships tailored for Black podcast creators, possibly from organizations like the National Association of Black-Owned Broadcasters (NABOB) could be a game-changer in this domain. Since the FCC, as Terry (2022) states, is in "regulatory paralysis", as echoed in this research with their lack of intentional movement towards EEO data use, quadrennial reviews releases, and viable programs and change to rectify the persistent miniscule percentages of minority ownership, especially as the move to more digital means is now a requirement to compete.

The CareerBuilder and BIN "100,000 Careers" initiative presents an integrated model of audience engagement and reflects key principles of Black political economy within the context of digital media and community activism. Leveraging the expansive reach of podcasting, it aims to address employment gaps within the Black community. However, it also invites scrutiny regarding its depth of impact and potential performative nature, especially when contextualized within the critical perspectives offered by scholars like Sperber (2021), who raise concerns about the commodification of activism in digital

spaces.

Drawing from McChesney's (2015) examination of the media's political economy, the "100,000 Careers" initiative could be seen as a manifestation of media's role in influencing socioeconomic structures, potentially challenging or reinforcing existing power relations within the capitalist system. Marable's (2015) work suggests that such initiatives need to be critically analyzed for how they actually confront systemic inequalities and facilitate tangible economic progress within the Black community, rather than just symbolically addressing them. Both McChesney (2015) and Marable (2015) underscore the importance of scrutinizing the true intentions and outcomes behind media endeavors purportedly aimed at social change.

Live events and community engagement present another potentially underexplored avenue for the podcasts themselves, instead of the larger platform presenting an event for podcasts and their audience. Live podcast recordings of community workshops can serve as multifaceted platforms, offering ticket sales, sponsorships, and merchandise sales opportunities (Linares, 2020). Martin has exhibited this type of audience engagement through his Democratic voting efforts targeting Black communities throughout the United States, at the local and national level, shown as programming on his daily news show, #RolandMartinUnfiltered.

In essence, Black news podcasting upholds the core values of the Black Press, advocacy, representation, and community focus, while harnessing the opportunities presented by digital technology and economic models. The movement from print to podcast reflects the evolution and diversification of Black media, ensuring that the foundational goals of the Black Press, to inform, empower, and advocate, continue to

resonate. Black news podcasting, therefore, does not simply succeed the Black Press; it elevates and expands its reach, ensuring that the Black voice remains vibrant and influential in the media narratives of today and hopefully tomorrow.

The power of narrative storytelling lies at the heart of Black news podcasts, offering a platform for the articulation of the experiences and perspectives of Black Americans as indicated with the principal traditional Black news media businesses. As Coleman (2013) suggests, the consumption of media plays a crucial role in shaping personal and communal identities and navigating the intricacies of racial dynamics. Consequently, Black news podcasts serve as a reflective mirror for Black audiences, resonating with their lived experiences and contributing to the formation of a shared identity. Black news podcasts have evolved beyond their initial role as news platforms, becoming vibrant arenas for the promotion of social justice and activism.

This evolution parallels the trajectory of the Black Lives Matter movement, which Nummi et al. (2019) note as a prime example of innovative Black activism that disrupts traditional forms of protest. Similarly, Black news podcasts have morphed into catalysts for systemic change, amplifying voices that challenge and disrupt societal norms.

Richardson's (2022) examination of Black millennial Christian podcasting illuminates the capacity of these digital platforms to interrogate prevailing ideologies while presenting counternarrative visions of Black identity and Christian faith. This strand of podcasting can be seen as a contemporary extension of the historical intersections between Black media, faith, and activism a lineage traceable to figures like Ida B. Wells and her spiritual connection with Charles Ake, and the strategic use of faith by networks like the #BlackStarNetwork and Fox to resonate with Black American

audiences.

These podcasts do more than just disseminate information; they provide a fertile ground for scholarship and practice in the financing of Black media ventures.

Additionally, they champion a version of Christianity that is more inclusive and socially attuned. The significance of this medium lies in its ability to foster a dualism of both societal and spiritual realms, offering a unique space where discussions of social justice, religious inclusivity, and spiritual introspection can coalesce.

Black news podcasts, particularly those exploring religious themes, like Roland Martin, who is also married to a minister with her own program on #BlackStarNetwork, hold the potential to be transformative agents. They can challenge traditional narratives within Christian spaces, promote greater understanding across diverse communities, and provide a platform for a more engaged, justice-oriented practice of faith. However, the incorporation of multiple arguments may limit their trajectory to reach their audiences, based on YouTube's algorithmic functioning. This transformative potential underpins their value in research and practice, highlighting the role of media in shaping public discourse about religion and social equity on platforms. Again, the same transformative potential was previously mirrored and worked, from Ida B. Wells' journey to the UK and Scotland, primarily on the basis of her journalistic pursuits, connected faith, and powerful womanhood, from her benefactors and supporters.

The Black news podcast industry has experienced a surge in popularity, reflecting larger trends in the overall podcast industry and an increasing demand for greater diversity in media. This burgeoning industry is defined by a rise in diverse voices, an emphasis on Black-centric content, and an innovative multi-platform approach to content

distribution. Moreover, successful Black news podcasts are increasingly forming partnerships with established media companies and advertisers, which amplifies their reach and augments their resources. Several challenges remain. Monetization, audience retention, economic exploitation of their Black culture and audiences, and maintaining a consistent output of high-quality content are key hurdles that creators must navigate. In her 2021 doctoral dissertation, Alston (2021) examines the decline of traditional radio among post-1990 listeners and the consequent reduction in advertising revenue.

Using the framework of disruptive innovation theory, this qualitative case study, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, explores the strategies U.S. marketing directors use to keep traditional radio competitive with digital media platforms. The study, which includes interviews with 15 marketing directors, identifies key strategies such as hosting more live events, embracing new technologies, and engaging with listener feedback (Alston, 2021). These findings offer insights into how traditional radio stations under the iHeart brand, as seen with BIN national roll-out, and Roland Martin's #RolandMartinUnfiltered, can continuously adapt and remain relevant in the digital era.

Fortunately, Roland Martin takes full advantage convergence and playing multiple programs at the same time. Both have already implemented Alston's (2021) suggestions as community is a huge part of BIN and Roland Martin, due to their dedication to providing news that matters to Black America. The effects of these events, by tracking engagement, subscribers, audience feedback, and monetization could be lucrative to explore as it appears to currently be a cornerstone for Black news podcasting, especially those programs featured on broadcast radio through larger organizations, like iHeartRadio.

Yet, the future of Black news podcasts remains promising, with the ever-increasing demand for diverse media content and the steady growth of the podcast industry pointing towards further growth and evolution. Black news podcasts on platforms like iHeartMedia and YouTube represent a seismic shift in the media landscape, redefining the relationship between Black communities and the news they consume. By providing news content that deeply resonates with Black audiences, these platforms have revolutionized the media industry, creating a sense of community, driving social justice and activism, and challenging conventional narratives. As digital technology continues to advance and more individuals turn to podcasts for news, Black news podcasts are set to become increasingly influential in shaping public discourse and effecting societal change.

Technological platforms and infrastructural dynamics also come to the fore in this discussion. Dominant podcast platforms, while robust, might not cater to the unique requirements of Black news podcast networks. As Sperber (2021) detailed, from a political economy perspective, there is the potential for a rise in “left entrepreneurs” in the podcast space, as there exists a tension between community activism and the need to make profit as podcasters, found inherently in the make-up of most social media platforms, like Facebook. Sperber’s (2021) critique underscores a critical challenge for Black news podcasting: the balance between maintaining a genuine engagement with community issues and the commercial pressures imposed by digital platforms.

This dichotomy illustrates the necessity for Black news podcasters to strategically navigate commercial platform algorithms and audience engagement tactics without compromising their mission to address systemic racial issues. There’s an importance of

fostering a communal narrative that resists commodification, leveraging podcasting as a form of resistance against mainstream narratives, and creating content that empowers and informs rather than simply attracts clicks.

The launch of one or many regional independent news streaming platforms spearheaded by Black podcast networks represents a potential shift within the digital media ecosystem. These platforms, sustained through crowdfunding alongside financial backers who commit to multi-year contracts with regular quarterly funding, may ensure full narrative control rests with the creators. This model also pays homage to the regional subscription-based systems of historical Black newspapers, which provided resilient networks for Black news businesses from the 1820s to today. These local and global networks facilitated content distribution and financial solidarity, safeguarding businesses against external adversities. Moreover, they enabled strategic mergers to preserve the heritage of these publications, when necessary.

Financially, the self-governance of independent platforms permits the adoption of monetization strategies aligned with community values, which can be especially pivotal for Black creators who frequently navigate systemic economic barriers. As Napoli (2011) found, the political economy of media entails understanding the forces that influence media production and distribution, within independent platforms, can be shaped to prioritize sustainable revenue models over traditional advertising reliance to maintain their media ventures in the face of a volatile digital marketplace.

This financial design could further be reinforced by a collaborative funding model drawing from grants, professional learning programs, and advertisers, reinforcing the principles of a political economy that champions autonomy and economic self-reliance.

There exists a fertile ground for partnerships between Black news podcast networks with other Black podcast networks, Black-owned businesses, ally-networks overseas with like ideologies and beliefs, national and global corporate, and FCC initiatives for broad audience reach and deep impact. Such synergies can usher in mutual promotional activities and sponsorships, thereby potentially enhancing the financial viability of these networks. Another potential gap here is the availability of training resources tailored to Black news podcasters sponsored by the FCC, in large incubator studios, and others owned by entrepreneurs like Roland Martin. Creating workshops on contemporary podcasting technologies and monetization techniques could be a pragmatic approach to bridge upskill gaps.

Black news podcast networks that build platforms using crowdfunding, could embody the potential for ownership and control that Marable (2015) advocates, where media serves not only as a vehicle for representation but also as an apparatus for economic empowerment within historically marginalized communities. This innovative approach has the potential to redefine the landscape, placing the power of media production and dissemination firmly in the hands of Black content creators. These suggestions hinge upon principles of the political economy of media that favor autonomy and economic self-determination, however; none of the cases in this study from *Freedom's Journal* to #RolandMartinUnfiltered were able to completely use crowdfunding for pure economic autonomy, though Roland Martin does state the majority of his news studio and show funding was from his audience.

Such platforms could facilitate the formation of an “intimate public” (Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019; Sim, 2016) where Black news creators can engage directly with their

audiences, free from the constraints and biases inherent in mainstream media conglomerates, echoing Napoli's (2014b) discourse on media diversity and the public interest. Algorithmic bias may still exist for conservative leaning voices within the Black-owned, -funded, and -controlled platform, but research and development in that area may elicit a grant funding opportunity to fix certain algorithmic biases within Black platforms like these, a new and interesting pathway that also circumvents commercial platforms lack of investing in that type of AI research and development, to best serve the public.

From a socio-political perspective, such platforms emerge as powerful conduits of expression of Black stories and the advancement of cultural discourse. They support a form of "sonic citizenship" that transcends individual programs centered on "counter-narratives" or commercial entities that may marginalize these voices, establishing a higher tier of governance and dialogue within the media landscape. They could also provide a nuanced news portrayal of Black life and perspectives, contributing to the creation of what Napoli (2015) terms "cultural forums." Within these forums, the authenticity of representation may be preserved to foster a more inclusive media ecosystem. The potential for these types of independent platforms also serve as spaces for political engagement and activism, aligning with Marable's (2015) views on the function of media in promoting social change and Roland Martin and iHeartMedia's aim to connect and support their audience and digital Black communities. Hopefully, with the change of ownership, better follow-up on the impact of these types of programs in Black communities may be better implemented.

Lastly, news media and podcast research organizations need to take a greater role in investigating Black news media consumers, as there is a very small percentage of data

that reflects this demographic. During the time of this study, there were less than five studies dedicated to Black news consumption and their audiences, during a nine-year period. Black news media consumer-based research needs to be further developed so that researchers can access that data to make stronger claims within their own research, hopefully during their own generation. The Kerner Commission Report of 1968 could likely support this need. To precisely determine their place within the digital ecosystem, and to determine their own needs within it as well, this type of research is a requirement. Today, our industry pursuits of measuring and analyzing big data have made it possible. So, researching Black news outlets and their audiences nationally and globally, needs to be actualized. This could also help make better policy decisions for Black-owned media, as there will be research to help back their claims of needing consistent funding and support, showing their impact in the industry, and to determine gaps for future industry studies.

In summary, the advent of independent Black-centric news streaming platforms heralds a new era of media production and consumption. As articulated by Marable (2015) and Napoli (2015), these platforms epitomize a paradigm where economic strategies, narrative control, and community activism converge to empower Black creators. They stand as a testament to the ability of Black podcasters to not only navigate but also actively reshape the digital media landscape in pursuit of a more equitable and representative media ecosystem. Black news podcasts and podcast networks is abounding with potential, echoing the suggestions found in the Kerner Report of 1968, to counteract the negative portrayals of Black life in traditional American news media systems.

However, to harness this potential fully, a concerted effort in research and practice, as

delineated above, is imperative. By investing judiciously in these areas, Black news podcast networks could ascend to unparalleled heights of financial sustainability, reach, and cultural impact to thrive and construct content beyond its current growth limits.

Recommendations for Black News Podcasters

Based on a synthesis of the dissertation findings and discussion, several strategic recommendations emerge to enhance the sustainability, reach, and impact of Black news podcasts. These recommendations encompass financial innovation, leveraging technology, fostering community engagement, developing strategic partnerships, engaging in policy advocacy, emphasizing content diversity and quality, committing to continuous research and learning, embracing collective economics, and promoting equity for media workers. By addressing these areas, Black news podcasters can overcome existing challenges and harness new opportunities, ensuring their pivotal role in media representation and advocacy for the Black community.

Embrace Financial Innovation

To ensure financial sustainability, Black news podcasts should embrace crowdfunding and community support. Utilizing platforms like Patreon, GoFundMe, and Kickstarter can provide essential funding while simultaneously strengthening community ties. However, introducing a payment model after an audience has free access, could reduce engagement and result in the loss of subscribers. To help with this, highlighting the importance of independent Black media in these campaigns can resonate deeply with potential backers, as done with Roland Martin in the form of internal ads in his programming. Additionally, adopting membership models where listeners can subscribe

for exclusive content, early access to episodes, and behind-the-scenes insights can create a steady revenue stream.

By offering tangible benefits, podcasts can incentivize listeners to support them financially. Sponsorship and advertising present another crucial area for financial innovation. Targeted sponsorships from companies whose values align with the podcast's mission can enhance revenue without compromising integrity. Emphasizing the importance of authentically reaching Black audiences can ensure that ad content resonates with cultural and community values. However, ethical considerations should guide advertising choices to avoid alienating the audience or compromising the podcast's mission, as seen with historical examples of controversial revenue sources with Roland Martin and the *Chicago Defender*.

The concept of collective economics for Black Americans (Nembhard, 2015) play a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability and growth of Black news podcasts. Creating podcast networks where resources such as production facilities, marketing expertise, and financial management are shared can reduce individual costs and enhance the quality of content. These networks can also foster collaborative projects that amplify individual voices and promote unity within the Black podcasting community. Ensuring equity within podcast networks is essential for the long-term health and diversity of Black media. This involves fair compensation, opportunities for professional development, and pathways for media workers to have ownership stakes in the network. Establishing equity-sharing models can incentivize media workers to invest in the success of the network, creating a more collaborative and motivated workforce. Additionally, providing

training and mentorship programs can help nurture new talent and ensure a continuous influx of diverse voices in Black media.

Leverage Technology and Digital Platforms

Maximizing the potential of technology and digital platforms is essential for the growth of Black news podcasts. Multi-platform distribution through YouTube and iHeartMedia can significantly broaden reach. The visual component of YouTube can enhance engagement, while iHeartMedia's extensive network can amplify visibility. Additionally, live streaming and interactive content via platforms like YouTube Live can foster a sense of community and immediacy, encouraging active participation and building listener loyalty. Utilizing data analytics is crucial for understanding audience preferences, behaviors, and demographics. Tailoring content based on these insights can enhance relevance and engagement, ensuring that podcasts meet the needs and interests of their listeners. Moreover, being aware of platform algorithms and their impact on content visibility allows podcasters to experiment with different formats and engagement strategies to optimize reach and impact.

Foster Community Engagement

Community engagement is vital for the success and sustainability of Black news podcasts. Hosting live events, community workshops, and panel discussions can create additional revenue streams while deepening audience connection. These events provide valuable networking opportunities and platforms for activism, further solidifying the podcast's role within the community. Leveraging the global potential of digital platforms

to connect with Black communities worldwide can foster a sense of global solidarity and shared identity, much like Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanist vision.

Develop Strategic Partnerships

Building strategic partnerships can amplify the reach and resources of Black news podcasts. Collaborating with other Black-owned media outlets can create a stronger, unified presence through joint ventures, cross-promotions, and shared content. These partnerships can significantly enhance visibility and impact. Additionally, engaging with corporations committed to diversity and inclusion can provide essential support. However, it is crucial to ensure these partnerships are genuine and not merely performative, with regular assessments to hold corporate partners accountable to their commitments.

Advocacy and Policy Engagement

Engaging with policymakers and Black media organizations, such as the National Association of Black-Owned Broadcasters (NABOB) and advocating for supportive policies is crucial for the long-term success of Black news podcasts. Active participation in policy discussions can help shape an environment conducive to the growth of minority-owned media, including securing tax credits, grants, and favorable regulatory conditions. Leveraging programs offered by the FCC and other government entities can provide essential financial support. Building a curated database of relevant grants and funding opportunities can also assist in navigating the financial landscape. Additionally, such a database can help track the historical lack of opportunities from the government

for the Black press, highlighting a constitutional right enshrined in the First Amendment that has been limited for Black Americans and other groups in the US.

Emphasize Content Diversity and Quality

Ensuring content diversity and maintaining high production quality are essential for attracting and retaining audiences. Black news podcasts should reflect the diverse experiences within the Black community, addressing intersections of gender, sexuality, class, and more. This inclusive approach can attract a broader audience and create richer, more nuanced narratives. Investing in high-quality production values, including clear audio, broadcast news standards, professional editing, and engaging presentation, can significantly impact listener retention and enhance overall credibility.

Research and Continuous Learning

Ongoing research and continuous learning are critical for the evolution of Black news podcasts. Conducting and supporting research into Black news consumption patterns, audience preferences, and media impact can provide valuable insights for strategic decisions. Collaborating with academic institutions and media research organizations can enhance this effort. Additionally, offering and participating in workshops, training sessions, and seminars on the latest podcasting technologies, monetization strategies, and content creation techniques can ensure that Black podcasters remain at the forefront of industry developments.

Black news podcasts hold immense potential to revolutionize media representation and advocacy for the Black community. By embracing financial innovation, leveraging technology, fostering community engagement, developing

strategic partnerships, engaging in policy advocacy, emphasizing content diversity and quality, committing to continuous research and learning, embracing collective economics, and promoting equity for media workers, these platforms can navigate existing challenges and seize new opportunities. The evolution of Black news podcasts is not just a continuation of the Black press legacy but an elevation that promises a vibrant, inclusive, and impactful future in the digital media landscape.

Limitations and Future Research

In the discourse on Black news podcasting, its connection to the Black press, there were several limitations of the current study. The historical coverage of this dissertation, while expansive, encounters inherent limitations in depth. The vast continuum of Black media history contains rich and less trodden periods, places, and people, that warrant a closer examination. Future scholars should be encouraged to delve into these underexplored territories, revealing the subtleties of each era's contribution to the development of Black media forms and their sociocultural implications.

Geographically, the focus of the study is primarily centered on the United States, thus not capturing the full breadth of the Black Diaspora's media influence. The global arena of Black media, shown briefly with Marcus Garvey in this study, have multiple diverse cultural narratives from across the world, representing a significant area for future investigation. By extending the geographic lens, researchers can gain a holistic understanding of the diaspora's multifaceted impact on media and culture, transcending national boundaries.

Methodologically, the dissertation is potentially constrained by its reliance on specific analytical frameworks. While qualitative textual analysis and historical

documentation have been pivotal, they may not encapsulate the entire spectrum of Black media's evolutionary journey. This study was primarily a document analysis coupled with a case study analysis. To overcome this limitation, an incorporation of mixed methods and participatory research could enrich the understanding of Black media's trajectory, bringing to the fore the lived experiences and personal narratives that form the crux of its essence. Interviews or surveys may be a useful addition to scholastic research to assess the financial situation for many Black podcasters at a small or large scale. Further implications for policy reform, programs, or laws can be supplemented with this rich research to determine the needs of Black media business owners in need of help.

In the quickly moving quantum ecosystem of digital media, the evolution of technology and algorithms poses a moving target for comprehensive analysis. The rapidity with which digital media platforms evolve, alongside their algorithmic undercurrents that shape content distribution and consumption, necessitates continuous research. Such work must be nimble, adaptive, and forward-looking, ensuring that the conclusions drawn are reflective of the latest digital trends impacting Black media. How can Black media benefit from left-leaning algorithms, and how may they disappear in a sea of liberal voices may be a prime start.

The dissertation also approaches race and media from an angle that may not completely account for intersectionality. The nuances of intersectional identities within the Black community, encompassing gender, sexuality, class, and beyond, offer a fertile ground for investigation. Gender was touched upon, but more research is needed in the impact of Black women in news media, historically, and in podcasting today, to add to the needed scholarly articles in this area. Innovative economic initiatives by Black news

business owners from intersectional communities may also be a nice addition. An intersectional lens in future research endeavors could unveil the complex dynamics that shape Black media experiences and production beyond news media, facilitating a more nuanced discourse that mirrors the reality of its audience. Additionally, the reliance on available primary sources could narrow the historical analysis, potentially overlooking critical voices and perspectives. Future research stands to benefit from a concerted effort to unearth and utilize less prominent archives, oral histories, and personal accounts, thereby enriching the historical context.

Lastly, the scope of audience engagement analysis within the dissertation may not fully reflect the complexities inherent in how audiences interact with Black media across different platforms and time periods. A critical area that warrants further research is the granular understanding of audience demographics specific to Black podcast listeners. As posited by scholars in audience research, a nuanced grasp of consumption patterns and content preferences can be instrumental in tailoring content and advertising to listener inclinations (Webster & Phalen, 2013). Regrettably, much of the existing podcast audience data tends to be generic, often neglecting the unique dynamics of racially and culturally specific audiences (Berry, 2016). Subsequent studies could provide a granular look at changing consumption patterns and engagement behaviors, offering strategic insights for Black media producers.

Similarly, there is a conspicuous absence of monetization strategies tailored to niche markets like Black news podcasts. Historically, most monetization models in the media industry have been crafted with a broad audience in mind, potentially sidelining the nuances of niche demographics (Napoli, 2008). This underscores the demands of

devising revenue models explicitly designed for Black news podcast networks, incorporating avenues such as sponsorships, listener donations, and live, premium content as seen with BIN and #BlackStarNetwork.

The preeminence of podcasting as a medium for storytelling, community building, and social commentary has been a game-changer for Black media. Investigating the impact of Black podcasting on cultural discourse, community mobilization, and social activism can illuminate its transformative role in contemporary society. This line of research is crucial to comprehend the extent to which Black podcasting has become a catalytic force for social change and cultural preservation within the digital era.

While this study establishes a foundational understanding of Black news podcasting within political economy, it also sets the stage for a continued academic inquiry. There is an academic imperative to probe deeper into the historical, geographical, methodological, and technological facets of Black media, as well as to explore the intersectional and audience engagement elements that characterize this field. As the landscape of Black news podcasting continues to evolve, so too must the scholarly approaches that seek to understand and expound upon its significance.

APPENDIX

Photos of Roland Martin's #BlackStarNetwork Studio





#BlackStarNetwork Studio Reveal! Haters Insert Hate Here

#ROLANDMARTINUNFILTERED

LIVE

#ROLAND MARTIN UNFILTERED ONLY DIGITAL SHOW

#WE/RMARTINUNFILTERED VENMO.COM/RMUNFILTERED CASH.APP/SRM

32:50 / 1:09:20

Scroll for details





#BlackStarNetwork Studio Reveal! Haters Insert Hate Here 🗨️



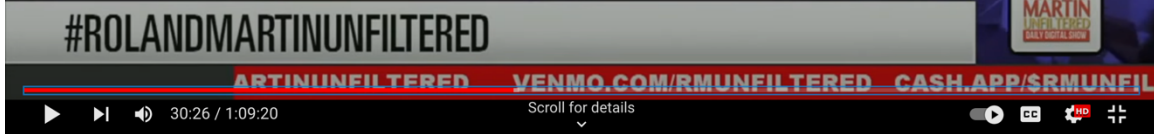
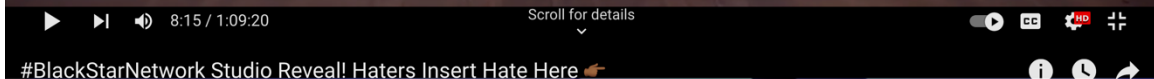
#ROLANDMARTINUNFILTERED

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#BlackStarNetwork Studio Reveal! Haters Insert Hate Here

FREEDOM'S JOURNAL.
NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MARCH 16, 1967 VOL. 1 NO. 1

WE WISH TO PLEAD OUR
IN CAUSE. TOO LONG HA
THERS SPOKEN FOR

#ROLANDMARTINUNFILTERED

LIVE
ROLAND MARTIN
THE REPORT
DAILY DIGITAL SHOW

A CREDIT CARD BY GOING AND USING SQUARE AT ROLANDM

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#BlackStarNetwork Studio Reveal! Haters Insert Hate Here

#BLACKOWNEDMEDIAMATTERS

#ROLANDMARTINUNFILTERED

LIVE
ROLAND MARTIN
THE REPORT
DAILY DIGITAL SHOW

TERED VIA PAYPAL AT PAYPAL.ME/RMARTINUNFILTERED

31:19 / 1:09:20

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[PAL AT PAYPAL.ME/RMARTINUNFILTERED](https://PAL.PAYPAL.ME/RMARTINUNFILTERED) VENMO.COM/RMUNFILTERED

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CC HD



VENMO.COM/RMUNFILTERED [CASH.APP/\\$RMUNFILTERED](https://CASH.APP/$RMUNFILTERED) USE A CREDIT CARD

31:55 / 1:09:20 Scroll for details

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1. https://s3images.coroflot.com/user_files/individual_files/original_248578_bav7ybogkwkeakq2nakavpa7g.png
2. <https://ca-times.brightspotcdn.com/dims4/default/1900bb2/2147483647/strip/true/crop/8256x6192+0+0/resize/1200x900!/quality/80/?url=https:%2F%2Fcalifornia-times-brightspot.s3.amazonaws.com%2Fd9%2Fe8%2Faa0c0370476f820a0592a8f44855%2F1152646-et-roland-martin-21.jpg>
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