

# Black Press continues pressing for respect

By Hazel Trice Edney  
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Los Angeles Sentinel publisher Danny Bakewell was forced to challenge a White-owned public relations firm last June before the 72-year-old Black-owned newspaper was finally allowed to cover the funeral of Ray Charles.

Freelance photographer Andre Smith of Detroit was twice denied access to this year's Academy Awards in Hollywood, although he had applied to represent five Black newspapers, with a combined circulation of 520,000, owned by Real Times LLC. He was told the circulation was not large enough.

Staff photographer Sandra Sellars of the Black-owned Richmond Free Press was barred from covering the swearing in of Virginia's first Black Supreme Court Chief Justice Leroy Hassell two years ago, while at least four White-owned news agencies were allowed that privilege.

And Kimber, Kimber & Associates, a Fresno, Calif., advertising agency that serves approximately 250 Black-owned newspapers, led a boycott of Kohl's department store in Milwaukee last year after the store spent \$86.4 million in advertising but none with the Black Press.

This is 21st Century reality of Black-owned newspapers, 178 years after the founding of America's first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, by Samuel Cornish and John B. Russworm.

Some publishers don't know where to start recounting the rebuffs.

"Why would I talk about one incident when [there are] so many?" asks Robert Bogle, publisher of the 121-year-old *Philadelphia Tribune*, the oldest Black-owned newspaper in the nation. "The Black Press of America has been marginalized as African-Americans in general have been marginalized. And therefore, we are not perceived to have the same credentials as non-African-American institutions."

When Cornish and Russworm founded *Freedom's Journal* on March 16, 1827, they declared, "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us."

This week, as Black publishers of the 200-member National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) converged on Capitol Hill in Washington to visit with lawmakers in celebration of

Black Press Week, many concede that after nearly two centuries of fighting for Black people — from the lynching and Jim Crow of yesterday to the police profiling and economic inequality of today — the Black Press has not fought nearly hard enough for itself.

And there is much to fight for.

"This is the first time I have ever known [of] that the Democratic Party almost totally ignored the Black Press as far as advertising in its publications," says Dorothy

Leavell, publisher of the *Chicago New Crusader*. "They did this targeted kind of advertising in battleground states and ignored the rest of the Black Press."

Two months before November's election, NNPA Chairwoman Sonny Messiah-Jiles wrote a letter to DNC Chairman Terry McAuliffe, pressing him about ad dollars that he'd promised the Black Press.

"Well, we are in the final 60 days and there is a lot of work to be done. Unfortu-

nately, the National Newspaper Publishers Association has not heard from the DNC regarding its advertising plans. As a result, I am sending you the proposal previously submitted in June, 2004 by the [NNPA] to ensure The Black Press of America is a part of the strategic advertising campaign to educate and mobilize voters to go to the polls and vote in November," she wrote.

"During a meeting with the leadership of NNPA, [Democratic Presidential

Candidate] Senator [John] Kerry and you both made a vow to advertise with The Black Press of America in a big way. Considering during the last presidential election, the Democratic candidate made a promise to advertise in Black newspapers and did not follow through, I am sending you another copy of our proposal in an effort to avoid history repeating itself and remind you of the commitment."

According to a January memo from the DNC to

NNPA publishers, the DNC made what it described as "a historic investment in African-American media, spending more on African-American print, radio and television than ever before."

But that \$3.2 million — nearly triple what was spent in 2000 — placed ads in only half of NNPA newspapers, amounting to \$500,000 or approximately \$5,000 each. The balance of \$2.7 million was spent between radio, Internet media and maga-  
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