

Black Editors Forum, so should there be a Forum of Black Journalists?

Mda has no existential angst about her organisation. After a trip to the United States at the end of July where she attended the glamorous annual gathering of the (American) National Association of Black Journalists, she's more convinced than ever. "They are so far ahead of us. The very fact that you can talk of 3 000 black journalists gathering annually is amazing. People actually pay a US\$250 registration fee. They want to be there." Mda wants to build an organisation of journalists who wield professional and financial power. Success, for her, equals prosperity. At the NABJ convention, an automatic teller machine was installed for delegates. "On Wednesday afternoon it was filled with US\$1-million. By Saturday morning it was finished," says Mda incredulously.

An idea she hopes to import from the convention is the job fair where most American newspapers and networks come along to recruit. She wants the FBJ to start dealing with the issues that affect journalists. "I watched them deal with everything from the big picture things like 'reporting Africa' to

mid-career burn-out as well as how to write a tight intro." While many would rejoice that somebody is going to teach local journalists to write a tight intro, Mda faces more burning issues.

The monthly FBJ imbizos with prominent people in the news will continue. For now, they are a Gauteng event where the monthly meeting at the SAB Centenary Centre in Newtown is a highlight. Mda is considering persuading speakers — who have included Kwame Toure (the man once known as Stokeley Carmichael), Patricia de Lille and Tito Mboweni — to go on-the-record. "That way the FBJ will be given a profile."

The meeting is also important, she says, because "there is a feeling that black journalists don't have access to decision-makers". News editors continue to send white journalists to do the important stories. "We need new opinions. White SA is always jumping up and down whenever something happens (like the Lesotho intervention/invasion). We need people who are in a position to say 'Hang on!'"

Ferial Haffajee is a journalist at the Mail&Guardian

FORUM OF BLACK JOURNALISTS

Membership of the Forum of Black Journalists is open to black journalists. But what precisely is black? "Whoever feels black," says Mda.

My deputy editor (Rehana Rossouw who identifies herself as black, but is classified coloured) swears that membership is not open to her.

Several requests for an application form from Mda were unsuccessful.

Invitations to our office at the Mail&Guardian go only to journalists with African bylines. I've taken my friend Ann Eveleth (physically white and born in America but more citizen-of-the-world than most people I know) along and seen the Sunday Independent's Maureen Isaacson at imbizos. Says Mda: "They are not supposed to come."

What is a journalist? "The FBJ must be owned by practising journalists. I didn't agree with the organisation's launch because it was dominated by too many old fuddy-duddies (She can't mean Zwelakhe Sisulu, Thami Mazwai and Jon Qwelane who held court?) who aren't journalists. No media owners can become members. Membership of the FBJ is open to black (whatever that means these days) reporters, sub-editors, editors, news editors and photojournalists."

Ferial Haffajee

Two unequal Americas

(and what black journalists did about it)



BY DOROTHY BUTLER GILLIAM

SOME PEOPLE would place the birth of our struggle at around 1968, a few years after I broke into the daily newspaper business. 1968, as a recent publication of the Freedom Forum's Newseum put it, was pivotal year. "In January, the Viet Cong launched the Tet offensive. In April the Rev Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated. In June Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. In August Soviet tanks rolled into Prague. In October two US athletes were ousted from the Olympics for giving the Black Power salute on the medals stand. In November Richard M. Nixon was elected president."

But the 4 April assassination of Dr Martin Luther King would doubtless be the event that most black journalists would remember most. The anger in black urban neighbourhoods that had sporadically spawned fires in some cities, seemed to engulf black urban America after the brutal murder of Dr King. The urban insurrections of the 1960s — most called them riots — demonstrated how inadequate the mainstream media in America was in covering black America. White reporters were attacked in poor black neighbourhoods. Some papers recruited janitors and anybody black who worked in their buildings to go into the riot zones.

Then the presidentially-appointed Kerner Commission fingered the press as a main culprit in creating two, unequal Americas — one black and one white — by failing to write and report adequately on black America. The press was told to hire black reporters and editors and improve its coverage.

One response to this major embarrassment for the media came from the Ford Foundation. Recognising that more black Americans needed to be trained immediately, Ford instituted an intensive 11-week training programme at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism during the summers.

The programme worked well — it was a boot camp for journalists and produced many black journalists who are today's veterans — Milton Coleman, deputy managing editor of the Washington Post; Mervyn AubeSpin, associate editor of the Louisville Courier Journal; former television anchor and now businesswoman Maureen Bunyan.

Charlayne Hunter-Gault was among those who taught in that programme along with many others. But after three years the Ford funding ended and Columbia called it quits.

The programme was scheduled to die in the early 1970s. But a small band of black and white journalists — led by Robert Maynard, Earl Caldwell, Walter Stovall and others — knew that the programme should not die. They determined to find the funding and run the programme themselves. As Bob Maynard put it: we were determined to wipe from the lexicon of journalism the phrase "we couldn't find anyone qualified".

By 1976 they had found a new home for the programme — the Summer Programme for Minority Journalists — at the University of California at Berkeley. They received funding from the Gannett Foundation — the forerunner to the Freedom Forum. The SPMJ sought to demystify daily journalism for blacks who had long been barred from America's newsrooms.

I first joined the faculty of the summer programme in 1976 and was asked that same year to become a member of the board of the sponsoring organisation which we called the Institute for Journalism Education. We carefully trained and placed hundreds of minority journalists during the 13 years we ran this successful boot camp for minority journalists. I was fortunate to become IFJ chair in 1985.

We soon found out that minority reporters weren't enough — we needed to train blacks, Asians, Hispanics and Native Americans as copy editors and desk editors too.

So we conceived a new programme — the Editing Programme for Minority Journalists — and started an intensive eight-week editing programme.

We found a home for it at the University of Arizona. We recruited faculty, conceptualised the courses and began turning out a cadre of copy editors and assistant desk editors.

But soon we knew something was sorely missing — people who were in a position to make big decisions about coverage, content and direction. In 1985, under the leadership of the then president Ellis Cose, IJE instituted the Management Training Centre at Northwestern University — one of the first newspaper management training projects in America for newspaper people.

Strategically we knew the time had come not only to respond to the needs we saw in the industry but also to get industry leaders more involved in the process of creating the programme.

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We put together an advisory committee for our management training centre of top industry leaders. These included representatives from the Chicago Tribune, USA Today, Washington Post, New York Times and many smaller newspapers as well.

The result of our joint efforts was a training programme of eight weeks that heavily incorporated principles of business and management. Two weeks of field site experience offered participants the opportunity to test some of the principles.

Leading newspapers sent their most promising people — those minority journalists who were fast-tracked to become metro or managing editors and those who were from the business side of the newspaper as well.

Some of our graduates include top editors and publishers such as John X Miller, now a publisher in the Gannett chain; Philip Dixon of the Philadelphia Inquirer; Wanda Lloyd, formerly a top editor of the USA Today and now managing editor of Gannett's Greenville SC newspaper; Dorothy Blan, now a publisher in New York state, and many more.

We also made a decision — controversial at the time — to include white women and later white men in the project. Our thinking was that whites needed to know how to manage a multi-cultural America and who better to help train them than those who were fighting to have their culture respected by the mainstream?

The editing training programme and the management training are still in operation today. IJE was renamed the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education after one of our founders, Robert C Maynard who died a few years ago after a distinguished and brilliant career of leadership and service in diversity, and as the first black owner of a metropolitan daily paper, the Oakland Tribune.

I briefly want to mention the parallel diversity movement in America — the activist, membership organisations.

The National Association of Black Journalists was begun in 1975 to further and promote all of the principles of the free press in a democracy, with the added mandate of pushing to increase the hiring and promotion of blacks; to promote more balanced coverage of African Americans and to give our communities greater access to media. It is now the largest media organisation of people of colour in the world — with 3 000 members that include TV and print working journalists, academics and students.

Following our pattern the other ethnic journalists of colour also organised beginning in the late 1970s and 80s.

Talk about unity.

Dorothy Butler Gilliam is a columnist on The Washington Post.

Legal Journalist of the Year Award

SOUTH African legal history has undergone more changes since the historic elections of 1994 than in the preceding 10 years. We have witnessed a plethora of fundamental legislation that has been passed by Parliament. The legislation that has recently emanated from Parliament has far reaching implications for the ordinary citizen in the street. South African lawyers are now faced with the challenge of interpreting this legislation within the parameters of a South African environment and at the same time taking cognisance of international developments. The implication of this legislation needs to be understood by the ordinary person in the street and lawyers and journalists play an important role in this regard.

During the same period, the judiciary has been visibly changing as it also takes cognisance of the latest developments, in a democratic society both nationally and internationally. We have seen the creation of a Constitutional Court, Labour Court, Labour Appeal Court, Consumer Court and the restructuring of the existing court structures. Every day new cases are heard creating precedents that affect our daily lives. A typical example applicable to the media industry is the recent Bogoshi judgment, which no longer holds the media strictly liable in cases of defamation. The media by way of its journalists have an important role to play in the dissemination of this "legal" information to the ordinary man in the street.

WWB has identified a need to recognise and honour journalists who work in the spe-

cialised area of law. It is the firm's intention to launch the "WWB Legal Journalist of the Year Award" in 1999. The aims and objectives of the award will include the following:

- to identify and honour journalists in the print and broadcasting media who report on legal issues, events, court cases and the like;
- to highlight the importance of accurate reporting in the field of legal journalism;
- to encourage legal journalism;
- to encourage the public's awareness of legal journalism;
- to facilitate and affirm the need for accurate, objective, yet insightful legal reporting.

The award will carry prize money of R17 000, and will be awarded for the best published legal/law related article including reports on criminal cases and/or legal academic issues. Journalists are invited to submit six articles that they have written on an aspect pertinent to the legal field. The panel of judges will comprise academics, journalists, editors and a representative from each journalist association and body. As part of this initiative, WWB intends to encourage the secondment of journalists to its and other law firms, for short periods, to enable them to experience some of the practical elements of the legal process. The award is supported by Rhodes University, prominent newspaper editors and all journalist associations, bodies and unions in the Republic.

For any further information about the award contact Joy-Marie Lawrence of WWB. Telephone (011) 240 5000. Fax (011) 240 5111

WWB

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The rapid growth of the multi-media industry and increasing convergence of media and communication technologies in the recent past has placed WWB in a unique position to offer comprehensive legal assistance to clients operating in this dynamic field.

The merging of traditional forms of communications, media and entertainment requires legal assistance that is able to deal equally with the regulatory aspects of telecommunications, broadcasting and communication, as well as the intellectual property and copyright aspects relating to media content.

The long established media law team of WWB has been expanded into the media and communications team. The services that the media and communications team provides include all aspects of the law pertaining to newspapers and magazines, wire services, broad-

casting, cellular telephony, television and Internet. The team acts for newspaper groups, publishers and major communications and broadcasting companies on a wide range of legal issues, including defamation matters, the evolving regulatory environment in South Africa; negotiation of inter-connecting agreements, national and cross-border corporate transactions and alliances.

➤ **For further information** contact the head of the media and communications team, Peter Grealy at (011) 240 5000 or by fax (011) 240 5111.

The other members of the team are: Peter Reynolds, Paul Jenkins, Gal Bastri, Lynn Flemming, Paul Sibisi, Joy-Marie Lawrence and Bradley Silver.