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Sanders, Joshunda. *How Racism and Sexism Killed Traditional Media- Why the Future of Journalism depends on Women and People of Color*

Racism in American Institutions, Brian D. Behnken, Series Editor. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC. 2015. ISBN: 9781440830815.

Reviewed by Dr. Patricia Combies RSM, Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Salve Regina University.

How Racism and Sexism Killed Traditional Media is the second monograph in the Praeger series that explores institutional racism in the media. Joshua Sanders, the author, writes both from the experience of being a black woman journalist for ten years in the legacy (traditional) media and as a professor of journalism. Her book traces the history of journalism from the perspective of racism and sexism from the 1600s through to today. Amazingly, it appears to be one of the few texts on journalism that studies the challenges and contributions of women, black men and women, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans to the growth of media in America. The monograph contains seven chapters that are centered around the 1968 report issued by the Kerner Commission, part of the National Advisory Committee on Civil Disorders requested by President Lyndon Johnson. The Kerner commission issued

“the most enduring indictment of the press’s racial uniformity that American history has to offer. The report noted that part of what fueled unrest in cities across the country was a media system that had not reflected the full lives of African Americans, in part, because black reporters had not been hired with any real consistency or promoted within news organizations. Specifically, the report said, “The news media have failed to analyze and report accurately on racial problems. They report and write from the standpoint of a white man’s world.”
(14)

Chapter two outlines the slow response to the Kerner report noting that American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) in 1978 finally conducted a census revealing that minorities made up less than 4 percent of journalists in the country. It would still take time before ASNE would change the two barriers it had that prevented black editors from membership. ASNE accepted only editors of daily papers for membership and most black papers were weekly. It was 1968 when ASNE admitted the first black editor. In addressing the second barrier, education, Sanders outlines the work of Robert C. Maynard, a black editor, in establishing the Institute for Journalist Education (IJE) at Berkeley in 1978. This program would spread to other cities offering summer classes that

eventually qualified hundreds of minority journalist with the degrees needed for employment. The summer program at Columbia University condensed years of journalism experience into the summer months providing a model for in-service education.

The strongest contribution of Sanders work is her attention to the details of the experiences of women and black journalists as well as mention of Asian journalist, Latinos and Native Americans. Sanders employs the personal narratives as well as the research of archives of legacy media to verify the experience of racism and sexism on the job. From being forced to use separate washrooms to being relegated to fluff pieces, she details how difficult being a minority or woman journalist is. Her research acknowledges and praises white editors and colleagues who tried to understand the racism and sexism in the profession and change it.

Once working in the profession Sanders stresses that black journalists faced pressure from within the legacy media with its white man's view and focus on a white audience. Reporters found, Sanders said, that articles about Black entertainers and sports figures were well received but articles on life in the black community were not published unless they showed the stereotypes of Blacks as lazy and violent. Similarly, women journalist were expected to discuss food and clothing. The publication of *MS* magazine and a strike by woman at *Ladies Home Journal* over the focus of articles exemplified the frustration of women and their courage to act for change. The second problem black journalists faced was from the black community that expected them to represent the community, sometimes creating challenges to the reporter for accuracy of reporting. Sanders cites numerous examples from black and women journalists who were able to break through into the legacy media but often left disillusioned.

The 1990s saw a rise in integration in the legacy media, but the actual percentages of minorities and women in key positions remained low. It would be the events of September 11, 2001, that would create a new era in media. If legacy media had failed in its response to racism and sexism, Sanders asserts in the final section of her book, legacy media was much too slow in recognizing the impact that social media would be on how people retrieve, create, and share information. She recalls her first realization of the strength of social media as a student at the University of Texas during the slaughter at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 2007. Her journalism professor put Global Twitter on the classroom screen, and the students in Texas experienced the events in Virginia through the texts and videos of those in the midst of it. Sanders confronts the

key questions that arise when audience controls the information: who oversees accuracy of sources, wrong information, costs.

The twenty-first century has seen a decline in the audience for legacy media. Sanders notes the end of numerous newspapers and magazines in the first part of this century. The publishers had not anticipated the economic impact of social media on advertising. The rise of social media witnessed the move of job postings, real estate, as well as consumer products ads to social media sites. As print media saw the interest of readers in social media grow, many established free web sites for consumers to read their publications. Only the *Wall Street Journal* and *the Economist*, aware of the economic effect, required subscriptions from the onset to read online. Today other papers have followed suit, but readership has already been lost. In 2005, the *San Francisco Chronicle* lost \$60 million in ads. The greatest challenge Sanders notes is that legacy media had a shared culture in which all consumers viewed the same news, at the same time, with a definite focus. Today social media offers endless possible sites to gain information reflecting a variety of views.

Sanders research is untiring in citing statistics that show the growth of social media and the decline of the legacy press. Those under thirty years old and minority groups use social networking as a major source for information. She acknowledges that social media's strength of influence is timeliness, diversity, reach and access. However, like legacy media, the greatest challenge is costs and sustainability. Despite the changes and statistical research, Sanders expresses optimism that legacy media may transform itself to continue into the future, but to do so requires the realization that by 2043, if not sooner, the country's minority will be the majority. Sanders provides a detailed analysis of the buying power of women and minorities as well as the growth of women in education and workplace power positions to strengthen her argument of the change in audience for media. If as Sanders proves racism and sexism killed traditional media; it may be the same two forces that will reform it for the future.

For anyone concerned about racism or sexism or anyone wanting to understand the role racism and sexism plays in media, Sanders book is a well-researched, well-documented review of the history of racism and sexism in the legacy media. In addition, she speculates from data about social media's role for the future. Anyone interested in media needs to read this work. At this time when we hear so much about "Fake media", Sanders closing remark offers a hope-filled

challenge. “With what Astra Taylor calls a more robust support system for the Fourth Estate, which has given diversity a boost in other countries, the United States media system can be sure that journalism takes everyone possible into account. The future of American democracy depends on it.” (155)