

TITLE: Creating an Ethnic Student Newspaper

GRADES: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA(S): US History (Twentieth Century)

American Democracy

Economics

English/Language Arts

OVERVIEW:

For many years African-Americans were not mentioned in the mainstream press unless a crime had been committed. They were routinely vilified by the white press, which characterized them as “paupers”, “indolent”, and “uncivil”. In addition to being negatively stereotyped, African-Americans had no way to respond to these accusations. Fed up with this situation, the first newspaper to be published by African-Americans was created. It was followed by hundreds of others. African-American newspapers focused on issues and stories that were important to African-Americans and were usually absent from the mainstream press. African-American newspapers investigated and reported on lynchings. They told African-Americans how to get jobs and find housing. They covered race riots in detail, even keeping lists of how many people on each “side” were killed. Cartoons featuring black characters and a serial similar to Ripley’s Believe It or Not found their way into the black press. These newspapers helped to create communities and give a voice to people who were voiceless.

PROGRAM SEGMENTS:

1) 0:00 – 16:43 *“Too Long Have Others Spoken for Us”*: African-Americans vilified in mainstream press; Freedom’s Journal published as independent voice; John Russworm and Samuel Cornish publishers; The North Star, edited by Frederick Douglass; ex-slaves were free to read after the Civil War; reign of terror after federal troops pulled out of the South; The Memphis Free Speech investigated lynchings; Robert S. Abbott declared the vehicle for change in America is the newspaper.

2) 17:36 – 23:20 *“Standing Up for the Race”*: By 1910, there are over 275 black newspapers in print; The California Eagle was a force for social change; Charlotta Spears Bass was both an editor and an activist in the community; the black press protested the film The Birth of a Nation for its portrayal of African-Americans; The Defender reached more than half a million African-Americans each week, was partly responsible for the Great Migration and had to be smuggled into the South after African-American newspapers were banned.

3) 42:49 – 50:35 *“A Separate World”*: Chester Commodore created cartoons with African-American characters; J.A. Rogers used cartoons to write a Ripley’s Believe It or Not-like serial about black history; Robert Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier encouraged African-Americans to leave the Republican party and become Democrats.

4) 59:00 – 1:11:36 *“Treason?”*: Pittsburgh Courier began the “Double V” campaign; African-American press was considered dangerous to America; the African-American press was a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement.

5) 1:11:36 – End *“Putting Itself Out of Business”*: The Civil Rights Movement put the African-American press out of business; black journalists were hired away from African-American newspapers by mainstream press; brain drain in black press; African-American newspapers increased advertising; African-American press could not criticize white America and still accept its advertising

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will analyze news articles and features covered by ethnic newspapers in both the past and present.
- Students will discuss the types of news articles and features that would be important to people of different ethnic groups, i.e., students will identify their audience.
- Students will create a school newspaper focusing on topics that are important to ethnic students.

## MATERIALS:

- The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords video
- The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords website ([www.pbs.org/blackpress](http://www.pbs.org/blackpress)) or KQED website ([www.kqed.org/ednet](http://www.kqed.org/ednet))
- Local ethnic newspapers
- Ethnic newspapers online:  
[www.afroam.org](http://www.afroam.org) (Afro-American Newspaper)  
[www.capitoltimes.com](http://www.capitoltimes.com) (from Austin, TX)  
[www.exodusnews.com](http://www.exodusnews.com)  
[www.indianapolisrecorder.com/](http://www.indianapolisrecorder.com/)  
<http://dolphin.upenn.edu/~vision/> (African-American student newspaper from University of Pennsylvania)  
[www.sfmt.com](http://www.sfmt.com) (Korea Times, San Francisco)  
[www.nichibeitimes.com](http://www.nichibeitimes.com) (Japanese-American Bilingual daily, San Francisco)
- Desktop Publishing Software

## TIME:

3 class periods (60 minutes each)

## PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

- Have students read different ethnic newspapers. Have them focus on the types of current news stories, features, and ads that are included in the newspapers.
- Discuss: What current events are covered in ethnic newspapers? Are certain types of events given heavier coverage than others? Are any current events covered that you think wouldn't be covered in the mainstream press? What types of issues do the editorials in ethnic newspapers discuss? How are these different than the editorials that might be written for the mainstream press? What types of "lifestyle" features, advertisements, and classified ads are present in ethnic newspapers? Are these different than what you might see in the mainstream press?
- Identify news and products that might be of specific interest to ethnic students at your school. Discuss whether or not these interests are addressed in your school newspaper.

## FOCUS FOR VIEWING:

The following segments of the video and suggestions for showing the segments provide effective preparation and points of focus for this activity.

- **Segment 1: *"Too Long Have Others Spoken for Us"***

For viewing Segment 1, write the following questions on the board or overhead:

- *What does the title of the segment mean?*

The segment shows the birth of the African-American Press, which for the first time gave African-Americans a voice. Its advent gave African-Americans the opportunity to counter the stereotypes prevalent in the Mainstream Press. This answer can be inferred early on in the viewing of Segment 1.

- *What does “Soldiers Without Swords” mean? Explain this weapon metaphor.*

It is similar to the expression, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” In fact, one of those interviewed in the segment uses that expression. The segment also establishes how effective the African-American Press was.

Both of these questions are good ones for students to try to answer before watching the video. It will encourage prediction and anticipation. Plus, they are questions that students are likely to guess at an answer which comes close to answering them correctly. At the point when the Freedom’s Journal is introduced, ask students to refine their answers to the questions.

- **Segment 2: “Standing Up for the Race”**

For viewing Segment 2, write the following questions on the board or overhead:

- *How did the California Eagle demonstrate Charlotta Spears Bass’ emphasis on social change?*

Early in the segment, it shows how the paper served as a draw for African-Americans to go to Los Angeles by providing valuable information on housing, jobs and so on.

- *Why was the Chicago Defender’s use of bold headlines bold and effective? What are some examples of these headlines?*

Midway through the segment, the audience learns that before Robert S Abbott used bold headlines, it was not done. The headlines helped dramatize things like lynchings and riots, but they also served to encourage readers in the South to move North for the jobs created by WW I. The result was the Great Migration.

The first part of the segment details the *California Eagle*, so it is appropriate to stop the video for a brief discussion on what the role of the newspaper was and what roles a newspaper can serve, especially for audiences whose needs are not being met anywhere else. Before starting the video again, talk about bold headlines, i.e., how and why they attract attention. The end of the segment gives you the opportunity to discuss how the bold headlines affected the *Chicago Defender*.

- **Segment 3: “A Separate World”**

For viewing Segment 3, write the following questions on the board or overhead:

- *Why were members of the African-American Press so revered by African-Americans?*

One of the segment’s first interviews reveals that members of the press were only behind entertainers and athletes in stature. In many ways they were celebrities because they were so well respected.

- *How was the Pittsburgh Courier’s publishing of many different opinions effective in making it the most highly circulated African-American newspaper?*

Much of the latter part of the segment focuses on the *Pittsburgh Courier*. Not only was it the first to be published nationally, it expressed differing viewpoints. By doing this, the paper remained fresh and appealed to a wide audience.

Both of these questions can be discussed after viewing the segment. They serve as a nice set-up for the activity because they help elevate the role of someone in the press and they give students an idea of the importance of publishing different viewpoints.

- **Segment 4: “*Treason?*”**

For viewing Segment 4, write the following question on the board or overhead:

- *Why were African-American newspapers banned and burned on military bases?*

This entire segment focuses on the Double V Campaign. Some people, particularly J Edgar Hoover — the head of the FBI — thought that the African-American Press was disloyal. They worried that this lack of loyalty among African-American soldiers could be particularly damaging, so they banned the papers.

Answering this question requires students to understand the entire segment. Like questions for other segments, it also helps establish the power of the press.

- **Segment 5: “*Putting Itself Out of Business*”**

For viewing Segment 5, write the following questions on the board or overhead:

- *How did growing numbers of advertisers affect the editorial content of African-American newspapers?*

The segment talks about how the growing number of readers after WW II led to increased advertising, including companies like GM. Those advertisers didn’t want any inflammatory articles about white people to be run in the newspapers. As a result, the papers toned down their editorial.

- *Why did many prominent African-American journalists leave African-American papers for mainstream newspapers?*

Towards the end of the segment, one journalist talks about the financial incentive to write for the Mainstream Press. This migration to the Mainstream Press created a “brain drain” for the African-American Press, resulting in its downfall.

Both of these questions are good ones for students to try to guess at their answers before viewing and then discuss post viewing. Their relationship to the activity is mainly that they address the economic side of the press.

#### POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

- Have students create an ethnic school newspaper or an “underground” school newspaper. As a class, brainstorm topics for news articles, lifestyle-type features, editorials and cartoons that would be of interest to students from various ethnic groups (see Web site examples cited above). Divide students into groups based on areas of interest (e.g. editorials, news stories, cartoons, etc.). Have each group come up with a short action plan for researching and writing its piece. Important questions to consider would be: What is the focus of the piece? What questions need to be answered in order to create the piece? How can the answers to these questions be found? Have students assign each member of the group a task that will help the group complete the action plan. Allow students time to conduct research and/or interviews. Once all information has been gathered, student groups should work together to complete the assigned piece. Once all of the news articles, editorials, lifestyle features and cartoons are completed, the student newspaper can be assembled using

desktop publishing software. The newspaper can then be distributed to other students.

#### EXTENSIONS:

- *Community Involvement:* Invite editors and reporters from local ethnic newspapers to be guest speakers. Beforehand, have students brainstorm questions about how ethnic newspapers are produced. Students should also ask guest speakers about how their newspapers try to distinguish themselves from those in the mainstream press. Additionally, students should inquire about what the guest speakers feel are some of the advantages and disadvantages of publishing an ethnic newspaper compared with a mainstream newspaper. Finally, students can share student-created ethnic school newspapers with guest speakers.
- *Economics:* Have students imagine that they are new arrivals to the area. Use local ethnic newspapers to help find jobs, housing, transportation, food, etc. Is it easy for immigrants to establish themselves in a community? Can an immigrant make enough money to provide food, clothing and shelter? Are ethnic newspapers helpful to immigrants? If so, how are they helpful?
- *Connecting & Talking Back:* Develop a school survey to gauge effectiveness of the ethnic school newspaper. Students should brainstorm questions to be included on the survey. Some examples might be: How would you rate the newspaper for news coverage? Lifestyle coverage? Did the newspaper present topics that were of interest to you? Are there any important issues to ethnic students that need to be addressed in the future?
- *Writing:* Have students write a reflective piece about their experience in creating an ethnic school newspaper. Have their opinions about different ethnic groups changed any? Have their opinions about the mainstream press changed?

#### ASSESSMENT:

- Evaluate students' action plans, articles and/or cartoons. Did they conduct the appropriate research and cover the assigned topics?
- Have students review their own pieces as well as the pieces of other groups. What do they like about each piece? Is there room for improvement? If students were to create another ethnic newspaper, what would they do differently?

#### STANDARDS:

##### **HS History Grades 9-12**

- Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills
- Chronological and Spatial Thinking

Students compare the present with the past, evaluating the consequences of past events and decisions and determining the lessons that were learned.

- Historical Interpretation

Students show the connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.

##### **HS U.S. History and Geography Grade 11**

- Standard 11.5: Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s. Analyze the international and domestic events, interests, and philosophies that prompted attacks on civil liberties.

- Standard 11.7: Students analyze America’s participation in WWII. Students analyze the roles and growing political demands of African Americans.
- Standard 11.10: Students analyze the development of federal civil rights and voting rights. Explain how demands from African Americans helped produce a stimulus for civil rights.
- Standard 11.11: Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society. Explain how federal, state and local governments have responded to democratic and social changes such as racial concentration in cities.

### **HS Principles of American Democracy & Economics Grade 12**

- Standard 12.2: Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens. Discuss the meaning and importance of each of the rights guaranteed in the Bill of Rights.
- Standard 12.8: Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life. Discuss the meaning and importance of a free and reasonable press.

### **HS English-Language Arts Grades 9 & 10**

#### *Reading*

- Standard 3.0: Students read and respond to historically and culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science. They conduct in-depth analyses of recurrent patterns and themes.
- Standard 3.12: Analyze the way in which a work of literature is related to the themes and issues of its historical period.

#### *Writing*

- Standard 1.0: Students write coherent and focused essays that convey a well-defined perspective and tightly reasoned argument. The writing demonstrates students’ awareness of the audience. Students progress through the stages of the writing process as needed.
- Standard 1.3: Use clear research questions and suitable research methods (e.g. library, electronic media, personal interview) to elicit and present evidence from primary and secondary sources.

### **HS English-Language Arts Grades 11 & 12**

#### *Writing*

- Standard 1.0: Students combine the rhetorical strategies — narration, exposition, persuasion and description — to produce texts of at least 1,500 words each. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting standards outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.
- Standard 2.6: Deliver multimedia presentations. Combine text, images, and sound and draw information from many sources (e.g. television broadcasts, videos, film, newspapers, magazines, CD ROMs, the Internet, electronic-media generated images). Use the selected media skillfully, editing appropriately and monitoring for quality. Test the audience’s response and revise the presentation accordingly.