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**Our House Is On Fire, Part 6:
Who Stopped the Presses?
The Color of Law
By David A. Love, JD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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The following is the sixth part of an ongoing Color of Law series.

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Who stopped the presses? Obviously, it is a question that many are asking these days.

It is a bit sobering to witness the apparent demise of the newspaper industry. Not unlike dominoes, newspapers around the U.S. are toppling, closing their doors, filing for bankruptcy, or ceasing their print operations and only remaining online. As someone who has written op-eds for newspapers throughout the nation over the past decade, I can appreciate the importance of having a vigorous and viable press in this country. In order for true democracy to work, we need news media that will speak truth to power, that will expose, without apology, government misconduct, corporate corruption and official wrongdoing. That was the original purpose of the press, after all.

But as someone who has always had one foot firmly planted in the independent media camp—as a former producer for Democracy Now!, former video documentary producer, a writer for a number of independent publications, and a political blogger—I understand two things: First, independent media came into being to fill a void because the mainstream media was flat on its behind. Fast asleep. Second, mainstream media have failed their mission by becoming too cozy with the powerful forces they were supposed to police.

Independent media have come to the rescue to save the public from a news industry which historically may not have reflected their reality, their perspective. For example, the Black, Latino and other ethnic press provide a crucial alternative to a media

establishment which often ignores these communities, or seeks to depict them as criminals or buffoons. Progressive media provide an alternative to a mainstream press which is too often White, conservative and male centered. It is worth noting that although the nation has an African American president, the White House press corps, lacking in diversity, does not reflect this reality. But as newsrooms shrink, the diversity problem only gets worse.

To be sure, there are many good newspapers which are struggling, and unfortunately many invaluable publications which are falling or have fallen by the wayside. The reasons for their demise are various: the Internet, blogs, an unsustainable business model of providing free online content, etc.

I would suggest some additional reasons that some newspapers have failed. Too often, they simply have not served their readers, and the product, like a GM car, has lost its appeal. Many news companies— not just papers, but TV as well—are owned by corporate conglomerates and entertainment companies. This reality is reflected in the softball, celebrity gossip orientation of many so-called news outlets. Governed by the bottom line and cost-cutting measures, these papers have eliminated their City Hall beat reporters, and other reporters who are in tune with the pulse of a given city. In the absence of seasoned journalists who can actually report on anything, because those people were already laid off, these newspapers become a collection of news wires and press releases, in a pamphlet. And who is paying for that when you can read it online?

The damage has been done in terms of the giant pass that the news media have taken on the important issues of the day. During the Iraq War, the mainstream media took the opportunity to act as nationalistic cheerleaders, the propaganda arm of the Bush White House— beating the drums of war and almost celebrating the thousands upon thousands of deaths that would inevitably occur.

As cheerleaders for corporate America, the mainstream press fell asleep on the Wall Street crisis. Over-caffeinated blowhard snake-oil salesmen posing as business journalists were in abundance during the heyday of the financial sector. But where were the probing exposés on the problems of deregulation, and the thoughtful analyses on the consequences of gluttony on Wall Street?

Even as we speak, what about coverage on the thwarted assassination plots against President Obama? Or a meaningful discussion on the malicious and deleterious effects of U.S. drug policy? How about a substantive debate in the mainstream news about the madness that represents America's gun policy, and the lethal combination of gun proliferation, economic recession and untreated mental illness—of individuals and of the society— that plays itself out in communities throughout the country?

Well, many newspapers and other corporate news venues will not offer and have not offered such valuable content. Their game is trifling and sloppy. So if they die, it wouldn't be too soon, as they provided us little benefit in the first place. That is why people increasingly turn to independent news sources, sources such as the one you are currently reading.

The winds of change are blowing, and there is about to be a transformation in the press. We do not yet know what the world will look like when all is said and done. Perhaps mainstream and independent newspapers, and other publications will increasingly become nonprofit entities, seeking a business model that makes them truly accountable to the public. And the blogosphere has been picking up the slack, having emerged as a legitimate source for quality information that often is unavailable

elsewhere. One thing is certain: independent muckraking news media with paid professional journalists, fact-gatherers and commentators must be supported if the press is to survive.

In crisis there is opportunity. Journalists, columnists, media practitioners, bloggers, you name it, need to start conversations around the nation, if they have not already done so, on the future of the news. We have the power to start the presses again—they'll just look a little different the next time around.

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member David A. Love, JD is a journalist and human rights advocate based in Philadelphia, and a contributor to the [Progressive Media Project](#), [McClatchy-Tribune News Service](#), [In These Times](#) and [Philadelphia Independent Media Center](#). He contributed to the book, [States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons](#) (St. Martin's Press, 2000). Love is a former Amnesty International UK spokesperson, organized the first national police brutality conference as a staff member with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and served as a law clerk to two Black federal judges. He blogs at [davidalove.com](#), [Daily Kos](#), and [Open Salon](#). [Click here](#) to contact Mr. Love.

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