

Book Reviews



Calvin L. Hall. *African American Journalists: Autobiography as Memoir and Manifesto.* Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009. 117p. alk. paper, \$35 paper (ISBN 9780810869301). LC2009-006052.

African American autobiography has a long, distinguished history dating back to the eighteenth century, when religious conversion and spiritual growth were the central themes written or dictated by men and women who were former slaves, such as the *Gospel and Labours of George White* (1810) and *Memoir of Old Elizabeth* (1863). Free blacks who wrote about their spiritual enlightenment include the first autobiography written by an African American woman in 1836, entitled *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, a Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel*. Historically, African American autobiography, written in narrative style, often functioned as a form of resistance to the institution of slavery by drawing attention to its horrors from those who had survived the experience. Slave narratives often provided documentation for the antislavery movement while also chronicling the will to survive subjugation and exploitation, as revealed in two of the most famous narratives published in the nineteenth century: by Frederick Douglass in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). These works, along with many other slave narratives written throughout the nineteenth century, helped rally support for the antislavery cause by demonstrating the humanity of the enslaved in their quest for freedom.

The early nineteenth century marked the beginning of the African American presence in print journalism with the publication of the first black newspaper in the United States, *Freedom's Journal* (1827), founded by John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish. Douglass continued using his immense writing skills by crafting two

additional autobiographies, one of which, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), recounts his activities publishing and editing *The North Star* (1847) newspaper in Rochester, New York. Jacobs also continued to write for several antislavery publications while remaining actively engaged in the antislavery movement. During the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of black-owned newspapers flourished in major cities north and south. Essentially established to provide its readership with first-hand reports of the major events and issues of the day, such as presidential speeches and abstracts of congressional proceedings, these newspapers also reported news pertinent to the African American community not generally covered in the mainstream press. In addition to covering secular and religious events, the papers published biographical sketches, vital statistics, poetry, essays, and editorials. Of the many critical roles played by the black press to educate and enlighten its readership, it also functioned as the primary medium through which the movement for political and social change was conveyed due to the diligence of African American journalists well into the twentieth century.

Mainstream newsrooms, however, like the rest of America society, remained largely segregated well into the mid-twentieth century and consequently restricted the work of African American journalists solely to black-owned presses. Early autobiographies had considerable influence on the works of early news chroniclers, and many journalists continued to articulate their accomplishments both public and private in keeping with the long-standing tradition of the narrative form. In 1928, antilynching crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett wrote about her experiences as journalist and social activist in her autobiography,

Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells (1970) while continuing to make her mark in the restricted world of journalism. Other African American journalists who were socially and politically active continued the tradition of writing memoirs about their experiences working for black-owned newspapers well into the twentieth century.

Integration of the mainstream press did not occur until after the civil unrest of the 1960s and the publication of the 1968 *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. Also known as the Kerner Report, the Commission investigated and provided details regarding media coverage of the urban unrest erupting in various cities, concluding that both newspapers and television failed to report objectively on African American life. Furthermore, the Commission declared "the journalistic profession has been shockingly backward in seeking out, hiring, training, and promoting Negroes." The Commission urged "the news media to do everything possible to train and promote their Negro reporters to positions where those who are qualified can contribute to and have an effect on policy decisions."

The publication of the Kerner Report resulted in a measureable impact on the number of African American print journalists hired to work in and diversify mainstream press in subsequent years. However, from the perspective of some black journalists hired to integrate corporate newsrooms, their knowledge of the African American community did little to advance so-called objectivity in reporting on news affecting minority communities because, more often than not, their opinions and viewpoints were overlooked, discounted, or at odds with what the editors intended to print. Seeking an outlet in which to express their increasing frustration and marginalization within the confines of mainstream newsrooms led some African American journalists to document their experiences using autobiography as the preferred format in which to describe their reality of working in the integrated world of print journalism.

Calvin L. Hall, an assistant professor and faculty fellow in the Department of Communications at Appalachian State University, brings together four memoirs written in the late twentieth century by African American print journalists Jill Nelson, Nathan McCall, Jake Lamar, and Patricia Raybon to examine what he calls the "synergistic relationship between race, class, gender, and journalism." Through the application of standpoint theory, Hall explores how these autobiographical memoirs fit within the framework and tradition of African American autobiography and why each narrative possesses within it the distinctiveness of manifesto by critiquing the social, psychological, economic, and political dynamics operating within their personal and professional lives as African American journalists. According to Hall, feminist standpoint theory as defined by Nancy Hartsock "provides a Marxist critique of the relationship between gender and power in society." While grounded in the feminist tradition, standpoint theory is appropriate to studying other unempowered or marginalized groups such as African American journalists. These journalists may lay claim to a specific standpoint epistemology by virtue of their particular sociocultural locations or authority, which, in this case, is based on race, class, gender, and group identification as African American journalists. These autobiographies render visible their role as African American journalists critiquing the world of print journalism from the vantage point of journalistic epistemic privilege gained from working in (white) corporate newsrooms. Viewed together, these autobiographies illustrate the many ways in which the standpoint of marginalized groups are all too often devalued and ignored in favor of the prevailing standpoint of the dominant group. As manifestos, Hall maintains that these memoirs challenge the assumptions of privileged (white male) standpoints at play in the newsrooms in which they work and provide a stage from which to discuss and interpret the ways in which race and gender are connected

to the field of journalism. The theme that connects the four memoirs as manifestos is a public critique of a "repressive system ... as reflected by the corporate newsroom." By applying Sidonie Smith's description of manifesto as "a proof, a piece of evidence, a public declaration or proclamation ... for the purpose of announcing past actions and explaining the reasons or motives for actions announced as forthcoming," Hall demonstrates how the autobiographical narrative employed by these journalists are in fact autobiographical manifestos because within them are found the essential characteristics of manifestos: that is, the "appropriation or contestation of sovereignty." Hall provides compelling reasons why these works are situated within the rich tradition of African American autobiography and why it is critical, as well as advantageous, to value and include other standpoints in news reporting.

The first chapter of Hall's book provides an excellent overview of journalism by "contextualizing the place of memory, truth, objectivity, and autobiography in journalism." In the next two chapters, he details how the major attributes of the autobiographical manifesto are depicted in Nelson's *Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience*, as she strives to maintain her "authentic self" without abandoning who she is as an African American woman, journalist, daughter, and mother. In the fourth chapter, Hall's analysis of the autobiographical manifesto focuses on surveillance and performance in Nathan McCall's *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*. McCall is all too aware that he is both "insider and outsider," as he tries to define what it means to be an African American man while working in the world of journalism under the constant gaze of white men in the newsroom. The issues raised in the next chapter cover appropriation of sovereignty, as in Jake Lamar's *Bourgeois Blues: An American Memoir*, and forgiveness in Patricia Raybon's *My First White Friend: Confessions on Race, Love, and Forgiveness*. Lamar describes his problematic relationship with his father,

followed by his encounter with the oppressive nature of white male privilege and sovereignty at *Time* magazine, while Raybon seeks to find her new self through the act of storytelling. Telling stories leads Raybon away from victimhood and toward the deliberate act of forgiveness. In the sixth chapter, Hall explicates the four overarching themes connecting the newsroom experience of African American journalists and the connection to the black experience overall. Following the conclusion, there is an appendix to an annotated bibliography of selected memoirs by other print journalists and broadcasters, as well as an index. The inclusion of memoirs by nine additional women journalists is clearly recognition of their contribution to the genre and field of journalism.

Hall's analysis is a richly textured and cogent study that enriches our understanding of the world of print journalism. By using the paradigm of standpoint theory from which to analyze experiences encountered by some African American journalists, Hall demonstrates the power dynamics at play in the newsroom, dynamics that are likely to continue until (white) journalists "rethink themselves and their craft from the position of the marginalized." *African American Journalists* is highly recommended for upper-level undergraduates, graduate students, and those who are contemplating a career in journalism or communication studies. —Emily M. Belcher, Princeton University.

Kay Ann Cassell and Uma Hiremath.

Reference and Information Services in the 21st Century: An Introduction. 2nd ed. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2009. 461p. alk. paper, \$69.95 (ISBN 9781555706722). LC2009-023650.

The second edition of Cassell and Hiremath's *Reference and Information Services in the 21st Century: An Introduction* opens with a preface describing the skill sets that reference librarians must possess and the organization of the work. They intend the skill sets mentioned in the book "as a means to fearlessly navigate