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New guidelines for journalists on race

Media Council of Bermuda

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The theatre boycott in June 1959 *File photo

The Media Council of Bermuda this week unveiled a guide for Bermuda journalists reporting on race.

'Reporting on Race—A Guide for Media Professionals' was funded by the Colorado-based Aspen Institute, which has had a long association with Bermuda. It recognizes the role that race continues to play in Bermuda and the influence of the media, both positive and negative, on public attitudes, debates and actions about racial issues.

The guide signals a likely shift in direction for the Media Council in the future.

Since it was established in February 2011, the Media Council has had to deal with a handful of complaints, two of which required adjudication by the eight-member Council.

The Media Council's Working Committee, which comprises Tony McWilliam, chairman, Jeremy Deacon, Tracey Neale and Bryan Darby, is considering redirecting its resources towards sponsoring courses and seminars for working journalists and others considering careers in journalism and issues affecting the industry.

'Reporting on Race—A Guide for Media Professionals' is believed to be a first of its kind for Bermuda. It arose out of a Leadership Seminar on Race and the Media, which was conducted in 2011 at the Fairmont Hamilton Princess Hotel by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change and the Aspen-Bermuda Partnership on Racial Equity.

The guide lists 11 specific guidelines for journalists, some of which were adapted from the National Union of Journalists' Guidelines on Race Reporting in the U.K. and the Poynter Institute's Guidelines for Racial Identification in the U.S.

The first guideline comes directly from the Media Council's Code of Practice, which says a person's race or nationality should not be mentioned in a prejudicial or pejorative way.

Another guideline says journalists should be responsible for knowing and being accurate with facts about Bermuda's racial history and racial inequities.

Included in the guide is a history section, which should be useful to all journalists, and especially beginning reporters and those new to Bermuda.

The guide was written by Meredith Ebbin, executive officer of the Media Council, and Raymond Codrington of the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. It was reviewed by a team of journalists, historians and others with a broad knowledge of Bermuda politics and current affairs, before being submitted to the Council's Working Committee for final approval.

The Media Council and the Aspen Institute are confident that the guide will contribute to the conversation about race in Bermuda in a meaningful way.

Copies will be circulated to all media organisations in Bermuda, print, media and on line, and will be posted on the Media Council website.

Like the Media Council's Code of Practice, it is a living document that will be regularly reviewed.

**REPORTING ON RACE IN BERMUDA
A GUIDE FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS**

I. Introduction

Race is a topic that is part of a number of conversations in Bermuda, especially in relation to the media. For many Bermudians, the media play a key role in framing race and race relations. Because the media are such important institutions, media professionals need to enhance their understanding of race.

The media impact public attitudes, assumptions, debate and actions on racial issues in both positive and negative ways. The media's handling of race also has a profound effect on the comfort levels, and competence of public dialogue on race in Bermuda.

Given the weight of responsibility the media have in determining racial attitudes, this guide provides some basic but essential information for all media professionals in Bermuda. Along with guidelines for practice offered by the Media Council of Bermuda, it concisely presents this island's 400-year-old story of race. That timeline is a reminder that for more than 90 percent of Bermuda's history, racially patterned inequities and disadvantages were normal features of daily life.

Hopefully, this background information will encourage media professionals to consider more carefully how they frame and represent race in their reporting, and how the media as an institution can contribute to and help frame a constructive dialogue about race in Bermuda.

This guide also includes a resource list of tools, readings, and documentaries identified by the two-year Aspen-Bermuda Partnership on Racial Equity (ABPRE). ABPRE is an outgrowth of the participation of a cross-section of Bermudian leaders in Aspen Institute Racial Equity Leadership Development seminars, sponsored by the Atlantic Philanthropies, between 2009—2011. ABPRE inspired those leaders to explore strategies for promoting a more racially equitable Bermudian society, and they identified daily media reporting and discourse that touched on race as critical priorities.

ABPRE convened a media seminar at Bermuda's Hamilton Princess Hotel on September 28— 29, 2011. There, media professionals representing print journalism, on-line media and television had an opportunity to consider how issues related to race and inclusion were playing out in Bermuda, and to examine how various media outlets analyzed, reported on, and represented race. They also reflected on how the media might promote more productive race conversations.

Several members of the Media Council of Bermuda attended the seminar and the Media Council has given its backing to the guidelines, information and resources offered here.

II. Race Reporting Guidelines

Bermuda has been striving since the 1960s to eliminate all forms of discrimination. The following are useful guidelines for Bermudian journalists dealing with race. We urge journalists to consider them as they go about their daily work.

The Media Council of Bermuda's Code of Practice (www.mediacouncilofbermuda.org) is a good starting point. It says news organizations should not refer to a person's race unless it is relevant to the story.

- Clause 12 of the Code of Practice, which covers discrimination, states:

The media shall avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's skin colour, race, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness, or age.

Media reports shall not place gratuitous emphasis on, skin colour, race, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness, or age. Journalists should also avoid stereotyping based on the above.

Nevertheless, where it is relevant and in the public interest, the media may report and express its opinions in these areas, in news stories and commentaries respectively.

- Journalists should be responsible for knowing and being accurate with facts on racial history and racial inequities, where these facts are available.

For example, being aware that schools and other public institutions were segregated until the mid-1960s can provide important racial context. In a small community like Bermuda, specific historical events can become part of the community's memory and have a significant impact on contemporary news events.

- Journalists should not make assumptions about a person's racial, ethnic background, or nationality based on their appearance.
- Take care not to give a racial element to a story where race is not the predominant factor.

For example, the 1977 riots were not race riots per se, even though the vast majority of the rioters were black. They were sparked by the hangings of Erskine "Buck" Burrows and Larry Tacklyn. On the other hand, when reporting on issues such as affordable housing, poverty, health, crime, seniors and education, journalists should be aware that historic inequities based on race may be a factor.

- Journalists should pay particular attention to changing trends in racial inequity.

For example, while we all know that income disparities exist and that Bermuda's schools are marked by racial imbalances, have these changed recently?

replacing it with a Tourism Authority help boost visitor numbers?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

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This Week's Events

No events scheduled for this date.

- Be aware that interview subjects for "positive" stories are not always racially representative (young high-achievers, charity workers and professionals). If you notice a pattern emerging with any particular group or organization, consider raising the issue with CURB or any other race advocacy group.
- Be aware of the use of labels that may be considered stereotypes or code words for black Bermudians: low-income, single mothers, teen pregnancy, out-of-wedlock births, wall sitters, deadbeat dads, Bermudians. The use of labels applies to whites as well. Non-Bermudians can be a code word for whites.
- Care should be taken not to allow talk shows and letters to the editor to be used to spread intolerance of racial and ethnic groups and foreign workers.
- There is a diversity of opinion within the black and the white communities on racial matters so it is important to seek a range of views, especially when writing about race.
- Care should be taken to ensure that inaccurate information and unsubstantiated claims about race are challenged, especially when they come from those in positions of leadership or influence.
- There is a high risk of being misunderstood while speaking on controversial racial subjects. Most people's racial knowledge and experience are partial at best. The media can help improve racial dialogue, knowledge and understanding by correcting misunderstanding and allowing others to correct their own misstatements and misunderstandings. Back-and-forth battles of accusation and denial seldom help inform the public or reveal anything about the issues or the people involved.

Some of these guidelines have been adapted from National Union of Journalists (UK) Guidelines on Race Reporting and the Poynter Institute's Guidelines for Racial Identification.

III. The Bermuda Story: A History Lesson

The extent of knowledge of Bermuda's racial history varies tremendously among members of the media.

It is difficult even for experienced Bermudian journalists to have anything approaching a complete knowledge of the factual history. Even the best educated, experienced and most understanding journalist will be challenged by the long legacy of historical events, which include modern social and political problems and widespread fears and suspicions, myths and misconceptions.

The history and background presented here is, at best, a brief outline of the fundamental facts upon which so many subsequent complications are based. While most Bermuda journalists are probably familiar with most of it, it ought to serve as a baseline of knowledge, especially for beginning reporters and journalists newly arrived from overseas.

Critical Role

Nearly 180 years after the abolition of slavery, and despite the substantial progress that has been made towards racial equality, race continues to play a critical role in Bermuda. While there are class divisions, Bermuda has been largely divided along racial lines.

Race is a crucial element in voting patterns, residential, school, church and parish populations and the make-up of sports teams and clubs. It even often determines one's choice of an undertaker! As documented in Census reports over the past two decades, the gap in wealth between black and white households points to a significant economic disparity, indicative of the fact that the impact of historical racial inequality is still being felt by the Island's society.

Settlers

Bermuda has been continuously inhabited since a group of English settlers was shipwrecked on the island in 1609. In 1616, the first black person and the first Indian arrived as permanent residents, creating an interracial society. Blacks initially worked as indentured servants. Slavery was subsequently established and remained a feature of Bermuda society until 1834.

During the first 50 years of settlement, Bermuda successfully grew tobacco as a cash crop for export, but the island was eventually overtaken by its vastly larger sister colony Virginia as a tobacco producer.

Bermudians then turned to the sea, becoming privateers and pirates and earning fame for their skills as mariners, and in the case of white Bermudians, vast fortunes.

White slaveholders sailed the seas with their black male slaves. This form of bondage put whites and blacks in close contact, forcing them to work together in the interest of survival on the high seas.

It has been argued that this created in a system of patronage that characterized white-black relations up to the 1960s, although not all scholars agree.

Just as in the US and the Caribbean, Bermuda had a community of free blacks and also experienced its share of slave revolts.

Emancipation

In 1833, the UK Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, which abolished slavery throughout the British Empire. Bermuda's Parliament subsequently passed its own Emancipation Act.

Black Bermudians, slave and free, welcomed Emancipation on August 1, 1834. But laws aimed at keeping power in white hands were quickly enacted. To give just one example, prior to Emancipation, adults had to own property assessed at £40 or more in order to vote.

After Emancipation, the value of property for qualified voters was raised to £100. Author Dr. Kenneth Robinson, writing in *Heritage*, described that law as a "cold-blooded retrograde piece of legislation."

This property-based voting system would remain in place until 1963. While black property owners enjoyed voting rights, political power was concentrated in the hands of wealthy white landowners, who could vote in every parish where they owned property.

Compensation

White slaveholders received financial compensation from the British government, but there was no matching payout for slaves. This impeded the economic prospects of newly-freed slaves.

Still, black leaders played a central role in the post-Emancipation era, establishing schools, libraries and businesses, often under the auspices of lodges or friendly societies, which placed great emphasis on self-development.

The annual Cup Match holiday began a celebration of Emancipation by friendly societies.

Economy

Over four centuries, Bermudians made their living in various ways. They became adept at creating new sources of revenue in response to economic conditions. The tobacco industry was followed by shipbuilding, privateering, salt-raking in Turks and Caicos and then farming.

In the latter half of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, Bermuda supplied produce such as the famous Bermuda onion to the US east coast. Tourism replaced farming as the dominant industry from the 1920s, and international business supplanted tourism in the 1980s.

In the early 1920s, a community of about 400 black Bermudians, mainly farmers, fishermen and boat-builders living in Tucker's Town, were forced out to make way for the creation of an exclusive enclave for wealthy white American tourists.

The development of Tucker's Town laid the foundation for Bermuda's success in tourism for most of the 20th Century, but the eviction policy faced strong resistance then and engenders controversy today, especially among some descendants of the displaced residents. One consequence of the Tucker's Town development was the 1930 Hotel Keepers Protection Act, which gave hotels the right to turn away black and Jewish guests.

Military Bases

Bermuda's location, halfway between the United Kingdom and the United States, has proved to be fortuitous. For nearly 200 years until 1951, the British government operated a naval base, HM Dockyard, in the West End. The US built bases in St. David's and Southampton during the Second World War.

HM Dockyard and the US bases were both a boost to the economy and had a major effect on the society. Hundreds of black and white men received trades training—in an integrated setting—in a rigorous apprenticeship programme at the Dockyard.

And the Bermuda Workers Association, the forerunner of the Bermuda Industrial Union, was started by a group of black Bermudian workers employed at the US base in Southampton.

Ancestry

Bermuda's racial make-up is 54 per cent black and 31 per cent white, with the remaining 15 per cent of mixed race, Asian or other races. Most white Bermudians are of British/Irish ancestry while black Bermudians have African ancestry. A smaller minority living in St. David's are descended from Native Americans who were brought to Bermuda during the 17th century as slaves.

Throughout Bermuda's history there has been racial intermingling and it is commonly accepted that blacks and whites have ancestry of both races.

In 1849, the first group of Portuguese settlers was brought to Bermuda as farm workers from the island of Madeira. Subsequent Portuguese arrivals would come from the Azores.

According to the 2010 Census, seven per cent of Bermudians claim Portuguese ancestry. Portuguese are widely perceived to be a distinct ethnic group within the white population. They encountered prejudice for many years. Some Portuguese Bermudians adopted English names to hide their ancestry.

Segregation

For most of its existence, Bermuda was run by a white elite who were known as the oligarchy and also as the "Forty Thieves". Primarily merchants, whose centre of domain was Front Street, they established a reputation for their business acumen, but maintained a system of social and economic control and segregation in schools, churches and in business. Blacks and others who dared to push for change risked losing their jobs or having their mortgages called in.

The first significant challenge to segregation came in 1944 with the formation of the Bermuda Workers Association (BWA). For president Dr. E. F. Gordon, the BWA became the vehicle for a major push for social and political change. In 1946, he took a petition to London on behalf of nearly 5,000 BWA members. His appeal to the United Kingdom to investigate a host of issues, among them segregation, the property vote and for free education, met with limited success.

The only tangible result was free schooling for primary students. Segregation would remain in effect until 1959. A Theatre Boycott in June of that year ended separate seating policies in cinemas. Major hotel resorts also opened their doors to black and Jewish tourists and restaurants soon followed suit.

In 1963, the property-owning qualification for voters was dropped. But the Parliamentary Election Act of 1963, raised the voting age from 21 to 25 and property owners were given an extra "plus" vote—concessions, political observers have said, were aimed at diluting blacks' new political power.

In addition, Commonwealth citizens, the majority of whom were white, were given the right to vote after three years' residency and voting constituencies were drawn up in a way that was said to enhance the political fortunes of the white minority.

Increased immigration from the UK from the 1950s onwards, the period when discriminatory barriers began to be lifted for blacks, laid the groundwork for the tension between black Bermudians and white expats and other foreign workers.

Civil Unrest and Reforms

Bermuda saw major political reforms in the 1960s. The formation of the Progressive Labour Party in 1963 and the United Bermuda Party in 1964 established the two-party system. Full universal adult suffrage became a reality in 1968, when the plus vote was dropped, and Bermuda had its first democratic election.

From the 1960s onwards, policies were enacted aimed at desegregating the school system and expanding educational opportunities.

Bermuda would not escape the social tumult that convulsed other Western societies in the 1960s and 70s. There were riots in 1965 and 1968. Over a span of 10 months in 1972 and 1973, the police commissioner, the governor and his aide-de-camp, a supermarket owner and his bookkeeper were shot to death. The executions of Erskine "Buck" Burrows and Larry Tacklyn for their roles in the murders led to riots in 1977.

In the wake of both riots, commissions chaired by distinguished international figures were established. The reports without exception pointed to historic racial inequities as the root cause.

Bermuda's racial dynamics are a key component of our voting system—a majority of blacks support the Progressive Labour Party and virtually all whites backed the United Bermuda Party, and since its disbanding, the One Bermuda Alliance.

Foreign Workers

Throughout its history, Bermuda has relied heavily on foreign workers to fill its labour needs. The majority have come from the United Kingdom, Western Europe, Canada and the Caribbean and have contributed much to the society.

The last decade has seen an increase in foreign workers from Asia, although workers from such countries as the Philippines represent only four per cent of the population. This had added a new dimension to the society and resulted in public expressions and displays of intolerance against Asian workers in particular.

Concerns by Bermudians that foreign workers receive preferential treatment in the workplace have been the subject of much debate, in both public and private spheres, for many years. Over the years, immigration laws have been tightened.

Historical divisions between white and black Bermudians, those who are Bermudian by birth and those with Bermuda status who were born elsewhere (derisively referred to as "paper" Bermudians) continue to play out in contemporary Bermuda society.

Cultural diversity

Bermuda has become a more multicultural society, both in terms of race and religion. It is overwhelmingly Christian, but non-Christian denominations, such as Muslims and Baha'is, have taken root since the 1960s.

There is also a small Jewish community. Their small numbers reflect Bermuda's history of anti-Semitism as Jewish immigration and Jewish tourism were actively discouraged.

IV. Resources

This section offers resources that address some of the key issues related to race and diversity in the media.

Racial Equity Presentation

- Aspen-Bermuda Partnership on Racial Equity Powerpoint from the Leadership Seminar on Racial Equity and the Media Seminar—PDF.

The PowerPoint demonstrates how policies, practices and cultural representations converge to impact the life chances of Black Bermudians. This presentation lays out the basic points around how race operates. Use this as a tool to encourage small group dialogues such as brown bag lunches or professional meetings.

Articles and Commentaries

- Building Blocks for Youth, "Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime in the News." (2003).

The article examines the relationship between crime rates and the portrayal of youth in the media. The article states that despite drops in crime rates, the public continues to fear youth of colour especially, based on the unintentional coverage of youth as menacing. This is a relevant article given the focus on youth and public safety in Bermuda. <http://www.cdp.org/documents/BBY/offbalance.pdf>

- Robert M. Entman, "Young Men of Color in the Media: Images and Impacts." Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute. Washington, D.C. Pgs. 1-21, 34-40 (2006).
- The Challenges of Media Training and Newsroom Diversity in 2012

This commentary helps readers to think about some of the issues related to dealing with diversity in one's organization from an industry perspective. This is a useful discussion by a peer about how and why diversity in the media is important.

<http://www.themediabriefing.com/article/2012-01-04/the-challenges-of-media-training-and-newsroom-diversity-in-2012>

- Visible Minorities in the Newsroom
- Radio Television Digital News Association Ethics
- Ten Lessons for Talking About Racial Equity in the Age of Obama.
- *The Color Line and the Bus Line*
- *When Voices Rise... Dismantling Segregation in a Polite Society* By Errol Williams

Errol Williams' award-winning documentary about the 1959 Theatre Boycott, launched by the Progressive Group that ended segregation in cinemas and hotels following a two-week protest. The film examined Bermuda's segregated system and the part played by the Progressive Group and other activists in bringing it to an end.

Report

- Report of the Royal Commission Into the 1977 Disturbances (The Pitt Commission Report)

The Pitt Commission examined the causes of the 1977 riots and resulted in the implementation of a slew of policies and programmes, among them the establishment of Bermuda Day, and the Small Business Development Corporation, as well as a constitutional conference that abolished the expatriate vote.

Books

- *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda 1616-1782* by Virginia Bernhard.

American history professor Virginia Bernhard's examination of the "complex" relationship between slaveholders and slaves in Bermuda.

- *Bermuda and the Struggle for Reform: Race, Politics and Ideology* by Walton Brown Jr.

Political scientist Walton Brown's analysis of social and political reforms that were achieved during the latter half of the 20th century. He offers an assessment of the Bermuda Workers Association, the Progressive Group,

and the Progressive Labour Party and other organisations, as well as with prominent activists such as E.F. Gordon and Roosevelt Brown.

- *Fine as Wine—From Coloured Boy to Bermudian Man* by Larry Burdchall

Well-known newspaper columnist Larry Burdchall writes about his growing-up years in segregated Bermuda.

- *The History of Mary Prince—A West Indian Slave Related by Herself*, Edited with an Introduction by Molra Ferguson

The only first-hand account by a Bermudian slave Mary Prince had a major effect on the abolition movement in the United Kingdom. She travelled with her Bermudian owner to London, where she was rescued by abolitionists, who published her story in 1831.

- *Second-Class Citizens, First-Class Men* by Eva N. Hodgson

Dr. Hodgson's book covers the 10-year period ending in 1963, with the abolition of the property vote. She highlights the role of key players of the period, among them Eustace Cann, W.L. Tucker and Governor Julian Gascoigne.

- *Bermuda—Five Centuries* by Rosemary Jones

This work covers 50 of Bermuda's history, in an easy to read style and format.

- *Chained on the Rock—Slavery in Bermuda* (Second Edition) by Cyril Outerbridge Packwood and C.F.E. Hollis Hallett

The first book devoted exclusively to slavery in Bermuda and written by the late historian and librarian Cyril Packwood was published in 1975. A second edition—edited and updated by Clara Hollis Hallett—was published by the National Museum of Bermuda in 2013.

- *Heritage* by Kenneth Robinson

Dr. Kenneth Robinson writes of the contribution of black Bermudians in the post-Emancipation era.

- *Slavery in Bermuda* by James Smith

An account of slavery in Bermuda by historian and retired civil servant James Smith

- *Black Power in Bermuda—The Struggle for Decolonization* by Quito Swan

An examination of the role of the Black Beret Cadet and other black activists during the turbulent 1960s and 70s—and of the Government's struggle to contain their activities.

Website

Profiles of John Stephenson, Gladys Misick Morrell, E.F. Gordon, Henry Tucker, and W.L. Tucker, www.biographies.bm, Meredith Ebbin, editor

John Stephenson:

Bermuda's first Methodist minister John Stephenson was jailed for preaching to enslaved and freeblacks. He served in Bermuda between 1799 and 1802.

Gladys Misick Morrell:

Morrell was leader of Bermuda's women's suffrage movement. The campaign for voting rights for women lasted 30 years and did not achieve success until 1944.

Sir Henry Tucker and Dr. E. F. Gordon:

Henry Tucker and Dr. E. F. Gordon are considered the foremost figures of 20th century Bermuda. Political and business leader Tucker was known as the architect of modern Bermuda. Gordon led the battle for social and political as president of the Bermuda Workers Association. Both served in Parliament, where they often butted heads.

W.L. Tucker:

W.L. Tucker, a successful businessman and the first black member of the Executive Council, the forerunner of Cabinet, shepherded the bill through Parliament that abolished the property vote.

This document was produced under the auspices of the Aspen Institute, with the backing of the Media Council of Bermuda.

Related Articles

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