

# **Fay M. Jackson and the Color Line: The First African American Foreign Correspondent for the Associated Negro Press**

by

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## **Abstract**

During the 1920s and 1930s, Fay M. Jackson broke traditional barriers by serving as the first African American foreign correspondent for the Associated Negro Press (ANP). Jackson was the only African American female reporter of the ANP who covered the coronation of King George VI in 1937 and used the opportunity to report on the sociopolitical affairs of Blacks in Europe while specifically underscoring the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. While in Europe, Jackson set out to meet with various political figures and activists of color to emphasize the parallel treatment between Blacks in the U.S and other communities of color outside the U.S. Little research has been done on the role of African American female journalists in American history. Therefore, Jackson's importance is further accentuated by the fact that she was one of few women who forged a way into the Black press. Jackson's voice has gone virtually unnoticed with scant acknowledgments of her career and contributions to the Black experience in America.

## **Introduction**

Fay M. Jackson was born on May 8, 1902 in Dallas, Texas and moved to Los Angeles, California in 1922. By twenty-six years old Jackson acquired the foundation needed to turn into an entrepreneur, a two-fisted reporter deeply concerned about the political welfare of her community, and a revolutionary voice in the Black press. Jackson started the first Black intellectual newsweekly on the west coast entitled *Flash* in 1928; became the political editor of the *California Eagle* in 1931, and served as the first Hollywood correspondent for the Associated Negro Press (ANP) in the 1930s. But her work as the first Black female foreign correspondent for the ANP in 1937 remains her most important contribution to the Black press. Little work exists, however, on her life and achievements in this arena; hence Jackson remains a part of a forgotten legacy of Black female pioneers in the field of journalism.

## **Black Female Journalists**

Scholars of African American Studies have been less than deliberate in providing in depth analysis on female journalists in the Black press, specifically from the 1890s to the 1930s. Roland E. Wolsey once stated, “female editors and writers of the nineteenth century had been ignored as journalists by almost all who had written on Black journalism before 1970” (Broussard 5). The role of Black women in journalism has remained in a state of obscurity until the last 18 to 20 years. Ida B. Wells is the most iconic female pioneer of this group. She was one of the most rebellious and prolific voices of her time but a biography chronicling her work did not appear for close to half a century after her death (5). Wells, who brought international attention to lynching and championed the rights of Blacks, women, and children, served as the progenitor of women like Fay Jackson. But only recently has there been an emergence of other biographical publications of women who worked as political and social activists with their pens.

The contributions of Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the editor of *Provincial Freeman* from 1854-1858 have become the focus of new biographies and biographical sketches. Amy Jacques Garvey, editor for the *Negro World* newspaper, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson who wrote for the *Pittsburgh Courier* have also received attention from historians (Broussard 7). Though publications such as *Raising Her Voice: African American Women Journalists Who Changed History* by Rodger Streitmatter, *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless* by Jinx Broussard and *Missing Pages: Black Journalists of Modern America: An Oral History* by Wallace Terry are valuable as the introduction of women who had been invisible, they do not offer the in-depth narratives of these leaders in journalism and the Black community.

Many African American women during the middle and late nineteenth century moved toward journalism because of their work in the women's club movement. Publications such as *Women's Era* founded by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin in 1894 for the National Association of Colored Women worked to systematically uplift the race (Broussard 14). Black female journalists have used the press to underscore issues of education, legal and economic conditions, politics, status, social reform, African American history, and literature (14). Black women journalists of the nineteenth and early 20th century were central characters, helping to distribute this information and participate in the debates that followed.

The premier historian of Black Women's Studies, Darlene Clark-Hine, has made some of the most important inroads in this area, such as the publication of the first major encyclopedia on Black Women in America and her various books from *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* to *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950*. Her work emphasizes Black women who transcended positions of servitude to roles of leadership during the most oppressive periods of American history. Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and her findings on the role of Black women as political activists after the Civil War sheds new light on a period that has neglected to make such references, and Deborah Gray White and her research on Black female historians in a predominantly White field provide evidence on the continued struggles women of color face in the academy.

However, Fay Jackson and other Black female pioneers in the Black press represent an important segment of the Black Studies topography that remains a practically untapped reservoir for understanding the tensions and negotiations behind forming the Black consciousness during the nineteenth and early 20th century. Therefore, while the primary focus of this article is to underscore Jackson's work as a foreign correspondent, it will hopefully encourage further examinations into the histories created by Black female journalists who served on the frontlines of the Black press, women who were integral to the formulation of the Black identity.

## **Issues of Race**

Through her work as the first African American female correspondent for the Associated Negro Press, Fay M. Jackson attempted to assist in the elevation of the proverbial race question to an international level. Her efforts stood on the shoulders of former Black journalists that grappled with the dilemma of race in America and its context within a larger frame (beginning with Africa) during the nineteenth century. Blacks in America have historically shared a complex relationship with the African continent, and the Black press has documented this fractured bond. W. E. B. Du Bois theorized this fracturing as "double consciousness." He described this as the un-reconciled struggle between being an American while maintaining one's Blackness, this battle within the souls of "Black folk" tainted the perception of Africa and caused a dysfunctional and sometimes hostile view of the continent.

Dubois asks the question “What is Africa to me?” in “From Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept.” He writes, “Africa is, of course, my fatherland. Yet neither my father nor my father’s father ever saw Africa or knew its’ meaning or cared much for it. My mother’s folk were closer yet their direct connection, in culture and race, became tenuous; still, my tie to Africa is strong” (Dubois 655). Black Americans have struggled between two worlds and the Black press has played an important role in projecting the ambivalence, resistance, and acceptance that Dubois touches on.

Due to this strained relationship between Blacks in the U.S and Africa, Black leaders had prompted many movements to establish a bond with Africans and other nations of color around the world in the hopes of creating a cohesive community and thereby challenging the imperialistic powers that oppressed them. Consequently, the Black press is in part a record of African Americans’ evolving attitudes toward their existence in juxtaposition to that of Africa and other societies of color and Jackson participated in the dissemination of these important themes.

### **The Salvation of the Black Press**

*An un-prostituted Negro Press is undoubtedly the only salvation for our race. When we lose that medium of expression we become more than ever pawns for exploitation at the hands of those who take advantage of every opportunity to discredit our race. -- Fay Jackson 1937, ANP*

Fay Jackson complained of the Black press’ reliance on stale news and article rewrites from White mainstream news publications regarding the affairs of Blacks internationally. She wanted African American newspapers to establish a larger and more significant presence internationally and believed that was the key to the Black press’ ultimate survival. As a result, during a casual conversation in the winter of 1936, Jackson asked Claude Barnett, the executive director of the Associated Negro Press to take the lead in a groundbreaking venture by appointing a reporter to serve as a foreign correspondent in Europe and cover the news with a “Black slant” (“Brilliant Writer”). Without hesitation Barnett recommended Jackson, making her the first African American foreign correspondent for the ANP.

Though Jackson would be the first to hold this position, the Black newspaper syndicate did have other correspondents. Nancy Cunard, a British aristocrat left behind her life as a socialite to work with the likes of Langston Hughes, W.E.B DuBois, and Zora Neale Hurston (Nancy Cunard). She learned about the injustices facing Blacks after meeting jazz pianist Henry Crowder and quickly decided to become a political activist (Cunard). The ANP also employed Rudolph Dunbar, a Guyanese conductor, clarinetist, and composer. Dunbar became the first Black man to conduct the London Philharmonic and to conduct an orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall in London (“Debut”).

Still, Jackson thought the Black press needed to make greater efforts to send African American reporters abroad and bring back firsthand accounts, in effect giving the Black press even greater legitimacy within its community. Part of the justification used by the ANP to send Jackson to London was that her correspondence had to include the coronation of King George VI. Jackson saw this as an opportunity to discuss the position of the Black community globally and therefore widen the Pan-African discourse in the Black newspapers.

Jackson's reporting provides further evidence that African American women were active participants in the formulation of the Black political consciousness during the early 20th century and stood beside leaders like Marcus Garvey and Dubois by serving as political activists via the press. Jackson left for Europe on January 9, 1937 and as she trekked through Paris, Dublin, and London, she sent back coverage on topics ranging from the racial climate in the French Parliament, the ban on Black actors in Italy to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. Though Jackson's accounts on the coronation as a foreign liaison for the ANP became the defining moment in her legacy, she worked to bring a wide spectrum of coverage during her stint in Europe.

### **Jackson Joins the International Conversation**

While dining in a café in Paris, Jackson met Jules Alcantre, a Black Parisian member of the administration of the Colonial Government for eleven years. He was the editor of the newspaper *Europe Colonies* and a graduate of the University of Paris. He also served as a judge in Paris for two years, a member of the Imperial Conference of France, and founder of the Economic Conference between France and its colonies (Jackson 3B) Jackson's interview with Alcantre showcased an acute awareness of some of the affairs impacting African Americans, such as the Scottsboro case, which dealt with the trial of nine Black boys accused of gang raping two White women from Paint Rock, Alabama. Alcantre shared with Jackson that he wrote a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt asking for their clemency. Jackson was delighted by this chance meeting with a Black figure that was a part of the political processes in France because he was someone who could provide insight into some of the key issues of interest facing Black Parisians. Jackson explained to Alcantre that African Americans looked to France as a "Nirvana of freedom from all the ills and injustices [they] suffer[ed] from in America" (3B).

However, Jackson's correspondence highlighted the social injustices that mirrored those in the U.S, including the lack of government representation. In the interview, Alcantre tells Jackson that Senegalese merchant Galnadou Diouf and Gratien Candace were the only two Black members in the French Parliament out of 918 members. Alcantre adds, "Laws are made for the French and French colonials not by us [Blacks] but by the White representatives. But when war comes all Negroes or Blacks are immediately impressed with the fact that they are Frenchmen and all Frenchmen are obliged to go to war for France" (3B). Jackson's reporting emphasizes Black Parisians efforts to acquire equal citizenship while underscoring the Parliament's unwillingness to provide an environment of equality.

The coverage by Jackson served two purposes: it highlighted the progress made by Blacks in Paris as underscored by Alcandre's tremendous accomplishments and it also provided an awareness of the ongoing racial strife present in Paris. Jackson revealed how many Black Parisians hoped assimilation would change their circumstances, just as many within the Black community in the United States hoped similar factors would negate their disparaging conditions during the 1930s. Jackson went beyond providing a basic narrative; instead, she interjected commentary highlighting the collective injustices facing Blacks across the globe.

Jackson's reports for the ANP gave readers the opportunity to examine the varying levels of racism facing Blacks at the political and social levels in Europe including Black entertainers and actors who faced a wide range of attitudes held by Europeans. On March 5, 1937, Jackson reported in her article "II Duce bans Negro on stage, screen," the censoring of Black actors in Italy. According to Jackson, because censors forbade the appearance of dark-skinned people on the Italian screen and stage, a Black ballet troupe that was billed to open at the Royal Opera House had to paint their skin "brick red." Additionally, the title of the production was altered from "Negro Lightning Bolt," to "Lumawig and the Lightning Bolt." The Italian Consul told Jackson that "Negroes" were not wanted as workers or visitors (Jackson "II Duce"). The Black communities of London were critical of this announcement. Jackson reported that performers such as prominent concert singer John Payne feared this was the beginning of a widespread ban on colored talent in Europe ("II Duce").

The articles provided some perspective into the racialized conditions that faced Blacks beyond America's borders. Jackson's correspondence revealed the unjust practices toward Blacks from the French Parliament and the blatant acts of discrimination in Italy by dictator Benito Mussolini. Jackson's efforts were meant to educate the patrons of the Black press and raise their political consciousness by informing them of the shared political and social affairs between African Americans and their brethren throughout the globe. Jackson's reports appeared in papers from the California Eagle, Louisiana Shreveport, to the Pittsburgh Courier, New York Amsterdam, and the Chicago Defender (JF/M). As Jackson continued to send commentary from London her work becomes a critical voice in the proliferation of Pan-African sentiment and it also assisted in substantiating the somewhat sympathetic mood from the Communist and Socialist parties toward the Black condition.

### **Covering the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict**

In October of 1935 Mussolini launched an invasion against Ethiopia and used poisonous gas and various weapons in his attack against the country (Scott 118). Though this attempt to usurp Emperor Haile Selassie's power was met with outrage throughout the international community, the West did not intervene and decided not to impose even the mildest of sanctions (118).

African Americans were outspoken about this situation because Ethiopia had long served as a symbol of Black power and pride due to Abyssinian success in repelling European colonization at the end of the nineteenth century and because of historians' acknowledgment of Ethiopians as the founders of the Egyptian civilization (118). Between 1935 and 1936 African Americans led a campaign in an attempt to thwart the efforts of Italian imperialism "even though they had a tradition of limited participation in international affairs. African Americans offered an unprecedented display of Pan-African sentiments to aid morally and materially the Emperor Selassie" (Scott 119). As Italy continued its efforts to occupy Ethiopia into 1937, the African American community continued to show a great deal of concern for one of the last African countries under Black rule. Before leaving for her correspondent assignment in January, Jackson underscored how the conflict in Abyssinia had made Black Americans more "world-minded," which played a role in Jackson's decision to urge the creation of the London post ("Brilliant Writer").

On April 16, 1937 Jackson sent a delayed wire report to the ANP on the death of 6,000 Ethiopian men, women, and children by Mussolini's paramilitary, the Blackshirts. She gave an account of a meeting sponsored by the League of Colored Peoples and the Pan African Federation at memorial Hall in London, which included Dr. Ralph Bunche, Socialist Party officials, a Communist member of Parliament, and various union leaders. According to Jackson's report "League of Colored Peoples sponsors great mass meet", the Pan-African Federation organized a meeting to discuss the acts of violence taking place in Ethiopia. The Honorable William Gallagher of Great Britain and a Communist Party leader labeled the crisis "a sinister conspiracy of silence with regard to the massacres of Abyssinia and the whole Ethiopian situation" (12). Jackson's article continued to underline the outrage of other prominent figures in London, such as the Honorable Ellen Wilkinson, a founding member of the Communist Party in 1920 who became a member of the Parliament in 1935. She was frustrated by Great Britain's lack of intervention and stated that she urged Emperor Selassie to put "his faith in the League of nations," but they "stopped so much as a revolver going into Abyssinia and at the same time refused to do anything," but never stopped the Italians (12).

Jackson reported that the League of Colored Peoples and the Pan African Federation adopted a resolution during the meeting, which in part read:

*This meeting condemns the recent atrocities committed in Addis Ababa by Blackshirts and Italian workmen under the instigation of the Italian army of occupation which surpassed in ferocity and ruthlessness the Congo atrocities, and calls upon British National government through its representative at Geneva to support the demand of Emperor of Abyssinia that Commission be sent to Addis Ababa to investigate and report to the world on this cold blooded massacre of thousands of defenseless men, women, and children.*

Jackson highlighted this resolution to underscore how African nations were incensed by the recent actions of Italy against one of their own countries and that they were pushing for an investigation into this tragedy. Though the League of Colored Peoples was willing to offer its support for Ethiopia, Selassie had gained a reputation for rejecting assistance from members of the Black community. This attitude angered Black leaders, and unlike W. E. B. Du Bois, who did not publicly denounce the emperor, Marcus Garvey published an entire editorial where he referred to Selassie as a coward (Garvey “The Failure”).

Jackson’s correspondence highlighted Selassie’s continued defiance against the Black community’s supportive efforts. Before the meeting at Memorial Hall, Jackson released a report in February detailing his rebuff of support from Blacks in England, France, and Portugal in the midst of this crisis. In the article she goes on to discuss Selassie’s decision to reject Haiti and Liberia’s proposal for forming a League of Black Nations. Alcandre reported to Jackson, “The best men of our race in France say if Haile had accepted the constitution of the league seven years ago, when Italy attacked Ethiopia, all the Black races in the World would be after Italy” (Jackson “Parisian scores”). Jackson provides further details by stating that Blacks in England, France, and Portugal were preparing to come to the defense of Ethiopia, but Alcandre confirms that Selassie’s denouncement of Black aid grew stronger as the preparations continued. Shortly after the mass meeting in Memorial Hall, Jackson gained a brief exclusive interview with Selassie wherein he expressed his disappointment in the League of Nations, now known as the United Nations. The emperor blamed himself for believing that the war would be averted and that being admitted into the League of Nations in 1923 would save his country from such acts.

The emperor told Jackson:

*I did not think the war would come. We were always uneasy when we saw foreigners in our land, so it was an immense joy when we were admitted to the League of Nations in 1923. We were saved. To us the word ‘League’ ha[d] a sacred meaning.*

Selassie reveals how much trust he had actually placed in the United Nations at that time:

*My people imagined the chiefs of 52 white nations seated with me and a cup passing from hand to hand. The foreign chieftains have drunk from the cup. Therefore they are bound to aid us.*

And he now wondered who “will put an end to the sufferings of my people?” (Jackson “Who will end suffering”). Jackson’s report successfully conveys Selassie’s misplaced allegiance to a dominant power structure whose membership included the views of imperialist nations. Her correspondence frames Selassie’s failure to align himself and his country with the League of Colored Peoples who desired the survival and sovereignty of Ethiopia.



Two years after Ethiopia's first conflict with Italy in 1895, Dubois writes about the conservation of the Black race through solidarity. He states the following:

*We are Negroes of a vast and historic race...It is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals; as a race we must strive by race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realization of that broader humanity which freely recognizes differences in men...Not only is all this necessary for positive advance; it is absolutely necessary for negative defense (Dubois 25).*

By reviewing the ideology expressed by Du Bois and applying it to what took place in Ethiopia, an important point is illuminated. If Selassie had decided to join in the implementation of the League of Colored Peoples, perhaps he would have been equipped with a better defense against the Italians. DuBois acknowledged that such unification provides positive advancement as well as protection. Forty years later, Jackson's reporting on Selassie's vehement denouncement and ill treatment of Black leaders becomes a part of an important narrative, one that underscores some of the key components that were a part of the discourse within the Black community during the nineteenth century and continued to serve as a critical touchstone throughout the climax of Jackson's journalism career in the 1930s. Jackson's foreign correspondence represents documentation of the ongoing struggles of the Black communities worldwide, as they struggled to unite on a single accord and present a united offensive to the oppressive actions under the umbrella of imperialism.

## **The Coronation and its Political Message**

On February 23, 1937, the New York Times reported "Italians are Angered by Bid to Haile Selassie to Send an Envoy to George VI Coronation." Supposedly the British government was following the precedent that had been set by past coronation etiquette. However, Italy's royal family felt that their relationship to Great Britain was much more important than political correctness and their decision to attend the coronation depended greatly on how the invitation was addressed to Selassie. If the invitation was addressed to Selassie as "His Majesty," no objection could have been raised according to the report in the New York Times because a "deposed sovereign does not lose his majesty title because he loses his kingdom." However, if the salutation said "Emperor," that would change the "complexion" of the situation because Mussolini viewed himself as the Emperor of Ethiopia.

A month later Jackson reported on the same controversy in her article on March 26, 1937, "Duce Ire May Boycott Coronation if Haile There." Her coverage offered some of the same analysis of why the British government extended an invitation to Selassie, but Jackson also elaborated on the fact that most nations still regarded Selassie as the King of Ethiopia. An interview with Beverly Nichols, a liberal reporter in London, stated that if Selassie accepted the invitation, it would represent "fresh humiliation," for him.

The New York Times and Jackson provided a very detailed synopsis of the events that took place on May 11, 1937, which was followed at length by the minutiae of the regalia worn, the preparations around the venue, and the ceremonial procedures. Jackson knew that some readers of the Associated Negro Press were interested in such details, but as a reporter for the Black press she also emphasized issues that did not capture the major headlines in the New York Times. In her article “2 represent Blacks at Coronation,” on May 7, four days before the coronation, she reiterated why she had come to London. Jackson writes of the tens of thousands of peoples of every race, creed, and color that decided to view the King’s pageant, and she posed the following questions:

*In this gigantic gargantuan parade of peoples, where will the Black people stand? What place in this panoramic sweep of Human Family do they occupy?” Both the African and the American Negroes have suffered slavery, exploitation, death. The American Black has given labor and love, song and science; blood and art to his country. What does he get in return? The African has given these gift-edged with agelessness when civilization was youngest—plus the wealth from above and beneath the ground of his native land. What does he get in return? (3A)*

As Jackson observed the preparations for the coronation; she uncovered the obvious lack of Black representation from various countries across the world but reiterated the fact that there were members from Hong Kong, Fiji, Trans-Jordan, Malaysia, and the Falkland Islands. But only two African chiefs were included on the royal guest list, Yeta III, Chief of Barotseland, an upper area of Zambia, and Ademola II, of Abeokuta, a city in the South-West area of Nigeria. Jackson reported that there were approximately 400 million Blacks under “Royal Rule,” but only two represent this large community at this international spectacle.

Jackson placed the coronation into a context not offered by mainstream news outlets. Instead of relying on reports from news agencies that ignored the lack of Black representation, the ANP was able to utilize Jackson’s first-hand observations. She analyzed this event with a critical lens that included a disheartening view on the exclusion of the Black community and provided additional correlations between the injustices facing Blacks in the U.S and abroad. Jackson drew parallels with the following statement:

*At home: a politician rides into high office on your vote and he throws you a few catchy, promissory slogans. Abroad: the far flung British Empire controls and govern one-fourth of the earth; and the ensign of that kingly power is set with the Star of Africa; the largest diamond in the world, yet England has had the cheek to exclude all but two of Africa’s chieftains (Jackson 3B).*

Jackson’s reporting shows the hypocrisy of the royal crown with the exploitation of Africa’s natural resources as seen with the Star of Africa but a lack of action regarding the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. Jackson writes, “We shall see that the British African as well as the American Negro stands sadly alone, dejected and neglected and weak among the Human Family of the World today” (3A).

This discourse solidifies Jackson as an agitator and activist within the African American community because her voice was clearly present in her articles. Jackson demanded action against the egregious acts committed by Britain. She also demanded action against other nations who chose to ignore the attack on Abyssinia and stood silently in support of the transgressions being committed against all Blacks, including African Americans. Jackson called upon every Black man and child to “set off a spark of rebelliousness and resentment,” for what was taking place, hoping that Pan-African sentiment would induce a reaction toward this continued warfare on the Black existence.

As an African American reporter, Jackson changed the framing of the coronation from a changing of the guard to a manifestation of the attitudes toward people of color internationally. The coronation was a proclamation to the world by the British royal family and other imperial powers of their prejudiced views. The issue of race consciousness stayed at the center of Jackson’s coverage as she illustrated the intersections between the Black experience of those on the African continent, the U.S, and Europe. Jackson tried to show the direct relationship and shared fate of those within the Black race, regardless of geographic location.

Despite the controversy surrounding the coronation, many political representatives from African countries flooded London to enjoy other activities affiliated with the ceremony. Jackson was keenly interested in deconstructing some of the negative dialogue prevalent in the U.S regarding the intellectual prowess of Africans. Jackson reported on the political and intellectual successes of the various men visiting from the multitude of African countries. She highlighted some of the leaders she had the opportunity of meeting in her report “Interesting Blacks from all over in London.” Jackson met Benjamin Olisa Eluka Amobi of Nigeria and member of the Ibo Tribe who in 1933 worked with the Legislation Council representing the Niger African Traders and Ernest Samuel Beoku Betts, barrister-at-law and solicitor of the Supreme Court who also worked as Counselor-at-law in Liberia. Jackson also shared the following in her account on May 28, 1937 “Interesting Blacks from all over London”:

*I had the privilege and the honor of bringing to these men and others the greetings from the Associated Negro Press of America and of relating some of the more progressive aspects of the newspapers of our race in the United States. I found in each of them a keen desire to link their interests with our own for the common good of darker races the world over thru some organizations or movement of progressive tendencies (10).*

Jackson’s reporting provided an argument for a further awakening of a color consciousness that attempted to encourage an investigation into the state of affairs facing Blacks globally. While Du Bois and Garvey stood at the forefront of these discussions during the 1920s and ’30s, Jackson played a significant role in attempting to distribute these messages in a context that would hopefully be disseminated to the Black masses via the Black papers. But surprisingly, upon Jackson’s return home after covering Europe through the lens of color awareness, she would find that her innovative efforts were not interpreted by the patrons of the Black press in the way she had hoped.

## **The Return Home as the “Gal who Covered the Coronation”**

Jackson returned from Europe in early June of 1937. By July 1 she had begun a tour across the state of California, during which she spoke of her time in London. The Black newspaper the California Eagle sponsored her first speaking engagement at the behest of its publisher Charlotta Bass. Tickets were twenty-five cents apiece to hear Jackson speak at the Second Baptist Church. When the doors closed, only 100 people had shown (Scant 100). Jackson went on to give what was considered a brilliant account of her travels. The following is a portion of a rough draft of the address “The Story I Could Not Write” that Jackson gave that evening. It represents Jackson’s own interpretation of what it meant to be a member of the Black press, if not an ambassador for the Black community. She also tells of her disappointments and frustrations as she learned what her legacy would be as the first African American female foreign correspondent. Her speech gives important insight into the psychology of what she hoped to accomplish and needs to be quoted at length:

*I am pleased and privileged to have this opportunity of appearing before you tonight to give account of my steward as the first American Negro journalist to be appointed and maintained over a period of time as Foreign correspondent for the Associated Negro Press. I do not emphasize the “first” to bring myself any special glory. It is a matter that should have been attended to long before now. I mention it to let you know that we have now actually established the foundation of international news contacts on a professional basis, by the same standard that govern the gathering and releasing of foreign news by other great news syndicates. I thought that London should be about the center for the world news, I knew that over 400 million colored people are subjects of the British empire...there ought to be the same news value for American Negro readers in releases originating in London, capitol of the British Empire. ...I submitted the idea to Mr. Claude Barnett, director of the Associated Negro Press, received the challenge of proving it. Now these thoughts were the burden of our decision to develop a closer contact between American ...African colored peoples. This purpose was the real reason for my going abroad (JF/M).*

Jackson did not believe in prostituting oneself to a level of celebrity for the sake of notoriety and personal accolades. Even her granddaughter did not fully know what Jackson had accomplished because of her humility until after Jackson’s death in 1979 (Pierson). Jackson wanted this feat to be perceived as advancement by the Black press. With her reputation of honesty and frankness, she briefly chastised the Associated Negro Press organization for not committing to such a project sooner. Jackson wanted to elevate the Black news agency to a status that would give it prominence around the world.

During an interview before Jackson left for London, she stated that the Black press represented one of the last media of salvation for the Black community, and it was her desire “more than anything else, to make a distinctive contribution to its proper motivation and its interests in the affairs of others whose circumstances are similar to our own (“Brilliant Writer”). In keeping in alignment with this goal, she relished in the fact that through her efforts on behalf of Black newspapers, she “established the foundation of international news contacts on a professional basis, by the same standard that govern the gathering and releasing of foreign news by other great news syndicates” (JF/M).

For Jackson, becoming a foreign correspondent was a chance to make the patrons of the Black press more socially and politically color conscious. Jackson continued to address her audience by saying:

*I did not go to London, primarily and essentially to cover the coronation. We used the coronation as an excuse to crystallize and build around more serious objective. But I never dreamed that the democratic American press, in general and some of the Negro newspapers in particular would focus so sharply upon the glamour of that international circus designed, and executed to demonstrate the far-reaching influence of imperialistic power! That the coronation of England's King received more widespread publicity in the American Press than it did in the British Press (for 3 of the largest and most popular newspapers in London, the Express, News Chronicle, and Sunday Referee openly and consistently panned it) is pointed to by bright minds as one more bit of evidence that Imperialism, Fascism and Capitalism go hand-in-hand, with each boosting the stock and show of the other. Having explained to you our “trailblazing, social conscious” race-minded” [sic] intentions, you can well appreciate my personal chagrin over the fact that...upon returning home I learned that British Blacks had held little knots of coronation parties all over Harlem, paying homage to the power that has robbed them of their bread and birthright. I blush to remember that more space was given to the fact that I received a press seat in Westminster Abbey a courtesy that was due all correspondents-matter which fell purely in the line of duty---than the outrageous snub Britain gave to Africa. It is then with feeling of despair and frustration that I carry the tag of “The Gal Who Covered the Coronation (JF/M).*

Hence, when Jackson began to report on the coronation, Claude Barnett sent a notice to the editors of the Associated Negro Press, which included major newspapers the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Amsterdam News*, to place the coronation articles with a particular prominence (Barnett); but Jackson's correspondence was supposed to be viewed as a “trailblazing, social conscious race-minded” opportunity for the Black press, and they too failed in presenting the proper context of this revolutionary undertaking.

Jackson lamented the meager coverage given to her reports on Britain's behavior towards Africa with respect to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict versus coverage she received on the coronation as a member of the press covering the coronation. Jackson became known as the woman who covered the coronation instead of the African American correspondent that challenged the sociopolitical injustices facing Blacks internationally, which may be one of the worst tragedies of her career.

## **Conclusion**

During the spring of 2006, I had the opportunity to travel to Los Angeles, California to meet with Fay Jackson's granddaughter Dale Lya Pierson and rummage through stacks of pictures, letters, and articles, which served as the springboard for my research on Jackson. Since Jackson was an Angeleno for most of her life, I traveled to various libraries in the Los Angeles area and met with local historians hoping to get additional information for my investigation into this forgotten figure of Black history. After returning to Ohio I began to place Jackson into the larger context of the Black press. As I tried to juxtapose Jackson with the roles played by other African American female journalists, I became increasingly aware of the difficulties lurking on the horizon of this project.

To construct an accurate depiction of Black history; scholars must gain a greater sense of awareness regarding the avid participation of Black women in the press. Fay Jackson, Ida B. Wells, Mary Jacques Garvey, and others engaged in political warfare and social debates that defined a generation. Still, generations continue to marginalize the efforts of these women. Finding resources on the life and work of Black women in journalism during the nineteenth and early 20th century may be difficult to locate because it does not exist in the 'normal' places. Much of the material on female journalists of this period may still be buried in boxes, unmarked files, university basements, or family attics. Scholars in Black Studies will have to move beyond their comfort zones if they hope to save the stories of Black women in America that moved beyond the prescribed roles of their generations to become leaders and pioneers in the Black press.

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