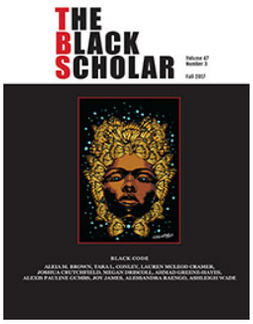

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The Myth of Post-Racialism in Television News, by Libby Lewis

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The Myth of Post-Racialism in Television News, by Libby Lewis. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016. $123, hardback. 186 pages.

Reviewed by Allissa V. Richardson

The epistemology that informs Lewis's latest book, *The Myth of Post-Racialism in Television News*, is of the homespun variety, the author explains in the introduction. Lewis writes that her 96-year-old grandmother used to say, "A heap see, but few know" (1). The "few" to whom she refers are the African American journalists who work in the nation's television newsrooms. What Black journalists know is that their presence in these mediated spaces suggests a fabled era of post-racialism, and masks a complex daily experience in the profession, Lewis argues. Negotiating discordant notions of reporter objectivity versus authentic "Black" voice, and performing carefully crafted gender and sexuality scripts, are *de rigueur* experiences for these reporters, Lewis writes in this revealing ethnography. Through interviews with scores of Black journalists, and personal reflections of her time in the newsroom, Lewis exposes many of the unspoken rules of engagement that Black journalists know, and practice, in an effort to keep their jobs.

"Intensified policing to ensure Black journalists fit the network news image toward a 'palatable Blackness' … would not be practiced if the media was as monolithic and colorblind as the rules of objectivity suggest," Lewis offers (1). She further explains that one's speech pattern, hair styles, and ways of dress are policed heavily in order to sell "soft" blackness to an ethnic audience, while simultaneously weeding out reporters who are "too black," or not heteronormative enough, for the mainstream. This fusion of critical race theory, queer theory, and political economy provides a solid framework to examine the lived experiences of Black journalists today, their value to the industry, and their impact on the communities they cover.

Lewis writes that television newsrooms regard Blackness "as reprehensible and redeemable by recognizing marginalized journalists as an empty canvas—written upon, scripted, and marketed by standards established by newsroom culture" (85). This means that Black journalists who do not fit the ideal archetype may be subject to countless rounds of meetings with image consultants and speech coaches, so that they can achieve the proper "white, Midwestern speech pattern" (2). Lewis weaves in a bit of memoir here, sharing her memories of straightening her hair to fit in, and "often talking more White than the whitest White person … " (2). She acknowledges that these professional choices construct a working identity that attempts to achieve colorblindness in the newsroom. This puts Black journalists in an editorial bind when they try to report news from their unique perspectives. They are either typecast as the journalist who will cover the Black "beat," or told to report objectively, without inserting race at all into the coverage. There is little middle ground.

Lewis shares what agency Black journalists have to negotiate their newsroom cultures. In one vignette, she describes the professional life of a journalist she calls "Storm." This

reporter finds freedom in working the so-called "graveyard shift." Since fewer executives police the late-night news time slots, the conventional wisdom is that one can achieve more news production autonomy, and move faster up the corporate ladder. Other Black journalists agree to anchor the so-called "weekend ghetto" shows, which feature African American talent on light news days only. The result, Lewis argues, is that "news media managers attempt to control temporalities and spatialities of 'Blackness'" where it is trendy or geographically appropriate (21). In other words, the rise of Roland Martin and Melissa Harris-Perry to cable news commentary anchors during President Obama's administration—or the fact that Black journalists report that they can move up faster in cities with large African American populations, such as Detroit or Chicago—reflects a sophisticated system of unspoken boundary lines of what executives think raced audiences want to see on television.

The final sections of the book outline the editorial results of what Lewis calls the "psychic and symbolic violence of the exercise of power in newsroom culture" (7). She writes that Black journalists who worked during the historic Obama administration did so amid racism that masqueraded as news objectivity or satire. For example, the Black journalists that she interviewed recounted tense interactions with editors who failed to step into their explanatory role as elite media outlets, opting instead to regurgitate and sensationalize racist, user-generated content as front-page news items. Lewis references the former California Mayor Dean Gross's circulation of an image depicting a watermelon patch on the White House front lawn as an example of how the news "facilitated the resurrection of blatantly racist imagery … by reducing racism to a relative debate about alternative meaning" or satire (28). By assembling panels to discuss whether or not the latest political meme should be considered offensive, news executives missed an opportunity to have Black journalists report on issues that were really important to Black people. Said differently, the arguments over insulting imagery, though important, often drowned out larger conversations about mass incarceration, generational poverty, or inequalities in financial rebounds from the Great Recession.

Lewis has written a compelling exposé on what today's Black television journalists face in a supposedly post-racial America. By fusing critical race theory, queer theory, and musings on political economy, this book fills in valuable epistemological gaps to explain one of the most pervasive, yet unspoken, causes of journalism's diminished cultural impacts in modern society: racism. The text challenges the industry trend toward creating "an all-powerful single-minded media" (29) and encourages its managers not to manufacture and police Blackness in its anchors, lest the annual drop in viewers might persist. This book should be required reading in any media management or journalism entrepreneurship class. It opens the door to executive-level dialogues that, heretofore, a heap saw, but few *knew*. And, in an age where the visual medium is considered the most persuasive and prevalent, *knowing* about the historic and current interplay between race and news production is the first step to improving this fraught relationship.

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Freedom Is a Constant Struggle, by Angela Davis. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016. $15.95, paperback. 158pp.

Reviewed by Mahmoud Zidan

The dedication of Angela Davis' autobiography, *With My Mind On Freedom* (1974), reads:

> For my family, my strength
> For my comrades, my light.
> For the sisters and brothers whose fighting spirit was my liberator.
> For those whose humanity is too rare to be destroyed by walls, bars, and death houses.
> And especially for those who are going to struggle until racism and class injustice are forever banished from our history.

It is evident that the dedication includes a number of redefinitions of already existing categories. The word "humanity" does not mean a specific group of people; it is all-encompassing. The words "sister" and "brother" do not refer to the members of Davis' family. The word "our" may be taken to refer to not only African American history, but also world history. The epigraph of one of Davis' first books is not restrictive; it is against closure.

Unlike other autobiographies that typically bring some kind of closure or conclusion to an individual's life, Davis' is a beginning, an opening, or a continuation. Davis' autobiography was published more than four decades ago, but her most recent book, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*, stays true to those principles of beginnings and continuities, as the title suggests. Consisting of interviews (conducted by human rights activist Frank Barat), speeches, and essays, it is a book that redefines and recasts the struggles of African Americans in more worldly terms.

The term "worldly" is not a new one for Davis. Her political affiliations through the Communist Party and the Black Panther Party paved the way for a reimagining of African American struggle as being unrestricted by a certain geographical site—the United States. Accordingly, she conceives of freedom as indivisible and worldly. Moreover, her conception involves the construction of a community of struggle that targets the collective.

By addressing all elements of the collective, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle* significantly broadens the definition of the community of struggle. Davis adopts an intersectional approach, analyzing discourses of race, gender, class, imperialism, sexuality, and ability, simultaneously. Davis also maps