

***Sun Reporter* Turns 77**

By Max Millard

On May 19, 2019, more than 1000 people gathered at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the *Sun Reporter*, the city's weekly black newspaper. Guests at the gala included then U. S. Senator Kamala Harris, San Francisco Mayor London Breed, and former Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr.

Senator Harris said, "The *Sun Reporter* has been the voice and the power of the people, and because of the work you've done, lives have been forever changed and improved... You were with me when I ran for San Francisco district attorney in 2002 and years later when I launched my campaign to represent California in the United States Senate and so, this newspaper and the community it created is forever a part of my story and California history."¹

The *Sun Reporter's* support of black candidates has been one of its chief missions since it was founded in San Francisco's Fillmore district as the *Reporter* in June 1944. Two black men from Texas, Albert White and Frank Logan, saw the mass migration of black war workers as an opportunity to start a local newspaper. When it proved to be unprofitable, it passed through several hands until 1948, when it was merged with a white-owned black newspaper, the *Sun*, and renamed the *Sun Reporter*.²

Thomas C. Fleming, the *Reporter's* founding editor, urged his best friend, Dr. Carlton Goodlett, to move to San Francisco in 1945 and set up a medical practice in the Fillmore district. Goodlett obliged, and within a few years, he and dentist Dan Collins became joint publishers of the merged paper, while Fleming remained editor. In the early 1950s, Collins sold out his share, making Goodlett the sole publisher. Goodlett held that post until his death in 1997. Fleming continued writing for the paper until 2005, the year before his death at age 98.³

During Goodlett's tenure, the *Sun Reporter* became an important organ for civil rights. It publicized the Auto Row protests of 1964, which put an end to the discrimination against black automobile salesmen on Van Ness Ave. It supported the student strike at San Francisco State in 1968, which gave birth to the nation's first ethnic studies department.⁴

The paper launched the career of Ben Williams, the first black reporter hired by a daily paper in Northern California, and Belva Davis, the first black female TV anchor in the Bay Area.⁵ It helped catapult Willie Brown to prominence in his first run for public office in 1962 and his second, successful run in 1964.⁶ For decades its layout artist was Emory Douglas, former minister of culture for the Black Panther Party, and internationally renowned artist to this day.⁷

The paper's motto is: "That no good cause shall lack a champion, and that evil shall not thrive unopposed."

The *Sun Reporter* has never discriminated in its own hiring practices, and at different times its staff has included white photographers, typesetters, proofreaders, and writers.

By the 1990s, Dr. Goodlett has left California due to failing health and Thomas Fleming's role had diminished, although he remained a columnist. The person in charge was Amelia Ashley-Ward, a

native of Magnolia, Mississippi, who grew up in San Francisco and joined the paper in 1979, after earning a B. A. in journalism and photojournalism from San Jose State University.⁸

In 1997, Goodlett died, Fleming retired from day-to-day operations, and Ashley-Ward became the sole owner and publisher. As with most newspapers nationwide, the *Sun Reporter* has been forced to reduce its staff due to the flight of advertising dollars to the Internet. It can no longer cover local news as extensively as it did in the past. But it remains strong, and has kept its price at 30 cents for the past quarter-century.

Ashley-Ward's long personal friendships with London Breed and Kamala Harris might give a needed boost to the *Sun Reporter's* fortunes in years to come, as the Internet continues to chip away at the viability of print journalism. From its fragile beginnings to the present day, the *Sun Reporter* has been a survivor, and as long as there is a black community in San Francisco, it's likely that there will be a *Sun Reporter*.

1. Sun Reporter, June 6, 2019, statement on page 5
2. Fleming, Thomas, and Max Millard: *In the Black World*, 2017
<http://www.maxmillard.com/blackhist/ibw417.pdf>
3. Adkins, Jan Baptiste: *African Americans of San Francisco*, pages 78, 85. Arcadia Publishing, 2012
4. Talbot, David: *Season of the Witch*. Free Press, 2012
5. Davis, Belva, with Vicki Haddock: *Never in My Wildest Dreams – A Black Woman's Life in Journalism*. BK Publishers, San Francisco, 2012
6. Richardson, James: *Willie Brown – A Biography*, University of California Press, 1996
7. Bloom Joshua, and Waldo E. Martin, Jr.: *Black Against Empire – the History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. University of California Press, 2013
8. Sun Reporter, June 6, 2019, "History of the Sun Reporter" by Gail Berkley