

March 23, 1973

Remarks of Commissioner Benjamin L.  
Hooks, Federal Communications Commission,  
at the 50th Anniversary Celebration of  
Universal Life Insurance Co., Memphis, Tenn.

President Walker, Universal Life Insurance Company officials,  
employees, guests.

It is indeed a pleasure to be here, joining you in this most  
significant milestone of your company--its 50th Anniversary.

Old time insurance men among you--I don't believe there  
are any here who began with the company, is there?--can recall,  
I know, how tough it was in the early days when you tramped through  
country side, knocked on doors, and picked up the few pennies or  
nickels many of our poor folks paid in weekly premiums.

Many of you then, I suppose, would agree with the late poet  
Langston Hughes when he said, "I wish the rent, were heaven sent."

Today, from the little office on Beale at Hernando where the  
founder, Dr. J. E. Walker, organized the firm, incorporating it  
March 10, 1923, with a capitalization of \$100,000, the firm under  
his son, the esteemed A. Maceo Walker has since 1952 when he took  
over the presidency, doubled in size. It now boasts assets of \$41 million,  
with a capital and surplus structure of almost seven million dollars  
and \$254 million worth of insurance in force.

These are accomplishments of which any firm could be proud and I understand that Universal can proudly boast that it is the first Black institution of any kind in the mid-south that has not only maintained a continuous operation for 50 years, but a highly profitable one in that period of time.

Yet, once again, I learn that despite your accomplishments, despite the fact you are operating in 10 states and the District of Columbia, that you employ more than 800 people and that "Black Power" is more than a slogan to you, it is difficult for you to get coverage in the local and national press.

This points up my continuing argument with the press. It is crying now because it says its freedoms are being taken away. I don't necessarily agree with that. I want to make this position very clear, however, that I am very strongly in favor of First Amendment privileges for the press and that includes the electronics media as well as the printed press. I think that they have a positive duty to tell the truth as they see it, to ferret all information they can to help, as I have said, make this a better country in which to live.

But it can't help much if it does not tell the positive as well as the negative things Blacks do. We get enough of the latter, certainly. It wasn't too long ago, and it is still true in too many locations, that you could turn on the television or radio, look and listen for a week without hearing or seeing anything positive that Blacks were doing.

The print media and broadcast industry did not tell much about the evils of segregation and the hurts Blacks suffered in the long, dreary years before the big Civil Rights push in the 50's began.

The media, I say, is not responding vigorously enough in terms of defending the First Amendment privileges of everybody. The Golden Age of radio (50 years of it, and 25 years of television) has been largely a Black-out age for the Black man. I can go back to all those years and the only thing radio had to offer Black folks was Amos n' Andy, a show that caricatured Blacks. I just wonder about the sensitivity of white people in the press who, rightly so, can understand when they are being attacked, but when Black folk and other minorities are crying for help, they are so insensitive to that.

But I would also like to toss television a bouquet. I think it did a tremendous job, particularly during the Martin Luther King, Jr. days. I think without the excellent coverage of television perhaps the Civil Rights Movement, as we knew it then, would not have culminated successfully in two great acts being passed by Congress. They have done some good things.

But the media is still too closed to Blacks, minorities and women seeking opportunity. I hear from knowledgeable sources that of 38,000 people working with the nation's newspapers in this country, only 253, or less than one percent (0.7 percent to be exact) is working as writers, editors, photographers, the news room professional. In



In large metropolitan areas, it is somewhat better, but only 4.6 percent of those employed in news is Black.

This then, is the sorry state of affairs in the print media. We know that in the broadcast media, no Black owns a TV station of the 693 operating in this country. Only 25 own radio stations (there are 7,000 in the U. S.) and that only one Black man, Bill Dilday in Jackson, Mississippi, manages a TV station.

The record of employing and upgrading of Blacks, women and other minorities, in the broadcast media, is almost scandalous.

But it is beginning to improve somewhat. The number of Blacks and other minorities who bring petitions to deny against stations seeking license renewals at the FCC, has sensitized some stations to the need to improve their hiring, upgrading and programming practices.

The FCC has established an in-agency EEO unit, headed by a young Black lawyer, to set about correcting some of the historical employment wrongs within the agency. For the FCC figures if it is going to tell the powerful communications industry which it regulates what to do in terms of equal employment opportunities, it had better first get its own house in order. The FCC has also established an external EEO unit to deal with the broadcast industry, and will soon staff same.

When one looks at the lack of meaningful representation in important positions in both TV-radio and the print media, it is little wonder there is such insensitivity to the Black community in terms, for example, of Universal Life Insurance Comapny and the dissemination of news of its progress.

But we are going to break these bonds of insensitivity, of bigotry. We are beginning to end the long and sorry Black-out history in the communications media, and beginning a golden era of Black-in, because the powers that be--the U. S. Supreme Court, the President of the U. S., the Congress and the FCC--are in unison in declaring that the industries that do business with the government will adhere to the law of the land, and provide equal employment opportunity for all.