



## JOURNALISM IN A SMALL PLACE: Making Caribbean News Relevant, Comprehensive, and Independent by Juliette Storr

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## Caribbean Journalism: Comprehensive and Proportionate

What is news in the Caribbean? Caribbean people have a basic understanding of what types of stories make the news. The news is about prominent people, events, and issues of the day. But the emphasis on relevance and significance is skewed towards their everyday lived experience, which reduces the importance of news stories to the sphere of the personal.

If we accept Jamaica Kincaid's argument, Caribbean people take an event and turn it into the everyday, and the everyday is turned into an event: "Small things loom large, and major events are reduced to an 'ordinary' occurrence."<sup>1</sup> Caribbean people, according to this logic, struggle with the significant. For societies that love to talk, it seems counterintuitive that they make small things significant and significant things small. This rationale goes against Western interpretations of what passes for news: the significant, the unusual, not the everyday. Nonetheless, Caribbean people weave the significant into the storytelling of their everyday lived experience.<sup>2</sup>

The legacy of Caribbean storytelling emerged from an African oral tradition, one filled with analogies and allegories for conveying important lessons and messages. African societies do not openly discuss social ills. According to Edward Hall's and Geert Hofstede's analyses of African cultural orientations, these societies are collectivist, high context cultures.<sup>3</sup> As such, group cohesion, kinship ties, and belonging are valued and result in deeper bonds which bring with them less direct, explicit communication; the rules of behavior are understood and do not have to be discussed. But Hall and Hofstede's models do not accurately describe Caribbean

cultures, which, in post-independence have vacillated between collectivist and individualist dimensions and low context and high context orientations. (Anthropologist Edward Hall, in his work on language, places a culture's communication style on a continuum between low-context and high-context. These are based on a culture's preference for direct, explicit communication—low—or indirect, implicit communication—high.)<sup>4</sup> In democratic models of governance that push openness, freedom of expression, and personal liberties, Caribbean societies clash with Western interpretations of how these ideals should work in public discourse. Caribbean societies are comprised of closed, secretive, conservative groups that remain silent on many important political, social, and economic issues, ones that Western societies like the United States and United Kingdom disseminate as news. While there is public discourse on political, economic, and social issues, this discourse is usually controlled by political and economic elites who prefer to maintain the status quo.

Colonial history is integrated into the oral traditions and maintained in these conservative cultures. Under European rule, colonial administrators made decisions without consultation with, or consideration of, the majority of the colonized. The significant was determined externally. External actors continue to play this role in present-day Caribbean societies.

Caribbean people should be interested in pursuing comprehensive and balanced accounts of their social realities. These accounts require “careful weighing, careful consideration, careful judging, careful questioning.”<sup>5</sup> To accomplish completeness and exactness, Kincaid believes, “would demand a reconsideration, an adjustment, in the way they [Caribbean people] understand the existence of time.”<sup>6</sup> These demands should be made of Caribbean journalism as it seeks to fulfill the principles of comprehensiveness and proportionality. When these principles are upheld, they lead to more accurate accounts of the political, economic, and social realities in these societies.

If Caribbean journalists provide comprehensive and proportional accounts, they will help citizens of the region to understand clearly what is significant and important to know about their societies. According to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, when journalists do this they are performing the cartographic function—that is, they are helping citizens to navigate their social world and make sense of it.<sup>7</sup> This task is the social responsibility of journalism, and it helps journalists understand what to cover and

how to cover it. Although Caribbean journalists accepted the importance of their social responsibility, many believe economic, political, and cultural challenges inhibit their ability to uphold this responsibility.

## Journalism in a Culture of Secrecy and Silence

Former director of culture in the Bahamas, Nicolette Bethel, referred to Bahamian society, and indeed that of the wider Caribbean, as one that suffers in silence and secrecy. “You don’t speak it, because if you do then it is real,” she explains. “If you are living it, it isn’t as real as when you speak it.”<sup>8</sup> This culture of secrecy was imposed on Caribbean society by colonial powers. It has left an indelible mark on the psyche of Caribbean people who are, the examples of Jamaica, Cuba, and Haiti notwithstanding, docile people resistant to change. Barbadian journalist David Ellis characterized this culture of silence as endemic to the region, and believes it influenced how journalists practice in the region. Ellis explained that David Thompson, the prime minister of Barbados, was very sick, though no one was talking about his illness as it was perceived to be a private affair. Despite the talk “on the ground” about the prime minister’s illness, Ellis noted, “people did not want to be obscene, or they didn’t want to appear to be. And these are the nuances of the culture that we talked about; they don’t want it to appear as though we are not respectful of his private life, his children’s situation, or his wife’s, or his mother. Those things matter in this instance.”<sup>9</sup> Ellis believes these types of situations are tempered by the culture of silence and fear, the fear of victimization, “which is a reality in this [small] environment which the journalists themselves live with.”<sup>10</sup>

Another example comes from the Bahamas, where a prominent member of the bar, Rubie Nottage, was nominated in 2008 for the position of Supreme Court judge. Questions were raised by journalists about her fitness for this position based on the US government’s indictment of her and her husband, Kendal Nottage. Juan McCartney, one of the journalists who questioned Mrs. Nottage’s nomination for Supreme Court judge, explained that citizens were angry with him and his newspaper because of his story; they wanted to know why he brought it to light. As McCartney explained,

people were really upset that we were questioning the fact that Rubie Nottage had an indictment against her in the US, and they thought it was just none of our business to say anything. No one ever stopped and asked, really how do we appoint our judges? What do we know about the people they are putting on the bench? Why don't we have open hearings? Why aren't we able to participate at least on a spectator level when these people are making these appointments? Right now, the legal and judicial commission does whatever the hell they want. We don't have any input; we can't even monitor them. All we can do is really speculate on what is happening.<sup>11</sup>

During the debate on this issue, the *Bahamas Press*, an online news distributor, ran a story with the heading “Nottages should sue the Guardian & Tribune for libel.”<sup>12</sup> The *Bahamas Press* story blamed “foreign influence” for the local media’s attack on Mrs. Nottage’s character. Mrs. Nottage and her husband were stalwart members of the political party, the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP). The *Bahamas Press* is a partisan organization that supports the PLP, and its defensive stance on the issue was biased.

In addition to the social pressure by which topics are deemed “off limits,” the difficulty finding reliable sources constrains Caribbean journalists’ ability to be comprehensive and proportionate. McCartney explained that when he entered journalism, a lot of his subsequent disappointment came from people’s unwillingness to talk on the record. This aspect of the culture remained one of his greatest challenges since “at times, it is very challenging to get people to open up and talk. Especially in a society ... where everything is closed and people like to keep secrets about the things that matter. It is very difficult to get them to open up and talk [on the record].”<sup>13</sup> Based on his experience, McCartney believes that people love to gossip about what is happening, but they will not publicly go on record about issues they considered too sensitive to discuss in the open. McCartney’s experience underscores the problem of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality in small societies.

Bahamian journalist and talk show host Quincy Parker also identified this aspect of Caribbean culture when he reflected on how some topics or issues were still taboo among Caribbean societies. In particular, topics like child abuse and incest are swept under the rug because no one wants

to say anything about them; neither is openly discussed in Caribbean societies, despite the fact that, according to the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization, and World Bank, the Caribbean has extremely high levels of both.<sup>14</sup> The region also has a high prevalence of domestic violence, sexual assault/rape, and human trafficking. The culture of secrecy makes any discussion of these important issues difficult. Nonetheless, Caribbean societies will have to learn how to discuss significant issues openly and deliberatively in a public forum if they are to progress as healthy democracies. Journalism will have to embrace the advocacy role as proposed by Michael Schudson,<sup>15</sup> as well as the radical role prescribed by Christians et al.,<sup>16</sup> to change the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors about culturally sensitive topics like incest, rape and domestic violence.

Although objectivity is the holy grail of most Western journalism, especially as practiced in the United States and United Kingdom, advocacy journalism, which “promotes a cause or expresses a subjective point of view,”<sup>17</sup> should be used to increase public knowledge and an understanding of the harm and injustice present in the Caribbean. In small societies that have a predilection for secrecy, silence, and authoritarian governance, journalism must advocate change. In some cases, this may require journalists to take on the radical role of airing “views and voices that are critical of authority and the established order”<sup>18</sup> so as to bring about change and reform. Some media scholars believe advocacy journalism is bad journalism or merely propaganda, but this is not always true: It depends on the purpose of the story and the integrity of the journalist. The purpose must fit the context of these small societies, where journalism has more to do with advocating on behalf of the people. Journalists must become more radical if these societies are to resolve some of their complex human problems and institute more democratic practices. The ideals of journalism espoused by Kovach and Rosenstiel—truth, loyalty to citizens, verifiability, independence, engagement and relevance, comprehensiveness and proportionality, and the provision of a public forum—could all be achieved while practicing the advocate and radical roles.<sup>19</sup> It will require journalists to function at the highest level of integrity, to be aware of their biases and influences, and to make their process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information open and transparent to the public.

In Western democratic societies, journalism obtained its legitimacy on the grounds of being neutral, gathering facts and analyzing them objectively. But no journalist is free of bias and they must be cognizant of these biases when performing the advocacy or radical role while upholding the principles of accuracy, fairness, and balance. Journalism in the Caribbean should be practiced not as a dichotomy of subjectivity versus objectivity, but rather on a continuum between subjectivity and objectivity to fulfill the needs of these societies and live up to the public's trust. The most trusted type of journalism is one free from political or economic influence, one that works on behalf of the people to provide them with the information they need to make informed decisions.

Quincy Parker conceded that a lot of progress has been made since the new forms of talk show began discussing challenging political, economic, and social topics in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> However, he believes Caribbean societies still have a long way to go to become more open to critical debate on these issues. In the 1990s, liberalization, deregulation, and privatization engendered a more open kind of talk radio. When these new shows began they pushed the envelope on social and political issues and started to create societies that were willing to discuss these issues more openly. However, the early furor created by this new liberal environment lost its luster and influence. Many of the talk shows descended from their initial perch as effective mediums for discursive conversation and became infotainment-style shows relying on the lowest common denominator to maintain their audiences. Many of the hosts interviewed for this book believed their initial impact on democracy had been supplanted by economic imperatives.

As Bahamian talk show host Steve McKinney explained,

when it started, when this new, modern talk radio business became the pining spirit of the Bahamas, people were able to call in and they led the discussion because most of them were like open lines. They would have led the discussion and say you know, "I want to talk about this, these roads gotta be fixed" and people power was actively at work. So, I would like to say that when radio talk show first began, people had this interest that they could change things and they expressed themselves through the power of the microphone and the telephone over the airwaves. And they did. The powers that be, government, church, state,

everyone, institutions, they listened. They sat up and listened because after all, this was a new phenomenon.<sup>21</sup>

But the euphoria of such liberty did not last long. Talk radio's ability to bring about deliberative debate soon died out. In Barbados, for example, David Ellis described the current environment this way:

We now have a situation where the market forces are so dominant that to some extent it is diluting what is considered to be the important stuff. People are attracted more and more by what might be perceived as the trivial or what others might describe as the human-interest dimension. And in these Caribbean environments there is an excessive emphasis on politics and politicians and to a lesser extent economic dimension. The people-centered aspect of it still needs to come to the fore.<sup>22</sup>

In essence, the novelty faded and the audience dwindled as many people lost interest in talk shows. But beyond the shift to commercialism, another reason the radio talk show lost its potency was due to the phenomenon of the “chronic callers,” individuals who called the shows numerous times each day. Many audience members grew weary of hearing the same chronic callers.

At first, politicians and other social actors were jolted out of their comfort zone when this new style of talk show emerged, but after the novelty wore off, they became more complacent and viewed this type of public feedback as loud, sensational talk, not effective debate. Politicians also learned how to contain the talk shows through increased legal action or the use of public relations. There was a significant increase in the number of lawsuits filed against radio stations and talk show hosts throughout the region, which will be discussed further in chapter six.

Although many of the talk show hosts still believe they were providing a vehicle for public debate on important issues, the effectiveness of these talk shows has declined. As McKinney explains, the initial commercial success of these shows created a competitive atmosphere, and talk show hosts became more extreme and outrageous in their presentations to gain or maintain audience shares. The content has therefore become more entertainment-focused and less informative. As McKinney put it,

there was serious competition for the commercial dollar. And every entity that was selling a product in this country [the Bahamas] decided that they was going on More FM ... because it was cutting edge, it was innovative, it was stylish, we mixed it with music. It was very provocative, and it cut right to the questions. We didn't play around with it, because it was new. Because it was new we were free-wheeling, there were no kind of conditions that said "well you know you can't say this." It was unregulated in a way. While we have rules through the business licenses for having a radio station, there was no real regulations put in place that would have been able to deal with what you could say, how you could do things on talk radio.<sup>23</sup>

Krissy Love, a female talk show host in the Bahamas, provided a similar description of the early days of radio talk shows. While these shows are still influential, their descent into competitive practices to gain market share did produce negative perceptions. "One of the disadvantages when the government released the reigns," according to Love, "[was that] they did release the reigns. I was telling the current prime minister you know you gave us freedom but we didn't have any rules. So with rights come responsibility and a lot of station owners don't get that. This genre created some monsters too."<sup>24</sup> Despite this development, Love believes the good outweighed the bad, as she claims there were still some levels of accountability: "It made policymakers realize that they have to answer to the people. But sometimes they now believe that there is so much talk show nobody checking so 'I ain't got to answer to nobody,' so it made people a little cynical."<sup>25</sup>

Fear of victimization also impacted the effectiveness of the new talk radio shows. Barbadian talk show host David Ellis contends that the smallness of Caribbean societies restricts how journalists practice their craft. As a result, talk show hosts were not able to report on political and economic elites as liberally as their American counterparts, for fear of intimidation and victimization. Some of the journalists interviewed described how they were forced to leave their country to find employment because they were fired or blacklisted by political elites for exposing corruption or wrongdoing; others have been physically harmed or

threatened. According to Freedom House, a nonprofit organization that monitors global press freedom, in Belize in October 2012 “the cars of two journalists who were critical of the government were vandalized in what opposition media deemed attacks on media freedom. In one case, the nuts securing the tires to a journalist’s car were removed.”<sup>26</sup> The report noted, however, that the motives for the incidents remained unclear. In August 2012, Guyanese journalist Freddie Kissoon reported he was assaulted after publishing a column in which he claimed he had been a victim of state oppression. Earlier that year, Kissoon was also dismissed from his position as lecturer at the University of Guyana.<sup>27</sup> In its 2012–2014 report, the Media Association of St. Lucia claimed that media freedom in the country was “somewhat weak.”<sup>28</sup> The report cited intimidation, victimization, lack of free expression, political influence, and abuse of power as the main contributing factors: “Politicians and their party faithful are quick to criticise and use various methods of persuasion and coercion when the media does not report in their favour, but will not hesitate to use that same media as leverage against their opponents or to support their causes when convenient.”<sup>29</sup> The 2012–2014 report also identified nine major threats to the free press: political pressure, the nature of press ownership, economic climate and technology trends, conflicting commercial interests, poor competitive practices/undercutting of the market, lack of training and guidance, poor leadership, regulations and laws, violence and unprofessional conduct.

The relationship between governments and media is often very contentious. Some politicians have labeled journalists as the “opposition press.” Others have characterized news stories as “too sensitive” or “not appropriate” for publication. Also, the increase in the number of lawsuits has effectively muzzled talk show hosts and journalists, causing media owners to impose self-censorship as they become more concerned with the bottom line and staying in business.

The new style of talk radio that emerged in the region in the 1990s, also known as “talkback,” is one of the most fascinating phenomena to emerge in the region in the last twenty years. In talkback radio the host invites the listeners to participate more actively in the program by phoning in, sending an SMS (Short Message Service), or emailing with their views and opinions. However, although talk radio shows became a popular phenomenon in the region, and the world, many scholars question their effectiveness when it comes to advancing democracy. In his analysis of the

new talkback radio culture, Australian media professor Graeme Turner acknowledges that this format displaced conventional news and current affairs programs in many countries as ordinary people incorporated themselves into the production of journalism. However, Turner believes talkback radio represents the “demotic voice” at its most aggressive and cautions us not to confuse it with democracy. Further, he contends, “radio journalism has given way to the talkback host or entertainer at precisely the time when the political influence of the talkback format has become most pronounced, and when the regulatory control of that influence has become least effective.”<sup>30</sup> Turner contends talk radio hosts have taken on some of the roles of journalists but few of the responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> He connects his analysis of the demotic voice and populism of talkback radio to Richard Hoggart’s analysis of the “rise of opinionation” as a substitute for analysis and judgment which had become a populist tendency in media (among newspaper columnists and letter writers) and public life in the 1950s.<sup>32</sup> Turner agrees with Hoggart, who viewed this tactic as “a grotesque and dangerous flattery of the public—dangerous because it substitutes a rhetorically constituted ‘people’ for genuine democratic participation.”<sup>33</sup> Turner believes this observation is still apposite today. He views today’s public media environment as a “demotic turn” where talkback radio and new online media are lively expressions of popular culture. He therefore deems talkback radio and new media as “poisonous cultural and political functions.”<sup>34</sup> The result of this, Turner claims, is a “type of entertainment that mimics the form and practice of journalism but which performs quite different social and political functions.” Consequently, Turner posits talkback radio, and online media, are “limited deliberative platforms that do not serve democracy well.”<sup>35</sup>

McKinney, Ellis, and Love agree with Turner that talk radio has produced a cacophony that is often interpreted as effective public debate. However, they also extended Turner’s argument to include the peculiarities of Caribbean culture. Bahamian talk show host Eddie Carter believes the power of talk radio is limited because Caribbean societies are not yet mature enough to discuss important issues openly and publicly hold politicians and other important political and economic actors accountable:

I honestly don’t think we’re truly able to handle open radio in our country. Perfect example is politics. Politics is probably the

easiest example you could get. Now you have a politician that speaks in the House [of Assembly] and he talks about morality and he talks about we have to do things the right way. We're such a small community that we know his dirt. We know the fact that he's got a family on the side and he's children with XY. We know that. But, we haven't matured enough as a nation yet where I can openly come out and say "well John Doe, you need to sit back down because we all know you've got Susan on the side with Tom, Dick, and Jane as your side children. You are not one to be talking morality and responsibility to me. You are not a good example." We haven't reached that stage yet. Which is funny, because we "sip, sip" it, you know. We will go outside and at the bar or the water cooler, or wherever, having lunch, and we will talk.

Funny, we all are willing to talk about "sweet hearting" to some extent and you know being playboys and players and all that. We'll talk about that. But, you know, we don't want to talk about incest. We don't want to talk about the murderers and the fact that families are out there protecting these people who are violating us and this country. They know who they are. We are too small for you not to know that guy is a criminal who is living next to you. We are too tiny. But yet we don't want to talk about [it].<sup>36</sup>

Trinbagonian journalist Peter Christopher presented a similar narrative for Trinidad and Tobago but added the people's appreciation for the journalistic version of the "news." He believes people do like to gossip about what is happening but, based on his experience, they also seem to like to know the truth behind these rumors: "I've always believed that our culture is very, as Dr. [Tia] Cooper would say, 'Bacchanalist.' We like to hear those saucy rumors ... but I do believe there are a lot of people who respect when people get to the bottom of the rumors and find out the truth."<sup>37</sup> He explained that he got more feedback from the public when his stories went in-depth: "There'd be a whole heap of volley and fuzz and then rile up and then after a while they'll stop talking the story because it has no basis for them to continue talking about it."<sup>38</sup> Christopher's review supports and contradicts Kincaid's analysis of Caribbean people and my

earlier assessment that it is difficult for Caribbean people to identify what is significant. His position both supports and refutes the argument that Caribbean people live with contradictions, mixing rumors and facts to discuss the significance of issues or events, but still wanting to know the truth, the significant.

The issues of fear, intimidation, and victimization are related to the distribution of power in these patriarchal societies with matrifocal households. The hierarchy of power is most visible in the inherited centralized structures of governance. Most of the power is in the hands of the prime minister or president, the central controlling force in most of these countries, who along with his/her governing party tries to control the decision-making at all levels of society. As a result, the prime minister/president is the most powerful political figure, and has authority over all government institutions and agencies; the prime minister/president and the governing party also has tremendous control over the media in these countries: They apply their control or power through policymaking, governing bodies that implement regulations and policies, and the creation of laws.

As Nicolette Bethel explains, “the fact that we live in a society that is dominated by government policy means … that [because of] cultural secrecy, real issues don’t get discussed. You raise an issue, and there are standard responses. We really don’t know how to deal with freedom of speech. … It’s a culture of not disseminating information.”<sup>39</sup> Bethel does not believe a freedom of information act would resolve the culture of secrecy and allow access to public information because the problem is in the structure of the civil service. These range from lack of responsibility and accountability, hierarchy of power, especially in decision-making, to an exodus of qualified technocrats who reached a glass ceiling:

The civil service is really not in place to facilitate the public in anything. That is why we need a complete redesign of our government structure. We should look at creating stand-alone agencies that get to hire and fire independently; they get to set their own qualifications independently. What we have now is an extremely lopsided administration, a lot of administrators that are not working in their area of expertise, if they have a specific area, and a shrinking number of technocrats. … You

can't discipline anybody unless you go through the public service commissioner. You can't retire anyone, hire or fire anyone, promote anybody unless it goes through the public service commissioner. The centralization of everything is a problem.<sup>40</sup>

This is the environment in which journalism is practiced throughout most of the region. Bethel's description points out how challenging it is to work professionally in these environments and more specifically how challenging it is for journalists to obtain access to public information. To fulfill journalism's obligations in democratic society, practitioners in the Caribbean will have to advocate for media literacy programs to educate society about the role of media and journalism in advancing the ideals of democracy. They will have to encourage drastic change and reform at all levels of society and become a voice of criticism. For, as Christian et al. posit, without this participation democracy will not be possible.<sup>41</sup>

These roles require journalists to practice communication according to a participatory paradigm. This multi-perspective approach to communication and development embraces the theories of hybridity, mixing and matching theoretical approaches and practices to provide a framework to guide the region's understanding of communication, media, and journalism and the role they play in advancing democratic society. It is not enough to create elaborate policies or academic programs concerning information and communication technology (ICT) without also understanding how they ought to be used to improve equality, justice, and liberty for all citizens.

According to Christians et al., the radical role of media and journalism "insists on the absolute equality and freedom of all members of a democratic society in a completely uncompromising way."<sup>42</sup> Too often, these scholars believe, "great imbalances of wealth, education, and access to information and communication are accepted as simply the rewards of personal initiative in societies based on competitive market principles."<sup>43</sup> To reverse these imbalances, they explain, "radical journalism makes every effort to ensure that no injustice is tolerated. The radical democratic commitment works for the continual elimination of concentrations of social power to enable every person to participate equally in all societal decisions. Professionally, journalists are called on to encourage not just superficial changes, such as voting procedures, but changes in the core of

the existing social institutions.”<sup>44</sup> This description of journalism’s radical role aligns with Nicolette Bethel’s call for a complete redesign of government institutions and agencies. It also aligns with the call for the universal recognition of human rights for all members of society. This is particularly relevant for a region that is still overwhelmingly homophobic and xenophobic and has a high prevalence of corruption, domestic violence, child abuse, incest, human trafficking, crime, drug and alcohol abuse. Moreover, ethnic tensions exist in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, the Bahamas, Barbados and many of the other island nations. In this milieu, it is crucial that journalism comes to the defense of the voiceless and disenfranchised.

## Caribbean Journalism and Democracy

Journalists’ understanding of their profession’s role in a democracy is crucial to the advancement and protection of democratic ideals. Media scholars and journalists throughout the Caribbean region believe journalists lack this fundamental understanding, which impacts the type of journalism that is practiced. According to Christians et al., journalism has three basic tasks in a democracy: “observing and informing, primarily as a service to the public; participating in public life as an independent actor by way of critical comment, advice, advocacy, and expression of opinion; and providing a channel, forum, or platform for extra media voices or sources to reach a self-chosen public.”<sup>45</sup> To accomplish these tasks Christians et al. believe certain requirements must be met:

The first relies on the public’s trust, which in turn depends on the public’s perceiving the media as both independent and competent. The second relies primarily on the existence of an efficient and extensive information collection and distribution system, plus an editorial intention to give access to a wide range of sources and views. The third ... arises from journalism’s involvement in democratic action and debate, and depends on an active use of press freedom in the context of a healthy public sphere.<sup>46</sup>

Caribbean journalists and the media organizations for which they work have a long way to go before achieving these goals, as many public critics

have pointed out. Most of this criticism has questioned Caribbean journalists' competence and independence. Further, there is very little diversity in their coverage and content. Most of the news coverage is focused on urban centers, elite views, political scandal, and crime. Caribbean media provides for limited democratic action and debate. Public criticism is particularly concerned with the sensational coverage of crime, which dominates the public sphere.

Political, economic, and social environments impinge on journalists' ability to advance democracy and their level of skills affects their competence. Compounding these restraints is the fact that information gathering and dissemination is challenging in these societies. Quincy Parker believes media democracy will not exist in these countries "until we have developed a sense of what it is to have a right to information."<sup>47</sup> Parker insists that freedom of information laws alone would not change these societies. He believes it is more important to change the culture of secrecy, especially among the civil service "because the ones who have the real information," according to Parker, "are the senior public servants who see it as their God-given duty to guard against the press getting this information."<sup>48</sup>

Other journalists agree that democracy will only flourish in these societies once they become more open and less secretive. For example, Eddie Carter believes democracy comes with debate and discussion: "I think those *ds* belong together. Because, when you get a consensus of ideas and plans and something that's truly 'we the people,' ... that's what we need—we need the 'we the people.' We need to sit here and come up with an environment in which I truly feel that my government is fulfilling the goals that I have for my country. Not goals that a select few sat down and did."<sup>49</sup> Despite his earlier criticism, Carter believes talk shows could help fulfill these goals, explaining:

I think that the talk show environment has given the average Bahamian an avenue in which to vent. Now, are we using it right? That's another question because I've also become a very strong supporter of "don't just tell me what's wrong, give me a suggestion on how to fix it." I think talk shows [can] do that [provide solutions] as well because then you get some different opinions that may be off the wall, may be wacky, with no chance

of working, but if you get five ideas then ... that may be the way to merge the best of all five and come up with that one great idea.<sup>50</sup>

One area of deficiency in media democracy is investigative journalism. Carter describes the region as a receivership society that sat and waited for the news to come to it. Lacking resources, insight, and drive, and relying mainly on official sources of information, investigative journalists in the Caribbean have been criticized for being too complacent. While accepting some of this criticism, Caribbean journalists pointed to underlying forces that constrained how they practiced their craft. Some journalists believe media agencies or media owners were also to blame for the lack of investigative journalism because they pushed an agenda that demanded that journalists feed a twenty-four-hour news cycle, which left very little time for investigative projects. Others blamed a lack of corporate, listener, and reader maturity. Carter explains:

If you are a journalist and you investigate a story truly and you find out all these true details ... you can still be snuffed. You can still be told "we're not going to do that." So are we discouraging investigative reporters with this attitude? I think so. Why should I go uncover ... that many layer[s] when I know my editor is not going to want no part of it. I know the owner of my newspaper is scared of me losing sponsors and losing advertisers.<sup>51</sup>

Carter believes journalists must remain vigilant and resist these forms of censorship so as to advance effective public deliberation. If they are to be effective watchdogs in democratic societies, journalists must provide good public information on a variety of issues, and they must make the news comprehensive and proportionate.

Both Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders, non-profit organizations that monitor global press freedom, recognize the region for its high levels of press freedom. However, lack of access to public information and a culture of secrecy constrain the development of a healthy public sphere. Further, structural institutions limit journalists' ability to perform the tasks advocated by Christians et al.

## Balancing Sensational Coverage

Holly Edgell, a Belizean journalist and communications professor, noted on her blog on 9 May 2012 that there was a segment of the population in Belize, and throughout the Caribbean, that “anticipated the gore and sensationalism of the latest news headlines with varying degrees of glee.” Another segment “follows news and information about law and order and want[s] to see journalists take the sensationalist, invasive approach down several notches.”<sup>52</sup> Edgell’s comments were made in response to an increase in sensational news coverage in Belize. She cited two cases from Belize that went beyond the bounds of responsible news coverage. The first involved the suicide of a seventeen-year-old girl, the second a missing teenager.

In April 2012, *Amandala* published an article about a teenager who committed suicide with the headline, “She took her life for love!” A photograph showed the seventeen-year-old with a rope around her neck. The newspaper also printed her suicide note. (The original version of the article is no longer available online.) On her blog, Edgell explained the newspaper’s defense of its coverage in the following terms: “This is what people want to see; the tragedy of teen suicide is fair game for public consumption.”<sup>53</sup> According to Edgell, those who criticized the newspaper’s coverage argued that “tragedy is one thing. But why magnify a family’s grief and expose this young woman’s most intimate feelings? Children need our collective protection.”<sup>54</sup>

The second case—that of the missing teenager—was covered by TV News 5. On her blog, Edgell noted that the reporter interviewed the child’s mother, “who was emotional but determined to remain in control.” After a series of questions, which ended with, “Do you think something bad happened to her?” the mother began to cry. According to Edgell, the station defended its coverage by pointing out that “she [the mother] came to the media for help. She must know they are going to ask her questions. Maybe her emotional plea will lead to finding the child.”<sup>55</sup> Edgell wanted to know why the reporter terrified the mother: “Why not simply stick to the facts? They shared the child’s photo and the information about when and where she was last seen. There was no need to push a petrified mother to the brink.”<sup>56</sup>

Both stories involve sensitive topics; both would be defined as “hard news.” However, for Edgell, along with other citizens throughout the region who have made similar critiques about sensational media coverage, what was disturbing was how these stories were covered. “A teen committing suicide could be an opportunity to educate the public on signs and symptoms of depression among young people,” Edgell points out. “On the other hand, news media in some countries don’t air or publish suicide stories, for reasons ranging from the copycat effect to privacy and sensitivity.”<sup>57</sup> The family members of the seventeen-year-old who committed suicide, and many readers, expressed their dismay and outrage by sending letters to the editor; they also voiced their dissent in other media. *Amandala* eventually published an apology. It read:

Our intent was not to cause further pain and embarrassment to the victim’s family, and for this we offer our sincere apologies. Late into the night, we forgot that we are held to a different standard, and treated the story simply as another story, when we should have approached the matter differently.<sup>58</sup>

Edgell admonished journalists to “temper their coverage: balanced storytelling that respects the privacy and allows members of the public to retain their dignity in times of crisis can still be compelling.”<sup>59</sup> She believes when it comes to children and youth, journalists should take special care and question what is the right thing to do. “Just because you *can* do something, *should* you? In other words, just because you have access to a photo of a hanging girl, is it appropriate to publish?”<sup>60</sup> Edgell extended this question to include all media: Just because the news media can cater to the segment of the population that feeds on sensationalism, should it? Edgell’s angst reveals concerns for media ethics, specifically training journalists in the region on issues of privacy and balancing the public’s right to know with the public’s need to know.

Achieving comprehensive and proportionate coverage is difficult in the new dispensation of media organizations and journalism. While most owners of news organizations have strongly embraced market-led reforms, journalists throughout the region have not. Journalists believe the negative influence of these reforms on the practice and profession of journalism in the region far outweigh the advantages, which has led to a devaluation of

journalism. Some media owners are also concerned about the effects of competition on the content of the media. Ken Gordon, media owner and former journalist, believes the quick changes in the small media markets of the Caribbean have led to lower standards in journalism, particularly in radio, where the increase in media organizations was greatest: “I think there’s an absolute crisis, particularly in radio more than anything else. I think it … is having a destructive effect, or impact, on this society. Standards in radio have fallen. I think the role of the media is to influence change and to improve change.”<sup>61</sup>

In a crowded market, the need to gain attention becomes a priority. Yet despite the economic logic of gaining attention, many critics feel the media does not have to appeal to the lowest common denominator to get audience attention. If the media is providing fair and balanced coverage of all communities, emphasizing significant hard news stories in combination with significant human interest and investigative stories—stories that reflect the concerns of citizens, balancing facts with fascination—then they could attract and sustain an audience that will continue to read, watch, listen, and engage.

Throughout the region, the “cartographic” nature of journalism has been distorted. Citizens are not getting the type of journalism that advances their participation in democratic societies. Public journalism, or in Roxanne Gibbs’s words, “people journalism,”<sup>62</sup> has been pushed aside in favor of journalism that sells. As a result, the media’s obligation to society has been reduced to the need to make a profit; in other words, commercial journalism.

When sensationalism becomes the preferred way to present information, then it distorts journalism’s mapmaking function. If news is only sensational, then the qualities of enlightenment and enrichment fall by the wayside as entertainment becomes the dominant value. In his book *Scooped! Media Miss Real Story on Crime While Chasing Sex, Sleaze, and Celebrities*, American media scholar David Krajicek discusses the effects of the media’s sensational coverage of crime. He concludes that “the media have done an increasingly poor job of developing a balance between what is interesting and what is important. This is the difference between a crime story and crime coverage, between a story about yet another anecdotal crime and one that identifies the anecdote as either representative of a trend or representative of absolutely nothing.”<sup>63</sup>

While it is alright for editors to provide news that creates a sensation, meaning, feeling, or reaction, a media diet comprised of only sensationalism makes citizens numb to the world around them—especially the important socioeconomic or sociopolitical realities of their community.<sup>64</sup> In the Caribbean, a region filled with complex, complicated issues that emerged from colonization, journalism should act as a bridge between the governed and the elected governors. Managing editors or media decision-makers have a responsibility to present a balanced diet of news and information to the public. This diet could be informative and entertaining, engaging and educational, interactive and comprehensive. For as Holly Edgell has advised, “it’s time to temper guts and gore with balance and context.”<sup>65</sup>

Media decision-makers have tremendous power: they decide what media consumers will ultimately consume. In small countries like those of the English-speaking Caribbean, this type of power is very important for effective democratic governance. When it is distorted in any way, it has the ability to weaken democracy, or even destroy it. When sensational coverage becomes the norm, truth, accuracy, relevancy, comprehensiveness, and proportionality are subsumed to market ideals; the public forum is inundated with an abundance of coverage that is meant to titillate rather than educate; the public sphere becomes a marketplace where deliberation takes a backseat to the market-driven logic of selling sensationalism.

Peter Christopher expressed his views on the effects of media owners pushing a market-driven logic on the newsgathering and dissemination process in Trinidad and Tobago using the following examples:

There are journalists who want to take the newspapers or want to take the TV stations in different directions but the owners and even some of their fellow journalists are so stuck in the mindset that they have to ... [deliver] the paper tomorrow just to get the advertisers' money, that it doesn't change. We've been having meetings in the *Express*, we've been saying that we're going to be more community oriented, we had the investigative desk launch recently, and what has happened? We're still writing the same stories "who got shot in Laventille," "which politician accused this politician of doing what," and "who made this statement" coming out in the newspaper every day simply because oh that's

what they've been doing for the past five, ten years. We've been number one doing this for the past five-to-ten years. Why are we changing? And a lot of the journalists who want to make change are seeing this mundane thing happening and becoming disheartened and leaving the profession.<sup>66</sup>

Christopher contends this trend was bad for both journalism and democracy. He believes the emphasis on making money produces an internal bias in news organizations where advertisers were given preferential treatment because they were bringing in money. According to Christopher, people in advertising were given better resources while those in the newsroom were given few resources to do their jobs. Examples range from a lack of tape recorders, to the use of old computers, to no transportation for journalists to travel.

More problematic for the region is the trend of local newspapers and their online versions becoming advertising billboards. In 2013, a one-week analysis of the front pages of the two largest newspapers in the Bahamas, the *Nassau Tribune* and the *Nassau Guardian*, showed the *Tribune*'s front page had 57 percent news stories and 43 percent advertisements. This was similar to the *Guardian*, which had 55 percent news stories and 45 percent advertisements. In addition to the high percentage of advertisements on the papers' front pages, both had placed advertisements in their top banner and just below their mastheads, in the first column near the left margin, and in two-inch banners across the bottom of the front page; indeed, the front page looked more like an advertising supplement than the cover of a national newspaper. Many scholars believe these changes indicate that advertising has become more important than news. This global trend has also been noted in India, where newspapers have also experienced success. In a 2012 article for the *New Yorker*, Ken Auletta noted that many Indian newspapers' circulation and advertising figures were rising, in part because they had dismantled the wall between the editorial and sales departments. Auletta cited the success of the *Times of India* as "a product of their content and unorthodox philosophy." Vineet Jain, the paper's managing director, told Auletta, "we are not in the newspaper business, we are in the advertising business ... if ninety per cent of your revenues come from advertising, you're in the advertising business."<sup>67</sup>

American scholars Robert McChesney and Ben Scott argue strongly against economic pressure in the news industry because they believe increased pressure from advertisers influences the content of the news and colors the credibility of newspapers.<sup>68</sup> According to American researchers, readers trust the media more when there is a clear division between the sales department and the editorial department. When readers trust the information in their newspapers they will read it more and thus advertisers will continue to have an audience for their products. But when readers lose trust in the credibility of the news, when they cannot distinguish between journalistic integrity and commercial pressure, they often discontinue their reliance on newspapers as credible sources of good public information.

Erica Wells, editor of the *Nassau Guardian*, one of the two largest dailies in the Bahamas, believes the whole issue of sensationalism has been blown out of proportion. Wells says there is some merit to sensational coverage, because ultimately the goal is to sell newspapers. But she points out that this must be balanced with responsibility. She also believes this approach is especially important because of the competitive media environment, especially when it comes to the internet. However, Wells admits, this approach has led to a shift in the presentation of news: “The new media environment means more selling to consumers, putting your product out there and getting people’s attention. In doing that, I have seen [how] the presentation [of the news] has shifted.”<sup>69</sup>

In the English-speaking Caribbean, the normative purpose of news is being subsumed by economic imperatives. However, there is no discourse in the region on the effects of commercialism on media’s responsibilities in these democratic societies. In both the United States and the United Kingdom, the influence of advertisers, business managers, and corporate owners of media on journalism has been criticized and debated by scholars and practitioners since the rise of media conglomerates through mergers and acquisitions of multinational companies in the 1980s. News media became big business and the commercial ethos has since eclipsed the public service mission. This trend is now apparent in the Caribbean and has become more pronounced since the Gleaner Company and Radio Jamaica Rediffusion merged at the end of 2015. Comprehensiveness and proportionality have been undermined in the rush to disseminate information

quickly into a crowded marketplace. News has become a commodity that is being manipulated for financial gain.

## Making the News Comprehensive and Proportionate

Comprehensiveness and proportionality are key principles for discerning significant and important information in Caribbean societies. Not everything is news, and the everyday should not be made into a significant event. In her work *A Small Place*, Kincaid may have been describing the oral nature of these societies; the propensity in oral storytelling is to make the story dramatic to keep the audience's attention. The evolution of this cultural phenomenon has affected newsgathering in the Caribbean. As such, Caribbean journalists should be influenced by their oral societies; their methods of storytelling should reflect this oral tradition. Caribbean journalists' definition of news, of what is newsworthy, should also align with the global understanding that news is timely, interesting, prominent, proximate, controversial, and unusual—but not at the cost of abandoning their own cultural values.

Caribbean journalism should be understood as a blend of American, British, and local values—a hybrid practice. Ewart Skinner identifies this hybrid nature in Trinidad and Tobago's media structure as “a blend of folk and technical media.”<sup>70</sup> He sees the endogenous folk system as more relevant to the sociopolitical context of that country because it is historically and culturally driven. He believes this system should be used to transform the external or exogenous technical structure. Skinner's argument is relevant for the contemporary practice of journalism in the Caribbean. Journalists in the region should operate from the cultural nexus of British, American, and indigenous values so that media transformation can “be seen as a triumph of local culture.”<sup>71</sup>

Developed countries in North America and Western Europe have set the standards for the practice and the profession of journalism in the developing countries of the English-speaking Caribbean. While journalism in that region is centered on the British model, there is an ongoing shift toward American-style journalism, particularly in those countries closest to the United States. In this sense British and American standards compete,

and the clash is producing a number of tensions. The first is among older journalists, most of whom were trained either on the job in their countries or in the United Kingdom and Canada, and younger journalists who were trained in the United States and have been influenced by American-style journalism. These tensions have been exacerbated by the use of new digital technology. Younger journalists, those between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, are more knowledgeable when it comes to new technology, while older journalists, thirty-five and older, are more aware of the principles and foundations of journalism and its role in democratic societies.

Keeping the news comprehensive and proportionate requires journalists throughout the region to resolve this tension. Their focus should be on helping citizens to navigate their social worlds. This cartographic role helps journalists to understand what they should cover. Kovach and Rosenstiel believe that thinking of journalism as mapmaking “helps us to see that proportionality and comprehensiveness are keys to accuracy.”<sup>72</sup> Limited resources forces media professionals to make decisions about what to cover and how to cover it. This coverage should include a fair and balanced mix of the significant and interesting, and it should reflect the diversity of Caribbean communities.

Examining journalism’s cartographic function in the Caribbean context reveals a lot about the shortcomings of news coverage in these multicultural societies. One of the most significant is the lack of diversity. The newspaper organizations in the six countries covered in this study continue to target the dominant demographic sought by advertisers: middle class, educated, and majority black elites in Grenada, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Barbados, black and mixed, or mulatto, in Belize, and black and Indian in Trinidad and Tobago. Likewise, television and radio are segmented into niche markets that reach a working-class audience. Media in the Caribbean is governed by an economic logic; it targets the most desirable audience, the most profitable demographic. This means many communities, and various ethnic groups, are underserved—or not covered at all—by news organizations in the region. This makes it very challenging to provide comprehensive and proportionate coverage. The mapmaking role is thus reduced to what sells.

The second tension is the competition between local and American coverage of the region. The challenge of competing with American news media has been exacerbated by online media. The influence of the United

States, the region's principal trading partner, became more dominant after the Second World War, and especially since the 1980s. This shift continues to create tension in the political, economic, and social spheres. The region's newest economic partner is China. This relationship will no doubt create tensions as well.

The public's rising appetite for American-style journalism has added to the tension. In particular, there has been increased public criticism of Caribbean journalists' inability to conduct investigative journalism along the lines laid out by their counterparts in the United States. Of course, Caribbean journalists, governed by media laws that were created under British colonization, simply cannot practice this style of journalism. These laws should be revised to allow for the merger of British and America practices; only then will Caribbean journalists find the best way to fulfill their obligations to their fellow citizens, who live in hybrid, or creolized, societies. The media systems should reflect the hybrid nature of the lived realities of the people, functioning as the cultural nexus to produce glocal practices (a hybrid combination of local and global).

If these societies are to find effective solutions to their myriad problems they will have to use hybrid frameworks to guide future development. If they are to forge effective democracies, Caribbean societies cannot continue to use archaic laws inherited from colonizers, or apply ideas coming from the United States and the rest of the world without adjusting them to fit their own environments. Bethel's ideas for reinvigorating journalism's sense of public service should be extended to all institutions and systems in the region. The dominant influence of the United States demands an appropriate response. No longer should Caribbean societies allow themselves to feel like victims of cultural domination—British or American. Rather, they should employ a proactive approach. Caribbean citizens would not be encumbered by smallness if they became active participants in the transformation of their societies. By combining the American and British styles with other ideologies and beliefs that have come to them through the movement of people (African, Asian, Indian, Canadian, Latin American), they could create structures, systems, and ideologies that match their realities. Journalism should play a central role in producing these changes.

The clash of British and American ideologies has created a complex set of issues for Caribbean journalists. First, there is the need to build and

protect a Caribbean public sphere, and national public spheres within each country, to promote public discourse on national and regional issues. Close proximity to the United States and the diffusion of new technologies like the internet and wireless telecommunication challenge Caribbean journalists' ability to shape their public spheres. Too often public discourse in the region is controlled by the dissemination of information from external sources—CNN, BBC, Reuters, and other sources like Wikileaks. Second, American media inundates the region with values-laden American-style coverage that has increased the public's taste for American media products and practices.<sup>73</sup> As Bahamian journalist Rupert Missick explains, greater access to foreign media puts additional pressure on Caribbean journalists:

For instance, if they watch cable news [CNN], our laws are such that you cannot say the same things. If a person has been arrested for murder for example, you cannot say anything other than, “the person is assisting police with their investigation,” until the person is charged. When they watch US media ... they will see the sort of trial start [in the media] before the actual trial begins. They would ask us, Why can't we say the same thing? as it is obvious according to them. When we explain it [our law] to them, it's still not acceptable enough.<sup>74</sup>

This has altered the way Caribbean people perceive themselves and their region. Although retaining a British past is important for these former colonies, they have also embraced an American consumer culture, which is depleting the moral responsibility of citizens as more and more people privilege material gain over community, equality, liberty, and justice. Hopeton Dunn believes Caribbean cultural production has been stunted by the American influence: “The tendency has been to look towards the United States for trade, investment, communication technology, and content with consequential impact on regional media, lifestyles, and business.”<sup>75</sup>

There are mixed feelings among Caribbean journalists about the American influence. Some journalists viewed it negatively because of its impact on indigenous Caribbean thought, belief, and values. Others viewed it as an opportunity to push Caribbean politicians to pass and implement more contemporary media laws, which would allow journalists to have more

access to public information and to conduct more liberal coverage of public officials.

In the Bahamas, the country that is closest to the United States, the American influence is pervasive. But while Bahamian journalists question this influence, very little has been done to combat it. Many are particularly upset at the fact that their audience continuously compares local news coverage to the American example. Bahamian journalists believe the comparison is unfair. As Bahamian journalist Tia Rutherford asked, “Should we compare ourselves to the US? Their system is different, their standards are different. They are more open, allowed to do more things.”<sup>76</sup> In the Caribbean, the constraints of the media market—legal, social, economic, and political—play a significant role in what journalists cover and how they cover it, even if Caribbean audiences either ignore or are unaware of these controlling factors.

Jessica Robertson, news director of ZNS, the state-controlled public service television and radio network in the Bahamas, believes the audience has to understand the difference:

I think also what the public has to understand is that things work differently. Take the US, because I think that is the market that most of our audience is familiar with. I don’t think the average person realized that there is this thing called the Associated Press … and they do all the grunt work. They go to these press conferences. They go to these assignments, they get the video and the info and then they put it up on their wires. Then all of these news organizations pull it down from there, that’s why when you tune in to all of the networks, you see pretty much the same kind of thing. So that frees them up then to do their special investigative reporting. They are not bogged down by having to go to all of these day-to-day things that we are [required to do] because we don’t have that kind of system. We never will, we don’t have a market for it. So the requirements are very different from that of our competitors … in the US and in other big markets. It just works very differently.<sup>77</sup>

The audience’s expectations and the region’s media systems make it very difficult for Caribbean journalists to provide comprehensiveness and

proportionality. But the public's expectations, particularly with regard to investigative journalism, should encourage Caribbean journalists to provide more holistic and balanced coverage of their diverse societies. They could advocate for public understanding of the differences between the media systems of the Caribbean and the United States. The time has come for Caribbean journalists to create a media system that meets the current needs of their societies. Media literacy programs could help them to educate the public; these programs should be designed to empower the audience to comprehend the effects of mediated communication on the individual and society, the process of production in the creation of content and meaning, the legal environment in which media functions, the ethical and moral obligations of media practitioners, and the effective use of mediated communication. But more importantly, emphasis should be placed on creating hybrid media systems. This approach requires a reconfiguration of media laws and regulations, the creation of media training and educational programs, and media literacy programs that help citizens to understand the role of media in the advancement of their societies and the influence of media in their lives. Clinging to British history, values, and beliefs no longer matches the reality on the ground. Yet the goal is not to replace British values and beliefs with American ones, but rather to integrate the two, blending them with indigenous values and beliefs to create systems that better serve the citizens of the English-speaking Caribbean.

Nicki Kelly, a veteran journalist who has worked in the region since the 1960s, explains the need for journalists to advocate and push for change so that citizens could demand more accountability from those that govern them:

[The liberalization of the market] has helped them [Caribbean citizens] in ... being more active participants in democracy. The people are changing. We are becoming a little more demanding of what we want from our politicians. I think ... this is where ... journalists are failing. If you keep informing people, they will then demand certain things of their government and their leaders, and ... the more information that you provide people with, the more demanding they are of accountability. The journalists should initiate this in the public ... they should demand accountability.<sup>78</sup>

Another challenge that has evolved out of colonial dominance and dependency, one that is also very pervasive throughout the region, is the “foreign is better” attitude, which can be seen in the compensation packages for foreign-born journalists. Kelly believes this undermines the worth of local practitioners: “Even the publishers don’t appreciate their staff. ... They also have this terrible thing: it’s only good if it’s foreign. Let them bring in a foreign journalist; they will pay them the sun, moon, and stars. But, if they have a good local person, they will not pay them what they are worth.”<sup>79</sup>

The belief that foreign journalists are superior to locals presents multiple problems. First, it highlights the continual bias in hiring practices, as local journalists do not receive the same respect and salary as their foreign counterparts, a practice carried over from the colonial period. Second, because editors and publishers do not hold local journalists in high esteem, this undermines their value in the eyes of the general public. If the people responsible for publishing the news do not respect local journalists, then why should the people consuming it?

The speed at which technology now allows information to flow into the region exacerbates the “foreign is better” attitude. Information is often already accessible in the United States, the United Kingdom, or other external media markets, which means Caribbean publics with access to technology use it to assess local journalists’ efforts.

A third issue is the conflict between the legal systems that govern journalism and the media environment. This is closely related to the issue of external influence, especially the influence of the US, where litigation is a booming industry. The growth of a similarly litigious culture in the Caribbean region has become a major area of concern. Over the last ten years, there has been a significant increase in the number of lawsuits filed against Caribbean journalists, radio and television talk show hosts, and media owners. Steve McKinney describes these lawsuits as a form of control. “We are in close proximity [to the US] and we have the attitude of America,” explains McKinney. “So you say you want to sue somebody; even if someone just slights you, you figure that you’ll do it.”<sup>80</sup> This increase in the number of lawsuits has resulted in increased forms of self-censorship.

Kovach and Rosenstiel acknowledge the limitations of the mapmaking metaphor in the American context: “Cartography is scientific, journalism is not.”<sup>81</sup> They also admit that proportionality and comprehensiveness in

newsgathering are both “subjective and elusive.” However, Kovach and Rosenstiel believe in the importance of nonetheless striving for proportionality and comprehensiveness and see them as key elements to journalism’s popularity and health. Caribbean journalists face additional challenges because of the culture of secrecy and silence. However, if Caribbean journalism is to remain valuable and vibrant, journalists throughout the region will have to provide comprehensive and proportionate accounts. Journalism must be valued by Caribbean societies, Caribbean citizens must evaluate the merits of this service within a Caribbean cultural context, and Caribbean citizens must believe that the type of journalism practiced is one that benefits their societies. The key to credibility is the perception that a Caribbean style of journalism is the appropriate one for these cultures. Proportionality and comprehensiveness can gain the public’s trust by demonstrating to Caribbean peoples the value of an indigenous style of journalism.