“From the Barbershop to the Front Page: Canada’s Black Beauty Innovators and the Community Newspapers that Made Them”

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By the 1860s, a barbershop could be found in almost every black community from Ontario to Montreal to the Maritimes. By the 1920s and 1930s, Canadian black beauty culturists (women who developed “systems” and “methods,” signature skin- and hair-care programs, and defined distribution networks) and barbers began to advertise their salons, products and services in community newspapers, beginning with the Dawn of Tomorrow (1923-1972), founded in London, Ontario by James F. Jenkins, an African American who moved to the city from Georgia in 1904 when he was 20 years-old; The Clarion (1946-1956), published out of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia by Dr. Carrie Best; the West Indian News Observer, which launched in 1967 but ceased publication in 1969, and was eventually reborn as Contrast (1970-1991), and finally, Share magazine, a weekly community newspaper launched in April 1978 that caters to the Greater Toronto Area’s (GTA) Caribbean community. This paper examines the roles these newspapers played in the advertisement, sale, and cultivation of a domestic beauty culture in Canada. The history of black Canadian news media has been largely overlooked in academic writings on Canada’s print media. Further, as black beauty product advertising and services have been largely excluded from the dominant media, these newspapers were (and continue to be) instrumental in the development of a domestic black beauty culture industry. The paper explains how innovations in hair care practices over the course of the twentieth century, i.e. hair straightening combs, chemical relaxers, Afros, and hair weaves, formed part of the editorial and advertising content of these newspapers, and how the innovative strategies used by these newspapers was (and continues to be) in a dialogue with other black-focused media across the Afro-Caribbean diaspora. This paper will address an aspect of the black Canadian narrative that has never been told.