



## John Henry Murphy III

March 2, 1916 - October 16, 2010

Born John Henry Murphy, III, on March 2, 1916, in Baltimore, MD; son of Daniel H. and Sarah M. (Clements) Murphy; married Alice Quivers, 1940 (died 1979); married Camay Calloway, 1980; children: (first marriage) Sharon, Daniel

Education: Temple University, BS business administration, 1937; American Press Institute, Columbia University, 1952, 1971.

Religion: Episcopalian.

Memberships: Board member: National Newspaper Publishers Association, National Aquarium at Baltimore, Amalgamated Publishers, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore School for the Arts, Council on Equal Business Opportunities, Provident Hospital, St. Augustine's College; advisory board, Morgan State University; Baltimore City Literacy Commission; Governor's Commission on Crime Prevention; Omega Psi Phi; Sigma Pi Phi; standing committee of Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, vestry of St. James Episcopal Church.

### Career

Afro-American Newspaper Company, 1937-86: Washington Afro-American, manager, 1937-48; director, 1946-67, assistant business manager, 1948-61, president, 1961-74, board chairman and publisher, 1974-86; Baltimore Times, photographer, 1987.

## Life's Work

As business manager, president, and eventually chairman and publisher of one of the largest and most influential black newspaper chains in the United States, John H. Murphy III was a major figure in black journalism and newspaper publishing for much of the twentieth century. Under Murphy's leadership the Afro-American Newspaper Company--a family-owned business based in Baltimore and publishing editions in cities throughout the east--remained profitable in even the hardest of times. During the 1970s and 1980s, Murphy's advertising innovations enabled the company to stay in business at a time when other black-owned newspapers were failing.

## Started in Family Business Early

John Henry Murphy III was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 2, 1916. His father, Daniel H. Murphy, was a typesetter who died in 1926. John moved with his mother, Sarah H. (Clements) Murphy, to Philadelphia where she remarried. By the time he was 12, John Murphy was delivering the Philadelphia edition of the Afro-American, the newspaper founded by his great-uncle, John H. Murphy, Sr.

John H. Murphy, Sr., who had been born into slavery in 1840, founded the Afro-American in Baltimore in 1892, when he merged his church publication, the Sunday School Helper, with newspapers published by two other Baltimore churches. Over the following two decades Murphy built up the circulation of the Afro-American, reaching some 10,000 readers. He used his politically-independent newspaper to fight for social change and as a forum for challenging racial segregation in the state of Maryland. Murphy's five sons were each trained in a different aspect of the business and by the time his son, Carl, took over as editor and publisher in 1922, circulation has reached 14,000. From a one-page church weekly, the Afro-American had grown into

the most-widely circulated black newspaper on the Atlantic coast.

John H. Murphy III attended Temple University in Philadelphia, earning a degree in business administration in 1937. He immediately joined the family business full-time, as a manager for the weekly Washington Afro-American. By this time, in addition to a semiweekly newspaper in Baltimore, the Afro-American published weekly newspapers in Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, and special editions that were distributed in New England, New York, and Virginia. With a circulation of 80,000, the Afro-American was the largest black newspaper operation in the eastern United States.

### Rose Through the Ranks

As the circulation of the Afro-American grew, so did its influence. It initiated "The Clean Block" campaign which became an annual event in support of crime reduction and the rejuvenation of inner-city black neighborhoods. The newspaper fought against segregated passenger cars on the Southern Railroad and campaigned for equal pay for black school teachers in Maryland. During World War II the Afro-American managed to send reporters around the world, to provide black Americans with coverage from their own perspective. Carl Murphy's daughter, Elizabeth Murphy Phillips Moss, became the nation's first black female correspondent.

On December 28, 1940, Murphy married Alice Quivers. They eventually had two children, Sharon and Daniel. In 1945 the Murphy family bought the Washington Tribune and Murphy took over management of the joint operation, with the Washington Afro-American expanding to a twice-weekly. In 1946 Murphy became a member of the company's board of directors. In 1948 he became assistant business manager for the entire company. Throughout his career Murphy concentrated on the business side of publishing, always

promoting conservative fiscal management.

During the 1940s and 1950s, black newspapers across the country saw their circulation and influence increase dramatically. The Afro-American maintained a close relationship with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It supported the NAACP suit against the University of Maryland Law School for its discriminatory admission policies. The Afro-American was a vocal supporter of singer and actor Paul Robeson and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois when they came under attack by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the radical anti-communists of the 1950s. The newspaper campaigned for the integration of professional sports, opening doors for black athletes. Along with the NAACP the Afro-American was instrumental in promoting the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation ruling, *Brown v. the Board of Education*, that outlawed segregation in public schools. Ironically school desegregation disrupted the newspaper's distribution system in southern communities. During the 1940s the Afro-American newspapers were delivered to schools in larger black communities by train. Newsboys collected the papers at school to sell in their neighborhoods and their teachers supervised the collections. As all-black schools began to disappear with desegregation, Murphy established a new system of agent-run substations in various towns throughout the South, to distribute the papers to the newsboys.

### Afro-American's Influence Grew and Waned

In 1961 Murphy was named as company president of the Afro-American, passing over more senior colleagues. During the early 1960s the Afro-American and other black newspapers grew in circulation and influence. The company had 200 employees and a total circulation of 160,000, including semiweeklies in Washington and Baltimore, weeklies in Philadelphia, Richmond, Virginia, and Newark, New Jersey, and a national edition that was distributed among black communities in the North and South Carolinas,

Georgia, and Florida. The Afro-American sent reporters all over the South to document the civil rights movement. In a 1992 interview Murphy told the Dictionary of Literary Biography: "We were the most liberal black newspaper when it came to sending reporters and photographers where the action was. That was our strength. Black people wouldn't believe what was going on unless they read it in one of their own papers."

During the 1960s Murphy served as board president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, an organization of black publishers founded in 1943. In that position he focused on increasing the advertising and circulation of the black press. In 1969 the American Society of Journalism School Administrators chose the Afro-American as publication of the year, the first time a black publication had been so honored. The citation read: "in recognition of the distinguished record of a newspaper which has served a predominantly black community and which has actively engaged in community service."

Despite the company's growth in the early 1960s, Murphy was faced with difficult decisions. In the late 1940s the Afro-American had become one of the very few black newspapers with its own press and an all-black printing shop. But by the late 1960s technological advances forced the paper to abandon its letterpress printing operation in order to keep up with the competition. Murphy attempted to finance a Goss press to print the Afro-American and other Baltimore-area newspapers. However, after securing three loans and buying a building to house the offset press, he was still \$200,000 short of the financing needed. He made the difficult but fiscally-responsible choice of abandoning the family printing tradition and hiring a company in West Virginia to print its papers. Murphy was forced to lay off 40 employees.

By the late 1960s the black newspaper business was changing in other ways. The rioting that occurred after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in

1968 destroyed many of the black-owned businesses that distributed and advertised in the Afro-American. As the civil rights movement ceased to be front-page news and as larger white-owned newspapers began to cover news from black communities, the readership and influence of black newspapers diminished. However, Murphy continued to believe that mainstream white newspapers had little interest in providing positive news coverage of black communities.

### Saved Afro-American with Dawn

In the early 1970s, in an attempt to keep the company solvent, Murphy undertook a major new venture. He introduced a weekly newspaper supplement, similar to the Parade magazine that was distributed with many white-owned Sunday newspapers. After months of meetings around the country, Murphy convinced the publishers of the nation's 30 largest black newspapers to enter into this joint venture. It was the first cooperative undertaking in the 150 years of black American journalism. Dawn magazine was such a success that it soon had a circulation of 900,000--by far the largest circulation in the history of the black press. For the first time national newspaper advertisers could reach blacks across the country.

Soon Dawn had expanded from 16 to 48 pages. Dawn enabled the Afro-American to survive the 1970s, a period when many black newspapers went out of business, unable to compete with the major white-owned papers. Murphy continued his efforts to promote the black press. As a member of the board of directors of Amalgamated Publishers, Inc., he helped obtain national advertising for approximately 80 black newspapers.

In 1974 Murphy was appointed chairman of the board of the Afro-American Newspaper Company and later became its publisher as well. Financially it

was a difficult time for the company. Between 1965 and 1985 combined circulation dropped from 160,000 to 50,000. However, Murphy's fiscally-conservative management consistently generated annual profits. Murphy's wife died in 1979 and the following year, on February 16, 1980, he married Camay Calloway, the daughter of musician Cab Calloway.

In the early 1980s, although the Afro-American Newspaper Company had annual revenues of \$6 million and profits of \$200,000--in large part due to the success of Dawn--the company now faced a new threat. Dawn had relied almost entirely on liquor and cigarette advertising. As this advertising disappeared the Afro-American suffered annual losses in advertising revenues as high as \$30,000. Murphy was forced to scale back operations. First he suspended the national edition of the Afro-American and then the Philadelphia and Newark editions. In the end the Afro-American was left with weeklies in Baltimore, Washington, and Richmond, with a combined circulation of 50,000.

Despite strong opposition from the editorial staff, Murphy decided to insert a free-distribution shopper/tabloid, called Every Wednesday, into the newspapers. Originally focusing on food and home improvements, Every Wednesday later expanded its entertainment coverage. With the tabloid circulation at 30,000, the Afro-American was able to hold on to its national advertisers. As Murphy told the Dictionary of Literary Biography, "You do what you have to do to stay in business. That's what we always have been and always will be--a business. We've stayed in operation a hundred years. We must be doing something right."

#### Remained Committed to Civic Affairs

Although he remained the company's largest individual stockholder, Murphy retired from the board of directors in 1986. Soon afterwards he ended his

direct involvement in the company's operation. Murphy then worked for a time as a photographer for a free-distribution weekly, the Baltimore Times.

Throughout his distinguished career, Murphy was involved in numerous civic and religious organizations. He served on the boards of directors of the Council on Equal Business Opportunities, Provident Hospital (now Liberty Medical Hospital), the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Baltimore School for the Arts, and various other organizations. He served as vice-president of the board of the National Aquarium at Baltimore. He was a member of the Mayor's Commission to Study Municipal Financing, the Baltimore City Literacy Commission, the Maryland Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and served on the Governor's Commission on Crime Prevention. Murphy was also closely associated with Morgan State University, a historically-black university in Baltimore, where he was a member of the advisory board and the Morgan State University Cluster Program. He was a member of the vestry of St. James Episcopal Church and the Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland.

Murphy has been the recipient of numerous awards, including a City of Baltimore Citizen Award in 1977, a U.S. Department of Commerce Award in 1980, and an Appreciation Award from the Race Relations Institute of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1981. He also received a Distinguished Citizens Public Service Award from Coppin State College in Baltimore in 1983 and an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Towson State University in Maryland in 1984.

Afro-American Newspapers remains the major news provider for the black communities of the Washington/Baltimore metropolitan region, with more than 120,000 readers. It is the oldest family-owned black newspaper in the country. Fourth-generation members of the Murphy family continue to manage the company.

## Awards

City of Baltimore Citizen Award, 1977; Publisher of the Year, University of DC, 1979; certificate, Maryland Commission on Sickle Cell Anemia, 1980; Father of the Year, Redeemer's Palace, Baltimore, 1980; U.S. Department of Commerce Award, 1980; Appreciation Award, Race Relations Institute, Fisk University, 1981; Distinguished Citizens Public Service Award, Coppin State College, 1983; honorary doctor of humane letters, Towson State University, 1984.

# Cemetery Details

## Arbutus

1101 Sulphur Spring Rd.  
Baltimore, MD 21227

# Previous Events

## Public Viewing

OCT 19. 8:30 AM - 8:00 PM (ET)

March Funeral Homes - West Baltimore  
4300 Wabash Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21215  
(410) 542-2400  
info@marchfh.com

## Family Hour

OCT 19. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

March Funeral Homes - West Baltimore  
4300 Wabash Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21215  
(410) 542-2400  
info@marchfh.com

# Tribute Wall



“ *John Henry Murphy III*

---

October 13, 2022 at 08:33 AM



“ *Though I never met Mr. Murphy, please accept my sympathy for your loss. Despite this difficult time, you can be comforted by the Christian hope of the resurrection. Jesus promises at John 5: 28, 29: "Do not marvel at this, but the hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear my voice and come out." Yes, we have the solid hope of embracing all family and friends once again that have fallen asleep in death.*

---

**A Robison** - October 20, 2010 at 04:39 AM



“ *We the March Family and Staff wish to extend our deepest and heartfelt sympathy in the passing of your loved one. Our prayers go out to you and your family in your time of loss. We know and understand that you have received many expressions of love and we will continue to lift you up in prayer. May the memories you cherish of brighter and happier days help to ease your sorrow and comfort you always.*

---

**March Funeral Homes** - October 18, 2010 at 10:00 AM