Depression in “The Promised Land”: The Chicago Defender Discourages Migration, 1929-1940

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Scholars have credited the Chicago Defender as being a major proponent of the northward movement of African-Americans during the First World War. However, there is very little scholarship on the Defender’s commentary on the conditions of African-Americans over time in the so-called “promised land” of the North. This article shows that when the economic opportunities declined during the Great Depression, the Defender started discouraging this northward movement. This article further shows how a major voice for African-American civil rights discovered the many facets of oppression and realized that it must be fought on every front and in every region of the country.

During slavery and the decades that followed, the North was perceived as a place where African-Americans could be free, be treated with dignity, and could live the “American Dream.” Metaphorically called “The Promised Land,” the North was the destination for escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad. After Emancipation and the end of Reconstruction, African-Americans, hoping to escape brutal discrimination in the South, turned Northward and saw opportunities for a new life in the booming Northern economy of the Industrial Age. Thus began a population movement known as “The Great Migration,” which reached a peak during the years of the First World War (1914-1920).

This “Great Migration” occurred at a time when African-Americans began to develop an identity apart from slavery. By 1914, African-Americans were more educated, owned more businesses, and founded more social
and fraternal organizations than was the case at the close of Reconstruction. In their pursuit of the benefits of a free society, African-Americans supported and strengthened an important social institution: the African-American press. From its origin in 1827, the African-American press protested against slavery and served as a vehicle for recognizing African-American achievement and celebrating African-American culture. By 1914, the African-American press also was becoming a lucrative enterprise that helped stimulate African-American business and fulfill the information needs of its community. More importantly, the press continued to serve as an organ of protest for a population of free people fighting the erosion of their rights, exemplified in court decisions such as *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, in denials of voting rights, particularly in the Southern states, and as targets of mob violence.

The period from 1877 to 1901 is typically seen by scholars as a nadir of African-Americans’ political rights and social status in post-Civil War America. However, this tenuous status of African-Americans in society could be extended through the first third of the twentieth century. During the first three decades of the new century white Americans were fearful and suspicious of immigrants and African-Americans, whom they perceived as outside of mainstream American culture. A rising tide of discrimination led to the passage of anti-immigration laws and the resurgence of terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, which broadened its message of racism, prejudice, and bigotry to include Catholics and Jews.

It was in this crucible of modern America that Robert Abbott established the *Chicago Defender* in 1905. The *Defender* was one of several distinctive, longstanding African-American newspapers established between the end of Reconstruction and World War I. These newspapers represented a new phase in the evolution of African-American journalism. Unlike earlier post-Emancipation papers that served political parties and other special interests, the class of papers to which the *Defender* belonged catered to the masses of African-Americans who hungered for an outlet to express their many concerns.

The *Chicago Defender*’s role in promoting the “Great Migration” in the years between the start of World War I to the early 1920s is well-documented. However, it has been suggested that in later years, during the Depression, the *Defender* not only stopped promoting the migration, but actually discouraged it. This study seeks to address what the authors believe is a gap in the historiography of the African-American press and the movement of African-Americans to the North. More specifically, what was the position of the *Chicago Defender* between 1929-1940 when the “Great Migration” ran head-on into the “Great Depression”? Did the newspaper continue to promote population relocation after 1929, even in the face of a loss of jobs, a decline in wages, and burgeoning Northern racism, fed in part by
the bitter competition between white organized labor and non-union black workers? To what extent did the Defender's internal operations affect the way it presented the migration? What follows is an attempt to answer those questions.

Theories of Migration

Although African-Americans began leaving the South after the end of slavery, their movement northward was relatively inconspicuous until World War I when, in a three-year period, about a half-million African-Americans moved from southern to northern states. Scholars conclude that the decision to migrate North grew out of the following conditions: First, crop failures in the South caused by floods and insect infestation forced workers from a rural to an urban-based economy. Second, oppression, in the form of Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, and mob violence, forced African-Americans to seek a place where they could safely exercise their rights as citizens. Third, the World War sharply reduced the flow of European immigrants to the United States thereby creating a vacuum in the supply of cheap labor for northern industries that African-Americans sought to fill. Moreover, increased production because of the war demanded an increased labor force willing to work for the wages at the level previously paid to new immigrants.

Scholars have used both the economic-based "Push-Pull Theory" and the societal-based "Socio-Emotional/Sentimental Theory" to explain the migration. According to the Push-Pull Theory, certain conditions "pushed" migrants to leave the South, while other conditions "pulled" them to recognize the benefits of a new home in the North. Peonage, poor agricultural yields, and oppressive labor conditions were among the conditions "pushing" African-Americans from the South. More employment opportunities, better wages, and the acquisition of material goods were the incentives or "pull" factors drawing the migrants northward. The Push-Pull approach is based on Ravenstein's nineteenth century "Laws of Migration," which served to explain migratory patterns in Europe and in North America. The laws explain various constraints of population movement including the characteristics of the migrants, the distances they traveled, and the perceived benefits of their destinations; however, the Push-Pull theory assumes that people migrate from one area to another principally for economic reasons, i.e., to improve their quality of life.

The "Socio-Emotional/Sentimental Theory" explores the social and personal factors that may have spurred migration, such as southern bigotry, mob violence, and the desire to join relatives and friends who had already moved North. This theory emerged in the 1950s and 1960s to challenge
the economic push-pull model because it was believed the earlier theory not only failed to account for non-economic factors, but also portrayed African-Americans as being incapable of controlling their destinies. As Lawrence Levine put it, the Push-Pull model characterized African-Americans "not as actors capable of affecting at least some part of their destinies, but primarily as beings who are acted upon—southern leaves blown north by the winds of southern destitution."11

The Role of the Chicago Defender

The Defender’s reflection of both push-pull and sentimental factors served as a unifying script that spoke for those already migrating and encouraged those who were considering migrating to leave the South. Whether to escape Southern discrimination or to pursue employment opportunities in the North, both southern and northern African-Americans turned to their own newspapers for guidance, reassurance, and an explanation of what the Great Migration meant for all of them.12

Although numerous African-American newspapers provided this guidance, scholars have cited the Defender as the single-most important journalistic influence persuading people to leave the South for the North.13 The Defender’s persuasive tactics are well documented. The Defender is noted for conducting a three-month campaign in 1917 called “The Great Northern Drive,” in which the paper designated a kick-off date for southern African-Americans to make a mass exodus to the North. Blazing headlines such as “GOOD-BYE, DIXIE LAND,” “NORTHBOUND THEIR CRY,” “SAVED FROM THE SOUTH” were common during the campaign.14 The paper also regularly presented Chicago as some sort of “promised land,” where African-Americans could escape the discrimination of the South and live a life of dignity and prosperity.15

Over time, Abbott grew to realize the challenges this influx of Southern emigrants caused with respect to the city’s race relations and economic structure. In the years that followed the campaign, the city erupted into a race riot, developed blatant race-based social and residential patterns and experienced the Great Depression. The Defender’s response to these challenges seemed to indicate a change of heart because its editorials no longer promoted the benefits of moving to Chicago. They started to reflect the depth and the breadth of the nation’s and the city’s racial discrimination almost to a point where the paper appeared to be reconsidering the benefits of migration. Roi Ottley’s biography of Abbott states that by 1935, Abbott had reversed himself and urged African-Americans to remain in the South.16
This study focuses on this reversal by interpreting the editorials published from 1929, the beginning of the Great Depression, to Abbott's death in 1940.

Robert Abbott and The Promised Land

After founding the Defender, Abbott did not at first support the northward movement that already had been going for years. Abbott’s position was consistent with that of other African-American community leaders who followed Booker T. Washington’s advice to “cast down their buckets where they are.” In other words, Washington believed that African-Americans would fare better if they stayed in the South, owned property, and prospered from the land. Furthermore, Washington openly advocated that African-Americans focus more on self-help than on civil rights activism. Washington, who died in 1915, was considered the most powerful and influential African-American of the new century. He advised presidents, senators, and other political leaders and was the person people sought for recommendations to political appointments. Washington’s ideas continued to guide African-Americans many years after his death.

However, the Defender’s early position on the migration was not only based on Washington’s ideas, but also on the experiences of African-Americans already living in the North. Prior to World War I, employers tended to hire immigrants for their unskilled positions, and African-Americans were denied membership in trade unions, a requirement for the skilled positions. As with other middle-class African-American northerners, Abbott worried about the behavior and impact of living near unsophisticated, unemployable southern newcomers.

Abbott was also familiar with the ideas of NAACP co-founder W.E.B Dubois who, unlike Washington, believed that African-Americans should demand their civil and political rights. Dubois, who died in 1963, also became a major influence on African-American thought in the twentieth century.

Abbott developed his own philosophy as he built his newspaper. By the time of the northward campaign, Abbott’s philosophy reflected both Washingtonian and Duboisian principles. Abbott no longer supported Washington’s position that African-Americans should stay in the South. Like Dubois, Abbott believed that African-Americans should aggressively pursue civil rights. On the other hand, Abbott did support Washington’s principles of self-help and business ownership.

But as World War I raged in Europe, Abbott, along with the rest of the nation, noticed the changing population patterns. As the flow of European immigrants slowed to a trickle, the pool of unskilled labor in the United
States dried up. Agents went South and aggressively recruited African-Americans, and probably anyone else they could find, to meet the industries' increasing wartime production needs. A depressed southern economy brought on by failed crops also provided a strong incentive to southern African-Americans to accept the agents' offers.22

Amidst all the societal changes, the Defender was developing into a first-rate, innovative newspaper. Using the Defender as a forum for his ideas, Abbott reached a level of influence that rivaled that of Washington and Dubois. By World War I, the paper's readership, and thus its influence, extended beyond the boundaries of Chicago to the Southern states. Attracted by bold, sensational headlines in red ink, and editorial content presenting African-American viewpoints, readers throughout the country, and especially those in the South, grew to rely on the Defender to express feelings they did not feel free to express on their own.23

Abbott now saw the migration as a tool to benefit the race as a whole. Employment by northern industries extended African-Americans' work skills beyond those related to agriculture. Abbott believed that the opportunity for African-Americans to commingle with people of other races could break down barriers to equal rights. Abbott also could point to his own experience as a southern migrant. Although he did experience discrimination in Chicago, he still became a successful, influential business owner. Abbott likely recognized that the increased African-American population that was more affluent, contributed to a burgeoning readership that would benefit the advertising and circulation revenue of his newspaper.24 Circulation skyrocketed by more than 100 percent during the World War I migratory period.25

The Defender used various techniques to stimulate the migration. It arranged reduced railroad fares for migrants traveling in groups of at least ten. It provided gory details of lynchings and other mob violence in the South while printing stories of southern African-Americans who met with success after moving North. It advertised new job openings and printed letters from migrants extolling the virtues of northern life, as well as letters from southerners requesting information about northern life. Out of this a prevailing theme emerged that Chicago was “The Promised Land.” Abbott himself characterized the migration as “The Flight Out of Egypt,” and migrants reflected this theme by singing they were “Going into Canaan” as they departed for the North. The publication of an unsigned poem titled “Bound for the Promised Land,” summarized the feelings of African-American southerners, and was so popular that it was reprinted several times during the campaign.26

Alan DeSantis has described the Defender’s campaign rhetoric as exhibiting three stages: 1) Southern Discontentment; 2) Land of Hope; and 3) Call-To-Action.27 These stages reflect how the Defender’s campaign identified a problem (brutal discrimination), offered relief (come to Chicago),
and issued a call to action for the people to leave behind oppression in the South, and embrace freedom and prosperity in the North.  

During Abbott’s pre-1914 anti-migration phase, the Defender provided balanced accounts of Chicago that included reports of discrimination, and employment and housing problems experienced by African-Americans there. But once Abbott came out in favor of migration, the Defender’s published accounts of Chicago life were primarily positive albeit somewhat misleading. For example, in one of the paper’s many South-North comparisons, a photograph of a one-room shack that housed a segregated southern school was printed next to a photograph of a modern integrated Chicago high school. However, what the comparison failed to note was that African-Americans did not attend the high school because it was located in a predominantly white neighborhood.  

The influx of a significant number of people in a relatively short time undoubtedly strained the city’s education, social, health, and housing resources and services. A population that had once been identified as the southern Black Belt now inhabited northern urban slums and ghettos. For example, many African-Americans left one-room, dirt floor, rural shacks in the South to live in one-room, overcrowded urban tenements in the North. These stressful conditions, which adversely affected family relationships and individuals’ health, led to juvenile delinquency and other crimes.  

This rapid influx of African-Americans also adversely affected an already fragile relationship between the races. Scholars point to increased discrimination in northern areas with high African-American populations. Although the dense population benefited African-American businesses and increased African-Americans’ political clout, their growing presence was perceived as threatening white people’s command of resources and power. Thus, hostilities and discrimination that simmered in Chicago and other northern cities before migration became more prevalent afterward. Deteriorating race relations not only became evident in racially differentiated housing patterns and segregated religious, entertainment, and social activities, they were also evident by outright discrimination towards African-Americans who dared cross the color line.  

These challenges facing African-Americans in “The Promised Land” came to the forefront after World War I. Returning veterans, especially white males, now sought the jobs that were held by African-Americans during the war. Labor unions that excluded African-Americans before the war now became an even greater barrier against hiring African-Americans as skilled labor. Furthermore, African-American veterans who had just fought a war “to make the world safe for democracy” returned home fully expecting to benefit from the democracy they fought to protect. However, a combination of African-American assertiveness clashing with white resistance ex-
ploded into the devastating riots of 1919. Called the “Red Summer,” the riots lasted for twelve days and left thirty-eight people dead. Some have suggested that following the riots the Defender’s support for migration came to an abrupt halt because the paper could no longer portray Chicago as “The Promised Land.” Negative news and editorials about Chicago did appear before, during, and after the end of the migration campaign. The Defender also recognized and warned of southern racism creeping into the North, complained of overcrowded living conditions, and criticized migrants who behaved in ways that hurt race relations and the quality of life prior to the riots of the “Red Summer.” But in the early 1920s, there would be another migration surge northward during which the Defender touted the benefits of living in Chicago. Not until the Great Depression began did the Defender’s stance on migration change in any significant way.

The End of The Promised Land

Months before the stock market crash, a Defender editorial commented on the increasing loss of jobs among long-term African-American employees:

What does this portend? Why are men and women being turned out upon the streets of Chicago without warning? What is back of this general wholesale discharging program? ... It concerns not only the race most seriously affected, but every race in Chicago and every racial group in America.

St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton’s book Black Metropolis deemed this editorial a warning of the upcoming economic hard times. The editorial also seemed to signal a shift in the Defender’s position on migration in light of the Depression and the hard times at hand. From then on, only an occasional editorial or cartoon compared good conditions in the North to the bad conditions in the South. Also gone were items describing how the South was suffering economically from lost African-American labor. It should be noted, however, that despite this apparent change of position, the Defender never stated that the South was a good place to live nor urge African-Americans to stop moving North. But it did suggest that African-Americans consider other places to relocate, or to stay and resist the mob violence in the South. The newspaper went so far as to say that returning to the South would be acceptable, but only if social conditions there changed. Moreover, this softening on the South appears to have been more in the spirit of a
"return to the land" than a return to the South \textit{per se}. This theme was reflected in an editorial on a "back to the farm" movement in Arkansas:

...It (the South) knows why our people left the farms in the first place. It knows that our farmers were mistreated so badly that they fled to the uncertain life of city factories and city streets rather than remain on farms and be cheated.

...Knowing these things, and now advocating the return of our people to the farms of Dixie, southern white people must have made some resolutions to treat them fairly. At least we hope that this is the case.  

While still supporting out-migration from the South, \textit{Defender} editorials advised readers to move to the West to take advantage of land being provided by the American government. The newspaper also advised readers to move to northern rural areas to avoid the challenges of adjusting to urban life where they would encounter not only discrimination and inadequate housing, but also the difficulty of transferring rural-based economic survival skills to the city:

When he came North he entered a new system entirely, in which one's borrowing power is based solely upon his ability to present good securities...

His appeals for work met no sympathetic response from the factory or the commercial houses. First of all the kind of labor he was capable of giving they did not need; and secondly, he had failed to make preparations to perform the kind of labor they might have needed.

As this was the era of the New Deal, the \textit{Defender} went as far as suggesting that the federal government devise and coordinate a plan to transplant recently arrived migrants into rural districts all over the country.

The challenges of the Depression were undoubtedly an underlying theme in the \textit{Defender's} subtle advice to migrants to return South: "Times are not what they used to be. There is no use shutting our eyes to this fact. Prosperity has gone into retirement .... Those who are in cities and have no means of support should find some way to get back to their homes and relatives."

During the migration campaign, the \textit{Defender} offered news of lynchings and other violence as reasons to leave the South. But during the Depression, the \textit{Defender} wrote editorials advising southerners to resist violence. It reverted to the advice that it had given in 1915-1916 to southerners when the paper had opposed northward migration. The \textit{Defender} suggested that instead of moving North, southerners should stay where they were and defend themselves:

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WHEN THE MOB COMES
AND YOU MUST DIE TAKE
AT LEAST ONE WITH YOU

“When you are in Rome, you have to do as the Romans do”; “Call the white fiends to the door and shoot them down.”

Similar language was used in a Depression-era editorial, titled “A Message to Southern Black Men,” that reacted to the defeat of a federal anti-lynching bill in Congress: “No man is violating any law when he defends himself against a mob. Mobs are both cowardly and criminal at heart; if you must go, then take somebody with you. Answer terror with terror; you can die only once; this is the message to the South.”

Although the Defender during the Depression did not explicitly advocate armed self-defense as an alternative to northward migration, it was offered as a way to respond to one of the problems of living in the South. Because it was clear that there were no effective legal remedies against violent acts such as lynching, there were editorials titled “Remedy to Stop Lynching” and “When, And How Lynching Will Be Stopped” that included statements such as: “…black men in the South must learn to meet death with death.”

This self-defense strategy was exemplified in the first few lines of the editorial “When, And How Lynching Will Be Stopped”:

In several communications received by the editorial department this question has been asked. The answer is ‘When black people prepare to defend themselves with the same weapons the lynchers use in the attack’ The most effective way to stop lynchings is for those who are the victims of this type of savagery to arm themselves...

Another editorial praised William Wales, a Virginia man killed while defending his home against a mob led by the local sheriff: “There should be more William Waleses in the South, then lynchings would be few and far apart.”

Prior to the Depression, the Defender had pointed out the racism that existed in Chicago and other northern communities. During the post-war migration of the 1920s, editorials pointed out that Chicago theaters were segregated, and that African-Americans were the only people expected to live in certain sections of the city and not others. The Defender also published cartoons depicting racism in both the North and South. For example, a cartoon depicting two conjoined men, labeled “North” and “South,” whose mission seemed to be keeping the Negro in his place; and another showing that southern propaganda was “poisoning the well” of race relations in Chi-
But there were also editorials and cartoons depicting the good life of the North, e.g., editorials comparing fair justice in the North to unfair justice in the South, and cartoons showing "heavenly" lights illuminating the North.

However, with the onset of the Depression the Defender presented no such balance between the benefits and hardships of northern living. The tone of the editorials and cartoons reflected disappointment in the way the North had neglected to follow the principles of democracy and civil rights. Prior to the Depression, the Defender chastised the North for ignoring racial oppression the South. An editorial cited a Chicago Tribune story that was unflattering to African-Americans in Alabama to show how the North had abandoned its responsibilities to protect freedom, justice and dignity. "The crime against conscience is not that the American South, as led by the criminals banded together as a political party, oppresses a helpless people, but that the North, the only decent and responsible leadership of our country, sees it done and offers no resistance."

The first lines of an editorial titled "The South In The North" also illustrated disillusionment with the North: "The North was never heaven, but until recently it was not the South."

During the Depression, there were no cartoons published that presented the North as a "Promised Land." Instead, the cartoons that were published appeared to reflect how the North and South seemed to be outdoing one another in oppressing African-Americans. For example, a pre-Depression cartoon, titled "Man Against Beast," depicted an African-American man struggling to close a door labeled "North" to keep out a beast labeled "The Ku Klux Klan." However, during the Depression the Defender published a cartoon titled "Sneaking In" which depicted a sinister looking figure inside a house labeled the North beckoning in a man carrying a rope labeled southern traditions. These two very different cartoons seem to indicate that while the North could be a place for resisting racism prior to the Depression, it now appeared to welcome it. The post-migration experience, the Defender said, demonstrated two types of discrimination: one Southern, one Northern.

The white South says: 'We love you, but stay in your place. Thus far shalt thou go and no farther' They base their laws and strategy on this formula. The white North says 'We love you Come drink of the water of life' Then they proceed to meet in secret places and say, 'Our policy must be to restrict and deny beyond the menial.'

The Depression not only forced the Defender to focus on economic conditions, but also provided an opportunity to express frustration over the unfulfilled promises of the migration. "Credulous and trusting in the faith
of white and black promises, north and south, east and west, these millions have been led into strange lands with alluring pictures and promises that have proved merely will-o'-the wisps. We have kept going struggling, but have never arrived.”

The Defender continued to complain about the city’s failure to adequately accommodate the increased African-American population in the two decades since the migration began. Depression-era editorial opinion tended to express the frustration of African-Americans whose hopes for equality were repeatedly dashed. “With the shadows of another World war rising higher with each succeeding day, thousands of men who wore the World war uniform fighting to ‘make the world safe for democracy,’ swear to the high heaven—in face of results—that they prefer dying before the firing squad rather than lift another rifle for America.”

The newspaper’s change in tone was reflected in subtle ways. For example, Abbott wrote a multi-part column about the lack of culture and refinement among African-Americans. Although the column does not mention the migration or the differences between southern and northern living, the headline: “There Is No Cultural ‘Promised Land,’ Says Editor R.S. Abbott,” reflected the disappointment of the times.

From the beginning of the Depression until his death in 1940, it was clear that Abbott realized that African-Americans could not rely on geography, political parties, or institutions to protect them from oppression. This was reflected in a 1931 speech in which he charged African-Americans to take responsibility for their own fate:

From Texas to Massachusetts slavery is at work. It works in colleges and universities. It works in the church. It is at work in the political thought of the nation. It works day and night. It is sleepless....

The Race itself is answerable to the judgment seat of its own misery. We surrendered rights without a struggle. We yielded our self-respect at the invitation of flattery.

This theme of controlling one’s destiny is again reflected in one of the last editorials published before Abbott’s death. In it the Defender called for northern African-Americans to support the fight against southern peonage. The editorial suggested that all African-Americans regardless of geographical location suffered if the African-Americans in one region suffered.

Too many of us away from the South have forgotten the people back home. We spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on our own pleasures without remembering those whom we left at the forks of the creeks. Yet, so long as these our brothers are enslaved, so long as the Race in America is degraded by having the majority of its members held in
peonage; just so long will the position of those living north of the Ma-
son-Dixon line be shaky.64

Summary and Analysis

The *Chicago Defender*, once the leading editorial voice promoting the
movement of African-Americans from the South to the urban north, ap-
peared to reverse its stance on migration between 1929-1940. The themes
of Depression-era editorials in the *Defender* discouraged migration to the
urban North and encouraged African-Americans to stay in the South and
fight the oppression there, or to consider alternative opportunities for a new
life in rural rather than urban environments in regions other than the North.
After 1929 no longer did the newspaper publish editorials touting the edu-
cational and economic advantages of the North. Instead, editorials described
the change in northern race relations from a moderate degree of tolerance to
a degree of intolerance akin to what was found in the South. In particular,
Depression-era editorials pointed to the failure of Chicago to support and
accommodate its growing African-American population. *Defender* editori-
als concluded that African-Americans must rely on themselves rather than
their geographical location to achieve the equal rights and the quality of life
they deserved.

It is clear that prior to the Depression, the *Defender* rhetorically re-
lected the economic push-pull forces and socio-emotional issues that char-
acterized the migration. But the Depression removed most of the economic
“pull” factors and served as a benchmark for assessing the societal factors.
Thus, the *Defender* adjusted its rhetoric to reflect the realities of living in
“The Promised Land.” Unlike what it had done for the past eleven years
(1917-1928), the *Defender* no longer printed cartoons, articles, and editori-
als promoting a better life in the North.

In the midst of the economic hard times, the *Defender* had to come to
grips with northern racism, which had always been present, but which now
thrust itself to the forefront. The mob violence and blatant segregation of
the South was replaced with the institutional neglect, and subtly segregated
housing, and discriminatory public service patterns of the North.

There were also internal factors that likely affected the *Defender’s* posi-
tion on the migration. The Depression, along with Abbott’s declining health,
affected the business operations of the *Defender*. Advertising and sales rev-
enues declined to the point that Abbott had to cut personnel and invest his
own personal funds to keep the paper from folding.65 Abbott’s poor health
also kept him from providing the creative energy in managing the paper,
and in developing strategies for maintaining “The Promised Land” in the
midst of difficult economic times. Furthermore, the *Defender* had to com-
pete with other successful African-American newspapers in both the local and national marketplace. With more choices of quality editorial voices for African-Americans, its readers no longer exclusively patronized the Defender.

This competition reflected a new era for the African-American press, as well as for the African-American public. The standards and traditions that the press created before World War I stabilized and matured after the war. During the 1920s through World War II, the press was expected to be a forceful, influential advocate for African-Americans' concerns. Although the African-American press was hurt by the Depression, about thirty-two newspapers were established during this period and overall circulation increased. This was a time when African-Americans turned to their press more than ever and patronized the newspapers that best addressed their interests and concerns. Other than the economy, readers wanted to know more about the Scottsboro Case, boxing champion Joe Louis, and the Ethiopian crisis. The Defender gave ample space to these issues; however, its coverage did not earn the Defender the same recognition as the migration campaign had. The Defender's coverage of these contemporary issues apparently was not as distinctive as that of other newspapers, especially the Pittsburgh Courier, which during the Depression, replaced the Defender as the top nationally circulated African-American newspaper.

In the years between the world wars, African-Americans considered strategies to achieve equality apart from those offered by established civil rights organizations or advocates. This period has been referred to as the era of the "New Negro," a term derived from Alain Locke's description of the literary and visual artists of the Harlem Renaissance. But this term also represents African-Americans' activism and independent thinking. Rather than automatically turning to the NAACP and the Urban League for redress of grievances, African-Americans considered participating in radical groups that focused on economic grievances and took a more confrontational approach to dealing with racial injustices. The 1930s was also when African-Americans, long and loyal supporters of the Republican Party, switched their support to the Democratic Party.

This might explain why, despite the Defender's changed position on migration, African-Americans continued to migrate but with less intensity. Although net migration from the South during the Depression decreased more than 50 percent, nearly 300,000 African-Americans made the move. The Defender, the mainstream white press, as well as relatives and friends in the North made it clear to southern African-Americans that the "promises" of the North no longer existed. But it is believed that migrants continued to come because of New Deal public assistance programs. In addition to continued discrimination, "push" factors included some of the same economic conditions in the South that existed prior to World War I: low de-
mand and low profits for agricultural products, the devastating infestation of cotton crops by the boll weevil, in addition to the reduction of cotton acreage allotments by the New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

So why did the leading proponent of northward migration appear to have given up on the promises of "The Promised Land?" The conditions of the Depression and Abbott's poor health are plausible factors. It appears that Abbott realized that it took more than changing geographical locations for African-Americans to realize the American Dream. His later editorials described how racism manifested itself in different ways. He called for African-Americans to broaden their concept of community, and to develop more effective ways of demanding racial equality. But it was apparent that along with the rest of the nation, the Defender and its constituents were at a crossroads. On the eve of America's entry into the Second World War, a new and more effective rhetoric and strategy was needed to articulate the dynamics and complexities of race relations. This rhetoric and strategy, in part, manifested itself in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. However, as with the "The Great Migration," the struggle for equality even after the Civil Rights Movement continue to be challenged.

Conclusion

This study is significant because it adds a new dimension to the scholarship on the African-American press' role in "The Great Migration." The study's focus on how a major proponent of migration, the Chicago Defender, reversed its position, shows how the achievement of a desired goal, reaching "The Promised Land," can create and reveal new and existing interracial problems.

This study also reflects the continued development of African-American newspapers. Between the two world wars more newspapers, such as the Pittsburgh Courier, became a national voice for African-Americans and existing national newspapers, such as the Chicago Defender, had to adjust their voices to reflect the changes in their communities. The Defender, in particular, realized that oppression came in many forms and that it existed in both the North and the South.

Thus, this study raises new issues about the role of the African-American press with respect to African-American internal migration. How did the Chicago Defender and other like-minded newspapers respond to the World War II northward wave of migration? How did these newspapers react to the trend of African-Americans returning to the South after the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement?

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Moreover, this study can serve as a premise for more research on African-American newspaper development after World War II and especially during and after the Civil Rights Movement. It would be useful to study and understand how African-American newspapers operated, as well as responded to the changing population patterns and racial conditions of both the North and the South.

Endnotes

1. This was the case in which Homer Plessy unsuccessfully challenged a Louisiana law that required African-Americans and whites to sit in separate train cars. The U.S. Supreme Court, in an eight to one decision, decided that states could require separate facilities by race as long as the facilities were of equal quality.


4. These papers, which are still in publication, have included the *Philadelphia Tribune* (1884), *Baltimore Afro-American* (1892), *Journal & Guide* (1900), *Pittsburgh Courier* (1910).


10. The "Laws of Migration" as summarized are as follows: 1) Most migrants travel short distances; 2) This produces currents towards great commercial centers; 3) Each current has a compensating counter-current in the opposite direction; 4) Both currents display similar characteristics; 5) Long distance movements are directed towards great commercial centers; 6) People in urban areas migrate less than people in urban areas; 7) Males migrate more over long distances and females migrate more over short distances; 8) Migrants tend to be between 20-34 years of age; 10) People mainly move for economic reasons; 11) Urban housing development is inadequate for the influx of migrants so ghettos/shanties are formed. See


27. DeSantis, “Selling the American Dream,” 481.


50. William Wales was an African-American killed in a fiery shootout with Orange County, Virginia, law enforcement officers who were trying to serve him with a lunacy warrant. Wales' sister Cora and Sheriff William Young were also killed. The mainstream *Orange County Review* and the African-American *Journal & Guide* gave two different perspectives of the incident. The *Review* reported that law enforcement acted on a complaint that Wales had at gunpoint harassed grave workers at the cemetery adjoining his property. The paper reported that the court had earlier condemned Wales' property "for cemetery purposes against his will." The *Guide*, on the other hand, reported that Wales and his sister were willing to surrender but were met with several bullets and were thus forced to defend themselves. The *Guide* reported that the white woman who owned the cemetery had seen Wales with a gun, but he never threatened her with it. The African-American paper also reported that Negroes were regularly harassed by whites and implied that the deadly incident was likely based on a desire to take Wales' property to expand the cemetery. The mainstream article mentioned the sheriff's and the Waleses' deaths in the lead. The *Guide* article never did mention the sheriff's death. See, “Tribute to William Wales,” *The Chicago Defender*, 30 May 1936; see also “Sheriff Young Killed By Colored Maniac,” *The Orange Review*, 21 May 1936; P. Bernard Young, Jr., “Didn't Accuse Wales, Wealthy Woman Says,” *Journal & Guide*, 23 May 1936.


56. "Says The South To The North," The Chicago Defender, 14 October 1933; "Why This Unrest?" 15 August 1931.


58. "'God Give Us Men,'" The Chicago Defender, 23 April 1938.

59. Ibid.


63. Abbott died 28 February 1940.

64. "Peonage In The South," The Chicago Defender, 10 February 1940.


66. The Defender competed nationally with the Pittsburgh Courier, which had surpassed the Defender in circulation during the Depression. The Courier also had a Chicago edition. The other Chicago African-American papers were the Whip, the Search Light, the World the Metropolitan Post and the Bee. See St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City, Vol. 2 (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1962), 399; Walker, 31, 40.


69. The Scottsboro Case involved the arrest and conviction of nine African-American youths falsely accused of raping two white women; Joe Louis was the first African-American heavyweight boxing champion since Jack Johnson who had held that title about 20 years earlier; the Ethiopian crisis was the attack of the black nation by a white nation.


72. Felecia G. Jones Ross, "Mobilizing the Masses: The Cleveland Call and Post and the Scottsboro Incident," The Journal of Negro History 84(4), 51; Walker, 31. See also Christopher G. Wye, "Midwest Ghetto Patterns of Negro Life and Thought in Cleveland, Ohio, 1929-1945," (PhD. diss., Kent State University, 1973), 398, 400.

73. This switch in party allegiances was a result of the Republican Party's gradual withdrawal from the principles of Abraham Lincoln's emancipation and from the post-Civil War politics that had granted African-Americans' voting and full citizenship rights. The New Deal principles of the Democratic Party were perceived as being more beneficial to African-Americans because it responded to their economic needs. See Matthew Rees, From the Deck to the Sea: Blacks and the Republican Party (Wakefield, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1991), 141-142; Felecia Jones Ross, "The Cleveland Call and Post and the New Deal, Journalism History 19(3), p. 89; Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 18-19.

74. Trotter, 10-11.

75. Trotter, 11.
